

12/23/2012

### **DA: No wrongdoing found at GNA**

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Cameras placed in the wrestling room of the Greater Nanticoke Area High School did not constitute criminal wrongdoing, Nanticoke police and the Luzerne County District Attorney's Office said Friday.

The cameras in the room were not in a part of the school where students are allowed to change clothes and were placed there to monitor reported bullying, according to a press release from Luzerne County District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis.

After school officials learned that students sometimes change clothes in the area monitored by cameras, the school removed the cameras, according to the release. The cameras were highly visible and no footage from them now exists, the release said.

Police started investigating Dec. 4, the day after a school board meeting when the entire board, superintendent and solicitor learned about the cameras, which by then had already been taken down.

The situation began when the school received an unspecified complaint about the wrestling program. Superintendent Anthony Perrone shared the complaint with the school board, as is customary. One board member, who school officials previously refused to name, asked the school's staff to install cameras in plain view in the wrestling room. Two days later, an administrator ordered the cameras removed because students might change clothes in the room.

12/23/2012

### **LCCC student housing still on drawing board**

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Luzerne County Community College officials believe hundreds of students would be interested in living in dormitories, if the housing were available. And a private equity firm's study backs up that belief. But under Nanticoke's zoning laws, the only place dorms could be built is nearly a mile off campus.

During a contentious city council meeting Wednesday night, a private developer's request for approval of a 240-bed, \$15 million dormitory project along Kosciuszko Street, near the college's campus entrance, was rejected because of neighbor concerns and the fact that part of the city is zoned for only single- or two-family housing.

"The council was just not interested in making a change from an R-2 zone, and 30 residents who came out were also not in favor of it," said Nanticoke City Manager Pamela Heard.

Alex Belavitz said he's surprised city leaders would reject what could have been the largest, privately funded development "in the city in a generation" – one that could have spurred tax revenue and brought more residents to the city to shop and eat. He noted the city's zoning map calls for dormitories to be located in an R-3 Zone, the closest of which would be in the vicinity of East Noble and South Chestnut streets, more than six blocks from the college's campus.

Tom Leary, Luzerne County Community College's president, said he and Belavitz spoke of the need for student housing nearly a decade ago and nothing's changed since other than student enrollment is up and the need is greater.

"It's not an absolute necessity for us," Leary said. "But it would be nice."

Since the college draws from a 10-county area, he said, often times it's difficult for students to commute back and forth; and with a lack of affordable places to live close by, it becomes a lost opportunity for some prospective students.

Belavitz, the president and CEO of Facility Design and Development, which has offices in State College, Scranton and New York, said he and private equity firm Kingsley Equity have been looking into the community's needs for some time and believed the property was ideal and the need real.

The land being considered for the project is Earth Conservancy property that was reclaimed mine land and is now a Keystone Opportunity Zone, meaning taxes will be abated through 2017. But the project still would create jobs and enter the tax rolls in five years, generating close to \$75,000 annually, Belavitz said. While he lamented the city's rejection of the project, he said the plans aren't dead.

"We remain committed to see it through," Belavitz said, though he declined to give details.

Leary said dormitories for community colleges are rare, though he mentioned Northampton Community College had a private company build dorms near its campus. He said he hopes the council's rejection is not the last time the idea is brought to the table.

Belavitz said the city has to realize "their zoning is antiquated." He hopes zoning changes are made and the project could be a viable one once more, he added.

He also hopes city council members realize that the concerns certain residents raised about noise, light and parking are easily addressed, and he said the developer is willing to work with the city to make the project happen.

12/20/2012

### **Nanticoke council shuts down plans for dorms**

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City council refused to rezone a piece of land on Kosciuszko Street across from Luzerne County Community College, effectively shutting down plans for a private developer to build a dormitory there.

At Wednesday night's meeting, Alex Belavitz of Facility Design and Development Ltd. explained how Kinsley Equities wished to completely fund the approximately \$15 million project, which would have started with housing for 240 students. Five acres of the land, part of a parcel reclaimed by the Earth Conservancy, would have been sold to the developer for \$150,000, Conservancy Executive Director Mike Dziak said.

Although LCCC would not be involved in the project or own the dorms, college officials did approve of it. In a phone interview prior to the council meeting, LCCC President Thomas P. Leary said surveys showed several hundred students indicated they could use housing, because the college serves a 10-county area.

Belavitz said the dormitories, which would be professionally managed, would be done in three phases, with housing for freshmen, upperclassmen, and townhouses for older students. He said Kinsley Equities, which has done similar projects at other colleges and universities throughout the state, wanted to be a good member of the community and would address concerns of residents, particularly those on nearby Cherry Drive.

But residents and members of council concerned over the potential for the development to be used as low-income housing weren't sold on the idea.

"I want to make sure this isn't going to be low-income housing. What kind of guarantee can you offer me?"

Councilwoman Lesley Butczynski said.

Belavitz said it could be put in as a condition of sale, but that didn't convince opponents. Resident Richard Zarzycki was concerned that if the dorm didn't work out, it could be sold by the developer to anyone for any use, including halfway houses or a minimum security prison.

"You've got your money and we've got a pain in the neck to deal with," he said.

Following much back-and-forth debate, council voted not to allow the rezoning of the property, which would have permitted higher-density development.

Dziak said that means the end of the project at that location, since a zoning change was a condition of the sale.

Although the proposed project site is in a Keystone Opportunity Zone for the next three years, meaning it is exempt from state and local taxes, when that expired the city would have stood to take in about \$75,000 a year in taxes from the \$15 million project, according to Hank Marks of the city's Redevelopment Authority.

Belavitz said he was surprised to be put in such a defensive position: earlier plans for dormitories in a different location, the site of the former 400 Club, met with approval from council, although the deal for that property ultimately fell through.

"We had their full support back in May and June for another site," Belavitz said. "We moved two blocks away, and now all this opposition."

12/20/2012

### **Student housing rejected**

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

City Council voted down plans Wednesday to turn the property near the entrance to Luzerne County Community College into a student housing complex.

Alex Belavitz, president and CEO of Facility Design and Development, Scranton, gave a thorough presentation of the proposed 240-bed facility. The facility would have included separate dwellings for freshmen, upperclassmen and older students, and single parents who might not want to live in a dorm-type setup.

The average cost for a single room would have been about \$550 per month. The facility was to be privately funded by Kingsley Equity at a cost of \$16 million. Kingsley also did a market study of LCCC students and found that 800 to 900 students would have been interested in the housing. Northampton Community College added a student housing complex managed by Kingsley, and the school's enrollment increased significantly, Belavitz said.

"It is a tremendous loss for the community of Nanticoke," he said. He added that with the addition of the complex, the

city would have seen a boost in the downtown business area, with the new residents utilizing the goods and services of the city.

Many residents were strongly opposed to the development, stating that they were afraid the property would be turned into low-income housing or that LCCC would take over the property, thus leaving the city with no tax revenue from the school.

12/17/2012

### **Skateboarders raise need for local park**

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Local skateboarders want people to take their sport seriously, and they want a park of their own to practice in without being hassled.

The North East Skate Crew and Northeast Pennsylvania Skatepark Alliance are having a premiere at 7 p.m. Thursday at Wilkes-Barre Movies 14 of "Blowin' It," a video by Dallas graduate Trevor Charles "T.C." Harding. The video features local skateboarders. The event is to raise funds for - and awareness of the need for - a skate park in the Wyoming Valley.

James Gidosh of the Northeast Pennsylvania Skatepark Alliance said the group had to pay for the venue and costs, but hopes to get about \$1,500 to \$2,000 to add to an account that includes proceeds from previous fundraisers.

Harding, who produced and directed "Blowin' It," has been making skateboarding videos since the late 1990s with his friend Jon Borthwick, also from Dallas, "but this is the best one to date."

Harding is a professional filmmaker who went to film school in Los Angeles and plans to move back there from Wilkes-Barre in the spring. His goals are to write feature films and "hopefully direct a couple someday."

People might dismiss skateboarding as a "little kid thing," but Harding doesn't think they realize how much work and passion goes into it, and how it can lead to other opportunities.

"I think you grow up a lot faster than other people do, through skateboarding," he said. "I think it teaches you to look at the world in a different way."

Most people don't go on to play professional sports, but you can always skateboard, Harding said. The best part is hanging out with your friends, but you don't need a big group, he said.

The trouble is, there aren't any venues in the Wyoming Valley specifically for skateboarders.

Two potential locations for a skate park are the Lower Broadway recreation park in Nanticoke and land owned by UGI Penn Natural Gas Inc. on Water Street near the courthouse in Wilkes-Barre, but both projects are stalled.

In the meantime, local skateboarders are frustrated. One of them posted to YouTube a two-part video compilation showing himself and his friends getting kicked off various properties around the county, from Nanticoke to Shickshinny.

Wilkes-Barre's riverside park is a popular hangout for skateboarders, to city and county officials' chagrin.

Luzerne County Flood Protection Authority Director Jim Brozena said they are committing acts of vandalism, and "the county has to spend dollars to repair things they should not have to repair."

"The concern obviously is, especially on the River Common, is that they seem to have become more destructive in the things they are doing, not just to the materials, but with graffiti and other things," he said.

Brozena said there was an attempt to put together a consortium with Wilkes-Barre, the county and UGI to build a skate park at the vacant property on Water Street, but discussions broke off and nothing came of it.

He said, "We're still interested in seeing that happen," but "the financial constraints make it very difficult to proceed at this point."

Nanticoke Administrator Pam Heard said the city is further along in the skate park process because it is in the master plan, there is already land set aside for it, and city and state officials have been meeting regularly with the Skatepark Alliance.

There's one big catch: "It's all about the funding," Heard said.

Skate parks can be expensive, starting at approximately \$200,000, not including maintenance, she said.

"We are doing our best to find some way to get it done," Heard said.

The city received a state grant for a walking trail at the Lower Broadway park, but at the time of application, Nanticoke hadn't finished the process of obtaining ownership of the land for the skate park.

Heard said the city partnered with the Skatepark Alliance to try for a grant through skateboard legend Tony Hawk or a share of the Mericle kids-for-cash money, but didn't receive either. She said they are still looking at grants, but, with the current economy, "Recreation really isn't on the priority list for funding right now in Pennsylvania."

Gidosh is aware of the financial situation.

"I know there's not a lot of funding to go around," he said. "I think we're probably going to be waiting a lot longer." State Rep. Gerald Mullery's Chief of Staff Leigh Bonczewski said the office is "always there to help the city" and bought some tickets for Thursday's movie to support the Skatepark Alliance.

Nanticoke is undergoing revitalization, and the skate park "will be a big piece of it when it all comes together," Bonczewski said.

"It may take some time, but it will happen," he said.

#### QUICK INFO:

The North East Skate Crew and Northeast Pennsylvania Skatepark Alliance will premiere a video featuring local skateboarders at 7 p.m. Thursday at Movies 14 in Wilkes-Barre. Tickets are \$5 at the theater, or can be reserved by emailing nepaskatepark@yahoo.com. Proceeds will go toward the construction of a skate park.

12/10/2012

#### **Furnace blamed for fire**

Times Leader

An early-morning fire Sunday destroyed a double-block house on Coal Street and left two people homeless.

The alarm for the blaze came in just before 6 a.m., and firefighters arrived to find flames in the rear of the building. A second alarm was shortly sounded.

Fire departments from Newport Township, Plymouth Township, Hanover Township and Edwardsville responded to assist Nanticoke.

The fire was knocked down within an hour, but the house was extensively damaged. The structure was later demolished. The fire was determined to be accidental and caused by a problem with the furnace.

Four firefighters suffered minor injuries, and one was treated at Wilkes-Barre General Hospital and released.

A fund has been set up to help the residents, and donations can be made to: The Stortz Family Fund, c/o Vantage Trust Bank, 158 S. Main St., Nanticoke, PA 18634.

In addition, clothing for an adult male and female can be dropped at the Nanticoke Fire headquarters at 2 E. Ridge St.

12/7/2012

#### **Nanticoke passes audit, holds tax line**

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

The city's 2011 audit report of financial statements has been completed by Joe Aliciene, a certified public accountant from an independent auditing firm.

Aliciene told council Wednesday night the city has received a "clean report" and that it is in "coordination with the standard fund balance." Aliciene added that "everything is true and correct within the financial statement."

The 2013 draft budget has been submitted to council. Property tax millage will remain at 4.0534 for the upcoming year, with no property tax increase. The general fund budget is \$4.9 million.

In other matters: council has passed a resolution to forgive taxes for New Horizons, a nonprofit entity, in the amount of \$1,800. The request was submitted by the city's housing authority.

Council gave the first reading of an ordinance to ban tobacco on Patriot Square. Council President Steve Duda said there have been numerous complaints regarding the cigarette butts and the fact that very young people are smoking in the park. Duda further stated that council has to "make it aggressive (so this can) happen for the kids." Duda also noted that cameras are being used in the park in order to monitor the activity.

The pedestrian bridge at the municipal building is nearly complete, with only minor finishing details left. As well, the road work at Union and Prospect streets has been completed. The Public Works Department has utilized 12 tons of asphalt to patch pot holes within the city's streets.

12/6/2012

#### **Nanticoke adopts \$4.9M budget with no tax hike**

Bill Wellock - Citizens Voice

Published: December 6, 2012

Residents won't see an increase next year in property taxes or income taxes according to a budget that council passed

unanimously Wednesday.

The property tax rate will remain at 4.0594 mills. A mill is a \$1 tax on every \$1,000 in assessed property value. The income tax rate will stay at 2 percent.

The \$4.9 million budget is about \$560,000 more than last year's budget.

The city, like many other county municipalities, has been beset by income tax problems this year after collection agency Centax went out of business and didn't distribute tax revenue on schedule. City manager Pamela Heard said Nanticoke is still due about \$500,000 in income tax revenue, and took out a loan this year to make up the difference.

The city will pay off that loan at the end of this year and promptly take out another \$410,000 loan for 2013.

"We're hoping the courts will do their job and we'll get the money, just belatedly," Heard said.

The budget anticipates the city will collect about \$180,000 more in income taxes this year than it budgeted - not what it has collected - last year.

Heard said she's confident in the estimate, and said the Pennsylvania Economy League, which is working with Nanticoke as it climbs out of distressed status, approved the budget.

The city plans to spend about \$182,000 more on its police department next year, which will add several part-time officers to the department. Heard moved from a finance position to city manager this year, and her old position was split between two people, saving the city about \$47,000, according to the budget. The city also did not replace a retiring tax department worker and didn't budget any money for the home-rule transition, which officials said is near completion.

In other business:

Council is considering banning tobacco and smoking on Patriot Square. The ban would mean people could not use any tobacco products, including smokeless products, or engage in any other smoking. Fines for breaking the law would range from \$50 to \$300. Council will take a final vote on the ordinance Dec. 19.

"It's a much-needed ordinance. We have to start somewhere," said council President Steve Duda. "We're being proactive and aggressive. It's our youth, our future. If we can do something as a city, we should."

The city will hold a meeting on its distressed status at 7 p.m. Dec. 10. The next city council meeting will take place at 7 p.m. Dec. 19.

12/5/2012

### **Assistant takes over for a legend**

### **Stetz named as successor for longtime Nanticoke head coach Gary Williams.**

John Medeiros - Times Leader

For the first time in 23 years, [Nanticoke](#) will have a new softball coach.

Ryan Stetz was named to take over the program from retiring coach Gary Williams. The school announced Stetz's promotion Tuesday morning, after the approval of the School Board on Monday night.

"It feels really good," Stetz said of his first head coaching appointment. "It's great to feel the excitement of the students at the school and the members of the team. Also, the support of the faculty and administration has been great."

Stetz has served as an assistant with the team the past three seasons, including being there when the 2010 squad won the PIAA Class 2A state championship. During that time, the Trojanettes went 69-6.

"Obviously, that's a combination of great coaching on Gary's part and great players," Stetz said. "It was a lot of fun to be a part of it."

Stetz is a 1996 graduate of Nanticoke, where he was a multi-sport standout at the school. He was selected as Athlete of the Year by the school for the 1995-96 school year and was his senior class' president. During his playing days, Stetz played wide receiver and defensive back for the Trojans football team, was an all-star guard on the basketball team and was a standout center fielder for the baseball team.

Baseball was his top sport, as he was an offensive dynamo while starting for three seasons with the Trojans. He continued his playing career at Lackawanna College, earning roles with the Lackawanna baseball and basketball teams. He continued his education at Bloomsburg University, where he completed his bachelor's degree, and then Wilkes, where he earned a master's degree in education.

"In a sense, being a teacher, you see so many different things," Stetz said. "If you had told me five years ago about softball, I never would have thought about being the head coach. But there are so many great families involved and a great history in the program.

"Even former players have been in contact with kind words of support."

After college, he returned to the Nanticoke school district as first an alternative education teacher and currently as a social studies teacher. During his 12 years at his alma mater, he has served as an assistant with the Trojans football



team, and is currently an assistant with the boys basketball squad.

Williams leaves the Nanticoke softball program after 22 seasons with the Trojanettes. He compiled a 330-166 record and won PIAA Class 2A state championships in 2003 and 2010.

In 2003, Nanticoke defeated Center High 4-0 in the final. The title was the first for a Wyoming Valley Conference school in softball. In 2010, Williams led his squad to an 11-inning, 3-1 victory over Philipsburg-Osceola.

The Trojanettes were wildly successful under Williams through his final game, a PIAA semifinal loss to District 4 champion Warrior Run on June 11. The team completed a perfect regular season in 2011, losing the District 2 final to Elk Lake.

"I'd be a fool not to," Stetz said when asked if he would seek out advice from Williams. "And I'll take aspects of what I've learned from other coaches, too. But I will put my own mark on the team, too."

11/27/2012

### **Fundraising effort ongoing for planned skateboarding park project**

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Building a skateboarding park may take some time, but the enthusiasts who believe it will happen one day are still trying to raise funds for the project.

James Gidosh of the North East Skateboard Pennsylvania Skate Park Alliance said Monday a skateboarding video will be premiered at Movies 14 in Wilkes-Barre on Dec. 20 at 7 p.m.

The event, sponsored by the North East Skateboard Crew, will request a \$5 donation, and proceeds will go to the construction of a skate park in Nanticoke as part of the Lower Broadway Recreational Area project.

"We are having the event to try to get some steam to get the ball really rolling on the skate park project and show how much of an interest there is for skateboarding in the area," Gidosh said.

Gidosh said Trevor Harding and John Borthwick of Dallas have been putting together footage all summer long from local skaters.

Gidosh said the Skate Park Alliance has applied for grant funding from the Mericle funds from the "kids for cash" scandal and the Tony Hawk Skate Park Grant, but hasn't had any approvals to date.

Pam Heard, Nanticoke city manager, said the Lower Broadway Recreational Area is split into two projects on opposite sides of the street.

On one side of the road, soccer fields are being renovated and walking trails installed through a state grant. The project cost is \$120,000 and the city was required to match the state funding.

Heard said the city has title to most of the property on the other side of the street and all legal issues have been resolved. What is needed now is more state funding to build the skate park and other facilities.

"A skate park is still in the plans, but right now we are concentrating on the soccer fields and trails," Heard said. "If someone gave the city the money today, we would put a skate park there. It is something we are working on, but there are no plans to break ground or announce funding."

State Sen. John Yudichak, D-Plymouth Township, said that several years ago his office helped secure a \$100,000 state grant for the city to study and plan a regional park in the Lower Broadway section of Nanticoke between the West Nanticoke Bridge and the Weis Grocery Store.

"A citizens committee helped plan the park that we hoped would add new recreational amenities to the city, including a skate park," Yudichak said. "Early into the project we faced many legal issues regarding the landowners in the proposed park area. The legal issues slowed us down considerably, but they had to be resolved before we could proceed."

Gidosh said the Skate Park Alliance has raised a little more than \$5,000 with various concerts, skateboard contests and other events over the years to help contribute to the project.

11/16/2012

### **Clinic gives city hope for revival**

### **Geisinger Health System breaks ground for facility in Nanticoke.**

Matt Hughes - Times Leader

Pictured, from left, Marie Grabowski, MD, Pediatrician, Partners in Pediatrics-Nanticoke; Susan Werner, MD, Family Physician, Geisinger-Kistler Clinic and future Geisinger-Nanticoke; Michael Ryan, DO, Chairman, Janet Weis Children's Hospital; John Yudichak, Pennsylvania State Senator; Pam Heard,



Nanticoke City Manager; John Gardner, MD, Department Medical Director, Community Practice, Luzerne County; and Kathy Reposa, Operations Manager, Community Practice, Luzerne County; ceremoniously break ground for the upcoming Geisinger-Nanticoke clinic.

Nanticoke planners are hoping a new health clinic in the heart of downtown will help bring back the city's pulse.

Geisinger Health System broke ground Friday on a new 12,000-square-foot facility on Main Street that health system officials said will house two physician offices and provide jobs for 11 new hires.

City, state and health system officials said the new practice will be a cornerstone of the city's economic revitalization. The two-story building will go up on a vacant East Main Street lot next to Luzerne County Community College's Health Science Center, the other base of that redevelopment.

"I'm a very strong believer that a good medical practice can be an anchor for a community," said Dr. John Gardner, Geisinger's medical director for Luzerne County. "Much like good schools and churches, a medical practice can be a keystone a community can coalesce around and build and begin to grow."

City Manager Pam Heard said the health care building will generate tax revenue for the city, create jobs and draw people into the city center, bolstering businesses in the area and creating opportunities for new businesses.

"We've got little businesses springing up all over town," Heard said, pointing out a T-shirt shop and a coffee shop across East Main Street, both recent additions to Nanticoke's downtown.

#### Road project coming

Heard said the revitalization will also be advanced by a pending PennDOT road improvement project on Main and Market Street, which she compared to the streetscape project in downtown Pittston.

State Sen. John Yudichak said a group of Nanticoke business owners called the South Valley Partnership, together with the city and Nanticoke Municipal Authority, envisioned the development of a downtown LCCC campus and of a "health care corridor" would be two pillars of the new downtown.

The first component was accomplished with LCCC's moving of its health science school into the former Kanjorski Building and its construction of a new culinary school on East Main Street. Geisinger's move is the first step in the second component's development, Yudichak said.

"We're going to put the educational facilities with the health care facilities and create a new base," Yudichak said. "We can attract new businesses to the downtown, new companies to the downtown, new people."

The \$3.8 million building will provide offices for Dr. Marie Grabowski, who will relocate from her existing office in Nanticoke, and Dr. Susan Werner, a family practitioner who will move from the Kistler Clinic in Wilkes-Barre.

It will also be staffed by an advanced practitioner, four nurses, a phlebotomist to work in an onsite lab, four office staff and a ProvenHealth Navigator – a liaison who advises patients with chronic conditions on lifestyles and health care management. Geisinger spokesman Matt Van Stone said those positions would all be filled by new hires.

#### Seventh pediatric office

The new clinic will house Geisinger's seventh pediatric office in Luzerne County and marks the health system's third major expansion in 18 months. The system recently opened after-hours walk-in clinics in Dallas and Mountain Top and the Tambur Family Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at its medical center in Plains Township.

Geisinger officials said it would bring essential services closer to the Nanticoke community.

"We already provide medical care to a lot of people in this community, so the idea is to go to the people, rather than having the people travel to us," Gardner said.

Construction is scheduled to begin Monday. Geisinger expects it will open in late spring.



11/16/2012

**Teacher a space finalist**

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

Greater Nanticoke Area High School chemistry teacher Anthony Fleury has been selected as one of 10 finalists in the nation to participate in a one week space exploration training program, school officials said at Thursday night's school board meeting.

The program will determine the teacher who will be selected to be launched into space, at a time to be determined in the near future. The program is a private one, not affiliated with the U.S. government.

Fleury has attended several robotics programs at NASA and has an avid interest in the subject of space exploration.

Grace Corrigan, mother of the late teacher Christa McAuliffe, who died in the space shuttle Challenger disaster, spoke at the high school in March 2008.

11/16/2012

**PIAA rejects transfer's appeal to play for Crestwood**

Times Leader

By a vote of 6-0, Luke Casey was denied eligibility to play basketball for Crestwood this year at a hearing held at PIAA headquarters in Mechanicsburg on Thursday.

Last month by a vote of 11-0, the District 2 committee ruled Casey was ineligible to play basketball after transferring from Nanticoke Area prior to the start of the 2012 school year. The District 2 committee voted believing the transfer was based on athletic purposes.

Student athletes are not allowed to transfer for athletic purposes per PIAA rules.

Casey, a junior, is ineligible to play basketball for one year at Crestwood but is eligible to participate in other sports.

After being rejected by the District 2 committee, the local branch of the PIAA, Casey had the right to appeal the decision to the PIAA.

As a sophomore at Nanticoke Area, Casey played in 21 games and was the second-leading scorer on the team averaging 9.4 points and in one game scored a season-high 20. He finished the year with 197 total points and shot 62.8 percent from the foul line.

11/13/2012

**MAIL BAG LETTERS FROM READERS**

Times Leader

**Education support staff deserve recognition**

On Wednesday we celebrate national Education Support Professionals Day. Classrooms are much more than four walls with students in desks and teachers at the front of the room. It takes a complete team of hardworking individuals to provide the children with the skills, resources and support they need to be successful.

The dedication of these teams ensures that students have a safe, clean and welcoming environment for learning. Aides, secretaries, hall monitors, cafeteria workers, custodians, maintenance workers, crossing guards, transportation assistants, attendance officers, to name a few, contribute to the well-being of our students.

All too often their efforts are lost in the daily routines of the classrooms. But on their day of recognition we thank them for their commitment to the students they work with on a daily basis.

We ask that everyone, especially students and parents, help us celebrate Education Support Professionals Day by expressing their gratitude to education support staff workers for the roles they play in inspiring confidence in our students and helping them develop the skills that they will need in the future.

James D. Verazin President

Greater Nanticoke Area Support Staff Professionals

11/7/2012

**Williams steps down as Nanticoke softball coach**

Jill Snowdon - Citizens Voice

In 22 years as Nanticoke Area's softball coach, Gary Williams has helped make an impact on the athletic careers of



countless young women.

But three special little ladies have made a big enough effect on Williams for him to say it is time to step down. "There's a lot of factors, but most importantly, I have three little granddaughters that I'd like to visit more often," Williams said on Monday.

Two of Williams' granddaughters, ages 4 and five months, live in Texas, while his 1-year old granddaughter lives in San Diego.

Williams, who retired from teaching chemistry five years ago, will have more free time now to travel and see the babies. "When my most recent granddaughter was born, we were in the playoffs, so I wasn't there for her birth and had to go out after the season," Williams said.

Williams racked up 330 career wins and just 166 losses with the Trojanettes. In addition, Nanticoke has won seven Wyoming Valley Conference championships, six District 2 titles and two AA state championships under his watch. This past season, the Trojanettes finished 22-4 and won the Division I East title as well as the District 2 Class AA championship.

Nanticoke Area lost to Warrior Run in the PIAA Class AA semis.

"I've had the opportunity to coach great kids and coach in some great games," Williams said. "Of course the state title games will always be right up there, but one game that always comes to mind is our two-day 21-inning game against Mifflinburg in 2003."

Williams met with the team Monday and informed them of his retirement but also reminded them that he will remain a big supporter of Nanticoke Area softball and he's just a phone call away should they ever need him.

There isn't a replacement lined up just yet for the head coaching position, but Williams endorses one of his assistants, Ryan Stetz. Stetz, who teaches in the Nanticoke Area School District, has been with the team for two years and has coached various sports throughout the area.

"I think Ryan would be a great asset to the program," Williams said. "He has the capability, the knowledge and the energy and I really hope he gets considered."

11/7/2012

### **On Campus Bill Arsenault**

Times Leader

**NEARHOUSE AN ALL-STAR** – Old Dominion junior Kati Nearhouse (Nanticoke) is a case in point that you don't have to be a big scorer to be a key performer on your team.

The 5-foot-6 midfielder and co-captain has scored two goals and has two assists this season but she was named to the Colonial Athletic Association first team for the other parts of her game.

She is outstanding at both ends of the field and is a big reason why the Monarchs finished the regular season 14-5, with a 7-0 mark in the CAA to capture the league title and earn a berth to the NCAA Division I Tournament.

Nearhouse was a scorer last season (eight goals and five assists for 21 points) and helped Old Dominion post a 22-3 record. The team defeated Ohio State (4-0) and Duke (2-1) before losing to eventual champion Maryland 4-0 in the NCAA semifinals. Nearhouse earned second team All-American and All-CAA honors.

"Our goal is to make it to the Final Four again," Nearhouse was quoted as saying on the Old Dominion web site.

And, if the Monarchs do make it, they'll be playing on their home field. The Final Four is set for Nov. 16-18 at the Powhatan Sports Complex in Norfolk, Va.

**LITTLEFORD LED THE WAY** – The Keystone women's soccer team finished with a 3-12-2 overall record and a 1-8-2 mark in the Colonial States Athletic Conference but the team got a big effort from Samantha Littleford.

Littleford (Nanticoke) led the Giants in goals (five), assists (four) and points (14). She was also a junior captain.

"Sam is a player with strong technical ability and great field awareness and that makes her very dangerous to stop," coach Noel Cox said. "She was asked to step into a more attacking midfield role during the course of the year with the amount of injuries we sustained. She was often the key player we played through to get our attack going."

Junior Rebecca Dinelli (Nanticoke) was also a member of the squad. The starting goalkeeper last year as a freshman, she played midfield this season. She did find time to play in four games, with two starts as keeper, and posted a 1-1 record. She gave up five goals and had 20 saves.

"Becca is the ultimate team-first player," Cox said. "After starting in goal last year she stepped up for her team and saw most of her minutes in the midfield. She was a strong defensive presence and a key playmaker for our attack. She and Sam are laying the foundation to help turn this program around."

10/29/2012

## **Lineup is easy to prepare if you can spell 'Schinski'**

### **Nanticoke features 3 talented sisters in its starting six heading into district tourney.**

Tom Fox - Times Leader

She stepped onto the court, nervous and unsure of what to expect. Then again, that would seem to be a common occurrence from a freshman in her first varsity match.

That's when Nanticoke's Kassie Schinski took a quick glance around the court and saw big sisters Kayley and Kendell.

"It's pretty exciting and nerve-racking all at the same time," Kassie said. "I don't want to mess up on the court because I don't want to let my teammates and sisters down. They are great to me. They tell me to just do my best and that's good enough."

It's something that you don't see too often.

Sure, you see two sisters on the same team – and even on the court -- at the same time. A set of twins may come up through the system every now and then, too.

But at Nanticoke, you have the Schinski girls. All on the court at the same time. All aligned on the same row during certain moments.

Kayley is a senior, and a three-sport standout who is looking to major in nursing when she attends college. She has applied to such institutions like Bloomsburg, Misericordia and Luzerne County Community College.

Kendell is a junior who loves the sport of volleyball, and hopes to play in college.

Kassie is the youngest, just a freshman, who expects to make a difference on the basketball court as well. In her first season, she has 31 kills, nine blocks, three assists, four digs, 13 aces and 79 service points.

Now, add to it that all three girls are starters on the varsity volleyball team, which enters the District 2 Class 2A playoffs as the No. 2 seed behind undefeated Holy Redeemer.

"It's something we've always talked about," said Kayley, who has 140 kills and 133 service points this season. "I'm glad that we got the opportunity to play together for one season. It was such a great experience, especially in my senior year."

Deb Krupinski admits she didn't know how to handle it.

"I had sisters and we were extremely competitive," the Nanticoke head coach said. "And yes, at times, we did fight. But I don't see it with these girls. They don't fight at all. For me, it was a change because I've never had three sisters together like this. I didn't know how it would work out, and you wonder about it. At practice, I pulled them on the side and said I was going to look at each one as an individual and see how each one would fit into our scheme."

Just watch the girls on the court for one second, and all the questions are answered.

The smiles never leave their faces. If one sister is down, the other two run over to slap her on the back.

"I love them. We don't fight," said Kendell, who has 63 kills and 172 service points. "We are so close, and we do a lot of stuff together. Our family is close. And we work so well together on the court. We are always there to keep each other up."

Krupinski says each one is different in her own way.

"Kayley is outgoing, a great leader and a role model for her sisters," the head coach said. "She is very mature and easy to get along with. Kendell is very coachable and has a great understanding of the game. Kassie is so quiet and shy, but she has so much ability. And what sets her apart is she's the lefty of the group."

Sports are always the talk around the Schinski house. That, and the possibility of a district title.

"We sit down and talk about what we did, and what we could do better," Kayley said. "With playoffs starting, we talk about how amazing it would be to win a title. It's going to be tough because there are a lot of good teams in the district, and Holy Redeemer is undefeated."

All three sisters know the volleyball season is dwindling down. It's one game at a time, all must-win contests. There are no more regular-season contests left.

And that means time together on the court is almost done.

"I'm so glad that I had this opportunity. I'm going to miss playing with Kayley next year," Kassie said. "We are all really close, and hang out all the time. It was a big help to play on the same court with both of them. Hopefully, we'll be able to win a district title together."

10/27/2012

## **Nanticoke Area, police deserve commendations**

Nanticoke police acted quickly and appropriately in advising Greater Nanticoke Area School District of a potential threat from a shotgun-toting man on Thursday.

The 20-year-old was apprehended in a wooded area of the city's Honey Pot section and he will face charges. He also will get help in dealing with personal issues that prompted his alleged firing of the shotgun in the woods.

There was a fear that people connected to the school system might be targets of the gunman. Police advised the school district of the situation and the school system also acted appropriately in locking down its buildings.

In lockdown, the students are safeguarded in their classrooms while police maintain a presence outside the buildings.

Such precautions may seem to be an overreaction at times but it is far better to be cautious. The infamous Columbine High School massacre of April 1999 left 12 students and one teacher dead and many others wounded in that Colorado community. The mere thought of a Columbine-style incident is enough to frighten parents, teachers and law officers.

The 2007 shooting spree at Virginia Tech left 32 dead and 17 wounded. That incident sparked complaints that university officials did not act rapidly in warning the university population of the threat. People were killed in two episodes of gunfire about two hours apart.

Greater Nanticoke Area also merits a commendation for advising parents of the situation via an automated telephone messaging system.

We are sure that other police departments and school districts have taken note. The rapid response and prompt implementation of safety measures show an awareness that reflects well on all agencies involved.

10/29/2012

### **109th Field Artillery is rich in history, service**

Paul Golias - Citizens Voice

The recent deployment of 190 members of the 1st Battalion, 109th Field Artillery, to Kuwait continues a chain of military service by area citizens that dates to 1775.

The Guardsmen in training for service in Kuwait constitute the 10th group of 109th soldiers deployed either as members of a unit of the 109th or as individual "backfill" servicemen and women.]

Those on "backfill" are assigned to other units to fill their ranks. In either case, as a unit member or a backfill soldier, the duty gives the 109th yet another presence in a region of conflict or an area where support is rendered to those in harm's way.

"Some of these men and women are on their third, fourth or even a fifth deployment," said Staff Sgt. Christopher J. Keen, 109th unit historian. Keen, of Dallas, also does career counseling, handles human resources work and can become a gun section chief when necessary.

Sitting in his office at the 109th Armory, Market Street, Wilkes-Barre, Keen easily rolls out overall 109th history and anecdotes, all of which he also shares with Guardsmen who, he says, are beginning to take a sharper interest in military history.

The terror attacks on the United States of Sept. 11, 2001, forced the U.S. Department of Defense to rely on Army Reserve and National Guard units for direct and support roles as wars were waged in Afghanistan and Iraq. The latter has officially ended but the U.S. still has a combat presence in Afghanistan and a wider presence in the Middle East. The last direct combat-zone role for the 109th came in 2009-2010 when 30 soldiers went to Iraq in a backfill deployment.

Here are the deployments, as listed by the 109th, since the terror attack:

n July 2002 to July 2003, five soldiers to Bosnia.

n July 2002 to March 2003, 85 members of Battery C, to Germany under what was dubbed Task Force Keystone.

n December 2003 to March 2005, 300 soldiers to Iraq and Kuwait.

n August 2005 to August 2006, 10 soldiers to Iraq.

n July 2006 to July 2007, 50 soldiers to Iraq.

n November 2007 to November 2008, 140 soldiers to Afghanistan and 40 others filled backfill roles with other units in Egypt, handling a United Nations peacekeeping mission in the Sinai Desert of Egypt, at the Israeli border.

n September 2008 to September 2009, 100 soldiers of Battery B to Iraq.

n June 2009 to June 2010, 30 soldiers to Iraq.

n October 2012, 190 soldiers to Kuwait in a backfill deployment expected to last one year.

The total number of 109th Guardsmen deployed to date under Mideast-related operations stands at about 940.

Keen said that backfill assignments are filled first by volunteers and then by matching military specialty needs with men and women and have not been yet deployed. Then, the ranks of those previously deployed are tapped to fill out the roster.

"Sometimes those deployed for a fourth or fifth time have served on (active) duty before joining the National Guard," he explained. "While on active duty, they might have served overseas one or more times."

Deployments are limited by congressional action to one year. After allowing for training, the actual time overseas averages nine months, Keen said.

The makeup of a military unit, its strength and its base of operations can change repeatedly. The 109th no longer has a Battery C, for example. That unit having been disbanded following its 2002 deployment. Members were transferred to other units.

The 109th currently has its Headquarters and Service Company at the 109th Armory, Battery A in Plymouth and Battery B in Nanticoke. Each battery has eight self-propelled howitzers. Lt. Col. Scott Mathna is the 109th commanding officer. The 109th traces its lineage to Oct. 17, 1775, when the 24th Regiment of the Connecticut Militia was organized by Col. Zebulon Butler. Connecticut and Pennsylvania both claimed possession of Northeastern Pennsylvania at the time and the matter was not settled until after the Revolutionary War.

Keen said the 109th is one of only a few military units in the U.S. to carry flags of two states - Connecticut and Pennsylvania, along with the National colors and the battalion crest.

"That reflects the unique history of this unit," he said, noting that Connecticut carried the local militia on its rolls even after the post-war land issue settlement.

Over the years, the 109th or predecessors served in or were activated for these wars or conflicts:

n Revolutionary War: The 24th won seven battle streamers, including Sept. 11, 1777 at Brandywine under Gen. George Washington. The unit was decimated at the Battle of Wyoming on July 3, 1778, when attacked by British, Tory and Indian forces.

n War of 1812: Unit members served on Navy gunboats, including the USS Niagara at the Battle of Lake Erie.

n Mexican-American War, 1848: Company I of the 1st Volunteer Regiment served under Gen. Winfield Scott, winning two battle streamers.

n Civil War, 1861-1865: The 143rd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry Regiment earns streamers in eight campaigns, including the major battles at Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor and Petersburg. Two men, Sgt. Patrick Delacey and Sgt. James Rutter, win the Medal of Honor.

n Civil War, Spanish-American War, 1898, in training as the war ended; loss of about 20 soldiers to disease.

n Mexican border conflict, 1916, as the 9th Pennsylvania Infantry. Converted to 3rd Pennsylvania Artillery because infantry units were not needed. Deployed but saw no action.

n World War I, 1918, deployed and went into combat in August as the 109th Field Artillery. Earned five battle streamers. Used French 75mm howitzers, four of which stand in front of the armory today.

n World War II: Landed in Europe on July 22, 1944, and fought into Paris, where the unit paraded through the city. Immediately sent to Hurtgen Forest where nearly all unit soldiers were casualties of severe weather and fighting during the Battle of the Bulge. The 109th won five battle streamers and a Presidential Unit Citation.

n Korean War, 1950-1953: The famous train wreck that claimed the lives of 33 Guardsmen occurred Sept. 11, 1950, as the unit rode in passenger cars at Coshocton, Ohio, en route to training in Indiana. The 109th was deployed to Germany to face off with the Soviet Union in the Cold War.

n Post-Sept. 11, 2001: Deployments as outlined.

The only break in the chain occurred during the Vietnam War when the 28th Infantry Division, which got extra training as a Selected Reserve Force, was not activated. Histories of that war recount that President Lyndon Johnson was reluctant to call up Guard units because he did not want to admit that the nation was so deeply involved in a war that required call up of reservists and Guardsmen.

The 109th also has done flood disaster duty, including the 1972 Agnes flood that ravaged the Wyoming Valley. The unit was activated in April 1968 when rioting began in U.S. cities following the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King, but the unit was not deployed.

The 1950 train disaster is recalled annually with a ceremony in front of the armory at a monument to the dead.

Despite its under-strength size due to deployments, the 109th trains annually in the summer, usually at Fort Pickett, Va., Keen said.

Sidebar

The 109th Armory was opened in 1932. It has housed varying numbers of National Guard soldiers, covering eras of horse-drawn caissons and guns, through 105 mm, 155 mm and 8-inch truck-drawn guns up to today's self-propelled

howitzers.

Ironically, the howitzers of today are with units in Nanticoke (Battery B) and Plymouth (Battery A). The armory houses the Headquarters and Service Battery. The howitzers are brought to the armory on occasion for joint drills.

Rumors abound, as they have off and on for the last decade, that the armory could one day be sold by the state and the historic 109th consolidated into a centralized Army Reserve/Guard center as has been done in Lackawanna County.

The armory has been a venue over the years for circuses, trade shows, basketball games, civic events such as the testimonial dinner held there for U.S. Rep. Daniel J. Flood, and myriad other events.

When built, it included stables and underground storage for caissons and carriages.

Artillery Park, now used by Wilkes University, is state-owned and leased to the university. It once housed a minor league baseball team and it is famous as the site where Babe Ruth said he hit the longest home run of his career. In the 1920s, officers of the 109th played polo against Ivy League schools at Artillery Park.

10/21/2012

**Like father, like son**

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The rebuilding of the Nanticoke Area soccer program from the ashes began with a father and his son.

Head coach Mark Matusek needed a new assistant for the 2012 season. His longtime second-in-command, Ryan Amos, had been the girls soccer coach in addition to his duties with the boys program. But when the PIAA moved girls soccer from the spring to the fall, Amos elected to stay with the girls program, creating an opening on Matusek's staff.

Matusek immediately sought out Ed Lukowski, an area club team coach and teacher at Nanticoke Area whose son, Ed, was entering his freshman year at Nanticoke.

The elder Lukowski played for Matusek from 1993-96 and is still the school's all-time leader with 163 points.

"I went over to him and said: 'I need an assistant coach,'" Matusek recalled. "He said, 'yea,' and that was it. He didn't take too long to answer."

The Trojans' revival, with father and son on board, was immediate. They went from 0-16 last year to 10-5 this season, while the young Lukowski tallied 17 goals and 10 assists as a midfielder.

"You can see the impact by the turnaround from 0 wins to 10 wins," Matusek said. "Other players have factored into it, but Ed has been the biggest factor."

"When Ed the father gives instructions, everybody listens. His knowledge of the game, they know they can gain a lot from that."

The elder Lukowski had his son on the road to varsity standout from an early age. He purchased the son his first soccer ball as an infant. When the son learned to walk, he would attempt to kick the ball, more often than not just nudging the ball forward an inch or two.

When the son grew up and began playing youth soccer, the father would take the son to Westside Park in Nanticoke. There, he would run his son through an assortment of agility drills.

At the time, the son did not quite understand what his father was doing. But the father was doing what came naturally to him: coaching his son.

And he has continued to mentor his son throughout the years as the coach of numerous club and travel teams.

"There is a fine line treating him as another player and as a son," the father said. "On the field, I know he doesn't like the way I coach. We always have conflict when he's on the field because I see things that he doesn't, and he is reading the game differently than I am. Sometimes, we butt heads during the game, but after the game, we see things eye to eye because he always sees it my way then."

The son has gotten used to the father's coaching style, although disagreements are inevitable.

"It's pretty much a love-hate thing," the son said. "He definitely pushes me harder, corrects the things I don't do right and tries to help me get better."

The son immediately established himself as one of the WVC's young stars, breaking the Trojans' freshman record for goals scored. On the practice field, the father does not play favorites. The son has to carry the Gatorade coolers out to the practice field, just like any other freshman.

"He doesn't treat him any differently than any of the other players," Matusek said. "But the son really looks up to him. He is very coachable. He wants to keep improving, and he has goals. He wants to be the best player he can become."

If his freshman season is any indication, the son might one day eclipse his father in the school's record book. The son is 119 points shy of the father's points record with three years to go.

"If it happens, I'd be fine with it. Hopefully, later than sooner," the father joked. "No, I'd like to see him break it. I'm not



holding it that close. Hopefully, he does because that would mean he has been successful and healthy." Added the son: "I do care, but I don't. It's more about playing for the team and doing my best to win." The father smiles. He knows his son wants to break his record but is too modest to admit it. They have three more years together and plenty of things still to accomplish. The father and son are only getting started.

10/19/2012

### **Students, parents call for end to bullying**

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Students and parents called for an end to bullying and mental health professionals urged awareness of depression, the root cause of teen suicides, at a town hall meeting Thursday.

Department of Veterans Affairs psychologist Denise Carey called the suicides of four local teens within two weeks an anomaly, "almost astronomical" in light of the fact there are 36,000 suicides nationwide in a year.

Bullying doesn't cause suicide, but it is a contributing factor, Carey said. The primary factor is depression, she said.

"The one thing that we know works is treatment," Carey said. "I'm telling you, teenagers, parents, kids, you have to have treatment if you have diagnosed depression."

There's no shame in seeking help. Carey likened depression, which stems from brain chemistry, to any other illness with a physical cause, like diabetes.

Symptoms parents should look out for include feeling "blah," anxiety, trouble sleeping or sleeping too much, inability to concentrate, a lack of interest in friends and withdrawal from things the child formerly enjoyed doing. If the symptoms are persistent - every day for at least two weeks - they could be a sign of depression, Carey said.

Dena Sims, a mother of four and co-founder of Parents Advocating for Safe Schools, which held the meeting, talked about her son's experiences being physically bullied, which left him with permanent leg nerve damage and the need for back surgery.

Pennsylvania Guardian Angels Regional Director Scott Koppenhoffer, who was bullied from first grade through high school, explained the emotional scars it leaves. He said the Guardian Angels would like to start an anti-bullying class outside of school.

Taylor Brown, a classmate of 13-year-old suicide victim Joshua Delos Santos, had parents take a pledge to be there to help the kids and guide them.

"This bullying is getting ridiculous," she said.

Ann Cibo of Northeast Counseling Services urged students to tell somebody if anybody says they are thinking of harming themselves.

"We have to keep our ears open," said Monica Thomas, co-founder of Parents Advocating for Safe Schools, "Kids are crying out for help."

10/15/2012

### **A couple of dominant victories**

#### **Korch, Yelen take top honors in race**

Robert Miner - Times Leader

Tony Korch and Sherri Yelen ran to wire-to-wire victories in the Benjamin August Memorial 3 Mile Run on Sunday. Korch, 52, of Nanticoke broke the tape in 17 minutes and 29 seconds. He outran second-place finisher, Tony Pszeniczny, 51, of Mountain Top, by 1:37. George Dunbar, 49, of Old Forge, finished third, 21 seconds behind Pszeniczny.

"There were no young kids here today to worry about - so the opportunity was there," said Korch. "And I was able to take advantage."

Korch went out fast right from the start and never let up.

"It was a nice day for a race," said Korch. "There was a head wind on the way out and a bit of a tail wind on the way back. At the turnaround (Martz bus garage just off Old River Road), I could see that there was nobody near me. So I tried to keep my pace and run a good time. My time was faster than my time from last year. At my age, it's nice to be able to win races."

Korch -- who finished eighth in last year's Benjamin August race that featured seven of the area's young runners who you do have to worry about -- bettered his time from last year by eight seconds. But this year's race featured a light field (15 fewer finishers than last year) - probably due in part to the earlier starting time.

Korch has been running competitively for 20 years. In May he won the Wyoming Valley Striders Spring Trail Run at Frances Slocum State Park. Korch is a regular at the trail runs. And he will probably be running in the Fall Trail Run at the state park on Oct. 28.

Unlike Korch, who has been running competitively for two decades, Yelen only started running in area races in June. And she's already chalked up a couple of wins.

The 40-year-old from Kingston won top female honors easily with a fifth-place overall finish yesterday in 20:53, outrunning second-place finisher, Carma Flannery, 52, of Shavertown, by 2:26.

In August, Yelen won top female honors in the Pauly Friedman Family 5K Run at Misericordia University.

"I wanted to beat my personal best (in a 3-miler) – and I did," said Yelen. "I went out hard right from the start. I had a nice pace going. There were men running way up ahead of me. I didn't try to track any of them down. I just got into a nice rhythm. And I kept pushing myself."

She pushed herself to a decided victory.

10/12/2012

### **GNA board hears more about bullying**

#### **Expert, parent tells officials that they can and should do more to stop the torment.**

By Susan Denney - Times Leader

Bullying was the topic of concern at Thursday's [Greater Nanticoke Area School Board](#) meeting when an expert and a parent confronted district officials.

Mental health professional Jo Ann Stone told the board about the concerns of 60 students who had participated in a grief counseling session with her at the St. Faustina Parish in Nanticoke after the suicide of a GNA student in September. Stone, of Scranton, said many of the students were angry and felt that bullying was an issue in the student's suicide.

"The kids would like to know what happens to bullies," she said.

Stone praised the district for its efforts to provide programs on bullying, but she wanted to know what the district consequences are for students who bully.

"The kids have to know there are consequences for their actions," she said.

When board members mentioned suspension as one of the consequences, Stone suggested that suspensions are actually welcomed by some students as a holiday.

She suggested revoking the privilege of participation in sports and other extracurricular events would be a more effective punishment than suspension.

Parent Julia Robins of Nanticoke said bullying was a problem at the high school. She said one of her children had withdrawn from the school this week because of being bullied.

Robins listed the people she had contacted at the school concerning incidents in which her daughter had been called vulgar names by other students.

Board members were silent as Robins told of how she had reported bullying early in the week to the school's police officer and the school's guidance department.

She said she had received no feedback about what was being done to stop it.

Robins too felt that consequences that mattered to the students would stop the behavior.

Stone said bullying today was "not the same old stuff. It's a disease."

"Suicide is the number three killer in America of children aged 10 to 24," she said.

When asked, Superintendent Anthony Perrone said that he was unaware of the situation with Robins' child.

Board President Jeff Kozlofski asked high school Principal John Gorham if he had been told of it. When he said no, Kozlofski said, "Make sure this is ended now."

Gorham assured the board that all reported incidents were addressed.

"We're very consistent with our discipline," he said.

Perrone said the issue of bullying was complex.

"Bullying begins at home. It's unfair to say that it's the school's fault," Perrone said.

Board Solicitor Vito DeLuca suggested that any teacher, administrator or staff member who hears about bullying should be required to report it to the superintendent.

10/5/2012

### **Curfew is near for Nanticoke**

Jon O'Connell - Times Leader

City council President Stephen Duda said at Wednesday's council meeting a daytime curfew for school-aged children should be ready for its first reading at the next council meeting.

Duda said Solicitor William Finnegan, Police Chief William Schultz and District Judge Donald Whittaker wrote a preliminary draft of the curfew ordinance, which is in response to the rise of juvenile crime committed during the day. Council Vice President Jim Litchkofski said after reviewing the ordinance, council members decided some of the curfew's verbiage needed rewriting before it is ready for public review and a vote.

Duda said the curfew was not intended to impose on school district attendance policies already enforced; rather, council members are concerned about children.

"We're not looking to be stepping on the school district's toes," Duda said. "(We're considering) the well-being of the children. They should be in school."

Duda said youngsters studying at home, whether home-schooled or through a cyber school, have been considered in the curfew's draft, though he did not immediately explain how they will be treated.

In other news:

- Contracts were approved for demolition of the old Rentko's Tavern building along Ridge Street, a well-known eyesore that the city bought with intent to demolish, and the People's Food Market along South Market Street.

Duda lauded the city's engineer for the bids on the table. North Penn Distributors Inc. and Brdaric Excavating, the bid-winning excavators, came in significantly lower for the two projects at about \$18,500 each.

Duda said they expect the demolition projects to be completed within two months.

- Curbing improvements, including new handicapped-accessible sidewalk ramps, along the city's K Routes and Hanover Street are to be done Nov. 1. As members voted on winter plowing contracts, resident Theresa Sowa asked if anything will be done about plowed snow piling up on the sidewalk's ramps.

Sowa said the piling snow makes it impossible to navigate in a wheelchair, and she has seen wheelchair users forgo the sidewalk altogether and take to the streets when snow blocks sidewalk ramps.

Council members agreed they would consider ways to keep the ramps clear in bad weather.

10/1/2012

### **Nanticoke to create recreation park**

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The city of Nanticoke can begin working to create the Greater Nanticoke Area Recreation Park, after it gained possession of needed land through eminent domain proceedings in Luzerne County Court.

The planned project, which began seven years ago, will include sports fields, basketball courts, natural and camping areas, walking and biking paths and a boat launch and fishing area on the Susquehanna River

The declaration of taking proceedings began in April when the city's solicitor, William Finnegan, filed court papers to acquire 90 parcels of land that will ultimately become part of the 135-acre park.

Finnegan said no landowners objected to declarations of taking within a required 30-day notice period, and he recently asked a county judge to approve a \$3,000 payment to landowners the city knows of.

The 90 parcels are located directly off Lower Broadway Street in Nanticoke across from the Weis Markets grocery store, and include some of a parking lot currently being used by Luzerne County Community College.

Finnegan has said the land was used to house Federal Emergency Management Agency trailers after the Agnes Flood in 1972, and after the flood the lots were sold off or people left, creating title problems.

In court documents filed recently, Judge Richard Hughes approved a requested \$3,000 payment to landowners, most of which – nearly \$2,500 – will be paid to Susquehanna Collieries and the Susquehanna Coal Company, which owned 9.26 acres of the land.

At least 19 other former landowners will receive \$5 for their small parcels, including the Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority for a right of way and the Greater Nanticoke Area School District.

Finnegan said the \$3,000 payment was determined after an appraisal of the land.

City administrator Pamela Heard said the park is a "work in progress" and the city will not apply for additional grants until work funded by a grant received in December is complete.

The city obtained a \$60,400 grant from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources that will be used for the construction of a pavilion, parking area improvements, pedestrian walkway, observation area, rain garden, installation of

site amenities, removal of invasive species, handicap access, landscaping and signage. Work on the land the city had already owned is expected to begin sometime in 2013. The entire project is expected to cost around \$1.1 million, according to the city.

9/29/2012

### **GNA Community Meeting on Bullying**

Times Leader

[Greater Nanticoke Area School District](#) has scheduled a community meeting on bullying and suicide Oct. 4, 7 p.m., at the high school auditorium.

Superintendent Tony Perrone said the acclaimed short documentary "Teen Truth: an inside look at bullying and school violence" will be shown, which includes footage of students in schools.

The film will be followed by a presentation on suicide, including what to look for. Perrone said the district will have handouts audience members can take home.

The meeting is open to the public and is free. Perrone urged parents and students to attend. He also noted the district website homepage features a confidential report form people can use to report bullying or other problems, and that the district has Student Assistant Teams composed of appropriate professionals to help students deal with problems.

9/24/2012

### **Church celebrates 100 years**

#### **A service marks centennial of Transfiguration of Our Lord.**

Steven Fondo - Times Leader

A large group of worshipers came out on Sunday to observe the centennial celebration of the Transfiguration of Our Lord Ukrainian Catholic Church in the city's Hanover Section.

Pastor Volodymyr Popyk hosted the anniversary event which included a visit by Archbishop Metropolitan Stephan Soroka of the Ukrainian Catholic Church's Philadelphia Diocese, who led a procession of clergy to open the service.

The church was founded in 1912 by Ukrainian immigrants from the Lemkivshcyna and Peremyshl region, who arrived in the Wyoming Valley to work in the anthracite industry.

"I was baptized in this church," said Joan Skordy, 69, who co-organized the event. "There's so much history here. It's an honor for me to participate in this celebration."

Skordy, who recently came back to Northeastern Pennsylvania from King of Prussia to care for her elderly mother, explained that many people from outside the area would be in attendance at the anniversary.

"My family helped found this church," said Pat Magi. "We drove up from Pittstown, New Jersey to attend the service today. I couldn't be more proud."

A festive banquet was held following the service along with a traditional Blessing of the Banners by the visiting clergy.

9/20/2012

### **Community gathers to mourn Nanticoke teen**

pcameron@citizensvoice.com

More than 200 little candles burned in the dark and circled the monument in the center of Patriot Square in Nanticoke as friends and family gathered Wednesday night at a vigil to mourn the suicide of their friend, son and brother.

Joshuah Delos Santos, 13, shot and killed himself at his parents' Nanticoke home Tuesday morning.

Holding a hodgepodge of candles dripping wax into glass jars, plastic cups and note cards, the large group listened to classmates remember a boy who loved drawing, science fiction and entertaining his friends with nonsensical knock-knock jokes.

Many speaking at the vigil criticized what they called "bullies" who they said drove Delos Santos to take his own life. A Facebook tribute page to the teen was ablaze with similar complaints from classmates.

But police have not been able to find any evidence to corroborate those claims.

"There's nothing in our investigation at this point in time that he was bullied at all," said Nanticoke police Chief Bill Shulz in a phone interview Wednesday. He asked that anyone with information on the suicide report it to police.

The [Greater Nanticoke Area School District](#), where Delos Santos attended eighth grade, has a "zero tolerance" bullying policy and an anonymous "bullying report form" on the district website, but Superintendent Anthony Perrone said by

phone Wednesday the teen never spoke up if he was suffering from harassment.

"He was really good at hiding his feelings," Nicole Delos Santos, 15, one of the boy's sisters said by phone Wednesday. "He didn't let us know."

At the vigil, the Rev. James Nash urged the crowd to help stop bullying as red flares burned at each street intersection around the square. Several students wore white shirts and dark ties in a tribute to their deceased friend, who often did the same in school.

Perrone, with the district for half a century now, estimated this was the first student to commit suicide in 30 years.

The gun Joshua Delos Santos used was legally owned by the boy's father and was secured with a lock in the home, Shulz said.

Friends, family and school officials all said the tragedy was worsened by the fact the boy never told anyone of his inner struggles. His sister asked others in a similar situation not to do the same.

"Stand up for yourself and say something to someone," Nicole Delos Santos said. "There's always all these different people that will help you."

9/17/2012

### **K-9 units team up in Nanticoke, Hanover Twp.**

Paul Golias - Citizens Voice

The barking alone is enough to get a bad guy to back off.

In Wyoming Valley's South Valley area, the barking may be coming from more than one K-9 dog, and that often means that more than one bad situation will not get worse.

Police officers in the Nanticoke City and Hanover Township police departments are using well-trained dogs both as stand-alone patrol and search partners and as components of a cooperative program that is paying dividends.

The dogs are handling a variety of challenges, from suspect apprehension to narcotics searches to building goodwill through community outreach.

Thanks to a \$102,000 grant made available via the state gaming proceeds distribution, both departments were able to buy new vehicles, cages and various K-9 support items intended to keep the animals safe and comfortable in the patrol cruisers.

Nanticoke's K-9 officer, Patrolman Brian Kivler, and his dog, Vice, and Hanover Township's officer, Patrolman Mark Stefanowicz, and his dog, Ado, met for a "team photo" last week. Vice is a long-haired German shepherd and Ado is a Malinois, related to the Belgian shepherd.

Police Chief Bill Shultz of Nanticoke and Chief Al Walker of Hanover Township joined the K-9 cops and dogs and then provided insight into the program.

Kivler has been Nanticoke's K-9 officer for the last four years. Vice is 4 years old and was trained by Plymouth Borough Police Chief Myles Collins.

Hanover's K-9 program dates to 1991. Stefanowicz teamed with Ado, also 4 years old, in 2009 and the dog was trained by Paul Price of the Northeast Canine Academy, Wilkes-Barre Township. It takes about three months to go through training, the officers said.

The key value of K-9 dogs is deterrence, the officers said.

"An individual will take on three police officers," Stefanowicz said, "but when he sees the canine, he backs off."

It often is enough to threaten to get the dog out of the cruiser or yell to a fugitive in hiding that "I'm sending in the dog" to get him to surrender, Stefanowicz said.

With gun violence escalating in Northeastern Pennsylvania, the value of K-9 dogs also has grown. And it is in this phase of police work, and in narcotics interdiction, that the South Valley K-9 Partnership shows its strength. The dogs can go anywhere in the county.

"Because small towns can't afford dog programs, the opportunity to use one of our dogs is a great benefit to those towns and to the county," Kivler said.

The dogs may be called on to search for a missing person or to do a narcotics search of a stopped vehicle. The dogs can search houses and other buildings.

From time to time, the K-9 cops will take their dogs to area middle schools and high schools and do unannounced locker searches. The dogs can detect drugs in lockers and school personnel then can determine if illegal drugs are being brought into the buildings by drug pushers.

"This service is priceless," Stefanowicz said. "The impact on kids is incredible when police show up to do searches." Stefanowicz said as many as eight to 10 K-9 units can take part in such inspections and "it is something to see that



number of K-9 units pull into a school parking lot at one time."

There are other K-9 units in Luzerne County, including Kingston, Wilkes-Barre Township, at the county prison and a new dog in small Sugar Notch Borough where the chief, Chris Pelchar, is the K-9 handler.

The Hanover and Nanticoke dogs have been used as trackers, including a recent case in Nanticoke where a missing 6-year-old was tracked back to his own home.

Stefanowicz said the dogs are very intense when they do drug searches and they can tire after 30 minutes or so. Often, a second dog then takes over or does part of the search in a bigger building, such as a school.

The dogs are not trained to sniff out bombs. Specialized animals are used in such cases because cops would not know if a dog was signaling drugs or a bomb if cross-training was used.

The officers do presentations to scout troops, community organizations and the like. Stefanowicz took Ado to show his skills at a recent cancer awareness program in Mountain Top.

Walker said Nanticoke and Hanover Township have a long history of cops backing up each other and the K-9 cooperative is an extension of that work.

Shultz said sharing of information is vital today and law enforcement agencies are networking to combat drugs and gangs, the latter an emerging issue that is on the radar of state and federal legislators.

The average career life of a K-9 dog is 10 years. The dogs live with the officer-handler and most often, in retirement, they pass to the private ownership of that officer and his family.

Hanover Township residents became familiar with Rikki and Zeke, K-9 dogs of the past.

State Sen. John Yudichak, who aided Nanticoke and Hanover Township in getting the state grant, lauded the regional effort.

"We cannot expect towns to go it alone in the fight for safe neighborhoods," he said. Yudichak, D-Plymouth Township, is hopeful that more cooperation and true regionalization will take place.

Walker said the towns are hopeful they can obtain new grants for K-9 and other programs.

9/16/2012

**Nanticoke community cashing in on sale day opportunities**

**City-Wide Yard Sale helps support businesses and offers a way to promote attributes of the city.**

Ralph Nardone - Times Leader

More than 100 joined the second Nanticoke City-Wide Yard Sale this year on Saturday. The event, which was started four years ago, is becoming an increasingly popular event, according to city officials.

Betsy Cheshinski, city clerk for Nanticoke and primary event organizer, said Mayor Joe Dougherty and other members of the city administration give their full support of the event because it offers a great way to promote the city's attributes.

It helps support city businesses, provides a way for residents to participate in something for the city as well as benefit by selling their "treasures," gives yard sale enthusiasts a chance to go through numerous sales and is also a chance for local nonprofits to conduct fundraisers, she said. The local Boy Scout troop and volunteer firefighters participated, she added. The city is committed to conducting the yard sale at least once each year and even twice like this year, depending on how well it is received, she said.

The first yard sale this year took place in June, she said. Then the public started contacting her about a fall version a few weeks ago, she added.

"We received quite a few calls from residents requesting we have another one in the fall," Cheshinski said.

The sale started at 9 a.m. centered in Patriot Park. There shoppers were able to get copies of a list of the addresses of participating homes and organizations as well as a detailed map of the city shoppers could use to get around and find the locations. The map was provided by the city, she added. More than 200 maps were given out by 11 a.m.

The Rev. Sylvia Thomas from the Berean Lighthouse Church, where shoppers were able to look over some deals on clothing and knickknacks, said she thought the sale was a great way to "be part of the city."

"This gives us all a boost," Thomas said.

She added the sale allowed people an opportunity to socialize, getting to know their neighbors a little better.

Mike Nestorick, who worked at the local Boy Scout troop booth located in Patriot Park, said the sale is a "great day for Nanticoke."

"There are a lot of great people who come to patronize us," he said. "Plus it's a good time to show the Boy Scouts responsibility and to get their parents involved," he said.

Cheshinski said she received a lot of positive feedback from businesses who benefited from the increased customer

traffic. She also said she saw a lot of new young families walking through the sale. For the day they got to see the benefits of an “old-fashioned community,” she said.

9/16/2012

### **Meet Bruce Phair**

John Gordon writes about area people for the Meet feature - Times Leader

Bruce Phair is the manager and technical director at the Dorothy Dickson Darte Center at Wilkes University. Phair, 61, graduated from Nutley High School in New Jersey and received a degree in music performance from Wilkes University. He lives in Nanticoke with his wife Karen. They have a daughter Kyra.

You originally started out in sales after graduating from college. “I went to New York City and worked in that field for four years before deciding to come back to Wilkes University. I took some more classes in business. I enjoyed my four years at Wilkes previously, so coming back was an easy decision.”

How did your future path go in a different direction during your second stint at Wilkes? “I really enjoyed acting in plays in the '70s at Wilkes. I decided to continue taking part in the productions upon returning. I was always kind of shy and acting was a great way to hide behind a character's face. People seemed to enjoy my performances so I continued to be a part of the theater. Eventually, I was introduced to back stage work and that catapulted me into the position of technical director for the Dorothy Dickson Darte Center in 1980. I remained in that role for the next seven years. I became the facility manager in 1987.”

What is it that keeps you excited about the job? “When I first attended Wilkes as a student I was one of the new and fresh faces coming through the doors. Today I see high school graduates coming in and they are the new fresh faces of the university. Although I am still the manager and technical director, I feel I am more of a teacher these days. That gives me the greatest joy.”

You also mentioned that there was a key figure in your hiring. Who was that? “Al Groh, who many see as the greatest catalyst for the rise of the Darte center, was instrumental in my hiring. I felt he saw something in me that would be a good fit for the school. Al was instrumental in the center coming into existence and he directed many plays as well as teaching classes at the university.”

Outside of the school were there any other role models in your life? “I would have to say my father for one. He taught me an appreciation for nature, carpentry and electricity to name a few things. We really utilized our time together. My wife is another energizing force in my life. She has been my best friend and supporter in life. There are so many individuals that helped me. They say what we reap in life is sown by others.”

What was your favorite role that you ever took on? “I would actually have to say the role of dad. My daughter Kyra is actually in my stage craft class.”

What is something you really enjoy when it comes to entertainment? “I love cast recordings of Broadway musicals. I would love to go back to New York and see some musicals live.”

What is your motto? “Lead by example.”

Where do you like to visit in your spare time? “My wife and I like to hop in the car and try to see places that we have not seen. Our favorite place we visited was Cape May, New Jersey. It has been our summer vacation the past 15 years.”

Where do you like to hang out in Northeast Pennsylvania? “I enjoy my own backyard. I really enjoy the cooler weather and splitting firewood in the fresh air as well as gardening.”

What do you think the area needs to improve upon most? “I would like to see a greater awareness of what the area has to offer to people who are not familiar with it. I would like people to have that feeling I have about the culture, mountains and river that drew me back.”

What is one of your proudest moments in life? “I would have to say when my wife and I helped clean carpets and scrub the theater building after the flood of 1972. That was a life-changing time and it also brought me and my wife closer together before we eventually married.”

9/14/2012

### **Cuts spur protest at GNA board meeting**

**The problem is a decrease in state funding, a school board member tells parents.**

Steven Fondo - Times Leader

A group of concerned parents came out to regular meeting of the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board on Thursday to protest recently enacted program cuts that were the result of a decrease in state funding.

The board was presented petitions against the discontinued elementary physical education, art and music programs. A number of parents spoke out in opposition to the cuts and many offered proposals to reinstate the defunct programs through volunteerism and tax increases.

"Elections have consequences," said board member Tony Prushinski. Many of you wanted change in the last election and voted for Governor Corbett. Well, look around; you got it."

Superintendent Tony Perrone told the crowd that even in light of the program cuts, the district has fared better than many others throughout the state due to its policy of creative and proactive federal and state grant procurement.

"There are 501 school districts in Pennsylvania," explained Perrone. "Each and every one of them is experiencing similar budget concerns."

Many parents suggested elementary teachers should include physical activity as part of their daily lesson plan.

"I came out for my daughter," stated George Merrick of Nanticoke. "Cutting these vital programs from the curriculum is not what we should be doing. These kids need these classes at that age. But unfortunately, like most things, it's all about money."

9/14/2012

### **Petition targets GNA arts cuts**

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Corporal punishment, music education and a failed vote to retroactively hire and pay a coach who had already been working for the school district - the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board meeting had a little something for everyone Thursday night.

While music blasted from a school dance in the gym across the hall, the board parried complaints from a lively crowd of about 35 residents who were protesting cuts to elementary music, art and physical education that began last school year.

Officials said they were due to Gov. Tom Corbett's cuts to public education in his first state budget.

Glenn Kipps, 50, of Glen Lyon led the charge. He presented a petition of nearly 2,000 signatures.

Some in the crowd asked for higher taxes to pay for the programs, but Superintendent Anthony Perrone said that wasn't possible.

"We have 60 percent of the kids in this district who are low-income," he said. "Their parents can't afford taxes now."

For the first time in several years, the board increased taxes this summer, which raised about \$19,000, but board members said it helped little for a school district with a total budget of about \$28 million.

"The only way we're going to get those programs (back) is if somebody gives us the money," Perrone said.

Elementary Center Principal Mariellen Scott said the cuts were made in favor of saving full-day kindergarten.

As they have in the past, the board and Perrone urged the angry parents to contact the governor and ask him to restore public education funds to the pre-cut previous levels.

In an unrelated but bizarre bit of business, Valerie Kepner, 38, and mother of two children in the district pointed out that corporal punishment is still listed as a form of acceptable discipline in the elementary center handbook. Board President Jeff Kozlofski said it was an anachronism that needed to be removed, but because the books had already been printed for this year, the district would send an addendum to parents.

Another strange issue came up at the meeting when the board voted down a motion to hire and pay a junior high school field hockey coach who had already worked 25 days for the district. The team was cut due to a lack of student interest. The board was concerned the coach had not received all her criminal background and child abuse clearances necessary to work with children before she started coaching. Kozlofski said the district would pay the coach for every day she had her clearances.

The district also hired Chester Prushinski, the cousin of board member Tony Prushinski, to be a crossing guard at an hourly rate of \$11.50 for 15 hours a week.

9/9/2012

### **New Nanticoke home-ec teacher is right man for the job**

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For the first time ever, a man is teaching students in the Greater Nanticoke Area School District how to cook, sew and run a household.

Two years ago, Joe Figlerski was teaching art in the district. One year ago, he was out of a job. Laid off from his position at the end of the 2010-2011 school year when the district cut elementary art, music and physical education,

Figlerski was rehired this summer to teach Family and Consumer Science, formerly and perhaps better known as Home Economics or Home Ec.

When Superintendent Anthony Perrone informed him of his new job and pioneer status in the district, he had one question.

"Is my hair long enough?" he joked, referring to his shoulder-length mane.

Figlerski, or Mr. Fig as his students call him, has the look of an off-beat art teacher. On Wednesday last week, the accomplished painter and tattoo artist was wearing a baggy shirt and 1970s-era patterned tie, and was clean shaven, other than the facial hair pouring out his bottom lip and wrapping around his chin.

Perrone uses words like "unique" and "Bohemian" to describe the 37-year-old teacher, who is also a Greater Nanticoke Area graduate and was a student of Perrone's when he served as a guidance counselor for the district.

When the previous, female Home Economics teacher retired after 37 years last spring, an unemployed Figlerski studied for the state certification course and took the exam twice before passing and becoming the rare male qualified to teach Family and Consumer Science. The Wyoming Area School District also has a man teaching cooking classes, but another instructor of their gender could not be found in Luzerne County.

It's no secret that the class has historically been seen as one for girls, but that stereotype is dead, or at least dying, several of Mr. Fig's students said. Nearly 40 percent of the students are male, and the course is elective, meaning the students choose to be there.

"There are famous male fashion designers and famous male chefs that are out there, why is Home Ec any different?" said Chelsea Gronkowski, a 17-year-old senior and one of Figlerski's students.

The switch from art to Family and Consumer Science was not a difficult one, Figlerski said, because he can incorporate his art background into the fields of cooking and sewing. And as the single father of a 4-year-old, Mr. Fig said he's "pretty domesticated" and spent his off-year caring for his daughter while he looked for other teaching jobs in the area. To start this year of Home Ec, Figlerski's students are recording everything they eat for a seven-day period and calculating caloric intake and nutrient levels. They will eventually move on to cooking, as well as household budgeting and repairing clothing with a needle and thread.

"I think of the class as learning how to fend for yourself," Gronkowski said.

Figlerski said he would like to modernize the curriculum by incorporating healthier dishes into his students' cooking repertoire, although he said one fatty staple of the old classes will remain.

"You gotta keep pierogies alive," Figlerski said with a smile. "We're all Polish, right?"

9/4/2012

### **Petition takes swipe at Nanticoke Area education cuts**

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Glenn Kipps isn't the most artistic person in the world. Most of his achievements in the field of arts and crafts were the paperweights he made for his mother in elementary school art classes.

"My hands aren't really inclined for that," he said. "I never was a good drawer."

But Kipps, now 50 and living in Glen Lyon, said those art lessons did teach him to put his young, creative mind to work, and he's worried the elimination of elementary art classes along with music and physical education programs in the Greater Nanticoke Area School District will hurt the development of young students there.

"You're going to have a bunch of zombies walking around," he said.

To voice his displeasure and also give others a forum to do so, Kipps recently started circulating petitions at several businesses in Nanticoke and Glen Lyon protesting the cuts. "SHAME ON OUR SCHOOLS" reads the top of the petition. Kipps said he has collected about 1,500 signatures and plans to present them at the next school board meeting Sept. 13.

He will face an uphill battle. The cuts to elementary "specials" began last school year, and school officials say their hands were forced by the slashing of millions of dollars to public education in Gov. Tom Corbett's first state budget last summer. Those education funds did not come back this year, and so neither did the programs.

"There's nothing we can do with those," said Superintendent Anthony Perrone, adding that all elementary teachers are certified to teach art and music and incorporate the subjects into their home rooms. "Times are bad."

In addition to the program cuts last year, the school district also laid off 21 employees. It was able to hire three laid-off teachers this year, but the district also raised taxes on property owners for the first time in several years. School districts get their local funding from property taxes.

Jaime Sorber, 20, has a pair of twin boys who will enter kindergarten in the district next fall, and has signed Kipps'

petition "everywhere I've seen it." The young father, who attended school in the district before finishing with a cyber school, is discouraged his children will not get the same opportunities to nurture their creativity in art and music that he did.

"A child's imagination is the most important thing they have," said Sorber, who is not a property owner and thus does not support the schools with taxes.

Ken James, vice president and the longest tenured member of the school board, said that is a problem.

"Everybody wants everything, but you have to pay for it," he said.

The school district's tax base is an older and poorer one, he said, which makes it difficult to raise taxes.

"Believe me, when we cut programs it's not fun for us," James said. "We don't want to hurt anybody."

At the last school board meeting in August, James said no one from the public complained about the cuts to specials in elementary school that are now a year old.

But Kipps, who is a property owner in the school district but has no children of his own, plans to be there in September. And he hopes to have an army of supporters with him, too.

9/1/2012

### **Bikers rally to help sick kids**

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Riley Schmidt was born with kidney failure. An organ donation from his dad failed, so the boy, now 3, must plug in to a portable dialysis machine every night before bed.

Frequent trips to a Philadelphia hospital have put a financial strain on the family as they've forced Riley's parents to miss significant time at work.

But they have had one bit of luck: the Schmidts' mechanic, Rick Temarantz, happens to be president of the motorcycle charity group Valley with a Heart Benefits.

The group has raised more than \$300,000 for local kids with serious health problems during its 12 years, and has now added the Schmidts to those it has helped.

The group has so far helped with some bills and prepaid gas cards for all the miles logged on the Pennsylvania Turnpike, Riley's father, Daniel Schmidt, said.

On Sunday, more than 400 motorcycles will take the 12th annual benefit ride from Nanticoke to Sweet Valley and back to raise awareness and money for Riley and several other sick children.

"Bikers have big hearts," Temarantz said. "They're not all rough and tough."

The rumbling ride will end at the Holy Child Grove in Sheatown, where a family picnic will be held from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m.

The picnic features 12 bands on two stages as well as a mechanical bull, games, raffles, vendors and beer on tap.

Fireworks are at dusk. All proceeds from the event go to help the sponsor children, along with other kids throughout the year. Temarantz said the event raised about \$17,000 last year.

Anyone is invited to attend the picnic, and all bikes - even Harley-Davidsons - are welcome on the ride, joked Temarantz, who drives a Victory motorcycle.

To stoke the friendly rivalry, the president of the charity group announces in his pre-ride speech every year that the Harley riders will get a 10 minute head start, so they won't get left behind.

"Then I get booed," he said. "Never had anything thrown at me yet."

8/23/2012

### **Pooling resources**

### **District wants public to use pool more often**

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A high school senior project could lead to a community swim program for residents of the city.

Anthony Perrone, superintendent of [Greater Nanticoke Area School District](#), said the high school pool has been open three days a week – Mondays, Tuesday and Fridays – during the summer, and he wants to see it become a bigger community resource.

"The pool needs some work, but we hope to generate revenue through a swim program so we can open it to the public more often," Perrone said. "The student project was a great idea – it got a lot of people of all ages to come in and use the pool."



The pool has been open to the greater Nanticoke area community since July 16. The last day for the program is Friday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at a cost of \$1 for children and \$3 per adult.

“There has been a great response with children and adults of all ages using the pool,” said Andrea Medura, whose daughter, Constance, is a member of the swim team and one of three students who participated in the pool project. “Lap swimmers, recreational swimmers and those learning how to swim have benefited from the pool this summer,” she added.

Swim team members and others interested in swimming volunteered their time to make this summer program become a reality.

Medura said participants include a woman who is a 5K runner and uses the pool to do water aerobics, and two friends, one who has a hip replacement and the other, a former Nanticoke swim team member, who come in the morning to swim laps.

“And then there are the kids, whose smiles and energy are contagious to everyone,” Medura said. “Because of this summer program, they have a place to go where they are exercising and sharing time with family and friends.”

In addition to Constance Medura, high school senior Kat Ferrucci and sophomore brother Adam Ferrucci volunteer three days a week to make the summer program available. Swim team members also come to help out.

“Constance and Kat also ran a swim clinic this past April as part of their senior project,” Medura said. “The clinic was offered to the Nanticoke Area Middle School students. Members of the swim team also were there to help. They were introduced to the different aspects of swimming and also had an hour of recreational swim time.”

Perrone said the pool area is in need of some aesthetic repairs, which are presently in the works; however, there are many items that are needed for swim meets and future programs.

“We are seeking donations to help us reach our goals to bring the pool up to par so that we can provide what is needed to run the programs effectively,” Medura said.

She said some donations have come in from Janison’s on East Main Street, Jerry & Son Market and attorney Rich Shiptoski.

A “wish list” has been compiled to improve the facility for swim competitions. Medura said the swim team also is seeking alumni or individuals with swimming expertise to help the swim team this year.

Perrone praised the students for the work on the project and he was pleased with the turnout all summer.

“I think we averaged 35 people per day in the pool,” he said. “And they were all ages. We want to see more activity in the pool.”

Perrone said with school resuming next week, the public swim time will end, but eventually reopen when he can assure that lifeguards will be paid with non-district funds.

“I believe the kids in Nanticoke need an outlet,” Perrone said. “The pool should be utilized.”

8/23/2012

### **Confessions of a kielbasa contest judge**

[bkalinowski@citizensvoice.com](mailto:bkalinowski@citizensvoice.com).

As a Polish guy from Nanticoke with the last name Kalinowski, I tend to think I know a little about kielbasa. You kind of have to when it's around during every family function.

If you would have told me a decade ago that one day there would be an entire festival dedicated to Polish sausage, I would have said no way.

Then it happened. The community revitalization group Plymouth Alive launched such an endeavor in 2004, hosting the inaugural Kielbasa Fest, a spin-off of the widely successful Tomato Festival in Pittston.

I was among the local media members and dignitaries invited to judge the festival's signature event - the kielbasa contest. I've been invited back several other times in the festival's eight years.

What an honor - getting to help crown the Kielbasa King/Queen of Northeastern Pennsylvania.

It's actually serious business for the vendors who enter the contest, hoping for a year's worth of bragging rights and the boom in business that comes with taking the title. And it's obvious feelings are hurt and egos are bruised when you look at the losers after a winner is announced.

The organizers of the event also put on quite the show, as dozens of area residents pack the banquet room of Franchella's Pub on Main Street to witness the Kielbasa trophy being awarded.

Terry Womelsdorf, president of Plymouth Alive, serves as emcee, performing as play-by-play announcer and color commentator, telling jokes and ribbing the judges as they chomp on piece after piece of kielbasa. They even let a kielbasa mascot loose to run amok around the room for awhile. Pete Truskowski paces back and forth in front of the

judge's table playing his accordion, leading the crowd in songs, notably the Beer Barrel Polka.

"Roll out the barrel. We'll have a barrel of fun."

Yes, there's beer, too.

The judges use it as a palette cleanser in between the different kielbasa entries. (And the bar is packed with people afternoon drinking.)

There's usually about 20 judges - half to judge the smoked kielbasa (pink/red) and half to judge the fresh (gray/light brown). I usually hope for smoked, and each year that's what I got.

When you sit down at your seat, in front of you is a scoring sheet, pen, plate, knife and fork. These great hosts think outside the box and also provide each judge with a large supply of Tic Tacs and antacids, which are very much needed by the end.

Each kielbasa entry is judged on taste, texture and presentation.

So the kielbasa can't just taste good and be enjoyable to chew - it has to look good, too.

Over the years, I've seen kielbasa crafted into a log cabin, a beach and even a moon landing re-enactment.

(Hint: Ask if they could do something like this at your next family outing if you want to impress).

I tend not to overemphasize the presentation category because I think most people want to know if a kielbasa tastes good, not that the maker has the talent to turn kielbasa into a work of art.

Volunteers of Plymouth Alive display the entries to the judges while slowly walking past the judge's table. Then it's time to grab some, dig in, and give it a score. Soon, it's on to the next entry.

Judging is conducted by secret ballot and the judges have no idea what kielbasa they are looking at or sampling.

Members of Plymouth Alive swear only a select few of their members even know.

So there's definitely drama leading up to the announcement of a winner.

The initial year, one of the two winners was hometown favorite, Dan Fetch, who operated a supermarket on Main Street, not far from the festival.

In the years to come, a dynasty of sorts was established as Bozak's of Olyphant won crown after crown. Komensky's of Duryea, which has won a few awards too, has seemed to be the most formidable foe.

As a disclaimer, Jerry's in Nanticoke is the one I get, but don't think they ever entered.

Organizers of Plymouth Alive like to shuffle up the judges from time to time, especially when the same businesses are winning year after year. And from what I've noticed, when they switched judges, the same businesses still keep winning. That shows they have consistency and broad appeal. After I judged a few times, some colleagues at the paper judged for a few years, then I returned. The rest of the judge panel has been comprised of people from local television and radio stations, along with council members, school board officials and magistrates. A former Citizens' Voice reporter covering the contest a few years back joked about the "celebrity" panel in his story, saying "it's not Elvis status."

No, but it sure is fun helping be kingmaker for NEPA's latest kielbasa champion.

Bob Kalinowski, a five-time Kielbasa Fest judge, can't make it this year due to vacation. He can be reached at 570-821-2055 or [bkalinowski@citizensvoice.com](mailto:bkalinowski@citizensvoice.com).

8/23/2012

### **Quality Hill Park its 'own little world'**

Sara Pokorny - Times Leader

"OK go up," Katie Murgolis, 5, shouts to her grandfather Jimmy as he mans one side of the see-saw at Quality Hill Park in Nanticoke, using just his hands to make it go whichever way she pleases.

"Now down," she yells again, not a second after she hits the highest point of the see-saw.

"She loves this," Jimmy Murgolis of Hanover Township said as he took a break and dusted his hands off. "Me? I like when she relieves me of my duties and I can sit on a bench."

Jimmy said the duo likes to frequent Quality Hill not only for the playground equipment, but the location.

"It's kind of tucked away back here," he said. "It's quiet. It's like its own little world."

The quiet little world is a result of a determined group of people that got together 60 years ago with the urge to take improving their community into their own hands.

"A bunch of neighbors got together and decided they wanted to do something for the kids," Kenny Gill, president of the Quality Hill Playground Association, said, "so they overtook some land that belonged to a coal company and built a playground."

As the years went on and the original members of the playground association grew older, the care once given to the area declined. Ten years ago Gill, along with Nicole Kruczek, Sandy Bohn, and Ryan Verazin, decided to revive the

association and perk the park back up.

“Why not?” Gill said. “It’s a great place in the community. We wanted to continue what the original organization started.”

The association got to repainting the equipment and began to hold fundraisers to accrue money for park upkeep.

“This is a private organization, so all the money that goes into the park comes from personal fundraisers,” Gill said.

The park has hosted Easter egg hunts, Halloween parades, and the annual Picnic in the Park, which will take place from 4 to 10 p.m. Saturday. A ticket gets all-you-can-eat food and non-alcoholic drinks. The food runs the gamut from hot dogs and hamburgers to haluski and baked ziti, all made or donated by members of the neighborhood. There will also be a beer tent, children’s games, a bounce house, live entertainment, dunk tank, and Chinese auction, among other things.

The Association has one goal in mind for the money raised.

“We’d love to build a pavilion here and rent it out to people for all types of social events,” Gill said.

The park has plenty of space to do such a thing. It touts not only a playground area with both newer and older equipment, but tennis and basketball courts and a soccer field.

#### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

What: Quality Hill Park

Where: Hill Street, Nanticoke

How to get there: Take the Sans Souci Parkway towards Nanticoke until it turns into East Main Street. Turn right on Slope Street and follow until the end, where you’ll make a left to see the park.

What: Picnic in the Park

When: 4 to 10 tomorrow

Where: Quality Hill Park, Hill Street, Nanticoke

Tickets: \$10 in advance by calling Kenny Gill at 735-0682 or Sandy Bohn at 239-6700, or contacting any member of the Quality Hill Playground Association. Tickets are available that day at the gate for \$15.

Additional info: One ticket gets all-you-can-eat food and non-alcoholic drink. There will be a beer tent with malt liquor and jello shots, as well as live entertainment, children’s games, a bounce house, dunk tank, and Chinese auction, among other things.

8/22/2012

### **Centax’s bonding firm may aid towns**

### **Municipalities harmed by late tax disbursement could be reimbursed, receive damages**

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Municipalities that sustained financial harm due to the Centax/Don Wilkinson agency’s failure to timely distribute earned income taxes may be able to avoid litigation and obtain reimbursement from the firm’s bonding company, the solicitor for the Luzerne County Tax Collection Committee said Tuesday.

Attorney Jeff Malak said the TCC has already submitted a claim for \$3.2 million with the bond company to obtain funds to pay municipalities and school districts that have not received the full amount of taxes they’re owed. Those entities also can seek to recover other damages, such as costs incurred if they had to take out a loan to cover the shortfalls, and lost interest on money they are yet to receive.

Several communities, including **Nanticoke** and Forty Fort, were forced to take out tax anticipation loans in order to meet bills due to significant delays Centax experienced in processing and distributing earned income taxes.

**Pam Heard, finance director for Nanticoke and treasurer of the TCC, said she is collecting information from all municipalities and school districts regarding damages they incurred to submit to the bonding company.**

**Nanticoke had to obtain a \$400,000 tax anticipation note after Centax failed to distribute several hundred thousand dollars to the city. Heard said she will seek reimbursement for approximately \$8,000 in interest the city will incur on the loan. She also might seek reimbursement for interest the city lost on money it has not yet received.**

**“There is a lot of lost opportunity. The city can’t spend money it should have had,” Heard said.**

Forty Fort council members, who voted Tuesday to seek a \$256,000 tax anticipation note, also vowed to seek reimbursement for costs associated with the loan.

Tim Henry, solicitor for Wilkes-Barre, said officials are still considering whether to take legal action against Centax should the city’s credit rating be negatively affected by the company’s failure to distribute \$1.1 million the city is owed. The Standard & Poors Rating Service recently notified the city it was considering downgrading its “A” credit rating based on cash-flow problems the city is experiencing.

“Obviously it would have an adverse effect if our credit rating suffered over this,” Henry said. “We certainly would be injured, and that would give us a cause of action.”

Centax began collecting earned income taxes for all 91 municipalities and school districts in the county in January as part of changes in tax collection mandated by Act 32, which requires most of the state’s 67 counties to have one tax collector for earned income taxes. Previously the tax was collected by tax collectors in each community. The company has encountered significant problems in processing payments it has received and recently reached an agreement with Berkheimer Associates to take over its accounts.

8/20/2012

### **A career in the cards**

### **Twelve-year-old from Nanticoke makes magic as youngest performer in ring.**

Susan Denney - Times Leader

Mr. Jay fans out the cards and asks you to pick one. You watch it carefully as he shuffles it back into the pack. Paying close attention to all of the cards, you watch him shuffle and cut them several times. He offers you your card back. Surprise! It’s the wrong one.

Then you look up at him and find your card held between his lips.

At this point, you tend to forget this poised magician is only 12 years old. But Mr. Jay is an old hand at cards. He’s been performing this and other magic tricks for three years. Since the age of 10, Mr. Jay, whose real name is Jarred Kraft, has been a professional magician.

Jarred lives with his mother, Stephanie, father, Fred, and younger brother Frede, who is 10. The family has lived in Nanticoke since Jarred was 6 months old.

Jarred and Frede both study with the Agora Charter Cyber School. The flexibility of taking his classes online allows Jarred a lot of freedom in scheduling his appearances.

Jarred pinpointed the start of his career.

“We were on a vacation at Great Wolf Lodge in the Poconos. There was a magician there. I asked him how I could learn more,” he said.

The magician invited them to a local meeting of the International Brotherhood of Magicians, or IBM. In spite of its name, men, women and children as young as age 7 are welcomed into the organization.

Jarred was now hooked. Local groups of IBM are called “rings.” He is a member of IBM Ring 30, which meets in Pittston. He feels that he gets a lot out of his membership.

“We teach each other magic tricks. And we have lecturers,” he said.

Membership in IBM is not like union membership, but Jarred does have to adhere to a code of ethics, which includes a promise not to divulge any tricks.

For now, Jarred is the youngest in his ring. But he has taught Frede a lot. At 10, Frede is a willing assistant and he has learned some tricks of his own. Jarred’s repertoire includes card tricks, rope tricks, coin tricks and illusions. He has developed advanced skills in sleight of hand.

Sleight of hand is the set of techniques used by a magician to manipulate objects such as cards and coins.

Jarred said illusions are usually performed on a stage and require bigger and more expensive equipment. Jarred is beginning to acquire more equipment for stage magic. But he prefers the work off of a stage.

“I’d prefer to be up close and right up in front of you.”

And he likes to combine comedy and magic. Perfecting magic tricks takes lots of time and hard work; but, Jarred said, “I could practice all day.”

The young magician is also interested in learning sideshow stunts. “Sideshow is not magic,” he said. “It’s real.”

Although he’s too young to begin learning their craft, he is fascinated by sword swallows and fire eaters.

Magic isn’t a hobby for Jarred. It is his chosen profession. When asked where he wanted to be 10 years from now, he quickly said, “In Vegas or on a Disney cruise.”

The Krafts fully support Jarred’s career. His stay-at-home mom manages his schedule and oversees the boys’ schoolwork. His dad is fascinated with the magic.

“He likes it,” Jarred said. But he added, “He had to get interested because I can’t drive to meetings!”

As Mr. Jay, Jarred has performed magic at parties, political meet-and-greets, and often does Pizza Bella customer appreciation days. He’s participated in stage shows with fellow IBM members.

He also appears frequently at charity events, including Cancertacular events. Cancertacular is a Northeastern Pennsylvania organization that raises money for children with cancer.

Jarred wanted to do a fundraiser for Toys for Tots, and with the help of his parents, organized a magic show in Luzerne last November. The members of his ring came out and performed a four-hour show to generate cash and toys for the U.S. Marine Corps program. Marines in dress uniform helped collect donations. He plans to do it again this year. His mom said his earnings for now are going back into his business. But she said he is allowed to keep tips. "That's his spending money," she said.

But Jarred was quick to add that at charity events, even his tips are donated to the cause.

Doing more magic is not Jarred's only dream. When he is 16 he plans to join the local volunteer fire department. He will represent the fourth generation of volunteer firemen in his family.

#### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Mr. Jay's next public performance will be at noon Saturday at Pizza King's at 512 Blackman St., Wilkes-Barre. Anyone wanting to book Mr. Jay for a future performance may call 570 592-2062. He can be emailed at themagichappens@yahoo.com. Follow his career on his Facebook page called "The Magic Happens."

8/18/2012

### **2 towns receive police grants**

### **Nanticoke and Plymouth will replace aging vehicles in their departments.**

jlynott@timesleader.com

Two area police departments received nearly \$80,000 in grants to purchase patrol vehicles through a federal program for small town and rural communities.

Nanticoke and Plymouth each were awarded the funds through the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Each municipality will buy a sport utility vehicle and car for its department and replace aging vehicles. Nanticoke received \$38,400 and \$38,660 went to Plymouth from the USDA's Rural Development Community Facilities program.

"They are much needed and our department is well deserving" of the funds, said Nanticoke Mayor Joseph Dougherty during a press conference Friday morning outside the city's fire headquarters on East Ridge Street.

One of the vehicles, a 2013 Ford Escape, was parked in front of the fire station.

The city expects to receive a new Ford Taurus soon and replace "what we need to" among its four marked vehicles, Police Chief William Shultz said.

Plymouth also has ordered its vehicles to upgrade the pool of four marked vehicles.

"This was an unexpected pleasure but it's much needed. Our cruisers are in very poor condition," Mayor Dorothy Petrosky said.

"Our cruisers are getting a little old. This is coming at a great time. We've been having problems in Plymouth, which we're working at correcting, and this money is sorely, sorely needed," Plymouth Council President Frank Coughlin added.

He thanked the federal and state lawmakers who helped with the funding. The USDA provides 55 percent of the cost of the vehicles and the municipalities are responsible for the other 45 percent.

Tom Williams, a Nanticoke native and USDA Rural Development state program director, acknowledged people would question why the department is involved with police cars.

"The Rural Development agency is the prime financier of rural infrastructure in Pennsylvania and in the country," Williams said.

In the state the USDA program provided about \$40 million in funding this year, and most of it was in the form of loans to hospitals and schools, he explained. There was only \$250,000 available in grants and the focus was on emergency responders and police departments that applied for the grants.

"We try to concentrate on the smaller grants in communities and Nanticoke and Plymouth -- certainly all municipal governments in Pennsylvania right now -- I think are stressed," Williams said.

8/18/2012

### **Grants buy police cars for Nanticoke, Plymouth**

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Nanticoke and Plymouth both received grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development to purchase two new 2013 Ford sedan police vehicles.

Nanticoke received a \$38,400 Rural Development Community Facilities grant and Plymouth received \$38,660. The grants pay for 55 percent of the cost of the police vehicles and the local communities must pay the remaining 45



percent, USDA Rural Development State Director Tom Williams said at a press conference Friday morning at Nanticoke Fire Headquarters.

Nanticoke and Plymouth applied for the grants, which are awarded for needs in communities where 20,000 or less people live, Williams said.

Both Nanticoke and Plymouth officials plan to replace old vehicles and now have four patrol cars each.

"Our cruisers are getting a little old. This is coming at a great time," said Plymouth council President Frank Coughlin.

"We've been having a few problems in Plymouth, which we're working on correcting. This money is sorely needed."

Coughlin said more part-time police officers also will be hired soon in Plymouth, which will help with growing problems with crime in the area. Recent crimes in Plymouth have included the July 7 triple homicide at a heroin deal and a drive-by shooting earlier this month in which at least six gunshots were fired on West Shawnee Avenue.

Coughlin would not yet say how many part-time police officers will be hired. Plymouth now has four full-time police officers and five part-time officers, said police Chief Myles Collins.

Like Plymouth, Nanticoke officials also are replacing old vehicles that have high mileage. With crime on the rise, Nanticoke Detective Capt. William Shultz said the vehicles are used often.

Police patrol the city and Warrior Run 24-7 and transport prisoners, which leads to a high use of the vehicles, he said.

USDA's Rural Development funding also has supported other community uses in rural communities across Pennsylvania such as fire protection, health care and education. Since 2009, the agency has invested nearly \$204 million in rural Pennsylvania communities.

8/16/2012

### **Nanticoke names new finance manager**

Steven Fondo - Times Leader

Council voted unanimously Wednesday evening to appoint current city employee Donna Wall as finance manager. Wall will assume the finance duties from City Manager Pam Heard at an annual salary of \$40,000.

"I believe in promoting from within," said Mayor Joseph Dougherty. "Donna has done a great job during her 17 years with the city, and I felt she was more than deserving of this promotion."

Council President Steve Duda said Wall's appointment would cost the city only about \$5,000 in salary due to the internal promotion.

In other business :

- Council announced the city has been approved for a \$38,000 U.S. Department of Agriculture grant to help purchase two new police vehicles. The money will defray 50 percent of the cost of new cruisers.

Council thanked U.S. Sen. Bob Casey for his assistance in securing approval for the federal money.

- Duda said the city is seeking a way to resolve the slow receipt of earned income tax due to the state's Act 32, which mandates a single collector in each county for the collection of the tax.

Many municipalities have complained of problems receiving revenues collected by Centax/Don Wilkinson Agency.

Heard said the city is requesting reimbursement of any fees and finance charges incurred through the tax anticipation note the city was forced to secure because of receipt problems.

8/11/2012

### **Eleven set to be inducted next Sunday**

The Times Leader staff

The Luzerne County Sports Hall of Fame will induct the class of 2012 at a ceremony to be held Aug. 19, at the Ramada Inn on Public Square.

Tickets to the 28th annual induction banquet must be purchased in advance. For more information, call 824-7133.

Merle Bainbridge

Football team captain and class president, he was the quarterback at West Pittston High School, a two-year starter on the basketball team, and a track and field standout.

His football career continued as quarterback at Lafayette. He also earned a master's degree from Temple.

A first-team West Side Conference performer in football, he finished third in the javelin in his senior year.

Bainbridge went on to coach six seasons at West Pittston and a year as an assistant at Wyoming Area. He was also the head coach at Spring-Ford for 11 seasons and an assistant at Coatesville for three seasons and Ursinus College for 13,

serving as defensive coordinator.

He retired in 1994 after 34 years serving his communities as a teacher. Bainbridge and his wife, Alberta, live in Royersford. They have two sons, Merle Jr. and Mark, and six grandchildren, Ian, Emily, Max, Weston, Mariah and Matthew.

### **John P. Gorham**

Currently the principal at Nanticoke, he was a track standout for Wyoming Valley West and Penn State who reached the U.S. Olympic trials in 2004.

With the Nittany Lions, Gorham set a number of records and was a four-time All-American specializing in the long jump. He won an IC4A championship and placed multiple times at the Big Ten Championships.

He won a PIAA long jump title as a senior at Wyoming Valley West, where he was also sixth in the triple jump and a 100 meters semifinalist. He set a long jump record for the Spartans – and District 2 – with a leap of 24 feet. Gorham won four district championships at Wyoming Valley West.

Gorham resides in Kingston with his wife, Tracey, and their four children, twins Cole and Jack, 9, Noah, 6, and Gracen, 4 months.

### **Kevin Gryboski**

The former major league pitcher played in six organizations in a 15-year professional career.

Gryboski was best known for his time with the Atlanta Braves, where he was a set-up man in their vaunted bullpen during their dominance of the National League East.

He was also a member of the Mariners, Rangers, Nationals, Pirates and Giants organizations, and received Rookie of the Year consideration in 2002 with the Braves. He went 2-1 with a 3.48 ERA in 57 games in his major-league debut season. He retired with a 12-8 career record and a 4.07 ERA in 238 major league games.

Gryboski was a two-sport standout at Bishop Hoban and then Wilkes. The Venetia resident is married (wife Leah) and has two children (K.J., 7, and Kaylee, 6).

### **William James**

An all-state honorable mention as a senior at Nanticoke, he was a member of the school's Class 3A state basketball championship team, which defeated Hickory Township 56-46 at the Farm Show Arena in Harrisburg.

James averaged 17 points and 14 rebounds during his varsity basketball career, scoring more than 1,100 points for the Trojans. He was the Wyoming Valley All-Star MVP as a senior. He also batted around .333 during four varsity seasons with the Nanticoke baseball team.

He went on to play Sunday baseball in the Wyoming Valley League and modified fast-pitch softball in New Jersey for 25 years, winning more than 200 games as a pitcher and batting better than .400 as a pitcher, center fielder and shortstop.

James is employed by the New Jersey District Water Commission. He lives with his wife, Anna, in Totowa, N.J.

### **Richie Kiewlak**

A standout at Nanticoke, he was a member of the school's Class 3A state basketball championship team of 1961.

Kiewlak scored nearly 700 points in two varsity seasons with the Trojans and was an all-state honorable mention. He also played four varsity seasons with the Nanticoke baseball team, batting .444 during his junior and senior seasons. He went on to an eight-year career playing semi-pro baseball, batting .375. His prowess on the diamond led to a tryout with the Philadelphia Phillies.

Kiewlak retired from U.S. Steel Corporation and currently lives in Fairless Hills. He and his wife, Patricia, have been married 46 years. They have two sons, Richard Jr. and David, and three grandchildren, Eric, David and Ryan.

### **Kenny Legins**

The two-time all-state basketball player at Nanticoke (1960-61) went on to play Division I college basketball at George Washington, accepting one of 39 scholarship offers he received.

Legins scored 607 points as a senior at Nanticoke and posted nearly 2,000 points during his high school career, which he capped with a Class 3A state championship in 1961.

At George Washington, he was a three-time All-Southern Conference selection as well as captain of the Colonials for his final three seasons at the university.

He became a teacher and coached basketball, advancing professionally to retire as vice president of Abitibi Bowater Paper Co., in 2008. He resides in Plymouth, Mass., with his wife, Barbara. They have two sons, Kenneth Jr. and Keith. Bob McFadden

Currently a wrestling official in the PIAA and the NCAA, he was a three-sport standout at Meyers in the 1980s for his efforts in cross country, wrestling, and track and field.

McFadden was a three-time letter winner in cross country, qualifying for states in 1986. In track and field, he won

district gold and silver while helping the Mohawks to a state team championship.

His featured sport was wrestling, where he was 95-9-2 – including an undefeated record in 55 dual matchups. He won two Northeast Regionals and twice placed third in the state. He continued wrestling at Bucknell, where he posted a 12-8 record in two seasons with the Bison.

He also played nearly a decade of modified softball as a sharp-hitting second baseman. He earned a bachelor's degree from Wilkes and a master's from Misericordia. He lives in Sugar Notch with his wife, Tracy, and children, Scott and Todd.

**Dave Anthony Shipula**

He starred in youth baseball and basketball in Hanover Township and college at King's, which he sandwiched around time as a student-athlete in Virginia.

Shipula attended Staunton (Va.) Military Academy for high school, where he played basketball for four years. As a senior, he was the team's outstanding player. He averaged 16 points and 18 rebounds per game.

At King's, he was a starter for two seasons on the basketball team and was a Division II All-ECAC honoree during his junior campaign. Shipula extended his basketball career by playing in France in 1977.

Since college, he has been an avid softball player and coached a number of youth leagues, and has served on the PIAA Oversight Council. Shipula has been active in the community in a number of causes as well.

He lives in Hanover Township with his wife, Sharon, and three children, Alexis, David and Alyssa.

**Jill Hockenbury Snowdon**

A multi-sport athlete in both high school and college, she excelled at both levels.

Snowdon played three seasons of soccer at King's, setting records for goals in a season (15) and career (37), assists in a season (9) and career (24), and points in a season (39) and career (98). She was a three-time MAC all-star.

She also played a season of basketball and was a member of King's first lacrosse team.

She started her college career at PSU Wilkes-Barre, where she played a season on the men's soccer team, scoring one goal.

She played four years of basketball at Bishop Hoban, scoring more than 800 points and leading the team to the state Class 3A final. She also played three seasons with the Hoban soccer team, taking her junior season off to join the track team as a sprinter.

Snowdon lives in Dallas with her husband, Brent, and children William (6) and Elizabeth (3).

**Jeff Snyder**

A master of martial arts with three black belts, he overcame injury to resume a hall of fame career.

Inducted into the Grandmaster Coal Hall of Fame in 1991, he was forced to retire due to injury in 1993 after winning more than 150 awards.

He returned to martial arts in 2009 and has added more than 60 titles since. He is a 10-time state champion, with eight of those titles coming in Pennsylvania.

Snyder had won four national championships and two world championships during his career. He has qualified for three events at the 2012 world championships and is ranked No. 1 in the nation in his age group for fighting in Taekwondo.

He works at Nurse Finders and Golden Living Center. Snyder lives in Wilkes-Barre with his wife, Bettie, and children Brock, 3, and Brooke, 1.

**Edmund 'Chick' Witkoski**

The star quarterback and basketball player at Plymouth High School recorded one of the longest in state football history. In a 1939 game against GAR, Witkoski returned a botched punt 107 yards for a touchdown in a 19-13 victory. He was an All-State honorable mention selection.

After high school, he joined the Air Force and continued his football playing as quarterback of the Jackson, Miss., Air Force Base team.

He went on to operate Ed's Market in Plymouth, and after his retirement, worked for Darings Market in Dallas.

Witkoski is an avid bowler and polka dancer, regularly featured on WVIA's Polka Party.

Witkoski has three stepdaughters, Theresa Flood, Marge Gushka and Suzanne Smith, and several grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

8/11/2012

**GNA adds new support classes**

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

[Greater Nanticoke Area School District](#) Superintendent Anthony Perrone announced at Thursday's school board

meeting the district has added emotional support classes to its curriculum.

In addition, there will be three full-time speech therapists and two life-skills classes available to the students for the new school year. Perrone said the district has "new teachers, new classes and is ready to go."

Perrone also said there will be some changes in the cafeteria menu this year. The menu will feature whole grain breads, more vegetables and a maximum of two ounces of meat. The government mandated these changes, Perrone said.

In other matters: the board:

Approved music teacher Brad Bunnell's request for eight performances or competitions for the 2012-13 school year. The superintendent will decide individually which competitions the band will attend. Not all will be approved, due to the fiscal restraints.

Accepted the resignations of furloughed teacher Ryan Kearney, as of July 10, as well as Henry Turoski Jr., strength and conditioning coach, for the 2012-13 school year. The board has also appointed Neal McMahan as strength and conditioning coach for the 2012-13 school year.

Approved the appointment of Ed Pascoe as cross-country head coach and Nick Weron as volunteer assistant. Barbara Lach has been appointed as the girls' volleyball bookkeeper.

Heard Andrea Medura say the school's summer swim program is a success. The program includes participants between the ages of 3 and 70, and has seen up to 40 children and adults during one session.

8/10/2012

[Nanticoke Area](#) implements healthy lunch guidelines

[bwellock@citizensvoice.com](mailto:bwellock@citizensvoice.com)

Superintendent Anthony Perrone says he expects to have "a revolution" on his hands this fall.

That will happen, he predicts, after students sit down for lunch that conforms to the new, healthier guidelines set by the United States Department of Agriculture.

Students will munch on more fruits and vegetables and whole grains and consume less saturated fat, trans fat, salt and meat. Milk must be fat-free or low-fat. Lunches will have calorie limits. The new rules are the first major changes to school meals in 15 years, according to the USDA.

Perrone mentioned the changes after the school board voted unanimously to set the meal prices for next school year.

The cost of a regular student breakfast increased by 25 cents to \$1 and the cost of an adult breakfast rose 25 cents to \$1.70. The price of lunches will stay the same, at \$1.75 for kindergarten to grade 5, \$2 for grade 6 to grade 12, and 40 cents for a reduced-price lunch.

In other business:

Board members Cindy Donlin and Anthony Prushinski had a minor dust-up after a vote on summer maintenance employees. Prushinski asked Donlin if the Nanticoke nepotism policies had changed after her affirmative vote and said one of the three maintenance employees was the nephew of a board member. After a brief back-and-forth discussion, Donlin changed her vote, which had no effect on the hiring. It wasn't clear to whom Prushinski was referring.

Some teachers are coming back to the district after furloughs last year. The board promoted speech teacher Nina Herbst's from part-time to full-time, and recalled Joseph Figlerski, who had been furloughed, to teach family consumer science. The board terminated 11 employees, furloughed 10 and demoted one in 2011.

Andrea Medura said the summer community pool program is going swimmingly. The school pool is open in the summer for the first time in many years, Medura said, and until Aug. 24, the pool will be open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday, Tuesday and Friday. Admission is \$1 for children, \$3 for adults and \$5 for a swimming lesson.

8/3/2012

**Nanticoke names Shultz police chief**

**The veteran officer will replace James Cheshinski, who died in June.**

Steven Fondo - Times Leader

City council voted unanimously on Wednesday night to approve the appointment of William Shultz as police chief to replace Chief James Cheshinski, who passed away in early June after a brief illness.

Shultz has been a police officer since 1974 and spent 10 years as chief of Plymouth Township police before joining Nanticoke's department in 1990. He was second in command to Cheshinski for a number of years.

"I'm honored to be filling Chief Cheshinski's shoes, and I hope to follow in his footsteps," Shultz said. "I plan to continue to serve the city of Nanticoke and her residents to the best of my abilities."

“Chief Shultz is the most qualified for the position,” said Mayor Joseph Dougherty. “He’s hard-working and a dedicated officer. I know he’ll make us proud.”

Council President Steve Duda said that with the appointment of Shultz, city officials hope to quickly address the understaffing of the department.

In other business:

- Council voted unanimously to approve a \$12,000 salary increase for recently appointed City Administrator Pam Heard. Heard’s salary will now be \$67,000.

Duda said the raise reflects Heard’s expanded duties in the aftermath of former City Administrator Holly Cirko’s departure.

- Council also voted unanimously to accept a bid of \$488,987 from Pennsy Supply for a paving project along Hanover Street. City officials said work on the project will begin this month.

8/3/2012

**Middle Road resident applauds signs of safety**

**State applies 25 mph road marking and will install stop sign at a key intersection.**

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For 20 years, Donald Casterline has complained about speeding cars and trucks along South Main Street between Route 29 and the Nanticoke line, especially past his Lower Askam house.

Now the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation is moving quickly to address his concerns.

This week, in numerous spots along the two-mile stretch, PennDOT painted big and bright “25 MPH” signs in white lettering onto the roadway and also fixed two collapsed storm drain grates that drivers swerved around, causing them to enter the opposing lane of traffic.

The agency also painted a crosswalk area across South Main Street near the school bus stop at Martin Street.

On Thursday, PennDOT announced it would install a stop sign at the intersection of Middle Road and Kosciuszko Street in neighboring Nanticoke, where South Main Street becomes Middle Road. That will be done the week of Aug. 13.

“It looks like we made some progress,” Casterline said proudly on Thursday. “More progress than I’ve made in 20 years here.”

He noted there is still one thing PennDOT traffic engineer Keith Williams and assistant district executive for maintenance Dennis Giordano promised him while at his house for a meeting July 11 that has yet to occur.

“They still owe us a wig wag,” Casterline said, using PennDOT lingo for solar-powered 25 mph signs with flashing lights that draw attention to the posted speed.

For 45 years, Casterline has watched bigger and faster vehicles zoom down the narrow, two-lane roadway. He has been urging elected officials, PennDOT and anyone else who will listen to him to do something in response.

He said heavy truck traffic, school buses, LCTA buses and thousands of Luzerne County Community College staff and students have made the roadway crowded and dangerous for motorists, pedestrians and homeowners, a few of whom have had vehicle versus house incidents over the years.

Casterline wanted PennDOT to install stop signs at various intersections along the stretch but PennDOT officials said those are not to be used to control speeding and could cause accidents.

But the stop sign at Middle Road and Kosciuszko Street was selected as a place to help control traffic heading into Hanover Township.

“I think it will break the momentum of the cars coming up this way,” Casterline said, adding that stringing the vehicles out a bit will help.

All the measures PennDOT has taken “are a big improvement. I’m happy with it.”

Casterline credited the media with covering his plight and likely playing a role in the speedy response from PennDOT.

PennDOT issued a statement urging people to “use extra caution when approaching the intersection over the next few weeks as drivers adjust to the changes.”

7/29/2012

**Sweet opportunity**

**Providing skills for low-income children**

Andrew M. Seder - aseder@timesleader.com

Ed Tolodzieski wants his daughter Cassandra to make something of her life. And the best opportunity for that to happen,



he believes, is 100 miles away.

Cassandra, 11, will soon head to the Milton Hershey School, a century-old institution founded by its namesake that offers educational and skill training opportunities to children from low-income families.

The schooling is free, as are room and board, clothing, medical and dental care and more. It's all paid for from the trust set up by the chocolate maker and his wife shortly after the school opened in 1909 and that has now grown to \$8.5 billion.

"To get her out of the projects, she'll get the education she needs," said Tolodzieski. "She has a great opportunity down there."

Sitting inside Antonio's Pizza and Subs along East Main Street in Nanticoke, Cassandra and three other Nanticoke girls, each wearing Aeropostale t-shirts, ate pizza and listened to school admissions counselor Stacey Spangenburg.

She explained school policies, expectations and offerings, answered questions and told the students that while they're making a big commitment to further their education, their family is making a "big sacrifice."

"They're giving a special gift so you can get a great education and opportunity," Spangenburg said.

Only one of six accepted

It's an opportunity that isn't available for everyone and even for those that do qualify to apply, only one in six are accepted.

More and more, the school has branched out to corners of the state from which it had not regularly received applications.

Starting next month, Cassandra, Alexa Dunaj, 12, and Jovina Munoz, 11, all of Nanticoke, will be among the 43 students from Luzerne County attending the 1,860-pupil school, a number that has increased by 700 over the last five years.

In addition to continuing efforts to serve urban populations already familiar to the school, recruiters are turning their efforts to areas of the state, including Northeastern Pennsylvania, which may not have an awareness of the school.

The plan is to increase enrollment to 2,000 students over the next 10 years, school spokeswoman Lisa Scullin said.

"We are aware that there are children from poverty across Pennsylvania who need the education, services and care we provide. Northeast Pennsylvania is an area where there is need, and we are working to make sure families here know about Milton Hershey School," she said.

To accommodate that growth, the school will open four new student homes on its 10,000-acre campus in Derry Township, Dauphin County in September. Scullin said four more student homes are slated to open next year and the school has permission to build eight more in the near future.

Spangenburg said having four students from one small city is not common.

It's a result of one student spreading positive comments about her time at the school. That student is Miranda Park, 13, who is entering her third year at the school and will be in seventh grade this fall.

She began at Hershey in fifth grade and a few months in got homesick, dropped out and went back to Nanticoke Middle School.

But she quickly changed her mind.

"I realized I made a mistake," she said. So she reapplied and was reaccepted this year. She was able to talk to her three Nanticoke friends about the school, her difficulties adjusting to leaving her family and friends and how she coped.

Making the transition

Her suggestions were simple. Keep in touch with your family, busy yourself with activities and schoolwork and realize that you're there to better yourself and to take advantage of an awesome opportunity.

Miranda said Alexa, Cassandra and Jovina will have the added benefit of knowing each other, a support system she didn't have.

Alexa agreed that while she worries about being homesick the transition will be easier to cope with knowing she has friends nearby, even if the girls learned none of them will live in the same home on the sprawling campus that includes swimming pools, a chapel, art museum, athletic facilities and both television and radio studios.

According to Scullin, the "main goal for all of our students is that they leave the school well-prepared to enter society as productive citizens. We want all of our graduates to be good students, but we also want them to be good people, good employees and responsible members of their communities. Our graduates continue to reflect this ethic."

She said that more than 90 percent of Milton Hershey School graduates plan to continue their education at a two- or four-year college or trade school. For students that will go on to higher education, the school offers scholarship credits during their high school years to cover most of the tuition, fees and room and board at universities or trade schools.

The school requires each student to pursue a career technical education track while there.

7/28/2012

**Eleven Wyoming Valley Conference softball players were honored by the Pennsylvania Softball Coaches Association all-state team, which was released on Friday**

Citizens Voice

The team, which is selected based on votes from sports writers across the state, includes 249 players throughout the state from Class A to AAAA.

**First team selections from the WVC** include Tiffany Oplinger of Lake-Lehman, **Maggie Gola of Nanticoke Area**, Danielle Tuzinski of Hanover Area and **Ange Hillan of Nanticoke Area**, all in Class AA.

Margaret Bridge, a junior pitcher at Berwick, was selected to the second team in Class AAA, while **Nanticoke Area senior outfielder Katie Kowalski and teammate Sammi Gow, a senior shortstop**, as well as Holy Redeemer junior Stacey Warga **were named to the Class AA second team.**

Honorable mention selections were Hazleton Area junior pitcher Becky Demko in Class AAAA, Tunkhannock senior pitcher Ashley Inman in Class AAA and Northwest Area senior pitcher Rachel Linso in Class A.

Oplinger was the top hitter in the conference as senior with a .680 average. She finished the season with six home runs, six doubles, five triples and 21 RBIs and had just one error at shortstop.

Tuzinski led Hanover Area to its first Division II championship since 1996 as well as 13-0 regular-season record. She recorded 90 strikeouts and 1.00 ERA and offensively she had 19 RBIs on six doubles, one triple and a home run.

**Gola and Hillan have been starters since their freshman seasons and led Nanticoke Area to the Division I East Championship, the District 2 Class AA title and a trip to the PIAA Class AA semifinals.**

**Gola drove in 33 runs on 35 hits, including 10 doubles and a pair of triples.**

**Hillan had a perfect season in centerfield for the Trojanettes and recorded 34 hits and knocked in 19 runs.**

7/26/2012

**Polish hospital honors Nanticoke native**

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A hospital in Poland has been named for Nanticoke native Dr. Stanley Dudrick, who pioneered what some consider one of the three most important advancements in surgery during the past century.

Dudrick, who has a long list of medical achievements listed in a biography of his 50-year career, said he thinks his greatest accomplishment has been training thousands of doctors and surgeons and helping patients around the world.

"I've touched a lot of lives," said Dudrick, 77, who now serves as medical director of the Physician Assistant Program at Misericordia University in Dallas Township and as professor of surgery in the Yale University School of Medicine in Connecticut.

Growing up in Nanticoke, the son of a coal miner, he vividly recalls his mother, deathly ill with severe rheumatic fever and heart disease.

More than anything, he was touched and moved by the doctors who made house visits and treated his mother, and he vowed to grow up to be just like them.

"They saved my mother's life," Dudrick said. "I said I wanted to be like these people."

Passionate physician

And so at age 6, he was set on his career path. By 1961, after graduating from Franklin and Marshall College with a biology degree, he was enrolled at University of Pennsylvania's medical school.

After internships and residency he became chief of surgery at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Philadelphia and in 1972 he moved to Texas to become the first professor of surgery at the newly established University of Texas at Houston Medical School. He worked there until 1994 before heading back east to work at Yale.

He always wanted to come back and work in the Wyoming Valley and made sure he visited at least twice a year, typically Christmas and summer.

His wife, Theresa M. Keen, a Pittston native he met while the two worked at Skytop Lodge in the Poconos during their college summers, was a 1955 Misericordia graduate.

Through conversations with the school and its president, Michael A. MacDowell, Dudrick was able to help develop the school's physician assistant program, and he will come on board full time this fall when the first class enters. Finally, his dream of working and living in Luzerne County will be realized.

Desire to keep helping

As for retiring, something some accomplished 77-year-olds might consider, Dudrick said it's not for him.

“I’m in the twilight of my career and the twilight of my life, and I’m trying to be as useful as I can for as long as I can,” Dudrick said.

Before he started the latest chapter of his life at Misericordia, he was in Poland in May and learned that a 28-bed hospital that opened this year in the town of Skawina, just south of Krakow, was named in his honor.

While there to lecture and participate in the annual meeting of the Polish Society for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition, he was asked to visit a new hospital that was constructed by two Polish doctors he knew.

The hospital is located in an area where all four of his grandparents were born and raised before emigrating to America. At a surprise unveiling of a bronze plaque at the hospital on May 24, Dudrick learned of the new Stanley Dudrick’s Memorial Hospital.

“It was a very emotional experience for me,” Dudrick said. “I don’t feel I deserve it and I would have never expected it.”

Dudrick, who first visited Poland in 2003, has been a consultant and member of the Polish Journal of Surgery’s editorial board for almost 10 years and has contributed several scientific papers for publication in the journal.

Dudrick said he didn’t ask for the hospital honor and was told the name was chosen because the two Polish doctors were inspired by his research.

“Coupled with the fact I had Polish roots and my family was from that region, it all came together,” Dudrick said. “It was an act of respect and gratitude.”

Dudrick said it’s nice to be recognized for his work, most notably his pioneering research while at the University of Pennsylvania in development of the specialized central venous feeding technique known as intravenous hyperalimentation or total parenteral nutrition, which allows those who cannot eat to be fed through a tube that bypasses the intestines.

Medical breakthrough

Along with open-heart surgery and organ transplantation, his breakthrough has been called one of the three most important advancements in surgery during the past century.

“The number one love of my life was to be the best surgeon I could possibly be,” he said. “Being the best husband is second.”

And it’s a fact he told his wife while proposing to her.

“I told her if she could live with that, would you marry me?”

The reply from the English major who would go on to bear his six children was: “Quo Vadis,” or “where are you going?” with the implication she would follow.

“Never once in 54 years has she interfered with me being the best doctor I could possibly be,” Dudrick said.

#### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Name: Dr. Stanley Dudrick

Age: 77

Family: Married to former Theresa M. Keen, the couple has six children and 16 grandchildren

Resides: In Dallas Township, born and raised in Nanticoke

Education: A 1953 graduate of Nanticoke High School, he earned a degree in biology from Franklin and Marshall College in 1957 and his M.D. from the University of Pennsylvania in 1961.

Career: Worked as chief of surgery at the VA Hospital in Philadelphia before becoming the first professor of surgery at the University of Texas at Houston Medical School. In 1994 he accepted a job at Yale University in New Haven, Conn. and serves as chair of the department of surgery at Saint Mary’s Hospital in Waterbury, Conn. This year he was hired as medical director of the Physician Assistant program and recipient of the first endowed chair at Misericordia University.

Claim to fame: Many, but most notably he is credited with a new technique called Total Parenteral Nutrition used to feed nutrients to the ill who could not eat.

7/24/2012

**Nanticoke defeats West Side for title**

Times Leader

Nanticoke used a three-hit effort by Colby Butczynski to defeat West Side 5-1 for the Wilkes-Barre 9-10 Rec Championship on Monday.

Dylan Sczychowski, Austin Norton, Jacob Kruginski and Jaden Held each produced a hit for Nanticoke. Butczynski picked up the win on the mound.

Mike O’Kane, Jim White, Dave Menzel and Jim Harding each had a hit for West Side.

7/20/2012

### **Improvements for downtown Nanticoke unveiled**

### **\$5.6 million from feds would help pay for walks, lighting, ramps and landscaping.**

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

Mayor Joseph Dougherty on Wednesday night presented to City Council proposed renovations for the city’s downtown area.

Daryl Pawlush of Penn Eastern Engineering detailed the streetscape project, which will make improvements to Kosciuszko, Prospect, Union, Main and Market streets. Planned improvements include new sidewalks, curbs, ramps, trees and street lights.

Thirty parking spaces also will be added to the area, increasing the total to 58. Handicapped-accessible ramps also will be installed at the intersections. The project will bring new landscaping and sidewalks near the entrance to Weis Markets.

Pawlush said the new lights will utilize LED technology, which will cut down on the energy used, saving the city a considerable amount of money yearly.

The federal government will provide \$5.6 million of the \$7 million project through an earmark and the city will provide \$1.4 million, or 20 percent. A separate earmark of \$2 million is being used to improve Alden Road, which is under construction. The earmarks were secured by former U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski.

Council President Steve Duda said the plans are bringing “a significant change” to the city. He said that in order to invite commerce to the city, the improvements must be made, and residents should “embrace this change.”

Finance Director Pam Heard said the 20 percent of the funding the city put in was money that has been saved from the sale of assets, minus expenditures, and excess revenue. Heard said raising taxes to pay for the project would not be necessary.

Also, there was a first reading of an ordinance to disband the city’s Civil Service Commission and to establish two separate boards, one for the police department and one for the fire department.

7/20/2012

### **Nanticoke names new manager**

### **City’s financial officer replaces Holly Cirko, who was recently charged with driving under the influence.**

Bill O’Boyle - boboyle@timesleader.com

Pamela Heard is the new city manager, replacing Holly Cirko, who was recently charged with driving under the influence.

Heard, 43, of Mountain Top, will continue serving as financial officer temporarily.

City Council unanimously confirmed her appointment Wednesday night. The post pays \$55,000 annually.

Heard said Thursday that she, her husband and two children will move to Nanticoke within one year, as per the requirement of the city’s Home Rule Charter.

“There are lots of good things happening in the city,” Heard said.

She said Geisinger Health System is building a satellite clinic downtown and a streetscape project will begin soon. She said the federal government will provide \$5.6 million of the \$7 million project and the city will provide \$1.4 million.

Several streets are being repaved this summer, she added.

“The Geisinger project will bring more jobs to the city, and more jobs means more people and more tax revenue,” Heard said.

Mayor Joseph Dougherty said he is looking forward to working with Heard, whom he called a dedicated employee.

“She possesses exceptional leadership qualities,” Dougherty said. “She’s not afraid to stay late to get the job done. I have great faith and confidence in her.”

As part of the Act 47 recovery plan, the city formed a manager recruitment committee to handle the selection process.

Cirko’s title had been city administrator, but the title was changed to city manager under Home Rule.

Several candidates applied and Heard emerged as the unanimous choice of the five-member committee.

“I wasn’t surprised when that recommendation was offered,” Dougherty said.

The mayor said Cirko, 39, applied for the position, but her application was received late – past a set deadline – and the committee did not accept it.

Cirko has been on paid leave since crashing her car into a wall about 3 a.m. June 26.

Dougherty said Cirko's last day of employment with the city will be Aug. 3.

According to a criminal docket filed in the office of District Judge Donald Whittaker, Cirko was charged on July 6 with DUI, careless driving and accidental damage to an unattended vehicle or property stemming from her arrest on June 26. Her preliminary hearing before Whitaker is scheduled for Aug. 8 at 2:45 p.m.

According to the state website, The Financially Distressed Municipalities Act, also known as Act 47, empowers the state Department of Community and Economic Development to declare certain municipalities as financially distressed. It provides for the restructuring of debt, limits the ability to obtain government funding, authorizes municipalities to participate in federal debt adjustment actions and bankruptcy actions, and provides for consolidation or merger of contiguous municipalities to relieve financial distress.

Heard said she has been working with the appointed recovery plan coordinator, and the city could be out of Act 47 status by the end of 2013 or early 2014.

"I'd like to be out of Act 47 tomorrow," Dougherty said. "We have an exit plan in place, and the city is in pretty good shape. We just have to watch our finances."

Dougherty said the city, like several other municipalities, has been having difficulty collecting its earned income tax revenue.

"We'll get by," he said.

Nanticoke's annual general fund budget is \$4.2 million and the city has 56 employees. Two-thirds of the budget goes to the city's paid fire and police departments, Heard said.

Heard is a native of Exeter. She graduated from Wyoming Area High School and The University of Scranton with a degree in accounting. She is a certified public accountant.

"We have a wonderful staff here," Heard said. "They have been invaluable, helping out tremendously while we are short-staffed."

7/19/2012

### **Proposed streetscape improvements unveiled**

Bill Wellock - Citizens Voice

The project's funding - \$5.6 million of federal money - came thanks to a congressman who's no longer in the House of Representatives.

Daryl Pawlush, a principal with Penn Eastern Engineers, and members of city council heard public comment Wednesday on the proposed streetscape over several downtown streets, one of the final steps before it starts.

Five years after former U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski secured funding for changes to Nanticoke streets, the city is close to starting the work.

The project could put new trees, LED streetlights, handicap ramps, paving, benches and parking meters in Nanticoke on several blocks of Main and Market streets, Pawlush said.

The entire project will cost \$6.7 million. The city is paying its share with money saved for capital improvements and with profits from selling some properties, said Pamela Heard, the former director of finance who was voted in as city manager Wednesday.

Citizens questioned how some parts of the project would work and discussion sometimes strayed from the topic at hand as people wondered what good an improved street would do without businesses to occupy the sidewalks. Council members said the project is a first step toward bringing new life to the city.

"We must all embrace this. This is a signal change," said council president Stephen E. Duda. "In order to get businesses into the city, you need good infrastructure. If we have a good-looking city, it all works together, hand-in-hand."

Duda said Geisinger Health System is close to moving a facility into downtown and that other businesses are looking at the space. He said he couldn't name those businesses because negotiations are ongoing.

**Want to comment on the plan for a streetscape in downtown Nanticoke? Stop by city hall during business hours or go to Mayor Joseph Dougherty's office hours from 5:45 to 7 p.m. Wednesdays, said council president Stephen E. Duda.**

7/19/2012

### **Nanticoke names new city manager**

Bill Wellock - Citizens Voice



Council on Wednesday hired a replacement for the city manager, who has been on paid leave since her arrest in connection with a drunken-driving wreck.

Council voted Pamela Heard, who was working as the city's director of finance, as the city manager at a meeting Wednesday. A home rule committee interviewed five candidates and recommended Heard to the mayor, and council approved the mayor's choice, said council president Stephen E. Duda.

Heard replaces Holly M. Cirko, who was on paid leave since crashing her car into a wall about 3 a.m. June 26. Police charged Cirko with driving under the influence, accidental damage, and careless driving.

Solicitor William Finnegan said Cirko will soon receive a notice informing her when her last day will be.

Heard has been working as the city's finance director for about three years. That experience was a key reason she was chosen, Duda said.

As the director of finance, she worked with the city's budget and with contract negotiations.

"She was not only the best because she was capable, she's already proven herself and worked hand-in-hand with Holly Cirko," Duda said. "I don't think we'll miss a beat."

Heard will make \$55,000 a year as the city manager. In the meantime, she will also continue the financial duties she was performing.

Heard may eventually take some specific managerial training, but no plans have been made for that yet, Duda said.

Tax anticipation

After months without reliable tax revenue, Nanticoke council on Wednesday accepted a \$400,000 loan from M&T Bank with an interest rate of 1.98 percent.

Nanticoke had been trying to avoid taking out a loan, Heard said before the meeting.

However, problems with the tax collection company implementing a new county-wide collection system meant the financial vice was tightening.

07/16/2012

**No place like home**

**Veteran's family donates residence for other vets**

Sara Pokorny - Times Leader

When Mary Ann Standish's brother Barry passed away in February 2011, she knew she had to do something to keep the memory of one of the most loved people in her life alive.

"Everyone who knew my brother respected and liked him," she said. "He was intelligent, kind, generous, and always had a smile on his face. If you knew Barry you became familiar with his fabulous sense of humor and his gentle nature. Although his life became so difficult after he was disabled, he never complained."

Barry was a U.S. Army veteran of the Vietnam War and the Nanticoke house he resided in until the day he died at the age of 69 will now be renovated and used by the NEPA Veterans Multicare Alliance to help veterans in need.

The West Field Street residence came into the family's possession in the mid-1940s, when the home was bought by Mary Ann's parents John and Lillian Standish, who raised a total of six children at the residence.

Barry was honorably discharged from the Army in 1964 after being disabled while serving the country. He was never able to work again in his profession as a mechanical engineer because of his injury. After he passed, the home was given to Mary Ann.

"When he died, it was really like the end of an era in terms of that home," Mary Ann said. "It didn't seem fitting that Barry and his legacy would just end like that. I didn't want it to turn into a rental that might fall into bad conditions, so I decided to donate the home."

Mary Ann said this is something Barry would have wanted, as he was always very active in affairs dealing with veterans. He and Lillian volunteered their time at the Anthracite Chapter No. 5 Disabled American Veterans Organization for many years and Barry volunteered at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Wilkes-Barre.

The house will now be known as the Barry B. Standish Veterans Home and work is currently being done on it. It's a three bedroom home that, when finished, will provide a space for a veteran and his or her family, for however long they need it, rent-free.

Karla Porter, vice presidents of NEPA VMA, said such jobs as a roof and porch floor replacement, new siding, and replacement of bathroom and kitchen fixtures need to be done. In recent weeks, the U.S. Air Force 314th Recruiting Squadron has been working on the house.

"They've been in charge of a lot of the cleanup," Porter said, "and it would be great if we could get people to volunteer some time to help with the actual renovation."

Porter said anyone willing to help can call NEPA VMA at 706-2066 or visit the website at nepavma.org. Any type of donation is welcome, from time to money to actual pieces for the home. Porter said a dishwasher has already been donated.

"We're very flexible as far as when people can work on the house is concerned. If someone lets us know when they can give us some time, we're willing to work with them to make it happen."

07/16/2012

### **Proud to be patriots**

### **Parade honors those contributing to country**

Sara Pokorny - Times Leader

The sun broke through the clouds and the spattering of rain stopped just in time for the South Valley Patriots Day Parade to come through Patriot Square.

The event was the first of its kind, hosted by the South Valley Chamber of Commerce as part of the organization's community development program. The Chamber represents 32 municipalities; they will take turns hosting the parade. The parade is held to honor what is typically thought of as a patriot, those in the armed forces, but it also represents a much broader array of people.

"We define a patriot as basically anyone who contributes to this country," Chamber executive director Chris Carey said, pointing out that that sentiment can reach as far as business owners, municipal leaders, and even those who cut the grass.

"They all contribute to what makes America, America. We wanted to define it this way so that it's broad and opens it up to celebrate more people."

As the first trucks rolled down East Broad Street, 8-year-old Billy Emmert stood on the corner clapping, knowing full well the value of honoring those who serve our country.

"My brother Johnny is leaving for Kuwait in a couple weeks," he said as he sat among friends Maddy Rowles and Jeffery Engle, 11, Carleigh Kenne, 10, and chaperone for the day Sarah Engle, on a bench along the parade route. Mitchell Miller Sr., 51, served in the Marine Corps in 1979. He was at the parade with his children Mitchell Jr., 7, Robert, 4, and Rhiana Fravel, 9. He was appreciative of the day.

"It's always nice when they do things like this," he said.

Several local vendors were there, from area food to community organizations and businesses, as well as a DJ.

The inclement weather cut the festivities short, ending around mid afternoon instead of the planned 9 p.m.

07/11/2012

### **Landlord shocked to learn tenants charged in killings**

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It's a nice little house, owned by a nice old lady who lives next door.

Early Saturday morning, heavily armed police barged in Rear 178 E. Ridge St. and nabbed two suspects wanted for a triple homicide in Plymouth.

Neighbors say they're stunned. The woman was a tough, hands-on landlord who took over the family homestead with pride - and strict rules. She wouldn't even let unwed couples move in together. Also, they say, the home, a block from the city police station, did not seem like a problem property - not the place two murder suspects from Philadelphia would end up.

"This is as much of a shock to me as it is to you," the landlord, Margaret Romanofski, 81, said Tuesday.

Romanofski, who lives in and owns an adjacent triple-unit apartment building, said she never saw the two suspects, Shawn Hamilton, 18, and Sawud Davis, 16, who police say stayed there only a matter of days.

Police have identified the tenant of the rental unit as Benyall I. Richardson, 30, who was not home during the raid and had not returned since. He was arrested in Nanticoke on Tuesday night on unrelated charges.

Saying she was upset and not feeling well, Romanofski, an avid church-goer and retired nurse, politely declined to speak much about any lease agreement for the property in the rear.

"He pulled one over on me," she said.

"The people were happy over the years. We didn't have any problems with our tenants in all the while," she added, noting that the properties were in her family for generations and always problem free.

Most neighbors agreed.

They said Romanofski had a long-term tenant in the rear apartment for nearly 20 years, but she moved out two years ago and Romanofski struggled to find a reliable, trustworthy replacement tenant, having to evict several.

"She's definitely not a slumlord. The property is kept nice. The garbage is out on time. The bills are paid," JoAnne Mera, 54, said. "I never saw anything suspicious and maybe she didn't either. I felt bad for her when it happened." Nanticoke police say the only time they were called to the home in recent memory was when Romanofski told police she no longer wanted Richardson living in the home. Police told her that was a landlord-tenant matter that would have to be resolved in magisterial court.

One of Romanofski's tenants said he lived in his apartment for 11 years and she is the best landlord he ever had.

"It seems she got duped," said the man, who did not want to give his name.

A woman who lives across the street said she was shocked to hear the address where the murder suspects were arrested. She said her daughter had previously considered renting the home, but it was not big enough for her family.

"I thought they had the wrong house. I was like, 'Are you sure it's not West Ridge?' I was so surprised. It's not a dump. It's clean. It was well kept," she said. "It's major shock. This woman, she's older, for her to have that happen to her, I feel bad."

7/9/2012

### **Nanticoke Area claims crown**

The Times Leader

Nanticoke Area defeated Pittston Township, 4-2, on Sunday in the championship game of the District 16 9 and 10 year old tournament.

The victory in Nanticoke Area's first season after Nanticoke and Newport Township Little Leagues combined.

Colby Butczynski picked up the win on the mound, while Austin Norton pitched the final 1 2/3 innings for the save. Getting hits for Nanticoke were Butczynski, Dillon Szychowski, Chris Ormes, Jayden Held, Nate Penko and Adam Eckhart.

Delivering hits for Pittston Area were Mike Nocito, Tony Gorey and Devon Shandra.

Nanticoke advances to the sectional tournament.

7/7/2012

### **Gow credits family**

### **Parental guidance led to Nanticoke star's success**

John Medeiros - Times Leader

Pretty much everyone has come to know that Sammy Gow is a talented softball player.

She has been a staple in the Nanticoke lineup for four years. Before that, she's played on a number of championship teams, including the 2009 Junior Division Little League state champions.

But the secret to her success isn't her swing, her glove, nor her throwing arm. The secret to her success, which includes being named The Times Leader Player of the Year – her parents.

"Definitely. My parents have been at every single one of my games since Little League," Gow said of parents Janet and Tom. "My dad was always my coach (in Little League, the Keystone State Games and with travel teams), he was always on the field with me. He'd always be in the backyard with me. That's why I always turn to him when I want to work on something, even now."

Heading to Wilkes in the fall, that tradition will continue. From their spot in the crowd to the ability to hone skills and enjoy each other's company, the Gows will continue to support their daughter, though there's no longer the need for the catcher's mitt.

"My mom would come in the backyard and be a part of it, too," Gow recalled. "When I used to pitch, she would catch (for) me. She would inspire me and give me talks. She was the one who would lift me up whenever I might be down.

"I owe them all of the credit. I wouldn't have been the player I was without them."

Gow gave up pitching well before her high school career took off. She used to post her fair share of double-digit strikeout games. But she moved on to the infield, playing second base on the 2010 Nanticoke state championship team, and starring at shortstop the past two seasons.

"I don't really know. It used to be a lot of fun," Gow said of her time in the circle. "But I love playing the infield, I love playing shortstop. I don't know what happened to my pitching."

As a senior, she batted .347, leading the Trojans in hits (35, tied with Maggie Gola), runs (29) and triples (4). She was

charged with just seven errors, though it's unlikely anyone can recall even one of them.

And when the pressure is on, Gow gets better. In three state playoff games this season, the senior batted a whopping .778 with two double, a triple and four runs (all team-highs). That's nothing new for Gow, who finished her high school career with a .609 batting average in PIAA Tournament games.

But that was with a Nanticoke squad that featured some of the same player who were on her Minor Division teams a decade ago. She will miss her friends who are heading to other places after Nanticoke, but she is prepared for the chance to excel for the Colonels.

"Over the years, I've played with some of the same girls for 10 years," Gow said. "But I've also played with girls from Tunkhannock to right next door in Hanover. Yeah, I won't be playing with the same team, but I am excited to be moving on. It will be an easy adjustment because of all the other players I've played with on different teams."

Also a standout basketball player, Gow's is a natural athlete. She's played soccer in the past and wanted to give field hockey a try, though her busy schedule would not allow her to add the commitment.

"I just love sports," Gow said. "I was definitely blessed with the athletic gene. I would have played every sport if I could."

And she is thankful her parents nurtured that gene into years of fun and exceptional play.

7/1/2012

**Deadline for avoiding tax penalty draws near**

**A 10-percent charge will kick in July 9 for Wilkes-Barre, Pittston and Nanticoke property owners.**

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Property owners in Wilkes-Barre, Pittston and Nanticoke have until July 9 to pay 2012 Luzerne County taxes without a 10-percent penalty, according to the county treasurer's office.

The office collects county taxes in the three cities.

The deadline to pay county taxes without a penalty varies in other municipalities because bills aren't issued in one batch at the same time.

Elected tax collectors handle the receipt of tax payments in 69 municipalities, and Hazleton and home-rule municipalities rely on outside companies or in-house collection.

The law allows a 2-percent discount for payment within two months of the tax bill issuance and another two months for payment without penalty, said Laura Beers, treasurer's office manager and tax administrator.

This four-month period technically ends July 8, in the three cities where collection is handled by the county, but the law requires payments to be accepted the next business day because the deadline falls on a Sunday, Beers said.

A 10-percent penalty is added after four months, increasing a \$500 bill to \$550, Beers said.

Property owners in the three cities have the option to pay their taxes online with a credit or debit card, Beers said.

A convenience charge is added for the service, but it may be less than the penalty if property owners are able to pay the debt sooner, she said.

The credit card convenience charge is 2.4 percent of the amount paid, or \$12 on a \$500 payment. The Visa debit fee is a flat \$3.95.

Credit/debit payments at the non-penalty or face amount will be accepted through midnight July 9, Beers said. A link for this service is available under the tax collection section of the treasurer's office page on the county website, [www.luzernecounty.org](http://www.luzernecounty.org).

Tax payments postmarked by the deadline must be accepted by tax collectors with no penalty, she said.

Some property owners use online bill services to have tax payment checks issued to the county, Beers said. These services often rely on a mail sorting system that omits the postal service time stamping on envelopes, Beers said. This becomes a problem for payments made close to the deadline.

"Postmark is required for each and every payment we process after July 9 – no exceptions. We must be able to prove to the auditors that we are following the law," Beers said.

The treasurer's office collected 73.6- to 78.1 percent of county taxes in the three cities as of June 26, or \$7.7 million, Beers said. The office expects a 92 percent collection rate through Dec. 31, which is the last payment date to avoid penalties beyond 10 percent.

The county has received \$77.65 million from 2012 property taxes countywide this year to date, or 86 percent of the budgeted \$90.3 million, she said.

6/27/2012

## Camp guides children through hardships

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Walking along State Street in Nanticoke on Tuesday, the most eye-catching image is a colorful Camp Noah sign planted on the lawn of St. John's Lutheran Church.

The church is hosting Camp Noah's week-long series of activities for elementary school-aged victims of last September's flooding, many of whom were displaced from their homes for weeks and months.

Camp officials say the program, functioning as a day camp, is designed to help kids develop important resiliency skills following traumatic experiences.

Jayne Leh, assistant education professor at Penn State in Berks County, spearheaded the local project with her students in an effort to give the future teachers the experience of teaching "outside the classroom" and help students cope with their emotions.

"There's support for adults - Red Cross, conversation, financial aid - but sometimes after things as dramatic as a flood, children can't find the right outlet to express themselves," Leh said.

While Leh has been involved with Camp Noah since 2007 and has visited tornado victims as distant as Alabama, 2012 marks the first year she or Camp Noah have reached out to Luzerne County.

"The damage among these students isn't as noticeable (as with Alabama children), but we're early in the week as far as students processing their emotions," Leh said.

From blocks away, the children, more than 30 kindergartners though sixth-graders could be heard laughing and playing at a nearby park, where camp organizers made sure memories of the flood remained distant.

The Rev. Deborah North of St. John's shared similar praise for the Camp Noah volunteers, saying, "They're running this camp, we're just enjoying learning from them."

"The main goal for the camp is to send kids home with a greater sense of wellbeing," North said. "These kids are gaining the ability to deal with emotional storms as they get hit with them in life."

Camp Noah and St. John's Lutheran Church will continue their no-charge program from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. through Friday. Any child affected by last year's flood is invited to join for the remainder of the week to share their stories and enjoy skits, music and games. For information, call 570-735-8531.

6/26/2012

## Familiar script to win for Nanticoke

### The team topped Duryea/Pittston Township to win the District 16 Little League major softball title.

John Erzar - Times Leader

The beginning was similar. And the end was the same.

The biggest difference, though, was the grand prize – **the District 16 Little League major softball title.**

Nanticoke once again rallied from an early and small deficit against Duryea/Pittston Township, sealing the game late for a quick 6-1 victory Monday.

In little over an hour, Nanticoke won its second consecutive district championship and its first since combining with neighboring Newport Township. Up next is a trip to the Section 5 playoffs where Nanticoke will face the D32 champion at 7:30 p.m. on July 3. The sectionals will be hosted by the D17 champion, either North Pocono or Old Forge.

The two teams played Thursday, and DPT took a 2-0 lead after one inning before Nanticoke rallied for a 4-2 victory. DPT again put Nanticoke in a modest hole as Mackenzie Gable singled home Angelica Singer for a 1-0 advantage in the first.

"Same kind of scenario," Nanticoke manager Jason Rinker said. "Even after a walk, the defense pulls together. It's a complete team effort. It works out really well."

But after Bella Gorzkowski followed with a single, Nanticoke pitcher Jenna Lipowski silenced DPT's bats.

Gorzkowski's single to left in the fourth was the only other hit allowed by Lipowski. She pitched perfect innings in the third, fifth and sixth.

Nanticoke quickly erased the 1-0 deficit in the second inning. Miranda Dunn walked and Megan Murphy reached on an error, both coming with two outs. Liz Moore followed with an infield single that scores both girls.

Murphy delivered an RBI double in the fourth to make it 3-1 before Nanticoke scored three times in the fifth to take a five-run lead.

Morgan Briggs had the big hit in the fifth, a seeing-eye single between short and third to score Abbie Corcoran and Lipowski. Helping her own cause, Lipowski hit an RBI single earlier in the inning.



“When you’re up 3-1 and you get those three insurance runs, it takes a lot of pressure off,” Rinker said. “It makes everything a lot smoother. It’s a world of difference between 3-1 and 6-1.”

DPT’s Nina Cencetti pitched well in defeat. She allowed just four hits and fanned six. But some costly errors helped Nanticoke produce runs.

6/24/2012

### **Nanticoke Area's Gow named softball Player of the Year**

Citizens Voice

Sammy Gow works hard for her accomplishments as an athlete, but it's fair to say the Nanticoke shortstop is a natural when it comes to sports. Whether she was leading off the Trojanettes' batting order or leading Nanticoke's basketball team in scoring, Gow has left behind a legacy at Nanticoke.

The four-year starter is The Citizens' Voice Most Valuable Player after leading the Trojanettes to a 22-4 record, a Division I East championship and a District 2 Class AA championship.

Gow had seven hits in two state playoff games for the Trojanettes and finished the regular season with three triples, four doubles, a .321 batting average, a 390 on-base percentage and a .910 fielding percentage at shortstop.

Jill Snowdon: As the team's shortstop and leadoff hitter, your roles were pretty important. What did your duties mean to you and how did you approach each of them?

Sammy Gow: This year I went back to playing short after playing at second the past three seasons and it was nice to get back to where I played pretty much all my life growing up. I didn't mind playing at second because it was in the best interest of the team, and short and second are a lot alike, except for the longer throw. But I've worked with my dad a lot on my footwork and having a quick release (from short) and I think my glove is one of my best strengths and every batter that came up, I would envision them hitting to me.

And as a leadoff hitter, I still got nervous at the start of every game, even though I've been the leadoff since I was a freshman. But I always had a lot of confidence in my teammates that were after me.

JS: What are some of your favorite softball highlights over the past four years?

SG: Definitely winning the state championship my sophomore year. That was the best day of my life and my only regret is that I didn't take the time during the game to look around and take it all in. I was younger so maybe that's why, but I really wish I took the time to cherish all the little moments and details of the day. Another favorite moment for me was when we beat Dallas in my junior year for the first time in seven years.

JS: What was the driving factor in your decision to attend Wilkes in the fall?

SG: I'm going there because I have a seat in the pharmacy program and my education is first and foremost. But I'm excited about playing softball and playing for coach (Frank) Matthews. I'm so glad I'll be playing locally because my parents and grandparents will be able to come to the game. That was another reason for my decision. And I think it's going to be awesome to play against Jenn (Harnischfeger) and Amanda (Cardone) when we play King's. (Both Harnischfeger and Cardone played at Nanticoke and will be juniors at King's).

JS: You were in a self-described slump this season but really came through in the playoffs. What got you out of it?

SG: I think the turnaround happened in the playoffs because I knew that every game could have been my last. I play better under pressure and I think the pressure of knowing that one game could be the end played a difference. I also worked a lot on my hitting going into the playoffs and I had a lot more confidence that I think I lost during the season.

JS: The season didn't end as you had hoped (a 14-1 loss to Warrior Run in the PIAA Class AA semifinals). How hard was it to grasp that your high school career was over?

SG: I still get upset when I think of that game. I don't know what happened with that game, but I remember walking out of the dugout and crying because the worst part of it was I wasn't going to play again with some of the girls on my team. I hated that my senior year ended that way, but it was a great four years, so I can't complain.

6/23/2012

### **School board members' relatives take teaching posts**

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The Greater Nanticoke Area School Board raised some eyebrows when it hired three teachers with family connections to board members at its meeting Thursday night.

Board member Ryan Verazin's sister Cara Verazin and member Tony Prushinski's niece Lauren Dembowski were each hired to teach at the elementary level. Marya Siergiej, the niece of member Chet Beggs, was hired as a special education

teacher.

The school district does not have a nepotism policy on hiring. Superintendent Anthony Perrone said he didn't know why that is, only saying it has never had one.

But Perrone defended the hirings, saying he and the three district principals, rather than the school board, did all the interviewing and made the recommendations to the school board on who to hire.

The three board members related to candidates abstained from voting on the hiring of their individual relatives, Ryan Verazin said.

Board Secretary Cindy Donlin, however, voted no on all three candidates.

"I've never voted for a board member's immediate family member" for any job position, she said. "I just don't think it's right. It's my personal choice."

Donlin conceded that because Demboski and Siergiej had substituted in the district, they were probably deserving. But Cara Verazin had not, she said.

"Years ago, when board members wanted their family members hired, positions were created. I sat in the audience as a taxpayer and it aggravated the living hell out of me," she said, explaining her distaste for hiring relatives of the board.

The school district also brought back three teachers whom were laid off last year to fill a budget shortfall, and hired another two. Donlin said 12 candidates were interviewed for the five open positions.

The new teachers replace seven retirees who took a buyout from the school district, and will save the school district about \$250,000, Perrone said, because those they replaced were more experienced and thus more expensive.

The hirings were part of the school district's \$25.2 million budget for the upcoming 2012-13 school year, passed by the board Thursday. For the first time in several years, the budget includes a small property tax increase of 2.3 percent on the millage rate, which translates to about \$20 more per year for the average household, Verazin said.

Facing more state cuts and a dwindling rainy day fund, the superintendent said the district will probably have to raise taxes again next year.

"We're not going to do an excessive amount, but we want to preserve our school district," Perrone said.

6/22/2012

### **Board relatives hired for GNA positions**

### **Board also unanimously passes \$25.2M budget that increases property taxes.**

Susan Denney - Times Leader

Of five new Greater Naticoke Area teachers hired Thursday night, three had close family ties to board members.

The board also unanimously passed the district's final 2012-13 budget of \$25.2 million that increases property taxes by almost a quarter of a mill.

New elementary teacher Cara Verazin is member Ryan Verazin's sister. Lauren Dembowski, another elementary hiree, is member Tony Prushinski's niece. Maria Sergei, niece of board member Chester Beggs, will be a special-education teacher for the district in the fall.

All board members voted on the personnel issues, except Verazin, Prushinski and Beggs abstained from voting for their family members.

But Board Secretary Cindy Donlin abstained from voting on all three, saying she will never vote to employ someone who is related to a member of the board.

After the meeting, Board President Jeff Kozlofski defended the hiring of board family members.

He said all the interviews for new teachers hired were conducted by the three principals and the superintendent. He said the board was not involved.

"(The principals) recommended them to us," he said.

Kozlofski also said the board has never considered an anti-nepotism clause comparable to the one adopted by Pittston Area.

The positions were made available because of a memorandum of understanding between the school district and the GNA Education Association, which is the teachers' collective bargaining unit. The memorandum provided for early-retirement incentives for seven senior teachers.

District Business Manager Al Melone said the union helped the district balance the budget. The early retirements also allowed the district to recall three furloughed teachers.

The district's final budget for the upcoming school year will increase the tax rate to 10.1777 mills compared to last year's 9.9295. A mill is \$1 tax for every \$1,000 of assessed value.

Melone reminded the audience this was the first tax increase for the district in many years. He said the average taxpayer

will see an property tax increase of about \$20.

Melone also said the district has retained the homestead and farmstead exclusion reductions provided by gaming revenues. Those taxpayers who opted into this program will see a reduction of \$141 in their taxes.

In another matter, the board appointed John Gorham to be the high school principal at a salary of \$80,000.

6/22/2012

### **Nanticoke school board approves budget with modest tax hike**

Bill Wellock - Citizens Voice

The Greater Nanticoke Area School Board unanimously passed a \$25.2 million budget at its Thursday meeting. The millage rate increases from 9.9295 to 10.1777, which translates to about \$20 more in annual taxes for the average property owner, board President Jeff Kozlofski said.

The board did not cut any teaching positions, Kozlofski said. He said he thinks the district dipped into its fund balance, but he wasn't sure how much of the balance it might have used.

Thursday's meeting also saw some moves with teachers. The board accepted the early retirement of seven teachers, posted an open position for one of those retirees, hired five teachers and brought back three teachers who were furloughed.

The district now has no teachers on furlough, Kozlofski said.

6/21/2012

### **Nanticoke plan revealed**

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

Alexander Belavitz, president and CEO of Facility Design & Development, on Wednesday night discussed with City Council potential plans for the \$16 million housing project whose Phase 1 development should begin after Labor Day. The multifamily project will not be a low-income development, but one that is price-sensitive for Nanticoke, Belavitz said. The development will come at no cost to the city.

Council also approved the purchase 12 speed signs. The signs will display the speed limit at 25 mph and will be posted along Union Street.

State Street resident Donna Parrish addressed council about illegal activity that has been occurring around the State and Chestnut streets area. Parrish said she recently witnessed illegal activity going on and called 911, which would not connect her with the Nanticoke Police Department, and she said did not receive a timely response.

She said that by the time she received a response, the activity had ceased and the suspects were gone.

Parrish requested that an after hours, non-emergency, direct number to the police department be provided.

Council President Stephen Duda assured Parrish the matter would be handled promptly and would be discussed with the mayor and the acting police chief.

Parrish also said illegal activities have been increasing in that area, and that she believes many of the landlords on that street are absentee owners.

6/15/2012

### **Fire ravages Nanticoke home**

Bill Wellock - Citizens Voice

Two families took what they could from their burned double-block house Thursday afternoon after a fire left their homes uninhabitable and their lives in uncertainty.

No one was injured, but eight people were displaced by the fire that started behind 63-65 W. Grove St., spread to the interior and burned out the upper floors of the building before firefighters extinguished it, Nanticoke fire Chief Mike Bohan said.

The cause of the fire was under investigation and the department called in a state police fire marshal, which is something the Nanticoke Fire Department generally does after a fire, Bohan said.

The fire was called in at 4:01 p.m. and firefighters arrived at the scene at 4:07 p.m.

Not knowing if the homes were empty, firefighters searched the building but found no one. All the residents were either outside or had been away from the home, Bohan said.

The left side of the building, 63 W. Grove St., was more extensively damaged than the right side, Bohan said, but both

sides had significant damage from fire, smoke and water. The flames got into the eaves and up to the attic, and the third floor was severely burned at both addresses, he said.

Behind the house, the second-floor porch at 63 W. Grove St. was charred, with siding around the porch peeling off. The top story had turned black and the edge of the attic was broken. Windows were smashed and debris littered the roof and the ground.

Both families who live in the house said they did not have renter's insurance.

Most of what Jennifer and Richard Bonk, of 65 W. Grove St., could salvage belonged to their 8-month-old son, Christian. Their attic was gone, their bathroom was lost and the couple's bedroom was half-destroyed - but Christian's room was untouched, Jennifer Bonk said.

They worked with firefighters to salvage a few belongings, such as the boxes and baby chair they piled on the curb. The Bonks' neighbor, Elijah Taylor, 29, was working out when he got a phone call and raced home to find his home on fire, but - thankfully, he said - his fiancée and three sons were safe outside. The couple's wedding date was planned for 10 weeks from now, but will have to be put on hold while they take stock of their options.

"Now, we basically start over," Taylor said.

The Red Cross helped both families with food, clothing and hotel rooms, said Red Cross spokeswoman Kara Mowbray.

6/15/2012

### **Parade to honor all those who serve**

### **South Valley Patriots Day Parade will be held July 15 in Nanticoke.**

Matt Hughes - Times Leader

Everyone loves a parade, and the Wyoming Valley is getting a new one.

The South Valley Chamber of Commerce announced Thursday it will host its inaugural South Valley Patriots Day Parade on Sunday, July 15, in Nanticoke. Planned as an annual event, the chamber's 25 member municipalities will take turns hosting the parade in subsequent years.

The parade is dedicated to area patriots, a group the chamber defines broadly.

Jerry Hudak, president of the South Valley Chamber, said the parade will honor the service not only of America's armed forces, but of municipal emergency responders as well.

"We want to show the appreciation of The South Valley Chamber of Commerce for these duties, and for those who have fallen in those duties," Hudak said.

Chamber Executive Director Christopher Carey added to that list business owners, municipal leaders and "everyone down to the person who cuts the grass; everyone who does their duty to make their community better."

The parade begins at 11 a.m., though activities on and around Nanticoke's Patriot Park will continue from 10 a.m. until 9 p.m.

Starting near Greater Nanticoke Area High School, the parade will proceed up East Green Street, turn right onto South Market Street, turn right again at East Main Street and end at the intersection of East Main Street and Kosciuszko Street. Organizers said veterans of World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan will march along with area emergency responders.

Events around Patriot Park will include food vendors, informational booths from chamber businesses and community organizations, live music and deejays and children's activities, including face-painting, balloon animals, clowns and an inflatable bounce house. Several ceremonies will also be held throughout the day, including a flag-raising ceremony and tolling of the fire bell for fallen firefighters.

Hudak said the chamber hopes to provide a public entertainment option in an era when such offerings are becoming less common.

"The fact of the matter is that a lot of things happened in previous years, such as closings of churches and recession and the like, which resulted in organizations curtailing social events that they used to have," Hudak said. "And we felt that there was a need for people to come out and enjoy themselves."

He also said the event will provide an opportunity for the chamber and its member municipalities to showcase themselves, as he anticipates business expansion in the area with the extension of the Southern Cross Valley Expressway planned in 2014.

"The South Valley probably has the distinction of having more underdeveloped land than any other area in the county," Hudak said. "We want to show this area off."

6/14/2012

## **Nanticoke's Chief Cheshinski recalled as leader and friend Longtime member of city force died Saturday**

Mat Hughes - Times Leader

Nanticoke bid a solemn farewell Wednesday to a veteran cop, tireless police chief and devoted friend.

City police Chief James Cheshinski, 60, died unexpectedly Saturday at Wilkes-Barre General Hospital. Dozens of police officers from Nanticoke and surrounding departments, the Pennsylvania State Police and the state Attorney General's Office paid their respects Wednesday at his memorial service.

Those who knew him well remembered Cheshinski as a law enforcement veteran of 41 years who had held every rank on the Nanticoke police force and was committed to improving the department.

Plymouth police Chief Myles Collins called Cheshinski "the kind of guy you could sit down and talk to, and if he could help you, he was always there for you."

He said the chief sought to build relationships and coordination among local police departments.

He was instrumental in bringing a canine unit to Nanticoke, taught children about the dangers of drug abuse in the D.A.R.E. program and encouraged other officers to become D.A.R.E. instructors as well, officers said.

But even more so, Cheshinski's co-workers remembered the chief as an approachable boss who was always willing to offer a helping hand where he could.

"I've worked a lot of places, but he was probably the best boss I've had," said Sgt. Brian Williams of the Nanticoke Police Department. "He was more than a chief; he was a great friend to all of us ... He was easy to talk to. He was usually in and his door was always open. We just didn't talk about work; we talked about life in general. If you had a problem, he would help you out with it."

"He had a great personality," said Capt. Bill Shultz, Cheshinski's partner of more than 20 years. "He was able to communicate and get along with others, as opposed to some of us. He was honest; he was a man of integrity, a family man, a husband, father and grandfather; a great cop and a great boss, too."

"He will be sadly missed," Shultz added. "He was like a brother to me."

City officials said the city will miss the experience Cheshinski brought to the department.

"The city is at a great loss," said District Judge Donald Whittaker. "The years of experience and background that Jimmy brought to the law enforcement community of this town is irreplaceable."

"He served the city for many years," Nanticoke Mayor Joseph Dougherty said. "He served it with honor and with integrity. He was an asset to the community and he'll continue to be an asset to the community because of the policies he put in place as police chief."

After the memorial service, an convoy of police cruisers escorted the chief past the city municipal building where fire trucks stood with raised ladders draping American flags, and past his home in the Hanover section of Nanticoke.

Cheshinski is survived by his wife, Mary; sons, Kyle and Ryan; daughter Kelly Felici and her husband, Pete; granddaughters Lexy and Brooke, and several aunts and cousins.

6/11/2012

## **Nanticoke native among 24 women serving on Navy submarine crews**

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Nanticoke native Ensign Abigail Gesecki Holt is one of 24 women serving on nuclear submarine crews in the U.S. Navy. Her most recent achievement includes working on the USS Wyoming and pursuing the qualifications needed for Submarine Warfare Insignia status.

With her junior naval officer ranking and 15 months of training, Gesecki Holt feels honored to be a part of the submarine community and prepared for her upcoming missions. Her training included attending a nuclear power school in Charleston, S.C., a submarine officer course in Connecticut that was designed to teach tasks outside the engine room and safety courses in New York.

"The training became more and more challenging as it went on," she said. "At the very end you need to make sure you have adequate knowledge to graduate."

As one of only three women serving on the USS Wyoming nuclear submarine, she does not let the large number of men on the squad become overwhelming.

"On a day-to-day basis I don't think about being a female, I think about being a submariner. At the end of the day it is important that I can do my job well and serve."

Gesecki Holt's husband, Jordan Holt, a 2009 U.S. Naval Academy graduate, has just been deployed to Japan while she



is awaiting deployment on the USS Wyoming nuclear submarine.

Her father, Henry Gesecki of Nanticoke, was surprised by his daughter's career choice. A 2006 graduate of Greater Nanticoke Area High School, Gesecki Holt set her sights on running track at the University of Pennsylvania, but she also looked into the Naval Academy. And, after an overnight stay, Gesecki Holt realized joining the Academy was the right choice.

"After her visit she was sure this was the right decision," her father said. "Once she completed the first round of training and education she knew it was the path for her."

A memorable career moment for Gesecki Holt was meeting with President Barack Obama and the first lady on Memorial Day. She and the other women working on submarines attended a breakfast with the Obamas, during which it was announced that the first lady would sponsor the USS Illinois, the newest naval submarine.

Gesecki Holt's next goal is to qualify for the Submarine Warfare Insignia pinning ceremony. The Submarine Warfare Insignia pin is one of three Navy warfare pins.

"To me I think the whole experience is challenging," Henry Gesecki said. "There is just so much that she needs to be certified in but I am confident in her skills and couldn't be any prouder."



6/9/2012

### **Nanticoke police Chief Cheshinski dies**

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Nanticoke police Chief James Cheshinski died Friday at Wilkes-Barre General Hospital, where he had been a patient for the past three weeks.

His friends and colleagues remembered him as fair and honest.

Detective Capt. William Shultz worked with him for 22 years and had been acting chief during Cheshinski's hospitalization.

"This chief was a fair man, fair to his employees and very reasonable to work with," said Shultz.

The two men worked together on criminal investigations and made arrests in numerous cases, he said.

"The chief was a policeman who was fair and just and I will always admire him for his work as a police officer," said Shultz. "He is a good friend and will be sadly missed."

Cheshinski, 60, joined the department in September 1972 as a patrolman and worked his way through the ranks, becoming chief in April 2003, according to the department's website.

He is survived by a wife, three children and two grandchildren.

Nanticoke Mayor Joseph Dougherty recalled working with the chief and learning from him.

"Jim has been not only a colleague, but he's been a friend and mentor over the last decade," said Dougherty.

The mayor especially appreciated Cheshinski's candor. "He pulled no punches with me," said Dougherty.

Dougherty expressed his condolences to the Cheshinski family, saying, "I wish the best to his family. They're just wonderful people, his entire family."

6/9/2012

### **Nanticoke approves new three-year agreement with firefighters**

Steven Fondo - Times Leader

City council voted unanimously on Wednesday to approve a new collective bargaining agreement between the city and the Local 2655 firefighters.

Council Chairman Steve Duda said the new three-year agreement addresses wages only at a scale similar to the one ratified in 2009.

According to city Solicitor William Finnegan, the contract will be posted on Nanticoke's website as soon as it is signed by all concerned parties.

Council also announced the city had recently entered into an agreement with Geisinger Health System to purchase a vacant parcel on Main Street adjacent to the Luzerne County Community College Health Sciences building.

In other business, council announced that state Department of Agriculture farmers market nutrition vouchers will be available on Monday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Luzerne County Community College.

County residents over 60 years old who meet certain income requirements can qualify for four \$5 vouchers good for food purchases at local farmers markets.

Questions about the program should be directed to the Rose Tucker Senior Center at 735-1670.

6/9/2012

### **Trojanettes heading to college for next game**

John Medeiros - Times Leader

Nanticoke heads into District 4 territory for its PIAA Class 2A semifinal against that district's champ, Warrior Run. The Trojanettes will play the Defenders at 4 p.m. Monday on the campus of Bloomsburg University. The winner will advance to the state championship game Friday at 3 p.m. at Nittany Lion Softball Complex in State College against either District 7 third-place team Neshannock and District 6 runner-up Martinsburg Central. The game is the second half of a doubleheader at the site. The early game, a 2 p.m. start, features a Class A semifinal between District 3 champ Greenwood and District 4 runner-up Southern Columbia.

## **CONGRATULATIONS 2012 GRADUATING CLASS OF GREATER NANTICOKE AREA!!**

6/8/2012

### **Nanticoke grads hit a grand slam**

bkalinowski@citizensvoice.com

For Sammy Gow and 12 other Greater Nanticoke Area seniors, graduation day was one milestone after another. Before donning their white caps and gowns Thursday night, the 13 seniors on the school's softball team had a do-or-die state playoff game to win in the afternoon - and win they did. The feat, which landed them a spot in the state tournament's final four, was call for celebration at Thursday's graduation ceremony at Greater Nanticoke Area High School. After a few traditional congratulatory and farewell speeches by graduating seniors, Greater Nanticoke Area Superintendent Anthony Perrone opened his remarks by saluting the team. "Stand up and give a cheer for the Nanticoke Area Trojan girls, who won again," Perrone said. The crowd erupted in applause for the team, which is eyeing its third state title since 2003. For the rest of the 168 graduates, their time as a Trojan is over - time to get ready for college, the military or the workforce. For these 13 young ladies, they get to represent the school for at least one more game - and hopefully two. "When we first found out we had a state game on the day of graduation, we had mixed emotions about it. We knew we had to focus on one thing at a time and we sure did," Gow said. "Turns out, today is one of the best days of our lives. Not only do we have a spot in the state semifinals, but 13 of us are also graduating. Today will definitely be a day we will never forget. Over the years, the 13 of us all stuck together and tonight we don't just graduate as a team, we graduate as a family." Even class Salutatorian Kelsey Rynkiewicz used a softball analogy in her remarks. "I would like to think of these past few years of high school as a softball or baseball game. As ninth-graders, we started out by finally making it to first base and beginning our journey home. Today, as graduating seniors, we have finally made it home," Rynkiewicz said. "However, it does not end here. Life does not stop after just one run. We have to keep going. All of us are crossing home plate, but at the same time, we are starting all over again. We still have more to do and many more times that we need to cross home."

6/6/12

### **Bartuska's Furniture closure leaves void in Nanticoke**

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After 78 years on the same street, downtown Nanticoke landmark Bartuska's Furniture is going out of business. Brothers Denis and Jim Bartuska, the third generation owners of the family business on East Main Street, say they can no longer compete with larger furniture stores selling lower-quality and cheaper imports from China. Bartuska's Furniture took pride in exclusively selling quality American-made furniture in a moderate price range. Amid a weak economy, the Bartuskas said many people aren't buying furniture at all. "You fill up your gas tank and you buy your food and there's nothing left for furniture," Jim Bartuska said. A lack of businesses and slow-moving plans to revitalize downtown Nanticoke also contributed to their decision to

close, they said. Downtown redevelopment projects such as Luzerne County Community College's two new buildings - the Health Sciences Center and the Joseph Paglianite Culinary Arts Institute - have not helped their business, they said. "We had hoped with the improvements downtown with the college coming downtown things would turn around and we tried to hang on," Jim Bartuska said. "But we can't hang on anymore."

Bartuska's Furniture employed seven, including the Bartuska brothers, who will lose their jobs. They began a going-out-of-business sale by slashing prices 20 to 50 percent. The store will remain open until everything is sold. After that, the Bartuskas could not say what they will do next.

Denis Bartuska said the family business tried to hang on as the Nanticoke General Municipal Authority tried to spur downtown development. The Bartuskas hoped an empty lot next to LCCC's two new buildings would be developed. Tenants are interested in the property, he said.

"That's going to take so long that it's going to be hard to hang on that long," Denis Bartuska said.

"There is development hopefully headed for this town. But, with the economy, people just aren't buying furniture," he said. "We had a lot of good years here and we really wanted to stay. If there was any way that we knew things would turn around in the economy and things were going to start developing in this town, we would definitely stay. But right now, business is slow."

Their grandparents, Peter Bartuska Sr. and his wife, Anna, opened the store in 1934. They originally sold new and used sewing machines. In the late 1930s, Bartuska's became one of the first appliance dealers in the area. The store also sold washers, gas stoves and refrigerators.

Today, it is the only furniture store left in Nanticoke, which had more than eight furniture stores 50 years ago. Their father, Peter Bartuska Jr., retired in the early 1990s and Jim, 47, and Denis, 48, have been running the business since that time.

"Literally, we grew up in the business," Jim Bartuska said. "It was part of our lives for our whole lives."

Chet Zaremba, vice president of Nanticoke Historical Society, called the closing of the landmark store "disheartening."

"It certainly leaves a void in Nanticoke," Zaremba said. "They certainly made their mark on the history of the downtown."

Zaremba agreed development in downtown Nanticoke has been slow.

"There's a lot of talking but nothing seems to be getting done," Zaremba said.

Nanticoke council President Steve Duda, who is also a member of the municipal authority, said tenants are interested in empty lots in Nanticoke, but that it's too early to say more because negotiations are still ongoing.

"We're working to bring business to the city," Duda said.

At a meeting Monday night, the General Municipal Authority agreed to buy Bartuska's Furniture's warehouse across the street from the store for \$145,000 to try to spur economic development there. Duda said the closing of Bartuska's Furniture is unfortunate and "very sad news for the community."

"They have been a pillar in the community," Duda said. "They braved the storm for many years."

5/30/2012

### **Sailing into a first**

### **Abigail Gesecki Holt is named to serve on a nuclear submarine crew.**

Matt Hughes - Times Leader

A groundbreaking servicewoman from Nanticoke had an audience with the president this Memorial Day.

Ensign Abigail Gesecki Holt, a 2006 graduate of Greater Nanticoke Area High School, is one of the first 24 women named to serve on a nuclear submarine crew. Gesecki Holt and the other female submariners met with President Barack Obama and wife Michelle in the Blue Room of the White House, where it was announced the first lady will sponsor the Navy's newest submarine, the USS Illinois.

Gesecki Holt also attended a breakfast with the president, first lady, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Navy Secretary Ray Mabus, and was present when President Obama laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier during Memorial Day ceremonies.

It was a banner day for Gesecki Holt, but her father, Henry Gesecki of Nanticoke, said it was only one of many. After her graduation from the U.S. Naval Academy in 2010, Gesecki Holt became one of the first women accepted into the Navy's nuclear submarine program.

"She was ecstatic for the opportunity to be part of it," Henry Gesecki said. "They're a very close-knit group of Navy people in the submariners."

Gesecki Holt said she could not comment without the Navy's clearance.

Women had previously been permitted on submarines for only a few days at most, primarily to perform technical maintenance or for training, but it was determined that because officers are entitled to a private bunk and an officer-only bathroom, women could serve in the role if a reversible sign was placed on the bathroom door.

Gesecki Holt jumped at the opportunity, her father said.

“In fact her dream if they ever open it up is to be part of the attack sub, which right now women aren’t allowed to,” Henry Gesecki said. “They’re fast and small and the accommodations for females just aren’t there right now.”

Gesecki Holt completed a 15-month intensive nuclear-sub training program that took her to bases in North Carolina, Connecticut and New York. She now lives in Jacksonville, Fla., with her husband, 2009 Naval Academy graduate Jordan Holt, and is awaiting deployment on the USS Wyoming nuclear submarine.

Henry Gesecki said his daughter was attracted to the assignment because its difficulty sparked her competitive nature. A track star who qualified for the state meet in all four years of high school and made the All-Patriot-League team in college, Gesecki Holt’s athletic prowess helped her get into the Naval Academy, her father said.

“She’s been competing since she was a little kid playing biddy basketball when she was just 12 years old, and she just wanted to be a part of that kind of environment,” Gesecki said.

Henry Gesecki added that Abigail is not his only daughter to accomplish the extraordinary. His oldest daughter, Cassandra, 29, is a captain in the Marine Corps and a veteran of Afghanistan who now works as an assistant public service director for the Corps in Hollywood, providing technical advice to television and movie producers. Middle daughter Candice, 26, graduated with a chemical engineering degree from Carnegie-Mellon University and is now pursuing a master’s in nutrition at Johns Hopkins University.

“They kept busy,” Gesecki said. “They don’t let any moss grow under their feet.”

Jessica Wilcox of Honesdale, a 2006 Wyoming Seminary graduate, also was named to a submarine crew and met the Obamas on Monday.

5/24/2012

### **Firefighters appreciate breakfast supporters**

Citizens Voice

Editor:

The officers and members of Hanover Fire Company Number 4, Nanticoke Fire Department, wish to thank everyone who attended and helped make their recent breakfast a huge success. A special thank you to those who donated bread, cakes and all sorts of pastries for the bake sale. A very special thank you to the four members of the Luzerne County Community College culinary arts class for your assistance in the kitchen area. They are Tessa LaMarca, Zora Low, Mark Williams and Julius Zuckerwar.

John P. Zegarski Sr.

5/18/2012

### **GNA board plans 2.5% tax hike**

**Increase will generate about \$130,000, but projected shortfall is \$872,307.**

Susan Denney - Times Leader

[Greater Nanticoke Area](#) School Board members voted unanimously Thursday night to raise the tax millage rate by 2.5 percent.

This would raise the district’s millage rate from the current 9.9295 to 10.1807 if adopted as part of the final 2012-2013 budget. A mill is \$1 for every \$1,000 in assessed property value.

The proposed final budget was set at \$24.25 million.

According to Al Melone, the district’s business manager, the increase represents about \$20 of additional taxes per year for the owner of a property valued at the district’s average of \$78,610.

Melone said the district is in good financial shape and he praised the board and Superintendent Anthony Perrone for their fiscal responsibility.

But he also said the tax increase will generate only about \$130,000. The projected revenue shortfall is \$872,307.

“That doesn’t take us out of the woods. We have to keep finding ways to reduce cost,” he said.

Melone said the district will have to dip into its fund balance to make up the rest of the shortfall.

After Melone’s presentation, board member Tony Prushinski blamed Gov. Tom Corbett’s cuts in state education spending for the GNA budget shortfall.

“This is Gov. Corbett’s tax increase. He raised taxes in Nanticoke tonight,” he said.

Melone also reported a renegotiated agreement with Nanticoke city for tax collection would reduce the district’s cost from \$32,000 to \$15,000.

The board also accepted a bid for re-roofing the high school gym and auditorium at a cost of \$269,130.

In other business, the board appointed Ken Bartuska as athletic director for the district. He will continue coaching the varsity basketball team.

Also, a large group of seniors presented their request for an outdoor graduation ceremony. A representative of the group said the outdoor venue would be more comfortable and large families would be able to attend together.

Perrone said the board would have to discuss the students’ request.

5/17/2012

### **Nanticoke rejects 3 bridge bids**

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

Council passed a motion Wednesday night not to award a contract based on any of the three submitted bids for the pedestrian bridge project.

The pedestrian bridge was to be constructed from the side of the municipal building leading to the outside area. The lowest of the bids was from Multiscape in the amount of \$78,886.

Council President Steve Duda said that at a time when Nanticoke “is looking to cut costs, it is not advantageous for the city to accept any of the bids.”

He continued that, “even \$78,000 is too high” and that it “didn’t serve in the best interest of the city.”

Council also passed a resolution authorizing the city to enter into a tax collection agreement with the Greater Nanticoke Area School District. City Administrator Holly Cirko said the city “never had a written agreement” and it is “more comfortable to have a formal agreement” on record.

In other business, the reconstruction of Main and Market streets is in the preliminary planning stage, and the city will have to meet with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation to make sure plans comply with state rules and regulations.

On June 3, the Honey Pot Volunteer Fire Department will host an all-you-can-eat breakfast from 7 a.m. to noon.

5/14/2012

### **Nanticoke park dreams closer**

### **City files to acquire land to start long process of creating recreation park downtown.**

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For years, the city has been working to create the Greater Nanticoke Area Recreation Park as part of a revitalization of the downtown.

Now, the city is one step closer to making the park a reality after filing eminent domain proceedings in Luzerne County Court to acquire nearly 90 parcels of land.

The \$1.1 million plan began nearly seven years ago.

The planned park will include bleachers, a concession stand, practice football field, several pavilions, skate park, tee-ball field, basketball courts, softball field, sitting areas, open practice fields, natural and camping areas, walking and biking paths, and a boat launch and fishing area.

The first step is land acquisition.

“No agency will give us funding (to start the project) if we don’t have the land to make something happen on,” Holly Cirko, Nanticoke city administrator said. “We won’t get funding until that’s over. Until that’s done, we’re kind of on hold.”

The declaration of taking proceedings filed April 10 in county court includes nearly 90 parcels of land that will ultimately make up the 134.58 acres of the planned park.

After the Agnes Flood in 1972, William Finnegan, the city’s solicitor, said most of the land on Lower Broadway Street in the city was used to house Federal Emergency Management Agency trailers for residents to get back on their feet.

After the flood, the lots were sold off or people left, creating title problems.

Finnegan said he doesn’t expect any problems in acquiring the land, and that a meeting will be held soon to update city administrators on the eminent domain proceedings.

Any land owner who objects must do so in writing to the court within 30 days. As of Wednesday, no objections were



filed.

Finnegan said many of the parcels are small, which is why so many are needed to make up the proposed park.

"The parking lot (on the property now) alone was 20 parcels," Finnegan said.

Construction in 2013

Most recently, in December, the city obtained a \$60,400 grant from the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Construction on the land the city already owns is expected to begin some time in 2013.

The DCNR said the funding will be used for the construction of a pavilion, parking area improvements, pedestrian walkway, observation area, rain garden, installation of site amenities, removal of invasive species, handicap access, landscaping and signage.

State Sen. John Yudichak, D-Plymouth Township, who has been working with the city on the project, said the DCNR grant will pay for the 20,000-square-foot area.

The entire project has gained some funding from the beginning, including a \$100,000 state grant used to come up with a comprehensive master plan.

The plan, drafted by the Borton-Lawson architectural and engineering firm, was updated in 2009 with a \$15,000 state grant, Yudichak said.

"It's a lot of land, with several different land owners, defunct coal land and rail land," Yudichak said. "With the (state's) budget situation over the last two years, and the elimination of the community development program, it resulted in a loss of \$100 million that curtailed our efforts."

Yudichak said the DCNR grant is good news, and a way to begin work on the project that has taken years to put together.

"We want to see it done. It would be a new recreational entrance to downtown (Nanticoke), an attraction for the city, and would bring the business district closer and the community connected to the (Susquehanna River)," Yudichak said.

Most of the area has undergone environmental work that still continues with the state Environmental Protection Agency -- testing soil, monitoring a nearby stream and planning for future flooding of the area, Yudichak said.

"We want something people of all ages can use," Cirko said of the park. "We're eager to see some construction start (with the DCNR grant)."

5/14/2012

### **Korch, Jesse win trail run**

Patrick Leonard - Citizens Voice

Tony Korch of Nanticoke won the Wyoming Valley Striders' 21st Annual Spring Trail Run held Sunday afternoon at Frances Slocum State Park.

The Striders organized the race differently this year than in races past by using a handicapped start. Runners didn't begin the race all at once but started in waves.

Korch began running approximately sixteen minutes after the first wave of runners took off, but was able to make up the difference by crossing the finish line in 37:18, nearly three minutes ahead of second-place finisher, Joe Dutko of Mountain Top.

"This is one of the best times I have had on this course," said Korch, who has been competing in trail races for the last 10 years. "The course was dry; there was not a lot of mud so it made for a fast race."

For many of the 53 runners, including Korch, this was their first experience running in a handicapped race.

Vince Wojnar of the Striders believes it's the first such race to be held in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

Most felt it was a positive experience.

"I thought it was very enjoyable," remarked Korch, who completed the Bear Mountain Trail Marathon in New York last week. "You get to see more people on the course. It's fair and I think it's cool."

For more read <http://www.citizensvoice.com>

5/9/2012

### **Inmate shares cautionary tale about drugs at GNA**

Sheena DeLazio - sdelazio@timesleader.com

When Rotarian Paul O'Malia asked Greater Nanticoke Area High School students if they know someone who does drugs or where to get them, nearly every hand in the auditorium went up Tuesday.

The teens' familiarity with drug abuse is why a Luzerne County Correctional Facility inmate was brought to school to

explain how drugs derailed her life. She told the students she hoped they would learn from her mistakes by making better decisions.

“It’s not worth it,” Shannon, 31, said about her lifetime struggle with drugs that landed her in jail. “As soon as I took that first pill, it was all over.”

The presentation by the inmate, identified only as Shannon, was part of the Straight-Up Drug and Alcohol Awareness Program sponsored by the Greater Nanticoke Area Rotary Club and its Interact Club at the school.

O’Malia, district governor of the Rotary Clubs, and founder of Straight Up, told students they can count on their dreams being crushed when they open the door to drugs.

Freshman Jake Bevan, president of the Interact Club, said he felt Shannon’s message will help students make good decisions if they are pressured by peers at the prom and other celebrations.

“We also learned about incarceration, and it teaches us what that’s like,” said Interact Club Vice President Tyler Fisher, a freshman. “I don’t want to be in prison.”

Students listened as Shannon told them about her troubled teen years, when she smoked marijuana at a concert with a friend’s mom. Acid and Ecstasy were next.

“When I was 17 years old, I went with friends to Philly and I was introduced to crack cocaine,” she said.

“I lost my car, my home, (everything) within two months. I graduated high school, but I don’t know how,” she said. It got so bad, she said, that at one point she was snorting cocaine off a textbook at the back of the school bus.

Shannon joined the U.S. Army, completed basic training and worked as a combat medic in a hospital. After two years in the Army, she returned home to the Wyoming Valley, where she met a man, had a job and owned a car.

Then the dream of a good life started to turn into a nightmare: “I started doing cocaine,” she said.

A short time later, Shannon said, she became addicted to the way Vicodin, Percocet and Xanax made her feel. She started snorting heroin and got violently sick when she didn’t have any.

“I didn’t care. I couldn’t stop,” Shannon said.

Feeling trapped, hopeless and powerless, she resorted to taking blank checks from her mother to get money to support her habit. That landed her in jail on forgery charges.

She violated the terms of her work release by not returning to the county prison, resulting in a two-year prison term in 2010.

She has spent the past three months in prison on other charges, and hopes to be released in July.

“I know I’m going to stay clean,” Shannon told the students. “I found one thing that is going to help keep me clean – God.”

She has been clean since January, is on work release and hopes to return as a productive member of society.

5/3/2012

### **Nanticoke modifies pension fund boards**

Council voted unanimously on Wednesday on a pair of ordinances to modify the existing police and firefighter pension fund boards.

Under the new ordinances, the two boards will consist of the mayor, a current council member appointed by the mayor, the police and fire chiefs and two members of their departments.

In other business, council announced that Nanticoke will hold a citywide yard sale on Saturday, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. with a rain date on Sunday.

Interested parties may stop by Anthracite Park beginning at 8 a.m. Saturday to pick up a list of residents who plan to participate in the sale.

4/30/2012

### **King's star overcoming loss of hearing**

Jill Snowdon - Citizens Voice

The crack of a bat. A fastball slapping the inside of a glove. A team celebrating a victory.

Amanda Cardone grew up playing softball and hearing the distinct sounds of a typical day on the field.

Just a few months ago, however, the sounds of softball and everyday life around her were no longer the same.

After three surgeries, the King's College sophomore catcher was dealt shocking news that she was permanently deaf in her right ear.

Cardone, a Nanticoke Area graduate, has rebounded from the diagnosis and while she now needs a hearing aid, her intensity and drive to succeed have remained the same.

She is enjoying a standout season with the Monarchs where she leads the team and is ranked ninth in nation with 48 RBIs.

King's (28-10, 10-4 Freedom) is the third seed for this week's conference tournament at Manhattanville College.

"I was really excited when I was told I was ranked nationally," Cardone, a two-year starter said. "I think because of what I've gone through the last few months, it was just the confidence boost I needed. It really made me realize that I can still do things and push on."

Cardone was just settling into life as a sophomore when she was hit with flu-like symptoms and a nasty sinus infection. She woke up one morning and had difficulty hearing from her right ear. At first she thought her ear was blocked due to the cold, but when it got progressively worse, it was time to take action

No official cause was given to Cardone, but the results were emphatic.

"The worst part was finding out that I wasn't going to get the hearing back," Cardone said. "I was really nervous how it was going to be with school and softball. But the hearing aid made a huge difference and it's really amazing how it works."

Cardone, a biology/pre-med major, informed her teachers of her condition and now sits in the front of each class to give her an added hearing advantage.

Softball can be trickier when things get loud, but Cardone adjusts the best she can.

"I really think she has a great attitude about it," King's coach Lisa Gigliello said. "She might miss some things that are said, but she has a good sense for things when she's on the field."

Cardone has a .994 fielding percentage behind the plate. She bats third in the order behind fellow Nanticoke Area grad Area Jenn Harnischfeger and sophomore Erin Beane. Cardone boasts a team-best .400 batting average.

"She's an explosive hitter," Gigliello said. "It's no surprise how well she's doing because she's a great athlete and we know she'll put the ball in play."

Dealing with her partial deafness has been a bit easier for Cardone thanks to her teammates. She credits the team's chemistry as one of its key strengths on the field and credits their friendship with getting her through a difficult transition.

"I was going through all of this during fall ball," said Cardone who has started in 63 of 65 games at King's. "In one game, every time Lisa yelled for me, the umpire had to tap me on the shoulder to let me know.

"There was some comic relief with it and I'm good with that because my team is so supportive and genuinely concerned."

The Monarchs are the defending conference champions and have their sights set on a repeat.

Cardone's bat is a big reason for the Monarchs to feel confident. And she's the perfect player to pick them up when they face a tough situation.

"I'm very excited about the possibilities for our team," Cardone said. "We have 19 people and we're 19 people strong. But the best thing is we're all behind each other. I know that first-hand."

4/24/2012

**Authority board shuffle puts Nanticoke plans on hold**

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Plans for the downtown business district, including the possibility of a new Geisinger Health System facility, are on hold while lawyers battle over whether the city council president can sit on the Nanticoke General Municipal Authority board.

Board Chairman Hank Marks said Monday that Geisinger is interested in an authority-owned parcel of land at Market Street and Broadway, next to Luzerne County Community College's new Health Sciences Center. The authority's developer, Scranton-based William Rinaldi, is working to bring Geisinger in.

Commonwealth Health, which bought up regional facilities including eight hospitals, has also showed interest in downtown Nanticoke, Marks said.

The municipal authority is responsible for downtown redevelopment projects, including LCCC's two new buildings, the Health Sciences Center and the Joseph Paglianite Culinary Arts Institute.

But the board can't make decisions on new projects, including the prospective medical facility, until a membership issue is ironed out.

City council on April 4 confirmed Mayor Joseph Dougherty's appointments of Council President Steve Duda,

Councilman Richard Wiaterowski and resident Jeff Lewis to fill the expired terms of municipal authority board members Chester Beggs, Hank Kellar and Marilyn Collacchi.

Wiaterowski declined the appointment.

City solicitor William Finnegan said after council's vote that a Supreme Court ruling and Nanticoke's home-rule charter allow Duda on the municipal authority.

However, during Monday's authority board meeting, authority solicitor Bob Zaruta told Duda, "I think it goes against the law for you to sit on the board."

Zaruta said the authority's legal research determined Duda's appointment was invalid, but Dougherty replied that city officials' research says it is valid.

If the city's and authority's solicitors can't work the matter out, both sides say they will take it to court.

Lewis' appointment is not contested, so he and authority members Tom Selecky and Marks formed a quota to pay bills. But other business has to wait until it's settled whether Duda can stay on the board, because if it turns out he can't, authority decisions could be invalidated.

4/24/2012

### **Celebrity game this weekend**

### **Breaking Benjamin's Josh Seibert and Chad Szeliga highlight stars to be on hand.**

Jimmy Fisher - Times Leader

The second annual Celebrity Basketball Game will be returning to Nanticoke on Saturday at the Greater Nanticoke Area High School gym. The event, which is sponsored by the Clifton R. Lewis Good Life Foundation, will be split up into multiple events beginning at 1 p.m. The first event is the intrasquad game between two Nanticoke teams, followed by a three-point shootout. Afterwards a slam dunk contest will take place, followed by a performance by singer/songwriter Josh Seibert and Breaking Benjamin drummer Chad Szeliga, and finally the celebrity game.

Celebrities participating in the event include Pittsburgh Steelers players Steve McLendon and Darnell Stapleton, and two-time NASCAR Truck Series Champion Todd Bodine. These participants will take on local athletes and citizens from Luzerne County.

The slam dunk competition will include Sprite Slam Dunk All-Star Carlos Smothers, Harlem Globetrotters Roscoe Johnson and "The World's Best Dunker" Kenny Dobbs.

Clifton R. Lewis, founder and president of the Good Life Foundation, said he and his co-workers have been working hard to acquire these celebrity participants.

"We've been working day and night trying to get these celebrities for six months," said Lewis. "We got them through the social media such as Twitter and Facebook and also through word of mouth. I have a friend who golfs with Darnell Stapleton so that was a big help."

At last year's Celebrity Basketball event Lewis said over 800 people attended, but he hopes to improve not only this year but in the future, and he hopes to get different talent.

"We want to try and get people every year and keep adding year by year," Lewis said.

The Celebrity Basketball game is looking to be an annual event in Nanticoke, but it is not the only event sponsored by the Clifton R. Lewis Foundation, as Lewis said they will be having dancing events going on in Minnesota and Arizona later this year.

Lewis is a native of Nanticoke and started the foundation in 2010 to help those diagnosed with Muscular Dystrophy, which he himself was diagnosed with in 2006. The Good Life Foundation helps families affected by MD by providing them with the help they need to afford mobilization such as wheelchairs and scooters. They have helped over 17 families in 14 states.

4/19/2012

### **Nanticoke files proposal for project**

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

City council on Wednesday night decided to file a proposal for reconstruction on Hill and East Green streets, from Prospect Street to Market Street, including removal of architectural barriers.

The proposal will be filed with the state Department of Community and Economic Development, which has given the city a grant of \$300,000. The proposed project will benefit Park Towers, a senior citizen residence.

Council also gave the second reading to an ordinance setting uniform requirements for contributors into the city's

wastewater collection and treatment system and establishing the authority of the Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority to administer and enforce the requirements. It also sets fees for the administration and operation of an industrial pre-treatment program. As well, it establishes the penalties for violations. Nanticoke is the first city to adopt such a resolution.

4/13/2012

### **Alden Road restoration work gets under way**

Citizens' Voice

Work began Wednesday on the restoration of Alden Road in Nanticoke. Motorists are advised that there will be sewer and gas line work, along with grading of the road, and are asked to avoid the area if possible.

The contractor, Pennsy Supply, also known as Slusser Brothers, will rebuild Alden Road up to about the Learning Station and Reilly Plating Co.

The \$1.9 million project, paid through federal funds via the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, has been in the works since 2005 and was started by former Mayor John Bushko. Delays in state and federal approvals stalled the project.

4/6/2012

### **Nanticoke municipal authority fills three vacancies on board**

Elizabeth Skrapits - Citizens' Voice

City officials have selected three replacements to sit on the board of Nanticoke's municipal authority, and the chairman isn't happy about it.

Mayor Joseph Dougherty submitted the appointments Tuesday and council confirmed them Wednesday night. Council President Steve Duda will fill the expired term of Chester Beggs; Councilman Richard Wiaterowski will replace Hank Kellar; and Jeff Lewis will fill the expired term of Marilyn Collachi.

But Municipal Authority Chairman Hank Marks questioned the legality of putting two sitting members of council on the authority.

"I contacted our solicitor and asked him to research the validity of those appointments," he said.

The city's attorney, William Finnegan, says the move is backed by a state Supreme Court precedent. Third-class city code might have prohibited council members from serving on an authority, but it no longer applies, because as of Jan. 1, Nanticoke is under a home-rule charter, he said.

"These two people have made the decision to go run for office in the city, they have an interest in the city, and they're willing to serve on an authority that has a role in the development downtown," Finnegan said, referring to Duda and Wiaterowski. "Those two individuals obviously have a passion to improve the city."

The five-member, unpaid municipal authority board is in charge of downtown redevelopment projects. It owned the former Susquehanna Coal Co. building at Market and Main streets, which is now Luzerne County Community College's Culinary Institute. It also owned the former Kanjorski Center on Main Street that is now LCCC's Health Sciences Center.

Marks said the authority recently bought the former CVS building from the city for \$155,000, and has received a \$100,000 grant from state Sen. John Yudichak, D-Plymouth Township, for rebuilding a parking lot behind the culinary institute.

4/5/2012

### **Nanticoke mayor fills 3 authority posts**

### **The city council OKs a permit parking system for three downtown streets.**

Steven Fondo - Times Leader

Mayor Joseph Dougherty selected three individuals to serve on the city's General Municipal Authority at a city council meeting on Wednesday night.

Appointed to five-year terms to the authority were Jeff Lewis, Richard Wiatrowski and Stephen E. Duda.

Duda and Wiatrowski both serve on council, but city Solicitor Bill Finnegan said current state laws allow the men to hold both positions.

The municipal authority is the business development arm of the city and was instrumental in Luzerne County



Community College's recent move to Nanticoke's downtown area.

In other business, council approved a parking permit order on second reading that calls for permitted parking along Coal, Orchard and Hill streets in the city. Violators will face up to a \$50 fine for all parking infractions.

The ordinance was enacted in response to residents' concerns with spillover from LCCC's downtown student parking lots.

An ordinance banning the use of cell phones while driving was tabled until Finnegan researches any possible conflict with existing laws.

4/4/2012

### **Nanticoke brewing company eyes expansion**

Citizens' Voice

[Benny Brewing Company](#), the Nanticoke microbrewery inside Marty's Blue Room, is one step closer to expanding its distribution beyond Luzerne County.

The Luzerne County zoning board voted 2-0 - one member was absent - Tuesday evening to allow a use variance that would permit the microbrewery at 100 Old Newport St. to expand its building to allow a 900 percent increase in its production. Benny Brewing currently has a single 31-gallon barrel to brew its three year-round beers and one revolving seasonal beer; the building expansion would allow for 10 31-gallon barrels.

"I want to look into Lackawanna and some up north as well," said brewmaster Ben Schonfeld, adding that about 10 locations currently carry its beer. "Maybe we'll go down to the Allentown area. I guess it depends on what distributor I choose."

Although there are many other steps left for construction to begin - getting the OK from the USDA, Liquor Control Board and planning commission - Schonfeld and his father, restaurateur James Schonfeld, hope to open the expansion by the spring of 2013.

At first, the Schonfelds would simply like to produce more of their three trademark beers: amber lager, india pale ale and wheat. As time progresses, brewmaster Ben might experiment with limited-edition beers, such as those aged in wooden barrels.

"We can't keep up with the demand we have right now," said James Schonfeld, owner of Marty's Blue Room. "We can't make it fast enough."

James Schonfeld said the microbrewery is already permitted to sell anywhere in Pennsylvania but, once the expansion is built, it will be a while before local residents spot the beers in a city like Philadelphia.

"We'd like to hit other markets slowly but surely," he said. "It's a slow climb, and it's something where you have to crawl before you walk. People enjoy it, and then you take it to another place."

4/3/2012

### **Baby's first haircut adds to family tradition**

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NANTICOKE - At 16 months old, Dutcher Stigora needed his first haircut. Dutcher's dad knew the right man for the job: legendary Nanticoke barber, 97-year-old Zelino Vici.

Jason Stigora, a Nanticoke native now from York County, recalls he and his grandfather going to Vici for haircuts decades ago. He thought it would be special to let Dutcher continue the family tradition.

On Monday morning, it was Dutcher's turn in Vici's barber chair, getting a trim from the old pro.

"Getting your hair cut by Mr. Vici is practically a rite of passage in our family. He's been cutting our hair for three generations, beginning with my grandfather, who used to bring me here when I was a young boy," Stigora, 35, said. "I have fond memories of growing up in Nanticoke, and I'm happy I can share the same experience with my son."

Stigora and his wife, Jennifer, were recently looking for somewhere "old fashioned" for Dutcher to get his first haircut and wondered if Vici was still in business. They came across a newspaper article online about how Vici was still going strong after 76 years. The couple set up a special appointment for Monday while they were in town visiting Stigora's mother, Kathleen Smith, 64.

"Mr. Vici's barber shop is an iconic Nanticoke landmark," Stigora said of the business at Prospect and Church streets. Dutcher was well-behaved and calm as his mother placed him in the barber chair's child seat. Then came the first clip. Jennifer started to cry.

"It's hard. It is," she later said about witnessing the milestone.

Vici buzzed the sides of Dutcher's head with a trimmer, clipped a few inches from the top with scissors, and then combed his hair to the side. Dutcher's first haircut was complete and the gathered family gave him a round of applause. "He looks more little boy, than baby now," Jennifer said.

Vici, who turns 98 next month, said Dutcher was the best behaved child in all his decades in business.

"I never had a baby sit so still," he said.

Vici said he was glad to be a part of the special day in Dutcher's life.

"It means quite a bit. They still have confidence in me at this age," Vici joked. "A lot of people think I'm too old to cut their hair.

4/2/2012

**Coffee shop hoping to perk up Nanticoke**

**Kimberly Coffee was first Main Street business owner to secure a facade grant.**

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The owner of a new coffee shop could be the small business poster girl for a renaissance of sorts that's invigorating a tired and worn Main Street.

Kimberly Coffee is bringing more than just a slice of Miami to downtown Nanticoke with her trendy, new coffee shop. She's adding new color and a fresh look to the southern side of a block of storefronts – some of them empty – that hasn't changed much in years.

The Nanticoke native and University of Miami graduate, who decided to bring some of that Southern Florida flavor to a Main Street where just a few doors down a pizza and pierogie shop takes a place of prominence, said now is the perfect time to open a new business in the city.

"For many years I thought about opening something like this. And when the health sciences building came across the street, and also the culinary school, I decided to put things in gear so the students have a place to come for lunch," Coffee said.

Main Street got its first major facelift in decades when Luzerne County Community College built and opened a culinary arts institute across the street and a block west of Coffee's building in the fall of 2010.

State Sen. John Yudichak, D-Plymouth Township, attended Coffee's grand opening on March 14. He said in a press release that the partnership between the city, state and LCCC has led to nearly \$20 million in downtown investment with the \$12 million health sciences center and \$7.5 million culinary institute.

"This is an exciting time for Nanticoke. ... These projects are also fostering an entrepreneurial spirit for business people like Ms. Coffee to invest in the downtown," Yudichak, a Nanticoke native, said in a prepared statement.

Coffee agreed that the timing couldn't be better for opening her shop.

"We get a lot of dental students, nursing students, some of the faculty come in. And I decided to have our uniforms as chef coats. We were inspired by the culinary school, so I thought it would be a nice touch," Coffee said.

Some sweet additions

Two of Coffee's five part-time employees are LCCC students; one of them, a pastry arts major, makes some of the delectable desserts filling a display case.

Students, faculty and police officers love the \$5 daily lunch specials, Coffee said, and the smoothies and frozen hot chocolate are big hits too. But Coffee caters to ethnic tastes as well.

"The panini sandwiches are very popular, and in honor of the many people of Polish descent who live here, we have kielbasa paninis," Coffee said.

But trendy offerings are the heart of the menu.

"We have ... a different flavored water every day. Today it was orange, yesterday we had pineapple water. That is definitely a signature of Miami. They do that at a lot of hotel lobbies in Miami. That's where I got the idea," Coffee said.

Tiger Sauce – a spicy mayonnaise with secret ingredients – is the signature condiment upon request, and jalapenos and jalapeno cheese are also available – good toppers for the shop's "fat dogs" that are twice as fat as regular hot dogs.

Coffee's employees are all trained baristas, able to properly steam and foam milk for the cappuccinos and lattes, that is, after a couple weeks of training that included milk spray on the ceiling, she said with a laugh.

Several two-seater tables with comfortable chairs, a lunch counter with high-back stools and an overstuffed loveseat add to the ambiance, along with free wireless internet and an online jukebox.

"I tried to make it trendy for the students. I tried to make it with a Miami flair," Coffee said.

Adding a little decor

But Coffee isn't limiting the breath of fresh air to the shop's interior. She was the first Main Street business owner to apply for – and secure – façade grant.

“We're changing all the windows, we're doing a whole remodeling of the front of the building, we're putting up a lighted canopy with our name on and we're adding outdoor seating,” Coffee said.

City administrator Holly Circo believes the façade grant program is another good motivator for new and existing business owners like Coffee to invest in the city. The city and state match will kick in up to \$5,000 each to match the business owner's investment in a new façade.

“We're excited she made this investment in our city. We're hoping the community college's expansion and Kim's opening the coffee shop will help other speculators see downtown Nanticoke is a place that's growing in the future.” Circo said Bartuska's Furniture, Antonio's Pizza and Nardozzo's Pizza & Pierogies also have applied for façade grants and the city is in discussion with two other businesses. Council President Steve Duda says the program is a win-win. “We invite any business to come and invest in our city. It's a joint venture. If they're successful, the city is successful; that's our philosophy,” he said.

Making more moves

Coffee said business is so good and feedback so positive that she's already considering expanding the shop into a space next door that she uses for storage.

“I've been getting people who say, ‘This is great, this is just what the downtown needs, I hope it continues up the street,’” Coffee said.

Nanticoke Mayor Joseph Dougherty said he sees Coffee's shop and the eventual façade improvements of other businesses as steps toward revitalization, and he hopes townspeople will support the businesses.

“No matter the size, any step toward revitalization is a positive. Private investment is very important to downtown revitalization. I'd like to see things move quicker, but projects like this take time. We need to have patience,” Dougherty said.

Coffee is counting on Dougherty's support as well.

“He said he loved the place. He said it was awesome. I told him when people come in and ask why I would open a place like this in Nanticoke, I say, ‘Why not Nanticoke?’” Coffee said. “He loved that.”

3/29/2012

### **Nanticoke officials, home-rule committee settle policy differences**

Elizabeth Skrapits - Citizens' Voice

Nanticoke officials and the city's home-rule transition committee amicably resolved their differences over who can make binding decisions.

Elected officials and transition committee members disagreed over interpretations of the home-rule charter, which took effect Jan. 2.

The committee's position was the charter enables them to enact a personnel policy and select a city manager, but elected officials' stance was that only council and the mayor had the power to hire, fire and pass legislation.

An agreement, signed by council and the committee, confirms elected officials should make the final decisions on matters that affect the city.

“The parties recognize that entities which have authority to act independently from the city are not eligible to be covered by the city's insurance policies,” it states.

“Accordingly, the members of the transition committee expressly acknowledge that their role in the transition process is advisory in nature and that they do not have any final authority to take any actions which would bind the city of Nanticoke and therefore are eligible for coverage under the city's policy.”

Under the terms of the agreement, the committee will be responsible for drafting codes and policies such as administrative and ethics codes, conflict of interest and personnel policies and the competitive bidding process.

Elected city officials will be consulted when these are drawn up, make the final decision relative to the content of the policies and codes, and give final approval.

The process for selecting the manager is also spelled out in the agreement. A city manager recruitment committee will be formed, consisting of council President Steven Duda - who is also on the transition committee - Councilman Richard Wiaterowski, two members of the transition committee and a neutral third party such as a representative from the International City/County Management Association.

This search committee will interview candidates, rank them and give them to the transition committee to review, then to the mayor, who will select the manager and set a salary.

City council will then have to vote to confirm the mayor's decision.

3/27/2012

### **Bertoni Turns It Around**

On Campus - Bill Arsenault  
Times Leader

After starting the season 0-7, freshman Sarah Bertoni has won four straight games for the Millersville softball team. Bertoni (Greater Nanticoke Area) kicked off the winning streak by tossing the first no-hitter in Millersville softball history – a 7-0 triumph over Philadelphia University. She followed that up with a 6-1 victory over Holy Family (six hits, an earned run, no walks and five strikeouts) and a one-hit 3-0 triumph over West Chester. Last Sunday, the 5-foot-6 right-hander worked 5 1/3 innings and got credit for a 3-2 victory over East Stroudsburg. On the season, Bertoni has pitched in 13 games and started 12 with seven complete games. She's worked 72.2 innings and has given up 86 hits and 43 runs, 35 earned. She's walked 11 and struck out 45. Her earned run average has dropped to 4.43.

3/24/12

### **New cafe, Coffee's Coffee, opens in downtown Nanticoke**

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

The name is fittingly simple - Coffee's Coffee - and the location is great, Kim Coffee says about her new coffee and sandwich shop in downtown Nanticoke.

Coffee's Coffee opened March 14 at the site of the former McDonald's Newsstand and is amid its grand opening. Coffee, who has owned the Main Street storefront since 1993, always dreamed of opening a coffee shop and thinks the timing is perfect. Luzerne County Community College recently opened two classroom buildings downtown - its culinary center and health/science building - drawing large groups of students and staff downtown like never before. "I always wanted to do this, and when the school came here, it made it that much better," Coffee said.

The business features speciality coffee, espressos, cappuccinos, lattes, teas, along with frappuccinos and smoothies. It also serves breakfast sandwiches, baked goods, soup, big hotdogs called "fatdogs," and panini sandwiches. The store is open 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday, and 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. on the weekends.

Coffee said her business was recently granted approval for one of the state's "facade grants" being awarded to help revitalize the downtown. She plans to remodel the store front, add a canopy, install new windows and create outside seating.

3/23/2012

### **Nanticoke passes first reading of permit parking ordinance**

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

City Council on Wednesday night approved the first reading of ordinance 3-2012, which would establish permit parking only on areas of Coal Street, Hill Street and Orchard Street.

The permits, which would be paid for by the council, would make parking in those areas available solely to the residents.

At present, residents of those streets often have great difficulty in finding parking near their homes because of parking by Luzerne County Community College culinary students.

The ordinance will require a second reading before the final voting.

In another matter, City Director of Finance Pam Heard said the city has received the last \$125,000 reimbursement from the state Department of Environmental Protection/federal Environmental Protection Agency for the City Hall HVAC grant.

The city also received a letter from DEP stating that the city will receive an Act 101 Recycling Program Performance grant of \$8,875 for 2011 materials recycled.

Heard also said the city has acquired a \$60,000 grant from DCNR for the development of a walking trail and pavilion in the Lower Broadway vicinity.

Mayor Joseph Dougherty administered oaths to two area firefighters.

Richard Bohan has been promoted to captain of the Nanticoke Fire Department, while Mark Boncal has been promoted

to lieutenant.

Resolution 6 of 2012 to approve a home rule transition memorandum of understanding, has been passed.

This agreement protects all parties involved in Nanticoke's home rule transition.

What's next

Council will next meet at 7 p.m. April 18 in City Hall.

3/23/2012

**Greater Nanticoke Area School District will conduct kindergarten registration for the 2012-13 school term April 2-3.**

Citizens Voice

In order to be eligible for kindergarten next school year, a child must be 5 years or older on or before Sept. 1, 2012. Parents should accompany their child. Bring the child's birth certificate and provide all health and immunization records. Two proofs of residency also are required. If a child is a foster child or has a custody paper, bring the original so that a copy can be made for the child's record. All information is necessary to complete the registration. Copies will be made.

According to the Department of Health, all children must be immunized with the following in order to attend school: DPT - four or more properly spaced doses with the fourth dose given on or after the fourth birthday; polio - three or more properly spaced doses; MMR - two properly spaced doses with the first dose on or after the first birthday; Hepatitis B - three properly spaced doses, and chicken pox - two doses of varicella vaccine or a history of chicken pox. Children will register according to last names. Children with last names beginning with the letters A to L will register April 2 from 8:30 a.m. to 11 a.m. and names with M to Z will register from 12:30 to 2 p.m.

April 3, last names beginning with the letters M to Z will register from 8:30 to 11 a.m. and A to L will register from 12:30 to 2 P.M.

All residents of the Greater Nanticoke Area School District will attend the registration at K.M. Smith Elementary School, 25 Robert St., Sheatown.

All children registering for kindergarten will receive speech, hearing and vision examinations. A reading readiness screening will also be done on each child.

Registration for new first grade students will also be accepted at this time. In order to be eligible for first grade next school year, a child must be 6 years of age on or before Sept. 1, 2012. Parents should bring their child's birth certificate, health and immunization records, and two proofs of residency.

Registration packets are available in the K.M. Smith principal's office between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. for parents/guardians to pick up.

3/20/2012

**Former Nanticoke Area star playing for Sweet 16 berth**

Jill Snowdon - Citizens Voice

The second round sectional of the Division I NCAA women's basketball tournament may be in Little Rock, Ark., but the Wyoming Valley has a very close connection.

Nanticoke Area graduate Sarah Acker is a 6-foot-3 senior center on the University of Delaware squad that will meet the University of Kansas tonight at 9:40. The game can be seen on ESPN2.

"It's amazing to be a part of something like this," Acker said during a telephone interview Monday night. "You always imagine playing in the NCAA tournament, but to actually be here is really awesome."

Acker played 15 minutes, scored two points and hauled in four rebounds in the Blue Hens' 73-42 win over the University of Alabama Little Rock on Sunday.

The win over UALR was the first NCAA tournament win for Delaware and the third-seeded Blue Hens enter tonight's game with a 31-1 record.

Their only loss of the season came on the road at the University of Maryland.

Acker and her teammates had a team dinner Monday and finished off the night by reviewing film of Kansas. A win and Delaware is in the Sweet 16.

"Their post players are very athletic and they have really quick guards," Acker said of what her team is preparing for against the Jayhawks.

"Kansas rebounds the ball really well, so it's going to be tough in the lanes. And we need to contain their shooters."



Acker is in her second season at Delaware, having played as a freshman at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia. She did not play as a sophomore.

The former Nanticoke Area standout played in 23 games this season for Delaware and averages 7.9 minutes per game. The Blue Hens' roster also includes Dunmore graduate Lauren Carra, a 5-9 junior forward who is second on the team in scoring with 10.3 ppg.

Elena Delle Donne is the team's top player and also is considered one of the top players in the nation. A 6-5 junior guard/forward, Delle Donne averages a nation's-best 29.7 ppg.

She was a Connecticut recruit after starring at Ursuline Academy in Delaware and was the No. 1 college prospect as a high school player.

She left UConn two days after arriving for summer school, citing family reasons for her return to her home state. Her story of her close bond with her sister Elizabeth has been the focus of many articles and television interviews as Elizabeth has cerebral palsy and is deaf and blind.

Delle Donne was recently featured on ESPN's "Outside the Lines" and she talked of the closeness she shares with her sister.

After leaving UConn, Delle Donne enrolled at Delaware but opted not to play basketball, instead she played one season for the Blue Hens' volleyball team and has since been a star on their basketball team.

"I played a summer of AAU basketball with her and she amazes me every time she plays," Acker said of Delle Donne.

"It's great playing with her. She's a great girl and one of the most down-to-earth people I have ever met. And she will be the first to tell you that we are where we are right now because of the team we have - from the starters to the bench players. It really is about everyone putting in hard work."

The Trojanettes went 58-2 in Acker's final two seasons and she had more than 1,500 points, 1,500 rebounds and 500 blocks.

3/16/2012

### **Support staff substitutes will get raise**

Susan Denney - Times Leader

In an effort to attract support staff substitutes, the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board voted Thursday to raise the pay rate.

Before the raise, all support staff substitutes were paid \$7.50 an hour. Now maintenance substitutes will receive \$11 an hour, janitor substitutes will receive \$10 an hour, and all others including cafeteria, cleaners, aides, secretaries, hall monitors and business office subs will receive \$9 an hour.

In another matter, the school board has approved the EnerNOC's Demand Response Program, which is intended to reduce energy use during peak summer months from July through September. If the district can reduce 500 kilowatt-hours per year over a six-year period, the potential earnings will be \$98,373 in addition to the energy cost savings. Director of Buildings and Grounds Frank Grevera said EnerNOC will install demand meters in every room. He will then be able to monitor room-by-room energy use and can reduce consumption in unused areas.

The board has appointed the following coaches for the spring season: girls track head coach Anthony Fleury, boys track head coach Edward Pascoe, wrestling head coach Joseph Ebert, baseball head coach Dean Myers and girls soccer head coach Ryan Amos.

Boys volleyball head coach Debbie Krupinski and assistant coach James Gavin have resigned for personal reasons. Those spring coaching positions are now open.

The board also posted the coaching positions for the 2012-2013 school year.

The high school's newly appointed dean of students, Eric Speec, reported to the board that discipline is improving on the campus and that the percentage of students attending their assigned detentions is increasing.

In his remarks, Superintendent Anthony Perrone listed recent academic achievements by GNA students in regional competitions. He also urged teachers attending the meeting to invite guest speakers into the classroom and to use the long distance learning laboratory.

What's next

Board will meet next at 7 p.m. April 12.

3/8/2012

### **Nanticoke fills vacant seat on City Council**

**Lesley Butczynski appointed to position that opened when Margaret Hydock resigned**

Steven Fondo - Times Leader

City Council voted unanimously on Wednesday to appoint Lesley Butczynski to fill the seat vacated by the recent resignation of Councilwoman Margaret Hydock.

Council also authorized the filing of a FEMA grant application that will provide funds to hire three additional firefighters for three years.

Council President Stephen Duda stressed that if the grant is awarded, the city would be under no obligation to continue the employment of the three firefighters beyond that three-year period at taxpayer expense.

The council also voted to authorize City Clerk Holly Cirko to execute Hazard Mitigation Grant program documents on behalf of the city.

City officials stated Slusser Brothers Construction Co. will begin work on the Alden Road improvement project next week.

The Alden Road work is part of a \$2 million dollar road improvement project in the city.

In other business, Interact, the junior arm of the Nanticoke Rotary Club, gave notice it will be filing the necessary permit applications to conduct a farmers market on the first weekends of June, July and August in the city's Patriot Square as a way to attract patronage for Nanticoke businesses.

3/8/2012

**They're living on with prayer, priest says of family**

**Fire would have killed them had they been home instead of at church, priest says of family.**

[jllynott@timesleader.com](mailto:jllynott@timesleader.com)

Church really was the best place to be Sunday for the Rev. Adam Sexton, his wife and eight children.

The rectory where they lived next door to St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church caught fire while Sexton was conducting the morning service.

He continued on without a second thought of stopping the liturgy. Instead the chaplain of the Nanticoke Fire Department said he put his faith in the firefighters.

Sexton and Bishop Tikhon of the Diocese of Philadelphia held a special Service of Thanksgiving for the firefighters of Nanticoke and surrounding communities who responded to the alarm.

The bishop understood Sexton's reasoning..

"I think that's what you saw in father's actions, that prayer to the Lord and service to him is always foremost," said the bishop. "But we don't neglect taking care of the needful things like putting out a fire."

His trip to the church was not unusual, he said. Having a small diocese, he is able to travel to most of the parishes.

"I did come here more specifically because of the fire and to be with the community and to be with father," said the bishop.

The blaze temporarily displaced Sexton, his wife, Angie Rae, and children: Alyscia, 12, Jacob, 11, Raeman, 10, Josiah, 8, Ilia, 6, Bede, 4, Gabriel, 3, and Seamus, 1.

They are staying in a hotel and next week plan to move into a rectory of a closed Catholic church in Nanticoke until their place is rebuilt.

Support for the family is coming from all over the country, said Sexton, who acknowledged being overwhelmed by it. "I'm not accustomed to being fussed over," he said.

Recalling the fire, Sexton said his initial reaction was not to panic. He felt "an enormous peace" upon seeing the smoke, he said.

Still he had concerns for the firefighters.

"I could tell by the look of the flames this was a very awful basement fire," he said. "Basement fires, as most people know, are lethal and had we been asleep we would have all been dead. Thank God we were not asleep and we were here praying instead."

The rectory could be repaired, he said he thought that morning. "The firefighters couldn't be. The only thing to do was to continue to pray and to urge my people to pray for them because these are our protector."

Sexton and the bishop and parishioners joined some of the firefighters after the service at the fire department's Station 4 on Espy Street, a block away from the church.

3/8/2012

**Nanticoke police probing LCCC account discrepancy**

A financial audit at Luzerne County Community College has revealed a discrepancy in one of the school's accounts, prompting an investigation by city police.

After an annual audit at the school, college officials asked its business consultants to assist in looking into the discrepancy.

The amount of money missing from the school's Public Safety Training Institute has not been released.

Nanticoke police have asked the Luzerne County District Attorney's Office to meet with them regarding the funds. A meeting is scheduled for today, District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis said.

Nanticoke Detective Capt. William Shultz did not return a phone call Wednesday seeking comment.

In an email, a college spokesperson said that after college officials reviewed information from the business consultants it was turned over to the Nanticoke Police Department.

Money had gone missing from the school in September 2008 when Peter Moses, was charged with stealing more than \$17,000 and two laptop computers from the school.

Moses, who was the associate dean of administration and auxiliary services, oversaw the cafeteria and Educational Conference Center and was paid about \$73,000 a year.

A Luzerne County jury convicted Moses of related charges in July 2010, and he was later sentenced to four to 23 months in county prison.

His conviction and sentence is on appeal in state Superior Court. He has remained free on bail.

3/8/2012

### **Air Force veteran comes home**

### **Airman 1st Class David Warren of Nanticoke served 5 1/2 months in Iraq and Kuwait.**

Joe Dolinsky - Times Leader

A son reunited with his family Wednesday after a tour in the Middle East.

Airman 1st Class David Warren, 21, of Nanticoke was greeted by friends and family at the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton International Airport after returning home from 5 1/2 months of service in Iraq and Kuwait.

A 2008 graduate of Greater Nanticoke Area High School, Warren worked locally for two years before deciding to enlist in the Air Force Reserve.

His mother, Sharon, recalls that day.

"He just came home one day and said 'Mom, I joined the Air Force,' " she said.

David's father, a retired first sergeant in the Plymouth National Guard, never went overseas during his time of service.

"I was proud. But I was also worried," she said.

Warren spent the majority of his time overseas as a vehicle operator, participating in convoy operations and movements of various supplies and munitions.

His position called for him to be proficient in cleaning, servicing and operating military vehicles, overseeing the loading and unloading of personnel and cargo and preparing operator records and reports.

Specifically, Warren said he drove tractor-trailers trucks full of supplies from Kuwait into bases throughout Iraq.

"I was through about five different bases in five months," he said.

Balloons and digital camera in hand, Sharon said she was just looking forward to having her son home.

Other than through email, David and his mother had little to no contact while he was overseas. "I just wanted to see him," she said. "And see him safe."

Warren spent his fair share of time in the air the past week.

He flew out of Kuwait before landing at Ramstein Air Base in Germany for a four-day debriefing period.

Warren then boarded a 12-hour flight straight into Dallas, before catching a short flight to his reserve base in Oklahoma.

From there, Warren would finally board the flight that reunited him with his family.

"After all the flying, I'm looking forward to just being home," he said. "And sleep in my own bed."

Contemplating his first taste of stateside cooking in more than five months, Warren said he is most looking forward to wings at Green Street's Restaurant in Nanticoke.

He picked a great day to fly home.

"Tonight's wing night," he said.

His return home is short-lived, however.

Warren will be returning to Oklahoma March 27 for seven months.

After his enlistment in the Air Force Reserve is completed in three years, Warren said he plans to go to school in hopes of becoming a parole officer.

3/5/2012

### **Fund set up for Nanticoke fire chaplain**

Times Leader

A fund has been established for the city fire department's chaplain and his family after a blaze caused significant damage to their residence on Sunday.

The Rev. Adam R. Sexton was giving the liturgy at St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church at Welles and Front streets in the Hanover section of Nanticoke when a fire erupted at the rectory at 106 S. Welles St.

Fire Fighter Greg Grzymiski said firefighters responded to the blaze at about 11 a.m. while Rev. Sexton, his wife, and his eight children were attending services.

A neighbor spotted the fire and called 911.

Grzymiski said there is "significant damage" to the rectory.

When Rev. Sexton was told about the fire, he continued with the service worrying about the firefighters, Grzymiski said.

Grzymiski said an investigation determined the fire was accidental.

A firefighter suffered a minor injury, Grzymiski said.

Rev. Sexton has been the fire department's chaplain for about three years.

Monetary donations can be made to the Adam Sexton Fire Fund at Vantage Trust Federal Credit Union, 158 S. Market St., Nanticoke, to help with the family.

Grzymiski said children's clothing and toys can be dropped off at the Nanticoke Fire Headquarters on East Ridge Street.

Rev. Sexton has six boys, ages 16 months, 3-years-old, 5, 7, 8 and 11, and two girls, ages 10 and 12.

2/16/2012

### **Nanticoke council member steps down**

#### **Margaret Haydock cites demands of new career with Department of Corrections.**

Susan Bettinger - Times Leader

Councilwoman Margaret Haydock has resigned from her council seat as of Feb. 15.

Haydock has left the council due to the demands of her new career with the state Department of Corrections.

Council is looking for a citizen to fill her seat. The requirements are that the person must be at least 21 years of age and a resident of Nanticoke for at least one year.

Letters of interest should be sent to the Nanticoke City Hall, 15 E. Ridge St., Nanticoke, attention Council President Steve Duda.

The last day for the letters of interest is Feb. 26. There will be two stages of interviews for the prospective members.

In other business:

- Council approved Thomas Wall for a position with the Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority.
- Analysis of the lands in Lower Broadway will begin in early spring. The grants for the work have come from the state Department of Community and Economic Development and Department of Environmental Protection. City Administrator Holly Cirko said the phase 2 grant of just under \$9,000 will be used to check the grounds to make sure that they are suitable for recreational purposes. Certain lands in the Lower Broadway area would be taken and turned into an area where residents can enjoy bird watching, walking trails, and other leisure activities.
- Director of Finance Pam Heard has asked residents to be patient while changes with the new web-based tax system are taking place. Heard also reported the property tax bills were mailed out on Feb. 13, and the new tax collector for 2012 will be Don Wilkinson. The last year to file with Berkheimer, was the year 2011.
- Recovery Plan Coordinator Joe Boyle said that under the Act 47 Recovery Plan, there is no limit to the amount of earned income tax or real estate tax that can be charged to residents. The state's recovery plan, has been enacted as a way for distressed areas to get back on a balanced budget.

#### **What's next**

The next council meeting will be at March 7 at 7 p.m. In addition, the Home Rule Transition Committee will hold its meetings on the second and fourth Tuesdays of every month.

2/15/2012

## **Nanticoke officials, home rule panel clash over policies**

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The city's elected officials are clashing with the home rule transition committee over who has the power to pick a manager and decide how city employees should act.

When Nanticoke's home rule charter took effect on Jan. 2, the study commission became the transition committee. Its members say the charter enables them to enact a personnel policy and select a city manager, but elected officials say only council and the mayor can hire, fire and pass legislation.

If not resolved, the matter could be decided in court, but committee solicitor Jeffrey Malak hopes it can be resolved amicably.

Malak said at Tuesday's transition committee meeting that he received a letter from city solicitor William Finnegan clarifying three concerns city officials had.

One issue was taken care of when the committee voted to put out requests for proposals for a professional consultant, legal advisor, recording secretary and insurance to cover errors and omissions. The committee previously hired Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance as consultant, Malak as solicitor and Donna Wall as secretary. But city ordinances require advertising for professional services and the committee hired without putting the services out for bid.

The committee voted to appoint NEPA Alliance, Malak and Wall on an interim basis until proposals are received. Although they put the insurance out to bid, the committee will also check to see if it can "piggyback" on the city's policy.

The other two issues - the process of recommending, drafting and approving the administrative code and what the committee's role is in it, and the search for and recruitment of a city manager and whether the committee has authority to hire one - might not be as easy to resolve.

The charter calls for an administrative code that includes conflict of interest, personnel and purchasing policies, a code of ethics and a competitive bidding process.

The city already has a full-time administrator as required by its state-mandated financial recovery plan. Committee members say the charter gives them authority to draw up qualifications for and hire the first manager. However, the charter also gives the mayor and council the ability to replace the manager at any time.

Council President Steve Duda, who is on the transition committee, asked what other home rule municipalities in Pennsylvania created transition committees empowered to pass legislation or hire employees.

Nobody could answer the question. NEPA Alliance Chief Executive Officer Jeffrey Box said they would have to research the matter. NEPA Alliance Government Services Manager Joe Chacke said a home rule commission can enact any law as long as it is not in conflict with the state constitution.

Malak said he and Finnegan will meet with some members of the transition committee and key city officials to try to resolve the issues or "at least narrow down where there may be a difference of opinion."

"I'm hopeful and confident that everything will work out," he said

2/10/2012

## **GNA board takes hard line on coach clearances**

### **School directors want updated background checks for sports program personnel.**

Susan Denney - Times Leader The [Greater Nanticoke Area School](#) Board on Thursday night voted down an agenda item appointing coaches for the 2012 wrestling, baseball, track and field and girls' soccer teams.

Several board members were concerned that many of the candidates have not provided updated clearances and background checks.

Board President Jeff Kozlowski said that if the district allows coaches or volunteers to have contact with students without clearances, "we're liable."

When voting no on the agenda item, board member Chet Beggs said, "You have clearances or you don't."

Board Solicitor Vito DeLuca prepared a new policy on background check procedures, which he presented at the meeting and the board adopted.

He said the new policy will apply to all coaches and sports program volunteers. It states coaches or volunteers who are not in compliance with background check requirements will not be permitted contact with students.

The following clearances are required by law: a state police Criminal History Record, a Department of Public Welfare Child Abuse Report and a Federal Criminal History Report or FBI report which includes fingerprints.

DeLuca said, "The law was amended at the end of 2011. We want to make sure we're in compliance."

According to DeLuca, the background check process is more complicated at GNA.



“Our district is a little different. Our coaches are appointed by season. We reappoint each year.”

Board member Ken James said, “The public needs to know that these people have clearances. They don’t have updated clearances.”

The board also decided that all clearances must be approved by district Athletic Director James Rhinehammer.

2/7/2012

### **Nanticoke bar cited with multiple violations**

### **Tavern where cops say woman was slashed cited by state police bureau.**

elewis@timesleader.com

A tavern where police say a woman was slashed in the face early on New Year’s Day was cited with multiple violations by state police Bureau of Liquor Control Enforcement.

In a news release issued Monday, state police said they cited the Prospect Street Caf? at 23 S. Prospect St. with excessive noise and operating in a disorderly manner on multiple dates in 2011, and on Jan. 1 when Jennifer Mieczkowski was severely injured.

The tavern also was cited with permitting minors to frequent the business and furnishing alcohol to minors, operating gambling devices and failing to abide by an agreement reached with the state Liquor Control Board on Dec. 6 that allowed the tavern to remain open.

Mieczkowski, 30, said she entered the tavern with Rickey Wells to buy a 12-pack of beer to take home. While she was talking to friends, a fight broke out and a woman slashed Mieczkowski numerous times in the face and neck, police said. No charges have been filed in the slashing.

Police obtained a video surveillance system that may have captured the assault.

Mieczkowski and Wells have filed separate civil lawsuits against the tavern and owner Paul Halliday.

Wells was beaten with a pool stick when he tried to help Mieczkowski, police said.

Halliday could not be reached for comment Monday.

Citations filed against the tavern on Monday add to 16 others since 2004, according to online records maintained by the state Liquor Control Board.

The LCB ordered the tavern to shut down after a series of administrative citations but successful appeals by Halliday allowed the business to stay open.

In the latest appeal, a three-member panel of the LCB objected to renewing the liquor license in September based upon the 16 citations and nine disturbances at or near the tavern.

Under a conditional agreement signed on Dec. 6, Halliday pledged to remain in compliance with the liquor code and to employ a security guard every Friday and Saturday from 10 p.m. to 2:30 a.m.

State police allege the tavern did not adhere to the agreement on Dec. 20 and Jan. 1.

While the news release does not specify the agreement violations, police said Mieczkowski was slashed on Jan. 1 and Lee David Antonik, 35, allegedly assaulted Vincent Rodriguez with a pool stick on Dec. 20.

2/3/2012

### **Nanticoke Housing Authority finds QVC purchases on credit card**

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After finding questionable purchases on the Nanticoke Housing Authority credit card - including more than \$2,000 in unspecified items from a television shopping network - the authority's board decided to bring in an outside accounting firm to give the books a thorough examination.

During a special meeting Thursday, board members Josephine Battista, Enes Centurione, Tony Prushinski and Chairwoman Dorothy Hudak voted to seek proposals for a full forensic audit of the authority's finances for 2009, 2010 and 2011.

A forensic audit, which involves going through all the authority's financial records line by line and item by item, will help determine whether any funds were spent incorrectly. Solicitor Vito DeLuca said authority officials consider it "prudent to know exactly what happened and whether the expenditures were appropriate or weren't appropriate." He noted that the audit could go further if necessary.

"The further you go back, the more expensive it's going to get, so we're starting off with the three years," he said.

The board also ratified an earlier decision to hire former Luzerne County Manager/Chief Clerk Doug Pape as interim executive director at a salary of \$78,000 plus benefits.

Pape replaces Jean Ditzler, longtime board member who served as executive director from July 2007 until her abrupt termination by the board on Jan. 19.

DeLuca confirmed Ditzler was suspended and dismissed, but would not explain why or give any other details, calling it is a personnel matter.

Ditzler, who did not attend the meeting, said she had "really no comment to make, not at this moment."

The board recently became aware Ditzler may have used the authority's credit card for items that might not have been appropriate.

"The executive director typically has authority to make purchases up to a certain amount," DeLuca said. "When we stumbled on some purchases that were a little bit questionable, I looked into them further."

Credit card statements for the Nanticoke Housing Authority's Bank of America account for 2010 and 2011 obtained by The Citizens' Voice show that between August 2010 and Nov. 2011, a total of 23 payments for \$2,111.75 in merchandise from QVC appears to have been charged on the card.

The items were not identified on the statements and no receipts could be located in the housing authority files.

"I confirmed recently that those were personal purchases made by the former executive director," DeLuca said.

He said Ditzler paid the housing authority back for all the QVC items. From his conversations with the office staff, DeLuca said he believes the authority was reimbursed immediately after each purchase.

Nonetheless, he said, "I don't believe a government credit card should ever be used for personal purchases at all. You're using housing authority credit. If you carry it over, you're getting a private or personal benefit from the government entity."

DeLuca said neither he nor any of the board members had any knowledge at the time that the items were being bought.

"We're pulling as many records as we can and looking to reconstruct some of the things that have gone on," he said.

The authority receives approximately \$1 million a year from the federal department of Housing and Urban Development for management and operations of the authority's six buildings containing 268 elderly high-rise apartments and 149 low-income family apartments.

It was unclear what source of funding was used to pay the credit card bills. DeLuca said the forensic auditors will determine exactly where the money came from.

Most expenses charged on the card appear legitimate. Receipts showed orders from the Oriental Trading Co. were for craft supplies for the senior high rises the authority oversees. Hotel rooms, airline tickets and gasoline were related to business trips such as Pennsylvania Association of Housing and Development Agencies conferences.

However, authority officials are checking to see if there are any remaining purchases that should be reimbursed, including numerous meals from Johnny D's and Pasquale's and a \$102.50 purchase from Valley Seafoods on Jan. 6, 2010, for which no receipt could be found.

"I could tell you that maybe an argument could be made that they are housing authority expenses. I don't believe that," DeLuca said.

DeLuca said if authority officials discover any act they believe to be criminal, it will immediately be reported to authorities.

2/2/2012

**Nanticoke's elected tax collector unhappy**

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The city's elected tax collector, whose position was eliminated under the city's new home rule charter, isn't happy about the transition.

But city officials say he's welcome to take part in creating a new, more streamlined and efficient finance department. Albert Wytoshek told council Wednesday he would like to continue in the position he "did a great job" in for 12 years. Council President Steve Duda said he understood, but "we all have to realize home rule changed the whole scope of government in this town."

Wytoshek, who turned 81 on Monday, said Mayor Joseph Dougherty discriminated against him and his "age, gender and beliefs" by putting the city's Finance Director Pamela Heard, who is 42, in charge of tax collection.

City Solicitor William Finnegan said if Wytoshek feels he is being discriminated against, he should hire an attorney, but indicated it is not the case.

"I know this has been explained to you, Al, 10 different times," Finnegan said.

Nanticoke's home-rule charter, which took effect Jan. 1, calls for the mayor to appoint the tax collector. It is part-time and can either be independent or "incorporated into an existing staff position."

At the same time, it allows for the elected tax collector to complete his term of office, which pays \$6,500 a year. The charter states, "The mayor shall resolve any disputes that may arise between the elected Controller and elected Treasurer and the individuals and/or departments to which their duties and responsibilities have been assigned." Finnegan said Dougherty sent Wytoshek a letter inviting him to help with the transition, but Wytoshek swore he never received the letter.

Finnegan countered Wytoshek's claim that Heard was getting \$48,300 a year to be tax collector, saying she would not receive any extra compensation for taking on the additional duties. The \$48,300 is her total salary in the 2012 budget. Wytoshek also attacked Heard's tax collector certification from the state Department of Community and Economic Development, saying the city should be reimbursed.

City Administrator Holly Circo said the state course Heard took, which cost about \$100, had been included in the budget for staff training and was approved by council.

"I think training employees is a good thing, and I don't think it should be criticized," Circo said.

She said tax collection is being consolidated with the finance department to increase efficiency.

In a Jan. 31 letter to Dougherty, Heard stated that planned tax collection improvements include converting to the less expensive system used by Luzerne County and 71 of its tax collectors; using a bar code scanner to post payments automatically; installing security cameras at the cash collection points; and working with PNC bank to bring in a check scanner to give the city immediate access to funds and eliminate the need for trips to the bank.

Heard is a licensed certified public accountant with a degree from the University of Scranton.

2/2/2012

### **Mayor rebuts age bias claim**

### **Nanticoke's change to home rule cited as reason for removal of tax collector.**

Steven Fondo - Times Leader

Former city tax collector Al Wytoshek at Wednesday night's City Council meeting accused the mayor of age discrimination in his removal from office.

Wytoshek, who served as tax collector for 12 years, alleged Mayor Joseph Dougherty ousted him because of "bad blood" in a closed-door decision process.

The mayor disagreed.

"Mr. Wytoshek was replaced under a transition process due to our move to home rule," said Dougherty. "He was fully informed about the decision and was invited to participate in the transition."

Dougherty reiterated Wytoshek will still be paid \$6,500 per year for the next two years of his term, "whether he participates in the transition or not."

City Solicitor William Finnegan said the home rule charter mandated specific changes with its inception. One of the changes deals with tax collection at the city level.

"We're following the dictates of the voters," said Finnegan. "Home rule brought a lot of changes."

Also, City Council voted to approve the first reading of an ordinance that will authorize the development of land along Lower Broadway in the city for a municipal recreation area which will include walking paths and a picnic area when completed.

The ordinance must pass a second vote before council can begin the process of acquiring the land.

In another matter, Dougherty read a formal proclamation honoring the Nanticoke chapter of the Eagles for their generous support of the city's police department.

"The Eagles are a great example of a civic organization," said Dougherty. "They do a lot of good for our community."

1/31/2012

### **Ex-county official gets Nanticoke spot**

### **Doug Pape, who was chief clerk/manager, getting \$78K as interim authority manager.**

jandes@timesleader.com

Former Luzerne County chief clerk/manager Doug Pape has been hired as the Nanticoke Housing Authority interim manager, a \$78,000 position vacated by the termination of Jean Ditzler

Authority Solicitor Vito DeLuca, also a county solicitor, said he recommended Pape because the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, or HUD, told him it was "imperative" for someone to oversee operations in the interim.

The permanent position must be filled through the state Civil Service system, requiring a test. DeLuca said he notified the state of the vacancy but does not know how long it will take to complete the process to find a replacement. Pape said he has not decided whether to apply for the permanent position. DeLuca said he suggested Pape because he has a master's degree in public administration, oversaw county government and was available. "His education, background and experience speaks for itself. We certainly were in a crisis situation, and it was the right choice. I stand by it," DeLuca said. DeLuca said he knows Pape professionally but does not consider him a close friend. "I would never do anything inappropriate to get a friend or family member a job," DeLuca said. "In the best interest of the authority, he is the best man for the position without any doubt in my mind." Ditzler was terminated a little over a week ago, though DeLuca said he can't publicly disclose the reasons. The authority board independently interviewed Pape multiple times and agreed to appoint him, DeLuca said. The authority has five members, but one seat is vacant. The remaining board members are Dorothy Hudak, Tony Prushinski, Enes Centurione and Josephine Bashista. Pape earned \$72,000 as county chief clerk/manager until home rule was implemented Jan. 2. He declined an invitation from some county home rule transition committee members to consider serving as interim home rule manager, saying he couldn't commit because he was exploring potential private sector positions. Pape said Monday was his first day on the authority job. "I want to dive in with all the HUD regulations and make sure we're doing everything by the book," Pape said. The authority oversees about 419 low-income apartments in six complexes, he said.

1/23/2012

### **Earth Conservancy to rehabilitate land Nonprofit group hopes to clean up part of a former strip mine in Nanticoke.**

mhughes@timesleader.com

Earth Conservancy plans to rehabilitate another plot of mine-scarred land in the southern Wyoming Valley. The Ashley-based nonprofit will host a public meeting Feb. 1 at its headquarters to accept public comments about its plans to clean up part of a former strip mine in Nanticoke. Earth Conservancy wants to re-grade and resurface a 20-acre parcel of a larger, 389-acre tract of land on the Nanticoke/Hanover Township border near the intersection of Kosciuszko Street and Middle Road to prevent acid mine drainage from escaping the property into surrounding waterways. Properties previously remediated by Earth Conservancy have been sold or donated to public and private entities, including Luzerne County Community College. Jacqueline Dickman, director of public affairs and development, said Earth Conservancy doesn't have any immediate plans to develop the property, but hopes it will eventually attract commercial or mixed-use development. The site is near the proposed terminus of the South Valley Parkway, a bypass the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation will build to alleviate traffic on Middle Road. Dickman said the land may become more marketable for development when the roadway is complete. Eventually, Earth Conservancy hopes to clean up the entire 389-acre Nanticoke property, which the roadway will pass through, she said. The nonprofit must hold the public hearing because the project is being funded with a \$200,000 Brownfields Cleanup Grant from the state Environmental Protection Agency, in addition to \$40,000 from Earth Conservancy. Earth Conservancy hopes to begin cleanup at the site in the early spring and complete work within 12 months.

If you go

What: Public hearing on Earth Conservancy's remediation of former mine land in Nanticoke

When: Feb. 1, 4 p.m.

Where: Earth Conservancy office, 101 S. Main St., Ashley

More information: A complete project analysis is available for review at Earth Conservancy's office or online at [www.earthconservancy.org](http://www.earthconservancy.org)

1/21/2012

### **Nanticoke officials target eyesore for demolition**

Elizabeth Skrapits - Citizens Voice

In an ongoing war on eyesores and problem properties, the city is planning to get rid of a longtime nuisance at 66-68 W. Ridge St.

Solicitor William Finnegan said the city will purchase the site, demolish the vacant house, then sell the property through a public bidding process.

City Administrator Holly Cirko said the money will come from a fund earmarked for removing blight. She said acquisition will be about \$5,000 plus \$6,000 in back taxes, and estimates the bid for demolition, transportation, disposal and backfilling should come in around \$31,000 to \$32,000. The project will be bid out once the city has control of the site. The property owner, who lives in New Jersey, has been taken to court and the site has been a problem for at least six years, said councilman Rich Wiaterowski, Nanticoke's former code enforcement officer.

Mayor Joe Dougherty and council have an ongoing commitment to cleaning up Nanticoke, council President Steve Duda said.

"We don't want any abandoned properties or properties that aren't up to code in the city." Duda said.

1/11/12

### **Nanticoke teen in Punt, Pass and Kick finals**

Tom Brolley - Citizens Voice

Alec Norton spent last weekend watching the NFL playoffs, his favorite sport.

Norton could have the chance to be a small part of this Sunday's AFC divisional round game between the Houston Texans and Baltimore Ravens at M&T Bank.

Norton is one of just four national finalists in the 12-13 boys age group in the NFL Punt, Pass and Kick competition this Saturday night at the Ravens' team facilities.

If Norton is lucky enough to win his age group, he'll join the nine other champions for an award presentation that will air on CBS, between the third and fourth quarter of Sunday's game.

Norton said he has no expectations going into Saturday's finals.

"I'm going to go out there to do my best," he said.

He'll still get to attend the game with his father Todd even if he doesn't win.

Forty finalists, in 10 groups, will compete in the PPK finals and two finalists will come from the area.

Olivia Seely from Berwick will join Norton in the finals in Baltimore. She'll compete in the girls 14-15 age group.

Seely won a local event, a sectional event and the Philadelphia Eagles team event before the Patriots game on Nov. 27.

Seely demonstrated her arm strength this past May during track season, finishing finished sixth in the javelin at the District 2 Junior High Championships last spring.

Norton, 13, also won the a local event, a sectional event in Allentown and the Philadelphia Eagles team event.

Norton was especially excited to win the Philadelphia event because the Eagles are his favorite team.

All 32 NFL teams crown champions in each of the 10 groups and the field was narrowed down to four finalists with the best scores.

Norton had the fourth best score in his age group to advance to the finals.

Norton's best throw traveled 108 feet, his best kick went 136 feet and his best punt flew 115 feet.

Norton, the son of Todd and Sherri Norton, is an eighth grader at Nanticoke Area where he's an high-honor student and he plays football, basketball and baseball.

He plans to play all three sports next school year at Nanticoke Area High School.

Norton and his father will drive to Baltimore Friday night and the competition will be held at 4:30 p.m. at the Ravens' team facilities.

Finalists in the five age divisions on both the boys and girls will have two punts, two passes and two kicks with the scores based on distance and accuracy in feet.

The top scorer in each group will be crowned national champion.

All participants and their guests are provided airfare, hotel accomodations and tickets to the AFC Divisional Playoff Game in Baltimore.

"I'm excited to just be there and to go to all the stuff in Baltimore," Norton said. "And I'm excited to go to the game."

1/10/2012

### **Prospect Cafe surveillance system seized**



Authorities investigating the slashing of a woman's face inside a Nanticoke tavern have seized the bar's surveillance system, according to a search warrant affidavit.

District Judge Rick Cronauer authorized the search warrant filed by Nanticoke police and the Luzerne County District Attorney's Office late Friday afternoon, two days after a request was made to attorney Michael Yelen for the surveillance footage.

Yelen represents the Prospect Street Cafe and its owner, Paul Halliday.

Police Detective Capt. William Shultz said Monday the surveillance video of the assault early New Year's Day was taken from Yelen's law office on West Market Street, Wilkes-Barre. The video is in state police custody to be forensically analyzed.

Police said Jennifer Mieczkowski, 30, of Nanticoke, was assaulted by an unknown female with a box cutter inside the tavern at about 2 a.m. on Jan. 1. Mieczkowski suffered several severe slash wounds to her face and neck.

Mieczkowski said she went into the tavern with her friend, Ricky Wells, 30, of Mountain Top, to buy beer to take home. While she was talking to friends inside, a fight broke out and a woman slashed Mieczkowski numerous times in the face and neck, police said.

Mieczkowski said the slash on her neck was a half-inch away from the carotid artery. She underwent emergency surgery at Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center, Plains Township, and will need further medical procedures on her face.

Shultz said police are actively investigating the vicious assault. The District Attorney's Office is assisting the investigation along with the state police Bureau of Liquor Control Enforcement to determine if the tavern can be closed as a nuisance bar.

An estimated 20 people who were inside the tavern have been questioned by investigators.

Mieczkowski estimated there were 50 people present, and she criticized the patrons for not coming to her aid.

Wells, who Mieczkowski said did come to her aid, was dragged outside and beaten with a pool stick. He suffered a broken jaw, police said.

According to the search warrant affidavit:

A state police liquor enforcement officer conducted an inspection inside the tavern on Jan. 4 and observed interior cameras affixed at various locations.

Halliday told the enforcement officer the surveillance system was within a room in the kitchen area. After the fight on Jan. 1, Halliday allegedly told the enforcement officer he removed the (surveillance) system and gave it to his lawyer, Yelen.

The District Attorney's Office contacted Yelen's office on Jan. 4 requesting the surveillance equipment to have it examined by the state police computer crimes unit. Two days after the request, police and the District Attorney's Office obtained the search warrant for Yelen's office after they did not receive a response, the search warrant affidavit says.

Yelen did not return a message for comment, and Halliday could not be reached at the tavern on Monday.

1/9/2012

### **Luzerne County's distressed municipalities on way to success**

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Luzerne County's three financially distressed municipalities are on track to shed their dubious distinction.

Nanticoke City, Plymouth Township and West Hazleton Borough have all been making financial improvements and could emerge from their state-designated Act 47 status this year or next.

"I don't see any reason for us not to get out this year," Nanticoke Mayor Joseph Dougherty said. "We're in better shape than we have been in decades, and our audits prove that."

The state Department of Community and Economic Development makes the decision whether or not to grant distressed status. West Hazleton was declared Act 47 in November 2003, Plymouth Township in July 2004 and Nanticoke in May 2006.

Under the designation, all three municipalities have been required to maintain balanced budgets, follow plans drawn up by their financial recovery coordinators and adopt better accounting practices, among other things.

Professionals with Pennsylvania Economy League, recovery coordinator for Nanticoke and West Hazleton, and Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance, which is Plymouth Township's, say the municipalities are really making progress.

"We're hoping by the end of this year (Plymouth Township) will be in a position to present its case to the state for exit of distressed status," said Alan Baranski, vice president of community and government services at Northeastern

Pennsylvania Alliance.

Joe Boyle of Pennsylvania Economy League said emerging from Act 47 will happen. "Clearly in the next year or two for Nanticoke and West Hazleton."

The three municipalities just need to keep doing what they're doing, he said.

#### **Plymouth Township**

Even natural disasters couldn't keep Plymouth Township down.

The township's financial situation has improved to the extent officials were able to handle infrastructure expenses such as damage to roads, sewers and drainage systems, created by flash-flooding on July 3, Hurricane Irene on Aug. 28 and severe flooding from Tropical Storm Lee on Sept. 8-9.

"Even despite the recent flooding event they had there, which normally would have crippled them - which would cripple a financially healthy community - they're doing well," Baranski said.

Disasters are nothing new to the township. It suffered flooding in September 2004, April 2005 and June 2006, plus there was a Dec. 17, 2004 fire that ruined the public works garage.

"You almost have to say we've been tested, and tested, and tested," supervisor Chairwoman Gale Conrad said.

It was overspending in the aftermath of the 1996 flood that started Plymouth Township on the road to financial distress. A previous administration spent money on things such as road repairs, without governmental guarantees they would get the funds back.

That taught the current administration a lesson: "We are determined not to spend what we do not have, and until we are approved for things by the government, we do not do it," Conrad said.

This time, township officials worked hard to get grants and find other sources of money to ensure there would be no negative effects on residents' pockets, Conrad said.

"Those days are gone," she said. "The people have given enough with this earned income tax."

Township officials rolled up their sleeves and did what they had to do in terms of cleaning up, engaging the right professionals and using the federal and state emergency management agencies to get the damage assessments in for the hazard mitigation grant program, Baranski said.

Supervisor Joe Yudichak, who is head of the road department, "is doing an excellent, excellent job," Conrad said. She said for weeks after the flood, he ran machinery on his own time, unpaid, to help the department get a handle on the huge amount of work to be done.

Money is starting to trickle in, Conrad said. She estimates at least 90 percent of the businesses - the backbone of the township's revenue - have bounced back.

Conrad said Plymouth Township's home-rule charter, which kicked in this year, is crucial to the recovery. It changes very little, but it allows the township to keep the 1.5 percent earned income tax it would have to give up when it gets out of Act 47.

The township's home-rule charter more or less institutionalizes the changes township officials have been following under the Act 47 plan, Baranski said.

"It is a big step to stabilize the financial condition of the township for the future," he said. "This is huge: realizing the recovery practices have worked for them. We're proud of the results there."

Plymouth Township has persevered through all the adversity and is better as a result of it, Baranski said.

"We hope this year will be one of recovery and emancipation," he said.

#### **Nanticoke**

What stands out about Nanticoke's most recent audit - for 2010 - is what isn't in it.

The independent auditor, Certified Public Accountant Joseph Mazzoni, wrote in his report for the 2003 audit that conditions "do raise substantial doubt about the City's ability to continue as a going concern."

By contrast, the last audit had no such dire warnings that the city might have to shut down.

For years Nanticoke was plagued by a cycle of borrow and spend. City officials borrowed more and more to pay its bills. The bills kept accumulating to the point the city would run out of money by July and have to borrow still more.

"That catches up to you after a while," PEL Executive Director Gerald Cross said.

Add to it a former tax collector who was found guilty of stealing thousands of dollars from the city's coffers, and it was a recipe for financial disaster.

Gone are the days of slipshod record-keeping and defaulting on tax anticipation notes, according to PEL.

"The city is now on a firmer financial footing, with professional management and a dedicated council and mayor," Cross said.

Boyle credits City Administrator Holly Cirko and Director of Finance Pam Heard with making an impact, noting,

"When you put professionals in there to do the job and support them, they will make progress."

Dougherty thinks the city's new home-rule charter, which took effect this year, will help the city.

"Act 47 was the vehicle that helped us become financially solvent," he said. "But now that home rule is passed, we have the ability to do what we need to do. We are always trying to improve our finances. Continually, as the audits show." Nanticoke's charter, which is more comprehensive than Plymouth Township's, calls for numerous changes including a strong-mayor form of government. The charter allows Nanticoke to keep the 1.5 percent earned income tax that is permitted under Act 47 but would revert back to the state-mandated level of 0.5 percent without home rule, and formalizes the city administrator position to make it permanent.

Boyle called Nanticoke "an excellent example of how Act 47 can work" if city officials take it seriously and cooperate with DCED and their financial recovery coordinator.

Dougherty gives kudos to PEL as well.

"Did I always agree with what they wanted to do? Absolutely not. But it worked," he said.

West Hazleton

Things look good financially for West Hazleton in the upcoming year. The budget calls for income of \$1.9 million and expenses of \$1.85 million, which means an anticipated \$76,948 surplus. There's no tax increase, either. The fire department is changing over from partially paid, with the retirements of fire Chief Robert Ward and an engine driver, to all-volunteer, which will save about \$132,000.

But in contrast to his Nanticoke counterpart, West Hazleton Mayor Frank Schmidt doesn't have much faith in Act 47 and doesn't think it helped the borough.

He said West Hazleton has debt of more than \$1.5 million, including a \$300,000 interest-free loan from the state and a \$1 million loan taken out 15 years ago. Schmidt said the previous administration that took out the \$1 million loan kept refinancing it instead of paying it down, which is how the financial trouble started.

The borough had to give up its 1-percent earned income tax, "and now we have to really struggle to survive, without raising taxes," Schmidt said.

Home rule would have allowed the borough to keep it, but West Hazleton voters struck down a ballot question to form a study commission, so the earned income tax rate reverted back to the state-mandated 0.5 percent.

Schmidt calls home rule a big gamble: you don't know who's going to run, who's going to get elected, and whether they're qualified to make changes.

"As mayor, I would be glad to give up my position if I knew somebody was going to come in and do a good job," he said.

Schmidt said he would like to see changes made in Harrisburg that would allow municipalities like West Hazleton to keep higher earned income taxes.

"The last thing we want to do is raise taxes on homeowners, because they've been taxed enough," he said. "We're hoping the state changes Act 47 and gives us permission to get that 1 percent. We wouldn't have to worry ever again."

1/8/2012

**Despite attacks, Nanticoke calm**

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Even after he was brutally clubbed in a carjacking last June, Mayor Joseph Dougherty looked forward to his nightly walk.

"When I got attacked it did not deter me," he said Saturday before he headed downtown.

The New Year's Day slashing of a woman in The Prospect Street Caf? wasn't keeping him inside and residents haven't raised concerns about an increase of violent crimes in the city.

"I was a victim of circumstance. I was in the wrong place at the wrong time."

Police are investigating the assault of Jennifer Mieczkowski, 30, of Nanticoke. She has to undergo additional reconstructive surgery on her face.

Dougherty sympathized with Mieczkowski, who waits for police to file charges in her case. "I wasn't happy waiting a couple weeks," he said.

Police arrested three men who pleaded guilty on Dec. 29 to charges related to beating Dougherty and stealing his company car as he sat in it on South Chestnut Street near his residence. The men will be sentenced next month in Luzerne County Court.

Nanticoke Detective Capt. William Shultz worked Dougherty's case and has been working on the Mieczkowski case.

"I don't know all the facts yet," said Shultz.

He said investigators are attempting to talk to people who were in the bar at the time of the slashing, he said. As many

as 50 people may have been there.

“Interviewing that many people takes time,” said Shultz.

His department is getting assistance from the state police Bureau of Liquor Enforcement and the county District Attorney’s Office, he said.

Shultz declined to comment on whether there has been an increase in the number of violent crimes in the city.

The latest data available from the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reporting Program showed a decrease.

In 2010 Nanticoke reported 58 violent crimes compared to 74 in 2009, according to the reports of offenses know to law enforcement. The violent crimes in 2010 were: nine forcible rapes; 11 robberies; and 38 aggravated assaults. The totals for 2009 were: one murder/non-negligent manslaughter; five forcible rapes; seven robberies; and 61 aggravated assaults. A few blocks from where the slashing occurred, Luigi Carannante works behind the counter of his business, Antonio’s Pizza & Subs on East Main Street.

He has read and watched the media reports of the attack. “Things happen in every town,” he said.

Across the street Fran Stavetski showed the pepper spray she keeps near the register at On the Rise Gifts and Novelties.

The store also installed security cameras and posted signs on the door indicating they are in operation.

The measures were taken when stores were selling bath salts that have since been banned. The store did not sell them out of concern that it could be targeted for a robbery.

“We didn’t want that,” said Stavetski.

1/7/2012

**Vigil is held for slashed woman**

**Residents demand that attacker at Prospect Street bar be brought to justice.**

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When Rilee Ruminski saw the bandages, she kept her distance from Jennifer Mieczkowski.

The face so familiar to the 3-year-old Rilee was partially hidden to protect the slash wounds Mieczkowski received early Sunday morning when she was attacked during a fight inside the Prospect Street Cafe.

As police continue to investigate the assault of the 30-year-old hair salon owner and mother of a 7-year-old daughter, nearly 100 people, including Ruminski and her grandmother Paula Shemanski of Nanticoke, gathered Friday night at a vigil for Mieczkowski on Patriot Square a few blocks from the bar.

They demanded that her attacker be brought to justice and planned to raise money through a bake sale and other benefits to pay for the medical treatments still needed for Mieczkowski, who has not health insurance.

“My son goes to her shop and (Mieczkowski) loves (Rilee) so much,” said Shemanski. “She’ll cut her hair and do her nails for nothing.”

Shemanski, like many of those who held lit candles, knew Mieczkowski and were shocked by the slashing.

“I started crying as soon as I saw her,” said Shemanski.

One of Mieczkowski’s cousins told Joe Iraca of the attack.

“It just blew me away,” said Iraca, of Nanticoke.

“There’s no way to make sense of it,” he said. “I’m just hoping something good comes out of this.”

Mieczkowski and a friend, Ricky Wells of Mountain Top, stopped in the crowded bar to pick up beer to take out shortly before 2 a.m. While she spoke to friends a fight broke out and a woman slashed Mieczkowski in the face and neck multiple times with a box cutter. Wells was dragged out of the bar and beaten, suffering a broken jaw.

Wells was the only one who came to her aid, she said.

“If it wasn’t for him, I wouldn’t be right here in front of you because I would have been killed,” said Mieczkowski.

She thanked her family, relatives, friends and strangers for attending.

“They weren’t coming out to look at my face,” she said. Instead they came to offer support and demand that the person who wounded her be held accountable.

“Let Jen get justice for what’s been done to her,” said her cousin Denise Pearson of Nanticoke before leading the crowd in “The Lord’s Prayer.”

Mieczkowski’s 25-year-old sister Ashlee organized the vigil and said she was planning a benefit to be held at the Pennsylvania Army National Guard armory in Nanticoke.

“My family is ridiculously close,” said the younger sister.

She and her sister were raised by a single mother who imparted a lasting piece of advice: “She said, ‘At the end of the day, all you have is each other.’”

The younger Mieczkowski expressed frustration with the lack of an arrest.

“My sister identified someone Monday night and still nothing has been done,” she said.

1/5/2012

### **Byorick returns to receive the ultimate honor**

Paul Sokoloski Opinion - Times Leader

The game has changed for Ali Byorick since she last stepped on the basketball court at Nanticoke High School.

That doesn't mean she can't play it.

She isn't the scoring star anymore that she was at Nanticoke, where she put up more points than anyone else ever did – including the greats from the school's storied boys teams.

But her current team at Lehigh University, where she's averaging 6.1 points through the first 14 games of her senior season, depends on Byorick as much as the Trojanettes did when she was shooting the lights out every night in high school.

Just in a different way.

“I think playing Division I ball, it's a challenge,” Byorick, 22, said Tuesday. “It's hard to play. It's such a huge transition. You're playing with people who are all Division I basketball players.”

Meaning they were all high school stars.

Not all of them stay in the spotlight. But not all of them get their old number retired, either, which is partly why the Lehigh women's team was on hand in the Nanticoke gym Tuesday to watch Byorick receive such a rare honor.

“It's something you dream about,” Byorick said. “You dream of this as a little kid.”

Her old No. 15 went up on the wall, where future generations of Trojanettes, and Trojans, can always aspire to reach such esteem.

“I remember coming to the varsity games and looking up to her,” current Nanticoke player Katie Wolfe said. “She basically inspired me to keep playing basketball.”

The mere sight of Byorick working her magic on a high school floor stirred pure joy in anyone fortunate enough to watch her.

She finished with 2,272 career points before graduating in 2007, led Nanticoke's charge into two PIAA playoff tournaments and was the engine driving the Trojanettes to identical 29-1 records during her final two seasons. In doing all that, Byorick became as dominant in high school as anyone the Wyoming Valley Conference has seen.

That's why Byorick became the first girl to have her jersey retired by Nanticoke, even without winning a state championship like the girls on the 1990 team she so revered.

“She was fantastic. She really was,” said Nanticoke head coach Allen Yendrzejewski, who didn't coach Byorick but sure watched her play. “A six-foot guard who could step out and shoot 3s. Just a phenomenal player.”

Byorick hasn't lost her touch, as she led Lehigh with 48 three-point field goals as a junior last season and is second on the team with 19 three-pointers early in this one.

The daughter of Dan and Trish Byorick of Nanticoke isn't the go-to girl at Lehigh, where Emily Gratch and Alexa Williams both average more than 10 points to pace a team picked to finish second in the Patriot League.

But Aly Byorick could still play the big scorer when she wants to. She hit for 15 points in a victory over St. Peter's and had 11 in a loss to Rutgers to lead Lehigh's scorers in November games.

“Every player wishes they can go out and score 20 points a game,” Byorick said. “That's not my role at Lehigh. And I really wouldn't change anything.”

“I'm just very blessed to have the opportunity to play Division I basketball.”

She still plays as hard as she ever did, whether the cheers come for the baskets she scores or the ones her teammates put in.

Because it may not always lead to a championship. But it forever leaves the mark of a champ.

1/4/2012

### **New Nanticoke council members officially sworn in**

Elizabeth Skrapits - Citizens Voice

The first council under the city's new home-rule charter is in the saddle and ready to ride.

On Tuesday, Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker swore in new council members Stephen Duda and Richard Wiaterowski, and also Kevin Coughlin, who stepped down as city controller to become the fifth member of council, replacing Mayor Joseph Dougherty. The other two councilmen, James Litchkofski and Jon Metta, are incumbents.



The new form of government, replacing third-class city code, calls for a strong mayor. Dougherty said he's up to the challenge. He is particularly looking forward to talking with residents, and plans to hold an open house in his office from 5:45 to 7 p.m. each Wednesday, with additional hours in the future.

Council will now have a chairman to lead it instead of the mayor, and Duda was selected as the first to fill the role, with Litchkofski as vice-chairman. Duda will also serve on the home-rule transition committee, which will help ease in the new form of government. Nanticoke residents voted in May 2010 to form a home-rule study commission, then, in November 2011, to pass the charter drawn by commission members.

One of the main factors behind the home rule movement was to keep the higher earned income tax - 1.5 percent - the city is allowed under its state designation as an Act 47, or financially distressed, city. The alternative would be to hike the property tax substantially. Dougherty said the city's finances are improving.

"We will be able to get out of Act 47 this year," he said. "The sooner, the better."

1/1/2012

### **Nanticoke budget includes property tax increase**

**Because of the transition to home rule, new five-member city council has until Feb. 15 to amend budget.**

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At its last meeting before the new home rule government assumes power, Nanticoke City Council passed its 2012 budget at a special meeting Saturday morning.

Council was required by state law to pass the budget by the end of the year, but because of the transition to home rule, the new five-member city council will have until Feb. 15 to amend the spending plan after taking office.

The budget includes a property tax increase of .35 mills, or approximately \$17.50 on a home assessed at \$50,000. A mill is a \$1 tax for every \$1,000 in assessed property value.

The earned income tax and other tax rates will not change.

The budget allows for about \$4.3 million in expenditures, about \$22,500 less than the 2011 budget.

Director of Finance Pam Howard said the city raised taxes so it could put \$50,000 into a capital expenses account for contingency expenses because council has vowed not to take out a tax anticipation loan in 2012.

Treasurer and Tax Collector Al Wytoshek criticized the tax hike, saying the city should look to reduce expenses instead.

The city spent about \$260,000 on attorney and legal fees and the salaries and benefits of the city administrator and finance director in 2011, he said.

"We just can't afford that; not this small a city," Wytoshek said.

In other business, council also approved, subject to solicitor review and approval, an agreement with the Luzerne/Schuylkill Workforce Investment Board to bring 10 employees and a supervisor to work with the city road department for six weeks at no cost to the city.

Council also approved the sale of the old CVS building on East Main Street, assessed at \$160,000, to the city's General Municipal Authority and the sale of 24 S. Prospect St.

The city will host an auction at the municipal building this month to sell the property, with bidding starting at the building's assessed value of \$106,000.