

12/26/2016

Nanticoke man's diagnosis leads to new model hobby

Bill Wellock - Citizens Voice

The last time Robert McCracken went fishing was about four years ago.

Kidney failure has kept the 64-year-old off the lake and away from his rod and rifle since around 2012, two years before he was diagnosed with the condition, which he is now treating.

The last three months, however, have brought a new hobby into his life, one that brings a miniature representation of the outdoors into his living room.

McCracken wanted to buy his fiance, Janetlee Holderman, a model train set, but only found gifts out of his budget.

"Then I told her, 'I have an idea,'" he said, pointing to a table in the living room. "This was the idea."

At Holderman's apartment on East Noble Street in Nanticoke are dozens of small plastic farm animals and two replica barns arranged on a table, complete with hay McCracken purchased at Tractor Supply Co. in Hanover Township and real grass.

The replica ranch is his new hobby. It started as a few animals on an end table and now takes up a folding table along one living room wall. A cowboy hat hangs above the menagerie.

McCracken said he spends hours on the project each day, adding details to make it his own, such as small yellow ropes tied around the figurines' necks, paper bearing his imaginary "Circle Farms" logo on the roof of each miniature barn and cereal arranged in a container as a substitute for feed. He has named his cattle and horses and even "branded" his livestock with a red marker. The digit "1" inside a circle lets visitors know the animals belong to McCracken's herd.

Holderman has contributed some touches, such as three small statues that McCracken calls "our watchmen" and a miniature wishing well.

"What ranch doesn't need a wishing well?" she said.

McCracken is now "addicted" to the display he has created. He sprays a fine mist of water on the grass and hay to keep it moist, spends hours each day researching ranching and watches videos on YouTube of rodeos and ranchers bringing in a herd of cattle. He is filling a notebook with his agricultural education.

He recently called The Lands at Hillside Farms so he could talk to a staff member there to learn more about the cows on that farm. McCracken and Lindsey Sutton, the organization's director of education, chatted for about a half hour about topics such as the breeds at the farm, their diet and how much milk they produce.

"He really had an appreciation for what our farmers and our cows do. It was definitely unique, but very welcome," Sutton said.

Last Tuesday, the staff from Hillside Farms even surprised McCracken with a visit from a live calf.

"I walked out there and there she was," McCracken said. "She was adorable."

While growing up in New Jersey, McCracken bagged feed at an agriculture store and bought a horse when he was 15. He eventually came to own five horses, rented space at a barn to house the animals and rode them in parades. He later sold the horses and moved to Pennsylvania after his parents died.

Besides providing a welcome pastime, the display is a source of comfort.

"You might laugh at this, but even though they're fake, it's like they're our kids," McCracken said of his dozens of plastic cows and horses. "In the morning, I can't wait to come out here."

"I never thought to do something like this. I like coming out at night when we're relaxing and looking at it," Holderman said.

Cassandra Smith lives in the same building as McCracken and Holderman and has seen the display grow.

"Every couple days, he'll have me come over. There's always something new to see," she said.

Her daughter, four-year-old Hannah Whitmire, has seen living horses and cows near her father's home in Berwick. She gave McCracken's likenesses a thumbs-up, and explained her two-year-old sister's thoughts on the ranch.

"Shes likes it," Whitmire said.

McCracken and Holderman plan to continue the display. The ranch's future includes a possible expansion to other parts of the living room, perhaps requiring a dip into the capital expenditures budget for another table.

At least one lifestyle change has taken hold of this replica urban rancher that is probably rare in the real profession.

"Now, I feel funny eating steak," McCracken said.

12/24/2016

Nanticoke dancer brings smile to hospice patient's face

It wasn't Santa or Christmas carols that brightened the holiday of one area nursing home resident Friday.

It was a Nanticoke dancer.

When 14-year-old Mackenzie Casey found out about Louise Jackson's holiday wish, she didn't hesitate to say yes.

The Joan Harris Center dancer performed a private ballet routine to "I Believe" for Jackson.

"I had no thought about it," Casey said. "It was automatic."

Jackson, 90, is frail and a patient at Hampton House on the Sans Souci Parkway.

According to Heather Cicini, Jackson's social worker, her wish was to see a professional dance somewhere, possibly Broadway. However, due to Jackson's deteriorating condition, that wasn't possible.

So Cicini asked Casey to perform, and she said yes.

It took two days for Cicini to put everything together. The performance was a surprise for Jackson, who was a dancer in her younger days.

Jackson "always talks about" dancing in New York City, Cicini said.

"I love it so much. I would do it for free," Jackson said, recalling her memories of doing the jitterbug at clubs. "They named me LouLou the go-go dancer!"

Jackson said her passion for dancing, though she never studied professionally, was inspired by watching ice skaters on television.

Casey performed the dance during a recent production, but she had to modify her routine for Jackson due to the limited space at the nursing home.

Still, the dance — and the dancer — impressed Jackson.

"She's beautiful," Jackson said of the teenager in a pink dress. "Very mature."

Casey has been dancing since she was 4 years old. And she also has a penchant for giving back to her community.

"I love it," Casey said. "Look how happy she is."

And Casey was right — the smile on Jackson's face couldn't have been brighter.

After the performance, Cicini presented Jackson with a baby doll because she had heard of Jackson playing with another resident's doll.

"I love her," said Jackson.

"It's never too late to make a memory," Cicini noted.

12/16/16

Penguins spread some holiday cheer

Seth Lakso - Citizens Voice

The Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins spent the little off time they had this week — they're in the midst of a stretch where they play six games in nine days — wandering through local toy stores in search of gifts.

For the second year in a row, the Penguins have a community partnership with the Commission on Economic Opportunity to help make sure local children have a happy holiday season.

After donating gifts in Pittston last year, the Penguins headed to Nanticoke to spread some cheer this time around.

"It's a great charity and it's awesome for our guys to be involved in stuff like that," Penguins coach Clark Donatelli said. "It's great to see. All the guys care and it's that time of year, to give back. It's awesome."

Last week, each Penguins player was assigned a child and given a wish list with three options.

Shavertown native Patrick McGrath picked up some Pokémon Cards and a toy pony set, while Dominik Simon went hunting for Barbie Dolls with the help of his girlfriend.

Before the players handed out their gifts, team captain Tom Kostopoulos gave a speech introducing the players and explaining why they'd come.

Just as Kostopoulos finished, a little girl brought a smile to the room, loudly proclaiming: "Merry Christmas!"

The players then presented their gifts to the children with the help of Wilkes-Barre/Scranton mascot, Tux.

"It's amazing," said Tiffany Tryba, who runs the Nanticoke site for the CEO. "It's that time of year and sometimes people do struggle and we do have a lot of kids that come here and I'm glad these kids were chosen. I think (some new Penguins fans were created today). I heard one of the little ones yell, 'Go Penguins!'"

12/14/2016

State awards recreation grants to projects in county

Citizens Voice

Nearly \$2.3 million in recreation grants will fund projects in Luzerne County, state Sen. John Yudichak, D-Plymouth Township, said in a press release Tuesday.

The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' Community Conservation Partnership Program awarded \$2,263,000 in funds to Luzerne County projects.

The grants include:

- Hazleton: \$115,000 for the rehabilitation and further development of Altmiller Park.
- Jenkins Township: \$100,000 for the development of Riverfront Park.
- Larksville Borough: \$40,000 for the rehabilitation and further development of Washington Street Park.
- **Nanticoke: \$250,000 for the further development of Lower Broadway Recreation Complex.**
- North Branch Land Trust: \$498,000 for the development of the D&L Trail in Plains, Wilkes-Barre Townships and Laurel Run Borough.
- North Branch Land Trust: \$1,000,000 toward the acquisition of approximately 822 acres on Penobscot Mountain in Slocum and Newport townships.
- Pittston City: \$260,000 for the rehabilitation and further development of Sullivan Park.

12/8/2016

Work continues on South Valley Parkway

Work on the South Valley Parkway is continuing.

On Dec. 2, officials opened the roundabout at Espy Street and Middle Road in Nanticoke.

Work crews will be excavating and doing other work this winter in preparation for spring construction, said Pennsylvania Department of Transportation spokesman Michael Taluto.

The \$83.4 million project will create a two-lane road running from Middle Road and Kosciuszko Street in Nanticoke to South Main Road, east of state Route 29, in Hanover Township. The new road will bypass the Askam section of Hanover Township, where drivers use South Main Street and Middle Road to travel now. It also adds six roundabouts, three replacing intersections on Middle Road and three new roundabouts on or next to the planned parkway. The project started in January 2016. PennDOT expects the work to be finished in 2020.

12/8/2016

District 2 rules Nanticoke Area softball player eligible

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A surefire contender in the softball season — still months away — Nanticoke Area appears back on track following an eligibility hearing Tuesday.

The District 2 athletic committee voted 7-0, reinstating Morgan Briggs' eligibility to play her senior season, which was nearly derailed because she played one inning of a senior all-star game.

"There was no intent on the girl's part to violate any rule or get around any rule," said District 2 athletic committee chairman Frank Majikes. "She was totally unaware of it and, obviously, it wasn't done intentionally."

The event in question was the 37th Annual Robert L. Dolbear Senior All-Star Softball Game, played June 26 at W.W. Kubis Memorial Field in Dallas.

Briggs attended the game to support her friends, having no intention of playing in the all-star game intended only for seniors.

But the teams were shorthanded, leaving the West without a catcher.

All-star coaches Heather Dale (Hazleton Area head coach), Bob Hegedty (Tunkhannock head coach) and Ron Hampsey (Tunkhannock assistant coach) approached then-junior Briggs, who volunteered to play upon request.

At least one other underclassmen was asked to play, but Briggs was the only one who could, because she had catching equipment in her vehicle.

"She's always willing to participate, and I think she was just trying to do what was in the best interest of everybody," said Nanticoke Area head coach Ryan Stetz.

Briggs played one inning behind the plate and had an at-bat before it was brought to the coaches' attention that Briggs was violating PIAA bylaws, punishable by a loss of eligibility for one year in that sport.

According to Stetz, Briggs was immediately pulled from the game, where coaches sought clarification from Majikes via telephone.

Majikes did not pick up, though, and the possible violation was eventually reported by Nanticoke Area athletic director Ken Bartuska to the PIAA.

Stetz said the 30-minute testimony at Tuesday's hearing revolved around Briggs having no intention of playing in the all-star game, while having only good intentions — so it would not be forfeited — when she did enter the game.

One photograph showed Briggs at the game in street clothes, alongside Nanticoke Area senior Rachel Roccograndi, who was in uniform.

Stetz said the Hazleton Area and Tunkhannock coaches took responsibility for playing Briggs, saying they did not know they were breaking the rules.

"It's a credit to all involved, as far as the Hazleton coaches and Tunkhannock coaches and even the committee," Stetz said. "It was great that everybody came forward with an honest description of what took place in the act of fairness. In this case, the PIAA committee really got it right."

The East won the all-star game, 15-2, in a contest that featured individuals playing defense for both teams, as well as pitchers and catchers that hadn't played those positions in years.

Briggs hit about .400 last season and was selected by Wyoming Valley Conference coaches as a second-team all-star in Division 2. She figures to be a key player this year for the Trojanettes, who went 13-5 in 2015.

12/6/2016

Luzerne County projects receive nearly \$2 million in state funds

Business, News, Top Stories - Times Leader

Several projects in Luzerne County will receive nearly \$2 million in funding through the state's Multimodal Transportation Fund Program.

State Sen. John Yudichak, D-Plymouth Township, announced the news via a press release Tuesday

Market Square Redevelopment: \$430,000 for Market Square Properties Development LLC for roadway and sidewalk work in the city of Wilkes-Barre as part of the Market Street Redevelopment project.

George Avenue Streetscape: \$600,000 to complete a pedestrian safety streetscape on George Avenue in the city of Wilkes-Barre. The project will help the city transform the smaller business districts that are not located in the immediate downtown business district.

"The projects will improve both downtown Wilkes-Barre and George Avenue, which is the main thoroughfare of the Parsons neighborhood. It is vital that we invest in both our downtown commercial district as well as our neighborhood business districts to create prosperity in the entire city," said Wilkes-Barre Mayor Tony George via the press release.

The City of Nanticoke also received \$463,742 for intersection improvements at Broadway and East Main streets. The project will create a safer intersection for both motorists and pedestrians and will provide multimodal access to the city through multiple parking facilities and spacious lighted sidewalks.

Other local projects that received funding include:

Ashley Borough Infrastructure Improvements: \$100,000 to assist with infrastructure repairs throughout Ashley Borough.

Old East End Boulevard Road Reconstruction: \$100,000 for the reconstruction of Old East End and Pittston Boulevards located in Bear Creek Township.

River Road and Market Street Intersection Improvements: \$82,000 to widen the roadway at the intersection of River Road and Market Street in Jenkins Township.

12/3/2016

'Miracle of Bethlehem' performances draw hundreds to Nanticoke

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Admittedly, Jim Botsko once had second thoughts of portraying Jesus in the annual showing of "Miracle of Bethlehem" at the Cultural Centre of St. Faustina.

"But that was six years ago," Botsko said with a chuckle Friday, before the first of three scheduled weekend performances.

Botsko believed back then he was too old to portray Jesus. "But Father Nash told me Jesus was ageless," Botsko recalled. "It was meant to be."

So Botsko, of Hanover Township, offered to stand in until they found a younger man. That never happened. "I still get goosebumps, even at practice," Botsko said, adding it was "an honor and privilege" to portray the man whom Christians consider the son of God.

Program director Judy Minsavage said the cast, with 62 people this year, started practicing in July. Participants range from children as young as 7 to adults of 70. The "Miracle of Bethlehem" spotlights the birth of Jesus, but also touches upon the story of his life, death and resurrection.

"They spend hundreds of countless hours practicing," said Minsavage, an employee of Times Leader Media Group. The show – held at the centre, 38 W. Church St. – runs for 45 minutes. It features well-known holiday tunes, such as "Mary, Did You Know?" and "O Come, All Ye Faithful," but also Minsavage-written pieces.

Friday's showing attracted a standing-room-only audience, and Minsavage said the performance will bring in an estimated 800 people during the weekend as area residents kick off their holiday season.

"It helps you get into the spirit of Christmas," cast member Charlie Marcella said.

Marcella, of Sheatown, has returned each year, portraying one of the three kings. It's also a family affair for Marcella, as his wife Mary Ann is part of the sewing committee. "We enjoy it," Charlie Marcella said.

After the show, 11-year-old Brooke Bau and her brother, Garrett, both of Shickshinny, said they enjoyed the show. Before coming to see the play, they were decorating their tree.

Garrett, 8, said the performance was "really good," and he enjoyed the lights illuminating Jesus at the show's conclusion.

The show also features live animals from Endless Dreams Animals, in Benton. The menagerie includes two goats, sheep, a duck, two chickens and an alpaca, as well as Mistletoe, a donkey. Mistletoe is a third-generation donkey for the show, said Jess Exley, of Endless Dreams.

"Anything we do, we put our heart and soul into," Exley said of the animals. "But this ("Miracle of Bethlehem" program) is our favorite one."

12/2/2016

Going round and round in Nanticoke

Sean McKeag | Times Leader

Krieger Construction, of Dickson City, puts the final touches on the first of six roundabouts in the Nanticoke/Hanover Township area. At 5 p.m. Friday, PennDOT opened the roundabout, which is at the intersection of Espy Street and Middle Road, to local traffic. The roundabout will be opened to thru-traffic by next weekend, Nanticoke's interim city Manager Donna a Wall confirmed. Construction on the roundabouts is part of the South Valley Parkway project. The final parkway project will be completed in 2020. According to Michael Taluto, a Pennsylvania Department of Transportation spokesman, said work on the next roundabout at the intersection of Prospect Street and Middle Road, will continue throughout the winter. The second roundabout is scheduled to be open in late 2017. Residents in the Hanover section of Nanticoke used a two-mile detour to Clarks Cross Road.

12/1/2016

Family of man who died after dog attack sues canine's owners

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

The family of a Nanticoke man who died shortly after having a finger amputated because his hands were mangled in a dog attack sued the owners on Wednesday, alleging they knew the pit bull was dangerous and failed to protect the public.

Donald E. Cox, 79, died Feb. 26, 2015, less than two weeks after an unmuzzled pit bull bit his hands as he sat on his front porch, according to the complaint filed by attorney Katie Nealon of Munley Law.

According to the complaint, Cox was sitting on the porch of his home at 1224 S. Hanover St. on Feb. 15, 2015, as Jeffrey Seiwel, 33, of 1218 New Grant St., walked by with George, a white and brown pit bull.

The dog had a history of "vicious propensities," having previously attacked people or animals, and Seiwel initially had a muzzle on it, the complaint says. But Seiwel later admitted removing the muzzle, thinking no one was in the area, according to the complaint.

The dog "suddenly and without warning" came onto Cox's property and bit his hand, causing severe bite wounds and fracturing bones in his hand and fingers, the complaint says.

When the attack was over, Seiwel told Cox he would come back with the dog's paperwork, but never followed through,

showing his “consciousness of guilt,” the complaint says.

Only later, when city police publicized the case, did officials learn who owned the dog, the complaint says.

The lawsuit says that Seiwell’s mother told police the dog had been seen at two veterinary clinics, but when police checked it out there was no record of vet visits or rabies shots.

Cox, who was in “great pain, agony and suffering,” underwent surgery the day of the attack to be treated for severe dog bites to the right hand and forearm, as well as to the left hand, the complaint says. His left hand sustained “massive loss of soft tissue” and had broken bones, according to the complaint.

The left hand was so badly damaged Cox required a skin graft and needed to have his index finger amputated, resulting in a “shock to his nerves and nervous system” that led to his death eight hours after returning from the hospital from the amputation procedure, according to the complaint.

His obituary identifies him as a U.S. Air Force veteran who served in the Vietnam War, Korea and elsewhere around the world before retiring in 1974.

Court records show that Seiwell was found guilty at trial in August 2015 of a summary offense of harboring a dangerous dog. Magisterial District Judge Donald L. Whittaker fined him \$272, according to court records.

In addition to Seiwell, the lawsuit names as co-defendants his mother, Suzanne Savitski, of 1218 New Grant St., and dog co-owner Lezah Lynn Davis, 28, of Hanover Township, who was also found guilty of a summary offense and fined \$194 in the case.

The complaint also targets the owners of the New Grant Street home, Brian S. and Kimberly Kaminski, of 46 Dale Drive, Fairview Township.

The lawsuit seeks unspecified damages in excess of \$50,000.

11/24/2016

Postal carrier honored for service

Joseph Lloyd’s one missed day of work came in 1983, when he injured his leg in a bicycle mishap.

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Longtime mail carrier Joseph Lloyd is to the U.S. Postal Service what Baltimore Orioles legend Cal Ripken Jr. was to professional baseball: an ironman who could be counted on to show up for work day in and day out.

Lloyd called off only one time in his career after a bicycle mishap when the chain snapped and lacerated his leg.

That was in 1983.

The 68-year-old was recently honored for 45 years of dedicated service delivering mail, most of that time in Nanticoke and the West Nanticoke section of Plymouth Township.

That’s a lot of mileage on the body.

“A lot of the guys burn themselves out — bad knees, bad hips. Not Joe,” said Frank Rafalko, postmaster for the Nanticoke Post Office. “He learned how to pace himself.”

Lloyd recently joked his streak might be more impressive than Ripken’s.

| A first-ballot Hall of Fame inductee, Ripken played in 2,632 consecutive games over 16 seasons before finally missing a game in September 1998.

Lloyd’s current streak is at 33 years. And he had 12 years of perfect attendance before that.

“I’m better than Cal,” Lloyd said with a laugh. “Put that as the headline: ‘Mailman beats Cal Ripken.’”

Lloyd, a widower who lives on Tilbury Terrace in West Nanticoke, could have retired years ago. But he continues to work because he likes it and because he’s still able.

“Once the legs go, it’s over,” Lloyd said. “Most carriers retire after 30, 35 years, but I still feel good.”

Plus, the job comes with certain healthy benefits, Lloyd said.

“This is the only job where you get paid to exercise — you know, walking all day.”

11/24/2016

Nanticoke Area's Casey set for final game

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The excitement of winning the final game of the regular season, along with the fact it was against rival Hanover Area, continued well after the Nanticoke Area football players exited the stadium.

Finishing the regular season 5-5, just the third time since the 2002 season when a Nanticoke Area team won five or more games in a season, had the Trojans thinking playoffs.

But first, players and coaches alike needed to see results from other games. As the final scores game came pouring in things seemed to be falling in Nanticoke Area's favor.

Most of the Trojans' faithful were thinking Eastern Conference.

Turns out they were wrong. Nanticoke Area did just enough to qualify for the District 2 playoffs for the first time since 1999, and were in the postseason for the second time since the 2013 season.

"Before we left the locker room coach Bruza told us we might be in the district playoffs," said Nanticoke Area defensive end/tight end Justin Casey, who will suit up for the Pioneers in the 66th annual UNICO Game on Saturday.

"When we actually found out we were in the district playoffs I was so excited I almost cried," Casey said. "I was celebrating with some of my friends, we were all together when we found out. We were more excited than you can possibly imagine. Even though we were playing the No. 1 seed, I was never more excited to play in a game in my entire life."

Though the Trojans lost to the Cavaliers, who are still alive in the PIAA Class 3A playoffs, Casey believes that just being able to get that far could be viewed as a stepping stone for future Nanticoke Area teams to shoot for.

"I think we started something, I can feel confident that the junior class will do a great job carrying the tradition my class set," Casey said. "We are all such a tight-knit group, something Nanticoke Area hasn't seen for a long time. We didn't want to leave a mark, we wanted to leave a message. No matter what you do you have to be a team and good things will happen."

Casey is one of four players from Nanticoke Area selected to play in the UNICO game which features the top senior players from the WVC.

Players from GAR, Berwick, Coughlin, Meyers, Lake-Lehman, Northwest and Holy Redeemer are also on the team which will be coached by GAR's Paul Wiedlich Jr., who led the Grenadiers to the District 2 Class 3A championship game.

"This is really just an honor and great experience to meet all the players you have been playing against all year," Casey said. "Everyone got along really well. To be honest, when I got here I figured half the team was going to hate me. But they welcomed everyone with open arms, so I was like 'let's get it.'"

While the game is expected to be a fun experience, and the practices are far from the ones Casey experienced during the regular season, there has been one particular part of the week that he has enjoyed the most. That is the annual exchanging of helmet stickers between the players on the team.

"Exchanging stickers is the greatest experience," Casey said. "I love the Lake-Lehman sticker. That is the first one I got. I have been hearing about this since I was a sophomore. I never expected to love it so much. This is all kind of like new eyes for me. Don't get me wrong, I want to win. Most importantly it is an all-star game. I want to have fun and make some memories with the new friends I am making now and the old friends I have been playing with since I was small."

11/23/2016

Family of Nanticoke man who died in W-B General Hospital files lawsuit

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

The family of a Nanticoke man who died in the care of Wilkes-Barre General Hospital filed suit this week alleging a doctor broke his neck, causing partial paralysis, during an unnecessary intubation.

The lawsuit alleges Bernard Joseph Ford III, 62, asked to be removed from life support after learning he would be permanently paralyzed as the result of the neck fracture Dr. Noel Estioko caused while inserting a breathing tube without consulting Ford or his wife.

The complaint, filed by Wilkes-Barre attorneys Patrick J. Doyle Jr. and Kelly M. Ciravolo, accuses the hospital as well as Estioko of negligence in causing Ford's death on April 6.

A spokeswoman said the hospital does not comment on pending litigation.

According to the complaint, Ford arrived at the hospital in March to be treated for shortness of breath. Hospital records show Ford was confused and in moderate distress with shallow breathing.

Ford, who had a history of rheumatoid arthritis and musculoskeletal disorder, received a drug to help increase air flow to his lungs, resulting in his condition improving, according to the complaint. And although there was no indication Ford was crashing, Estioko decided to perform an emergency intubation because of increased levels of carbon dioxide in his blood, the suit says.

Estioko never talked to Ford's wife about his pre-existing conditions and performed the procedure with what he deemed the "implied" consent of Ford — even though Ford was "coherent and stable" and his wife Joan was at his bedside, the complaint says.

During the procedure, Estioko broke Ford's spine, the complaint alleges. On April 4, Ford learned that the best-case scenario involved him being a paraplegic requiring total care, including a feeding tube, the attorneys wrote. The same day, Ford told doctors he wanted to be removed from life support. Doctors gave him drugs to keep him comfortable until he died two days later, the complaint says.

Ford's cause of death was listed as "cervical spine fracture, traumatic," according to the complaint.

The lawsuit alleges Estioko was negligent in performing the intubation despite knowing about Ford's medical history, causing the father of three to endure "severe pain and suffering prior to his death."

The complaint seeks unspecified damages to be determined at trial.

11/17/2016

Nanticoke police union files complaint over chief's hiring

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The Nanticoke City Police Association has filed a complaint alleging that an internal candidate was improperly passed over when retired state Trooper Thomas Wall was hired as city police chief in September.

The police union, in a complaint filed Tuesday in Luzerne County court, claims the state Third Class City Code requires that a city mayor appoint a member of the city police force, if that force includes qualified candidates, to fill an opening for the chief's position.

The complaint alleges that Wall had two conflicts of interest at the time he was appointed: He was a member of the city's police civil service commission and he is married to Nanticoke interim city Manager Donna Wall.

Nanticoke's police chief slot fell vacant after former Chief William Shultz died in August.

Nanticoke Mayor Richard Wiaterowski appointed Wall, a Nanticoke resident, as city police chief on Sept. 21.

Wiaterowski cited Wall's 25 years of experience with the state police, his proven leadership ability and record of community service.

Wall, 57, retired from the state police as a corporal in 2012. He never served as a Nanticoke police officer prior to his appointment as chief.

The complaint, filed by police union President Brian Kivler through Harrisburg attorney James McAneny, states that Nanticoke police Lt. Michael Roke was qualified to be chief and was interested in applying for the position.

The complaint asks the court to direct Wiaterowski to "appoint a chief, if at all, from the ranks of the duly appointed members of the Nanticoke police department," and direct that Thomas and Donna Wall recuse themselves from any participation in that process.

The complaint names Thomas Wall and Wiaterowski as defendants.

Both men said Wednesday they were not aware the complaint had been filed prior to being asked about it by a reporter.

Wiaterowski, at a city council meeting Wednesday night, said he would comment after he sees a copy of the complaint.

Wall, reached by phone, said he could not comment about the specifics of the complaint before he saw it.

He said things have gone well overall since he took command of the department, which employs 14 full-time officers, including the chief, and two part-time officers.

"I've been following the contract, trying to make things better for the officers," Wall said.

He said there have been "a few complaints," but that is to be expected whenever a new chief takes the reins of a police department.

He said the police union is within its rights to file a complaint if its members feel it is necessary.

"That's part of the system," Wall said.

However he also noted that "if they want to live by the letter of the law, they live by the letter of the law. It works both ways."

Nanticoke city solicitor William Finnegan, speaking prior to Wednesday's city council meeting, said he also has not seen the complaint. He said he is confident that Wall's hiring was legal, based on prior case law.

Nanticoke operates under a home rule charter, unlike most third-class cities in the state, and the provisions of the city charter support Wall's appointment as chief, Finnegan said.

Wiaterowski, in an interview on Sept. 21 hours before he appointed Wall as chief, said he had interviewed four external candidates, including Wall, and one member of the city police department for the vacant chief's position.

11/17/2016

Owning their own cafe is a dream come true for Nanticoke couple

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When the Grateful Roast Cafe and Coffee Roaster first opened in June, the owners didn't even turn on their "Open" sign.

"It's really easy to get a bad rep, it's hard to keep a good rep and even harder to make a good rep out of a bad rep," owner Brian Williams said. "Neither of us had ever run a restaurant or cafe before so we didn't want to be overwhelmed by it at first. We let it grow organically. Let it do what it's going to do."

And nearly five months later, business is seemingly booming.

Williams and his wife, Sarah Kratz, held a grand opening for the Nanticoke cafe in September after years of planning and wanting to own their own coffee joint and cafe. It was in 2006 that the idea for Grateful Roast was really born, according to Williams, when he began roasting coffee on his sun porch in Nanticoke for his friends and a handful of clients. His small business was quickly shut down by the city for not having the proper permits, but the dream didn't die.

"I was doing it to learn how to roast and it grew into more," Williams said. "We're not rich people, so we couldn't make it happen right away. But I knew I wanted a roastery. This has been a long time in the making. We've been saving, wishing and dreaming for this."

In March, the couple signed a lease on the space at the corner of Kosciuszko Street and Middle Road that previously housed Grave 74 Tattoo Studio. They immediately began renovations on the building, which used to have a large garage door where the coffee station now sits.

The name, "Grateful Roast" stems from the couple's love for the Grateful Dead, combined with the reminder to have gratitude for the little things — like coffee.

Both owners have their specialties in the cafe — Williams roasts the coffee, makes drinks and bakes bagels, while Kratz is the master in the kitchen, cooking daily soup specials, sandwiches, salads and even baked goods.

The interior of the cafe is cozy and inviting with teal-painted walls, neon-colored artwork on the walls and a bar counter full of delectable baked goods. Artist Stephanie Boback, known for her chalk drawings at the F.M. Kirby Center for the Performing Arts, designed the chalkboard menu on the wall by the front door.

Next to the menu sits a large coffee bean roaster and dozens of bags of roasted and unroasted coffee beans. Williams roasts all of the beans in-house and said it takes an average of 15 minutes to roast a batch of beans. The coffee beans hail from countries around the world, including Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya, Ethiopia and Indonesia.

T-shirts hang near the saloon doors to the kitchen reading, "Because life's too short to drink bad coffee." And each coffee cup and take-out bag is hand-stamped with intricately designed lettering, "GRC."

"We wanted to do something great for the community because it's a great community," Williams said. "So we wanted to give them something to get out of the house for. We wanted to give back and add something positive to the area."

In the future, Williams said he would like to see the coffee side of the business expand so that they could sell bags of their beans to other cafes and retail stores. At some point, the couple said they would also like to open for a Sunday brunch.

"I love coffee, love the industry," Williams said. "Specialty coffee is such a niche market. I love being able to become an intimate contact between where the coffee is coming from and where it's going. It's an industry with a positive impact on the farmers and the world around us."

Grateful Roast Cafe

Location: 400 Middle Road, Bdg. C, Nanticoke

Hours: Monday through Friday, 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Saturday, 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Contact: 570-285-5282

Online: gratefulroast.com, Grateful Roast Cafe and Coffee Roaster on Facebook

11/6/2016

Don Williams advocates for prison guard safety after son's death

While returning soldiers from other wars were treated like heroes, Army veteran Don Williams said this was not the case when he and others returned home from the Vietnam War.

Williams, 71, a Nanticoke resident, served in the Vietnam War from 1966 to 1967.

He remembers a very unwelcome reception when he came back to America.

"I'm so happy for the guys coming back today from Iraq and Afghanistan because people welcome them back,"

Williams said. “We came back to a country that kind of abandoned us emotionally over there and took a very negative perception of us, so when we returned, we were not welcomed back. Often times, we found ourselves getting into arguments with people. We were just soldiers returning from a war. It’s not like we caused it.”

Williams served as a helicopter gunner in Vietnam and received an award for his combat missions.

He is the father of the late Eric Williams, a 34-year-old correctional officer who was killed by an inmate on Feb. 25, 2013, while working in a housing unit at U.S. Penitentiary Canaan in Wayne County.

His son was beaten and repeatedly stabbed. He was only equipped with handcuffs, keys and a radio.

Since his son’s death, Williams started and is now president of the political advocacy group Voices of JOE, whose mission is to address safety concerns of corrections officers, to promote and support legislation pertaining to safety of corrections workers, and to raise awareness of the dangers encountered in working within prison systems.

Voices of JOE is named for three fallen correctional officers, including his son and two others killed by inmates — Jose Rivera and Osvaldo Albarati.

He got involved with the advocacy group when he learned there were a number of things lacking that could have saved his son’s life.

“I did it because you can’t kill my son and I’m just going to sit back. I can’t let that go,” Williams said. “We’re still fighting almost four years to get a trial. It keeps getting put off and put off. I just think there’s a lot of problems in the system. I can’t get my son back but I will not be a person who will sit in the house and do nothing about it.”

His efforts helped to get legislation passed to protect federal correctional officers.

The Eric Williams Correctional Officers Protection Act, introduced by U.S. Senators Pat Toomey and Bob Casey, provides that the federal Bureau of Prisons must give non-lethal pepper spray to guards in medium and high-security prisons so they have some means of self-defense.

He also started the Eric Williams Race for Justice and a scholarship fund created in his memory for criminal justice and law enforcement students.

For 33 years, Williams worked at Clearbrook Lodge in Shickshinny, helping adolescents with drug and alcohol addictions. He was a counselor and when he left, he was vice president of adolescent treatment. He still serves as a consultant.

He said it’s difficult to track success rates but he said he is satisfied with what he has accomplished.

“I think the seed that we planted in them there would start to blossom after a while,” he said. “They would realize what we told them was true.”

Don Williams

Age: 71

Current town: Nanticoke

Branch of service: Army

Where he served: Vietnam

Community service: Founder and president of the advocacy group Voices of JOE, to address safety concerns of corrections officers.

11/6/2016

Four school districts get a total of \$82,129 in state safety grants

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Four Luzerne County School Districts got Pennsylvania School Safety grants for a combined total of \$82,128, according to information released by the state Department of Education Friday afternoon.

It was a small slice of \$6.5 million in competitive “Safe Schools Initiative Targeted Grants” awarded for training and pay of school resource officers and school police officers, and to purchase equipment or fund programs intended to help prevent and reduce violent incidents.

The four local grants were not for officers. Three were for equipment: Luzerne Intermediate Unit got \$25,000, Dallas School District got \$24,899, and Wilkes-Barre Area got \$18,230.

The fourth local grant was \$14,000 to [Greater Nanticoke Area School District](#) to fund a program.

The grants for training and compensation of officers run for two years. First-year applicants can get up to \$60,000 for a school resource officer and \$40,000 for a school police officer, while second-year officers can get \$30,000 and \$20,000, respectively.

The difference is subtle. Generally, an school resource officer is an officer in a municipal police force with extra training in school policing and working with students who is contracted to work in district schools part of the year. A

school police officer is usually employed directly by the district.

11/3/2016

Proposed Nanticoke budget holds line on taxes

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The council of Nanticoke will have a budget hearing 6:30 p.m. Nov. 16 in the council chambers, 15 E. Ridge St. Mayor Richard Wiaterowski released a \$5.5 million general fund budget proposal on Wednesday that has no tax hikes and a 1 percent increase in revenue.

The mayor's proposed budget for 2017 is \$5,576,602 compared to \$5,537,427 in 2016.

Wiaterowski's proposal would keep the millage rate at 5.93. A mill is a \$1 tax for every \$1,000 of assessed value. The breakdown of millage includes general purpose millage at 4.75, debt services at 1.15 and .0194 for the library.

The council and department heads had input on the budget, according to Wiaterowski.

Wiaterowski noted that the city, which has a population of 10,465, is seeing a decline in assessed property values because of tax appeals, with a \$2.333 million decline in this year's assessed value.

Earned income taxes contribute to 43 percent of the budget's revenue or \$2,397,938.86 of the budget.

"Higher wages and a lower unemployment rate are resulting in a slight increase in tax income on earnings," Wiaterowski's introduction said.

The general fund contributes to 32 percent or \$1,784,512.64 to the budget and the final 25 percent or \$1,394,150.50 comes from code department revenue and miscellaneous reimbursements.

Expenses for the city continue to rise, the mayor noted. Per contractual agreements, salaries are increasing \$54,017, which is down from previous years because the reduction of the police chief and code officer's salaries as well as promoting from within to the city manager's position.

The salary of the police chief, upon the death of William Schultz and the hiring of Tom Wall, went from \$81,867 to \$65,000, a savings of \$16,867. The proposed budget reflects interim city Manager Donna Wall's \$4,000 health insurance buyout because she will be on her husband's health insurance. She is married to Wall. Her buyout will save the city over \$22,000 for the course of the year.

Wiaterowski expects the code enforcement office to have a difference in the favor of the city close \$27,000 from 2016.

The biggest chunk of savings is the salary for Code Enforcement department. There will be two people in the department forming the \$36,000 salary which will save the city \$10,600.

The council will have a first vote on the budget after a budget hearing 6:30 p.m. Nov. 16 is held in the council chambers. The second and final vote will come during the Dec. 7 council meeting.

10/17/2016

Grohowski to participate in Liberty Bowl halftime show and parade

Amber Rose Grohowski, a student at Wilkes University and former Miss GNA at Greater Nanticoke Area, was recently selected to take part in the Autozone Liberty Bowl Halftime Show and Parade in Memphis, Tennessee on Dec. 30 as part of being a state finalist in the America's Homecoming Pageant which was held in October. She will spend three days touring the city and volunteering at the St. Jude Research Hospital before taking part in the Autozone Liberty Bowl Parade on Beale Street and participating in the half time show during the bowl game. Amber Rose is the daughter of Eric and Diane Grohowski of Nanticoke. She has two brothers, Trevor Grohowski, and Dr. Deric Grohowski.

10/15/2016

Tux and Champ show students how to get along with each other, despite differences

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Kilee Favors thinks bullying is an issue that needs to be addressed.

The seventh-grader who attended an anti-bullying event at the Greater Nanticoke Area Elementary School sponsored by the United Way of Wyoming Valley, said bullying makes life worse not just for the victim, but for other people, as well. "Bullying can lead to things like suicide," she said. "It has an effect on the person bullied, on their parents and on their friends."

Cassandra Cerulli, Miss Luzerne County, addressed those gathered at the event, reminding them that almost everyone has been bullied.

“Believe it or not,” she said, “I have been bullied.”

Cerulli invited Champ, the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre Yankees mascot, and Tux, the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins mascot, to join her in the front of the auditorium to make a point.

Although Champ is blue, with a striped shirt and large eyes, and Tux is black, with a team jersey, and a yellow beak, she said, there is no reason for them to not get along.

Illustrating the importance of respecting other people, the two mascots playfully shared the stage, highlighting their ability to be friends in spite of their differences.

“Rocky” from WKRZ told young people gathered that, although bullying might have been accepted in previous generations, it is not okay to put other people down and make them feel bad about themselves.

Participants watched a video in which a young person collected negative comments about herself on sticky notes as she made her way through the day. At the end of the video, classmates threw the comments in the garbage and invited her to sit at their table.

“Rocky” told students they could do just that — help classmates to set aside the negative things said about them and help them work to be their best selves.

Alan Stout from Catholic Social Services’ Big Brothers/Big Sisters program, said he will visit the school on a weekly basis to reinforce anti-bullying topics, including diversity, empathy and reporting.

Stout said there are five types of bullying: physical, verbal, cyber, property and exclusion.

All, he said, have a marked impact on their targets.

“For example, in exclusion, when a person is not invited to have lunch with his classmates, that really hurts people,” he said.

Stout will work with grade school students in the district through the end of the year.

Friday also happened to be the school’s annual “Pink Out Day” where students wore pink to show support for those with breast cancer.

Favors thought both the event and the willingness for her classmates to support a worthy cause underscored the positive attitude of the staff and her classmates.

She looks forward, she said, to learning how to prevent bullying and to help those around her from understanding that bullying is not alright.

10/3/2016

Victim’s mother meets leader of rescue attempt

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Mandy Powell waited outside in a chill breeze for a man she had never met but considers an angel.

As children living in Apollo Circle drew on the sidewalk and rode their bikes around the development, she watched as a car turned the corner and parked in front of the picnic table where she sat.

John Cramsey, the Emmaus man who was arrested near the Holland Tunnel while trying to rescue a 17-year-old Wilkes-Barre girl and Powell’s daughter from an alleged drug den in New York City, emerged from the car. He carried an assortment of yellow flowers in a glass vase. Cramsey and Powell embraced immediately.

Cramsey was only sorry he could not have brought Powell’s daughter, Sierra Schmitt, with him.

Cramsey, recently released from prison, wanted a chance to meet Powell as a parent who also lost a daughter to a drug overdose.

“I’ve been successful every time I’ve been called to go and help somebody,” he said. “This is the one time I didn’t get where I was going.”

Cramsey and two others were arrested on June 21 while en route to Brooklyn, New York, where he says Jenea Patterson, the Wilkes-Barre teen, called for help in the middle of the night after she awoke to find her friend, Schmitt, dead from a suspected heroin overdose.

The 20-year-old Schmitt’s death remains under investigation, a spokeswoman for the New York Police Department said.

Powell said she has been “taking it day by day” since her daughter’s death. She wanted to meet Cramsey because even though her daughter did not make it back from New York City, she thinks of him as a “superhero” doing a job no one else would do.

“I just think it’s awesome that a man can go out there and save children he doesn’t even know,” she said. “I just think that he’s an angel.”

Powell and Cramsey sat together at a picnic table and discussed his background. He talked about losing his own

daughter to an overdose in February and since then working to help “total strangers” get treatment for addiction. “I’m a man against the world with what I’m doing,” he said.

Powell showed him voicemail messages she said Patterson left on her cellphone that day. The messages would not play on Sunday afternoon, but Cramsey noticed a timestamp of 7:23 a.m. — just before he, 29-year old Kimberly Arendt of Leighton and 53-year-old Dean Smith of Zionsville were arrested.

“I gave up my life at that time exactly,” Cramsey said, his voice thick.

Police said officers pulled Cramsey’s truck over for a broken windshield and ordered the suspects out of the car when an officer spotted a loaded magazine of bullets. Officers found a loaded .45 caliber semiautomatic handgun in the front seat, police said.

Police then raided the vehicle to find five pistols, an AR-15 rifle, a 12-gauge shotgun, 2,000 rounds of ammunition and body armor as well as marijuana, a marijuana pipe and several prescription pills.

Cramsey spent three months in prison and still faces weapons charges. Smith and Arendt remained jailed in Hudson County, New Jersey, as of Friday afternoon. Cramsey was bailed out Sept. 8 with the financial help of supporters.

Powell counts herself among Cramsey’s supporters and said on Sunday she would do what she could to help him as his case proceeds.

“Personally I don’t think you should be under investigation,” she told Cramsey. “You’re losing everything over this, God bless you.”

10/1/2016

Nanticoke duo pens a book about a curious boy and a magical leprechaun

Nanticoke residents Fran and Sean Patrick Spencer wrote a book about a mischievous leprechaun.

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A Nanticoke grandmother and her grandson spent the better part of the past year seeing a dream come to life — in the form of a book. Fran and Sean Patrick Spencer’s book “Ian-John and the Leprechaun” came to life recently when the Spencer’s had the first shipment of their hard cover children’s mystery books came in.

Fran said she had gotten the idea to write a book at a child’s birthday party almost two years ago, where she told a haunted ghost story. A year later, she had enlisted some help of her grandson, Sean Patrick, 14, a freshman at Greater Nanticoke Area, and the book came to life.

“I was like oh my god,” Sean Patrick said of the moment his grandmother came to him with the idea.

“He couldn’t believe it,” Fran countered with a laugh.

Reading in an Irish accent Thursday, the duo gave the Times Leader a sneak peek of their book.

The premise of the book takes place in an imagined forest in Ballyshannon, Ireland.

“I just closed my eyes and pointed to a map,” Fran admits of how she picked the name.

Ian-John, a curious young boy goes off in the forest, defying his mother’s wishes, to find a lost sheep.

He comes upon a leprechaun and gets into some hijinx, which include going into a mysterious portal.

“There’s nothing more magical than a leprechaun,” Fran said.

The illustrations in the book are “soft” yet “bright.” And even though Sean Patrick didn’t color the drawings himself, he was able to help out in the design. His influence is seen throughout the pages — including what kind of house the leprechaun lived in.

“He has a vivid imagination,” Fran said, noting the book was a way to have Sean Patrick channel his artistic side.

The book is filled with names close to the family and coincidentally, the leprechaun is named Sean Patrick.

Because the book ends with a bit of friendship between the leprechaun and the boy, the pair hopes to continue writing about the adventures of Ian-John for some time to come. It definitely doesn’t hurt that Sean Patrick wants to be a writer, and as they admitted, has wanted to be a writer since pre-school.

Sean Patrick also likes to be creative and do graphics; Fran hopes one day their books will become animated shorts or audiobooks.

The duo is having a book reading 2 p.m. Saturday at the Barnes & Noble in the Wilkes-Barre Township Marketplace.

9/22/2016

Retired state trooper sworn in as Nanticoke’s new police chief
emark@citizensvoice.com

A lifelong city resident and retired state trooper will start work as



Nanticoke's new police chief next week.

Thomas Wall, who retired in 2012 after 25 years as a state police officer, was sworn in at Wednesday's city council meeting by Mayor Richard Wiaterowski.

Wall will succeed the late William Shultz, the longtime Nanticoke police chief who died last month. His first day on the job will be Monday.

Wiaterowski said he chose Wall based on his "qualifications, experience and leadership abilities."

Wall, 57, demonstrated those qualities through his police work, his service with the city fire company as a young man, a long stint on the city zoning board more recently and other civic and volunteer work, Wiaterowski said.

Wall credited his family with helping to convince him to return to law enforcement.

"When I retired from the state police I thought it was over," he said.

But once the police chief's spot in his home city fell vacant, Wall said he felt the call to apply for the position. In a phone interview Wednesday afternoon he said he views police work as "more of a vocation than an occupation."

In remarks soon after being sworn in, Wall said his children told him he always seemed happiest when he was on his way to work as a police officer. They urged him to "go for it," he said.

Wall is married to Nanticoke interim city Manager Donna Wall. He will report to Wiaterowski and will not interact on-the-job with his wife, Wiaterowski said Wednesday.

Wiaterowski, who supervises the city police department according to Nanticoke's city charter, said he interviewed four external candidates, including Wall, and one member of the city police department for the vacant chief's position.

Potential grievance

Hiring a new chief from outside the city police force did not sit well with some officers — though they declined to expand on their objections on Wednesday.

The Nanticoke City Police Association is considering filing a grievance, according to Detective Sgt. Joseph Guydish. He declined to discuss the basis of the grievance and deferred further comment to Officer Brian Kivler, the union president.

Kivler declined to comment, saying the union's attorney had advised him to keep quiet for now.

Wiaterowski said police union representatives told him last week they planned to file a grievance if he named Wall as chief instead of an internal candidate. The officers cited provisions of the city code which they said mandated the police chief be hired from within if possible, the mayor said.

Wiaterowski said he consulted with city solicitor William Finnegan and stands by his choice of Wall to be the city's top cop.

"We looked into all that," he said. "I am confident in my decision and we are going to move forward."

Wall said he holds no animosity toward officers who feel the need to file a grievance over his hiring.

"If they are unhappy, that's their prerogative," he said. "I don't hold anything against anybody."

Wall's hiring will save taxpayer money, according to Wiaterowski.

He will earn \$65,000 per year, with no benefits or pension plan. That is much less than the city would have paid any other candidate as chief and represents a savings of about \$60,000 per year over the total compensation Shultz earned, including the cost of benefits, Wiaterowski said.

Wall said several times that change is inevitable and that he will institute changes in the police department once he gets a chance to speak with all officers on the force and get their input.

The new chief said he looks forward to improving communication between the police force and the community.

"I will make it known to officers they are there to be of service to the citizens of Nanticoke," he said.

Wall said he plans to meet with city residents, business owners and officials from the city fire department and Greater Nanticoke Area School District to discuss ways "to keep Nanticoke a safe place."

He encouraged residents to take an active role in their community, noting that Nanticoke needs "more people getting involved."

Wall graduated from Nanticoke High School in 1977, earned an associates degree from Luzerne County Community

College, then graduated from King's College in 1981 with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. He retired as a corporal stationed at the Wyoming state police station. For the past four years, he worked as transportation director for Wilkes-Barre Area School District.

Nanticoke employs 14 full-time police officers, including the chief, and two part-time officers, Wiaterowski said.

9/22/2016

**Retired state policeman Tom Wall is Nanticoke's new top cop
Tom Wall, husband of interim city manager, takes over post**

mmizenko@timesleader.com

Meet Tom Wall

Wife: Donna

Children: Jamie Krestes and Tyler Wall

Son-in-law: Tim Krestes

Grandchildren: Charleigh, 6 months

A retired Pennsylvania State Trooper has been hired as the city's top cop.

Tom Wall, a lifelong Nanticoke resident, was sworn in as police chief by Mayor Richard Wiaterowski Wednesday at the council work session. His appointment comes after the death of William Shultz, who battled cancer for almost two years, earlier this year.

The salary of the chief, who starts Monday, will be \$65,000 a year.

Wall's wife, Donna, is the interim city manager, following the January resignation of Andy Gegaris.

The new chief wants to "wait until the dust settles" and then sit down with force and go over plans. He said he recognizes that change is hard and notes "there will be no time period" for change to happen.

"Give me a month or two (to make changes)," Wall asked the roughly two dozen in attendance.

Wall retired in 2012 after 25 years as a state police officer. He has been in public service for 40 years, boasting credentials which include being corporal at the state police Tunkhannock barracks and an instructor for the state police.

"When I retired from the state police, I thought it was over," he said, then joking about his family warning him he already had a retirement party and he won't get another.

One person critical of the mayor's decisions over the past few years has been Hank Marks. He wanted Wiaterowski to "hire the best." And Marks, who is president of the Nanticoke Area Taxpayer's Association, said Wall "was the best."

"Anyone with better credentials," Marks said, "I'd like to see them."

Wall won't be taking the city's benefits, thus saving the city close to \$60,000 a year, something Marks' lauded.

"I keep telling the mayor to save money," Marks said.

The mayor has heard rumors of the police force filing a grievance. Wiaterowski said the city "crossed their Ts and dotted their Is" when it came to hiring Wall.

"It's never easy (to make a decision)," Wiaterowski said, "when you know the family."

Donna Wall said her husband will report to the mayor.

"He will be an asset to the city," she said.

Chief Wall said he knew he was human and "I'm going to make mistakes," but he promised to be the "hardest-working chief" aside from former chief Chet Zaremba, who was in the audience to support Wall.

Also on hand to see Wall sworn in was Wall's daughter and son-in-law, Jamie and Tim Krestes, and son, Tyler.

The next city council meeting will be 7 p.m. Oct. 5 at the municipal building, 15 E. Ridge St.

9/17/2016

Nanticoke native wins Emmy award

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Under normal circumstances, people don't want to miss a chance to see Morgan Freeman speak in person. Natalie Thimm, however, had something better to do.

The Nanticoke native was picking up her first Emmy when she missed Freeman speaking on Sunday at the Creative Arts Emmy Awards. Thimm was part of the five-person team that won for Outstanding Makeup for its work on Comedy Central's "Key and Peele."

"It's exciting," Thimm said. "After all those years of working so hard, it paid off."

She's come a long way from working at the cosmetic counter at J.C. Penny's in the Wyoming Valley Mall in the 1980s. Thimm laid the groundwork for her career locally, taking classes at Wilkes-Barre Vocational Technical School and Empire Beauty School. After graduating, she moved to Philadelphia and worked in a costume store. But her heart was out west.

"I knew I was going to come out to L.A.," she said.

By 1993, she was there. After spending seven years in Hollywood, she returned back east for a bit, but made her way back.

Since her return, Thimm has worked on shows like "CSI: NY," "Ugly Betty," "Dollhouse," "America's Next Top Model," "Parks and Recreation" and more. She's also worked on movies such as "Furious 7" and "Neighbors 2: Sorority Rising."

Thimm said she still makes her way back home for the holidays and the occasional summer visit.

She was part of the makeup team for the "Key and Peele" episode, "Y'all Ready for This."

The sketch comedy series, which finished its fifth and final season this year, has been nominated for the makeup award before, but never won.

"It was one of the best moments of my life," Thimm said.

She's keeping busy, with a schedule that includes work on TV shows "Jane the Virgin," "Pitch," and "Flaked."

Since winning the Emmy, she might be getting more work.

"Over the last couple days my phone has been ringing," she said.

9/16/2016

Nanticoke school board again rejects construction bids

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For the second time this year, the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board rejected construction bids for the expansion of Kennedy Elementary School.

The low base bids opened last month for the project totaled more than \$8.8 million. They were about \$1.4 million less than bids rejected in May, but were still too costly.

The district now plans to open bids in December or January and then start the project in the spring, Superintendent Ronald Grevera said.

Officials will look at possibly adjusting the project and changing bid specifications to reduce the cost, Grevera added.

In May, the school district was considering a motion to seek new bids without the district's project labor agreement, but the school board rejected that option. The district's project labor agreement provides collective bargaining terms for building project workers hired by district contractors and subcontractors and includes a preference for Nanticoke Area residents to work on the project.

In August, Boyle Construction of Allentown submitted the low base bid for general contract work at \$5.9 million. Scranton Electric Heating & Cooling submitted the low base bid for heat, ventilation and air conditioning at \$1.3 million. Bognet of Hazleton submitted the low base bid for plumbing at \$548,776. Apollo Group of Kingston submitted the low base bid for electrical work at almost \$1.1 million.

9/16/2016

Gameface cover story: Nanticoke Area's Walters tackles the odds

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Trying to talk to Sharon Walters during a Nanticoke Area football game is pointless.

She's not trying to ignore anyone. It's just that her attention is focused solely on her son Mark Walters, who is a junior defensive back, returns kicks and gets some reps at running back for the Trojans (2-1).

The fact that she is sitting in the stands watching her son play is a blessing and a miracle.

Mark wasn't supposed to play football. In fact, he wasn't even supposed to walk.

"I was born a couple months premature," he said. "I had a lot of problems. One of the first things the doctors and nurses said was that I would never walk."

Despite what they were told, Mark's parents were determined to make sure he walked.

Walters was born nine weeks early on July 24, 1999 at CMC in Scranton. He was supposed to be born in October. He weighed 3 pounds, 9.5 ounces and his weight dropped to two pounds, eight ounces while in the hospital.

Walters spent about two months in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. He was hooked up to a ventilator for the first few

days of his life because he wasn't able to breath on his own. He was on feeding tubes and had an IV hooked up to his head.

Needless to say it was a terrifying experience for all involved.

"They told us he was going to have setbacks," Sharon said. "They said there will be delays but they would be minor. When he got out of the hospital he had to see a cardiologist, neurologist, audiologist and ophthamologist." It was when the family visited the neurologist that they received the devastating news. The muscle tone in Mark's legs was weak, if there was any at all.

"The doctor was very blunt," Sharon said. "The first thing that came to my mind was that I'm not going to let this happen and I will do anything I can to help him along."

The first thing Sharon did when she returned home from the appointment was call the family pediatrician. From there, she received tips and resources on how to attack the situation.

"We had a physical therapist come to the house," Sharon said. "He (John McGurk) came in and examined him and told us he would try his hardest to get Mark walking. He said it will be hardcore, and that if Mark is a fighter he would get him walking."

There was no timetable, just a lot of hard work ahead. When the physical therapist wasn't at the house, Mark's mother and father would work with him.

"It was the most terrifying time in my life," Sharon said. "My pregnancy was going normal. There was nothing wrong. I can remember one day going into the hospital and walking into the NIC Unit and seeing tubes and needles that were not previously there. I just lost it."

While in the hospital, Mark developed an infection in his intestines because of the feeding tubes. He developed jaundice from being under the lights, and when he was home from the hospital for just two days, he had to return because he turned blue.

He underwent tests and it was discovered he would stop breathing in his sleep. He was placed on a heart monitor until he was one and saw a physical therapist until he was in eighth grade.

Through all the hard work and dedication, Mark made improvements.

Everyone could see it. Mark was getting stronger and was showing hints that he was going to start walking.

At first, he would pull himself up with the help of a couch and walk along it.

"I cried," Sharon said seeing it. "It was like he never gave up. Nobody ever gave up on him. He's not big, but he is a fighter. He's determined to do what he wants to do and he's going to do it."

After those first steps, the magical day arrived in the kitchen.

"He got himself up by a chair and turned," Sharon recalled as if it happened yesterday. "He turned and when he turned he fell down. He pulled himself back up on the chair and took two steps. He fell down again, but that was when he actually walked without holding on."

Now, Mark, who is 5-foot-6, 155 pounds, is moving all over the place.

"He's just a great kid with a great work ethic," Nanticoke Area coach Ron Bruza said of Walters. "He's the spark on the team. When we are down in the trenches and things aren't going our way, he gives us a spark. All the kids take to him."

Mark said he plans on going out for the track and field team in the spring.

"It's purely a miracle for me," Mark said. "I don't know where I would be if I couldn't walk. I wouldn't be playing football or hanging out with my friends."

9/16/2016

Winning an Emmy: Nanticoke native proves dreams do come true

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To see Natalie Thimm receive her Emmy award, watch the 2016 Creative Arts Emmy Awards at 8 p.m. Saturday on FXX Channel.

From catering the Emmys to winning an Emmy, Nanticoke native Natalie Thimm is living her dream. Thimm won a 2016 Creative Arts Emmy for her work on an episode of Comedy Central hit show "Key & Peele" at an awards show Sept. 18 at the Microsoft Theater in Los Angeles.

The winning episode "Y'all Ready for This?" was up against ABC's "Dancing with the Stars" episode "Halloween Night," Fox's "Grease: Live," the Ryan Gosling-hosted episode of NBC's "Saturday Night Live" and NBC's live production of "The Wiz."

When the show was announced as winner, Thimm said it took her longer to get to the stage because she was wearing a long gown and spiked heels. Right before her category was announced, she had thought about taking the heels off.

“Everyone jumped up faster (than me),” she joked about the moment she and her co-workers were announced as winners. “I still made it up in time.”

According to the Emmy website, Creative Arts Emmys honor artistic and technical achievement in a variety of television program genres, guest performances in weekly series, as well as exceptional work in the animation, reality and documentary categories.

A daughter of Frank and Diane Thimm, who still live in the area, Thimm’s journey began in the 1980s as a graphic design student at Wilkes-Barre Vo-Tech. After graduation, she took her talents to Empire Beauty School. She moved to Los Angeles for a time after her beauty school graduation, then moved to Philadelphia. After realizing the East Coast is not where she belongs, Thimm moved back west and has been in the Los Angeles area for the past 20 years.

“I had to get out (of Philadelphia),” she said about why she chose to go back. It was then she started working a second job as a caterer to pay rent.

Currently, she works on the CW’s “Jane the Virgin” and is gearing up to work on a Netflix original series.

Thimm has only been starstruck once, she said, when she was working with Eddie Cibrian.

During one of her catering stints, she met him as he walked up to her bar, she recalled. A few years later, he was working on “Ugly Betty” as Coach Diaz, and Thimm was part of the show’s makeup crew. Upon seeing him come into the trailer, she asked her boss if she could work on him. The boss agreed and each time Cibrian needed makeup, Thimm went to his rescue.

“I love his dimples.” She said. “He was all mine.”

During the interview with the Times Leader, Thimm became emotional. She said she studied the laws of attraction and believes if you want something to happen, it will. She prayed to her late grandmother and best friend as her category was announced at the show. Ironically, Thimm said she had a picture of an Emmy on her dream board — a collage of images, pictures of dreams, which serves as motivation — which she made several years ago.

“It’s nice to be in this category (of winners),” she said. “I have a feeling of accomplishment.”

9/14/2016

UGI to restore manufactured gas plant in Nanticoke

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The area around a former manufactured gas plant will have new life by the beginning of next year, officials say. UGI Utilities is restoring a site at the intersection of North Walnut and Arch streets. It should take about four months to fully complete, according to UGI officials.

The project is not the first of its kind for UGI, Joseph Swope, UGI’s communications manager, said in an email. There are multi-site agreements between the state Department of Environmental Protection and UGI which address environmental conditions at 20 manufactured gas plant sites as well as completing gas well plugging.

“UGI works closely with the PA Department of Environmental Protection and attempts to restore properties for a beneficial reuse under Pennsylvania’s Act 2 Program,” Swope wrote.

According to the DEP’s website, Act 2 is a land recycling program enacted in 1995. The land recycling program offers companies and individuals set standards for cleanup, set timelines for restoration, liability aid in the event of issues and financial help for those who wish to clean up marred land.

According to Swope, the downtown will have more parking and a greenway, including planting new trees and grass.

“It will take a site that is currently not available for use and turn it into a benefit for the entire community,” he said.

Manufactured gas plants transformed coal or oil to gas, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The gas manufacturing and purification processes produced products and residues that include tars and light oils.

Swope said because of the processes formerly conducted on the plant grounds, UGI conducted soil and water testing to determine the scope of restoration work to be performed. He is confident there will be no impact to water or residents’ health based on the testing.

9/8/2016

Brewing company eyes October opening in Hanover Twp.

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Ben Schonfeld started making beer at home 14 years ago and has since become a brewmaster who is close to opening his own company and restaurant.

Schonfeld, 36, of Nanticoke, expects to open Benny Brewing Company in late October at 1429 Sans Souci Parkway in Hanover Township.

Seman Tire was demolished to make way for the 6,000-square-foot Benny Brewing Company, which will include a 10-barrel brewing system that can be viewed from a restaurant and brew pub. It will also include an outdoor patio with tables from Munich, Germany, and a beer garden with hops and vines.

“I went from brewing beer commercially on a half-barrel brewing system to moving up to a 10-barrel brewing system,” Schonfeld said, while showing four 20-barrel conical fermenters and two 10-barrel fermenters that he purchased from Alpha Brewing in Nebraska.

Schonfeld declined to say how much money was invested in the new business.

He is currently distributing beer to 45 restaurants and bars throughout Luzerne and Lackawanna counties.

Within the next two months, his beer also will be available in Northampton, Lehigh, Berks and Lancaster counties.

People could come into the brewery and buy beer by sixtel kegs — which hold just over five gallons, or half barrel kegs.

They also could buy cases of beer, he said.

“We’re going to be canning beer,” Schonfeld said. “Cans probably will be available by the end of this month.”

Schonfeld said he is waiting for a company to come in from Canada to set up the canning line and get it ready.

“Hopefully, the beer will be in production and out to the local places by the end of September in cans,” he said.

Four core brands and four rotating seasonal brands of beer will be available in cans, he said.

His four core brands are 570 Amber Lager, Wit Belgian Style Wheat Beer, American Pale Ale and Hopenstein India Pale Ale. His four seasonal brands are Sippin Time, BennyFest, Dunkel and Oatmeal Chocolate Stout.

He also has a “One & Done” series that he said are “ever revolving recipes that are just made once and never made again.”

“It kind of keeps it fun instead of making the same beer over and over again,” he said. “It keeps the creativity in the brewery going.”

When the new business opens, people can watch beer being brewed from the restaurant or they can watch sports on eight big-screen televisions under unique bucket light fixtures.

The menu will focus on barbecue recipes and will include sandwiches and burgers with a “little bit of a twist,” he said.

Other beer will be available in addition to his brands as well as liquor and wine, he said.

Outside, Schonfeld said people could pull hops off of vines to give their beer a different flavor. Catering events could be held outside, he said.

He expects to employ about 25 full- and part-time workers.

Opening Benny Brewing Company is a dream come true for Schonfeld.

“It’s awesome,” he said. “I don’t go to work. I go to do what I want to do. This isn’t work.”

9/5/2016

Valley with a Heart benefit brings out motorcyclists, residents

Another large turnout for Valley with a Heart event

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Anthony Conklin smiled as he sat near the concession stand at the Valley with a Heart benefit at St. Faustina Grove on Sunday.

It was hard to believe that Conklin, 4 months old, was not expected to live through the first hours of his life.

Now, the little guy with the big grin and two other sick children are being assisted by the nonprofit that seeks to better the lives of children and their families challenged by illness.

The benefit, which included a motorcycle run and a festival, is in its 16th year, and many members of Valley with a Heart have been there from the beginning.

“In 2001, a group of concerned friends got together with an idea to raise funds for a young cancer patient,” said Rick Temarantz, president of Valley with a Heart. “We were motorcyclists, so we decided to hold a benefit ride.”

Anthony’s mother, Samantha Suchoski, said he will be having the first of three surgeries in the near future. Funds are needed for necessary services and equipment to keep her son healthy.

The family travels to Danville regularly to get treatment for Anthony. Temarantz said the organization does not give out cash, but does such things as providing gift cards for travel and paying bills.

“We do everything the right way,” he said. “The bulk of the proceeds go to our poster children, but we also use some money to assist sick kids throughout the year.”

The organization, he said, works with the Luzerne Foundation in regard to distribution of funds.

The event provides the opportunity not to just raise money for a good cause, but to have a lot of fun celebrating the Labor Day weekend and the end of summer.

The event averages about 450 motorcycles and between 2,000 and 3,000 attendees.

“It’s a one-day event,” said Temarantz. “But we’re here for three days.”

Chris Concert, Valley with a Heart board member, said the event has the feel of a family reunion with many attendees coming back year after year.

This year, Concert was providing a photo booth, complete with flowers, feathers and hats.

“We collected them from yards sales and stuff,” Concert said. “People are having a lot of fun with it.”

Other vendors’ offered food, face painting, balloon animals, home goods and even a bounce house.

“This isn’t just a motorcycle ride,” said Temarantz. “It’s an event.”

Linda Armstrong, executive director of Dress for Success Luzerne County, participated in the motorcycle ride as a show of support for the organization and an opportunity to enjoy the wonderful weather.

“Community organizations need to work together in spirit of service,” said Armstrong. “That’s what makes it all work.”

For out more about Valley with a Heart, including upcoming events and opportunities to donate, access their website at

<http://www.valleywithaheart.com>

9/2/2016

Long awaited Nanticoke sewer project begins

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A suspended sewer project in the city has new life, according to city officials.

The project, aimed at replacing old city sewer lines, suspended in May, resumed earlier this week, according to Donna Wall, interim city manager. Verizon cable lines lying close to the existing sewer lines caused the delay.

Times Leader records from 2014 show when the Geisinger building on Main Street joined the downtown landscape, its new sewer lines created an issue when they were connected to the city’s old, decrepit ones.

The project will replace sewer lines within three blocks on Main Street, between Walnut Street and the Burger King on Market Street. It also will close a section of Main Street during the day.

Funding for the sewer project has been in the city’s hands since 2014, Wall confirmed.

Wall said Locust and Main streets were closed Tuesday and Wednesday, and the timeline for specific streets is “day-by-day.” The crew arrives sometime in the 7 a.m. hour and works all day. The street is opened when the crew leaves.

“It was one of the conditions,” Wall said of the timeframe of the work. “We want to have operations for businesses.”

The detour, which Wall said she has traveled, is “minor.” Those travelling into Nanticoke will now take North Market to behind the Weis market, to the light at Burger King. Wall noted it is highly unlikely traffic coming from the Middle Road detour will affect the Main Street detour.

As long as the weather cooperates, traffic should return to normal by the end of October, Wall said.

“I’m optimistic,” she said.

The paving of the road will not be completed until the city begins its streetscape project, which will assist the city in becoming Americans with Disability Act compliant.

9/1/2016

Work begins at former manufactured gas plant

Denise Allabaugh - Citizens Voice

UGI Utilities Inc. has begun work to restore the site of a former manufactured gas plant and create a parking lot and greenway area in Nanticoke.

Over the last two weeks, UGI has prepared the site and is set to begin the restoration phase of the project.

The site, located at North Walnut and Arch streets, is being tested, cleaned and restored over the next four months.

UGI has been working with representatives from Nanticoke and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection to improve the site conditions and develop a beneficial use for the property.

Manufactured gas plants were common through urban areas of the United States from the late 19th Century through the middle of the 20th Century. UGI has successfully restored several of these sites in the state. There is no known impact to public water or health at this location, according to UGI.

In previous work at the site, UGI conducted soil and water testing and determined the scope of restoration work to be performed.

Residents and drivers traveling in area should note that lane restrictions may be in effect during the project as equipment moves in and out of the work area. Motorists driving through the construction zone are urged to watch for roadwork signs and to follow the directions of flag personnel.

8/28/2016

Changes await students upon start of new year

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Amy Scibek is leaving Wyoming Valley West as State Street Elementary School principal to become principal at Greater Nanticoke Area High School. Also at Greater Nanticoke Area, the district is temporarily closing Kennedy Elementary School this year because of an upcoming construction and renovation project there.

Because Kennedy Elementary will be closed, second-grade students will attend the Elementary Center and fifth-grade students will attend the Educational Center. Both schools are at the Kosciuszko Street campus in Nanticoke.

Elementary school students will be getting new Google Chromebook computers to use in their classrooms, and teachers in grades K-7 will use a new mathematics program called “Go Math,” Superintendent Ronald Grevera said. The new series provides teachers with a variety of Common Core-aligned materials, and officials hope it increases math achievement in the district.

As the new high school principal, Scibek will be examining the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) curriculum, Grevera said. The district is adding a new high school course — Scientific Research and Design. It’s intended to introduce students to the skills needed for technical careers such as engineering and scientific research, Grevera said.

FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL FOR STUDENTS

Wednesday, Aug. 31 — Greater Nanticoke Area

8/27/2016

Nanticoke chief remembered as a humble cop’s cop

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William Shultz was a cop’s cop.

Speaker after speaker made that point on Friday at a memorial service for Shultz, the Nanticoke police chief who died on Aug. 17 at 61 after a battle with cancer.

“I consider myself fortunate to have been a part of his career,” said Luzerne County District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis, the first of seven speakers to share memories of Shultz with his family, friends and law enforcement colleagues in the auditorium of Nanticoke High School.

Shultz made it “his personal mission” to protect and serve the residents of Nanticoke, Salavantis said.

Shultz found that mission early. He became a police officer in Plymouth Township at 18, the youngest age possible, and when he took the reins of that department Shultz was one of the youngest police chiefs in Pennsylvania at 25. He served as Plymouth Township’s chief for more than 10 years, then left to join the Nanticoke police force in 1990.

It seemed strange to some that Shultz gave up a chief’s position to become a patrolman with a new department, said Tony George, former Wilkes-Barre police chief and the city’s current mayor.

“He said “I need to do more,”” George said.

Shultz gave young cops one piece of priceless advice, according to George. While it is important for police officers to study and train hard, situations will arise on the streets where “you will have to play it by ear” — and officers need to be ready for that, George said.

George described Shultz as one of the rare people he considers to be “irreplaceable.”

State Rep. Gerald Mullery, D-Newport Township, grew up in Plymouth Township. He recalled Shultz as a local legend during his boyhood in the ’70s and ’80s.

Shultz was ahead of the curve when it came to the concept of “community policing,” according to Mullery.

“We played in the street,” Mullery said. “He would stop and talk to us. He knew our names, our parents, what sports we played. ... He knew us, he cared about us, we knew him.”

Others spoke of Shultz’s humility and reluctance to take credit for his many achievements.

He was all about the work, said Chester Zaremba, a former Nanticoke police chief and state trooper.

Shultz “immersed himself in the job as no one else could,” said Zaremba, who was Shultz’s boss as Shultz worked his

way up the ranks in the Nanticoke police force to detective sergeant and later captain. Shultz worked so hard, in fact, that Zaremba began to worry he might burn out. Then, Zaremba said, he talked to another veteran officer who knew Shultz well. “He told me to imagine someone who has a hobby he enjoys to the maximum,” Zaremba said. Shultz could be tough when needed but he had a passion for helping those in need, said Michael McGuire of the state Attorney General’s Office. “We always said Bill is the guy you want to show up if one of your family members needed help,” McGuire said. For Shultz, family — his wife Anne Marie, his son William Jr. and his grandchildren — was the only thing even more important than his passion for police work, McGuire said. Fellow officers would ask Shultz to go out for food and beer after a long day, McGuire recalled. According to McGuire, Shultz would decline politely and reply: “I’m going home to see the most beautiful girl in the world.”

8/27/2016

Former Nanticoke police chief William Shultz remembered at memorial service

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Police officers and officials from across the county came to honor William Shultz, the Nanticoke police chief from 2012 until his death on Aug. 17, Friday at a memorial service at the Greater Nanticoke High School auditorium. Officers from neighboring Newport Township to Dallas Township turned out to honor a man many knew as an advocate and friend.

Nanticoke Mayor Richard Wiatrowski said Shultz, who died at the age of 61, was “private man who devoted his life to being a police officer.”

A slideshow of memories was shown as Shultz’s wife, Anne Marie, and family stood by a photo of the late chief. During the service, several speakers commemorated the life of a man many called dedicated. At the end of the service, members of nearly 15 agencies processed through the streets of Nanticoke to the Nanticoke fire station, where Nanticoke and Hanover Township ladder trucks held a flag for the last call.

“I consider him a dear friend,” a visibly upset Luzerne County District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis said, remembering her time working on cases with Shultz. “He was one of the first law enforcement (officers) who came to me.” Salavantis said Shultz went through “deceit, lies, harm and death” daily. She also mentioned that Shultz, though private, would want the couple dozen civilians and multiple law enforcement officers on hand to “celebrate and carry on the fight.”

A fight that began in the 1980s when Shultz was called to be on the state attorney general’s Mid Valley Task Force. He was police chief of Plymouth Township at the time.

He was then hired by the Nanticoke Police Department in 1990 and appointed chief in August 2012.

According to Nanticoke’s Municipal Police Cooperative Agreement, the Mid Valley Task Force enhances the coordination of drug investigations in the Luzerne County area and provides mutual police aid to more effectively enforce the provisions of narcotics and drug laws, preserving the safety and welfare of the entire area.

Hanover Township Police Chief Albert Walker said Shultz was a “giant in local law enforcement” because of his longevity in the profession — over 40 years — and his dedication.

“I had the pleasure to work side by side with him on cases that overlapped our jurisdictions, and he was a wealth of information,” Walker said.

Not only did law enforcement officers attend the service but area lawmakers were also on hand.

State Sen. John T. Yudichak, D-Plymouth Township, and State Rep. Gerald J. Mullery, D-Newport Township, spoke during the service. They both hold a connection with Shultz as they grew up in Plymouth Township, while the late leader was the top cop there.

Yudichak told a story of Shultz pulling him over on Route 11, and Mullery talked of life lessons.

“The chief taught me there are consequences for my actions,” Mullery said, recalling a time when he was growing up and broke some glass. The chief spoke to Mullery’s mother and then made the now-state representative and friends shovel out a snow filled gravel lot.

Former Wilkes-Barre police chief and current Mayor Tony George spoke of a time in the police academy, which is when he met a then-Sargent William Shultz.

“Everyone is replaceable,” George said, “except William Shultz.”

8/24/2016

Update: Nanticoke police say department's K-9 died unexpectedly

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The Nanticoke Police Department is mourning the loss of its K-9, Vice.

The department announced Tuesday on its Facebook page that Vice had died.

"He will be truly missed by all," the post read.

According to Nanticoke Police Capt. Robert Lehman, Vice died Monday night of complications from an unspecified cancer.

"He was very close with us," Lehman said. "Absolutely."

The department was already mourning the death of Police Chief William Shultz, who passed away last week at the age of 61. Shultz was hired by Nanticoke in 1990 and was appointed chief in August of 2012.

Vice was born Feb. 14, 2008, and had been with the department and K-9 handler Brian Kivler since October 2009.

Times Leader records show Vice was considered a full-time officer, with his own badge — No. 9072½.

Along with sniffing out marijuana and cocaine, Vice was able to track fleeing suspects.

Lehman said criminals shouldn't expect the Nanticoke department's war on drugs to cease just because Vice is gone.

"The efforts will continue," he said.

State law specifies that if someone had attempted to harm or kill Vice, they could have been prosecuted on a felony charge.

The career life of a drug dog runs on the average of 10 years, according to Lehman.

"He almost met his career expectancy," he said.

Vice was purchased by the Greater Nanticoke Area School District, and Lehman said the city was "very fortunate" to have had the help in obtaining him.

According to a November 2009 Times Leader article, the school district paid \$5,500 to purchase the dog for the department, with the understanding that Vice would be brought onto school campuses to do occasional locker searches.

Also contributing to the cost was the Nanticoke Housing Authority, which gave the district a \$500 check.

Lehman said drug dogs can cost municipalities upwards of \$10,000, but that the department was "hopeful" about getting another dog, "if the budget dictates."

"That's something for the city to consider," he said.

Lehman said Vice was the second K-9 in the history of the department, which previously had a dog the late 1980s.

August 23, 2016

Nanticoke City Police Department Facebook



It is with deep regret that the members of the Nanticoke City Police Department announce the unexpected passing of our K-9 partner Vice. He will be truly missed by all.

8/20/2016



Nanticoke City Police Department

There will be a Memorial Service for Chief William A. Shultz on Friday, August 26th at the Greater Nanticoke Area High School Auditorium from 4:00 pm until 7:00 pm. Further details will be announced.

8/19/2016

Nanticoke native, PA Gov. John S. Fine honored by Nanticoke Historical Society

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It was a “speechless” day Friday for the family of former Pennsylvania governor John Sydney Fine, as he was honored with a Pennsylvania historical marker.

The Nanticoke Historical Society and the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission honored the 35th governor of Pennsylvania with the iconic blue and yellow marker outside the Greater Nanticoke Area education complex.

Helene Fine Rubin, Fine’s granddaughter, said she was “speechless” after she helped Chet Zaremba, president of the historical society, unveil the marker in front of two dozen people.

Rubin, who grew up in Dallas, and currently lives near Philadelphia, was joined by other family members for the day. “I’m just sad my mom and dad aren’t able to be here to see this,” she said.

Fine was born on April 10, 1893, in the Alden section of Newport Township to Jacob and Margaret Fine. The family then moved to Nanticoke, where Fine completed high school.

Fine was secretary of the Luzerne County Republic Committee from 1920 to 1922 when he was promoted to chairman of the committee.

Fine was elected to a permanent term on Pennsylvania’s Superior Court in 1947 but resigned during his campaign for governor.

As State Rep. Eddie Day Pashinski, D-Wilkes-Barre, who represented state Sen. John Yudichak, D-Plymouth Township, and state Rep. Gerald Mullery D-Nanticoke, said during his remarks Friday, Fine’s inauguration was the first in the state to be televised. He also created the first state sales tax, “but it was only 1 percent,” Pashinski joked.

Jacob Rubin, 15, a great-grandson of Fine, said he was “really touched” that the people of Nanticoke would want to honor his great-grandfather in a special way.

“I hope this marker inspires the students of Nanticoke,” he said.

Pashinski agreed with Jacob, calling Fine an “inspiration” for the students who walk to school via Kosciuszko Street.

Dr. William Lewis, of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, said the unveiling was a “personally exciting” day for him.

“The educational value (of the markers) is enormous,” Lewis noted.

Markers cost thousands of dollars and there aren’t any state grants to help defray the cost.

Lewis mentioned that the commission gets “several calls” a day from people who are looking to visit each of the 2,600 markers throughout the state.

The marker is the second for the society as it placed a historical marker for the former Concrete City — an abandoned Lackawanna, Delaware and Western Railroad housing complex — several years ago on Front Street in the Hanover Section of Nanticoke.

“These (markers) commemorate people, places, events that make Pennsylvania so unique,” Lewis said.

8/18/2016

Nanticoke City Police Department & City Council

It is with deep regret that Mayor Richard Wiaterowski and the members of the Nanticoke City Police Department announce the untimely passing of **Chief of Police William A. Shultz.**

Chief Shultz has been a police officer since 1974 where he began his life long career in Plymouth Township. He was appointed to Police Chief in 1981, and was one of the youngest Chiefs of Police in Luzerne County, where he served in that position until his hire in Nanticoke City in 1990. He was one of the first members of the Attorney General's Mid Valley Task Force and a past president of the Luzerne County Chiefs of Police Association. He quickly moved up in rank to Detective Sergeant and then to Detective Captain. He was appointed to the Chief's position in August 2012 after the untimely passing of then Chief James Cheshinski. Chief Shultz' dedication to his job, family and friends was beyond reproach. He will be deeply missed by all who had the honor to know

8/13/2016

GNA opens new construction bids for elementary expansion project

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The Greater Nanticoke Area School District opened new construction bids Friday for the expansion of Kennedy Elementary School, and the low base bids for the project total more than \$8.8 million.

The new bids came in about \$1.4 million less than bids rejected in May for being too costly. District officials will review the new bids and decide whether to accept any alternatives to the base bids and whether the low bids meet the specifications for the project.

In May, the school district was considering a motion to seek new bids without the district's project labor agreement, but the school board rejected that option. The district's project labor agreement provides collective bargaining terms for building project workers hired by district contractors and subcontractors and includes a preference for Nanticoke Area residents to work on the project.

Officials hoped changing bid specifications and projects plans — such as redesigning the courtyard, changing window sizes and reducing the height of the building — would reduce the cost of the project.

Boyle Construction of Allentown submitted the low base bid for general contract work at \$5.9 million. Scranton Electric Heating & Cooling Inc. submitted the low base bid for heat, ventilation and air conditioning at \$1.3 million. Bognet Inc. of Hazleton submitted the low base bid for plumbing at \$548,776. Apollo Group Inc. of Kingston submitted the low base bid for electrical work at almost \$1.1 million.

8/12/2016

Nanticoke superintendent signs five-year contract; board approves new hires

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Greater Nanticoke Area School District Superintendent Ronald Grevera resigned at Thursday's school board meeting so he could accept a new five-year appointment with the district.

School districts in Pennsylvania can appoint superintendents for three to five years. Grevera is in his third year at Greater Nanticoke Area.

His annual salary is \$126,690, and his new contract expires June 30, 2021. He said his contract provides him annual pay increases of 2 percent.

Also at Thursday's meeting, the school board appointed Amy Scibek as high school principal with a salary of \$88,500 this year.

She had worked for the Wyoming Valley West School District as principal of State Street Elementary School since 2008 and also as an assistant high school principal for two years, Grevera said.

She replaces Matthew Schwenk as the Greater Nanticoke Area High School principal. He started in January and resigned to take another job, Grevera said.

The board also appointed Jenette Stapert as special education teacher and Tammy Boyd as a long-term substitute teacher for speech and language.

8/4/2016

More liquor stores to be open Sundays, expanded hours

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

Need to buy a bottle of booze on a Sunday?

That's soon going to become easier.

The Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board is poised to announce new and expanded Sunday hours for liquor stores around the state.

Currently, the law permits only 25 percent of the state's 600-plus liquor stores to open on Sunday between noon and 5 p.m. A new law passed in June, aimed at chipping away at the state's Prohibition-era alcohol regulations, allows for more stores to be open on Sunday and for expanded hours.

In Luzerne County, only five of the 19 state-run "Fine Wine and Good Spirits" stores now open on Sundays — the locations in Dallas, Pittston, Hazleton, Wilkes-Barre and Wright Township.

One new location that will now be open on Sundays is the Nanticoke store at 13 Weis Plaza, in the Weis supermarket complex.

A sign on the front door advertises "New Sunday store hours" coming in mid-August. The store will be open 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Sundays, the sign says.

It was not immediately clear what other stores would be open on Sundays as a result of the law, known as Act 39, which is ushering in various other liquor law changes, such as wine sales in supermarkets.

Shawn Kelly, a spokesman for the state Liquor Control Board, declined to reveal other changes to the liquor store system.

"We will announce the locations and hours next week after Act 39 takes effect," Kelly said.

8/1/2016

Dozens gather to support law enforcement at Nanticoke vigil

sscinto@citizensvoice.com

As the sun began to set, it came time to light the candles on Patriot Square.

Dozens of people attending a vigil for fallen police officers Sunday night set to work as a slow song played. Some produced lighters from their pockets and helped those around them light thin white candles protected by cups encircled with a blue and black ribbon.

The pinpricks of flame spread around the square as those gathered shared a moment of silence at a vigil organized to honor fallen officers in the local area and around the country in recent months.

"I'm so glad they're having this," said 92-year-old Nanticoke resident Doris Merrill. "It's really needed."

Nanticoke resident Meagan Walters organized the vigil because she wanted to give the community a chance to show their support of their police departments and officers.

"Right now our police officers are very down on themselves," she said. "They needed positive reinforcement."

Walters said interest in the vigil grew as soon as the community got wind of what she was planning.

"When the community found out, everybody got behind it," she said.

Nearly 100 people made their way to Patriot Square to stand with their neighbors and hold a candle while local church leaders led prayers for law enforcement.

Denise Sopko of Nanticoke came to the vigil to support the officers she said she sees in the Nanticoke community every day.

"It's about community," she said. "Without a police department, we don't have a community ... we have a great team here."

Rebecca Seman of Nanticoke hoped Sunday's vigil, with city residents rallying around law enforcement, would set an example for other communities.

"Just look at this place," she said, gesturing toward the crowd.

7/29/2016

Vigil will honor law enforcement

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

After seeing cops shot dead amid anti-police protests around the country, local nurse Meagan Walters became disgusted. She and some family members decided to do something to show their support for the men and women in blue.

They've planned a candlelight vigil for 8 p.m. Sunday on Patriot Square in Nanticoke to honor law enforcement officers.

"We all feel this world is upside down right now. People think the good guys are bad and the bad guys are good," Walters said. "We want the good guys to know that they have the support of the people they are trying to protect — that not everyone is against them."

From cops to prison workers, law enforcement officers risk their lives daily to protect every citizen and rarely get any credit, Walters said.

"If you have people willing to lay their lives down for somebody they don't know, they deserve the utmost respect," Walters said.

The 28-year-old from Newport Township is hoping the event will help unify people during a divisive time in the country

"I'm hoping people will come and show their support and show their love. We really need positivity. We, as a nation, lost respect for each other. We need to end this division. And we all need to love each other for being Americans," Walters said.

Walters reached out to the Rev. James Nash of St. Faustina Parish, who will offer some prayers during the vigil. Others will be invited to speak. Organizers are still looking for a microphone and speaker system to use, but will use a bullhorn if necessary, depending on the size of the crowd.

The group will provide the first 100 candles to be used at the vigil, but attendees should attempt to bring their own.

Walters and family members reached out to Nanticoke and Newport police on Thursday to tell them about their plans.

Kingston police Sgt. Sam Blaski, president of the Fraternal Order of Police, Wyoming Valley Lodge, said it was great to hear private citizens doing something to honor law enforcement.

"It made me feel good and put me in a good mood. It brightened my day," Blaski said, describing his reaction to the planned event to honor police. "For these people in Nanticoke coming together to show their support, that's just great." Blaski said he was good friends with Correctional Officer Kristopher Moules, who was killed last week on duty, and the outpouring of support from the community helped deal with the tragedy.

Luzerne County District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis also saluted the vigil idea.

"I'm thrilled people want to come out and say they are supportive of law enforcement," Salavantis said. "Every day, law enforcement puts their lives on the line. Typically they do it without a pat on the back. It's important to respect and appreciate what law enforcement does to keep us safe."

For information about the event, contact Meagan Walters at mlwalters2288@gmail.com

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Vigil in support of law enforcement

WHEN: Sunday, 8 p.m.

WHERE: Patriot Square, Broad and Market streets, Nanticoke

Organizers will provide the first 100 candles, but attendees should attempt to bring their own.

For information, contact Meagan Walters at mlwalters2288@gmail.com

7/18/2016

L.S. Bowl-a-Rama still standing after demolition date passes

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A Nanticoke landmark scheduled to be razed is still standing.

The former L.S. Bowl-A-Rama was purchased by Pasquale Scalleat under the name PS Capital Ventures. Scalleat has told Nanticoke officials several times this year he would have the building razed by the end of May.

Nanticoke solicitor William Finnegan told the Times Leader several weeks ago a time frame was negotiated between all parties that concluded with demolition of the building commencing July 5.

As of Monday, the building still stands, run-down and rotted out, on the corner of Washington and Prospect streets.

According to draft minutes from the July 6 meeting of the Nanticoke City Council, Finnegan said the grass and weeds were cut and open areas on the building secured but demolition had not been done.

The cost of the demolition, according to Finnegan, could cost taxpayers upwards of \$250,000.

Finnegan asked that residents realize the council and officials are doing all they can to resolve the issue but because it's a "big problem, not easily resolved," it may take time.

In order to have the building demolished, a 10-day notice of demolition and an asbestos abatement form with the Air Quality department at the local Department of Environmental Protection offices must be filed.

Colleen Connolly, community relations coordinator for DEP, confirmed neither have been filed.

If work is done without filing, DEP could take several courses of action, according to Connolly.

“If they do begin work with no notice or forms sent in, DEP could issue a Notice of Violation, we could issue a “stop work order” and we could, at some point after the matter is settled, issue a civil penalty, which could include a fine,”

Connolly wrote in an email.

Finnegan said the warrants previously issued were held off but will be reinstated soon if they haven’t been already.

Scalleat can be incarcerated if he continually ignores the fines and warrants.

As of Monday, county records show PS Capital Ventures owes \$9,361.21 in back taxes for the year 2015 on L.S. Bowl-a-Rama.

Efforts to reach Scalleat or his local attorney, Jonathon Comitz, were unsuccessful.

7/17/2016

Historical marker to Gov. John S. Fine to be dedicated

Citizens Voice

The Nanticoke Historical Society met recently to finalize plans for the upcoming dedication of the Governor John S. Fine Historical Marker to be held at 11 a.m. Friday, Aug. 19, at the site of the former junior high school, 400 block of Kosciuszko Street, Nanticoke. The marker obtained through the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission will be installed on the Greater Nanticoke Area High School campus and was made possible through the cooperative efforts of Dr. Ronald Grevera, superintendent of schools and school board members Ryan Verazin, president; Ken James, vice president; Gary Smith, Tony Prushinski, Megan Tennesen, Wendy Kotsko Wiaterowski, Matthew Landmesser, Frank Shepanski Jr. and Len Olzinski. For information and to donate to the marker fund call 570-258-1367.

7/10/2016

Hockey Tournament Aids Cancer Fight

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Hockey tournament aids cancer fight



Toy Callao | For Times Leader
Hockey took over the Quality Hill Park in Nanticoke for the Hockey Fights Cancer event on Saturday.

Rain doesn't stop annual fundraiser in Nanticoke

By Melanie Mizenko
mmizenko@timesleader.com

NANTICOKE — A downpour of rain didn't stop Saturday's Hockey Fights Cancer benefit at the Quality Hill Playground in Nanticoke.

For the fourth year in a row, Shawn and Lauren Myers, of Nanticoke, put on the street hockey benefit. Nearly \$6,000 has been donated to the Medical Oncology Prescription Fund in Kingston thanks to the event, according to Lauren. "After Shawn's mom died of cancer, he decided to get involved," Lauren said.

The park was closed for the

day to make way for the benefit. Street hockey teams used the basketball court and played 10-minute games in a round-robin tournament. Those who looked to loosen up between their games practiced on the tennis courts.

Aubrey Kennedy, of Shick-shinny, has known the Shawn and Lauren for years and came to help out. Kennedy said she came early and will stay late to help clean up.

"The turnout is great," Kennedy said. "Stuff is always going on."

As for the splash of rain that came during the day, Kennedy said everyone "was a good

sport about it."

John Hirt, of Wright Township; Rob VanPelt, of Berwick; and Tony Lash, of Jeddó, were three players for the Flying Llamas.

"Llamas with wings," Hirt said.

The team came prepared with a tent and stayed dry during the rain. The Llamas also played in the three previous benefits, according to Lauren.

"It brings people out, and we play hockey," Lash said. "What else is better?"

Lash, the Llama's goaltender, said the event was personal for

See HOCKEY 15A

Hockey

From page 3A

him since his grandfather died of cancer.

The Flying Llamas play in a Hazleton street hockey league and had shirts to prove their legitimacy.

"It keeps you out of trouble," Lash said

about hockey.

"I call it my hockey therapy," VanPelt said.

The \$10 entrance fee allowed event-goers the chance to see each game and enjoy food and non-alcoholic drinks. A dunk tank, sponsored by the Wyoming Valley Hockey League, was also collecting money, allowing people a chance to

dunk players.

Lee Getts brought his two children — Liam, 10, and Elias, 7 — to see what everything was about.

"It's fun," Elias said of the day after throwing a few balls at the dunk tank. He was able to dunk Matthew Meade, a teacher from his school.

"It was fun dunking

someone I know," Liam said, who also dunked the teacher.

The boys, who have gone to a few Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins games, were interested in the street sport as well, though they didn't quite understand the rules.

"They're still young," Lee said.

FramaticApp

7/2/2016

Nanticoke community rallies around cancer patient

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A community in lower Luzerne County is banding together to lift the spirits of a 27-year-old cancer patient. In early June, Richard Laury, of Nanticoke, found out he had advanced glioblastoma — brain cancer.

"It was like an out of body experience," Laury said about the day he found out.

He also said he went totally pale and thought "it was a dream." Unfortunately, it wasn't.

He is currently two weeks into six weeks of chemotherapy and radiation. He has 42 chemo tablets left to take — one daily before bed — and 30 radiation treatments left to undergo.

His friend Bill Borysewicz created a Strength4Richard GoFundMe page to help Laury with treatment costs. Within 36 hours, Borysewicz said, the page had reached its goal of \$10,000. The total as of Friday afternoon is \$13,436.

"It's overwhelming," Laury admitted.

The community didn't stop there. There are two upcoming events to help Laury and his family during this time. A benefit concert will be held at 7:30 p.m. Saturday at St. Faustina Cultural Center, 38 W. Church St. Borysewicz wanted to do a small concert, but it blossomed into an hour-and-a-half benefit. There will also be a raffle with nearly 70 prizes ranging from gift cards to baskets.

A spaghetti dinner will be hosted by the Knights of Columbus Council 10676, Glen Lyon, from noon to 3 p.m. July 17 at St. Mary's School Hall, 1010 S. Hanover St., Nanticoke.

"A hundred percent of the proceeds will go to Richard," Knights of Columbus member V.J. George said.

Laury is a member of the Knights. George said the group will "do as much as we can."

George notes that Laury is liked and loved within his church.

The Rev. James Nash, pastor of St. Faustina Parish, has known Richard for years and said it was "surprising" to hear about the news.

"It's the last thing we expected to hear," Nash said. "I asked him to repeat it."

Laury said the support has been great. He's received cards from people he doesn't even know.

"They put them in the collection basket at church marked 'For Richard'," Laury said.

The one thing he misses most, and hopes he can do soon, is drive. He had surgery in mid-May, to remove a tumor that was pressing on his brain. Because he's on medication for seizures, he isn't allowed to get behind the wheel of a car.

"It's for the birds," Laury joked. "I feel like a prisoner."

Mike Frantz, a friend of Laury's, said Laury was "always there when we needed him" and these fundraisers are their way of saying thank you.

6/30/2016

Grateful Roast Cafe brings a 'unique' coffee shop to Nanticoke

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The Grateful Roast Cafe and Coffee Roaster opened "naturally" last week, bringing with it a twist of the Pacific Northwest to Northeastern Pennsylvania

"We didn't even put the open sign on," owner Brian Williams admitted about the first day of the shop, located on Middle Road. Since then business has been slowly picking up, especially through word of mouth and social media.

Williams, who grew up in the Pacific Northwest, came to Nanticoke for his wife, Sarah Kratz. They have been roasting coffee beans since 2006.

"(Started roasting) because I enjoy the craft," Brian admits, noting he is still learning the process.

In March, the couple signed a lease on the building at the corner of Kosciuszko Street and Middle Road that formerly housed Grave 74 Tattoo Studio.

Sarah designed the interior of the building, including the teal walls and red and blue chairs.

"She would have a vision and her dad (Dennis Nealon) would build it," Brian said. He considers the shop "cozy" and "inviting."

The name, Grateful Roast, spreads from the couple's love for the Grateful Dead as well as the reminder to appreciate farmers and see a bigger picture, Brian said.

Christy Emelett has gone to the cafe several times since the opening and calls the place "super fresh."

"I have found when you get a latte, cappuccino or anything that's not just coffee, with the chains it all tends to taste the same," Emelett said. "Here, you can taste the difference."

Emelett, who usually gets lattes, is currently on a coconut iced coffee kick and likes the choices Grateful Roast provides.

"The shop has everything you would expect and want from a coffee shop," Emelett said.

Along with pastries from local vendors, the business offers a small menu after 10 a.m., which includes paninis and melts.

Brian said, though the couple wants their business to grow "organically," he's having a hard time keeping the shop stocked with roasted beans.

The shop is open 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday but Brian said the customer base and their needs will dictate the hours as the shop grows.

More Info:

Grateful Roast Cafe and Coffee Roaster

Hours: 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday

Address: 400 Middle Road, Nanticoke

Online: Grateful Roast Cafe and Coffee Roaster on Facebook.

6/25/2016

Nanticoke sewer, street projects set to move forward

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Two sections of Nanticoke will see improvements made to streets, according to city officials.

After being stalled in May, the Main Street sewer project will begin as soon as the contractor, Anrich Inc., of Wayne, can move a team back to Nanticoke.

Donna Wall, the interim city manager, said because the project was stalled, Anrich Inc.'s workers were moved to another construction site outside of Nanticoke. Though she confirmed Anrich Inc. was up last week to dig up "soft test pits."

The project was suspended because of nearby fiber optic cables. When Verizon laid cables for their service in the city, they were run near the outdated sewer lines. Verizon quickly remedied the situation.

Main Street is a state road, and the city needed the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation to approve the project again.

"(Because of the cables) we had to come up with a whole new plan," Wall said.

The project will replace sewer lines on Main Street, between Walnut and Market streets. When the Geisinger building came into the downtown in 2014, it was hooked up to the older sewer line, creating an issue when its new lines connected to the city's old lines.

Times Leader records show the project is a federal earmark. Last year, Wall said, the city also received a Local Share Account grant of \$500,000 for the project.

The Main Street sewer project should be done within two months.

In another part of the city, several streets will begin to be improved thanks to Nanticoke taking out a \$3 million Pennsylvania Infrastructure Bank loan in April. The loan will help the city become compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The city will make four payments a year over a 10-year period on the loan, which carries 1.75 percent interest rate.

Wall said several streets in the Honey Pot section of the city, including Access Road and Hanover Street, are marked for that project.

The contractor for the project will be Stell Enterprises.

6/22/2016

Nanticoke seeks delinquent garbage fees

Sarah Scinto - Citizens Voice

Over the past 10 years, the city of Nanticoke has lost about \$83,000 due to delinquent garbage fees, City Administrator Donna Wall said.

On Tuesday, the city cited more than 190 property owners in district court who did not pay their 2016 garbage collection fees and warned of its intentions to "vigorously pursue collection of these accounts."

"It's the same people ... who just year after year, they've failed to pay," Wall said.

Wall said the city typically collects refuse fees at a good rate: 96 percent of property owners paid their fees in 2015, according to the city's release.

The city charges \$220 per year for all garbage and single stream recycling collection. The city allows residents to have up to four, 30 gallon bags of trash picked up per week.

One homeowner, Wall said, neglected to pay any garbage fees between 2006 and 2009 and still owes the city \$3,900.

"We don't even think he owns the property anymore," she said.

On top of the 195 citations filed Tuesday, Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker said his office has more than 300 unpaid or unsettled cases of delinquent fees on file from past years.

"Every year they just file against the same individuals," Whittaker said. "It's a large volume of work."

Whittaker estimated about \$79,000 in fees remain uncollected by the city and the court. He said a portion of the delinquent accounts come from out-of-state or "absentee" landlords, and law enforcement often cannot justify the cost of travel to serve warrants or collect the unpaid fees.

"They're not going to send two policemen out to, say, Syracuse, to get \$300," Whittaker said. "It's just not financially feasible for us to go out and collect it."

Tuesday's release from the city came as a notice to homeowners with delinquent fees.

"Owners will be given 15 days from today to satisfy their financial obligations to the city," the notice states. "For those who fail to do so, the city, through its police department, will proceed to serve these warrants on offending property owners and they will be brought before the court where the city will seek financial penalties and/or incarceration for failure to pay for this important service."

Wall noted that even when property owners don't pay the yearly fee, the city still has to collect garbage from the delinquent properties, which shifts the cost of the service onto residents who pay their bills.

Whittaker said each citation filed will have a time and date for a hearing. If the defendant appears at the hearing, they can plead guilty or not guilty; but if they do not show up they are automatically found guilty by the court. The court then sends a notice to the homeowner of the result and the homeowner has 30 days to appeal the verdict. If they do not appeal, Whittaker said the homeowner receives a notice indicating what they owe in fines. If the homeowner still does not take action, the court will generate a warrant to be given to a constable or police officers.

Wall hoped to see repeat offenders among the 2016 delinquent accounts start to pay back the fees they owe.

"Every year it's always the same people," she said.

6/21/2016

Greater Nanticoke Area budget calls for 5.5 percent tax hike

mmizenko@timesleader.com

Taxpayers in the Greater Nanticoke Area School District will see their taxes go up 5.5 percent next year.

The school board passed an approximately \$28 million budget for the 2016-2017 school year unanimously Monday night during a special meeting.

The tax rate will jump from 10.4932 mills to 11.0765 mills. A mill is \$1 in tax on every \$1,000 of assessed property value. A homeowner with a home assessed at \$100,000 will pay \$1,107.65 in school taxes.

At the May board meeting, the needed tax increase was estimated to be 8 percent. However, board Business Manager Al Melone said that was because the district still didn't have financial numbers from the state.

The budget has \$28,221,743 in expenditures and shows revenue of \$28,132,570.

Melone said the district "virtually (had) no choice" but to increase the millage.

"We're caught in a box," Melone said.

Superintendent Ronald Grevera said the increase is needed because the pension payment increase for the school year is \$326,000. Also, a 2.1 percent increase in health care costs for employees and worries that "state revenue may be late" caused the district to raise the taxes.

Melone also said Luzerne County's assessment values contributed to the tax increase.

"Enrollment is up, but the assessment went down," Melone said.

Melone, whose company also does the Pittston Area and Dallas school districts' budgets, said Nanticoke would be in the 4 percent tax hike range, if the assessed values didn't go down.

Melone apologized for the need for increased funding falling on the taxpayers' backs.

Hank Marks, a city tax watchdog, begrudgingly agreed with Melone.

"If he said we need it, we need it," Marks said.

The increase is the highest since the district increased taxes 6 mills in 2008.

In other business, the board also:

- Unanimously rejected the revised Wilkes-Barre Area Career and Technical Center Budget for the 2016-2017 school year.

Board President Ryan Verazin said the district would owe a 2 percent increase to the center under the budget and the board "didn't feel comfortable" paying.

"We're already raising taxes," Verazin said.

- Approved teachers Dawn Marshall and Linda Kelchner to form GO, GNA. GO stands for Global Opportunities. It will be no extra cost to the district. The mission of the new club is to expose students to a wider world.

6/21/2016

Nanticoke school board increases property taxes

Michael P. Buffer - Citizens Voice

The Greater Nanticoke Area School budget for the next school year includes

\$28.2 million in expenses and a 5-percent increase in the property tax rate, Board President Ryan Verazin said. The vote at Monday's meeting was unanimous. The tax increase boosts the tax rate from 10.4932 mills to 11.0765 mills. A mill is \$1 on every \$1,000 in property assessment. Revenue for the next school year is projected at \$28.1 million.

6/21/2016

**Nanticoke cracking down on residents not paying refuse fees
The annual fee is \$220. Residents who pay on a payment plan, pay \$120 twice a year.**

mmizenko@timesleader.com

The city is ramping up efforts to force delinquent refuse fee homeowners to pay their bills. According to the mayor's office, starting Tuesday delinquent accounts will be given 15 days — July 6 — to pay their city refuse bills. City Manager Donna Wall said the city is missing \$86,000 in fees unpaid since 2005. There are some homeowners who owe up to \$2,000.

Top Searches

"It's the same people (who don't pay)," Wall said.

Previous media reports had said only 40 percent of residents are paying their annual trash fees. Mayor Richard Wiatrowski said that is wrong, and the city has a "high collection rate." Wall said the correct collection rate is 96 percent.

Wall said health concerns and legal mandates require the city to still pick up delinquent homeowners garbage. After the city's refuse office sends letters to delinquent accounts holders, complaints are forwarded to District Judge Donald Whittaker's office. For this year alone, Whittaker's office has 195 complaints to be filed by his office for no payment of fees.

Whittaker noted the repeat offenders have had written correspondence from his office a "minimum 12 times." "For years they haven't been acted upon," Whittaker said defending his office from criticism that it's his office that lets residents fall through the cracks.

Some residents will come to court and pay their fees after receiving their letters, but most don't. After being found guilty in absentia, the constable or Nanticoke police will be tasked with serving an arrest warrant to the homeowner. Homeowners aren't jailed for not paying their refuse fee, but if the case makes it to a payment determination hearing, residents can be jailed for failing to pay court costs and fees.

Unfortunately, because it's a city issue, it doesn't get forwarded to Luzerne County Court, like criminal cases. To have the case seen by Luzerne County court, residents have to file an appeal on Whittaker's judgment.

When residents fail to pay, garbage collection is on homeowners who pay their bills, Wall said.

"Enough is enough," Wall said.

Those with active arrest warrants, Wiatrowski noted, can be taken in on a simple speeding ticket.

"When they run the name, they can be jailed for not paying refuse fees," the Mayor said.

6/16/2016

Nanticoke amends Radiological Emergency Response Plan

mmizenko@timesleader.com

The next council meeting will be held 7 p.m. July 6 in the council chambers, 15 E. Ridge St., Nanticoke.

The city council unanimously approved a new Radiological Emergency Response Plan at Wednesday night's meeting. Every city within a 10-mile radius of a nuclear power plant is required by federal law to update its plan every two years. The Honey Pot section of Nanticoke falls within that radius for Talen Energy's Susquehanna nuclear power plant in Salem Township.

The city's deputy director for emergency management, Chet Prymowicz, said the only change typically made to the plan is to update it with the names of newly elected officials. However, this year, changes were made in the wording of the document due to the city's home rule charter.

"We now have a strong mayor who makes the call to evacuate," Prymowicz said.

Prymowicz said he doesn't believe the city will ever need to use the plan.

If it does, however, there will be route management teams assembled to help evacuees on their way to a reception center, which would be located at the Big Lots Shopping Center in Dunmore.

Since the last update, Nanticoke lost four medical centers, which means the city needs fewer ambulances to transport

patients, Prymowicz said. The closing of the centers also benefits the city given that the city has fewer volunteer first responders, who would be needed to assist patient evacuations. |

The city also removed two traffic control points from the plan. The ongoing construction of new roundabouts on Middle Road, Prymowicz said, will “drastically change” the routes out of the city in case of radioactive emergencies. The roundabout changes won’t be added to the plan until 2018.

“It will change for the better,” Prymowicz noted.

Newport Township approved its plan last week, and Prymowicz said every plan is different based on where they are in the radius. The Luzerne County Emergency Management Agency also has a plan in case of emergency.

In other business, the council read an executive order from Mayor Richard Wiaterowski hiring Dane Aukstankalnis as a full-time firefighter. Resident Hank Marks asked why the hiring wasn’t on the agenda and why Wiaterowski hired him.

“The city is budgeted for 10 (firefighters) and the chief,” Council President William Brown said in response. “We don’t decide (who) to hire.”

Marks asked what the salary was and if Aukstankalnis had benefits.

Donna Wall, interim city manager, didn’t quote a figure because she didn’t have the contract in hand.

“They taxpayers deserve to know,” Marks said.

6/13/2016

Nanticoke receives state DEP grant for new recycling containers

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A recently awarded grant will allow the city to buy and distribute recycling containers to residents.

Nanticoke was one of six Luzerne County municipalities awarded a Department of Environmental Protection grant for its recycling collection and education programs.

The DEP awarded \$16.7 million in grants to 120 municipalities in the Commonwealth. The grant allots up to 90 percent of recycling program costs to municipalities and counties, whereas distressed municipalities are eligible for up to 100-percent program coverage.

“It’s actually for containers,” Donna Wall, interim city manager for Nanticoke, said noting the city will be able to buy 5,000 high containers with the money.

Wall explained that “a few years ago” the city went single-stream recycling — all recyclables can be mixed in one container — and since some residents moved out or died, the city doesn’t have containers in stock for new residents.

The decision to go single-stream was a “way to get people to recycle.”

One rule of single-stream recycling, Wall said, is to rinse out jars before recycling them.

“When you eat spaghetti, you’re suppose to wash out the heavy stuff,” she said.

The city council will have to decide whether to bid the containers out or go through the state funded COSTARS program.

“They’re (the containers) very expensive,” she said.

Wall expects the city to have the containers by the fall.

The second part of the grant allots money to educate the public on how to recycle, the details of which Wall said she “has to get creative” with. She wasn’t the city manager at the time the grant application was submitted, so she isn’t sure of the wording of the grant’s educational requirements, she said.

“We could put it on our yearly newsletter,” Wall said with a chuckle.

6/9/2016

Nanticoke Area graduates urged to live life of service

bkalinowski@citizensvoice.com

Dr. Ronald Grevera, the superintendent of Greater Nanticoke Area, invoked the words of President John F. Kennedy on Wednesday in challenging the Class of 2016 graduates to live a life of service.

He told them to look no further than the 65-year-old man on stage, dressed in a blue cap and gown.

Dennis Horwath quit school early at age 17 to fight in the Vietnam war and never returned to school. He later served 20 years in the Pennsylvania Army National Guard. After the Sept. 11 attacks, he tried to reenlist, but was told he was too old.

That’s the epitome of service, Grevera said.

The superintendent read excerpts of JFK’s 1961 inaugural address, including the “ask not” portion where he challenged

Americans to serve the country.

"It's my hope you live your life in such a manner you practice servant leadership," Grevera said.

Jennifer Lopez, salutatorian and class secretary, reminded the class of all the memorable things they did together. That bond will always be even as they grow apart and embark on different careers, she said.

"We are a close-knit family who will always be together in spirit," she said.

And, of course, graduates of the technology era have an easier time keeping in touch than graduates in the past, Lopez said.

"Thank goodness for social media," she said.

6/8/2016

Vietnam veteran will receive diploma today at GNA commencement

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

Dennis Horwath was dropped off at a Newport Township orphanage in 1950 when he was two months old. He was raised by strict Catholic nuns he doesn't have the kindest words for. At age 17, the rebellious orphan quit school to fight on the front lines of the Vietnam war.

Today, Horwath finally returns to school to get his diploma.

The 65-year-old has been invited to take part in Greater Nanticoke Area High School's graduation ceremony. He's expected to sit center stage next to the superintendent.

"It's a long time coming. I'm kind of getting a kick out of it. I'm glad they're going to honor me," Horwath said Tuesday.

"I just keep thinking of the other guys that never had a chance to come back and graduate. I thank God every day that I'm still here."

After the war, Horwath served 20 years in the Pennsylvania Army National Guard and worked for two decades in the kitchen of the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Plains Township.

During that time, Horwath never saw the need to get his high school degree, figuring he learned enough from his life lessons.

"I'm no dummy," he said.

These days, in retirement, Horwath once again lives in the building where he spent his youth.

The orphanage, known as St. Stanislaus Institute, closed in 1972, but the building - on the National Register of Historic Places - was renovated into apartments in recent years.

He ended up back at the old orphanage "by chance," he said.

A fire tore through his family's Wilkes-Barre apartment last June, forcing them to find a new place to live. Horwath figured they'd start over in the place where his difficult life began.

In October 1950, Horwath was placed in the orphanage after his mother, suffering from postpartum depression, tried to harm him. He only met his biological parents a handful of times.

Despite the strict upbringing by the nuns, Horwath said he always found trouble and did poorly in school. At age 17, he was still a freshman.

When he had the chance to quit school for good, he took the opportunity. He soon visited an Army recruiting office in Wilkes-Barre. Within days, he left for boot camp.

Despite the ongoing war, his first deployment was supposed to be in Germany.

"I really didn't want to go there," he recalled. "They asked for volunteers for service in Vietnam and I volunteered."

Horwath served in a front-lines infantry unit that saw constant combat. He now suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder.

"I have nightmares about different things I'd rather not discuss. I saw a lot of stuff and did a lot of stuff," Horwath said.

After returning home from Vietnam, Horwath performed various jobs, including a stint as a nurse's aide at Wesley Village in Jenkins Township. That's where he met his wife.

They've been married 34 years, and have one daughter and two grandchildren who live with them.

Horwath served as a National Guardsman with the 109th Field Artillery in Wilkes-Barre from 1976 to 1996. He worked at the VA hospital for 20 years before retiring in 2010.

Just recently, he heard about a program for veterans who never graduated and got in touch with Greater Nanticoke Area's Superintendent Ronald Grevera, who helped Horwath with the process.

"This is a big deal," Grevera said. "He has an amazing story."

Horwath said his graduation is a classic case of "better late than never."

"It's going to be quite different, so I'm kind of looking forward to it. I'm kind of nervous," Horwath said. "It's going to be

something to remember."

6/4/2016

Greater Nanticoke Area conducts 'graduation walk' as a new tradition

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One area school started a new tradition that the administration hopes will inspire younger students to stay in school — a graduation walk.

Students, who were already in caps and gowns at the Greater Nanticoke Area High School for graduation practice, took 20 minutes from their day on Wednesday to walk the halls of three of the districts buildings. They walked through the educational center (grades six and seven), elementary center (grades three, four and five) and Kennedy Elementary (grade two).

GNA Superintendent Dr. Ronald Grevera said the students didn't walk in the K.M. Smith building because the building isn't part of education center.

Grevera said board member Wendy Wiaterowski brought the idea to Grevera's attention after seeing the tradition on social media about a high school in Texas.

"It's a nice little tradition; great idea," Grevera said. "It's surprising that nobody really thought of it before."

Grevera hopes the walk will "show the importance of education to the younger kids."

Alexis Selli, 18, president of the senior class, agreed with Grevera.

"They'll see us and want to work to be like us," Selli said.

Matthew Schwenk, principal of Greater Nanticoke Area High School, said he "was at the end of the (senior) line" and saw that the younger kids were just as inspired as the older kids were.

"It was a win-win" Schwenk said noting that the younger kids were motivated to stay in school and the older kids were recognized by adults and former teachers. Schwenk called the atmosphere similar to a "pep rally."

"I saw young kids clapping, hands outstretched for high-fives," Schwenk said

"The kids faces light up," Selli remembered.

Selli was the first person in line while walking though the halls. She said the seniors were "so happy" they received the approval from the administration to do it.

"It's not an option (to not continue)," Selli said.

Selli called the "graduation walk" one of her "fondest memories" of high school that she'll take with her to the University of Florida.

Nanticoke will graduate 141 graduates Wednesday with 58 students reporting that they will be attending two-year schools and technical institutes and 61 students reporting they will be attending four-year colleges or universities.

6/3/2016

Nanticoke Farmers Market opens Saturday

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There's only one farmer at the Greater Nanticoke Area Community Garden Farmers Market but several direct sales vendors, crafts and community groups come out once a month to bring together the community and small businesses around Patriot Square.

Rebecca Seman, organizer of the market now in its third year, said J&A Farms brings produce and flowers each month.

"He does well for our small market," Seman said.

"It (the market) brings things to them that we don't have here in town like a sense of community and getting together to communicate outside of Internet and phones," Seman noted.

When the market idea started in 2014, it was held for just one day, with around 20 vendors and 150 people throughout the day. Last year, it was expanded to one day each month from June through September with a fall festival in October. Seman noticed attendance grew throughout the summer as the idea caught on.

"(More people came) with each day we had it," she said.

The market runs from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. each day — June 4, July 9, Aug. 6, Sept. 10 and Oct. 15.

Seman said the farmers market will feature theme days this year.

The August market will be children's day. According to Seman, Endless Mountain animals, entertainment by Mary, Kate and Christine Nash, a magician and a children's art exhibit and contest will be offered.

A decades day will be held in September with entertainment by Dave and Elaine, a Scranton-based duo.

“(Dave and Elaine) will be bringing us grooves from the 60s on up,” Seman said.

The market will turn into a fall festival in October when its hours change from 1 to 5 p.m. and a pie and chili contest will be held.

Seman, who is also coordinator for the GNA Community Garden, says the farmers market is “overwhelming” but “positive” for the community.

For information on the market or to be a vendor, call Seman at 570-793-7910.

6/3/2016

Work continues on South Valley Parkway

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Construction is underway on a project state and local officials say will have a big impact on the southern end of the Wyoming Valley.

Crews from Kriger Construction of Dickson City are working on what will become the South Valley Parkway, a two-lane road through Hanover Township into Nanticoke.

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation held a press conference at a work site on Thursday to talk about the work.

Standing on land that will one day be part of the road, officials from PennDOT, the state legislature and Luzerne County Community College praised the \$83.4 million project, saying it will bring benefits for travel, safety and economic development.

The construction will create a two-lane road running from Middle Road and Kosciuszko Street in Nanticoke to South Main Road, east of state route 29, in Hanover Township.

The new road will bypass the Askam section of Hanover Township, where drivers use South Main Street and Middle Road to travel now.

It also adds six roundabouts, three replacing intersections on Middle Road and three new roundabouts on or next to the planned parkway. PennDOT Secretary Leslie Richards said roundabouts are safer than traditional intersections with crossing roads because they reduce fatal car crashes and speeding.

The project started in January of this year. PennDOT expects it will finish by August 2020, said spokesman Mike Taluto.

The road and its roundabouts in Hanover Township will connect the highway to about 2,000 acres of land for potential industrial development, said state Sen. John Yudichak, D-Plymouth Township. Another 5,000 acres of land in Newport Township that is open for development and connected by railroads could also benefit from the roadway, he said.

“I think you’re going to see an uptick in the entire footprint,” Yudichak said.

In a speech, he predicted the area could become a center for shipping and commerce in the eastern United States with links to interstates 80 and 81, the Pennsylvania Turnpike, and proximity to major urban areas — like Newark, New Jersey, New York City and Philadelphia — all contributing to development.

“You can’t develop the land without infrastructure,” Yudichak said.

Mike Dziak, the president of Earth Conservancy, made his sales pitch, mentioning the land for sale behind him. The organization donated 70 acres of land for the road, said Kriger Construction project manager Mike Chorba.

Luzerne County Community College President Thomas Leary said the new road would make travel to the college’s campus easier. All of the school’s students commute, and many use South Main Street and Middle Road. Residents there have complained about the amount of traffic and speed of vehicles on the narrow street.

Complaints about speeding and safety put the project on the state’s transportation improvement plan, an outline of planned upgrades to transportation infrastructure, back in the 1990s. The plan stalled until state government passed the transportation funding bill called Act 89 of 2013, Yudichak said.

6/1/2016

USDA will buy police vehicle for Nanticoke

Bill Wellock - Citizens Voice

The United States Department of Agriculture is buying a police vehicle for Nanticoke.

USDA Rural Development, which works to improve the economy and quality of life in rural America, is providing a Rural Development Community Facility Grant for \$35,200.

Nanticoke is contributing \$28,877 toward the vehicle.

The grant will purchase a new utility police interceptor vehicle, equipped with an automatic license plate scanning system and two automatic external defibrillators.

“USDA Rural Development is proud to fund law enforcement vehicles such as the one being purchased for the city of Nanticoke,” said Rural Development State Director Tom Williams in a press release. “Funding projects like this ensures that the law enforcement of Nanticoke will continue to respond to emergency calls quickly and efficiently.”

5/19/2016

Nanticoke City Council announces change in real estate tax collectors

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The city council unanimously agreed to release Luzerne County as the city’s tax collector during its meeting Wednesday.

Berkheimer will take over as the city’s real estate tax collector, effective Jan. 15, 2017. The \$2.25 rate per bill and \$1.25 reminder mailings saves the city 25 cents per bill.

Nanticoke Finance Director Jennifer Polito said having Berkheimer take over the real estate portion of the tax is good for residents because the real estate tax and school tax will be on separate bills.

“We asked them (Luzerne County) to split the bill,” Polito said. But county Budget/Finance Division Head Brian Swetz said, “All or none.”

School taxes, which will continue to be handled by the county, are mailed in February while real estate taxes are mailed in March.

Polito said since Nanticoke’s real estate tax is higher than the school tax and the splitting of the taxes is “better for us (the city)” because of the savings to the residents and the chance the pay both bills at rebate value.

City tax watchdog Hank Marks praised the city’s decision to change tax companies.

“I think if we save money, it’s good,” he said.

According to Polito, the city has a positive fund balance so waiting a month to begin collecting taxes won’t hurt.

In other business, the council:

- approved a bid to Stell Enterprise Inc. as part of “Phase I” of the Pennsylvania Infrastructure Bank road improvement loan the city took out in April.

Interim city manager Donna Wall said Stell will start paving roads within the next few weeks.

- read a proclamation from Mayor Richard Wiaterowski proclaiming Saturday as the sixth “Kids to Park Day” where children are encouraged to get out “to a neighborhood, state or national park.”

The next council meeting will be held 7 p.m. June 1 in council chambers, 15 E. Ridge St.

5/13/2016

GNA board rejects Kennedy expansion bids

Michael P. Buffer - Citizens Voice

The [Greater Nanticoke Area School Board](#) voted Thursday to reject construction bids for the expansion of Kennedy Elementary School because the cost of the bids exceeded the district’s \$7.5 million budget for the project by \$2.7 million.

School district officials hope new bids will not exceed the project’s budget.

The board on Thursday also rejected a motion to seek new bids without the district’s project labor agreement after hearing from two union leaders.

About 30 trade union members attended the meeting to oppose the motion rescinding the project labor agreement for the project. The district’s project labor agreement provides collective bargaining terms for building project workers hired by district contractors and subcontractors and includes a preference for Nanticoke Area residents to work on the project. Tony Seiwel, a Nanticoke resident and official with Laborers’ International Union of North America, said the cost of the bids should go down when the district obtains new bids.

Warren Faust, president of the Northeast Pennsylvania Building and Construction Trades Council, said the project engineer can help reduce costs by adjusting bid specs on architectural-design and material requirements. Faust also said the cost of labor was not the reason the bids went over budget, noting labor typically is responsible for about 20 percent of a building project.

Also at Thursday’s meeting, the board approved a proposed budget that would spend

\$28 million and increase the property tax rate by 5.56 percent. The board must adopt a final budget for 2016-17 before

the next fiscal year starts July 1.

5/12/2016

Race in honor of fallen correctional officer set for Saturday

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

The race for justice has changed, but the mission remains the same: honor slain Correctional Officer Eric Williams and raise scholarship money in his name.

This year's run will be a 5K, a change from last year's relay format.

The Eric J. Williams Memorial 5K Race kicks off Saturday at 10 a.m. at Luzerne County Community College in Nanticoke.

Williams, 34, a Nanticoke native, was murdered by an inmate Feb. 25, 2013, while working at U.S. Penitentiary at Canaan in Wayne County.

The race's goal is to raise money in Williams' name, but also to raise awareness of working conditions in prisons, Jeremy Dominick, the union vice president at Canaan, wrote in a letter promoting the race.

"People frequently picture a prison as a place where, once arrested and convicted, a criminal is tucked away in a cell for most of the day, and is guarded by multiple, highly armed officers. Nothing could be further from the truth," Dominick wrote. "Our prison systems are highly overcrowded, usually alarmingly understaffed, (places) where officers working alone and unarmed have to manage as many as 120 dangerous inmates in an open housing unit by themselves. With the increased numbers of violent inmates, there has been an increase in the number of officers injured, with some killed. This needs to change, and soon."

May 11, 2016

LS Bowl-a-Rama in Nanticoke building to come down

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A former Nanticoke landmark is scheduled to be coming down within the month.

The former L.S. Bowl-A-Rama on the corner of Washington and Prospect streets, was bought in 2014 by Pasquale Scalleat at a free-and-clear Luzerne County back-tax auction. The deed on the property shows Scalleat bought the property under PS Capital Ventures Inc., of Hazleton.

Interim city manager Donna Wall said she met with Scalleat, Mayor Richard Wiaterowski and zoning officer Joe Kordek. At the meeting Scalleat promised to have the building down sometime this month.

To demolish the building, Department of Environmental Protection Community Relations Coordinator Colleen Connolly said Scalleat or the demolition contractor would have to file a 10-day notice of demolition in Harrisburg and an asbestos abatement form with the Air Quality department at the local DEP offices.

"To my knowledge, they haven't," Connolly said.

Recently, Scalleat finished demolition on Flemington, New Jersey, Cut Glass building. Flemington Mayor Phil Greiner said the demolition "went well."

"From a town perspective, they (the owner and Scalleat) had no issues," Greiner said.

Scalleat's Philadelphia-based business Paselo Logistics LLC, owns the Huber Breaker property in Ashley. According to Wall, Scalleat said during the meeting that he would demolish the building because he needed fill for the clean up of his Huber Breaker property.

The Department of Environmental Protection recently found that property to be out of compliance.

County records show that PS Capital Ventures owes \$9,243.30 in back taxes for the year 2015 on L.S. Bowl-a-Rama. The same records show Paselo Logistics LLC is delinquent \$47,140.30 in back taxes for 2014 and 2015 on the Huber Breaker property.

When called for comment Wednesday afternoon, neither Scalleat nor his lawyer, Johnathon Comitz of Comitz Law Firm were available.

5/9/2016

Nanticoke sewer project on hold

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A sewer project a year-and-a-half in the making has been stalled because of nearby fiber optic cables. The city's sewer

plan was supposed to begin in late April and has now been suspended.

The project was supposed to replace sewer lines in three blocks on Main Street, between Walnut Street and the Burger King on Market Street, as part of the city's streetscape plan.

The streetscape project is a federal earmark, which the city has had for "years" but the sewer line update has pushed the project back to phase I.

When the Geisinger building on Main Street came into the downtown in 2014, it was hooked up to the sewer line, creating an issue with the lines when its new lines connected to the old lines of the city.

According to Donna Wall, interim city manager for Nanticoke, when Verizon came into the city to lay cables, it ran them on top of or in the immediate proximity of existing sewer lines.

"We want to rebuild the downtown and we have old lines," Wall said. "We had to do something."

Last year, the city received a local share account grant of \$500,000 to update its "over 100-year-old" sewer lines.

If the city has to move sewer lines and subsequently, storm drains, Wall said, the "cost will go up." Wall hopes Verizon could do a "soft dig" to find out exactly where the cables are but cautioned a permit from the state may be needed for the construction.

Verizon spokesman John O'Malley said he would look into the issue.

Wall said Verizon was on Main Street May 6 redoing its street markings.

5/7/2016

Earth Conservancy receives land reclamation grant

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Earth Conservancy has received a \$734,600 Growing Greener grant for a project called "Bliss Bank" in Nanticoke. The grant will allow the Earth Conservancy to continue a second phase of restoring mine-scarred land on Prospect Street across from Luzerne County Community College, said Michael Dziak, president and CEO of the Earth Conservancy.

"This will provide land for future development and save our green area for conservation and open space," Dziak said. The money will be used for Bliss Bank Phase II, a 54-acre reclamation project that is part of a larger 200-acre tract known as Bliss Bank Phase I.

State Sen. John Yudichak, D-Plymouth Township, and state Rep. Gerald Mullery, D-Newport Township, announced the grant Friday.

"Creating economic opportunities while cleaning up the environment is a great use of state resources," Yudichak said. "The Earth Conservancy has proven it has the ability to effectively manage grant dollars to reclaim mine scarred land and make it available for development."

Mullery said the environmental benefits of the cleanup are important, but it will also have an economic benefit.

"The project will allow the property to be used for mixed use development that could someday support economic initiatives," Mullery said.

Growing Greener grants are used for a variety of projects that include helping communities address land use and provide new and upgraded water and sewer systems.

4/21/2016

Nanticoke agrees to take out \$3M loan

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The council unanimously voted to take out a \$3 million loan through the Pennsylvania Infrastructure Bank Wednesday night during a city council meeting.

The loan will be used for street reconstruction and to help the city become compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, according to the meeting agenda. The city will make four payments a year over a 10-year period on the loan, which carries .75 percent interest rate.

Also during the meeting, Hank Marks asked when the Nanticoke streetscape project is expected to begin.

Interim City Manager Donna Wall said she has a meeting Thursday to get a concrete date.

"I expect the middle of next week," Wall said.

The project will begin with the sewers on Main Street.

Both Wall and Mayor Richard Wiaterowski stressed the detours for the project won't be as intense as the detours for the Nanticoke roundabout project.

“One we can control, one we can’t,” Wiaterowski said.

According to Wall, a portion Main Street will be closed 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday but will remain open at night and during the weekends.

In other business:

- Council approved an application to be put in for a Department of Community Natural Resources grant for approximately \$500,000.
- Council addressed the safety of the Ellis Building on Washington Street, owned by Pasquale Scalleat, who also owns the Huber Breaker. Scalleat told council that it should be torn down by the middle of May.

4/16/2016

Dennis steps down as Nanticoke Area field hockey coach

Matt Bufano - Citizens Voice

The head coach of Nanticoke Area field hockey since 2008, Lori Dennis recently submitted her letter of resignation to the school’s administration.

“I just wanted to move on to do something different,” Dennis, who does not plan on coaching field hockey anywhere else, said Friday.

Having been a field hockey official for 10 years prior to coaching Nanticoke Area, Dennis said she plans on going back to the refereeing side of the game. She is also the junior high coach for Crestwood softball.

“Lori did a great job for us,” said Nanticoke Area athletic director Ken Bartuska. “We’re sorry to lose her, and we certainly wish her well.”

Several players have gone on to play collegiately in the Dennis era, including Kati Nearhouse (Old Dominion/Syracuse) and Kayla Gronkowski (Lock Haven). The Nanticoke Area Class of 2016 also boasts a few players verbally committed to play, Krystal Daniele (King’s) and Amber Grohowski (Wilkes), Dennis said.

“It’s not about my accomplishments, it’s about the girls’ accomplishments,” Dennis said. “It’s about them learning the game and having fun. I’m proud of the fact that, despite wins and losses, we had a lot of girls that went on to play in college. I’m very proud of that.”

Among the highlights this past season was an early-season win at Holy Redeemer. Nanticoke Area finished the year 6-9, good for fourth place of six teams in WVC Division 3.

4/16/2016

Nanticoke baseball coach Dean Myers steps down

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Nanticoke’s Dean Myers resigned as the Trojans baseball coach on Friday morning, choosing to step down rather than extend a dispute.

“Nobody forced me out,” Myers said. “I went out on my terms and the kids can get the support they need from the administration and the staff.”

Myers said he had been upset over an issue at the team’s new field at the high school. There was confusion over whether it would be playable for a game that was ultimately postponed at the end of last week’s rainy spell.

With he and his staff leaving their day jobs early to get to the game on time, Myers said he “texted (his) displeasure” that he had been told the field was ready before the game was called off instead.

Myers said he spoke with district superintendent Ronald Grevera on Friday and was asked to write a letter of apology for his reaction. He declined.

Myers said there was no assurance that he would be the coach for the program in the long term and that he did not want to be a distraction for the players.

“If I’m in the way of getting what they need, then it’s best for me to go,” Myers said. “I love those kids. When adults can’t see eye-to-eye, it shouldn’t affect the kids. They shouldn’t wonder who their coach is going to be.

“Once it starts to affect the players, I just said, ‘Forget it.’ “

The rest of Myers’ staff, including long-time area coaches Joe Yudichak and Kevin Ward, remained with the team, which played later in the day at Northwest. Myers said he encouraged all of his assistants to stay on.

“The staff does a great job,” Myers said. “Really, they did all of the work.”

Yudichak has been with the program for several years and has also been the head coach of the successful Nanticoke legion squad, which won the Wyoming Valley title last summer and reached the state tournament.

Nanticoke improved in the five-plus years Myers and his coaches were together, particularly after the program was reclassified as 2A and began play in Division 3 of the Wyoming Valley Conference. The Trojans went 25-13 in the last three seasons, finishing second in the division the last two years.

Last spring, Nanticoke knocked off defending champion Lakeland in the District 2 Class 2A tournament before bowing out in the semifinals to eventual winner Montrose.

But the Trojans had opened the 2016 season 1-3 in league play, losing three straight before Friday.

Nanticoke scored twice in the top of the first on Friday against Northwest but gave up seven in the second and lost 7-2.

The Trojans will get another crack at the Rangers on Monday at home.

4/16/2016

Myers resigns as Nanticoke baseball coach

Steve Bennett - Citizens Voice

Citing philosophical differences between himself and administration within the Nanticoke Area School District, Trojans baseball coach Dean Myers resigned Friday morning.

Joe Yudichak, an assistant coach with the team, was immediately named interim head coach for the remainder of the season. The team's other assistants, Kevin Ward and John Ivan, also remained with the program.

Myers was in the middle of his sixth season with the Trojans, and the team was off to a 1-3 start at the time Myers resigned.

Yudichak is also the manager for the Nanticoke American Legion baseball team and has been with the program for 10 years, spending the last five as an assistant coach under Myers.

"Anybody that knows me understands that I am not about the wins and losses," Myers said. "It is about how the players conduct themselves. I love to watch baseball. I love to see good plays, whether they are from my team or the other one."

Yudichak led the Nanticoke legion team to a league and Region 5 championship last summer. That earned the team a trip to the state tournament, where it finished third.

"I am familiar with the guys. The reason I stayed on through this is because of the kids," Yudichak said. "Just going to try and keep the program going."

Nanticoke Area School District superintendent Dr. Ronald Grevera did not return a message left Friday afternoon seeking comment.

4/10/2016

Shredding event a hit with area residents

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Carl Coates only expected the line to take 15 minutes to get through.

He was wrong. It took 45 minutes.

Coates, of Plymouth, was one of an "expected 300 to 400 people" who lined up at Greater Nanticoke Area High School for a free shredding event State Rep. Jerry Mullery, D-Nanticoke, and his office held Saturday morning.

"It's pretty popular," Mullery said of the event. "People lined up about 9:30 a.m. for the 10 a.m. start."

He was at the front of the line helping dump papers into large bins. Those bins were then shredded in a truck outside the high school.

Mullery has been sponsoring the shredding event for the past four years.

"I hold two events each year, one in the spring and one in the fall," Mullery said in an email to the Times Leader late last week.

Constituents of Mullery's braved the snow and mid-20 degree temperatures for a chance to have their personal documents shredded.

"To be here (under cover) is pretty good," Mullery joked. "We're usually in a parking lot."

Coates called the line a "wind tunnel."

Mullery's staff gave individuals in line an option for those who didn't want to wait to drop off the papers and go.

"You can't cut the grass today," Coates said about why he stayed in line.

When Coates joined the line there were roughly 50 people in front of him. To get from one end of the line to Mullery, people were kicking boxes full of papers or carrying garbage bags full. Some even had large Tupperware containers.

When Coates was finished, there were roughly 50 people waiting for their turn.

The quickest part of the event for Coates was dumping his papers into the bin.

“No problem,” Coates said.

“We, as a state, should be providing (this event) for residents,” Mullery said.

People, though cold, wore smiles, which Mullery appreciated.

“They don’t mind waiting in line,” Mullery said. “They all have good attitudes when they come to me.”

“There’s no use getting aggravated,” Coates shrugged.

3/22/2016

Some Luzerne County school districts hit ‘crisis’ mode with lack of funding due to state budget battle Officials, parents from throughout area send message to legislators

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HANOVER TWP. — Luzerne County schools aren’t standing alone against Gov. Tom Wolf in a budget battle that threatens their closure because of a funding crunch.

Hanover Area Junior/Senior High School’s auditorium was standing room only on Monday as representatives from several school districts as well as government officials came together to address rumors of school closings circulating throughout the schools as well as in social media.

Randy Tomasacci, representing the Northwest Area School District, called the impasse “trying times,” but said the school “will make it to the end of June.”

Tomasacci said Northwest took out a \$2.8 million tax anticipation note “to get through the crisis” but he noted the district is not purchasing anything and delaying payments to vendors as a way to crunch numbers to keep students in school.

“We can tell Harrisburg we aren’t going to fight alone,” Tomasacci said to the crowd. “We stand together with Hanover.”

Those at the meeting blamed officials in the state capitol, namely Wolf, Speaker of the House Mike Turzai and Majority Leader Dave L. Reed.

State Rep. Gerald J. Mullery, D-Newport Township, told those in attendance that Turzai and Reed are the only two who can call a bill to a vote.

“We need you to make your position known,” State Rep. Eddie Day Pashinski, D-Wilkes-Barre, said during the meeting.

If Wolf takes no action on the budget bill by March 27, it becomes law, Mullery said.

Rumors addressed

After the meeting, senior Heather Evan asked Hanover Area Superintendent Andrew Kuhl if seniors will be able to graduate on time because the rumor around the halls of the San Souci Parkway building is that the school can only sustain one more pay period or April 15.

“The school is not closing,” Kuhl responded to the senior. “We intend on the original graduation date.”

Aside from Northwest and Hanover Area, Greater Nanticoke Area also will be able to stay open through the end of the school year — but barely.

GNA Superintendent Ronald Grevera told the plight of his district — 55.5 percent of state revenue (about \$6 million) has not come in from the state.

“We rely very heavily upon the commonwealth to give us our revenue,” Grevera said.

Wilkes-Barre Area Superintendent Bernard S. Preveznak said his schools “may close sometime in May” because of the impasse.

“It’s not fair to the children we love so much,” Preveznak emotionally said.

Preveznak said the impasse has made him direct the financial advisor to “prioritize bill paying.”

Hanover Area Business Manager Thomas Cipriano Jr. said final payment date of the six-month TAN the district took out has been pushed back from late January to June 30.

“The interest and fees on this borrowing translates to \$167 a school day,” Cipriano said.

Another option school districts have had during the impasse was to take deferments on payments. Hanover Area took a two-month deferment on paying health care premiums totalling \$580,000, thanks to the Northeast Pennsylvania Health Trust. Greater Nanticoke Area also has taken advantage of delaying payments to the trust.

Upset parents

It was a relatively quiet meeting until Pashinski told the audience that Harrisburg saw the battle up to four and a half years ago.

Over that timeframe, if various changes had been made state laws such as school subsidy distribution formulas

and taxation of Marcellus shale gas, it could have meant an additional \$2 billion to \$3 billion dollars in the state treasury, Pashinski said.

Visibly upset, Wilkes-Barre Area parent Jeri Sue Pierce, a military veteran who just moved to the area, called Pashinski, who was speaking at the time, and others at the table “disgraces.”

“I moved my entire family here not knowing what I was moving my family into,” Pierce said. “A senior (her son) ... may not graduate for something you guys have known for four years?”

Hanover Area taxpayer Cindy Dinoski had a simple idea based on other states models.

“Make marijuana legal and tax it,” Dinoski said.

Lauren Austra, of the Wyoming Valley West School District, pointed out her Facebook group — Luzerne County Unified Parents for Education — has over 1,000 signatures on an online petition imploring Wolf to sign a budget.

“We need a budget, and we need a budget now,” Grevera implored.

3/15/2016

Districts consider closing schools as money runs out

Michael Buffer - Citizens Voice

Area school districts are preparing plans to address running out of money and could close schools in May, weeks before most are scheduled to close for the summer.

State funds due to school districts have not been released because of the ongoing state budget impasse.

Last Thursday, the Greater Nanticoke and Hanover area school boards voted to give administrators the authority to take action in response to the state’s failure to adopt a budget for the fiscal year that began last July.

The Wyoming Valley West School Board could vote today to give employees 60 days notice that schools will close.

The Pittston Area School Board is expected to address the budget crisis at tonight’s meeting.

Informational meetings for taxpayers and parents are scheduled to take place in the Wyoming Valley West School District at 7 p.m. tonight and in the Wyoming Area School District at 7 p.m. Wednesday.

Tonight’s Wyoming Valley West meeting is at the middle school in Kingston. The Hanover Area School District is hosting a meeting for “all stakeholders of district in Luzerne County” in its high school auditorium at 6:30 p.m. this Monday, Hanover Area Superintendent Andrew Kuhl said in a letter posted on the district’s website.

“There is fear that school districts will not be able to continue operations,” the Wyoming Area School District said in a release about Wednesday’s meeting at the secondary center cafeteria. “The consequences grow serious as many are depleting savings, making cuts and holding off on purchases and payments, or borrowing to meet expenses.”

In January, school districts received about six months worth of 2015-16 funding from the state after Gov. Tom Wolf unlocked emergency funding to school districts with partial vetoes of a \$30.3 billion budget from the Republican-controlled state legislature.

“Our goal is to provide uninterrupted, full service to the students of Hanover Area School District. Unfortunately this may not be possible,” Kuhl said.

At the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board meeting on Monday, board member Christine Katsock urged district residents to contact state legislators.

“Apply the heat, ladies and gentlemen, because we are in dire straits,” Katsock said.

Wilkes-Barre Area Superintendent Bernard Prevuznak said he is meeting with district teachers and employees on Wednesday to discuss the budget situation.

“Teachers may not get a paycheck,” he said.

The district will run out of money in mid-May without state funding and then will have to decide whether to close schools or borrow money, Prevuznak said.

“This is an apocalyptic crisis,” he said. “We need your help. We need to come together as a district.”

Dallas Business Manager Grant Palfey said he has been getting a lot of questions about whether the district will end the school year early, like other local districts are considering.

“We’re not in that boat, thank goodness,” he said.

Although Dallas can make it through the rest of the school year, Palfey said the district has a \$1.1 million budget deficit to deal with, and committees are looking at ways to cut costs or otherwise get hold of the money.

[The Greater Nanticoke Area School District](#) will start paying bills from its reserve fund in the next few weeks, Superintendent Ronald Grevera said.

“With that stated, with no end to the impasse in sight, we will need to cease operations at the end of May,” Grevera said, adding the district will need to give employees 60 days notice that the district will close.

In a how-to memo on closing a school district for lack of funds, the state Department of Education mentioned providing 60 days notice to employees, Kuhl said.

The notice is a requirement in the federal Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act (WARN Act), but it may not apply to a school district that has run out of money, he said. The act is often associated with mass layoffs from plant closings.

3/9/2016

From Facebook to storefront: New Nanticoke business opens

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The song goes "it's a small world after all," and for businesswomen Tammy Rynkiewicz and Tracy Fritz, Facebook was that small world.

Both Rynkiewicz and Fritz, Facebook businesswomen have joined together to open TnT Subs and More, 235 W. Main St., Nanticoke. Rynkiewicz, owner of Facebook-based Rynkiewicz Dips and Mixes, teamed up with Fritz, owner of Facebook's Mrs. Fritz's Homemade, "just over a year ago."

Both admit it was a chance meeting as they used Facebook to connect for something other than food and they "connected."

According to the women, the "opportunity (to own a storefront) just came up really fast."

"We already had our ServSafe certifications," Rynkiewicz said. "We just had to clean up and have the code (officer) approve."

If the address sounds familiar, it's the old Geroch's Hoagies storefront. They're keeping the original design and fixtures from Geroch's.

"(It's) got a corner-store charm," Fritz said.

They also recently completed a commercial kitchen spot, in Ashley, and during the renovations on that building, the Nanticoke storefront chance happened.

"We had expressed interest (on the storefront)," Rynkiewicz said.

Rynkiewicz and Fritz won't stop their separate businesses, but having a storefront will allow them to "not to have to meet at a parking lot" to service their customers. They will serve, in addition to Rynkiewicz's dry mixes and Fritz's homemade goods, take out hoagies, box lunches and other foods. Fritz said they went to a bakery in Old Forge for the breads and have "several different suppliers" when it comes to their deli meats.

Both women also want to get involved with their communities, translating Facebook fundraising efforts - Rynkiewicz sells dip mixes for \$5 and the selling organization profit is \$2.50 - to the new store in the near future.

It will be a family affair for the duo, their husbands "don't want to get involved (washing dishes)" but their children are more than willing to help.

"She (Rynkiewicz's daughter) has a job for everyone," Rynkiewicz said. "My brother is our delivery man."

During the lunch rush, they will deliver to businesses around the area.

The name TnT comes from a combination of their first names.

"I can call it Tammy and Tracey," Rynkiewicz said. "Tracy can call it Tracy and Tammy."

Fritz said both women will still continue to be "out there" at fairs, farmers markets and other community events.

"But one of us will be here (during store hours)," Fritz said.

They will be open six days a week, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday.

3/8/2016

Nanticoke, Pittston to receive development grants

Bill Wellock - Citizens Voice

Nearly \$550,000 in state development funds is coming to two Luzerne County municipalities.

The state Department of Community and Economic Development is distributing funding through its Community Development Block Grant program. The cities of Nanticoke and Pittston are recipients.

DCED Secretary Dennis Davin announced the grants Monday.

Nanticoke will receive \$274,500 for ramp installation and accessibility modifications to increase accessibility citywide.

Pittston will receive \$274,500 for several projects including building an elevator at the firehouse on Kennedy Street, rehabilitation of Jefferson Park, rehabilitation of homes and supporting the St. Mary's Housing project to convert a former school to senior housing.

3/7/2016

Nanticoke native named among top influential physicians

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

Dr. Stanley Dudrick, the Nanticoke native known as “the father of intravenous feeding,” was recently named one of the 50 most influential physicians in world history by a respected online resource dedicated to the medical field.

Dudrick, a pioneer of medicine who invented intravenous feeding of patients, ranks 42nd of all time, according to the website Medscape.com, which is owned by the better-known WebMD.com.

After a successful career changing the world of medicine, Dudrick returned to the area in 2012 to take over Misericordia’s start-up physician’s assistant program. He also became professor of surgery at The Commonwealth Medical College in Scranton.

Dudrick was out of town last week and wasn’t immediately available for an interview to talk about the honor, a school spokesman said. The doctor has spoken about his illustrious career in previous interviews with The Citizens’ Voice.

After his 1953 graduation from Nanticoke High School, Dudrick planned to become a doctor and come home to practice. He received his bachelor’s degree in biology from Franklin & Marshall College and obtained his medical degree at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. After his residency training, he joined the faculty at Penn and ascended from instructor to professor of surgery in five years.

Dudrick wanted to return to the area, but he “was doing stuff that hadn’t advanced out of the universities yet,” he said in a previous interview. Dudrick noted his speciality — heart surgery — wasn’t even practiced in the Wyoming Valley at the time.

In 1972, Dudrick was recruited to be the first professor and founding chair of the Department of Surgery at the then new University of Texas Medical School. He later served as chairman of the Department of Surgery at Pennsylvania Hospital, the nation’s oldest hospital, founded in Philadelphia in 1751 by Ben Franklin.

Dudrick then went to work at Yale University in 1994. Dudrick was professor of surgery at Yale University School of Medicine and chairman emeritus of its Department of Surgery immediately prior to returning to the Wyoming Valley.

3/3/2016

Nanticoke adopts Luzerne County 2014’s Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

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The city council voted to adopt the Luzerne County’s 2014 Hazard Mitigation Plan update at its monthly meeting Wednesday.

The plan allows municipalities to receive federal funds in the event of a natural disaster. The plan is mandated and required by the county — and interim City Manager Donna Wall said she and another employee found the letter advising of the county update dated from last year while transitioning to a new office.

According to Wall, letting the protocol lapse a year won’t affect current or future coverage for the city.

During the work session, held before the council meeting, the council agreed to having bike racks put in Patriot Square.

The racks will be built as an Eagle Scout project by Justin Skoniecki from Troop 418.

Skoniecki projects to have the racks built and installed by late spring.

The next meeting will be 7 p.m. March 16 in council chambers at City Hall, 15 E. Ridge St., Nanticoke.

2/29/2016

Yudichak: South Valley Parkway project is part of larger development picture

Paul Golias - Citizens Voice

Work on the South Valley Parkway and beyond is expected to drive bigger development plans in the region.

Current work on the South Valley Parkway from Hanover Township into Nanticoke, and plans for the expressway to someday reach into land-rich Newport Township, are just part of a larger development picture according to state Sen. John Yudichak, D-Plymouth Township.

“This project is going to be critical to economic development in the South Valley,” said Yudichak.

Yudichak said approximately 5,000 acres exist in the South Valley. Earth Conservancy and the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce own more than 1,000 acres. Additional land is privately owned. Many areas are now state forest or Game Commission lands set aside as green spaces.

Yudichak said Earth Conservancy and the chamber have long-term development plans. Some of this development will

hinge on extension of the South Valley Parkway from Prospect Street in Nanticoke south into Newport Township. “The tie-in of this land to the interstate highway system via the parkway is crucial,” Yudichak said. He said he foresees extensive residential, recreational, commercial and industrial development in the next decade. More green spaces also will be created to enhance the quality of life in the region, he said. Expanded railroad service also is likely, Yudichak said. The Canadian Pacific Railway runs north-south along the Susquehanna River in Nanticoke, and Hanover and Newport townships. It has a siding in the old Honey Pot rail yards as a tie-in to Whitney Pointe Industrial Park. Yudichak said extension of a rail line into the area would allow service to industries locating there. Yudichak said his vision is a completed parkway opening up the South Valley and utilizing the existing highway-bridge infrastructure created in the last half of the 20th century. The two-lane parkway will cost \$84 million. Work began in January and its various stages could extend construction until 2020.

2/24/2016

Bill named after Nanticoke prison officer sent to Obama for approval

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

A bill named after slain correctional officer Eric Williams to arm federal prison workers with pepper spray has been sent to President Barack Obama for approval.

The U.S. House on Wednesday approved the “Eric Williams Correctional Officers Protection Act” by a voice vote. The U.S. Senate had passed the measure by unanimous consent in December.

The bill authorizes correctional officers, and all other employees required to respond to inmate emergencies in federal medium-security and higher prisons to carry pepper spray.

Williams, 34, of Nanticoke, was working alone in a unit housing with about 130 inmates when he was attacked, beaten and stabbed to death at nightly lockdown on Feb. 25, 2013, at U.S. Penitentiary at Canaan in Wayne County.

Prosecutors say an inmate, a gang assassin already jailed for murder, stabbed Williams more than 125 times with a crude, hand-made knife after ambushing the officer. Williams was equipped with just a radio, keys and handcuffs. Pennsylvania’s senators, Democrat Bob Casey and Republican Pat Toomey, worked with Williams’ family to introduce the legislation.

“Every day, America’s law enforcement officers place their own lives at risk to defend the rest of us. For this, they deserve our gratitude and our support. Today, Congress acted to ensure that our correctional officers have a basic tool to defend themselves—non-lethal pepper spray,” Toomey said. “This bipartisan effort was made possible by the tireless efforts of Eric Williams’ parents, Don and Jean Williams, who turned their family tragedy into a national effort to protect other officers.”

“We have an obligation to keep safe the men and women who serve in our correctional facilities,” Casey said. “The tragic murder of Eric Williams illustrates the risks they take every day just by going to work. It’s a service to the memory of C.O. Williams and a tribute to the dedicated advocacy of his family that the House acted today to ensure that staff in the most dangerous prisons will now have access to a non-lethal means of self-protection.”

Three days after the Williams slaying, the federal Bureau of Prisons expanded a pilot program to include all 17 of the nation’s penitentiaries, which are the highest security level prisons in the federal system, like USP Canaan.

After Williams’ murder, the bureau continually expanded the program to include all staff exposed to inmates in all high and medium security prisons, or 65 total facilities.

The bill passed Wednesday will become law if signed by Obama.

2/19/2016

Hobby shop fire ruled accidental

Jacob Seibel - Citizens Voice

A fire that caused significant damage to a hobby shop that caters to model train and slot car enthusiasts was ruled accidental, according to fire officials.

The fire started around 5:30 p.m. Thursday at 32 S. Market St., a three-story building with the hobby shop on the first floor.

A state police fire marshal determined the fire was likely electrical, but could not pinpoint the exact location where it started, according to Nanticoke Fire Chief Kevin Hazleton. Nothing about the cause seems suspicious, he said.

Firefighters encountered heavy flames when they arrived, and it took about 30 minutes to bring the fire under control, Hazleton said. He credited firefighters from Nanticoke, Hanover Township and Kingston with doing a great job to contain the fire. No one was hurt.

There was no one in the building when the fire started and no one lives there, according to Clem Ojevich, owner of the hobby store.

The shop contained model trains, slot cars, train and car tracks and a workshop, according to Ojevich. Ojevich, 74, said his family has run businesses in Nanticoke since 1945.

2/15/2016

Road closures for the South Valley Parkway in Nanticoke and Hanover Township to begin in April

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With the new construction for the South Valley Parkway and the six roundabouts in the Nanticoke/Hanover Township area, road closures and detours are to be expected.

Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT)'s traffic impact summary from Jan. 29 shows Dundee Road, which links South Main Street to the Sans Souci Parkway, will be closed from May 2016 to May 2019, accounting for the longest of the closures anticipated by the agency.

According to Chris Tomaszewski, assistant liaison engineer for PennDOT and the South Valley Parkway project manager, the road will "be used as a haul road — a road used to carry trucks— to build the new roadway."

"This is in the heart of the project," said Sam Guesto, Hanover Township manager. "The effect to our citizens that use the road for travel may be moderate."

Guesto said the notice was anticipated and the township was notified of the closing early last week.

Tomaszewski said drivers could use state Route 29 during the closure of the road. A detour using the Sans Souci Parkway where drivers can take Ashley Street to Main Street/Middle Road is in place. Using the Sans Souci Parkway, drivers can take Ashley Street to Main Street/Middle Road.

"The detour will be about five miles (if you drive the detour from start to finish)." Tomaszewski noted.

Guesto was assured PennDOT will reconstruct the closed portion of the road when the project is complete.

The summary states of other closures is:

- Espy Street, closed from April to August 2016
- Prospect Street, closed from March to October 2017
- Middle Road, west of Koscuizsko Street, closed September 2017 to August 2019
- Koscuizsko Street, closed from March to June 2019
- Middle Road, at exit 2 over state Route 29, closed August to October 2019

Each of the aforementioned closures has its own separate detour.

Nanticoke's Interim City Manager Donna Wall said, "It will definitely be a big inconvenience for the people living in the Hanover section of Nanticoke and for people traveling to that section of town."

The dates are not set in stone and weather can be a factor in delays. "The contractor will do their best to meet those start dates," Tomaszewski said.

Tomaszewski explained, "There are items in the contract that once an intersection is closed, the contractor only has a certain amount of days to reopen or be assessed liquidated damages," which is payment for breach of contract.

2/15/2016

The Benco Dental Clinic in Nanticoke helps those insured or uninsured obtain dental exams from Luzerne County Community College students

mmizenko@timesleader.com

No insurance? No problem.

February is Children's Dental Health Month and, regardless of insurance status, young and old can benefit from a dental

clinic in the city. The Benco Dental Health Clinic makes it easier and cheaper to obtain services, including x-rays, sealant, oral cancer exams and other preventive procedures. Services are performed by dental students from Luzerne County Community College.

The clinic charges \$15 for adults, \$10 for senior citizens 62 and over and \$5 for children under 18 — but it does take “up to three hours” for an appointment.

“The drawback is the time,” said Julie Cleary, professor of dental health programs at LCCC. First-year students, Cleary admitted, could take longer than normal but, for second-year students, the time for an appointment is just about two hours.

“It depends on the amount of work being done,” Cleary said.

The 24-chair clinic, first opened in 2011, is located on the first floor of the Francis S. and Mary Gill Carrozza Health Science Center, 42 E. Main St. Cleary said the new clinic is “more up-to-date” than the former clinic which only housed 16 chairs.

“We can accept (a combined first and second year total of) 36 students,” Cleary said.

The clinic requires the dental hygiene students to pass their boards and boasts a “99 percent passing rate in the first exam.”

First-year student Caitlin McDermott “knew I wanted to do it (become a dental hygienist)” and is grateful to have the opportunity close to home.

“I’m from here,” McDermott said. “I want to stay around here.”

Those who attend the clinic are asked to realize “it’s a learning environment” and that includes stacks of paperwork and an evaluation of procedures done by “a licensed dentist and dental hygienists.”

Though the students perform digital x-rays and can email files to the patient’s dentist, by doing a panoramic full mouth x-ray, students learn “old and new techniques.” The clinic has a darkroom to teach students about traditional x-rays. Unlike dentists, Cleary said the clinic doesn’t do restorative work — like fixing cavities or root canals; it only offers preventive treatments.

As a requirement to pass their clinics, students need patients to sign up and go through the full exam.

“Take advantage (of the clinic),” McDermott said.

Patients of all ages, as well as patients with or without teeth, can have a complete exam with students and instructors.

Second-year students are in clinic 4 to 8 p.m. Monday, 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday and 1:30 to 5:30 p.m. Fridays; first-year students are in clinic starting at 1:30 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday and starting at 8:30 a.m. on Fridays. Make an appointment by calling 570-740-0446.

2/12/2016

Greater Nanticoke Area approves moving fifth-grade students

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Fifth-grade students in the Greater Nanticoke School District will go to the education center with the sixth- and seventh-graders in the next school year, but they will remain on an elementary-school schedule and take buses with other elementary-school students, Superintendent Ronald Grevera said at Thursday’s school board meeting.

The change is the result of the plan to close Kennedy Elementary School next year and begin a \$9 million expansion. Second-grade students will join the third- and fourth-graders at the elementary center next year.

After the expansion at Kennedy is done, the district plans to close K.M. Smith Elementary School, which currently is for kindergarten, pre-K and the first grade.

Also at Thursday’s meeting, the school board approved a new four-year agreement with the union for support staff. Those employees will get a pay increase of 60 cents an hour in July and then get 50-cent pay increases for the subsequent three years.

The union represents roughly 115 school district employees who work as secretaries, cafeteria workers, cleaners, aides, crossing guards, maintenance workers and custodians. The agreement will increase costs by a total of \$300,000 over four years, Grevera said.

The board also approved a resolution to increase interest fees and penalties for property owners with delinquent taxes. Delinquent taxpayers owes \$1.5 million to the district, solicitor Vito DeLuca said.

2/8/2016

Work begins on South Valley Parkway

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From his home on South Main Street, Daniel Dennis can hear the scrapes.

A few times a week, cars driving down the road nip the curb a few feet from his home.

Last year, one hit the wall outside his house.

“It’s too narrow for the amount of traffic going down this road. Plus the speed — they fly,” he said.

Dennis’ neighbors Gary and Janelle Sirak remember another incident years ago when a car went off the road, clipped their porch and hit the home Dennis now inhabits.

They are all looking forward to completion of a Pennsylvania Department of Transportation project that will create a new road bypassing the street where they live.

Work has begun on that project, the South Valley Parkway, and PennDOT expects it to finish by August 2020. Kriger Construction of Dickson City is completing the work.

If the Siraks need to stop in front of their home, people in other cars honk their horns. To continue forward, they need to swerve to the other lane. When Luzerne County Community College lets out, crossing the street is very difficult, Gary Sirak said.

The new road, “is a good idea,” he said.

The parkway will create a two-lane road between Hanover Township and Nanticoke, bypassing the residential Askam section of Hanover Township.

The roadway will run from Middle Road and Kosciuszko Street in Nanticoke to South Main Road, just east of State Route 29, in Hanover Township. It will include six roundabouts.

Complaints about speeding and safety put the project on the state’s transportation improvement plan, an outline of planned upgrades to transportation infrastructure, said Chris Tomaszewski, the project manager. That was back in the 1990s, the beginning of a process with studies, changes to the project and public meetings, he said.

The changes will put three roundabouts on Middle Road and three on the new parkway. The new kind of intersections should improve safety, allow more vehicles to travel through the intersection at a time, slow down speeds and reduce crashes, Tomaszewski said.

“When PennDOT’s looking at intersections, that’s one of the first things we look at,” he said. “All around, it’s a safer intersection type.”

Three of those roundabouts will be at already existing intersections at Espy Street and Middle Road, Prospect Street and Middle Road, and Kosciuszko Street and Middle Road. PennDOT will complete one of those each year to mitigate detours and traffic disruptions. The roundabouts will have crosswalks and islands for pedestrians crossing the street.

The new road will also open more land for development, said Hanover Township Manager Sam Guesto, possibly bringing in more businesses and more residents to the township.

“Although there are always some bumps in any type of project, so we want to be mindful,” he said, mentioning concerns about the roundabouts and wanting to make sure all the stormwater and sewer infrastructure would be replaced if moved.

Lane closures have begun for the project. Last week, PennDOT closed a single lane in both directions on state route 29 between exits 2 and 3. Those lane closures are scheduled to last for the next year.

2/8/2016

The Greater Nanticoke Area Family Center enrolling Pre-K students

The Greater Nanticoke Area Family Center is enrolling pre-kindergarten children and their parents for My School, My Community 2016, a family-community engagement and school readiness program. The first in a series of MSMC nights will be Monday at the K. M. Smith Elementary School. Parents are encouraged to sign up as soon as possible. Each child receives a personalized passport for fun and important activities and places for pre-kindergartners and parents to enjoy. Visit the website at gnasd.com, email the center at fcenter@gnasd.com, or call 570-735-0935. Information needed is child’s name and date of birth, parent name(s), home address and a cell phone number.

2/6/2016

The Greater Nanticoke Area School District Now Has A Mobile App

GNA Webdesign

Anyone with a web-enabled smartphone or mobile device can access the HTML5 version of the mobile app by entering <http://h.studentsapp.mobi/gnaschooldistrict> on your smartphone, adroid pad, iphone pad or computer. When you see

the link, save it to the homepage on any of your devices.

Please be advised that the *adobe pdf reader* is needs to be installed on your devices in order to read some of the pdf documents.

2/4/2016

Light agenda, heavy public comment at Nanticoke City Council meeting

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An otherwise light agenda, issues of the roundabouts on Middle Road and taxes were at the center of the city council meeting Wednesday night.

After John Telencho asked about how the roundabouts project on Middle Road will impact traffic, Mayor Richard Wiaterowski stood at the podium to relay information he had found.

Wiaterowski said Kriger Construction Inc., of Dickson City, was awarded the construction bid in October and he's "sure that they will have people monitoring the traffic situation."

Wiaterowski noted Earth Conservancy and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation started planning the project in 1996 — 20 years ago. The project was designed for development of mine land that Earth Conservancy had reclaimed.

As for the three roundabouts Nanticoke is getting — Middle Road and Prospect Street, Middle Road and Espy Street, Middle Road and Kosciuszko Street — the mayor said, "Don't believe in all three."

"It's really out of our hands," Wiaterowski said.

Property tax increases were once again a topic brought up by Hank Marks, president of the Nanticoke Area Taxpayers Association. Marks asked the council why Plymouth Township was able to apply for leaving Act 47 — financial distressed status — without having to raise taxes while Nanticoke has raised taxes twice in three years.

"People can't afford it," Marks said about the 21.5 percent tax increase in the 2016 budget. "Isn't there enough empty houses?"

Council President William Brown reminded Marks that .53 mills of the 1.3 mill — a mill is \$1 in taxes for every \$1,000 of assessed value — increase is going toward a loan to help with street work.

In other news, the council:

- tabled the passage of minutes from the Jan. 20 meeting due to an error by the city clerk.
- passed bills for \$482,875.72.

The next meeting will be Feb. 17 in the council chambers at Nanticoke City Hall, 15 E. Ridge St.

2/3/2016

Crews in Nanticoke are clearing trees, preparing to construct six new roundabouts in and around Nanticoke. That number may seem daunting to drivers who have never driven through any roundabouts.

WNEP-TV

The Cocoa Hut, a gas station at Middle Road and Espy Street in Nanticoke, sits just next to where one of the roundabouts will be built. Gas station workers fear construction could impact business.

"The business is definitely going to be impacted for a while with the construction," said Bob Wren, a manager there.

Not too far away, at Middle Road and Kosciuszko Street, where another roundabout will be built, the owner of a building there is having problems finding a tenant. He blames the upcoming construction.

But not all businesses will be impacted.

Many students get to Luzerne County Community College by driving on Middle Road -- and it can get backed up quickly. But with the new roundabouts that are supposed to be installed, they hope that it improves traffic and cuts down on their commute times.

"I think it's a good idea! It'll really help speed up the traffic and I think people will adjust to it after time," said Curtis Bates, a student at LCCC.

"Eventually there will be an exit that will connect the highway right to the campus. It's going to help thousands of students. It's going to get them in and get them out faster," added Thomas Leary, LCCC president.

Work is expected to be completed for the first roundabout by the end of the year and work on all six roundabouts should be completed by 2020.

1/30/2016

Details of Nanticoke manager's agreement released

Details of the separation agreement between Nanticoke and City Manager Andy Gegaris were released this week. Gegaris was placed on paid administrative leave on Jan. 4. It was announced at the Jan. 20 city council meeting that Gegaris and the city had reached an agreement for his voluntary departure from the job he had held since May 2014. The agreement specifies that Gegaris will be paid through Feb. 5, which will be his official last day. The city will not contest his claim for unemployment benefits, should he choose to apply for them. It also specifies that Gegaris “waives any and all claims or causes of action” related to his employment or separation. Further, it states Gegaris, “waives any right to any monetary or economic recovery or equitable relief against the city in any administrative proceeding or in any action, lawsuit or other proceeding.”

Also, city officials will provide Gegaris with “a positive recommendation letter” and a positive employment recommendation to prospective employers, the agreement states.

[Nanticoke city council named Donna Wall, the city’s human resources director, as acting city manager until a full-time manager is hired.

1/30/2016

Nanticoke settlement agreement with manager released

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Nanticoke Mayor Richard Wiaterowski planned to try to have Andy Gegaris fired if he didn’t agree to leave the city manager position on his own, according to a newly released settlement agreement recently approved by the city council. Gegaris decided to resign, but he and the city entered into the settlement agreement to “amicably resolve any and all existing and/or potential disputes” associated with his employment and separation, it said.

Under the agreement, Gegaris, who was hired as city manager in May 2014, will remain on paid administrative leave until Feb. 4. He has been on leave since Jan. 6.

City officials have publicly indicated the position paid \$65,000, but it was budgeted at \$62,000 in 2016, city records show.

The agreement also says:

- Gegaris must be reimbursed for all accrued but unused vacation and personal time.
- The city won’t contest unemployment compensation benefits sought by Gegaris.
- Gegaris waives any right to sue over his city employment and separation.
- The city will provide Gegaris with a positive recommendation letter and provide a positive employment recommendation to any prospective employers inquiring about his city employment.

Under the city’s home rule charter, the mayor can’t simply fire the manager.

The charter says the mayor must recommend termination to the council and submit the reasons for the proposed dismissal.

The manager has the opportunity to publicly address the council about the proposed termination and respond to issues raised by the mayor, the charter says.

A “supermajority” council vote — four out of five — is required to terminate the manager under the charter.

The mayor selects the manager, but his appointee is subject to council confirmation, the charter says. If the council fails to act on a nominee within 30 days, the mayor’s nominee is automatically hired, the charter says.

The manager must be a full-time employee and report directly to the mayor.

City officials said human resources director Donna Wall has been appointed as acting city manager for six months.

Former Luzerne County controller Walter Griffith, who owns an auto repair business in the city, requested and released a copy of the settlement agreement Friday and said he’s frustrated officials have not provided specifics on the reason for the personnel change.

“There are still unanswered questions, but they won’t answer them, saying it is a confidential personnel matter,” Griffith said. “None of this is transparent to the people of Nanticoke, and I just don’t think that’s fair.”

Griffith said he will continue monitoring city matters, largely because the city had the highest overall real estate tax millage increase among the county’s 76 municipalities this year.

The city’s millage went from 4.8885 to 5.9258. A mill is \$1 tax for every \$1,000 in assessed property. That means the municipal tax bill on a \$100,000 property in Nanticoke will rise from \$488.85 to \$592.58 this year — a \$104 increase, or 21 percent.

“That was a heck of a high tax increase in a community that’s mostly senior citizens on fixed incomes,” Griffith said.

1/24/2016

Letter to the Editor

Citizens Voice

I am asking for help in locating a young girl, maybe 7 to 10, who was with her family on Dec. 19 around 8 p.m. at the Redbox by CVS in Nanticoke. She was with two young boys, a woman, and two men.

About nine hours prior to me going to Redbox to return a movie, I helped my beloved best friend of 17 years and eight months, my loving cat, Isabelle, cross over the Rainbow Bridge. I will spare you the details of my overwhelming grief which is so profound I fear that I may never find acceptance.

At 8 p.m., I was at Redbox with my hood up to hide a swollen face and never-ending tears. The family I am looking for was looking at the movies on the wall and the young girl came over to the Redbox and it appeared as if she was looking to see what movie I was going to take, with a look that said, "Oh, I hope she is not taking the one I want."

Odd you might think, but I have been a mom for nearly 40 years, so I have seen my share of communication without words.

Having no desire to even make eye contact with a person, I simply could not bear to have this child "wonder" if she was about to miss picking a movie that they walked all the way to the Redbox to get.

So, I looked her in the eyes, and with the weakest of smiles, I told her I was returning, not picking a movie.

She saw my tears at that moment, and I saw sympathy from this little girl.

I rushed to my car, but remembered being told by a sweet person years ago that when you are beyond sad, do what you can to put a smile on the face of another.

I returned to where this family was standing and handed the children a few dollars. And finally, this is where I get to the point of my story. The children said thank you and I returned to my car, putting my head on the steering wheel and the tears began again.

I looked up while starting my car and there was this young girl, standing away from her family; looking straight at me. Our eyes locked. She was dressed in a skirt with tights, glasses and gloves on her little hands. She picked up her hand, which was next to her head and she began to wave slowly. Ever so slowly.

|I was able to see the gentle kindness and the concern she has for others in we wave. In that moment, her gentleness surrounded my grief and for a split second, I felt peace.

And I thought, truly, that of all of the gifts I could have received on this night, the sweetness of this child was the perfect gift. As I drove away, I felt that there is hope for the future of our young people; a concern that is with me every day.

As long as I live, this memory will have a life in my heart. That night a young girl gave me a gift of peace.

So, please ask anyone you know; be it your family, your neighbors, anyone, please. I am desperate to find this young girl and pay it forward in some way. She must know how she made a difference by her gesture on that night without hope. Please help.

If this family reads this, please contact me at 570-735-2774. Again, anyone with a young child, niece, or friend, I would appreciate any help.

Lynn Knight

Nanticoke

1/23/2016

Greater Nanticoke Area officials look to switch vo-tech membership

By Michael P. Buffer - Citizens Voice

Still reeling from the loss of a seat on the Wilkes-Barre Area Career and Technical Center's Joint Operating Committee, the Greater Nanticoke Area School District is looking at possibly sending students to another vo-tech school.

The district is looking at the feasibility of sending students to the West Side Career and Technology Center in Pringle, instead of the Wilkes-Barre Area career center in Plains Township.

School board member Tony Prushinski suggested making the change at last week's school board meeting.

Superintendent Ronald Grevera said the district is "only in the preliminary stages of looking at the feasibility of withdrawing" from the Wilkes-Barre Area career center.

The career center provides education that focuses on technology and skilled trades and is governed by a joint-operating committee with 11 representatives from five area school boards.

Last month, Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough ruled the Crestwood School District is entitled to an additional

seat on Wilkes-Barre's governing board. As a result, Greater Nanticoke Area lost a seat and now only has one seat on the board.

Crestwood officials argued they should have two representatives due to population changes recorded in the 2010 U.S. Census.

Five of 11 seats on the board are held by the Wilkes-Barre Area School District, two are held by the Pittston Area, and Hanover Area has one representative.

The Northwest Area, Lake-Lehman, Dallas, Wyoming Valley West and Wyoming Area school districts are member districts of the West Side career center. Three representatives from the five school boards serve on that school's joint-operating committee.

Greater Nanticoke Area sends 80 students to the Wilkes-Barre Area career center, which has a half day program for students, Grevera said. A benefit to sending students to the West Side school is they "would remain at West Side for the entire day avoiding the extra travel," Grevera said.

Greater Nanticoke can withdraw from Wilkes-Barre Area career center at the end of a school year if financial obligations are paid in full and if written notice of an intention to withdraw is provided a year in advance, Grevera said.

1/22/2016

Nanticoke area twin sisters Brianne and Brittany Dougherty make childhood care center prosper

mmizenko@timesleader.com

Twins Brianne and Brittany Dougherty did almost everything together while growing up. That hasn't changed in 27 years.

The Nanticoke natives recently took over ownership of Magic World Child Care Center, 14 W. Kirmar Parkway, a business they had managed for the past five years.

Ironically, the twins changed their college majors to elementary and special education around the same time, within their second semester of college. Brianne went to Bloomsburg University and Brittany went to Wilkes University.

"I can't recall who was first (changing their major)," Brittany said.

After graduation, the girls took jobs substituting within the Greater Nanticoke Area School District. Brittany was looking for a summer job and heard about the day care opening through a fellow teacher. She started working there as a director in 2011. Within a few weeks, she was looking for a partner — enter Brianne.

"If you've ever done a good job at something and said 'I wish I could clone myself,'" Brianne said, talking about what it's like to work with her sister.

Over the years, the two have grown the business from two to four rooms and have gradually accumulated 4,000 square feet of property — inside and out. They've been lucky with their landlord, who didn't hesitate to "turn one apartment into a room," as their business expanded.

When Brittany first started, the center had a total of eight children. Now, their clientele totals 48 children from 6 months old up to the first day of sixth grade, during school months. During the summer months, they are filled to capacity at 57. The twins held the titles of "director/teacher" until June 2015 when they were financially stable enough to purchase the business, adding "owner" to their resumes.

Families from Newport Township and Nanticoke as well as from as far away as Benton — 24 miles — have their children enrolled with Magic World.

"It's amazing the progress you see in children," Brianne said of a child who has been with them since day one and is now going to graduate from the program.

They attribute their success to being family-run and family-oriented.

"Love is in the walls," Brianne said.

Inside the business

Magic World has a staff of nine people, including the twins, all of whom are credentialed to work in a daycare. Two staff members have bachelor's degrees in education and three more are going to school for elementary education. The state does regular yearly checkups at the facility.

Brittany recalled the state coming in the day before the opening.

"We had to pass," she said. "We told people we'd have care for the kids."

During state inspections, credentials and paperwork are checked.

"When you run the businesses the right way, it's like second nature," Brianne said.

The twins are currently redoing their preschool curriculum to fall in line with the Keystone Stars — a Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning program that improves, supports and recognizes improvement efforts

of early learning programs. They are also looking into a new state toddlers curriculum that starts at age 2. Students in their preschool programs range from 3 to 5 years of age, split into two groups: 3- and 4-year-olds in preschool with 4- and 5-year-olds in pre-kindergarten. Shying away from challenges doesn't scare the duo as they take the children, age 3 and up, on field trips, the most recent to see Disney on Ice at the Mohegan Sun Arena. In the wintertime, they have Scranton-based TUMBLEBUS — a full-sized school bus transformed into a gymnasium — visit the center.

1/21/2016

Nanticoke Special Care Hospital is back on the commercial real estate market

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The former Nanticoke State Hospital is still off the tax rolls and is back up for sale. In November 2015, the former Nanticoke Special Care Hospital at 128 W. Washington St. was sold at auction for \$100,000. The anonymous bidder agreed to 10 percent down and the closing of the sale recorded within 45 days — in this case, Dec. 24, 2015. Now, an online listing for the property lists a sale price more than four times its November price tag. A for sale sign on the property lists the broker as Mericle Commercial Real Estate Vice President of Brokerage Albert Guari. The Luzerne County Recorder of Deeds office confirmed Wednesday that the county still had the property deed and assessment in the name Commonwealth of Pennsylvania under care of the Department of General Services. Having the deed still in the name of the Commonwealth as a hospital keeps the property from being on Nanticoke's tax rolls. "We are not the owner," said Troy Thompson, press secretary for the Department of General Services. The building was taken over by the state in 1911 after operating on donated land by Susquehanna Coal Co. for two years. In 1990, the building was divested by the state to Mercy Health Partners, who paid \$1 for a 20-year lease. Community Health Systems subsequently bought the building in 2011, when a new two-year lease was drawn up for \$2,000 per month, with a \$500,000 option to buy. Post Acute Medical, of Camp Hill, bought the facility before moving within the Wilkes-Barre General Hospital. A clause in the property deed required that ownership be given back to Susquehanna Coal Co.'s successor, Newport Aggregates, once hospital functions on the property cease. Thompson said the state has no claim to the property, as of June 30, 2015 because "effective July 1, 2015, the deed was transferred back to Newport Aggregates." Attempts to reach Guari and Newport Aggregates by phone Wednesday evening were unsuccessful.

1/21/2016

Nanticoke council approves release agreement with city manager

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

City council has approved a release agreement with embattled city Manager Andy Gegaris, which will soon end his employment with Nanticoke. Gegaris, who was hired as Nanticoke's city manager in May 2014, has been on paid administrative leave since Jan. 4. It would have taken a supermajority of four out of five council members to terminate his employment at Wednesday's council meeting, as stipulated in the city's home rule charter. But hours before the council meeting, Gegaris reached an agreement to leave voluntarily, city solicitor William T. Finnegan Jr. said. His remarks came shortly before council voted unanimously, 5-0, to approve the agreement. Council also voted unanimously to name Nanticoke's human resources director Donna Wall as interim city manager until a full-time manager is appointed. Wall will receive an extra \$1,500 per month for her added duties. Council members did not comment on the agreement, but Finnegan emphasized that Gegaris "is leaving voluntarily." His official last day will be Feb. 5 and he will be available to consult with city officials as needed until then, Finnegan said. The agreement between Gegaris and the city, including financial details, will be available to the public once it is signed and recorded — which should be no later than Monday, according to Finnegan. Gegaris declined an opportunity to address the council and the public at Wednesday's meeting, Finnegan said. Mayor Richard Wiaterowski — to whom the city manager reports, as stipulated in the city charter — read aloud a statement about Gegaris and his impending departure.

“As mayor I am responsible for evaluating my staff,” Wiaterowski said, adding that his goal as mayor is “to make the city a place where people are proud to work and live.”

The mayor said that when he chose Gegaris as city manager, almost two years ago, he felt Gegaris “was the best person to meet our challenges.”

But Wiaterowski made clear he thinks it is time for both Gegaris and the city to move on.

“I feel there is a need to make a change in this position ... to meet the city’s goals,” he said.

Gegaris’s 20-month tenure saw controversy mix with celebration.

Last year, Nanticoke became the first city in Pennsylvania to emerge from Act 47, the state’s program for financially distressed municipalities.

Just months after that, Gegaris drew criticism from some city residents during the planning process for this year’s city budget, which includes a property tax increase of about 21.5 percent.

He also was criticized for not moving from his home near White Haven to within Nanticoke city limits, as stipulated by the city charter. Last August, a Luzerne County judge ruled that provision of the charter — which applied only to the city manager and city clerk — to be unconstitutional, allowing Gegaris to keep his job in Nanticoke and his home in Dennison Township.

That means Nanticoke’s next city manager will not need to live in the city.

“Our next manager could come from anywhere around,” said council President William Brown.

Specifics of the process for choosing a new city manager will be at the discretion of Wiaterowski, Brown said, in remarks after the meeting adjourned.

Nanticoke’s home rule charter, approved by the city’s voters in 2011, created a strong mayor/city manager/city council government model, in which the mayor has control over city employees in most cases.

Gegaris was the third city manager since home rule took effect in 2012.

1/16/2016

Just like old times

Nanticoke downs GAR on night 1961 state champs honored

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Nanticoke delved into its past Friday night, honoring the 1961 Nanticoke High boys basketball team that won the PIAA Class A state championship.

It gave a glimpse of its future by introducing youth players at halftime.

As for the present, well that appears to be in good hands after a 51-40 victory over GAR vaulted Nanticoke into sole possession of first place in Division 2 of the Wyoming Valley Conference.

“It was a great environment for Nanticoke basketball,” Nanticoke coach John Beggs said. “We had our youth basketball night, so that’s the future. We honored the past with the 1961 team. So our guys were really excited to play in this environment. We were looking forward to it all week.”

Nanticoke (4-0 Div. 2) also improved to 11-2 overall, the best mark in the WVC. GAR fell to 3-1 in the division and 5-7 overall.

The packed gymnasium didn’t faze the Trojans too much. But a delay in the start because of a long junior varsity game and the ceremonies for the 1961 team did.

“It definitely brought some nervousness when we came out after the jayvee game and saw everybody here packed in on every side,” Nanticoke guard Scott Stout said. “But we got a little edgy when we had to wait longer to play.”

The Trojans took a 15-13 lead at 5:26 of the second quarter on an inside basketball by Brent Piontkowski to take the lead for good. But it wasn’t until late in the third that Nanticoke began to ease away.

A 29-20 lead entering the fourth quarter came via consecutive 3-pointers by Piontkowski and Stout.

“When it was 26-20, Stout hit a huge one on the wing,” GAR senior Justin Crosby-Smith said. “That gave them momentum and riled them up. It was hard stopping them.”

Luke Butczynski started the fourth with another 3-pointer for Nanticoke, starting a 9-2 run to open the quarter. The Grenadiers didn’t get their first field goal until Marquan Kemp scored inside at 5:45. Kemp’s basket was GAR’s first since the 6:28 mark of the third quarter.

GAR made a mild run at the deficit, managing to get within 44-35 with about two minutes left. Nanticoke, though, shook off the threat with four consecutive points.

While the 3-pointers were the catalyst in the victory, defense also played a huge part. Nanticoke held GAR 3-point ace Tino Altavilla to one basket from behind the arc.

“And I was upset with that shot,” Beggs said. “I think he is the best shooter in our conference. I saw him make 23 straight threes once in warmups. So our goal was to give him no shots because we knew any shot he took was going in. Him making one was enough for us and we focused on not giving him any more shots.”

Altavilla injured a finger on his left hand midway through the third. He returned in the fourth, but by that time Nanticoke had the game going its way because of the five second-half 3-pointers.

“We got out of what we were trying to do there,” GAR coach Jerry Altavilla said. “We had to switch up the lineup and had to go defensively. We had to take out some of our offensive players off. I don’t think we did a good job with the tempo, either.”

Dajon Rush paced GAR with 12 points. Pionkowski had 23 and Stout added 17 for Nanticoke. The teams play again Feb. 2 at GAR.

1/15/2016

Nanticoke Area limits tax increase to 8 percent

Michael P. Buffer - - Citizens Voice

The Greater Nanticoke Area School Board voted Thursday for a preliminary budget that would spend \$28 million during the next school year and limits a property tax increase to 8 percent.

The preliminary budget is non-binding but prevents the board from approving a tax increase that exceeds 8 percent, Business Manager Al Melone said. Approving a final budget is required by June 30, the last day of the current school year.

The tax-increase limit exceeds the index amount established by the state on tax increases that don’t need voter approval or state approval of referendum exception amounts. The index amount for Greater Nanticoke Area is 3.6 percent. The state will have to approve the district’s request for exceptions on certain expenditures that will allow a tax increase of up to 8 percent without a referendum. District officials still hope to avoid a tax increase but want some flexibility because the state still has not approved education funding amounts in a budget for the current fiscal year, Melone said.

Two weeks ago, Gov. Tom Wolf unlocked emergency funding to school districts with partial vetoes of a \$30.3 billion budget from the Legislature. Last week, the state released about six months worth of 2015-16 funding to school districts. The current property tax rate in Greater Nanticoke Area is 10.4932 mills. The preliminary budget prevents the rate from exceeding 11.3327 mills. A mill is \$1 on every \$1,000 in property assessment.

In other business from Thursday’s meeting, the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board extended the contract for Superintendent Ronald Grevera through 2021. His contract was due to expire in 2019 when the board hired Grevera two years ago. His annual salary on July 1 will increase to \$126,690.

The board also voted to hire Matthew Schwenk as high school principal. He plans to start Jan. 25, and his annual salary will be \$90,000.

Schwenk has been the principal of a Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit program that provides educational services to adjudicated juveniles in a facility in Danville.

1/15/2016

One memorable ride: Nanticoke High 1961 state champs to be honored

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Nearly 55 years have past since that magical night at the Harrisburg Farm Show Arena, but the memories remain strong and now they’ll be revisited.

The Nanticoke High School basketball team which won the 1961 PIAA Class A state title will be honored Friday prior to the game between Nanticoke and GAR. The ceremonies will begin at 7 p.m. and a banner honoring the team will be revealed.

Two of the five starters who defeated Hickory Township 56-46 will be present, Bill James and Rich Kiewlak. James lives in Jim Thorpe while Kiewlak resides in the suburbs of Philadelphia.

Joe Shepela, who lives in California, and George Yanchik, who lives in South Carolina, won’t be attending. Ken Legins, the fifth starter, died in 2013. Coach Syl “Stretch” Bozinski, who finished with 616 career victories, died in 2001. Other players and some cheerleaders are also expected to be there.

“Never, never did we doubt our ability,” Shepela said. “We worked as a team and were very well coached. At practice, we went through the drills over and over and over. We were like a well-oiled machine. When any team threw something at us different, we were able to change our tactics. Maybe instead of hitting Kenny all the time, hit Billy. And then

Richie would hit some really long ones.

“That’s why I feel we were adaptable to changing situations.”

And every player had their role and accepted it. Yanchik didn’t have any classes with the others and described himself as “a social outsider to that degree” yet played a huge part in the team’s 26-1 record that season.

“I wasn’t a big part offensively,” Yanchik said. “My area was playing defense and rebounding. We had plenty of scoring.”

All four of the surviving starters agreed Legins was the star of the bunch. He scored 16 points in the championship game and went on to play at George Washington University where he led the team in scoring for three years and was All-Southern Conference as a senior.

“Kenny, everything he that got he earned it,” said James, who was a co-captain with Legins. “I never had any jealousy toward him.”

“He was the kingpin,” Shepela said of Legins. “He had the ability to overcome taller guys in the post. He was only 6-4, 6-5 and he overcame great odds against taller guys in the post.”

Nanticoke also overcame being a small school winning at the state’s highest level. The PIAA had three classes in 1961, with Class A having the schools with the largest enrollment. Nanticoke was grouped with the smallest teams in Class C, but elected to play at Class A.

“I don’t think a lot of people know that we are the only Class C team that took a Class A title in Pennsylvania,” Kwielak said. “I don’t think that will ever be done again with all the jointures.”

A year before winning the 1961 championship, Nanticoke rode a 26-0 record into the Eastern State Finals only to lose to York. The championship season didn’t start out well for the Rams, who were also called the Nans, as they dropped an early season game to Sharon in a tournament in Johnstown.

Nanticoke never lost again that season.

James recalled a memorable game against rival Newport Township during the championship run. The two high schools would eventually merge with Harter High School, located across the Susquehanna River, to form what is now Greater Nanticoke Area.

Newport was coached by Jim Davis, who would later coach and become the athletic director at the new school. Word got out that the Newport players were saying they were going to come to Nanticoke and leave with a victory.

“They were getting cocky and saying they were going to come our place and they were going to beat us,” James said. “You know what we beat them by? Fifty-five points. That’s how good this team was.”

Every home game was packed. The gym at the high school — which stood where a CVS Pharmacy is now when entering the town via the Sans Souci Highway — held about 700-800 people. Sometimes twice as many would squeeze in to see the Rams.

As good as the Rams were, they once again ran into trouble in the Eastern State Finals against Reading. Trailing by seven with barely two minutes left, many fans began to leave. Nanticoke, though, went to a full-court press and pulled out a 51-47 victory by scoring the game’s final 11 points.

There weren’t as many dramatics in the championship game against Hickory Township. Legins scored 10 first-quarter points. James had 19 points and 12 rebounds. Except for a lull in the third quarter, the Rams kept Hickory Township at arm’s length on the way to a 56-46 victory. Nanticoke fans made up a large part of the 9,000 in attendance.

“I’d hate to think what would have happened if we lost,” Yanchik said. “We certainly would have been disappointed. We had a good team and in the game we were never really threatened I guess. We had the lead throughout the game. I don’t remember any specific times where the game was getting away from us.”

The game was played on a Saturday night, so the team stayed over in Harrisburg. The next morning on the trip back, the Rams were met in Bloomsburg by a fire truck on Route 11 and escorted to just outside of Nanticoke. There, the team switched to convertibles and was escorted through town until reaching Central Park where a ceremony was held.

Various reports had the crowd at the park estimated between 20,000-30,000.

“There were 20,000-30,000 fans and there are only 11,000 people in Nanticoke,” James said. “So we had a lot of people rooting for us. And another thing, for months we ate for nothing. We were in every restaurant from Nanticoke to Wilkes-Barre to Scranton. These are things you never forget.”

Shepela didn’t want to forget the Nanticoke reserves, who he called the best practice team the starting five could have. He was the only starter to return for 1962 where the Rams’ season ended in the Eastern State Semifinals.

“Everybody on the team worked well,” Shepela said. “Looking back at it, there wasn’t any person who thought they were well above anybody else on the team. We were five guys who worked hard.”

Nanticoke city manager placed on administrative leave

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

City Manager Andy Gegaris has been placed on administrative leave, according to Nanticoke city officials. As of Wednesday, it was not clear why Gegaris had been placed on leave or how that would affect his long-term job status.

Gegaris, who was hired as Nanticoke's city manager in May 2014, was not in the office Wednesday, according to Nanticoke business manager Jennifer Polito and city human resources director Donna Wall.

"We have been told he is on administrative leave," Wall said.

She declined to comment further since it is a personnel issue.

Polito confirmed that Gegaris was on leave and not in his office. She also had no further comment on the matter, she said.

Polito and Wall did not provide details of how Gegaris was placed on leave, but the Nanticoke home rule charter, adopted in 2011, gives authority over the city manager to the city's mayor, an office currently held by Richard Wiaterowski.

The charter created a strong mayor/city manager/city council government model, in which the mayor has control over city employees in many cases.

However, it would require approval from at least four members of city council, as well as the mayor, to terminate Gegaris's employment — and Gegaris would have a chance to defend himself at a public meeting.

The city charter stipulates that a supermajority of city council — four of the five council members — must approve the mayor's request to terminate the city manager. The charter states that "the city manager shall have the opportunity to address city council at a public meeting and respond to the issues set forth for his/her dismissal."

The next city council meeting is scheduled for Jan. 20.

No interim city manager has been appointed, said Wall, who noted she, Polito and other city officials would handle whatever duties need to be attended to on a temporary basis as long as Gegaris is on leave.

Gegaris and the elected leaders who might soon decide the fate of his employment shed no light on the situation Wednesday.

Wiaterowski did not return multiple messages left on his office phone number and with city staffers on Tuesday and Wednesday.

A listed home phone number for Gegaris was out of service on Wednesday. Attempts to reach him by cellphone and through social media proved unsuccessful.

Repeated attempts to reach city council President William Brown and other council members also proved unsuccessful.

1/6/2016

Nanticoke no longer accepting cash in new payment policy

Bill Wellock - Citizens Voice

Nanticoke is no longer accepting cash payments.

On Jan. 1, the city began its new payment policy. Residents can no longer pay cash for various city bills and fees, including refuse bills, police citations and fines, right-to-know fees, permits and code violations.

The city will accept payment with checks, money orders, debit and credit cards. Payment with credit and debit cards include a processing fee.

The change will save city government up to \$7,000 per year, said Jennifer Polito, the city's accounting and finance director.

Having city employees who handle cash requires insurance costing between \$5,000 and \$6,000 per year, Polito said. Additionally, the city paid about \$1,000 in mileage costs each year for an employee to drive to the bank to deposit cash, she said. Now, employees can scan in checks and money orders.

The change prompted some complaints from residents concerned about the processing fee.

"Some people said they don't want to pay the fee, that's their choice. They paid by checks," she said. "For the most part, it's gone well. There hasn't been a lot of resistance."

The city is also looking into online payments for some fees, Polito said.

The Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority already processes sewer fees online.

Nanticoke is trying to update the city website to allow residents to pay their refuse fee online by June, Polito said.

1/6/2016

Murt's Desserts brings cupcake camper to area

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A bright pink and blue trailer in the driveway is a sure sign you're at the right place for cupcakes and other desserts. The visually pleasing camper belongs to 16-year-old Brandon Murtha, a 10th grader at Greater Nanticoke Area High School. Brandon runs Murt's Desserts and takes the camper on the road to area craft fairs and vendor shows, selling cupcakes and other sweet treats. He has been asked to do a few Sweet 16 parties, birthdays and other personal events. "I always wanted to have some kind of business," Brandon said. He admits he wanted an ice cream truck but, after deliberation with his family, decided the cupcake camper was a better idea. Having never taken a baking class, he watches Youtube tutorials and takes inspiration from The Cake Boss, Buddy Valestro.

In 2014, Brandon's parents bought the camper from a family in the Poconos. The camper had to be completely remodeled from removing the bunk beds to adding a large window to sell from, as well as replacing the tires. In July 2015, Brandon completed and passed his opening food inspection.

Since baking in the camper is not a possibility, the Murtha house at 1664 S. Hanover St. has become a home bakery. In doing so, Brandon's parents had to have the home rezoned by the city of Nanticoke. To pass inspection, it is required that dessert ingredients are separated from regular, everyday baking items. There is a separate cabinet inside the Murtha home and the refrigerator has a separate shelf specifically for cakes, cookies and desserts.

"It's a lot," Debbie Murtha, Brandon's mother, said.

There are times Brandon bakes for hours, wakes up early and goes to bed long after the family has turned in for the night. He takes roughly 10 dozen cupcakes to events, and even then, there are times when he sells out of cupcakes before the end of the event.

The times required from order to table is about a week.

Brandon takes requests for different flavors and cake ideas and tries to accommodate. The most unique flavor request has been watermelon and the most requested is the chocolate peanut butter.

"I have a basic vanilla recipe and add to it," Brandon said.

He has an upcoming order of chocolate cake, strawberry filling and cream cheese icing. He recently had a challenge when someone requested a Minion cake which he made as six small cakes layered and iced with butter cream.

"That cake was hard," Brandon confessed.

He also accommodates when an allergy is made known.

Hard work and dedication pay off as Murt's Dessert's has a five star rating on its Facebook page. Brandon hopes to one day "stay in Nanticoke" by opening a store in the downtown area. The camper, he said, will stay.

To order, contact Brandon through Murt's Desserts Facebook page or by calling 570-735-3406.

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Nanticoke's cashless policy now in effect

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With innovations like Google Pay, Apple Wallet and Uber, cash-in-hand transactions for everyday life are fading away. In November, the Nanticoke City Council voted on a cashless policy. The policy, voted on by city council, went into effect on Jan. 1. According to the policy, the city no longer accepts cash as payment for refuse bills, citations and fees, right-to-know fees and code violations and permits.

For Nanticoke, going cashless means no bonding of employees handling the bills, the ability to lower liability insurance and easier auditing of the books.

"It's better for us all," Jennifer Polito, Nanticoke's accounting director, said.

It also eliminates an "outside threat" of people who think about robbing the cash from the municipal building.

City Manager Andy Gegaris said it took six months for them to research the process and bring it in front of council.

"It was a well-thought out process," Gegaris said. "It wasn't done haphazardly."

Both Polito and Gegaris admit there was some hesitancy in the office for the "new year, new policy," but they both expect things to work out smoothly as time goes on.

"The training (for employees) took 45 minutes," Polito said, noting it took a day for her to do paperwork.

The city will now accept checks, money orders and credit/debit card payments. If payment is made by credit or debit card, a processing fee is added to the transaction. For every \$100, a \$3 fee is added on — for instance, if the bill is \$260, the total bill, with the fee, is \$269 — or if a bill is \$500 or greater, three percent of the total is added on.

The percentage fee wouldn't necessarily be for refuse bills, citations and fees, or right-to-know fees. Polito thinks the percentage would apply more toward the zoning part of the city policy.

According to Polito and Gegaris, the fee is not ideal and they hope it doesn't make people think less of the new system, but they stress the city isn't making money on the fee.

"It's the bank's convenience fee," Polito said.

Due to the safety concerns of residents, no over-the-phone payments are accepted.

"We ask for identification on all credit card transactions," she said.

Though it's not up and running yet, Polito said the city wants to have online payments "by a secure link" by the beginning of June "for the second half of the sewer payments."

The city had a payment drawer full of receipts by early afternoon.

Tom and Mary Grobinski were just one of many paying their sewer bill by check Monday at the municipal building at 15 E. Ridge St. Though the couple have "no desire" for the city to rely solely on credit or debit cards, they agree paying by check or money order is "safer."

"We have records of payment (by paying with check or money order)," Mary said.

Cashless payments are nothing new for Nanticoke residents. Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority has required a cashless transaction for residents' sewer bills since September.