

12/26/2018

McGrane Tournament: Piontkowski's diverse skill set key for Redeemer

Matt Bufano - Citizens Voice

Jared Piontkowski stands out on any basketball court.

This week, it's at the Wyoming Valley Catholic Youth Center, where Piontkowski will be the tallest player among Holy Redeemer, Crestwood, Hanover Area and Pittston Area for the 53rd annual Robert McGrane Basketball Tournament.

"Probably family genetics," said Piontkowski, a junior who has grown from 6-foot-3 to 6-7 and now 6-9 through each year of high school. "My dad's 6-7. My mom's tall for a girl. I was just happy I surpassed my older brother, but I didn't think it would be by a lot. I'm still on a growing spurt; that's what my doctor said."

Having played basketball since age 5 or 6, Piontkowski's most challenging season happened to be the one when he didn't play at all. That was last year.

Last November, Jared and his older brother, Matt, were ruled ineligible to play after transferring from Nanticoke Area to Holy Redeemer.

The District 2 athletic committee unanimously ordered the two to sit out the 2017-18 season, a decision that was upheld during the appeals process, as well.

The Piontkowskis' eligibility last season was challenged because, according to PIAA bylaws, transfers cannot be motivated by athletic purposes.

Despite what the PIAA ruled, though, Jared Piontkowski maintains the decision to transfer was rooted in academics.

"I wanted to better myself and get far and go to a good college with a great education," he said. "My brother right now is at King's. He has a 3.9 GPA at King's, so that one year at (Redeemer) prepared him. I have a 3.6 with challenging courses that I know will help me with my major that I want to go into."

The brothers made the most of their situation, attending every Redeemer practice and game.

Their loyalty was rewarded when they were given silver medals from Redeemer's loss in the District 2 Class 3A championship game at Mohegan Sun Arena.

"I learned a lot about them, actually," said Redeemer head coach Paul Guido. "I didn't know mom, dad, Matthew or Jared. I didn't know any of them, and I learned a ton about the character and the resiliency that those two kids have. The whole family has it. Just to be able to go through the process and the things that they went through last year, but to still have the focus or the motivation to come every day and take stats for us at a game, even though they could have been playing. To come and participate and practice and work out and have an impact in practice — but know that they can't play — that's tough, man."

While they were barred from playing basketball, the Piontkowskis were allowed to play volleyball.

Jared and Matt had outstanding seasons, each being selected to The Citizens' Voice all-star team and playing key roles for head coach Jack Kablick's Royals, who won their eighth straight district title.

"Great coaching staff, great players," Jared Piontkowski said of Redeemer volleyball. "Ben Rachilla took me under his wing to make me who I am today."

Rachilla is now a freshman at Quincy University in Illinois, which is one of a handful of volleyball teams recruiting Piontkowski.

Piontkowski said he's communicated with Quincy, St. Francis (Pa.) and Loyola Chicago. An assistant coach for Penn State also reached out to Redeemer about Piontkowski, he said.

Regardless of where he goes to college — and what sport he plays in college — Piontkowski is fully committed right now to Redeemer basketball.

He's a member of the starting lineup along with seniors Nick Prociak and Collin Cook, as well as sophomore Mason Mendygral and freshman Justice Shoats.

"When I was a freshman, I barely got in," Piontkowski recalled of his time with Nanticoke Area. "The seven games that I played were probably against bad teams that we blew out. In the first game (this year), I scored seven points, three blocks, a lot of rebounds. In that one game, I had as many points as I had as a freshman in that seven-game span."

Coach Guido touted Piontkowski's "diverse" skill set, saying he can play the post or the perimeter on offense and defense.

"I think everybody sees him as, 'Oh, he's 6-foot-9, he's a post player,'" Guido said. "But then you look at him physically and he's kind of thin and stretched out and he's not the ideal post player. ... We're able to use him and his talents and his skills in a bunch of different ways, which is nice."

The son of Ralph and Danielle Piontkowski of Nanticoke, Piontkowski said he was able to find the silver lining in his

lost 2017-18 season, adding that he plays now with a chip on his shoulder.

"I'll never take this for granted," he said. "Even though I sat out a year, it was worth the wait. It may have shocked a lot of people that I couldn't play, but it made my brother and I better people. It made my parents — it showed how much pride they have and what great parents they were for their children. I'm not going to take it for granted."

12/14/2018

A city in Luzerne County is saying goodbye to its mayor.

(WBRE/WYOU) -- - Kelly Chote

A viewing was held Friday night for Rich Wiaterowski at Greater Nanticoke Area High School.

Wiaterowski conducted the swearing-in ceremony when Tom Wall became Nanticoke's Police Chief two years ago, but Wall also knew the mayor on a more personal level, stopping by to see him just last week.

Despite the fact that Wiaterowski was taking on cancer for the second time, the father of four had a fighting spirit.

"He wasn't going to give up," said Wall. "He was determined that this wasn't going to keep him down."

Wiaterowski also served as a volunteer firefighter in the city for 25 years.

"It's going to be tough," said Fire Captain Mark Boncal. "He was really involved in the fire department and every activity going on."

Wall said Nanticoke will never be the same without the man who put the city before himself.

"He had a vision for the city, where he wanted it to go, and it was coming to fruition, but unfortunately, he didn't get to see his dreams come true," said Wall.

A funeral service will be held Saturday at 11:30 a.m. at Saint Faustina Parish in Nanticoke.

Firefighters will escort the mayor on his final ride through the city.

12/14/2018

Nanticoke Area earns spot on Advanced Placement list

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The Greater Nanticoke Area School District increased the number of Advanced Placement offerings for students, and it has helped the district earn a spot on the 9th annual national Advanced Placement District Honor Roll.

Greater Nanticoke Area is one of 373 school districts in the U.S. and Canada on the honor roll. It recognizes districts for increasing access to AP courses and also maintaining or improving the rate at which AP students earned scores of 3 or higher on an AP exam.

Advanced Placement is a program in the U.S. and Canada created by the College Board which offers college-level curricula and examinations to high school students.

American colleges and universities may grant placement and course credit to students who obtain high scores on the examinations.

Greater Nanticoke Area is currently offering two sections of AP English Literature and Composition, two sections of AP History, two sections of AP Calculus and one section of AP Biology, Superintendent Ronald Grevera said.

Starting in the 2019-20 school year, students will also have the option of taking AP Probability and Statistics. The district has also raised money to help students with the exam costs, Grevera said.

"We are trying to decrease the financial burden on our students and families, and we do not want family finances to hinder students from participating in the exam," Grevera said.

Hazleton Area is the only other Luzerne County school district on the 9th annual national Advanced Placement District Honor Roll. At total of 46 school district on the honor roll are from Pennsylvania.

12/12/2018

GNA board picks new president

Michael P. Buffer - Citizens Voice

The Greater Nanticoke Area School Board elected Tony Prushinski as the new board president during a reorganization meeting last Thursday.

The board also voted to appoint Vito DeLuca to remain as school district solicitor at \$24,000 a year. Kenny James will remain board vice president.

Prushinski, a 12-year veteran of the school board, said he wants to continue educational initiatives to help students on

the state assessment tests and prepare for college and career options. He also wants to increase the number of Advanced Placement offerings at the high school and renovate the football stadium with turf and a rubberized track.



12/10/2018

Nanticoke Mayor Wiaterowski remembered for compassion, service to the community

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

Friends remember Rich Wiaterowski as a loving family man and a community leader, who cherished and cheered for Nanticoke and its people until the day he died.

Wiaterowski, who served as mayor of Nanticoke since 2014, passed away Sunday at age 45, following a battle with acute myeloid leukemia. Wiaterowski fought the disease, a type of cancer that affects the bone marrow and blood, for more than a year since he was diagnosed in November 2017. He received a bone marrow transplant in February and in May he said tests showed he was cancer-free, but he suffered a recurrence in July.

Wiaterowski stayed active almost until the end of his life, retaining his sense of humor and passion for serving the community that gave him

overwhelming support in return, according to Nanticoke city Councilwoman Lesley Butczynski.

“He was one of a kind,” said Butczynski, who knew the mayor since he was in grade school. “An amazing man, who loved his family so much and loved his city.”

Butczynski said she and Wiaterowski spent lots of time together while growing up.

“He would always be so kind to everyone, make everyone laugh,” Butczynski said.

Years later, as they both served as elected officials in Nanticoke, Butczynski witnessed Wiaterowski’s boundless enthusiasm for making their city a better place to live and work.

“I just loved talking to him about the city of Nanticoke,” she said.

The mayor’s love of the city and its residents never dimmed, even in the face of grueling medical treatment, according to Butczynski. He very much wanted to attend Nanticoke’s Christmas parade on Sunday, she said.

“Rich was really upset when he went to the hospital,” Butczynski said. “He told the doctor ‘you’ve got to get me better for the parade.’”

State Rep. Gerald Mullery, who knew Wiaterowski since high school, described him as “fun-loving, spirited, compassionate.”

“He had a way of making you feel like you were the only one in the room,” Mullery said.

Mullery, whose 119th District includes Nanticoke, praised Wiaterowski’s good work as mayor.

Wiaterowski led an effort to pave and repair the city’s streets, an initiative about which he was passionate, according to Mullery.

The mayor did not hide his condition from public view as he battled the disease that ultimately claimed his life, Mullery said.

Wiaterowski’s supporters organized several fundraisers to help with his fight, including a benefit attended by hundreds at the Nanticoke Armory in April.

Wiaterowski made a point to attend those events and thank friends and supporters in person, according to Mullery.

“He always had a brave face,” Mullery said. “Right in the middle of the fight he made public appearances. He was very strong, very willing to share his story.”

Butczynski agreed.

“No matter how bad he felt he just wanted to go out and see people,” she said.

Butczynski praised Wiaterowski’s family, including his wife, Wendy, and their children, for showing tremendous strength and support in the face of his illness.

Wendy Wiaterowski “is an incredible person,” Butczynski said. “She stood by Richie’s side through everything.”

Wiaterowski was elected mayor in 2013 and re-elected in 2017. He worked for Laborers International Union of North America before his illness. The Nanticoke City Fire Department paid tribute to Wiaterowski, a volunteer firefighter, on the department’s Facebook page on Sunday.

12/6/2018

After 12 years, Prushinski chosen to lead Greater Nanticoke Area School Board

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Tony Prushinski, who got the highest vote count when he first ran as a newcomer in 2007, got his first crack at heading the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board when his fellow members chose him as the president at Thursday's reorganizational meeting.

Prushinski, a Dallas teacher at the time, ran on the promise to boost standardized test results, and raised the concern regularly after getting on the board. While he was serving as board secretary prior to Thursday's meeting, he had never landed the president's post. After getting the nod, he said his goal is to "keep our schools moving forward," and asked Superintendent Ronald Grevera to explain some of the initiatives for 2019.

Grevera noted the district has received two state School Safety grants, \$25,000 for communication system upgrades and a Raptor Technologies visitor management system that scans driver's licenses for those visiting the school. The other grant of \$39,000 will pay for a School Resource Officer.

The district also nabbed a deal from Botvin Lifeskills Training that will provide books and materials for a new program for grades six, seven and eight. Botvin specializes in helping students develop self-management, social and drug and alcohol resistance skills.

And the district is applying for money from the state Local Share Account program, which disburses money from legalized gambling to a wide range of projects. Grevera said the district got money last year and is hoping to get \$250,000 or more to pay for new artificial turf at GNA Stadium that would make it a multi-sport facility.

11/25/2018

Pete Gray: Not just any glove, but the glove of a baseball legend ... Fundraising campaign is underway to restore baseball glove of legendary Nanticoke major leaguer

Jack Smile - Citizens' Voice.

When David Jolley saw Pete Gray's glove on a list of Baseball Hall of Fame artifacts in need of some TLC, he called: "I got it."

Jolley, a vice president of public affairs for Geisinger, is a baseball history buff and author of the book, "A Good Cup of Coffee ... Short-Time Major Leaguers & Their Claims to Fame."

As a member of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, New York, Jolley has a subscription to the Hall's magazine, where he saw Gray's glove on a list of restoration projects. Gray, a Nanticoke native, was a one-armed ballplayer who reached the major leagues with the St. Louis Browns in 1945.

"Given my love of baseball history, as well as the local connection to Gray, I contacted the Hall and said that I wanted to help raise the money," Jolley said. "I wrote a fundraising letter that I sent to family and friends and we have raised over \$1,800 so far of the \$2,700 needed. I've done follow up messaging on Facebook and made phone calls to get donors. I also did a radio interview with Frankie Warren on Magic 93. I made my gift in memory of my brother, Carl, who taught me baseball and shared my love of the game. Carl passed away three years ago from ALS, and you know of that disease's connection to baseball."

Gifts can be made online at <https://support.baseballhall.org/campaign/pete-gray-glove-b-114-73/c195469> or by sending a check made payable to The National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, 25 Main Street, Cooperstown, New York 13326. Write "Pete Gray Glove Restoration" on the memo line.

A piece of history

Gray's glove has no legible manufacturer's markings. It is likely 80 to 90 years old.

In an email, Sue MacKay, the Hall of Fame's director of collections, wrote: "The glove needs areas of stabilization so cuts and tears do not become larger. The work is done for stabilization purposes only and not for the purpose of making a glove look like the day it was produced."

Asked about the cost of the project she wrote: "The cost is for the conservators' time and materials. Conservators graduate from accredited programs and usually specialize in specific areas. A thorough analysis is recorded and repairs are completed based on recommendations from the conservator."

The legend, from Nanticoke to the major leagues

Gray was born Pete Wyshner to Lithuanian immigrant parents in Nanticoke in 1915. He was 6 when he hitched a ride with a farmer and fell from the running board of a produce truck, mangling his arm in the spokes of the truck's wheel. In his book, "One-Armed Wonder," William Kashatus, also from Nanticoke, described what happened next, "The

farmer drove Pete home and left him lying on the front porch in a fit of hysteria. When a passerby saw how badly he was hurt, she took him to the hospital where his arm was amputated above the elbow.”

A natural right hander, Gray taught himself to play baseball as a one-armed left-handed outfielder. He was in his mid 20s during World War II and had been struggling up the “baseball ladder” for a decade. Finally in 1942 he signed with the Three Rivers team in the Canadian-American League, then caught on with Memphis in the Southern Association, where in 1944 his speed and athleticism peaked as he batted .381 with 68 stolen bases in 90 games and was named the Southern’s Most Valuable Player.

In 1945, he was promoted to the major leagues with the St. Louis Browns, where he batted .218 in 77 games. But as Kashatus writes in his book, “more importantly, he proved his legitimacy as a ballplayer.” He was at his best in a double header sweep of the Yankees in Yankee Stadium when he went 4-for-8 and scored three runs.

Gray played three more minor league seasons after 1945, retiring after playing 45 games for Dallas in the Texas League in 1949.

A hometown hero

Back home in Nanticoke, Gray tried to live a quiet, private life. Kashatus was 7 when his father introduced him to Gray. “I sat and watched in awe as he demonstrated how in one swift motion, he could catch a baseball, remove it from his glove, and throw.”

In the book, Gray describes his technique, which he could do in a second, less time than takes to read how he did it. “I’d catch the ball in my glove and stick it under the stub of my right arm. Then I’d squeeze the ball out of my glove with my arm and it would roll across my chest and drop to my stomach. The ball would drop right into my hand and my small crooked finger prevented it from bouncing away.”

The crooked finger was the result of another childhood mishap. “I’d been bitten by a cat as a young boy and my finger came out crooked, if that didn’t happen, I’d never been able to play ball.”

While Gray was kind and friendly with kids, he distrusted adults, except for a small circle of friends. Gray wanted to be thought of as a legitimate athlete. He could be mean and dismissive with strangers wanting to meet him because he believed they regarded him as a sideshow curiosity who only made the major leaguers because of a shortage of players during World War II.

He said “no” to requests to appear on national television shows and be interviewed by writers.

In the book, Kashatus writes about how Joe Falls, a writer for the Detroit Free Press, told Gray in a phone call he was coming to Nanticoke to interview him.

“I don’t want to talk to anybody,” Gray snapped. “I just want to left alone. I won’t be here if you come.”

The glove’s long route to the Hall of Fame

Falls persisted and eventually got the interview. The story appeared in Sport Magazine in 1973. Falls convinced the Hall of Fame to ask Gray for his glove to exhibit at the Hall’s Museum. The Hall’s curator made the call in 1974, but Gray didn’t send the glove until 1989.

In 1986, Gray relented to have a movie made. Called “A Winner Never Quits,” it starred Keith Carradine as Gray.

Nick Alapack was a meter reader for UGI in Gray’s section of Nanticoke. “I saw him walking around and tried to talk to him. He was always a little grumpy. It took awhile to get to know him.”

Eventually they became friends and when Gray was in a nursing home toward the end of his life, Alapack would visit and bring him potato pancakes. Alapack had a connection in the New York Yankees front office and got word to Yankee legend Phil Rizzuto — who was an advocate for Gray and invited him to a Yankees game every season — that Gray was in the nursing home. Alapack was there the day Rizzuto called to chat with Gray.

Kashatus got the same treatment as Falls when he approached Gray about writing the book 20 years after Kashatus, as a young boy, had met Gray for the first time. After a few questions Gray said, “Look you go and write whatever the hell you want to write, just leave me alone.”

But Kashatus didn’t give up, and eventually, Gray gave him access to his life and they became friends. Kashatus was an usher at Gray’s funeral Mass when he died at age 77 in 2002.

Kashatus said he hopes the restoration of the glove doesn’t include a repair of the cut in the palm area. |

“Pete probably made that cut to take out the padding,” he said. “He wore the glove on his fingers. He didn’t need padding. Without the padding it was easier to get the ball out for the throw. If they fix the cut, they are in fact destroying the historical value of the glove.”

Whatever happens to the glove, to Kashatus, Gray will always be a hero. From the book: “In short Gray was a hero for he embodied the ideals of hard work, perseverance and faith in the American Dream.”



11/21/2018

St. Joseph's Church, rectory in Nanticoke to be demolished

Bill Wellock - Citizens Voice

St. Joseph's Church and other closed churches are more than just buildings to the Rev. James Nash, pastor of the former church's parish.

"They are sacred spots. The immigrants who came over here from eastern Europe or Ireland with nothing in their pockets but faith in their hearts built these churches," he said. "They worked very hard for them."

After standing for decades, St. Joseph's Church and an adjoining rectory at 107 E. Noble St. in Nanticoke will be demolished, said Bill Genello, Diocese of Scranton spokesman.

Nash, who has been a pastor for 12 years at St. Joseph's and in the consolidated parish it joined, wishes it had not come to this.

The diocese tried to find a buyer for the buildings and worked with multiple realtors to find a new use for it. Three auctioneers turned down a chance to sell the buildings. Nash was hoping that another local religious organization could purchase the building to make it a house of worship again.

But the religious leaders he knew said their organizations couldn't afford it. The building sat vacant since it closed in 2010 while expenses mounted.

"It got to the point where we were up against the wall, really," Nash said.

There is no schedule for demolition, Genello said, but preparations have already begun. The diocese sold stained glass windows and other items from the church and donated appliances from the rectory to Habitat for Humanity, Nash said. Nothing is left inside now except the church pews.

When it's demolished, the diocese will try again to find a buyer, this time for the lot that will be left.

The church was a popular worship site for many Slovak families when it was first built. Many parishioners came from coal-mining families and they celebrated baptisms, wedding and funerals at the site.

Decades later, churches across the region were consolidating, not opening. Churches in Nanticoke were among those being closed. St. Francis of Assisi Church was the first to shut down in May 2009 after officials noticed structural problems. In 2010, it was demolished. St. Joseph's and two other churches had closed the month before. Six Nanticoke churches, including St. Joseph's, combined to form the new parish of St. Faustina Kowalska, which serves about 2,800 families made up of 5,000 individuals who worship at two of the remaining churches.

"They've been challenged with all of the consolidations and closings. Most of them have had the attitude of 'Hang in there and let's get on with it,' so there can continue to be a Catholic presence in Nanticoke. I'll be eternally grateful to them for their cooperation with that," Nash said.

11/2/2018

Warehouse construction begins on former mine land

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NorthPoint Development has signed a deal with an e-commerce company to occupy one of three large warehouses that will be built in Hanover Twp. and Nanticoke, according to Brent Miles, vice president of economic development for the Missouri-based commercial development firm.

Miles would not identify the company but he said all three warehouses will generate more than 1,500 new jobs with an average annual salary of \$41,000.

The e-commerce company will open a fulfillment center and it will be the first building completed, Miles said.

"We're excited for the building to get done and for them to move in," he said.

Miles joined State Sen. John Yudichak, U.S. Rep. Matt Cartwright, Earth Conservancy President/CEO Mike Dziak, Luzerne County Manager David Pedri and several other state, Luzerne County, Nanticoke and Hanover Twp. officials Thursday to break ground for the "Hanover 9" site near Luzerne County Community College.

Construction of one building already started. In all, NorthPoint Development will construct more than 2.3 million square feet of buildings on a 340-acre parcel near the South Valley Parkway and state Route 29 in Nanticoke and Hanover Twp. and the annual payroll is expected to more than \$63 million.

Two buildings should be complete by the third quarter of next year, Miles said. One will be 1.4 million square feet and the other will be about 600,000 square feet. The third building will take a little longer, he said.

The total capital investment from NorthPoint Development and tenants for the project is expected to be more than \$209 million.

NorthPoint purchased the parcel from the Earth Conservancy, a nonprofit that works to remediate the impacts of past coal mining operations in Luzerne County, for \$15 million.

Dziak said it was in 1994 that the Earth Conservancy purchased more than 16,000 acres of bankrupt Blue Coal Corporation properties. The mine-scarred land sat idle for decades.

Looking at the development now transpiring on the land, Dziak said, "This is like a dream come true."

NorthPoint also developed the 172-acre commercial complex in Hanover Twp. that includes Chewy.com, which recently announced plans to hire 200 more people at its fulfillment center.

Since it opened last year, Gregg Walsh, vice president of human resources operations for Chewy, said about 1,400 people have been hired to work at the 800,000-square-foot center which is the size of 16 football fields in the Hanover Industrial Park.

Athletic apparel giant Patagonia has begun operating in a warehouse constructed next to Chewy and Adidas will open in June next year, Miles said.

"We've had great success with the buildings we've built," Miles said. "The tenants that came here have been welcomed with open arms. When they hire employees, they're getting a very large turnout. That tells us that there's a good labor force and a good labor pool."

Miles said having a good labor pool is becoming more and more important to businesses hiring hundreds or thousands of workers when they choose where to locate.

"They've got to know that if they move into this building that they're going to be able to fill these positions," he said.

"Seeing the other tenants and the success that they're having continues

to tell us that our numbers were right and that labor is strong. People are coming out for these jobs."

Yudichak credited the \$90 million South Valley Parkway project that will be completed next year as a reason for economic development success over the last two years.

He said the partnership with Luzerne County and NorthPoint Development is "writing a new economic success story that is unmatched anywhere in Pennsylvania."

NorthPoint Development's investments have pumped more than \$1 billion into the regional economy, created more than 5,800 jobs and boosted local wages, he said.

"This is signaling to the rest of Pennsylvania that Luzerne County is back in the job-creating business in a big, big way," Yudichak said. "The investments, the jobs and the sheer pace of development driven by NorthPoint is changing the economic conversation in Pennsylvania and it is bringing national attention and national companies to our doorstep here in Luzerne County."

11/2/18

Construction begins on \$209M commercial project in Hanover Township

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A contingent of area officials gathered near a massive new building under construction Thursday to heap praise on Missouri-based NorthPoint Development for its \$209.4 million project on former mine-scarred land across from Luzerne County Community College.

Three buildings at the 342-acre tract known as "Hanover 9," which spans into into Hanover Township, are projected to create 1,548 new jobs with an average salary of \$41,000 and annual payroll of \$63.4 million, officials said during a groundbreaking ceremony.

An e-commerce company will be moving into the first 612,560-square-foot building that has started taking shape, with an announcement identifying the tenant expected soon, said Brent Miles, NorthPoint's economic development vice president.

Miles said the second 1.4 million-square-foot building, located in Hanover Township, will be the largest commercial structure in Northeastern Pennsylvania. He expects it to be occupied by a "very well-known company" that would attract national publicity when a deal is announced. Officials familiar with this company have declined to release details, saying they have signed confidentiality agreements.

The first two buildings should be completed within a year, Miles said.

Hanover 9 runs along Route 29 on the east side and will be accessible from both the new South Valley Parkway and Kosciuszko Street.

NorthPoint also brought Chewy.com, Adidas and Patagonia Inc. to its first 172-acre project in Hanover Township, and the company is finalizing its third project on 150 acres it plans to buy from Earth Conservancy and the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce along Dundee Road in the township.

Chewy.com is hiring 200 more employees, which will bring its local staff count to 1,600, the company recently announced. Patagonia is now operational, and Adidas is expected to open in June, NorthPoint representatives said.

Officials weigh in

With earth moving equipment rumbling in the background, state Sen. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, told the group NorthPoint is pumping more than \$1 billion into the regional economy.

"The investments, the jobs and the sheer pace of development driven by NorthPoint is changing the economic conversation in Pennsylvania, and it is bringing national attention and national companies to our doorstep here in Luzerne County," Yudichak said.

Hanover 9 is among 2,000 acres of prime real estate in the South Valley that sat idle for decades because mining left a blighted "moonscape" that repelled private commercial investors, Yudichak said.

Fueled with government funding, the nonprofit Earth Conservancy performed reclamation at the NorthPoint project sites, making them more marketable, he said.

The state's funding of the \$90 million South Valley Parkway opened up 7,000 acres, including Hanover 9, for residential and commercial development, he said. The parkway was the "most significant reason NorthPoint has so generously invested its corporate resources" in the county, he said.

Miles said his employee-owned company based its decision on the availability of accessible sites and workers and cooperation from area officials.

"We truly believe that capital goes where capital is welcome, and we've been welcomed with open arms here," Miles said.

The community has been "building the cake" needed to attract development to the NorthPoint sites for two decades, he said.

"We're simply the icing on top," Miles said. "We wouldn't be here to do that last piece if you hadn't put in the hard work."

The rapid construction of part of the first building at Hanover 9 has surprised passersby on Kosciuszko Street, several attendees said.

U.S. Rep. Matt Cartwright, D-Moosic, jokingly said he initially thought the structure was a colosseum for the nearby community college.

Hanover 9 and NorthPoint are worthy of attention because the large-scale project will create sustainable wages and strengthen the regional economy, he said.

"With economic development, spurred by NorthPoint and the Hanover 9 project, we will see more people able to stay in Northeastern Pennsylvania and build their lives here and raise their families," he said.

Cartwright credited the region's hard work ethic.

"These things run deep in Northeastern Pennsylvania, and I know as these national corporations hire our workers, they're going to see the unparalleled benefits of bringing their businesses here."

Purchase details

NorthPoint purchased the first 85-acre section of the Hanover 9 site from Earth Conservancy for \$2.83 million in September.

Earth Conservancy sold the remaining 257 acres to NorthPoint for \$7.165 million, according to a deed recorded this week.

Because both purchases involve only portions of some existing parcels, the county must create separate new parcel identification numbers and calculate the assessed values for real estate taxation purposes for the NorthPoint acquisitions - a process that is still underway.

Elected officials approved a tax break for the Hanover 9 project at the start of the year that will provide full real estate tax forgiveness on new construction for seven years, 90 percent exemption in the eighth year, 80 percent in the ninth and 70 percent in the 10th and final year.

NorthPoint must pay full taxes on the land throughout the break, and the land has been tax exempt under Earth Conservancy ownership.

10/31/2018

Retail, office space planned for new Nanticoke center

Bill Wellock - Citizens Voice

A new professional center is planned for downtown Nanticoke.

Mark Construction Services of Moosic plans to develop a building on East Main Street into two floors of retail stores and office space. A third floor with six apartments could come later.

The site is on a block bordered by East Main Street, Arch Street and North Walnut Street. That block is currently home to a Geisinger Health System facility and to the former Nanticoke Villa, an assisted living facility that closed in October 2014.

The project includes the partial demolition of an abandoned building and interior upgrades to another building, which will become the home of the retail and office space and future apartments. The work also includes adding two parking lots on the site.

Developers plan to demolish another building, a former beer distributor, across North Walnut Street to make space for a third parking lot.

The site is across East Main Street from another potential development location. The General Municipal Authority of the City of Nanticoke wants to build a five-story mixed-use building there. Property owners there objected to the use of eminent domain, and that dispute remains unresolved in the Luzerne County Court of Common Pleas.

At a meeting Tuesday, the Nanticoke City Planning Commission gave conditional approval to the Mark Construction Services project, provided developers respond to comments from city and county engineers.

A zoning meeting is planned for Nov. 29 to discuss the parking lot located across North Walnut Street.

"This is a good project for the city and the community. It's good to see stuff happening there. It's nice to see Main Street getting developed," said Mark McNealis, planning commission solicitor.

10/21/2018

AMAZING KIDS: Guitarist Gabriel Josefowicz makes music his life

Steve Mocarsky - Citizens Voice

Gabriel Josefowicz was excited to start taking guitar lessons at age 8, but it took his parents sitting with him and making him practice at home until an egg timer ran out to get him prepared every week.

Now, the 14-year-old freshman at Greater Nanticoke Area said during a recent interview at Rockology Music Academy at East End Centre in Wilkes-Barre Twp. that he puts in a solid hour of practice every day with no coaxing.

"Then on Saturdays, I'll come here and I'll play for three or four hours. Sometimes I'll go over one of my friends' houses and we'll play. When I'm not doing that, I'll usually listen to music or think about music," Gabe added.

Area music promoter Joe Nardone Jr. founded the academy in 2016 to provide expert instrumental and vocal instruction as well as band classes in which student musicians learn to play with other student musicians.

Vince Insalaco, Gabe's band class instructor at the academy, said he nominated Gabe for this year's Amazing Kids publication because of his dedication, talent and accomplishments.

In addition to playing and singing with two bands at Rockology — The Rockology All Stars and ECG (Explosive Cyclone Genesis) — Josefowicz has been writing music with the bass player and drummer from ECG for a new band they started called Zero. He also participates in various workshops at the academy.

“Any opportunity to improve himself as a musician, he takes advantage of it,” Insalaco said, adding Josefowicz “plays at a professional level at 14.”

Josefowicz has played with the bands at festivals on Public Square and at Kirby Park and opened for professional acts at the Kirby Center in Wilkes-Barre.

He’s played for the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins opening night at Mohegan Sun Arena in Wilkes-Barre Twp., and he’s played the national anthem before RailRiders games at PNC Field in Moosic.

A huge fan of Jimi Hendrix, Josefowicz said he was inspired by the late guitar virtuoso’s version of the “Star Spangled Banner” and was excited to learn the song when Gregory Bealla, his private instructor at Rockology, suggested it.

At the time, Bealla was teaching Josefowicz at a music store in Nanticoke, and both he and the store owner played in bands. They wanted to get Gabe out playing in front of people so Bealla asked Gabe if he wanted to learn to play the anthem.

“I thought doing something patriotic will always be well-received,” Bealla said. “As I gave him the pieces (to practice), he came back the next week owning them.”

It took Gabe about a month to master the song, Bealla said, and Gabe’s performances “went over great.”

Bealla said Gabe’s parents, David and Gina Josefowicz, of Glen Lyon, didn’t know he had tried unsuccessfully to get a job teaching at the academy when Gabe began attending the live band classes there.

“When (Rockology staff) found out I was the longtime instructor of Gabe Josefowicz, they said, ‘we have to hire this guy.’ So actually, I didn’t take him to Rockology, his playing opened the door for me to get into Rockology,” Bealla said.

Gabe said he became interested in playing guitar when he was 4 and he his dad played used to play the “Guitar Hero” video game.

“Being able to see bands like AC/DC playing in front of big crowds and knowing maybe that’s something I might be able to do some day, or just playing for somebody in general and giving the power of music to them,” is what he said motivates him.

When he’s not playing guitar, Gabe enjoys writing poetry, which he said helps him with song writing, and playing drums. His favorite subject in school is Spanish. And he hopes to attend college to study music engineering and production.

Gabe’s advice to other kids: “Never give up.”

He said he once felt like giving up, “then I really thought about it and I’m like, well, what else would I do? This has been with me my whole life, so there’s no reason to stop. Something will happen eventually.”

Gabriel Josefowicz’s parents, David and Gina, had this to say about their son and parenting:

What successful parenting strategy can you share with other parents?

David: “Be supportive, especially with music. I always tell him I played all kind of sports in high school and I haven’t played since. (Music) is something he can play for the rest of his life, never go hungry, can always play somewhere for the money or whatever he wants to do. He can play till the day he dies, and I just always try and reinforce that. This is something a lot of people cannot do. But things just come easy to him and I find it absolutely amazing what he can do at 14.”

Gina: “Just support their interests.”

David: “And if your child wants to play music or do something different than the norm. ... Your kid wants to play an instrument, I think they should all do that. I know he doesn’t see it, but it helps in school. It helps his coming out of his shell. At first he didn’t want to sing, and now he’s leading his own original band. It’s just amazing how far he’s come. We used to have to sit with an egg timer ... when he first started and just make him practice for his first couple songs that he learned.”

At what moment did you realize your child was special?

Gina: “A couple years after Gabe began taking guitar lessons, he started to just pick things up and he could play by ear. It didn’t take much for him to learn a song just playing with the radio.”

David: “Other band parents say he’s a wealth of knowledge. You could shout out a song to him and he’ll play it. I can remember when he was 10 and I bribed him to learn a Slayer song, which is extremely difficult for a 10-year-old, and he learned it and nailed it easily. I said, ‘There’s something here.’ Then to see him at 13 go out in front of thousands of people, stand at home plate and nail the national anthem — twice — with no sweat, and here’s his dad sweating and thinking, what if a string breaks, what if his amp falls over? Nothing phased him, and I thought, if he could do this, he could do anything.”

What is the greatest challenge you’ve encountered in raising your child?

Gina: “The whole process, I think, is a challenge. But as far as with the music, just being supportive of what he likes

because it wasn't the norm, and he's not a conformist — he likes what he likes and doesn't care what the other kids think, and sometimes he took a lot of flack for that.”

10/12/2018

Nanticoke Area adds teachers to district's extra-help program

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The Greater Nanticoke Area School District is starting a new after-school program to help kindergarten through fifth grade students who are struggling with math and reading.

The school board voted Thursday to post for five reading and five math teachers for the extra-help program, which starts next month. The program will provide an hour a week in reading help and an hour a week in math help, Superintendent Ronald Grevera said.

The district will hire elementary school teachers who are already on the district payroll for the extra-help program, Grevera said. The district will spend federal funds on the program.

The program will help 12-15 students in each grade for math and 12-15 students in each grade in reading, Grevera said. The program will end this school year in March.

Also at Thursday's meeting, the school board filled the following vacant positions: Alicia Erwin as elementary special education director; Kristen Nelson and Andrea Kordek as special education teachers; Cody Wittick as an elementary teacher; and Anthony Koval as a high school biology teacher.

10/12/2018

Newswatch 16 Investigates: What Happened on Bus 24?

Dave Bohman - Newswatch 16

A 12-year-old softball player riding on her school's team bus after a game fell on the floor after apparently suffering a seizure. Video from the bus shows she lay on the floor for more than six minutes before anyone seemed to notice.

The girl has epilepsy and suffered what her doctor called as a grand mal seizure on the bus ride with her teammates at Greater Nanticoke Area Middle School in May.

Her mother is now coming forward with her story, which includes video showing two adults on the bus doing nothing while the girl had her seizure.

Her mother doesn't want us using her first name because the Nanticoke Middle School student is just starting to recover emotionally from what she went through, and the girl doesn't want to ride the bus to away games.

"She is constantly afraid that she is going to be somewhere and people aren't going to know what to do," said the girl's mother Sharon Cullen.

Cullen is still jolted by what happened on Bus 24 back in May.

Video from the bus shows her daughter, who has epilepsy, sitting down during the ride home after a softball game.

"She then falls out of the seat, banging her head on the frame of the opposite seat," said Cullen.

She suffered a concussion and bruises. Then she lay on the floor of the bus for more than six minutes.

"She's completely helpless and alone right now and no one has come to her aid," Cullen said.

Other girls on the bus claimed they were looking out windows trying to get truckers to honk their horns and did not notice their teammate on the floor.

During those six minutes, video shows substitute coach Brian Stachak looking back eight times.

"I don't have an explanation for that. I don't," said Cullen.

The coach tells Newswatch 16 by phone, he's a high school coach who was subbing for this one game. He says no one told him about the girl's medical condition.

Cullen thinks someone should have. That's because earlier, she filled out this a required of all student-athletes. It noted her daughter had epilepsy.

After the bus pulled into Nanticoke Middle School last May, an ambulance rushed the girl to the emergency room where she was treated and spent the night.

The girl's own doctor wanted to see the bus video to see if she had a seizure, how many, how long they lasted -- vital information for diagnosing a problem. But Cullen says when she asked for the video, it took the school system four days to produce it.

"I don't know why it wasn't given to her right away," said Mary Loughlin.

Loughlin is the head of the local chapter of the Epilepsy Foundation of Eastern Pennsylvania. She says the bus video

was vital to helping the girl's doctor diagnose a grand mal seizure.

"People can die from seizures. They can die if they're left untreated or helped," said Loughlin.

Loughlin says the coach should have ordered the bus driver to pull off the highway and call 911 immediately.

In an email, Nanticoke school solicitor Vito Deluca wrote that most questions about what happened cannot be answered because of personnel or privacy concerns.

As to why the substitute coach was not told of the girl's epilepsy, Deluca writes that since the incident, the superintendent, "instituted a policy requiring the head coach to maintain a binder containing important student medical information and advise all assistant coaches of its content."

Cullen says that should have been done before her daughter's seizure.

"The coach that was on the bus didn't even have a roster," Cullen said. "Let alone, any medical information."

Cullen says the current policy is not working. She says when her daughter started volleyball this fall, it took a week for the athletic department to notify the coach of the girl's condition.

Nanticoke's school solicitor writes that schools are not required to notify coaches of a student athlete's medical conditions and that Nanticoke schools continue to improve student safety.

10/4/2018

Nanticoke property owners will fight

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Clifford and Mary Lou Pomicter and Debbie Massaker don't want to lose their homes on East Main Street in Nanticoke. They have filed responses to eminent domain declarations from the General Municipal Authority of the City of Nanticoke that would seize their properties and others on the block for a development called the Nantego Development Project.

In its declaration of taking, filed Aug. 28, the authority said it plans to build a five-story mixed-use building on the site that will include affordable housing for senior citizens, a Geisinger center for the elderly, a parking garage and a bus station.

The General Municipal Authority filed for eminent domain against five properties. The Pomicters and Massaker have filed responses.

"These are all viable businesses. They are making money," said Clifford Pomicter.

A Sept. 27 response from attorneys on behalf of the Pomicters and for Massaker argues that using eminent domain in this instance is improper because the Municipal Authorities Act doesn't allow for eminent domain to be used for what the city authority proposes.

The response also said that the Nanticoke Housing Authority already provides adequate affordable housing for seniors. That authority operates three facilities for seniors citizens, Park Towers, Oplinger Towers and Nanticoke Towers.

There are several nearby vacant lots that are suitable for the Nantego plan, and building there wouldn't displace already established property owners and their tenants, the response said.

The response also points to news articles, including a Sept. 26 article in The Citizens' Voice, that mention the possibility of commercial space in the development. An Aug. 17 press release from state Sen John Yudichak, D-14, Plymouth Twp. about the Nantego project says it will include retail space below the senior housing, which the response said is another reason not to allow eminent domain.

The Pomicters have lived in their home at 135 E. Main St. for 18 years, and they own two rental apartments, which are occupied, and two storefronts, which are unoccupied. They estimate they've spent at least \$100,000 on maintenance and renovations for their property. The buildings are hooked up to utilities and have a new furnace.

"That's not blighted. They may not be modern, but they're in very good shape," Mary Lou Pomicter said.

After living in his home for years and pouring money into renovations, Clifford Pomicter is worried he will lose it as he's getting ready to retire, leaving him and the tenants on the block with few options.

"They want to kick the elderly out to build new buildings to bring in the elderly. It makes no sense," he said.

Massaker has lived in her property, Nilved Apartments at 143 E. Main St., for the last 20 years. She also owns 10 apartments and two storefronts on the block and has five tenants on her property, she said.

"When people say these buildings are blighted, it really makes the owners and the tenants mad, because people live here and people have their businesses here. (Nardozzo's Pizzeria) next door is a three-generation business. People live in these buildings. They're not vacant. They're not blighted," Massaker said.

Most of the storefronts on the block are unoccupied, with the exception of Nardozzo's Pizzeria and Reams Chiropractic Center. Mary Lou Pomicter has had interest from prospective tenants, but no one has rented within the past year and a

half. Massaker is talking to some prospective commercial tenants who she said are waiting until utility work on East Main Street is finished before possibly moving in.

9/26/2018

Developer purchases first parcel for 340-acre project in Hanover, Nanticoke

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Missouri-based NorthPoint Development now officially owns part of a 340-acre tract that will house its second project in Hanover Township and Nanticoke, according to a deed filed Monday.

The project will include three buildings, including one expected to be 1.2 million to 1.4 million square feet, which would make it the largest such structure in Northeastern Pennsylvania, a company representative told Luzerne County Council members last month.

The developer paid the nonprofit Earth Conservancy \$2.83 million for an 85-acre parcel in both municipalities, or \$33,333.33 per acre, says the deed transferring ownership to NP Hanover Industrial II LLC.

Earth Conservancy Executive Director Mike Dziak said Monday he expects to close on the sale of the second 255-acre tract to NorthPoint in October.

Proceeds from the sale will be spent on other projects in the nonprofit's mission to put former Blue Coal land back into productive use, including mine reclamation and the construction of roads linking some sites to the new South Valley Parkway, Dziak said.

Elected officials approved a tax break for the NorthPoint project at the start of the year.

Known as "Hanover 9," this partially wooded land runs along Route 29 on the east side and will be accessible from both the parkway and Kosciuszko Street across from Luzerne County Community College, maps show.

The company will receive full real estate tax forgiveness on new construction for seven years, 90 percent exemption in the eighth year, 80 percent in the ninth and 70 percent in the 10th and final year.

However, NorthPoint must pay taxes on the land during the break, and the land has been tax exempt under Earth Conservancy ownership.

The amount of taxes NorthPoint will pay on the land is unknown at this time because the tract it has purchased has been subdivided and must be carved out separately with new parcel identification numbers and assessments, county officials say.

The 85 acres covers parts of five existing parcels, the deed says.

NorthPoint brought Chewy.com, Adidas and Patagonia Inc. to its first 172-acre project, which also was on former Earth Conservancy land in Hanover Township.

NorthPoint's Brent Miles told council he is in discussion with a "very well-known company" to occupy the massive building at the second project site, predicting an executed deal would attract national publicity due to the company's identity, capital investment and jobs.

NorthPoint expects to begin construction shortly on that building and a second smaller one on the Nanticoke portion that already has attracted an unidentified tenant, he has said.

He had estimated 1,300 to 1,500 jobs would be created at the site, possibly 2,000 to 3,000.

Dziak said Monday the new property sale to NorthPoint will transform the blighted section and boost the local economy.

"It's a significant sale because NorthPoint already is in the process of preparing the land to build a new building that will house another company and provide more jobs," Dziak said. "It's a real positive thing for the community."

Taxing bodies also recently granted a tax break for NorthPoint's third project on 150 acres it plans to buy from Earth Conservancy and the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce along Dundee Road in the township.

9/26/2018

Officials discuss possibility of 'mini transit hub' in Nanticoke

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The Nantego Development Project could be home to a "mini transit hub" in downtown Nanticoke if it is built, said Norm Gavlick, Luzerne County Transportation Authority executive director.

LCTA officials have met with the Nanticoke General Municipal Authority to give their ideas about how the project could include public transit.

Possible ideas include widening East Main Street to accommodate a pull-off stop for buses and including an indoor

waiting area for riders.

"We agreed to use it if they provide it," Gavlick said.

The \$21.6 million project at the 100 block of East Main Street would include 36 one-bedroom units and four two-bedroom units for seniors citizens whose income is 60 percent of the area's median income or lower, according to a grant submitted to the Department of Community and Economic Development. It would also include commercial space on the street level and a parking garage.

The grant application mentions a LIFE Geisinger facility for senior citizens, but that might be replaced by a YMCA program for older adults, wrote Mark S. Grochocki, the chief of staff for state Sen. John Yudichak, D-14, Plymouth Twp. The project would demolish 13 "mostly vacant and blighted" properties.

LCTA may also move an existing bus stop around the corner from a Geisinger facility so as not to block traffic on Main Street.

With a transit hub in downtown Nanticoke, LCTA would change some routes to make travel more efficient for riders in the southern end of the Wyoming Valley. Route 14, which includes Glen Lyon, Nanticoke, Hanover Twp. and Wilkes-Barre, and Route 15, which includes Nanticoke, Hanover Twp. and Wilkes-Barre, would change. Route 22, which runs from Plymouth to Wilkes-Barre, might also change.

"It could open up the lower end of the valley. There would be a lot of possibilities for people who want to get around from Nanticoke without having to come back to Wilkes-Barre first," Gavlick said.

9/25/2018

Officials explain \$21 million Nantego development in Nanticoke

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Officials got their chance Monday to explain the controversial Nantego revitalization project set for East Main Street. And they revealed at least one tenant: the Luzerne County Transportation Authority.

Since eminent domain papers were filed — which some residents said caught them by surprise — the Nanticoke General Municipal Authority became the legal owner of the properties pending just compensation, which is required by the Fifth Amendment when private property is taken for public use, according to Nanticoke City solicitor Luke Moran. "If the authority didn't condemn those properties, PennDOT was going to," said Moran during an authority meeting Monday. "Eminent domain was done with the focus on public improvements."

He continued: "We approached some property owners and we realized that there were going to be quote on quote holdouts or property owners who were going to be resistant and drop anchor and want more money than what their properties were worth.

"If the property owners did that, it meant acquisition costs would be exceeded from a budgetary standpoint which means that we would be held hostage and the project would probably not come to fruition."

Moran did note the city is prepared to offer the newly ousted owners a sum of money that correlates with the appraisal reports the authority received from a commissioned appraiser.

"The fair market value is close to the assessed values of Luzerne County," he said. "The last time that (an assessment) was done is in 2009."

The Nantego project, estimated at \$21 million, would house residential and commercial sites and be built once the current buildings are demolished. Affordable senior living apartments would be available to citizens over 65 if they qualify for a certain voucher. But not all the apartments would be reserved for seniors.

Moran also tried to dismiss concerns the developer would receive tax-free status.

"Not to our knowledge," he said. "The reason we are doing this is to bolster the tax rolls. No one has come to us about tax abatement."

He added: "This is not talk. Shovels are to be in the ground. This project is actually going to happen.

"We believe that what's best for the city is to invest dollars, improve the real estate, the condition, create jobs, bring commercial businesses here and attract family-sustaining jobs to create that economic public impact in a reverberated way. "

Moran does not believe there will be any more eminent domain actions by the city for Nantego.

9/24/2018

Fire riders roll into Nanticoke

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A motorcycle club of current and former New York City firefighters rumbled into town last week and surprised a retired member with a trip to a memorial to his brother who was killed on Sept. 11.

The group visited a tribute at Luzerne County Community College to fallen New York City firefighter Michael Carlo, 34, who was killed at the World Trade Center. Carlo was born and raised in the Wanamie section of Newport Twp.

His brother, Rob Carlo, was shocked when members of his club - the New York City Fire Riders - brought him to his brother's memorial at LCCC's Walk of Honor. The Nanticoke Fire Department was there to greet them.

"I was just told we were coming up for a ride. I had no idea you guys were meeting us here," Rob Carlo said in an impromptu speech at the memorial. "My family is going to be thrilled we did this here today."

The memorial, which includes tributes to others killed on duty, was partially funded by the Carlo family from money paid out to Sept. 11 victims.

"It's great. It will be here for years to come. Hopefully it doesn't get filled with line of duty deaths. It's a nice place to come and reflect," Rob Carlo said.

Rob Carlo, who now lives in California, was visiting friends in New York when the group decided to take the ride to Nanticoke. They told him they planned to visit the Nanticoke Fire Department, which has a memorial to Sept. 11 outside made from World Trade Center steel.

They also visited that memorial during their trip.

Carlo said so many of his colleagues are filled with anger, hate and depression 17 years after the Sept. 11 terror attacks. He said this year instead of dreading the month of September he tried to spend his days thinking of things he was thankful for.

"I refuse to let them win," Rob Carlo said of the terrorists. "Every day we could be grateful."

Nanticoke Fire Chief Kevin Hazleton said the department was happy to host the Fire Riders.

"What an honor to have them come," Hazleton said.

9/17/2018

Donation presented to Habitat for Humanity project

Citizens Voice

Wells Fargo recently presented Wyoming Valley Habitat for Humanity with a \$35,000 grant award. The charitable contribution will help fund Habitat's Nanticoke home build that will house a low-income family and help them achieve the dream of first time home ownership. Along with the monetary support, Wells Fargo employees contributed 600 hours of volunteer labor at the Nanticoke project. Wyoming Valley Habitat for Humanity is a non-profit organization that builds simple, decent homes to sell to families in need. Habitat families are selected based on level of need, willingness to become partners in the Habitat program, and ability to repay a no-interest, 20-year mortgage.

9/14/2018

Locals worry about vacation properties in Carolinas

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

Attorney Joe Iracki of Nanticoke was supposed to be heading to his cottage in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, today for an annual homeowners association gathering this weekend.

Instead, he's stuck here to worry about what Hurricane Florence will do to the property his family has owned since 1995.

"I'm worried about the wind picking something up and smashing the windows or shingles being ripped off the roof," Iracki said.

Iracki said he and his wife weren't able to get a flight down to board up the windows of the property or move their car out of the driveway.

Their vacation home, located in the Shore Drive area of Myrtle Beach, is about 500 yards from the beach.

The property has survived three other hurricanes since they've owned it, but none as powerful as this one is expected to be.

Since their property is tiered, they are hoping the storm surge does not reach the second-floor living quarters. Their car

in the driveway likely will be flooded if the storm surge is around 15 feet, he said.

Karen Hazleton, a Nanticoke-based accountant, said her vacation home south of Myrtle Beach in Surfside Beach is in jeopardy.

"We are just expecting the worst," she said.

Her home, which is also tiered, is about 150 yards from the beach. She hopes it's high enough that the storm surge doesn't hit the living areas.

Most houses around her are ground level, she said.

"I would fully expect my neighbors are going to get decimated," she said.

Hazleton and her husband had a contractor board up the windows of the property.

A Dodge caravan and a golf cart in the garage under their home are likely goners, Hazleton said.

"That's why I have insurance," she said.

9/14/2018

Nanticoke Area may reprint yearbooks after graduating senior left out

Michael P. Buffer - Citizens Voice

The Greater Nanticoke Area School Board approved some administrative changes at Thursday's meeting, and officials said the district may print new 2017-18 yearbooks to correct mistakes.

The cost to print new yearbooks has not been determined, Superintendent Ronald Grevera said. A parent told the board that her son, a graduating senior, was omitted from the yearbook, and board member Tony Prushinski said the district should pay to print 180 new yearbooks.

The board on Thursday approved the motion to appoint Jessica Fletcher as an elementary school principal retroactive to Aug. 20. She had been an elementary school teacher for the district, and her salary as an administrator will be \$70,000 a year.

The board also accepted the resignation of John Gorham as an elementary school principal. The Crestwood School District hired Gorham as principal at Rice Elementary School, and he will start that job sometime in October.

The board also accepted the resignation of Susan Lipsey as special education director. She accepted a job with another school district, and her last day working for Greater Nanticoke Area has not been determined, Grevera said. The board approved a motion to advertise for new special education director.

9/11/2018

Building owners upset over Nanticoke eminent domain filings

By Jennifer Learn-Andes and Dan Stokes - jandes@timesleader.com

At 63, Clifford and Mary Lou Pomicter feel very much at home on East Main Street in the city.

Their residence, located above a commercial space in a building they own, has four bedrooms and one bath. It's spacious and comfortable, it's in walking distance of everything they might need.

And it's facing the wrecking ball.

The Pomicters say they were shocked and upset when they received official notice a few days ago that a city authority plans to take their properties through eminent domain for a revitalization project.

"We are close to retirement. We don't want to move," Clifford Pomicter said. "Had the (city) come to us and told us its intentions, we probably could have worked something out."

The city's General Municipal Authority filed declarations of taking in the Luzerne County Court of Common Pleas on Aug. 28, informing five property owners their structures will be condemned to construct a new five-story, mixed use structure, court records show.

Attempts to reach city representatives, including the authority solicitor, about the eminent domain action were unsuccessful Tuesday.

The condemnation notices, which are dated Aug. 30, say the property owners must file preliminary objections within 30 days after being served notice if they want to challenge the authority's right to take the action, the sufficiency of a security bond posted by the authority or the procedures followed by the authority.

Project described

According to court filings, the authority board unanimously voted to acquire the properties through eminent domain May 21 for the proposed housing and public transportation project benefiting the elderly.

State and city officials celebrated the awarding of a \$1 million Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program grant last

month to help pay for the project, which is estimated at \$21 million and called the "Nantego Development." The project will be on the south side of East Main Street, starting in the 100 block at the intersection of South Prospect Street and extending to the area of 6 S. Walnut St.

Officials have said it will create approximately 40 affordable senior housing units that will include 36 one-bedroom and four two-bedroom units for seniors at or below 60 percent of median income. Retail spaces are planned below the housing units.

In addition to apartments, the building will house a Living Independently For Elders (LIFE) Center on the ground floor, in partnership with LIFE Geisinger to provide eligible older adults with the support they may need to continue living independently.

A parking structure will also be built into the building that will serve building residents as well as the business district of Nanticoke, officials said.

Eminent domain declarations were filed on these properties and owners, according to the filings and county assessment data:

- o A four-story apartment building with commercial space on the first floor at 143 E. Main St. owned by Nilved Apartments LLC, which bought the property for \$150,000 in May 2011.
- o A residential structure at 6 S. Walnut St. purchased by Michael and Gloria Mooney for \$31,500 in July 2016.
- o A mixed residential and commercial building at 129 E. Main St. acquired by Dale R. Reams for \$50,000 in August 2016.
- o The former Bartuska's Furniture Store at 147 E. Main St., owned by Denis and James Bartuska.
- o A commercial/residential building at 133 E. Main St. owned by the Pomicters.

'Very mad, very bitter'

The owner of a century-old apartment building in the condemnation zone, who asked not to be identified, said she and the Pomicters are planning to retain a lawyer to challenge the eminent domain.

The woman said she and her recently deceased husband invested their life savings on purchasing and restoring the structure, which was built in 1915 and still contains many original architectural details.

She noted the Nanticoke Historical Society website included her apartment building as one of the most recognizable city buildings, indicating it was built by Frank E. Devlin as the first "regulation apartment house" in the city. The Nilved name - Devlin spelled backwards - still appears on the structure.

Like the Pomicters, she resides in one of the apartments and said renters both young and old occupy apartments in her building and some others.

"I'm very mad, very bitter, that they they're forcing me to spend my money to fight this," the woman said.

Clifford Pomictier questioned why officials want to create additional senior housing when there are vacancies in several other existing facilities.

"I can't understand why they want to build another one," he said.

Pomictier estimated he has invested at least \$100,000 in his property and has complied with code enforcement requirements, even though he argues two buildings in the block already owned by the authority have not been maintained.

The Nilved Apartments owner also complained about high weeds, an exterior pile of discarded furniture and a broken, street-level window at an authority-owned structure at the end of her block where it intersects with Shea Street.

Mary Lou Pomictier said she believes city officials have discouraged prospective commercial tenants at the authority building and others nearby.

"I think the (city) is telling the people interested in leasing or renting from us that they are going to buy it, so they don't bother with us," she said.

Either way, she and her husband worry about the future.

"We aren't going to get a place as big as the one we have now," said Mary Lou. "What are we going to do with all of the stuff we have?"

Her husband also worries about the impact relocation would have on her. He suffered two strokes earlier this year.

"Where we live now, if something were to happen to me, my wife is at least in walking distance to everything," he said.

"That's one of my biggest fears with all of this."

9/7/2018

Nanticoke to be featured in WVIA series

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

RA public broadcasting company is seeking Nanticoke residents to take part in a video it is making on the city. Nanticoke will be featured on WVIA's "Our Town" series, a day-in-the-life program that will include people, places and happenings of the city.

The first meeting is at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 13 at Nanticoke City Hall, 15 E. Ridge St. Residents will discuss which landmarks, events and local stories they think should be included in the program.

A second meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 20 at city hall. During that meeting, those in attendance will determine what stories should be told. Up to 25 volunteers with personal camcorders will be assigned video to shoot to be included in the television program.

Anyone interested in being a videographer or storyteller for the program should contact WVIA "Our Town" producer Lisa Mazzarella at 570-602-1164 or by emailing lisamazzarella@wvia.org.

"Our Town Nanticoke" will debut at 8 p.m. Dec. 3 on WVIA-TV.

9/7/2018

Child's Knoebels excitement goes viral

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

Video of a little Nanticoke girl's excitement upon arriving at Knoebels Amusement Resort is getting a lot of attention online.

The mother of McKinley Gleco, 2, posted the video to Facebook on Sunday, with a caption of "... And the rollercoaster! I freaked out!" the girl's final words in the funny 28-second clip as the family's car passed a coaster.

Officials with Knoebels quickly reached out, asking for the video so they could post to their page.

"ADORABLE: This two-year-old is talking about Knoebels, then realizes she's AT Knoebels!," the amusement park posted.

The video had amassed more than 58,000 views by Thursday evening.

McKinley's mother Melissa Roberts said she knew the video was cute. But she thinks all her daughter's videos are cute. She didn't expect all the attention the video is getting.

"I'm her mom. So I'm biased," she said.

But people started to tell her this one had viral potential.

McKinley knew the family was going to Knoebels and excitedly was talking about her plans as the car neared the park.

Then Roberts' stepmother started filming on her smartphone.

"We're gonna go on the rollercoaster and the slide and the boats and the horsies. Neigh," McKinley said.

The girl's father, Brynton Gleco, then asked, "What's that?"

"Knoebels!," McKinley said.

The father and daughter talk for a bit more about where they are, then McKinley sees a ride.

"And the rollercoaster! I freaked out!" McKinley shouts.

Roberts said they once took the girl near one of the smaller roller coasters to see if she was big enough to ride. Then the coaster raced by.

"She kinda tensed up when it came by," Roberts recalled.

After Saturday's visit to Knoebels, McKinley asked her parents if they were going again on Sunday.

"She asks to go everyday," Roberts said.

A spokeswoman for the company said the family-owned business enjoyed watching and sharing the video.

Kozmo, the park's mascot, sent McKinley a letter with a book of ride tickets for her next visit.

"It's so heartwarming to see how much she loves Knoebels," said Stacy Ososkie, public relations director. "We hope Knoebels always brings her that much happiness and excitement. What a beautiful memory captured on video that her family will look back on fondly for years to come."

9/3/2018

Valley with a Heart Benefits event raises funds to help sick children

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

As a mother, Lauren Brown's biggest concern right now is saving her baby girl's life.

She had to quit her job so she and her fiance could take 17-month-old Scarlett Rose to frequent doctor appointments in Danville and Philadelphia.

Scarlett is suffering from Stage 3 bladder cancer.

Members of the charity group, Valley with a Heart Benefits, have been helping Scarlett's family pay bills and have provided them with gas cards for their frequent travels.

Scarlett was the organization's special guest Sunday at the 18th annual Valley with a Heart Benefits motorcycle ride and festival to raise money for sick kids.

"It's amazing," Brown, 30, said. "I started crying when I saw all the bikes coming up the road."

Scarlett was one of three poster children selected to receive proceeds from this year's event.

Hundreds of motorcyclists participated in the ride and hundreds of other people attended the event, an all-day party with 15 bands playing on two stages.

Brown, of Nanticoke, is hoping Scarlett is cured and that her family could help the group with next year's event.

Scarlett is undergoing chemotherapy. Doctors are trying to remove the tumor instead of removing her bladder, which would force her to rely on a catheter for life.

"We are trying to save her bladder," Brown said.

The other poster children this year were Keira Thomas and Damion Dorshefski.

Damion's grandmother, Kim Knight of Hanover Twp., said the boy has been hospitalized with heart problems almost every day since being born in August 2017. He has had three open-heart surgeries in his young life, she said.

Valley with a Heart has helped "big time" with gas cards and money for bills, she said.

"It killed me to have to ask them for help," Knight said. "They said they would do anything they could to help."

Deb Kunec was there to remember her daughter, Amanda Sod Braley, 28, who died in March from sarcoma cancer.

Amanda was the second-ever Valley with a Heart poster child in 2002 and battled cancer multiple times prior to her death.

Sunday marked six months since Amanda died and one year since Kunec's father died unexpectedly.

"They were best friends," Kunec said. "He did all his bucket list items with Amanda and she did the same with him."

Kunec said she'll never miss a Valley with a Heart event.

"It's always great to be with this group," she said. "Everyone is telling me Amanda is here, that you could feel her spirit."

9/3/2018

Valley with a Heart continues to help families of seriously ill children

Marcella Kester - For Times Leader

Lauren Brown said she knew something was wrong when her 17-month-old daughter wouldn't sleep through the night. Her instinct was right.

"They did the ultrasound, that's when they found the mass inside her bladder," a teary-eyed Brown said of a hospital trip to Danville. "After more testing, we found out that it was a tumor."

Her daughter, Scarlett Frankowski, was diagnosed with stage III rhabdomyosarcoma – a pediatric form of bladder cancer.

Scarlett was one of three children – all 3 years old or younger – selected to be the beneficiaries of the 18th annual Valley With a Heart ride and benefit Sunday.

Now under the care of Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, Scarlett is undergoing chemotherapy along with repeated surgeries to try to remove the tumor in the hopes of saving her bladder.

Brown said she first heard about Valley With a Heart through individuals associated with the nonprofit. After filling out an application for assistance, the family has received \$2,000 worth of gift cards to help with gas, food, bills and more – something Brown said she is thankful for since she was forced to leave her job.

"Ever since she got diagnosed, I've been out of work, and going from two incomes to one isn't really the greatest," she said.

As roughly 300 bikers returned to St. Faustina Grove following the ride, organization president Rick Temarantz explained how this year's benefit is not only aiding seriously ill children and their families in the area, but also memorializing former benefit poster-child Amanda Sod Braley and two others close to the group who lost their lives this past year.

Braley, Temarantz said, was the organization's second-ever poster child. Diagnosed with Ewing's Sarcoma, Braley was able to beat the cancer four times throughout her her life, growing a close relationship with members of Valley With a Heart in the process.

But when it returned again, organization members said Braley made the announcement that she was done fighting, and officially lost her battle this past March.

“She was definitely an inspiration to us all,” Temarantz said, noting that despite recurring cancer Braley was always upbeat and known as a “fighter.” “Battling cancer and beating it for as many times as she did – I mean I don’t know if I could have done that.”

While the organization president admitted that there is no monetary goal the group is trying to reach, he did acknowledge the optimistic turnout for this year’s benefit while praising sunny skies above.

While the majority of event funds will go benefit the three poster-children, some funds will be set aside for the group to assist other families throughout the year.

“We’d be more than willing and more than able to help,” he added, prompting families with seriously ill children to visit the Valley With a Heart website.

While the area filled with attendees buying foods, indulging in raffle baskets and playing games, Victoria Stash was busy watching her son finish his set on stage. Her son and other family members are a part of Breakdown Jimmy, just one of 15 bands to fill the venue with live music on two stages during the event.

“We come out every year to support Valley With a Heart because we think it’s a great cause,” she said. “I don’t ride unfortunately ... but there’s always lots of music, games, foods and its just such a worthy cause.”

As for Brown, she said she plans on using the funds from the benefit to help catch up on bills while also setting some aside for Scarlett’s future medical expenses, including another surgery she’s scheduled to have next week.

With her family surrounding her, Brown said she was overwhelmed at the amount of support from the community to help her and the other families.

“Today’s also my 30th birthday, so I couldn’t have asked for a better present,” she said.

For more information, visit ValleyWithAHeart.com.

8/31/2018

South Valley Parkway stretch near Nanticoke opens today

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Two more miles of the South Valley Parkway — the last stretch connecting to Luzerne County Community College — are open to traffic.

The latest section of the ongoing road construction project opened today.

Motorists coming from Wilkes-Barre can now reach Kosciuszko Street on the parkway, bypassing the stretch of South Main Street — known as Middle Road — that ran through the Askam section of Hanover Twp. and is next to homes in that area.

A motorist traveling from Wilkes-Barre on South Main Street continues onto the parkway after passing the Hanover Industrial Estates. He goes through three roundabouts and crosses over the South Cross Valley Expressway before reaching the section that opened today. Following that takes motorists to Kosciuszko Street and an already-opened roundabout. A road leading to the community college is about a quarter-mile away.

A final stage of the project will build a roundabout at Prospect Street and Middle Road. That will begin in spring 2019. Besides offering a faster connection between Wilkes-Barre and Nanticoke that avoids a residential neighborhood, the \$89 million project also opens land to potential development.

The road and its roundabouts in Hanover Twp. will connect the highway to about 2,000 acres of land for potential industrial development.

“The opening of yet another segment of the South Valley Parkway ahead of schedule signals we are nearing the completion of this transformational infrastructure project,” said state Sen. John Yudichak, D-14, Plymouth Twp in a press release. “South Valley communities are already seeing a quick return on the Commonwealth’s \$89 million infrastructure investment with the creation of thousands of jobs and the leveraging of over \$500 million in private investment made by local companies, like Colours, and national companies, like NorthPoint, Chewy.com, Adidas, and Patagonia.”

8/31/2018

Next phase of South Valley Parkway opens today

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The next phase of the South Valley Parkway project opens today, marking completion of the entire expressway save for the final roundabout at Prospect Street, state Department of Transportation officials said.

That new, 2-mile segment of highway runs between an existing roundabout off the South Cross Valley Expressway (Route 29) and Kosciuszko Street.

The \$58.7 million addition is part of an overall 3.6-mile roadway providing a faster route between Nanticoke, Hanover Township and Wilkes-Barre, diverting traffic from busy Middle Road. Overall state investment in the project is \$89 million.

“The opening of yet another segment of the South Valley Parkway ahead of schedule signals we are nearing the completion of this transformational infrastructure project,” said state Senator John Yudichak, D-Plymouth Township. PennDOT broke ground on the South Valley Parkway in January 2016, and it has an official scheduled completion date of Aug. 1, 2020. But progress has been swift, and officials expect the work could be done next year, with the opening of the Prospect Street roundabout.

Included in the project are six roundabouts — three in Hanover Township and three in Nanticoke.

Already, Yudichak and others pointed out, the new road has inspired more than \$500 million in private investment nearby, including projects by local companies, such as Colours, and national companies, like NorthPoint, Chewy.com, Adidas, and Patagonia.

That came following the 2016 purchase by NorthPoint Development of 172 acres of reclaimed land along the South Valley Parkway from the Earth Conservancy. More than 2 million square feet of prime logistics space has been erected on the site where online pet-product retailer Chewy became the first tenant — resulting in more than 1,000 people hired at its fulfillment center.

The highway also brings a new acronym to the local lingo: SVP. The new road also has an official state route number: 3046

“The SVP will increase safety, provide a quicker route to students travelling to Luzerne County Community College and open up the area for economic development and job creation,” said state Rep. Eddie Day Pashinski, D-Wilkes-Barre.

Top Searches

“I’m thrilled the project is nearly 100 percent complete and congratulations to Sen. Yudichak and all involved over the past decade in bringing together this valuable infrastructure project,” Pashinski added.

LCCC President Thomas P. Leary said the opening of this major segment comes just in time for the new fall semester. “With thousands of visitors to the campus almost daily, the new roadway creates a more direct link to LCCC from the surrounding area,” he said.

8/31/2018

Annual benefit will honor Nanticoke woman’s memory

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

Nearly 17 years ago, a fledgling charity group offered to help the family of 11-year-old Amanda Sod after she was diagnosed with cancer.

Amanda became the second-ever poster child for the annual Valley with a Heart Benefit, a motorcycle ride and day-long festival to raise money for sick kids.

After several more bouts with sarcoma cancer over the years, Amanda died in March. She was 28.

The 18th annual Valley with a Heart Benefit — scheduled for Sunday — is being held in Amanda’s honor.

“They helped her with so much over the last 16 years,” Amanda’s mother, Deb Kunec said. “She was like their kid, too. They kept in touch with me. She’d keep in touch with them. A lot of people followed her story over the years.”

The volunteer organization’s motto is, “We do it for kids.”

The poster children who will receive the proceeds of this year’s event are Keira Thomas, Damion Dorshefski, and Scarlett Rose Frankowski. All are under age 3 and are battling medical conditions.

Over the years, the Valley with a Heart Benefit has grown to be a popular and successful fundraiser, with around 400 motorcyclists participating. Thousands of others attend the gathering at the St. Faustina Grove in Newport Twp.’s Sheatown section. The event includes food stands, vendors, kids games, 15 bands on two stages and a fireworks show.

“One hundred percent of the proceeds go back to the children of Luzerne County. Our pie chart is one color,” said Rick Tamarantz, president of Valley with a Heart. “This isn’t just a motorcycle ride. This is an event.”

Tamarantz said the group was saddened by Amanda’s death in March.

“She was a fighter,” he said.

When the organization began in 2001, the founders knew some of their poster children would eventually pass away. That’s the reason why they try to do as much as they can to help.

“We try to focus on what we do good and how we helped them when they were on this earth,” Temarantz said. “I cannot imagine what it’s like to have a sick child.”

8/27/2018

Schools around the area making changes as students head back to class

Michael P. Buffer - Citizens Voice

The Greater Nanticoke Area School District celebrated the new Kennedy Early Childhood Center with a public ribbon-cutting ceremony and an open house Sunday.

Students in pre-K through second grade will start learning in the new building on Sept. 4. Many students in northern and central Luzerne County go back to school today.

All Greater Nanticoke Area schools are now going to be on one campus off Kosciuszko Street in Nanticoke. The district closed K.M. Smith Elementary School at the end of the last school year. K.M. Smith was used for pre-K, kindergarten and first graders and is located on Robert Street in the Sheatown section of Nanticoke.

The new building is an addition to the original Kennedy Elementary School, which opened in 1964. It has 30 classrooms, a nurse’s suite, principal’s office, conference room, two pre-K classrooms, a full service cafeteria, and a large group instruction room. The project began in April 2017 and cost more than \$8 million. The entire building is equipped with air-conditioning, and the new building is LEED — Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design — Silver Certified. That means it is energy efficient and building materials used are friendly to the environment, Superintendent Ronald Grevera said.

8/25/2018

Take a tour of Greater Nanticoke Area’s renovated school

mguydish@timesleader.com

They were still spreading topsoil and planting hydrangea outside, and the automatic doors and lights weren’t always quite as responsive as they should be, but Greater Nanticoke Area Superintendent Ron Grevera couldn’t stop smiling as he showed off Luzerne County’s newest school Friday.

“This is the large group instruction area,” Grevera said of an open space full of padded, movable seating boxy enough to double as “fort” walls in a child’s imagination. “They can have lessons here, or bring in an outside speaker, or if a class is misbehaving maybe sit them down to talk.”

The new Kennedy Early Childhood Center gets officially unveiled at a public ribbon cutting Sunday at 2 p.m., but Grevera gave enthusiastic tours Friday, showing off a mix of new addition and old space thoroughly revamped — in most cases, the only clue you’ve entered the older section is the original terrazzo tile flooring.

Each room has the latest technological version of the old chalkboard: Promethean “interactive displays,” giant flat touch-screens with computer capabilities. Rooms have their own sinks that double as drinking fountains. The cafeteria has indentations in the walls where combo seat-table furniture fits when folded, leaving more floor room for other activities.

The building is part of a grade-restructuring that Grevera believes will make it easier for teachers to keep track of — and improve — academic achievement. Previously, K. M. Smith housed kindergarten and first grade, Kennedy Elementary had only second grade, the Elementary Center had grades 3-5, the Education Center had 6-7 and the high school had 8-12. Expanding and renovating Kennedy turned it into a facility for pre-kindergarten through second grade. The Elementary Center remains the same, while eighth grade is moving to the Education Center. K.M. Smith is closed. “I’ve always been a proponent of the middle school concept,” Grevera said. “It helps you cater better to the needs of adolescents.”

The expansion of Kennedy literally connects it to the Education Center — a former outside wall of the latter is now an inside wall of the former. Sometime in the future, Grevera said, he hopes to create a door between the two.

The Kennedy Early Childhood Center will offer all-day kindergarten and half-day pre-K in two sessions, one morning and one afternoon. The new pre-K section is two rooms stocked full of educational toys and play areas, with a teacher office in between. Bathrooms are part of the deal, sporting low, to-size toilets and sinks.

The renovations took three years from the start of planning to Sunday’s ribbon cutting, and cost \$9 million. The district will be getting about \$3 million in state reimbursements, and — this is another fact that makes Grevera smile — another \$300,000 for making the school LEED (Leading in Energy and Environmental Design) certified.

“All the new material is environmentally friendly,” he said. The building is climate controlled, with lights designed to

shut off automatically and efficiency is built into the heating, air conditioning, insulation and plumbing. And though school doesn't start until Sept. 4, and workers are still scrambling throughout the building doing final touches, most of the classrooms look invitingly student-ready. One second-grade room had books and folders with student names resting neatly next to a glue stick, eraser and box of crayons on each desk. Another room had tennis balls on the feet of the little chairs to make it easier for the youngsters to push them around without scuffing the floor.

8/25/2018

GNA to host open house at new school

Michael Buffer _ Citizens Voice

The Greater Nanticoke Area School District is planning a public ribbon-cutting ceremony and open house for the new Kennedy Early Childhood Center at 2 p.m. Sunday. The project was a renovation and addition to the original Kennedy Elementary School, which opened in 1964. Students in pre-K through second grade will be educated in the new facility, bringing all schools to one campus off Kosciuszko Street in Nanticoke.

8/25/2018

Judge orders Nanticoke police chief to be removed

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Luzerne County judge on Friday ordered the city police chief removed from office, finding his hiring nearly two years ago was illegal. Chief Thomas Wall, a retired state trooper, will be relieved of his post Oct. 1 if the city does not appeal the ruling by Judge William H. Amesbury, who also ordered Mayor Richard Wiaterowski to legally appoint a new chief. Reached Friday, Wiaterowski said the city plans to appeal. Wall echoed that sentiment, describing the ruling as a "minor setback."

"Just as sure as the nose on your face, we are ready to appeal," Wall said. "We were waiting for this. We kind of knew how it was going to go, and now we'll appeal it."

Wiaterowski appointed Wall, a Nanticoke resident, as chief in September 2016, citing his 25 years of experience with the state police, his proven leadership ability and record of community service. But the City of Nanticoke Police Officers Association soon filed suit against the city, arguing an internal candidate was improperly passed over to fill a vacancy created by former Chief William Shultz's death. The complaint also alleged Wall had conflicts of interest because he was a member of the city's police civil service commission and he is married to Nanticoke interim city Manager Donna Wall. In his ruling Friday, Amesbury found Wiaterowski and the city appointed Wall as police chief without seeking applications or interviewing anyone within the police department, although Lt. Michael Roke had expressed interest in the job. While state law requires a police chief to be hired "from within the ranks," the city maintained expanded powers granted by its home-rule charter supported an outsider being appointed chief. However, Amesbury sided with the union and agreed state law prohibits the city from making such a change to regulations that affect employee rights. His order directs Wiaterowski to appoint a police chief "from within the ranks" and removes Wall as chief effective Oct. 1, unless the city files its appeal. Union President Brian Kivler did not immediately return a message seeking comment.

8/25/2018

Judge says Nanticoke police chief hired illegally; mayor promises appeal

pkernan@timesleader.com

A Luzerne County judge has determined that Nanticoke Police Chief Thomas Wall was hired illegally. If the order stands, the city would have to have a new chief by Oct. 1. But the mayor is promising to appeal this week's ruling. Judge William H. Amesbury's order comes in the wake of a suit that was filed shortly after Wall's 2016 hiring. The suit,

filed by the City of Nanticoke Police Officers Association, alleges that the city violated state law in hiring Wall. Wall, a retired state trooper, was appointed by Mayor Richard Wiaterowski. But state law requires that a candidate for chief must be chosen from within the ranks of the police department. If a suitable candidate cannot be found within the ranks, only then can an outsider be appointed.

The union alleged that this step was skipped, despite Lieutenant Michael Roke expressing interest in the position after it opened following the 2016 death of Chief William Shultz.

The union also suggested a conflict of interest, given Wall's position on the Police Civil Service Commission. The union also pointed out Wall's wife, Donna, is the interim city manager.

Judge Amesbury's decision affirms a motion filed by the union in May 2017, which asked for an order removing Wall from office.

This week's order does just that. It states that Wiaterowski will have to appoint a new chief Oct. 1 unless the city appeals the ruling.

The mayor said an appeal will happen.

"The city respectfully disagrees with the Court's opinion and will be appealing this decision to a higher court," Wiaterowski said in a statement sent to a Times Leader reporter Friday. "We are confident that this appointment was proper and in accordance with my powers as Mayor of the City of Nanticoke."

8/24/2018

Dollar General looking to open in Nanticoke

Bill Wellock - Citizens Voice

A Dollar General could be coming to Nanticoke.

The city's zoning board will hold a hearing to consider a variance being requested by the companies behind a project to build a Dollar General at 443 W. Main St. and West Church Street, on the western end of the city.

The hearing is scheduled for 6 p.m. Aug. 30 in the municipal building, 15 E. Ridge St., Nanticoke.

There are already several Dollar General stores in the region. A shop at that location would add to two dozen within 20 miles of the city, according to dollargeneral.com.

The closest existing store to Nanticoke is at 2280 Sans Souci Parkway, Hanover Twp.

8/23/2018

Nanticoke's Send Request releases album under SharpTone Records

Charlotte L. Jacobson - Citizens Voice

Hometown pride means a lot to Nanticoke-based band Send Request.

Images of parks, ice cream shops, diners and schools from across the Luzerne County town appear in the band's most recent music video, "Falling to Pieces."

"We wanted this video to showcase the places and people who made us who we are today," the band wrote on its Facebook page. "This is where we call home."

The pop-punk outfit comprised of Andrew Blank, vocals and guitar; Derek Holminski, guitar and vocals; bassist Aron Wood and drummer Jonathon Labenski, recently signed to SharpTone Records, which produces popular bands such as We Came As Romans and Miss May I.

The quartet recently went On the Record to discuss how the band came to fruition and its new album, "Perspectives," which hits record stores Friday, Aug. 24.

Q: How did you choose your band name, Send Request?

Holminski: I was on Internet Explorer downloading Google Chrome, and in the bottom left corner it said "sending request." I just dropped the "ing." We ended up using the name by all of us writing five band names and mixing them up in a salad bowl. We drew each name and pinned them against each other tournament style, until Send Request won.

Q: What was the path that led to the creation of Send Request, and how long have you been working together as a group?

Blank: We all went to the same high school. I was 16 and doing this cover band with Jon at the time but also sharing an interest with Derek about writing songs and touring. Ultimately, the cover band came to an end, and Send Request was created not long after that. Derek got in touch with Aron, and I got back in touch with Jon, and five years later here we are still riding the same wave. I can solidly say we have no plans to stop. Music is our passion.

Q: Do you perform outside of NEPA? If so, where have you toured, and how often?

Labenski: We make our way out of the Northeast occasionally. We have done a few shows in the Philadelphia area and the Allentown area. We have also had the pleasure of building a fan base in the Williamsport area. Throughout the years, we have also done shows in New Jersey and New York.

Q: Describe a Send Request live show. What do you hope for your audiences to experience while seeing you perform?

Wood: A Send Request live show in its purest form is best described as hitting up all your friends and just hanging out and having the best time you possibly can. As a band, we try to connect with our fans both on and offstage and are happy to say that we are friends with all of our fans new and old. Connecting through music is what we live for, and being able to meet all the amazing people we have through it makes it that much better.

Q: What do you enjoy about performing in and around NEPA? Has the music scene here affected your sound as a band?

Holminski: I mean, it's always awesome to play in our home. Getting to see all the friends we have made over the years jam out with us is something extremely special. There isn't much pop-punk in the area, so that is something we are definitely trying to change.

Q: Your album, "Perspectives" is coming out this month. What was the songwriting process like for this record? Do you have a favorite song on the album?

Blank: "Perspectives" is a conglomerate of different emotions all bundled into 10 tracks. Each song lyrically has a story that comes from personal experience, so the record almost feels like a diary to me. The songwriting process was slow, but I wanted everything to feel as natural and as relatable as it could be, and I've learned things like that take time, so I was patient and really let the songs write themselves in a way. I can honestly say I'm really happy with the album as a whole, so I can't pick favorites when the whole thing is just that good.

Q: Has being signed with SharpTone Records affected your outlook for the future of the band?

Blank: If anything, it's made us buckle down more. We want to be the best we can be, so we'll just keep grinding.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to add that you think people should know about Send Request or your upcoming record release?

Labenski: This new record is gonna hit really hard. All of it is emotionally driven, and that is definitely a different speed for this band. It is this band's best work to date.

Meet Send Request

Established: 2013

Based in: Nanticoke

Members: Andrew Blank and Derek Holminski, guitar and vocals; Aron Wood, bass; and Jonathon Labenski, drums

Genre: Pop-punk

Upcoming: Friday, Sept. 14, Electric City Music Conference, the Keys Beer & Spirits, Scranton

Online: Find Send Request on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and at www.sendrequestband.com.



8/18/2018

Nanticoke project receives \$1M grant

Citizens Voice - Staff Report

A grant for \$1 million will help fund a multi-million dollar senior-living project in Nanticoke, state officials announced Friday. The grant will go toward the Nantego Development Project in downtown Nanticoke, State Sen. John Yudichak, D-14, Plymouth Twp., and State Rep. Gerald Mullery, D-119, Newport Twp. announced. The Nantego Development Project is an estimated \$21 million project that will create approximately 40 affordable senior housing units that will include 36 one-bedroom and

four two-bedroom units. The project will also include retail spaces below the senior housing units.

The project is part of a host of projects that are focused on revitalizing Nanticoke's downtown by improving the infrastructure, streetscape, pedestrian safety, and economic development.

"Governor Wolf's strategic support of Nanticoke, through the Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program, will enable the Nantego Development Project to bring new housing and retail opportunities to downtown Nanticoke, continuing the

city's revitalization and spurring additional economic development throughout the South Valley," said Yudichak. "There's no doubt that downtown Nanticoke needs to be revitalized and this funding is a big step in the right direction," said Mullery. "Today's grant announcement can attract further public and private investment, which will help to complete the project, bringing jobs and businesses back to the downtown."

The Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program is a Commonwealth grant program administered by the Office of the Budget for the acquisition and construction of regional economic, cultural, civic, recreational, and historical improvement projects.

8/18/2018

Yudichak, Mullery announce \$1M grant for Nanticoke revitalization

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The ongoing revitalization of Nanticoke's downtown received good news Friday in the form of a \$1 million grant. State Sen. John Yudichak, D-Plymouth Township, and state Rep. Gerald Mullery, D-Newport Township, announced the Redevelopment Assistance Capitol Program grant will help pay for the estimated \$21 million Nantego Development Project.

The project will create approximately 40 affordable senior housing units that will include 36 one-bedroom and four two-bedroom units. Retail spaces are planned below the housing units.

Yudichak and Mullery said the Nantego undertaking is part of a host of projects that are focused on revitalizing Nanticoke's downtown.

"Gov. Wolf's strategic support of Nanticoke, through the Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program, will enable the Nantego Development Project to bring new housing and retail opportunities to downtown Nanticoke, continuing the city's revitalization and spurring additional economic development throughout the South Valley," Yudichak said. Mullery added: "There's no doubt that downtown Nanticoke needs to be revitalized and this funding is a big step in the right direction. Today's grant announcement can attract further public and private investment, which will help to complete the project, bringing jobs and businesses back to the downtown."

The Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program provides funding for economic, cultural, civic, recreational, and historical improvement projects.

"Providing homes for our seniors to live comfortably in their communities is vitally important to their quality of life and I'm pleased this grant will help in such a significant way," Gov. Wolf said in a press release. "Removing blighted buildings and replacing them with affordable housing is a win for residents and a boost to economic development in the region."

About the project

New Horizons Development Corporation was approved for the \$1 million grant to revitalize a portion of East Main Street.

Blighted buildings will be demolished and reconstructed into 40 affordable housing units for seniors at or below 60 percent of area median income.

In addition to the housing, the building will house a LIFE program on the ground floor in partnership with LIFE Geisinger to provide eligible older adults with the support they may need to continue living independently. A parking structure will also be built into the building that will serve as parking for the housing as well as the business district of Nanticoke.

"With a growing aging population, this collaborative revitalization investment demonstrates a shared desire to create an age-friendly future for all our residents," said Department of Aging Secretary Teresa Osborne.

Department of Human Services Secretary Teresa Miller echoed that sentiment.

"Older Pennsylvanians deserve the opportunity to age safely in place and live in their community and near their family and friends," Miller said. "This development will make that possible for more Pennsylvanians."

8/17/2018

Governor Wolf to Eliminate Blight, Develop Affordable Senior Housing in Nanticoke

<https://www.governor.pa.gov/governor-wolf-eliminate-blight-develop-affordable-senior-housing-nanticoke/>

Harrisburg, PA – Today, Governor Tom Wolf helped move forward efforts to eliminate blighted buildings and construct 40 affordable housing units for seniors on a two-block portion of downtown Nanticoke, Luzerne County by awarding a \$1 million grant to these projects.

“Providing homes for our seniors to live comfortably in their communities is vitally important to their quality of life and I’m pleased this grant will help in such a significant way,” Governor Wolf said. “Removing blighted buildings and replacing them with affordable housing is a win for residents and a boost to economic development in the region.”

New Horizons Development Corporation was approved for the \$1 million grant to revitalize a portion of East Main Street in the downtown area of Nanticoke. Blighted buildings will be demolished and reconstructed into 40 affordable housing units for seniors at or below 60 percent of area median income. In addition to the housing, the building will house a LIFE program on the ground floor in partnership with LIFE Geisinger to provide eligible older adults with the support they may need to continue living independently. A parking structure will also be built into the building that will serve as parking for the housing as well as the business district of Nanticoke.

“Governor Wolf’s strategic support of Nanticoke, through the Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program, will enable the Nantego Development Project to bring new housing and retail opportunities to downtown Nanticoke continuing the city’s revitalization and spurring additional economic development throughout the South Valley,” said State Senator John Yudichak.

“The revitalization of downtown Nanticoke will get a boost thanks to this funding obtained in partnership with Governor Wolf, Senator Yudichak, and city officials,” said Rep. Gerald Mullery. “Older residents will welcome the new affordable housing options and local businesses and customers will benefit from the additional parking.”

“The efforts put forth by New Horizons Development Corporation to work collaboratively with local community leaders, including LIFE Geisinger, to identify a creative housing option that will preserve and improve the quality of life for residents of the City of Nanticoke mirrors the Wolf Administration’s commitment to ensure that older Pennsylvanians can live and age well in the setting of their choice for as long as possible,” said Department of Aging Secretary Teresa Osborne. “With a growing aging population, this collaborative revitalization investment demonstrates a shared desire to create an age-friendly future for all our residents.”

“Aging brings changes that affect individuals’ physical health, but living apart from their family and community can affect their mental health by leading to feelings of isolation and depression,” said Department of Human Services Secretary Teresa Miller. “Older Pennsylvanians deserve the opportunity to age safely in place and live in their community and near their family and friends. This development will make that possible for more Pennsylvanians.”

Supported through the Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP) program, funding will support critical expansion projects, some of which will provide opportunities for additional economic development.

7/3120/18

Nanticoke native graduates Valley Forge Military Academy

Citizens Voice

Alexander Rusin of Nanticoke has graduated from Valley Forge Military Academy (VFMA), a private, independent, college preparatory school.

Rusin graduated at the top of Valley Forge Military Academy’s Class of 2018, where he was honored as valedictorian. Previous honors include his selection to attend the Duke of York’s Royal Military School in Dover, England for the first semester of his junior year.

Rusin will begin studying bio-medical engineering next year at Drexel University in Philadelphia, in the fall.

7/25/2018

Residents in reactor’s radius to get potassium iodide tablets

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The state Department of Health will offer free potassium iodide tablets on **Aug. 9** to Pennsylvanians who live or work within 10 miles of the state’s five nuclear power plants, including the Susquehanna Steam Electric Station facility in Salem Twp.

The tablets can protect the thyroid gland from harmful radiation if there is a nuclear emergency.

Because there are health risks associated with taking potassium iodide, people should only take it on the advice of public health or emergency management officials, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

People picking up tablets will receive specific instructions from community health nurses on-site about how to use the pills.

“Emergency preparedness is an important aspect of public health, and having potassium iodide tablets for residents who live or work within 10 miles of a nuclear facility is an essential preparedness action in the case of a radiological emergency,” said Secretary of Health Dr. Rachel Levine.

No appointments are necessary to pick up the tablets. They will be distributed from 2 to 7 p.m. on Aug. 9 at the following locations:

- Butler Township Community Center, 411 W. Butler Drive, Drums.
- **Luzerne County Community College Public Safety Center, 1333 S. Prospect St., Nanticoke.**
- Salvation Army Community Corps Building, 320 W. 2nd St., Berwick.

The tablets are also available year-round at county and municipal health departments or state health centers for those who live or work near a nuclear power plant. The Luzerne County facility is located at 665 Carey Ave., Suite 2, Wilkes-Barre and the Wilkes-Barre Health Department is located in the Kirby Health Center, 71 N. Franklin St., Wilkes-Barre. The Columbia County facility is located at 327 Columbia Blvd, Suite 2, Bloomsburg.

7/24/2018

Facebook post: Nanticoke mayor's cancer returns

July 23, 2018 timesleader Local, News 2

pkernan@timesleader.com

Despite a positive prognosis not long ago, Nanticoke Mayor Rich Wiaterowski's leukemia has come back.

The unfortunate news comes from the Facebook page for the mayor's supporters, Team Wiaterowski.

“This is one post I didn't expect to make and wish I didn't have to. Please keep Richie and his family in your prayers,” the post from Friday evening reads. “Unfortunately, his leukemia has returned and he will be returning to Fox Chase (Cancer Center) on Monday.”

The mayor has been battling acute myeloid leukemia, or AML, since last November. Efforts to reach him for comment were not immediately successful.

Wiaterowski received a bone marrow transplant earlier this year from a donor in Germany. At a benefit for the mayor held in April, Wiaterowski said things were progressing positively.

At the time, Wiaterowski said things would be going really well if he could make it to day 100 after his marrow transplant without issue. Day 100 was May 13.

On day 105, May 18, Wiaterowski posted on Facebook, saying he got a call from his doctor, saying that results came back showing he is 100 percent “cancer free.”

While Friday's post does not detail exactly what led to the discovery of the cancer returning, it did say Wiaterowski's battle wasn't done yet.

“We all know how hard he has fought and he will continue fight!! You got this Richie! Know that we are all here for you!!!”

7/22/2018

Fighting the stigma of addiction

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After Matthew Swiderski died at 29 from an overdose Nov. 1, his family had a choice when writing his obituary. His struggles with addiction could have remained a private family matter, but they chose to help remove the stigma around addiction by being forthcoming.

“We decided we were going to put it in,” said his sister, Jenny Swiderski Yonick. “I was adamant about that because I didn't want another — ‘died at home or died unexpectedly.’ People need to know.”

“We take comfort in the knowledge that our beloved son, brother, grandson, nephew and friend is at peace. Another

gifted and much-beloved person was stolen from this world due to the devastating effects of heroin,” the obituary said, adding Swiderski “was freed from his struggles” Nov. 1.

“We’re of the belief that the stigma needs to go away and now more than ever it is clearly an epidemic. Addiction doesn’t discriminate. It’s almost as if every person has somebody that’s going through what we went through as a family,” Yonick said. “I just want people to know there is a living, breathing side to addicts. It’s not just these deadbeat people that are junkies. They are real people who have so many people who love them.”

Yonick, 31, said she isn’t sure exactly how and when her brother became addicted to heroin. She suspects his struggle with depression and anxiety led to his addiction.

“My brother, he was a person who struggled with depression, ever since he was a teenager. He felt that people couldn’t understand him. He just couldn’t get out of his darkness,” Yonick said.

“The thing with this is we don’t even know the half of what went on, just by the nature of how addiction is. We don’t really even know where he got it or how he got it. He talked to another family member and said if he had known the half of what this does, what heroin does, he would have never ever decided to start it and he wished he had the hindsight to not.”

Yonick and her brother grew up in Nanticoke. They both graduated from Bishop Hoban High School in Wilkes-Barre.

“We were both on the swim team together,” she said. “I was a senior when Matthew was a freshman.”

After graduating from Hoban in 2007, he earned a degree in creative writing and literature from Burlington College.

“It was hard for him with his depression and anxiety to go through the interview process and things like that, so at the time of his death he was not working,” Yonick said. “Our whole point of view was he needs to get better. He can’t focus on getting employment when he is struggling with so much. My parents literally did everything they possibly could.”

He was living with his parents — Dee and Ken Swiderski — in Nanticoke.

“My parents went to the end of the earth to help him,” Yonick said. “They did everything they absolutely could to help him. If love were enough, he would still be here because that’s how our family is.”

He enjoyed spending time with his maternal grandmother Dolores Evans and paternal grandparents, Victor “Speedy” and Dorothy Swiderski.

“He would spend a crazy amount of time with his grandparents, provide them company, help them get their food ready,” Yonick said. “My 90-year old Pop Pop would make my brother go to the gym with him and do work outs. He loved his grandparents. He would literally do anything for them.”

Yonick and her husband live in the Harrisburg area. She’s an elementary school teacher for the Cumberland Valley School District.

“We feel like this fall — before he passed away — was like his gift to us because he was not doing anything,” Yonick said. “He was not doing heroin this fall. He went to multiple Penn State games with us. He went camping. He was going camping with us. He was spending all this time with us, which he was not able to in years. It was a blessing because of all the wonderful memories we have this fall.”

Those memories from the fall helped her family deal with his death.

“We’re trying to live in the positive because we’ve been through the worst. ... It was a long, long struggle, and it impacts the families as much if not more than the addict. You fear phone calls that come at a wrong time, fearful of the other shoe dropping,” Yonick said.

“It isn’t just the addict that’s going through the darkness. Our entire family was right there with him. The one thing I could say about our family is no matter what we loved him. He knew, the Matthew that is my brother and not the addict, I know deep down inside he knew he was loved by his family.”

Toxicology testing shows he died from an overdose of fentanyl.

“It wasn’t heroin laced with fentanyl. It was pure fentanyl. Our opinions are how could somebody sell somebody this knowing it will kill them?” Yonick asked.

“The crazy thing in is I’ve done so much reading and research since this has happened, and it could be anyone. It could honestly stem from your doctor gave you a pill for your ankle injury. It can just blow out of control. And it’s so important for our younger generation. I’m a teacher, and I look at these kids. These kids need to know, and they need to know now because it could be anyone,” she said. “It’s a crapshoot if you have that addictive personality. What causes somebody to like that feeling of getting high is horrifying to other people. I had gall bladder surgery, and they were shooting me up with all crazy stuff. And I was like — I hate how this makes me feel. I feel like I’m going to die. This is terrible. But you don’t know how that would impact somebody else.”

7/20/2018

Nanticoke business designs truck for promotion honoring Eagles

It was a big deal for a small business in Luzerne County.

Eclipse Fleet Service in Nanticoke was commissioned by Penn Beer, Bud Light, the NFL and the Philadelphia Eagles to design a truck with a decal for the "Philly Philly" commemorative pack that will be in stores starting Aug. 16.

As the finished truck pulled in Thursday, Eclipse Fleet Service employees in matching shirts cheered and later chanted "E-A-G-L-E-S, Eagles!"

Bud Light changed its famous "Dilly Dilly" catchphrase to "Philly Philly" to celebrate the Eagles' Super Bowl win.

Joel Garnick, president of Eclipse Fleet Service, said customer Penn Beer in Manayunk is the wholesaler for Anheuser-Busch and its brand Bud Light in Philadelphia County and is putting together the commemorative pack this weekend.

The truck will head to Penn Beer near Philadelphia on Friday and Philadelphia Eagles right tackle Lane Johnson will be in a photo shoot and video with it Monday.

"Our driver is taking it down the Northeast Extension, going down the Schuylkill Expressway midday and it's going to raise a lot of buzz," Garnick said. "Everybody is Philadelphia proud and it's definitely going to turn a few heads."

Eclipse Fleet Service worked together with Ted Reidler, president of Reidler Decal Corp. and Focus Fulfillment, on the decal.

"Bud Light sent us the design with a power point presentation which we then had to reconfigure so we could produce it," Reidler said.

Nate Serafin, a subcontractor, worked with Eclipse Fleet Service to install the decal. The panels came in sections so he said he paid extra attention to make sure everything lined up right.

"There was a lot of extra care with this one because it's a big project for everybody," Serafin said. "The fenders were a lot of work with the Eagles' wings on them but all in all, I think it was a good project."

Eclipse Fleet Service also worked with Sherman-Williams to match the Philadelphia Eagles green paint color with the decal.

The back of the truck features Eagles quarterback Nick Foles' play that helped him win an ESPY award Wednesday for his performance in the Super Bowl.

In all, Eclipse Fleet Service had about two weeks to complete the "Philly Philly" truck.

"There was a lot of concentration from our 23 employees to get this ready, especially on such a large scale," Garnick said. "This is going to be national news for Penn Beer, Philadelphia Eagles and Bud Light."

Eclipse Fleet Service has been in business for 12 years, opening in 2006 in just 2,000 square feet of space and later expanding and moving to its current 64,000-square foot location on 52 acres at 375 W. Union St.

The business refurbishes trucks and has completed other jobs for businesses from Virginia to Maine to Ohio. Jobs are typically for one unit like the "Philly Philly" truck, Garnick said.

"We're NEPA proud to be able to do what we do," Garnick said. "Some of these units are from corporate America. We deal with corporate Coca-Cola, corporate Anheuser-Busch, corporate Pepsi."

Chuck Saypack, vice president for Eclipse Fleet Service, said getting the deal for the "Philly Philly" truck was like "small town pride goes big time."

"There was a lot of hard work and dedication from our employees who chipped in and worked together to get it done well," Saypack said.

7/1/2018

Nanticoke's Big Bang draws thousands for fun, fireworks

Geri Gibbons - For Times Leader

For a fifth year, Nanticoke's annual Big Bang celebration drew more than 2,000 to the fields behind the high school for food, friendly competitions and, of course, fireworks.

Besides the aerial entertainment, the event provides a chance for Greater Nanticoke Area sports teams and the student council to raise money while connecting with fellow students for a bit of summertime fun.

Council member Nicole Mackiewicz said funds raised at the event go toward community gatherings throughout the year.

"The event committee sponsors the Halloween parade and the Christmas parade," she said. "And we will also put money toward next year's Fourth of July celebration."

Mackiewicz lauded the city's fire and police departments for their help throughout the day.

"Especially when the weather's so hot," she said. "We want to make sure that everyone stays safe and healthy."

Junior Zack Pelton, a member of the high school's wrestling team, and mother Shaunah worked side-by-side making sales and providing information about the event to those entering the field area.

Standing behind an arrangement of colorful glow sticks and funky sunglasses, Pelton encouraged patrons to make a purchase, saying, "You want people to know you're coming."

His mother was also quick to suggest a spicy food item to those who approached the stand.

"Try this hot sauce. It's homemade," she told one attendee. "But make sure you have water to go with it."

Across the way, Ken Kasprzyk was serving up hotdogs, hamburgers, kielbasa and kabobs to raise money for the football team.

Kasprzyk enjoyed time spent behind the grill for a good cause.

"I think we're also selling salads and sides," he said. "But my spot is behind the grill."

Cow Pie Bingo was an event favorite featuring a drawn-out grid on the football field with letter/number combinations.

Winners were determined by the area of the grid where the cow — um — did his business.

For a second year, Whistle the cow was selected to determine the winners.

She seemed to relish her role as she made her way onto the field, accompanied by owners Jennifer and Aaron Zyllo.

And although Saturday was marked by stifling heat, attendees seemed to take it in stride.

"We're making the most of the day," said student council secretary Liz Redenski. "We're selling Kool-Aid and water bottles, so we're helping people keep cool."

7/1/2018

First Greater Nanticoke Area class to celebrate 50th reunion

Bob Kalinowski- Citizens Voice

Former bitter rivals, the Nanticoke and Newport Twp. school districts merged for the 1968 campaign, but students still went to high school in different towns.

Though they didn't interact during the school day, they played sports and cheered under the same banner — as Nanticoke Trojans — and immediately became an athletic powerhouse.

Nearly 300 students from Nanticoke City and Newport Twp. graduated together in June 1968 as the first-ever class of Greater Nanticoke Area, but they remained divided.

They even published separate yearbooks and ordered different class rings.

For decades, they continued the segregation by holding separate reunions. But that changed 10 years ago when, faced with dwindling participation, the two factions of Greater Nanticoke Area's Class of 1968 held a joint 40th reunion.

Class members are now busy planning their 50th reunion — the first group from the school district to reach that mark. To be inclusive, they are calling it the "Nanticoke/Newport High School" reunion.

"It was like the North and South, some people still fighting the Civil War. It was the same thing with the rivalry between Nanticoke and Newport. Fifty years later, you got to give it up," said Kline Searfoss, who was class president of the Nanticoke faction of the Class of 1968.

Becoming the Trojans

Nanticoke students attended the high school formerly located at Main and Kosciuszko streets in Nanticoke City, where a CVS pharmacy now stands.

Students from Newport Twp. attended half-day morning sessions at the Pulaski school on Market Street in Glen Lyon, sharing the building with junior high students who took classes there during afternoons. They had their own class officers, as well.

"It was pretty dysfunctional. The people at Nanticoke didn't know the people in Newport and the people at Newport didn't know the people in Nanticoke. The only thing that united us was the fact we played sports together. Other than that, we were completely separated," recalled Searfoss, who shared quarterback duties on the football team and went on to become a nuclear engineer.

For generations, students in both towns celebrated the heated football rivalry between the Nanticoke Rams and the Newport Nutcrackers and their annual Thanksgiving game. Suddenly, the Class of 1968 became the Trojans for their senior year.

In the inaugural year of the Greater Nanticoke Area Trojans, the boys sports teams won the elusive "triple crown," winning league championships in football, basketball and baseball.

The 1968 Nannual — the yearbook published for Nanticoke students — documents the domination on the sports fields, but makes no mention of it being the first combined year with Newport.

That year's Newportrait — published for the Newport students — mentions the consolidation under a photograph of the

basketball team, which completed its regular season without a loss.

“MERGER PAYS OFF!,” screamed a headline about the league championship.

Both yearbooks lament it would be their last. A new combined yearbook — The Trojanaire — was to be published in the future. However, separate yearbooks continued to be published the next two years until students started attending the same building for the 1970-71 school year.

Junior class officers at Newport Twp. summarized the year of change in the 1968 Newportrait.

“We have been effected by a great number of changes in our school system this year. We have witnessed the combining of our football, baseball, and basketball teams and also the band. Our colors have been changed to blue and white with a new title of Trojans ... Although the jointure has created some problems, we have overcome most of these and continue on our road to success.”

The United States was embroiled in turmoil in 1968 as well.

Protests raged against the Vietnam War and civil rights demonstrations gripped the country. Civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in April 1968 right before the senior class trip to Washington, D.C. Students were in the nation’s capital as riots erupted around them in response to King’s murder.

Right after they graduated, presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated, too.

Rivalry relived

The Nanticoke/Newport consolidation was finally solidified in September 1970 when Greater Nanticoke Area opened its current facility on Kosciuszko Street, originally called John S. Fine High School in honor of the former Pennsylvania governor who hailed from Nanticoke.

For the Newport students of 1968, schooling had already been chaotic for years prior to the merger with Nanticoke.

In December 1963, the Newport Twp. High School in Wanamie burned down.

Newport students were then forced to do half-day split sessions at Pulaski Junior High in Glen Lyon — grades 10 through 12 during the day and grades seven through nine in the afternoon.

To get ready for the 1967-68 merger, the Nanticoke and Newport school districts planned to hold a combined graduation in June 1967, which sparked controversy. A letter to the editor published in a local newspaper at the time urged against such a plan.

“This is to the disgusted seniors who spoke out about the combined graduations of Newport and Nanticoke High Schools. I, too, would feel the same way if I were graduating. All these years, there was nothing about Newport and Nanticoke doing things together. Now all of a sudden they want to combine graduation,” wrote a former Newport graduate. “When the two schools become one, Nanticoke will have its say. You can bet on it!”

In the years prior, Nanticoke and Newport students had often clashed, usually before their rivalry football game.

Perhaps the most notable incident came in October 1965 when vandals splashed red paint — one of Newport’s colors — all around Nanticoke, targeting City Hall, Nanticoke High School and Nanticoke’s football stadium. At the time, Nanticoke’s lone police car was out of service due to a crash.

“Vandals Paint Nanticoke Red While Cops Await Cruiser to Pursue Them,” read a headline in a local newspaper.

The story goes on to note Nanticoke police, using private vehicles, caught the vandals in the act at the football stadium and fired a gunshot toward them to get them to flee.

Following the merger, next-door Hanover became the new arch rival and target of pranks, class members say.

GNA at 50

While sports was a source of the heated rivalry, they also helped the two towns come together.

Caroline Pawlush Brozena, a reunion committee member from Newport Twp. who was voted most likely to succeed, said extracurricular activities — like sports, cheerleading and the band — helped during the merger year. She was a cheerleader and was proud to root for the Trojans her senior year.

“It didn’t matter if I was a Newport Nutcracker or a Nanticoke Trojan, I had a great time in high school,” Brozena said.

“I had no problems because I was involved as a cheerleader. We practiced with the Nanticoke kids. We went to games with them. We all had to get along.”

Since most of the two factions didn’t know each other, Newport and Nanticoke held separate reunions for decades. Due to shrinking turnout, they sought to host a joint venture to mark their 40th reunion. They hosted a clambake at the grove of the former Centre Inn on Old Newport Street in Newport Twp.

“It was great. We had a blast,” Brozena said.

The class of 1968 had 214 graduates from Nanticoke and 81 graduates from Newport. Most of them are 68-years-old. Reunion organizers said they hope as many as possible turn out for this historic 50th reunion, to be held Sept. 8 at the Wyoming Valley Country Club in Hanover Twp.

“Fifty years is a milestone, a big milestone,” Brozena said. “I’m hoping for a good turnout. But we’ll see. There was

some animosity and I'm sure there still is.”

50th reunion of the Nanticoke/Newport Class of 1968

WHEN: 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. Sept. 8

WHERE: Wyoming Valley Country Club, Hanover Twp.

COST: \$55 per person

CONTACT: Kline Searfoss at 570-436-1969 or Beverly Howell 570-735-8487.

Icebreaker to be held 7 p.m. Sept. 7 at R Bar and Grill in Newport Twp.

SEEKING CLASS MEMBERS:

The committee planning the 50th reunion of the Nanticoke/Newport Class of 1968 are trying to contact the following classmates.

From Nanticoke: Ronald Butka, Stephen Buchinski, William Crigas, Frank Demski, Arthur Houck, Robert Hoover, Thomas Jenkins, John Neidzwski, Donald Stofko, Joseph Stoker, Kenneth Thompson, Robert Wodarczyk, John Wozniak, Linda Bethel Baker, Sally Reese Swan, Linda Rinehamer Lehet, Donna Shedlock Werkheiser, Linda Siko Hewitt, Theresa Yatsko Burgess.

From Newport: Arnold Fiorani, Gary Kichner, Anthony Sklaney, Barry Varchimak, Patsy Faux Waltman, Catherine Graves, Grace Kreitzer, Sarah Shank.

Anyone with questions about the reunion can call Kline Searfoss at 570-436-1969.

IN THEIR WORDS:

“The crazy thing was you didn't know these people unless you played athletics. You have been rivals so long and all of a sudden you're classmates and teammates. I enjoyed high school, had a great time and absolutely loved it. To me, I'm a history buff, it was historic year. Martin Luther King was shot earlier that year. When we went to D.C. for our senior trip, you saw all the burned out buildings from the riots. After we graduated, you go home and watch the news, Robert F. Kennedy got shot. It was a tumultuous year.”

— JOSEPH IRACKI, Nanticoke

“The 1967-68 school year was a beginning and an end. The initial shock of the jointure began in our sophomore year with the vote on the GNA mascot. 1968 Newport Township grads would become the first GNA Trojans and 50 years later they would celebrate that prestigious experience. We would retain a portion of our Nutcracker identity by retaining our Newport ring and yearbook. It would be a bittersweet year full of anticipation and uncertainty shaped by world events. Little did we know then the notoriety that would be associated with this beginning. It is one of the many reasons to celebrate.”

— DAVE GUZOFISKY, Newport

“I think I remember most actually how well the jointure went considering Newport was our arch rival. All sports teams joined, cheerleading squads, all of it and it worked. Our senior class trip I will never forget. We raised money to go to Washington D.C. for 3 days My dad did not want to let me go because at that time the riots in D.C. and burning of buildings was going on. But I begged and I was able to go. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think I would be working there some day. I think the most exciting part was winning triple crown championships — in football, basketball and baseball. It was a great time to be in high school at Nanticoke Area.”

— MARGE DAVISON MATISKO, Nanticoke

“It was my senior year and after attending Newport Township schools my whole life, it was, as a teenager, an absolutely devastating time. We were ready to embark on our greatest accomplishment — our senior year — by joining our rival high school, our nemesis. We remained completely separated from Nanticoke High School with the exception of sports. We had no contact whatsoever personally, socially or academically together. In a way, we were thankful for this situation because we were not fully combined. In our hearts, we remained Newport High School as signified by our senior yearbook, our class rings, and our diplomas. We felt we were the last class to graduate from Newport Township High School. Now, as time has gone by, we can appreciate our time together planning our 50th class reunion. I feel I have formed new friendships and I have a great feeling of camaraderie. We have all come together as one to enjoy one of their greatest milestones of our lives, ‘Our 50th Class Reunion!’”

— BEVERLY HOWELL, Newport

September 1967 to June 1968

Here are some things that happened during the Class of 1968's school year:

1967

Sept. 11: The Carol Burnett Show premieres on CBS

Oct. 2: Thurgood Marshall is sworn in as the first black justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Oct. 27: Several thousand people advance to the Pentagon to protest against the Vietnam War.

Nov. 9: First issue of the magazine Rolling Stone is published in San Francisco.

Dec. 8: Magical Mystery Tour is released by The Beatles as an eleven-song album in the U.S.

1968

Jan. 30: The Viet Cong and North Vietnam launch the Tet Offensive against South Vietnam, the United States, and allies.

February: Civil rights protests and disturbances occur in Orangeburg, South Carolina and Memphis, Tennessee, and on the campuses of the University of Wisconsin–Madison and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

March 31: U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson announces he will not seek re-election.

April 4: Martin Luther King Jr. is shot dead at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. Riots erupt in major American cities, lasting for several days afterwards.

April 11: President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1968.

June 5: U.S. presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy is shot at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, California. Kennedy dies from his injuries the next day.

6/20/2018

NEPA Sharks: TNT Subs owner has passion for food

Marcella Kester - For Times Leader

Tammy Rynkiewicz is a self-starter.

While the Nanticoke resident has been an independent saleswoman for multiple companies, she admitted her true passion has always been in the kitchen.

So Rynkiewicz combined her experience in sales and love of food and created her own business: TNT Subs & More.

“I left my job in 2015 to pursue my homemade dip mix business,” she said, noting the thought of opening a deli was never far from her mind. “I started looking and talking to a friend and we decided to start TNT and the opportunity came about.”

Rynkiewicz was one of the contestants at The Woodlands Inn last Friday evening, battling it out in the area’s first-ever NEPA Sharks event for a chance to win \$5,000 for their businesses.

The event was put on by Golden Mile Funding LLC as well as the Times Leader Media Group.

TNT Subs & More, of Nanticoke, creates various homemade foods, specializing in pierogi and various other ethnic dishes.

Recently, the business has become mobile.

“We teamed up with another food truck who sells ethnic foods and we go to events together, offering the public full Polish cuisine,” said Rynkiewicz.

She found out about the competition through the Times Leader, and was planning on using the prize money to further advertising initiatives and purchase more equipment.

The Baut Studios was announced the winner of the competition Friday, earning the \$5,000 grand prize.

Despite not winning, Rynkiewicz said she will continue to do what she loves — regardless of the challenges that come with being a business owner.

Top Searches

“It’s a lot of hard work. A lot of unpaid, hard work,” she said. “The best part is giving back. I found that giving back to the community is very rewarding.”

Find out more about TNT Subs at its Facebook page.

6/19/2018

New drive-through coffee shop opens in Nanticoke

Citizens Voice

A grand opening was held Monday for a new drive-through coffee shop at 443 W. Main St., Nanticoke. Donna Dougherty opened the new coffee shop, called Dragon’s Brew, in the parking lot of Nanticoke Fitness. The shop will serve brewed coffee, espresso, protein shakes and blended drinks.

6/18/2018

Valley with a Heart donates toys to area police departments

One local organization is trying to help area police departments develop better relations with the children in the communities they serve.

On Sunday, the Valley with a Heart volunteer organization delivered toys to area police departments during an event at West Side Park in Nanticoke. The departments will keep the toys in their cars and hand them out to children they come across.

“Having a 7-year-old daughter, I think it’s very important to have the community and little kids reach out,” Allison Barletta, vice president of the Hazleton City Council, said. “Seeing the police, they see the lights and the uniform can be intimidating. But having officers reach out give them a toy and speak with them will really help our kids out.”

Valley with a Heart President Rick Temerantz agreed.

“This is our fourth year holding this event,” Temerantz said. “The goal of this is if an officer encounters a child in need, and hands the child a toy it tends to calm them down a little.”

These toys also serve as a form of public relations for the police departments.

“In today’s age, the cops don’t get the respect they deserve,” Temerantz said. “They are fathers and mothers. They know what it’s like to see a crying child and how to comfort that child. Maybe they won’t see a cop as a threat, and they will remember later in life when a cop helped them out.”

The Valley with a Heart’s main focus is raising money to help families of sick children in the Wyoming Valley.

“In the 18 years we’ve been doing this, we’ve raised over half a million dollars for families with sick children,”

Temerantz said. “Whether it be gas cards, medical bills or anything to make a family’s life easier.”

Temerantz encourages people to check out www.valleywithaheart.com or check the group’s Facebook page for updates.

“We are always looking for corporate sponsors or donations,” Temerantz said. “Most importantly, 100 percent of the money raised by his organization is given back to families in need.”

Officers from the Pennsylvania State Police, Hazleton City Police and Swoyersville were in attendance at the event.

Toys were also delivered to departments from Wilkes-Barre, Edwardsville, Larksville and the Pennsylvania State Police Hazleton barracks.

“I am honored that Valley with a Heart reached out to us and the kids in Hazleton City,” Barletta said. “Right now we are a distressed city, so we benefit from having them reach out to us, and the police can hold these toys in their car and distribute them to a kid in need.”

Top Searches

“I’ve been attending their events for the past three years, and I truly appreciate what they do for the surrounding communities and Luzerne County.”

Swoyersville Mayor Chris Concert echoed Barletta when it came to the importance of Valley with a Heart’s event.

“Not only am I the mayor but I’m also a member of Valley with a Heart,” Concert said. “It’s really important to foster a great relationship between children and police.”

6/8/2018

Nanticoke playground seeks help to make storm repairs

Nico Rossi - Citizens Voice

The Quality Hill Playground, a staple in the Nanticoke community, is in need of repairs.

The park was severely damaged when a May 15 storm decimated several trees, ripped the roofing off the park’s two buildings and destroyed parts of the chain-link fence. Because the park is privately owned, repairs are not covered by the city of Nanticoke and must be paid out of pocket.

Kenny Gill, president of the nonprofit Quality Hill Playground Association, said they need to raise money to get the park back to its former glory.

“One of the first things I noticed, when I got here after the storm, were all the trees knocked down and the fences they took down with it,” Gill said. “Five years ago, we spent anywhere between \$24,000 to \$32,000 putting the fences around the park, and now most of it needs to be repaired or replaced.”

According to Gill, the storm caused about \$16,000 in damage. The association’s insurance covered the new roofing, estimated at \$6,500, but does not cover any tree removal or fencing.

“Once we learned the insurance was only covering the damage to the building and not anything else on the property, such as the trees or the fence, that’s when we knew we had to do something,” Gill said.

Conklin’s Tree Service of Wapwallopen removed seven downed pine trees and shrubs, and cleaned up all of the brush

and debris. According to Gill, the estimated cost to repair the fences is \$9,500.

Anyone wishing to donate material or funds for the repairs may visit www.gofundme.com/qpafencerepair or send a check payable to Quality Hill Playground Association to 78 Hill St., Nanticoke, PA 18634.

For information, visit the park's Facebook page, Quality Hill Playground Association-Nanticoke, PA.

"We are looking for all the help we can get," Gill said. "Hopefully we can raise the money and within two or three months have this park back up and running."

5/30/2018

Habitat for Humanity seeks family for project in Nanticoke

Bill Wellock - Citizens Voice

Wyoming Valley Habitat for Humanity is looking for a family that needs a home.

The organization is soliciting applications for a "partner family" that will help build a home on what is currently a vacant lot in Nanticoke.

The building process should take about a year, but families need to invest their own "sweat equity" in the construction to qualify, so the organization is looking for a partner now.

To qualify for the program, a family must meet several criteria. Applicants must be living in inadequate housing, which could include problems with water, electricity, sewage, heating or a landlord who doesn't maintain the property or neighborhood safety. Another requirement is that a family earns between 30 and 60 percent of the local median family income. For a family of four in Luzerne County seeking to partner with Habitat for Humanity, that's between \$17,850 and \$35,700.

Applicants go through an interview process that looks at their financial history and other information. They buy the home from Habitat for Humanity, so they need to be able to afford the mortgage on the property. They must also have lived in the area for at least one year.

"We have all these strict standards so that when we partner, hopefully we're assured of success for both them and us," said executive director Karen Kaufer.

The organization seeks potential partners through many avenues. It advertises and sends out information to local social service agencies and businesses to gather applications.

Kaufer has seen many families move in to Habitat homes in the past 11 years. Some of those clients' children are now graduating high school and heading to college.

"I think they would not have had the opportunity to do that had they not had this hand-up in the community," she said.

5/29/2018

Reflections on a Life Well-Lived

Dave Bohman - WNEP-TV

Doris Merrill of Nanticoke spent much of World War II at the Christian Admiral Hotel in Cape May, New Jersey.

The beachfront resort also housed a Naval Intelligence Unit that tried to crack enemy codes.

Merrill was the only woman in a group of older officers, all of whom were men.

"I learned so much from those men," said Merrill. "Oh, they weren't happy at the idea of a woman coming in to work with them but then, in about a week, they treated me like I was their daughter."

Right after the war, she met a Marine from Maine. She fell in love and married her husband Paul in a full military ceremony.

She accumulated roughly 70 medals but not from the military.

Shortly after leaving the military and eventually becoming a teacher in Nanticoke, Doris Merrill was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and began a new kind of service as an advocate for people with disabilities.

16 years ago, President George W. Bush recognized her contributions to the military and the disabled.

"Life has been so good and being in the service was part of it," said Merrill.

At 94, Doris has outlived her husband and her son.

On Memorial Day she gives thanks to those who fought and died in war but being one of the few women in the military in World War II, she also reflects on how women who followed in her footsteps have become Admirals and Generals.

"It's about time," said Merrill.

5/29/2018

Nanticoke cop sues city over pay for doctor visits

Kara Kroll is suing the City of Nanticoke for overtime pay she says she is due for time spent going to physical therapy due to a work-related neck injury.

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A police officer has filed a federal labor lawsuit against the City of Nanticoke over 15 hours of overtime pay she says she is owed because officials would not let her go to physical therapy during work.

Kara Kroll, who was hired in 2015, alleges in the lawsuit that she missed a week of work after suffering a sprained neck while on duty on Oct. 7, 2016. The complaint does not specify the exact nature of the injury, but a grievance Kroll previously filed over the issue says she hit her head on a staircase platform in a backyard, resulting in a diagnosis of whiplash and neck strain.

When Kroll returned to duty, she needed continuing treatment, but Nanticoke officials refused to give her time off during her shifts to go to the doctor, the complaint says.

The city required Kroll to schedule the doctor appointments outside of her normal eight-hour shift, according to the complaint.

“Consequently, (Kroll) incurred overtime for having to go to (the city’s) doctor after or before her scheduled shift,” Pittston attorney Cynthia L. Pollick wrote in the complaint. (Kroll’s) treatment was necessary and for the benefit of (the city) since she was treating for a work-related injury.”

The complaint asserts that Kroll racked up an hour of overtime on each of 15 days. Kroll is paid about \$20 an hour and is entitled to time-and-a-half pay after working 40 hours in one week, the complaint says.

The lawsuit alleges a violation of the Fair Labor Standards Act by the city for failing to pay Kroll for time spent “attending and traveling to her medical treatments.”

Kroll is seeking payment of the unpaid overtime as well as attorneys fees and costs. She is also seeking an order barring the city from denying her overtime for future medical treatment.

Nanticoke Mayor Rich Wiaterowski said he had not yet seen the lawsuit but added that an arbitrator sided with the city in April regarding a grievance about Kroll’s overtime request.

“We already won that case,” Wiaterowski said.

According to the arbitrator’s opinion, there was no dispute that the city paid Kroll’s full salary and medical costs while she was out of work for the week.

When Kroll returned to duty, Police Chief Thomas Wall told her to try and schedule her physical therapy appointments outside of work hours, and he subsequently denied Kroll’s requests for overtime pay, the opinion says.

Arbitrator James M. Darby, who is the chairman of the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board, denied the grievance, finding that the city did not violate the collective bargaining agreement by denying the overtime.

“The evidence shows that the city has never paid officers overtime to attend rehabilitation sessions during non-work hours,” Darby wrote.

5/28/2018

The Fab Four and so much more

Jack Smiles - Citizens' Voice

The “Grammys Salute to the Beatles” aired on CBS in February 2014, the 50th anniversary of the Beatles’ introduction to America on the Ed Sullivan Show on Feb. 9, 1964. The Grammys Salute was billed as “The Night That Changed America.”

It was certainly a night that changed Edd Raineri, who was 11 at the time and living in Nanticoke where his family ran a fruit and produce business. As he watched and listened to the long haired John, Paul, George and Ringo perform live on a black and white antenna TV that night, he was transfixed.

As he put it, “Later that night, I remember going upstairs to the bathroom mirror and combing my hair down over my forehead. They were like nothing I had ever seen or heard before. There was no turning back after that.”

Indeed he went on a journey deep into world of Beatlemania and 1960’s pop culture and never “turned back.”

Today, he has his own radio show “The Beatledd Fab Four Hour.” The weekly program airs live at 7 p.m. Fridays on King’s College radio WRKC-FM 88.5 and streams live online at wrkc.kings.edu. The eighth anniversary of the show is this month and to commemorate the show’s success, he took some questions from Public Square.

Q. What are your earliest memories of being a music fan?

A. I think the first record I ever bought was “Conscience” by James Darren in 1962. I met him a few years ago and have

a photo of he and I holding up that record. But it was certainly The Beatles who impacted me the most in many ways.

Q. Were your parents into music?

A. My parents were not into music. In fact, I don't think my father ever turned on the radio in his car. And he disliked the Beatles his entire life.

Q. How many Beatleests have you been to?

A. I started going to Beatleests in 1995 and have been to many over the years, including 'ests in England and Amsterdam. I've always been thrilled to meet personalities who historically brushed up against The Beatles. Their stories fascinate me.

Q. How many Beatles' connected people have you met?

A. I've met dozens and dozens of Beatles' connected people ... family members, musicians, recording engineers, business associates. Our special guest list at The Beatledd Fab Four Hour over the last eight years is a "Who's Who" of the 60's. I also did the very last interview with Davy Jones of The Monkees. He died four days later.

Q. Your most memorable episodes and guests?

A. My interview with Spanky McFarlane of "Spanky & Our Gang" comes to mind. She had recently lost her son and she broke down during the interview. All of a sudden, it became a Barbara Walters type interview and I had to edit out a lot of silence so she could compose herself. I've also had wonderful radio chats with Gary Lewis, Tommy James, Pete Best, Brian Ray from Paul McCartney's band, May Pang, Chad & Jeremy, Mike Pender of The Searchers, Dawn Wells from "Gilligan's Island," Butch Patrick from "The Munsters." There are so many on the list.

Q. How many solo shows by Beatles have you seen?

A. I've seen McCartney perform many times, including in his hometown of Liverpool. Ringo, a few times. I never got to see George perform live. I never saw John Lennon but I'm pretty good friends with his sister, Julia, and Gary Van Scyoc of Elephant's Memory, who was John's bass player in the early 70's. I've actually stood in Lennon's bedroom in Liverpool where he lived during the onset of Beatlemania. He could never have imagined, looking out the window there, the impact he and the Beatles would have around the world.

Q. How many rock shows do you estimate you've seen and which one stand out besides McCartney and Ringo?

A. Well over 100. I've been going to rock shows since Joe Nardone first started putting on shows here in Wilkes-Barre well over 40 years ago. I remember, as a teenager, interviewing Bob Seger backstage at the old Comerford Theater on Public Square. And Delaney & Bonnie and Ian Anderson of Jethro Tull. I always enjoyed seeing The Stones, The Who and David Bowie as well.

Q. Before your radio show, how did your music interest manifest?

A. When I was a kid, my parents made me take accordion lessons. I was a pretty good accordion player in my time. But guitars were on the way in and I missed the boat. In the late 70's, I was a pop songwriter and signed a lot of material to music publishers in New York City, including Screen Gems-EMI. And all of the songs were written on my accordion. That used to freak out the A&R reps. In 1983, as "Eric Rain & The Altar Boys," I released a single, "Sorry"/"T.J.", on my own record label, "Micki McBozzer Records".

Q. How did you get the idea for the radio show?

A. I had been a guest on The Sue Henry Show on WILK as a kind of Beatles expert. In fact, I arranged for three Beatles' related personalities to join me: Sid Bernstein, the promoter who brought The Beatles to Shea Stadium; Alf Bicknell, who had been The Beatles' limo driver; and Sam Leach, a Liverpool dance hall promoter who had worked with The Beatles before they were famous. Anyway, Sue eventually asked me if I wanted to do my own Beatles radio show on WRKC, Radio King's College, where she is general manager. And so The Beatledd Fab Four Hour was born. The first show aired on May 7, 2010.

Q. How did it grow?

A. The show has grown on its own merit. We're not afraid to color outside the lines and do not limit the music to classic Beatles recordings. The goal is to entertain Beatles' fans and those who loved the 60's era. We've had over 200 special guests on the program. It's just amazing what you can do on college radio vs. "cookie cutter" corporate commercial radio. And because of Facebook, we have listeners all over the world. I was once at a McCartney concert in Washington D.C. and a fan from Japan recognized me.

Q. How much prep goes into a show? How much off the cuff?

Varies week to week. Sometimes 90 minutes or so, when I know exactly where I want to go with it that week.

Sometimes three hours. There are two separate pieces to each show that require attention: the music play list and the dialogue, which may include some research and guests.

I like to work from a script. Each show is broadcast live. We only have one hour to make it happen, with a guy on the air before me, and a guy coming on after me. So each show has a well-planned hour. Each show has a distinct

choreographed beginning, middle and end. There certainly is spontaneity during the show but I always know where I'm going next. We generally nail it within 60 minutes.

Q. You also produce rock shows. Talk about that.

A. Doing the radio show has serendipitously led to putting on some fantastic shows at The F.M. Kirby Center. In 2015, I brought "1964 The Tribute" to the Kirby and last year, brought "Liverpool Legends" and "Shawn Klush as Elvis." I'm bringing a big 1960s icon to the Kirby Center Dec. 2 — the legendary Johnny Rivers. The guy had nine Top Ten hits and 17 in the Top 40. Gonna be a big show.

A. Favorite song?

Hmm ... "Somewhere Over The Rainbow" by Judy Garland and "Moon River" by Henry Mancini or Andy Williams. After those two, there are hundreds tied for third. My favorite Beatle song is still "She Loves You," but "Beatledd" knows more than Beatles

5/23/2018

Greater Nanticoke Area Educational Center

Citizens Voice

Six students from the Greater Nanticoke Area Educational Center were finalists in the annual Fine Arts Fiesta Poetry Contest. They each received a certificate from The Wyoming Valley Poetry Society and were invited to read their poems to the public on May 20 on Public Square. Their poems were submitted by their reading teachers, Lisa Kapral and Carol Hromisin.

Finalists — Sixth Grade: first place, "My Grandma" by Jenna Thomas; second place, "Teardrop" by Rylie Lewis; honorable mention, "Family" by Ryan Kenney; honorable mention, "Try" by Kiersten Johnson.

Seventh Grade: first place, "Along the Way" by Nicholas Neipert; honorable mention, "Raindrops and Rose Petals" by Maura Jenceleski.

5/17/2018

Nanticoke man files suit against county DA's office

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man has filed a federal malicious prosecution lawsuit against the Luzerne County District Attorney's Office, alleging he was arrested on "trumped up charges" after splitting up with the niece of a county detective.

Damian Caban alleges county Detective Charles Balogh "turned a blind eye toward potentially exculpatory evidence" when his niece, Janelle Everetts Skipalis raised allegations against Caban following their split on Dec. 19, 2015.

"The defendant Balogh knew that (Caban) was the victim of false statements by Janelle Everetts Skipalis, but because defendant Balogh intended to protect and favor his niece, Skipalis, he instead used his position as a county detective to charge (Caban) with trumped up charges, without probable cause," Wilkes-Barre attorney Andrew J. Katsock III wrote in the complaint.

The lawsuit names as defendants Balogh as well as the Luzerne County District Attorney's Office. District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis declined to comment Wednesday.

According to the complaint, Skipalis and Caban got engaged on Nov. 6, 2015. The couple planned to move into a home in Hanover Twp., and Caban put \$6,000 down toward the purchase and spent another \$5,000 on renovations, the lawsuit said.

But on Dec. 19, 2015, Skipalis told Caban she wouldn't marry him and that he could not stay in the house, according to the complaint. The couple got into an argument and then Skipalis, with the "help, advice and assistance" of Balogh, filed charges against her former fiance, the lawsuit alleges.

Court documents show Hanover Twp. police arrested Caban on charges of simple assault, harassment and trespassing after Skipalis alleged he had forced his way into her home and grabbed her hair during a struggle. The complaint alleged Caban injured Skipalis' head and face during the altercation, and that he threatened to kill her.

The lawsuit alleges that during a preliminary hearing, Assistant District Attorney Angela Sperrazza threatened to file more charges against Caban unless he admitted guilt. Caban refused, the complaint said.

Court records show the district attorney's office subsequently added charges of making terroristic threats and reckless endangerment against Caban.

"As was threatened and promised, the Luzerne County district attorney charged (Caban) with additional criminal charges because he refused to admit guilt," Katsock wrote.

The state Attorney General's Office later took over the case and Caban, who maintained his innocence, was found not guilty on all counts at trial.

The lawsuit alleges Caban was wrongfully accused and that the DA's office "grossly over-charged him" solely because Skipalis' uncle is a Luzerne County detective.

The suit alleges malicious prosecution, false arrest, defamation and failure by the DA's office to adequately train and supervise Balogh.

Caban is seeking damages for humiliation, lost wages, legal bills and other expenses, in addition to punitive damages against Balogh.

The lawsuit said Caban has also filed a state lawsuit against Skipalis over a \$26,000 diamond engagement ring and a \$2,300 gold chain and charm that Balogh has maintained possession of, despite the relationship's termination.

5/17/2018

Storm leaves behind a big mess

Denise Allabaugh - Citizens Voice

Cleanup was under way in Nanticoke on Wednesday after a storm with high winds and heavy rains caused severe damage on Tuesday.

Nanticoke firefighters responded to more than 20 calls of trees, power lines and street poles down.

Nanticoke Fire Lt. John Polifka said some properties were damaged as well as a parked vehicle when a street light pole fell on it on Broad Street near Patriot Square.

The storm's damaging winds toppled a tree in Nanticoke Cemetery and caused damage at Patriot Square, where police tape surrounded an area where a large tree snapped. Nanticoke public works employees were still cleaning up downed trees Wednesday.

Trees were uprooted in Quality Hill Playground, which is closed to the public for safety reasons until the damage is cleaned up.

In all, six trees in the playground were damaged, said Kenny Gill, president of the Quality Hill Playground Association.

Conklin's Tree Service of Wapwallopen removed three downed trees in the playground that blocked an alley.

Jamie Conklin, owner of Conklin's Tree Service, said in addition to removing downed trees at the playground, he received more than 25 calls in three hours to remove trees that fell on houses and vehicles in other areas from Hazleton to Hunlock Twp.

Many trees were uprooted as a result of the high winds and he was busy Wednesday responding to emergencies. He plans to return to Quality Hill Playground to remove the other downed trees.

About 30 feet of fencing in Quality Hill Playground was gone from the trees falling on it, Gill said. Trees fell on fencing that surrounds the basketball court and the tennis court.

Gill said Quality Hill Playground Association officials are waiting to find out if insurance will cover the damage or if it will be considered an "act of God."

As a nonprofit organization, he said the association raises money to do park improvements and not to respond to "Mother Nature's wrath."

If people have storm damage to their homes, it could be covered under their homeowners' insurance policies or if there is damage to their vehicles, it could be covered under their auto insurance, said local insurance agent George Shadie.

Shadie recommended people notify insurance agents of damage as soon as possible. He said to take pictures immediately and press insurance companies about repairing and cleaning up the damaged areas.

"Confirm their conversations in writing," Shadie said. "Either use insurance company recommended contractors or confirmed reputable ones."

Shadie said his Jaguar convertible was damaged by tree limbs and flying debris in Butler Twp. from Tuesday's storm which he said is covered under his auto comprehensive coverage. He said his deductible is zero and it's important for people to know their deductibles on all their policies.

"This is money they'll have to pay," Shadie said. "For example, if you have a \$500 deductible and the agreed damages are \$1,500, your insurance company will only pay \$1,000."

In addition to downed trees, the storm also left a number of people throughout Luzerne County without power, including 397 PPL customers by late Wednesday afternoon. PPL regional affairs

director Alana Roberts said all power should be restored to customers in Luzerne County by 11 p.m. Thursday.

About 500 workers were working to restore power day and night "as quickly and safely as possible" throughout PPL's service territory, Roberts said. Crews were brought in from other states such as Tennessee, Kentucky and Illinois. She

said crews will move into Luzerne County after restoring power in the Lehigh Valley area, Harrisburg and Lancaster. By late Wednesday afternoon, nearly all UGI customers in Luzerne County had their power restored, according to the utility's online outage map.

The majority of UGI's power outages were in Union Twp., Conyngham Twp., Ross Twp. and Hunlock Twp. Crews were working late in the day to restore power to those areas. The remainder of UGI customers should have their power restored Thursday, UGI spokesman Joe Swope said.

"This storm caused a lot of damage and the consistent rain slowed things up," Swope said.

If you have storm damage and need to file a claim, the Pennsylvania Insurance Department offers these tips:

- o Know your insurance policy, policy number and the customer service line to file a claim.
- o Read and understand what your insurance policy states.
- o Keep a record of everyone you spoke to on the telephone, including names, dates and times of the conversations, as well as any exchanges in writing.
- o Ask questions if you do not understand something.
- o Photograph and make a list of the damaged items.
- o Save any receipts for materials purchased for repairs.
- o Do not throw away damaged property unless a claims adjuster advises you to do so.
- o Protect your property from further damage by making temporary repairs until your insurance company is able to advise you.
- o Do not have permanent repairs made until your insurance company has inspected the property and you have reached an agreement on the cost of repairs. If you make permanent repairs before the adjuster has seen the damage, your claim could be denied.
- o After you file a claim form and the insurance adjuster has inspected the damage, the insurance company usually will respond in writing within a week.
- o If your claim is complicated or questionable, the company may request additional time. If you don't hear from the insurance company, call and ask for reason for the delay.
- o Once you and your insurance company agree on the terms of a settlement, the law requires you be sent payment promptly.
- o If your claim is denied, make sure you obtain a letter explaining the reason.
- o If you are not satisfied, call the Pennsylvania Insurance Department, 1-877-881-6388.

5/11/2018

Girls basketball: Nanticoke Area finds head coach

Steve Bennett - Citizens Voice

While he was growing up in Nanticoke, Ed Grant always made sure to get to as many Nanticoke Area basketball games as he could. In fact, Alan Yendrzejewski was his favorite player. And when Grant finally was able to take the court as a seventh grader for the Trojans, Yendrzejewski was his first coach in the program.

The two continued to bond over the game of basketball, and for seven out of the last nine seasons, Grant served as Yendrzejewski's assistant coach with the girls program at the school.

And when Yendrzejewski decided to step away from the job at the end of April, Grant thought it would be the perfect opportunity for him to slide one seat over on the bench.

On Thursday, the Nanticoke Area school board voted unanimously to name Grant the new girls basketball coach at the school. "I'm just excited about it, there is a lot of tradition," Grant said. "I'm proud to be the coach. This is where I went to school. I came up through the program. It means a lot to be among the coaches that have come through here. There have been a lot of great ones."

During Yendrzejewski's nine years with the program, the Trojanettes won four Wyoming Valley Conference league titles and appeared in three district championship games, winning one of them. The Trojanettes also won four state playoff games.

Grant will inherit a program that will lose three starters from last season's squad that finished 22-6 and advanced to the second round of the state tournament, where it was eliminated by Gwynedd-Mercy.

"Coach Yendrzejewski was my favorite player growing up, I was able to play for him," Grant said. "To be able to take over for him is very special. I am going to keep everything flowing; the philosophy will be the same. We are going to continue to do the things that we believe in with the tradition of the program."

Grant believes the transition will be a smooth one since he is familiar with the girls and they are with him. By not

changing the philosophy, that means the Trojanettes will continue to use their pressing defense to help create turnovers and easy baskets on the offensive end. Although, Grant won't be afraid to tweak a few things in terms of the scheme on the offensive end of the floor.

"We lost three starters from last year, but there were many other girls who contributed off the bench that we expect to flow into the scheme of things," Grant said. "It will be a little bit of a reboot for us."

Now that his hiring is official, Grant's first order of business will be to meet with the returning players and any newcomers as soon as possible. The next step will be to get everything lined up for the summer league and off season program.

"I always wanted to be a head coach at Nanticoke Area," said Grant, who coached the Lake-Lehman boys basketball team for one season. "You can't beat the community following at all the games. The fans are there before any of the games are ready to start. I can't thank the school board enough for giving me this opportunity, and (Yendrzejewski) for all he has done for me over the years."

5/11/2018

Boys soccer: Matussek stepping down as Nanticoke Area coach

Eric Shultz – Citizens Voice

Back in the late 1980s, Mark Matussek hardly knew a thing about soccer.

He knew who all-time great Pelé was, but had never played or coached the game. By 1989, he had only a few years of youth coaching experience to point to as his soccer background.

That's not quite the resume of an average high school coach nowadays, but Matussek remembers Wyoming Valley soccer still in its early stages back then. In 1989, it was enough to make Matussek the man to start Nanticoke Area's boys soccer program from scratch — a position he's finally ready to give up.

After 29 seasons, Matussek is stepping down as the Trojans only boys soccer head coach to date.

"I've been thinking about it on and off for the past two seasons. I just think that 29 years — long time," Matussek said Thursday night. "And I was thinking, maybe it's time to give someone else an opportunity to run the program."

Matussek called the move "the toughest decision I've ever had to make." He had his resignation letter typed up and saved, but it took some time to finally hit the "send" button and deliver it to athletic director Ken Bartuska.

Nearly three decades of coaching Trojans soccer would have never happened, though, had it not been for a family friend.

Bartuska recalls his sister's neighbor suggesting he head to a weekend clinic to learn how to coach soccer. Nanticoke was starting a youth program and needed people to help run the team.

"I didn't know anything about it, so how can I coach?" he figured.

Matussek gave it a shot, though, and a weekend at a Crestwood coaches clinic turned into three years of youth experience, which turned into a job recommendation from parents for the brand-new Trojans job. Then-AD Jim Davis gave him a call, and Matussek, a substitute teacher at the time, figured it wouldn't hurt to start the program.

It was rough at first.

Matussek's first team included roughly 24 players, but just four freshmen with prior playing experience. Its first game, a trip to Crestwood, resulted in a 19-0 loss.

The Trojans finally won their first game in 1990 at Wyoming Area, the first of a three-win, two-tie season.

"The bus driver drove around town blowing the horn (for the first win), and people didn't know what was going on," Matussek said.

By the time his four experienced freshmen in '89 became seniors, "they honestly got sick of losing," Matussek said, and the Trojans went undefeated in league play and made it to the 1992 league title game.

That kicked off a nice run of winning seasons throughout the decade.

But perhaps Matussek's biggest career highlight came in 2003.

Nanticoke Area qualified for its first District 2 title game after beating then-undefeated Dallas, 5-1, he said, and it qualified for states despite losing in the title game. The Trojans opened their first state tournament against defending state runner-up Eastern Lebanon Catholic and held a second-half lead before falling, 3-2, to the eventual PIAA champs.

"That was the only time as a coach that I've lost a game and felt really good about it," Matussek said.

Nanticoke Area's last season under Matussek ended in the D2 Class 2A quarterfinals. Wherever the next coach takes the Trojans in future seasons, Matussek hopes he or she can boost participation numbers. "It's been very difficult the past few years getting kids out," Matussek said. "I'm hoping whoever comes in can get into the youth program and help with the youth program."

5/11/2018

Long-time Nanticoke boys soccer coach Matusek won't return for 30th season

Dave Rosengrant – Times Leader

For nearly three decades, Nanticoke boys soccer hasn't had a head coach besides Mark Matusek. That will come to an end for the upcoming season as Matusek, the longest-tenured coach in the Wyoming Valley Conference, informed Nanticoke Area athletic director Ken Bartuska that he would not be returning for his 30th season as head coach of the Trojans. Matusek, who couldn't be immediately reached for comment on Thursday, piled up more than 250 wins since the program's inception in 1989.

Matusek racked up several division titles in his 29 seasons, with Meyers being runner-up to the Trojans on a few occasions, and the Mohawks getting the best of Matusek a few times as well.

"Any time you have a coach with that kind of tenure, you have a great coach," said Meyers coach Jack Nolan, now the longest-tenured coach in Division 2 of the Wyoming Valley Conference. "Any time you have a coach that's been around a long time, he gets the best out of his kids.

"I was actually a little upset because they are going up to Triple-A this year and up to Division 1, and we wouldn't get to play them. ... Him leaving is going to be a big loss for the league and the program and the sport."

Even when the Trojans didn't have a division-winning team on the field, Matusek's teams were always tough to beat. Just a few years ago in 2016, the team finished with just seven wins in the regular season but managed to win two matches as the No. 9 seed in the District 2 Class 2A Tournament. That included ousting top-seeded Blue Ridge to reach the semifinals before losing a one-goal game to Wyoming Seminary.

"We all have those couple years when we're rebuilding and you know it's going to be a struggle, but Mark was always competitive," Nolan said. "And you always had to have your team prepared because you knew it was going to be a tough game.

"That's a testament to Mark and his knowledge of the sport and how much he gets out of the kids. He's put a lot of time and effort into it and deserves all the accolades he's received, and the time off in his retirement."

5/11/2018

Preliminary budget for Nanticoke Area includes tax hike

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The tax rate on properties in the Greater Nanticoke Area School District would increase 3.6 percent, according to a preliminary budget proposed Thursday.

The proposed budget would allocate nearly \$30 million. The school board voted 6-3 to propose the budget for the 2018-19 fiscal year and is required to adopt a final budget by June 30. The fiscal year starts July 1.

The proposed tax hike would increase the property tax rate to 11.9113 mills. A mill is \$1 on every \$1,000 in property assessment.

The tax increase also does not exceed the state index, which is the maximum amount allowed without the approval of a voter referendum or state exception amount.

Business Manager Al Melone recommended raising the tax rate to the index because state funding is not going up.

"We have to take care of ourselves," Melone said. "GNA takes care of GNA."

The district cut \$1.1 million in expenses that were in a "rough and dirty version" of the budget in January, Melone said.

The retirement of six employees helped reduce spending by about \$500,000, Melone said.

5/7/2018

National Nurses Week: Finding her real role in life

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With a mother who taught high school music and a father who taught college theater, small wonder Kyra Yezefski first appeared on stage when she was 6, and has been in "10 or 15" productions in her 28 years. The bigger question may be, how did she end up not only working as a nurse, but being so good at it.

"I love science and I love music," she explained. "Theater is a hard career to make a living at, but I didn't have a clue what I wanted to do in science."

After graduating from Greater Nanticoke Area High School (where her mother taught) in 2008, she tried going to Wilkes University (where her father taught) to study biology. But something didn't quite click, until she decided to

become a Certified Nursing Assistant. She liked it so much she went back to school, this time in the nursing program at Wilkes-Barre Area Career and Technical Center, and hasn't looked back.

"At Guardian Elder Care, a big part of my day is handling the medicines, taking vital signs, assessing the residence day to day, doing any kinds of treatment that needs to be done," she said. "But really, my favorite part is just talking to them, spending time with them."

In fact, becoming a nurse meant she got less of that. "The hall was split between three CNAs. As a nurse, you have responsibility for all 28 people. It can get pretty busy."

Yezeffski said she enjoys hearing what the residents have to say.

"A lot of times they want to tell you about what they did in their lifetime. Sometimes they just want to talk about what's going on that day. A lot of them don't have families that come around. The nurses and CNAs that work there, they really look forward to seeing us."

Though she's only been a nurse since December, Yezeffski clearly feels the calling, and has no plans to look for another career. She expects to advance her training and eventually become a Registered Nurse. "Probably within the next year I'll get started," she said, "but right now I'm content where I am."

Of course, she still loves music, and she still sings every chance she gets. "My favorite Broadway show is Into the Woods, followed by Le Miz or maybe Wicked," she said. "I also love Whitney Houston."

But she doesn't feel as strong an urge to return to the stage as she does to help the people she now serves, despite the fact that she started showing up in her father's productions of Shakespeare plays when she was around 6 years old, albeit without any speaking part - or really much of a part at all.

"I was shy as a young kid, I didn't want to talk. Dad made these signs and I'd walk across the stage with them," announcing the start of the next act, say.

Yezeffski heaps high praise on her husband, a high school sweetheart who shared the stage with her in productions of Carousel, Into the Woods and Guys and Dolls. He now works as a lighting and sound designer for Effects Unlimited in Pittston.

"He paid for my education, for all the stuff I needed," she said. Which may be why her favorite Whitney Houston tune is "I have nothing."

"Share my life, take me for what I am, 'Cause I'll never change all my colors for you ..."

Kyra Yezeffski

Age: 28

Born: Nanticoke

School: Greater Nanticoke Area High School class of 2008, Wilkes-Barre Area Career and Technical Center practical nursing program.

Became a nurse in December, previously worked as a Certified Nursing Assistant.

Works at Guardian Elder Care, Nanticoke.

5/5/2018

Information sought on historical event

Letter to the Editor - Citizens Voice/ Published: May 5, 2018

Editor: A few weeks ago marked the 82nd Anniversary of a very sad day in this area's history. On Good Friday, April 10, 1936, a tragic series of events unfolded in the Wyoming Valley, which became known as The Good Friday Bombings.

Six packages containing cigar box bombs were mailed to Thomas Maloney, of Georgetown; Michael Gallagher, of Hanover Twp., Harry Goulstone, of Kingston; Judge Benjamin Jones, of Wilkes-Barre; sheriff and funeral director Luther Kniffen, of Wilkes-Barre; and James Gorman, of Hazleton. Sadly, on that Good Friday, Thomas Maloney opened the first package, wounding him, his son and daughter. He and his son died from their wounds, and his daughter survived.

Later in the day, Michael Gallagher also opened a package, which killed him instantly and wounded his son-in-law, Clinton Lehman. Ultimately, Michael Fugmann, of Hanover Twp., was arrested, tried, convicted and put to death for the crime. In Fugmann's defense, the names of Big Joe Danowski and Big Tony Denovige were also mentioned.

I am a member of the local historical societies and am interested in researching this historical event. If anyone has any information on the Good Friday Bombings of 1936, any of the people involved, or are relatives of these people please contact the Nanticoke Historical Society at Nanticokehistorical@yahoo.com or by calling 570-258-1367 or myself at 570-606-8443.

Mike Chmiola - Member - Nanticoke Historical Society

4/30/2018

Yendrzejewski stepping down at Nanticoke Area

Steve Bennett - Citizens Voice

Ever since he was 12 years old, all Alan Yendrzejewski knew was Nanticoke Area basketball. Whether it was a practice or a game for him at that young of an age, he knew where he was going to spend his holiday weekends.

Now, he will be spending that time at home.

Yendrzejewski announced that he is stepping down as the head girls basketball coach at the school after a nine year run. He plans on spending more time with his family, particularly with his children age 10, 8 and 6.

"I talked to the girls on Friday, it is on my terms," Yendrzejewski said. "It's just time to take a little break and recharge the batteries. There is no reason. I do tell people that every Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's, I have been doing this since I was 12 years old. It is all I've known. I'm looking forward to spending time with my kids. I'm going to get to see what it is like not having to go to practice the day after Thanksgiving and Christmas."

Yendrzejewski recently wrapped up his ninth year with the Trojanettes, finishing 22-6 overall and losing to Gwynedd-Mercy in the second round of the state tournament, for the second consecutive year. Yendrzejewski began his coaching career as an assistant with the boys program under current Nanticoke Area athletic director Ken Bartuska, before moving on to become the head coach of the girls program.

While the head coach of the Trojanettes, Yendrzejewski led the team to three district championship games, winning one of them. He also won four league titles and four state playoff games.

"It was a tough decision, it was a proud nine years working with the kids," Yendrzejewski said. "I am happy to have the opportunity to do that. I always respected the tradition of the program, and in the meantime add to it. I think we have done that during my time. I am just really proud of what we accomplished."

4/16/2018

Nanticoke pulls together for leukemia-stricken mayor, Richie Wiaterowski

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Nanticoke rallied for one of its own on Sunday.

Half a world away, another man is helping him out.

Since November, the city's mayor, Richie Wiaterowski, has been battling acute myeloid leukemia or AML. The city gathered together at the Nanticoke Armory to raise money to help cover the costs of his medical bills.

Wiaterowski said the support was "overwhelming."

"My doctors said I wasn't even supposed to be here, but there was no way I could miss it," he said, pulling aside the surgical mask covering his face.

Since his diagnosis in November, Wiaterowski said that he's only been able to spend a total of 20 days at home. The rest of that time has been spent in and out of hospitals in Philadelphia.

But that hasn't put a damper on the love he has for his town. Wiaterowski said that scenes like Sunday's were what he wants people known Nanticoke for.

"These are Nanticoke people. They're good people," he said "When someone's sick, they come out and pull together." And pull together they did.

Throughout the day, more than 1,000 people came in to support the mayor, according to his sister Nancy Potsko.

Residents of Nanticoke and others packed into the armory to try food and beer, listen to live music or simply to offer the mayor well. Many of those supporters donned bright orange t-shirts that read "The Mayor's Battle Is My Battle."

Potsko, who organized Sunday's event, said she was thrilled by the turnout.

"It means a lot; it's amazing, overwhelming and emotional all at once," she said.

In addition to the other festivities, Potsko said attendees could have tried their hands at winning one of 137 raffle baskets or even a \$1,000 door prize.

Wiaterowski's wife, Wendy, expressed sincere thanks to everyone who took part on Sunday.

"Everyone in the state of PA is praying for us," Wendy said.

According to Wendy, things have been progressing along well for her husband. The mayor received a perfect match for a marrow donor, a young man from Germany, and since the donation was made, things have been going well.

"The doctors say he's doing amazing. I update everyone on Facebook about how he's been doing, and lately it's been

boring; we like boring,” she said with a laugh.

For his part, Wiaterowski is looking forward to May 13. So far, it’s been 72 days since the marrow transplant.

“The magic day is 100,” he said, indicating that May 13 end date. “If we get there okay, I lose a lot of restrictions; I won’t need to wear this mask anymore.”

4/14/2018

Benefit planned for Nanticoke mayor recovering from cancer

bwellock@citizensvoice.com

May 13 is Day 100 for Rich Wiaterowski.

That Sunday will mark 100 days since the 44-year-old Nanticoke man, the city’s mayor, received a stem cell transplant that helped him recover from acute myeloid leukemia.

Life has changed dramatically for him and his family since his diagnosis in November 2017.

It kept him from the basketball gym where he loves to cheer for the Nanticoke Trojans and share in the camaraderie of his hometown. A weakened immune system meant most of the games were off-limits on doctors’ orders. He watched while his children shoveled the snow. His job site changed from a dusty construction site to light duty on a computer at home. Hunting and fishing had to wait while chemotherapy and total body irradiation prepared him to receive stem cells to replace his own.

The Wiaterowskis don’t know the donor, but his cells were an excellent match that helped save Rich’s life.

When Rich Wiaterowski first learned a transplant could come from an anonymous donor, not knowing the identity didn’t seem like a big deal. Then came the day a coordinator with Be The Match, an organization that helps arrange stem cell transplants, called their house to tell the Wiaterowskis they had a donor.

“Once I got home, I opened the email, and it said scroll down, keep going, then ‘Your donor is: (From) Germany, 28 years old, O-positive (blood type.)’ I got very emotional. I broke down and cried,” he said.

For now, that’s all he knows. The donor knows even less about him. A year after donation, the organization will ask both parties if they want to share their contact information.

In the meantime, Wiaterowski continues to recover.

This Sunday is day 72 post-transplant. His family, friends and supporters will gather for a benefit event to show their support and to gather funds to help the family with the thousands of dollars in medical bills that health insurance didn’t cover.

“It is crazy the way people in this town have come together,” he said. “When someone is sick, not just me, anybody that we’ve seen go through a sickness like this, the town pulls together.”

His son’s sixth grade class sent get-well cards. He’s gotten cards from friends and strangers. He’s kept every one.

“It’s overwhelming,” said his wife, Wendy Wiaterowski. “It’s amazing how much people care, genuinely care, and want to send love and prayers and warm wishes.”

Wiaterowski moved home from the hospital in the beginning of March, although he still travels to Fox Chase Cancer Center in Philadelphia for weekly follow-up appointments.

Recovery has been months in the making.

He realized something was amiss in November 2017. He was exhausted and his bones ached.

When his doctor called to say he was coming over to discuss the results of a blood test, he knew the diagnosis would be bad.

Tests at Fox Chase confirmed the news, and he started chemotherapy that day. More than two months later, he was receiving a stem cell transplant.

“Right now, he’s doing very well. In (the physicians’) eyes, he’s doing remarkable. There’s lot of positive with that. But there’s still a long road ahead,” Wendy Wiaterowski said.

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Benefit for Rich Wiaterowski

WHEN: 1 to 8 p.m., Sunday

WHERE: Nanticoke Armory, 490 E. Main St., Nanticoke

DETAILS: A \$10 donation at the door includes entrance to the event, one soda/water ticket, food and entertainment. Children 12 years old and younger are free.

Parking is available at the armory. Overflow parking is also available at Greater Nanticoke Area High School, and a

shuttle will leave from the bus port next to the high school near Church Street. There will be a cash bar, silent auction and other raffles.

Entertainment includes:

- 1 p.m.: Acousticstein
- 2 p.m.: Strawberry Jam Duo
- 3 p.m.: Doug and Sean Acoustic
- 5 p.m.: Ol' Cabbage
- 6 p.m.: Rhythm and Booze
- 7 p.m.: 40 lb. Head

4/15/2018

A NEW KIND OF VIBE LOCAL FIRM PUTS THE 'STORY' BACK IN 'HISTORY' WITH UNIQUE, DIGITALLY-LAYERED APPROACH TO STORYTELLING

Lois A. Grimm - Citizens Voice

For anyone whose had to sit through a history class filled with dates, obscure names and nebulous references to laws, social movements and events, the word 'exciting' rarely enters the picture. According to a 2003 Gallup Poll, only 10 percent of responding teens named history as one of their favorite classes.

Conversely, popular media derived from historical events has long been popular among book and movie audiences. Books such as "The Other Boleyn Girl," "The Help," and "Cold Mountain" were wildly popular bestsellers. Moviegoers couldn't get enough of "Glory," "Saving Private Ryan" or "Schindler's List."

So what gives? Why do people hate history class but love books based on historical figures and events?|

The founders of VizVibe, a transmedia company in Nanticoke, think they have the answer.

"History can be dry. What we are doing is engaging," Vic Deluca, director of sales and marketing of the fledgling tech media company said recently.

Combining media of all types from video to mobile apps to photographs and everything in between, VizVibe seeks to make history come alive for current and future students. Their inaugural project, and the catalyst for the existence of the company itself, depicts the Selma marches of March 1965. The idea took hold after Kevin Jones, one of the founders of VizVibe, and Jim Gavenus, a self-described photo storyteller, threw around the idea of a documentary on the Selma marches.

Gavenus, who is a photography professor at Luzerne County Community College, has been documenting individuals involved in the Civil Rights movement for the past 15 years. He routinely traveled to Alabama to photograph and hear the stories of Americans who not only participated in the marches but in other aspects of the movement. Recently, Gavenus' work was shown in the "Selma to Montgomery" exhibit at the college, along with the work of Spider Martin, the prolific photojournalist who covered the marches in 1965. The exhibit will be traveling nationally.

While the idea of a documentary on Martin's work was appealing, both Gavenus and Jones expressed concern that the length and breadth of the Martin collection couldn't be accurately portrayed in that type of format.

"When you make a documentary, there are budget and time constraints," Jones said.

Gavenus's approach to storytelling helped propel VizVibe's products.

"If I'm going to tell a story, I have to experience it. It makes it real for me. I think you need to be a participant,"

Gavenus said of his work.

With VizVibe's approach to education, anyone with access to a tablet or smartphone can experience history and all that goes into it.

Tentatively titled Selma AR (augmented reality), the transmedia experience will allow students to not only view a photo of Alabama state troopers advancing on a group of marchers, they'll be able to see video of the incident. Then, using AR cards, students can view 3D representations of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, which marchers crossed on their way to the state capitol.

VizVibe has access to Spider Martin's collection of photos, many of which have never been seen by the general public and which number more than 3,000, as well as the entire collection of the National Voting Rights Museum and Institute in Selma, Ala.

Many of the photographs in the collection have notes written on the back of them by Martin himself and detail the experiences he had while documenting the marches. As Gavenus put it, these notes are "ultra first-person history" and provide another lens through which to view the iconic marches.

“This is going to be a multiple platform way to tell stories. It’s a totally immersive interactive experience,” Deluca said. While there are some apps available that are based on history and other educational subjects, they are often lacking in content, Jones said. They only go so far. VizVibe believes learning about any subject, not just history, is a multilayered experience.

“Being accurate is key. The content is limited right now (in existing apps) and there is nothing linking the learner to additional sources,” Jones said.

What Jones, Deluca and their coworkers, Jeremy Stair and Eric Thomas, seek to do is bring all of the story telling elements together to form a cohesive experience for learners.

Humble beginnings

In February 2017, when VizVibe was founded, they opened shop in an unassuming building with a space over Hands on Learning Daycare and Preschool on South Walnut Street, Nanticoke.

The growth of VizVibe has been completely self-funded by the four men and each brings a unique skill set to the business. Jones, who is the owner, is also a professor, and coordinator of the communication arts department at Luzerne County Community College. He has an extensive background in multimedia and interactive design including broadcasting, advertising, television, and radio experience.

Thomas has previous experience with web and app design, 2D/3D animation, and audio production while Deluca utilizes his commercial photography and printing background to round out the team’s expertise.

All four say they believe the business has the opportunity to change the way teachers present information to students ... and not just from a historical perspective.

“I hated school but I would have loved to have VizVibe,” Stair said. Stair is in charge of user interface design and development. He emphasized that the app part of the transmedia package is a tool to get to other content.

Jones agreed, saying VizVibe is a full-service shop for any educational organization - schools, museums, etc. They are currently working on a space package which will allow students to use AR cards to travel to different planets, see Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin descend from Apollo 11 and take their first lunar steps and hear the audio between the astronauts and mission control.

“The possibilities are really endless,” Jones said. “Take the Selma project. That’s just one part of the Civil Rights movement. There are so many directions you can go with it,” he added.

Part of their business plan includes helping struggling school districts access their products through the use of preloaded smart devices which would include “bundles” depending on what the schools were looking for. According to Jones, education bundles could be made for just about any topic you can imagine.

The founders of VizVibe are not only excited about the opportunities their products will provide to students but to the local economy as well. They want to bring more tech jobs to the area and plan on staying in Nanticoke. Their first app, Solar Space AR, is now available on the Apple store and should be available for Android within the next few weeks. VizVibe is beginning work on a Gettysburg project, too.

“Between the college and VizVibe, this is the most excited I’ve been in years to come to work,” Jones said. Thomas, Deluca, and Stair agreed, noting the time and money they’ve invested has been well worth it.

Thomas, the “mad scientist” of the group, is in charge of coding and animation, though he says each member of the foursome delves into all parts of the business.

“We’re a family and a team,” Thomas said.

Jones envisions schools using VizVibe to encourage their students to explore, learn and grow ... which just happens to be the company’s motto.

4/14/2018

Greater Nanticoke Area approves plan to reconfigure grades next year

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The [Greater Nanticoke Area](#) School Board voted Thursday to approve a plan to reconfigure grades in school district buildings next year.

The district plans to close K.M. Smith Elementary School, the only school not located on the district campus off Kosciuszko Street, after the current school year, and open a \$9 million addition to Kennedy Elementary School when the 2018-19 school year starts.

K.M. Smith Elementary School is currently for pre-K, kindergarten and first graders. Next year, students in pre-K through second grade will go to the Kennedy Early Childhood Center.

Students in the third through fifth grade will go to the Elementary Center.

The Educational Center will become a middle school for sixth through eighth grades. The high school, which had started with eighth grade, will start with ninth grade next year. Superintendent Ronald Grevera said the reconfiguration is “a big step” and it will help principals “focus on student achievement.” Grevera thanked board member Tony Prushinski, chairman of the education committee, for his work developing the reconfiguration plan.

4/4/2018

Nanticoke nurse to stand trial over patient death

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A registered nurse whose patient died under her care on Wednesday waived her right to a preliminary hearing, allowing a felony count of neglect of care to move forward to trial.

Kelly E. Levandowski, 39, of Nanticoke, is accused of “intentionally, knowingly or negligently” failing to provide sufficient care to Melvin Johnson, 72, who died after going into cardiac arrest at the Guardian Healthcare and Rehabilitation Center at 147 Old Newport St., on June 20, 2013.

As she left central court Wednesday morning, Levandowski declined to comment. Waiving the charge forward will allow the defense to get discovery in the case and determine how to proceed, defense attorney John Pike said.

According to charges the state Attorney General’s Office filed against Levandowski, the criminal investigation began after the state Department of Health cited Guardian in 2013 for failing to provide adequate monitoring over the incident. The charges say Johnson had suffered from a ruptured aneurism and subsequent bleeding of the brain prior to being admitted at Guardian on the day of her death. She had been on a ventilator, but was weened off of it prior to admission, according to the charges.

According to prosecutors, at least four staff members told Levandowski, a shift supervisor, that they were concerned about Johnson pulling on a breathing tube. Levandowski, however, stayed seated at the nursing station, according to the charges.

Shortly after 7 p.m., Johnson pulled the tube out and Levandowski reinserted it herself, but did not call 911 as required by facility policy, the complaint says. Levandowski also wrote in her notes that 15-minute checks were to continue, although prosecutors say there is no evidence that they had started previously.

About a half-hour later, another nurse discovered that Johnson had again removed the tube and was unresponsive, prosecutors said.

Levandowski claimed to have performed CPR until medics arrived on scene, but no other staff members were able to vouch for her life-saving efforts, according to prosecutors. In fact, one nurse aide told investigators that after Johnson died, Levandowski directed her to fill out a form indicating 15-minute checks had been performed on Johnson since 3 p.m., even though they had not been.

Levandowski has been free on \$25,000 unsecured bail since her arrest in January. She is due back in court for a dispositional hearing on May 24.

Pennsylvania Department of State records show Levandowski remains a registered nurse with a license that expires Oct. 31. Online records show no disciplinary actions against her.

4/1/2018

Ex-Penn State star Hamilton accused of assaulting son, blasts authorities

psokoloski@timesleader.com

A perplexed Harry Hamilton lashed out at authorities this week, accusing investigators of enabling drug sales, embellishing facts and manufacturing evidence against him during a preliminary hearing in Centre County Court. The former Nanticoke Area, Penn State and NFL star defense back swatted away at charges brought by State College police that accuse him of assaulting his teenage son during an attempt to intervene in a situation Hamilton fears could lead the high school student into the world of drugs.

Hamilton believes the boy, a track and field standout who lives in Centre County but is not in Hamilton’s custody, is being influenced by a reputed marijuana dealer who has access to the track team. Hamilton admits to scolding, but not striking, them both.

“You’re talking to a man who is capable of hitting, and has hit, somebody so hard they never played football again,” Hamilton said of a tackle he made during his NFL days with the New York Jets and Tampa Bay Buccaneers. “If I hit someone, there would be hospital reports, emergency reports. You don’t have that. Did I hit the (other) kid? No. Did I

scare the (other) kid like I scared my kid? Yeah.”

State College police charged Hamilton with felony counts of burglary and criminal trespassing, a misdemeanor count of simple assault and two summary offenses of harassment following an incident at his son’s State College residence March 3.

Police say Hamilton, a New Jersey attorney who is defending himself in the case, punched his son and threw a second person to the ground after damaging a front door frame that reportedly had been locked and screen door at the residence before accusing his son of using drugs.

“Interesting,” said Hamilton, who maintains homes in New Jersey, State College and Wilkes-Barre. “They have to embellish it in a way that simply didn’t happen. They (investigators) told the (son’s) mom, ‘We don’t know how he got in, you better get a new lock.’ Meanwhile, the original lock — which was undamaged — gets lost. Nobody can find it.

“There was no proof of a punch — not a picture, not even a mark — except for the kid’s statement,” Hamilton continued, suggesting that statement may have been coerced. “If I hit him, where is the bruise? Where is the proof?”

“That’s the embellishment I’m talking about. That’s this case.”

His preliminary hearing began March 28 and was continued to this Wednesday, although Hamilton will be back in court at 10:30 a.m. Monday for a protection from abuse hearing.

‘I grabbed him’

From Hamilton’s standpoint, the police reports are inaccurate.

He said he arrived at his son’s residence March 3 to check on the welfare of the boy and his mother and knocked on the front door, only to find it unlocked — which Hamilton called a rarity that raised his suspicion.

Once inside, Hamilton said he smelled marijuana coming from an upstairs room as his son came down the steps. After the two exchanged an extended greeting, Hamilton continued, he tried to pull his son out the door and away from what he believed to be an illegal situation with one hand while attempting to open the door with the other.

“When he refuses, that’s when I grab him,” Hamilton said. “I grabbed him as if I was tackling him to get him outside and away from what was going on inside. He’s almost 6-3, weighs as much as some of those lanky receivers I used to cover. He was able to escape the grasp, partially. I got turned around toward the stairs. At this point, I’m hearing, not seeing, there were other people in the house.”

Hamilton said he then received a blow to the back of the head that was sufficient enough to knock him down.

“When I turned to identify the assailant, I believed I was looking into the face of a 6-foot-6 drug dealer who, it looked like, had something in his pants, had his hand in his pants,” Hamilton said. “I grabbed him instantly — there was no way he was getting out of my grasp — and threw him outside.”

Hamilton said he also injured his knee in the process and went to a hospital afterward to receive treatment.

During the altercation, police said, Hamilton punched his son several times and threw him to the ground — a statement Hamilton vigorously disputes.

He said he pushed his son toward the doorway with a short, quick shove that is commonly known as a “punch” in football jargon — similar to an open-handed chuck a defensive back would give to a receiver coming off the line of scrimmage.

“Punch, to me, is to extend a hand with the front part of your hand open,” Hamilton said. “I’m not a boxer. I don’t punch people with a closed hand, you’ll break your knuckles.”

He said he later left through the building’s back door when he noticed the alleged assailant waiting in a car and feared the boy may be carrying a weapon.

“I didn’t want to get shot,” Hamilton said.

‘Being demonized’

Most troubling to Hamilton, he said, is the resistance he’s faced from authorities over the past two years while trying to alert them about what he claims is a serious drug trade in the State College area.

“Where is the investigation into that? The police decided to pass,” said Hamilton, who was a star safety on Penn State’s 1982 national championship team and made 23 interceptions as a defensive back during his eight NFL seasons. “You have a drug war. There is a major cover-up with the Centre County police department. Who’s being protected? Who are they covering up for? It greatly disturbs me.

“They want the headlines,” continued Hamilton, a son of the late and iconic Wyoming Valley community activist and humanitarian Stan Hamilton. “They want the professional football player. You have a man with an impeccable background. If I went into a burning building to save somebody from a fire, would the thinking be different? Somehow, now I try to save somebody from the gateway drug of marijuana, I have been charged criminally.

“They should be thanking me for exposing a major drug operation.”

Hamilton, who joined the Army after retiring from the NFL, was a spokesman for a drug rehabilitation clinic while

playing for the Jets.

“This is a message for any kid,” Hamilton said. “... I took an oath, as an attorney, as a military officer. It would be my civic duty — almost a direct order — to do something about illicit activity if I encounter it. And then I am in trouble. Big trouble. Because I step in to curtail any possible activity where my son is concerned. Unfortunately, my actions and my efforts are being demonized.”

3/30/2018

Harry Hamilton, local football legend, accused of attacking son

Bret Pallott, Centre Daily Times

Nanticoke Area graduate and former Penn State football player Harry Hamilton is charged with two felonies after allegedly punching his son several times and throwing another individual to the ground.

Hamilton, 55, starred on offense and defense for the Trojans in 1979. He was an Academic All-American and played for the Nittany Lions from 1981-1983. He was drafted by the New York Jets in the seventh round of the 1984 NFL draft and intercepted 23 passes in his eight-year career.

Hamilton's son heard loud banging noises coming from the front door of his State College residence on March 3 and went downstairs to find Hamilton just inside the front door.

After exchanging a greeting, Hamilton accused his son of using drugs and started a physical altercation with him, according to State College police.

Hamilton placed his son in a headlock, pulled him off the stairs and banged his son's head off the steps. Hamilton also punched his son several times in the head and neck before throwing him to the ground, according to police.

A second person came downstairs after hearing the altercation and began to argue with Hamilton outside the front door. Hamilton allegedly picked the person up and threw them to the ground. Hamilton was last seen leaving the residence on foot.

Further investigation showed the front door was locked before Hamilton entered. A picture frame, front door frame and rear screen door had all been damaged.

Hamilton was charged with felony counts of burglary and criminal trespassing. He was also charged with a misdemeanor count of simple assault and two summary counts of harassment.

Hamilton was arraigned before District Judge Thomas Jordan, who set bail at \$25,000 unsecured.

Hamilton's preliminary hearing was continued to April 4.

According to Sports Illustrated, Hamilton sued the NFL for \$5 million in 2014. He claimed he was not made fully aware of the dangers associated with football-related head injuries.

At the time of the lawsuit, Hamilton said he has memory issues, headaches, anger management issues and occasionally relies on painkillers.

The SI article said Hamilton was one of more than 200 players to opt out of the \$765 million class action settlement between the NFL and thousands of former players.

The settlement came after retired NFL players accused the league of being aware of the evidence and risks associated with repetitive traumatic brain injuries, but failing to warn and protect players against those risks.

3/21/2018

TheGNAInsider.com: 'The sky's the limit'

By Aaron Miller, Newspaper In Education student columnist / Published: March 21, 2018

The 2017-18 school year marked the beginning of a new era for The GNA Insider, the student newspaper at Greater Nanticoke Area High School. For many years, the paper had been published as a quarterly account of life at GNA, ranging from sporting events, award ceremonies and other honorable distinctions. The creativity of the journalists was limited by the printing costs and time restraints of the school day. On top of that, each paper had a given limit of 30 to 35 pages, so when it came time for printing, a lot of great ideas had to be cut to fit in our given restrictions.

Prior to my senior year, I had discussed transitioning our newspaper from solely a traditional one to an online paper with Sean Carey, our journalism adviser. Our dream and expectations of how the finished product would transpire were extremely high, leading us to be reluctant in finally suggesting the idea to the administration of our school. That all changed two weeks prior to the first day of my senior year when my adviser had messaged me saying that we were approved for our website and would begin working on it the very first day of school.

With the support of Dr. Grevera, the district's superintendent, we received the funding and began working with the

program used by many distinguished schools and organizations, including: American University, New York University, Emerson College, Misericordia University, Wilkes University, Marywood University, University of Pittsburgh, and many, many more. The program is School Newspapers Online Sites (SNO), a subset of Wordpress. The features provided by the site allow our journalists to bring up-to-date information to all GNA students, faculty, staff and community members alike within a variety of mediums in real-time.

Our newspaper has multiple sections that help organize all of our articles and reporting. The most viewed sections include: sports, campus life, alumni, and multimedia. Sports is the most developed of the four because of the student body's enthusiasm at all sporting events. Campus life incorporates everything that happens on campus, including teacher profiles and college advisement updates. Our Alumni section is devoted to former students and also includes a "Where Are They Now?" section, which recounts the accomplishments and goals achieved by individual alumni of the district. This section was even featured in an issue of The Citizens' Voice last year. Finally, our multimedia category attracts the most viewers because of the vast selection of photos. The various sections of our newspaper allow for current and future students alike to gain access to the happenings of GNA.

Our main priority here at The GNA Insider is to keep readers current with the affairs of the school and surrounding area, and now we can successfully achieve that. Without the help of entire 2017-18 Journalism Class, none of this would be possible. Student journalists include: Seniors — Eric Jeffries, Dawson Hughes, Derek Kurkoski, Taylor Zabrenski, Mark Walters, Destiny Geahr, Aaron Miller; Juniors — Nate Kreitzer, Brianna Stritzinger, Harley LaRue, EJ Gill, Liam Carcieri, Elias Miller, Madelyn Bugdonovitch, Haileigh Hendricks, Allison Williams, and Sophomore, Kimberly Smith. To expand our horizons, we have recently begun to venture out into the social media realm. Twitter, along with Facebook and Snapchat, allow our writers to receive feedback. It also expands our typical viewership from just people in the district to parents and community members interested in what their children and teachers have accomplished. My senior year of high school has been lighted with the success of a dream becoming reality and building a foundation for something even greater. Even though I am graduating in a few short months, I plan to continue my commitment to The GNA Insider, no matter where my future endeavors lead me. I will always be grateful for the opportunity my school and adviser provided me, and I know the same goes for them. Writing is my passion and helping pour the cement for something that will last a lifetime is mesmerizing. The experience I obtained from this project encouraged me to apply to Emerson College, in Boston, Massachusetts, the number one rated journalism school in the country. I was recently accepted with one of the college's most prestigious merit awards and will be fully committing soon. This transition from a traditional paper not only was a great way to bring our school into the 21st century, but it was also a way to gain exposure to the real world of journalism and will provide a stepping stone into my future career.

Yet, I am only one piece to the puzzle. There have been leaders before me and there will be leaders after me, but if I make only the slightest impact upon the way things are executed, I consider my work as an accomplishment. With our step into the future of reporting, the sky's the limit to the possibilities of what future students can do. I hope future students can take the advice of their teachers and strive for greatness, because it has been proven by this year's success that anything is possible.

Visit us at thegnainsider.com!

Aaron Miller is a senior at Greater Nanticoke Area High School. Student columns are published Wednesdays during the school year.

3/17/2018

Gaming grants pump \$6M into Luzerne County

Citizens Voice

Wilkes-Barre City is getting \$1.14 million in grant funding, including \$220,000 to help restore the Irem Temple on North Franklin Street.

Nanticoke City has \$700,000 coming to acquire properties on Market Street for a streetscape project and to fund a stadium project for the school district.

Pittston City has been allocated \$695,000 to expand its public works garage and to help pay for the replacement bleacher at the school district's stadium.

In all, more than \$6 million will be infused into Luzerne County for projects through money generated by the gaming industry, state officials announced Friday.

The office of state Sen. John Yudichak, D-Plymouth Twp., announced the list of projects in a press release. He said the Commonwealth Financing Authority approved over \$6 million in grants from the Luzerne County's Local Share Account, which is funded by tax revenue generated by the state's casinos, including Mohegan Sun Pocono.

"The broad scope of the LSA grant program allows Pennsylvania to invest in creating jobs and building better communities throughout Luzerne County," Yudichak said.

The largest total award in the Wyoming Valley was \$450,000 for Nantcoke's Market Street project.

"I am so excited to hear of the two LSA grant awards to the city of Nanticoke," Nanticoke Mayor Rich Wiatrowski said.

"The city is pleased to know that the state considered these projects viable for continued revitalization for our downtown and for the schools district athletic field improvements."

Wilkes-Barre Mayor Tony George said each project the city sought funded for was successful, but more funding is needed.

"All of them were, I think, given grant money — not nearly as much as needed, but I think it was fair across the board. Everyone got a percentage (of the amount requested)," George said.

2/12/2018

Some optimism displayed at vigil for Phylicia Thomas

boboyle@timesleader.com

It's been 14 years since Phylicia Thomas went missing -14 years that her mother, family and friends have grieved as they wait for a resolution of the case.

On Sunday night at Patriot Square in Nanticoke, a slight breeze of optimism blew through the crowd of about 50 people gathered to sing Phylicia's favorite song and light a candle in her memory.

Pauline Bailey, Phylicia's mother, and family friend and advocate Judy Fisher announced to the crowd that they have been contacted by Pennsylvania State Police and told there will be a meeting soon to review the case, opening a door that appeared to be closed for a long time.

Bailey believes her daughter, then 22, was killed Feb. 11, 2004, while attending a party inside a house trailer and dismembered in a barn on Timber Lane in Hunlock Township. That belief is based on what Bailey and her friends were told by some people who attended the party. There have been no arrests in the case.

"We received a call from the state police informing us that they will meet with us soon to discuss the case," Fisher said.

"All we want is to work as a team so we can bring Phylicia home and solve this case."

"Let's hope this is the last year for us to have this vigil," Bailey said as she opened the ceremony. "In recent weeks, some people have called us, some to just talk and console us, some to share information. All we ask is that anybody with any information about what happened to Phylicia come forward and tell us. We won't reveal your name. We just want you to tell us what you know."

A sign on a table nearby read, "Phylicia Thomas - her life mattered." The attendees sang Phylicia's favorite song - "Wish You Were Here" - Pink Floyd's 1975 hit. The crowd also joined in saying "The Lord's Prayer."

Pauline Bailey has six other children: Todd, Jesse, Jared, Wyatt, Jocelyn and Wade. Most of them attended the vigil with their children. Jocelyn's oldest daughter is named in memory of Phylicia.

"Just the thought that those responsible for Phylicia's death are still out there is unbelievable," Jocelyn said. "They could do the same thing to somebody else's child."

Jocelyn said the last 14 years have been difficult on her family, especially her mother.

"It's been beyond frustrating," she said. "But it's important that we come to remember Phylicia and keep her name alive."

Bailey said she is determined to bring her daughter home.

"Nobody will stop us," she said. "We know what happened. We will find her. We won't stop until we do."

Fisher said the main goal has always been to bring Phylicia home to allow her family to bury her so she can rest in peace.

"This is about telling the truth," Fisher said. "And it's about bringing closure to the family."

Bailey and Fisher believe Thomas' remains may have been buried in a vegetable garden or burned and disposed of somewhere on a 25-acre site where the trailer once stood along Golf Course Road and Timber Lane in Hunlock Township.

The site was sold in December 2015, a house trailer was razed and debris removed. Following the sale, the new property owners allowed Bailey to search the area. In 2016, separate searches were conducted on the property using animals from Malvern-based Search and Rescue Dogs of Pennsylvania: one on behalf of Bailey, a second for state police.

During the first search, cadaver dogs gave indications at certain areas of the property, suggesting they may have detected decomposing human remains. State police took one of the same dogs back to the site two weeks later and no hits were recorded. The dog's handler said he couldn't explain why no hits were recorded on the second search.

Bailey expressed disappointment that the 14-year investigation has not been successful in finding Phylicia, nor those responsible for her disappearance and presumed murder.

"We want to see the people responsible brought to justice," Fisher said. "We believe some of the people involved are still out there."

As Bailey was walking to the center of Patriot Square, she was struggling with the fact that 14 years have passed with no resolution to the case.

"I woke up this morning sick to my stomach," she said. "This is like going to a funeral every year."

2/12/2018

Hope rules at vigil for missing woman

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

Hope was the theme of Sunday night's vigil for Phylicia Thomas, who has been missing for 14 years.

"We are bringing my daughter home and no one is going to stop us," Pauline Bailey told dozens of people gathered in Nanticoke's Patriot Square Park.

Bailey said that Sunday's vigil - the 14th consecutive gathering on the anniversary of Thomas's disappearance on Feb. 11, 2004 - will be the last before her daughter's case is solved.

"We know what happened," Bailey said. "We're not going to stop. ... We just want to bring her home."

Thomas, of Lake Twp., was 22 when she disappeared. Her family and friends have searched to find out what happened to her ever since.

They gather each year to honor Thomas, who was remembered Sunday as a young woman with a big heart who would do anything to help anyone in need.

Some stood in snow and slush, held lighted candles and sang Thomas's favorite song, Pink Floyd's "Wish You Were Here."

Bailey and Judy Fisher, a family friend and community activist, said they will soon have closure - and the answer to what happened to Thomas.

Bailey said that over the past year she has spoken with people who said they saw Thomas at a house party in Hunlock Twp. the night she disappeared. Thomas was sexually assaulted at that party, then killed and her remains were disposed of nearby, according to the witnesses, Bailey and Fisher said.

The only person ever named as a person of interest in the case was Steve Martin, an acquaintance of Thomas's. Martin committed suicide in state prison in 2005, while serving a sentence for causing a fatal automobile accident in Wilkes-Barre.

Bailey criticized the police investigation into her daughter's disappearance, but said new investigators have been assigned to the case.

Fisher said Thomas's family and friends would like to hear from anyone who attended the party at which she was allegedly assaulted and later killed. Witnesses may remain anonymous and need not fear for their safety, she said.

As more people come forward, the answer to what happened to Thomas becomes clear, according to Bailey.

"We have hope again," she said. "We have a pretty good idea where she is. We had people tell us things."

Anyone with information about Thomas or her disappearance may call Fisher at 570-328-4957 or send an email to: findphylicia@gmail.com.

1/24/2018

County approves tax break for commercial project

emark@citizensvoice.com

Luzerne County Council on Tuesday approved a 10-year tax abatement for a proposed commercial project that the developer says could create thousands of jobs.

Council voted 7-3 to approve the tax abatement for NorthPoint Development, the Missouri-based firm that plans to build three large commercial structures on a 330-acre tract off state Route 29 in Hanover Twp. and Nanticoke.

Council voted to exempt new buildings on the site from property tax liability for 10 years. The exemption will be 100 percent for the first seven years, decreasing to 90 percent in year eight, 80 percent in year nine and 70 percent in year 10.

Hanover Twp., Nanticoke, Hanover Area School District and Greater Nanticoke Area School District have approved the tax abatement, through a program known as Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance, that allows local taxing

authorities to exempt improvements to business properties located in "deteriorated" areas.

A council majority on Tuesday cited the benefits the project could bring to the county, especially the creation of 2,000 or more jobs, once the buildings are leased and fully operational.

"I can't see us turning it down," Councilwoman Sheila Saidman said.

The vote was not unanimous, though.

Councilmen Edward Brominski, Harry Haas and Stephen A. Urban voted against the tax abatement. Councilman Matthew Vough was absent.

Haas said he hoped to see the county obtain better terms on the tax deferral deal, such as limiting the 100 percent tax exemption to a shorter time frame.

County Manager David Pedri said he had discussions with NorthPoint Development officials and expects the firm to be a good corporate citizen, but that no other terms were presented for the tax abatement request.

Haas questioned whether the site is really "deteriorated," as required to qualify for the tax abatement program.

Brent Miles, NorthPoint Development's vice president of economic development, described the site as rugged and "very topographically challenged," with steep slopes that will require grading. He said he once rode in a vehicle that got stuck while driving around the site.

NorthPoint Development has reached a tentative agreement to purchase the tract from the nonprofit Earth Conservancy.

Council members encouraged Miles to hire local contractors and laborers to help construct the project, which

NorthPoint Development estimates will cost \$100 million.

Warren Faust, president of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Building and Construction Trades Council, raised the issue of local hiring during public comment.

"There are plenty of qualified contractors in this county who can work on this project," Faust said. "They are ready, willing and able to build this."

Faust criticized NorthPoint Development for using too many contractors from out of the county when the company built the 800,000-square-foot Chewy.com fulfillment center in Hanover Industrial Estates.

Miles said the company was under a very tight deadline for construction, so it hired firms with which it had previously contracted on other projects, to make sure the Chewy.com warehouse was finished on schedule.

He promised to work with Faust and county officials to make sure Luzerne County contractors are included on the project. Plans that NorthPoint submitted to the county include a proposed 1.3-million-square-foot commercial structure and two other large buildings.

Also on Tuesday, council approved a \$25,000 settlement of a lawsuit filed against the county by Francis Lombardo, a former inmate at Luzerne County Correctional Facility. Lombardo alleged in the suit that officials of the jail abused him and violated his rights.

1/24/2018

Portion of South Valley Parkway opens

Citizens Voice

Part of the South Valley Parkway in Hanover Twp. opened to drivers Monday morning. The section of the \$83 million road construction project that opened occupies a stretch of land northwest of the South Cross Valley Expressway/state Route 29. It runs from a connection off of South Main Street near Exit 2 of the expressway to a newly constructed roundabout west of there. Two ramps near that roundabout connect to the South Cross Valley Expressway between exits 2 and 3. Further west of that roundabout, one lane of traffic will be open on a bridge over the expressway and Dundee Road, leading to another roundabout. The planned roadway continues to Middle Road and Kosciuszko Street in Nanticoke, but that section remains under construction. It is scheduled to open sometime in 2019.

1/21/2018

Former school transformed into training center for electrical apprentices

Denise Allabaugh - Citizens Voice

Since he was young, Wilkes-Barre resident Mark Gatusky wanted to be an electrician.

Both his grandfathers, his father and uncles were electricians and part of International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local Union 163.

Gatusky, 37, said his family wanted him to try going to college first, however.

He went to the University of Scranton, earned a master's degree in history and subsequently worked in the health

insurance business for years. He often traveled, didn't see his family enough and he said the return on his investment "just wasn't there."

Then, he decided to follow his dream to become an electrician.

Gatusky is in his final year of a five-year electrical apprenticeship where he gets on-the-job paid training as well as education at a training center that opened last year at 41 W. Church St., Nanticoke.

He has done electrical work for projects ranging from a water park to natural gas power plants to the PPL Center, an arena in Allentown.

Pointing out that he earns a higher salary with better benefits as an electrician, Gatusky said, "I found myself much happier doing this and working with my hands."

"It's a creative way to make a living. No day is the same," he said. "You could use your mind, be creative and have a living that you could have pride in, not only from a paycheck perspective, but you could look at a building and say, 'You know what? I did that.'"

The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Union 163 and Penn-Del-Jersey chapter of the National Electrical Contractors Association turned the former St. Stanislaus Catholic School in Nanticoke into a training center for electricians.

Gatusky is one of 57 apprentices in the program.

Training director John T. Nadolny said there is no cost for a five-year electrical apprenticeship.

Prior to opening the new training center, they rented space from Luzerne County Community College, he said.

Apprentices in the program receive technical training on Monday and Wednesday nights for three hours and occasionally Saturdays from September to April as well on-the-job paid training with contractors.

Their starting pay is about \$12 an hour plus benefits for the first 1,000 hours. Electricians have the potential to earn more than \$34 an hour plus benefits for an entire family, he said.

"You earn while you learn and at the end, you get college credits," Nadolny said. "You can go for an associate's degree, a bachelor's degree or a master's degree and get up to 60 credits for this five-year program."

Over the five years of the program, Nadolny said apprentices receive 8,000 hours of on-the-job training.

"This isn't a job. It's a career," he said. "It's not for everybody. It's hard work. It's very dangerous work. We teach them how to be safe."

Electricians do outside work and inside work ranging from wiring homes, schools, hospitals, arenas and commercial, industrial and manufacturing facilities to lighting protection.

The future for electricians is wired for growth.

Nadolny said there is a big demand for electricians. Good candidates have mechanical knowledge and are dependable, he said.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of electricians is projected to grow 9 percent over the next eight years. As homes and businesses require more wiring, more electricians will be needed.

Becoming an electrician is a good high-paying alternative for interested applicants who don't want to take on the high debt of college, Nadolny said.

"Unfortunately, many of people who go to college end up with a quarter of a million dollars of debt when they're done and they work at McDonald's," he said. "College isn't for everybody. Maybe some would do better in the trades."

Mountain Top resident Jillian Henderson, 31, is in her first year of the electrical apprenticeship.

While being an electrician is not a traditional career for women, Henderson said she loves to work with her hands.

"You get to use your hands and your brains. It's the best of both worlds," Henderson said. "My father is a contractor so it runs in the family."

Wilkes-Barre resident Ernesto Tapia, 27, who also is in his first year of the apprenticeship, said he also loves working with his hands and doing something different every day.

"I can't stay in one spot," Tapia said. "I can't sit inside. I've got to do different things, work inside and outside."

People can apply for the apprenticeship on the first Monday of each month between 1 and 6 p.m. at 41 W. Church St., Nanticoke. Applicants must be 18, be a high school graduate or have a GED and receive a satisfactory score on a Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee test and resident in the Local 163 jurisdiction, which is mostly Luzerne County. For more information, call 570-258-2665

IBEW Local 81 has a training center with the same program in South Abington Twp. for Lackawanna County residents. For more information, call 570-319-1721.

1/20/2018

Section of South Valley Parkway will open Monday

Bill Wellock - Citizens Voice

A section of an \$83 million road construction project will be ready for drivers soon.

Part of the South Valley Parkway in Hanover Twp. will open at 11 a.m. Monday.

The section to open occupies a stretch of land northwest of the South Cross Valley Expressway/state Route 29.

It runs from a connection off of South Main Street near Exit 2 of the expressway to a newly constructed roundabout west of there. Two ramps near that roundabout connect to the South Cross Valley Expressway between exits 2 and 3. Further west of that roundabout, one lane of traffic will be open on a bridge over the expressway and Dundee Road, leading to another roundabout.

The planned roadway continues to Middle Road and Kosciuszko Street in Nanticoke, but that section remains under construction. It is scheduled to open sometime in 2019, spokesman Mike Taluto said.

The new parkway opens up land to potential development. Missouri-based NorthPoint Development is considering building there.

The company has already built a warehouse for Chewy.com, an online pet supply retailer, on another nearby section of land in Hanover Twp. Two other NorthPoint buildings near the Chewy.com warehouse will be homes for Adidas and Patagonia facilities.

Now, NorthPoint is considering constructing three new buildings on Earth Conservancy land next to the South Valley Parkway. Once occupied, the site could be home to 1,300 to 2,000 jobs.

The company is looking for tax breaks on the development. NorthPoint has already secured tax deals with Hanover Twp., Nanticoke, and those municipalities' respective school districts. Luzerne County Council will vote on whether to extend that tax break to county taxes at a meeting Tuesday.

Development was part of the vision for the road construction project when it was conceived, along with alleviating traffic on Main Street through the Askam section of Hanover Twp.

The road and its roundabouts in the township will connect the highway to about 2,000 acres of land for potential industrial development.

1/20/2018

County council set to vote on tax break request for project

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

County council could vote next week whether or not to grant a 10-year tax abatement for a proposed commercial development in Hanover Twp. and Nanticoke.

NorthPoint Development, a Missouri-based industrial development firm, plans to build three large commercial structures on the 330-acre parcel off state Route 29 and Kosciuszko Street, which the firm says would create 1,300 to 2,000 jobs. NorthPoint has reached a preliminary agreement to purchase the land from the nonprofit Earth Conservancy. NorthPoint has requested that Hanover Twp., Nanticoke, Hanover Area School District and Greater Nanticoke Area School District exempt new structures on the site from property taxation for a decade. The firm's request falls under a tax abatement program known as Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance, or LERTA, that allows local taxing authorities to exempt improvements to business properties located in "deteriorated" areas. The two municipalities and two school districts already approved that request, according to county records.

At a Jan. 9 work session, county council members heard a NorthPoint executive extol the virtues of the project. On Tuesday, the issue reaches the agenda for council's voting session.

Council will consider a resolution that would provide tax exemption for the NorthPoint project, with 100 percent tax abatement the first seven years, followed by 90 percent in year eight, 80 percent in year nine and 70 percent in year 10. Those numbers could change, according to Councilman Harry Haas.

"I encourage the manager and council members to get a better deal for the county," Haas said Friday.

Haas said he was impressed by NorthPoint's presentation at the work session earlier this month. He is also impressed by the success NorthPoint had developing the parcel in Hanover Industrial Estates that houses the 800,000-square-foot Chewy.com warehouse, he said.

But NorthPoint's argument that "it all comes down to nickels and dimes" for industrial development projects works both ways, Haas said.

"It also comes down to nickels and dimes for taxpayers," he said.

It is possible that county Manager David Pedri will negotiate better terms on the county's behalf, or that a council member will make a motion to amend the resolution to reflect better terms, Haas said.

Council Chairman Tim McGinley said he expects council to discuss the requested tax abatement in detail, then vote on the resolution that will determine its fate Tuesday.

1/18/2018

Search for fallen WWII soldier's family moves to Moosic

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice - Note: partial article from CV

The hunt for family of a World War II soldier missing since October 1944 has shifted — and appears to be over. Military officials initially contacted the Nanticoke Historical Society, looking for family of Private Anthony Laskowski, believed to have been a Nanticoke native killed in a massive explosion near Agincourt, France. But some Laskowskis in the Nanticoke area knew the military was on the wrong track — their Anthony Laskowski survived the war and died in the 1980s. After a recent story was published in The Citizens' Voice, they eventually helped track down the right family, the Laskowskis originally from Moosic. Delphine Krappa Mattei, 81, of Dupont, on Wednesday said the Laskowski the military is inquiring about is her uncle, Anthony A. Laskowski. He was the brother of her late mother, Laura Laskowski Gerlak.

1/17/2018

Wilkes-Barre, Pittston, Hazleton, Nanticoke mull cooperation on blight

boboyle@timesleader.com |

The mayors of three of Luzerne County's four cities met Tuesday to discuss issues and possible partnerships to help ease some of the financial burdens each faces and ways to grow their communities.

Mayor Tony George of Wilkes-Barre, Mayor Mike Lombardo of Pittston and Mayor Jeff Cusat of Hazleton met for more than an hour in Wilkes-Barre City Hall to exchange ideas and to share experiences. Mayor Rich Wiaterowski of Nanticoke could not attend the meeting.

Lombardo said the group, for now, is called Council of Cities and the plan is to meet quarterly or more often, depending on issues.

Tuesday's discussion centered on blighted properties and how to deal with absentee owners and overcrowded units with numerous code violations. The mayors' goal is to find the best way to get the buildings rehabilitated and returned to the tax rolls as soon as possible.

There was extended conversation on Act 90 — the "Neighborhood Blight Reclamation and Revitalization Act" — which took effect in 2011.

Act 90 expands the powers that municipalities have to reduce blighted properties. Those in "serious code violation," as determined by local zoning officers, can have several legal actions taken against them. Buildings that are determined to be a "public nuisance" also fall under the law.

A city may take action if after six months from the date of an order to correct violations there has been "no substantial step" to correct those violations.

Some of the options available:

- Liens can be placed against properties with code violations.
- Municipalities can take property owners to court to seek judgments against an owner's assets.
- Municipalities may deny permits to owners of buildings who are in violation.
- Municipalities may deny permits to owners who are behind in taxes.
- Municipalities may deny permits to owners behind in other municipal accounts (water, sewage, refuse collection, etc.)
- Municipalities may deny these permits until all existing violations are remedied.
- Out-of-state property owners may be extradited to Pennsylvania to be charged with property-related violations.
- Magisterial districts may establish "housing courts" — additionally, judges are encouraged to attend training and education relating to new blight laws.

Housing help

George, Cusat and Lombardo will invite Luzerne County District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis to discuss what her office can do to assist the cities in addressing the issues covered by Act 90.

"In Pittston, our focus over the next four years will be on our housing stock," said Lombardo, who returned to office this month. "All of our downtowns are growing or have the potential to grow and housing issues dictate where we go from here."

Lombardo hopes the mayors can share issues each city is confronting and also discuss how they can join together to

make purchases of items and materials they all use.

“In Hazleton, we certainly have a lot of issues with housing,” Cusat said. “We found one apartment where eight people were living in one room. We’ve also found people living in basements with no way out.”

George agreed the four cities together have the potential to present a stronger argument on issues.

“As a group, we have a better chance at securing federal funding for certain projects,” George said.

Lombardo and Cusat agreed, saying each city acting alone would not be as influential as a united effort by the four.

The mayors also intend to find ways to attract developers to their cities to help eliminate blight.

1/16/2018

Family sought of Nanticoke soldier killed in France in World War II

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

After more than 73 years, there is renewed hope of determining the fate of a Nanticoke soldier believed to have been killed during World War II.

Private Anthony Laskowski and 32 other men were thought to have been killed in a horrific explosion and inferno on Oct. 10, 1944 near Ajincourt, France. But the remains of Laskowski and 12 others were never recovered. They’ve been considered missing in action ever since.

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency recently recovered remains in that area and are trying to link them with the missing through family DNA testing.

The organization recently reached out to the Nanticoke Historical Society to help track down relatives of Laskowski.

Chet Zaremba, the group’s vice president, said he’s been having little luck.

“He did live in Nanticoke at one time, so we owe him something,” Zaremba said. “There’s lots of Laskowskis around here, but I can’t make any connection.”

Military officials have told Zaremba that Laskowski’s enlistment paperwork indicates he was from Nanticoke and his mother, Stefania, lived in the Sheatown section of Newport Twp.

News accounts from January 1945 reported on his suspected death and says he was the brother of Mrs. John Gerlak of Dupont and the husband of Evelyn Laskowski, of Center Avenue, Newark, New Jersey.

The military’s missing persons website has Laskowski listed under those unaccounted for from New Jersey.

Military officials provided the historical society with a summary about the incident that likely killed Laskowski.

Members of Laskowski’s unit — the Army’s 35th Infantry Division, 60th Engineers Combat Battalion — were laying anti-tank landmines at night on Oct. 10, 1944 during a period intermittent artillery and mortar fire. Truck after truck was loaded with fused mines.

A big explosion from the leading truck caused the systematic detonation of other trucks and mines on the ground, causing more than 1,500 mines to explode.

“The entire area immediately became an inferno of exploding mines, small arms ammunition and burning,” according to an after-action report by the 60th Engineers Combat Battalion. “The night was very dark and there was a heavy fog, which made rescue work most difficult ...”

Zaremba is hoping Laskowski still has some local relatives so the military can determine if his remains have been found.

“They are trying to identify them so they could bury them properly,” Zaremba said.

Relatives can contact the Army’s Past Conflict Repatriations Branch at 1-800-892-2490.

Missing in action

Name: Private Anthony Laskowski

Branch: U.S. Army

Missing since: Oct. 10, 1944

Location: Near Ajincourt, France

Unit: 35th Infantry Division, 60th Engineers Combat Battalion

Hometown: Nanticoke

Marital residence: Newark, N.J.

Are you a relative?

The military is seeking relatives of Private Anthony Laskowski in order to provide a DNA sample that could help identify remains found in the area where Laskowski went missing during World War II. Relatives can contact the Army’s Past Conflict Repatriations Branch at 1-800-892-2490.

1/5/2018

Winning lottery ticket sold in Nanticoke will expire soon

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

Time is running out for someone to claim a \$50,000 winning lottery ticket purchased at a Nanticoke convenience store last year.

Someone correctly matched the "Pick 5" numbers the evening of Jan. 12, 2017 in a ticket purchased at Turkey Hill Minit Mart at 460 W. Main St.

The winnings will be forfeited if the ticket is not claimed by Friday, Jan. 12, as winning tickets expire after one year, lottery officials warn.

The winning numbers, in order, were "8-1-0-5-8."

Turkey Hill in Nanticoke has a sign up near its lottery register advising residents to "Please check your tickets" as a big winner sold here is set to expire.

"This is a \$50,000 winner and is unclaimed," the sign reads.

Allen Zieglar, a spokesman for the Pennsylvania Lottery, encouraged people to check old tickets in hopes they have the winner. If it's not claimed by next Friday, the \$50,000 will be returned to the lottery's fund that benefits older Pennsylvanians.

"We want players to check every ticket every time. We don't want them to miss out on a prize. That's why we are here. We do our best to notify the public and players that there are winning tickets out there," Zieglar said. "Unfortunately, if it's not claimed in time, the money goes back to the lottery fund."

While some state lotteries give players only 90 or 180 days to claim a prize, Pennsylvania Lottery prizes expire one year from the drawing date, Zieglar noted.

In the past year, \$18.8 million in lottery prizes have gone unclaimed, he said.