

12/30/2008

Nanticoke sets its 2009 tax rate at 2.43 mills

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Council opted Monday to raise real estate taxes, despite some residents' concerns about other tax hikes and the poor economy.

Council voted unanimously to raise real estate taxes from 1.72 mills — which equals 44.5 mills in 2008 assessment — to 2.43 mills for 2009. A mill is \$1 on every \$1,000 of assessed property valuation.

“Even though we had to raise taxes, we realized the tax burden on Nanticoke residents is high,” Councilman Jon Metta said. “We tried to reduce it as much as possible while maintaining a balanced budget and also while monitoring expenditures line-by-line.”

Residents paid an average of \$105 per property in real estate taxes in 2008, based on a median assessed valuation of \$2,360 from the last reassessment in 1965. The increase means residents will pay an average of \$179, based on a median assessed valuation of \$73,400 from the recent reassessment.

Council initially proposed raising taxes to 2.83 mills, which he said would mean \$208 a year per homeowner, based on the median assessed valuation.

“We decided to hold or delay capital improvements,” Metta said. “We had budgeted approximately \$130,000 and we deferred that for one year, and we’ll use grant money to do things in 2009. We also reduced our attorneys fees by \$20,000.”

Residents Hank Marks and Hank Kellar argued it is a bad time to raise taxes at all.

The economy is weak, bills for heating oil, food and utilities are going up, and residents also have higher school district and county taxes, plus a \$50 higher garbage fee to the city, Marks said.

City officials didn't have a choice, according to Gerald Cross, executive director of the Pennsylvania Economy League, Nanticoke's financial recovery coordinator.

The city got a \$200,000 loan from the state this year because it was falling short on earned income tax revenue expectations, Metta said. Council previously promised to raise millage high enough to cover payments toward the city's debt, in exchange for the state allowing the city to reset the loan for 10 years without interest, Cross said.

PEL financial specialist Harry Miller reminded council and residents the city was “multi-million dollars” in debt before it was given distressed status in May 2006. Most of the debt is nearly 10 years old, Cross said.

Resident Chester Beggs asked about cutting the police department's midnight shift, which Mayor John Bushko immediately nixed. Nanticoke needs 24-hour police service, Bushko said.

Police and fire contracts are being negotiated. Councilman Brent Makarczyk thanked both departments for understanding Nanticoke is in a financial bind and for working closely with the city. He said there is a possibility there may be a firefighters' contract soon.

Beggs also suggested selling off the property owned by the redevelopment authority, which council dissolved earlier this year, and getting the land back on the tax rolls.

12/30/2008

09 Nanticoke city budget

Nanticoke City council raises property taxes

The average homeowner will pay \$179 in property taxes in '09, up from \$105 this year, Councilman Jon Metta says.

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Council members voted unanimously to raise property taxes during a short meeting Monday night to pass the city's 2009 budget.

Effective Jan. 1, the city's new property tax rate is 2.4344 mills -- .9577 mill for debt service, .0194 mill for library and 1.4573 mills for the general fund under the new property valuation system.

With a 2.4344 property tax millage and other tax revenue, the city is expected to generate \$3.93 million in revenue to cover \$3.91 million in expenses next year.

One mill will generate \$382,800 in property taxes for 2009, Pennsylvania Economy League Executive Director Gerald Cross said. A mill generated \$14,800 this year under the previous home values, he said.

The average homeowner will pay \$179 in property taxes in 2009, up from \$105 this year, Councilman Jon Metta said. These figures are based on the 2.4344 rate and new home values.

Residents Henry Marks and Henry Kellar urged council to consider a lower millage because of the tough economic times.

Marks pointed out the number of bank foreclosures and reduced spending habits of consumers who are trying to save their money this holiday season might also equate into homeowners not being able to make their tax payments.

“This is a very bad time to be raising taxes,” Marks said.

Nanticoke property owners paid 44.5 mills in property taxes this year, which equals out to 1.7244 mills under the new millage system. The total millage is .71 mills higher than last year's millage using the new home values.

“It's increasing real estate, but we are reducing where we can,” Metta said.

The highest millage the city could have enacted for the general fund was 1.8573 mills, according to solicitor William Finnegan.

Council members were able to cut .4 mills off the general fund when Mayor John Bushko told council it needed to cut \$130,000 from the capital projects fund and \$20,000 from labor attorney fees for negotiating the contracts with the city's police and fire departments.

Bushko and councilmen Joe Dougherty and Jim Litchkofski said they didn't want to raise taxes but they felt there was no other way to cut the budget.

“We have to put together a balanced budget. If there was any way we could cut \$10,000 here and \$10,000 there and I would prefer that than raising taxes,” Bushko said, adding he vowed to look over the budget again in an attempt to find more savings.

Council also unanimously authorized taking out a \$300,000 tax anticipation note from PNC Bank at 3.15 percent interest. It must be paid by Dec. 31, 2009.

12/30/2008

No developer named for LCCC project

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Luzerne County Community College trustees postponed selecting a developer for the Culinary Arts Institute in downtown Nanticoke until they get more information about the three candidates for the project.

The board met briefly Monday, voting to table awarding a contract until after the board’s finance committee meets on Jan. 6. Board chairman Paul Halsey and board members Joseph Rymar, Michael Tigue and Greg Skrepenak — who is also a Luzerne County commissioner — make up the committee.

“We want to make certain the college is making an informed decision, based on all the information available,” college President Thomas Leary said. “We have a responsibility to our taxpayers and students.”

The request for proposals to construct the Culinary Arts Institute at Market and West Main streets in downtown Nanticoke stated the college wants an approximately 20,000 square foot “green” building, meaning it would be designed to be energy- and water-efficient and incorporate recycled materials into its construction. The building would include kitchen and pastry arts classroom/labs, an auditorium and an office area for staff. The three development teams to express interest have offered different concepts for the building’s design, as well as varied estimates on what the project will cost.

Moosic-based Mark Development’s estimate is approximately \$7.5 million. However, that does not include green design, although representatives of the firm expressed willingness to go green if college officials desire.

The Exton-based Educational Property Group initially cited a figure of about \$6.7 million to build the building, but designing the building “green” drove the cost up to approximately \$8.5 million.

Total project costs for Maryland-based Paragon Building Services Inc. would amount to approximately \$7.9 million, according to a tally of fees from the firm’s proposal, which includes green design.

Although the culinary arts center would be built to LCCC’s specifications, its construction would be financed through state grants combined with money fronted by the developer. There is up to \$4.5 million in state grants available for the project. The chosen developer would put up the remainder of the money, then get it back through either a lease or purchase deal with the college.

12/30/2008

Culinary Arts Center developer for LCCC not decided

Board of trustees tables a vote, wants more info on three competing bids.

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Luzerne County Community College’s board of trustees on Monday tabled a vote on choosing a developer for the Culinary Arts Center pending further review by the board’s finance committee.

Board chairman Paul Halsey said board members felt they needed additional time to conduct a thorough, side-by-side comparison of plans presented by competing developers before making a final decision.

College officials had been cautioned that they could potentially lose part of \$4.7 million in state grants if they did not act quickly to choose a developer. Speaking after the meeting, College President Tom Leary said the board is aware of the grant deadlines and is confident they will be met.

“We want to make certain the college is making an informed decision based on all the information that’s available,” Leary said.

“We have a responsibility to taxpayers and our students. We want to make sure it’s done properly,” he said.

The college is considering plans presented by Mark Construction Services and Educational Property Group, which each presented in-depth proposals to the board at a meeting earlier this month. A third developer, Paragon Building Services, has also submitted a written proposal, but has not met with the board.

Mark Construction has proposed building a 22,000-square-foot building at an estimated cost of \$7.5 million; Property Educational Group’s proposal is for a 23,000-square-foot building estimated at \$6.7 million; Paragon’s proposal, which does not indicate the square footage of the building, is for \$7.9 million.

Leary said the board’s finance committee will meet on Jan. 6 to again review the three proposals. The committee will present its recommendation to the full board, which will schedule a public meeting to vote on choosing a developer.

“We are going to move as quickly as possible,” Leary said.

12/26/2008

LCCC officials support ‘green’ construction

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Going “green” in building construction is a growing trend nationwide — and some Luzerne County Community College board members believe it’s the way to go for the school’s latest project.

Recently college officials accepted proposals for the Culinary Arts Institute, which would be built at Market and West Main streets in downtown Nanticoke. The three-page request for proposals states, “The College is seeking a green, sustainable and high-performance facility.”

Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification is obtained through verification by neutral industry experts that a newly constructed building is environmentally sound, energy-efficient and healthy for the people who live or work in it.

Under the LEED system, projects earn points for satisfying certain criteria: a sustainable site, water efficiency, energy and atmosphere, materials and resources, indoor environmental quality and design innovation. Depending on the number of points, a project can earn one of four LEED levels: certified, silver, gold or platinum.

LEED-certified buildings “cost less to operate and maintain; are energy- and water-efficient; have higher (lease) rates than conventional buildings in their markets; are healthier and safer for occupants; and are a physical demonstration of the values of the organizations that own and occupy them,” according to the U.S. Green Building Council’s Web site.

LCCC trustee Elaine Curry has stressed the importance of a “green” building, and her fellow board member J. Toure McCluskey has also expressed interest in the savings the college could realize with an energy-efficient building.

“I won’t support a building that’s not green,” Curry said. “I think it’s irresponsible today for people building new construction not to pay attention to preserving and saving the environment for future generations.”

Green and sustainable is becoming a requirement for new construction, said Alex Belavitz of Facility Design and Development, the firm which drew up the original design for the culinary arts center two years ago, and which is working with Exton-based Educational Property Group, one of the potential developers.

Regarding the culinary arts center, he said, “If half the project is paid for with grant money, it should be green, sustainable and economical to run.” The proposal from Educational Property Group’s team includes details for making the project green, such as a list of recycled construction materials and a checklist for LEED certification.

Maryland-based Paragon Building Services Inc. states in its proposal that, if hired, the firm will construct the facility using at least 30 percent “green” building products, and equip it with “alternative sources of energy such as wind and solar to aid in reduction of operating costs.”

The team of the third developer, Mark Development of Moosic, did not include green specifications in its proposal. However, architect Scott Allen told the board his firm can work on the design to “make portions of it green,” and, with more information, could “make it as green as possible.” The certification and review process take time, and it “changes fundamentally how you design the building, the electrical equipment, mechanical equipment,” Belavitz said. Making a building green also adds 15 to 20 percent to the construction budget, he said.

“There might be a slight cost increase up front, but over time, it would increase the efficiency of the building,” Curry said. “We need to increase efficiency in how we use energy, water and materials.”

12/25/2008

Greater Nanticoke Area students, faculty collect toys

Times Leader

Greater Nanticoke Area School District’s students, faculty and employees collected more than \$5,000 that will be used to purchase food certificates and toys for families in the district. The holiday fundraising drive has been a tradition in the district for 25 years. Many community members also participated. The drive collected enough new toys to give 144 children two toys each and enough money to benefit 200 families.

12/23/2008

Developer urges LCCC to create full plan for culinary arts center

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The principal of Paragon Building Services Inc. would love to get the contract to build Luzerne County Community College’s new culinary arts institute in downtown Nanticoke — but not just yet.

Joe Sinkaus, president of the Berlin, Md.-based contracting and construction management firm, believes officials should do more studying before turning the project over to a developer, and offered his assistance in developing a plan for a facility that will best suit the college’s long-term needs.

“They have to prepare a formal (request for proposal). They have to do case studies. They have to establish their needs. That’s what we offered to do,” he said. “Yes, we want to develop it. We’d be honored to be a part of it. But we want to do the right thing.”

College President Thomas P. Leary said the Culinary Arts institute has been in LCCC’s master plan for two years, and there has already been substantial discussion with the academic affairs division and culinary arts department in terms of what is needed.

“I don’t think there’s a rush. I think the board is taking its time and deliberating to select the developer who will best serve the needs of the college and the community,” he said.

LCCC officials advertised on Dec. 12 a request for proposals, due Dec. 17. There were three pages of specifications; “Usually, the ones we see are 300-400 pages long,” Sinkaus said.

LCCC’s board of trustees met Thursday, the day after the deadline, to talk about the three proposals they received and hear presentations from two potential development teams: Philadelphia-area Educational Property Group and Moosic-based Mark Development. The board plans to meet again on Monday, Dec. 29, for further discussion.

Nobody from Paragon attended last week’s meeting, but Sinkaus sent a letter to college officials that day. In it, he urged the board to hire a company like Paragon to manage the proposed facility instead of “awarding a developer to go full speed ahead on a fast track schedule.”

“I think it’s unfair, unprofessional to award the project right now,” Sinkaus said. “I emphasized to them in my letter ... that planning is key.”

Suggestions in the proposal include touring similar schools, like the Culinary Institute of America; asking for insight from industry leaders who produce specialized equipment; and comparing the culinary program enrollment with national trends to determine future needs. There also should be a more detailed request for proposals drawn up, according to the letter.

"I understand the time constraints regarding funding," the letter concludes. "However, consider the size of the overall institution and the size of the proposed scope of work. I believe it would be in the best interests of LCCC and its surrounding community not to give up control of a very important growth segment of the future of the school."

There are four state grants totaling \$4.5 million available for the project, including \$1.5 million in state gaming revenue which is channeled through Nanticoke. How soon the grants can be used and by whom is a concern of city, state and college officials. State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, has said the grants might have to be re-applied for if Mark Development is not awarded the project, and that time is short to use the money.

Nanticoke officials are trying to learn the deadline for using the \$1.5 million. Mayor John Bushko found out Monday from the state Department of Community and Economic Development, which administers the grant, that it doesn't matter which developer uses it.

"At this time, there is no approved project," stated DCED Economic Development Analyst Marge Ryan in an e-mail to city officials. "DCED is waiting on a narrative describing the project, the budget, what the (gaming) funds would be used for, and evidence that there is a developer. DCED does not care who the developer is provided one is properly selected. And we are awaiting information from the City and/or the chosen developer that all other project financing is in place."

12/22/2008

Lifestyles

Artist shows character with every drawing

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Upstairs in the Nanticoke home John Krupa and his wife Esther share with their two dogs and two cats — "our sidekicks," Esther jokes — his studio is decorated with his work, including caricatures of themselves and friends, some portrayed as superheroes. Krupa says his biggest influence is Stan Lee, the driving force behind Marvel Comics and the creator of Spider-Man, the Incredible Hulk, the X-Men, and many other characters. Caricaturing takes drawing ability and being able to quickly capture peoples' features on paper. The secret is "Practice, and just being used to people watching you," John said.

Krupa, 30, has been on the caricature circuit since 2001, working mainly in pen-and-ink and oil pastels. But his interest in art started when he was a kid.

"I've been drawing since fourth or fifth grade," he said. "I wasn't always this big, so I'd draw Bart Simpson so I wouldn't get beat up."

Even when he grew older and taller — 6 feet 3 inches to be exact — Krupa kept drawing. After graduating from Meyers High School, he received a degree in fine arts from Luzerne County Community College.

At first he worked full-time and only drew as a hobby. Esther's mother suggested he try taking his talents further, by doing caricatures at "the three Fs: fairs, festivals and flea markets," ranging from the Garden Drive-In's flea market to the Pittston Tomato Festival. His first big job was at the Luzerne County Fair.

Krupa did a summer stint in the venue that's a must for most caricature artists, the amusement park — in his case, Hersheypark.

While visiting a friend in Kansas, Krupa got a caricaturing gig at the Amelia Earhart festival.

Recently, Esther inspired John to expand from on-the-spot caricaturing to other areas, including personalized greeting cards, family caricature portraits, pet portraits and wedding favors.

One bride and groom had the Krupas design labels for souvenir bottles of lager and had glasses printed up with his caricatures of the newlyweds on them.

With Esther's guidance — she's John's business partner and "idea woman" — they developed a business, "Kiddie Kartunes," that they hope to grow into a full-time operation.

Krupa enjoys doing a wide variety of caricaturing jobs, from children's birthday parties to nursing homes. He has done store openings, Wilkes-Barre's First Friday social event, and private cocktail parties.

Often Krupa draws people as their favorite fictional character.

His oddest request?

"Someone wanted to be drawn as Yoda one time. I never got that before," he said.

But no matter how people want to be caricatured, John Krupa is up for the challenge.

To see samples of John Krupa's caricatures, visit <http://www.myspace.com/kiddiekartunes> or call 735-5606

12/20/2008

Construction firms make pitch to LCCC

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Two developers, Mark Construction Services and Property Educational Group, are vying to win the contract to construct the Luzerne County Community College Culinary Arts Center.

In their layout designs, both provide space for two kitchen lab classrooms, a pastry arts lab, a dining room classroom, four standard classrooms including a computer lab, locker rooms, an auditorium classroom, central storage with loading dock access, a student lounge, office space and an auditorium classroom.

But that is where the similarities between the two proposals end.

Mark Rinaldi, president of Mark Construction Services, told the LCCC Board of Trustees at Thursday night's meeting he is "fairly certain" his firm has acquired the grant funding needed to build this project.

The packet he provided board members contains letters from state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, and the governor's office to the Northeastern Economic Development Co. of Pennsylvania, which is Rinaldi's financial partner for the project.

The correspondence assures the \$4.7 million in grants will be available for the project. That money includes \$2 million from the Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program and \$1.5 million paid over three years from the gaming funds provided by the Mohegan Sun at Pocono Downs.

Board secretary Elaine Curry asked Rinaldi if he had been promised to win this project. He told her "No, absolutely not."

According to the governor's office and Department of Economic and Community Development, the grant money is tied to the project and not a specific developer.

John Walsh of Property Educational Group, said state DCED officials said his firm could receive the grants, but would have to apply for them.

"We accounted for the original \$3.5 million in grants and not the gaming money," Walsh said.

At the request of board member Tom O'Donnell, Walsh said he would obtain a letter from the state official regarding the grant availability for his firm.

Yudichak expressed concern that if a developer other than Rinaldi was selected the grant money might be lost and rerouted to another project during the reapplication process.

"If you have to reapply, yes you are eligible for funding and you are eligible to be denied for funding. That's the major difference (between the two developers)," Yudichak said noting the grants would be ready to go if Rinaldi is selected as developer.

Yudichak previously said he was not in favor of a particular developer winning the project. He just wants to see Nanticoke's downtown get revitalized and the college expand one of its fastest-growing programs into downtown.

"I am going to fight for whatever developer is selected by the college to get every dime of that grant money," Yudichak said.

Rinaldi said his firm could complete the project so students could begin attending class there in January 2010.

Property Educational Group could have the building ready for occupancy by fall 2010 because the firm would need to acquire the land, demolish the existing buildings and perform soil testing.

The LCCC board will meet before the end of the year and is expected to vote to hire a developer. A meeting date hasn't been set.

College officials have not determined whether they will lease or purchase the building.

12/19/2008

Nanticoke may raise '09 taxes

Some on council say funds needed for improvements, but others say timing is wrong.

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Council members on Wednesday discussed the 2009 budget and the possibility of having to raise taxes.

Councilmen Jon Metta said the city needed to start putting money aside to build up its capital improvement fund so it can repair infrastructure and purchase police cars, fire trucks and other equipment when needed.

Mayor John Bushko and Councilmen Joe Dougherty and Jim Litchofski didn't want to raise the city's property taxes because they felt it would hurt residents already suffering through a tough economy.

"We know this is going to be a horrible time for people, economically speaking. We believe it is better to defer any type of capital if we can keep taxes as low as possible for the people," Litchofski said.

Metta and Brent Markarczyk argued the city needed to raise taxes to fund capital improvement projects.

"Of course nobody likes raising taxes, but we don't like falling in the hole," Makarczyk said.

Metta suggested that because the city still had a few days before having to pass the budget, the mayor should look at it to decide what he or other council members wanted to cut.

The council did not vote on the budget. A special meeting will be held Dec. 29 to discuss the spending plan again. By state law, the budget must be passed by Dec. 31 or the city will not be able to function.

The city's current millage is 44, but it will drop significantly because of the recent increase in property values due to the countywide reassessment, Pennsylvania Economy League Executive Director Gerald Cross said. PEL is the city's Act 47 coordinator and works with city officials to help them improve the city's finances. Act 47 is the state's financially distressed municipalities act.

Metta made a motion to allow interim city Administrator Holly Quinn to apply for a tax anticipation note of \$300,000 from PNC Bank at a rate of 3.51 percent. The loan must be repaid by the end of December 2009.

12/19/2008

LCCC officials inch closer to picking project developer

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Luzerne County Community College's board of trustees got a step closer Thursday toward deciding on a developer for the new Culinary Arts Institute.

In addition to the two developers who had previously shown interest, a third, Maryland-based Paragon Building Services Inc., responded to the college's last-minute request for proposals.

Although only two development teams, from Moosic-based Mark Development and Exton-based Educational Property Group, showed up Thursday to give presentations, solicitor Joseph Kluger said the board will consider all three proposals equally.

“Paragon is not being precluded because they were not present,” he said.

Plans to build the culinary arts center at West Main and Market streets have been in the works for two years. The board only voted to put the project out for bid on Dec. 9, advertised on Dec. 12 and required bids to be in by Wednesday. The project was put up for bid due to a new board policy. The board will attempt to meet again before Dec. 31 to go over the information and ask more questions of the development teams, board President Paul Halesey said.

Board vice chairman Greg Skrepenak, who is also a Luzerne County commissioner, said he would like to choose a developer by the end of the year. To delay would be unfair, not only to the developers, but to the integrity of the project, Skrepenak said.

At stake is \$4.5 million in state grants — \$2 million in Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program funding; \$1 million in Department of Environmental Protection Growing Greener money; and \$1.5 million in state gaming revenue.

The trustees want to find out for certain the deadline to use the \$1.5 million, Halesey said. They also want to ensure the grants can be used by a different developer.

William Rinaldi, principal of Mark Development, was designated developer for the project two years ago. At the time, it was intended to be privately financed, and an independent restaurant was part of the plan.

Chris Cawley, managing director of Northeastern Economic Development Co., which is working on Mark Development’s financials, said his firm applied for the grants, and the state has a “great comfort level” with Rinaldi.

Transferring the grants to a new developer might not be possible without re-applying for them, and then, funding might not be guaranteed, said state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke.

Educational Property Group principal John Walsh said “our guy is very certain” the grants can be transferred. Board member Dr. Thomas O’Donnell asked for a letter stating that to be put on file with LCCC President Thomas Leary before the trustees decide on a developer.

Educational Property Group’s costs for the 23,000-square-foot building would be about \$8.4 million, and its sale price depends on grant availability, he said. He said the estimate is higher because of a redesign to make the building “green” — more energy-efficient and environmentally sound — which board member Elaine Curry had been pressing both developers for.

Educational Property Group is looking at a flexible lease agreement with LCCC. Walsh advised the board to have their solicitor check into state-required procurement procedures; the college might not be able to buy the building outright as soon as officials think.

Mark Development could do the building for \$7.5 million, with \$4.5 million of that covered by the grants, then sell it to LCCC for the balance of \$3 million, Cawley said.

Mark Development holds letters of intent from Nanticoke council allowing it to buy the senior center, and from the Nanticoke Housing Authority, which owns the Susquehanna Coal building, but no official transaction has taken place. Both buildings need to be acquired by the developer and demolished for the project.

Rinaldi said he does not want to hurt the college in any way, and if he is not chosen as developer, he’s willing to work something out.

12/19/2008

**LCCC board hears Culinary Arts building proposals
Two developers present plans. Trustees must choose to buy or lease structure.**

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The Luzerne County Community College Board of Trustees was told Thursday night it needed to make a decision on whether the college wanted to lease the Culinary Arts Institute or wanted to purchase the building once completed from a developer.

John Walsh, president of the Educational Property Group, told board members they needed to determine how they wanted to acquire the building because purchasing it outright required different procedures to be followed than if the college wanted to lease the building.

Board Vice President Gregory Skrepenak, who’s also a county commissioner, requested the board’s solicitor, Joe Kluger, look into what the different procedures might be regarding leasing or purchasing the building.

During the two-hour meeting, Walsh’s development team and competitor Scranton-based Mark Development Services presented in-depth proposals to board members detailing each firm’s vision for the layout, architectural design and financing the project.

William Rinaldi, president of Mark Construction Services, told board members his team had been working on this project for two years and had acquired site control of the Nanticoke Senior Citizens Center and the Susquehanna Coal Building. Those buildings will need to be demolished to make room for the college’s Culinary Arts Center.

Nanticoke Mayor John Bushko spoke up from the audience, saying the city had not yet sold the Nanticoke Senior Citizens Center to Rinaldi. Bushko confirmed there was a letter of intent, but the city hadn’t received any money from Rinaldi.

“It wouldn’t be prudent for us to sell to you if you aren’t the developer,” Bushko said.

Board trustee Joe Lombardo asked Rinaldi if he would be willing to allow another developer to purchase the senior citizens center and the Susquehanna Coal Building if the board didn’t select Rinaldi as the developer.

Rinaldi said yes. “I am not going to hurt the college in anyway,” Rinaldi said.

Both companies also presented small 15-minute presentations to the board during its regular meeting last week.

College officials stated they wanted this to be an open process available to all interested developers, so they advertised a request for proposals last week.

A third developer, Paragon Building Services of Berlin, Md., then submitted a proposal packet for the project. No representatives from Paragon attended Thursday’s meeting.

Board members will meet again before the end of the year and at that time are expected to make a decision on which developer to hire. The meeting hasn’t been scheduled yet.

12/17/2008

Time might not be so tight for LCCC project

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Today is the deadline for prospective developers to submit proposals for Luzerne County Community College's Culinary Arts Institute, to be built at Market and East Main streets in downtown Nanticoke.

Although time is tight for the project, the situation with one of the grants might not be as dire as expected.

The college's board of trustees voted at its Dec. 9 meeting to put the project out for bid after vowing to embrace a new policy of openness and transparency. Two developers, one of whom had the initial green-light for the culinary arts building when it was to be a private-sector project, gave presentations at the meeting.

At the time, some board members questioned why they were being rushed. State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, who spoke at the meeting, said \$1.5 million in state gaming revenue for the project could be lost if the board didn't act by Dec. 31.

Yudichak later said he wanted to spur the board to action because of the state's preference for "shovel-ready" projects when giving out its limited resources.

"Is there an unlimited time frame we can utilize this funding? No," he said.

"I don't know there's a drop-dead date, but we're getting to a use-it-or-lose-it situation," said Steve Weitzman, spokesman for the state Department of Community and Economic Development, which administers the funding.

He didn't have a deadline, but said it was "probably not by midnight on New Year's Eve." Still, the project has to move forward quickly, he said.

Yudichak acknowledged that Nanticoke, which applied for the grant on the college's behalf, could ask for more time to use it.

"I would urge the city to apply for an extension right now and not wait for the final weeks," Luzerne County Commissioner Stephen A. Urban said.

Because it hosts Mohegan Sun at Pocono Downs, Luzerne County receives allotments of slot machine revenue through the DCED-administrated Local Share Assessment Fund. Municipalities could put in for a share of \$11.5 million in 2007.

On Oct. 3, 2007, Nanticoke council agreed to apply to DCED for state gaming revenue on behalf of LCCC.

DCED announced on March 14 that Nanticoke would be awarded \$500,000 a year for three years, "for Luzerne County Community College to relocate and grow its new Culinary Institute in downtown Nanticoke."

In a March 15 article in *The Citizens' Voice*, Yudichak said the plan was to have a firm called Mark Development construct a \$7.2 million, 20,000 square-foot building at East Main and Market streets and lease it to LCCC.

The project was initially supposed to be a public-private partnership; the original concept included a private-sector restaurant, Yudichak said. But LCCC wanted to own the building instead of having a private lease arrangement, he said.

An Oct. 10 letter from Yudichak to Chris Cawley, managing director of the Northeastern Economic Development Co. — the financing agent affiliated with Mark Development — expressing the state representative's "strongest support to you and developer William Rinaldi" for the culinary institute project, was given to LCCC trustees at the Dec. 9 meeting.

Urban said he thought Yudichak's letter was an attempt to influence the board members to favor Mark Development over the other potential developer, Philadelphia-area-based Educational Property Group.

"Forget about letters that were written by state officials about who they recommend for the project," Urban said. "The trustees should act independently. They are the legislative body charged with approving and overseeing the actions of the college."

12/15/2008

Nanticoke Historical Society saves, documents pieces of city's past

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They're preservationists, technophiles, detectives and, when the occasion calls for it, Dumpster-divers.

Members of the Nanticoke Historical Society have seen too much of the city's history reduced to rubble, crumble to dust, get carted to landfills or otherwise irretrievably vanish to be squeamish. When it comes to saving records that might be crucial for charting the South Valley's history or providing genealogical data, they'll do what they have to.

"Believe me, it's a rich, rich history we have in this town," said Chester Zaremba, the society's vice president and secretary.

Upstairs in what was once a bedroom in the Mill House, historical society president Juliana Zarzycki surveys stacks of boxes with eclectic contents. There's a 1923 Nanticoke High School diploma that belonged to Henry Levi, who went on to run his family's haberdashery downtown; it was donated by Levi himself.]

There are bound volumes of the Nanticoke Daily Press from 1935, their pages turned sepia and flaking. There are histories of the Newport High School from 1891 to 1967, a case of coal company maps and an elaborately framed, hand-colored photograph of a little girl wearing a 1920s frock. All the material has one thing in common: it needs to be computerized. The historical society has about a terabyte — 1,000 gigabytes — worth of material so far, and at least as much waiting to be converted into downloadable digital files. The mission is to make all the society's material as accessible to the public as possible, Zaremba said.

"We don't want to be a museum, we don't want to be a repository. We want scans of things," he said.

That's John Sherrick's specialty. Although all the members eagerly embrace the new technology that allows condensing the equivalent of a roomful of storage boxes into a hard drive the size of a paperback book, Sherrick's the guy who does the job.

"He's burned out three scanners already," Zaremba joked.

Sherrick is trying to put together an encyclopedia of Nanticoke's past, including the churches, mines, schools, cemeteries, fire departments, commercial interests, and of course the people. He'd like to have an entry for each family in Nanticoke.

“The problem is, when an old person dies, the family comes in, and doesn’t think the text, the photos are important. Everything goes in the Dumpsters,” Sherrick said.

They recently avoided what might have been a heartbreaking situation from a preservationist’s standpoint.

The circa-1910 Susquehanna Coal Co. office building at Market and East Main streets is slated for eventual demolition, to make way for Luzerne County Community College’s Culinary Arts Institute.

Historical society members, saddened by the idea the office for the South Valley’s largest employer would have the same fate as the State Theatre and old high school, received permission from the current owner, the Nanticoke Housing Authority, to take whatever they wanted from it.

“On two successive hot July Mondays ... about seven or eight of us, we went in there and literally cleaned it out,” Zaremba said. “Because of the exigent circumstances, we decided it was better to take it than see it fall to the wrecking ball and go into a massive Dumpster.”

The building was a treasure trove. Zaremba said when its previous owner Kenneth Pollock closed it in the 1970s, most of the coal company files were left behind. Since they didn’t know when the building would be demolished, society members felt they had to hurry with their salvage operation.

“We didn’t have any time to look and decide. It was grab and run,” Zarzycki recalled.

Zaremba estimates they carted away seven truckloads of artifacts and documents, including employee records and state-issued mining certificates, some dating back to the late 1800s.

“We have to sort through it to see exactly what we have. If it looks important, we take it. That’s our philosophy,” Zaremba said.

The Susquehanna Coal Co. material needs to be categorized and scanned, but it’s in storage in Hanover Township, and won’t be computerized for a while yet. Historical society members want to get that archive in their new headquarters organized before tackling what Zaremba, Zarzycki and Sherrick know is going to be a huge undertaking.

Since its founding in 1996, the historical society expanded to the point that by this summer, it needed a bigger home. It outgrew the First Presbyterian Church’s pastor’s house, and a new pastor was going to move in (for years, the church’s pastors had lived elsewhere) so the church needed the house back.

Fortunately, the South Valley Chamber of Commerce and the Mill Memorial Library board were willing to let the historical society share the Mill House. Society members think it’s appropriate to have headquarters in one of Nanticoke’s most historic homes.

Samantha Mill, descendent of one of the city’s earliest landowners, left her house and grounds to Nanticoke in her will, hoping they would be used for a park and library. The city accepted the bequest on Sept. 26, 1938, and the library was built in 1959.

The move to the Mill House was expensive for the historical society, which relies on membership dues, research fees, and calendar and book sales to keep going, Zarzycki said. There are approximately 65 dues-paying members, and new ones are always welcome, Zaremba said.

Besides the archives, the biggest resource of the historical society is its people, Zaremba said. Mike Passetti is the photographer, the guy to call when something happens, like the demolition of the former WNAK building on Dec. 3. Mark Regulski edits the society’s newsletter. Zarzycki’s specialty is collecting the information.

And all the members like to find out where it came from, who the people are in the family portrait, what building that is in the newspaper photograph. There is a database of more than 3,000 identified photographs so far.

“What a lot of us enjoy doing is the detective work,” Zaremba said.

12/15/2008

Nanticoke church honors Polish tradition

Holiday customs have special meaning for Holy Trinity Church

Janine Ungvarsky - Times Leader

Sometimes old traditions lose meaning in translation, become empty as they move from place to place. Not so with a special custom celebrated Sunday by the Woman’s Catholic Council of Holy Trinity Church.

As part of their annual Christmas party, about 30 members of the council and guests honored the most cherished of all Polish holiday customs, including the blessing and sharing of the oplatek wafer and the singing of koledy — sacred Polish hymns.

Dressed in a traditional costume of red pants, white shirt and a black wool vest embroidered with poinsettias hand made in Poland, Frank Mrufchinski explained the importance of the thin, rectangular wheat wafer that’s embossed with nativity scenes.

“Christmas is a religious holiday in Poland, when we celebrate the birth of our Savior,” he said. “We share the treasured Polish custom of sharing the blessed oplatek and wishing everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, even asking forgiveness for any wrongs during the year.”

The wafers are traditionally shared during the wigih — a meatless meal served on Christmas Eve, he said.

Wigih is laden with tradition, Mrufchinski said, from waiting for the youngest child to spot the first star before starting to having the eldest person start sharing the oplatek. There is straw on the table — a reminder of the stable where Jesus was born — and an empty chair at the table, ready to welcome passing strangers. “The Polish saying is that when there’s a stranger in the house, God is in the house,” he said.

| After dinner comes the singing of koledy, songs of Jesus and Mary, shepherds and wise men, Mrufchinski said, and he led those present Sunday in singing several of the cherished songs. “One that’s often requested is ‘Lulajze Jezuniu,’ a lullaby for the baby Jesus,” he said.

After singing, Mrufchinski said the family would go to midnight Mass — Pasterka, the Mass of the Shepherds — where they would sing more songs by candlelight.

Those present Sunday celebrated joyfully, exchanging hugs as they moved about the room breaking pieces from each other’s oplatek and eating the blessed wafers. For most of those present, the traditions were like old friends. Elaine Repotski, West Nanticoke, said as a member of the Women’s Catholic Council, the dinner is an annual event.

“Everyone gets together to break bread and share a meal, remember the traditions,” she said. But for her guest, Flavia Pollick, also of West

Nanticoke, it was a new experience.

"I'm Italian," Pollick said, "so I'll learn a lot today."

Repotski agreed: "We learn about each other, and we become one."

12/11/2008

Mercy Special Care Center new home for Nanticoke Senior Citizens Center

Pam Urbanski writes "Nanticoke Area Notes" every other Thursday. Story ideas and news items can be e-mailed to her at pamurb806@aol.com.

A new location has been found for the Nanticoke Senior Citizens Center.

The new facility will be located inside the Mercy Special Care Center on Washington Street. If all goes as planned, the new center will open at the beginning of January.

"We're hopeful and very optimistic that seniors will be able to enjoy a new center for the New Year," said Brenda Lispi. She is supervisor for all facilities in Luzerne and Lackawanna counties run by the Bureau for the Aging.

Those who visit the center will enjoy more space. At the present senior citizen center, there is just one big room. At the new center there will be different rooms for exercising, crafts, meals and activities.

"We're really very excited about our new place and we think it will serve the community well," said Lispi. "The trend right now in senior citizen centers across the country is a facility that promotes wellness and nutrition, as well as the traditional and popular programs the centers offer to date. Since the senior center is now located on Market Street in the downtown area, some think that location is better suited for older citizens. "There are bus routes that will take residents right to the new Washington Street facility. "Also, most of our visitors do drive and there are at least 25 paved parking spaces that can be utilized by people who come to the center." Lispi added.

Along with a new facility will come new employees. Lynn Brown, who is director of the Nanticoke Senior Citizen Center, has been employed there for the last 28 years. She has worked with many people from the Nanticoke Area and considers them family.

Brown has bittersweet feelings about retiring Jan. 19. "This is my home away from home and I am going to miss the people and the activities. They are my extended family," she said.

Much has changed since her first day on the job. "I think that years ago there was much more of an extended family and maybe the need for a center was not as great. Now, jobs take children and grandchildren away from Nanticoke. But, older family members don't want to move away. They want to stay here where their roots are. Their families are very thankful their loved ones have a place to go to be with friends, receive a nutritious meal, and participate in programs and activities that keep them going," Brown said.

"It's important to them and us that we are able to keep seniors in their homes as long as possible. The people who carry out the programs that take place in this facility help to do that," she said.

Sue Vealla, assistant director, will retire in the middle of December. The reason for moving the senior centers is that Luzerne County Community College is relocating and expanding its culinary department to downtown Nanticoke.

Special Christmas project

The Greater Nanticoke Area School District is sponsoring a district-wide holiday project. Students, faculty and staff are asked to donate new, unwrapped toys or make a monetary donation. Families in the Nanticoke Area that are struggling this year will receive toys and/or food gift certificates.

Frank Grevera, director of building and grounds, is project manager. He decided to take over the reins after Anthony Perrone, superintendent of schools, realized because of health reasons he could no longer head the project. "I thought that with the way the economy is, there would be a greater need this year and that we should carry on," said Grevera.

"The staff in the business office, especially Bonnie Dembowski, has really helped out," he said.

Grevera tells me that all principals are very involved in the project and hold different fundraisers in their respective buildings. "They really have motivated their students to help out. The faculty also does its part to include making a monetary donation in exchange for dress-down days," he said.

According to Grevera, families that will be receiving the special holiday gifts have been designated as families in need by the guidance departments. Families will be receiving letters and phone calls inviting them to come to the school to pick up the gifts. Homeroom teachers will be collecting donations until Wednesday. For more information, call the school business office at 735-7783.

It's show time!

The Education Center Yearbook Club is sponsoring a movie night Saturday at 6 at the center's gym. "Horton Hears a Who" will be screened and refreshments and snacks will be available for purchase. Admission is a donation of your choice to help the yearbook club raise funds.

Santa coming to town

Santa Claus will arrive in Nanticoke in Sunday with a parade starting at the Nanticoke Area High School and continuing down Green Street to Patriot Square, where festivities will begin at 1:30 p.m. Santa will be on hand to give out gifts and goodies to boys and girls who stop to visit and tell their Christmas wishes. The event is sponsored by the City of Nanticoke and the South Valley Chamber of Commerce. City firefighters as well as volunteers from Luzerne County Community College, will also be on hand to assist. For more information, call Linda at 735-0508.

Store reopens for business

Just in time for the Christmas season, Broadway Jewelry and Watch Repair has reopened at 2 Broadway St. in Nanticoke (across the street from Citizens Bank). Owner John Dolan took over the business that was previously owned by Lee Wysocki. Dolan brings his 25 years of business experience and knowledge to the job.

12/11/2008

Prospective LCCC culinary arts school developers bring different ideas

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Luzerne County Community College officials are fast-tracking the selection of a developer for the Culinary Arts center at Market and Main streets in downtown Nanticoke.

On Tuesday night, LCCC's board of trustees voted to put the project out for bid, then heard proposals from two developers and their teams. Both developers had different plans for the approximately 22,000-square-foot building.

Other developers are welcome to submit proposals, but state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, said time is tight. There is \$4.7 million in grant money available, but he is concerned the college might lose part of that — \$1.5 million in state gaming money obtained by the city of Nanticoke for the project — if a developer isn't selected by Dec. 31.

LCCC's board is looking to meet next week. By then, the developers will have to come up with specifications including financials, which will be a deciding factor for college officials.

Even the site could change, if another developer comes up with something better than the site currently occupied by the city-owned senior center and the former Susquehanna Coal Co. office, Yudichak said.

12/10/2008

LCCC told to move quickly on culinary school, or lose funding

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Luzerne County Community College's board of trustees must move fast to select a developer for the Culinary Arts Institute in downtown Nanticoke or funding might be lost, according to a state official.

In the wake of controversy created by a no-bid construction management contract, college officials vowed greater openness in awarding contracts, including putting them out for bid even if that is not specifically required.

Two firms have expressed interest in building an approximately 20,000-square-foot culinary arts facility at Market and East Main streets in Nanticoke on the site of the city-owned senior center and the former Susquehanna Coal Co. office, which is owned by the Nanticoke Housing Authority.

State Rep. John Yudichak said \$4.7 million in grants are available for the project, including \$1.5 million in state gaming money funneling to LCCC through Nanticoke City. However, that must be used by the end of December or the college stands to lose it, he said.

On Tuesday, the board of trustees heard presentations by William Rinaldi, principal of Scranton-based Mark Development, and his architect, Scott Allen of S/D/A Architects, and from Jay Reynolds and Greg Pellathy of Exton-based Educational Property Group/Apex Housing and their architect, Alex Belavitz of Facility Design and Development Ltd.

Mark Development believes the culinary building will cost \$7.5 million; Educational Property Group/Apex cited a figure of \$6.7 million.

Until recently, it was assumed Rinaldi was going to be the developer. Nanticoke council voted in July to sell him the senior center, and Yudichak said \$2 million in state grants for the project were obtained specifically for Mark Development by its consultant, Northeastern Economic Development Company. The \$2 million is not transferable, Yudichak said. Both developers said they would use private funding to make up the balance of the project not covered by grants; Reynolds said even without the \$2 million, the project was still "very desirable" to his firm.

"Why is this being presented to us in December instead of October when we'd have had time to digest this?" board member Dr. Joseph Lombardo asked after the presentations. "This is a big project to put our stamp of approval on."

The college recently came under fire for giving Precept Associates a no-bid contract for construction management services that allowed the firm a fee of 8 percent of project costs and exceeded the scope of work approved by the board on June 12, 2007.

When Luzerne County commissioners learned LCCC solicitor Joseph Kluger hadn't reviewed the contract before college president Thomas P. Leary signed it on May 18, 2007, they refused to pay \$4.9 million of LCCC's bills until the matter was investigated.

The board had Kluger re-negotiate the contract with Precept Associates' attorney. The two parties have reached a tentative agreement, Kluger announced Tuesday.

Under the terms of the new contract, Precept Associates will continue as construction manager for Phase I of the Public Safety Training Institute, but with a standard hourly rate rather than the 8 percent fee.

Precept Associates will also manage Phase II of the Public Safety Training Institute's construction and converting the Kanjorski Center in downtown Nanticoke into LCCC's Health Sciences Center, at a fee of 4.9 percent of actual construction costs. The new agreement will limit the firm to those two projects, instead of the entire master plan, as the previous contract implied.

Because of the Precept Associates situation, LCCC's board decided to be "open and transparent in its handling of contracts" and solicit requests for proposals for future projects, according to a statement by Kluger.

As a result, the board voted Tuesday to put the Culinary Arts Institute out for bid and hold a special meeting before the end of the month for further discussion on the project.

"The college is making the decision here," Yudichak said. "They are ultimately the ones responsible for the financing of the building, for the aesthetics of the building, for the functionality of the building."

12/10/2008

LCCC's \$1.5M grant for facility could be in danger

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The Luzerne County Community College might lose a \$1.5 million grant if it does not move forward to select a developer for the Culinary Arts Institute project by the end of this month, college trustees were told Tuesday.

Also, college board solicitor Joe Kluger announced that he has been renegotiating a construction management agreement with Precept Associates with the board's approval that would save the college more than \$500,000.

As trustees listened to two competing developers -- Bill Rinaldi and the Educational Property Group -- present their preliminary plans for the development of the Culinary Arts Institute, the discussion quickly turned to financing for the project.

The 22,000-square-foot project would cost about \$7.5 million, including \$4 million worth of grants, said Rinaldi, who is chief executive officer of Mark Construction.

Rinaldi told board members that Nedco, a financial specialist firm he works with, secured the \$1.5 million grant from the Department of Community and Economic Development after applying for casino gaming money available from the state.

Board member Elaine Curry asked many questions about the funding and if Rinaldi was the only developer who could receive the gaming grant funding.

He said no other developer could receive that money because he had a letter from the state promising it to his firm.

The Educational Property Group representatives didn't have any exact financial costs to present to the board as Rinaldi did, but estimated it would cost about \$6.7 million to construct a 23,000-square-foot facility. The company based that figure on a \$12-per-square-foot leasing fee.

Alex Belavitz, president of Facility Design and Development Ltd., said DCED representatives told him that the city of Nanticoke decides which developer will receive the money because the city applied for the grant. Belavitz was working with the Educational Property Group.

A representative from Rinaldi's firm who declined to give his name told board trustees that "if projects don't materialize, they (the state) will start pulling grants."

Elaine Cook, another board trustee, questioned state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, saying that her interpretation of the paperwork presented showed that the grant money is tied to the product and not to a particular developer.

Calling it a "gray area," Yudichak told the trustees he would make some calls to double check on who the money is being awarded to. Again, as Rinaldi did previously in the meeting, Yudichak cautioned the trustees that the college might lose the money if it didn't act soon.

"I will fight for every dime and nickel for this project. I will fight for this project and this college," said Yudichak, who for the last several years has been a strong advocate of revitalizing the South Valley region and downtown Nanticoke.

12/8/2008

GNA offers free vaccine program

Students needing immunizations would be able to receive shots at school with parents' permission.

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Some students in the Greater Nanticoke Area School District can receive free immunizations shots at school.

The "School Immunization Catch-up Program," a federally funded project, introduced more than a decade ago, was designed to assist school nurses to offer immunization clinics. The state sends the participating districts the vaccines for free.

Only students who are deficient in their vaccines will receive the shots if their parents sign the authorization form, Greater Nanticoke Area health care coordinator Sandy Najaka said.

The state recently increased the number of vaccines a child needs based on recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control, said Heather Staford, director of Bureau of Immunizations for Pennsylvania. Students now need two shots to help prevent chickenpox, an extra booster shot between the ages of 11 and 12, and a meningococcal vaccine.

But some parents aren't aware of the new vaccines, so their child falls behind on his or her required shots, said Najaka, who reviewed students' shots records to determine which students are not up to date in their vaccinations. Letters were sent out home to parents notifying them if their students needed to get a caught up on their shots.

Students don't have to get their shots through the district, but they do have to receive the vaccines before entering school in fall 2009, Najaka said. Nanticoke is one of only four districts in the state participating because some school districts find it is too time-consuming on their nursing staff to review all the students' medical files to ensure the child is eligible, according to Pennsylvania Department of Health spokesperson Stacy Kriedeman.

Najaka acknowledges it can be time consuming to coordinate a vaccination clinic, but says the benefits to the district and parents outweigh the time spent handling the paperwork.

The district will ensure all its students have their required vaccines and students don't have to miss school.

"For kids to have it in school it saves a trip to the doctor's office and helps families without health insurance," Najaka said.

Najaka hopes this vaccine clinic to be held in the spring semester will bring the students up to date on all their shots.

Students in grades six through 12 will receive two of the vaccines -- the booster shot and meningococcal vaccine -- when the district's nursing staff administers the shots. Fifth-graders will receive the chickenpox shot

TO LEARN MORE

For more information on immunizations, visit the Center for Disease Control by clicking here <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/>

12/6/2008

First Presbyterian's sewer problem less costly than expected

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Potentially expensive sewer issues at Nanticoke's First Presbyterian Church have been flushed out, brightening the future of a church first organized in 1829.

Shortly after new pastor Richard Hawley and his family moved in several weeks ago, they noticed something was wrong with the sewer connections for the church at East Main and Walnut streets and its pastor's house next door. Hawley feared that it was a sewer line break, the cost of repairs might have forced the church to close.

He appealed for help to state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, and his chief of staff Joe Boylan. They had the Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority come out to look at the sewer main and the church's connecting lateral pipe. It turned out the pipe wasn't broken: debris and a large root blocked it, Hawley said. It cost approximately \$550 for a sewer technician to clear the blockage — a lot less than anticipated, he said.

Best of all, the church's annual Thanksgiving dinner didn't need to be canceled. Hawley estimates about 200 people from the community — and members of the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins hockey team — had their holiday dinner at the church, and at least 100 takeouts were delivered.

"It worked out very well. So we're looking forward to some good days ahead," Hawley said.

The church's next event will be a special service at 7 p.m. on Christmas Eve.

12/5/2008

Nanticoke's budget for '09 shows no changes – yet

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City council members got their first look at the proposed 2009 budget during Wednesday's council meeting.

The preliminary general fund budget is anticipated to be about \$4 million, as presented by interim city manager Holly Quinn. That's slightly less than the 2008 budget of \$4.2 million.

The budget could change, she said, because council members have until Dec. 31 to approve next year's budget.

Due to the county's reassessment process, the millage rate on real estate will change, Quinn said.

It is unclear exactly what the new rate will be, but it can not be higher than 2.8344 mills, according to Councilman Jon Metta.

Council members also approved keeping the earned income tax at 1.5 percent and the non-resident income tax at 1.33 percent for 2009.

Council members also unanimously approved appointing the city's part-time zoning officer, Andy Kratz, as the city's Americans with Disabilities Act officer. Kratz continues to receive his \$35-per-hour wage and will be used as needed.

Most of his salary from the ADA position will be paid using community block grant money received from the state because he will be responsible for ensuring road improvements meet the federal ADA guidelines, according to city clerk Betsy Cheshinski.

12/5/2008

Nanticoke fire department may get new truck soon, thanks to donations

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The city's paid fire department might be able to afford a new truck sooner than expected, thanks to the generosity of volunteer firefighters.

Fire Chief Mike Bohan and members of the city's volunteer fire departments have been working out a deal, Councilman Brent Makarczyk said.

Six of the volunteer companies would each donate \$5,000 a year for four years, or \$120,000 total, Makarczyk said. That's half the price of a new truck — and it means no money would have to come from Nanticoke's budget until 2012, he said.

Nanticoke's fire department needs a pumper truck to replace the one that died this summer, but the cash-strapped city couldn't afford a new or even nearly new one.

The department recently returned a truck loaned by Milton Borough in Northumberland County, and is borrowing one from neighboring Hanover Township.

City officials also plan to see if the Nanticoke Housing Authority, which runs the city's low-income and senior housing, and the Greater Nanticoke Area School District also want to help pitch in for the new fire truck.

12/4/2008

Nanticoke officials expect to hold line on taxes in 2009

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Council passed the first reading of the city's 2009 budget Wednesday.

Meanwhile, a resident expressed concerns about student-oriented housing proposed for Washington Street.

The \$4,071,543 budget does not change most tax rates. Property tax rates will need to be adjusted based on the recent reassessment.

The city expects \$143,429 less revenue than in 2008, based on the fact that the 1.5 percent earned income tax didn't come in as city officials expected.

Because of Nanticoke's financial condition, there are no plans to hire full-time or part-time personnel. Legal fees will be higher — \$130,200 in 2009 as opposed to \$120,806 in 2008 and \$110,200 in 2007 — due to police and fire contract negotiations, litigation against the city, and "increased need for qualified legal guidance," according to the document.

Council will vote again on the budget at the next meeting.

In other business, resident Bob Bertoni expressed doubts about a proposal to build housing designed for Luzerne County Community College students on the site of the former L.S. Bowl-A-Rama building on Washington Street.

Educational Property Group Inc. hopes to demolish the defunct bowling alley and construct a building with roughly 120 units. The group has set a

target occupancy date of fall 2010. LCCC is not affiliated with the project.

While he would like to see something done with the vacant L.S. building, Bertoni said he doesn't want to see college housing at the site. Kids already vandalize the cemetery across Washington Street from the building, and there's a speeding problem, he said. Bertoni is also concerned about littering, and questioned how much authority LCCC would have to police the housing if a private company builds and runs it.

"I think no one would want that in their neighborhood," Bertoni said.

Bushko said he'd love to have it in his. He defended the project, saying it would bring in tax revenue and get rid of an eyesore. Bushko said he met Educational Property Group representatives and noted the firm has experience with many similar projects for other colleges.

Councilman James Litchkofski said the project is still in early stages, adding that while he would love to see the L.S. property developed, he wants to see more about the plans.

Educational Property Group hasn't applied for permits or a zoning change yet, city clerk Betsy Cheshinski said.

12/4/2008

Former home of WNAK razed for church parking

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The residential Nanticoke building that was home to the small, but popular WNAK radio station for decades and launched many successful media careers was demolished Wednesday.

The building at 84 S. Prospect St. has been empty since early this year, when the station's new owners, West Chester-based Route 81 Radio, moved operations to a multi-station headquarters in Avoca.

In March, the Nebo Baptist Church, across the street from WNAK, purchased the building from Route 81 Radio for \$70,000. The church plans to use the property for additional parking spaces.

WNAK moved into the building in 1982 after years operating in another Nanticoke location. Previously, the building was used as a funeral home. While based out of the Nanticoke building and before being sold in 2003, independently owned and operated WNAK-AM 730 regularly rivaled and beat corporate powerhouse stations in ratings throughout Northeastern Pennsylvania, despite having one-fifth of the reach. Its niche was adult easy listening, which included polkas.

When purchasing WNAK, the new owner said studios would remain in Nanticoke, but then said they were moving the station to the former WARM building in Avoca to better satisfy Federal Communication Commission guidelines. In September 2007, the station switched to an all Spanish language format.

By Wednesday afternoon, all that was left of the Nanticoke building was rubble. A rusty radio antenna was crumpled up atop the piles of bricks and wood. A large satellite dish still stood in the rear.

12/3/2008

A Nanticoke Area School Board tradition After board reorganizes, time to feast

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Sure, the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board appointed a new president (Bob Raineri) and had a debate about how public reports from the education committee should be (not very).



Greater Nanticoke Area School District Superintendent Tony Perrone sits down to the dinner he helps cook each year as a treat for staff and the public after the annual reorganization meeting held the first week of each December. This could be the last time he helps with the feast. He said he plans to retire in 2009.

PETE G. WILCOX/THE TIMES LEADER

But let's get down to the real business: The free dinner served afterward, which Superintendent Tony Perrone said is the 12th such holiday meal he's helped prepare at the district, is probably his last.

As a crowd of about 40 board members, staff and general public gathered around tables bedecked with poinsettia to nosh on the likes of shrimp and fettuccini in garlic sauce, stuffed shells, meatballs, crabmeat with angel hair pasta and breaded chicken, Perrone humbly took some credit for the feast, making sure to praise the kitchen staff's help.

"My father was a cook in the army," Perrone said. "I know how to cook a little."

He said he and the staff work on the annual holiday meal for weeks in advance, freezing the finished products so they can be warmed up Tuesday night.

At the meeting, the board unanimously elected Raineri president, replacing Jeff Kozlofski, and re-elected Kenny James as vice president. Raineri served as president previously, in 2004 and 2005. Vito Deluca was tabbed for another year as solicitor at an annual pay of \$19,000 plus \$125 an hour for any work done outside of the routine solicitor's duties.

At the request of board member Frank Vandermark Jr. – who, along with Patricia Bieski, was absent – the board voted to add an education committee report onto the regular monthly meeting agenda, but the move sparked a debate on just how much information could be released to the public. Board member Tony Prushinski, a teacher in the Dallas School District, warned that releasing some information could violate employee confidentiality and have a chilling effect on staff willingness to discuss important issues.

After a short debate, the board agreed that, while the report would be added to the regular

agenda, it should not include such information.

All told, the meeting was probably shorter than the dinner afterward, which featured side dishes of salad, broccoli and cauliflower along with the multiple entrees. The Spanish rice seemed to draw the most raves, and as the meal wound down Perrone urged people to take some with them. It may be the last time he'll be pushing leftovers at the annual feast. After more than 40 years in the district and 12 as superintendent, he said he expects to leave the post for good next year. Technically, he retired already, in 2003, but stayed on without pay. It was supposed to be a one or two-year stint.

12/3/2008

Projects hinge on sale of Nanticoke property

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If the L.S. Bowl-A-Rama building at Washington and Prospect streets in Nanticoke comes down, student housing might go up in its place — and Hanover Township would gain a huge new family entertainment center.

Local businessman George Ellis, owner of L.S. Bowl-A-Rama on Washington Street in Nanticoke, is looking to sell the property to Educational Property Group. The Philadelphia-area developer of buildings for colleges and universities is interested in the 1.64-acre site to construct housing for Luzerne County Community College students.

Provided he can sell the L.S. Bowl-A-Rama property, Ellis plans to move his entertainment operation to Hanover Township. He has a retainer for a 7-acre parcel of Earth Conservancy land next to the Hanover Industrial Park, just off the Nanticoke exit on Interstate 81.

The new enterprise, which he calls Game King, will have bowling — a total of 32 lanes, in fact — but it will be more than just a bowling alley. Ellis describes it as “a full-blown family entertainment center.”

“All the things that will be in there will be first-class,” he said.

The facility, to be designed to look like a castle, would house a billiards lounge with eight pool tables, a 5,000 square-foot state-of-the art arcade with interactive games, and seven birthday party rooms. There would be a bar with a fireplace, a pro shop and a custom trophy store, Ellis said.

He also intends to have a 10,000 square-foot indoor-outdoor go-cart track — possibly the first on the east coast — that can be used year-round. Ellis said his brother Robert, who owns Ellis Market Catering in Wilkes-Barre, will work with him on the facility's restaurant, which will serve American food, buffet-style.

Game King will create about 35 full-time and almost 70 part-time jobs, Ellis estimates. He hopes to open a year from this July, he said. Plans and research for the \$6.5 million facility have been in the works for five years, Ellis said.

But in order to get it off the ground, Ellis said he had to get rid of L.S. Bowl-A-Rama.

“One of the anchors around my neck was the building in Nanticoke,” he said.

Ellis and his late father, George Ellis Sr., opened a skating rink in 1974 in what was once a silk mill. They later added the bowling alley. A fire wiped out the rink in 1991. L.S. Bowl-A-Rama closed last year.

Ellis said he has a letter of intent from Educational Property Group and expects a sales agreement in about January.

Educational Property Group, which also expressed interest in constructing LCCC's Culinary Arts Institute at Market and East Main streets in downtown Nanticoke, plans to clear the entire L.S. Bowl-A-Rama site. The firm is looking to build about 120 student housing units there, with fall 2010 the tentative occupancy date, said architect Alex Belavitz of Scranton-based Facility Design and Development Ltd.

The college is not affiliated with the project at present, LCCC President Thomas P. Leary said. LCCC doesn't need to do anything, because Educational Property Group would provide all the funding, Belavitz said.

“This isn't a project where we're asking for anything from the college whatsoever,” he said.

On the other hand, Ellis wants a partner or investor for Game King. Because of the current economic situation, he said the bank would prefer he bring in an investor before he can secure a loan. Ellis figures about \$750,000 should do it.

Ellis said he has permits, civil engineering work, and most of the architectural plans done, and is anxious to get Game King off the ground.

“This project will move forward no matter what,” Ellis said. “Once the (L.S.) building is sold, everything will fall into place.”

12/1/2008

LCCC keeps closer eye on selection of institute developer

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Two developers have shown interest in building Luzerne County Community College's new Culinary Arts Institute in downtown Nanticoke.

However, some city and county officials say they want the contract to be awarded in a way that will avoid the controversy in which the college was involved with a previous construction management contract, and ensure the most appropriate building is constructed at a highly visible intersection.

The Culinary Arts Institute would be built at Market and East Main streets, on the site of the city-owned senior center and Nanticoke Housing Authority-owned Susquehanna Coal Co. building. The new facility with state-of-the-art equipment will house LCCC's expanded and enriched culinary arts programs.

It's up to college officials to select a developer for the project, who will then purchase the site from the city and housing authority.



The original design for Luzerne County Community College's Culinary Arts Institute, as developed by Facility Design & Development Ltd.

**COURTESY OF
Facility Design & Development Ltd.**

Rinaldi and Slomowitz for \$3 million; an amphitheater is proposed for the site.

The other firm interested in constructing LCCC's Culinary Arts Center is Educational Property Group Inc., based in the Philadelphia suburb of Exton and with a branch in Oviedo, Fla.

The firm, formed in the early 1990s, has focused on educational and college-town projects since 1998, according to its Web site, www.edprogroup.com. Educational Property Group is involved in projects at Penn State, Kutztown, Temple, Shippensburg and West Chester universities.

Scranton-based Facility Design and Development Ltd., which drew up a comprehensive plan for Nanticoke two years ago that involved bringing LCCC downtown, drew up the Culinary Arts Institute design that originally sold the city, college and state on the project, the firm's principal Alex Belavitz said.

"Our original design for the Culinary Arts Institute generated an appropriate solution that was used to obtain the grant funding. But we have since been replaced by a firm willing to design a cheaper building," Belavitz said.

Approximately \$4 million of the project is likely to be funded with public money. The rest will be provided by the developer.

"Educational Property Group has offered to do the original design for the original budget, and is not asking for any more grant money. Speaking from experience, they made it clear they don't even need all the grant money if it's structured properly," Belavitz said.

Bushko said since the project will rely partly on public money, it should be put out for competitive bid.

"I don't think we should be shortchanged. I think we should get the best bang for our buck that we can," Bushko said. "It's the centerpiece for downtown revitalization. It has to be the focal point of the downtown. There are no two ways about that, because any way you come into town, you're going to see that building."

LCCC administration and the board of trustees have not approved the Culinary Arts Institute project or made a decision about a developer, college President Thomas P. Leary said.

"This board is committed to being transparent and open for businesses and individuals to do business with the college," he said. "I know it will be an open process, yes, but the specifics of that process have not been determined."

LCCC faculty and deans have been involved in the design of the building for instructional purposes, and there have been internal and external modifications to the original design, Leary said.

Luzerne County Commissioner Stephen A. Urban favors putting development up for bid, and said the purpose of the bidding process in the first place is to have a project built to specifications.

"If the architect already designed something, then it's up to the contractor to build to the design," he said.

Urban stressed that the process should be transparent, not only to the college president but to the board, the commissioners and the City of Nanticoke, "since they have a vested interest in this; it's going to be a permanent fixture in Nanticoke," he said.

LCCC officials were recently in the public eye when a controversial situation came to light regarding a no-bid contract for its construction manager, Precept Associates.

Leary signed a contract with Precept Associates on May 18, 2007 — three weeks before the firm was first incorporated, according to Department of State records.

The contract called for Precept Associates to receive an initial payment of \$80,000 and 8 percent of all construction costs — a rate the LCCC board didn't approve.

College solicitor Joseph Kluger also determined the contract contradicted the board's June 12, 2007, resolution to approve hiring Precept Associates

Nanticoke council voted in July to sell the senior center for \$250,000 to William Rinaldi's Moosic-based company, 406 North Washington Avenue LLC. The city has a letter of intent from Rinaldi, but no formal agreement or contract with him, Mayor John Bushko said.

The Nanticoke Housing Authority is waiting until a deal is in place before it sells the former Susquehanna Coal Co. office building, authority solicitor Vito De Luca said. Rinaldi has done construction projects for Lackawanna College, including a dormitory. He and Marvin Slomowitz are in a partnership, Hazleton Creek Properties LLC, which has been reclaiming land near Church and Broad streets in Hazleton using material dredged from the Delaware River in Philadelphia. Hazleton Redevelopment Authority recently agreed to sell the land to

to manage construction of only two projects: the Public Safety Training Institute on campus and renovations to the Kanjorski Center in Nanticoke for a Health Sciences Center.

“The signed document went beyond the scope of the resolution,” college officials stated in an Oct. 22 press release.

After learning Kluger didn’t review the Precept Associates contract before Leary signed it, the county commissioners refused to pay \$4.9 million of LCCC’s bills until the issue was investigated. Attorneys for LCCC and Precept Associates are in the process of renegotiating the contract.

Urban believes the county should also withhold its portion of the culinary institute’s funding if the contract isn’t awarded according to a proper bidding process.

“We held up payment to the college (for Precept Associates’ services). We did not make the bond payments for the work that’s already been done because we don’t believe the contract was done correctly. We believe the fees in that contract were excessive,” Urban said. “Any contract at that college should be done competitively, and everything associated with that college should be transparent, so the public knows what’s going on. And if it’s not, I’ll recommend to the county not to make payment.”

Another reason the Precept Associates contract came under scrutiny was that the firm had the same address, 1086 Highway 315 in Plains Township, as Prociak & Associates, an independent auditor for LCCC — and whose principal, Michael Prociak, is a longtime friend, accountant and campaign manager to LCCC board member and county Commissioner Greg Skrepenak. Prociak has denied having an ownership interest in Precept Associates, and Skrepenak has said he had nothing to do with bringing Precept Associates on board.

12/1/2008

Church tries Goth Liturgy

Saturday night service at Nanticoke place of worship is an alternate approach.

Ralph Nardone - Times Leader

Churches continually strive to attract fresh faces into their flocks, and one of the challenges they face is getting the attention of younger people who may have turned their backs, according to the Rev. Lou Divis, deacon in charge at St. George’s Episcopal Church.

To address this quandary, the church on Main Street in Nanticoke embraced a new approach called the Goth Liturgy on Saturday night at 9. Unlike the traditional Sunday-morning service in which an organist, choir and congregation join in energetic hymns of praise, the Goth Liturgy is more “meditative,” Divis said.

The church is dimly light, lined with candles and full of the aroma of burning incense. Gregorian chants from the 12th century and faith-based music from techno bands such as Depeche Mode and Love Spirals Downward played softly during the hymn segments.

The servers were dressed in black robes and the guest celebrant, the Rev. Peter D’Angio from St. Luke’s Episcopal Church in Scranton, was clothed in a flowing white robe. The sanctuary had a noticeably more intimate ambiance.

About 30 worshippers participated, some manifest with the Goth look.

Divis called the service a “different kind of spirituality” geared toward those who may have been hurt by the church or don’t find it welcoming.

“It’s a way to say to them come and worship,” Divis said. D’Angio said he personally knows teens he feels may be searching for a place of worship who will find the Gothic theme appealing.

The Goth Liturgy took off in England in the 1990s, Divis added, and may gain momentum locally if the congregations grow. Saturday night’s service will be followed by several more during Advent season at St. George’s, which ends at Christmas, Divis said.

Divis said the present image of Goth comes more from the music the teenagers buy. However, Goth has a steeped European history, which includes a mass conversion to Christianity hundreds of years ago.

The modern Goths are viewed as mysterious and aloof, with their white faces and black attire. The truth is that during the Middle Ages, Goth images were filled with Christian themes, D’Angio said.

Steven Englehart, 20, from Lebanon, Pa., liked the darker, more serene service, saying it provided the right “mood setting.” Englehart revamped the church’s sound system to pipe in the chants and new-age music.

D’Angio finished the service by telling the congregation to “live without fear.” Divis warmly encouraged them to return to the church as they left.

Divis stressed the most important message for the Goth Liturgy is to welcome worshippers. The church is “reaching out” to a group who can attend without feeling out of place.

Many local Goths are Christians, Divis said. And, they can feel free to attend St. George’s Goth Liturgies adorned in spiked hair, black boots and eyeliner

11/24/2008

Dress code available

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A revised copy of the Greater Nanticoke Area proposed dress code is now posted on the district Web site, www.gnasd.com with revisions made in red italics. Parents and students can print out copies of the code to prepare for the switch.

The dress code, which has been approved by the board, will go into effect when school resumes after winter break Jan. 2. While it originally started out similar to the stricter dress codes enforced by Wyoming Valley West and Pittston Area, it loosened up after parents and students protested the code and suggested changes.

As it stands, the code allows casual, dress and corduroy pants in khaki, navy blue, black, gray and prints, but no jeans, spandex, cargo pants with hidden pockets or pants that are too baggy or tight. The same colors apply to shorts, which must be no shorter than 2 inches above the knee, and skirts, which must be knee-length or longer. Capri and crop pants were added to the code.

Shirts must be collared, but can be any color as long as any logos are smaller than 2 square inches. Crewneck sweatshirts and sweaters, and v-neck sweaters are allowed, but no hoodies.

While black pants and shirts are allowed, all-black outfits are not.

11/24/2008

Nanticoke church will open its doors to Goth community with service

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Spiky-haired youths, wearing black eyeliner, dressed in black clothing and black boots, are rarely seen in attendance at local religious services. However, one city church is seeking to change that.

St. George Episcopal Church on Main Street will hold its first Goth liturgy this Saturday, opening its doors to members of the Goth community and anyone else who is looking for “a different kind of spirituality,” according to Deacon Lou Divis.

“I think experiencing a liturgy that’s a little off the wall is intriguing,” she said. “I’m expecting spikes and chains and beauty and joy.”

Divis said she hopes attendees will feel the truth and joy of God’s love, be who they are and not feel they have to appear in their “Sunday best.” Her goal is to “let people worship God in a way that’s meaningful to them, within the parameters of the liturgy.”

“It’s allowing people to come as God sees them,” she said.

Goths embody the dark, dramatic and mysterious mood or aesthetic, but also embrace the Elizabethan, Victorian or medieval periods, which were replete with Christian and religious imagery. White makeup, dark hair and makeup, and black clothing are stereotypical goth attire, although Divis said many do embrace and use color. Many goths are already Christians, and this service is a way of making them feel accepted in the mainstream church.

Divis said the idea of welcoming everyone to God, despite appearances, has stuck with her since the day a young man, a friend of Divis’s son, came in during a service wearing baggy jeans. She said there was a moment of horror in the church.

“That sense of ‘What’s he doing here?’ has been with me,” she said, adding she wants to be able to say, “Come on in, you’re fine just the way you are.”

During the service at St. George’s, the servers will be in black and the celebrant will be dressed in white. The lights in the sanctuary will be dimmed and candles will be placed along the windows to give the service a darker, more intimate feeling.

The service, based on the regular liturgy, will also feature the Gregorian chant, which originated in the 12th and 13th centuries, to modern songs from Depeche Mode, an English electronic music band formed in 1980, and Love Spirals Downward, an electronica recording act in the 1990s.

The Episcopal Church is no stranger to specialized church services. The Rev. Timothy (Poppa T) Holder of Trinity Episcopal Church in the south Bronx created a hip-hop Mass and later wrote “The Hip Hop Prayer Book.” In 2003, the first U2charist was held, a liturgy that incorporated the music of Irish rock group U2, which is still held today to raise money toward reducing poverty and child mortality rates and fighting disease epidemics throughout the world.

Divis said she first heard about Goth liturgies while in seminary. She discovered a church in England, St. Edward King and Martyr in Cambridge, England, which has been holding Goth services for the last several years.

St. George’s has about 40 members in its congregation, and Davis said she hopes to see some of them at the Goth liturgy. She said the service is an experiment, but she hopes those who attend will leave with a better knowledge of God’s love for them.

“Helping people understand how much God loves them is what I hope to affirm with those who come,” she said. “I know what it’s like to be on the outside looking in.”

11/24/2008

Framing stained glass snapshots

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The beautiful, multicolored, stained glass windows were always there, shining down on Nanticoke native Harold Jenkins during church, as a student at St. Mary’s Church and School and as an altar boy.

But Jenkins didn’t realize how much he valued the images of saints and stories depicted in those windows until he learned St. Mary of Czestochowa Parish was on the list of churches in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Scranton facing possible consolidation in less than a year.

If the church closes for regular services and is used for only an occasional wedding or special service, Jenkins, 40, worried that the windows might be damaged or removed. Even if the building is maintained, if the church doors are closed most of the time, the only way to see the windows will be from the outside, with nothing lighting them up from behind to make the images clear and colorful.

So, while waiting for his cousin’s wedding to begin, Jenkins pulled out his camera and started clicking. Several weeks later, he’s still taking pictures, trying to get the best photos of each decorative window in the church.

“I’m trying to do it all,” Jenkins said. “I’m trying to preserve it not only for myself but for anyone else.”

The photos, along with descriptions and commentary on the images included in the windows, are available on his blog, anothermonkey.blogspot.com. When the Diocese of Scranton released the preliminary recommendations for restructuring the parishes in the diocese, it recommended all six Nanticoke Catholic parishes consolidate at Holy Trinity Parish.

While an official decision by Bishop Joseph Martino will not be available until early 2009, the possibility of losing the church in which Jenkins grew up was difficult to handle, he said. Documenting the 12 portrait windows, each with two main images, has been therapeutic.

“It’s sad when I think about the churches that have closed because they’ll (parishioners) never see the inside of those churches again,” Jenkins said.

While he has photos of all the portrait windows, Jenkins said he is still working on getting the best shot he can of each one before posting it. The

first windows in the series show Mary, mother of Jesus, and St. Stanislaus Kostka, a Polish Jesuit novice. Documenting the windows has made Jenkins look at them in another way, he said, and he sees details that he never noticed despite 40 years of attending church under their soft glow.

“You have a tiny, tiny city here and people think Nanticoke is a dump, but it’s full of so many neat, unique things,” he said. While Jenkins’ project focuses specifically on St. Mary’s, he wishes members of other parishes on the preliminary list for consolidation would take photos of the windows, artifacts and decorations of their churches. If all the photos are posted online, printed in a book or otherwise preserved, the images will remain even if the future of the buildings remains uncertain. “Every parish should have one person with a digital camera who can do the same thing,” he said. “I would love to encourage other people to do it.” It’s important, Jenkins insists, to preserve the buildings through images, now before it is too late.

11/21/2008

The state is helping First Presbyterian Church of Nanticoke identify a sewer break, and in the meantime, the church’s pastor is determined not to let the problem get in the way of the annual community Thanksgiving dinner.

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“The Thanksgiving dinner is on regardless,” Richard Hawley said, noting, “Things are looking up.” The church at East Main and Walnut streets and its pastor’s house next door have a broken sewer connection, and there aren’t resources to fix it. He asked Nanticoke officials for help, but city employees aren’t allowed to do sewer repairs on private property. So on Thursday, Hawley went to the office of state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke. Yudichak contacted the state Department of Environmental Protection, which will allow an emergency permit to do the job, Hawley said. Hawley said the church is in the process of getting a loan from a source in the presbytery in case the problem turns out to be on church property. Hawley was concerned Thanksgiving dinner would have to be canceled if temperatures dip, since the water can’t be used in freezing weather. But the church will serve the free dinner, with take-outs and deliveries at 11:30 a.m. and family style dining at 1:30 p.m.

11/20/2008

Sewer connection issue endangers Nanticoke church’s community Thanksgiving dinner

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Whether 200 or so people have Thanksgiving dinner at First Presbyterian Church of Nanticoke depends on the weather. Pastor Richard Hawley said he and his family moved into the house next to the church on Main Street about six weeks ago. But the church and house have such a major problem with their joint sewer connection, the Hawleys may have to move out and close the 148-year-old church — and cancel the community Thanksgiving dinner. First Presbyterian is planning a dinner for the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins hockey team and its coach, followed by a free holiday meal for community members. Hawley approached council Wednesday to ask if the city could help. Sewer pipes from the church and its pastor’s house join into one that connects with the sewer main. The joint pipe is broken under the street, leaking raw sewage and stormwater. In freezing weather, you can’t use the water, Hawley said. The church hired a plumber to do extensive work, but it hasn’t yet received the bill, Hawley said. The church doesn’t have the resources to fix the broken sewer line, he said. He asked if Nanticoke’s Public Works Department could do it. City solicitor William Finnegan said he looked at the ordinances, and the answer is no — even for a church. “We’re going to come to the point where we’re either going to have to close because of (freezing) or because of dollars,” Hawley said. In other business: Milton Borough, which lent the city a fire truck in July, needs it back, Councilman Brent Makarczyk said. Nanticoke’s neighbor, Hanover Township, will let the city borrow one, he said. Council voted to take Hanover Township officials up on their offer and return Milton’s pumper truck. During the last meeting, resident Mike Stachowiak pointed out that new sidewalks on several city streets redone with federal money did not meet Americans with Disability Act requirements. City officials checked it out. The contractor, Slusser Brothers, has agreed to bring the sidewalk ramps up to government standards, engineer Daryl Pawlush of Michael J. Pasonick Associates said. Council also voted to advertise for an ADA coordinator to work on an hourly, as-needed basis to ensure in the future the city meets federal and state requirements for handicap access to public properties.

11/20/2008

**County asked to collect Nanticoke’s delinquent taxes
A council member said private collection firm’s fee structure was too high.**

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City council agreed Wednesday to have Luzerne County collect the city’s delinquent property taxes. The city considered using a private firm as it had in the past, but after reviewing the data which showed the firm’s fees increasing dramatically, Councilman Jon Metta recommended the city use the county as a collection agent.

“We are looking at giving away almost a third (of what we would collect),” Metta told his colleagues and the audience. In the past the city had about \$200,000 in liens against property owners for past taxes, but this year the city has received all but about \$60,000 in taxes, Metta said.

“When we had lots of money outstanding, the percentages weren’t as bad. The rates just don’t make sense,” he said noting the county will still charge the city, but it will be a much lower rate.

Metta didn’t know the name of the private firm or exactly how much the increased fee structure would cost the city. Interim City Administrator Holly Quinn was instructed to contact the county to set up the collection arrangement. Council members also decided to advertise to hire someone qualified to serve as the city’s Americans with Disabilities Act officer for community development.

Nanticoke lost its last ADA officer when former city administrator Kenneth Johnson resigned to take a job closer to his home in Northumberland County.

The new ADA officer would work on an hourly basis as needed to ensure the city is meeting ADA guidelines when constructing or fixing streets and city buildings.

11/19/2008

Education support staff honored for their work

Times Leader

Today we celebrate Education Support Professionals Day. This yearly event is scheduled during American Education Week, to thank all of our support professionals who work in our school districts.

The campaign honors people who support our teachers such as custodians, maintenance workers, secretaries, cleaning workers, cafeteria workers, hall monitors, teacher’s aides, library aides, transportation aides, computer aides and technology aides.

Our support staff, as a whole, has many years experience, and its members are very dedicated to what they do. The jobs are very rewarding, demanding and sometimes thankless, but we get consolation in the fact that the children we feed, clean up after and help along life’s way will be our leaders of tomorrow.

Thank you to all the education support professionals in all of our school districts for a job well done, and have a happy Education Support Professionals Day!

J.D. Verazin, President
Greater Nanticoke Area Support Professionals

11/19/2008

Chef at Nanticoke restaurant takes dishes in new direction

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Say pork tenderloin and Tosha Hardsky thinks of apples and honey. You’ll find lobster ravioli with vodka sauce at Map’s Restaurant in Nanticoke. Say lobster and she’ll reach for vanilla and saffron – or her own tangy vodka sauce. Say mushrooms and she’ll bring out garlic and Madeira.

The 26-year-old chef devotes herself to deciding which accents will best enhance the dishes she creates at Map’s, a restaurant her mother opened a year ago on West Ridge Street in Nanticoke.

“I really put a lot of thought into it,” Tosha said. “It depends what kind of mood I’m in. If I’m happy I’ll make fruit sauces and garlic sauces.”

“Her sauces are just heavenly,” said Tosha’s mom, Pam Hardsky.

“They are so light. They’re airy and the flavors pop out in your mouth,” added her aunt, Joy Kelly, who is one of many family members who pitch in at Map’s.

At the restaurant, which owner Pam (that’s M-A-P backwards) Hardsky decorated with cartography of Nanticoke and of the world, her sisters Kathy, Judy and Dory help with the serving and hostessing, her mother, Ceil, folds the napkins and niece Jillian tends bar when sister Joy isn’t available.

Daughter Tosha is most often busy in the kitchen using skills she honed at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y. Even before she went away to study, Tosha prepared for her career with culinary classes at Wilkes-Barre Vo-Tech, which she attended while she was taking academic courses at Greater Nanticoke Area High School.

Former Nanticoke principal John Gregorowicz – now, with his wife, Elaine, a frequent diner at Map’s – remembers Tosha and is “thrilled to see a former student succeed.”

“The food is excellent,” Gregorowicz said. “She goes out of her way to accommodate you. One evening my wife walked in and said she was sorry she’d missed the lobster done in vanilla sauce. Tosha said, ‘No problem. I’ll make it right now.’ ”

Under different ownership, the restaurant was called the Ship’s Inn years ago. Pam Hardsky and her family have remodeled the place but kept a nautical theme.

The walls are decorated with porthole mirrors and lots of maps -- topographical maps, atlases of the world and maps of historic Nanticoke, the “Thousand Islands” and New Orleans’ French Quarter – all of which suggest you can find a variety of food here.

On a recent Friday afternoon, Tosha whipped up a few of her specialties. She made poached lobster “slippers” -- each a small piece of lobster tail weighing about 2 ounces – and spiced them with vanilla and saffron; pork tenderloin with apple and honey; zebra-striped lobster ravioli in vodka

sauce and a mushroom strudel of phyllo dough stuffed with shiitake, portabella and button mushrooms.

The mushroom strudel is an extremely popular appetizer at the restaurant, Tosha said, and she wants to keep the recipe secret. The vodka sauce is also something she prefers to keep to herself.

11/18/2008

Competition, sluggish economy force Centre Inn to close

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A landmark restaurant, bar and banquet facility in Newport Township has closed as the sluggish economy and heightened competition led to a drop in customers.

The Centre Inn was forced to shut down Friday, but owner Tony Argento said negotiations are ongoing to sell the business to a New Jersey corporation.

Argento began to see a decline in business about four years ago.

“Business got bad with the economy, and all the restaurants that opened by the arena (in Wilkes-Barre Township) hurt,” said Argento, who owned the Centre Inn for the last 21 years.

Argento filed for Chapter 11 reorganization bankruptcy in December 2007. It was changed in October to Chapter 7, a liquidation bankruptcy in which a filer sells his assets to pay creditors.

A United States trustee, with administrative responsibilities in bankruptcy cases, closed the Old Newport Street business on Friday.

The Centre Inn was a popular place for fine dining and brunch on the weekends. With two large banquet rooms, it hosted many wedding receptions along with graduation and holiday parties.

Since some events are already booked, Argento said he hopes a new owner will reopen the business soon.

“I feel bad about my customers,” Argento said. “We have events booked up for the holidays and I’m hoping this won’t have any effect on them. Hopefully, they won’t have to change their plans. I don’t know what’s going to happen.”

Argento employed family members and about 10 part-time employees who are now out of work.

“Business wasn’t good anymore,” Argento said. “It’s not just affecting me. Many people can’t afford to go out to eat. Before, our customers might have come once a week. Then, it became once every other week or once every three weeks.”

The widespread economic difficulties have not only hurt the Centre Inn, but other Nanticoke area restaurant owners also have seen a recent decline in profits since eating out has become a luxury.

Eli Panagakos, owner of the Bus Stop Cafe on East Broad Street in Nanticoke, said his business has slowed during the tough economy. He has not raised his prices and is taking a loss, he said.

“People can only stretch the dollar so far,” Panagakos said. “People aren’t making more money and everything is going up.”

Larry Karnes, owner of Larry’s Pizza on East Church Street in Nanticoke, said people have been purchasing smaller orders.

“It’s tough all over,” Karnes said.

Alex Graham, manager of Madison Vodka Bar & Steakhouse, which opened in August on East Washington Street in Nanticoke, agrees that many people can’t afford to go out to eat.

“Business is not as great as we would want it to be, but it’s OK,” Graham said.

11/14/2008

Nanticoke firm reducing use of toxic substances

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By the time the movie “Erin Brockovich” was educating cinemagoers about the toxicity of hexavalent chromium in 2000, Joe Reilly was fully aware of the carcinogen and had banned it from his business years before.

“We were probably getting out of hexavalent chromium back in the early 1990s,” said Reilly, the president of Reilly Finishing Technologies in Nanticoke.

The metal-plating company is still looking for ways to reduce its environmental footprint, recently enrolling in a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency program to voluntarily reduce the use of a list of highly toxic substances. Reilly committed to completely eliminating the metal cadmium from its nickel-coating process.

Cadmium causes cancer and builds up in body through repeated exposure, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It’s used to stabilize a chemical reaction that deposits nickel on a surface being plated without using electricity, Reilly said.

The cadmium isn’t consumed in the reaction, however, and ends up in the hazardous waste product. Reilly said his company would use and discard up to 40 pounds of cadmium annually.

“It would be hazardous waste and go to the landfill and be there forever,” Reilly said.

Working with its suppliers, Reilly’s company switched to a proprietary process that avoids using heavy metals. “The cadmium was probably one of the last toxic metals we had to get rid of,” he said.

Though the process costs more to run, Reilly said, it was more about being “able to look myself in the mirror every day and knowing that I’m doing the right thing.” The company received a Governor’s Award for Environmental Excellence in 1999 for equipping its expansion facility with a closed-loop water recycling system that reduced water consumption and waste discharges.

“We’ve always tried to stay ahead of the curve as far as being environmentally proactive,” Reilly said. “Once we created that waste, it’s ours forever. So the less we create, the better off we are, and the less toxics we create the better off we are.”

The environmental conscientiousness also has a regulatory benefit for the company, which will celebrate four decades in operation next year. Reilly said state and federal oversight isn't as "fist and hammer" as it can be, and regulators will often give the company a chance to correct problems before issuing violation notices.

11/14/2008

With little fanfare, GNA approves new dress code

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Greater Nanticoke Area school board passed the final reading of the new dress code, which will go into effect when students return from Christmas break on Jan. 2.

Although some parents and students protested the idea of a stricter dress policy when it was first proposed, nobody from the audience spoke about it at Thursday's meeting. Superintendent Anthony Perrone said he hasn't heard anything from students and parents recently.

The dress code calls for solid-color pants and skirts, shirts with collars, and shorts no more than 2 inches above the knee. Hooded sweatshirts, head-to-toe black, camouflage, denim, Spandex pants, skirts above the knee, baseball caps, bandannas and backless shoes — including clogs and toeless shoes such as flip-flops — are some prohibited articles.

The new policy is essentially a revision of the existing one, with a few slight changes, according to district officials.

"Really, the only difference is, no jeans and no skirts so high that everything shows," Perrone said.

He noted that other area school districts, such as Wyoming Valley West and Pittston Area, have similar policies.

11/14/2008

GNA enacts student dress code

Board votes 7-0 to enact dress code that forbids jeans. The code becomes effective Jan. 2.

slong@timesleader.com

The Greater Nanticoke Area School District has joined list of school districts requiring students abide by a dress code.

With seven of the nine board members present, the vote was unanimous to enact the code effective Jan. 2. Board members Patricia Bieski and Sylvia Mizdail were absent.

Students, boys and girls, must wear golf or button down shirts with collars and casual, dress or corduroy pants. Students can not wear jeans.

District officials originally planned to implement the dress code this fall, but faced lots of criticism from parents and decided to push the implementation to the spring semester.

"When you are dressed nice you act differently. When you are sloppy and just don't care that is how you act," Superintendent Tony Perrone said.

Board members also learned the district is receiving more than \$300,000 in state and federal funding.

Calling it a "holiday deal," business manager Al Malone announced the district will receive a credit of \$215,000 to \$220,000 in insurance premiums for December because it is a member of the Northeast Pennsylvania School District Health Trust program.

Malone didn't know the exact figure the district would save, but estimated the amount on previous monthly payments.

Each district that is member will not pay insurance premiums for December.

The district also is receiving \$85,000 for its Title One programs from the state Department of Education because the district did not meet all the required criteria under the national No Child Left Behind mandate.

Scheduled to be used in the elementary school, the money will provide more staff development for teachers, more student computers in each classroom, fund the gifted program and an aerobics class.

"We are going to have a study island for every class," elementary school Principal Mariellen Scott said.

She also pointed out the school did meet 16 of the 17 Adequate Yearly Progress standards last year and hopes to improve to a perfect score of 17 of 17 this year.

With \$45,000 grant from the state Department of Education's Classrooms for the Future program the district can continue improving the high school's technology program, Perrone said.

11/13/2008

GNA Elementary Center goes high-tech with new TV studio

Lights, camera, action! There is something new at the Greater Nanticoke Area Elementary Center. It's a new television studio.

Pam Urbanski writes "Nanticoke Area Notes" every other Thursday. Story ideas and news items can be e-mailed to her at pamurb806@aol.com.

"Good Morning GNA," as it is called, received its name through a contest in which students picked the name.

The new studio is under the direction of Linda Cormier and she is assisted by a "studio crew" consisting of the following fifth grade students to date: Naja Alicea, Mia Britton, Christopher Dennis, Danielle Green, Jacob Havey and Brent Piontkowski. The studio is a welcome addition to the school and has students, faculty and staff talking.

Each morning, students from different classrooms announce the daily activities, lunch menu and today's history. In addition, there is also a joke of the day and poetry reading. The Pledge of Allegiance is recited and there also is the singing of the National Anthem.

The studio is housed in the school library and early in the morning the studio crew prepares by setting up the camera and the audio equipment. The crew also is responsible for setting up the backdrop of the studio consisting of weather and props.

"The students are very excited about the addition of the television studio and we look forward to adding new and exciting segments to the morning

show,” Cormier said. “A program we hope to include is one that will showcase the talents of the students of the Elementary Center and Kennedy Elementary.”

Parent-Teacher Guild President Cindy Evans is hoping students will gain new skills. “I think it is a great opportunity for students to gain confidence in public speaking and to improve on those skills,” she said. “Having to talk in front of peers builds their self-esteem.”

The PTG thanks all those who made contributions to purchase television sets, especially the Rotary Club of Nanticoke. All of the classrooms have them and this enables students to watch “Good Morning GNA.”

Look out morning anchors from “Good Morning America,” you have competition!

Soccer clinic this weekend

The Greater Nanticoke Area Lady Trojans soccer team is sponsoring a two-day fall soccer clinic Saturday and Sunday from 9 a.m. to noon in the GNA Elementary Center gym. The clinic is for students in kindergarten through fifth grade. The clinic will be conducted by members of the boys and girls soccer teams and the coaching staff. The camp will highlight fundamentals and shooting skills. Participants are asked to wear comfortable clothes and sneakers and to bring a bottle of water. Cost is \$30. Registration forms are available on the school district Web site at www.gnasd.com.

Click on the news and happenings page.

Chorus parents' variety show

Greater Nanticoke Area chorus parents' organization will hold a variety show Friday and Saturday, Nov. 21-22, beginning at 6:30 p.m. Students who will participate had to audition and were chosen by a panel of judges. “We have some amazing acts,” said Linda Accurso. Talented students will take the stage to sing, dance, and perform comedy acts. Kennedy Elementary and Elementary Center students will perform Friday and the high school students will perform Saturday. Admission is \$5.

Parish concert set for Nov. 22

The Greater Nanticoke Area Catholic Youth Group is sponsoring a parish concert and has put together a great night of music for Saturday, Nov. 22, beginning at 7 p.m. in the Pope John Paul II School auditorium.

Bill Borysewicz, youth director, will headline the show with some classic rock hits, as well as a few of his most popular songs. Soul Searching, featuring songwriter Brenda Wenner, keyboardist and vocalist Judy Minsavage and acoustic guitarist Ann Kachline, will perform some of the spiritual hits from their new CD, “Timeout.”

Nanticoke Area High School's very own Elvis Presley, Josh Slosky, a senior, will bring down the house with some original hits from his debut album, “Josh Slosky, Beyond the Keys.”

“We're bringing together the God-given musical talent of our parishes and members of our combined choir for an exciting night of music,” said Borysewicz. “There will be original music by local parishioners, a tribute to the Blessed Mother, praise to God and country and some classic rock hits. There will be something for everyone.”

Sound and lighting will be provided by DBY Production Services in conjunction with Higher Sounds Studio.

Pork and sauerkraut supper

St. John's Lutheran Church, 231 E. State St., Nanticoke, will hold a pork and sauerkraut supper Saturday, Nov. 22, from 3 to 6:30 p.m. Tickets are \$9 for adults and \$4 for children 6 to 12. Kids under 6 are free. Takeouts are available. For more information, call 735-3856.

11/7/2008

Nanticoke officials allow liquor license transfer

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Nanticoke council approved the transfer of a liquor license into the city from Shickshinny, but its new owner has to get approval from city officials before creating the business for which it will be used.

Jignesh Patel wants to open a deli that sells beer at 40 S. Prospect St.

He needed immediate permission from council to get the license or he could lose it, his attorney Joseph Dessoie said.

City solicitor William Finnegan said Patel's company, Anutana LLC, has not received final approval for a change in zoning that would allow a business on the property.

A change in zoning will require a public hearing.

Neighbor Paul Cimasky is apprehensive about having a store that sells alcohol next to his home.

He said he has five children and is worried about their safety, and also fears the new store might lower his property value.

Patel, who said he owns another store in Nanticoke, likes the city and wants to grow his business in it — and he said he doesn't want to be a bad neighbor.

Dessoie assured council Patel would work with Cimasky when moving forward with plans.

11/6/2008

Nanticoke landlords complain about proposed rental unit law

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City officials decided to wait before tackling two issues of concern to residents: a landlord-tenant ordinance with fees property owners say are too high; and if new street paving work meets federal Americans with Disabilities Act requirements.

City officials had solicitor William Finnegan prepare an ordinance that would help keep track of residents and rental property owners, require out-of-town landlords to appoint a property manager, and ensure units are inspected before tenants move in. Its purpose is for safety and also to be better able to collect taxes from residents who might otherwise slip through the cracks.

Instead of voting a second time on the ordinance, council tabled it until the next meeting on Nov. 19 after city landlords complained about having to pay an annual registration fee of \$50 per unit, on top of a \$55 inspection fee to be paid each time a tenant moves out.

Property owner Daniel Warakowski said landlords already pay mercantile tax, and have to deal with property value reassessment, maintenance of their units, and higher taxes and garbage fees. That has to be passed on to the tenants in the form of rent hikes, Warakowski said.

“How much could a landlord absorb, how much could a tenant absorb? You have to put yourself in that position,” he told council.

Another property owner, John Mioduski, noted the inspections would create a lot of work for code enforcement officer Joe Kordek, and asked if the city would have to hire another. Councilman Jon Metta said the city could hire an agency and split the fees, but admitted there were too many questions about the ordinance.

“We will try to figure out the right language for the next meeting,” Mayor John Bushko said.

Also for the next meeting, city engineer Daryl Pawlush of Michael J. Pasonick Associates said he would determine whether Slusser Brothers met federal standards for handicap accessibility when repaving several streets.

City officials used federal Community Development Block Grant funds to improve several streets, including parts of West Noble, Nanticoke and Slope streets. But when repaving, the contractor didn't make the sidewalks accessible for wheelchair-bound people, resident Mike Stachowiak said. For example, there is no ramp at Coal and Slope streets, and there are no ramps on West Noble Street by the Holy Trinity school, making it impossible to cross the street, he said.

Some ramps that were put in are too narrow, and none has a textured surface for visually impaired people, as required by an act passed in April 2007, Stachowiak said.

If ADA standards weren't met, the paving company has to make corrections at its own expense, Pawlush said.

11/6/2008

**Nanticoke's proposed fees bother landlords
After listening to objections, city council tables rental ordinance.**

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Nanticoke council members tabled the second reading of the rental ordinance during Wednesday's meeting after city landlords objected to the proposed license fee.

The ordinance would require landlords to pay an annual license fee of \$50 per unit, in addition to a \$55 inspection fee before a new tenant can move into a property.

Landlords Dan Warakowski and John Mioduski said the city is punishing responsible landlords with this new expense.

“How much can a landlord and tenant absorb? It's the honest landlords that are taking the brunt,” Warakowski said, adding that he must already pay higher trash fees and property taxes, to keep his more than 20 properties maintained.

City leaders want the ordinance because they can use the information to create a database to learn how living is in town and determine if renters are paying their earned income taxes.

Warakowski suggested the fee be a one-time charge, instead of per unit.

Councilman Jon Metta said the city would try to reevaluate the ordinance to work with the landlords, but pointed out a flat fee rate would not be fair to landlords with fewer properties.

“We have to find a happy medium. We are not trying to cripple you guys,” Metta said.

Another city landlord, James Samselski who owns a handful of properties, has opposed the license fee portion since the ordinance was unveiled last month

11/3/2008

**Greater Nanticoke Area tracking excessive student absences
After concerns came up about 31 students having missed more than 10 days of school during the first two months, Greater Nanticoke Area School District has determined all of the students with excessive absences either moved out of the district without informing the school, or are now enrolling in the Virtually Linking INstruction and Curriculum program.**

Erin Moody, staff writer, covers area schools. You can reach her at emoody@citizensvoice.com or 570-821-2051.

After concerns came up about 31 students having missed more than 10 days of school during the first two months, Greater Nanticoke Area School District has determined all of the students with excessive absences either moved out of the district without informing the school, or are now enrolling in the Virtually Linking INstruction and Curriculum program.

The VLINC program, which is set up by the Northeast Intermediate Unit 19 and offers online instruction, will be a better fit for some of the students who struggle with traditional school, Superintendent Tony Perrone said.

“Some of these kids are regular truants,” he said. “They aren't going to go to the regular school. It doesn't offer them what they want.”

To his knowledge, as of last week there was only one student who had 13 or more absences. The district is trying to keep a closer eye on absences, after it was discovered about a third of the senior class had missed 25 or more days, out of 180, last year. Two students had missed 120

10/30/2008

**The campaigning and advertising will be over in five more days
Election Day is almost here.**

Pam Urbanski writes “Nanticoke Area Notes” every other Thursday. Story ideas and news items can be e-mailed to her at pamurb806@aol.com.

Tuesday is the day we go to the polls to elect a new president and vice president of the United States. We also will elect a representative in Congress, a state representative, an attorney general, and auditor general and a state treasurer.

There is also a water and sewer improvement bond referendum on the ballot. I don't know about you, but I am glad the day is almost here. Don't get me wrong, I agree this is an extremely important election with a lot at stake, but it seems to me that the presidential campaign has been going on forever and ever.

I'll be so glad to turn on the television or the radio and not hear a campaign advertisement for or against Senators Barack Obama or John McCain. When I pick up the telephone there no longer will be a prerecorded message asking me to vote for a particular candidate. It will be good to sit down at lunch and not have to debate.

Many people are very passionate about this election and hopefully all the hard work by many dedicated Democrats, Republicans and Independents will have voters turning out to cast their votes on Election Day.

In Nanticoke, there are six different precincts where residents will cast their votes _ Nanticoke Towers, St. Stanislaus Church hall, Oplinger Towers, John S. Fine High School football stadium, Nanticoke City Hall and Holy Transfiguration Church in the Hanover section of Nanticoke. The polls are open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. If you're still in line when the polls close you can still vote.

Leonard Piazza, Luzerne County director of elections, expects polling places to be busy and has some advice for voters. "The heaviest turnout is usually when the polls open, at lunchtime and around closing time. My advice to voters is to try and squeeze in some time to vote, but not around those busy times. If you're a first-time voter, you must have an approved identification and it must be valid. The best type of ID is photographic identification," said Piazza.

Piazza anticipates few problems, but wants voters to know his staff will be available on Election Day by calling 825-1715 or 825-1716. So, get out and vote!

Schools ready for Halloween

Tomorrow, Nanticoke Area elementary schools will be filled with police officers, firefighters, nurses and doctors.

No, an emergency situation is not expected. It's Halloween and students will be dressed up in their favorite costumes. They will participate in a Halloween parade at the Nanticoke High School auditorium, followed by parties in their classrooms.

Be alert for increased car and foot traffic on Kosciuszko Street in the morning and afternoon hours.

Pierogi sale set

St. Mary's Catholic Women's Council will conduct a pierogi sale Tuesday and Wednesday. The cost is \$7 a dozen. Orders may be placed by calling Helen at 735-4668, Barbara at 735-4209 or Johanna at 735-1798.

Fall fair at library

Friends of the Mill Memorial Library will hold their annual fall fair Sunday, Nov. 9, from noon to 4 p.m. The fair will feature crafts, books, Granny's Attic, food, baked goods and more. Santa will be on hand for pictures from noon to 2 p.m. All proceeds benefit the library.

Bingo at St. Joe's

Parishioners of St. Joseph's Church invite you to their monthly bingo Sunday, Nov. 9. Doors open at 12:30 p.m. Early birds start at 1:45 with regular games at 2. There will be cash prizes and door prizes. Refreshments will be available. Bingo is held in the church parlors at 107 E. Noble St. Everyone is welcome.

Mass for students at St. Stan's

A young adult Mass for high school juniors and seniors and college-age students will be held Sunday, Nov. 9, beginning at 6 p.m. at St. Stanislaus Church, followed by a movie and discussion in the church rectory on West Church Street.

Turn that clock back

An extra hour of sleep! That is if you remember to turn your clock back on Saturday.

Mass of Remembrance

A Mass of Remembrance will be celebrated Sunday at 10:15 a.m. at Holy Trinity Church, South Hanover Street, Nanticoke. The parish community of Holy Child, Holy Trinity, St. Mary of Czestochowa and St. Stanislaus Churches will gather to remember those who died during the last year.

10/29/2008

Skate park project gains momentum

Skateboarders have been asking Nanticoke officials for a park of their own for years.

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An X-Treme Skate Park on Lower Broadway by the West Nanticoke bridge was to be the first project in a comprehensive plan for the Greater Nanticoke Area Recreation Park drawn up by the Borton-Lawson engineering firm in 2005. But legal problems with the site forced it to be shelved. Now that Nanticoke's revitalization project is about to begin and the legal issues are being cleared up, it's time to resurrect the neglected skate park idea, Joseph Boylan, chief of staff for state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, believes.

"With the college moving downtown and the streetscape plans, there's no better time to do it," Boylan said.

The boards of Luzerne County Community College and the Nanticoke municipal authority just signed agreements for the college to lease-purchase the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street for a health sciences center.

City officials are waiting for Pennsylvania Department of Transportation approval to start work on a streetscaping plan that includes new streetlights, sidewalks, benches and greenery for East Main and Market streets, and remodeling Patriot Park.

A skate park in Nanticoke sounds like a good idea to James Gidosh, who formed the Northeast Pennsylvania Skate Park Alliance with Kevin Pizzano two years ago.

Alliance members hoped for a skateboarding component in the soon-to-be-renovated Coal Street Park in Wilkes-Barre, but, Gidosh said, "That got

squashed. We kept asking and kept asking, and I guess that's a dead issue."

On Tuesday, Yudichak, Boylan, Nanticoke city administrator Holly Quinn and Luzerne County Director of Parks and Recreation Andy Gegaris met with representatives from two possible funding sources, the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the state Department of Community and Economic Development.

Representatives of the Joint Urban Studies Center offered their services at no cost. They have already done an analysis of four existing skate parks from beginning to end: how they came about, how they were funded, how they moved forward, Boylan said.

Boylan said Gidosh will be invited to assist in planning and development of the Nanticoke park. Gidosh said he has also studied other parks, including issues such as liability and who handles the insurance. He said he was "very interested in helping out" and would be glad to share the research and give input.

Tuesday's meeting was to let the state agencies know site issues, which delayed the project, are being worked out. DCNR won't kick in any money unless ownership problems are settled, Boylan said.

After flooding from Tropical Storm Agnes in 1972, the city acquired and demolished several homes in the Lower Broadway flood plain, using federal funding. However, the city never obtained clear title for the properties. The result was a legal tangle attorneys have been sorting out.

"We hired a title searcher, he's done the work, we're having a review session this week to see how we can gain site control of the entire Lower Broadway area," Boylan said. "We wanted to tell them (DCNR), 'Hey, we're taking the proper steps to get this done.'"

Next week, Boylan will help Quinn apply for a DCNR grant to conduct a short-term study of how to create and maintain the park. There's another grant to be applied for in April.

"If all the funding falls into place, we might start looking to bid contracts by the summer of next year," Boylan said. "Summer of next year to bid for construction is rather aggressive, but I think at this point we need to be aggressive. We need to move forward."

10/28/2008

LCCC gets authority's OK to lease Kanjorski Center The Kanjorski Center won't be empty for much longer.

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Nanticoke General Municipal Authority's board gave approval Monday to lease it to Luzerne County Community College, which will soon start transforming the East Main Street office building into a new health sciences center.

"I could have been at that Phillies game tonight, but there was something more important — the five years of hard work we put into this," said state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke.

LCCC's expansion into downtown is the keystone to revitalizing not only Nanticoke, but also the greater South Valley, Yudichak said.

For years, municipal authority members were at odds over what to do with the Kanjorski Center, which languished, mostly vacant, since October 2005. Attempts to rent or sell it failed, and city officials clashed over downtown plans while the municipal authority went broke paying for the building's upkeep.

Authority member Chester Beggs said Yudichak came up with the concept of bringing LCCC into the picture — an idea all the parties found attractive.

"The college looks forward to a great partnership with the City of Nanticoke which will allow for the expansion of high-demand occupational programs, provide a catalyst for economic development, and serve the educational interests of our students for many years," LCCC President Thomas P. Leary said Monday.

"This project is really the result of the commitment of city, county and state officials working together to ensure progress will be made in the City of Nanticoke to benefit residents as well as students of the college."

U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, also assisted with a \$5.6 million federal grant Nanticoke officials plan to use for downtown streetscaping, authority member Dennis Butler noted.

LCCC's board of trustees already approved the contract, so all that remains is to sign it — a formality. Then the college can start renovating and expanding the building. Preliminary work will take about a month, and physical retooling should be complete in approximately 13 months, Leary said. The goal is to open the health sciences center in summer 2010 at the latest, he said.

Finances are arranged: the state and county are each contributing \$10 million to LCCC's master plan, Leary said.

The contract calls for the college to lease the Kanjorski Center for seven years, for a total of \$2,029,009. After that, the college can buy the building outright for \$1.

LCCC is contractually entitled to 272 parking spaces. The municipal authority plans to create a parking lot next to the Kanjorski Center and lease it to the college for \$1 a year. After the sale in seven years, the college will take over maintenance of the lot. Butler wanted that to be clarified in the contract. It was.

In 2005, the municipal authority bought and tore down a group of commercial buildings at 108-124 E. Main St., next to the Kanjorski Center, that included the Coffee Shoppe and Lecher's Hardware. That property will be used for the parking lot, authority Chairman Ron Kamowski said.

He said the authority is in discussions with the Darlak family, which owns another adjacent property once occupied by the defunct and demolished YT Hardware store.

Kamowski said the authority will advertise for a bank to finance the project, to be repaid as the rent comes in from LCCC.

"We already had favorable word we will be able to," he said.

10/28/2008

Agency agrees to lease center to LCCC

After year of negotiations, a Nanticoke authority and the college agree on terms.

slong@timesleader.com

After more than a year of negotiations, the Kanjorski Center has a new tenant.

"We have what we believe to be a finalized version of the lease with the college," Nanticoke General Municipal Authority solicitor Joe Lach said. During its regular monthly meeting Monday night, the authority approved the contract to lease the Kanjorski Center to Luzerne County Community College after making one revision in the contract.

But before voting on contract, authority member Dennis Butler asked for clarification regarding which entity would be responsible for maintaining and handling snow removal from the parking lot.

"The college will maintain the parking even though they may not own it (the Kanjorski Center)," Lach said, noting college officials had seen and approved the revision, but didn't know what other steps the college might need to take to approve the revision.

Butler then made a motion to accept the contract that was accepted unanimously by the five board members present.

LCCC President Tom Leary confirmed the college would be responsible for snow removal and other parking lot maintenance when contacted Monday night.

As part of the agreement, the authority will pay for the paving and lining of a street-level parking lot with about 270 spaces to meet the needs of students, staff and faculty working at the Main Street facility.

The college originally requested 300 parking spots. Leary said there would be other parking around the building to compensate for the additional 30 spots not available in the lot itself.

Parking will be free and available to anyone in downtown, Lach said.

"We want to have a very positive relationship with the city of Nanticoke. So we will definitely allow the citizens to park in these lots when we are not at maximum level," Leary said.

The college board of trustees voted Oct. 13 to approve the contract for a lease/purchase of the 42,000-square-foot building based on recommendations from its solicitor, Joe Kluger. The building will become home to the college's health sciences program.

LCCC will lease the building for \$289,858 annually for seven years before purchasing it.

Renovations on the building could begin in about a month, Leary said.

"The college looks forward to a great partnership between the college and city of Nanticoke, which will allow for the expansion of high demand occupational programs provided a catalyst to economic development and serve the educational interests of our students.

"This project is the positive result of city, county and state officials working together to accomplish educational and economic progress for our region," Leary said.

10/23/2008

Trojans, Cella deserve patience during rebuild

John Erzar Notebook - Times Leader

Nanticoke coach Lou Cella looks at two similar programs just outside the region – Lewisburg and North Schuylkill – as examples of how downtrodden teams can recover.

Then he looks at the program he inherited and realizes it's going to take time – perhaps more time than people imagine or care to admit – to get to respectability.

"This program will take four to eight years to fix," Cella said, "because when you've been this bad for this long, it's going to take four to eight years."

Whether he lasts that long is yet to be seen.

Several parents went before the school board last week to criticize Cella's coaching methods and how he's handled various off-field issues from injured players to uniforms.

"You know when you take a job, like Nanticoke, you know how it's going to be," Cella said. "You know people are going to be confrontational. You're never going to please them regardless what you do.

"We could have success right now and there would be the same feeling. It doesn't matter to me because it's part of the job."

One parent even questioned Cella's coaching credentials, which is really nitpicking even if there may be a discrepancy. After all, when a team loses 52 of its last 59 games, Wyoming Valley West's George Curry and Southern Columbia's Jim Roth won't be sending in resumes any time soon.

A program like Nanticoke is going to draw interest from coaches like Cella, who has been itching to get back into coaching after two forgettable years at now-closed Bishop O'Reilly. He has the passion and desire to repair Nanticoke football, but if there isn't a mutual understanding about how broken the program is, he's just wasting his time.

Just consider a few snippets from his predecessors' days at Nanticoke.

Len Butczynski resigned after the 2005 season because kids just wouldn't come out for the team. He even substituted garbage cans as defenders at practice because there weren't enough players.

Bob Colatosti lasted two years before the position was opened after an 0-10 season in 2007.

The situation was so bad two weeks into last season that Colatosti pulled a paper out of his pocket after a 42-0 loss to Meyers. He had written down all the problems encountered – four starters quitting before the season opener, two suspended for being ejected in the opener, seven others either injured or ineligible.

So Cella tries to change some things, perhaps too vigorously in some cases, and some parents start an uprising.

Things need to change, and yet another head coach shouldn't be among them.

If Cella leaves or his position is opened after the season, it's going to send up a red flag that this is one job not worth seeking. There were 12 other applicants along with Cella, but how many would re-apply when they know the next coach would be the fourth in five years?

What some people fail to realize is Nanticoke is successful despite an 0-8 record.

The offense was averaging more yards per game at midseason than Dallas. The leading rusher last year had 189 yards; three kids are already well passed that total. And the Trojans have rushed for 119 yards or more in all but one game. They did that just twice last year.

But the biggest achievement came last Saturday against a strong GAR team. The Trojans were outmanned and expected to lose by at least six touchdowns. Instead, they played extremely hard and lost 35-6.

Call them moral victories, but they're accomplishments nonetheless.

Just like the ones North Schuylkill had while going 9-61 from 2001-07 before improving to 6-2 thus far. Just like the ones Lewisburg had while going 10-60 over the same time span as it enters this weekend at 7-1.

North Schuylkill had three winless seasons and Lewisburg had two before turning things around.

Nanticoke is all but certain to have its second consecutive winless year and carry District 2's longest losing streak – currently at 19 games – into next year.

"We have made progress," Cella said, "but I would have liked to make more progress at this point. We have a long way to go. This thing has been down the last six years."

And it will be down another six and another six until everyone realizes a coach needs cooperation and more than a year or two to complete the overhaul.

10/23/2008

DPW heads paid to go to meetings

Foreman, assistant receive overtime or comp time to attend council meetings.

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The city is paying two members of the Nanticoke Public Works Department to attend council meetings.

Public works foreman Walter Pavelitz and his second-in-command, Kenny James, receive either overtime pay or compensatory time to attend council meetings to answer questions from the public or council regarding work performed in their department.

Last year, City Administrator Kenneth Johnson requested all department heads attend the monthly council meetings and not work sessions. As city administrator he could authorize the additional pay.

"We were not critical or analyzing overtime at the street department," Johnson said in an interview Wednesday night. The police and fire departments cost the city more money in overtime than any other departments, Johnson said.

Councilman Joe Dougherty oversees public works as part of his council duties. He defended the choice to have Pavelitz or James attend the council meetings.

"We don't want to second guess anybody because of something we do not understand. We decided Walter should be there in case there are questions from residents," Dougherty said.

James, the former streets department union steward, maintains this overtime situation has only become an issue because a colleague has a personal vendetta against him and Pavelitz.

"If people have something to say, put your name to it," James said.

If James is specifically asked to attend as a street department representative he will in Pavelitz's absence, but otherwise he attends meetings as a private citizen, he said. Johnson confirmed that, stating James sometimes attends meetings without being paid.

Earlier this month, council members granted interim City Administrator Holly Quinn comp time for attending the monthly council meeting and work session since taking over duties for Johnson.

Fire Chief Michael Bohan occasionally attends council meetings, but says he does so as a private citizen and doesn't receive comp time or overtime pay. Bohan and Police Chief James Cheshinski never requested overtime pay or comp time to attend the meetings, Johnson said. Cheshinski was unable to be reached for comment.

But all department heads answer questions from council members or the general public when they are in the audience.

Mayor John Bushko and Quinn are not opposed to having the public works foreman being compensated for attending council meetings when he is on official city business.

"Typically, nobody is compensated for attending meetings, but if an administrator or council member asked an hourly salary employee to attend they should be compensated whether it be overtime or comp time," Quinn said.

The city does not have a problem with excessive overtime costs with the streets department, said Quinn, who before taking on the administrator duties was the city's fiscal manager.

10/19/2008

Nanticoke, LCCC could finalize Kanjorski Center lease this month

The community college wants to move its Health Sciences program to the building.

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A lease contract for the Kanjorski Center could be finalized by the end of the month.

At this month's meeting on Oct. 27, the Nanticoke Municipal Authority is expected to review and vote on the lease contract, which would allow Luzerne County Community College to relocate its Health Sciences program into the downtown facility.

After reviewing the contract, authority solicitor Joe Lach called it “fairly fair.” Lach passed on copies of the contract to authority members through e-mail, so they could review the document before the meeting. Lach wasn’t aware if board member Chester Beggs had received a copy. The college board of trustees voted Monday to approve the contract to lease the 42,000-square-foot building for seven years. LCCC will pay \$289,858 annually in rent and all utilities. After seven years, LCCC will purchase the building for \$1. Lach acknowledged it may appear the authority is getting a cash windfall, but insists the authority is not entering this contract to obtain money. This partnership between the authority and college would benefit the city by bringing an economic boost to downtown Nanticoke and provide much needed-space to the college while saving it a substantial amount of money rather than building a new facility from the ground up, Lach said. The authority will make little, if any, money from the agreement because it still has to provide parking and lighting. College officials had said previously they need at least 300 parking spaces for students, faculty and staff. “We want to be coordinated with the college. We hope whatever the Municipal Authority needs to do will be accomplished in the timeline the college needs,” Lach said. The authority doesn’t have the money to pay for any of these updates, Lach said, so it has been in preliminary talks with area banks to secure a loan to pay for these expenses. Lach didn’t have the specifics of the loan information, but said the authority would be able to repay it using the rent from LCCC. The authority’s loan should be paid off at the end of the LCCC lease, Lach said, adding that the municipal authority might be able to be dissolved – just as the Nanticoke Redevelopment Authority was earlier this year by council. “I want the authority to be self-sustaining, get these projects done and get out of the way. There are too many layers of decision-making in the small city (Nanticoke),” Lach said.

10/19/2008

HOME program may be coming back to Nanticoke

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Qualified homeowners who want to replace a roof or make other repairs might soon be able to get some financial help through the city of Nanticoke. Triad Associates of Glenside has drafted a manual to revive Nanticoke’s federal HOME Investment Partnership program, under which low- and moderate-income residents who meet federal criteria would be able to borrow up to \$25,000 interest-free for home improvements. Steve Lingle of Triad Associates gave city officials a housing rehab manual to look over. Council needs to approve it and opt to restart the program. “For some elderly or low-income people, they’ll get their homes fixed, have a better quality of life, and not have to pay until the home is sold,” said city clerk Betsy Cheshinski, who will administer the program if it’s adopted. Lingle recommended limiting the amount participants can borrow to \$25,000 plus the cost of a heating system and roof, because if the maximum loan amount is higher, federal lead-based paint standards apply — and they can be very expensive. Besides income requirements, owners of single-family homes — no rental properties are allowed — must have the houses up to code and be current on taxes and utility payments. Work on the properties will be put out for bid and, if the homeowner doesn’t like the low-bid contractor, he or she can pick another, as long as he or she pays the difference, Lingle said. Unlike with Nanticoke’s previous HOME program, the loan doesn’t have to be paid back in monthly installments — a “nightmare” for the city from a clerical perspective, according to Lingle. Instead, the city places a lien on the home for the amount borrowed, so that when the house is sold, the money is taken out of the sale proceeds and returned to the HOME fund. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the state Department of Community and Economic Development provide some money, but Lingle said if enough money is returned when liens are paid off, the program can become self-sufficient. Cheshinski said there are still five people participating in the old HOME program. There is “in excess of \$140,000” in the fund now, Lingle said. “Your money is doing no good sitting in the account, when it could be used for fixing someone’s house,” he told city officials. If and when the HOME program is restarted, Cheshinski will advertise, Lingle said.

10/18/2008

Ambulance associations to regionalize

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Regionalization is a hot topic among many first responder agencies in Luzerne County and two ambulance associations are moving forward with such plans. The Nanticoke Fire Department Community Ambulance and Newport Township Firemen’s Community Ambulance Association are dissolving their companies to form the South Valley Regional Ambulance, said Bernie Norieka, president of the board of directors for the Nanticoke association. He hopes the regional ambulance company will be functional by the first of the year. Until all the paperwork is processed, both ambulance associations will function independently, providing emergency response services to their communities. Deciding to continue forming a new company was a hard decision to make, said Newport Ambulance Capt. Janine Floryshak. But the Newport Township Ambulance board of directors decided it would be best for community residents to join the two companies because ambulance services will be more streamlined and efficient, Floryshak said. “It’s a collaboration of efforts and expenses,” Norieka said. A paramedic and emergency medical technician would ride together in an ambulance, responding to each call, under the new company.

Previously Newport Township Ambulance could only provide basic life support services using its emergency medical technicians and often relied on Nanticoke ambulance employees to respond when more serious medical care is needed. Nanticoke has paramedics, who can provide advanced life support services, and EMTs on staff.

Neither organization receives money from their community; each company earns money from medical transports and fundraisers.

The new board of directors will be comprised of members from Nanticoke and Newport Township's ambulance services.

Newport Township's ambulance service is currently housed rent-free in the township's fire department station. Newport Township Ambulance officials hope to work out a deal with township commissioners to continue using the facilities at no cost. Nanticoke's ambulance service has its own headquarters on Washington Street in Nanticoke, near Mercy Special Care Hospital.

The Nanticoke Fire Department Community Ambulance and Newport Township Firemen's Community Ambulance Association are dissolving their companies to form the South Valley Regional Ambulance.

10/17/2008

Nanticoke City Council passes rental ordinance, receives mixed reactions

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The city's new rental ordinance, which council passed on first vote Wednesday, received mixed reactions.

The ordinance calls for a \$55 inspection fee, with the requirement that landlords get their properties re-inspected when tenants move out and new ones move in. Landlords also have to pay a \$55-a-year registration fee, code enforcement officer Joe Kordek said.

The new ordinance will help the city keep track of its residents, which will help with earned income tax collection. The ordinance also calls for landlords who live out of the area to designate a property manager so the city will have someone to contact in case of a problem, Councilman James Litchkofski said. That would help in the case of unoccupied properties owned by out-of-state banks and mortgage companies, he said.

Mayor John Bushko, who voted against the ordinance, along with Councilman Joseph Dougherty, opposed the annual registration fee.

"To me, that's giving the city money for nothing," said Bushko, a landlord. "That's not a license. It's a tax."

The fee is per unit, so if a person owns a four-apartment house, he would have to pay \$220 a year, he said.

Resident James Samselski said he didn't mind paying the \$55 once, but he didn't like having to pay it five times for five units in the same building.

Councilman Brent Makarczyk said that was because it is easy for landlords to hide the number of units they own.

Other residents approve of the ordinance if it will help city officials address problems caused by absentee landlords. For months, Roseanne Briggs has been asking for something to be done about a rental property on Ridge Street.

In other business, council voted to take Berkheimer Associates back as tax collector. In September, council terminated the city's agreement with the firm due to its concerns about income tax revenue not coming in at the expected rate.

Resident Marian Samselski protested the city's new refuse collection agreement with sole bidder J.P. Mascaro and Sons. During the last meeting, the city signed a four-year contract at an annual cost of \$947,796 — up from \$715,200 a year in the previous contract. Fees are going up from \$176 per household a year to \$235 a household.

"I think \$235 is too much for a senior," Marian Samselski said, noting that some municipalities give seniors discounted refuse collection rates.

10/17/2008

LCCC officials anxious to begin Kanjorski Center renovations

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Luzerne County Community College officials plan to start renovations to the Kanjorski Center within 30 days of gaining ownership — but college President Thomas P. Leary says it's too soon to tell if the county commissioners' hold on \$4.9 million will affect the project.

Earlier this week, LCCC's board of trustees approved a deal for the office building, to be used as a health sciences center. Nanticoke's municipal authority plans to vote on the contract during its meeting on Monday, Oct. 27, at 7 p.m., authority chairman Ron Kamowski said.

The college will lease the 4,200-square-foot, three story building at 42 E. Main St. for seven years at \$24,154 per month, or \$2,029,009 altogether. After the seven years, a federal grant used to build the Kanjorski Center expires, and the college can buy the building outright for \$1.

The college will be responsible for the first year of the lease, then apply to the state for reimbursement of 50 percent of costs for years two through seven, Leary said.

Nanticoke is also required to provide the college with 272 parking spaces on property of which the city will retain ownership, municipal authority solicitor Joseph Lach said.

"I think we're in good shape here, as long as there's no impediment to the funding source the college planned to use for the project," Lach said.

On Wednesday, the county commissioners voted against paying \$4.9 million of LCCC's bills until the college's solicitor, Joseph Kluger, looks over a contract naming Precept Associates LLC construction manager for LCCC's master plan.

The firm, which already worked on the Public Safety Training Institute and is slated to handle the approximately \$9 million Kanjorski Center renovation, is to get 8 percent of construction costs for all projects. The contract with Precept Associates, which Kluger did not review prior to Leary signing it in May 2007, was not put out for bid.

Precept Associates was first formed on June 5, 2007, at 41 S. Main St. in Pittston, according to Pennsylvania Department of State records. The corporation was dissolved on Aug. 13, 2007, and re-formed the same day with an office at 1086 Highway 315 in Plains Township, records show.

Michael Prociak, Luzerne County Commissioner Gregory Skrepenak's campaign manager, was an accountant for the firm, but has denied having an ownership interest in it.

After Nanticoke's municipal authority approves the contract, Kanjorski Center renovations should start by early December, Leary said. He estimates

the project will take 14 months, moving the health sciences center opening from September 2009 to January 2010. Leary hopes the college will have a recommendation from its solicitors "very soon" so construction won't be delayed further. "We really have to take a wait-and-see approach to this," he said. "I believe the commissioners prudently put the decision on hold until our solicitor has a chance to review the contract and determine if parts were invalid."

10/16/2008

Nanticoke trash raises a stink

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The city's trash collection and how bids were awarded was a heated topic during Wednesday's council meeting. Council members approved a two-month contract for trash collections services to J.P. Mascaro and Sons for \$132,830 for November and December, interim city administrator Holly Quinn said. The city's current contract ends at the end of this month and the new contract does not begin until January. Earlier this month the council approved a four-year contract with J.P. Mascaro and Sons. That contract will run from 2009 to 2013. Starting in January households will pay \$235 a year for trash collection, an increase from \$176. Resident James Samselski questioned why the city was not more aggressive in securing more bids for trash collection services. His mother, Marion Samselski of West Union Street, said the city should look into a discounted rate for seniors. She said she shouldn't be paying so much just for her weekly half-a-bag of trash. J.P. Mascaro was the only the trash collection company to submit bids when the contract was advertised, city officials said. Mayor John Bushko said Waste Management was informed the city was reviewing contracts, but the company declined to submit a bid. The refuse-collection company bills the city on a monthly basis, Quinn said.

10/16/2008

GNA superintendent: Issues involving football coach were unfounded

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No disciplinary action is occurring for a Greater Nanticoke Area School District football coach who was accused of falsifying his application and holding practices before allowed to by state regulations, Superintendent Tony Perrone said Wednesday. While it is a personnel issue and could not be discussed in depth, Perrone said the coach's work history appears to be accurate and other issues are unfounded. Parents of football players expressed concerns at last Thursday's monthly board meeting, and Perrone promised to look into the matter and talk to people on all sides. He said he spoke with the athletics director and all the issues should be addressed. Gifted classes will now meet every week, Perrone also said, after looking into a parent's concern that his third grade son had been to only one class during the first seven weeks of school. The parent brought the concern to the board at last week's meeting, and said while his son was supposed to have gifted class every Monday, his son had only gone once. Why the classes were not held was unknown, Perrone said, but arrangements have been made to have class every Monday, or if there is no school on a Monday, on another day that week. "I really, really don't know what happened," he said. "I just think with the year starting, there was so much else going on." Districts are required to provide additional education services to students with Individualized Education Programs, including gifted students. In Greater Nanticoke Area, Perrone said, there are 35 students with IEPs.

10/16/2008

Soul Searching trio records video at former St. Stanislaus orphanage

Three talented women from Nanticoke are moving forward with their musical careers.

Pam Urbanski writes "Nanticoke Area Notes" every other Thursday. Story ideas and news items can be e-mailed to her at pamurb806@aol.com.

Brenda Wenner, Judy Minsavage and Anne Kachline, better known as the group Soul Searching, have performed in this area for many years and all have produced numerous CDs. In addition to their most recent CD, "Time Out," they have released a music video for one of their songs, "Why Can't I Be?" What makes this video so interesting is that it was recorded at a local landmark, the former St. Stanislaus orphanage in Sheatown. The song was written by Wenner and is meant to spread a message. "The song is a thought-provoking, moving testimony to the human condition of generations of children of the world," Wenner said. "It gives the children of the world who are struggling to survive through war, famine, poverty, neglect and abuse a voice." "The song encourages one to take a moment to be still and listen and then we could hear the children cry, "Why can't I be?" Wenner thought the former orphanage would be a perfect site to shoot the video. "The place is worn down and broken and that helps to convey the message in the video. The inside was filled with many treasures. There is a painting that we were told was done by one of the nuns who worked there. The mural is beautifully done with houses, birdhouses and flowers. The words to the song help make a connection between that 'perfect' painting and a child dreaming of a perfect life, living in a perfect place, reaching out to those around him," Wenner explained. In the video there is a boy looking through cabinets in the attic, finding a teddy bear. It was fear at first and then security.

Perhaps one of the most haunting moments is at the end of the video as it shows a young boy in one of the rooms of the orphanage with books strewn across the floor. "It's the story I've written on the pages of my mind," she said.

The video then shifts to a place outside the orphanage, a small cemetery. As a lady kneels next to the grave the wind blows a paper through the air. Wenner admitted that she, the children and the film crew were a little unsure about going into the orphanage to film. "We heard all of the stories about the old building, but we were all presently surprised. "We never got an eerie feeling. It really is a remarkable place," Wenner said. The video was filmed by Hanover Township resident John Jacobs. It was mixed and produced by Jack Minsavage from Higher Sound Studio in Nanticoke.

Rummage sale at St. John's

St. John's Lutheran Church, East Grand Street, Nanticoke, will hold a rummage sale Friday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Bag day is Saturday. Homemade vegetable soup, baked goods and other foods will be sold. For more information, call Leona at 735-3856.

Calling all ghouls and goblins!

The annual Nanticoke Halloween parade, sponsored by Nanticoke [Civic Pride](#), will be held Saturday, Oct. 25, from 2 to 4 p.m. at Patriot Park. Children 1 to 12 years of age are invited to show off their Halloween costumes.

Yvonne Bozinski, chairwoman, is looking forward to this year's event. "There are always so many good costumes," Bozinski said. "Our Civic Pride committee really enjoys sponsoring this event for the children and their families."

Prizes will be awarded for the cutest, most original and the scariest costumes. There will be treat bags for all who participate. In the event of inclement weather, the parade will be moved to city hall.

Going green to earn green

| There is a great program that will help keep our city going green and help Nanticoke schools earn green. Residents are asked to help recycle by bringing newspapers, magazines, catalogues and office paper to place them in a dumpster near the playground at the Noble Street entrance. There will be a sign posted on the dumpster.

Dr. Mariellen Scott tells me this is a fundraiser for students who attend Kennedy Elementary, the Educational and Elementary Center and the K.M. Smith School. Money raised will go to the student activity account and be used for student activities.

School taxes in face value

Albert J. Wytoshek, Nanticoke treasurer and tax collector, reminds property owners the 2008 school property taxes are in face value until Nov. 28. When sending payment, include a self-addressed stamped envelope if a receipt is requested.

Taxes are payable at the municipal building tax office Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

10/14/2008

LCCC approves Kanjorski Center pact

The Nanticoke building will house the college's expanding health sciences department.

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The Luzerne County Community College Board of Trustees voted unanimously during its meeting Monday night to accept a contract for the lease/purchase of the Kanjorski Center in downtown Nanticoke.

The college will lease the 42,000-square-foot building for seven years, paying \$289,858.56 yearly to the Nanticoke Municipal Authority to house its expanding health sciences department. LCCC board members have not been given a copy of the contract to review, but accepted the contract based on a presentation made by LCCC Solicitor Joe Kluger. He and LCCC President Tom Leary have been negotiating the deal on behalf of the college.

"This will allow us to expand into additional programs for the health sciences students," Leary said.

Board Chairman Paul Halsey praised the agreement, saying the college was "creating a state of the art facility for the health sciences students."

The Nanticoke Municipal Authority must now meet to vote on the contract. Authority members are expected to meet later this week to review the contract, said Henry Kellar, the authority's secretary.

The lease/purchase contract should be signed and finalized within 10 days, Kluger said.

State Representative John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, praised the Nanticoke City Council, LCCC Board of Trustees and the three Luzerne County commissioners for supporting the project.

"It is an exciting day that we have all been working for. There are a lot of people who have been working really hard for his new vision of the South Valley. We want this to be an investment in the future of Nanticoke and the South Valley, but also an investment in the future of Luzerne County Community College," Yudichak said.

College officials haven't exactly determined how the college will pay the monthly \$24,154.88 rental fees, but Leary said allocating the money shouldn't be a problem. When college officials begin working on next year's fiscal budget, they will review different accounts and set the appropriate money aside to cover the lease and utility expenses, Leary said. As tenant, the college must pay all the utility expenses, Kluger said. At the end of seven years, the college can purchase the building for \$1, which it plans to do, Leary said.

Since LCCC is leasing the building, the city of Nanticoke will not be responsible for repaying a nearly \$2 million loan to the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Agency. The federal government approved an agreement to forgive the loan in September.

When the Kanjorski Center was opened in the mid-1990s, it served as a processing center for a national insurance company. The college will use a portion of the \$20 million bond money it is receiving from the state and Luzerne County to renovate the building to meet its students' needs. Before students can move into the building, it must be renovated. Renovations were originally anticipated to cost about \$9 million, but Leary said that amount might be higher due to the economy. Construction could take up to 14 months.

Last year, when plans were unveiled for the three-story building with a basement level, officials anticipated the facility would include two nursing classrooms and labs, a simulation bay, respiratory therapy lab, lung function lab, 24-seat dental clinic, dental lab and surgery technician lab and

house the college's emerging drug-and-alcohol studies program. Turning the Kanjorski Center into a health sciences center is the college's second major project in Nanticoke. Phase one of the Public Safety Training Institute, a regional training center for first responders, is already complete. Its facilities are directly across from the main campus. Phase two of the institute is in the process of being developed. The college also plans to add a culinary arts center downtown to expand its restaurant education program.

LCCC's construction manager, Precept Associates of Hanover Township, will oversee the Kanjorski Center renovations based on the architectural designs by AE Group, a Wilkes-Barre architectural firm.

10/14/2008

LCCC solicitor failed to review no-bid contract

BY MICHAEL P. BUFFER - STAFF WRITER

Published: Tuesday, October 14, 2008 4:09 AM EDT

Luzerne County Community College officials on Monday promised transparent decision making after disclosing that college solicitor Joseph Kluger didn't review a controversial contract for construction management services.

The contract is a no-bid, \$1.6 million deal with Precept Associates LLC. College President Thomas Leary signed the contract in May 2007.

"Joseph Kluger and his dad ... are among the pre-eminent commercial lawyers in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and I think we should take advantage of them," said Thomas O'Donnell, a member of the college board of trustees.

Greg Skrepenak, a county commissioner and college trustee, said the contract "was based on the recommendation" of A+E Group, the architect for college building projects expected to cost \$20 million.

Michael Prociak, Skrepenak's campaign chairman, was an accountant for Precept, and Prociak and Associates also conducts auditing services for the college.

Kluger said he will review the Precept contract but said the college "is proceeding as if it is a viable contract." The contract says Precept will be paid 8 percent of the actual construction costs for two projects — construction of the Public Safety Training Institute and renovation of the Kanjorski Center in Nanticoke. The state and county each committed \$10 million to fund both projects, and Precept has been paid more than \$500,000 for work on the Public Safety Training Institute.

On Monday, the board approved a lease-purchase agreement with the Nanticoke General Municipal Authority for the Kanjorski Center, which will become a health sciences workforce development center.

Officials expect the college to pay more than \$2 million after becoming owner of the building in 2014, but Kluger said some lease details haven't been finalized.

Also at the meeting, O'Donnell asked college board Chairman Paul Halsey to form an ad-hoc committee "as quickly as possible" to review college board bylaws.

10/13/2008

Greater Nanticoke Area considers four-day school week

A four-day school week is a possibility Greater Nanticoke Area School District is considering, Superintendent Tony Perrone said, but it will only work if the other districts on the east side of the Susquehanna River make the switch as well.

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The district has been looking into the possibility as a way to reduce costs for the district, as utilities and gas prices have shot up during the last year.

[Greater Nanticoke Area](#) is the second Luzerne County school district to announce it is looking into a shorter week. Hazleton Area has been exploring and discussing the option since August. A committee is expected to report at Thursday's board meeting whether the option is feasible for Hazleton Area.

A main issue for Greater Nanticoke Area, Perrone said, is that its students also attend the Wilkes-Barre Area Career and Technical Center.

Crestwood, Hanover Area, Pittston Area, Wilkes-Barre Area school districts also send students to the career center.

All the schools involved would need to change their schedules to make a four-day week work, Perrone said, and he intends to further explore the possibility.

During the summer, Misericordia University experimented with a four-day week to help employees cut fuel costs.

10/13/2008

County authority will assist with Main Street project

Nanticoke's downtown revitalization is about to become a reality.

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Designs for Market and East Main streets are ready, and only need some engineering plans so work can start, possibly by spring. They came in under budget, so there's money for more improvements.

And, after months of negotiations, a deal is ready to be signed to sell the Kanjorski Center to Luzerne County Community College, so the transformation into a health sciences center can start.

The college is buying the office building on East Main Street from Nanticoke's municipal authority. Parking is a problem, so U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, got the city \$5.6 million in federal transportation funding to do something about it.

City and state officials wanted to build a parking garage, but federal guidelines ruled that out. Instead, they asked the planning firm Facility Design

and Development Ltd. to come up with a downtown streetscape plan that included lots of surface parking.

Facility Design and Development principal Alex Belavitz said the plan calls for new sidewalks, streetlights, trees and shrubbery, and benches on Market and East Main streets.

"It revitalized me. I feel like I'm only 45. It's gorgeous," Nanticoke Mayor John Bushko said about the plans. "What a beautiful thing, (as you're) coming into town."

Engineering design for the project will be bid out, Bushko said. The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation has Facility Design and Development's plans, and once the engineering plans are in and approved by PennDOT, work can start, Nanticoke Administrator Holly Quinn said. She estimates that could be as early as spring 2009.

"In 24 months, this is going to be a completely different downtown," said Joseph Boylan, chief of staff for state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke. The Market and East Main Street work won't eat up the entire \$5.6 million — an unexpected bonus for the project.

"According to (Belavitz), it's going to come in way under budget from the earmark, so we're going to be able to do some extra work, which they're designing now," Quinn said. "Our goal date is Nov. 1 for the supplement to the plan Facility has designed for us."

One extra on the drawing board is a facelift for Patriot Park, which Boylan called "a focal point that is sometimes forgotten in the city."

City officials are exploring more options for using the money. Giving Prospect Street a new look, particularly around the entrance to LCCC, is one possibility, Bushko said.

The streetscape work is meant to complement LCCC's branching out to downtown. In addition to taking over the Kanjorski Center, which has been mostly vacant for years, the college is planning to have a culinary arts center built at Market and East Main streets.

But city and state officials consider the Kanjorski Center sale the cornerstone for downtown renewal, a catalyst that will bring in new businesses and help existing ones. After months of negotiations and waiting, it's going to be a go.

LCCC President Thomas P. Leary wouldn't state outright a contract would be signed when the college's board of trustees meet Monday at 6:30 p.m. in the college's Educational Conference Center — but he hinted an important announcement would be coming.

Bushko said he was grateful LCCC officials stuck with the project even when it seemed stalled.

Yudichak said he sees a "bright future for the city in the partnership with one of Luzerne County's strongest assets."

10/12/2008

'ReStore' gives a new home to old household items

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Are you interested in an old piano?

Need a new toilet? Perhaps some carpeting remnants? If you're not especially fussy and you're on a budget, the Habitat for Humanity ReStore in Nanticoke might have what you seek.

A new-to-you door for your kitchen?

How about a light fixture that really is new but slightly out of style?

On a recent Wednesday afternoon, you could have found any of those items at the Wyoming Valley Habitat for Humanity ReStore at far less than what you'd pay in a typical store.

But, part of the adventure of shopping at the ReStore, at 421 W. Main St. in Nanticoke, is that the inventory is always changing because you never know who is going to donate what.

At one point last summer, for example, manager Paul Precht had "loads and loads of fencing." Except for some odds and ends, it was gone in September.

Just about any day, it's almost a given you find some paint or nails or grout sealer or door jambs or molding at the ReStore.

"Sears donates paint; Alexandria Moulding (from Hanover Industrial Estates in Wilkes-Barre) donates molding," Habitat for Humanity director Karen Kaufer said, mentioning just two of many steady donors. "So many people are so generous to us."

Leading the way past a porch railing, a bathroom sink and a pile of doors, Precht said not only manufacturers and distributors but individuals who are remodeling their homes often give their castoffs to the ReStore so they can be recycled.

"When we have fireplace mantels, they sell immediately," he said.

"We do have a truck to make pick-ups," he added. "That makes our lives easier."

But the ReStore has to be selective about donations it accepts, Kaufer said. "If you want to donate something, you should call and describe it. If Paul doesn't think it's likely to sell, we don't want it. We don't want to pay to have to haul it away."

Just like a regular store, the ReStore puts a premium on its space.

"I'm asking \$300 for this (used) washer/dryer set," Precht said. "If it doesn't sell in a few days, I'll go down to \$250."

For a dining-room set, he was asking \$1,000. "But that's negotiable," he said.

One of the biggest bargains might have been a white door, complete with multi-paned windows, that Precht had priced at \$10. The door looked a little shabby, but in the right hands, it wouldn't stay that way, the manager said. "I have a friend who could refinish it and make it look like \$1 million."

Habitat for Humanity is a Christian ministry dedicated to helping families build affordable housing.

Since it was founded in 1976, Habitat for Humanity International and its affiliates have built more than 225,000 homes. The local chapter dedicated its 15th house in Edwardsville on Oct. 5.

Donations from businesses and individuals are first used for refurbishing or building such homes, and the ReStore sells what's left over to anyone from the community.

The Nanticoke ReStore is in a building some remember as an Oldsmobile dealership. It is open from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. The

phone number is 258-0998

10/11/2008

Truants, gifted keep Nanticoke Area busy

Janine Ungvarsky - Times Leader Correspondent

Both truants and gifted students captured the attention of the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board Thursday, prompting action to make sure neither group gets left behind.

Board member Tony Prushinski asked Superintendent Tony Perrone if absentee notices were going out, noting he didn't want a repeat of last year when the board discovered in the spring that some seniors had missed as many as 115 school days and were still graduating.

Perrone said 31 notices had gone out to students with at least 10 absences, but said some of them never reported to school and may be removed from the rolls. "It's October 9th. Shouldn't we know that by now?" Prushinski said.

Perrone said some of the students with chronic absences have legitimate problems, including school phobias. Board members also requested that the gifted program staff be questioned after hearing from the father of one of the district's 35 gifted children. Ray Whittaker said his third-grade son's Department of Education-mandated Individualized Education Plan (IEP) called for weekly gifted instruction.

"In seven weeks, he's had one week of instruction," Whittaker said.

Perrone expressed concerned and noted the IEP is a legal document. "That IEP must be followed," he said.

10/10/2008

Nanticoke football coach under fire

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A new Greater Nanticoke Area football coach may have falsified his resume and held mandatory practices before legally allowed by the state, and special education students are not receiving legally required educational services, according to concerned parents who brought the issues up to the school board Thursday night.

The board and Superintendent Tony Perrone said they had not been aware of any of the issues, but were noticeably upset by the information and promised to quickly look into the concerns.

Parent David Kotz said several things about the resume of Coach Lou Cella, who was not identified during the board meeting, did not add up.

According to Kotz, the coach claimed to have 13 years coaching experience but graduated 12 years ago. The coach graduated from high school in 1996 and college in 2000. Kotz also questioned some of the claims to places and years coached on the resume.

Kotz, whom several other parents backed, said the coach had required practices before allowed by the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association, and would not allow students who missed the practices to play. Other issues, including seniors being promised they could keep jerseys if they sold a certain amount of T-shirts and players needing death certificates proving a family member had died to be excused from practices and not miss games, were also brought up. Perrone advised the board not to say anything, and said he would call the coach into his office on the next day of classes, which will be Tuesday. Today is an in-service day and there is no school Monday due to Columbus Day.

Parents also informed the board about a football player who had received a spinal injury at the beginning of the season and was not allowed to wear his jersey or ride with the team to games. The board and Perrone said they were not aware of the injury.

After the meeting, Cella described his coaching experience as follows — 1996 to 1997 at Old Forge High School, his alma mater; 1998 to 2000 at Hopatcong High School in New Jersey; 2001 to 2002 at Bishop Hafey High School; 2003 to 2004 at Bishop O'Reilly High School; 2005 at Bishop Hafey and 2006 to 2007 at Lackawanna College.

Cella said no mandatory practices were held before allowed by the PIAA, only strength and speed sessions. All students who came to him before Aug. 11 with a completed physical were allowed onto the team and attendance at the strength and speed sessions did not affect eligibility.

As for the jerseys, Cella said he paid for them himself because the district was not due to buy new uniforms for a couple years, and he paid for the T-shirts himself. There was an agreement that players could keep a jersey after selling 20 T-shirts. He also said all of his policies are included in the contract parents and players sign, which was given to all board members and administrators who interviewed him for the position. Board members had said at the meeting they had not seen the contract.

Cella said he was surprised this came up as an issue, but it probably was connected to the fact he was disciplining players who did not follow policies.

Parent Raymond Whittaker asked the board why his third-grade son, who is in gifted education, has had only one gifted class during the first seven weeks of school. His son is supposed to attend once a week for the gifted program.

There are 35 IEP students in the district, Perrone said, and each one has specific education requirements called for in their IEPs. Board member Tony Prushinski said this was unacceptable and tantamount to child abuse.

10/10/2008

Parents complain about Nanticoke coach

Janine Ungvarsky For The Times Leader

The rules and credentials of Greater Nanticoke Area head football coach Lou Cella came under fire Thursday night from parents, prompting promises of an investigation from school administrators.

Parents asked the school board to address rumors that the program was being cancelled and were told that is not the case. Parents then asked if the

board was aware of a number of rules in Cella's contract with his players which they said included mandatory practices before the date allowed by the PIAA.

Players were cut from the roster for not attending these practices, parents said, and some players lost their jobs when Cella called employers requesting adjustments to players' work schedules. With a copy of Cella's player contract in hand, one player's father questioned Cella's resume. David Kotz said he checked with the athletic directors at some of the districts where Cella said he coached and what he was told did not match.

"He said he coached (one team) to within one game of the championship. I checked. He left the year before," Kotz said, asking if the resume was checked before Cella was hired. "You had 38 players when they signed up. You have 18 now and he's the reason."

Other parents alleged that injured players who left the field during the game had their jerseys taken away and were prohibited from riding the team bus or being on the sidelines at other games.

School administrators initially defended Cella, saying that he was doing his best and student athletes do have to set priorities. But as more parents added to the discussion, board members expressed surprise at some of the allegations and vowed to look into them.

"There are two sides to every story," Superintendent Tony Perrone said, "and I'll meet with the coach next week to get his."

Perrone and board members promised the situation would be investigated and addressed as necessary.

Cella was not present at the meeting.

10/9/2008

Nanticoke Workers used a trailer-mounted horizontal directional drill to bore a tunnel about 25 feet below the riverbed Water main put in under Susquehanna

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As ominous as the deep, repetitive rumbling near the Nanticoke Bridge might have seemed on Wednesday, it was actually a sign the city's water supply would soon be more secure.

For the past six years, the city has been a pipe break away from losing water service. In 2002, one of two water mains that run under the Susquehanna River broke, leaving a large storage tank to supply the city if the second line broke.

The line has held, however, while Pennsylvania American Water Co. came up with the \$1.5 million necessary to replace the breached line. The installation project began about two months ago, mostly hidden from public view by trees, fences and the fact that the river remained unaffected.

Starting in Nanticoke, Gabe's Construction Co. Inc. of Sheboygan, Wis., used a trailer-mounted horizontal directional drill to bore a tunnel about 25 feet below the riverbed. The drill, similar to those used for oil and gas drilling, could reach a four-degree angle, allowing it to curve under the river.

After reaching the Plymouth Township side, the hole was reamed out to several feet in diameter.

On Wednesday, the end of a 1,000-foot-long, 20-inch-wide, plastic pipe was attached and pulled back through the hole. The pulling stopped every 8 feet so an extension piece of the drill could be removed. The project was running about a month behind schedule because of a broken part, but it was slowly nearing an end.

"Today the fat lady is on the stage," said driller and operating engineer Patrick Thomason.

Though unlikely to break with its flexibility and 3-inch-thick walls, the high-density polyethylene pipe shuttered as it was pulled through the hole in the bedrock, creating a rhythmic, repetitive rumble. Thomason noted the drill was strong enough to pull back a jetliner at full throttle and still have a bit left over.

It would take most of the day to install the entire black line, which snaked for several blocks through West Nanticoke parallel to state Route 11.

Daniel Rickard, PAW's manager for the project, said the tunneling method is cheaper and less damaging than "damming" the river and blasting through the riverbed, but he noted the process also has inherent risks. The project ran over schedule, he said, because a drill piece that broke had to be backed out of the hole and a replacement shipped in. "It's specialized equipment, so when you break something, it's not like you can just go to Lowe's and buy it. Everything they needed came from Wisconsin," he said.

Carter said he would keep the drill hooked up until this morning in case the pipe expanded during installation and contracted overnight.

Within a month, the new pipe will be on line, Rickard said.

10/6/2008

Beat Reports: Bears spotted near Nanticoke schools

Erin Moody

There's nothing quite like the delicious scent of a Dumpster filled with cafeteria food scraps and bits of leftover lunches discarded by hundreds of students.

What we might think stinks is a tempting buffet to a couple of bears who've been spotted wandering around the campuses of Greater Nanticoke High School and K.M. Smith Elementary School. For the past few weeks, students and staff have occasionally spotted what appears to be two black bears around the high school and one black bear at the elementary school.

There is no immediate danger to students, Superintendent Anthony Perrone assured, and the bear at the elementary school was caught a week ago and taken miles away. The high school bears haven't been seen in at least a week.

When bears are spotted, staff hustles students at recess inside, and the district calls the game commission. To catch the elementary school bear, the commission set traps with donuts. No bears have been seen since the trapping.

As far as Perrone knows, outside recess is not being moved indoors unless necessary because the students need fresh air and to run around. It's the Dumpsters that are luring the hungry bears packing on the pounds for hibernation, so the district is trying to make sure the Dumpsters are always closed.

10/5/2008

While city's council members believe ordinance needed, not all agree on details

Nanticoke hashes out rental law

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A proposed rental unit ordinance in Nanticoke is getting mixed reviews from council members.

The entire council agrees the ordinance is needed in some form, but disagree on certain aspects of the plan.

Councilman Jon Metta applauds the ordinance because it will require all landlords to submit their names, addresses and phone numbers for themselves and tenants.

The city will generate a list of renters using the data and determine which renters might not be paying all of their earned income taxes, Metta said.

Revenue expected from earned income taxes has come in at a much slower rate than anticipated.

Mayor John Bushko said that same list could be generated using the Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority's database because it includes the name of each property owner and how many units are at a particular site, Bushko said.

Bushko, who owns five rental properties in town, is opposed to the additional fees in the plan.

Landlords already pay a \$55 inspection fee to receive an occupancy permit for each unit, but under the new ordinance, they also would have to pay an annual \$50 licensing fee per unit.

Bushko thinks the license fee is just a way for the city to punish good landlords who maintain their properties.

"I think it is going to scare people away. You can only tax so much. The next thing that is going to happen, the landlords will just sell the property to anybody," Bushko said.

It's unknown how much revenue the city will generate. But it's not about the money – it's about improving the city, said Gerald Cross, executive director of Pennsylvania Economy League, the city's recovery coordinator.

"It is a desire for the city to get a handle on their rental situation, so they can enforce the building codes properly and keep track of absentee landlords," he said.

Landlords face stiff penalties if a tenant moves in before the city's code enforcement officer has inspected the unit. Landlords who don't keep the grass cut, don't remove snow or don't make the necessary repairs as required by the code officer could be fined up to \$1,000 and risk losing the occupancy permit.

Bushko agrees the properties need to be inspected for code violations to ensure the dwellings are safe to live in, but thinks the inspection should be valid for two years from the inspection date. Inspection fees can add up quickly for a landlord because some tenants stay only a few months, Bushko said.

To deal with absentee landlords, the ordinance also requires property owners who reside more than 20 miles from Nanticoke to name a property manager, who must live in the area.

City solicitor William Finnegan drafted the ordinance based on a similar ordinance adopted by Berwick Borough in April 2007.

Berwick Borough Manager Shane Pepe said its ordinance was upheld in federal court when challenged on several levels, including invasion of privacy.

"It's a necessary evil. If landlords actually took care of their property and people took care of their rentals, it wouldn't be needed," Pepe said.

Nanticoke's rental ordinance would not apply to properties where the owner lives on the premise or properties maintained by the Nanticoke Housing Authority.

Mayor John Bushko agrees the properties need to be inspected for code violations to ensure the dwellings are safe to live in, but thinks the inspection should be valid for two years from the inspection date.

10/3/2008

Nanticoke council receives draft rental ordinance

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Nanticoke council received a draft rental property ordinance from solicitor William Finnegan designed to help with tax collection and cracking down on problem properties. It calls for a \$55 initial inspection fee when a tenant moves out, and a \$50 annual license fee. Out-of-town landlords will have to designate a local manager.

"We'll be able to expedite nuisance situations much better," councilman Jim Litchkofski noted.

The ordinance's purpose is to get owners to be more responsible for their rentals, Finnegan said. In some cases, it has been hard for Nanticoke's code enforcement officer to hunt down landlords. It will also allow city officials to keep track of residents, for better earned income and per capita tax collection, Litchkofski said.

"There's a lot to it. It's not going to be an easy thing to get up and running," Finnegan said.

Council also awarded the bid for Orchard Street improvements to low bidder Latona Trucking for \$322,558, which was lower than expected, according to city engineer Daryl Pawlush of Pasonick Associates. The work is covered by Community Development Block Grant funding.

10/3/2008

Nanticoke council mulling rental laws

New trash pickup contract signed that raises household rates \$59 annually.

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For months Nanticoke council members have considered passing a rental lease law.

Now council is reviewing a 17-page ordinance enacted in Berwick.

Council members were given copies of the proposal at Wednesday night's meeting. The ordinance would generate revenue for the city and create a database of all landlords and renters in the city.

Under the measure, landlords would be required to pay a \$50 license fee for each unit and continue paying \$55 for an inspection of each unit.

The city's code enforcement officer will conduct inspections on all rental units. Each rental unit – either apartments or homes – must be inspected before a tenant moves in.

The proposed ordinance has not been finalized and is expected to be approved at the first council meeting in November.

In other business, residents will pay more for garbage collection in January. Council signed a four-year contract with J.P. Mascaro & Sons to handle trash collection from January through December 2013. Each household will begin paying \$235 annually, an increase of \$59 over the current rate.

That rate will remain the same throughout the contract period.

Most services will remain the same, except for the removal of large items such as furniture or appliances.

These large items will no longer be picked up at no cost. Beginning in January, residents must purchase a sticker at a cost of \$25 to have a large item picked up.

If the free pickup of large items had remained in effect, the annual trash rate would have rose significantly, though Mayor John Bushko did not know the exact cost.

"We are trying to keep costs as low as we can. Unfortunately this is the only way we could do it," Councilman Joe Dougherty said.

Mascaro & Sons, which has facilities in Nanticoke, was the only company to submit a bid. One resident voiced displeasure about the higher cost, but the Mascaro representative said the rate has remained the same for the last four years under the previous contract.

In other action, Betsy Cheshinski was appointed as interim city clerk at a salary of \$4,100 per year for the part-time post. She will be responsible for recording the minutes of each meeting. Early next year Cheshinski will decide if she wants to remain as city clerk.

Former fiscal director Holly Quinn, who is serving as interim city administrator while the city searches for a new administrator, is receiving an extra \$1,000 per month for her additional work.

This compensation package will remain in effect until a new administrator is hired.

10/2/2008

Nanticoke set to raise garbage fees

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Residents can anticipate paying higher garbage fees next year — and a real estate tax hike is also on the horizon.

Council and Mayor John Bushko voted Wednesday for a four-year refuse collection contract with sole bidder J.P. Mascaro and Sons. The cost for collection went up from \$176,000 in the last contract to \$235,000 in this contract, councilman Jon Metta said. In consequence, the annual refuse collection fee will rise from \$176 per household to \$235.

Although the contract allows for weekly yard waste collection, large items such as appliances and furniture will no longer be picked up for free, Bushko said.

To dispose of them, residents will have to purchase a sticker for \$25 at city hall, he said.

Council reduced the real estate tax for debt service from 29 to 13 mills in 2006. But it will have to go up again in 2009 to pay back loans from the state, according to Nanticoke's financial recovery coordinator, Pennsylvania Economy League. The state Department of Community and Economic Development required council to pass a resolution ensuring millage will be raised enough to cover past and future debt.

Real estate tax now is 30 mills for general use and 14 mills for paying off debts. A mill is \$1 on every \$1,000 of assessed property value. Each mill brings in about \$20,000.

The city needs to commit \$303,000 for debt, PEL Executive Director Gerald Cross said. Based on the old assessed values, the city would have to raise the real estate tax by 24 mills, he said. However until Luzerne County officials approve reassessment which will change property values, there's no way of knowing what the new millage amount will be, Cross said.

10/2/2008

Ongoing street paving projects creating minor traffic difficulties

Driving down some city streets was a little difficult last week due to the ongoing paving project.

Pamela Urbanski - Nanticoke Area Notes

Some roads in the city will continue to be shut down and drivers will be detoured as paving work continues. The paving projects were made possible through a 2006 community block grant.

Donna Wall from the community development office in Nanticoke tells me there is a lot of work to do when it comes to paving city streets, but city officials' hands are tied as to what roads can be paved using block grant money.z

"Even though a lot of city streets need to be paved, the money from the block grants can only be used when 51 percent or more of the families who live on these streets are low to moderate income," Wall said.

Streets that are being paved include West Ridge (from Market to Hanover Street), West Noble (from Hanover to Fairchild Street), Slope (from Main to Hill Street), Nanticoke (from North Market to Main Street) and Maple (from Broad to Green Street).

School taxes in penalty period

Nanticoke City Treasurer/Tax Collector Albert J. Wytoshek announced the rebate period for school taxes ended Monday. Property taxes are now in

penalty value, which ends Dec. 15. It is the property owner's responsibility to forward tax statements to the respective mortgage company/bank. For more information or an appointment, call 735-2800.

Elementary wrestling signups

The Nanticoke Elementary wrestling program will hold registration Monday and Oct. 20 from 6:30 to 8 p.m. at Johnny D's South Philly Steaks, 701 S. Walnut St., Nanticoke. Children ages 5 to 12 are invited to participate.

The cost is \$30 per wrestler and \$55 per family, which includes a T-shirt for each participant. Checks can be made payable to GNA Wrestling Booster Club.

The program is structured to teach the basics of wrestling and includes actual competition. Practices are tentatively scheduled for Wednesdays and Saturdays during the season that runs from November through February. Insurance coverage information is required for registration.

For further information, call Mike or Joann at 735-2376.

Bingo at St. Joe's

The parishioners of St. Joseph's Church invite you to their monthly bingo Sunday in the church parlors, 107 E. Noble St.

Doors open at 12:30 p.m. Early birds start at 1:45 and regular games will begin at 2. Cash prizes will be awarded. Door prizes and refreshments are available.

Chinese auction at St. Stan's

St. Stanislaus Church is holding its annual Chinese auction Sunday in the school hall on West Church Street.

More than 200 items are scheduled to be auctioned off including gift certificates for local restaurants and businesses.

Homemade food will be available for purchase and the coffee and cake is free.

Doors open at 11 a.m. and the auction begins at 1 p.m.

For more information, call Christine at 735-1750.

Chicken barbecue Sunday

If you're looking for a great meal, why not stop by the Holy Child Church chicken barbecue Sunday from noon to 3 p.m. in the parish hall on Newport Street in Sheatown.

Takeouts are available from 11 a.m. to noon. Dinner will be held until sold out.

9/18/2008

National Guard soldiers to depart today for training

Bob Kalinowski - - Citizens' Voice

Approximately 90 Pennsylvania Army National Guard soldiers from the 109th Field Artillery depart today for training before an eventual deployment to Iraq.

Soldiers will say their goodbyes to loved ones around 2 p.m. from the Bravo Battery armory in Nanticoke. They will first travel to Fort Indiantown Gap, then to Camp Shelby, Miss., for training, and finally to Iraq. Most of the soldiers belong to Nanticoke's Bravo Battery, which previously had members serve a one-year stint in Iraq before returning home in February 2005.

GOD SPEED 109TH! - FORWARD!

9/18/2008

Nanticoke tweaking capital budget to buy equipment

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Council members considered tweaking the city's capital budget during Wednesday's meeting to purchase emergency response and road clearing equipment.

Councilman Brent Makarczyk expressed interested in the city purchasing at least one pumper fire truck in 2010 or 2011 and possibly a ladder truck sometime between 2014 and 2017.

A new pumper truck could cost \$315,000 if purchased now, Makarczyk said.

However, there are other alternatives that could benefit the city.

A mini-pumper truck would cost between \$180,000-185,000 and Makarczyk mentioned that Olyphant has a 2004 pumper truck it might be willing to sell.

If the city waits two to three years, the cost for a new pumper truck could increase to \$195,000-210,000, Makarczyk said. A new ladder truck could easily cost a \$1 million or more.

'The prices we are quoting here at no frills, basic truck. Nothing overly fancy,' Fire Chief Mike Bohan said.

The city only has \$40,000 allotted for such an expense, he said. The city has applied for grants to purchase new fire equipment, but was turned down, Markarczyk said.

The city is now fully protected since Milton Borough loaned its pumper truck last month to the city until a new or used unit can be purchased.

Under the free loan agreement, Milton can request its truck back at any time.

The Hanover Hose Company's fire truck was stored at the main fire headquarters since June when the city's 1977 fire truck engine broke.

"We have gotten a bandage for it. But I think we need a better solution," Makarczyk said.

Councilman Joe Dougherty said the street department needed a dump truck with a plow and spreader for the front to clear the streets in the winter.

The other truck is rather “beat-up” he said and barely able to plow a driveway. Dougherty said he would investigate the cost for the equipment. But with the city’s stressed financial situation as an Act 47 community officials know purchasing such vehicles will take a plan.

9/18/2008

1995: A winning attitude

By Caleb Sheaffer - Citizens' Voice

Maryann Shiptoski lost count of her medals a few years ago.

At this point, she knows she has at least 100. She has some for speed walking and jogging, and others for swimming, her favorite sport. She keeps them on her bedroom wall, hanging on a row of hooks next to a Boston Marathon poster.

In June, Shiptoski received three more medals — one gold and two silver — to add to her collection.

Shiptoski, 46, won one first-place and two second-place honors in freestyle and backstroke swimming events at the statewide Special Olympics competition at Penn State University.

This wasn’t the first time Shiptoski took home medals from the event.

More than 15 years ago, Shiptoski went to the Wilkes-Barre YMCA when her mother underwent aquatic therapy for a back injury. Until then, Shiptoski was withdrawn, always a bit behind in school, and didn’t get involved in many activities.

“What happened was my mom was going to the YMCA, and then I ended up swimming,” Shiptoski explains.

Since then, Shiptoski has grown out of her shell and has developed into a talkative, confident person with a competitive edge.

Back in 1995, The Citizens’ Voice reported on how Shiptoski changed after learning to swim and earning a swimming teaching certification as well.

The next step for Shiptoski was competing in the Special Olympics, first at the local level, and then at statewide competitions.

“We knew nothing about the Special Olympics until I learned to swim at the YMCA,” Shiptoski said.

Before she learned to swim, Shiptoski was inward, shy and lived with her parents. After learning to swim, she developed confidence and made many friends at the YMCA.

Then, she became even more independent after winning medals in the Special Olympics. Shiptoski moved into her own apartment in the Nanticoke Towers, and has continued to participate in the Special Olympics in the summer and fall.

She only missed two years of the competition, due to illness.

The fall events are held at Villanova University, whereas the summer events take place at Penn State University.

Shiptoski prefers visiting State College, as she loves the Nittany Lions and enjoys staying in the dorm rooms.

Special Olympic athletes must qualify at sectional races in Luzerne County, before the state competition.

Because of her swimming ability, Shiptoski has had no trouble qualifying for states year after year. But once she reaches Villanova or Penn State for the state events, she definitely feels challenged.

“The competition is very hard down there,” Shiptoski said.

Shiptoski recalls being nervous during her first swim meets. Before one race, she was so nervous that she accidentally knocked off her goggles before diving into the pool. That match didn’t go as planned. Unable to see, she still swam 16 laps.

Reflecting on her experience with Special Olympics, Shiptoski is glad that she decided to participate.

“I make a lot of good friends and it gives me confidence,” Shiptoski said. “I like to travel, but I don’t like getting up early in the morning.”

Her parents, Joe and Phyllis Shiptoski, of Newport Township, support Maryann in her athletic endeavors. They travel to watch her compete and her dad makes sure she gets to practice three times a week, for swimming and jogging.

“She’s more open than she has ever been with people,” Joe Shiptoski said, attributing that to her success at the Special Olympics.

Through her own athletic experiences, Shiptoski also supports her brother, Rich Shiptoski, of Shickshinny. He has run in the Boston Marathon and the Steamtown Marathon.

She is also a huge fan of the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins, attending games during the year with her family. Underneath her Special Olympic medals, Shiptoski keeps a large stuffed Penguin, along with her Penn State and Penguin baseball hats.

Although she is getting older, Shiptoski shows no signs of slowing down. This month, Shiptoski will start practice for the speed walking and jogging events, three times a week in Kirby Park.

“You can’t compete until you are 11, but there are people all the way up to 65,” Shiptoski said. “I’m going to do it as long as I can, but my Dad has to take me to practice.”

9/18/2008

Nanticoke in need of fire truck

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Nanticoke’s fire truck situation is an example of why Luzerne County needs an inventory of all its police and fire services assets, the city’s financial recovery coordinators said Wednesday.

The city needs a pumper truck, and has borrowed one for now. Councilman Brent Makarczyk asked for one to be put into the city’s capital improvement budget for 2010 — unless it can somehow get a pumper before then.

A new pumper would cost at least \$300,000, fire Chief Michael Bohan said. The city could buy a mini-pumper for a minimum of about \$180,000, or buy a 2004 pumper from Olyphant Borough for about \$170,000, Makarczyk said.

Bohan said fire apparatus grants are available, but they’re very competitive. Nanticoke was recently turned down for a \$300,000 federal Department

of Homeland Security Grant. Makarczyk said the city will keep trying.

The cash-strapped city doesn't have funds to buy any kind of fire truck right now, said Harry Miller of Pennsylvania Economy League, the city's financial recovery coordinator. And taking out a loan would mean hiking real estate taxes, PEL Executive Director Gerald Cross said.

Cross didn't think it was fair Nanticoke taxpayers would have to be the only ones to pay for a regional asset: a fire truck would protect the schools in the Greater Nanticoke Area district and Luzerne County Community College, which don't just serve city residents.

The city should look into cooperative opportunities with other municipalities, Cross said. That's why PEL sought — and received — council's vote to apply for a grant of state gaming money "to identify and establish a police and fire services asset district" on behalf of the Luzerne County Municipal Cooperation Commission.

It would be used to take a survey of all the assets the county's municipalities have, from personnel to equipment and apparatus, Joe Boyle of PEL said. Most municipalities don't know what their neighbors have — or, sometimes, even what they have, he said. There could be a municipality with what Nanticoke needs.

"We didn't know about Milton. Maybe there's a Milton in Luzerne County," Cross said, referring to the Northumberland County borough Nanticoke borrowed the pumper truck from. "We need to put together an asset inventory to figure out who has what in a situation like this."

In other business:

Council voted to end the agreement with Berkheimer Associates for income tax collection services. City officials are increasingly concerned about income tax revenue not coming in at the expected rate. Council didn't hire a replacement for Berkheimer. They are awaiting a detailed quote from the Don Wilkinson Agency, councilman Jon Metta said.

Council learned Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority is closing its satellite office in city hall as of Jan. 1, 2009. The payment drop-off box will remain outside the building.

Cross, who is on the WWSA board for Plains Township, said the closure is for economic reasons. He said more people are making payments online or mailing them in, and although WWSA essentially hung onto the office for two years so financially-distressed Nanticoke could keep getting the \$900-per-month rent, it didn't make financial sense to keep it open any longer.

Council plans to vote at the Oct 1. meeting on a new landlord-tenant ordinance. The city needs to keep better track of who's moving in and out, and also take control of absentee landlords, Makarczyk said.

9/14/2008

Nanticoke's fab five reminisce about storybook season

Holly Kozlowski Uzdella can rattle off memories of her high school basketball career like it was just yesterday.

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Holly Kozlowski Uzdella can rattle off memories of her high school basketball career like it was just yesterday.

There are reminders, of course, to help jog her memory, such as the display of photos and trophies that decorate her father's barbershop. Her scrapbooks are also close at hand, should she ever want to reminisce. Or she could easily go back by popping in the video of Nanticoke Area's state title game.

Eighteen years have passed, but the memories from 1990, the sights, the sounds of playing on the greatest girls basketball team from the Wyoming Valley Conference are still vivid for Uzdella.

"One of my favorite memories is from the Eastern final at Pottsville's Martz Hall," Uzdella said. "We were playing North Schuylkill and when our names were being announced for the starting line-up we couldn't hear a thing because the fans were going crazy. Our coach had to point to us when it was our turn to go out on the court. It was so amazing how many people were there for us. It's things like that that will forever be etched in my mind."

Uzdella and fellow senior stars Ellen Bartuska, Casey Comoroski, Holly Ryncavage and Lori Scally Zaleski, capped their tremendous undefeated season by winning the 1990 state championship. Along the way they captured interest from college coaches, bitterness from opponents and support from basketball fans throughout the Wyoming Valley.

"When you're young like that you don't realize how big (Nanticoke girls basketball) was at the time, but I'll never forget the amount of support we had," Zaleski said. "And it wasn't only people from Nanticoke." But the residents of Nanticoke certainly led the caravan of fans. And, rightfully so. For four years the Trojanettes dominated the Wyoming Valley Conference and District 2. It wasn't until 1990, however, that Nanticoke finally made it to the big dance at Hersheypark Arena.

As sophomores, the fab five were eliminated in the Eastern semifinals by Lancaster Catholic. As juniors, they were sent home in the same round once again by Lancaster Catholic. As seniors, they made a pact that the only thing that would bring them home from the state playoffs would be a victory parade.

"There was no way we were going to lose again," Uzdella said. "Coach (Rose) Volpicelli put it in our minds that we were going to win and she executed the game-plan to get us there. It wasn't a matter of how we were going to win, it was a matter of how many we would win by."

The Trojanettes' storybook season had its fill of villains. Lopsided victories in favor of Nanticoke angered coaches, opponents and opposing fans. Volpicelli and her talented group of seniors were often accused of running up the score and embarrassing their conference foes.

"It's so hard when you're that young because you're always told to do your best, and we were just out there to play a game the best we knew how," Ryncavage said. "We didn't want to run up the score and we didn't want to embarrass anyone," Comoroski added. "But what do you do when you are trying to get to that (state championship) game?"

Each of the five starters had a scoring cap. As soon as she scored 18 points, whether it was in the first or fourth quarter, she was finished playing for the night. That was Volpicelli's attempt at preventing a rout, but in most cases Nanticoke came away with a convincing victory.

One of Nanticoke's romps took an interesting turn late in the fourth quarter and woke up an otherwise quiet crowd. With 99 points on the

scoreboard and 38 seconds left on the clock in a game against Tunkhannock, Nanticoke's efforts to keep the game under 100 points were denied thanks to the Tigers.

Tunkhannock's coach at the time, the late Norm Sisle, called time-out. He waved his players to the bench and even got parents in on his master scheme. The Tigers had possession when they returned to the court and, instead of working an offense, their ball handler raced down to Nanticoke's basket and gave the Trojanettes 101 points.

Unfortunately, to add insult to injury, the plan didn't run as smooth as the Tigers had hoped. "I remember the girl just took off towards our basket," Uzdella said. "She was all alone but she actually missed the lay-up. She had to get her own rebound and put it back."

"Oh, I'll never forget that game," added Zaleski. "I guess there was some bitterness there. But the crowd started to cheer. It was kind of funny."

The road to gold

Nanticoke's dominance continued in the state playoffs. The team's scoring cap was lifted and sitting out a quarter, or two or three, because of the score was in the past. Finally, the Trojanettes were putting their hours of intense practices to good use.

Against Strath Haven in the Eastern quarterfinals at Martz Hall, the Trojanettes poured in 41 points in the first quarter. It was a 41-13 lead that was never threatened.

In the semifinals they once again met the team that decided their fate the previous two seasons — Lancaster Catholic. "I actually think the loss to Lancaster Catholic our junior year prepared us for what we wanted to do as seniors," Comoroski said. "We were so determined as seniors. There was no way we were going to be stopped our senior year."

And so the Trojanettes eliminated their biggest nemesis, and in typical Nanticoke fashion — a 45-point victory.

North Schuylkill was Nanticoke's next victim. The result was an 80-60 win which put the Trojanettes one victory away from their ultimate goal of winning a state title.

"It was unbelievably exciting," Zaleski said. "When you're young like that I don't think you realize how big something like (going to the state final) really is. I wish I would have taken more time to stop and take it all in."

In the biggest game of their high school careers, against Beaver Falls, the Trojanettes withstood adversity they rarely had to face over four years. With just four minutes remaining in the fourth quarter, Uzdella fouled out for the first time in her career. Bartuska was playing cautiously as well with four fouls. And the score was much closer than the Trojanettes were used to.

But they found a way to prevail.

Reserves Renee Pointkowski and Teri Glazin filled in perfectly, while the 5-foot-1 Comoroski put on a show. She nailed a remarkable 23-of-35 free throws and finished with 36 points.

The heartbreak from being eliminated in years past, the negativity that often surrounded the Nanticoke squad, the chemistry that was built from seventh grade, all came down to this, a 77-67 victory and a state championship. The Trojanettes' smallest margin of victory also served as their biggest win.

Always a champion

Ryncavage and her fiance Jim Saba recently dusted off the videotape of Nanticoke's championship game. It's been nearly 15 years since Ryncavage watched the tape, but she doesn't need to see it to remember the excitement that surrounded that season. She has photos, her gold medal and her varsity jacket. But most importantly, she has her teammates.

Each of the girls went on to be successful, and they continue to stay connected through visits, phone calls, e-mails and, of course, basketball.

Comoroski played at St. Bonaventure, was recently inducted into the college's hall of fame and now serves as associate athletic director and senior woman administrator at Missouri State University. Bartuska starred at the University of Richmond and earned a degree in biology. She is living in Delaware and has been a zookeeper at the Philadelphia Zoo for the last 11 years.

Uzdella was a standout at Lock Haven University. She is married eight years to Chris Uzdella, has a stepdaughter, Natashja, and works at InterMetro Industries in Wilkes-Barre, where she is a senior accountant. Zaleski, who was also a state champion in javelin for Nanticoke, played one season at West Chester University, one season with Luzerne County Community College and graduated from Temple University. She is married 11 years to Matthew and they have 5-year-old twin boys, Michael and Jacob. She is a regional director of CareSite Pharmacies and oversees 10 pharmacies in Pennsylvania. Ryncavage played for a season at LCCC and works for CVS Caremark as a supervisor of pharmacy technicians.

"We definitely still keep in touch," Zaleski said. "And basketball and that season is something that always comes up."

"We're all bonded by being apart of that team," Uzdella said. "Looking back, I think being on that team helped define me as a person. It helped me set goals, accept adversity and embrace good times and I think that spills into my life now."

While the fab five have moved on from basketball, one question will always remain — will there ever be another team like Nanticoke?

"It's hard to say," Ryncavage said. "You have to have five people who are really committed, really talented and have the same goal in mind."

"It was such an awesome experience," Uzdella. "You can only hope to see a team like ours again."

9/12/2008

GNA test scores show improvement

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Greater Nanticoke Area test scores are up, welcome news to the school board after years of agonizing over how to improve reading and math skills in the district.

“Big improvement. We’re tickled pink about it,” board president Jeff Kozlofski said.

Poor performance on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment tests at the Educational Center and Elementary Center led the state Department of Education to put the district on warning it might have to adopt a plan if scores didn’t improve. The high school is already on a state-mandated five-year plan.

Educational Center principal Joe Long showed a recorded presentation by Philomena Covert of the Luzerne Intermediate Unit 18. Data was analyzed using the Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment System, which charts academic growth and makes projections to help educators pinpoint areas where individual students need intervention. Students were grouped by whether their performance on the PSSA tests was below basic, basic, proficient or advanced.

“Gains are tremendous” in 2008 math scores for fourth through eighth grades, particularly in the sixth grade, Covert said. Reading scores are also above state average, she said.

Covert’s breakdown showed:

Fourth grade: Below basic, basic and proficient students grew in reading and math. Below-basic students particularly gained in both areas.

Advanced students did not show growth in either area, which Covert said was in keeping with a statewide trend.

Fifth grade: Below basic, basic and proficient students also showed growth, but there was a big decline in the advanced group that might call for intervention, Covert said.

Sixth grade: All four groups had growth in math skills, including advanced students. Proficient and advanced students’ reading scores went up, but basic and below basic went down.

Seventh grade: All four groups showed “outstanding” growth on math scores. Below basic, basic and proficient students showed “commendable” growth in reading, Covert said

Eighth grade: There was a “little dip” in math scores among basic, proficient and advanced students, meaning they need to be challenged more, Covert said. Advanced students didn’t show growth in reading for two years in a row.

It will take a while before the progress starts being reflected in the SAT scores, Superintendent Anthony Perrone said. But he was glad to hear the good news, as were other district officials.

“As an administrator, we’re very pleased to see the changes and effort everyone has made,” Long said. “Even the kids’ attitudes have changed.”

In other business, parent Delia Bracero asked the board to bring back the district’s diversity program. She said her son was “degraded” because he is Hispanic. A program similar to one her daughter has at Luzerne County Community College would be good for GNA, Bracero said.

“It’s a very important program. You have kids who will participate,” she said.

Perrone and board member Pattie Bieski promised district officials would put together a new diversity program soon.

9/12/2008

Advanced GNA students also need help

JANINE UNGVASKY Times Leader Correspondent

Efforts to improve test scores for Greater Nanticoke Area students who previously tested proficient or below have been successful, but more attention needs to be paid to advanced students, according to information presented to the school board Thursday.

Educational Center Principal Joe Long played a video of a presentation made to the district’s teachers and staff earlier in the week. That presentation, made by Filomena Covert of the Luzerne Intermediate Unit’s curriculum department, said that the district’s overall improvement on Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) tests was “tremendous.”

Sixth and seventh grade students in particular showed “quite amazing” results by improving beyond projections, Covert said. Long attributed those results to “excellent sixth and seventh grade math and reading teachers” and said that the progress scores “show that the efforts being put forth by teachers and administrators is working and pushing our kids to higher levels.”]

Most students who previously tested as basic, below basic or proficient improved, she said, but in many cases, students who previously tested as advanced did not show progress. Covert said this is a trend statewide, and district administrators said steps would be taken to address the trend in the district. Superintendent Anthony Perrone reported that he would be meeting with representatives of the Intermediate Unit to consider becoming part of a cyberschool consortium. Perrone said the district has about 60 students in cyberschools, which receive the district’s share of funding for those pupils. “I don’t know if you realize it, but (cyberschool tuition) is one of the most expensive bills we pay,” he said. By entering the consortium, Perrone estimated the district could save about \$3,000 per student.

In other business, the board:

- Approved the purchase and installation of a Millenium Badging software at a cost of \$11,661 to allow ID badging to be printed on access entry cards for district buildings.
- Accepted resignations from aides Persephone Link and Debra Robacheski and hall monitor Diane James.
- Appointed Michele Kordek as long-term substitute teacher.
- Heard from parent Delia Bracero, who requested an update on the reinstatement of a diversity program. Perrone said the district is pursuing a new program.

9/9/2008

Family pays tribute to late dad with donation to his favorite nature trail

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Rachel Jeffries’ late father Melvin Evans loved the Susquehanna Warrior Trail.

Almost every day in his last year, he visited the trail, especially his favorite part between the Hunlock Creek Drive-In and B & E Motors. After the 57-year-old Evans died following a heart attack in June, Jeffries and her family decided to help the trail her father loved. The Jeffries family donated \$1,000 to the Susquehanna Warrior Trail Council for upkeep and maintenance of the trail. The family also started a special fund in her father's memory to assist the Susquehanna Warrior Trail. Close to the Hunlock Creek Drive-In, the trail will be named the "Mel Evans Mile" in his honor. When Jeffries contacted the council, its members were thrilled Jeffries decided to assist them.

"It actually went over better than what I anticipated," said Jeffries, an English teacher at Greater Nanticoke Area High School. "They actually seemed honored that we would even ask them that."

Max Furek, a board member of the Susquehanna Warrior Trail, said the Jeffries family's generosity was unexpected and hopes it inspires other people to help the project. In 1996, the Susquehanna Warrior Trail Council came together to plan the Susquehanna Warrior Trail, a 18.5-mile trail of converted railroad beds. The trail runs from Larksville to the PPL Riverlands Park in Salem Township. Jeffries' father was a retired meteorologist living in Nanticoke near his daughter and son-in-law, Eric Jeffries. He used to spend a lot of time with his grandchildren, Eric, 8, and Kay, 9. Jeffries is still working on coordinating the signs that will be placed along the trail in her father's honor. The signs will let all hikers know they are walking on the "Mel Evans Mile."

"I think he would have been slightly embarrassed by all this," Jeffries said. "He did enjoy the trail and thought it was a great thing what the people were doing for our community."



9/7/2008

Empty no more? If feds approve, LCCC to lease Kanjo Center

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Luzerne County Community College's board of trustees may approve a lease contract to move into the Kanjorski Center within the next 10 days, pending final approval by the federal government. The Kanjorski Center on Main Street in Nanticoke. Luzerne County Community College is expected to lease the building, pending final approval by the federal government, to use it as a 'health science workforce development center' through March 31, 2014. The U.S. Economic Development Administration, which supplied a multi-million grant to construct the center in the mid-1990s, agreed to allow LCCC to occupy the building if certain conditions are met.

In a letter dated Sept. 5, the Economic Development Administration stated it must receive letters from Nanticoke Mayor John Bushko, the Nanticoke Municipal Authority and LCCC officials, agreeing the college will operate the building as a "health science workforce development center" through March 31, 2014. The college can purchase the building, if it so desires, after April 2014.

"You are cautioned not to take any actions on the transfer of the title or amended use of the facility until a written amendment has been offered by EDA and fully executed by all necessary parties," the letter from EDA Regional Director Willie Taylor stated.

Under the agreement, the college can lease the 32,000-square-foot building, and the financially distressed city doesn't have to worry about repaying the grant, said state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke.

If EDA wasn't in agreement with the plan, the city would be responsible for repaying \$1.9 million of the original grant if the building is used for other purposes than originally approved.

EDA has tentatively agreed to the plan because the college is an educational institution training thousands of residents to enter the workforce, said Yudichak, who is a strong supporter of the project.

"It's the final hurdle. It is very exciting for the city and the college. Obviously it is a big deal and helps us seal the deal with the college," Yudichak said.

The Kanjorski Center was originally built using federal grant money secured by Democratic congressman Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, to serve as an economic catalyst for downtown Nanticoke when a nationwide insurance company wanted to relocate its processing center to the downtown. The company later moved its operation elsewhere.

Although the building has been 80 percent vacant for more than two years, Kanjorski believes it can once again serve an important purpose – this time in training nurses.

"I am glad that LCCC will be using the Kanjorski Center to educate much-needed health care workers. The college's presence will provide a boost to downtown Nanticoke, and our region will benefit from having first-rate graduates in the health care industry," Kanjorski said in a press release. For LCCC President Tom Leary, this is a dream come true after more than a year of negotiations to acquire the space needed to expand the college's health sciences program. The college announced its desire to relocate its health sciences program into the Kanjorski Center in May 2007.

"I just finally realized this dream of the partnership between the city and the college became a reality," Leary said.

Interior renovations could begin within 30 days of the lease being signed, Leary said. LCCC will use \$10 million in state and \$10 million in county funding to pay for the lease and renovations.

To view the original document from the federal Economic Development Administration, visit www.timesleader.com

9/6/2008

Sale of Kanjorski Center to LCCC nearly complete

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After years of waiting for a tenant followed by months of delay, the last hurdles are down and the sale of the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street in Nanticoke should take place within a week or so.

“This is great news. Finally, finally it’s getting done,” Mayor John Bushko said.

City, Luzerne County Community College and state officials received word Friday the federal Economic Development Agency was ready to approve the college’s use of the Kanjorski Center as a health sciences workforce development center.

The EDA requires letters from representatives of the city, LCCC, and Nanticoke’s redevelopment and municipal authorities agreeing to transfer responsibility for an outstanding grant from the city to the college.

State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, said the city and college reached agreement on the other issues related to the sale, including providing parking for the building. All that remains is to survey the land to determine what property will be a part of the deed, he said.

“This is an absolute home run for Luzerne County, the college, and certainly for the city of Nanticoke,” Yudichak said, describing the project as “the keystone of what we are trying to achieve with downtown redevelopment.”

LCCC President Thomas Leary anticipates closing the deal within a week to 10 days.

“It’s going to be a great partnership between the city and the college,” Leary said. “It’s a perfect collaboration.”

Under the terms of the EDA grant, which was used to build the Kanjorski Center, the municipal authority would have had to pay back \$1.9 million to the federal agency if the building was sold before a certain date.

EDA Regional Director Willie Taylor wrote in his letter to city, state and college officials that the money won’t have to be paid back as long as the Kanjorski Center remains in use by the college as a health sciences center.

That won’t be a problem, Yudichak said.

“The college is going to be there for a long, long time. Generations to come,” he said.

The EDA’s hold on the building expires March 31, 2014. At that time the college can buy the building outright, with the paid rent deducted from the final purchase amount. Bushko believes the total price will be about \$2.1 million.

The Kanjorski Center has been 80 percent vacant since its main tenant moved out in October 2005. LCCC announced its intentions to buy the building in May 2007.

9/4/2008

The Greater Nanticoke Area Drug Task Force continues to be a force in the fight against drugs and alcohol. One cannot argue the point that the success of this organization is due, in part, to the goals established by its founding fathers — those of prevention, intervention and recovery.

Pam Urbanski writes “Nanticoke Area Notes” every other Thursday. News items and story ideas can be e-mailed to her at pamurb806@aol.com.

One of the ways these goals are met is by holding programs and events that offer young people healthy alternatives to a drug-using lifestyle.

One such event, a summer picnic, was held a few weeks ago at Moon Lake Park. Members of the Recovery Recreation Committee, a subcommittee of the Drug Task Force, invited members of the Youth Task Force to join them for a day of swimming, boating, games and food.

It also was an opportunity for the recovery committee to share its stories. “It was an amazing day,” said Don Williams, who is one of the founding fathers I spoke of earlier. He now serves as the program’s outreach director. Williams called the event a picnic with a purpose. “Not only did our young people have a lot of fun, they also heard some very personal stories,” he said. Williams told me you could have heard a pin drop when the recovery members shared their life experiences with the youngest and most vulnerable in society. “There was a lot of ‘if I had to do it over again stories’,” he said.

The drug task force is holding another event that will help further its goals.

September marks the 19th annual observance of the National Alcohol and Drug Addictions Recovery Month. It’s a time to recognize the value of sobriety and wellness within communities, to celebrate the successes of people in recovery, to acknowledge those still struggling with this disorder, and to salute the dedicated men and women who work in alcohol and other drug treatment and prevention fields.

Recovery Extravaganza will be held Sept. 27, from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. at Patriot Square in Nanticoke. The day-long event will feature live entertainment of music and dancing including “Sounds of the Drifters” featuring Bobby Cook. Cook is a former lead singer of the Elsberry Hobbs Drifters and was featured in the Tony and Grammy-award winning musical “Smokey Joe’s Caf?.” Cook will bring back the sounds of the Drifters including such tunes as “Under the Boardwalk,” “This Magic Moment,” “Up on the Roof” and “On Broadway.”

Other bands include Hyde Park and In-Da-Street. The Pennsylvania National Guard also will be on hand with its rock-climbing wall. There also will be a talent show with cash prizes, face-painting and demonstrations from the United States military.

In addition to entertainment, food and games, the GNA Youth Task force will have a booth with information. A booth also will be set up and staffed with people who will offer information about drug addiction, recovery, prevention and intervention.

If you, a friend or family member need to be guided in the right direction, this is the place to be. “Please join us as we celebrate the first Recovery Extravaganza sponsored by the Greater Nanticoke Area Drug Task Force,” said Williams.

Rummage sale at St. Stan’s

Parishioners of St. Stanislaus Church invite the public to their annual rummage sale Saturday from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the school hall at 38 W. Church St. in Nanticoke. Thousands of items including antiques, collectibles, carnival glass, knick-knacks, jewelry, household items and more will be featured. If you love to read, this is the place for you as more than 1,000 books will be for sale. A bake sale will be held in conjunction with the rummage sale. Proceeds will go toward items for care packages to be sent to troops in Iraq.

Special Mass set for students

The Rev. Jim Nash, pastor of the combined churches of Holy Child, Holy Trinity, St. Mary of Czestochowa and St. Stanislaus, invites students in pre-kindergarten to 12th grade to a special mass Sunday, Sept. 14, at 10:15 a.m. at Holy Trinity Church.

Following Mass, a free breakfast will be served at the former Pope John Paul II School building. Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts will provide crafts and parents can sign children up for CCD. There also will be door prizes for children in attendance.

A special behind-the-scenes tour will be given of the church.

Anyone who would like to help out or for further information, call Cindy Garren at 735-4833.



9/1/2008

A woman's love of ventriloquism

Luckily, Klein doesn't have to worry too much about feeding and taking care of them, since they're inanimate when she's not around.

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Klein, who lives in Nanticoke, is a trained ventriloquist. She and her puppets, or 'vent figures' as they are called in the trade, perform for kids and adults throughout the area.

Ventriloquism takes a lot of time and practice, she said, adding that she has taken acting and writing lessons to perfect her craft.

"It's not just not moving your lips," she said. "It's acting and reacting with that character, that makes them come alive."

Creating a character also takes time. You have to think about their personality, Klein said,

including their attitude, likes and dislikes, and their voice.

"You have to look at your character and say, 'What kind of voice would she have?'" Klein said, adding she uses different tones in her voice and makes it higher and lower depending on what the character demands, along with different accents.

Ventriloquists also have to respond to the puppets like they are having an actual conversation, Klein said, coordinating the puppet's movements and mouth while projecting its voice.

"I'm two or three people when I'm up there," she said

You never know what's going to happen during a show, according to Klein, and a good ventriloquist knows how to ad-lib.

If a cell phone goes off, the puppet can ask the person to turn it off, she said, or say 'God bless you' when someone sneezes.

"You have to be in tune with what's going on around you," she said. "That's what makes it come alive."

Most of her 12 puppets are soft figures, similar to stuffed animals. They tend to be cheaper and travel easier than traditional carved, wooden hard figures, although Klein's first puppet, Carly, is a hard figure.

"I think every ventriloquist should have one hard figure," she said.

Klein said she always wanted to do ventriloquism, but didn't know how to go about it until she met a chalk artist who came to her church in 1995.

His wife, a ventriloquist, told Klein about the Maher home-study course.

She ordered the ventriloquism course but never found time to complete it until three years later, when a pastor friend asked her to do a show.

"I had no puppets, and I hadn't ever finished my lesson," she said.

Since Klein was a medical technologist who worked occasional weekends, she decided if she was off the weekend that the performance would take place, she would take it as a sign from God that she was supposed to do it.

When she checked her schedule, she saw that she was off. So she finished her lessons, and got her first puppet. In two weeks, she had performed at 14 homes, and was soon asked to do a program at a church.

"God directed my path," she said.

As she began to get more involved in ventriloquism, Klein said she started attending conventions, including I Fest, the International Festival of Christian Puppetry and Ventriloquism in Bourbonnais, Ill.

She began entering competitions at the festival, getting critiques on her performance and meeting other ventriloquists. The past two years, she has taught classes at the festival.

"It makes me a better ventriloquist," she said of the competitions. "It makes you stretch yourself and do things you wouldn't normally do."

Klein has worked as a medical technologist for 35 years, first at Mercy Hospital in Wilkes-Barre, and now at Geisinger Medical Center in Danville, so she doesn't have as much time to perform shows as she would like.

However, she performs when she can, doing shows at churches, libraries and schools, tailoring her program to the specific audience and venue, including religious and secular shows. She said it takes about a month to prepare for a show, which includes learning the script for a program and practicing it. She usually videotapes herself practicing to analyze her performance.

One of the most important things is that a performance includes some funny material, she said. She also includes magic, and incorporates music written by her niece and nephew so she can sing duets with the puppets.

"I don't do just 45 minutes of ventriloquism," she said.

Klein also does educational performances. Last year, she did a show for nurses at Hanover Hospital called "Is there a Hilda in the House?"

She used Hilda, a nurse puppet, to act out scenarios demonstrating extraordinary patient care, and the importance of "going the extra mile," she said, and the nurses earned one continuing medical education credit for attending her performance.

Klein said she tries to make learning fun through her ventriloquism, and would like to continue the nursing program at other area hospitals and nursing schools.

"I always try to teach some concept or something, but you can have fun doing it," she said, adding her slogan is "Music, Learning, Laughter and Fun."

Klein does charge a professional fee for her shows, since ventriloquism can get expensive, according to Klein. Nurse Hilda cost about \$600, and

Hazel and Harry cost around \$400 each when she bought them a few years ago, she said, and hard figures can also cost from \$2,000 to \$5,000. Klein said her goal is to retire and concentrate on her ventriloquism. She enjoys entertaining since it is a way to reach out to people and make them feel good.

“To know that I have touched a life, that brings more satisfaction to me than anything else,” she said.

8/30/2008

Homeowner proud of nostalgic memorabilia

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Brian Carey can step out of his shower and get the feeling he's in the Atlantic City of yesteryear.

Seashells on the window sill add to the beach ambience in the bathroom.

The distinctive 'Coca-Cola' sign shows up again and again in Brian Carey's nostalgia-themed kitchen.

No, it's not as if a wave of salt spray hits him in the face.

But he can glance at the dozens of photos he's hung on the walls in his Nanticoke-area home and almost feel the sand between his toes, as if he's at a certain stretch of beach near Kentucky Avenue and the Boardwalk.

That's where Carey's grandmother, the late Margaret Wright Stradling of Glen Lyon, posed in her old-fashioned bathing costume – by today's standards, it's more like a dress – with friends after her high school graduation in 1908.

Stradling liked the place so much she took her own daughter – Carey's mother – there in the '30s.

By the '50s, Carey's parents, the late James W. and Alta Carey, were taking his brother and sister to that same spot near Kentucky Avenue, and by the early '60s, he was part of the family vacations, too.

“I get such a feeling of peace looking at these,” Carey, 47, said. “I never felt happier or more secure than on those vacations with my family.”

“And even though my grandmother passed away before I got to know her, I feel a connection to her, too.”

Laughing as he described himself as “a nostalgia nut,” Carey pointed out some of the other decorative features on the bathroom walls – a vintage box of saltwater taffy, an artist's rendering of a young woman riding a horse as it leapt from a diving platform, a photo of the old Steel Pier and a decades-old letter from the manager of an Atlantic City Hotel touting an affordable room for two at \$4 per night.

And that “included running water.”

“That was a simpler time,” said Carey, who added a collection of seashells to the window sill to complete the look.

Guests often comment on the old-time photos in the bathroom, Carey said, and they tell him “You won't find that ‘Atlantic City’ in Atlantic City anymore.”

Evidence of Carey's affinity for simpler times extends to his kitchen, too, where he's decorated with vintage advertisements for such items as Coca-Cola, Hershey's chocolate, Betty Crocker yellow cake mix and Old Dutch cleanser.

Perhaps the most striking ad is a cut-out of two women, almost life-size, dressed identically and holding trays of muffins.

They were advertised as the “twin efficiency” of Monarch Stoves, and Carey used to notice them in the window of the former Del Woliver Store on Green Street when he walked past in his childhood.

“I'd say, ‘Look at those ladies,’ ” and my mom would say, ‘You know they're not real.’ ”

| Still, they were the kind of giant cut-outs that would appeal to a child, and when the store closed about 40 years ago, he asked for them and the owner let him have them.

They stayed in his mother's attic for years, but Carey recently dug them out and decided to display them on the door to his kitchen, near a sign that had once urged people to drink Coca-Cola in the Cardone Store on Broad Street.

“I still remember how you could walk in there and it always smelled of fresh meats and cheese,” he said.

Lest you think Carey lives in the past, he works in the news business, as the morning drive anchor for 1010 WINS in New York City and as an anchor for ABC News Radio.

He can be heard locally over the WILK radio airwaves.

8/27/2008

Commercial truck assembly plant in Nanticoke to close

Nicholas Sohr - Citizens' Voice

The America's Body Company Inc. commercial truck assembly plant in Nanticoke will close its doors at the end of the work week, and its 61 employees will lose their jobs, according to the plant's manager and state filings.

ABC was acquired by wide-ranging manufacturer Leggett & Platt in 2005.

The nation's faltering economy slowed business and led to the plant's closure, said General Manager Ed Smith.

“Market conditions are the main thing they're looking at,” he said. “We've been extremely slow all year.”

The Nanticoke plant at 375 W. Union St. built van chassis and assembled utility and other trucks.

“It's definitely tough,” Smith said. “This whole area has been affected in the last few years. There's not a whole lot of manufacturing left, and that's a shame.”

Shares of Leggett & Platt closed up 12 cents at \$21.67 Tuesday.

8/26/2008

Officials begin finalizing lease-purchase plan for the Kanjorski Center, Nanticoke

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Luzerne County Community College solicitor Joseph Kluger, Nanticoke City solicitor William Finnegan and Nanticoke General Municipal Authority solicitor Joseph Lach are finalizing a lease-purchase agreement for the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street, future site of the college's Health Sciences Center, authority Chairman Ron Kamowski said Monday.

Since a \$5.6 million federal grant obtained by U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, can't go for a parking garage for the Kanjorski Center, city officials plan to use the money for improvements to East Main and Market streets, including surface parking for LCCC. Facility Design and Development drew up plans and showed them to city officials last week.

The Kanjorski Center has been about 80 percent vacant since its main tenant, HealthNow, moved out in October 2005. The remaining tenant, the state Department of Labor and Industry, will finish relocating to Wilkes-Barre by the end of August, Kamowski said.

8/26/2008

Audit shows Nanticoke making progress on the road to financial recovery with audit report

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Nanticoke's 2007 audit shows the city is making progress in tracking its finances, but there is still a way to go.

"They're much better than they were in the prior year," said Joseph R. Aliciene, whose accounting firm performed the audit. "They're still not done, but considering where they were ..."

Previous years' audits revealed inaccuracies in the city's accounting procedures, records and internal controls over financial transactions.

Accountant Joseph Mazzoni noted in the 2005 audit, "Certain customary accounting records are not maintained, supporting documents are not always readily available, and major events and transactions have gone unrecognized."

Nanticoke was declared Act 47, or financially distressed, in May 2006. It was difficult for Aliciene's firm to do the 2006 audit because records were poorly kept and information was incomplete for most of that year, city Administrator Kenneth P. Johnson said.

Council hired Johnson in May 2007 and Fiscal Manager Holly M. Quinn in August 2006. Aliciene said Nanticoke's bookkeeping is "going in the right direction." Quinn deserves a large part of the credit for that, Johnson said.

"This is the first time we had an audit that really ties down the numbers," he said.

Although Nanticoke is "turning the corner," there is still a lot to do, Aliciene said. Actions city officials need to take include:

- Not having the same employees who send out bills collect money.
- Coming up with a better way to record the sale and purchase of city assets.
- Bonding some city employees who handle money, and increasing the bond amounts for others.
- Adopting a system to back up important files and store the backups in another location in case of emergency.
- Using pre-numbered contractors' licenses and building permits to keep track of them.
- Stronger control over money collected by the police and fire departments for fines, fees and other revenue.

These audit report findings are common ones, Aliciene said. Johnson said he is not concerned about the problems because the city already fixed some of them, such as bonding employees and using pre-numbered permits, and is working on correcting the others.

What does worry Johnson is the earned income tax, which isn't coming in as expected. Aliciene calculated a 2007 budget deficit of \$503,448 in the general fund, which pays the city's bills. There is still a shortfall in earned income tax collection that Johnson predicts should be resolved in time for next year's budget.

But overall, Johnson was pleased with the 2007 audit. "It's a good reflection the city's going in a positive direction," he said.

8/21/2008

Nanticoke officials pleased with early look at improvement plan

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The city's planning firm is moving forward with designing downtown Nanticoke's new look, Nanticoke officials said Wednesday.

Facility Design and Development has drawn up specifications for improvements to Market and East Main streets, particularly adding parking, which is necessary for Luzerne County Community College's move downtown. The college is buying the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street for its health sciences center, and plans to have a new culinary arts center constructed at Market and East Main streets.

"We're getting there," Councilman Jon Metta said after the council meeting.

"The sooner, the better," Councilman Joseph Dougherty replied. "I don't want to see empty lots. I want to be complaining about too many people downtown. That's what I want to see: people and people and people."

Facility Design and Development should finish its work within a week, said township engineer Daryl Pawlush of Pasonick Associates.

"I've seen some of what they've done, and I like it," City Administrator Kenneth Johnson said.

Suggestions include new 13-foot tall decorative streetlights, uniform sidewalks with wheelchair-ramp cuts at intersections and a new entrance corridor on East Main Street near the senior high-rise, according to the specifications.

Parking is a crucial component, since there's not enough for existing downtown businesses, let alone the additional traffic LCCC will bring in.

Sidewalks, which were widened in the 1970s, will be narrowed in places, Metta said. There will be parking next to the Kanjorski Center, plus some more in the rear. Metta said the former CVS building next to the center will also probably be demolished to make room for more parking.

The next step is to have the civil engineering done, before the plans go to the U.S. Department of Transportation, Johnson said. When the federal department approves the streetscaping plans, Nanticoke officials can start accessing the \$5.6 million federal grant U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-

Nanticoke, obtained for a parking garage for LCCC. The money can't be used for a garage, but streetscape improvements are an acceptable use. In other business, paving and sewer work on Orchard Street should begin in about two weeks, then take a week or so to finish, Pawlush said. The city has \$348,008 in Office of Community Development money for Orchard Street and Alden Road.

8/21/2008

Nanticoke shortfall approaching \$700K

Officials want collection agency to explain why earned income tax revenue so far off.

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Council members and the city's financial recovery coordinators want answers from the city's tax collection agency regarding the discrepancy in amount of taxes the city should receive this year.

Berkheimer Associates told city officials they should only receive \$1.745 million in earned income taxes this year, said Councilman Jon Metta, who oversees the city's finances as his part of his council duties.

That's almost \$700,000 less than the city's recovery coordinators anticipated.

City Administrator Kenneth Johnson was directed by council during a budget meeting Wednesday evening to call Berkheimer and request the company send a representative to the first council meeting in September.

The Pennsylvania Economy League, projected the city should receive \$2.4 million in earned income taxes for 2008 because the council tripled the earned income tax rate last year from .5 percent to 1.5 percent.

PEL Senior Research Associate Harry Miller told council that logic states if the city tripled the earned income tax rate, it should increase revenue by triple the amount.

In the past the city received between \$680,000 to \$700,000 a year in earned income taxes, so by tripling it the city should have received about \$2.1 million this year, Miller said. The other \$300,000 would come from people paying at the higher rate of taxes last year, but since the tax rate was implemented late those funds would just be sent to the city this year.

"Getting through this year is doable. What scares us is next year. What are the projections for next year?" Miller said.

So far the city has received a little over a \$1 million in earned income tax revenue this year, including \$84,000 for July, Nanticoke Financial Director Holly Quinn said.

When council members met with a representative from Berkeimer in June, they were told the tax revenue would increase greatly in from July until the end of the year.

But it hasn't.

The city is projecting a total budget shortfall in its general fund of about \$185,000 Metta said.

"We are just going to have to keep watching to make the sure the month-to-month expenditures are still in parameters and make sure more importantly the revenues are coming in. We should still be short but we have to decide how to make it," he said.

Berkheimer is paid a flat rate of 1.9 percent to collect the money.

Metta directed Johnson to also negotiate the rate down to 1.7 percent so the city could keep some of its money.

8/21/2008

The end of the long, hot summer: Swimming pools give way to schools

Pam Urbanski writes "Nanticoke Area Notes" every other Thursday. News items and story ideas can be e-mailed to her at pamurb806@aol.com.

It's the end of August and that means the sights and sounds of summer — children splashing in swimming pools, riding bicycles or skateboards, light summer reading or just enjoying a day with friends — will be replaced with the school bells and buses, teachers and text books.

A full day of classes will be held for students in kindergarten through 12th grade starting Tuesday. Lunch will be served that day. There will be no classes on Friday, Aug. 29, or Monday, Sept. 1.

At Greater Nanticoke Area High School, approximately 950 students will be walking through the front doors on the first day of school. They will be greeted by a new administration as Steven Tripler takes the reins as principal and John Gorham will welcome students as assistant principal.

Gorham said he is looking forward to the challenge. "I'm looking forward to working with an excellent faculty and staff and students," said Gorham. "I'm hoping that our students come back energetic and refreshed, ready to learn."

Juniors and seniors once again will be able to take advantage of dual enrollment. Students who are in the top 15 percent of their class can attend classes at Luzerne County Community College, King's College or Wilkes University for part of the day. "It really is a great program because students can work toward college credits while completing high school credits," Gorham said. "A lot of the students can take core classes they normally would have to take in the first year of college. The other advantage is that the cost to students and their parents is minimal because the program can be offered because of grants."

If a student requires busing, parents/guardians will be able to find out bus stops and times by going to the district Web site at www.gnasd.com and click on department and then transportation. Bus schedules also will be posted on all district buildings with the child/children's home room assignment.

Kindergarten bus assignments, postcards for students whose buses have changed, and new students who are registered with the district should have received a postcard with their bus stops and times.

Parents/guardians are reminded that if their child has moved or they are new to the district and have not been assigned a bus they should call 735-5066.

Slow down, watch for students

With the start of school comes increased traffic. In addition to Greater Nanticoke Area students returning to classes, students who attend Luzerne County Community College also will begin a new school year. I live on Kosciuszko Street and I know first hand what this street will be like on Tuesday.

Nanticoke Police Chief James Cheshinski asks drivers to try to use an alternate route the first week of school. He also wants drivers to be patient and to slow down.

"The start of school means more cars on the road including young drivers, as well as increased pedestrian traffic. Watch for students crossing streets. Please have patience, allow for extra time and slow down," Chief Cheshinski advised.

Birchwood hosting program

Birchwood Nursing Center will hold an awareness program about Alzheimer's Disease and dementia. Estella Parker-Killian, regional director of the Greater Pennsylvania Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association, will present an overview of the book, "Coach Broyles, Playbook for Alzheimer's Caregivers" on Tuesday at 6 p.m. at the center, 395 E. Middle Road.

Activities director Carla Kurkowski decided to bring in a speaker after she realized a program of this type was needed. "When I started working at Birchwood I couldn't believe how involved the family members of our patients were in the care of their loved ones, and how Alzheimer's and dementia affects their lives," she said.

The program is free to the community, as well as family members who have relatives at the center. Signs and symptoms will be discussed. All attendees will receive a book. For more information, call Carla at 735-2973.

'In Memory of Pauly D' benefit

A few weeks ago, Paul Drozdowski of Nanticoke died in a tragic skateboarding accident. Now some friends are coming together to remember Paul and to raise money to offset the cost of his funeral expenses.

Carl Kivler is a member of the band Strength for a Reason, which frequently does shows just to keep kids busy and off the streets.

"There really isn't a lot for kids to do in small communities any more," Kivler said. "We like to give kids an alternative to doing drugs and drinking."

Kivler got to know Drozdowski at the band's shows. "You could always count on Paul being at concerts. That smile was catchy. The last time I talked to Paul he wanted to know when our next concert would be. I told him that in August we would be doing a show with No Turning Back, a band from the Netherlands our band members came to know when we toured Europe. Paul was really excited about the show and so we decided to do the show that he planned on attending in his memory," Kivler explained.

The event is being called "In Memory of Pauly D," as the band called him. The concert will feature five bands and will be held Tuesday beginning at 6 p.m. at Underwood Skate Park in Taylor. T-shirts will be sold and raffles will be held to raise money. Donations also will be accepted.

I knew Paul as a student at Pope John Paul II School. He also worked at CVS, so I would see him often. He had a smile that would light up any room and a great spirit. I will miss him as I know others will as well.

Mass for Peace tonight

The Mother Theresa Social Concerns Ministry of the Parish Community of Holy Child, Holy Trinity, St. Mary of Czestochowa and St. Stanislaus Churches of Nanticoke will hold its third Mass for Peace tonight at 7 at St. Stanislaus Church on West Church Street.

This Mass is celebrated as prayerful hope for an end to violence, especially in war-torn areas. It is also celebrated in honor of those who defend our freedom and in remembrance of those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice. The Mass also will honor members of 109th Field Artillery Battery B who have been deployed to Iraq. Their family members will be in attendance.

For more information, call 735-4833.

8/20/2008

GNA hires tech grant coordinator

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Nanticoke City Councilman Jon Metta was approved for the position of Pennsylvania Information Management System director/federal coordinator for the Greater Nanticoke Area School District Tuesday night.

The school board dealt with finance and personnel issues after last Thursday's meeting ran late.

Board member Pattie Bieski was the sole vote against Metta's appointment, with board member Gary Smith absent. She said she had sat in on interviews for the position, and another candidate had been one of the best in the state for part of the job's responsibilities.

"This is a job that is very important for the district," she said. "I wanted to have the person who could get up and running."

Board member Tony Prushinski followed her comment by saying if there are two equally qualified candidates and one is from the area, he believes the district should go with the local person.

Metta was elected to Nanticoke council in May 2007, and his wife, Karen, is a former teacher for the district.

The board also approved Amanda Schraeder to the secondary science teacher position left open by the resignation of Edward Alessandrini, Superintendent Anthony Perrone confirmed. Alessandrini is facing charges of corruption of minors and furnishing alcohol to minors. According to police, he provided alcohol to three 18-year-old graduates and two 16-year-old students.

In addition, approval was given to appoint Eric Speece to physical education/health teacher and Susan Walton to business education teacher. Art teacher Joseph Figlerski was granted one year of unpaid leave to attend the New York Academy of Art.

Board members Frank Vandermark, Jeff Kozlofski and Cindy Donlin voted against Walton's appointment.

In corrective actions, the board rescinded two motions concerning credit reimbursement and a pay increase, as the names were incorrect on the agenda for last Thursday's meeting.

They also approved the motions for the correct teachers. Denise Roote will receive \$130 for one hour of credit reimbursement and Richard Borofski

will receive an increment increase for achieving his master's degree.

After the meeting, Perrone further discussed the proposed cell phone ban, which would not actually ban the phones from school property because of safety concerns in emergency situations. However, all cell phones are not to be seen, heard or used during school hours.

The district will conduct a focus group meeting Monday, Aug. 25, at 6 p.m. in the high school cafeteria concerning the proposed dress code.

Perrone said the session would not be for complaints.

8/20/2008

Centenarian credits healthy living and enjoying life for her longevity

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Olga Cannon reached a milestone Tuesday by turning 100.

But she hardly acts like she's 100. Last week, she did the polka and the chicken dance at her church's picnic.

Although her family planned a birthday party for her on Saturday, they took her out to dinner Tuesday night at Logan's Roadhouse.

"So, I can throw peanut shells all over the floor," Cannon quipped, while sitting in front of her cake decorated with red, orange and purple flowers.

Cannon credits her longevity to healthy living, and enjoying life by getting out of the house. She still occasionally plays the penny and nickel slots at Mohegan Sun at Pocono Downs and in Atlantic City.

"I watch what I eat. I don't drink. I'm not a smoker. I love fruit and water, but I eat my cake and candy, too," Cannon said.

Cannon was born Olga Shymansky on Aug. 19, 1908, in Lopez, Sullivan County, where she spent the first eight years of her childhood before moving to Plymouth. She remembers picking wild strawberries, swimming in the nearby creek and playing with her neighbor's pigs when she was a child.

Talented at performing cartwheels and handstands in her younger years, she wishes she would have trained to become a gymnast.

The family moved to Northeastern Pennsylvania, where Cannon finished eighth grade before starting her first job at a silk mill in Nanticoke, earning \$3 an hour. Throughout her life, she worked many jobs, everything from making doughnuts in Nanticoke's first doughnut shop to waiting on customers at a general store.

"I wasn't lazy. You have to keep moving. If you don't, you're done," Cannon said.

When she was 24, she married William Henry Cannon, who died in 1974. The couple had seven children — Martha Regulski, Alice Figliomeni, William Cannon, Adrienne Fine, David Cannon, Ronald Cannon and Harold Cannon. She has 13 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren.

"I love life," Cannon said. "I'm going to live to be 120."

8/18/2008

10 miners receive a special thank you

At Nanticoke festival, the men are saluted with polka Mass and check presentations.

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They've seen friends die in the mines, feared for their own lives and worked 16-hour days.

And, on Sunday, 10 local former miners were recognized at the annual Coal Miner's Heritage Day Festival in Nanticoke, for their dozens of years of hard work.

A special polka Mass, featuring music by Eddie Derwin's Polka Naturals, and organized by Alma Berlot of Nanticoke, was held for the miners, followed by a check presentation for each of the miners in recognition of their labors.

"I don't do it for me. I do it for them, and all they've done for us," Berlot said Sunday afternoon. Berlot's father, Edward "Sam Salvatore" Salvatore, died in 1955 after attempting to rescue three fellow coal miners.

"He saved one, and he went back for the second and third, but then the mines collapsed, and the three of them died," Berlot said of her beloved father, whom she says never complained about working long, hard hours. Berlot was just out of high school when her father died, leaving her mother to raise five children.

"He was the best father in the whole wide world. That's why I do this," Berlot said.

John Vengien of Plymouth worked just five years in the Dorrance Colliery in Plymouth before a traumatic experience made him leave the industry.

"A rock fell when we were down in the mines on two of my best friends," said Vengien, 90. "I tried to save the one guy, but he died. That's when I quit."

But despite spending just a few years in the mines, Vengien can tell hundreds of stories of the "dangerous holes" he had worked in, such as when the laborers had to use a hand-crank type of jackhammer to get coal out, and when miners told laborers that six carloads of coal wasn't enough.

"It wasn't easy in those days," Vengien said.

For 20 years, Vengien had worked with local legislators to have the U.S. Postal Service bring out a coal miners stamp.

"We got a letter back that said the stamp isn't a national interest, is regional and is a profession," Vengien said. "So I gave up."

But that didn't stop Vengien from writing a song, which gained a U.S. patent, titled "Coal Miner's Song," which tells of the hardships miners faced on a daily basis, including cave-ins, poor pay and toxic fumes.

Ninety-four-year-old John Oshirak, dubbed the area's "oldest coal miner" Sunday, remembers a lot about the mines, but one story stands out in the West Nanticoke resident's mind the most.

"There was a roof cave-in ... and my boss got killed. It was terrible," said Oshirak, who worked for 35 years in dozens of local mines.

Unlike Vengien and Oshirak, who started out as laborers, who were responsible for removing coal from veins, John Marcinkevicz, 85, of Nanticoke, got his assistant foreman papers in 1957 and was responsible for laborers.

For 21 years, Marcinkevicz worked in local mines until they closed. Then he went to work at Allen Industries, but he can never forget the hard work.

“We’d use four boxes of dynamite, that’s 60 pounds, a day. We’d have 21 (dynamite) holes for one cut (coal vein),” Marcinkevicz said. “Then we’d use air hammers and water hammers to get it out. In all my years in the mines, I never had a man hurt.”

Joseph Russin, 75, of Hanover Township, said he started working in the mines at age 17 and couldn’t complain.

“There was no jobs; that’s what we had to do,” Russin said. “I had a lot of close calls, but I liked it.”

Other miners honored Sunday were Joseph Sunara, 92; Russell Halchak, 92; Joseph Luczak, 84; Durwood Smith, 85; John Shoshirak, 94; and Alvin Danielowicz, 85.

A tent on display Sunday showcased books, artifacts and coal sculptures, and a petition list to encourage the U.S. Postal Service to issue a coal miners stamp.

As of Sunday, Berlot said she had accumulated upwards of 2,000 signatures.

“My work comes from the heart,” Berlot said. “Hopefully, we can do it again next year.”

8/16/2008

**Nanticoke Area parents question need for dress code
Security cited as a concern because weapons can be hidden under baggy clothes.**

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Parents angry about the proposed dress code being considered by the Greater Nanticoke Area School District made their voices heard during Thursday’s board meeting.

The meeting was moved from the normal board meeting room to the high school auditorium to accommodate the large crowd of more than 100 people.

Several times parents shouted out questions to the board members on stage asking why T-shirts and jeans were not allowed as part of the new dress code.

Superintendent Tony Perrone said the safety of the students is his main reason for demanding that students abide by the dress code that calls for casual, dress or corduroy pants and golf shirts or button-down dress shirts for both girls and boys.

The dress code will not take effect until the students return from winter break, Perrone said.

Since the introduction of the proposed dress code last month, Perrone and the school board have given in to some of the parents’ requests because all colors and striped and plaid designs are now allowed. Red and black had previously been eliminated, as well as patterns.

“I think it’s unfortunate that the dress code wasn’t proposed earlier, so it could take effect the first day of school. I think a lot of questions would have been avoided if this was proposed earlier. We have a very lenient dress code,” board member Tony Prushinski said.

Some of the students dress distastefully, and that has ruined it for all the students, Perrone said.

“Parents have to look at what their children are wearing,” he added.

Perrone said a major concern is that baggy clothes and hooded sweatshirts allow students to hide weapons.

Board member Cindy Donlin said the district did address the safety issues when compiling the dress code requirements.

If students dress more conservatively, they will have more respect for themselves and their peers, Perrone said.

One parent told board members she felt the main problem seemed to be security and safety issues. “It’s not the gangs. They are not respecting each other because they are not being respected,” another mother told board members.

Hank Marks, president of the Greater Nanticoke Area Taxpayers’ Forum, told board members in the last 16 years he’s attended meetings he seldom sees interested parents.

“I think the parents have got to get more involved,” Marks said.

8/15/2008

**Festival digs mining heritage
Nanticoke event boasts pierogi-eating contest**

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So, how many pierogies can the average hungry person eat in one sitting?

Jolly Joe (a.k.a. Al Truskowski) and the Bavarians are one of the bands who will bring polka music to the Coal Miners’ Heritage Days Festival in Nanticoke this weekend.

“I think 14 or 15 is pretty much the record,” said Jerry Hudak, a South Valley Chamber of Commerce officer who is helping to organize this weekend’s Coal Miners’ Heritage Days Festival at Patriot Square in downtown Nanticoke.

The festival’s pierogi-eating contest is set for 4:15 Sunday afternoon and involves servings of 12 potato pockets at a time.

“Each contestant is given a dozen pierogies, and that’s dish No. 1,” Hudak said. “As they go through that, they’re handed a second dish and maybe a third.”

The pierogies will be supplied by John “Yogi” Jagodinski, whom Hudak described as “the potato-pancake king.”

The three-day, third-annual festival will include “fun and games in a bazaarlike atmosphere,” Hudak said, as well as a display of mining equipment and a “Coal Miners’ Polka Mass” at 3 p.m. Sunday.

“We want to honor the heritage of the miners,” Hudak said. “I guess 99 percent of the people in the Valley had a miner in the family somewhere.”

Scheduled entertainers include the Kerry Dancers, who will perform Irish step dances, polka bands Jolly Joe & the Bavarians, Joe Stanky & the

Cadets and Eddie Derwin & the Polka Naturals and DJ Rockin' Rich, who will bring a variety of music.

The Top Hat Dancers will dance "in full Victorian regalia, like something out of 'Gone With the Wind.' I think that will be very eye-catching," Hudak said.

The South Valley Chamber of Commerce is a regional group with members ranging from Hanover Township, Plymouth and Nanticoke to Berwick, Mountain Top and Lewisburg. "There are lots of mom-and-pop stores, and we cater to them," Hudak said.

In connection with the festival, committee member Alma Berlot is searching for the area's "oldest coal miner," whom she wishes to honor with a trophy, a banner and \$100.

Her own father lost his life trying to rescue his co-workers after a mining accident, Berlot said, and she appreciates the hard work and sacrifices of the men who earned their living in the area's coal industry.

"They are heroes," she said.

She invites the oldest miner to come to the festival at 4 p.m. today to be recognized.

To nominate someone before then, call 735-0448.

If you go

What: Coal Miners' Heritage Days Festival

Where: Patriot Square, downtown Nanticoke

When: 4 to 10 p.m. today, 2 to 10 p.m. Saturday, 2 to 9 p.m. Sunday

Today's activities: Opening ceremony at 4 p.m., Kerry Dancers 5:30 to 6 p.m., Jolly Joe & The Bavarians 6 to 10 p.m.

Saturday's activities: DJ Rockin' Rich 2 to 3:30 p.m., Top Hat Dancers 3:30 to 4:30 p.m., DJ Rockin' Rich 4:30 to 6 p.m., Joe Stanky & the Cadets 6 to 10 p.m.

Sunday's activities: Coal Miners' Polka Mass at 3 p.m., pierogi-eating contest 4:15 p.m., Eddie Derwin & the Polka Naturals 5 to 9 p.m.

More festival info: 735-6990

8/14/2008

LCCC moves to lease, then buy Kanjo center

Solicitor given OK to negotiate as college plans to put Health Sciences Center downtown.

slong@timesleader.com

Plans to move parts of Luzerne County Community College into downtown Nanticoke are moving forward.

Read more Progress articles

The LCCC Board of Trustees on Tuesday unanimously authorized the college's solicitor, Joe Kluger, to negotiate the lease and eventual purchase of the Kanjorski Center on the college's behalf.

"This is an important step because this is the step that the college basically commits itself to tell our solicitor, go ahead and make the deal happen,"

LCCC Board President Tom Leary said.

Last summer, the college announced plans to expand its Health Sciences Center by moving it into the downtown Kanjorski Center facility on Main Street by next January.

Now, Leary thinks that if the negotiations are wrapped up within the next few weeks, students could be studying in the new facility sometime in the summer of 2010. It should take approximately 13 months to complete renovations for the Kanjorski Center.

It's unknown exactly when the negotiations for the Kanjorski Center will be finalized, but Kluger has been told to work as quickly as possible.

Once Kluger receives the proposed contract from the Nanticoke Municipal Authority, he will review the legal documentation and then present it to the trustees for their input. The authority owns the building and has permission to negotiate its sale on behalf of the city.

The LCCC board of trustees must approve any contract terms and price before any sale can be completed.

Supporters of the project see this as a revitalization boom for Nanticoke because it will inject more people into the city's main business district.

"It's been a long time coming and the college has been waiting for the city to get its ducks in a row. They've been very patient," Nanticoke Mayor John Bushko said.

Plans to move the college's culinary arts center into downtown Nanticoke is moving forward, Leary said. It will be the second phase of the expansion-into-downtown project.

The college's culinary arts department personnel, deans and vice presidents approve of the designs submitted so far for the culinary arts center.

8/14/2008

Nanticoke administrator resigning for new job close to home

Resignation, effective Sept. 5, surprises city officials, who now must find a replacement.

slong@timesleader.com

Nanticoke City Administrator Kenneth Johnson is resigning, effective Sept. 5.

He made what he called a difficult decision early Tuesday morning and sent his resignation notice to council members Wednesday.

The decision to leave the city was a financial and personal one for Johnson, who has gotten a job closer to his home in Northumberland County.

Still, it will be hard for him to leave a position he truly enjoyed, especially with so many projects – including the downtown streetscape, Kanjorski Center sale and repaving – nearing completion.

"For this city to accomplish what it has in a little over a year is amazing," he said.

Council members were surprised by his decision.

Calling the situation “very sudden and abrupt,” Councilman Jim Litchofski said filling Johnson’s position will definitely be a challenge. Mayor John Bushko favors advertising the job vacancy immediately because it could take months to find a qualified applicant to fill Johnson’s post. It is hard to find city administrators who are experienced in dealing with Act 47 cities, Bushko said. As stipulated in the Municipalities Financial Recovery Act, also known as Act 47, the city was declared financially distressed by the state in May 2006.

“I think council is just going to have to step up to the plate until we find a replacement. The financing is the most crucial part, but (fiscal director) Holly Quinn is still there and she handles the finances,” Bushko said.

The city also is negotiating contracts with the police and fire departments. Bushko doesn’t anticipate those talks to be interrupted because the lawyers have been so heavily involved in the discussions.

Pennsylvania Economy League, the city’s recovery plan coordinator, will continue to work with the city.

“They would probably be wise to bring someone in to help them (with daily administrative issues), but that would be up to them,” Johnson said. Council members could hire a firm to appoint a temporary city administrator, but that would likely be ineffective with the city’s financial restraints. Such a firm was used before Johnson was hired in May 2007, but that firm’s cost was much higher than what the city paid Johnson. Council will discuss the issue during its meeting Wednesday.

The city must not only fill the city administrator position, but also Johnson’s city clerk position.

In November, Johnson took over city clerk duties after Anthony Margelewicz resigned the post. A city clerk maintains a municipality’s records and keeps the minutes from each meeting.

Johnson, who has worked for Nanticoke for 15 months, has been hired as business manager at Rockwell Assisted Living in Milton Borough, less than a mile from his home.

He has been commuting two hours roundtrip each day.

His new job will save him gas money and provide more time to spend with his wife, he said.

8/13/2008

Nanticoke administrator resigns

After 18 months on the job, Nanticoke’s administrator is calling it quits — but he says he’s going to miss the city.

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Kenneth Johnson will leave the city Sept. 5 to start a job as business administrator for an assisted care facility less than a mile from his house in Milton Borough, Northumberland County. The distance — Johnson drove two hours round-trip each day — was a main factor in his decision.

“The primary reason I’m doing this is I have an opportunity that was close to home,” he said. “This was not an easy decision, not only for me, but for my wife. Most people who know me knew I really enjoyed being the city administrator.”

City officials just found out.

“I’m happy for him, if it’s something that’s closer to home, he can spend more time with his family,” Mayor John Bushko said. “We got a lot done while he was here. I wish him well.”

Johnson said the new position came up suddenly, and he couldn’t turn it down. But he said he will miss Nanticoke, particularly watching downtown plans come to fruition.

Johnson is departing at a critical time, Councilman James Litchkofski said. Police regionalization discussions are in progress, new contracts are being negotiated for the city’s police and fire departments, income tax is not coming in at forecasted levels, and downtown revitalization plans are coming together.

“Tough decisions have to be made. Ken’s leaving now is another wrinkle in the plan,” Litchkofski said. “His knowledge and expertise, his experience were very helpful, and it’s regrettable he has to leave at this time.”

Litchkofski said it will be difficult to find a replacement, because there aren’t many people with municipal administrative experience, particularly in a financially distressed city.

Johnson also served as clerk, and the city needs to find a new one as soon as possible, Bushko said. He said it is an important job because duties include taking minutes at the meetings and keeping records.

Council appointed Johnson administrator at the May 2, 2007 meeting. He was working for the Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance, Plymouth Township’s financial recovery coordinator, at the time. He retired from the state Department of Community and Economic Development.

8/13/2008

LCCC gives solicitor go-ahead to negotiate agreement for Kanjorski Center

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Luzerne County Community College board of trustees gave its solicitor a green light to seek a formal agreement for lease-purchase of the Kanjorski Center in downtown Nanticoke.

For months, LCCC and Nanticoke have discussed the college moving into the center, which has been vacant since 2005. The college plans to use the building for a health sciences center.

College President Thomas Leary said this step will finalize the process.

“This tells the solicitor go ahead and make this happen,” Leary said.

If plans progress as hoped, classes would begin in the Kanjorski Center in summer 2010. The solicitor is being asked to work quickly, now that the board has approved.

It will take an estimated 390 days of construction to have the building ready. He would not speculate on a price for the agreement.

LCCC plans to be closely involved with the parking situation for the building. The health sciences center would need approximately 250 parking spaces.

Originally, a parking garage was planned, but when it was discovered that a \$5.6 million grant could not be used for it Nanticoke began exploring surface parking possibilities.

The board also approved a motion by trustee Dr. Thomas O'Donnell to record all bills for payment as part of the monthly meeting to make the records opened. Any bill the school pays should be included and not simply a summary, he said.

"I'm looking for complete openness, which would mean every check issued by this institution would be made open," he said.

With the same intention of openness and responsibility, the board also approved a Code of Conduct that includes points such as proper preparation for meetings, avoiding conflict of interest and maintaining confidentiality of privileged information.

An emergency book and tuition fund is being established to assist students struggling with illness, family issues or other difficult situations, said Sandra Nicholas, executive director of the LCCC Foundation Inc. Last year, the school gave about \$133,000 in scholarships, and this year it has given about \$171,000. In addition, it gave students about \$7,000 for help with the type of situations for which the emergency fund is being established to help. Already this year, about \$3,000 has gone to students in those situations, she said.

"As you all know the cost of a book today, it can be the difference between coming to class and not," she said.

8/11/2008

Greater Nanticoke Area parent calls proposed dress code unfair

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If the Greater Nanticoke Area School District implements a stricter, uniform-like dress code this year, it won't be without a fight from local parents and students who aren't in favor of all the changes.

Whether they don't agree with the colors, styles or overall idea of the code, opponents want the school board to know how they feel.

Parent Michelle Pegarella's front porch proudly displays a sign stating the dress code is unfair and parents should write and call school representatives and attend the Aug. 14 school board meeting. She has also posted signs downtown and by the post office.

It's not that she's against the code, but finds the choices too limiting, she said. In an amended version of the proposed dress code, her suggestions include allowing additional colors, jeans, collar-less shirts that don't have "low cut or plunging necklines" and dresses that comply with the rules for shirts and skirts.

"My daughter is going into pre-k, and I want her to look like a little girl," Pegarella said. "... When I did take Katie school shopping she told me, 'Mommy, why do I have to wear clothes that are for brother?' and 'I want to wear pink, pretty clothes that are for girls and not for boys.'"

Plans for some protests are circling among parents and students, such as wearing clothing inside out or walking out of classes, and others are signing a petition to stop the dress code.

Parent Sandy Swalla attended the special school board meeting on Tuesday to protest the dress code, but it wasn't brought up. She said she plans on being at the board meeting Thursday and bringing other parents with her.

It would be better if the board wasn't trying to implement this after the school year started, she said.

Seventh-grader Dylan Monelli said he is completely against the code and doesn't want to follow it, if approved.

"I never dress in polos and khakis," he said. "It makes me feel uncomfortable."

His sister, Marissa Monelli, who is going into the ninth grade, doesn't think a stricter dress code will make students more equal and focused on what they wear. If everyone is wearing the same style of clothing, then students will judge each other on what brand of polo or pants someone is wearing, or another aspect of dress.

"If we aren't going to be judged on our clothing, we're going to be judged by our hair or shoes," she said.

A copy of the proposed dress code is on the Greater Nanticoke Area School District's Web site , www.gnasd.com. The board must read the proposal three times before accepting it.

8/11/2008

Nanticoke Area may ban cell phones

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Some students have been caught using cell phones to cheat on tests, and the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board is looking into banning student cell phones altogether to stop the problem.

Whether they are texting multiple-choice answers or taking photos of tests with camera phones, students have several ways of sharing information. There is no reason for students to have the cell phones during school, board President Jeff Kozlowski said. There are land line phones in the school they can use. Students are already not supposed to have cell phones with them at school.

While there are some reasons students (and their parents) might want to have phones, such as safety and staying connected, Kozlowski said there are too many negatives in allowing them.

Nationwide, schools are banning students from having cell phones during school, similar to what Greater Nanticoke is looking into. However, one Pennsylvania school district decided against a ban a few weeks ago.

But while the Shippensburg Area School District, which is southeast of Harrisburg, voted to allow phones, they are supposed to be off and out of sight during classes.

Getting the grade

While school isn't always the first thing on teenagers' minds, a study included in the "State of Our Nation's Youth" released this week suggests that

getting good grades is the biggest pressure for teens.

The study surveyed about 1,000 students on several topics, including school. The results show 45 percent of teenagers say pressure to get good grades is a major problem for them.

In addition, the study found the average student spends 8.2 hours on homework each week, with 21 percent of the students in the study saying they spent more than 10 hours a week. In 2005, the study found 12 percent spent more than 10 hours on homework.

The study was done by Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans, a Washington-based, nonprofit education association.

8/11/2008

Nanticoke legal suit focuses on rent

City intends to sue, claiming ambulance association owes it cash. Association denies claim.

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The City of Nanticoke plans to sue the Nanticoke Fire Department Community Ambulance Association for non-payment of rent.

Association President Bernie Norieka said the association will fight the case because it has paid all money owed to the city. He says this lawsuit is politically motivated.

During last week's council meeting, members of council directed City Administrator Kenneth Johnson to file a small claims court case against the association to recover the city's money. Johnson expects the case will be filed this week in Judge Donald Whitaker's court.

Councilman Joe Dougherty, who plans to run for mayor in this year's elections, contends the association owes the city \$4,600 for space it rented to store three of its vehicles at the Nanticoke Fire Department headquarters on East Ridge Street.

"They made several payments, but they were always behind," Dougherty said.

Until last December, two of the association's ambulances and its former rescue vehicle, which was sold to the city last September, were stored in the headquarters. It's unknown when the association began renting the space. Johnson confirmed there is a lease, but it was never signed.

Johnson admits it's hard to know what the association owes, if anything, because in the past the city has made many deals with just a verbal agreement and handshake.

Documentation from the city entitled "EMS Rent Report" shows the association paid four checks totaling \$10,600 in rent to the city from November 2006 through September 2007. City records show the association owes \$4,600, including rent from October 2007 to December 2007.

Norieka said he has documentation to prove the association does not owe the money.

"They are doing this to an ambulance company that was nearly bankrupt. In other cities it is unheard of to charge the association money. The cities usually pay the ambulance," Norieka said.

When he became association president in October 2006, Norieka sent the city a letter requesting the rent be reduced from \$800 to \$675 monthly because at the time the city was borrowing the rescue vehicle for free. It is ludicrous for the association to pay rent for the space the rescue vehicle occupied, when the city was using it free of charge, Norieka said.

He also claims the association was overbilled because it was charged for three months of rent from October through December 2007 when the ambulance company was attempting to move out of the fire department headquarters.

Last September, the association purchased the former Washington Hose Company station, at the corner of South Hanover and Washington streets, from the city by paying the appraised value of \$87,500 for the approximately 3,000-square-foot building.

Norieka, who was on council at the time, abstained from voting on the sale. Since the association didn't have the full amount in cash, the association provided the rescue truck to the city for \$40,000 as a down payment and paid the remaining \$47,500 in cash.

All the necessary tools and equipment were included with the truck during the sale. The truck including the tools was valued by Norieka and Johnson as being worth at least \$80,000. This sale was documented in writing.

The association wanted to move into its new facility by October, but was delayed because the city could not provide a clear title and deed to the property until December, Norieka said.

Dougherty said he didn't know there were any problems securing deeds and titles, but maintains the association was still occupying space in the building.

Norieka and the association's other board members felt everything was paid in full. He declined to show the paperwork, saying he preferred to present it to the judge.

Norieka says the ambulance company is being targeted as part of a political backlash because he intends to run for mayor of Nanticoke in this year's elections. Norieka served on council from April until the end of December 2007 when he filled the unexpired term of former councilman William O'Malley.

"Now because Dougherty has aspirations to run for mayor, he is trying to make himself a hero by attacking a nonprofit association," Norieka said. Dougherty said he doesn't have any vendetta against Norieka, but says he was elected to watch out for the citizens' best interests, which includes ensuring all debts to the city are paid.

Because some of the council members weren't sure if the association owed any more money, a deal was proposed to allow the association to work off the debt by providing educational health seminars to the school district and residents in the city's housing authority units.

Council member Jon Metta favored this idea, but Dougherty maintained the city should collect the money instead. Metta declined to be interviewed for this article.

"We couldn't give (community service) to any other business that owes the city money. If someone doesn't pay their garage fee we take them to the magistrate," Dougherty said.

The ambulance association will still perform community service duties as a service to the city's residents, Norieka said.

Although the ambulance company carries the city's name, it does not receive any funds from the city or its taxpayers. It is a nonprofit company with

volunteer members serving as a board of directors that obtains money from billing insurance companies and Medicare when patients are transported to area hospitals.

The company has now improved its financial situation and is "barely breaking even," Norieka said.

8/11/2008

Nanticoke woman rolls for gold in Wheelchair Games

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Because of Sue Paterno, Doris Merrill competed in the Wheelchair Games for the last nine years.

So it was thanks to the famed coach's wife that Merrill was the oldest participant at this year's 28th Annual National Veterans Wheelchair Games, where Merrill won four gold medals and one silver medal.

In the late 1990s, when Merrill attended a Penn State football game, she had a tough time getting her wheelchair up the large hill to Beaver Stadium. Sue Paterno — wife of Penn State coach Joe Paterno — noticed her struggling up the hill and offered to find Merrill a parking spot closer to the stadium. After being starstruck at meeting the coach's wife, Merrill began talking with Paterno, who encouraged Merrill to start exercising. It would be the best thing to help Merrill continue her life with multiple sclerosis, the debilitating disease that causes her to need her wheelchair.

"She told me, 'Why don't you swim?' And I tried it," Merrill said. "It started to get me really involved. I found out I can do a lot more."

Last week, Merrill, 84, of Nanticoke, returned home from Omaha, Neb., where the games were held July 25 to 29. At the Wheelchair Games, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, she competed in the Power Chair 200 race, the Air Gun competition, the Motorized Slalom, Ramp-Bowling and the Motorized Rally.

Of the 498 participants in the competition, she was the oldest by 34 days, and she couldn't have been happier about her age.

"I love it. I just love being the oldest person there," Merrill said. "God's been good to me."

Despite discovering she had multiple sclerosis in 1957, Merrill didn't have much trouble until 20 years after her diagnosis. After serving the country in World War II, she taught in the business department at then-Wilkes College and the Greater Nanticoke Area School District.

The symptoms of her multiple sclerosis differ from day to day. She said the best medicine in her fight against the disease has been a positive attitude and supportive friends and family.

Her son Paul Merrill usually takes her to the games, and he said he saw a marked difference in her after she decided to participate.

"She really enjoys it. She likes seeing people she met at the games and seeing new people," Paul Merrill said. "It keeps her alive. It gives her something to look forward to."

She used to compete in the games as a representative of the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Plains Township, where she receives her care. But now she participates as part of the team from the VA hospital in Philadelphia, because of a lack of funding.

Her favorite event is probably bowling, but air guns and the racing events follow close behind. During the Power Chair 200 race, Merrill wears a helmet, buckles her seat belt in the wheelchair, puts the chair in the fastest gear, and lets it roll.

She isn't sure how fast she goes, but she gets nervous. This year she went faster than she ever did before — bringing home the gold in the event.

"Let me tell you, did I slow down after that!" Merrill said with a laugh. "I was sweating streaks."

She also received the gold in the Air Gun competition, Ramp-Bowling and the Motorized Rally. In the Motorized Slalom she received the silver medal, because she got distracted during the event and received a five-second penalty for going off the slalom course.

"I'm just grateful that I won what I won," Merrill said. "(The games) are a bridge to the walking world. It's such a great thing to be accepted."

Each year she goes, her friends at the Nanticoke Senior Center want to know how she did — and she always shows off her medals.

Next year's games will be held in Spokane, Wash. Merrill wants to attend the games, but her participation depends on how well she is and if her family can take her. She learned a few lessons from the games, and knows her life has been better because she has participated.

"You never quit no matter how down you are," Merrill said.

8/8/2008

Nanticoke council approves written agreements with two employees

City Council previously offered salaries and benefits with just a verbal agreement.

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City council unanimously approved employment agreements for two employees during the Wednesday night meeting.

The agreements between the city and Holly Quinn, fiscal manager, and Joe Kordek, building inspector/code enforcement officer, detail the employees' salaries, work descriptions and benefits.

Previously, the council hired employees and offered salaries and benefits with a verbal agreement.

Kordek, who was hired in October 2007, is paid \$35,000 annually. Quinn earned the same amount in 2007, but her pay rose to \$38,300 this year to include a \$2,500 performance increment and \$800 salary increase outlined in the city's financial recovery plan.

The Pennsylvania Economy League, which serves as the city's financial consultant, developed the plan that gives all employees an \$800 pay increase this year and next year.

At the onset of their employment, according to the agreements, Kordek and Quinn received 10 days of vacation time. For every year they work they will receive 10 days of vacation that can be carried over to the next year, up to a maximum of 30 days, Mayor John Bushko said.

Quinn and Kordek will receive nine paid holidays, four personal days and may participate in the city's non-uniformed pension plan, health insurance, sick leave/life and disability insurance plans and receive reimbursement for mileage and costs of attending job-related seminars or conferences.

The agreements will be in effect indefinitely for both employees.

Resident Teresa Sowa said she didn't approve of the city using verbal agreements. She was the only resident to address the council on the issue. "Anybody can say you said this or that, if it's not in writing," Sowa said. "Anybody can paint the picture into a totally different view. Once it's documented on paper, there it sits."

Sowa also said the negotiations should be conducted in public at open meetings, but the state allows municipalities to conduct personnel issues in closed meetings.

Councilman Brent Makarczyk said the city has made great strides.

"When you look at last year, there were a majority of the contracts signed where there was no public input or public vote. We are letting the public know what we are doing. We feel, as a majority, the agreements are fair to the employee and taxpayers," Makarczyk said.

Sowa said the immediate vacation time was not proper.

"I don't think that's right for them or any employee that first starts a job. They don't do that in any big corporation or anywhere else," she said.

City Administrator Kenneth Johnson will meet with Police Chief James Cheshinski when the chief returns from vacation to negotiate his employment agreement.

8/7/2008

Loaned fire engine arrives in Nanticoke

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The Hanover section of Nanticoke regained its fire truck on Wednesday night.

Shortly before the council meeting ended at about 8 p.m., Nanticoke Fire Chief Mike Bohan arrived in town with a loaned fire engine from Milton Borough in Northumberland County.

The truck from Milton is a 1980 fire engine that will be stored at the city's main fire headquarters on East Ridge Street, across from City Hall.

That allowed a 1974 Hahn pumper truck to be returned to the Hanover Hose Company headquarters on Espy Street in the Hanover section of the city.

The truck from Hanover was originally moved to the main station in May after the engine in the city's 1977 fire truck broke down.

Repairs proved to be too expensive on the 31-year-old unit, so it was put out of service permanently.

Milton is not charging the city any fees to borrow the truck, but Nanticoke did have to add the apparatus to its insurance policy.

It's unknown how long Nanticoke will keep the truck. Milton can ask for the truck to be returned at any time under an agreement agreed to by both communities' leaders.

City council approved paying off a lease on the city's 2001 fire engine Wednesday night using remaining funds from previous Community Development Block Grants of 1999 and 2003. The vote was unanimous. The payoff amount was more than \$70,000, but an exact figure was not given.

City Administrator Kenneth Johnson said the city saved an estimated \$8,000-\$10,000 over a three-year period in interest costs by paying off the truck early. The lease was scheduled to continue until 2011.

8/7/2008

Lexington Village owner accused of defaulting on millions in loans

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A Philadelphia bank has filed suit against the owner and developer of a housing complex off of Kosciuszko Street, claiming he is in default on millions of dollars worth of loans.

Dominick Ortolani, owner of Lexington Village, owes more than \$7 million to Royal Bank America, according to civil complaints filed in Luzerne County Court.

The documents were filed on July 9, by the West Chester law firm of Unruh, Turner, Burke and Frees.

Ortolani is in default on three notes the bank issued in 2005 and in 2007. In December 2005, he borrowed \$4.84 million, and in August 2007 he borrowed \$315,000. He also borrowed \$982,000 in October 2007, the filings indicated.

After court costs and late fees, his balance is now \$7,272,210.48.

Attorney John K. Fiorillo, who represents Royal Bank America, said recently he could not comment further on the suit.

The Lexington Village development, first proposed in 2004, was conceived as 55-unit independent senior living community, complete with a recreational center, and a 75-person Alzheimer's facility. The project was expected to cost \$13 million, with the majority of that funding coming from private sources.

There was, however, some public money tied into the project. Since the development is constructed on an old strip mining pit, Nanticoke City secured a \$260,000 grant to reclaim the site for development.

State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, recently helped secure an additional \$400,000 from the Department of Community and Economic Development, but he said that grant has not yet been released to Ortolani.

"We're very concerned about the finances of this project, particularly since a great deal of public time and money is involved," said Yudichak. "The developer has to sit down with the city and the commonwealth to explain where he is at financially."

The recreation center is not complete, and construction has not yet begun on the Alzheimer's unit. All the townhomes are built, but the complex is only half full. There are no owner-occupied units in the development, and tenants said they paid between \$900 and \$1,000 a month in rent.

When reached by telephone on Friday, Ortolani called the judgement a "temporary setback." The loans matured, and he is in the process of

refinancing them through a different lender.

“Banks today, they’re all jittery,” Ortolani said. “Maybe if times were better they would extend.”

His tenants, however, are concerned he is in financial trouble. They are now sending their rent checks directly to Royal Bank America, and many have received water bills. Water service was supposed to be included in the rent, tenant Bob Bernatovich said.

“It seems everything has come to a standstill,” said Bernatovich.

His neighbor, Susan Stanfield, said the access roads were supposed to be paved. As of yet, they have not been.

Stanfield has also noticed that Ortolani is now renting apartments to younger people. The development was originally conceived as a 55-and-over community, she said.

A subcontractor on the project, Mark Callahan of Kingston, recently filed suit against Lexington Village L.P. He claims he was never paid for work he did on the apartment complex, Luzerne County court documents indicated.

Ortolani owes Callahan more than \$230,000, plus interest, for labor and materials, according to the suit.

Yudichak was unsure of the status of the project, but Ortolani said it will go on as scheduled. He expects to have new financing secured within the month, and construction on the Alzheimer’s unit to commence in the fall.

8/6/2008

109th group returns after training with advanced, new cannon

editintern@timesleader.com

The soldiers of Bravo Battery, 109th Field Artillery, came home on Tuesday – even though it’s just for a short time.

The group returned to the Nanticoke Armory after 27 days of training at Camp Shelby in Mississippi. They arrived by bus at about 12:30p.m.

The Nanticoke-based National Guard unit was being trained to use the Army’s newest and most technologically advanced towed howitzer cannon, the M777A2. The National Guard Battery will use the howitzer during its deployment early next year in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

That training puts the local unit in an elite position: It is the only field artillery unit to possess and be proficient in firing the Army’s latest two cannons, the M109A6 and the M777A2, said Capt. Joe Ruotolo, battery commander.

The M777A2 is a towed system as opposed to a self-propelled cannon such as the Paladin, which the unit currently employs.

Staff Sgt. Joseph Novackowski of Kingston said it was “simply a matter of mastering a different set of gunnery techniques. The men of Bravo Company handled that with ease.”

The soldiers were pleased to be back in Pennsylvania. They will be placed on active duty Sept. 19 and will return to Camp Shelby.

“We’re back for 45 days, then it’s back to the heat and humidity,” said Brian Zins, who is a non-commissioned officer in charge of nuclear, biological and chemical operations.

The soldiers’ families were grateful for the chance to see their loved ones before they are mobilized to prepare for combat duty, sometime in September.

“We’re very happy to have him home, very proud,” said Dina Hughes, wife of Sgt. 1st Class Mike Hughes. “We’re glad to know they’re safe and sound. Having them leaving for Iraq soon is the scary part. We all just want them to get home safe.”

The soldiers will return to Pennsylvania again sometime before Christmas and then leave Jan. 2 for Fort Dix, N.J. From there they will be deployed to Iraq.

Firing the new howitzer in Iraq will mark the first time since World War II that an element of the 109th Field Artillery division will deliver artillery fire in combat.

8/6/2008

Nanticoke officially moves h.s. principal

Mary Ann Jarolen has sued the district over her transfer to elementary school position.

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The Greater Nanticoke Area School Board on Tuesday ratified the transfer of former high school principal Mary Ann Jarolen to her new position as assistant principal at the K.M. Smith and Kennedy elementary schools. Jarolen will oversee pre-school through second grade.

Although the district sent Jarolen a letter on Jan. 25 notifying her she would be moved, she was not actually transferred until April 10, when the district temporarily removed her from the high school post.

Jarolen has sued the district in an attempt to fight the reassignment. Court documents show she was removed from her high school post due to state test scores that have steadily dropped during her tenure as principal.

She was unable to be reached for comment on Tuesday night.

Board directors Bob Raineri and Frank Vandermark were the only two members who voted against transferring Jarolen.

Vandermark said he does not agree with the demotion because the district’s low performance on the state standardized tests is not just one person’s responsibility.

Jarolen is being replaced by Stu Tripler, a principal from the Bangor Area School District in Northampton County.

School board member Patricia Bieski called Tripler “dynamic” after serving on a committee that interviewed him for the position.

“First and foremost, he cares about the kids,” she said.

Tripler, who will be paid an annual salary of \$80,000, grew up in Luzerne County and wanted to return to his roots.

Board President Jeff Kozlofski, Raineri and Vandermark were the only members to vote against hiring Tripler.

Kozlofski said he was not able to take part in the interview, and Kozlofski thinks there were qualified candidates from within the district who could

fill the slot. Nanticoke resident and taxpayer James Samselski questioned if Tripler would be the best candidate for the job. "The vote was not unanimous, but that just tells us there were questions unanswered," Samselski said. "This man is going to set policy and make personnel decisions for all the entire high school. With three dissenting votes, that tells me board members were not given enough information about Tripler."

But Samselski said he also might be mistaken and Tripler could be best person to oversee the high school.

Superintendent Tony Perrone said Tripler's salary is about in the middle range of what other principals are paid at comparable schools.

The board also accepted high school assistant principal Brian McCarthy's resignation because he was offered a better-paying job in another district. His resignation is effective Aug. 21.

John Gorham, a physical education teacher at the high school, was promoted to replace McCarthy. Gorham lives in Kingston.

Board member Tony Prushinski and Raineri voted against hiring Gorham.

A woman who teaches at K.S. Smith Elementary was also interviewed for the assistant principal job, along with Gorham.

They are both equally qualified to be assistant high school principal, Prushinski said.

Prushinski believes the other teacher should have been promoted because she resides within the district's boundaries. She lives in Conygham Township.

8/6/2008

Jarolen reappointed elementary principal at Nanticoke Area

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The Greater Nanticoke Area School Board reappointed Mary Ann Jarolen as elementary principal by a 7-2 vote on Tuesday night.

Board members Bob Raineri and Frank Vandermark voted against the reappointment.

The board held a special meeting to vote on personnel matters Tuesday. Jarolen could not be reached for comment after the meeting.

High school principal since 2005, Jarolen was demoted in April because of poor test scores, according to the board.

She took the matter to court because there was not a required hearing before the action, and won an injunction prohibiting the transfer until the administrative hearing was held.

According to Tuesday's vote, Jarolen will be principal of prekindergarten through second grade at K.M. Smith and John F. Kennedy elementary schools, board President Jeff Kozlofski said.

"I think you can't blame one person for test scores," Raineri said. "If that's the case, they should all be held accountable."

The board also accepted the resignation of Brian McCarthy, high school assistant principal, who has been filling in for Jarolen. He is accepting a better offer at Delaware Valley School District in Milford, Kozlofski said.

To fill the available positions, the board approved Stu Tripler as high school principal at a salary of \$80,000 and John Gorham as secondary assistant principal at a salary of \$68,000.

Raineri, Vandermark and Kozlofski voted against Tripler's appointment, and Tony Prushinski and Raineri voted against Gorham's appointment. Kozlofski said after the meeting that while he had not been in the interview with Tripler, he thought there were people in the district who could do a good job. Eight people applied, some of whom were already employed by the district, he said.

There were two very good, equal candidates for the secondary assistant principal, Prushinski said, one of whom was a woman already teaching kindergarten at K.M. Smith Elementary School.

She lives in the Greater Nanticoke Area School District, and Gorham does not, he said.

"I truly think if we have two equal candidates, then we should go with the girl (in the district)," Prushinski said.

The next regular board meeting is Aug. 14 at 7 p.m. at the high school. The proposed dress code will be discussed, Kozlofski said. The board is also looking into starting a no-cell-phone policy for students because some have been caught using cell phones to cheat, he said.

8/3/2008

Coal Miner's Heritage Festival Aug. 15-17

The South Valley Chamber of Commerce will sponsor the Coal Miner's Heritage Festival Aug. 15-17 at Patriot Square, Broad and Market streets, Nanticoke.

An artifact tent will be featured with coal memorabilia donated by Laura Keating, whose father was historian Joseph Keating.

A search is under way for the oldest coal miner who will receive a gift of \$100 and a coal miner trophy.

Gene Gomolka will autograph his book "Coal Cracker's Son." Anyone wishing to purchase a book may call 735-0448.

There will be food, crafts and games. A polka Mass will be held Sunday at 3:30 p.m. at the park.

John "Yogi" Jagodzinski is coordinator of the event.

Chamber officers are Jerry Hudak, president; Dan Kowalski, vice president; and Linda Prushinski, secretary.

Alma Berlot and Laura Keating are in charge of coal mining memorabilia.

Karen Dougherty and John Stanky are members of the planning committee.

8/2/2008

Leggett & Platt to close Nanticoke plant; 61 jobs to be lost

Times Leader

Leggett & Platt announced it will be closing its Nanticoke manufacturing plant at the end of August and 61 employees will be out of a job. The facility supplies and installs van bodies, dump bodies and utility bodies for various industries, according to a news release from the company. The reason for the closing, according to the release, is due to business and economic reasons, and it is not related to the abilities and productivity of the employees.

8/2/2008

Neighbors to help shine the light on crime

mmcginley@timesleader.com

The country may be a bit brighter Tuesday evening.

People are being asked to turn on their porch lights at dusk and keep them on throughout the night in observance of National Night Out, an initiative designed to raise crime and drug awareness, strengthen neighborhood unity and generate support for anti-crime programs.

Locally, the Neighborhood Crime Watch in Nanticoke will host its annual event at 4 p.m. at the St. John's picnic grounds on Front Street in the Hanover section. Food and soft drinks will be served and speakers, such as District Attorney Jackie Musto Carroll, will talk about crime issues.

"I think that the general public has to be made aware of the importance of crime prevention," said Nick Pucino, coordinator for the Nanticoke festivities. "It's a night where everyone can get together and celebrate a good night of fun."

Pucino said the largest crowd he's seen attend in the last five years was about 3,000. Last year, the turnout was a bit sparse because of the extreme heat, but he's hopeful more residents will turn out this year since the NEPA Task Force will etch vehicle's VIN numbers on car windows to deter auto theft.

"The VIN plate can be easily taken off inside of the car, but if the number is etched on each car window, then the glass will have to be removed," said Rich Zarzycki, crime watch president.

According to the National Night Out Web site, families and neighbors across the country will host block parties, cookouts, parades and other activities to commemorate the day.

A press release issued by the National Association of Town Watch, which sponsors the day, says any municipality, law enforcement agency, crime prevention organization, community group or neighborhood association can register to participate and will receive an organizational kit with planning suggestions, sample press releases, artwork and promotional guides.

Last year, 35.4 million people participated nationwide. This year's number is expected to be the largest ever, according to the association.

Besides Nanticoke, other communities are having celebrations, and county detective Chaz Balogh encourages residents to see what their towns are doing to celebrate.

Balogh said the district attorney's office will host a 6 p.m. rally on Monday in the courthouse rotunda, with food and anti-crime information, to get local crime watch associations and the general public excited for Tuesday.

"What we try to do is bring all the crime watches in Luzerne County together to celebrate a night before," Balogh said. "We want them to know Jackie Carroll and the district attorney's office are behind them 100 percent."

In Wilkes-Barre, crime watch president Charlotte Raup said a "big celebration" is planned for Tuesday.

"It's a good time to get together and celebrate that we're taking the streets back," she said.

Wilkes-Barre's event begins at 6 p.m. on Public Square and will feature a puppet show, games, prizes and a street dancing class.

"Our goal is to get rid of the drugs and keep our kids safe," said Raup, who's been planning Wilkes-Barre's National Night Out for four months.

"We're not just watching them (criminals) that night, we are every night," Raup said.

8/2/2008

Get a good night's sleep

Times Leader

There are few decisions that may be tougher to make than selecting the right mattress. With so many manufacturers' claims for better health through a good night's rest or relief of backaches, one can become overwhelmed by ads they see and hear. An important thing to remember is there is no single "right choice." Your personal preference should determine what is best for you.

Buying bedding? This is not something you should do from a distance. When it comes to mattresses, the only way to make sure it works for you is to try it out.

"It's like trying on a pair of shoes," said Denis Bartuska of Bartuska's Furniture & Bedding in Nanticoke. "What fits and feels good to one person may be different to another."

In the past, advertisements stated that firm feel is best and boasted about coil counts. However, today's quality beds feature supportive centers along with more luxurious padding. This promises a comfortable, good night's sleep with less tossing and turning. Even terms like "plush" or "firm" can be misleading. One manufacturer's plush mattress may feel firmer than another's. The only way for you to know which mattress is best for you is to try a variety of different beds.

How is it made?

The most popular mattress is innerspring construction; a series of coils provides support, while different types, layers and thicknesses of foam allow for comfort. The coils in an innerspring mattress may be tied together, providing a three-dimensional grid for firm support. Spring Air's Back Supporter Mattresses, for example, feature extra coils where most of the body weight is concentrated for unmatched support. Or, mattresses may have individual coils that allow more of a contour to the body. Individual coils, like those in Spring Air's Palm Beach Series, also reduces the amount of your partner's movements you'll feel. Different foam densities (the measure of how firm the foam is) will determine the feel of the

mattress. Some mattresses will also add layers of resilient latex and/or memory foam, which contours and supports the shape of the user. People often overlook the importance of the foundation. Imagine buying that perfect new mattress and setting it up on an old, sagging foundation – the new mattress will eventually follow that old sagging contour. The proper foundation will ensure you get the most out of your new bedding.

What brand should I buy?

Some manufacturers spend many millions of dollars to make their name recognizable, but that is still no guarantee of quality. Unfortunately, they have to build the cost of national advertising into the price you pay for the bed. Don't get caught up in a name. Within your budget, select the mattress that gives you the best performance, comfort and durability.

How much should I spend?

Usually, more expensive beds feature more costly materials. However, there are many additional factors that can influence the price you pay for a mattress. A store's cost of doing business, the amount it spends on advertising, store leases, as well as sales commissions all affect the price you pay.

Some stores run what appear to be big discounts on mattresses, but keep in mind that the discounts may be off "suggested retail" and not reflect real markdowns. Again, more shopping and comparing will give you the best gauge of what you get for the money. Some deals may not be deals at all if they add extra charges for delivery, setup and removal of your old bed.

Premium features like memory foam, latex foam, and thick pillow tops will quickly increase the price. Expect to pay around \$699 to \$999 for quality queen set. And don't skimp on the kids' beds. Saying, "It's good enough; he's just a kid," is the wrong approach. Growing bodies need proper support and quality sleep.

People are often shortsighted when buying a bed. Going from a \$699 bed to one "you really love" at \$999 sounds like a lot of extra expense, but over the 10-year useful life, it amounts to less than \$0.10 a night. "Ten cents a day to sleep better, live better, feel better – that's a great investment," Bartuska said.

Where to buy a good set of bedding

Buying a mattress is definitely a "hands-on, body-on" experience. There is no way to tell what you're getting by ordering a bed from TV or online. You cannot really try out a bed that is on a rack wrapped up in its plastic. You need to lie down fully on a bed to assess its comfort and support. Shop around. Make sure you deal with people who know about and can explain options. Some salespeople may try to influence you to buy a particular bed, or brand, based on the amount of commission they receive on the sale. Ask questions and explain what you're looking for; the sales help should be able to direct you to the mattress that fits your needs. Buy from a business you can trust. A reputable dealer will stand behind its beds if a problem ever arises.

Find out about Spring Air mattresses at Bartuska's Furniture in Nanticoke

For three generations, Bartuska's Furniture has been offering consumers quality furniture and bedding at low prices. Being family operated, their lower cost of operations will save you money. And because Spring Air doesn't advertise nationally, its mattresses cost less.

At Bartuska's, Denis, Jim, Ann, Susanne and Charlotte know the products they feature. They can help you select the right Spring Air mattress for your needs and budget. And with free delivery, setup and removal of your old mattress, there are no hidden extras. Bartuska's keeps 15 different models in stock, so there's no waiting for delivery.

Now that you know how to shop for a new bed, why not head to Bartuska's Furniture in Nanticoke for a great deal on a new mattress – your ticket to feeling better with a good night's sleep.

7/29/2008

Nanticoke Municipal Authority pitches alternative parking plan to LCCC for Kanjorski Center

By Robert Olsen - Citizens' Voice

A counter-offer was submitted to Luzerne County Community College on July 25 regarding the purchase of the Kanjorski Center, Nanticoke Municipal Authority Chairman Ronald Kamowski said on Monday.

A \$5.6 million earmark by U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, was supposed to be used for a parking garage to accommodate the community college, but when it was discovered the grant couldn't be used for that type of structure, the authority began exploring plans for surface parking. Luzerne County Community College wants to convert the Kanjorski Center into its health science facility. About 250 parking spots would be needed.

According to Kamowski, the authority has some "very workable" plans to accommodate the community college. One plan shifts parking closer to Main Street, shrinking land set aside for a future retail center. That will allow the authority to "accomplish the parking demand without buying any other properties," he said.

Another option is leasing out the parking lot on Lower Broadway.

"But then we need safe-crossing zones and things like that," he said.

The cost of paving the 250 spots will fall upon the authority, and is in its budget, but only if the community college accepts the counter-offer, he said.

"It took us a little while to get this offer together," Kamowski said. "I've gotten calls from (LCCC) twice a week ... they are very anxious to move ahead."

The streetscape and other paving projects planned for the revitalization of downtown Nanticoke do not fall under the jurisdiction of the authority, and will be funded by the \$5.6 million grant.

"As soon as (the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation) gives approval, (the projects) can begin," Mayor John Bushko said. "It would be nice to have all this stuff in place just so we can move forward, but the money is earmarked. It's there."

7/28/2008

Nanticoke board promotes playgrounds to residents

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Nanticoke's recreation board is starting a campaign to re-introduce residents to one of the city's many resources: its four playgrounds.

"We think a lot of residents forget about the playgrounds," board president Mike Borowski said. "It's a nice place to go if you want some quiet time, to go for a picnic."

The first "Party in the Playground" will be Aug. 23 at the Quality Hill playground at Hill and Slope streets, Borowski said. It will run from 3 to 8 p.m. and feature a disc jockey, tennis tournaments, basketball, children's games, and food provided by the recreation board.

The board plans to have similar events in the West Side, Honey Pot and Hanover playgrounds, recreation board member Yvonne Bozinski said. The recreation board has been working with all four playground associations, which hold events to raise funds for maintenance, she said.

"We do have some nice playgrounds, and we'd like people to utilize them," Bozinski said.

The recreation board is also planning activities for when the weather turns cooler, she said.

Possibilities include free movies in the park and in the senior high rises; games in the West Side playground clubhouse, and karaoke and polka in the park, Borowski said.

"It's for all ages. It's not going to be for just one age bracket. We want to cater to everyone," he said. "We want to involve every resident of every age."

7/27/2008

GNA suggests back-to-school shoppers follow proposed dress code

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The dress code hasn't been officially updated, but Greater Nanticoke Superintendent Tony Perrone suggested parents and students shop for back-to-school clothes that fit the khakis-and-polo look approved by other local districts.

At the June school board meeting, the idea of a stricter dress code was discussed. Since then, phone messages have been left for parents informing them that the district is proposing a code, and a description is on the district's Web site.

However, the changes won't be in effect when school starts on Aug. 26, and Perrone said he didn't know how long it would take for the school board to read the proposal three times and vote on it.

Until the stricter dress code is approved by the board, students will not be required to follow it, although Perrone suggested they start at the beginning of the year.

"So, if they were smart they would start buying basic things," he said.

However, students will not be punished for wearing jeans, cargo pants, collarless shirts and other items allowed by the current dress code until a new one is in effect, he said.

"We know that the first year is the most difficult, so we will make modifications as the year goes along," Perrone said. "We had a dress code and if the kids followed it, it would have stayed in effect. I just think when kids are dressed nice they behave better."

With a month to go before school starts, there is some confusion among parents, students and even school officials as to what will take place when.

While the phone messages said it was a proposed change, the 2008-09 Dress Code Policy on the district Web site does not say the dress code is proposed. It does have a note at the bottom saying the school board could amend it at anytime.

One parent said she went out and bought clothing that fit the proposed stricter code in case stores ran out of appropriate clothes in the colors her sons want, but she is keeping the receipts. She had also bought jeans and shirts for school that don't fit the proposed code since her children won't want to wear the polos and pants.

Christine Mash has four children in the district, and is in favor of the code and plans to follow the suggestions. The dress code online is very similar to what Wyoming Valley West School District did last year, and those students looked very well-dressed.

"They're asking for people to voluntarily cooperate with it," she said. "By the time school year starts they wouldn't be able to have it official, and if they start the school year and have to change it could be a real pain in the neck."

A stricter dress code will be a change for her senior daughter, Allyson Kowlaski, but as a parent she doesn't care either way. Her daughter typically wears jeans and a T-shirt, and they are waiting to buy clothes until it's clear what the students can wear.

As a member of the Parent Teacher Association, she's talked with several families who aren't happy about the stricter dress code and confusion concerning when it begins. Although she sees students dressed inappropriately and thinks something has to be done, things might have gone smoother if a stricter code had been approved earlier.

"If it's not enforced right when they go back, once they fall into that groove, it'll be hard to enforce," Kowlaski said.

The next school board meeting will be Aug. 14, and parents and students are encouraged to bring suggestions to the meeting or to contact the district office.

7/27/2008

Party in the Park' lived up to its title

The 2008 Nanticoke City Music Fest was titled a "Party in the Park" and it lived up to its title.

Everyone appeared to have a fun time. However, this event is costly.

The Music Fest Committee would like to thank all the organizations and businesses that helped make this event financially feasible. A sincere thank

you to everyone involved in this event.

Yvonne Bozinski And the Music Fest Committee

7/27/2008

Act 47 is working for Nanticoke

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Two years ago, faced with out-of-control debt, years of financial mismanagement and a devastated credit rating, Nanticoke officials successfully petitioned the state to have the city declared Act 47, or financially distressed.

“We were like \$5 million in the hole, with bonds,” Nanticoke Mayor John Bushko said. “We had no way of increasing our taxes. We had no room for expansion with housing. It was a terrible situation.”

The city still has a way to go towards recovery, but officials are optimistic. Act 47 is working so far, but there are bumps in the road, councilman Jon Metta said.

“So far little things have worked out. I think things will go in the right direction. But every time we take a step forward, it seems something hits us,” he said. “One step we’re moving ahead, the next step we’re not going anyplace. There are a lot of moving parts.”

For example, one of the fire trucks died, and the city needs a new one, Metta said. Fortunately, he said, Milton Borough in Northumberland County lent a fire truck to Nanticoke.

Each year Nanticoke officials spent more than the city took in revenue. Escalating deficits led city council to get Nanticoke into the state Early Intervention program for financially-troubled municipalities. But Nanticoke’s debt was so extensive and its problems so deep-rooted, that council took the next step and applied to have the city declared Act 47 by the state Department of Community and Economic Development.

DCED Secretary Dennis Yablonsky decided Nanticoke fit the criteria and designated the city Act 47 in May 2006. In June 2006 the state appointed Pennsylvania Economy League as Nanticoke’s financial recovery coordinator.

Act 47 is not a bailout or takeover by the state, and it is technically not a declaration of bankruptcy. Nanticoke officials still make their own decisions, and they are still responsible for day-to-day operations.

To solve the problems of chronic mismanagement and lack of accountability, city council hired Holly Quinn as fiscal manager and Kenneth Johnson as city administrator. Johnson, who had worked in municipal management for several years, was familiar with Act 47 as a former employee of DCED, and also of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance, the financial recovery coordinator for Nanticoke’s financially-distressed neighbor, Plymouth Township. PEL came up with a recovery plan for Nanticoke.

“It’s a tough thing, because there are a lot of requirements in the recovery plan, which is an ordinance the city has to follow,” Johnson said.

The plan didn’t call for laying off any employees or cutting services for residents. However, it did require raising residents’ earned income taxes from 1 percent to 2 percent — with 0.5 percent going to the Greater Nanticoke Area school district — and re-negotiating contracts when they expired. Clerical and street department contracts have been settled; negotiations are under way for new police and fire department contracts. But the earned income tax isn’t coming in as expected — city officials say it’s at least \$600,000 behind — and Johnson said personnel costs, especially overtime, are too high.

And yet, the fact that city officials get monthly updates on the city’s financial condition enables them to discover problems, PEL Executive Director Gerald Cross said.

“In the past, they wouldn’t have known until they ran out of money,” he said. “They are able to track and control expenditures more thoroughly than they were in the past. ... Nonetheless, there’s a lot of work to do.”

New and updated accounting software, having the right people in place, keeping a closer eye on finances, and following the recovery plan as closely as possible have helped, Metta said. DCED monitors how well the city sticks to the recovery plan.

“The thing I think you have to be careful with in Act 47, when you write that recovery plan up, they hold your feet to the fire,” Bushko said.

For example, Bushko recently wanted to add a cost-of-living adjustment to the police pension, but DCED wouldn’t allow it.

“They say no, you can’t do it, and that’s the end of the story,” Bushko said.

Although impatient for more dramatic results, he acknowledges Nanticoke will have to stay in Act 47 for a long time.

“The exit route isn’t easy,” he said.

7/24/2008

Craving a Philly cheese steak? Then give Johnny D’s a shot

You must make it a point to check out the new restaurant at East Union and South Walnut streets in Nanticoke.

Pam Urbanski writes “Nanticoke Area Notes” every other Thursday in the Citizens Voice. Story ideas and news items can be e-mailed to her at pamurb806@aol.com.

Johnny D’s is a unique establishment that specializes in Philly cheese steaks.

The owners, Heather and John Dinstel, are extremely nice, welcoming and talented. Heather is a native of Nanticoke, while John is from New York. They couple met at John’s father’s restaurant in Wilkes-Barre when Heather was a waitress there. They have been married for two years.

John is a graduate of Penn College Culinary School in Williamsport. He worked in many restaurants and for Conagra Foods. He also wrote recipes for Chef Boyardee and Healthy Choice.

The Dinstels have visited Philadelphia many times and really love the cheese steaks from the City of Brotherly Love. They wanted to bring that special taste to the valley.

“We wanted to open a place that was unique and fun, a place that has great homemade food and a great variety,” he said. From the look and taste of

things, they have accomplished just that.

As I entered the restaurant, I was impressed by the look of the place. The red and black walls really grab your attention. There is nice lighting and a flat screen TV.

And when Heather and John say homemade, they mean it. Heather was bringing out a newly roasted piece of beef. "We roast our beef and slice it fresh every day," said Heather. Oh, did it look and smell good!

The menu is loaded with original items including one of their best sellers — the Nanticoke Tony, which is named after Heather's dad. It's a sliced rib-eye steak topped with fried onions, lettuce, tomatoes, crab fries, garlic sauce and American, wiz or provolone cheese. Hungry yet?

The menu also includes all types of steak sandwiches, hoagies, salads and chicken wings. Homemade desserts are available and kids have their own menus. There are monthly specials that are far from ordinary. The prices are very reasonable as well.

The Dinstels also provide catering service and host private parties.

Hours are Monday through Saturday from 10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. The restaurant is eat-in or takeout and provides delivery to the Hanover Industrial Park and the Greater Nanticoke Area.

The telephone number for Johnny D's is 735-6666 or e-mail JDinstel@comcast.net.

Future Fest Jam set

An outdoor concert, featuring students from Front and Center Music, will be held Saturday at 3 p.m. at the recreation field on Front Street in the Hanover section of Nanticoke.

Future Fest Jam is an opportunity for students who take lessons to show off their musical talent. "We have students from beginner to advanced," said Len Kishel, who is the owner of the music center.

Kishel tells me there is a reason behind the event's name. "We feel these musicians are the future of rock 'n' roll. They are here to celebrate what they have learned with fellow musicians, family and friends," he said.

For some, lessons are a family affair. For example, take the Parent-Teacher Association that will be performing Saturday. The group is made up of parents and teachers of students who are musicians. "We have fathers who have decided to take lessons so they can perform with their sons," Kishel said.

Other bands that will perform include Blue Rain, 3 Imaginary Boys, Feety Pajamas and the Gravedancers. "We look at this Jam Fest as a rock 'n' roll recital," Kishel said.

The Hanover Recreation Club has donated use of the grounds for the event and it will run the concession stands where food and drink will be for sale. Those attending should bring a lawn chair or blanket. Rain date is Sunday at 1 p.m.

For more information, call Len at 740-2009.

St. Mary's holding bazaar

The parishioners of St. Mary's Parish are working hard to prepare their bazaar Friday and Saturday, Aug. 1-2, at Holy Child Grove on Newport Street in Sheatown.

"Our last bazaar was in 2004," said Karen Briggs, who is co-chairwoman of the Chinese auction. "We're looking forward to bringing the community together once again. We hope this will be one of our best bazaars ever," she added.

In addition to homemade foods, there will be musical entertainment, as well as games and a Chinese auction with baskets loaded with stuff for the whole family.

On Friday, the band Ironman will take the stage. There will be a polka Mass with Stanky at 4 p.m. and 40-Lb. Head will perform in the evening.

Holy Child Grove has huge covered pavilions so the two-day bazaar will be held rain or shine. See you there!

National Night Out set for Aug. 5

The Neighborhood Crime Watch of the Hanover section of Nanticoke will take part in "National Night Out" on Tuesday, Aug. 5, at St. John's Orthodox Church picnic grounds on Front Street.

This year's theme is "Give Drugs and Crime a Going Away Party."

The festivities will begin at about 4 p.m. and will start by residents locking their doors, turning on outside lights and joining neighbors in walking around specific areas. "We want people to come to the party and showing we aren't going to take it anymore and we will give drugs and crime and violence a going-away party," said Nick Pucino, crime watch coordinator.

The crime watch crew once again will be grilling hot dogs and hamburgers. There also will be nachos and cheese, bottled water, snacks and more.

The Nanticoke Police Department will be present to support mutual crime prevention efforts. In addition to food, there will be music and games and gifts for children.

The National Association of Town Watch sponsors "National Night Out," which takes place one night every year when people in all 50 states gather to celebrate and demonstrate against crime.

7/20/2008

Fall of the coal house

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If you look past the disorder and deterioration inside the Susquehanna Coal Co. office on East Main Street, you get a strong sense of what the above-ground aspect of the coal mining industry might have been like before its decline.

It made Nanticoke Housing Authority solicitor and city native Vito DeLuca pause and reflect.

"You know, when you think about it, this same thing could happen to the oil industry someday. Somebody could be touring an oil refinery office," he said.

The Pennsylvania Railroad Co. and the Pennsylvania Canal Co. formed the Susquehanna Coal Co. in 1869 on 5,823 acres of coal land purchased

from Col. Washington Lee, who built Nanticoke's first breaker. For many decades the company was the biggest employer in the city and neighboring Newport Township, with hundreds of people on the payroll — which was processed in the East Main Street office building. The Susquehanna Coal properties were sold to the Susquehanna Collieries Co. in 1917, when the Pennsylvania Railroad divested itself of all mining interests. The company would go through other changes of ownership over the years, ending with Kenneth L. Pollock in the 1960s. By the 1970s, Pollock had relocated the Susquehanna Coal offices to Front Street in Nanticoke and closed off the Main Street building. More than 30 years of disuse have taken their toll. Pigeons roost in the rafters, soiling the furniture stored below, which is already warped and water-damaged from the badly leaking roof. Vandals did damage, including setting small fires in parts of the building. Despite the decay, the old building retains reminders of its former importance.

"Look at this. Could you imagine how much work went into that?" DeLuca said, pointing at the wooden door frames. They are simply but elegantly carved and stained, and somehow still in near-pristine condition.

Everywhere are souvenirs of better days: checks drawn on the Glen Lyon National Bank, a photo of one of the breakers, an IBM punch-card computerized payroll system from the 1960s. The gilt lettering on the doors, a room-sized safe, and dozens of filing cabinets hint at prosperity in days past.

Many of those filing cabinets are still full of records of the men and women who once made their living in the mines. Those records will most likely be preserved, even if the building might not be.

The future

Pollock's son, also named Ken Pollock, donated the Susquehanna Coal Co. building to the Nanticoke Housing Authority in 2006. Authority members, excited about the opportunity to preserve the historic site, planned to renovate it into 11 senior housing units, with the authority's offices on the first floor.

But after being turned down twice for federal tax credits, and unable to secure other federal funding, the housing authority board opted to give up the project. DeLuca is negotiating to sell the building to 406 North Washington Avenue LLC of Moosic, which also bought the Nanticoke senior center from city council last week. The firm, which is headed by William F. Rinaldi, will most likely demolish both buildings to construct Luzerne County Community College's new culinary arts center.

Housing authority board members Dorothy Hudak, Josephine Bashista and acting director Jean Ditzler expressed regret at the probability the Susquehanna Coal Co. office will share the wrecking-ball fate of the old Nanticoke high school and State Theater.

However, the authority board is giving the Nanticoke Historical Society the opportunity to take any artifacts in the building members think might be useful. Historical society president Julianna Zarzycki said members would come in this week.

"We're going to look at the stuff there, and if it's of no value to us, we'll leave it there," she said.

Many of the files are deteriorated from years of exposure to moisture from the leaky roof and the windows, which were broken out and boarded up years ago.

Historical society members hope to salvage any remaining coal company documentation, such as payroll records, mining records and employees' cards, that could be valuable for historical or genealogical purposes.

"Sometimes it will put they were married and had three children and they were from Hungary, or Slovakia, and they'll have the year — it's really a gold mine," Zarzycki said.

7/18/2008

Several Nanticoke projects progressing

Work is going on behind the scenes for some big downtown projects.

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The Nanticoke Housing Authority is reviewing a potential sales agreement with 406 North Washington Avenue LLC of Moosic, whose principal is William F. Rinaldi, for the Susquehanna Coal Co. building at Market and Main streets. Solicitor Vito DeLuca said Thursday the authority hopes to have a contract within 30 days.

The housing authority hoped to renovate the former coal company office building for senior housing, but couldn't get the government funding. Instead, the building will likely be demolished along with the Nanticoke senior center next door — which council sold to Rinaldi's company last week — to make way for Luzerne County Community College's culinary arts center.

Preliminary work on the skate park, the first phase of the Greater Nanticoke Recreation Park to be built on Lower Broadway, has resumed. It was on hold while city and state officials focused on other downtown projects, such as the sale of the Kanjorski Center to LCCC for its health sciences center. That sale is expected to go through soon.

7/17/2008

Nanticoke council accepts temporary fire truck

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Council voted Wednesday to enter an agreement with Milton Borough in Northumberland County to borrow a fire truck.

The deal had been in the works since Milton's council, on hearing that Nanticoke needed a truck to replace the dead Engine 3, voted last week to lend a 1980 engine to the city.

The Hanover fire station will get Engine 4 back from the main station on East Ridge Street, and the Milton truck will go to the main station, City Administrator Kenneth Johnson said Nanticoke must pay insurance on the fire engine and return it when Milton Borough needs it back. In the meantime, Nanticoke officials are looking for a permanent truck.

Nanticoke Treasurer Al Wytoshek, who was a member of the Washington fire company, said the city was offered Washington's fire engine for \$22,000 some time ago, but city officials declined.

Council closed the Washington Street fire station in May 2006 because the financially distressed city could no longer afford its bills. Mayor John Bushko said the city didn't buy the fire engine at that time because it wasn't needed. Engine 3 was only recently declared to be beyond repair.

In other business:

Johnson assured residents work on Alden Road will go forward, despite the delay due to a bureaucratic tangle with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. State Sen. Raphael Musto, D-Pittston Township, helped clear it up, and the city should at least be able to get started with the paving before winter, Johnson said.

Bushko estimates the public works department can at least get Alden Road milled and one coat of pavement put on, but there is a lot of sewer work involved and sidewalks have to be put in.

Johnson and Bushko said they would look into a situation with earned income tax collection. They said they just found out Berkheimer Associates is telling residents who have more than \$50 a quarter in earned income tax due, and who do not have employers who deduct it from their paychecks, must pay quarterly. There is also a \$20 fee involved, Bushko said.

7/17/2008

Greater Nanticoke school district officials say a deadly accident involving a skateboard could have happened anywhere, and they don't plan to start locking the public out of district property.

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Although not a skater himself, 19-year-old Paul Drozdowski, while hanging out near the [Greater Nanticoke Area](#) parking lot with friends Friday, made the fatal mistake of borrowing a skateboard, then riding it as a car towed him. Drozdowski fell, fractured his skull, and died Saturday in Community Medical Center, Scranton.

Nanticoke police Detective Kevin Grevera said the investigation is still in a preliminary stage. He hasn't yet met with the Luzerne County District Attorney's Office to determine if charges should be filed against the driver of the car, an 18-year-old girl.

Drozdowski wasn't the only one participating in the antics in the faculty parking lot on the north side of the high school building.

"Apparently, based on witnesses' statements, a few people were being towed along on a skateboard, and it just so happened when the victim took his turn, unfortunately, he was the one who fell," Grevera said.

Greater Nanticoke Area solicitor Vito DeLuca said skateboarding and other risky behavior is not permitted, "and certainly not encouraged," on school grounds.

"We routinely chase trespassers This specific tragedy could have occurred anywhere. There was nothing specific to our property that would make a risk to someone engaging in that behavior any greater than if it would have been done anywhere else," DeLuca said. "The district did nothing at all in any way, shape or form to contribute to the tragedy. The fact that an accident, no matter how tragic, occurs on your property, does not automatically trigger liability."

The district, being a municipal entity, has additional protections that would not be afforded a homeowner, he said.

Grevera said the district has "no trespassing after 10 p.m." signs in the parking lot area.

But trespassing is hard to define, GNA school board president Jeff Kozlofski said. School property is used after hours for sports and practice, as a place for parents to pick up students, even for driving practice, he said.

"The school, in our eyes, is something for the community to use. I don't know of any school that's gated totally closed," Kozlofski said.

Even if the district's property was kept locked, kids would still get in, he said.

"You can't keep everybody out of there," he said.

Nanticoke police have made several underage drinking arrests in the area over the past few months, but no trespassing arrests, Grevera said.

7/14/2008

Chamber organizes South Valley Coal Miners' Heritage Festival

Times Leader

The South Valley Coal Miners' Heritage Festival will be presented Aug. 15, 16 and 17 at Patriot Park, Broad and Market streets in Nanticoke.

The event is being coordinated by the South Valley Chamber of Commerce. A series of programs, exhibits and games will focus attention on the coal mining heritage of the region. Polka and other ethnic music will be performed. There will be a polka Mass on Sunday, Aug. 17 at 3:30 p.m.

The organizers expect to have numerous food, beverage, craft and other vendors.

7/14/2008

Nanticoke's East Main Street on way to new look

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The first wave of changes to Nanticoke's downtown is coming, starting with East Main Street getting its first major face-lift in 36 years.

Scranton-based Facility Design & Development Ltd., the architectural and planning firm the Nanticoke Municipal Authority hired for downtown redevelopment, is drawing up a plan that includes new sidewalks, streetlights and plenty of on-street parking.

"There's no question we have to redo our streetscape. Downtown has changed over the past two or three decades," said state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke.

“I think we’re on the cusp of seeing some real tangible results in a community where it’s quite overdue,” Facility Design & Development principal Alex Belavitz said. “We feel that some of the very important first steps outlined in the strategic plan two years ago are starting to unfold.” In April 2006, the firm unveiled a strategic plan for the South Valley. Nanticoke’s profile showed a deteriorating downtown with weeds invading its sidewalks, run-down buildings and very little parking. The first phase of revitalization included bringing Luzerne County Community College downtown, finding a tenant for the mostly empty Kanjorski Center on East Main Street, and improvements to make Main Street safe, well-lit and pedestrian-friendly, Belavitz said.

“Things are hopefully starting to move in the right direction,” Councilman Jon Metta said. “There’s been a lot of behind-the-scenes work.” City council just sold the senior center at Market and Main streets to a private developer, who will build a culinary arts institute for LCCC. City and state officials are working with the college on a lease-purchase arrangement for the Kanjorski Center, to be LCCC’s health sciences center. Part of the deal includes a provision for parking, Yudichak said. When city officials realized a \$5.6 million earmark U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, put in the 2005 transportation funding bill couldn’t be used for a parking garage, they decided to go with surface parking. Federal Highway Administration spokesman Ian Grossman said improvements such as road paving, lighting and safety improvements and road redesign could be eligible.

“Essentially, the money is theoretically immediately available if the city and the state provide a project description that we deem acceptable for the use of that earmark money,” Grossman said.

Since the transportation bill expires next year, after which Congress will have to decide whether to extend its unused earmarks, Nanticoke doesn’t have much time to submit its plans to the Federal Highway Administration. Belavitz said his firm should have all the design work and specifications completed within the next two to three months, but intends to hand in a preliminary plan as soon as possible so the federal government can see the city will use the money sensibly.

The time frame for federal approval depends on how clear the plan is: “Whether everything comes vacuum-packed and ready to go,” Grossman said.

Downtown Nanticoke’s last reconfiguration was after the Tropical Storm Agnes flood of 1972. It wasn’t necessarily for the better, Belavitz believes. The early 1970s plan changed the curbs, which “effectively choked off on-street parking opportunities,” he said.

“To create a vibrant downtown, you need parking opportunities that are flexible.”

East Main Street today makes it hard for a customer to suddenly pull over in front of a store if something in the window catches his eye, or find a space in front of a restaurant to run in for lunch.

Belavitz wants to change the street setup back to the way it was pre-Agnes. A street that’s safe, pedestrian-friendly and provides parking in front of retailers encourages people to go downtown, he said.

And the investment in downtown improvements should help spur private investment in Main Street properties, Belavitz believes.

“Communities require reinvestment in themselves on a regular basis,” he said. “That’s the problem in northeast Pennsylvania: there’s been very little reinvestment in over a generation, except for demolishing dilapidated buildings. But then sometimes you end up with a ‘missing tooth’ on Main Street. That doesn’t engender private development.”

7/14/2008

Mercy has space for Nanticoke senior center

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The administration at Mercy Special Care Hospital wants area residents to be happy with their proposed new senior center, but that’s not all. They want the seniors to be healthy, too.

Mercy is looking to provide a location for the Nanticoke senior center, which will be displaced when its current home at Market and East Main streets is demolished. Nanticoke council sold the building to Moosic-based 406 North Washington Avenue, LLC, for \$250,000 on Tuesday. The developer will construct Luzerne County Community College’s culinary arts center on the site, so the county has to find the senior center a new home.

The deal to have Mercy move the senior center to the hospital on Washington Street isn’t final. But if it goes through, the administration is eager to ensure seniors are provided not only the things they are used to, such as hot lunches and social activities, but some new benefits as well.

“It’s more than just a place to socialize and have a nutritious meal,” Mercy Administrator Robert Williams said. “We want to have a wellness model we believe will be unique among senior centers in northeast Pennsylvania.”

Mercy has almost 100 registered physicians on staff, and professionals ranging from pharmacists to respiratory therapists, Williams said. They can provide seniors with education and services including blood pressure screenings, diabetic counseling, medication awareness seminars and seasonal immunizations, he said.

There will be opportunities for Nintendo Wii games and other exercise sessions designed by physical and occupational therapists.

And Mercy wants to benefit the community it has been a part of for almost 100 years.

“We’re excited about being able to collaborate,” Williams said.

The senior center would be housed in a wing of the hospital with its own entrance and something the current location lacks — a parking lot. Buses stop half a block away, Agency on Aging vans will still be available, and accommodations can be made for seniors who need assistance, Williams said.

The wing will be renovated for the new center, Williams said. It has a large main room for dining, meetings and general purposes. In addition, there are several smaller rooms that can be used for things like arts and crafts, card games, and a computer lab. There’s also an enclosed outdoor courtyard.

Nanticoke Mayor John Bushko said he received a petition from approximately 40 residents asking to keep the senior center downtown, where the

supermarket, drugstores and other shops are.

“We had no say in where they’re going. That’s the county that does that,” Bushko said, but added, “We’ll work on it. I’ll try to do something, but I don’t know if we’ll make any headway with the county. The Department of Aging handles that, not us.”

The Area Agency on Aging for Luzerne and Wyoming counties felt the benefits of having the center at Mercy “far outweighed” the benefits of having it downtown, Williams said. There aren’t many places downtown large enough to host a senior center, he said.

The county has not yet signed agreement with Mercy, according to Barbara Lispi, senior center services director for the Area Agency on Aging. “Nothing is set in stone,” she said.

Luzerne County commissioners put the new location of the senior center up for bid, and Mercy was the only one to respond to the request for proposals, according to Nanticoke officials. There had been word St. Francis of Assisi church was interested, but didn’t bid.

County spokesman Jason Jarecki confirmed there was only one bidder, but wouldn’t say who it was.

“I have not heard of that being mentioned as a possibility,” Jarecki said when asked if the senior center site would be re-bid. “I feel cautiously optimistic it’s past that point.”

7/12/2008

Likely EMS merger lauded

Officials see a lot of potential positives in consolidating Nanticoke, Newport Twp. ambulance companies. aseder@timesleader.com

The two ambulance companies serving Nanticoke and Newport and Plymouth townships might soon incorporate into the South Valley Regional Ambulance Association. The new department could be established by year’s end.

Combining the Nanticoke Fire Department Community Ambulance and the Newport Township Firemen’s Community Ambulance Association is a “no-brainer,” said Bernie Norieka, president of the board of directors of the Nanticoke group. The consolidation would combine equipment and manpower.

The change, officials from the two companies said, will create less overhead and 24-hour, full-time service for all three municipalities. Nanticoke also serves Plymouth Township.

“It would end a duplication of expenses and personnel,” Norieka said. The Nanticoke organization voted to approve the jointure. Newport Township’s ambulance association does not have a board and approval needs to come from a majority vote from its members. A vote could be taken at the association’s next meeting on July 21, said Newport Ambulance Capt. Janine Floryshak.

If Newport’s members approve the move, a new corporation and board of directors would be established. Norieka said some issues have not been discussed in detail, including whether both ambulance buildings would remain open and how many full- and part-timers would be needed to staff the company.

Nanticoke has nine full-time employees and about a dozen part-timers and provides coverage with an advanced life support ambulance around the clock.

Newport offers basic life support services and often calls Nanticoke for more serious injuries or dispatches. Newport staffs its company with some of its 13 part-timers from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. and Nanticoke offers services in the eight-hour gap.

“We’ve been working together for many years. This seems like a logical step,” Norieka said, mentioning that neither company receives municipal funding. If joined, the two would work together on fundraisers, pooling their resources for equipment and fuel.

Norieka said the combination makes sense on many levels and as police and fire departments across the state merge or regionalize because of manpower issues or ways to cut overhead, he’s hoping the two companies will serve as a trendsetter in the region’s ambulance community.

Nanticoke Administrator Kenneth Johnson said the city supports the proposal.

“I believe that any inter-municipal effort generally results in more efficient service delivery. We have a private nonprofit that joins with another similar organization to provide a critical community service. That community service is financed without any taxpayer subsidy and through user fees. “

The Newport ambulance operates out of space provided by the township near the municipal building. Floryshak said operating out of a Nanticoke-based facility would not create a negative situation for Newport residents, because the Nanticoke ambulance garage is within eight miles of all parts of Newport Township.

7/11/2008

Milton officials approve plan to lend fire truck to Nanticoke

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A Northumberland County community has stepped forward to help one in Luzerne County ensure its residents have enough fire protection.

Milton Borough officials agreed to lend Nanticoke a fire engine until the city can come up with a permanent replacement, said City Administrator Kenneth Johnson, who also serves as one of 10 members of Milton’s borough council.

He had to abstain from voting at Wednesday’s council meeting, but he said the other members unanimously passed the measure to loan their extra engine to Nanticoke.

Engine 3 is beyond repair, so Nanticoke fire Chief Michael Bohan recommended moving Engine 4, normally at the fire station in the Hanover section of the city, to the main fire station on East Ridge Street, near the municipal building. That left the Hanover station with only a fire support vehicle.

Milton Council Vice President Linda Meckley said somebody at the Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs mentioned Nanticoke’s plight to borough manager Chuck Beck, who then checked with Milton fire Chief Wayne Shaffer.

“Apparently the fire chief knew about the need also,” Meckley said. “So they got together and contacted Nanticoke.” Nanticoke Mayor John Bushko, who lives in the Hanover section of the city, called the loan a “godsend.”

7/10/2008

Nanticoke Area Notes

Lunch is served at Pope John Paul II building

Pam Urbanski writes Nanticoke Area Notes every other Thursday. Story ideas and news items can be e-mailed to her at pamurb806@aol.com.

It's lunch time!

Parents, there is a new place for your children, 18 years of age and younger, to have lunch during the summer with their friends. Delicious, nutritious lunches will be served at the Pope John Paul II School building, Monday through Friday from noon to 12:30 p.m.

The program is offered by the Commission on Economic Opportunity. CEO can offer these programs to communities where there is a certain percentage of reduced or free lunches in the elementary schools during the school year. It is funded by state grants, fundraisers that are sponsored by CEO and contributions from individuals, churches of all denominations, community-oriented organizations and businesses.

The program is available in Nanticoke thanks to several people in the Mother Teresa Social Concerns Ministry, including Pat Botsko, a parishioner of St. Stanislaus and the Rev. Jim Nash, pastor of the parish community of Holy Child, Holy Trinity, St. Mary's and St. Stanislaus.

“I saw the commercial for the summer lunch program on WNEP, Channel 16 and thought it might be a great idea for our community,” she said.

“The next day I called Nash to see what he thought and he was wonderful.” Nash told Pat to get more information.

She did and the rest is history.

“We are so grateful that there are people in Nanticoke that care enough to put this program into their facilities and have volunteers to serve the children,” said Gretchen Hunt, nutrition program manager at CEO.

“This is really a community project,” said Botsko.

“We have residents, parishioners and members of the youth group and youth minister Bill Borysewicz, who will be helping to serve the lunches that are prepared each day in the CEO kitchen in Wilkes-Barre and then transported to different locations.”

The program is free of charge and runs through Aug. 22.

There is no registration required. For information, call 735-4833.

Center plans fireworks fun

Guardian Elder Care Center, Sheatown, will hold its annual block party and fireworks Friday, July 18, from 5 to 10 p.m. on the center grounds.

I have attended this event many times and I can tell you it is great for everyone and every age.

“This is a wonderful opportunity for our residents to mingle with their friends, family and the community,” said Celeste Heilbrunn, co-chairwoman and administrative assistant at Guardian.

Each resident will also be given Guardian dollars to purchase food.

They will have a lot to choose from as potato pancakes, hot dogs and French fries, pizza, gyros and ice cream are all on the menu. Entertainment will be provided by Jolly Joe and the Bavarians.

There are games for the kids and instant bingo for adults.

The highlight of the day will be the raffling of more than 40 theme baskets packed with stuff.

“Each year our employees and the families of the residents donate items for these baskets and they are really beautiful,” said Heilbrunn.

I have yet to win one of these baskets but I keep trying. Maybe this year will be my lucky year!

The staff and residents are praying for good weather because at dusk a magnificent fireworks display will begin. This year Zambelli International, the same company that did the fireworks in New York City for New Year's Eve is expected to put on quite a show.

City to hold yard sale

The City of Nanticoke is holding its third annual city-wide yard sale Saturday, July 19, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The sale will take place on all city streets in Nanticoke city as well as the Hanover and Honey Pot sections of the town.

Yvonne Bozinski, coordinator for the event, said the idea of the event is to coordinate the dozens of garage sales held throughout the year, have them on the same day and try to draw the biggest possible crowds to the sales.

“We invite everyone to put out a table with what you would like to sell on this date. Our hope is for everyone to travel throughout Nanticoke, not only to get a good deal but to see how beautiful our town is,” she said.

Local merchants also offer deals to shoppers on this day. Patty Zendarski and Betsy Cheshinski do a great job in compiling a map that lists all the city streets and all residents who will be participating in the yard sale and their addresses.

Maps can be picked up at Patriot Park beginning at 8 a.m.

If you would like to participate in the yard sale and have your address listed on the yard sale sheet, call city hall at 735-2800.

The deadline to register is Friday.

Happy shopping!

Wanted: Heritage helpers

The South Valley Chamber of Commerce is looking for a few good men and women to help out with its annual Miners Heritage Days to be held Aug. 15-17.

If you can volunteer, call John at 947-2631.

7/10.2008

Seniors rip center's relocation

Nanticoke People who use facility say current site is near businesses they use, while proposed new site would be hard to access

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The only time Betty Friday receives a cooked meal during the week is when she visits the Nanticoke Senior Citizens Center at Main and Market streets for lunch. It's also a place where she plays cards and spends time with friends.

But Friday and other city residents are worried those meals and good times could be coming to an end.

The center, operated by the Luzerne County Area Agency on Aging, soon will move because Nanticoke City Council voted Tuesday to sell the building to a private developer.

The center is expected to be relocated to the Mercy Special Care Hospital on West Washington Street, almost a mile from its current location.

Friday, who has been visiting the center for nearly two decades, and other senior citizens who frequent the facility are angry it is being moved from downtown. They say the new site is too far from other businesses the seniors often frequent.

"It's convenient for all the stores down here," Friday said. "People like to be here to go to the banks, to go to the pharmacy to pick up their medicine, to go to the store to pick up their groceries. There is nothing back there by the hospital."

Mercy Special Care Hospital was the only agency to submit a proposal to offer facilities for the center. But a formal agreement for a new location has not yet been signed.

Mayor John Bushko said during Tuesday's meeting he hopes the center would be relocated somewhere downtown.

Some seniors who walk from their homes at Nanticoke Towers or Oplinger Towers to the center say if the center moves to the hospital they will no longer be able to visit it because navigating the city's hills will cause problems.

Nanticoke resident Henry Marks expressed concern recently that the center's membership would decline considerably if it is relocated.

"I know they have a hard time getting a big turnout for dinners here the way it was so close," he said. "I'm afraid up at the hospital it will be a lot worse. I hope it just doesn't fall apart."

Seniors could use public transportation such as that provided by the Luzerne-Wyoming Counties Transportation Department, but a brochure advertising its services says that trips must be scheduled in advance. Friday said that the 90-cent cost of those trips could also be an issue for her and others.

Another alternative is the Luzerne County Transportation Authority. Operations Manager Robb Henderson said the Authority's schedule includes 29 Nanticoke trips, all of which stop at Hanover and Washington streets.

Henderson said people 65 and older can ride the bus for free after obtaining a card from LCTA and that the buses are ADA-equipped and can accommodate people using walkers.

But passengers using walkers or wheelchairs would have to walk about a block from the bus stop to the hospital, which could be a formidable task for some.

"The purpose of this (center) is to keep them healthy, to make sure they're fed and taken care of," Friday said. "To take it from them is not right. There are a lot of people in this center who have children who live away, and if they don't have this center they are going to be cooped up in the houses. Do you know what that is going to do to them?"

Nanticoke resident Henry Marks expressed concern recently that the center's membership would decline considerably if it is relocated.

7/10/2008

State needs to rework Nanticoke project to secure funds, say feds

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Despite a recent article in a Washington, D.C.-based publication, Nanticoke is not losing \$5.6 million in federal money for downtown improvements.

The city can still get the money if state officials submit a new project that would be eligible under federal guidelines.

The Hill, a newspaper that covers the workings of Congress, reported Wednesday the U.S. Department of Transportation is blocking \$5.6 million in funding U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, obtained for Nanticoke in the 2005 federal transportation bill. The article states the federal agency is "refusing to move forward" on the earmark.

"I wouldn't say it was completely removed," Federal Highway Administration spokesman Ian Grossman said. "As things are currently written, it's not an eligible expense under transportation law. We've been working with the congressman's office and the state to make the earmark eligible and legit."

The exact language of the earmark is "For the Nanticoke City Redevelopment Authority to design, acquire land, and construct a parking garage, streetscaping enhancements, paving, lighting and safety improvements, and roadway redesign." City officials wanted the money for a parking garage for the Kanjorski Center, which Luzerne County Community College is negotiating to lease-purchase for its health sciences center.

The Citizens' Voice reported on April 27 that representatives of state and federal transportation agencies said the \$5.6 million couldn't be used to build a parking garage. The only types of garage permitted under federal guidelines are those strictly for intermodal purposes — for people to park in while they carpool or use public transportation.

When they learned a parking garage wasn't possible, Nanticoke officials changed their plan. They want to use the \$5.6 million for safety improvements, such as new streetlights and sidewalks, and another kind of parking.

"A parking garage may or not be the best solution there. We have a plan B, to create surface parking to create the necessary number of spaces the college is going to need," said state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke. "It's our belief that strategic, well-engineered street and surface parking is going to be conducive to the downtown revitalization."

To be able to use the \$5.6 million, city and state officials must submit a detailed project description that matches the intent of the original earmark

and is eligible under federal law, Grossman said.

“It’s not as if there’s a bucket of money they can use any way they wish, but there is some flexibility,” he said. “If we could find the right project and the right legislative language, the money would still be available.”

Yudichak said assistance from federal officials would be needed to make sure the streetscape plan the city and community college drew up meets the eligibility requirements. Pennsylvania Department of Transportation District 4.0, the project manager, will “work hand-in-hand” with the Federal Highway Administration, Yudichak said.

The Hill article ends, “In a four-page letter sent to Kanjorski in late May, (U.S.) DoT General Counsel D.J. Gribben ... pledged to work with Kanjorski’s staff to modify the project in the next transportation technical corrections bill so the city can provide some parking for the center, if not a parking garage.”

Yudichak doesn’t want to wait that long, because the Nanticoke municipal authority and LCCC hope to have a deal worked out for the Kanjorski Center by the end of July.

“The parking garage unfortunately held us up for three years,” he said. “We know the garage is not eligible. Is it worth it to go through another three to five years for a corrective amendment?”

7/9/2008

Nanticoke sells downtown parcel eyed for LCCC center

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Council voted at a special meeting Tuesday to sell the city-owned senior center at East Main and Market streets to a Moosic-based developer for \$250,000.

The purchaser is 406 North Washington Avenue, LLC, whose principal is William F. Rinaldi, according to Mayor John Bushko. The Department of State database shows the company C was incorporated in September 2007, with its offices at 400 Fourth St. in Moosic.

Luzerne County Community College wants the site for its culinary arts center, which college officials said would be built by a private developer. Nanticoke administrator Kenneth Johnson said three appraisals were done on the building, and city officials believe the price is fair. Sale proceeds will go into the city’s capital improvement fund, where it will be used for projects like paving roads, Councilman Joseph Dougherty said.

Council learned during the June meeting that the senior center would be moved to Mercy Special Care Hospital, which city officials say put in the sole bid to the Luzerne-Wyoming County Area Agency on Aging.

Resident Hank Marks said seniors are not happy about the new site, which is on Washington Street — the other side of the city, away from the downtown district. Marks said he would have preferred a facility at St. Francis of Assisi Church on Green Street.

“It’s not going to be a good situation,” Marks said.

“No, it’s not,” Busho agreed. He said he’s been getting a lot of phone calls from residents who oppose the move.

Councilman James Litchkofski said city officials would do everything they could to assist in the transition, and told Marks the new location at Mercy might not be so bad.

Nanticoke Housing Authority has also had talks with Rinaldi’s firm about the possibility of selling the former Susquehanna Coal Co. office building on East Main Street, next to the senior center.

“We don’t have a sales agreement or anything. That’s something we’re looking at,” housing authority solicitor Vito DeLuca said.

Local businessman Ken Pollock donated the Susquehanna Coal building to the authority, whose members planned to convert it into 11 moderate-income senior apartments. After failing twice to get federal tax credits through the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency to fund the project, board members decided in May to look at other options for the building.

“It was one of those things that as time went on, costs went up, and to get funding for it became even less likely,” DeLuca said. “In the event that building is somehow able to complement the development that’s going on downtown, we’re not looking to make money off this building ... We’re looking to breathe new life into the downtown.

7/9/2008

Nanticoke senior center sold; date with wrecking ball likely LCCC may relocate culinary arts program to new building on site.

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The city council sold the Nanticoke Senior Citizens Center for \$250,000 to Scranton developer William F. Rinaldi during a specially called meeting Tuesday afternoon at the municipal building.

Rinaldi can now tear down the building, which is housed in the former Nanticoke Post Office, to construct a new structure, which Luzerne County Community College will then have the option of leasing or purchasing to house its Culinary Arts Center.

City officials feel they received a good deal on the building at 2-6 N. Market St. because numerous appraisals the city had done on the 6,650-square-foot building valued it at \$145,000 to \$180,000.

New assessment values by 21st Century Appraisals, the county’s reassessment firm, valued the property at \$216,700, including \$183,400 for the building itself and \$33,300 for the land.

“Based on my understanding of the structure of the building and what it needs to bring it up to snuff, I think we did OK,” councilman and finance director Jon Metta said.

Another Councilman Joe Dougherty said it was best that the city sold the structure because it needed a lot of improvements including fixing what he called a “deplorable” basement.

The city should receive the money over the next several weeks, City Administrator Kenneth Johnson said. It's unknown exactly how the money will be spent. The money is expected to be added to the city's capital budget.

Before Councilman Jim Litchkofski made a motion to approve the contract, Metta requested to adjourn into executive session to discuss the sale.

Metta said he wanted to further review the documentation he had been presented about an hour before the meeting.

"I wanted to make sure what I read was what was presented," he said. After returning from a brief executive session, Metta seconded Litchkofski's motion. It was passed unanimously by the council members. Councilman Brent Makarczyk was not present at the meeting.

Senior citizens who meet in the facility weekdays to eat and socialize are expected to be moved to Mercy Special Care Hospital on Washington Street in the next few months.

The Nanticoke Housing Authority is also in negotiations to sell the Susquehanna Coal Building on West Main Street. The former Susquehanna Coal Co. headquarters sits behind the Nanticoke Senior Citizens Center and its lot will also be needed to make room for LCCC's Culinary Arts Institute.

7/8/2008

Nanticoke sale on front burner

City to discuss selling 2 properties to make room for culinary arts institute.

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The creation of the Luzerne County Community College's Culinary Arts Institute could soon be moving forward if the sale of two buildings in downtown Nanticoke proceeds.

Nanticoke City Council members will discuss selling the Nanticoke Senior Citizens Center during a special meeting at 4:30 p.m. today at the municipal building.

The Nanticoke Housing Authority is also looking to sell the Susquehanna Coal Building, which sits behind the center, authority solicitor Vito DeLuca said.

"It's a matter of trying to help a project move forward in the city," he said.

State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, who has been supportive of the college moving into downtown, said a developer is expected to construct a new facility on the lots.

The college board of trustees would then decide if it is more feasible to lease and or purchase the building.

The college is also working to relocate its Health Sciences Program into downtown Nanticoke by either leasing or purchasing the Kanjorski Center.

The developer hopes to move forward with construction plans in August, Yudichak said.

LCCC President Tom Leary said the college has not agreed to use one specific location for the culinary institute, but is more concerned that the facility be in downtown and of adequate size to serve the needs of the students.

The two structures are not being sold as one unit, but rather in two separate sales.

Since neither sale is finalized, city and housing authority officials declined to release the names of any interested parties in purchasing the buildings.

The city would receive the money from the Senior Citizens Center building sale and the housing authority would receive money from the coal building sale.

Housing Authority officials at one time planned to turn the coal company headquarters into affordable apartments after the building's owners donated it to the agency.

When the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency declined to fund the renovation project, the authority began looking for other ways to utilize the building.

The board is not looking to profit from a windfall of cash because the coal building was donated, but board members do hope to recover expenses.

"The building was donated to us and we are not trying to take advantage of that," DeLuca said, adding he hoped to have a sales agreement finalized soon.

The city bought the Senior Citizens Center building at the corner of Main and Market streets in 1977 from a private individual for \$64,000, according to Nanticoke City Administrator Kenneth Johnson.

Luzerne County Area Agency on Aging has rented the former post office from the city since June 1977, when it began operating a senior center program in the city.

Seniors using the center are expected to be moved into a facility at Mercy Special Hospital on West Washington Street in Nanticoke, said Mercy Hospital spokesman Jack Coyle.

Yudichak says he thinks the center will be operating out of the hospital in about three months.

7/7/2008

Prices fueling patrol for savings

As fuel prices soar, some emergency responders are seeking to cut costs.

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Fuel costs have doubled within the past year.

And, while most motorists can opt to make fewer day trips, carpool to work or downsize vehicles, emergency responders charged with upholding the law and saving lives and property don't have that luxury.

Local police departments still have to respond to 911 calls. Ambulance crews still have to tend to the sick and injured. Firefighters still have to suit up and drive their gas-guzzling engines and tankers to battle blazes.

Their commitment to serve comes at a cost to the taxpayers who support them and the donors who help keep volunteer companies afloat.

On top of escalating costs for vehicles, utilities and equipment, those departments must also fill the tanks with \$5 diesel and \$4 gasoline at quite the cost – **filling up a Nanticoke fire engine recently resulted in an \$800 bill.**

That means some changes are taking place in firehouses and police precincts throughout Luzerne County.

Some changes are subtle, like asking officers not to use air conditioning in their cruisers, choosing to increase foot and bicycle patrols and not using the larger trucks or SUVs as often.

Others are more unique.

In Hanover Township, only one fire engine will make appearances at the more than half-dozen community firefighter parades scheduled for the township's surrounding area this summer. In the past, two or three engines would run in the parade, but Chief Stanley Borowski said those days are history – much like \$2 a gallon gas.

Harveys Lake Police Chief Jeff Butler said his officers have been asked to turn their cruisers off when they're not driving them. "No idling, no engines running unless they're driving them," he said.

In Nanticoke, city Administrator Ken Johnson said he knows departments and municipalities throughout the region, state and country are struggling with finances. He said he can't imagine any municipality staying under budget this year when it comes to the fuel line item. But, he said, police and fire departments can't significantly scale back their mileage without risking public safety.

They can't stop answering crime calls, fighting fires or making ambulance runs, he said. While some cost-saving measures can be taken, with the amount of square miles most fire and ambulance companies and police departments serve, protection is a costly public service. There are still some steps he and his city's emergency service providers are discussing, including having the fire department only dispatch a truck for non-fire calls if the Nanticoke Community Ambulance requests their presence. Currently the fire department is automatically called when an ambulance is dispatched.

A decision made last year is now paying off for Hazleton.

While looking at purchasing new cruisers, Chief Robert Ferdinand decided to recommend five Dodge Chargers. Though they have eight-cylinder engines, they only use four when running at low speeds. The five Chargers are the first patrol cars out on shifts and the six-cylinder Chevrolet Impalas are used when needed.

Looking back on his decision, Ferdinand said the move was a smart one.

"It was clear that fuel was continuing to rise at an alarming rate. I figured that would be a trend, though I didn't imagine gas would be this high this fast," Ferdinand said.

Not all departments are scaling back.

Kingston Police Chief Keith Keiper said nothing's changed besides the higher fuel bills. Air conditioning is still being used in police cruisers, no foot or bicycle patrols are being ordered and the one department SUV is still put out on a daily patrol shift. Borough Administrator Paul Keating said the decision not to take actions to reduce fuel costs is "a matter of public service and safety. We will maintain our patrols to assure our residents are safe."

Ditto for neighboring Kingston Township, where Police Chief James Balavage said his department will exceed its annual fuel budget by month's end but there's not much he can do about it.

The township budgeted \$19,000 for 2008 for police department fuel. Through June that budget line was about \$1,000 away from going over budget. The budget figured gas at \$2.90 a gallon, even though it was about a quarter less than that when the budget was set last fall. "There's no way anyone could have anticipated \$4," Balavage said.

Balavage said that asking officers to turn their air conditioning off wasn't an option, since wearing a bulletproof vest and uniform, coupled with the summer heat, would lead to "decreased alertness."

In Wyoming, the rising fuel prices haven't altered current protocol for the police department, but Mayor Bob Boyer said a planned purchase of an SUV to replace one of the borough's aging sedans has been eliminated as an option. He said bicycle patrols will be out this summer but that's an annual thing, not spurred on by fuel spikes.

Wilkes-Barre Police Chief Gerry Dessoye said city patrols have not been asked to do anything differently, other than trying not to idle. No increases in bike or foot patrols have been scheduled. City Fire Chief Jacob Lisman also said nothing has changed in his department.

No departments indicated they're going to go out and bring back horse patrols or add motorcycle brigades, but Butler said Harveys Lake Borough Council has discussed motor scooters. That would certainly save on fuel, Butler said, but since most shifts are patrolled by only one officer, he's not sure how an officer would bring in someone he's apprehended on the scooter.

7/3/2008

Nanticoke to repair Orchard Street

Council also moves forward on changing parking configuration on Locust Street.

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Residents living on Orchard Street will soon see improvements in their sewer lines and street.

Nanticoke City Council members voted unanimously during Wednesday's meeting to authorize Pasonick Engineering to advertise for bids to fix the sewer line and repave Orchard Street.

The majority of the project, which is costing more than \$400,000, will be funded using a \$350,000 Community Development Block Grant from the state.

City Administrator Kenneth Johnson hopes the work will be started by the end of the summer. All the engineering design paperwork has already been completed, Johnson said.

"As soon as we have the contract we can do it. My guess is it will be late summer before we end up getting in the ground," Johnson said.

Council members also unanimously voted to authorize Johnson, City Solicitor William Finnegan and City Engineer Daryl Pawlush of Pasonick Engineering to prepare the documents necessary to vacate Arch Street and alter the parking configuration on Locust Street. Both streets are near the Kanjorski Center.

By converting the parking spaces into slanted slots instead of parallel spots, it will provide more room for parking near the office building that Luzerne County Community College is hoping to acquire for two of its academic programs.

Arch Street runs beside the Kanjorski Center to Weis grocery store. Locust Street runs behind the Kanjorski Center.

7/3/2008

Nanticoke searches for fire engine, prepares to alter downtown parking

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Council may have a lead on a fire engine to replace one that died about a month ago.

Councilman Brent Makarczyk said at Wednesday's meeting he found two available engines, but both were more than 25 years old. The shelf life of fire engines is about 20 years, he said.

"As we're in dire need of a truck, we don't want to spend money out of haste," he said, adding that if an older truck is purchased, the city may need to replace it in a few years.

However, Makarczyk said he was just notified there might be engines available from West Hazleton and Harveys Lake, and will be calling those municipalities to inquire about the trucks.

"We really appreciate the patience of the citizens in the Hanover section," Makarczyk said. The fire department lost Engine 3 when the engine died, leaving the Hanover station with only a support vehicle.

In other matters, council voted to have documents prepared to abandon portions of Arch Street and alter the parking configuration of Locust Street near the Kanjorski center to create more parking.

City Administrator Kenneth Johnson said all of Arch Street would be abandoned except at Arch and Broadway streets. Locust Street has many handicapped spots, Johnson said, and the city wants to re-configure parking to create more spaces.

"There's issues of traffic flow and parking now," he said. "We're going to get more cars in there."

Luzerne County Community College made a formal offer to the Nanticoke Municipal Authority for the lease-purchase of the center about two weeks ago. The college wants it for a health sciences center.

In other business, Johnson told council he would prepare a request for proposals for a new garbage contract. He said council would consider possible changes, including having bulk pick-ups only a few times a year and using garbage stickers instead of an annual fee.

Council also authorized Pasonick Engineering to advertise for bids for the paving of Orchard Street. Johnson said the city has approximately \$350,000 in Community Development block grants to use for the project.

6/26/2008

Nanticoke Area High School salutes its graduating seniors

Pam Urbanski writes Nanticoke Area Notes every other Thursday. Story ideas and news items can be e-mailed to her at pamurb806@aol.com.

My column about the Nanticoke Area High School graduating class had to be delayed because as I was finishing my story an electrical storm moved through Nanticoke. My deadline came and went and we still didn't have power. Better late than never as they say.

The senior class of Greater Nanticoke Area was honored during class day ceremonies June 6.

The community came together and presented close to 70 awards to students who excelled academically and in the sports arena.

Students also were recognized for service to the community and for their talent and dedication in the arts. Seniors who were active in the many clubs offered at GNA, as well as those who took on leadership roles within those clubs also were also acknowledged.

The Greater Nanticoke Area Education Association presented awards to the top 10 students.

In alphabetical order, they are Tiffany Becker, Kaitlin Bowalick, Alyssa Degosky, Cassidy Douthat, Eric Habib, Keri Hall, Melanie Laird, Jessica Selecky, Christopher Smith and Geri Smith.

Outstanding class performance awards and class achievement awards were awarded to students who attended Wilkes-Barre Area Vocational-Technical School. They went to Julianna Ardoline, Korey Nadolny, Cora Ferro, Joseph Jackson, Rick Kinder, Nathaniel Wilcox and William Easton.

The 38th Commencement Exercises recently were held at Greater Nanticoke Area. Under blue skies and warm temperatures, graduates dressed in blue and white made their way into the stadium. The 188 graduating seniors were greeted by an enthusiastic crowd of family friends.

Valedictorian Keri Hall, who will be attending Messiah College in the fall, told her classmates to dream big as she quoted Walt Disney. "All your dreams can come true if you have the courage to pursue them. We can't let things stand in our way."

Salutatorian Tiffany Becker also challenged the graduating class. "We are destined for greatness. Keep an open mind and don't be afraid to chase your dreams."

Approximately 75 percent of the graduating class will go on to post-graduate education. Students who will join the armed forces number is at 4 percent. Those who will enter the work force are approximately 13 percent of the graduating class. More than \$2 million in scholarships were awarded to 16 percent of the class.

Congratulations to the class of 2008 and their families.

Coal Miners' Festival set

The South Valley Chamber of Commerce will sponsor a Coal Miners' Heritage Festival on Aug. 15-18 at Patriot Park, Broad and Market streets.

For more information, call 735-6990 or 735-3175.

Historical Society program

The Nanticoke Historical Society will host a very special guest speaker tonight at 7 at the society home, 229 E. Main St.

Chris Murley, director of Abandoned Mine Research Inc, which specializes in mine equipment restoration and underground photography, will speak about his group "The Underground Miners."

He will discuss old and new mining techniques, artifacts that have been recovered and equipment restoration. Murley also will show a video of the inside of abandoned mines.

It is suggested that those attending park their vehicles on Spring Street for easier access. For more information, call 258-1367.

Holy Trinity festival opens Friday

It's hard to believe it's time for the Holy Trinity Church festival again.

The festival will be held Friday and Saturday from 5 p.m. to midnight at the Holy Child Grove in Sheatown.

Parishioners have been working very hard for many months and will, as always, have delicious food on hand including pierogies, sausage and peppers, pizza, potato pancakes and more. There also will be games for everyone and musical entertainment will be provided by Iron Cowboy on Friday and 40-Lb. Head on Saturday.

6/26/2008

Overall costs fall for school health trust

But cost per person rises because of two districts pulling out of group.

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Overall costs for the Northeast Pennsylvania School District Health Trust continue to shrink, dropping 4 percent in the past year, the Trust board learned Wednesday. But thanks to the decision by two districts to leave the Trust, the cost per person has shot up by \$26 per month.

That's because the withdrawal of Dallas and Pittston Area school districts from the Trust meant a 14 percent drop in the total number of people insured, Dr. Stephen Rothstein of Blue Cross said. Blue Cross administers major medical and hospitalization coverage for the Trust, a consortium formed in 1999 to lower health insurance costs for area districts. The fewer people covered, the more it costs per person.

That hasn't translated into an increase in costs to member districts, though. The Trust has already set premiums for the fiscal year beginning July 1, and most remaining districts saw rates drop by about 4 percent. Three districts saw steeper decreases thanks to new contracts that have teachers paying higher deductibles and co-payments for services. [Greater Nanticoke Area](#) and Wyoming Valley West saw drops of about 17 percent, while Tunkhannock Area had rates decline by about 7 percent.

The Trust, which ran in the red during its early years, has been building a surplus and lowering rates consistently in more recent times, and at each board meeting the officers and Executive Director Andrew Marko usually tout some new deal that will help keep costs down. Wednesday's meeting was no exception.

Trust Board Co-Chairman Phil Russo announced that, after extensive negotiations, the Trust had landed a new deal on "stop-loss coverage" – insurance that kicks in once a single person's claims exceed \$300,000. The coverage had been provided by Swiss Re at a cost of \$14.45 per member per month, but will now be provided by Avalon for \$8.78 per member per month.

The local trust negotiates the stop-loss coverage jointly with 12 other similar regional education consortiums that form the larger Pennsylvania Health Trust. Russo was recently elected secretary to the state trust.

While the stop-loss insurance change means a premium savings of more than \$17,000 annually, Marko noted that the net savings could be smaller. That's because the local trust gets most of the stop-loss premiums back each year – close to \$600,000 – if no claims are filed against it. Avalon, the new provider, has promised to continue that policy, Marko said.

6/24/2008

Deal for Kanjorski Center close, says Leary

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Three debts on the Kanjorski Center won't stop a deal between Luzerne County Community College and the Nanticoke Municipal Authority, because only one — the smallest — has to be repaid.

LCCC officials just made a formal offer for the building, which the college wants for a health sciences center. The municipal authority board reviewed the lease-purchase proposal behind closed doors Monday night, but didn't vote.

LCCC President Thomas P. Leary said things are "very close" to completion.

Details of the deal will not be released yet, municipal authority Chairman Ron Kamowski said.

"We have to put together some numbers to make sure what they're offering covers everything," authority board member Dennis Butler said.

State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, said the college would lease the Kanjorski Center for seven years, the term remaining on a \$1.8 million federal Economic Development Administration grant used to build it. The grant only has to be repaid if the building is sold, Yudichak said.

"When I met with them (EDA representatives) in Philadelphia, they said they would take 33 percent of the sales price. But a lease is another story," he said. "Once the seven years is past, we would be relieved of all federal interest, so there would be no payback."

The second liability, a state Department of Community and Economic Development lien on the building for \$271,000, is the only debt that has to be repaid. It will be paid back over the seven years of the lease, Yudichak said.

The third of the three debts is no longer an issue because Luzerne County commissioners voted last week to forgive \$864,000 in county loans against the Kanjorski Center.

Nanticoke Redevelopment Authority members were concerned after their solicitor discovered five mortgages from 1993 to 1995, apparently totaling \$3.7 million and still on the county books.

"The mortgages may not have been satisfied (updated) at the courthouse, but they were paid," Luzerne County Office of Community Development Director Andrew Reilly said.

He and Commissioner Stephen Urban determined through research the loans, taken out through the Luzerne County Community Development Office, actually totaled \$1.5 million.

Over the last 15 years, the municipal authority made payments on the loans and interest, leaving a balance of \$864,008.36, Urban said. The debt will be forgiven at the rate of 20 percent a year over five years, as long as LCCC maintains the building as an educational facility, he said.

"In order to make this worthwhile project work, and revitalize downtown Nanticoke, the balance of the loan needed to be forgiven," Commissioner Maryanne Petrilla said Monday in an e-mail.

The municipal authority is working on the next hurdle: parking for the Kanjorski Center. The board voted Monday to ask city council to vacate Arch Street behind the building to use for more parking.

6/24/2008

LCCC, authority to negotiate sale or lease

College hopes to relocate its Health Sciences and Culinary Arts programs downtown.

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The Nanticoke Municipal Authority got "the ball rolling" Monday as it prepared to negotiate the sale/lease of the Kanjorski Center to Luzerne County Community College.

Authority members reviewed an undisclosed offer from LCCC to purchase/lease the downtown office building during its meeting Monday night at the Nanticoke Municipal Building.

Last summer, LCCC officials announced they wanted to move the college's Health Sciences and Culinary Arts programs into downtown Nanticoke. After meeting in executive session to discuss the offer, authority members appointed Chairman Ronnie Kamowski to negotiate with LCCC. State law allows municipal authorities, councils and other government agencies to meet in behind closed doors to discuss real estate negotiations and contracts.

The board members said they have some questions they needed answered before completing the LCCC deal.

"I will try to get the board answers as we move forward in discussions. Right now things look like we are moving forward," Kamowski said, adding he hoped the negotiations would be worked out quickly for the benefit of the authority, city and LCCC.

He declined to comment on what questions the board had regarding the proposal or release a copy of the letter LCCC sent the board.

Board member Dennis Butler made a motion to ask the authority's solicitor, Joe Lach, to send an official letter to city officials asking them to shut down Arch Street to accommodate parking for the college.

If the council approves the request, Arch Street will be permanently closed between Walnut and Locust streets. Arch Street runs behind the Kanjorski Center and in front of Weis Market. Broadway Street would remain open.

6/23/2008

5 Nanticoke streets set to get smoother

Council unanimously picks Slusser Brothers to handle paving project with a total bid of \$453,756.98.

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Roads in Nanticoke aren't the greatest. In fact many times drivers find themselves dodging potholes as they travel through town.

But before the end of the summer the city will start paving portions of five streets in town using two years worth of Community Development Block Grant funding from the state.

The streets being paved are West Ridge Street from Market to Hanover streets, West Noble Street from Hanover to Fairchild streets, Maple Street from Broad to Green streets, Slope Street from Main to Hill streets and Nanticoke Street from North Market to Main street.

Council members voted unanimously to accept a total bid of \$453,756.98 from Slusser Brothers based on a recommendation from the city's engineer, Daryl Pawlush of Pasonick Engineering.

"It was a very competitive bidding process. It is our professional opinion that the city got a very, very good bid from Slusser Brothers," Pawlush said.

Slusser Brothers' bid beat out three other contracting firms, including Pike's Creek bid of \$455,549, American Asphalt's bid of \$463,327.82 and Barletta Materials' bid of \$469,503.90.

The city requested one bid from paving contractors for all the work, but each contractor broke down their bids, giving separate estimates for the work designated for 2006 and 2007 grant programs.

The state Department of Community and Economic Development only recently released the funding to the city for the 2006 and 2007 programs after the city completed some administrative requirements, City Administrator Kenneth Johnson said.

Pike's Creek submitted a lower bid for the 2007 project, but when combined with its bid for the 2006 work, the total bid was higher than Slusser Brothers.

The state Department of Community and Economic Development recommended the city not break the work into two separate projects, Johnson said.

"If you were to split them apart the city would save less than \$4,000 total and yet we would probably incur a lot more administrative headaches. We

are certainly within our rights to combine two years into one,” he said.

Construction should begin in late July or early August after the city coordinates the work with the contractor, Johnson said.

“They’ll want to go to work quickly. Everybody needs the work,” he said.

6/23/2008

Nanticoke officials believe other mortgages exist on Kanjorski Center

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Last week, the county commissioners forgave \$864,008 Nanticoke owed on the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street, in hopes of speeding its lease or sale to Luzerne County Community College for use as its health sciences center.

However, the solicitor for Nanticoke’s recently dissolved redevelopment authority believes there are four other mortgages from the county still in existence which, along with a \$1.8 million federal grant, the city might have to pay back if the building is sold.

But Nanticoke Redevelopment Authority solicitor Susan Maza identified five mortgages totaling \$3.7 million taken out by the redevelopment authority from Luzerne County between Sept. 15, 1993, and July 7, 1995, that she says are still on the county books.

There is also a \$1.8 million mortgage recorded Oct. 27, 1994, given to the authority by the federal Economic Development Administration to construct the Kanjorski Center. Under the terms of the grant, if the building is sold or used for purposes other than economic development, either permission has to be obtained from EDA for the new use or the money must be paid back.

County, state and college officials have been looking into the EDA situation.

State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, has held meetings with EDA representatives and said they have been “great.” In a best-case scenario, the building could be sold and there wouldn’t have to be a payback of the federal funds, he said. Another option is a lease-purchase agreement that would allow LCCC to essentially rent to own the building.

However, Maza still maintains the transfer of the Kanjorski Center to the municipal authority, which was executed in March, and its subsequent sale could be a problem.

“The question becomes, what effect does that have on the existing mortgage? Does it trigger a repayment clause?” Maza asked during a recent telephone interview.

Redevelopment authority chairman Hank Marks, who is also on the municipal authority, brought the matter to council’s attention last week.

“I don’t know how we can proceed with this thing hanging over us,” Marks said.

The \$864,008 the commissioners forgave might be the remaining balance on the \$3.7 million in county mortgages.

“I don’t see how the county wouldn’t have taken action after 10 years,” Councilman Brent Makarczyk said. “I don’t think anyone’s going to let you go 13 years without making a mortgage payment.”

The municipal authority hit a snag in paying off its debts on the Kanjorski Center when its main tenant moved out in October 2005, taking its approximately \$30,000-a-month rent with it and leaving the building 80 percent vacant.

“To the best of my knowledge, when I was (municipal authority) solicitor they were not making mortgage payments because they had come to some sort of understanding with the county because they were broke,” attorney Joe Lach said.

The county has continued to show support, according to Yudichak.

“Commissioners (Maryanne) Petrilla, (Stephen) Urban and (Gregory) Skrepenak all agree on the value of getting the college downtown,” Yudichak said. “They have been terrific. They will cooperate in any way possible.”

6/21/2008

Sewer mess stalemate

Blocked line causing frustration; man finds officials can do nothing.

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Richard Grevera often stops by his elderly mother’s home in Honey Pot to do chores, and while his dedication might be enviable, some of his duties certainly aren’t.

About a year ago, sewage began backing up in the basement. A camera was snaked down into the sewer line and, to Grevera’s surprise, found that it was blocked under his neighbor’s property. Grevera says the neighbor, Mike Krolikowski, refuses to give him access to the ground.

So in between periodically pumping out the smelly pool, Grevera began contacting officials in an attempt to remedy the situation. They all told him basically the same thing: There’s nothing we can do.

The Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority told him they only maintain the main lines in the streets, not the laterals that connect those lines to each home. Property owners are responsible for those.

Workers at legislative offices told him to contact the city, and the city told him that, while it might be able to help, it has no more access to the land than he does.

“This particular part of town is really complicated because laterals are all over the place,” said Kenneth Johnson, Nanticoke city administrator.

“Sewers were probably put in, in many cases, after the house was built.”

It’s a situation that county minority Commissioner Stephen A. Urban says isn’t too common in the county, but certainly exists.

“Most of the houses were like that,” he said. “There were people who had bore holes” that simply emptied onto the ground or into the street before sewer lines were mandated.

Johnson said that Grevera might have a legal right to access the land under an “implied easement.” Easements on properties regulate what an owner can do with a property and what lands can’t be developed. An implied easement is one that tacitly exists because it’s logically necessary for another

property owner to have access to the land.

Urban examined Grevera's and Krolikowski's deeds and determined that they "didn't specifically spell out that there was an easement on the property, but it made mention that there might be."

Krolikowski did not immediately return a call for comment.

But Johnson said Grevera will probably need an attorney to sort it all out.

"Unfortunately, people don't have a lot of money, and, unfortunately, they want the city to fix everything," Johnson said.

But that's exactly what Grevera and his mother Ann, who keeps her windows open to ventilate the smell, want. The city could just dig down about 3 feet and slip on a pipe, he said.

"Why such a big headache?" he asked. "I don't understand it."

Johnson said it needs to be resolved privately.

"It's like one of those situations that's almost impossible to resolve unless the individual takes the bull by the horns and goes in and fixes it, but then you're going on private property," he said. "In my business, there aren't answers to everything."

6/20/2008

Lower tax take puts Nanticoke in a bind

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The city is facing yet another cash flow problem because revenue from the earned income tax is coming in slower than anticipated.

Council members learned during a special meeting on Thursday that the city is facing a \$600,000 shortfall in its earned income tax revenue for 2008.

"If we don't meet our targets for the remainder of the year, we will have trouble paying our bills," Pennsylvania Economy League Executive Director Gerald Cross said at the beginning of the meeting. PEL was assigned by the state to help the city resolve its financial problems after Nanticoke was declared an Act 47 city.

When the city's finance office and the PEL developed the 2008 budget, they estimated the city would receive \$2.4 million in earned income taxes. But a Berkheimer official, doesn't think the city will generate that much in funding. At least not this year.

It could be 2009 before the city starts seeing that much in earnings from the earned income tax, Berkheimer Director of Sales Jim Hunt said.

He told officials they can realistically expect to receive \$1.8 million to \$1.9 million in earned income tax funding this year.

As of the middle of this month the city has received \$463,000 in revenue from the earned income tax.

Hunt said he expected the majority of that money to start rolling in next month and continue throughout the year.

Starting last September through December (2007), the city received \$359,810.86 from the earned income tax, according to records provided by the city treasurer.

"I think we can work through this if the scenario we just heard is the scenario we see over the next several weeks there are methods of working through this," City Administrator Kenneth Johnson said.

A loan of \$270,000 to the state's Community and Economic Development department is due by the end of August.

Cross said the PEL would tell the DCED the city is experiencing a cash flow problem and would see if the loan could be repaid at a later date.

PEL Senior Research Associate Harry Miller asked Berkheimer's Hunt why it was taking up to seven months for the city to receive residents' income taxes after the employers pay it.

Hunt said other tax collection companies in the region have up to two months to turn in all their tax collections to Berkheimer, who in turn sends the money to the city.

The city council voted in May 2007 to increase its earned income tax from 1 percent to 2 percent to generate additional revenue.

Businesses based in Nanticoke must withhold the 2 percent earned income tax from their employees' checks if the employees are Nanticoke residents.

The city also receives a half a percent commuter tax from people who work in Nanticoke but live elsewhere.

Employers based outside of Nanticoke are not required to tax their employees who live in Nanticoke above one percent. Employees who are not taxed at the higher rate must be billed for the additional taxes in quarter installments by Berkheimer.

"More than half of the residents are not having more than 1 percent withheld, and people aren't making the quarterly payments," Hunt said.

Another thing that is dropping the city's projected income tax earnings this year is a surplus of money the city received at the end of 2007, Hunt said.

The city earned almost \$100,000 more earned income tax revenue last year than expected by taking in a total of \$1.06 million as compared to the anticipated \$975,000.

6/20/2008

Street paving scheduled for five Nanticoke roads

Work will begin soon on five Nanticoke streets in the city. Council awarded Slusser Brothers, lowest of four bidders, the contract to repave portions of Maple, Nanticoke, Noble, Ridge and Slope streets for \$453,756 using 2006 and 2007 federal Community Development Block Grant money. The city is receiving \$358,460 for 2007 and \$381,267 for 2006. The funding will completely cover the cost of the work.

6/19/2008

Hanover section residents concerned about lack of fire engine at station

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The city's desperate need for a new fire truck has turned fire protection in the Hanover section into a burning issue.

Engine 3 is "dead beyond repair" and the city is down to one pumper and one ladder truck, Councilman Brent Makarczyk said. As a result, Engine 4 has been temporarily moved to the main fire station on East Ridge Street, on the recommendation of fire Chief Michael Bohan.

That leaves the Hanover station with only a support vehicle that can control and confine a fire until the bigger trucks arrive.

The lack of a truck concerns Hanover section residents Bill Jesse and Richard Zarzycki.

"Don't you consider us part of the city?" Zarzycki asked.

The problem is manning the station during the day: it's staffed by volunteers, most of whom work then, Makarczyk said. That's why the Hanover fire truck is at the main station. Paid firefighters are always around, and the station is centrally located. Bohan pointed out that it is the lack of a truck that is the problem, and it's not a paid-firefighter versus-volunteer issue.

City officials are asking state and federal lawmakers for help with grants to buy a new pumper truck. They will also look to area fire companies to see if any have a truck to sell, Makarczyk said.

Despite the temporary setback, city officials are aware the Hanover fire station is very active, and definitely don't plan to eliminate it.

"Under no circumstances do we want to close the Hanover station down," Makarczyk said.

In other business, Mayor John Bushko said he was surprised to find that the senior center will be moving from its current location in a city owned building at Market and Main streets to Mercy Special Care Hospital on West Washington Street within 90 days.

City officials expected the Area Agency on Aging for Luzerne/Wyoming counties to have to find a new location, since the building it rents from the city is slated for eventual demolition so a culinary arts institute for Luzerne County Community College can be constructed there by Kingston based Mark Development.

Officials just didn't expect it to happen so soon - and they hoped to be notified first.

"It's our tenant, and I found out on the street they're moving," Bushko complained.

The county requested proposals for a new location, and Mercy was the sole bidder, Councilman Jon Metta said.

Senior center members are concerned about the new location, since public transportation lets them off a block and a half away from Mercy, and many have canes, walkers or wheelchairs, Julianna Zarzycki said. The new facility is also smaller, she said.

"Everybody down there is really unhappy about being displaced by LCC," Zarzycki said.

Council and city Administrator Kenneth Johnson said they would see what they could do to make access to the new senior center easier. Johnson said he believes the Luzerne County Transportation Authority can adjust the route to drop off and pick up members closer to the building.

6/19/2008

Greater Nanticoke Area board announces teacher hirings

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The Greater Nanticoke Area School Board hired a host of new teachers at Tuesday's meeting.

The board hired Brandyn Spencer, English; Brandon Collins, chemistry; Martin Ort, music; and elementary teachers Edward Grant, Nicole Yustat, Lindsay Thomas, Eleanor Anthony, Kimberly Koretz and Laura Price.

Paid school lunch prices will increase 20 cents to \$1.50 for kindergarten through grade 5, and 25 cents to \$1.75 for grades 6-12 and to \$2.75 for adults.

There will be no school board meeting in July.

6/18/2008

Nanticoke school board approves teachers contract, passes budget

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The Greater Nanticoke Area school Board voted for the teachers contract, passed a 2008-09 budget with a lower tax increase and posed the idea of a stricter student dress code, similar to Wyoming Valley West.

Previously, the board approved portions of a new contract, but on Tuesday the final version got the thumbs-up. A few details had to be clarified before it could be formally accepted, board member Robert Raineri said. It's now up to the teachers to pass it, but he said they agreed to the amended version by telephone.

The contract runs from August 2005, when the previous one expired, to August 2010 — so next year, negotiations will restart.

"It was a long, hard-fought battle for three years, and next year we get to do it again," Raineri said.

Under the new contract, teachers will receive raises averaging 3 percent, which includes steps, or educational levels. The contract does not call for teachers to pay part of their health insurance premiums, but it does raise deductibles for prescription cards and doctors' visits.

"The district is saving more by raising their deductibles than if there was a premium share," Raineri said.

Teachers made some concessions, such as giving up early retirement incentives, he said.

The contract doesn't require a property tax increase, Raineri stressed.

The 2008-09 budget originally contained a 9-mill hike to cover increasing operating expenses. However, the increase was cut to 6 mills, business manager Albert Melone said. A mill is \$1 on every \$1,000 of assessed valuation.

The \$24,446,811 budget was changed to include a \$250,000 grant for new educational programs, Melone said.

Superintendent Anthony Perrone announced the district is considering a stricter dress code. GNA officials have been looking at policies in other districts, and would like to draw one up similar to that at Wyoming Valley West. Its dress code, adopted just before the 2007-08 school year, prohibits students from wearing things like jeans and T-shirts. Instead, Valley West students have to wear solid color pants, skirts and shirts with collars.

“Theirs is not real rigid; it’s not difficult for the kids to follow. They wouldn’t be giving up their identities,” Perrone said.

In other business, the board accepted the resignation of Michael Pawlik, who is the director of federal programs and a school principal. The board also voted to post his position, along with that of another principal and an assistant high school principal.

Currently, high school assistant principal Brian McCarthy is filling in for principal Mary Ann Jarolen, who is now at K.M. Smith Elementary School. She is fighting the decision in court.

The board’s position is she was moved because of poor test scores; Jarolen’s stance is she was demoted without a required hearing.

6/18/2008

GNA OKs teacher pact, budget with hike

RALPH NARDONE Times Leader Correspondent

The Greater Area Nanticoke School Board voted unanimously Tuesday night to accept a new teachers contract that will run through August 2010. Board President Jeff Kozlofski thanked the union and district team lead negotiator and board member Bob Raineri for the amount of time and effort they put into reaching the agreement.

Kozlofski said the contract is a good one “on both ends,” for the district and the teachers.

Raineri said the contract provides an approximate average 3 percent salary increase for 2008 that will be applied retroactive to April 17 of this year. He emphasized the actual contract has not been signed by the teachers as of meeting time because some minor details were being finalized. He expects the formal signature to happen in the next few days.

Raineri said the negotiations took place over three years and were tough at times.

No teachers representatives were available for comment. Raineri said, in his opinion, they are happy with the final contract.

In other business, the board voted for a six-mill tax increase for fiscal year 2008-2009. According to district business manager Albert Melone, the tax increase will be minimal.

On average, homeowners will pay approximately \$25 more each year, Melone said. The increase brings district tax rate to 255 mills. A mill is a \$1 tax on every \$1,000 of assessed property value.

Originally, a nine-mill increase was planned, but the increase was lowered during the meeting because the district received notice of a \$250,000 state grant, Melone said.

In another matter, Superintendent Tony Perrone said the district is seriously considering a dress code. Only in the discussion phase at this point, the code will mirror the Wyoming Valley West’s code, Perrone said.

6/8/2008

GNA graduates persevere through year of change

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Greater Nanticoke Area High School senior Keira Lohman used the words of famed computer scientist Alan Kay to challenge fellow graduates to embark on bold and great things in the years to come.

“The best way to predict the future is to invent it,” Lohman told the school’s 188 graduates Friday evening. “The future is not just something that happens to us. It’s up to us to create it,” said Lohman, the senior class secretary.

Looking out at the graduates seated in the middle of the school’s football stadium — the girls in white caps and gowns and the boys in blue — Superintendent Tony Perrone said his speech often begins the same way each year.

“Every year I come here and say, ‘This is one of the best classes we’ve had’ — and it’s true,” he said.

Young people are the lifeblood of the country’s future success and now it’s the Class of 2008’s turn, he said.

“Follow your inner voice and instincts and do what’s right,” Perrone said. “Seniors, make your lives a life in progress.”

Class President Jesse Stine noted there was some turbulence during the senior year — a teacher strike loomed, class elections were late and yearbook preparations were stalled.

“The fact is we didn’t have it easy. We persevered and we need to continue to persevere,” he said. “Responsibility calls, and the correct decisions need to be made.”

The Class of 2008 also experienced a principal change midway through the year when Brian McCarthy was appointed acting principal, becoming the third principal to lead this particular class since it came to the high school.

During his address, McCarthy challenged seniors to use their inherent talents to become successful.

“Tonight is your night,” he said.

6/6/2008

From Presley to pierogies?

Don’t miss this noteworthy event in Nanticoke

If you’d like to experience some Elvis tunes, maybe some Billy Joel or Elton John, and an evening of Rolling Stones-style rock ‘n’ roll, all in one

place, over the course of one weekend, where would you go?

Here's a hint: Northeastern Pennsylvania's Original Starfires will be there, too, playing the kind of music fans enjoyed at the former Hanson's Amusement Park in the 1960s.

Need another clue? The event also includes a hula-hoop contest and a jitterbug contest.

Are you still wondering? This should clinch it. You can enter a pierogi-eating contest at this musical extravaganza.

If by now your thoughts have turned to Nanticoke, you're right. Patriot Square, at Broad and Market streets in the downtown, will be the scene of the three-day "Party in the Park," also known as Nanticoke Musicfest 2008.

"We're trying to show people we have a nice park," organizer J.D. Verazin said. "We're just trying to promote Nanticoke."

Verazin carefully selected the musicians, many of whom pay tribute to famous artists of the past and present.

The entertainment gets under way tonight, from 5 to 8, with Elvis Presley tribute artist Brad Crum from Harrisburg using his 3 and 1/2-octave vocal range to persuade fans to love him tender, love him sweet and stay off his blue-suede shoes.

Then, from 8 to 10 p.m., "Shattered" will pay tribute to the music of the Rolling Stones.

"You always hear about Elvis meeting the Beatles," Verazin quipped. "Here he's meeting the Rolling Stones."

On Saturday, tribute artist Lee Alverson from the Pittsburgh area will don his realistic costumes and deliver one hour of Elton John music and one hour of Billy Joel music from 5 to 7 p.m.

Afterward, from 7 to 11 p.m., Nanticoke's own Eddie Day and the rest of the Starfires, who reunited about five years ago, will make their fans happy with the kind of music that had people dancing at Hanson's several decades ago.

From 3 to 6 p.m. Sunday the Cadillacs, whose motto is "Rock 'n Roll, It's What We Do," will be on stage, followed by the new wave/pop band M80 from 6 to 9 p.m.

Come hungry on Saturday, Verazin suggested, if you want to enter the pierogi-eating contest between 4 and 4:30 p.m. "I think last year the guy who won ate 24. They give you a time limit and a bottle of water."

The jitterbug contest will take place at 7:45 p.m. Saturday, and the hula hoop contest will start at 6:15 p.m. Sunday.

Look for rides and a dunking tank with local celebrities ready to take the plunge throughout the weekend.

It should be a good time, Verazin promised, and it's just the beginning. "From Musicfest we go to a citywide yard sale on July 19, and then we'll get ready for October and the Halloween parade."

"We're trying to show people we have a nice park. We're just trying to promote Nanticoke."

J.D. Verazin

Musicfest organizer



6/6/2008

Time to 'Party in the Park'

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There may not be polka this year, but there will be plenty to dance to at this year's Nanticoke Music Fest.

The 11th annual Nanticoke Music Fest will take place Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and feature three tribute bands, including tributes to the Rolling Stones, Elvis, and piano men Billy Joel and Elton John. Also local favorites the Starfires featuring Eddie Day, the Cadillacs, and M-80 will perform.

When lining up the bands for this year's Music Fest, J.D. Verazin figured he'd try something different this year, rather than the usual polka bands. He surfed the Internet and listened to a number of tribute bands, before deciding on three — Brad Crum, an Elvis impersonator from Harrisburg, Shattered, a Philadelphia band that imitates The Rolling Stones, and Alverson, a singer from Pittsburgh who recreates the music of Billy Joel and Elton John.

"I wanted to keep it rock 'n' rollish, but not too heavy," said Verazin, a member of the Music Fest committee.

Yvonne Bozinski, director of special events for Nanticoke, is looking forward to this year's event because it will include activity booths and food vendors. She hopes this will create a festival-like atmosphere.

There will be a pierogie eating contest and a Jitterbug contest Saturday, and then a hula hoop contest Sunday.

"Hopefully it'll be more fun than sitting in the park and listening to music," Bozinski said. "It's bigger and better than we've ever done before."

Hopefully the weather holds out."

The Music Fest committee's main goal for the event is to bring together the Nanticoke community, as well as give a welcome to others from outside the community.

Bozinski said Nanticoke hosts an annual yard sale, and people come to the yard sale from as far away as New Jersey. Bozinski doesn't know if people will come from that far away for the Music Fest, but she anticipates many people making it for one of the three days.

"It is a lot of hard work, but it pays off when a lot of people come," Bozinski said. "It's free. It's just for the people to come and enjoy, and see a little bit of Nanticoke."

6/5/2008

Nanticoke Street project advances

Nanticoke City Council approves contract to draw up plans for project.

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Work on the streetscape project in downtown Nanticoke is one step closer to reality.

City council members unanimously approved a contract with Facility Design and Development Ltd. to draw up plans and drawings for the proposed project on Main and Market Streets.

It was advertised as a request for proposal, but the city only received one response and it was from Facility Design.

The two-phase project would widen the sidewalks, while removing some of the bricks lining the sidewalks, improve the lighting and install curbside parking, Councilman Brent Makarczyk said.

The fees are expected to cost \$247,000 and will be paid using a combination of three grants totaling \$350,000 from the Pennsylvania Department of Economic Development

The streetscape project will not affect the sale or lease of the Kanjorski Center to the Luzerne County Community College, Makarczyk said.

“This isn’t going to impede on the plans with LCCC or the talks we are having with them,” he said. “This is just general streetscaping for the downtown that we think will enhance the overall look of downtown and give it an overall facelift.”

City engineer Daryl Pawlush from the Pasonick engineering firm requested to take a look at any plans that Facility Design and Development draws up because he said his firm knows the city.

After some question about possible additional cost to taxpayers, Pawlush agreed to review the plans at no cost to the city.

6/5/2008

Nanticoke worries about earned income tax collection

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Council heard ominous news Wednesday about the money the city relies on to function.

Earned income tax isn’t coming in as anticipated — in fact, the city received nothing in January and February and only \$24 in March — and isn’t catching up, according to Gerald Cross of the Pennsylvania Economy League, Nanticoke’s financial recovery coordinator. City administrator Kenneth Johnson called a graph of the zero collection “disturbing.”

The recovery plan PEL drew up for Nanticoke called for raising earned income tax from 1 percent to 2 percent, with 0.5 percent going to the Greater Nanticoke Area school district. The increased revenue was supposed to help counter the city’s growing annual deficits and cover expenses without having to lay off city employees.

Employers are supposed to deduct earned income tax from paychecks, or else residents have to pay a lump sum by tax day, April 15. PEL and city officials expected to get a bump in revenue after April, but it hasn’t come.

Berkheimer Associates, the city’s earned income tax collector, said last year the city would receive “catch up” collections by June 2008, Cross said. But by the end of May, the city has received \$813,000 — not the \$1.32 million PEL expected.

Unless collections get better, the city might not be able to balance the budget or pay back its loans and could fail to meet state requirements for financially distressed cities, Cross said.

City officials and representatives from the financial recovery team will meet soon with Berkheimer personnel to take a look at the collection process.

In addition to paying the additional earned income tax, residents will soon be receiving reassessment notices for their homes, resident Dennis Butler said. When the reassessment process started, gas wasn’t \$4 a gallon and the city didn’t have a 2 percent earned income tax, he pointed out.

Increased assessments and resulting higher property taxes are not fair, especially to the city’s many senior citizens on a fixed income, Butler believes. He asked if the city, county, and school district could be phased in over a three- to five-year period.

“People are going to see mortgage payments going up \$400, \$500 a month,” Butler said. “I would like to see us go to the county and say, ‘hey, let’s phase these values in a third at a time.’”

In other business:

Mayor John Bushko and Police Chief James Cheshinski gave Officer Robert Lehman the Excellence Award, a Meritorious Service award, and the Purple Heart citation bar to wear on his uniform. The awards are based on commendations Lehman received for his service in the U.S. Navy, supporting the Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Council approved Facility Design and Development, Ltd. for planning, design, and drawing up specifications for downtown streetscape improvements.

Daryl Pawlush of Pasonick Associates, the city’s engineer, said he didn’t know the project was up for bid, and asked for the courtesy of notification next time, since the firm has worked with the city for at least 25 years. The nonprofit South Valley Partnership, which is spearheading the project, wanted to use Facility Design and Development because the firm had already done planning work for the group.

6/2/2008

Nanticoke skateboarders wait patiently for somewhere to ride

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Nanticoke skateboarders, who for years have been asking for a skate park, will have to wait a bit longer for their wish to come to fruition.

The nonprofit South Valley Partnership plans to install a skateboard park as the first component of the Greater Nanticoke Area Recreation Park on Lower Broadway, but legal issues with the land are still holding up the deal.

Nanticoke Solicitor William Finnegan is working to help the city secure ownership of approximately 140 former residential properties torn down in a hazard mitigation project after the Tropical Storm Agnes flood of 1972. The area is part of the Susquehanna River flood plain.

The city owns the land, but doesn’t have clear title to it because the deeds were either lost or improperly filed.

The added legal work and associated cost has stalled the project, according to state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke.

City Councilman James Litchkofski is leading the charge to keep the project moving forward.

Mayor John Bushko is frustrated on behalf of the city's skateboarders, who have been patiently waiting for at least six or seven years for a park.

"Every other town, if they want something, they just go get it. Nanticoke, we have to jump through the hoops, get eight different answers and still not get where we're going anyway," he said.

Another effort is in progress to get a skate park constructed in Wilkes-Barre. Northeast Pennsylvania Skate Park Association founders James Gidosh and Kevin Pizzano have been approaching city council for years — most recently in April — trying to find a suitable location.

6/1/2008

Two-alarm fire destroys Nanticoke eatery, residence

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The pouring rain came too late to do anything but soak firefighters who spent more than two hours fighting back flames that destroyed the top two floors of a home and local restaurant and bar in Nanticoke on Saturday.

The building, at 62 Green St., is owned by Jim and Kelly Porzucek, who run the Green Street's Restaurant and Bar on the first floor and live above it.

The bar appeared to have begun in the first floor storage closet and quickly spread to the top loft, Nanticoke Fire Chief Michael Bohan said. The cause of the two-alarm fire is under investigation. The second and third floors sustained heavy fire damage, while the bottom floor was mostly water and smoke.

Only one person, Kelly Porzucek's brother, was in the building when the fire was discovered, Bohan said. One fireman sustained a minor back injury. A pet gecko, named Chloe, was rescued.

Firefighters who first responded to the call went inside the building until it "flashed," said Bohan, who then had to fight the flames from outside. A flash is a sudden, extremely hot burst of fire.

Jim Porzucek works at the State Correctional Institution at Dallas, while his wife works at Greater Nanticoke Area High School, next-door neighbor Ed Wiernusz said.

Wiernusz, who had spoken to Kelly Porzucek's brother, said the brother had found the fire when he opened a door.

"He tried to fight it, he got a garden hose but (the fire) went right up the walls," Wiernusz said.

The restaurant and bar was a popular neighborhood spot, especially on Wednesday nights when chicken wings were on special, bystanders said. Friends and family gathered at the scene to support the Porzuceks, who have two sons. Becky Golightly, a close friend, said she raced to the house from Kingston when she heard the news. The family had been preparing to celebrate Jim Porzucek's mother's retirement last night, Golightly said.

"They would have been there for us if we needed them," friend Becky Golightly said.

She added the fire was especially terrible because the Porzuceks were not only losing their home, but their business as well. The Porzuceks had not decided whether or not to renovate and rebuild the bar, she said.

Kelly Brown and Tara Doris, both of Nanticoke, watched as firefighters doused the building time and time again, hoping the fire would die down. Both said they loved the restaurant and bar. The food was good, the prices were low and, Brown said, the Porzuceks were "down-home, friendly people."

"This is one of the saddest things I've seen in a while," she said.

6/1/2008

Fire guts W. Green Street tavern

Green Street's Restaurant and Pub in Nanticoke burned Saturday afternoon. One firefighter is injured.

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A small tavern known to local patrons for Wednesday-night Buffalo wing specials and more than 100 wing sauce varieties was destroyed when flames ripped through the family-owned business on Saturday afternoon.

Firefighters responded at about 3:10 p.m. to battle the blaze at Green Street's Restaurant and Pub, 62 W. Green St., that sustained heavy fire, smoke and water damage, said Nanticoke Fire Co. Chief Michael Bohan.

There was moderate fire damage to the tavern's first-floor, Bohan said. Flames then traveled up the structure's exterior walls and burned off the roof and attic. The attic sustained severe fire damage.

The entire building had severe smoke and water damage, according to the chief. The owners, Jim and Kelly Porzucek, were living on the second-floor.

Firefighters were sent out to the scene after Steven Fretty, a brother of Kelly Porzucek, smelled smoke downstairs, Bohan said. Fire started in the bar's storage area.

The owners declined to comment about their loss.

A firefighter from Newport Township suffered a back injury, the fire chief said. There were no other injuries, he said. Edwardsville, Hanover Township and Newport Township fire companies assisted.

"It's great to see such cooperation among municipalities," Nanticoke Councilman Joe Dougherty said.

Firefighters contained the blaze within the first two hours, the fire chief said, but had to continue to douse several hot spots in the attic. The cause of fire has not been determined pending further investigation, Bohan said.

"We don't believe it to be suspicious," he said.

A fire marshal from state police at Wyoming will investigate the cause on Monday.

Dougherty said the fire was “devastating.”

“We are trying to bring business into Nanticoke and today we are unfortunately losing a business.”

Several patrons who say they regularly went to Green Street’s watched as firefighters fought the blaze at their favorite street-corner tavern.

Brian Fisher, 41, of Alden, said he will miss 35 cent wings and clams on Wednesday nights. He and his friend, Ronnie Baker, 44, of Nanticoke, were planning to grab a bite to eat at Green Street’s on Saturday.

“They had good food,” said Fisher, who usually ordered Cajun wings, clams, and steak and cheese. “This is just a shame. Where would they relocate in this town?”

Baker, who lives just a couple houses down on West Green Street, watched as the pub went up in flames from his front porch. He said he worked at Green Street’s as a part-time cook about eight years ago.

“It was real nice up there,” Baker said. “They have the best wings.”

Bob Vincent, 70, of Nanticoke, said he would go to the tavern often with family. He said Green Street’s was more than just a place to go for cold beer. It was a place many locals went for dining, especially on Wednesdays.

“I’m going to miss the food,” said Vincent, who added that he’ll have a hard time parting with honey mustard sauce or blue cheese sauce with his wings.

“They had good food. ... This is just a shame. Where would they relocate in this town?”

Brian Fisher Alden

6/1/2008

GNA absences cause concern

School board learns 177 seniors have missed more than 25 days, some as many as 70 days.

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School directors in the Greater Nanticoke Area School District are concerned about the excessive number of absences some seniors have racked up. About a third of Nanticoke High School’s 177 seniors have missed more than 25 days of class this year, according to the school’s attendance records released in May.

Some students have missed as many as 40, 50 and 70 days. Two students have missed more than 120 days out of the 180-day school year, school board member Cindy Donlin pointed out.

Several board members were shocked to hear how many days some students were missing.

“I don’t know if this is happening in other districts, but this board needs to make a policy that this doesn’t happen again,” board member Tony Prushinski said.

The district does have a formal policy as spelled out in the 2007-08 student handbook from Nanticoke High School.

According to the handbook, a student who is absent must submit an excuse form within five school days. If a form is not turned in, the absence will be listed as an unexcused one. If a student misses more than nine classes per semester due to unexcused absences, the student could lose credit for that course. Students will not be permitted to make up work if it is classified as an unexcused absence, according to the handbook’s absence procedure section.

Board members asked acting high school Principal Brian McCarthy about the circumstances of the multiple absences of some of the seniors. He said he would have to check the students’ files for more specific information.

Board member Patricia Bieski said the district is participating in “child abuse” if it does not work to rectify the situation to ensure students are abiding by the rules.

She told Superintendent Tony Perrone during the meeting the district needs to do whatever it takes, even if it means spending money the board hadn’t previously considered using, to keep students in school.

“Children of this age don’t understand what impact this will have on them. The most important thing in a child’s life is a loving family and a good education. This has to be a top priority. We have to find a way,” she said.

Prushinski noted that if students don’t attend, they can’t do well in their classes or state-mandated tests. He said this year’s seniors are the same class in which 67 percent performed at basic or below basic on last year’s Pennsylvania System of School Assessment tests.

Prushinski demanded to know what steps the district was taking to ensure students are showing up for class.

The district uses various methods within the limits of the law to ensure students are attending classes, Perrone said.

He noted the district uses an automated phone system to call parents to alert them of when students miss class or are late to school. If the students miss classes over several days, the district’s police officer goes to their homes in an attempt to bring them to school or issue them a ticket to appear before the local judge, Perrone said.

Parents can be fined if their children continually miss school. The fine is paid to Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker, but that money is eventually sent back to the district, Perrone said.

6/1/2008

Local woman top model

Jamie Wall, a Nanticoke native, is named ‘America’s Next Top Model’ by Philadelphia television station.

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During the last few years, the college student has focused on attaining her pharmacy degree at the University of

the Sciences in Philadelphia and spending time with her close-knit group of family and friends, while modeling on the side to earn some extra cash.

But, her modeling career got a boost in May when The CW Philly 57 television station, part of CBS Television Stations, named her “America’s Next Top Model,” after the 21-year-old Nanticoke native and 2005 Bishop Hoban graduate won the station’s highly publicized contest.

“It’s a great accomplishment, but you just have to put everything in perspective,” said Wall, who applied after much prodding from a friend.

She’ll receive a complimentary three-night trip to Beverly Hills, Calif., and has earned guest appearances on The CW Philly 57’s Summer Special, a program featuring young hosts who chat about places to go in the city and discuss popular summer trends, said station spokeswoman Joanne Calabria.

“She is the whole package; she is smart, beautiful and nice,” said Calabria, who noted Wall had stiff competition.

Of those submitting more than 400 portfolios and 3,000 photos, Wall was chosen as a finalist along with 11 other hopefuls.

“I was so busy with finals at school that I’d actually forgotten about it when my friend told me I was chosen for the top 12,” said Wall, who carries a 3.9 GPA and works as a pharmacy intern.

After interviewing with a panel of judges and garnering online votes from classmates and friends, Wall learned she won May 14, when the announcement was made live on the air, following the national “America’s Next Top Model” television program. Wall is also featured on the station’s Web site – making her face a bit more recognizable in the Philadelphia area.

However, CW Philly wasn’t the first to recognize her talent. She caught the eyes of agents at Reinhard Modeling Agency in Philadelphia the day she strutted into their office in the spring of 2006.

“She certainly has the usual: the height, the sizing and proportions, but she has a really amazing personality and you can see it when she smiles,” said Jenna Adams, Wall’s print and runway agent.

And there’s no doubt the achievement may improve her modeling career.

“I’ve had some different agencies and promotional companies contact me in Philly because they saw the contest,” Wall said.

And while humble, she’s no stranger to the spotlight. In fact, this month Wall can be seen on the pages of Glamour and Cosmopolitan magazines in an advertisement for Scunci Hair Products. She’s also done work for Gwen Stefani’s clothing Web site, L.A.M.B., in addition to a slew of other photo shoots for various companies. Besides print, Adams said Wall is skilled on the runway, where she’s modeled in designer shows for Neiman Marcus, Saks Fifth Avenue and Nordstrom clothing lines.

She perfected her runway walk last school year, when nearly every weekend she was traveling to major cities in California, Florida and North Carolina to model various lines.

“She’s certainly very good at having a new client and then creating them as a regular client,” Adams said. “She has people come back and request her specifically.”

Adams said that despite Wall’s success in the Philadelphia modeling industry, she never pegged Wall to win the highly competitive contest.

“I think it came as a surprise to all of us,” she said, referring to Wall’s unassuming nature. “She’s never the first person to raise her hand or nominate herself.

“She’s very positive, she’s very organized and just a pleasure to deal with,” Adams said.

But, Wall’s biggest challenge this summer won’t be which company’s advertisement to lend her talent to – it’ll be whom she’ll ask to accompany her to Beverly Hills.

“My mom just keeps saying how she’s never been there before,” Wall said with a chuckle, admitting she’s still not sure who her lucky companion may be.

5/29/2008

Annual party in park fast approaching: Three-day MusicFest begins June 6

Pamela Urbanski writes “Nanticoke Area Notes” every other Thursday in The Citizens Voice. Story ideas and news items can be e-mailed to her at pamurb806@aol.com.

If you’ve been waiting for summer to come around to enjoy some great outdoor events, you won’t want to miss the upcoming party in the park. Packed with top entertainment, the three-day Nanticoke MusicFest at Patriot Park has something for everyone.

Appearing Friday, June 6, from 5 to 8 p.m. will be Brad Crum as Elvis. Billed as the No. 1 Elvis impersonator in Pennsylvania, Crum will present a

tribute to the king of rock and roll.

Taking the stage the same night from 8 to 10 will be the band Shattered. Each member of the band captures the vocal sounds and instrumental work of the legendary Rolling Stones. The group also uses many authentic costume changes through out the performance.

The musical entertainment continues Saturday, June 7. Performing from 5 to 7 p.m. will be Lee Alverson, who has an impressive resume. He has shared the stage with many national acts including the Beach Boys, Barry Manilow and Three Dog Night to name a few. He has produced successful musical revues including a big band show, a "Phantom of the Opera" tribute, as well as tributes to film scores. His show specialties are tributes to Billy Joel and Elton John.

If you remember Hanson's Amusement Park at Harveys Lake and the Starfire Ballroom in Wilkes-Barre, then you must be familiar with the Starfires.

The group attracted thousands of fans to its weekly shows in the '60s. And now some 30 years later, Roger Griff Griffith, R Jay, Eddie Day, Bob Gardner, Charlie McCuen, Howard Dymond and John B. Hall are back together. So put on your dancing shoes and be ready to dance the night away with the Original Starfires with Eddie Day from 7 to 11 p.m.

On the final day, Sunday, June 8, the Cadillacs will perform from 3 to 6 p.m. Covering a variety of artists, their music entertains crowds of all ages. The final act will be the M-80s, who will take the stage from 6 to 9 p.m. These six talented musicians will have you rocking and rolling.

In addition to the musical entertainment, there will be all your favorite foods including potato pancakes, pierogies, pizza, sausage sandwiches, ice-cream, cotton candy, etc.

As an added MusicFest extra, the Apollo Circle Resident Council will sponsor a bingo party each night. Proceeds from bingo will be used to finance programs for children of the Apollo Circle Family Development and to finance events for the annual community day to be held Saturday July 12. Contests also will be held throughout the weekend. If you can hula hoop and jitterbug you may win a prize. Rides and games of chance also will be part of the festivities. Magician Pat Ward also will be on hand.

Marilyn Collacchi, one of the committee members, is hoping for good weather and a good turnout. "We hope that our neighbors and friends will come out and enjoy the party in the park. We have great entertainment and food, something for the whole family. You won't find better entertainment all in one place anywhere this summer," Collacchi said.

Patriot Park is bounded by Broad and Markets streets.

Tax face period to end

Nanticoke City Treasurer/Tax Collector Albert J. Wytoshek reminds residents the face value period for 2008 city property taxes will end Tuesday, June 10.

Taxes are payable at the municipal building tax office Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Payments will not be accepted by postmark. When requesting a receipt, enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Property owners are reminded it is their responsibility to forward tax statements to their respective mortgage companies.

Anyone needing assistance or an appointment should call 735-2800.

Task Force holding golf tourney

The Greater Nanticoke Area Drug Task Force is sponsoring a "Just Say No to Drugs" golf tournament June 30 at the Wyoming Valley Country Club.

For more informatin or to register a foursome, call 814-9002 or 574-8111. Deadline for team or individual entries is June 13.

5/28/2008

Contempt of court proceedings stayed in GNA case

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The hearing started five minutes late and with no attorneys present, but turned out to be a non-event.

Luzerne County Court of Common Pleas Judge Ann Lokuta announced Tuesday that "all proceedings" in her court regarding a petition to find Greater Nanticoke Area Superintendent Tony Perrone in contempt of court were "stayed" pending the outcome of an appeal in the case.

Perrone hadn't even made it into the courtroom before Lokuta adjourned and left.

The contempt petition was filed May 21 by attorney Charles Coslett on behalf of his client, former Greater Nanticoke Area High School Principal Mary Ann Jarolen. The School Board transferred Jarolen to an elementary school on April 10. Coslett sought and won an injunction from Lokuta ordering the district to reinstate Jarolen to the high school post.

District Solicitor Vito DeLuca filed an appeal in Commonwealth Court on April 21, and said at the time that the appeal superseded Lokuta's order, so the district did not reinstate her.

On May 21 Coslett filed a petition asking Lokuta to find Perrone in contempt of court for not following the order to reinstate Jarolen at the high school. Coslett also argued that, even if the appeal supersedes the injunction, Lokuta should order Perrone to reinstate Jarolen until the appeal is settled.

Lokuta's terse statement was simply that "all proceedings" in her court regarding the case are stayed pending the appeal.

5/22/2008

Attorney for displaced Nanticoke principal wants superintendent held in contempt

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The attorney for demoted Greater Nanticoke High School principal Mary Ann Jarolen has filed an action to either have her returned to the high school or to have the court find Superintendent Anthony Perrone in contempt of a court order.

Attorney Charles R. Coslett petitioned Luzerne County Judge Ann Lokuta to allow Jarolen back to her job at the high school until the Commonwealth Court responds to Greater Nanticoke Area School Board's appeal of Lokuta's earlier ruling on the case.

The petition also asks Perrone "be held in contempt of court and incarcerated until such time as he reinstates (Jarolen) to her position as high school principal."

Lokuta granted the petition on Wednesday and scheduled a hearing on the matter for Tuesday, May 27, at 11:45 a.m.

GNA solicitor Vito DeLuca, who is representing Perrone, said he does not believe the superintendent willfully violated a court order, although he noted Coslett is entitled to request the state court remove the automatic stay of Lokuta's order. The appeal to the state superseded the county court order, DeLuca said.

"But the civil contempt, I have absolutely no idea where he (Coslett) believes he is coming from with that," DeLuca said. "We followed the letter of the law, so I don't see any legal basis for that at all."

The school board voted on April 10 to remove Jarolen from the high school and make her principal of K.M. Smith Elementary. The board's position is that poor test scores led to the reassignment. Jarolen filed an injunction to stop the transfer, stating she had not had a required administrative hearing in front of the school board before the action.

Two hearings scheduled for Feb. 8 and March 17 were postponed, one because of a scheduling conflict and one because Jarolen could not attend for medical reasons. She is being treated for breast cancer.

Lokuta granted Jarolen's injunction after a two-hour hearing on April 18. That allowed Jarolen to return to the high school.

The district countered by appealing it to Commonwealth Court, where no ruling has been made.

The appeal automatically returned Jarolen as principal of K.M. Smith Elementary until it is resolved. Coslett's petition asks for Lokuta's April 18 order to be restored while the appeal is pending.

5/22/2008

Nanticoke council asked to reconsider authority dissolution

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Concerns about the sale of a downtown office building and losing a \$5.6 million grant prompted redevelopment and municipal authority members to ask council to reconsider a previous decision to dissolve the redevelopment authority.

Council's majority voted at its last meeting to take on the responsibilities of the redevelopment authority, which until recently owned the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street.

Plans are in the works for its lease-purchase or sale to Luzerne County Community College, which wants it for a health sciences center.

The redevelopment authority transferred the deed to the municipal authority in March. Municipal authority member Dennis Butler questioned the legality. The center still has about \$1.8 million left on the grant used to build it, which must be paid back if it is sold within a certain time.

"How do you transfer an encumbered building without satisfying the encumbrances?" Butler asked.

Councilman Brent Makarczyk said the city could lease the Kanjorski Center to LCCC for seven years until payback was no longer an issue.

Hank Marks, who is on both authorities, said members don't mind disbanding the redevelopment authority as long as it won't interfere with the LCCC sale or jeopardize a \$5.6 million grant U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, got for parking and street improvements.

The money is specifically earmarked for the redevelopment authority.

Marks complained a recent editorial by Councilmen Jon Metta, James Litchkofski and Makarczyk made the redevelopment authority look like "a group of bumblers."

But council advised the authority to get rid of the previous downtown planner, Robert Yoder, despite that Kanjorski had threatened to pull the grant if his "hand-picked developer" was removed from the project, Marks said.

Kanjorski did re-route the \$5.6 million, but returned it.

Hank Kellar, also on both authorities, reminded council they would have to put up with Kanjorski, since most of the authority's money is from the federal government.

"You're faced with dealing with a man who tells you what to do, how to do the job and whether you'll get the money," Kellar said.

5/21/2008

Attorney asks judge to hold Tony Perrone in contempt

Mark Gydish - Times Leader

The attorney for former Greater Nanticoke Area High School Principal Mary Ann Jarolen has asked a judge to hold School District Superintendent Tony Perrone in contempt of court, claiming Perrone has ignored an April 18 order to reinstate Jarolen as principal.

Attorney Charles Coslett filed the petition Wednesday, arguing that Perrone "has not sought a suspension" of the injunction pending the district's appeal in the case. School Board Solicitor Vito DeLuca has said that the injunction was automatically stayed when the appeal was filed.

Luzerne County Court of Common Pleas Judge Ann Lokuta scheduled a hearing on May 27 for both sides to present their case.

Jarolen was notified on Jan. 25 that the district planned to reassign her, and the School Board voted on April 10 to move her from the high school.

Coslett sought and won an injunction during an April 18 hearing before Lokuta. The hearing included details of Jarolen's fight with cancer that has resulted in numerous days off for treatment and recovery, and a lengthy analysis of state test scores that the district argued have dropped steadily during Jarolen's tenure.

In granting the injunction, Lokuta dismissed the test score argument and ordered the district to give Jarolen her old job back, but DeLuca filed an appeal April 21. The district kept Jarolen working as an elementary principal pending that appeal. In court papers, Coslett says Perrone's actions "are clearly violative" of the injunction, "and may amount to civil contempt" of Lokuta's order. Coslett further asks that, even if Lokuta decides the appeal supersedes the injunction, she should order Perrone to reinstate Jarolen until the appeal is settled.

5/17/2008

Nanticoke City Council is committed to bringing LCCC to the downtown

Editor: This is addressed to the citizens of Nanticoke:

As taxpayers, you have a right to know how your tax dollars are being spent in your community. As councilmen in Nanticoke, it is our responsibility to be accountable to you for the decisions on how best to invest those tax dollars.

Recently, the Nanticoke City Council voted to disband the city's five member redevelopment authority board. The decision was, we believe, an important step toward protecting millions of dollars in taxpayer money. Moreover, the action makes it possible for the city to complete the process of bringing Luzerne County Community College into our downtown as a full partner in the city's revitalization.

It is important to note that our action does not reflect upon the work by any single member of the authority. RDA members like Chet Beggs, Hank Keller and Hank Marks have worked hard and they have given their very best to the city, but ultimately, as Mr. Beggs noted at our recent public meeting, the authority system has become more of a hindrance than a help in completing projects.

We are grateful for LCCC's interest in our downtown. The college is one of the city's and one of Northeastern Pennsylvania's greatest assets. The city cannot afford to miss out on this historic opportunity.

Regrettably, recent history in the city has taught us tough lessons about the loss of grant money and the inefficiencies of a fragmented government. In the case of the RDA, three years after securing a \$5.6 million federal grant no constructive action has been taken to ensure the responsible expenditure of those tax dollars.

In 2005, the redevelopment authority and Congressman Paul Kanjorski announced they secured a \$5.6 million federal grant to fund the construction of a parking garage, commercial space and the creation of 120 new jobs for the city. In good faith and cooperation, we waited two years for those promises to come true — they never did.

Instead of a new project and new jobs, we watched as 200 HealthNow jobs left the city. Adding insult to injury, city taxpayers got stuck paying all the bills for the RDA and for the upkeep of the vacant Kanjorski Center property.

Frustrated with the lack of progress, the city helped create the South Valley Partnership and developed a strategic economic plan that sparked the interest of LCCC in our downtown. With a major tenant committed to the city, we began working with all parties to build a parking garage for LCCC. As meetings were being held to advance the project, we learned inaction on the part of the RDA allowed Congressman Kanjorski to re-direct the \$5.6 million earmark to projects in Lackawanna County and other parts of Luzerne County.

Thankfully, after much work by college officials, Congressman Kanjorski agreed to cease his efforts re-direct the funding. The \$5.6 million remains earmarked for the City of Nanticoke, however it was confirmed recently by federal highway officials that the grant cannot be used for the construction of a parking garage.

While it is disappointing to learn that a parking garage is not eligible, the city is committed to fully executing the \$5.6 million grant and providing the necessary parking/streetscape enhancements to accommodate the college and the many existing businesses which have invested in the future of Nanticoke.

We want to work with the college, city businesses, city residents and our elected officials at the federal, state and county level — all in cooperative effort to spend these hard earned tax dollars wisely and in the best interest of vibrant and more prosperous Nanticoke.

We welcome your advice and your support on these important city projects. Please feel free to contact us at the city building to share your thoughts. Together, we can move Nanticoke forward.

Brent Makarczyk - James Litchkofski - Jon A Metta

5/17/2008

Plans uncertain for former coal company building in Nanticoke

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The corner of Market and Main streets is one of the city's most visible intersections — and a crucial site for downtown revitalization. That's why the Nanticoke Housing Authority wants to do something with the former Susquehanna Coal Co. office building there, even if its original plan doesn't pan out.

Luzerne County Community College officials intend to construct a culinary arts institute at the intersection, on the site of the city-owned senior center, as part of a plan to expand into downtown Nanticoke.

The Nanticoke Housing Authority intended to develop 11 moderate-income senior apartments in the Susquehanna Coal building, which is right behind the senior center. But after a nonprofit offshoot of the authority twice failed to get federal tax credits to fund the project, authority board members aren't sure they will try again.

The board appointed member Jean Ditzler, who is acting director of the authority, as manager of the Nanticoke Senior Housing LP, the nonprofit limited partnership the authority created to apply for the tax credits. Ditzler's responsibility is to get the housing authority reimbursed for its expenditures in the failed tax credit applications.

The Susquehanna Coal building or its site could still be used for senior housing — “or whatever kind of project we can get in there,” housing authority solicitor Vito DeLuca said. The housing authority will consider different ideas, with the backing of U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, and state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, DeLuca said.

“The future of the building is uncertain, except we will try to find other avenues to develop that corner,” DeLuca said. “We know that corner is crucial to redevelopment in the city, and the housing authority wants to be part of that.”

LCCC plans to move two of its growing programs into downtown Nanticoke, which city, state, college and county officials see as a foundation for revitalizing the city.

LCCC President Thomas Leary said the college is “very close” to working out a lease-purchase agreement with Nanticoke officials for the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street. The college wants to use the building as its health sciences center.

Despite a setback in April when officials learned a \$5.6 million federal grant can’t be used to build a parking garage on East Main Street, other options are in the works to provide the 300 parking spaces necessary for faculty and students. Leary said officials are trying to determine how they can obtain enough surface parking to meet the needs.

As for the culinary arts center, Leary said he is meeting next week with the developer. College officials want to ensure its design is conducive to the needs of the students and can fit both new and existing programs, he said.

Nanticoke Housing Authority, an independent entity formed in 1966, has five board members appointed by the mayor. It is responsible for the city’s elderly high-rise and low-income family apartment complexes, including Apollo Circle, Nanticoke Terrace and Park Towers.

5/17/2008

GNA considers cyber school

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Greater Nanticoke Area school district officials are tired of losing money from sending students to charter schools and computer-based cyber schools. So they’re trying to get into the act themselves.

“We could run our own charter school and save a lot of money, and that’s what we’re trying to do,” Superintendent Anthony Perrone said after hearing the district will lose more money in 2008-09 due to increasing cyber and charter school enrollments.

Perrone said GNA still has to pay the tuition of all students in the district, even for students who attend schools outside of it. And GNA’s portion of state funding for those students goes with them, district business manager Albert Melone said. If GNA starts a cyber charter school for those students to attend, the state funding would stay in the district, Perrone said. He said he has been going to the Luzerne Intermediate Unit 18 to learn how to do it.

5/16/2008

Nanticoke Area budget contains tax increase

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Greater Nanticoke Area School Board voted Thursday to increase real estate taxes and, after hearing some surprising statistics about this year’s senior class, decided to crack down on absenteeism next year.

The \$24,196,811 budget for the 2008-09 school year calls for increasing property taxes by 9 mills to a total of 258. A mill is \$1 on every \$1,000 of assessed valuation.

The first reading of the proposed budget passed 7-1, with board member Anthony Prushinski voting against the proposal. Board member Kenny James was absent. Prushinski voted against the budget because he believed taxes should have been raised in smaller increments over the years instead.

The budget is based on settling the teachers contract, Business Manager Albert Melone said. It contains \$1.9 million for retroactive pay and benefits, but that was planned for because salaries have been frozen since the contract expired Aug. 31, 2005.

“I just want to state for the record the millage increase is not for the teachers’ contract,” board member Robert Raineri said. “We did the contract without raising millage.”

The contract is settled except for language the district’s attorney is clarifying, and the board expects to vote on it at its next meeting on Tuesday, June 17, Raineri said.

The millage increase is due to increasing costs of necessities such electricity and gasoline, Superintendent Anthony Perrone said. It is also to build up the fund balance, which is an account to cover things like capital improvements — the new windows at the high school, for one — and emergencies. Melone is budgeting for a \$3.9 million fund balance.

Melone said GNA is “kind of an anomaly” among area school districts, because the state provides 59 percent of its revenue. Most districts are financed primarily through local sources. For example, Dallas only gets 31 percent of its revenue from the state and 1.4 percent from the federal government — the rest comes from district taxpayers.

Each mill brings in \$23,000 for the district. Average tax bills are \$696 a year, and the 9-mill increase means an additional \$27 per household, Melone said. However, GNA’s 4,660 approved homeowners are getting \$152 per property taken off their tax bills due to state gaming revenue. Prushinski created a stir among the board and audience by announcing that 48 of the approximately 170 seniors who will graduate June 6 were absent for more than 25 days. Two students were absent for 120 days, board member Cindy Donlin said.

The high school handbook calls for students ages 17 to 20 who have been absent for 25 or more days to either get a GED or take the school year over again, Prushinski noted.

Excessive absenteeism is a reason scores on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment tests — required under the federal No Child Left

Behind law — are so low, he said. The high school failed to make adequate yearly progress for the past two years and is on a state-mandated five-year improvement plan. And 67 percent of the graduating senior class received basic or below basic scores on the tests, Prushinski said. He questioned how students can learn if they're never in the classroom.

"It's actually abuse to the kids, but they don't know it. They're too young to know it," board member Pattie Bieski said. "The most important thing in a child's life besides a loving family is a good education."

The rest of the board agreed with Bieski and Prushinski that something must be done about the situation. Although Prushinski said it is probably too late to do anything about this year's senior class, the board plans to start working on a policy for next year.

5/12/2008

Nanticoke police officer promoted to sergeant

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

Nanticoke council has promoted police officer Brian Williams to the rank of sergeant.

Williams, a five-year veteran of the department, was elevated because of a need for a third supervisor, usually on midnight shift, Mayor John Bushko said.

Williams will be able to help with scheduling and overtime issues, Councilman Jon Metta said.

"Hopefully that will make things run more smoothly," he said.

Williams is making \$1,000 more than the top-paid patrolman, so the salary shouldn't be a problem for the cash-strapped city, Metta said.

5/10/2008

Nanticoke Federal funds can't be used for the proposed LCCC parking garage since it wouldn't be an intermodal facility

Parking garage relegated to lot

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The proposed parking garage planned for downtown Nanticoke is being downgraded to a surface parking lot.

It was revealed at a meeting held last month at Luzerne County Community College that the \$5.6 million federal grant earmarked for the parking facilities could not be utilized as originally proposed. Attending the meeting were U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke; state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke; and officials from Nanticoke, LCCC, the Federal Highway Administration and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation.

"The garage that has been proposed for the college is not eligible under the guidelines of the Federal Highway Administration. As it has been expressed to me it is extremely unlikely that will change in the near future," Yudichak said.

If the city constructs a parking garage using the federal funds, it would be responsible for repaying the money to the federal government, Nanticoke Councilman Brent Makarczyk said.

Federal transportation officials said the federal money could not be used to build a parking garage because the facility would not be used as an intermodal facility — a facility that would allow people to park in the garage and then ride public transportation to another site. An intermodal facility has never been proposed for the site; plans are to provide parking for people visiting downtown or attending LCCC.

LCCC and city officials hope to move the school's Health Sciences and Culinary Arts programs into downtown.

First, the college must ensure "the surface parking supplies our need for the convenience of our students and faculty," LCCC President Tom Leary said. The college needs at least 300 spaces.

The fall 2009 opening for the Health Sciences Program at the Kanjorski Center is getting pushed back due to the delays.

That worries Leary.

"We are concerned about delays because costs rise with each passing day," he said noting the college must renovate the building.

Kanjorski said he is committed to making sure sufficient funding is provided for the college's parking needs.

"Working together, I am confident that we can bring LCCC into the downtown for the benefit of both the college and the city of Nanticoke," Kanjorski said.

Kanjorski, the 11th District's 12-term congressman, faces a challenge from Republican Hazleton Mayor Lou Barletta in the November general election.

Yudichak expressed urgency in expediting the plans because the college is on a tight time schedule. He and other officials expressed disappointment that after three years of working to construct a downtown parking facility, they have just recently learned the money can't be used for its original purpose.

Council members estimated at a recent meeting that paving a surface parking lot might cost about \$600,000.

The city has not been decided where it will put the parking lots, but options are to pave lots on Market Street near Weis Market or on Main Street next to the Kanjorski Center.

Kanjorski originally secured the federal funding in 2005, then rerouted it to other projects within his district because he said he was concerned the money would be lost if city officials did not move quickly enough.

President George Bush signed the bill into law providing the money in 2005. Overall funding for the bill expires in 2009. The money for Nanticoke will still be available because Kanjorski set up the project up as a high priority, meaning the funding will not expire, according to U.S. Department of Transportation regulations.

5/8/2008

Nanticoke council dissolves city redevelopment authority

By Robert Olsen - Citizens' Voice

Amid concerns regarding the fate of a \$5.6 million grant earmarked for the redevelopment authority, council voted 3-2 Wednesday to dissolve the authority.

"This has absolutely no reflection on any individual," Councilman James Litchkofski said regarding the decision. "This is an opportunity for the city to expedite the downtown project. The time has come for us to move forward."

Hank Marks, who served on the authority, questioned how the dissolution would affect Luzerne County Community College's plans to move forward with the development downtown and if the grant would still be available if there was no redevelopment authority.

According to Litchkofski, the dissolution "will not jeopardize" the grant.

Mayor John Bushko, who voted against the dissolution, said he believed U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, would move the grant along, and echoed Marks' concern regarding the dissolution.

"The grant is made out to the redevelopment authority," Bushko said. "Without even talking to him (Kanjorski), we're going to do away with the authority."

Litchkofski then questioned whether Kanjorski knew the money couldn't be used to build a parking garage from the beginning. Bushko said he couldn't speak for the congressman, but if Kanjorski did know, council should have been informed.

"The Federal Highway Administration says (the garage) can qualify only if it is an intermodal garage," Litchkofski said. "Now that is a crucial piece of the equation. Either the congressman was unaware or he did not share that information with us ... and that is one of my concerns."

Councilman Joseph A. Dougherty, who also voted against the dissolution, said his concern is also about the grant.

"What is going to happen to it?" Dougherty asked.

Former authority member Chet Beggs said a street level parking lot would be a better use of the money.

"Take \$600,000, buy some property, pave it, get rid of (the Kanjorski Center), give it to the college, get \$5 million and start spending it to fix up the roads," Beggs said. "I've been here for three and a half years and it's a bunch of crap. If the money is there, spend it."

Litchkofski said there is a concern that LCCC might get spooked if a parking garage couldn't be built, but there is no other option to Nanticoke at this time besides building the garage with the city's own money.

The grant was originally slated to be used for construction of a parking garage to accommodate Luzerne County Community College's proposed health sciences center in the Kanjorski Center.

5/8/2008

Nanticoke scraps redevelopment board

Council votes to dissolve body in effort to ease LCCC purchase of properties.

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The Nanticoke City Council passed a resolution to dissolve the city's Redevelopment Authority during Wednesday's meeting.

Mayor John Bushko and Councilman Joe Dougherty voted against it.

Councilman Jon Metta presented the resolution and along with councilmen Brent Makarczyk and James Litchkofski voted in favor of dissolving the authority board.

Metta, Makarczyk and Litchkofski believe that by dissolving the redevelopment board the city could streamline the process to help Luzerne County Community College move two of its educational programs into downtown.

"We are responsible as the elected officials. This is a big move for Nanticoke and we should take the responsibility for it," Litchkofski said.

Some people, including Redevelopment Authority board member and former Acting Chairman Hank Marks questioned the need to dissolve the authority.

Marks questioned if the city would receive the \$5.6 million federal grant as promised by U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski for downtown parking.

Dougherty is concerned that by dissolving the Redevelopment Authority board the city might have lost the money yet again.

"The grant they were talking about is issued to the Redevelopment Authority, not the city, not the municipal authority. I don't want to see the city lose the grant because it's been dissolved.

The grant money was taken away last year when Kanjorski moved the funding for other projects in his district, including the Hotel Sterling restoration. He took the money because he felt the city's inaction to move forward on a parking garage would result in no projects in Northeastern Pennsylvania being able to use the funds.

Earlier this year Kanjorski promised to restore the money.

Litchkofski disagreed with Dougherty.

As long as the resolution is worded correctly the city should have no problem receiving the money directly from the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, Litchkofski said.

"By us dissolving this it will not jeopardize the funding," he said. "Essentially, the Redevelopment Authority would be disbanded and we (the council) would become the RA (Redevelopment Authority)."

Luzerne County Community College has expressed interest in either purchasing or leasing the Kanjorski Center on Main Street to house its Health Sciences Program. LCCC also wants to move its culinary arts center into the Nanticoke Senior Citizens Center in downtown. But parking is a crucial issue for students and faculty.

The resolution was drafted about two months ago by city Solicitor William Finnegan as he worked in conjunction with the City Administrator Kenneth Johnson.

5/7/2008

Support for 109th troops' families least we can do

Our Opinion- Times Leader

THE GREATER WYOMING Valley responded with heart and pride during 2004 when hundreds of area residents serving in the Pennsylvania National Guard deployed overseas as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Can that kind of support be rallied here a second time?

It should.

About 100 citizen-soldiers belonging to the 109th Field Artillery will be called to active duty later this year, according to a report in Tuesday's edition of The Times Leader. These troops, whose mission will be to support an armored combat vehicle unit in Iraq, will train in Mississippi starting in mid-September, then move to the Middle East by February 2009.

They are expected to return home later that year.

The soldiers, who belong to battalions based in **Nanticoke** and Plymouth, will be making a significant sacrifice, leaving behind families, jobs and other obligations – essentially postponing their lives to protect ours.

Granted, you might think the United States' prolonged conflict in Iraq has been poorly managed, maybe never should have begun.

You might have grown weary from reading daily headlines that detail Baghdad's latest roadside bombing. You might even have voted for a presidential hopeful who espouses speedy troop withdrawals.

All politics aside, this editorial is about people – your neighbors who pledged to defend the nation. (Incidentally, they're many of the same people who respond to help area victims of floods, blizzards and other disasters.)

They deserve respect and, in their absence, their families merit special consideration by the community.

Pledge today to do your part as the battalions' "family support groups" spring into action. Donate goods or services to these families, many of whom might see their household incomes dip. Provide babysitting services to a strapped parent. Prepare cards and letters for the soldiers, keeping them updated on home-front happenings.

If requested, contribute items to be shipped directly to the soldiers for morale-boosting or other reasons.

There is something almost each of us can, and should, do to show appreciation toward the men and women of the Armed Forces. For a few options, computer users can visit Web sites such as www.americasupportsyou.mil.

Don't think of it as your duty. Rather, consider it partial payback.

These soldiers, who belong to battalions based in **Nanticoke** and Plymouth, will be making a significant sacrifice, leaving behind families, jobs and other obligations – essentially postponing their lives to protect ours.

5/5/2008

Teen's aspiration is priesthood

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He is at a loss for words when explaining that feeling, but he says it involved watching his priest perform the ceremony for his first communion and just admiring the way the priest went through the sacred rites.

In fourth grade, he made up his mind to pursue a life in the church after high school and college. While many people might find this surprising, Kotsko, 17, of Nanticoke doesn't believe it is. Quiet and serious, Kotsko explains his decision to pursue a life in the church by the importance he places in his Catholic faith.

"There is a great shortage of priests in the world," said Kotsko, a senior at Holy Redeemer High School. "I can see myself becoming a priest."

Two weeks ago, Kotsko had the opportunity to attend Mass led by Pope Benedict XVI at Yankee Stadium in New York City. Describing the event as awe-inspiring, Kotsko said he felt the pope's message was filled with hope for the faithful in America.

Kotsko's priest, Rev. Michael Langan, of St. Francis of Assisi in Nanticoke, put Kotsko's name in a lottery through the Diocese of Scranton, and Kotsko was lucky enough to obtain two tickets for the pope's Mass. Kotsko took his aunt, Jackie Kotsko, to see the Holy Father during the huge event in New York City.

"When the Holy Father came, he did it not only for me, but for a lot of young people," Kotsko said. "There was a surge of energy when he arrived." Kotsko realizes not many people his age aspire to a religious life, but that hasn't held him back from his decision. After telling his teachers about his goal, he received a call from the Diocese of Scranton, informing him of a seminar held for those who wish to pursue a religious vocation. He attended this meeting when he was a freshman in high school.

Also, Kotsko spoke with Langan and the Rev. William Culnane at St. Dominic's Rectory in Wilkes-Barre. They both encouraged him and tried to give him an idea about the path he'll must take to achieve his goal.

Langan said he has talked with Kotsko about the process of becoming a priest and the years that must be dedicated to study and prayer. This is called a period of discernment and many individuals will go through years of study and still decide against entering the church.

"It is not an automatic thing. It will take some time and spiritual counseling with advisers and the diocese to see if this is really God's calling for that person," Langan said.

After high school, Kotsko will need to receive a Bachelor of Arts degree, then study pre-theology, and finally go to the seminary to study theology, before he can become a priest. Usually an individual must study for about eight years before he becomes a deacon. After a year as a deacon, he will be ordained as a priest.

In the fall, Kotsko will enroll at Luzerne County Community College, and then he hopes to transfer to King's College. From Kotsko's perspective, many other teenagers don't take religion as seriously as he does. He isn't sure why this is, but he believes it is unfortunate.

"I go to church because I want to. Other students go because they were forced to go. They don't go of their own free will," Kotsko said. Acknowledging the church faces troubles in the United States, Kotsko said the biggest problems are the child abuse scandals and "moral relativism." He defines "moral relativism" as the absence of a strict moral code, leaving people free to live their lives according to their own standards rather than the church's standards.

Kotsko's parents, Daniel and Margaret, support their only son, and both of them hope he achieves his goal.

If he becomes a priest, Kotsko realizes he will give up certain things, like having his own family. But, as he says, as a priest he would be involved with many family celebrations — marriages, first communions, and funerals. He says the church would become his family, stressing that a sense of togetherness was affirmed for him when he went to New York City to see the pope.

"It certainly changed my perspective that other people go to church. Not many people my age go, and it was surprising they were attentive at Mass," Kotsko said.

5/3/2008

Local soldiers will head back to Iraq

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Approximately 90 Pennsylvania Army National Guard soldiers from the 109th Field Artillery will deploy to Iraq in mid-September, 109th leaders confirmed Friday.

Most of the soldiers will come from Nanticoke-based Bravo Battery, which previously had members serve a one-year stint in Iraq before returning home in February 2005.

Some soldiers from Plymouth-based Alpha Battery, which served in Kuwait, Qatar and parts of Iraq during that same mission, are also being called to serve.

"Clearly, we're all expected to do our part. We've always represented the Wyoming Valley well. The fact the federal government is calling on us is nothing new," said 109th Capt. Robert Perino. "We're certainly sending people who are ready to go."

Members of the 109th will "backfill" open spots in the Carlisle-based 108th Field Artillery and they'll all serve under the umbrella of the 56th Stryker Brigade out of Philadelphia, 109th officials said.

The last time members of the 109th served during the Iraq war they served as military policemen.

This time they will serve as artillerymen, the job for which they've trained all their careers, said Lt. Col. Kevin Miller, the 109th's commanding officer.

"This is the first time we will deploy as cannon artilleryman since World War II," Miller said.

An artillery unit provides fire support for ground forces, the colonel said.

Miller said 109th members potentially would fire 155 mm artillery rounds from Howitzer M777 tanks.

"We're always looking to step forward. This is near and dear to every artilleryman's heart. This will again be another historic event for the 109th Field Artillery," Miller said.

The 109th Field Artillery is one of the oldest forces in the United States military. It was formed Oct. 17, 1775.

Lt. Scott Brunnenmeyer of Nuangola will deploy for his second tour in Iraq. The 25-year-old, who will be a platoon leader on the ground, thinks the second deployment will be easier because "the first time I did not know what to expect."

"Obviously, you have to put your life on hold again. But that's what we all signed up to do. We want to accomplish our mission," the 2000 Crestwood High School graduate said. "We want to go over and serve our country well, but we all want to come home safe and sound. We're going over together and we're going to come home together."

During the last mission to Iraq, one 109th soldier didn't make it home. Sgt. Sherwood Baker of Plymouth, a member of Headquarters Battery, was killed April 26, 2004, in an explosion at a suspected chemical weapons factory in Baghdad, Iraq, while his unit was serving with the Scranton-based 103rd Armor Regiment.

About 120 soldiers from the 109th are serving around the world. About 80 are in Afghanistan and the rest are stationed in the Sinai Peninsula.

The soldiers destined for Iraq will leave in mid-September to begin training in Camp Shelby, Miss. They'll serve up to one year, Miller said.

When they ship out, the 109th will have about 160 soldiers remaining in the Wyoming Valley. A good recruiting year has placed the battalion in a good position to absorb the dual deployments, Miller said.

In March, the unit announced it had reached full strength for the first time in six years. At 354 soldiers, it was at 100-percent strength. Now, it's at 101 percent, Miller said.

Miller said he expects his unit to perform at the highest level.

"Across our chain of command, they recognize the superb abilities that our Guardsmen have always had. They know that they could count on the 109th to send forth the very best," he said.

5/3/2008

Confidential settlement reached in slander/libel case

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A settlement has been reached in a lawsuit filed more than a decade ago by a group of teachers from the Greater Nanticoke Area School District who accused school officials of slander and a Wilkes-Barre newspaper and three of its reporters of libel.

More than 100 teachers filed suit on Dec. 5, 1997, against Anthony Perrone, the district superintendent; Charlie Coslett, the solicitor at the time; the newspaper, The Times Leader, and reporters Sanjay Bhatt, CeCe Todd and Dave Janoski, who wrote a series of stories about teachers taking

continuing education classes to increase their salaries.

The lawsuit had been scheduled to go to trial Monday in the Luzerne County Court of Common Pleas.

Terms of the agreement were kept confidential, Jeffrey McCarron, an attorney for The Times Leader, said Friday in an e-mail to one defendant. McCarron did not return a telephone message for comment.

The settlement appeared to have been reached after a judge denied a defense motion for dismissal of the case through summary judgment.

The case against the reporters, who have all since left The Times Leader, will be discontinued and they will not be required to pay any of the settlement, McCarron said in the e-mail.

Bhatt writes about education for The Seattle Times. Todd is assistant editor of the East Valley Tribune in Arizona. Janoski is projects editor at The Citizens' Voice.

Perrone, Coslett, attorney John Freund, who represented the school district through its insurance carrier, the Pennsylvania School Claims Service, and Mary Jo Hynes, the teacher who led the group of plaintiffs, could not be reached by telephone Friday.

The teachers charged Perrone and Coslett each with one count of slander and The Times Leader and the reporters each with one count of libel, according to the lawsuit.

The teachers had sought a jury trial and were seeking in excess of \$20,000 each in compensatory damages and more than \$20,000 each in punitive damages on every count including charges that they suffered public and professional humiliation, ridicule, vilification and contempt.

The teachers contended Perrone made statements beginning in April 1997 accusing them of illegally and improperly applying for tuition reimbursements and salary enhancements for college courses he described as being audio-visual or correspondence courses.

They accused Coslett of claiming the teachers engaged in criminal conduct amounting to "theft by deception," by taking the classes despite having prior approval from school district officials.

The teachers claimed The Times Leader and the reporters published articles based on misleading, incorrect and false information leading to "grave and irreparable damage to their reputations and standing in the community."

5/2/2008

Regional public safety training facility being readied

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Firefighters from as far away as New York City and Washington, D.C., marched with their local comrades into the new Regional Public Safety Training Center at Luzerne County Community College last Friday, as phase one of the total 32-acre project was dedicated.

The state-of-the-art emergency services training facility on Prospect Street will serve a 10-county region, training firefighters, police officers and first responders in the latest public safety techniques.

For the last four decades, local firefighters have wanted a training facility in Luzerne County, and now they have it, said James Wills, president of the Luzerne County Fire and Rescue Training Association.

"We now have someplace where we can actually physically do the things we need to do. A lot of times we have to simulate things. Simulations are a long way away from the real world. This is going to be able to do real world type things," Wills said.

The entire five-phase project is anticipated to be completed by 2012. Using a combination of federal, state and local funds, this first phase cost about \$7 million. Joe Grilli, vice president of training institutes, LCCC, said the project was completed two months early and came in under budget, but he was not exactly sure of the total cost savings.

Firefighters will start training in the 9,000 square-foot, three-bay apparatus building and the five-story tactical structural firefighting tower/burn building within two weeks. Two 1970-era fire trucks purchased by LCCC's Alumni Association are being housed in the apparatus building.

Although the fully-equipped trucks are 30 years old, firefighters can still learn the basics of connecting hoses and operating the pumps, which according to Karen Flannery, dean of public safety training, is the most important.

The tower is constructed of heavy-duty metal capable of maintaining heat to simulate the intensity of a burning structure. It is also designed with moveable doors to be set up in a variety of ways so no matter how many times firefighters enter the building they can't memorize the interior.

"Let us be reminded as we pass that burn tower as we are heading out (of a burning structure) they are heading in. Simply to protect us, simply to protect our house, simply to protect our belongings, simply to protect our lives," said Greg Skrepenak, a LCCC trustee and Luzerne County Commissioner.

The college's public safety training institute will immediately begin designing the second phase, which will include a driving course, Flannery said.

5/2/2008

Late Nanticoke mayor was community's 'jewel,' friend recalls

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The city of Nanticoke lost one of its most notable and dedicated residents when former mayor and police chief Wasil Kobela passed away at the age of 79.

Kobela, who died on Tuesday at Wilkes-Barre General Hospital, had spent his life serving the people of his hometown. He worked tirelessly to make Nanticoke a better place to live, friends said.

"I never saw him as self-serving or looking out for his own interests," said retired Nanticoke police Chief Chet Zaremba. "He was not doing this to get that. He always did for somebody else. That's the way he was."

Zaremba was police chief when Kobela was mayor. He also worked under Kobela as a police officer, and with him as a state trooper. His community involvement was second to none, he said. Kobela was involved in several police and civic organizations. He was particularly dedicated

to the Nanticoke Lions Club and the Greater Nanticoke Area Basketball Booster Club, Zaremba said.

“He was a jewel of the community. He really was,” Zaremba said of his former boss. “I don’t know of anybody right now that is his equal.”

During Kobela’s term as president of the Nanticoke Lions Club, the club raised about \$185,000 to purchase defibrillators for the community hospital and the fire department, said friend Jonathan Stegura, who was also active in the club.

The Lions Club did it by giving away a car. The cost of each ticket was \$100, and Kobela sold the majority of them, Stegura said.

“Everybody told him he could not sell any. He sold 100,” said Nanticoke Mayor John Bushko, who was elected to council in 1993, the same year Kobela was elected mayor.

Bushko called Kobela a “very close friend” and a “terrific guy” who was always accessible during his term as mayor.

“I would say Wasil’s biggest achievement was that he was in that office every day,” he said.

U.S. Rep. Paul E. Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, said Kobela’s commitment to community service was unmatched, both as an elected official and a law enforcement professional.

“When he was police chief, the crime rate in Nanticoke was extremely low,” Kanjorski said. “He had a very responsive police force.”

Long-time friend Joe Simone spent many an afternoon with Kobela at the local coffee shops. He remembered his friend as an honorable man who was deeply devoted to his family, church, community and friends.

“His word was his bond. If he said he was going to do something, he did it,” Simone said.

Kobela always tried to accommodate everyone who asked him for a favor, no matter how large or small, Simone said. If he couldn’t grant the request, he would try to find someone who could.

Kobela is survived by his wife of 51 years, Leona, two children, and a grandson, according to his obituary, which appeared in Wednesday’s edition of *The Citizens’ Voice*.

His funeral will be held Saturday at 9:30 a.m. from the Stanley S. Stegura Funeral Home Inc., in Nanticoke. A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated at 10 a.m. at Holy Transfiguration Church. Friends may call on Friday from 5 to 9 p.m.



5/1/2008

Nanticoke giant recalled
Former mayor and police chief Wasil Kobela, who died Tuesday, devoted life to city.

By mmcginley@timesleader.com

Wasil Kobela, left, and campaign manager Bernard Kozlowski share a joke at a Meet the Candidates Night in May 1989.

Wasil Kobela was a dedicated man – so much so that he spent nearly his entire professional career serving the city he loved: Nanticoke.

Kobela, 80, who died Tuesday, served as mayor and chief of police, devoting more than 52 years of his life to the town he grew up in and in which he spent his entire life.

“He was a big supporter of Nanticoke and believed it was a great community to live in,” said Jonathan Stegura, a friend and member of the Nanticoke Lions Club, which Kobela served as president of for two years.

During his reign, Stegura said, the club raised enough money to purchase two defibrillators for the city.

Stegura said what attracted many to Kobela as a public servant was his concern for citizens.

“When he was mayor, he didn’t have a private number. His house number was listed in the book, so that people could get in touch with him,” Stegura said.

Al Wytoshek, a former city council member for 12 years who worked with and under Kobela, recalls the mayor having great plans for revitalization.

“He had some good things in the making that would have developed if he had more support and help,” Wytoshek said, referring to Kobela’s idea to build a supermarket near the area of Middle Road and Kosciuszko Street.

Wytoshek said he frequently shared ideas in the 1990s with the mayor, who welcomed different opinions and thoughts – and always used his best discretion when dealing with city matters.

“One thing about Wasil is he always worked with you,” Wytoshek said. “He was too gentle.”

Most recently, he spent a great deal of time with his daughter in New Orleans, helping her business recover from the devastation of Hurricane Katrina.

“He very seldom said ‘no’ to you,” Wytoshek said. “When he could do something for you, he would.”

Not only will his friends miss him, Stegura said, but so will the community.

“It’s going to be a great loss because he knew how the city was changing, and he always had a sense of what should be done to keep it on the straight and narrow,” Stegura said.

5/1/2008

GNA school evacuated because of Freon leak

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

Students were evacuated from Greater Nanticoke Area High School on Wednesday as a precautionary measure when a small amount of Freon

leaked into the cafeteria.

Employees were servicing a heating, ventilation and air conditioning unit at the end of a lunch period — around 1 p.m. — and accidentally cut into one of the lines, buildings and grounds supervisor Frank Grevera said.

A little bit of the refrigerant liquid leaked out, but students were sent outside as a precaution, he said. The maintenance staff cleared out the cafeteria, power-washed everything and scrubbed the tables, and by 2:30 p.m. everything was fine, he said.

5/1/2008

Kathy's Kitchen and Catering plans grand opening

Nanticoke Area Notes - Pam Urbanski

It was a dream of Kathy Capie to open a catering business. In December her dream became a reality when, with the help of her husband and son, both named Jim, she opened Kathy's Kitchen and Catering in Nanticoke. The restaurant features a nice breakfast, lunch and dinner menu, featuring eggs, pancakes or breakfast sandwiches, salads, hoagies, wraps, burger and steaks. The restaurant also makes homemade soups and salads. You might find the senior Capie outside at the barbecue pit preparing chicken, ribs or kielbasa. "Patrons really seem to enjoy the food we prepare on the pit," Jim said.

The Capies are thrilled Luzerne County Community College will be a new neighbor in downtown Nanticoke. "We are really looking forward to serving the students, faculty and staff. We think business will pick up considerably once the college is downtown." They are already offering discounts to students who show their LCCC identification.

You can eat in or order takeouts. The restaurant can seat 50 people inside and 15 outside. Parking is available. The facility is non smoking. "We cater for all occasions and offer foods to fit your needs," Jim added. "We can come in and set up and then serve or we can just deliver the food."

Kathy and Jim want to be good neighbors and support their community. They have donated to several groups, including the Drug Task Force, Nanticoke High School, and the Nanticoke softball league.

A grand opening will be held Thursday, May 8, from 2 to 5 p.m. There will be specials throughout the day and Stanky and the Coal Miners will entertain from 2 to 5. The restaurant is located at 175 S. Market St. Hours are Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. There are daily specials and discounts for seniors every Thursday.

Mass for cancer sufferers

A Mass in honor of St. Peregrine, patron saint for anyone who has experienced cancer in their life, will be held Friday at 7 p.m. in St. Stanislaus Church.

"As we know cancer has touched the lives of so many in our society and in our parishes. It spreads beyond the individual and touches the entire family. Anyone who has lived with cancer, or any serious disease, and their family members, are invited to the St. Peregrine Mass and the gathering following the Mass," said Pastor Jim Nash. The Sacrament of the Sick will be administered.

Youth group needs donations

The Youth Group of Holy Child, Holy Trinity, St. Mary's and St. Stanislaus Parish Community is asking parishioners to help them stock up on some much needed items.

Paper plates, napkins, paper cups, plastic forks, knives and spoons are on their wish list. They are also asking for donations of iced tea and drink mixes. Items can be dropped off at the parish office.

Teen Mass at St. Stanislaus

A Teen Mass will be held at St. Stanislaus on Sunday at 7 p.m. Weather permitting, a cookout will follow. Call Bill Borysewicz at 735-4833 if you can bring a food item for the cookout.

St. Francis pastie sale

The Altar and Rosary Society of St. Francis Church is holding its annual pastie sale. Pasties come with gravy and with or without onions for \$7. Orders must be placed by calling Andrea at 735-5381 or the parish office at 735-6903. Pick up will be from 3 to 6 p.m. on Friday, May 16, and 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday, May 17.

4/27/2008

LCCC parking project stuck in neutral

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

The good news for Nanticoke is U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, has brought back the \$5.6 million he once promised to and then took away from the city's redevelopment authority.

The bad news is the money can't be used to build a much-needed parking garage for the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street, where Luzerne County Community College plans to open a health sciences center.

And the maybe-things-aren't-so-bad news is if the U.S. Department of Transportation won't allow the parking garage, the city can use the money for some necessary improvements to Main and Market streets.

The mix-up started when Kanjorski obtained a \$5.6 million grant — requiring 20 percent matching funds — in the 2005 transportation funding bill. When he thought city officials were dragging their feet — they say they were trying to hash out details such as how big to build the garage — Kanjorski reassigned the money to other projects outside the city.

LCCC entered the picture with plans for a health center, and officials hailed the proposal as crucial to revitalizing downtown Nanticoke. They prepared plans for an approximately 300-space parking garage, not knowing the \$5.6 million had been withdrawn.

Kanjorski recently agreed to bring the money back to Nanticoke, his hometown. However, at a meeting this week, representatives of state and federal transportation agencies told city and college officials the garage did not qualify for the federal grant.

“We asked federal highway officials if there is a way to use this money; their answer is no, it does not qualify under the law,” said state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke.

Nancy Singer, U.S. Department of Transportation spokeswoman, stated that “parking garages must meet certain federal requirements in order to be eligible for federal-aid funds. Simply put, the parking garage must serve an inter-modal purpose.” In other words, the funds can only be used to build garages if people will be parking in them to carpool or use public transportation.

“It was a definite blow to the city to find out the funding for the parking garage that was administered by the congressman cannot be used for a parking facility, parkade or parking garage ...” Nanticoke municipal authority chairman Ron Kamowski said.

He added, “But I hope the Congressman and his redevelopment authority can get the necessary exemptions so the funds can be used for the parking facility, since it will be a very integral part of LCCC coming downtown with its sciences center.”

“I am working closely with Luzerne County Community College to make sure that there is sufficient funding to meet the college’s parking needs,” Kanjorski said in a statement. “I have spoken to the Federal Highway Administration and members of Congress to ensure the intent of Congress in providing \$5.6 million for a parking facility in downtown Nanticoke is followed. Working together, I am confident that we can bring LCCC into the downtown for the benefit of both the college and the City of Nanticoke.”

Nanticoke Mayor John Busko said, “I think the Congressman deserves a chance to try to straighten it out, and if he doesn’t, I’m sure we can come up with a way to build a garage for the college. They need the parking. That’s a must.”

Yudichak also hopes there is a way — a loophole or some flexibility in the language — that will allow the parking garage. If not, the financially distressed city will have to re-route money and find other sources of funds to build it.

However, there is a silver lining, Yudichak said. The \$5.6 million can be used for street improvements. It could go for new streetlights, sidewalks or a redesign of Main and Market streets and maybe surface parking for downtown businesses, Yudichak said.

But first, there needs to be a comprehensive parking study of Nanticoke’s business district, he believes.

“This is a lot of money, we’re grateful for the money, how do we best use it?” Yudichak said. “Now we have to go through that process.”

4/27/2008

Test scores stress staffs

By Mark Guydishguydish@timesleader.com

The demotion of Greater Nanticoke Area High School Principal Mary Ann Jarolen may have been the most public consequence of mounting pressure on local public schools to boost state test scores, but it’s far from the only one.

Since the mandates for increasing annual test scores first hit in the 2002-03 school year, districts have revamped what they teach right down to kindergarten level. Students now start next year’s lessons before this year is done.

Tutoring classes are offered throughout the day as well as before and after school. Veteran teachers who have spent a career specializing in one subject, like science, have had to learn to teach completely different lessons, such as reading.

And teachers increasingly leave their jobs years, even a decade or more, before retirement age.

“I think there is pressure on public education teachers like never before,” Greater Nanticoke Area Federal Programs Director Michael Pawlik said.

“And I think our teachers are responding by becoming focused like never before.”

Test-score testimony

When Jarolen launched legal action in Luzerne County Court to keep her high school post, Pawlik testified at length about declining high school test scores.

Although the school board did not give a reason for removing Jarolen from the principal position on April 10, during the court proceedings it was shown that the district administration specifically cited test scores as the cause.

Jarolen won an injunction ordering the district to reinstate her, but the district filed an appeal that put that order on hold.

During the injunction hearing April 18, Pawlik conceded that a principal does not teach in the classroom or administer the tests. But he also testified that Superintendent Tony Perrone has said at numerous staff meetings the principal is ultimately responsible for scores.

It was an argument Jarolen’s attorney, Charles Coslett, dismissed as “the worst case of scapegoating I’ve ever seen.”

If so, Greater Nanticoke is not alone in putting a principal’s feet to the fire. Other superintendents said a heavy burden falls on principals as well.

“Every building principal is accountable for the test results, just like the teachers,” Hazleton Area Superintendent Frank Victor said. “Everyone feels that pressure, knowing they have to make those benchmarks.”

Benchmark driven

The “benchmarks” are based on what percentage of students score “proficient” or “advanced” in math and reading tests. The minimum percentage required by law, first implemented in 2002-03, rises annually, ultimately hitting 100 percent by 2014. The state has also increased the number of grades tested.

Locally, as the pressure has increased, more schools have missed the mark. Hazleton Area, the county’s largest district, has had the toughest struggle. Six of nine district schools missed the goals last year, and the high school has missed them five years in a row – the longest streak in the

region.

The more consecutive years a school misses goals, the more serious the consequences. After five years, the state has the right to take over a school and start shuffling or replacing staff.

That didn't happen at Hazleton Area, Victor noted, because as a whole, the high school is doing well. It fell short in what the state calls "subgroups," which statistically do poorly on standardized tests: Minorities, children from low-income families, and English as Second Language (ESL) and special-education students are all looked at separately from the overall student scores.

Last year, Hazleton Area High School students combined met the goals, but three subgroups did not: Hispanic, economically disadvantaged and low income. The state didn't come in with a heavy hand, but it did come.

"We were assigned what they call distinguished educators," said Victor, referring to specialists who look at where the school is failing and monitor efforts to reverse the trend.

"What they said is we were doing what we should be doing," Victor said.

That included adding services for ESL students to make sure they got the assistance they needed in translation and learning the language, and adding more remedial courses for special education students.

Systemic issues

But Greater Nanticoke's problem is more systemic, and a little more complex. While the high school met goals overall last year, statistics show that was primarily because, unlike Hazleton Area and some other high schools that start at ninth grade, Nanticoke starts at eighth.

That means two grades (eight and 11) are tested rather than one, and their results are combined by the state.

At Nanticoke, the eighth graders did well enough to not only exceed the state goals, it did well enough to compensate for poor results from 11th graders. Taken alone, the juniors managed only 46 percent in reading and 34 percent in math – the area's worst 11th-grade scores.

At Jarolen's court hearing, Pawlik mentioned these scores. He also noted that scores dropped from seventh to eighth grade, suggesting the problem is specific to the high school. And while principals aren't teachers, he testified that they are responsible for monitoring teacher performance and making sure that district plans are implemented and resources allocated properly.

Those dismal scores prompted new board member Tony Prushinski to run for office; he has frequently blasted the district publicly at board meetings, demanding action be taken.

Pawlik said the district has taken major steps since he took over the effort. It is in the process of revamping curriculum so that students in kindergarten are learning what they need to know to pass the tests by the time they reach third grade. Teachers in every subject have been trained to do "sponge activities," exercises that impart the lesson in their subject but do so using the type of math or reading skills students need to pass the tests.

"The idea is to squeeze every last drop of learning out of a lesson," Pawlik said of the name. This has required teachers to give lessons they aren't really trained for. Science teachers, for example, give reading problems and help students deal with the reading aspect of it, not just the science part. Textbooks have gone from driving the curriculum as teachers move progressively through the chapters to being driven by it as teachers refer to whatever part of the book fits their needs.

And students are taught more on an "April to April" basis than September to June, because the tests are typically given in April. That means they learn what they need to know for next year's test beginning right after this year's test is done.

Tutoring important

And tutoring is offered before school, after school and even during school.

During a recent session, teacher Barbara Warman worked math lessons with six students during what would be their study hall period.

Student Joshua Slosky – one of the juniors who needed to boost those scores – said he preferred the tutoring session to study hall. And having just taken the state tests earlier this month, he also said the tutoring had definitely helped him understand and work the problems better.

These are tactics adopted by other districts as well.

Both Hazleton Area's Victor and Wyoming Valley West's Michael Garzella said they have been doing the same or similar things in their schools, though Victor believes all the changes and stress are taking a toll on veteran teachers. There was a time, he noted, when teachers with 40 or more years of experience were still in the classrooms.

Now, "You get more early retirements because of the demands and pressures. I can remember when you would talk with teachers and the comment was they were waiting until they turned 65 (to retire)," Victor said. "Now you don't have that. You absolutely don't have that any more."

Another strategy

Greater Nanticoke has also started giving quarterly tests known as "4-Sights," designed explicitly to mimic the state tests and show where student weaknesses are so they can be corrected. In fact, Pawlik believes these and other tactics have been so successful that he predicted 11th-grade math results this year could rise from 34 percent proficient or better to something in the 60 percent range.

If that happens, the school will meet the state goals, but the pressure won't let up. Not only must more students score proficient or better in coming years, the state is also planning to introduce "Graduation Competency Assessments," or GCAs, in 2014, a battery of 10 tests in four subject areas, with students required to pass at least seven of them during their high school years to graduate.

Local districts also are struggling with a rapidly shifting student body, with a growing number of low-income, special education and minority students. In Greater Nanticoke Area High School, among 11th graders taking the state tests in 2002-03, 9 percent were special-education students. Last year, 21 percent were. In the same time frame, the percent of economically disadvantaged students taking the test rose from 18 percent to 39 percent, though that number is more volatile, having spiked at 42 percent in 2004-05.

And Pawlik said the district is dealing with an increasingly transient enrollment, with kids entering and leaving the district every year. He didn't have hard numbers, but estimated the turnover is as high as 20 percent annually.

None of which Pawlik and administrators in other districts said should be an excuse for poor test results.

"You can sit back and say, 'These are our excuses,' but you really have to say, 'Where do we go from here?' There are very explicit strategies you

can use to improve scores for each of those types of students.

“We are the only hope many of these kids have.”

“I think there is pressure on public education teachers like never before. And I think our teachers are responding by becoming focused like never before.”

Michael Pawlik

Greater Nanticoke Area Federal Programs Director

4/27/2008

How you measure impacts results

Depending on yardsticks, GNA has county's worst scores or beats out a few districts.

By mguydish@timesleader.com

Greater Nanticoke Area School Board member Tony Prushinski has complained that the district has the worst state test scores in Luzerne County. Does it? The short answer is no, but ...

It depends on how you measure “worst.”

As far as the state is concerned, what matters most is the percentage of students in a school who score “proficient” or “advanced” in math and reading tests. Using that yardstick, in 2006-07 Greater Nanticoke did as well as or better than three other county high schools (Hazleton Area, Wyoming Valley West and Crestwood) in math tests, and better than Wilkes-Barre Area’s GAR High School in reading tests.

Specifically, GNA had 49.6 percent proficient or better in math while Hazleton Area had 49 percent, WVW had 49.2 percent and Crestwood had the same as GNA. In reading, GNA had 57 percent proficient or better and GAR had 55 percent.

But the state measures the percent of students in four different categories: Advanced, proficient, basic and below basic. Look at them separately, and the picture keeps changing.

In the advanced category, GNA high school had 27.3 percent, better than five other high schools. In the proficient category, it had 22.3 percent, the lowest in the county.

In the basic category (where a higher number is worse because it means more students are doing poorly) Nanticoke had 16 percent, the second smallest percentage in the county (a good result). In the below basic category, it had 34.4 percent, the highest percentage of students scoring in the lowest category.

Reading results are similar when broken into the four categories. So GNA is worst when measured in some ways, better in others.

But wait, there’s more.

Comparing high schools by using overall test results can be an apples-to-oranges effort.

Different high schools house different grades. Some run from grade seven through 12, while others start at grade nine. That can skew results. How? The state tests grades three through eight and 11. So the high school that houses grades seven and up tests three grades, while the one that begins at grade nine tests only one grade. Yet the state calculates a school’s overall test results based on the total number of students tested, regardless of the grade they were in.

With rare exceptions, 11th graders post the worst test results of all grades in a district, especially in math (a phenomenon that educators have grappled with for years). By including the higher scores from a lower grade, a high school’s overall results can rise.

Take Greater Nanticoke Area High School, which houses grades eight through 12. That means two grades are tested. If the school only housed grades 9 and up, only the 11th grade results would matter, and those are poor: in math, 33.9 percent scored proficient or better.

Average in eighth grade, where 66.9 percent scored proficient or better, and the school’s overall results climb by nearly 16 percentage points, with 49.6 percent of all high school students tested scoring proficient or better.

Arguably, the best way to decide if GNA high school really has the worst test scores in the county is to compare eighth grade and 11th grade results separately.

In eighth-grade reading, GNA did better than three other local districts. In eighth-grade math, it outdid six other schools.

But in 11th grade, in both reading and math, Greater Nanticoke is at the bottom of the list by wide margins. In math, 33.9 percent of Nanticoke students scored proficient or better, a full 15 percentage points below the next poorest showing in the county, Hazleton Area with 49 percent. In reading Nanticoke had 46.3 percent score proficient or better. The school just above it is GAR, where 53.6 percent scored proficient or better.

The state measures the percent of students in four different categories: Advanced, proficient, basic and below basic. Look at them separately, and the picture keeps changing. In the advanced category, GNA high school had 27.3 percent, better than five other high schools. In the proficient category, it had 22.3 percent, the lowest in the county.

4/26/2008

‘We’ve turned a dream into reality’

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For James Wills, president of Luzerne County Fire & Rescue Training Association, it was a day almost 50 years in the making.

With hundreds cheering, Luzerne County Community College held a dedication ceremony Friday for its new Regional Public Safety Training Center, and Wills couldn’t help but beam.

“We started fire training in 1960 but never had a permanent facility. Sometimes we would have to go to Dallas High School,” Wills explained.

“Since there was no physical training, you could take 80 hours of courses without ever seeing an actual fire. This is a great opportunity for emergency services in our region.”

Ground was broken for the 32-acre facility, situated at the corner of Prospect Street and Middle Road, across from LCCC's main campus, in March 2007.

"As the largest college in Northeast Pennsylvania, we're perfectly suited to develop this unique training center for those who dedicate their lives to protecting us and keeping us safe," LCCC President Thomas Leary said.

With phase one of construction complete and four phases to go, the training center will provide state-of-the-art equipment not only for firefighters but also police officers, emergency medical technicians and students at LCCC, said Karen Flannery, dean of Public Safety Training and Special Initiatives.

"We've turned a dream into reality. As we continue to build, what will the message be? Today the message is thank you. To all first responders, we honor you."

At a cost of about \$32 million, which was funded largely through grants and contributions, the training center is expected to be complete by 2012. Facilities will include a heliport, burn tower, indoor shooting range, rescue and hazardous materials props, and an emergency vehicle operations course.

"We're proud of the work we've done together as public servants. Now our men and women in blue will get the best training possible to help them save lives and get themselves home safely," said state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, who helped secure funding through the state legislature and Gov. Ed Rendell. "We're turning this region back into a vibrant and prosperous community."

Following a procession by the Scranton Firefighters Honor Guard and the Ceol Mor Pipe & Drum Band — not to mention representatives of first responders throughout the region from Nanticoke to Berwick — Leary cut the ribbon along with Yudichak and Luzerne County Commissioner Greg Skrepenak.

"Who would have ever thought we would have this? It's beyond inspiring and I'm ever so humbled to be a part of it," Skrepenak said. "This is a monument to our first responders, and let us be reminded that as we run from a fire, they run to the fire to protect our belongings and our lives."

4/26/2008

**Regional training facility at LCCC is under way
Completion of the entire five-phase project is expected by 2012.**

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Firefighters from as far away as New York City and Washington, D.C., marched with their local comrades into the new Regional Public Safety Training Center at Luzerne County Community College Friday afternoon, as phase one of the total 32-acre project was dedicated.

The state-of-the-art emergency services training facility on Prospect Street will serve a 10-county region, training firefighters, police officers and first responders in the latest public safety techniques.

For the last four decades, local firefighters have wanted a training facility in Luzerne County, and now they have it, said James Wills, president of the Luzerne County Fire and Rescue Training Association.

"We now have someplace where we can actually physically do the things we need to do. A lot of times we have to simulate things. Simulations are a long way away from the real world. This is going to be able to do real world type things," Wills said.

The entire five-phase project is anticipated to be completed by 2012. Using a combination of federal, state and local funds, this first phase cost about \$7 million. Joe Grilli, vice president of training institutes, LCCC, said the project was completed two months early and came in under budget, but he was not exactly sure of the total cost savings.

Firefighters will start training in the 9,000 square-foot, three-bay apparatus building and the five-story tactical structural firefighting tower/burn building within two weeks. Two 1970-era fire trucks purchased by LCCC's Alumni Association are being housed in the apparatus building.

Although the fully-equipped trucks are 30 years old, firefighters can still learn the basics of connecting hoses and operating the pumps, which according to Karen Flannery, dean of public safety training, is the most important.

The tower is constructed of heavy-duty metal capable of maintaining heat to simulate the intensity of a burning structure. It is also designed with moveable doors to be set up in a variety of ways so no matter how many times firefighters enter the building they can't memorize the interior.

"Let us be reminded as we pass that burn tower as we are heading out (of a burning structure) they are heading in. Simply to protect us, simply to protect our house, simply to protect our belongings, simply to protect our lives," said Greg Skrepenak, a LCCC trustee and Luzerne County Commissioner.

The college's public safety training institute will immediately begin designing the second phase, which will include a driving course, Flannery said.

4/24/2008

Rumors of fight, weapon bring authorities to Nanticoke school

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About 20 law enforcement officers and an FBI gang task force arrived at Greater Nanticoke Area High School early Wednesday in response to rumors about a pending fight and a weapon at the school.

Nothing happened, but police responded as a precautionary measure, said Superintendent Anthony Perrone and Nanticoke Detective William Shultz.

"This started last week as a fight between a boy and a girl and that's what caused the whole incident. For the last two days, they have been bickering back and forth. They called each other derogatory racial names," Perrone said. "There was no riot. Nobody brought a gun. There is no lockdown in any of the schools."

The FBI joined Nanticoke, Newport Township, Hanover Township and state police, Luzerne County sheriffs and two constables at the school. They

brought metal detectors but did not use them, Shultz said.

Nanticoke police fielded 50 to 100 calls Tuesday from concerned parents and law enforcement officials about rumors of a gang fight or weapon at school, Shultz said. A rumor was posted on MySpace that "something" was going to happen Wednesday and told students not to come to school, he said.

"Ninety-nine percent of the time when this is publicized, nothing is going to happen," Shultz said. "We just wanted to assist the school and make things as safe as possible. Some parents are very concerned as they should be, but unfortunately this was a situation where the rumor mill got the best of everything."

Several students did not attend school or left early Wednesday. Perrone could not say how many students were absent.

Nanticoke senior Ryan Berndt said a "mass amount" of students left school after the rumors spread.

"Kids were getting scared," Berndt said. "Kids were crying."

There was no threat between the boy and girl, but other people got involved, Perrone said. He said he also fielded several calls from concerned parents Tuesday night, and he said he "tried to explain to them exactly what happened."

School resource officer Mike Wisniewski joined other law enforcement authorities in patrolling the high school throughout the day Wednesday.

Nanticoke Sgt. Mike Roke remained at the school all day.

4/24/2008

Health trust approves new rates for settled contracts

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The Northeast Pennsylvania School Districts Health Trust on Wednesday approved the adoption of revised health insurance rates for three school districts that either recently settled or approved key components of teacher contracts.

As of July 1, Wyoming Valley West and Greater Nanticoke Area will each receive 17 percent reductions, while Tunkhannock Area will receive a 7-percent reduction.

Health trust Executive Director Andy Marko said the rates decreased because the new contracts included higher co-pays and deductibles on behalf of the teachers.

"Every one of the districts in our trust is showing a minus sign. The trust has to be doing something right," Marko said.

Wyoming Valley West and Tunkhannock Area settled their teacher contracts last year.

While Greater Nanticoke Area has not officially settled its teachers contract, the school board voted last week to approve and implement the contract's salary and health care components. School and union officials are hopeful the contract will be ratified at the board's next meeting.

In other business, Marko encouraged district representatives to promote wellness programs among school staff, including walking and running teams, tobacco cessation, and health and nutrition fairs.

Marko said many of the programs, offered by Blue Cross of Northeastern Pennsylvania, are free and would help tremendously.

"We encourage you to take a look," Marko said. "And being a self-funded group, we only pay Blue Cross to administer the plan. So if teachers are healthy (and less claims are filed), the less you pay."

4/23/2008

5:30 PM

Health Trust: Nanticoke, Valley West premiums to drop 17%

Mark Guydish - Times Leader

Insurance changes negotiated into new teacher contracts at Wyoming Valley West and Greater Nanticoke Area School Districts will result in premium reductions of about 17 percent, North East Pennsylvania School Health Trust officials said today.

The Trust, a consortium of local districts formed in 1999, has been able to lower costs for all participating districts in recent years, but Executive Director Andrew Marko said Nanticoke and Valley West had negotiated new contracts with increases in co-payments and deductibles that would more than triple their savings beginning in July. Marko said most districts will see decreases closer to 4 percent below this year's rates.

The savings come by having teachers pay more for their health care. For example, Marko noted the usual deductible is around \$100 to \$300 depending on type of coverage, but the two districts have negotiated deductibles ranging as high as \$750. They've also increase the amount teachers will pay for doctor office and emergency room visits, and for prescription drugs.

"Teachers realize that costs are going up and they are trying to do their part," Marko said.

In both districts, the changes in insurance coverage helped resolve contract disputes. The school boards had been pushing to have teachers pay part of their premiums - a move the unions oppose rigorously. But that demand was dropped in exchange for the increases in co-pays and deductibles, which can end up saving the district more money than premium sharing.

Lake-Lehman School District, for example, dropped premium sharing from its latest contract offer in exchange for insurance changes similar to those accepted at Wyoming Valley West, Superintendent James McGovern said. The board had asked for a 5 percent premium sharing, but found the insurance changes would actually lower premiums overall by a minimum of 6 percent and probably more.

Marko said Tunkhannock Area had also negotiated new coverage that would increase savings, but the reduction was substantially smaller than the other two districts: 7 percent. The trust board of directors approved all three rate changes at its meeting this afternoon.

4/22/2008

GNA files court appeal to send principal back to elementary school

The attorney for Greater Nanticoke Area School District has filed an appeal to send the high school principal back to the elementary school where she was transferred by the school board.

On Friday, Judge Ann Lokuta granted an injunction to return Mary Ann Jarolen as high school principal until a hearing on the transfer is held. District Solicitor Vito DeLuca, who is representing the administration, filed the appeal in county court Monday. It means Jarolen has to stay principal of K.M. Smith Elementary, where the school board voted 6-1 to transfer her at its April 10 meeting. The board moved Jarolen, who was high school principal since 2005, on the request of the administration, DeLuca said.

“They have a right to file the appeal, but we’ll see how events unfold,” said Jarolen’s attorney Charles Coslett.

He said he has contacted DeLuca via e-mail.

“I indicated the mere filing of an appeal does not give them carte blanche to act as if no injunction was issued,” Coslett said.

The case now proceeds to Commonwealth Court, to determine whether Lokuta’s ruling was correct.

“It could take quite a while. It could take a number of months,” DeLuca said, adding, “I’m very confident we will prevail.”

Jarolen has not had a required administrative hearing in front of the school board. Two hearings — on Feb. 8 and March 17 — were postponed, one due to a scheduling conflict and one because Jarolen, who is undergoing treatment for breast cancer, could not attend for medical reasons.

The board offered to have the hearing during the day, evening, weekend, or give her a paid day off, DeLuca said.

“We made every effort to accommodate Mrs. Jarolen to schedule a hearing,” he said. “For some reason she was able to attend school on a regular basis and educate our 950 children.”

DeLuca expects the administrative hearing will be held when Jarolen gets clearance from her doctor.

DeLuca said the board is alleging during Jarolen’s principalship, there has been a “serious and drastic decline” in test scores at Nanticoke High School. He presented evidence in court Friday.

“The statistics are compelling and striking,” DeLuca said. “We can’t take a risk of letting this remain status quo any longer.”

Principals are responsible for test scores in their schools, he said. They sign the tests, make a certification to the Department of Education, ensure all educators in their charge are performing as they should and, in Jarolen’s case, to make sure they are participating in her plan to improve test scores, DeLuca said.

4/19/2008

Principal wins injunction against Nanticoke Area

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Mary Ann Jarolen, the recently reassigned principal of Greater Nanticoke Area High School, won an injunction Friday in Luzerne County Court prohibiting a transfer to an elementary position until a required administrative hearing is held.

Jarolen sued the school district and requested the injunction Tuesday after administrators moved ahead with the transfer despite the postponement twice of scheduled administrative hearings.

The school board approved the move in a 6-1 vote at its April 10 meeting.

“In denying (Jarolen) her procedural due process safeguards, the actions of the defendant were arbitrary and capricious,” Court of Common Pleas Judge Ann Lokuta said in her ruling.

Vito DeLuca, the school district solicitor, said he would file an immediate appeal and would look into having the injunction order stayed.

“(The board) and the administration have to be responsible to the children of the school district to make sure they have the tools they need to succeed in adulthood,” DeLuca said. “This is a case where the school district’s hands have been tied.”

Lokuta issued the injunction following a two-hour hearing that included testimony from Jarolen and Michael Pawlik, the school district administrator who serves as its director of federal programs.

An administrative hearing was scheduled and postponed twice — Feb. 8 because of a scheduling conflict and March 17 because Jarolen, who is undergoing treatment for breast cancer, had been precluded by her medical condition from participating.

School board member Tony Prushinski said he could not understand how Jarolen was able to attend the Friday hearing but not medically cleared to participate in the district’s administrative hearing.

“I find it confusing that we can’t have a hearing in Nanticoke, but today for a few hours she was able to attend the hearing at the Luzerne County Courthouse,” Prushinski said. “Why could she appear at a hearing at the courthouse but not at the school?”

DeLuca argued Jarolen’s demotion was precipitated by low test scores at the high school and that the delayed hearings were postponing the inevitability of her transfer.

Pawlik said math and reading scores at the high school have dropped since Jarolen took over as principal and that the school has slipped three notches in the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment ratings, from a “warning” level in 2005 to “School Improvement II” in 2007.

“I believe that shows a sincere interest of the students in the district that the captain of the ship, the principal in this case, be moved,” DeLuca said.

Charles Coslett, Jarolen’s attorney, said Jarolen was being blamed for test scores she had no direct influence over. A principal manages the school, Coslett said, but the more than 140 educators in the district actually impart to students the knowledge required for testing.

“I’ve never seen such scapegoating in my life,” Coslett said. “One person is being made the scapegoat. It’s so irrational and arbitrary.”

Jarolen told Lokuta she tried to work through the treatments but would easily become fatigued because of the toll they took on her body. Jarolen said she recently finished a round of chemotherapy and would need a month or two to “start feeling normal again.”

In her order, Lokuta said a hearing should be held no later than July 7.

4/19/2008

Principal reinstated at GNA

Judge agrees demotion cannot occur without hearing, except when financial constraints.

By Mark Guydishmguydish@timesleader.com

Luzerne County Judge Ann Lokuta Friday ordered the Greater Nanticoke Area School District to reinstate Mary Ann Jarolen as high school principal, pending a district hearing.

The ruling came after a court hearing that pitted details of Jarolen's battle with cancer against lengthy analyses of school test scores.

On Jan. 25, Jarolen was notified of the plan to reassign her, and on April 10 the school board voted to do so. Jarolen sought a court order reinstating her, contending she was legally entitled to a hearing in front of the school board. Lokuta heard both sides in that request Friday morning.

Jarolen testified that she was diagnosed last year with stage 3 advanced localized breast cancer that had spread into her lymph nodes, and that chemotherapy and radiation had caused severe burns and long bouts of fatigue. She conceded her attendance record has been "the worst in my 35 years in education" and gave the dates of some 50 days she took off as a result of the treatments.

Her attorney, Charles Coslett, used the testimony to justify the two times Jarolen postponed scheduled hearings on her demotion in February and March. Jarolen said she believes she would be well enough to handle a hearing in one or two months.

Coslett argued that court precedent is clear: such demotions cannot occur without a hearing except when a district is facing financial constraints.

District solicitor Vito DeLuca tried to show Jarolen has a habit of taking off when she "faces tasks that are uncomfortable," including when she was to attend two-day anger management training after an incident with a teacher. Jarolen said a doctor told her she should not attend it during chemotherapy.

District Director of Federal Programs Michael Pawlik testified in detail about declining test scores in the high school, showing that, measured multiple ways, scores had dropped sharply since 2005. In the Jan. 25 notice of plans to reassign Jarolen, the district said declining scores prompted the move.

DeLuca said the district faces serious consequences because it is failing to meet federal and state mandates, and that Jarolen did not face irreparable harm through the demotion, a prerequisite for granting the injunction.

Pawlik also testified that, while the principal doesn't teach or administer tests, all district principals were told by Superintendent Tony Perrone that they are responsible for test results, and part of their job is to monitor teacher performance.

Coslett said about 140 teachers and Perrone himself were responsible for scores.

"In my 31 years of practicing school law I have never seen such a case of scapegoating," he said.

4/18/2008

Nanticoke Area solicitor says e-mail led to reassignment

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A late e-mail led to the reassignment of Greater Nanticoke Area High School principal Mary Ann Jarolen prior to a required administrative hearing, school district solicitor Vito DeLuca said in a court filing Wednesday.

The school board voted at its April 10 meeting to reassign Jarolen, the high school principal since 2005, to a position as the principal of an elementary school in the district. Jarolen sued the district Tuesday in Luzerne County Court and requested an injunction to return her to the high school until a hearing can be held.

Judge Ann Lokuta will hear the case today at 11 a.m.

Jarolen said she first learned of the transfer in a Jan. 25 letter from Superintendent Anthony P. Perrone. A hearing was scheduled and postponed twice — Feb. 8 because of a scheduling conflict and March 17 because Jarolen, who is undergoing treatment for breast cancer, had been precluded by her medical condition from participating.

In the school district's response to the lawsuit, DeLuca said he sent an e-mail to the school board solicitor and hearing officer, Ellis Katz, on March 18 requesting Jarolen's reassignment "be implemented immediately," and a due process hearing be held after she was medically cleared to participate.

DeLuca said the district offered Jarolen a paid leave of absence so she could meet with her attorney, prepare for the hearing and attend the hearing. The district also offered the option of scheduling the hearing during the day or on a weekend day, DeLuca said.

At the close of his March 18 e-mail, DeLuca submitted a motion requesting the board be allowed to consider the demotion prior to a hearing.

Later that day, Katz sent an e-mail to Jarolen's attorney, Charles Coslett, setting a March 28 deadline for his response.

Coslett did not respond until April 2, DeLuca said.

"That is absolutely not true," Coslett said. "I asked for a one-week extension, within which to respond to Mr. DeLuca's argument and that was granted by Mr. Katz."

In the lawsuit, Coslett argued Jarolen's reassignment was "indisputably a demotion."

DeLuca countered in the district's response, saying Jarolen, "will receive no reduction in compensation as a result of the reassignment."

DeLuca also argued against an injunction.

4/18/2008

Former Nanticoke administrator alleges age discrimination in suit against city

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

A former Nanticoke administrator is suing the city and several members of its council, alleging age discrimination and politics were behind his firing.

Greg Gulick named Mayor John Bushko, councilmen Jim Litchkofski and Brent Makarczyk, and former councilman Bill O'Malley in the suit, filed in federal court this week.

Gulick, 61, is seeking to be reinstated as administrator along with back pay, compensatory damages, attorney fees and court costs.

He also wants the court to issue a permanent injunction against the city to prevent it from "taking adverse employment actions on account of political affiliation" and from discriminating against employees based on age.

The suit states Gulick "performed his work as City Administrator ... in a good, professional and competent manner." After he was terminated by council, his job was performed by Tony Margelewicz, who the suit notes is younger than Gulick, but does not state his age.

Gulick also claims his firing was retaliation because he did not belong to the same political faction as Bushko, Litchkofski, Makarczyk and O'Malley, and because he actively supported a rival of Bushko in the 2005 election.

Bushko said he knew Gulick intended to file the suit.

"He's filing against us for age discrimination ... I'm older than him, so that doesn't make any sense," said Bushko, who is 63.

Margelewicz was 57 when he was hired to replace Gulick, and the city's current administrator, Kenneth Johnson, is 61, Bushko said.

"There was no age discrimination. That's silly," he said.

As for the alleged political reasons, Bushko said it was news to him Gulick was supporting an opponent of his in the 2005 mayoral race, which featured five candidates.

"I could care less. If I was going to get mad at the people who supported my opponent in the election, there would be two-thirds of the town I didn't like," Bushko said. "I don't stay mad at people anyway."

Gulick was hired as city administrator in February 2003, and council terminated him April 16, 2006. About that time, council hired Margelewicz for a newly defined but similar position, that of financial administrator, according to The Citizens' Voice archives.

4/17/2008

Nanticoke to vote on contract segments

School board will decide on salary and health insurance for teachers and other district professionals.

slong@timesleader.com

[Greater Nanticoke Area School District](#) board members will meet tonight in the board meeting room to vote on the salary and health insurance segments of the teachers union contract.

The entire contract could be approved as early as next month, district team lead negotiator Bob Raineri said.

The last contract expired nearly three years ago.

While it is unusual to approve an employment contract in portions, the union decided to break it into two parts at the request of the district, according to Greater Nanticoke Area Education Association lead negotiator Jane Brubaker.

By voting on these two segments of the contract, the district can submit the paperwork to reduce its monthly insurance fees.

"We can get an early discount on the insurance if the salary and health insurance is approved," Raineri said.

When asked about further details of the contract, Brubaker declined until after tonight's meeting, but he did say it was affordable and should not cause the district to raise taxes.

"It was a long negotiation, but I think we came to an agreement that was fair to our members and fair to the community," Brubaker said.

The new contract is effective through Aug. 31, 2010, and will be retroactive to Sept. 1, 2005, the day after the former contract expired.

The Education Association union represents 134 teachers, guidance counselors, librarians and school nurses within the district, Brubaker said.

If you go

What: Greater Nanticoke Area School District Board meeting

When: 6 tonight

Where: School board meeting room at the high school

4/17/2008

Principal's demotion proper, GNA says

Mary Ann Jarolen was transferred to an elementary school from the high school.

Times Leader Staff

The Greater Nanticoke Area School District said its demotion of a high school principal was not illegal and should stand.

The district's solicitor, Vito DeLuca, made the claim Wednesday in response to a lawsuit filed Tuesday by Mary Ann Jarolen. Jarolen last week was transferred from the high school to an elementary school.

Her attorney, Charles Coslett, said the move was illegal because Jarolen was not provided a hearing on the transfer. A post-demotion hearing could not be done unless it was for budgetary reasons, Coslett said.

But the district cited low test scores in its decision to transfer her, he said. Coslett wants a judge to rescind Jarolen's transfer pending a hearing on it. DeLuca on Wednesday said Coslett's request should be denied. The transfer was not illegal, he said, and explained how the low test scores could create problems for the district.

"The high school's state rankings in reading and math have drastically declined to the point where the district would be subject to severe sanctions by the Department of Education if the situation does not improve," he wrote.

A hearing is set for Friday before Luzerne County Court of Common Pleas Judge Ann Lokuta.

4/17/2008

Nanticoke police officers to be held accountable for uniform purchases

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

Council voted on a new contract addition Wednesday that will make the police department accountable for its own uniform purchases. The contract calls for a uniform allowance of \$700 for 2008. Under the new contract stipulation, they will be given a check for it at the beginning of the year, city Administrator Kenneth Johnson said.

Officers must maintain records of uniform expenses, to be kept in a department repository. They can't borrow from the next year's allowance, as they did in the past.

The agreement, which Johnson said had been discussed for a year, was mutual between city officials and police, Chief James Cheshinski said.

"It just became too hard to distinguish what was and what wasn't part of a uniform," he said.

Officers no longer need purchases approved by fiscal manager Holly Quinn under the system created by former councilman William O'Malley in 2007. All purchases went through the city finance office to ensure funds were handled properly, and that the money was being spent appropriately. O'Malley had been concerned about some uses of the uniform allowance. From 1997 until 2007, 10 officers bought a total of 25 guns — including Remington 870 pump-action shotguns and Bushmaster assault rifles — for a combined cost of more than \$16,500, according to city records.

Cheshinski said the new policy would eliminate past problems, such as buying inappropriate items.

Officers have to maintain proper uniforms according to Cheshinski's standards. And officers will be answerable to the Internal Revenue Service, Johnson said.

The IRS allows law enforcement officers to claim deductions for work clothing and its upkeep, but they must be worn as a condition of employment, and they can't be used as everyday wear.

Mayor John Bushko and resident Theresa Sowa questioned why the city was spending so much on a Philadelphia lawyer — Joel Barras of Reed Smith LLP — and asked why the city didn't hire a local labor attorney. The city has paid \$2,984 since January on its labor lawyer, and has \$50,000 budgeted for the year.

Councilman Jon Metta said the city needed the labor specialist to deal with grievances and contractual issues,

"We're paying for past practices. Things were not done properly," Metta said. "If we had spent the money five years ago, we wouldn't have to spend it now."

In other business:

Council agreed to provide a police and fire escort for the Greater Nanticoke Area Drug Task Force's second annual two-mile Walk for Awareness. It will be held May 17 at 10 a.m. Sign-up sheets will be available that day in Patriot Park, said Brett and Brandon Schenck, president and vice president of the task force.

Resident Thomas Allen complained about tractor-trailers from Leggett and Platt driving fast on West Union Street and creating divots in his yard. Bushko said Johnson would look into it.

Resident Ann Marie Kemsel told council lights from the parking lot at Anthony's Auto Barn on Middle Road are shining directly into her house, "illuminating it like daytime." The city has an ordinance requiring lights to be pointed away from adjacent properties, and Bushko said city officials will try to get something done about the problem.

4/17/2008

Mill Memorial Library offering great events for National Library Week

Nanticoke Area Notes - Pam Urbanski

The Mill Memorial Library is celebrating National Library Week with some great events Saturday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

"Children Who Read Succeed" is a program for children 12 and under and their parents. "We want to capture the attention of our smallest visitors to let them know the library has a lot to offer and is a fun place to be," said Cindy Higgins, director of children's programs at the library.

Higgins also has lined up people from throughout the community for the day.

Members of the Nanticoke Fire Department will be on hand to read stories and show off their fire-fighting equipment, including fire trucks. Not to be outdone, Nanticoke police officers are searching for the perfect story to read. Newport Township's emergency medical technicians also will be guest readers and will have their emergency response unit for children to check out.

Additionally, Red, the mascot from Red Robin Restaurant, will be available for pictures with children. And parents always are hearing about Internet safety. In line with this, senior supervisory Special Agent Mary Pat McCoy from the Attorney General's office, will present the program "Operation Safe Surf," designed especially for children pre-school to 12 years of age.

"From what I am hearing, the presentation is well done, complete with a cartoon that our youngest children can relate to," said Higgins.

Cathy Sabulski the Northeast Regional coordinator for Pennsylvania Traffic Injury Prevention, will have a car seat safety display and will be on hand to answer questions.

Sanitary Bakery and Weis Markets will provide refreshments. Larry's Pizza, Red Robin and Friends of the Library will provide door prizes.

And anyone who checks out a book you will be entered into a special drawing for prizes. Girl Scout Troop 2377 will be face painting and helping children to make bookmarks.

Friends of the Mill Memorial Library also will do their part to recognize National Library Week as they sponsor a book and bake sale from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Donations are welcome and appreciated and they will be collected from 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. The Friends also will raffle baskets stuffed

with great gifts for kids. An outdoor game also will be raffled.

All in all, it's a great day to visit the Mill!

Wrestling boosters to meet

The Nanticoke Area High School Wrestling Booster Club will hold its annual awards and recognition banquet for the varsity, junior high and elementary programs Sunday at 1 p.m. at the Alden Manor. Cost \$20 for adults, \$12 for children 10 and under and free for children under 3. For more information, call 735-1434 or e-mail gnawrestling@hotmail.com.

Bingo at the fire company

Honey Pot Fire Company will host its monthly bingo Saturday at 7 p.m. at the fire hall. Refreshments will be served.

St. Mary's pastie sale

St. Mary's Catholic Women's Council will hold a pastie sale Tuesday and Wednesday. Cost is \$6. Orders may be placed with Helen at 735-4668, Barbara at 735-4209 or Johanna at 735-1798. Orders must be placed by Monday. Pickup is from 2 to 4 p.m. each day at the church on Hanover Street.

Holy Trinity hoagie sale

Holy Trinity Women's Catholic Council is holding a hoagie sale Saturday and Sunday, April 26-27. To place an order, call Gloria Eget at 735-8490.

Tax rebate period ends

Nanticoke City Treasurer Albert J. Wytoshek announced the rebate period for city property taxes has ended and are now in face value.

Property owners are reminded the 2008 county tax bills are payable at the Luzerne County Courthouse treasurer's office and cannot be accepted at the Nanticoke tax office.

It is the property owner's responsibility to forward tax statements to the mortgage company.

Anyone needing assistance or an appointment should call 735-2800.

4/16/2008

Reassigned GNA principal asks for injunction

By msisak@citizensvoice.com and eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

The recently reassigned principal of Greater Nanticoke Area High School is suing the school district, claiming officials demoted her to an elementary position without a required administrative hearing.

Mary Ann Jarolen, principal of the high school since 2005, asked a Luzerne County judge to issue an injunction to return her to the high school until an appropriate hearing can be held.

The suit was filed Tuesday by Jarolen's attorney, Charles R. Coslett, who did not return calls for comment.

The school board voted 6-1 at its meeting last Thursday to reassign Jarolen to an elementary school in the district. Board members Ken James and Robert Raineri were absent.

"What we read at the meeting, that was a motion from our attorney. The decision came from the administration. We voted on the administration's recommendation," board President Jeff Kozlofski said. "We can't go in there like gangbusters and say, 'You're not working today.' We set policy, that's all. The superintendent runs the school district."

Board member Frank Vandermark said he cast the lone dissenting vote when the board considered Jarolen's reassignment because he felt the district should have followed through with an administrative hearing, as mandated by Section 1151 of the state's Public School Code.

"She has every right to do this, as well she should have. Procedures should have been followed. A hearing should have happened first, and the board should have acted after the hearing," Vandermark said when told of the legal action. "This is just going to cost extra taxpayer money that we should not be spending right now."

The suit states Jarolen was advised in a Jan. 25 letter that Superintendent Anthony P. Perrone was recommending the transfer and that she had a right to a hearing. Jarolen's attorney argued the reassignment was "indisputably a demotion," and scheduled a hearing for Feb. 8. It was postponed until March 17 due to scheduling conflicts with the attorneys for Jarolen and the school district.

The March 17 meeting was delayed because Jarolen, who is undergoing treatment for breast cancer, had been precluded by her medical condition from participating in her defense or attending the meeting, the lawsuit said.

Perrone said Tuesday he was unaware of Jarolen's lawsuit and could not comment on her reassignment because it is classified as a confidential personnel matter. The suit states the district "represented that its demotion of (Jarolen) is resultant from 'declining test scores,' not budgetary necessity."

District solicitor Vito DeLuca declined comment because he is representing the district administration. Attorney Elliot Katz is representing the school board. He could not be reached.

The district has until Thursday to file a brief in response to the lawsuit. A hearing is scheduled for 11 a.m. Friday before county Judge Ann Lokuta. Assistant high school principal Brian McCarthy is temporarily filling in for Jarolen, who is at K.M. Smith Elementary school, Kozlofski said. He noted the pay is the same for high school and elementary principals.

The district promoted Jarolen to high school principal from assistant principal in 2005 in a similar switch, which moved Thomas Kubasek from the head position at the high school to principal of the K.M. Smith and John F. Kennedy elementary schools.

4/16/2008

Principal files suit over transfer

Greater Nanticoke Area's Mary Ann Jarolen claims district's action was illegal.

By dweiss@timesleader.com

Reassigned Greater Nanticoke Area Principal Mary Ann Jarolen says her transfer from the high school to an elementary school was illegal. She filed suit Tuesday in Luzerne County Court of Common Pleas against the district claiming the transfer was contrary to state law because she was not given a hearing on the demotion.

Her attorney, Charles R. Coslett, wants the district to rescind the transfer until Jarolen is given a hearing on the move.

A court hearing on the request is set for Friday.

According to Jarolen's suit:

On Jan. 25, she received notice the superintendent recommended she be reassigned. The letter advised her of her rights to a hearing under the Public School Code.

Jarolen invoked her right to that hearing. She also claimed the move was a demotion.

The district agreed.

The initial hearing date was postponed because of scheduling conflicts and rescheduled for March 17.

But it was postponed again because two of Jarolen's doctors said a medical condition would prevent her from attending and participating in the hearing.

On March 18, the district solicitor said the district could bring about the transfer before the hearing.

Not so, Coslett said.

His suit said the district could only have a post-demotion hearing if the demotion is of budgetary necessity or if a prior hearing would be fiscally impossible.

But the district still transferred Jarolen, without hearing, on April 10.

Coslett's suit said the district, in demoting Jarolen, cited "declining test scores."

Coslett wants a judge to rescind the transfer and prevent the district from conducting a hearing on the demotion until Jarolen's doctors give her clearance.

District solicitor Vito DeLuca said he felt it would be inappropriate to comment on the suit because it relates to an employment matter pending before a judge.

4/16/2008

Regional police effort to continue despite departure

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

A proposed regional police effort will continue, despite Hanover Township commissioners' withdrawal from its board, officials in Nanticoke and Newport Township say.

On Monday, the commissioners voted 5-1 to drop out of the South Valley Regional Police commission, which was tasked with putting together logistics of a combined department, such as how many officers it would have and where coverage zones would be.

The news surprised Newport Township and Nanticoke officials, in light of the fact that the police commission has only had one meeting and during it, Hanover Township was given extra representation.

"I'm still optimistic we can continue on," Newport Township Commissioner John Zyla said. "I still feel that was the right way to go."

Nanticoke Councilman Jon Metta said remaining members would consider options at the next commission meeting, to be held April 24 at 6 p.m. in Newport Township.

"It might work with the two of us only, Newport Township and Nanticoke. I don't know," Metta said. "My hope is we can continue on and find other municipalities to join us."

A study by Bryan D. Ross, former chief of Berks-Lehigh Regional Police, suggested a combined department would work. The three municipalities opted to take the next step and form the commission.

Hanover Township Commissioner Robert Burns, the "no" vote, said he was disappointed his fellow commissioners decided to drop out so soon.

"I just wish we had continued the process to see where it was going to end, and unfortunately, we didn't get that far," he said.

Burns wanted to see what benefits regionalization might have had for Hanover Township, and, if it turned out not to have any, he would have voted against forming the actual department, he said.

"We'll continue to move forward with the remaining members, and see where the commission wishes to go," said Joe Boyle of the Pennsylvania Economy League, which was assisting the commission. "I'm disappointed Hanover would not see it through. They put in a lot of work."

4/14/2008

Eleven-year-old Nanticoke boy writes book about life with Tourette syndrome

By csheaffer@citizensvoice.com

Joseph Nutaitis is an active, friendly 11-year-old kid, who likes playing football and digging holes in his yard.

Joseph's father, John Nutaitis, lovingly compares "Joey" — as his friends and family call him, though he prefers Joseph — to the character P.J. in the cartoon "The Family Circus." Joseph is always wandering around, finding the least direct route to wherever he is going.

But, as of late, whenever Joseph is in public with his family, it seems as though Joseph is one of the rudest people on the planet. He'll make noises by blowing his lips together. Sometimes he suddenly jerks his head or hands. Other times, the sound he makes is a slight clearing of the throat.

Since he was 7, Joseph has been diagnosed with Tourette syndrome, a neurological disorder that is characterized by sudden vocal outbursts or physical movements, known as tics. Joseph's family — including his brother John, 13, and his sister Johanna, 14 — are used to the problem, and mostly ignore his tics. The family even gave each of the tics a pet-name.

But, when the family is in public, people get angry at Joseph for making sounds he cannot control. At the movies, a man and a woman yelled at Joseph for making a noise during the film. At a restaurant, a woman announced loudly that she wouldn't be able to finish her meal if Joseph didn't stop his tics.

The Nutaitis family finished watching the movie, and finished their meal, but Joseph left both public outings filled with shame and anger because of his disability. His parents worry that if people continue this behavior, Joseph will become afraid of going in public. As Joseph says, "I can't help it." "We can understand initially when people get mad, but we have no problem explaining it," said Shelley Nutaitis, Joseph's mother. "Once it's explained it's beyond his control, most people are understanding."

The family usually has to explain Joseph has a more common form of Tourette syndrome. Many people are familiar with Tourette's, but the name brings to mind scenes in comedy movies in which people shout obscenities and random words. This is a rare form of Tourette's, and most people's tics aren't offensive and don't consist of entire words.

The Nutaitis family said the [Greater Naticoke Area School District](#) has been more than understanding about Joseph's problems.

In addition to having Tourette syndrome, Joseph, a fifth-grader at the school, exhibits symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder and a slight tendency toward Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. This is common for many people who suffer from Tourette syndrome.

Although Joseph's teachers tell the students Joseph cannot control his tics, that doesn't stop children at school from picking on Joseph behind the teachers' backs.

John Nutaitis can recall nights when Joseph, with tears in his eyes, asks why other children pick on him because of his Tourette's.

"Through it all, the remarkable thing is Joseph has not been negative," John Nutaitis said. "Joey's learned a lot of compassion because he had to deal with a lot of snide remarks."

Medication for Tourette syndrome is not always effective, and many times side effects accompany the prescriptions. In terms of treatment for the disorder, Joseph has been practicing a series of behavior modification techniques with his father, a licensed professional counselor in Pennsylvania.

He also visits a Tourette's specialist at the Hershey Medical Center.

Throughout his life, John Nutaitis worked with children with autism and other behavioral issues through his business, Comprehensive Behavioral Counseling in Naticoke. Now that his own son is affected by Tourette's, he wants to help others with the disorder.

"You have to understand kids have feelings too. I think it's time to get a program into the schools, and to educate people about Tourette's," John Nutaitis said.

Through his experiences with Tourette syndrome, Joseph has remained positive. With the help of his family, he even wrote a book, "Tourette's: Am I Really That Different?" Joseph took the book to school, and shared it with his classmates. Overall, most of the children are understanding and don't tease Joseph.

4/11/2008

GNA principal transferred by school board

eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

Greater Naticoke Area School Board transferred the high school's principal to another school, but can't disclose the details.

The board voted 7-1 Wednesday to reassign Principal Mary Ann Jarolen, effective immediately. Board member Frank Vandermark was the "no" vote. Robert Raineri and Ken James were absent.

"There's a pending hearing. I voted 'no' because we should go to the hearing and get both sides before we decide to move her," Vandermark said.

It was the administration's decision, not the board's, to make the move, board President Jeff Kozlofski said.

Jarolen will be transferred to one of the elementary schools, but Vandermark could not say which one.

Board members and Solicitor Vito DeLuca could not give details on the reassignment because it is a personnel matter.

Superintendent Anthony Perrone refused to talk to the press after the meeting.

It will be up to Perrone to select a temporary or permanent replacement for Jarolen, Kozlofski said. Brian McCarthy is assistant principal.

"Will he take over? I don't know. That's up to Mr. Perrone," Kozlofski said. "There's nobody lined up. ... At this time there's no intention of hiring a principal."

Administrators will meet today to discuss the situation, and vote later on Perrone's recommendation, Kozlofski said.

Jarolen was elevated from assistant high school principal after the board moved Thomas Kubasek from high school principal to principal of K.M. Smith and John F. Kennedy elementary schools in June 2005.

At the time, board members wouldn't say why Kubasek was reassigned, but it later came out he was not considered a strict enough disciplinarian. Kubasek has since retired.

Jarolen has been battling breast cancer. Last year at graduation, students wore pink ribbons on their gowns to show support for her.

In other business, the board:

Voted to advertise for three elementary teachers, a special education teacher, a music teacher, a chemistry teacher and an English teacher.

Voted to post all fall and winter sports positions. The board just hired Lou Cella as head football coach on Feb. 21, but the position will still be advertised and Cella has to re-apply so he can be hired officially, Kozlofski said.

4/8/2008

A local lesson in life

Naticoke native turns 100

slong@timesleader.com

Former Nanticoke Area School District teacher Jule Znaniecki loves history.

She's lived 100 years of it.

A Nanticoke native, she grew up in a home on Espy Street in Nanticoke's Hanover section neighborhood after her April 6, 1908, birth.

Family traveled from all over the country to Znaniecki's home on Saturday to help celebrate her special day.

Although she has lost her sight in the last two years, she is as intellectually sharp as ever.

She doesn't consider herself to be a trailblazer, but she is, said her daughter Jule Wnorowski.

The first in her family to go to college, Znaniecki began teaching after graduating from East Stroudsburg State Normal School with a teaching certificate in 1928.

The college now is East Stroudsburg University.

She taught in the Greater Nanticoke Area School District for almost three decades until her retirement in 1973.

Her favorite subject is history.

"It's a living subject, it goes on, that's why you should do the best you can every day, because you are part of living history."

When asked what she liked about teaching, her face lit up.

"Every child is different, but they are all loves. I guess it just comes naturally, you don't think about it, you just do it," she said.

Znaniecki paved the way for women to follow in her shoes as she become an activist fighting to change a state law that required women to resign their teaching posts after getting married.

"I thought if men could continue teaching and women could not, it was discriminatory," Znaniecki said.

She had to resign from teaching when she got married because of the state law, but returned to teaching after her children entered school.

A law was passed about five months after her wedding to allow women to continue teaching, regardless of marriage status.

Wanting to ensure everyone had access to books, she also helped establish Nanticoke's Mill Memory Library in 1958.

"Books were not available to the average citizen back then. This gave everyone the opportunity to read good books," Znaniecki said.

Proud of her Polish heritage, Znaniecki said she wanted to be a teacher at an early age, just like her next-door neighbor Elizabeth Badman.

She married her husband, Vincent, another Nanticoke native, on July 15, 1937, at St. Mary's Church in Nanticoke, and they raised three children -- Jule, Vincent and Jean.

From 1961 to 1966, she was the "first lady" of Nanticoke as her husband served as the city's mayor.

Before that, he served a stint as a councilman.

While they were dating, he also served as city police chief.

Znaniecki is a founding member and later served as president of the Wilkes University Polish Room Committee.

She is also a founding member of Pi Beta Gamma, a women's business and professional club.

"It's a living subject, it goes on, that's why you should do the best you can every day, because you are part of living history."

Jule Znaniecki

4/4/2008

Nanticoke looking at police pension hike

Officials want to know if it would trigger other increases, hurt taxpayers.

slong@timesleader.com

The city might dig itself into a financial hole if retired police officers are given a cost-of-living adjustment.

Nanticoke Mayor John Bushko said retired officers deserve an increase in their monthly pensions because they have not received a raise in more than a decade. He wants to increase their pensions by \$100 a month.

Bushko's motion to grant the increase was made at Wednesday's council meeting, but was defeated by a 3-2 vote.

Councilmen Jim Litchkofski, Jon Metta and Brent Makarczyk voted against the motion. Bushko and Councilman Joe Dougherty voted to authorize the increase.

Police department retirees would have seen an immediate increase in their checks if the motion had passed.

"I am sure it will not cost the city one dime to fund the police pension," Bushko said.

Litchkofski, Metta and Makarczyk said they are concerned that increasing the police pension funding would require the city to increase funding to the city's fire department pension and possibly other union pension funds.

That in turn could pose a financial hardship on the city, said Metta, the city's accounts and finance director.

Litchkofski said he would love to give the retirees a pay raise but would not do it until he was assured by financial experts and the city's labor lawyer that it would not cost the city taxpayers thousands of dollars.

"If the pension fund is bankrupt or doesn't have enough money in it, then the money has to come from the city coffers," Metta said. "We don't want that to happen because the city is under a financial burden right now."

City Administrator Kenneth Johnson said he favors the increase but noted "that might kick off giving a new benefit to the active police, which then kicks off and gives the same thing for the firemen. Everything could be connected because we don't know if there is parity."

Bushko insisted that increasing the police pension would not affect the firemen's pension fund.

Makarczyk made a motion requesting the city's labor lawyer, Joel Barras of Philadelphia, review the union contracts, so the city will know if parity exists.

Investment banker Don Williamson of ASCO, which handles the city's police and fire department pension funds, sent the city a report last year stating the police department pension could handle the increase, but the fire department pension could not because that fund is not as financially healthy, Makarczyk said.

The police pension fund has a surplus of more than \$900,000; the firemen's pension fund is underfunded by about \$250,000, Johnson said. A combination of some bad investments and the retirement of some firefighters shortly after the pension was created put the fund in the red, while the police pension grew because no officers retired immediately after it was created, Johnson and Metta said.

4/3/2008

Nanticoke Redevelopment Authority's future uncertain

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

How many authorities does it take to build a parking garage?

Nanticoke officials tried to find out at Wednesday's city council meeting.

The Nanticoke Redevelopment Authority owns the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street, and the municipal authority manages it; three of the same men sit on both five-member boards.

Last month, acting redevelopment authority Chairman Hank Marks signed the building over to the municipal authority to streamline its sale or lease to Luzerne County Community College for a health sciences center. That should happen in a few months when Luzerne County sorts out bond issues critical to financing the transaction.

Since the redevelopment authority's usefulness is presumably over, council planned to ask Solicitor William Finnegan to research how to dissolve it. Finnegan said he already knows the procedure, and it's up to council to decide whether they want to do it.

But members of both authorities say the redevelopment authority should stay in existence for a while yet.

A parking garage is a crucial part of LCCC's plans to move downtown, because parking is extremely limited. U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, is retrieving a \$5.6 million federal grant to build it. City officials want to know what role, if any, the redevelopment authority has in securing the money and building the parking garage.

A condition of the grant is the money must flow through the redevelopment authority to LCCC, municipal authority member Dennis Butler said. The original earmark in the 2005 transportation funding act specifically assigns the \$5.6 million to the redevelopment authority. Marks agreed the redevelopment authority should not be dissolved if it might jeopardize funding.

A meeting among representatives of the federal transportation authority, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation and LCCC and city officials will take place April 22, redevelopment authority solicitor Susan Maza said. It should clear up what the \$5.6 million can be used for and who gets it, she said.

Councilmen Jim Litchkofski, Brent Makarczyk and Jon Metta want to know who will construct, maintain and own the parking garage.

During a March 3 meeting of city and LCCC officials, Kanjorski's representative brought a memorandum indicating the redevelopment authority would be involved in managing the project.

The councilmen don't want the city stuck with another structure it can't afford, like the Kanjorski Center, mostly vacant since October 2005. The municipal authority is broke and the city pays its bills.

When pressed by Litchkofski on the ownership issue, redevelopment authority member Walter Sokolowski said it would be ideal if the college designed and maintained the garage.

Joe Lach, solicitor for the municipal authority, said there are "too many fingers in the pot" and recommended dissolving both authorities.

In other business, council promoted firefighter Line Chief Thomas Sadowski to deputy chief.

4/3/2008

Nanticoke Area Notes - Pam Urbanski

GNA's Hauer selected as member of the Big 33 cheerleading squad

The Big 33 Football Classic is an All-American football game featuring the top high school football players in Pennsylvania. It is known as the "Super Bowl of High School Football."

During the last 14 contests, players from Pennsylvania are on one side of the pigskin and football players from Ohio are on the other. There has been at least one Big 33 alumnus in every Super Bowl.

As you know, a football game of this importance would not be the same without cheerleaders rooting on their favorite teams. And just as being part of the Big 33 football roster is a big deal, so is being selected to the Big 33 cheerleading squad.

Stephanie Hauer is a senior and cheerleading team captain at Greater Nanticoke Area High School. She has been selected to be part of the 2008 Big 33 cheerleading squad.

The squad is comprised of high school seniors who currently cheer for their high schools and are in good academic standing.

Hauer's cheerleading coach, Carmella Brown, urged her to fill out the application for the Big 33.

"Stephanie has what it takes. She leads by example in the athletic arena and in the classroom. She gives 110 percent all the time," Brown said.

Continuing, she said Stephanie is conscientious, determined and hard working.

"She is the best of the best. It's an honor for any athlete to be selected for a squad that signifies excellence in his or her sport," said the cheerleading coach.

Hauer credits part of her selection to her gymnastic background.

"I was a gymnast at the Wilkes-Barre YMCA for many years. The tumbling skills I have really play a role in my cheerleading abilities, she said.

Cheering at the football game is not the only thing Hauer and her fellow cheerleaders from Ohio and Pennsylvania will be doing while in Hershey.

"Cheerleaders and football players are required to participate in community service during the week," she said.

"As part of the buddy program, we pair up with special-needs children and do activities. For one project, the children will cheer with us during part

of the football game. We also will host a mini-cheerleading camp,” Hauer said.

Hauer is an amazing and very busy young lady. She excels in the classroom, ranking in the top of her class at GNA.

She also is part of dual-enrollment where she attends college and high school classes. Advanced placement classes are also part of her course load.

Earning a paycheck is on her list of things to do.

Hauer’s future plans? “I plan on attending East Stroudsburg University, where I already have started the tryout process for cheerleading.”

Hauer is the daughter of Fred and Donna Hauer. She has a brother, Eric, and a sister, Emily. The Big 33 football game will take place in Hershey on June 14.

All-you-can-eat breakfast

Newport Township Fireman’s Community Ambulance will hold an all-you-can-eat breakfast Sunday from 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at St. Mary’s Church hall in Wanamie. Menu includes scrambled eggs, home fries, ham, coffee, juice and tea.

Cost is \$6 for adults and \$4 for children 10 and under.

Call 735-4652 for more information.

Chicken dinner at St. Mary’s

Christian Men and Women of Corpus Christi Parish will hold a chicken dinner Sunday, April 13, at St. Mary’s Church hall in Wanamie.

Takeouts will be from 11 a.m. to noon. A sit-down dinner will be served from noon to 3 p.m.

Cost is \$8 for adults and \$4 for children. A limited number of tickets will be available at the door. Call 736-6372 to get tickets in advance.



Artist rendering of the future Luzerne County Community College culinary arts center, at Market and Main streets in downtown Nanticoke.

Quick Info

- Site: Market and Main streets, Nanticoke, where the senior center is currently located.
- Architect: Facility Design & Development Ltd., which has offices in Wilkes-Barre, Scranton and New York.
- Developer: Mark Development of Kingston.
- Cost to build: About \$7.2 million.
- Size: More than 20,000 square feet.
- Capacity: 300 students.
- Estimated construction start: By summer 2008.
- Estimated Completion date: In time for classes in fall 2009.

3/30/2008

New LCCC building expected to stir growth

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

Luzerne County Community College’s Culinary Arts Institute will serve up new opportunities for students in a growing field — and the new building will be icing on the cake for Nanticoke redevelopment.

The new building will cost approximately \$7.2 million, encompass more than 20,000 square feet and will replace the city-owned senior center at Market and Main streets.

“That is going to become a flagship of the community college as well as downtown Nanticoke,” said state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke.

Because of its visibility at Nanticoke’s main intersection, the site was highlighted for a major project in the South Valley strategic plan, according to Alex Belavitz, principal of the architectural and planning firm Facility Design & Development Ltd., which drew up the plan.

“There’s kind of a destination, visually,” he said. “It will give the city a new landmark.”

Traffic studies showed 22,000 cars a day pass through the intersection, college President Thomas P. Leary said.

“I was very surprised to hear that,” he said.

The Culinary Arts building will be constructed by Kingston-based Mark Development, and LCCC will make a lease-purchase agreement with the firm, Leary said.

Mark Development will arrange to buy the city-owned senior center. Nanticoke officials are bringing in an appraiser from Philadelphia to assess the building, city administrator Kenneth Johnson said.

To help with the lease and buy equipment for the Culinary Arts Institute, a total of \$2.5 million in state gaming money is available, Yudichak said. He is also hoping to obtain an additional \$3 million in state funding, and Mark Development will chip in with \$2 million in private investment, he said.

Facility Design & Development is designing the Culinary Arts building in conjunction with the college, particularly Sal Shandra, chairman of the

culinary arts department, and Gary Mrozinski, Dean of Business and Technologies.

LCCC currently has 150 full-time and part-time students in limited space at the Prospect Street campus, Leary said. Moving to a separate facility will enable the college to double its enrollment and add new curriculum offerings, he said.

The new Culinary Arts building will include two state-of-the-art kitchen laboratories and the region's first dedicated pastry arts laboratory, Belavitz said. There will also be regular and distance-learning classrooms, computer labs, and a classroom-theater that can be used after-hours as a community meeting room.

"What we're most proud of is this: for a compact building, it fulfills all the college's needs," Belavitz said. "And it marries educational architecture with the best of sound Main Street architecture."

The additional space will allow expansion of the food production management and pastry arts programs, Leary said. The college will be able to develop new programs, such as resort management, casino and gaming operations, spa management, and corporate and hospitality facility travel planning, to accommodate specific needs of northeastern Pennsylvania's job market, Leary said.

"It will enable students to have a much wider range of careers in the hospitality field," he said.

Yudichak pointed out there is a "blossoming tourism industry in northeast Pennsylvania off the I-81 corridor," including Mohegan Sun at Pocono Downs, the Wilkes-Barre Scranton Yankees baseball franchise, Montage Mountain, and the Penguins hockey team.

Hospitality is predicted to be the second-largest growth field within the next 10 years, Leary said. The college will also have the top growth field, health sciences, covered. LCCC is buying the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street, just down the road from the Culinary Arts site.

The expansion means LCCC will be able to better serve — and attract — students from 12 counties in northeastern Pennsylvania.

"Between the nursing programs and the culinary arts, we're going to put 400 students downtown," Leary said.

The new facilities will bring in private investors and help grow existing businesses on Market and Main streets, Yudichak said.

"I'm very pleased the college

3/29/2008

Kanjo Kanjo works toward \$5M garage

LCCC needs 300-spot garage in order to move programs downtown Nanticoke.

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Discussions about a downtown parking garage in Nanticoke are being resurrected.

Luzerne County Community College wants to expand its Health Sciences and Culinary Arts program by moving into larger facilities in downtown Nanticoke, but the college needs a garage that will accommodate at least 300 spots, LCCC President Tom Leary said.

U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, said Wednesday he is working to restore \$5.6 million in funding for the garage to provide parking spaces when LCCC moves into downtown.

"If we can get the development downtown I will do everything I can to get that money," he said.

Kanjorski came under fire last fall when it was learned he had rerouted the \$5.6 million in federal funding originally destined for the garage to two other projects, including the Hotel Sterling renovation in Wilkes-Barre.

At the time, Kanjorski said he was worried that the money would be lost if Nanticoke officials didn't move quickly on the parking garage project. A delay, he said, might result in the federal government deciding not to release the money.

Nanticoke City Councilman Jim Litchofski, who has been critical of the congressman in the past over the issue, said the money should be returned because under federal law it still belongs to Nanticoke.

"I would expect Congressman Kanjorski as a senior member of Congress to deliver that money to his hometown," Litchofski said.

Kanjorski wouldn't elaborate on how the funds he is promising would be acquired — whether the money is being rerouted from the other local projects or if this represents new funds being pumped into the district.

"As soon as it's completed we will be able to discuss it fully," Kanjorski said.

Representatives of the city, college and Kanjorski's office must meet with Federal Highway Administration and Pennsylvania Department of Transportation officials in April to discuss the next step of the process, PennDOT spokeswoman Karen Dussinger said.

The federal money would be funneled through PennDOT which would disperse the funds after approving various stages of the work.

3/27/2008

LCCC eyes 2009 to open downtown

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Supporters of the downtown revitalization project are working together to ensure Luzerne County Community College students can start attending class in center city by August 2009.

But first the college must acquire the Kanjorski Center, a private developer must purchase the Nanticoke Senior Citizens Center and both buildings have to be renovated.

A first step was taken Monday night when the Nanticoke Redevelopment Authority turned over the deed to the Kanjorski Center to the Nanticoke Municipal Authority. The next step is for the municipal authority to sell or lease the center to the college.

LCCC President Thomas Leary hopes the deal is completed within 45 days.

The parties still have to decide whether the college will purchase or lease the center. City officials had said they prefer to sell the property so that they don't get stuck trying to find a tenant if the college moves out.

When the transaction is complete, the municipal authority must repay the city for money it had borrowed to pay authority bills — a total of at least

\$45,000, according to City Administrator Kenneth Johnson.

Renovations at the Kanjorski Center could cost an estimated \$8 million, Leary said.

As long as construction begins by June 30, the end of the college's fiscal year, Leary doesn't anticipate any problems in receiving the \$10 million earmarked for the project by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Luzerne County Commissioners approved a \$10 million bond to match the state allotment.

Commissioner Chairwoman Maryanne Petrilla says it's money well-spent – the project will spur economic growth in the southern end of the county.

3/25/2008

LCCC, local officials make progress with center plans

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

After months of delays and setbacks, Luzerne County Community College officials are not only on the same page as city and state officials, but they're ready to turn to the next chapter in the textbook.

"We saw some progress tonight," college President Thomas Leary said after Monday's Nanticoke General Municipal Authority meeting.

LCCC officials, state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, all four members of city council and Mayor John Bushko attended. College officials plan to expand the culinary arts and health sciences programs and relocate them in downtown Nanticoke, a move considered crucial to revitalization efforts.

Nanticoke's municipal authority manages the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street, and the redevelopment authority owns it. They have been going back and forth about the best way to transfer the building to LCCC for a health sciences center.

When the meeting adjourned after an hour of intense discussion, acting redevelopment authority chairman Hank Marks — who is also on the municipal authority — took a step to ensure progress wouldn't be held up by either authority. With a pen loaned by city Councilman Jon Metta, he signed a new deed to the Kanjorski Center.

The authorities are now ready to sell or lease the building to LCCC at a moment's notice, municipal authority solicitor Joseph Lach said.

That's important, because the college is on an extremely tight construction schedule to get its health sciences center in place in time for classes in August 2009, LCCC Vice President of Training Institutes Joseph Grilli said.

The Kanjorski Center can change hands as soon as Luzerne County takes out its loan. Local watchdog Tim Grier recently dropped a legal challenge that would have held up the county from borrowing up to \$93.5 million, approximately \$20 million of which is for LCCC. Because of that, the delay won't be as long as expected, but officials say it will still be about two months before the bond goes through.

Another obstacle in the project was the loss of \$5.6 million in federal money to build a parking garage for the Kanjorski Center. U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, who re-routed the money last year, is trying to get it back, college officials said. They want to start drawing on the funds as soon as possible.

"The garage is an integral part of the health sciences building. It's absolutely critical to the success of the health sciences program downtown,"

LCCC Dean of Administration Richard Amico said.

The redevelopment authority will funnel the \$5.6 million to the college, which will most likely build the garage. The money, which will arrive over several years, has a 20-percent match, Amico said.

Within the next two weeks, representatives from the college, city and state will meet with officials from the Federal Highway Administration and Pennsylvania Department of Transportation to find out about the regulations and guidelines attached to the \$5.6 million, Yudichak said.

There are also details to be worked out by college and city officials, such as who will own and maintain the parking garage once it is built.

3/24/2008

Tributes to major rock acts top Nanticoke's Musicfest lineup

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

The Rolling Stones, Billy Joel and Elton John are coming to Nanticoke this summer.

Well, sort of.

As an added draw to this year's Musicfest, Civic Pride committee member J.D. Verazin booked tribute bands, which play songs in the same way as the famous originals.

"I wanted to get somebody good this year, so we went out on a limb," Verazin said. "You won't find better entertainment all in one place any time this summer."

The weekend of June 6, Patriot Park will resound with the sounds of Shattered, a Rolling Stones tribute band from Philadelphia, and Lee Alverson of Pittsburgh, who has done impressions of Billy Joel and Elton John at resorts and casinos across the country, from Universal Studios, Florida to Lake Tahoe.

And Elvis will be in the park. Harrisburg-based Brad Crum, who bills himself as the No. 1 Elvis impersonator in Pennsylvania, kicks off the three-day festival.

It won't be the first time Musicfest has tribute bands — in 2004, there was a Shania Twain sound-alike, and in 2005, a Rod Stewart impersonator — but three in one festival is a new twist, Verazin said.

This year's musical lineup also includes well-known local talent: Eddie Day and the Starfires, The Cadillacs and M-80. The Starfires are a favorite in Nanticoke, Verazin said. Lead singer Eddie Day Pashinski, now the state representative for Wilkes-Barre, taught music at Greater Nanticoke

Area for many years.

Besides bands, Musicfest will feature games, food and concessions, performances by the Kerry Dancers and magician Pat Ward, rides, and hula hoop, jitterbug, limbo and pierogie-eating contests.

"It's going to be bigger and better than ever," Verazin said. "This is going to be one of the best we've ever had."

But booking big-draw bands doesn't come cheap. Verazin is hoping local organizations, such as churches and nonprofit groups, help out by sponsoring games. It will be an opportunity for them to make money, because large crowds are expected, and also help subsidize Musicfest's music. "All we're charging is \$35 for the entire weekend. Give us 35 bucks and they can keep the rest," Verazin said.

For sponsorship information, call Betsy at Nanticoke city hall, 735-2800, or e-mail nanticokewebdesign@yahoo.com. Visit www.nanticokecity.com and click on "[Party in the Park](#)." for more information on Musicfest.

3/24/2008

Review due for Nanticoke public works department

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

Nanticoke's public works department is up for review, city officials learned last week.

Nanticoke's financial recovery plan, drawn up by the Pennsylvania Economy League, calls for a state-subsidized peer-to-peer review of the public works department. The department needs to focus on basic maintenance and contract out major repairs, the plan states.

A peer consultant was in, but he never submitted a report, city Administrator Kenneth Johnson said. PEL recommended a new consultant, Allentown's former engineer. He will meet with officials and the department, Johnson said. He hopes this consultant issues a report, which would let city officials know, among other things, how many employees the public works department needs.

Councilman Joseph Dougherty believes the city should hire another full-time person. It is down to only five employees who can work, he said. In spring and summer, when there is the most to do, he said he would like to get some part-time workers.

3/20/2008

Nanticoke police receive special recognition at council meeting

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

Council honored the city's police department Wednesday with awards for valor and service.

"This is a very important award. It just shows the dedication of the men we have working for us," Mayor John Bushko said as he presented the officers with bars to wear on their uniforms.

Police Chief James Cheshinski started on the force Sept. 18, 1972, making him the longest-serving officer in city history, according to Bushko. Not far behind is Detective Capt. William Shultz, who from 1974 to 2004 has had 30 years of combined service between Nanticoke and Plymouth Township.

"Since 1991, Plymouth Township's loss continues to be Nanticoke's gain," Bushko said.

Those with a decade of dedication under their belts are Detective Capt. Kevin Grevera, Officer Lee Makowski and Sgt. Michael Roke.

Sgt. Joseph Gydosh and officers Bryan Kata, Joseph Kosch, Richard Vietz and Brian Williams were recognized for five years of service.

Officers Brian Kivler and Amos Vanderhoff received a special award for gallantry and valor above and beyond the call of duty.

Despite the risk, the two officers entered a burning building on East Eighth Street on Jan. 2 to rescue Jeanette McIntyre, who was asleep, Bushko said.

There's more good news about the department: officers were just measured for bulletproof vests and shields to be purchased through a \$10,000 grant obtained by state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, city fiscal manager Holly Quinn said.

In addition, the Nanticoke Housing Authority has given the police department \$25,000 as part of an agreement for extra service. It will be used to buy a new police vehicle, city administrator Kenneth Johnson said.

3/20/2008

Nanticoke cops cited for valor

Officers Amos Vanderhoff and Brian Kivler helped rescue a woman from fire in January.

slong@timesleader.com

Two Nanticoke police officers were presented Medals Of Valor during Wednesday's council meeting for saving a woman's life on Jan. 2.

Mayor John Bushko read a declaration thanking officers Amos Vanderhoff and Brian Kivler for what he called heroic acts when the officers rescued Jaime McIntyre from a burning home on East State Street at 4:43 a.m. Jan. 2.

"These gentlemen put their lives at risk by doing this, by running into a burning building and pulling her out. It was a valorous act. They deserve what they got," City Administrator Kenneth Johnson said.

A neighbor informed the officers when they arrived on the scene that Jaime McIntyre had not left the home despite the neighbors' repeated attempts to wake her.

Vanderhoff and Kivler found her sleeping on a couch in the rear of the home. Because she was unable to get up on her own, the officers carried her out of the building, Vanderhoff said.

"Sometimes you just don't have time to think about it, but my partner and I made the decision there was somebody inside and we tried to do our best to get her to safety," Vanderhoff said when asked if he was afraid to go into the burning house.

Vanderhoff said he and his partner were just doing their job. He commended the fire department and 911 operator of assisting with the situation. "We're extremely grateful the city has chosen to recognize the selfless dedication these officers have demonstrated in the line of duty," said Detective Kevin Grevera, the officers' union steward.

But this isn't the only time Vanderhoff has entered a burning structure to save lives.

About a year ago, when Vanderhoff worked in Ashley as a police officer he saved a family.

Several other officers received awards for honorable years of service. Police Chief James Cheshinski was recognized for being the longest active serving police officer in city history. He's been with the department for 35 years.

Det. William Schultz was recognized for his 30 years of service in as a police officer. He's been with the department since 1990 and prior to that served as police chief in Plymouth since 1973.

Det. Kevin Grevera and Officer Lee Makowski received awards for 10 years of service.

Sgt. Joseph Gydosh, officers Joseph Kosch, Richard Bietz, Bryan Kata and Brian William all received their five-year ribbons for their service.

3/15/2008

Teacher debates need for GNA trip

A literacy coach to attend a four-day conference regarding the Reading First program.

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Tony Prushinski is questioning why the Greater Nanticoke Area School District is sending a staff member to a conference when the reading test scores among the district's third-graders have not improved in the last several years.

Literacy coach Joan Solano evaluates the district's kindergarten through third-grade teachers on how they teach the Reading First program, a scientific-based reading program. She requested permission from the school board for days off to attend the four-day Pennsylvania Federal Program Coordinator conference at the Hershey Resorts and Convention Center in April. The district would be responsible for paying for the trip costing \$538.

Prushinski, an educator for 25 years and current reading teacher in the Dallas School District, said he doesn't believe the program is working and questioned the need for Solano to attend a four-day conference.

Third-graders are the first grade level to take the reading portion of the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment, but each year the district's test scores have gone down instead of up, despite the district's use of the Reading First program which works with the district's kindergarten through third-graders.

"Our scores are so low 30 to 35 percent of people are getting basic or below basic. How is this going to help them? By the time they get to third grade they should be at their best. The Greater Nanticoke Area School District is a proud community and these PSSA scores are unacceptable," Prushinski said.

Solano was not present at the school board meeting Thursday, but Mariellen Scott, principal of Kennedy Elementary and Greater Nanticoke Area Elementary, said Solano provides valuable feedback to the teachers in a confidential manner so they can improve the children's reading scores. There are some conferences school administrators and staff are required to attend as stipulated by the grant the district received to purchase the Reading First program five years ago, K.M. Smith Principal Joe Long Jr. said.

He wasn't sure the grant providers required Solano to attend this conference.

Prushinski also asked what topics would be covered during the conference, but none of the school administrators could tell school board members the topics.

When administrators receive paperwork regarding conferences they are often given an outline of the conference's meetings, Scott said.

Scott said she would retrieve that information from Solano or another school official and pass it onto the board members. The board then voted unanimously to send Solano to the conference.

3/15/2008

LCCC expansion plan gets financial injection

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

A \$2.5 million serving of gaming revenue for Luzerne County Community College's Culinary Arts institute is a palatable proposition for state, Nanticoke and college officials.

On Friday, the state Department of Community and Economic Development listed how \$11.5 million in slot machine revenue would be dished out to Luzerne County municipalities. Included is "\$500,000 to Nanticoke, for Luzerne County Community College to relocate and grow its new Culinary Institute downtown."

The allocation is actually \$500,000 a year for five years — a total of \$2.5 million. Nanticoke will be the conduit of the funds to LCCC, city Administrator Kenneth Johnson said.

"It is excellent news for the people and city of Nanticoke. The willingness of DCED to allocate money towards this project just shows how viable it is," councilman James Litchkofski said. "It will have a long-term impact on Nanticoke's revitalization."

The plan is for Kingston-based Mark Development to construct a 20,000 square-foot building at East Main and Market streets, where the city-owned senior center is, and lease it to LCCC, state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, said. The developer would buy the center from the city at fair market value, he said. Construction could start as early as May, and should be finished in time for classes in 2009.

Total project cost is estimated at \$7.2 million. The \$2.5 million covers LCCC's lease, college president Thomas Leary said. The money will also be used for expanding the culinary arts programs — something faculty and students are looking forward to, he said.

Health care and hospitality are northeastern Pennsylvania's two fastest growing occupations, projected to grow further over the next 10 years, Leary said.

The Culinary Arts institute, plus LCCC's planned purchase of the Nanticoke redevelopment authority-owned Kanjorski Center on East Main Street for a Health Sciences center will help the college meet the area's needs.

The new facilities will attract students from all over the region, as well as provide a catalyst for further business development in Nanticoke, Leary believes. They also will provide jobs, bring more people downtown and build corporate partnerships, Yudichak said. There is already the potential for \$25 to \$30 million in private investment, he said.

"It's hard to be negative about anything related to this project," Johnson said.

3/14/2008

Campus Connection - Citizens Voice

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Fab frosh: Saint Joseph's freshman center Sarah Acker (Nanticoke) posted her 11th double-double of the season with 12 points and a game-high 12 rebounds as the sixth-seeded Hawks topped the 11th-seeded Saint Louis Billikens, 71-58, in the opening round of the Atlantic 10 Championship at Alumni Memorial Fieldhouse. Acker's 269 rebounds for the season is a new Saint Joseph's single-season freshman record for rebounds.

3/14/2008

Talks between GNA school board, teachers labeled productive

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

Negotiations with the teachers union are going well, Greater Nanticoke Area school board confirmed Thursday, indicating an end to a three-year contract impasse could be in sight.

After talks Wednesday night, the teachers' Pennsylvania State Education Association representative Jane Brubaker characterized the union as "cautiously optimistic."

School board member Robert Raineri agreed Wednesday's talks were productive. The teachers and board each gave in on some things — but confidentiality issues prevented him from giving specifics.

"Things went better than they have in the past," Raineri said.

Resident Hank Marks said he was glad to hear that.

"I hope this thing can be resolved," he said. "I don't like getting up here and rapping the teachers ... but they've been treated well over the years."

Board and teachers union representatives intend to meet again next week.

In other business, board member Pattie Bieski said the district has finished its mandated five-year strategic plan for improving Nanticoke High School. The plan has been sent to the state Department of Education, she said.

Students take the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment tests to determine their reading and math abilities, as required under federal No Child Left Behind law. Districts must make adequate yearly progress goals in test participation and school attendance, but the high school fell short in the past two years.

The board's newly formed education committee will study the plan and determine what is and isn't working, board member Frank Vandermark said. Everyone blames teachers and administrators, but "no one actually went to the kids to ask why they're not doing so well," he said.

"I think that's very important," Vandermark said.

GNA's Educational Center and Elementary Center received warnings from the state for PSSA performance, and could also have to adopt a plan if they don't improve.

Poor third-grade reading test scores led board member Tony Prushinski to take a critical look at the elementary schools' Reading First program last month, and inquire into the schedule and duties of literacy coach Joan Solano.

"When we're going on a downward slide, I think we should ask questions about the program. I think we should ask questions about the coach," Prushinski said.

Elementary principal Dr. Mariellen Scott agreed to give board members the schedule for a conference Solano will be attending in Hershey.

Prushinski had wanted to know whether it would be relevant to her job.

Solano checks on how elementary teachers are doing with the reading program and provides support, Scott said.

3/13/2008

LCCC can now move forward on Kanjorski Center plans

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Tim Grier's withdrawal of his challenge to Luzerne County's plans for borrowing up to \$93.5 million — approximately \$20 million of which is for Luzerne County Community College — means college officials can move forward with their master plan.

It includes buying the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street in Nanticoke for a health sciences center. City officials are eager to see the sale happen. LCCC's presence downtown is considered crucial to revitalization efforts.

"We've been moving along in terms of design and all that, but now that we have this secured, the project can move forward. We can implement the plans we've made," college President Thomas Leary said. "It's a great day for the city, it's a great day for the college, and it's a great day for our students."

A sale price and timeline for the transaction are not yet set.

"It's like going out to buy a house. You know it's going to be done. You just have to get everything together and finalize the details," Leary said. State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, will talk to the county about a time frame, city Municipal Authority Chairman Ron Kamowski said. "The county wants to see it happen. We'll just sit here and let them get their paperwork and bond issues straightened out, and it should fall into place," Kamowski said. "Hopefully, they (the college) can hit their fall 2009 deadline."

Nanticoke's redevelopment authority owns the Kanjorski Center, and its municipal authority manages it. The redevelopment authority board recently voted to allow the sale of the office building and as much surrounding property as needed to LCCC, without having to call a meeting or do anything that would cause further delay.

The county's \$20 million funds several other projects at LCCC. It will be used to complete the Public Safety Training Institute, which is under construction, and pay for renovations on campus, including redoing the parking lot.

3/13/2008

Teachers, GNA board make good progress, will meet next week

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The latest contract talks between the Greater Nanticoke Area school board and teachers union went well.

"We made some very positive progress tonight," Jane Brubaker, the teachers' Pennsylvania State Education Association representative, said Wednesday night. "We're cautiously optimistic."

She said the two sides hope to make more progress when they meet again next week.

GNA teachers' contract expired Aug. 31, 2005. Health insurance and salary raises are two main sticking points.

3/6/2008

Nanticoke council OKs public works pact

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Council voted unanimously Wednesday to approve a three-year contract with the Teamsters Union, representing the city's public works department. The new contract has a few differences from the previous one, including clearer language, city administrator Kenneth Johnson said.

"It's a very well-written contract," he said.

Employees will get raises of \$800 per year and up to 23 days of vacation. They will have to contribute to their health insurance, but employees with plans other than single-payer coverage get credits for the first two years to help cover it, Johnson said.

The city's clerical workers received a new contract in January. Their contract, as well as the public works contract, expired Dec. 31, 2007.

Negotiations for both contracts were not easy, Johnson said.

"But in the final analysis, the city has to do everything it can to keep costs under control," he said.

Negotiations are beginning for police and fire contracts, which expire Dec. 31, 2008.

In other business, council:

Passed a motion to apply for \$348,008 in state Community Development Block Grant funding. It will be used to redo Orchard and Alden streets.

Authorized engineer Pasonick Associates to start work on the streets to be redone with 2006 and 2007 CDBG money. These are: a block of West Ridge Street, West Noble Street, Slope Street, Nanticoke Street and Maple Street.

Passed a resolution raising the cost of application, installation and maintenance of handicapped parking signs from \$50 to \$150. It costs the city \$173, including labor and purchase of materials, to install them, Johnson said.

3/6/2008

Nanticoke Redevelopment Authority clears way for quick deal with LCCC

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The city's redevelopment authority took steps Tuesday to be able to transfer the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street to Luzerne County Community College at essentially a moment's notice.

Board members voted on a measure that allows them to sell the office building and as much surrounding authority-owned property as needed to LCCC, without the redevelopment authority having to call a meeting or otherwise delay proceedings.

The college wants to buy the Kanjorski Center to use for a Health Sciences center. When the time comes, said attorney Joseph Lach, all the redevelopment authority has to do is give the deed to its Chairman Hank Marks to execute.

The redevelopment authority owns the Kanjorski Center, but the municipal authority manages it. Lach, who is municipal authority solicitor, pushed the redevelopment authority to either allow the direct transfer to LCCC or else to hand the Kanjorski Center over to the municipal authority — which a September 1993 agreement allows — to streamline the sale.

When LCCC lets the redevelopment authority know what its needs are for the project, the authority can include additional downtown property in the deed, board member Walter Sokolowski said.

One problem is a lack of parking at the Kanjorski Center. The redevelopment authority bought properties at nearby 108-112, 116 and 120 E. Main St. and demolished buildings on them in November 2005. The college will probably need that land for a parking garage, Lach said.

Preliminary plans call for the garage to be built at the rear of the property, with a privately owned restaurant and possibly retail space in front. However, the final design of the project depends on available funding, Lach said.

The main source of money for the parking garage was supposed to be \$5.6 million set aside by U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, in a 2005 transportation funding bill.

Concern about losing the funds led Kanjorski to re-route the \$5.6 million to other projects in his district, including renovations to Wilkes-Barre's Hotel Sterling. On Saturday, Kanjorski met with LCCC officials to talk about returning the money.

3/6/2008

Mother of astronaut Christa McAuliffe to visit Nanticoke schools March 18-19

By Pam Urbanski - Nanticoke Area Notes

When a reporter asked astronaut Christa McAuliffe, who was set to be the first teacher in space, what gave her the most satisfaction, she said "I touch the future, I teach."

Tragically, Christa and six other crew members lost their lives when the space shuttle Challenger burst into flames shortly after takeoff in January 1986. Fortunately, there are teachers who continue to share her vision.

Nanticoke physical science and physics teacher Anthony Fleury is one of those teachers. During the summer a few years ago, Fleury attended his first Boeing Educators to Space Camp in Huntsville, Ala. He returned a few years later to attend an advanced space camp. Through its educator programs, staff members help teachers to enhance science, technology, engineering and math education in our nation's school systems.

"Space camp is one of the most intensive conferences I have attended," Fleury said. "We go from morning to night, learning different activities such as creating labs or missions we can bring back to our classrooms. It's exciting and I love every minute of it."

Fleury has managed to stay close to his colleagues and mentors from space camp. They meet regularly and come from all over the country. The last meeting took place this past summer when they gathered in Florida to witness the space launch. They came to support their friend and fellow teacher, Barbara Morgan. She was the first teacher asked to take part in a space mission since Christa McAuliffe.

It was during this time that he learned about Grace Corrigan, mother of Christa McAuliffe. Corrigan has traveled all over the country, visiting schools and delivering inspirational messages and stories of her astronaut hero daughter. She is also a frequent guest speaker at space camp.

"We were riding out to the launch pad and my friend and fellow teacher, Jen, told me how much the meeting meant to not only the students, but the faculty as well. It was then that I decided to give Grace a call and ask her to visit our Nanticoke schools," Fleury said.

He made the phone call and she graciously accepted. Corrigan will visit Nanticoke schools Tuesday, March 18, when she will meet with faculty and Wednesday, March 19, when she speaks to students.

"Everyone is very excited about the visits. We have been gearing up for this visit since it was first announced in early January," said Fleury.

During the morning activity period, Fleury has shown a video which includes clips of NASA footage and the late McAuliffe. Many of the classes have incorporated excerpts from Corrigan's book and math-based lessons related to the shuttle program. In his class, students are making podcast movies about Christa and the space program. "It is going to be an awesome two days in our high school," said Fleury.

For more information visit [GNA School District Happenings page](#).

World Day of Prayer

The Berean Lighthouse Church, Market and Green streets, Nanticoke, will host the World Day of Prayer on Friday at 1 p.m. All are invited to attend this worship service. The prayer service is being provided by the World Day of Prayer Committee of Guyana.

Holy Trinity hosting seder

A parish seder meal will be held at Holy Trinity Parish hall Saturday after the 4 p.m. Mass. The Passover seder is a Jewish ritual feast where families gather for a meal and to read the Haggadah, the story of the Israelite exodus from Egypt. It is normally celebrated on the first and last nights of Passover, but the parish is holding the event during Lent so it may stay connected to the Jewish roots in faith. Turkey and lamb will be the main courses. There is no cost, but a free-will offering will be taken. Reservations are required and may be made by calling 735-4833.

Basket bingo at St. Stan's

A spring basket bingo will be held at St. Stanislaus School hall Sunday. Prizes include baskets, gift certificates and door prizes. Refreshments will be available. Doors open at 11 a.m. and bingo starts at 1 p.m.

Living Way of the Cross

As the season of Lent draws to a close, the Rev. Jim Nash, pastor of the parish community of Holy Child, Holy Trinity, St. Mary's and St. Stanislaus, reminds us it's important to continue our journey toward Easter.

One way we can do that is by attending the Living Way of the Cross, which will be presented by the young adults of the parishes on Palm Sunday, March 16, at 7 p.m. at Holy Trinity Church. Complete with moving and inspirational music, the young people of the church do an outstanding job of portraying the last days of Jesus' life. You don't want to miss it. Bill Borysewicz is director of youth ministry. The program will be held regardless of weather.

3/5/2008

Nanticoke authority eases way for LCCC downtown

slong@timesleader.com

The Nanticoke Redevelopment Authority made it easier for the Luzerne County Community College to move into downtown during a meeting Tuesday night at the Nanticoke Municipal Building.

Redevelopment Authority board members approved a motion authorizing board representatives to transfer the deeds of the Kanjorski Center and other redevelopment authority-owned properties related to the LCCC downtown project to the college when the college announces it is ready to purchase the properties.

Nanticoke Municipal Authority solicitor Joe Lach suggested the motion, noting it would streamline the process.

“We’ve been talking about this project for months. The final decision of the project can’t be completed until the funding is in place. Rather than have more meetings it would be easier to just turn the property over,” Lach said.

The college has been working to acquire the Kanjorski Center on Main Street to expand its Health Sciences program and the Nanticoke Senior Citizen Center on Market Street to expand its Culinary Arts program.

Although the Redevelopment Authority is broke, board members authorized Wilkes-Barre real estate appraiser Allen Rosen to appraise a property on Market Street for another project.

The appraisal will cost \$500 and should take about two weeks or less. Nanticoke Mayor John Bushko told the authority it should proceed with the appraisal and he would get the city to cover the fee.

“You’ll get the money from the sale,” Redevelopment Authority board member Walter Sokolowski said.

3/3/2008

Pursuing some different cases

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Zaremba recalls the Nanticoke he grew up in during the 1950s was quite different than it is today.

“It used to be hard to get down the sidewalk sometimes because of all the people in the streets shopping. That was before the Wyoming Valley Mall or the arena,” he said.

Zaremba has known Nanticoke to have more than 22,000 residents in his lifetime. About half as many people live in Nanticoke today according to the 2005 census.

The history of Nanticoke isn’t just relevant to current citizens of the city or others who reside in the Wyoming Valley, Zaremba explains. The anthracite coal boom brought more than 10,000 people to Nanticoke in the 1930s. With the decline of the coal industry in the 1940s and 1950s, many thousands ended up leaving the area. When the next generation of those families wants to know more about the life of their parents and grandparents, quite often Zaremba gets a call at the Nanticoke Historical Society.

“Interest in Nanticoke is spread all over the country from Maine to California,” said Zaremba. In one case, an elderly man from South Africa contacted the Nanticoke Historical Society. The man came from England with his parents but they both died in the 1918 flu epidemic that devastated Nanticoke. As a child, he returned to England and eventually moved to South Africa. Later in life, he desired to know where his parents were buried and Zaremba was able to provide records and photos for the man.

The Nanticoke Historical Society was organized in 1996 because there was no repository for historical information before that, said Zaremba. Now Zaremba and his associates can investigate the history of Nanticoke with a small staff and an office at 229 Main St., where they conduct research, have meetings and plan events.

Some upcoming events the society may organize include tours of Nanticoke’s cemeteries.

“There are some interesting and influential people buried around here. Taking someone to see their graves puts them much more in tune with the story being told,” said Zaremba.

Another proposed historical society event includes some living history in the form of a Victorian tea. The historical society’s office is situated inside a church that was designed with Victorian-era architecture and will provide a realistic setting for a re-enactment of what life was like at the end of the 19th century. The tea will feature actors in period dress and displays of artifacts from the society’s collection.

Although the events are mostly in the planning phase, information about the group’s activities can be found on the Web site, www.nanticokepa.com/nanticoke-history.htm, as well as at the monthly meetings at the historical society’s office on the last Thursday of each month at 7 p.m. Anyone interested in learning more about history is welcome to attend.

Zaremba seems satisfied with his new line of work — chasing history.

“Finding out who are in these old photos or figuring out who knew who or what happened, it’s kind of like solving a crime. But all I want to do now is help people learn about their past and that’s it.”

3/2/2008

Kanjo backs parkade for LCCC downtown

jmarckini@timesleader.com

U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, plans to move forward with building a parking garage as part of Luzerne County Community College’s expansion of the campus in downtown Nanticoke.

The congressman met with LCCC President Thomas Leary and board members to discuss the status of the college’s plan to move its Health Sciences Center into the four-story Kanjorski Center on the main campus.

Kanjorski told college officials he would invest into the 300-vehicle garage plans with the downtown renovation project at his Wilkes-Barre office on Saturday.

“The congressman has fully indicated to us he is willing and ready to assist us as he has indicated in the past. He has indicated he is going to work closely with use to secure the money we need to make this project happen,” Leary said.

LCCC plans to move its health sciences program into the Kanjorski Center and its culinary arts program into the Senior Citizens Center. Both of the centers are slated to open in 2009. College and city officials have expressed the need for a downtown parking facility with the expansion.

Last fall, Kanjorski promised \$5.6 million for the parking garage, but then re-routed the money for the Sterling project in Wilkes-Barre. Pulling the funds was unfavorable among city officials.

College officials and Kanjorski will work together in the next few weeks to secure funding before planning the construction of the garage, he said. They will also draft an application to comply with city regulations. Though the congressman agreed to secure the total amount of money they need, Leary said there is never any guarantee to securing federal support.

2:31 p.m. ---2/28/2007

GNA union to file unfair labor practice complaint

Mark Gurdish - Times Leader

The Greater Nanticoke Area teachers union announced it will file an unfair labor practice complaint against the district, contending remarks by board member and district negotiating team chairman Bob Raineri violated the labor law.

Raineri said that he wants to take the district's offer directly to the teachers if a new contract is not agreed upon during a the next negotiation session, scheduled for March 12.

Union President Barbara Zaborney sent a "letter to the editor" to The Times Leader announcing the plan to file a complaint with the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board. The union contends that the law clearly bars districts from bypassing the union negotiating team, and that such a move is divisive and interferes with the negotiating process.

Pennsylvania State Education Association Uniserv Representative Jane Brubaker, working as lead negotiator with the local union, said the two sides are close to an agreement, with only health insurance and early retirement incentives remaining as chief stumbling blocks.

Zaborney's letter is posted [here](#).

2/28/2008

Nanticoke agency may see its end approaching

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

Nanticoke officials want to get rid of the redevelopment authority, but not just yet.

The redevelopment authority owns property throughout the city, including the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street. The municipal authority manages the properties.

City officials don't think two authorities are necessary because there is a duplication of services. The five-man boards even share three of the same members.

A legal advertisement on Wednesday states council intends to consider, at the March 6 meeting, a resolution to dissolve the redevelopment authority. During the Feb. 20 meeting, council tabled a similar resolution.

"Since we put it on hold, we assumed the whole process would be put on hold," Councilman John Metta said. "The administrator and solicitor decided to put it back in place."

Metta said they should have held off on the ad until council is ready to take action. Things are moving in the right direction, but they "just got out of sequence," he said.

"As far as I'm concerned, and I'm one vote, it will happen eventually," Metta said. "But we're going to hold it until we get a couple issues resolved."

One issue is the sale of the Kanjorski Center to Luzerne County Community College, which plans to convert the office building into a health sciences center.

A September 1993 agreement gives the municipal authority the option to take over the Kanjorski Center property from the redevelopment authority. The municipal authority board voted to do so in November. Board members believe selling the Kanjorski Center will be easier if LCCC only has to deal with one entity instead of two.

Mayor John Bushko objects to dissolving the redevelopment authority until he is sure the sale of the Kanjorski Center won't be jeopardized. City officials say the college moving downtown is the key to revitalization.

"I just want to get that building sold," Bushko said. "That is so important, to get this building in the hands of the college."

2/28/2008

Nanticoke municipal authority in need of revenue

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

Although optimistic Luzerne County Community College is definitely interested in purchasing the Kanjorski Center to convert into a health sciences center, funding delays and lack of a written agreement make the Nanticoke General Municipal Authority board nervous.

But LCCC's president says the college would not move forward with architectural planning and design if it didn't intend to go through with the project.

The authority is in bad financial shape and borrows money for operating expenses from the financially distressed city. The approximately \$5,000 a month from the Kanjorski Center's only tenant, the state Department of Labor and Industry, is not enough for utilities and maintenance.

"Looking at this, we have about four months before we're broke again?" authority member Dennis Butler asked, holding up the finance report.

"Pray for the county," Chairman Ron Kamowski said. "Things won't move until that bond is released."

Wilkes-Barre activist Tim Grier filed two complaints to stop the Luzerne County commissioners from borrowing up to \$93.5 million, including \$20 million for LCCC projects.

Grier is appealing an administrative order from the state dismissing the complaints because he does not pay property taxes. The county can't get the

bond until the appeal is complete. Commonwealth Court recently granted the county's request to expedite the case. Briefs must be filed by March 24, which cuts the normal time in half.

The municipal authority has nothing in writing from LCCC, and Butler wondered what would happen if the Kanjorski Center sale falls through. Authority Solicitor Joseph Lach said it is unlikely. "I've never seen a project with as much support as this one," he said.

Real estate agents Lewith and Freeman are continuing to market the Kanjorski Center, although Lach said there isn't much interest due to publicity surrounding the sale to LCCC.

"We won't sell it out from under them," Butler said. "As far as I'm concerned, they have the right of first refusal."

Butler and Kamowski said downtown redevelopment hinges on LCCC's plans, and private investors are waiting for the sale to go through.

"We have proceeded with all the designs, all the plans to move our Health Sciences into the Kanjorski building," LCCC President Thomas Leary said when contacted later. "When the bond issue is resolved, we will continue negotiations for the sale of the facility."

Leary said he remains optimistic the collaboration "will have a positive outcome that will benefit the students of the college and the revitalization of Nanticoke."

2/25/2008

Nanticoke City Hall stays open

Mayor wanted to close the facility because of mold. Other officials see no emergency. Cleanup work set.

slong@timesleader.com

The municipal building will be open today, despite the mayor's call to close it until a mold problem can be solved, City Administrator Kenneth Johnson said.

During Wednesday's council meeting, Mayor John Bushko said the building should be closed because a home test kit used in November detected mold in the building.

"There is no pending emergency," Johnson said.

Bushko and Johnson have not spoken since the meeting. Bushko said he's happy that proposals are being received so that the cleanup work can be completed soon.

No one denies the building's air vents are very dirty, but Johnson and Councilman John Metta said they don't believe it is reason to close City Hall.

"We don't know the status of the building. We know the ducts are dirty, but don't know if there is toxic mold in the building," Metta said. "I don't know how accurate or exactly what the home test did. A home test is a different thing than a laboratory test."

Once the duct system is cleaned, it will make the heating and air-conditioning system run more efficiently, Johnson said.

Six companies were contacted, but only two of them submitted proposals to conduct environmental tests on the mold before and after cleaning the duct system.

On Friday evening, Johnson authorized one of the contractors to proceed with the project after reviewing a proposal sent to his e-mail account and consulting with Metta, who is also the city's finance director.

This contractor will test the dust and mold's toxicity level before and after cleaning the system. The contractor will also modify the current duct system to make cleaning it easier in the future, Johnson said.

City officials would not release the company's name until the company formally accepts the project, but did say the proposal was significantly lower than the other proposal received with a total price tag of between \$4,000 to \$10,000. Work is expected to begin early this week.

Since the proposal is less than \$10,000, it does not require council approval or vote to proceed with the project.

Johnson does not anticipate the work interrupting normal city functions.

"The cleaning will be done in off-hours. It is not going to affect City Hall or anyone that wants to come in to pay their bills," Johnson said.

If you go

The municipal building will be open today during the regular hours of 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

2/25/2008

Nanticoke council hires Brian Zegarski as city firefighter

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

Nanticoke City Council recently voted 4-0, with Councilman Brent Makarczyk absent, to hire Brian Zegarski as a firefighter at a starting salary of \$30,958. Zegarski's brother John also works for the fire department.

There had been some undisclosed resistance to hiring Zegarski, but Mayor John Bushko urged council to do it because "this legal situation is costing us money." Zegarski is a veteran and, therefore, has hiring preference, Bushko said.

The city has more than \$38,000 in outstanding legal bills, most from 2007, and most to the Philadelphia law firm of Reed Smith LLP, fiscal manager Holly Quinn told council. There is no cash on hand to pay those bills, she said.

2/22/2008

GNA contract talks stalled

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

Contract talks with Greater Nanticoke Area teachers are not going well, the school board and public learned Thursday.

Greater Nanticoke Area Education Association representatives rejected the board's latest contract offer when the two sides met about 10 days ago,

board member Robert Raineri said. Another meeting is scheduled for March 12.

“Personally, if nothing is resolved at that meeting, I’m going to see to it we have a public meeting and expose everything,” he said.

“I was very disappointed,” Raineri said later. “I think maybe it’s time the whole teachers’ body finds out all the details of the offers.”

The teachers’ contract expired August 2005. Health insurance and salary increases are two major issues.

In other business, the board:

Appointed attorney Ellis Katz, of the law firm Sweet, Stevens, Tucker and Katz LLP, as special counsel “for purposes of an employee reassignment matter.”

“We may be moving some administrators to different buildings,” Raineri said, but wouldn’t elaborate further.

Hired Diane James as a hall monitor, a part-time position with no benefits. Diane James, who is board member Kenny James’ daughter, was the best of four candidates who interviewed for the job, superintendent Anthony Perrone said.

2/22/2008

Cella becomes Nanticoke’s coach

By drosengrant@timesleader.com

Lou Cella is getting another shot at coaching a high school football team.

Cella, who spent two seasons at the helm of a struggling Bishop O’Reilly program before resigning in 2005, was appointed head coach of Nanticoke on Thursday at the school board meeting.

“Cella seems to be an outstanding gentleman and coach,” said Bob Raineri, who is a board member and on the football coach committee. “It was a very difficult decision to make because all 13 candidates were very good. We wish we could have hired them all. It was a tough decision.”

Cella, 30, was an assistant coach at Lackawanna College the last three years, including a 10-0 campaign in 2006. He also is a former player at Wyoming Area and Old Forge and an assistant coach at Old Forge.

“I want to work with high school kids and it means so much to me,” Cella said. “I felt it was my calling to be a high school football coach. I feel blessed that Nanticoke gave me that job.”

Cella, who was a finalist for the Nanticoke job in 2005 before Bob Colatosti was appointed coach, added that the struggling Nanticoke program needs to be cleaned up and he plans on starting from scratch.

“I’m thrilled,” Cella said. “It’s very difficult to get a high school football job in the area, but I am thrilled and there is a lot of work to do and a lot of cleansing to do.”

Cella, who had a 2-18 mark at the helm of the Queensmen program, was appointed by a 6-3 vote. Only five votes are needed for a hire.

Board members who voted in favor of Cella were Jeff Kozlofski, Kenny James, Patricia Bieski, Gary Smith, Cindy Donlin and Raineri. School board members that voted against the hiring of Cella were Tony Prushinski, Frank Vandermark and Sylvia Mizdail.

The school board opened the position held by Colatosti the past three years shortly after the Trojans finished 0-10 this past season.

Colatosti was 5-25 in those three years and didn’t reapply. He said after his position was open that he felt the program was making progress, citing the increase in participation from the junior high to the varsity level.

Still, Nanticoke was outscored 412-44 this past season. Its 11-game losing streak is the second longest in District 2 to Western Wayne’s 40-game losing streak.

Nanticoke is 7-43 over the past five years, with five of those victories against Class A teams that were disbanded by the merger of four Catholic high schools prior to the 2007-08 school year.

Cella might have a better opportunity to build the program than Colatosti. Nanticoke dropped perennial power Dallas and resurgent Coughlin from its schedule for the next two years. Those teams were replaced by Columbia-Montour Vo-Tech out of the All-American Conference and Mid Valley, another rebuilding program from the Lackawanna Conference.

Nanticoke kicks off its season on Friday, Aug. 29, with a game at Wyoming Area. Cella is a faculty member at Wyoming Area.

Sports writer John Erzar contributed to this story.

2/22/2008

Nanticoke employees worry about debit cards

20 cards were activated under the users’ names. The cards have since been canceled.

slong@timesleader.com

Some city employees fear city-issued debit cards activated two years ago using employees’ personal information may not have been canceled, even though they were supposed to be.

The cards were issued to about 20 employees, including police officers, firefighters, public works employees and Finance Director Holly Quinn.

City employees’ Social Security numbers and dates of births were used by the city without the employees’ permission to acquire the debit cards in early 2006 from M&T Bank, city Detective William Shultz said.

The cards were designed to only allow city employees to purchase gas to be used in city vehicles.

“You don’t have to access individual information to get debit cards in employees’ (names). That could be considered identity theft,” he said, noting the police department is considering submitting this case to an outside enforcement agency for review.

Several officers said they think it is a violation of the Patriot Act, enacted to increase security after 9/11, to use employees’ Social Security information, because the employees are not the bank’s customers, the city is.

City Administration Kenneth Johnson said the Social Security numbers would have been needed to open the account because the employees were

listed as users on the account.

Johnson, who was hired more than a year after the cards were issued, said city officials should have conferred with city employees before moving forward with this program.

“The mistake they made here is they (city officials) didn’t get their (employees’) permission,” he said.

The cards were issued to the city’s police officers, firefighters and public works employees in February 2006 when former councilman and former finance director Bill O’Malley served on council.

On Thursday he recalled the applications were filed out for the cards but couldn’t remember what information was needed to open the accounts.

O’Malley said the cards were canceled before he resigned his seat last spring.

Quinn attempted to cancel the cards from M&T Bank, but the bank still has a \$1,500 line of credit in employees’ names for each card, police union representative Kevin Grevera said.

Shultz and other employees want the city to deactivate the cards, so individual employees cannot be held responsible for any expenses that might be added to the cards.

Even if the cards weren’t canceled, the employees’ personal credit history should not be affected, because the cards were in the city’s name.

The cards should not be affecting employees’ personal credit history because they are debit cards, not credit cards, he explained.

“The debit card was tied to the city’s accounts,” O’Malley said. “The individual had no liability. The liability was on the city.” The employees were just listed as the persons eligible to use the cards on behalf of the city, he said.

Quinn said that when she checked her personal credit report, the account was never listed. But some city employees are wondering if the cancellation was processed.

When Patrolman Brian Williams, Patrolman Bryan Kata and Shultz recently called the bank to check on the line of credit on each of their cards, they were informed each card had an available credit line of \$1,500.

Johnson said during a conversation with the bank on Thursday morning that he was told the cards were canceled.

“These are no longer active cards. We attended to this several months ago, but I can’t force a bank to fix their own records,” Johnson said.

A memo will be distributed to the affected employees requesting the cards be turned in or verification be provided if the cards have already been destroyed, Johnson said

2/22/2008

GNA’s reading program questioned

Board member Tony Prushinski says Reading First not showing best results.

slong@timesleader.com

Greater Nanticoke Area School District board member Tony Prushinski said he had issues with the Reading First program during Thursday’s board meeting.

The program was purchased five years ago using a \$875,000 grant after the district qualified because of its low test scores.

It is designed to help kindergarten through third-grade students improve their reading skills to perform better on the Pennsylvania State School Assessment test.

“The things they are doing here have been proved to work in other districts,” Superintendent Tony Perrone said describing the scientifically based program.

But Prushinski feels the students’ reading scores should have improved more significantly after using the program.

“With Reading First one-third of our third-graders are at basic or below-basic, and that’s not good,” he said.

“I don’t think the program is giving us the results we need.”

Third-graders are the only ones taking the PSSA reading test using the Reading First and their test scores are falling.

Throughout the evening Prushinski questioned elementary school principals Mariellen Scott and Joseph Long on how the program was utilized and what they thought of its effectiveness.

Scott admitted she wished the scores were better, but noted teachers did learn new techniques that worked to help the children improve their skills. She suggested that looking at the school’s retention policy might help because some children improve their skills if they are repeat a grade one year.

The grant funding is running out at the end of this school year, so the district will not have to abide by all the rules regarding the program in the future. Instead, it can mold the program to make it more effective for the students locally.

“Now that it is done we can re-tool it. We can use what was good with the program and improve what we don’t like,” Scott said.

2/21/2008

Nanticoke mayor says municipal building poses health risk

Mold may close city hall

slong@timesleader.com

Mayor John Bushko called for the Municipal Building to be closed immediately during Wednesday night’s council meeting after mold was found in the structure.

“We are jeopardizing the safety of all our employees,” he said. “Everybody is at risk coming in this building.”

A home test kit detected the presence of “toxic” mold last fall in the squad room of the Nanticoke Police Department, which is housed in the basement of the municipal building.

Those test results and a memo from Nanticoke City Police Officers Association Union Representative and police Capt. Kevin Grevera dated Nov.

15, 2007, were sent to Bushko, City Administrator Kenneth Johnson, Councilman Joe Dougherty and Police Chief James Chesinski. In the memo, Grevera requested that a professional company be hired to test the toxicity levels of mold in the building.

"Perhaps the quantities of mold in the air and air ducts are not potentially hazardous, or perhaps they are. We need to have further analysis as soon as possible to factually determine any potential health risks," the memo stated.

Johnson said the mold problem resulting from an accumulation of dust in the vents was discovered about two years ago, but city administrators never resolved it.

Johnson said he scheduled a contractor to clean the building's ventilation system in the middle of January, but the company never showed up. There was no written agreement made with the company, whose name was not readily available. The cleaning would have cost the city slightly under \$5,000, Johnson said.

Grevera stressed that while the vents do need to be cleaned, a professional company must also be hired to test the toxicity level of the mold, which can be carried through the duct system.

If the mold and ventilation systems are not adequately cleaned by Monday, Bushko said he wants city hall closed.

"Let's just make arrangements to move everybody over to the fire house or somewhere because I think the building has to be closed," Bushko said. Some police department employees notice a difference in their breathing when they report to work and some are being treated for chronic sinus issues, Grevera said.

"Can you imagine working in a place where they don't even resolve your basic health concerns?" he said.

"In the private sector Occupational Safety and Health Administration would step in, but we don't have that luxury."

2/21/2008

Nanticoke Area Notes - Pam Urbanski

The Nanticoke Senior Citizen Center offers plenty of activities, programs

The Nanticoke Senior Citizen Center is a great place. The center, located at Market and Main streets, is open to those who are 60 years of age or older. Breakfast and a hot lunch are served daily.

"The meals are wonderful, well balanced and served cafeteria style. This means they are served hot and fresh each day," said Lynn Brown, center director.

Reservations for lunch must be placed by 1 p.m. one day in advance. In addition to lunch, the breakfast includes coffee, tea, toast and Danish.

There is always some type of activity or program going at the center. On Tuesdays and Thursdays close to 60 people enjoy bingo. For those who want to strengthen their muscles and improve mobility, the center offers exercise class or Tai Chi.

There also is shuffleboard, card games and a big-screen television. Seniors also utilize computers at the center.

On March 10 and 12, an AARP driver's refresher course will be held from 12:30 to 4:30 p.m. Registration is required and participants must attend both days.

On April 2, a bus trip to the casino in Monticello is planned and on April 16 a bus trip is planned to Hunterdon Hills Playhouse in Hampton, N.J., to see "The Last of the Red Hot Lovers."

"This nice thing about having a membership is that members get to purchase tickets before they go on sale to the public," said Brown.

Health screenings, as well as educational and informational speakers, also are part of the programming at the center.

Transportation is available and made possible by funds from Luzerne/Wyoming counties Department on Aging. A ride to and from the center is 90-cents.

The Nanticoke Senior Citizen Center currently is issuing 2008 membership cards. Donation for the card is \$5. If you were a member last year, you must renew that membership.

"This is great opportunity to get out of the house, be with friends and take part in some healthy activities," Brown said. "Come and spend the day with us. See what we have to offer."

Menus and a newsletter are available at the center, which is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Lunch is served at 11:45 a.m.

For more information, call 735-1670.

Tax rebate period ends April 11

Albert J. Wytoshek, Nanticoke City treasurer/tax collector, announced the 2008 city property taxes were issued Feb. 12.

The rebate period will end Friday, April 11. Face period ends Tuesday, June 10, and penalty value ends Dec. 15, the last day to pay taxes at the municipal building.

Anyone not receiving a property tax statement should contact the tax office.

It is the responsibility of the property owners to forward tax statements to the mortgage company.

When remitting payment by mail, if a receipt is requested, enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Residents are reminded tax payments are not accepted by postmark.

Office hours are Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. For more information, call 735-2800.

Activity group to hold ham bingo

Newport Township Women's Activity Group will hold a ham bingo Sunday, March 9, at the Corpus Christi Church hall, Market Street, Glen Lyon. Doors open at noon and an early bird game will be held at 1 p.m. Admission is \$2 and includes a door-prize coupon.

There will be raffles, bake sale items and refreshments.
For more information, call Bonnie at 474-1031 or Eileen at 736-7394.

2/21/2008

A-10 honors

Citizens' Voice

For the second straight week, and fourth time this season, St. Joseph's freshman center Sarah Acker (Nanticoke) has earned Atlantic 10 Rookie of the Week accolades, this time for the week of February 11-17. Posting back-to-back double-doubles — her fourth and fifth respectively — Acker helped the Hawks to a 1-1 record on the week. At Charlotte, she tied her season-high with 16 rebounds and added 10 points and three blocks in a last-second loss to the 49ers. On Saturday, Acker helped St. Joseph's to a 69-64 win at Richmond, scoring 16 of her 18 points in the second half, adding 12 rebounds and two assists.

2/11/2008

Improving facilities on horizon for GNA schools

District taking bids for tiles in high school cafeteria, storage building roof, fence at field.

slong@timesleader.com

The Greater Nanticoke Area School District is accepting bids to make capital improvements throughout the district. Those improvements include replacing the ceiling tiles in the high school cafeteria, the roof at the Lincoln Storage Building and installing a fence and backstop for the softball field at K.M. Smith Elementary School.

The cafeteria and roof projects are being conducted as a form of preventive maintenance, Nanticoke Superintendent Tony Perrone said.

"Just like your house, if you don't fix it, it will start falling apart," he said.

Approximately 7,000 square feet of cafeteria ceiling tiles, which have not been replaced since the school was built in 1970, will be replaced, said Frank Grevera, director of buildings and grounds for GNA.

The district is funding this project using extra funds remaining in the cafeteria account, which is at a surplus, Perrone said.

A new 10,000-square-foot rubber roof will be installed on the former Lincoln School on Kosciuszko Street.

Grevera said the rubber roof was the best option because it is relatively easy to repair. The building is now used as a storage facility for the district, which often runs short on storage space, Perrone said. Money from the district's capital improvement fund will pay for the new roof. Grevera did not know when the roof had last been replaced, but knew there was some restoration work completed in 1995.

A four-foot galvanized fence stretching 500 feet and an 18-foot-high backstop will be installed at the girls' softball field on the elementary school campus as soon as the weather improves, Grevera said.

Bids must be submitted by 1 p.m. Feb. 25 in the district's business office. The school board must approve any bids before contracts are awarded.

The district is also undertaking its second Energy Conservation program to install 48 air-conditioning and heating units, three water heaters, all the windows and window shades at Nanticoke Area High School.

"It equates to a third savings of the energy bill," said Grevera, noting all the equipment installed will meet energy efficiency standards. The money saved from lowering the district's energy bills is reinvested in the capital improvements fund.

The heating and air-conditioning units are expected to be delivered by the end of the month and installed when students are out of the building, Grevera said.

The district replaced lighting fixtures in four district buildings and some air conditioning-heating units at K.M. Smith Elementary and Kennedy Elementary four years ago.

2/11/2008

State labor board asked to remove fire and police chiefs from their bargaining units in Nanticoke on Jan. 1, 2009

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

Nanticoke City Council voted unanimously Wednesday to ask the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board to remove police Chief James Cheshinski and fire Chief Michael Bohan from their unions. The move will not become effective until Jan. 1, 2009, the day after police and fire contracts expire. The financial recovery plan by Nanticoke's financial recovery coordinator, Pennsylvania Economy League, calls for police and fire chiefs to be excluded from their bargaining units at the end of their current collective bargaining agreements. In many municipalities chiefs are non-union because they are considered management.

Council voted to remove Cheshinski and Bohan from their unions in February 2007, but re-voted in May 2007 to allow them to remain in.

At the time, council said removing them before the contracts expire might result in an expensive legal battle. The unions could file unfair labor practice charges, which would cost city officials time and money to fight.

2/7/2008

Nanticoke moves ahead on police regionalization

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

Despite some misgivings, Nanticoke became the first of three municipalities to take the next step in creating a regional police department during a

meeting Wednesday.

A study recently unveiled by Bryan D. Ross, former chief of Berks-Lehigh Regional Police, showed a South Valley police force created by combining departments from Nanticoke and Hanover and Newport townships would work.

Now each municipality has to vote to participate in a commission to draft articles of agreement that will define the regional department. Nanticoke council voted 3-2 to appoint Councilmen James Litchkofski and Jon Metta as the city's two representatives to the commission. Mayor John Bushko and Councilman Joseph Dougherty voted no. Bushko asked why he was not appointed when, as mayor, he is in charge of the police. He was told he could sit in on the meetings.

Dougherty said he didn't think numbers used in the study were correct. For example, it stated Nanticoke's real estate taxes are 60.38 mills, but they are 44.5 mills. Dougherty and Bushko also had concerns about fewer police on the city's streets with a regionalized department.

The study calls for 29 officers, the total the three municipalities have now, and a proposed budget of \$2.7 million. Salaries will be based on the highest-paid department.

Detective Kevin Grevera questioned whether the city would save money. He said if Nanticoke goes with suggestions in the study, the city would get 20,800 hours of police service a year for the same amount the city pays now for 30,440 hours.

Grevera said if officials take into consideration raises, new uniforms, cruisers and other expenses, "You're not going to be able to touch the same amount of police service for less than \$2 million." The city's police budget now is \$948,856, he said, adding that Nanticoke has three times the number of calls Hanover Township does.

Residents Hank Marks and Theresa Sowa also urged caution in moving forward with the study.

Litchkofski said the police and the public would be included as the study commission moves forward.

"Because we move into a feasibility study doesn't mean it's a slam dunk," he said.

"We will be looking at police regionalization for public protection, not just saving dollars," Metta said. "It's the overall package."

Gerald Cross and Joseph Boyle of the Pennsylvania Economy League, Nanticoke's financial recovery coordinator, noted the city's recovery plan calls for exploring alternate means of providing the same or improved police services.

2/7/2008

Chief Mike Bohan offers safety tips for preventing and escaping fires

So many times over the last several weeks, we have read about devastating fires in Luzerne and Lackawanna counties. Many have lost their homes and everything inside of them. Tragically, some have lost their lives. It's frightening.

The City of Nanticoke has nine, full-time firefighters and approximately 30 volunteers. Nanticoke firefighters responded to 746 calls in 2007. Forty-seven of those calls were structure fires. In the last four months alone, firefighters have responded to 15 structure fires in the city. So why so many winter-month fires?

I posed that question to Nanticoke Fire Chief Mike Bohan. "During the cooler months, people use supplemental heating devices. Kerosene heaters, coal stoves, space heaters and wood stoves top the list," Bohan said. "The increased cost of electricity and natural gas forces people to turn to these sources."

What do we need to do to reduce the risk of fire when using the above?

"Make sure the heating device is a minimum of three feet away from anything combustible. With wood stoves, use only seasoned dry wood and have your chimney checked out by a certified inspector. Make sure it is properly maintained," the chief said.

If fire breaks out, what might save lives?

"Smoke detectors are your first line of defense," Bohan said. "You should install one on every level of your home and in every bedroom. And make sure the batteries work. Change them every six months and clean and check the smoke detector every week."

"Carbon monoxide also detectors should also be installed," the chief added.

Continuing, the chief said, "Practice drills in the home. Everyone should have two ways out of the home and a meeting place. Once you are out, never go back inside a burning building.

"If you realize you can't get out of a burning building, go to the closest window and hang something visible out of it. This tells firefighters someone is trapped and needs to be rescued. Firefighters take an oath to save lives first and protect property second."

If your child attends Nanticoke schools and is in grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, talk to them about fire safety. Firefighters recently visited the schools and gave out important information and demonstrated fire safety techniques.

If you have a non-emergency question, you can call the fire department at 735-5860.

Church to hold spaghetti dinner

St. Mary of Czestochowa Church is sponsoring a buffet-style spaghetti dinner Saturday, Feb. 16, in the parish center on Hanover Street. Cost is \$7 for adults and \$3.50 for children under the age of 12. Take-outs will be available from 4 to 5 p.m.

A homemade potato pancake and clam chowder sale also will held by Friday, Feb. 22. Cost is \$6 per quart for the chowder and potato pancakes are three for \$2. Advance orders are required by Feb. 19, by 5 p.m. To order, call Mary at 735-4653, Helen at 735-4668, Barbara at 735-4209 or Carol at 779-3597.

2/5/2008

GNA great an inside force for St. Joe's

Bill Arsenault - Times Leader

Former Nanticoke Area standout Sarah Acker had the biggest game of her career last Saturday night, leading the St. Joseph's women's basketball team to a 72-66 victory over the University of Massachusetts in an Atlantic-10 game in Amherst, Mass.

The 6-foot-3 center had 24 points and 16 rebounds for the Hawks, who are 11-10 overall and 3-3 in the A-10.

"Sarah has been solid for us in the post and certainly presents a matchup problem for some teams," coach Cindy Griffin said. "As we get deeper into our Atlantic-10 play, we will be facing many experienced post players. The big challenge for Sarah will be to maintain her poise and keep learning the defensive as well as the offensive system. She continues to gain experience every time out on the court and that is helping the rest of the players fill their roles."

Acker leads the Hawks in scoring (11.9), rebounds (7.6) and blocked shots (29). She also has 30 assists and 18 steals.

"We expect Sarah to finish strong and continue to prove herself as one of the top freshmen in our league," Griffin said.

GNA grad helps Navy in track

Sophomore Abby Gesecki (Nanticoke Area) is a big point scorer for the Navy women's track and field team.

"Abby epitomizes the phrase, 'quiet waters run deep,'" coach Carla Criste said. "She is rather quiet off the track; however, people certainly take notice of her once she steps onto the lanes."

Gesecki is one of the top performers from the 400 through 800 meters and is a dominant mile- and 2-mile relay leg member as well. She captured the 500 (1:17.90) and was a member of the winning 3,200 relay in Navy's 93.5-87.5 victory against Army in the annual Star Meet on Saturday in Annapolis, Md. The Midshipmen are 7-0 in dual meet competition.

"Abby has really upped her training intensity this year and it certainly shows," Criste said. "She should easily make All-Patriot League this year in multiple running events."

The league championships are set for Feb. 22-24 at Bucknell University in Lewisburg.

2/2/2008

Falling, wobbly streetlights remind Nanticoke officials revitalization funds are urgent

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

Strong winds toppled two streetlights on Prospect Street in Nanticoke this week.

Nobody was injured and no cars were hit, but their collapse brings new urgency to city officials' quest to find money to replace the aging streetlights downtown.

Two clerical employees coming in to work shortly before 8:30 a.m. witnessed the first streetlight fall — right in front of their car — at the intersection of Green and Prospect streets, city administrator Kenneth Johnson said.

"It scared the hell out of them, because it started sparking and it was real loud," Mayor John Bushko said. "We're very lucky no one got hit with one."

The base of the streetlight showed metal flakes indicating corrosion, Johnson said.

The second one to go was at the intersection of Prospect and Main streets. Staff at Omega Bank called city hall to report a streetlight across from their building wobbling precariously in the wind. It stayed up. But one nearby that looked all right collapsed, Johnson said.

"I'm going to have to take a look at this one that was waving. It's probably going to have to come down," he said.

The fallen lights were disconnected at the base and "taken away to the boneyard of streetlights," Johnson said.

Several deteriorating streetlights crashed to the ground in Wilkes-Barre in 2001 and 2002, illuminating the need for downtown revitalization.

Bushko said Nanticoke's situation is "exactly the same."

Nanticoke's downtown streetlights were installed after the 1972 Agnes flood, and so have reached their 35-year lifespan, Johnson said.

Sturdier streetlights are a priority for planned improvements along East Main Street — but city officials have to find money first.

Luzerne County Community College is buying the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street for a health sciences center. City officials want to construct a parking garage and put up new streetlights for safety. U.S. Rep Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, took away the \$5.6 million federal grant city officials intended to use.

City officials might re-allocate other federal funding or perhaps use some of their annual state-administered Community Development Block Grant money if the project qualifies, Bushko said.

1/30/2008

Construction of skateboard park is slowed by property acquisition

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

Property ownership issues and a focus on downtown redevelopment are holding up Nanticoke's skateboard park, frustrating its future users.

"I'm a skateboarder in Nanticoke and we've been fighting for that for almost six years," 17-year-old Terry Acker Jr. said. "Everyone's starting to get mad."

The skate park is the first component of the Greater Nanticoke Area Recreation Park the South Valley Partnership plans to develop on Lower Broadway in the city. But the ongoing problem of securing ownership of approximately 140 former residential properties, along with officials' focus on the sale of the Kanjorski Center to Luzerne County Community College, has slowed the park's creation.

"It took a bit of a backseat because of the other Nanticoke redevelopment projects," said Tom Ruskey, chief of staff for state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke.

LCCC wants to buy the Kanjorski Center from the city's municipal authority, to house the college's growing health sciences program. City and state officials' priority has been finding money for a parking garage for the building, Nanticoke Administrator Kenneth Johnson said. Ever since learning U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, removed \$5.6 million in federal funding to build the garage, city officials have been looking for other ways to scrape together money to build it. Parking is limited around the Kanjorski Center, and its previous tenants used to have to park in Lower Broadway and take shuttle buses to the office building on East Main Street.

Although Nanticoke and its redevelopment and municipal authorities are looking into selling off their properties, approximately 95 parcels on Lower Broadway would not be among those for sale. Part of that land is needed for the Greater Nanticoke Area park.

The trouble is, although the city owns the land, it doesn't have clear title to it.

The area was a neighborhood prior to the Tropical Storm Agnes flood of 1972, but the houses on it were subsequently demolished using government funds.

The land on Lower Broadway is either in a flood plain or a flood way, which is high risk, Johnson said. It cannot or should not be used for residential or business purposes.

"You're not going to build a high-rise there," Johnson said.

The reason the city never obtained clear title for the properties is unclear. Some city officials say records were destroyed in a later flood.

"There have been so many conflicting stories I won't even get into them," city tax collector Al Wytoshek said. "It's a holy hell mess and it's got to be straightened (out)."

Ruskey said Yudichak's office is working with city Solicitor William Finnegan to obtain titles and deeds.

"It's a slow, drawn-out process," Ruskey said. "Once we're able to clear that up, we can get going."

The state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources nixed the idea of obtaining title to enough properties to build the skate park, then working on the rest later.

"They said it is better to get the whole thing done and not piecemeal it," Ruskey said.

Bushko suggested the city use quiet title instead of struggling to dig up the previous ownership of each parcel.

Quiet title is an action taken in court to establish ownership of a property. A complaint describing the land in question is filed with the prothonotary, and a judge renders a decision in court without a jury trial. It is often used in cases such as properties bought at sheriff's sales.

1/30/2008

Student Standouts - Citizens' Voice

Rebecca Dinelli, a sophomore at Greater Nanticoke Area High School, was recently nominated as an alumna and attended LeadAmerica's 2007 Congressional Leadership Conference for Theater Arts at Wagner College, Staten Island, N.Y.

The program covered acting as well as the non-performance side of the theater arts such as producing, directing and theater management. The 10-day career-focused leadership program included daily workshops and performances, interaction with professionals including set designers, producers, actors and casting directors, taking in (on and off) Broadway shows and many other field experiences in New York City.

LeadAmerica offers such programs across the country. Through briefings and discussions with national and international leaders in the fields of study and hands-on simulations on topics such as arts, business, engineering and politics, students experienced leadership in action and learn about the complexities of decision-making in a chosen field or profession.

Rebecca is the daughter of John and Patty Dinelli of Nanticoke.

1/30/2008

Nanticoke FD gets donation - Citizens' Voice

The Nanticoke Fire Department recently received a \$400 donation from a business in the city.

Bill Davis of The Pit Stop, 118 S. Market St., donated his commission on weekly lottery sales his store generated during Fire Prevention Week in October. Money also was raised through T-shirt sales and donations from customers.

"Being a news business, we wanted to give some support to the local fire department," Davis said.

1/29/2008

Nanticoke and its authorities will look at selling city-owned properties

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

The only entities in town in worse financial shape than financially distressed Nanticoke are its municipal and redevelopment authorities.

So selling dozens of pieces of land ranging from tiny slivers to substantial plots is appealing to city officials, who would like to see the short- and long-term benefits of a citywide real-estate sale.

Municipal and redevelopment authority board members voted during their semi-joint meeting Monday to have redevelopment authority Solicitor Susan Maza look into the guidelines for selling authority- and city-owned properties.

"Let's get this stuff on the tax rolls," redevelopment authority Chairman Chester Beggs said.

Tax collector Albert Wytoshek said the redevelopment authority owns at least 150 properties and the municipal authority about 12. The city could have hundreds of them: Wytoshek's books show 95 parcels in the Lower Broadway area alone.

In the past, records were poorly kept, authority member Hank Marks said. As a result, many parcel descriptions are very vague.

Maza is tasked with finding out procedures for selling the properties — such as whether they have to be put out for bid — and soliciting quotes for

services from title searchers, so the parcels can be fully identified.

The authorities also need to find fair market value for the properties, and whether they can hire a realtor to help dispose of them.

The sooner they're sold, the better, authority members and Mayor John Bushko agreed.

"We're lollygagging too long with these properties," Wytoshek said.

Board members also urged haste in getting ownership of the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street transferred from the redevelopment authority to the municipal authority to streamline its sale to Luzerne County Community College. Maza said she would prepare the deed within a month.

LCCC wants the Kanjorski Center for a health sciences center, but the deal is on hold, municipal authority Chairman Ron Kamowski said.

Wilkes-Barre political activist Tim Grier appealed to Commonwealth Court a state order dismissing his complaints against Luzerne County's plans to borrow up to \$93.5 million, approximately \$20 million of which is for LCCC. The state Department of Community and Economic Development ruled Grier couldn't file the complaints because he doesn't pay county taxes.

Nanticoke authorities want to be ready as soon as the issue is resolved.

"I'd tar and feather anyone who tried to stop that college going downtown," Beggs said.

1/28/2008

Newly formed Nanticoke rec board plans first bus trip, lines up projects

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

Ever since it was revived in July after years of being defunct, Nanticoke's recreation board members have been busy making plans to improve the quality of life for city residents.

And the all-volunteer group has a new mission.

"We want to provide recreation for all ages," treasurer Yvonne Bozinski said.

"It's something new, and something new takes time to develop, but I'm really impressed with the way people are responding," Vice President Jim Samselski said. "I think we get more people at our meetings than our municipal meetings."

Freshman Sarah Acker, a 2007 Greater Nanticoke Area graduate, is center for the Hawks basketball team at St. Joseph's University. For its first event, the rec board is sponsoring a bus trip to Philadelphia on Feb. 24 to watch her team play the George Washington University Colonials.

So far, 73 people have signed up and three buses are reserved, Samselski said.

Unfortunately, one of the members of the rec board can't make the bus trip - and he undoubtedly is the one who would like most to go.

Sarah's father, Terry Acker, who is with the Pennsylvania National Guard 109th Field Artillery, was recently deployed to Egypt where he will be stationed for about a year, according to his son, also named Terry.

"People miss him and will be happy when he comes back," Acker Jr. said.

He said the family got his father a Web cam and phone so he can keep in touch.

"He's going to miss a whole year of my life, and my sister's life, and my other sister's life," Acker Jr. said. "It's going to be so hard on him."

Acker Sr. wants to stay on the rec board, so its members are sending him the minutes and keeping him updated on its progress, Bozinski said.

Right now, board members are drawing up bylaws, she said. In its 2008 budget, city council allotted the rec board \$5,000 for expenses.

For more expensive endeavors, like making improvements to Nanticoke's parks, the rec board is pursuing state grants. In September, Samselski applied for the first round of Office of Community Development funding and is in the process of asking for more.

Projects the board wants to achieve with the grants are:

- o A pavilion at West Side park.
- o A basketball court for the Greater Nanticoke Area Youth Task Force headquarters on Prospect Street.
- o Resurfacing the basketball court at the Honey Pot park.
- o Handicap-accessible restrooms for the Hanover recreation park.
- o Lawn mowers and other equipment for the Quality Hill park.

The rec board has a sponsor for a card tournament for seniors but it has to go through the committees of the city's three high-rise apartment complexes. Samselski wants the board to meet with them to come up with some other activities as well.

The city owns the senior center on Market and Main streets, but the site is marked as the future home of Luzerne County Community College's culinary arts center. The rec board is going to try to obtain a new home for the senior center, Samselski said.

There will be plenty of opportunities for working with young people, too. Rec board members Gary Smith and Frank Vandermark are on the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board, and Vandermark is president of the Youth Task Force.

"The nicest thing is there are nine or 10 people who all think positive," Samselski said of the board.

o The Nanticoke recreation board consists of Terry Acker, Mike Borowski (chairman), Yvonne Bozinski (secretary), Robert Katra, Ron Kile, Nicole Kruczek, David Lane, James Samselski (vice chairman), Gary Smith (treasurer) and Frank Vandermark.

Its next meeting is Monday at 7 p.m. in city hall.

o The board's first event is a bus trip to St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia on Feb. 24 to see the women's basketball game vs. George Washington University. The game starts at noon. Cost is \$20 (\$25 if you want a T-shirt), which includes bus transportation and a ticket to the game.

For more information or to reserve a ticket, call 735-8108 or 735-7421 before Feb. 15.

1/28/2008

\$6.7 M nursing home sale includes Birchwood in Nanticoke

By ssanger@timeshamrock.com

The Taylor Nursing and Rehabilitation Center has been sold for \$6.7 million to a buyer who also purchased a nursing home in Nanticoke as part of the deal, according to the state Department of Health.

While repeated calls to the nursing home and the new owner have gone unanswered, health department spokeswoman Stacy Kriedeman confirmed the sale through documentation that must be filed with the state when a change-of-hands occurs.

She said the facility at 500 W. Hospital St., Taylor, was sold Jan. 1 to Taylor Health and Rehabilitation Center LLC, and a change of ownership license was issued Jan. 10.

The buyer, Nathan Stern, also purchased the Birchwood Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Nanticoke as part of the deal, she added.

A deed for the sale of the Taylor Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, filed at the Lackawanna County Courthouse on Jan. 8, said the sale included 4.87 acres at Phillips and Hospital streets.

The deed identifies the grantor as Taylor Long Term Care Center Inc. and the grantee as 500 WH Street LLC, of Brooklyn, N.Y.

The nursing home remains open.

Kriedeman said she was not sure if the sale was related to an investigation the health department launched in September after a patient there died of asphyxiation when she became entangled in her bed rails.

Following the death of 86-year-old Stefhanie Galleti, the nursing home was ordered to submit a proposal to the state on how to correct several deficiencies at the 161-bed facility.

Kriedeman said the home has since corrected those deficiencies and is in compliance.

Since the investigation, the Taylor nursing home has a provisional license, not a regular operating license.

"This is one of the things we use when we find deficiencies in a facility," Kriedeman said.

The nursing home's administrator at the time of the incident, Beverly Pellegrino, is no longer with the nursing home. The new administrator, Terry Hollinger, noting he just completed his first week with the facility, said he knew nothing about the details of the sale last week, but would attempt to get more information. Subsequent attempts to reach him were unsuccessful.

1/28/2008

[Newly formed Nanticoke rec board plans first bus trip. lines up projects.....](#)

1/27/2008

Tips to zero in on ancestor Tom mooney Out on a limb

Tom Mooney is a Times Leader genealogy columnist. Reach him at tmooney2@ptd.net

How's your knowledge of Nanticoke? A researcher is trying to get a line on ancestors who lived there many decades ago.

Dee Sikorsky has found a "brick wall" in her pursuit of information about her grandmother, Dorette (or Dorothy) Marie Mohr, and her grandmother's parents, Harman (or Herman) and Dorothy Mohr, in the 1800s.

"I cannot believe that my grandmother, who had lived in Nanticoke with both her mother and father and later with my grandfather after her marriage, could just fade into oblivion," she writes.

Dee, here's a principle I've found useful in genealogy. If you can't find something on an ancestor, try other ancestors – or perhaps the institutions they were associated with.

Dorothy, your grandmother, was the wife of George Rice Honey, a boilermaker whom you told me died in an accident on May 28, 1906.

I've found the Wilkes-Barre Record news story on his death, as well as the official report by the Pennsylvania Department of Mines. He fell from the top of a huge boiler he and a crew were removing from the No. 7 breaker of the Susquehanna Coal Co.

The death story led to the account of his funeral, which names the family church (still operating in Nanticoke) as well as the cemetery, his organizational memberships and some relatives.

I'll send these stories to you. Perhaps they will suggest a new avenue or two for you. Incidentally, Nanticoke City Directories from the turn of the century list your Mohr and Honey families, giving you more names to work with. Anyone who can help Dee Sikorsky may reach her at

rsikorsk@epix.net

Tips: You can do the best genealogy in the world, but if no one in your family knows about it, how much value does it have? The December 2007 issue of The Writer magazine offers "Write a Family History," a comprehensive guide to putting your findings down on paper for your extended family. Accompanying the article are pieces on memoirs, family newsletters and birthday letters. Back issues are available for \$5.95 plus shipping by calling 1-800-533-6644 weekdays. • Ever wonder what day of the week an important date in your family's history fell on?

There's a universal calendar as close as your computer. Go to timeanddate.com and type the appropriate year into the box.

For a good early history of the Luzerne County town where your ancestors lived, go to the Luzerne County Genweb and look for "town histories." Use your search engine.

News Notes: Ron Kordish will discuss "Lackawanna County Milk Bottles and Dairies" at the next meeting of the Genealogical Research Society of Northeastern Pennsylvania. The meeting is set for 7 p.m. Feb. 20, in the community room at 211 Susquehanna Ave., Olyphant. For information about joining the society, call 570-383-7661. Incidentally, there's a schedule of the group's meetings for the year on its Web site at www.grsnp.org. The Northeast Pennsylvania Genealogical Society remains on hiatus until spring, when its meetings will resume.

The Luzerne County Historical Society's research library will be closed from Feb. 19 to March 4.

My last "Getting Started in Genealogy" class for the winter season is set for 6 to 8 p.m. on Feb. 6 at Boscov's Department Store in Wilkes-Barre. The two-hour session is free, and you don't have to register. Just park in the store's parkade and head for the fourth-floor auditorium. There won't

be another class until September.

If you can't find something on an ancestor, try other ancestors – or perhaps the institutions they were associated with.

1/26/2008

Nanticoke Area deals with MRSA; another case reported at Meyers

By bjarvis@citizensvoice.com

The Greater Nanticoke Area School District on Friday reacted swiftly to a case of methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus infection, bringing the number of school districts that have reported infections in 2007-08 to at least four.

A strain of bacteria commonly found in the nose and on the skin, MRSA is known for its resistance to antibiotics and often spreads via hand-to-hand contact, open wounds or nasal secretions. It can be lethal if not treated.

The student, who attends the Educational Center for sixth and seventh graders, has been diagnosed and successfully treated, said Superintendent Anthony Perrone, who noted 351 students attend the school.

While the student has been out since Wednesday, Perrone said the district first learned of the case Friday morning. The building was then promptly fumigated.

“We were very proactive. As soon as we found out, we made the calls to parents through a voice-automated system, took the kids out and disinfected the rooms and bathrooms. We know there’s no problem here.”

As a matter of protocol, Perrone added, the district disinfects all of its schools on a regular basis.

“When we first learned of MRSA, we went out and got special cleaning detergents. We’ve asked parents before and we’ll ask them again to make sure their kids wash their hands all the time, and they’re welcome to send along any disinfectant they wish to their child’s homeroom.”

Meanwhile at Wilkes-Barre Area, Superintendent Jeff Namey received word of another MRSA case at Meyers High School on Friday but has not received medical documentation.

Still, with two other MRSA cases in recent weeks, Namey said the building would be sanitized yet again.

“It’s a lot easier to do it over the weekend when you have a two-day window instead of a few hours, and we would rather be safe than sorry. We’re even going as far as to steam the rug to make sure we get every possible area the student was in,” said Namey. “Any room in the building the students possibly could have entered has been disinfected, and will be again by materials approved to kill the virus.”

In past MRSA cases, the district has used bacteria-fighting chemicals including SaniGuard, Neutral-Q and Ultra-Clorox Germicidal Bleach.

Namey also stressed that the first two students in question were limited to certain rooms and did not take non-academic courses like art, music and gym.

If it turns out the third student was indeed infected and connected to previous infections, however, Namey said he planned to bring in the local and state health departments.

The Wyoming Area and Dallas school districts have also reported MRSA cases in the last year.

1/25/2008

Regional cops for South Valley towns touted

A regional force for Nanticoke city and Newport and Hanover townships explained at forum.

slong@timesleader.com

Three South Valley communities discussed combining their police departments into a regional unit to control costs at a crowded public forum held Thursday night at Luzerne County Community College.

State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, said it would be financially prudent for Hanover Township, Nanticoke and Newport Township to form a regional police department because all three are struggling financially like so many other communities in the state.

“It the most responsible we can be with tax dollars by creating greater efficiency, greater protection and controlling costs,” Yudichak said.

A feasibility study conducted by Bryan D. Ross on behalf of the Luzerne County Municipal Cooperation Commission was presented to an overflowing crowd of residents, police officers, police chiefs and elected officials from the three communities to determine if the South Valley could support such a venture. Yudichak is chairman of the commission. A combination of state grants and county funds paid for the roughly \$6,000 study costs.

Ross, who had been a police chief for the Berks-Lehigh Regional Police Department for 14 years, said after reviewing financial and statistical data and each community’s coverage area he determined it would be beneficial for the three to form a regional force.

He pointed out that the study shows the communities would spend about the same amount of money they each are spending now to protect the approximately 28,000 citizens residing in the region, while increasing the opportunities for advanced training and creation of specialty divisions within the department.

Nanticoke Mayor John Bushko raised concerns about how many officers would be patrolling each town.

“In Nanticoke it’s two officers minimum (per shift). Usually it’s three,” Bushko said. “I don’t want to get involved in this and have less coverage for people in town.”

Ross said the great thing about regional police departments is they no longer patrol a city’s boundaries, but work in zones throughout the entire region so response times would not be dramatically increased.

A regional police department would function out of one headquarters and be required to pay rent to whichever municipality’s building it occupies. The department would be its own entity into its self – responsible for paying its own bills and handling the appropriate administrative work.

“This agency works as a standalone agency. It has its own solicitor,” Ross said. “They can borrow money. They can build a building. They can do

almost anything a municipality can do except levy taxes.”

Ross cautioned that if the communities want to move forward with the regionalization plan, it won't occur overnight.

A regional police commission must be formed that would be responsible for running the department.

Smaller police departments, such as Warrior Run or Ashley, could eventually consolidate with the South Valley Regional Police Department at a later time if both sides agreed to it, Ross said.

However, the communities also have the option of not creating a regional police department.

1/24/2008

Nanticoke's real estate tax set for 44.5 mills

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

Luzerne County Judge Ann H. Lokuta granted Nanticoke officials permission Tuesday to set the city's 2008 real estate taxes at 44.5 mills.

Of the 44.5 mills, 30 go into the city's general fund, 14 are for debt, and 0.5 is for the Mill Memorial Library. A mill is \$1 on every \$1,000 of assessed valuation. A mill brings in about \$14,000 in Nanticoke, a city struggling to recover from financial problems.

The city has to petition the court each year to keep its general purpose rate at 30, or five mills over the state allowable limit.

"The recovery plan says 30, so it's got to be 30," city Administrator Kenneth Johnson said.

Municipalities can raise taxes as high as they want to pay off debt without seeking court approval.

Last month, tax collector Al Wytoshek argued the city's tax rate for debt should be 13.5 mills. He decided not to contest the 14 mill rate in court after learning the extra .05 percent results in about an additional \$7,000.

"Basically that would be the \$7,000 we give to the library," he said.

Johnson and the Pennsylvania Economy League, Nanticoke's financial recovery coordinator, pushed for the extra 0.05 percent. A 13.5 rate would bring in a projected \$200,458, while 14 mills should bring in about \$207,882, Wytoshek said.

Those figures are based on an 88 percent collection rate, which the tax collector said the city seldom achieves.

"Collections are going down. People are not paying their taxes like they used to," Wytoshek noted.

City officials lowered real estate taxes in 2006 from 60.38 mills, but in 2007 increased its earned income tax to 2 percent, with 0.5 percent going to the Greater Nanticoke Area School District.

Nanticoke's total assessment for all property is \$19,207,317 and its total taxable assessment is \$14,848,747.

1/23/2008

Rite Aid in Nanticoke sold for \$3.25 M; store is across from proposed LCCC center

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

The Rite Aid drugstore at 5 E. Main St. in Nanticoke has been sold for \$3.25 million.

SADG-5 Limited Partnership sold the property, which extends from Locust Street to Market Street, to DG Ran LLC.

SADG-5 Limited Partnership is located in Dickson City. The Pennsylvania Department of State lists the address for DG Ran LLC as Ambler.

Principals of both companies could not be reached for comment.

The sale is good news for Nanticoke, which gets \$16,125 in real estate transfer tax from it. Greater Nanticoke Area School District also gets \$16,125.

"We could absolutely use the cash," Nanticoke Administrator Kenneth Johnson said.

"I think it's wonderful. I think somebody knows more than I do about what's going on in town, because they wouldn't invest \$3.25 million just on speculation," Mayor John Bushko said. "That's really a valuable corner."

Luzerne County Community College wants to locate its culinary arts center on the property now occupied by the city-owned senior center, which is diagonally across from the Rite Aid. A private developer will construct the building.

"I can only think the community college project will add value to that intersection," Johnson said.

1/21/2008

Trojans merit being seen

High School Sports Notebook

By John Erzar - Times Leader

Nanticoke basketball fans have always been among the best in the area.

They flocked to see superstars like Ken Casey in the 1970s and Paul Guffrovich in the 1980s. They followed the Nanticoke girls throughout the 1989-90 season that culminated with the PIAA Class 3A championship. And recently, they tracked the girls' unfulfilled quest for another state title.

But now another Nanticoke team that doesn't have the same dazzling appeal needs to be seen by its community.

The Nanticoke boys won the Wyoming Valley Conference Division II first-half title last week. The Trojans' accomplishment was unexpected considering last season's 9-16 overall record and the popular opinion that the crown was headed to Holy Redeemer or GAR.

Yet at two home games during the first-half season – vs. Redeemer and Dallas – attendance was rather modest. Not bad, but not like the past.

Perhaps it was because the Trojans aren't a must-see team compared to the aforementioned. There's no one on the roster with talent close to that of Casey or Guffrovich. They don't make opponents look downright silly like the 89-90 girls team. And there is no state title hopes like the girls had the past few seasons.

The alluring quality to the Trojans is the way they play. They hustle, they scrap, they battle ... perhaps even a little too hard at times. They are entertaining in their own special way with their brand of blue-collar basketball. And more people in a blue-collar city like Nanticoke should see them.

1/21/2008

Study on regionalized police force to be revealed

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

A combined police force would be good for Nanticoke City, Newport and Hanover townships, according to a study that will be made public on Thursday.

The question now is whether officials from the three communities will take the next step and put together a commission to create it.

Bryan D. Ross, former chief of the Berks-Lehigh Regional Police and the current chief of the Upper Pottsgrove police, performed the study. Ross will give a presentation on it to the public at Luzerne County Community College on Thursday. He will open the floor for discussion and questions. "And I hope there's a lot of them," said Pennsylvania Economy League policy specialist Joseph Boyle, who worked with elected officials from the three municipalities.

A regional South Valley department would keep costs under control, allow for more efficient deployment of resources — no duplication of equipment, for example — and enable the three communities to have a specialized, professional department.

"We looked at every budget from each municipality, filtered that through what we would like to accomplish in a regional department, and it came back that it was absolutely feasible for the three municipalities to combine into one department," said Luzerne County Municipal Cooperation Commission Chairman, state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke.

"What I'm going to be asking on (Thursday) is, we know it's feasible, appoint a commission to draw up a contract."

All decisions, such as the department size and location, would be made by local officials, not the state, he stressed. There is state funding available to help them get started.

There are approximately 34 regional police departments in Pennsylvania, according to the state Department of Community and Economic Development. None of them is in Luzerne County — so far.

A proposed West Side regional police force fell apart when Plymouth Borough opted out, and Edwardsville and Larksville are seeking other regionalization options.

Sugar Notch and Warrior Run are working on combining their departments. If the South Valley police force comes about, other communities such as the two boroughs could join, Yudichak said.

Creating a contract will be complicated because there are a lot of differences among the Nanticoke, Newport Township and Hanover Township police departments, such as salaries, pensions and coverage areas.

Hanover Township has the largest population and the most miles of roads, but Nanticoke is most densely populated. The starting salary for a Hanover Township patrolman is \$46,076 a year; it is \$40,131 a year in Nanticoke; and Newport Township's sole full-timer, the chief, earns \$29,000 a year.

The proposed starting salary for the regional police department is \$37,500, to be increased to \$40,000 after one year and \$50,000 after five years. None of the current full-time officers will lose their jobs, Yudichak said. The study recommends at least 29 full-timers, the total now. Hanover Township has 16 full-time officers, Nanticoke has 12, and Newport Township has one.

A regionalized force would be good for employees, Nanticoke Councilman Jon Metta said. It would give police an opportunity to cross-train and move up in rank.

"The criminal element in the South Valley has changed over the past several years, and we have to reflect the change," Nanticoke Councilman James Litchkofski said. "That's no reflection on the guys we have now, because they put their lives on the line every day for us. But we want to give them the best tools, the best training so they can come home safe and sound, and maintain control of the streets."

1/20/2008

Street congestion With cars parked on both sides, many thoroughfares become too narrow for two-way traffic Nanticoke may make roads 1-way

slong@timesleader.com

Careful. Are you sure you're going the right way down that street? Many people driving through Nanticoke might soon be asking themselves this very question.

At the urging of resident Dorothy Yeager, Nanticoke Mayor John Bushko wants the council to consider making several residential westbound and eastbound streets in the central part of town one-way.

Northbound and southbound streets, such as Prospect and Kosciuszko streets- would remain two-way thoroughfares because they are main traffic arteries through the city.

Advocates for the one-way streets believe traffic will flow smoother because all vehicles will be headed the same direction, instead of two cars headed opposite ways down the same street.

"Today, with cars parked on both sides of the street, it makes it hard for two cars to go in opposite directions at the same time," Yeager said, noting most drivers must now find a spot to pull over so a vehicle traveling the opposite direction can pass, because there is not enough room for vehicles to pass each other when cars are parked on both sides of the road.

Bushko wants the city to conduct a three- to four-month trial run of 10 streets to ensure one-way streets would be effective and not create havoc for

drivers.

“I think once we see how it works it could be extended to the whole town if it needs to,” Bushko said.

Currently the city has three one-way streets - Locust, Shea and a portion of State.

Yeager said the changes couldn't come soon enough for her. Many of the homes in Nanticoke, like other cities in this region, were built extremely close to one another and without any garages.

“The problem is getting worse, with more and more drivers and people not having garages,” she said.

Solicitor William Finnegan said the city can adopt an ordinance to define which streets would be one-way, but certain guidelines must be followed before an ordinance can be enacted.

Those guidelines include conducting traffic studies to determine which streets need to be one-way.

The study would look at the number of vehicles on the street, pedestrian traffic and number of accidents on that particular roadway, Bushko said.

Yeager said the traffic study should be conducted during early mornings or late evenings when more people are home because that's when vehicle congestion increases.

1/18/2008

Ack Attack

Campus Connection - Citizens' Voice

Having played in just 16 collegiate games, Saint Joseph's freshman center Sarah Acker (Nanticoke) has already made an impact for the Hawks. Saint Joseph's leader in scoring (12.0 ppg), Acker currently ranks seventh in the Atlantic 10 in rebounding (7.19 rpg) and is fifth in blocks (24). Acker was also selected Atlantic 10 Rookie of the Week twice (Dec. 2-9, Jan. 7-13) and earning Hilton Philadelphia Hawk Classic All-Tournament Team honors.

Webdesign note: If you would like to see Sarah Acker play, please click [here](#).

1/18/2008

Nanticoke officials face tough choices on street repairs

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

City officials have an annual grant that can be used for road repair and paving, but there's a catch: it can only be used in low- to moderate-income areas, which don't necessarily contain the streets most in need of the money.

Nanticoke has a \$340,545 state Community Development Block Grant coming for this year. The city got comparable amounts in 2006 and 2007, but couldn't access the funding until September.

The state Department of Community and Economic Development froze the funding due to financial management issues and incorrect grant application by previous city officials, but released it when the current administration proved they took steps to remedy the problems.

Nanticoke officials haven't decided which streets will be paved with the 2008 Community Development Block Grant money, city Administrator Kenneth Johnson said. They can't make the decisions without public input. Council held a hearing before Wednesday's regular meeting.

Many of the roads residents suggested paving don't fit the grant requirements. Prospect Street, proposed by resident Rick Novak, is one. It is heavily traveled because of traffic from Luzerne County Community College, he said.

Prospect and West Union streets were to be paved with an approximately \$2.3 million federal grant, but council previously voted to re-route it to the Kanjorski Center. LCCC is buying the Nanticoke General Municipal Authority-owned building for a health sciences center and needs parking. The project is the cornerstone of downtown revitalization.

Novak said he realized the need for money downtown, but asked for the heavily traveled roads in “deplorable” shape, like Prospect Street, to take priority when paving.

1/17/2008

Nanticoke clerical workers have contract

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

The city's clerical employees can add a new contract to their files, but a resolution council passed Wednesday put a temporary roadblock on street department contract negotiations.

Council and Mayor John Bushko unanimously voted to approve a new contract for the city's six clerical staffers. The employees voted 4-2 to pass it on Monday, City Administrator Kenneth Johnson said.

Next, council passed a resolution 4-1 — Councilman Joe Dougherty voted no — to implement mandates in the city's financial recovery plan concerning the terms and conditions of employment for the street department workers.

Its passage means contract negotiations have to start over, Johnson said.

“Right now, we're back to ground zero,” he said.

He said he would contact the union and each of Nanticoke's seven public works employees about the resolution, as well as city officials' intent to continue negotiating in good faith.

Nanticoke was declared Act 47, or financially distressed, by the state in May 2006. The recovery plan Pennsylvania Economy League, Nanticoke's financial recovery coordinator, drew up calls for city officials to take money-saving measures in new contracts.

Some of these are:

Limiting raises to \$800 a year in the first and second years.

Having employees share equally in paying cost increases to their portion of any health care, vision or dental premiums paid for by the city.

No post-retirement benefits for new hires, and making retirees contribute the same amount to their health care premiums they would if they were working.

Fewer holidays and personal days.

Scheduling to avoid overtime.

Eliminating past practices. The unions will have an opportunity to identify and negotiate specific practices or rights they want to preserve.

The new clerical staff contract has cost-containment provisions.

They are getting the \$800-a-year raises, but Councilman Jon Metta said there is a tentative agreement for a \$500-a-year cash payment due to increased hours. Starting Monday, clerical employees will work 40 hours a week instead of 35, he said.

Clerical workers will have nine paid holidays instead of 18 and four personal days instead of five. Their sick days will be cut to 12 instead of 15.

Police and fire contracts expire Dec. 31, 2008, so negotiations will start this year. Johnson said city officials have not yet exchanged notice to begin bargaining with their unions.

1/17/2008

Nanticoke efforts on contracts split

slong@timesleader.com

City officials approved the Teamsters Local 401 contract for its six clerical employees during Wednesday's council meeting, but negotiations for the seven street department employees hit a snag.

By the end of the month all street department, clerical and management employees will pay 10 percent of the monthly insurance premiums costs if they have employee/spouse or family coverage, City Administrator Kenneth Johnson said. There is no cost increase in single-person coverage.

Health coverage has been an obstacle in negotiations.

Street department union steward Kenny James said the employees realize insurance costs continue to increase and the city is looking for ways to improve its financial status, but the employees feel they are being squeezed in the middle.

"We are willing to co-pay (insurance premiums) on the current plan, but they are wanting us to give us a lesser plan," James said.

Johnson said the public works employees with employee/spouse and family coverage were offered a \$500 credit against the higher insurance costs by the city.

That offer was taken off the table after the employees voted down the proposal, Johnson said.

Because the street department contract has not been approved, the city's Act 47 recovery plan will be followed and does not provide a pay increase for workers during the contract's first year.

Street department employees voted twice on the proposed contract, but each time it was defeated by the seven men, James said. The street department votes were 4 to 3 and 5 to 2 against, with the last vote taken on Monday.

The clerical workers contract includes an \$800 pay raise each year for the next three years. It cuts their paid holidays from 22 days to 13, including nine holidays and four personal days, and the women will work eight hours a day, including an hour's paid lunch.

Last month former council member Bernie Norieka contended the clerical staff should work 35 hours a week, instead of its normal 30 hours.

Recently sworn-in council member Jon Metta agreed with him.

"We are receiving more work out of them, they reduced holidays dramatically so there is extra work being done also," Metta said.

The clerical workers contract is scheduled to expire Dec. 31, 2010.

Later this year city officials will begin to negotiate with the police and firefighters unions. Those contracts will expire on Dec. 31.

1/16/2008

The home team

Couple's dinner party features a favorite dish prepared together

mbiebel@timesleader.com

For the first 30 years after her mother's death, Alma Berlot didn't feel like decorating her home for Christmas.

This past December, the Nanticoke woman made up for it, bringing out angels and snowmen, manger sets and a tiny village scene.

On the second weekend in January, everything from two fir trees studded with Victorian ornaments to a tiny ceramic house with reindeer on the roof was still on display.

"I'm celebrating her life," Berlot said as she prepared a fancy dish in her cozy kitchen. "Of course, I'll never get over her death. She was killed by a drunk driver on Christmas Eve. That's why you'll never see us serve alcohol in this house."

Last Friday, Berlot and her husband, Alvin, hosted a dinner for 16 people. A star of the feast was a family favorite, braciola, an entree of thinly sliced beef rolled around a bread stuffing that had been spiced with fruit and nuts.

"My mother always said, 'Chi dorme, non piglia pesci,' if you sleep you catch no fish," Alma Berlot said, quoting the original Italian. "That's why we're always working."

But the couple, who celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary last year, made party preparation appear to be more fun than work, chatting about their son, three daughters and several grandchildren as they put final touches on the stuffing and rolled the meat around it.

"My little grandson Cole said to me, 'Gram, you've got swell stuff,'" Alma said with a laugh.

Gram is a retired nurse; Pop-Pop is retired from Certainteed Corp. and, together, they cooperate easily on home projects.

“He’s responsible for this,” Alma Berlot said, indicating a saucepan her husband had filled with celery and onions that were destined to become part of the stuffing. “I deserve no credit.”

Alvin Berlot also had picked up meat that a butcher had cut very thin, maybe about 1/16 of an inch.

“Oh, he did a beautiful job for you, hon,” Alma Berlot said.

“It has to be really thin,” Alvin Berlot said. “Even 1/8 of an inch is too thick. And once I brought home flank steak, but that was too tough for this. We’ll never use it again.”

The Berlots plumped raisins and dried cranberries by soaking them in water, and added the fruit, water and all, to the stuffing for added moisture. Then Alma Berlot cut each slice of meat into pieces roughly 6 by 4 inches, piled stuffing along one side, and rolled.

“I try to see which way I can fit the most stuffing in. I want my people to taste all the good flavors,” she said.

Mashed potatoes and sour red beets were to accompany the main course, along with a salad of Romaine lettuce, sunflower seeds, olives and garlic.

For dessert, Alma Berlot sliced in half anginetti pastries – a Stella D’oro product for which the Berlots drove all the way to the Sunshine Market on Route 315 – and sandwiched a mix of cream cheese, whipped cream and pineapple chunks in between the halves for a cream-puff effect.

She also planned to serve marshmallows and crackers dipped in chocolate, but you probably already know how to make those yourself.

1/16/2008

Nanticoke man joins FDNY

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens' Voice

Congratulations to local firefighter Jason Rybak of Nanticoke.

After several months at the academy, he graduates today to become a member of the Fire Department of New York.

Several Nanticoke firefighters — Chief Mike Bohan, Deputy Chief Kevin Hazleton, Capt. Steve Kotch, Lt. Richard Bohan and firefighters Matt Regulski and Greg Grzymiski — will be attending today’s ceremony to show their support.

We’ll try to do an update once Rybak gets settled in at his assigned station.

1/13/2008

Community comes together in Nanticoke for Coal Miners Day

Times Leader

Coal Miners Day was designated Dec. 19, 2007, by State Rep. Todd Eachus, D-Butler Twp., and State Rep. Keith McCall, 122nd District. The ceremony was held by the monument of the coal miner on the CVS grounds owned by Sam Marranca.

John Slosky of Nanticoke played the trumpet. He is taught by Karen Phair. Phair’s accredited music production class played “You Will Never Walk Alone,” “Amazing Grace,” and “America the Beautiful.” The chorus is comprised of John Slosky, Timothy Accurso, Kristy Gleco, Kyra Phair, Candance Rakowski, Keri Height, Jillian Grimim, Katlyn Waclawski, Jessica Bienkowski and Staci Whitman. Solos were given by Accurso and Bienkowski. “How Great Thou Art” and “Amazing Grace” were sung by Gleco.

The Rev. William J.P. Langan, pastor of St. Francis and St. Joseph’s parishes of Nanticoke, gave the invocation. Langan, State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, Nanticoke Mayor John Bushko, and the Rev. Phyllis Pelletier of St. Johns Lutheran Church Nanticoke spoke about coal miners’ diligence and courageousness. Coal mining engineer Henry Zielinski spoke of his goal to use his knowledge to make coal mining safer. Joseph Terrans, a representative from Congressman Paul Kanjorski’s office, spoke about his grandfather who also endured many hardships while working in the mines.

Red Hats, Angels Among Us, Martha Selta, Laverne Kussavage and Dorothy Bartley also attended.

A proclamation in honor of Coal Miners Day was presented to Alma Berlot for her dedication to the coal miners.

Christmas bouquets were donated by Al and Alma Berlot; Susies Red Caboose, E.J. Lewis, Nanticoke Florist, Carmens Florist, Carols Florist, Barry’s Florist, and Barbara’s Florist. Bernadette Bartoli also donated flowers and food.

A special reception followed at the Berlot home.

1/13/2008

A novel part of history

Nanticoke native taps into childhood desires to pen book about coal mining

Janine Ungvarsky - Times Leader Correspondent

Eugene Gomolka isn’t a man to sit around doing nothing. The Nanticoke native and World War II veteran has been an award-winning journalist, an international map maker, an independent businessman, a musician and a song writer. So when a heart condition sidelined him in early 2007, he wasn’t about to sit back and read a book. The 82-year-old Gomolka decided to write one.

“I remember the exact date I started,” Gomolka said. “It was March 22, 2007. I had had a heart attack and open heart surgery and I didn’t have anything to do. I couldn’t go outside, I wasn’t allowed to drive so I said, ‘I guess I’ll just go ahead and start a book.’” He wrote about 1,500 words or more a day, and finished the book on June 5. Gomolka said he’s currently reviewing final proofs of the book before it goes to print for sale in March or April.

Writers sometimes struggle with ideas for a book project, but Gomolka had three possible topics. He considered writing about Frances Slocum, the local settler girl taken by American Indians and raised as one of their own, or about telling the story of his experiences as a mapmaker in Saudi Arabia. And he thought about telling what it was like to grow up in Nanticoke as the son of a coal miner.

“They tell you to write what you know and what I knew most was the coal region,” Gomolka said, so he began work on “Coal Cracker’s Son,” a tale of Polish immigrants in the coal mining industry during the Great Depression and World War II.

The story of Joey Gobol and his Polish immigrant family isn’t too different from Gomolka’s earliest days and he said the events encountered by Joey are largely fictionalized accounts of events from his own youth. This seems fitting, since Gomolka’s interest in writing dates back to his childhood.

“I always longed to be a writer,” Gomolka said, “and when I was a 12-year-old Boy Scout I was the scout scribe for the local newspaper.” During his time in downtown Nanticoke’s Troop 411, Gomolka wrote regularly for what became The Times Leader. Ambitious even then, young Gomolka held two jobs: helping in the news office for 50 cents per week and delivering the paper.

“I earned \$16 a month delivering about 70 newspapers, six days a week. I gave half of my earnings to my mother, which was the common practice of that era. And, the eight dollars that I kept for myself was enough to satisfy all of my childhood needs for a month. In fact, I thought I was a rich kid,” Gomolka said.

The money helped his family -- his dad worked for the Glen Alden Coal Company in Wanamie and his mother was a talented seamstress who worked for two Nanticoke stores, Jackiere’s Department Store and Claire’s Dress Shop -- but the biggest reward for Gomolka came from all those columns he wrote about his scout troop’s activities.

“I collected all those reports and measured them, and if I wrote enough, I could win free time at Camp Acahela. I won two weeks free and that was a great blessing and a relief to my parents,” Gomolka recalled.

His interest in writing continued through his years at Nanticoke High School, where Gomolka said he loved his English composition classes most of all. And he said he spent his study halls taking classes in shorthand and typing, just because they were related to writing. Years later, those skills would come in handy. But first, there was more pressing business to attend to. Gomolka graduated from high school in 1942, just six months after Pearl Harbor and the same year the draft age was lowered to 18.

Within a year of graduation, Gomolka was in the Navy. “I enlisted in 1943 and served stateside until 1944 when I received an honorable medical discharge,” he said. “Since the war was still going on hot and heavy, I then joined the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as a civil service employee and served for 18 months on the U.S.E.D. Liston, a survey boat assigned to determine the depth of the Delaware River and Delaware Bay shipping channels. Ironically, even though I did not encounter the enemy during my time in the Navy, I did witness the surrender of the German U-boat 858 which was escorted into Delaware Bay by the U.S. Navy destroyer escort Pillsbury on May 14, 1945, six days after VE-Day.”

After his Navy days came a 20-plus year career with the U.S. Geological Survey Commission making maps, along with a stint of map making for private companies, including his time in Saudi Arabia. The job was interesting, but by the mid 1960s, Gomolka, now a husband and father, was tired of the travel. He turned back to his love of writing and found a use for all those typing and shorthand skills he’d picked up in high school when he took a job as a sports writer in Delaware. The job paid half of what he made as an engineer, but with the support of his wife, Cecilia, whom he married in 1948, Gomolka was able to begin a second career as a sportswriter for the Delaware County Daily Times. “I had a very cooperative wife who is an RN and went to work to supplement the income. That let me start over as a sportswriter.”

For 15 years, Gomolka covered local college sports and even the Philadelphia Eagles for the Times. He won two Pennsylvania newspaper publishing awards for best sports column in the ’70s. For a time after that, he dabbled in business as president of a fundraising company before retiring from full-time employment in 1989. But Gomolka isn’t one to sit home idle, so he took up music. He had toured Europe as part of a 33 member hand bell choir in 1984 and played for President Ronald Reagan and former Chief Justice Warren Burger at ceremonies honoring the 200th anniversary of the United States Constitution. After retirement, he taught himself keyboard and banjo well enough to play with several bands near his homes in Pennsylvania and Florida. He even wrote and published several songs. But once again, he returned to writing and the stories of his youth.

Gomolka said “Coal Cracker’s Son” tells the story of about 20 years in the life of timid young Joey Gobol, who conquers his fear to help his family and his father during a mine strike. His mother Victoria tries to hide her “Polish-ishness” and to get her husband Pawel (pronounced Paul) to quit the mines. He said the novel deals with many of the things immigrants faced -- with Pawel starting in the mines at just 15 and the family Americanizing the last name from Goboloski. The book is illustrated with pictures from the local area, including the Sugar Notch breaker and other local sites, Gomolka said.

Though the story is based on incidents in Gomolka’s life, he said there are differences between him and main character Joey. “Unlike Joey, I didn’t really do anything heroic,” Gomolka said. “I had my character do what I would have hoped to do.”

“It’s not a tear jerker,” Gomolka said. “My characters aren’t looking for reader’s sympathy. I hope readers will rejoice in the triumphs our parents and grandparents had when things look so bad with the war and financially.”

It’s a tale he hopes readers will enjoy, and Gomolka is planning on numerous local appearances and book signings to introduce his work to the Wyoming Valley that inspired it. And even as he faces the daunting challenge of marketing a new book, Gomolka said he is considering sitting back down and cranking out another 63,000 words. “I’m just a rookie at this,” he said, “but I’d like to tell the tale of Joey’s next 20 years and see what happens.”

About Eugene Gomolka:

- Son of Joseph and Josephine (nee Rokosz) Gomolka
- Raised on South Prospect Street, Nanticoke
- Graduated June 1942 from Nanticoke High School
- Enlisted in U.S. Navy in 1943; served state-side as a Seaman Second Class (S 2/C)
- Married April 1948 to the former Cecillia Brennan of Philadelphia
- Father of six, grandfather of 19, and great-grandfather of three
- Worked with the U.S. Geological Survey Committee for 20 years
- Sportswriter for Delaware County Daily News for 15 years

- Retired 1989 and currently resides in Pennsylvania and Florida
“They tell you to write what you know and what I knew most was the coal region.”

Eugene Gomolka

1/13/2008

Greater Nanticoke takes new approach to early education

By bjarvis@citizensvoice.com

At the Greater Nanticoke Area Family Center, the importance of early education can't be stressed enough. Setting their sights on students almost from the moment they leave the womb, the family center provides a haven for newborns to 5-year-olds — a demographic most educators believe is critical.

“We were having a lot of kids coming to school who just weren't ready for school. Now we deal with kids from age zero right on up,” said Superintendent Anthony Perrone. “We have a lot of low-income families with a lot of problems. It's not that the children aren't intelligent. They just don't have the exposure other kids have. It may sound crazy, but we have kids who don't know how to properly use eating utensils.”

A licensed psychologist, Perrone wrote the initial grant application for the center's inception in 1994, when he served as supervisor of pupil services. The program has relied solely on federal funding ever since.

“It's very good for social skills. The children get stories, crafts and snack time, and they learn about reading and sharing, which is extremely important,” said center board member and parent Margaret Haydock, who brings her 2-year-old daughter MacKenzie to the weekly group meetings.

“It's also a good place to talk and share ideas about the ups and downs of parenting. We'll get together outside and make play dates.”

Offering an array of free services, the center conducts developmental screenings in hearing, vision, speech and motor skills, as well as home interventions in which trained visitors bring books, toys and games to a family's doorstep.

According to center Director Diane Klish, parents are more welcoming because they view the program as an arm of the school district rather than social services.

“We're able to get into a lot of homes other agencies can't because we're non-threatening,” Klish said. “Often parents don't know what normal behavior is, or they accept a problem as normal. We say, ‘Let's get your child's speech fixed or make sure they're eating properly, or else they'll get behind.’ And once they're lagging behind in kindergarten, they'll never catch up. The sooner we get an intervention, the better.”

Perhaps the most innovative component of the family center, however, is its fatherhood initiative.

Aimed at “making dads the best they can be,” the program reaches out fathers who may not know how to take their child's temperature, much less provide an education, said Klish.

“If mom is working or not around, this helps dads with areas in which they may not feel comfortable. There's all kind of situations where dads have to be both parents,” Klish added. “We always stress that parents are the primary and best teacher. They'll have more impact than anyone else their kids will ever meet. It's empowering for them to learn about child development, or just learn how to play with their child.”

Past activities have ranged from sports and woodworking to camping and fishing trips. And for single dads dealing with custody and visitation issues, the program offers a much-needed forum to get information, meet others in the same boat or just plain vent.

“Moms are important, but dads have great influence too, and this gives them an outlet. They can talk about their feelings and problems,” said Perrone. “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world, and I truly believe that.”

1/11/2008

Low math test scores cause for concern at Nanticoke Area

By bjarvis@citizensvoice.com

Newly elected Greater Nanticoke Area School Director Tony Prushinski wasted no time in making his presence known at the board's Thursday meeting.

Rattling off declining test scores on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment, Prushinski warned the district faced the possibility of a state takeover within two years if progress is not made.

“The key word in the whole United States right now is change. If the program is not working, we change it. Nobody likes ‘No Child Left Behind,’ but it's the law and we have to deal with it,” Prushinski said. “Our test scores are unacceptable and someone has to take responsibility.”

Between 2004 and 2007, the percentage of 11th graders that failed their math standards increased from 51 percent to 64 percent to 66 percent, Prushinski said. If scores continue to decline for a total of five straight years, Harrisburg would “start to look at us very closely.”

“We can't blame the children. Administrators have to give teachers the tools to succeed with students. I hate to use the word negligence, but the reasons this room is not filled with parents is because they don't know,” said Prushinski, who teaches sixth grade in the Dallas school district. “If Hazleton and Pittston can do it, the programs are out there. To allow students to fail ninth and 10th grade but still go on to 11th grade and take the PSSAs is a disgrace.”

High school Principal Maryann Jarolen said the district has brought in a series of curriculum consultants over the years, but she did not have the power to set or change policy.

“I agree with Tony. The curriculum needs to change,” Superintendent Anthony Perrone said afterward. “I'd like to see people get more involved.” Prushinski also questioned a \$10,000 raise recently granted to school police Officer Mike Wisniewski, who was hired in 1999 as a support staff employee but now receives almost \$30,000 and the same health benefits as district administrators. The raise was attributed to working 12 months out of the year instead of 10.

“My concern is safety and credentials. God forbid anything tragic happens,” Prushinski said, noting Wisniewski is on duty from 7:15 a.m. to 3 p.m.

“I want to go on record saying the Nanticoke Police Department should be in charge so the district can worry about education, not law enforcement. And there’s no reason to have a truant officer in July and August.”

Board member Patricia Bieski said she agreed Wisniewski spends too much time writing petty tickets and “is not being utilized in the fashion he should be.” Jarolen added that Nanticoke police officers patrol the schools periodically at no cost but receive free lunches.

Though a large number of teachers were in attendance, no one addressed the board on their behalf. With contract negotiations looming, GNA Education Association President Barbara Zaborney would only say that teachers make it a habit to regularly attend board meetings.

Board president Jeff Kozlofski was unable to attend the meeting due to illness.

1/11/2008

New member has say at GNA

Tony Prushinski questions utilization of district police officer, criticizes test scores.

By mguydish@timesleader.com

Thursday’s Greater Nanticoke Area School Board meeting began with new member Tony Prushinski questioning the salary and work of the district police officer, and ended with Prushinski pushing for major changes aimed at improving test results. In between, one parent complained of recurring lice problem at Kennedy Elementary.

Prushinski noted that District Police Officer Mike Wisniewski leaves work by 3 p.m. while some students and staff are still in school. Prushinski also said the \$10,000 pay increase given Wisniewski when he was promoted from nine-month attendance worker to 12-month police officer in May, 2006 “seems excessive to me.”

Superintendent Tony Perrone said he wasn’t sure of Wisniewski’s salary. Times Leader records list his salary upon getting the new title at \$24,480. Board Member Patricia Bieski said Wisniewski was “not utilized as he should be,” spending a lot of his time issuing parking tickets. Board Member Bob Raineri suggested the district should forge an agreement to have Nanticoke city police patrol the schools.

During the public comment section, Amanda Neal said her daughter, a second-grader at Kennedy Elementary, had returned home with lice, been treated, and returned home a second time, even though no one else in her family had it. She said her daughter was pulled from class because of the infection and “spent a day in the hallway, she had to eat lunch in the hallway.” Neal urged the district to advise other parents that there is a lice problem. Board Member Cindy Donlin said the school nurse should check all students every day for two weeks to stop the infection.

The meeting itself was short. The board voted to hire Jennifer Golazewski as cleaner, Barbara Warman as high school math teacher, Larry Yocum Sr. as Conyngham Township tax collector and Renee Demko for the grant-funded position of “family development specialist” at \$13.50 an hour, with a 50-cent raise when training is done.

Prushinski closed the meeting by criticizing the district’s repeated low scores in state reading and math tests, particularly in 11th grade, where students have failed to meet minimum state goals three years in a row. He said test results have grown worse during those three years despite efforts to improve them, and insisted that “something has to change.”

Prushinski, a teacher in Dallas School District, said administrators must “give teachers the tools to succeed with our children.

“Shame on anybody who has anything to do with these scores,” he said. “No one is going to want to move to Greater Nanticoke Area.”

1/10/2008

Nanticoke News - Pam Urbanski

Council members prepare to face challenges, concerns of new year

A new year for the City of Nanticoke means opportunities, challenges and concerns for those who hold office.

Life resident and veteran city servant Joseph Dougherty has held different offices in the city. He served as city controller and one two-year term as a city council member. This year, he begins his second term on council and has been appointed director of streets and public improvements, where he will supervise seven employees.

He knows things will be difficult. “The men who work in the street department do a great job. The problem is they don’t always have the equipment they need,” Dougherty said.

He said the department is down to two trucks with plows, a dump truck and two spreaders for salt. “Equipment breaks and if that happens it will make it more difficult to clear snow and or ice from the roads. We have been fortunate that the housing authority helps us during snowstorms,” Dougherty said.

As of now, the city has one private plower. “People can make more money plowing for others. With the cost of gas, you can’t blame them for taking on plowing jobs that pay more than the city,” Dougherty said.

“Another duty for city employees is sewer maintenance. You never know what you’re going to find once you start digging. It’s difficult if you don’t have the right equipment. Pothole patching is also on the list of things to do, along with keeping Patriot Park in good shape,” he said.

Another concern for Dougherty is overtime pay. “I will continue to try and keep overtime to a minimum, but when you have a snowstorm or sewer problem the residents need to know they will have the services they pay for.” Dougherty hopes grant money will become available for equipment.

“We’ll have to see what we can acquire through grant money,” he said.

I can tell when talking to Dougherty he is up to the challenge and enjoys serving the public. He is upbeat and enthusiastic and I’m sure he’ll continue to do a good job.

Jon Metta is a new face on city council. He has been appointed director of accounts and finance. “I will be making sure we stay within the guidelines of Act 47. Last year, the city sought distressed city status and financial relief from the state. We need to follow the guidelines for a recovery plan set forth by the state,” Metta said.

"I'll keep track of expenditures and keep council and Mayor John Bushko informed of the day-to-day operations," he said.
His greatest challenges?

"Right now, we're negotiating contracts with the clerical workers and the street department. It's one union, but two different contracts. I'm hopeful we will be able to work for a new contract. Once these negotiations are done, it's time to start negotiating with the police and fire departments. Those contracts expire in December and I'm sure negotiations will begin in a few months." Metta said.
Dougherty and Metta are excited about Luzerne County Community College moving downtown and agree it will bring much needed revitalization to the city.

Screenings set for St. Stan's

Lifeline Screening, a provider of health screenings, will make a stop in Nanticoke.

The tests, which are fast, accurate and affordable, can quickly detect arterial abnormalities which can cause disrupted blood flow. Technicians use Doppler ultrasound technology which is non-invasive and painless. Lifeline Screening also can identify risk for osteoporosis.

Tests will be conducted Jan. 23 at St. Stanislaus Church. Pre-registration is required. Call 1-800-324-1851 to register.

Bill Borysewicz, director of youth ministry at St. Stanislaus Church, invites teens to attend the next teen Mass on Sunday at 7 p.m.

Golomki and halushki sale

St. Mary's Catholic Women's Council will sponsor a golomki (stuffed cabbage) and halushki sale Tuesday and Wednesday. Orders can be placed by calling Helen at 735-4668 or Barbara at 735-4209. Walk-in orders will be filled from 2 to 4 p.m. in the Saint Mary's school basement. Cost per quart for golomki is \$1.50 and halushki \$3. Containers will be provided.

Pam Urbanski's column appears every other Thursday. Story ideas and news items can be e-mailed to her at pamurb806@aol.com.

1/8/2008

Nanticoke council duo officially start terms

Eileen Godin - Times Leader Correspondent

Veteran city council member Joseph Dougherty and newcomer Jon Metta were sworn in during Monday's reorganization meeting.

In front of family and friends, Dougherty officially began his second term. Dougherty, who grew up in Nanticoke, said he is pleased to continue to take an active role in the city's development and financial recovery.

Previously, Dougherty has served as city controller for two years and has served one two-year term as a city council member.

After serving nine months on the city council, Bernard Norieka stepped down. Norieka was appointed to Bill O'Malley's council seat in April 2007. Metta, who will be taking Norieka's seat on the council, is hoping his 16 years in experience as a financial advisor for Raymond James and 12 years with the Pennsylvania Economy League will benefit the city.

Mayor John Bushko also announced the following city council members were appointed to serve as department directors: Metta as director of Accounts and Finances; Dougherty as director of Street and Public Improvements; Brent Makarczyh as director of Public Safety; and James Litchkofski as director of Parks and Public Property.

In other news, the city reinstated the 2008 garbage fees as follows: \$176, full amount due by Jan. 31; \$211.20, penalty amount due by Feb 28; \$93, payment plan 1 due by Jan. 31; \$93, payment plan 2 due by June 30; \$111.60, after due date penalty for each plan.

"No change in rates this year," Mayor Bushko said.

The next meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. Jan 16 at the municipal building.

1/4/2008

Nanticoke civic organizations thank Santa Claus' helpers

Editor:

The City of Nanticoke, Civic Pride Committee and the South Valley Chamber of Commerce joined together to welcome Santa Claus to Nanticoke Dec. 9. Over 250 children enjoyed pony cart rides, gifts and their visit with Santa.

A special thanks goes to Karen Phair and her choral group, the Nanticoke Fire Department, the Girl Scouts from troop 25-26 and the culinary department from LCCC.

A special thanks to our Santa - Jerry Hudak.

Members of Civic Pride Committee

South Valley Chamber of Commerce

1/3/2008

Nanticoke city workers near pacts; health key point

Extended contracts for public works and clerical employees expired Monday.

slong@timesleader.com

After months of negotiating, the city and union representatives for the clerical and public works employees are close to agreeing on a contract.

Contracts for the seven public works employees and six clerical workers were set to expire on Dec. 31, 2006, but were extended one year through 2007 to allow for negotiations. The contracts expired on Monday. Each department has a separate employment contract.

Rising health care costs are taking a toll on the city and its employees and is one of the sticking points in the negotiations, according to a union official.

Teamsters Union Local 401 business agent Jim Murphy acknowledged health care costs are an issue but emphasized the city and union were working out some final details.

The city provides full medical insurance coverage for all full-time employees and their families.

The city allocated \$69,171 in the 2008 budget to pay for the insurance premium costs for the seven public works department employees, \$102,082 to pay insurance costs for the city's nine full-time firefighters and \$197,519 to pay insurance costs to cover the city's 12 police officers.

Public works department union steward Kenny James said the city has negotiated "in good faith" regarding other issues, including vacation and sick time, but said men in his department want the city be more flexible regarding employees' portions of health insurance costs.

The city wants public works employees to pay co-payments and a portion of premium costs, James said. Exact costs being proposed were not available.

James said he realizes the city is working to become financially stable again and insurance costs have risen dramatically, but he said the employees in his department should not bear the entire burden of cutting the city's expenses.

"We understand we got to pay something or go with a lesser plan, but this is a double shot," James said adding he's seen co-workers in his department go without pay raises and new equipment and changed health care providers during his 33 years of employment. "We should be able to do one or the other, not both. We just want the city to be fair with us."

Clerical staff union steward Mary Cheshinski said progress was being made in negotiations with her department but declined further comment.

Last month, Councilman Bernie Norieka said the clerical staff should be required to work an additional five hours a week for a total of 35 hours, as detailed in the city's financial recovery plan. The clerical staff works 30 hours a week and is considered full time.

City Administrator Kenneth Johnson declined to comment on specifics of the negotiations because agreements have not been approved by either side.

"In the best of worlds, you want everything to go perfect," he said. "We're trying to get the best contract for both parties."

Public works employees are expected to receive a copy of the latest proposal today, and should vote on it next week.

Cheshinski believes the clerical staff will vote on its contract by the middle of the month. Each individual employee can vote on the proposal using a secret ballot system.

If the proposal is defeated, the union will reopen talks with the city, Murphy said.

Public works and clerical employees have the right to strike, but Murphy said that is only done as a last resort.