

12/18/2015

Glory days: Nanticoke Area celebrates 1989-90 state title run

Matt Bufano - Citizens Voice

Imagine: It's March 1990 and you are the pride of Nanticoke.

The fanfare is evident by the oversold gyms on the road, and the decorated homes and storefronts in your city of 12,267. You receive fan mail and are asked to autograph pieces of merchandise bearing your school name and, sometimes, your own.

You reward the frenzied fandom with what the entire city joins you in celebrating: a state championship.

"It was an unbelievable experience, one that I will never forget," said Lori Scally Zaleski, one of five senior starters for the 1989-90 Nanticoke Area Trojanettes girls basketball team. "The gym was always packed. There would be a line of fans outside the gym, waiting to get tickets for playoff games."

Getting off the bus before the Eastern Final at Pottsville's Martz Hall, Holly Kozlowski Udzella — one of the team's four 1,000-point scorers — recalled being greeted by "an aisle of people" five rows deep on each side.

What followed that crazed scene was the Trojanettes beating North Schuylkill, 80-68, and earning a place in the state championship game against Beaver Falls.

Then, behind the 36-point performance of future St. Bonaventure Hall of Famer Casey Comoroski Hunt, Nanticoke Area defeated Beaver Falls, 77-67, for the PIAA Class AAA title and a perfect 30-0 record.

No Class AAA boys or girls team from the Wyoming Valley Conference has since won a state title.

One of the all-time great teams produced in Luzerne County scholastics, the Trojanettes will be honored at a boys-girls doubleheader Wednesday against North Schuylkill at Nanticoke Area as part of a 25th anniversary celebration.

Admission is \$4 for adults and \$2 for students, and the celebration will begin after the boys game that tips off at 6 p.m.

In hindsight, members of the team are still amazed — but more aware — of what they meant to the community.

"It's not until years later that I have realized the impact we had on our community and the accomplishments we made," Comoroski Hunt said.

"Those memories are just as vivid today as they were 25 years ago."

On the court

The 1989-90 lineup could be pegged as something of a team of destiny.

The starting five — Comoroski Hunt, Scally Zaleski, Kozlowski Udzella, Ellen Bartuska and Holly Ryncavage — first achieved great success by winning the WVC eighth-grade title.

"I think we gelled together," Scally Zaleski said. "We played together for a long time from when we were in seventh grade. Everyone had a role. It wasn't that one person did everything. We all had a role within that team, and we all respected those roles. We looked to help and support each other."

Then-head coach Rose Volpicelli and assistant Elaine DeLuca knew, at the state level, their team with an average height of about 5-foot-6 would be undersized.

So, as far as a style of play, it was scrappy.

The Trojanettes pressed and forced turnovers on defense, played "streetball" and improvised on offense, and fundamentals were paramount every step of the way.

It didn't hurt, too, that preparation started by playing against a second-team that could have been plenty successful on its own.

"We were playing against the second-best team in the state day-in and day-out (at practice)," Kozlowski Udzella said.

Goals were set prior to each game, among them: shooting 80 percent from the free-throw line and 50 percent from the floor (not including layups), and keeping the opposition to less than 50 points.

More often than not, those goals were reached and the Trojanettes scored 100-plus points five times.

The always-lopsided scores did produce some vitriol against Nanticoke Area, but Volpicelli — who always preferred the accolades and positive recognition go to her players — took the brunt of the criticism.

"She got beat up pretty bad (in the press) and she never let it deter her. She'd tell us, 'Don't let it bother you,'" recalled Bartuska, who today works at the Philadelphia Zoo. "The work ethic that she instilled in us, to this day, it's so much of who I am. I haven't played basketball in years, but those little things that she coached us on — the fundamentals, the mental game, how we conduct ourselves — that has translated into so much of my life that I owe to her and her coaching abilities on and off the court."

By the time the state final rolled around, the Trojanettes were an unstoppable force and led Beaver Falls at the end of each quarter.

High drama came in the final seconds, though, when a Beaver Falls player grabbed Ryncavage by the hair and pulled her to the floor.

A double-technical foul was called, and Ryncavage — bruised ribs, chipped teeth and all — made every free throw.

Local legends

The day after winning the state final at a sold out Hersheypark Arena, the Trojanettes came home to a king's welcome.

Chet Zaremba, Vice president of the Nanticoke Historical Society, was then working as a sergeant with the state police. From inside his marked police car, he met the Trojanettes' bus on Interstate 81 and escorted the Trojanettes into the streets of Nanticoke, where a massive parade was forming.

"Everybody felt that they were part of what was going on," said Zaremba, who recalled former Nanticoke mayor Walter Sokolowski and U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski riding alongside him in the parade.

Citizens' Voice news reporter Bob Kalinowski, a life resident of Nanticoke, remembers attending every game that season with his aunt and grandfather. They went to cheer on his cousin and team member Lisa Przekop.

"Even as a child, I knew I was witnessing something special," Kalinowski said. "Those girls were absolutely my idols growing up. After they won

the state championship, they became legends and were treated like rock stars. It was a magical time. That team brought immense pride to our city.” The Trojanettes’ last hurrah came before a standing-room-only crowd at Bishop Hoban High School for the WVC Senior All-Star Classic. Each member of the starting-five played, but not at the same time, until all five were inserted with 2:01 left. “It was a really packed house, and they got a standing ovation, maybe three minutes,” said former Citizens’ Voice sports editor Neil Corbett, who hailed the Trojanettes as perhaps the best basketball team he came across in the WVC. “It was incredible to see.” Some team members still live in the area. Some moved away but get back often. Today, they are still recognized as members of the historic team. “It was 25 years ago and people still talk about it. That’s how important it was to the city,” said Bartuska, the center. “Looking back in retrospect it’s amazing to see how it brought the whole town, whole area together.”

12/15/2015

Greater Nanticoke Area holds reorganization meeting

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

The Greater Nanticoke Area School Board held its reorganization meeting last week. Leonard Olzinski was sworn in as new board member. Kenneth James, Tony Prushinski and Ryan Verazin, all who were re-elected to their seats, were also sworn in. The following re-elections were also made: Verazin as board president, James as vice president, Prushinski as secretary, and Gary Smith as treasurer. Attorney Vito Deluca remains as the district’s solicitor through 2016 at an annual salary of \$22,000. During the regular board’s meeting: Superintendent Ron Grevera announced that the district received a \$9,000 grant from the Workforce Investment Board. The grant will be used for a program that will help high school students with career choices and preparation. The emphasis will be on specific fields: health, business and finance and manufacturing. In addition to exploring the opportunities associated with these fields, students will receive lessons in interviewing skills and resume preparation. Grevera said that the program will take place at the close of the close year. Grevera also expressed his concern over the lack of a state budget. “The district is running on local property taxes,” Grevera said. He added that the district is being careful to only utilize what is necessary to keep the schools running. The board approved the appointment of Matthew Landmesser as a member of the board. The appointment was made due to the recent resignation of Bob Raineri. Ken James of the Athletic Department announced that the GNA Winter Sports Flex-Pass is available to students for \$10 and \$30 for adults. The Flex-Pass can be used for boys and girls basketball and wrestling. It is good for admission to 10 events in any combination. Flex-passes are on sale at the games or at the Athletic Office. The board accepted a donation of \$150 from Mary Swigonski, MaryLou Ramsey, Ruth Ann and David Balla, Jean, Michael, and Matthew McCloskey. The donation was given to the GNA Elementary Library in memory of Regina Angle. The first board meeting of 2016 will be at 7 p.m. on Jan. 14.

12/17/2015

US Senate passes act named for slain Nanticoke correctional officer

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

His name will live on. Acting in the name of slain correctional officer Eric Williams from Nanticoke, the United States Senate on Wednesday passed a bill mandating that workers in the most dangerous federal prisons must be armed with pepper spray for protection. The usually divided chamber united together and approved the “Eric Williams Correctional Officer Protection Act of 2015” by unanimous consent. Williams’ father, Don, happened to be watching C-Span on Wednesday afternoon at his home in Nanticoke when senators began discussions on the bill named for his son, who was killed by an inmate nearly three years ago. “We’re happy there will be something so lasting in our son’s name and so needed that will have the ability to save lives,” Don Williams said shortly after the vote. Don Williams said he’s left to wonder if his son would still be alive if he had pepper spray on him. “That’s hard to say. I’d like to believe it could have made a difference,” Don Williams said. “Pepper spray and another officer, and there absolutely would have been another outcome.” Williams, 34, was working alone in a unit housing about 130 inmates when he was attacked, beaten and stabbed to death at nightly lockdown on Feb. 25, 2013, at U.S. Penitentiary at Canaan in Wayne County. Prosecutors say an inmate, a gang assassin already jailed for murder, stabbed Williams more than 125 times with a crude, hand-made knife after ambushing the officer. Williams was equipped with just a radio, keys and handcuffs. The bill passed Wednesday authorizes correctional officers, and all other employees required to respond to inmate emergencies in federal medium-security and higher prisons, to carry pepper spray. Don Williams, who has vowed to fight for correctional officer safety the rest of his life, called the Senate vote a “great start” to reforms that should

focus more on employee safety than the coddling of convicts.

“For them to be totally unarmed, it was ludicrous,” Don Williams said. “I can’t believe all we had to go through for people to see this. It’s common sense.”

At the time of Williams’ murder, correctional officers at seven of the 122 prisons in the federal system were equipped with pepper spray as part of a pilot program.

Three days after the Williams slaying, the federal Bureau of Prisons expanded the pilot program to include all 17 of the nation’s penitentiaries, which are the highest security level prisons in the federal system, like USP Canaan.

In the years since Williams’ murder, the bureau continually expanded the program to eventually include all staff exposed to inmates in all high- and medium-security prisons, or 65 total facilities.

Wednesday’s legislation brings the expansion closer to becoming law. If passed in the House of Representatives, as expected, it will move to the desk of President Barack Obama for approval.

U.S. Sen. Bob Casey, D-Pa. — who introduced the Williams bill along with Pennsylvania’s other senator, Pat Toomey — argued on the Senate floor that correctional officers are law enforcement just like police and deserve to be armed with something to protect themselves.

“We have an obligation to keep safe the men and women who serve in our correctional facilities. The tragic murder of Eric Williams illustrates the risks they take every day just by going to work,” Casey said in a statement after the vote.

The bill keeps the memory of Williams alive and is “a tribute to the dedicated advocacy of his family,” Casey said.

Casey had been fighting to arm correctional officers with pepper spray as far back as October 2011, but leadership in the Bureau of Prisons had been long hesitant about issuing pepper spray or weapons to staff, arguing those items could be seized by inmates and used against staff.

Prosecutors are seeking the death penalty against Jesse Con-ui, 38, the gang assassin accused of killing Williams. He remains jailed at ADX Florence, the supermaximum security prison in Colorado known as the “Alcatraz of the Rockies.”

After Wednesday’s vote, the union that represented Williams and his colleagues applauded the law.

“Our staff, day to day, work with some of the worst offenders our society has ever produced,” said Eric Young, national president of the Council of Prisons Local. “Our colleagues deserve to feel safe in their workplace, and we are thrilled that this passage permanently ensures a means of self-defense to all of our correctional staff working at medium or higher security prisons.”

12/16/2015

Toys R Us gift card meant for Nanticoke grade school students put up for sale online Was intended to provide presents for economically disadvantaged children

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A Toys “R” Us gift card paid for from donations and intended to provide presents for economically disadvantaged grade school students at Greater Nanticoke Area appeared for sale on at least one Facebook page, prompting swift response from a district employee and stinging rebukes from online observers.

“I noticed the lady was selling the gift card shortly after picking up the donation for my son,” Tricia Shilanskis said. “I immediately took screen shots and sent them to the secretary at the elementary center, making them aware of her actions.”

Shilanskis said the district told her the number on the card matched one of those handed out by the district. Shortly after that, an employee from the district identifying herself as Bonnie Dembowski posted a warning urging others not to buy the cards. “These cards were given to you as a Christmas drive donation for your children,” she wrote.

Superintendent Ronald Grevera confirmed Shilanskis’ account, and said he hoped the incident would not mar an otherwise worthy program conducted annually by the district.

After news of the card’s source was posted, several people who had expressed an interest quickly rescinded, and the criticism commenced.

“This is pathetic,” one person wrote.

“My daughter and other mothers would be so grateful to receive such a wonderful gift to help at Christmas,” another commented.

“My children received this last year and it was a great help ... they where (sic) unfortunately denied this year, and then I see someone selling theirs when it could have been returned and given to another family,” a third offered.

Shilanskis stressed she did not forward the screen shot to the district “as a revengeful thing,” but felt the attempted sale was inappropriate. “When you donate something, you don’t take that for granted. You don’t take (the cards) knowing you are going to sell them. I think it’s a shame,” she said.

The post was removed from the site, NEPA Rummage Sale, and is no longer available. There was no response to a message sent to a person listed as one of the page’s administrators.

Superintendent Ronald Grevera said it was the first time he has seen such an attempt in his two years with the district, and it was a single bad mark on a program that has helped hundreds annually.

According to state data, 62 percent of the students in Greater Nanticoke Area schools are economically disadvantaged — the third highest rate in Luzerne County behind Hazleton Area and Wilkes-Barre Area.

Grevera said for years the district has raised money through donations from teachers, vendors, residents and by holding events, all to help low-income students or others facing hardships that year. “I gave \$200 myself,” he noted.

The district also holds food drives to contribute to the local food bank, he added. In all cases, it’s donations only; no money comes from the district budget.

Teachers choose students from kindergarten to sixth grade as possible recipients, and gift cards or other items are provided until the money runs out, Grevera said. Typically, he added, they start by picking one student from each homeroom, and usually have some left to give out additional gifts.

Abuse of gift cards was a concern, Grevera added. The district switched last year from giving grocery store gift cards to cards for Toys “R” Us and Babies “R” Us because, “I was worried people might use the grocery cards to buy cigarettes or magazines,” he said.

Last year, there was enough money to give Toys “R” Us gift cards and some food items, Grevera said. This year, only gift cards were provided. He was unsure of the exact number but said about 150 cards were handed out.

District Solicitor Vito DeLuca said he was not familiar with details of the program and he had not heard about a parent trying to sell a gift card, but he suspected the district could not legally control what a person does with the card once it is provided.

For starters, DeLuca said, the district could not know the circumstances that may have prompted a person to try to sell a card.

In response to a Facebook request for comment, the parent apparently associated with the card said she had a card “from my child’s grandmother. I do not know what any of this is pertaining to,” and that people “need to get there(sic) facts straight.”

12/16/2015

Isabella Kropiewnicki, of Nanticoke, will compete for 2015 Miss Junior Teen Title

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Isabella Kropiewnicki has been selected to participate in the 2015 Miss Junior Teen pageant this weekend in Philadelphia.

Kropiewnicki, 13, was anonymously referred for the 2015 Miss Junior Teen pageant and sent a letter about her referral. Kropiewnicki had an interview earlier in the year at the Holiday Inn – East Mountain Inn where she was selected to be part of a contingent to represent the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton area.

According to Isabella’s mother, Christine, this is the first Miss Junior Teen pageant in which Isabella will compete. The pageant is not associated with the National American Miss (NAM) pageants.

The competition includes a personal interview on Saturday and a casual and formal wear modeling routine in the division of Miss Junior Teen (ages 13–15), one of four age divisions.

If Kropiewnicki wins the title of Miss Junior Teen this weekend, she will represent Philadelphia and the surrounding communities (Allentown, Wilkes-Barre/Scranton, Philadelphia, Trenton, New Jersey) at the National Pageant in Orlando, Florida.

The national competition has a share of \$30,000 in prizes.

Kropiewnicki’s story

Kropiewnicki has been participating in NAM pageantry for three years and was surprised when she received notice of the referral.

She keeps busy four days a week with dance, which includes ballet, tap and pointe technique, at Joan Harris Centre in Luzerne. She has been dancing for 10 years and will soon begin Irish step dance.

She is also a member of the Greater Nanticoke Area chorus and field hockey team.

An injury in her leg had Kropiewnicki sidelined from field hockey and on crutches for two and a half months but, according to her mother, she is getting “back to normal.”

Kropiewnicki’s favorite part of the pageants is “meeting new people and keeping in contact with friends from previous pageants.”

Kropiewnicki would like to become a pediatric oncology nurse because she loves children and wants to “help them feel better.”

Her advice to those thinking about doing pageantry is “don’t be afraid to do things” and “don’t be out to win, just have fun.”

12/15/2015

Santa makes an appearance at Nanticoke’s annual ‘Christmas in the Park’

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Residents lined the streets and watched from their homes as the Nanticoke Fire Department ushered Santa Claus to town Sunday.

The second annual “Christmas in the Park” began with a parade which included Greater Nanticoke Area cheerleaders and football players, various Nanticoke-based Girl and Boy Scout troops, Nanticoke Crime Watch and a float by Nanticoke Community Garden. Parade participants left Greater Nanticoke Area High School on Kosciuszko Street and traveled three blocks to Patriot Square Park.

Santa Claus watched the parade from atop a Nanticoke fire truck and, when he reached his destination, he was greeted in the middle of Patriot Square by young and old, waiting to see him and give him their Christmas list.

Wearing matching Santa-faced red and white striped dresses, sisters Gulia and Ava Knutzon, of Nanticoke, along with their mother, Allison, were just three of the hundreds of individuals in attendance to meet the man in the big red suit.

Ava, 3, was excited to see Santa and enjoy a horse-drawn carriage ride around the square.

Gulia, 5, couldn’t wait to tell Santa she wanted a smart board for Christmas.

Nanticoke Mayor Richard Wiaterowski attributed the amount of people to the extremely pleasurable weather.

“We (City of Nanticoke Events Committee) are excited for the amount of people,” Wiaterowski said. “The weather obviously helped.”

“It’s nice to see people out,” Wiaterowski said because he “remembers doing this as a kid.”

Committee member Lindsey Temarantz said the committee planned for 300 children based on the response from last year’s event.

She also said it takes about three months to plan so that “everybody is on the same page.”

“Once we’re done with Trunk or Treat, we start with this,” Temarantz said, referencing a Halloween event in the city.

A horse and carriage ride around the park, hot chocolate sponsored by the firemen of Nanticoke and cookies donated by the Luzerne County Community College culinary students were also available.

12/10/2015

4U2Rent Events Center opens in Nanticoke

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Nanticoke as a destination location?

That's what Bernie Norieka, owner of the new 4U2Rent Events Center, 400 Middle Road, said about the city. It's why Norieka chose the city to play host to his new brainchild: a new appointment-only events center, with different types of flooring and accessories to accommodate all types of events.

In the two months since its opening, 4U2Rent Events Center has seen several birthday parties, a Sweet 16 party, a craft show (which utilized the entire building) and a bridal shower, among others. The business's Facebook page boasts several five star reviews.

The center has four rooms, which can be rented separately or together. One room has a rubberized floor, "perfect for cheerleading," Norieka said. The smallest room, with tiled floor, can fit up to 70 comfortably. An arcade and a ready-to-use, if you provide the snacks, snack bar are also available. Two rooms contain TouchTunes Digital Jukebox players.

The arcade currently has a pinball machine, pool and air hockey tables.

"We will update (the arcade) as we get customer feedback," Norekia said. "The biggest thing we saw was kids sitting along the wall waiting for their turn to play."

The place also has three bounce houses: a small, medium and large, for events to add on, if desired.

"We didn't want to just be a bounce place; we wanted to be destination location," Norekia said.

Norieka doesn't want the business to be known as just a birthday party place; he wants to help start-up businesses, such as karate, yoga and other local instructors as well as host events for corporate meetings.

Recently, installation of a 108-inch screen was completed. The screen has a computer hook up, "perfect for PowerPoint presentations," according to Norieka.

He wants to use the screen to host community parties, as well. Norieka suggested something like a "parents night out," which could make use of the building and utilize the "certified and vetted babysitters" from Big Daddy's Daycare, located next door to the center.

"Or maybe something for the Super Bowl," he said.

Rental rates start at \$30 an hour plus \$1 per person. Discounts are also offered for those who do multiple bookings.

"The biggest complaint we heard (when looking into how to run the new center) was the food," Norieka said, which is why, he said, renters supply their own food and drinks.

For more information, call the center at 570-262-8397, reach it on Facebook or log onto 4u2rentevents.com.

12/5/2015

Nanticoke council approves 21.5 percent tax hike for 2016

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

City property taxes will rise by more than 21 percent in Nanticoke next year.

City council on Wednesday gave final approval to Nanticoke's 2016 budget, which includes a total millage rate of 5.93 mills. The rate represents an increase of 21.5 percent over this year's rate of 4.88 mills.

That means the owner of a property valued at \$100,000 will see a 2016 tax bill of \$592.58, an increase of \$104.73 over this year's bill of \$487.85.

Council voted unanimously, 4-0, to adopt the budget. Councilman Stephen Duda was absent.

Council had also voted unanimously, with Duda absent, to give preliminary approval to the budget on Nov. 18. At that meeting, city residents let council members and City Manager Andy Gegaris know they were not happy with the size of the proposed tax increase, which city officials said will be used to improve Nanticoke's crumbling infrastructure.

Councilwoman Lesley Butczynski, reached by phone on Friday, said there are widespread misconceptions about the budget and tax increase.

Salary increases for non-union city employees did not cause the tax rate to rise, Butczynski said. Those raises were among the complaints citizens expressed to council last month. The pay increases — a total of 7 percent, given in two separate 3.5 percent increases — represent only a sliver of the city's increase in expenses, Butczynski said.

The bulk of the increased tax revenue will fund projects to fix and improve Nanticoke's roads and sewer system, which are in dire need of repair, she said.

Gegaris and council President William Brown made similar remarks at the Nov. 18 council meeting.

Hank Marks, president of the Greater Nanticoke Area Taxpayers Forum and one of the most vocal complainants at last month's meeting, said on Friday that council members ignored repeated pleas from members of the public who said they cannot afford to pay any more in taxes.

Marks said he and his group will try to unseat Brown and council Vice President Kevin Coughlin when they are up for election in 2017.

"We have to get new people in there," he said. "You have to realize you can't keep raising taxes and giving raises."

Nanticoke's 2016 budget includes a general millage rate of 4.7514 mills as well as dedicated millages for debt service (1.155 mills) and Mill Memorial Library (.0194 mills).

A mill is \$1 in taxes for every \$1,000 of assessed value.

12/4/2015

Census report: Poverty rates soar in Nanticoke, Hazleton

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Poverty rates in two cities in Luzerne County have skyrocketed in the last five years, a census report released Thursday shows. The U.S. Census Bureau released its five-year estimate of national demographic and socioeconomic data, including poverty rates, household income and government assistance between the periods of 2005-2009 and 2010-2014. Many Pennsylvania cities have seen statistically significant changes, with Hazleton and Nanticoke reporting some of the most major changes.

The poverty rates in 24 of the 57 Pennsylvania cities listed in the report changed significantly between the two reporting periods. Hazleton (59 percent) and Nanticoke (54 percent), reported the second and third largest percent increases in the number of persons living below the federal poverty level, which is \$11,770 for an individual. Wilkes-Barre also had an increase of almost 25 percent. The report does not include the most recent percentage of people in the state living in poverty. Census information from the most recent report, covering 2009 to 2013, shows persons below poverty level in the state is 13 percent.

Only 15 cities in the state had a statistically significant change in median household income between the two periods. Of those, only two — Jeannette in Westmoreland County and Aliquippa in Beaver County — experienced an increase. The remaining cities with a significant change all showed a decline in median household income. Among those reporting the largest losses in median household income was Hazleton with a decrease of \$5,181.

Between 2010-2014 and the previous five-year period, 38 cities in the state reported significant changes — all increases — in the number of people receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. Hazleton was among four other cities that had increases above 70 percent.

12/3/2015

Nanticoke residents to see 21.5 percent tax increase

Times Leader

The city council voted, with the exception of Steve Duda who was absent, to approve the 2016 budget of \$5,537,429 at Tuesday night's monthly meeting.

The budget includes a 21.5 percent increase in property taxes. A home valued at \$75,000 will see an increase of \$78.55 or less than an additional \$6.55 per month. A \$125,000 home will incur an increase of \$130.91 or an addition of less than \$10.91 per month.

The total millage rate is 5.93 mills. A mill is \$1 in taxes for every \$1,000 of assessed value.

Following residents' complaints regarding the property tax increase, Council President William Brown explained that half of the increase will be used to fund major road repair projects, which will begin in the spring of 2016.

It will also enable the city to obtain a \$3 million Pennsylvania Infrastructure Loan at a guaranteed fixed interest rate of less than 2 percent for 10 years.

Brown added that the many of the city's streets are in desperate need of repair and that the city wanted to take advantage of the very low interest rate.

The remaining half of the increase will be used for necessary increases, such as the rising cost of workers' compensation, payroll taxes, utilities, general legal services, pension plans, as well as a federally mandated health insurance premium increase, among other essential budget increases.

The total revenue increase is 6.9 percent, which is within the 8 percent increase limit as per the Home Rule Charter agreement.

The next meeting of the council will be at 7 p.m. on Dec. 16.

12/1/2015

Artists transform Wilkes-Barre windows for the holiday season

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While Santa waves from a window at the Geisinger Health Systems office, Yoda and C3PO of "Star Wars" fame offer seasons greetings across Public Square at Blue Wireless.

Meanwhile, Heat Miser and Snow Miser — remember them from a 1974 television special? — grimace menacingly at Rodano's and, at Katana, Charlie Brown and the rest of the "Peanuts" gang throw back their heads and open their mouths wide to offer "Joy to the World."

From the gingerbread cookie at Dunkin' Donuts to the word J-O-Y created from peppermint sticks at Frederick Dental Group to the mirror in which you can see your "selfie" at Luzerne Bank, downtown Wilkes-Barre's windows have recently taken on a festive appearance.

"It's a real labor of love," said **Leonardo Davenport, of Nanticoke**, one of about 20 artists who volunteered to paint decorations on the storefront windows.

"We look at this as our gift to the community," said John Maday, speaking for the promotions committee of the Downtown Wilkes-Barre Association, which organized the painting. "It recreates the memory of the downtown from long ago when every store had its displays and what's nice is, each of the artists gave a different perspective on what the holidays should be."

So you might find Snoopy singing while Lucy offers advice at El Zocalo restaurant, a snowman riding a sled at the Kirby Center, Rudolf wagging his tail at Bottlenecks.

Davenport is the artist responsible for the Rudolf at Bottlenecks, as well as characters he named "Macey" after a waitress, "Jason" after the owner and "Peppermint Patty" after a drink.

Carrying a variety of different colored paints in the trunk of his car, he also painted the big Santa and a waif-like child that represents the Valley Santa charity on the Geisinger Health Care building and an array of holiday motifs on the F.M. Kirby Center.

"This will really make them stand out," he said, dabbing a touch of red here and there along the edges of his work.

Sporting a beret and suspenders covered with images of palettes and brushes, Davenport said he was wearing his painting clothes.

His first name wasn't always Leonardo, he explained. "I'd tell people my name was Leonard, and they'd forget it," he said. "I added the 'o' and

now they remember.”

11/23/2015

**70 years of polka joy: John 'Stanky' Stankovic of Nanticoke is still performing
Performing since age 9, John 'Stanky' Stankovic reaches a milestone.**

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DRUMS - "Roll out the barrel, we'll have a barrel of fun! Roll out the barrel, we've got the blues on the run ..."

"Apples, peaches, pumpkin pie. Who's not ready, holler 'I.' Let's all play hide and seek ..."

Polka after polka, long-time musician John Stanky provided the vocals, his buddy Eddie Derwin accompanied him on accordion and about 60 residents of Providence Place Retirement Community sang along on a recent Tuesday afternoon.

Finally, 88-year-old Rosemary Ondeck could resist no longer. She stood up, linked hands with Providence Place staffer Mary Donna Chehovich and danced to the tunes she's enjoyed for decades.

"Are you tired?" Chehovich asked a few minutes later.

"No!" Ondeck told her emphatically.

Stanky smiled as he watched the infectious energy, this polka magic, take hold.

For 70 of his 79 years he's been a part of it, creating cheerful, peppy music that makes toes tap, hands clap, and feet dance.

"My father told me, 'If you learn 10 songs on the accordion, you'll never starve.' So I learned 20," he said with a gentle laugh.

Well-known throughout the region as leader of the band Stanky and the Coal Miners, the musician - whose given name is John Stankovic - is a lifelong resident of Nanticoke.

That city's tidy little Hanover section is where he started - at age 9 - to play for audiences, sometimes by himself; sometimes with local band leader Guy Ambrose.

As a high school student in his early teens, he formed a polka-playing trio called the Tip Toppers. About nine years later, in 1959, he started Stanky and the Coal Miners, choosing the name as tribute to anthracite workers like his father.

Playing for birthday parties and wedding celebrations in private homes was just the start.

Eventually Stanky would play all over the world. During one busy week in September 2000 his band played a USO show in South Korea, the Bloomsburg Fair in Pennsylvania and a venue in Switzerland. "Three continents in one week," he said.

There were performances at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City, at the National Folk Festival in Butte, Montana, and at so many weddings and church picnics they would be difficult to count.

Crazy, but rewarding, is how Stanky's wife, Dottie, describes his long career. "We met so many wonderful people," she said. "We made so many good friends."

Dottie Stankovic, who served several terms as Luzerne County's Register of Wills before she retired in 2013, married the band leader in 1962. They had met at the Citizens Club in Nanticoke, where Stanky was playing the night Dottie showed up for a Halloween party dressed as Pocahontas.

Laughing, Stanky remembers how he hesitated to tell this young woman who was "so pretty" about his day job as a "rag man" who drove an old vehicle up and down the streets, blowing a horn so people would bring him their junk and he could recycle it.

It turned out, she didn't mind; she eventually went along for the ride and blew a horn herself.

Stanky's self-published autobiography, "Apples, Peaches, Pumpkin Pie, The Story of Stanky and the Coal Miners," tells lots of Dottie stories. There was the time, before they were married, when he was sick and she walked about four miles from her house in Ashley to his home in Nanticoke to bring him medicine.

There was the time after they were married when he forgot to take his accordion on a gig. She found it at home and, since cell phones hadn't yet been invented, called the radio station to which she suspected he'd be listening on the car radio and persuaded the announcer to broadcast her message. Stanky heard it, turned around and went back for the accordion.

Traveling with the band provided Stanky with fascinating stories, from a bus that burst into flames to the 5-pound wheel of cheese that came in handy because it was the only food they had to eat during a blizzard. Then there were the times the group played aboard airplanes in flight.

"I would get the captain's permission first," Stanky said. "We loved it and the people loved it."

Long-time fan Shirley Shaw, 79, of Scranton, said traveling with Stanky's groups was a treat.

"Every trip he ever took to Ireland, or to the Passion Play in Germany, my husband and I went along," she said. "It was fantastic. We loved it all." Stanky believes he might not have traveled so extensively if not for one snowy night when his six-piece band played at the Knights of Columbus Hall in Luzerne for an audience of "maybe four people."

He told his musicians they should play as well for a small group as for a huge one, and they impressed one of the audience members, local travel agent Barry Tenenbaum, so much he asked "How would you guys like to go on cruises?"

More than 150 cruises would follow, giving Stanky a chance to see places as far-flung as Alaska and the Panama Canal.

But after suffering a stroke about five years ago, Stanky sticks closer to home. He still has about three gigs a week, mostly at retirement communities or nursing facilities, and while he might strike up his accordion in his house on Espy Street, he's more likely in public to sing the polkas while his buddy Eddie Derwin plays the accordion.

That's how the duo performed at Providence Place last week, where 92-year-old Betty Kaylor got to her feet and danced, supported by two staff members, and 88-year-old Tommy Yankus sang along with just about every number, whether it was in English or Polish.

After the concert, resident Florence Yodzio, 89, told Stanky she remembered hearing him play at Knoebels Amusement Park in Elysburg, and she happily translated some polka lyrics from Polish to English. "That one means 'I'm like a young man, a warrior going onto the battlefield,'" she told a reporter.

Stanky may have added a few younger folks to his fan base during the Providence Place event, too. One fresh-faced staff member asked him to pose with her while her co-worker snapped a photo.

Their take on the one-hour, afternoon concert? "Awesome!"

11/19/2015

Nanticoke faces 21-percent property tax hike for 2016

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

Property taxes will increase in Nanticoke next year — and residents let council know they are not happy about it on Wednesday.

Council gave preliminary approval to the city's proposed 2016 budget at a contentious meeting Wednesday night.

The bottom line: Nanticoke property owners will pay about 21 percent more in property taxes in 2016 than they did this year.

The owner of a property valued at \$100,000 will see a 2016 tax bill of \$592.58, an increase of \$104.73 over this year's bill of \$487.85.

Council members and city Manager Andy Gegaris said the tax hike is needed to fund badly needed repairs to Nanticoke's infrastructure. Several city residents disagreed.

"I strongly urge the council not to pass the budget," said Walter Griffith, a former Luzerne County controller and vocal advocate for fiscal restraint.

"I just don't think the city can afford it."

Hank Marks, an 83-year-old life resident, agreed.

"I also urge council not to pass this budget," he said, adding that council members who voted for such a steep tax increase were "committing political suicide."

Marks noted that many Nanticoke residents are senior citizens who will not get any increase in Social Security benefits next year.

He and Griffith took turns debating details of the budget with Gegaris throughout the council meeting and a budget work session that preceded it.

They interrupted and spoke over one another repeatedly.

One point of dispute was how much the tax hike amounts to, in terms of percentage.

Gegaris argued that the tax increase should be defined as 7 percent, which represents the projected increase in revenues in the budget. To make that math work, the proposed general millage rate of 4.7514 mills must be separated from dedicated millages for debt service (1.155 mills) and Mill Memorial Library (.0194 mills). The total proposed millage rate for 2016 of 5.93 mills is about 21.4 percent higher than the 2015 rate of 4.88 mills.

Residents at the work session urged council to consider options to curtail spending, including the possibility of eliminating the city's paid fire department and relying on volunteer firefighters instead.

Council members largely let Gegaris espouse the city's position during the work session and the voting meeting. In remarks after the meeting adjourned, they expressed regret over the need to raise taxes so much.

The council "did what we needed to do," said Councilwoman Lesley Butczynski, who added that the city's roads and sewer lines are in desperate need of repair. Council President William Brown said some roads in Nanticoke have been deteriorating for many years and repairs cannot wait any longer.

Council voted unanimously, 4-0, to approve the budget on Wednesday. Councilman Stephen Duda was absent.

Council will vote on whether to give final approval to the proposed 2016 budget on Dec. 2.

11/18/2015

Nanticoke school district seeks letters for board seat

Michael P. Buffer - Citizens Voice

The Greater Nanticoke Area School District is seeking letters of interest for an open board seat vacated by Robert Raineri.

Raineri was re-elected in 2013 and stepped down with two years of his term remaining. His service on the board began in 2000.

The school board plans to appoint a successor at its next meeting on Dec. 7, board President Ryan Verazin said.

The [district website](#) asks applicants to send letters to Verazin at the district office in Nanticoke.

11/18/2015

Mums are good choice for a fall garden, Nanticoke man says

Nanticoke man reports flowers still going strong in November

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Thank heaven for mums.

That's what retired teacher Frank Mrufchinski, 81, of Nanticoke thinks on cold but sunny autumn days when he's out feeding birds or simply enjoying his garden.

The morning glories have faded, of course. So have his miniature roses and coleus. But the mums, bless their hardy root systems, have kept the yard colorful this October and November.

"They're white, yellow, purple, pink and rust," Mrufchinski said. "I'll be sad when they're gone. I like to go out and just admire them."

Contemplating the beauty of the flowers reminds Mrufchinski of his youth, when he and his twin sister, Teresa, would accompany their mother to the Forty Hours Devotion at the former St. Stanislaus Church in Nanticoke and see "beautiful white mums in golden vases" on the altar.

He's not sure where those particular flowers came from, although he distinctly remembers another time when a Sister asked the twins to bring her white peonies to decorate the church for First Holy Communion. "We didn't have any, but our neighbor Mrs. Rynkiewicz did," he said. "She was

glad to give us some.”

The rectory of that church had a well-kept garden, too. “It was like the flower showplace of Nanticoke,” Mrufchinski said, recalling how children from the parish school enjoyed munching grapes from the rectory garden’s arbor as an occasional treat.

Memories aside, Mrufchinski still enjoys tending his garden. Last May, he bought several mum plants for his yard, dug the holes and stuck them in. “I have good dirt,” he said. “You’ve got to have good dirt.”

Some of the mums he planted in previous years bloomed again this year, but he suspected not all of them would come back so he planted additional ones.

Beverly Turner, of Perennial Point Gardening Center in Plains, said not all ‘hardy mums’ will return year after year as perennials in Northeastern Pennsylvania. “‘Hardy’ means that they can withstand a few fall frosts without blackening and either going dormant or dying,” she said.

“A fall-purchased ‘hardy mum’ has been specifically produced to provide fall color, and they should usually be treated as annuals,” Turner wrote in an email. “Planting them as early in the season as possible will increase their chance of survival, as will not cutting back their foliage.”

When Turner saw a photograph of Mrufchinski’s mums, the gardening expert said, “Wow, these are really beautiful! They look exceptionally well cared for.

“A lot of folks, including me, will take a potted mum home and miss daily watering it, resulting in an alive but less beautiful plant,” Turner said. If you want to have flowers that bloom in the fall, Turner said, mums are a great choice as are Montauk Daisies and Shasta Daisies. Mentioning the Latin names Dendranthemum, Leucanthemum and Nippoanthemum, she said they’re all in the chrysanthemum family, all late-blooming and, incidentally, all deer-resistant.

11/17/2015

Hooligans opens for business in Nanticoke

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City residents know the face associated with the name Mark Neylon Jr. because his family owned and operated Ridge Street Cafe n'More.

The Neylons are expanding their breakfast business into a sit-down lunch and dinner business at their new venture, Hooligans Restaurant & Pub, 396 E. Washington St.

Ridge Street Cafe n'More officially closed on Oct. 4 after the breakfast rush and Hooligans officially opened for business during the dinner rush on Monday.

"I wouldn't call it a soft opening," Neylon said. "It's just a Monday and it seemed like a good day to open."

The business has a social media manager who runs its Facebook page. According to the page, individuals have been waiting since June for the opening of Hooligans. Those who ate a pre-opening dinner commented on how good the food is.

Neylon said it's a family business, just like the Cafe. His sister is the front house manager, his father is general manager and he is the executive chef, but no one gets a title because "we're all going to help each other out."

Unlike Ridge Street Cafe, the bar and pub has a full bar and a liquor license. Neylon stresses that families can sit down and enjoy the food "without dropping \$200."

To the Neylons, Ridge Street Cafe was a stepping stone and, because the family enjoys the people and atmosphere of Nanticoke so much, they wanted to stay in the area. The family feels the new restaurant is in a good space because it's close to those wanting to come in from the Back Mountain or Wilkes-Barre.

"It has a good population looking for something new," Neylon said. "We're at a great location."

The menu, posted on the Facebook page when it reached 500 likes, boasts a butchers block, pasta and pizza selection, as well as the standard salad and chicken dishes. Appetizers are called "appeteasers."

"The menu is a lot more varied, eclectic," Neylon said.

The business is open 11 a.m. to 2 a.m. every day but Monday when it opens at 4 p.m.

11/14/2015

Presentation shows highlights of 2015 for Greater Nanticoke Area

Susan Bettinger - For Times Leader

During this month’s Greater Nanticoke Area School Board meeting, board President Ryan Verazin gave a year-in-review presentation.

The slide show included highlights from each committee in the district.

Among the highlights were improved academic programs, increased safety measures, improvements to facilities and the holding of the tax rate for the 2015-16 school year.

The addition of check-in points for all visitors to the high school and grant money being used for a full-time police officer were just some of the safety measures taken.

The district also opened the GNA Cyber Lab, allowing cyber students to earn a GNA diploma and participate in district activities.

A new baseball field will be available starting in the spring of 2016.

In other matters:

- Ken James of the Athletic Department announced that Amber Grohowski was selected to represent Nanticoke in the Wendy’s High School Heisman competition. She advances to the state level. Grohowski participates in basketball, field hockey and track.
- The board had accepted a letter of resignation from Bob Raineri as a member of the board, effective Nov. 12.

11/10/2015

Former Nanticoke hospital sold at auction

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

The former Nanticoke Special Care Hospital sold Monday at an auction.

Fortna Auctioneers of Anville announced on its website that the hospital was “sold at Absolute Auction to the highest bidder!!”

Details about the sale were not listed on its website.

Commonwealth Health formerly owned the approximately 80,000-square-foot hospital on four acres of land and it formerly provided long-term acute care services to seriously ill patients with complicated medical needs. Last year, Commonwealth Health sold the hospital and its satellite operations to a subsidiary of specialty health care company Post Acute Medical based in Camp Hill. Post Acute Medical moved to the seventh floor of Wilkes-Barre General Hospital.

The Nanticoke property, built in the early 1900s, formerly was Mercy Special Care Hospital until Community Health Systems purchased it in 2011 as well as Mercy Hospital in Scranton and Mercy Tyler Hospital in Tunkhannock.

11/10/2015

Athletic recognition committee forms in Nanticoke area

An Athletic Recognition Committee has been formed at the Greater Nanticoke Area School District to recognize athletic and scholastic achievements of students past and present. This also includes graduates of the former Newport, Harter and Nanticoke high schools. The committee is seeking volunteers and plans to raise funds for a trophy case to display various trophies and academic accomplishments over the years. Anyone who knows or has a history of their school success in sports or academics or would like to assist with any of the committee activities is invited to the next meeting to be held at 10 a.m. Monday, Nov. 16, at the administrative offices of the Greater Nanticoke Area School District, Kosciuszko Street. Call the district office at 570-735-1270 for information.

11/8/2015

A salute to those who served

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

You're about to take a journey through World War II.

This commemorative section is filled with riveting stories from the men and women who lived it, survived it and remember it well.

This year marks 70 years since the war's end — and we thought the area's surviving WWII veterans deserved some recognition.

Over the past year, I've met and interviewed 21 men and women who served during the war. The youngest of them turns 88 in February.

The goal of this special project — unveiled now to coincide with Veterans Day 2015 — is to preserve their stories.

And time is running out.

Of the 16 million Americans who served in World War II, only about 850,000 are alive today. Nearly 500 die each day. The federal government predicts they'll all be gone by 2036.

This project was personal for me.

My grandfather Leon Kalinowski — our Polish family called him Dziadzi — served honorably in World War II with the Navy in the Aleutian Islands, between Alaska and Japan.

Sadly, that's about all I know. I'm sure he had some great stories to tell. I just never took the time to sit down and document them.

What kills me is I wanted to. He was my best buddy and I visited him often. I had a video camera at the time. I had grand ideas to sit down with him in the yard and talk about his whole life — from the Depression to the war to the hellish life as a coal miner. I kept putting it off.

Then, suddenly, one day in March 2006 my world came crashing down when he died after having a stroke in his sleep. The heartache of losing him was bad enough. But, I was infuriated with myself for letting his life story pass away with him.

That was my motivation for this project — to do for other families what I regrettably did not do for my family and myself.

I wasn't sure where to start in my search for World War II veterans. I had a list of 150 veterans who visited the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C., on a bus trip organized by Leadership Wilkes-Barre in 2008. I searched each name in our archives and, sadly, the overwhelmingly majority of them had died.

I was able to start with a few veterans who regularly contact our paper. Each veteran I spoke to seemed to have a friend who also served and that's how I landed each subsequent interview. I likely could have found some by making requests on social media, but we didn't want to reveal our special project until it was time to launch.

And now is the time.

The people featured in this section are often referred to as part of “The Greatest Generation.”

After getting to know them over the past year, it is clear they are still great.

Each of the 21 veterans still had a sharp mind. Most of them are still active. And some of them are still working for a living. One continues to serve as a state constable. Another is a state-certified veterans counselor. The eldest of the group, a 98-year-old Army veteran, still heads out for beers each Thursday night with his buddies.

And, as you will read, each of them has a unique story of service in World War II.

Bob Kalinowski, the lead reporter for this special section, is the grandson of two World War II veterans. The Nanticoke resident has been employed by The Citizens' Voice since graduating from King's College in May 2003. He was later accepted into the Navy's Officer Candidate School and

was to join the February 2005 class in Pensacola, Florida, but was given an honorable discharge due to an injury and has remained at the paper ever since. He can be reached at bkalinowski@citizensvoice.com, 570-821-2055 and @cvbobkal on Twitter.

11/8/2015

Four Nanticoke brothers served during WWII

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

“They were Nanticoke’s Band of Brothers,” said Mark Brown while tidying the family burial plots that cover the remains of his father and two uncles, all of whom served in World War II. Nearby a freshly dug grave awaited the body of another uncle, Joseph Cionzynski, a Coast Guard veteran who died Oct. 28.

Days later, on an unseasonably warm and sunny morning, his family gathered in Holy Trinity Cemetery to mourn — yet celebrate — the end of an era.

Each of the four Cionzynski brothers — Henry, John, Charles and Joseph — served in a different branch of the military in the war years. Brown’s father, an Army veteran, was the first brother to pass away in July 2002. His uncles, John and Charles, one a Navy veteran the other a Marine, were the next to go. On Tuesday, it was time to say farewell to his uncle Joe.

“I’m sorry I didn’t learn more about all of my uncles’ involvement in World War II,” said Brown, 65. “There is so much younger generations should ask their relatives. Because after they’re gone, it’s too late.”

Henry fought in the Battle of the Bulge and was awarded a Bronze Star. Charles took part in the D-Day invasion of Normandy. John fought in the Pacific. Joseph guarded the harbors in New York and San Francisco.

In the years after the war, Charles and John moved out of the area and felt they were discriminated against because of their Polish surname — pronounced “Chin-Gin-Ski.” They opted for Brown. While Henry and Joseph remained lifelong Nanticoke residents and Cionzynskis, much of the rest of the family went with Brown.

Browns and Cionzynskis alike gathered at the cemetery to note a family passage Tuesday.

“Unfortunately, we had more funerals in recent years than weddings,” said Joseph’s son, also named Joseph Cionzynski, who lives in Lansdale.

In the past few years, his father missed his fallen brothers.

“Quite often he made reference about him being the last of the brothers,” Joseph Cionzynski said. “Those guys, they were really tight through their whole life. Before my uncles passed away, my father would spend hours on the phone, almost on a daily basis. They looked forward to that phone call.”

On a beautiful fall morning in Holy Trinity Cemetery, the story of the Cionzynski brothers came full circle, as the next generation gathered to pay their respects.

Joseph Cionzynski said the gorgeous, sun-filled weather was fitting.

“My father absolutely loved sunshine. He had arthritis. Gloomy, rainy, cloudy days were painful for him. It was 74 degrees with brilliant sunshine. It was a perfectly clear day,” he said. “How often do you get weather like that in November? We all took note of that.”

In the years after the war, Charles and John Cionzynski moved out of the area and felt they were discriminated against because of their last name. The Polish family surname is pronounced “Chin-Gin-Ski.” They changed their last name to Brown. Henry and Joseph remained lifelong Nanticoke residents and kept their last name until their death. Much of the rest of the family, however, changed their name to Brown.

11/8/2015

There at the beginning of the end

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

Walter Sowa had been working non-stop for months to support the bombing raids on Japan when a secretive crew of servicemen were shuffled into his radar repair unit on Tinian Island in July 1945.

“They were kind of cocky,” Sowa recalled. “They said, ‘We are here to finish the war.’”

All they would say is they were sent to end the war. They wouldn’t disclose their mission.

“It just so happened that small group was the one assigned to drop the atomic bomb,” Sowa said.

Tinian, part of the Mariana Islands about 1,500 miles south of Japan, served as the launching point for the Enola Gay for its Aug. 6, 1945 mission over Hiroshima.

It also served as the starting point for the lesser known plane, Bockscar, that dropped an atomic bomb over Nagasaki on Aug. 9.

For about six months prior to the nuclear attacks that ended the war, the island had been a busy starting hub for daily bombing missions.

“The regular B-29s were bombing the heck out of Japan,” Sowa recalled.

Sowa had been busy working in the radar repair department on the island.

“The B-29s, when they took off from the islands, had a trip of 1,500 miles. At that time, they couldn’t predict what the weather would be like when they got to Japan. It could be overcast and they couldn’t use a Norden bombsight — a visual bombing. So they had to resort to radar, which was able to penetrate the clouds and give them a better picture,” he said.

When the mysterious new soldiers were added to the unit in July 1945, Sowa didn’t know what to think.

“They were relatively green as far as repairing radar, but we assimilated them into our shops,” Sowa recalled.

The men promised they were going to end the war, but wouldn’t say how.

“Well, by George, they dropped the bomb and after they dropped the bomb, one month later, they were back in the states. What ticked me off more, I was still there six months later,” Sowa said. “They were hailed as heroes. But let’s face it. It was a big activity.”

Before the rest of the world became familiar with the plane used to drop the first atomic bomb on Japan, Walter Sowa posed for a picture in front of the Enola Gay, which returned to Tinian Island after the bombing.

"I didn't think it was going to be that important later on. Nonetheless, it's a classic," Sowa said. "It's hard to believe that skinny guy was me."

Sowa obtained a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering and a master's degree in physics. After several years working in the field, he started teaching engineering at Penn State Wilkes-Barre, where he worked for 32 years prior to retirement. He and his wife Marie have been married for 63 years. They have two sons, one daughter and seven grandchildren.

After Sowa graduated from Newport Township High School in 1942, he enrolled in a free summer course in science, engineering and management that Penn State was offering at Nanticoke High School. The \$18 textbook for the class was the only charge — and that's exactly how much he received in graduation gifts. After that, a seemingly too-good-to-be-true offer came his way. The federal government offered to pay him \$1,420 to go to school to receive technical training that included radar classes. As soon as that schooling was done, he was drafted and placed in the radar repair unit. "I think they deferred me so I could finish that school. The government probably had me tagged where I was going to go," Sowa said.

11/8/2015

Veterans Day special to Nanticoke woman who served in WWII

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Losing her military ID some 70 years ago turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to 91-year-old Doris Merrill, a disabled veteran who will represent the Paralyzed Veterans of America at a Veterans Day ceremony in Washington on Wednesday.

The Paralyzed Veterans chose the Nanticoke resident to represent the organization because she has served as an inspiration for other veterans with physical disabilities through her decades of organized athletic competition, professional endeavors and community service.

Her association with the military began in 1944, when the then 20-year-old Merrill was serving as a transcriptionist in Cape May, New Jersey. She had joined the U.S. Navy as an opportunity for further education.

With a high security clearance, she was trying to make her way into the seashore town's Admiral Hotel, which served as a covert military headquarters tracking every U.S. military ship globally.

Then this man, a U.S. Marine, wouldn't let her in the building to do her job.

To make matters worse, Merrill ended up scrubbing floors as a consequence of not having her ID with her.

Later in the week, Merrill bought two sandwiches at the Salvation Army for 35 cents. She couldn't eat the second one, so she turned and asked the person behind her if he wanted it.

Not only did Paul Merrill, the Marine who had berated her for not having her ID with her, take the sandwich, he asked her what she was doing that weekend.

"I'm going home to Pennsylvania," she said.

"I've never been to Pennsylvania," he said, "I should come with you."

Life-altering decision

Merrill remembers calling her mother in Nanticoke all those years ago.

"I said to her, there's a Marine that wants to come home with me for the weekend," she said. "I don't know if you would really want him to come."

To her surprise, her mother was delighted to host a Marine for the weekend.

"Bring him home," she said. "We have an extra bedroom."

That, said Merrill, was the beginning of the best decision she had ever made in her life.

Less than a year later, on April 21, 1945, she married Paul Merrill, in a ceremony that she said was "like a parade."

With about 20 attendants in the wedding party, the only vehicles available to transport them to ceremony were two hearses.

"There wasn't any room for me to sit down," she said. "So, I sat on the floor of the hearse."

Washington event

In that spirit, the nearly 92-year-old woman is making her way to Washington on Wednesday to lay a wreath at the World War II Memorial, representing the Paralyzed Veterans of America, during a Veterans Day ceremony.

The U.S. Navy veteran, who has used a wheelchair consistently since 1957, has competed in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games since 1999 when they were hosted in Puerto Rico. She competes in various events, including ramp bowling.

She feels displaying over 60 medals she has earned in those games unnecessary.

"I know that I won them," she said. "That's enough."

Of her military service, Merrill said she was very grateful for the opportunity to serve her country.

Kindness, respect

The only woman working on a project which tracked the movement of Navy ships throughout the world, she said her military superiors treated her with kindness.

"In a man's world, they treated me with great respect," she said. "And, I in turn, did my job."

Because of the high degree of security associated with the project on which she worked, she was precluded from mentioning it to anyone.

"You didn't go home and talk about it," she said.

Because of that she said, she became very good at listening.

Living in the barracks with other WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service), she said found herself listening to the stories of others carefully, but not really able to share her own.

When the movie "The Hunt for Red October" came out in the 1990s, Merrill remembered getting the chills as she watched it in a theater.

"Someone talked," she said, "not me."

Passion for teaching

Having gone on to get both her bachelor's and master's degrees, Merrill spent many years teaching at Wilkes, Penn State and eventually Nanticoke High School.

She said she has never regretted one minute of it.

When teaching for the Greater Nanticoke Area School District, she needed assistance making her way to and from the school building.

"The football players helped me during basketball season and the basketball players helped me during the football season," she said. "I have not one bad thing to say about any student that I ever taught. Their parents raised kind, courteous children."

After her retirement from that district in the late 70s, she established a Wall of Fame in Nanticoke for athletes scoring over 1,000 points.

"It's one of the accomplishments of which I am most proud," she said. "I felt I was giving back."

Family focus

Although Merrill's husband Paul died in 1982, it is evident that his memory is very much a part of her life.

Her home in Nanticoke is filled with photos of the man she called her best friend.

When she speaks of her children — Paul II (Pepper), Heather and Toby — she is quick to share a specific memory, describe their personalities and express gratitude for their presence in her life.

Pepper died last year, a great sadness for Merrill.

"I never realized how much he helped me," she said. "Each day I realize more fully all that he had done for me, things I didn't even know about."

Merrill also has three grandchildren and three great grandchildren, all of whom she has a fun, positive relationship with.

Grandson Paul is accompanying her Wednesday, which she said he considers an honor.

Despite the fact that she has MS and her husband had a heart attack early in his life, her memories are not of illness, but of family.

"When we were with our grandchildren, we forgot," she said. "We forgot we were sick, we forgot we were older. We made games out of everything from laundry to cleaning their room. They were working and they didn't even realize it."

Role model

Carol Hayes of the Paralyzed Veterans of America, sponsor of the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, said she looked forward to meeting Merrill in person.

As one of the few remaining veterans of World War II, Hayes said Merrill embodies the courage and character which define military personnel.

"I know of her wonderful reputation and positive attitude from her participation in the games," she said. "She has been the oldest competing athlete for several years in a row."

Hayes said Merrill also will be honored at a Veterans Day breakfast where she will have a chance to meet several Washington dignitaries.

Embracing life

Merrill's home is small, but her life is big.

On the wall, next to photos of family, is her photo with President George W. Bush and wife, Laura.

She speaks easily of her love for Penn State and of her friendship with the late Joe Paterno and his wife, Sue Paterno.

"Sue found out I was having a difficult time attending games," she said, of Sue Paterno. "Right away, she got me a parking space very close to the stadium."

She also remembers meeting award-winning actor Tom Hanks.

"I said 'you starred in Survivor'," she said. "He never corrected me."

Hanks actually starred in a movie entitled "Cast Away."

Merrill, though taking time for necessary rest, still remains active.

Involved in the Wyoming Valley Woman's Club, she is looking forward to their selection of Woman of the Year this year.

When asked what her secret to such a long and robust life is, Merrill points to a plaque on the wall which greets visitors.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledging Him and he will direct your path," said Merrill. "I believe that."

10/25/2015

Athlete of the Week: Ed Lukowski, Nanticoke Area soccer

Matt Bufano - Citizens Voice

Ed Lukowski

Nanticoke Area

Senior, Soccer

Hometown: Nanticoke

Age: 17

Family: Parents, Ed and Wendy; sisters, Sophie, Amiah and Scarlett.

Accomplishment: Ed scored six goals — including the 100th of his career — in Wednesday's win against Wyoming Area.

Getting to Know Ed

Favorite subject: Math

Favorite book: "Among Heroes" by Brandon Webb

Favorite movie: "Olympus Has Fallen"

Favorite TV show: "NCIS"
Favorite actor: Tom Cruise
Favorite musical artist: Eminem
Favorite food: Steak
Favorite sport to follow: Soccer
Favorite team: Manchester United
Favorite athlete: Cristiano Ronaldo
Favorite holiday: Christmas
Favorite color: Red

Away from soccer, Ed enjoys ... fishing and playing basketball and hanging out with his friends.
If Ed could switch places with any athlete for one day, he'd switch with ... Cristiano Ronaldo.
If Ed could meet anyone in history, he'd like to meet ... George Washington.
If Ed could travel anywhere in the world, he'd travel to ... Germany.
Ed's favorite thing about soccer is ... the camaraderie he develops with his teammates.
The hardest thing about soccer for Ed is ... staying calm and focused.
One thing Ed can't live without is ... his family.
Ed's biggest role model has been ... his father.
One word that best describes Ed is ... determined.
Ed's biggest fear is ... not being able to play sports.
Up next, Ed ... hopes to play soccer and study accounting in college. He is undecided where he will attend.

10/25/2015

A new heart for Brian Dougherty

Bill Wellock - Citizens Voice

Brian Dougherty was born with half a working heart.

When his mother, Susan Boncal, was 22 weeks pregnant, she learned he would be born with hypoplastic left heart syndrome. The left side of his heart would be underdeveloped. The right side of his heart was taxed with pumping blood throughout his entire newborn body.

The 15-year-old from Nanticoke has dealt with a host of problems, more than many teenagers.

Through it all, he's been a great kid, said his teacher at Greater Nanticoke Area, Jean Marie Hockenbury. She has taught Brian as a homebound student for the past six years.

"He's been an amazing kid," she said. "He's always ready to work."

Brian had his first surgery when he was six days old. Before he turned two, he had been through three open-heart surgeries.

He developed a digestive problem called Protein Losing Enteropathy. The maladies piled up: malnutrition, stunted growth, cataracts and osteoporosis. Brian started taking medicine regularly to cope with a list of health issues, and for about seven years, his health was stable.

Around age 10, problems began coming back. Fighting the PLE was a constant shifting battle. When he got sick, the problem got worse. A stomach bug could be life-threatening. His family and physicians did their best to make him as healthy as possible.

In June of 2014, Susan asked the doctors treating Brian about a heart transplant. His health had been too poor before for a transplant. In the spring of that year, the levels in his blood of albumin, a protein made by the liver, were dropping. Before his health deteriorated, doctors evaluated Brian for a heart transplant. That fall, they went to Pittsburgh for a transplant evaluation. He was on the list.

He was at a camp for children with heart problems when he had a severe heart failure. A doctor admitted him to the hospital and he started taking intravenous drugs. On June 24, 2015, he was bumped to the top category of transplant candidates. Two months later, the call came. A heart was ready.

Brian prepped for surgery. On Aug. 20, he went into the operating room at 4:20 a.m.

All he and his mother know about the donor organ is that it came from a young man. Brian has adapted well to his new heart.

For four days after the surgery, Brian was intubated and paralyzed. He is walking now.

Recovery has brought its own frustrations and victories.

"Will he ever catch a break??" Boncal wrote on Brian's GoFundMe Web page after describing trouble with his kidneys, two days after Brian could have been discharged from the hospital.

And then, in the same post, came a moment of joy:

"On a lighter note, Brian has continuous contractions in his left foot and ankle due to one of his strokes. As I was massaging his foot last night (a routine practice these days) I started singing a song (about piggies) that I used to sing to him as a baby," she wrote "Well, he cracked up laughing and giggling to hiccup point! A priceless moment that the song still had the same result!!"

Brian will stay in Pittsburgh now while he continues to recover. Doctors monitor his health and perform biopsies to make sure his body accepts the new heart. The first biopsy showed no rejection. A second test showed mild rejection. For now, he and his family wait.

Brian said he's feeling better now. He's looking forward to his health improving. He wants to try running.

"I've never done that before," he said.

Susan is hopeful his health will improve.

"When the doctors look straight at your face and say he should not be walking and he is ... ," she said. "The podiatrist that's going to be taking care

of his rehab said if another physician came into his office and looked at his MRI and saw what he was able to do, they would say that was not the same person. There's no way this person should be able to walk and function as he can. But it is the correct MRI. I can see the name and medical record and the time it was taken. I can see the damaged area of the brain from his first stroke, so I know it is the right MRI, but pretty much he's a miracle."

Brian is still recovering. He said he is doing better. For now, he is staying in Pittsburgh, monitored by physicians, gaining strength. When his health improves, Brian also wants to get back in the kitchen. He loves to cook. His grandpa taught him how.

"I got kicked out of the kitchen a few years ago," Susan said.

Instead of cartoons, he watches cooking shows. He likes Guy Fieri's "Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives."

His favorite meal to cook is a dish of noodles with meat sauce, and his favorite restaurant is Nanticoke's R Bar & Grill. He recommends the dill pickle-flavored wings.

His goal, powered by his new heart, is to become a chef.

Find Brian's GoFundMe page at www.gofundme.com/WholeHeartforBrian.

10/25/2015

Brandon Murtha sells cupcakes and more from mobile bakery

Denise Allabaugh - Citizens Voice

At age 16, Brandon Murtha is already a successful entrepreneur known for his colorful cupcake camper.

The 10th grader at Greater Nanticoke Area High School started his own bakery called Murt's Desserts. He specializes in cupcakes and also makes cakes, cake pops and other desserts.

He takes a 10-foot camper to events to sell cupcakes. His family found the camper on Craigslist, drove to the Poconos to buy it and fixed it up.

"When I started this, I wanted to have an ice cream truck about two years ago. Then, my mom asked me what I would do in the wintertime because you can't sell ice cream in the winter so I said I would have a cupcake truck," Brandon said. "There were really none around here at the time so then we decided to start looking for one. And, I started to make cupcakes and I was pretty good at it so I just kept going."

Brandon taught himself to make cupcakes by watching YouTube videos. He makes cupcakes for anyone who orders them. People find him through his Facebook page called Murt's Desserts and word of mouth.

Metz Culinary Management has purchased his cupcakes and they are sold in a Starbucks kiosk on the first floor of Wilkes-Barre General Hospital.

He makes two dozen cupcakes to sell in the kiosk each week.

People also have ordered cupcakes and cakes for birthday and graduation parties and other events. Specialty cakes he has made included a Minion cake and luau cakes. He recently made and decorated 11 dozen cupcakes with four different flavors to fill an order. He sells cupcakes for \$2 each or \$15 a dozen.

"It's just something I like to do," Brandon said. "It's fun and people like it when you make the stuff for them."

He has taken his camper to sell cupcakes in a variety of places including Nanticoke festivals, outside the R Bar and Grill in Nanticoke and Wyoming Valley Motors. Brandon's dad, Dave Murtha, hooks up the camper and drives him to events.

When asked what motivates him, Brandon said, "I always try to do things the best I can. When I start doing something, I just want to finish it until it looks good and it tastes good."

He said his favorite part of running a bakery is "seeing the people when I give them the things I make for them."

Brandon juggles his schoolwork with his business as well as a part-time job as a cashier on the weekends at Wegmans.

His mom, Debbie Murtha, said they received a zoning permit from Nanticoke for Brandon to operate a home-based bakery. He passed a state inspection and got insurance. His 19-year-old brother Nick is a supervisor at Metz and he is studying hospitality business management at Luzerne County Community College.

Brandon would like to continue to run a bakery in his future. His advice to other kids working toward a goal is "to just keep going and try your best to do it."

10/10/2015

Nanticoke Fire Dept. earns quick response status from state

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

The Nanticoke Fire Department recently earned Quick Response Service certification from the state Department of Health, a development that the city's fire chief says could help save lives.

The certification as a QRS-worthy emergency response unit will allow Nanticoke firefighters to aid seriously injured patients they find at emergency scenes before ambulance crews arrive, according to Fire Chief Kevin Hazleton.

"What it's really going to do is let us provide a better service to the citizens of Nanticoke," Hazleton said.

Now that the department's two engine trucks and their crews are certified as QRS, they can render more extensive assistance and care to victims of traumatic injury at fire scenes or accidents, the chief said. While all firefighters are trained in emergency first aid, a QRS-certified unit has access to more equipment and works under the direction of a medical doctor, he said.

The QRS system in some ways is roughly similar to the 1970s television program "Emergency," according to Hazleton.

"If a medic unit is being delayed for some reason, we can at least start (treatment) until the ambulance can get there," he said.

All of Nanticoke's career firefighters are certified emergency medical technicians, or EMTs, which is one of several pre-requisites for agencies that seek QRS status, Hazleton added.

The department achieved QRS certification last month, after a months-long application process that Hazleton described as “not the easiest thing in the world.”

To become certified, the department had to buy medical equipment and supplies to keep on both of its engine trucks, Hazleton said.

The Nanticoke Fire Department is among a handful of QRS-certified responders in Luzerne County, the chief said. He credited Nanticoke firefighter Justin Gildea, a certified paramedic, with playing a large role in making that happen.

“We’re fortunate to have a firefighter who is a paramedic,” he said. “He coordinates our EMS for us.”

The Pennsylvania Code describes a Quick Response Service unit as “an EMS agency that ... uses EMS providers to respond to calls for EMS and provide EMS to patients before an ambulance arrives.”

10/9/2015

Former Nanticoke Hospital on auction block, will be sold to highest bidder

Times Leader

Fortna Auctioneers will conduct auction selling the Former Nanticoke Hospital/Medical Facility at 1 p.m. on Monday, Nov. 9 at the facility, 128 W. Washington St., Nanticoke.

The unique property is being offered at absolute auction with no minimums and no reserves and will be sold to the highest bidder.

Potential buyers may inspect the facility from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Monday, Oct. 26.

The former hospital/medical facility/special care hospital resides on 4+ acres and consists of 80,000+ square feet.

Details on the sale may be obtained from Fortna Auctioneers at 800-831-4242 or by logging onto www.fortnauctioneers.com for a virtual tour.

9/25/2015

LCCC trustees support student housing plan

Michael P. Buffer - Citizens Voice

The Luzerne County Community College Board of Trustees voted Thursday to support a plan for student housing across from the main entrance of the college campus off Kosciuszko Street.

The college is not providing funds to build the housing, and Building Solutions LLC of Selinsgrove plans to build student housing in phases on land currently owned by the nonprofit Earth Conservancy, college President Thomas P. Leary said. Building Solutions will determine how many housing units to build and the construction schedule, Leary said.

A company representative was not at Thursday’s meeting. In a letter of support, Leary wrote that the “potential development of housing” is the result of a “collaboration between the city of Nanticoke and Luzerne County Community College” and will produce “positive growth and economic development.”

The college has a “strict separation” from Building Solutions regarding the housing and won’t let the company use the college logo, Leary said at last month’s board meeting. The board of trustees postponed a vote last month because some members wanted to modify clauses that could expose the college to liability and defense payments in litigation.

The company will not get exclusive rights to student housing, so the college could build its own student housing in the future or reach an agreement with another company for more student housing, Leary said.

Student housing should increase enrollment and be most attractive for students who live outside Luzerne County, officials have said. Building Solutions has built student housing for other state universities, Leary said.

9/23/2015

On Tap: Benny's Brewing Co. expanding in Hanover Twp.

Jim Reeser - Citizens Voice

In 2010, Ben Schonfeld started Benny’s Brewing Company in a small room at Marty’s Blue Room in Nanticoke. He brewed a barrel at a time and used four converted refrigerators as fermenters.

In a few months, that will all change with the opening of the new Benny’s Brewing Company and Restaurant at 1429 San Souci Parkway in Hanover Township. It’s the next step in Schonfeld’s maturation as a brewer and it gives him the opportunity to further market his line of beers.

The 6,000-square foot facility features a 10-barrel, open-view brew house, a fully-operational restaurant with an open view of the kitchen and a beer garden patio.

There will be a full bar and Schonfeld plans to have eight or nine of his beers on tap along with four or five guest beers. Amber Lager, Wit, Pale and Hopenstein IPA are Schonfeld’s flagship beers and they will always be on tap.

He’s planning a “chalkboard series” which will be one-off or experimental beers. Beer will be available to go. Schonfeld is installing a canning line to sell 12-ounce cans of his product. In addition, patrons can get growlers and sixtels.

Construction continues on the facility and Schonfeld hopes to start brewing in the space in November. He hasn’t set date to officially open, but said he hopes it will be by the end of year or early 2016.

While Schonfeld is going out on his own, it will be business as usual at [Marty’s Blue Room](#) — the place that launched his brewing career. “That was a stepping stone,” he said. “It’s my parents’ place and nothing will change there.”

9/20/2015

Nanticoke unveils 9/11 memorial made of World Trade Center steel

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

Two sunny September mornings, 14 years and 8 days apart, could not have been more different.

The community came together on Saturday as the Nanticoke Fire Department unveiled its 9/11 memorial, made of steel from the original World Trade Center towers that fell to terrorist attack on Sept. 11, 2001. Uniformed firefighters and emergency responders, elected officials and ordinary citizens gathered to share the message written on signs seen throughout the crowd outside the city fire station: Never forget.

The youngest person holding a sign on the side of East Ridge Street appeared to be Christian Bonk, “almost 4 and a skilled sign-maker,” according to his mother, Jennifer Bonk.

The Bonks’ sign read: “Never Forget 9-11-01.” Mother and son worked together to make the sign on Friday, then showed up early for Saturday’s unveiling to show their support for those who died on 9/11 and for first responders, living and dead, Jennifer Bonk said. She noted that she has a relative who works in emergency services.

Christian Bonk, wearing a tricycle helmet with an image of a dinosaur on it, smiled and quickly answered “yes” when asked if he wanted to be a firefighter someday.

The Sauers family, of Nanticoke, also arrived early to support the cause.

“It should never be forgotten,” said Mike Sauers, a former firefighter and lifetime Nanticoke resident.

That message was hammered home by the speakers at a brief ceremony before the unveiling.

Nanticoke Fire Chief Kevin Hazleton welcomed visiting firefighters from New York City, with whom the Nanticoke department retains close ties through local connections.

Those connections helped Nanticoke secure one of the last available pieces of Twin Towers steel for the monument, through New York City firefighter Carl Scheetz, according to Hazleton.

Hazleton also pointed to the large turnout of firefighters, police and emergency medical personnel from throughout the region. The morning sun glinted off dress blues and well-shined badges as it grew warmer by the minute.

Nanticoke Mayor Richard Wiaterowski spoke of the disbelief and horror he felt on Sept. 11, 2001, as he watched the towers collapse on television.

On that day, “a group of cowards shattered thousands of lives,” he said.

“I personally will never forget,” he said. “This (monument) will serve as a reminder.”

State Rep. Gerald Mullery, D-Newport Township, who graduated from Greater Nanticoke Area High School in 1988, called 9/11 the defining event of his generation.

The monument made of World Trade Center steel, as “a tangible part of that,” will serve as a “constant and eternal reminder,” he said.

Then came the unveiling. The monument reads, in part: “All gave some, some gave all. FDNY 343.”

9/20/2015

Passing the torch: Lukowski breaks father's scoring record at Nanticoke Area

Matt Bufano - Citizens Voice

From 1993 to 1996, Edward Joseph Lukowski Jr. was the record-setting standout of Nanticoke Area’s boys soccer program.

He continued playing soccer at Wilkes, pursued a teaching career and four years ago returned to Nanticoke Area’s sidelines as an assistant coach.

All the while, his 163 career points stood tall atop Nanticoke Area’s record books.

“There was probably better athletes than me, better goal-scorers than me, kids that were more skilled,” said an all-too-humble Lukowski. “But I don’t know what it was that held (the record) up this long.”

The 20-year record, though, finally fell last Saturday when a current standout, a four-year starter, netted a hat trick to put him at 167 career points and counting.

The new record-holder is none other than Lukowski’s son, Edward Joseph Lukowski III.

“I coached the father, then the son comes along and beats the father’s record,” said Nanticoke Area coach Mark Matusek, who has led the program since 1989. “It was fun to be a part of it, I was really happy for the two of them.”

While Lukowski III showed immense potential at an early age, the road to becoming an all-time Trojan great was anything but easy.

“When I was younger, soccer was every month of the year,” Lukowski III said before rattling off several states he played in. At 10, he was also one of five Pennsylvanians selected to play in Portugal.

When Lukowski III got to high school he made an immediate impact, scoring 17 goals and helping the Trojans go from zero wins the year prior to 10.

“I knew what I had in him as a freshman,” Matusek said. “The very first game, he was the best player on the field.”

Then came the injuries.

Lukowski III missed five games as a sophomore because of offseason knee surgery. He missed eight games the following season with a pulled hamstring.

“I know when I wasn’t playing and (my dad) was still coaching, I was sitting here the whole time,” Lukowski III said. “It hurt not to play.”

Now healthy, Lukowski III is making up for lost time in a major way.

Since passing his father’s record, the younger Lukowski has tallied six goals and one assist in two league games. He currently leads Wyoming Valley Conference Class AA players with 10 goals for the 3-2 Trojans.

In addition, Lukowski III has followed in his father’s footsteps by parlaying his soccer skills into a spot on the football team as a kicker. So far, he has kicked eight extra points.

The advice the elder Lukowski gave his son on playing football?

“Kick the ball and when guys are coming at you, pretend like you’re going after it, take a bad angle and miss,” the elder Lukowski laughed. “But he doesn’t. He had two tackles in the game the other day.”

While the elder Lukowski is looking out for his son’s health on the football field, Lukowski III said the best soccer advice he got from his dad was learning to play aggressive.

With three younger sisters — including freshman Amiah Lukowski, who scored four goals in a game this season — Lukowski III is now trying to be the teacher to them, as opposed to the student he was to his dad.

The book will close on Lukowski III’s high school career after this season with a school record, at least three winning seasons and at least one District 2 playoff win.

He is undecided on what’s next for him, whether it’s to continue playing local college soccer or focusing strictly on academics.

But the four-year ride with Nanticoke Area’s varsity, through its ups and downs, has been an undisputed success.

“It’s been a very good career here,” the elder Lukowski said. “I would’ve liked to have seen him more healthy, but hopefully we can stay healthy this season. But he’s obviously done well in the time that he’s been on the field.

“Made us proud.”

9/17/2015

Nanticoke community garden group plans fall festival

Paul Golias - Citizens Voice

The Greater Nanticoke Community Garden will hold a Fall Harvest Festival on Sunday, Oct. 4, at Luzerne County Community College’s parking lot and the Community Garden space, located across from Weis Market on Lower Broadway.

The Community Garden organization is inviting vendors to participate. The fee is \$20 and an item to be raffled.

Festival hours will be noon to 5 p.m. Vendors should provide tables, chairs and tent or canopy. For information, contact Becky Seman at 570-793-7910.

9/11/2015

GNA borrows \$9.3M for school expansion

Michael P. Buffer - Citizens Voice

The Greater Nanticoke Area School District will borrow \$9.3 million to fund a project expanding Kennedy Elementary, according to information disclosed Thursday at a hearing.

A 30-year bond issue will cost \$17.9 million in principal and interest payments, and the state will provide almost \$8 million in reimbursements. No one from the public addressed the board during the hearing.

The expansion will allow the district to close K.M. Smith Elementary School after the 2016-17 school year. It is currently used for kindergarten, pre-K and first grade classes and is the only district facility not on the district campus off Kosciuszko Street in Nanticoke.

It’s located on Robert Street in the Sheatown section of Nanticoke and also is the district’s oldest facility. It dates back to 1930 and has structural deficiencies, including not being compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The Kennedy expansion will save \$68,400 in annual staffing costs and \$50,000 in energy costs. The new debt will increase the tax rate by 0.3259 mills, and the cost savings will decrease the rate by 0.1909 mills.

The net result is an increase of 0.1350 mills. A mill is \$1 on every \$1,000 in property assessment.

The district gets \$620,272 from each mill. The school board in June approved a \$26.5 million budget that maintained a tax rate of 10.4932 mills.

Kennedy, which currently is only used for second grade, will be used for pre-K, kindergarten and first grade after the expansion is done by August 2017.

After the hearing, the school board conducted its monthly meeting and voted to hire Jeffrey Gregory as high school principal with an annual salary of \$88,000. He will replace Joe Long, who will become an elementary school principal in the Wyoming Area School District.

Gregory has been working as the director of admissions at Lackawanna College and has administrative experience in the Lake-Lehman, Old Forge and Lackawanna Trail school districts. He lives in Peckville.

9/11/2015

Nanticoke memorial will serve as constant reminder of 9/11

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

On the 14th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the supply of coveted pieces of World Trade Center steel for memorials is about to run out.

One piece is coming to Nanticoke.

City firefighters will unveil the piece of steel as part of a permanent Sept. 11 memorial outside fire headquarters on Ridge Street. With demand for the steel exceeding supply, they were able to obtain a piece as a thank you for the strong relationships built with the Fire Department, City of New York (FDNY) over the years.

“It’s an honor, really, to be one of the few,” said former Nanticoke Fire Chief Mike Bohan, who took part in the process to obtain the steel before his retirement last year.

Earlier this week, the Associated Press reported that fewer than 30 pieces of World Trade Center steel remained in possession of The Port Authority of New York & New Jersey at a hangar at the Kennedy Airport that was once crammed to the rafters with the metal.

The FDNY, which lost 343 members in the terror attacks, only has about 10 pieces left, said New York City firefighter Carl Scheetz, a member of the famed Rescue 1 unit in Manhattan and friend to many Nanticoke firefighters.

Scheetz has been FDNY's steel request coordinator since the program began in 2003 and was the one who helped award Nanticoke its piece. He also helped craft it.

"We're pretty much running out," Scheetz said, noting he is cutting up smaller pieces as the supply dwindles. "We've been trying to get it out to as many places as possible for memorials so people don't forget."

FDNY friends

Many of Nanticoke's firefighters got to know Scheetz through a Luzerne County native who is a member of Rescue 1 and the unit's former leader, Capt. Robert Morris, who taught advanced fire training classes in Luzerne County.

Nanticoke Fire Chief Kevin Hazleton said that years ago they learned Scheetz was the FDNY's "steel guy," who crafted a steel cross he hand-delivered to President George W. Bush.

They wanted a piece of steel, but didn't think they had a chance to get one.

"Over the years, we were like, 'Let's not even bother him.' He's telling us about giving steel to the president and the pope and people like that," Hazleton recalled.

But at Morris' retirement party, they approached Scheetz.

"So, you're the steel guy? What would be the odds for a small fire department like ours to score a piece of steel?" Hazleton recalled asking him.

Scheetz outlined the application process, which included a formal letter and plan be submitted to the city's fire commissioner. He promised to put in a good word for Nanticoke, which had consistently sent crews to FDNY's Medal Day ceremonies and other special events.

Nanticoke eventually was awarded a piece.

Many FDNY members plan to return the favor and will travel to Nanticoke for a Sept. 11 memorial dedication ceremony the fire department is hosting Sept. 19.

"Those pieces have been hard to get, and soon they'll all be gone," Hazleton said. "At the end of it all, we wanted one so people never forget."

Constant reminder

Nanticoke's piece of World Trade Center steel has been inset in a slab of granite, which has a plaque affixed to it honoring the bravery displayed by first responders on one of America's darkest days.

According to the recent Associated Press report, steel from the World Trade Center anchors memorials and exhibits in all 50 states and eight countries. In all, about 1,500 individual nonprofit groups, governments or museums have been awarded a piece, the report said.

The piece must be in public view and not be used to make money. Of his remaining pieces, Scheetz said he's making a steel cross he hopes to give to Pope Francis.

After dealing with and handling World Trade Center steel for more than a decade, Scheetz said his duties are a constant reminder of Sept. 11.

"But it's a good one, because you know it's going out for memorials and hopefully people will never forget what happened," Scheetz said.

Memorial dedication

Members of the Nanticoke Fire Department will unveil a Sept. 11 memorial monument containing a piece of steel from the World Trade Center.

The dedication is Sept. 19 at 10 a.m. at fire headquarters, 2 E. Ridge St., Nanticoke. Any fire or EMS department planning to attend the dedication is asked to contact fire headquarters at 570-735-5860 with the name of the department attending and the number of personnel attending.

9/10/2015

Earth Conservancy awarded \$400K grant for site cleanup

Elizabeth Skrapits - Citizens Voice

On the site of a onetime strip mine that may one day be an industrial park or housing development, Earth Conservancy Executive Director Mike Dziak indicated a site behind a strip of trees that will soon be a new highway.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency delivered a \$400,000 "brownfields" grant to the Earth Conservancy to help clean up the mine-scarred and waste coal-laden Bliss Bank, so that it can be used for commercial or residential purposes.

What makes the site particularly desirable is that starting with the bidding of the project in late October, the \$50 million South Valley Parkway is slated to become a reality. The highway will connect Route 29 and Interstate 81 with Kosciuszko Street, near Luzerne County Community College — and right by the Bliss Bank site.

In addition, a private developer is looking to build a four-story building on five acres of Earth Conservancy land near Luzerne County Community College and the Bliss Bank site that could house up to 250 students, with room to build more, Dziak said during a press event at the site on Wednesday.

Creating economic opportunity while cleaning up the environment is the best use of tax dollars, said state Sen. John Yudichak, D-Plymouth Township, who in January 2014 assisted in obtaining a \$928,000 state Department of Environmental Protection Growing Greener grant to help with the Bliss Bank site.

While in operation, the Blue Coal company used the Bliss Bank, located at the intersection of Nanticoke City and Hanover and Newport townships, as a dump site for mine waste. There was also coal exploration, as evidenced by the strip pits among the huge culm heaps. There's also plenty of acid mine drainage, which finds its way into the Nanticoke Creek watershed.

Earth Conservancy Executive Administrator Geoff Shaw said the piles of waste coal will be removed to make the site conducive to commercial and residential development, as well as reduce the acid mine drainage. Phase II, which is expected to be completed in fall of 2019, includes grading and

contouring the site; stormwater management; the channeling of Espy Run, a small stream that is lost underground in the mines; and re-vegetating the site.

“Earth Conservancy is extremely thankful for what the EPA has done,” Shaw said.

Since 2003, the EPA has given Earth Conservancy a total of \$2.4 million in grants to help clean up 12 sites, EPA Mid-Atlantic Regional Administrator Shawn M. Garvin said.

He commended the organization for the great work it is doing, which goes with the federal agency’s focus on making visible differences in communities, both in terms of the environment, public health and economic development.

“This is about quality of life for our communities,” Garvin said.

State Rep. Gerald Mullery, D-Newport Township, who attended Wednesday’s conference, noted in a statement that an EPA study showed residential property values increased by 5.1 percent to 12.8 percent after cleanup of nearby brownfields — sites once used for industrial or mining purposes.

Yudichak has a particular affinity for the Earth Conservancy: His father, Joseph Yudichak, was on the original board of directors when the nonprofit organization was formed in 1992, and as a child, Yudichak would accompany him to the sites.

“I’ve literally grown up with Earth Conservancy,” he said.

Then-U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski was the force behind securing the former Blue Coal land in 1994 for reclamation. The company had been in bankruptcy since 1976, Yudichak said, tying up more than 16,000 acres “in the heart of the Valley.”

“It’s a great project: A lot of history, a lot of fights well fought — and this is the fruit of those battles,” Yudichak said of the Bliss Bank reclamation.

Earth Conservancy has already reclaimed thousands of acres for industrial, recreational and residential use; Yudichak described it as “Taking the negative legacy of King Coal” and transforming it into something positive.

Nanticoke City Administrator Andy Gegaris also thanked the Earth Conservancy for what it has done for the city and LCCC, which is its largest employer.

9/8/2015

Nanticoke group seeking cooks for upcoming contest

Paul Golias - Citizens Voice

It will be chili for supper and pie for desert in Nanticoke on Saturday, Sept. 19.

The Greater Nanticoke Area Community Garden farmers market is looking for cooks and bakers to join a chili cook-off and a pie-baking contest.

Rebecca Seman, garden project coordinator, said the market will hold its final sales on Sept. 19 on Patriots Square, Nanticoke. Hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Those entering the pie contest are asked to bring two fruit pies, one for appearance and tasting by judges and the other to be sold to raise funds for the community garden. Crusts should be homemade. The contest is open to bakers of all ages. The limit is one entry per contestant and the fee is \$5.

The chili cooks should bring two gallons, and some will be sold to benefit the community garden. Fee for the chili contest is \$5.

Deadline for entry forms is Sept. 14. Forms are available at the Mill Memorial Library or via the community garden’s Facebook page.

A health fair also will be held in conjunction with the final farmers market, she said.

To become a farmers market vendor, to make a donation or for information on the chili or pie contests, call Seman at 570-793-7910 or email her at GNA.Community.Garden@gmail.com.

For information on upcoming events, visit the Greater Nanticoke Area Community Garden Facebook page. The group meets on Saturdays at 1 p.m. at Mill Memorial Library, off Kosciuszko Street.

9/4/2015

Health fair set for Nanticoke

Susan Bettinger - For Times Leader

Guardian Elder Care of Nanticoke is sponsoring its inaugural health fair from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Sept. 19 in Patriots Square.

The event will be in collaboration with a farmers market. Councilwoman Lesley Butczynski said that there will be approximately 25 vendors, and “more are welcome to join the event.”

Butczynski added that information on a variety of health, wellness and substance dependency topics will be available. For more information, call Guardian Elder Care at (570) 735-7300.

During the Sept. 2, council meeting, the council confirmed the appointment of Thomas Wall to the Wyoming Valley Sanitation Authority Board of Directors with a term expiring on Jan. 3, 2021.

The annual autumn city-wide yard sale will be held on Sept. 12 with a rain date of Sept. 13, 2015.

The next meeting of the City of Nanticoke council will be held at 7 p.m. on Sept. 16.

9/3/2015

Court: Nanticoke residency requirement unconstitutional

Judge says city manager cannot be singled out

rdupuis@timesleader.com and Geri Gibbons - ggibbons@timesleader.com

Unconstitutional.

That is what a judge had to say about a provision in Nanticoke's Home Rule Charter requiring the city manager to live in the municipality even though other workers do not.

Luzerne County Judge Thomas F. Burke Jr. issued the ruling last week.

"It's over," Mayor Richard Wiaterowski told the Times Leader this afternoon.

And that means City Manager Andy Gegaris, who lives about 30 minutes away in White Haven, won't have to quit or move.

Questions raised

Gegaris was hired on May 22, 2014 and informed that he had to become a city resident by May 22 of this year, according to the petition.

At a council meeting earlier this year, local resident and critic, Henry Marks questioned Gegaris's professional qualifications, and inquired about the manager's residency status. Council then authorized solicitor William T. Finnegan to seek the court's judgment on whether the provision should stand.

Gegaris is the city's third manager since the charter took effect on Jan. 1, 2012, the document points out, and the fifth person to hold the post since 2004.

The charter, which had been prepared by a study commission, was approved by city voters in November 2011.

Nanticoke has just under 50 employees, but according to the charter, only two are required to live in the community: the city manager and the city clerk.

Current City Clerk Mary Beth Cheshinski is a Nanticoke resident.

Burke pointed out that Cheshinski is a part-time employee, making Gegaris the only full-time employee subject to the provision.

And that, the judge wrote, violates both the U.S. and state constitutions, adding "that the imposition of a residency requirement for the position of City Manager represents disparate treatment for that position as contrasted to the police, fire, clerical and public works employees of Nanticoke City who are not subject to the same requirement."

History

Gegaris is the city's third manager since the charter took effect on Jan. 1, 2012, the city's petition pointed out, and the fifth person to hold the post since 2004.

The charter, which had been prepared by a study commission, was approved by city voters in November 2011.

"The City of Nanticoke is experiencing difficulty in recruiting and maintaining highly qualified candidates to discharge the significant responsibilities of the position of city manager in light of the residency requirement which has been imposed in the charter," the petition states, adding that when Gegaris was interviewed for the post, there were six people who had applied for the position and none of them resided in the city.

"The City of Nanticoke needs stability which cannot be effectuated with the high turnover rate in the city manager position," the city argued.

Gegaris on call

The petition also pointed out that Gegaris is required to be available by telephone 24 hours a day, seven days a week, other than during vacations, and he has been fulfilling that requirement.

"Further, in this day and age, technology makes it easy to always be able to contact these employees in cases of emergency due to the use of cell phones and email," the petition stated.

The judge agreed, referencing testimony made by Gegaris when a hearing on the matter was held in July.

Burke wrote that "the potential issue relating to the City Manager's availability to handle emergency matters is further diffused by the credible testimony of Mr. Gegaris, who testified that he is available virtually 24/7 by way of cell phone service enabling text, cell email communications on an as-needed basis, including responding to calls at 4:30 a.m."

Nanticoke late last month became the first city in Pennsylvania to shed financially-distressed status under Act 47. Burke also pointed out that an official with the Pennsylvania Economy League, Nanticoke's state-appointed financial recovery coordinator, "credibly and persuasively" testified to the excellent job Gegaris was doing as manager, and that in his opinion, the imposition of a residency requirement would "hinder the recruitment of qualified professionals" for the post.

"We advertised for the job twice, and not anyone from Nanticoke applied," Wiaterowski said in an interview.

Noting that the manager's post is "at-will" and dependent on the support of the current mayor, Wiaterowski also said "it's not fair" to require Gegaris to pick up and move for a \$65,000-per-year job that could be gone when the political winds change.

Wiaterowski said he plans to consult with Finnegan about whether and how the charter language needs to be amended in light of Burke's decision.

9/3/2015

Judge: Nanticoke manager can stay

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The City of Nanticoke can't require just two employees to live within the city, a county judge ruled last week.

Nanticoke's home rule charter stipulates that the city manager and city clerk must live within the municipal boundaries, but because the charter only asks that of those two employees, the rule violates the state and U.S. Constitution and is unenforceable, Luzerne County Judge Thomas F. Burke Jr. said in a order filed Aug. 28.

City manager Andy Gegaris lives in White Haven. He was hired on May 22, 2014 and the charter gave him a year to move into the city.

The charter also requires that the city clerk move into the city within a year of hiring. However, clerk Mary Beth Cheshinski already lives in Nanticoke.

A Nanticoke resident raised the question of Gegaris' residency at a council meeting, and solicitor William Finnegan asked county court to decide whether the city charter's requirement was legal.

About 50 people work for Nanticoke government. The charter only stipulates that the manager and city clerk must live in the city. “There is no escaping the fact that the imposition of a residency requirement for the position of City Manager represents the disparate treatment for that position as contrasted to police, fire, clerical and public works employees of Nanticoke City who are not subject to the same requirement,” Burke wrote.

9/1/2015

Priest finds vocation after teaching career

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The Rev. James Nash of St. Faustina Parish in Nanticoke is an advocate of men considering the priesthood as a second career.

That’s what he did.

The priesthood always intrigued him, but he decided to become a teacher first. After 23 years as an English teacher, he no longer could resist the calling from God and retired early in 1985 to enter the seminary.

“I was a teacher for 23 years and all of a sudden I’m on the other side of the desk, taking notes and doing research — all the things I used to have my students do,” Nash, 73, recalled.

Nash, then 43, attended Pope St. John XXIII seminary near Boston, a religious training school that caters to older, second-career men seeking to become priests. One of Nash’s proteges — a 50-year-old retired Pennsylvania Army National Guard officer — just entered the school.

“Certainly they are more sensitive to the fact we’ve been out in the world and have life experiences,” Nash said. “They understand the transition is different than that of a young man.”

Nash said second-career vocations are nothing new. The earliest followers of Jesus had prior careers, he said — Matthew was a tax collector, Luke was a doctor and Peter was a fisherman.

During his time at the seminary, Nash said he studied alongside doctors, lawyers and military men.

Nash, originally from Hanover Township, was ordained a priest in 1989. His first assignment was at Our Lady of Snows Church in Clarks Summit, serving as assistant to Monsignor John Bendik, who is now the priest at St. John the Evangelist Church in Pittston.

“Looking back, I feel so blessed he was my first pastor. He showed me what it is to be a priest. He was a tremendous role model for me,” Nash said.

Nash spent five years there before being assigned for a year as an assistant pastor at then-Holy Trinity Church in Nanticoke under Monsignor Bernard Toloczko.

After that, Nash was appointed to lead his own church, Holy Name of Mary in Montrose.

The promotion was rare at the time because normally priests had to serve nearly two decades as an assistant before being appointed to lead their own church, Nash said.

The 10 men from the Diocese of Scranton currently in the seminary will likely be assigned their own church rather quickly because of the priest shortage, Nash predicted.

“I think they’re going to have to,” Nash said. “They aren’t going to be assistants very long.”

In 2005, after 10 years in Montrose, Nash returned to Nanticoke, which had six Catholic churches at the time. He was appointed to lead Holy Trinity, Holy Child and St. Stanislaus. Within a few years, he was also placed in charge of St. Joseph’s and St. Mary’s. St. Francis was closed.

“There were five open churches at one point,” he recalled.

In 2010, the churches were consolidated into St. Faustina, with the former Holy Trinity location as the main worship site and St. Mary’s as an alternate site.

With the continuing shortage of priests, the diocese is asking lay people to step into the roles of parish life coordinators to run the church’s day-to-day business while priests focus on sacramental duties.

“People have to start thinking differently,” Nash said. “Priests aren’t always going to be available, but the parishes will remain,” Nash said. “The positive side of all this will be if it calls out people to live out their baptisms. Maybe the shortage is the catalyst.”

Nash said well-respected mentors in the Catholic community helped shepherd him to become a priest. He thinks everyone in the faith could and should do the same when they see a person with potential to become a priest.

“Although our diocese is pursuing vocations, we all have to be vocation directors,” Nash said. “If you see a person who would make a good priest, say something. Maybe you’ll plant the seed in him.”

8/27/2015

LCCC student housing plan on hold

Michael P. Buffer - Citizens Voice

An agreement to bring student housing to Luzerne County Community College’s Nanticoke campus is on hold.

At a work session before Wednesday’s board of trustees meeting, several board members asked to modify some clauses in a proposed agreement with Building Solutions LLC of Selinsgrove. They expressed concerns that the agreement could expose the college to liability and defense payments in litigation.

If the company agrees to renegotiated terms, the board could vote on the agreement at its meeting on Sept. 24, board Chairman Carmen F. Magistro said.

Under the proposed agreement, Building Solutions would build student housing in Nanticoke within walking distance of the college campus, college President Thomas P. Leary said. The college would not provide funds for the housing and would agree to promote the housing to students, Leary said.

Leary defended the proposed agreement at the work session and seemed eager for a vote at Wednesday's meeting.

"We have an opportunity to accomplish this," Leary said. "We can't do it on our own."

The agreement has a "strict separation" between the college and company and would prevent the company from using the college logo, Leary said. The company would determine where to build and how many units to build, he said, adding it would have "an economic impact on the city of Nanticoke."

The company also will not get exclusive rights to student housing, so the college could build its own student housing in the future or reach an agreement with another company for more student housing, Leary said.

Student housing would increase enrollment and would be most attractive for students who live outside Luzerne County, several board members noted. Building Solutions would initially build housing for several hundred students in phases, Leary said.

The company has built student housing for other state universities, he said.

8/26/2015

Wyoming Area hires new principal

Michael P. Buffer - Citizens Voice

The Wyoming Area School Board voted Tuesday to hire **Joe Long, the principal at Greater Nanticoke Area High School**, to be the principal at Sarah J. Dymond and Montgomery Avenue elementary schools.

The annual salary for Long's new job will be \$82,000, Superintendent Janet Serino said. Last month, the school board approved a medical leave of absence for Robert Kaluzavich, who had been principal at Dymond and Montgomery Avenue elementary schools and will retire at the end of the school year.

The district interviewed 12 applicants for the job, Serino said. Long, 51, lives in Jenkins Township. He was the principal at Greater Nanticoke Area High School in 2014-15, and for eight years prior to last school year, he was the principal of two elementary schools in the Greater Nanticoke Area School District.

The school board on Tuesday also voted to close the district's tennis courts because of safety, surface and structural concerns. The district plans to remove unsafe lighting and poles on the courts.

The district also plans to execute an agreement that allows district tennis players to use Pittston Area School District tennis courts.



8/25/2015

Nanticoke officially sheds financially distressed status

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State Sen. John Yudichak has heard a lot about Pittsburgh from his colleague Sen. Jay Costa.

The "City of Champions" stuff. Reminders that the city is home to the Pittsburgh Steelers, six-time winners of the Super Bowl.

"Today, I have one up on Jay Costa," said Yudichak, D-Plymouth Township. A municipality in his district became the first city in the state to leave financially distressed status.

After nine years, Nanticoke will leave the state's program for financially distressed municipalities.

Other boroughs and townships have left the program, but Nanticoke is the first city.

Department of Community and Economic Development Secretary Dennis Davin made it official with

his signature at a ceremony Monday at city hall.

Since the state legislature passed the Municipalities Financial Recovery Act in 1987, the Department of Community and Economic Development has declared 29 municipalities distressed, according to DCED's website. The cities of Farrell in Mercer County and Aliquippa in Beaver County have been in the program since its inception. The largest city in the program, Pittsburgh, has been financially distressed since 2003. In Luzerne County, West Hazleton borough left in 2014, and Plymouth Township remains.

The financially distressed municipalities program, known as "Act 47" after the law that created the designation, provides loans, grant funds and technical assistance to local governments to help them improve their finances.

Act 47 grants allow municipalities to fund their plans for leaving distressed status, said Lyndsay Kensinger, DCED communications director.

Nanticoke's recovery included changes in the earned income tax and professional help to develop a recovery plan.

Former mayor John Bushko remembered assuming his office in 2006, the year Nanticoke joined the Act 47 program, and looking at the city finances.

From 1970 to 2005, Nanticoke changed. In 1970, close to 14,600 people lived in the city, according to U.S. Census figures. By 2010, about 10,500 people lived there. The city's population also grew older. In 1980, about 13 percent of residents were older than 65. In 2000, about 23 percent of residents were at least that old, according to the city's first financial recovery plan.

Even with a shrinking population, the city's physical area didn't change, the 2007 recovery plan pointed out.

"The miles of streets to be plowed and repaired and the sewer lines to be maintained are likely to remain the same despite an exodus of taxpayers.

Similarly, the loss of population does not necessarily reduce the demand for public safety services," the report read.

With heavy debt and taxes at their limit, "something had to be done," Bushko said.

The city prepared an Act 47 application. The designation allowed the government to raise the earned income tax on residents from 0.5 percent to 1.5 percent.

"That's really what helped us out of the hole," Bushko said.

The state's Act 47 fund also provided two zero-interest loans to Nanticoke, totaling \$900,000, according to the city's most recent financial plan. The city is repaying those loans, and owes \$445,000 on the principal.

While in Act 47 status, Nanticoke government adopted a home rule charter. The charter allowed it to continue its higher tax rate.

City manager Andy Gegaris said the tax rate is set at what it needs to be to provide adequate services.

"We're not going to sacrifice public safety. People look for a safe, clean community," including full-time police and fire services, he said. A sewer project in the city's downtown will likely need an increase in sewer rates to pay for it, he said.

"Not raising taxes is what put us here in the first place," Gegaris said.

The city also hired consultants from the Pennsylvania Economy League to coordinate its recovery. Gegaris said he plans to apply for a grant to continue the \$24,000 annual contract with PEL for two more years.

The removal of the designation is part of a larger pattern of positive change in the city, Mayor Richard Wiaterowski said. He thanked former mayors Bushko and Joseph Dougherty for beginning and continuing the program. Now, he said, the city is seeing investment from Luzerne County Community College and Geisinger Health System and a planned sewer project and new downtown streetscape.

"I'm thrilled," Wiaterowski said.

8/25/2015

Nanticoke city first in state to leave Act 47 distressed status

City is first in state to leave designation under Act 47

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With a stroke of Dennis Davin's pen, the City of Nanticoke exited distressed status Monday afternoon.

The city was assigned distressed status under Act 47 in 2006 and became the first city to exit the status Monday.

Davin, Department of Community and Economic Development secretary, credited city officials with making tough decisions that made fiscal improvements a reality.

He assured attendees at Monday's announcement at City Hall that Gov. Tom Wolf's policies would ensure the building of "strong, stable communities all across the commonwealth."

Davin said the decision was a result of careful review of the city's financial records following a public hearing held on June 22.

The termination makes Nanticoke the first city and 10th municipality of the state to exit the program.

In contrast, Scranton has not been able to obtain the measure of financial health necessary to leave the program and continues to struggle, having entered the Act 47 program in 1992, with no tangible hope for leaving the program on the horizon.

State Sen. John Yudichak, D-Plymouth Township, addressed those gathered, saying the city was making history, calling the announcement "incredible."

West Hazleton Borough, also in Yudichak's district, recently exited distressed status.

"A decade ago, news from Nanticoke was all bad," said Yudichak, reflecting on Nanticoke's need to borrow a police cruiser from Wilkes-Barre to put policeman on the street and a pronounced deficit.

He credited current and past community leaders with making financial success possible.

He also credited the Pennsylvania Economy League with drafting an effective recovery plan for the city.

Mayor Richard Wiaterowski called the exit from distressed status the "beginning of a new chapter for Nanticoke."

"The days of borrowing funds for operating expenses is no longer," he said.

He credited the administration, staff and citizens with hard work and support.

Historically, several developments aided the city's return to economic health.

In 2009, a county-wide reassessment allowed Nanticoke to increase collection of property taxes in the long term.

It also began operating under a Home Rule Charter in 2012, enabling an increase in revenue.

City Manager Andy Gegaris has assured residents that while he is extremely grateful that the city will no longer be deemed distressed, the real success lies in its commitment to sustaining its recovery, maximizing its scarce resources.

Rick Vilello, of the Governor's Center for Local Government Services, said he considered the opportunity to address those gathered "a real honor."

"I know the challenges and the hard decisions necessary to get here," he said. "It's wasn't easy, but it certainly was worth it."

8/25/2015

In Focus: Nanticoke first city to shed state's 'Distress' designation

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My experience with Nanticoke City has never been one of distress.

It's a town known for its great people who could play basketball, make kielbasa and hold elective office at all levels.

Yet there was an atmosphere of joy Monday when Department of Community and Economic Development Secretary Dennis Davin joined state and local officials to sign a determination letter honoring Nanticoke's request for termination of distressed status as determined under Act 47.

Nanticoke will be the first city and 11th municipality to exit the program.

Nanticoke may have been financially distressed, but this city and its people never had their spirit distressed.

It's been a long haul for the city to go from that \$2.4 million deficit in 2006 when the general budget was around \$5 million, to becoming the first city in the history of the Commonwealth to have its distressed status lifted.

State Sen. John Yudichak said, it is a "remarkable" accomplishment. He said many other towns "have wallowed" in distress status.

Yudichak, D-Plymouth Township, has represented Nanticoke for years, first as a state representative and lately as its state senator. He is a proud graduate of Greater Nanticoke Area High School and he knows the struggles the city has been through and he knows the people.

Before Monday's meeting with the state Secretary of Community and Economic Development Dennis Davin, I took a ride around Nanticoke looking for signs of distress.

What I found was a city improving.

Oh sure, there remains some blight — Mayor Richard Wiaterowski and the City Manager Andy Gegaris have that in their long-term plan — but there is a lot of new to Nanticoke.

Just drive down Main Street and you will see a new mega-building built by Geisinger Health System, the Luzerne County Community College's Culinary Arts School and Commonwealth Health System's new center.

And you can rely on places like Rite Aid, Burger King, Weis Market, Sanitary Bakery and the aesthetically beautiful Patriot Park in the center of the city.

Distress was difficult to find, and that is due to the commitment made by the mayor and city council, all city employees and the tax paying residents. It's been a true team effort.

Nanticoke is famous, legendary even, for its great athletic teams.

Winning spirit

Yudichak told me there are plenty of state championships to back that up, along with many more contenders. Nanticoke embraced the school merger decades ago and school spirit permeates the towns. The Trojans and Trojanettes still offer high-caliber competitive teams with that small town feel. That feel of one community, one school, one constant goal.

Remember those days of Coach Syl Bozinski and those basketball teams?

When Secretary Davin talked about lifting the distressed status, he talked about the challenges the city faced. He mentioned the tough decisions and the difficult budgets.

"None of it was easy," he said.

And that's nothing new for this city.

It has always faced adversity head on and attacked, never retreating, whether it be on the basketball court, the softball diamond or the accounting office. This latest victory — and it is an historic victory at that — is typical of Nanticoke and its people.

Yudichak talked about his Democratic leader in the Senate, Sen. Jay Costa, who is from Pittsburgh, often referred to as the City of Champions. It's hard to argue with that title, given the number of Super Bowl victories alone.

"But today, I have one up on Sen. Costa," Yudichak said. "The City of Nanticoke has made history. This is a title well-earned."

Yudichak remembers those dark days when Nanticoke was in the news every day and always with a negative slant. He talked about the days when Nanticoke had to borrow a police cruiser from Wilkes-Barre because there was no money to purchase one. Yudichak remembers the battles at public meetings, the concern about jobs and pensions and public safety.

"It took courage," he said. "The city leaders came up with a game plan and the mission is now complete. Tomorrow only gets better if you work hard today."

Tools to succeed

DCED determined that the city has eliminated structural deficits and has greatly reduced debt service payments. The city now has the tools to make the decisions necessary to maintain responsible budgets, meet its obligations to vendors and creditors and provide essential services to city residents.

"We've had our fiscal house in order for some time now," Gegaris said.

But the road to a better future will have bumps too, Gegaris said. Taxes, for instance, will likely rise — not dramatically, but gradually to assure that the fiscal house stays orderly.

It has been a long, rough road to this day. The city has lost that negative perception of being fiscally distressed.

Syl Bozinski would be proud.

8/25/2015

SHINE program set to launch for Luzerne County children in October

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The after-school SHINE program is ready to start in Luzerne County and has secured more than \$1 million in funding, officials announced Monday. The program will start at seven schools in October and serve roughly 500 students from nine schools in Luzerne County. Officials announced more details about the program during an event at Heights Murray Elementary School, and the Wilkes-Barre school will be one of the seven locations for the program.

Jeanne Miller, the program's interim director, said an interview process is currently underway for program teachers. The program will have 17 teachers and eight "home visitors," who will start assisting Kindergarten students at their homes in September, Miller said.

Miller was the director of Carbon County SHINE — Schools & Homes In Education. The program has been operating in Carbon County for 10 years.

The after-school program is for students in kindergarten through eighth grade, and the curriculum will be project-based STEAM — Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics. Wilkes University is the Luzerne County program's administrator.

"Today, we are here to announce that we have reached a first-year funding goal of \$1 million to open the SHINE program to 500 children in five Luzerne County school districts," said state Sen. John Yudichak, D-Plymouth Township.

In July, the Commonwealth Financing Authority awarded \$831,454 to the program when allocating local slots revenue from Mohegan Sun Pocono.

The city of Wilkes-Barre applied to get slots revenue for the program.

The United Way of Wyoming Valley will provide \$160,000 over two years for the program, and the Greater Hazleton United Way will provide \$10,000 over two years. The William G. McGowan Charitable Fund will provide \$50,000.

Yudichak said he and U.S. Rep. Lou Barletta, R-Hazleton, are “proud cheerleaders for this program” and noted local educators “will drive this program.” Barletta, who also spoke at Monday’s event, said it’s “a proven program” that will help “at-risk children.”

Educators have already selected children to participate in the first year of Luzerne County’s program, and most schools have waiting lists, Miller said. The Luzerne County program is expected to expand to 800 students in its second year and 1,000 students in the third year.

Local school districts won’t contribute funds and only have to provide facilities and equipment for the after-school program. The other locations for the first year of the Luzerne County program are:

- The Wilkes-Barre Area Career and Technical Center in Plains Township — for middle school students from GAR Junior/Senior High School in Wilkes-Barre and the **Greater Nanticoke Area** and Hanover Area school districts;
- the West Side Career and Technology Center — for Wyoming Valley West Middle School students;
- The Hazleton Area Career and Technical School — for Hazleton Area Middle School students;
- State Street Elementary School in Larksville;
- **Greater Nanticoke Area Elementary Center in Nanticoke;**
- Maple Manor Elementary School in Hazle Township.

8/21/2015

Nanticoke Fire Department mural will honor 9/11 first responders

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader Correspondent

A sacrifices emergency responders made after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 will be commemorated at the city fire department with a mural. The city council on Wednesday gave permission for Nanticoke artist Leonardo Davenport to paint a mural on the side of the fire hall.

Davenport said that the mural’s theme will be “Never Forget 9/11” and will be dedicated to the “first responders” whom Davenport names as the “firefighters, paramedics, police, and those serving the emergency medical community.”

The mural will face Market Street.

Davenport also stated that his goal is to have the mural completed by the 15th anniversary of the 9/11 tragedy — Sept. 11, 2016. Anyone wishing to contribute to cover the expenses associated with the completion of the mural may utilize the website www.gofundme.com, where an account soon will be created.

Grove Street resident Ann Paveletz addressed council regarding an issue that she has described as “greywater” running from her neighbors’ property. Paveletz stated that she has spoken with “numerous people” regarding the situation, which she said is causing damage to her property. Mayor Richard Wiaterowski said that this was the first time he heard about the situation.

Wiaterowski and his family were out of the area on vacation when Paveletz first spoke about the water damage at the Aug. 5 council meeting. Immediately after the adjournment of this evening’s meeting, Wiaterowski introduced himself to Paveletz and her husband, Bill, giving them his personal guarantee that the problem will be addressed.

He and council members remained after the meeting to speak with the family, and Ann Paveletz said she was pleased the mayor took the time to personally address the problem.

The following events also were announced:

- The Valley with a Heart will host the 15th Annual Benefit Ride & Family Picnic to benefit seriously ill children on Sept. 6 at the Holy Child Grove in Sheatown. Call 570-735-5333 or 570-675-1504 for more information.
- The annual City Wide Yard Sale will be held on Sept. 12, with a rain date of Sept. 13.

8/20/2015

PIAA upholds D2 ruling on Berwick transfers

Stephen Pianovich - Citizens Voice

A PIAA Board of Appeal unanimously upheld District 2’s ruling that two WVC student-athletes are ineligible to play football at Berwick this season.

It was ruled by the district in June that Jules and Damon Beckhorn transferred from Nanticoke Area to Berwick for athletic reasons — which is against PIAA rules.

The Beckhorns appealed the decision, and after nearly two-and-a-half hours of testimony Wednesday that was closed to the public and media, the state’s athletic appeals board found the same result as District 2 in a 5-0 vote.

The Beckhorns were represented by a new attorney in the hearing, Steven Hoffman, who practices in Allentown.

After the vote was announced, Hoffman said he and the family were disappointed.

“We believe this has been wrongly decided based on hearsay based on a Facebook post that nobody has been able to establish was written by Damon,” Hoffman said.

Hoffman said there was no new evidence presented Wednesday, and one of his main arguments was around the Facebook post.

On an account under Damon’s name, the post read “Berwick football coach on my couch talkin (sic) to my parents” and was made before the two students transferred.

Hoffman said Damon denies writing the post.

Representatives from both Nanticoke Area and Berwick were in attendance Wednesday, and the schools have each previously voiced they thought the transfers were made with athletic intent. Nanticoke Area head football coach Ron Bruza was at the hearing, but Berwick's George Curry — who has been at the center of the controversy — was not.

Curry denied any recruiting or wrongdoing after the District 2 hearing in June. The winningest coach in PIAA history, Curry previously announced that he will be resigning as the Bulldogs' head coach after the 2015 season.

Like the District 2 board, the PIAA was also unanimous in its decision.

The state's voting board was comprised of James Zack (District 4 Chairman), Douglas Bohannon (District 3 Vice Chairman), Robert Hartman Jr. (District 11 Chairman), Audrey Hall (Girls' Athletic Representative) and Dennis Nemes (Private Schools' Representative).

The Beckhorns are allowed to play any other sport at the school during the 2015-16 school year, and they could practice with the football team. But they cannot appear in football games or scrimmages.

With the football season just more than two weeks away and the Beckhorns out of options to appeal, the family still might seek further legal recourse, according to Hoffman. Hoffman said "we're going to explore filing a lawsuit" against the PIAA, but he did not know if it would definitely happen or a timetable on such an action.

Berwick Superintendent Wayne Brookhart, who has been dealing with the situation since the school shut down its program for an internal investigation on the matter in May, said he is ready to put it in the rearview mirror.

"Am I ready to move forward? Yeah, absolutely," said Brookhart, who was one of three Berwick administrators at the hearing. "If they file a suit, we'll get everybody together again and say the same things we said the last two times."

8/20/2015

Senior citizens celebrate at new Rose Tucker Center in Nanticoke

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The crowd of about 100 or so at the new Rose Tucker Active Adult Center were sipping coffee and munching treats Wednesday as they awaited the grand opening ceremony to begin.

And then singing DJ George Rittenhouse played an Elvis Presley song. The place erupted into a dance club with many seniors dancing and gyrating to "The King."

Gail Voyton, director of the center at 145 E. Green St. in the former Pope John Paul II School that closed nine years ago, said the new location opened July 6 and it offers much more space than the previous center. She said the clients have been raving about the new gathering spot.

"The relocation has not been much of an adjustment for our seniors," Voyton said. "I think it's been more of a celebration."

Voyton said seniors enjoy the social aspects of the center where they have lunch and play games and plan trips to casinos and other events.

One of his first songs Rittenhouse played was "Ramblin' Rose," a fitting tune for the center that is named in memory of former Luzerne County Commissioner Rose Tucker.

Irene Gregory, who will turn 89 in October, said the new center has attracted more people.

"I love the camaraderie," she said. "We plays games like pinochle and bingo and pokeno. We're taking a bus trip to Mount Airy (casin0) to hear a Barry Manilow impersonator."

Dorothy Dougiallo, 81, said she enjoys the socializing at the center.

"I like everything here," she said. "There's always something fun for us seniors to do."

Dougiallo and Gregory were at a table with Maxine Carey, 71, Loretta Minsavage, 91, Bernadine Aciukewicz, 82, Marion Samselski, 82, Marion Bertoni, 82, and Janet Martin, 76.

"This is a great place to pass the time," Bertoni said. "It takes a couple of hours out of our day. It gets us away from cleaning our houses."

John Marcinkevicz, 92, enjoys the meals and he loves to play cards. He also loves to spend time with all the women, who outnumber the men about 15 to 1.

"If I stayed at home, I'd be staring at the four walls," he said. "Here, I meet a lot of people and have some fun."

Marcinkevicz brings his harmonica and plays a few tunes every day, like "You Are My Sunshine," and "Down in the Valley."

Marcinkevicz said the women at his table are all "girlfriends." And then he said, "And there are a few more over there."

Legislators attend

State Sen. John Yudichak, D-Plymouth Township, and Rep. Gerald Mullery, D-Newport Township, attended the ceremony and offered comments.

Yudichak called the center's grand re-opening a celebration of "the continued revitalization of our beloved hometown of Nanticoke."

Yudichak said just a few years ago the center was located on Main Street and had to be relocated to make way for Luzerne County Community College's Culinary Arts Institute — a \$30 million investment in Nanticoke's downtown.

He said progress is being made on the Nanticoke Streetscape project and more good news is on the way with investments in Main Street and Patriot Square that could attract new businesses.

Mullery said the opening of the Rose Tucker Active Adult Center is another step forward in the revitalization of Nanticoke.

"The remodeled parish center provides our senior citizenry with a modern and pristine gathering center," Mullery said. "Nine years ago, my heart broke when Pope John Paul II School closed its doors. Today, my heart was full of joy seeing the refurbished building filled with grateful constituents."

Yudichak praised the effort to keep the center in Nanticoke and he heaped more praise on Rose Tucker, for whom the center is named.

"In Luzerne County, we have unique institutions," he said. "We have great traditions and we have special people. In Rose Tucker, we had all three wrapped in one. She was a trailblazer and a shining example of how with hope in your heart can do great things, no matter your age or station in

life.”

Tucker was the first woman in Luzerne County history to be elected county commissioner as a Democrat and the first woman to chair the Luzerne County Board of Commissioners.

“And she did it all after her 60th birthday,” he said.

That was more music to the ears of the center’s clients.

8/9/2015

It was only rock ‘n’ roll & they loved it A nostalgic look at sixties’ rock ‘n’ roll with Eddie Day

William C. Kashatus - Citizens' Voice

Ed Pashinski is a staunch supporter of community involvement. As state representative for the 121st District, Pashinski is a tireless worker for health care reform, public education and services for the elderly.

But once in a while, he re-lives the good old 1960s when he was a popular local musician who played all the old haunts. Known as “Eddie Day,” Pashinski was the lead singer for various rock ‘n’ roll bands, including the Star Fires, the Nighttimers, and TNT.

The Star Fires, in particular, were so successful that their song “You’ve Done Me Wrong” scored in the Top Ten of the local record charts in 1966. On Saturday, August 15, Eddie Day and the Star Fires will host a summer reunion dance with Joe Nardone & the All Stars, another popular ‘60s band, at Irem Temple Country Club, Dallas. Those who attend the event will be able to turn back the clock to a more innocent time when rock ‘n’ roll embodied a young generation’s hopes, dreams and aspirations.

“Rock ‘n’ roll” originated in the United States in the 1950s. Heavily influenced by rhythm and blues and country music, rock also drew strongly on a number of other musical genres such as folk, jazz and classical.

African-American singers like Little Richard and Chuck Berry initially dominated rock. Their lyrics emphasized romantic love, and later social issues.

Unlike pop musicians, who played the piano and had their songs written for them by professionals, black rockers composed their own songs. It was also a guitar-based genre that emphasized rhythm, not harmony.

During the 1960s, however, white, male musicians became more prominent, political lyrics were introduced and rock became an expression of social consciousness. Rock was, in many ways, the by-product of changes that were taking place within American society: racial integration, the sexual revolution, consumerism and the widespread diffusion of the radio, the juke-box and the 45 RPM record that put teens from far-flung communities in daily contact.

While discontent and dissent already existed in white mainstream society, it exercised very little influence over the masses. But rock ‘n’ roll offered a powerful conduit for an entire generation of young people who began searching for an identity. The process would continue for decades, having a reciprocal influence on the evolution of rock music, its lyrics and expression.

Eddie Day and the Star Fires helped introduce rock music to this region. Organized as a garage band in the late 1950s by drummer Richard “R. Jay” Gumbravich and bass player Roger “Griff” Griffith, the Star Fires added singer Eddie Day Pashinski a few years later when he was an undergraduate at Wilkes College.

At the time, Pashinski intended to become a math teacher. But a visit to the Fred Waring Music Work Shop at Shawnee-on-Delaware in Monroe County in 1963 changed all that. Waring, a famous musician in his own right, convinced Pashinski that if he wanted a career in music, he had to study the subject. So he changed his major and, as he would later say, the decision “changed my life.”

Like other contemporary bands who took the name of a popular car, the Star Fires were named after a trendy Oldsmobile model. The group soon became the house band at Hanson’s Amusement Park at Harveys Lake during the summer and the Star Fire Ballroom in Wilkes-Barre during the winter.

“We would draw a thousand people when we’d play on a weekend night, 500 or 600 on a week night,” said Pashinski in a recent interview. “It was the thing to do.”

Success followed when the group began performing with some of the top recording artists of the 1960s, including Chubby Checker, Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons, Little Anthony and the Imperials, Bobby Goldsboro, Freddie “Boom Boom” Cannon, the Four Tops, Shirelles and the Shangri-Las.

“Bobby Goldsboro was one of the nicest artists we ever worked with,” recalled Pashinski. “Once, he lost a pair of his good shoes and asked if he could borrow a pair from us. Charlie, one of our band members, agreed. But after he completed his performance, Bobby left town with Charlie’s. Last time I heard, Charlie is still looking for Goldsboro and those shoes!”

Soon the Star Fires were recording songs on the Laurie and Bell record labels. They made four recordings, all on 45 rpm singles. The best known was “You’ve Done Me Wrong,” which reached No. 8 in the top ten on the local record charts in 1966.

After graduating from Wilkes with a degree in Music Education, Pashinski became a music teacher and choral director in the Greater Nanticoke Area School District. He also held several union positions, including chief spokesman, vice president and president of the GNA Education Association, and president of Luzerne County Coordinating Council. He also kept performing.

Pashinski left the Star Fires when he was in his early 20s and began his own band called “Eddie Day and the Nighttimers.” Over the years, the group evolved into “Thee Eddie Day Groop,” and finally, “Eddie Day and TNT.”

There were also dramatic changes in rock music itself. “The early 1960s were a simpler time,” explained Pashinski. “We were a dance band that only played Billboard Top 40 songs like “Stand By Me” and “My Girl.” These were dance tunes.

“As the decade unfolded, the music began to change from dance to concert music, so we were forced to do a combination of songs. The music also became more political. We started to play ‘Revolution’ by the Beatles, ‘Aquarius’ by the Fifth Dimension, and ‘You Can’t Always Get What You Want’ by the Rolling Stones.”

Eddie Day and his various bands also played different genres of rock, including progressive (Pink Floyd), heavy metal (Led Zeppelin) and psychedelic (Sly and the Family Stone).

“The genres of the late 1960s also had a good solid beat, but it was more gutsy than the music we played earlier in the decade,” said Pashinski. “But we never played songs based on genre, we played songs if we thought people would dance to them.”

There were changes in clothing and hair styles, too.

In the early 1960s, the Star Fires wore their hair short and dressed in matching outfits. By the mid-1960s, Eddie Day and the Nightimers adopted Edwardian style jackets, dress slacks and Beatle boots. At decade’s end, Eddie Day and TNT eliminated the matching outfits, grew their hair longer, wore bell bottoms, bright colors and paisley patterns reflecting the psychedelic mood of the times.

Pashinski and his bands were also forced to become entertainers as well as musicians. One of the things that set them apart from other groups was their unique ability to dazzle audiences with professional showmanship, more complex production equipment and an engaging experience.

“We went from playing dance halls and school dances to playing the college and club circuit,” said Pashinski. “But we were always professional. We never used profanity or appeared in revealing clothing, which many of the nationally-known rock bands were doing by the end of the decade.”

In 2006, Pashinski ran for an open seat in the 121st District and won election to the State House of Representatives where he still serves today. A recent widower, he is the proud father of four children and seven grandchildren. He also returned to the Star Fires.

The current group consists of Pashinski, a vocalist who also plays keyboard; Griffith, who became an ordained Presbyterian minister and is now retired; drummer Gumbavich; vocalist Charlie McCuen and saxophone player Bob Gardner, along with recent recruits Louis Cossa on keyboards and Sheffee Abram on guitar.

“People still love rock and roll dance music,” Pashinski said. “I’m 18 when I’m on stage and the people dancing are teenagers again. I think we are all truly blessed that we can still go out there and relive those wonderful times again and again.”

8/8/2015

Nanticoke amends Project Labor Agreement

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

The City Council voted to amend the city’s Project Labor Agreement at Thursday night’s meeting.

The agreement assures that individual unions will only need to sign documents once, instead of multiple times as has been the case on various occasions.

Council President William Brown stated that the resolution will provide for “more efficiency” as well as the Saturday and Sunday overtime for city employees will be clarified.

The deadline to apply for the Luzerne County 2016 Gypsy Moth Suppression Program is Aug. 14.

The individual request for treatment states that in order to qualify for the program the property that is requested to be treated must meet the following criteria: (1) There must be a residence on the property. (2) Residence must be within 200 feet of the forest. In addition, the property may not qualify if any of the following exist: (1) Property is commercial. (2) Adjacent properties are not participating. (3) Tree species are not favorable to gypsy moths. (4) Adjacent property owner(s) are opposed to aerial application of insecticide.

There will be no extensions for the submission of the applications.

Residents who do not qualify for the program can look for other options, such as searching for additional programs or hiring a private company for the treatment.

The Greater Nanticoke Area Community Garden Organization will host a Farmers Market from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. on Aug. 15. For more information, contact Rebecca Seman at (570) 793-7910.

The annual autumn city-wide yard sale will be held on Sept. 12.

The council will hold its next regular meeting at 7 p.m. on Aug. 19.

8/2/2015

Scout’s honor

Paul Golias - Citizens Voice

What began as a routine “good deed” day for a Boy Scout and his dad in Nanticoke became an once-in-a-lifetime heroic “good deed” morning that likely saved some lives.

Jared Marshalllick, 14, a member of Boy Scout Troop 418, and his dad, Frank Marshalllick, 49, an assistant scoutmaster in the same unit, continue to receive awards and plaudits for their bravery in entering a burning house to save people.

The occupants of the six-unit house on Green Street Nanticoke, and their pets, escaped. The Marshalllicks were unhurt but soot-covered and, remarkably, they were calm during and after the episode, Frank Marshalllick said. He credits their involvement in scouting for bringing them through the experience.

Feb. 21 began as a project day for Troop 418. Jared Marshalllick and his fellow troop members were out putting doorknob hangers on houses, advising that the “Scouting for Food” program would be looking for bags of food on the following Saturday. The donated food is taken to the pantry run through St. Faustina Parish.

“We ran out of hangers and we were returning to the American Legion Home (Post 350 sponsors the troop) to get more hangers,” Frank Marshalllick said.

“Dad, look, that house is on fire,” Jared yelled as they drove on Green Street.

“We saw smoke coming out from under the eaves and from bottom windows,” his dad said. The two jumped out of the car and Frank Marshalllick

called 9-1-1, only to get a busy signal, he said. "Another guy also could not get through (to 9-1-1)," he said. People were trying to get a door open, Frank Marshallick said. He told them to "back up," and he then kicked in the door. "The smoke was heavy. It was totally black. You couldn't see beyond your own face," he recalled. He said people began yelling that dogs, cats and a bird were in the house. The father and son went to a first-floor window and pulled burning curtains out of the way. The blaze then blew out another window, Frank Marshallick said. "A six-year-old child came out a door and we asked him if anyone else was in the house. He said, 'Yes, my mom and dad and sister and brother,'" Frank Marshallick said. The situation was now more serious than endangered pets. Father and son went up a flight of stairs and began yelling at people to get out. "Someone said they had to get their dogs," Jared said. "I tried to help them get the animals."

The roar of sirens and approaching fire trucks scared the dogs and they ran back into the building, Frank Marshallick said. The hectic episode continued with a woman coming out of the house, carrying a two-month-old baby. The Marshallicks restrained the six-old-old who had exited earlier from returning to the house but the woman took the baby across the street, gave the baby to someone to hold and then amazingly went back into the house. Fire fighters ordered everyone out and the woman and her husband "came back out," Frank Marshallick said. The dogs, pit bulls, also ran out and the Marshallicks took one and fire fighters took the other to safety. "It was a two-alarm fire and damage was extensive," Frank Marshallick said. A second house also was damaged. The Marshallicks have received commendations from Congressman Lou Barletta, state Sen. John Yudichak, state Rep. Gerald Mullery, Nanticoke Fire Department, Mayor Richard Wiaterowski and the American Legion. Still to come is a Boy Scouts of America heroism award. "We are really proud of them," Scoutmaster Matthew Matyas said. Frank Marshallick, a sheet metal worker in Local 44, and Jared, a Star Scout working his way toward the coveted Eagle Scout rank, said their actions came naturally, an outgrowth of the scouting experience in which the motto "Be Prepared" and the scout law's admonition to be brave are repeated at weekly meetings. As they sat for an interview, troop members began a weekly meeting with recitation of the scout oath, motto and law. Fifteen scouts and six leaders were on hand in a troop that, founded in 1996, boasts of some 40 Eagle scouts, a remarkable average of two per year. Matyas, 24, has been scoutmaster for one year, succeeding Chester Prymowicz who served in 2013-14. Matyas said Scoutmaster Michael Nestorick, who died in 2013, gets the credit for launching the troop and creating the culture of service and advancement. Matyas, a teacher at Crestwood High School, himself earned the Eagle rank under Nestorick. Troop 418 will camp this summer at Camp Winnebago in Rockaway, NJ. The unit hikes and camps regularly, including treks to Civil War battlefields, historic sites such as Valley Forge and the USS New Jersey and on the Appalachian Trail and other trails. One scout working toward Eagle is creating a butterfly sanctuary that will be located on the Susquehanna Warrior Trail in Plymouth Township. Troop 418 is the lone unit in Nanticoke. "Our scouts are dedicated. This can be a rugged experience. We have football players who juggle their schedules to stay in scouting. We work to build pride. The Marshallicks' heroism is another chapter in our history," Matyas said. Further information: Email the unit at Troop418nanticokebsa@gmail.com Meetings: Wednesdays, 6:30 p.m., Nanticoke American Legion, 23 W. Broad St., Nanticoke. Regional Scout council: www.nepabsa.org

7/31/2015

Nanticoke man working to ensure inmates who kill are punished

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Don Williams won't ever allow his son's death to have been in vain.

His son, Eric Williams, 34, had only handcuffs, keys and a radio and was the only corrections officer working a cell block at the U.S. Penitentiary Canaan in Wayne County when he was killed Feb. 25, 2013.

A federal grand jury indicted inmate Jesse Con-Ui on first-degree murder charges in June 2013. Prosecutors are seeking the death penalty in the trial scheduled for July 2016.

Don Williams is working to improve conditions for prison employees. He also wants more severe penalties for inmates who kill or injure corrections officers.

Williams founded Voices of JOE, a political advocacy group whose primary purpose is to lend a voice to the families of corrections workers as well as corrections workers themselves. The group held its first roundtable discussion Wednesday night Wednesday's meeting at the Watson Inn, Watontown.

Williams, of Nanticoke, started the group that seeks to identify on-the-job safety concerns for corrections workers, promote and support legislation pertaining to safety of corrections workers, and raise awareness of the dangers encountered in working within the prison system.

"I made a commitment to my son upon his death that I won't allow him to have died in vain," Williams said Thursday. "I won't be satisfied until these concerns are acknowledged and rectified. I'm not looking to attack people and have heads roll. I'm looking for change — for protection for those working in prisons and for justice for inmates who attack them."

Voices of JOE is named for three fallen corrections officers — Jose Rivera, Osvaldo Albarati and Eric Williams. All three were killed by inmates. Rivera was killed at a federal prison in California and Albarati was killed when he left his job at a facility in Puerto Rico.

Williams said Wednesday night's meeting went well.

Williams said there was a discussion about a recent decision by a U.S. Attorney to accept a plea bargain for Jose Rivera's killer.

“The inmate was doing life in prison already,” Williams said. “They allowed him to plea out and gave him another life sentence.”

Williams said the decision has caused a tremendous response in the corrections’ community.

“That’s like painting a target on all prison workers,” he said. “If an inmate kills a corrections officer, nothing will happen. We feel the same thing could happen to Eric’s killer.”

Williams said he and members of Voices of JOE feel the U.S. Attorney’s Office “threw in the towel” by accepting the plea bargain.

“We all found it unacceptable,” he said. “They never went to trial. They just gave up.”

Williams said Voices of JOE has asked federal legislators to do a retrospective review of the case. The group wants U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch to look into it as well.

Williams said the first meeting also discussed safety issues within the corrections system, including staffing ratios and special housing.

“We’re concerned about reducing prison population to save money,” Williams said. “And too many inmates who should be in special housing are being integrated with the general population. That was the case with Eric. His killer should have been in special housing.”

Williams said more and more reports of inmates attacking corrections officers are being heard.

“The inmate populations continues to rise, while staff is being cut,” he said. “That’s a formula for disaster.”

Williams said Voices of JOE is calling for oversight hearings in the Judiciary Committees of the House and Senate.

Williams said the death penalty should be invoked in cases where an inmate already serving a life sentence kills an officer or another inmate.

“Even if you’re not a supporter of the death penalty, common sense tells you that you can’t allow these inmates to get no penalty for killing someone,” Williams said. “Some of these cases are slam dunks. They are caught on video. You can’t murder somebody and have nothing happen.”

U.S. Rep. Tom Marino, R-Lycoming Township, U.S. Sen. Bob Casey, D-Scranton, and U.S. Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Zionsville, all had representatives attend Wednesday’s meeting. Marino sits on the House Judiciary Committee.

“The federal death penalty needs to remain a viable option available to the Department of Justice as a way deter and protect our officers,” Marino said.

Marino said the first meeting of Voices of JOE brought together the corrections officers union and elected representatives and gained a great deal of clarity about the state of our federal prisons and issues facing correctional officer safety.

Casey said meeting participants discussed the overall concern that prison officers and their families have about the dangerous nature of their work. The need to ensure that correctional facilities are staffed by an adequate number of guards was also discussed.

“Prison guards take incredible risks every day,” Casey said. “We have an obligation to prison officers and their families to take common-sense steps to ensure they’re safe on the job. Allowing more prison officers to carry pepper spray could make all the difference when it comes to an attack from an inmate.”

Toomey said the murders of corrections officers are horrific and shocking. Toomey favors expanding the use of pepper spray.

“While some level of risk will always be present in a prison, Congress can and must do more to protect our correctional officers,” Toomey said.

7/31/2015

Road work will reduce Route 29 to one lane

Eric Mark - citizens Voice

Motorists should expect travel delays on the South Cross Valley Expressway (Route 29) thanks to a major resurfacing project that starts today. The project will reduce Route 29 to one lane in both directions in some areas between the John S. Fine Bridge and Interstate 81 in Nanticoke, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation.

The lane closures and roadwork start at 7 a.m. today on Route 29 South, PennDOT said, in a news release. Starting Friday, Route 29 North will also be reduced to one travel lane, PennDOT said.

Significant travel delays are possible in the four-mile work area, as crews install a new center median guide rail in addition to the milling and resurfacing work, PennDOT cautioned.

The single lane pattern will continue until late October, when the \$8.9 million project will be halted for winter, according to PennDOT. Work will resume on the project next spring and finish next summer, if things proceed as planned by PennDOT.

7/20/2015

Nanticoke’s Steve Bilko joins a shrine for those who made an impact on baseball

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One swing of the late Nanticoke native Steve Bilko’s bat could cause quite a stir.

So could the reputation of his legendary minor league career.

And when you put them together, it creates a legendary game-changer.

That’s the type of player The Baseball Reliquary members are looking for when they vote players into their Shrine of the Eternals – promoted as an alternate to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y.

“The difference is, in Cooperstown, you have to be among baseball’s statistical elite to get in the Hall of Fame,” said Terry Cannon, the executive director of The Baseball Reliquary, which sponsors The Shrine of the Eternals. “We throw the record books out the window.”

As a result, some pretty controversial figures from baseball’s history came through The Shrine of the Eternals door.

“Pete Rose is in. Shoeless Joe Jackson is in The Shrine of the Eternals,” said Gaylon White, a member of The Baseball Reliquary who co-introduced Bilko’s induction into The Shrine of the Eternals during a ceremony Sunday in Pasadena, California.

Curt Flood, who challenged the Philadelphia Phillies for the right to free agency, is in there, too. So is Dick Allen, one of the most controversial

players in Phillies history. Jackie Robinson, who broke Major League Baseball's color barrier, is among the 51 members inducted since The Shrine of the Eternals was formed in 1999, along with infamous Players Union negotiator Marvin Miller.

They stand side-by-side in the Shrine with gentler giants of the game like Roberto Clemente, softball icon Eddie Feigner and Dr. Frank Jobe, the godfather of Tommy John surgery.

The bigger their impact on the sport, the more likely they are to be considered for the Shrine.

"These were people who made important contributions to the game," Cannon said, "people who were good leaders, trailblazers. Their contributions came in other ways than statistical contributions."

As an example, Cannon points to Glenn Burke, who played only four major league seasons for the Los Angeles Dodgers and Oakland A's but was inducted into the Shrine on Sunday along with Bilko and Sy Berger.

"Glenn Burke was a pioneer," Cannon said of the former fleet outfielder, who died of complications from an AIDS-related illness in 1995 and whose induction Sunday was accepted by his sister, Paula Hunt and introduced by media producer/director Doug Harris, who co-produced the 2010 documentary OUT: The Glenn Burke Story.

"He was a gay athlete," Cannon continued, "he was the first player in baseball to play while everyone knew he was gay – a perfect kind of candidate The Reliquary would consider for The Shrine of the Eternals. What we're interested in is their impact on the baseball world outside of the record books."

Each April, The Baseball Reliquary – a national organization of 300 members – sifts through 50 nominations and enters a vote. The top three vote-getters are automatically elected into The Shrine of the Eternals, which included Flood, Doc Ellis and Bill Veeck Jr. in its first induction class in 1999 and later honored Bilko's Nanticoke neighbor Pete Gray – a one-armed outfielder for the St. Louis Browns who passed away in 2002 and was inducted into the Shrine in 2011.

For now, artifacts from and historical references about the inductees can be found in the large Centennial Room of the Pasadena Central Library in Pasadena, California – where Sunday's induction ceremony was held – but aren't likely to remain there for an extended duration.

Unlike the Baseball Hall of Fame, which houses busts and relics honoring its inductees in a museum in Cooperstown, New York, The Shrine of the Eternals kind of floats through different stops in Southern California.

"We're more like a traveling museum," Cannon said. "We're spread out all over Southern California. We don't have a home base."

But Bilko's lasting legend and popularity as a minor league player apparently hit home with The Baseball Reliquary voters. A whole wing of the Pasadena Central Library is dedicated to Bilko, who suffered a heart attack and passed away in 1978 after walloping 313 home runs over 13 minor league seasons. He did it while displaying superhero power that mesmerized the Pacific Coast League's Los Angeles Angels from 1955 through 1957 – at a time when the city didn't yet have a major league team – and played parts of 10 seasons in the major leagues while accumulating 76 home runs with six different teams.

"He was so big, it still resonates," Cannon said. "People still talk about him. That was the big leagues for the Los Angeles area. He was such an important cultural figure. There were a lot of hitters who didn't do that well in the major leagues but had these extraordinary minor league careers. Guys like Bilko, who were huge talents but never quite made it at the major league level, kind of roamed the baseball planet and had a great impact on large generations of fans. I'm sure it resonates with The Reliquary.

"That's one of the reasons why, I'm sure, he was voted in."

7/19/2015

Greater Nanticoke Area to put cameras on school buses

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

The Greater Nanticoke Area School Board approved the monitoring of student activities on the district school buses at Thursday's meeting.

The monitoring will consist of both audio and visual cameras installed on the coaches.

Only Bob Raineri and Frank Shepanski, both of whom were absent from the meeting, did not vote for the measure.

The board also approved policy changes that add cyber school attendance requirements. Cyber school requirements previously had no minimum time of attendance. Beginning with the new school year, the attendance requirement will be set at 2.5 hours per week per course.

Kenneth James, of the athletic department, asks that anyone who has knowledge of GNA's former athletes, contribute their information to the Greater Nanticoke Area's Committee to Honor Past Athletes. James said that he wants to make sure that "no one is forgotten."

District Superintendent Ronald Grevera stated that how students dress needs to be discussed during the August board meeting. Grevera added that many of the students need to begin dressing "in a more appropriate manner."

The board will meet next at 7 p.m. on Aug. 13.

7/18/2015

Stephen Bilko throws out first pitch of Angels game on honorary weekend for his father

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It's been a good bit since Stephen Bilko played the part of a three-sport star at Nanticoke High School.

So naturally, the son of the famed minor league slugger by the same name was a little nervous before his debut on a big league mound.

"I don't even know if I can reach home plate," Bilko said.

This was no ordinary warmup toss, though.

Bilko threw out the first pitch Friday before a game between the Boston Red Sox and Los Angeles Angels at Anaheim Stadium, kicking off a big weekend of festivities for his late father Steve Bilko.

Still one of the most revered home run hitters in Pacific Coast League history nearly 60 years after he played for the minor league Los Angeles Angels, Nanticoke native Steve Bilko will be inducted posthumously Sunday into the Shrine of the Eternals, a traveling baseball Hall of Fame museum in Southern California that recognizes the achievements its inductees accomplished off the field as well as on it.

"I didn't realize the enormity of my father's popularity out here," said Stephen Bilko, who joined his brother Tom Bilko among the 10 Bilko family members on hand to celebrate the honor this weekend.

Both Stephen and Tom Bilko played on Nanticoke High School teams that won Wyoming Valley Conference championships in baseball, football and basketball about a decade after their dad made his legend as a minor league Babe Ruth while playing for the Angels. Steve Bilko went on to play for the Los Angeles Dodgers and California Angels during their inaugural seasons in major league baseball – among the six different big league clubs he played for.

Stephen, a standout wide receiver, later signed a free agent contract with the Cleveland Browns in 1973 (back before the NFL established a team-by-team draft) and went to training camp with the Browns before suffering an injury that ended his pro football hopes. He still lives in Nanticoke and spent 35 years as a teacher at Nanticoke High School before retiring, and still lives in .

Tom Bilko went on to become an orthopedic surgeon and spent his fellowship working under reknowned sports surgeons Drs. Robert Kurlan and Frank Jobe. Tom Bilko, who now lives and practices in the Chicago area, also spent some time in the 1980s as the team doctor for the New England Patriots and Boston Bruins, working on former NFL standouts John Hannah, Irving Fryar and Tony Eason.

"We first started playing when my father played with Detroit," Tom Bilko said. "Next thing you know, we were playing Little League. We both played football and baseball and basketball in high school. People don't realize, my father was all-league at Nanticoke in football as a freshman. He did track and field, would go from a baseball game to do field events in high school."

Stephen was selected to throw out the first pitch as Steve's oldest son, but Tom was standing close by before Friday's first pitch.

"You never know what can happen," Tom joked. "If, by some circumstance Steve is not able to throw, I am capable of stepping in. He'll probably need treatment before or after the pitch."

"That's my doctor talking," Stephen Bilko quipped.

7/17/2015

Ineligible Berwick players appeal to PIAA

Stephen Pianovich - Citizens Voice

The two brothers who were ruled ineligible to play football at Berwick last month have appealed the ruling to the PIAA, District 2 Chairman Frank Majikes confirmed Thursday.

Jules and Damon Beckhorn, two students who planned to play for Berwick and coach George Curry this fall, will likely not have their appeal heard by the PIAA until the second week of August, Majikes said.

No official date or place has been set for the appeal hearing.

By a 10-0 vote, the District 2 athletic committee ruled last month that the Beckhorn brothers transferred from Nanticoke Area to Berwick for athletic purposes, which is not permitted under PIAA rules. That vote came after a four-hour hearing at Dallas High School that featured testimony from representatives from Berwick, Nanticoke Area and the Beckhorn family.

Majikes said the Beckhorns will be notified of an exact date and place for the hearing as soon as one is set. And though the PIAA has a meeting slated for next week, the Beckhorns' hearing will not be discussed due to so many other ongoing issues, Majikes said.

"It's tough right now because a lot of people are on vacation and there's a lot of other hearings they need to address," Majikes said.

"As soon as they know, the family will be notified by (PIAA executive director) Dr. Robert Lombardi."

The controversy around the transfers started in May when Berwick shut down its program for two weeks for its own internal investigation, which ultimately found "no conclusive evidence" Curry recruited players, Berwick superintendent Wayne Brookhart said last month.

Curry, who is resigning from Berwick after the 2015 season, has maintained he did not recruit the two brothers to his program.

7/17/2015

Nanticoke city manager, solicitor challenge residency requirement in county court

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A Nanticoke administrator says living outside the city does not impact his ability to do his job.

City Manager Andrew Gegaris maintained his position from a witness stand Thursday in Luzerne County Court.

But one city resident argued that's not the point.

"The home rule charter is the law of this city, just like the Bible is the law of God," Henry Marks said in court Thursday.

Gegaris, who lives in White Haven, testified before Judge Thomas F. Burke in support of a city petition challenging the legality of a charter provision requiring the city manager and city clerk live within the city limits.

Hired on May 22, 2014, Gegaris had until May 22 of this year to become a city resident.

The charter does not place such a residency requirement on other municipal employees.

Nanticoke solicitor William T. Finnegan in his closing statement to Burke said courts have long-upheld the legality of residency requirements, but they "have not allowed for distinction between subclasses."

Finnegan said his argument against enforcing the provision is rooted in the equal protection and due process clauses of the U.S. Constitution, which provide for equal treatment under the law.

He also noted that courts historically have struck down laws when finding them in violation of the Constitution.

But Marks — who did not formally testify, but rather made an unsworn statement before the bench — argued that the law is the law, and the “the mayor and council are picking and choosing which provisions to enforce.”

Marks also said Gegaris agreed he would move to Nanticoke when he was hired, but has not kept his word. Until then, he said, he admired the city manager.

“If you can’t take a man at his word, what can you take him for?” he said.

Marks said he supports the home rule charter, but disagrees with the individuals in charge. Near the end of his statement he attempted, to deep sighs from Gegaris, to issue other criticisms of the city manager before an objection from Finnegan shuttered the attack.

Former Luzerne County controller Walter Griffith, who resides in Trucksville but operates an auto repair business in Nanticoke, also argued against striking down the residency requirement.

The people of Nanticoke chose the home rule charter, he said, suggesting the responsibility for changing the law should rest with those citizens and not the court.

“To make requirements moot or somehow watered down defeats the purpose,” Griffith said. “We stand on very slippery ground.”

Burke took the matter under advisement at the conclusion of the proceeding. He is likely to issue a decision by order at some date in the near future.

7/15/2015

Nanticoke claims Legion crown

Tom Romanelli - Citizens Voice

The Nanticoke American Legion baseball team rode the hot bat of Mike Sulcoski to the championship and a berth in the regional tournament. Sulcoski, who was named playoff MVP, went 3 for 4 with two runs scored and two RBIs in an 11-1 win over Greater Pittston on Tuesday.

Two of those hits were for extra-bases, including a double and a home run that put the exclamation point on the afternoon.

“We just need to keep playing our game and keep doing what we’re doing,” Sulcoski said. “We are making quality at-bats and our pitchers are making good pitches.”

Both Nanticoke and Greater Pittston, after knocking off defending champion Swoyersville earlier in the afternoon, are headed to the regional tournament beginning this weekend in Bloomsburg.

“The kids worked hard all year and we came around and played great defense, had good pitching, and timely hitting,” Nanticoke coach Joe Yudichak said. “We put it all together in this tournament to lead us into regionals this weekend.”

Nanticoke was hitting on all cylinders right out of the gate.

With a run already across in the inning, Mike Blazaskie laced a bases-loaded RBI single into center field to plate two runs. Two batters later, Steve Kreitzer came up big with a double down the left field line to add two more runs to the total.

Nanticoke scored seven runs in the inning.

Blazaskie, who started the game, carried the momentum from the bats onto the mound. He picked up the win and pitched three innings. He allowed one run and struck out six batters.

After holding Nanticoke off in the bottom of the second Greater Pittston got one on the board.

Two singles by Gavin Malampy and Tyler Dougherty brought Steve Homza to the plate. He delivered for his team an RBI single to right field cutting their deficit to 7-1.

Nanticoke came up in the bottom of the third inning and answered right back.

A double by Kreitzer and single by Tyler Myers gave Christian Pack an opportunity with a runner in scoring position. He did his job and got the run in with a ground out to shortstop.

Sulcoski would drive another run in with a RBI double in the inning giving Nanticoke an eight run lead.

After Myers drove in a run with a double in the fourth inning, Nanticoke took a nine run lead into the bottom of the fifth inning. Sulcoski promptly ended the game with a home run over the left field wall.

For Greater Pittston, Dougherty went a perfect 3 for 3 at the plate.

“I have the utmost confidence in my players (going into regionals),” Greater Pittston coach Jerry Ranieli said “It’s baseball, so you never know what is going to happen. Whoever plays the best baseball will win the tournament.”



7/10/2015

Nanticoke’s newest police officer breaks rewrites history at established department

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As the city’s first female police officer in the police department’s history, Kara Kroll made history as she took her place among fellow officers.

City manager Andy Gegaris, however, is quick to point out that Kroll was not hired because she was a woman, but because she was the person most qualified for the job.

She fills a vacancy created when a member of the force transitioned to a school-based officer.

Mayor Richard Wiaterowski and Chief William Shultz joined Gegaris in expressing confidence in Kroll’s abilities, having served with the Newport Township Police Department and coming through

the civil service system, placing third.

Shultz took a moment to reflect on his own career which started 41 years ago when he joined the Plymouth Township Police Department.

“They gave me a gun and a badge,” he said, “I learned on the job.”

Four years later in lieu of a raise, he went through Act 120 training, and the rest is history, now having served on Nanticoke's police force for 25 years.

"It's an added benefit that Kara is already trained," he said. "She has experience and gets along well with other officers."

Kroll, a 2010 of Wyoming Area, said she looked forward to her tenure of the force with enthusiasm.

"I've always wanted to help people," she said. "Being a police officer gives me a chance to do that."

The city has not been without challenges. With crime sporadically increasing and drugs and related crimes at issue, the 16-member force, including two part time officers consistently works to keep residents safe by any means possible.

Shultz, himself, is certified as a firearms instructor, and two officers have also been trained in rifle and handgun instruction.

Two detectives on the force are intensively trained to address drug related and violent crimes.

"It seems that since 2002, use of heroin seems to have quadrupled," said Shultz. "We live in an area where a lot of people are addicted to drugs, and we need to aggressively address it."

He said the city also experiences cyclical crime such as vehicle break-ins and burglaries, which happen frequently over the period of a month or two, and then cease when the perpetrators are caught, or move to another area.

He said the department was being brought in 21st century, embracing technology and forensic science in such areas as DNA testing

Shultz believes, however, that the present administration, including the mayor and city manager, will make a difference in the long term.

"We're committed to long term sustainability," said Gegaris, "using existing funds effectively and efficiently."

Gegaris said the city would also pursue available grants and consider a tax increase.

"I think more officers on the department would make the city safer," he said, "public safety is our number one concern, and we are committed to doing whatever it takes to combat crime."

"I believe with these two men in charge, in several years, we will have a whole new Nanticoke," said Shultz, also crediting the support of Sen. John Yudichak.

Gegaris and Wiaterowski both said they invite residents to voice their concerns during office hours they hold every two weeks.

"This administration operates with transparency," said Gegaris, "and we welcome input from our residents."

7/8/2015

State authority approves distribution of \$12.7 million in slot revenue

Citizens Voice

A state authority approved the distribution this morning of \$12.7 million in slot revenue from Mohegan Sun Pocono to help fund 54 economic development and civic improvement projects in Luzerne County.

The projects range from \$831,000 to help Wilkes-Barre operate an after-school program that promotes learning in science and math to \$600,000 to assist Medico Industries in Hanover Township with upgrades to its facility and a new press line. Other approved projects include:

Hazleton, \$475,000 to help renovate the former Security Savings Bank building into a performing arts center.

Wilkes-Barre, \$500,000 to renovate Public Square into a new hub to foster technology.

Harveys Lake, \$450,000 to install flow meters at sewage pump stations.

West Pittston Borough, \$150,000 to help with start up of North East Pennsylvania Land Bank Authority and acquire and demolish blighted property.

Wilkes-Barre, \$100,000 to help build new outpatient clinic for Children Service's Center.

Nanticoke, \$317,000 to acquire and demolish 26 properties in downtown corridor.

Jenkins Township, \$200,000 to continue efforts to create Northeast Luzerne Co. regional police department.

Wyoming, Exeter and West Pittston boroughs, \$500,000 to improve stormwater and sewer systems

The funds were distributed to projects in municipalities across Luzerne County

The Commonwealth Financing Authority approved the annual distribution by a unanimous vote without debate. The distribution was established by a 2004 gambling law.

7/7/2015

Amber Grohowski is finalist in pageant

Citizens Voice

Amber Rose Grohowski, 17, daughter of Diane and Eric Grohowski, Nanticoke, has been chosen as a state finalist in the National American Miss Pennsylvania Pageant Aug. 16-17 at the Hilton Harrisburg.

The National American Miss pageants are held for girls 4-18 and have five age divisions. Grohowski will participate in the teen age division. The winner of the pageant will receive a \$1,000 cash award, the official crown and banner and air transportation to compete in the National Pageant in California where she will receive a complimentary tour of Hollywood and two tickets to Disneyland.

Grohowski participates in basketball, field hockey and track.

She cares for an injured foster dog from Blue Chip Animal Refuge.

7/6/2015

Effort to trap, neuter Nanticoke's stray cats gets underway

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Dawn Mendygral could not have chosen a more fulfilling way to spend a Sunday morning.

While many were still reading their morning paper or recovering from holiday festivities, Mendygral and other volunteers from Happy Hearts & Tails, a non-profit organization, were setting traps for about 20 feral cats in areas of the city with high populations of the felines, so they could be neutered and returned to their home environment.

The early morning activity marked the beginning of a two day Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) effort that will conclude later today, with cats being returned to their home colony, neutered, having received a rabies vaccination and with ears "tipped" for future identification.

The event is a cooperative effort among Happy Hearts & Tails, the city of Nanticoke and the Eastern Pennsylvania Animal Alliance (EPAA) a non-profit, providing a "spay mobile" to neuter the felines.

The EPAA also provided spay and neutering services for pets of area residents who previously had appointments.

"The organization has a full staff including veterinarians," Mendygral said. "They had a full day and did a wonderful job."

She said the TNR program improves the lives of feral cats, improves their relationships with area residents and decreases the size of colonies over time.

"It also reduces undesirable behavior such as spraying or cat fighting," she said.

She said cats are generally healthier after they have been neutered, with a reduced incidence of infection and less physical stress from repeated mating activity.

The effort however, requires a great deal of commitment and effort on the part of volunteers. After the traps are placed, they must be monitored until a cat is trapped. The cat must then be removed and kept overnight awaiting neutering.

"Sunday began early and ended late." she said. "Early morning and at dusk are the best times for successfully trapping."

She said volunteers literally didn't sit down throughout the day, moving from one location to another.

As she speaks, her concern for the long term benefit of the cats is evident.

"I'm motivated to do this because I love the cats," she said. "Perhaps because there aren't a lot of people that do."

Mendygral's efforts to address feral cats have been strongly backed by city officials.

City Manager Andy Gegaris said residents have come to him with concerns in regard to cats that seem to roam the city, spraying people's porches, getting in cat fights or upsetting domestic cats.

He said the cooperation of the city reflects not only a willingness to address an overpopulation of feral cats, but a willingness to keep an open dialogue with residents in regard to any concerns they might have.

"I don't know if this is the complete solution," said Gegaris, "but I think its worth a try and certainly better than ignoring the problem."

Mayor Richard Wiaterowski agreed.

"We're working to make the city better in any way possible," said Wiaterowski. "We value resident input."

The program is taking place at no cost to the city.

Those interested in contributing to TNR efforts can do so by accessing <http://tlgets.me/i7h>. Checks made out to "Dawn Mendygral" with "TNR Project" in the memo line can also be mailed to or dropped off at City Hall.

7/6/2015

Activist questions Nanticoke 911 times

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Crime Watch President Travis Buchanan encourages group members to refrain from handling dangerous situations by themselves. He directs them to immediately call 911 and then to wait for police.

Recently, he says, that wait has been unnecessarily long.

Police Chief William Schultz disagrees, telling the Times Leader that each and every call to 911 receives a timely response.

"Of course, sometimes one issue might have priority over another issue. For example, a domestic issue may have priority over suspicious activity in a playground," he said, "and some calls warrant only a phone response."

Incidents described

Buchanan, a resident of South Nanticoke, cited three incidents in which he alleges he called 911 and was met by inadequate response time.

- On June 21, he called 911 with a report of a black Escape driving around his house, with its passengers yelling derogatory remarks. He said an officer did call back, but had the response been quicker, police could have directly addressed the issue rather than "simply looking into it after the fact."

- On June 19, he alleges that a blue Mercedes and a blue Chrysler Sebring were parked in close proximity to his house, engaging in suspicious activity.

"It seemed that one of the passengers got out of his vehicle and threw money on the seat," said Buchanan. "Then they were discussing something that seemed to be hidden on the floor of the car."

Buchanan alleges that a call to 911 resulted in a wait time of about 30 minutes, and that the responding officer did not have access to information he previously relayed.

"I asked the officer if he had seen the vehicles as they exited the area," Buchanan said, "and he said 'what vehicles?'"

- On May 18 Buchanan says he was hit by a dirt bike that was traveling at a high rate of speed in his neighborhood.

"At about 9 p.m., I was hit by a vehicle which was not registered, was not legal to have on the roadway and was operating in a dangerous fashion," Buchanan said. "When I called 911, it took almost an hour and a half to get a call back. Then I was asked why I was in the roadway."

Need to prioritize

City Administrator Andy Gegaris said that in his 13 months on the job, he has fielded only one complaint regarding police response.

Gegaris said that although the overwhelming majority of city residents are upstanding, law abiding citizens, there is a small undesirable element that the police consistently address.

“I support our police 110 percent,” he said.

Mayor Richard Wiatrowski said he also supports the police, believing their responses are timely, while acknowledging their need to prioritize.

Other frustrations

Fellow Crime Watch member Jill Kochanski said she shares Buchanan’s frustration with police response.

Kochanski alleges that on June 28 she called 911 at about 5 p.m. complaining about a “very large white Ford with a red trailer attached,” that was blocking an alley, and therefore blocking access to her garage.

“It was at least an hour between the time I called and the time that the truck was moved,” said Kochanski. “The police never made contact with me.”

Kochanski said she got involved with the group because she had a desire to gather with like-minded residents concerned about their city.

“Sometimes at a meeting, someone will share a concern about someone loitering around a certain area and someone will step up and say, ‘that person was also hanging out near my home.’”

Kochanski said in the past she believed police were quick to respond to 911 calls.

“I remember almost exactly a year ago, there was a problem across the street and I called and they were here in two minutes,” she said. “I don’t know what happened.”

Her concern, she said, was that a call would go out in regard to a more serious incident without timely response.

“I wouldn’t want to report a prowler in my neighbor’s house and then have him wander around there for over an hour,” she said.

Both Kochanski and Buchanan credit Nanticoke with being poised to leave distressed city status under the state’s Act 47. They question, however, if the city has the resources to sustain its police force.

“Perhaps we need more police, or police on a different schedule,” said Buchanan.

The chief, meanwhile, said he, too, is looking for more information.

“It’s difficult because Travis has been both a witness and a victim in multiple cases,” said Schultz. “I am also still waiting for him to provide specific dates and times of calls he said he made to 911.”

Schultz encourages residents to call 911 in regard to any crimes or troubling incidents they observe.

7/5/2015

Twins not only best friends, but business partners

Bob Kalinowski, - Citizens Voice

Webmaster Note: Edited from original article for Nanticoke.

They grew up together, lived together, went to school together and have done just about everything in life together. They are not only twins, but best friends.

And for two sets of local twins, the togetherness continues in the workplace as business partners.

Eric and Jason Negron operate a gyro shop and a cheesesteak business in downtown Wilkes-Barre. They just celebrated 10 years since they took over and grew the family business.

Meanwhile, Brianne and Brittany Dougherty recently assumed ownership of a growing day care they’ve managed since it opened in Newport Township four years ago.

So do these twins ever get sick of being around one another? Both sets said not at all.

“We actually hang out with each other outside of work. We’re always together,” Brianne Dougherty said. “The business has brought us closer.”

Joan Friedman, a psychotherapist who is one of the nation’s leading experts on twins, says identical twins often make good business partners.

And she knows a lot about the topic. Friedman is a twin and also has twin sons. She has authored several books about twins.

“Identical twins that get along the best, and choose to go into business together, are the pairs of twins who use their skills to compliment the other, rather than threaten each other or be competitive,” Friedman said.

The Dougherty sisters

Brianne and Brittany Dougherty, 27, went to school to become teachers and obtained degrees in elementary and special education.

After filling in as substitute teachers one school year, they sought a summer job and heard about a day care opening. They started working there — and never left.

Now, they own the place.

The twin sisters from Nanticoke recently purchased Magic World Child Care Center at 14 Kirmar Parkway in Newport Township. As directors, they’ve built the business over the years from a small center with eight kids into a center now caring for more than 40 children.

And they love it.

Not being able to immediately land a teaching job after college was a blessing in disguise, the Dougherty sisters said.

“We’re happy we didn’t because we couldn’t have asked for anything better than this,” Brittany said on a recent day after being mobbed with hugs from a group of youngsters. “We’re still able to do our passion and teach children.”

Brianne agrees that it all worked out better than they planned.

“This wasn’t something we originally thought about for our future. Now, we couldn’t imagine doing anything else,” Brianne said. “For us, it’s more than a business. Our hearts are in it. It’s been our livelihood the past four years.”

Unlike the Negron twins, the Dougherty sisters don’t live together. They also parted ways for college. Brianne went to Bloomsburg University, while Brittany went to Wilkes University.

But, of course, they sought and obtained the same degree.

“We separated for college and then we got back together,” Brianne joked.

Now, their corporation name is the same as what they were called in high school, “Twin Dough,” pronounced “twin dock.”

The sisters say they love their work because they get a sense of pride seeing children thrive in their program.

“Seeing them advance through our program from infancy or toddlers, all the way up to pre-K and seeing them graduate, it’s so rewarding,” Brittany said. “It’s a big thing to see them graduate — from barely being able to speak to being ready for kindergarten.”

7/4/2015

2015 Coming to America: The Bau family

By Jennifer Bau from Times Leader

The story of Guerrino Bau, my grandfather, began in 1922, when he was born to Giovanni Bau and Felicia Testaguzza Bau in Nanticoke. That same year, Benito Mussolini came to power in Italy. Soon after Guerrino was born, Felicia took him back to Italy, leaving Giovanni in Nanticoke to work in the coal mines. She returned to America two more times, staying just long enough to have her other two sons, Dominic and Luigi.

In February of 1929, Italian school teachers took a loyalty oath to Mussolini, which included recruiting and brainwashing Italian youth with Fascist doctrine. My grandfather remembers propaganda posters glorifying ‘Il Duce.’ In 1932, Guerrino was indoctrinated into the National Ballila, a Fascist youth organization.

One of the first days of his training, 10-year-old Guerrino walked up to his command sergeant and told him he did not want anything to do with the Black Shirts because he was an American citizen. The sergeant was offended and badly beat Guerrino.

My grandfather vividly remembers the day when the Black Shirts came to his village of Pergula. The Black Shirts came looking for items of value and demanded his mother’s wedding ring. She told them the ring was in America with her husband. The soldiers did not believe this and ransacked the house. My grandfather prayed that his mother hid the ring well because if it were found, the whole family faced imprisonment and possibly death. After a thorough search, the unconvinced soldiers left and my grandfather never found out where his mother hid that ring.

Felicia’s cleverness and foresight came in to play again in 1939. She took measures to protect her children. In contrast to Hitler, Mussolini still held respect for the Roman Catholic church so she decided to put Dominic and Luigi into the seminary.

Guerrino was 16 so his mother gave him a choice — the seminary or America.

Guerrino decided on America. Guerrino escaped Italy in September of 1939, and traveled alone to America to live with his father.

On October 28, 1942, Guerrino entered the U.S. Army as a paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne All-American Division because he realized that his family in Italy would never truly be free until the Fascists and Nazis were defeated.

In December 1943, while traveling overseas, Guerrino worried about having to fight in Italy. On June 6, 1944, Guerrino and the 82nd Airborne jumped behind enemy lines in Ste-Mere Eglise, France, to secure roads and bridges for the D-Day invasion.

The unit’s next combat jump was on Sept. 16, 1944, into Holland. Guerrino was injured and was in a hospital tent on the front lines for three weeks, during which time his Missing in Action status worried his young wife at home.

After the war my grandfather journeyed to Pergula to see his mother. Since all American communication to Italy was stopped when Germany and Italy declared war on Russia and the U.S., Felicia had not known the whereabouts of her oldest son for four years.

When Guerrino walked into his hometown wearing his American uniform, people who knew him as a teenager looked at him in disbelief.

He was reunited with his mother and stayed in Italy for one month, then took a boat to New York City, a train to Harrisburg, and hitchhiked to Nanticoke to reunite with his wife and son.

Having only an eighth grade education, Guerrino used wits and hard work to support his family. His first business attempt, a pool hall, flopped. He went from being a door-to-door salesman to owning his own door-to-door sales business. He also started a successful pizza shop in Bloomsburg and then in Hanover Township. He later became the supervisor of buildings and grounds for the Greater Nanticoke Area school district, a position from which he retired at 75. He died Jan. 26, 2005.

7/3/2015

Bear rescued from tree in Nanticoke

Jacob Seiebl - Citizens Voice

Nanticoke firefighters and the Pennsylvania Game Commission rescued a black bear Thursday morning after the bear wandered into the middle of the city and crawled up a tree.

Nanticoke firefighter Robert Roberts Jr. said a crowd of onlookers gathered before noon near a tree next to Sanitary Bakery in the 100 block of East Ridge Street where the bear perched itself on limbs around 20 feet high.

Bear sightings are not unusual in the area, he said, but this one drew a lot of public attention because of where the bear was on the loose.

“You couldn’t get any more in the middle of town than where that bear was,” he said.

Roberts said the bear, which was estimated to be more than 300 pounds, had to be shot with a tranquilizer gun to knock it unconscious. Firefighters sawed off some tree limbs and extended the ladder up the tree in order for the rescue team to harness and slowly lower the bear.

The game commission will release the bear back into the wild, Roberts said.

“He will probably be disappointed he won’t be next to the bakery anymore,” he joked.

7/2/2015

Nanticoke to require residents to register before speaking at council meetings

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

The City Council unanimously passed a motion requiring individuals who wish to address council during a meeting to register with the city clerk 15 minutes prior to the start of the meeting.

The rule was required by the city's recently adopted administrative code.

Several residents inquired as to the reasoning behind the motion.

City Manager Andrew Gegaris said that the motion is in place "not to limit" the citizens input in any way, but rather to control the meeting in a more orderly fashion. The new procedure will begin with the Aug. 5 meeting.

Council also unanimously voted to give Gegaris a \$3,000 per year pay raise.

The cost of living increase is within the city's budget and still does not bring Gegaris up to the pay level of the previous administration's city manager, Councilwoman Nicole Colatosti-Mackiewicz said. Colatosti-Mackiewicz also said that Gegaris has done a great job as city manager. Gegaris has done much to help the city, where the previous administrations had failed to do so, she added.

Mayor Richard Wiaterowski swore in Kara Kroll as full-time police officer. Kroll becomes the first female officer in Nanticoke's history.

Linda Prushinski, chairperson of the Six County Firefighters' convention, said that the Honey Pot Volunteer Fire Department wishes to thank everyone who was involved with or attended the convention. The event was very successful, she added.

The city will host the second annual Big Bang Celebration on July 5, beginning at 4 p.m. behind the high school.

The city is collaborating with Happy Hearts and Tails and the Eastern PA Animal Alliance to conduct a Trap-Neuter-Return Clinic at the Nanticoke City Hall on July 6, beginning at 8:30 a.m.

6/27/2015

Fire companies gather in Nanticoke for convention

smocarsky@timesleader.com

Contingents from up to 241 fire companies descended on Greater Nanticoke this weekend for the 112th Six-County Firemen's Association Convention, which culminates Saturday with a parade and open house.

"We had 52 units pre-register, and a lot of units just show up on the day of the parade," said Tony Prushinski, chairman of this year's convention, which began Thursday and is being hosted by the Honey Pot Volunteer Active Fire Department.

"But with the weather being what it's supposed to be, it's anybody's guess" how many fire engines will be driving through the city with sirens blaring for the parade, Prushinski said on Friday night during a two-day Open House at the fire hall, located at 13 Honey Pot St., Nanticoke.

Downpours and potentially flooding rain are in Saturday's forecast.

"Danville (fire companies) hosted last year's convention and were supposed to be leading the parade here this year, but they're on river watch, so they won't be here," Prushinski said. "The weather will be playing a big factor in who shows up."

Prushinski said Honey Pot fire officials applied to host this year's convention because it coincides with the company's 50th anniversary. The Six-County Firemen's Association voted to approve the station as host.

Of course, the Honey Pot fire station is so small, the convention meetings were held at the Tilbury Fire Co. in the West Nanticoke section of Plymouth Township. "Our brother firemen helped us out," Prushinski said.

The history of Honey Pot fire protection is actually quite interesting, Prushinski noted.

Many years ago (Prushinski wasn't sure exactly when), a fire consumed three homes in Honey Pot before fire apparatus could arrive because a train of coal cars was blocking the road leading to the area. So a group of residents decided a fire company needed to be established for the remote section of the city.

The Honey Pot Volunteer Hose Co. was formed in 1942, but the coal miners who formed it realized they were too old and sick to be active firefighters. Although the original hose company still exists today as a social club, the Honey Pot Volunteer Active Fire Department was chartered in 1965 by a group of Honey Pot residents under Theodore Zdziarski, the first fire chief, Prushinski said.

Funding to buy a pumper engine was raised by collecting and selling rags, metal and whatever other items a local scrap dealer would purchase, Prushinski said.

Today, the department has a 2003 Pierce Mini-Pumper and still owes about \$51,000 for its refurbishment. Vendor fees and sales of shirts, beer mugs and shooter glasses with Honey Pot and Six-County logos at the open house today and Saturday are one means of fund raising this year.

While beers and soda were being poured, funnel cakes and shishkabobs were being consumed, games were being played and children's faces were being painted outside the firehouse, Prushinski noted that the parade and open house will go on Saturday, rain or shine, with the band Tyme performing at the open house.

The parade begins at 2 p.m. at the Greater Nanticoke Area school complex on Kosciuszko Street, proceeds west on East Church Street, turns onto South Market Street and ends at South Market and Main streets. A second parade immediately organizes on Access Road and continues down Garfield Street to the Honey Pot Fire Station.

6/26/2015

Nanticoke welcomes Six County Firemen's Convention to town

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

Firefighters from throughout the region will descend on — and parade through — Nanticoke this weekend for the 112th annual Six County Firemen's Convention.

The Honey Pot Volunteer Fire Company will host the event in the Honey Pot section of the city with a block party on Friday and Saturday near its fire hall.

A highlight of the weekend will be the fire truck parade through Nanticoke, starting at 2 p.m. Saturday.

"I'd like to see as many residents out for the parade as possible," said Bill Graboske, a volunteer with the Honey Pot Fire Company.

The parade will begin at Greater Nanticoke Area High School, then travel up Church Street and down Market Street, which eventually leads to River Street in the Honey Pot section. The parade will continue on Garfield Street for a lap around the Honey Pot section.

Fire crews from Columbia, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Montour, Northumberland and Schuylkill counties comprise the Six County Firemen's Association and will participate in the weekend event.

Food, drinks and games will be available at the Honey Pot firehouse, located at 13 Honey Pot St. Trophies and awards will be presented on Saturday.

Entertainment on Friday will be provided by Honey Pot Productions. The Tyme Band classic rock group will perform on Saturday from 4 to 6 p.m. and from 7 to 9 p.m.

The event is being held in conjunction with the 50th anniversary celebration of the Honey Pot Fire Company.

6/25/2015

District 2 committee rules Berwick transfer students ineligible for football

Steve Bennett - Citizens Voice

An internal investigation that forced Berwick school administrators to shut down its football program for two weeks in May led to a hearing in front of the District 2 athletic committee, the local extension of the PIAA, Wednesday at Dallas High School.

At the center of it all was the alleged recruitment and transfer of Jules and Damon Beckhorn, student-athletes who left Nanticoke Area to attend Berwick in April.

After a four-hour hearing that included testimony from representatives from Nanticoke Area, Berwick and the family involved, District 2 ruled Jules and Damon Beckhorn transferred to Berwick for athletic purposes.

Effective April 20, 2015 to April 20, 2016, the two are ineligible to play football at Berwick. They can practice, but are prohibited from participating in a scrimmages or games.

The committee voted unanimously in favor of the motion made by committee member Chris Thomas, and seconded by Frank Galicki.

Berwick football coach George Curry defended himself following the hearing.

"There is no recruiting and they found that out in the deliberation," Curry said after the hearing. "That is baloney. That is a bunch of crap. I never told anybody to recruit, and I don't recruit. I never recruited. The media, they create that."

A Facebook post made under the name of one of the student-athletes in question stated "Berwick football coach on my couch talkin (sic) to my parents." The post was made prior to the transfer.

"It seems pretty suspicious. There were conversations that substantiated that Facebook post," Nanticoke Area solicitor Vito DeLuca said. "There was a combination of the Facebook post and other evidence we presented."

"The reality is the only issue that was really being decided on today was whether or not the transfer was athletically motivated. That is a simpler burden than having to prove there were recruiting violations."

Berwick solicitor Robert Bull said while Nanticoke Area contended a person from Berwick, or someone representing the Berwick football program was on the couch, the family said it was not true.

All testimony during the hearing from the Berwick side was closed, while only a portion of Nanticoke Area's testimony was open.

Nanticoke Area principal Joe Long, as well as head football coach Ron Bruza and assistant Neal McMahon offered statements in regards to the Facebook post and interaction they had with Jules Beckhorn prior to the transfer.

Long said near the end of February he received a text message from Bruza containing the Facebook post. Long said he alerted the school's athletic director, superintendent and solicitor.

In addition, Bruza said Jules Beckhorn told him he's leaving Nanticoke Area because his brother is being recruited by Berwick and promises were made to the family.

"Never happened," Curry said. "How could that happen when I never spoke to the family? Here to this day I never had anything to do with the young one (Damon), the one they are all excited about. He has not shown up for one workout. I wouldn't let him until we found out what was going on."

On the 2014 preseason Nanticoke Area football roster, Jules Beckhorn was listed as a junior running back/linebacker, and Damon Beckhorn was listed as a freshman wide receiver/defensive back.

Damon did play some quarterback last season, attempting 10 passes and throwing for one touchdown. He also rushed for 62 yards and one touchdown.

Jules had nine carries for 55 yards, and caught one pass for 13 yards.

"Rules are there for a purpose and need to be followed," Berwick superintendent Wayne Brookhart said. "There were some things that probably weren't as they were supposed to be. We are ready to move forward for the kids, program and both districts."

Brookhart said nothing during testimony came as a surprise since most of the evidence was uncovered during its internal investigation.

"There was really nothing we didn't know or weren't aware of," Brookhart said. "Our facts actually matched Nanticoke. That is rarely how these things go. We said they were not eligible, (Nanticoke Area) said they were not eligible, and the committee said they were ineligible."

District 2 chairman Frank Majikes said the family has a right to appeal the decision to PIAA headquarters in Mechanicsburg, but it would have to come through the Berwick school district.

Brookhart said it's unlikely the district would file an appeal since it believed the transfer was for athletic purposes.

6/24/2015

SIX COUNTY FIREMEN'S ASSOCIATION CONVENTION

Citizens' Voice

Honey Pot Active Volunteer Fire Company will host the 112th annual Six County Firemen's Association Convention this weekend, Friday, June 26, and Saturday, June 27, in front of the Honey Pot Fire Company, Nanticoke. Convention hours are 6 to 10 p.m. Friday, June 26, with entertainment by Honey Pot Productions. On Saturday, June 27, the firemen's parade begins at 2 p.m. from the Nanticoke Area school grounds. Convention will conclude at the company grounds after the parade with entertainment by Tyme Band. For information, contact Tony or Linda at 570-735-0508.

6/22/2015

Nanticoke ready to shed distressed city status

Paul Golias - Citizens Voice

Nanticoke's expected emergence from Act 47 status is a "big deal" and something worth celebrating, according to officials who helped the community during its financial difficulties.

State Sen. John Yudichak said "tremendous teamwork" has Nanticoke about to make history. It is on the verge of becoming the first city in Pennsylvania to come out of "distressed city" status.

"Everyone kept their eye on the ball ... this is a great credit to everyone in the city of Nanticoke," he said.

Nanticoke's government made "tough decisions" and followed the state-approved recovery plan, said Joe Boyle, the Pennsylvania Economy League staffer who coordinated the nine-year effort to right the floundering ship.

Boyle said he will recommend removal of Nanticoke from Act 47 status at a state Department of Community and Economic Development hearing tonight at 6 p.m. at the Nanticoke Municipal Building. Rick Viello, former mayor of Lock Haven and director of the governor's local service office, will be hearing officer.

Viello will file a report with the secretary of DCED who has 90 days to approve or disapprove. Boyle said quick approval is expected, based on the city's strong recovery.

Nanticoke, a third-class city, would be the first city of any size to come out of Act 47. West Hazleton Borough emerged in October 2014. Plymouth Township is the lone Luzerne County town still under the act and that municipality is expected to emerge by 2016.

Scranton has been designated as financially distressed under Act 47 since 1992.

Act 47 was enacted by the state Legislature in 1987 to aid communities with severe financial problems. The challenges sometimes placed the towns on the verge of bankruptcy. Grants, loans and technical assistance were provided. A key to Act 47 was development of a recovery plan and following that plan. PEL worked with the state and Nanticoke to write its plan.

"I will testify that Nanticoke is ready to come out," Boyle said. "The community's government worked hard. The city adopted home rule (on Jan. 1, 2012) and the government has a much better setup, with a good staff," he said.

Nanticoke's annual budget is about \$5 million and the mayor and council worked through Act 47 with no layoffs and no cuts in services, Boyle said. The city has full-time police and fire services.

One of the "tough decisions" was raising the earned income tax from 0.5 percent to 1.5 percent, Boyle said.

Yudichak said that despite a debt of \$2.5 million in 2006, some people in Nanticoke opposed using Act 47, fearing the stigma of the distressed label. Yudichak said "great leadership" of then Mayor John Bushko, council members Jim Litchkofski, Brent Makarczyk and Bill O'Malley, the late Joe Lack, solicitor, and others allowed the state to intervene.

"Everyone rolled up their sleeves and did what was the best for the city," he said.

Yudichak said the Fraternal Order of Police, Fire Fighters Union and Teamsters showed "great concern" and worked to stabilize the community.

Nanticoke's downtown is going through a renaissance. Luzerne County Community College has placed facilities there; Geisinger Medical Center, Allied Services, Weis Markets and small businesses have invested in the city, the senator said, and new projects such as Streetscape are on the way. Andy Gegaris, Nanticoke city manager, said the city is proud of its accomplishment and "cautiously optimistic" about its future.

"We are aware of what needs to be done to stay out of Act 47. We look at this as a beginning."

Gegaris said collaboration with neighboring towns will help all of the communities. The concept of a South Valley Council of Governments remains viable, he said, and inter-governmental cooperation can assist the economies of all towns, thereby benefitting the citizenry.

6/22/2015

Nanticoke gardeners rebound from theft

Last updated: June 22, 2015 5:25PM - 475 Views

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Thefts from the Greater Nanticoke Community Garden in early June have been met with a sense of resiliency which has many residents now viewing the event as a blessing in disguise.

City manager Andrew Gegaris said the organization has fully rebounded from the theft of tomato, pepper, cucumber, watermelon and squash plants, as well as a wheelbarrow and metal rake.

"I was impressed with the outpouring of support from members of the community, who not only replaced what was stolen, but went above and beyond to support the garden," he said.

Gegariss said at one point, the overwhelming influx of donated plants resulted in a shortage of water, with the garden having to turn down additional donations for a short period.

“The city fire department jumped right in providing water and manpower,” he said.

Coordinator Rebecca Seman said it was originally with great sadness members realized plants, so carefully selected and placed in the ground, could be taken without consideration for the effort and thought it took to put them there.

“Most of our members have families and jobs and their time and effort are really valuable,” she said. “To see that wasted was unsettling.”

Had someone wanted a plant or two, Seman said, “they would only have had to ask.”

Ultimately, however, Seman said the unfortunate event provided opportunity to educate and inform the public about the value of the garden and to garner support from members of the community.

William “TJ” Edwards, for example, immediately donated a wheelbarrow, rake and dirt to the effort.

“He was aware of all the work that went into both preparation and then planting,” said Seman. “He wanted to make sure that we would continue to move forward.”

Although the garden certainly provides a geographic area for members of the community to grow plants, both Seman and Gegariss say it also has a deeper long term purpose, focusing on an ecological restoration, sustainability and creating public learning, eating and enjoyment of nature.

“It’s a great chance for inter-generational teaching,” Gegariss said. “It wonderful when youngsters realize tomatoes don’t come from the supermarket, they come from a tree.”

He credits the State Correctional Facility at Dallas for donating plants, reinforcing the vision of community support across a broad scope.

Garden’s benefits

The garden also will benefit the community in several other ways.

For one, Seman said it will make some of its harvest available to those who visit area food banks.

“They will have opportunity to visit the garden and choose from available vegetables,” she said. “In that way we can avoid the cost of transportation and refrigeration.”

With 150 pallets, the newly established garden has seen much success in its first year in spite of challenges it has faced.

Seman also said she hopes to align the garden with the current trend of reversing the decline of monarch butterflies.

“We have plenty of milkweed plants which will attract butterflies and provide a chance for a bit of color and education,” she said.

Educationally, she also hopes to offer classes on canning and nutrition.

The entity also sponsors a farmers market four times throughout the summer, which raises money for both the garden and the city’s activity committee.

Residents have said they enjoy a chance to buy products from local vendors and are especially glad the market makes good use of the city’s centrally located public square.

Looking ahead

As for security, Seman said in addition to an increased police presence in the area, members of the garden who are there throughout the day, are committed to being aware of the actions of others.

Members of the community interested in donating to the Nanticoke Community Garden can do so by accessing a GoFundMe account at <http://www.gofundme.com/wmrd7y4>.

Local businesses are also being sought to sponsor t-shirts, to be printed by local business, Emjaze, reminding wearers to “keep calm and garden.”

The next Community Garden Farmers Market will take place at 2 p.m. on July 18.

6/18/2015

GNA board approves budget without raising taxes

mbuffer@citizensvoice.com

The Greater Nanticoke Area School Board voted Thursday for a \$26.5 million budget that keeps the property tax rate at 10.4932 mills.

A mill is \$1 on every \$1,000 in property assessment. The budget is for the school year that starts July 1.

The board also approved a bond issue that will refinance \$8.2 million in outstanding debt and save at least \$200,000 in future debt payments.

Refinancing that debt helped the district avoid a tax increase, Superintendent Ronald Grevera said.

The state Legislature has not yet approved an annual budget that will allocate education funding, but the school district budget projects revenue from state sources at \$16.5 million. Gov. Tom Wolf’s proposed budget included a 5 percent increase in state revenue for the district, which included a 2.5 percent increase in its budget, business manager Al Melone said.

The budget allows the district to spend some reserve funds, and the surplus reserve would drop slightly from \$7.4 million to \$7.3 million during the school year.

The school board on Thursday also voted to hire Sharon Kulp Baddick as elementary principal at \$85,000. She is the assistant principal at Crestwood High School and will replace Maryellen Scott, who is retiring. The board also approved the retirement of District Principal Mary Ann Jarolen.

6/15/2015

Nanticoke could see Act 47 distressed status lifted

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DISTRESSED NO MORE?

- Nanticoke City Council has asked the state Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) to remove the city from the Pennsylvania's list of Act 47 "financially distressed" communities.
- A hearing on the request is set for 6 p.m. Monday at City Hall, 15 East Ridge St. The hearing is open to the public, and testimony will be taken in order to aid the state in making a decision.
- The Pennsylvania Economy League, Nanticoke's state-appointed recovery coordinator, supports the move.
- A ruling from the state is expected within two to three months.
- Anyone needing special accommodations to attend the hearing should contact Richard P. Vilello Jr. at 888-223-6837.
- For details of the state's distressed communities — which include such diverse locales as Plymouth Township, Scranton, Harrisburg and Pittsburgh — see <http://tlgets.me/i09>.

History has not always been kind to this city, but history may be about to change.

Following a hearing next week, Nanticoke could become the first city in Pennsylvania to successfully shed its designation of "financially distressed" under the state's Act 47 recovery program.

"We didn't become distressed overnight, and we don't get out overnight," City Manager Andrew Gegaris said during an interview Tuesday afternoon. "But the city is in a position to move forward."

The hearing is set for 6 p.m. Monday at City Hall, 15 East Ridge St.

Tough times

Buffeted by years of declining population, job losses and a stagnant tax base, city finances reached a low point in 2006. Borrowing heavily just to cover regular annual deficits, an \$800,000 deficit was projected for that year, according to a contemporary Times Leader report, and estimated deficits had totaled \$1.8 million over the previous three years.

Teetering on the brink of fiscal disaster, Nanticoke received the state's financially distressed label in May 2006, becoming the state's 22nd municipality — and Luzerne County's third — to enter the program since the act was passed in 1987.

A state spokesman in 2006 said Nanticoke met several criteria for Act 47 relief, including its deficit spending and failing to repay short-term loans in 2001 and 2003.

Healthy budget

Today, Gegaris said, the city's \$5.4 million budget is deficit free.

"The goal is to get out," said Joseph Boyle, senior research associate with the Pennsylvania Economy League, Nanticoke's state-appointed recovery coordinator.

"It's really what you shoot for when you go into Act 47."

But for most Act 47 communities, that is no easy task. While one township and eight boroughs have left the program, including West Hazleton, no cities have yet done so.

One of the reasons cited by several cities for not wanting to leave the program is fear over losing its benefits, including nonresident wage tax revenue made available to cities under Act 47.

What put Nanticoke on more sound economic footing? Gegaris and Boyle pointed to several factors:

- The city appointed a government study commission which recommended adopting a Home Rule Charter, which was approved by the voters and took effect on Jan. 1, 2012.
- Under home rule, the city gained the ability to levy a 1.5 percent earned income tax.
- Luzerne County's reassessment, which took effect in 2009, also helped local finances, Boyle noted.
- As well, the city has re-negotiated contracts with its four bargaining units.

Critics in 2006 feared that Act 47 would mean a loss of local control and terminations.

"There were no mass layoffs," Gegaris said. But, as he and Boyle both noted, there were concessions.

"The city has gone through a series of recovery plans (under Act 47) and made some difficult decisions," Boyle said.

"Nanticoke is a great example of what communities can do to get out," Boyle added.

Discussing change

A number of residents approached by the Times Leader around Patriot Square Park on Tuesday afternoon admitted they didn't understand much about Act 47 status.

One man, who declined to give his name, offered a very simple view on leaving Act 47: "I'll believe it when I see it," he said with a laugh.

At the Bus Stop Cafe on East Broad Street, owner Eli Panagakos also didn't know much about Act 47 and distressed status. Still, 22 years of running the corner eatery have given him a front-row seat on local life, and he said he doesn't like to hear people knocking the community.

"To me, any forward progress is good," he said when asked about the upcoming hearing.

At the same time, he understands many of the city's challenges.

"Most people that live in Nanticoke work outside of Nanticoke," Panagakos said.

That's a factor which led the city into distress to begin with — and one which, Boyle explained, led to the creation of Act 47 in the first place.

While initially designed for reeling former steel towns in western Pennsylvania, the state's other post-industrial areas, including former anthracite communities, face many of the same challenges, he added.

"It's difficult to get young people to move into a place like Nanticoke, but they've made strides," Boyle said.

Gegaris sounded a similar note.

"Obviously, we need jobs," he said. "We'd like to have more employment opportunities for our residents."

At the same time, he sees hopeful signs on several fronts.

Luzerne County Community College is looking to a private sector partnership to create a multi-story dormitory complex on a parcel of land on Kosciuszko Street near the school's entrance.

And Gegaris is optimistic about an upcoming downtown streetscape project, potential plans for an upgrade of Patriot Square and efforts by city residents to create new events in recent years, including Wingfest and local Independence Day celebrations.

Earning the state's blessing to leave Act 47 would only build on that momentum, he said, raising morale and drawing more interest from outsiders.

"This continues to build on community pride," Gegaris said.

6/15/2015

Nanticoke seeks ruling on city manager's residency requirement

rdupuis@timesleader.com

The police don't have to. The firefighters don't have to. The clerical workers don't have to. The public works employees don't have to. Among Nanticoke's approximately 48 municipal employees, only two people are required under the Home Rule Charter to live in the community — the city manager and the city clerk.

Should they be?

City officials say no, under a petition filed Monday in Luzerne County Court, in which they are seeking a judge's ruling on whether that provision of the charter is legally enforceable.

The petition, filed on the city's behalf by solicitor William T. Finnegan, comes as City Manager Andrew Gegaris, who lives in White Haven, has been under fire from a local resident and critic, Henry Marks.

"There is an actual controversy, and the issue is ripe for review by this honorable court as Andrew Gegaris faces potential termination," the petition states.

Current City Clerk Mary Beth Cheshinski is a Nanticoke resident.

Questions raised

Gegaris was hired on May 22, 2014 and informed that he had to become a city resident by May 22 of this year, according to the petition.

At a recent council meeting, Marks questioned Gegaris's professional qualifications, and inquired about the manager's residency status. Council then authorized Finnegan to seek the judgment.

Gegaris at that time said he will abide by the court's determination, but also has said that he questions the constitutionality or legality of the charter's residency requirement.

Gegaris explained Monday that his children are still in school, and not having to move them has been a consideration.

"I love my job," Gegaris said, adding that "I'm going to do whatever I have to do" to move to Nanticoke if the court rules that the requirement is legitimate.

Gegaris stressed that he would actually make the move if required, not merely look "to put a name on a mailbox."

"I want to do it right," he said.

Still, Gegaris and the city hope the court will acknowledge their arguments — that there is no "rational basis" for imposing the requirement on those two employees, and that doing so violates their equal protection and due process rights.

Approximately one-third of Nanticoke's employees do not live in the city, the petition states.

History

Gegaris is the city's third manager since the charter took effect on Jan. 1, 2012, the document points out, and the fifth person to hold the post since 2004.

The charter, which had been prepared by a study commission, was approved by city voters in November 2011.

"The City of Nanticoke is experiencing difficulty in recruiting and maintaining highly qualified candidates to discharge the significant responsibilities of the position of city manager in light of the residency requirement which has been imposed in the charter," the petition states, adding that when Gegaris was interviewed for the post, there were six people who had applied for the position and none of them resided in the city.

"The City of Nanticoke needs stability which cannot be effectuated with the high turnover rate in the city manager position," the city argues.

The petition also points out that Gegaris is required to be available by telephone 24 hours a day, seven days a week, other than during vacations, and he has been fulfilling that requirement.

"Further, in this day and age, technology makes it easy to always be able to contact these employees in cases of emergency due to the use of cell phones and email," the petition states.

Gegaris said he has always been available when needed.

Finnegan said the next step is for the court to issue an order setting a hearing date on the petition. That order could come as early as today.

6/12/2015

Nanticoke Area graduates 179

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

The Greater Nanticoke Area High School Class of 2015 graduated on Thursday in the school auditorium, in a ceremony so upbeat it almost felt like a pep rally.

The positive vibe permeated the school hallways in the hour before the ceremony began, as keyed-up soon-to-be graduates gathered to take photos and record videos with family and friends.

"We have a lot to look forward to," said Macey Pudlosky, one of 179 Trojans in the graduating class.

Her friend and fellow graduate Katelyn Downs agreed.

Downs, who said her future plans include college and travel, described her time at Nanticoke High in three words: "It was nice."

The graduation speakers, both students and adults, continued the cheery theme.

District Superintendent Ronald Grevera told the class not to fear the unknown as they head off to new places, filled with new people and experiences.

He urged the graduates to be "climbers," people who are "persistent, tenacious and resilient" and "live their life to the fullest." He also told them to believe in themselves and their self-worth.

"Having self-esteem in our abilities and talents is very important ... to be successful in this world," he said.

Class valedictorian Chrislyn Cabonilas said that "each graduate here has the potential to do great things."

Salutatorian Katie Sherman told her classmates to "carry Trojan pride with you wherever you go."

The Class of 2015 includes 33 members of the National Honor Society.

The ceremony was broadcast live to those who gathered in the school cafeteria after being turned away from the auditorium, where every seat was filled.

6/11/2015

New home sought for Nanticoke senior center

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(Webmaster's Note: This section taken from a larger article which pertained to Nanticoke. No copyright infringement intended.)

The active adult center in Nanticoke needs a new home by the end of the month because it is in the Mercy Special Care Hospital on West Washington Street, which has been sold, officials said.

The Luzerne/Wyoming Area Agency on Aging on Tuesday asked council to consider leasing property at 173 E. Green St. for \$5,052 per month, or a total \$303,120 over four years.

The 6,285-square-foot property is owned by Swoyersville-based UDU Realty and would be ready for occupancy with no disruptions, officials said.

The Nanticoke center provides activities and hot meals to an average 30 to 40 older adults daily, the department said.

At \$9.65 per square foot, the new property is more expensive than the current space, which is leased at \$2,000 per month, or \$4 per foot.

However, only one other property owner responded to the county's two public advertisements seeking space, and that one was substantially higher, the department said.

The aging department has state block grant funds available to cover the new Nanticoke lease without tapping the county's general fund operating budget, officials said.

Leases for the department's other active adult centers in Luzerne and Wyoming counties range from \$5.38 to \$16.90 per square foot.

The department expects attendance to increase with the new location because it is about two blocks from an elderly apartment building and will have its own bus stop.

The Nanticoke location was named after former county commissioner Rose Tucker in 2009 to honor her work helping others.

Council is expected to vote on the lease later this month.

6/10/2015

PIAA: Nanticoke Area falls in softball semifinals

Stephen Pianovich - Citizens Voice

In Nanticoke Area's first two games of the state playoffs, the team jumped out to big leads and kept the opponent off the scoreboard in the early innings.

The Trojanettes were on the other side of that trend Tuesday against Bethlehem Catholic.

Thanks to three first inning runs — all of which came without any hits — and an 11-strikeout performance from Elyse Cuttic, Bethlehem Catholic ended Nanticoke Area's season, 5-0, in a PIAA Class AAA semifinal at Blue Mountain High School. The Trojanettes end their season at 16-6, with a District 2 title and a top-4 state finish.

Nanticoke Area got off on the wrong foot because of an unusually erratic opening frame from sophomore pitcher Leandra Ramos.

Bethlehem Catholic's first three batters all reached base on walks, totaling just 14 pitches between them.

A wild pitch scored the game's first run, and the Golden Hawks went up 3-0 as Nanticoke Area shortstop Rachel Roccograndi could not handle a sharply hit grounder off the bat of Courtney Shupp.

Ramos eventually found her groove. She didn't walk anyone after issuing four free passes in the first inning, retired nine in a row at one point and pitched into the fifth inning.

Bethlehem Catholic did not get its first hit until the fourth inning, when the team hit three singles but left the bases loaded.

The Golden Eagles added five more hits in the fifth and sixth against Ramos and reliever Miranda Bohn, scoring one run in each inning.

One run, however, would have been enough for Cuttic, who helped Bethlehem Catholic reach the state title game for the second consecutive season.

The hard-throwing southpaw struck out at least one hitter in each frame, including the side in the second and allowed only five total baserunners. “She was fantastic,” Nanticoke Area coach Ryan Stetz said of Cuttic. “She moved the ball in and out, she got the ball up on our hands a little bit. She shut us down while other teams could not this year, that’s a credit to her.”

Cuttic also mixed some offspeed pitches with her overpowering fastball to keep the Trojanettes off balance. Another reason for her success could’ve been because she was left-handed, and the only lefty Stetz recalled his team facing in 2015.

Nanticoke Area catcher Maddy O’Donohue agreed with her coach, saying “I think the fact she was a lefty screwed a lot of people up.” O’Donohue, a senior, had the best day at the plate of any Nanticoke Area player, going 2 for 3 with a triple. She singled with two outs in the seventh and Stetz put in a pinch runner, allowing O’Donohue to receive an ovation as she jogged off the field for the final time in a Nanticoke Area uniform. Stetz said he owed it to the catcher, whom he said “put the program on her back.”

“Our team was like my family. Moving away from them is going to be hard, it’s going to be really hard,” a red-eyed O’Donohue said after the game. “It was a lot of fun. It was one of the best seasons I ever had in my life, I don’t know what is going to live up to it.”

While it was a bittersweet ending to O’Donohue’s high school career, she is the lone senior in Nanticoke Area’s starting lineup. In fact, seven of the 10 players Nanticoke Area used Tuesday were underclassmen.

The Trojanettes’ six-game playoff winning streak came to an end Tuesday, but it was an experience that was both memorable and beneficial for the program.

“I think (the playoff run) has a great impact on them,” Stetz said referring to Nanticoke’s returning players. “But we’re going to start over next year, we’re going to put this year behind us. We’re going to enjoy that we’ve gotten this far, and I think it gives us a great starting point in the future.”

6/7/2015

Race for Justice winners donate scholarship

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

The winners of the Eric Williams Race for Justice got their prize on Saturday — then promptly gave it away.

The four-man team from the U.S. Penitentiary at Lewisburg recorded the fastest time in the relay race held at 13 sites across the nation on May 16 to honor corrections officer Eric Williams, a Nanticoke native who was killed on the job by an inmate at the U.S. Penitentiary at Canaan, in Wayne County in 2013.

The Lewisburg team members, all corrections officers at the prison, designated Mansfield University to receive a \$5,000 criminal justice scholarship, said Don Williams, father of Eric Williams and a prime mover behind the race and the Sgt. Eric Williams Memorial Scholarship Foundation.

A large crowd of lawmakers, law enforcement, corrections officers and supporters attended the ceremony Saturday morning at Luzerne County Community College, which hosted one of last month’s races, Williams said.

A surprise \$1,000 scholarship was awarded to LCCC for its support of the race and the scholarship foundation, he said. Other schools throughout the country received scholarships from the winners of races at the other 12 sites, he added.

The organizers of the race decided to hold a ceremony to give participants and supporters a chance to gather and reflect, Williams said.

“We thought it would be good to have a follow-up to the national race,” he said. “We accomplished what we wanted.”

The ceremony looked to the future and as well as the past, according to Williams.

Eric Williams’ brutal death — he was stabbed repeatedly with a homemade knife in an unprovoked attack, while alone and essentially unarmed — inspired two proposed bills in Congress designed to protect corrections officers, who are not permitted to carry weapons.

One of the proposed bills would allow corrections officers to carry pepper spray, while the other would allow them to store weapons while at work and take them home after work, for protection, Williams said.

Saturday’s ceremony featured speeches from local legislators in support of the proposed bills, according to Williams. He and his wife, Jean, plan to travel to Washington, D.C., later this month to lobby Congress on the legislation.

The Eric Williams Race for Justice will be held again next year, probably during National Law Enforcement Week in May, Williams said. He hopes it becomes an annual tradition.

“That would be a good thing,” he said. “You can’t go wrong calling attention to the dangers officers face.”

The support from the community at large and the law enforcement community in particular continues to inspire Williams, he said.

“It’s a very powerful brotherhood, sisterhood of law enforcement that really closed ranks to help our family, to be supportive,” he said.

Most of the hundreds of people who took part in the race named for his son never met him, Williams noted.

“They don’t know Eric, but you would swear they did,” he said.

6/6/2015

Greater Nanticoke Area plans \$8.9M school expansion

Michael P. Buffer - Citizens Voice

The [Greater Nanticoke Area School District](#) plans to close K.M. Smith Elementary School and spend almost \$8.9 million expanding Kennedy Elementary. The school board approved the plan



Thursday and expects a state reimbursement of more than \$3.1 million. The district needed to make a decision soon because the state is imposing a July 1 moratorium on the PlanCon state funding process for school construction projects. K.M. Smith currently hosts kindergarten, pre-K and first grade classes and is the only district facility not on the district

campus off Kosciuszko Street in Nanticoke.

It's located on Robert Street in the Sheatown section of Nanticoke and also is the district's oldest facility. It dates back to 1930 and has structural deficiencies, including not being compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The district plans to borrow money to fund the

\$8 million expansion of Kennedy, which currently is only used for second grade, Superintendent Ronald Grevera said. After the expansion is done by August 2017, Kennedy will be used for kindergarten, pre-K and first grade.

The elementary center, which is currently for grades 3, 4 and 5, will be realigned for grades 2 through 4. The education center will go from grades 6 and 7 to grades 5 through 7. The high school will remain for grades 8-12.

The district will review its options in the near future on what to do with the K.M. Smith property, school board President Ryan Verazin said. The school board in March voted to pay EI Associate Architects \$10,000 to conduct a building feasibility study. The completed study included two other options rejected by the board: spending more than \$13 million to renovate both K.M. Smith and Kennedy; and closing K.M. Smith and spending more than \$16 million to build a new school on land by the high school.

6/6/2015

Greater Nanticoke Area school expansion approved

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No new school, but J.F. Kennedy would be expanded and K.M. Smith closed under a plan approved by the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board at a special meeting Thursday. If the proposal moves forward, it's estimated to cost the district about \$5 million, with ground broken this time next year.

"The total is estimated at about \$8 million but we're expecting about \$3 million reimbursement from the state," Superintendent Ronald Grevera said of the choice made after reviewing proposals in a \$10,000 district-wide feasibility study.

The state reimbursement is a key reason the board held a special meeting to vote on an option. Gov. Tom Wolf has proposed a moratorium on the reimbursement program, known as "PlanCon," and the state Department of Education has advised that any district hoping for state money should submit initial paperwork, known as PlanCon Part A, by July 1.

Wilkes-Barre Area School District is facing the same deadline, though with a much steeper price tag, on its high school project, most recently estimated to cost as much as \$100 million. That board has narrowed choices to building one or two new schools on the sites where Coughlin and Meyers high schools currently sit, and expects to make a final choice as early as this Wednesday.

The Greater Nanticoke feasibility study by EI Associates offered three options for elementary schools (there were also options to partially or fully renovate the high school):

- Renovate K.M. Smith for pre-kindergarten through first grade and Kennedy for second grade for a total cost of \$13.16 million, about \$8.4 million after state reimbursement.
- Close Smith, renovate Kennedy with additional classrooms, and build a new pre-k through first grade school on land by the high school for a cost of about \$16.26 million, \$11.5 million after reimbursement.
- Close Smith and expand Kennedy to hold the students, the option selected. The expansion would occur primarily at the front of the building along Kosciuszko Street, eliminating a small parking lot but creating a courtyard surrounded by the school.

Grevera said option three made the most sense not only because it was the least expensive, but because it would merge all the schools onto a single "campus-like setting." It also provides rooms for pre-kindergarten, assuming talk in Harrisburg about providing money for such classes becomes a reality.

"We know the research shows the earlier you help students the better, and in our community with 60 percent of our students eligible for free or

reduced lunches, it makes sense to get started on that," Grevera said.

If money doesn't become available, the school could still be used to house other grades.

Eliminating one building also cuts down on the transitions children must make as they move up the grades.

Currently Kennedy houses only second grade, meaning students must transition to the building for a single year before moving to the elementary center. The plan would allow the school to house pre-k to first grade or kindergarten to second, with the other elementary grades split between the elementary and educational centers.

"From an educational standpoint that's a very good thing," Grevera said, noting research suggests more transitions reduce academic achievement. The pre-k rooms would each have their own restrooms so students wouldn't have to leave the rooms.

Along with the threat of a state moratorium on construction renovation, there's another reason to do something now: Interest rates on borrowing are low.

And while state predictions — frequently proven unreliable in this area — suggest the district may see an increase in enrollment, Grevera said it looks like a small rise followed by some reductions, so a change in demand for more space seems unlikely.

"If everything goes the right way, this time next year we should be breaking ground," Grevera said. The feasibility study estimates construction could wrap up by August 2017.

6/3/2015

Nanticoke group sets dates for farmers market

Paul Golias - Citizens Voice

The Greater Nanticoke Area Community Garden has set its farmers market dates for the summer.

Rebecca Seman, garden project coordinator, said the market will operate from 2 to 6 p.m. June 20, July 18, Aug. 15 and Sept. 19 on Patriot Square in Nanticoke. All dates are Saturdays.

"We will offer music, food, farmers selling their products, animals and fun for the kids," Seman said.

To become a vendor, make a donation or obtain more information, call Seman at 570-793-7910 or email GNA.Community.Garden@gmail.com.

For information on the organization's upcoming events, search for "Greater Nanticoke Area Community Garden" on Facebook. The group meets on Saturdays at 1 p.m. at Mill Memorial Library off Kosciuszko Street.

6/2/2015

Broken elevator causes inconvenience for Nanticoke Towers residents

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A broken elevator in Nanticoke Towers apartment complex has made getting in and out of the building a challenge for residents in the last couple of days.

Nanticoke Housing Authority executive director Doug Paper explained that a mechanical malfunction caused the elevator to go out of commission on Saturday.

He said that the maintenance department got a new part, and expected the elevator to be back in service by the end of the day.

Pape said it was the first issue that the building has had with the elevator since 2013. To help residents, the authority posted notices in the building with contact information should they need help getting in or out of the building.

"Obviously, it's an inconvenience," he said.

Pape explained that Nanticoke Towers is an older building designed to hold only one elevator. The authority considered adding a second elevator, but Pape said the costs of the project could have topped \$1 million.

Instead, Pape said the authority has been in the planning process of installing individual chair lifts in the building's stairwells "as a backup plan" should the elevator go out of commission again.

"We're just about complete with our due diligence on that," Pape said, adding that the process has involved getting quotes and becoming educated on the equipment.

"It's kind of the best option at this point that we can do," he said.

5/24/2015

Nanticoke honors longtime nursery school operator

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

Mayor Richard Wiaterowski presented Betty Height with a plaque of appreciation on behalf of the city as she retires from Little Stars Nursery School.

Height began the school in the basement of her Nanticoke residence in 1984. Height said that she thought of the idea to start the nursery school because she wanted to combine her previous teaching experience with being able to remain at home while raising her three young children.

Kathy Snyder, who worked with Height from the school's inception, and Alice Biscontini, who joined the two in 1991, were also honored in the plaque.

Members of the Hanover Township Volunteer Fire Company formally thanked Wiaterowski for his action in replacing the 100-year-old building's ramp.

The repairs were scheduled to last approximately two weeks, but major structure damage was discovered inside of the building. Ultimately, the

project took four months to complete.

Fire Chief Kevin Hazleton said that the company's fire engine was "stored and heated, for the entire four months, at no cost, by Eclipse Manufacturing." The engine remained in use during the four-month period. Hazleton added that it was great that "after 20 years of trying (to have the repairs done) that it finally took place."

Council voted to authorize the city Solicitor William T. Finnegan to ask for a declaratory judgment to determine residency requirements for city employees. Finnegan pointed out that there are currently 40 city employment positions, and only two — the city manager and city clerk — are required to reside within the city limits. Finnegan said that he will ask the county court for a determination to the legality of the issue.

The community garden's opening day will be held at 8 a.m. on May 30. For more information on the garden, contact Rebecca Seman at (570) 793-7910.

Council will hold its next meeting at 7 p.m. on June 3.



5/18/2015

Times Leader

Nanticoke City Police Chief William Shultz was honored at a surprise gathering by the Nanticoke Police Department on his 25th anniversary of service.

Shultz was hired by Nanticoke on May 7, 1990, after serving as the police chief of Plymouth Township. With his 25 years of service with Nanticoke and 16 years at Plymouth Township, Shultz has served as a police officer for 41 years. Luzerne County District

Attorney Stephanie Salavantis and Assistant District Attorney Jenny Roberts presented Shultz with a plaque recognizing his long-time service to the citizens of the county. Nanticoke city officials also in attendance were Mayor Richard Wiatrowski, Nicole Colatosti-Mackiewicz and Leslie Butczynski, councilwomen; Chris Gegaris, city manager; Mary Beth Cheshinski, city clerk; Kevin Hazleton, fire chief; and Deborah Zwoytek, administrative assistant, Police Department. District Magistrate Donald Whittaker and his entire administrative staff and city administrative staff were also present. The chief's wife, AnnMarie, was instrumental in organizing the affair. Police Department members with Shultz, from left, first row, are Officers Amos Vanderhoff and Bryon Kata. Second row: Officer Brion Kivler; Sergeant Joseph Guydosh; Lieutenant Michael Roke; Shultz; Officers Lee Makowski, Justin St. Clair, Chad Southern, Joseph Buchalski; Captain Robert Lehman; Officer Richard Vietz; and Chester Zaremba, retired police chief.

5/16/2015

Greater Nanticoke Area holds line on taxes

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

There will be no school property tax increase for residents in the Greater Nanticoke Area School District, certified public accountant Albert Melone announced at Thursday's school board meeting.

The 2015-2016 school year's preliminary budget includes \$26,355,214 in revenues and \$26,679,392 expenditures.

Melone said that the figures are "extremely conservative" and that he anticipates an even better picture if Harrisburg's budget plans for the school district are followed through.

Melone added that the district is in "good shape" and that the state has proposed an additional \$800,000 to the school district for the new school year. The board will vote on the final budget during the June 2015 school board meeting.

In other matters, the board has accepted a letter of retirement from Mariellen Scott, effective June 29. Scott is currently serving as the principal of the GNA Education Center. Scott has also served as acting superintendent of the district prior to the appointment of Ronald Grevera last year.

The district will be looking more closely into the problem of truancy during the new school year. Solicitor Vito DeLuca has been involved with the STARS program, which is designed to prevent truancy by involving the families of students who are at risk of failing due to poor attendance.

The high school will offer a credit recovery program from June 22 through July 16 for those students needing to make up credits in order to catch up with their grade level for the start of the new school year. If needed, a second summer session will be held from July 20 through August 12.

Awards day will be held at 8 a.m. on June 9. Graduation is scheduled for 6 p.m. on June 11.

The next meeting of the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board will be held at 7 p.m. on June 18.

5/16/2015

Fire that damaged Nanticoke duplex under investigation

Elizabeth Skrapits - Citizens Voice

Nanticoke fire officials consider a fire that damaged a duplex and destroyed a car early Friday morning suspicious.

Nanticoke Fire Capt. Mark Boncal said the call came in around 2:30 a.m. When firefighters arrived, there was a lot of fire visible in the passenger side of a red car, he said.

"We initially were just asked for a car fire one house up from that," he said. "In the process of extinguishing the car fire, we noticed flames were

visible from the second floor of 148 W. Broad St.”

The fire caused extensive damage to the second floor of 148 W. Broad St., and moderate smoke and water damage to the first floor and also to the 150 W. Broad St. side of the duplex, Boncal said. Both sides were unoccupied, he said. The car was destroyed.

The state police fire marshal was notified and came to investigate on Friday, Boncal said.

Fire officials wanted to find out what the cause might have been, and also whether the fire in the car and house were related, he said. The investigation is continuing.

Coincidentally, Nanticoke units were also called out shortly before 2:30 a.m. Friday to assist neighboring Hanover Township with a call at 125 Stewart Road, according to the Hanover Township Fire Department Facebook Page.

Boncal confirmed Nanticoke was not able to respond to the Hanover Township call to Ace Moving & Storage/Bekins in the Hanover Industrial Estates. Information about that fire was not available.

5/13/2015

Race will honor slain correctional officer

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

The family of slain Correctional Officer Eric Williams likes to joke they are offering fellow law enforcement officers around the nation a chance at an all-expense paid trip to Nanticoke next month.

That's the top prize for the winner of Saturday's inaugural Eric Williams Race for Justice.

That, and \$5,000 scholarship money to be awarded to the winning team.

“I was laughing. How would you like to be from California and win a free trip to Northeastern Pennsylvania?” Williams' father, Don, said recently.

“It's for a good cause. I'm sure people from out of town will love it here.”

Twenty of the nation's federal prisons are hosting races at 13 sites across the United States, each vying for the \$5,000 grand prize to be awarded in memory of Eric Williams, a correctional officer from Nanticoke murdered by an inmate in February 2013 while working at United States Penitentiary at Canaan.

The Williams family, through a memorial scholarship fund set up for the fallen officer, plans to pay for the winning team to travel to Nanticoke on June 6 to receive the money during a ceremony at the Walk of Honor at Luzerne County Community College. The memorial grounds at the college include a plaque in honor of Eric Williams.

“I'm anxious to see which team nationally is going to win. We got some people in Texas who are really excited about this and telling us it's going to be them,” Don Williams said. “They're really gung ho.”

Six regional winners each be awarded \$1,000 in scholarship money, which the Williams family hopes will go toward a school with courses in law enforcement.

Anyone can run in the race — individually or as part of a team — but only teams comprised entirely of law enforcement are eligible to win the scholarship money.

For the race's purposes, law enforcement is broadly defined — from all correctional officers and cops to probation officials and loss prevention officers.

In his life, Eric Williams served in three of those professions — as a loss prevention officer, as a cop and finally as a correctional officer at USP Canaan, one of the most notoriously dangerous prisons in the federal system.

Arizona mob assassin and convicted killer Jesse Con-ui is charged with ambushing Eric Williams, 34, at nightly lockdown and then stabbing him nearly 200 times. Con-ui is awaiting trial and prosecutors — at the insistence of the Williams family — are seeking the death penalty. At the time, Eric Williams was only armed with keys, handcuffs and a radio, in charge of monitoring more than 120 inmates by himself.

“I'm doing this for two reasons,” Don Williams said. “This gives me a certain way of remembering my son. It gives meaning and value to his life, besides just being killed. The other thing is, we're using this event to call attention to the problem with prison safety. I want to raise public awareness that there are severe problems that need to be addressed.”

The race hosted by Eric Williams' colleagues at USP Canaan begins at 9 a.m. Saturday at Luzerne County Community College. Registration begins at 7:30 a.m. in the colleges gymnasium, where a DJ is scheduled to play and basket raffles will be available.

Jeremy Dominick, the union vice president at USP Canaan, is hoping for a huge turnout Saturday of law enforcement and supporters of those who work to uphold law and order each day despite the dangers of the job.

Dominick knew Eric Williams from high school, having graduated a few years after him at Greater Nanticoke Area.

“It's horrible someone had to pay the ultimate sacrifice, but it hits closer to home because he's from my same high school and same town,” Dominick said.

Dominick said a large turnout for the event in Eric Williams' hometown will help spread their message about the dangers of the job.

“It's about awareness and knowledge about what goes on inside a prison,” Dominick said. “It needs to be heard.”

Workers at Federal Correctional Institution Schuylkill are hosting a race in Pottsville, followed by a community picnic to celebrate law enforcement.

Danielle Boris, a unit secretary at FCI Schuylkill, said people in that region are really rallying around the event in Eric Williams' name.

Pennsylvania Attorney General Kathleen Kane headlines a large group of elected officials in the region taking part in the day's festivities, she said.

“I'm looking forward to some networking with all the law enforcement agencies participating,” Boris said. “That's what the goal is — having everyone come together, know why we're there, remember the sacrifices, but also have a good time and — I don't want to say forget what you do at work — but relax for a bit.”

Federal prisons from as far away as San Pedro, California, are participating in the race.

The race committee recently obtained a letter from U.S. Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, after he heard of the efforts of the prisons in Texas. He addressed it to race day participants.

"I applaud all of the relay's participants for donating their time to this important cause. I have no doubt that your presence here today will play an important role in emphasizing safer law enforcement, prison safety, and helping the Eric Williams Scholarship Fund," Cornyn said.

A federal prison in New York City has several teams running in the Eric Williams Race for Justice. Members of the Metropolitan Correctional Center New York plan to run across the Brooklyn Bridge in Eric Williams' honor.

"We're going to run from Manhattan to Brooklyn and then from Brooklyn back to Manhattan," said Tyrone Covington, president of the prison's union, AFGE Local 3148.

Their race is being held May 22 due to prior commitments.

Taking part in the race is a way to lend support to fellow prison workers, Covington said.

"When I look at Eric Williams, I think this could happen to any of our members," he said.

Covington, 37, is on one of the race teams. He didn't seem too hopeful he'd be on the team coming to Nanticoke next month to collect \$5,000 in scholarship money.

"It's not necessarily a run for winning," he said. "It's a run for support."

What: Eric Williams Race for Justice

When: Saturday, registration starting at 7:30 a.m., race begins 9 a.m.

Where: Luzerne County Community College, Nanticoke

Info: The inaugural Eric Williams Race for Justice — a four-mile relay race — is being held at 13 sites around the United States, including in the slain correctional officer's hometown of Nanticoke. The team with the fastest time will be awarded \$5,000 in scholarship money, while six regional winners will win \$1,000. Civilians may participate, but only teams comprised of all law enforcement members are eligible to win the scholarship money.

Cost: \$25 per runner

Teams and runners sought: Organizers of the event are still looking for teams and runners. Following the team relay race, a modified race will be held in which individuals and teams of people could walk or jog to participate as a symbolic gesture. Participants can register in advance or register inside the gymnasium of LCCC on race day.

For info, email: ericwilliamsraceforjustice@gmail.com

To donate: Eric Williams Scholarship Fund, P.O. Box 164, Nanticoke, PA 18634

5/13/2015

Troubled times

Steve Bennett - Citizens Voice

Berwick superintendent Wayne Brookhart announced Tuesday he's suspending all football operations for two weeks effective immediately because of an internal investigation.

According to Brookhart, the focus of the investigation is the transfer status of two student-athletes.

According to multiple sources, two student-athletes left Nanticoke Area in April and enrolled in Berwick. The Citizens' Voice confirmed the information through two sources, a football source and an administration source, who both wished not to be identified because of the ongoing investigation.

"I suspended the program for two weeks due to a challenge of a transfer (to Berwick)," Brookhart said Tuesday afternoon. "We are doing an internal investigation. I feel there is sufficient evidence that warrants more evaluation of the situation, and prompted more questioning. We definitely want to do an in house review of the allegations we received."

Brookhart declined to discuss any of those allegations.

Berwick head coach George Curry did not return calls seeking comment regarding the investigation.

It's against PIAA rules to transfer for athletic purposes.

If one or both principals from the schools involved in a transfer elect not to sign off on the principal-to-principal waiver, a hearing in front of the District 2 athletic committee is necessary if the transferring students intend to participate in athletics at the receiving school.

District 2 chairman Frank Majikes did not return calls seeking comment regarding the athletic committees role, if any, in the investigation

By shutting down all football operations, the Berwick football program will be forced to stop its off-season conditioning program during the two weeks.

Those workouts consist of weight lifting, conditioning and agility drills. While conducting these workouts, players are permitted to wear helmets and shoulder pads.

Teams can do football-related drills, but no contact of any type is permitted.

Brookhart indicated the two-week ban does not cover football coach Curry's quarterback camp. The camp is scheduled for May 23 at Crispin Field.

"The investigation is ongoing and I feel we need more time to conclude it," Brookhart said. "There are still some things that are necessary for us to learn. It is important to take care of our own house. We don't want to rush to judgement, we want to make sure we have all the facts."

Prior to the shutdown, Curry was preparing for his 46th year coaching high school football and his 39th at Berwick.

He is the all-time winningest high school football coach in the state with a record of 446-100-5. His record at Berwick is 395-79-3.

Curry began his coaching career at Lake-Lehman before going to Berwick. He coached 35 consecutive years at Berwick, leading the Dawgs to six PIAA Class AAA championships, with the last coming in 1997. Curry stepped down from Berwick following the 2005 seasons, stating that "35

years in one place is a long time.”

After leaving Berwick he became the head coach at Valley West for three seasons before stepping away.

Gary Campbell Jr. succeeded Curry at Berwick and guided the program for six seasons. Campbell resigned from Berwick in the spring 2012 to take a job at Wahconah High School in Massachusetts.

From there, Curry took over in June and guided the program to three consecutive trips to the district championship game appearance, winning the title in 2013.

That year the Dawgs advanced to the East Final where they were eliminated by Archbishop Wood.

5/11/2015

Education, heritage celebrated at Nanticoke's Mill Memorial Library

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Genel Gronkowski, activities director at Nanticoke's Mill Memorial Library, said the library nestled in the heart of the city looks forward to growth and change, but also looks back to a rich history that helped define it.

Gronkowski said the property itself tells an interesting story.

“When it was still the Mill homestead, daughter Samantha often sat and read outside on the lawn,” she said.

According to the Nanticoke Historical Society website, Samantha loved animals, trees, flowers and children. Before she died in 1837, she had donated to worthy causes and provided opportunity for several young people to attend college.

Mill eventually bequeathed the homestead and surrounding property to “build, furnish and maintain a modern library,” the site says.

Ground for the project was broken and completed in 1957, with several subsequent projects improving and expanding the library, according to the society.

Mill's love for reading is reflected today in the shelves of books containing titles on everything from home repair to textbooks available for students of local elementary schools.

But beyond the written word, Gronkowski said the library provides varied resources for the benefit of young and old.

Board president Susan Maza said the ultimate goal of library is the presentation and exchange of information.

She said four computers provide opportunity for everything from research to job searches.

“Often our patrons will draft a résumé, communicate with employers and apply for employment online,” she said.

Maza said the library often provides a tour of the library for elementary school students to familiarize them with resources.

“The younger someone becomes familiar with library, the more likely they will utilize its resources for a lifetime,” she said.

Innovative programs address the interests and needs of the community in areas as diverse as learning a specific skill and fellowship with those who share a common interest.

Friday mornings often find enthusiast crafters crochet hook or knitting needle in hand, creating afghans and scarves in the perfect color, texture and pattern.

The group welcomes beginners with its only prerequisite being a desire to learn.

In addition to a finished item to provide both warmth and beauty, the group also brings a sense of history, community and creativity to its members.

For adults and teens who want to try their hand at sculpting, a two-part class will be offered early this summer, entitled “Baby Dragon Sculpting.”

The unique offering will provide an opportunity for participants to sculpt, bake and glaze their dragons and then decorate them.

A Lego club for ages five through 10 to provides the opportunity to build, create and spend time with other budding builders.

Monthly movie nights provide an opportunity for young patrons to gather to watch a movie selected to also provide opportunity for learning.

The library's Anime Club is among the most popular bringing together those with a love for Japanese comics.

Maza also lauds the library's Friends Group, a group with generally and financially supports the library.

The group recently hosted a Book and Bake Sale, to support upcoming needs of library. They also host an annual fall festival.

The library is part of the Luzerne County Library System.

4/27/2015

LCCC dormitory plan eyed for Nanticoke

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Luzerne County Community College is looking to the private sector to meet a demand for housing among a student body that numbers more than 6,000.

According to plans currently under review, five acres on a 15-acre parcel, located near the entrance of the college, would be used to build dormitories slated for a fall 2017 opening.

The Kosciuszko Street property chosen for the project is owned by Earth Conservancy, Nanticoke City Manager Andy Gegaris said. The plan has cleared the city's zoning and planning offices, Gegaris said, and is scheduled to come before city council for a vote on May 6.

The proposed 4-story tall dormitories are described as having “150-250 beds,” documents show, with a choice of single, double and triple apartments available, in a community setting.

Council's April meeting provided an opportunity for developers Gary Grossman and Douglas O'Dell to present information and answer questions posed to them by council members. They said a recent student survey indicated a majority said they had a need for affordable housing near the college.

“Students from Hazleton, for example, would much rather live and work in Nanticoke,” Gegaris told the Times Leader. “The proposed ‘near-

campus' housing would save them both time and money, enriching their college experience.”

The housing units would be occupied exclusively by students and would be overseen by management, he added.

Mayor Richard Wiaterowski did say some residents living near the proposed complex have voiced concerns about the project.

But Wiaterowski also noted that the proposal includes a significant undeveloped area between the dormitories and private housing that would provide a natural buffer between the complex and private homes.

According to documentation provided by an engineering firm, the project reflects a nationwide trend toward successful privatization of community college housing which includes Northampton County Community College, Pennsylvania College of Technology, Pennsylvania State University's Mont Alto campus and the University of Pittsburgh's Titusville campus.

It also reflects LCCC's expanding role in the region.

The college last week announced two new agreements that will facilitate student transfers between LCCC and East Stroudsburg University.

Gegaris believes the dormitory project would be beneficial to the city.

“The college is a primary employer of city residents,” he said, “growth of the college is growth for the city.”

The decision ultimately rests with council, he noted.

In the meantime both city council members and administration welcome input from residents and students in regard to the project.

4/27/2015

Fundraiser benefits Nanticoke library

ggibbons@timesleader.com

Some of Caitlin Malishchak's fondest memories of childhood were spending time at Nanticoke's Mill Memorial Library.

Not only did she enjoy spending time with friends and being introduced to literature, she remembers especially looking forward to sledding on the hills that surrounded the building on East Main Street.

To Malishchak, a “Love Literacy for Life” event Saturday night at the Susquehanna Brewing Company — to raise money for the library — provided an opportunity to look back on the history of the facility and to look forward to maintenance, upgrades and purchases the organization hopes to make.

Now a mother herself, she hopes to share her love for reading with her daughter.

As a young reader, her favorite was “On Beyond Bugs,” with the Cat in the Hat. “It was a book that taught about insects, while making kids laugh,” she said.

Board president Sue Maza hopes Saturday's night's event which provided participants with a chance to sample locally brewed beer, sample quality wines, and enjoy finger foods, would provide book lovers the opportunity to enjoy each other's company while raising necessary funds for the library.

“This is the first time that we've done this,” said Maza, adding that about 100 pre-registered to attend. The amount raised is not yet known.

Volunteer Karen Kanjorski manned the basket raffle table which were donated by members of the community.

Baskets contained everything from food items to household good to entertainment opportunities.

“People have been very generous and it is for a great cause,” said Karen Kanjorski.

Board member Vicki Frace, lifetime friend of Kanjorski, said the two share many memories centered on the library and want to provide opportunity for the next generation to forge long time friendships over a book, a computer or while participating in a book club.

Paul Kosiba, Scranton, said he thought the event was a perfect opportunity for both fundraising and sampling quality beer.

“Micro brewing has a unique taste,” said Kosiba, “and, at the same time, we're supporting a local business.”

Mayor Richard Wiaterowski said he was encouraged to see community members gathered to support literacy.

For music lovers, deejay Linda Simpson was on hand to provide a quiet background to an event which attendees said was a wonderful to spend a night out for a good cause.

4/26/2015

Dead rise after dawn to appear in zombie film

kgaydos@citizensvoice.com

Some Nanticoke citizens happily turned into zombies on Saturday.

Many locals participated in the filming of trailers for Same World Productions' horror project “Nanticoke,” set in the city. The full-length film is set to be shot this summer.

Saturday's filming started at the Nanticoke Municipal Building, where actual city Mayor Richard Wiaterowski would be giving a character the key to the city, said Alexa Krupilis, company executive assistant. All goes well until a council member starts acting odd, she said.

The story concerns a group of vampires who have a secret arrangement with the government. It allows them to exist in secret in exchange for the elimination of high-risk terrorist threats. When a zombie outbreak occurs, the vampires are the best defense.

Before filming began for the zombie scene Saturday, executive producer John Smith planned out some of the shots, including having a few child zombies biting at a police officer's knees.

“It's going to be great,” said Smith, also president of Same World Productions.

He formed the company with Karen Metta of Nanticoke, who is company vice president and a producer on the film. Wiaterowski said she brought the project to his and city council's attention a couple months ago.

“We were very supportive of it,” he said. “I think it's great for the city.”

Wiaterowski said he arrived at 7 a.m. that morning to sit at the council table and practice his lines.

“I was just reading my lines, over and over.”

The locals playing zombies gathered outside the meeting room, putting on makeup for the scene. Many were veterans of horror movie makeup. Horror movie fan Theresa Waltz moved to Nanticoke in the fall, finding it funny that the opportunity to be in a horror movie came up so soon after. Waltz’s zombie daughter, Isis, sat with Kenna Golebeski and Auria Daniels in full zombie makeup, playing games on an iPhone. She and her cousin Renee Daniels always go all out for Halloween creating haunted houses.

“We love scaring people. It brings us joy,” said Waltz, the cuts and bruising painted on her face accentuated by an Iron Maiden T-shirt.

Zombies Cheryl and Joel Kerlavage of Nanticoke also had practice — they had a zombie wedding last October.

“It was the coolest wedding ever,” Cheryl Kerlavage said, adding everyone dressed up for a costume party.

“Even your 90-year-old grandmother,” Joel Kerlavage said.

Those without makeup got to portray audience members at the meeting.

“Do you want to be a normal person? Come with me and be a normal person,” one woman told a young girl as they walked into the meeting room.

Find out more about “Nanticoke” at facebook.com/nanticokemovie or nanticokemovie.com.

4/23/2015

Production company hopes to film horror movie in Nanticoke

kgaydos@citizensvoice.com

It’s zombies versus vampires in Nanticoke — and city residents could be a part of it.

Filming of trailers for Same World Productions’ horror project “Nanticoke” will take place Saturday in the city. If all goes well, said John Smith, executive producer and Same World Productions president, filming for the full-length feature will begin in July and he hopes to cast locals in several roles.

The story concerns a group of vampires who have a secret arrangement with the government. It allows them to exist in secret in exchange for the elimination of high-risk terrorist threats. When a zombie outbreak occurs, the vampires are the best defense.

“The undead have to save us from the undead,” Smith said.

Nanticoke Mayor Richard Wiaterowski, as well as some city council members, will be featured in the trailer.

Smith, who lives in Lynchburg, Va., formed the company with longtime friend, Karen Metta of Nanticoke. Metta, who retired from teaching at Greater Nanticoke Area, is the vice president of the production company and a producer of “Nanticoke.”

Smith said during a visit to the area, he thought the city would make a good setting for a movie or television show.

“It felt really, really right,” he said.

He said they’ll be in talks with a few known names for roles, although nothing is final yet. They’ve already generated interest from locals, said Alexa Krupilis, company executive assistant who will also play a vampire in the project.

“The people of Nanticoke are very receptive of doing this movie here,” he said. “I’ve never seen that in L.A.”

Smith wrote the screenplay and Ryan Gilmore of Los Angeles wrote the story. Smith has worked as a senior editor with Showtime Cable networks and Columbia Pictures.

“I thought I was ready to retire,” Smith laughed.

They’re hoping for a limited theatrical release in time for Halloween, or possibly turning it into a television show, Smith said.

“We’re going the whole nine yards on this one,” he said.

Same World Productions is also working on the movie “Native Nations,” a story about the Santee tribe fighting to maintain their lands in Northern Minnesota. Find out more about “Nanticoke” at facebook.com/nanticokemovie or nanticokemovie.com.

4/23/2015

Tommyboys offers a hangout in Nanticoke

kgaydos@citizensvoice.com

The owners of Tommyboys Bar and Grill in Nanticoke set out to create a place that would become regular hangout for their customers.

The restaurant on Market Street draws patrons with several weekly specials, an extensive drink selection and indoor/outdoor seating, owners Adeline Smith and Stephani Smith said.

The family-run business will be open six years in June, and business has been going well, the Smiths said. Jillena Smith, Adeline’s daughter and Stephani’s sister, also works at the bar.

“Nanticoke’s been good to us,” Adeline Smith said.

She said they’re working on expanding the menu, trying out different pizza combinations to feature. The menu includes everything from pizza to burgers, subs and fried platters. They feature many speciality wing sauces, like crabby butter garlic, cajun blue cheese and honey mustard inferno.

An oval bar dominates the main room, with drink specials written on chalkboards hanging around it. In the next room, framed vintage band posters hang on the wall above a shuffleboard table, and patrons can also play darts or pool. There’s also a “beer” pong table, although patrons can only use water in the cups, Adeline Smith said.

“It’s just for fun,” she said.

Weekly specials include build your own burger night on Mondays, cheesesteak night on Tuesdays and wing night on Thursdays, among others. The flat-screen televisions around the bar are great for watching games, Adeline Smith said.

“Even the hightop (tables) have little TVs,” she said.

The drink menu includes creative specialty shots like the Starry Night — Goldschlager and Jagermeister — Pineapple Upside-Down or Baby Guinness with Bailey's Irish Cream and Kahlua. Stephani Smith comes up with the drink recipes. She said she likes coming up with new concoctions.

"We change them up all the time," she said.

On Friday and Saturday nights, live entertainment keeps the place hopping. Open mic nights are held regularly on Tuesdays.

"We never charge a cover. Never, ever," Adeline Smith said.

As the weather improves, patrons can enjoy the outdoor patio. Tommyboys Bar and Grill may also be rented for private parties.

Adeline Smith said that she's fine with people renting the whole bar for a party when the restaurant is normally closed.

She said they also sponsor local teams, and like to help out with community benefits and events. During election season, they also host political events, she added.

"We always try to help out the community," Adeline Smith said.

Location: 12 Market St., Nanticoke

Hours: Kitchen: Mondays-Wednesdays, 4 p.m. to 11 p.m.; Thursdays-Fridays, 11 a.m. to midnight; Saturdays, noon to midnight; Sundays, noon to 11 p.m.; Bar until close each night

Contact: 570-735-2023

4/23/2015

House passes bill honoring corrections officer

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

The state House on Wednesday unanimously passed a bill to name a Conyngham Township bridge in honor of Eric Williams, a corrections officer from Nanticoke who was killed in the line of duty.

House Bill 629 will now go to the state Senate for review, according to the bill's sponsor, state Rep. Gerald Mullery, D-Newport Township.

The bill, if adopted, would name the bridge on Route 3005 over the outlet of Lily Lake as the Senior Officer Eric J. Williams Memorial Bridge. Williams was stabbed and killed by an inmate at the U.S. Penitentiary in Canaan, Wayne County, where Williams worked as a corrections officer, in February 2013. He was 34.

Williams was an avid outdoorsman who enjoyed spending time at a cottage he owned on Lily Lake, according to Mullery.

Williams, a graduate of Greater Nanticoke Area High School and King's College, began serving as a federal corrections officer on Sept. 11, 2011.

Before that, he worked for several years as a police officer.

4/13/2015

Greater Nanticoke Area ballplayers help fight hunger

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Greater Nanticoke Area High School senior baseball players Joe "Jobo" Olszyk and Josh Bencotter wanted to make their senior project count.

The two have shared a long term friendship based on a mutual love of the game, as well as helping others. Passing the Nanticoke Community Food Bank at St. Faustina's parish one Wednesday, an idea took root: combine their two passions to benefit the community.

"Seeing people waiting in line to receive food, the boys realized there were people in the community who had true need, who had to choose between food and medicine," said Jenifer Olszyk, Joe's mother, "they wanted to help."

A collection for the food bank during the team's season seemed like a perfect answer.

Jenifer, the baseball team's booster club secretary, provided vision and support for the boys as they worked to make their vision a reality.

Oncology Clinical Research Coordinator at Wyoming Valley's Henry Geisinger Center and a clinical nursing instructor at Luzerne County Community College, her heart for service is reflected in her son's commitment to service.

She credited her co-workers who, upon hearing about the food collection, overwhelmed her with food donations.

"When we help others, it puts our own lives in a proper perspective, when you're having a bad day and you realize there are people struggling with poverty and illness," she said, "you gain gratitude for your own blessings."

Both boys said senior adviser David Prushinski was "totally supportive" of the project, providing direction and support.

This year, seniors were directed to focus their projects on benefiting the community, and this effort certainly fulfilled that requirement.

At the Trojan Classic tournament on Sunday, the spirit of competition on the field yielded to a spirit of cooperation and goodwill on the sidelines, as a steady stream of players from other teams quietly brought cans of soup and vegetables, dry goods, and other items.

And although the Nanticoke Trojans won their game Sunday against the Dallas Mountaineers in overtime, another quieter victory was won against hunger in the local area.

The team's coach Dean Myers made success possible, always willing to take time to share information about the project with others, communicating with parents, encouraging his players to be their best in every setting.

"The project also required the boys do research regarding area specific poverty," said Jenifer. "The numbers made the need a reality."

Mark Bencotter couldn't have been prouder of son Josh, both as a baseball player and as a person.

"Josh has been a baseball player since he's about 7 years old, and we've always been proud of his hard work," said Mark Bencotter. "And we're now very proud that he has a heart to give back to the community."

"The response has been overwhelming and heartwarming," said Jenifer, "I had to set aside an area of my house for the collection of food items."

Both boys will be heading off to college in September, with Olszyk majoring in criminal justice in hopes of joining the State Police or the National

Guard. Benscoter is set on earning a degree in engineering.

Those wanting to contribute to this project can drop off any can goods and non-perishable foods at Nanticoke home games or practices throughout the season. They can also contact Jenifer Olszyk at 570-332-4391 for more information and to request pick ups.

4/4/2015

Tasty traditions live on as people prepare for Easter

dallabaugh@citizensvoice.com

Keeping up with a 25-year Good Friday tradition, Berwick resident Cinda Hartman made the rounds at mom-and-pop businesses throughout the Nanticoke area for her Easter food shopping.

Her first stop was [Sanitary Bakery](#) on East Ridge Street, where she bought key lime pie, chocolate cream pie and cupcakes.

Her mother's family is from Nanticoke and she always makes the rounds at the places they used to go, she said. After Sanitary Bakery, she planned to go to Park Market on East Broad Street. She formerly shopped at Diamond City Candy Shop just off the city square until that closed a few years ago. Now, she shops at Michael Mootz Candies and Gertrude Hawk in Hanover Township and planned to eat at Stookey's in Nanticoke for lunch. Hartman called their afternoon the "food tour." She was joined by her daughter, Deirdre Lally and Connie Bianco, 69, of Berwick, who bought key lime pie and paska bread.

They were among hordes of people who crowded the Nanticoke area on Friday buying traditional foods for the Easter holiday. At times during the day, more than 15 people waited outside just to get in the doors to take a number at Sanitary Bakery.

Peg Camburn, 69, traveled 45 minutes from Weatherly to Sanitary Bakery on Friday to buy cupcakes, a bunny cake and two pies.

Sweet rolls also were popular sellers at Sanitary Bakery. Nanticoke resident Peter Rynkiewicz, 72, was among the customers buying sweet rolls as well as poppyseed.

"I like coming here any time," Rynkiewicz said. "It's a good bakery. It's the only one in town."

Glen Lyon resident Edwina Pohlidal, who teaches at Luzerne County Community College, made a trip to Sanitary Bakery on Friday just to buy sweet rolls.

"They're especially delicious with ham," she said. "Everybody says that, even people who come in from out of state who are originally from here. They have to get the sweet rolls to go with the ham. It's a tradition."

On West Main Street in Nanticoke, Joanne Gerrity hustled to keep supplying kielbasa to a rush of customers who jammed into Jerry and Son Market. The market was celebrating its 26-year anniversary on Friday.

"It's been crazy all day. It's been like this all week," Gerrity said. "The extra garlic fresh is very popular right now. The kielbasa with cheese we make is very popular right now."

Joshua Klitzner, 25, of Shickshinny, said he comes to Jerry and Son Market every year. He picked up three rings of extra garlic fresh kielbasa Friday for his grandmother. His family has an Easter breakfast with kielbasa every year, he said.

"My family has been shopping here all 25 years I've been alive," he said. "My grandmother makes it a habit. If you try to go somewhere else to get kielbasa, it's just not the same."

4/3/2015

Zoning board members appointed in Nanticoke

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

The City Council approved appointments to the Nanticoke City Zoning Board at March's monthly meeting.

The following were appointed by Mayor Richard Wiaterowski: Charles Alles, term expires Dec. 31, 2017; Jeff Grzymiski, term expires Dec. 31, 2016; Michael Jezewski, term expires Dec. 31, 2018; Ed Janora, term expires Dec. 31, 2017; and Tom Wall, term expires Dec. 31, 2018.

Wiaterowski added that all of the appointed members have been "serving on the board for years," and the appointments and terms were presented to council in order to formally update the current administration's records and adhere to formal legal procedures.

All members of council were present during the voting.

The Honey Pot Volunteer Fire department will host an all you can eat breakfast buffet from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. April 12. The cost for adults is \$8 per person and \$4 for children 13 and under. For more information, contact Linda Prushinski at (570) 735-0508.

The Susquehanna Brewing Company will host "Love Literacy for Life" to benefit Nanticoke's Mill Memorial Library. The event will be held from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. on April 25. Tickets are \$25 and can be purchased by calling the library at (570) 735-3030.

The next meeting of the council of Nanticoke will be held at 7 p.m. on April 15.

3/31/2015

GNA building feasibility study could recommend replacing elementary school

mbuffer@citizensvoice.com

A building feasibility study could include an option to replace KM Smith Elementary School with an addition to another school, Greater Nanticoke Area School District Superintendent Ronald Grevera said.

KM Smith Elementary School, the oldest building on the district campus, dates back to 1930 and has structural deficiencies, including not being compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, Grevera said. KM Smith is currently used for kindergarten, pre-K and first grade.

A new building could cost \$6 million, Grevera said. The school board hopes to make a decision on whether to proceed with construction by July 1

when a moratorium on state reimbursement funding goes into effect, Grevera said.

If the board approves a plan for new construction, district officials also are hoping to take advantage of historically low interest rates when borrowing money, Grevera said.

The school board last week voted to pay EI Associate Architects \$10,000 to conduct the building feasibility study. The study is expected to be done by May and involves a review of all school facilities, Grevera said.

Other district schools are: Kennedy Elementary, second grade; the elementary center for grades 3-5; the education center from grades 6 and 7; and the high school for grades 8-12. All schools are located on the district campus in Nanticoke.

The board chose EI Associates because it is familiar with district facilities dating back to the last major project in 1999, Grevera said. EI Associates has offices in Harrisburg, Cedar Knolls, New Jersey, and Newark, Delaware.

3/31/2015

West Side COG to spend gaming funds on equipment upgrades

Paul Golias - Citizens Voice

Published: March 31, 2015

The West Side Council of Governments will upgrade public services using its 2014 state gaming grant allocation.

The 11 towns in the COG and Nanticoke, which piggybacked on one purchase, have acquired or will purchase a total of four new police cars, several dump trucks or pickup trucks, other public works equipment, laptop computers and computer aided dispatch software for police departments.

“We have just about fulfilled our 2014 LSA (local share account),” said Eileen Cipriani, member of West Wyoming Borough Council and president of the West Side Council of Governments. The Luzerne County local share account allocates funds generated by the state gaming industry.

The COG was awarded \$800,000 in 2014 state gaming grant funds, almost double the \$470,000 awarded in 2013.

Funds have paid for a skid steer loader in Plymouth, a leaf loader in Kingston, police cruisers in Larksville, Edwardsville, Forty Fort and Swoyersville; and dump trucks or pickup trucks in Luzerne, Wyoming, West Wyoming, Exeter and West Pittston. Cipriani said the COG also purchased laptops and dispatch software for police departments in all 11 towns, plus Nanticoke.

“This huge upgrade in police communication equipment is very important in light of the current concerns regarding emergency response times in Luzerne County,” Cipriani said.

Computer-assisted dispatch software is used by the Luzerne County 911 center. The software typically consists of packages that initiate public safety calls and maintain the status of responding resources in the field. It allows 911 operators and police departments to keep track of police resources and put more information at the police officers’ fingertips.

In making its equipment choices, the COG was unable to buy hoped-for shared equipment. Its 2015 wish list includes a road paver and upgraded communication equipment for fire departments in the COG municipalities.

The \$470,000 received in 2013 was used to buy shared public works equipment. As the weather improves, towns will schedule and begin use of the shared street sweeper and leaf vacuum truck bought with 2013 funds, Cipriani said.

3/29/2015

A garden grows in Nanticoke

Paul Golias - Citizens' Voice

Rebecca Seman is holistic in her outlook on foods and in how the greater Nanticoke community’s residents can live in harmony.

Beyond the Greater Nanticoke Area Community Garden project that is front and center this spring, she wants to build relationships that bring people together, both around organic foods and in creating that sense of community.

“It would be great to see Nanticoke sustainable,” she says, envisioning a community where people are healthier because they have access to healthy fruits and vegetables, and perhaps enjoy “everything natural.”

Seman and a small group of like-minded people operated their first Community Garden in the Nanticoke area in 2014 and they are looking for a plot of six acres or so on which a Greater Nanticoke Area Community Garden can be located. The 2014 “garden” was run in a few small locations around Nanticoke, said Erik Thiel, Nanticoke, a member of the project team.

“GNACG is looking for community support to secure a larger and permanent location for the entire community to start growing their own food, herbs, flowers and more,” Thiel said.

Unless another site is found, the 2015 garden may be located on Nanticoke City-owned land in the Lower Broadway area. There is an acid mine water runoff issue, the area is subject to flooding and water and soil conditions are not the best, Seman said. It’s the “down by the bridge” site that may be the only option this year.

The community garden would allow people to raise organic produce, Seman said. Fruits and vegetables raised chemical-free can be part of a diet that includes vitamins and non-genetically modified foods, she said.

“The holistic-organic movement is big and growing,” she said. Urban farming is expanding dramatically in the United States and worldwide.

Australia is a model for urban farming, she said. “People can visit police stations and public buildings and find food gardens. Chickens, bees, goats and cows are raised. Everything. Everything is natural,” she said.

Seman, who serves as garden coordinator, credits her mother, Sheila Seman, of Nanticoke, and her late grandfather, George Seman of Wilkes-Barre, for nurturing an interest in gardening, and then further research into holistic nutrition and organic gardening “prompted me to start my own gardens,” she said. Now, she is spreading that passion into the community.

The Community Garden group has an ambitious agenda for 2015. In cooperation with the city, a new entrance sign to the city and more flowers are planned on East Main Street. A bird-bee-butterfly garden and sanctuary will be created to the rear of Mill Memorial Library to celebrate Earth Day and a farmer's market will be run June 20, July 18, Aug. 15 and Sept. 19 on Patriot Square, featuring organic foods, soaps, breads, honey and flowers.

Wherever the community garden is located, organic methods will be encouraged and there will be educational activities for adults and children, Seman said.

The Nanticoke City event committee has no affiliation with the GNACG but the city will try and help through support and donations, according to Andy Gegaris, Nanticoke City manager. "We'll assist in the development," said Gegaris. "The city loves the initiative."

Seman, who has three children, said the group is "trying to build relationships," and will work with the city, Boy Scouts, Nanticoke Conservation Club, Mill Memorial Library, Nanticoke Historical Society and Eastern Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation (EPCAMR) or any other organization on various projects.

Robert Hughes, executive director of EPCAMR, said the agency will receive 80 water boxes used for growing trees and some of these will go to GNACG.

GNACG is also looking for local businesses to sponsor the group's work. In return for a donation, GNACG will help beautify the business by planting flowers or food, in the ground or in containers, according to Seman.

Gegaris said a community garden "engages families and teaches children and adults who have a desire to teach themselves."

GNACG is seeking a kitchen area in Nanticoke to hold canning classes.

To become a sponsor, to make a donation or for information, call Seman at 570-793-7910 or email her at GNA.Community.Garden@gmail.com.

For info on upcoming events, visit the GNACG Face book page.

The Community Garden group meets on Saturdays at 1 p.m. at Mill Memorial Library off Kosciuszko Street in Nanticoke.

3/26/2015

Greater Nanticoke Area announces kindergarten registration

Citizens Voice

[The Greater Nanticoke Area School District](#) is conducting kindergarten registration for the 2015-16 school term. Registration will be held Tuesday, April 7, Wednesday, April 8, and Thursday, April 9.

Times for registration will be from 9 to 11 a.m. and 12:30 to 2 p.m. Registration will be held at the K.M. Smith Elementary School, Sheatown.

The child must accompany the parent to the registration for screenings that will be done that day.

In order to be eligible for kindergarten for the 2015-16 school term, a child must be five years old on or before Sept. 1, 2015.

Parents must bring the child's birth certificate, two proofs of residency, and provide current health and immunization records. If there are legal documents, (custody/foster) a copy is requested.

If an access card applies to the child, parents are asked to bring it with the other necessary information. The parent/guardian must also provide a picture ID the day of registration in addition to the proofs of residency.

Registration for new first grade students will also be accepted at this time.

In order to be eligible for first grade in the fall, a child must be six years of age on or before Sept. 1, 2015.

Parents must provide the same necessary information listed for registration.

Registration packets are available in the principal's office at K.M. Smith School between 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Parents who plan on picking up the packet may bring the necessary papers that must be copied.

3/23/2015

Municipalities move to form South Valley COG

Paul Golias - Citizens Voice

Six communities are moving forward on formation of a Lower South Valley Council of Governments.

The success of other government councils in Luzerne County has sparked enthusiastic support for a South Valley organization, said Andy Gegaris, city manager in Nanticoke.

"By the fall, I think we will have this together," Gegaris said.

Communities that have met and remain in contact largely via emails are Nanticoke, Newport Township, Hanover Township, Plymouth Township, Sugar Notch and Ashley. The towns hope that Warrior Run also will join, Gegaris said.

The driving force is the dramatically rising cost of local government. Gegaris said the towns hope to kick start the council with some type of joint public works program, including street paving, and with parks and recreation projects.

Nanticoke long has had a need for a new Department of Public Works building. "Our current building is an embarrassment," the manager said, and all of the towns could benefit from a joint public works building and yard. "That is a vision," he said, acknowledging that it will take much work to make it happen.

Coincidentally, the two-year-old West Side Council of Governments is dreaming of buying a small-size street paver with its 2015 state gaming money allocation. The West Side council has used funds from previous grants to buy shared public works equipment and police equipment.

The town councils in the proposed Lower South Valley Council of Governments are preparing to enact enabling ordinances. Gegaris said it is hoped all towns will have passed the ordinances by the end of May.

Meanwhile, wish lists and equipment inventories are being drafted.

Gegaris said Dan Guydish, executive director of the Mountain Council of Governments in the Hazleton area, has assisted the Lower South Valley officials. Gegaris said the town councils want the town managers to carry the ball. He said state Sen. John Yudichak is squarely in support and has emphasized that the council must be driven by the towns to be successful, as opposed to feeling that it is a mandate.

The council also is not limiting its size to the six communities.

“We’ll take anyone who wants to join,” he said, but the towns feel it is best to take small steps at first and win some “little victories” in cost savings and equipment sharing.

Gegaris said the county’s councils of governments, which include the Back Mountain Community Partnership, could eventually meet as a “COG of COGs.”

“We (the communities) have to share information and work together if we want to survive,” he said.

The seed for a possible South Valley Council of Governments was planted when West Side council towns balked at including Nanticoke in the fledgling West Side configuration. Nanticoke did participate in the 2014 gaming funds grant that yielded police equipment for 11 communities. Last year, in the wake of the West Side council’s decision, Mayor Richard Wiaterowski of Nanticoke said, “I would love to see us here (in the South Valley) try to form our own council.”

Plymouth Township attended some West Side council organizational meetings but did not become a member. The township is in the Greater Nanticoke Area School District and is seen as a better fit in a South Valley Council of Governments. Hanover Township and the three smaller boroughs are in the Hanover Area School District.

Nanticoke’s police department provides coverage in Warrior Run Borough under contract and the fire departments in the proposed council area have a long history of cooperation.

Hanover Township is using the Warrior Run Volunteer Fire Department building to house equipment due to the poor condition of the old Askam station and Hanover and the boroughs have response protocols in place where they assist each other.

3/23/2015

Students get lesson rich in art and local history

Paul Golias - Citizens Voice

An excited Frank Fernandez applied an iron oxide glaze to a piece of pottery he shaped in a classroom at Nanticoke Elementary Center.

“I never did anything like this before,” the 10-year-old said Tuesday morning, as 29 students of art teacher Michelle Kordek gathered to continue a multi-faceted project.

They were making pottery, but they also were gaining knowledge of the area’s anthracite mining history and one of its legacies — polluted water runoff from abandoned mines. The iron oxide used to make the glaze came from a site dubbed Red Lake, a former strip mine pit and municipal landfill in Newport Township, near the former Glen-Nan Colliery.

The children had previously made pinch pots out of clay. The pots were baked and, following application of the iron oxide glaze on Tuesday, they were fired again.

Before the classroom project, the fourth grade and fifth grade students took field tours of abandoned mine sites like Red Lake. The 20-acre site is typical of abandoned mine drainage problems in Northeastern Pennsylvania. The lake bubbles and gurgles as water rushes in from seeps and old mine gangways. Acid mine water runs into the Honey Pot discharge from an abandoned air shaft of Susquehanna No. 7 Colliery. The merged flow is about 2,000 gallons per minute, according to Bob Hughes, executive director of the Eastern Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation. The high-iron load eventually reaches Newport Creek and the Susquehanna River.

The coalition received a \$3,000 grant through the state Department of Environmental Protection to purchase two pottery wheels, clay and other supplies to carry out the project. Cooperating were Greater Nanticoke Area School District, Wilkes University, Misericordia University and Earth Conservancy, which works to reclaim mine-ravaged land.

Joining teacher Kordek were Gabby Zawacki, watershed outreach specialist at the coalition, and two coalition interns, environmental studies students Amanda Hamstra and Jessica Johnson of King’s College.

The children used brushes to paint the iron oxide glaze on the pots, being careful to leave the bottoms free of glaze. Kordek said this was necessary to prevent the pots from cracking as they were fired.

Dominic Milazzo of Alden said his great-great grandfather worked in the Susquehanna Coal Company mines. He said the project was “lots of fun.” He joined classmates in watching a pottery wheel demonstration by a clay-splattered Zawacki.

Kordek, a teacher for seven years and an art instructor for the last two years, said it is exciting that students can “recycle materials from our back yard to create art.” The students visited sites that, while close to their homes, they had never visited before.

“Visiting Red Lake was a learning adventure in their home town,” she said.

Kordek, of Ashley, also comes from a mining family. Her grandfather worked at the Huber Colliery.

“Teaching the area’s mining legacy is important,” Kordek said. “It is great to see the kids’ interest.”

Hughes said Pennsylvania has 5,500 miles of streams polluted by acid mine drainage. In visiting mine sites and in making pottery from iron oxide, the students gain an awareness of a long-standing pollution problem, he said.

3/19/2015

Readers’ Choice: Nanticoke chicken wings take flight as they are voted “best wings”

Anyway you sauce it, R Bar and Grill’s wings are at the top of the coop.

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Hot. Sweet. Naked. Get your mind out of the gutter, we are talking about chicken wings here.

Wings are the go-to bar food, found at probably every bar. They are a constant fixture at bars because they aren't hard to make. Fry 'em, toss 'em, serve 'em. Easy, right? Sure, but for the best wings, something's got to be a little different. It takes a little more than dousing them in your average Buffalo sauce or making sure they are crispy enough.

The wings at R Bar and Grill at 119 East Kirmar Ave., are still an easy plate to make, but these wings, according to uand do everything to stand out. The bar's lightly, hand-breaded chicken wing was voted "best wings" for the 2015 Times Leader's Readers' Choice Awards.

"Any wing you get is great. They're all good," said customer Ken Matulewski from Nanticoke. "It doesn't matter what flavor you get."

The bar boasts more than 75 wing sauces from the staples of mild, medium and hot, to the wildly different Broccoli Cheddar, Steak and Potato and Maple Bacon Brown Sugar.

"Customers love our wings because they are just plain amazing," said server Lindsey Temarantz. "They are consistent and there are so many flavors."

"The wing flavors are creative and there is always something different on the menu," said bartender Lauren Maga. "My favorite is the Cajun Siracha Horseradish."

R Bar and Grill allows customers to mix and match their sauces and offers dry rubs as well to those who aren't fond of getting their fingers messy.

"The variety of flavors and the quality of the wings really set them apart," said customer Diane Pientka from Nanticoke. "They will make the wings any way you want them too. Whether it is crispy or not, they will make them. They want to make the customer happy and make them to their standards."

Pientka's husband, Mark, said the couple frequents the bar "more than they would like to say," and he usually orders the Sweet Chili Blue Cheese wings and the Cajun Honey Mustard Blue Cheese.

The restaurant's wing night is every Tuesday with 45 cent wings. Customers are also able to buy 8 ounces of their favorite dry rub or 16 ounces of their favorite wing sauce for \$6.

3/18/2015

Why Lauren Maga of Nanticoke is the best bartender around Region's best bartender voted, Lauren Maga takes the title

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Good friends are difficult to find, but coming upon a good bartender can be even more challenging. If you're looking for a bartender with some rave reviews, look no further than Lauren Maga of R Bar and Grill in Nanticoke, who was recently voted Best Bartender for the Times Leader's 2015 Readers' Choice Awards.

Maga said she was surprised to learn she was voted the best bartender in the region because she only bartends one day a week.

"Oh, I've been bartending for 14 years. I'm usually on the managing side any more, or training bartenders. We have a lot of great bartenders here. Any one of them could have qualified," Maga said.

The seasoned bartender has earned a reputation with local customers including Carol Martin of Nanticoke.

"She already knows what I want before I even come in. As soon as she sees me walk through the door, she makes my drink — a Peach Long Island Iced Tea — and it's ready by the time I sit down. She's the best," Martin gloated.

Every Tuesday night — R Bar and Grill's infamous 'wing night' — Maga can be found behind the bar; possibly mixing one of her signature cocktails.

"I love making drinks up on the spot. R Bar sells over 20 signature cocktails that were made up by me," Maga said.

Her personal favorite is the Ga'R'bage Can, a 32-ounce pitcher filled with vodka, rum, gin, triple-sec, blue curacao, a splash of cranberry juice and a can of Red Bull.

Her original drinks are popular enough that a bar in Plymouth was rumored to have offered money to an R Bar and Grill customer for Maga's drink recipes.

"The drink menus used to say what was in each drink, but after it was rumored that a bar offered \$100 to someone to take them, we took the ingredients off the menu," Maga said.

For now, if you want to experience Maga's special drinks and complimented service, you'll have to go to R Bar and Grill.

3/15/2015

Readers' Choice: Best server hails from Nanticoke

R Bar and Grill feels like home to Lindsey Temarantz's customers.

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There is no rest in the service industry. Long shifts equal aching feet and sore backs. Between the less than minimum wage salary and constant eye-rolling from the public, it is hard to see why a waitress would smile.

However, Lindsey Temarantz, waitress at R Bar and Grill in Nanticoke, is nothing but smiles. Her dimples greet customers and welcome them to what she said is their "second home."

"I always want to make sure people feel comfortable," she said.

The community voted Temarantz "best waitress" for the 2015 Times Leader Readers' Choice Awards.

Temarantz said she loves her customers and how the job keeps her busy. She has served at the bar for the past six years and customers can't get enough of her.

"I am only here a few nights a week but regulars are used to Lauren (her sister who won "best bartender") and I," Temarantz said. "They picked the name they knew."

Customers see her effort and have rewarded her with the honor.

"Lindsey really takes the time out to talk to her customers," said Tom Wrubel from Nanticoke. "She doesn't just serve and walk away. She spends time with her tables."

Wrubel comes to R Bar and Grill about three nights a week because of the atmosphere and, of course, his server.

Temarantz credits patrons returning because of the bar's burgers and wings, but behind her humbleness, is a hard-working server whose customers are like family.

3/15/2015

GNA students lauded for efforts in science

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

Greater Nanticoke Area High School Principal Joseph Long announced at Thursday's school board meeting the accomplishments of students who participated in the regional meeting of the Pennsylvania Junior Academy of Science at Wilkes University.

The following awards were given:

- First award in engineering as well as the Junior High Excellence award in engineering to Kristofer Seiwel.
- First award in math to Kaitlyn Bigos and Evan Stecco.
- Second award in math to Ben Sersen.
- First award in microbiology to Megen Banas and Carlos Castillo.
- First award in physics to Sarah Adkins, Emily Brzozowski, Emily Ehrensperger, Andrea Grey, Riley Klepadlo, David Mash, Aaron Miller, Alyssa Petroski, Kassandra Rinker, Emily Scott, Lexi Seery and Katie Sherman.
- Second awards in physics to Matthew Daniels, Ashlee Pryzwara, Andi Roberts and Tyler Zarembo.
- Second award in zoology to Lauren McHenry.
- Sherman also received a Perseverance Award for her four years of participation.

Fifteen GNA students participated in the Science Olympiad competition. Sherman and Derek Fisher placed first in Protein Modeling. Sherman and Liz Kanjorski placed first in Disease Detectives.

The Elementary School's Jump Rope for Heart Fundraiser raised over \$4,000. Fourth-grade students Kendra Titus and Lauren Rudawski and second-grade student Joseph Jacobs were the top three students to raise donations for the event.

The board approved the adoption of the McGraw Hill Wonders Reading Program for grades K through fifth.

Board President Ryan Verazin said that the program is the "top of the line" and the first new reading program brought into the school in over a decade.

"We want to make sure our students are keeping up with the standards" Verazin added.

The Board also approved the operation of a summer school program from grades 9 through 12. The program will start this summer for those students who do not pass certain courses during the regular school year, so that they will be given the opportunity to catch up with their grade level for the new school year.

In another action, the board approved the establishment of an Athletic Recognition Committee from various members of the community who have participated in athletics in the past.

2/27/2015

Bill would name bridge after fallen correctional officer from Nanticoke

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

A local legislator wants to establish a memorial to a prison corrections officer from Nanticoke who was killed on the job two years ago.

State Rep. Gerald Mullery, D-Newport Township, has introduced House Bill 629 to re-name the bridge on Route 3005 over the outlet of Lily Lake in Conyngham Township to the Senior Officer Eric J. Williams Memorial Bridge.

Williams was 34 when he was assaulted, stabbed and killed by an inmate at the U.S. Penitentiary in Canaan, Wayne County, in February 2013.

Williams, a former police officer, was a 1996 graduate of Greater Nanticoke Area High School and graduated from King's College with a criminal justice degree. He began working as a federal corrections officer on Sept. 11, 2011, according to Mullery.

The bill is expected to be referred to the House Transportation Committee for consideration, Mullery said, in a news release.

"Officer Williams was dedicated to serving his community, his commonwealth and his country," Mullery said. "His courageous service will never be forgotten and this legislation is just one small way we can remember him. He owned a cottage at Lily Lake, so it is entirely fitting to name the nearby bridge in his memory."

2/24/2015

Nanticoke Area girls have a winning attitude

Matt Bufano - Citizens Voice

How did the Nanticoke Area Trojanettes come this far?

It's a fair question given their average-sized, underclassmen-heavy roster that includes six sophomores and just one senior.

But here they are, riding a 14-game win streak. Having already won the WVC's Division 2 title, the Trojanettes are one win away from advancing to the state playoffs — and this success should not come as a surprise.

"The team that is up there right now, they don't take a backseat," said Nanticoke Area junior high coach Gerard Rentko. "No team likes to be down. But if they're down, they're a team that knows how to come back."

Rentko's word is one that should be taken with confidence. A 30-year junior high coach, about 18 of which have been at Nanticoke Area, Rentko over time has learned to tell the great apart from the not-so-great.

This year's Trojanettes have been closer to "great" their whole careers.

When the current junior class was in eighth grade, the junior high team went 21-2, Rentko said. In the following year, the current batch of sophomores went 20-1.

In both seasons, they won their division competing against the same schools they face in varsity.

Years ago, varsity head coach Alan Yendrzejewski took notice of the success the Trojanettes were having at the junior high and freshman levels. He said a thought in the back of his mind was, "OK, we definitely have something to work with."

But even before that, the current crop of talent enjoyed success at an early age, including the sophomores, who have played together since second grade.

"Being able to keep that close of a bond with the girls throughout high school, middle school and growing up — it's something special," sophomore point guard Riley Klepadlo said.

The trophy collection of Klepadlo and her fellow sophomores is an extensive one that dates back to elementary school, and even includes a championship win in the 2012 Winter Challenge tournament in Syracuse, New York.

As the head coach, Yendrzejewski's responsibilities include helping players reach their full potential and establishing roles for everyone on the team, which could be a bit challenging.

However, given the history this team shares, players generally know what they need to do.

"We understand each other without really having to say much," junior Gianna Roberts said.

For a historical perspective, the 1990 Trojanettes, who won the PIAA Class AAA championship with a perfect 30-0 record, were led by five seniors that played together since junior high.

The advantage to be gained from having a team that knows one another so well is apparent for the Trojanettes, as on-court communication is one of Nanticoke Area's strengths.

"We've gotten so used to playing with each other that, communication-wise, it's so much easier than when we started," Klepadlo said.

However, raw talent is perhaps the main reason why the Trojanettes are winning.

An all-around player who often racks up the rebounds, steals and assists, Klepadlo averages 13.3 points per game and was recently crowned MVP of Division 2 by the WVC Girls Basketball Coaches Association.

Roberts and senior Deanna Thomas average 13.5 and 11.7 ppg, respectively.

The sophomore/junior/senior trio agreed in unison that they saw something special with this team from the first practice for the 2014-15 season.

"We worked harder than we've ever worked in the past," Thomas said. "Over the summer, we were going hard and just coming up from day one, we knew that it was going to pay off."

Several years removed from coaching these Trojanettes, Rentko still follows the team closely.

"These kids, if they had me for one year, they have me for the rest of their life," he said with a laugh.

Among the other Trojanettes who have translated junior high-to-varsity success are junior Amber Grohowski, and sophomores Cassie Novakowski, Keira Brown and Kayla Aufiero.

Rentko said where this team succeeded in carrying over success to the varsity level, whereas others failed, is the players got stronger, and simply, "They have the heart and desire to get better."

Nanticoke Area's win streak will be put to the test Wednesday, when it faces North Pocono at 6 p.m. at Wilkes in the District 2 Class AAA semifinals.

2/22/2015

Nanticoke fire leaves nine displaced

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

No one was hurt, but several pets perished and nine people are temporarily displaced following a house fire in Nanticoke on Saturday morning.

The fire, in an apartment building at 176 E. Green St., was reported at 10:02 a.m., according to a Luzerne County emergency dispatch supervisor.

The fire started near a dryer in one of the four apartments in the building, according to Nanticoke Fire Chief Kevin Hazleton. The apartment where the fire started was heavily damaged and the other three apartments in the building also sustained smoke and water damage, Hazleton said.

All of the residents of the apartment building, as well as the building next door at 174 E. Green St. got out of their homes unharmed, Hazleton said.

However, it was a mixed story with pets in the building: Some pets were saved, but several cats and birds died in the fire, he said.

The American Red Cross is helping the displaced residents and will provide them with temporary shelter if needed, Hazleton said.

The cause of the fire appears to be accidental, he said.

Multiple fire companies responded, including Nanticoke, Newport Township, Hanover Township, Plymouth Township, Plymouth Borough and Kingston.

2/13/2015

Greater Nanticoke Area School Board remembers Jim Davis

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

Members of the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board and residents of the district remembered Jim Davis at Thursday night's meeting. Jim Davis, who was known as the "Father of Greater Nanticoke Area Athletics," passed away on Feb. 5. He had served as the district's first athletic director.

"Mr. Davis had an impact in my life, personally, as my biology teacher," said board President Ryan Verazin. "It was such a profound impact that I ended up studying and majoring in biology at the collegiate level and still continue to utilize some of the basics Mr. Davis taught me in my professional career today."

Ken James of the high school athletic department added that Davis was instrumental in the promotion of girls' athletics, in addition to developing the athletic department as a whole.

In other matters:

- During last month's board meeting, the board adopted a resolution indicating that the GNA School District will not raise property taxes above the index.
 - Maryann Jarolen changed positions from district principal to assistant to the superintendent.
 - Jarolen stated that there will be an "increase in rigor" in the high school's educational plan beginning with the 2015-2016 school year. Some of the proposed changes include increasing the amount of required credits for graduation from 21-24 beginning with the class of 2017. The core subjects of English, math, science and social studies will be required courses from grades 9-12. The health and physical education requirement will increase from one credit to two, and there will be honors level courses for all grades and all major subjects.
 - Superintendent Ronald Grevera announced that the district will participate in the Project Shine program beginning in September 2015. The program is geared toward at risk students and will assist them with homework assignments and career guidance.
- The board will meet next at 7 p.m. on March 12.

2/13/2015

Valentine's Day Sweetheart Dance

Citizens' Voice Staff

The first Valentine's Day Sweetheart Dance for high school students with disabilities was held Wednesday at the Greater Nanticoke Area High School gymnasium. Approximately 200 students from schools throughout the Wyoming Valley attended the event, which was organized by the Greater Nanticoke Area Life Skills class, Lori Dennis, special education teacher, and two GNA juniors, Sarina Kinlaw and Joanna Tushinski, for their senior project. The 4 ½ hour event included dancing, a photo booth for the participants to enjoy, and the selection of a Valentine's court and crowning of a king and queen. Student volunteers and donations of food and money from the community helped make the event possible. Organizer Lori Dennis said she was "overwhelmed" at the outpouring of support for the inaugural dance from the community, students, and school districts, including GNA, Hanover Area, Wilkes-Barre Area Career and Technical Center, West Side Career and Technology Center, Dallas, Wyoming Area, Wyoming Valley West, and Wilkes-Barre Area schools.

The idea originated with Dennis' friend and fellow teacher in the Berwick Area School District. A similar dance has been held in Berwick for the past 15 years. Dennis participated in the Berwick event for several years and decided to try to bring the concept home to the Greater Nanticoke Area.

"It is a huge success. The kids really love it," Dennis said. "It gives them a chance to dress up and dance and socialize and enjoy themselves. They all have a really good time."

2/12/2015

Phylicia Thomas remembered at candlelight vigil

ggibbons@civitasmedia.com

Family and friends of Phylicia Thomas ask anyone with information to contact Judy Fisher at 570-328-4957.

Tipsters who wish to remain anonymous can call Crime Stoppers at 800-472-8477.

A no-questions asked cash reward in excess of \$2,000 is offered for information that leads to Thomas' recovery.

Nearly 100 candles pierced the darkness on Wednesday night as family and friends of Phylicia Thomas gathered at Patriot Square for a vigil commemorating her life.

Thomas, who would have been 33 years old, was last seen in her Lake Township home in 2004. Since that time the family has sought answers from state police, from the community, from anyone who might know something, to no avail.

Although there have been some leads over the years and a person of interest, ultimately the investigation has been up to this point fruitless.

Thomas' mother, Pauline Bailey, took a moment to reflect on memories made in the last months of Thomas' life.

"Our last vacation was a trip to North Carolina to visit my son, Wade," said Bailey. "It was a big trip and we were so happy together."

Bailey also looked back on Thomas' last Thanksgiving which she said, "was all about family."

Now 11 years later, with so many questions unanswered, Bailey begs anyone with information about the case to come forward.

"We know someone, somewhere, knows something," said Bailey.

And although the night was filled with sadness, it was also filled with hope as attendees took opportunity to write messages on pink and silver mylar balloons that were released with messages to a sister, a friend and daughter. Some read, "I love you," "I miss you everyday," and "You are an angel."

"We hope wherever she is she knows we love her," said Jocelyn Thomas, 30, Phylicia's sister, clutching a balloon. "Since we have lost her, it seems like the world has paused."

"Phylicia was like my other half," said Jocelyn, "I miss her always."

Curtis Howell, of Plymouth and a family friend, wrote special music for the event.

Strumming on his guitar, Howell said of Phylicia, "you are in our mind, in our heart, you are in our soul, you are still with us."

The park, filled with light and song, seemed to reflect the love and friendship that surrounded Thomas' during her life and the determination for justice that continues on her behalf.

Attendees gathered around a photo montage and a painting of Phylicia that provided opportunity for them to picture her in their minds' eye.

Beth Ann Freeman, of Mountaintop, said she hopes the events brings the case to the forefront of police attention and ultimately results in some closure for the family.

"We will come back every year until we have an answer," Freeman said. "Every year."

2/10/2015

Athletic community mourns loss of former Nanticoke Area AD

Matt Bufano - Citizens Voice

The list of what Jim Davis accomplished tells a story that personifies him as being exactly who Ken Bartuska said he was.

"He's the father of Nanticoke Area athletics," Bartuska said.

A product of Nanticoke High School — where he was a decorated basketball player — Davis spent 30 years as an educator, coach and athletic director at Nanticoke Area. At different points in his career, he coached basketball and cross country, and was an assistant football coach too.

Davis died Thursday. He was 80.

Among his important contributions to the community was serving as Nanticoke Area's first athletic director when the Nanticoke, Newport and Harter schools combined in the mid-1960s.

At the time, the three high schools offered just basketball, baseball and football. With Davis overseeing the athletic program, Nanticoke Area expanded to its current offering of a wide-variety of sports to play.

"He established all the programs. He was the one that got everything going," said Bartuska, the district's current athletic director. "Every team, every program we have today has his mark on it in some shape or form. ... He was a tough, old school, demanding guy. But there's nobody that had your back more than he would have."

Davis' legacy is not defined solely by his time at Nanticoke Area. He also was very involved with District 2, where he succeeded Anthony Marchakitus as chairman in 1988 and stayed on in that role for 10 years.

"His impact and influence on the student-athletes across District 2 was unbelievable," said current chairman Frank Majikes.

But it doesn't stop there.

Davis' reach extended past Northeast Pennsylvania, as he was a member of the PIAA State Board of Control and was awarded state Athletic Director of the Year in 1995. In addition to his 1976 induction into the Luzerne County Sports Hall of Fame, he was inducted into the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame in 1991.

Asked how Davis found time to delve into all these different ventures, in addition to being a church and family man, Majikes laughed and said, "That's a very good question. But he always found the time and he was available to everybody." Majikes added that Davis "very seldom," if ever, missed District 2 meetings in his time as chairman.

After first knowing of Davis in the 1950s when Davis played basketball at King's, Majikes said Davis became a mentor to him.

Prior to Nanticoke Area's boys and girls basketball games late last week, the gym shared in a moment of silence to honor Davis. Bartuska said he hopes additional things will happen at Nanticoke Area in Davis' honor, though nothing is planned yet.

Current Nanticoke Area girls basketball coach Alan Yendrzejewski played for the Trojans in 1995-96 when they made the state playoffs. Davis was the athletic director and biology teacher when he was a student.

Yendrzejewski said Davis was frequently at games with other administrators, supporting the team.

"He was just an icon, not just in Nanticoke, but the entire Wyoming Valley," Davis said. "It was just so sad that he passed away."

2/8/2015

Nanticoke vigil set to commemorate Phylicia Thomas, missing since 2004

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Family and friends of Phylicia Thomas ask anyone with information about her whereabouts to call Judy Fisher at 570-328-4957.

Tipsters who wish to remain anonymous also may give information to Pennsylvania Crime Stoppers by calling 800-472-8477.

A no-questions-asked cash reward in excess of \$2,000 is offered for information that leads to Thomas' recovery.

When Phylicia Thomas went missing 11 years ago, family members never thought years would go by without knowing what happened to their daughter, their sister, their friend.

On Wednesday night, a candlelight vigil will be held at 7 p.m. in the Nanticoke Square along East Broad Street, not only to remember Phylicia, but

also as an opportunity to seek new information that will hopefully lead to some closure, some answers as to what happened to the young woman who simply seemed to disappear.

Pauline Bailey, Phylcia's mother, will be holding a candle in remembrance of her daughter, who would have been 33 years old this year. Last seen at her Lake Township home on Feb. 11, 2004, State Police have said they have pursued leads which so far have been fruitless.

Initially, State Police named Steven Martin of Ross Township as a person of interest. Martin was also named as a person of interest in the case of Jennifer Barziloski, 18, who disappeared in 2001.

Barziloski's skull was found near Martin's residence. Martin later died after a suicide attempt while in jail on an unrelated charge.

Family friend

Recently a family friend, Judy Fisher, stepped in to insure the case would once again come to the forefront. Writing letters, contacting police agencies and interacting with the media motivated Crime Stoppers to revisit the case last fall.

The organization is offering a \$2,000 cash reward, with no questions asked, as a reward for tips that lead to Thomas' discovery.

"We are so grateful for those in the media who again put Phylcia's name and face out there, allowing us to believe that we can have some hope," said Fisher.

And although Fisher, as well as the family, presume Thomas is dead, they continue to hope they will find out what happened.

"Pauline says she wants what every other mother wants, to know where her daughter is," Fisher added.

The public is invited to Wednesday's candlelight vigil, to remember Thomas and hopefully draw attention to the need for further information in the case.

2/2/2015

Nanticoke Historical Society plans photo tour

Paul Golias - Citizens Voice

Published: February 2, 2015

Their motto is, "If it's historical information, we want it."

The society will offer a photo tour of the city on Feb. 19 in the town council meeting room at Nanticoke's municipal building. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. and the tour begins at 7.

Tour attendees can ask to see photos of specific events or geographic locations: the return of Nanticoke servicemen from World War I, marching into the city on Main Street; the Nanticoke High School championship basketball team of 1961; the last coal mine operations in Nanticoke and Newport.

"We have tens of thousands of images available and we'll go on (showing photos) as long as the people want to stay," said Chet Zaremba, society vice president and secretary/treasurer.

Zaremba said he hopes that people fill council chambers. A previous photo tour held at the St. Faustina Cultural Center, in the former St. Stanislaus Church, drew a large crowd, he said. Photos are projected onto a 4 feet by 8 feet screen.

Zaremba and John Sherrick, both of Nanticoke, oversee the society's massive collection of historical records, photos and artifacts. The society rents the Samantha Mills House, a white frame building to the rear of the Mill Memorial Library on Kosciuszko Street, Nanticoke.

Sherrick is the society archivist and he has dedicated years to cataloging the city's history. He has photographed every tombstone in every cemetery, every building on every street and additional shots and angles of anything that might be of historical value to anyone.

And he is looking for more.

"It's sad to see a Dumpster in front of a house. Family histories are being lost. Before you throw things out, contact us," Sherrick said. "Even an old photograph of a family member in the back yard can have value. There may be something in the background."

Sherrick said the only photo of a Jewish synagogue that once existed on State Street is from such a snapshot. The synagogue is visible over the shoulder of the photograph's subject.

The society was founded in 1995 by a group led by Zaremba, 69, a retired state police sergeant and former Nanticoke police chief, and Frank Regulski, also a former chief. Like societies in Pittston, Kingston and Plymouth, it began with chats on the history of the community. The society was born when a call was put out "and people showed up and it went from there," Zaremba said.

The society began collecting material such as Nanticoke High School yearbooks, furniture donated by citizens, old photos, art work such as a painting of one-armed baseball player Pete Gray, coal company records and sports histories. Some oral histories were taken. Then the PastPerfect cataloging software was obtained with help from The Luzerne Foundation and Tony Brooks, former director of the Luzerne County Historical Society.

Then Sherrick went to work.

Sherrick, 68, began shooting photos of tombstones. He then turned to photographing buildings that once were small mine-era grocery stores.

"I thought, 'What the heck, I might as well shoot everything,'" he said.

So he photographed every building in the city. Now, he updates those shots as needed.

"Everything is searchable," Zaremba said.

The society also gives away original historical material. If an ancestor's payroll card from Susquehanna Coal Co. is found, the society will give it to the family and retain a copy. When Roger Gilbert of Wapwallopen found a 1926 gold medal given to David Price of the state championship basketball team, Gilbert gave it to the society, which in turn presented it to Greater Nanticoke Area School District for its sports trophy cases.

"That's where it belongs," Zaremba said.

Zaremba said the society's leadership team is small but dedicated: Julianna Zarzycki, president; Judith Minsavage, newsletter editor; Mike Passetti, facilities manager; Nick Pucino, public relations; Eugene Danowski, technical support; Sally Gorgas, activities director, and Bill and Kathy Sweeny,

membership.

Membership stands at about 60, Zaremba said. Dues are \$15 annually and the society relies on dues and book sales to stay solvent. Books include the society's own works, by Zaremba and the late C. Charles Ciesla, and by others, such as Gaylon White's "Story of the 1956 Los Angeles Angels," on which Nanticoke native Steve Bilko played.

1/27/2015

Citizens Voice



The Greater Nanticoke Area School District, at the Jan. 15 school board meeting, received a gold medal from the Nanticoke Historical Society commemorating the 1926 State Championship Boys Basketball Team and the team's 52 point scorer, David Price. The medal was in possession of Roger Gilbert, who donated the medal to the historical society. The board of directors at the Nanticoke Historical Society felt the school district should receive the medal to be placed in the trophy case at Greater Nanticoke High School to accompany the 1926 trophy. From left, are Dr. Ronald Grevera, superintendent; Megan Tennesen, ceremony organizer and school director; Ken James, school director and chairman of the athletic committee; Chester Zaremba, vice president of the Nanticoke Historical Society; Roger Gilbert, donor of the medal; Chet Beggs, school director and athletic committee member; John Beggs, boys head basketball coach and Ken Bartuska, athletic director.

1/18/2015

Proposed merger of Methodist churches shelved

Paul Golias - Citizens Voice

A plan to merge five Methodist Churches in the South Valley region of Luzerne County has been shelved.

Members of the congregations of Nanticoke United Methodist Church and Ashley's Centenary United Methodist Church voted "almost unanimously" against the proposed merger, members of the churches said, and that ended the talks, at least temporarily.

Gerald Wolgemuth, media director for the Susquehanna Annual Conference of the UMC, confirmed that the merger talks are on hold.

The discussions could resume "at the call of the church," he said.

Also involved were the Askam United Methodist Church in Hanover Township, Calvary United Methodist Church in West Nanticoke and the Alden Station United Methodist Church, Newport Township. The latter church has a very small congregation and utilizes a lay leader.

The Rev. Roger C. Noss Jr. is pastor of the Nanticoke and Ashley churches and the Rev. George Price III is pastor of the Askam and Calvary churches.

Under the merger plan, which was advanced by the conference's Lewisburg District several months ago, all of the churches would have been closed and a new church would be created in an existing building in the Hanover Industrial Park.

Church members, asking that they not be identified, said dwindling congregations and financial support issues prompted the merger talks. The Nanticoke and Ashley churches are more financially stable than the other congregations and churchgoers there opposed the merger and voted against it in balloting conducted by the UMC in November. Wolgemuth said vote totals from any church would not be released.

Wolgemuth affirmed the comments regarding smaller congregations and financial issues, noting that many churches have become "quite a burden" to sustain.

"This is not good stewardship," he said.

The spokesman said four local UMC churches in the Buffalo Valley area west of Lewisburg closed small houses of worship and purchased an unused rural school. They accomplished the change in three months, he said.

"The only solution at times is to pool resources," Wolgemuth said. "We are stronger together than (small churches) standing apart."

The Alden Station United Methodist Church has about 15 members and a lay leader rather than a pastor. "This is not unusual," Wolgemuth said, as there are four levels of pastors and leaders. "Lay leadership is quite common," he said.

During meetings on the proposed local merger, the possibility that the UMC might withdraw pastors and use more lay leaders was aired.

Wolgemuth said any decisions on closing churches, merging churches and pastoral levels will come only after "lots of meetings between the local churches and the Conference."

Church closings and mergers have been commonplace in Northeastern Pennsylvania in recent decades as population declines and population shifts have changed the religious landscape. One of the most historic involved First United Methodist Church of Kingston and Kingston Presbyterian Church which merged following the Agnes Flood of 1972 to create The Church of Christ Uniting, Sprague Avenue, Kingston. That church is very active in the community, including use of its kitchen by the Meals on Wheels program.

Wilkes-Barre's largest Methodist Church, First UMC on North Franklin Street, closed in the summer of 2013. Its small congregation could not sustain the 16,000-square-foot property. There are four remaining Methodist Churches scattered around the city.

Many Catholic churches in the Scranton Diocese have closed. Towns that once had multiple parishes, most of which were created to serve ethnic groups, now have one parish. Nanticoke once had five parishes but mergers led to creation of St. Faustina Kowalska Parish which uses two worship sites. Plymouth parishes merged to create All Saints Parish. Catholic populations have grown in some areas, such as Mountain Top, and construction of new churches is necessary to accommodate larger congregations. Only this week, demolition of the closed Holy Trinity (Lithuanian) Church in the Heights section of Wilkes-Barre began.

The new Jewish Community Alliance has purchased a large former supermarket on Third Avenue, Kingston and it will be converted into a multi-use building and campus. The move will allow closing or sale of some properties, again a move brought on by declining membership numbers.

1/17/2015

PSU student travels 2 hours to Nanticoke for haircut by 100-year-old barber

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When Zel Vici opened his barber shop in 1935, Ron Roenigk was still 48 years away from being born.

Roenigk, a 31-year-old graduate student at Penn State University in State College, traveled two hours to Nanticoke Friday to get a haircut from Vici, the 100-year-old iconic barber who decided not to retire at the end of 2014.

Roenigk read about Vici in a Pittsburgh newspaper. Roenigk is from Sarver in Butler County and he is studying for his MBA at Penn State.

Roenigk is engaged and getting married in June. He said he just might return to Vici's shop for his pre-wedding haircut.

And Roenigk, like any good student, did his homework on Nanticoke. After his visit with Vici, Roenigk was heading to Sanitary Bakery, Tarnowski's Kielbasa Store and Stookey's BBQ — all legendary businesses in the Nanticoke area.

"I really like the family-owned businesses," Roenigk said. "I appreciate the quality and the craftsmanship."

Vici's shop was busy Friday morning. Three customers plus Roenigk were there waiting for their turn in the chair. Roenigk seized the opportunity to learn more about Vici and Nanticoke.

Bernie Cywinski, 87, of Sheatown, has been getting his hair cut by Vici since 1945 — the year he got out of the military and returned to Nanticoke.

"This guy just does a great job," Cywinski said. "If you come here, your coming to the best."

Cywinski remembers when Nanticoke had 30-plus barber shops. Now there are just three.

"I'm glad Zel didn't retire," he said. "I don't know where I'd find another barber as good as Zel."

Roenigk was busy asking questions and learning more and more about Nanticoke, its legendary businesses and its people. He said whenever he travels, he likes to discover the hidden treasures in small towns and get a feel for each community.

"I'm sure there's only one Stookey's," he said. "And I know there's only one Zel."

Roenigk, who served in the U.S. Marine Corps, said he will be moving to South Carolina after his June 20th wedding to work for Amazon.

"Hey Zel, will you still be working in June?" Roenigk asked.

Vici assured him his intention is to still be open for business.

"Good," Roenigk said. "I think I'll be back for a haircut before the wedding."

Vici qualified his assurance by stating "if my heath is still good," but he smiled and said he would be happy to cut Roenigk's hair for his big day.

Dave Klaips of Kingston graciously gave Roenigk his place in line and the Penn State student got in the chair. He and Vici discussed how to cut his hair.

"I think I'll leave about a quarter of an inch on the sides and three-quarters of an inch on the top," Vici offered.

Roenigk agreed and when the clipping was done, Vici turned Roenigk around to see his new look in the mirror.

"Good job, Zel," he said. "I like it. I like it a lot."

Another satisfied customer.

"Zel has a tremendous work ethic," Klaips said as his turn came. "And he does it right here in front of us and he has been doing it for 80 years."

Roenigk asked to get a picture with Vici before he left. Vici was asked what he thought of Roenigk driving in from State College to have him cut his hair.

"Oh, it's a great feeling to have someone do that," Vici said. "Now, who's next?"

1/14/2015

Luzerne County Council vote leaves Nanticoke with no city tax collector

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Nanticoke has nobody to collect city taxes on its 4,236 properties because a Luzerne County Council majority did not approve a contract allowing the county treasurer's office to continue handling that work.

With the absence of county Councilman Rick Williams Tuesday, council was tied 5-5 on the matter.

The county treasurer's office started handling city collection in 2014 because it responded to Nanticoke's public advertisement seeking a collector in 2013.

Nanticoke doesn't use elected tax collectors, and city officials wanted to contract out the work instead of handling it in-house. The county treasurer's office responded because it already was collecting county taxes in the city, and the county would generate about \$10,000 in revenue annually without adding staff, officials said.

The problem: a county staff attorney concluded the administration did not need county council approval. County Chief Solicitor C. David Pedri said he recently reviewed state law and has a different opinion that council approval is mandated.

Council was asked to vote Tuesday on retroactively approving the contract.

Timing is an issue because county and municipal tax bills are scheduled to be mailed by Feb. 2. The contract said the county must inform Nanticoke by Sept. 1 of the prior year if it's not going to handle tax collection.

Nanticoke Manager Andy Gegaris said he learned about the cancellation through a news report and was reviewing options. He said the partnership was a "win-win" for both the city and county and questioned why some council members did not support it.

"This will impact our cash flow and ability to get bills out on time. What I find most troubling is that petty politics are holding the city hostage,"

Gegar said.

West Wyoming resident Ray Gustave told council he was “very disappointed” in the decision because the city entered into the contract in good faith. Council members could cancel 2016 city tax collection by Sept. 1 if they don’t believe the work is in the county’s best interest, he said.

“Mistakes happen. I believe that it is unconscionable to leave the city of Nanticoke in this position with collection of their taxes at this point in the year, when the tax bills are supposed to be going out,” Gustave said.

The five council members who voted against the contract: Edward Brominski, Kathy Dobash, Eileen Sorokas, Stephen A. Urban and Stephen J. Urban.

Some of them said they can’t vote in good conscience to legitimize something that wasn’t handled properly.

Stephen A. Urban also said Nanticoke has an “obligation” to collect its own taxes. The county is trying to get rid of roads and bridges to concentrate on essential duties, and he questioned whether other treasurer’s office work is shortchanged to take on the additional task.

Brominski said he can’t justify retroactively supporting work the county’s been doing “illegally.”

Stephen J. Urban said council’s power was usurped, and approval would compromise his ethics. He compared it to someone returning stolen goods to a store and asking for leniency.

County Manager Robert Lawton said the solicitor had an incorrect interpretation of the law in 2013, but there was no “intentional act” to circumvent council.

“I really don’t appreciate the kind of language that’s been used to describe an inadvertant mistake, but I don’t expect an apology,” Lawton said.

Councilman Jim Bobeck said the city could sue because the Sept. 1 cancellation date has long passed, and he questioned the fairness of giving the city a few weeks to find a new collector from scratch. He also stressed the work generates revenue.

“When we talk about the county getting aggressive about finding new ways to get revenue into the county without putting it on the backs of property taxes and those taxpayers here, this is exactly what we’re talking about,” Bobeck said.

Councilman Rick Morelli said the sudden cancellation is a “bad decision.”

“We’re kind of sticking it to them. It’s not fair to them, and I don’t think it’s what our job should be,” Morelli said.

Council members Harry Haas, Tim McGinley and Linda McClosky Houck also voted for the contract.

Council also failed to approve a new contract for the county treasurer’s office to start collecting county and municipal taxes in Newport Township, which requested the service because the township’s elected tax collector recently resigned. Some council members said municipalities in this position have traditionally filled such vacancies with another resident or neighboring elected tax collector.

1/10/2015

Nanticoke makes appointment to municipal authority

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

During Wednesday evening’s meeting, the city council approved the appointment of John Nadolny of East Main Street to the city’s municipal authority.

Council also approved the professional services rates between Pennoni Associates Inc. and the city for engineering services.

The approval was for any miscellaneous work and plan reviews performed on an hourly basis. Pennoni normally works with the municipality to develop fixed costs for specific efforts.

The following are the rates from Jan. 1 to Dec. 31 should the city need to utilize Pennoni’s hourly rate services: borough engineer, \$125; project engineer, \$105; staff engineer, \$88; associate engineer, \$85; graduate engineer, \$75; engineering technician, \$75; field inspector, \$65; two-man survey crew, \$145; and clerical, \$35.

The Christmas tree decorating contest raised \$185 for Toys for Tots. The trees were decorated by Greater Nanticoke Area Family Center, Nanticoke Junior Football, Girl Scout Troop 30829, Nebo Baptist Church, NEPA in Need and Northeast Counseling Act Team. The trees were on display at the municipal building through Jan. 5 where citizens were able to cast their votes for the best decorated tree. The \$1 fee to vote was donated to the Toy for Tots organization.

The council will meet next at 7 p.m. on Jan. 21.

1/2/2015

Nanticoke barber Zel Vici, 100, not ready to retire after all

Zelino ‘Zel’ Vici opened shop in 1935

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Barber Zelino “Zel” Vici, 100 and still going strong, decided he wouldn’t retire at the end of 2014 after all.

Earlier in the year, as his 100th birthday approached, Vici told the Times Leader he would retire at the end of the year.

With two days left in 2014, Vici changed his mind.

“What would I do if I retired,” Vici said while tending to a customer at his shop at South Prospect and Church streets.

“What would I do, sit on the couch all day?”

Vici said he would rather get up early, have a little breakfast and then walk down the steps to his shop, turn on the lights, open the doors and wait for customers.

“It’s what I do,” Vici said of the job he’s been doing since 1935. “I can’t do anything else. So as long as my health is good, I’ll stay open.”

Vici said his health is good, but he admits that he can no longer go for long walks because his back tightens up. He said he only drives during daylight hours.

“I only go to the grocery store, the drug store, the doctor’s office and to church,” Vici said.

Frank Waitkus of Mountain Top has been a customer of Vici’s for five years. He became a customer when his 86-year-old barber retired.

“I like the old masters,” Waitkus said. There’s no one like Zel.”

Vici still plays Frank Sinatra while he works and he enjoys Tony Bennett and Dean Martin. The old masters stick together.

“I kind of figured he would stay open,” Waitkus said. “Zel is a regional treasure.”

Vici talked about visiting his grandson in Delaware over the Christmas holiday. He bragged about his 3-year-old great-grandson who is learning to play the violin.

Vici has a son and a daughter, two grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Bryan Fullerton of Nanticoke has been getting his hair cuts at Vici’s for nearly 30 years.

“I’m glad he’s not retiring,” Fullerton said. “It’s hard to find a good barber.”

As Vici meticulously cut Fullerton’s hair, you could see his concentration. With scissors and a comb in hand, Vici can still transform overgrown mop tops into well-groomed styles ready for a job interview, a church service or a big date.

“He always does a good job,” Fullerton said. “If he didn’t do a good job, I wouldn’t keep coming back.”

So the the light will stay on at the little barber shop on the corner. Vici will be open at 6 a.m. and close at noon.

Vici said doctors gave him a pacemaker years ago to keep his heart beating. He said diabetes causes him to take insulin. But nothing slows him down.

As he swept up after a couple of customers left, you could see the smile on his face.

It’s been a long journey since he started as a lather boy for Dick Ginger around 1930 at a barber shop at West Green and Maple streets, where Vici learned his trade.

When Vici opened his shop in 1935, there were 32 barber shops in Nanticoke — now there are three.

When he closes the shop at noon, Vici has some lunch and he reads a lot. He said he sometimes takes a nap and “fools around” on the computer before going to bed around 9 p.m. He uses Skype to keep in touch with his grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

“I enjoy my job,” he said. “You have to stay active.”

And then Zelino Vici, who turned 100 on May 28th, sat down for a moment and waited for his next customer.