

12/31/2003

Plan urges Nanticoke park space - A consulting firm presents its improvement proposal to city leaders.

By Michael McNarney - mmcnarney@leader.net

The people of Nanticoke want more trails for jogging and walking.

Conversely, there are no trails for jogging and walking in Nanticoke.

So shows the city's park and open space plan, presented to a handful of people at City Hall Tuesday afternoon.

The plan, drafted by a Bethlehem-based firm and expected to be adopted by City Council next week, is only a guide and doesn't contain any mandates.

But making sure Nanticoke is connected to proposed area trails and making sure the city plays a key role in park development along the Susquehanna riverfront are among the strongest recommendations contained in the plan.

"There's a lot of activity up and down the Susquehanna," said Paul Driscoll, vice president of the consulting firm Urban Research & Development Corporation. "It would be good to see that Nanticoke is and remains connected to that type of planning."

Almost 44 percent of residents who responded to a survey for the study said jogging and walking trails were what they wanted to see the most. Of the city's 10,955 people, just 218 responded.

While new trails were a popular idea, it's not clear how many people would actually use them. A majority of the survey respondents said they "never or very seldom" use city parks.

Patriot Park generated the most interest among respondents. The study recommended that even if the city doesn't have any money, city officials should raise money from businesses and keep the Civic Pride Committee refurbishment effort at the forefront.

Safety issues - real and perceived - at Patriot Park were a big topic of discussion. Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski said security cameras have been discussed, but not installed.

Bernie Sztot, a member of the committee that helped put together the plan, told of a recent confrontation he had with some young toughs who blocked the sidewalk as he tried to pass.

"I said, 'somebody's going to get hurt,'" Sztot said. "I said, 'Maybe me, but somebody's going to go with me.'"

12/30/2003

Nanticoke residents break even on taxes for 2004

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

Nanticoke City residents will not have a tax increase in 2004, but they most likely will not have a decrease either.

Council unanimously passed the final reading of the approximately \$3.2 million budget at a special meeting Monday night, and voted 3-1 to keep the tax rate steady at a total of 60.38 mills.

Councilman John Bushko, who voted against the tax rate, said since two bonds will be paid off by next year, the millage should be lowered.

Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski said there is a petition in court due to come up next month for a \$1 million loan the city wants to take out.

If the court approves the loan - which will be used for bills and debts - the millage that would go toward the previous bonds will now go toward paying off the new loan.

If the city does not get the loan, it will have to drop millage, Bozinski said.

Councilman William Brown said the problem is the city does not have enough money coming in.

Mayor John Toole said Nanticoke takes in \$13,000 on a mill of taxes, while, for example, Pittston gets \$39,000 per mill.

Toole attributed it to low assessment, except on newer homes.

"This year we're really going to have to stick by the budget," Bozinski stressed.

She asked city administrator Greg Gulick to make sure department heads submitted monthly reports of their expenditures.

Rising health care costs are one of the city's problems. Toole said it costs \$28,267 a month for health insurance for retirees, administration, and the fire, street, and police departments.

A resident asked whether the city could ask for co-payments, but Toole said the fire and police departments had been "adamant" against the subject.

To take the matter to arbitration could cost the city a lot, and Bozinski pointed out that municipalities don't usually win in arbitration, especially with fire and police departments.

In other business, council voted to take out a six-month tax anticipation note in the amount of \$300,000 from PNC Bank at a 2.55 percent interest rate.

Council voted to award a \$197,849 bid to Slusser Bros. for the Broad Street sewer project.

Council accepted the resignation of Fire Chief William Ives, who was deputy chief for five years and chief for 13.

"He's been a real asset to the department," Toole noted.

Council voted to put Deputy Chief Mike Bohan in place as temporary chief; Toole said union issues had to be resolved if Bohan was made chief permanently.

Council also accepted the resignation of Controller Joseph Dougherty, who will be taking a seat on council Jan. 5, replacing Walter Januszkeski, Jr.

Toole said council will discuss finding a replacement for Dougherty as controller at the next regular meeting in January.

12/25/2003

Guardsmen receive gift: Get to spend Christmas with families

By Robert Kalinowski , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

Pennsylvania Army National Guard soldiers from the First Battalion, 109th Field Artillery, who will be soon deployed to Iraq, got an early Christmas present this year: To be able to spend Christmas Day with their families.

It almost didn't happen. The guardsmen were initially scheduled to leave before the holiday for a six-week training period at Fort Dix, N.J. Now they will depart on Dec. 30 for at least a one-year tour of duty.

Two families of guardsman from the Bravo Battery, Nanticoke, Bob Donahue, 19, and Ron Bruza, 22, gathered on Thursday to speak about what this Christmas means to them.

"We went from tears to happiness. We got our wish that he would be here with us," said Bob Donahue Sr. about his son.

"It was our Christmas come true our present. We don't need anything else," said Tierney, the guardsman's mother.

Bruza's parents also expressed appreciation their son is home for Christmas, but noted his pending departure will be tough to handle.

"It's been an emotional roller coaster. It's joy, and then not so much sadness, but you don't know what to expect," said Bruza's father Ron Sr.

"It's going to be really special," said the guardsman's mother, Yvonne, "for a while."

Bob Sr., who served in the Marines, said he'd have a talk with his son in the next few days about the upcoming mission.

"I was in the service, he is in the service, we understand this stuff," he explained.

Bruza's father, Ron Sr., rightly worried as a parent, feels proud of what his son is about to embark upon.

"He takes a challenge and runs with it," Ron Sr. said. "He always would tell me 'I can do it and I will.'"

Bob Sr. said his son is the same way. "If he sets his mind to it he does it."

This mentality and work ethic enabled Bruza to be the captain of the football team and Donahue the captain of the basketball team during their time at [Greater Nanticoke Area High School](#).

Any challenges they faced before don't compare what they will be soon up against, they agreed. But they aren't backing down from this new challenge.

"When the call came," Donahue said, admitting to being somewhat shaken up, "I knew that's what I signed up for - that it was a possibility."

"We realized we were going over to do what we were trained to do," Bruza added.

They realize their lives will completely change very soon. Both enlisted in the Pennsylvania National Guard to earn money to help pay for college.

Donahue just completed a semester at Penn State Wilkes-Barre, where he is a freshman. Bruza was halfway through his junior year at King's College, ready to begin student teaching.

They will put these parts of their lives aside for now to join Operation Iraqi Freedom. They probably will still be deployed next holiday season.

"This Christmas is going to be special because we almost didn't have it," said Bruza.

"I think it's going to mean a lot to our families knowing next year we're probably not going to spend Christmas together," Donahue added.

12/25/2003

Kindergarten students get help writing to Santa

By Debby Higgins , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

How would you feel if you had to write a letter to let Santa know exactly what you wanted for Christmas, but you haven't learned how to write?

Sounds pretty frustrating, right? Well, students at [Greater Nanticoke Area Elementary Education Center](#) empathized with the plight of kindergarten students who are still working on their writing skills.

But, thanks to fifth and sixth grade and kindergarten teachers and Principal Dr. Maryellen Scott, the older students were able to offer some help for the little ones.

"The idea was to have the older students mentor with the younger ones to compose a letter to Santa," explained project creator fifth grade teacher George Tensa.

Students in fifth grade classes were given time to visit kindergarten classrooms to interview kindergarten kids who told them all about their Christmas wishes.

Tensa said each kindergarten child was assigned to a fifth grader who conducted an interview. The fifth graders wrote down all the requests then composed a letter addressed to Santa Claus.

"I asked Santa for 13 presents. No, 14," said kindergarten student Colton Caravella.

"How is he going to get all those toys to your house?" asked fifth grade interviewer Nicole Booth.

"I think you know he has a bag full of toys. He waves his hand and makes them all with magic," Caravella explained.

"Most of the kids asked for stuff that's popular. We did get a couple requests for toys that were unusual," interviewer David Warho.

"I think the little kids took the letter idea seriously. I did get one unusual request for a toy quad," interviewer Brandon Schenck said.

Tensa said the idea for the letters was definitely holiday related, but it came with a well-hidden lesson tucked inside.

"The older students were very enthusiastic and dedicated to the project. If one of the kindergarten children was absent and didn't have a chance to be interviewed, the older students made sure they completed their interviews," Tensa said.

After the first draft of the letters was finished, copies were given to sixth grade students for review.

"The sixth graders made corrections and returned the copies to the fifth graders who made the changes. We wanted to make sure Santa received perfectly written letters," Tensa added.

Toys were at the top of the list for the little ones.

"I think they were just worried about getting something they really wanted. They didn't want us to forget anything," offered fifth grader Sarah Bertoni.

For the older students, their Christmas wishes were a little different.

Fifth grader Ebony James wished for her brother to come home for Christmas.

"He's in the Army and I wish he comes home so we can have our family together," James said.

12/25/2003

Nanticoke, Newport Twp. eye police pact

By Robert Kalinowski , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

Nanticoke City and Newport Township are negotiating a potential deal where the Nanticoke Police Department would acquire policing duties from Newport Township Police Department, according to Nanticoke Mayor John Toole.

Toole said talks have been in the works since about this time last year at the request of Newport Township officials.

If the deal is completed, it would be a way for Newport Township to save money and to begin regionalization of police forces, he said.

Since the talks began, both sides have looked at financial numbers of the possible merger.

"They have been making offers, but we don't know if we can do it," said Toole.

Toole admitted Nanticoke City wouldn't make much, if any, money on any pact.

"We have to make sure we could at least break even," said Toole.

Money is not the important thing here, he explained. The future is.

"I'm all for regionalization. This would be a start," Toole said.

Toole said Nanticoke is already helping Newport Township police. Late Tuesday night, the lone Newport Township police cruiser struck a deer and needs repairs.

Toole authorized the city to lend Newport Township a police car.

"We didn't have a police car six years ago," said Toole, recalling the grim days when the city received cars from Wilkes-Barre, "now we're loaning them out."

He said that before the proposed agreement could be completed, the city must get approval from the police union to hire some part-time officers.

Nanticoke has full-time cops but would need to hire part-timers if they merged, he said.

He noted that Newport Township could benefit from the use of Nanticoke's detectives as well.

"For now, it's just preliminary talks," said Toole. "We're seeing if we can get the financial numbers to make it work."

12/22/2003

Tough questions for Nanticoke officials

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

Nanticoke officials are seeking a \$1 million loan to pay off debts, but there are concerns that more debt may not be the right answer to the city's financial questions. On Dec. 16, Nanticoke solicitor Bernard Kotulak petitioned Luzerne County Court to take out a 10-year unfunded debt loan of \$1 million. A hearing is set for 10 a.m. Jan. 14 at the Luzerne County Courthouse. Nanticoke councilman John Bushko said the purpose of the loan is to pay off \$500,000 the city owes on a tax anticipation note, and also \$400,000 in bills. In addition, the city has borrowed \$4.3 million from the sewer fund, which will take 20 years to pay off, Bushko said. He feels by taking out the \$1 million loan, the city is only shuffling its debt around, and sooner or later the facts of the city's financial position will have to be faced. "We're like alcoholics living in denial. That's my opinion," Bushko stated. He said the city simply does not collect enough money to cover all its expenses, which is why something has to be done. "This is what I don't understand, and I try to get this across. None of the bills are going to come down," Bushko said. "They're taking the \$1 million loan out, and they're going to pay off the TAN and the bills from this year. But where is the money going to come for next year's bills?" Nanticoke Mayor John Toole claims the situation is not as bad as it seems. For one thing, Toole said the bills are not from this year - they go back up to six years. The TAN is also not recent, but goes back two or three years. Toole said the money was used for a new ladder truck for the fire company. Toole said a lot of money has been spent on the city's infrastructure throughout the past few years. "I often ask where's the money going to come from," Toole said. "There's just so much work to be done with infrastructure repairs. If it had been kept up, we wouldn't have this problem." When Toole took office about six years ago, he said Nanticoke had no police cars - the department had to borrow Wilkes-Barre's vehicles. The fire department's ladder truck didn't run, there were other problems with equipment, and the city hall roof was leaking, he recalled. Within the past few years, the city paved a few roads, which cost \$250,000 from the general fund. "That's a quarter of a million dollars right there," Toole said. Bushko has a different take on why the city is struggling financially. "Costs went up - everything goes up. And taxes stay the same," he said. "Our costs keep escalating and our millage has to stay the same. Something has to be done." Toole thinks the budget for 2004 looks good, however. "We don't have a spending deficit per se," he said. "The budget is just about balanced. We'll see what happens if emergencies come up." Bushko and Toole did agree that the city would not raise taxes. The current tax rate is 60.38 mills, Toole said, and the city has to petition the court each year to maintain the additional 30.38 mills over the legal limit of 30. Toole explained that the city has two bond issues totaling about \$1,700,000 that are being paid off - one this year, and one next year. "Actually, when we were working on (the budget), we thought the millage was going to decrease by two or three mills," Toole said. "Next year there's also a bond issue paid up, I think, and the millage will probably be decreasing." The city has asked for assistance from the Governor's Center for Local Government Services, which sent expert Joe Krumsky to help Nanticoke get its act together. Before the city submitted the petition for the loan, Krumsky "went through everything," Toole stated. "And he said really, it's not as bad as it looks because we're working to address the problems." Toole added, "And we're doing it on our own, without any large grants." Krumsky has not yet submitted a report, but when he does, Bushko said it would give recommendations and show what the city can and can't do. Bushko is hoping Nanticoke will follow Scranton's example: by following the recommendations from the state, Scranton is working on making a comeback. He said when the report is in, what Nanticoke will probably have to do is go to distressed city status, and start making cuts. Bushko believes a lot of services can be outsourced, like big businesses do. The city already has an outside contractor collect garbage, and Bushko said sewer repairs could also be done by outside sources. "A lot of times private industry could do it a lot cheaper than the government," Bushko noted. City officials will have to make serious decisions in the upcoming year, which Bushko said might be "like cutting your throat politically," but is their responsibility. eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

12/19/2003

Body found in Nanticoke

The frozen body of a 19-year-old Nanticoke man was found Thursday by a person walking in a wooded area behind a parking lot off Broadway Street in Nanticoke.

Charles Stas, Orchard Street, was identified as the man, according to county Chief Deputy Coroner Bill Lisman.

Lisman said there doesn't appear to be any foul play involved.

There is no indication at this time that Stas suffered any trauma or injuries that caused his death, Lisman said.

Further tests, he added, will begin after the body thaws in a day or two.

Nanticoke police received a call at 10:13 a.m. from a person who discovered the body near a wooded area behind a parking lot on Lower Broadway Street, according to Det. Sgt. William Shultz.

12/18/2003

Nanticoke closer to demolishing problem property

By Lisa Napersky , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

Nanticoke City officials are one step closer to demolishing a partially collapsed building on South Hanover Street that has been considered a health and safety hazard for some time. Luzerne County Judge Ann Lokuta signed an order Wednesday authorizing the city to publish its intent to tear down the former T.P. Jones Furniture Store, which has been in a dilapidated state for the last several years. If nobody responds to the publication in 60 days, the city will get the green light to raze the property. The building's owner, Randy Jenkins, whose last known address is a now defunct post office box in Peoria, Ariz., has refused to take service of legal documents sent to him by the city. He is also wanted on criminal charges for failing to respond to numerous citations on the structure. City Solicitor Bernard Kotulak said Jenkins owes the city more than \$50,000 in fines for building code violations. A warrant was issued for Jenkins' arrest after he failed to show up for a hearing before District Justice Donald Whittaker on July 31. Kotulak explained that the city must publish the demolition notice in Arizona newspapers once a week for the next 60 days, satisfying a legal obligation to try to contact the building's owner. The city had also hired an Arizona detective to track Jenkins down, but those attempts were futile. A hearing on the demolition will be held Feb. 11 at 10 a.m. before Judge Lokuta, who will be asked to sign the final order turning the structure over to the city for demolition. The property was purchased last March, sight unseen, for \$7,600 through an eBay Internet auction from an unknown seller in New York. The official owner of the property is listed as the Arizona-based Church of a Different Spirit, with Jenkins listed as the contact. The city's engineer determined the structure was unsound after the roof collapsed on June 6. City officials estimate that demolition will cost approximately \$144,000, but until the city assumes ownership, it cannot raze the structure nor seek funding to cover the cost of demolition. "Once we've taken the proper legal measures, we will obtain an order to knock down the structure, and we'll start taking bids for the project," said Kotulak. "The city is committed to getting rid of this problem property." In the meantime, City Administrator Greg Gulick said he is continuing his crusade to clean up the city. Gulick said that since he took office in February, 65 city properties have been cited for code violations or cleaned up and repaired. "Now that word's out we're not messing around - that we're going to court on these matters - people are cooperating with us," stated Gulick. The city administrator noted the city's next project is to see the former Ellis Skate-a-Rama on Washington Street renovated. Code enforcement officer Richard Wiaterowski said the city was working with the owner to get the building up to code so that it could be turned into a cold storage facility. "We're going block by block with our effort to clean up the city," said Gulick. "Some of these legal matters take a long time, but it will be worth it in the long run."

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Dec. 13, 2003

Cops' station renovation saves ailing city thousands

At no cost to public, officers raise funds, modernize their quarters.

By DAVID WEISS - dweiss@leader.net

They have been trained to patrol streets and round up criminals, but city police officers have found other skills helpful in improving their workplace. Officer Mike Roke is a novice electrician. Officer Kevin Grevera is handy with a paintbrush. And officer Joe Guydosh dabbles in carpentry.

Their efforts, combined with the volunteer work of all the city's officers, helped turn the city's police station from a stuffy, deteriorating base to a organized, modern headquarters.

They remodeled the station's holding cells, installed DUI and evidence processing rooms with the proper equipment, bought computers and performed numerous maintenance tasks.

All of it came at no cost to the city taxpayers because the officers got the materials with their own money, grants or through donations. They also did the work themselves, on their own time.

"We don't do this on city time," said police Chief James Cheshinski.

The officers started the project because they understand the city's financial status makes it unable to pay for the work. The city's deficit has reached \$1 million.

Without the repairs, the department would have continued to deteriorate, with parts of a ceiling falling, messy storage areas, and dimly lit areas. A drainage problem near the parking garage was one of the first things Roke wanted fixed. The problem forced officers to swerve their vehicles around spots - until he got off duty one day, bought a few bags of cement and fixed it himself.

"The city government always moves in slow motion," Roke said. "We've learned to be pretty self-reliant."

Among the work the officers performed:

Donated tires for police vehicles.

Grevera donated his former personal vehicle to the force to use as an unmarked cruiser, with Roke and Guydosh installing the police equipment.

Hoagie sales helped them raise \$1,500 to buy stop sticks - used to flatten the tires of a fleeing vehicle in a chase - and a metal detector, and donate funds toward a coal miner memorial, a children's safety program and sports teams.

Built a barracks, equipped with two cots and two showers for officers working long shifts at the station.

Purchased three computers with grant money.

Improved the shooting range, and installed additional windows to improve ventilation at the station, located in the basement of the municipal building.

"This didn't just happen overnight," Roke said. "Everybody did something."

One of the biggest improvements was renovating a storage area near the holding cells. They painted the holding cells; added lights; and built the DUI, evidence and fingerprinting processing units behind the cells. The addition contains a video recorder, lockers for weapons and safety mats. The processing center allows officers to handle drunken driving suspects at the station instead of taking the suspects to Wilkes-Barre facilities. The new area also prevents the officers from parading criminals through parts of the station where the public might be.

"It all goes back to pride," said Cheshinski, who noted his office furniture is all donated. "Nothing in this office is city property - except for the phone line."

The officers figure they saved the city at least \$9,000 in material, plus labor, which could have cost thousands more.

"We feel like we want to give back to the community that stood by us," Grevera said.

Cheshinski said the work also has increased camaraderie and efficiency in the department. The officers plan to continue to make improvements in the department. Roke said he will try to keep most of his electrical work to the Police Department.

"I'm not gonna be going door-to-door asking people if they need receptacles replaced," a joking Roke said.

Officer vows shooters will face arrest

By MICHAEL McNARNEY mmenarnev@leadernet

Vandals who shot out at least 70 windows of cars and buildings with a pellet gun in Nanticoke may have done tens of thousands of dollars in damage, police said Monday.

Damage complaints were still coming in Monday, Nanticoke police officer Kevin J. Grevera said as he typed reports into a computer in the basement of City Hall. A pellet gun was used, Grevera said.

Grevera, who got the case when he came on duty at 7 a.m. Sunday, said police have about 60 cases in Nanticoke alone. He said the vandals - identified as three adult men and an adult woman - also shot out windows in Newport Township, Plymouth Township and Warrior Run.

The officer said he's waiting to arrest the culprits until all the victims turn repair estimates in to the police department, but people shouldn't fear that the vandals will walk.

"Before we had half of the calls on this one we had the case solved," Grevera said. "I guarantee you that every person responsible will be charged."

Newport Township Police Chief Carl Smith said five vehicles were damaged in the township's Alden section, and a window at Bink's Sheatown Service Station was shot out.

Plymouth Township police Chief Robert Lehman said he's received seven complaints about damage to autos and buildings.

Warrior Run police did not return telephone calls seeking comment.

Grevera said the damage estimates he has seen range from \$200 to \$900, averaging around \$250 each.

That puts the total at around \$17,500 -- well beyond the \$5,000 threshold necessary to file felony criminal mischief charges.

Leonard Marshallick, 74, came out of his East Washington Street home Sunday morning to find the driver's side window shot out of his silver Chevrolet Impala.

Destined for Mass at the Polish National Catholic Church on Prospect Street, Marshallick and his wife took their vintage BMW - undamaged and parked in the driveway - instead.

Still, Marshallick said, the whole thing is a pain. The auto glass repair man wanted to come to the house today to fix the window, but it conflicted with Marshallick's trip - he's a Korean War veteran - to the Veterans Administration Medical Center.

So the garbage bag will stay draped over the window until Wednesday, Marshallick said. He estimated his cost, after deductible, at about \$50.

Grevera said anyone with damage should call police at 735-2200.

12/08/03

Nanticoke cars targeted in shooting spree

By Elizabeth Skrapits - Citizens' Voice Staff Writer



Numerous Nanticoke City residents had a rude awakening Sunday when they discovered the windows of their vehicles had been shot out with what police believe were pellet guns. "Just about everyone's been very upset coming out in the morning and finding their windows broken," Nanticoke Police Officer Joseph Kosch said. "A lot of people were coming out to go to church." Police said more than 30 vehicles had their windows damaged. The vandalism most likely occurred in the early hours of Sunday morning, according to Kosch. "We're estimating somewhere between

midnight and four in the morning. That's when the first one was called in," he said. Police believe more than one person was responsible; they say several suspects have been identified and will soon be arrested. Resident Linda Letizi said she was alerted by a neighbor out walking her dog early in the morning to the fact that her husband Paul's car had been damaged. "We thought we were the only car until I called 911," Letizi recalled. "I said to the lady, 'I hate to call 911 because it's not an emergency' - she said it was going to be a while because there were so many incidents in Nanticoke." Letizi thought at first the damage was caused by someone "out to get her," but police told her the window shootings were random. In fact, she later learned that at least five cars belonging to her neighbors along the street had also been shot. "They must have gone right around town," Letizi said. Kosch noted the damage was not restricted to a particular area. "It was over the entire city. The tally is still coming in," he said. People whose vehicle windows were damaged are being asked to come forward and assist in the investigation. Kosch said the higher the dollar amount of the damage, the more serious the charges will be when they are filed against the suspects. Nanticoke police are tracing vehicle license plate numbers to their owners, but it is very important for people to contact police anyway. "It only gives us so much information to go with, and if they're not in the phone book, we're stuck," Kosch said. Victims should report to Kevin J. Grevera, the investigating officer, at the Nanticoke police station as soon as they can. The station opens at 8:30 a.m. Monday, and there will be someone at the desk until 4 p.m. Victims can also call 735-2200, but police would prefer if they came in personally. Police ask that victims provide their vehicle year, make, license plate number, and their name, date of birth, phone number and address. In addition, victims are asked to bring an estimate for the cost of the window repair, if possible. Letizi said the incident Sunday was the third time this year one of her family's cars was damaged. "My insurance company is probably going to think, 'What the heck is going on here,'" she said with a laugh, before growing serious again. "It's really a shame."

11/30/2003

Turn the page

By: Elizabeth Skrapits

A small city is a dynamic thing, subject to phases of boom, decline, occasional stagnation - and revitalization.

To study the past and look to the future of Nanticoke City is to view a portrait of an American downtown that is both typical and distinctive.

Jule Znaniiecki was born in 1908 in the Hanover section of town, a second-generation Nanticoke native. Her grandfather, Frank Patrzykowski, left Poznan, Poland in 1884 to escape German rule.

Immigrants flocked to Nanticoke at the turn of the century because of its many collieries: the Susquehanna, Auchincloss, Bliss, and Truesdale.

Znaniiecki said that at Ellis Island in New York, they were directed onto northeast Pennsylvania-bound trains by coal-company agents who were stationed there.

"During the train ride - they said, 'that is Europe. That is the way my country looks.' This came especially from the Slavs-Polish, Russians, Ukrainians - they loved the ride from New York," said Znaniiecki. "But when they reached Nanticoke, it was a different story. It was a mining town, dirt roads, wood planks for sidewalks, smoke and pollution in the air."

Immigrants like Patrzykowski, who went on to become a councilman, became active in civic affairs and set the foundations for the transformation of Nanticoke in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

"In time they learned they had to take part. They went to night school and learned English. Those who were adept did very well," Znaniiecki said.

"They knew how to do things, and it didn't take them long to pave the roads and put in sidewalks and deal with epidemics."

At the turn of the 20th Century, Nanticoke's economy was mainly based on coal mining and farming, but many immigrants opened their own businesses. Znaniiecki said there were saloons all over town, and numerous grocery stores. During World War I when the men went off to war, the textile industries were started.

According to the history of Nanticoke that Znaniiecki wrote for the city's 1976 U.S. bicentennial book, Nanticoke was incorporated as a borough in 1874.

By 1924, Nanticoke qualified to become a third-class city under Pennsylvania code, and in 1925 the current government of a mayor and four-member council was established.

Znaniiecki wrote that in 1926 Nanticoke contained 22 churches, 11 public schools, five parochial schools, six collieries, four banks, four silk mills, two shirt factories, and a cigar mill. That was the General Cigar Co. on West Church Street, which made White Owl and Robert Burns cigars. The building was demolished this past July.

In the age of the streetcar, people came from all over the area to shop in the main commercial district of Nanticoke, centered around Market, Main and Broad streets.

There were department stores and specialty shops; Znaniiecki remembered W. D. Jenkins's The Leader Store, Leventhal's Men's and Boy's Wear on East Main Street, and lots of other clothing stores catering to women and men.

"When I was in high school in the 20s, we worked at Newberry's or the shoe stores or Kirby's, and our wages were 50 cents. Everything was a nickel," Znaniiecki said.

After graduating from East Stroudsburg University, Znaniiecki became a teacher in 1928, until she married her husband Vincent in 1937. Dancing and going to the movies were favorite diversions.

"We had three theaters. The State Theater was the big one down here on Main Street. It was just recently demolished," Znaniiecki recalled. "There was the Casino Theater, and the Rex Theater up on Market Street, near the park."

There were lots of places to go dancing, too, like the dance halls down on Broadway, and bands would play at the Armory.

"We never knew what it was to go to Wilkes-Barre in those days. We had everything on Market and Main," Znaniiecki said. "It was a flourishing town in the 20s."

And the growth continued. Nanticoke's population hit a peak in the 1930s that lasted into the 1940s. The U.S. Census shows a 1930 population of 26,040 and a 1940 count of 24,244.

But after the 1930s and 40s, the decline was slow and steady. In 1950, Nanticoke had 20,160 residents; in 2000, there were only 10,955 - in 50

years, the city lost nearly half its population.

Chester Zaremba, former chief of police and current vice-president of the Nanticoke Historical Society, has lived in Nanticoke his entire life, and his son and daughter-in-law also chose to live in the city.

"They want to live here because it's a nice, clean, safe, attractive city," Zaremba said.

He remembered his childhood in 1950s Nanticoke. Zaremba's father worked the afternoon shift, 2-10 p.m., at the Huber Breaker. On Fridays, Zaremba would go downtown with his mother and brother.

The afternoon would start with a treat such as pizza or pierogies, then on to the shopping district, which stretched from Walnut Street to North Market Street, then from South Market Street all the way to the park.

"At that time, I remember every conceivable kind of shop you could want," Zaremba said. "You just ran out of time on a Friday night in Nanticoke. There was so much to do."

There were the big stores like Woolworth's and lots of specialty shops - the hobby shop was Zaremba's particular favorite.

On Saturday nights, downtown Nanticoke was hopping. The line for movies at the State Theater would wrap all the way around the block.

"You were shoulder-to-shoulder on the sidewalk many times," Zaremba recalled.

Today, downtown Nanticoke is no longer thronged with shoppers and entertainment-seekers, and many of the buildings that once housed thriving businesses are now vacant.

Congressman Paul E. Kanjorski (D-11) is a native of Nanticoke and former city solicitor.

"Nanticoke has definitely been going through a transition," he admitted. "It suffered, like all of Northeastern Pennsylvania, from the devastation of the coal mining industry, and that happened probably in the late 40s when gas and oil became standard fuels, replacing anthracite."

Zaremba believes the population drop was caused by an exodus resulting from the closing of the mines, increasing education - particularly at the high-school level - and parents encouraging their children to seek better employment elsewhere.

"Everybody was going to New Jersey to get a job," Zaremba recalled.

Nanticoke Mayor John Toole moved to the city in 1972, when he married his wife Elizabeth, a lifelong resident. In the early 1970s, after Tropical Storm Agnes, there was a small real estate boom because the city was out of the flood zone.

"I remember when looking for a home in Nanticoke, you really couldn't find one," John Toole said.

Znaniacki wrote in 1976, "Nanticoke today is a pause between the old and the new with none of the old grandeur and charm. Gone are the opera house, the ballrooms, and the hotels. The urban redevelopment bulldozer has razed these monuments to the past. In their places are rising new modern buildings with the latest conveniences and facilities. This did not happen overnight."

Meanwhile, Nanticoke continued to lose residents. U.S. Census reports show 14,638 residents in 1970 and 13,044 in 1980.

Gerald Cross of the Pennsylvania Economy League said the population of Luzerne County, as a whole was 341,956 in 1970 and 343,079 in 1980. That shows a .3 percent loss in population for the county and 10.9 percent for Nanticoke, Cross noted.

"It's not so much that people were leaving the county as leaving the city," Cross said. "But that is symptomatic of third-class cities. You'd find that Hazleton, Nanticoke, Pittston, all suffered a similar decline."

Elizabeth Toole said part of the problem is that there is a large senior citizen population in Nanticoke, and often when elderly people pass away, their families move out of town and sell the houses.

Kanjorski explained that the American trend of leaving cities for suburban areas is a factor.

"What has happened in Nanticoke is basically in transition from a thriving center core population to a bedroom city," he said.

The decline of Nanticoke's downtown is representative of what is happening throughout the U.S., Kanjorski, the Tooles, and Zaremba all believe.

"When the malls came into being, that hurt the downtowns in I would say all of the cities. I think it was more of a national trend," Toole said.

Zaremba noted that downtown Nanticoke suffered as activity moved from the city to the shopping centers, then to the malls. He remembered forsaking downtown Nanticoke for the Gateway Shopping Center in Edwardsville when it first opened.

"You shifted; you were looking for something different, I think," he said.

In the 1950s, Zaremba's family had one car, which his father would take to work, so he walked to town with his mother and brother. Today families have three and four cars, he said.

"If you wanted a record player, you went to Bergman's," Zaremba said. "Now you go to Circuit City."

Increased mobility, as well as the advent of the highway system, encouraged outward migration, Kanjorski said.

On the other hand, that same issue of mobility and roads could be an asset to Nanticoke.

Kanjorski managed to get the all clear for a four-lane highway to connect state Route 29 and Nanticoke Highway and run to Newport Township.

Eventually the highway will be designed to go to state Route 11, up to Shickshinny.

Kanjorski believes the highway will afford opportunities for other areas, especially on 1,600 acres of former mining land now owned by Earth Conservancy, on which a 2,000-acre multi-purpose park is scheduled to be built. There is also the possibility of an industrial complex containing everything from offices to technology companies and perhaps hotels.

Kanjorski said in the future there will be a complete transition of Nanticoke from a 1930s-40s coal-mining town to a more diversified municipality, with people living in the city and various industries located around its perimeter.

In order for Nanticoke to continue to grow and prosper, attention must be paid to the infrastructure, by keeping public improvements up to date and making a long-term commitment, Kanjorski said.

Making plans and keeping to them will form the foundation for Nanticoke to make a tremendous recovery, Kanjorski said.

"I look back and think if I return to Nanticoke after 20 years, the downtown will have several new buildings, boutique shops and retail stores, parking to accommodate them, houses up to standard," he said. "(There will be) a high quality of life, and a periphery of jobs and parks around the community and new communities around those areas ... Assuming the area can attract the kinds of jobs and industry that will sustain this kind of growth."

One aspect of Nanticoke that already draws favorable comment from neighbors and visitors is the pride most residents take in their homes. "If you drive around the city, you'll see that people take good care of their properties," Elizabeth Toole said. "It is a beautiful town. In the past few years, we've paved more streets and torn down more dilapidated buildings than ever before."

Zaremba said the city is starting to focus on something important that has been neglected: code enforcement. City Administrator Greg Gulick and Code Enforcement Officer Richard Wiaterowski have been on a mission to actively deal with problem properties and eyesores.

John Toole said dealing with decrepit buildings was one of the first major things he addressed when he took office. In the past six years, he estimates 20 or 25 buildings have been demolished.

But it does not pay to get too overzealous about getting rid of old buildings, many of which help give Nanticoke its distinctive character.

"All of our frame buildings have been torn down. They should have kept one," Znaniecki lamented.

The Lincoln building was constructed in 1912, the high school in 1914 - both are gone. The 1924 Kosciuszko building was the first to go, Znaniecki recalled.

"I'll never forgive them for taking down the high school," she said. "We could have had so much there, using different parts of the building. But they sold the land and CVS is there now."

Zaremba also believes there should be more of a preservation effort. He said one of the reasons the Nanticoke Historical Society was founded in 1996 was because landmark buildings such as the State Theater and the junior high school were being torn down.

"All the buildings we knew - who didn't go to the State Theatre? Who didn't go to the high school? When those buildings went down, they took a little of us with them," Zaremba said. "Once it's gone, you're never able to build it again."

New towns have sprung up all over the U.S.; Kanjorski pointed out that they may look nice, but they're not real communities - Nanticoke is.

He gave as an example the town of Celebration, near Orlando, Fla.

Celebration is a carefully planned community featuring pre-1940s architecture; it was created by a subsidiary of the Disney Corporation in 1994 with the intent of blending the atmosphere of a traditional old-fashioned small town with contemporary innovations and modern amenities.

"In reality, all the characteristics of homes, streets, porches, sidewalks in Nanticoke are very analogous to Celebration, Fla., but ours are the real thing. They're not façades," Kanjorski said. "Nanticoke will represent what so many people in America are looking for - a return to the idyllic life that Celebration is trying to create."

He concluded, "We don't have to reconstruct it - we have it."

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11/30/2003

Nanticoke officials share a vision for a prosperous future

By:Elizabeth Skrapits

Nanticoke may be in a slump right now, but there is already evidence it is pulling out of it - and hopes are high for the future.

"I really think we're on the right track," said Chester Zaremba, a lifelong resident who is vice-president of Nanticoke's Historical Society.

Nanticoke Mayor John Toole said a reason for the region's decline is that people have to move away to other states to get jobs.

"We don't have room for expansion," John Toole said. "There's very little space for large businesses and industrial parks. The present buildings can be used; there is some space, but not to the extent where you would see a major employer."

But there are improvements, both already made and still to come. "You can say we have some very good things going on," said Nanticoke native Congressman Paul Kanjorski.

He pointed out the recent renovation of Weis Markets. "They recognized Nanticoke is going to grow and provide the kind of shopping capacity that warrants that kind of investment," Kanjorski said.

Over the last 10 years, some employers have been brought in, such as Health Now, which took over the old Traveler's building. There are also two pharmaceutical operations and plans are underway for commercial office space.

Kanjorski said there are two very promising prospects for offices in downtown Nanticoke, which he said, is working on moving along as fast as he can.

There is \$2 million in grants for Market Street - part of, which is a Keystone Opportunity Zone - which John Toole said, has been "sitting there for years."

"We've had a lot of plans for Market Street, and they just haven't taken off yet," John Toole said. "I always have people contacting me, and the (chamber) does too, looking for small or certain-sized spaces to lease."

John Toole believes from his research about urban flight and suburban sprawl that downtowns can make a comeback.

"I've been saying all along that Nanticoke is a great place to live, and people who come to visit say, 'wow, what a great city.' But it's not a big destination," John Toole said.

"Like Jim Thorpe - can we ever get to be like that someday? I don't know," his wife Elizabeth Toole added.

She was one of the organizers of MusicFest, a four-day summer music festival, which is one attempt to make Nanticoke a "destination." Another is carriage rides at Christmastime.

Elizabeth Toole said many plans - such as for a dam project, recreation areas, and a nine-hole golf course - had to be abandoned or put on hold because funding never came through.

In the future, when 16,000 acres of former mining land now owned by Earth Conservancy is reclaimed, it will give Nanticoke a tremendous boost, according to Kanjorski. He expects that to happen within the next 15 years - but the trouble is, things are moving excruciatingly slow.

Zaremba said when he started working for the city as police chief after 23 years in the Pennsylvania State Police; he got his first exposure to how slowly city government works.

The city needs "an impetus, a go-getter attitude," Zaremba said, and admitted, "I'm starting to see somewhat of a turnaround."

"What Nanticoke will transform into is basically a suburban community, because it will no longer have a commercial downtown," Kanjorski said. "There will no longer be a situation where it will be like a shopping center."

Instead, he predicts Nanticoke will have an increase in boutique-type shops and small business operations.

The proposed improvements would not only lead to a better quality of life for Nanticoke residents, but could set an example for other communities, such as Wilkes-Barre and the West Side, Kanjorski said.

"Nanticoke in a way will lead the comeback," he said.

"We're never going to have a thriving retail district again any more," Zaremba admitted, but noted that instead, "Specialty shops that can't be located in a mall, can't pay the kinds of rent in the malls, will find their niche."

He concluded, "You're not going to be able to fill your Christmas shopping list in Nanticoke, but you can shop somewhere else and come home and have a nice Christmas here."

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11/28/2003

A dangerous street has Nanticoke worried

By KASIA KOPEC - kkopec@leader.net

[GNA School District](#)

Frustrated that police patrols, educational campaigns and begging haven't slowed speeding drivers on Kosciuszko Street, school officials and parents are considering installing new stop signs or speed bumps.

The main artery from Main Street to Luzerne County Community College, Kosciuszko Street, has worried parents, crossing guards and school officials for years.

Superintendent Tony Perrone and others say the problem has intensified, and they fear someone, probably a child, will be injured or worse if something isn't done to slow down lead-footed drivers.

Children walking to the high school, middle school, or two elementary schools on Kosciuszko Street cross at the crest of a hill, right at a blind spot for motorists.

"I was out there the other day and I saw this girl speeding up the hill and she actually had to zig-zag to avoid hitting one of our crossing guards," said Perrone. "I don't know where her mind was."

It wasn't an isolated occurrence.

Veteran crossing guard Leo Prezworski said drivers regularly ignore him. So he's resorted to shouting at drivers or frantically waving his stop sign to get their attention.

"I step out there early to try to give them time to stop," said Prezworski. "If they're going 40 or 50, they need time to stop. But it seems like a lot of people just don't care."

Susan Rooney Saunders, whose three children walk to school from their Green Street home a few blocks away, said she has lost count of the near misses she has witnessed.

"I've seen women pushing baby strollers have to sprint across the street to avoid oncoming cars," said Saunders. "And last summer, while my children and I were volunteering to move books to the new library in the Elementary Center, we saw two accidents in the span of less than two hours."

One of those wrecks involved a child on a bike, she said.

Perrone blames cell phones and cigarettes for distracting teen drivers on their way to the high school or the community college.

Elementary school Principal Mariellen Scott has been working with community college officials to resolve the problem, but Perrone said more needs to be done.

Perrone advocates installing permanent stop signs at Noble and Ridge streets where they cross Kosciuszko Street, to force traffic to stop on either side of the crest of the hill.

Nanticoke city Administrator Greg Gullick said if the district requests the stop signs in writing, council will consider them.

"It's a local road, so we can do whatever we want in terms of stop signs," said Gullick. "If they ask us to install them, we'll certainly take a look at it."

But the Nanticoke Police Officers Association does not support the installation of new stop signs.

In a letter to the Times Leader, the association quotes PennDOT as saying, "Unnecessary stop signs cause accidents, breed contempt for other necessary stop signs and increase, rather than decrease speeds as motorists try to make up for lost time."

Officer Richard Vietz, who was patrolling Kosciuszko Street Tuesday morning, said police are severely limited in what they can do to enforce existing traffic laws the way it is.

"With two guys on a shift, it's hard," he said. "We get here when we can, but if there's a domestic dispute going on ... we can't be here passing out speeding tickets."

Saunders said some members of the parents council have been talking about installing temporary speed bumps as an alternative to stop signs, but she doubts either measure would do much to deter speeders.

"We have crossing guards, human beings, standing in the middle of the street with stop signs in their hands and cars still don't stop," she said. "Are they going to stop for a bump in the road or a sign on side of the street?"

November 23, 2003

MEMORIAL TREES HONOR VETERANS IN NANTICOKE



Nanticoke Civic Pride Committee, along with members of the 109th Field Artillery 1st Battalion Battery B, Veterans of the Vietnam War and Chamber of Commerce, recently dedicated memorial trees honoring veterans. This was held to announce the kickoff of phase-one of the remodeling and refurbishing of Nanticoke's Patriot Park. The cost of the project is \$30,000. For information, call 735-3476 or 735-0525. From left are, first row, Seth and Joan Prestash; second row, Staff Sergeant Steven Stempien, James Gallagher, Ken Miller, National Guard; Jim Bombay, Vietnam War Vets; Julianna Zarzycki, Chamber of Commerce; Amelia Brown, Civic Pride; Jerry Hudak, coordinator; Yvonne Bozinski, John Bushko, Civic Pride; Jared Kennedy, Aaron Wright and Bob Ohl, National Guard.

November 21, 2003

Plans to raze dilapidated structure in Nanticoke in legal limbo

Owner of property on South Hanover Street is a no-show at hearing; neighbors are frustrated

By Lisa Napersky Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

Nanticoke City officials will likely have to wait a few more months before they can authorize the demolition of a partially collapsed building on South Hanover Street.

The owner of the former TP Jones Furniture store, Randy Jenkins, failed to show up for a hearing before Luzerne County Judge Ann Lokuta Wednesday morning to explain why he feels the building shouldn't be torn down, so the city must continue its efforts to contact Jenkins.

Jenkins, whose last known address is a now defunct post office box in Peoria, Ariz., is also wanted on criminal charges for failing to respond to numerous citations on the dilapidated structure at 428 S. Hanover St.

Jenkins owes the city in excess of \$50,000 in fines for building code violations.

Nanticoke Solicitor Bernard Kotulak requested that the hearing to determine whether the structure should be razed be continued until the proper legal steps are taken to notify Jenkins, including hiring an investigator in Georgia.

If Jenkins doesn't respond in 60 to 75 days, Kotulak will ask the court to issue an order to demolish the building.

The delay has angered some area residents who have been fighting for several years to have the building razed because it is a health and safety hazard, but Kotulak said his hands are tied.

"The defendant has refused to accept service of the legal documents we sent him," explained Kotulak.

"Under Arizona state law, we can't take his property without giving him due process of law. We have to follow proper legal procedure."

The property was purchased in March, sight unseen, for \$7,600 through an eBay Internet auction from an unknown seller in New York.

The official owner of the property is listed as the Arizona based Church of a Different Spirit, with Jenkins listed as the contact.

The building's roof collapsed on June 6 when the city's engineer determined the structure was unsound and recommended demolition.

City officials estimate that demolition will cost approximately \$144,000, but until the city assumes ownership, it cannot raze the structure nor seek funding to cover the cost of demolition.

When Jenkins failed to show up for a criminal hearing before District Justice Donald Whittaker on July 31, a warrant was issued for his arrest, and he remains a fugitive.

Kotulak said the hiring of a private investigator would cost the city about \$200. The next step will be to try to notify Jenkins through publication in Arizona newspapers.

"Once we've taken those steps, we will obtain an order to knock down the structure, and we'll start taking bids for the project," said Kotulak. "The city is committed to getting rid of this problem property"

In the meantime, city Administrator Greg Gulick said he is continuing his crusade to clean up the city.

Gulick was in court Monday for a summary violation involving a dilapidated garage at 204 Welles St. Gulick said that since he took office in February, 65

city properties have been cited for code violations or cleaned up and repaired.

"Now that word's out we're not messing around - that we're going to court on these matters - people are cooperating with us," stated Gulick.

The city's next project is to see the former Ellis Skate-a-Rama on Washington Street renovated, the city administrator said.

Code enforcement officer Richard Wiaterowski said the city was working with the owner to get the building up to code so that it could be turned into a cold storage facility.

"We're going block by block with our effort to clean up the city," said Gulick. "Some of these legal matters take a long time, but it will be worth it in the long run."

The hearing on the demolition of the T.P. Jones building was rescheduled for Dec. 17 at 10 a.m.

Nov. 17, 2003

Tribute to coal miners of area

Sunday's monument unveiling will be in Nanticoke; Alma Berlot led fund-raising drive

By STEVE MOCARSKY - smocarsky@leader.net

[Pictures](#)

Alma Berlot's fond memories of her father include him coming home from a day of work in the coal mine and treating her to half a sandwich or an orange covered in coal dust that he saved for her in his lunch pail.

But it was a coal mine tour at McDade Park in Scranton not long ago that prompted Berlot to spearhead a drive to honor men such as her father for the work they did.

"When I saw the conditions the coal miners worked in - the filth, the rats ... I was terrified," Berlot recalled.

She became determined that a monument should be erected in her hometown to honor the men who often sacrificed their health or lives to provide for their families and further the state's and nation's industrialization.

That determination has paid off. The monument will be unveiled Sunday.

Berlot and her husband Alvin visited cemeteries and monument companies to get ideas for a monument and found that prices ranged between \$45,000 and \$52,000.

The day after a visit to such a company, Berlot saw a picture of a sculpture that artist Alan Cottrill created to commemorate the 2002 Quecreek mine disaster in Somerset County. The five-day underground entrapment of nine miners after a cave-in and their successful rescue made national headlines.

Berlot contacted Cottrill and eventually persuaded him to create a monument for display in Nanticoke. The price tag will be about \$38,000.

Berlot said some scoffed at the prospect of raising so much money. Even requests to the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board and the Mill Memorial Library for a donation of land on which to erect the monument were denied.

But Berlot wouldn't be deterred. She made about 500 coal sachets and sold them outside area stores. And as word of the project spread, community support grew.

Nanticoke Police Officer Kevin Grevera offered to send donation requests to all Nanticoke residents. And Sam Marranca, county director of veteran services, agreed to place the monument on his property at Kosciuszko and Main streets.

Grevera, Alvin Berlot and Nanticoke Streets Commissioner Paul Ushinski dug a hole for the monument's foundation. Shawnee Concrete donated materials. Wilkes-Barre Area Vo-Tech teacher Michael Vnuk and six students built the monument's base, and Joseph Yudichak donated use of a crane.

About \$25,000 in donations poured in from the community. And Sunday, a monument committee had a polka party fund-raiser at American Legion Post 350 with Jolly Joe and the Bavarians.

Berlot said she was overwhelmed by community response when more than 350 people showed up for the party; only 150 were expected.

While polka dancing was the main activity, those attending also paid tribute to the miners. The band played "Coal Mine in the Sky" as actual coal miners and children attired in costumes provided by coal miner historian Joseph Keating took center stage. Women dressed as angels walked through the crowd as a prayer was read for deceased miners.

Nanticoke native Gene Gomolka traveled from Naples, Fla., to attend the event.

"My father ... died of black lung at 65. He worked in the mines from the time he was 12 years old ... When I heard (Berlot) on the radio talking about this project, I thought it was great she was doing this," Gomolka said.

Julie Golanoski said family members came from Gettysburg, Tennessee and Virginia to attend the party. She shared stories with Gomolka and others about her father and her husband Casimer when they worked in the mines.

The unveiling of the monument - a 5-foot, 10-inch sculpture of a coal miner - will be held at 1 p.m. Sunday by CVS Pharmacy at Kosciuszko and Main streets in Nanticoke.

Steve Mocarsky, a Times Leader staff writer, may be reached at 459-2005.

HOW TO HELP

Donations may be sent to Coal Miners Memorial Monument, c/o Citizens Bank, 75 N. Market St., Nanticoke, Pa. 18634.

Monday, October 6, 2003



Officials Break Ground On Lexington Village

State Senator Ray Musto and Pennsylvania State Representative John Yudichak joined developer Dominick Ortolani and local officials to break ground for a new luxury senior apartment complex, Lexington Village in Nanticoke.

Lexington Village will offer 55 unique luxury senior apartments in a 12.5-acre campus style community
Construction has begun and occupancy is planned for 2004.

Both Senator Musto and Representative Yudichak have been actively working with the developer during the planning stages for the complex and to secure state funding in support of the project.

First row from left are Janet Ortolani, Joseph Dougherty city controller; Representative John T Yudichak, Dominick Ortolani, developer; State Senator Ray Musto, Kathy Rose, project administrator; second row: Shawn McHale, Weller Banking; Councilman William Brown, Mayor John Toole, Russ Bilby engineer; and David Balzer, architect.

Posted on Fri, Sep. 05, 2003

Nanticoke moving on decrepit building

By KASIA KOPEC-kkopec@leader.net

The mortar is crumbling, trees are growing through a roof destroyed by fire more than a decade ago, and pigeons roost in the windows of this ruined building the size of a city block.

But what differentiates the old Duplan silk mill on Prospect Street from other eyesore properties in the city is that it remains open for business. The front of the mill houses L.S. Bowl-A-Rama, where anyone brave enough to lace up a pair of bowling shoes and hurl a ball down a lane in the direction of the fire-damaged section is welcome.

City Administrator Greg Gullick said the bowling alley is up to code and poses no danger to patrons. "It's just the back portion there, where the owner used to have a roller skating rink and some storage, that we're concerned about."

But Code Enforcement Officer Richard Wiaterowski said he is uncertain how sound the building is and awaits a report from the city's engineer before deciding whether to close it.

Wiaterowski filed a complaint against the building's owner, George Ellis Jr., with District Justice Donald Whittaker on Thursday morning. "He said he hired a contractor and he is going to start construction, but I filed the complaint just in case."

Ellis said he understands Wiaterowski's position and agrees the building is an eyesore. He has hired an excavator he said is preparing to tear down the third floor and remove debris in advance of the installation of a new roof. Ellis rebuts any suggestion the bowling alley portion is in jeopardy, and said he has been assured the steel beams supporting the decades-old building are sound.

"After the fire, we had OSHA and the Department of Labor and Industry and everybody in here checking it out," Ellis said. "They told me this place was built to withstand a world war. So it isn't going anywhere."

Renovations are expected to begin in about a month after environmental testing is completed.

"We have to make sure there is no asbestos or pollutants or anything of that nature in there before we start with the construction," Ellis said. "Of course, if they find any of that, we'll have to take a different route."

Officials have tried for years to force the building's owners to fix it up. They even issued an arrest warrant for George Ellis Sr. in 1995 after he didn't respond to a complaint about the condition of the property.

Wiaterowski said though his predecessors made an effort to address the violations, they never followed through, and he promised things will be different.

9/4/2003

Senior home complex set for Nanticoke

Lexington Village scheduled to include 52 apartments and a 66-bed personal care center.

lroth@leader.net

If all goes according to plan, Kosciuszko Street will be the location of a new \$12 million housing complex for the elderly called Lexington Village. Developers Dominick and Michael Ortolani of Plains Township plan to build a 52-apartment independent-living home and a 66-bed Alzheimer's and personal care treatment facility on 12.5 acres.

The apartments are slated for completion in 2004, with the long-term care home scheduled to open in 2005.

"It's great to see people investing in the community," said Mayor John Toole.

The development will contribute much-needed money into the city's tax coffers, said state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke.

Yudichak and State Sen. Raphael Musto, D-Pittston Township, said they helped woo the developers, adding they would seek money for cost overruns from the state Department of Community and Economic Development.

A ground-breaking is scheduled for 4:30 p.m. today on the site across the street from Luzerne County Community College.

The development is expected to employ 70 to 75 people and have a \$500,000 annual payroll, Yudichak said.

"All the things we were looking for, we found there," said developer Michael Ortolani. Nanticoke is a quiet community, he said, and the proximity to LCCC will help enhance the "campus effect" of the complex.

The 52 two-bedroom apartments will all have 9-foot ceilings, eat-in kitchens, hot-water-circulated baseboard heat, air conditioning, walk-in closets, a garage and attic storage. Residents will have access to the multi-purpose room at the care home once it is built.

"I think we're going to be successful beyond our imagination," Ortolani said. "We didn't spend a penny in advertising" and two-thirds of the apartments have already been leased, he said.

Hallmark Senior Properties of Baltimore is managing the property. The apartments will likely cost \$750 to \$800 a month.

Personal-care patients will live, eat and exercise separately in the nursing home from Alzheimer's patients, Ortolani said.

"The Alzheimer's unit has the very latest features," because they will be built with the special-needs patients in mind. For example, patients recall colors better than numbers, so doors will be painted different colors, he said.

He and his father have developed homes, condominiums and strip malls in New Jersey, he said. It will be their first project for housing for the

elderly. J.W. Weller Mortgage Banking Corp. of West Orange, N.J. will provide the financing.

Mayor Toole said he hopes the project will spur other investment. He said he recently met with developers interested in building townhouse-like residences on the former Consolidated Cigar property on West Church Street.

The owner has nearly finished clearing rubble from the demolished factory, and has said he will then donate the land to the city

9/4/2003

Resident stymies paving

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Dr. Michael Kotch talks about the problems with Middle Rd. in Nanticoke. He hopes that the city will fix the pothole problem.

Richard Buttrick has thwarted the city's attempt to pave pothole-plagued Lincoln Avenue using grant money, and he's proud of it.

"For the last 40 years I've been trying to better the city in other ways. Sometimes self-interest takes precedence."

Buttrick wants the city to redirect the money to demolish the partially collapsed former T.P. Jones furniture store on South Hanover Street. His wife, Christina, owns the house next door, which she rented to her brother. He had to move in with her after the store's roof fell on June 6.

A spokesman with the state Department of Community and Economic Development confirmed Lincoln Avenue can't be paved with federal Community Development Block Grant money because fewer than 51 percent of its residents are low- or moderate-income.

And Buttrick takes the credit for tipping them off.

He said he told the state that census figures from 2000 show 46 percent of the street's residents have low or moderate incomes.

"I felt the city should have to comply with the requirements everyone has to comply with."

Residents of Lincoln Avenue are despairing that no fix is on the way for their ruined road.

"It's disgusting. It's getting worse and worse all the time," said Robin Muth of 1601 Lincoln Ave. Her daughter Samantha, 11, said she can feel the potholes when her school bus drives over parts of the street.

It's also a safety issue, Muth said. "I come up on the wrong side of the street to avoid potholes."

Michael Kotch's driveway is near a spot drivers swerve to avoid. "There must be five or six (potholes) in front of my driveway that my car falls into every time I move it." He said he doubts the road will survive another winter.

The project to rebuild Lincoln Avenue could have begun next week. Instead, it will be canceled, said Mayor John Toole. "I'm not happy. This was all set to go. There are a lot of unhappy campers that use that road. They're getting flat tires. I hope we can do it next year."

Buttrick, a city resident and independent community development consultant, said he tried for two months to convince the city it was ineligible before going to the state.

After Buttrick derailed the project, he sent the mayor a letter. "You should be thanking me," his letter read. "The City would have had to pay that money back from its General Fund" for the improper use of grant money.

But city officials say Buttrick might not have his way. They have other plans for the money.

"We'll be changing it to another road project, I would think," Toole said.

Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski said she'd like to see if Lincoln Avenue could still qualify. "What we possibly could do is see if people have moved out of the area. Or send staff to go door-to-door on these streets."

Volunteers are being sought to conduct a survey of the area to determine whether or not it in fact meets the low income requirements.

Toole said the T.P. Jones building will be knocked down, maybe just not as quickly as Buttrick might like.

About \$100,000 in a demolition fund, though promised for other projects, could be used, Toole said. Or the city could take out a loan from the state. And in August, council voted to petition the court for an order to tear down the building, which is owned by a church in Las Vegas. If a request to expedite the court hearing is approved, the city could have permission to raze the building this month.

"I don't know what he was thinking," Toole said. "Selfishness, I guess, comes out."

9/2/2003

Nanticoke officials, resident disagree over paving project

By Elizabeth Skrapits, Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

Nanticoke City officials want to fix up a main street in town, but a resident believes the grant funding would be better spent elsewhere.

Nanticoke had received permission to use Office of Community Development Community Block Grant money to pave Lincoln Avenue, which Mayor John Toole said the city and its engineer determined was a main traffic artery.

But Toole told council at Saturday's work session that resident Rick Buttrick sent in a complaint to OCD, which caused the agency to change its mind.

Rather than risk a lawsuit, city officials will have to find another road to improve.

"Council will talk about doing another project to see if we can get it in, in time for the construction season," Toole said. "There's enough streets to do; it's just that Lincoln Avenue is a heavily used street."

Buttrick contends Lincoln Avenue can be paved if the city is willing to do an income survey.

"They're required to make sure 51 percent of the people who benefit from an OCD activity are low or moderate income," Buttrick said. "On its face the project is not eligible, because according to the 2000 census, the area is 46.5 percent. However, that does not preclude the city from doing a house-to-house income survey to see if the 2000 census was correct, or the demographics have changed over the past three years since the census was completed."

If the survey determines the Lincoln Avenue area to be at least 51 percent low to moderate income, the city could use 2004 OCD money, Buttrick pointed out.

Toole said Buttrick was right, but it would take a while to do the survey, and by the time it was finished and everything was approved by OCD, it

would be too late to do the project this year.

Toole said the city did an income survey once before, about three years ago, in order to use OCD money to buy a new pumper truck for the fire department.

He said the department was sent out to cover the entire city: they went door to door, making residents sign documents to verify their income. The results of the survey showed 59 percent low to moderate income, so the city was able to use the OCD money to purchase the new fire truck. But Toole said it had involved a lot of legwork.

"Then you have to have a majority of people sign, and make sure they're telling the truth about their income, and people are reluctant to do that," he noted. "We did do it before, but that's not saying how the survey is going to come out."

If Lincoln Street does not qualify for OCD funding, it would have to be put off indefinitely, because the city does not have enough in its general fund. Toole said the project would cost about \$150,000 for the basics alone

Buttrick said if the OCD money could not be used to pave Lincoln Avenue, it should be used for demolition of the former T.P. Jones furniture store on South Hanover Street.

Buttrick's wife owns the house next door to the T.P. Jones furniture store.

"Obviously, given this time of year, if it is not possible to bid new construction contracts that require paving, they can use the money for demolition," he said.

The building, which is owned by an Arizona-based entity called Church of a Different Spirit, partially collapsed three months ago.

"There have been two other minor collapses since," Buttrick said.

"People next door could hear the rumbling of material falling into the building."

A Greater Nanticoke Area school bus stop near the building has recently been moved a block up, owing to possible danger.

Toole said while it was common knowledge the building had to be demolished, it could not be done because the city does not own it.

At the July meeting, Councilmen John Bushko, William Brown and Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski voted to have Solicitor Bernard Kotulak petition Luzerne County court to allow the city to demolish the building.

Toole said he met with Kotulak Thursday and there was nothing new to report.

"The problem is that even if the judge authorizes the city to demolish the building, the city says it doesn't have the money to demolish it," Buttrick said. "I've been saying for three months that they can use community development block grant funds to demolish the building."

Toole said in speaking with OCD, he learned the city does have close to \$100,000 in a specific demolition fund, but the city would have to "re-balance" some other demolition projects to use it.

"You can also petition the office of OCD to take a loan, if it came to that," Toole said.

However, the city must gain legal control of the building first, because it does not want to risk a lawsuit.

"We're doing everything we can. Everyone agrees the building has to come down. It's just coming up with the funding to do it and do it legally,"

Toole said

8/27/2003

Fire destroys home in Nanticoke

A fire destroyed a two-story home at 424 E. Washington St., Nanticoke on Tuesday night.

Nanticoke Assistant Fire Chief Mike Bohan said fire crews responded to the home around 8:30 p.m. and encountered flames on the second floor.

It took firefighters less than an hour to bring the fire under control.

Chief Bohan said the home is a total loss, with heavy fire damage on the second floor and heavy smoke and water damage on the first floor.

Firefighters were throwing burned debris out a second floor window that measured two to three feet deep on the ground along side the home.

Wyoming Valley Chapter of the American Red Cross will assist the three people who lived in the home, Chief Bohan said.

No injuries were reported

Chief Bohan said the state police fire marshal will be called to investigate the cause of the fire.

Assisting [Nanticoke were firefighters](#) from the Hanover Township Fire Department.

8/25/2003

Historical marker recalls career of Pete Gray

By Tom Venesky , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

[Famous Nanticokeans](#)

To make it in professional sports, athletes have to overcome formidable odds and make the most of their athletic ability.



Former Nanticoke resident Pete Gray is the ultimate example of how to overcome adversity and realize your dream.

Gray, who passed away last year at the age of 87, lost his right arm when he was six. Despite the handicap, he grew up yearning for a chance to play major league baseball.

In 1945, Gray's dream became a reality when he played 77 games for the St. Louis Browns.

In honor of his accomplishment, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) dedicated an historical marker to Gray. PHMC Commissioner Dr. Robert Janosov said the marker would be located on Front Street, in the Hanover Section of Nanticoke, where Gray lived. During a dedication ceremony prior to the Red Barons game on Sunday at Lackawanna County Stadium in Moosic, Janosov told the crowd the location is a fitting place to ensure Gray's legacy lives on.

"It will stand near the Little League baseball fields where new generations of baseball players will be inspired by the marker's message and Pete's accomplishments," he said.

Red Barons General Manager Rick Muntean called Gray an "American legend" and said it was an honor for the Red Barons organization to be involved in the dedication.

"For any man to play this game with one arm is remarkable," he said.

Although he is widely known for his accomplishments on the diamond, Gray is also remembered for his outgoing personality.

Although his handicap prevented him from enlisting for service in World War II, Gray contributed to the war effort by visiting army hospitals and speaking with amputees to reassure them they could still lead a productive life.

His baseball career ended in 1949, when he retired and returned home to Nanticoke.

Author William Kashatus, who wrote the 1995 biography "One-Armed Wonder: Pete Gray, Wartime Baseball and the American Dream," spoke about his first meeting with the legend in 1966.

Kashatus was six years old at the time and remembers how Gray showed him how he could catch a baseball, remove it from his glove and exchange it to his throwing hand in one swift motion.

"I sat in awe as he asked me to remember him when I made it to the big leagues," he said. "Pete respected my dreams and became my very first hero."

Kashatus' friendship with Gray continued into his adult life, when he knew him as a "card shark, scratch golfer and loyal friend."

"The marker will serve as a reminder to young people that if a man with one-arm can make it in baseball, then nothing should discourage them from their dreams."

The marker is the newest of 1,900 historical markers located across the state. Janosov noted that each marker establishes an important link to the past.

"It's my hope that the 'Pete Gray' Wyshner marker will not be the end of the story but will, instead, provide encouragement for further study and discussion about our rich heritage," he said.

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8/15/2003

Nanticoke residents paying price for crimes committed by ex-tax collector

By Lisa Napersky , [Citizens' Voice](#)

Many Nanticoke residents received an unpleasant surprise in the mail this week - notices that their houses were being placed on the upcoming tax sale list. Although city and county officials couldn't say for certain why the notices were sent to residents who have paid their taxes, there seems to be no question that the problem stems from a former city employee who pocketed thousands of dollars in tax revenues. Brenda Davis, East Field Street, pleaded guilty last October to theft, forgery and default as tax collector. She admitted to stealing an undetermined amount of tax money in her position at the Nanticoke tax office, where she was employed from 1993 until her suspension in June 2001. Davis was scheduled to be sentenced in April, but prosecutors agreed to delay sentencing until Nov. 13 when a restitution amount should be determined. Officials decided to wait and see if any taxpayers who properly paid their taxes in the Nanticoke office have their properties listed for tax sale in September. The logic was that if homes are listed and no one comes forward with proof of payment, these amounts could be deducted from the restitution total. An alternate plan to perform an extensive audit was scrapped because it could have cost in excess of \$100,000. The audit would have been paid for by the three taxing bodies involved - the city, the county and Greater Nanticoke Area School District. In the meantime, the confusion is causing a great deal of stress for many Nanticoke residents who were sent letters saying they could lose their homes. Reportedly, the Luzerne County Tax Claim Bureau, which generated the notices, has been inundated with phone calls and visits from frustrated taxpayers. "I had to go to the courthouse today to prove that I paid, and they told me they've been getting calls left and right, people crying and upset," remarked one resident who asked not to be identified. "I'm very upset because I had to take a day off work to straighten this out, and no one seems to want to be held accountable." Nanticoke Solicitor Bernie Kotulak said the notices were inadvertently sent out as a result of a glitch in the county computer system, although he admitted the problems might be related to the Davis case. "If these people paid their taxes, they only have to go to tax claim and present proof that they paid," noted Kotulak. A clerk in the Nanticoke tax office would only say it was a county problem and refused to comment further. A call to Mayor John Toole was not returned. Employees in the Tax Claim Bureau referred questions to Virginia Augello, bureau director, who could not be reached Thursday because she is on vacation. Debra McNulty, who now works in the county treasurer's office, was tax claim director when the Nanticoke problems first surfaced. She said there were at least three years of tax revenues in question, and some people might be getting a second tax sale notice even though they already verified that they paid their bills. "Until the case is resolved and the money is paid back, the questions over who is delinquent will continue," said McNulty. "If people get notices, they should take care of it as soon as possible to get their names off the list before the ads are printed." An employee in the tax claim office confirmed that a total of 8,000 notices were sent out Monday to county residents who are three years delinquent on their taxes. She said the annual Upset Price Sale would be held Sept. 30, and that the list of properties for sale would be advertised on Aug. 29, 30 and 31. County Controller Steve Flood said several county employees spent a great deal of time last year trying to help the city determine how to allocate \$30,000 in uncashed checks and \$15,000 in cash that was found in the municipal tax office. "We tried to do what we could to help them, but we are not responsible for this," explained Flood. "One of the problems is that many people in Nanticoke paid by cash, so it couldn't be traced. I don't think we'll ever know how much money Brenda Davis actually stole over the years." County accounts manager Joan

Hoggarth said that some of the recent notices might have been sent out in error by the tax claim office, but the bottom line is that it might be a while before Nanticoke tax woes are resolved. "We really can't tell exactly what she did or trace how much she actually stole until these people who got notices come forward," noted Hoggarth. "We can't remove the delinquencies until the issue is resolved."

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8/15/2003

Nanticoke mud flow stirring debate

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A 5-foot long smear of dirt and rocks collected outside Eugene Letukas' Hanover Street home after Monday's deluge. Tuesday found Letukas shoveling the mess into a wheelbarrow, just as he has after every heavy rainfall this year.

The dirt comes from a barren rear lawn at 1500 Lincoln Ave., neighbors say.

Homeowner Celia Cavalini of 1500 Lincoln Ave. did not answer her door and could not be reached by phone Tuesday. The elderly woman so rarely leaves the house that several longtime residents said they wouldn't recognize her.

Four years ago, Cavalini's neighbor, Joe Kowalski of 1509 S. Hanover St., got so sick of the mud running across his lawn and driveway that he built a \$4,000 retaining wall, he said.

Now the redirected dirt flows out into Hanover Street and rushes down the hill, settling in front of Letukas' house at 1540 S. Hanover St. On Monday "it looked like a muddy creek just flowing down the street," said his wife, Alyson.

Letukas doesn't fault Kowalski for building the wall. "He had to do what he had to do."

Now, Letukas said, the city needs to step in.

"We just need to have something done." Letukas called the mayor Monday, and attended last week's council meeting with a small group to complain about Cavalini's yard.

"I don't see how the city can do anything," said streets Commissioner Paul Ushinski, who has noted some of the residents' complaints. "If I was the homeowner, I would get bales of hay to stop the erosion. But who am I to say?"

One resident suggested neighbors should just learn to live with it.

"It used to aggravate me. You pay for your property here," said Fred Stanski of 1424 Lincoln Ave.

But he's had a change of heart.

"She and her husband built the house, then he died. She's 80-some years old and didn't want to leave," said Stanski, who has shoveled snow for Cavalini. "People

shouldn't feel this way. They're gonna get old, too."

8/12/2003

Nanticoke man files suit over accord to sell lot

Joseph Simone is asserting Nanticoke municipal authority has backed out of a contract.

By KASIA KOPEC - kkopec@leader.net

A city man has filed a lawsuit alleging that the General Municipal Authority and Redevelopment Authority reneged on an agreement to sell him an empty lot on South Market Street.

According to the complaint:

Joseph Simone of East Church Street approached the municipal authority on Jan. 25, 1999 about purchasing the lot.

The lot separates two properties owned by Simone: the former Blue Bird restaurant and a card shop. Simone wanted to buy the lot and use it for parking for the two businesses.

The municipal authority voted on June 25, 2000 to have the lot appraised and to sell it to Simone for the appraised value plus costs.

Penn Laurel Real Estate appraised the property at \$8,000.

Sometime before May 29, 2001, it is alleged that the defendants found a problem with the title and filed a suit in the Court of Common Pleas to rectify it.

About three months later, Simone was informed the municipal authority decided not to sell the lot.

Simone, through his attorney, Maurice Cardone, claims that although a traditional agreement of sale was not prepared, the actions undertaken constitute a contract.

Simone could not be reached Monday, and Cardone declined comment.

Garry Taroli, the municipal authority's solicitor, would not comment on the pending litigation, but he said an answer to Simone's complaint was filed July 25.

No further action has been taken by either party and no court date has been set.

8/6/2003

Run-down garage could get man jailed

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That was the stern warning District Justice Donald Whitaker issued to Larry Stadulis, who owns a dilapidated two-car garage on Espy Street.

The city has ordered Stadulis to demolish the garage as part of a crackdown on negligent property owners. More than 50 property owners have been cited since June, and back-to-back hearings for eight, including Stadulis, were held Tuesday.

Stadulis, who also owns and operates the Larmel Inn at 301 Middle Road, said he wants to comply with the judge's order but he doesn't know how he is going to manage it.

"See I'm in a real catch 22, here," Stadulis admitted at a hearing Tuesday morning. "My ex-wife's name is on the deed so the bank won't lend me the money to knock it down without her approval. And I can't reach her."

Stadulis concedes his garage needs to come down, but says his ex-wife, Melanie Stadulis, lives in Alabama and he has no way to reach her.

Also, he doesn't have the cash to cover demolition costs. "I would need \$8,000 or so. And I haven't been able to find anybody willing to do it on the cheap."

Whittaker said he would delay action on the case for 30 days, but if the garage isn't taken down by then, Stadulis faces a fine of up to \$1,000 per day dating to June 11, when the city's Code Enforcement Officer Richard Wiaterowski issued the citation.

"You might as well put me in jail, because there is no way I can pay that," Stadulis said.

Whittaker said if it comes to it, he will issue a warrant for Stadulis' arrest, but he advised him to take care of the problem himself instead.

"Get four or five guys with sledge hammers and go at it," Whittaker said.

Stadulis asked if his ex-wife also faces prison if the property isn't demolished, but Whittaker said it is unlikely she will be extradited from Alabama.

"You could move to Alabama too," he offered.

Reached Tuesday afternoon, Stadulis said he has no plans to leave the state, but that he will probably follow Whittaker's advice to demolish the garage himself.

In another hearing, Whittaker ordered William Shirk and Leonard Radziak, owners of 120-122 Rear West Noble St., to demolish their property within 30 days. The building, which is adjacent to the former T.P. Jones Furniture store, was scheduled to be torn down by Popple Construction crews after a portion of it collapsed in June. But when it was determined the building could be stabilized, city officials opted not to use public funds for demolition and go after the building's owners for the money instead.

That demolition has been put on hold because representatives of the Church of the Free Spirit (listed on tax records as Church of the Different Spirit) based in Las Vegas, which owns the building, failed to show for a hearing on the property Thursday.

A warrant for the arrest of Randy Jenkins, who is listed on tax records as an officer of the church, has been issued said City Administrator Greg Gullick. "We're working with the Luzerne County District Attorney's Office, our sheriff's department and the sheriff out there to enforce the warrant."

The Las Vegas church owes the city more than \$50,000 in fines stemming from its failure to demolish the former furniture store, Gullick said. Six other property owners were ordered to trim weeds, pick up trash, make repairs or otherwise rehabilitate their properties to bring them into compliance with the city's building codes

8/6/2003

Nanticoke cracks down on owners of run-down properties

By Elizabeth Skrapits , [Citizens' Voice](#) Staff Writer

In the latest battle in Nanticoke City's ongoing war against problem properties, District Justice Donald Whittaker handed down rulings against seven property owners Tuesday morning.

City Administrator Greg Gulick, who has been working with Whittaker and Code Enforcement Officer Rich Wiaterowski to deal with Nanticoke's eyesores and hazards, believes the hearings went very well.

"I think people will get the word that Nanticoke City will be enforcing the code," Gulick declared. Charles Vanderlick, who owns a property overgrown with weeds and containing a dilapidated garage at 239 Pine St., failed to appear for his hearing. He will be confronted with fines of \$300 per day and court costs.

The same penalty is faced by Toni Annunziata, who didn't show up, either, and whose 5-7 W. Green St. property has weeds and high grass around the premises.

A property at 256 E. Noble St. is nearly in compliance; all owner Robert Adams has to do is remove an old swimming pool and clean up a bit and he won't be fined.

Lawrence Stadulis claims his 301 rear Middle Road building will be razed within the 30 days allotted by Whittaker.

So does Leonard Radziak, who said he has contracted with Popple Construction for demolition of his dilapidated structure at 120-122 rear W. Noble St.

Two of the properties have had their mortgages foreclosed on, so Whittaker determined Wiaterowski should find out within 15 days whether the deed holder or the bank is the legal owner in each case.

Wiaterowski must also check out the other five properties to make sure they are in compliance.

Whittaker's rulings will be held in abeyance with the condition that the owners take care of the problems within the 30-day deadline.

If they do not, the owners will be found guilty and sentence will be imposed based on the date of the hearing.

Owners have the option of appealing Whittaker's decision to county court.

Wiaterowski noted there are more nuisance property hearings to come, with two or three more scheduled for next week.

"When these are cleaned up, we'll go around and pick out the next batch," he said.

"We'll take care of it - bring 'em in here, give 'em 30 days or \$300, and they'll clean 'em up." Gulick said residents who wish to report problem properties might call either him or Wiaterowski at

735-2800

8/1/2003

\Nanticoke targets problem properties

By Elizabeth Skrapits , [Citizens' Voice](#) Staff Writer

The double-block house in Honey Pot, Nanticoke, across from the Ted Hiller ballpark, sticks out amid the rest of the neatly kept properties along

Garfield Street.

The roof of 435 Garfield St. barely exists, except for a few scattered boards, and the second floor of the house has fallen through to the first. Bushes grow rampant over the sagging front porch and are pushing their way through the broken door and into the house.

In the rear, the kitchen has collapsed completely, exposing a battered and rusted aluminum sink leaning beside a huge hole in what is left of the floor.

Nanticoke officials are waging a war against the problem properties that have been plaguing the city and its residents, sometimes for years.

When the Arizona-based owner of the half-collapsed former T.P. Jones Furniture store on Hanover Street failed to show up for a hearing Thursday, District Justice Donald Whittaker issued a warrant for his arrest.

The city will bring the owner, Randy Jenkins of the Church of a Different Spirit, from Arizona to Pennsylvania if necessary.

"Nanticoke City is enforcing the codes, and it's best to abide by them, or due process will follow," City Administrator Greg Gulick said.

Gulick said he, code enforcement officer Richard Wiaterowski and Whittaker plan to work together to eliminate problems.

"We're not using city money, just our time," Gulick said. "That's what we're paid to do."

Demolition or renovation will be paid for by property owners, not the city, unless the property belongs to the city. For instance, the city is awaiting bids for demolition of two vacant properties it owns in the 400 block of East Washington Street, having petitioned the court to do so.

The legal processes on the properties can drag on, however. The double-block at 433-435 Garfield St. is one example

Wiaterowski said the property has been a problem for the city since 1999 and, for fed-up neighbors, even longer. There was a small fire in the building five years ago, which led to it being condemned.

However, the property was in a legal tangle caused by the son of the late former owner allegedly forging names on documents, and the case churned through the court system for a long time.

The property is owned now by Michael Costillo, who plans to tear down 435 Garfield St. and renovate the other half, 433 Garfield St., into a single-family dwelling.

Gulick said he went with engineers for the city and for Costillo to examine the property, and was surprised to find that 433 was structurally sound and its roof was good, despite the condition of its other half.

Work on the demolition and renovation project will start as soon as the paperwork is complete.

After a hearing July 14, Luzerne County Judge Thomas Burke gave Costillo 14 days to submit plans to the city.

Wiaterowski said Costillo needs to have "stamped and sealed" plans from his engineer that when 435 Garfield St. is demolished, 433 Garfield St. can stand on its own.

Other times, it is not the legal process, but the property owner who may be dragging his or her feet.

The former LS Skate-O-Rama building, a large sprawling structure that stretches on Washington Street from Prospect to Walnut, is in such bad shape that trees and other vegetation are growing in it, poking their way out of broken windows.

Wiaterowski called the LS building the worst eyesore in Nanticoke, now that the old cigar mill at 154 West Church St. has been demolished.

Other property owners have been more cooperative. The owners of a dilapidated building at Fairchild and Union streets behind D&R Sporting Goods paid for its demolition and the work that turned it into a parking lot for the store. The Rosebush Building on Market Street was also recently demolished and that lot was filled in.

"Once people see that we are doing this, hopefully, we won't have to cite anybody," he said. "We are making progress - it just takes time."

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8/1/2003

Owner of dilapidated building skips hearing

By Elizabeth Skrapits, Citizens' Voice Staff Writer



The out-of-state owner of a controversial property at 428 South Hanover St., Nanticoke, faces arrest and extradition from Arizona after missing a hearing Thursday morning.

District Justice Donald Whittaker issued a warrant for the arrest of Randy Jenkins, the contact from the Arizona-based Church of a Different Spirit, after he failed to show up for a hearing on the property.

"We're not messing around," Nanticoke City Administrator Greg Gulick said.

The City of Nanticoke wants Jenkins extradited to Pennsylvania, and Gulick said officials would work with Arizona police to do so.

"We're just waiting for information from the (Luzerne County) district attorney's office on procedure," he said.

Jenkins had purchased the former T.P. Jones Furniture store, apparently sight unseen, for \$7,600 in an eBay auction from an unknown owner in New York.

The building's roof partially collapsed inward and its support beams bent on June 6. City engineer, Pasonick Associates, determined the structure was unsound and recommended demolition.

The owner disagreed, claiming in a June 17 letter to Nanticoke Code Enforcement Officer Richard Wiaterowski that the building was "a worthy project of restoration and renovation to new use as affordable cooperative housing."

The letter also stated, "... we believe that your discussion of razing the structure is not only ill-advised but arbitrary and capricious if not an abuse of discretion."

The signature on the letter was illegible, and there was no return address on it. Gulick said it was his understanding Jenkins bought buildings in college towns to renovate and rent to students.

Jenkins' origins, however, are obscure.

His organization was first revealed to Nanticoke officials as the "Church of the Free Spirit," but is referred to on the deed to the property as "Church of a Different Spirit."

There are also at least two different contact addresses, including Peoria, Ariz., and possibly one in Nevada.

The lowest estimate for demolition of the building was \$144,000, which was submitted by Popple Construction.

However, Nanticoke officials say they cannot demolish the building because the city does not own the property.

For his lack of action, Jenkins currently owes the city \$50,000 in fines - \$1,000 per day for 50 days of violations, according to the BOCA code.

If he does not pay, city officials indicated he would face up to 90 days in jail.

7/17/2003

Man injured when wall falls wrong way, hitting a house

By TERRIE MORGAN-BESECKER - tmorgan@leader.net

Crews demolishing the old Consolidated Cigar building on West Church Street accidentally knocked a section of wall into an adjoining home Friday afternoon, slightly injuring one of the occupants who said he was struck by a brick.

Mayor John Toole said workers with Nordstrom Construction of South Carolina had chains attached to a wall and were attempting to pull it inward, but for an unknown reason it "kicked out" and fell onto the roof of 146-148 W. Church St. at around 3 p.m.

"They were pulling it and it went the wrong way. They made a mistake," he said.

The wall damaged the 146 side of the home, which was occupied at the time by Duane Krommes, 23, and three other people.

Krommes, who rents the home, suffered scratches to his right arm after a brick "came flying" through a window, he said.

"I was sitting here watching TV and I heard this smashing," Krommes said. "It scared the crap out of me."

Krommes said he helped his wife, mother-in-law and her boyfriend exit the home. No one else was injured.

The initial call on the incident came in as a building collapse with possible worker entrapment, prompting several rescue units from other communities to respond to the scene.

Most of the building has been demolished and Toole said officials do not believe there's any danger of structural collapse. Workers from Nordstrom continued to work as firefighters responded to the scene.

Toole said the building is at least 100 years old. Consolidated Cigar vacated the building about 30 years ago, he said. Several other businesses operated in it over the years.

He said Nordstrom, which is insured, has been working on the building for about three months. The company's owner is salvaging wood flooring and beams from the building for sale at his wood mill. The company, which had a permit for the work, has agreed to donate the land to the city once the building is torn down, he said.

7/12/2003

Report confirms people leaving Luzerne County

By: Robert Kalinowski , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

A report recently issued by the United States Census Bureau confirmed what many people in Luzerne County have already suspected: People are moving out.

Nanticoke City was the lone Luzerne County municipality to be mentioned in an Associated Press story about the Census Bureau's report.

The city was listed as one of five places in Pennsylvania with more than 10,000 residents that saw the largest drop in population.

It is estimated that the town lost 1.1 percent, or about 115, of its residents since 2001.

However, Nanticoke isn't the only place in the county where more people are leaving than moving in.

According to the rankings, as of July 1, the population of the county has dropped by more than 4,600 people since the 2000 Census and by 1,581 people since last year.

Since 2001, the county dropped from being the 11th to the 12th most populous in the state, as it lost about .5 percent of its residents.

Courtdale, Duryea, Edwardsville, Hazleton, Hughestown, Kingston, Pittston, Pringle, Shickshinny, Swoyersville, Warrior Run, Wilkes-Barre, and Wyoming, all lost 1 percent of its population.

Joining Nanticoke with a 1.1 percent loss in population were Forty Fort, Luzerne, Penn Lake Park, Plymouth, Shickshinny, Sugar Notch, West Hazleton, and West Pittston.

Losing the most residents were Wilkes-Barre, with 423; Hazleton, with 234; Kingston, with 136; Nanticoke, with 115; and Pittston, with 81.

Only 13 of the county's 76 communities gained residents, with the highest gainers being Fairview Township, with 56, and Exeter, with 53.

The rest of the municipalities in the county saw a decline in population of one percent or less.

The 13 communities with gains were primarily rural areas of the county.

Although his town was highlighted on the report, Nanticoke Mayor, John Toole, pointed out that population loss is a regional problem.

He suggested, as the numbers indicate, that people are moving out of cities due to "urban sprawl."

He said in communities like Nanticoke there isn't much space to build houses or businesses, so people move to areas with available land.

His point was agreed upon by Sue Copella, director of the Pennsylvania Data Center, which is familiar with the Census Bureau report. She admitted there isn't much a town can do to reverse the trend.

"There isn't as much area to develop. People are moving out to develop," she said about cities and boroughs in Pennsylvania.

Looking at the numbers she added, "Overall in Pennsylvania, the cities and boroughs lost (people), while you saw that townships grew."

She said it is something that has been happening for years.

Another thing that has decreased the population is the exodus of educated young people, according to state Rep. John Yudichak, D-119.

"They are forced to leave the area because the jobs are not here," said Yudichak.

However, he is proud that the area has recently made strides in fighting back against the economic impact of the decline of the coal and garment industry.

Yudichak pointed to the area colleges as a place to recruit qualified employees as the area begins to rebound with more business, medical, and technological jobs arriving.

"We're not going to be exporting them anymore," Yudichak said.

Toole issued the same hope, "The only thing that is going to bring changes is to bring in jobs."

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July 11, 2003

Court rules Nanticoke must pay widow benefits

By TERRIE MORGAN-BESECKER - tmorgan@leader.net

The city's failure to thoroughly investigate a disability claim by a firefighter will likely allow the man's wife to receive lifetime workers' compensation benefits despite questions about whether his illness was work-related.

In a decision filed Thursday, Commonwealth Court upheld a ruling by a workers' compensation judge and board that said the estate of Terry Ziolkowski, now deceased, is entitled to the benefits. The city lost its right to appeal, the court said, because it waited too long to question the cause of Ziolkowski's illness.

The decision means Ziolkowski's wife is eligible to receive two-thirds of his average weekly salary in 1995, up to a maximum of \$509 per week, from now until she dies or remarries.

The financial impact the ruling will have on the financially strapped city was unclear Thursday. The payment will fall on the city's workers' compensation insurer.

Mayor John Toole said the city might be hit with increased premiums, which are partly based on the number of claims.

Ziolkowski, who also served on the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board, claimed his heart disease was caused or exacerbated by stress connected to his 23 years as a firefighter. He died in 1998 at age 49 and his wife sought death benefits under the worker's compensation act. The city fought the claim, maintaining there was insufficient medical documentation to show Ziolkowski's condition was work related.

Ziolkowski's attorney, Charles Coslett, said the case started when Ziolkowski filed a union grievance against the city, arguing he should not have to use his sick time while getting treated for his heart disease.

Based on an opinion by then-Solicitor Jerome Cohen, the city agreed and in September 1995 began paying Ziolkowski benefits under the Heart Lung Act - a program that provides full pay for a limited time to police or firefighters injured in the line of duty.

Nearly 1 1/2 years later, however, the city reopened the case and determined the decision was made in error, citing a lack of medical evidence to support the claim.

A workers' compensation judge denied the city's challenge, saying officials had ample opportunity to investigate the cause of Ziolkowski's illness before it granted Heart and Lung benefits.

"While there may be a question as to whether the claimant was injured in the performance of his duties ... the city of Nanticoke waived any objection by agreeing to pay Heart/Lung benefits to the claimant," the workers' compensation judge wrote in a 1999 opinion.

Toole was not in office when Ziolkowski's case began and said he could not comment on why the city did not conduct a more thorough investigation earlier.

Cohen on Thursday said he could not remember details of the 8-year-old case.

Michael Yelen, attorney for the city and a workers' compensation insurer, said he had not yet spoken with his clients regarding a possible appeal. Yelen had tried to overturn the benefits, arguing, among other things, the city was precluded from presenting medical evidence at the workers' compensation hearing.

Coslett said Ziolkowski's wife has not received any money from workers' compensation while the case was pending. The court ruling will allow her to file a death benefits claim, which would be retroactive.

July 11, 2003

Nanticoke population dwindling

By JENNIFER LEARN-ANDES - jandes@leader.net

Nanticoke is one of the five Pennsylvania cities that showed the largest percentage drop in population between 2001 and 2002, according to Census Bureau estimates released Thursday.

The city of 10,955 lost roughly 115 people, or about 1.1 percent of its population, according to the latest figures.

Shock was not the reaction of several city residents.

"This doesn't surprise me. We've known it's been down," said city Councilman John Bushko.

Joining Nanticoke of places with more than 10,000 residents with the largest drops: Johnstown, Altoona, Sharon and Oil City.

Taken as a whole, Pennsylvania's 72 municipalities with 10,000 residents or more lost about 0.5 percent of their population, or about 19,600 people. In Nanticoke, Bushko and others cite as the biggest culprits death and the exodus of young and early middle-aged job seekers. Others are headed to the suburbs of Mountaintop and the Back Mountain, Bushko said.

"People are just moving away because there's less employment I think. And if there's less people, there's less money coming in for taxes," said Bushko, who commutes to Philadelphia for work.

Philadelphia, by the way, recorded the largest drop in sheer numbers at 9,546 people.

Nanticoke has serious money woes, but Bushko says neighboring municipalities also are feeling the pinch on their populations and pocket books. He predicts money troubles will force towns to regionalize services, and perhaps merge altogether.

"There has to be a merging among towns because we can't afford to run a town alone anymore. If we don't start providing services together, nobody's going to last," Bushko said.

Jane Matulewski sees tangible signs of the population decline in the beauty salon she has operated in the city for 37 years.

Older people are dying, and they aren't replaced by fresh faces.

That didn't hurt as much decades ago because many children and grandchildren remained here to work and raise families, but that's not an option for many anymore.

Matulewski's son and his wife live in Wisconsin. Her cousin's son is in Arizona. One of the customer's in her shop Thursday afternoon has a son in California.

Other customers come in with stories about layoffs and losing jobs

In her mind, Nanticoke doesn't feel like a city these days because most of the shops, stores and business bustle are gone

"The business downtown, it's not what it used to be. I don't think we should be classified as a city. It's more of a senior citizen town than anything," Matulewski said.

Bushko said he's given up on turning the city into a business or shopping center, believing it will remain a bedroom community.

Most larger Pennsylvania cities and towns have been shrinking steadily since World War II, partly because of the decline of heavy industries, such as coal and steel, that once required tens of thousands of workers to live within walking distance of mines and factories.

At least one thing hasn't dwindled with Nanticoke's population: a craving for pizza.

Nardozzo's Pizzeria on East Main Street has been in the city since the 1950s and "is just as busy as ever," a worker there said.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

7/10/2003

Historical marker to honor Pete Gray

Thanks to the generosity of many local donors, the Luzerne County Historical Society raised more than its share of the \$750 needed to erect a historical marker in memory of Nanticoke's one-armed baseball player, Pete Gray.

The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission will contribute another \$750 on behalf of the state to meet the total cost of \$1,500.

The marker will be erected in late August on Front Street in the Hanover section of Nanticoke where Gray was born and raised, on the same side of the road as the Little League baseball diamond. The distinctive blue and gold roadside marker will read:

"Pete Gray" Wyshner (1915-2002)

The only one-armed man to play Major League Baseball. Born and resided most of his life in Nanticoke. As a child, he lost his right arm in an accident. Named Most Valuable Player of the Southern Assn. while playing for the Memphis Chicks in 1944. In 1945, he played 77 games as an outfielder for the St. Louis Browns and batted .218. His on-field exploits set an inspirational example for disabled servicemen returning from World War II.

Special invitations will be sent to donors for the dedication ceremony to be held at Lackawanna County Stadium prior to a Red Barons game during the final home stand of this season, Aug. 23-28. Any additional money raised during the funding drive will be put towards the pre-game ceremony.

7/3/03

The abandoned T.P. Jones furniture store on South Hanover Street partly collapsed June 6 and the city could legally demolish it by naming it a public safety hazard, But the city can't afford the \$144,000 demolition price tag.

Instead, the city is hoping to force action by the owner, The Church of the Free Spirit in Las Vegas, through the courts. The church's next hearing is July 31. Kotulak said he has uncovered evidence that the church might not be legitimate and that its leader apparently faces extensive fraud charges in Arizona.

With appeals and response time included, it could be September before demolition would occur.

Also:

The Rosebush Bar at Spring and South Market streets is slated to be razed July 21.

The [Police Department](#)

will receive an older-model car for undercover use from officer Kevin Grevera. In exchange, the City Council approved \$2,000 in supplies to outfit

the car and give police a mobile cell phone for road use.

Responding to complaints from citizens and police, Toole asked Kotulak to prepare a potential ordinance to control skateboarders and bikers.

Nanticoke to target rundown properties

The crackdown on negligent property owners won't end with a Las Vegas church being fined for its failure to demolish the former T.P. Jones furniture store in timely fashion.

The city has cited 14 property owners, and another 38 will soon receive citations ordering them to repair or raze dilapidated buildings.

City Administrator Greg Gullick and Code Enforcement Officer Richard Wiaterowski identified the 52 problem properties during a citywide tour conducted last month.

"We went street to street," said Gullick, who added the affected property owners are a mix of out-of-town landlords, heirs and residents. "And we found all kinds of problems, from loose bricks to porches that are falling off."

Along with the citations, owners of the decaying buildings face fines of \$300 for violations of city ordinances and \$1,000 per day for violating Building Official and Code Administrator codes.

Some of the money collected from fines will go to the state, but the bulk will be funneled to the city's general fund, said Gullick.

It is revenue the financially troubled city desperately needs, but Gullick said bolstering the bottom line is not the motive for the more aggressive approach.

"It's not about the money, it's about making the city a safer and nicer place to live. And it's about increasing property values."

Former police Chief Chester Zaremba, who spent several years issuing citations before the city hired a full-time code enforcement officer, said he is happy to see administrators taking this latest initiative.

"I've always said all Nanticoke has to offer is a nice, quiet safe place to live," said Zaremba. "We don't have a lot of industry, so in my opinion, it is incumbent upon city officials to keep up with enforcing the ordinances so that the town remains an attractive place for people to make their homes."

That is something the city has neglected to do for a quarter century, said Rick Buttrick of Nanticoke, who has worked as a housing and community development consultant for 38 years. He doubts this initiative will fare much better.

"It's not as if all these properties just all of a sudden fell into a state of disrepair," said Buttrick. "They have been becoming derelict for a long time while the city stood by and did nothing."

Buttrick is an outspoken advocate of using community development grants to demolish the old T.P. Jones store on South Hanover Street, rather than waiting for the store's current owner, the Church of the Free Spirit, to do the job.

He said if officials want property owners to live up to their obligations, it should lead by example.

"I suspect the other 52 are in far better condition than this property and I suspect those property owners are local, or much more local, than the fake church from Nevada, that very likely has very few assets to go after," he said. "For those reasons, I think the city needs to step up and take care of this situation sooner rather than later."

Problems at another long-neglected property, at 413-415 E. Washington St., might finally be close to coming to an end as council voted Wednesday night to solicit bids for its demolition.

Gullick said action on the double-block home, whose owner died in 1993, has been delayed by the need to get a court order authorizing the city to tear it down, as well as the need to get historical and environmental clearances.

"You can't just knock a building down," Gullick said

7/1/03

Times Leader - Local Briefs

The City of Nanticoke filed a complaint alleging the owners of the former T.P. Jones Furniture store are in violation of the city's building codes. As a result of the action, the Church of the Free Spirit, based in Las Vegas, Nevada., faces fines of \$1,000 per day until an order to demolish the dilapidated structure is executed or until District Justice Donald Whittaker rules some other action is warranted.

A hearing before Whittaker is set for 9:30 a.m. July 31, 2003

6/28/2003

Nanticoke begins work on recreational project

Work on a recreation complex in Nanticoke has officially begun.

By Rebecca Bellville , Citizens' Voice Intern

State and local officials announced yesterday that money has been secured to plan and develop the Nanticoke Greenway Complex, which will eventually be located on Lower Broadway across from Weis Market. State Sen. Ray Musto and state Rep. John Yudichak, D-119, worked to secure about \$100,000 in state money for the project.

The project, which is being managed by the Pennsylvania Environmental Council, is meant to provide more outdoor recreational opportunities while reclaiming the environment.

"From young tots to senior citizens, there will be something for everyone eventually," said Gerald Hudak, founder of the Nanticoke Greenway Alliance.

A large group of organizations is working on the project, including the City of Nanticoke, the Nanticoke Greenway Alliance and the state Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation.

Yudichak said that the project would probably be completed in three phases.

The next step is to study what recreational facilities the city needs. Comments from the public are very important to this step, and will be encouraged through public forums.

"We want to get public input, that's the most important part," Yudichak said. "They're going to be able to say, 'I want a skate park,' 'I want a walking trail,' 'I want a playground for my grandchildren.' "

He said that the project would benefit not only the City of Nanticoke, but also people from nearby communities.

Several ideas have been kicked around to develop the area, and it is unclear at this point whether any of them will come to pass.

Mayor John Toole said that it would be a priority to try to put a skate park in the area.

"The kids have been promised that," he said.

Bob McDonald, president of the Nanticoke Chamber of Commerce, listed other ideas, including soccer and softball fields and walking and biking trails.

"If we have 100 ideas and four of them stick, that's four good things that will happen to the city," McDonald said.

Yudichak said that the complex would be an economic boon to the city because it's close to downtown Nanticoke.

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6/16/2003

Nanticoke gets state grant to improve parking lots

By Tom Venesky , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer



Shoppers in downtown Nanticoke will soon find it easier to patronize their favorite shops on Market Street.

Nanticoke General Municipal Authority and state Rep. John Yudichak teamed on a project that will bring three new parking lots to the downtown.

Yudichak obtained a \$50,000 state grant toward the lots.

"Parking is the number one problem that the merchants on Market Street speak about," he said. "These are small business owners who have invested in the community to make it thrive.

"It's time we pitch in to help their businesses and Nanticoke prosper, and this project is a way to show the business community that we're willing to invest."

The parking lots will be constructed at 101-103 S. Market St., 109-123-127 S. Market St. and 133-139 S. Market St.

Yudichak said the lots would add 30 to 40 parking spaces and availability of the parking would help roughly 20 businesses on the street.

He said the sites are weed-covered dirt lots owned by the municipal authority.

"The lots now are difficult to turn into, and people will pass by a store because the parking isn't attractive," Yudichak said.

"We've had several new businesses come in over the past few years, and it's a tough job to sustain economic development in the downtown. But Nanticoke has done a fair job."

Municipal authority member Jean Barry said the project would also improve safety because many people stop on the street to pick up shoppers rather than try to find parking.

She agreed with Yudichak that the additional parking would help to attract more businesses.

"Nanticoke has a good climate for small businesses and this will provide an incentive for them to come in," she said.

Authority Chairman Michael Jezewski said that by responding to the business community's need, the authority is providing the foundation for a "bright future in Nanticoke."

A groundbreaking ceremony was held on Friday. Yudichak said it would take about two months to complete the work.

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6/7/2003

Building partially collapses in Nanticoke

By Elizabeth Skrapits , [Citizens' Voice](#) Staff Writer

A vacant building on South Hanover Street in Nanticoke collapsed inward Friday afternoon, causing a residence next door to be evacuated and an emergency declared.

The roof of the building, located in the 400 block of South Hanover Street and listed on a recent building permit as 423 Hanover, collapsed inward at approximately 4:30 p.m.

There was nobody in the building at the time, and there were no injuries reported.

Nanticoke Mayor John Toole said the roof of the building caved in and went partially through to the second floor. The structural I-beams bent inward and the floors sagged.

"It just has to slip a little bit and it'll go," Toole observed.

The city engineer and a contractor came to look at the site Friday evening, and a further meeting will be called on the site Saturday morning, but Toole could not say what time, since the contractor would be making arrangements.

An environmental study will have to be done on the building as soon as possible to determine whether it contains asbestos.

The only way to bypass the bidding process to have professionals look at the building was to declare a state of emergency, according to Toole. Additionally, on the recommendation of the engineer and Nanticoke emergency personnel, the stretch of Hanover Street in front of the building was blocked off to all traffic.

"I don't know if it's overkill blocking the street," Toole said, "but you have to go on the safe side."

The neighboring residence had to be evacuated. Its tenants collected their valuables and went to stay with relatives.

The collapsed building formerly housed the T. P. Jones Furniture store, which also sold paint and wallpaper. Toole said he had heard the building had just been purchased by people from Arizona through an online auction on eBay.

The purchasers came to the municipal building two weeks ago to take out permits, Toole said.

"It's going to have to be demolished - unless somebody can come up with something else," Toole noted.

6/4/2003

Vandals' despicable actions destroyed the hopes, hard work of others

Sometime Monday night or early Tuesday morning, the 19th or 20th of May, someone vandalized the welcome sign at the entrance to the Hanover Section of Nanticoke.

There are people in this town who are devastated. In one fell swoop, someone destroyed not only a sign, but the expectation that all the good that some townspeople do might somehow be appreciated and enjoyed. The real shame of all this is the fact that this is the second time someone has destroyed one of these welcome signs.

This is no small matter.

These signs were purchased with funds raised by a few people who believed that they somehow might be able to better the town in which they live. But besides the cost and loss of a considerable investment, it is difficult to imagine the mentality of someone out to destroy a vision of a group of people who are naive enough to believe in their fellow man. The area around the sign had been excavated, and flowers and a border had been placed at the foot of and around the sign. Volunteers maintained the site. It was beautiful.

It's all gone now, and with it the dreams of those who never thought we would have to place alarms or somehow guard against this kind of despicable behavior. The sign was stolen, not only from the group who initially had it erected, but from all the fine people of the Hanover section of Nanticoke.

I plead for your help. We don't have any money left for a reward to be offered. All the money was spent on these signs. All we ask is that anyone who has any information about the sign to please call and give the information to the [Nanticoke Police Department](#). Alternatively, the people who have the sign may return it, undamaged, with no questions asked.

Nick Pucino

Hanover section. Nanticoke

5/7/2003

Proposed Nanticoke Park gets matching grant funds

Plans for a recreation park in Nanticoke received a major boost on Monday when the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources awarded a

\$32,000 matching grant for the project. .

The funds come from DCNR's Community Conservation Partnership Program and the grant was awarded to the Pennsylvania Environmental Council, who is facilitating the project.

State Sen. Raphael Musto and State Rep. John Yudichak helped to secure the grant. The money will be used to initiate a feasibility study and master plan for the development of the Lower Broadway Greenway and Outdoor Recreation Park in Lower Broadway, Nanticoke.

In December 2002, the state Department of Community and Economic Development awarded a \$75,000 grant for the project, which will be used to accommodate the match for the DCNR grant and for planning and construction.

The funds will be used to transform a 40-acre mine-scarred parcel into a green gateway for Nanticoke, complete with numerous recreational opportunities.

"It really has the potential to lift the spirits of the City of Nanticoke," Yudichak said. "It's a good community project, and we're very grateful to be a part of this."

With the two grants, the total amount of funds obtained for the project is \$107,000. Yudichak said more funds are anticipated from the state Department of Environmental Protection.

The project will be unveiled on May 15 with a tour of the site. Public input hearings for the master plan will begin soon after and Yudichak hoped construction would start before the end of the year.

Ellen Ferretti Alaimo, director of PEC's Northeast Regional Office, said a steering committee consisting of community members and organizations would be formed. Also, a request for proposals will be sent to engineering and architectural firms to create the plan.

"We're very happy to be working with the local community on this. The nice thing about it is it's within walking distance of the City of Nanticoke, where there is a large population center," she said. -

Another partner in the project is the Nanticoke Greenway Alliance, which is Coordinated by Jerry Hudak, and Chaired by Tony Margelewicz.

4/6/2003

Zaremba reflects on 33 years of service

By: Ed Lewis 04/06/2003 ([Citizens Voice](#))

After a 33-year distinguished career in law enforcement, Chester Zaremba hung up his uniform for the last time on April 1 when he retired as police

chief in Nanticoke City.

But, he'll continue to chase one person around in the coming years - his 3-year old grandson, Tyler.

"It's time to move on," Zaremba said from his comfortable home in Nanticoke. "I'll be busy watching and enjoying my grandson; it's going to be a joy doing that."

Zaremba said his grandson has given him a "second chance," explaining he wasn't around all that much when his son, Michael, was born in 1971.

"The first time I saw my son, he was eight-days old," Zaremba said. "I was at the (state) police academy in Hershey when he was born."

Zaremba joined the Pennsylvania State Police in 1971, retiring in 1993 as a sergeant and the head of the criminal investigations unit at the Wyoming Barracks. He spent tours of duty in Lock Haven, Montoursville, Dushore, Towanda and Shickshinny barracks before being transferred to Wyoming in July 1985.

All that time, he spent hours commuting to his job not willing to move his family from Nanticoke where he is a life resident.

In 1987, Zaremba was named "Pennsylvania State Police Officer of the Year" by the Pennsylvania District Exchange Club, and rescued a man who attempted to commit suicide by jumping off the third floor inside the Luzerne County Courthouse rotunda in Nov. 1984. He also received four letters of commendation.

Before joining the state police, Zaremba enlisted in the U.S. Air Force two weeks after graduating from Nanticoke High School in 1963. While in the service, he attended Syracuse University for a year enrolled in the school's Eastern European Languages program.

He served in Europe as a radio interceptor during the Cold War until he left the service in 1967.

"I wanted to be a cop because I wanted to be there," Zaremba said. "I always wanted to be around helping people. It's that simple thank you that goes a long way." Zaremba became the police chief in Nanticoke on Jan. 7, 1993, seven-days after he retired from the state police.

"When I came on board here in Nanticoke, there was only one desk and one typewriter for all the officers," Zaremba said. "I always liked challenges and I believe the level of efficiency where the Nanticoke Police Department is at right now couldn't be better."

Zaremba said the Nanticoke Police Department has improved immensely over the last 10-years, and thanked his colleagues and city elected officials for their help.

He said police officers spent their own time and money in renovating the police department.

"They came with paint, wood, and used their carpentry skills," Zaremba said. "We have a processing room where we take fingerprints, photographs, and reports. We didn't have that before."

Zaremba applied and received a \$40,000 federal COPS technical grant for a computer system that links the department to state and federal authorities.

"We got it up and running about a year and a half sooner than expected," Zaremba said of the computer system. "It's working really well and it's effect is having police officers spending more time doing what they're suppose to do, policing."

Zaremba said he is amazed how police departments have improved with technology and training over the years. He explained when he was stationed in Montoursville investigating a fatal vehicle accident in the early 1970s, he had to travel 12 miles just to get a signal from his radio.

"After the Columbine tragedy, we asked ourselves how prepared are we," Zaremba said. "We have to be prepared for something like that."

Most of the schools of the [Greater Nanticoke Area School District](#) are located on Kosciuszko Street in Nanticoke. With city and state funds, the [Nanticoke Police Department](#) has the necessary equipment and training to respond to such an event.

"Things have changed so much," Zaremba said. "You were able to do certain things in 1971 that you can't do in 2003."

"Police are doing more today with the same amount of manpower but with more reporting requirements," he noted.

Zaremba said he was fortunate to have had a great working relationship with the state police, other local police agencies and federal authorities. Zaremba said now that his is retired, he will tinker around with his 1954 Ford, add to his collection of 585 license plates, and travel with his wife, Henrietta.

elewis@citizensvoice.com

In Retirement, Zaremba Says It's His Turn To Adjust His Lifestyle

Retired Nanticoke City Police Chief Chester Zaremba said it's his turn to adjust to his wife, Henrietta.

"She's been running the show for the last 33 years," Zaremba

said. "A wife of a police officer has to step up because a cop is not always there on Christmas, birthdays, and family parties. "She has her routine and it's going to take some time for me to adjust to her schedule."

Zaremba has been retired for less than a week, and already, he has a fhll "to do list" in front of him. "My main responsibility is going to be watching my grandson, Tyler," Zaremba said. "But my wife has been telling me that - this needs to be painted, or this - needs to be fixed."

With Zaremba's retirement, he ended a 33 year career in law enforcement where he first served with the Pennsylvania State Police for the first 22 years.

"Everyone always says you'll - know when it's time. I guess I do," Zaremba said. "Spring is here and I just want to do more - things."

[NPD](#)

Council Looks To Repair Mountain View Drive

Nanticoke City Council conducted its work session Wednesday night. Mayor John Toole and Council members Yvonne Bozinski, Bill Brown and John Bushko were in attendance.

Because of complaints from several residents living on Mountain View Drive, and after further assessment of that road, council passed a motion to advertise for bids for the reconstruction and/or repair of Mountain View Drive. Money will be taken from the Liquid Fuels Fund for this project.

The Nanticoke City Zoning Board has a new member. Bernie Nocicki was appointed by council. Councilman Bushko asked if any seats remain open on the redevelopment board.

"This is a very important authority, and I feel all seats should be filled at the next meeting," stated Bushko.

Brown, head of the public works department, said a new shipment of asphalt was received.

"I am asking citizens to report potholes that need to be filled as well as catch basins covered with debris or leaves that hinder drainage," said Brown. The number to call is 735.1800.

Bozinski, citing concerns over overtime by city employees, made a motion that all scheduled overtime must be approved by department heads and the city administrator.

"Emergencies are understandable, but overtime scheduled a month in advance is not," she said. Bushko seconded the motion; Brown also cast a 'yes' vote. Mayor Toole, citing contract violations, voted 'no.'

Council Approves Ordinance 2003-13 and Resolution 2003-10 - Meyers To Retire

City Council approved ordinance 2003-13, which establishes a clerical service charge of \$10 for residents who wish to make copies of documents from the city treasurer's office.

Council approved resolution 200310, which authorizes an agreement related to operation and maintenance of the city sewer collection system with the Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority.

According to the terms of the agreement, the WWSA will help maintain sewer mains in the city dispatching "camera and suction" equipment to clean out blockages when problems emerge. The WWSA will provide the city with \$25,000 worth of maintenance service throughout the year saving Nanticoke from hiring costly private contractors.

Anyone who has a problem with their sewer system, just contact the street department," Mayor Toole said. "We will contact the WWSA, and they'll come out and work on the trouble."

Council approved the motion to accept the retirement of Lt Richard Meyers from the police department, effective March 10. Meyers served the city for 30 years; Mayor Toole and Council will draft a proclamation of commendation and appreciation for his three decades of service to the community

2/7/2003

Nanticoke City Council Appoints New City Administrator

[Citizens' Voice](#)

Nanticoke City Council hired Greg Gulick as its new city administrator during a meeting Thursday night. Gulick, an Ashley resident, was hired by a 3-1 vote and replaces Richard Muessig. He comes to Nanticoke boasting management and public administration experience after having previously been employed by Blue Cross.

In other business, Mayor John Toole reported on the state of the city, addressing the city's current debt and financial problems. Toole said stagnant tax revenue and the rising costs of maintaining the city are just two of the problems facing his administration. He indicated that the hard work of his administration and the fire department had resulted in the city's securing grants totaling \$1 million. The money enabled the city to purchase a pump and ladder truck.

The mayor thanked the housing authority for donating a brand new police cruiser to the city. He also reported approximately 11 miles of city roadways have been reconstructed and paved. Meanwhile, road construction and sewer replacement will remain a top priority:

Toole said projects throughout the next year would include the removal of dilapidated buildings and an effort to attract new businesses.

The city will also replace the traffic light at Main and Kosciuszko streets. He reported that curbs at that corner would be cut in order to ensure safety especially for school buses, and to ease the mobility for citizens with disabilities. Sidewalks will also be installed along Main Street in front of the library. The long awaited Union Street Bridge Project will also get under way.

"We must constantly search for ways to do things more efficiently and continue to strive toward progress," Toole commented.

Gerald Hudak, project coordinator for the Nanticoke Greenway Alliance, reported a \$75,000 grant was awarded to the group by the Pennsylvania Environmental Council.

He also announced the skate park project will start in the spring.

Increase In Garbage Fees

Council voted 3-0 to approve an increase in garbage fees following the expiration of the city's current contract with Apex Waste.

The increase will go into effect in January 2003.

Garbage fees will go up by \$13.00. If paid before January 31, the cost per household will be \$133.00. From Feb. 1 to March 1, the cost will be \$138.00.

After March 1, the penalty phase will be entered and the total fee per household will be \$165.00.