

12/29/2005

**Nanticoke holds taxes, but some tempers rise**  
**Outgoing Mayor John Toole has words with Treasurer Albert Wytoshek.**  
**City clerk steps down.**

By mbuffer@leader.net

**"I understand now you're trying to pick up some extra money. I just don't see the need for it."**  
**John Toole Outgoing mayor after dismissing a proposed \$20 fee on requests to verify garbage payments**

City officials adopted a \$3.5 million budget that maintains the same property tax rate, and some officials were on the hot seat for the last time at Wednesday's meeting.

Treasurer Albert Wytoshek blasted outgoing Mayor John Toole after Toole dismissed a proposed \$20 fee on requests to verify garbage payments for new home purchases.

"I understand now you're trying to pick up some extra money," Toole said. "I just don't see the need for it."

"See, you see, that's why you're a failure," Wytoshek said. "You don't know what the hell's going on."

"Who's a failure?" responded Toole, who ran for a third term this year and was defeated in the Democratic primary election.

"You are," Wytoshek said.

"After eight years, I'm a failure, huh," Toole said.

Toole boasted that the city property tax rate remained 60.38 mills while he was mayor. A mill is a \$1 tax on every \$1,000 of assessed property value.

City resident Richard Butler said maintaining the tax rate wasn't an accomplishment because it was so high that it could only be raised with court approval or a higher debt payment. Butler, a mortgage banker, also argued against the proposed \$20 fee on requests to verify garbage payments. Wytoshek said the fee wouldn't cost taxpayers and would be paid by title-search and mortgage companies. Butler said the cost would be passed on to new home buyers.

Wytoshek said his office receives 150 to 300 requests a year to verify garbage payments.

Council voted to table the resolution establishing the \$20 fee and allow the new council to vote on it. Three of the four city council members could be different at the next council meeting, which is scheduled for Jan. 3.

John Bushko will become the next mayor and vacate his council seat. A new councilman will have to be appointed to finish Bushko's term, and two new councilmen elected in November, Jim Litchkofski and Brent Makarczyk, will begin their terms.

Also at Wednesday's meeting, City Clerk Michael Yurkowski said the new leadership didn't want to retain him, and he announced his resignation effective Dec. 31. He has been city clerk since 1992.

"Thank you on doing a good job, Mike," Toole said.

12/29/2005

**The city fire department has received a \$191,071 federal grant**

U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski announced Wednesday.

The money is from the Firefighter Investment and Response Enhancement grant program of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The Nanticoke Fire Department will use the grant to replace aging Scott Air Packs and install diesel engine exhaust control systems in the fire stations, said Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke.

The air packs allow firefighters and other emergency personnel to enter smoke-filled rooms and buildings.

Kanjorski was among 286 co-sponsors of the FIRE Act of 2000. More than \$9 million in federal grants has been awarded to more than 85 fire companies in Kanjorski's 11th Congressional District since the program began.

12/24/2005

**The Citizens' Voice has compiled a list of the area's Top 100 athletes of all time**  
**#7 - Pete Gray**

In 1944, a group of sports writers got together to honor Pete Gray with the Courageous Athlete of the Year Award in Philadelphia.

"To Pete Gray," the inscription on the plaque read, "With less, he achieved more."

A more fitting tribute to the Nanticoke native couldn't be written. By making it to the major leagues despite losing his right arm in a childhood accident, Gray authored one of the most inspirational stories in the history of American sport.

Gray lost his arm at age 6 when he fell off the running boards of a grocer's delivery truck, but he never stopped playing the game he loved.

Gray played semi-pro ball in the region as a teenager, earning \$100 to suit up for a team in Scranton or a team in Pine Grove, until he got his first big break in 1942.

He was signed sight-unseen by Three Rivers of the Canadian American League. When the club's manager picked him up at the train station, he was shocked to say the least.

"The guy almost passed out," Gray told The Baltimore Sun in 1982.

The day Gray made his debut with the club, a packed stadium chanted his name all game long. When the manager finally gave him an at-bat, it came at a pressure-packed moment.

The bases were loaded with two outs in the ninth inning and Gray's team trailed by a run. He lined a 2-1 pitch down the rightfield line, and as was

their custom, fans threw money on the field in tribute. Gray picked up \$700 before he was done.

Gray hit .381 in 42 games that season before breaking his collarbone and caught on with Memphis of the Southern Association in 1943. In his second season with the club, Gray hit .333, tied a league record with 68 stolen bases and was named league MVP.

That set up his historic season with the St. Louis Browns in 1945.

Gray's signing was not without controversy. His manager, Luke Sewell, and some of his teammates thought Gray was brought in as a publicity stunt to sell tickets.

That may have been true. With dozens of top players off fighting World War II, major league clubs were often clamoring for paying customers. But with the benefit of hindsight some 60 years later, it seems like a myopic way to view Gray's rise to the big leagues.

He hit .218 in 77 games in 1945, but the season was not without its highlights.

On April 17, Gray made his major league debut, going 1-for-4 as the Browns beat Detroit, 7-1.

On May 20, Gray had his signature day in the majors, helping the Browns to a doubleheader sweep of the New York Yankees. He had three hits and two RBIs in the opener and scored the winning run. He made seven catches in the outfield in the nightcap.

When the players back from war returned to the major leagues, Gray went back to the minors. He retired in 1950 and died in 2002.

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

Gray changed his name from Pete Wyschner when he signed up for a St. Louis Cardinals tryout camp in Minersville in 1931. He chose the surname because his older brother's boxing name was Whitey Gray.

Keith Carradine portrayed Gray in the 1986 TV movie "A Winner Never Quits" on ABC.

Gray used a glove fashioned by a Nanticoke shoemaker. It had little padding and Gray would slide only his fingertips into it, so he could easily flip it off to make a throw after fielding a fly ball.

### **Gray, in a 1985 story in the Citizens' Voice**

"I got chased out of more ballparks than anyone I can think of. When I'd show up at a tryout camp or at the gate of a ballpark, they'd take one look at me and holler, "Get this guy outta here or we'll call the cops." But I never gave up wanting to play in the major leagues. And I Did."

12/19/2005

### **How did America's pastime impact its past time?**

#### **LCCC professor aims to explain role baseball has played in U.S. history.**

By kwernowsky@leader.net

It's possible William Kashatus' theory about baseball is worthy of academic debate.

Did the sport influence the American culture, or has the culture influenced the sport? Have withering U.S. attention spans created a need for baseball to become a bombastic, showy sport laden with scandals about performance-enhancing drugs? Did Jackie Robinson's entrance into the major leagues get the civil-rights ball rolling?

Kashatus, a professor and historian who has written more than a dozen books, including several about baseball, says the history of this country owes a lot to the sport considered its pastime. For the spring semester, the Luzerne County Community College professor will instruct a course he hopes will teach people of the impact he believes baseball has had on America.

During a research venture to Yankee Stadium for a book about Lou Gehrig, Kashatus met the club's historian, Tony Morante. When Morante mentioned he taught a popular course on the history of baseball at a New York-area community college, Kashatus was inspired to start his own. He theorizes that baseball helped spur some of the greatest movements in many of the most important periods in American history: from women's and civil rights, to changes in labor relations and gambling.

In one example, Kashatus said baseball became a key part of Northeast Pennsylvania's coal-mining culture, and eventually led to the creation of the old Anthracite League. The immigrant workers thought the sport was a right-of-passage to becoming an American. It was like speaking English, Kashatus said. It made them more American.

"They started teams basically to try to remove some of the tension and the stress that existed because of the nature of the work in the mines. Sunday-afternoon baseball was something that was healthy for them and a form of entertainment for the community," Kashatus said. "It was their way of defining their Americanness."

Jackie Robinson, Kashatus said, became a seminal character in the story of the American civil rights movement when he left the Negro Leagues' Kansas City Monarchs to join the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1946. It's a move historians say influenced Martin Luther King Jr.

"We talk about Jackie Robinson breaking the color barrier is a landmark event, not just in the history of baseball, but in the history of all sports," Kashatus said. "Robinson was, in many respects, as great as King was because he inspired King. He helped to show the rest of America that African-Americans were not inferior."

This 13-week course isn't going to be a wash, a slacker class for baseball fans hoping to spin yarns about the sport. It's going to be a lot of work, Kashatus said.

The three-hour class, which will meet Mondays, will begin with a PowerPoint presentation followed by a discussion and then a workshop or a guest speaker. Kashatus said he hopes to find some heavy-hitters from the sport to speak, but he has yet to confirm their participation.

Kashatus said students will have the opportunity to do an additional research paper he will attempt to have published in a baseball periodical.

For more information about registering for Bill Kashatus' History 265 – History of Baseball – contact Luzerne County Community College at (800) 377-LCCC. Registration is open until Jan. 12.

12/18/2005

### **Nanticoke Area Notes**

By: Pamela Urbanski

#### **Choral group spreads cheer**

Greater Nanticoke Area choral students in grades four through 12 have been delivering the sound of the season in and around the Nanticoke Area. Voices of Nanticoke, under the direction of Karen Phair, Nancy Evans and Jeniso Bunnell, carry on the tradition of entertaining friends throughout the community. One hundred and fifty students spend time practicing after school to make sure each performance is top-notch.

During the day, they board buses and head out to different locations in the community to spread Christmas and holiday cheer. They have visited places like the Guardian Elder Care Center in Sheatown, Birchwood and Hampton Nursing Homes and the Luzerne County Courthouse. They braved freezing temperatures to sing at the Christmas in the Park celebration.

Senior choral student Tommy McGrady is glad to be able to go out and share his talents. He gives, but he also receives many benefits. "It's great to be able to look into the eyes of the elderly when we perform," said Tommy, "We know we are making a difference."

He told me that by being part of the choir, he has received the gift of friendship. "It is great to be a part of this group. I have made so many friends and learned so many things about them and myself that I normally would not have if there was no choir."

Last Saturday, the students gave their gift to the community by presenting their annual Christmas concert. "I Need a Christmas Vacation" is a story about a huge snowstorm that unexpectedly moves into the area the day before Christmas vacation. Students, faculty and staff fear they will be stranded. They begin to think about the celebrations they will miss. Thirteen actors and the combined choirs participated.

"It really was a great performance," said Phair. "We were able to show a different culture such as Kwanza and Chanukah and more." It was a happy ending as everyone made it home safe and sound.

This week, the choir will visit all the schools in the Nanticoke Area School District. Senior choir member Amy Bono enjoys performing in the schools the best. "I think it's great to be able to go into the schools and show our classmates what we can do," she said. "The kids get so excited!" There is no rest for this talented bunch. Starting after Christmas, they will begin preparing for the annual musical, "The Sound of Music." It's something to look forward to in the spring, as the performances are always magnificent.

#### **Confession schedule announced**

Deanery Advent confession for the Nanticoke Area will be held at St. Stanislaus Church on East Church Street. Area priests will come together Sunday at 2 p.m., Monday at 7 p.m. and Tuesday at 7 p.m.

#### **Bingo postponed at St. Joe's**

St. Joseph's bingo scheduled for today has been postponed until January. Watch this column for further announcements.

12/16/2005

### **Nanticoke cuts insurance cost**

#### **Expenses will drop significantly and coverage will grow because of the changes**

By MICHAEL P. BUFFER mbuffer@leader.net

City council on Thursday approved two insurance contracts that will increase coverage and reduce insurance expenses by almost 27 percent, officials said.

The city's insurance tab will drop from \$175,000 to \$138,000, said Ruth A. Moraski, a consultant from Zigmund Co. The city received quotes from four insurers.

EMC Insurance Companies of Des Moines, Iowa, will provide insurance for property, crime, police-officer and public-official liability and automobiles. That insurance will cost \$53,320.

The State Workers Compensation Insurance Fund will provide workers' compensation insurance. That deal will cost almost \$85,000.

Zigmund solicited insurance quotes and is working for the Nanticoke Early Intervention Consortium, which was contracted in February for \$80,000 to study the municipality's finances and develop a comprehensive plan to restore a firm financial footing.

The state has agreed to provide \$50,000 to pay the consortium, and the city and county will each contribute \$15,000, said city Administrator Greg Gulick. The consortium also includes the Northeast Pennsylvania Alliance, Keystone Municipal Services and Concord Public Finance.

Also Thursday, the city amended a lease agreement with the Stickney Volunteer Fire Department that would allow officials to sell parts from an inoperable fire truck. The truck is a 1970s model, and parting it out could produce several thousand dollars, Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski said.

12/15/2005

### **Nanticoke to limit sex offenders' residences**

#### **City's proposal on restricting where predators can live would be a first for the area.**

By mbuffer@leader.net

The city could soon join the growing ranks of municipalities with laws restricting where registered sex offenders may live.

City council has introduced an ordinance that would prevent a sex offender from living within 2,500 feet of any school, child-care facility, community center, park or common open space.

If the ordinance is approved, Nanticoke would become the first municipality in Luzerne and Lackawanna counties with such legislation, said Councilman Joseph Dougherty.

"It's a great ordinance," said Dougherty, a father of four daughters who said he is interested in protecting children from sex offenders.

According to a state police Web site, four Nanticoke residents are sex offenders registered under Pennsylvania's Megan's law. The total number of sex offenders living in Luzerne County, including incarcerated offenders, is 247.

Dougherty said he doesn't know what percentage of land in the city would be off limits for sex offenders to reside under the ordinance. City officials are mapping out which neighborhoods would be affected.

The law would not affect offenders who established residence prior to the passage of the legislation.

Council plans to vote on the ordinance in early 2006 after a second and third reading.

Dougherty said he learned about this type of ordinance in Bristol and Doylestown townships in Bucks County when visiting a relative in the Philadelphia area. Nanticoke's ordinance is based on those ordinances.

At least 10 other municipalities in the Philadelphia area have passed such an ordinance, according to published reports.

More than 40 municipalities in New Jersey have restrictions on sex offenders' residences, said Tony Manzo, the attorney for Lower and Cape May townships in New Jersey.

Last month, a man who spent a year in jail for having sexual contact with a 16-year-old girl filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the Lower Township ordinance.

Manzo said the law will be upheld, citing a U.S. Court of Appeals decision that upheld a similar law in Iowa prohibiting sex offenders from living within 2,000 feet of schools or day-care centers.

Iowa's branch of the American Civil Liberties Union issued a news release asking the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn the law, saying it breaks up families, doesn't focus on offenders who are a threat to small children and doesn't prevent predators from traveling to areas where children could be abducted.

But in November, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear a challenge to the Iowa law.

Manzo defended the Lower Township ordinance, citing a U.S. Court of Appeals decision upholding New Jersey's Megan's law, which requires sex offenders to register with police when they move into a community.

New Jersey's Megan's Law requires that neighbors be notified, but doesn't restrict where offenders may live. Local ordinances take the restrictions further.

Megan's law is named after Megan Kanka, a 7-year-old New Jersey girl killed in 1994 by a sex offender who lived across the street.

Manzo said federal appellate courts have "looked at the objective of safety and protection for children as legitimate."

Two weeks ago, Lower Township officials amended their ordinance. They decreased the restriction distance from 2,500 feet to 500 feet.

But almost the entire township remains off limits to sex offenders because they can't live within 500 feet of school bus stops, said township Clerk Claudia Kammer.

The Nanticoke ordinance does not include school bus stops within its restrictions.

To get more on Megan's Law go to: <http://www.pameganslaw.state.pa.us/>

12/14/2005

### **LCCC's trustees approve \$41 million overhaul of Nanticoke campus**

By Robert Kalinowski, Staff Writer

Luzerne County Community College officials believe the health care and hospitality industries are and will continue to be the fastest growing regional job sectors.

Wanting to produce skilled graduates able to meet and fill the demand, school officials are planning a full-scale overhaul of the Nanticoke main campus.

A \$41 million "master plan" for the project - set in motion by the desire to build a new health sciences facility - was approved Tuesday night by the school's Board of Trustees at LCCC's Corporate Learning Center on Public Square.

The plans, recently completed by the school's architects and engineers, include expansion of the hospitality department and the construction of a school-sponsored public safety training institute, among other proposals, officials said.

"It is clear that the health care industry is and will be of growing concern in Pennsylvania and particularly in Northeastern Pennsylvania," LCCC President Dr. Patricia C. Donohue said. "Therefore, LCCC must plan its facilities to prepare for the future of the industry."

Bolstering the hotel and restaurant management program will be of strong emphasis, said Dr. Dustin Swanger, provost and vice president for academic affairs.

"With the growing demand in our region for recreation and entertainment venues such as casinos, new restaurants, and spas, hospitality education is a key area for growth for the college," Swanger said.

The master plan will be submitted to the Pennsylvania Department of Education for approval and consideration for funding, officials said.

Generally, Swanger said, the state pays for 50 percent of capital projects, meaning LCCC would have to come up with \$20.5 million. That could come from sources such as loans, county funding and fundraising, he said.

### **Citizen's Voice Top 100 Athletes**

#### **No. 18: Steve Bilko - Nanticoke Baseball**

By: Jonathan Bombulie, Staff Writer

He was often referred to as the Babe Ruth of the Pacific Coast League. Nanticoke's Steve Bilko put together three consecutive seasons where he dominated the PCL.

From 1955-57, Bilko, playing for the minor league Los Angeles Angels, led the league in home runs three consecutive seasons, hitting 37, 55 and 56. He consistently hit over .300 and was named the league MVP all three years. He won the Triple Crown in 1956, batting .360 with 55 HRs and 164 RBI. In the PCL he benefited from an extended schedule because of the good weather, playing 168 games in 1955.

Bilko hit massive home runs and had massive size. The Los Angeles Times once ran a headline titled "Not Even Mrs. Bilko Knows His Weight." For the record, Bilko was listed at 240 pounds.

Signed as a free agent by the St. Louis Cardinals in 1945, Bilko made his major league debut with the Cardinals in 1949 at the age of 20. He went on to spend 10 seasons in the majors playing with St. Louis, Chicago (NL), Cincinnati, Los Angeles Dodgers, Detroit and Los Angeles Angeles. He ended his career with 76 home runs and 276 RBIs and a lifetime .249 BA.

Bilko posted outstanding power numbers in the minor leagues but had difficulty matching the lofty expectations when he reached the majors. He received his first call-up in 1949 after hitting 34 homers for Rochester in the International League but did not stay for a full season until 1953. He suffered a broken arm in 1952. He played every game for St. Louis in 1953 but struck out 125 times.

His best year in the bigs was 1961 while playing for the expansion Angels. He bated .279 with 20 homers. He batted .287 in 1962 but his season was cut short because of a leg injury. He returned to Rochester in 1963 and retired that season. He clubbed 313 homers and batted .312 in his minor league career.

He was inducted into the Luzerne County Chapter of the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame in October of 1996.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Bilko tied two major league records in 24 hours in 1953. On May 27 he struck out five times in a row against Cincinnati and, the following day, had two doubles as part of a 10-run inning.

While playing for the Los Angeles in 1961, he had the distinction of hitting the last home run ever in LA's Wrigley Field.

He was a 2004 inductee into the Rochester Red Wings Hall of Fame.

For more Nanticoke athletes in the top 100 click go to [www.gnasd.com](http://www.gnasd.com) and click on sports.

12/11/2005

### **Nanticoke Area Notes**

By: Pamela Urbanski

#### **Enjoy Christmas in the Park**

Mayor John Toole and Liz Toole invite Nanticoke residents to the annual Christmas in the Park this coming Saturday at Patriot's Square. The festivities begin at noon and run until 3 p.m.

As in past years, the mayor hopes the event will once again bring the community together. "It's an opportunity for families and friends to come together and have some fun," said Mayor Toole.

There will be carriage rides around the park, free of charge. The Greater Nanticoke Area High School Chorus and the Holy Trinity Choir will put you in the holiday spirit as they offer songs for the season. Hot chocolate will keep you warm and toasty.

And be sure to bring your camera because Santa is making a stop before heading to the North Pole.

For more information, call the city building at 735-1780. See you there.

#### **Ordinance targets sex offenders**

Councilman Joseph Dougherty is pleased that an ordinance he proposed passed on its first reading at a council meeting Wednesday, Dec. 7. The ordinance of the City of Nanticoke establishes sex offender residency restrictions and penalties for violations.

"I know some other communities have passed similar ordinances," said Dougherty. "I don't think we should wait until something happens to pass a law."

The ordinance states it shall be unlawful for any sex offender to establish a permanent or temporary residence within 2,500 feet of any school, child-care facility, common open space, community center, public park or recreational facility.

Sex offenders have 45 days to comply with the ordinance and move to a new location not within 2,500 feet of any of the locations listed.

The Nanticoke Police Department will enforce the order. Penalties for violators will be enforced and include imprisonment and fines.

The ordinance must have two final readings before it can become part of the code of the City of Nanticoke.

#### **Yearbooks ready for pick up**

MaryAnn Jarolen, Nanticoke Area Junior-Senior High School principal, announced 2005 graduation photos and yearbooks may be picked up at the principal's office Monday thru Friday between the hours of 8 a.m. and 1 p.m.

#### **Mill Library friends to meet**

Friends of the Mill Memorial Library in Nanticoke will meet Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. in the Alta Harrington Room to discuss the holiday party.

Hostesses will be Helen Shipkowski and Eleanore Chmielowski. President Marion Diacheysn will preside.

Dues will be collected for 2006. A report on the 2005 Christmas/fall fair will be given.

#### **Holiday program at Berean Church**

The Berean Lighthouse Church, 2 W. Green St., Nanticoke, will present its Christmas program Sunday, Dec. 18, at 7 p.m. at the church.

The Sunday school students will perform songs and recitations in part one.

The choir will present a Christmas musical entitled, "A Carol to the King," written and arranged by Mosie Lister.

In case of inclement weather, it will be postponed until a later date. All are welcome.

12/11/2005

### **Optimistic outlook for Nanticoke**

By Elizabeth Skrapits, Staff Writer

Downtown plans are in disarray, the business district is slumping, finances are a mess, and people are moving out at record rates. Mayor-elect John Bushko and incoming members of council know they have a tough job ahead, but they can't wait to get started.

"I don't think you can count Nanticoke out yet," councilmen-elect James Litchkofski said. "I think a lot of people are going to be pleasantly surprised to see what happens in the next few years."

With new officials, new buildings, a recreation park and other projects in the works, and new regional efforts under consideration, change is coming to Nanticoke.

Bushko, Litchkofski and councilman-elect Brent Makarczyk will take office in less than a month. They, with incumbent councilman Joe Dougherty and a third person to be appointed to Bushko's seat on the four-person council, will have the opportunity to make personnel changes and appointments to authorities.

Optimistic mood

The Tropic Isle Tan on Prospect Street has been around for a year. Customers already come from as far as Scranton and Bloomsburg, manager Jackie Knorowski said. A revitalized downtown could attract more.

Dr. David Evans, a practicing eye doctor for 20 years, owns an office building on Prospect Street and other properties around the city, including the John Heinz physical rehabilitation center.

"I'm optimistic about the town," Evans said. "I've invested heavily in Nanticoke, so I believe it's got potential."

Hank Marks, president of the Greater Nanticoke Area Taxpayers' Association, is a fixture at city council meetings. He tells elected officials exactly what's on his mind, especially when he doesn't think they're spending his money wisely.

Marks hopes the new officials will find ways to turn around the city's grim financial picture.

"The people coming in are going to make it better," Marks said. "It can't get worse - it has to get better."

Jim Samselski is outright enthusiastic.

"The future is so bright," he said. "There will be growth over the next eight years, after 20 years of the city being stagnant."

But there has to be more involvement by residents, Makarczyk stressed.

"People only come to the meetings if they need something or something's wrong," he said. "Nothing gets better without a total group effort."

Obstacles to overcome

"This could be one of the toughest starts any administration ever had, because of the situation we're coming into," Makarczyk said.

Top priority is to get finances in order, Litchkofski said.

The city owes at least \$4 million in bonds and loans, and has about a \$300,000 deficit. Refinancing a bond only got rid of the deficit temporarily, Bushko said.

Nanticoke is enrolled in the state Department of Community and Economic Development's early intervention program, which provides guidance to financially troubled municipalities.

Concord Public Finance and Keystone Municipal Services, working together as early intervention coordinator, plan in January to give city officials a list of things they can do to get Nanticoke back to fiscal stability.

Another priority is reviving Nanticoke's struggling downtown.

Demolition cleared the way for a parking garage and commercial building on East Main Street. However, municipal authority board members say they won't have a solid plan until they or the project developer, Turbotville-based Impact Pennsylvania, find tenants.

Further down the street, the 30,000 square-foot Kanjorski Center sits 80 percent vacant. Next door, the former CVS building recently lost a potential tenant. Dollar General had a shake-up in its executive management that led to the chain retailer backing out 72 hours before finalizing a lease agreement with the city, municipal authority member Robert Bray said.

Nanticoke's population - 10,955 according to the 2000 census - is declining at a rate faster than any other third-class city in Pennsylvania, State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, said. Jobs are being lost as employers such as HealthNow, which took 214 jobs to Dallas Borough in October, move out.

But residential and commercial developments in the works will bring new jobs and people to the city. A study being performed for the South Valley Partnership, a non-profit community organization, will determine the best ways to attract and keep businesses - and help the former coal-mining town figure out how to reinvent itself.

Positive developments

The entranceway to Nanticoke will have a new look by summer. The first phase of the \$5 million Lower Broadway recreation park on the Susquehanna River includes a skate park, play area, open field and greenway.

Phase one of Lexington Village on Kosciuszko Street consists of 55 luxury two-bedroom independent living cottages with attached garages.

Developer Dominic Ortolani hopes seniors can start moving in in April.

The second phase, a 66-bed Alzheimer's facility that will bring in more than 40 healthcare jobs, should begin late next year, he said.

Except for a \$240,000 state grant to reclaim the site, a former culm bank, the \$6.5 million project is privately funded, Ortolani said.

The approximately \$6 million for the Whitney Pointe development is also mostly from a private investor, Ken Pollack.

He bought the 500 acres of reclaimed mine land stretching across Newport Township and the Honey Pot section of Nanticoke in 2004.

Development of the 147 residential and 19 industrial lots began this year.

Pollack also matched \$350,000 in state funding to tie the industrial park into an active Canadian Pacific rail line from New York to Philadelphia.

Luzerne County Community College is planning a \$9 million Public Safety Institute Fire Training Center, Yudichak said. Administrative offices and classrooms will be built at Prospect Street and Middle Road, which will become the college's main entrance, he said.

The training facility for first responders is expected to attract 4,000 people from 10 counties in Northeastern Pennsylvania to Nanticoke each year,

Yudichak said.

The project will be financed with state and county money. U.S. Senators Arlen Specter and Rick Santorum have been approached for federal funding, Yudichak said.

Luzerne County Community College is an asset the city always overlooked, incoming officials believe. They want to find a way to bring all those students, faculty and staff to the business district, and also integrate the college more into the community.

"I want to market the community college. I want people to know it's in Nanticoke," Bushko said. "We get 5,000 guests a day from all over the place, and we're not proud of it."

A long way to go

Bushko, Litchkofski and Makarczyk want to continue the progress the current administration has made in terms of infrastructure improvements.

"We have to maintain the roads to the best of our ability, so people driving to work won't hit the same potholes over and over," Litchkofski said.

City officials need to get aggressive in enforcing inspection ordinances and dealing with absentee and neglectful landlords, Bushko said.

He wants to meet with other communities to discuss combining police and fire departments. Regionalization could mean more grants, better coverage, and possibly saving money down the line, he said.

The hardest part of the job will be in the first two months, getting things straightened out, getting new people in, and talking to neighboring municipalities, Bushko said.

"But there's so much opportunity there," he noted. "There's so many ways to do things. All you've got to do is bring them up and sit down."

12/10/2005

### **Trouble's in the pipeline as 2 men claim to be Nanticoke's sewer rep**

By mbuffer@leader.net

"What we do is very simple. We get a letter from the city council. The letter says who is appointed. That's the person we take. If they have a fight, it's up to them. That's all up to them."

Tony Panaway Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority solicitor

The next board meeting of the Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority could be like the old TV game show, "To Tell the Truth."

Will the real authority representative of Nanticoke please stand up?

Two men plan to go the Dec. 20 authority meeting as the city's lone authority representative.

On Wednesday, city council voted 4-1 to replace William Kearney with District Judge Donald Whittaker on the authority board.

Councilman John Bushko voted against the appointment, claiming it isn't legal because Kearney's term on the authority board doesn't expire until Dec. 31 and because Whittaker doesn't live in the city or maintain a business in the city.

Those claims are disputed.

An Aug. 3, 2000, letter to the authority from city clerk Michael Yurkowski states says Kearney was re-appointed to a five-year term ending Dec. 7, 2005. But authority Executive Director Fred DeSanto said Kearney's term ends Dec. 31.

The authority has 17 board members from 14 charter municipalities. Wilkes-Barre has three members.

Authority terms last five years. They expire in different years, but they all expire Dec. 31, DeSanto said.

But authority Solicitor Tony Panaway said the authority defers to municipalities regarding appointment decisions.

"What we do is very simple," Panaway said. "We get a letter from the city council. The letter says who is appointed. That's the person we take. If they have a fight, it's up to them. That's all up to them."

Whittaker said he researched the matter and discussed it with Panaway before Wednesday's vote.

"I don't want to make the governing body look like fools," Whittaker said.

Both Kearney and Whittaker said they plan to attend the Dec. 20 authority board meeting. Bushko predicted Wednesday's appointment will result in "a legal hassle."

Kearney said he doesn't mind being replaced and said "it's up to" the members of city council.

Bushko maintains council should not have voted to replace Kearney until after his term expires Dec. 31. By then, lame ducks who voted for Whittaker – Bill Brown, Mayor John Toole (who also gets a vote) and Yvonne Bozinski – will be gone. Councilman Joe Dougherty voted for Whittaker, too.

They will be replaced by Bushko as mayor, and Jim Litchkofski and Brent Makarczyk on council. Litchkofski said the new council should vote on a representative.

There are other issues surrounding the appointment.

Whittaker lives in Plymouth Township but can represent the city on the authority because he maintains a business – magisterial office -- in the city, Solicitor Bernard Kotulak said.

But Bushko said serving as district judge isn't the same as maintaining a business.

Whittaker was re-elected to his post this year. His office handles civil and criminal matters for residents of Nanticoke, the borough of Plymouth and the townships of Newport and Plymouth.

"Having an office in Nanticoke, that is not a business," Luzerne County Commissioner Stephen A. Urban said. "The county pays for the rent of that office. The county pays for his staff."

Luzerne County is budgeted to pay the city \$12,500 next year to rent space in city hall for Whittaker's magisterial court operation.

The controversy involving Whittaker's appointment isn't the first dispute involving an authority board member who didn't live in the municipality that made the appointment.

In 1998, Forty Fort officials debated whether Patrick Judge should remain the borough's representative on the authority after Judge moved to Lackawanna County.

Judge said he leased part of an office in Forty Fort, where he used a desk and computer for business purposes. Judge remains the borough's authority representative.

Urban said conflicts of interest could result from a district judge serving on the sewer authority.

"It's not a civilian board like a bank board," Urban said. "This is a political body that gets involved in hiring people and setting rates."

District Judge Joseph A. Halsey is Hanover Township's representative on the authority. Halsey lives the township, and his magisterial district includes the township and the boroughs of Ashley, Sugar Notch and Warrior Run.

Whittaker and Halsey said they would recuse themselves from judicial cases that involve disputes with the authority. Halsey said serving on the authority doesn't conflict with the judicial code of conduct "as long as you don't receive pay."

The authority has been providing wastewater treatment since 1962. It was formed by 14 Luzerne County municipalities, which have appointed representatives on the authority's board.

12/8/2005

### **District judge at center of controversial Nanticoke appointment**

By:Elizabeth Skrapits

Despite uncertainty over whether it was legal, outgoing city officials voted Wednesday night to make a board appointment that has incoming officials steamed.

Solicitor Bernard Kotulak couldn't clarify when the term of Nanticoke's Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority representative William Kearney officially ends, but that didn't stop council from replacing him.

Council members Bill Brown, Yvonne Bozinski, Joe Dougherty, and Mayor John Toole voted to appoint Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker to Kearney's seat for a five-year term - provided it turns out to be legal, they said.

No one except Dougherty will be returning to council next year, and councilman John Bushko, who voted against the motion, will replace Toole as mayor.

The principal argument focused on when Kearney's term expires. Although a board member can be re-appointed early, a new appointment cannot be made until a sitting member's term expires, Bushko said.

Kearney has served on the board for 20 years. An Aug. 3, 2000 letter to the authority from city clerk Michael Yurkowski states that at the Aug. 2, 2000 meeting Kearney was re-appointed to a five-year term ending Dec. 7 2005.

But a letter to Bushko sent Monday by WWSA Executive Director Fred DeSanto states all terms of incorporating municipalities' members end Dec. 31.

Ultimately it will be up to the Sanitary Authority solicitor to determine which date is correct, Kotulak said.

"I don't think his term is up, and the city shouldn't get into a legal hassle over this," Bushko said.

Bushko also questioned whether Whittaker is eligible to represent Nanticoke.

Since the position the WWSA board is not a federal, state or local government position and is unpaid, Whittaker can serve, Kotulak said.

The state Municipal Authorities Act says a municipal authority board member "shall be a taxpayer in, maintain a business in or be a citizen of the municipality by which he is appointed."

Whittaker lives in Newport Township and does not own property in Nanticoke. Luzerne County pays for his magisterial office in Nanticoke City Hall. His salary comes from the state.

That doesn't matter, Whittaker said. He said his research indicated a board member only has to be a county resident.

Councilman-elect James Litchkofski asked why Toole, Brown and Bozinski "orchestrated this midnight appointment." Litchkofski felt he should have had a say in the matter, since the appointee would have to work with the new council and mayor.

Council has delayed making eight appointments to the city's housing and municipal authorities for nearly a year because new city officials might be elected, Bozinski said.

"If we didn't respect you as a group, we could have put all of those eight people in," she said, adding, "I was asked by Mr. Whittaker if I would vote for him if his name came up. No one else came to me. I gave my word."

Prior to the meeting, Whittaker was asked why he wanted to serve on the board.

"They asked me to serve - I'll serve," he said.

But during the meeting, Brown and Bozinski said Whittaker approached them.

When asked again after council's vote whether he approached council or council approached him, he said "Both," and walked away.

In related business, Toole re-appointed Steve Buchinski to the Nanticoke City Redevelopment Authority. His term expired June 30. Toole also appointed Robert Bray to fill the remainder of Jeff Piontkowski's term, which expires June 30, 2006.

Toole did not need a vote by council to make the appointments, Bushko said.

Bray and Buchinski currently serve on the Nanticoke General Municipal Authority board.

Council adjourned the meeting until Dec. 15 at 10 a.m. to vote on insurance for 2006. Insurance consultant Ruth Moraski of Zigmund Co. said she found a way to save \$37,000 and get expanded coverage for the city.

12/04/2005

### **Rocky road**

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Staff Writer

No plans for East Main Street, no new tenants for the Kanjorski Center, no 2006 budget, and not enough revenue.

Those are some of the problems the Nanticoke General Municipal Authority faces at the end of 2005.

During a Saturday morning meeting that often grew heated, municipal authority members defended their inability to find tenants for existing and planned buildings.

Councilman and mayor-elect John Bushko asked the municipal authority the status of the project on East Main Street. Three older buildings have been demolished so Impact Pennsylvania, a Turbotville-based development group headed by Robert Yoder, can construct new commercial buildings.

Developer Dominic Ortolani, whose plans for the site were rejected by the municipal authority in favor of Yoder's, asked whether a study had been done to determine what would be appropriate for the site. The municipal authority intends to build to suit tenants lined up in advance.

But there are no tenants, nor are Yoder or the authority any closer to finding them than they were six months ago, authority member Robert Bray admitted.

Yoder is also helping the authority find new tenants for the Kanjorski Center, said Walter Sokolowski, a member of the Nanticoke redevelopment authority who sat in on the meeting.

HealthNow, a Medicare claims processing firm, vacated the Kanjorski Center for the Twin Stacks Center in Dallas Borough at the end of October. That means the loss of \$33,200 a month rent, Bray said.

The municipal authority still receives \$4,800 a month from its only remaining tenant, the Department of Labor and Industry. That is not enough to cover the authority's operating expenses of approximately \$38,000 a month, Bray said.

Expenditures have already been cut substantially, authority member Chester Beggs said. However, municipal authority members have to meet with their accountant Karen Hazleton to work out how to handle the loss of revenue and come up with a budget for 2006, Bray said.

12/04/2005

### **It looks a lot like Christmas**

By: Pam Urbanski

It certainly is beginning to look a lot like Christmas in the City of Nanticoke. Patriot Square is decorated and ready for Santa's visits and the wreaths placed along Main Street and up Market Street add nicely to the holiday season.

The wreaths are made possible by donations from area businesses, organizations, and individual donors. Who is responsible for doing the actual hanging of the wreaths? The Public Works Department braved the cold temperatures last week and did a nice job putting the decorations in place. Thanks.

I am sure Santa will have an extra gift or two for you under the Christmas tree!

### **Practice fire safety this holiday**

During the winter months, stories that seem to appear more frequently in the news are those about fires in our homes or businesses. This is because the winter season brings reasons for celebrations. There is more cooking, home decorating and entertaining, and increased risk of fire due to heating equipment.

Fire Chief Mike Bohan reminds residents to make sure they have installed smoke detectors that are working.

"Seventy percent of all home fire fatalities occur in homes where there are no smoke alarms or no working smoke alarms," he said.

Christmas trees are a leading cause of house fires, he added.

"Keep your tree at least three feet from fireplaces, radiators, space heaters, heating vents and other sources of heat," said Bohan. "And remember to check your tree to make sure it has enough water at all times."

He reminds residents that lights should be approved by an Independent Testing Lab (UL) and to throw away any lights with frayed or cracked cords. Put holiday candles well away from Christmas decorations and other combustibles and do not leave candles burning unattended or within the reach of small children.

"Blow them out before you leave the room," said Bohan.

He tells me with the increased cost of gas and oil, homeowners may want to use space heaters to save money. He warns area residents to keep all space heaters and portable heaters at least three feet away from anything that can burn.

If you have any questions about fire safety, call fire headquarters at 735-5860.

### **GNA band student honored**

Congratulations to Grace Turner for placing in the Pennsylvania Music Education Association District Band Competition.

Greater Nanticoke Area Music Teacher Brad Bunnell nominated Grace for competition at the district level. She went on to compete with over 100 students from area schools, placing 16th in clarinet and sixth in base clarinet.

Grace credits her elementary music teacher, Nancy Evans, for getting her interested in playing in the band.

"She worked with us on the elementary level and I really enjoyed it," said Grace.

What was the hardest part about the competition? "We had to perform a song on sight."

That means the judges gave her a sheet of music and she had only two minutes to look it over and then she had to play.

Grace said Bunnell and her piano teacher, Barb Hall, whom she has worked with since the fifth grade, helped her prepare for competition.

In January, all students who qualified for district band will perform in concert. Musicians will also have an opportunity to qualify for regional band.

**Great job, Grace!**

### **Tax reminder**

[Albert J Wytoshek, city treasurer](#) announced the 2005 school district taxes and school per capita taxes are now at the penalty amount until Thursday, Dec. 15. This is the last day to make payment for these taxes at the city tax office. Nanticoke City 2005 property and city per capita taxes and school district and school per capita taxes are due on this day.

Separate checks must be made for each tax paid. Payments will not be accepted after Dec. 15.

The tax office, located at the Nanticoke Municipal Building, is open Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

If a receipt is requested, please enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope. Mail in payments will not be accepted by postmark.

It is the property owner's responsibility to forward tax statements to their respect mortgage company or bank.

For more information, call 735-2800.

12/01/2005

### **Nanticoke maintains tax rate**

By mbuffer@leader.net

The city property tax rate would remain the same under a proposed \$3.5 million budget unveiled at Wednesday's city council meeting.

Council approved the first reading of the 2006 budget. A vote to approve the budget is scheduled for Dec. 28.

The current tax rate is 60.38 mills, according to City Administrator Greg Gulick. A mill is a \$1 tax on every \$1,000 of assessed property value.

The total assessed value of properties in the city is almost \$14.8 million. According to Gulick, 29.88 mills are earmarked to fund debt service, and a half mill is for funding the library.

The police budget is \$903,378, making it the largest expense in the city budget.

Council members discussed the budget briefly during Wednesday's meeting. In response to a question from Councilman John Bushko, who will become mayor in January, Solicitor Bernard Kotulak said the city has until Feb. 14 to reopen the budget and amend it.

Also during Wednesday's meeting, council approved an ordinance to demolish a house at 205 Phillips St. Kotulak said the house is "severely blighted."

The ordinance allows Kotulak to ask a judge to approve the demolition. If approved, the city will solicit bids for demolition work and get a lien on the property in the amount of the demolition job, Kotulak said.

11/27/2005

### **Nanticoke Area Notes**

By: Pamela Urbanski

#### **A great season for soccer**

The Greater Nanticoke Area Youth Soccer Association just completed another successful soccer season.

Starting back in August, close to 350 players, ages eight to 18, and more than 30 coaches took to the fields for some soccer fun. Most teams practiced twice a week and games were played every Saturday through October.

As with any organized sports' league for youth, it takes dedicated adults to make sure the kids have a good season. Intramural soccer is no different. This past year, Dave Lane served as president of the league. He and his wife, Charlene, worked very hard to make sure players enjoyed their season.

It wasn't uncommon to see the Lanes at 7 in the morning on a Saturday making sure fields were okay, setting up concession stands or fielding phone calls from parents or coaches. Around 4 or 5 p.m. you would find them putting away equipment, cleaning up and preparing for next week's games.

Dave's favorite part of the season was coaching. "I really enjoy the kids. It has been fun to watch them go from U8 to U16, the age group he coached this year. Our goal is to teach the fundamentals of soccer and have fun," he said. "Hopefully, we can keep their interest in the sport and move them into junior high and then high school soccer."

This year, four teams placed in the Luzerne County Cup, a double-elimination tournament that allows for a little more competitive play with scores being kept and championship games in A and B brackets for ages U10 and up.

The Nanticoke teams did well. It was a gold medal in the A bracket for Dave Chapin and his U12 girls' team. Second place in the A bracket went to Dave Lane and his U16 girls' team. Second place also went to the U14 boys' team coached by Mike Mavus. Paul Cimasky coached the first-place B division U11 girls.

Dave told me the officers and all volunteers worked hard to ensure a good season. They include Vice President David Chapin, Secretary Ed Whitebread and Treasurer Patty McNulty. Mike Mavus and Ken Smith also helped Lane keep the fields playable.

There is some concern about getting enough volunteers for the upcoming years. "You can't have the same people doing all the work all the time," Dave offered. "They get burned out. We need people to step up if we are going to continue to play youth soccer in Nanticoke.

The next reorganization meeting will be held in January to plan for registration in the spring. If you would like to help out, you can call Dave at 735-2909.

#### **A Holy Child breakfast**

Holy Child Parish will hold an all-you-can-eat breakfast buffet Sunday, Dec. 4, from 9 a.m. to noon at the parish center on Newport Street in Sheatown. Menu includes scrambled eggs, sausage, potatoes, cereal, chipped beef on toast, coffee and tea. Cost is \$6 per person. Chances for the holiday ham and kielbasa basket also will be sold.

#### **Toy bingo at St. Stan's**

St. Stanislaus Parish is holding its annual toy bingo Sunday, Dec. 4, at the parish gym on East Church Street. Doors open at 11 a.m. and the bingo begins promptly at 1 p.m. Refreshments will be available.

Students selling poinsettias

Students of Pope John Paul II School are selling poinsettias for Christmas. The flowers in six-inch pots are available in red, white, pink and the cost \$6.50. Red poinsettias in 10-inch pots are selling for \$15.50. Orders can be placed with any student or by calling the school at 735-7935. Pick-up date is Friday, Dec. 16.

### **'Feast of St. Nicholas' set**

The Slovak Heritage Society of Northeastern Pennsylvania is sponsoring "The Feast of St. Nicholas" at St. Joseph's Parish on Dec. 3 following the 6 p.m. Mass. All are invited to enjoy an evening of singing Slovak Advent and Christmas carols and an opportunity to share Christmas memories. Slovak hospitality will follow. The church is located on East Noble Street.

11/27/2005

### **Nanticoke students take course in region's history**

By Tom Venesky , Staff Writer

A fourth grade class from the Greater Nanticoke Area School District recently got a hands-on look at one of the area's oldest problems. More than 120 students participated in a walking tour of abandoned mine sites last week. The tours were conducted by the Plymouth Township Planning Commission.

The students visited the Honeypot mine shaft in Newport Township, walked down to the remnants of the Nanticoke Dam at the Susquehanna River, took samples of acid mine drainage in Nanticoke and stood in disbelief at the tragic site of the Avondale Mine Disaster.

At the end of the day, the students came away with a new respect for the environment and the area's history.

"It's important for us to learn about the coal mines and the streams," said Martha Allen, 10. "The water we tested was gross. I never knew most of the streams had iron in them."

Plymouth Township Planning Commission member Robert Hughes, who is also regional coordinator for the Eastern PA Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation, conducted the tours.

The tours were paid for by a \$1,000 grant from the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay.

Hughes said the experience was a real eye-opener for the students as they witnessed coal mining history and the environmental effects that still resonate today.

"They got outside of their neighborhood and it was exciting and visually stimulating," he said. "Experiences like this at this age enhances their education. It was chemistry, history and environmental stewardship rolled into one."

Allen said aside from the mine pollution, she learned what a cattail was and what a breaker did.

"I never saw a cattail before," she said, after viewing the aquatic plants at the Dundee Outfall.

Kendall Schinski, 9, compared the orange water to bright chocolate milk, and saw the difference when bugs were found in the clean sections of stream.

Visiting the Avondale Mine site had an emotional impact on Schinski, especially when she learned that many children her age lost their lives in the 1869 mine disaster.

"It was a lot of walking and cold, but I enjoyed it. The little orange lake was orange on one side, clear on the other with a water fountain on one end," she said, describing the mine treatment system at the Dundee Outfall.

Schinski said she also recognized the importance of keeping the environment clean and pledged to do her part.

"I learned that you can't go in that dirty water because you'll get sick from the bacteria," she said. "Mr. Hughes told us they do cleanups at these places every summer. I'm going to go down next summer and help them out."

11/26/2005

### **Fire damages Nanticoke home, displaces family**

By kwernowsky@leader.net

A fire displaced a family of three Friday evening in the Hanover section of Nanticoke, said fire officials.

The cause of the fire at 122 Pine St. is under investigation by the state police fire marshal, but it isn't considered suspicious, said Deputy Chief Jay Munson of the Nanticoke Fire Department. No injuries were reported.

The blaze started at about 6:10 p.m. on the second floor of the house, according to Munson, who said the second floor sustained heavy damage. "It's pretty well gutted."

The first floor of the home sustained heavy smoke and water damage, Munson said.

The owner, Michael Duda, his wife and child were not home at the time the fire started, Munson said. They are expected to stay with relatives.

Dan Drury was in his basement when he heard his wife scream from upstairs that the house next door was on fire.

Drury, who lives at 126 Pine St., quickly grabbed a hose from his back yard and put it through a second-story window. He hosed down the siding on Duda's house in an attempt to keep the flames from damaging his own home, which sits about 10 to 12 feet away. Minimal damage was done to Drury's siding.

Firefighters from all of the Nanticoke companies arrived several minutes later, and in about 15 minutes they had the blaze under control, Munson said. They spent another hour and a half at the house putting out hotspots.

11/23/2005

### **Thanks, GNA community, for adopting Jones schools**

Editor:

When Hurricane Katrina flooded the Gulf Coast, we saw many images of the devastation it caused. During the 1972 Flood of Agnes we received much needed help from everywhere, including the State of Mississippi. My sister, Carol Evans and I decided we could do something to help a school district there. The Greater Nanticoke Area School District adopted the Jones County School District in Ellisville, Mississippi. Through many personal donations, fundraisers by our students, dances by our PTSA and drawings by our cheerleaders, we were able to collect \$3,716.65 which was sent to them. I want to thank all of those responsible, especially our Superintendent, Mr. Anthony Perrone for allowing this to happen. Also, all of our school principals, personal donors, The 12th Man Football Club, cheerleaders, students, faculty and staff.

Thank you very much.

Jim (J.D.) Verazin

Custodial Technician

GNA Educational Center

Adopt-A-School Organizer

11/22/2005

### **Nanticoke budget has \$300,000 hole**

By:Elizabeth Skrapits

In order to fill a \$306,362 hole in the 2006 budget, Nanticoke City Council is first looking to expand its revenues. The preliminary budget council examined Monday night contains \$3,539,689 in expenditures and \$3,233,327 in revenues. The city's taxes are already at the maximum rate, so there will not be a tax increase, councilman Bill Brown said. Council will determine how to reduce the deficit by the next regular meeting, when the first of two votes to accept the budget will be held, Brown said.

To help, Robert Sabatini of Keystone Municipal Services, gave city officials a preliminary emergency action plan, as part of the state's Early Intervention Program.

It focused on revenues because they are easier to enact than making cuts to expenditures, which often involves negotiations, Sabatini said.

The first thing the city needs to do is get new accounting software. The current system is too complicated for city administration, so financial data is not reliable, he said.

"You need a clear understanding of where you are week to week, month to month, and adapt to any shortfall on a timely basis," Sabatini said.

Suggestions for getting more revenue included updating Nanticoke's mercantile and business privilege taxes so it will generate more than the combined \$160,000 anticipated for 2006.

Another goal is to improve its delinquent tax collection rate, which tax collector Albert Wytoshek said is around 85 percent. Typically, municipalities should collect 95 percent, Sabatini said.

Owners of vacant properties do not have to pay the \$176 annual garbage fee, a practice Sabatini said should be stopped because the city can't effectively verify all vacant properties.

The recommendation that sparked the most discussion was to schedule regular inspections of rental properties and charge landlords an annual permit fee per unit.

The city has an ordinance for property inspections, but the system is ineffective, Sabatini said. A stronger plan with follow-ups would help city officials manage blight, identify properties illegally converted for rental, and help ensure safety, he said.

Brown and councilman John Bushko, both landlords, did not like the idea because an additional fee of \$50 combined with other fees such as sewer and garbage would almost make the properties not worth renting.

"I think it's something we need to do, but I'm not crazy about it," Bushko said.

The budget must be passed by Dec. 31, but council has until Feb. 15, 2006 to make amendments to it, Brown said.

In other business, Dollar General, which planned to purchase the former CVS building on East Main Street from the Nanticoke Redevelopment Authority for \$300,000, pulled out of the deal three days before closing.

11/20/2005

### **Nanticoke Area Notes**

By: Pamela Urbanski

Making the holiday brighter

Two area churches are doing their part to make sure that people who live in the Nanticoke area have a great meal and are not alone on Thanksgiving Day.

St. Francis Parish will hold its 22nd annual Thanksgiving dinner for people who are unable to provide for themselves, those who will be alone for the holiday or who are homebound on Thanksgiving Day. The dinner will be held from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the parish center, East Green Street. Anthony Volpicelli, once again, is heading up the group of volunteers who will cook, prepare and serve close to 400 dinners. He is glad to be a part of this tradition.

"I'm happy I'm able to give so many years. As long as my health holds up, I will keep cooking," said Volpicelli. "All of us who volunteer want to make sure that everyone has a dinner to eat on Thanksgiving Day."

He tells me it is also important that everyone has someone to share a meal with. "It really makes the holiday a little nicer." Sit-down dinners, as well

as take-outs, are available.

For reservations or more information, call the parish center at 735-6903. Deadline to make a reservation is Tuesday.

At the First Presbyterian Church of Nanticoke, Main and Walnut Streets, church members are prepared to offer turkey and all the trimmings on Thanksgiving Day. Dinner will be served at 1 p.m. This is the third annual dinner for anyone who would like to come together and enjoy the fellowship of others and, of course, a delicious meal.

"It is a way of giving back to the community," said church elder and volunteer Martha Price. "All of us who prepare, serve and clean up enjoy what we do."

For more information, call the church at 735-6449.

Both dinners are free to the public.

Spaghetti dinner in Glen Lyon

Looking for something to do today? Don't feel like cooking?

The New Life Committee of Corpus Christi Parish will hold its annual spaghetti dinner today from noon to 3 p.m. in the church hall, Main Street in Glen Lyon. Take-outs are available from 11 a.m. to noon. Containers will be provided. Cost is \$6 for adults and \$3 for children under 12.

Enjoy a Victorian tea

First Presbyterian Church, Main and Walnut Streets in Nanticoke is sponsoring a Victorian tea on Sunday, Dec. 4, from 2 to 4 p.m. Take a trip back in time to the Victorian era as the church will be decorated to reflect the time period. Refreshments include sandwiches, scones, desserts, tea and coffee. Tickets are \$7 and must be purchased before the event by calling M. Price at 735-4043. No tickets will be available at the door. A craft sale, white elephant sale and Chinese auction also will be held in conjunction with the tea. You can enjoy tea and then shop or just shop till you drop.

A Christmas bread sale

Women's Catholic Council of Holy Trinity Church is sponsoring a Christmas bread sale. Delicious homemade poppy, nut, prune and apricot are available and orders must be received by Nov. 25. Call 735-7641 or 735-4978 to place your order. Order sheets also can be found at each entrance to the church.

A Mass for the young

The Rev. Jim Nash, pastor of Holy Trinity/Holy Child/St. Stanislaus Parish Community, invites area teens and young adults to celebrate a Mass geared toward their age group on Sunday, Nov. 27, at 7 p.m. in St. Stanislaus rectory. Following the Mass, refreshments and youth-centered activities will be held. All are welcome.

11/15/2005

### **To cafeteria workers, guards: Thanks for help at schools**

Editor:

Wednesday, Nov. 16 is recognized by the Pennsylvania General Assembly as "National Education Support Professionals Day"

This resolution cites the dedication of 40 percent of the education work force from kindergarten through 12th grade in carrying out their critical role in supplementing the work of teachers.

All year long educational support professionals keep schools running efficiently and effectively. This date is set aside to say "Thank You" for all their hard work, long hours, and dedication. National ESP day is the perfect opportunity to recognize and celebrate their contributions.

So, to all secretaries, cafeteria workers, aides, cleaning personnel, custodians, crossing guards, hall monitors and maintenance men, thank you for all you do.

It's a job well done.

James (J.D.) Verazin

President

Greater Nanticoke Area Educational Support Professionals

11/15/2005

### **Three projects move forward in Nanticoke**

By: Elizabeth Skrapits

The sound of construction equipment echoed across Nanticoke City as three major projects got under way Monday.

Demolition began on three properties at 108-112, 116 and 120 E. Main St. for an as-yet undefined commercial development by the Nanticoke General Municipal Authority.

In another part of the city, infrastructure is being put in place for phase one of Lexington Village, which will consist of approximately 55 senior housing units on 12.5 acres on Kosciuszko Street near Luzerne County Community College.

And off Lower Broadway in the Honey Pot section of the city bordering Newport Township, progress is being made on the rail line and buildings at Whitney Pointe, a four-phase residential and commercial development.

"It just takes a while to get things going, but when they get going, you'll see some big changes," city Administrator Greg Gulick said. "It's really neat to see these all happening at once."

Sewer lines and fire hydrants are being installed at Lexington Village and the foundations will soon follow, Gulick said.

The project started late because Developer Dominick Ortolani was delayed when a contractor for the project sued him, but that has been settled, said state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke.

"Because of the delay, the project continues to evolve. They're focusing now on getting the housing units up," he said. The plan is to build some of

the units by the beginning of next year.

When the first phase is complete, work will begin on the

second phase of Lexington Village, which includes a 66-bed Alzheimer's facility. It is expected to bring 75 jobs to the area.

The \$12 million project is mainly privately financed, but state Sen. Ray Musto, D-Pittston, and Yudichak secured a \$260,000 state grant for infrastructure.

Nearly \$400,000 in state funding went to Whitney Pointe, toward reviving the existing Glen Lyon rail line. The rail line is part of a bigger line that runs from New York to Harrisburg. Most of Whitney Pointe is financed by Pollock Enterprises, whose principal Ken Pollock has invested more than \$1 million in it already, Yudichak said.

Concrete is being poured for offices, and work on the rail line has been ongoing, Gulick said.

The former Dan Flood Industrial Park was vacant for 30 years until Pollock purchased it and began clearing 500 acres of former mine land. There will be 147 residences in Newport Township and 19 commercial units, mainly in Nanticoke. Creative Printing Services is set to move in, and other tenants are being lined up, Councilman John Bushko said.

The Nanticoke General Municipal Authority is having less luck with the East Main Street project, Bushko said.

"They're having conversations with potential tenants. As soon as something's committed, they'll figure out a design," he said. "But if they don't put the parkade in there, it's useless. You need parking downtown."

Nor has Impact Pennsylvania, the developer hired for the project, shown elected officials any concrete plans. The general idea is to get a tenant in and build to suit, Bushko said.

11/11/2005

### **Poverty rate high, GNA chiefs say**

By Ian Campbell - Times Leader Correspondent

Criticism from a taxpayer group sparked protests of unfairness from several board members at the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board meeting Thursday.

Responding to charges that the board needed to keep a handle on costs, board members Kenny James, Jeff Kozlofsky and Pat Bieski said that the boards through the last nine years had done exactly that, bringing the district back from the brink of state takeover and into a well-managed operation.

In reply to charges from one member of the group that test scores were low, Middle School Principal Mike Pawlik and Superintendent Tony Perrone said results were tied to parental involvement, poverty rates and a variety of other issues.

"We have a 51-percent poverty rate in the district, and that impacts what we have to do," Pawlik said.

In addition to education, the district also has to take care of breakfast for many students, and needs to provide afternoon tutoring in a number of subjects at a variety of levels. In some grade levels, the numbers of children getting reduced or free breakfasts is running near 65 percent, and children who are hungry can't be expected to learn, he said.

Much of the funding for the tutoring and food comes from state and federal funds, he said after the meeting. The outside funds appear on the budget, but are not directly raised from the property taxpayers, so it gives a slightly unbalanced picture of district spending, he said.

A recent reading skills grant brought in \$175,000. A request for a Grade 7 and Grade 8 reading intervention program is with the federal Department of Education, and if approved will generate \$30,000 a year. Also, a \$60,000 state economic development grant has been requested for supplemental education and incentives, which would be used for snacks prior to and after school tutoring programs.

The high levels of low-income students make those funding options available, Pawlik said, and it makes return of income eligibility forms all the more important.

"We have classes that go from 50 percent eligible one year to 35 percent the next, simply because the forms haven't been returned," he said.

11/06/2005

### **New program helping victims manage stress**

By Nichole Dobo , Staff Writer

A local 48-year-old woman leans back in her chair, takes a breath and begins.

Her words slip between bright quips and somber anecdotes about a life "that nearly ended" and the Nanticoke program that helped save her.

A victim dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder, the woman said she was spiraling out of control last year. In April, she joined a Nanticoke women's counseling group and the flood of emotions that once ruled her life became manageable.

"I had no place to turn," she said tousling her full hair, then smiling. "I have been absolutely amazed how this place helped turn my life around."

The program is an offshoot of Nanticoke-based Northeast Counseling Services. It helps local women manage symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. The meetings are in locations known only to counselors and women who attend the meetings.

About 9 percent of people exposed to extreme trauma will develop some form of post-traumatic stress disorder, according to a U.S. Surgeon General's report. About half of those cases find some relief within six months, according to the report.

For the remainder, symptoms - physical and emotional - can last forever.

There are a number of women in the area dealing with this syndrome, said Laura Wereschagin, director of the Directions post-traumatic stress program. Many are victims of rape, domestic abuse, death of a loved one or sexual abuse, she said.

A partnership three years ago between the Domestic Violence Service Center and Northeast Counseling Services helped form the post-traumatic stress counseling group. As the two foundations partnered up for cross-training, the instance of women in need of post-traumatic stress treatment

shot up 2,000 percent, Wereschagin said.

Right now about 13 women are in the Nanticoke program, Wereschagin said. Of those 13, about two or three are living in a local domestic violence shelter.

"This is needed in our area," said Paula Tirano, director of the local Domestic Violence Service Center.

Women from the domestic violence shelter use the Nanticoke and Hazleton post-traumatic stress programs as a way to help heal, Tirano said. Since the program's inception, Nanticoke-based Northeast Counseling Services has worked with the domestic violence counselors to identify women in need of post-traumatic stress counseling.

This has worked very well, said Howard M. Ogin, clinical director of hospital services for Northeast Counseling Services.

For one woman, this program is most effective because of the women-only environment and the professionalism of the staff.

11/4/2005

### **Rende: GNA didn't force me to resign**

### **Former part-time counselor and school board candidate responds to rumors he quit over wrongdoing.**

By badams@leader.net

Greater Nanticoke Area School Board candidate Al Rende recently spoke out to clear up questions about his decision to resign from a part-time post as a counselor with the district.

Rende said he wanted to respond to scuttlebutt suggesting that he left because of alleged wrongdoing. He said he was not forced to resign his job at the district's Family Center. "I've heard a ton of rumors," Rende said. He expressed hope that voters will see through them.

Rende, 43, is aware of one rumor accusing him of taking something from the district. He said it is false and he would welcome an audit of the money he was given to use for center programs. Rende said an audit would show he appropriately used the money.

He is a certified addictions counselor and social worker who facilitated a student anger management group and fatherhood initiative in the district to get fathers more involved in their children's lives.

District Superintendent Tony Perrone said he cannot discuss personnel matters.

Rende is one of eight candidates for five seats on the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board. Rende, Frank Vandermark and Sylvia Mizdail are on the Republican ballot. Mizdail, Bob Raineri, Jeff Kozlofski, Gary Smith and Cindy Davis Donlin are on the Democratic ballot. Delia Bracero is a write-in candidate.

Rende said he submitted his resignation on Oct. 26 because he needs to step back, refocus and determine who can best help people. Rende said he had become disillusioned in part with the district's disciplinary practices and with the assistance students receive. Rende said everything he tried to initiate was met with lack of support, such as starting a Watch Dogs program to get fathers to volunteer in schools.

Rende said he had agreed with then-high school Principal Tom Kubasek last school year that alternatives to student out-of-school suspensions should be considered after a large number of students were suspended. The counselor said some people perceived Kubasek as being too lenient and wanted tougher discipline.

The district moved Kubasek from the high school to an elementary school principal position as of July 1 and named Maryann Jarolen as high school principal. No public reason has been given, but Kubasek has retained an attorney and the district has since admitted it was a demotion. A hearing is scheduled later this month to determine if the demotion was justified as Kubasek seeks reinstatement to the high school principal post.

He said he had approached the school board at a public meeting about problems in the district, not realizing that he should have first brought his concerns to the superintendent. "I was out of step," Rende said.

Rende said that after he supported alternatives to suspension and spoke at the board meeting, the district "roadblocked" him in his efforts to help students at the Family Center. He said the district cited budgetary reasons last summer for decreasing his hours from 16 per week to eight, but Rende said he had no objection to that.

11/03/2005

### **Nanticoke mayor: No tax hike expected**

By mbuffer@leader.net

City officials on Wednesday talked about reviewing next year's budget but disclosed few details about budget proposals.

Mayor John Toole said city council members got copies of a preliminary draft of the budget this week and said property taxes should not increase. Employee health insurance costs are projected to increase by about 25 percent next year, Toole said.

Despite dramatic increases in health care costs in recent years, the city has avoided tax hikes by not replacing employees who retire, Toole said, noting that the number of city employees has dropped from 58 to 41 since he became mayor in 1998. This year's budget is about \$3 million, Toole said.

During Wednesday's meeting, city Administrator Greg Gulick said the council needs to introduce a budget for a first reading at its Nov. 30 meeting. Gulick suggested council members meet in a closed session to discuss labor issues connected to the budget.

City Solicitor Bernard Kotulak said the council could not discuss the budget in a closed session if they discussed "non personnel items," but council members on Wednesday weren't interested in meeting behind closed doors. Toole said the city needs to reach a new union contract with office personnel represented by Teamsters Local 401.

During the meeting, city officials discussed having a budget hearing to review budget line items, but they didn't make a decision on how to review the budget. City officials also said the city will have to put Christmas wreaths on 60 streetlights this month because the South Valley Chamber of Commerce decided not to do it this year.

10/30/2005

### **Nanticoke official questions county's authority to take funding**

By Elizabeth Skrapits Staff Writer

It took Nanticoke officials a while to figure out that what looked like a liability was actually a little windfall.

The cash-strapped city needs every penny of revenue to address mounting debt, tax collector Albert Wytoshek said.

So when the city received a 1999 delinquent tax check from the county controller's office for \$5,978 instead of \$8,261, Wytoshek wanted to know why.

He is worried auditors will question the amount when they arrive in two weeks for the annual tax office audit.

Luzerne County Controller Steve Flood said it is normal procedure to take money owed by municipalities out of checks issued to them. Nanticoke's auditors will note the deduction and make the appropriate adjustments, he said.

In April, the county treasurer's office found a list of checks from 1999, including one for \$8,261 in delinquent taxes Nanticoke had never cashed.

"It was essentially found money - an uncashed check from 1999 that was about to be sent to the state," deputy controller Dave Murawski said.

Wytoshek had a reason to be concerned. His former assistant, Brenda Davis, pleaded guilty in October 2002 to stealing money.

It is estimated the Greater Nanticoke Area School District lost \$101,509, the county \$53,000 and the city \$30,000.

Last year, Flood discovered Nanticoke officials had not applied to Ohio Casualty Group, for funds due because of the Davis case. It settled on \$25,000, Flood said.

Part of the Aug. 17, 2004, agreement with Ohio Casualty Group required Nanticoke to pay \$2,283 to the county. The final release form was signed by Mayor John Toole in September 2004, but the money was not paid by the city.

In December 2004, attorney Harry Skene sent a letter to Nanticoke Solicitor Bernard Kotulak asking for the money.

"We heard nothing. They basically ignored the request," Murawski said.

It should have been brought before council so a check could have been cut from the general fund, Wytoshek said.

10/30/2005

### **Spook-free fun reigns in parade**

**Nanticoke native organizes the event with local groups to provide some Halloween joy to area children.**

Becky Seman says she feels as if children today don't have a lot of good to look forward to with the negative elements facing them in society.

So with the help of others, the Nanticoke native and 21-year-old Luzerne County Community College student decided to put together a Halloween parade and costume contest to scare away any woes or worries kids might have. The event took place Saturday afternoon at Patriot Square and was enjoyed by kids, adults and even a few pooches.

"I love kids and I love where I live," Seman said. "It makes me feel happy seeing kids smile. It helps take their minds off all the negative that's going on in the world."

Seman, who is a member of Civic Pride, an organization that keeps the park clean and maintained, came up with the idea for the parade a month ago.

She had help from the Crime Watch group, the drug task force and city officials.

"A lot more showed up than expected," she said. "We ran out of candy bags."

But the approximately 250 participants were soon compensated when council members John Bushko and Yvonne Bozinski saved the day by supplying more treats.

"We're going to try and do this every year," Bozinski said. "It was a real nice outcome."

The councilwoman said she came as a hula dancer but had to change because of the cool fall weather.

Not only did children participate in the festivities, but adults also came dressed in Halloween garb.

Debbie Fields, who accompanied her 7-year-old daughter, came dressed as an American Indian.

The area woman moved here two years ago from Philadelphia and said she likes the small-town feeling of Nanticoke.

"I think it's great," she said. "There is no way they could set something like this up in Philly. They would have to provide 7 million gift bags."

There were also a number of dogs dressed up by their owners. A pimped-out pooch, fairy dog and monster mutt were seen making their way through the large crowd.

10/28/2005

### **GNA admits principal was demoted**

**Tom Kubasek, formerly principal of the high school, contests his transfer to an elementary school.**

By badams@leader.net

Former Greater Nanticoke Area High School Principal Tom Kubasek's involuntary move to the elementary school caused a public outcry from some parents and students. Now, the district has conceded it was a demotion and not a transfer as it previously maintained.

Kubasek had served as high school principal for four years before he was moved to the principal's position at K.M. Smith Elementary School. The school board in May replaced him with assistant high school Principal Maryann Jarolen.

"I will attempt to prove that the demotion was arbitrary and capricious and should result in his reinstatement," said attorney Charles Coslett.

Kubasek said the district's admission that he was demoted after a hearing before the school board. That hearing will continue on Nov. 29 with

Coslett continuing to represent Kubasek.

Coslett said the school board will decide the issue and he is not optimistic that it has the "intestinal fortitude" to say Kubasek's demotion had no merit. The attorney is prepared to appeal the case to Pennsylvania Secretary of Education Gerald Zahorchak where Coslett said it will get an unbiased review.

He said the district belatedly responded to his request to explain why Kubasek was moved, but Coslett on Thursday did not want to disclose that reason.

School Board Solicitor Vito DeLuca said he is representing the district administration in the proceedings and attorney Ellis Katz of Bucks County is representing the board. DeLuca said he did not want to comment on the upcoming hearing. "I don't think it would be fair to him or the process," he said of Kubasek.

DeLuca said it was his decision that the district should concede that Kubasek was demoted. He said he made that decision because the principal had received a reduction in pay. The district had paid Kubasek a \$1,000 stipend to serve as senior project adviser.

Superintendent Tony Perrone would not comment on the situation.

Parents had complained publicly at school board meetings after the board voted to move Kubasek to the elementary position.

Jarolen had said in August that her previous role as disciplinarian is the main reason behind some parents' opposition.

"They lied to us and said it wasn't a demotion," parent Joanne Capece said Thursday. She said the district took Kubasek out of a position he loved and that the high school students loved him.

"He was tough on them, but he also understood them," she said. Her two sons attend the high school.

"The school board has made a mockery out of (the) district," Capece said.

10/27/2005

### **Nanticoke Road Projects face Uncertainty**

By Elizabeth Skrapits Staff Writer

The city's state Liquid Fuels fund has run out of gas, but there's plenty of road to cover before the city's next check.

There is only about \$85,000 left in the account, and the next check isn't due until April 2006, city Administrator Greg Gulick told council at Wednesday night's work session.

From the fund, \$50,000 has to go to paving Lincoln Avenue, \$36,000 to pay for street lighting until next spring, about \$40,000 will be needed to buy road salt, plus there will be vehicles to repair and blacktop to purchase, Gulick said.

The city could get a \$100,000 bank loan, to be paid off over five years, he said.

"I'm tired of every time we come up with something, going to the bank and borrowing," Mayor John Toole said, suggesting instead the city temporarily take the money from the sewer fund.

Council will have to decide how to make up the deficit at next week's meeting.

Liquid fuels money, which comes from gas taxes, is given by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation to municipalities based on how many miles of roads they have. The money can only be used for road-related expenses.

In other business, Councilman Joe Dougherty proposed passing a Megan's Law ordinance that would put restrictions on where convicted sex offenders can live in Nanticoke. They should be prohibited from living near schools, day care centers, and public facilities like recreation parks, Dougherty said.

Megan's Law, named after a 7-year-old New Jersey girl who was raped and murdered by a repeat offender, requires convicted sex offenders to be placed in statewide and nationwide registries.

Solicitor Bernard Kotulak, who was absent Wednesday, would have to determine if such an ordinance could be passed, and if so, write it up. The ordinance could be unconstitutional, Toole said.

Seven municipalities, all apparently in Bucks County, already have Megan's Law ordinances, Dougherty argued.

The Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority is increasing its fees from \$130 to \$160 per dwelling unit in Nanticoke, city clerk Michael Yurkowski said. Increased costs are being passed on to consumers throughout Luzerne County, not just Nanticoke, Gulick said.

Building permits are down 50 percent from last year, Toole said.

10/27/2005

### **#60 of the Citizens' Voice Top Athletes For Boxing - Bill Speary**

In the first round of the first fight of his boxing career, 40 miles from his Nanticoke home in a strange armory in Tamaqua, Billy Speary was knocked down. He laughed, got up, won the bout by knockout and went on to stardom.

An 89-pound teenager with a history of childhood illnesses, Speary walked into a converted Nanticoke firehouse and asked trainer Art Thomas to show him how to box.

By 1937, he had won an AAU national championship as a flyweight. He won the same honor in the bantamweight division the next two years.

By 1940, Speary had fought nearly 198 times as an amateur. He went 183-15, avenged each of his losses in a return bout and recorded more than 100 knockouts.

Speary wanted nothing more than to represent his country in the 1940 Olympics, but World War II stopped those dreams cold.

Undeterred, Speary turned professional and became one of the top-drawing fighters in the country.

He went 46-17-2 and fought several world champions. He beat featherweight titlist Harry Jeffra in a non-title fight in Wilkes-Barre in 1940 and twice battled champion Willie Pep to 10-round decisions.

Did you know?

Speary was the third fighter given the Edward J. Neil Memorial Award by New York boxing writers for contributions to the sport in 1940. Jack Dempsey won in 1938. Billy Conn won in 1939.

89 After retiring from the ring in 1944, Speary settled in the Lehigh Valley where he worked for Bethlehem Steel. Having struggled with heart problems his whole life, he died at age 49 in 1967. Amateur boxers were generally paid under the table in the 1930s. Speary bristled at the notion, but it was rumored that he earned as much as \$20,000 during his final three years before turning pro.

10/25/2005

### **HealthNow completes move; Nanticoke building lacks new tenant**

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Staff Writer

Movers were busy Saturday taking apart HealthNow's offices in the Kanjorski Center on Main Street in Nanticoke, and putting them back together in the Twin Stacks Center on Route 415 in Dallas Borough.

"The game plan was to move everything this weekend, so we would be fully functional and operating in full business mode this morning,"

HealthNow spokeswoman Karen Merkel-Liberatore said Monday.

Nanticoke General Municipal Authority, which owns the Kanjorski Center, does not yet have a replacement for the Binghamton, N.Y.-based healthcare claim processing company, its biggest tenant.

In addition, the authority has to find a new building manager. The current one, Bill O'Malley, terminated the contract his firm, Windham Corp., had with the municipal authority, effective Nov. 2 due to differences over compensation and insurance.

Last month, Municipal Authority solicitor Sue Maza sent a letter to William Wickis of HealthNow requesting \$804,986 from the company by Sept. 12. The money was allegedly for operating costs, to return the building to its original condition, and to repay the authority for planning expenses rung up during a now abandoned proposal to expand the Kanjorski Center.

The letter stated if HealthNow did not pay, the lease would be terminated effective Oct. 31.

But Merkel-Liberatore said it was part of the company's relocation plan to be out by the end of October, anyway.

The company still has not paid up, so the authority retained a law firm to pursue the claims against HealthNow, Maza said.

O'Malley said he "could swear on a stack of Bibles there's no \$800,000 in damages in there," but normal wear and tear on the building.

However, he noted the municipal authority will have to prepare the Kanjorski Center for a new tenant and make some standard repairs, which there is no money to do. The authority's coffers contain only about \$40,000, he said.

The loss of two months' rent at \$33,000 a month will be a blow to the authority, which has a \$90,000 mortgage payment due to the county by the end of the year, O'Malley said.

He pointed out the municipal authority also needs money for an approximately \$9 million project, a commercial and retail complex to be built on East Main Street.

"The municipal authority is aware of what's due and they are working on it," Maza said.

With HealthNow gone, there are 30,000 square feet vacant at the Kanjorski Center. The state Department of Labor and Industry occupies the remaining 4,500 square feet of the building, but as of Jan. 1, the department will be leasing on a quarterly basis so it can leave at any time, O'Malley said.

The municipal authority has not hired a real estate agent to market the Kanjorski Center, Maza said. Instead, it hopes to replace HealthNow through the developer for the East Main Street project, which will also need tenants.

10/17/2005

### **Nanticoke authority reviewing bids for asbestos removal**

By Bill Androckitis Jr. Citizens' Voice Correspondent

Nanticoke Municipal Authority received several bids for asbestos removal at several authority-owned properties at a special meeting Saturday.

The authority recently acquired three buildings along East Main Street that will be demolished to make way for new retail and office space.

Datom Products, Dunmore, submitted the lowest bid of \$15,923. PDG Inc., Drums, submitted a bid of \$17,200, and Power Component Systems Inc., Harrisburg, had the highest bid at \$23,887.

The authority also tentatively accepted contracts from Thomas R. Harley Architects for design services for renovations and expansion of the Kanjorski Center and construction of a new parking garage.

Board member Robert Bray noted that work will not start on the designs until a tenant is lined up for the building.

Karen Hazleton was hired to provide accounting services for 2006 at a cost of \$900 per month.

10/13/2005

TIMES LEADER - OUR OPINION

### **Stealing school kids' money not a class act**

**IT'S AWFUL WHEN money that was raised to help others is stolen.**

**But when the money was raised by kids? That's even worse.**

A thief or thieves broke into K.M. Smith Elementary School in Newport Township last week and ransacked parts of the building. They took a 75- to 100-pound safe that was in a locked room inside the school office area.

Principal Tom Kubasek said the safe contained about \$800 that had been collected by kindergarten and first-grade students at the school during a program called "Kids for Kids." They began collecting the money after Hurricane Katrina hit and continued through September.

"This came from their hearts," Kubasek said.

This is the second time in recent months that money raised by children has been stolen. Last school year, about \$2,000 was stolen from Heights-Martin L. Murray Elementary School. Sixth-graders had collected the money to defray the costs of their class trip and other school activities.

Unfortunately, it's fairly common to hear about vandalism and thefts at our area schools. We're not sure what the allure is – perhaps disgruntled students seeking revenge – but we wish it would stop.

How awful it must be for the children whose money has been stolen to have their faith be shaken at such a young age.

Our plea to those who stole money from K.M. Smith and the Heights elementary schools – give the money back. If the money's gone, confess, and start making restitution.

A Heights parent said Wednesday that \$1,000 of the missing money had been returned. That's a great start. We hope that those who stole the money at K.M. Smith come forward soon. Mistakes are made.

But there's still time to show these kids the power of an apology.

10/9/2005

### **GNA aids district damaged by Katrina**

### **A concerned man helps the local school district adopt one in Mississippi.**

By kamerman@leader.net

"I'm the type of guy ... if I get an idea I run with it"

J.D. Verazin Leader of project

J.D. Verazin knows what it's like to need help.

In the flood of 1972, as a member of the local National Guard, Verazin watched bodies and homes float down streets as he and others tried to restore conditions in Luzerne County.

Among the people from around the country that came to assist Verazin and others in the disaster relief was a group from Gulfport, Miss.

Now, Verazin, a custodian and Web master for the Greater Nanticoke Area School District, is spearheading an effort to get people in Mississippi back on track.

"I saw what a flood can do," Verazin said, recalling how bodies from a local cemetery washed up.

([See Agnes of 1972 flood website](#))

After Hurricane Katrina hit Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama, Verazin said his sister brought up the idea of "adopting" a school.

"I'm the type of guy ... if I get an idea I run with it."

Verazin said he began researching areas that need help and eventually learned that two libraries and a computer area of a school in the Jones County School District in Ellisville, Miss. were destroyed. So, the Greater Nanticoke Area School District has decided to raise money for the school district. About \$475 has been raised.

"There is money coming from each of the five schools," Verazin said.

He said only checks are being accepted and several school organizations are holding fund-raisers for the program.

He said some of the money that was stolen from K.M. Smith Elementary School in Newport Township Monday night or early Tuesday morning was earmarked for the program.

A safe containing about \$800 in cash and checks was stolen from the school during the break-in. Also, parts of the school were ransacked. Police are investigating the burglary.

10/6/2005

### **New Nanticoke housing head introduced**

By wprice@leader.net

Mayor John Toole announced the hiring of the new housing authority director at Wednesday's council meeting.

Perry Clay, of the Philadelphia area, was formally introduced to the council and the public.

The authority oversees 419 housing units in six complexes throughout the city.

"I hope to serve residents with everything I can offer," Clay said. He said he was looking forward to serving the city and is moving his family in shortly from the Philadelphia area.

"He's a good person and will be an asset to the community," Toole said. "Everyone seems to like him already."

He replaced Edward M. Brosh, a housing authority commissioner and acting executive director.

In other news:

Toole asked for the city's support and participation in the second annual Smith Health Care Parkinson's Disease Walk-a-thon. Friend of the mayor Linda Jacoby, a sufferer of the disease, is organizing the event.

Smith Health Care, a nursing home where Jacoby resides, will sponsor the event.

The fund-raiser will be held on Oct. 23 at Smith Health Care Ltd., 452 S. Main Road, Mountaintop. Anyone interested in participating in the walk should register by 9 a.m. and should contact Jacoby at 868-5356. The walk begins at 10 a.m., rain or shine.

Don Perkoski, a member of the Nanticoke Crime Watch, applauded the police department. "They're doing a fantastic job."

He asked council members and the mayor to participate in the Dec. 1 Crime Watch meeting. Perkoski reminded residents that meetings take place the first of every month.

10/3/2005

### **Hearts heavy for Nanticoke church shuttered by fire**

**Members of St. John's Lutheran find temporary quarters at St. John's Slovak Lutheran. The pastor sees a return taking several weeks.**

By kkazokas@leader.net

For the second consecutive week, some parishioners at St. John's Lutheran Church worshipped in a not-as-familiar environment Sunday.

A fire Sept. 23 at the church on 231 State St. has forced its pastor, the Rev. Phyllis Pelletier, to temporarily move Sunday worship services to St. John's Slovak Lutheran Church, 604 Hanover St.

"We're going to be out of it for a few more weeks, I think," Pelletier said of the State Street location, noting that rewiring has to be done, flooring needs to be repaired and new carpeting must be laid.

The fire broke out between the basement ceiling and the sanctuary floor, Pelletier said, when the ballast of a fluorescent light overheated. She said the damage could have been worse if the blaze had started at a different time.

"Fortunately, we were having a rummage sale, so there were people there (to report the fire), but we had a lot of smoke and water damage."

Parishioner Melissa Simon experienced the event firsthand. "We were pulling up when it was happening. We basically got out what we could get out of the church's office, but we got all the people out first before anything."

Not all parishioners have been attending the worship services at the alternate location, which take place at 8 and 9:30 a.m. just as they did at East State Street.

"We have a lot of elderly people in our congregation, and the Slovak church has very steep steps," Pelletier said.

Simon believes the church's senior citizens might be most disheartened by the fire.

"They found it probably to be the hardest," she said, adding that the church is approaching its 125th anniversary next year.

10/3/2005

### **Honey Pot Fire Company's numbers skyrocket**

By Tom Venesky , Staff Writer

Two years ago, the Honey Pot Fire Company had a difficult time attracting enough members to form a quorum for company meetings.

Today, fire company association president Chester Kopco has a hard time finding enough equipment for all the people volunteering to serve on the fire company. Not that he is complaining.

"It's almost to the point I have to be particular about who I take because we are getting full," Kopco said.

The company welcomed eight new members last month, four active and four juniors, and recently obtained a transfer member from the Nanticoke Fire Department, another active member and two more perspective members. The additions raise the company's membership to 47, including social and active members.

Kopco attributes the fire company's membership success to two things: community involvement and a focus on family.

"You have to involve the entire community and give something back," Kopco said. "We've handed out smoke detectors, we'll give toys to kids for Halloween and conduct safety patrols.

"When you're out in the public, people don't mind giving when they see you doing things."

The fire company is also benefiting from a strong family tradition. Among last month's new members, three are related to current active members.

"It's the community that's driving this because they care," Kopco said. "I've never had this before. It certainly makes us work harder when we get such positive feedback. It makes all of us proud."

New junior member Stephanie Markowski, 14, joined the company to follow in her father's (Tony Markowski) footsteps.

She made it clear that she is willing to do any job, from rolling up hoses to helping with fundraisers, to show she is committed to the company.

"My dad used to bring me here when I was little and let me sit on the fire truck, so I guess it grew on me," Markowski said. "It means a lot to join the company and I want to be here for a long time."

The company is currently at a disadvantage because its engine is out of service for repairs. Kopco said the truck should be back by the end of November, and the new members will be trained and ready to go.

The company is also considering purchasing a brush truck and establishing a fire police organization.

"We're branching out and we have the people and finances to do it now," Kopco said.

10/2/2005

### **An empty feeling in Nanticoke**

**Lecher's Hardware coming down soon**

By rfennick@leader.net

"I don't know of an older business in Nanticoke."

Chester Zaremba Historical Society president

Lecher's Hardware is being dismantled in much the same way it was built: one nut and bolt at a time.

The store, a mainstay on East Main Street for more than 150 years, and two other properties soon will be razed to make way for a commercial building, part of a redevelopment project undertaken by the Nanticoke Municipal Authority.

Three other businesses – a coin shop, coffee shop and dry cleaner – were displaced with Lecher's. One of them, Galazin Cleaners, has relocated to 107 S. Market St.

Lecher's catered mostly to local residents, said John Kropiewnicki, who owned the hardware store from 1979 until it closed two weeks ago.

The store's contents, including two shipments of newly purchased inventory, were sold at an auction last Saturday.

"I lost money on that, big-time," Kropiewnicki said. "I got two orders in the day of the sales agreement (Sept. 9). There was talk of an option to buy this building in 2001 and that fell through so I didn't think this would happen so fast this time."

The building's owner, Melania Kropiewnicki, John's mother, sold the building for \$108,000, according to Susan Maza, authority solicitor. The other buildings sold for \$107,000 and \$121,000.

The developer, Susquehanna Development Group, Turbotville, plans to build a commercial building on the site.

Nanticoke native Chester Zaremba, president of the city's historical society, called the store's closing "another sad chapter in the demise of downtown U.S.A.

"I don't know of an older business in Nanticoke," he said. "In fact, one of the oldest photos in our files is of Lecher's Hardware, taken sometime in the 1880s. There's always been Lecher's on our Main Street."

Zaremba, the city's former police chief, said he will miss the store from a consumer's point.

"You went there and found what you needed," he said. "It was convenient and John (Kropiewnicki) knew what he was talking about. Those old wooden floors had that homey creakiness. And, it had a certain comforting smell to it."

Leonard Davenport, who paints ads on the downtown storefronts, said the atmosphere inside Lecher's was of an old-time neighborhood business.

"John (Kropiewnicki) had most of the answers such as how to put something together or take it apart," Davenport said. "And the advice was free. Regulars would stop in and visit for awhile. You can't do that in one of those big places."

An elderly woman waiting for a bus outside the store said she didn't frequent Lecher's often but when she did, found it was handy.

"I wasn't a big customer," said the woman, who asked not to be identified. "But, it was good if you needed just one screw or bolt. You didn't have to buy the whole pack."

Kropiewnicki also owns Lee's Oil, a heating-oil company. He isn't sure if he will reopen a hardware store and sold his inventory because storage was a problem. He's also waiting to hear if he will receive any type of displacement assistance.

Founded in 1852 by Charles H. Lecher, the store remained in the Lecher family for 100 years until Wilbur Deeter took over in the 1950s.

Kropiewnicki bought the business from Deeter.

9/28/2005

### **Nanticoke Municipal Authority closes on property for development project**

By Tom Long Staff Writer

A huge orange backhoe sits on a parking lot in downtown Nanticoke, surrounded by an orange plastic fence. A red dumpster the size of a small school bus is ready to collect the remains of the crumbling wall a few feet away.

The neighboring empty buildings, which held the Coffee Shoppe, Lecher's Hardware, a cleaner, a collectibles store and the empty Kove's Lounge, are coming down.

After months of wrangling over a \$1.5 million grant from the federal Economic Development Administration, the Nanticoke General Municipal Authority has met its deadlines. It had ownership of the properties by Monday's deadline property owners Helen McLarney and Melania Kropiewnicki confirmed Monday they'd closed the sales of their properties. And, with demolition equipment in place, the authority has met today's deadline to start work on the site.

"Everything's going on schedule," said authority member Chester Beggs. "We put heavy equipment down there to demolish the buildings. We put that down there today (Monday)."

The EDA grant was originally destined to expand HealthNow That business is now leaving Nanticoke's downtown Kanjorski center for Dallas. Since the departure was announced, the municipal authority has been working on new plans to use the development money.

Beggs and fellow authority member Walter Sokolowski referred requests for details on the project to municipal authority Solicitor Susan Maza. Three calls to Maza's office throughout the day Monday were not returned.

It's unclear exactly what will replace the businesses at E. 108-124 Main St.

Plans call for a mix of residential and commercial space, Beggs said. The space will be designed to fit the needs of its tenants, he said. When a model is ready, it will be put on display for two weeks to get feedback from the public.

"They're not giving out too much information," said Councilman John Bushko. He doesn't know who the tenants will be, and the authority hadn't informed him Monday if it was on schedule to make its deadlines.

Communication between the elected council and the appointed authority in Nanticoke has been rocky at times. Bushko said the two bodies were speaking, but that "actually we (council) have no input there at all."

9/24/2005

## **Fire wrecks church's rummage sale plans**

By Robert Kalinowski , Staff Writer

Just as Friday's rummage and bake sale at Nanticoke's St. John's Lutheran Church began, Mary Diacheysn thought she smelled something burning. The 69-year-old's first instincts were to check the kitchen, where parishioners were serving wimpies, chicken tetrazzini and vegetable beef soup since 9 a.m.

All was under control, and the twice-yearly event held in the 231 State St. church's basement continued uninterrupted for 45 minutes.

"We smelled smoke, but didn't know where it was coming from. Then, all of a sudden we saw fire falling from the ceiling," Diacheysn recalled Friday afternoon.

An electrical fire had broken out between the basement ceiling and first floor worship area of the 123-year-old church.

At the far end of the basement, below the entrance, parishioners watched ceiling blocks and electrical components crash down near dozens of items tagged for sale.

"Once the flames started to come, we had to shoo everyone out," said Diacheysn, estimating 40 people were in the basement.

"It was scary."

Fire crews from Nanticoke and Hanover Township got the blaze under control in about 15 minutes, sparing the worship area from any fire damage, fire officials said.

But the rummage and bake sale - scheduled to run until 6 p.m. Friday and from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday - couldn't continue. Some areas of the basement floor took on a foot of water, power was shut off and the stench of fire lingered.

Sale volunteers who evacuated outside lamented the unfortunate incident that ruined the event they planned for several months.

"The rummage sale is done for this year," said 41-year-old parishioner Lori Pauska. "We only do this two times a year - and this had to happen."

"Its sad. We really gear up for these rummage sales," said Diacheysn. "It helps us help the church."

The last sale raised \$1,200 for the church of 250 members, volunteers said.

"It's heartbreaking. We're a small congregation. We do this to help our church get by," said 81-year-old Leona Conrad.

"It's devastating. We worked hard for this. There's only a few of us ladies and we're all old," said 75-year-old Shirley Batogowski.

Diacheysn said firefighters arrived "in seconds" after the 911 call was placed.

Crews were on scene before the last person was out of the basement, she said.

A quick response proved important, as firefighter turnout was unusually slim, Nanticoke Fire Chief Mike Bohan said.

The 12 firefighters from Nanticoke and Hanover who responded did a good job in preventing the blaze from spreading throughout the church, he said.

No services could be held in the church until the electrical system is repaired, Bohan said.

Pastor Phyllis Pelletier said Sunday services (8 a.m. and 9:30 a.m.) will temporarily move across town to another church named St. John's Lutheran at 604 Hanover St.

"A church is not a building. It's the people," said Pelletier. "We're going to put one foot in front of each other and keep going."

9/20/2005

## **Nanticoke Authority feels project will be completed**

Tenants aren't lined up, no concrete site plans exist, and the funding is not 100 percent certain, but the Nanticoke General Municipal Authority is fairly confident the East Main Street project will go through.

It calls for the demolition of three existing businesses to construct a new commercial and retail center in the 100 block of Main Street.

Sales agreements between developer Impact Pennsylvania and Melania Kropiewnicki, who owns two parcels at 116 and 120 E. Main St., and Helen McLarney, owner of 108-112 E. Main St., are ready to go.

However, the property transactions can't close until the municipal authority has funding in place, Solicitor Susan Maza said at a special joint meeting of the municipal authority and redevelopment authority Wednesday.

"If we're held up with the sale for whatever reason, it could be detrimental to the project," municipal authority board member Robert Bray said.

Maza believes the authority should know within five days about the funding.

Building acquisition and demolition will be paid for with leftover federal grants for \$189,000, \$200,000, and \$72,000, plus a \$500,000 grant CityVest has committed to the project, redevelopment authority member Walter Sokolowski said.

A requirement for the authority to receive \$1.5 million in federal economic development money to go toward construction is that demolition must begin by Sept. 27, Maza said.

The demolition contract also depends on the municipal authority's ability to acquire the three properties.

For demolition, Thomas Harley, architect for the project, recommended Delvecchio Transport of Dunmore, which came in the lowest of three bids at \$312,000, or up to \$357,000 if the project is delayed for 90 days.

After a phone call to Impact Pennsylvania principal Bob Yoder, Harley reported to the municipal authority the numbers fit the project budget.

The buildings will be torn down according to environmental standards, so there will be a clean lot to start with, Harley said.

"What's going to go in place of those buildings?" resident Theresa Sowa asked.

Bray said it would be a combination of retail and commercial space.

No concrete plan is in place. The municipal authority has to find tenants, and the space will be designed to suit them, Maza said.

When Harley makes the architectural drawings, they will be available in the Nanticoke municipal building, then a hearing will be held for public

comment, Maza said.

The project, including a parkade, will cost a little more than \$12 million, Bray said.

Besides the \$1.5 million EDA grant, the city received \$5.6 million for a parking garage and another \$1.6 million that can be used for parking, obtained by U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, through the 2006 federal transportation bill, Sokolowski said.

Additionally, the municipal authority took out a \$5 million loan for the project from Omega Bank. At the July 11 meeting, Maza admitted, when questioned, that the board took action on the loan in a private meeting instead of in public.

9/20/2005

### **Nanticoke businesses closing to make way for project**

It's an advertising slogan John Kropiewnicki never could have envisioned when he purchased Lecher's Hardware in 1979.

In bold, fluorescent yellow and orange paint, the display window of his 116 E. Main St. landmark business screams to passers-by: "Demolition Sale! Everything must go."

Last week, Kropiewnicki and other business owners in the E. 108-124 Main St. commercial strip sold their properties to the Nanticoke Municipal Authority. The historic buildings will be razed to make way for a yet-to-be-finalized development project.

For Kropiewnicki, it was a victory of sorts - he's leaving on his own terms.

Lecher's, introduced to Nanticoke in the mid-1800s by Charles H. Lecher, survived years of competition from home improvement giants, like Home Depot and Lowe's, that steam-rolled in to the region and wiped out other hardware stores, he said.

But, he's also bitter so many people supported and flocked to those stores.

"Every time a business opens in the area and brings 200 new jobs, people don't realize it puts little guys like me out of business," he said.

Kropiewnicki will open for the last time today, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., with all items being sold for 25 percent off. Whatever stock isn't sold will be auctioned Saturday at a time to be announced.

Aside from standard hardware supplies, some of the things Kropiewnicki had remaining on his shelves Monday were fly swatters, phone cords, motor oil, mouse traps, bug spray and even egg slicers.

"This is the only place I ever came," said Frank Bolinski, 85, while stopping by Lecher's to say farewell to Kropiewnicki. "I liked getting the hometown deal."

"It's going to be a big loss to the town," said John Guszak, 65, a self-described handyman who bought all his supplies at Lecher's. "It's a sad day. This is the end of the era of what Nanticoke used to be."

After stocking up on merchandise at Lecher's, Guszak went to the next door mom-and-pop restaurant, known plainly as "The Coffee Shoppe," for lunch.

Inside the 112 E. Main St. business, a half dozen retired grandmothers sat at the lunch counter chatting with owner Helen McLarney and lamenting the impending closure.

"It's like family here," said Dottie Pall, 62, while sharing some laughs with the regulars. "Plus, you can't beat the prices."

McLarney's top seller, a cup of coffee, goes for 53 cents.

A breakfast platter, advertised from the front window, is \$2.09

Her trademark lunch deals cost between \$2.95 and \$4.95. "We try to keep the prices low and we are the cheapest anywhere. At 6 a.m. people are sitting in their cars waiting to get in," said McLarney.

The dimly lit, cozy coffee shop features 15 lime-green antique stools around its elbow counter. Menu items and specials are neatly hand written on posters around the establishment. The ice bin is plastered with a once-popular bumper sticker displayed around the city: "I Love Nanticoke, Pa."

The 79-year-old said it's bittersweet to close the business she's owned for 41 years.

"We made a good living here. We had a lot of laughs," she said, "But, I'm just going to relax. I've been working hard all my life."

McLarney will open 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. today and Wednesday, the last chance to enjoy the signature soups and rice pudding she makes daily.

A few months ago McLarney decided to close the adjoining Kove Cocktail Lounge, 108 E. Main St., after several years of declining business.

All the seven storefronts in the strip set for destruction were once bustling. But the city lost nearly half its population, from about 20,000 in 1950 to just above 10,000 today, and consumers began to rely on shopping at malls and outlying retail outlets, McLarney and Kropiewnicki agree.

All remaining business owners have until Sept. 27 to move out.

The Nanticoke Coin store, 120 E. Main St., closed Monday.

Galazin cleaners, 124 Main St., will remain open until at least Friday and its owners say they are looking for a new location for the 60-year-old business.

On Sept. 28, the municipal authority will seek bids to demolish the strip. The former YT Hardware store building and an adjoining warehouse used by Bartuska's Furniture will be spared.

"We had some really good customers. I've been thanking them in the last few days," said McLarney.

"Hardware stores have become dinosaurs," said Kropiewnicki, who also owns Lee's Oil in Nanticoke. "I just want to thank all the patrons of Lecher's Hardware over the last 26 years."

9/18/2005

### **Accidental fire destroys kitchen in Nanticoke home**

By Heidi E. Ruckno, Staff Writer

Nanticoke City firefighters were dispatched to a structure fire at a double block home Saturday that temporarily displaced four people. The blaze at 62 Coal St. broke out around 3:45 p.m. Bonnie May and her daughter Mellisa were the only people home at the time. Her husband and son, both named Rick, were out, she said.

When they saw the flames, Bonnie and Mellisa ran from the building. They knocked on their neighbors' door to warn them, but no one was home next door.

No one was injured in the blaze. The family's six Chihuahuas also got out safely, although firefighters had to rescue two of them.

Firefighters were not immediately sure who owned the building. According to Deputy Fire Chief Jay Munson, two people reside at 64 Coal St., the other half of the double block. Firefighters were still trying to locate them, Munson said.

Firefighters said it took just 10 minutes to extinguish the blaze, which started in the Mays' kitchen. The cause of the fire has been ruled accidental. "She was cooking on the stove," Munson said. "It appears that something got out of control."

Munson said the kitchen was gutted, but the rest of the home sustained only smoke and water damage. In addition, firefighters damaged some walls trying to extinguish the blaze, he said.

According to Bonnie May, she and her family planned to stay with relatives until they are able to get back into the house.

Munson said the May residence sustained, fire, smoke and water damage, but he believed their neighbors would be able to stay there Saturday night.

9/16/2005

### **Greater Nanticoke Area hires 2 teachers**

**Pamela Mulaski, elementary teacher, and Mary Morganti, special education, are hired.**

BY kkile@leader.net

Greater Nanticoke Area School Board members hired two teachers at Thursday night's meeting. The board also accepted the resignations of two teachers and three aides.

Mary Morganti was hired as a special education teacher effective the first day of the 2005-2006 school year. Pamela Mulaski was hired as an elementary teacher effective immediately, and Jennifer Ferro was hired as a tutor to a special needs students.

The board accepted the resignations of Kristen Miller, special education teacher, and Amy Kishel, art teacher. The resignations of Amy Grabowski and Denise Washinski, special education aides, and Paula Kanjorski, instructional aide, were also accepted.

Superintendent Anthony Perrone said most of the resignations were teachers aides who worked three hours a day. He said while most of them probably like their jobs, they cannot afford to stay employed at the district because of gas prices and the cost of oil.

"Most of the people that are leaving have gotten better jobs somewhere else," Perrone said.

In other business:

The board tabled a motion to reimburse a former teacher for college credits she completed at Millersville University. Chesla Bohinski completed three credits totaling \$390. Board president Robert Raineri said Bohinski resigned in August and accepted a job with the Dallas School District. Board solicitor Vito DeLucca is going to look into if the district has to reimburse her even though she is no longer employed at the district.

The district received a \$200,000 grant for adequate yearly progress. Perrone said the money will be used to tutor for the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment test, and basic math and reading. Last year the district received \$150,000.

9/15/2005

### **Nanticoke authority outlines building project, legal action**

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Staff Writer

Nanticoke Municipal Authority sold one building, bought three more, and is planning legal action against its main tenant in another building. The former CVS building at 30 E. Main St. will be sold for \$300,000 to a buyer who wants to put in a Dollar General, according to authority solicitor Sue Maza.

"A store's going in that's going to bring 15 to 20 new jobs to the area," she said.

At one time, the municipal authority considered using a \$1.5 million federal grant to expand HealthNow, the main tenant of the adjacent Kanjorski Center, to the CVS property.

Plans for the expansion fell through and HealthNow will move to Dallas at the end of the year, but the municipal authority recently received word the grant can be used for the Main Street project instead, Maza said. Developer Impact Pennsylvania will use the funding to build commercial and residential buildings downtown.

Sales agreements have been drawn up for three properties the municipal authority plans to acquire, level and prepare for new construction.

These are 108-112 E. Main St., to be purchased from Helen McLarney for \$107,000; and 116 E. Main St. purchased for \$121,000 and 120 E. Main St. for \$108,000, both from Melania Kropiewnicki.

In order to meet grant requirements, the project has to begin by Sept. 27. Bids for demolition will be solicited by the end of the week, Maza said.

"We have a lot of work between now and then in terms of doing the closings and moving forward, but I don't see any reason that won't be accomplished," she said.

The municipal authority is suing Binghamton, N.Y.-based HealthNow for unpaid expenses and has threatened to evict the Kanjorski Center tenant if the company doesn't pay what's owed. Besides rent, the Medicare claims processing company is responsible under the terms of its lease for contributing to operation costs, such as building maintenance, Maza said.

In correspondence with HealthNow, she wrote that the company owes \$23,372.82 for 2002, 2003, and 2004 operating costs, \$661,614 to return the premises to its original condition, and \$120,000 for expenses the municipal authority had when planning the Kanjorski Center expansion to accommodate HealthNow.

HealthNow representative William Wickis sent a letter saying the company wants to terminate its month-to-month lease with the municipal authority effective Dec. 31, Maza said.

HealthNow has signed a lease with Twin Stacks Center in Dallas Borough.

After unsuccessful attempts to reach the company, Maza said she sent a letter to Wickis demanding the company pay the \$804,986.82 it owes to the municipal authority.

She also wrote in the letter that HealthNow can remain in the Kanjorski building until Dec. 31 only if it pays up. If the money was not received by Sept. 12, the company was put on notice it would have to vacate the building by Oct. 31.

The deadline was meant as a spur because in the past, HealthNow has non-responsive to the municipal authority, Maza said.

"On the morning of Sept. 12, I came into the office, and in the fax machine was a letter from HealthNow's general counsel," Maza said. "The gist of it was that HealthNow disputes the analysis and denies the claim in its entirety."

She said it was surprising in light of the fact that in the past, HealthNow paid its share of operating expenses.

The municipal authority has retained Attorney John Dean and his Scranton-based litigation law firm of Elliott, Greenleaf and Siedzikowski to "pursue any and all moneys owed to the municipal authority by HealthNow," Maza said.

9/11/2005

### **Many made Night Out a big hit**

National Night Out 2005, sponsored by the National Association of Town Watch and Crime Watch of the Hanover section of Nanticoke, was a resounding success. Nothing could have taken place without the cooperation of St. John's Orthodox Church, which allowed us the use of their picnic grounds. Our special thanks to Rev. John Russin.

WBRE, Channel 28's Andy Mehalshick was a huge hit, and responded to the crowd by putting on a great show. The music that the great band OZ donated was outstanding. Our thanks to Congressman Paul Kanjorski, who came. Our Luzerne County District Attorney's Office was represented by crime-prevention specialist Chaz Balough. Nanticoke Mayor John Toole was in attendance. Nanticoke mayor-to-be John Bushko and his grandson, Lenny, also enjoyed the event.

The Nanticoke Police Department processed many bicycle registrations. Chief Jim Cheshinski and Detective Captain Bill Schultz did an outstanding job. The Nanticoke Fire Department with Chief Mike Bohan and Charles Alles were in attendance. At the end of the event, Ruby's Pizza on Espy Street donated all the pizza and beverages we could consume.

Weis Markets, Wegmans Market and Price Chopper Market in Edwardsville all helped. John Opachinski Jr. donated a substantial part of the refreshments.

Alma Berlot with her husband, Al, along with Crime Watch, supplied the prizes for the children's games they organized and ran. The Nebo Baptist Church puppet show and Cathy Malys were a special hit. Tables for information were set up by the Luzerne County MADD group.

Last but not least we must thank the Crime Watch crew who worked as a team in producing a successful event. The cooking, kitchen, soda and support people worked like a well-oiled machine and did an outstanding job.

9/10/2005

### **at home with ... diane and bob klish**

#### **Diane Klish is laid-back but welcoming.**

By ihooley@leader.net

Sort of like her home, whose tall spaces seem to open out to a visitor, and then recede back into cool shadows.

The 52-year-old mother of three and owner of three dogs moved into her Nanticoke home with her husband, Bob, a coordinator of a drug and alcohol program, 27 years ago. They bought the home from an aunt, who later passed away.

"She wasn't married and I lived next door when she lived here, and I spent a lot of time with her. She was like my second mother," explained Klish, an employee of a preschool program at a local school district.

The aunt, Aunt Bea, was sort of a "klutzy" person who often broke things, Klish remembered fondly. Sometimes Aunt Bea revisits and causes things to break in threes; for example, the toaster, a remote control and a light bulb might all go at once.

Aunt Bea was also on a mission to "modernize" the home before the Klishes moved in, said Diane. She covered the hardwood floors with carpet, painted the old fireplace mantel and all the wood trim in the kitchen and removed the old-fashioned crunch doors between the dining and living rooms.

Little by little, the Klishes are restoring the home to its original character.

"The house was built by the contractor who built old houses around here, and he built this one for himself," said Diane.

The home is also a foursquare house, she added, so each of the four bedrooms upstairs are the same size.

The Klishes restored the wood archway and wainscoting, put in deep purple wallpaper in the hall and a handmade stained-glass window in the kitchen, and hung macramé curtains in some of the lead-glass windows. They also removed Aunt Bea's white paint from the kitchen trim.

The Klishes' front living room and dining room are sparingly furnished. In the dining room, a Hitchcock dining-room set blends with the home's

classic feel. In the front living room, a shining, black digital piano near the windows is the only tangent to seeming acres of hardwood floors. In the kitchen, which is located at the back of the house, opening to the deck, Klish and her husband turned the dark, '70s-era cabinet faces around and painted them a distressed white.

"It made a lot of difference," said Diane. "It was so dark in here before."

Also of note in the kitchen is half of an old Hoosier, a large cabinet used in centuries past to store pots and pans, sugar and flour. A Hoosier, so named because many Hoosier-makers came from Indiana, includes a large work surface. In the Klishes' kitchen, the Hoosier acts as an island. At the back of their home, the Klishes created a pond by digging a hole in the ground and lining it with plastic. They filled it with water hyacinths and koi, orange and golden fish. The back yard also has an herb garden, where Jamaica, the Klishes' 11-year-old Labrador retriever, snacks on grass and other plants, much to Diane's chagrin. A tree house sits above the scene.

"It was my daughter's when we were younger. We'll never rip it down."

Who: Diane and Bob Klish

How long: 27 years

Specs: This four-bedroom home with a finished basement and an attic features a pond filled with goldfish and a resident frog, who helps keep the back yard free from flies, says Diane Klish.

In her words: "I just like to take old things and recycle them." "A lot of this house is adopted. Phoebe's adopted (one of her three dogs), the furniture's adopted, and I just adopt anything that needs adopting."

### **Higher fuel prices place strain on town budgets**

Skyrocketing gasoline prices are wreaking as much havoc with municipal budgets as they are with household ones.

Besides filling the tanks of police cruisers, road department vehicles and fire trucks, Luzerne County municipal officials are worried about the ripple effect on everything from garbage collection to road paving - and whether taxpayers will have to pick up the additional tab.

"When prices essentially double at the pump, municipalities must find those dollars somewhere. That could mean a reduction in some other service," Kingston Township supervisor chairman Jeffrey Box said.

Officials are starting to keep anxious eyes on fuel gauges, and asking employees to do the same.

"We put all departments on notice to monitor fuel consumption and limit abuse like unnecessary idling of cars," Wilkes-Barre City Administrator J.J. Murphy said.

Exeter Borough Mayor Joseph Coyne said Tuesday night the police department will adopt gas-saving measures such as having a bike patrol and asking two officers to ride together.

Nanticoke resident Theresa Sowa also suggested bike and foot patrols to council Wednesday night.

While council agreed to look into fuel consumption, and the fire department plans to cut down test runs of fire trucks - from every day to every other day, according to Councilman Joe Dougherty - officials were lukewarm to the idea of the city's 12-man police force being limited.

"I think the more visible police are, the better. I'd rather spend the gas money," Nanticoke Mayor John Toole said.

Just before gasoline hit \$3 a gallon last week, Mayor Tom Leighton had Wilkes-Barre officials order an extra supply and fill the tanks before the cost went up, Murphy said.

City officials budgeted \$162,000 in 2005 for vehicle maintenance petroleum products for the public works department alone. A price hike was not taken into account when the budget was made.

The city gets its fuel at a cheaper rate than consumers; however, cost increases are proportionally the same, Murphy said.

Municipalities are tax-exempt for fuel, Box said. Some file to get the tax back; others have an arrangement with a specific gas company to deduct it at the pump, he said. But having to wait for reimbursement could put a strain on municipalities' cash flow, Box noted.

West Pittston officials budgeted \$7,000 for fuel for the police, \$7,000 for public works, and \$1,000 for the fire department in 2005, Mayor Bill Goldsworthy said.

It is only September, and the borough has already used more than \$13,000 of that \$15,000 allowance, he said.

"We'll definitely be over budget. And that's not even half of it," Goldsworthy said. "Everything the borough uses will be higher. A lot of people don't realize that."

He pointed out that rising fuel costs lead to steeper prices for other supplies and services municipalities need. For example, road salt has to be trucked in by suppliers, and road paving requires petroleum-based products.

9/4/2005

### **Bringing community together in the name of art**

#### **Members of Hanover section gather to enjoy the works of artists, make some of their own.**

By kamerman@leader.net

Local professional and amateur painters displayed their work under Saturday's clear blue sky during Arts on the Edge in the Hanover section of Nanticoke.

Although art was the prevailing theme, the point of the event at the Hanover Recreation Club off Front Street was to bring community members in

the Hanover section together, said Christine Mash, one of the event coordinators.

“There’s nothing better on a Labor Day weekend than people staying close to home and working together,” said Don Shappelle, a guitarist and singer who played at the event with many other bands. “It’s a great chance for people to get together and do something for the community.”

Fred Jackson, who has lived in the Hanover section for five years, went to the event to browse for things to buy while his daughter, 12-year-old Sara Jackson, enjoyed seeing people.

“I just like walking around and seeing all the stuff and seeing my friends,” she said, noting there aren’t many community events there.

Mash said two local churches used to have community events at the park in the Hanover section on July Fourth weekend and Labor Day weekend every year, but stopped the events because of dwindling numbers.

“We wanted to get a little something going again,” Mash said. “Someone from our town had the idea for it being an arts fest.”

Residents throughout the community were encouraged to hang art outside their homes Saturday and many held garage sales in conjunction with the event.

Mash said she pulled out an old painting she created in the eighth grade and hung it outside her home. It’s a picture of a classmate sitting on an orange inside a refrigerator. Mash laughs at the deep interpretations people offer about the painting, saying she doesn’t think she put much thought behind it while making it.

“Most people here are amateurs,” said Judy Priore. “We wanted to open it up to amateurs and to local people to get some community spirit going.”

Erik Glenn of Wilkes-Barre said he was impressed with the paintings and photos displayed.

“Everybody has really nice stuff,” Glenn said. “The artwork is beautiful.”

Glenn’s sister, Corinne Glenn, was happy that some of the artists sold pieces to benefit victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Kelly Gibbons of Dallas raffled a painting of a heart surrounded by arms for the relief effort.

“I did it when the tsunami hit,” said Gibbons, who makes some money from her paintings, but has earned most of her pay as an assistant preschool teacher for Luzerne County Head Start. “I tried to sell prints online, but it wasn’t successful.”

Gibbons, who said she’s about to take a new teaching job soon, allowed people to donate the amount of their choice for a raffle ticket.

Priore said she thinks the most important aspect of the event is getting local kids active in the park.

“We figure if they get involved, they’re more likely to take care of the park,” Priore said, noting involvement in the park could keep kids out of trouble.

Children had the opportunity to make their own paintings and added to a mural of a whale in an ocean that had recently been painted on a wall next to the park’s tennis court. Children also took part in bicycle decorating and sidewalk chalk activities, with about 10 teenagers volunteering their time to supervise.

“We want to keep the kids busy so everyone can relax and enjoy this,” Mash said.

9/1/2005

### **Nanticoke to see revenue from neighboring development**

By IAN CAMPBELL Times Leader Correspondent

How the city could benefit from a residential development in Newport Township took center stage at a council work session Wednesday evening, as a representative of the developer explained how an access road off Rock Street could add to the city’s tax rolls.

Mike Amato outlined how the city could generate \$300,000 by selling off 10 lots along the roadway the developers would build, and then receive liquid fuels revenues for the road once it was handed back to the city, and property taxes on the houses erected on the lots, ranging from 1/3 to 1/2 an acre.

The development would be named Whitney Point, and be an offshoot of Ridgeview I and II developments under construction in Newport Township, on land formerly occupied by the Dan Flood Industrial Park.

The access road would allow an alternative access to the Ridgeview developments and was a requirement of Luzerne County planners, Amato told council.

Mayor John Toole said the developers should move forward with the project.

In response to a question after the meeting, Toole noted that the change in traffic flows resulting from the developments put a renewed emphasis on the state Route 29 connector project, as the plans called for approximately 200 homes in total. He said there are questions about how the limited Honey Pot access would impact the project.

In other financial business, council moved to approve the funding obligation for 2006, also known as the Minimum Municipal Obligation for Police, Fire and Non Uniformed Pension Plans. The current obligation is effectively zero, which is actually an improvement of at least \$200,000 a year, Toole said.

In 1997, the city owed the firemen’s pension fund almost \$100,000 in addition to the annual payment, and it was only after challenging the state that the city had the situation resolved in its favor.

“We’ve not really paid anything in years,” Toole said.

The cost of fighting the state over the fund issues had been about \$15,000, he said after the meeting.

8/19/2005

### **EXCLUSIVE**

### **‘Overdue’ tax stirring anger**

### **Luzerne County commissioners examine ways to prevent people who’ve paid their taxes from getting delinquent notices.**

By jandes@leader.net

Luzerne County commissioners say they have noticed the recent flurry of complaints surrounding the county's Tax Claim Office where people have waited in long lines, sometimes armed with delinquent notices for taxes they paid years ago.

"We know there are issues. We know they have to be addressed," said Commissioner Todd Vonderheid. "There have to be better ways to do what the office is trying to do. We need to find answers to all of the problems."

Problems often stem from the way the office processes records, he said.

"The issues aren't all related to staffing," Vonderheid said.

Commissioners are reviewing requests-for-proposals from companies to create an electronic database and tracking system, he said.

"The important thing is (Commissioner) Greg (Skrepenak) and I completely concur with the issues that came to light the last few days," he said.

Minority Commissioner Stephen A. Urban said he's especially concerned because he discovered this week that one of the employee's phones had been unplugged during a time when the office was receiving many calls. The employee told him it must have disconnected by accident, but Urban said he will instruct managers to do spot checks.

"The office is there to provide a public service, and purposefully disconnecting phones would be unacceptable," Urban said.

Urban said he wants commissioners to send a letter of apology to all property owners, primarily in Nanticoke, who received letters saying their properties will be sold for overdue taxes after they had repeatedly shown proof of payment in prior years.

"I believe that every taxpayer that was wronged ought to get a letter of apology from commissioners so they can keep it in their file saying they paid their taxes so they can keep it for their records," Urban said.

Tax Claim Director Virginia Augello acknowledged Thursday that her office inadvertently sent some overdue notices, despite documentation that they had paid.

These properties were tangled in the theft of tax payments by a former Nanticoke employee, but the employee's bonding company has wrapped up reimbursement of losses.

"The majority were taken off the delinquent list, but because of miscommunication, we missed two sheets," Augello said.

Urban also wants to make sure Augello doesn't take time off when large batches of notices go out – something that happened Monday when people had to wait in long lines.

Augello has two vacant positions, and Urban said he'll push to get them filled.

Two property owners complained Thursday that it's time for commissioners to intervene.

Nuangola resident Annette Weiss said the office this week sent her a notice saying she owes 2001 taxes after she's visited the office three years in a row showing a cancelled check and signed receipt from the former borough tax collector as proof of payment.

"Four years is a long time to get something straightened out," Weiss said. "Someone needs to look at that office and resolve these issues. I know I'm not the only person."

Augello said Thursday that the borough's former tax collector, Robert McCue, listed Weiss' tax as delinquent and unpaid, so her office can't clear it out unless he turns over the money to the county. Her office hasn't been able to reach him, she said.

"I have his signature and cashed check he signed. What am I supposed to do? Drive to his house and beat it out of him? The county is not making any attempt to resolve this," Weiss said.

McCue could not be reached for comment Thursday.

Urban said he will review the documentation from Weiss and ask commissioners to get involved in closing it out if Augello can't or won't take action.

Wilkes-Barre resident Carl Eddy, a college professor, said he had to wait in line with roughly 75 others Monday to straighten out overdue notices.

He estimates a third of the people in line had never received tax bills in the first place and/or had paid the taxes through their mortgages.

Eddy said the county must figure out why property owners are getting overdue bills in error and fix the problem because being forced to visit the office to avoid a public sheriff sale is not only inconvenient, but downright embarrassing.

He said he has a flawless credit rating.

"If they publish my name saying I didn't pay, that's defamation," Eddy said.

The office also needs to process people better, he said.

"They need to modernize and put more employees at the counter," Eddy said, noting that he saw roughly 25 people leave Monday because they couldn't wait in line any longer. "I heard the grumbling and believe me there was grumbling."

He blames management, not the tax claim worker behind the counter.

"The girl who waited on me was terrified. I don't blame her," Eddy said. "The office director Virginia Augello needs to be accessible and responsive."

8/17/2005

**Taxpayers still haunted by clerk's theft.**

**Two with proof of payments receive overdue bills because of past crime.**

**"I paid my taxes, and to keep getting these notices ... I'm going to be 82.**

**I just can't keep going to the courthouse year after year."**

**Wanda Ostowicz Nanticoke resident**

**The legacy of a thief continues.**

By jandes@leader.net

It's been years since former city clerk Brenda Davis admitted stealing tax money while working in the office. A judge ordered her in 2003 to repay \$5,000 and put her on probation after audits revealed \$184,000 in missing county, city and school tax money.

The bond company that covered Davis closed out the matter by paying \$110,000 in November, of which the county received roughly \$13,500, according to the Luzerne County Controller's office.

Still, the crime continues to inconvenience some taxpayers.

Rosalie Roote said she's been receiving annual notices that she owed a tax payment since 2001, even though she paid it.

Roote tried to be patient when receiving notices in 2002 and 2003, understanding that the investigation and prosecution of Davis was under way. She personally delivered a canceled check and signed receipt showing her property taxes had been paid when the county tax claim office sent her an overdue notice in 2003.

When Roote got another overdue notice in 2004, tax claim workers blamed it on a computer switch and promised it wouldn't happen again.

So the Nanticoke woman saw red when yet another notice arrived by certified mail Saturday, saying her house will be sold at sheriff's sale if she doesn't pay that same bill.

"I was furious, totally furious. I can't believe that this has happened again," Roote said.

"It's costing my time straightening this out year after year and costing taxpayers money to be sending out these certified letters."

Wanda Ostopowicz, also of Nanticoke, keeps getting the same yearly notices, too. The elderly woman had to ask a relative to drive her to the courthouse Monday to clear it up. She waited in line 45 minutes, only to be told to disregard the notice.

"It's frustrating. I paid my taxes, and to keep getting these notices . . .," Ostopowicz said. "I'm going to be 82. I just can't keep going to the courthouse year after year."

Ostopowicz said tax claim workers told her she might receive notices for another year or two because her tax payment was among a batch tied up in Davis' theft of tax money. She said other fellow Nanticoke residents waiting in line with her Monday were in the same boat.

It's not clear why the tax claim office hasn't resolved the matter.

Tax Claim Director Virginia Augello was not in the office Monday and could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

Roote said the office has run out of excuses.

Each year the county's bill increases, from an original several hundred dollars to the present \$1,943.81.

"There's something wrong in that office," Roote said.

8/14/2005

### **Cabbage roll held to support Honey Pot Fire Department**

By Heidi E. Ruckno , Staff Writer

You're only as good as your cabbage, or so the spectators say.

More than 400 people tried to win hundreds of dollars Saturday rolling heads of cabbage down Cabbage Hill, better known as Market Street, in the Honey Pot section of Nanticoke.

The event was organized as a fundraiser for the Honey Pot Volunteer Fire Department.

"I've always heard about the legend of Cabbage Hill but it never really had the pizzazz it has now," said Honey Pot resident Leonardo Davenport.

Sporting a cabbage leaf on his head in honor of the occasion, Davenport was excited because Cabbage Hill will now be known for more than just the Polish and Lithuanian settlers who raised cabbages in their yards.

Fire Chief Chet Kopko could not believe the turnout for the First Annual Honey Pot Cabbage Hill Cabbage Roll, and since the event was his brainchild, he was proud to call it a success.

The day consisted of cabbage-themed beauty contests, cabbage decorations and cabbage slalom races, but all of that took a back seat to the main event.

For more than two hours, children of all ages rolled cabbage heads down a plastic tarp with fire hoses on either side.

"It's like bowling," Kopko said. "You're going to roll your cabbage down the hill, but we're rolling for distance."

Distance was measured by a tape measure attached to the tarp. Unfortunately, they ran out of tape after 350 feet.

Competition kicked off around 4:30 p.m. The first run was unsuccessful, as the cabbage rolled less than 20 feet. But Honey Pot resident Jolann Baron really fired up the crowd when her cabbage slid 117 feet, five inches.

Three bowling pins were set up along the course. If a contestant knocked down a pin he or she walked off with either cash or gift certificates.

Kay Jeffries, 6, of Nanticoke, was the first gift certificate winner. Her roll of 133 feet, five inches, won her a gift certificate to a local restaurant.

Jeffries was the all-around leader for a while, but it did not last long. Kyle Kotz, 13, quickly beat her with a roll of 180 feet. He admitted, however, that he had been practicing.

"When they were doing some test runs, I rolled a couple," said Kotz, whose father is a member of the fire company.

Also in it to win it was 14-year-old Steve Swicklik of Nanticoke. Although it was the only one in his refrigerator, his head of cabbage looked like it had a chance to go far. It was almost perfectly round and not very leafy, but Swicklik did not have the luxury of practice.

"I actually didn't even know about it," he said, "and then my friend Corey called me and said there was a cabbage roll and I said, 'Cool.'"

Unfortunately for Swicklik, chanting "go cabbage go" as it rolled down the hill did not help his chances. He was not even a contender.

While most played fair, there were a few disqualifications. Some cabbages were wrapped in rubber bands, giving them the advantage of bouncing, and others were frozen solid for speed.

After all, more than money was on the line. The results were submitted to the Guinness Book of World Records. It may be the first record of its kind on file, because a search of the Guinness Web site turned up no records for cabbage rolling.

8/13/2005

### **Some Nanticoke parents pushing for principal change**

By Heidi E. Ruckno , Staff Writer

They want school board to return Kubasek to high school position

Two months ago, the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board decided to promote Mary Ann Jarolen, assistant principal at the high school, to principal.

The decision was still the dominant issue in the minds of the public at Thursday's regular meeting.

Jarolen's promotion means a new assignment for former principal Richard Kubasek. He will now be a principal at two elementary schools. School Board President Robert Raineri said he will be "very busy" in his new role, but the public is still sounding off. They want Kubasek back.

"No kid deserves to be put down. We need to be built up," said 11-year-old Pedreo Bracero.

According to Raineri, discipline has become a problem at the high school. Teachers and administrators felt like they were losing control of the school, he said.

Jarolen's opponents said Kubasek approached discipline with compassion, and her more rigid approach has met with some backlash.

Parents and students claimed Jarolen does not treat them with respect, prompting them to get 822 signatures persuading the board to reconsider its decision.

Students, parents and taxpayers have signed the petition.

Kim Vincent, who has also lobbied for Kubasek's return, said they plan to present the petition to the Board of Education in Harrisburg.

Delia Bracero, Pedro's mother and one of Jarolen's most vocal opponents, claims that Jarolen treated her disrespectfully while discussing a disciplinary matter involving her daughter, and that Kubasek had to intervene in the discussion.

"I don't condone any abuse of power," Delia Bracero said.

She pleaded with the board to revisit the issue and take another vote.

Board Secretary Patricia Bieski said that the issue had been discussed in an executive session, but that the board was not going to change its mind.

"We already considered it, and as a board, we stand by our decision," Bieski said.

Although at least eight people spoke out against Jarolen, Solicitor Vito DeLuca was not entirely convinced they were in the majority. He has not seen any evidence of mass resistance.

"Whether or not this group is representative (of public opinion), I don't know," he said.

Board members did not get terribly specific about the reason for the change, stating only that it was best for the school.

Kubasek had been an elementary principal before going to the high school four years ago, and by board accounts, he was very successful at the elementary level. Members would not say who approached whom about making a change.

There was no Richard Kubasek listed in the phone book, and Jarolen could not be reached for comment late Thursday.

8/11/2005

**Moms stay devoted to principal**

**Parents plan to complain about Tom Kubasek's reassignment again at meeting.**

By kkile@leader.net

It has been almost four months since Tom Kubasek has been reassigned from high school principal to elementary school principal – and several parents are still fighting to reverse the decision.

Parents, led by Delia Bracero and Kim Vincent, have complained at school board meetings and sent letters to U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, and state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke.

And tonight they will be back at another school board meeting continuing their fight.

Bracero said she's a big supporter of Kubasek because of the way he handled problems with her son, Peter, who had been suspended. "He disciplines without losing sight of respect. In child development it's very important to maintain respect, to maintain an open communication line. You can't demean a child. You can't put a child down. You can't have favorites and you can't threaten a child

In May, the school board voted to move Kubasek from high school principal of K.M. Smith Elementary School. Assistant high school principal Maryann Jarolen was bumped up to replace Kubasek. Both principals started their new positions on July 1.

Bracero's son will be a senior this year. He said Kubasek is a better principal at the high school.

"I got in trouble and he accepted me back into school. Kubasek wanted me back in. He gave me a chance when she (Jarolen) wouldn't have."

He said once he got back to school his grades improved.

Jarolen said her previous role as disciplinarian is the main reason behind the opposition from some parents.

"My job (as assistant high school principal) was to discipline the way the state policy reads. They are criticizing me for doing my job. If people don't like it, they blame the person. They say, 'You suspended my student,'" when they should say the student did something to get suspended.

Vincent said her family is contemplating putting her son, Justin, back into private school if Kubasek is not the high school principal.

Vincent said she hopes the group can convince the school board to "re-vote."

Kubasek could not be reached for this article.

The Greater Nanticoke School Board will meet at 6:30 tonight in the GNA High School.

8/11/2005

**Exclusive: That's using your heads, fellas**

By mjones@leader.net

Chester Kopco realized that so few volunteers were joining the Honey Pot Fire Co., he'd better do something drastic.

So as president of the group, Kopco suggested to his colleagues that heads should roll. Literally.

That, in short, explains why cabbage heads will sail down North Market Street this Saturday, as competitors in the inaugural "Cabbage Hill Cabbage Roll Festival" vie to see who can best propel the produce.

Participants will pitch their veggies over a slippery, tarp-covered track, bound on both sides by fire hoses. Judges will inspect each leafy sphere, ensuring that its core hasn't been tampered with for competitive purposes. Said Kopco, 50, an assistant fire chief, "I got one clown who thinks that if he fills it with concrete it'll roll farther."

Aside from bragging rights, top cabbage bowlers will take home cash, prizes and potentially a mention in the "Guinness World Records" book. The fund-raising event, to be held Saturday afternoon in the city's Honey Pot section, also includes a costume contest, a cabbage-decorating competition and a zany event in which participants race shopping carts through a slalom (or is that cole-slaw-lom?) course.

Organizers tout the festival as a way to give townfolk what they hunger for: something to do.

Plus, it's meant to energize this small fire company, signaling that its leadership has a new approach toward attracting and retaining volunteers. Already, publicity about the pending festival and other upcoming activities has fueled new recruits, Kopco said. And the company intends to boost its efforts to draw not only young adults, but include their spouses, children and grandparents. "We changed our entire philosophy."

Once a "dying company of maybe 20 members," the group intends to do more self-promotion, letting people know it needs financial support and that it aims to remain a central gathering spot in this hilly, residential neighborhood.

On Sept. 10 the company will toss itself a 40th anniversary party. Firefighters will distribute free smoke detectors to Honey Pot residents, subsidizing the giveaways with a homeland security grant, Kopco said. Likewise, neighborhood children will receive items such as safety-themed coloring books and water bottles with reminders to "stop, drop and roll."

The company also has agreed to play host for next summer's Six-County Firemen's Convention. Aside from a traditional parade, Kopco envisions a fireworks show, a carnival with 22 rides and a firefighter's exposition with vendors and equipment displays. It'll cost \$25,000 or so, not all of which will be recouped, Kopco estimated.

But the event will pay huge dividends by attracting attention and aiding recruitment not only for Honey Pot, but for the City of Nanticoke's larger fire department, he said.

Ready for rescue?

Admittedly, the Honey Pot company, which operated on a \$13,000 yearly budget, needed to do something for its survival. The group's fire engine, now entering its fourth decade of use, required repairs and major maintenance costing nearly \$30,000. (The vehicle is undergoing fixes in the Syracuse area and should be back in service around Christmas, the firefighters said.)

Ultimately the group will need to buy a more modern truck, which could run \$200,000 or more. That's a lofty price tag, considering the Honey Pot bunch responds to only 20 or so calls in its neighborhood each year.

Yet Kopco said consolidation with a nearby company is a "sore spot." Granted, from a purely economic perspective, a case can be made for merging some of the region's fire departments, he said. A legislative report issued last month indicated Luzerne County is one of four counties in Pennsylvania with more than 100 fire companies, The Associated Press reported.

The same study indicated that the number of volunteer firefighters statewide had dropped from about 300,000 in 1976 to nearly 72,000 today.

Nevertheless, Kopco said he believes Honey Pot's company serves a larger purpose than extinguishing occasional brush fires. It conducts fire-safety campaigns and outreach efforts, especially around the holidays, perhaps contributing to the area's low number of structure fires, he said.

It also acts as the primary gathering spot for a residential district that is devoid of churches, shops and businesses. "The center of the Honey Pot community is that firehouse," said Kopco, noting that groups such as an area playground association and the Boy Scouts meet there.

How bizarre

When selecting a fund-raiser, the company wanted to avoid garden-variety events, said Bill Graboske, 29, an assistant fire chief. "We were kicking around ideas, and bottom line is you can do a typical firemen's bazaar, but you're taking a big risk. If it's a dud, you can lose money."

The cabbage roll concept was immediately embraced. "A few people outside the company heard about it and thought it was brilliant," Graboske said.

Kopco claims it's a throwback to the 1930s. Coal miners used to sit near vegetable patches in the so-called Cabbage Hill area and have picnics with their kids. On a hot Sunday, after a few ales ... well, you don't have to be Isaac Newton to figure out where this is headed. Kopco said: "I guess my ancestors were as crazy as I am."

Participants can bring their own cabbages or pay \$1 for one of the 200 heads the company has ordered. It costs \$3 to register for the roll.

The company purposefully kept its fees and food prices "moderate," Graboske said. "We want this to be an affordable thing, so people can bring their whole family. We're not only doing this for ourselves - to make money - we're doing this for the community."

In other words, if you go to this festival, you don't have to take a lot of lettuce.

**The Cabbage Hill Cabbage Roll Festival will be held this Saturday afternoon in the Honey Pot section of Nanticoke. (Directional signs will be posted along the city's main thoroughfares.)**

**Registration for all events begins at 3 p.m. Fees to enter the cabbage-rolling contest or the slalom event are \$3 for adults, \$1.50 for children.**

**Proceeds benefit the Honey Pot Fire Company, an all-volunteer crew.**

**For information, call 740-2131.**

8/8/2005

**South Valley Parkway project gets federal funds**

By Tom Venesky , Staff Writer

When the South Valley Parkway project lost out on a \$7 million federal earmark, state Rep. John Yudichak looked for help from Sens. Arlen Specter and Rick Santorum.

Both legislators answered the call when they included \$2.5 million for the project in the Senate portion of the federal transportation bill, which passed in late July.

Yudichak said when Congressman Paul Kanjorski steered away the \$7 million from the parkway to other projects in his district, construction of the new road was in danger of being delayed.

"We had to scramble because everybody's goal is to get this highway built," he said. "Senators Santorum and Specter both went to bat for us. With their success, we'll get this highway built."

The first phase of the parkway, which will cost an estimated \$42 million, will connect state Route 29 in Hanover Township to the Kirmar Parkway in Newport Township. The new road will guide traffic away from Middle Road, which has been a safety concern among resident. The road, which will be a four-lane divided highway, will also offer additional access to Luzerne County Community College.

"The senator (Santorum) fought for the funding for the South Valley Parkway because of the increased access to the college and the safety improvements," said Santorum spokesman Robert Traynham. "We're very pleased to earmark money for this project."

Yudichak, a Democrat, said the project is at the top of the priority list for road projects in Luzerne County, making it easier to reach out across party lines to Santorum and Specter, who are both Republicans.

He said the new road, which is expected to be completed by 2009, will carry industrial truck traffic away from Middle Road. The new access will make it easier to complete land reclamation work in Newport and Hanover townships and Nanticoke City.

"By completing that work, it should generate commercial interest for those three communities," Yudichak said.

"But my primary goal has been to move this forward because safety on Middle Road is critical. Middle Road isn't designed to handle industrial traffic, this new highway is, and it will be accomplished with the help of Sens. Santorum and Specter."

A public meeting will be held in the near future to outline the final steps in the process before construction of the highway begins.

8/8/2005

### **Local archers always on target**

By Mike Cherney , Staff Writer

For the three bow-wielding men lined up 50 yards from a bull's-eye at a makeshift range in a Nanticoke field, archery is more than a sport.

To Ed Sklaney, Phil Schwartztrauber and Jerry Carlson, it's an addiction.

They're addicted, they say, to the mental finesse required for the game. They're addicted to the personal satisfaction of a tournament well played.

And they're addicted to the friendships that form around the bow.

Perhaps most of all, they're addicted to the fun.

"Everybody in archery, they're good people," said Carlson, a 43-year-old Wyoming resident who has been shooting for 20 years. "You don't even have to be with your friends. Before you know it, they are your friends."

The three, who say they are best friends who would not have met had it not been for competitive target archery, have turned a barely part-time hobby into a nearly full-time obsession. Although the trio has focused on having a good time, it hasn't stopped them from excelling at the sport. Sklaney, a 49-year-old mail carrier from Nanticoke, and Schwartztrauber, a 34-year-old mechanic from Greenfield Township, have split the overall men's target archery aggregate championship in Pennsylvania for the past five years.

The aggregate championship is awarded to the archer who accumulates the most points throughout the Pennsylvania State Archery Association season.

"They live with the bow," said 62-year-old Rich Bushinski, owner of the Bow Clinic in Dupont, who often goes to tournaments with the three.

At a recent practice session, Carlson was quick to analyze why an arrow hit a few inches from the bull's-eye. Sklaney sported a program on his palm pilot that calculated, depending on various environmental factors, to what distance he should calibrate his bow. And Schwartztrauber spoke of an indoor range in his basement where he practices after his kids go to sleep.

At first glance, the bows they shoot are starkly different from their medieval brethren. Made of aluminum, the bows sport a magnified viewfinder and other calibration tools. A good bow outfitted with the latest equipment, they said, could cost \$1,700.

But 21st century technology can't do everything. Archers must still have the muscle to pull back a string that can reach 60 pounds of tension. And they spoke of a game that requires intense concentration.

"Getting your adrenaline up will only make this worse," Schwartztrauber said. "This is about self-control and keeping your mind on the target. Once you focus on winning or what someone else is doing, you're done."

The trio's archery addiction didn't start with bull's-eyes as targets, but with deer instead. All three, avid hunters, first picked up the bow because they wanted to try something other than a gun.

But the more they pulled the bowstring, the more they wanted do it longer than hunting season. They wanted to do it year-round.

"It gets in your blood," Sklaney said.

That's when they became interested in competitive target archery.

The Pennsylvania archery association holds five different tournaments at the regional and state levels every year from March to August. Regional chapters of the association also sponsor smaller tournaments across the state.

Some tournaments involve archers shooting at a target from various distances, others create mock hunting situations.

Most are held outdoors, but the first state tournament of the year is always the indoor shoot.

It's at these tournaments, some archers said, where the fun really begins.

"It's like shooting with friends," said Dick Sutton, owner of Sutton Archery in Benton. "Even if there are 400 people on the line, you still know most of them and you have a great time."

The shoots turn archery into a team sport. Carlson, Schwartztrauber and Sklaney all shoot on a team sponsored by Bushinski's Bow Clinic. The teams can include up to a dozen people, but each team only pools the scores of its top four archers to create a team score.

The team, Carlson said, is notorious for having a good time at the state-sanctioned shoots.

The game does require sacrifices. It is difficult to balance the time demands of jobs, families and archery. Still, there are perks for the archery-oriented family man - Schwartztrauber said his wife has picked up the bow, and they both went to a national tournament in Las Vegas in February.

Despite the challenges, it's clear the trio is committed to archery. And it's a commitment that rubs off on others, like Clementoni, who first met Schwartztrauber through his job.

"Not only are they good archers, they're also great friends," Clementoni said. "If anybody asks them a question, they're not going to steer them wrong. They're just all-around great guys."

8/6/2005

### **HealthNow makes it official: inks 3-year lease for Dallas office space**

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Staff Writer

It's official: as of Friday, HealthNow has a contract to move from the Kanjorski Center in Nanticoke to the Twin Stacks Center in Dallas.

According to the company's soon-to-be former landlord, the most appealing thing about the new location is its congressional district.

Attorney Lynn Banta, owner of Twin Stacks, confirmed that a three-year lease was signed with the Medicare claims processing company.

"They have been terrific to work with," she said of HealthNow. "We are thrilled. Our Economic Development Council has really worked to replace the jobs and the revenue loss from Commonwealth Telephone."

Banta, president of Back Mountain Business and Professional Association, of which the Economic Development Council is an offshoot, said the infusion of above-minimum wage jobs is a win for Dallas.

"This has really been a cooperative effort, and that's what we need," she said.

But Dallas' gain is Nanticoke's loss.

Although the Kanjorski Center is a Keystone Opportunity Zone, which means there are no state or local taxes on the property, HealthNow leaving means Nanticoke loses 214 employees who would have paid a total of \$10,058 in emergency and municipal services tax.

Ron Kamowski, owner of 154 Market St., Nanticoke, where HealthNow had its overflow offices, said the company plans to move into the district served by U.S. Rep. Don Sherwood, R-10, on Dec. 31.

He blames U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-11, for the loss of his tenant.

Kamowski, who has owned the building since 1984, said he has always had a good working relationship with HealthNow.

They came to Kamowski nearly five years ago because they needed more space. Plans to expand the Kanjorski Center fell through, despite a \$1.5 million federal grant the municipal authority, which owns the building, is still trying to save.

Municipal Authority solicitor Susan Maza has said in the past that HealthNow's refusal to sign a five-year lease and lack of communication was part of the problem.

But Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services would not let HealthNow commit to a lease that would run longer than its contract with the federal agency, Kamowski said.

"HealthNow pulled out of Nanticoke strictly because of the influence of the congressman and members of the municipal authority, and because the municipal authority would not give HealthNow enough leverage to negotiate their new contract, they packed up and left," Kamowski said.

Kanjorski could not be reached for comment.

HealthNow just wanted to do the job it was contracted for by the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Kamowski said.

"They do not want to get caught up in local politics nor do they want to be in the public eye," he stated. "They have been one of the best employers that Nanticoke has had in a long time. Harassment from the congressman and threats by him are what caused the relocation."

Earlier in the year, Kanjorski gave Travelocity a tour of the Center and told HealthNow he would bring the travel services company in to fill up the building. That was the last straw for HealthNow, Kamowski said.

"Well, if the congressman's name is on the building, I hope he can help us out with a new tenant," Councilman John Bushko said.

The Binghamton, N.Y.-based company paid \$32,000 per month for 28,000 square feet in the Kanjorski Center, and will be renting more than 30,000 square feet at Twin Stax for \$4 less per foot, a HealthNow spokesperson stated previously.

8/2/2005

### **Nanticoke approves grant for downtown redevelopment**

By Bill Androckitis Jr. , Citizens' Voice Correspondent

The final approval of a \$1.5 million grant for downtown redevelopment in Nanticoke is expected within the next week, Susan Maza, solicitor for the Nanticoke Municipal Authority, announced at their meeting Monday night.

The authority expects to receive the grant from the Economic Development Administration and begin acquiring properties along Main Street beginning in September. Expected completion for the construction is the fall of 2007.

Plans for the project are currently being developed, and Maza said they will be presented to residents.

"The idea is to have public input," Maza said.

Resident Dennis Butler raised his concerns about constructing additional office space when there was already an overabundance in Nanticoke and the surrounding area.

"What happens if this whole thing goes belly-up," he asked.

Maza said that within the agreements for any loans taken out, taxpayers will not be responsible if the bills can't be paid.

The authority has recently contacted the Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce to help market the Kanjorski Center. Specifications of the space that will soon be vacated by HealthNow will be compiled, and given to the chamber.

In other business, the authority approved a contract with the Department of Labor & Industry to lease 4500 square feet for a period of one year, with three three-month extension options.

Specifications for lawn care and snow removal will be put together, and the authority will put the services up for bid at their next meeting.

7/31/2005

### **County lacking in cyber-savvy**

By Mike Cherney , Staff Writer

An animation of one computer beaming an envelope to another computer has a simple message for users of Dupont's municipal Web site: Click me to send e-mail to borough officials.

It's a luxury not all Luzerne County municipalities provide.

In an age where everything from books to used furniture to meat grinders can be purchased on the Web, many towns and cities across the county are also offering online government. Meeting schedules, licensing forms and even bill payment can be accessed on the Internet. And it doesn't stop there.

More than 90 percent of U.S. towns with populations over 2,500 have Web sites, according to a voluntary mail-in survey of 3,007 municipalities by the International City/County Management Association. In contrast, only nine-about 40 percent - of Luzerne County's 23 boroughs and cities with populations over 2,500 are online.

"Probably in most other counties our size, most of the municipalities would have Web sites," said Stephen Englot, the head of the county's data processing department. "I'd say Luzerne County is probably lagging behind in that regard."

But in the past five years, some Luzerne County municipalities have played catch-up by creating government Web sites. Many boroughs, cities and townships want to provide their residents with basic need-to-know information, while others are hoping to attract new residents and businesses to their areas through the Web.

And although maintaining municipal Web sites for cities across the country has gone from trendy to cost-effective in the past few years, many local towns just don't have the resources-or the demand-to create Web sites that save administrative dollars.

Some of the cities in the county, such as Nanticoke, Hazleton and Wilkes-Barre- which just went online June 9 -have Web sites. But large boroughs like Plymouth, Edwardsville and Exeter, even the municipality of Kingston, are still offline.

"It's a benefit because people can check out and see what's going on in their communities," said Courtney Accurti, acting director of communications for the Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs, which offers low-cost Web sites for towns across the state. "It makes life a little bit easier for some members of the community."

In Luzerne County, municipal Web sites range from simple to complex. Swoyersville has a basic Web site that states 2005 recycling stickers are overdue for purchase and garbage collection is following a normal schedule. The site also provides information about the borough's history.

Hazleton City's Web site begins with a fancy slide show and has detailed information about things like city departments, community development, local events, news, and links to community organizations.

Wilkes-Barre City's Web site offers downloadable forms so residents can print them at home instead of getting them at City Hall.

And there are many Web sites in between.

"They wanted the citizens to have information about Laflin at their fingertips without having to do too much research," said Lorraine Healey, borough secretary for Laflin. "We tried to get as much information as we could on the site."

Others are hoping to attract new people to their towns.

"If I lived in New Jersey, and I was going to move to Nanticoke, the first thing I would do is look it up on the Internet," said J.D. Verazin, a Nanticoke Web site designer who created the sites for Nanticoke and Laflin. "I've seen spikes as far as the hits are concerned, so you know there are people on there that are constantly checking it out."

But no matter how elaborate the Web site, many Luzerne County municipalities face a similar problem when it comes to maintaining and improving their Web sites: a lack of web-savvy staffers.

"Computers don't just run on their own," said Joe Moskovitz, administrator of Dallas borough. "At small municipalities like ours, where we have limited staff, that's a challenge."

And some Luzerne County residents are not exactly clamoring for online government.

Standing on her mother's Edwardsville porch, 46-year-old D. Rhode, an Edwardsville native who now lives in Washington, D.C., said it would be nice if Edwardsville created a Web site so she would know what was happening in her old hometown.

But her mother, Carol, scoffed at the idea.

"What would I look up about Edwardsville on the Web site?" she said. "I've been here my whole life so there's nothing I need to know."

Some other residents who live on the same block said they did not own a computer. One elderly woman said she did not know what a Web site was. And in Dupont, which has had a Web site since 1994, few residents said they had logged on.

"For me it's easier to pick up the paper," said 48-year-old Dupont resident Sharon Ziobro, who said she had never checked out the Web site. "I would bet a lot of people don't even know it's there."

But it's a different story across the country. People are coming to expect their municipalities to have information on the Net, said Meghan Cook, the program manager at the Center for Technology in Government at the University of Albany.

And many U.S. cities are finding it financially advantageous to transfer some city services online, said Paul Taylor, the chief strategy officer for the Center for Digital Government, a research and advisory institute for the technology needs of governments.

Providing forms online and allowing residents to pay bills on the Internet can be cheaper than having someone process those transactions at city hall, he said. Although not many municipalities offer bill payment online, experts expect the number to increase, especially since many cities are facing financial problems.

"Having a municipal Web presence makes sense when you can mine costs out of old processes through the Internet," Taylor said. "If you can take a couple of bucks out of the cost of something that you do a million times, it allows you to move revenue you do have for more important things."

When it comes to Web sites, Luzerne County municipalities appear to be behind the times. And it might stay that way, at least until more residents start logging on more often.

"More and more people are used to going to their computers to find out information," said Englot, head of the county's data processing department. "The more they do it for their shopping or planning their trips, the more they want to use that computer for anything, including contacts with their local government."

7/30/2005

### **Highway bill good news for W-B, Pittston, Nanticoke**

By James Conmy , Staff Writer

Three Luzerne County cities received \$18.6 million Friday through the federal Highway and Transportation bill passed by the U.S. House of Representatives.

A transportation center in Wilkes-Barre City, sidewalk replacements in Pittston and construction of a Nanticoke parking garage and office building all are included in the bill.

State matches on those projects increase the capital investment in the three communities to \$23.25 million, said U.S. Rep. Paul E. Kanjorski, D-Luzerne.

"This bill is just extraordinary news for these three cities," Kanjorski said Friday. "The money is for a very wide ranging use. It's cut and paste for whatever the priorities and needs of the cities are."

Wilkes-Barre is the largest beneficiary in the county. Besides \$6 million for a South Washington Street transportation hub to centralize public transit, it will receive another \$3.8 million for downtown infrastructure, including new street lights.

Now the bill has passed, the money will be administered through PennDOT and cities can expect funding in the next 60 to 90 days, Kanjorski said.

"I think we still have time for our communities to put the money out this construction period," Kanjorski said. "Had we waited until September we would have lost any chance of getting it out on the street."

Transportation projects in Luzerne County communities represented by U.S. Rep. Don Sherwood, R-Wyoming, did not receive funding. That does not mean Sherwood did not lobby for projects in the county not in his district, said Jake O'Donnell, Sherwood's spokesman.

"There are projects in Luzerne County we've been supportive of, but we weren't the primary sponsor," O'Donnell said. "We're uncomfortable taking credit for projects where we weren't the primary sponsor."

The highest priority Luzerne County project in Sherwood's district, combined sewage overflows in Kingston, did receive \$1 million in another bill President Bush is expected to sign in the next two weeks, O'Donnell said.

Luzerne County could get more good news on Monday. Kanjorski has scheduled a 10 a.m. press conference about funding for Wachovia Arena at Casey Plaza and state Route 115 connector road to Interstate 81.

An earlier version of the Highway and Transportation bill included \$250,000 to design the connector road. It had another \$250,000 for surface improvements to an area east of the Highland Park Boulevard exit off of Interstate 81.

The amounts in the earlier bill were subject to change.

The new bill's final amounts will not be known until Monday, Kanjorski said.

The bill was delayed for almost two years because lawmakers debated the reimbursement rate for states. It is based on what they pay in federal taxes to the Highway Trust Fund.

7/29/2005

### **Confusion regarding letter causes Nanticoke financial worry**

By jfox@leader.net

When Mayor John Toole read aloud a letter regarding a pending state grant and suggested it meant the city's place in the state's Early Intervention Program was unsure, city council members were thrown into a fit of confusion.

"The letter that they received is for an application that Representative (John) Yudichak supported for community revitalization funding," said Leslie Suhr, spokesperson for the state Department of Community and Economic Development.

The letter had nothing to do with the Early Intervention Program for financially troubled municipalities, Suhr said. The city has already been accepted into the program, has received \$50,000 in state funding for the program and its recovery coordinator is scheduled to meet with city officials next week.

"I'm not really sure where the miscommunication was," she said.

Toole's comments at Wednesday's meeting led Councilman John Bushko and other council members to question the city's status in the financial-

recovery program.

The mayor, Bushko said, read over the letter several times, indicating the state was considering the application for funding of the intervention program.

But that was for an \$80,000 community revitalization grant, not the early intervention program.

"The way I understand it everything is approved," Bushko said of the state program. However, on Thursday, Bushko still harbored some slight doubts, but thought the mayor was probably mistaken. "I think he's confused."

Calls to Toole were not immediately returned.

In March, the state announced the \$50,000 grant to fund the city's participation in the state program to shore up the municipality's financially precarious situation.

The application for the grant was submitted in February and described the city's struggle to pay overdue bills and debts to vendors totaling \$370,000.

In addition to the \$50,000 state grant, city Administrator Greg Gulick said the office of state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, secured an additional \$15,000.

The city must come up with a final \$15,000 to pay for the consulting services of the Nanticoke Early Intervention Consortium.

7/28/2005

### **Nanticoke moves on improving roads, securing aid Council is working to improve the roads throughout the city.**

By KRISTEN GAYDOS Times Leader Correspondent

At Wednesday's work session, city council awarded a bid for the Lincoln Avenue project to Slusser Brothers, Inc. for \$123,249.

According to city engineer Ben Sevenski, the project includes repaving and drainage work from Enterprise Street to Middle Road, and pipe work at the intersection of Stuart Drive.

Sevenski said the project should begin around the end of August or beginning of September.

Councilman William Brown also said he received a letter from state Rep. John Yudichak's office regarding improvements on Alden Road.

According to the letter, Alden Road is a federal aid route and may be eligible for federal funding, with a 20 percent match by the city.

Brown said Michael J. Pasonick Jr. & Associates gave an estimate of \$381,000 for the project. The city would be responsible for \$76,000.

Council voted to look into the project and see what funds they have available for the match.

Mayor John Toole said he received a letter from the state Department of Community and Economic Development regarding the city's application for funding.

Toole said the letter stated that the application has been received, and the city will be notified if it will receive funding.

The letter resulted in confusion among the council. Brown said he thought he was told by Yudichak that funding was already in place.

Toole said he had tried to call the department, but had no response. Brown said he would look into the matter.

In other business:

- Councilman Joe Dougherty told council he received more complaints regarding the refuse collection by J.P. Mascaro & Sons, Inc. Dougherty said he had met with them to discuss the problems, but the service has not improved. He said he will try to schedule another meeting.
- Councilman John Bushko asked council to considering hiring workers to cut the grass on vacant and dilapidated properties in the city. Several residents complained that nearby properties with overgrown grass are eyesores and have become havens for pests. The council voted to hire workers to take care of the properties as soon as possible.
- City Solicitor Bernard Kotulak said he received a request from Habitat for Humanity for council to consider giving them the property at 416 E. Washington St. to construct a house. Council said they would discuss the matter at the next meeting.

7/27/2005

### **She's bubbly, she's vivacious, she's a go-getter. At 59, Nanticoke native Lucy Ricci had all the qualities of a pageant winner. And in this particular contest, her age worked in her favor.**

By: Heidi E. Ruckno, Staff Writer

Life begins at 50, some say, but it seems that precious few people actually believe that.

Those in doubt should meet Nanticoke native Lucy Ricci, who now lives in Las Vegas. Last year, Ricci, then 58, was crowned Ms. Classic American Woman.

The Home Depot sales associate has never been one to sit back and let life happen around her. Ricci instead prefers to go after what she wants.

"You only have one life. Live it," she said.

That's the message Ricci has conveyed during her reign as Ms. Classic American Woman. That reign will come to a close in August.

Ricci never considered herself to be a beauty queen. She entered the contest on a whim, and was more surprised than anyone when she won.

"It was the furthest thing from my mind," she said. "I never thought I was pretty enough."

Ricci's relatives disagreed.

"We were very surprised when she won this contest. Even Lucy was," said Rose Pelas, her sister. "She didn't have any idea that she was going to be picked."

She would never have considered entering the contest if the advertisement in AARP magazine wasn't so intriguing.

Ricci initially laughed at the idea that someone would stage a beauty contest for women over 50, especially one without a talent requirement. Although she is an accomplished poet and musician - she writes poetry and songs, collects bells, loves football, and insists that her health is her most prized possession - Ricci instead was judged in three categories: figure, beauty and personality.

"You can still win one of these contests if you're weak in one of these categories," said pageant creator John Marmas.

His company, Marmas Productions, produces the pageant.

Throughout the past year, Ricci, who turned 59 during her reign, has made several public appearances, many of them at veterans' hospitals.

With five brothers who served in the military, Ricci said she would never miss a chance to pay tribute to America's heroes who fought to keep the country free.

Ricci plans to make her last public appearance in her hometown. She will speak Sunday, July 31, at 2 p.m. at the educational conference center on Luzerne County Community College's main campus, Nanticoke. The event is free and open to the public, Ricci's sister-in-law Bobbi Ann Ricci said.

"It thought it would be so great to do an appearance in my home town as my last appearance," Ricci said.

The Nanticoke Historical Society is helping organize the event.

Her sister Louise Pevone said Ricci's speech will focus on her humble upbringing in Nanticoke as one of 16 children in an Italian immigrant family.

"She just wanted the small town to know that somebody from a small town got this title," Pevone said. "Of course, she's coming for the family, too."

Most of Ricci's brothers and sisters are still in northeast Pennsylvania, but she prefers life out west. After several trips to Las Vegas, Ricci decided seven years ago to move there permanently.

Las Vegas, Ricci said, makes her feel young because everything is new and the weather is warm. That is not necessarily true on the East Coast, she said.

After several years in New Jersey, Ricci felt it was time for a change, so she and her husband Frank headed for the desert. Unfortunately, they were there for only four years before her husband died. They have no children.

Although she will no longer be Ms. Classic American Woman, Ricci will forever be associated with the pageant. She will always be the first title holder of the senior contest, so years from now she can still capitalize on that.

"If the girl after me has half as much fun as I had, she will have a great year," she said.

hruckno@citizensvoice.com

By Heidi E. Ruckno - Staff Writer

Many people laugh at the idea of a senior beauty pageant, including a 59-year-old beauty queen, but John Marmas thinks it's a pretty good idea. Marmas, the owner of Marmas Productions, crowned Nanticoke native Lucy Ricci the first Ms. Classic American Woman last year in Las Vegas.

"I'm a senior citizen myself and I still believe there's a lot of attractive women (in that age group)," he said. "Once you hit 50, you don't go to an old age home."

There are hundreds of beauty pageants throughout the country, said Marmas, who spent 12 years with the Miss Universe pageant. He created Ms. Classic American Woman as a venue specifically for older women.

There is no swimsuit or talent competition. The women are judged solely on three equal categories: figure, beauty and personality. For the personality segment of the pageant, they are asked to appear in a long-sleeve sweat suit, Marmas said.

Ricci beat out 99 other women for the title, accumulating a significant number of points in all three categories, Marmas said.

"Lucy's just very energetic. She's bubbly. She's vivacious. She's a go-getter. She's the kind of winner that we love having," he said.

Along with her title, Ricci won \$2,500 and a trophy. She also received a crown and a sash and has made more than a dozen public appearances this past year.

7/25/2005

## **HONORING NATIONAL GUARD TROOPS**

### **Saluting freedom, 109th**

### **Soldiers and their families gather to receive recognition for everything they have done for their country.**

By smocarsky@leader.net

More than 250 area soldiers and their families were honored at the 109th Field Artillery Armory on Sunday at a ceremony to recognize the soldiers' service in Iraq and Kuwait.

Master of ceremonies 2nd Lt. William Thomas IV said the ceremony was part of the Freedom Salute Campaign – the largest Army National Guard recognition endeavor in history.

"It's designed to publicly acknowledge our soldiers as well as those who've helped support them during these recent military operations ... in particular, the 109th's deployment in 2004 to Iraq and Kuwait in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom II."

Lt. Col. Mike Evans, the battalion commander, said he's "never seen such a close-knit group" as the 109th in his 24 years of military service, and he praised its level of service.

"These soldiers had a job to do and they did it extremely well. Their efforts contributed to a successful (Iraqi) election in January. ... We recognize the contributions and sacrifices of these soldiers, their families and their employers," Evans said.

Taking notice of Sunday's warm weather, U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski said the morning temperature in Qatar last year at this time was 120 degrees.

"All the troops in full uniform with their packs on, it was astonishing to see how they faced that kind of situation. ... The people of Iraq have a great

deal of respect for American servicemen and women because they have shown they can meet challenges with strength and courage,” said Kanjorski, the guest speaker.

Kanjorski presented each soldier with a copy of a July 22 entry in the Congressional Record in which he asked Congress to join him in thanking the soldiers “for their courage and love of country.” Each soldier was named individually in Kanjorski’s address.

Commanders from the 109th also presented the soldiers with gifts including:

- An American flag enclosed in a wood and glass display case.
- An “American Soldier – Defender of Freedom” certificate.
- A pin for each spouse in recognition of support and sacrifice.
- A Center of Influence medal for an individual who supported them through deployment.
- A limited edition National Guard coin.

Soldiers with children also received “foot lockers” with games and other items for each child.

“I think it’s a very great honor,” Staff Sgt. Mark Brown said of the ceremony he attended with his sister, Carol Brown-Papp, and his niece, Alicia Boltz.

Brown, of Nanticoke, said he appreciated the flag and the Congressional Record excerpt “more than anything, having our names go down in history forever.”

Brown said he was glad his sister and niece were recognized as well. “They supported me tremendously through this whole thing. And it brought us closer as brother and sister.”

Officials from the 109th also recognized some individuals for extraordinary service.

Lt. Col. Evans congratulated Spc. Anthony Petroski III on his designation as the Pennsylvania National Guard’s Soldier of the Year, noting that Petroski’s distinction brought “great credit” to the 109th.

The individuals who “went out of their way to ensure our soldiers were looked after” during their mobilization received 17-inch statues of minutemen as Outstanding Center of Influence awards. They were Jen Sorber, Busy Bs support group president and wife of Sgt. 1st Class Jamie Sorber; Citizens’ Voice reporter Tom Venesky; and Wilkes-Barre city Administrator J.J. Murphy.

Those who received Distinguished Center of Influence awards in the form of print mosaics of the American flag include Pat Amditis of Advertising at a Glance; Capt. William Start, OIC, Battery A; Anthony Perrone of Greater Nanticoke Area High School; and Capt. Matthew Travis, commander of the 1st Battalion’s Service Battery.

7/24/2005

### **'Off-the-wall' idea to boost fire company**

By Tom Venesky , Staff Writer

As volunteer fire departments struggle to devise unique events to give their annual fund-raisers a one-of-a-kind twist, Chet Kopco of the Honey Pot Fire Company in Nanticoke has come up with an idea for their bazaar next month that he is positive will be exclusive to the small community.

On Aug. 13, the fire company will close North Market Street to make room for rolling heads of cabbage. Kopco hopes the rolling produce will roll up money for the fire company, which is faced with a \$30,000 repair bill for their fire engine.

Dubbed the First Annual Honey Pot Cabbage Hill Cabbage Roll, participants will compete for cash prizes for the cabbage that rolls the furthest.

It might sound like an off-the-wall idea, but there is a history behind the cabbage roll.

"North Market Street is called 'Cabbage Hill' because years ago, the Polish and Lithuanian residents all raised cabbages up there," Kopco explained.

"Honey Pot is an ethnic community and this has a lot to do with our heritage."

For \$3, adults can roll their cabbage down the hill. Competitors can bring their own head of cabbage or purchase one of the 200 Kopco ordered for the event. Children can also participate by rolling brussels sprouts down the hill.

The cabbage that rolls the furthest wins a cash prize, and some prospective competitors are taking the event seriously.

"Some people have stuck their heads of cabbage in the freezer so they are frozen when they roll them," Kopco said.

"Others said they're going to drill holes in the cabbage and roll it like a bowling ball. People are having a lot of fun with this."

Kopco said local businesses have been supportive of the event and many signed on as sponsors. Half of the \$3 entry fee goes to the fire company and the other half will be put into the prize pot. Kopco hopes the event catches on so in the following years it will raise funds to purchase a new engine.

"Our current engine broke down and it will cost \$30,000 to repair it. It's 40 years old, and hopefully this cabbage roll will eventually help to pay for a new engine," he said.

The cabbages that aren't rolled won't be exempt from competition. After the roll, the fire company will hold a cabbage slalom, where cabbages are placed in shopping carts and raced around a course, and a cabbage decorating contest.

The day will conclude with a costume/beauty pageant for adults and children incorporating the theme of the Honey Pot cabbage.

Aside from the roll, the remainder of the events will be held in the Honey Pot Hose Company parking lot on Turner Street.

Proceeds from the cabbage contests will also be used to pay to host next year's Six County Firemen's Convention. Honey Pot was recently selected as the host community and the convention will bring in more than 150 fire departments from Luzerne, Lackawanna, Columbia, Schuylkill, Montour and Northumberland counties.

The convention will be more than just meetings, Kopco said, and events are being planned to keep the community involved.

"It's a three-day event and we'll have carnival rides, fire expos, displays, food and a lot of activities," he said. "This is part of the community focus

the fire company is emphasizing, and being that this is our 40th anniversary, hosting this convention is the icing on the cake.

"We got the convention for our community more so than the department."

Earlier this year the fire company outlined ways they could get the community involved with their activities. The efforts are paying off, as the company received applications for four active members, eight social members and three junior firefighters last month.

In addition, the elementary school students in the Greater Nanticoke Area School District recently raised money to help pay for the repairs to the engine.

"The kids are really buying into the community focus," Kopco said.

In recognition of the company's 40th anniversary, a celebration will be held on Sept. 10 in the Turner Street parking lot. All residents will receive a free smoke detector and children will get a fire prevention kit.

"We have a lot of things going on and a lot of work to do," Kopco said. "This is our way of saying thank you to the community."

7/23/2005

### **At career's end, going out in style**

**LCCC administrator Susan Searfoss didn't settle for just another day as she wound up her work.**

**"She's a good friend. She's been good for the college. Her energy and vitality sparked other people."**

**Sally Healey Professor at LCCC.**

By kkile@leader.net

Susan Searfoss was flying high as she celebrated her last day as director of evening programs at Luzerne County Community College.

More than 50 family, friends and colleagues watched and cheered as Searfoss departed the campus Friday for her last time – by helicopter. She, with five of her closest friends, including her husband, Jay, and her sister Judy, took the helicopter to Caesars Pocono Resort.

"I wanted to do something different," Searfoss said.

Searfoss has been with LCCC for 20 years. She worked five years part-time in the dental department and the last 15 years as the director of evening programs.

"It's a special place," Searfoss said.

She said she has seen people rent a limo or leave in a convertible on their last day, but Searfoss wanted to go out with a bang. She said she planned her departure for a year and first thought of leaving by a hot air balloon. She decided against it because she was not guaranteed good weather.

Searfoss and her friends plan to spend the day at Caesars and have dinner at the Private Table on Route 209.

In August, Searfoss plans to move to Oak Island, N.C., with her husband and two dogs, Sadie and Gwen. Colleagues said she will be sorely missed at the college.

"She's a good friend. She's been good for the college. Her energy and vitality sparked other people," said Sally Healey, English professor at LCCC. Healey has worked with Searfoss for 15 years. She said Searfoss really "topped them all" by going out by helicopter.

As the helicopter took off the crowd waved goodbye and cheered. Some even wiped away tears. The helicopter circled the campus one last time, and Searfoss waved farewell.

"Now that's a way to go out," one spectator said.

7/19/2005

### **Building owner blames authority, Kanjo for tenant loss**

**HealthNow will relocate to Dallas site after what's called major communication breakdown.**

By jfox@leader.net

For Ron Kamowski, HealthNow's decision to move its more than 200 employees from downtown to Dallas stings.

The New York-based Medicare claims processing company is pulling out of the Kanjorski Center on Main Street and Kamowski's two-story office complex on Market Street.

When the company relocates this fall, Kamowski stands to lose thousands of dollars a month in rent.

Staring at 5,000 square feet of soon-to-be-empty space, Kamowski, 58, questions the city's General Municipal Authority and its lack of communication with HealthNow, the primary tenant in the authority-managed Kanjorski Center since 2000.

"I was going to thank the municipal authority and Congressman Kanjorski for forcing HealthNow out of Nanticoke because they did a wonderful job," Kamowski said Monday.

Earlier this year, when Texas-based Travelocity was looking to move its local call center from a Plains Township facility, U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, led representatives of the company through HealthNow's 28,000 square feet in the Kanjorski Center.

It was a walkthrough that annoyed HealthNow, Kamowski said.

"You don't bring somebody in from the outside and ruffle their feathers. That was the icing on the cake," he said.

Kamowski's comments echoed those of Bill O'Malley, property manager for the Kanjorski Center, at a recent authority meeting.

"My phone rang right after that happened," O'Malley said of the Kanjorski-led tour. "That was the straw that broke the camel's back."

Calls seeking comment from Kanjorski were not immediately returned.

Travelocity ended up in a 30,000-square-foot facility in Hanover Industrial Estates.

The authority doggedly pursued a long-term lease from the company as HealthNow waited for a new contract from the federal government. After its lease expired in September 2004, HealthNow refused to make a long-term commitment and rented month to month.

Talks between the company and the authority eventually deteriorated. The authority has yet to hear from HealthNow more than a week after the planned move was announced to the press.

HealthNow has rented from Kamowski on Market Street for nearly four years. The company plans to relocate to the Twin Stacks Center on state Route 415, about 11 miles from its current location. The move will allow the firm to consolidate all 214 local employees into a single building at a rent lower than it paid for the two locations in Nanticoke, according to Karen Merkel-Liberatore, a HealthNow spokeswoman. Merkel-Liberatore has said the company plans to enter into a three-year lease and expects the move to be complete by October.

7/19/2005

### **Teen trims locks for children with hair loss**

Rachel Richards, 14, of Nanticoke, recently donated 15 and a half inches of her hair to Locks of Love. She is the daughter of Eve and Robert Richards. She will be a freshman at Nanticoke High School in the fall. Locks of Love is an organization that provides hairpieces to financially disadvantaged children suffering from any form of medical hair loss. A minimum of 10 inches of hair is required for a donation and up to 10 ponytails could be used to make one hairpiece. Richards' hair was cut by Donna Martin's Hair Designs in Forty Fort.

7/17/2005

### **Nanticoke Area Notes**

By: Pamela Urbanski

#### **Nanticoke gymnasium to get facelift**

The gymnasium at the Nanticoke Area High School is undergoing some renovations this summer. According to Frank Grevera, director of building and grounds, the work is long overdue and necessary

"The gym is more than 30 years old," he said. "After inspecting the seating, we felt the bleachers were just not safe to sit on or continue to move in and out." He told me the constant pulling out and pushing the seating back into position has loosened the nuts and bolts and the rollers are worn out. To keep costs down, the maintenance staff at GNA is demolishing and removing all the bleachers. Dettner Whiting will install new, plastic bleachers that are power-operated. New crash pads, which keep athletes safe during sporting events, will be placed on the walls near the locker room and lobby area. The walls will have a new paint job and red, white and blue striping.

The gym floor is being financed through the capital improvement fund. This money is available because, once again, Grevera did his job and watched where every penny was being spent.

"We bid and re-bid on many items that went into the elementary center," he said. "We made sure we got the best deals for our money"

#### **St. Ann's Novena to begin**

St. Francis and St. Joseph's Churches will hold their annual St. Ann's Novena beginning tomorrow, July 18, and concluding on the Feast of St. Ann, which is Tuesday, July 26.

"Our novena is a time for spiritual renewal and so it's also conducted as an annual parish mission," said Father William Langan, pastor.

He asks his parishioners to extend an invitation to their neighbors, family and friends, especially those who have lapsed in the practice of their Catholic faith.

Father Denis Blais of the Fathers of Mercy will be conducting the parish mission. "Father Denis will encourage and challenge the parish community to make a stronger, deeper personal commitment to Christ and His church."

The Mass schedule is as follows: Monday through Friday, noon at St. Francis and 7 p.m. at St. Joseph's.

The Saturday and Sunday schedule will remain the same.

Questions? Call the St. Francis rectory at 735-6903.

#### **Take a safari at Corpus Christi**

Corpus Christi parish invites area children ages four through 12 to go on a safari adventure. The parish will be hosting its annual vacation bible school July 25-29 from 9 a.m. to noon at the parish picnic grounds in Wanamie.

Kids will meet friends, explore bible stories, sing great songs and there will be crafts, games and snacks. Who knows? You could end up riding a rhino or maybe you'll get to hop along with some kangaroos. It is guaranteed to be fun.

To register call the parish office at 736-6372.

#### **Welcome extended to Father Nash**

I would like to extend a warm welcome to Father John Nash, who is the new pastor of the Holy Trinity/Holy Child/ St. Stanislaus parish community. Father Nash is no stranger to Nanticoke as he served the parishioners of Holy Trinity in 1989 as assistant pastor before being assigned to Montrose a year later.

Welcome Father Nash!

Pamela Urbanski can be reached at [urbanski@myexcel.com](mailto:urbanski@myexcel.com)

7/16/2005

### **WNAK up for national award**

By Mary Ondrako

Route 81 Radio's WNAK (730 AM and 94.3 FM) based in Nanticoke recently learned it has been nominated for a national industry award. The station is one of five finalists for a National Association of Broadcasters' Marconi Radio Awards in the category, "Adult Standards Station of the Year." Its contenders are KEZW-AM in Denver, Colo.; KJUL-FM in Las Vegas, Nev.; KKZZ-AM in Ventura, Calif.; and WAMB-AM in

Nashville, Tenn.

Named for Nobel Prize recipient Guglielmo Marconi, the "Father of Radio," the awards are presented to outstanding radio stations and on-air personalities.

An independent task force selected finalists in the 22 categories, according to the broadcast association. The ballots will be sent to members of the Marconi Radio Awards Selection Academy later this month with the winners announced at the annual awards dinner and show to be held Sept. 22 at the Pennsylvania Convention Center, Philadelphia.

Margie McQuillin, WNAK general manager, said the nomination is especially an honor for a fledgling radio company. Route 81 organized in the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton market about a year-and-a-half ago, purchasing the station from the late Robert W. Neilson and taking it to the FM band for the first time.

"We're amazed, shocked and excited, all at the same time," McQuillin said. She credits the hard-working staff and community-oriented programs for the recognition. She said that 15 percent of air time is dedicated to promoting local community events.

Recently, Jim Greech of Hazleton was hired as general sales manager for Route 81's regional cluster. McQuillin said his addition will help to more effectively market the stations that include WAZL-AM in Hazleton and WCDL-AM in Carbondale.

McQuillin feels the station has a good chance at winning the national title because ratings are considered. According to Arbitron, WNAK is one of the highest-rated adult standards station in the nation in terms of average listener shares.

Congratulations to Route 81 and the WNAK staff and good luck!

7/12/2005

### **Nanticoke authority has office space, needs tenants**

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Staff Writer

Nanticoke General Municipal Authority is soon going to have to find out what to do with approximately 90,000 square feet of commercial space - and potential tenants aren't exactly standing in line.

HealthNow spokeswoman Karen Merkel-Liberatore announced last week that the Medicare claims processing company planned to move out of the Kanjorski Center, Main Street, by October. The 214 employees will be relocated to the Twin Stacks Center in Dallas Borough.

At the same time, the municipal authority has hired Impact Pennsylvania, part of the Susquehanna Development Group, to construct a commercial building on Market and Main streets. The project could cost between \$9 million and \$14 million and will include residential space and a parkade, authority member Robert Bray said during Monday night's meeting.

The authority was under pressure to hire a developer to hang onto a \$1.5 million federal grant originally for expansion of the Kanjorski Center, Bray said.

But according to Solicitor Susan Maza, the authority is "still exchanging documents" with the federal agency, so the grant has not been secured.

With the new 50,000 square-foot building to be constructed, plus 30,000 square feet in the Kanjorski Center and another 10,000 in the former CVS building next door, the city will have a total of 90,000 square feet to fill, Joseph Lach of the South Valley Partnership said.

Resident Richard Butler took the municipal authority to task for not planning exactly what to do with the building before committing to the project, especially in light of the fact that the Kanjorski Center will soon be 80 percent vacant.

The developer has a proven track record in contacting tenants, Maza argued. Earlier, she said any tenants interested in the new building are being asked to contact Impact Pennsylvania.

Butler said instead of only using public money, the developer's principal should put up some of his own funding towards the project, which would ensure a commitment.

"We don't have the wherewithal to support another failure in this town," Butler said.

He suggested the municipal authority cooperate with other entities, such as the South Valley Partnership or Penn's Northeast, to help aggressively seek out tenants, rather than rely on the developer.

Nanticoke Treasurer Albert Wytoshek urged further cooperation between the authority and city officials. While the new board is more open than those in the past, there is still too much discussed in executive session, Wytoshek believes.

In response to a question from Nanticoke Councilman Joseph Dougherty, Bray said there are eight years left on the mortgages on the Kanjorski Center.

There are two: one from the state that requires payments of about \$148,000 a year, and one from Luzerne County at \$80,000 a year. The authority opted to investigate the terms of the loans and formed a committee to do so.

Then there is the question of expenses at the Kanjorski Center once HealthNow vacates it.

Building manager Bill O'Malley said he did not expect significant savings on maintenance, since the building still had to be kept up for the remaining tenant, the state Department of Labor and Industry.

O'Malley asked whether the municipal authority would list the property with a realtor.

"There's a few things in the fire," authority member Chester Beggs said. "I think we're going to be OK."

When Beggs said, "We all knew HealthNow was going to go," O'Malley replied that was not true.

"After three different administrations and all the turmoil that's gone on down there, these people have soured," he said.

Maza said that was not the impression she got in November 2004, when she spoke with HealthNow representative Bob Fitzgerald. At that time, he gave the impression the company was looking for more room, authority member Steve Buchinski said.

7/12/2005

## **Tenant's exit brings cash worries**

**With HealthNow leaving Kanjorski Center in fall, municipal authority concerned about funds.**

By jfox@leader.net

Members of the city's General Municipal Authority called for a close examination of finances Monday in the wake of last week's announcement that a major tenant in the authority-managed Kanjorski Center is relocating to Dallas.

HealthNow, a New York-based Medicare claims processing company, has rented 28,000 square feet in the downtown Kanjorski Center since 2000 at rate of \$32,000 a month. The company announced on Thursday its intention to move its 214 Nanticoke employees to the Twin Stacks Center on Route 415.

Authority member Chet Beggs called for a review of maintenance expenses on the building in an effort to identify possible savings both before and after HealthNow's planned move in October.

"Right now I have it basically down to nothing," said Bill O'Malley, the authority's property manager for the building.

Costs have been pared down to the most basic maintenance and safety precautions, he said.

With the impending vacancy of most of the building – a 14-member division of the state Department of Labor and Industry is the only other tenant – concerns about the authority's ability to function with a significant loss in income surfaced.

The authority makes payments on two debts from the construction of the center, one to Luzerne County and a second to the state.

The payments on the county debt can be suspended in the event of vacant office space, said authority member Bob Bray. The state debt cannot, he said, adding that payments to the state total about \$140,000 a year.

"There's going to be some pretty lean times," O'Malley said, suggesting the authority may be required to borrow funds to bridge any funding gaps in the absence of HealthNow's rent.

Bray was concerned that it might be difficult to immediately find a tenant to fill the HealthNow void.

"It's a safe bet to say there won't be other tenants in that building," he said.

Beggs offered a more optimistic assessment, saying there are already interested parties.

"There are a few things in the fire," he said. "I think we're going to be OK."

During an acrimonious public comment session at the evening meeting, members of the public questioned the proposed authority project to construct a new office complex downtown with a \$1.5 million federal grant and \$5.7 million loan secured by the authority. The project will include 50,000 square feet of office space and a parkade and could cost between \$9 million and \$14 million, according to authority members.

Joe Lach, a resident of Plymouth Township and solicitor for the municipality across the Susquehanna River, questioned who will occupy the proposed building. Authority members have made repeated assurances that there are potential tenants interested in the development but have declined to indicate specific names.

7/12/2005

## **Operation Jump Start**

An area legislator is encouraging residents to donate to Operation JumpStart, a fund that assists military families facing financial or medical hardships.

Pennsylvania has the highest percentage of National Guard personnel activated for Operation Iraqi Freedom compared to other states, said state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke.

"Operation JumpStart will help spread awareness of the need for a statewide military relief fund as it collects donations for Pennsylvania military personnel and their families in times of crisis."

Donations are being collected through the Harrisburg-based Foundation for Enhancing Communities, a nonprofit community group that helps with more than 650 charitable causes.

Tax-deductible donation to Operation JumpStart may be made via the Internet through two Web sites: [www.operationjumpstart.net](http://www.operationjumpstart.net) or [www.supportmilitaryfamilies.com](http://www.supportmilitaryfamilies.com). Contributions may be mailed to: Operation JumpStart, c/o The Foundation for Enhancing Communities, P.O. Box 678, Harrisburg, PA 17108-0678.

People who donate \$10 or more will receive a commemorative license plate.

7/11/2005

## **As districts raise taxes, Act 72 looked to for help**

**In Luzerne County, eight of 11 school districts have hikes. One reason is lower tax base.**

By mguydish@leader.net

Combined, Luzerne County's 11 school districts expect to spend nearly \$407 million in the 2005-06 school year. About \$5 million of that – roughly 1 percent – will come through tax increases in eight districts.

The increases range from 2 mills in Hanover Area to 16 mills in Wyoming Valley West. In all, eight districts raised taxes. Crestwood, Greater Nanticoke Area and Pittston Area did not.

The most common reason given for tax increases was a one-two punch of skyrocketing special-education costs and stagnant or declining tax bases. While area educators expect the former to continue to climb for the foreseeable future, the taxing landscape could change in a few years if Act 72 delivers as promised.

All 11 districts opted in to the state law designed to use money from legalized slot machines to reduce local property taxes, though that probably

won't happen before the 2006-07 school year. In a best-case scenario projected by the state, local districts would be able to cut taxes collectively by about \$20 million, wiping out the looming tax increase four times over.

Can slots really generate that kind of cash? It sure looks like investors expect it to. The Mohegan Tribal Gaming Authority plans to spend \$505 million to bring gambling to the Downs at Pocono in Plains Township perhaps by next summer.

Of course, the gaming authority expects to make a profit. School districts, by law, can't. They can't even pile up much of a cash reserve for emergencies. A recent state law limited such reserves to no more than 8 percent of the district's total budget. Local districts are routinely well below that.

Many districts tapped reserves to keep taxes down this year. Wilkes-Barre Area's \$80.9 million spending plan calls for using every penny of a nearly \$2.7 million reserve, and taxes will still go up 15 mills. Business Manager Ralph Scoda is confident savings will be found during the year to rebuild reserves.

Wyoming Valley West had planned a tax increase of 19 mills, but at the last minute decided to use \$217,000 from its reserve to whittle off three mills, leaving about \$1 million for emergencies in a \$50 million budget.

A mill is a \$1 tax for every \$1,000 of assessed property value, and that's the same in every district. But how much a mill raises for a district varies dramatically. In the county's smallest district, rural Northwest Area, one mill garners about \$16,600 a year. In the biggest district, sprawling Hazleton Area, it brings in 10 times as much: \$161,319.

Looked at another way, Luzerne County residents in Hazleton Area (the district touches two other counties) will see a 4-mill tax increase next year, but that will give the district \$644,276. The tax increase in Northwest Area is nearly twice as high, climbing 7 mills to 220.3, but will generate considerably less money: about \$117,250.

There was something new in play when districts created their budgets this year. Because they all opted into Act 72, they will all be subject to restrictions on how high they can raise taxes without voter approval. The limit is calculated using an "index" that is basically a measure of inflation, and the Pennsylvania School Board Association says, if history is any indication, it will vary from about 2.8 to 3.6 percent each year.

The limit didn't take effect this year. Districts had to opt in to Act 72 by the end of May, and they didn't have to finish their budgets until the end of June. That means they were crunching numbers knowing it will be tougher to pass big tax increases in the future. No school board cited those looming tax limits as a reason for this year's hikes.

7/10/2005

### **Local quintet is country to the core**

### **Den Dwellers have been getting together to jam since late '50s**

By ghoban@leader.net

Time was when Norm Borofski, Mel Hankey, Joe Maday, Danny Novak and Jimmy Ravert could bring down the house inside any bar or VFW post.

These days, however, sticking around the house suits this still-tight musical unit just fine. In fact, a simple basement den is its primary musical venue.

Meet the Den Dwellers.

Since the late 1950s, this musical quintet has been "messing around" with classic country songs recorded by such artists as Gene Autry and Mickey Gilley.

With Borofski, 70, on bass, Hankey, 73, on electric guitar, Maday, 70, and Novak, 67, on rhythm guitar and Ravert, 68, on lead rhythm guitar, this all-Nanticoke-bred band is pure country.

"I think we all mostly love country," Novak said. "We all grew up with Hank Williams."

(OK, Hankey admits he's still hung up between country and jazz when it comes to his favorite type of music, but that's neither here nor there).

Still, the group agreed it doesn't listen to or like the country artists of today, with the possible exception of Alan Jackson.

"When Elvis died, country died," Maday declares. "The new artists even all wear the same kind of hat. Waylon Jennings and George Jones are the best singers of anybody."

One long-ago day, while sitting in a high school class, Maday remembers, he wrote on a desk that Hank Snow was his favorite musician. Borofski saw it and taught him how to play guitar.

"I kind of had my eyes on his sister, but that didn't work out," Borofski said.

The group's friendships go back more than 40 years.

"Joe and I knew each other from high school," Borofski said. "Mel got in with us playing, and Danny wound up in the band, too. Then, Jimmy just came round robin through Mel."

Each band member, at one time or another, did some type of public performing in local bars or VFWs.

"There were always guitars in my house," said Hankey, the only band member who has had professional training. "I pick it up every day. Music is one of the things that just came naturally to me. It's the only thing I've ever been interested in."

Now the Den Dwellers alternate practicing in either Borofski's or Ravert's basement each week.

"Norm's house has a cellar and a recording room that we practice down in, and he called it his 'musical den,' " Maday said. "Then we took it one step further and called ourselves the 'Den Dwellers.' "

On a recent weekday afternoon, as they played song after song, the gray-locked members sported matching black caps with "Den Dwellers" embroidered on them instead of the customary cowboy hat many country singers wear. Each man also had a pin of the instrument he plays fastened to his hat.

"My son Jim made them for us at his store, Wyoming Valley Monograms," Ravert said. "We've all gotten to be great friends. These guys are like

my brothers.”

As Maday called out “Bobby McGee,” a listener couldn’t guess Hankey is the only band member who reads music.

“Mel is so good he forgets that we are here,” Maday said. “God gave him too much talent.”

Even though all five group members can sing, Novak is nicknamed “golden throat” because of his powerful, spine-chilling voice.

“This is the most fun because there is no pressure,” Novak said. “I have a karaoke set in my basement that I work with all the time.”

This group of retirees might spend as much time reminiscing about the old days as making music together.

“What we talk about down here stays down here,” Borofski said.

Even though three of the members have had open-heart surgery, the group keeps playing year after year.

“We don’t play if someone can’t make it,” Borofski said. “We will keep playing until we start dropping off one by one.”

7/9/2005

### **The Class of '05 also class of 9/11**

### **Our students see the world change forever in one day**

By dkonopki@leader.net

“(Feeling secure) is one of the things that people love about being an American. Now, you go outdoors and wonder who’s a terrorist. We live in a different place.”

Mike Sarnak Greater Nanticoke Area graduate

It should have been a time to celebrate a new beginning. But less than two weeks into their high school careers, members of the Class of 2005 weren’t talking about school dances and weekend get-togethers.

Instead, the talk was dominated by planes being flow into skyscrapers. Terrorists. War. Getting drafted.

“I was sitting in geography class when we saw the planes fly into the trade center,” said Crestwood senior class President Scott Boone, who was a 15-year-old ninth-grader at the Wright Township school when terrorists struck New York City and Washington, D.C., on Sept. 11, 2001.

“At first, we didn’t know if it was real or not. When we finally knew it was real, the feeling was disbelief. There was a lot of fear. A lot of us thought we’d be at war in the next few days.”

In the days and weeks after the attacks, it was hard for the students, teachers and coaches to talk about anything else.

“For at least three or four weeks, that’s all we talked about,” Boone said. “We talked about it during classes, at lunch and at football practices. Some of our football practices and games were changed because of everything that was going on.”

Greater Nanticoke Area Superintendent Anthony Perrone addressed the affect the terrorist acts might have on students several weeks after they occurred.

“You and I, we had happy childhoods,” he told the Times Leader in November 2001. “We grew up and we had no fears. I feel sorry for these kids. I don’t think their lives will ever be the same.”

Today, Perrone says members of the Class of 2005 enter a different world than the one that greeted them as high school freshmen.

“I think the world has changed. It’s a little different place,” he said. “But I don’t think they think about it as much as they did when (the attacks) first happened. They’ve moved along with their lives. They’re going to college or entering the work force or joining the military.”

Even before he stepped foot in the high school, Nanticoke Area’s Mike Sarnak had given thought about joining the military. The attacks solidified those feelings.

“When the second plane hit the building, everyone knew it was an act of terrorism. How did it make me feel? It made me mad,” said Sarnak, who begins Air Force basic training at Lackland Air Force base in San Antonio on Aug. 30. “It motivated me. I put a (American) flag on the wall in my room.”

Sarnak, who played football and basketball for the Trojans, isn’t the only recent Nanticoke Area graduate with plans to enter the military. Eighteen of the 148 graduates are expected to join the armed forces, according to a school survey.

That’s the largest number for the school since the terrorist attacks took place. The 2002 and 2003 graduating classes had eight apiece, and the Class of 2004 had nine.

“A few of the students have told me things about wanting to be there with everything going on,” said Nanticoke Area Principal Mary Ellen Jarolen.

“The military also offers many opportunities for incentives.”

Boone and Sarnak agree the world has changed a lot since their freshman year.

“I think it’s a different world,” said Boone, a former Crestwood football player who will study business at Philadelphia University. “There’s a lot more caution. People are much more careful.”

And a little more worried, Sarnak said.

“We don’t have that feeling of peace all of the time,” he said. “(Feeling secure) is one of the things that people love about being an American. Now, you go out door and wonder who’s a terrorist. We live in a different place.”

7/8/2005

### **HealthNow departing Nanticoke**

### **Firm relocating to Twin Stax Center in Dallas. Kanjorski says new tenant will be found.**

By JON FOX jfox@leader.net

HealthNow, a Medicare claims processing firm which employs more than 200 in this city’s economically struggling downtown, has announced

plans to relocate to Dallas.

The New York-based company with operations in the Kanjorski Center and office space along Market Street plans to move to the Twin Stacks Center on state Route 415, about 11 miles from its current location.

The move will allow the firm to consolidate all 214 local employees into a single building at a rent lower than it paid for the two locations in Nanticoke, Karen Merkel-Liberatore, a HealthNow spokeswoman said Thursday.

Merkel-Liberatore said a three-year lease will be signed soon and expects the move to be complete by October.

The Nanticoke General Municipal Authority, which manages the Kanjorski Center, had made repeated attempts to coax HealthNow into a second long-term lease since its first lease expired in September 2004.

The authority's solicitor, Susan Maza, said communication between the company and the authority eventually ceased.

As of Thursday afternoon, Maza she had not received word from HealthNow about their intention to move.

"From a business perspective, I find it unprofessional in the sense that we have requested repeatedly that they contact us to discuss the issue and we have not received any response from them. That's not the way we do business," she said.

In November 2004, Maza met with two representatives of HealthNow regarding a renewal of their lease and a possible expansion of the Kanjorski Center.

"At that meeting we had discussed with them that if they need more space that could be accommodated," she said. "When we left that meeting in November of '04 it was left on a very positive note."

Dialogue between the two parties then withered. Requests for more meetings were not answered, nor were subsequent letters sent to the company, Maza said.

"HealthNow has been nonresponsive," she said.

The authority has spent hundreds of thousands of federal grant dollars to pave the way for HealthNow's expansion in Nanticoke, but the company never pursued an expansion to the point of construction in the Kanjorski Center or elsewhere. It was at that point where company would balk at a commitment, Maza said.

"That's where HealthNow would just never respond," she said.

The loss of the largest tenant in the only building leased by the authority could throw the body into an economic turmoil. Board members have made repeated pleas to tighten belts at the authority's monthly meetings, and HealthNow's relocation will end its largest source of income

The firm, which in 2000 assumed United Health Group's Medicare claims processing operation in the Kanjorski Center, currently rents 28,000 square feet at a monthly rent of \$32,000. The building's other tenant, a division of the state Department of Labor and Industry, employs 14 workers. U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, who was instrumental in the construction of the center which bears his name, reacted to Thursday's announcement with equanimity.

"The reality of the situation is what it is," he said of the departure of the business to the district of U.S. Rep. Don Sherwood, R-Tunkhannock. "This is not an unexpected event or terribly upsetting"

The Kanjorski Center will not be vacant for long, he said, adding that HealthNow's decision will not affect a push to use three-year-old \$1.5 million federal grant. The grant was initially drafted to subsidize an expansion of the Kanjorski Center and add 30,000 additional square feet for HealthNow, but the authority was compelled to seek other occupants when the company expressed little interest.

The authority hopes to use that money as part of a \$5 million project to create at least 50,000 square feet of office space and create at least 100 new jobs.

"There are several tenants that the authority or their representatives have been working with," Kanjorski said.

Those prospective tenants, he said, have a need for space that exceeds both that available in the center that bears his name and the new proposed office space.

"I think a new tenant will take the building in the foreseeable future," he said.

7/8/2005

### **HealthNow makes it official: firm moving to Dallas**

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Staff Writer

HealthNow administered a revitalizing shot to Dallas Borough, but a painful blow to Nanticoke City on Thursday.

The New York-based Medicare claims processing company announced it intends to move operations from the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street to the Twin Stacks Center on Route 415 in Dallas.

"We're grateful HealthNow is moving here, and it's a great shot in the arm for Dallas," said borough manager Joseph Moskovitz. "But we feel sorry for Nanticoke, and we know it is a blow to their efforts to revitalize their downtown."

Although a lease has not yet been signed, HealthNow senior communications director Karen Merkel-Liberatore said the company definitely plans to move its 214 employees to Twin Stacks by October.

HealthNow moved into the Kanjorski Center in 2000. Since its lease expired in September 2004, the company has been renting month-to-month. It paid approximately \$32,000 per month for 28,000 square feet of the Kanjorski Center.

Merkel-Liberatore would not release potential lease terms at Twin Stacks, but did say HealthNow would take more than 30,000 square feet of the complex, at a rate \$4 per square foot less than the company paid at the Kanjorski Center.

"The Back Mountain can't survive just as a bedroom community," said Attorney Lynn Banta, who co-owns Twin Stacks with her husband Richard Haas. "We need to replace what was torn out of here when Commonwealth left. People ate lunch every day, shopped on their lunch hours."

Dallas officials know what it is like to lose a major employer. In 2001, Commonwealth Telephone Co. moved its corporate headquarters - and 330 jobs - to a Keystone Opportunity Zone on Public Square, Wilkes-Barre.

Twin Stacks has 28 tenants employing about 200 people. The 214 more from HealthNow will double the on-site employee base. Banta said HealthNow has already asked them to begin construction to adapt space for the company.

"They were clear when they came to see us they were already making plans to move back to New York. This was not a case of us versus Nanticoke," Banta said, adding, "They have been very easy to work with. We're looking forward to a great relationship, a great tenant, and a great asset to the Back Mountain."

Nanticoke's experience with HealthNow was different.

Susan Maza, solicitor for the Nanticoke Municipal Authority, which owns the Kanjorski Center, said she has not heard from the company, even in response to a letter she faxed to its Binghamton, N.Y., office June 15.

"It's just unfortunate, and I find it very disappointing that HealthNow could not contact us directly to discuss this," she said.

The municipal authority made numerous attempts to work out a lease and potential expansion with HealthNow since last year, but no company representative ever responded, Maza said.

Savings and the internal working environment were the main reasons behind the move, Merkel-Liberatore said.

"It allows us to have all our employees on one floor, which we believe will provide a more productive environment for our team members," she said.

The Kanjorski Center did not have on-site parking, and employees had to take shuttle buses to their lot on Lower Broadway. That will not be a concern at the new site.

The Twin Stacks complex also boasts numerous conveniences, such as a full-service gym, a day-care center, a restaurant, and a beauty salon.

Congressman Paul Kanjorski believed the municipal authority had been preparing for HealthNow's desertion for at least six months, and was used to the company being unresponsive.

"This is not something that was unexpected by the authority or by me, for that matter," Kanjorski said. "I've been dealing with these people for the last four years."

Nanticoke councilmen John Bushko and Joseph Dougherty have a lot of questions to ask the municipal authority at the next meeting on June 11.

Bushko suggested the municipal authority consider hiring a "very aggressive" realtor to market the Kanjorski Center.

The municipal authority has put together a list of potential tenants, Kanjorski said.

7/7/2005

### **Retired police officers seek hike in pension**

#### **Council will consider a cost-of-living increase for eligible retirees.**

By KRISTEN GAYDOS Times Leader Correspondent

Retired city police officers may be getting a little more money in their pension checks.

Mayor John Toole, responding to a request by the retired officers, said at Wednesday's council meeting that council would look into a cost-of-living increase for eligible retirees.

According to the officers, they have only received one increase from the state two to three years ago. They currently receive no increase from the city. The requested increase was not available.

If implemented, the increase would be once a year.

In other business:

Councilman William Brown informed the public that the Community Development funds for road paving is restricted to certain roads.

He said council will have to come up with other funds to pave the remaining roads, including Chestnut and Grant streets. A map is posted in the Municipal Building.

Councilman John Bushko asked council to consider placing speed limit signs on Union Street.

Bushko said there have been numerous accidents on the corner of Union and Chestnut streets, and people are racing ATVs in the street.

Council said it would look into the matter.

7/7/2005

### **Nanticoke eyes problem properties**

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Staff Writer

Sometimes the grass is greener on the other side of the fence in Nanticoke - and longer, too.

Councilman John Bushko asked Wednesday night if it would be possible to get an ordinance "with teeth in it" for people who let their properties become overgrown and weedy.

Solicitor Bernard Kotulak said there is a nuisance ordinance, which Code Enforcement Officer Richard Wiaterowski has often used to take problem property owners in front of Magistrate Donald Whittaker.

Another possibility is for the city to cut the grass on the properties and then place municipal liens on them for the work, like Avoca Borough does, Kotulak said.

The liens are good for 21 years, so the city will eventually get paid, he said.

Councilman Joseph Dougherty said he noticed a lot of overgrown yards while making the rounds with Wiaterowski Wednesday.

"It seems like on just about every block, there's a property that's a problem," Dougherty said.

One property that is not as problematic as it used to be is the former L.S. Skate-A-Rama on Washington Street.

George Ellis Jr.'s L.S. Enterprises has been renovating the fire-damaged half of the massive building, and, according to City Administrator Greg

Gulick, progress is being made. Work should be finished by November, he said.

In other business, Councilman Bill Brown said several residents have been asking why only certain streets are being paved.

Nanticoke received \$480,000 in federal Office of Community Development Community Development Block Grant funding for 2004, \$423,600 of which went for paving.

The money can only be used in areas that are 50 percent or more low- to moderate-income.

The 200 block of East Union Street, 400 block of East Green Street, and 200, 300 and 400 blocks of East Church Street fit the qualifications, Brown said.

"Chestnut Street is in deplorable condition, but it's not eligible," Brown said. Neither is East Grand Street.

The money for other recently paved streets came from the sewer fund, he said.

The city has applied for more than \$400,000 in OCD money for this round of grants.

Brown wants to see the first two blocks of East Church Street, Noble Street, and the 400 block of East Union Street paved with the money when it comes. City officials hope to see the money this fall, he said.

The goal is to re-pave all the east side streets, Brown said.

"The west side from Market Street over is something the new mayor is going to have to look at and plan for over the next four years," he said.

7/3/2005

### **Fathers' day**

By Robert Kalinowski , Staff Writer

Call it a 'Dads 101' class. But in this class, everyone's an instructor.

For the last year, the Greater Nanticoke Area Fatherhood Initiative has brought together a group of dads and their children in an effort to improve parenting skills.

Lesson number one: spend time together- even if it means doing a little work.

The group, backed and funded by the Greater Nanticoke Area School District and the state, recently embarked on a project to beautify and restore Nanticoke's West Side Park.

Sons and daughters watched their dads scrape paint and cut wood planks in preparation of refurbishing several park benches. Then they gave it a try themselves.

The same was done with sanding and painting.

"A lot of kids don't even know what the concept of a father is," said Al Rende, a member of the group. "We want to show them that dads can be role models."

Participating in community service is another lesson dads and their children could learn together. In turn, this can make their family more solid, Rende said.

When kids learn the concept of family, they are less likely to get into trouble, he said.

The group has two trips planned. They'll visit the Pike County jail to see what life is like behind bars. They'll also participate in a rafting adventure on the Delaware River.

And then, like in most classes, there will be a test.

"Did I enjoy going rafting down a river or being at the jail," Rende said. "Maybe it will help kids make better decisions."

Walter Szychowski, president of the group, always enjoyed spending time with his 4-year-old son, Dylan, but thought that joining the group could give him some insight on being a better father.

The community service aspect is his favorite part. He and his son's bond will leave an imprint on the town they call home.

"Doing community service with my son only makes him a better person and it also makes it a better place for him to live," he said.

When Szychowski was younger, he often visited West Side Park to play basketball, swing on the monkey bars and enjoy the slides. He and his pals respected the park and all that used it. The new generation is much different, he said.

Graffiti could be found all over park equipment. The kids leave trash all over the place, and often have foul mouths, he said.

A constant upkeep of the park headed by the dad's coalition will change the look of the park and maybe change the attitude of those who come to play, he said.

Joe Gryskiewicz brings his daughter, Aubrey, 11, and son, Collin, 8, to the fatherhood initiative events.

"It gives them the social skills for teamwork," he said.

The group also attempts to get fathers of Nanticoke Area students more involved in their child's school life.

They are trying to get every dad of every school student in the district to volunteer at least one hour during the 2005-2006 school year.

Aside from special events, members of the Greater Nanticoke Area Fatherhood Initiative meet weekly.

They talk about how to curb bad behavior in children, how to be better disciplinarians and how to counteract the ever-increasing influence drugs have on today's youth.

"We have some dads that are really committing themselves to becoming better dads," Rende said.

7/1/2005

### **GNA principal gets support**

**High school administrator Tom Kubasek was moved to K.M. Smith Elementary.**

By kkile@leader.net

The debate over high school principal Tom Kubasek's transfer to K.M. Smith Elementary School continued at Thursday night's meeting. More than 80 people attended, causing the meeting to be held in the auditorium rather than the regular board room. Supporters cheered as Kubasek entered the high school. Students wore T-shirts supporting Kubasek and warning, "Election day is coming." They also displayed signs which said, "Our voices can't be heard if you don't open your ears." In May, the school board voted to make the switch. Assistant high school principal Maryann Jarolen will take the post as head principal, and Kubasek will become principal of K.M. Smith Elementary School. Thursday's meeting was the last meeting before the transfer goes into effect today.

Many people spoke on Kubasek's behalf, describing him as a kind and compassionate man.

Samantha McManus, a student in the high school, said Kubasek treats everyone with respect. "He can be a better principal at the high school." Carol Grabinski has a granddaughter in the high school. She said she is sad and concerned with the board's decision.

"He has the time to be involved with the concerns of the students," Grabinski said.

Joan Capece said Kubasek is keeping kids in school.

"He started as principal four years ago and in those four years the dropout rate has dropped."

Kevin Grevera said he has worked with both Jarolen and Kubasek regularly. He said the board is not doing justice if it lets people influence its previous decision.

"If you made an executive decision, stick behind your guns," Grevera said.

Kubasek did not address the board on his own behalf.

The board did not address any of the comments at the meeting. Board solicitor Vito DeLuca said the board is not discussing the matter in public.

In other business the board hired the following for the 2005-06 school year:

- Tracy View, Teresa Polfka, Jennifer Wolfe, Amanda Salus, Jennifer Jones, Valerie Bartle, Rebecca Waiter and Janelle Stapert as elementary teachers
- Michael Stachowiak as a science teacher
- Jennis Bunnell as a music teacher
- Joan Solano, Ann Marie O'Donnell and Carol Hromisin as reading teachers
- Clint Ross and Paula Fine as special education teachers
- James Barna as a physical education teacher
- Joe Figlerski as an art teacher
- Steven Blannard as an alternative education teacher
- Stacy Spigarelli as an elementary guidance counselor

7/1/2005

**Bridge renamed to honor the 109th Field Artillery**

**The Carey Avenue span will recognize the area's Army National Guard.**

By bmarcy@leader.net

The Carey Avenue Bridge is no more – at least, not the name.

The bridge, which spans the Susquehanna River to connect the communities of Plymouth, Larksville and Hanover Township, will from now on be known as the 1st Battalion, 109th Field Artillery, PA Army National Guard Bridge.

State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, introduced a bill in the state House to change the name of the bridge to honor the 109th National Guard unit and the soldiers who served in it and its predecessors from the Revolutionary War to the present war in Iraq.

The proposal was merged with other highway naming bills and passed both the House and the Senate. Gov. Ed Rendell signed the bill into law Thursday.

The 109th grew out of a unit that was formed on Oct. 17, 1775, a few months after the establishment of the U.S. Army. The unit has been involved in every major American conflict, from the Revolutionary War to engagements in Iraq and other parts of the Middle East today. The 109th has 532 soldiers and is based in **Nanticoke**, Plymouth and Wilkes-Barre.

Yudichak has said the bridge renaming was meant as a memorial to soldiers from the 109th who died in combat, such as Sgt. Sherwood Baker of Plymouth, who was killed in action in Iraq last year. Baker was the first Pennsylvania National Guard member killed in action since World War II. The Carey Avenue Bridge was built in 2002 at a cost of \$27.5 million, replacing an outdated metal span. The new bridge name would be significantly longer than the old one, but Yudichak has said it will likely be abbreviated to the "109th Bridge."

After his bill passed the House in April, Yudichak said:

"The '109th Bridge' would forever serve as a tribute to the members of Pennsylvania's National Guard, and would be a reminder to us all of the responsibility we have to honor those brave souls who have put their lives on the line to preserve the freedoms we cherish."

The bridge renaming becomes effective Aug. 30.

6/30/2005

**Nanticoke agency makes its case**

**City would lose a \$ 1.5-million grant if the municipal authority were to disband.**

By jfox@leader.net

A representative of the city's General Municipal Authority, a body controlling nearly \$2 million in grants and holding the reins of a downtown development project, appeared before city council Wednesday to lobby for the authority's continued existence. As the three-member authority works to save a \$1.5-million federal development grant that been set to expire at the end of May but was extended, members of council had complained that they have been left in the dark about plans for the project. On June 21, at a special council meeting Councilman John Bushko, the Democratic nominee in the November mayoral election, made a motion to have council explore the possibility of disbanding the authority.

No other council member backed Bushko's motion.

At Wednesday's meeting, authority solicitor Susan Maza made a case for the necessity of the authority and its continued existence. The authority, she said, is the grantee for the \$1.5 million of federal funding, and if municipal body ceased to exist the grant would be lost.

Maza also offered council an update on the progress of the downtown development project of which details have been slow to emerge.

The three members of the authority have been working diligently since their appointments in January to save the three-year-old grant, she said.

"If you've worked with grant money you know how time-consuming going through that process is," she said.

A commitment for a \$5.7 million bridge loan to match federal financing was secured on June 22 through the assistance of the developer of the project, the Susquehanna Development Group, Maza said.

Without the authority, that financing may not have been available considering the city's precarious financial footing, she said.

Maza said the developer has submitted a construction schedule to the federal administrators of the grant and that the project should be completed by September 2007.

A schedule may have been drafted, but Maza was unable to offer council member many more details about the flavor of the project that will add at least 30,000 square feet of office space downtown and bring at least 100 jobs, according to grant paperwork.

"It's a commercial building," she said.

She said the developer has been in discussions with prospective tenants, but no specific plans have been drafted.

Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski asked that council continue to be updated on the project as plans are solidified.

"If we were to be asked about the project we'd at least have some idea of what is going on," she said.

The municipal authority is scheduled to next meet at 7 p.m. on July 11.

6/27/2005

**This guy just loves his Habitat**

**Don Mulholland moves from Florida to the Wyoming Valley, and enjoys his job and the people here.**

By vrose@leader.net

Three years ago, retired house painter Don Mulholland gave up a lifestyle that many senior citizens might consider ideal. He abandoned the sunshine of St. Petersburg, Fla., to come to Northeastern Pennsylvania.

You could argue that such a move is akin to birds flying north in the winter. However, the 73-year-old Mulholland looks at it as one of the best decisions he's ever made.

"I love it here and I love my job," said Mulholland, who serves as the assistant warehouse supervisor at the Wyoming Valley Habitat For Humanity ReStore in Nanticoke. "The people are wonderful, which is one reason I look forward to coming to work."

Mulholland is a fixture at the ReStore, which is somewhat of a bargain-basement Home Depot. It offers building supplies at rock-bottom prices to raise money for Habitat for Humanity, a non-profit organization that builds houses for people who don't qualify for mortgages.

All of the supplies available at the ReStore are donated by local residents.

Mulholland, who has worked at the ReStore for just over a year, is a jack of all trades. He unloads trucks, stocks merchandise, waits on customers, runs the register and fills out paperwork. Perhaps most important, he's able to answer most questions that arise.

"Don's really something," said warehouse supervisor Judy Sullivan. "He's really been instrumental in organizing the store. He enjoys being here and talking to people, and he certainly knows the merchandise."

Mulholland began as a volunteer worker at the ReStore, but now is a paid employee.

"He does the work of somebody half his age," Sullivan said. "A few weeks ago I brought my 17-year-old daughter along to help out at the store.

She wasn't very happy about it, but after watching Don help unload a tractor-trailer, she said 'Mom, I'll never complain again.'"

Mulholland is a native of Alger, Ohio. He began painting houses at age 8, but his career in that line of work ended when he slipped and fell off the 30-foot high roof of a corn crib.

He remembers it like it was yesterday. "It happened on May 15, 1972, at 11 o'clock in the morning," Mulholland said. "Some joker spilled paint on the roof, and it caused me to slip. I busted my knees and messed up my back."

After the injury, he worked several odd jobs, including picking up scrap metal and cleaning yards.

Mulholland has been married twice. He has six children, 12 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. He and his wife, Anna, moved from Ohio to St. Petersburg 14 years ago.

At first, he enjoyed living in Florida, but he had difficulty dealing with hot weather. "The humidity was getting so high that I couldn't take it. It caused my bronchitis to kick up."

So, on the advice of friends who were from Wilkes-Barre, Mulholland and his wife decided to pull stakes and head for the Wyoming Valley. "They said it's awfully nice in Pennsylvania, and they were right," said Mulholland, who resides in Nanticoke.

"I make new friends every day," he said. "It makes you feel good when you sell something and know where the money is going."

6/26/2005

## **Nanticoke woman wins 3 gold medals**

h annual National Veterans Golden Age Games at the University of Oklahoma. The event is the largest sporting event in the world for senior veterans. Merrill, who represented the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Plains Township, competed in the 75-and-older division. She took first place in 25-yard swimming (wheelchair category), 50-yard swimming (wheelchair category) and ramp bowling.

6/26/2005

## **3 raised from deacon to priest**

### **A former businessman and a former teacher are among the newest clergy for the Diocese of Scranton.**

By kamerman@leader.net

Three local deacons were embraced by a long line of priests Saturday as they were welcomed into the priesthood before a large crowd in St. Peter's Cathedral in Scranton.

A choir sung hymns during the two-hour ordination Mass for 60-year-old Joseph R. Hornick of Pittston, Edward L. Michelini, 59, of Conyngham, and 34-year-old Brian F. Van Fossen of West Nanticoke.

Priests placed stoles around their shoulders and cloaked the men with chasubles after they took their vows as priests.

"This is the most important day in the lives of these men," said the Rev. Joseph F. Martino, the bishop of the Diocese of Scranton, during the Mass. "They are to be made new men today. They'll be elevated to a new relationship with Jesus Christ."

Friends and family members of the new priests swarmed them as they left the church and bells rang in their honor. A couple asked Van Fossen to give them his first blessing as a priest.

When asked how he felt, Van Fossen replied, "Very good. It's wonderful."

The men were quickly summoned to a meeting with Martino in the rectory next to the church after Mass to discuss their assignments. The men entered the meeting not knowing where they will be assigned within the Scranton Diocese.

Martino said the new group of priests is small, especially compared to a few decades ago.

"There was a time when we had a dozen or more (enter per year)," Martino said.

The bishop said there are two local men "in the pipeline" working toward priesthood and 25 men have shown interest in becoming priests, he said. All three priests ordained Saturday live in Luzerne County, and one – Van Fossen – was born and raised locally.

He's the son of Teresa Bukofski Van Fossen of West Pittston and Charles Van Fossen, who is deceased.

He attended Pope John Paul II Elementary School in Nanticoke and graduated from Bishop Hoban High School in Wilkes-Barre. He is a member of St. Stanislaus Church in Nanticoke, where he will celebrate his Mass of Thanksgiving at 3 p.m. today.

Van Fossen earned his undergraduate degree in philosophy from the University of Scranton in 1993 and a master's degree in counseling from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania in 1998. He recently obtained a master's degree in theology from the Theological College at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

Hornick is a widower and father of three grown children. He was born in Trenton, N.J. and was raised in Levittown. He served in the army for two years before graduating from Dickinson College in Carlisle in 1967. He had a career as a commodity broker and owned a vending business. His wife of 16 years, Mary Ann, died in 1991. Hornick, whose three children live in California, recently earned a master's degree in divinity from Blessed John XXIII National Seminary. He will celebrate his Mass of Thanksgiving at 12:15 today in St. John the Evangelist Church in Pittston. Michelini, a native of New York City, graduated from the District of Columbia Teachers College in 1969 and obtained postgraduate degrees from Stanford University in California and Ohio State University.

He's a former teacher at Bishop Hafey High School in Hazleton. He recently completed his theological training for the priesthood at Blessed John XXIII Seminary. His mass of Thanksgiving will take place at 2 p.m. today in St. John Bosco Church in Conyngham.

6/25/2005

## **Grant will help Nanticoke, Newport and Plymouth townships plan for future**

By Elizabeth Skrapits Staff Writer

A state grant won't fix all the problems in Nanticoke City, Newport and Plymouth townships, but it will help provide the communities with a plan for a clearer, better future.

The South Valley Partnership was awarded a \$91,200 Land Use Planning and Technical Assistance Program grant, Fred Reddig, executive director of the state Department of Community and Economic Development's Governor's Center for Local Government Services, announced Thursday.

The money will be used to pay urban planner Alex Belavitz of Facility Design and Development Ltd. to put together, with local input, a comprehensive economic development plan for Nanticoke City and Plymouth and Newport townships.

The plan will determine "how to take advantage of the region's assets so it is not at the mercy of any developer that comes down the pike," State Rep. John Yudichak said.

"It's a plan that's desperately needed. We can't continue to float from one failed project or potential project to the next," he said.

Councilman Bill Brown filed the paperwork after his colleagues on city council, John Bushko, Yvonne Bozinski and Joseph Dougherty, agreed

Nanticoke should be the conduit for the grant.

According to DCED press secretary Leslie Suhr, these are some of the goals the South Valley Partnership listed in its application:

Overall assessment of downtown buildings and infrastructure.

Analyze Nanticoke area market characteristics from a market standpoint.

Conduct surveys of businesses and property owners.

Make proposals for physical improvements, site improvements, market opportunities and ways to draw visitors to the area.

Parking and streetscape improvements.

"This plan can and will be an important tool in guiding economic development in the South Valley region," said Joe Lach of the South Valley Partnership. "It will help public and business leaders to make intelligent choices about appropriate projects and development in our region."

LUPTAP grants encourage municipal cooperation. Usually

they come with a 50 percent match provided by the communities, but since three municipalities are working together, their matching component is less, Suhr said.

The total project cost is \$135,000, so the South Valley Partnership needs \$43,800. Yudichak said the matching funds are already in place.

His office helped get a \$20,000 state Community Revitalization grant, and a local nonprofit organization, the Nanticoke Area Development Corporation, has committed \$30,000.

6/23/2005

### **Nanticoke posts high grad rate**

#### **The study compared schools' ninth-grade enrollments with graduation numbers 4 years later.**

By mguydish@leader.net

Greater Nanticoke Area is doing a much better job of making sure students graduate than any other Luzerne County school district, according to the Pennsylvania Partnership for Children.

The nonprofit group released a "fact sheet" on what it calls the "graduation gap" in Pennsylvania, comparing ninth-grade enrollments in 2000-01 with the number of kids who graduated four years later. By that yardstick, Greater Nanticoke Area graduated all but about 5 percent of its kids in four years.

The next best rates in Luzerne County were posted by Dallas and Hazleton Area, both graduating all but about 9 percent. Most county district rates ranged from 10 percent to 19 percent. The state average is nearly 22 percent.

Greater Nanticoke Area Superintendent Tony Perrone credited the school district's success to a tight-knit, caring staff. "I try to make it like we're all one family," he said. "I taught some of their parents."

Outgoing high school Principal Tom Kubasek echoed that sentiment, praising the staff for helping him create a school "where students could easily approach the administration and faculty." He also lauded Guidance Counselor Cathy Kaminski for winning a grant that paid for a program called "The Right Track," which helps keep troubled students in school by getting them extra support in a quieter classroom.

The worst local rate -- nearly 27 percent -- was posted by Northwest Area, meaning about one out of every four ninth-graders did not graduate from the school district four years later. But Northwest has the smallest enrollment among county districts, so slight changes in numbers can lead to big changes in percentages.

More importantly, the partnership did not consider student transfers in making the calculations. It used state data, and the state does not track student transfers. According to the fact sheet, "transfers represent a small percentage of students and do not dramatically impact the results demonstrated in this report."

But local superintendents have repeatedly voiced frustration when transfers are not included in such calculations.

"I think it's critical," said Hazleton Area's Frank Victor. His school district has begun tracking "student movement," keeping tabs on how many students come and go in each school each year. Only numbers for elementary/middle schools were available Wednesday, but they are substantial.

The partnership's numbers also clash with graduation rates calculated by the state. In most cases, the state numbers look better. For example, while the partnership's figures show nearly 28 percent of Northwest Area ninth-graders don't graduate four years later, state data says it's closer to 9 percent.

The difference arises because the state uses a more complex formula that looks at how many students drop out each year as the ninth-graders work their way through high school to graduation.

Go to [www.papartnerships.org/dropouts/](http://www.papartnerships.org/dropouts/) for the full report. And for a Times Leader comparison of state graduation rates and those calculated by the Pennsylvania Partnership for Children, as well as more detailed information on the Partnership's calculations, go to [www.timesleader.com](http://www.timesleader.com)

6/23/2005

### **Diocese adds three to its numbers**

#### **The deacons are all late bloomers, with the youngest at 34.**

By mguydish@leader.net

Three Luzerne County deacons will be ordained as priests in the Diocese of Scranton on Saturday, but as if to highlight one of the nagging demographic problems plaguing the diocese, all are late bloomers. The youngest is 34, while the other two are 59 and 60, which means their careers will be comparatively short. During a 10 a.m. ceremony at St. Peter's Cathedral, Bishop Joseph Martino will ordain Joseph R. Hornick, Edward L. Michelini, and Brian F. Van Fossen

At age 60, Hornick is the oldest of the three. Though a native of Trenton, N.J., he spent the past two summers as a deacon of three Pittston churches:

St. John the Evangelist, St. Casimir and St. Joseph. He is a widower and former commodity broker who owned a vending business before choosing the religious life.

Michelini, 59, was born in New York City and is a member of St. John Bosco Church in Conyngham. He taught at Bishop Hafey High School in Hazle Township.

**Fossen, 34, is the only area native. He was born in Nanticoke, attended Pope John Paul II School there and graduated from Bishop Hoban High School in Wilkes-Barre. He attended the University of Scranton and became a deacon. He is a member of St. Stanislaus Church in Nanticoke.**

While the ordination of priests is good news for the diocese, the small number offers scant help for a diocese with fewer and fewer clergy. A recent study reported that the number of active priests in the diocese has dropped from 442 in 1960 to 224 last year, and will continue to decline to 164 in 2010.

The study also notes that the diocese is aging in many places, particularly Luzerne County, where it is common for parishes to see more funerals than baptisms each year.

6/22/2005

### **Nanticoke rejects authority takeover**

#### **A motion to study the question dies at the city council meeting.**

By kwernowsky@leader.net

Councilman John Bushko's attempt to have attorney Joe Lach examine a council takeover of the General Municipal Authority responsibilities failed at a special meeting held Tuesday.

Bushko has claimed the authority, which is responsible for nearly \$2 million in federal economic development money, is not looking out for the best interest of the city, and thinks the council should have more input on authority plans and decisions.

Lach, the Plymouth Township solicitor and vice president of the South Valley Chamber of Commerce, told council members that he would look into the matter at no cost to the city.

"I have no agenda in this, and I have no political interest in this. The council can take it or leave it," Lach said.

So they left it. Bushko's motion died without a second from fellow council members.

Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski said the council is usually left wondering about authority decisions yet it's the council that hears the bulk of the complaints from constituents.

She wondered if the council could have more input in authority matters through the creation of a co-op board consisting of council members and authorities. However, Mayor John Toole pointed out that it's illegal to appoint members of the council to a municipal authority board.

Authority Solicitor Susan Maza said she would welcome any input and the attendance of council members at authority meetings, but added that even council members aren't privy to the happenings of closed executive sessions.

The authority, under the direction of U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, was working to secure the commitment of 100 jobs in the ailing downtown by the end of May or risk losing a \$1.5 million grant. Officials from the federal Economic Development Administration gave the authority an extension.

In other business:

- Council voted to allow the burgeoning Greater Nanticoke Area Drug Task Force youth group to use the Stickney Fire Station.

The task force was started in August 2003 at a community effort to battle the spread of drug use in Nanticoke. It currently meets in the basement of St. Francis Church, will lease both floors of the building for 10 years at a cost of \$1.

The matter rattled Stickney Volunteer Fire Department President Bob Bray who said he's not pleased that the department will have to move its engine out of the station when the task force holds its meetings.

"I thought it was all settled," Bushko wondered aloud.

The council held a meeting to hash out the agreement with the department, but Bray did not attend. He said several members of the department expressed concern about the agreement, but the decision was made anyway.

"We don't have a problem with the task force using the second floor, but we don't want that engine taken out," he said. "We haven't even seen a copy of the agreement."

6/21/2005

### **Money for schools**

EXCLUSIVE:

#### **Proposed budgeting system doubted**

#### **W-B Area superintendent says plan touted by governor may do more harm than good.**

By: mguydish@leader.net

Gov. Ed Rendell has proposed a new budgeting system to provide more state money for poorer school districts, but one local superintendent suspects it might backfire and penalize some of the districts it is intended to help.

Rendell's 2005-06 budget for basic education includes a plan to divvy up about \$23 million as a "foundation supplement." The idea is to make sure every district can spend at least \$8,500 per student. Districts that spent less last year would be eligible for extra cash this year.

In releasing details of the proposal last week, Rendell noted that the average spending per student statewide is \$9,124, but two out of three

Pennsylvania students are in a school district that spends less.

According to state figures, five of 12 local districts spend more than the state average: Hanover Area, Northwest Area, Tunkhannock Area, Pittston Area and Wilkes-Barre Area.

Locally, seven districts would share \$764,268 under the plan.

How much a district gets depends on factors such as tax rates, property values and enrollment, but the first step is simple: Districts must spend less than \$8,500 per student. And that's the part that could make the whole effort flawed, according to Wilkes-Barre Area Superintendent Jeff Namey.

Namey suspects the state's figures might not be accurate. He said he believes Wilkes-Barre Area spends less than the \$9,929 per student calculated by the state. But more important, "all our local districts are poor districts," Namey said, yet not all would receive a foundation supplement.

"For those districts – and Wilkes-Barre is one of them – that have stepped to the plate to provide what we think are the best programs we can provide, our cost per student increases, but then you get penalized."

Namey praised Rendell's effort to equalize spending, but said it may need some revision to be truly fair.

Stripped of the complex jargon and math, here is how it works in three steps. Only districts eligible in step one can qualify to get money in steps two or three.

1) If a district spends less than \$8,500 per student, it gets more money. Statewide, 221 of 501 districts qualify. Seven local districts would get between \$13 to \$23 extra per student. The exact amount depends on how wealthy the district is. Dallas would get the least, Greater Nanticoke Area the most.

2) Those same districts can get more money if they also have a relatively high tax rate. But there's a catch: The state considers the value of property being taxed. The idea is to make sure districts with low-value buildings get more money than districts with high-end structures that generate more property tax revenue. Statewide, 75 districts qualify. Only two local districts do, Greater Nanticoke and Wyoming Valley West. The amount of extra money they get per pupil would more than double.

3) The state tops off the whole deal with more money to poor districts that have fewer than 1,500 students, a bonus that only 29 districts would earn statewide. No local districts are eligible.

All told, the amount being parceled out as foundation supplements is relatively small. Rendell's \$4.47 billion basic education budget is only 2.5 percent higher than last year, adding a bit more than \$109 million. The \$23 million in "foundation supplements" is 21 percent of the total increase, but is less than 1 percent of the \$4.47 billion.

6/16/2005

### **HealthNow is considering office space in Dallas complex Business spokesperson says the current site is too cramped.**

By JON FOX [jfox@leader.net](mailto:jfox@leader.net)

HealthNow, a major tenant in the Kanjorski Center that employs more than 200 individuals, is unhappy about the limited amount of space available in the downtown building and has looked at alternative office space in Dallas, said Laura Perry, a corporate spokesperson.

Representatives of the company, a New York-based Medicare claims processing firm, have explored office space in the Twin Stax Complex on state Route 315, Perry said.

"We want to find a place that is a good work environment for our employees."

The downtown space is too cramped, Perry said.

"The biggest thing is that we're full there and there is no room to grow."

The company, which employs 214 workers in the center, has occupied the center on a month-to-month basis without a signed lease since September 2004.

Lack of a lease has become an increasingly frequent topic at meetings of the city's General Municipal Authority, which manages the building. Susan Maza, the authority's solicitor, has said communication between the company and the authority has been sporadic.

"I think we've been somewhat frustrated in trying to deal with them," said Bob Bray, one of the three members of the authority. HealthNow, he said, has been unwilling to enter into any type of formal lease agreement.

Bray was unaware that HealthNow was looking for office space. Neither the authority's solicitor nor its other members could be reached for comment Wednesday.

Perry declined to say if the company intends to move to the Dallas site. "We don't have a signed lease with anyone."

The firm, which in 2000 assumed United Health Group's Medicare claims processing operation in the Kanjorski Center, rents 28,000 square feet at a monthly rent of \$32,000. The building's other tenant, a division of the state Department of Labor and Industry, employs 14 workers.

The city's municipal authority has spent hundreds of thousands of federal grant dollars to pave the way for HealthNow's expansion in Nanticoke.

But the company never pursued an expansion to the point of construction in the Kanjorski Center or elsewhere.

The authority is struggling to save a nearly expired 3-year-old, \$1.5 million dollar grant to create additional office space downtown and bring at least 100 jobs to the city. The grant was initially drafted to subsidize an expansion of the Kanjorski Center and add 30,000 additional square feet for HealthNow, but the authority was compelled to seek other occupants when the company expressed little interest.

6/10/2005

### **Commencement held at Greater Nanticoke Area**

By Robert Kalinowski , Staff Writer

Kara Levandoski stood among fellow Greater Nanticoke Area High School seniors Thursday evening and read from a poem she penned in elementary school.

A dreamer then, she named it "Anything is possible."

Whether it was learning to ride a bike or to read, becoming a doctor or scientist, all goals were attainable, she felt at the time.

Through her years at Nanticoke the optimistic sentiment grew stronger, so she thought it would be an appropriate message to share with classmates on the doorstep of college, the military or the workforce.

"Never did I realize I'd be reading the same poem I wrote as a child on graduation day," said the school's National Honor Society president, selected to deliver the ceremony's "Inspiration Message."

"As Greater Nanticoke Area High School students, we've experienced great success by trying," she told the 157 seniors of the Class of 2005. "My fellow classmates, anything is possible when you try."

The invocation to Greater Nanticoke Area's 35th graduation ceremony began with Caitlyn Klish, class secretary, asking the seniors to look up and down the auditorium aisles at fellow classmates - for what probably would be the final time.

She told them to envision surgeons, teachers and maybe even a president in the making.

"GNA is an influence woven into the fabric of America," Klish said.

Courtenay Pientka, class treasurer, peered into the sea of blue and white caps and gowns and saw "proof of hope for the future."

Over the years, love from parents, confidence from teachers and support from friends has ensured success in the next chapter of life, she told them.

"Wherever we may go from here always remember tonight's victory," Pientka said.

With 77 percent of graduating seniors going on to higher education, earning \$1.68 million in scholarships and grants, it was a victory - for students and the country, said Principal Tom Kubasek.

"Have faith, courage and a willingness to endure and you will succeed," he said. "Your voices will echo for generations to come."

Class President Dan Pascoe had a simple request for graduates: "Be in your heart what you want to be."

Pascoe, a lead singer in a local band, will pursue his love of music in college.

As a final send off to classmates, he performed a song he wrote about the Class of 2005's journey, "The very best of years."

On of the most touching parts of the song went like this: "When the curtains close and the ceremony ends, these years will last forever because we spent it with our friends."

6/9/2005

### **Old bill stalls Nanticoke grant**

### **The city must pay back \$100,000 before the state will issue the new funds.**

By jfox@leader.net

A mistake that cost the city the balance of a \$100,000 state grant four years ago has resurfaced to hold up the delivery of a \$250,000 grant.

In 2001, the city tore down its municipal garage nearly two months after a state grant to fund the demolition and the construction of a new garage had expired.

The state asked for the entire \$100,000 back, but the city had spent more than \$21,000 of the money. It was a debacle that re-emerged this week.

The state told city officials the bill hasn't disappeared over the years. In fact, they want the bill paid before they hand over \$250,000 to cover the recent removal of a former cigar factory on West Church Street.

"They demanded this money be repaid," Councilman Bill Brown said at Wednesday night's city council meeting.

Mayor John Toole contended the state's decision to request the return isn't final.

"That can be challenged yet," he said. "Send it back, and we'll see if we can get it back."

Council moved to pay the bill out of the general fund.

In other business:

Joe Lach, a municipal solicitor and a member of the South Valley Partnership, a nonprofit group pushing for economic development of the southern Wyoming Valley, renewed his criticism of the city's General Municipal Authority.

The authority, which is at the helm of a push to use a \$1.5 million federal grant to spur downtown development, has excluded the residents of the city and city council from the process, he said.

Calling the meetings of the authority an "abomination," he asked the council to "take action to get this municipal authority under control."

Councilman John Bushko, acting on Lach's recent offer to represent the city for free in any legal action it initiates against the authority, asked him to meet with the city's solicitor, Bernard Kotulak, to discuss possible action.

Bushko called the authority's handling of a proposed downtown construction project "frightening."

Council approved a request by Emerald Anthracite to reclaim waste coal from an area of the Dan Flood Industrial Park in an effort to prepare two sites for eventual construction.

"For how many years has that industrial park sat up there with nothing in it," Brown said, expressing enthusiasm for the project.

Council members said a Wilkes-Barre-based commercial printing operation plans to relocate to the site once the reclamation is completed.

Council approved a \$700,000 bond issue from M&T Bank to refinance a 6-year-old, \$3.6 million sewer bond and save the city nearly \$110,000.

Council also moved to pay back a \$300,000 tax anticipation note taken at the beginning of the year.

6/7/2005

### **Nanticoke receives application extension for funding**

By Bill Androckitis Jr. , Citizens' Voice Correspondent

The Economic Development Administration has granted an application extension to Nanticoke officials for \$1.5 million in funding for downtown redevelopment.

Greg Patryna from Impact Pennsylvania Inc., the developer of the Main Street project, gave the Nanticoke Municipal Authority the news at their meeting Monday night.

"Time is very critical," Patryna said. "We are days away from finalizing it."

The authority will now review the application in detail, and submit it to the EDA.

Patryna discussed the plans for the section of Main Street, from Walnut to Orchard Street. Current buildings will be acquired and demolished to make way for new structures, including a parking garage with more than 300 spaces.

Plans should be available for public review within the next few months, and there are already possible tenants.

"I have had several contacts with people interested in moving to Nanticoke," Patryna said.

In other business, George Anthony, from the South Valley Partnership, presented plans for the Lower Broadway Greenway Park.

The new park will encompass 135 acres, and will include new soccer and baseball fields, hiking trails, picnic areas, and a boat launch in to the Susquehanna River.

"One of the major elements from public surveys was (the desire for) a skate park," Anthony said.

Because of public interest, the skate park will be the first phase of the project, tagged at \$250,000. Equipment has already been purchased from Rich's Golf in Wyoming.

The skate park will be fenced in, and the project includes landscaping the surrounding area.

6/5/2005

### **Residents respond to increase in crime**

By Bill Androckitis Jr. , Citizens' Voice Correspondent

Cherie and Marc Gfeller have called Nanticoke their home for more than 10 years.

They are raising two boys in their East Green Street home and are proud of the city they live in.

"We bought it as a starter home, but decided to stay here," Mrs. Gfeller said.

Recently, though, their neighborhood has seen an increase in crime.

"The street isn't as quiet as it was three or four years ago," she said.

Rather than see the neighborhood fall into decline, the Gfellers and some of their neighbors have formed the East End Nanticoke Crime Watch.

At their second meeting last week, nearly 40 concerned residents showed up to learn more about forming a neighborhood watch program.

Charles Balogh, community service officer from the Luzerne County district attorney's office, gave an overview of what a crime watch organization can and should do in their neighborhood. He stressed that taking the initiative is the most important part.

Balogh explained that residents need to become the eyes and ears for law enforcement, watching out their windows and forming walking patrols.

"Make people aware that you are out there, that you are concerned," he said. "Stick with it; believe that it will work. I truly believe that if you work as a group you can eliminate many of your problems."

Simple measures, such as leaving porch lights on overnight and being aware of the surrounding area, are part of the first step.

Also on hand was Nanticoke Police Chief Jim Cheshinski, who took questions from residents.

"I am a true supporter of crime watches," Cheshinski said. "If you have a problem, let me know and I will try to solve it."

Members from the city's only other crime watch group in the Hanover section also attended the meeting.

The next meeting of the East End Crime Watch will be held at city hall on Thursday, June 23.

6/2/2005

### **City gets extension for grant**

#### **The deadline has passed, but federal officials are allowing extra time for proposals.**

By ffox(a) leader net

The fate of a \$1.5 million federal grant for construction in this city's economically ailing downtown remains up in the air. The grant, issued in 2002 to the city's General Municipal Authority, was set to expire May 31, but federal officials have given the authority a bit of a grace period.

"We have agreed to give them the time to submit the construction documents that we need to review before I decide to pull the plug or not pull the plug," said Paul Raetsch, regional director of the Economic Development Administration, the body that oversees the funding.

Raetsch said some documents have been submitted to his office but the authority is still forwarding material. He expects a decision on the future of the funding to be made in the coming weeks.

The authority, with the involvement of U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, was working to

secure a commitment from a company to locate at least 100 jobs in the city. If the authority failed to show sufficient job creation, it risked not meeting the requirements of the aging grant and losing the funding.

In addition, the EDA requires a site plan and a clear idea of what the development will look like before any money is released for the project, Raetsch said.

The authority, which is at the helm of the downtown development project to create jobs and add office space, had failed to act on the EDA grant for

nearly three years.

The grant was originally awarded to subsidize a 30,000 square-foot expansion of the authority-managed Kanjorski Center. That expansion would have allowed HealthNow, a New York based company that processes Medicare claims, to expand. But the company has expressed no interest in expanding in Nanticoke and recently scaled back their operation by 42 jobs.

In March the authority tapped the Susquehanna Development Group as the developer to lead the construction project, but even as late as May 11 the plan appeared to be in the early stages and unclear. Also, details were scarce.

There were no commitments from prospective tenants, and a final location of the project had yet to be decided. And that remains the state of affairs in early June, with the authority working with borrowed time, said Robert Bray, one of the three members of the municipal authority.

The proposed building, a mixture of commercial and professional space that includes a parking garage, could be located along either a portion of Main Street between Walnut and Orchard streets or on Market Street between River and Broad streets, Bray said.

And just what company will step in to infuse jobs into this city is still unclear.

"We do have, I wouldn't say a commitment, but have had conversations with several parties interested in relocating to downtown Nanticoke," he said. He declined to indicate who those parties may be, citing concerns of "confidentiality."

"A big part of this is EDA approving an extension to this money," he said. "I still feel this can happen."

6/1/2005

### **Nanticoke: Officer jumps into action Team pulls drowning woman from river**

By dweiss@leader.net

His soaked bulletproof vest and boots tugging him down, Officer Leonard Nardozzo was dunked under the chilly waters of the Susquehanna River three times Tuesday morning while trying to rescue a woman who strayed more than 30 feet into the river.

Nardozzo was the first officer to arrive along the river's banks near the Nanticoke/West Nanticoke Bridge just before 8 a.m.

There, he saw a 38-year-old woman in the current, screaming for help and "bobbing" up and down.

The officer, equipped with no flotation devices, first tried coaxing her to swim closer to shore. But after seeing her repeatedly sink under water, Nardozzo knew he had to go in after her.

He soon found himself struggling to get safely back to shore. Nardozzo was repeatedly submerged during the save attempt before a team of rescuers was later able to pull the woman from the water.

"At that point I couldn't swim to get her," Nardozzo said. "I was just swimming for my life."

Police believe the woman, whose name was not released, entered the river in an attempt to injure herself, Detective Bill Shultz said.

The episode began to unfold around 6:30 a.m. when the woman left Northeast Counseling Diversion Unit, a treatment facility for mentally challenged individuals, on Washington Street.

Later, an agency worker found the woman at Main and Market streets and was able to coax her into a vehicle.

But as she was being taken back to the agency, she jumped from the vehicle and wandered off, Shultz said.

Around 7:40 a.m., a passer-by told Officer Bryan Kata someone was in the river.

Nardozzo was in the area and drove down a dirt road in a wooded area toward the river.

He heard the woman screaming.

"I started to go into the water," he said. "I was trying to tell her to paddle."

But then he saw her starting to go underwater for a few seconds each time. Nardozzo, after unclipping his gun and radio belt, swam out to the woman.

No longer able to stand on the river's floor, he grabbed the woman. But she was scared, Nardozzo said, and didn't cooperate with the officer.

And as Nardozzo dragged her to shore, the woman's body went limp as she again went underwater. Nardozzo stopped to regroup.

"When I stopped, there was no bottom under my feet," he said.

Nardozzo became submerged. He panicked and realized his bulletproof vest and boots were weighing him down.

He soon went underwater two more times. By then, the woman had floated 8 or 9 feet away from the veteran officer and Nardozzo said he needed every ounce of energy just to make it back to shore.

Nardozzo said he realizes he should have taken his bulletproof vest off. He believes the 3- or 4-pound device weighed about 10 pounds when it was soaked.

"They say your life flashes before your eyes. It did," Nardozzo said, saying he kept thinking of his wife and 2-year-old son.

"That was probably one of the scariest moments. ... I was almost down."

A short time later, Nanticoke Fire Capt. Charles Miller swam a personal flotation device about 50 feet out to the woman.

Once he secured the woman to the device, a team of rescue workers pulled Miller and the woman to shore, fire Lt. Rich Bohan said.

Nardozzo was treated at Wilkes-Barre General Hospital, given a tetanus shot and released.

The woman was taken to Scranton Community Medical Center for hypothermia treatment and was in stable condition, Shultz said. She was in the water for at least 20 minutes, Shultz said.

The detective said it is unlikely the woman will be charged. She will be taken for a mental health evaluation, he said.

"It was not an intentional act," Shultz said. "When they pulled her out, she apologized for causing this."

6/1/2005

### **Nanticoke police and fire personnel rescue woman who walked into river**

By Nichole Dobo , Staff Writer

A police officer and a 38-year-old woman were treated for hypothermia Tuesday morning after a rescue at the Susquehanna River in Nanticoke. Police found the woman bobbing around nearly 30 feet into the river around 7:30 a.m.

Nanticoke police Officer Leonard Nardozzo decided to dive into the river after watching the woman's head slip under the water several times. "She was saying 'I'm cold. Help me' and I saw her go under, under, under," Nardozzo said. "I counted eight seconds, so I decided to go in the water."

Nardozzo said he grabbed the woman's clothing and began swimming to shore, but the frigid water, a tumultuous undertow, and the weight of his bulletproof vest and boots hampered the rescue attempt.

After being dragged under the water several times by the woman, Nardozzo was forced to give up the rescue because of safety concerns until the fire department arrived with flotation devices and rope, he said.

Soon after, the Nanticoke Fire Department arrived with the needed equipment.

Charles Miller, a Nanticoke firefighter, dove into the river to save the woman around 7:30 a.m.

"He said, 'I'll go' and went out there," said Line Chief Chester Prymowicz of the Nanticoke Fire Department.

At this point, the woman had drifted nearly 100 feet into the river, Prymowicz said.

Police believe the woman, who was a voluntary patient at the Northeast Crisis Unit, was attempting suicide.

As a matter of policy, The Citizens' Voice does not publish the names of people who attempt or commit suicide unless there is a compelling reason to do so.

Earlier in the morning, Nanticoke police were called to help Northeast Crisis Unit look for the woman who had walked out of the Nanticoke facility around 7 a.m.

Since the woman was a voluntary patient, the staff could not stop her when she walked out, said Capt. William Shultz of Nanticoke police.

Edmund Abdo, executive director of Northeast Counseling Services, declined to comment on the case and could not confirm the woman was a patient because of mental health and privacy laws.

The Northeast Community Crisis Unit in Nanticoke is a residential crisis center that provides temporary help for troubled people.

On average, about four to five people stay at the center for about a week, Abdo said. It is a voluntarily center; therefore, it is not locked down, he said.

5/31/2005

### **Lightning-linked fire shakes up man**

### **Homeowner, 83, goes to the hospital for observation after fire in attic is put out**

By jfox@leader.net

As rescue workers and neighbors helped him from a plastic chair to a gurney, John McGrath's hands and arms trembled and his face was an ashen white.

The 83-year-old had been driven from his home and across the street to a neighbor's garage after a bolt of lightning struck his roof and kindled a fire in his attic Monday afternoon.

The fire, sparked just before 5 p.m., was quickly extinguished and McGrath was unharmed, but paramedics took him to Mercy Hospital for observation, relatives said.

Neighbors near McGrath's 220 Christian St. home, including a city councilman, the chief of the fire department and a retired police officer, rushed to his house after the lightning crashed into the rear of his roof and a concussive thunder clap reverberated through nearby streets.

Councilman Joe Dougherty, who lives four houses down from McGrath, came to help after he heard the "loud crack" and smelled smoke.

"I came in and the gentleman was on the phone," he said.

Fire Chief Mike Bohan, who also lives nearby, followed quickly on the heels of Dougherty.

"The chief came in just 20 seconds after I went in," he said.

Making their way to the third floor, they saw the glow of a fire through the smoke, but when the on-duty firefighters arrived on the scene the flames were quickly doused, he said.

The fire had been confined to the attic, but McGrath's back yard was strewn with smoldering hampers and cardboard boxes pulled from the flames.

The first and second floors sustained only water damage, officials said.

Bernadette Meyers was washing dishes at her home adjacent to McGrath's when the lightning struck.

"It was like an explosion," she said. "I waited a couple of minutes, then I smelled smoke."

Her husband, Richard Meyers, a former police officer in Nanticoke, went next door to help McGrath across the street.

After the fire was extinguished and the storm clouds cleared, neighbors old and young still lingered craning necks for a glimpse of the action that punctuated a languid Memorial Day. Some firemen folded hoses and some sat drinking sports drinks as the sky turned blue and a white mist hung over the river.

Beth Kirschner, McGrath's niece, came back from the ambulance to tell the assembled group of relatives that McGrath was being taken to the hospital just to be safe.

A Glen Lyon resident, she had heard through a chain of neighbors and relatives about the lightning almost as soon as it happened. She was grateful for the help the residents of the street offered her uncle.

He has "very good neighbors," she said. "They keep an eye on him."

5/30/2005

### **Nanticoke community hopes to establish crime watch**

By Heidi E. Ruckno, Staff Writer 0

A group of Nanticoke residents are no longer content to watch their neighborhoods decline. They've decided to do something about it. Even though their neighborhood in the East End of Nanticoke is still relatively quiet, Cherie Gfeller and her neighbors have noticed an increase in violent crime.

They don't want the criminal element to overtake their neighborhood, so Gfeller is organizing a crime watch group. Twelve residents showed up at the group's first meeting, she said, and many more showed interest.

Gfeller and her husband, Marc, were thrilled with the turnout, considering they only distributed flyers within four blocks of their East Green Street home.

"We've been getting some problems," Mrs. Gfeller said.

Neighbors have reported marginal drug activity, she said, and on occasion, the police have broken up fights at the corner of East Green and Kosciuszko streets.

The Gfellers brought their concerns to the police department, which has responded by increasing its patrol in that neighborhood.

But Mrs. Gfeller feels a patrol car can only do so much. She believes the crime watch can help the police do their jobs by alerting them to problems.

"What they see driving up every two hours is a lot different than what we see living here," she said.

Jim Litchkofski, has gotten behind the effort. Litchkofski said the city has only one other crime watch, a group operating in the Hanover section of Nanticoke.

"This is concerned citizens banding together," he said. "I think any time that there is a visible presence in the community with crime watch signs posted that the criminal element knows that drug trafficking and all the negative activities that go along with it is not going to be tolerated."

The ultimate goal is to make drug dealers uncomfortable, he said. Litchkofski does not want them doing business in Nanticoke.

"That's what a crime watch is for. It's a deterrent," Mr. Gfeller said.

Like the Gfellers, Litchkofski thinks the East End crime watch group will be a valued asset to the police department. They can be its "eyes and ears," he said.

"There's a lot of good people in Nanticoke," he said. "They're getting involved, they're banding together and we're going to make great progress."

5/27/2005

### **Nanticoke parish gets reprieve**

#### **The Diocese of Scranton announced that St. Stanislaus will remain open for now.**

By kwernowsky@leader.net

"This doesn't mean it's going to close, but it's not a permanent solution."

Bill Genello Diocese spokesman

About 150 worried parishioners received some relief Thursday when officials from the Diocese of Scranton announced that St. Stanislaus Roman Catholic Church will remain open.

Chancellor James B. Earley of the Diocese in Scranton hosted a parish meeting Thursday to discuss a restructuring of the parishes that will see the exit of two priests and the installation of a new priest to oversee three of the Nanticoke area's six Catholic churches.

The Very Rev. John F. Poplawski of St. Stanislaus has been granted a sabbatical by the diocese, and he will travel to Rome for six months before he is reassigned within the diocese. The Rev. Richard E. Fox, the current pastor for Holy Trinity and Holy Child Catholic churches, will also receive a new assignment within the diocese.

The Rev. James R. Nash, the pastor at Holy Name of Mary Church in Montrose, will oversee all three churches starting June 29.

With rumors of the closure of St. Stanislaus rippling through Nanticoke's Catholic community, some parishioners are relieved that the church will remain open for now.

"We're glad it's staying open," said Joe Kutz, who has attended the Polish church for more than 70 years with his wife, Marie.

However, officials say Thursday's announcement doesn't mean the diocese is ruling out the closure of the church in the future.

"This doesn't mean it's going to close, but it's not a permanent solution," said diocese spokesman Bill Genello.

Restructuring is becoming an issue that the diocese and Catholic Church is dealing with more and more. With aging parishioners, smaller families and fewer people going into the priesthood, the church is facing a drop in numbers in almost every area.

The Diocese of Scranton has 220 priests who serve in 193 parishes in the 11-county diocese. That's compared with 476 priests in 1966. That number is expected to drop to about 164 by 2010, according to a study done by the diocese.

"We're becoming a secular culture, and the culture seems to be less religious as a whole," Genello said. "The most critical challenge is the shortage of priests, but we're also having demographic changes in all areas of the diocese."

The St. Stanislaus parish was founded in 1875 and is among the oldest in the Diocese of Scranton, according to Genello. This is the 65th restructuring in the diocese history Genello said. Many of the changes occurred since 1991 because of the demographic shifts. Growth in parishes follows trends of economic and population growth, according to Genello, who cited an increase in parishioners in Wayne, Monroe and Pike counties, where population is on the rise.

A change in the Mass schedule at the three churches is expected to accommodate the new priest, according to the Rev. Joseph Kopacz, diocesan secretary for priests. He said fewer Masses means St. Stanislaus' 713 parishioners are enough to keep the church economically viable.

"You're trying to balance the pastoral concerns of the people with economics," Kopacz said. "The diocese closed two parishes in Scranton because they were small and couldn't sustain the parish. There's still a lot of life in here but we'll have to reduce the number of Masses to what is needed to keep these churches open."

As parishioners filed out of the meeting there was a sense of jubilation that, for now, St. Stanislaus will remain open, but some say that with all of the factors that affect church attendance, it's only a matter of time before the diocese announces more change.

"Sense and economics tell you that a lot of these are going to need to close," said 81-year-old Frank Novak. "But for now, I'm glad it's staying open."

5/27/2005

### **Three Nanticoke parishes will share one priest**

By Robert Kalinowski , Staff Writer

Parishioners of Nanticoke's St. Stanislaus Church will get to keep their parish.

But as of June 29, they'll be sharing a priest with three other Nanticoke Catholic churches.

Representatives of the Scranton Diocese made the consolidation announcement Thursday night to more than 150 concerned parishioners at the 129-year-old parish.

"Of course, I was worried. We love our parish," said Olga Simoncavage immediately following the diocesan-mandated meeting. "It's going to stay open. I'm happy. I'm delighted."

The Rev. James R. Nash, current pastor of Holy Name of Mary Church, Montrose, will take the reigns of St. Stanislaus, Holy Child and Holy Trinity, diocesan officials said after the meeting, which was not open to the media.

The Rev. Richard Fox, current pastor of Holy Child and Holy Trinity churches, is taking another assignment in the diocese.

St. Stanislaus pastor, the Very Rev. John F. Poplawski, V.F., has been granted a sabbatical.

"There were so many rumors, so it was hard to know what was happening. We're happy, naturally, that it's not closing," said Frank Novak, 81.

For the last two weeks, Novak and other St. Stanislaus parishioners wondered what the diocese had in store for their historic church. An announcement in the last two Sunday church bulletins said the meeting would focus on the "future direction of the St. Stanislaus parish community."

He's glad that future, at least for now, doesn't include the church closing.

Novak noted that a similar situation at St. Francis and St. Joseph's churches, served by the Rev. William J.P. Langan, in Nanticoke, "seems to be working out well."

Nanticoke's six Catholic churches will now be served by three priests, including the Rev. John Krafchik of St. Mary's, who will be retiring next year.

The consolidation is bittersweet for 77-year-old Phyllis Brojakowski.

"It's going to be strange. It's going to take a lot to get used to," she said. "People didn't want our church to close, so I feel a lot better. But I'm trying to figure out how they're going to do this."

"To have a priest for three parishes, it will be hard on the priest, but at least we'll have our church," said Jean Sepling, 70.

Bill Genello, diocesan spokesman, said the decision boiled down to a dwindling number of active priests available to serve the 11-county diocese.

In 1966, the diocese had 476 priests. Today, that number is around 220 priests to serve the diocese's 193 parishes. By 2010, projections indicate there will be around 164 priests, he said.

This was the 65th time the diocese restructured parishes in response to changing demographics and financial challenges.

More than half of them have occurred since 1991, mostly due to declining populations in Luzerne and Lackawanna counties and rising populations in Monroe, Pike and Wayne counties, Genello said.

It's no secret, he said, more might be on the horizon.

"We have to make changes to use our resources to serve the needs of all Catholics in the diocese," said Genello.

St. Stanislaus is safe "for now," he said.

But when asked if Thursday's consolidation announcement is a permanent solution for the Nanticoke area, he said, "I don't know if you could say either way."

"As time goes on we have to re-evaluate the needs of each particular community compared to the resources we have. And again the most important of those resources are the number of priests we have," he said. "Obviously, we wish we had enough priests in every church. That would be ideal, but

that's not a reality."

5/26/ 2005

### **Advisers near a deal to refinance city bond**

#### **Restructuring the 1999 sewer bond would save more than \$109,627.**

By jfox@leader.net

Financial advisers negotiating on behalf of the city are close to securing a deal to refinance a \$3.6 million, 6-year old bond and save the city nearly \$110,000, city officials said Wednesday.

The drive to restructure the debt is part of the city's involvement in the state's early intervention program for cash-strapped municipalities.

Garret Strathearn, a financial adviser with Concord Public Finance, asked city council to authorize him to move forward in negotiations with a bank he said has offered conditions "very, very, very favorable for Nanticoke."

According to figures provided by Strathearn, refinancing the city's 1999 sewer bond will save the city just more than \$109,627 in the 2005 fiscal year.

Considering the city's shaky financial footing, banks have been wary or wholly unwilling to work with the municipality. After PNC Bank declined to provide the city with a short-term loan to smooth out an intermittent revenue stream as tax revenue trickled in, only one bank of 18 approached agreed to offer the loan.

M&T Bank offered to issue the city a \$300,000, six-month tax anticipation note in February.

The case with the bond refinancing is much the same, Strathearn said.

"As you know, it's very difficult to get a financial institution to work with the city," he said.

City officials hope to have the details of the refinancing solidified and the plan submitted to administrators of the state intervention program at the Department of Community and Economic Development early next month.

5/25/2005

### **Parishioners worry about St. Stanislaus' fate**

By Robert Kalinowski , Staff Writer

The buildup to Thursday's meeting to discuss the fate of Nanticoke's St. Stanislaus Church has parishioners like Mary Ellen Starzynski on edge.

"There's a lot of rumors. We all can't wait until Thursday," said Starzynski. "We're hoping to hear good news."

Starzynski, 57, is a life member of the 129-year-old Polish parish, where she serves as a lector and Eucharistic minister.

For the last two Sundays, she saw announcements in the church's weekly bulletin about the Scranton Diocese's plans to "to discuss the future direction of the St. Stanislaus parish community" at the 7 p.m. meeting at the church.

For the last two weeks, she's spoken with other Nanticoke Catholics who, like her, are wondering what this could mean.

There's a growing worry around town that the historic church, the oldest Catholic parish in Nanticoke, could soon close its doors, she said.

"I don't know if I'd ever be able to drive past it if it's still standing and I'm not going there," said the West Ridge Street resident on Tuesday.

"We're very upset. We don't know. None of us know," Starzynski said. "But it's not up to us. Whatever is going to be is going to be."

The diocese has only said the meeting will focus on a declining number of diocesan priests and the potential need to shift priests and resources to growing areas in the diocese.

Over the last two days, Bill Genello, diocesan spokesman, hasn't been able to say how the meeting will affect the church or why the topic is being addressed at St. Stanislaus.

The Very Rev. John F. Poplawski, V.F., pastor of the church, said even he does not know what will be announced at the meeting to be held at the parish.

He said, "The rumor mill in Nanticoke is going nuts," but he has not been told of any plans to close the church, which has 600 members.

Delores Olshefski, who been a member of St. Stanislaus since her marriage 48 years ago, shutters while thinking about the theories being bantered around town.

"Everybody's guessing this and guessing that, and asking all kinds of questions, but nobody will have answers until after the meeting," said the 69-year-old East Washington Street resident.

"Nobody wants to lose their church. But with not that many priests and not that many attending Mass, whatever the diocese does we'll have to deal with it," she said.

Kevin Halchak remembers becoming an altar server at St. Stanislaus when he was in third grade.

At the time, he shared altar server duties with about 30 others.

When he looks at the altar server roster these days, the 23-year-old, who is still active in the church, sees less than a dozen names.

Fellow members of the younger generation are just not filling the places of those who have died, leading to an inevitable drop in church attendance, he said.

"When you come to church and there's so few people, it hurts the celebration," Halchak said.

Though he wouldn't be totally opposed to any plans to close or consolidate the services at the church his family has been going to for four generations, it's difficult to even think about the rumors being floated around town.

"People put their heart and soul into building that church and supporting it over the years."

5/24/2005

### **Town hall meeting set for May 26 to discuss future of St. Stanislaus Church**

By Robert Kalinowski , Staff Writer

Parishioners of Nanticoke's St. Stanislaus Church will gather Thursday to address the fate of the historic 129-year-old church.

The Diocese of Scranton has called a 7 p.m. town hall meeting "to discuss the future direction of the St. Stanislaus parish community."

A declining number of diocesan priests and the potential need to shift priests and resources to growing areas in the diocese will headline the discussion led by diocesan Chancellor James B. Earley, diocesan officials said.

It was not immediately clear on Monday what this meeting might mean for St. Stanislaus.

But news of the meeting - advertised in the last two Sunday bulletins at the West Church Street church - has some Nanticoke Catholics worried that the church might soon shut its doors.

"The rumor mill in Nanticoke is going nuts," said the Very Rev. John F. Poplawski, V.F., pastor of St. Stanislaus, in response to such early speculation.

He said nobody except the decision makers at the diocese have any idea what would happen with the church and they haven't told him of any decision.

"I'm the pastor there. If it was closing, I'd be the first to know," said the Very Rev. Poplawski, who heads the Nanticoke Deanery.

"Whatever is going to be announced will be announced Thursday. I'm not even privy to that information," he said.

Bill Genello, acting diocesan spokesman, said Earley would discuss diocesan demographics, including the "allocation of resources and priests" at St. Stanislaus on Thursday.

He said similar talks would involve another Nanticoke church, St. Mary's of Czestochowa, South Hanover Street, in the future.

Genello wasn't able to elaborate on what this means for the churches.

Nanticoke has six churches under the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Scranton.

The once-thriving coal-mining town reached a peak population of more than 26,000 in the 1930s. The last recorded estimate of Nanticoke's population, as of July 2003, was 10,533 residents, according to U.S. Census data.

Nanticoke is not alone in discussing the future of its churches.

The diocese is in the midst of a research study into diocesan demographics, which indicates a dwindling of diocesan priests and projections of miniscule future gains in the Catholic population.

In March, the Rev. Joseph R. Kopacz, vicar and diocesan secretary for priests, said it's no secret that the study makes it inevitable that closures and consolidations of diocesan churches lie ahead.

As of 2002, there were 240 active diocesan priests in the 11-county diocese. By 2010, the number of priests is expected to drop 32 percent, according to diocesan projections.

Catholic population growth in Monroe and Pike counties is a factor leading to the inevitable changes, the Rev. Kopacz previously said.

Frank Mrufchinski, lifelong Nanticoke resident and member of St. Stanislaus Church, said he would stand by the diocese with any decision it makes in regard to any churches, including his.

Mrufchinski, 71, said his grandparents, the Bandorskis, were founding members of the Polish church, which he considers "one of the jewels of Nanticoke."

It's now one of the five oldest Polish Roman Catholic churches in the United States, he said.

"It's everything to me. As far as I'm concerned, it's irreplaceable. So many vocations came from that church. So many successful people came out of St. Stanislaus Parochial School," he said.

"But, I have full confidence in Bishop (Joseph) Martino and Bishop (John) Dougherty of the Scranton Diocese in what must be done."

Nicole Dobo, staff writer, contributed to this report.

5/22/2005

### **A look back at the 1969 Nanticoke boys basketball team vs. Steelton-Highspire**

#### **Trojans cry foul**

#### **Refs' calls in basketball playoffs, not lack of talent, cost squad state title shot, say players and coaches.**

By jpetrucci@leader.net

"... We had the best team in the state that year."

Dave Washinski Star on 1969 Nanticoke team

The Nanticoke High School boys basketball team left the locker room after halftime with a commanding 16-point lead over Steelton-Highspire. When the Trojans returned to the locker room 16 minutes of game clock later, they were a beaten team.

Steelton-Highspire, however, had little to do with the outcome of that March 15, 1969, PIAA Class 3A Eastern semifinal game. Nanticoke, it is believed by many, was beaten by a pair of officials who inexplicably reversed the course of one of the best teams in Wyoming Valley history.

By legendary coach Syl "Stretch" Bozinski's estimation, Nanticoke was called for 23 traveling violations in the second half against Steelton-Highspire after hardly being whistled at all for walking in the first half or its previous 24 games.

"Phil Atwood and Norm Carden, I never forgot them," former Nanticoke assistant coach John Kashatus said, remembering the officials. "That's the first time I said those names in 20 years, but that's how indelible they are in my mind."

This was a Nanticoke team that averaged 90 points per game when there was no three-point line. This was a team that overcame the recent merger of Nanticoke and Newport Township high schools. This was a team that was led by no true superstar, but rather by an athletic group of winners – that Trojans senior class won five of six possible Wyoming Valley League titles in football, basketball and baseball in 1967-68 and 1968-69.

"I don't want to cry on anyone's shoulder," said Dave Washinski, a senior sharpshooter on that Nanticoke team. "When you lose, you lose. But it was kind of plain to see now that I'm older ... You don't play 30 games and score 90 points or better and make 10 turnovers a game or less and then go into one half and make 25."

Bozinski guided Nanticoke to the state title in 1961, but these '69 Trojans were even better. They were undefeated in 1969, winning 24 consecutive games by an average margin of 20 points, heading into the Steelton-Highspire matchup. Six regular players scored 20 points at least once during the season.

It appeared nothing could stop this Nanticoke team.

Steelton-Highspire was a near mirror image of the Trojans. Both teams lacked significant size but made up for it with aggressive, up-tempo offenses and tenacious man-to-man defenses. Not only did Nanticoke match up well with Steelton-Highspire, but the Trojans also had a coaching staff as good as any in the country.

First there was Bozinski, who at 6 feet 5 inches, was known as a gentle giant. He coached the Trojans for 31 years.

"He put Nanticoke on the map. I never saw him angry or using profane language. They called him the Cary Grant of basketball," said his first assistant, Rich Rutkowski, a Nanticoke assistant under several head coaches for 34 years.

Joining Rutkowski on the coaching staff were Kashatus and Joe Ciampi. While Kashatus made his mark coaching varsity baseball at Nanticoke and as an official himself, Ciampi went on to coach women's basketball at Auburn University for 27 years and become just the 10th coach in women's college basketball history to win 600 games.

From the opening tip against Steelton-Highspire, Nanticoke continued its dominating ways. The Trojans made 73 percent of their field goal attempts in the first half, racing out to a 23-10 lead after eight minutes before outscoring Steelton-Highspire 16-13 in the second quarter for a 39-23 halftime lead.

The Bilko brothers – Tom and Steve -- Washinski, Bob Yatko and Dave Morgan were in rare form and found the confines of the arena locker room comfortable, almost a prelude to another celebration.

“(Steelton-Highspire) came out kind of sluggish and we really hit everything in the first half,” said Washinski. “It didn’t seem like we were going to have any trouble.”

Trouble, however, was right outside the locker room as the second half started.

Nanticoke, which didn’t alter its game plan, was whistled for seven traveling violations before scoring its first field goal of the half at 5:52 of the third quarter. Steelton-Highspire outscored Nanticoke 15-7 in the third and cut the increasingly surmountable lead to 10 points.

“It almost seemed like no matter what we did, as soon as we caught the ball and took the first dribble it was a walk. It was like nobody wanted to get the ball after four or five of them,” said Kashatus.

With so much confusion, many fans from the Wyoming Valley wondered why Nanticoke didn’t call timeout during the second half. It wasn’t for a lack of trying.

Ciampi nudged Kashatus with his elbow and said, “Coach, we’ve got to tell Syl to call timeout.” Kashatus, agreeing, then nudged Rutkowski and relayed the message. Rutkowski followed in kind, but Bozinski wasn’t a believer in timeouts. He rarely used them, believing his team would be better served if the players worked things out for themselves on the court. All the preparation had been done already in Bozinski’s highly organized, fundamentals-based practices.

“Syl said, ‘We’ve just got to get settled,’” Kashatus recalled.

As the final minutes counted down, Steelton-Highspire came perilously close to taking the lead. Tom Bilko took a lob pass at the top of the key, took one dribble and converted an uncontested layup to add to Nanticoke’s shrinking cushion.

But there it was again. That sound. That whistle, which had gone from an occasional game-stopper to a constant shriek, struck again. Officials called traveling on Bilko. No basket. Steelton-Highspire marched down the floor and took the lead for good.

The scoreboard read 57-54 in Steelton-Highspire’s favor after the final buzzer, and the Trojans found themselves back in the locker room trying to figure out what happened.

“We stood outside with the coaches after the game in disbelief,” said Rutkowski. “Like when you had the Kennedy assassination, it’s just like shock. It takes a little while before it wears off.

“It was a long ride home. We never said anything about the game. We never even talked.”

The PIAA, according to Rutkowski and newspaper accounts, stood steadfast by the officiating. Bozinski declined to protest the game’s outcome, in part because the PIAA had upheld previous officials’ rulings in several disputed games involving area teams. Also, that just wasn’t Bozinski’s style. There were several conspiracy theories regarding what happened that winter Saturday in ’69.

First, the officials were from District 1, or the suburban Philadelphia area. A District 1 team, Penn Crest, played in the other Eastern semi. One could conclude that the officials wanted their team to play the easier opponent, which on paper and in a fairly officiated game would have easily been Steelton-Highspire rather than Nanticoke.

Steelton-Highspire went on to beat Penn Crest and defeated Farrell easily in the state championship, 61-50.

Another possible explanation is the PIAA, or another outside influence, had something to do with the officiating after halftime. Steelton-Highspire is located in the Harrisburg area and the perennially contending Rollers played almost all of their games, including playoff contests, within District 3’s borders and always brought throngs of fans with them. More fans meant more tickets sold, which led to a bigger payday for the state’s governing body of high school athletics.

“Who’s this Nanticoke? Steel-High was a moneymaker for them,” said Rutkowski. “It was like a home team for them.”

Rutkowski also said the PIAA was enraged by the coverage of the game from Wilkes-Barre newspapers. Nanticoke did not have a game film of the game to review the calls, although the PIAA did as it recorded most of its championship events.

“They felt the game was honestly refereed,” Rutkowski said of the PIAA.

Kashatus recalled hearing after the game from people close to the Nanticoke squad that during halftime, fans were still looking to place bets that Steelton-Highspire would win.

Finally, some felt Nanticoke committed a lot of traveling violations in the first half, but they went uncalled. Also, it was suggested to the Trojans that District 2 officials didn’t know how to call a walk properly and that’s how Nanticoke played all season.

“If memory serves me correctly, we didn’t have many walking violations during the year,” said Kashatus.

The Greater Nanticoke Chamber of Commerce wrote a letter to the PIAA calling for an investigation. In the letter, the group cited numerous statistics, including one that had Nanticoke averaging 10-15 violations per game during the regular season.

“My fellow players and I know we had the best team in the state that year, in our minds,” said Washinski. “I know Coach told us plainly that we were as good or better than the ’61 state championship team. We were proud of our accomplishment, it’s just too bad we didn’t get there.

Sometimes that happens.

“We took it as a team. We were taught by coach to play your best and usually you’ll come out a winner. But in this case it didn’t, not when you have other people working against you.”

5/21/2005

### **Nanticoke Area School Board opts in to Act 72 education briefs**

The Greater Nanticoke Area School Board has opted in to Act 72, which will use gambling proceeds for property tax relief.

Board President Bob Raineri and six other board members approved the measure during Thursday night’s meeting. Member Mark Yeager voted against it and Patricia Bieski was absent.

Property owners would save \$150 to \$260 a year in school taxes, depending on how much money is in the statewide pool of gambling proceeds. “It definitely will help all property owners. Everyone definitely needs a tax break when they can get it,” Raineri said.

The board must raise the earned income tax by 0.1 percent as part of opting in to Act 72, known as the Homeowner Property Tax Relief Act. So far, 40 school districts have opted in to Act 72 and 110 have opted out. In Luzerne County, Hazleton Area, Pittston Area and Wyoming Area have opted in; none have opted out. In Wyoming County, Tunkhannock Area has opted out.

In other business, the school board appointed high school Principal Thomas Kubasek to serve as principal at K.M. Smith and John F. Kennedy elementary schools. High school assistant principal Maryann Jarolen was named high school principal. The assistant principal position will be posted.

5/20/2005

### **Nanticoke Area OKs Act 72 program**

By Nichole Dobo , Staff Writer

Greater Nanticoke Area School Board voted Thursday night to participate in the state's new property tax relief program.

Eight members of the board voted to "opt in" to the tax relief program with no discussion during a 15-minute meeting. The board had a 40-minute executive session before the public meeting.

The state's property tax relief act, commonly known as Act 72, is to be funded with revenue from slot machines. However, the slots have not become operational in the state. Plans to have them in place by December appear to have been pushed back a year by a lawsuit which challenges the legality of gambling in the state.

Mark Yeager, the only board member to vote against Act 72, said he is worried the legislation won't work out as legislators have planned.

"Well, I know property owners are going to be happy with everyone except for Mr. Yeager," said Hank Marks, president of the Nanticoke Taxpayers Forum.

"I have too many questions," Yeager replied, adding that the legislation's many requirements were burdensome and could cost taxpayers more than they will save.

Yeager is not alone. As of Thursday, 83 of the state's 501 school districts have rejected the act, according to the Pennsylvania School Boards Association. Only 35 school districts have decided to participate, according to the association.

Locally, three school districts of the county's 11 districts - Wyoming Area, Hazleton Area and Pittston Area - have voted to "opt in."

So far Northwest Area is the only school board that did not have enough votes to pass a resolution to participate in Act 72.

The resolution was blocked because two members voted against the resolution and only five board members showed up for the vote. The a majority of the entire board must vote for a resolution for it to pass, according to the school code.

Northwest board members who were in favor of the act vowed to vote again at a special meeting before May 30. As of Thursday, no meeting has been advertised. The state's Sunshine Act requires state agencies to give 48 hours' notice for a special meeting.

School boards have until May 30 to decide if they want to take part in Act 72.

In order to qualify for property tax relief school boards must agree to a lengthy list of regulations from the state, including levying a 0.1 percent increase on earned income tax. Also, districts that "opt in" can only raise taxes to at a state-regulated level - about 4 percent in Greater Nanticoke Area - without a voter referendum, according to the legislation.

The average homeowner in the district save about \$260 in property taxes if the state generates \$1 billion in revenue from the slot machines. Every adult in Pennsylvania must each lose more than \$330 for the state to raise \$1 billion.

However, landlords, commercial property owners and renters do not qualify for any tax relief under Act 72 and may actually shell out more money for taxes because of the increased earned income tax. Social security checks, pensions and bank account funds are not considered earned income tax.

Any tax relief is not expected until 2007, according to state estimates. The state must generate \$900 million in revenue from the slot machines before many key parts of the legislation, including the 0.1 percent increase in income tax, takes effect.

May. 20, 2005

### **Federal funding**

#### **EXCLUSIVE: Nanticoke cash deep in heap of pork**

#### **\$9 million for improvements, parking garage, might be held up in Congress.**

By jfox@leader.net

Buried deep inside hundreds of pages of special projects for home districts, the House version of a highway and transit bill holds \$9 million in funding for the city. But that funding might have a rocky road to travel before it materializes.

Residents have U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, to thank for this federal dollar bonanza – more money than the bill includes for Wilkes-Barre and Scranton combined. But just when the downtown gets showered with cash for a parking garage and street improvements and exactly how much is still up in the air.

The House passed its highway bill in March, and the Senate followed suit Tuesday.

Both bills must be reconciled into a single package before the bill can become law.

The Senate version clocks in with a price tag of \$295 billion, \$11 billion more than the president said would be acceptable. The White House has said anything larger than \$284 billion would draw the first veto of the Bush presidency.

The \$284 billion House version meets the presidential price ceiling but contains a specific “reopener” provision the administration objects to.

There is also \$12 billion set aside for nearly 4,000 projects inserted by lawmakers and called “pork” by some critics. And therein lies Nanticoke’s funding – \$2 million for general improvements in the city and \$7 million of a parking garage, streetscaping, paving and lighting.

Erich Zimmermann, a policy analyst with the watchdog group Taxpayers for Common Sense, said projects for home districts are “becoming more and more normal” in bills, and in some ways it’s “what greases passage in the House.”

But this bill, with its explosion of earmarks, could see a long passage through committee before the two versions are reconciled, he said. Kanjorski, however, says the funding will likely come sooner than later and he's confident that the federal largess aimed at Nanticoke will emerge from committee unscathed.

"I have a fairly high amount of optimism," he said, citing a conversation with a high-ranking member of the Transportation Committee that will review the bills.

Once the bills are passed in the House and Senate, he said, "they don't play with projects they play with numbers and percentages."

In the past, projects have been cut across the board by a small percentage but not eliminated, he said.

Some say the process of getting a final bill to Bush's desk could take until the end of the year, but Kanjorski says a more likely time frame is 30 days.

As for a veto, he said that's an unlikely scenario.

"Bush has never vetoed a bill, and I think he was eating his Wheaties or something," he said of the administration's insistence on the \$284 billion figure.

5/14/2005

### **WNAK's former owner Neilson remembered as radio pioneer**

By Mary Ondrako

This week's column is dedicated to a local radio pioneer and humanitarian.

The regional radioland was saddened to learn of the death of Robert W. Neilson, a member of 730 Broadcasters Inc., which formerly owned and operated 730 WNAK-AM for 38 years. Neilson died March 13. He was 81.

"He loved radio," said former WNAK co-owner and station manager, Charmaine Grove. "He was a good person, a kind person. He was always happy and always had a smile on his face."

"He was a wonderful man who cared for people," said his wife, Margarete. "He dedicated his life to finding the right music and tried to please his audience."

Neilson grew up in New Jersey and began his broadcasting career as a teenager at a radio station in Atlantic City, N.J., a time when bands would play along the steel pier, said Grove.

She met Neilson while working at a middle-of-the-road radio station in Red Lion and the pair decided to begin their own station, she said. In the early 1960s, they built WBYO-FM, a religious/country music station in Boyertown. The station was well received and pastors from throughout the nation would send in taped sermons to be played on the air, Grove recalled. After several years, the station was sold and Neilson set his sights on Northeast Pennsylvania.

In 1966, he purchased a small, 1,000-watt station and WNAK was born. Grove and, later, Robert "Bobby" Baird, who served as the station's sales manager for 20 years, were brought in as co-owners.

Neilson, a religious man with strong convictions, had three rules concerning the station's operations, Grove related. "No alcohol, no cigarettes and no commercials on Sunday," she said.

The station, under Neilson's leadership, maintained a consistent format of easy listening and hymnal and gospel music. And Neilson, himself, became known for his insightful editorials about current events that he provided on air daily. Editorials, Grove said, that became a "side business" and were requested by radio stations throughout the nation for their own programming.

But it was his strong morals that connected with the region, said Rev. Tom Carten, former general manager of King's College station WRKC-FM, who said he had Neilson address his broadcast management class because Neilson "took a failing station and turned it around."

"He ran a radio station of values to people of values," said the Rev. Carten. "He was a man of great principles."

Those principles struck a chord with listeners, who propelled the small station oftentimes to the top five in the local Arbitron ratings.

Grove said WNAK sought to keep personal touch with the community it served through projects like "the 730 Club," in which members would be personally contacted and invited to station-hosted events, and "Mission Impossible," its community outreach program that raised more than \$100,000 for area charities and needy residents over several years.

Grove said he was an intelligent man, a good leader and a respected community member "He stood up for what he believed in and followed through on it. It wasn't lip service. He did it," Grove said.

Some broadcasters credit Neilson for their career starts.

Mike Stevens, who hosts WNEP-TV's "On the Pennsylvania Road," got his start at WNAK in 1965. "I'm saddened by his passing. He was my mentor in broadcasting. He taught me work ethic and character," Stevens said.

"It was a great way to start in the business," said former Nanticoke resident Brian Carey, a newscaster at New York City's 1010 WINS-AM and ABC Radio network news announcer. "He was very honest. Bob Neilson did everything his own way and his way worked," Carey said. "It's definitely the end of an era."

A funeral service with full military honors was held for Mr. Neilson at Indiantown Gap National Cemetery, Annville.

5/13/2005

### **Taxes stay steady, despite increase in district costs**

### **Budget shows the two greatest expenses would be payrolls and health care**

By IAN CAMPBELL Times Leader Correspondent

Greater Nanticoke Area School District taxpayers will see no increased taxes in the 2005-2006 budget announced Thursday, despite increased costs.

It will also be Superintendent Anthony Perrone's last budget: a motion was passed at the meeting that a nationwide search for his replacement begin.

Perrone announced his planned resignation in May 2003, and at that time agreed to work for up to three years while a replacement was found. In presenting the budget proposal, business consultant Albert Melone Jr. noted that the property tax millage would remain at 245 mills, and the balance of the local income would be made up by two \$5 per capita charges, a 1 percent real estate transfer tax on property sales, 1 percent on earned income, and \$5 per capita on the Emergency and Municipal Services Tax, depending on where in the district payees live. The average district property has an assessed value of \$3,067, and an annual levy of \$751, Melone told the board. The local funding will generate \$8,280,756, or 39.79 percent of the \$20,809,752 annual budget, with state funding providing another 52.45 percent, and the federal government providing only 7.69 percent, despite requiring far more and placing much greater restrictions on the use of those funds, Melone said. "National policies, like No Child Left Behind, and then only giving 7.9 percent, there are clearly more demands than money," he said of the federal government.

"We've been good at getting grants, but to maintain that will be an issue in the future," he said.

Most of the other districts he worked with were generally receiving in a 40 percent range from the state, but the age of the population and the income levels worked in GNA's favor, he said.

The budget revealed that the two greatest expenses in the next year would be payrolls and health care costs. Despite adding 17 new teachers to replace retiring staff, the staff costs would fall by \$354,506. But as the board was required to continue health coverage for retirees until they were covered by Medicare, that savings was offset by an additional \$407,447 in health charges.

Costs for staff would be held in the next year because the teacher and support staff contracts were expiring, and changes wouldn't take place until new contracts were settled, he noted.

There was an increase in what Perrone called "court adjudicated tuition," of at least \$159,000. The superintendent noted a child could leave school at 15, but if he or she then was involved in the court system, the district would be responsible for educational costs until that person was 21. Prison and remand facilities had costs far higher than school district costs, he said.

In answer to a question from a member of the public, he also mentioned the budget item included payments to charter schools, cyber schools and virtual schools that he called a "stinger to the district," taking funds that the district could not replace.

The district's expenses are fixed, and reducing the number of children in a class puts those expenses over a smaller group, he said.

"If a whole class went, that'd be different," he said.

In answer to another questioner, board President Bob Raineri said that a special meeting would be held 6 p.m. May 19 to discuss and vote on the Act 72 tax reduction proposal.

5/13/2005

### **No tax hike at Nanticoke Area**

By Jennifer S. Murphy , Citizens' Voice Correspondent

Greater Nanticoke Area School Board passed the 2005-2006 tentative balanced budget Thursday. There will be no real estate tax levy increase for residents. The real estate tax will remain at 245 mills.

The budget for the upcoming school year has a small reserve fund available.

"Our budgets are fairly accurate," stated accountant Robert Melone Jr. while presenting the budget to the board.

According to Melone, there is one outstanding item in the budget; no provision for teacher salary increases because the district's contract is in negotiation.

The largest expenditure change from last year is an increase in health care benefits. There is a \$403,000 increase from last year representing a national trend.

The final budget will be voted on June 16. Expected revenue for the district is \$20,809,752. Projected expenditures total \$20,850,502.

The budget does not reflect any cuts on the state and local level. GNA will see an increase of approximately \$803,000.

GNA has 17 teachers retiring this year and plans to hire 19 new teachers.

The two additional teachers will be hired for special education. The vacated positions will be filled as new hires.

The district has plans to hire additional professional services in guidance, alternative teaching, music, art, earth science and reading. In addition, provisions have been made for new textbooks for \$300,000.

In other business, the board accepted resignation of Superintendent Anthony Perrone and will conduct a search for a new candidate.

5/11/2005

### **Downtown Nanticoke revitalization gets a boost**

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Staff Writer

An authorized contract with a developer and the potential for \$14 million in state and federal funding could change the landscape of Nanticoke City's downtown

Nanticoke General Municipal Authority board members, elected officials, and a handful of residents expressed relief as the long and frequently controversial process of finding a developer came to an end Tuesday night.

The Nanticoke General Municipal Authority met, followed by a brief meeting of the closely related redevelopment authority. Both boards agreed to accept a contract naming Impact Pennsylvania, Inc., part of the Susquehanna Valley Development Group, as exclusive consultant/developer through May 2010 for various downtown revitalization projects.

The designated development area is Main Street from Walnut Street to Orchard Street and Market Street from River Street to Broad Street.

"It's about time we're getting this off the ground," Mayor John Toole said.

The municipal authority voted to accept Susquehanna Valley as the official developer March 14, but a contract had to be executed to start the search for funding on the county, state, and federal levels, authority member Robert Bray said.

"Everything starts now," authority member Chester Beggs said.

The municipal authority risked losing \$1.5 million in federal Economic Development Administration funding if there were no downtown redevelopment plans in place.

The job creation and retention grant, was obtained in 2002 for expansion of the Kanjorski Center to accommodate more jobs at the Medicare claim processing company, HealthNow.

Councilman John Bushko asked if there was any verification the \$1.5 million could be transferred to the new project.

Bray said he understood it could be, provided the project brings in at least 100 new jobs - which he believes can happen, with the potential tenants. In a letter to the municipal authority dated Tuesday, Congressman Paul Kanjorski said more than \$14 million could be made available for Nanticoke revitalization projects.

Besides the \$1.5 million EDA grant, the authority currently has \$1.4 million available for economic development. A federal highway bill passed in the U.S. House of Representatives and under review by the Senate includes \$9 million for transportation-related projects for the city. Kanjorski wrote that he expects the state to match the money with at least an additional \$2,250,000.

No project designs have been drawn up to date, but solicitor Susan Maza said there will be an opportunity for public comment on any proposed plans.

An article in the contract says a concept plan would be prepared "in consultation with (the authority) and with local input."

Bray said one of the first projects to be considered will be a commercial and professional space with a parkade. Lack of parking is an ongoing problem downtown, particularly for tenants of the Kanjorski Center on Main Street.

"In the next several weeks, I believe we will be able to disclose publicly a series of projects for downtown Nanticoke, including a parking garage, retail commercial space, a financial institution, and the construction of a new 20,000 square foot building," Kanjorski wrote. "These new buildings and tenancies should provide at least 120 new jobs, many of which are professional positions with salaries above Nanticoke's average."

On execution of the contract, Susquehanna Valley gets a one-time, non-refundable fee of \$75,000. For each project, the firm will receive 50 percent when financing is secured, 25 percent when half the work is done, and the remaining 25 percent when the project is complete.

South Valley Partnership member Joseph Lach asked the authority what the developer would get when finished, but Maza said there was no estimate.

5/11/2005

### **Youth drug task force members are not at odds with firefighters**

Editor:

Firefighters save lives, protect property and enhance the safety of their communities. The Stickney Fire Company in Nanticoke has done so for many years and, without fail, has answered the call to service.

The Greater Nanticoke Area Drug Task Force has much in common with the Stickney Fire Company. There is a clear and present emergency in Nanticoke, and we are responding. At our recent Walk Away from Drugs event, approximately 160 residents showed their support for the anti-drug movement in our city. They heard Luzerne County Commissioner Greg Skrepenak say that the county had 200 fatal drug overdoses in the past four years. Sadly, just over 40 of them occurred in Nanticoke. Neither the city, county, school district nor the commonwealth is capable of single-handedly eradicating this problem, so we decided to pitch in.

More than 600 residents signed a petition that was presented to city council requesting a community youth center. We now have more than 100 youth members. These young citizens are cleaning the park, cutting grass, serving at church dinners, holding awareness events and working together and supporting each other. This is the largest "gang" in Nanticoke. They represent the majority of their peers, and they are effecting an attitude adjustment within their age groups. They do not tolerate drug use in their city. They are bringing about a change; don't be afraid of it. They are letting the city and the county know that people can take back their communities.

Nanticoke council members have answered by agreeing to provide a facility to continue the good works of our task force. They examined their resources and determined that Stickney would be a good place to start, in part because of its location and the unfortunate decline in activity there. According to city statistics, the Stickney Engine last responded to a fire call in July 2001. The company's active member rolls are down to 12, and only two men currently respond to fires. We were also told a recent state report recommended that the city consider closing this fire company. Our hope is that the task force can find a home, the members of Stickney can remain in their fire house social club, and we can co-exist on good terms without losing the Stickney entirely.

It must be pointed out that a writer from another newspaper reported incorrect information last week. The members of the task force are not at odds with the firemen. That fallacious supposition is irresponsible, especially when published. It places both reputable organizations in a state of vicarious animosity, when none exists.

The youth of the task force respect the firemen. They don't know the circumstances by which a new youth center would be procured or that a few people are upset over this. They just want to help and be helped.

We thank the Stickney Fire Company members for their courageous years of service and for answering the call of duty. With a crime rate and death toll like ours, perhaps this is the greatest call to service the proud men of Stickney and Nanticoke City will ever respond to.

The question is, how?

Kevin J. Grevera, President

Greater Nanticoke Area Drug Task Force

5/11/2005

### **Kanjorski: Nanticoke may get \$1.1 million more in grants Nine million would come from federal Dept. of Transportation**

## **and rest from PennDOT, letter says.**

By jfox@leader.net

With the city's General Municipal Authority rushing to save a \$1.5 million federal grant set to expire on May 31, U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski announced the possibility of more than \$11 million additional state and federal dollars.

Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, made the funding announcement in a letter sent to an authority member and read aloud at Tuesday's authority meeting. "We have gone through some challenging times, but I believe we are embarking on a new era of revitalization for Nanticoke," the congressman wrote.

A total of \$9 million for a parking garage and "other broad purposes" in the city has been set aside in a highway bill which has passed by the House of Representatives and is under consideration by the Senate.

If approved, the federal Department of Transportation funds will be matched by \$2,250,000 in PennDOT funds, according to Kanjorski.

Including portions of grants awarded to the city since 1993, grants awarded CityVest, a non-profit redevelopment organization, the expected transportation funding and the aging Economic Development Administration funding, Kanjorski tallies total public funding available to Nanticoke at more than \$14 million.

It was the 3-year-old EDA funds that brought the authority board together Tuesday for a special meeting. The three members voted unanimously to approve a contract with a developer selected in March for a downtown redevelopment project.

Under the gun to draft plans for new office space and secure a commitment from a tenant to create at least 10 jobs by May 31, the authority signed the contract granting the Susquehanna Development Group exclusive rights to develop an area of downtown the same day it was completed.

"There is no concept design developed as of today," said authority Solicitor Susan Maza.

Authority member Robert Bray said the initial idea is to pursue the construction of commercial and professional space with a parking garage. That development could be located along either a portion of Main Street between Walnut and Orchard streets or on Market Street between River and Broad streets. No final location has been set.

Bray, who described himself as "cautiously optimistic" said the authority and developer has to secure a mixture of state, county and local funding to use the \$1.5 million before the grant expires.

"The cards are stacked against us," Bray said.

Kanjorski, in his letter to the authority, said he is in the midst of discussions with three "entities" which could bring 120 jobs downtown and dangled the possibility of more announcements in the coming weeks.

"I believe we will be able to disclose publicly a series of projects ... including a parking garage, retail commercial space, a financial institution, and the construction of a new 20,000-square-foot building," he wrote.

5/8/2005

## **42 HealthNow job transfers shock Nanticoke**

By kwernowsky@leader.net

A Medicare claims company has plans to move its call center employees out of the Kanjorski Center later this year, according to Robert Bray of the city's Greater Municipal Authority.

Mayor John Toole said he learned Friday that HealthNow will consolidate the 42 Nanticoke call center employees into its division in Binghamton, N.Y., in December. However, Toole said the company has yet to notify city officials of their plans to move the jobs elsewhere.

HealthNow is a New York-based company that processes Medicare claims, with about 214 employees based in Nanticoke. Representatives from the company could not be reached for comment Saturday.

While Toole said he was surprised and later dismayed about the upcoming loss of jobs, he said there are more than 150 HealthNow positions that will remain in the city.

Bray said his organization has attempted to negotiate a long-term lease with HealthNow to secure the company as a tenant. However, HealthNow has been operating on a month-to-month lease since September.

"Unfortunately we can't control the jobs at that location," he said. "Our job is to secure jobs, not retain them."

City Councilman John Bushko said the move came as a surprise to him and that the company's refusal to commit to a long-term deal with the municipal authority isn't encouraging.

"They've been trying to negotiate a contract for three years now and they have a month-to-month tenant," Bushko said. "Their business is going down; I figured they'd be moving."

5/7/2005

## **42 jobs heading to New York**

By Denise Allabaugh and Elizabeth Skrapits , Staff Writers

New York-based health care company HealthNow is relocating its call center from the Kanjorski Center, and the company's future in Nanticoke seems uncertain.

The 42 call center employees will have an opportunity to apply for jobs in the Binghamton, N.Y. division when the company moves there in December, HealthNow spokesman Don Ingalls said.

The Nanticoke branch of the Medicare insurance claim processing company employs 214 people overall.

"Company executives met with employees several months away to give them a lot of time," Ingalls said. "Customers have told us they want more timely and accurate service. By grouping call centers together, we think we can provide more accurate and faster service to our customers."

The news of the impending move and resulting loss of jobs surprised Nanticoke Mayor John Toole.

"I didn't realize they were doing it," Toole said. "They didn't notify anyone in the city."

Toole has concerns about the possibility of HealthNow moving out of Nanticoke completely.

So does State Rep. John Yudichak (D-119), who has heard rumors about HealthNow being dissatisfied with the situation at the Kanjorski building.

"One of the fears that I had was because of the situation with the high turnover of the municipal authority and the heavy-handedness of (U.S. Rep. Paul) Kanjorski, a business is not comfortable and is leaving the city," he said. "There has been a failure of leadership on this issue."

The city received a \$1.5 million federal economic development grant four years ago to expand Health Now and create 125 jobs.

Instead, the number of jobs has dropped from almost 300 to the present level of 214, and will sink further with the loss of the additional 42.

The Nanticoke General Municipal Authority, which is down from five to three members - all of which have been seated for under a year - has until the end of the month to come up with an alternative project or risk losing the \$1.5 million.

Kanjorski's office never gave the city a solid answer on whether the funds could be put to another use, such as job retention, Yudichak said.

According to Ingalls, HealthNow is on a month-to-month lease at the Kanjorski Center. Their long-term lease expired in September 2004.

The company has a contract with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and recently bid on a contract for durable medical equipment, he said.

The decision whether to award the contract to HealthNow lies with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Ingalls said.

HealthNow is not the only tenant in the Kanjorski Center. The state Department of Labor and Industry also occupies the building, filling it to capacity, said municipal authority solicitor Susan Maza.

"We had discussions with HealthNow earlier this year when they were making the application for their federal contract," Maza said. "They wanted to wait and see if they were awarded the contract before they would say whether they would remain at the location."

Kanjorski and Toole provided Travelocity with a tour of the Kanjorski Center in February, when the building was looking for a home for 300 workers.

Yudichak called Kanjorski's behavior during the tour "intimidating."

"That's not the way to make the main tenant happy," he said. "I don't know anybody who will tell you it's good business to take someone into a tenant's lease space and tell them their days are numbered, and a new company is moving in."

Kanjorski said he does not anticipate HealthNow will leave the building, but he was quick to add there is a possibility its contract may not be renewed. He said the tour for Travelocity was meant as a backup plan.

"They are operating on a month-to-month lease and are waiting to apply for a renewal of their contract in late fall," Kanjorski said. "If they do not have a long-term lease with the Nanticoke Municipal Authority for a year or two and there is a possibility of this going vacant, we wanted to make sure we utilize it with a potential tenant."

Kanjorski said he is also working to obtain funding to build a parkade with 300 to 500 spaces next to the center on East Main Street.

"The building is very attractive, but it has a parking problem," Kanjorski said. "We're anticipating solving that by adding adequate parking."

The parking issue was a flaw of the original building concept, which Kanjorski was a part of, Yudichak pointed out. If HealthNow pulls out altogether, Yudichak's fear is the building will be difficult to market, because it has off-site parking that requires shuttle bus service.

He said last year a developer expressed interest in putting a garage and retail complex next to the Kanjorski Center - and was willing to put his own money into the project - but he was removed by the municipal authority in favor of someone else.

"It's two months since the developer was named, and we don't have a contract to move forward," Yudichak said. "We are now 10 months behind schedule on a project that should be well underway. That speaks of the lack of leadership and how not to do business."

5/5/2005

### **Firefighters, youth group at odds**

#### **A proposal to move an old fire engine to increase space finds objections.**

By jfox@leader.net

An anti-drug youth group's need for a new, larger home, and a volunteer fire company's pride collided Wednesday evening.

City council reviewed a draft of a lease that would turn both floors of the Stickney Fire Station over to the growing Greater Nanticoke Area Drug Task Force, a youth group with more than 100 members.

The group meets in the basement of the St. Francis Church but has outgrown that space, said Jim Samselski, a leader of the youth group.

Council member John Bushko advocated leasing both floors of the building to the group for 10 years for \$1.

"The kids could use that building," he said. "It's underutilized."

To make room for a recreation area in the building, council members said a fire engine stored on the ground floor would be moved to the city's main fire garage.

It was a proposal that rankled John Barton, a member of the 30-member Stickney Fire Co.

"Have you ever heard of esprit de corps?" he asked Bushko.

Moving the engine, an object of pride for the company, would affect the morale of the company, he argued.

"We're held together with rubber bands now," he said. "We bought a fire truck with our own money to help the city out, and now they're throwing us out of our house. How's that for gratitude?"

Council moved to meet with the fire company before the lease is finalized for the May 25 meeting.

In other business:

Joe Lach, Plymouth Township solicitor and advocate for the revitalization of downtown, implored council to reel in the city's General Municipal Authority.

The authority, which controls a \$1.5 million grant set to expire on May 31, has "made a mockery" of efforts to redevelop the city by its "lack of candor" and most recently holding a "patently illegal meeting" at which the public was excluded, he said.

Lach, as a member of the South Valley Partnership, a nonprofit organization pushing for the development of Nanticoke and surrounding communities, offered the authority the assistance of the partnership's city planner at an hourly rate. Council approved a \$700,000 bond issue to refinance municipal debt. Council member Bill Brown, who reports on finances for the city, said the city is getting a handle on its overdue bills. "We should be current by the end of this month," Brown said, referring to a shrinking list of vendors waiting for overdue payment from the city.

5/5/2005

**Nanticoke board calls delay for today's development meeting  
At stake for the city is funding that is part of a \$5 million project.**

By jfox@leader.net

The city's General Municipal Authority will not have a special meeting that had been scheduled for today to discuss a contract crucial to securing \$1.5 million in federal funding.

The authority, which controls decisions regarding the development of portions of downtown, faces a May 31 deadline to sign a contract with Susquehanna Development Group, draft plans for the construction of office space and secure a firm commitment from a tenant to create 100 jobs. If those elements do not coalesce by month's end, the city risks losing the funding earmarked in 2002 as part of a \$5 million redevelopment project. Meetings were tentatively scheduled for tonight and Monday to discuss what authority Solicitor Susan Maza has called a "complex contract" with the developer chosen by the authority in March.

The contract has not been finalized, and Maza has said she has exchanged "a few drafts" with an attorney for the development group.

"There's nothing to discuss at this time," Maza said Wednesday. "There's nothing to review at this time."

She offered no additional explanation for the delay.

The first draft of the agreement was distributed to authority members last week. Robert Bray, one of three board members, said he had questions about the document during a meeting earlier in the week.

5/4/2005

**Solicitor: Sessions put \$1.5M in danger  
City authority's repeated closed-door meetings might force city to lose the money.**

By jfox@leader.net

A municipal solicitor and advocate for the revitalization of the downtown says a city authority's discussion of a contract behind closed doors could jeopardize a \$1.5 million federal grant.

Joe Lach, Plymouth Township solicitor and vice president of the South Valley Chamber of Commerce, is concerned "excessive" use of executive sessions in possible violation of state law could pose legal problems as the General Municipal Authority races to save a grant set to expire May 31. The authority needs to sign a contract with the Susquehanna Development Group for a downtown redevelopment project and secure a commitment from a tenant to create 100 jobs by the end of the month or risk losing the grant issued in 2002.

On Monday, the authority's three members and its solicitor excluded the public from a discussion on a draft contract, and Lach said that could open the door to legal challenges to the validity of any agreement that emerges.

"What happens now as we come down to the 11th hour?" asked Lach, whose organization represents businesses in and around Nanticoke. "It throws it into complete legal turmoil if it was created in complete violation of the Sunshine Law."

The Sunshine Act is the state statute that requires meetings by public bodies be held in public with limited exceptions.

After the executive session, Susan Maza, the municipal authority's solicitor, said it was merited to discuss a "service contract" and refused to elaborate.

Discussion of a service contract is not among the legal exceptions that allow public bodies to hold closed meetings under state law, said Teri Henning, general counsel for the Pennsylvania Newspaper Association.

"Discussing a potential contract with a developer should not fall under any of the executive session exceptions," Henning said.

Asked to clarify her position Tuesday, Maza cited a legal exception that allows agencies to discuss in private the purchase or lease of real estate and made no mention of a service contract.

"It was a draft of a proposed agreement and part of the proposed agreement involves consideration of purchase or lease of real property," Maza said. She didn't bring up real estate as a reason before or after Monday's closed-door session.

Reached Tuesday, Steve Buchinski, authority president, said the board discussed neither the purchase nor lease of property in executive session.

Lach called Monday's meeting part of a pattern of abuse of executive sessions by the authority.

"I'm troubled by what I see as a subterfuge," he said. "It's so frustrating, so disappointing, so disheartening."

The public, he said, has been excluded from discussions that are of their "vital interest" regarding downtown redevelopment.

"It seems as though this organization was created for the purpose of avoiding public scrutiny," Lach said. "These three people are weighing the future of a \$1.5 million grant."

Lach is not alone in his complaints about executive sessions called by the authority which controls all decisions regarding development along parts of Main and Market streets.

Council members Bill Brown and John Bushko have decried closed-door sessions held by the authority.

"We're the elected officials and we're being shut out," Brown said during a February council meeting. "City Council has little or no input into these meetings and their plans for downtown."

In March, Maza convened an executive session to offer a legal opinion to authority members, advising them that no contract existed between the authority and a developer competing for the downtown project.

The Sunshine Act provides a body the right to consult its attorney in private regarding a pending lawsuit or issues on which "identifiable complaints are expected to be filed."

"The mere fact of a solicitor communicating an opinion does not fall under the litigation exception," said Henning, the media lawyer.

5/3/2005

### **Nanticoke group faces drug problems head-on**

Simply telling kids to "say no to drugs" and failing to offer them alternatives doesn't work.

That's a fact made all too clear by the sobering statistics on the high rate of substance abuse among area youths.

But a grassroots organization in Nanticoke is doing more than lecturing teens on the dangers of drug abuse - it's giving them something else to do and a providing them with place to discuss their problems.

It started out a little over a year ago as a group of concerned and committed parents and community members who were willing to take on a serious drug problem in their neighborhoods. That group has grown into the Greater Nanticoke Area Drug Task Force - a wonderful example of what a community can do when everybody pulls together.

Spearheaded by Nanticoke Police Officer Kevin Grevera, the task force began operating out of the basement of St. Francis Church. Today, so many families are involved in the program, the church basement is no longer large enough to accommodate them all. Sixty-five youths and 30 parents attended the group's last meeting. Soon, with the help of local officials, the task force hopes to have a permanent youth center in a neighborhood fire hall.

The program offers recreational activities like hikes, outings and ball games. Although the majority of youths who participate do not have substance abuse problems, the program provides a local place for teens involved in 12-step recovery programs to meet and offers peer counseling and education.

The reason the program is successful is that it has the support of the entire community, including church and business leaders, the Greater Nanticoke Area School District, and, most importantly, the teen-agers themselves, who have held fund-raisers and volunteered their time to keep the center going.

We commend the Nanticoke community for taking a pro-active approach to getting young people on the right track - and keeping them there.

5/3/2005

### **Pact eyed in closed session**

#### **Public unable to attend meeting involving developer's contract crucial to helping the city.**

By jfox@leader.net

The city's General Municipal Authority met Monday in a session closed to the public to discuss a developer's contract that is crucial to securing a \$1.5 million grant that expires on May 31.

Asked why the public was excluded from the meeting, Susan Maza, authority solicitor, said the executive session was legally merited to discuss a "service contract."

The Pennsylvania Sunshine Act, which requires public agencies to hold certain meetings open to the public, lists six reasons that justify an executive session. The words "service contract" are not included in any of the six.

Maza declined to indicate which of the six reasons encompassed discussion of a "service contract."

When a representative of the Times Leader objected to the exclusion of the public from the meeting and asked to have that objection recorded in the minutes of the meeting, Maza refused that request.

The act provides any person the right at any time to raise an objection to a perceived violation of the rules governing open meetings.

The three board members, Robert Bray, Chester Beggs and Stephen Buchinski, discussed the "language" of a proposed contract with the Susquehanna Development Group, according to Bray. In March, the authority selected the group as the exclusive developer for a portion of downtown in order to take advantage of \$1.5 million in federal funds earmarked in 2002 for the creation of 100 jobs in Nanticoke.

Maza circulated a draft of what she called a "complex contract" to the members of the authority. Bray, who received that draft on Saturday, told members he had "some questions on it" before Maza suggested the executive session.

The contract with the developer is just one aspect of a scramble to utilize the federal funding. The authority must also show "solid plans and specs" and a firm commitment from a tenant to create 100 jobs, according to Paul Raetsch, regional director of the Economic Development Administration, the agency that oversees the aging grant.

"It's no secret that this needs to be completed by the end of the month," Bray said.

Reached after the meeting, Bray said the contract is the first step to pinning down a tenant company.

"The tenants come along once the developer has the contract, and then we can start making those inroads," he said. "It's not going to be easy, but I think we can do it."

Authority members plan to hold special meetings Thursday and Monday at 7 p.m. to finalize the agreement with the developer before the next regularly scheduled meeting on June 6, after the grant expires.

5/3/2005

### **School officials don't like pressure on Act 72**

#### **Some board members feel rushed and doubtful about law that would cut property taxes.**

By kkopec@leader.net

"... I don't understand why there's all this pressure - why they're in such a hurry - the first quarter hasn't even gone through the first slot machine yet."

Russ Bigus Dallas School Board president

Gov. Ed Rendell's warning that school districts might be required to participate in Act 72, the state's property-tax reduction program, isn't sitting well with several area school board members.

Even those who support the controversial program, which would provide districts with \$1 billion in slots revenue in exchange for a reduction in property taxes and other reforms, say the hard-line approach undertaken by Rendell and state legislators is doing more harm than good.

"To me as a taxpayer and a school board member, Act 72 is a no-brainer and I'd opt in tomorrow if I could," said Dallas School Board President Russ Bigus. "But I don't understand why there's all this pressure -- why they're in such a hurry -- the first quarter hasn't even gone through the first slot machine yet."

Under current regulations, school districts have until May 30 to opt into the program that would cut property taxes by as much as \$359 per household but raise earned income tax by 0.1 percent.

Rendell has said he has heard Democratic legislators will introduce a bill today that will force school boards to participate.

"At first the legislators put out a bill and told school boards to vote on it; now it looks like they don't like what the boards are doing so they want to mandate it," said Crestwood School Board President Bill Jones. "And I don't agree with that at all."

To date, published reports indicate 10 of the state 501 school districts have voted to participate. A court case brought by the Pennsylvania School Boards Association that sought to delay the deadline for opting in was rejected by a Commonwealth Court judge last week.

Jones said Crestwood school board members will vote on the issue May 19.

Dallas has not yet scheduled a vote, but Bigus said school board members will meet with members of a 12-person advisory council, charged with studying the Act 72 issue, later this week.

Bob Raineri, who serves as Greater Nanticoke Area's school board president, said he thinks many school board members have lingering doubts about the program and that state officials aren't doing a good job addressing those concerns.

"Maybe they should sit down and take a hard look at this program before they try to shove it down our throats," he said.

Bigus, who has attended several seminars on Act 72, said he tried for months to get together with the legislators who represent his district to discuss the issues. He said repeated calls went unanswered.

"I think Act 72 is a great concept that has been poorly presented," said Bigus.

5/3/2005

### **Watershed plan includes major facelift**

By Tom Venesky , Staff Writer

Three streams in the Nanticoke Creek Watershed could see a major facelift to eliminate acid mine drainage problems.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Earth Conservancy and the state Department of Environmental Protection are partnering on the project, which would restore stream flow in Nanticoke Creek, Leuder Creek and Espy Run.

The project carries a price tag of approximately \$55 million and calls for re-alignment of the stream channel, a functional waterway bank buffer and a passive treatment system to filter acid mine drainage.

The passive treatment system will be constructed at the Espy Run Seep and Askam Borehole and will reduce iron levels by an estimated 98 percent. Earth Conservancy Executive Director Mike Dziak said the project will serve as a model to clean the entire anthracite region watershed. The 30-day public comment period expired in April and officials are working to obtain funding for plans and specifications to put the project out for bids.

"This is the first time in my experience a project of this magnitude has progressed this far," Dziak said. "We've been working with the Corps on this for three years."

Past mining practices have caused fractures in the stream channels, allowing water to flow into the mines where it is converted into acid mine drainage. Dziak said there are places in the Nanticoke Creek Watershed that emit more than 7,000 gallons of water per minute from the mines. The Nanticoke Creek watershed extends from Alden Mountain to Newport Township over to Warrior Run Borough.

EC has been working with DEP and Wilkes University on concepts to minimize water infiltration into the mines, and he believes the problem needs to be dealt with at the stream channel.

The first phase, which will focus on one either Espy Run or Leuder Creek, will cost approximately \$10 million, according to Dziak, and Congressman Paul Kanjorski has been asked to earmark federal dollars specifically for the project.

5/1/2005

### **A local man's war won't go away**

### **The 30th anniversary of the day the U.S. left Vietnam holds powerful memories for Joe Brojakowski.**

By kwernowsky@leader.net

Thirty years ago Joe Brojakowski watched a newsreel at an American Embassy in Germany as the North Vietnamese Army took Saigon.

His first thought was of the South Vietnamese populace and the idea of them living under communist rule.

"I remember seeing those hard-working people and thinking, they are going to be arrested, and prosecuted and 're-educated' as the communists called it," the 57-year-old said.

Saturday marked the 30th anniversary of the end of what many call the Longest War. The last remnants of the American presence fled Saigon as the Communists claimed the city on April 30, 1975. The 15-year Vietnam conflict took more than 3 million Vietnamese lives and more than 58,000 American lives.

For Brojakowski, who was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress after the war, the persistent memory of lives lost in front of his eyes is something

he cannot shake.

Closure didn't come when he left Vietnam or with the pullout of the U.S. presence in 1975. He admits that anniversaries like Saturday, when so many take a moment to acknowledge the effect the conflict had on many nations, the memories are more distinct.

It was 1965 when the 18-year-old Nanticoke kid enlisted in the Army. He did two tours in Vietnam, the first between 1965 and 1967 and a second voluntary tour between 1968 and 1971. A blast from a howitzer artillery gun ruptured his eardrums during the second tour.

Four years prior to the fall of the city Brojakowski completed his final tour of duty near Saigon with the Army's 1st Artillery Division.

From Germany years later, Brojakowski watched the North Vietnamese tanks storm the city. He watched helicopters carry refugees from the rooftops of tall buildings. And that he had to watch the U.S. cut its losses and flee the city, he said, left a pit in his stomach.

"I think we abandoned the Vietnamese," he said. "If the politicians would have stayed out of the way and let the military do their jobs, we would have won that war."

In the same breath he admits that if it weren't for the politicians, there might not have been a war to speak of.

"The fight against communism was the big thing at the time," he said. "If the politicians would have stayed out of it, we probably wouldn't have gone there in the first place."

Brojakowski's hope is to someday be able to return to a country where he fought in his youth. At the doorstep of an elder age, he wants to steer his thoughts away from the ugliness he witnessed in Vietnam to the memories he has of the county's beauty. He tries to think about the hard-working people and lush landscapes he saw in that county in Southeast Asia so many years ago.

"When I win the lottery, I'm going to take my wife back there, and maybe that'll bring me some closure."

4/30/2005

### **Nanticoke youth group finds new home**

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Staff Writer

The basement of St. Francis Church was a great place for the Greater Nanticoke Area Drug Task Force to meet, but now it's getting crowded.

"Last meeting there were 65 kids and maybe about 30 parents," said Nanticoke police Sgt. Kevin Grevera, the task force president. "We're bursting at the seams and don't want to turn anyone away."

The task force provides drug-free activities and recreation for the city's young people. It also hosts a youth group, a teen-on-teen support group for various issues that are not necessarily drug related, and 12-step programs.

"Whatever building we take has to have space for those three key elements, at least," Grevera said.

His wish for a permanent home may be in the process of being granted. Council and Mayor John Toole have asked Solicitor Bernard Kotulak to look into allowing the task force to lease the Stickney fire hall.

Its location at Prospect Street, just off Main Street, seems perfect, task force member Jim Samselski said.

It is a block away from Patriot Park, a block from the skate park to be constructed in the summer, and close to kids' downtown hangouts.

Samselski estimates the two-story building is about 40 by 75 feet wide. The main story is wide open, with enough room for two fire trucks, and its concrete floor is easy to clean.

The second floor will be good for group meetings, and Congressman Paul Kanjorski donated computers for a computer room, Samselski said.

"Pretty much it's an ideal scenario right now," he said.

The Stickney Volunteer Fire Co. should still be able to use the building for meetings and social events, Councilman John Bushko said.

"Our intention is certainly not to displace them. This is the building the city offered us," Grevera said of the firefighters. "We look forward to being there with them."

Now that a home base is being secured, Samselski has asked officials for permission to work with city administrator Greg Gulick for recreation grant funding to keep the momentum going. Grevera said a letter to raise funds for building maintenance and other expenses will be going out soon.

So far there has been a lot of support for the task force.

"Everybody has been all for anything we've tried to do," Samselski said. "We've been well-received in the community."

Grevera added, "We can always use more adult supervision and volunteers."

4/30/2005

### **EXCLUSIVE**

### **Nanticoke risking \$1.5 M fed grant**

### **Local officials must create a downtown development project by May 31.**

By jfox@leader.net

The city's General Municipal Authority must get a firm commitment for 100 new downtown jobs by May 31, or risk losing a \$1.5 million federal grant.

Awarded to the city in 2002, the grant will expire next month unless the authority can assemble a development project that includes the creation of "new higher-skill, higher-wage jobs," said Paul Raetsch, regional director of the Economic Development Administration, which oversees the grant.

The authority has yet to complete a plan to build additional office space along Main or Market streets.

The authority lacks a design, has yet to select a final site, and there is no commitment from a company interested in expanding in Nanticoke, said Bob Bray, a member of the authority since December.

"Time is not an ally of ours right now," Bray said.

The authority has controlled decisions regarding a redevelopment zone including portions of Main and Market streets since a 1993 contract with the city, and in March it tapped the Susquehanna Development Group as the developer to lead the construction project.

In addition to finalizing a plan by the deadline, the authority is tasked with assembling 70 percent of the funding for a \$5 million project.

The federal money represents 30 percent of project costs according to a 2002 grant application.

The grant paperwork calls for a \$50,000 contribution from the state, and \$3.45 million from local sources and the authority. Supplementary funding has not been solidified, Bray said.

"I'm of the opinion that other federal funding can be secured," said Bray, who added that the authority is trying to assemble "all of those pieces of the puzzle."

The authority has yet to select a final site for construction, and it hasn't decided precisely what to build.

"There are thoughts and ideas, but I haven't seen the physical layout," Bray said.

Complicating matters, he said, is the fact the authority has had difficulty scheduling a meeting with the developer. The authority is talking with three or four companies regarding the possibility of occupying additional office space, but Bray declined to elaborate further, citing "confidentiality."

"We need to come up with who the potential tenant will be in the very near future," he said.

The grant was originally awarded to subsidize a 30,000-square-foot expansion of the authority-managed Kanjorski Center.

That would have allowed HealthNow, a New York-based company that processes Medicare claims, to expand by 100 jobs. But HealthNow has no intention of expanding at this time, said company spokeswoman Laura Perry.

Raetsch, the regional EDA director, said the grant funding can still be used on something different - but only if the project creates a number of jobs equivalent to what was proposed in 2002.

"We have an obligation here to make sure the original intent of our investment is being maintained," he said. "We need to see the jobs."

EDA officials, he said, need to see "solid plans and specs," and funds will be available on a pro-rated scale according to the portion of 70 percent state and local funding contribution the authority assembles.

"We don't disperse unless we see that required local share," he said.

Raetsch doesn't expect the grant to be extended.

The current authority deadline, he said, already represents a bit of borrowed time.

"We have deadlines," he said. "We certainly are not anticipating any extensions."

U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Naticoke says the May 31 deadline will be met.

He said he has been in close contact with the EDA and describes himself as "peripherally involved" in satisfying the conditions of the grant - including assembling additional funding sources and courting companies.

"There won't need to be any other extensions," he said.

4/30/2005

### **A narrow escape from Saigon remembered**

By kwernowsky@leader.net

Almost 30 years ago Larry Stadulis flew his last helicopter full of refugees out of Saigon and returned home to the muted life of raising two children and running the Larmel Inn on Middle Road.

Stadulis received his draft papers in June 1960 and the Army sent the then 23-year-old to flight school, where he learned how to pilot a helicopter.

By 1966 Stadulis learned of a job opportunity with what he thought was a private air service called Air America, which contracted with the United States military.

He left the Army, and after a few months of working with the company, he learned Air America was a covert venture run by the Central Intelligence Agency.

Air America pilots did whatever they were told; from transporting weapons to military outposts, to taking food and supplies to indigenous villagers, to moving wounded troops from combat zones. Stadulis was no stranger to gunfire. He was fired upon more times than he cared to discuss.

Pilots for the company played an important role in the U.S. military pullout of Saigon. Today marks the 30th anniversary of the end of the American military presence in Vietnam as the North Vietnamese Army overtook Saigon. The U.S. officially turned over combat operations to the South Vietnamese Army two years earlier.

During the decade of U.S. military involvement in the conflict, about 58,000 Americans and an estimated 3 million Vietnamese were killed.

Friday was Stadulis' anniversary.

At 8 a.m. on April 29, 1975, Stadulis received the order to start flying refugees out of the Mekong Delta. By that afternoon he was transferred to another helicopter and ordered to help evacuate the city of Saigon.

The rooftops of the tall buildings were packed with people trying to escape the city on the verge of collapse under the threat of the North Vietnamese Communist rule.

Stadulis was told Air America personnel and Americans were his first priority. Desperate Vietnamese refugees clung to the skids of Stadulis' helicopter as he left the rooftop heliports. Those aboard attempted to save whomever they could by gripping their hands tightly on take off.

"There you are, 200 feet in the air and you had people hanging around the outside of the helicopter," he said. "They were desperate and they wanted to get out."

Other Air America pilots took those fleeing Saigon to the Defense Attaché Office, which was later overrun by the North Vietnamese. From there, the helicopters ferried those trying to escape to awaiting ships in the South China Sea.

Dave Kendall, a fellow Air America pilot, was ordered to ditch his helicopter in the sea by the crew of the US. Blue Ridge after he dropped off a helicopter packed with refugees. After intentionally crashing the aircraft into the sea, the ship's crew pulled Kendall out of the water. He changed shirts, kept his soaked bib overalls on, and jumped into Stadulis' helicopter for what would be their final flight that day.

By nightfall, Stadulis and Kendall dashed their final load of refugees to the South China Sea, where U.S. ships were given a blackout order to avoid drawing enemy fire. The 20-minute low-fuel warning light was on for 15 minutes and Stadulis couldn't find his target, the USS Midway.

Pressed for time, running out of gas, and desperate for a place to land, Stadulis made one final plea for some signal that would lead the way to a safe landing. At about 8:30 p.m. the USS Midway gave the answer.

"That thing lit up like a Christmas tree," he said. "It was awesome. We landed mid-ship and running on fumes."

By midnight, all Air America helicopters were ordered grounded. It was the last time he flew a helicopter.

Stadulis spent nine days on the Midway before leaving the ship in the Philippines. The U.S. Embassy sent him to Manila where he took a commercial flight to Hong Kong. A week later he was in Nanticoke.

In 1970, five years before he returned home, Stadulis purchased the Larmel Inn, a place his parents owned since his childhood.

Stadulis' itch to get in the cockpit again often eclipses his desire for cooking a pork roast for the Friday night dinner crowd, though he still has the vivid memories of the time when his country was at war and the exhilaration of playing a vital role in its conclusion.

"I disagreed with how it ended," the 68-year-old said. "They pulled the plug on the South Vietnamese. We really cut and run and didn't keep our word to the Vietnamese. But that is history."

The Veterans of Foreign Wars is sponsoring Vietnam Veterans Recognition Week from Monday to May 7 to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War.

On May 7 the VFW Post 1227 Duryea, will honor local Vietnam veterans with a western-style beef barbeque to express thanks for their service.

4/29/2005

### **Cops: Is group home in chaos?**

#### **Three teens charged with rioting. Other problems persist, police say.**

City police say they're concerned a local child-counseling agency has lost control of a youth group home after a recent incident in which three teenage girls were charged with rioting at the facility.

Detective William Shultz said that over the years police have responded to many serious incidents at the home, at 137 E. Noble St., including attempted arson and assaults on the staff. In the latest incident, on April 17, the three girls were allegedly so out of control that the staff locked them out of the home until police arrived.

The girls, two who are 14 and one who is 13, reportedly threatened the staff and other residents with a knife and can opener, tried to set a cardboard box on fire by placing it on a stove, threatened to spray occupants with a fire extinguisher, tossed milk crates around in attempt to break windows and repeatedly punched and kicked the walls.

"You have people who are supposed to be watching them and now they're afraid of these kids," Schultz said Thursday. "For whatever reason they've certainly let the situation get out of control."

The home is operated by Children's Service Center in Wilkes-Barre. Joe DeVizia, executive director of the agency, said he and several senior staff members are investigating the April 17 incident, as well as the concerns police raised about the home's overall operation.

DeVizia said the home, which houses children with mental retardation and mental health issues, has been in the community for 17 years. The home operates without incident the majority of the time, but there are occasions when it goes through "spurts" of problems caused by clients with behavioral problems that are particularly difficult to control.

"Overall it's considered one of our best programs, but there are times it could be better," DeVizia said. "We can assure you, we will make sure things get back to where they need to be. ... We are not going to close our eyes and ears to this."

DeVizia said he's also looking into the staff's decision to lock out the girls involved. Ordinarily that would not be an appropriate action, he said, but it might have been warranted given the concern for other residents' safety.

Several neighbors interviewed Thursday said they've never had any problems with the group home.

"If they're having problems it's inside the place. There's nothing outside," said Charlotte Chickson, who lives directly across from the home.

Sylvia Cheponis lives a few doors away. She said that when the home first opened residents would sometimes shout out the windows, but she's had no problems otherwise.

"The kids will pass by and say 'hello' and 'goodbye.' They're no problem at all."

Shultz said he believes Children's Service Center needs to more closely screen the children its housing there to determine if a more structured setting would be more appropriate.

"If they're going to be carrying on and misbehaving to the degree they're locked out, certainly that's a concern for everyone," Shultz said. "If the kids can't listen then they have to put them in a higher security facility."

Shultz said the girls involved in the April 17 incident have been charged with riot, a third degree felony, as well as disorderly conduct, recklessly endangering another person and disorderly conduct. They have petitioned to juvenile court, but have not yet had a hearing.

4/28/2005

### **Nanticoke council accepts resignation of board members**

By Elizabeth Skrapits Staff Writer

Nanticoke City officials stirred up the ongoing municipal authority controversy at Wednesday's work session.

Council voted to accept the resignations from the Nanticoke General Municipal Authority of Michael Borowski, who submitted his letter Feb. 28, and the March 1 letter from Jeffrey Piontkowski.

"I think council should have been made aware of it sooner than we were," said Councilman John Bushko, pointing out that Mayor John Toole had been given at least one of the resignations Feb. 28.

Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski agreed, saying she did not know any of the three previous appointees to the authority and said council should have a chance to interview candidates.

Toole proposed, but council did not vote on, two replacements, one of whom was Walter Sokolowski, an aide to Congressman Paul Kanjorski. On hearing sounds of discontent from among the approximately 25 residents present, Toole defended Sokolowski, saying, "He has experience working on projects," and noting that he has worked with the municipal and redevelopment authorities before. Later, Bushko asked if Solicitor Bernard Kotulak could research the case of Clearfield Borough vs. Clearfield Borough Park Authority to see if there was a precedent to allow Nanticoke to take over the Kanjorski building.

"I think too much money is wasted over there," Bushko said, adding that he felt control of the building should rest with elected officials, not the municipal authority. The authority finances other projects with revenue from the Kanjorski building.

"I think it's ridiculous when you're trying to get a project off the ground," Toole said before voting against the request. He said after the meeting that plans for the Main Street project will be coming soon.

In other business, council was surprised to hear Luzerne County Controller Steve Flood has helped himself to some delinquent tax money. Treasurer Albert Wytoshek read a letter from Flood that came with a \$5,978 check, reissued in place of an \$8,261 delinquent tax check from 1999. Because the city owes the county \$2,283 from a case involving misappropriation of funds by former Nanticoke tax collector Brenda Davis, and because the city did not respond to requests from the county, Flood wrote that he authorized withholding that amount.

"Nobody has the authority to take tax money and deviate it in any way," Wytoshek said.

Instead, he said all tax money must go to the city treasurer to be recorded and divided into three parts, one for the general fund, one for the city's debt, and one for the library.

Kotulak agreed Flood should not have taken the money, and Wytoshek asked council to send a letter asking for it back.

4/28/2005

### **Possible panel member doubted**

### **Mayor touts Kanjorski staffer for General Municipal Authority position.**

By JON FOX [jfox@leader.net](mailto:jfox@leader.net)

After accepting two resignations from members of a powerful city authority, Mayor John Toole named a member of U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski's staff as a possible replacement.

The mention of congressional aide Walter Sokolowski as a candidate to fill one of the vacancies on the city's General Municipal Authority did not draw any support from council and members criticized the possible appointment after Wednesday's meeting.

"It's a conflict of interest, really," said council member John Bushko. "He works for Kanjorski's office."

The authority recently named the Susquehanna Development Group, a development firm owned by Robert Yoder, a Kanjorski campaign contributor, as exclusive developer for a downtown redevelopment project.

The authority, which manages the Kanjorski Center, a downtown office complex, controls decisions regarding a development zone along Market and Main streets and nearly \$2 million in federal grants that Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, has touted his role in obtaining.

The letters of resignation addressed to Toole were accepted nearly two months after they were dated by authority members Jeffery Piontkowski and Michael Borowski. Toole could offer no explanation for the delay.

"I think council should have been made aware of it sooner than they were," Bushko said, who then suggested that council advertise and accept applications for the two appointments.

"Actually I have two names," Toole said. He named Sokolowski and Ted Weron as candidates to serve the balance of the two terms. Sokolowski's name drew a dissenting outburst from those attending the meeting.

Council members, who have recently complained that decisions regarding downtown development have been made by the authority with little or no input from local elected officials, questioned Toole's haste in naming replacements.

"I'd like to meet these people," said councilmember Joe Dougherty.

Council member Yvonne Bozinski said the last series of appointments to the authority in September was made without an opportunity to become acquainted with, or even meet, the individuals who now control the direction of downtown redevelopment.

"When we voted, I didn't know these people, I didn't talk to them and I couldn't even recognize them," she said.

"He has experience with projects," Toole said in support of Sokolowski.

He did not believe the appointment of Sokolowski, a former mayor of Nanticoke and member of the city's Redevelopment Authority, would represent a conflict, saying "it's only one member" of a five-member board.

4/24/2005

### **Cleanup dodges rain**

By Heidi E. Ruckno, Staff Writer [hruckno@citizensvoice.com](mailto:hruckno@citizensvoice.com)

Despite less than desirable weather, volunteers assembled at several area sites Saturday morning for the Great Pennsylvania Cleanup.

At Patriot Park in Nanticoke, about 50 people, most of them students at Luzerne County Community College, picked up trash, trimmed branches and raked up loose twigs.

Dr. Murali Panen offered extra credit to his biology and horticulture students in exchange for a few hours of their time, but many of them came out just because they wanted to.

"The college gives the students a lot, and this is one of the finite ways we can give back to the college," said 20-year-old Ryan Geiger, a student from Columbia County.

Geiger didn't need the extra credit; he just wanted to help.

John Mazur, 50, a retiree from Plymouth who recently went back to school, volunteered his time because the cleanup was "something good to do."

"I see it all, the little stuff, even," Mazur said. "I'm still carrying my cup around and I will until I find a trash can."

Both Geiger and Mazur agreed that the City of Nanticoke does a nice job keeping up the park, they just feel it could use a bit of polishing. Anxious to help, Aury Rodriguez of Mountain Top showed up with a rake in hand and her 11-year-old son Daniel, who shares his mother's love of community service.

"I love cleaning, I love gardening, and I love to take care of my community," said Aury Rodriguez, 37.

Daniel Rodriguez said his mother has gotten him into the habit of cleaning up litter whenever he sees it.

The group also planned to do a bit of landscaping around City Hall, at the Library and in front of the CVS building.

The college will also give the city some flowers and plants grown in its greenhouse, but Panen said they would have to be planted at a later date.

Down the road, in Alden, Newport Township officials staged another cleanup.

According to township resident Al Rende, 25 volunteers pulled 86 tires out of the woods behind Sharpe Street.

"I know my kids were playing back here and they found all kinds of stuff," said Rende, who lives in that neighborhood.

"We want to make it a little safer for kids to come back and play in the woods."

Rende's group, which included 12 children from at-risk households, found everything from old refrigerators and insulation to broken glass and scrap metal.

The group planned to work until they filled an entire Dumpster, said Rende, who estimated the group would not be done until around 4 p.m.

Parks and open spaces were not the only areas getting a facelift Saturday - many creek beds were as well.

Focusing on the Back Mountain Trail along Toby Creek, which runs from Carverton Road to Lower Demunds Road, a group of 40 to 50 people cleared debris and picked up trash.

Volunteers recovered tires, tables, a bed frame and even a swing set.

Boy Scouts T.J. Weeks and Nathan Dombeck, along with several other members of Troop 155 in Trucksville, were working toward their Air of Light Badge.

The scouts picked up 12 bags of trash, in addition to the debris they found.

"Every single year there's just so much trash," said Judy Rimple, president of the Anthracite Scenic Trails Association.

4/24/2005

## **CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE**

### **A true spirit of cooperation**

#### **Area groups share their resources**

By RENITA FENNICK rfennick@leader.net

Rosemary Dessoie has a lot of things on her plate right now.

There's a state police call center being built in the Grimes Industrial Park in Pittston Township and a \$2 million infrastructure project getting off the ground at the Duryea Industrial Park.

Not to mention all of the other responsibilities – some small and some not so small – that go with being executive vice president of both the Greater Pittston Chamber of Commerce and the Pittston Area Industrial Development.

"We have a small staff, just two full-time people and one part-timer so there's only so much we can do," Dessoie said. "But, thanks to the Wilkes-Barre Chamber, we are able to do so much more. In the last five years, all of the Chambers in the area have worked more closely than in the history of this organization."

And, that's a long time. The Pittston Chamber has been around since the 1920s.

It's one of four Chambers actively working in Luzerne County to provide services and support to members of the business community.

But, the Chambers have taken on an added role in the last few years, says Steve Barrouk, president and chief executive officer of the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business & Industry.

"The Chambers here in Northeastern Pennsylvania are a unique breed because Chambers aren't typically economic development groups," Barrouk said. "But, for all of the organizations here the top priority is serving members and recruiting new business to the area. We've learned that the only way for all of us to be successful in that way is to collaborate."

Dessoie said she relies on the Wilkes-Barre group to send out some mailings and to help with other support services like human resources issues, seminars, grant applications and "one of the most important, the health care program for businesses."

The advantage of the collaborative effort, Dessoie says, is being able to reap the benefits and assistance provided by a larger organization, like the Wilkes-Barre Chamber, while still being able to maintain the identity of the Greater Pittston community.

**The driving forces behind the revitalized South Valley Chamber of Commerce, formerly the Greater Nanticoke Chamber of Commerce, are working on a comprehensive plan that will help Nanticoke and Newport and Plymouth townships find their identity. The group formed an economic development corporation, the South Valley Partnership, and is taking one step at a time, spokesman Joe Lach says.**

**They relocated the Chamber office from the Market Street Plaza in Nanticoke to the Mill House on the grounds of the Mill Memorial Library.**

**Also on the agenda is a public meeting to discuss an architectural plan for a five-phase proposal to develop 140 acres in Nanticoke's Lower Broadway section to a recreational park with playing fields, hiking trails, a skate park and boat launch on the Susquehanna River.**

**"That would completely change the entrance for those who come into Nanticoke from the West Side," Lach said.**

**All of that ties in with another aspect of economic development: improving the quality of life.**

**"Providing a higher quality of life for our work force and for the employees of these companies that we want to attract is one of the recommendations we were given from the Battelle study which we commissioned," Barrouk said. "Part of it is reviving central cities, improving the environment and providing necessary amenities."**

**Lach believes that focusing on the Nanticoke area ties in with the greater goal of making the county a more attractive place to live, work and do business.**

**“What we’re doing here ties in with the big picture of how development is taking place in the Valley,” he said. “You figure, Hanover Crossings is coming pretty close to the Nanticoke line and it’s a logical progression that the development would move southward.”**

Barrouk believes that officials in every local Chamber should be proud of the work they’ve done and the projects they continue to tackle.

“All of our chambers are important to the respective communities that they serve,” he said. “And, with the mutual support that we have, we recognize that regional thinking is extremely important to the future of this community. We’re no longer competing with each other but competing with the world.”

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P.O. Box 5340, Wilkes-Barre, PA 18710-5304  
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Web site: [www.wilkes-barre.org](http://www.wilkes-barre.org)

Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce  
One South Church St., Suite 200, Hazleton, PA 18201  
Phone: 570-455-1508 FAX: 570-454-7787  
Web Site: [www.hazletonchamber.org](http://www.hazletonchamber.org)

Greater Pittston Chamber of Commerce  
P.O. Box 704, Pittston, PA 18640  
Phone: 570-655-1424 FAX: 570-655-0336  
Web site: [www.pittstonchamber.org](http://www.pittstonchamber.org)

South Valley Chamber of Commerce  
495 E. Main St., Nanticoke  
Phone: 570-735-6990  
Web site: [www.nanticokechamber.org](http://www.nanticokechamber.org)

4/24/2005

### **ATV clubs eager to get riding park**

By [gsmith@leader.net](mailto:gsmith@leader.net)

A study that will determine if an ATV park on a tract of mine land within Luzerne County is feasible remains in its infancy and is developing slowly, according to the president of one of four ATV clubs lobbying for the park.

“With the government, things work slow,” said Dan Kowalski of Newport Township, president of the Black Diamond ATV Club. “There has been a meeting between the county and DCNR, and it’s now in the planning stages. They are checking the land maps to determine who owns the land in question and whether it’s feasible.”

DCNR Deputy Press Secretary Terry Brady confirmed the \$32,000 feasibility study funded by a DCNR grant was completed and is under review by his agency.

“We certainly don’t want to get in the business of operating an ATV park, but we want to encourage their development.

“We’ve identified an area south of the Susquehanna River between Nanticoke and Glen Lyon that would be a good location and it has local government interest,” Brady said.

The Black Diamond ATV club, with three other groups -- the Back Mountain Enduro Riders and the Pocono and Valley ATV clubs -- have formed a consortium called ARTS (Anthracite Regional Trails System) to lobby for the park.

ARTS maintains that opening such a park -- like the Hatfield-McCoy ATV park in West Virginia -- could bring in \$5.7 million into the local economy annually.

Most of the land in question, which might comprise up to 15,000 acres between Mocanaqua and Honey Pot, is owned by the Earth Conservancy.

No motorized vehicles are currently permitted on the land, but outlaw ATV and 4-wheel-drive operators routinely trespass.

No cost estimate for the land or the development of the park has been made available, but Kowalski said grants from DCNR are obtainable and should cover half the price.

“DCNR has expressed the desire to go forward with the project. There is pressure on them to do something like this in the eastern part of the state,” Kowalski said in a recent interview.

DCNR has 229 miles of designated ATV trails statewide, but only 28 miles in eastern Pennsylvania. There are 13 miles of trail in Monroe County and 15 miles in Pike County. About 100 miles of trails are open on federal land within the Allegheny National Forest in the western part of the state.

Kowalski added that ARTS does not want to hinder development; rather, it wants to utilize unused mine land for ATV recreation.

“We don’t want to step on anything that’s already in place. We don’t want to stop industry or homes from going in. If that was the case, we’d back away immediately,” Kowalski said.

He admitted there are liability and security issues associated with such a park.

“These are high-concern items. Riders have to acknowledge the activity is dangerous and have to take the risk away from the landowner.

“There are a lot of models out there regarding security, but at least initially it will have to be enforced (rigorously).”

According to Brady, there were 151,143 ATVs registered with the agency in the state as of April 1. Registration allows the machines to be operated somewhere other than the owner's property. To add perspective, Brady said there are 48,722 registered snowmobiles in the state. In Luzerne County, there were 5,004 registered ATVs, compared to 803 registered snowmobiles. Estimates vary, but Brady said it's likely there are more than a 300,000 ATVs throughout Pennsylvania. "It's a win-win situation all around. The county and the state can make money off of this," Kowalski said. ARTS meets at 9 a.m. on the second Sunday of every month at Luzerne County Community College. Access the Black Diamond ATV Club Web site at [www.bdatvclub.com](http://www.bdatvclub.com).

4/23/2005

### **Genetti to throw welcome home bash for 109th Bravo vets**

By Robert Kalinowski , Staff Writer

Home from Iraq for less than three months, these soldiers still marvel over a good meal.

Gus Genetti plans to give them one.

For free.

The Wilkes-Barre businessman will host Bravo Battery of the 109th Field Artillery for a formal homecoming ball on Sunday, April 30.

It will be held at Genetti Hotel and Convention Center, Market Street, Wilkes-Barre, from 6 to 11 p.m.

"I think they're all heroes. We're happy and honored to do it," said Genetti, a self-described admirer of the military who served in the Army during the 1950s.

"They deserve all the consideration that we could possibly give them," he said.

Bravo Battery, of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard, served a year tour in Iraq. The 150-soldier Nanticoke-based unit returned home on Feb. 1.

While they were gone, the unit's family support group sought prices for the planned ball from local catering businesses.

When Genetti made his offer, they stopped searching.

"We heard all this (Genetti's offer) when we were in Iraq. When we heard about it, we couldn't be too enthused at the time because we were in a combat zone," said First Sgt. Frank Poperowitz, 53, of Shickshinny, who will be emcee of the event.

"Now, I think what he's doing for us is great. I don't think there's anyone else in the Wilkes-Barre area who offered what he did," he said.

So far, roughly 100 soldiers have taken advantage of Genetti's offer and made plans to attend the event, organizers said.

Each soldier is allowed to take one family member for free, but the unit's family support group is picking up that cost. Additional guests have to pay.

About 225 people were expected to attend as of Friday.

Genetti said he isn't sure how much the offer will cost him.

"You know, I never added it up and it doesn't matter. We're delighted to make the commitment," he said.

The invitations sent by the family support group said the cost for additional guests is at a discounted price of \$27.

This means Genetti's offer is worth at least \$2,700 and likely much more.

Genetti said the event in the Grand Ballroom is going to be an "extravaganza," with patriotic décor, 109th personalized ice sculptures, an elegant milk chocolate fountain, surprises and much more.

Food will be available buffet style and there will be an open bar, he said.

The homecoming ball will be the first time many of the soldiers saw each other since the day they returned home from Iraq.

"The objective is to get everyone together and reward them with a nice dinner," said 1st Sgt. Poperowitz.

Bravo Battery will have two special guests at the ball, Lt. Col. Therese O'Brien and Command Sgt. Major Daniel Reynolds, who led the 336th Military Police Battalion, to which the unit was attached in Iraq.

4/22/2005

### **Greater Nanticoke Area board holds Act 72 session**

By Jenniler S. Murphy Citizens' Voice Correspondent

The Pennsylvania School Boards Association gave a detailed seminar on Act 72 to the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board and a handful of residents Thursday night.

"The board has the information now to make an informed decision and will vote next month after we pass our budget," said district Superintendent Anthony Perrone.

The vote is scheduled for May 9.

Pennsylvania School Boards Association Associate Counsel Sean Fields presented information regarding Act 72.

"PSBA believes in local school board governance. The PSBA has been hired by school boards to provide information sessions such as the one we heard tonight," Fields said.

Act 72, the Homeowners Tax Relief Act, would provide a property tax savings with an increase in the earned income tax by 0.1 percentage point, or \$1 for every \$1,000 of income, in order to be eligible for state gaming revenue.

The savings will only be passed on if the state has collected \$500 million in the property tax relief fund and \$400 million in the reserve fund.

"Act 72 represents a shift to local income base taxes in order to qualify for state funds," Fields said.

According to the Act 72 formula, Nanticoke residents would see an average of \$168 dollars savings on property tax. However, the savings would not be seen until 2007 at the earliest.

Those who stand to gain the most from Act 72 are area seniors for citizens. Gov. Ed Rendell initially proposed Act 72 as relief for Pennsylvania seniors. Nanticoke has a large aging tax base. Those who will fund Act 72 are the average working homeowner. "This is not for education," said Fields.

The vote rests with the 501 state school boards. They have until May 30 to opt in to Act 72.

Greater Pittston Area School Board opted in Tuesday, the first district in Luzerne County to vote.

Fields said the association has reservations because there are unresolved issues. It is seeking to extend the deadline by initiating litigation against the state in Commonwealth Court. The Supreme Court ruled against extending the deadline to May 30, 2006.

4/22/2005

### **Planned Nanticoke park will have something for everyone Residents get early look at plans for new recreational park**

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Staff Writer

Half a dozen boys edged into the room at Luzerne County Community College where a public meeting on the Greater Nanticoke Area Lower Broadway Greenway Park was in progress Thursday night. They stood along the wall and listened as John Levitsky of Borton-Lawson and landscape designer George Anthony outlined the plan for the park.

bird-watching in the summer, Levitsky said. Older children will be able to play soccer, football, baseball and T-ball while their younger brothers and sisters play in the tot lots, Anthony said. Finally Julie McMonagle, director of the Pennsylvania Environmental Council's northeast regional office, said what the boys were hoping to hear. Their skate park is a high priority, and there is money left over from the planning grant to purchase some skate equipment, McMonagle said. "We've been waiting for a long time - like four years," said 14-year-old Aaron Mulhern. He and his friends are tired of being chased off the sidewalks when they try to skateboard there, and can't wait to have a place of their own. State Rep. John Yudichak said the intention is to get the first phase of the project, featuring the skate park, underway before the summer is over. Yudichak and state Sen. Ray Musto have secured more than \$100,000 in grants, but additional money is needed for the skate park and other parts of Phase I. The South Valley Partnership has pitched the skate park to the Luzerne County commissioners, and hopes to find out whether they got the \$245,000 they asked for by early June. Yudichak and Musto are also working on obtaining various other grants to help toward the estimated \$5 million overall cost of the park.

"A year ago, a group of residents had a dream of turning old coal land, abandoned mine land, into a park for children," Yudichak said. A steering committee of people from Nanticoke and Newport and Plymouth townships pooled resources, contacted state, county and local officials, and sought input and assistance from members of their communities. Now, the park that the three municipalities hope will become a regional attraction, is moving past the design stage. Resident Carmela Michno was glad to note the suggestions she had put in the survey she was asked to fill out, such as miles of walking trails and playgrounds for younger children, had been included in park plans. "We need something for everyone," she said. The planners took the flood plain areas into consideration, and intend to put in facilities that will not be damaged or will be easy to clean up when the Susquehanna River floods. A future goal is to take a historic old railroad bridge and turn it into a pedestrian bridge that will become the hub of the trail system, including the Susquehanna Warrior Trail, Levitsky said. But the bridge is privately owned and would cost about \$1 million to restore, Yudichak said. He noted there is still a lot of work and several challenges ahead. There are environmental issues, such as mine drainage that has to be cleaned up. Another problem is that many of the parcels of land in the park area are owned by private individuals, or by railroad companies that are no longer in existence. Some parcels have been secured, donated by Nanticoke City, the Earth Conservancy and Ken Pollock. McMonagle said details of maintenance need to be worked out with groups including the South Valley Partnership and civic, athletic and business organizations. "We're going to need everybody. It really is an opportunity for everybody to come together and make this possible," Yudichak said.

4/22/2005

### **Residents get early look at plans for new recreational park The \$35 million project will have hiking trails, sports fields and picnic area.**

By KRISTIN KILE Times Leader Correspondent

It won't be long before Nanticoke residents can hike through and children can skateboard in the Lower Broadway Park.

Members of the community gathered Thursday evening to see the final master plan of the \$5 million project that spans 135-acres.

The park will include, hiking trails, a skate park, two soccer fields, practice football and football field, a softball field and a tee ball field. It will include many open spaces and picnic areas.

State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, compared the park to the Hanover Area Regional Recreational Park. He said the plans for this park are ambitious but it can be done.

"Our dream can be a reality; all we have to do is look at what has happened at the Hanover Area Recreational Park. The hundreds of kids that are now playing on fields that critics said never would be filled is an example we should all learn from and is an example we should all point to on that this too can be possible if we work together."

Plymouth, Newport Township and Nanticoke, with the Pennsylvania Environmental Council and Borton-Lawson Engineering, are working together to make the project happen

Surveys and interviews with various committees were done to see what the community wanted in the park. From that they found, the primary element was a skate park, which is phase one of the project. That is expected to be complete by the end of the summer.

Residents were excited to see their suggestions were taken and that the things they wanted are shown on the plan.

Now that the master plan has been completed, the next step is to finalize it. Julie McMonagle, from the Pennsylvania Environmental Council, said once it is finalized it will go to the state and more grants will be sought to continue the project.

"At the same time the South Valley Partnership is going forward with purchasing the skate park equipment. The PEC will be giving them a mini-

grant to do that and then PEC is also contracted with Borton-Lawson for the construction drawings for the skate park," McMonagle said. Yudichak is very optimistic about the park and said they have made tremendous strides to make this into a reality. "This is the beginning. The completion of the master plan and its presentation here tonight is not the end of our work and we have a lot more work ahead of us. It is the beginning of what can be a substantial project, not only for the three communities but really for the Luzerne County."

4/21/2005

### **Family and friends will remember James Bertrand at benefit April 24**

By Robert Kalinowski , Staff Writer

Jackie Bertrand's eyes teared up as she looked at a birthday card she received from her son in March 2004, affectionately signed "Love James." She has kept that card close by her side for the last year, reminding her of a wonderful mother-son bond of 30 years. Her son, James Bertrand, died a month after hand-delivering the card, along with a hug and kiss. He drowned in a tragic accident on April 26 of last year when a vehicle he was a passenger in plunged into a water-filled strip-mining pit in Newport Township. Tuesday will mark one year.

Mrs. Bertrand, 58, remembers her son like most of his good friends do - as the "gentle giant."

At 6-feet, 8-inches tall and 270 pounds, Jim was an intimidating figure to those who didn't know him, but he really was loving, fun and respectable young man, she said.

"He was 30 years old and he never cursed in front of me once," she said Wednesday from her Nanticoke home. "No matter if he had 100 friends around, he would always bend down and kiss me when he was leaving to go anywhere."

An avid fan of NASCAR races, which are held on Sundays, James would never miss the regular Sunday dinners the two shared - even if he had to get razzed by his buddies for being a bit late to watch a race, she said.

James was the man of the house since 1988 when his dad, Dennis, died of a heart attack. He learned how to be strong and independent, but always maintained a caring, unselfish and helpful attitude to all, she said.

This showed on a fishing trip he took to Moon Lake Park, Plymouth Township, in April 1994. James and two friends heroically saved an Exeter couple from drowning when the couple's boat capsized.

Mrs. Bertrand thinks it's all too ironic that her son died in a drowning incident almost exactly 10 years after that incident.

Since his death, Mrs. Bertrand has complied a shrine dedicated to James atop a television stand at her home. It includes various pictures of him smiling and awards for excellence in his favorite barroom games, such as darts and pool.

Arguably the most poignant is his beloved fireman's helmet, which James proudly wore while fighting dozens of fires in Nanticoke and surrounding areas over the years.

James joined the [Nanticoke Fire Department](#) in 1991, as soon as he turned 18. He served loyally for 12 years.

"It was his love. It was his dedication. His life was the fire company, aside from his family," she said.

Today, James Bertrand's fire gear still hangs in Nanticoke Fire Department's headquarters, said Nanticoke Fire Chief Mike Bohan.

One of the city's fire trucks will soon be adorned with a sticker in memory of Bertrand, that is highlighted with one his favorite quotes: "Life's a dance ... you learn as you go."

"It's one year, but he's not forgotten. He was a vital member of our organization," Bohan said.

Even in death, Mrs. Bertrand is hoping James could contribute to his fellow firefighters - even in name only - who obviously will never forget him.

Some of his friends have organized a benefit event for Sunday at the Holy Child Grove in Newport Township to mark one year since his death.

Information on the benefit may be obtained [here](#).

Mrs. Bertrand requested the proceeds be given to the Lape Hose Co. 2, Pioneer Truck and Ladder 1 of the department in her son's name.

So far, about 400 tickets have been sold.

"That shows how many people were friends with him. You can't find anyone that would say anything bad," Mrs. Bertrand said.

"I think he would think it's great," said Bertrand's girlfriend at the time of his death Kristen Pawlowski. "I'm sure he would be right there with us if he could be. Well, he probably will be."

4/21/2005

### **Questions abound following Nanticoke authority resignations**

By Elizabeth Skrapits Staff Writer

Further questions have arisen about the resignation and replacement of two members of the Nanticoke General Municipal Authority.

Jeffrey Piontkowski's resignation letter was dated March 1 and addressed to Mayor John Toole. Michael Borowski's letter was dated Feb. 28 and addressed to Toole and council. Both resignations were to take effect March 1.

Toole acknowledged he received the letters and then forwarded them to city clerk Michael Yurkowski.

The letters were never submitted to council. Toole said it might have been the clerk's oversight.

Yurkowski said any correspondence addressed to council is placed in a file. He could not say why the letters were never discussed at a meeting.

He thought council was aware of the resignations because past practice included a board member submitting his or her letter of resignation directly to the board or authority, Yurkowski said.

Resignations only become official after council votes to accept them. Toole is charged with proposing replacements for council to vote on.

Council members Bill Brown, Joseph Dougherty and John Bushko said they heard about the resignations, but never saw the letters. Since Piontkowski and Borowski resigned, there have been two regular council meetings, one work session and two municipal authority meetings.

Brown said the resignations and potential replacements would be discussed at council's next work session April 27.

"Council practically told me not to bring any names up until after the election," Toole said. "Any names I bring up, I was told they wouldn't consider until after the election."

Council members disputed Toole's claim. "I have no idea why he would say we wouldn't want him to bring up a name. If we don't like it, we just vote against it," Bushko said.

Third-Class City Code mandates vacancies on boards and authorities be filled as soon as possible, Bushko said. Decisions are made by a majority vote, regardless of the number of board members present.

"They need three votes for anything to pass. If one votes against it, that could hold up a whole project," Bushko said.

4/21/2005

### **Study recommends ATV riding facility in Newport Twp.**

By Tom Venesky , Staff Writer

A steering committee looking into the possibility of creating an ATV riding facility has determined a suitable location exists in Newport Township. The study was initiated by Earth Conservancy in 2002 to look at the options to address illegal ATV riding, which has been a longstanding problem on Earth Conservancy property.

A final report was released late last week and it recommended the Newport Township property as the best location due to large, open tracts of land, terrain desired by ATV riders and local government interest.

A number of ATV riding clubs were among the members of the steering committee.

Another site, in Plymouth Township extending from Plymouth to Moon Lake, was ruled out because of smaller tracts of land and absence of local government support.

The Newport Township site extends from Nanticoke to Glen Lyon and Earth Conservancy owns property on which trails would be established.

Insurance regulations prohibit ATV riding on lands under Earth Conservancy control, but the Earth Conservancy board of trustees would consider selling the property if the right situation presented itself, according to spokeswoman Jacqueline Dickman.

"The land could not be owned by Earth Conservancy and would have to be sold to whatever entity would build the facility," she said. "The board has formed a task force to look at the report and ATV issues."

Dan Kowalski, president of the Black Diamond ATV Club Inc., said the Newport Township location is "right on the money" because there is a variety of terrain for all skill levels.

"The trails are already there; we just need signage, mapping and law enforcement, which is critical to keep people in check and clean up the ATV image," he said. "Overall, this location is the right choice."

Other findings:

The establishment of an ATV facility would reduce illegal riding and contribute to the local economy.

The preferred facility would consist of a system of trails linking "challenge" areas to test the abilities of ATV riders.

The recommended ownership alternative is the purchase and development of a land resource into an ATV facility by a government entity that allows for a high degree of participation in the planning, development and operation of the system by a local ATV club or clubs.

A second ownership alternative is the purchase and development of a land resource by a government entity or agency that would lease the land to a club or consortium of clubs.

The establishment and sustainability of an ATV trail riding facility is feasible given the need, available resources, proximity of the lower Wyoming Valley to an extended ATV enthusiast population, and the commitment of leaders in the ATV community.

Dickman said the study is a preliminary step looking to address illegal ATV use in Luzerne County. According to the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources,

4,875 ATVs were registered in Luzerne County last year.

Scott Cope, chief of the planning projects section under DCNR's Bureau of Recreation and Conservation, sat on the steering committee and commended the 58-page report for the inclusion of public input and technical data.

"This wasn't done in a vacuum, and there's a lot of energy to get people into a safe riding area," Cope said. "The entire lower Wyoming Valley is loaded with ATV activity and there's some good groups."

The Newport Township site is favorable, according to Cope, because a large portion is abandoned mine land.

He said the facility could be a boon to the local economy, but Cope cautioned the facility must be designed with environmental protection in mind.

Cope said DCNR would be willing to assist with any future steps in the process, and entities may seek acquisition or development grants to facilitate the process.

According to the report, the estimate cost to develop an ATV park in the county over five years is \$3.2 million. Construction alone carries a price tag of \$1.4 million. The park carries an estimated revenue stream of \$3.9 million over five years, including grants, memberships and usage fees.

The study was funded by DCNR and Luzerne County, Dickman said.

"The next step in the process might come from outside Earth Conservancy," she said. "We'll see what our board task force determines, and this is still very early."

Kowalski said his club will work to educate the public on the facility and urge the county to seek a grant to acquire the property.

4/19/2005

### **Nanticoke council uninformed of authority resignations**

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Staff Writer

Miscommunication caused more discord in Nanticoke: Council members discovered the city's administration and mayor failed to notify them about

the two latest municipal authority resignations.

Councilman John Bushko recently found out the resignations of municipal authority members Jeff Piontkowski and Mike Borowski were submitted to Mayor John Toole on Feb. 28, to take effect March 1.

Before going into effect, the resignations must be accepted by council.

However, nothing was mentioned at council's regular meetings on March 2 and April 6, work session on March 30, or the municipal authority meetings on March 14 and April 11.

Toole claims the resignations were sent to city clerk Michael Yurkowski, but he couldn't say when.

"I don't quite remember. It was given to the clerk, and I think the clerk has to send it in to the municipal authority," he said.

When questioned further, Toole said he did get the letters, but he turned them over to Yurkowski "about a month ago - I don't recall."

Asked why nothing was said during any of the council or municipal authority meetings, Toole said it could have slipped Yurkowski's mind.

Yurkowski said he had the resignations on file at work with the municipal authority meeting minutes.

He believed council was aware of the letters, did not know why they were not brought up at any of the council meetings, and noted it "could have been an oversight."

"Previously, there weren't any other resignations brought up and approved. We assumed since they resigned, they resigned, and that was the end of it," Yurkowski said.

Councilman Bill Brown said he and Councilman Joseph Dougherty had heard unconfirmed reports for at least six weeks that Borowski and Piontkowski were off the board.

"We were waiting for the resignation letter," Brown said. "And here it could have been sitting in the city clerk's office for who knows how long."

The authority has had to make decisions on a proposed downtown redevelopment project before the May deadline for a \$1.5 million federal grant.

During the March 14 municipal authority meeting, at which the three remaining board members chose Susquehanna Valley Development Corp. for the project, South Valley Partnership secretary Joseph Lach asked why Piontkowski and Borowski's names were not mentioned during roll call, and questioned whether they were still on the board.

Authority Solicitor Susan Maza said she "had not received notification to the contrary."

State Rep. John Yudichak, D-119, said the authority's failure to communicate with city officials and lack of resources, information, and history due to the board turnover could affect its functioning.

"That would make five (resignations) in a 12-month period. This raises questions about how effective the municipal authority can be," Yudichak said. "There's a lot of inconsistency in the leadership and execution, and I think a large part of that is the high rate of turnover. It's hard to institute a game plan when the team keeps changing."

Piontkowski has been on the board for more than three years, Borowski for one. The remaining members, Chester Beggs and Steve Buchinski, were placed on the board to fill two of three seats caused by a mass resignation in September 2004.

The third seat was filled when Robert Bray was appointed to the authority by council Dec. 29, 2004. Toole tried to block the action on Jan. 3, claiming the appointment was not legal because Brown had proposed it when acting as mayor in his absence.

4/18/2005

### **Park plan hopes are on a roll**

### **The South Valley Partnership is developing riverland into an 135-acre skateboard site.**

By jfox@leader.net

"The steps to make this a tangible, touchable, enjoyable effort are now under way."

Joe Lach of the South Valley Partnership

The lowlands are alive with the sound of skateboarding.

Well, not just yet, but a skate park planned for unused land along Lower Broadway is closer to construction than it has ever been.

"I think the skate park has a chance of becoming a reality within a short period of time," said Joe Lach, vice president of the South Valley Partnership, a nonprofit group involved in developing the land along the Susquehanna River.

"Our goal is to have the skate park completed within the calendar year," he said.

"My dream is to have it done before the snow falls so the kids can use it this year."

"We're trying desperately to get that in," said Jerry Hudak, a staunch advocate of the park and president of the South Valley Chamber of Commerce. "That's the big push."

A draft plan shows the Lower Broadway Park sprawling across 135 acres on both sides of Lower Broadway on the bank of the Susquehanna River. Preliminary designs for the park include the skateboarding area, an exercise trail, sports fields, a playground and a concession area.

For two years, the Nanticoke Greenway Association and the Pennsylvania Environmental Council, and later the South Valley Partnership, have worked to turn the flood-prone lowlands into park land benefiting Nanticoke as well as Plymouth and Newport townships.

But the expansive park complex on what was once a residential section of Nanticoke inundated by Agnes in 1972 and later demolished seemed more of a pipe dream, due to its hefty price tag.

That perception appears to be changing as proponents of the park prepare to present draft plans to the public on Thursday.

"It was exciting to talk about it, but we can smell something happening," Lach said. "I think it's going to be a reality."

Lach envisions the park to cost about \$5 million, a daunting sum he hopes can be obtained through a combination of federal, state and private funding.

Instead of approaching the park complex as a single project, development will progress in phases, Lach said.

He believes parts of the first phase, including the skate park, softball and tee-ball fields and a basketball area, could be completed before winter.

"The steps to make this a tangible, touchable, enjoyable effort are now under way," he said.

For the skate park, the feature Lach hopes to tackle first, costs of fencing, earth preparation and concrete foundations run about \$250,000. He appealed to county commissioners in January for that funding.

"It would be a godsend, obviously, if the county could see to granting our entire request," he said.

The equipment, "functionally a complete skate park minus the concrete," has already been secured from Rich's Golf Center in Wyoming, Lach said.

"The South Valley Partnership has acquired the actual equipment, what the kids will roll on."

But even if county funding doesn't materialize, Lach thinks the park will find a home just a stone's throw from downtown.

"We're waiting to see if that comes through as expected," Hudak said of the county money. "And if it doesn't, that leaves us hustling for grants."

As the South Valley Partnership gets ready to step up and assume ownership of the land and shepherd the park into existence, an engineering firm is drafting plans for the skate park.

It's just the beginning of a large project, Hudak said.

"It's going to take time, and when it does start to come it's not going to come overnight. It's going to come over number of years," he said. "It's going to be a very beautiful thing, but it's also going to be a very expensive thing."

4/17/2005

### **Nanticoke Area Notes**

By: Pam Urbanski - [urbanski@myexcel.com](mailto:urbanski@myexcel.com)

#### **Ukrainian dance show at GNA**

If you love to be entertained by a top-notch dance troupe, but don't want to travel a distance or pay a hefty price for admission, you're in luck!

The Voloshky Ukrainian Dance Ensemble will perform at [Nanticoke Area High School](#) on Sunday, April 24, at 7 p.m. Through a variety of dance, the ensemble will help the audience understand and appreciate the dance, traditions and culture of the Ukrainian people. They have performed throughout the United States and Canada.

The proceeds will go towards the upkeep and maintenance of the church.

The parishioners of Our Lord Ukrainian Catholic Church in the Hanover section of Nanticoke are sponsoring the show "We're thrilled to be able to bring this outstanding performance to the Wyoming Valley," said chairperson Arlene Jennings.

Arlene tells me she has seen the show a few times and it is fantastic. "The costumes are beautiful, the music is powerful and the dancers are the best," she offered.

Tickets are \$10 and can be purchased at the door. For more information, call Arlene at 735-8497.

#### **Book and bake sale at the Mill**

Friends of the Mill Memorial Library are sponsoring a book and bake sale on Monday and Tuesday, April 18-19, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the library.

Here is a great chance for residents to donate books they no longer read and to share your favorite dessert. Donations are appreciated and will be accepted Monday and Tuesday from 10 a.m. to noon.

The library also is holding a spring basket raffle. If you love to garden or know someone who does, you'll want to win this one.

The Mill Library also is taking part in the LUzerne County Library System Author Fest on May 1, at the Westmoreland Club in Wilkes-Barre.

Doors open at 2 p.m. Well-known authors Joseph Kanon, Meg Wolitzer, Dave King, Craig Nelson, Charles Brandt, Josephine Carr, Melissa Jacobs, Andrea Kane and Ilene Beckerman will have their books on hand to purchase and you will have an opportunity to chat with them and get the books autographed.

Cost for admission is \$15 and \$5 of the ticket price goes toward the purchase of books at the event. Additional proceeds will go to local libraries.

Clifford Farides, a published author, recently was hired as the librarian at the Mill. Clem Kondracki from the Mill tells me the board of directors and staff are looking forward to a long association.

The library also is seeking a new director for children's programming. "Wendy Skoniecki will be missed by the staff and parents," said Miss Clem. "She did an excellent job providing many hours of games, crafts and storytelling." Applications for the position can be obtained at the library's front desk.

#### **St. Joe's holding soup sale**

St. Joseph's Slovak Church will hold a take-out chicken rice vegetable soup sale Friday, April 22. Advance orders can be made by calling 735-43175 or 725-1245. You also may call and leave a message at the church rectory at 735-0331. Orders must be placed by Wednesday, April 20. Pickup is at the church parlors at 107 E. Noble St. from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Cost is \$5 per quart and \$3 per pint.

4/17/2005

### **Senior home project outliving clients**

#### **Planned retirement village was to bring economic life into city.**

By [jfox@leader.net](mailto:jfox@leader.net)

A legal snarl between the developer of a senior housing complex and a contractor has stalled a \$12 million project intended to breathe economic vitality into this aging city.

A sign declaring a patch of cleared and leveled land as the future site of Lexington Village, a 52-unit apartment complex and associated Alzheimer's facility, lies faded and broken in a clump of weeds.

The apartments were scheduled to be completed last year with the 66-bed Alzheimer's unit to follow, but the only things occupying the 12.5-acre lot on Kosciuszko Street area an empty construction trailer, a lonely portable bathroom and a bundle of plastic piping.

All the apartments, priced between \$750 and \$800 a month, have been pre-leased, but the delay in construction has meant some people will never

move into the facility.

"We've had some people give deposits that have died," said Dominick Ortolani, the project's developer.

Officials broke ground on the site in September 2003 with much fanfare, and state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, praised the development as an opportunity to stoke Nanticoke's sputtering economic furnace. The facility is expected to employ 70 to 75 people with a \$500,000 payroll, he said then.

But problems have plagued the project almost from the outset.

In January 2004, Ortolani said work was delayed when engineers discovered the site needed more preparation. The state provided a \$261,400 grant for the construction of three retaining walls and ditches to improved drainage.

Ortolani said Friday that inaccurate paperwork filed by John Ludwig of Allied Contractors & Engineers in September 2004 prohibited him from clinching the project's financing.

"I just got so irritated I fired him," he said. "Then he sued me for the time he spent bidding the job."

Allied filed a court action against Ortolani seeking more than \$50,000 for work performed.

Ortolani's attorney, Tim Polishan, calls the lawsuit "without merit" and Ortolani calls it "spiteful."

The legal action has halted construction since it was initiated in October. Allied's attorney William Finnegan contends Ortolani could place funds into a secure account to satisfy the contractor's claim if Ortolani loses the suit and go ahead with construction.

But Ortolani says he doesn't have the leeway in his budget.

"Where do you get the \$50,000 from the budget? What is that? Lawsuit money?" he said. "This is more than disappointing. It's frustrating, maddening, and you have a feeling of helplessness."

The idle construction site and lack of progress has led to calls from those who have reserved apartments and questions from people in the community.

"Unfortunately that delay has fed into doubts and concerns about (Ortolani) and the overall project," said Yudichak. "I think were all frustrated and that includes Mr. Ortolani."

Mayor John Toole, who had hoped the project would spur other investment, questioned the future of Lexington Village.

"I'm concerned about it," he said. "We're responsible. All that (state) money was spent and nothing seems to be happening with it."

The state requires an audit of how the grant was spent be submitted upon completion of the project.

Ortolani expects the legal matters to be resolved next week and plans to proceed with construction immediately. "Right after that we're ready to blast off."

4/14/2005

### **Nanticoke authority questions Contracts and Leases**

By Elizabeth Skrapits Staff Writer

Nanticoke Municipal Authority board members talked leases and contracts at Monday night's meeting.

It was discovered that leases for both tenants at the Kanjorski building, 40-60 East Main St., have expired.

The one for Health Now, which employs approximately 214 people, expired Aug. 31, 2004, and the one for the state Department of Labor and Industry on Dec. 31, 2004.

Solicitor Susan Maza said the Department of Labor and Industry had expressed interest in extending its lease for a year, with four three-month options, but she told the board she has not been able to get in touch with officials there.

Nanticoke Property Manager Bill O'Malley said Health Now might be willing to pay at a higher rate in order to keep the building in good shape. Any expenditures would be picked up by the company at a rate of 90 percent.

O'Malley said the Kanjorski building in itself was solvent, but it only generates so much

cash - not enough to support other properties the city owns, such as the State Theater and Market Street buildings.

What the board mainly questioned was a contract with White Transit School Bus Inc., a division of Martz Bus Co. - specifically, the fact that nobody was able to find it.

O'Malley said the bus runs as a service to employees of Health Now, taking them from the Kanjorski Building to the parking lot on Lower Broadway. The city couldn't get a right-of-way to the parking lot, and a walkway would have cost \$ 7 million, he said.

Health Now picks up onethird of the cost for the buses, and the billing terms have not changed since 1994, O'Malley said. The bills average \$2,800 to \$3,200 a month to the municipal authority.

Board member Chester Beggs said he would go along with paying the bill for another month, but wanted to see the contract. He wanted to know what hours the bus service was furnished.

Maza said that if the contract could not be found by the next meeting, she would invite a representative from the company.

City Councilman Bill Brown said the city received nothing from the municipal authority on the Kanjorski building deal, leading resident Walter Sokolowski to point out that in 1994, the municipal authority agreed to give at least \$50,000 a year back to the City of Nanticoke.

For the first few years, the municipal authority had a positive cash flow, but then ended up covering the \$70,000 cost of a city administrator and paying \$100,000 to the financial firm of Parente Randolph, O'Malley said.

Sokolowski asked whether the city could hold Health Now liable for any expenses since backing out of a planned expansion.

The municipal authority spent \$125,000 for an architectural plan for the expansion, Brown said, and Sokolowski noted the city purchased the vacant CVS building.

O'Malley said the municipal authority never had a contract with Health Now.

4/14/2005

**Nanticoke seeks court approval to secure \$700,000 loan  
If OK'd, the money will be used for unfunded debt**

Nanticoke City officials have petitioned Luzerne County Court to take out an unfunded debt loan of \$700,000 due to a shortfall in revenues combined with unexpected expenses and unpaid bills.

The petition, filed Wednesday through city Solicitor Bernard Kotulak, requests the loan be taken out for 10 years.

Council and Mayor John Toole unanimously passed a resolution to ask for the additional \$700,000 on April 6.

Toole said there will be no tax increase for residents.

Toole said the move would amount to restructuring two other bond issues, one from 1996 and another from 1998. He said there is close to \$350,000 in another fund to pay the two off early.

Councilman Bill Brown said the \$700,000 is going to be used to pay back the city's \$300,000 2005 tax anticipation note, the total amount of which is due in June.

It will also go to pay back internal accounts the city borrowed from, such as \$120,000 from the sewer fund and \$60,000 from the refuse account.

If the city gets permission from the court, it will place the loan out for bid through its financial advisory firm, Concord Public Finance, Brown said.

The hearing on whether to grant the city's request will be held Wednesday, May 4, at 10 a.m. on the third floor of the Luzerne County Courthouse by President Judge Michael Conahan.

4/12/2005

**Two quit municipal authority**

By jfox@leadernet

Mayor John Toole confirmed the resignation of two members of the city's General Municipal Authority on Monday.

For the second consecutive month, only three of the five members of the authority attended the board's meeting. The two empty seats represented the fourth and fifth resignation from the authority in six months.

Jeffery Piontkowski and Michael Borowski had not been in contact with any of the other board members or the authority's solicitor, but Toole said the city clerk received written resignations from both men last month.

Both, he said, cited time constraints as the motivation behind their resignations.

"We haven't seen anything," said Robert Bray, who was appointed to the board in December.

Neither Piontkowski nor Borowski could be reached for comment Monday night.

Their resignations represent a complete turnover on the board since September when three members and the authority's solicitor all stepped down.

Jim Zoeller, Michael Jezewski, Susan Saunders and Solicitor Garry Taroli resigned in the midst of negotiations with HealthNow, a tenant in the authority-run Kanjorski Center on Main Street. At the time, outgoing board members either said very little about their motivations or failed to return phone calls.

Piontkowski and Borowski were the only two who did not resign at that time.

Lease negotiations with HealthNow, a New York based company that employs about 200 and processes Medicare claims, are still ongoing. The company has continued to rent space in the Kanjorski Center since the end of August without a lease.

4/12/2005

**Partnership gains funds for planning**

**South Valley nonprofit garners \$90,000 state grant for economic plan for Nanticoke as well as Plymouth, Newport townships.**

By jfox@leader.net

After fruitless appeals to city officials to fund a regional economic development plan, a group trying to spark redevelopment in the southern Wyoming Valley was awarded a \$90,000 state grant Monday.

The funding will allow the South Valley Partnership, a private nonprofit group, to develop a strategic development plan for Nanticoke as well as Plymouth and Newport townships. Facility Design & Development, a Wilkes-Barre architectural and planning firm, is expected to complete a land-use and development plan by early this summer, said Joe Lach, vice president of the South Valley Partnership who lives in Plymouth Township.

Lach had repeatedly lobbied municipal officials to contribute \$100,000 toward the plan with a focus on Nanticoke's downtown.

But the city, on shaky financial footing, had nothing to contribute, and the city's General Municipal Authority was unwilling to part with any part of more than \$366,000 in federal funding in its possession.

Despite support for Lach's request from members of council, the authority refused to release any money to develop a plan.

Mayor John Toole opposed funding the strategic plan, saying recently that if the city had controlled the money, he would have preferred spending it to pave roads.

It doesn't matter any more.

The state grant, along with \$20,000 in state funding secured by Newport and Plymouth townships and \$30,000 donated by the Nanticoke Area Development Corporation, has erased the need for any contribution from the authority.

Officials expect the plan to cost \$120,000.

"It clearly changes the dynamic at this point," Lach said.

"We're over the top for what we need in terms of the strategic plan,"

State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, a vocal proponent of a regional development plan, said appeals for funding hit a "stonewall" in Nanticoke.

"In response to that, the Governor's Center recognized that we were struggling," Yudichak said.

"They loved the idea of regional planning. ... They felt it was just too important to let it fade away,"

A development plan that clearly outlines how state funding would nudge a community toward a defined redevelopment goal seems to be a requirement of the Rendell administration, Yudichak said.

“There’s no question, and I think it’s a smart directive from the governor to say before we invest tax dollars that were going to do it wisely,” he said.

Communities such as Pittston and Carbondale have “proven that the money will follow the plan,” he said.

4/12/2005

### **Theft of grave items steals a mom’s solace**

#### **Sgt. Christopher Daniel’s mother says she finds comfort at resting place.**

By badams@leader.net

Toni Daniel-Williams usually finds comfort in daily visits to her son’s grave, but Sunday was different.

An angel statue and crucifix were stolen on the two-month anniversary of Sgt. Christopher Daniel’s death.

“How can people be so cruel?” Daniel-Williams asked.

Her son died in a car crash on Feb. 10, just nine days after arriving home from a year serving in Iraq with the 109th Field Artillery’s Bravo Battery.

Daniel-Williams had visited St. Mary’s Cemetery on Sunday morning and everything was intact on his grave. When she and her mother, Artie

Owens, returned Sunday afternoon, they noticed the items were missing.

Rick Baran, the cemetery’s operations manager, said the theft of items from gravesites that can be resold is on the rise. He said thieves try to sell them at area flea markets.

Daniel-Williams, her husband, Christopher Williams, and children, Heather and Matthew, visited Daniel’s grave Monday afternoon. Eight-year-old Heather placed a new angel statue in the fresh dirt on her brother’s grave.

The angel is resting on its side, as if it’s lounging. “That’s the way I remember my son,” Daniel-Williams said.

Her 21-year-old son’s photo, a candle-holder, flags and flowers were undisturbed by the thieves.

Daniel-Williams said frequent visits to his grave in the cemetery’s side hill section comfort her. “It feels like I’m closer to him.”

If she is feeling anxious about something, she talks to her late son. “He’s listening,” she said.

Daniel of Wilkes-Barre served as a military policeman and was selected to serve as a gunner on a special detail assigned to security for the battalion commander. He and other battery members had arrived to a hero’s welcome in Nanticoke on Feb. 1.

His family’s Sturdevant Street home was still decorated with banners and flags from his homecoming when he died in an early-morning crash on Interstate 81 on Feb. 10.

Baran said the 70-acre cemetery has 72,000 graves and is frequented by walkers, runners and family members. “We do have random patrols.”

He said cemetery crews have discovered people with vanloads of stolen items such as artificial flowers. “The theft of these items that can be resold is certainly on the rise,” Baran said.

He said some people may assume it is youths who are stealing, but middle-aged women have been caught taking items in the past.

“It’s extremely difficult to detect.”

4/11/2005

### **Building futures**

#### **Woman left job to help at ReStore**

By badams@leader.net

Judy Sullivan left a frustrating job with long hours for part-time work amid used sinks, hinges and hand saws.

The 54-year-old mother of five has no regrets. Changing jobs to work for Wyoming Valley Habitat for Humanity was the change she needed.

She doesn’t expect her job with the nonprofit group to be life-long, but her passion for its cause likely will be.

“At this point in my life, I will only do what I believe in,” Sullivan said.

She manages Habitat’s ReStore, which accepts new and used building materials and sells them to fund homes for qualified applicants living in substandard housing.

The turquoise paint on ReStore’s exterior stood out on a drab March afternoon as traffic sped by on West Main Street. The jeans and boot-clad Sullivan talked from an office inside the former car dealership. She seemed most at home walking amid rows of doors and windows or behind the wheel of a 14-foot delivery truck.

She works with warehouse supervisor Don Mulholland, a retired painter and former customer who wore a black beret as he stood behind the store counter last week.

He explained how he got the job. “I came in here for a window. I’m still here and the window’s in the house.”

He assists Sullivan and the large pool of volunteers who gather and organize warehouse items, ranging from donated nails to French doors. Sullivan appreciates that he lives in walking distance of the store and is building-material savvy. “He can identify all the odd things that come through the door.”

Sullivan doesn’t claim to have extraordinary building skills and joked that her father was the “duct tape king” when it came to fixing anything. As a single mother, she learned to make basic home repairs to save money.

“I have this rule. You don’t get the plumber until there’s three things wrong,” she said.

She is organized and is establishing relationships within the community to help the store grow. “I wanted to turn it into a real business.” She works with businesses, contractors and customers and is building a base of volunteers.

Sullivan's goal is to stay at the job for a year.

"You're never going to leave this store," Mulholland said.

Sullivan began her career as a registered nurse in the 1970s. She returned to college locally to earn a degree in economics after raising five children. Sullivan got involved in Habitat for Humanity in 1999 while participating in Leadership Wilkes-Barre. She served on the organization's board and helped choose families to receive a Habitat home.

"I really like working with the family selection," she said.

As part of the job, she was required to visit the family's home. She had not realized the conditions in which some people live.

She spontaneously quit a full-time job elsewhere. "I was working a lot of hours and just feeling frustrated. I had no plan when I quit my job."

The ReStore manager's job seemed a good choice, but her children had their concerns.

"I think they thought, 'Mom's having some sort of midlife crisis,'" she said. But Sullivan said they were supportive once they realized she wasn't going to attempt anything radical such as skydiving.

"They think I'm doing a good thing."

4/10/2005

### **Honey Pot fire company shifts priorities**

By Tom Venesky , Staff Writer

The Honey Pot Fire Company 6 is expanding its role.

Fighting fires will remain the top priority, but there is an added emphasis on community service to provide residents with more services than fire protection.

Company president Chet Kopco said the importance of community service is increasing as older members look to do more than fight fires.

As a result, the company will begin holding monthly community outreach programs aimed at educating residents on a variety of safety issues. The first event will be a community CPR training course conducted during the week of May 15.

"The roll of the volunteer firefighter is changing and we're now doing things beyond the scope of fighting fires," Kopco said.

The new focus also benefits the fire department. Kopco said older members from other fire departments are joining to help Honey Pot's community outreach efforts while continuing to fight fires with their home departments.

The department will celebrate its 40th anniversary this year, and in keeping with the community outreach focus, members will hand out free smoke detectors to every Honey Pot household during the anniversary open house this September.

The project was made possible through a \$3,240 from the federal Department of Homeland Security Firefighters Assistance Program.

For more information on the May community CPR classes, call Bob DiStifano at 735-3444 or 762-6892. Deadline for registration is May 1.

For more information on the smoke detectors or upcoming community programs, call 735-7030 or 735-8031.

4/9/2005

### **NEPA native wins industry award**

By Mary Ondrako

Former Nanticoke resident Brian Carey, a news anchor at 1010 WINS-AM in New York City and an ABC Radio News correspondent, won the prestigious New York Metro AIR Award for best newscaster at a ceremony Wednesday night.

"It was surreal," Carey said of winning. "I ran out in the lobby and called my brother (who lives in Nanticoke) to tell him," he said.

Carey said it was a very emotional night for him. Upon receiving the award he credited his mother, Alta Carey, who died last summer, for encouraging him to pursue his dreams of being a news broadcaster.

Brian explained that he was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis early in his career. "I was really sick and even moved back home. I honestly never thought I would go on, but my mother just kept encouraging me," he said.

Carey said, as far as his condition, he is doing well. "I haven't had any problems in the nine years I've been here (in New York City)," he said. Carey

got his start at WNAK-AM when he was a teenager. He also worked at 590 WARM-AM, Magic 93, WBRE-TV, and was news director at WILK-AM. His network news reports are carried on WILK-AM.

Congratulations to Carey on his achievements.

4/9/2005

Dance fever

### **Folk-dance ensemble highly anticipated**

**"They are an excellent group, and they do beautiful different Ukrainian dances, and there's also some singing, and they tour all over."**

### **Geraldine Adamchak Planning committee member**

By kkazokas@leader.net

Arlene Jennings has seen the show before.

But the idea of witnessing another Voloshky performance hasn't worn thin for the Nanticoke resident.

In fact, Jennings can't hide her anticipation as she describes what makes the Ukrainian dance ensemble's presentation so gripping.

"It's the colorful costumes, the fluid movements and just, they're really a top-notch professional group," she said of Voloshky, excitement rising in her voice.

Other area residents soon will have the opportunity to see what fuels Jennings' enthusiasm and, in the process, help an area church.

Voloshky, a Jenkintown-based troupe, will perform April 24 at the Greater Nanticoke Area High School. Proceeds from the public show will go to various, yet-to-be-determined building projects and maintenance efforts at Nanticoke's Transfiguration of Our Lord Ukrainian Catholic Church, said Jennings, the event's chairperson.

The decision to bring Voloshky to Nanticoke came as a simple one for Jennings and several of her fellow parishioners, some of whom had attended previous high-energy folk-dance performances by the ensemble.

"They are an excellent group, and they do beautiful different Ukrainian dances, and there's also some singing, and they tour all over," said Geraldine Adamchak, a planning committee member.

"We are Ukrainian. And a few of us had seen them. And we thought that if we could get them, why, we would try to get them in," she added.

Raising awareness about Ukrainian heritage played a big part in the organizers' decision to book Voloshky.

"We were looking for something to bring the culture to this area, too, because there's very little of this kind of stuff in our area here," Jennings said.

The group's Web site, [www.voloshky.com](http://www.voloshky.com), states, "the 40-member ensemble draws from a repertoire of over 45 traditional dances representing the various regions of Ukraine."

The ensemble's shows are said to pack sparkling athleticism with graceful, stylized, romantic movements.

The group performs throughout the United States and Canada in concert settings, cultural and entertainment festivals, corporate functions, community and arts centers as well as in schools and universities, the Web site states. Many of its members, Adamchak said, are youngsters.

Jennings, who has seen Voloshky perform several times at Wilkes-Barre's 109th Field Artillery Armory as well as in Scranton, said the 90-minute program will include about 25 dancers. Several, she said, have chosen not to participate because the event falls on Palm Sunday on the Ukrainian calendar.

Still, Jennings doesn't believe that will make the performance any less exciting. She said she sees the event as an afternoon of great fun as well as a chance to learn a little bit more about Ukrainian culture and "kind of break out of the winter doldrums."

Tickets will be available at the door.

4/7/2005

### **Nanticoke council takes aim at city's municipal authority**

By [jfox@leader.net](mailto:jfox@leader.net)

Council members made a plea to be included in decisions regarding downtown redevelopment as discussion of the city's General Municipal Authority dominated Wednesday's city council meeting.

An apparent chasm between members of council and the authority, which controls nearly \$2 million in federal grants, has left elected officials questioning what is happening with a planned downtown project.

Last month, the authority voted to select the Susquehanna Valley Development Group as the developer of a portion of Main Street adjacent to the Kanjorski Center, but council members Yvonne Bozinski, Joe Dougherty and Mayor John Toole said they had little idea what was planned.

"When we look at it we don't have any say in what's going to happen," Bozinski said.

"A lot of times we're not even told," Dougherty said.

Despite members of the authority being appointed by the mayor and approved by council, there appears to be little communication between the two bodies, and some members of council are becoming more vocal about their dissatisfaction.

"I think we should make a motion to abolish the municipal authority," Bushko said.

City Solicitor Bernard Kotulak said the authority, which owns and operates the Kanjorski Center, cannot be dissolved while it holds debt obligations.

Joe Lach, an attorney and advocate for the economic redevelopment of the southern Wyoming Valley, called for council to take a firmer stance in demanding action from the authority.

"I see almost \$2 million that have been here for some number of years and isn't being used," he said.

According to the city, the authority has used \$110,850 of the grants issued since 2000.

Lach asked that council pass a resolution requiring all decisions made by the authority to be approved by council, and offered to represent the city for free in any ensuing legal challenges brought by the authority solicitor.

4/7/2005

### **Nanticoke council unhappy it has no say in municipal authority's projects**

By Elizabeth Skrapits, Staff Writer

Nanticoke elected officials have no say in two main redevelopment projects, council learned Wednesday night.

During the work session last week, council asked Solicitor Bernard Kotulak to look into the possibility of an ordinance that would allow council and not the municipal authority final say in any development project.

What Kotulak discovered was that on Sept. 7, 1993, an agreement was signed giving the Nanticoke Municipal Authority responsibility for management of, and exclusive right to lease, develop, and supervise, the Kanjorski Center project on Main Street and the Market Street redevelopment project.

Elected officials can suggest what they would like to see in the projects, but the municipal authority has the final say, Kotulak told council and Mayor John Toole.

Councilman John Bushko asked if the municipal authority could be dissolved. Kotulak said council could go to court to do it, but it was unlikely to be approved - an authority can only be dissolved if it doesn't have any debt or bond issues, or if it finishes its work.

"In this situation, where they're landlords of the Kanjorski building, it could go on forever," Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski said.

At last week's work session, council also asked Kotulak to see if \$100,000 could be taken from another grant to give to the South Valley Partnership for a comprehensive plan.

Kotulak said that whether Nanticoke officials like it or not, the administration of Gov. Ed Rendell is starting to ask for municipal comprehensive plans before giving out grants.

"It's something that's going to have to be addressed one way or another at some point," Kotulak said. The city has three grants outstanding, he said. One is for \$277,500 from the Department of Housing and Urban Development the city has authorized to the municipal authority for demolition on Market Street. A second federal grant for \$200,000 Kotulak said he had no details about. The third is the \$1.5 million federal grant originally slated to be used for job creation and retention at the Kanjorski center. In order to be able to divert money from any of these for the comprehensive plan, city officials would need to get permission from the agencies administering the grants, Kotulak said. Attorney Joseph Lach, secretary of the South Valley Partnership, said the city has a legal responsibility it cannot rid itself of to provide stewardship of the nearly \$2 million in grant money. The municipal authority has only spent grant funds on legal and accounting fees to date, city Administrator Greg Gulick said. Lach said the city should reserve its right to have final say on anything the municipal authority does, and if authority members don't like it, officials should battle them in court. He said he would even represent the city for nothing, which was greeted with applause from residents. "Looking at the record over the past several years, it cries out for something to be done," Lach said. In other business, council voted on a resolution authorizing the city to petition Luzerne County court to take out \$700,000 in unfunded debt.

4/7/2005

### **'Pushy,' McNulty sign off**

### **Longtime radio personality Terry McNulty is retiring after today's show on WNAK.**

By rfennick@leader.net

It's last call at Naomi's Café, the favorite Goose Island watering hole of Pushy Bosco, one of the uniquely Northeastern Pennsylvania characters created by longtime radio host Terry McNulty.

McNulty, who interjected local humor such as the Sugar Notch Shuffle and "passing the pineapple" into his daily radio shows, will hang up the microphone today after 45 years on the air.

His farewell show airs from 6 to 9 a.m. on WNAK Radio, where he has been hosting a show since March 2004.

McNulty's voice was a staple on WARM Radio, where he spent most of his career serving as a disc jockey and news director. Faithful listeners followed the daily chronicles of McNulty's fictional couple, Pushy and Riba Bosco of Goose Island. The shtick became so familiar that many listeners said they hoped to find Naomi's in the Wilkes-Barre neighborhood of Goose Island, McNulty said.

This is the second time McNulty, who is in his 60s, attempted to retire.

In 1998, new WARM station owner Citadel Broadcasting Co. replaced McNulty with the nationally syndicated "Imus in The Morning."

McNulty filed an age-discrimination suit against the radio station and the case ended in 2004 with a settlement.

"I was retired when WNAK rang me up and I unretired," McNulty said. "Now, I figure I need time to enjoy myself, play some golf, see my grandkids, spend time with my wonderful Mary and do gardening." He and his wife live in Chinchilla.

He said there's a chance he might record some occasional Goose Island clips for WNAK.

"The days of Pushy are probably limited. I may do the Goose Island thing for WNAK on a part-time basis, maybe stop in once in awhile and record them."

McNulty's radio days began in the 1950s as a disc jockey at WSCR, Scranton, though he spent most of his career at WARM.

His fascination with the medium started long before that.

"I always wanted to be in radio, even when I was in elementary school. I'd come home, do my homework and set up a fake microphone and say: 'OK, ladies and gentlemen, it's time for the fourth-grade homework from so-and-so school. As I did my homework, I announced in the microphone."

His first radio stint, as a record librarian for WARM, coincided with the days he spent playing drums and singing in a band in the 1950s. Those tunes, along with other oldies music, remain dear to McNulty. It's another reason he enjoyed his position at the Nanticoke station, which is known for playing music from bygone eras.

"That's the music that everyone enjoys," he said. "I hope everyone continues to tune in to WNAK. That's the best music this side of Hick's Crick."

4/7/2005

### **Rendell addresses scouts**

By Robert Kalinowski , Staff Writer

David A. Urbanski knows the meaning of determination.

The Nanticoke boy set a goal in 1996. It took eight years of hard work to see it come true.

The junior at Bishop Hoban High School described becoming an Eagle Scout in 2004 as the "proudest day in my life" on Wednesday night at the 22nd annual Friends of Scouting dinner at Genetti Hotel and Convention Center in Wilkes-Barre.

Urbanski reflected upon his life-changing journey with the Boy Scouts to the nearly 1,000 people in attendance and thanked them for their support. He described the thrill when a scout receives his first badge, the camaraderie built chatting with friend around campfires, and the accession through scouting's ranks. He spoke of the satisfaction in staying true to scouting oaths such as duty to God and country and especially helping other people at all times.

"Scouting is as good as it gets," he said.

Among the crowd of community leaders from throughout Northeastern Pennsylvania was special guest and keynote speaker Gov. Ed Rendell, who autographed dinner programs for scouts in attendance.

Rendell said the issue of "values" is one frequently bantered about in American society today. "Values" shouldn't be interpreted as divisive social issues, but ones toward which Boy Scouts aspire, he said.

"The ultimate value is the golden rule, 'Do unto others as you would have others do unto you,'" he told the crowd. "The most important value of all is serving people that need our help."

Whether one is a Boy Scout, attorney or elected official, decisions should not be made for selfish reasons but to best contribute to the common good, he said.

Two people in the crowd were honored by the Boy Scouts at the dinner for doing just that.

John Moses, Wilkes-Barre attorney and incoming CEO of ALSAC, the development arm of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, and Austin Burke, president of the Greater Scranton Area Chamber of Commerce, were co-honored with the annual Distinguished Citizen Award.

"When you see these scouts, you have to feel good about the future of Northeastern Pennsylvania and the future of the United States of America," said Burke.

"What a thrill it is to see these young, healthy and vibrant scouts," said Moses. "(Scouting) is a tradition steeped in history and stamped with excellence."

The dinner, sponsored by the Northeastern Pennsylvania Council of the Boy Scouts, was the fifth one in which scouting supporters from Lackawanna and Luzerne collaborated to hold a single event. Proceeds will help support more than 11,000 scouts in six Northeastern Pennsylvania counties.

4/6/2005

### **Yudichak seeking to rename bridge in honor of 109th**

### **He wants Carey Avenue Bridge to be 1st Battalion, 109th Field Artillery Pennsylvania National Guard Bridge.**

By bmarcy@leader.net

"I think it's fitting to recognize the 109th for their long and distinctive service to this nation."

State Rep. John Yudichak D-Nanticoke

The Carey Avenue Bridge needs a new, much longer name.

That's the word from State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, who says it's time to scrap its name in favor of a more honorable designation: the 1st Battalion, 109th Field Artillery Pennsylvania National Guard Bridge.

It's a mouthful, admits Yudichak, but he said it's a worthy tribute to a National Guard unit that has served its nation with honor from the Revolutionary War to the present war in Iraq.

He said it also would be a memorial to soldiers from the 109th who died in combat, such as Sgt. Sherwood Baker of Plymouth, who was killed in action in Iraq last year. Baker was the first Pennsylvania National Guard member killed in action since World War II.

"Part of this is honoring soldiers like Sgt. Baker who gave their life for their country, and part of it is honoring all the soldiers who served their nation honorably throughout the history of the 109th. I think it's fitting to recognize the 109th for their long and distinctive service to this nation."

Yudichak's bill to rename the Carey Avenue Bridge – which spans the Susquehanna River to connect the communities of Plymouth, Larksville and Hanover Township – passed the state House of Representatives unanimously last week.

It now heads to the state Senate. Yudichak said he anticipates smooth passage.

The 109th was formed on Oct. 17, 1775, a few months after the establishment of the U.S. Army. The unit has been involved in every major American conflict, from the Revolutionary War to engagements in Iraq and other parts of the Middle East today, Yudichak said.

The 109th has 532 soldiers and is based in Nanticoke, Plymouth and Wilkes-Barre.

The Carey Avenue Bridge was built in 2002 at a cost of \$27.5 million, replacing an outdated metal span. If his legislation passes into law, Yudichak admits the new bridge name would be significantly longer than the old one. He suggested an abbreviated version.

"It'll be affectionately known as the 109th Bridge," Yudichak said.

"The '109th Bridge' would forever serve as a tribute to the members of Pennsylvania's National Guard, and would be a reminder to us all of the responsibility we have to honor those brave souls who have put their lives on the line to preserve the freedoms we cherish."

4/03/2005

### **Nanticoke Area Notes**

By: Pamela Urbanski

### **GNA seeking volunteers**

The Greater Nanticoke Area School District is looking for adult volunteers to assist elementary school students in a remedial reading program.

If you are 55 years of age or older, love to work with children and can give one and one-half hours of your time twice a week, you might want to consider helping out.

According to Anne Rappaport, director of the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program for the Area Agency on Aging, the program is really rewarding for students and the senior volunteers.

"Our older adults really feel good about being able to make a difference in the lives of students," Rappaport said.

She tells me the volunteers have a lot of patience and the teachers tell her the students work very well with the volunteers who come into the classroom. "Every child wants to be able to read, so the young children respond very well and are very appreciative to those who help them to read a little better."

If you're interested or need additional information before you sign up, call Senior Corps/RSVP at 822-1158 or 1-800-252-1512.

The children need you!!

### **Basket bingo at St. Stan's**

If you're tired of sitting home and want to get out of the house, I have the perfect place for you to be today.

Father John Poplawski and the parishioners of St. Stanislaus Church on East Church Street are holding their annual spring basket bingo today. They have a lot of great prizes and refreshments. Doors open at 11 a.m. and the bingo starts at 1 p.m.

### **Kindergarten registration at GNA**

The Greater Nanticoke Area School District will have kindergarten registration for the 2005-2006 school term on April 5, from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. at the K.M. Smith Elementary School in the Sheatown section. The district provides full-day kindergarten. To be eligible for kindergarten in August, a child must be five-years-old on or before Sept 30.

Registration for new, first-grade students also will be accepted at the session. Parents of kindergarten and new first-grade registrants must bring their children's birth certificates, Social Security numbers and health and immunization records.

Michael Pawlik is principal.

### **Holy Name Society sets race night**

Holy Name Society of St. Francis Church is sponsoring a night-at-the-races Saturday, April 9, at St. Francis Parish Center on East Green Street. Doors open at 6 p.m. and post time is 7 p.m. Cost to sponsor a horse is \$10. Those who purchase at least one ticket will be admitted free of charge.

For all others, a \$5 entrance fee will be charged. Proceeds from this event will be used for maintenance and improvements to the parish complex.

Questions? Call the rectory at 735-6903.

### **Chicken-n-biscuit dinner set**

St. John's Lutheran Church on East State Street will hold a chicken-n-biscuit dinner Saturday, April 9, from 4 to 7 p.m. Take-outs are from 3 to 4 p.m. Cost is \$7.50 for adults and \$4 for children. Parking is available on Walnut Street.

### **Chinese auction to be held April 10**

Pope John Paul II School will hold its annual Chinese auction Sunday, April 10, in the cafeteria of the main school building on South Hanover Street.

This year's auction promises to be one of the best with great prizes such as an Apple iPod Digital Audio 20-gig hard drive, an eight-piece padded folding sling patio set, two canopy swings, gas grill with side burner, an iTrip FM transmitter for Apple iPod, portable CD players and more. There also will be themed gift baskets for kids, mom, dad, grandma, etc. and great door prizes.

Lunch also can be purchased and you won't want to miss the delicious dessert table. Doors open at 11 a.m. and the auction begins at 1 p.m. Each ticket, which includes 25 chances to win and one door prize chance is just \$5. Questions? Call the school at 735-7935.

### **GNA Soccer to register**

The Greater Nanticoke Youth Soccer Association will hold registrations for the 2005 soccer season. The registrations will take place at the West Side Club House located on West Grand Street in Nanticoke. The dates are as follows: Saturdays, April 9 and 16, from 9 a.m. to noon, and Thursday, April 21, from 7 to 9 p.m. Children signing up for the first time are asked to bring their birth certificates and their Social Security cards. Cost to register is \$30. Late registrations will include an additional \$15.

### **Spaghetti dinner at St. John's**

The next event at St. John's Church, 126 Nesbitt St., Larksville, is a spaghetti dinner Saturday, April 9. Take-outs are at 4 p.m. and dinner will be served from 5 to 7 p.m.

Tickets are \$6 for adults and \$3 for children 12 and under and are available at all Masses or at the door. There also will be a raffle and bake sale.

Call the rectory at 779-9620 for more information.

### **Bake sale at Holy Family Parish**

The Altar and Rosary Society of Holy Family Parish in Luzerne will hold a bake sale after all Masses on the weekend of April 9-10 at the Bennett Street Church.

Donations of baked goods from parishioners are welcome and all members are asked to participate.

Co-chairpersons are Andrea Petrasek, Ann Marie Pointon and Marie Hazlak.

### **Spaghetti dinner to be held**

Forty Fort United Methodist Church will hold a spaghetti dinner Saturday, April 16, from 4:30 to 7 p.m. Take-outs are from 4 to 7 p.m. Containers will be provided.

Cost is \$5 for adults and \$3 for children under 12 years of age. This event is presented by the combined efforts of the Methodist women and men's organizations of FFUMC.

4/3/2005

### **A former area resident and radio personality has been nominated for a prestigious radio industry award**

By mondrako@citizensvoice.com

Brian Carey, a Nanticoke native and an anchor at 1010 WINS-AM news station in New York City, is a finalist for an Achievement In Radio Award as best newscaster in the metropolitan area.

The AIR Awards is an industry-wide competition that recognizes the excellence and creativity of the New York Metro radio industry. More than 1,000 stations participated. Entries are judged by experienced radio industry professionals in like-sized markets around the country. Five other broadcasters are competing in Carey's division - two others from WINS, two from Metro Networks, and one from WCBS. "It's such an honor just to be nominated," Carey said. The nomination will put him in company with some of the top names in the radio business at a special awards ceremony April 6 at the New York Marriott Marquis, Times Square. National broadcaster Don Imus and national recording artist Lionel Richie will attend the

gala event and present special lifetime achievement awards, Carey noted.

A graduate of Greater Nanticoke Area High School and King's College, Carey began his broadcasting career at WNAK-AM when he was a teenager. "I started by cutting the grass. Someone from the station came over and asked me if I was interested in an on-air position," Carey recalled. At King's, he worked at the college radio station, WRKC-FM, and was hired as a weekend reporter at WBRE-TV. Carey made the rounds at the area broadcast facilities, including serving as news director at WILK-AM, working with Frankie Warren at Magic 93, and anchoring news for 590 WARM-AM. While at WARM, Carey also trekked to Philadelphia to anchor news at WPEN-AM and WWDB-FM. He became weekday morning anchor at WWDB and was later elevated to executive producer before moving to New York City, where he served as news bureau chief and news anchor/reporter for Metro Networks. He has been an anchor at Viacom's WINS, the No. 1 radio station in the nation, according to Arbitron, since 2000 and is also a news correspondent for ABC Radio News.

Despite being in the "Big Apple," Carey said he still considers Northeast Pennsylvania home. "I still have family here and visit often," he said. To hear Carey's network news reports, tune to WILK, 980, 910 and 1300 AM, Sunday from 6 to 11 a.m.

3/31/2005

### **Council: We're kept in dark**

#### **Members complain they have no control over a redevelopment project.**

By JON FOX jfox@leader.net

Council members spoke out Wednesday about a lack of control regarding decisions made about downtown redevelopment.

Comments made by Councilman John Bushko and Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski stemmed from a March 14 decision by the Nanticoke General Municipal Authority to select the Susquehanna Valley Development Group as the developer of a Main Street project.

The two decried a lack of input by elected officials and a lack of communication between the authority -- staffed with members appointed by the mayor -- and the council.

The authority controls nearly \$2 million in federal grants.

"All the money's funneled through us, but we have no say on what developer it's going to be or what's going up," Bushko said.

Bozinski questioned the language of the ordinance that created the authority. She questioned just how much autonomy was granted the body.

"I think something was lost in the translation," she said.

The intention of creating the authority was not to pass all of the decision making powers to the authority board, she said.

Bushko asked the city solicitor to investigate the legality of drafting an ordinance requiring authority decisions to be approved by council.

Even with a developer chosen to shepherd the Main Street project along, council members complained about knowing almost no details about the proposed development.

"Nobody knows really what the project is now," Bozinski said.

"I know somewhat, a little bit, what's going on," said Mayor John Toole. "I don't think it's a secret."

Toole said the project entails a 20,000-square-foot building but offered no more details.

In other business:

Council asked the city clerk to read through meeting minutes to determine what council resolved to do regarding a request by the South Valley Partnership to contribute \$100,000 to conduct a regional development plan.

Bozinski believes council has access to \$100,000 of federal grant money previously transferred to the municipal authority. Toole believes that money must be allocated by the authority.

Treasurer Al Wytoshek expressed alarm about city's ability to repay a \$300,000 short-term loan at the end of June. The general fund contains only \$332,000 and the city is obligated to pay \$335,000 in payroll over the next six months, he said.

Councilman Bill Brown said the city plans to refinance its bond debt, alleviating the current financial pressure.

"We'll have no problem paying that \$300,000. We have something."

3/31/2005

### **Council wants final say in Nanticoke's development**

#### **Nanticoke elected officials want final say in who develops what in the city, council announced at Wednesday night's work session.**

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Staff Writer

Councilman John Bushko asked whether solicitor Bernard Kotulak could draw up an ordinance giving council final approval of any developer selected by the city's municipal authority for any project.

"I'm not trying to cut them down, but we should have final say here," Bushko said.

On March 14, the municipal authority voted to hire the Susquehanna Valley Development Corp. for a Main Street revitalization project, after hearing a detailed presentation for the project by the Thornhurst Development Team.

The three council members present at the municipal authority meeting, Bushko, Bill Brown and Yvonne Bozinski, objected to the authority's decision.

Kotulak agreed to research the agreement that created the authority to see what can be done, and to tell council his findings at next week's regular meeting.

Next, council questioned what was happening with the Main Street project. Bozinski said the issue was that "nobody knows really what their plan is," referring to Susquehanna.

Mayor John Toole said he knew about the plan, which he noted was not concrete.

Bushko asked why council was not informed.

"Maybe if I knew what was going on, I wouldn't run my mouth so much," he fired at Toole. "Why are you the most important guy in town?" That led to a discussion about the former cigar mill property on West Church Street, which is currently undergoing demolition and site cleanup. Bushko asked why Toole had said a townhouse project at the site would be good if "council doesn't shoot it down." Toole replied that he didn't know whether the developer, Renaissance Development Group, would still do the project. The city had originally planned to give the property to Renaissance to build townhouses as well as pay the developer to do demolition and site cleanup.

Bushko said nobody on council wanted to abandon the project, but pointed out that State Rep. John Yudichak, who secured \$250,000 for demolition and cleanup, wanted the city to get some money for the site.

Toole said the property was appraised at \$21,000.

"That shouldn't be a big stumbling block for a \$1 million project," he said.

Council also decided to look into getting back \$100,000 of a federal economic development grant from the municipal authority to give to the South Valley Partnership for its comprehensive plan.

The municipal authority opted previously not to give the money to the South Valley Partnership, which is comprised of Newport and Plymouth townships and Nanticoke, despite council asking it to do so.

Toole said if Nanticoke is able to get the \$100,000 back, he would rather see it put to other uses within the city, such as paving roads.

In other business, city treasurer Albert Wytosek expressed concern about how the city would pay back its \$300,000 tax anticipation note, which is due in a lump sum by the end of June.

Nanticoke has \$332,000 in its general fund, and will owe a total of \$335,000 in payroll over the next six weeks, plus up to approximately \$250,000 in bills, Wytosek said. He wondered whether the city was setting aside \$75,000 a month as council promised.

Brown said there wouldn't be a problem with paying the TAN back in time. He said he has been working with Concord Public Finance, the city's financial advisor.

3/29/2005

### **Woman sues Earth Conservancy over son's drowning in 2004 four-wheeling accident**

The mother of a Nanticoke firefighter who drowned after a vehicle he was riding in plunged into a waterhole on Earth Conservancy land is suing the organization, alleging its negligence led to her son's death.

James Bertrand, 30, died last April when the Jeep in which he was a passenger ran off a dirt roadway, down an embankment and into a 15- to 20-foot-deep waterhole on conservancy property in Newport Township. A Glen Lyon woman who was behind the wheel managed to escape the submerged Jeep through an open window.

Bertrand's mother, Jacqueline Bertrand, also of Nanticoke, accuses the conservancy of failing to post the property, place a fence or other barricade around the property, maintain the property in a safe condition, warn the public of dangerous conditions and other violations.

She is seeking an unspecified amount of damages.

A state police investigation into the accident last spring resulted in no charges being filed.

At the time, conservancy executive director Mike Dziak said the property was open to the public for hunting and other recreational activities in the manner of state game lands, but motorized vehicles are strictly prohibited. Dziak also said the property -- a densely wooded parcel popular for partying and four-wheeling -- is not routinely patrolled.

Dziak said the accident and another in 1998 in which five people drowned could have been avoided if people obeyed rules prohibiting motorized vehicles on the property.

3/26/2005

### **GNA changes traffic patterns on school grounds**

Effective Tuesday, March 29, there will be new traffic patterns in effect at the Greater Nanticoke Area High School and Educational Center. Parents of students in grades six to 12 will no longer be allowed to drop off or pick up their children in the loop in front of the main entrance of the high school.

This loop will be for buses only. No car or pedestrian traffic will be permitted to enter or exit school grounds from the Noble Street entrance.

Students who walk or are transported to school by their parents and attend grades six to seven at the Educational Center will now use the main entrance of the Educational Center located on East Union Street.

High school students in grades eight through 12 who drive, walk or are transported by their parents may use either the school's gym entrance or Church Street entrance's old bus port doors in the morning.

Students who enter the high school from the Church Street entrance will not be allowed in the building until 7:25 a.m.

Student drivers will use the gym exit at dismissal.

Walkers and students who are transported by their parents will be dismissed from the old bus port exits on the Church Street side of the school.

Walkers must use Church Street to exit the high school. Only students who are bused will be permitted to use the main entrance of the high school.

There will be no change of traffic patterns for elementary center students in grades two through five.

3/26/2005

### **Almost home**

## **Lots of progress being made at former Nanticoke church**

By mharper@leader.net

About a year ago, we stepped into Bernie Norieka's busy, under-construction world.

He was in the early days of a serious home-renovation project: turning an old church in the Hanover section of Nanticoke into a full-time residence for himself and his wife.

So how are things now?

"It's still going," 58-year-old Norieka says with a laugh, taking a break from his work. "It's ongoing. It will never end. It's not going as fast as I'd hoped it would. It's one of those things."

But a tremendous amount of progress has been made on the church – the former St. Joseph's Church, which was built in 1915. The church closed in 2002, and Norieka, a furniture designer who has renovated restaurants and homes, picked it up for \$50,000. And he began work on his biggest project to date.

Work on the church's first floor quickly is coming to an end, and the busy team of workers will move onto the finishing touches of the interior. Where once there were pews there's now a kitchen, with large wooden cabinets and tile work and a stone fireplace. Where once there was an altar there's now a dining room. And the guest area, including a bedroom and a bathroom, is complete near a spot once assigned for confession. For now, Norieka is just working toward his goal. An ending is in sight. The interior likely will be completed by the end of April, and the church's exterior will get worked over by year's end.

While his wife, Toni, was a bit skeptical in the beginning, Norieka says she has come around. And she's getting in on the action by handling the staining and finishing of woodwork and other details in the arts-and-craft-style home. "She's my professional finisher," Norieka says.

Now, for anyone who's working on a home-improvement project large or small this spring, Norieka has some advice.

"You have to be prepared for unplanned events and unplanned expenses," he says. "Choose your contractors and subcontractors very carefully."

And at this point, what has been his biggest challenge? Norieka says dealing with the scope of the project and sticking to his budget.

"The whole thing is the biggest challenge," he says with a laugh.

3/24/2005

## **Mayors discuss ways to attract people to their towns**

By Tim Gulla , Staff Writer

Though their communities may look different, mayors from Pittston to Hazleton all say they face the same challenges in trying to reverse the trend of flight from cities.

Yet trying to stop flight and increase residency is a challenge they can't ignore if they want their cities to prosper.

Addressing professionals from area mortgage, financing and real estate firms at the second annual Luzerne County Housing Symposium on Wednesday, mayors from four of the largest communities in the county all said government can play a key role in getting people to move back.

"My goal is to rebuild the city with good, working-class families that will be an asset," Wilkes-Barre Mayor Tom Leighton said.

Clean streets, police protection, enforcement of ordinances and codes all benefit the cause, Leighton said, as do the less visible things like cleaning out catch basins and providing more access to those with disabilities.

Government also can play a key role in increasing the quality of life through such efforts as the planned development of the Susquehanna riverfront that will turn the river into an asset, Leighton said.

Hazleton Mayor Lou Barletta has seen property values rise in Hazleton and a large increase in new businesses as a result of efforts to increase residency in his community.

Upon taking office, he said he knew he had to change the city's image and much of that was based on housing. One of his first goals was to tackle blight and the city acquired three full blocks in the Pine Street area of the city to make room for housing.

"We're now planning on expanding the neighborhood outward," he said.

**Nanticoke Mayor John Toole said his city's efforts to remove blight are paying off. A recently razed property is likely to bring in \$20,000 a year in local taxes once it's redeveloped into housing, he said.**

**Other efforts are underway to provide more opportunities for recreation, such as a walking trail and possibly a small golf course in Nanticoke.**

**Though he couldn't release details, Toole divulged that good things may be in store for Nanticoke. He's hoping to announce soon a \$10 million to \$13 million development project in the city that would include a new 20,000 square foot building.**

**"Nothing's signed on the dotted line," Toole said. The project is the result of a public and private partnership.**

Charles Kasko, president of the Luzerne County Housing Partnership, said the symposium was established to bring realtors, builders and bankers together to promote the links between housing and economic development.

"It's about affordable housing at all levels," he said, "and understanding the need to plan for housing, meet housing needs and balancing environmental and infrastructure needs."

3/20/2005

## **Regional effort needs money**

**The South Valley Partnership doesn't need a dime.**

**It needs one million of them.**

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Staff Writer

The non-profit community development organization, which is made up of representatives from Nanticoke City and Newport and Plymouth

townships, wants to put together a comprehensive economic development plan for the region.

But the SVP has to dig up \$100,000 from somewhere to cover the \$120,000 total tab. Local contributions will cover the outstanding \$20,000. The comprehensive plan would give the three municipalities a resource for determining what kind of residential and commercial developments would be best for their communities.

It would contain an inventory of businesses and land - both developed and undeveloped - and include input from elected officials, the municipal and redevelopment authorities, and the business, educational, and religious communities.

"All of this has to do with what it makes sense to plan for as we look into the future," said SVP secretary, Attorney Joseph Lach of Plymouth Township.

Facility Design and Development Ltd. has been hired to do the work. Lach said Plymouth and Newport townships have already come up with \$20,000 in contributions.

Nanticoke Council voted in February to ask the municipal authority to release \$100,000 for the city's portion of the project. The money was to come from a \$480,000 federal grant the city gave the municipal authority in 2001, councilman Bill Brown said at the time.

But municipal authority members refused to even make a motion at their last meeting to give SVP the \$100,000.

"I will not vote for that at all," authority member Chester Beggs said when the issue arose.

Lach said SVP approached the authority because "we thought they would have the most logical interest in our plan." Nanticoke is the business hub of the South Valley area, he said.

However, Lach said the authority's resistance came as no surprise.

"It doesn't deter us one bit," he said. "We will find funding, but we had hoped the municipal authority would take the opportunity to move the city's downtown forward in a positive way."

There is no accurate factual database to determine the best use of space in the communities. Nanticoke's downtown is a prime example, Lach said.

"If people think old vacant buildings are depressing, they should try new vacant buildings," he said.

State Rep. John Yudichak said Nanticoke was not asked to foot the entire bill. Even if it couldn't give \$100,000, the city could have used \$50,000 of a federal economic development grant and acquired the rest through other sources.

SVP intends to go ahead with the planning process next month, and "will get the money no matter what," Lach said.

Yudichak is also positive about being able to come up with government and private contributions.

He said the fact that it is a regional effort makes it even more likely to get state financing.

Mayor John Toole said Nanticoke would be willing to help find some money for the SVP, or to apply for a grant on its behalf.

Another good reason for SVP to get its plan financed is that it has "marching orders" from the Gov. Ed Rendell's office to create one.

Rendell's advisors visited Nanticoke recently to tell the city to enter the Department of Community and Economic Development's Early Intervention Program, which will help take care of the city's ongoing financial issues.

They also told officials that the city needs a comprehensive economic development plan, Yudichak said.

He pointed out that Pittston, Carbondale, Scranton and Wilkes-Barre all have comprehensive plans, and their projects are moving forward.

"It's common sense that before you develop and before you grow, you'd better have a game plan for that growth," he said.

3/20/2005

Nanticoke Area Notes

### **Students stage a moving play**

By: Pamela Urbanski

Friday nights for students marks the end of the school week. For some, it's a night to relax at home. For others, it's a night out with friends for some pizza or a chance to take in a movie.

But, for sixth, seventh and eighth grade students of Pope John Paul II School, Fridays during Lent mean something different. They have been visiting churches throughout the Scranton Diocese, portraying the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This moving production takes the audience back 2,000 years to the time of Christ. Students wearing long gowns and coverings over their heads so only their faces show, as was the tradition in biblical times, walk solemnly through the church.

In her introduction, Amy Robacheski tells us, "We must contemplate Christ on the way to Calvary." We must relive the Stations of the Cross to become more aware of Jesus' love for us."

The performance is narrated by Kelsey Yohey and Heather Kile.

Dustin Panek portrays Pontius Pilate, the man who hands Jesus over to be crucified. Even though this is just a reenactment, Dustin doesn't like being the bad guy. "I don't like being the one who sentences him to death," he said.

Jesus, portrayed by eighth grader Joseph Zannetti, carries a heavy wooden cross under the watchful eyes of centurions. At times, they push him and he falls to the ground, causing those caught off guard to jump in their seats. All this happens as Jesus' mother Mary, portrayed by Kaitlyn Lane, agonizes over the cruel treatment of her son.

Jonathan Senczakowicz portrays the head guard. He is glad he has the opportunity to help others realize what Jesus went through. "I think we help people to comprehend the stations a little better because we relive the moments right in front of their eyes."

Simon of Cyrene, portrayed by Christopher Waugh, is pulled from his seat and forced to help Jesus carry his cross. He understands a little better what Jesus must have gone through. "That cross was so heavy, Jesus really suffered."

In the sixth station, Veronica, played by Amanda Pawlowski, forces her way past the guards to offer comfort. She wipes the face of the suffering Jesus. At a recent performance, the younger children in attendance gasped when they saw the imprint of Jesus' face on her towel.

After Jesus drags his heavy wooden cross down the aisle, the guards place it at the front of the church and as the music turns somber, an eerie silence sweeps across the congregation, and all that's heard are the echoes of a hammer hitting wood as Jesus is nailed to the cross.

Wind, thunder, and lightning rip through the church as Jesus utters his seven last words and dies on the cross. The 13th station is one of the most moving.

Tears well up in the eyes of people attending as Jesus is placed in the arms of his mother, Mary, surrounded by those who loved him and even those, who moments before, helped to put him to death. Mary Magdalene, portrayed by Sarah Prushinski, and the other Mary, Sarah Sabulski, come to inspect the tomb.

The production concludes with the sounds of Hallelujah, and the risen Christ proclaiming peace to the people, this time surrounded by glorious angels.

Mrs. Mary Ann Yendrezeiwski, is the eighth grade teacher and the one who directed and coached the students. She is very proud of their accomplishments. She knows these portrayals have taught her students something they could never get out of a textbook. "When the students portray the last hours of Jesus' life, it makes the events seem so real."

The Board of Pastors at Pope John Paul II School, and priests of parishes where the stations were performed, also should be recognized for their encouragement and beliefs that the students, teachers and principal help to make a difference in an around their community.

The final performances will take place Wednesday, March 23, at Holy Family Parish in Sugar Notch, and Good Friday, March 25, at noon at St. Francis of Assisi Parish on East Green Street, and at 7 p.m. at Holy Trinity Church on South Hanover Street. Robert Kaluzavich is principal of Pope John Paul II School.

3/19/2005

### **Turf war dividing Nanticoke**

#### **The area's longtime congressman and a state representative appear at odds over the city's development program.**

By jfox@leader.net

Several months ago, Joe Lach dialed up his law offices to check his voice mail as he drove home from a Friday afternoon meeting with Mayor John Toole and members of city council.

He was surprised by a message from U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, asking that he get in touch. At Lach's home, the caller ID on his unlisted home phone indicated a missed a call from a Washington, D.C., number.

It was a second call from Kanjorski's office. The congressman wasn't happy Lach was seeking money for a regional economic development plan. "Within the space of 10 minutes, someone had let him know we had been there to make a pitch," Lach recalled. When he returned Kanjorski's call that Monday, Lach said the 11-term congressman "dressed me down, said he was disappointed that we were making this pitch and he felt it was going behind his back." The exchange is indicative of Kanjorski's intimate involvement in Nanticoke's municipal affairs -- redevelopment efforts in particular -- and seems to stem from a widening rift between the congressman and state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke. Kanjorski said Lach "was making a serious mistake" by "consorting with" Yudichak, whom Kanjorski described as "obstructionist and standing in the way of progress in the community," Lach said. Kanjorski's opposition to Yudichak might come from concerns that the younger man is eyeing his congressional seat, an opinion Lach says the congressman has expressed to him. Lach, an attorney and a member of the South Valley Partnership, is part of a group of private individuals pushing for the economic redevelopment of the southern Wyoming Valley. He had asked council to help him get \$100,000 to pay for a development study. The cash-strapped municipality didn't have the money, but Lach had hoped it would lean on the city's General Municipal Authority, a board containing members that one city official says were hand picked by Kanjorski. Since 2000, the city has handed more than \$477,060 in federal redevelopment dollars to the authority, and the authority has spent \$110,850. "A good use for the money, since it's sitting there, is funding our plan," Lach had told council. The authority recently denied Lach's request for study money, despite concerns from council members anxious about knee-jerk development that might not serve the future of the city. And when Lach saw Kanjorski recently, the congressman had not forgotten their phone conversation. "You're swinging for the wrong camp," said Lach, recalling Kanjorski's words. The schism between Kanjorski and Yudichak resurfaced at a meeting earlier this week during a discussion of how the municipal authority spends money for downtown redevelopment. That body controls nearly \$2 million in federal grants. Neither lawmaker was present at Monday's authority meeting, but their aides attended. Under the gun to select a developer for a stretch of Main Street, board members had to choose between a developer aligned with Kanjorski or one supported by Yudichak. The board unanimously chose Kanjorski's developer. Dominick Ortolani, whose wife contributed to Yudichak's campaign and who describes himself as a longtime friend of Yudichak, presented the authority with a proposal that included a parking garage and office space. Yudichak supported Ortolani's proposal in 2004 when the board voted to give him \$25,000 to proceed with the plan. Monday, the three board members present, Steve Buchinski, Chester Beggs and Robert Bray, voted unanimously to accept the proposal from a development group headed by Robert Yoder, a Kanjorski campaign contributor. Kanjorski appeared before council earlier this year with a representative of Yoder's firm, the Susquehanna Valley Development Group. The congressman warned officials that if the authority failed to act before May 31, the city would be at risk of losing a \$1.5 million federal grant earmarked to expand the authority-owned Kanjorski Center. The center houses an office of HealthNow, a New York-based firm that processes Medicare claims. In explaining the decision to go with Susquehanna Valley, one authority member cited the time crunch and said he had the sense Susquehanna had "more expertise." The decision baffled Ortolani, who said he was ready to proceed with the project immediately. He also expressed bewilderment regarding a vote for the competing proposal by one authority member in particular. "Chet Beggs wasn't even at the meeting when the Yoder group presented its proposal. He voted for something he never even saw. That's ridiculous." Beggs was in Florida when Susquehanna addressed the board, according to city officials. And Kanjorski's hand seemed to have influenced two of the municipal authority appointments that led to a unanimous vote for Yoder this week. Two of the three members present Monday, Beggs and Buchinski, were, according to Councilman Bill Brown, pushed by Kanjorski's office as preferable candidates to restock the board after mass resignations last year. Beggs and Buchinski replaced two outgoing board members after Walter Sokolowski, a former Nanticoke mayor and an aide in Kanjorski's office, contacted the councilman. "Wally's the one who called and requested a vote to back those two guys," Brown said. "Wally called from Kanjorski's office." The mayor's appointments to authorities are contingent upon the approval of council. It was

Beggs who spoke loudest against Lach's request for funding. For Lach, the shadow of political infighting casts a pall over the effort to revitalize the downtown. "It's crushing to think we have all this potential influence and resources and we can't get it to mesh," Lach said, adding he has no political aspirations of his own. "My own personal feeling here is that somebody has decided that a particular developer gets the project." And it might be political aspirations of a different sort that have Kanjorski intimately involved in Nanticoke. "Paul Kanjorski said to me when I visited him at his office that he believes John Yudichak is interested in his seat and said it would never happen," Lach said. Yudichak acknowledged the increasing acrimony between himself and Kanjorski. But of a future bid for a federal congressional seat he said, "The best way for Paul Kanjorski to keep his job is to do his job. ... I'm not concerned about future political positions." Kanjorski responded to a request for comment with a written statement. "Nanticoke is my hometown, and I have always been committed to improving the quality of life for its people," the congressman wrote. "At one point, Nanticoke received more federal funding per capita than any other municipality in the country." He will continue, he wrote, to "work with every elected official and community leader" who is committed to the revitalization of the city.

3/19/2005

### **Series to address coping with death**

The Rev. Richard Fox, pastor of the Holy Trinity/Holy Child Parish Community of Nanticoke, announced the commencement of Coping with The Loss of a Love, a program developed by Judith M. Nowak, a registered nurse who has extensive experience and education in the bereavement and stress-management fields.

The program is not a support group but rather a series of eight, 90-minute presentations for anyone who is grieving the loss of someone close, be it a partner, dear friend or family member. The confidential sequence of weekly gatherings is designed to help people learn and share comfort. Each week's topic will be built upon the previous week's accomplishments, and time will be reserved for questions.

Some of the goals of the presentations are to lend perspective to some of the strong feelings, emotional upheaval and turmoil that frequently emerge after the death of someone special and to provide a yardstick for each individual to measure his or her own progress.

The series will begin April 13 and continue for eight consecutive Wednesdays, ending June 1. All sessions will be conducted at 6:30 p.m. in the church rooms of Holy Trinity Church, on Hanover Street, by Nowak and either Fox or the Rev. Carl Prushinski. Reservations are required for this complimentary series. To register, call the parish office, 735-4833.

Session topics will be: "Grief and Mourning," April 13; "Caring for Yourself," April 20; "Pain and Sadness, Confrontation and Escape," April 27; "Communication with Family and Friends," May 4; "Anger," May 11; "Guilt," May 18; "Reconciliation," May 25; and "Moving on, Growing from What We Have Learned," June 1.

3/18/2005

### **\$65,000 grants help city develop its recovery plan The municipality must still come up with \$15,000 on its own.**

By jfox@leader.net

The state announced a \$50,000 grant Thursday to fund the city's participation in the state's Early Intervention Program, a bid to shore up the municipality's financially precarious situation.

The application for the grant submitted to the state in February described the city's struggle to pay overdue bills and debts to vendors totaling \$370,000, and a recent report by the state Department of Community and Economic Development depicted the municipality as close to insolvency. In addition to the \$50,000 state grant, City Administrator Greg Gulick said the office of state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, secured an additional \$15,000.

The city contracted in February with the Nanticoke Early Intervention Consortium for \$80,000 to study the municipality's current financial status and develop a comprehensive plan to restore a firm financial footing.

With \$65,000 in secured funding, the responsibility for the final \$15,000 falls on the shoulders of the city and will have to be drawn from the general fund, Gulick said. "It has to. There isn't a choice," he said.

The consortium, headed by the Northeast Pennsylvania Alliance and including Keystone Municipal Services and Concord Public Finance, will likely begin the study by mid-April and work with the city for three to four months, Gulick said. The efforts of the group "will formally define the city's financial shortcomings and identify strategies that can be incorporated to operate the city more efficiently," said Yudichak in a written statement.

3/18/2005

### **GNA grad seeks out next level Todd Bargella looks to parlay two-way college experience into a slot with the Pioneers.**

By jpetrucci@leader.net

For the past 14 months, Todd Bargella has done little but work out, travel to tryouts and wait for phone calls, most of which did not bear good news. When Bargella woke up early Thursday morning, he was full of anticipation because finally, he had a real opportunity to be a pro football player. "With all that waiting around, today was like opening presents on Christmas Day," the lineman said.

The biggest gift for Bargella, a former star at Greater Nanticoke Area High School, would be earning a spot on the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Pioneers 21-man, opening-day roster. Bargella, along with 33 other hopefuls, took part in full-contact practice on Thursday as the Pioneers' 11-day training camp got underway at the Riverfront Sports Complex.

Bargella is worth watching for more than his 6-foot-6, 285-pound build or the fact that he's a local product. Of the 12 linemen on the Pioneers roster, only two have arena football experience, and the competition for a roster spot figures to be intense and crucial to the team's fortunes this season.

"Everybody's competing for a starting job," said Bargella, who played at Lackawanna College for two years before earning all-Southern Conference honors as a tight end at Western Carolina, an NCAA Division I-AA program, in 2002 and 2003.

"We have just one guy (Chris Ekweueme) back and he's a highly motivated guy. I'm trying to do my best to feed off him. Everybody's fighting out there."

Although he's new to the arena game, Bargella is plenty prepared. He also played regularly as a defensive tackle at Western Carolina, so he's used to the two-way aspect unique to the eight-on-eight, indoor game. Also, Bargella received highly specialized training for two months in Atlanta in early 2004. He worked with the same trainer who works with NFL players Terrell Owens, Ron Dayne and Dorsey Levens in preparation for the NFL combine.

Being around such a big-time and competitive atmosphere opened Bargella's eyes.

"That's the reason I'm still doing this," said the 23-year-old, who added this would likely be his final effort to jumpstart a pro career. "When they rolled in, they had five cell phones and their Cadillac Escalades ... I'm human, too."

Bargella looked sharp in Thursday's workout, catching a screen pass and racing down the sidelines and also getting to the quarterback from his defensive line spot. He was primarily a blocking tight end in college – he had just five catches in 2003 – but there is still a learning curve as he'll be a true lineman in af2. Bargella said he's focusing on staying low coming out of his stance.

"He played both ways in college and hopefully that transitions into something pretty good here," said Pioneers coach Les Moss.

In the past year, Bargella has returned to Lackawanna College to complete his graduation requirements in sports management. He assisted the school's football program and head coach Mark Duda last season. In between, he earned money working as a bouncer at The Woodlands Inn & Resort.

Bargella is happy to be home. It's where he seems to feel most comfortable and after straying as far as Colorado for two-day tryouts with Arena Football League teams, he's looking forward to playing in front of his family and friends.

His biggest fan, grandfather John Bargella, died in May, and that has fueled his desire to keep pursuing the pros.

"He wanted me to take it to the next level," said Bargella. "It's like playing high school ball all over again. It's exciting."

3/16/2005

### **Cigar factory nearly extinguished**

#### **The longtime eyesore on West Church Street is being torn down with state funding.**

By jfox@leader.net

An eyesore will soon be no more.

A nearly two-year relationship between city officials and the hulking ruins of the former Consolidated Cigar Factory on West Church Street is drawing to a close.

By Tuesday afternoon, 12 truckloads of moldering wood, twisted and rusty rebar and corroded piping had been hauled away from the site as part of a remediation project funded by a state grant.

"We've been trying to get this down since 2003," said city Administrator Greg Gulick.

The removal of debris and the demolition of the remaining structure, a brick stairway tower, are expected to take three weeks and cost \$184,000, Gulick said.

The state grant covers costs up to \$250,000.

A South Carolina-based lumber reclamation company had bought the building and was in the process of demolishing the structure and salvaging reusable timber when part of a wall collapsed and struck an adjacent double-block home in July of 2003.

The company's owner, Mike Nordstrom, was brought up more frequently at city council meetings as work at the factory slowed and then stopped. Nearby residents began to call for the mess to be cleaned up and council began looking for help.

The owner eventually handed over the property to the city, effectively saddling it with the headache of moving a mountain of brick and wood. Watching the removal operation from West Church Street, Mayor John Toole said he was pleased to finally see the end of the problem in sight.

"I'll be happier when I see town homes here if council doesn't knock that down again," he said.

The mayor had been the most vocal proponent of a now-expired agreement with Maryland-based Renaissance Development Partners that entailed the city handing over the rehabilitated land to the group for the construction of seven town homes. The development was contingent on the receipt of additional grant funding from the state.

Members of council questioned the planned transfer of an asset from the hands of the city to the developers. It was a concern echoed by state officials, said Councilman Bill Brown.

State officials "said we're giving you the \$250,000 to clean all this. The city should turn around and sell it at a fair market value," Brown said. "We don't want to keep giving everything away."

Toole, who has been in weekly contact with the Maryland group, says the developers are still interested. "It's ridiculous," Toole said. "We'll see weeds growing here."

The mayor has said the construction of the town homes on the square-shaped parcel overlooking the Nanticoke skyline of church spires and cookie-cutter peak-roofed homes represents an investment of more than \$1 million in the city.

"Imagine what that will do for property values here," he said.

3/15/2005

**GNA students praised for Science Olympiad  
District's team qualified for state competition at Huntington next month.**

By KRISTIN KILE-Times Leader Correspondent

Superintendent Anthony Perrone praised students of the Science Olympiad team at Monday night's Greater Nanticoke Area School Board meeting. The team qualified for states at the 44th annual Pennsylvania Junior Academy of Science Competition at King's College on March 6. It will now compete at the state level on April 29 in Huntington.

Numerous members received awards, including: Kerri Hall, Holly Mitkowski, and Amanda Jones, gold medal in Experimental Design; Hall and Mitkowski, bronze medal in Bottle Rockets; Hall and Grace Turner, silver medal in Reach for the Stars; Keri Height and Julia Saunders, silver medal in Awesome Aquifer; and Jason Lokuta and Jared Kmielowz, fourth place in Science Crime Busters.

In other business, Honor Society inductions will be held 6 p.m. Sunday, May 26.

Also, the board hired Wendy Skoniecki as a family development specialist in the family center program at \$13.50 per hour after completing training. The board hired Robert Hrobak as a cleaning person.

Retirement letters of intent were accepted from teachers Beverly Banks, Joann Dekutoski, Ronald Bau and David Guzofsky for the end of the school year.

The board approved an extension of Eric Kubasek's position as technology assistant 10 months to a 12-month, seven-hours-per-day position.

3/15/2005

**Nanticoke developer pick rapped  
Susquehanna Valley Development gets authority's nod for redevelopment plan.**

By jfox@leader.net

The General Municipal Authority, a body created to coordinate redevelopment of downtown, voted Monday to accept the Susquehanna Valley Development Group as the developer of a parking, office and residential project on Main Street.

It was a divisive decision that drew the ire of local government officials and state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke.

In choosing the Susquehanna Valley Development Group, the authority passed over a competing proposal from Dominick Ortolani, the developer of the Lexington Village senior housing complex.

Robert Bray, a member of the authority, said both proposals were very similar but Susquehanna Valley Development Group presented a plan with a "sense of more expertise" when representatives presented the project last month.

Asked to describe specifics of the accepted developer's plan for Main Street extending one block north from Lower Broadway, Bray said it included a parking garage, office space and perhaps residential space. Ortolani's proposal, based on a site study and drafted using a combination of \$25,000 of authority funds and private matching funds, also included a parking garage and office space.

The decision to choose the Susquehanna Valley Development Group was made after a brief executive session during which authority Solicitor Susan Maza advised authority members that no contract existed between Ortolani and the authority.

Councilmen John Bushko and Bill Brown, both present, along with Ortolani disputed that claim and said authority minutes did not reflect what actually took place during the July 2004 authority meeting. Maza, who was not solicitor at the time, said her stance that a contract did not exist was based on two conversations with the former solicitor.

"It looks like he should have the next opportunity to come up with his plan here," Brown said in favor of Ortolani, citing an expenditure of what Ortolani said was more than \$25,000 of his own funds.

Bray said a quick decision was necessary otherwise the authority may lose a \$1.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Agency.

"We have some money that was made available to us that if we don't act quickly we're going to lose it, and when I say quickly I mean the next 30 days," Bray said.

U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, addressing City Council last month said the authority has until May 31 to develop a plan or stand losing the grant. Kanjorski said the grant was earmarked to build an annex to the authority-owned Kanjorski Center in Nanticoke to accommodate an expansion for HealthNow NY, a Medicare claims processing operation that works inside the building.

Bushko, citing a connection between the Susquehanna Valley Development Group and Robert Yoder, a developer he said walked away from a \$30 million project four years ago after a disagreement with the authority, criticized the decision.

"I think hiring Yoder is a mistake," Bushko said.

Mayor John Toole stood up to praise the action by the authority. "I have to congratulate the board," he said. "They made a decision and now we have a developer."

"Here we are again," said Yudichak, reached by phone after the meeting. "We have Paul Kanjorski and John Toole strong-arming the authority." Yudichak said the group associated with Yoder was chosen because of a past and present relationship with the congressman. Ortolani, he said, was dismissed because he was not "Kanjorski's developer."

Yoder contributed to Kanjorski's campaign in October of last year.

3/13/2005

**Rolling on with life  
Wheelchair-bound bowlers find fun and competition when they hit the lanes.**

By dkonopki@leader.net

Rolling down the alley two feet to the right of its intended target, the bowling ball looked as if it had no chance to hit the No. 7 pin – the only one left standing after Doris Merrill confidently knocked down nine on her first roll.

Then the “Merrill Wave” began.

The 81-year-old Nanticoke woman wildly moved her arms to the left and the ball began to drift in that direction, eventually knocking down the pin and securing a spare during the fifth annual United Spinal Association Tournament.

“I don’t know how it started,” said the animated and energetic Merrill about the wave. “It’s just a habit. I can’t stop doing it. I don’t know if the added wind helps the ball or not, but sometimes it works. There’s something about it.”

Merrill was one of three dozen paralyzed bowlers sponsored by Veterans Affairs programs from Wilkes-Barre, the Bronx, N.Y., and Castle Point, N.Y., who competed in the event Thursday at Chacko’s Family Bowling Center. The competition featured six divisions: manual open, manual novice, manual quadriplegic, ramp division, ramp division (ages 60 and older) and push stick. Each bowler competed in two games.

Sixteen other bowlers competed at events in Manhattan and Buffalo and those scores were faxed to the Wilkes-Barre tournament. The two-game scores from the three sites were compared and awards were given to the top three finishers in each of the six divisions. Award winners who competed in Wilkes-Barre received their plaques, and winners from the other sites will receive their awards in the mail.

Merrill took second place in the ramp division (60 and older) with 278 pins for the two games, placing second to Castle Point’s Ed Horvat (289). Dallas resident Andy Chacko took third place in the division with a 276. Merrill and Chacko were the only Luzerne County residents who competed in the tournament.

“I’m just out there to have fun and try to improve every time,” said Chacko, who has won medals at several state and national events since he began competing eight years ago. “It really doesn’t matter (in what place) I finish. It’s a chance to spend some time with the guys. When you’re at events like this, you see people who are in worse shape than you are. No matter what’s wrong with you, you’ll always find someone who’s in worse shape.”

Chacko and Merrill are more than competitors – they’re friends who usually get together to bowl the first and third Wednesday of each month. At Thursday’s event, Merrill defeated Chacko by one pin in each of the games.

“I wasn’t even aware of the score,” said Merrill, who has battled multiple sclerosis for most of her life. She’s been in a wheelchair since the age of 23. “The scores aren’t important. Andy and I are good friends. The important thing is being able to participate. We learn from each other.”

Merrill spent most of the tournament cheering the other bowlers, even Horvat and the other competitors in her division.

“We’re not envious of each other,” said the former teacher at Greater Nanticoke Area and Wilkes College who will compete in ramp bowling and swimming at the Senior Olympics in June in Pittsburgh. “We enjoy helping and encouraging each other. If I can give someone a tip or a little encouragement, I’ll do it. I don’t care if it’s someone I’m competing against or not. I’ll keep doing it as long as it’s fun and people don’t take it too seriously.”

Like the other ramp bowlers, Chacko places two hands on the 16-pound ball while it’s on the ramp, adjusting it slightly before letting it go. After each shot, his brother Ed retrieved the ball from the ball return and wiped it with a towel before giving it back to him. Merrill’s son Paul provided the same service for his mother.

The tournament is used by some bowlers, including Chacko, as preparation for the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. The event started in New Jersey before moving to Chacko’s four years ago. The first three tournaments were sponsored by the Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association but changed hands to the United Spinal Association last year, allowing paralyzed non-veterans to compete.

“This unites veterans and all Americans who have spinal cord injuries,” said program manager Patrick Donaghey, whose organization is based in Jackson Heights, N.Y. “There are some very talented people here. To see some of the scores reaching 200 and above is really eye-opening.”

3/6/2005

### **Nanticoke Area Notes**

By: Pamela Urbanski

Take a ride on this 'Carousel'

Do you ever wish for a less hectic lifestyle? For a chance to live in a time when life traveled at a slower pace? A time when love and romance seemed less complicated and people lived more for the day than for tomorrow.

For many, those days seem to be few and far between. But, some young performers can, and will take you back to another place and time when they present Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical "Carousel."

Allow yourself to forget about winter and the snowy, cold weather. The high school auditorium has been transformed into a Maine coastal village at the end of the 19th century.

Friends (talented Greater Nanticoke Area actors and actresses) are gathering at the midway on a beautiful spring day. They're excited winter is over and the carnival has come to town. Everyone wants a ride on the new carousel.

I was fortunate to sit in on a rehearsal and was totally amazed, but not surprised by the talent and drive of these students.

Directors Karen and Bruce Phair, once again, have put together quite a production. "We have a cast of 50 students on stage and had approximately 25 students who helped construct and paint the set," said Mrs. Phair.

GNA Music Director Nancy Evans will direct an ensemble of more than 30 students, many of whom will sing solos and they're great!

Amy Bono plays Carrie Pepperidge, a ditzzy, flirty girl who likes to have a good time. "I really enjoy playing this character because she is a very emotional girl, but she's also very loving," Amy said. She loves to dress the part. The costumes her and all the students wear really add to the play.

Amy is very talented and boy can she belt out the tunes! She is grateful to Mrs. Phair for encouraging her to be part of this and other plays. "Mrs. Phair really inspired me and gave me the confidence I need to perform like I do," she added.

Dan Pascoe, a senior GNA student, portrays Bill Bigelow, a rough and tumble, carefree, carnival barker. I am proud to say that Daniel is my nephew. I know of his talent, but I'm always taken aback when I see him perform and hear him sing. He will give you goose bumps! "I love to perform," he said. He admires Mr. and Mrs. Phair for their patience. "Sometimes, I wonder how they do what they do," he said laughing. "I have learned so much, not only lessons of drama, but lessons of life," Dan offered.

Kyra Phair plays a heavenly friend. She is the one who escorts Billy (Dan Pascoe) down to earth after he is allowed to return for one day to make things right. Since she is the daughter of Bruce and Karen Phair, I couldn't help but ask her what it was like to perform under mom and dad. "It's really great that I could be a part of the play this year," she said, adding that there is always a lot of talk at home about the play. She likes being part of the conversation. "My dad and mom talk about what needs to be done, how things are going, things like that. It makes me feel good to be able to give my opinion."

The production also features dancing. Joe Milchiona from the Joan Harris Center is choreographer. He has brought together dancers as young as first grade to high-school age. These kids will have you tappin' your feet.

Tom McGrady, another talented student, plays Jigger Cragin, a not-so-nice fellow who always seems to be at the center of trouble. He, too, will amaze you with his voice and acting ability. For him, the best part is being able to pretend he is someone else. "In life, it's hard being good all the time," Tom said laughing. "It is fun to play a character that breaks the rules." He is hoping the community will take the time to attend this play. "You know, so many times Nanticoke students get a bad rap. But, as you can see here tonight, there is a lot of good kids with a lot of talent." He is so right!

It's now about two hours since I first arrived, around 8:30 p.m., and these kids still are going strong. Many of them tell me this play has created new friendships. Students Alyssa Waugh, Stacey Lokuta and Cassie Dennis have made some new friends. "I think we all are surprised at the friends we have made," Cassie said. "The kids we probably would have never bothered with have become our good friends." Most of the students that I talked with echoed the same feelings.

This production features many popular songs including "If I Loved You," "June is Bustin' Out" and "You'll Never Walk Alone." Bring your tissues, you'll need them!

The show will run Friday and Saturday, March 11-12 at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, March 13, at 2 p.m. in the high school auditorium. General admission is just \$5.

(For more information visit the GNA website at [www.gnasd.com](http://www.gnasd.com))

3/6/2005

### **Perrone raps wrecking of skate rink**

By badams@leader.net

An ice skating rink the city built this season near Greater Nanticoke Area High School's football stadium was short-lived. School Superintendent Anthony Perrone on Friday expressed disappointment that vandals ruined the rink last month soon after it opened. "There were kids down there (skating) one day."

The temporary rink was built at the bottom of the parking lot behind the high school. Perrone said that despite spotlights in the area, someone in a truck drove onto the ice one night.

He said the vehicle damaged the ice and the sandbags on one side that had helped contain the water. "The next day we came in and the water was all gone."

Perrone said the school district tries to make the buildings and grounds accessible for children's use. "It's a changing world, I think."

The rink was located last season along Prospect Street, but the new location had more parking and did not require a liner. The fire department filled it with water.

"When you try to do something good, it only takes one person to ruin it," said city Administrator Greg Gulick. He used another example in which soccer fields on Earth Conservancy land in Hanover Township were vandalized last March. Several men were criminally charged.

Perrone said it is not known who ruined the skating rink.

Gulick said the city would have rebuilt the rink if the weather had been cold enough. He said this season's act of vandalism won't prevent the city from building another rink on school grounds next winter.

3/4/2005

### **Public health and safety**

#### **The condemnations continue**

#### **Tenants of an Oak Street property are lodged in a hotel after officials take action.**

By jfox@leader.net

As part of a stepped-up crackdown on problem properties, city officials condemned a home in the city's Hanover section Thursday, the second condemnation this week.

"It's a continuation of our crackdown on bad properties," said City Administrator Greg Gulick. Conducting a follow-up visit to check violations at the rear of 108 Oak St., code enforcement officer Rich Wiaterowski was surprised to find someone renting the small white home.

Wiaterowski began paying attention to the property several months ago when it was listed for sale by a real estate agent. The property was not livable at that time, he said.

When he returned Thursday, he found Eric Winters, 33, his fiancée, Lisa Bolmer, 28, and her two young children living in the home.

The house, Wiaterowski said, was in "tremendous disrepair and unsafe."

Live electrical wires hung from a hole in the kitchen ceiling, wires were exposed in the bathroom and a bedroom and it has extensive water damage, Wiaterowski said.

Winters and Bolmer moved into the home at the end of December with the assistance of the Commission on Economic Opportunity, a nonprofit organization that offers housing “startup funds” to those who need it.

CEO paid \$900 to cover the first month’s rent and a security deposit for the couple.

After they moved in, the two had an arrangement with owner Gerald Altavilla of Wilkes-Barre that they could live rent free in exchange for working on the home, the tenants said.

When city officials arrived to inspect and then condemn the home, Bolmer was surprised, then upset.

“I can’t even explain how I feel about this,” she said from the doorway of her the home. “This is the second time this has happened to me.” She had a similar experience with a rental property in Berwick, she said.

Officials at CEO were “shocked” when they were informed of the situation, Winters said. The organization is temporarily lodging the couple and Bolmer’s children in a hotel while they seek alternative housing.

“We are stuck in a hard place again,” Winters said. “I’m mad at the so-called landlords for lying to us.”

When they moved in Altavilla said the house’s kitchen needed to be refurbished but said nothing of past problems with code violations, Winters said.

Dave Ritter, director of the housing/outreach program for CEO, said the commission depends on would-be renters to investigate the conditions of apartments and homes.

Landlords are then asked to sign a certificate stating the residences are “habitable,” he said.

3/3/2005

**Councilwoman: Downtown needs a plan  
Sporadic redevelopment efforts are cause for concern, says Yvonne Bozinski. Planner is advised.**

By jfox@leader.net

Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski at Wednesday’s council meeting called for the creation of a plan for downtown redevelopment.

The seemingly haphazard selection of sites for possible development in the economically flagging downtown business district with “no general overall plan” is cause for concern, she said.

In making her point, she repeatedly referred to a meeting with state officials at which the city was advised to “get a planner to plan out the city.”

The city’s General Municipal Authority, an autonomous body that owns and maintains the downtown Kanjorski Center and has taken the lead in a push for redevelopment, met Monday with a developer interested in the city and has plans to meet with another developer on March 14, said Mayor John Toole.

As much as some members would like to see a map for redevelopment drafted, that is “really a municipal authority decision,” he said.

The South Valley Partnership, an organization that has called for more economic and governmental cooperation between communities in the southern Wyoming Valley, has asked the city for about \$100,000 to join other regional communities in hiring a city planner to develop an economic development map for the area.

Joe Lach, the secretary of the organization and the solicitor for Plymouth Township, stood up to praise Bozinski’s comments at the meeting.

“This region and, more importantly, this city needs a comprehensive economic development plan,” Lach said. “Its entirely different from what a developer comes into to do. A developer comes in with an agenda.”

“All around us, Carbondale, Pittston, people are following this model,” he said.

Toole said Dominick Ortolani, the developer of the Lexington Village senior housing complex, has spent \$25,000, matched by \$25,000 from the authority, for a study regarding the possibility of a parking complex on Main Street.

In other business:

- Councilman Bill Brown said the recently received \$300,000 tax anticipation note has allowed the city to pay vendors who had been increasingly insistent in their calls for payment from the economically challenged municipality.

“A lot of vendors are happy,” Brown said. “The checks were written out.”

- The results of an environmental study of the city’s senior center conducted prior to renovations there indicate asbestos is present. The presence of the environmentally hazardous material will likely result higher renovation costs, said city Administrator Greg Gulick. “You’re talking a lot of money.”

“We have quite a bit of work there,” Bushko said.

The city plans to conduct some exploratory work to determine the extent of water damage to the building’s structure.

3/2/2005

**Building code violations  
Two problem properties in Nanticoke condemned  
Buildings, at Shea and East Main streets, are owned Dr. Janusz Wolanin of Kingston.**

By jfox@leader.net

There is little to distinguish the two buildings at the corner of Shea and East Main streets from the rest of the properties in this struggling downtown.

Many stand vacant, and nearly all are somewhat worse for wear and ragged around the edges.

But a small red poster pasted at eye level on 121 E. Main St. declares the red brick building and its tan brick neighbor "unfit for human habitation," municipal shorthand for the crumbling state of interior disrepair that led the city to condemn both properties Monday.

It wasn't the first time the problem properties have attracted attention. During the past two years police have responded to the buildings 35 times. The calls have ranged from domestic violence and drug activity to rape and a shooting, and have resulted in several arrests, police said.

"I've been dealing with activities stemming from that building for years," said Sgt. Kevin Grevera of the Nanticoke Police Department.

A resident of one of the apartments has already been displaced by the condemnation; another family and a business owner were given one week to relocate.

The city's code officer, Rich Wiaterowski, condemned the two buildings, which contain four apartments and two storefronts, after police were called to the address yet again when a resident reported a burglary. Responding officers discovered multiple code violations inside the two properties.

According to police, problems with the rental properties include: at least eight holes in the structure exposing rooms in two of the apartments to the elements, dangerous electrical wiring, plumbing leaks, smashed windows, doors and walls, and a significant accumulation of trash.

A trash chute at the one of the buildings, extending the entire height of the three-story structure, was crammed with rubbish, including drug paraphernalia, used condoms and furniture, Grevera said. "When we went in it was just deplorable."

It also appears that people have been squatting in two vacant apartments that contained food wrappers, beer cans, and a bathtub full of human waste, Grevera said.

"It's a mess," said city Administrator Greg Gulick. The action by the city, he added, is "part of our continuing crackdown on derelict properties."

In July, police sent the building's owner, Dr. Janusz Wolanin of Kingston, a letter notifying him of several problems with the buildings and a request to contact law enforcement. Wolanin never responded, police said.

Grevera said certificates of occupancy for the property were never obtained by Wolanin and he could face a \$1,000 fine per occupied unit dating back to 2003.

A call to Wolanin seeking comment Tuesday was not immediately returned.

Some neighbors say the tenants of the two buildings have been perennial problems.

"They throw things out of the windows and bust windshields," said Dan Lutz, 42, who lives on the 100 block of East Main Street. "We call the cops and they come down and say they can't do nothing."

Carol Moyer, 34, owner of nearby Carol Floral and Gifts, said of the situation: "It's horrible." Tenants, she said, spit from the windows and last year struck a moving car with a piece of metal thrown from an upper story.

"I'm familiar with the building," said Mayor John Toole. "On the outside it doesn't look that bad. From what they're telling me, the people they rented it to really made a mess of it."

The owner of Joan's Tag Service, a business that has occupied one of the two storefronts for several weeks according to neighbors, declined to comment on the situation.

2/27/2005

Letters to the editor - Citizens' Voice

### **Dinner with Sgt. Grabowski showed importance of caring**

Having just arrived home from a fine dinner honoring Al (Red) Grabowski, retired Nanticoke City police sergeant, who was chosen to have his heart's desire fulfilled by the kind folks of Manor Care, Kingston, I decided I had to share this story.

Red's heart's desire was to have dinner with the police at an Italian restaurant. Manor Care contacted our department and expressed Red's wish.

To do it right in the Wyoming Valley, if you want Italian, you see Pasquale Festa of Pasquale's in Hanover Township.

We picked Red up in a cruiser, as requested, and transported him from one of the most caring environments I have ever seen, Manor Care in Kingston. It felt great to know people take care of one of our own in the special way they do.

Red was surprised to see 25 friends at the door of Pasquale's, some uniformed, some not. I wasn't surprised. Who wouldn't want to see Red, and who wouldn't want to eat at Pasquale's?

Once there, we were met by Pasquale, Judy Griffith, Corrine Meduec, and Karen Kiwak, the staff at the restaurant. As usual, they outdid themselves in service, preparation, atmosphere and taste. The day was a huge success for our deserving friend.

As we left, I approached Pasquale and took out my wallet to settle the bill. Here's where it gets good. Cops are used to giving orders, and believe me, when it's a food order, we're not bashful. Before I could take out a dime, Pasquale closed my wallet and said, "You serve the public; we serve the public. Red served longer than anyone here. This one's on me."

Our friend Pasquale picked up the tab for 25 people and reminded me of one important thing: Each one of us, no matter who, is very much the same, and when we are able, we should remember to take care of each other just like Red and Pasquale and Manor Care.

Grazie, Pasquale!

Sgt. Kevin J. Grevera

Nanticoke Police Department

2/27/2005

### **Nanticoke Area Notes**

By: Pamela Urbanski

Rec Project is moving forward

The Greater Nanticoke Area Recreation Project continues to move forward and on schedule.

On Wednesday, March 3, at 7 p.m., Julie McMonagle, director of the Pennsylvania Environmental Council and project manager, and the steering committee will meet at the Newport Township Municipal Building.

On the agenda for this meeting are the draft report and the final draft of the map of the park.

"What we will do at this meeting is present a layout of the park," McMonagle said.

She tells me that over the last six months, the committee has been meeting to decide where soccer fields, football fields, the skate park, walking trails, etc. will be placed.

"We have a very tight configuration since there is not as much buildable land as we thought," she added. "One of the reasons is because of the railroad that runs through the Lower Broadway section where the park will be built."

She tells me they have worked through this minor inconvenience. The draft report, a summary of how the different phases of the park came to be, who has been involved and what work they have done so far, will be discussed.

Julie knows critical stages are yet to come and is encouraged by one organization's commitment to the park. "I am pleased that the South Valley Partnership, has stepped up to the plate and said it will be responsible for the development and management of the park."

The South Valley Partnership is made up of concerned citizens from the municipalities of Nanticoke, Plymouth and Newport Township whose main mission is economic development.

Through this development they hope to improve the quality of life for residents, to attract business and preserve the ecosystems that exist in the municipalities.

"I know we are a society that is used to instant gratification. We don't like to wait for things. We want them now. But a project of this size takes time.

"There is a lot of red tape when dealing with land and funding. Be patient. A lot of people are working very hard to make this project work. Get involved if you can," McMonagle stated.

For more information call Julie at 718-6507.

Spaghetti dinner to be held

The Altar and Rosary Society of St. Francis Church will hold its annual spaghetti dinner Sunday, March 6, at the parish center on East Green Street.

Andrea Josefowicz, society president, tells me a new, delicious sauce will be featured.

Take-outs are available starting at 11 a.m. with containers being provided. Sit-down dinners will be served from noon to 5 p.m.

Cost is \$7 for adults and \$3.50 for children. Children under six are free.

Tickets will be sold after all masses at St. Francis Church or you can call Andrea at 735-5381 or Gerri at 735-2058.

Help also is needed to make the event a success again this year. Call one of the above telephone numbers to sign up.

2/26/2005

**PEOPLE LIKE ME: Lisa Owens**

**Work keeps grandma sky-high**

**LCCC secretary loves her job so much that she sky-dived to raise funds for the school.**

By vrose@leader.net

Five years ago, Lisa Owens celebrated her 65th birthday by jumping out of an airplane. And this great-grandmother hasn't slowed down since. Owens works full-time as a secretary in the counseling department at Luzerne County Community College and is president of the school's alumni association.

"I have the best job in the world," Owens said. "I can't wait to come to work. Most people dread Mondays, but I start getting psyched up for work on Sunday afternoon."

Owens proved her dedication to LCCC in August 2000 by making her parachute jump. She took the plunge to raise money for the creation of a children's community center at the school.

The Hunlock Creek resident took skydiving lessons before making her jump near Hazleton. Strapped to her instructor, Don Kellner, Owens had a free fall of 5,000 feet before she pulled the ripcord and floated to the ground.

For Owens, her first and only sky dive was the thrill of a lifetime.

"It was unbelievable," she said. "When I left the plane, you didn't know how fast you're falling because you're above the clouds.

"It's like a sci-fi movie -- everything looks surrealistic," Owens added. "When the clouds separate, the sky resembled rivers and lakes."

However, once she got below the clouds, reality set in.

"I started hearing noise from ground level, and I was bummed because I knew it was about over."

Her jump raised \$1,100 in pledges for the children's center. The project never came about, so the money was placed in a scholarship fund at LCCC, she said.

A mother of four and grandmother of 10, Owens was born and raised in Germany. She grew up under Adolph Hitler's regime. She developed an interest in skydiving as a child by watching German soldiers parachute in her homeland.

"Jumping out of an airplane has long been a dream of mine," she said.

Owens came to the United States at age 21 in 1957 and took up residence in the Bronx, N.Y. She moved to Nanticoke 30 years ago, because her second husband, Frank, is a native of the town.

Owens spent 18 years working in a Sweet Valley sewing factory. When the factory shut down, she enrolled at LCCC and earned a two-year degree in office management.

"Going to college was an easy decision. I was too young for Social Security and too old to get a job that wasn't menial."

Looking back, Owens says the factory closing was a blessing in disguise.  
"It led to me getting a new life. This is the place I want to be."

2/26/2005

### **Newport probing why fire department didn't respond**

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Staff Writer

Nanticoke City and Newport Township officials are investigating what they hope is an isolated incident involving their fire departments. On Saturday, Feb. 12, a fire broke out in a dumpster at Marty's Blue Room, a restaurant in the Sheatown section of Newport Township. Luzerne County 911 attempted to dispatch the Newport Township fire department, and when there was no response, turned to Nanticoke. "The dumpster fire, from what I understand-I wasn't there-Newport Township didn't man their apparatus at all," Nanticoke Fire Chief Mike Bohan said.

Newport Township Commissioner Joseph Rymar said the matter is under investigation.

"Based on what I know, it appears nobody was available," he said. "We are aware of it, and we're taking a look at it, and we'll take steps to make sure it doesn't happen in the future."

It was the first time Rymar had heard of Newport Township failing to respond, and a 20-year veteran of the fire department told him it was a situation that had never happened before.

Newport Township has three paid drivers, and the rest of the department is volunteer. The township has historically had 24-hour, seven-day-a-week coverage, but last October the commissioners opted to put volunteers on duty during weekends rather than paid drivers, for financial reasons.

"We are taking the steps necessary to not only protect public safety, but to practice fiscal responsibility and operate within the financial constraints we have," Rymar said.

In the event of a fire, all firefighters are notified through the pagers they are equipped with, Rymar said, adding that there has never been a failure to respond to pages in the past.

Nanticoke firefighters should assist Newport Township's department whenever they are needed, but not be the first responders in Newport Township's place, Nanticoke City Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski told council during its work session this week. Mayor John Toole pointed out that it could become a liability issue.

"Hey, if somebody calls you for help, what are you going to do?" Nanticoke City Administrator Greg Gulick said. "If we're called, we're going to go."

If there is an emergency in Newport Township and its fire department does not respond, Nanticoke is second due on Luzerne County's 911-protocol list, Gulick said.

Bohan said Nanticoke and Newport Township have a good working relationship, and the city will always assist the township's department.

However, he noted that there is a nine-minute delay while Newport Township is dispatched before Nanticoke can respond to the call, which could be a problem. Fires can spread fast, and the first few minutes are critical.

Hanover Township is the only municipality Nanticoke has a signed mutual aid agreement with, but fire departments routinely help each other out, Gulick said.

"Some towns have signed mutual aid agreement, some don't," Gulick said. "Everybody works together. That's the only way to survive any more."

Drawing up a formal agreement between the two departments is one option, and regionalizing or combining the departments is another.

"We will complete our investigation into the matter and then, based on what we find, make a decision on what we will do in the future," Rymar said. "At this point in time, based upon the manner in which we've handled these things before, we intend to go forward with the present setup we have."

Lack of manpower and financial struggles are issues fire departments all over the state face.

"Firefighting is labor-intensive. You need a lot of bodies to throw at a fire," Bohan said. "We keep hearing 'regionalization.' Maybe it's time we sit down and do something about it."

2/24/2005

### **Dispute could end municipal authority**

#### **City council fears it is being left out of redevelopment decisions.**

By jfox@leader.net

Distressed by a lack of communication between the city's General Municipal Authority and elected government, council members discussed taking action to dissolve the authority at Wednesday's council meeting.

The authority, an autonomous body created by council and staffed by members appointed by the mayor, owns and manages the downtown Kanjorski Center and plays a large part in redevelopment plans for the city.

But a gulf between the authority and council has left elected officials in the dark regarding plans to reinvest in a faltering downtown.

Councilman Bill Brown spoke out about an authority meeting he and Councilman John Bushko attended Tuesday. Both men waited during a nearly two-hour executive session after which authority officials promptly adjourned, telling the two they had discussed redevelopment plans but refusing to elaborate, Bushko said.

"We're the elected officials and we're being shut out," Brown said. "City council has little or no input into these meetings and their plans for downtown."

Brown said he and other members of council would look into ways to dissolve the authority or otherwise move the locus of redevelopment planning

back to council before next week's meeting. His comments came after U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, criticized city officials Saturday for failing to avail themselves fully of funding for redevelopment during the past five years.

"If we don't get on the same page ... we're in big trouble," Bushko said, adding that his experience at Tuesday's meeting was "what tipped the scales."

City Clerk Michael Yurkowski said council has not received minutes from authority meetings in more than a year.

The authority has until May 31 to propose an economic development plan or face losing a \$1.5 million federal grant. So far, any plans that might be in the works have been developed independently of council, Brown said.

In other business:

- Council accepted a bid from Brdaric Excavating of Luzerne for \$184,000 to begin clearing the site of the former Consolidated Cigar building on West Church Street. The bid was significantly less than the other three received by the city, all of which exceeded \$440,000. Ben Sevenski, city engineer, said the differential was likely due to the fact Brdaric operates its own landfill, decreasing disposal costs.
- Council announced plans to apply for \$423,601 in Community Development Block Grant funding for 2005 to lease a fire truck; defray administration expenses; and repave East Church Street between Market and Walnut streets, East Noble Street between Market and Walnut streets, West Union Street between Hanover and Market streets and East Union Street between Kosciuszko and College streets; .

02/24/2005

### **Nanticoke wants answers from authority**

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Staff Writer

Nanticoke City Council wants to know what's going on behind closed doors at the municipal authority.

At stake is a \$1.5 million federal Economic Development Authority grant for downtown for which the municipal authority has to submit a plan by May 30.

Councilman Bill Brown said at Wednesday night's council meeting that he and Councilman John Bushko were forced to wait outside a special municipal authority meeting for an hour and a half Tuesday night. At that time, the board was having a closed-door executive session to discuss the downtown redevelopment project, he said.

"We are elected officials, and we are being shut out," Brown said. "City council has little or no input at these meetings."

"If we don't get on the same page with what's going on, we're in trouble," Bushko said.

He said he learned Saturday for the first time that a developer had walked away from a \$15 million project on Market Street because of difficulties with the municipal authority.

The project would have involved buildings with businesses on the first floor and apartments above, with a parkade; grants and funding had already been secured for it, Bushko said.

Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski said she had not even been informed about that project.

During a three-hour municipal authority meeting Saturday, Congressman Paul Kanjorski, D-11, railed at city officials for doing nothing for six years, but Brown blamed the municipal authority for keeping council in the dark.

City Clerk Michael Yurkowski said it is customary for the municipal authority to provide minutes of its meetings for council, but has not done so for more than a year.

Yurkowski also questioned whether regular business could be discussed during executive session.

Mayor John Toole admitted it was a mistake to form the municipal authority in the 1990s, but said to dissolve it would be expensive and lead to a big legal battle.

Later in the meeting, he said the municipal authority board has four new members and a new solicitor who may not be aware of the Sunshine Act - the state's open meetings law - and noted they are working on a project at "crunch time."

In other business, council accepted a low bid of \$184,000 from Brdaric Excavation of Luzerne for demolition and cleanup of the former cigar mill site, 150-174 W. Church St.

Engineer Ben Sevenski of Pasonick Engineering said the city has received grant funding for the project.

Brown said the city has received its \$300,000 tax anticipation note from M&T Bank, and the money should be ready Thursday.

Prior to the meeting, council held a hearing for plans to spend \$423,601 in federal Community Development Block Grant money.

The city will apply to use \$314,422 of the grant, which must be used in low- to moderate-income areas, for street reconstruction, Brown said.

The streets on the list are East Church from Market to Walnut, East Noble from Market to Walnut, East Union from Kosciuszko to College Street, and West Union from Hanover to Market. He estimated work should begin in late summer or fall, if the use is approved.

Additionally, the city wants to spend \$33,000 for its fire truck lease and \$76,178 for administration, Brown said.

2/24/2005

### **Loss of U.S. funds would be devastating, officials warn**

By James Conmy , Staff Writer

Luzerne County elected leaders dread the ramifications the proposed 2006 federal budget could have on local projects.

President Bush's spending plan consolidates the \$4.7 billion in federal Office of Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block

Grant program with 15 other programs into a new \$3.7 billion initiative.

In 2004, Luzerne County communities received about \$10.8 million in block grants. They were used to subsidize public services like United Rehabilitation Services and conduct emergency demolitions, like a block of dilapidated row homes on River Street in Wilkes-Barre City.

Several streets were paved and curbs allowing wheelchair-bound people better access were installed.

"This money goes right back into the community and that is a major concern," Luzerne County Commissioner Greg Skrepenak said Wednesday.

"One of the goals of our administration was to help the communities as much as possible."

The county distributes around \$6 million annually to a pool of 24 communities. Each of the county's boroughs and townships is eligible once every three years.

Luzerne County's four cities - Hazleton, Nanticoke, Pittston and Wilkes-Barre - each receive annual allotments.

Pittston Mayor Michael Lombardo is confident the city's block grant will find its way back into the federal budget. He does fear it will be less than the average \$430,000.

The funding has been used in recent years to build the Pittston library, Riverfront Park and renovate the fire station.

"Most of the projects we do in the city have this type of funding in it," Lombardo said. "Without the funding, we wouldn't have been able to get them done. It's obvious why we would have such great concern."

In Nanticoke, the money has recently been used to lease fire engines and demolish blighted structures. Any cuts would be devastating, Mayor John Toole said.

"It's going to really hurt these communities," Toole said.

U.S. Rep. Paul E. Kanjorski, D-11, will fight the proposed budget. The money is not only needed to pay for projects, but satisfy local matches for federal and state grants, Kanjorski said.

"You just don't lose that money; you lose all the money that money leverages," Kanjorski said. "It will set Pennsylvania back considerably."

For example, Wilkes-Barre officials used \$131,000 in block grant funding for its local match for a \$450,000 grant. The money was used to buy an aerial ladder truck.

Lombardo hopes senators Arlen Specter and Rick Santorum, along with Kanjorski, will fight to restore the money. He also anticipates Gov. Ed Rendell will do the same.

"You're taking away programs that benefit people," Lombardo said. "It's the old adage: 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it.'"

"This isn't broken."

Skrepenak also is confident the block grants will end up in the budget, but fears they could be drastically less.

"We know losing the CDBG funding will sting," Skrepenak said. "But we have to figure out what else we can do."

"We would try to find as much money as we can to do community development programs, but we can't afford them all."

2/20/2005

### **Nanticoke's financial woes fester**

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Staff Writer

Nanticoke City has dug itself into a deep financial hole, and some city officials think it's time to put down the shovels and climb out.

The administration's list of "aged payables" - another term for past-due bills - stretches to 23 pages and contains amounts from \$15 to \$125,987.

And more bills are coming in all the time.

Blue Cross recently sent Nanticoke a notice to pay up or have its health insurance cut off. The Frank P. Crossin Agency nearly pulled the plug on the city's liability insurance for non-payment, according to Nanticoke Councilman Bill Brown.

"They always threaten," said City Administrator Greg Gulick. "They don't cancel us. We're always late with those payments."

Records state the city owes Mike's Service Center \$9,323, and \$2,918 of that amount was due for more than three months. The owner showed up at the municipal building Wednesday to see if he could get some of the money that was overdue, Brown said.

"Here's a local guy who has a business downtown, putting fuel in our vehicles," Brown said. "A little guy could go under," Councilman John Bushko added.

The city owes vendors a total of \$263,986 as of this past week, and must make a payment of \$59,600 to J.P. Mascaro and Sons from the refuse fund, Brown said.

Until September 2004, the city's bills were more or less paid on time.

"From October on, we shut the door on paying almost everybody," Brown said. "The city didn't have any funds coming in."

Nanticoke did receive some earned income tax revenue from Berkheimer Associates and money from its Adelphia cable franchise fee. But officials still had to borrow \$62,908 from the refuse account on Jan. 24. They also took \$112,000 from the sewer fund to pay health and liability insurance and payroll for December and January, Brown said.

Tossing IOUs in the refuse and sewer funds is not a new practice for city officials.

"They must have taken thousands from it over the past five years," Brown said.

"It's robbing Peter to pay Paul," Bushko said.

Council voted recently to start a separate account for the refuse fund in order to keep track of the money. Previously, it was lumped in with the general fund.

Brown estimated \$10,000 would be left in the general fund after this week's bills and payroll, not enough to pay off the past-due accounts.

Fortunately for the city, council received word Tuesday night that M&T Bank, the only one of 18 banks solicited by the city's financial consultant to show interest, would give Nanticoke a \$300,000 tax anticipation note.

The TAN should be available for the city on Feb. 22. It has to be paid back in monthly installments of \$75,000 by June 30, and city officials are

determined to prove they can do it for two years in a row.

"We made sure the TAN was paid back last year, because of the unpaid \$555,000 TAN from 2001 the city defaulted on," Brown said.

When the tax money comes in, "it has to be put on the side, and we have to keep a close eye on it."

The city had to take out a \$1 million 10-year bond in 2004 to pay the 2001 TAN. That bond is one of four totaling \$2,550,000, \$1,483,329 of which the city has left to pay back in annual \$333,328 installments.

The city hopes to refinance one of these bonds, a 1996 note for \$500,000 due in March 2006, with \$68,732 left to pay back, but its financial advisor is cautioning officials to wait.

Incoming tax revenue will be sufficient to keep the city afloat until fall.

"Then we'll probably be in the same situation again," Brown said.

Reports of independent audits performed by CPA J.R. Mazzoni for fiscal years 2001, 2002 and 2003 indicate the city has "experienced a pattern of operating deficits and borrowing to fund operations."

Nanticoke's budget has contained deficits for several years running. The audit reports indicate in 2001 the city had a deficit of \$123,361 for all funds and \$197,282 for the general fund; in 2002, \$217,181 overall and \$249,677 in the general fund; and in 2003, \$387,077 in all funds and \$297,978 in the general fund. The 2004 audit has not yet been completed.

Part of the problem is that the city's tax rates are at the limit, according to Brown.

Nanticoke's property tax rate is 60.3 mills. Of that, 29.8 mills go to debt service, 30 are for the general fund and .5 is for the Mill Memorial Library.

Each mill brings in \$13,000, and the city has 4,200 people on its tax rolls.

"It's not good, but it's not as bad as it looks," Nanticoke Mayor John Toole said.

The city's millage may seem high, but property assessments are low, Toole said. He feels the city should lower millage for debt service by about five mills.

Council did vote this year to enact the \$52 emergency and municipal services tax on all people employed within the city, but Brown believes it would be better to impose a \$52 annual tax on all homeowners for fire and police services. That would bring in enough to cover the deficit the city runs each year, he said.

"I won't paint a rosy picture of the city's finances," Brown said. "I still say the city needs a way to generate an additional \$300,000 a year in revenue."

Another issue is the need for changes to the city's financial administration.

The 2003 audit report notes that "the city's internal control and accounting records are inadequate."

Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski "put a lot of time into getting everything up to par" by organizing the financial system, Brown said. But within a few weeks, city administration went back to doing things the old way.

Bushko believes council should get a spreadsheet each month that lists what was budgeted for each department, what was spent year-to-date, and what is left in each account. So far that information is not being provided.

"We need to be honest with the people. They need to know," Councilman Joe Dougherty said.

"We're not just letting things fall apart here," Brown said. "We're working with the South Valley Partnership, the South Valley Chamber of Commerce ... We're trying to bring businesses in, we'll start the Early Intervention program. A few officials do feel strongly the city can be turned around."

The state Department of Community and Economic Development's Early Intervention program provides resources to help local governments identify financial problems and find long-term solutions.

The city applied for a grant and is waiting to hear from DCED, Gulick said. Meanwhile, Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance, along with Concord Public Finance and Keystone Municipal Services LLC, were hired to help Nanticoke with the program.

City officials are aware some findings may be difficult to swallow but are willing to try.

"The state is investing quite a bit of money in this," Gulick said. "We can't just blow it off."

2/20/2005

Nanticoke Area Notes

**Find friends at the senior center**

By: Pamela Urbanski

Here we are in the middle of February. Mother Nature continues to drop mixed bags of precipitation into the Valley, forcing many, especially the elderly indoors. That's not so bad if you are a member of the Nanticoke Senior Citizens Center. There is a lot to do at the center to keep you active and involved.

This past week I stopped by to chat with the seniors. Regina Torba's was the first welcoming face I saw. She volunteers as a greeter/receptionist two to three days a week.

"I love the people here," she said. "I like to help out. It makes me feel good."

Lynn Brown, center director, has been at the center for 25 years. I could tell when we talked how much she loves what she does, and a special bond exists between her and those who visit the center.

"I see a lot of these people everyday," she said. "We are like a family."

She tells me the seniors have a great sense of humor and she is grateful she has the opportunity to make a difference in their lives.

I asked her what the toughest part of her job was. Her eyes welling up with tears she told me it is when one of the members pass away. "It is like losing a member of your family."

Our conversation quickly ends as it is time for some activities. For Ed Brezinski, Chester Lubecki and Heidi Blockus that means a game of

pinochle. They all agree the center is a great place for fellowship and to pass the time.

"It is good to be with people," said Chester.

The center offers an exercise program Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:30 to 10 a.m. If you are a member, the class is free. A Tai Chi class is held Fridays at 10 a.m. Cost is \$1 per session.

Tozia Yaniga loves to exercise.

"It keeps my body and my brain fit," she says laughing. She also enjoys helping out at lunchtime. "I help my friends who have a hard time eating," she said. "It's a good feeling."

I found Regina Meyers, Helen Gorski, and Helen Gates seated around a table talking. For these lovely ladies, it is about getting out of the house to share a meal, have some fun, and stay active.

Gates lost her husband and was very depressed. It was a friend who convinced her to join her and her friends at the center.

"I used to just sit home and cry. I don't want to do that anymore," she said. "I love it here, all the people are nice."

Sophie Jimcosky comes to relax and enjoys the games. "We have a beautiful shuffleboard here. We watch some pretty good movies too," she said. The center is open to those 60 and older. Hours are 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. The cost to become a member is \$4 for the year. Transportation to the center is available. Tickets can be purchased at the center. They cost 70 cents one way.

A healthy, nutritious lunch is served daily. Educational programs such as healthcare and nutrition are offered throughout the year.

RSVP Tax Assistance for seniors will take place from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday, Feb. 28.

Starting in April, the center will start day trips. Those who are members can reserve their seats first. After two weeks the trips are open to non-members.

Upcoming trips include Wildwood and Cape May, N.J., June 13 through June 17. The trips include coach transportation for four nights, breakfasts and dinner each day, entertainment and day trips, including a visit to Atlantic City. Flyers are available at the center.

The Area Agency on Aging runs the center through state and federal funding.

For more information about the trips or any activities at the center, call 735-1670.

2/17/2005

### **Nanticoke manages to secure tax anticipation loan**

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Staff Writer

Nanticoke officials breathed a sigh of relief Wednesday night when they found out the city will get its 2005 tax anticipation note after all.

Council voted unanimously at a special meeting in Mayor John Toole's office to take out a \$300,000 tax and revenue anticipation note from M&T Bank, at a 2 percent interest rate.

Attorney Brian Koscelansky, who acted as bond counsel for the city, told council that the next step is to file paperwork with the state. The money should be available on Feb. 22, he said.

Municipalities often rely on tax anticipation notes to cover bills and operating expenses until revenues, such as property and wage taxes, start coming in.

But getting the 2005 tax anticipation note was far from easy for Nanticoke. PNC Bank, which has given the city tax anticipation notes in the past, refused to do so this year.

Concord Public Finance, the financial adviser for Nanticoke, solicited proposals from 18 Pennsylvania banks.

M&T was the only one to respond, according to Concord senior financial adviser Garret Strathearn.

Nanticoke should be receiving more tax revenue in March and April, which will be used to pay back the tax anticipation note by its due date of June 30, Toole said.

The city has accumulated at least \$300,000 in unpaid bills, Toole estimated.

When asked which ones the city will pay first, he replied: "There's quite a bit out there. In previous years, we were paying bills out of the garbage fund."

With an approximately \$3 million budget, it is not unusual for bills to add up to \$200,000 a month, Toole noted.

Nanticoke officials are also interested in refinancing a \$500,000 bond, but Strathearn and Koscelansky cautioned them to wait until certain issues are resolved, such as how the proceeds from the refinancing would be used.

Concord cut its fee in half, from \$15,000 to \$7,500, due to the "critical nature" of the city's finances, Strathearn said.

"We wanted to make sure you got as much of the proceeds as you will need," he told council.

Councilman John Bushko thanked the financial firm.

"It's not too often the city gets a break," he said.

2/15/2005

### **Area communities might have to skip additional cops**

### **Ten county municipalities currently are looking for federal money to hire police.**

tmorgan@leader.net

Ten Luzerne County communities seeking more than \$1.4 million in federal grants to hire police officers will be out of luck if President George W. Bush's proposed budget is passed in its present form.

The budget eliminates funding for two COPS hiring programs that for more than a decade have put tens of thousands of police officers in communities nationwide.

The programs have been a boon to Luzerne County, with at least 21 communities receiving more than \$4.8 million for 62 additional police officers since 1994, according to the federal Department of Justice, which administers the COPS program. Under the hiring programs, the federal government pays 75 percent of an officer's salary for three years. Communities could apply for additional funding to cover a fourth year. After that, the full tab had to be picked up by local government. The hiring programs are among 20 programs that have been offered through COPS since its inception in 1994. The grants have been hugely popular among communities, many of which have been forced to cut back on police protection because of money woes.

Despite its popularity, the program has seen steady funding decreases over the years, dropping from \$2.5 billion in fiscal year 2002 to \$600 million in fiscal year 2005, said Gene Voegtlin, legislative counsel for the National Chiefs of Police Association. Bush's budget for fiscal year 2006 reduces overall funding to \$117 million and includes no money for the hiring programs.

That's bad news for communities such as Wilkes-Barre, which has been trying for several years to obtain a grant to fund a school police officer program. Nine other communities – Sugar Notch, Ashley, Warrior Run and Laflin boroughs, Nanticoke and the townships of Butler, Jackson, Kingston and Ross -- also have grant requests pending for police hires.

The Wilkes-Barre Area School District first placed an officer in schools in 2000 with the hire of former city police officer Brian Lavan. In 2002, the city joined in and sought a \$500,000 COPS grant to fund four school police officers. But the grant was denied that year and all subsequent years. The city initially picked up the tab for three officers after the grant was denied, but staffing shortages forced the department to cut the program back to one officer as of January 2004, said Wilkes-Barre Area School District Superintendent. Jeff Namey.

Namey said the program has been a huge success, not only in reducing crime, but in fostering a better relationship between students and police. The school board was so impressed with the results that it voted this month to hire a second officer, retired Wilkes-Barre Sgt. Michael Rosengrant, to add to the ranks.

Namey said he hopes grants eventually will be available to pay for the officers. He said he's confident the board will continue to fund the program, even if they're not. A report now being prepared for the school board shows there's been a significant reduction in arrests since the program began, he said.

"When you see the numbers it's very clear their presence in the school is very important, not just for the children, but for the community around the school," Namey said.

Laflin Police Sgt. Dan Evancho has also been trying for several years to obtain a \$117,674 grant to place one police officer in the Pittston Area School District. Unlike Wilkes-Barre, neither the borough nor school district has been able to fund the program.

"The school has its own security and periodically we're in and out of the high school, but there is no full-time police officer stationed there," Evancho said.

Evancho said he's been frustrated by the repeated denial of the grant and was disheartened to learn funds may totally dry up.

"It's tough for small areas like this. Every department that has a school within its jurisdiction could use this," he said.

In Nanticoke, Detective William Shultz said he hoped a \$150,000 grant would allow the department to hire two officers who had previously been funded through a prior COPS grant. The officers' positions were eliminated through attrition once the three-year funding period ended in 2001 or 2002, he said.

"Last year we had more robberies than ever due to substance-abuse problems. It certainly would be nice to have two more officers," he said.

Bush's budget is almost certain to undergo changes before it's approved. Congress historically has restored at least partial funding to programs targeted for cuts or elimination. Still, the president's targeting of the COPS program concerns law enforcement groups.

"These programs have been the mechanism that allows law enforcement to build a solid foundation," said Voegtlin of the National Chiefs of Police Association. "Even if we're lucky and just get what we got last year, the number is still only going to be about half of what law enforcement received just three years earlier."

2/13/2005

Nanticoke Area Notes

### **NADTF quite a powerful force**

By Pamela Urbanski

It has been a year and a half since concerned citizens came together to address the drug problem in Nanticoke.

Known as the Nanticoke Area Drug Task Force (NADTF), it offers support to the youngest members of the community. Because of the task force's dedication and vision for a better tomorrow, it has implemented ways to reach our youth and provide alternatives to drugs and alcohol.

"Educating the public has been a priority," said Don Wilhams, one of the founding fathers of the task force.

"The task force has brought in speakers who have presented some pretty disturbing facts about the increased use of drug and alcohol among our kids. These sessions also have given us ways and suggestions on how to prevent kids from starting down the wrong path," Williams added.

Williams said that one program that really had an impact on the kids was the "Thugs and Drugs" program. "We brought in people who, unfortunately, made some bad choices and their lives are now messed up because of drugs and or alcohol. It was a real eye opener for the kids." Another good that has come from the NADTF is the formation of a Youth Task Force. Youth and adults meet monthly to talk about what is going on in their lives, and to plan events and programs.

They also have their own recreation center in the basement of the St. Francis Church on East Green Street. Everyone is welcome. Every Tuesday from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. kids gather to socialize and have some fun. They can play pool, ping-pong or try their hand at video games. There also are arts and crafts, and computers for games and homework.

The task force is still searching for a larger place so it can offer more activities and accommodate more students. "We are still working with city officials and people around the community to find a better site" Williams said.

A program called "Two Way Street," where there is an exchange of letters between youth task force members and teenagers who are currently in

treatment facilities recovering from drug addictions, is up and running.

"This program has been well-received and has met with a lot of enthusiasm," Williams offered.

"With the addition of a phone line, the lines of communication between the adult and youth task force and the public are now open. Task force members can call 7624009 to find out about upcoming events and activities," said Sister Miriam Stadulis.

Call 762-4009 to get more information about the task force or to find out how you can help. And for those seeking information about community resources available for drug, alcohol or mental health problems, call 762-4009 between the hours of 6 and 9 p.m. and a trained adult member of the task force will assist you.

Some upcoming events are a winter outing to include night skating and food at a local ski area. A walk-a-thon to raise awareness of the drug problem is scheduled for April 30.

Hats off to members of the task force who have stepped up to address a difficult issue and who really are making a difference. To the students of [Greater Nanticoke Area](#), keep up the good work.

Williams tells me new members are needed further the work of the task force. The adult task force members meet the first Tuesday of each month at 7:30 p.m. at St. Francis School hall.

2/12/2005

### **Divine devotion lifts soul**

### **Parishioners laud benefits of Eucharist adorations**

"The adoration is an extension of the Eucharistic Mass, and it gives us more time to be present to our Lord and to grow in his love and share that love with others."

The Rev. Kevin Mulhern Gate of Heaven Parish, Dallas

With golden, mid-afternoon sunlight illuminating the St. Stanislaus Roman Catholic Church pews, more than a dozen churchgoers from across the spectrum of devotion gather.

Their inspirations for coming to the Nanticoke parish on this mild February Tuesday vary.

There's Juana Gyza, who shares a pew with her three grandchildren in hopes this experience will nurture their faith.

There's 95-year-old Michael Sinco, ever confident of God's healing powers, prayerfully awaiting a mending of his arthritic thumb.

And there's 78-year-old Carolyn Obaza, sure to show for perpetual Eucharistic adoration each Tuesday, even if it means skipping supper after work sometimes.

"It's very, very comforting and very, very relaxing for me," Obaza says of the experience. "I feel ree-freshed when I come out of there."

Since May 12, 1992, perpetual adoration of the Eucharist has taken place on Tuesdays at St. Stanislaus Church. The event, centered on prayer in the presence of consecrated bread, believed by Catholics to represent the body of their Messiah, Jesus Christ, stretches from about 8:30 a.m. to late in the night. Designated parishioners take turns keeping watch over the exposed Blessed Sacrament, mostly by way of one-hour shifts. Additional parishioners and non-parishioners alike visit the church throughout the day, organizers say.

Those who attend might cite different impetuses for taking part, but many echo the benefits adoration brings them, mostly involving tranquility and comfort.

"There's no phones ringing. Nobody's knocking at your door," says 68-year-old Dolores Olshefski, head adoration coordinator at St. Stanislaus.

"So you have that hour to be quiet.

"It just brings me peace, a relaxation," she says, "and I don't worry about anything. I leave everything in the hands of God."

Some spend their adoration hours deep in prayer. But Obaza says no formal rules dictate such a thing has to happen.

"You can go and just sit with the Eucharist," she says. "You don't have to do anything. You can say a rosary. You can say prayers from a prayer book. And they (the adorers) can just sit. They can just fall asleep if they want. But just as long as they're there with Jesus."

Having people keep watch over the exposed Blessed Sacrament has long been a part of Catholic custom. But the importance of the Eucharist and the need for adoration has been especially central in the minds of some since Pope John Paul II's recent declaration of The Year of the Eucharist, an observance scheduled to run through October.

Some Catholics plan to mark the year with pilgrimages focusing on Eucharistic miracles. But for many, the most poignant Eucharistic-oriented moments happen in prayerful solitude right inside their local churches.

And during Christianity's solemn and holy Lenten season, which began Wednesday and takes place through late March, the number of those participating in Eucharist adoration seems sure to grow at least somewhat.

"The Eucharist is the center of our lives as Christians, especially as Catholics," says the Rev. Kevin Mulhern of Gate of Heaven Parish in Dallas. His church has adoration on Sundays during Lent and on the first Friday of the month.

"The adoration is an extension of the Eucharistic Mass, and it gives us more time to be present to our Lord and to grow in his love and share that love with others."

Churches such as St. Stanislaus or St. Jude in Mountain Top, where 24-hour-a-day adoration takes place in a cozy chapel nestled in the back of the church, make sure to cover the Eucharist with a veil while no one is present.

Yet that measure doesn't need to take place as often as one might expect.

John Burke, one of the adoration coordinators at St. Jude, says a few people even sign up for the hard-to-fill overnight hours.

"There are some that are on (the schedule) 2 in the morning, 5 in the morning, 4 in the morning, things like that," he says but adds, "The overnight hours are not as well-filled."

The Very Rev. John F. Poplawski, pastor of St. Stanislaus, sees the Eucharist as the most important expression of Catholic beliefs and views

perpetual adoration as a prime opportunity for Catholics to communicate with Christ.

“When the Blessed Sacrament is then placed on the altar, then the people know of the real presence of Christ, so then we are called to be present to Christ,” he says.

That connection is not lost on people such as 65-year-old Ann Morgis of Nanticoke or a few other St. Stanislaus congregants, who feel a closeness to their savior during adoration, even if it means praying in silence with little or no company.

“We unite our minds, our souls and our bodies for one hour with Christ,” Morgis says. “We come and we spend our one hour with Jesus.”

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Eucharistic adoration, the opportunity for Catholics to pray or meditate in the presence of the exposed Blessed Sacrament, takes place at several area parishes. Here are some adoration schedules churches have provided to the Times Leader:

St. Stanislaus, 38 W. Church St., Nanticoke: after the 8 a.m. Mass until about 11 p.m. each Tuesday; rosary prayed during the first and last hours; special prayers and the Divine Mercy Chaplet offered at 3 p.m.; video on the Eucharist shown at 2 p.m. on the first Sunday of the month. To volunteer to keep a one-hour vigil during the adoration, which was established in 1992 by the Rev. Joseph Kakareka, call John or Dolores Olshefski, 735-5278, or Carol Obaza, 735-5481

2/11/2005

**Nanticoke plans to fix leaks, deterioration at senior center**  
**The city, which owns the building, plans to inspect the site and make repairs.**

By JON FOX- jfox@leader.net

On an overcast morning with flurries in the air, the Nanticoke Senior Center was filled with soft music, the sounds of a keno game and the soft whoosh of a pucks gliding down a shuffleboard table.

When it rains, the sound of water dripping into buckets is added to the mix.

The downtown center -- a car dealership, a post office and a curtain shop in other incarnations -- has been a senior center run by the Area Agency on Aging for the past 29 years. Recently the Market Street building has started to show its age.

A central skylight leaks during wet weather and a wall at the center appears to be damaged by water runoff from a vacant building next door.

The city, which owns the building and rents it to the agency, has scheduled a contractor to fix the skylight, but bad weather has delayed those repairs. Also, there are plans to make exploratory cuts into the building's wall to ascertain the condition of the wall.

“They don't know if the studding in the wall is rotted,” said city Councilman John Bushko. Contractors, he said, will likely cut 2-by-6-foot openings into the wall. “When we see what the scope of the work is, then we can put it out for contract. There might be a section there that needs to be replaced.”

Last week, crews conducted an environmental study of the center to determine if asbestos or mold is present, Bushko said. Results of the study were not available.

Problems with the building haven't stopped seniors from coming out. The center, which is open five days a week and located between the city's three senior citizen housing high-rises, attracts up to 45 residents a day during the winter, said Nancy Thomas, 73, a 10-year regular.

Crowded around a table, a group of players was embroiled in a cutthroat keno game. “All the time there's buckets on the chairs, and we can't eat on that table,” Catherine Raymond, 82, said of the leak and the single table put out of commission by rain. “And the floor's falling apart over there.”

Behind the long wooden shuffleboard table, the baseboard is spongy and separating from the wall. “Bad shape isn't it?” said Marty Manik, 78, one half of a shuffleboard team.

Just how extensive repairs will be is unclear to city officials and those who run the senior center.

“I don't know how critical it is,” said Tom Cresci, director of community services with the Area Agency on Aging. “They haven't gotten back to our agency as far as the extent of the renovation or what the renovations will be.”

2/11/2005

**Nanticoke hires 2 junior high softball coaches**

By Kristen Kile-Times Leader Correspondent

Cliff Muench and Bill Rubasky were hired as junior high assistant softball coaches at Thursday night's Greater Nanticoke Area School Board meeting.

Some parents were concerned why it took so long for the board to make a decision. Board President Bob Raineri said the board looked at the applications later than they should have and that is what caused the delay.

Raineri also said there were many qualified candidates and that is why they decided to add more coaches. Because of the addition in staff, another salary was offered, which Muench and Rubasky will split. Board member Cindy Donlin opposed the salary. “The reason I am opposed to the added salary is the inequality in the salaries we already have in coaching”

Raineri said they are going to address other sports salaries. He said the number of students who participate in activities change from year to year and they have to address that issue by compensating salaries and possibly the number of coaches.

In other business the Board:

- Reappointed Dave Warren and Charlie Brown as high school assistant softball coaches.
- Accepted the resignation of Annette Hallaburda, a cleaning person in the Education Center effective January 31, 2005.

2/9/2005

## **A day in the life**

### **Perfecting the recipe**

#### **GNA lunch ladies combine good food, good company**

By Jean Lacoë-jlacoë@leader.net

Don't ask Mary Mikulski for her spaghetti recipe, because you'll never get it to taste as good.

As head cook at [Greater Nanticoke Area High School](#), Mikulski simmers her sauce in "the cauldron," a huge pot mounted into a gas cooking unit. She's tried making the same recipe at home – albeit in a smaller quantity – but the flavor always fails.

On GNA's "spaghetti days," however, kids run into the cafeteria, vying to get in line first. Even the superintendent's secretary asks for seconds.

It's not what you'd expect from a school cafeteria. But this place is different.

Many local school districts have hired food service companies to run their cafeterias because their in-house operations lost too much money.

Not Nanticoke. Its cafeteria has stayed in the black, despite its pre-President Reagan pricing. Where else can you get Mary's spaghetti, a thick slab of buttery garlic bread, a mound of wax beans and a slice of homemade chocolate cake – all for \$1.50?

Hard work, organization pay off

The Nanticoke lunch ladies start work early. On a recent Wednesday, Mary and Diane Shock got there first at 6:30 a.m. Mary jotted down the refrigerator's temperature – 35 degrees – the first of many detailed records she must keep.

Mary, 55, carted four 10-pound tubes of government-issued beef to the cauldron, where she stabbed them with a knife. As she wrestled to open the thick plastic, blood dripped to the floor.

"You've gotta use everything government," Mary explained before cleaning up the mess. She builds menus around the feds' free food and orders the rest from vendors – even the local grocery store.

Mary tossed the meat into the cauldron, where it softly sizzled. She strained to break up chunks of ground beef with a wooden paddle big enough to row a boat. "You see, you've gotta have muscles to do this."

Stealing glances at a recipe written in a yellowed notebook splattered with food, Mary mixed in ingredients including basil, onions, parsley, parmesan cheese, garlic and tomatoes. Mary, who has worked in GNA cafeterias for 17 years, said the recipes were passed down from other lunch ladies.

Meanwhile, Diane whipped icing for the sheet cakes she had baked the day before. Every Wednesday, the staff serves freshly baked cake; on Fridays, cookies.

While the spaghetti sauce bubbled, Mary sliced lunch meat for Dagwood sandwiches. Nobody could predict whether the kids would favor spaghetti or sandwiches that day, so the ladies prepared for either.

They try not to let food go to waste. For example, they gradually mixed spaghetti sauce with pasta noodles throughout the day. Extra sauce could be frozen and used later, they reasoned, but the mixture would have to be discarded.

Hustling, teasing on the menu

Despite the variables, the ladies' routines remain consistent -- unless there's a glitch.

At 8:19 a.m., an early dismissal was announced because of impending snow. The first lunch would be served at 9, instead of 10:20. The state doesn't require schools to serve lunch if there's an early dismissal, but the ladies feel obligated.

"This might be the only meal some kids get," Mary said, stopping her slicing to call the rest of her five workers in early.

The crew had to hustle, but never seemed in danger of missing the 9 a.m. deadline. Mostly good-natured bickering and taunting picked up in intensity.

Michelle Kozicki brought a bowl of freshly washed tomatoes to Mary so she could slice them.

"Bout time you brought me those tomatoes," Mary said.

"Shut up!" Michelle said. "I'm already nervous."

"You're always nervous," Mary said. "You see how she is? You see how she talks to her boss? I should whip her. Where's my knife?"

It would be easy to assume that Mary, the cafeteria manager, and her staff don't get along. But back in Mary's cramped office, a pin on her purse says "Great Boss."

By 9:02, the first group of kids flooded the cafeteria, forming two lines: one for the spaghetti, one for triple-decker Dagwoods. The ladies slid the last bins of food into place as the lines formed, ready to dish out heaping portions, mandated by Superintendent Tony Perrone.

"Mr. Perrone likes us to give the kids a lot," Mary said.

One boy routinely asks for, and gets, six helpings. Six chocolate milks, too.

Each teenager punched a code into a keypad and a photo of the teen's face appeared on a computer screen so the cashier – usually Mary – could verify that it was the correct teen. Parents fund their children's accounts.

The line moves quickly, with many students gobbling food from their trays.

Wave after wave of students came, with the staff opening another lunch room and serving simultaneously. By 10:40 a.m., 254 lunches had been dished out – a bit less than their usual 300 or so. Cleanup began. Mary started the task she least enjoys -- a pile of paperwork that includes detailing every cup of food used, every lunch served and penny collected.

The crew rushed to finish so they could get home before most of the snow fell. But on a typical day, Mary and her crew eat lunch together. Despite their bickering, the ladies enjoy each other's company – and the food they cook. That's pretty neat, especially since Mary didn't like the food when she was in school.

"I hated school lunches," she said. "I always took a bag lunch."

2/6/2005

Nanticoke Area Notes

### **Eateries expect 'super' Sunday**

By: Pamela Urbanski

Unless you are completely out of touch with the sports world, you know today is Super Bowl Sunday!

Tonight, we find out who will be called Super Bowl champions. This year's game is a little more exciting since a team from Pennsylvania will be represented when the Philadelphia Eagles take to the field. Local eateries and fans are gearing up for today's game.

Larry Karnes, owner of Larry's Pizza on the corner of Noble and College Street, is ready for the increased business. "Super bowl Sunday is always extremely busy," Larry said. "Because the Eagles are playing, we are anticipating an even busier Super Sunday. We'll sell close to 17,000 wings easily, and hundreds of (pizza) pies."

But Larry's is staffed and ready. "We added extra people and we will have six fryers going over the weekend," he said.

They also have taken a lot of pre-orders. "We strongly recommend placing your order early. In fact, as soon as you're done reading this article, call 735-0111 and place your order," he said laughing.

Antonio's Pizza on Main Street is also anticipating a busy Super Bowl Sunday.

"Sales will definitely be up," said co-owner Carl Gastilla. When I asked Carl if he thinks his phones will be ringing off the hook even more so because the Eagles are in the Super Bowl, he wasn't sure. "It's been at least 20 years since a Pennsylvania team has made it to the Super Bowl, so I really don't know," Carl offered.

Oh Carl, come on, Pittsburgh Steeler fans are hurting enough this weekend. My husband, David, and son, Aaron, are still not themselves after the Steelers lost to New England two weeks ago. And Larry Karnes will be quick to tell you that Pennsylvania was well represented in 1979 when the Steelers were the champs! Enjoy the game!

Lenten season begins Wednesday

On Wednesday, Feb. 9, Christians will begin a time of prayer, sacrifice and almsgiving as the Lenten season begins.

Father Richard Fox, pastor of Holy Trinity Church and Holy Child Church, looks forward to Lent because it is a wonderful opportunity for spiritual growth. "Lent allows us to deepen our relationship with God through the power of the Eucharist," he said.

He is hoping that area Catholics will take advantage of the many opportunities to serve their parishes and their communities and bring the message of the Gospel throughout the city of Nanticoke and the Diocese of Scranton.

"Check out the bulletin from your parish, there is something for everyone that will help you on your Lenten journey," Father Rick offered.

Father Krafchak from St. Mary of Czestochowa echoes his feelings. "It is our hope that people will take full advantage of the grace and opportunity of the season."

The schedule for ashes and mass on Ash Wednesday at individual churches are as follows:

Holy Trinity Church- Mass and distribution of ashes 7 and 9:30 a.m. and 7 p.m. At 12:10 p.m., there will be a liturgical service and distribution of ashes.

Holy Child Church - Mass and distribution of ashes 6 p.m.

Guardian Elder Care Center - Mass and distribution of ashes 11 a.m.

St. Stanislaus Church - Mass and distribution of ashes 8:30 and 11 a.m. and 6 p.m.

St. Mary of Czestochowa Church- Mass and distribution of ashes 7 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. and a scripture service with ashes at 11 a.m.

St. Francis Church - Mass and distribution of ashes at 7 a.m. and 5:15 p.m. and Mass and distribution ashes at St. Joseph's at noon.

Welcome home Bravo Battery!

Welcome home to the soldiers of Bravo Battery, 109th Field Artillery from Nanticoke. Thank you for your service to our country! You are our new heroes!

2/6/2005

### **Fire under investigation**

The cause of a fire that tore through a vacant house Saturday morning is under investigation, said Nanticoke authorities.

According to Nanticoke fire Chief Michael Bohan:

The fire started at about 1:30 a.m. at 140 Pine St. in Nanticoke. Though no one lived at the house, owner Harry Grozio used it to store antiques.

The fire damaged almost the entire interior of the structure.

It took firefighters from Nanticoke, Hanover Township and Edwardsville more than two hours to get the fire under control. The blaze also damaged part of a neighboring house at 142 Pine St.

The state police fire marshal is investigating.

2/5/2005

### **Travelocity to add 120 jobs, move to new location**

By Tim Gulla and Heidi E. Ruckno, Citizens' Voice Staff Writers

Southlake, Texas-based Internet travel company Travelocity has to find a new home for its 300 workers in Plains Township.

But not only does it plan on staying in the region, Travelocity also hopes to add as many as 100 to 120 jobs over the next 12 months, said Demitra Xidas, the company's general manager of sales and customer care.

Xidas said the company's lease of the former Kingdom Vacations building on River Street expires this summer. Though Travelocity wanted to

renew the lease, Xidas said the building's owner plans to sell it to a developer.

Travelocity, an online travel service that also operates two call centers in Texas, is owned by Texas-based Sabre Holdings.

She could not divulge which sites the company is looking at but said Travelocity is looking for a facility similar but a little larger than the 25,000-square-foot building it uses now.

"We're narrowing it down," she said. "We're looking for something that meets our employees' needs, as well as our business' needs."

The ideal building already would be designed for call-center duties, she said. Travelocity will need roughly 30,000 square feet of space and parking for about 250 cars.

"We don't want something that's three or four floors," she said. "The one we have right now is very suitable."

Xidas said U.S. Rep. Paul E. Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, and the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry are helping Travelocity find a new site.

Wilkes-Barre Mayor Tom Leighton said Travelocity contacted the city about nine months ago to inquire about the vacant call center on South Main Street but couldn't make use of the entire 80,000-square-foot building. The city is looking to lease or sell the entire building, not just a portion.

"What I wanted to make certain was that they remain," said Kanjorski, who's been working with Travelocity for the past several weeks.

Kanjorski said the company looked at about five sites and it is negotiating for possible leases at several sites. Though he said he could not divulge all of the locations, Kanjorski said Travelocity officials looked at sites in Nanticoke, Pittston and Hanover Township.

One building shown was the Kanjorski Building in Nanticoke, which is owned by the Nanticoke General Municipal Authority.

New York-based Health Now operates a call center there, employing about 230 people. Kanjorski said the building was shown to Travelocity as an example of the city's capabilities to build a similar facility.

Health Now's long-term lease expired last summer, and negotiations are under way for another long-term lease, said Nanticoke Mayor John Toole.

Kanjorski said the city is trying to accommodate Health Now in any way it can.

"But I think it's still an open question as to whether and how long they remain in Nanticoke," he said.

Although she didn't know all of the specifics of the lease agreement, Health Now spokeswoman Laura Perry believes the company has a lease on the Nanticoke property until October 2005. But she said the company has no plans to move or cut back on staffing.

Health Now processes Medicare claims for medical equipment, such as wheelchairs.

Xidas couldn't say exactly when Travelocity would have to move out of its current location but said the company would seek to temporarily extend its lease on the Plains property if needed.

2/3/2005

### **Nanticoke hires group to help solve city's financial woes**

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

Nanticoke council chose its coordinator for the Early Intervention Program to help the city get its financial house in order at Wednesday night's meeting.

Council voted to appoint the Nanticoke Early Intervention Consortium, headed by the Northeast Pennsylvania Alliance working with Keystone Municipal Services LLC and Concord Public Finance, which offered a bid of \$80,000.

Councilman Bill Brown said that the hiring would be contingent on receiving payment from the state.

The state Department of Community and Economic Development is providing a 50-50 matching funds grant for the program, but Brown said the city could end up paying less than the \$40,000 due to in-kind services.

According to DCED, the purpose of the program is "to establish short-term and long-term financial and managerial objectives that strengthen the fiscal capacity of Pennsylvania's county and municipal governments, along with the integration of long-term community and economic development strategies that strengthen the local government's tax base."

Jeffrey Box, vice president of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance, said it will probably be at least a few weeks until a contract is finalized and work can begin.

In other business, Garret Strathearn, senior financial adviser with Concord Public Finance, said 18 financial institutions have been solicited for bids on a \$300,000 2005 tax anticipation note for Nanticoke.

He has asked for the bids to be delivered for council by Feb. 15, and for e-mail or phone confirmation on whether the agencies will bid by Feb. 11. PNC Bank, which has lent Nanticoke its annual TANs in the past, refused to give the city one this year.

City Administrator Greg Gulick asked about refinancing a bond, but Strathearn said the city should not think about anything of that nature until the TAN is secured.

"It's going to be a difficult challenge," Strathearn said.

Council promoted Det. Sgt. William Shultz to captain, and Patrolman Kevin Grevera to sergeant.

Mayor John Toole presented Grevera with a plaque for being named Officer of the Year by the Fraternal Order of Police Wyoming Valley Lodge 36.

Council voted to request the municipal authority release \$100,000 for Nanticoke's share of an economic development study to be developed by Facility Design and Development Ltd.

The comprehensive plan is a joint project of the South Valley Partnership, which consists of Nanticoke and Newport and Plymouth townships.

"This is a very important plan for the city," Councilman John Bushko said. If Nanticoke does not take advantage of it, "we'll be in the same position 20 years from now," he said.

The \$100,000 will come from a \$480,000 federal grant the city received in 2001 and gave to the municipal authority, Brown said.

Jerry Hudak was appointed as coordinator for the federal low-income home loan program. Gulick said the city will apply for the maximum amount

of \$500,000 and has asked for more information on the program.

2/3/2005

### **Nanticoke expecting results in search for loan soon**

#### **Vendors' back bills are nearing \$200,000, says the head of city finances.**

By JON FOX-jfox@leader.net

A financial adviser said the city can expect news in its quest for a short-term loan by Feb. 15.

Garret Strathearn with Concord Public Finance told city council Wednesday that he has approached 18 financial institutions in an attempt to secure a tax anticipation note to get the city through the first lean months of the year.

The cash-strapped city's request to PNC Bank for a tax anticipation note was denied recently.

Strathearn told council he expects to hear preliminary telephone responses from the institutions by Feb. 11 followed by official responses on Feb. 15.

"We've had some level of interest," he said.

It is still too early to determine if the city will get the short-term loan to pay vendors, he said, but added, "We think we may be able to help the city out.

Councilman Bill Brown, head of the city finance department, said the situation is becoming pressing.

The city has managed to make payroll but back bills to vendors are approaching \$200,000.

In other business:

Mayor John Toole made a motion to appoint Josephine Bashista to the city housing authority. The motion was not seconded.

"Mayor, I think you're really putting us on the spot. I don't know this person," said Councilman John Bushko.

Councilman Joe Dougherty asked that Dorothy Hudak be considered. The mayor declined to make a motion.

"He doesn't want to put anyone else in there because of the conflict," Brown said of Toole's choice for the housing authority after the meeting.

Lillian Condu, the mayor's aunt by marriage, remains on that authority even two years after her five-year appointment expired.

"He just wants his people in there so it's at a standstill," Brown said.

Toole appointed Chet Beggs, Walter Sokolowski and Steve Buchinski to the city redevelopment authority.

Council awarded an \$80,000 financial advising contract to the Nanticoke Early Intervention Consortium contingent upon state funding assistance through the Early Intervention Program.

The consortium is a group of three firms, the Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance, Keystone Municipal Services and Concord Public Finance.

## **February**

2/1/2005

### **MANY HAPPY RETURNS**

#### **Long hugs, big smiles greet troops**

#### **Soldiers come home after a year in Iraq**

By LANE FILLER-lfiller@leader.net

For the Diacheysns, it's a case of hello and goodbye again.

Sgt. Michael Diacheysn and his three daughters stood outside the Chaplain Leonard J. Sabalis Army Reserve Center in the Hanover Township Industrial Park on Monday waiting for the wife and mother, who also answers to the name of Staff Sgt. Margaret Diacheysn.

As they waited, they shared their excitement with well over 100 friends and family members of 42 soldiers returning from a year in Iraq.

The Diacheysn family of Nanticoke is back together again. For now.

In about five months, Michael will be headed off to Iraq, deploying with the 828th Quartermaster Company.

"I think the kids will be better with him going, because now they see that people do come home from wars," Margaret said. "Before I got back, I think they just thought people who went away to war got killed or hurt, or never came back."

Their daughters, Justine, 12, Jordan, 8, and Jena, 5, bounced from parent to parent as she spoke.

Michael works full-time with the reserves; Margaret is one semester shy of becoming a nurse.

But before she could finish her schooling she shipped out as an MP with the 362nd, a cobbled-together unit of reservists from all over the country who came together for this mission.

"They did a great job," said their captain, William Allen. "They received awards and commendations, provided security for the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Army Chief of Staff. Someone must have had confidence in them."

Allen will return to Pensacola, Fla., in a few days to resume a career leading a state fugitive task force.

Then there is Spc. Diery Louis of Brooklyn, who says he may only be home 30 or 40 days. A native of Haiti, now a U.S. citizen, Louis is maneuvering desperately to attach to a unit shipping out to keep the peace in his homeland.

"The people there need a little peace from all the fighting between the factions," said Louis, a police officer in civilian life.

"I want to go and do what I can."

But for most of these folks, it's a return to normality, with a few bumps likely along the way as they readjust to their family roles.

In some cases, jobs have changed hands and routines re-routed.

"Her biggest worry was handing over the checkbook and the bills for me to take care of, but I adapted to it and I think I did a pretty good job,"

Michael Diacheysn said.

"When he's gone, I'm going to have to deal with all that outdoor boy stuff, like lawns and snow removal," Margaret said. "I don't even brush the snow off my car, he gets up early and does it for me."

Both acknowledged that there have been changes in the way the household runs, and they must work together to resolve the differences.

"We've been briefed about not coming home and taking everything over," Margaret said, "but if I don't, the kids won't think it's me."

1/30/2005

### **Soldiers enjoy emotional homecoming**

By: Heidi Ruckno

Two members of the 109th Field Artillery arrived home a few days ahead of schedule Saturday, much to the delight of their families and friends. Specialists William Harris of Wilkes-Barre and Tony Phan of Nanticoke received a hero's welcome at the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton International Airport after arriving on a flight from Chicago. The pair spent four months in Iraq.

Harris' homecoming was an intimate affair attended by his wife, Jane, children, Cody and Emily, niece, Kasee Pavlick, and foster son, Ed, a three-year-old child he and his wife are about to adopt.

Harris was speechless as he arrived home. He said he was anxiously awaiting the chance to reconnect with his family.

"I'm just grateful to be home," said Harris.

Immediately after getting off the plane, Harris kissed his wife. In keeping with the romantic spirit, the soldier came bearing gifts - a diamond ring.

"He sent me 11 white roses and he told me when he comes home, he's bringing a 12th rose," Jane Harris said. "This is the 12th rose."

In stark contrast to the Harris family's intimate gathering, Phan had an entourage waiting for him. Nearly 20 friends and relatives assembled at the airport to welcome him home.

"It will be good to wake up knowing he's living," Dottie Pugh, Phan's grandmother, said.

Pugh celebrated her birthday Saturday and said she could not think of a better gift than her grandson's homecoming.

Phan said a four-month tour was hard enough. He could not imagine a year-long stay.

"I'm just happy to be home," he said. "But I'm real happy for the unit to be home."

1/30/2005

### **Library offers a haven from cold**

By: Pamela Urbanski

This past week, I stopped by the Mill Memorial Library to check out the upcoming activities and events. If you're looking to get out of the house and want to escape the dreary days of winter, make time to visit the Mill.

This particular evening, I found adults searching the Internet, some were thumbing through the pages of their favorite books and others were catching up on the day's news, reading the local paper.

Down in the children's room, kids were looking for books, getting their homework done and a few were being read to. Soon this room will be filled with children and adults as the Mill Memorial Library begins its spring children's programs on Monday, Feb. 7, through the first week of May.

Children's program director Wendy Skoniecki has some great programs planned.

"Toddler Time, for tots that are eight months to three years of age and their caregivers will be treated to music, dance, crafts and, of course, story time. At this age, we want our youngest visitors to fall in love with the library," Skoniecki said. Classes will be held on Mondays at 10:30 a.m. and Wednesdays at 6 p.m.

During story hour for ages 3 to 5, children are introduced to colors, numbers, days of the week, etc. "It really is our pre-school class at the library," she said.

Each week, there is a different theme to include a great story. Some highlights are the observance of National Dental Health Month and "Healthy Teeth," Dr. Seuss' birthday, the celebration of National Library Week in April and you really don't know what mud is all about until you play with it at the Mill. These classes are offered Mondays at 6 p.m. and Wednesdays at 10:30 a.m.

Kids Hour, a program for students in first through sixth grade, offers kids an opportunity to plan weekly sessions. "When you give students an opportunity to dig deep and come up with creative and interesting things, they always come through," Skoniecki added. Guest speakers and craft-time will highlight the program. This program will be held Tuesday at 6 p.m.

Registration for all programs will be held during the first week of programs.

Silvey settles in as new librarian

Librarian Sandra Silvey has settled into her new position at the Mill. She comes from the Hoyt Library in Kingston and finds Nanticoke a welcoming place. "The staff works well together. The board of directors has a vision for the library and the patrons really care about having a community library," she noted.

Because funding to local libraries has been cut, revenue needs to be raised. The annual fund drive is under way. Each household will receive a letter asking residents to give the gift of literacy and learning by making a donation to the Mill Library.

Tax advice available at library

If you need help with your income tax, Karen Hazleton, CPA, will give free tax advice and answer your tax questions Saturday, Feb. 5, from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. and Tuesday, Feb. 8, from 5 to 6:30 p.m. at the library. Refreshments will be served. Coffee and doughnuts, donated by local Curry Donut owners Len and Laurie Olzinski will be available.

Another service provided by the staff are tours of the library. Wendy has been kept busy giving tours to Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops and for schools. One thing she always includes is the history of the Mill and its founder Samantha Mill.

"I think it is important for this generation to know the history of the library and how it came to be," Skoniecki offered.

Wendy and Sandra showed me the display case in the Alta Harrington reading room filled with historical letters, pictures, newspaper clipping from the 1900s to include Samantha Mill, her will, the dedication of the library and many pictures to name a few items. One really gets a quick lesson in history.

One picture really caught my eye. It was the archway constructed by Samantha Mill on East Main Street to welcome home the soldiers of World War I. It reads "We honor and welcome you home - Defenders of Liberty." Wendy tells me she heard that an archway welcoming home our local soldiers from Bravo Battery, the 109th Field Artillery, after their time in Iraq, is being planned. Who would have thought in the year 2005, we would be welcoming home our own heroes?

Library hours are Monday through Thursday from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information, call 735-3030.

Mardi Gras/Oldies Dance set

Father Richard Fox and members of the Holy Name Society of Holy Trinity and Holy Child Churches invite everyone to their Mardi Gras and Oldies Dance on Saturday, Feb. 5, at the American Legion. Music will be provided by the Cadillacs. A buffet dinner, as well as refreshments, are planned. Price is \$25. For more information, call Xavier at 735-6017, Jim at 735-8108 or Millard at 735-2133.

1/27/2005

### **Nanticoke mulls fiscal advisers**

#### **Facing severe economic problems, city officials are considering two bids.**

By JON FOX-jfox@leader.net

The city took another step toward participation in the state's Early Intervention Program for financially troubled municipalities Wednesday.

At Wednesday's council meeting, officials opened two bids from advisers for assistance charting the city out of rough financial waters.

The first, from the Pennsylvania Economy League, totaled \$80,750 for advising services. The second, from the Nanticoke Early Intervention Consortium, totaled \$80,000.

The consortium is a group of three firms, the Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance, Keystone Municipal Services and Concord Public Finance.

Council tabled the bids for review by council members and the city solicitor. The state program provides for a 50 percent state funding match for the advisers' fees.

Hours invested by municipal employees may also be considered as a financial contribution, state officials have said.

In other business:

Mayor John Toole swore in the following people in the fire department: Richard Bohan as a lieutenant, Charles Miller as a captain, Chet Prymowicz as a line chief and Dave Urbanski as a deputy chief.

Council went into an executive session to discuss the employment status of a tax office employee who was to be laid off tomorrow. The employee's termination was one of three job cuts that were expected to save the city \$91,000 annually in salaries and benefits.

After the executive session, Mayor John Toole said the city has decided to retain the employee, Karen Wolfe, through April and the end of tax season.

Toole was not enthusiastic about the decision. "We're going into the Early Intervention Program and we've got to start saving money."

Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski said residents may contact the fire department for a free smoke detector donated by Kidde. Fire officials will evaluate the need of homes for smoke detectors and install them for free if needed.

Councilman Joe Dougherty apologized for the conditions of the roads after the recent winter weather. Three of four municipal trucks were disabled with mechanical problems, he said.

Council voted to raise fees for duplicate bills and informational bills to \$20 and \$15 respectively. The increase, said Treasurer Al Wytoshek, is to compensate for the rising cost labor and hours spent on requests.

1/27/2005

### **Nanticoke discusses demolition, cleanup of former cigar factory property**

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

The former cigar mill property on West Church Street has been a smoldering issue that Nanticoke City Council said is finally about ready to be put out.

The cigar mill site first came up during a special meeting, held prior to Wednesday night's work session, for public input on how to spend \$423,600 in Office of Community Development grant funding.

Resident John Sidonis asked when cleanup of the site was going to begin.

"I'm sick of looking at it," he said.

Mayor John Toole said money has been appropriated: The city has applied for and is expected to receive a \$250,000 grant from the state, and can now put the project out for bid.

At the work session, City Administrator Greg Gulick said a preliminary estimate by Engineer Ben Sevenski of Michael J. Pasonick Jr. & Associates indicated demolition and site cleanup could cost up to \$293,000.

But the state has said it will only provide \$250,000, so the city would have to come up with the rest of the money, Gulick said.

Sevenski said he based the estimate on the cost of demolishing the former T.P. Jones building on Hanover Street, but the cigar mill site also

contains a 50-foot tower to be demolished and, therefore, is a risk factor. It will be a difficult job, he said. Sevenski said requests for proposals could be sent out in time for a bid opening at council's Feb. 23 meeting, and if emergency specifications were included, the project could be started in early March.

Attorney Jerry Cohen, representing a client with property next to the former cigar mill site, said he was pleased to hear the cleanup was being put up for bid, and thanked council and the mayor.

"After all the months of complaining, someone should say thank you," Cohen said.

Toole said the Renaissance Development Group, which had proposed building townhouses at the site, was still interested in the project and had the funding in place for it.

Resident Dustin Kandrac asked whether the developer would buy the land after it was cleaned up.

"We'll work something out," Toole said, adding that it was not uncommon to have joint government and private sector projects.

When Kandrac suggested the land could be sold, Toole said that the proposal called for six or seven \$100,000 townhouses that would bring in tax money for the city, and that the developers would not be the first not to have to pay for a property.

Toole said he was considering a barter - such as having the developer pave a road - and opined that it was better to do something with the site, "Or else you might have weeds there for the next 20 years."

In other business, council opened proposals from two agencies to help the city with financial planning and fiscal recovery, as part of the state Department of Community and Economic Development's early intervention program.

The Pennsylvania Economy League offered a bid with two components: a financial plan and community and economic development, for \$80,750.

1/23/2005

### **Truly vital gear: Smoke alarms vital for fire**

By: Pamela Urbanski

People lose their lives or sustain injuries in house fires. Many of these fatalities can be prevented through proper fire safety education and by having the proper fire safety devices in the home.

That is why the Nanticoke Fire Department has joined forces with WNEP-TV, Channel 16 in "Operation Save a Life," a program designed to distribute and install smoke alarms in city residences that do not have the life-saving devices.

According to Channel 16's Laurie LaMaster, another goal of the project is to raise awareness in the community for the need of smoke alarms, as well as give other life-saving facts and tips to their viewers. They will do this through a series of fire-safety messages that will air on WNEP over the next several months.

Hoping to make Northeastern and Central Pennsylvania safer from the dangers of house fires, Kiddie, the world's largest manufacturer of fire safety products for more than 80 years, agreed to donate 10,000 smoke detectors to our 17-county region.

The National Fire Protection Agency reports that smoke alarms are the residential fire-safety success story of the past quarter century. Since 1970, when battery-powered smoke alarms became available to consumers, the home fire death rate has been reduced by half.

"Our department stresses the importance of working smoke detectors each year during National Fire Safety Week," said Nanticoke Fire Chief Mike Bohan. "Now along with Channel 16 and Kiddie Corporation, we can actually make a difference."

This program will allow the Nanticoke Fire Department to distribute and install, free of charge, residential smoke detectors. Anyone interested in the program should contact fire headquarters at 735-5860 to make arrangements for a fire department representative to do the installation.

Keeping safety in mind, fire personnel will have proper identification when entering a home to install smoke detectors. "Residents are urged to ask the fire personnel for proper identification before allowing them into their homes," the fire chief advised.

Chief Bohan also reminds residents of the importance of developing and practicing a home fire-escape plan. "When the smoke alarm is activated, all family members should know what to do. This includes leaving immediately. If your escape route is blocked, use another way out. Go directly outside to a predetermined meeting place. Call the fire department from a neighbor's phone or portable phone after you have escaped. Once you are outside, stay outside until firefighters tell you it's safe to go back inside. Also remember to test your smoke alarm once a month and never, never remove the batteries to use them somewhere else," Bohan emphasized.

Pope JohnPaul to hold registration

Robert Kaluzavich, principal of Pope John Paul II School, announced registration for the pre-kindergarten three- and four-year-old program, kindergarten and grades one through eight will take place Jan. 31 through Feb. 4.

Parents of pre-school and kindergarten registrants must bring their child's birth certificate, baptismal certificate and immunization records.

The pre-kindergarten and kindergarten registration will take place at the Pope John Paul Primary Center, 173 E. Green St., next to St. Francis of Assisi Church. Open registration for grades one through eight will be at Pope John Paul II School. Times for registration are the same for both buildings, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. each day.

A \$30 non-refundable registration fee is required for enrollment in grades kindergarten through eighth. The fee is \$15 for pre-school registrants.

There will be an open house at the primary center on Wednesday, Feb. 2, from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.

For more information, call the primary center at 740-6150 or the main school at 735-7935.

Eat hearty at the Mardi Gras

Altar and Rosary Society of St. Francis of Assisi Church will hold its Mardi Gras - All-You-Can-Eat Breakfast Buffet on Sunday, Jan. 30, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

The center is beautifully decorated in the Mardi Gras theme and the buffet features more than 22 entrees and desserts. Tickets are \$6.50 for adults and \$3.50 for children 12 and under. Children under three are free. Tickets can be purchased after all masses or at the door the day of the breakfast.

For more information, call Andrea Josefowicz at 735-5381.

1/23/2005

### **A real Renaissance woman**

#### **For wedding at Renaissance Faire, bride sews period-style garments for all 10 members of wedding party.**

By Mary Therese Biebel-mbiebel@leader.net

After William Capie proposed to Karen Herrala last year - or maybe we should say, after the couple "plighted their troth" - the bride-to-be couldn't sleep all night.

"I was thinking of all different kinds of weddings," she said.

Soon, the answer was clear. Karen, 43, and William, 45, are both intrigued by the Renaissance era, both enjoy dressing up, and Karen takes pride in her sewing.

So, she decided to fashion 10 Camelot-inspired garments - for herself and the rest of the wedding party, and tie the whole entourage to the Renaissance Faire in Manheim.

"I didn't even start mine until 10 days before the wedding. I was doing everybody else's. I was still sewing my veil as we drove to the fair."

Most people would never attempt such a project, Karen says. "Sewing does seem to be a dying art, but I always had a flair for it."

Every customized stitch was in place as the couple stood under a gazebo in October and pledged their love before 35 friends and their pastor, the Rev. Laura Lewis of First Presbyterian Church in Nanticoke.

In keeping with Renaissance-style vows, the groom placed a ring on the bride's thumb, then her index finger, until he worked his way to the third finger of her left hand.

After the ceremony, the couple and their guests roamed through the fair, where other visitors recognized William's outfit as similar to what King Arthur wore in the movie "Monty Python and the Holy Grail."

In real life, William inspects sprinkler systems and Karen is an MBA between jobs. But on their wedding day, they felt like a king and queen.

At one point, two young women bowed low and kept bowing until William remembered to tell them to arise. Also, "Everybody was asking me to go ahead and do the galloping scene," said William, who managed a fair gallop, even weighed down by armor. "By the end of the day, my legs were killing me."

Actually, Karen had sewn a tunic for her husband and he had made his own armor from thin-gauge metal and automobile detailing trim.

"He bought a stainless steel bowl for the elbow and cut it," Karen said.

A purchased sword, crown and coif - that's the chain mail covering protecting a knight's head and neck - completed his outfit.

The best part about making the garments - Karen doesn't call them costumes because the quality of the fabric is so high - is how well they fit the wearers.

"My son, he was a knight and to him the fleur de lis means nothing. But he loves hockey and the New Jersey Devils, so he had a devil on the front of his tunic.

For a teenaged niece, Karen made a "princess-type dress" with sleeves that measured 92 inches around as they draped from mid-bicep to ankles. "It was beautiful; she helped design it."

The wedding dress was the most complex, made from a tapestry kind of material in shades of ivory and burgundy and featuring old-fashioned laces instead of modern fasteners.

Though she was confident all of the outfits would turn out well, the bride was still concerned about her Aunt Shirley's reaction. "I was so nervous about her seeing the clothes, because she was the seamstress who taught me."

As it turned out, Karen needn't have worried about Aunt Shirley, who had given her sewing lessons when she was growing up.

"She called my parents the next day and talked for 45 minutes about what a great job I'd done."

1/23/2005

H.S. Baseball

### **Dan Benick chooses Maryland for college**

By DAVE KONOPKI-dkonopki@leadernet

Dan Benick thought he was headed for several long months of gut-wrenching moments and sleepless nights, culminating with the most difficult decision of his young life.

Instead, the process ended quickly and the decision was easy.

The Greater Nanticoke Area three-sport standout recently signed a letter of intent to play baseball at the University of Maryland. Although he wasn't able to provide specifics about the scholarship, Benick says he received a "good package" to attend the Atlantic Coast Conference school.

The senior shortstop/pitcher will be following in the footsteps of his older brother Jon, who played baseball in the ACC at the University of Virginia. Jon is now a Double-A player in the San Diego Padres organization.

"Once Maryland started recruiting me, everyone else was out of the picture," said Dan Benick, who was considering offers from several other Division I programs. "I knew that's where I wanted to go.

"I've always wanted to play in the ACC. My brother played in that conference and I know how good the baseball is. "It's one of the top three conferences in the country."

Benick, who is also an all-Wyoming Valley Conference golfer and basketball player, isn't the only WVC standout to accept a scholarship months before the first pitch of their senior seasons.

Benick, who used his arm and bat to help lead Nanticoke Area to the District 2 Class 2A championship last year, will play for head coach Terry Rupp at Maryland. Benick is one of eight players who have already committed to play for the Terps in 2006.

And, like Gutsie, Benick says making an early decision should help make him a more relaxed - and productive - player this season.

"It took a lot of pressure off me," said Benick, who was scouted by Maryland after playing for the Maryland Oriolanders during the last three falls.

"I was playing (for the Oriolanders) last fall and I wasn't doing very well. But right after I signed, I had my best weekend of the season. I think it's going to help (me) have a better senior season."

1/22/2005

### **South Valley Chamber of Commerce forms**

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

Business owners in Nanticoke City, Newport Township and Plymouth Township are setting out to prove that regionalization is not just for municipalities.

Declining membership and economic circumstances led the Greater Nanticoke Area Chamber of Commerce to reorganize into the South Valley Chamber of Commerce.

Its goal is to "establish a more influential, productive and profitable atmosphere for local entrepreneurs in the South Valley section of the Wyoming Valley," according to its president, Gerald J. Hudak.

"Instead of saying 'We're from Nanticoke,' we'll say, 'We're from the South Valley.' This way we won't be isolated; we'll get to know what's in our area - and what isn't - and we can work together," Hudak said. "It's a revolutionary idea."

Board member John Grontkowski said the chamber had to expand because there was not enough business in Nanticoke to support it.

"I sat down and spent a lot of days kind of soul-searching, and realized Nanticoke just can't do it alone," Hudak said. "I realized surrounding communities can't do it alone, either."

By banding together, members can combine their strengths and work together to generate business for each other, he said.

"We share a common problem, and we need to find common solutions," Hudak said. "I really see it as a win-win situation for all concerned."

So far, the reception has been very positive, he said during the unveiling of the new organization Friday in the chamber's office at 179 S. Market St., Nanticoke.

State Rep. John Yudichak, D-119, who is a proponent of regionalization, stopped by to offer support.

"I think it will lead to great partnerships in the future," he said. "It's a very progressive step in taking a regional approach ... Economic development does not stop at a political boundary."

The non-profit South Valley Partnership, consisting of Nanticoke, Newport Township and Plymouth Township, was formed about a year ago for economic and community planning. It will work together with the new chamber, Yudichak said.

Businesses in Hanover, Slocum and Rice townships, as well as in any other municipality in the South Valley area, will be invited to join, Hudak said.

The Nanticoke Chamber of Commerce has always welcomed members from outside communities, said Dorothy Ashford, a member of the chamber's executive board.

She said there will have to be discussions on how to put the new board together.

The South Valley Chamber of Commerce will have a general membership meeting next month, and will meet monthly after that, in space provided by Luzerne County Community College.

The chamber hopes to encourage the growth of small businesses, as well as attract larger ones. Smaller businesses, which Yudichak considers the backbone of the community, are often neglected. Helping them thrive is important, because their owners live and invest in the community, Yudichak said.

The South Valley Chamber of Commerce will bring them together and give them a collective voice, which will help in getting state grants, he said.

If the communities put together a comprehensive regional program, Gov. Ed Rendell will invest state funding in it, Yudichak said.

He noted it was "no coincidence" the 'S' on the new South Valley Chamber of Commerce logo looks like a road. The proposed South Valley Parkway, a four-lane highway linking Route 29 to the Kirmar Parkway in Newport Township, would open up hundreds of acres of Earth Conservancy land in Hanover and Newport townships for economic development.

Grontkowski has hopes the new chamber will be mutually productive for its members.

"Theoretically, it sounds good," he said. "Let's see what happens."

1/21/2005

### **County airs 12 development proposals**

Luzerne County commissioners discovered more than \$64 million in economic development projects are in the pipeline for 2005.

Development professionals and local leaders Thursday addressed the commissioners, seeking allocation from the county's Office of Community Development to finance portions of their projects.

They varied from a \$4.3 million revitalization of two vacant commercial sites on North Main Street in Wilkes-Barre into loft apartments to twin eight-story condominium towers in Pittston City at an estimated cost of \$32 million.

"This meeting shows that there are people in this community committed to building projects that will make Luzerne County a better place to live and work," said Commissioner Todd Vonderheid. "A day like today is the reason Greg (Skrepenak) and I ran for office."

In all, 12 pitches were made with a total of \$5,124,000 in county funds sought, such as:

Luzerne County Community College President Dr. Patricia Donohue asked for \$1.5 million to help finance the first phase of an emergency responders' training center. The proposed \$8.7 million center, built on the LCCC campus, would offer real-life scenarios, including a fire tower, for first responders in a 10-county area.

Earth Conservancy Executive Director Mike Dziak requested \$358,000 to help finance a \$1.3 million reclamation project in Sugar Notch Borough that would open up 50 acres of former mine land to residential use. Another 130 acres would be donated to the borough to be kept as green space. Dziak said the project could add up to 70 homes to the borough over the next five to seven years. Assuming the homes and lots will sell for \$150,000, 70 homes would mean \$10.5 million in new construction and \$270,000 a year in new tax revenues, he said.

Hazleton City Administrator Sam Monticello asked for \$1 million toward the construction of an estimated \$9 million Intermodal Public Transit Center in downtown Hazleton.

Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority sought \$506,000 for a \$2,253,000 project to repair a sewer problem near Ross Street, Wilkes-Barre.

Tri-Area Recreation Authority is seeking \$320,000 for the completion of an educational and environmental park and a recreation park in the Hazleton area. The total cost of the projects is an estimated \$1.4 million.

Mountain Top Soccer Association asked for \$300,000 for a \$1.1 million "soccerplex" in Wright Township that will eventually include 11 fields for youth games.

**South Valley Partnership requested \$245,000 for a \$297,000 skate park in Nanticoke that would be the first phase of a proposed 40.5-acre recreation park in the city.**

Greater Pittston Chamber of Commerce and the Luzerne County Redevelopment Authority asked for \$100,000 to complete funding of a \$2.1 million project that would open up 87 acres of mine-scarred land at the former Avoca Railroad Yards, Duryea. The property, which is a Keystone Opportunity Zone, would be used for commercial development, and the entities predicted approximately 400 jobs would be created.

White Haven Haven Area Community Library asked for \$100,000 to help stabilize the Engine House building, where a community library and visitors' center is planned. It's part of a \$1.75 million project to reinvigorate the downtown and make it a tourist destination.

Huber Breaker Preservation Society sought \$95,000 to assist in a \$285,000 project to stabilize and clean the area around the former coal breaker in Ashley.

In the near future, the commissioners will review the plans and decide the wisest way to spend the county's OCD funds.

In some instances, the plans that were proposed could be better served by seeking additional private sources of funding and the commissioners could help point developers in that direction, according to Vonderheid.

1/20/2005

### **County to collect Nanticoke taxes**

By JENNIFER LEARN-ANDES-jandes@leader.net

The Luzerne County Treasurer's Office will collect county taxes from city residents starting this year because city officials refused the county's offer to pay a reduced rate.

Five other cities and home rule municipalities accepted the county's offer to pay \$1.50 per bill to continue collecting county taxes on their own - Pittston, Hazleton, Kingston, Kingston Township and Wilkes-Barre Township.

The county's collection of its taxes in Nanticoke will save taxpayers about \$30,000 a year. The county had been paying the city \$6.93 per bill. Treasurer's Office Deputy Dominick DePolo said his office will take over the additional collection of the roughly 4,000 Nanticoke taxes without adding staff.

The 2005 tax bills sent to Nanticoke residents will contain a return mailing envelope for their convenience.

The office already collects county taxes from 15,000 Wilkes-Barre residents.

1/20/2005

### **Nanticoke's job cuts preparatory move**

**City is cutting three jobs to save \$91,000 as it enters state program to get on track.**

By JON FOX-jfox@leader.net

The elimination of three municipal jobs is a prelude to the city's involvement in the state's Early Intervention Program for financially faltering communities, the city administrator said Wednesday.

"We're trying to get our finances in order," said Greg Gulick. "We have to cut our expenses."

Three positions will be trimmed, including the city's financial analyst, a clerk in the treasurer's office and a road department laborer.

The cuts are expected to save the financially ailing city \$91,000 per year in salaries and benefits, Gulick said.

A state-commissioned report based on information gathered in June projected the city would end 2004 with a deficit of more than \$200,000. Mayor John Toole believes the number will be closer to \$165,000. Results of a city audit are not yet available.

The elimination of one of three positions in the treasurer's office was spurred by the city's decision to no longer collect county taxes from city residents.

"We're not doing the county taxes so a third of the work is gone," Gulick said.

The same state report that portrayed the city's finances as shaky and projected a sizable deficit indicated there was considerable duplicate work in the treasurer's office.

"We're showing the state that we're cutting expenses," Gulick said.

As one of the first steps in the state's intervention program, the city has requested proposals from financial advisers and those bids will be opened at the Jan. 26 council meeting.

Once an adviser has been selected and a bid approved by city officials, the state will fund at least half of the cost of retaining the adviser, according Department of Community and Economic Development officials.

1/20/2005

### **Council questions Toole's family ties**

#### **The mayor tries to keep a relative in office years after her term ended.**

By JON FOX-jfox@leader.net

Lillian Condu's appointment to the city housing authority's board of commissioners expired more than two years ago.

But since her five-year term ran out in November 2002, she has continued to sit on that executive body, and that seems to suit Mayor John Toole just fine.

Condu is the 89-year-old aunt of Toole's wife, Elizabeth, who has been employed by the authority since 1991. The authority board on which Condu sits oversees personnel issues at the authority, including setting salary levels.

Toole is covered by his wife's Housing Authority health insurance. The authority pays 100 percent of their insurance premiums.

Despite the family connections, which made Toole's move to reappoint her recently appear unethical to at least one council member, Toole contends there is no conflict of interest.

"To be honest with you, I didn't know it had expired," Toole said of Condu's five-year term.

Councilman Bill Brown made an issue of expired board appointments at a council meeting Jan. 5, suggesting the mayor, who has the sole power to offer candidates for authority boards, is dragging his feet.

Condu's appointment is not the only expired one.

Frank Bilenda's appointment to the board expired in November, and Ann Marie Schultz resigned last June.

"You have three seats that should be reappointed or filled," Brown said.

At that point during the meeting, the mayor moved to reappoint Condu. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski and swiftly voted down.

"Until I bring up another name, she stays on there," Toole said.

Toole appointed Condu to the board in 1997. Once a term expires, authority commissioners can continue to serve indefinitely until they are reappointed or replaced. The positions are unpaid.

A motion to reappoint Bilenda received no seconds.

Edward M. Brosh, a housing authority commissioner and acting executive director, says the department of Housing and Urban Development, which oversees the authority, and the state Civil Service Commission are aware of the connection between Toole and Condu.

"It hasn't hindered our operation," Brosh said.

What concerns Brosh is that the board stands at only four members since Schultz's resignation.

With a short-handed board there's little leeway for absenteeism. At least three members must be present at meetings for authority business to be conducted. "If we can't get a quorum at a meeting we can't do our job."

The authority oversees 419 housing units in six city complexes. The board is tasked with ensuring the authority complies with federal regulations and overseeing authority staff, including hiring and setting salaries.

Councilman John Bushko, who voted against Condu's reappointment, said he believes the third-class city code is vague on who can bring forward candidates for city authorities. "My opinion is that anyone on council can appoint."

Brown, who initially broached the topic of expired appointments at the last meeting, asked that the city attorney determine if council members other than the mayor can move to appoint authority members.

Bushko said a desire to see some new faces on the board led him not to support the mayor's candidates.

"She's been on the board for a long time and I think we need some new blood in there," he said of Condu.

Bilenda never made it to a vote because the motion to reappoint him was not seconded.

Condu's appointment represents a conflict of interest for the mayor and raises some ethical questions, Bushko said. "I don't think it's ethical that he should even vote on it."

The state Ethics Commission defines a conflict of interest as a public official using "the authority of his office or employment or any confidential information received through his holding public office or employment for the private pecuniary benefit of himself, a member of his immediate family, or a business with which he or a member of his immediate family is associated."

Toole believes the issue, dormant since his last run at mayor four years ago, has resurfaced for purely political reasons. "This is the same thing that came out last time I ran. They put fliers out attacking my wife and all that."

Bushko has announced his intentions to enter the mayoral primary this year, and would face Toole on the Democratic ticket if the mayor seeks re-election.

Brown, who is also a Democrat, has suggested at council meetings that he might run for mayor, too.

Toole says he has not decided whether he will seek a third term.

1/19/2005

### **Short by possible \$400,000, Nanticoke cuts 2 jobs**

By JON FOX-jfox@leader.net

After the city ended 2004 hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt, officials trimmed two positions from the municipal payroll Tuesday, a former city official said.

The elimination of Sue Bennett, the city's financial analyst, and a position within the treasurer's office will save the city an estimated \$50,000 in salary and benefits, according to the former official.

According to a state-commissioned examination of the city's finances, the city was projected to end the year short more than \$200,000, but that estimate was based on numbers gathered in June. The actual shortfall might be closer to \$400,000, the former official said.

The layoffs come on the heels of the city's failure to secure a short-term loan to carry the municipality through the first months of the new year. City officials typically secured a tax anticipation note to bridge the gap between the end of one year and the receipt of tax revenue in the next.

However, this year PNC Bank declined to issue the city that note.

Councilman Bill Brown said earlier this month the city owed more than \$165,000 in back bills and vendors had begun threatening to stop providing the city services and goods.

The exact nature of the position cut within the treasurer's office and the name of the employee were not available Tuesday.

1/16/2005

### **Getting fit in Nanticoke City**

Nanticoke Area Notes

By: Pamela Urbanski

Today, I am continuing to tell you about fitness centers within city limits that will help you keep that New Year's Resolution of a healthier you.

Curves for Women, located at 75 N. Market St., will celebrate its one-year anniversary next month. The establishment has come a long way since opening its doors with membership now close to 300. If you can spend 30-minutes-a-day, three-times-a-week to improve your quality of life, would rather exercise in an environment designed especially for women who help to encourage you to reach your fitness goals, this place is for you.

The fitness center welcomes women from age 13, but children must be accompanied by an adult.

On your first, visit a staff member will help you complete a figure analysis and a health history.

Center manager, Carol Brice, who herself is a Curves' success story, dropping four dress sizes since starting at Curves, tells me this is an important part of the program.

"If any flags go up when we are interviewing potential members, we suggest they check with their physician," Brice said. "If doctors are not familiar with the program, we will fax the names of the exercise machines and what group(s) of muscles they work and the physician can then, in turn, tell the patient which machine(s) they may want to avoid."

Continuing, she said, "Individual attention is a big reason why our members succeed. I love what I do, I know every member and what her goals are."

The fitness center uses hydraulic resistance machines that are arranged in a circle or circuit. Women move from upper body machines and target specific muscles, then to a recovery platform where they choose to walk or jog. The next step is a lower body machine.

"The ten-plus machines are arranged this way to allow your muscles to recover for a full 60 seconds, which gives you the most benefit to help you to work harder and see results faster," she added.

The workout is done to upbeat music with taped instruction telling members when to move. Carol tells me that's why the workout takes just 30 minutes. There are no weights to adjust. "You just keep moving," Carol said.

A staff member is there to make sure machines are being used properly, to remind members of the machines they should not be using or just to answer questions. Another added bonus - friendships that are made. "It is so nice to see the benefits of exercising extending into other areas of our members' lives," Carol stated. "A lot of friendships have begun here."

Center hours are Monday through Friday from 6:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., Monday through Thursday from 3 to 7 p.m. and Friday from 3 to 6 p.m.

It is suggested that you call and make a first appointment. If you have any additional questions the phone number at Curves is 740-2777.

Tom and Jeanne Williams are the owners of this and four additional Curves in Wyoming Valley. Lisa Swanson is general manager.

Next week, I'll tell you about two traditional fitness centers.

Refuse notices have been mailed

The city clerk from the Nanticoke refuse department remind residents that refuse collection notices have been mailed to city residents. If paying the full amount by March 1, the total due is \$176. Penalty amount due May 1 is \$211.

If you chose the payment plan, the first payment of \$88 is due by Jan. 31, with payment number two due by June 30. After due date, penalty amount is \$106.

When paying by check or mail, include the refuse collection fee card sent to households in the mail. Please enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope so your sticker can be mailed back to you. Money orders and checks should be made payable to City of Nanticoke, Treasurer. If paying in person at the city building, 15 E. Ridge St., hours of collection are Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m.

Questions? Call the city building at 735-2800.

1/16/2005

### **State to pay for cigar mill cleanup**

By Elizabeth Skrapits , The Sunday Voice

The state has promised Nanticoke \$250,000 to clean up the former cigar mill property on West Church Street, but the funding comes with a price.

"The state is willing to assist in cleaning up this hazardous site as the city moves forward on its financial recovery plan," State Rep. John Yudichak

said.

Yudichak and Larry Siegel from Gov. Ed Rendell's office met with city officials on Friday. Dean Fernsler, a local government policy specialist with the Department of Community and Economic Development, could not make it due to the weather.

"The purpose of having them both there is to stress the importance that the Commonwealth is investing in Nanticoke, and to remediate a blighted property, but also to work on solving the city's financial problems," Yudichak said.

In light of a DCED study showing that Nanticoke was on the verge of financial distress, the state has been encouraging Nanticoke to get involved in an early intervention program to avoid falling further into fiscal decline.

Nanticoke has begun the process. City Administrator Greg Gulick said requests for proposals from financial consultants have been solicited and will be opened by council at its Jan. 26 meeting.

The cigar mill was damaged in an arson fire July 3, 1996.

Michael Nordstrom, the property owner, handed over the deed to the city in 2002 because he could not afford to do anything with the site. The city had the building demolished in July 2003, but there was no money for cleanup.

Councilman John Bushko said the city was given permission to request bids. He said a tower has to be taken down, and the site cleaned up. All work, including shoring up a back wall on the property, would be covered by the contract.

The Renaissance Development Group wanted to build townhouses on the site, if the city would give it the property outright.

Bushko said while the state was not opposed to the townhouse project, the state didn't like the idea of giving the property to a developer for nothing.

1/15/2005

### **She's celebrating a century**

### **Family, friends and nursing home staff surprise Mary Jevit with a party.**

By JON FOX-jfox@leader.net

## **CONGRATULATIONS MARY!**

The coal mines were in full swing. Teddy Roosevelt was president. And Mary Jevit was born.

Surrounded by family and staff at Nanticoke Villa, Mary celebrated her hundred years on Friday.

With a "100!" tiara perched on her head, Mary seemed to be having a hard time grappling with the milestone and the party.

"She still can't get over the surprise," said Jean Wilcox, activities director at the nursing home where Mary has lived for the past seven years.

The staff went all out with the party spread, including macaroni salad, sandwiches and cake. It was the first time a resident has cracked the momentous mark.

The oldest of 12 children born to a Ukrainian father and a Czech mother, Mary lived in Warrior Run until she was 93. Her failing vision and decreased mobility prompted her to move to the Villa.

"I can't read the paper. I can't see the pictures. I'm just living."

Les Jioia, 56, of Staten Island, drove in for his aunt's birthday.

"Each year it was getting closer," he said. "We had our fingers crossed that she would make a hundred."

Jioia grew up in New York but remembers spending most of his summers in Warrior Run with his aunt. Her cooking is what he remembers best.

"She was always cooking, baking. I gained a lot of weight. Then, I had to go home and lose it."

Pork chops were Mary's signature dish.

"However she made them, they can't be duplicated," Jioia said.

Helena Jioia, 86, Mary's sister, recalls her big sister acting like a second mom. Being the oldest, Mary shouldered a lot of responsibility.

"She was the head and she worked the hardest," Helena said.

Her vision is a bit blurred but her mind is sharp as a tack, says Volodymyr Klanichka, her priest at Transfiguration of Our Lord Ukrainian Catholic Church.

Mary, his oldest parishioner, can still sing Christmas carols in Ukrainian and can converse with Klanichka in the language when he visits her at the home.

"She remembers very nice," he said.

Wilcox, the home's activities director, said Mary sometimes addresses her in Ukrainian.

When Wilcox asks Mary what she is saying, Mary just shakes her head, saying it would be too hard to explain, and switches over to English.

1/14/2005

### **Low SAT scores worry GNA School Board**

By Elizabeth Skrapits Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

Greater Nanticoke Area School Board fielded questions about SAT performance at Thursday night's meeting.

Resident Hank Keller said GNA students have been performing poorly on the Scholastic Aptitude Tests. For the last five years, the average score has been between 920 and 952, and is currently 947, he said.

"Those scores put us in the bottom 10 percent, no question," Keller said, and asked the board what the district plans to do about it.

High School Principal Thomas Kubasek said that the curriculum is being aligned with state standards, that students who signed up for the SATs have to take preparation classes in March, and that teachers are giving more guidance and instruction to kids taking the SATs.

Keller said that the problem was not at the high school but that an educational base is not established in the lower grades.

Board member Sylvia Mizdail said blame should not just be placed on the teachers; some parents are not helping their children. Keller said many parents in town can't show their kids how to do new math, for example, because most of them were taught through the old system. At K.M. Smith Elementary School, 47 percent of students are low income; 30 percent of their parents did not graduate from high school, and of that 30 percent, 13 percent have not learned to read, Family Center Director Diane Klish said.

Elementary Center Principal Maryellen Scott said the reason students were not taking the tests was not because of frustration, as Keller said, but because they are not interested.

Parents do not always get their children to school on time, and attendance is a "perennial problem," Scott said.

That was backed up by a report from school police officer Michael Wisniewski, read by board member Mark Yeager: Year to date, 124 letters were sent to students who missed 10 or more days of school.

Kubasek said there were many students with scores of 1000, 1100 and 1200, but the students with lower scores brought the others down.

High School Assistant Principal Mary Ann Jarolen said the district has a shifting population - the student with the lowest SAT score had only attended GNA for five days, after years in another district.

Keller again asked the board what the district was going to do about the SAT situation, to which board member Cindy Donlin asked Keller what he wanted the district to do.

At that point, resident and substitute teacher Amanda Salus stepped up and said it was wrong to treat students as though they were just a number, an SAT score.

Students get stressed from taking standardized tests, which might result in poorer performance, but that does not mean they are not capable of achievement, Salus said.

"Kids need to be encouraged to know they're not just a number," she said to applause.

In other business, board member Patricia Bieski complained about letters being stolen from the sign at the entrance to the district.

"It's a focal point. You really, really notice it when you come into our district," she said.

Bieski asked Building and Grounds Supervisor Frank Grevera if anyone had been caught on camera stealing the letters.

Not yet, he said.

Resident Hank Marks suggested using a brand name glue, which he said was so strong a gorilla would not be able to pull the letters off.

Grevera said the district has already been using the glue. It was agreed to find another way to keep the letters on.

The board accepted the resignation of head football coach Leonard Butczynski, effective immediately, and voted to post and advertise the position.

Dr. Jon Olenginski was appointed school physician at an annual salary of \$5,000. Board member Jeff Kozlofski said Olenginski will donate \$1,000 of that towards the boys' locker room at the new football stadium

1/14/2005

### **Ribbons galore to greet 109th**

### **Support groups for the three returning batteries plan a warm welcome**

By MARK GUYDISH-mguydish@leader.net

Support groups for the returning 109th Field Artillery plan to tie one on, as it were, then tie on another, and another and another, until the area blazes with traditional "welcome home" yellow bows.

"We're tying them straight down Route 115, all over Nanticoke, on Market Street" in Wilkes-Barre and Kingston, said Tracy Clocker, president of the Alpha Battery support group. "We're tying them to whatever we can get them on."

These are no simple, two-loop, shoelace-style bows. These are so fancy that the support groups are having trouble finding enough people capable of tying - or learning to tie - them.

"Tell anyone that can get bows or who knows how to make them to call me," Clocker said.

OK, consider it done. Bow-tying artists of the area, if you have time on your hands and troop appreciation in your heart, give Clocker a call. The number is in an accompanying box.

But be warned, the bows are just the beginning. Clocker said the support groups - there are separate ones for Alpha, Bravo and Service batteries - are making other plans as well.

Although exact return dates aren't known, Clocker said Bravo Battery is expected to arrive at the month's end and Alpha is to return sometime in February. On Thursday, the Times Leader's original embedded duo, reporter Jerry Lynott and photographer S. John Wilkin, started a long trip to Kuwait to join the troops and report back to readers as the soldiers prepare to depart.

The departures from the Persian Gulf are good news, but the support groups, of course, are readying for the more important arrivals here in the states.

"I know Service Battery is having a clambake," Clocker said. "Bravo, I believe, is having a formal at Genetti's. And we're having a down-to-earth, casual party. We're working the details out this Sunday."

The support groups are lining up police and fire departments to escort the troops once they reach the area from Fort Dix, their initial stop after returning from Iraq. High school bands are also being tabbed for the homecoming.

Alpha Battery is preparing gift bags for each soldier that include photo slides and commemorative candles marked "109th," Clocker said. And the group has been asking restaurants to donate gift certificates for free dinners for the soldiers.

"They've been very receptive," she said of area business. Then she spread her gratitude around, praising Wilkes-Barre city administrators and the community before blurting out the real song of praise, raising her voice in elation.

"It's over! It's all over!"

How to help:

Anyone who can provide elaborate yellow ribbon or bows, or who knows how to tie them, and wants to help the 109th Field Artillery support groups can call Tracy Clocker at 288-6264.

Nanticoke City Webdesign note: If anyone has Tracy's email, please let us know by emailing us at [nanticokewebdesign@yahoo.com](mailto:nanticokewebdesign@yahoo.com) and we will put it on here. Thank you.

1/14/2005

### **National Guard unit to get big welcome home**

By Robert Kalinowski , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

When soldiers from Nanticoke-based Bravo Battery of the 109th Field Artillery return from active duty, they can expect a patriotic road to home. On Monday, the unit's family support group - known as the Busy B's - plans to start hanging hundreds of ribbons along the homebound highways the soldiers will travel.

The unit could be back in the United States late this month or early February, after a yearlong tour of duty in Iraq, the group has been told.

Following several days at an Army base in Fort Dix, N.J., the soldiers will be bused back to Northeastern Pennsylvania.

They'll enter their home state when the New Jersey Turnpike becomes the Pennsylvania Turnpike, said Jen Sorber, president of the support group and wife of Sgt. 1st Class Jaime Sorber of Hanover Township.

At the state border is where Sorber and the group hope the first ribbons will be placed.

"Once they reach Pennsylvania, it will be a great sigh of relief for them knowing they are in the state they came from," Sorber said Monday at a Bravo Battery homecoming meeting at the Nanticoke Armory.

The group is currently awaiting a final OK from the turnpike commission if its crews would be able to help adorn the roadway with the yellow and red, white and blue ribbons. If not, the group will only decorate local roadways, Sorber said.

After an 86-mile trip on the turnpike, the soldiers will be met with a state police escort at state Route 115 Bear Creek, she said.

This is where Sorber hopes the soldiers will first be met with the "perfect" homecoming they deserve - the one the group has been planning since December.

"I'd like the soldiers to see all the yellow ribbons, kids on the streets holding flags and residents holding 'Welcome Home' signs," she said.

The parade, which will include local fire and police units and hopefully residents, will follow Route 115 to Interstate 81 to state Route 29 toward Nanticoke. All along the way will be the hundreds ribbons, she said.

When the parade reaches Nanticoke, it will run along East Main Street, where a big banner reading "Welcome Home 109th. We're proud of you" will hang, to Kosciuszko Street. It will end at the Greater Nanticoke Area High School, where a ceremony will be held in the gymnasium.

Sorber said about 2,500 mini flags and hundreds of red, white and blue balloons have been ordered for the event, which she hopes gets a large turnout.

"We need to definitely let them know their heroes," said Michelle Lukashewski, wife of Sgt. 1st Class Joe Lukashewski of Wilkes-Barre.

"I just want them to feel the outpouring of support we've had since the day they left," said Amanda Dutzar, wife of Staff Sgt. William Dutzar of Nanticoke.

Alpha Battery of the 109th, which has served in Kuwait and Qatar, will be returning to Fort Dix at the same time as Bravo Battery. The 289 soldiers from the units have primarily served in security roles, escorting convoys and arresting and detaining insurgents.

An exact date of their return is not yet known.

The Guard has asked families not travel to the military base.

Members of the Bravo Battery support group said they'll first get to see their hero loved ones when they get off the bus outside at the Nanticoke gym.

1/09/2005

### **Controversy pits Toole vs. authority**

What should have been a standard appointment to a municipal authority vacancy turned into a public battle among Nanticoke City officials.

The matter started at city council's Dec. 29 work session when councilman and finance chairman Bill Brown filled in for Mayor John Toole, who was absent for medical reasons.

Brown made a motion to appoint Robert Bray to a vacant seat on the municipal authority, and he and councilmen John Bushko and Joseph Dougherty voted in favor of the appointment.

Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski voted against it - not that she had anything against Bray, she explained, but because she would have preferred to see a woman in the seat.

Everything seemed fine until Toole showed up at the municipal authority meeting on the first Monday of the month and tried to put a stop to Bray's appointment.

"I'm kind of dumbfounded by it," Bray said of Toole's reaction. "On numerous occasions he's asked me to serve on various boards."

Bray said he was asked to take the position, and couldn't understand the reason for the controversy.

"I don't want to personalize this. If there's a disagreement between council and the mayor, I don't want to get in the middle of that," he said.

"It's not that I really opposed it," Toole said later. "I just thought, what happened there, missing a meeting like that, I thought it was highly disrespectful to do that, behind my back."

An argument erupted at council's Jan. 5 meeting over whether Brown was allowed to make an appointment in the absence of the mayor, with Toole insisting it was illegal and the rest of council insisting it was acceptable.

"You want to have all the powers to appoint, but you don't want to take responsibility for anything that goes wrong," Bushko told Toole. State Rep. John Yudichak was called in to do some homework.

"At the request of Councilman Brown, we researched and found in third class city code that the actions to appoint Bray were legal," he said. "He should be allowed to take his place on the municipal authority board."

Yudichak said Bray, who is Chief Financial Officer of Wyoming Valley Behavioral Health Services, has 32 years of financial experience and is a lifelong Nanticoke resident, has "an impeccable professional record in the field of finance and business."

"Legally, it's the right thing, in the appointment of Bray; on merit it's the right thing to do," he said, noting, "The municipal authority is not a partisan organization and should not be treated as such"

Toole said Yudichak was the one trying to make it into a political issue.

He also continued to question the legality of the appointment, and maintained that he thought it was wrong for Brown to make it without consulting him first.

"It's nothing sinister, nothing like that," Toole said. "It's just that it's disrespectful to come out and say, 'when you miss a meeting, you're not the mayor any more.'"

He added, "A little discussion would probably have avoided all this."

Unlike many municipal authorities, Nanticoke's does not focus on sewers, but rather on economic development.

One of several projects at stake is a \$1.5 million job creation grant for expansion of the Health Now facility in the Kanjorski building downtown, which the authority owns along with the former CVS building next to it.

Brown said the municipal authority has until May 1 to get everything ready for the project, or it could lose the grant.

"So that board should be at full force," he said. "They should have a guy like Mr. Bray, who is more than qualified, on it."

Brown said Bray was the only one who stepped up for the position and furthermore, vacancies are supposed to be acted on as soon as possible.

But Toole questioned why council decided "suddenly" that the vacancy had to be filled, stating that the municipal authority had four good people on it, and nothing pressing on the agenda they couldn't wait for.

In the past year the municipal authority has gone through some shake-ups, with resignations of four board members and the solicitor.

The board consists of Jeff Piontkowski, Mike Borowski, who was appointed earlier in the year, and Chester Beggs and Steve Buchinski, both of whom were appointed in September.

Bray was intended to replace Susan Saunders, who resigned in mid-September, for a term expiring Dec. 31, 2005.

Toole said he had been told Bray was interested in the vacancy, but first the mayor wanted to talk to him about two things related to his position on the board of directors of the Mill Memorial Library.

One was the board's opposition to a sidewalk being installed around the library, which Toole said was a safety and aesthetic issue, and would be paid for by the state.

The other issue was the library board's apparent refusal to allow a coal miner statue on library grounds, Toole said.

"I really think it's not fair to him. He's in the middle of this," Toole admitted. He said he apologized to Bray, and still wants to talk to him.

Bray said formal notification of his appointment was dropped off Friday in the form of a letter from the city.

He said he is in the process of learning and understanding the issues the municipal authority will be dealing with, and hopes he can provide positive contributions.

"I don't look at it as a big issue. Apparently there's something underlying it that I know nothing about," Bray said. "I'd like to get this behind me and move forward."

1/9/2005

### **Nanticoke Area Notes**

By:Pamela Urbanski

Getting a 'kick' out of exercise

The start of a New Year is the perfect time to start a new exercise program.

Maybe you want to shed some extra pounds, become physically fit or challenge yourself to try something that is good for your mind and body. And if having to get into your car and travel a distance to get to that exercise place is an excuse you have for not starting up, you might have to come up with a better reason than that. You don't have to leave city limits to become active.

Sembach Martial Arts is one of the oldest schools for martial arts in the Wyoming Valley. It first opened in Edwardsville in 1968, moving to its current location on East Main Street in Nanticoke in 1981. Here, traditional karate, jujitsu and aikijitsu are taught.

"Our main goal is teaching self-defense," said owner and chief instructor Master Joseph Duda. "We teach kids and adults how to defend themselves."

That means shaping up physically and mentally. A typical class includes warm-up exercises, calisthenics for conditioning and then sets of moves passed on from generation to generation which complete the class.

But, Master Duda tells me this training carries over to other areas of life.

Many times, parents tell him how their kids do better in school and are more disciplined at home since they started taking classes. He tells me he comes down to a kid's level and gives them an example most can relate to.

"I tell them that training in martial arts is just like playing a video game. At first, you are not that good. You have to keep practicing and trying. But, when you complete a level and move to the next level you feel good about what you have accomplished," he added. "I want my students, young and old, to be able to challenge and motivate themselves and strive to be better in anything they may do."

"I tell them, find something in yourself that you didn't think you had before to reach a new level, to succeed," he said.

Classes are offered Tuesday and Thursday from 5 to 6:30 p.m. for kids and 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. and for adults.

On Wednesdays, classes for beginners, kids and adults are offered from 5 to 6:30 p.m. and 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. for advanced. Morning classes for all ranks are offered on Tuesday and Thursday from 10 a.m. to noon.

For more information, call the school at 735-8464 and leave a message. Or better yet, stop by the school on East Main Street and register. They offer one month of free lessons.

Check this column next week for more information on fitness centers in Nanticoke.

New mass schedule announced

Father Richard Fox, pastor of Holy Trinity Church on South Hanover Street announces a new mass schedule effective immediately.

Masses on Saturday are 4 p.m. at Holy Child Church and 6 p.m. at Holy Trinity Church.

On Sunday, Masses are 7:30 a.m. at Holy Child Church and 10 and 11:30 a.m. at Holy Trinity Church.

Mardi Gras breakfast is a go

If you are wondering if St. Francis Altar and Rosary Society is holding its annual Mardi Gras breakfast, the answer is YES!!!

The breakfast buffet, featuring 22 varieties of food and desserts, will be held Sunday, Jan. 30, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. at St. Francis Parish Center on East Green Street.

Not only is the food great, the parish center is beautifully decorated in the Mardi Gras theme and the price is right!

Cost is \$6.50 for adults and \$3.50 for children 12 and under. Tickets are sold after all masses and at the door.

For more information, call Andrea Josefowicz at 735-5381.

1/9/2005

### **Ice fishing derby planner has high hopes for a big chill**

By George Smith-gsmith@leader.net

Gronkowski, of Nanticoke, really welcomes cold weather.

Without it, the Nanticoke Conservation Club's annual ice fishing derby at Moon Lake in Plymouth Township could be a bust.

Gronkowski, president of the 80-member sportsmen's club that is among the most active and visible in the area, said the annual derby is set for Feb. 5 - the day before Super Bowl Sunday.

No safe ice at 47-acre Moon Lake? The club has a "rain date" set for Feb. 19.

"Who knows. Maybe we will have a miracle and have ice," Gronkowski said last week. "It's supposed to get colder, but I don't think we will get the single-digit temperatures we need for really thick ice."

Gronkowski said he remains optimistic, as he has this winter been out on Lily Lake. But the warm, unseasonable weather quickly made that impossible.

Now, Gronkowski, the other members of the club and the anglers planning to enter the derby have no choice but to wait and watch the weather forecast.

"Last year we had 170 anglers registered, but that number was down because it was so cold," Gronkowski surmised. Last year, a bitter wind blew across the lake and all but the few anglers fortunate enough to have tent-like shelters shivered and stamped their feet. Temperatures were in the single digits; the wind chill was below zero. Exposed fingers quickly numbed.

The year before, Gronkowski said, the derby attracted 250 anglers. This is the 10th year the club has scheduled the event. Only twice did unseasonable weather result in thin, unsafe ice and force a cancellation.

The registration fee is \$5, but junior anglers under age 16 fish for free. Registration starts at 7 a.m., and the derby will be held from 8 a.m. until 1 p.m. Hot food and refreshments will be available. Anglers landing the heaviest trout, bass, bluegill, crappie and perch will receive prize money based on the number of entrants.

Novice ice anglers, or veterans in need of a refresher course, can preregister for the ice fishing skills clinic that will be conducted by club member Phil Levandoski.

Levandoski, who has completed the state Fish and Boat Commission's SMART (Safety first, Manners are important, Appreciate clean water, Return your catch, and Teach others) Angler Program, will review topics such as ice depth and safety, baits and lures and fishing techniques with the help of other club members.

The clinic geared toward young people will include an indoor classroom presentation at Moon Lake County Park's heated nature center. Fishing time on the ice under the supervision of club members will follow.

To register for the clinic, call Levandoski at 735-6303 prior to the event.

The Nanticoke club has continued to actively pursue conservation projects throughout the area.

"This is the third year for our fish habitat structure project at Frances Slocum State Park," Gronkowski said. "We have two more years for that working in conjunction with the Fish and Boat Commission. We will be creating 10 structures each year for five years."

Frances Slocum Lake is located in Kingston Township.

Club members have also helped stock Fish Commission trout in Harveys Creek in West Nanticoke, and the club has purchased and stocked additional fish - including trophy trout - in the creek.

The club is also active in Nanticoke's riverside park cleanup project in an area known to residents as "Lower Broadway." Last April, the club's cleanup coincided with the state's inaugural Great Pennsylvania Cleanup.

Gronkowski remains optimistic the Feb. 5 derby will be held.

"If we have a cold snap, and if the ice is thick enough, we will hold the derby. A lot of people look forward to it," he said.

1/8/2005

### **GNA Coach Steps Down**

By John Erzar-jerzar@leader.net

Len Butczynski spent the past four years trying to rebuild the [Greater Nanticoke Area](#) football program.

On Friday afternoon, Butczynski decided he won't be back for a fifth season. He resigned after a second consecutive 1-9 season.

"I've been mulling it over the last couple of weeks about giving it up," said Butczynski, who cited family considerations for the reason he resigned. Nanticoke Athletic Director Jerry Bavitz said early Friday afternoon that Butczynski was considering resigning and expected a decision next week. However, Butczynski handed in his resignation to Bavitz later in the day, then spoke to about six players who were participating in off-season weight lifting.

"I grew up there my whole life and played there," said Butczynski, a 1986 Nanticoke graduate who compiled a 9-31 record. "It was a heartbreaking decision."

Nanticoke School Board President Bob Raineri said he wasn't surprised with Butczynski's resignation.

"I think he was frustrated because he doesn't have that many students to work with; he's only got 20-some players every year," Raineri said. "That's hard to work with, those small numbers, and compete. Maybe (the resignation) was caused by frustration and a couple of years of not winning."

Several opposing coaches have praised Butczynski for his game plans and coaching. However, Nanticoke's roster never topped 30 players throughout his four years, making for difficult situations in practices and games.

"It was very tough," Butczynski said. "Football is a game of injuries. You'd get injuries and not have enough for practice. A lot of times, me and my assistant coaches would be out there. I'd play quarterback, the assistant coaches would play wide receivers. We'd have garbage cans set up for defensive linemen.

"It gets to the point where you can only do so much."

Butczynski spent five years as the offensive coordinator at Crestwood before becoming head coach at Nanticoke. The Trojans finished 1-9 in his first year and improved to 6-4 in 2002. It was only the second time the program had a winning record in the past 10 years.

Nanticoke was 1-9 this season and finished last among 16 Wyoming Valley Conference teams in points scored (81) and points allowed (375). The Trojans' only victory came in the season opener, a 13-12 victory against Bishop Hafey.

"No one complained of his coaching to me, anyway," Raineri said. "I felt he was very dedicated and always with the kids and working with them in the weight room. I feel for him."

The next school board meeting is Thursday. Raineri said the school would like to have a new coach hired at the February or March meeting.

Butczynski, a middle school teacher at Wyoming Valley West, said he wasn't opposed to coaching again. He recently applied for the opening at Pittston Area and interviewed for the post. He has been contacted by other head coaches about joining their staffs.

"I'm going to take some time off, enjoy my two sons and see what happens from there. I really don't know yet."

### **Mayor, councilman spar over power**

#### **Appointment to board triggers quarrel over who can act when mayor is absent.**

By JON FOX-jfox@leader.net

Mayor John Toole has challenged the validity of an appointment to the city's municipal authority made while he was out for medical reasons. Robert Bray was appointed by council at its final meeting in December while Toole was undergoing surgery. The council's vice president, Bill Brown, served as acting mayor in Toole's absence.

At Monday's authority meeting, Bray was preparing to be seated on the authority's board when the mayor objected.

"Basically, as I sat down for the discussion and they said I was a new member, the mayor said, 'How did Bob get in?'" Bray said Thursday.

The mayor objected to Bray's appointment on the grounds that members must be appointed by the mayor, Bray said.

At Wednesday's council meeting, Brown criticized Toole's intervention at the authority meeting.

Brown was armed with a letter from state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, that excerpted passages from the Third Class City Code that states the vice president of council exercises all the rights and powers of the mayor in the mayor's absence.

"Are you saying that when I miss a meeting you're the mayor?" Toole asked Brown.

"It's right here. You read it," Brown said. "It's right from Harrisburg."

"That's not a determination to me," Toole said, brandishing a letter from the city solicitor that Toole said presents an opposing opinion.

Yudichak, who attended the meeting, chastised the mayor for embarrassing a "pillar of this society."

"In the case of Bob Bray the situation is as clear as day. That appointment is legal and he should be allowed to take his seat," Yudichak said later.

Bray said he is confused and still doesn't know if his appointment stands.

"You got to have some thick skin when you get involved in things like this," the 53-year-old Nanticoke resident said. "I certainly didn't go to anyone and say I'd like to be on this authority. They approached me." The chief financial officer at Behavioral Health Service of Wyoming Valley, Bray said he believes his background in finances could help the city.

The municipal authority owns the Kanjorski Center that rents space to HealthNow, a New York-based Medicare claim processing company.

The five-member board was depleted by the resignations of three members and its solicitor in September. Bray's appointment would bring the board back to a full complement of members.

1/7/2005

### **Cigar plant funding uncertain**

#### **\$50,000 grant from state for site cleanup had been called "definite."**

By JON FOX-jfox@leader.net

What city officials portrayed as an iron-clad commitment of \$50,000 by Gov. Ed Rendell to help remove the ruins of the former Consolidated Cigar building might not be a sure thing.

State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, attended Wednesday's city council meeting to clear up any misconceptions among council members. The funding Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski called "definite" has not been guaranteed, Yudichak said.

Rather, financial assistance in cleaning up the mess on West Church Street is contingent on the city's continued involvement in the state's Early Intervention Program. The program is designed to help faltering municipalities and, if possible, head off the need to enter the state's Act 47 program for financially distressed communities.

Rendell "was very explicit that the Early Intervention Program - cleaning up the city's financial situation - is parallel to cleaning up the cigar factory site," he told council.

The remediation of both the city's finances, portrayed as close to collapse by a recent state-commissioned report, and the site on West Church Street would progress on "two parallel tracks," he said.

Last year, city officials applied for a \$275,000 state grant to rehabilitate the eyesore, but have yet to hear back.

Yudichak said the plan championed by Mayor John Toole to develop town homes on the site has raised "red flags" with the state.

Officials had entered into a now-expired agreement with Maryland-based Renaissance Development Partners to hand over the city-owned site and pay the company 15 percent of the state grant to manage the project.

State officials question why a cash-strapped city would "give away an asset," Yudichak said. They also want to know why the city would hand over a portion of the grant money.

"They want to make sure the city benefits and that's only fair," he said.

A meeting between city officials and representatives of the state Department of Community and Economic development has been scheduled for Jan. 14.

### **Fatal Nanticoke crash studied to assess fault Accident reconstruction could show whether 'gross negligence' existed**

Police are awaiting the results of an accident reconstruction report to determine whether charges should be filed in a two-car crash that killed a city woman last month.

Detective William Shultz said Thursday police have not yet determined who was at fault for the Dec. 18 crash at North Walnut and Broadway streets that killed 76-year-old Theresa Navroth.

Shultz said one of the drivers, Thomas Kane, 56, of Vine Street, Larksville, was given a blood-alcohol test after the crash. He declined to release the results of the test, pending the completion of the accident reconstruction report.

Navroth, of Nanticoke Street, was a passenger in a 1998 Ford Crown Victoria driven by Edward Cooney, 76, of Honey Pot Street, Nanticoke. Police said Kane was southbound in a 1997 Jeep Cherokee at about 6:09 p.m. and struck the passenger-side door of Cooney's vehicle, which had entered the intersection after stopping at a stop sign on North Walnut Street.

Shultz said Kane, who did not have a stop sign, had the right of way. Cooney told police he saw Kane's car approaching, but believed it was far enough away that he could safely enter the intersection.

Shultz said police must be able to prove gross negligence to file a homicide charge in a traffic accident. The accident reconstruction report is needed to make that determination.

"We have to look at the accident reconstruction to see if speed was a factor, if it played a role with alcohol, or anything else," he said.

The report is being prepared by Trooper Todd Norton of the state police in Wyoming. Shultz said he did not know when the report would be complete because Norton is involved in a number of other investigations.

### **Nanticoke discusses removing blighted building**

The fate of the former cigar mill site on Church Street was a smoking issue for Nanticoke City Council on Wednesday night.

The building at 154 W. Church St. was demolished by the city in 2003, but the debris and parts of the structure remain.

Michael Nordstrom of Wild Clover Reclamation and Lumber Co. in South Carolina previously owned the property. He signed it over to the city because he could not pay for demolition and cleanup, and Solicitor Bernard Kotulak determined Nordstrom was bankrupt.

Council voted to authorize filing a proposal for a \$275,000 grant for the prevention and elimination of blight from the Housing and Development office of the state Department of Community and Economic Development.

The money would be used to clean up the debris at the cigar mill site. The city had applied for the funds earlier, but needed to file with the appropriate DCED office to expedite the matter, Mayor John Toole said.

State Rep. John Yudichak, D-119, said that during a recent meeting with city officials, Gov. Ed Rendell promised to do everything in his power to help Nanticoke, along two parallel tracks.

The first is for the city to get involved in an early intervention program with DCED, to get its finances in order.

The second is the cleanup of the cigar mill site; Yudichak said state officials are aware it is a hazard and an eyesore, not just for neighboring residents, but for the entire city.

Despite Rendell's generosity, Yudichak stressed to council that they must focus on the city's finances, and said another meeting with state officials

would be held Jan. 14.

"He was very explicit that this help was not going to prevent the city from having to make some tough decisions," Yudichak said of Rendell. Part of the issue is that the city owns the cigar mill property, and intended to give it to the Renaissance Development Group to build townhouses on the site, Yudichak said.

But if the state provides grant money to cash-strapped Nanticoke, its concern is that the city is giving away an asset free of charge; the state wants to make sure the city will benefit, Yudichak said.

He accused city officials of mismanagement in overseeing the demolition of the site, particularly Toole, who he said met with Nordstrom and got a verbal rather than written agreement from him to clean up the city.

Toole said Nordstrom had come into the municipal building - it was not a meeting - and city officials had no way of knowing he was going to abandon the cigar mill.

Council ended up agreeing to look into an ordinance that would require anyone planning community development work - including demolition at a commercial site like the cigar mill - to be bonded.

### **Near-broke Nanticoke is refused loan**

#### **The city owes more than \$165,000 in late bills. It has \$34,428 in the general fund.**

By JON FOX-jfox@leader.net

PNC Bank has declined to provide the city with a vital short-term loan to ease it through the beginning of the new year, a city official said Wednesday.

In the first months of the year, with tax revenues still to come in, city officials have relied on tax anticipation notes in the years 2000 through 2003. A loan based on expected revenues, a tax anticipation note had typically provided funds for the city to bridge the gap between the end of one year and the receipt of tax revenue in the new year.

This year, however, on the heels of a state-commissioned report that depicted a city close to insolvency, the city doesn't have that option.

Now, in the first month of 2005, the city owes more than \$165,000 in back bills and has only \$34,428 in the general fund after making payroll. And that money is refuse fees from residents paying for 2005 trash collection, said Councilman Bill Brown at Wednesday's council meeting.

Referring to being refused for the TAN, Brown turned to Mayor John Toole and appealed for suggestions. "So if you have any ideas ....," Brown asked.

Toole offered no solutions and said he was told PNC Bank declined to grant the loan because city Administrator Greg Gulick told a bank representative the city would default. Gulick, from his seat in the audience, said that was untrue,

The city has defaulted on a TAN in the past.

In November and December, the city paid only employees and ignored mounting bills. Even then, it was still necessary to transfer money from a sewer repair fund into the general fund to get by.

Council voted to create an individual account for trash fees to keep closer tabs on money needed to pay trash collection contractors and keep it out of the general fund.

Unpaid bills are beginning to pose problems. "Vendors have been calling up," Brown said. The gas vendor contracted to fill police cruisers threatened to stop filling tanks last week. "Basically they were going to stop giving the gas to the police department."

"The street department couldn't get supplies yesterday because we owe one of our vendors money," Councilman Joe Daugherty said.

Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski said this beginning-of-the-year scenario is nothing new except for the fact that a loan is now unavailable. "We were able to get the TAN to get us through and now we can't get the TAN."

The city was also unable to secure a bond issue from PNC Bank, Brown said. Brown is exploring other borrowing options and hoped to meet with another financial institution today.

State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, who attended the meeting, was hopeful tough choices by council members and help from the state's Early Intervention Program can turn things around.

"The Early Intervention Program can prevent Act 47," he said. Act 47 is a state program for financially distress communities. That said, he acknowledged the city is on shaky financial footing. "There's no question it's dire straits."

"The silver lining is I believe you have recognition by at least four members of the governing body that short-term solutions are no longer adequate," he said.

### **Nanticoke couple sets mark for 2005 with New Year's afternoon birth**

#### **A bit late but OK, first baby arrives**

Her mom, Nancy Wiaterowski, and dad, Harold Shotwell, weren't thinking much about that Saturday. They were just thrilled to celebrate her very special designation as **the first baby born in Luzerne County in 2005.**

Haylee Marie, all 6 pounds, 13 ounces and 20 inches of her, entered the world at 1:35 p.m. at Wilkes-Barre General Hospital. The arrival was rather late for the New Year's baby, so her mom and dad were surprised to learn she was the first.

"It's exciting. It really makes me happy and proud," Wiaterowski, 20, said as she cuddled with her little girl in a hospital bed Saturday night.

Dr. Theresa Baseski, the obstetrician who delivered Haylee Marie, was also surprised she was the first baby. Baseski often works on New Year's Eve. Over the past 14 years she has had the honor of delivering the year's first arrival five or six times, she said.

"I was on call New Year's Day this year so I thought I won't have the New Year's baby," she said. "I'm excited to hear she's the first one."

Wiaterowski said she knew she was in for a long haul once her contractions started around 4 p.m. Friday. When Shotwell arrived home from work around 10:50 p.m., her contractions were two minutes apart, but her cervix was not anywhere near the dilation level it needed to be.

Baby made it clear: There would be no 2004 tax deduction.

"I missed out on that one, but that's OK," Shotwell said with a laugh.

The infant's arrival time wasn't the only surprise for her parents, who had opted not to learn her gender until the moment she popped out of the womb.

"At first we wanted to find out, but they couldn't tell," said Shotwell, 25, "then we were like, we don't want to know."

The baby is the first for the couple, who reside in Nanticoke. She's also the first grandchild for Shotwell's mother and stepfather, Millie and Randy Kasprzyk of Hunlock Creek. She's the fifth grandchild of Wiaterowski's parents, Patricia and Rich Wiaterowski of Sweet Valley.

Despite the birth being her first delivery, Wiaterowski said she was calm throughout.

"Even after all that pushing I felt fine. I didn't feel woozy or tired," she said.

"I was more nervous than she was," Shotwell added.

Their New Year already having started on the highest of notes, the couple said they have a simple wish for the coming year.

"We just hope she's healthy all the way through," Wiaterowski said.

Oh, and one more thing.

"I hope she stays like this forever," she said.

### **City will have a nice 'rink' to it**

by: Pamela Urbanski-Sunday Voice

The New Year will bring new recreation for kids and adults in the Nanticoke area.

That is, if Mother Nature cooperates.

You may recall that last year mayor John Toole and city officials joined forces and constructed a skating rink in Patriot Park. It was a great idea, but unfortunately the rink did not hold.

"There was just so much that needed to be done to hold the water," said City Administrator Greg Gulick. "We tried but it just didn't work out."

That's why, this year, Mayor Toole contacted Greater Nanticoke Area Superintendent Anthony Perrone and asked if the school district had a suitable area for a skating rink.

Perrone and Frank Grevera, director of building and grounds for the school district, did some research and realized the school's lower parking lot off of Union Street would be the perfect place to put the rink.

"It really is a great area," Frank noted.

He told me the first plus is the asphalt lot is pitched to hold the water. In addition to that, there are concrete curbs so many sand bags do not have to be placed to hold the water.

"We had to fill approximately 90 sandbags for the one side of the rink," he added. He pointed out that this is not a great amount considering it is a fairly large skating area.

Frank also placed additional lighting in the area for nighttime skating.

"This is really a great area because it is out of the way and there is plenty of parking," Grevera added. "We want to be able to utilize school property as much as possible."

Perrone and members of the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board want the kids to have something to do during the winter months, which is a feeling that has been echoed throughout the city of Nanticoke.

One thing that officials at the district are asking is that those who use the rink take care of it and the surrounding area.

"We ask adults to please help supervise and to talk with their kids about taking care of the area."

He told me if problems arise, the school board will have second thoughts about setting up the rink next year.

If the weather cooperates, that is if temperatures drop to freezing and stay there, the rink should be ready the first week of January. It is good to see city officials and the school district working together to provide much needed recreation in Nanticoke. Enjoy!

### **Happy New Year!**

GNA students make district chorus

Congratulations to two Greater Nanticoke Area students who have qualified for district chorus.

Daniel Pascoe, a senior, and David Yezefski, a sophomore, auditioned with five hundred students from other schools in the area to qualify. They are two of 150 students who will perform in January and have a chance to move onto regional chorus at Riverside High School.

"These two students are to be commended for this accomplishment," said choir director Nancy Evans. "They had to memorize a 10-page piece, and had to be able to sing any part of this musical selection. They sang unaccompanied and in front of a dozen music directors from throughout the area."

Evans said she is very proud of these students and that they will represent the Nanticoke School District well!