

12/30/2004

State cash to help remove fallen-down ruin

The city had appealed to Gov. Rendell for aid in getting rid of an old cigar factory

By JON FOX-jfox@leader.net

The city will soon receive \$50,000 in state funds to clear the ruins of the former Consolidated Cigar building on West Church Street, city officials said Wednesday.

A meeting between council members and Gov. Ed Rendell that took place two weeks ago could help the city clear the hulking mess that has sat untouched since it collapsed in 2003.

Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski said the money, dispensed from the governor's discretionary fund, could come as soon as next week and will allow the city to begin clearing the site.

"He said that it was definite, and we would be getting the money very, very shortly," Bozinski said at a council meeting Wednesday. "It was a very promising meeting."

City officials had appealed to the state for a \$275,000 grant to rehabilitate the West Church Street site but have yet to be informed how much funding has been awarded. The \$50,000 should, however, allow preliminary work to begin, City Administrator Greg Gulick said.

Council members also discussed with the governor plans to enter the state's early intervention program for financially troubled communities and other available state aid, Bozinski said.

A recent state-commissioned report painted a bleak picture for the city, stating fiscal insolvency is unavoidable if changes were not made in the municipality.

In other business:

Council passed on first reading a \$52 Emergency and Municipal Services Tax on all those making more than \$9,400 a year.

Rejected the county government's offer to collect county taxes within the municipality for \$1.50 per bill.

Congratulated Kevin Grevera, a Nanticoke police officer, on being named Luzerne County police officer of the year.

Announced the city had collected \$50,000 in uncollected taxes this month, decreasing the total amount of uncollected taxes for the year to \$70,000.

12/26/2004

Nanticoke tackles social issues with task force

By Elizabeth Skrapits , The Sunday Voice

Connie Mihalichko, an eighth grader in the Greater Nanticoke Area School District, and Sean Haines, a freshman, agree that Nanticoke is a pretty "beat" town.

"If you don't play basketball or sports, there's nothing to do," Haines said.

"Except bowling," Mihalichko added.

They said it would be nice to have an arcade or someplace similar, for kids to go.

"But drugs aren't going to go away, so something like that would be taken over, too," Mihalichko said.

"She said a mouthful," Nanticoke City Police Officer Kevin Grevera said, shaking his head. He sees firsthand the extent of the drug problem in town.

That is why the Greater Nanticoke Area Drug Task Force Inc., listened to the teens in town when they said that more than anything else, they wanted somewhere to go.

Mihalichko and Haines have been members of the GNA Youth Task Force almost from its inception in February. They both know people who were involved with drugs and want to help their peers avoid the problem.

Besides, there are things to do at the youth center, which is open Tuesday nights in the basement of St. Francis Church.

Task force board member Michael Kotch, who also is affiliated with Clearbrook Lodge, said the number-one relapse trigger for a recovering addict is boredom.

It's also about preventing kids from getting involved with drugs in the first place, board member James Samselski said.

"We can't tell kids to say 'no' and not give them an alternative," Samselski said. "That's what this whole thing is about."

Grevera said there are youth sports programs, but not everyone is into athletics. There is no indoor recreation in Nanticoke - nowhere for "latchkey kids" to go after school.

He pointed out that not only do kids need something to do, they need a safe place to do it, which is what the youth task force wants to provide.

Grevera said there is a "good majority" of kids involved in the program who are not necessarily at risk and who do not have drug problems.

Diversity is a key element of the program.

"They have common ground in what they see in town - they want something better here," Grevera said.

Kotch said he and Samselski are both fathers of 14-year-old daughters, which is one reason they got involved with the task force. They remember there being more to do in Nanticoke when they were growing up.

"We see what's going on in this town. We don't want it for our kids and we don't want it for other peoples' kids," Kotch said.

Williams initially wanted to invite a Narcotics Anonymous chapter into Nanticoke. But they felt the city needed more, so over time, the GNA Drug Task Force was developed.

It was formed in Aug. 2003, with a board of trustees that includes doctors, clergy, school district personnel, mental health professionals, parents, and city councilmen.

When the task force was formed in February it began with three members, and now has about 35 active members.

Grevera said he went for help to Rev. William Langan of St. Francis Church, who became the GNA Task Force vice president. Langan sent out letters seeking support from churches of different faiths, and allowed the youth task force to meet in the basement of the church.

Board member Don Williams, who is also treasurer of Clearbrook Lodge, said the GNA drug task force attempts to work on three areas - prevention, education and intervention.

The common goal is not just to build a permanent youth center, but to have after-school programs for kids, educational seminars and space for 12-step programs, Grevera said.

"I think these kinds of ideas occur in many communities, but Nanticoke put it into action," Samselski said.

Grevera said the church is a great place to meet, but the group is growing so it needs more room. If the youth task force keeps increasing and a bigger, permanent home is not found, some kids may have to be turned away.

"These kids have been so enthused about this, they have raised their own funds to keep things going," Williams said.

They sent out mailers, had bake sales and Samselski said the kids made close to \$2,000 selling hoagies. Area businesses have been generous with their donations - such as supplies for the hoagie sales - and there has been a lot of support from the community.

Several possible locations are being scouted, but no commitment has been made, Grevera said. "I really don't feel the people in this town are going to let us down, and let these kids down," he said.

In the meantime, the task force is seeking funding for the building and operating expenses. Grevera said the goal is to raise \$200,000, but he would like to collect \$500,000.

12/24/2004

County gets 6 towns to agree to cut tax commission rates

By James Conmy and Elizabeth Skrapits , Citizens' Voice Staff Writers

In an effort to save approximately \$146,000, Luzerne County is implementing property tax billing and collecting changes in six communities. Commissioners Greg Skrepenak, Stephen Urban and Todd Vonderheid approved the move at Thursday's budget meeting.

Hazleton, Nanticoke and Pittston, all third-class cities, and Kingston and Wilkes-Barre townships and the Municipality of Kingston, all home-rule communities, will still have the opportunity to collect county property taxes themselves. Municipal officials must agree, however, to lower the commission they receive from \$3.50 and up per bill to \$1.50. Under the former agreement, Pittston charged \$15.91 per bill, Nanticoke charged \$6.93, Hazleton charged \$3.45, and Wilkes-Barre Township, Kingston Township and the Municipality of Kingston each charged \$3.50. The county started collecting its property taxes from Wilkes-Barre residents in 2003. The move has saved the county \$161,722 annually. "It was very last-minute," Kingston Township Manager Ed O'Neill said. "I got a call Tuesday morning from the treasurer's office. We had the option of taking the reduction or they would assume duties of collection."

Since the county treasurer's office told him they had to know what Kingston Township was doing by the next day - Wednesday - O'Neill said he had to do a quick phone survey of the five supervisors.

Having tax collector Karen Rose go from \$3.50 to \$1.50 commission for each taxable she handles for the county means a loss of up to \$7,000 in revenue in Kingston Township's budget, but the supervisors opted to do it anyway, O'Neill said.

He said he was in the treasurer's office Thursday, where he learned that of the other six municipalities, Wilkes-Barre Township, Kingston, Hazleton and Pittston City also offered to take the reduction. He said the only municipality that did not give an answer was Nanticoke.

"This is the first I've heard of it," Nanticoke Councilman John Bushko said when asked what the city planned to do about the tax collection changes. Council was not notified about the matter by City Administrator Greg Gulick, who Bushko said should have done so in order that a meeting could be called to discuss the city's options and make an informed decision.

Bushko also believes the county should have given municipalities more time to respond.

"They just asked Tuesday, and they want an answer Wednesday? That's very unfair to do it that way," he said. "The county commissioners know how municipal governments work, and you can't expect to get an answer in one day."

Bushko said there are 4,600 people to whom Nanticoke sends bills. He does not think the city can afford to reduce the commission to \$1.50 per bill without having to lay off one of the three people in the tax collector's office.

Luzerne County, Nanticoke City and the Greater Nanticoke Area School District each pay a third of the salaries for the three employees, according to Bushko.

New Bridge opens to traffic on Union Street



Motorists today can begin using a new \$494,000 bridge along Union Street in Nanticoke. Officials cut the ribbon marking the completion of the

work Tuesday. The \$494,000 construction project involved the replacement of the old structure over Forge Creek with a precast concrete box culvert, rebuilding of the roadway on both sides of the bridge, drainage work, concrete curbs and concrete sidewalks. The project was paid for with 80 percent federal, 15 percent state and 5 percent local funds. A short detour had been in effect since construction began last spring. The detour is scheduled to end today when the new bridge opens to traffic. Marking the opening of the bridge Tuesday were, from left, Jake Censulla, Slusser Brothers; Greg Gulick, city administrator; Bernie Walko, PennDOT; Ben Sevenski, Michael J. Pasonick Engineering; Jeff Novitski, PennDOT; Bill Brown, Nanticoke council; John T. Yudichak, state representative; Ted Zurla, PennDOT; Paul Maher, aide to Congressman Paul Kanjorski; Michael Yurkowski, city clerk; John Toole, mayor; John P. Flannery, PennDOT.

12/20/2004

'Christmas in Nanticoke' draws crowd

By Robert Kalinowski, Citizens' Voice Staff Writer



With his reindeer resting at the North Pole and his sleigh getting a tune up, Santa Claus was given a fire truck escort to the fifth annual "Christmas in Nanticoke" on Sunday.

The event is funded by private donations and proceeds from the Nanticoke Musicfest, according to Nanticoke Mayor John Toole.

Toole believed Sunday's festivities, which were held on Patriot Square, attracted the largest turnout in the event's history - approximately 150 people.

"I talked with some of the kids," Toole said. "They're just happy to see Santa Claus."

Children and their parents were treated to horse-pulled wagon rides around the park after Santa gave out his gifts.

Following a Christmas carol sing-a-long led by the Greater Nanticoke Area High School Chorus, Santa took time to speak to the gathered youngsters.

Santa assured each youngster he'd pass along the requests to his elves in the North Pole workshop. However, he reminded them they would have to be especially good this week.

Taylor Kotsur, 7, of Nanticoke, told Santa she wanted a new bike.

However, when he asked if she'd been good, she told him, "Not all the time."

Her mother, Tammy Stortz, doesn't think that will be a problem come Christmas.

"She's honest," Stortz said. "So that makes up for it."

12/19/2004

Bronze Star recipient trained 'all his life' for duty

Shickshinny resident Barbara Poperowitz fondly recalls the days when she used to get on her husband's case about sitting on the porch having a beer when he should've been taking care of odd jobs around the house.

Today, she yearns for the day when her husband will be back on the porch enjoying a cold one.

Mrs. Poperowitz's husband, 1st Sgt. Francis Poperowitz, 52, has been away from home since last December when he was deployed to Iraq.

Mr. Poperowitz has been a full-time soldier with Nanticoke B Battery of the 109th National Guard for nearly 30 years. Mrs. Poperowitz describes him as a family-oriented spouse with many friends, but when he's with the soldiers, "he's all business," she said.

That approach recently earned him the Bronze Star Medal for his work in building the Iraqi security force and defending Iraqi police stations in Sadr City against attacks by the insurgent Mahdi Army.

"He was shocked when he got the medal. This is the first time he was deployed and he trained all his life for this,"

Mrs. Poperowitz said. "Getting this medal was big for him.

"But he doesn't have to win medals, we're proud of him anyway."

Mr. Poperowitz is stationed outside of Baghdad and his wife said he goes into the city three times a week to supplement the police force.

She said phone access in Iraq is hard to come by so the couple communicates by e-mail. The conversations rarely center on the perils of combat.

Instead, Mrs. Poperowitz said her husband wants to know how the family is doing and who won the latest NASCAR race.

When he does write about his experiences in Iraq, she said he tells her how strongly he believes in the mission and how he fully supports President Bush.

"He told me the Iraqi people want a good education for their children and a decent life, and it's just a handful of insurgents that want things back to the way they were," Mrs. Poperowitz said. "Other than that, he really can't say what he does."

His daughter, Tina Balasavage of Pittston, said she e-mails the results of every race to her father and she has big plans for him when he is expected to return home next February.

"We're hoping he gets back in time for the Daytona race because we'll throw him a huge race party," she said. But with many soldiers having their tours extended, Balasavage said she doesn't dwell on the day her father returns. "I don't think about it because I know how things can change in the military," she said. "I don't want to put myself through that. When I get the call saying he's on the plane headed home, that's when I'll get excited." Mrs. Poperowitz has no doubt that day will come and she will see her husband sitting on the porch at home with the family. "Everybody is praying for him and prayer is very powerful, that's why he's coming home," she said with tears in her eyes.

12/19/2004

Plymouth Twp. officials asses DPW damage

By: Elizabeth Skrapits

It was black Saturday for Plymouth Township in the aftermath of a fire that devastated the public works department's garage. Three trucks and plows and the road crew's equipment, was damaged by the blaze that fire officials estimate began before 8 p.m. Friday. A state police fire marshal sifted through the debris Saturday, but did not release a cause of the fire. Black soot covered the floor of the meeting room in the municipal building where the board of supervisors, Ed Brennan, Mike Manley, and Chairwoman Gale Conrad, met with Mike Carroll of State Rep. John Yudichak's office and Jeffrey Box of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance, the township's Act 47 coordinator. The first priority was to arrange for plowing in case of snow, which is predicted Sunday night. Carroll said PennDOT would be available for emergency snow removal. Conrad assured residents and the Greater Nanticoke Area School District that the supervisors would do everything possible to be sure roads are cleared. Two of the three destroyed trucks just had \$8,000 worth of work done to them, according to Brennan, who is also roadmaster. He said one truck can be salvaged and will be fitted with a plow and spreader. The township's recycling and garbage trucks were not damaged, and Brennan said pickup will proceed as usual this week. Township offices were not harmed, but the building is inhabitable. The fire damaged the plumbing and electrical systems, so the building is without heat, light, or water. "If you flush the toilet, it's going to come out of the ceiling," Brennan said. "Everything's burnt right out." The supervisors will decide next week what to do about temporary offices. Conrad said residents who need to contact the township may call 779-5388. Jackson Township Supervisor Chairman and roadmaster John Wilkes, Jr. came by to offer neighborly assistance to Plymouth Township, volunteering the use of Jackson Township's municipal building and public works department garage if needed. "When we got the call this morning, I came down to lend a hand any way we could. Who knows, we could be in the same position," Wilkes said. "Anything we can do to help out, that's the bottom line." Box said the situation is now in the hands of Plymouth Township's insurance company, which will send an adjustor Monday morning to assess the damage and bring in a cleaning crew. NEPA Alliance will also aid the township any way it can. "We'll work with them to re-adjust their financial priorities, to get them through this latest disaster," Box said. Plymouth Township started the year by having to lay off its police force in January due to an extreme lack of funds, was declared Act 47, or financially distressed, by the state in July, and then was hit hard by the flooding from Tropical Storm Ivan in September - it took the township two months to clean up all the debris. "We'll get through this," Conrad said of the fire. "We'll be better for it, I'm sure."

12/19/2004

Nanticoke Area Notes

By:Pamela Urbanski

These students have the spirit
Students who attend first grade at Pope John Paul II School have been busy little elves. The past several weeks they have been making decorations for the Christmas tree at the Nanticoke Municipal Building. First grade teachers Ellie Anthony and Helen Baluta tell me it's an annual event the children look forward to. "They have a great time making the decorations," said Mrs. Anthony. "We explain to them that they are helping to bring Christmas joy to their neighbors and friends." A highlight of the project is a trip to the city building to decorate the tree and sing some Christmas carols. "We appreciate the invitation and the people at the city building really make the children feel welcome," added Ellie. The students are not the only ones who look forward to the trip. So do those who work at the city building. "The kids are really adorable," said Karen Kanjorski from District Justice Donald Whittaker's office. "The ornaments they make are really nice and every year they do a great job decorating the tree." We all know that decorating is hard work and requires a lot of energy. That's why the students were treated to cookies and punch and received a treat bag filled with Christmas goodies. Get your history book(s) now
"The History of Nanticoke and Newport Township" by Charles Ciesla is available from the members of the Nanticoke Historical Society. The book, 8½ by 11 inches, contains 363 pages and includes more than 100 photos of breakers, churches, schools and businesses in the area. Mr. Ciesla tells

me the book makes an excellent gift for the holidays. The price is \$30 and all the profits go to the Nanticoke Historical Society. The book may be ordered by calling 570-258-1367.

Time for Christmas in the Park

Don't forget to visit Santa Claus today from 1 p.m. until 4 p.m. at the annual Christmas in the Park. There will be free, horse-drawn carriage rides. Caroling will be presented by the Nanticoke High School and Holy Trinity Church choirs. Culinary students from Luzerne County Community College will provide the Christmas cookies. Who knows maybe Mother Nature will provide some Christmas snow! See you there!

12/17/2004

Artist of the week

By MARQUES G. HARPER-mharper@leader.net

Artist Anthony J. Waichulus, a Nanticoke resident, has become a national name through his trompe l'oeil works. At his home studio, he works on new pieces and teaches several art students. He is the Artist of the Week.

The names of his works:

'The Polisher'

'A Fool's Argument'

'Pieces of History'

'Caps & Robbers'

Waichulus at a glance: A recent incident took Waichulus by surprise. One of his latest pieces, called "Orchestrating the Drama," won first place in a contest sponsored by The Artist's Magazine.

The 32-year-old Nanticoke resident recalls thinking the award was a mistake. Out of 13,000 artists, Waichulus' work took top honors in the still-life category. The piece was reproduced in the magazine's December issue.

"Thankfully," he says sitting in his dimly lighted home studio, "I continue to be well-received. I thank God every day. It's like a dream to do what I do every day. I'm just very grateful for all of it."

These days, Waichulus sticks to a schedule that allows him to paint constantly at the studio where he teaches several students. He also teaches at Luzerne County Community College and the Wyoming Valley Art League, among other local spots.

As far back as he can remember, he says, he has wanted to do something creative. He studied art at The Art Hatchery in Bear Creek, Luzerne County Community College and the Schuler School of Fine Arts in Baltimore.

His journey into trompe l'oeil still lifes began on a trip to New York while he was an LCCC student. In the great halls of priceless artwork, he discovered the lifelike painting style in which he is now well-versed.

"When I saw that work for the first time, I knew that's what I wanted to do for a living," says Waichulus, whose works are sold at the John Pence Gallery in San Francisco.

On another college trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the 1990s, he got a chance to court the woman, Leah, who later became his artist-wife.

Laughing, he says, "The Met has probably played a crucial role in my professional and personal life. I should write them a letter or something."

Advice to aspiring artists: "A masterpiece can come from anywhere," he says, noting that his award-winning piece depicts a similar thought. The piece, he told The Artist's Magazine, came from a lively class discussion at LCCC.

He told the magazine: "We were discussing what makes a successful expression of art. I wanted to tackle this idea in a painting, giving the viewer a behind-the-scenes understanding of artistic impression."

Ultimately, he says artists should stick to the three Ds: drive, determination and discipline. In his case, sticking to the Ds worked.

"When you have a real drive to do something," he says, "it almost becomes an obsession." For example, he says, he took what he needed from Schuler's program in two years instead of the usual five and was told by his instructors to go into the world and paint.

"Don't get too discouraged," he says. "You usually are your own worst critic. That's the biggest message I try to deliver to my students. Don't be afraid of a challenge."

Web site: <http://www.thewaichulisstudio.net> or www.johnpence.com

12/17/2004

Pioneers sign GNA grad

Former Greater Nanticoke Area High School standout Todd Bargella was one of three players recently signed to the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Pioneers training camp roster.

Bargella (6-foot-6, 280 pounds) was an all-conference selection at Nanticoke and played at Lackawanna College in 2000-2001 before transferring to NCAA Division I-AA Western Carolina. As a junior there in 2002, he had seven catches for 55 yards and a touchdown, while totalling 12 tackles and two sacks on defense. In 2003, he played in 12 games, catching five passes for 53 yards to earn all-Southern Conference honors as a tight end. He also made 12 tackles and two sacks on defense that season.

12/16/2004

Nanticoke looks to state for help in solving money woes

By Elizabeth Skrapits, Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

Nanticoke City Council voted to take the first step on the road to fiscal stability at a special meeting Wednesday night, by approving the city's participation in the state Department of Community and Economic Development's Early Intervention Program.

The program provides municipalities in financial difficulty with 50-50 matching grant funds, to be used for hiring a consultant to help develop and implement a comprehensive multi-year financial plan.

DCED Local Government Policy Manager Dean Fernsler called Nanticoke "a prime candidate" for the program, and was pleased with council's vote.

"In their particular case, I think it would be advantageous for them," he said.

Earlier Wednesday, council and Mayor John Toole met with Fernsler and state Rep. John Yudichak, D-119, both of whom stayed for the meeting. The five-year financial plan was recommended in a recently released study compiled by DCED's Governor's Center for Local Government Services. The study indicated Nanticoke could be facing insolvency no later than fall 2005, and would not be able to continue to provide its current level of services.

If a five-year plan is not adopted, the state will be unwilling to grant the city money for programs and projects, and the city could even face Act 47, distressed municipality designation, according to the study.

Yudichak said the process Nanticoke is about to embark on is the same one Wilkes-Barre City has already undertaken.

Nanticoke has an opportunity to achieve fiscal discipline through the program, and Yudichak believes the city will get an honest assessment of its current debt and how to get out of its bind, among other benefits.

Fernsler said it is up to Nanticoke now to get things started by submitting requests for proposals from professional financial consultants.

Once the bids are in, they will be evaluated, a consultant selected, and then the city applies to DCED to get started with the program.

"At that point, we would expedite that application fairly quickly," Fernsler said.

He said he hoped the city could get into the program as early as the first quarter of 2005, but it would depend on city officials.

Toole said he heard the program could run anywhere from \$120,000 to \$300,000, but he hoped that since Nanticoke was such a small city, the cost would be less.

He said the city would have to look for money for the matching-funds portion of the grant.

Toole suggested the city go to court to petition for use of the approximately \$255,000 he said is in the sinking fund, which is meant for paying off debt.

"It would be a godsend if we could use it," he said.

Yudichak said there is flexibility in the program, and costs to the city could be minimal; DCED realizes some cities cannot afford the 50 percent share of matching funds. For example, he said City Administrator Greg Gulick's work could be considered an in-kind contribution.

Toole said the city would be sending out requests for proposals soon, but expressed skepticism about the city being able to overcome all its problems without following a plan year after year.

"This five-year plan is actually never-ending," he said.

Toole said to get Nanticoke out of its financial hole, departments will probably have to be downsized and contracts re-negotiated.

The city might also end up raising the occupational privilege tax, which is currently \$10 annually for people who work in the city and earn more than \$10,000. New state legislation permits municipalities to increase the tax up to \$52, to be used for emergency services.

During the meeting, Solicitor Bernard Kotulak handed out copies of a sample ordinance, one that was passed recently on first reading by Wilkes-Barre City Council.

Nanticoke council will have to decide by the Dec. 29 work session whether they want to raise the tax, and if so, by how much, and what the minimum income limit will be.

12/16/2004

Worried Nanticoke will seek state help

The city hopes to avoid insolvency by obtaining financial advisers.

By JON FOX-jfox@leader.net

Hoping to fend off municipal insolvency, city council appealed to the state's Early Intervention Program at a special session Wednesday evening. After a 20-minute meeting with state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, and a representative of the Department of Community and Economic Development, council members voted unanimously to apply to the program.

If accepted, the city would receive half the cost necessary to retain professional financial advisers. The move came close on the heels of a state commissioned report that painted city finances in an exceedingly bleak light.

The city, it stated, could face insolvency, from which it would not recover, by fall 2005. A \$225,000 budget deficit was predicted for this year.

"I think it's great for the city," Mayor John Toole said. The program, however, he noted, requires a 50 percent match by the financially strapped municipality.

"We don't have it budgeted right now, so we're going to have to sit down next week and look for the money," he said.

Councilman John Bushko welcomed the assistance that may come in the form of a detailed recovery plan drafted by consultants. "We need help and we need it quick. You have to be willing to go with the recommendations. Sometimes it may not be pleasant."

Toole said he anticipates advisers recommending cuts to the fire and police departments and arbitration to restructure labor contracts. It is an area of expense the recent state report indicated was pushing the city close to distressed status under that state's Act 47 relief program.

Pay rates, paid leave benefits and health benefits are "out of control," it stated.

The Early Intervention Program, introduced in September, is a way to prevent the more drastic "distressed" status declaration, Yudichak said.

"There's no question it's a precursor. Act 47 is on the horizon. It's a good opportunity to spend some money now and get local government back on track."

Dean Fernsler, local government policy specialist with the Governor's Center for Local Government Services, said the city could be accepted into

the competitive program as early as the first quarter of 2005.

If accepted into the program, the city would then seek proposals from financial consultants. Once a firm is selected the municipality will likely undergo a financial assessment and management audit and then adopt a multi-year recovery plan, according to DCED literature.

Even with the state contributing half the cost of financial advisers, the burden to a overburdened budget could be extreme. Mayor Toole said the city's contribution could be nearly \$100,000.

"In speaking with DCED and discussing the city's current financial situation, they're aware that the city may not be able to make the 50 percent match," Yudichak said.

Fernsler, the local government specialist, said the program accepts "in kind contributions," which are services performed by municipal employees, such as a city manager, that may count as payment.

At the moment, the state has received only one application for the new program based on a model Governor Rendell developed for Philadelphia.

That application is from Luzerne County government.

In addition to Nanticoke's application in process, Fernsler said "there are a number of applications being developed by cities across the commonwealth."

12/13/2004

Updated financial software advised

Ailing city would benefit from new accounting methods, says state analysis.

By JON FOX-jfox@leader.net

City officials will meet with representatives of the Governor's Center for Local Government Services during the next two weeks with hopes of updating municipal accounting software, said state Rep. John Yudichak.

A recently issued state analysis of Nanticoke's administrative and financial situation recommended the city update to software specific to state local government accounting.

Such a software package, costing in the range of \$8,000 to \$12,000, could be paid for with a grant, according to the report. At a recent council meeting, Yudichak offered assistance in securing such a grant for the city, which a recent report commissioned by the state Department of Community and Economic Development indicated could face financial insolvency as early as the end of this year.

It's important to ascertain what type of software will be appropriate for a city of Nanticoke's size, said Yudichak, D-Nanticoke. "Obviously, something the size of what Philadelphia has is not going to work for Nanticoke."

QuickBooks accounting software is the favored package utilized by Pennsylvania municipalities.

The report states the current system entails "duplicative work, and needed reports are not being produced." In moving to a new software package, "the payback in efficiency of office personnel and information to council would be rapid."

"One of the glaring issues was that there wasn't a monthly financial statement produced," Yudichak said of the analysis. In speaking with the author of the report, a Philadelphia-based analyst, there appeared to be "a general lack of communication between" the city's finance department and council.

Sue Bennett, the city's accountant and financial analyst, says monthly reports are being produced.

12/13/2004

Honey Pot fire company struggling

By Tom Venesky, Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

Just like the community, the 1964 pumper truck has always been there for the Honey Pot Volunteer Active Fire Co.

But time has taken a toll on the 40-year-old truck. It has been refurbished twice and parts are hard to come by.

Locating a simple window crank has proven to be an impossible task for the company.

Age has turned a formerly reliable piece of equipment into a liability, with the truck often out of service for weeks at a time while it's being repaired.

The company is working to purchase a new engine, but coming up with the \$225,000 is proving just as impossible as the search for the window crank.

According to Chester Kopco, president of the Honey Pot Firemen's Active Association, the old pumper was purchased for \$45,000 in 1965, when the fire company was born. The truck was paid for entirely by the Honey Pot community, but Kopco acknowledged that asking the community of 600 households to bear the cost of a \$225,000 engine is not realistic.

"We need a miracle. We need to hit the lottery," said Honey Pot Volunteer Active Fire Company Chief Frank Wolfe. "We do our best to raise money for a new truck and we also have tried to get grants, but we're having a hard time getting any and that's what's hurting us the most."

The company has 28 members and prides itself on being self-sufficient, thanks to community support. When the company is in need, the citizens always deliver, Kopco said. But with such a large expense for a new engine, the fire fighters had no choice but to seek grant assistance.

The company applied for a federal Homeland Security Assistance Grant and was turned down right before the final approval stage, Kopco said. The company will try again in 2005.

The grant would cover 90 percent of the cost of a new truck, Kopco said, and he was confident enough funds could be raised through the community to cover the remaining 10 percent.

"This was the first time we ever applied for any grant money at all," Kopco said. "We always went to the citizens or bought it on our own."

If the federal grant fails to materialize next year, the company does have another plan to obtain the money - a plan that parlays decades of generosity from the community.

Kopco said Honey Pot will host the Six County Fireman's Convention in 2006, and the company plans to turn the convention into an enormous

bazaar that will showcase the Honey Pot community.

If all goes well, the convention will generate enough money for a down payment on the new engine.

"It will be a celebration of the Honey Pot citizens because they have been our sole contributors for 40 years," Kopco said. "It's a thank-you to them." The most pressing reason for a new engine is not the age of the 1964 pumper, but rather safety concerns that arise when the old truck is down for repairs.

Kopco said when the pumper is out of service, the Nanticoke Fire Department covers Honey Pot.

State Rep. John Yudichak said the department has been successful recently in obtaining several state grants to perform repairs to the fire hall. He cautioned, however, that it wasn't wise to expect a large state grant to purchase a new truck.

Instead, Yudichak recommended the company continue to focus on a grant from the federal government and also look at other funding options.

"The large dollars are going to come from the federal level," he said. "There's also the state low-interest loan program, where a fire department can seek a grant to match the funds they've raised and take out a loan to cover the difference."

Yudichak said he's worked closely with Honey Pot volunteers. The company's story is similar to many other small community fire departments.

"They have limited revenue, funds are hard to raise and there are only so many volunteers," he said. "The cost of equipment is astronomical, but these small departments all do a great job for their communities and they need a reliable equipment base."

Wolfe said the company raised \$11,000 this year, and \$2,000 of that went toward truck repairs.

"Our truck was alright, but now we're putting so much money into it and we're nickel and diming ourselves to death," he said. "We need a new truck desperately, but the cost is extremely high. That's why we need help, volunteer or financial."

To help the company, contact Wolfe at 735-8031 or Kopco at 735-7030.

12/13/2004

Soldiers' children celebrate holidays with 'Army friends'

By Robert Kalinowski , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

Alycea and Marissa Ohl enjoy being with their "Army friends."

To do this, though, the Corning, N.Y., youngsters come to Northeastern Pennsylvania.

Their dad, Capt. Bob Ohl, is the commander of Bravo Battery of the 109th Field Artillery, Pennsylvania Army National Guard, now serving in Iraq.

The proud youngsters said they haven't fit in with their hometown classmates since their dad left for the war in January.

"The kids say I am immature because I wear this outfit," said Alycea, 8, wearing a desert Army uniform her dad sent from Iraq.

Alycea and her sister, along with 10-month-old brother Robert Jr., and mother, Ginny, attended a Christmas-themed party for soldiers' children held at Bravo Battery headquarters in Nanticoke on Sunday.

"I thought it would be nice for the kids to be around other kids in the same situation," Mrs. Ohl said. "They call these kids their 'Army friends.'"

When it's possible, Mrs. Ohl said she brings Alycea and Marissa to events organized by the Bravo Battery family support group, known as the "Busy B's."

At Sunday's party, Alycea, Marissa, 6, and the other children received presents and candy from Santa's "elves," made Christmas tree garland with string and cereal, listened to holiday music and took rides in a horse-pulled wagon.

The event was paid for by proceeds from the Nanticoke Musicfest, according to Nanticoke Mayor John Toole.

"I like seeing the kids enjoy themselves," Toole said. "That's what it's all about."

The Ohl sisters said the party was fun and it helped them look forward to Christmas - especially the presents.

"I want anything Hillary Duff," said Alycea.

"I want a new piggy bank with a lock on it," Marissa said, joking that every time her piggy bank feels a bit light, Alycea seems to have some extra money.

"Well, I actually want my dad back, but it's going to be after Christmas," said Marissa.

"Yeah, in February," Alycea quickly added.

Samantha Sorber, 9, of Hanover Township, daughter of Sgt. 1st Class Jaime Sorber, realizes this fact, but is still holding out hope.

"I want him to come home on Christmas," she said of her dad.

Shrugging her shoulders about if that's going to happen, Samantha said she talked to her father in the morning and he assured her that he'd be home "soon."

"Soon" is tentatively scheduled to be early February, as Bravo Battery soldiers are set to complete a one-year deployment to Iraq.

12/12/2004

Nanticoke Area Notes

By: Pamela Urbanski

He knows how to paint a town

When driving through the city of Nanticoke, you might have noticed the colorful paintings on storefront windows.

With the holiday season in full swing, Nanticoke resident and artist Leonard Davenport is working with store owners to not only help them advertise, but add a festive touch to the community.

Through our conversation, I learned his business, Paintings by Leonardo is a well-known company. Leonard has customers from Milford to Selinsgrove and Williamsport to Mount Carmel. He tells me that he is one of the few people left that provide this service.

"Window painting is a dying art, but I love it and it is a service that is needed." He added that the people of Northeastern Pennsylvania are the nicest people he has ever worked with.

This past week, I found him at Bartuska's Furniture Store on East Main Street where last year he painted scenes from the classic holiday film, "A

Christmas Story" by Jean Shepherd. It was well received.

"We actually had people calling us this year and asking if we could do the same thing," he said.

Says storeowner Jim Bartuska. "I think people love it so much because it takes them back to a time when things were a little less hectic and demanding," said store owner Jim Bartuska.

"It is the perfect family film," Davenport added.

Yes, he will bring Ralphie and his Red Ryder BB gun to life again on the side window. You won't be disappointed in this year's main window.

When passing Bartuska's Furniture Store on East Main Street, I am sure you have noticed the Serta sheep just lounging around.

Jim tells me because Serta mattresses are so comfortable, people don't need to count sheep anymore. The sheep are bored and need a job! So while they are not grazing, they will be pulling Santa's sleigh to the North Pole!

Leonard thinks the makers of Serta mattresses would be very impressed! "I told them to take a picture and send it to the company," he commented.

Below the red-nosed sheep pulling the sleigh is the village from the Christmas story with Ralphie peeking out from the side.

"I think people will enjoy this year's theme just as much," Jim said.

I can tell the good people at Bartuska's enjoy thinking of and providing a different theme each year for people to enjoy!

Planning to make a street safer

While driving up Kosciuszko Street this past week, you probably noticed some heavy equipment and mounds of dirt.

According to Frank Grevera, director of buildings and grounds for the Nanticoke Area School District, drivers have been complaining about not being able to see when then are trying to make a right-hand turn coming out of the high school at the intersection of Union and Kosciuszko Streets.

"Because of the safety issues, as well as numerous complaints we have received about kids riding their bicycles up and over that hill into the road, we decided it was time to take care of the problem," Frank said.

The hill will be cut and the ground leveled. In the spring, they will decide what to do with that area. "We are discussing projects such as a walk of fame."

He tells me rather than hanging signs on the fence in that area, plaques would be placed to honor athletic teams. Other ideas include planting grass and flowers to perk up the area.

Get set for Christmas in the Park

Be sure and make time for Nanticoke's Christmas in the Park next Sunday, Dec. 19, from 1 to 4 p.m.

There will be free, horse-drawn carriage rides. The sounds of the season will be provided by the Nanticoke Area High School choir and the choir from Holy Trinity Church. Of course, the highlight of the event will be a visit from Santa Claus.

See you there!!

If you like trains, this is for you

If you are one of those people who love to see a train chugging along the tracks beneath the Christmas tree, then you might want to visit Clemar Distributions Inc. on Market Street in Nanticoke.

The O'Jevich family has owned a business in Nanticoke since the 1940s. About 10 years ago, Clem O'Jevich decided to concentrate on trains. "It is a hobby for me," he said laughing. "It is something I enjoy doing and it keeps me busy."

I have passed the store many times and decided I to check it out.

It is a neat place, carrying a full line of trains like LGB, Aristocrat, O scale and HO scale to name a few. He also carries replacement parts and accessories. What he doesn't have on hand, he can order for you from one of his many distributors.

Another neat "toy" is the large-scale train for the outdoors. "Because of their size, these trains are really detailed," Clem added. "You can see every nut and bolt that would be on a train on these models."

I know most of us are not thinking outdoors now, but he tells me they are great for your yard or around ponds and can be left outdoors year round. Sounds like a great Christmas gift to me!

Store hours are Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to noon, Friday from 9 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. You can call the store at 735-5570 for additional hours.

12/12/2004

A world of fun

Nanticoke grad tours with Globetrotters

By JERRY KELLAR-jkellar@leader.net

Like so many college students, Luke Malishchak wanted to travel abroad after graduation before settling into the real world.

OK, so where does one start?

Since earning a degree from Moravian in June, the Nanticoke native has been, well ... trottin' around the planet with the most famous basketball team on the planet.

Malishchak is a member of the New York Nationals, an eight-member touring opponent of the Harlem Globetrotters - aka The Clown Princes of Basketball. In just a few short months, the 5-foot-7 point guard has been to Moscow, Beijing and Sydney, Australia, as well as Honolulu and Jamaica.

And he just turned 23.

"It's been extremely fun, just getting to see the world," Malishchak said earlier this week from his parents' home, while on a short break from a recent four-month tour. He leaves for the club's West Coast tour Dec. 21.

"We've been to the Great Wall, Tienanmen Square, Waikiki Beach, Olympic Park in Sydney. ... It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I'm traveling around the world for free doing something I love. You can't beat it."

Malishchak's global hoops dream actually started three years ago on a playground in Wilkes-Barre. Nationals scout Al Clocker, a Wyoming Valley

native and veteran basketball coach, approached the former Greater Nanticoke Area standout after watching him play in a summer league pickup game.

"He asked me if I was interested in playing for the Globetrotters," Malishchak recalled. "As a 19-year-old kid my eyes lit up. I was like, 'Wow, of course. I'll go right now.'"

At the time, Clocker didn't realize Malishchak was just a freshman in college. Not wanting to forfeit the remainder of his college eligibility and turn pro, Malishchak finished school then met with a Globetrotter official in Atlantic City.

He was a National.

Since then, Malishchak's life has been consumed by basketball, Harlem Globetrotter-style.

Its roster consisting primarily of ex-college players, the New York squad is more than just the basketball opponent for the 'Trotters. The Nationals are also supporting actors in the show's many rehearsed skits, known on the tour as "reams."

"That's obviously a big part of it," said Malishchak, the latest Wyoming Valley Conference alum - Larry Koretz (GAR) and Dave Steigerwald (Northwest Area) are the others - to tour with the Globetrotters. "It's all choreographed, very kid-oriented. There's a set amount of (show) plays that they run."

Don't take that to mean the Nationals are expected to simply roll over each night.

"We play to win every single night. When we have the ball on offense we're trying to score every time," he said, adding that the Nationals routinely push the stars in practice.

"We do have some credibility on the court. We don't get to show it in front of 60,000 people, but we both know that there's respect going both ways. More than enough we give them a run for their money."

Malishchak, who has a bachelor's degree in clinical psychology, has a two-year contract with the Globetrotters/Nationals. He declined to divulge his salary but noted that the organization picks up all expenses, including health benefits.

"I think the exposure and the experience of traveling and seeing the world for free is worth more than I'm getting paid," he said. "These past six months have been nothing like I've ever dreamed of. It's tough being away from my family and girlfriend, but I'm playing basketball. It's something I've loved doing since I was a kid. And I'm getting paid for it."

"I'm having the time of my life, I really am."

Pepsi challenge too good for GNA to stay with Coke

By BONNIE ADAMS-badams@leader.net

The Greater Nanticoke Area School District has switched from Coke to Pepsi vending machines in a deal that might net more than \$200,000.

School Board President Bob Raineri said the board approved the seven-year deal at Monday night's meeting. Raineri said Pepsi will give the school district \$10,000 up front and \$5,000 a year in the contract's second through seventh years.

Raineri said the district will get a 35 percent commission on water and soda sales and a 20 percent commission on Gatorade sports drink sales.

He said the school district will receive about \$217,000 for the contract, which he described as more lucrative than Coke's. The contract also includes a \$1,000 annual scholarship.

BURN VICTIM

Boy's family can only watch, wait

By JON FOX-jfox@leader.net

The family of a 13-year-old boy severely burned while playing with gasoline last week has set up a fund to help cover his medical bills.

Jimmy Knight Jr. was playing with four friends at a cemetery on West Field Street on Nov. 30 when he inadvertently lit himself on fire.

"I guess they were making a bomb," said his mother, Donna Roman, speaking in her mother's home on New Grant Street.

Jimmy remains in the Lehigh Valley Hospital Burn Center recovering from second- and third-degree burns over more than half of his body.

Roman has spent nearly every day since the accident at her son's side.

She is focused on Jimmy's recovery, and expects medical costs to be significant. She has insurance, but said she has no idea how much of Jimmy's expenses will be covered.

Jimmy's grandmother, Dorothy Kopiak, told the story of how he was burned:

On Nov. 30., Jimmy came home, fetched some gasoline from Kopiak's garage and met his friends.

"From what I understand, he spilled it on himself, and when he lit a match he caught fire."

His four friends, all brothers, covered Jimmy with their jackets, helping extinguish the flames. But by the time his gasoline-soaked clothing was put out, Jimmy had suffered the burns.

Jimmy's friends helped him walk several blocks back to his grandmother's house. Jimmy lives across town on Orchard Street with his mother.

His clothes burned to tatters, the flesh on his legs and arms scorched, Jimmy told his grandmother he loved her and embraced her.

"He said, 'Gram, I'm burnt.' How he walked that far, I have no idea."

The sight of her injured grandson was so shocking that Kopiak couldn't even manage calling 911, she said.

Jimmy's aunt, Monika Kristensen, called emergency medical services and Kopiak called Roman after she had calmed a bit.

Kopiak was so shaken that two hours later she suffered a heart attack. "I came completely unglued." She said she underwent a catheterization procedure and is recovering from her first heart attack.

Jimmy was airlifted to the burn center outside Allentown, where he remains.

On Thursday he underwent skin grafts. He remains under sedation and is unable to speak.

Roman spends most days at the hospital, sleeping at a home for family members of patients where lodging costs \$30 per night.

On Tuesday, however, Roman spent the day at her mother's.

She appeared exhausted and conceded she was still in shock.

"Today, I'm not going down because they're changing his dressing," she said.

The painful procedure takes four to six hours and extra pain medication will likely push her son nearer unconsciousness, Roman said.

"We're just taking things day by day," she said.

"They say it's going to be a good couple of years before he's better," Roman said.

Jimmy is one of about 1,500 children who are burned each year playing with matches and gasoline, according to the Burn Foundation, a Philadelphia-based non profit organization.

12/6/2004

CITY FINANCIAL WOES

Nanticoke must curb labor cost, state says

By JON FOX-jfox@leader.net

Overstaffing, runaway pay rates and benefits in the municipal work force are identified as problems ruining city finances, according to a report by the state Department of Community and Economic Development.

But bound by restrictive state labor-relation laws, the city is limited in its options to deal with organized labor, the report concedes.

Pegged as a significant contributor to a deficit likely to reach \$225,000 this year, labor policy is a problem more easily identified than remedied.

If city leaders fail to address labor-related issues, there is "a limited probability" the city will be able to avoid distressed status under Act 47, the state's relief program for financially failing communities, according to the report.

The city, it states, will require "excellent core policy, preparation and representation" in dealing with labor over the next five years.

As for specifics, the report suggests the city could be fully protected with eight full-time firefighters rather than the 10 it employs now. It also suggests changing the structure of their shifts.

Currently no "coherent policy or plan with regard to labor exits," the report states.

Under state Act 111, emergency personnel such as firefighters and police officers relinquish the right to strike, but in return they receive the right to binding arbitration. Municipalities cannot appeal the decisions arrived at through arbitration.

The bargaining process should result in concessions by management as well as labor, but unions have made few concessions to the city, according to the 47-page report.

In addition, pay and benefits are "out of control to the extent that failure to significantly modify them over the five years will likely contribute to forcing the city into Act 47."

But altering the firefighters' contract, which calls for a minimum staffing level of 10 individuals with two on per shift, is just not possible, according to Mayor John Toole.

"It can't be done," he said. "I don't call that defeatist. It's a fact."

"We don't have \$130,000 to go to arbitration," he added referring to estimated legal fees. In November, the city entered into a new four-year contract with firefighters.

With 18 building fires in 2003 including "fewer than five" categorized as "major incidents," the city's current staffing level is unjustified, the report states.

The report advises employing seven full-time firefighters working 24-hour shifts and a full-time chief. Currently the city employs its firefighters in 10-hour day shifts and 14-hour night shifts.

Cutting two firefighters would save between \$100,000 and \$120,000 in salaries and benefits, according to cost estimates by City Administrator Greg Gulick.

Nanticoke's condition as a community confronting financial failure and trapped in binding labor agreements is not unique. Labor costs often make up the largest portion of municipal budgets and navigating labor law is often difficult.

"There's no question that the labor element is a constraint. It's a very significant constraint, and it's not one unique to Nanticoke," said Scott Hoh of the Governor's Center for Local Government Services.

If the city seeks relief as a distressed municipality, a recovery plan drafted by state-appointed financial advisers could trump union contracts, releasing the city from some of its obligations.

But state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, hopes complete financial failure is not a prerequisite for change and disagrees with the mayor's bleak assessment.

"I think it's disingenuous to suggest nothing can be done," he said. "Just look a few miles north at the city of Wilkes-Barre."

That city, he said, has made tough choices and worked with unions to move toward stable fiscal footing.

The state report suggests preparing for eventual arbitration and a strategy of explaining the city's tough financial position to employees and unions.

12/06/2004

Nanticoke-based military unit honored in Iraq

By Robert Kalinowski , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

A ranking U.S. Army officer recently presided over an awards ceremony held in Iraq to recognize the service of local National Guard soldiers in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Col. David Philips, commander of the 89th Military Police Brigade, commended the Nanticoke-based Bravo Battery guardsmen of the 109th Field Artillery for their performance in combat operations, especially in the April insurgent uprisings in Baghdad and Sadr City.

Their work included patrolling the streets of Baghdad, performing traffic control, conducting convoy security escorts and taking part in base and police station security operations, according to information supplied by 1st Lt. Cliff A. Morales, public affairs officer for Bravo Battery.

At the ceremony, 14 soldiers received the Bronze Star Medal and 86 soldiers received the Army Commendation Medal.

Col. Phillips commended the professional attitude the soldiers have displayed towards Iraqi citizens during their tough mission.

He told the unit that their professionalism has helped build a stronger Iraqi-American bond and a more stable environment for the new democratic government in Iraq.

Though they have long sacrificed by serving and risking their lives in a foreign land, they have ensured a safer homeland for the American people, especially their own families, the colonel said.

Col. Phillips then shared a personal story with the guardsmen - how he spent his morning of Sept. 11, 2001.

At the time, he was working as a senior security official at the Pentagon.

Just 10 minutes before the terrorists drove a hijacked plane into the building, he was finishing a conversation with a Department of Defense civilian and two soldiers. He then walked out of their office and out of the Pentagon.

Seconds later, the plane struck the building.

Col. Phillips was one of the first people to rush into the burning, smoke-filled building to search for survivors.

He found none.

The office he had just left was destroyed. His worst fears were later confirmed when he learned the people he just talked to were killed.

Hoping to walk out of the building with survivors propped over his shoulder, Col. Phillips left the building only able to salvage a single United States flag.

He stood proudly with that flag at the Bravo Battery awards ceremony, which was held on Nov. 24, saying he wanted to remind the soldiers of that fateful day when everything changed.

Col. Phillips said he feels looking at the flag helps people remember why they fight against terrorism to ensure the American way of life.

At the awards ceremony, Col. Phillips, along with several other military officers, personally presented each soldier with a certificate of achievement for excellence in combat and other citations.

First Sgt. Francis Poperowitz, of Bravo Battery, an artilleryman, was honored for earning a place on the honor roll of military police for his performance Iraq.

He was issued a challenge coin from Command Sgt. Maj. Charles Guyette, of the 89th Military Police Brigade.

12/6/2004

Helping to keep their spirits up

109TH FIELD ARTILLERY

By STEVE MOCARSKY-smocarsky@leader.net

Decorations of red and green, an electric train encircling a Christmas tree, dozens of children running and playing. All that combined with the empathy of others present helped relieve some of the heartache and loneliness.

But the underlying feelings of everyone in the room were pronounced in the lyrics of one song that played on a jukebox at the edge of a barren dance floor: "All I Want for Christmas is You."

"That song says it all," said Jane Harris, whose husband, Spc. William Harris, is deployed with the 109th Field Artillery's Bravo Battery in Iraq.

Bravo Battery's "Busy Bs" family support group had its Christmas party, which included a luncheon, at Lacey's Catering Hall on Main Street next to the Nanticoke armory on Sunday.

"It's a great way for the families to get together and support each other in a time of need," said Harris, of Ashley.

She has the daunting task of seeing through the holidays two stepchildren, two foster children and a foster son she and William are in the process of adopting. "He left at a good time, when it came time for potty training," Harris joked.

This will be the first holiday season through which she and other support group members will have to cope with the absence of their military spouse, parent, child, aunt, uncle, niece, nephew or sibling through the holiday season. Bravo Battery was deployed for training to Fort Dix, N.J., on Dec. 30 last year before leaving for the Mideast.

"I could cry now," Harris said when asked what she expects it to be like for her and the kids on Christmas Day. "It's going to be a sad day, his not being there to see the expressions on their faces, the toys they got."

One tradition Harris will miss is attending midnight Mass with her husband. She hopes he'll call her as the Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City is being broadcast so she can hold the phone up to the TV and they can keep some part of their family tradition intact.

Jeremy Metz said he'll miss opening one present each on Christmas Eve with his brother, Spc. Adam Metz of Wilkes-Barre, and going to their aunt's house on Christmas Day to open the rest of the presents and share a family dinner.

Apparently, Jeremy will also miss being able to razz his brother in person, as he noted that Adam's war injury consists of a broken shoulder that resulted from an overenthusiastic football game.

Adam's mom, Diane, will miss "just having him home for the holidays."

Sitting at a table with the Metzses, Sophia Arnold of Hunlock Creek spooned mashed potatoes onto the plate of 2-year-old Jaycee Arnold, the daughter of her son, Spc. Stephen Arnold.

"He is very family-oriented, so it's going to be hard. He'll miss everything - being together with the family, shopping with the baby, all of it," Arnold said, her voice trailing off as she suppressed an urge to cry.

Jennifer Sorber, support group president and wife of Sgt. 1st Class Jaime Sorber, said getting together with the group for the holidays means a lot to her.

"As the deployment went on, we all became better friends. I didn't have a lot of friends before; now, I can't count them all. And we didn't let

terrorism stop our happiness in getting together," Sorber said.

Sorber predicted that her husband's absence through Christmas will be hardest on her 5- and 8-year-old boys, Carl and Kyle, more so than the other three children. "The older boys feel the absence more."

As for herself, Sorber misses the tradition of decorating a live tree with Jaime.

"I didn't have the heart to put up a real tree and decorate it by myself. My parents bought us an artificial tree and decorated it for us. My husband promised me we would never have another Christmas without a real tree."

Given her husband's almost certain absence on Christmas, what else would Sorber want to receive on Christmas Day?

"I just hope we can talk to him. The lines will be long for the phone, so I'm praying."

12/5/2004

Smiles in time of war: 109th's party goes on

The troops are away, but the families of Battery B still provide kids a good time.

By JENNIFER LEARN-ANDES-jandes@leader.net

It won't be quite the same this year, but the 109th Field Artillery Battery B children's Christmas party will still go on.

Last year's party was canceled because the unit's Army National Guardsmen were in the process of being deployed, so this year their spouses and other family members in the Busy Bees support group decided to get it together for the children, and each other.

As they wrapped Bratz dolls and GI Joe figures at the Nanticoke armory on Saturday, the women felt the absence of their husbands, sons, boyfriends and brothers.

Michelle Gallagher remembers shopping and wrapping gifts for the party two Christmases ago with her husband, Staff Sgt. Patrick Gallagher.

Gallagher and the other men had done most of the cooking for the party.

"It's very difficult to do Christmas this year but we have to do it for the kids," she said.

Through donations and fund-raisers, the group raised about \$900 to hold today's party at Lacey's Catering in Nanticoke for 62 children and 86 adults.

Rita Kania, of Mountain Top, said the bustle of folding and taping wrapping paper was a welcome distraction. Her son, 20-year-old James Kania, doesn't want store-bought Christmas packages sent to Iraq.

He craves his mother's baking instead.

She already sent brownies and is about to ship a batch of dozens of chocolate chip and oatmeal raisin cookies. Her favorite cookie shipping device is a Pringle's potato chip can.

Kim Rogaski, of Plains Township, said her boyfriend, Brian Lukashewski, put green tea, beef jerky and Christmas lights on his holiday list. He plans to use the lights to decorate his tent and others.

Lukashewski was pleased to learn through e-mail that the holiday party will continue, Rogaski said. Their 7-year-old daughter, Kaitlyn, had always looked forward to attending with him.

12/05/2004

Nanticoke Area Notes

By: Pamela Urbanski

Looking at a church's history

Let me take you back in time, way back to the year 1742.

It was a time when one of the few visitors to the Wyoming Valley and the Indians living by the

Susquehanna River, the Shawanese tribe of Plymouth or the Nanticokes, were the Moravian missionaries who came preaching Christianity to the tribes.

Around 1762, close to 200 settlers arrived after learning of the beauty and fertility of the

Wyoming Valley. In 1770, the First Presbyterian Church was started in the Wyoming Valley. The wars and battles that followed throughout the years could not deter the growth of the church and the communities that surrounded it.

Members met and worshiped in various places and buildings. In 1829, a group of people wished to organize a new Presbyterian Church. The new church, to be known as the Presbyterian Church of Hanover and Newport, was organized.

In 1860, with only 13 members in the congregation, the church was reorganized and the name changed from the Union Church to the Presbyterian Church of Nanticoke.

The congregation outgrew its building and 30 years later, the construction of a new church (the present edifice) was begun in 1893. During the early years of the 20th century, Nanticoke was a thriving town with a growing population.

These were the days of "packed pews," Christmas cantatas, church suppers, ice cream socials, strawberry festivals and active missionary societies.

With the dawn of the 21st century, additions and renovations were made to the church building and manse (parsonage). The church elders tell of the dawn of the 21st century as a "rough patch."

The six-person Board of Session, along with pastor Robert Boyar, was faced with structural problems of the church building and dwindling members. But, they were determined that God would see them through their time of strife.

The first-ever commissioned lay pastor, Laura Lewis, arrived in 2001. Since then, with determination and the strong faith of church leaders and members, there has been a slow, but steady increase in membership.

This year marks the 175th anniversary celebration of the First Presbyterian Church of Nanticoke, founded Nov. 27, 1829.

On Oct. 24, 2004, a special morning worship service and banquet was held to mark the occasion. The celebration continues.

Today, church members will sponsor a Victorian tea. Those attending will be treated to tea and homemade refreshments including tiny sandwiches

and warm scones.

The cost is \$7, but I've been told tickets were just about sold out for this event. However, those wishing to get a glimpse of the past are invited to a Victorian open house on Dec. 12 from noon to 4 p.m.

Members have planned a wonderful holiday event. "The parsonage next to the church will be decorated to reflect the Victorian era, complete with evergreens and candlelight," said church elder Martha Price.

"We are taking you back to a very important time in our church and community history," she added.

In addition to the tours, a craft fair featuring homemade wooden and needlepoint items, in addition to jewelry, will be held. Martha tells me committee members have worked very hard for the past six weeks organizing this event.

"It's a great opportunity to buy something for yourself or a Christmas gift for someone special on your list," she commented.

Homemade cookies also will be available to purchase and a Chinese auction featuring theme baskets for young and old will be held.

I thank Martha for providing me with a history of the First Presbyterian Church. There is so much to be written. Unfortunately, my space is limited. Perhaps the elders and members of the church say it best.

"As we look back on these 175 years, we fondly recall and remember the many past members of this church, a congregation that once filled nearly every pew in the church. Though we are now a smaller group, the congregation of the First Presbyterian Church of Nanticoke remains even more dedicated to bringing the good news of the Gospel to our community."

The church is located at Main and Walnut Streets with parking on Spring Street. For information about events, please call 735-6449.

12/4/2004

Nanticoke's winter rink being moved to school lot

Paved area near the football field will be used because area provides more parking.

By BONNIE ADAMS-badams@leader.net

The city plans to move its ice skating rink to school property this season to provide more parking than last year's location.

Greater Nanticoke Area Superintendent Anthony Perrone said the city recently approached the school district about relocating the rink from the park along Prospect Street.

The school district plans to locate it in a paved area near the football stadium, where there's ample parking. He said a drain will need to be covered. Perrone said there is a paved edge on three sides of the macadam area. The city will place sandbags on the fourth side to contain the water until it freezes.

He has heard some complaints from residents who questioned the ice skating project's cost, but Perrone said it will not cost the school district anything. He said the fire department will fill the area with water.

Perrone said the city is in charge of the project and the city's liability insurance will cover it.

"Kids have nothing to do in this town," Perrone said. "The school is here for the kids."

Perrone said the rink should be open before Christmas if temperatures are cold enough. The concession stand will sell hot beverages.

School board President Bob Raineri said it's important to create recreational opportunities for children in town.

City administrator Greg Gulick said locating the rink on a paved area will save money because a liner won't be necessary.

12/4/2004

Kingston ordered to pay in dispute

A Nanticoke businessman says the borough owed him money for clothing vouchers.

By RON LIEBACK-rlieback@leader.net

A Nanticoke businessman who said Kingston municipality failed to pay for more than \$900 in clothing purchased at his sporting goods store recently won a default judgment against the borough.

District Justice Joseph Halsey issued the judgment in favor of DNR Sports owner Mark Komoroski after both parties failed to show for a Nov. 22 hearing. Kingston was ordered to pay \$927.

Mayor James Haggerty disputes the judgment and said he plans to appeal. He has until Dec. 23 to take action.

Haggerty said the borough did not attend the hearing because Halsey held it in the wrong place. Haggerty insists the hearing should have taken place in Kingston, not in Halsey's Hanover Township office.

Komoroski filed the civil complaint at District Justice Donald Whittaker's office in Nanticoke in April. DNR Sports provided vouchers to Kingston public works employees so they could purchase clothing for work. Komoroski said he gave the borough 15 vouchers, worth \$150 each, and Kingston refuses to pay for six that have not been used.

Haggerty has said he refused to pay because Komoroski submitted invoices stating that work-related clothing was bought. He said Komoroski didn't oversee what was purchased, resulting in at least one Kingston employee buying items not related to work.

12/3/2004

Yudichak offers Nanticoke help in solving financial crisis

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

State Rep. John Yudichak, D-119, offered assistance to Nanticoke in getting the city's finances in order, and council now must decide whether to accept his offer.

A preliminary report on Nanticoke's financial situation recently issued by the state Department of Community and Economic Development states,

among other findings, that the city might end up with a 2004 operating deficit of \$225,000, and could be facing insolvency within the coming months.

Yudichak came to Wednesday night's council meeting to offer his assistance, recommend the city get involved with DCED's early intervention program, and ask council members if they wanted him to obtain a grant for a computer system and financial software.

Early intervention is a program managed by the DCED's Governor's Center for Local Government Services. Yudichak said it provides up to \$100,000 to hire a personal financial adviser to work with the city in putting together a five-year financial plan and a strategy to get the city on a track to a balanced budget.

Yudichak said he thought it would be a smart idea for the city to bring in outside help, someone who could step back and take an objective look at the financial situation.

He said it would not be a case of the state taking over the city; all decisions would be made by Nanticoke officials.

"But this gives us some help at virtually no cost to the city," Yudichak said. "It makes good sense that when you have a financial crisis, you bring in an expert and plot a strategy to get out of that predicament."

DCED's report recommended a software package specific to Pennsylvania local government accounting, which would handle tax, sewer and refuse billing, fixed assets billing, accounts payable and receivable, and reporting functions.

It would cost from \$8,000 to \$12,000, but suggested a grant would be appropriate.

Council voted to have Yudichak try to obtain the computer grant, but will have to pass a resolution to get involved in the early intervention program.

Councilman John Bushko said City Administrator Greg Gulick will get the paperwork done for the program.

Since council does not meet until the work session on Wednesday, Dec. 29, Bushko said he would like to try to call a special meeting to pass the resolution.

An immediate financial problem brought up Wednesday night is the fact that the city was in danger of not having enough in its coffers to meet the \$73,607 total December payroll, let alone other pressing expenses.

Treasurer Albert Wytosek said there is \$102,984 outstanding in municipal property taxes, and \$8,050 behind in per capita tax.

"Some people wait until the last minute to pay their taxes. Dec. 15 is the deadline," Gulick said. "We're not short yet. We're getting there, but we're still going. We may only get a half of it, a quarter of it or none of it, but there's still money to come in."

If an insufficient amount of taxes come in, the city will have to transfer money from another account to make payroll, Gulick said.

Councilman Bill Brown said some tax funds came in from Berkheimer on Thursday, bringing the cash on hand from \$63,393 "up to the \$70,000 mark."

The first payroll for Dec. 10 should be covered, said Brown, but the city still does not have money for the second payroll, which will fall due Dec. 24.

12/2/2004

Nanticoke urged to enter financial program

Rep. Yudichak recommends getting fiscal advice from state before it's too late.

By JON FOX-jfox@leader.net

State Rep. John Yudichak, at Wednesday night's city council meeting, called for the city to enter the state's early intervention program for financially troubled municipalities.

The program would allow the city to take advantage of professional financial advice and devise a five-year plan for recovery, said Yudichak, D-Nanticoke.

The representative's advice comes a week after city officials received a draft of a financial analysis commissioned by the state Department of Community and Economic Development.

The report paints a bleak picture of the municipality. It indicates the city is floundering financially and could face insolvency this year, by next fall at the latest.

"We finally have in black and white evidence of what you were raising concerns about," Yudichak told city council at the meeting. Mayor John Toole was absent because of a death in his family.

There are more bills than there is money, and it's been that way for seven of the past nine years, Yudichak said.

Nanticoke needs a plan "to get us away from taking the (Tax Anticipation Note) every year, to get us away from deficit spending, to right this fiscal ship," he said.

There was little argument from council members.

Asking that the city administrator be authorized to solicit quotes for a TAN, a type of loan, to get cover budget shortfalls, Councilman Bill Brown said the money will be critical in getting the city through the first months of the coming year.

"Yeah, but in July we won't be able to pay it back," said Councilman John Bushko.

From a balanced budget in 1999, the city has slowly slid into debt and leaned more heavily on short-term credit. This year the deficit is likely to be in the neighborhood of \$225,000, according to the state report.

"We're having a problem trying to make the last month of payments to vendors and payroll," Brown said.

The city needs \$294,369 to pay all its end-of-the-year bills and \$73,607 just to pay employees.

The city account, however, holds only \$63,393. Treasurer Albert Wytoshek said he only expects an additional \$15,000 in property taxes to flow in before the year's end.

And in the spirit of a final straw, the city just received a bill from the state for more than \$20,000 for their share of a bridge project on Union Street. Seemingly exasperated, Brown appealed to the audience for suggestions on how to pay the bill. Simply put it off, one person said.

12/2/2004

Nanticoke lacks funds to make December payroll

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

Nanticoke City Council examined some negative financial news at Wednesday night's meeting.

Councilman William Brown, who was sitting in for absent Mayor John Toole, said the city is having trouble meeting its \$137,000 December payroll.

He said the city has due \$67,918 in health insurance, \$33,643 in non-uniform retirement fund payments, and needs to come up with \$119,200 for the refuse fund.

The city only has a total of \$63,393 total cash on hand, and needs \$73,607 more just to make payroll, or \$294,369 altogether, Brown said.

In addition, the city owes the state \$20,256 for its share of the Union Street Bridge project, payment of which council agreed would have to be postponed.

Bills are not getting paid on time, according to Brown, and there will only be about \$19,000 left in the sewer fund at the end of the year.

"I don't want to run a shop this way," he remarked.

Treasurer Albert Wytosek said the city was "extremely far behind" in all the taxes taken in. So far, it has collected \$102,984 in city taxes, which is \$40,000 less than usual, and Wytosek estimated less than \$15,000 is due to come in by the end of the year. The city has also received \$8,050 in per capita taxes, which he said is less than normal.

Council voted on the first reading of the ordinances to pass the annual taxes, but chose to table an ordinance maintaining the occupational privilege tax of \$10 for 2005.

12/1/2004

Schools wary of slots impact

Districts want to be certain how much gambling money they will get before committing to tax reductions.

By BONNIE ADAMS-badams@leader.net

State gambling legislation that would reduce each homeowner's school taxes by about \$109 to \$359 a year has sparked questions and skepticism among local school boards.

They are still untangling details before deciding whether their school districts should opt into the Homeowner Tax Relief Act program, commonly known as the Homestead Act, which uses gambling proceeds to help fund education.

The property tax savings from Act 72 vary by school district and come at a cost because participating districts must increase their earned-income taxes. That 0.1 percent increase must be used for property tax relief in addition to gambling proceeds.

"It's probably one of the toughest decisions a board will have to make," said Tim Allwein of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association.

Association representatives are traveling statewide to help school boards and the public understand the legislation.

"There are a lot of questions," he said. Allwein said it is frustrating for school boards because they want to know for sure how much gaming money their school district will receive before committing to the program.

"No one's sure what a good estimate will be," Allwein said. The state Department of Education has released estimates for each school district based on two distribution totals - \$1 billion and \$500 million a year.

Each district's estimate is based on a tax relief formula that gives the most state resources to districts with the greatest tax burden and the least local wealth.

Wilkes-Barre Area business manager Ralph Scoda agrees with Allwein that the decision is difficult for school boards. "It's not a win-win situation for both sides."

He said that what might be good for the school district could mean a higher earned-income tax for residents. Also, the act includes a back-end referendum: If a district opts into Act 72, it can't raise taxes beyond a certain point without voter approval.

Scoda said that no matter what a school board decides, it will be based on guesswork. "It's extremely difficult."

Virginia Falzone, president of Wilkes-Barre's North End Citizens and Taxpayers group, said senior citizens are hoping for a tax break.

But she said residents are skeptical that the yearly property tax savings will be as high as the state estimates. Department of Education figures list savings of \$200 to \$356 for homeowners in the Wilkes-Barre Area School District.

Lake-Lehman School Board President Jim Mahon said the estimates are inflated. He doesn't believe Lake-Lehman homeowners will pay \$133 less a year if there is \$500 million in the fund, or \$214 less if there is \$1 billion.

Mahon said a Pennsylvania School Boards Association representative will attend a future school board meeting to address the board and public. He opposes using gambling proceeds to help fund education. Mahon said he would rather see property tax relief through wage tax increases.

If a district already collects an income tax - and all local districts do - the school board must pass a resolution by May 30, 2005, to raise that tax by 0.1 percent.

Greater Nanticoke Area School Board President Bob Raineri said the district plans to form a citizens advisory committee to seek input from retirees and working people. Wyoming Area is doing the same.

Raineri said a homeowner might pay less in school taxes, but pay more in earned income taxes. "I really don't think we're going to gain too much from this."

Pittston Area School Board President Mark Singer said it's likely the district will opt into the program because it needs the money. Pittston Area faces a \$550,000 budget shortfall from the closing of Techneglas in Jenkins Township.

"From what I know, I think it's a situation where we have to," Singer said.

Bonnie Adams, a Times Leader staff writer, may be reached at 829-7241.

On the net

For more information on the Homeowner Tax Relief Act program, go to the state Department of Education's Web site at:
www.pde.state.pa.us/proptax/site/default.asp.

11/30/2004

Draft of state report says Nanticoke in financial trouble

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

Nanticoke City is in deep financial trouble that will require quick action by city officials, according to a draft report from the state Department of Community and Economic Development obtained by The Citizens' Voice on Monday.

The report, based on a study performed for DCED's Governor's Center for Local Government Services by Cornell Hopkins of Hopkins and Hopkins LLC of Chalfont, outlines the city's financial mistakes, their consequences, and the need for a five-year plan.

The report states that the city is facing a 2004 operating deficit of \$225,000, and could be "facing insolvency from which it cannot recover," starting "as early as late this year and not later than fall of 2005.

Some key questions outlined in the report are whether the city can pay for programs and services it currently furnishes; if there are reserves to finance economic emergencies; and whether there is financial flexibility

The answer to all the questions is no

"It paints a very stark picture for the city," state Rep. John Yudichak, D-119, said of the report. "It validates some concerns I've had, and that some members of council have raised, about the financial health of the city.

DCED spokesman Kevin Ortiz said the report is in the draft stage, and should be completed soon

"This is a report that will help DCED help Nanticoke make sure they can follow the best practices in a way that will help them to best use state resources to avoid fiscal insolvency," Ortiz said

The final report will include a recommended five-year financial plan and management advice to help implement it. Wilkes-Barre City is following a five-year plan from DCED

The report states that if Nanticoke does not adopt the five-year plan, the state will be unwilling to give it funding for programs and projects, and there is the possibility the city could enter Act 47 - distressed municipality - status

"It's exactly what I expected from it. I could have told them that," Nanticoke Mayor John Toole said of the report

He said the \$225,000 figure may end up being less, and doubts the city will become insolvent this year or next, although he admits to the possibility "a few years down the road.

The report states that the city has operated in a deficit for seven out of the last nine years, and has been using \$1.1 million in tax anticipation notes from 2000 to 2003 to cover operational expenses from previous years, instead of using them to run the city for the first few months of the new year.

The city then consolidated two of the TANs into a \$1 million bond that created an additional \$150,000 in principal

"The city's got to tighten its belt and start doing things the right way," Nanticoke Councilman John Bushko said. "Basically, we can't afford our services on the amount of tax dollars we take in.

Bushko noted the budget has a "built-in deficit guaranteed every year," and the city has been raiding the sewer fund for years for operating expenses.

11/28/2004

Nanticoke Area Notes

By: Pamela Urbanski

Sewer fees put to good use

The City of Nanticoke continues to put the monies collected through its sewer fees to good use.

City officials continue to map out plans to repair and upgrade sewer lines throughout the city. It is an ongoing process and the worst sewer lines are targeted and repaired.

Hopefully, two current projects on the to-do list will be completed before the winter weather arrives.

Betsy Chesinski, city administrative assistant, tells me the sewer line on Chestnut Street running from Ridge Street to Church Street is undergoing repair. Once that sewer project is complete, the roads will be paved. New handicap-accessible corner sidewalks also will be installed. Lagana construction was awarded the contract for the work.

In the Hanover section of Nanticoke, engineers found a major sewer line problem in the area of Standard Place. It is considered more of an alley than a street because of its size and location, which is behind Front Street to the rear of Pelas candy store. Krasavage Construction was awarded the contract to replace 1,000 feet of sewer line, manhole covers and paving of the roadway. This work is set to begin within the next few weeks.

11/25/2004

Trojan effort is just what GNA needs

School problem no way universal

Greater Nanticoke Area's Len Butczynski will try to remain undefeated today in his third time coaching the East team in the UNICO All-Star Football Classic.

Amazing what a coach can do when he has a full team to work with.

He'll coach 40 high school seniors in today's game, nearly twice the number of players occupying the home sideline at Nanticoke.

At Nanticoke the past four years, Butczynski led half a team to a 9-31 record, including the recent 1-9 season that ended with about 23 Trojans in uniform.

Because of that record, Butczynski has become a target of some Nanticoke fans who think someone else could do better.

I'd like to meet that someone, and tell him about college vacancies at Florida and Illinois.

Nanticoke has the second-largest male enrollment among District 2's 15 Class 2A schools. But when it comes to the amount of boys who played fall sports, the number is small pierogies. Of 410 boys at Nanticoke Area, only 58, or 14 percent, participated.

"Kids just don't want to practice," said senior tight end Chris Ushinski.

It's not just the football team. The Trojans boys soccer team, a state qualifier last year, ended this season with only 15 players and just missed the playoffs. Same goes for the cross country team, which, two years removed from a division title, finished with about five boys. The Trojans golf team? About six.

This is not a school lacking athletic success, tradition or community support.

What happened to the Distasios, the Bilkos, the McDermotts?

This is clearly a guy thing. Nanticoke's girls have little trouble filling out their teams' rosters.

Butczynski, a 1986 Nanticoke graduate, has discussed the problem with his athletic director. Butczynski and his staff try to recruit boys in school, along every road that intersects with Kosciuszko Street and at other school sporting events. The coach was even able to sell the fact that the school district committed to renovating the stadium for this past season.

Still, he was barely able to field a team. He admits he has no answers.

With so few players, Butczynski has no choice but to go half-speed in practice, against blocking bags and tackling dummies. He tries to stress the importance of stepping it up to full speed for games, but the Trojans are still outnumbered, still a step behind.

Ushinski, who said he enjoyed his career despite three 1-9 seasons, tried to convince his classmates to join the team.

"They'll come out for a day and say 'This isn't for me.' They'll make up some kind of lame excuse."

Two other lame excuses, according to Ushinski: "My stomach hurts" and "I don't think my mom or dad will let me play."

Smaller rival Hanover Area doesn't have this problem. The Hawkeyes football team consistently fields about 40 boys. So it appears that priorities have changed for teenage boys in Nanticoke. No one, however, is sure why they've changed, or what's behind the change.

Cars, girls and jobs have long robbed high school teams of players. Add computers, video games and extreme sports to the list of accomplices.

If kids aren't hearing the adults, maybe they'll accept the challenge from one of their own, Ushinski: "Kids aren't as hard-nosed as they used to be, I guess."

11/18/2004

Nanticoke can no longer afford to ignore growing drug problem There were 37 overdose deaths in the city over the past four years.

Editor: [Citizens' Voice](#)

This letter is for the edification of the citizens of Nanticoke as it relates to the growing drug problem within our community.

The following is a partial account of narcotics activity in Nanticoke City during October: A woman died from a heroin overdose; a pharmacy was robbed at gun point; a bar was robbed at gun point; a pharmacy was burglarized; two attempted burglaries of a pharmacy occurred; two families lost custody of a total of six children; 64 criminal arrests were made as a result of thefts, assaults, and other drug related crimes.

There have been at least 100 instances of drug overdoses over the last four years. To wit, 37 have resulted in death. I often hear the question, "In Nanticoke?" The answer is emphatically, "yes." Families have been ruined and bankrupt, parents have taken their own lives over this epidemic, and hepatitis has become no less common than a seasonal cold.

Despite the efforts of parents, police, clergy, schools and medicine, nothing has changed. We tell our children, "don't use drugs" but give them few alternatives. We placate the taxpayers and forget the future taxpayer. We ponder the exodus of the best and brightest, yet offer no vocational opportunity.

Slightly more than a year ago, concerned members of our city bonded together over the bleak realization that we are in big trouble. We formed the non-profit GNA Drug Task Force Inc. We held a meeting with about 30 people. All were under age 20. Three have since died. Overwhelmingly, they told us they wanted a place to go, a youth center. They asked why they never got their skate park that was promised.

To date, the task force has welcomed Narcotics Anonymous into Nanticoke, established a youth group, held educational events and organized efforts of recovery and treatment for individuals. We cannot afford to be embarrassed about our drug problem any longer. Our city needs a youth center, and we are working toward that goal.

If you need help, or can help; please contact us at:

GNA Task Force, P.O. Box 139, Nanticoke, PA 18634.

Officer Kevin J. Grevera

GNA Task Force president

11/18/2004

Nanticoke library declines stock offer

By Robert Kalinowski Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

Mill Memorial Library board members declined a donation of \$165,000 in stock from a cofounder of Cornerstone Technologies during a meeting Wednesday.

Board members at the meeting, which was held at the Nanticoke library, lamented about "digging deeper" into their trust fund and discussed several

costly purchases.

Susan Maza, board president, explained that the donation was wanted - and especially needed in the face of government cutbacks - but the library could not obtain the money due to a conflict with the contributor, Bruce Conrad, and current company operators.

"The issue has to be settled among the shareholders. It's not a stock that's readily accessible on the open market," she said.

The stock in question, she explained, is invested in several "limited liability" entities and is not traded as a stock on the New York Stock Exchange would be traded.

One of those entities is Cornerstone Technologies, an innovative research and development company which began operation in 1999 after Congressman Paul Kanjorski, D11, helped secure more than \$9 million in government funds for the project.

Since that time, the company has been at least four of Kanjorski's relatives.

Conrad parted ways with the company several years ago and has recently claimed the company had been trying to buy out his stock for some time.

When the dispute could not be settled, Conrad offered to donate the stock to the library.

However, it became apparent to the library board the unresolved dispute would not allow for that, Maza said.

"We couldn't liquidate it," Maza stated after the board voted 6-0 to decline Conrad's offer.

After Conrad made the offer in September, the board vowed they would perform "due diligence" before accepting.

In recent weeks, several board members were told Cornerstone is involved in litigation and the library might be "liable" if it accepted the transaction.

A Cornerstone official also told a board member that there was "no market value of the stock."

When contacted at his Jim Thorpe, Carbon County, home Wednesday night, Conrad disputed both of these statements and hinted that some people close to the situation might have tried to corner the library in to declining the donation - or at least from pursuing it.

He noted that the \$165,000 was a proposed settlement to a lawsuit the company filed against him for allegedly stealing company secrets. That amount, he said, was what they subtracted from the stock's worth due to his alleged "harm" to the company.

"They alleged in court that the stock was worth that value. So, were they lying then or are they lying now?" he asked.

Conrad said that it is "clearly not true" that the library would be held liable if litigation were brought against Cornerstone. He said that it's a corporation's responsibility to protect its shareholders.

In recent weeks, Peter Kanjorski, CEO of Cornerstone and the congressman's nephew, could not be reached for comment about the donation.

"I really did try to give the library something of value. It's appalling that isn't possible," Conrad said Wednesday.

Now that the library board has rejected the offer, Conrad said he does not know where the stock is or where it will go.

11/17/2004

DA's office offers farewell to arms, hello to rewards

State, federal funds will allow county officials to purchase handguns for a \$75 gift certificate; shotguns, rifles for \$50.

By DAVID WEISS-dweiss@leader.net

Have a gun you don't want anymore?

Sell it to the district attorney's office. The staff would be more than happy to buy it.

That way the weapon will be sure to stay out of criminals' hands, said spokeswoman Carol Crane.

Luzerne County District Attorney David Lupas on Tuesday announced the start of a new program, dubbed "Operation Safe Guns."

The program will allow Lupas, using a \$10,000 grant, to buy guns from people who no longer need or use the weapons. The guns will be destroyed.

Crane said the office will pay the gun owners with gift certificates. Crane said gift certificates were chosen because the program will mirror a successful program used in Allegheny County.

"Guns are like gold to criminals," said Crane, noting stolen guns can be sold at a high price to drug dealers. "The less that are laying around out there, the better."

A handgun will be worth \$75, shotguns and rifles will be worth \$50. Crane said the gift certificates will most likely be from Wal-Mart because consumers would be able to use the certificates for merchandise and groceries in every part of the county, Crane said.

The gun buy-back program is only one component of the new initiative.

Lupas also will be distributing brochures to teach people about gun-safety. The brochures will give gun owners insight on storing weapons at home, telling them to keep them out of children's reach.

Crane said the grant came from the state Commission on Crime and Delinquency, which obtained the money through the U.S. Department of Justice.

The grant money was to specifically "combat firearms violence," she said. "How do you best do that? By removing guns off the street."

Crane said the program, which is not an anti-gun campaign, is believed to be the first of its kind in Luzerne County. But it has been done in other counties.

"For the most part there's been overwhelming success. We don't know how it's going to work here."

Several police chiefs joined Lupas for his announcement Tuesday. Luzerne County Detective Dan Beky is the project coordinator.

Anyone interested in selling guns they no longer want can sell them to the Luzerne County District Attorney's office on the following dates and times:

6 to 9 p.m. Nov. 18 at the Emergency Management Center on Water Street in Wilkes-Barre.

10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Nov. 20 at the Pittston Police Department.

6 to 9 p.m. Dec. 2 at the Hazleton Police Department.

6 to 9 p.m. Dec. 16 at the Dallas Township Police Department.

10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Dec. 18 at the Nanticoke Police Department.

11/16/2004

Woman finds time machine

By DONNA M. GILLIS-For the Times Leader

After shedding more than 70 pounds, 51-year-old Debra Rinehamer of Nanticoke noticed another dramatic change in her body. This one, however, wasn't as appealing as the weight loss.

"I looked like an iguana," she said.

That's because after losing the weight, Rinehamer was left with a drooping face and jiggling neck that made her look well beyond her years.

That changed, however, thanks to some surgical lifts and tucks that gave her a new look.

"I can wear necklaces and chokers again," Rinehamer said. "Everything is so much firmer, to the point where my neck looks like that of a 21-year-old."

Rinehamer sought help from Dr. Francis J. Collini in Shavertown, who performed a face lift and eyelid surgery. She found the recovery to be more uncomfortable than painful, and said the results were worth the discomfort.

"I was bandaged for a couple days and had some swelling and bruising."

Rinehamer admits that before her weight loss, she had been grappling with the effects of aging.

"Some people say that one year could make such a difference in the way you look, but that's not really true. I noticed things that happen overnight.

"I'd wake up in the morning and think, 'Where did this saggy skin come from? This wasn't here yesterday,'"

Rinehamer said she feels more confident, talkative, and excited about simple things such as wearing jewelry and trying on new clothes.

"People I haven't seen in a while don't even recognize me. I feel confident, younger and sexier.

"I've learned that sometimes if you look old, you act old."

11/14/2004

Donated Cornerstone stock in question

By Robert Kalinowski, The Sunday Voice 11/14/2004

What initially appeared to be a generous donation to Nanticoke's Mill Memorial Library might turn out to be a bust.

In October, The Sunday Voice reported that Bruce Conrad, a co-founder of Cornerstone Technologies, donated all his stock in the company - or \$165,000 worth - to the library.

After members of the library board of director heard the news, they were gracious, but cautioned they would perform "due diligence" before accepting the transfer.

Conrad, who parted with the company several years ago, assured them that the current operators of Cornerstone Technologies, some of whom are relatives of Congressman Paul E. Kanjorski, had offered him approximately \$165,000 for his shares.

Upon hearing about the proposed transfer, Peter Kanjorski, CEO of Cornerstone and nephew to the congressman, declined comment until he could investigate the matter.

During the past four weeks, the library board has looked into the situation and the initial feeling is that it doesn't look good, according to Bob Bray, vice president of the library board.

"We really don't know if we have a donation or not," he said.

Bray said the board has learned there apparently are suits pending against the company which might make the library liable if they accept the donation. The worth of the stock is also unknown.

Bray said representatives from Cornerstone have indicated there is "no market value of the stock."

"What appeared to be a generous contribution might not turn out to be," Bray said.

He said he would have more information when the library board meets this Wednesday.

Several attempts to contact Peter Kanjorski this week about the worth of the stock and if the library would receive any money were unsuccessful.

In previous reports, Conrad said officials at Cornerstone were "struggling for ways to buy out" his stock for some time. There was a dispute on how the money would be paid, he said.

Conrad said he wanted an upfront payment so he didn't have to deal with the tax consequences and they wanted to pay him in yearly installments. However, he said there was never any question that it was worth around \$165,000 and that they were willing to pay that amount.

Reached at his Jim Thorpe home on Saturday, Conrad said the value of the stock should be even more than that. The \$165,000 was a proposed settlement to a lawsuit Cornerstone filed against him in Northampton County Court for allegedly stealing company secrets.

That amount was what they subtracted from the stock's total worth due to his alleged "harm" to the company, he said

Because of the ongoing dispute, Conrad, who is dealing with potentially serious health problems, said he wanted "finality" with the stock in the company he co-founded.

After seeing a newspaper article that the Mill Memorial Library was going through some financial difficulty, he decided to give his stock - at least what they were offering him - to the library. The library, which recently had to revert to money in its trust fund in the face of government cutbacks, planned to use the donation for its daily operations and other miscellaneous ventures.

In October, Conrad challenged Cornerstone to "match my gift" to the library. After hearing that Cornerstone representatives told the library there was "no market value" for the stock, Conrad suspected wrongdoing by the company.

Unless Cornerstone's assets were transferred, or hidden, which would be "fraud," they should pay the library the money, he said.

Cornerstone Technologies is a research and development company that uses high pressure liquid to break materials into tiny particles, generally under 20 microns in size.

Congressman Kanjorski, D-11, helped secure more than \$9 million in government funds to begin the company, which was operated by at least four of his relatives since 1999. He has insisted he never steered or earmarked federal money for his family members, claiming they happened to be the successful applicants that were awarded the money.

11/14/2004

A Nanticoke man reawakens his golden memories

Cares of the world are put aside

By DAVID ISEMAN-diseman@leader.net

Frank Mrufchinski had spent much of his life worrying about others.

His elderly mother. The good folks at St. Stanislaus in Nanticoke. His fellows at the Nanticoke Rotary Club.

But, retired and pained by a bad hip, it was time to think of himself.

A glorious opportunity presented itself, he says. So, hurting or not, he had to consider it.

"The timing was tough. They scheduled my hip replacement operation and I said I'd like to go on this trip.

"I told my doctor and he said to go, just go, just go."

Still Frank worried about the 11 hours of traveling, about getting around in a wheelchair. He considered waiting until after the surgery.

But he had already done so much waiting.

For nearly a decade he had taken care of his homebound mom, often nearly a 24-hour job. Before that, there were other relatives to care for, as well as his work for the church and Rotary.

So it was now - or wait some more.

"When I first saw the campus I got tears in my eyes.

It wasn't a typical campus.

There's the glowing Golden Dome, the somber, stately Basilica of the Sacred Heart, the arched cave of rock kept lit with hundreds of candles called the Grotto.

Frank, though disciplined in demeanor by years of teaching, got animated as he told of his Oct. 21-24 visit to the University of Notre Dame.

He paused before he spoke, searching for just the right words. He handed to a reporter a two-page note, crafted in cursive, of the things he saw on the Holy Cross Heritage Trip, the kind people he met.

He spoke as he passed around photographs. And he couldn't help himself from gushing.

"They were so good to me. That's the Holy Cross spirit. ... You could feel the presence of the Lord." Putting a closed fist to his chest, he added: "I could feel it. I could. I could feel it in here."

Frank ended up missing the football game that was offered as part of the tour. Rain made him too nervous to try to maneuver with a wheelchair through the crowds.

But he got a special tour of the stadium later due to the kindness of a groundskeeper. He met players, as well as Fighting Irish coach Tyrone Willingham. He has photos of them all.

By luck, he was able to visit with two men who had taught him a half century earlier at King's College. Retired priests William Beston and Augustine Peverada live at a nursing home at the university, Frank said.

And more good fortune. Current King's President the Rev. Tom O'Hara also happened to be visiting because Notre Dame was honoring priests who serve or had served as college presidents. Frank attended Mass with Father O'Hara.

Frank spoke about his trip from a hospital bed at John Heinz Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine. He had his hip surgery Oct. 27.

Asked to recount the trip's best moment, Frank paused, moving his jaw back and forth like older folks sometimes do without realizing it. He answered slowly.

"At night we'd go to the Grotto, and I'm there and I'm facing this operation and I'm praying and everybody's praying with me," he said, his voice trailing off, his eyes moist.

He quickly regained his composure, though, and reached for more photographs.

11/14/2004

Nanticoke girl to compete in Miss PA USA Pageant

Heather Baranowski of Nanticoke will compete in the Miss Pennsylvania USA Pageant at the Hyatt Regency in Pittsburgh Nov. 26-28.

This is the state preliminary to the nationally televised Miss USA Pageant.

Heather, 21, will be competing for the title of Miss Pennsylvania USA 2005 among 117 other women. Heather graduated from Greater Nanticoke Area High School in 2001 and Barbizon School of Modeling in 2002.

Heather spent the summer of 2003 in Tokoyo, Japan, modeling for World Top and this past summer returned from Milan, Italy, where she modeled for 2Morrrows Management. She has done modeling in runway, print and commercial work through D&D Talent/Model Management and Reich, New York, in New York City.

Heather is the daughter of Anthony and Michelle Baranowski, Nanticoke, and the granddaughter of Edward and Adeline Baranowski, Nanticoke, and Florence Levan and Fred Hunsinger, Berwick.

Heather has a sister, Sarah, and two brothers, Tony and Joshua.

11/7/2004

Celebrating Education Support Professionals' contributions

On Nov. 17, every school in the United States will celebrate Education Support Professionals Day. In 2002, The Educational Support Personnel name was changed to Education Support Professionals. This change acknowledges the major contribution ESPs make to children and public education everyday.

We are involved in the lives of children everyday, maybe not in the classroom but in our own special and professional way. The new name reflects a growing pride in the valuable role ESPs play throughout America's public schools. ESPs are often the first people who our children encounter on a daily basis.

We are the people who help them cross the street, provide them a nutritious meal, and keep their school buildings clean and safe. ESPs are the "unsung heroes" and the "backbone" of our School Districts.

Even though we are not educators, we educate in our own way.

This is a good time to remember that ESPs such as secretaries, hall monitors, school police, aides, cafeteria workers, custodians, maintenance workers, cleaning personnel and crossing guards are an integral part of every school system.

Visit www.nea.org to learn more about Education Support Professionals and the work they do.

James (J.D.) Verazin

President

Greater Nanticoke Area Educational Support Professionals Association

11/7/2004

Nanticoke Area Notes

By: Pamela Urbanski 11/07/2004

Christmas Fair at Mill Library

Friends of the Mill Memorial Library, a group of dedicated individuals who love and support their local library, will host their annual Christmas Fair on Sunday, Nov. 14, from noon to 4 p.m. at the library on East Main Street. There will be something for everyone.

"Most of our crafters and vendors will have items geared toward the Christmas season," said Marion Diacheysn, president of the Friends.

New this year will be a Chinese auction featuring Italian, kitchen, Christmas, bathroom and children's theme baskets. A yearly favorite is the grand raffle.

"Each crafter donates an item to be chanced off at the end of the fair," Marion added. "You do not have to be present to win. Other events include a book and bake sale, granny's attic and, of course, delicious homemade food like haluski, wimpies, pizza, and soup. Our hope is that we have a nice turnout so we can continue to support the library."

C of C planning holiday parade

If you are like me, you're thinking, Christmas already?

But, in order for organizations to have successful events, the word must get out early. That's why the Greater Nanticoke Area Chamber of Commerce is asking local residents to think about being part of its annual Santa Claus Holiday Parade, which will be held Saturday, Nov. 20.

Joseph Lach, parade chairman, is inviting all community organizations and groups to participate by walking, riding in an automobile or on a float.

The parade will form at the Nanticoke High School, proceed West on Ridge Street, Hanover to Green to Market and Market to Main Street where it will conclude.

If you would like to participate, you can call Joe at 287-4787 or the Chamber office at 735-6990 by Nov.15. You also can return the forms issued through the mail.

Park steering committee to meet

Julie McMonagle from the Pennsylvania Environmental Council (PEC), who along with area residents, has been working on the Greater Nanticoke Recreation Park Project, announced that due to low attendance at the October steering committee meeting, a Nov. 19 steering committee meeting has been scheduled for 7 p.m. at the Plymouth Township Municipal Building.

"This will be the last meeting until January and there are several issues that need to be discussed," Julie noted.

They include the implementation plan for the park (which areas of the park will be built first, second, etc.), and a date for a public meeting to present the draft report and maps of the park. A discussion needs to take place about the possibility of using some of the remaining grant money to purchase used skate park equipment. This includes discussing who will do this and how the potential skate park equipment would be maintained. Steering committee members are asked to make this important meeting a priority.

Night-at-Races at Pope John Paul

Pope John Paul II School will hold its annual Night-at-the-Races II on Nov. 20 in the school cafeteria on South Hanover Street. A \$10 donation goes toward the purchase of a horse ticket. Your horse will then be entered in one of many races with a chance to win \$50. A \$2 donation will be collected at the door for those who have already purchased a horse and a \$7 donation for those who have not.

This donation includes a delicious all-you-can-eat dinner menu prepared by Jack Rentko. Menu features London broil steak sandwiches, meatball hoagies, clam chowder, sausage hoagies, ziti, spicy chicken tenders, potato and noodle salad, cole slaw, baked beans, hot dogs, wimpies and dessert, as well as also coffee, beer and soda. You must be 21-one years old to attend. Horse tickets should be purchased by Nov. 12. For more information, you can call the school at 735-7935 or Karen at 735-7476.

11/4/2004

Council waits to fix damaged sewer line

A question over city finances causes members to put off accepting a bid

By JON FOX-jfox@leader.net

City council postponed accepting a bid for the replacement of sewer lines on Standard Place at Wednesday night's council meeting until officials could verify the balance of the sewer fund.

Councilman Bill Brown suggested tabling the acceptance of the low bid of \$244,416.50 by Ed Krasavage Construction of Wyoming to make sure that the funds in the account were adequate.

"Why aren't we aware of the finances of the city?" asked Councilman John Bushko.

The account contains more than \$300,000, but Brown said he wanted two years. There hasn't been much development in the history of the city."

Among the many projects discussed by Leighton were the impending new street lights, the former call center building on South Main Street, the riverfront park and street paving.

The infrastructure for the street lights is being put in place, Leighton said. He hopes the lights, which have a historical design, will begin being installed in early 2005, starting on South Franklin Street.

"It's not like going to Home Depot and putting in a new lamp," said Leighton said. "The engineering has started. You're going to see lighting in the downtown in the very near future. My philosophy is to take our time and do it right the first time. We're not going to make mistakes with the street lights. It's too expensive."

The city is also moving on finding a tenant for the former call center, an 80,000-square foot building, he said.

"It's being marketed aggressively and I get updates daily. We have to be sure there are no outstanding bills to be paid.

Brown's motion to table the acceptance of the bid was seconded by Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski, providing an emergency meeting to award the contract be scheduled for Nov. 10 at 7 p.m.

The motion was approved with only Bushko voting against. "Let's face it. It will get lost in the shuffle. That sewer will be broken until May, June." Shouting from her seat in the audience, Standard Place resident Sandy Sadowski protested the delay. "The stink's not in your house."

The confusion about city finances began at last month's meeting. A repaving project on Lincoln Avenue was postponed by Mayor John Toole so that the city finances could be examined.

At Wednesday's meeting, city Administrator Greg Gulick explained that funds earmarked for the project were bits and pieces of 30-year-old grants that could not be used for that improvement. The revelation came last week from a state auditor, Gulick said.

"We look like fools here," Bushko said of the confusion. "Everybody up here was under the impression that we could use that money for any capital improvement in the city."

In other business council:

Approved on second and final reading an ordinance prohibiting placing trash out more than 24 hours before the scheduled pickup

Voted not to raise the trash fee for 2005. The fee will remain \$176. ,

Approved the sale of a 2-acre property on Church Street to the Step-by-Step program for \$45,000. Step-by-Step plans to use the site to build a facility to temporarily house up to five mentally disabled children.

11/1/2004

Honey Pot's 'dear friend'

By STEVE MOCARSKY-smocarsky@leader.net

A TRIBUTE TO AN ACTIVIST

It's impossible to tell how many of the 110 little ghosts and witches who paraded around the Honey Pot Playground on Sunday ever heard of Jean Kutz.

But were it not for her efforts through the years, the children of the city's Honey Pot section might not have had the opportunity to enjoy using playground equipment in their section of town.

That's why state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, and others gathered to dedicate a new picnic table at the playground in Kutz's memory after the Halloween party.

City native Kutz died on May 31 after a lifetime of community service and activism.

But her dedication to the betterment of Honey Pot remains apparent through the products of her efforts and the stories shared by her family, friends and members of the Honey Pot Recreation Association.

After the Halloween party, association members shared stories about Kutz while sitting around the picnic table that will soon bear a plaque in Kutz's honor.

"We were working on (U.S. Rep.) Paul Kanjorski's campaign. John (Yudichak) was 11, and he came up to me and Jean and said, 'I just want you to know I'm going to be president of the United States some day, and I want you to work on my campaign,'" said association treasurer Linda Prushinski.

"Through the years, they were always supportive of me and taught me valuable lessons about staying close to your roots and giving something back to the community. That's what I think a great citizen is and what our leaders should be. I aspire to have the same kind of work ethic that Jean had," Yudichak said.

"(Kutz) was one of the first people to come visit me after I was elected and asked for my help for the Honey Pot Playground," Yudichak said. "It was sad when she passed away. She was a dear friend and we wanted to honor her in a special way. They came to me with idea of picnic table, and I was glad to donate it just to recognize what a wonderful person she was, always concerned about the welfare of the people in the community, particularly the children."

Some local children remember Kutz well and are appreciative. Dressed in a sorceress costume, 9-year-old Melanie McIntyre recalled her fondly. "She was really kind. She used to talk to me a lot, ask me about school," said Melanie, whose bus stop was across the street from Kutz's home. Kutz's sister, Dolores Prushinski, was touched by the dedication ceremony and fondly recalled her sister's service as a judge of elections, City Council member, playground advocate and treasurer of the recreation association. "The last check she wrote was from her bed for this fence," Dolores Prushinski said, referring to the recently installed fence surrounding the playground. "She said, 'Now I can die peacefully.' "

10/29/2004

Nanticoke takes heat over cash balance

By RON LIEBACK-rlieback@leadernet

Resident Sandy Sadowski questioned a \$69,000 discrepancy in the balance in the city's bank account at Wednesday night's council meeting. City Administrator Greg Gulick said he could only account for \$210,115 out of the \$280,000 in the city's coffers.

"I am waiting for the bank to give us the statements," Gulick said in response to Sadowski while sitting among 16 residents. "This stuff takes time." "Excuse me," she sarcastically said to Gulick. "You give me the account number tomorrow and I will get you the balance in 15 minutes."

The figures came into question after three bids were opened for the pavement of Lincoln Avenue.

The lowest bid for the work was from Pikes Creek Side Contractor, an affiliate of Reading Materials in Hunlock Creek, for \$149,311.15. Two other bids were presented, one for \$258,150 by Slusser Brothers of West Hazleton, the other for \$169,178 from Lagana Supply of Hazleton.

Mayor John Toole said the city will wait until he gets an accurate picture of the city's finances before making a decision on the construction.

"I think we should do it because we should have \$278,000 in our account," said Councilman John Bushko. "We know the money is there, we just need track it down in the system."

Gulick also said the city needs to fix water damage at the Senior Center on North Market street that occurred from the remnants of Hurricane Ivan. A contractor met with Gulick

to give the city an estimate of the structure's damage. "He said it was \$30,000 off the top of his head." Toole again said the city must wait until the finances are in order.

At the end of the meeting, Toole said a four-wheel-drive police vehicle was damaged while police were chasing a criminal through a parking lot and wooded area. He said the cruiser is being repaired.

In other news:

-Representatives from Stepby-Step are looking to purchase 2 acres on Church Street to build a facility to house up to five mentally disabled children. The children would be allowed to reside there for 30 days a year while parents are busy or on vacation.-

-The cost of yearly garbage stickers will rise from \$175 to \$180.-

10/20/2004

Three soldiers from 109th injured in Iraq

By Robert Kalinowski , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

Three soldiers from the 109th Field Artillery, Pennsylvania Army National Guard, were injured Friday in an explosion near Baghdad, Iraq, local military officials confirmed yesterday.

"They were in convoy and their Humvee was hit with an IED (improvised explosive device)," said Capt. Gerard Wrazien of the 109th Field Artillery Armory.

Wrazien identified the soldiers as Spec. Dave Miscavage, 20, White Haven; Spec. Ryan Craig, 20, Swiftwater; and SSG. Patrick O'Boyle, 41, Mountain Top

Miscavage, of Service Battery, Kingston, sustained the most severe injuries, according to Wrazien

During the incident, Miscavage was struck in the face with shrapnel, which injured his left eye and broke his jaw, Wrazien said.

He was initially treated at the 31st Combat Support Hospital in Baghdad, where surgery was performed on his eye. The soldier was then transferred to a military hospital in Germany to receive a second surgery on his eye, said 1st Sgt. Thomas Tinner of Service Battery.

"He's still under medical care, and I believe he's going to be moved to Walter Reed," said Wrazien, referring to the Army hospital in Washington, D.C.

Sgt. Tinner said he believed Miscavage's return to the United States would occur within a few days.

Wrazien said Miscavage's exact medical status was unknown Wednesday, only adding that in civilian terms, it probably wouldn't be considered critical condition.

He said military officials have spoken with him and "he's in good spirits." His military future is uncertain, however.

Wrazien said Craig of Headquarters Battery, Kingston, and O'Boyle of Bravo Battery, Nanticoke, were treated and released after the incident.

Craig took some shrapnel and sustained ruptured eardrums. O'Boyle also took shrapnel to his face and received three stitches.

Local military officials said they would know more about the incident and the injuries when a report is released.

Wrazien said initial speculation is that the IED was planted on the roadway.

He didn't give an exact location of where the explosion occurred, only confirming the soldiers were en route to Baghdad.

10/17/2004

Nanticoke Area Notes

By: Pam Urbanski

It's the queen and her court

The votes have been tallied and the [Greater Nanticoke Area Senior High School](#) students have elected a new Miss GNA and her court. The young ladies, chosen by their peers, are well-rounded individuals who excel in and out of the classroom. They were the center of attention at the annual homecoming celebration.

Mr. Thomas Kubasek, GNA Senior High principal, welcomed family and friends to this year's festivities. "We are especially proud to have this beautiful stadium to share with you," he said.

Miss GNA and her court, dressed in beautiful gowns, arrived in classy automobiles donated and driven by members of the community.

Kara Levandoski, is this year's homecoming queen. She is the daughter of Philip and Janice Levandoski. In talking with Kara, you can sense she is a talented senior with a great spirit. "I was very excited when I was chosen as Miss GNA," Kara offered. "I feel very honored to represent my class."

Kara has been vice president of her class since the ninth grade. She is president of the National Honor Society, corresponding secretary of the Student Council, photojournalist for the Nanticoke Tribune, and a member of the Science Olympiad, the yearbook staff, the Youth Salute Program, and is the National Society of High School Scholars. She is a member of the volleyball and soccer teams. Kara plans on attending college to pursue a degree in the medical field.

In a few weeks, she will be in the running for Miss UNICO. Judges will interview her and ask her questions about school and her involvement with community. Thanksgiving weekend she will attend the Miss UNICO pageant where Miss UNICO will be crowned.

Good luck, Kara!

Kara's court includes the following:

Kimberly Higgins, daughter of Mike and Patrice Higgins. She is a member of the National Honor Society, Student Council and Who's Who Among High School Students. She plans on attending Penn State University to pursue a career in the medical field.

Lauren Kuryloski is the daughter of Robert Kuryloski and Linda Wheeler. She is a member of the National Honor Society, editor of the Trojan Tribune, vice president of the French Club, and a member of the Science Olympiad, Who's Who Among High School Students and the track and field team. She also plans to attend college to pursue a career in medicine.

Lindsey Ludorf, daughter of David and Cathy Ludorf, is a member of Student Council, Who's Who Among American School Students and a 2003 winner of the USA National History and Government Award. She plays softball and was a member of 2002 State Championship girls' softball team and the track team.

Courtney Pientka is the daughter of Chet and Pam Pientka. She is a member of Student Council and was selected to Who's Who Among High School Students, was chosen for the Youth Salute, and Academically talented. She is co-captain of the volleyball and basketball teams, and a member of the soccer team. She plans to attend college and major in biology or engineering.

Following the ceremonies, Kubasek thanked senior class advisors, Connie Larson and Alan Yendrzejewski for helping to coordinate the evening's events. A special thank you was given to the U.S. Marine Corps for escorting the young ladies and their parents. Lee Wysocki from Broadway Jewelers provided the crowns for Miss GNA and her court.

Congratulations to these talented and gifted seniors. You represent your school and our community well. And hats off to their parents for raising such fine individuals!

Tribe keeps customers happy

By RENITA FENNICK-rfennick@leader.net

There are a lot of things Linda Prushinski likes about Mohegan Sun, a 240-acre gambling resort near Uncasville, Conn.

The interesting American Indian decor, the unique shops and boutiques, the variety of restaurants -they're all reasons the Nanticoke woman is preparing for her 13th trip to the New England gambling destination. But, if she had to pinpoint one thing it would be the casino's employees.

"It's the atmosphere of the people," Prushinski said. "The people that work there are really nice, very friendly and knowledgeable about American Indians. That's the big reason we love to go there."

On Sunday morning, Prushinski and 159 other area people will board three buses bound for a two-day trip to Mohegan Sun.

"When we read they were interested in Pocono Downs, we were excited," she said. "I'm hoping they remodel it so that it has the Indian motif like they have at the casino in Connecticut."

The American Indian influence in the design, architecture and decor of the 3-million-square-foot facility is no gimmick: The casino is owned and operated by the Mohegan tribe of Connecticut. It opened the gaming facility in 1996 on the tribe's 450-acre reservation near the Thames River. The tribe, which has about 1,000 members, including 600 in Connecticut, received federal recognition in 1994.

Mohegan Sun is a 15-minute ride from Foxwoods Resort Casino, the world's largest single casino, which is operated by the Mashantucket Pequot tribe.

In the eight years since opening, the Mohegan tribe facility has grown to the point where it holds an even market share of the state's casino dollars, according to Brian Lyman, a Norwich (Conn.) Bulletin reporter.

In September, the Mohegan Sun posted a win of \$71.1 million on a handle of \$873 million in slots revenue, Lyman said. The win is the money the casino pulls out of the machine and the handle represents all of the money that goes into the machine.

Lyman said the Mohegan tribe has been looking to diversify its holdings so it's not surprising it has agreed to buy the Plains Township racetrack. The Mohegans have been investing in other tribal gaming enterprises including the Menominee Indian Nation in Wisconsin and the Cowlitz Nation in Washington state.

The Mohegan facility in Connecticut includes a Casino of the Earth, Casino of the Sky, Shops at Mohegan Sun, a 10,000-seat arena for sports and

entertainment, a 300-seat cabaret, meeting and convention space and a 1,200-room luxury hotel. Other amenities are a spa, fitness center and seven-story waterfall. The 300,000-square-foot gaming area offers more than 6,000 slot machines, table games and keno.

"There's a lot to do there and with the complete mall inside the casino, a lot of shopping can be done," Prushinski said. "When we go there, we play slots or we go out for dinner."

Prushinski said she learns a lot about American Indian culture when she visits Mohegan Sun.

"If you ask a question, you're going to get an answer, sometimes more than you want," she said.

The Mohegans, which means Wolf People, is the ancient wolf clan of the Lenni Lenape Indians. Originally a part of the Pequot, the Mohegans lived in the upper Hudson River Valley in New York near Lake Champlain. When the Europeans arrived, the Mohegans relocated in Quinnehtucket, or Connecticut.

10/10/2004

Nanticoke library gets windfall

By Robert Kalinowski , The Sunday Voice 10/10/2004

Bruce Conrad, a co-founder of Cornerstone Technologies, recently donated all of his stock in the company to the Mill Memorial Library, Nanticoke. Conrad, who several years ago parted with the company operated by relatives of Congressman Paul Kanjorski, said he was just looking for "finality" with his approximately \$150,000 worth of shares in Cornerstone.

He also wanted to do a good deed for the library, which like most libraries, is currently going through some tough times. It's a library he's especially fond of because it helped him in the past, he said.

When Conrad was the director of planning and development in Carbon County, a post he held for 16 years, the Dimmic Library in Jim Thorpe was destroyed by fire.

In addition to raising funds to rebuild and repair, he and the library reached out to other regional libraries for donations of spare copies of books to restore its stock.

"I remember boxes and boxes coming in from the Mill Memorial Library," said Conrad, recalling the kind gesture.

Conrad said he was grappling with what to do with his stock in Cornerstone for some time when he saw a newspaper article about the library having financial problems.

After having a discussion with his wife, the 53-year-old decided to donate all his stock to the library, which his son frequently uses as a student at Luzerne County Community College.

Recently, Conrad met with library officials to complete the transfer, setting the stage for the library to obtain a large sum of money it would use for operational expenses.

"I challenge them (Cornerstone) to match my gift," Conrad said.

That statement, Conrad said, was not with any ill will toward his former partners. He said he would just like to encourage them to offer the library as much as they tried to give him for the stock.

"They (Cornerstone) have been struggling for ways to buy out my stock," Conrad explained.

He said the current Cornerstone owners previously offered to give him \$150,000 for the stock.

However, he wanted an upfront, one-time sale and they wanted to pay him in yearly installments, he said.

Conrad said he didn't want to deal with the tax consequences with the installment plan, especially as he is dealing with a serious health problem.

So, he decided to sign over all the stock to the library, which won't have to pay taxes on it because they are a not-for-profit entity.

"It's finality for me in terms of that stock and how to get rid of it," Conrad concluded.

Bob Bray, vice president of the board of the directors of the Mill Memorial Library, said the library board would soon meet to determine how to proceed.

"There is still a lot of work that has to be done," said Bray.

Bray said the library board would perform "due diligence" in evaluating how much the stock is worth and how it could be obtained.

If the stock is worth as much as Conrad said, the money would go a long way at the library that recently had to revert to its trust fund in the face of government library budget cuts, he said.

Bray said the board would look to have a meeting with representatives at Cornerstone in the near future.

Peter Kanjorski, CEO of Cornerstone and a nephew of Congressman Kanjorski, when contacted this week, said it was the first he heard of the transaction.

He, therefore, said he was unable to comment about the stock.

Kanjorski said he would look into the transaction and respond at a later date after he obtained additional information.

Nanticoke mayor supports new parkade

Dominick Ortolani wants to raze downtown buildings for the project.

By KEVIN OWEN KEARNEY-kkearney@leader.net

Developer Dominick Ortolani has the backing of the city's top official in his quest to develop a downtown parking garage project.

Ortolani approached Mayor John Toole and city council at Wednesday night's meeting, saying he hoped they were in favor of the project. Ortolani is working with the Nanticoke General Municipal Authority on the project, which will be accompanied by the development of 20,000 square feet of retail space.

Toole said he feels the project is worthwhile. No council members voiced opposition or posed questions to Ortolani.

Ortolani said after the meeting that some feasibility tests have been completed, and the next step to be addressed is the redevelopment authority taking over several buildings, some still in use, to make room for the proposed 260-space garage.

"It would really, really brighten up ... the city," he said, noting that of the five or six buildings, most are vacant and in disrepair. He stressed that the project is just in the infancy stage.

It could not be determined Wednesday night if the redevelopment authority would consider taking over the buildings.

Plans for the garage have been in development for six months. The estimated cost is estimated at \$6.5 million, Ortolani said, adding he hopes to receive state funding to help cover some of the costs.

The municipal authority has paired \$25,000 of its money with \$25,000 from investors to conduct feasibility studies and draft preliminary plans. State Reps. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, and Raphael Musto, D-Pittston, said they would assist in Ortolani's quest for funding, according to the developer. Ortolani added that he would look to obtain a private loan for the retail phase of the project, which would be a public-private partnership located in heart of downtown parking district.

Most of the parking spaces would serve HealthNow, a New York-based Medicare claim-processing company that rents space in the authority-owned Kanjorski Center. The company has about 200 employees.

Ortolani has done work in the city before, developing Lexington Village, a \$12 million elderly housing complex.

10/6/2004

Nanticoke could see parkade

Money has been allocated for feasibility studies and some preliminary plans.

By JON FOX-jfox@leader.net

Having a hard time parking that behemoth Buick downtown?

Take heart.

Working with the Nanticoke General Municipal Authority, developer Dominick Ortolani has drafted plans for a 250- to 300-space downtown parking garage with 20,000 square feet of retail space, said state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke.

Ortolani has worked on the plans for about six months, Yudichak said.

"It's in just the infancy of the project stages," he said. "There's a lot of work to be done yet, but people are working very hard."

Ortolani, who developed Lexington Village, a \$12 million elderly-housing complex in the city, could not be reached for comment.

The municipal authority has combined \$25,000 of its own money with \$25,000 from investors to conduct feasibility studies and draft preliminary plans, Yudichak said.

The project would be a public-private partnership located in the heart of the downtown, Yudichak said, adding that the additional parking would serve employees of HealthNow. HealthNow is a New York-based Medicare claim-processing company that rents space in the authority-owned Kanjorski Center and employs about 200.

Exactly how the project would be funded has yet to be determined, Yudichak said. "Money has to be secured, and private investment has to be secured."

Mayor John Toole said he would like to see a usage study done.

"In talking to some of the people from HealthNow, they say they don't need the parking," Toole

9/30/2004

Nanticoke Police over the limit on overtime

By: John N. Hemsley-CV correspondent

The City of Nanticoke's Police department is runnin into trouble with overtime issues.

Councilman Bill Brown announced at a work session on Wednesday that the city's police department has almost doubled its budgeted overtime this year, and the city might struggle paying the force its wages.

"The city's running low on general fund money," said Brown.

The department is allotted \$20,000 this year in overtime funding. They have used \$39,633 as of the end of September.

One possible solution to the problem is hiring part-time police officers to take the load off of the force, but there is an agreement between the city and the police department stating that they can dispute that.

"They feel that (part-timers) create lawsuits," said Brown.

"Legally, you can't go out and hire part-timers," said Mayor John Toole. "We'll lose in arbitration. The only thing to do is to negotiate with them."

Brown said that most of the overtime is occurring because it is being previously approved.

"Eighty percent of it is scheduled overtime," said Brown. "We don't have the money coming in."

Toole said that the city has its hands tied behind its back because of circumstances that caused the police department to be shorthanded.

"We had a policeman out with heart and lung injuries, and there is another officer using up all of his sick and personal days," said Toole.

Toole went on to say that their wages will likely be paid by transferring money into the general fund.

The board is not asking the mayor to perform miracles, but to investigate this issue further.

"We're just asking you to look into it," said Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski to Toole.

9/29/2004

Flood: Everyone pulled together

NanticokeArea Notes

from Sunday 9/26/2004 Times Leader

PAMELA URBANSKI

The heavy rains from tropical Hurricane Ivan, moved through our area last weekend, causing flooding for area residents which, in turn, required extra manpower from city departments.

Mayor John Toole and members of Nanticoke City Council met early Saturday morning (Sept. 18) and authorized the Nanticoke City police, fire and street department to call out extra manpower to help

with the flooding that occurred from the Nanticoke Creek and the Susquehanna River in the area of West Union Street.

Police Chief James Cheshinski had his work cut out for him. Officers Kevin Grevera, Lee Makowski and Michael Roke were assigned to monitor water levels at various locations. They also handled police calls with the remaining officers in the department.

When our neighbors from Plymouth Township needed assistance, Cheshinski assigned Officers Bryan Kata and Brian Williams to the township.

"These officers went door-to-door to help notify residents that they were advised to evacuate their homes."

"The administrative assistant was called in to handle phone calls coming into the municipal building. The fire department handled numerous calls," Chief Cheshinski explained.

"Fire department personnel were kept busy conducting 30 pumping operations," Fire Chief Michael Bohan added.

The areas receiving the most attention were Union Street, the Hanover Section of Nanticoke, Ridge, Church and West and East Main Streets. The fire department also assisted the staff at the Mill Memorial Library.

Firefighters answered calls of downed power lines and trees due to strong winds and rising water. When the Nanticoke/West Nanticoke bridge was shut down until the river level subsided, the department maintained two traffic control points - Lower Broadway at Weis Plaza and Walnut and Arch Streets.

The San Souci Parkway was closed and fire personnel were asked to re-route traffic onto Kosciuszko Street to Middle Road. The Nanticoke City Street Department also assisted with traffic control until the Luzerne County Road and Bridge Department reopened the roads.

City firefighters assisted the West Nanticoke Fire Department in pumping basements on Monday after floodwaters subsided.

Chief Cheshinski knows it was the cooperation from all city departments that made this difficult time a little easier for area residents. "It was nice to see all the departments working together," he said.

9/23/2004



Breakfast at the White House

Doris Merrill and son Paul Merrill of Kingston recently ate breakfast at the White House with first lady, Laura Bush and President George Bush while visiting the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C.

From left: Paul Merrill, Laura Bush, President Bush and Doris Merrill.

9/23/2004

Closing the gap

By BONNIE ADAMS-badams@leader.net

PUTTING EMPHASIS ON READING

Low reading test scores among fifth-graders prompted [Greater Nanticoke Area](#) to seek a competitive grant to address the problem starting in kindergarten.

The School District is the first in Luzerne County to implement the five-year Reading First program, which focuses on coaching teachers so they can help children become better readers.

The \$174,963 annual grant GNA received is based on the district's low fifth-grade test scores and the number of low-income students in 2001-2002. GNA competed against other school districts with similar situations.

GNA reading coordinator Thad Wadas said 42 percent of fifth-graders at the former Lincoln Elementary and Kennedy Elementary and 47 percent at K.M. Smith scored "below basic" proficiency on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment tests that academic year. Those schools each had 43 percent low-income students.

PSSA test results are categorized as advanced, proficient, basic or below-basic proficiency.

With Reading First, GNA students will receive 90 minutes of uninterrupted reading instruction daily. Wadas said that length of time can be a

challenge with kindergarten students.

He said the goal is to take the reading strategies students learn and apply them in all subject areas. Every student in kindergarten through third grade will be tested starting this week to determine their reading skills.

New reading coach Carmela Michno has taught at Nanticoke for 32 years. She said teaching reading has changed for the better because of the research into children's varied needs.

Reading First provides scientific-based reading instruction in the early grades to help "eliminate the reading deficit," according to the state Department of Education.

Michno will help with the staff-development portion of Reading First. She is visiting classrooms and observing teachers' methods for helping students read. Michno said teachers are receptive to being coached.

"We give them our undivided attention," she said. "They all want to have success here."

Wadas said teachers have the answers to improve students' reading skills, but the program helps them to focus their priorities.

"How can we as a district improve what we're doing. It helps us look at ourselves in a constructive, not a critical sense," he said.

9/20/2004

Posted on Sun, Sep. 19, 2004

Valley's dikes cause worries downriver

Shickshinny, Plymouth Twp. worry waters blocked by the levees upriver will find them.

By LANE FILLER-lfiller@leader.net

If the Susquehanna crests according to plan, Shickshinny residents could see 5 to 10 feet of water running down Main Street on this morning. It's a problem the town has faced before, but the newly raised dikes in Wilkes-Barre have raised fears as well.

Down the river from Wilkes-Barre, beyond the levees, citizens, shop owners and emergency workers spent Saturday preparing for a disaster that could leave roadways looking like rivers and homeowners looking for help.

Saturday morning, Jim Bach undertook the monumental task of emptying his first-floor store, Edgar G. Scott Furniture, into a second-floor loft across Main Street. Next door, at Miss Ashley's Beach House Preschool and Daycare, every item on the lower level was taken upstairs.

Sofas and recliners, bureaus and carpets, televisions and air conditioners and beds and mats: Each needed to be moved, because Main Street was projected to be under water when the river crests.

Jay Smith, emergency coordinator for Shickshinny, said a voluntary evacuation of Susquehanna Avenue and Canal Street became mandatory at 4 p.m. Saturday.

"Main Street floods at 31 feet without the new dikes in Wilkes-Barre. With them, who knows," Smith said, adding that anyone seeking shelter would be welcomed and helped at Northwest Area High School, where community members and Red Cross volunteers were getting things ready. Smith said he did not believe the Shickshinny/Mocanaqua Bridge would have to be closed.

Plymouth Township is the first community downriver from where the dikes end, and people there were preparing for the worst. The fear is water that in the past would have flooded Wilkes-Barre will find its way to their town instead.

At 10 a.m. Plymouth Township officials and volunteers got together to come up with a plan. One hour later, a voluntary evacuation of low-lying areas began. Residents were bringing precious belongings to the town's Municipal Building, nestled on a hill, and cots were being procured.

"We already have water in basements," Board of Supervisors Chairwoman Gale Conrad said. "Most people here will have relatives or friends on higher ground to go to if they need to evacuate, but this building will be ready for those who need it."

Nanticoke doesn't face tremendous flooding problems, so Mayor John Toole was in Plymouth Township to lend support.

"We've got firemen and police officers that will be working overtime, and we're here to give you any help you need," Toole told Conrad.

Plymouth Township has no police officers of its own: Due to budget issues, the municipality was forced to dissolve its department in December. Toole attended a meeting of Luzerne County officials at the county's EMA building at 7 a.m. Saturday, and said officials claimed communities downriver wouldn't face additional problems because of the dikes.

"Let's see what they say after," Toole said. "There are also soft spots in that dike, parts that aren't totally finished, so we'll see what happens."

In Mocanaqua, Tina Remensnyder juggled phones at the Conyngham Township Municipal Building, coordinating volunteers offering help with residents needing it.

"The underpass will flood, and River Street will be under water by nightfall," Remensnyder said. "I could handle 36 feet, we've done that before. It's just if it goes higher, who knows what will happen?"

Remensnyder said evacuees were going to the municipal building and Polish Falcons Hall for shelter.

9/19/2004

Have some damage? Here's what to do

Utility companies are busy, while hardware stores are restocking shelves.

By DARRIN YOUKER-dyouker@leader.net

Ivan the Terrible make a mess of your home? Here's some advice to clean up and keep safe:

Electricity:

The Department of Environmental Protection reminds homeowners to turn off all gas and electricity when returning to flooded homes. Never stand in water when touching appliances or main switches.

Any problems with electrical service to a home should be handled by utility workers.

Gas:

Anyone with questions about appliances or meters that might have come into contact with water should call PG Energy, which services about 157,000 customers in Northeastern and Central Pennsylvania, said company spokeswoman Donna Gillis.

The utility has about 50 PG Energy workers in Hanover Township and Wilkes-Barre to handle calls.

Food:

Any food that has come in contact with floodwaters should be thrown away, said Mark Carmon, DEP spokesman. Canned food can be salvaged as long as it is sterilized and not punctured, but better to play it safe and throw it out.

Any partially defrosted frozen food should be used immediately or thrown away. Throw out food left in a refrigerator that has been without power for more than four hours.

All cooking utensils and dishes should be cleaned. Drinking water should be brought to a rolling boil if there is suspicion of contamination.

Cleaning:

Toss out water-logged rugs and mattresses because contaminated material will likely stay in them. Anything that comes in contact with floodwater should be cleaned and disinfected. Floodwater picks up sewage and contamination as it travels.

Furniture can be aired out, though fabric may be ruined.

Papers and photographs can be salvaged if dried within 48 hours.

Major appliances can be cleaned and tested by electricians.

Several cleaning companies in the Wilkes-Barre area offer 24-hour service for homes with water damage. They are listed in the phone book under Fire and Water Damage Restoration.

Steve Smith, a manager for ServiceMaster, said his crews had responded to 74 calls since 2 a.m. Saturday.

Supplies: Local hardware and home improvement stores report a shortage of pumps and wet-dry vacuums

Scott Quick, assistant manager of the Home Depot in Wilkes-Barre, said the store ran out of pumps 30 minutes after the doors opened at 6 a.m. Saturday. The store hoped to restock by day's end, he said. Shoppers also were buying up patch materials to plug leaks in roofs and basement walls, Quick said.

Lawrence Hager, manager of Main Hardware in Wilkes-Barre, said homeowners from battered South Wilkes-Barre were coming in to buy anything that would sop up water.

"It's crazy here," Hager said.

Pumps have sold out twice, he said. Mops and squeegees were also in short supply, he said.

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS:

PG Energy: 829-3461 or 800-432-8017

Luzerne County Rumor Line: 800-821-3716.

Luzerne County Emergency Management Agency: 820-4400

PPL Utilities: 800-342-5775

UGI Utilities Inc: 819-4844

Pennsylvania American Water Co.: 800-565-7292

Red Cross: 823-7161

Department of Environmental Protection: 826-2511

9/16/2004

Kennedy won't campaign for Kerry in our area after all The death of Mary Jo Kopechne comes up as a possible reason.

By BRETT MARCY-bmarcy@leader.net

First, Ted was coming. Now, he's not.

U.S. Sen. Edward Kennedy will stump for presidential candidate John Kerry in Harrisburg and perhaps Pittsburgh tomorrow, but he won't swing through Northeastern Pennsylvania.

A hinted stop in Nanticoke by the liberal Massachusetts Democrat is off the itinerary, according to Kennedy's spokesman.

On Wednesday, local officials heard Kennedy would be in the area to campaign for Kerry, the other Massachusetts senator. By midday, the visit had fizzled.

"Senator Kennedy will not be in Northeastern Pennsylvania on Friday," said Kerry campaign spokesman Mark Nevins, confirming a local visit had been discussed, but not finalized.

Carole Lewis, director of the Luzerne County Area Agency on Aging, said she received a phone call Wednesday morning from someone asking permission for Kennedy to visit the Nanticoke Senior Center to discuss senior health care issues.

"We were just asked if he could come and speak about it, because he is a sitting official and health care is something our seniors really care about," Lewis said. "But it wasn't long after that when someone called back and said that it had been canceled."

Also, one source close to the Kerry campaign said the Kennedy visit to Nanticoke was a "done deal" as of Tuesday night.

The source, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the event was canceled by early Wednesday, soon after news reports of the visit surfaced.

Although no reason has been given for the cancellation, it's possible that Kennedy's ties to the area still haunt him.

Kennedy became forever entwined with the Wyoming Valley on July 18, 1969, when the car he was driving plunged off Dike Bridge into a pond on

Chappaquiddick Island, Mass. His passenger, 28-year-old Mary Jo Kopechne, a Forty Fort native and Democratic campaign worker, drowned. Those memories stick with area residents, said one source.

"I think people who were Kerry supporters told the campaign that they were crazy to bring Kennedy here. If he comes, it's going to be a negative, black mark for Kerry."

Kerry's sister, Peggy Kerry, will visit Hanover Township on Sunday as an attendee of Luzerne County District Attorney David Lupas' annual Fall Gathering at the Catholic War Veterans Grove.

9/15/2004

Resignations disable Nanticoke municipal authority Board that was negotiating a lease with company that employs 200 lacks a quorum.

By JON FOX-jfox@leader.net

Three board members of the Nanticoke General Municipal Authority and the authority solicitor unexpectedly tendered their resignations Monday at the end of what was otherwise a routine authority meeting.

The authority is in the midst of renegotiating an expired lease with HealthNow, a New York-based Medicare claim-processing company that rents space in the authority-owned Kanjorski Center and employs about 200.

But the resignations, leaving the authority without a sufficient number of members to conduct business, will not jeopardize HealthNow's presence in downtown Nanticoke, said Mayor John Toole.

Toole, who met with a representative of HealthNow Tuesday afternoon, said "they have no intention of moving."

Those who resigned, Jim Zoller, Susan Saunders, board Chairman Mike Jezewski, and Solicitor Garry Taroli said little about their motivations or failed to return calls, but an official close to the authority said negotiations with HealthNow had levied an intense amount of pressure on the five-member body of appointed officials.

"Whatever happened last night is a matter of public record, and I don't have anything to add to it," said Saunders, a seven-month member of the board.

"The municipal authority has a long history and it's not something that can be summarized quickly. A lot of it was going on for some time."

Saunders made her decision individually, she said, and was surprised by the resignations of her fellow board members Monday.

U.S. Rep Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, said discussions between the authority and the company had deteriorated. "There appeared to be little or no communication between the authority and HealthNow."

Toole and Kanjorski described the development as an opportunity to move negotiations forward.

"Today I feel optimistic about it and think this is probably the best thing that could have happened," Toole said.

Toole, who was at the meeting Monday, said he was surprised by the spate of resignations but said Jezewski had seemed "burned out."

Joe Lach, of the Greater Nanticoke Chamber of Commerce, was disheartened by the departure of the majority of the board.

"I don't know what this means for HealthNow and its position in the city," he said. "I'm concerned that we haven't been able to get over what hurdles existed in making that relationship (between the city and the company) more comfortable and quasi permanent."

Members of the authority board are appointed by Nanticoke City Council. The next council meeting is scheduled for Sept. 29, and Toole said a special meeting will be called if needed to appoint members before the end of the month.

9/12/2004

A faith-building experience in Nanticoke

The sounds of hammers and circular saws filled the air on Ridge Street in Nanticoke on Saturday.

Dozens of volunteers, motivated by faith, pounded nails and poured concrete all day to erect a house for the Wyoming Valley Habitat for Humanity

In honor of national Building on Faith week, three shifts of volunteers put in a few extra hours on Saturday at the Ridge Street site. The project, which began in May, will transform a vacant lot into a home for Jamie Dean, his wife Amanda, and their children, Hailey, 9, and Paige, 3.

Coordinator Morag Michael said the 1,200 square foot ranch house should be completed by next spring depending on the weather.

"The Building on Faith week is a way to build partnerships with faith congregations and invite them to join with us," she said, adding United Methodist churches in Newport Township, Nanticoke, Trucksville and Centermoreland along with College Misericordia are all lending a helping hand.

The project is sponsored by the United Methodist Churches of the Wyoming Valley, which is funding the \$45,000 cost of the house through donations.

Richard Spering, pastor of the First United Methodist Church of Nanticoke and Newport, said the project gives all people, regardless of race or nationality, an opportunity to join together for a good cause.

As he took a break from shoveling gravel, Jamie Dean watched the activity and said he and his wife thought it would be years before they could ever purchase a home.

One of the requirements of Habitat for Humanity is the new homeowner has to contribute "sweat equity" to the tune of 300 hours, plus 100 additional hours for each adult in the family.

"I really feel sense of ownership knowing I helped to build my house," he said. "When they put up the inside walls and the house began to take shape, it really hit that we're going to have a home."

Although the money for the home is being raised through donations, Dean will pay it back through a monthly mortgage. Michael added another requirement for prospective homeowners is they have to live in sub-standard housing and don't have the means to move out.

While work on Dean's house is progressing, Michael said the churches are still seeking donations. Of the \$45,000 goal, she said \$25,000 has already

been raised.

To make a donation or to volunteer, call the Wyoming Valley Habitat for Humanity at 820-8002.

9/8/2004

Air would be cool, but some pens will do

Nanticoke library needs help with most of the basics

EDITOR'S NOTE: Mill Memorial Library is one of five organizations featured this week in a Times Leader series devoted to community service. The series encourages readers to do good works - such as donating time or material goods - as a tribute to the people killed during the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

By MARK E. JONES-mjones@leader.net

An air conditioner conked out at Mill Memorial Library earlier this year, making a sticky situation even worse.

And not just for patrons in search of summer reads.

Mill Memorial's decision makers are coping with a cash crunch, due mostly to the state government's cutbacks in library funding and a stubborn stock market. It certainly doesn't help matters when the AC goes kaput (replacement cost estimated at \$7,000 to \$9,500) and a copy machine teeters on the brink (\$900).

Library director Melissa Szafran Jones increasingly finds herself evaluating gadgets and materials, asking, "Is it something we can do without for a while?" Likewise, the library's board of directors tries to curb expenses while not leaving patrons stuck in a bind.

"Our board is very conservative," said treasurer Barbara Lach. "We treat every issue as if it were our own home; we don't make rash decisions about making big repairs."

For the time being, fans supplied by the library's friends group provide cool relief. And this weekend the library will resume its Saturday hours, which had been dropped for the summer. So, by all outward appearances, the place is operating as usual, catering to the information whims of patrons ranging from toddlers to octogenarians.

Mill Memorial makes fact and fiction available mostly to Nanticoke and Newport Township residents. Its self-defined "service area" encompasses a region with 23,000 people, Jones said.

Gerald Brown, 37, who lives about two miles from the library, said he has stopped here "just about every single day for the past two years." He's been hunting for a job in the credit collections business, using the library's Internet access. He also thumbs through "Forbes" and "Fortune," watching for "companies on the rise," he said.

Michael Waugh, 6, visits the library for children's storytimes, much as his three older siblings did, said mother Elaine Waugh. Recently, Michael and 14 other youngsters listened to excerpts from "Summertime in the Big Woods" and "Toasting Marshmallows," including a poem that proposed: "The best paths lead you to where you didn't know you wanted to go."

Long, winding road

Mill Memorial got its start in the World War II era, thanks to the generosity of Nanticoke resident Samantha J. Mill.

Upon her death in 1937, she bequeathed her home and property on Main Street for what became a public park and library. Of course, back then, there wasn't a building to house the books, so town officials opted to temporarily put the collection in the former Ebenezer Presbyterian Church. In September 1958, the city officially dedicated the present-day library - a stone-and-glass structure built for about \$200,000. "It's one of the high points of the community," board member Lach said. "Without Samantha Mill, what would we have had?"

Among other services, the 46-year-old Mill Memorial lets patrons peruse all sorts of periodicals ("Astronomy" to "Rolling Stone") and leaves area school students with few excuses for avoiding homework; it keeps copies of every textbook on hand.

But Mill Memorial could do more, with some support.

When asked to supply a library wish list, director Jones concentrated on the kinds of items that most families can afford. Copy paper, pens and pencils. Children's craft supplies (paste, crayons and construction paper). And age-appropriate DVDs and videotapes (PG-13 and below).

Garden items such as plants and benches also would be helpful for a pending project in the courtyard, she said. Of course, in the best-case scenario, bigger donors would chip in for those costly items: an air-conditioning unit and a copier.

Regardless of whether readers decide to contribute, count on the library to continue its mission of supporting lifelong learning. Today's toddlers, Jones said, might grow up to be avid readers, distinguished professionals, maybe even library benefactors.

"My mom took me to storytime when I was 3," she said. "And look where I am now."

The Mill Memorial Library's Friends group will have its next meeting at 6:30 p.m. Sept. 14 at the library, 495 E. Main St., Nanticoke. New members are urged to attend. A yearly membership costs \$6.

The group will soon schedule its Christmas festival, an annual fund-raising event held in November. Watch for details.

Kindly contribute only new or top-condition items. The library is open 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Monday-Thursday and 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

Phone: 735-3030. Visit the Mill Memorial website at www.gnasd.com/millmemorial.htm

9/7/2004

Guitar is octogenarian's fountain of youth

By BONNIE ADAMS-badams@leader.net

His 88-year-old fingers nimbly work the strings of his guitar.

Carl Kemrite wears a cowboy hat and sits on a bench outside the assisted-living facility where he lives. He strums and sings - "Someday you'll want

me to want you."

Inside his neat room, two photos of country singer Alan Jackson in guitar-shaped frames hang on the wall above his bed. Kemrite's guitar rests on a stand beside it.

"I have had a musical life," he said. He got his start taking violin lessons as a teen before he bought a cheap guitar. Since then, he's been all country. Kemrite and other musicians played every weekend for farmer dances, now more commonly called square dances. They performed at a pavilion at the former Sans Souci Park, at a grove in Hunlock Creek and at Lake Silkworth.

"We were pretty well known," said Kemrite. He later played with the Country Playboys band in area bars and parks.

"Anything to make a few bucks," he said. Music was a passion rather than a full-time job for him.

A guitar has accompanied him everywhere, including his travels in the Navy during World War II. He performed on his own weekly 15-minute radio show at a Norfolk, Va., radio station.

He played guitar on an aircraft carrier, an ammunition ship and a small submarine chaser on which he served. Kemrite was a Navy radioman deciphering what he calls the "dits and dots" of Morse Code.

His love for playing the guitar has remained steady and he is thankful for hands that are arthritis free. He removes the hearing aid in his left ear before he plays "You Can't Break My Heart," a tune he wrote.

"It's been broken before, broken by someone like you," he sings.

The Nanticoke native grew up on Ridge Street in a family of 10 boys, of which he is the only one living. He has settled into the Smith Health Care home where he has lived since February. Kemrite walks in the rural area and has nurtured two tomato plants outside his window.

He plays his guitar for fellow residents, but the man who has provided music for so many, admits he has no talent for dancing. He used to perform at senior centers and nursing homes and is still willing to do that, but he needs a ride.

"I like performing, entertaining old people."

9/2/2004

Youth group asks Nanticoke council for help

By JON FOX-jfox@leader.net

About 15 members of the Youth Task Force, part of the Greater Nanticoke Area Drug Task Force, appealed to city council on Wednesday to help them find space for a recreational center.

The teenagers handed council a petition with roughly 600 names supporting their request. The group has space available in St. John's Lutheran Church, but it's open for only a few hours one day a week, said Don Williams, part of the drug task force.

"About a year ago, the citizens of Nanticoke stepped out of denial and realized we have a pretty serious drug problem," he said.

The youth program offers children an alternative to drugs, but the program needs space, Williams said.

Mayor John Toole suggested the former CVS building in downtown Nanticoke might be available on an interim basis and made plans to explore the option.

"I have nothing but praise for these young people," he said. "In seven years as mayor, this is the first group of young people I've seen come together."

In other business:

Residents of Pine Street in the Hanover section presented a petition to council asking to investigate the actions of a resident who they say films the neighborhood with hand-held cameras and has installed surveillance cameras on his home.

"We talked to the chief (of police), but he said his hands are tied and residents are tired of it," said Dan Drury.

Council approved the purchase of back hoe for sewer work at the cost of \$74,308.

Council approved the expenditure of \$2,500 to repair the all-wheel steering mechanism on the fire department's ladder truck.

9/1/2004

Municipalities wary of county collecting its own taxes

By James Conmy -Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

Some officials from six local communities are concerned a Luzerne County proposal to take back its property tax collection could make residents' lives more inconvenient.

Under the proposal, the county would collect its own property taxes from Hazleton, Nanticoke and Pittston cities, Kingston and Wilkes-Barre townships and the Municipality of Kingston. The proposal would save the county approximately \$148,000.

The six communities would then no longer collect the county's property taxes, which they currently do.

Commissioners held a meeting with representatives of the communities Monday morning to hear their concerns.

According to Public Information Officer Kathy Bozinski the officials' primary concern is the added level of responsibility placed on residents.

Instead of coming in person to pay or sending their tax bills to one place, under the proposal, they would have to pay in person or mail one tax bill to the county and another to their community.

Officials on hand were Chris Yankovich, Eddie O'Neill, Dave Jenkins, Carl Goodwin and Jeff Box, Kingston Township; Mayor John Toole, Nanticoke; Solicitor Harry Mattern, Administrator Paul Keating and Rosalie Pinkoski, Kingston Municipality and Manager Michael Revitt, Wilkes-Barre Township.

"They felt this can be a disconcerting change for the residents, who are primarily elderly," Bozinski said of the officials' concern.

Goodwin also asked if the decision to collect the six communities had anything to do with their political party make up. He said three of the

communities, Kingston Municipality, Kingston and Wilkes-Barre townships, are predominantly Republican.

Bozinski said commissioners assured Goodwin that was not the case.

As for the inconvenience issue, according to Deputy Treasurer Dominick DePolo, in the City of Wilkes-Barre, 98 percent of residents pay taxes by mail, there have been few problems and a minimal increase in traffic of people physically paying in person.

DePolo also said the treasurer's office can handle the increased collection by adding only two per-diem employees at a small expense.

Debra McNulty, tax collection administrator from treasurer's office, also explained how the billing cycle works and what the relationship would be between the communities and the county, under the proposal.

The issue only was discussed at a Monday morning meeting, it will not be voted on for at least a few weeks.

Bozinski said one of the commissioners biggest concerns is how the new system would impact the budget process of these particular municipalities.

Chairman Greg Skrepenak called the meeting positive and set a timetable for a decision to be made.

"For the most part they have issued their concerns, primarily the convenience issue, saying it is a sufficient system that has been in place for a long time and they are comfortable with it," Skrepenak said. "We need to reanalyze the situation, go through the numbers, look at every thing and make a decision some time in the near future."

Skrepenak admitted the decision needs to be made soon not only for the county's budgeting purposes, but for the six communities as well. The Municipality of Kingston begins its budget process in October and Skrepenak acknowledged a determination needs to be made by then.

8/29/04

Experience proves a good one in a Nanticoke neighborhood

By LANE FILLER-lfiller@leader.net

"I'd treat a dog better than those people," Mike Bernatovich remembers a resident stating when Step-By-Step proposed a community home for the mentally ill and disabled in the city.

Bernatovich, Step-By-Step's northeast regional director, was shocked at the venom - still is eight years later. He feels there's no cause for alarm. Yet residents have been alarmed, repeatedly, when homes for the mentally ill and disabled have been proposed in their neighborhoods, and have fought zoning variances that would permit the facilities.

And many residents opposed Step-By-Step when it proposed a community home at South Market and Washington streets to house 10-12 people.

But Step-By-Step prevailed, and recently interviewed neighbors don't have a single problem with the facility or its residents.

In what might be a bit of revisionist history, no one could recall opposing the home way back when, either.

"It's wonderful, and it's improved the neighborhood," said Joan Machinchick, who owns the neighboring property. "They're nice, they all speak to us, they never make any trouble, and the house and landscaping are immaculate."

"They love my dog," added daughter Ann Gensel.

Norman Duzinski sat on his porch smoking a cigarette, and glanced across the street at the neat home that houses Step-By-Step clients, several of whom were also sitting on their individual porches, taking in the sunny day from their white rocking chairs.

"I don't know, I guess they're a little slow or retarded, but they're no trouble at all, those people," Duzinski said. "They sit on the porch, smoke, take walks around the neighborhood, and there's always somebody over there trimming bushes or cutting grass. They're always real nice."

Often one argument against such homes in residential areas is the safety of the children who live there.

But Duzinski's blond granddaughter, Tiffany, 3, played away on the porch, and her grandparents have no special fears for her safety.

Ora Evans also lives across the street from the facility. Getting on in years, white-haired and not too fleet of foot, Evans might fit one profile of a resident who could fear living near the mentally disabled. But she has no such qualms.

"They're fine neighbors," Evans said. "I talk to them all the time, they go on trips and I ask them if they had fun. I have no complaints."

"It's an improvement and they're actually good neighbors," said John Butchko, owner of Butchko's Garage, which sits catty-corner to the home. "It was an empty lot, and now it's a real good-looking place."

What really makes the community home stand out, according to Machinchick, is the positives.

"There are problems with noise and normal troubles from other houses here, just not that one. It's really the quietest place in the neighborhood, and one of the best-maintained. It's probably raising property values."

8/26/04

Navy Veteran competes in Annual National Veteran Golden Age Games

Doris Merrill, a Navy veteran from Nanticoke competed in the 18th annual National Veteran Golden Age Games in Fresno, Calif.

Merrill was awarded gold medals in wheelchair bowling, 25-yard backstroke swim and the 50-yard freestyle swim. She is qualified for competition in the National Senior Games.

8/20/04

ARTIST OF THE WEEK

Sue Obaza

TIMES LEADER-CLARK VAN ORDEN

Obaza's art life got started in Cleveland, Ohio, where she and her four siblings were taken to museums and symphonies. Obaza, a Nanticoke resident, says her parents were a strong influence on her artistic start.

Despite taking art lessons in grade school and later in high school, Obaza gave up her artistic life for domestic bliss. As a student at Indiana University, she met her husband, David, a Nanticoke native. At the time, the two were studying dental technology. Eventually the study of teeth

lead to marriage and a family.

After their studies, Obazas moved to Western Pennsylvania where they ran a dental business. When David Obaza's father died, the family left Johnstown and moved to Nanticoke in the early 1980s.

"It was difficult being here," says Obaza, 45, a mother of three and a member of the Wyoming Valley Art League and the Colored Pencil Society of America. "The art career started as a prayer to find something."

Someone told her to pursue art. So she picked up some colored pencils and learned to find pleasure in the medium.

"It was cheap," she says. "It was easy."

Obaza moved on to take formal lessons with local artist Nina Davidowitz and was encouraged enough to study art at Luzerne County Community College in the early 1990s. She also studies with Nanticoke artist Tony Waichulis and was involved with art shows in New York.

A decade ago, though, she didn't have a lot of confidence in her artistic abilities. That has changed significantly, she says. Now one of her goals is to explore acrylic and mixed mediums and to continue to push her creativity and herself as an artist.

Ultimately, her art career, particularly doing portraits, "brings me a lot of pleasure. It really does," she says. "I sometimes take for granted how easy it comes. I think anytime you pursue something afraid of you grow somehow."

These days she and her husband run Nantego Dental Prosthetics of Pittston. Meanwhile, Obaza continues to do portraiture on a commission basis and she coordinates a weekly life-drawing class for the art league.

And perhaps as important, she says she realizes she's not alone. The area's art world is full of talented people. And Obaza says she's truly delighted to know many people in the local scene.

What inspires her: "I seem to be especially good at portraiture," she says. "I try to bring out what is unique to them. I wonder about them."

She says people have said her work has spiritual and emotional touches.

"I want to do more than just bring out the outward person. I want to bring out the inward person."

Advice to aspiring artists: "If it's something you love to do just get all the training you can," Obaza says. "Follow your heart. Follow your inspiration. Success might not be what you think, but it's worth pursuing."

If you want to start in art, Obaza recommends trying colored pencils first because supplies are inexpensive.

8/20/2004

Iraq mortar attack injures local soldier

Pvt. Eric Zagata of Bravo Battery loses part of a finger, his family says.

By KEVIN OWEN KEARNEY-kkearney@leader.net

A 22-year-old Wilkes-Barre newlywed serving in Iraq was injured in a mortar attack Thursday, his wife and father said.

Pvt. Eric Zagata of the 109th Field Artillery's Bravo Battery, based in Nanticoke, was struck in the lower back with a piece of shrapnel and had part of his left ring finger amputated, said his wife, Tara. The couple will celebrate their one-year anniversary in September.

Eric Zagata, who was part of a military convoy near Camp Anaconda when the attack occurred, suffered additional injuries to the left side of his body, said his wife, who spoke with the Department of Defense in Harrisburg on Thursday afternoon.

Military officials could not be reached for comment Thursday night.

Tara Zagata said she was stunned when informed of her husband's injuries. "It was the worst feeling I've ever had. I don't even know how to (explain it)."

She said she spoke with her husband after the attack, which he tried to downplay in an attempt to comfort her. He didn't say much, other than he'd be "coming home soon," Tara said.

Eric also spoke with his father, Leonard, of Hunlock Township.

"He's upset," Leonard Zagata said. "I could tell by his voice. He said he hopes to get home. I told him I hope so too."

He said Eric joined the military shortly after graduating from Northwest Area High School four years ago. The battery members have been in Iraq since the unit was activated late last year.

Tara Zagata said her husband is being treated at a hospital in Ballud, Iraq. He will eventually be transferred to Germany, and his wife will take a military plane there to see him.

Leonard Zagata said Eric had come under attack before. While assisting police in Sadr a few months ago, he barely came out unscathed in a mortar assault, his father said.

"It was a close call," the elder Zagata said.

8/15/2004

A true inspiration

By Debby Higgins , The Sunday Voice

Don't tell Doris Merrill she's a champion. She'll only respond by complimenting others for their support.

The retired [Greater Nanticoke Area](#) schoolteacher refuses to take credit for winning numerous gold and silver medals in competitions held throughout the United States.

There is no contest that Merrill most certainly is a champion, despite the fact that she suffers from multiple sclerosis and other medical conditions that keep her in a wheelchair.

Over the past six years, Merrill has competed in wheel chair competitive events that even she never thought she could do.

The Nanticoke native's success recently got her invited to attend a breakfast with President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush, famous actors Jack Palance, Tom Hanks and Ernest Borgnine and a host of other notable Americans in Washington, D.C. for the unveiling of the World

War II memorial.

But, Merrill, a Navy veteran of World War II, humble as always, refuses to acknowledge she's a winner.

"We disagree. We think Doris is our personal winner who represents all veterans from our area. We know she's special," said Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center public affairs officer Vince Riccardo.

Merrill recently returned from her latest round of wheelchair games where she earned four more gold medals.

"I really can't tell you how many I've won. I just don't count them because the number isn't important. What is important is representing our veterans," Merrill said.

The seemingly boundless energy she exudes serves to spur others to help them realize their potential, explained VA Medical Center director Rowland Moore.

"Doris is an inspiration to all of us. Despite her physical challenges she continues to achieve great accomplishments. She is our champion from Wilkes-Barre," Moore said.

Merrill has competed throughout the United States and Puerto Rico in wheelchair games ranging from ramp bowling to 50-meter freestyle swimming to motorized slalom racing.

Traveling with her son Pepper, Merrill competes in games sponsored by the Eastern Paralyzed Veterans, Golden Age Games, the United Spinal Association of America and others.

"I've been competing for about six years and I can't begin to tell you how much I enjoy it. I wish more handicapped veterans from our area would join us in the competitions," she said.

Donations sponsored through the VA Medical Center help Merrill finance her traveling expenses for the competitions, explained Kim Hoge, VA Medical Center chief of volunteer services.

"We have an excellent sponsorship program and very generous donors who help Doris pay her expenses so she can compete," Hoge said.

Hoge said Merrill is the only veteran from our local VA medical center to compete in these kinds of wheelchair games.

"I wish we had more people to represent our area," Hoge said.

She also volunteers her time at the medical center to help brighten the day for hospitalized veterans. Dedicated fellow volunteer Nino Sartini said Merrill is an asset the medical center can't do without.

"Doris is our shining star. She's our own personal winner who gives all handicapped veterans hope," Sartini said.

"Everyone in the VA inspires me to go out there and compete. I didn't believe I could do it, but I found out I could. Winning gold medals isn't important. Showing others they can accomplish great things is," Merrill said.

Merrill also is a volunteer with Pennsylvania Association of Retired Teachers, where she also served as past president.

"Doris is a big asset for our veterans in our nursing home and throughout the entire hospital. We would hope others would follow her lead," Riccardo said.

Merrill will represent our area's veterans in 2005 in Pittsburgh when she competes in the United Spinal Association Games.

"My life has been surreal. Just incredible. I'm having a wonderful time," she said.

Merrill said she would encourage anyone who would like to help her keep up the spirits of our veterans at the VA Medical Center to please call 821-7237 to find out more.

"Doris is an inspiration to all our veterans and to our volunteer service," Hoge said.

8/13/2004

GNA might need kindergarten help

By KRISTIN KILE-Times Leader Correspondent

Superintendent Tony Perrone at Thursday's school board meeting said enrollment is "sky high" in the [Greater Nanticoke Area School District](#), especially in kindergarten.

Because of the increased enrollment, another kindergarten teacher might have to be hired, he said.

There are five kindergarten classes at the K.M. Smith Elementary school, filled with 29 students each. Officials do not know exactly how many students there will be because of students moving in and out of the district.

Perrone said he would like to see no more than 25 children in a class. "During the first two weeks we'll check enrollment and if it stays as it is, we'll have to hire another teacher."

With the addition of another teacher, additional classroom space is needed. Officials are not worried because they say there is enough space to add another class.

8/12/2004

Victims of a tire-slashing spree earlier this week are getting help from a pair of local businesses.

Radio station WNAK and [Kost Tire & Muffler](#) are working together to provide free tires to the victims.

On Monday, the tires on 22 vehicles parked on East Main, Walnut, Church and East Noble streets were slashed, causing about \$2,000 worth of damage, said Nanticoke police Chief Jim Cheshinski and Detective Bill Shultz.

Margie McQuillin, general manager of the radio station, said it wanted to help the victims because of the high cost of tires, about \$80 for each one.

"To the average family, that can represent a significant cost just to get their vehicles back on the road."

Kost owner Erwin Kost said his business is "glad to help and make short order of this problem."

To get free tires, victims will need to give Kost a copy of the police report, proof of residency and vehicle ownership. Police usually charge for copies of reports, but are not doing so in this case.

WNAK may be reached at 735-0730, and Kost can be reached at 586-3078.

No one has been charged in the case and police urge anyone with any information to contact the Nanticoke City Police Department at 735-2200 or send us anonymous email at npddet@yahoo.com

8/11/2004

Nanticoke tire slashers leave owners flat

By JON FOX - jfoxrq~leadernet

It was a morning of vandalism and inconvenience.

"I work at Wegmans at 10 o'clock, and I had to change three tires before I went to work," Mark Baron said Tuesday.

On Monday morning, the Baron household's three vehicles each had a punctured tire - as if Mondays weren't bad enough already.

"It was an interesting morning," Baron said with deadpan delivery.

Residents living on a series of streets crisscrossing downtown Nanticoke woke to at least 20 vehicles leaning to the left or right on flat tires. Police estimate total damages at \$2,000.

The vandalism is not an isolated incident, said Detective William Shultz of the Nanticoke Police Department. "We've had incidents with BB guns and tire-slashings in the past."

Residents on Tuesday called in about two more punctured tires from Monday. Shultz said the police department has no leads. He suspects they're looking for "teenagers on a rampage."

If Rosemary Baron, Mark Baron's mother, was angry Monday morning, the emotion had ebbed into placid resignation by Tuesday afternoon. She sat on the steps of her home in the 400 block of South Walnut Street as her son pulled a flat tire from the trunk of his car.

"It's just money out of your pocket you don't have," she said.

The family's two dogs, kenneled at night, failed to issue a single bark Sunday night. "We said where were you when we needed you?" she said of the pair of dogs, seemingly more amused than annoyed.

Next door, Bernadine Pietrzyk had already gotten her tires replaced. She woke up to find two tires ruined.

"When you have one car, you have to do it immediately."

A South Walnut Street resident for 28 years, she said this is the first time she's experience vandalism of this nature.

"If they stole something, maybe they could use it, but what good is slashing a tire other than doing something rotten?"

Anyone with any information is asked to contact the Nanticoke City Police Department at 735-2200 or send us anonymous email at npddet@yahoo.com

8/8/2004

A partnership for the future

By Tim Gulla , The Sunday Voice

If the South Valley section of Luzerne County wants to grow, state Rep. John Yudichak doesn't think it can afford to wait for a "grand slam" project that would change the economy overnight.

"There have been those who have been looking for the home run," he said. "We have to hit some singles, some doubles and get people moving around the bases."

But the sister communities of Nanticoke City, Plymouth Township and Newport Township have never had the finances to field a team capable of doing this. With Yudichak's support, however, a group of local businessmen is at least trying to change the way the three communities manage the game.

Funded with a \$20,000 start-up grant acquired by Yudichak, the new South Valley Partnership is a not-for-profit corporation created to "generate strategies for sustainable regional growth."

The partnership was founded on a belief that the communities in the South Valley region have been unable to attract private and public funding for development due to a lack of strategic planning. Planning is even more important today, Yudichak said, given the way the state will be doling out economic development dollars to communities that have projects waiting to go.

Yet this isn't always easy for towns, by themselves, to do.

"Towns aren't going to spend \$100,000 on a comprehensive plan when there's \$200,000 of road work to do," Yudichak concedes.

Members of the South Valley Partnership say they're not stepping on any toes and not offering any criticism.

There's no shortage of well-intentioned people in the South Valley, said Attorney Joseph Lach, secretary of the new corporation. What was lacking, he said, was someone to help guide the communities in regional development.

And just as they're trying to tackle the future in a constructive way, none of the board members from the South Valley Partnership, who sat down with The Sunday Voice on Thursday, professed to know all the answers to the challenges of developing the South Valley. That's why their goal is to leverage private funding to hire the services of a consultant to help the three communities formulate plans for the future.

"We have no interest in ownership or in taking credit for anything that happens," Lach said. "Our goal is to help everyone else do what they want to do."

Randy Rushton, president of the South Valley Partnership and owner of Randy's Paints in Wilkes-Barre, said his involvement in the project is simple. Born and raised in Nanticoke and now living in Newport Township, Rushton said he wants to see the communities grow.

For the project to be a success, the group believes, the three communities and all of the stakeholders have to provide input. The end result of the work won't be mandates to the communities, they said, but agreed upon goals and common vision.

Elected officials from the three communities have already signed off on the idea and a stakeholders meeting is planned for Aug. 11, in which the

South Valley Partnership board hopes to get everyone involved.

Board members and Yudichak say regional planning is vital, especially in light of the planned construction of the South Valley Parkway, a four-lane highway that will branch off from Route 29 and open up thousands of acres of land, much of it in Newport Township, for development.

No longer just an idea, the parkway is in the final design stage and PennDOT plans to unveil those plans within the next few weeks, according to Dave Krisanda, a PennDOT spokesman. Construction is expected to start in 2006 or 2007 and PennDOT already has \$27 million budgeted in the first eight-years of the project.

Other economic development officials welcome the company the South Valley Partnership will provide.

"I strongly support what they're doing," said Steve Barrouk, president and CEO of the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry. The chamber plans to offer whatever support it can to the group.

"We need more people pulling in the same direction in this community and welcome their participation because I believe a good part of the future of the Wyoming Valley will be in a southerly direction," Barrouk said.

The South Valley Parkway should open up former coal land, now owned by Earth Conservancy, to development.

"They have a unique opportunity to really create a new community there," Barrouk said.

Nanticoke Mayor John Toole said he, too, supports the efforts of the South Valley Partnership.

"It's great to have somebody out there looking for private capital," he said.

Mayor Toole believes in a regional approach and conceded he would like to see a merger of the communities, although he doesn't know if that will ever happen.

"Newport has the land and they have the space to expand, where in Nanticoke, we're sort of landlocked," he said.

Yet Nanticoke, as the larger community in terms of population, might have a greater ability to land funding for projects.

Merger is not the idea behind the South Valley Partnership, however.

Board members in the South Valley Partnership know they have a long way to go. But they say they've already gotten further in the past six months than they ever imagined. Already, they said, other business people are approaching them with ideas and potential development projects.

"We realize the opportunities are there," Lach said.

The idle Dan Flood Industrial Park, for instance, could become a very marketable property if funding comes through to restore rail service in that area. A rail spur would put the entrance to the park only 300 yards from the main rail line from New York to Harrisburg.

Nowhere else along the route, the board members believe, is there a more accessible piece of property for development.

None of this is "pie in the sky," the board members say. But of course, they understand it's going to take funding to get some of these ideas off the ground.

"I'm committed to finding the funding one way or another," Rushton said. "That won't be the issue that stops this from happening."

8/8/2004

Nanticoke ready for fresh start

By Elizabeth Skrapits , The Sunday Voice

State officials have a message for Nanticoke City: get your finances fixed and then we'll talk funding.

One of the things Gov. Ed Rendell has said is that the state will not invest any more money in Nanticoke until the city "gets its financial house in order," according to State Rep. John Yudichak.

When Rendell recently announced funding for projects in Pittston, Wilkes-Barre, and Hazleton, some people wondered if Nanticoke was being ignored.

"In my six years in office, we secured over \$600,000 for projects in Nanticoke. That's substantial. Nanticoke is not being shortchanged," Yudichak said. "But the governor is right - you have to have your financial house in order, and you have to have a plan. I don't think that's unreasonable."

In 1999, Yudichak helped the city secure a \$100,000 community revitalization grant from the Department of Community and Economic Development for a new public works department garage.

City officials had until 2001 to execute the grant, and had the opportunity to amend it if they needed more time.

But city officials failed to do that, and lost the grant, Yudichak said, adding that his office tried to urge the city to expend the money in a timely fashion, but the city did not.

"It's the only grant to my knowledge in my legislative district that had to be turned back because the guidelines weren't followed," Yudichak said.

Nanticoke Mayor John Toole said the city could not have afforded the project anyway.

"What happened was there wasn't enough money to build a garage, and we didn't have the extra funding, or a place to put it," he said.

Yudichak said he does not want to dwell on the city's past mistakes, but instead wants to look to the future.

"We're going to get that roadmap to get our fiscal house in order," he said, noting that it is being drawn up thanks to an apolitical regional effort called the South Valley Partnership, made up of representatives from Nanticoke, Newport Township, and Plymouth Township.

Its first goal is to put together a comprehensive land use and community development plan.

Its specific mission is to plan for community development, so it's unique in that it has a very focused mission and it is trying to work with these three communities for sustainable growth," Yudichak said of the partnership.

Strategic plans are necessary, but they cost money, and many municipalities don't have the funds. Yudichak said his office has secured a \$20,000 state grant, and the partnership will raise the rest of the money itself.

Another way the city is getting its fiscal house in order is by having the state compile a report and make recommendations.

Yudichak said DCED's Governor's Center for Local Government Services has been brought in, at the request of Nanticoke officials, to get a handle on what the city's financial situation is.

City administrator Greg Gulick said the report is tentatively scheduled for release Aug. 17, and the state is still collecting information.

"I hope things aren't as bad as some people have suggested, but they have to be honest with the residents," Yudichak said. "They can't put their heads in the sand and say 'next year we'll deal with the deficit.'"

Toole realizes all too well Yudichak's warning that the city will have to make some tough decisions. He said the city has been "sort of cutting down every year, sort of downsizing, but trying not to affect any services."

The hardest thing for city officials to do is manage a budget, with costs going up - particularly for healthcare - and tax revenue staying stagnant.

Toole said when he first took office, the city had a spending deficit of over \$300,000.

The 2003 audit has not been done, but Toole said, "Last time I spoke to the accountant, he thought it would be about \$120,000 or \$130,000 - he said it would be a lot better this year."

Congressman Paul Kanjorski (D-11), said he is aware of some of the circumstances Nanticoke is facing, but said it is important to stop criticizing the city and instead offer assistance.

"There isn't any question that Nanticoke has to get its house in order, and they are going to do that," he said.

Yudichak and Kanjorski both admitted there were some internal issues to be dealt with, such as getting city officials to work together and stop infighting that can obstruct progress.

"I'm open to get together with city officials and municipal authority officials," Kanjorski said. "I don't want to say they've been at loggerheads, but they certainly have not been keeping each other informed, and keeping me informed."

Over a period of several years now, there have been federal grants exceeding \$3 or \$4 million, including Housing and Urban Development and Department of Transportation grants, that are still waiting for Nanticoke to decide how to use, Kanjorski said.

He added he thinks Rendell is "pleasantly disposed" to assist funding in Nanticoke.

There have already been some major projects using both government and private funds underway in the city, Yudichak and Kanjorski pointed out, and both emphasized their willingness to help Nanticoke officials as much as possible.

"I think Nanticoke has a great deal of opportunity, but we have to get a better focus," Kanjorski said. "From what I know, they certainly have the wherewithal to make some major infrastructure improvements. I just want to make sure they get the best leverage to utilize state and federal funds."

8/6/2004

Three towns collaborate on futures

Business leaders want a development plan for the city and Newport and Plymouth townships.

By JON FOX-jfox@leader.net

The South Valley Partnership, a group of local business people, is hoping Nanticoke, Newport Township and Plymouth Township can move out of their economic doldrums and enjoy a bit of redevelopment.

The newly formed nonprofit organization plans to draft a regional development plan, which the three municipalities do not have.

The group has entered into an agreement with all three municipalities, secured \$20,000 in state funding, and is ready to move forward.

Seated at a conference table at state Rep. John Yudichak's Nanticoke office, Joe Lach, the partnership's secretary and solicitor for struggling Plymouth Township, described the aim of the organization.

The governments of the three municipalities, absorbed in the daily struggle of running operations on limited budgets, often can't step back far enough to attack the larger goal of local revitalization.

"It's hard to plan the war when you're fighting the battle," Lach said.

Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, who has worked closely with Lach and the other board members, stressed the importance of a plan when dealing with state economic funding. "It's the first time on a regional basis that we're going to try and tackle one of the biggest deficiencies which is a lack of a land-use plan."

In working with the governor's office, Yudichak said securing state funding for local projects is often contingent on how development fits into a larger economic road map.

"It is certainly apparent from the Rendell administration that they want a plan in place."

In the past, local governments such as Nanticoke's have sought funding for piecemeal projects, he said. "It had been 'find us some grant money and we'll put our thumb in the dike.'"

Consulting with a Wilkes-Barre-based urban planning firm, the organization plans to spend August meeting with business owners and community leaders to begin working toward the development of a comprehensive plan.

In the coming months, members of the group will meet with people Yudichak referred to as the "stakeholders" in the three communities and begin identifying areas ready for development.

"We're going to unleash the professionals on the communities," Yudichak said.

8/5/2004

Nanticoke unsure of size of city's deficit

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

City finances were once again an issue at Wednesday night's Nanticoke council meeting.

Hank Marks of the Nanticoke Taxpayers Forum asked council whether anybody had been sent in by the state to study the city's financial situation.

The Department of Community and Economic Development has been doing a financial study of the city, and will make recommendations.

Administrator Greg Gulick said the tentative date for the state to submit a report is Aug. 17, and that he is still being asked for financial information.

"I don't think we're in the category of Plymouth Township," Mayor John Toole said, referring to DCED's recent granting of distressed municipality

status to the township.

Marks pointed out that the fire and police departments were the largest part of the budget, which Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski confirmed. She said of the city's approximately \$3 million budget, \$1.2 goes to the 23 members of the fire and police departments, mainly for benefits. Toole said \$100,000 of that was for retirement, including buyback of accumulated sick days.

Marks said when the contracts are negotiated, the city should start looking for concessions, noting, "Years ago, wages weren't very good, so they gave benefits. Now wages are good."

Resident Mike Stachowiak asked council what the city's projected deficit was.

The 2003 audit has not been received, but Toole said, "I'm hearing everything from \$130,000 to \$240,000."

The city has made cuts to the police department and has cut down on roadwork and fire department overtime, according to Bozinski and Toole, but Councilman Bill Brown said the city still had to borrow \$300,000.

Toole said over the past several years the city has cut its work force by 35 to 40 percent, but added that officials will have to see what the state's recommendations are.

In other business, council authorized the city engineer to solicit bids for road and sewer work on Chestnut Street.

Brown said the portion of Chestnut Street from Church to Noble would be paid for from the sewer fund, and Chestnut from Noble to Union with leftover county Office of Community Development grant money.

Jim Samselski asked council if the city could spare some space for temporary use by the Youth Task Force division of the Greater Nanticoke Area Drug Task Force.

Samselski asked if the city could allow the use of one of its buildings for a few months until a permanent home for the group is found.

Toole said the city would have to look into liability, but suggested the use of the former CVS building on Main Street

"We'll try to come up with something," Toole promised.

8/5/2004

Nanticoke OKs repairs for eaves

Board awards \$9,975 deal to S and B Construction fix the faded overhangs.

By JON FOX-jfox@leader.net

Repairs to the eaves of the municipal building could begin in a week, council members say.

Council voted Wednesday to accept a \$9,975 proposal from S and B Construction to repair the discolored eaves that ring the squat building that houses the municipal offices, the police department and a magistrate's office.

"I've been waiting for years to get this done, and we finally have the money," said Mayor John Toole. "Let's do it."

In other business:

Mayor John Toole presented a \$925 dollar check to the Civic Pride Association. The funds came to the city as part of the proceeds from Wilkes-Barre's First Fridays on Franklin Street.

The July event was operated under Nanticoke's liquor license, and in return, 25 percent of the profit was given to the city, Toole said.

Council voted to open for bids a sewer project on Chestnut Street between Church and Union streets. The funding for the work will come from community block grant funding and the city sewer fund.

Jim Samselski appealed to council to provide a meeting place for the Greater Nanticoke Area Drug Task Force, a youth group. The group meets in St. John's Lutheran Church, but Samselski said the expanding group needs more space.

Mike Stachowiak decried the condition of a couch in the lobby of the municipal building. "I would be ashamed to put that out for the garbage," he said of the dilapidated couch. "Why is that still out there embarrassing us?"

Mayor Toole asked City Administrator Greg Gulick to remove the furniture.

8/4/2004

109th troops to get family videos

The Kiwanis, Circuit City and a high school student pitch in to help Battery B.

By JANINE UNGVASKY

Videos from home will soon be on the way to deployed members of Battery B of the 109th Field Artillery First Battalion, thanks to the Wyoming Area Kiwanis and some local businesses.

The Kiwanis brought a video camera to the Bravo company family support meeting Monday night at the armory in Nanticoke. "Each family will have an opportunity to go into the room and make a private three to five minute video to be sent to their soldier," said Kiwanis President Steve Harmanos.

Circuit City donated the blank disks and tapes for the recording, he said, while Guaranty Bank is providing a DVD player to be sent to the unit overseas to play the videos.

Harmanos said the project was the idea of Kiwanis member Malcolm Williams. "He's a veteran who served in Korea for a year and remembers how lonely it was."

"One of the best things when you're over there is the communication from home," Williams said. "I was thinking about what we could do to use the technology that we have today to send something over there. This is something they can treasure and watch again and again."

Williams expects the Kiwanis to make 60 to 70 videos. About half of that amount were taped Monday.

Wyoming Area High School senior Adam Ciampi will assist with the DVDs as his senior service project. "I'll be editing them, putting a little

personal touch to them."

Williams said the Kiwanis hope this project will let the families and the soldiers know how much their efforts are appreciated. "Everyone thanks the troops but this is a way to thank the families and the troops and make their separation a little easier."

8/2/2004

Work begins on Nanticoke eyesore

By Robert Kalinowski , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer 08/02/2004

After more than a decade sitting idly and deteriorating, the fire-ravaged former LS Skate-A -Rama in Nanticoke is on its way to being renovated. The building's owner, George Ellis Jr., of Buttonwood, plans to turn the city's most infamous eyesore in to a warehouse following numerous requests by city officials over the years to bring it up to code.

For the past several months, a contractor hired by Ellis has been clearing out massive amounts of loose debris left inside the old, popular teen nightspot since it was damaged by fire. This arduous task is nearing completion, according to city officials.

The next step calls for internal and external renovations and a new roof for one half of the old Duplan Silk Mill, as the other half escaped the flames and houses the LS Bowl-A-Rama.

However, there are no definite plans on when this may begin.

Regardless, Nanticoke Mayor John Toole said he's glad the years-long battle to get the building up to code appears to be over and progress is being made.

"There have been a number of complaints from neighbors of it being an eyesore and just being dangerous," said Toole.

"There were loose bricks falling onto Washington Street," he said of the street running parallel to the building.

The mayor credited Greg Gulick, city administrator, and Rich Wiaterowski, city building inspector, for aggressively enforcing the city building code.

"We're enforcing the codes of the city. We started this project quite a while ago," said Gulick.

Gulick noted that Ellis is "doing what has to be done."

He said if a building owner ignores the city's requests, he or she would risk being fined or jailed.

"He's really working well with the city," Gulick said of Ellis. "It helps eliminate an eyesore. Once it gets fixed up, it will be a warehouse and maybe it will create some jobs in the city."

The city administrator added that past inspections were done to see what parts of the building are good and what parts are bad. Engineers and workers from environmental agencies also evaluated the building.

Gulick said this was done to make sure the right steps were taken and the building eventually is brought up to code.

"Inspections will continue until the work gets done," he said.

Gulick said the renovation would be a "long process" and wasn't able to put a timetable on when it would be or could be complete.

Ellis Jr. could not be reached for comment Sunday evening.

7/30/04

Nanticoke In Need of Volunteer Firefighters

By: Paul Ellis-CV Correspondent

Trying to attract fresh faces to the ranks of the city's threadbare volunteer [fire department](#), Nanticoke council announced plans for an outreach program to involve high school students in the fall at Wednesday night's work session.

Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski said the program will begin in September or October and is designed "to encourage youth out of high school to become volunteers."

"Due to the shortage, we have to get kids involved and associated" at a young age with the hopes some or many will remain on the volunteer firefighting force after graduation, she said.

"It's been successful in other areas," she said. "Even if we get three or four out of the group, it would help us greatly."

Bozinski stressed the parents of each student volunteer will be required to oversee and authorize participation in the program. Volunteers would be limited to certain firefighting responsibilities out of safety concerns, she explained.

In other news, Bozinski and council approved retaining Tim O'Reilly of Philadelphia to represent the city if the contract dispute with the fire department ends up in arbitration.

"The fire department requires the city to contract an attorney to represent it during the negotiation if it gets to arbitration," she said. "We're hoping we don't have to get that far."

Councilman John Bushko recommended council vote on paying for repairs for the eaves on the city building and fixes to the senior center for under \$10,000 at August's council meeting.

In response to comments made by Mayor John Toole about \$3,000 in repairs being made to a police cruiser put out of commission after a recent accident in Newport Township, Bushko urged council to put all future auto repair work on city vehicles out for bid.

"Anybody should be able to get a crack at it," he said. "Spread it around town."

Bozinski concurred and recounted a story about repairs to a police cruiser several years ago that cost the city \$500 less than an original estimate once work was put out for bid.

Council also debated merits of the purchase of a trailer for transporting a lawnmower back and forth across the city.

Presently, city workers drive the lawnmower where it needs to go, posing a safety hazard to motorists and possibly doing damage to its transmission.

"We have a trailer," commented Bushko. "Why get another one when you have one that just sits there?" Council members agreed that an inventory will be conducted to determine the condition of the trailer.

7/29/2004

Nanticoke starting junior volunteer program

By KRISTIN KILE-Times Leader Correspondent

A junior volunteer program with the fire department will begin this fall, city council announced at Wednesday night's meeting.

Firefighters, the fire chief and Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski will visit schools in September to explain the program.

"We are hoping it will encourage some of our young people, once they get out of school, to volunteer with the fire company.," Bozinski said.

"Even if we get three or four out of the group we will be lucky."

Although students won't be putting out fires, they will be in the background handing out water to firefighters, going through training and assisting at the firehouse.

In other business, council is waiting for bids from four vendors for the installation of security cameras and lights at Patriot Park. City administrator Greg Gulick said he expects the project to begin in the next 30 days.

7/25/2004

Taking a ride on the Wheels of Freedom

Motorcycle event benefits families of the 109th's Bravo Battery.

By ANDREW CLYDE-Times Leader Correspondent

About 150 motorcycles took to the road during Saturday's Wheels of Freedom, a charity ride benefiting the families of the 109th Field Artillery's Bravo Battery.

Dennis Boor, a Vietnam veteran, was one of the many who took part in the ride that started at the Nanticoke armory and ran on U.S. Route 11 to Red Rock and back. "A lot of people forget about those left behind."

And those left behind - parents, spouses, children and friends - all feel a sense of uncertainty when it comes to their loved ones abroad, and take comfort in gatherings such as Wheels of Freedom.

"This is what keeps me going," said Judy Buff, mother of Spc. Kyle Buff. While Kyle is in Iraq, Judy is "very active with the 109th. We sent packages even when (Kyle) wasn't over there. ... I never thought I'd be sending them to him.

"It becomes more personal. It becomes a little harder because it has a face."

Judy's eyes welled with tears as she remembered the last days before Kyle's departure.

"Christmas was somber. We didn't do the traditional things. Nothing really fell into place," she said wiping her eyes. "Nothing is the same."

Buff said she misses Kyle's hugs, and her husband, Chet, misses gardening with his son. The garden was not planted this year.

"There's a lot we didn't do this year," she said. "It's just too hard."

Behind the concession stands surrounded by hot dog buns and cups of soda, Casey Kopco said she is really proud of her husband, Spc. Nicholas Kopco. "I love him and I miss him a lot," Casey said, who is due to give birth in four weeks. "I hope he's here for the birth."

Wheels of Freedom was thought up in April. Founders Kelly Chestnut and Chris Brigalia want to make it an annual event.

"And after the troops come home, we'll raise the money for charity," said Jennifer Sorber, one of the event's coordinators and wife of Sgt. 1st Class K. Jamie Sorber.

Please click on the following links for all Military Information - From Nanticoke Webdesign

[109th website](#)

[Military Information](#)

[Video Images From Iraq & Afghanistan](#)

7/17/04

Riding the rails to success

Industrial park will get railroad facility. Backers see a bright future.

By DAVE JANOSKI-davej@leader.net

A state-financed rail facility planned for the long-vacant Daniel J. Flood Industrial Park will help attract industry to the Nanticoke area and replace thousands of trucks that haul coal waste and fly ash on local highways, say backers of the facility.

The new owner of the park, HUD Inc., trading as Emerald Anthracite II, has received a \$249,000 grant from the state Department of Transportation to build the facility. HUD will use the facility to transport culm and fly ash from two ongoing mine-reclamation projects in the Nanticoke area.

The company hopes the rail link also will attract new companies to the park, which has failed to generate business development since it was established with state funding 28 years ago.

"It's a big plus for Nanticoke," said HUD Inc. corporate engineer Thomas Doughton.

Doughton said the 3,000-foot rail spur, which will connect to a nearby Canadian Pacific interstate line, and the proposed South Valley Parkway, which would provide quicker access to Route 29 and Interstate 81, will improve the park's prospects.

State Rep. John Yudichak, who worked with township officials to secure funding for park infrastructure repairs and find new owners, said the rail

access will be "crucial" to the park's success.

"The lack of access was one of the things that always held the park back," said Yudichak, D-Nanticoke.

HUD Inc. will provide \$107,000 for the rail construction, which will include loading facilities for culm and fly ash. HUD operates two mine-reclamation projects in Newport and Hanover townships. The company ships culm to a Philadelphia power plant and uses the fly ash produced by the plant for fill at the two sites.

HUD's application for the PennDOT grant says the rail facility will maintain 60 existing jobs, create 35 new ones and eliminate 32,000 truck trips between here and Philadelphia annually.

"We're happy to help remove that truck traffic from the highways," said PennDOT spokesman Kirk Wilson.

HUD expects to finish the rail facility before the end of the year, according to its application. It envisions 2,000 round trips to Philadelphia this year and 8,000 round trips in both 2005 and 2006.

Doughton said he didn't know how long the mine reclamation projects would last. HUD Inc. President Kenneth M. Pollock did not return a phone message Friday.

HUD Inc. purchased the 400-acre Daniel J. Flood Industrial Park for \$300,511 in a Luzerne County Sheriff's sale last month. The park was sold by the sheriff because a \$180,000 loan from the Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority that was used to establish the park in the 1970s was never fully repaid.

The two government-related entities that ran the park, the Nanticoke Industrial Development Corp. and the Nanticoke Industrial Development Authority, ceased to exist several years ago.

The park originally consisted of 630 acres, but about 230 acres were sold for residential development.

7/12/04

Nanticoke blaze ruled accidental

By Robert Kalinowski , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

A fire that ripped through a South Walnut Street home in Nanticoke on Saturday evening has been ruled accidental in nature, according to Fire Chief Mike Bohan. Bohan, who returned to the scene Sunday morning to conduct the investigation, said the fire started in a side porch and then spread to a rear kitchen, an upstairs room and the attic of the two-story home.

He said the fire got "a good start" on firefighters, as it was fully involved by the time the first crews arrived on the scene at 130 S. Walnut St.

However, he said the work of firefighters helped contain the two-alarm blaze from spreading to the next door residence at 132 S. Walnut St. or the nearby Davis-Dinelli Funeral Home, both of which had just minor thermal damage.

"They got at the interior and did a good job," Bohan said.

He admitted he was very close from ordering his crew out of the home.

"They took a beating, but they did a good job. They didn't want to get out. Their efforts saved the next door structure," he said.

He said crews extinguished the stubborn blaze in about 30 minutes, but remained on scene until about 11:45 p.m.

Bohan added that several firefighters who were treated and released at area hospitals experienced heat exhaustion and minor smoke inhalation. He said they were all doing fine on Sunday. The lone occupant of the home, Josephine Fouchia, 78, was not harmed and is staying with relatives.

7/11/04

Passerby rescues Nanticoke woman

By: Kevin Donlin-Citizens Voice

An elderly Nanticoke woman escaped her burning residence Saturday night thanks to the quick actions of an alert passerby.

The two-alarm fire did significant damage to the large, two-story home at 130 S. Walnut St. The lone occupant, Josephine Fouchia, 78, was not injured.

A few firefighters needed to be treated for heat exhaustion, however. One unidentified Nanticoke firefighter was examined at an area hospital for a combination of heat exhaustion and smoke inhalation, according to Nanticoke Deputy Fire Chief Jay Munson.

"It's under investigation, but it's not suspicious," Munson said. "Most of the damage was confined to the porch and the kitchen."

Mary Elmy of Slocum Township was driving on South Walnut Street when she said she smelled something burning.

"I parked my car and the gate was locked," Elmy explained as she stood outside the residence. "I got inside and she (Fouchia) was on the phone. By the time we got to the kitchen, flames were shooting in the side window."

Elmy said Fouchia was safe and with family members as firefighters battled the stubborn blaze.

According to authorities, the fire was called in at approximately 8:30 p.m. The house, which is located on South Walnut Street at Broad Street, was fully involved when fire crews arrived on the scene.

The neighboring home at 132 S. Walnut St., as well as the Davis-Dinelli Funeral Home at 170 E. Broad St., each sustained mild thermal damage, Munson explained.

"This was a pretty good knockdown," Munson said. "It was under control within 20 to 25 minutes."

Munson said he did not expect the state police fire marshal would be needed to examine the scene.

Authorities believe the fire originated in an enclosed, side porch that faces a small alley. Nanticoke Police Officer Brian Williams said some cardboard and an electric lawnmower were stored on the porch.

"When I arrived on scene, I asked if anyone else was inside and she (Fouchia) said, 'No, I live alone.'"

From the porch, the fire worked its way up the side of the home and eventually settled in the roof. Nearly an hour after responding to the scene,

firefighters were still working to water down the smoldering roof.

Crews from Nanticoke and Hanover Township, including Medic 9, Franklin Hose Co. 4, Rescue 5, Hanover Engines 4 and 5, Nanticoke Engines 2 and 6, Truck 1, and Hose Co. 3, responded to the scene.

7/9/04

Plan to trash Patriot Park? You might be caught on film

By JON FOX-jfox@leader.net

Vandalism under the cover of darkness.

It's a perennial problem in Patriot Park says city Administrator Greg Gulick, but he's hoping a healthy dose of electronic surveillance will end the nighttime destruction.

"They've been turning the tables upside down, dumping the garbage cans, breaking the trees," Gulick said. "We put trees down there. They were 90 bucks a piece, and they came and just snapped them. It's unbelievable."

For at least the past year and a half, the vandalism has become more frequent, he said.

But come August, there could be digital cameras mounted around the downtown park, keeping an unwavering watch over saplings and picnic tables, Gulick said.

Next week, Gulick, police officers and a representative from Vector Security will look over the park that covers a square block to determine how many cameras are needed, where they'll be placed, and how much it will all cost.

Detective Bill Shultz of the Nanticoke Police Department says investigating the vandalism has proven difficult.

"Not many people see anything," he said. "You don't have many houses, per se, around the park."

The businesses surrounding the park close at night and acts of vandalism, for the most part, go unobserved. "We're not getting a lot of cooperation," Shultz said.

With cameras in place, police will be able to review surveillance tapes after incidents in the park, Gulick said. Vandals caught on tape "will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

The installation of cameras is a step other Wyoming Valley communities have taken to crack down on miscreants, Gulick said. "It's not unusual, but I don't want to divulge communities that do have them."

The eye in the sky won't be much of a secret in Nanticoke if approved by city council at its next meeting on July 28. "There will be signs stating that you are now on video," Gulick said.

Hanging out on the western edge of the park on a soupy summer afternoon Jonathan Stewart, 17, and Bob Boston, 21, weren't too keen on the possibility of cameras coming to the park, their daily hangout.

"I think it's trying to set us up to get us in trouble," Stewart said. "I mean the cops already circle this park like 600 times a day."

He and his friends aren't responsible for the vandalism, Stewart said. The worst his crew gets up to is a little littering, he said.

If the cameras do go up, Boston predicts an ironic end to the experiment in surveillance. Whoever is responsible for the vandalism is likely to turn their attention to the cameras themselves, he said.

"If they put cameras up here, they won't be here for long."

7/9/04

Residents to receive tax relief from newly signed budget

The 2004-05 state budget signed by the governor this week contains important funding increases for schools, communities and local governments to assist with their operations in the upcoming year, says an analysis by State Rep. John Yudichak, DLuzerne.

"After 10 years of watching their property taxes increase steadily, people will finally receive the property tax relief they have been waiting for,"

Yudichak said. "Coupled with budget increases for education, local governments and community revitalization funding, this year's budget supports quality-of-life improvements for citizens, communities and local governments," Yudichak said.

Yudichak said he was particularly pleased that the budget contains no new taxes, and with the enactment of the property tax reduction and slots legislation, Pennsylvanians should see noteworthy decreases in their property taxes within the next few years.

The budget increases the total Accountability Block Grant funding for schools to \$200 million, a \$25 million increase from the \$175 million originally agreed upon last year. The grants can be used by districts beginning this year for initiatives such as decreasing class sizes, providing tutoring programs and implementing fullday kindergarten programs.

Yudichak said basic and special education funding will also receive substantial increases. School districts in the 119th Legislative District will receive the following increases in state funds for basic and special education:

Crestwood, \$152,683; Greater Nanticoke Area, \$246,923; Hanover Area, \$137,227; Wilkes-Barre Area, \$532,410; Wyoming Valley West, \$313,634.

"This unprecedented amount will help area schools establish and maintain programs to increase student learning and academic success," Yudichak said.

Yudichak said the new budget provides a \$12.5 million increase in local government resources development and a \$4 million increase for community revitalization. Additionally, \$6.8 million in new money has been designated for the cleanup of scrap tires to help restore abandoned waste tire sites.

Yudichak said that a \$600,000 increase in shared municipal services grants will especially benefit smaller municipalities that are struggling with their daily operating expenses by giving them the resources to merge some services with neighboring municipalities.

"The consolidation of municipal services is a good cost-saving measure that serves to free up money, time and labor for other important activities," Yudichak said. "Many municipalities in this area will benefit from the funding increase.

Yudichak said overall, he was pleased with the 2004-05 budget allocations, and felt that Pennsylvanians could look forward to a better standard of living as the year progresses.

7/9/04

Nanticoke crime watch prepares for 'Night Out'

The Neighborhood Crime Watch of the Hanover section of Nanticoke will host the annual "National Night Out" celebration Tuesday, Aug. 3, beginning at 5 p.m. or before.

The theme this year is "Give Crime and Drugs a Vacation."

Featured will be a live broadcast of the weather with Kim Martucci of WBRE-TV Channel 28.

The band "Oz" will provide music for the event.

Luzerne County District Attorney David Lupas will also be present to lend his support for the event.

Sens. Rick Santorum and Arlen Specter and Congressman Paul Kanjorski, Gov. Ed Rendell and state Rep. John Yudichak along with Mayor John Toole and Nanticoke city council have been invited.

The Nanticoke Police Department will be doing children IDs for all those present. This will include a picture, fingerprints and a DNA sample to be given to the parents for safekeeping.

Free hot dogs, hamburgers and beverages will be available to all children. Food and beverages will be available to the public as well.

Free parking will also be available.

All of Nanticoke City and especially residents of the Hanover section are invited. Come and see your Crime Watch at work.

7/8/04

Nanticoke Council to join South Valley Partnership

By John N. Hemsley Citizens' Voice Correspondent

Nanticoke City Council entered into an alliance with surrounding communities on Wednesday, unanimously agreeing to join the South Valley Partnership.

The South Valley Partnership is a not-for-profit organization that assists in planning of investments and provides resources to sustain growth for municipalities.

"It gives us a much better base to obtain funding," said Attorney Joseph Lach of the South Valley Partnership. "We have some prospects for funding."

Nanticoke joins Newport Township and Plymouth Township in this alliance.

Council feels that if everyone works together, more can get done to help the communities.

"The city could use all the help we can get," said Councilman John Butchko.

Councilmen Bill Brown, Joseph Dougherty, and Butchko, Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski, and Mayor John Toole voted in favor of the measure.

In other business, based on mid-year numbers, Nanticoke is projecting a deficit of between \$200,000 and \$240,000 by the end of the year, according to Treasurer Al Wytoshek.

This is more than the estimated \$151,000 stated at a regular council meeting in April. Nanticoke's deficit in 2003 was \$232,000.

7/1/04

Nanticoke to install WVSA drop box; OKs street lights on Varsity Drive

By JON FOX-jfox@leader.net

City council at a meeting Wednesday approved the installation of a Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority drop box in front of the Municipal Building.

The box, a drop point for payments made after business hours, will be installed near the front entrance.

Council also approved the installation of street lights on Varsity Drive. The city will not pay for the installation but will pay the electricity fees estimated by city Administrator Greg Gulick at \$10 to \$15 a month per light.

During his report on the state of the police department, Mayor John Toole said staffing is stretched thin while several officers are on medical leave. He estimates the department is down to eight full-time officers.

Hank Marks, president of the Greater Nanticoke Taxpayers Forum, suggested the city hire part-time officers to fill out the department and avoid excessive overtime payments.

Toole said that would not be permitted under the current union contract.

Given the state of financial affairs, Marks suggested the union might be willing to make concessions.

"We're not a rich community. We're in financial trouble and things need to change."

Council member Yvonne Bozinski suggested council sit down with a union representative to discuss options.

6/29/04

A Nanticoke area teen's project to collect sporting goods for U.S. troops has been successful.

Caitlin Klish, a junior at Greater Nanticoke Area High School, decided to collect new or used sports equipment for the soldiers in Iraq. Her mom, Diane, said she collected more than 700 items, including basketballs, baseballs, frisbees, golf clubs and bags. Sporting goods are still being accepted at the Nanticoke Armory. For more information, call 735-0671.

6/27/04

Asphalt zipper to hit the streets

By Pam Urbanski - urbanski@myexcel.com

Navigating some city streets in Nanticoke can be a challenge.

Potholes and uneven pavement, combined with narrow roadways, make it difficult for drivers to get where they are going. Funding for street improvement projects is hard to come by and manpower is limited.

City officials must target the worst roads in need of repair and come up with ways to stretch the dollar. Thanks to cooperation between the Nanticoke Public Works Department and the Regional Equipment Center in Newport Township, East Grove Street, Tory Court and Kings Court will be paved and sewer lines will be replaced.

City Administrator Greg Gulick tells me that newly found underground springs are the reason the roadways are deteriorating.

A new machine that is being demonstrated to city employees is helping to keep the cost down. The asphalt zipper, a small, milling machine that attaches to a backhoe hopefully can be purchased by the city for future roadwork.

"It really keeps cost down when our people can do a lot of the work," said Gulick. "This is a great area to try out this piece of equipment because there is not heavy traffic," he added.

Manpower and machinery from the Regional Equipment Center will be used to grade, roll and pave the roads.

"We are grateful for the help we are getting from our neighbors," Gulick continued. "If small cities are going to survive we all have to pull together."

6/27/04

Fire department to get a new roof

By Pam Urbanski - urbanski@myexcel.com

Other city projects include replacing the roof of fire department headquarters located on East Ridge Street. Dunmore Roofing was awarded the \$37,000 project and funding for this project comes from a Community Development Block Grant.

The 30-year-old roof has been leaking for some time, causing water damage to the truck floor and the interior of the building. Gulick said this project is long overdue and must be completed to avoid further water damaged related repairs. The money for this project is also from a Community Development Block Fund Grant.

6/27/04

Bridge Project nearing completion & demolition of T.P. Jones building

By Pam Urbanski - urbanski@myexcel.com

The Union Street Bridge project is almost near completion. The gas and water companies are replacing their lines and paving will begin shortly. On Slate Street, sewer lines are being replaced and the roadway will be paved. The money for the replacement of these sewer lines comes from the sewer fees paid by city residents.

I'm sure Hanover Street residents are jumping for joy with the recent demolition of the T P Jones building. The city engineer determined the structure was unsafe after the roof collapsed.

Gulick noted the city went to court to get access to the property so they could demolish it. John Brdaric Excavating was awarded the \$103,000 project. Community Development Block Fund money was again used for this project.

"We hope to recoup some of the cost of knocking down this building," Gulick commented.

6/27/04

GNA sees light at end of tunnel

Seven years ago, the school district was near bankruptcy. It's now on firm financial ground.

By BONNIE ADAMS - badams@leader.net

The 7-year-old state report that blasted Greater Nanticoke Area's finances is always within Superintendent Tony Perrone's reach.

The advice in the Department of Education report was all that stood between the district and an impending state takeover by 1998. The state described Greater Nanticoke as being "on the brink of bankruptcy."

The situation was so desperate that GNA's new Student/Parent Coalition was selling candles to help fill some of the district's financial gaps.

After this week's adoption of a new budget that does not contain a tax increase and a projected \$2.9 million fund balance in 2005, Perrone reflected on what's changed for the better since 1997.

The state report had predicted a possible \$3.1 million deficit by the end of the 1998-99 school year. It scolded the district for out-of-control spending and called for swift action to prevent a state takeover.

Perrone said that the reluctance to raise taxes, salary increases, transportation costs and the number of personnel all contributed to the district's

financial slide.

The "Stainbrook report" as it's called, was authored by then-Department of Education financial adviser Ron Stainbrook, who is now director of school services with the department. Perrone had contacted Stainbrook in 1996 to study GNA's finances.

Stainbrook said this week that not many districts so close to a state takeover fix the problems as Greater Nanticoke did. "GNA is a wonderful success story."

He credited Perrone for the turnaround of a district "on the verge of disaster. GNA is one that followed our advice right down the line."

Perrone said taking Stainbrook's suggestions was necessary but painful. "I never could have imagined that we'd come this far," he said.

These are some of the actions the district took, based on Stainbrook's recommendations:

Initiated professional staff reductions. The district examined the number of students per class and the number of classes each teacher taught per day.

Changes were made and some newer employees were laid off. Perrone said the district has about the same number of teachers today as in 1997, but it has been more aggressive in seeking grants and other funding to help pay costs.

A high school staffing policy was developed and implemented to staff educational programs in accordance with need. Many teachers at the high school had taught fewer than six classes per day.

Participation in the district's school food service program was low and the number of hours for cafeteria workers needed adjustment. Perrone said the district worked to get more children to buy school lunches and aggressively sought federal reimbursements.

The school board placed a temporary moratorium on administrative salaries and the number of administrators was reduced. Perrone said there were eight administrators in 1997 and there are six now.

Transportation contracts were rebid to save money.

Perrone noted that the seven-year teachers contract that runs through 2004-2005 contained a salary freeze for the first year and average increases of 1.9 percent in subsequent years. "The teachers have been very fair to me," he said.

As he spoke this week, a crane lifted old air conditioning/heating units from the high school roof to make room for new ones as part of an energy program in which savings pay for improvement costs. Perrone walked from his building down the hill to the football stadium and pointed to new metal bleachers that replaced dangerously worn ones that more than 70 years old. The improvements are signs of progress of which he is proud.

A long tradition of no tax increases helped drive the district into its financial hole. Then in 1996, the school board raised taxes by 20 mills to avoid a deficit.

Yearly millage increases of 2 to 4 mills since have been part of the plan to help fund increasing costs. One mill equals \$1 on every \$1,000 of assessed value.

Perrone said that if a school board never raises taxes it is not looking at the long-term. At a time when some school boards are imposing double-digit millage increases for 2004-2005, GNA didn't raise taxes because, Perrone said, an increase wasn't necessary.

The superintendent said the district has not slipped back into its old financial bad habits, but challenges remain.

When asked about major concerns, he and school board President Bob Raineri listed health-care costs. The district expects them to increase 17 percent in the coming school year.

GNA business manager Albert Melone Jr. said districts' contributions to the Pennsylvania Public School Employees' Retirement System are expected to skyrocket.

As a superintendent who helped bring a district back from the brink, Perrone offered advice for others. He said painful changes must sometimes be made and districts must look at the long-term.

"If you want to make it, that's what you have to do."

6/27/04

Local soldiers off to training

By Robert Kalinowski , The Sunday Voice

With a large group of their comrades serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom, the remaining members of the 109th Field Artillery, Pennsylvania Army National Guard, departed the Wyoming Valley on Saturday morning for training in Fort Pickett, Va.

The 173 soldiers, or nearly half of 109th, will head to Virginia to fulfill its annual two-week training obligation. They will receive artillery certifications, communications and transportation training and complete various other exercises.

It's the same training routine the 109th went through last year, several months before being notified some of the unit would be heading off to war.

"The significant thing is even though (the rest of) our battalion is deployed to Iraq, we need to be ready," said Capt. Gerard Wrazien.

"Every year we need to certify with the U.S. Army that we are a ready artillery unit," he said.

Wrazien wanted to make clear this doesn't mean the unit will be deployed anytime soon.

"This is just the culmination of our training year," he said.

He did admit, though, the mindset going in to this year's training would be a bit different, as half of the guys who they trained with last year won't be with them this year.

About 300 members of the 109th who completed this training last summer, deployed on Dec. 30, 2003, for a tour of duty that will last up to 18 months. One of those soldiers was killed in action.

On April 27, 2004, Sherwood Baker, 30, of Plymouth, of Headquarters Battery, was killed in an explosion in Baghdad. He was serving with the 103rd Armor regiment, out of Scranton, at the time.

"It's really a tight knit group. We're thinking about those guys over there on the front lines."

"When you train with a group of soldiers, you want to be with them when they are activated," Wrazien said.

The soldiers will return to the Wyoming Valley on July 9.

6/24/04

He's the GI but she's the trouper

Spc. Michael Koons of Nanticoke says his wife, Margie, has taken on more duties since he's been with 103rd in Baghdad.

By LANE FILLER - lfiller@leader.net

Mikaela Koons isn't happy. At the age of 9, she doesn't really understand why her daddy, Spc. Michael Koons, of Nanticoke, had to go away for a year.

Her mom, Margie Koons, does understand, but isn't thrilled.

"She's really started to do good with it, though," Michael said of his wife. "At first, she felt she might not be able to cope, but she's really been a trouper, particularly taking care of the stuff I normally would, like the cars."

In fact, Margie just bought and installed a car battery on her own.

As for his daughter, Michael said, "It's been hard for her, because we're very close. She knows I go away every year for the Guard, but this is a lot different. She must hear the news on television, because my wife watches it, but she tells Mikaela I'm safe and OK."

Michael Koons works at Cleveland Brothers Heavy Equipment in Wilkes-Barre, and is a tank mechanic in the Guard. Here, he is a turret gunner and an MP with the Scranton-based 103rd Armor.

Koons, 41, has been in the Guard for 14 years. Prior to that, he served in the active-duty Army, joining straight out of high school and spending almost four years in Germany.

"I think that makes it easier for me than some of these guys," Koons said. "Having been active, I'm more used to sharing a room with a bunch of guys, and spending 24 hours a day with my squad. But even I was bugged by Fallujah."

There, Koons shared quarters with about 25 other soldiers, deprived of space and privacy.

Koons was away from the military entirely for almost nine years before he joined the Guard. "Honestly, I needed the money, and the Guard was a part-time job I could do."

Now, he is only two years away from eligibility for retirement from the military, and plans to take it when the opportunity arises.

An avid computer user at home, Koons spends a lot of time on the Internet here, and he and his wife just started instant messaging each other.

Koons is also a golfer at home, a hobby he cannot continue in Iraq.

"It hasn't been as bad here as I imagined it would be," Koons said, "because all you hear on the news is the bad stuff. You don't hear about the good people we've met, Iraqis, and the kids."

But Koons does admit to shock at the conditions the Iraqis live in.

"Until I saw it, the poverty and how far behind the times they are, I couldn't picture it," Koons said. "Then you see all the palaces and think, 'How can some of these people still support Saddam? Can't they see how much he took from them?'"

And, of course, the battle against Saddam, by extension, has taken things from Koons, his daughter, and his wife. Mostly, it's taken them away from each other, but Koons remains optimistic that it will all be fine, and particularly, that Margie can handle everything that's thrown at her.

"She's always run the home anyway, the bills and bank accounts and stuff, so that's no problem, but she hates cutting the grass."

Here's hoping that next summer, she won't have to.

6/17/04

Citizens' Voice staffer survives Survivor audition

By Robert Kalinowski , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

Having never watched the popular reality show, and with no intention of ever applying to be a contestant, yours truly somehow ended up casting for "Survivor" yesterday at the Wyoming Valley Mall.

When I got there - as a journalist, not an adventure-seeking opportunist hoping to win the \$1 million grand prize, I was merely seeking to find out what people like about the show, why they wanted to be a part of it, and how they were planning to audition.

While watching the auditions from the first wave of would-be contestants, one of the attendants on the set from WYOU 22, who along with 98.5 KRZ hosted the local casting call, asked if I wanted an entry form.

Nearly embarrassed, I told her "Survivor" wasn't my thing and I was just there to interview contestants for a newspaper article. Looking back at the set, I immediately saw someone who was sure to be a good interview.

Dressed in cowboy attire and singing a country music song, J.T. Duffy, 34, of Hazleton, picked up a large sharp spear and appeared to jab it into the ground. As I walked closer, I saw that he jabbed it into a large raw fish. With the spear, he raised the fish up to his mouth, took a bite and then spit the chunk to the side.

Duffy also told a story he thought would help his chances.

When he was a kid, as his parents were discussing Thanksgiving dinner plans, Duffy decided to take matters into his own hands. He and friends, armed with BB guns, took a hunting trip to a local turkey farm. After taking numerous shots to its body, the turkey - a bit dazed, but alive - came after Duffy and bit his hand.

"That's when I kind of whacked his head off a tree," Duffy explained. And Thanksgiving dinner was served.

Duffy said this story (who knows if it was really true?) was intended to prove he was capable of providing food for his tribe if none was available, one of the many arduous tasks contestants must do during the seven-week contest at a site yet to be announced.

After I spoke with Duffy, I saw that the line for auditions had all but diminished. The first several dozens of people, many who waited for up to three hours, all had completed their two-minute audition in front of the "Survivor" camera. It was about 4:45 p.m. and another wave was expected from people coming from their 9 to 5 jobs.

So, I began to look over the entry form, a five-page document asking personality questions. Waiting to see what the next round of potential contestants would bring, I filled out the form for fun (I thought). After completing the form, I saw a bunch of people starting to shuffle in, but no one in line to begin their audition. I was then urged to attempt mine. Reluctant, stubborn or just against it, I said, "No." Then, the crew from WYOU said they were about to film a live broadcast for their nightly news and needed someone auditioning in the background of their report. Needless to say, I came through to help out our Northeast Pennsylvania News Alliance partner and jumped into the spotlight. With the "Survivor" camera in my face and me in the background of the WYOU broadcast, I was to state my case why I should be selected as a contestant. So, I did what was natural and spoke honestly. I said I never watched the show and really had no intention of auditioning. The only thing that could be perceived as a reason to choose me was when I said people like me don't watch shows like "Survivor" and if they picked me maybe people like me would watch and increase ratings. Sound confusing? I bet they were more confused. When the audition was done and the 10 seconds on the television news in the past, I spoke with one of the people running the auditions. "We haven't had a 'Survivor' contestant from here and it's about time we did," said Jan Haswell, creative services director for WYOU and WBRE. She's right. I watched some of the auditions and the only guarantee I'll make is that if a local contestant is picked it sure wont be me.

6/16/04

Vote expected on settlements

Luzerne County commissioners are expected to vote today whether to accept a pair of settlements totalling about \$100,000 related to lost tax dollars. Controller Steve Flood announced the "new found money" at Monday's commissioners work session, saying his office negotiated the settlements with Ohio Casualty Insurance during the past year. For starters, Ohio Casualty has agreed to pay \$85,000 in the matter of Brenda Davis, a former clerk in the Nanticoke City Treasurer's Office who admitted to embezzling funds while working in the city tax office. Audits found \$184,000 in tax money missing. Flood said the settlement will be split between the county and the [Greater Nanticoke Area School District](#), which is owed about \$100,000. The district will receive \$70,000 and the county will take \$15,000, about a third of what it is owed. The company also has agreed to pay \$20,000 to settle the case of former Rice Township Tax Collector Elsie Dock, who failed to turn over \$128,000 to the county. Flood said he was particularly happy with the offer to settle the Dock incident, calling the case a "dead issue" because the statute of limitations had run out.

6/14/04

Nanticoke Musicfest honors soldiers, Flag Day

By Robert Kalinowski Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

To open the final day of the seventh annual Nanticoke Musicfest, members of the 109th Field Artillery, Pennsylvania Army National Guard, Bravo Battery, conducted a flag raising ceremony in observance of Flag Day, which is recognized around the nation today. The flag that was hoisted was previously flown over the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C. Paul Maher, field representative for Congressman Paul E. Kanjorski, presented the flag to Nanticoke Mayor John Toole. "Congressman Kanjorski requested this flag be flown over the Capitol for the City of Nanticoke for flag day and to honor those serving in Iraq," Maher said. Toole said he thought it was important to honor the members of the 109th who are currently serving in Iraq, several of whom are from Nanticoke. "It has a special significance. I think now more than ever people are taking pride in the flag," he said. Toole said the city conducts the flag raising ceremony every year and invites the 109th to preside.



Sgt. Steven Stempien, of Bravo Battery, said the unit is glad to be a part of it. "I know they do this every year. We're glad to support them," he said.

After the flag was hoisted to the top of the flagpole, it was lowered to halfmast. The nation's flags will remain at half-mast until July 5 in honor of the late former President Ronald Reagan, Stempian said.

Once at half-mast, a trumpeter performed "Taps" as dozens of onlookers held small flags and put their hands over their hearts.

After the short ceremony, the last day of the four-day Musicfest began.

The headlining, and final, act was The Collective, a popular local band, which plays pop, soul, hip-hop, and R&B music.

Toole estimated that several thousand people passed through Patriot Square during the weekend.

"It's nice to have something positive in the city," he said.

He said the proceeds from the event go to support other community events, such as Christmas in Nanticoke.

Luzerne County's only musicfest begins June 11

The Nanticoke City Musicfest 2004 is Luzerne County's only musicfest and this year, entertainment will range from new wave to rock to country to polkas. On Sunday, even some hip-hop will be mixed in.

The musicfest, in its seventh year, begins Thursday, June 10 and it will run through June 13.

Bands performing will be:

Thursday, June 10, [3 Plus John](#) and Johnny Stevens Polka Band

Friday, June 11, Midnight Hour, the winner of last year's Battle of the Bands and [Simply Shania](#) (a Shania Twain tribute)

Saturday, June 12 will be the Battle of the Bands

Sunday, June 13, [The Collective](#)

In addition to the music there will be plenty of food, games and rides. There is no admission to the musicfest.

A Flag Day ceremony will take place Sunday June 13.

Several bands have sent in videos and tapes for the Battle of the Bands competition. This has been one of the most popular features of the musicfest year after year.

WHAT: Nanticoke City Musicfest

WHEN: June 10-13

WHERE: Patriot Square

TIMES: 5-10 p.m. Thursday and Sunday and 5-11 p.m. Friday and Saturday 6/6/04

6/6/04

Taking a big dose of confusion

By DAWN SHURMAITIS

Special to the Times Leader

MEDICARE DRUG DISCOUNT CARDS

Armed with slides and handouts, simple language and great patience, Joe Giebus and Anne Rappaport face an anxious crowd of seniors eager for easy answers on the new discount drug program.

But when the Area Agency on Aging representatives finish their 30-minute spiel, they're met with blank faces and raised hands. Reactions range from "I'll never understand it" to "It takes a lawyer to figure this out."

Whether they're in Nanticoke, Hazleton, Pittston or Tunkhannock, Giebus and Rappaport continually confront the same dilemma: explaining the nearly unexplainable.

"If you think it's confusing, I agree," says Rappaport, who has spoken along with Giebus at numerous senior centers in Luzerne County about the new prescription drug cards, which became available last week.

While pharmacists expected a rush from those seeking savings on their prescription medications, for the most part it hasn't happened. Many baffled seniors already struggling to pay for costly prescription drugs on limited incomes say no matter how hard they listen and how many pamphlets they read, it's still difficult to decide which card - if any - to choose.

"My husband's been reading everything and I even talked to Medicare on the phone and I still couldn't get any understanding," says Myrtle Paige, who came to the Nanticoke Senior Center with her husband, Albert, hoping for definitive answers. "I think it's utter confusion."

All but about a half-million of the 2.87 million cards approved by the government nationwide have been issued to people who participate in Medicare managed-care plans and who were automatically enrolled in the card offered by their insurer.

The problem, say Rappaport and Giebus, is that there are so many variables to consider. "Obviously, every situation is different. Shop and compare," says Giebus.

The cards will provide discounts for Medicare participants who have no other prescription drug coverage. In addition, certain low-income participants will be eligible for subsidies, also known as credits, of \$600 a year.

There are 17 different Medicare-approved discount drug cards being offered in Pennsylvania alone. The cards, which are optional and cost no more than \$30 a year, can save users up to 30 percent on prescription costs. Average savings are 10-15 percent.

Some companies might also offer discounts on over-the-counter medicines as well as medical supplies. Discounts vary by card and each card is

slightly different.

Who can apply? Anyone enrolled in Medicare except people who get their drugs through Medical Assistance. You can only get one card. However, you may still keep any other discount cards you have as they might offer better discounts.

The cards are being offered by private companies that include health insurers, Medicare HMOs and pharmacy benefit managers. Seniors say they've received numerous brochures in the mail pushing the various cards. Some have also received information from Medicare and AARP.

Luci Conti, who is 80 and fills three to four medications a month for arthritis, osteoporosis and other ailments, attended a recent talk in Nanticoke to clear up some questions about the subsidy and PACE, a state health insurance program that pays for prescriptions, minus a small co-pay.

About 15,000 seniors in Luzerne County are on PACE or PACENET. If you are on these programs, and your prescriptions are already paid for, you don't need a discount card.

But if your income is low enough (a maximum of \$12,569 for singles and \$16,862 for couples), you could qualify for the \$600 subsidy - if you're on Medicare and under age 65.

"My druggist explained it to me," says Conti, of Nanticoke. "But then a lady in the store told me something else. So that's why I'm here today. To find out."

Rappaport and Giebus field numerous questions wherever they go. When they can't answer, they refer the seniors to 1-800-Medicare, 1-800-783-7067 or the Web site www.medicare.gov. If you call, tell the operator you are from Pennsylvania and what drugs you regularly take. The operator will then tell you which cards you are eligible for. You can choose only one.

Beware of anyone calling you or knocking on your door to sell prescription cards, Rappaport and Giebus caution. No one is allowed to sell the discount cards door-to-door or by telephone.

"Please, please, please read what you get in the mail," Rappaport says. "Please be careful what you're signing. Watch out for fraud. Do not give your Social Security number to anyone."

Also, make sure the card you finally agree to use has "Rx" in big letters and the Medicare logo on the face. The logo means the card has been approved by Medicare.

In the end, Glen Lyon resident Peter Tkatch put it this way: "People up in age don't understand it and get scared. Me, at 84, I don't worry anymore."

USEFUL TO YOU

Answers to your questions about drug discount cards from the Area Agency on the Aging:

Should I get a discount card?

Not if you're on PACE or PACENET (the state's drug program for those 65 and older). You won't benefit from the prescription cards. If you already get prescription benefits from your former employer, or as a veteran through the VA, you also do not need the card.

If you're on Medicare A or B, get a card. If you're single and your income is more than \$23,500 or married with an income of more than \$35,000 - which means you don't qualify for PACE or PACENET - get a card.

How much will it cost and how much will I save?

Fees range from zero to \$30 a year. Discounts vary, but could be as large as 30 percent. Some cards have restrictions on the type of drugs you can buy.

Which card should I get?

It depends on your situation. Many local pharmacies are advertising that they will answer questions about the cards for their customers. Carefully read the brochures and make sure you get the card that works best for you. Compare the cards. What's the enrollment fee? How much is the discount? What drugs are accepted? Some pharmacies and drug companies also offer their own discount cards.

6/5/04

Wesley Habitat House becomes a reality

On May 21, more than 50 people from a dozen different United Methodist Churches brought their shovels and lined the perimeter of the future Wesley Habitat House in Nanticoke. The land (126-8 W. Ridge St.) was given to Wyoming Valley Habitat For Humanity by the City of Nanticoke. Mayor John Toole and City Controller Kevin Coughlin were on hand for the ceremony. The Rev. Ken Carder led the Wesleyan inspired service and invited those gathered to join in the opening prayer. Lisa Pinkowski, treasurer for the project, then presented Wyoming Valley Habitat For Humanity with a check for \$10,000, money raised from both mission giving and Nail Sales by area churches. The money will help pay for the excavation and the pre-cast foundation for the house. After a song by the Spirit Singers from Trucksville United Methodist Church, Carder invited everyone to pick up their shovels, dig into the soil and turn the first layer of the earth. It is hoped that the site will be ready for Saturday morning volunteer groups after July 10.

Further information about the project can be found at the project Web site, www.wesleyhabitatouseofwv.org

6/3/04

After long struggle, building set for razing

With a mystery owner unreachable, the city finalizes demolition.

By JON FOX-jfox@leader.net

The bizarre saga of T.P. Jones Furniture building and the redevelopment that never was came to a close Wednesday.

In the morning, contractors met at the ramshackle building on Hanover Street to finalize plans for demolition, and in the afternoon a 2-inch thick file was put to rest in a heavy metal filing cabinet.

"We've been trying to get this building down since June 6, 2003," said city Administrator Greg Gullick, leafing through his file on the building.

The story of the former furniture building's final months begins with a shadowy church buying the property for \$7,600 in an eBay auction and ends with a shadowy owner unreachable somewhere in the South American country of Colombia.

The city spent an estimated \$20,000 in court fees, in advertising in an Arizona newspaper in the hopes of reaching the new owner and in private detective fees before officials received court approval weeks ago to raze the building.

"Demolition will start June 14 at 7 a.m.," Gullick said. The cost will run the city more than \$103,000, funds that will come from the a community development block grant that had been earmarked for a repaving project on Lincoln Avenue.

The Church of a Different Spirit, based in Peoria, Ariz., bought the site in March of 2003 from a New York state owner with the intention of refurbishing the building and renting student apartments.

But three months later the roof caved in, and that's when the headaches began, Gullick said. The city contacted Randy Jenkins, representative of the church, informing him of the collapse and asking him to address the problem.

"Well, he never showed up," Gullick said.

Nanticoke police and departments in Arizona were working together to find Jenkins but to no avail.

The city eventually learned that according to documents from the Arizona Attorney General's Office, Jenkins had attempted to defraud the state out of \$25 million by seeking fraudulent alternative fuel loss reimbursements, Gullick said.

When the investigator tracked Jenkins' last known address to Colombia, Gullick knew the odd dance was over. The city had done all they could to make contact and won the right to proceed with demolition.

At least \$30,000 in code violation fines were issued, but Gullick said the city holds no hopes of being paid. "We'll never recover anything. We know we're stuck with it, so we had no choice."

5/31/04

Details of new Public Safety Institute to be revealed next month

By James Conmy , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

A feasibility study expected to be completed next month will reveal details into a proposed emergency services training facility.

When completed, the center, which will be off Prospect Street in Nanticoke near the Luzerne County Community College, would create a centralized, regional approach to police, fire and emergency medical technician instruction, according to state Rep. John Yudichak, D-119.

The "Public Safety Institute" would be on a parcel included in the 44 acres of land donated to the college by Earth Conservancy.

It would be a joint effort between Yudichak, the Luzerne County Fire and Rescue Training Association and LCCC. The \$40,000 feasibility study is being jointly financed by LCCC and a state grant through Yudichak's office.

Jim Wills, president of the fire and rescue training group, said there is a dire need for the center.

"We're training kids to be firefighters and we're sending them out into the world with bogus training," Wills emphasized. "We're trying to get it done the right way for the first time in 50 years. We finally found partners."

A fallen New York City fire fighter, Michael Carlo, was part of the inspiration behind the center, Yudichak said.

His mother, Phyllis Carlo, is from Newport Township and gave Yudichak a \$20,000 from the New York Stock Exchange in honor of her son, who died on Sept. 11.

Yudichak said now it is an endowment in the Luzerne Foundation, but could be used to help finance the training center.

Preliminary plans include a three- to four-story steel tower with various entrance and exit points on a black top property with fire hydrants. Fire fighters and emergency services personnel could practice multi-level rescues. Police SWAT teams could use the building as well.

There also could be a drafting pit for water, a vehicle operation training course and an area where firefighters and other emergency workers can practice removing victims from vehicles.

Yudichak stressed it was too early to say exactly what equipment and training would be available at the facility, or how much it would cost.

"We have all ideas on what we would like to see there, but we have done this in a professional way where we contracted with the very best consultant in the field to conduct a feasibility study," Yudichak said. "This really came from the ranks of the volunteers, police officers and firefighters."

"It fits in to what we're trying to do with regional cooperation between the municipalities," he said.

Wills said the training center would be the first of its type in the area in more than 15 years. Emergency service personnel used abandoned coal miners' homes called "concrete city" in Hanover Township during the late 1980s and early 1990s. But over the years, the homes dilapidated, were not proper for training and became unusable.

The training center would be the first of its kind in Northeastern Pennsylvania and provide training local emergency personnel are traveling out of the area to receive.

"If it is right here in the center of our county, we're going to be able to get our first responders training at a better cost and closer to home,"

Yudichak said. "When the report comes back, we're going to have a game plan. Although it may be a game plan that has to be finished in stages."

Wills credited Yudichak and Dr. Patricia Donohue, president of LCCC. He said they are bringing the type of enthusiasm and commitment the project needs.

When Dr. Donohue was at Harrisburg Community College, she created a public safety training facility and is 100 percent in support of one in Northeastern Pennsylvania, according to Wills and Yudichak.

Dr. Karen Flannery, associate dean of continuing education at LCCC, is the college's point person for the project. She said the proposed center would be owned by the college, but the feasibility study is looking at training needs in a nine-county area.

LCCC already offers some local level training, in addition to associate degree programs for emergency medical technicians, fire sciences and criminal justice.

Dr. Flannery also explained, if constructed, the fire tower would use natural gas and not have a negative impact on the environment or neighboring residences.

5/29/04

Vehicle Break-ins

City police said they were investigating at least seven incidents in which vehicles were entered between Thursday night and Friday morning. Stolen items included clothing and car stereos and speakers. The vehicles were parked on the 300 block of East Main and Christian streets; the 300 block of East Church Street; and the 400 block of East Union and West Grove streets.

Anyone with information is asked to contact police at 735-2200 or you can email the Police Department anonymously at npddet@yahoo.com

5/28/04

This sure isn't your grandparents' polka music

New song combines hip-hop with traditional compositions to attract younger listeners

By JOE PETRUCCI-jpetrucci@leader.net

Band leader John Stanky has tried everything in more than 50 years in the polka music business.

Stanky and the Coal Miners have performed Irish polkas, Italian polkas, Russian polkas, even rock 'n' roll polkas.

Add hip-hop to the list of experiments.

Stanky and local songwriter/producer Jim Donnelly have joined to record "Stanky's Hip-Hop Polka."

Funny as it seems, the song just might work.

"People say 'That's not what I expected, I really like that,' " Donnelly said. "That's a big compliment. It's our goal of still introducing his music, mixed with something newer a younger audience will like."

Stanky's traditional followers, fear not. The 68-year-old lifelong Nanticoke resident will not be donning big gold chains or outfitting his black van with spinning rims.

"It's not like he's going to do this all the time," Donnelly said.

"Stanky's Hip-Hop Polka" will be available on compact discs starting today at Joe Nardone's Gallery of Sound locations and when Stanky and the Coal Miners perform at a special "release night" at Black Rock Brewing Company on Coal Street in Wilkes-Barre.

Stanky has played the Black Rock once a month since January and has succeeded in attracting younger, college-aged fans to his performances to compliment his older fan base.

Donnelly came up with the idea for a musical novelty when hip-hop legends Run-DMC covered "Walk This Way" with original hard-rocking band Aerosmith in 1986.

Donnelly, who owns and operates Moonlight Productions in Pittston, thought a polka/hip-hop song would be a funny mix. Once listeners get past the initial giggles of the unlikely musical bedfellows, they like what they hear.

Donnelly has played the song for Black Rock's younger patrons and employees and said feedback has been positive. "Everybody had a little chuckle at first before they heard it, but then when they heard it they were like, 'That's not bad, I kind of like it.' "

Donnelly and Stanky met at Black Rock in January. The two became fast friends and Donnelly approached Stanky with his idea. Stanky, always willing to try something new, agreed.

At Stanky's performances, Donnelly immediately was attracted to Stanky's signature song, "Apples Peaches Pumpkin Pie," which Stanky composed in the early 1950s with the late Walt Gorecki.

Also, Donnelly liked "No Beer Today," a song Stanky has played for only about four years after hearing the Walt Groller Orchestra perform it on WVIA-TV's "Pennsylvania Polka" program, for which Stanky serves as executive producer. Groller adapted the tune from an old German song.

Sitting in on drums with Stanky, Donnelly realized the two songs had similar beats that could easily mesh with a hip-hop rhythm. Donnelly began experimenting with a drum machine on his computer and was able to match a hip-hop beat with that of the two polkas.

Then Donnelly recorded Stanky's accordion and vocals separately, and after about a half-dozen revisions, came up with a final version that satisfied him. The final cut also includes some rock guitar and a rapper's voice announcing: "It's the man with the master plan, here to turn it out with a mic in my hand."

The song, which was limited to 2 minutes, 34 seconds in the hopes of getting radio airplay, does not sacrifice Stanky's talents. It enhances them with a different beat that translates well to polkas.

"The beat that's in there doesn't hurt the dancers," Stanky said.

Donnelly also played with Stanky's vocals, giving it a tinny, "AM radio" effect when Stanky belts out "Apples Peaches Pumpkin Pie, who's not ready, holler I, let's all play hide and seek."

"He's still doing his own thing. That's the core of his success," Donnelly said.

5/27/04

A painful downsizing

Nanticoke's Bicycle Willy being forced out of home



Most people just know him as Bicycle Willy.

There's little mystery in the nickname; for as long as many can remember, William Vincent has pedaled his bike through the city's streets. "I always ride the bike. I never drive a car," he said, sitting in a rocking chair outside his apartment on Apollo Circle, a Nanticoke Housing Authority complex he's lived in for more than 30 years.

Getting up, he carried a pair of small statuary angels from his apartment and put them in the basket on his red, single-speed cruiser.

Vincent, 83, is in the midst of paring down three decades worth of stuff, preparing for a mandatory move to a smaller apartment in Oplinger Towers, a high rise owned by the housing authority.

Vincent has just 60 days to clean out a two-bedroom apartment crammed with radios, TVs, photographs and whatever else he's added to his collection.

A single man in an apartment designed for families, Vincent is being relocated to a one-bedroom apartment by the housing authority.

"Anybody with no children and two and a half rooms, they have to go," he said. "I just can't help it. I wish I could sue the buggers, but there's nothing I can do."

It's not the distance of the move - his new digs are only about six blocks away - but the smaller space on the sixth floor that's tough to take.

"I don't like it," he said. "It's like a jail house. There's a bunch of people in there."

Living alone since his mother died in 1975, Vincent has accumulated enough bicycles, lawn mowers, photographs and clothing to jam most of his home and an outdoor shed he calls his "shanty."

"I got two and a half rooms loaded," he said.

At one point he owned 200 bicycles, a collection that's been thinned to about 14. He's not entirely sure of the precise number.

"I couldn't find the right kind of bicycle so I just kept buying them," he said.

William Michael Vincent, 57, Bicycle Willy's nephew and only living relative nearby, is helping his uncle winnow down his possessions.

Bicycle Willy's collection contains a little bit of everything, but is mostly comprised of Willy's two passions.

"All his life he liked grass cutters and bicycles," his nephew said. "His life was riding a bicycle and his life was cutting grass."

Getting up abruptly, Vincent walked back into his house, then returned with a special hat.

"I got my picture on a hat from Atlantic City," he said. "I only go down there for french fries and soda. I don't spend a lot of money, but when I see something good I buy it."

The hat is emblazoned with the seal of the City of Nanticoke. Pinned to one side is a round button that is a picture of Vincent wearing the same hat on his head.

Sort of a hat within a hat.

He settled back into the rocking chair and put the cap on. The hat's OK, it's going with him.

"I got a lot of junk in the shanty I've got to get rid of," he said. "I've got pictures on the walls for memories and I got to take 'em down."

William Michael Vincent says his uncle has always been a "pack rat."

"Everything was not one but two, you had to have two to make a pair. If you were to give him one ink pen he'd want two."

The move may sting, but Vincent's nephew thinks it'll be good for his uncle to be downtown and around people closer to his age.

"He wanted to stay there until he died, but I said to him 'Willy, nothing's permanent.'"

The process of getting rid of what most people would think is junk has been hard for his uncle. Even seemingly trivial items carry sentimental freight.

"He calls them his memories and it's hard for him to break away from that stuff," William Michael Vincent said.

Housing authority officials declined to discuss Vincent's case, but said a recent Department of Housing and Urban Development audit found many tenants were living in apartments with space that exceeded their needs.

HUD regulations and housing authority lease agreements mandate that tenants be "appropriately housed," authority lawyer Vito Deluca said. As many as a dozen residents are being relocated.

Inside American Legion Post 350, a group of veterans hunkered down around the horseshoe-shaped bar, glancing up occasionally at a horror movie on the bar TV.

Vincent, a regular visitor, had just made an appearance about 20 minutes ago.

"Oh everybody knows him," said bartender Thelma Chernowski.

"We all call him Bicycle Willy," said John Karpinski from behind his beer.

"He likes to pedal his ass all around town," another patron chimed in.

"Eighty-three and strong as a bull," Karpinski added.

Almost mid-comment, Willy strode into the barroom in a black satin jacket, another Atlantic City acquisition. Paying no attention to the afternoon crowd, he walked toward a back room.

Chernowski, who had heard about the forced move, thinks the relocation won't be good for Willy.

"He's not going to last long down there," she said.

Sitting on the Legion stoop, Willy sipped a Pepsi. His bike was parked at the curb, a sepia-toned picture of his nephew as a young boy rested in the basket.

"You put in the paper what they're doing to me in 2004. They're throwing me out," he said.

Bicycle Willy, 83, has 60 days to clean out an apartment full of 30 years of memories for a move to a downtown housing authority high rise. "I might be here in 2005 by the time I get everything

5/13/04

The Citizens Voice home : Letters to the editor

Nanticoke Fire Department showed compassion and professionalism

Losing a child to death cannot be compared to anything.

Editor:

Every parent believes that their children are special. Teaching them right from wrong as they are growing up, as well as teaching them respect for others, as well as themselves, is a challenging task.

Loosing a child to an untimely death cannot be compared to anything.

We know we had a very special person in our family, but we never realized how many of his friends felt the same way.

This letter, however, is not about Jim. It is about the greatest group of men and women we have ever had the pleasure of meeting - the Nanticoke Fire Department.

Every parent or anyone who has a relative affiliated with this organization should be very proud of them. This fine group of men and women organized every detail necessary to let us know how they felt about my son, Jim, who died as a result of a tragic accident on April 26.

The respect shown to Jim and our family by these firefighters and their display of professionalism was overwhelming. The people of Nanticoke should be proud that these men and women are part of their community. They work hard, they play hard, but above all, they care.

We would also like to thank everyone who has touched our lives in the past few weeks. You may have been strangers involved in Jim's rescue - fire companies and EMS personnel from other communities, acquaintances, or friends - but please know that, in time, you will have helped ease our pain by caring and being there for us.

Life's a dance, you learn as you go.

Jackie Bertrand Denise, Tom and D.J. Wrubel

5/11/04

On the mend and in loving arms

The reward for information on who is responsible for abusing the animal climbs to \$4,100

By MARK GUYDISH-markg@leader.net

The kitten with the clipped ears may still be nameless, but he's not homeless and certainly not unloved - the reward for information on who committed the abuse has climbed to \$4,100.

A Dennison Township couple adopted the stray Sunday after seeing its story unfold in newspapers and on TV. Someone had cut off the tips of the cat's ears and left it wandering the streets of Nanticoke, bleeding profusely.

"What happened to that cat, I feel, was totally hideous," said John Munisteri, who, along with his wife, Lindsay, adopted the cat after its wounds were treated at the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty To Animals of Luzerne County.

One reason the family adopted the cat, Munisteri said, was to replace their 24-year-old cat, who died last year.

The late Whiskers was actually older than the Munisteri's eldest child, currently 16. The youngest of four in the house is 9, but that doesn't include the non-human residents. Chatham, the yellow Labrador Retriever, is 4, and the as-yet-unnamed kitten is estimated to be 6 months old.

The family is still "hemming and hawing" about the kitten's name, Munisteri said. They've been scouring the Internet looking for a moniker that would reflect its courage and survival, but nothing has fit so far.

When it comes to this cat, mice aren't the only critters that people want to trap. The reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person who clipped the ears has climbed to \$4,100, thanks to \$2,500 from the Humane Society of the United States, according to Ed Gross, the director of development at the local SPCA.

The initial reward was \$500 offered by Pittston veterinarian Inayat Kathio, who treated the cat when it was brought in to the SPCA. He doubled that amount almost before the reward was announced. Gross said a private individual offered another \$100, and a local night club put up \$500.

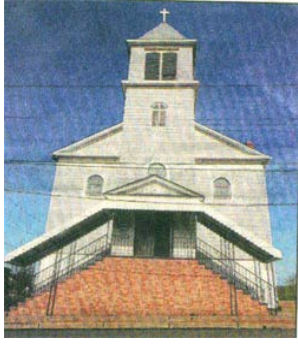
Anyone with information about the cat's injuries can call the SPCA at 825-4111. Police are investigating some leads, but nothing firm.

"Whoever did this, they need to be made an example of," said Ed Gross of the SPCA.

5/10/04

Building's Saving Grace

By MARQUES G. HARPER mharper@leader.net



During the past few months, Bernie Norieka's friends have had plenty to talk about, plenty of earthly questions to ask regarding Norieka's \$50,000 housing find at 316 Pine St. in the city's Hanover section, an enclave of tightly fitted homes and businesses.

One question, though, comes up regularly, Norieka admits on a recent afternoon.

And it has nothing to do with the new house - a white church with a bell tower - sitting a few blocks away from his old house of 28 years. It has nothing to do with Norieka and his wife, Toni, having too much livable space. And certainly it has nothing to do with how the couple will dust the high ceilings or decorate the former altar of their new home.

The much-asked question is one about conjugality. It goes like this: So how are you and your wife going to have sex in a church?

Norieka, 57, has become ready for it - even anticipating that someone eventually will get up the nerve to ask. He says with a chuckle: "God moved out, and I moved in."

The idea for the church-to-home project, he says, came from one of his friends who bought a Sweet Valley church and converted it into a home. While the friend later sold the church and moved to Philadelphia, the idea stuck with Norieka.

When the opportunity in Nanticoke came his way, Norieka bought the church and sold the 2,800-square-foot house he shared with his wife a few blocks away. Until the renovations on the church are completed, the couple are living in their summer home at Lake Silkworth.

Standing 40 feet off the ground at the top of the old bell tower, Norieka answers a visitor's questions and checks out the views from the church. "It's like this every day," he says, his hair swirling in the springtime air. "It's always breezy."

From the bell tower, Norieka says, you can see Montage Mountain Ski Resort, Interstate 81, the nuclear plant in Berwick and other landmarks within a 12-mile radius. While the views might capture some guests' eyes and attention, it's really the house as a whole that is the conversation piece.

In 1915, 316 Pine St. was built, but even today pieces of its former existence as the old St. Joseph's Church, which became part of the Corpus Christi Parish, remain. These days, though, the building is no longer "God's house," despite the crucifixes, church Christmas decorations, 9-foot stained-glass windows, shrine of the Blessed Mother and other religious artifacts that were left behind.

"It's certainly not a worship site," says Maria Orzel, spokeswoman for the Diocese of Scranton. "In the hearts of many people, it will still be viewed as the former church. But it's fair to say it's no longer characterized as a worship site."

And therefore, it's fair to say the space now is the house of Norieka.

Years ago, Norieka says, he and his family attended the Catholic church. However, in recent years, St. Joseph's and several other area churches have closed because of dwindling church population numbers and mergers with other parishes. St. Joseph's closed in 2002 and merged with other parishes to form Corpus Christi.

Norieka, who is acting as his own general contractor, is working on the renovations of St. Joseph's with handyman friends, several subcontractors and his wife, who wasn't too crazy about leaving the couple's last home.

"She didn't like the idea, but she didn't stop me," says Norieka, who now follows the numbers of ambitious homeowners and business people nationwide who have turned churches into houses, nightclubs and stores, among other things.

"I don't have a problem moving into a church," says Toni Norieka, 56, who has been stripping woodwork at the church.

She wasn't surprised when her husband wanted to buy St. Joseph's because he has talked about his idea for years. But she says she isn't a "happy camper" because the renovations are months from completion.

"Maybe it would be a different story if the church was renovated and all ready to move in," she says. "This is a long process. I'm anxious for it to get finished and to see what it will be like."

Using his own design, the interior look, Bernie Norieka says, will incorporate a missionstyle or arts-and-crafts theme. In part of the main body of the church, a spacious kitchen will be equipped with commercial stainless-steel appliances and a 12-foot-long island. An original church chandelier will be moved to the center of the space. There will be half-wall dividers to section off the space similar to a loft.

"I pretty much can see in my mind's eye what this is going to look like," says Norieka, a furniture designer who has completed renovations of restaurants and homes.

The former main altar space with its curved ceiling will be turned into a dining room. The confessional will be converted into storage space.

In one downstairs corner, a guest suite will be constructed and outfitted with a large bathroom and whirlpool tub. Upstairs, in the church's balcony, a master-bedroom suite will offer the appeal of loft space and overlook the great room, or living room, which has a 16 1/2-foot ceiling completed in tin.

A series of rooms in the master bedroom will include a walkin closet space and an enormous bathroom with a 10-foot ceiling, whirlpool and separate shower stall.

After the interior work is finished, Norieka will tackle the exterior. He plans to alter the front of the church and add a stone facade and a new front door. And later he might add a garage or carport to the 145-by-145 yard along with a sunroom and patio.

While there haven't been any expensive project-related mistakes, Norieka says he doesn't want the revamp to become ornate or overvalued. That's why he's recycling as many existing pieces as he can, using items from his old house and shopping at the Wyoming Valley Habitat for Humanity's ReStore, which takes in donated building materials, tools and secondhand goods and sells them at a reduced price.

He also is planning to install new heating and cooling and wiring systems and much-needed insulation. One thing he won't do is change the aluminum siding, which he says would be an expensive endeavor.

"The nice part about this is that it's not ornate," he says, standing on the front steps of the church feet away from glass doors etched with large crosses. "We call it the church. Everybody refers to it as a church. It's a building right now that sort of resembles a church."

Overall, Norieka says, the undertaking is his most ambitious project, and he plans to wrap up a bulk of the work later this fall. So far he estimates having received 250 to 300 requests to see the house and take a tour.

"I'm surprised by the number of people who say, 'I wanted to do that,'" he says. "Now I'm doing it. And that's the end of the story."

Marques G. Harper, a Times Leader staff writer, may be reached at 831-7324.

5/8/04

School aid for Guard children is sought

Help for the kids of soldiers killed in combat sought by state Rep. Yudichak.

By BONNIE ADAMS-badams@leader.net

Children of Pennsylvania National Guard soldiers who die while on active duty in the state receive tuition assistance, but children of those killed in combat do not.

State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, wants to amend the legislation so that children such as Sgt. Sherwood Baker's 9-year-old son will be entitled to 50 percent state tuition benefits.

Yudichak said he was already looking into the issue before Baker, of the 109th Field Artillery, was killed in Iraq on April 26. Baker, 30, of Plymouth, was manning a machine gun atop a Humvee when a building exploded, killing him and another soldier.

"Sgt. Baker's sacrifice really crystallized our resolve," Yudichak said. He has been working with state National Guard officials regarding the tuition benefit contained in the Workers' Compensation Act of 1993.

The governor can order National Guardsmen to active duty in Pennsylvania, such as to assist in emergencies such as floods or civil unrest. But guardsmen also can be activated by the federal government, as is the case with the 109th Field Artillery and the 103rd Armor Regiment deployed to the Middle East.

Children of those who are killed or die as a result of injuries while in state active duty are entitled to tuition assistance at Pennsylvania's state-owned colleges, universities or approved trade schools. That assistance continues for eight semesters or four years, whichever is longer.

Yudichak noted that the state's National Guard is increasingly involved in world events and Pennsylvania law needs to be changed to reflect that.

"At the very least, we need to make sure the children of service members are not cast aside," he said.

5/6/04

Nanticoke puts off sewer access ruling

By JON FOX-jfox@leader.net

City Council tabled a request from the Newport Township Authority to grant access for a sewer line running through a portion of Dan Flood Industrial Park within Nanticoke. For nearly an hour Wednesday night, Jonathan Spohrer, solicitor for the authority, explained the request, but council failed to reach a consensus.

"We're trying to keep this simple," Spohrer said. "The Sewer Authority just wants to maintain this line for the benefit of the industrial park."

Mayor John Toole, at times visibly aggravated, asked how an authority created by council could give away what had previously been under city control.

The sewer line was transferred from the control of the Nanticoke Industrial Authority to the Newport Township Authority in May 2003.

"A year's gone by since last May, the first we hear about this was last week," he said, referring to the introduction of the request to council at last week's meeting. "It's one of our authorities that we appoint, and that's wrong. None of us knew what was going on."

The Newport Township Authority sought possession of the sewer line in order to meet the requirements necessary for a Pennsylvania Industrial Authority loan to develop the 400 acre industrial park.

Before the Newport Township Sewer Authority, a separate entity, accepts control of the line from the Newport Township Authority, officials have asked to be granted access to perform maintenance.

Toole said he moved to have the request tabled because "we really don't know what it's about."

It's unclear how many homes in the city's Honey Pot section are connected to the sewer line and may be subject to Newport Township sewer fees in the future, Toole said.

In other business:

Council unanimously reappointed Rich Wiaterowski as code enforcement officer.

Accepted a bid from Dunmore Roofing & Supply Co. Inc., of Dunmore, of \$37,150 to replace the roof on the city's central fire station.

Opened an environmental study of the Lower Broadway area up for bid. The study is to be funded by a grant.

Voted down a proposal to combine work sessions and meetings into a single evening for the months of June, July and August.

5/6/04

Homemade pierogies a hit in L.A.

Eleanor Dzugan, of the Honey Pot section of Nanticoke, never dreamed that her popular hand-made pierogies would end up being served in a five-star Hollywood restaurant.

Eleanor's son, Robert, and daughter-in-law, Jacquelyn, have a nephew, David Myers, who is an executive chef and founder of "Sona," a restaurant in West Hollywood, Calif.

Myers was named by Food and Wine magazine as one of the "Best New Chefs of 2003" and is a finalist for the May 10 James Beard Award (the Academy Award of the restaurant industry) to be awarded in New York City. He was also recently featured on the April 12 Today Show.

Myers, who had eaten many of Dzugan's pierogies over the years, requested that Robert and Jacquelyn bring him some during a recent West Coast business trip.

It turned out Myers was entertaining some clients who had never eaten pierogi before.

He prepared them lightly fried in French butter and then sauteed them in a red wine and onion reduction sauce.

He called his dish "Pierogi Sona."

It was such a big hit with the LA crowd that Myers is considering making it a permanent part of his menu.

Could the next California food craze be coming from Honey Pot?

5/6/04

Authorities doggedly pursue cat mutilator

The telephone was ringing off the hook at the Luzerne County Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals following publication of a story about a cat that had its ears mutilated.

Ed Gross, director of development for the SPCA, reported the community's response to the animal's plight was overwhelming.

"The reward has grown from \$1,000 to \$1,600. We've also had some leads on who may have mutilated the cat's ears," Gross said.

He said several prospective new caregivers have come forward expressing an interest in adopting the cat.

"We'd like to remind everyone while this cat's situation is special, we have many wonderful homeless cats also awaiting adoption," Gross said.

Over the weekend, the male adult cat, approximately five or six months old, was taken to the SPCA with both ears mutilated. The cat was found in Nanticoke bleeding profusely from both ears.

Adoptable pets may be visited on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and 5 to 7 p.m., Wednesday and Friday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from noon to 3 p.m.

For more information call 8254111.

5/5/04

Man owns up to bank robbery

By Lara Brenckle-lbrenckl@centredaily.com

From: State College Newspaper

STATE COLLEGE - A man arrested in Erie confessed to robbing a bank in State College Friday, said police, who believe he was simply passing through the Centre Region and saw an opportunity.

James Henry Spence III, of West Nanticoke, was arrested Saturday when he was spotted driving a stolen car in Erie, said State College police.

After his arrest, police said he confessed to robbing a bank in Nanticoke, in northeastern Pennsylvania, on April 28.

The Omega Bank at 366 E. College Ave. was robbed Friday when a man walked into the bank and gave a teller a note saying he had a gun and wanted money.

State College police learned of the Nanticoke robbery Tuesday, realized it was similar to the Omega Bank robbery and contacted the Nanticoke Police Department.

State College detectives then asked for help from the Scranton and Erie offices of the FBI. Spence was interviewed by FBI agents and confessed to the Omega Bank robbery, police said.

State College police said it appears Spence was simply traveling through the area when he decided to rob the bank.

No information was released on the amount of money taken in the robbery.

Federal bank robbery charges have been filed against Spence in connection with the Nanticoke robbery. State College police say they anticipate additional federal charges will be filed against Spence in connection with the State College robbery.

State College police said they have not determined whether they will file separate charges in the case.

5/4/04

Reward set in abused kitten case

Cat found in Nanticoke with its ear tips clipped was brought to the SPCA Sunday.

By MARK GUYDISH-markg@leader.net

The thought intrudes the moment you see the scrawny kitten, both ear tips clipped off in precise-looking curves, the scarred line of the wound glaring from his white and gray fur.

"Cruelty never takes a vacation," said Ed Gross, director of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals of Luzerne County. "But I've never seen an animal come in with ears cut off and I've been here 34 years."

Someone found the stray cat near Noble and Ridge streets in Nanticoke and brought it in Sunday, Gross said.

The kitten was malnourished and bleeding when it came in, Gross said. Pittston veterinarian Inayat Kathio sealed the wounds with a laser, and

despite the obvious abuse, the cat is remarkably friendly, rolling and purring on the steel clinic table as Gross showed the damage done.

"He's so underfed you can see his ribs," Gross pointed out. "But he's going to recover completely."

Gross said one possible excuse for the mutilation was a perverse sort of personal training. "A lot of people who have pit bulls crop the ears on their dogs, which is illegal," He said. "They practice on smaller, unsuspecting animals first."

Cropping pit bull ears is meant to make them harder to hurt in illegal fights. "Ears have a lot of nerves and bleed a lot," making them liabilities in a fierce fight.

Gross said the mutilation was likely done with "a knife or scissors and with no anesthetic.

"Whoever did it probably had help, someone to hold the cat down."

The abuse so enraged Kathio that he has offered a **\$1,000 reward** for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the culprit. Anyone with information should call the SPCA at 825-4111. Officials say the call will be confidential.

The mutilation qualifies as a second-degree misdemeanor punishable with a fine from \$500 to \$5,000 and up to two years in jail, Gross said.

Perhaps ironically, the glaring example of animal abuse comes at the start of Be Kind to Animals week, May 2-8.

"If somebody is out there and did this, chances are if they get hold of another cat they'll do it again," Gross said. "I'm afraid to think what they might be capable of doing."

4/30/2004

2 sought in robbery of bank

The incident appears connected with the nearby theft of a car Wednesday, police say.

By KEVIN KEARNEY-kkearney@leader.net

City police are looking for two men in connection with a robbery at First National Community Bank on Wednesday.

A man entered the bank on South Market Street at 11:45 a.m., wrote on a withdrawal slip and handed it to a teller. It said, "Have a gun, want 20's, 50's and 100's," according to a news release.

The teller, who complied with the demand, said the man had his right hand inside his coat pocket, making her believe he had a gun, police said. The man left the bank with the money in his hand.

Detective Bill Shultz said Thursday authorities would not release how much money was taken.

A witness said she saw the robber walk north on Market Street.

Shortly after, witnesses saw two men stealing a blue 1991 Lincoln from Orchard Street, which is behind the bank, Shultz said. One of the men matched the appearance of the robber, the detective said.

The theft was reported about 20 minutes after the bank heist.

The robbery suspect is described as a white male, about 6 feet tall, 200 pounds, clean shaven with brown hair. He was wearing a blue, waist-length winter jacket, blue jeans and a blue baseball cap.

The man seen stealing the car with the robber is described as short.

The investigation is being conducted by the Nanticoke Police Department and FBI, with assistance from state police at Wyoming and the Luzerne County District Attorney's Office.

Anyone with information is asked to call the city Police Department at 735-2200, ext. 3205; Email the Nanticoke Police Department at npddet@yahoo.com; call the FBI's Scranton office at 344-2404; or the county 911 center at 819-4916.

4/27/04

Strip Mine Drowning

By BONNIE ADAMS-badams@leader.net

Divers recovered the body of firefighter James Bertrand on Monday from the same water-filled strip mining pit where five people drowned in 1998 when their vehicle broke through the ice.

State police said Bertrand was a passenger in a Jeep that sank in 15 to 20 feet of water between 2 a.m. and 3 a.m. Monday. The woman driving the vehicle, Sally Jo Sanders, 33, of Glen Lyon, managed to escape through an open window, swim to shore and was later found wandering along a roadway.

The Luzerne County Coroner's Office identified the victim as Bertrand, 30, of Nanticoke. State police Trooper Martin Connors said Sanders was driving when her Jeep failed to negotiate a curve and entered the water.

Connors said state police are continuing their investigation into Bertrand's death. He said Sanders was taken to Community Medical Center in Scranton where she was treated and released.

Bertrand's sister, Denise Wrubel of Glen Lyon, said her husband called her at work Monday morning to tell about her younger brother's death. "He loved life," Wrubel said.

"He was the biggest guy you'd want to meet, but the biggest teddy bear," she said. Wrubel said her brother, who was single, worked in construction and was a generous man.

"He went out with his buddies," she said. Wrubel said he enjoyed NASCAR races and watching football.

Nanticoke Fire Chief Mike Bohan said Bertrand had been a volunteer firefighter for the past 12 years. He said eight fire department personnel who knew him assisted Newport Township at the scene. "They're taking it kind of rough right now," Bohan said.

He described Bertrand as a "big strapping guy" who liked to hunt and fish. The two had hunted deer from a cabin in Bradford County. "He was fun-loving, a great guy to know."

"He's been a friend of mine for 12 years," Bohan said. He said he had no idea why Bertrand would go to the strip mining area where his fire department had assisted after five people drowned on Jan. 1, 1998.

Luzerne County Coroner Dr. George Hudock performed an autopsy Monday afternoon at Wilkes-Barre General Hospital. County Deputy Coroner Bill Lisman said the cause of death has been ruled a drowning. The manner of death, however, remains under investigation.

Lisman said it took Sanders several hours to walk from the scene to seek help. County 911 spokeswoman Liz Linskey said a motorist found her wandering along a roadway at approximately 6:30 a.m.

Lisman described the scene as an extremely remote area and said it took about 20 minutes for all-terrain vehicles to reach it. He said the Jeep was upright and visible beneath the water. Lisman said a dive team removed Bertrand from the Jeep.

Police and emergency vehicles formed a staging area along Industrial Park Road, several miles from the scene. Todd Jones, of Larksville, vice president of the Black Diamond ATV Club, said the group used five all-terrain vehicles to assist emergency workers in gaining access to the scene. A black pickup truck and a procession of ATVs returned to the staging area at 10:50 a.m. Emergency personnel held up a tattered, blue blanket to shield Bertrand's body from view as it was moved from the truck onto a gurney and placed in the coroner's van.

Newport Township manager Larry Grove said the property where the strip mining pit is located belongs to Earth Conservancy, which owns thousands of acres of former mine land throughout the county.

Conservancy Chief Executive Officer Mike Dziak said he was told that the death occurred in the same pit as the 1998 accident. Dziak said that if it is the same location, it is owned by the conservancy.

Dziak said the land has been posted and is designated as Pennsylvania state Game Lands. He said the state Game Commission imposes fines on trespassers. "Are there signs there today? I don't know," he said.

"It's just an impossible situation to control," he said. Dziak said the area around the pit was posted and rock barriers were put in place after the 1998 deaths.

"People take signs down and move things," Dziak said. He said Earth Conservancy owns 4,700 acres of land in Newport Township.

Grove said the township tries to stop all-terrain vehicle traffic in that area by ticketing trespassers who park along Industrial Park Road to unload their ATVs. "It's just so difficult to stop this."

He said there are three or four ways to gain access to the mining pit. "It's a party place for kids," Grove said.

4/26/2004

Neighbors in a stink over dog

Animal's owner, woman next door argue if feces odor is public nuisance.

By JON FOX - jfox@leader.net

Anna Gorski sat at her kitchen table, flipping through the pages of a painstakingly prepared photo album.

Each snapshot shows a chainlink fence in the foreground, behind which sits the subject of the photo on a lawn of neatly trimmed, green grass.

It's not one of Gorski's grandkids. The 78-year-old never had any children. Rather it's the calling card of her neighbor's dog, Duke.

"Can you imagine living by something like that?" she asked, referring to six pages worth of slightly overexposed photographs. "That's dog crap."

Rich Brogan, her neighbor at the corner of Grand and Chestnut streets, just doesn't clean up after the German shepherd, she said.

Brogan responds that Gorski's complaints are unfounded, characterizing her remarks as harassment.

Good fences might make good neighbors, but the low chainlink barrier separating these two postage stamp yards doesn't do anything to impede the free exchange of odors, Gorski said.

"I open the windows - there's my dining room, here's my kitchen - my whole house smells from the dog. Oh, the dog dirt!"

The dog, she said, uses only a small portion of Brogan's yard to do its business, a patch of lawn Gorski passes each time she uses her back door.

Brogan said Duke, whose framed portrait sits on a coffee table in his living room, can use any part of the yard he pleases; it is, after all, his yard.

Gorski, he said, has complained for about a year, but the complaints escalated inexplicably in the dead of winter.

"Middle of winter, there's three feet of snow on the ground, and she's complaining about dog crap in the yard."

The yard, he said, never went more than three days without Duke's business being skimmed from the snow.

"The only time it was really bad was probably when the snow melted," said Brogan's wife, Sherri. With the fair weather, yard cleanups will probably occur more often, she added.

The dispute has taken on a decidedly less neighborly tone, with both parties saying the argument has degenerated to name-calling across the fence.

"I contacted an attorney," Brogan said. "I want to file harassment charges against her."

Gorski said she's made repeat trips to police, demanding action to end the malodorous incursions into her home through open windows.

"I've been everywhere and anywhere for three years trying to get help, and that dog makes piles and piles." Past the photos in Gorski's album, pages of Post-it notes document the dates and responses she receive from city officials.

The city's response hasn't been what she's hoped for. "They come, they look at it and they walk away."

Gorski said when Brogan gets around to collecting the waste in his yard it fills a trash can, a claim Brogan disputes.

Police, he acknowledged, have visited his home, but he said they saw no problem with his yard.

On her last visit to authorities, Gorski said, an officer told her he would look into issuing a nuisance citation that carries a fine between \$25 and \$300.

The municipal nuisance ordinance provides defense against anything either "offensive to the senses" or that "interferes with the comfortable enjoyment of life and property" such as "all disagreeable or obnoxious odors and stenches."

According to police, the case remains under investigation and no citation has been issued.

As far as regulations regarding defecating dogs in the city, Brogan's point that it's his yard and his dog's prerogative rings true.

According to the ordinances, Duke can go and go and go as long as he stays on Brogan's property. Any wafting stenches, however, could elevate the

situation to a nuisance.

City Administrator Greg Gulick said the city tries to stay out of all neighborhood disputes, but said excessive feces in a yard is a "health hazard." "We cited one person last year," describing a spring thaw that revealed a yard littered with feces. "When the warm weather came, we went and warned the neighbor."

The city, he said, rarely gets complaints such as Gorski's, but when they do the threat of a citation generally gets some results.

"Once they know that you're not messing around" yards get cleaned.

Nanticoke and Kingston grant free license to dogs at home, but if things get out of control, feces-littered yards could be deemed either a nuisance or unsanitary.

4/21/2004



Fire destroys Nanticoke duplex

A two and a half story duplex home at 205-207 E. State St., Nanticoke, was destroyed in a fire that broke out Tuesday about 4 a.m.

Nanticoke Fire Chief Michael Bohan said the home was occupied by Bill DeGraffenreid, Bonnie Wysocki and her children, Leah, 16, Lee, 15, and Ryan, 13. The other half at 207 E. State St. was unoccupied.

Bohan said, "When we arrived on scene, the home had fire on the second floor at 205, and it progressed to the attic and numerous void spaces. Severe fire damage was sustained to the second and third floors."

Responding were 25 firefighters, three engines, a hook and ladder truck, Medic 25, Nanticoke and Medic 9 from Hanover Township.

When the second alarm sounded, the Hanover Township Fast Team and Engine 6 from Hanover Township rushed to the scene shortly after 4 a.m.

Bohan commended the firefighters in preventing the fire from spreading to the home at 201 E. State St. and St. John's Lutheran Church, next to the burning wood structure.

Two firefighters were treated for minor burns.

4/21/2004

Crime Watch of Hanover section of Nanticoke to participate in community clean-up day

For the 14th year, the Neighborhood Crime Watch of the Hanover section of Nanticoke will join its neighbors in the annual statewide clean up campaign.

Gov. Edward Rendell has asked all residents to participate by sweeping their sidewalks and cleaning tree lawns and curb areas.

The Crime Watch group will assemble between 8 and 9 a.m. on Saturday, April 24, at the Quick-Mart on Middle Road and Espy Street to receive street assignments and begin the clean up.

If time permits, the group also will clean a few catch basins that need attention.

You don't have to be a member of the Crime Watch group to participate. Everyone is welcome. Supplies, such as gloves and trash bags, will be provided.

Give the group a hand in cleaning up the neighborhoods. Even an hour or so will be a benefit.

4/12/2004

Nanticoke ready to join statewide cleanup effort

By Robert Kalinowski , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

A few Nanticoke residents are calling their neighbors to action, asking them to take part in the 2004 Great Pennsylvania Cleanup on April 24.

About a dozen residents that comprise the Nanticoke Civic Pride Committee are spearheading the effort. In the past, the group has concentrated on the restoration and cleanup of Patriot Square.

Now, they are asking fellow citizens to do some cleaning in front of the homes, comparable to the cleanup held in Wilkes-Barre a few weeks back. This will coincide with the state sponsored cleanup on April 24, a project designed by Governor Ed Rendell.

"What we want to do is motivate people," explained Theresa Sowa, co-chairwoman of the Nanticoke Civic Pride Committee. "We want everybody during that week to clean the debris in front of their homes."

The retired Enterprise Street resident said a clean community promotes a better image to attract good-mannered residents and potential business owners.

"You have to have pride in your community. That's how I feel," Sowa explained. "I remember complaining about how dirty it was downtown.

That's how we really got started."

Sowa said the committee and their past work has been aided by city Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski. Since then, Councilmen John Bushko and Joe Dougherty have joined the committee to help, Sowa said.

Nanticoke Mayor John Toole said he has seen city residents and employees already doing some after-winter cleaning and hopes the trend continues after this month's large cleanup.

Toole said, unlike the Wilkes-Barre cleanup, there wouldn't be a special pick up for the debris residents collect. He suggested residents place the debris in garbage bags and include it in their regular garbage pick up.

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4/8/04

City of Nanticoke still in debt

Paving may be limited to just a couple streets

By John N. Hemsley Citizens' Voice Correspondent

The City of Nanticoke is in the red - again.

Nanticoke's expenditures expect to exceed their revenues by an estimated \$151,000 by the end of the year, according to Susan Bennet, certified public accountant.

Even though the city is in debt, it is lower than last year's total of unpaid bills, which was at \$232,000.

This is cutting into the efforts of paving many of Nanticoke's streets.

"We're not going to be able to do that (paving)," said Nanticoke Mayor John Toole.

Paving might be limited to only two streets for this year.

According to Nanticoke City Council, part of the reason why this is happening is due to the lack of money coming in from the water company.

"The water company hasn't been paying at all," said Councilman Bill Brown. "We have to take a stance.

"They are digging up to repair waterlines and not paying permit fees," said Brown.

Pennsylvania-American Water Co. is Nanticoke's supplier.

In other business, a time clock being installed at the city's fire and police departments and in the city hall building turned into a heated debate.

Residents feel that city employees should be held accountable for their time on the job by using a time clock and not by writing it down.

One Nanticoke resident believes time clocks should be installed.

"I think it's necessary for fire, police, and the city," said East Noble Street resident Joan Watkins. "They put it on paper and you have to take their word for it."

4/6/04

Police want to know who killed animals

By Mike Struckus , Citizens' Voice Intern

An investigation was being conducted Monday that could point the finger at possible suspects responsible for the mutilation of animals found Friday in a wooded area off West Main Street, near the border of Nanticoke and Newport Township, said Nanticoke City police.

However, Nanticoke Police Sgt. William Shultz stressed that the investigation is still being conducted and all possible situations are being looked at to find out who was responsible.

"There is a lot of information we have to address, and we're trying to look at all the aspects of the story," Shultz said.

Wildlife Conservation Officer Thomas Swiech said that it appears that the remains, which were found piled on top of each other, are those of several deer, a coyote, two foxes, and an owl.

Nanticoke police believe that some feathers from birds and remnants of cats were also found, but nothing has been confirmed yet.

Sgt. Shultz said that police officials have received several complaints about peculiar behavior around the area where the animals were found.

"There have been reports of individuals, dressed in black, and standing around the fire," he stated.

Other reports were also confirmed of an eyewitness seeing animals being propped up with sticks, as if in a ritualistic style.

Newport and Nanticoke police were working from a tip from an anonymous individual who said a shotgun was seen being handled by the group who may have been involved with the killings and called police after the group spotted the person and pointed the gun at the person.

"Something is going on," Shultz said. "Something is wrong, and we need to address it."

Anyone who has information can call Newport Township police at 735-2001; Nanticoke police at 735-4000; the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals of Luzerne County at 825-4111; or the Pennsylvania Game Commission at 675-1143.

4/5/04

Turning a Dump into a Park

By Mark E. Jones-mjones@leader.net

Although he never aspired to the role, Gary Gronkowski has become a guru of garbage.

He can judge the approximate age of a trash heap based on what types of tires it contains. (Beer cans serve as an equally good barometer, he says.)

He also knows that a pile of discarded asphalt shingles will - when exposed to the elements long enough - turn to goo and require that he use a

pitchfork to poke it apart.

That, in essence, explains why the Nanticoke Conservation Club president was recently perturbed by a stack of roofing material that had been dumped in a field not far from the Susquehanna River. "This is the stuff that (ticks) me off," said Gronkowski, 38, jabbing a finger toward the debris. "It's fresh. It's probably been left by a fly-by-night contractor who didn't want to pay to get rid of the stuff."

Here's the good news: The shingles, plus mounds of nearby litter and abandoned household items, will soon be gone.

Later this month a crew consisting of conservation club members and other volunteers will conduct a trash pickup at the site, known to most Nanticoke residents as Lower Broadway. The event is set for Saturday, April 24, 2004.

It's one of several local projects scheduled to coincide with the first "Great Pennsylvania Cleanup," a statewide antipollution effort. Promoters at the state Department of Environmental Protection are urging groups to get involved by calling 1-888-548-8372 or visiting this Web address:

www.dep.state.pa.us.

So far, the concept appears to be catching on. The state's Web site indicates litter pickups are planned at about a dozen Luzerne County spots, including Forty Fort, Plymouth Township, Frances Slocum State Park and White Haven. Officials also have announced that volunteer crews will scour sections of Hazleton and Wilkes-Barre.

Likewise, the Wyoming Valley Watershed Coalition and its partners are soliciting volunteers for five local projects, including the one in Lower Broadway.

Changing perceptions of site

The partially wooded site, which borders busy Broadway Street, has particular importance to many residents because it's been earmarked as the future location of a public park.

One day, as planners envision it, the park might encompass about 300 acres. It would include fitness trails and soccer fields. Maybe a skate park. Perhaps even an environmental center.

The cost of creating the park could exceed \$1 million, according to one early estimate of land acquisition and related expenses. State and other grants will likely help to pay for it.

In the meantime, the project's supporters simply want to start changing residents' perceptions of the long neglected property, said Tony Margelewicz, chairman of the Nanticoke Greenway Alliance.

"We want to make it known that it's not a dumping ground," he said. "Someday there will be children playing on it."

Scout groups and members of Nanticoke Civic Pride are expected to help haul away junk on April 24, Gronkowski said. "It's just like anything, if you want to sell it, you clean it up first," he said. "We're not selling anything, but we need the public buy-in (for the park to succeed)."

If Iron Eyes Cody were alive, the American Indian would certainly shed more than a single tear over the mess marring Nanticoke.

The actor, linked indelibly to those Keep America Beautiful commercials of the 1970s, died in 1999. So, respectfully, we ask that you take a gander at this partial list of junk strewn over the city's Lower Broadway section, then picture for yourself how it looks.

An upholstered car seat.

Several plastic clothes baskets.

A faded and partially deflated Wilson basketball.

A vacuum cleaner.

A flattened McDonald's french fries container.

A black tarp.

An Everlast flip-flop.

Two recliners.

A Trailrider tire.

A Westinghouse television.

A crumpled car body.

A wood pallet.

Burger King bags.

Empty Budweiser, Coors and Coors Light bottles.

NEPA popular as trash site

Gronkowski, who picked up his litter savvy during previous service projects at an area stream, took a preliminary tour of this month's cleanup site. He tallied tires and took stock of other hard-to-remove items. Among them: a crumpled auto body and a lumber pile.

While there, he encountered Nanticoke resident Walter Uranowski, 76, who said he frequently walks through the area. "Every time I come here, there's more and more junk," said Uranowski, bristling at a barrier formed by newly discarded boards. "You know, if the cops parked here from time to time, they'd make enough money to pay their salaries."

Gronkowski suggested that's probably not the case. The area is too dark. And illegal dumpers arrive at odd hours. Besides, he later said, "there's illegal dumping in every state, every corner where no one's looking."

Still, he and other residents believe the problem has become particularly pronounced in Northeast Pennsylvania. In part, that's due to the region's abundance of former coal mining tracts and other abandoned parcels, which allow for an "out-of-sight, out-of-mind mentality," he said.

"We have more remote areas, more unpatrolled areas with easy access," said Gronkowski. "I mean, I got my Saturn in here. Imagine a guy in a pickup truck - no problems."

Later that day, an elderly couple tried to drive through the proposed park, then turned back at the wood-debris barricade.

The duo recalled that, back in its heyday, this area contained a basketball court and a dance hall. "Boy, if the people who used to live in Lower Broadway saw it today," the man said, "they'd roll over in their graves."

4/3/04

Doctor blamed for causing drug overdose death of man

By Edward Lewis , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

A convicted Nanticoke doctor is being blamed in a five-count civil lawsuit for causing the drug overdose death of 42-year-old Kevin Sweeney on March 1, 2000.

Sweeney died less than 24 hours after Dr. Laureano M. Manuel had prescribed him Diazepam and methadone, according to the lawsuit filed Friday in Luzerne County Court by Attorney Joseph A. Lach.

Lache represents Joseph E. Sweeney, who was appointed administrator of his brother's estate.

According to the lawsuit, Kevin Sweeney had suffered from back pain, depression and an opiate addiction. He had sought treatment from a number of physicians for his back pain until Dr. Manuel began treating him in September 1999.

Dr. Manuel had seen Sweeney on average of once a week to 10 days between September 1999 to Feb. 29, 2000.

During that time, the lawsuit alleged, Dr. Manuel had prescribed Sweeney a number of controlled substances, including Zanax, Corisoprodol, Amitriptyline and Hydrocodone, which is an opiate.]

On Feb. 29, 2000, Dr. Manuel had prescribed Sweeney Diazepam and methadone.

Less than a day later, he was found unresponsive at his Hanover Township home.

According to the lawsuit, Sweeney died from cardio- respiratory depression and arrest due to a drug overdose from medication prescribed by Dr. Manuel.

The death of Sweeney was the direct result of negligence of Dr. Manuel, the lawsuit claimed.

It further claimed Dr. Manuel did not have knowledge, formal training or education in the diagnosis care and treatment of back pain, depression and opiate addiction.

Dr. Manuel is being accused of negligence, fraud and misrepresentation, survival action and wrongful death. Each count seeks \$50,000.

Dr. Manuel was convicted by a Luzerne County jury on Sept. 11, 2002, of two counts each of Medicaid fraud and prescription of a controlled substance to a drug dependent person and one count of prescription of a controlled substance not in accordance with treatment principles.

He was sentenced to five to 10 years in state prison on Oct. 15, 2002, but had been free on \$75,000 bail while he appealed his sentence.

The state Superior Court earlier this year affirmed his punishment and the state attorney general's office filed a petition in county court seeking to revoke his bail.

A hearing on the attorney general's petition has not been scheduled. Dr. Manuel lived in Berwick but had his office at 294 E Union St., Nanticoke

4/3/04

Circular 'altar' with animal remains in Newport Township a mystery

By DAVID WEISS-dweiss@leader.net

Nanticoke Police note: e-mail us at npddet@yahoo.com or call 735-2200 if you have any information concerning this article

NEWPORT TWP. - Township and Nanticoke City police are investigating a pile of about 25 to 30 burned and mutilated animal remains found in a "circular-type altar" in a wooded area, police said.

Nanticoke Officer Kevin Grevera said police received a call last week notifying them of the pit found behind the 500 block of West Main Street in Nanticoke. The location is within neighboring Newport Township's boundary.

Remains of birds, dogs, deer and cats were detected in the stone pit, which has a circumference of about 30 feet, he said.

Grevera also said officers recently received a complaint of a black Labrador retriever being found with its paws cut off.

The find is being investigated by the two police departments, the Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals and the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

Grevera said he could not speculate if the slayings are related to any type of satanic rituals.

"It's fairly obvious that it isn't legitimate hunters or trappers," he said. "We do have additional information we are following up on."

Most of the animals in the pit have been reduced to bones. Others appear skinned, but their bodies still mainly intact. Some fur was visible, along with deer legs - chopped inches above the hooves.

The sight raised enough ire in Nanticoke resident John Hall to make him want to start a reward through the police department to offer anyone who helps bring an arrest. He wants to start the reward with \$250 of his own.

Nanticoke Police note: e-mail us at npddet@yahoo.com or call 735-2200 if you have any information concerning this article

Hall and his friend, Robert Belcher Jr., learned of the pit after Belcher's 15-year-old son discovered it while riding an all-terrain vehicle. Hall is familiar with the area, where he walks his dog.

"I'm out here every day," Hall said. "When I heard about this, I thought, 'Oh, how terrible.'"

The police officer was unsure how long the remains had been at the location. Any charges filed in the investigation will be done with guidance from the district attorney's office.

"There are a lot of cruelty to animal charges which are applicable, in addition to reckless burning and conspiracy," Grevera said.

There have been many brush and garbage fires in the area recently, Grevera said. But the remote location makes it tough for police to watch.

"It's one of those areas we have a great deal of difficulty patrolling," he said.

4/1/04

Nanticoke Council Adopts State Uniform Construction Code

By Elizabeth Skrapits Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

Nanticoke City Council voted at Monday night's work session to opt in for enforcement of the state Uniform Construction Code, but will need to find a new building inspector to do it. Council unanimously passed the first reading of an ordinance that would allow the city to administrate and enforce the Uniform Construction Code, a statewide mandate that establishes a minimum of five mandatory inspections on all residential and commercial construction. The opt in/opt out period starts April 9 and ends July 8. Opting in means a municipality can use its own employee, if properly certified to perform the inspections, contract out to a third party, or partner with one or more other municipalities for the service. Opting out means the state Department of Labor and Industry would handle UCC enforcement and administration.

Building Inspector/Zoning Officer Richard Wiaterowski is certified in BOCA code, except for electrical, and could be certified for UCC, City Administrator Greg Gulick said. However, Wiaterowski gave his resignation, effective April 9, due to his taking on a job with the Luzerne County Corrections Department. Solicitor Bernard Kotulak said the city will have to get another building inspector, but the ordinance is to acknowledge to the state that the city is going to enforce the UCC itself.

Council agreed to speak with Wiaterowski about staying on part-time until a replacement could be found.

Mayor John Toole said the city "definitely" needs a full-time building inspector.

In other business, council passed a resolution to authorize Gulick to apply for \$87,091 in Department of Community and Economic Development funds to pave East Church Street from Walnut to Market streets. Gulick said the grant, which would include paving, engineering fees, and audit costs, is part of DCED's "Elm Street" program.

Council passed a resolution to transfer the city's property at 126-128 West Ridge St. to the Nanticoke Housing Authority, to be signed over to Habitat for Humanity for the construction of homes.

Kotulak said the property has a common driveway and an encroachment, which makes it undesirable for most construction.

Councilman John Bushko protested that the city should try to sell properties it was not using.

3/10/04

First attempt at biathlon a golden charm for Nanticoke resident

Nanticoke resident Matt Emelett competes in the winter biathlon at the Empire State Games

By DAVE KONOPKI - davek@leader.net

Late in December, Matt Emelett decided to attend an introduction to biathlon clinic in upstate New York.

"I saw the sport on television a couple of times and it looked like a lot of fun," said the Nanticoke resident. "But I had never competed in a biathlon event in my life."

Now he's a gold medalist in the sport.

The 20-year-old recently won the gold in the Individual Biathlon Event at the Empire State Winter Games in New York. The event was held at Mount Von Hoevenburg in Lake Placid and Emelett competed in the novice division.

The sport of winter biathlon combines cross-country skiing and rifle shooting. Competitors race various distances between shooting stations, where they can deduct seconds or minutes from their time. In summer biathlon, the skiing is replaced by running.

Emelett didn't have lofty goals entering the Empire State Games.

"My goal was to just finish the race," said the sophomore physical therapy major at Wilkes University. "I was in complete shock when I knew I'd won. When they called my name, I was in complete disbelief."

Inspired by his finish, Emelett continues to train for the biathlon and plans to enter several summer biathlon events. He also has a long-term goal of making the U.S. Olympic team.

"It might be five or six years away, but I think it could be a realistic goal," said Emelett, who is a member of the cycling team at Wilkes. "I just need to continue my training and get a little faster."

3/8/04

Honey Pot official backs playground fence plan

By Elizabeth Skrapits Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

A safety measure soon to be installed at the Garfield Street Playground in the Honey Pot section of Nanticoke has at least one neighbor singing, "Don't Fence Me In."

Linda Purshinski, vice-president of the Honey Pot Recreation Association, said the organization has discussed putting up a fence around the playground for three years and raised the approximately \$6,000 it will cost through donations.

"We want it to be safe for the kids," Purshinski said. "We feel it will be more secure."

In the past, when there were problems such as noise complaints, the Nanticoke police said "they couldn't do anything until they knew the parameters of the playground," Purshinski said.

She said signs will be posted indicating the playground will only be open from dawn until dusk, but in order for the rule to be enforced by police, a fence has to be installed.

The four-foot chain-link fence will be added along the existing 12-foot fence to form a rectangle around the playground, Purshinski said.

The cause of the controversy is that when the fence goes up, the neighboring property owner, Richard Ryncavage, will lose two

parking spaces for his apartment building. Additionally, there are concerns that the fence will go all the way down to the street, but Purshinski stresses this is not the case.

"We don't want to be mean," she said. "They have a wrong impression of what we're doing."

The Recreation Association claims the fence will only be on land that is technically part of the playground.

Many years ago, the Greater Nanticoke Area school district received the Garfield Street property from a now-defunct coal company, Purshinski said. The playground, she noted, was formerly part of the Garfield Street School.

The deed states the property can be used for education or recreation or it would revert back to the coal company. Since the coal company no longer exists, the school district is responsible for the property.

The district leases the property to the city of Nanticoke, which in turn leases it to the Honey Pot Recreation Association, Purshinski said.

She explained that under the lease, the association is allowed to make improvements to the property, and the school district has been very supportive of the Recreation Association's plans.

3/4/04

No one hurt when pipe bomb detonates in Nanticoke

By Robert Kalinowski , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

A pipe bomb found inside a Nanticoke residence on Wednesday afternoon blew up as the Scranton Bomb Squad tried to perform a "render safe" procedure to disable the device.

The explosion shattered three windows and caused minor exterior damage to 170 W. Green St., where the bomb was found.

No one was injured as a result of the blast.

This was the first time such a bomb exploded as the Scranton Bomb Squad attempted to perform the procedure, police said.

The bomb, capped on both sides, was approximately 10 to 12 inches long and three-quarters inches wide.

The residents of the home found the bomb on a shelf in an unused closet while preparing for upcoming remodeling.

The family has lived in the residence for several years, so authorities suspect previous residents may have left the bomb there.

Authorities were dispatched to the home just after 4 p.m. for a call that a bomb was discovered at the residence.

Nanticoke emergency crews arrived at and secured the scene, asked nearby residents to temporarily leave their homes, and called in the Scranton Bomb Squad.

When the bomb unit arrived, it attempted to perform the "render safe" procedure.

The procedure could be likened to detonation, but not exactly, police said.

The squad carefully delivered the bomb to the yard of the residence. From there, the squad attempted the procedure, which was performed as crews stood at a distance from the device, police said.

Normally, crews would break the bomb open from a distance and "make it safe," police said.

However, when they tried to do this, the unexpected, but "contained," blast occurred, police said.

Crews finished the job soon after and left the scene at about 7:30 p.m. All residents were safe to return to their homes Wednesday night, police said.

Nanticoke police said the investigation is continuing and the incident will be reported to the federal Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms

3/4/04

Crew detonates pipe bomb found in home

The device was found in a never-used closet in a West Green Street home.

By LANE FILLER-lfiller@leader.net

After the pipe bomb was found in Steve Lappano's house; after it was removed; and after it exploded outside, taking several of his windows with it, it seemed the man's night might finally take a turn for the better Wednesday.

It was not to be.

When Lappano called PG Energy, as advised by Nanticoke Fire Chief Michael Bohan, to have his gas turned back on, he was repeatedly told there would be a \$90 charge to have it done.

"I'm not paying it," Lappano yelled into the phone as he strode through his quaint but broken-glass strewn backyard. "A bomb just exploded outside my house. I didn't ask anyone to turn the gas off, and I'm not paying to get it turned back on."

It started at about 4 p.m. at Lappano's home on 170 W. Green St. in Nanticoke. Lappano's father-in-law, helping with some renovations, peered into a closet Lappano and his wife had never used in their two to three years in the house, and saw what appeared to be a pipe bomb.

Police and firefighters were summoned and they in turn summoned the Scranton Bomb Squad, which got the device outside. They it began a procedure called "render safe," during which the pipe bomb was detonated.

"It was very loud, very shocking," Bohan said of the detonation, which happened at about 6 p.m. "I've really never heard of anything like this in my 27 years in firefighting.

No one was hurt and Lappano seemed to be holding up well under the absurdity of the situation. He said he had no idea how the bomb could have gotten into his house or who could have put it there.

At about 7:30, as the firefighters were ready to leave, Lappano said "I just realized I've got no heat." The firefighters said he should call PG Energy, and Lappano genially agreed.

He was less genial 20 minutes later, after talking to several PG Energy employees and at least one supervisor, when he stormed out of the house and got in his car, looking for justice and gas.

"They want to charge me almost \$100 bucks," Lappano told a neighbor. "It's insane."

Justice, common sense and human kindness prevailed, however. By 9 p.m., PG Energy employees had turned the gas back on, at no charge to Lappano.

"It was a mix-up between customer service and the guys who actually handle this stuff," Lappano said via telephone, sounding much more relaxed.

3/4/04

Council Reviews Nanticoke Finances

By Elizabeth Skrapits-Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

City finances were among the main issues at Wednesday night's Nanticoke council meeting.

Resident Alma Berlot asked Councilman William Brown, as finance director, why city employees were recently given \$1,000 raises. "It was done covertly," she said.

Brown denied that council "went under the table" in dealing with the situation.

He said the employees' contract had been negotiated, and three out of the four council members had voted for it.

Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski said she did not agree with the contract, so had voted no.

Mayor John Toole said he did not vote for the contract because the raises it included were not in the budget.

Toole noted that cuts in expenditures have not been made, and the city could face a shortfall of \$150,000 by the end of the year.

In other business, council voted unanimously to approve the application for a Community Development Block Grant of \$458,854 to be used for various projects, including demolition.

On a related subject, Councilman John Bushko asked whether the city could move forward with the demolition of the former TP Jones furniture store on South Hanover Street.

Engineer Ben Sevenski of Pasonick Associates said emergency bidding had been done when the site partially collapsed last June; Popple Construction came in as the low bidder.

2/23/04

Nanticoke woman still moved to serve

Former teacher who volunteers at VA doesn't let MS stop her

By BONNIE ADAMS - badams@leader.net

World War II veteran Doris Merrill zipped down the medical center hallway and out of sight in her motorized wheelchair.

The 80-year-old was off to a therapy room where she regularly volunteers to help patients at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

There, she teased patient Henry Harter, 91, of Stillwater, and he teased back. That's how the banter often goes between Merrill and her fellow veterans.

"Now you know why I like to volunteer," she said afterward. She loves listening to the veterans' stories.

"I'm still needed," she said.

Merrill helps with a veterans' newsletter and competes in athletic events. She won five gold medals in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in New York City in 2001.

Merrill, of Nanticoke, was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis at age 23, shortly after getting out of the Navy in 1946.

She remains genuine in her humor, laughter and compassion. The former Nanticoke public school teacher is vibrant and talkative, except when her illness brings her down.

She temporarily lost her sight, her voice and her hair in 1978. From her room in another area hospital, she overheard someone say that she had only 24 hours to live. "There's no way I'm dying," Merrill thought. She tried a different drug therapy and eventually rebounded.

When asked if she is a determined person, she replied, "If I have to be."

Merrill was teaching at John S. Fine High School in Nanticoke when her multiple sclerosis affected her ability to walk. Football and basketball players regularly carried her up the stairs of the building.

"I could not have taught without those kids at Nanticoke High School," she said. Even now, she hears from former students there and at Wilkes University, where she also taught.

Her students kept vigil with her husband when Merrill was so sick in 1978. She said the kindness she has given to others has returned to her tenfold.

"God's been good to me," she said.

The oldest of four children, she enlisted in the Navy in 1944. Merrill wanted to do her part for the war effort after her brother, George, joined the Navy.

She worked in Naval Intelligence at Cape May, N.J., where she met the Marine corporal she would marry. A photo of her wedding party is displayed in a case at the medical center. Merrill is wearing a white Navy dress uniform, and her late husband, Paul, and their attendants are wearing dark uniforms.

"It was the best 37 years," she said of their marriage. Their son, Paul, lives in Kingston. Their younger son, George, died 8 1/2 hours after birth.

"That's one time in my life I got very bitter," Merrill said. But the self-pity subsided when she realized she still had her son, Paul, to raise.

The grandmother of three said she wanted to live long enough to become a great-grandmother. That happened in October with the birth of her grandson's daughter, Olivia.

"When the Lord says 'Go,' I'll go."

2/20/04

Rendell links tax reform to passage of gambling measure

By James Conmy , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

Gov. Ed Rendell was in Nanticoke on Thursday night promising to bring property tax reform to Pennsylvania. The governor's plan is to slash property taxes by legalizing slot machines at Pennsylvania horse race tracks, like the Downs at Pocono, Plains Township. Gov. Rendell estimated statewide the slots could generate \$1 billion in revenue, create 35,000 new jobs and save 30,000 jobs, which are in jeopardy at the state's struggling racetracks. The proposal is stalled in the state legislature, but Gov. Rendell and local state elected officials like Sen. Ray Musto and Reps. John Yudichak and Tom Tigue, are fighting to have it included in the 2004-2005 budget. "Nobody seems to be in a hurry to do this," the governor told the crowd of about 100, most of whom were senior citizens. "If we wait too much longer, we're not going to be able to do it in a way people get relief." Locally, the plan would save the average household between \$462 and \$262 per year. For example, in the Greater Nanticoke Area School District, property owners would save an average of \$309 per year. "The property tax system in Pennsylvania is inherently unfair," Rep. Yudichak said. "The dream of property tax cuts is now within reach." Gov. Rendell mentioned some Republican leaders' fear legalizing slots could create a gambling problem in Pennsylvania. However, he pointed out a million Pennsylvanians travel to neighboring states to gamble every year. But they are ineligible for counseling in other states because of non-residency. The governor's plan does include funding to treat potential addicts. But he said no matter what, it should be person's choice as to whether he wants to gamble. "All of that money is going to other states," Gov. Rendell said. "Three hundred and thirty dollars may make a significant difference for someone who has the burdens of living on a fixed income." If accepted, the governor plans to increase state funding in school districts from about 34 percent to 44.5 percent. "We're going to get there, that is a promise," emphasized Gov. Rendell. "The people of Pennsylvania have been waiting for property tax reform and the time to give it to them is now." Luzerne County Commissioner Todd Vonderheid said Gov. Rendell's plan is especially needed in Luzerne County. He said by reducing costs, the state can invest more in bringing in good jobs. "Property tax is the number one issue to working families and senior citizens in Northeastern Pennsylvania," he emphasized. "This is a bold first step and it's great to see our local state delegation taking the lead throughout the commonwealth." Joan Watkins and Dorothy Yeager of the Nanticoke Taxpayers Forum were on hand for the governor's speech. They are supporting Gov. Rendell's proposal to initiate property tax reform and bring slots to state racetracks. "I thought it was a terrific speech and I hope it can be implemented," Watkins said. "He explained it very well - why take gambling money out of the state when we could keep it here?" Yeager also was impressed with the governor's plans. "He was impressive," she said. "We need property taxes lowered. They're getting higher and higher." Yeager, like many of Nanticoke's residents, is on fixed incomes. "This town's all retired people; they are paying too much," she concluded

2/16/2004

Dept.'s challenges fire up new chief

Mike Bohan says he plans to turn things around within a department that's bouncing back.

By MICHAEL McNARNEY-mmcnarney@leader.net

When Mike Bohan volunteered to join the Nanticoke Fire Department in 1976, he was a young father joining an elite fraternity of 210 men. There were waiting lists then, Bohan said - lists that took two or three years to get off of.

Now, Bohan's youngest child is 18, and there are 90 volunteers on the rolls.

"If we have a working structure fire, if we have a turnout of 20 to 25 guys, we're doing well," Bohan said.

Bohan, 48, is aiming to turn that around as the department's newest chief. The City Council unanimously voted to name him to the position at its meeting last month.

Bohan's position is a unique one in the fire service. |

He not only leads a department that is part volunteer and part full-time paid - 10 men are currently making the Nanticoke Fire Department their careers - but he is also working full time in the department fighting fires and driving fire trucks.

Bohan himself started as a volunteer and later became a paid full-timer. Two full-timers are always on duty at the department's main station, across from City Hall on East Ridge Street.

And even though he's chief and author of the work schedules, it was Bohan working a 14-hour shift from 4 p.m. Sunday until 6 a.m. today.

"He really took the bull by the horns," City Administrator Greg Gulick said. Bohan's new salary is \$38,000 a year.

Bohan said he wants to turn the membership decline around, starting with visits to Greater Nanticoke Area High School and more classes for potential new firefighters.

Already, he said, there are 30 people signed up - from surrounding areas as well as Nanticoke - for a beginning firefighting class scheduled for later this month.

The department's volunteers have restored an old police car, 1995 Chevrolet Caprice, and turned it into a fire chief's car. Now volunteers are working on a Reading truck to use as a utility truck.

"We do have a good core group of firefighters," Bohan said. "To do it for nothing - it's amazing. I definitely think they are a very underappreciated group of individuals."

When Bohan first volunteered, he said, he was basically given a helmet and boots and sent to work. Now, he said, there's 88 hours in coursework just to get started as a volunteer - to say nothing of specialized courses in hazardous materials.

Working more closely with neighboring departments, Bohan said, is another solution to problems presented by the city's declining population and the accompanying decline in volunteers.

"Everybody's talking about consolidation, regionalization," Bohan said. "Maybe we can do that with the fire service."

USEFUL TO YOU

To learn more about becoming a Nanticoke volunteer firefighter, call 735-5860.

2/12/04

Nanticoke receives OK to tear down structure bought by 'church'

Luzerne County Judge Ann Lokuta on Wednesday granted Nanticoke City permission to demolish a partially collapsed building at 428 S. Hanover St. after repeated attempts to contact the structure's owner failed. Nanticoke officials filed a petition in Luzerne County Court against the building's former owner, Randy Jenkins, Glendale, Ariz., and the Church of a Different Spirit, Peoria, Ariz. The church purchased the property in March 2003 for \$7,600 through an eBay Internet auction from an unknown seller in New York. Jenkins was listed as the contact. Nanticoke officials deemed the building unsafe after the roof collapsed last June. A private investigator in Phoenix, Ariz., Arthur C. Hanratty, was hired by Nanticoke to locate Jenkins. Hanratty served Jenkins with notice to appear for a hearing in Luzerne County. Advertisements of the hearing also appeared in early January in the Daily News Sun, a newspaper in Arizona. On Wednesday, Jenkins failed to show for a hearing before Judge Lokuta, who granted Nanticoke's request to raze the building. Jenkins also owes Nanticoke more than \$50,000 in fines regarding building code violations.

2/11/04

A quest just rolls on and on - Pushing for a skate park brings a lesson in government to two teens.

By MICHAEL McNARNEY-mmcnarney@leader.net

When Chris Pastuszak and Billy Borowski started lobbying for a skate park in Nanticoke, they were barely in their teens.

Now Pastuszak, 16, has a drivers license, and Borowski, 17, has an after-school job and a goatee.

And Nanticoke still doesn't have a skate park.

"I think they like to make promises and not hold true to them," Pastuszak said.

"I think they don't want to build it," Borowski said.

The pair and their skating friends are still practicing their sport in back yards and - when they can stay ahead of the police - in front of the Kanjorski Center, at Luzerne County Community College, on the loading docks in front of the post office, and elsewhere.

And they're still politely bringing up the topic at Nanticoke City Council meetings, a place where politeness can be in short supply, said Councilman John Bushko. "They're nice kids. We [council] go and we hang out and we're giving these kids the runaround."

Bushko said council has already approved the idea of a park, but the project got passed off to city's Civic Pride Committee and then to the Lower Greenway Alliance, the group building a park on Broadway Avenue near the Susquehanna River.

Tony Margelewicz, a leader of the greenway project, said the skate park was supposed to be built along Broadway but has gotten bogged down in the larger bureaucracy and process associated with the greenway - which could be 300 acres.

"I really feel I'm letting these guys down," Margelewicz said.

The greenway group has hired consultants to help plan the park. So there are assessments, site plans, environmental assessments, public-input meetings and more.

"I want to push this project in the worst way," Margelewicz said. "By the time it gets done, they [Pastuszak and Borowski] are going to be on their way to college, and it's not fair to them."

In Ames, Iowa, city parks and recreation director Nancy Carroll said the skate park built by the city in 2002 has been wonderful.

"We just think it's one of the best things we've ever done," Carroll said. There's usually 25 or 30 people using it a day in warmer weather. Pastuszak estimated there are about 15 regular skaters in Nanticoke.

Ames, which is home to about 50,000 people, kicked in \$130,000 for the 10,500 square-foot park. Grants and donations made up the rest of the \$218,692 total cost.

Carroll cautioned that insurance concerns must be addressed first. In Iowa, she said, the state Legislature exempted cities from liability arising from properly built skate parks.

"It really is a fear factor," Carroll said. "When it comes to the deep pockets of a city, you have to be careful."

The Pennsylvania Department of Natural Resources tells cities on its Web site to check with their own insurer or check with insurers that specialize in skate parks. At last week's council meeting, Mayor John Toole said he didn't know if anyone ever got price quotes for a proposed skate park.

Pastuszak and Borowski said they're going to keep pushing for the park - if not for themselves, then for generations that follow. But still, they've been left a little wiser about the political process.

"We used to go [to council] every month," Pastuszak said. "Gradually, it seemed like less progress was made and less progress was made.

"Now it's going nowhere."

2/09/04

Townhouses may rise up from rubble

By MICHAEL McNARNEY-mmcnarney@leader.net

Now, it's a ruin.

A lone stair tower looking out over a vast field of bricks is all that's left of the cigar factory on West Church Street in Nanticoke.

But two Maryland-based developers have visions of three-story townhouses on the site - if the city can gain control of it, finish the demolition job and give them the parcel.

"This will not cost the city anything," Mayor John Toole vowed.

Demolition of the Consolidated Cigar building, also known as the General Cigar Co. building, went bad in July 2003 when part of a wall struck a neighboring double-block.

"Everything went to hell," City Administrator Greg Gulick said. "Otherwise, the building would have been gone by now."

The owner, Mike Nordstrom of Wild Clover Lumber and Reclamation Co. of Murrell's Inlet, S.C., had been salvaging the floorboards and other lumber from the building for refinishing and resale, Gulick said.

But after the July 2003 collapse, Gulick said, Nordstrom came under greater regulatory scrutiny and ran out of money.

It's money that Renaissance Development Partners principals John Howell and Jeff Welch say they will try to get to finish the demolition and build up to nine, three-story townhouses on the site.

Howell and Welch appeared at last week's City Council meeting, asking for council's cooperation.

"Immediately the challenge is the cigar factory site, which seems to be at a standoff," Howell told council. "The current owner refuses to clean it up, and the city refuses to clean it up."

Nordstrom had agreed to give the site to the city, city officials have said. If Renaissance Partners can get grant money to finish the cleanup, officials said, the project can move forward.

Neither Gulick nor Toole knew of Renaissance Partners' track record. The corporation's business address is the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry's startup business center at 421 N. Pennsylvania Ave. However, its Web site, www.renaissancedevelopment.us, was registered in Maryland.

"It's going to be a good project," Gulick said, "providing Renaissance can get the funding."

Michael McNarney, a Times Leader staff writer, may be reached at 831-7305.

2/09/04

A sticky issue in Honey Pot -A playground fence may rile good neighbors

By MICHAEL McNARNEY-mmcnarney@leader.net

Bernie Gorski said she and her Garfield Street neighbors used to be loyal donors to the Honey Pot Recreation Association.

No longer.

Gorski and others who live near the Honey Pot playground on Garfield Street are fighting the association's plan to fence off two off-street parking spots adjacent to the playground.

Parking is at a premium in Honey Pot, built up long before Ford Expeditions and three-car garages. On much of Garfield Street near the park, there's no room to even park on the street without completely blocking the sidewalk.

"They don't even live down here," Theda Rynkiewicz said of the playground officials pushing for the fence. "They live up in the other end of Honey Pot."

The fence - which will essentially seal the park off except for a gate that can be unlocked - will help the neighborhood, association President Carl Aciukewicz said, not hurt it.

"We've had problems in the playground with noise, littering, things like that," Aciukewicz, who lives in upper Honey Pot at 49 Rock St., said.

"What we're going to do is put a fence up and put signs up and say, 'Hey, here are the rules of the playground.'"

The fence will stop the foul language and late hours - defined as 8 or 9 p.m. by Aciukewicz - of older teenagers who play basketball there. Some of them, Aciukewicz said, are from downtown Nanticoke and not Honey Pot.

"You can't stop them from" using the park, Aciukewicz said. "But you can curb it."

"What we're doing," Aciukewicz said, "is fencing our own property."

But the land is only leased, not owned, by the playground association. It is owned by the Greater Nanticoke Area School District. City Clerk

Michael Yurkowski said last week that the School District leases it to the city, which in turn leases it to the playground association.

Aciukewicz said his association's lease runs until 2016, but playground neighbor Rynkiewicz said she isn't so sure. She and neighbors have hired Kingston lawyer Jonathan Spohrer to study the matter. The city attorney is also looking into the subject.

The two spots are next to a three-apartment building at 115 Garfield St. owned by Rynkiewicz and her husband, Richard.

Their tenants already have spots, but the two spots are used by visitors as well as by many residents who have no off-street or on-street parking at all.

A third spot is now occupied by the association's equipment shed, but was where Gorski long parked her car - starting with the 1964 Chevrolet Impala she drove to her first job decades ago.

"Now, this group, for whatever reason, decided they don't want anybody parking here," said.

2/06/04

Just what might have been?

by: MICHAEL McNARNEY-mmcnarney@leader.net

The people of Nanticoke could have had a 20-year certified public accountant as its new overseer of the public purse.

Or a commercial insurance salesman who said he used to be a controller for a multimillion-dollar business.

Or a corporate tax manager with a bachelor's degree in accounting as well as a master's degree in business administration.

Instead, city officials chose a microfilm technician in the Luzerne County Prothonotary's Office to be the controller for a city with a \$1 million debt and no clear way out of its money mess.

"I really don't have an accounting background," Kevin Coughlin, 44, said Thursday. He said he helps scan court documents and put them onto microfilm, as well as docket cases and do filing and whatever else needs to be done.

Mayor John Toole, who made the motion for Coughlin's appointment at Wednesday's City Council meeting, agreed that hiring Coughlin was political.

Former Controller Joseph Dougherty ran for City Council and won in 2003, leaving the controller's seat, an elected position, vacant.

"He's a bright young man. He's interested in the city. He has kids involved," Toole said of Coughlin at Wednesday's meeting.

"Is it a political appointment? Yes, it was a political appointment. I trust in Kevin."

Among those passed over was Karen Hazleton, a certified public accountant since 1984 who has an accounting practice in the Hanover section of Nanticoke.

Her Saturday-morning interview with Toole, Councilman Joseph Dougherty and Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski lasted four minutes.

"It was a very quick interview," Hazleton, 47, who has lived in Nanticoke since 1979 and who holds a master's degree in business administration from Wilkes University, said with a laugh Thursday.

The controller oversees spending for the city, which has a \$3.2 million budget this year.

With mounting money problems - crowned with the disappearance of \$100,000 and tax office employee Brenda Davis's subsequent guilty plea to theft and forgery charges - it's an important job.

"It was a great time for me to offer my experience and expertise," Hazleton said.

She said she doesn't plan to run for the office in 2005. "I got a very bad taste about how politics works."

Coughlin, who Hazleton was passed over for, said he took some accounting courses at Luzerne County Community College.

Coughlin is a 23-year county employee. His wife, Ann Marie Coughlin, is also a county employee.

His father-in-law, Stanley Glazenski, is a former Nanticoke mayor and retired deputy clerk of court for Luzerne County.

Coughlin said he is active in youth sports coaching and wants "to try to do something for the kids." He sees his role as controller is to pay the bills "and make sure everything is up and up."

"I can just try to control the spending," Coughlin said.

Tony Margelewicz, 53, who also interviewed and was not selected, lashed out at Toole at Wednesday's meeting. Thursday, he said his quarrel was more with how Coughlin was selected rather than Coughlin himself.

Margelewicz also said Toole challenged him to a fight after Wednesday's meeting. Toole, in an interview, didn't deny it.

1/29/04

Nanticoke seeks loan of \$1 million for bills

City Council met Wednesday night and quickly made three decisions.

The city, having received permission from Luzerne Court of Common Pleas judge Ann Lokuta, will seek an unfunded loan of \$1 million to pay bills.

After a bit of squabbling about where the city's debt originated, council voted to pursue the loan, which will be repaid over 10 years. In an aside, council member John Bushko accused Mayor John Toole of "living off the prior administration because you rape the sewer account every chance you get."

Toole disputed that claim.

Council also named as new fire chief professional firefighter and 27-year Nanticoke Fire Department veteran Mike Bohan. Bohan replaces William Ives, who relinquished the post at the end of 2003.

Bohan, the first professional chief in the city's history, said: "I want to continue concentrating on improving our equipment and getting the volunteer ranks back up. I'm also very interested in starting a junior firefighting program to get young people interested again."

In settling a piece of old business, council agreed that former police Chief Chester Zarembo will begin receiving his pension.

Disputes had cropped up because Zarembo, who retired in April, 2003, was not hired within the Third Class City Law. In addition, there were fears that because of a technicality, Zarembo should not receive any money until 2009, and that the city would be forced to repay pension money released before then.

Zarembo thanked council warmly after they voted to begin paying his pension.

1/20/2004

A call for action in community

By MICHAEL McNARNEY - mmcarnay@leader.net

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Joe Dougherty recognizes Nanticoke is at a crossroads.

The city government is cash-strapped. The number of families living in poverty increased from 7.7 percent to 11.5 percent between 1990 and 2000, while the population dropped by 10.6 percent to 10,955.

The fresh city councilman says consensus and cooperation, not disagreement, are necessary if the city is to survive, much less prosper.

"I just want to see us all work together," Dougherty said. "I feel we can all work together. It's the only way things are going to get done."

Dougherty had already won the Democratic nomination for city controller in May 2001 when the sitting controller, Ann Marie Bezdziecki, resigned.

City Council appointed Dougherty to the controller's job in September 2001; in November 2001, he won the seat outright.

Dougherty ran for council and was elected in 2003, while serving as controller. Council is now looking for a new controller.

"I just wanted to get more involved," Dougherty, 36, a salesman for Colours Inc. in Wilkes-Barre, said.

Nanticoke needs more involvement - and more people, he says.

Dougherty is from Nanticoke and is raising his family there. Families, he said, are what the city needs more of.

But dozens of communities the size and age of Nanticoke face similar problems without simple solutions.

"We need to increase revenue somehow and decrease spending," Dougherty said. "But where do we cut? I don't want to cut services."

The city fields a substantial police department, full-time firefighters and volunteers, a six-man street department and has lots of playgrounds.

Right across the Susquehanna River is Plymouth Township, which just eliminated its police department - a warning to other municipalities on fiscally shaky ground.

Nanticoke hasn't raised its taxes in "years and years" Dougherty said, while health insurance, fuel and other costs have soared. Police officers, he said, don't have a co-pay for their insurance, something Dougherty and many people in private enterprise fork over.

"You don't want to raise taxes," Dougherty said. "Something has to be done through the state. Everybody needs help now."

1/19/2004

Sliding toward rink's full potential

Skaters say facility's ice needs to be smoother; facility's grand opening could occur on weekend

By STEVE MOCARSKY - smocarsky@leader.net

Although ice conditions aren't perfect for skating at Patriot Park, some folks still managed to have some fun this weekend enjoying the city's new rink.

"There are some high spots and broken pieces. It's not perfect or professional, but as you can see, a strip's all they need," said John Jaikes, a Nanticoke native out Sunday helping his nephew and two daughters slide down a strip of ice on their bellies.

"It's fun," said 12-year-old Jessica Jaikes as her dad gave her a push to increase her sliding speed and distance.

Jeffrey Jaikes, 9, said he wants the city to "fix it up because it's bumpy," while 8-year-old Jennifer Jaikes said she hopes to do some skating there if the city clears the snow off the rink.

Mayor John Toole said the rink is "not quite finished yet," and needs additional water added to make the ice thicker.

Toole hopes conditions can soon be improved. He's hoping a grand opening with musical entertainment can be arranged for next weekend.

City firefighters and street department employees volunteered time to set up the temporary rink using tarps as a base and old fire hoses and topsoil as a frame. Some water leaked into the park because of ground that's not level, but officials hope to correct the problem.

Nanticoke resident Gloria Deitz, who was throwing some bread and nuts in the park, and trying to lure a squirrel from its perch on a nearby tree with a walnut, said Toole's plan for the rink was a nice idea.

"It's something for the kids to do, if the bigger ones leave it alone," Deitz said.

The mayor said someone threw a picnic table onto the rink last week, damaging a section. "At least we think it's kids. ... I hope we catch them."

Toole said people have told him they heard some negative feedback about the rink that he believes is political in nature. He thinks most people are pleased with the prospect of providing a free winter activity in town for children.

Stephanie Hart, 16, said the rink is a good idea because "there's not much for the kids to do around here," as she walked through the park with her friend Nicole Banks, 15. Both girls live in Nanticoke.

Both girls were upset to hear about the picnic table.

"The community's trying to do something for the kids and (someone is) trying to ruin it," Banks said.

Hart said she thinks "a lot more people will come" to the rink if and when musical entertainment begins.

John Jaikes said he appreciates workers setting up the rink because "it's getting harder and harder to do things that don't cost anything."

"Everybody should come out and enjoy this," Jaikes said.

1/17/2004

Press Release Source: Office of the Pennsylvania Governor

PA Governor Rendell Announces \$261,400 DCED Grant for Lexington Village Project in Luzerne Co.

HARRISBURG, Pa., Jan. 17 /PRNewswire/ -- Pennsylvania Governor Edward G. Rendell today announced that Nanticoke City has received a \$261,400 Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) grant to help prepare the site for construction of Lexington Village, an integrated-living community of 55 senior restricted-age apartments, in addition to an Alzheimer's and personal-care facility.

"This project provides much-needed housing and personal-care services to our seniors while directing investment and new revenue to Nanticoke," Rendell said. "Through targeted, proactive investments, I am deeply committed to securing private investment in economic-development projects to create jobs in small and midsize cities and towns across the state."

Funds will be used to install three swales and to construct three retaining walls that will make the site ready for construction. The grant is administered through DCED's Housing and Redevelopment Assistance Program.

Rendell said the development has the potential to create 75 jobs and generate more than \$500,000 annually for the local economy. Completion of the apartments is set for 2004 and the personal care facility in 2005. The development is located off of Kosciuszko Street near Luzerne County Community College.

For information on DCED funding, visit the DCED Web site at www.inventpa.com.

CONTACT: Abraham Amoros, Office of the Pennsylvania Governor, +1-717-783-1116.

1/18/2004

Group persists despite cost of proposed park Planners seek to transform scrub land into trails and a playground.

By MICHAEL McNARNEY - mmcnarney@leader.net

It's a haven for dumpers, beer drinkers and illegal all-terrain vehicle riders.

But Jerry Hudak envisions walking/biking trails, a skate park and a playground for kids.

Hudak and others want to turn roughly 300 acres of badlands on both sides of Broadway Avenue near the Susquehanna River into a park.

Its borders haven't been determined, its opening date might be years away, and lots of money is needed to make the dream a reality.

But that hasn't curbed enthusiasm.

"It's quite a big endeavor, but we're going to go for broke," said Hudak, president of Nanticoke's Chamber of Commerce and leader of the Nanticoke Greenway Alliance, the local group working to establish the park.

More than \$100,000 in state grants have been awarded for studies and planning. But land acquisition, equipment, construction and additional planning will likely push the cost past \$1 million.

Land owned by the city as well as municipal authorities is tentatively included in the park, said Julie McMonagle of the Pennsylvania Environmental Council. The council is overseeing consulting and engineering for the park.

"We knew that we had some pretty much wasted land in the flood plain that was just lying around," Hudak said. "Quite frankly, it's very unbecoming as you enter the city."

McMonagle and Hudak are working to make the park all things to all people. There has already been one public meeting to gather input. A second is planned for 6 p.m. Thursday at the Plymouth Township Municipal Building.

"We'll rely on their input in designing the park," McMonagle said. "We're planning a park that will reflect what the community wants."

Already, Nanticoke's kids play soccer on a well-kept field on the north side of Broadway. But a visitor to the south side finds quad trailers, beer cans and vast amounts of junk - from appliances to at least one automobile - on the south side.

Walking/bicycling trails, something Nanticoke's park system lacks, topped a citizens' wish list recently compiled by a consultant.

Hudak said there are lots of abandoned railroad rights-of-way in the area well-suited for such trails.

The trail system's crown jewel could be the abandoned railroad bridge over the Susquehanna River just south of the Broadway bridge.

Hudak said the bridge could connect the planned Susquehanna Warrior trail on the west side of the river to the Nanticoke park, which itself could be a hub for an extension of the Wyoming Valley levee trail system on the north and the Earth Conservancy's proposed Escarpment Trail to the south.

But Hudak said he doesn't know who owns the bridge, and that rehabilitation estimates have been around \$1 million.

Almost everything else a person could want in a park has been proposed: a playground for younger kids, a skate park for older kids to softball and soccer fields and basketball courts for everyone.

There are also potential amenities that people wouldn't ordinarily think of, Hudak said. The rock cuts made by railroad builders a century ago could make great geologic interpretive sites. And a climbing center for rock climbers who frequent the area could be built.

Hudak said he's already had interest from developers who would like to erect commercial buildings adjacent to the park area.

A question that hasn't been answered is who would pay to mow the grass and maintain the park once it opens. The city struggles to pay its bills and faces a declining population and tax base.

"That's a difficult question, but they have to start talking about it now," McMonagle said. She said other options include forming a regional recreation authority and exploring having colleges and businesses contribute.

Hudak sees the park as a tool for retaining the city's young people and drawing in new people and businesses. Maintenance costs, he said, will be worth it.

"We have to provide some reasons for the children to appreciate the community and the environment around here," he said.

On the net:

Learn more about grants already awarded for the Lower Broadway Greenway at:

<http://www.nanticokechamber.org/grant.htm>

1/15/2004

Nanticoke, lace up your skates

By LANE FILLER - lfiller@leader.net

When will the ice skating in Nanticoke's Patriot Park begin?

Soon, promises administrator Greg Gulick, very soon.

The city had hoped to have its new rink up and skating by last weekend, but the effort was beset by temporary problems.

For starters, "it's not quite level," Gulick said of the rink, constructed of tarps, old fire hoses and topsoil.

"When they filled it with water, a lot ran out."

Gulick said firefighters and Street Department employees who have volunteered their time to make the project a reality spent much of Wednesday shoring up the rink with sandbags. The hope is that the sandbags will plug the leaks long enough for the water to freeze, creating a smooth skating surface.

"We hope to have everything set up so that people can come out and skate this weekend," Gulick said. "It's still good and cold, so with a little more

work, we should be in business by Friday or Saturday."

The idea of a skating rink was first proposed by Mayor John Toole after he repeatedly heard complaints that there was nothing for kids to do in Nanticoke during the winter.

Toole has said the rink will be built at a minimal cost to the taxpayer, and with no increase in the town's insurance premiums. He said he hopes to see a second, smaller rink constructed for the younger kids.

1/15/2004

Nanticoke asks judge to approve \$1 million loan

By Elizabeth Skrapits , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer

Nanticoke City passed the first hurdle in taking out a \$1 million debt loan Tuesday after a hearing in the Luzerne County Court of Common Pleas. Judge Ann Lokuta gave permission for the city to proceed with taking out the general obligation note, which will be payable over 10 years.

The loan is for the city's unfunded debt, as defined in the Local Government Unit Debt Act of 1996.

"Over the last couple of years, there's been a lot of unanticipated debt," Mayor John Toole said. "A lot of it is one-time debt and shouldn't surface again."

Lokuta ruled that "the city's unfunded debt was lawfully incurred; that taxes levied have not produced the revenues needed; that paying such debt by curtailing services will be dangerous to public health and safety; and that it is not feasible to levy additional taxes in the current fiscal year."

Taking out the 10-year note "will accomplish the payment of the debt without endangering the rendering of services or requiring the levying of excessive taxes," Lokuta also wrote.

The city's current tax rate includes about 30 mills for unfunded debt, city Administrator Greg Gulick said

That millage levy went towards two previous bonds - one paid off last year and the other due to be paid off this year. It will now go towards the new loan.

"This is not going to increase taxes at all," Gulick noted

Now that the court has given the green light, Gulick said the next step is for council to approve the loan by resolution at the Jan. 28 work session.

Gulick said attorneys and bond counsel, PNC Bank, would be at the meeting to explain the loan details.

After it is approved at the meeting, it goes to the state, which then has 20 days to review it and give a response, according to Gulick, who estimates the city should have an answer by late February or early March.

Toole said the loan will also take care of bills and pay off a tax anticipation note that has been rolled over for two or three years, meaning most of the city's debts will be settled.

"There's other debt out there, but less than when we came in office," he said. "In 1998, there was unfunded debt for close to \$2 million."

Toole estimates much of it was incurred from 1994 through 1997.

"Things should pretty well balance now, but who knows what the years ahead will bring," Toole concluded.

1/12/2004

Nanticoke ice rink needs fine tuning

By Tom Venesky , Citizens' Voice Staff Writer



The temperatures are just right, and with a few more minor adjustments, Nanticoke residents will soon be able to take advantage of an ice skating facility in Patriot Park.

City employees will be finishing construction of the ice rink today, and Mayor John Toole said it should be ready for use some time this week.

The rink measures 150 feet by 110 feet and the water is contained in a sandbag barricade. Toole said construction of the rink started last Thursday and on Friday, fire department personnel filled it with water.

Because there is a slight pitch to the ground, Toole said employees would stack additional sandbags and increase the height by eight inches on one side to contain the water. The ice thickness ranges from two inches to five inches.

"We've been talking about an ice skating area for two years, but there were always liability questions which knocked it down," Toole said, adding the rink is not a permanent structure and will be covered under the city's current policy.

Despite the frigid temperatures, Toole said on Sunday that not all of the water had frozen thoroughly. But he expected the ice to be solid within a few days.

He said anticipation for the rink is high among residents.

"We're getting a lot of calls at city hall. People want to know if it's ready yet and some people wanted to rent ice skates," Toole said. "I think it's going to go over well."

He added the rink will be a perfect spot for families to take their children and there has even been an offer from a local band to supply music during the day. The rink will be open until 10 p.m. and it will remain in use as long as the weather allows.

"If it goes well, I'd definitely like to make this a yearly tradition," Toole said. "Next year we'll put more planning into it and maybe even make it bigger."

1/9/04

Arrest made in vehicular deaths

A N.Y. is charged after 2 were killed in a crash in a car he was driving.

By LANE FILLER - lfiller@leader.net

A New York man turned himself in to Nanticoke police Thursday in connection with the October death of two women.

Eugene W. Devins, 41, of Saranac, N.Y., was driving a Honda Civic carrying his wife, Verna Devins, 37; Donna Roushey, 19, of Nanticoke; and David Romanowski, 21, of West Nanticoke on Oct. 30, 2003. According to police reports, Devins lost control of the Honda and hit a Jeep driven by Edward Stavetski, 31, of Nanticoke.

Verna Devins and Roushey were killed in the crash, which occurred on Lower Broadway near the Nanticoke/West Nanticoke bridge. Eugene Devins has been charged with driving under the influence of alcohol, two counts of homicide by vehicle while under the influence of alcohol, aggravated assault by vehicle while under the influence of alcohol, reckless driving, careless driving, driving at unsafe speeds, exceeding maximum speed limits and disorderly conduct.

The disorderly conduct charge stems from the allegation that Eugene Devins obstructed emergency workers trying to help his wife, interfering with their work as he attempted to help her himself.

According to Nanticoke police officer Richard Vietz, Devins came to Nanticoke and turned himself in in a prearranged manner. Devins was arraigned before District Justice Donald Whittaker and released on bail. A preliminary hearing will be held at 10 a.m. Thursday.

According to police reports, Devins and Stavetski were given blood-alcohol tests because they smelled of alcohol at the scene. Devins registered 0.136 while Stavetski registered 0.02.

According to police reports, the Devinses were drinking at the Nanticoke American Legion that night, where Verna Devins' daughter, Melissa Dillon, was bartending, from about 9 p.m. until midnight.

The Devins had met up with Roushey and Romanowski at Romanowski's home and were going out to get some food when the accident occurred, according to police reports.

1/8/2004

Garbage rate up 28 percent

City residents will pay \$176 this year, \$38 more than in 2003.

By MICHAEL McNARNEY - mmcarney@leader.net

Annual garbage rates here have jumped \$38 from last year, causing some residents to grumble as they opened their 2004 bills this week.

"I guess they want us to get a loan" to pay the bill, retiree James Reynolds said Wednesday. "I can't see a 30 percent raise."

The yearly bill for households climbed from \$138 to \$176, said city Administrator Greg Gulick, a 28 percent increase. But the increase, he said, covers only the cost to haul away garbage and doesn't generate any extra revenue for the city.

J.P. Mascaro & Sons of Harleysville, Montgomery County, was the low bidder when the city sought a new five-year contract last November, Gulick said. Their bid, \$591,300 for 2004, was significantly lower than Waste Management's \$707,823. Over five years, the contract will be about \$3 million.

Garbage services have not changed, Gulick said.

Residents each week can still put out four trash bags, recyclables, lawn waste in warmer weather, and one bulk item like a refrigerator.

Mark Cesare, Mascaro's general manager, said expenses for trash haulers have gone up in the five years since Nanticoke's trash rates were last set.

The state imposed a \$4 per ton tax on garbage in the summer of 2002, tripling the cost at the landfill from \$2 per ton to \$6 per ton.

Insurance costs have gone "through the roof" since the Sept. 11 terror attacks, Cesare said, and state licensing and regulatory requirements are always growing.

"There's a lot of things that factor into the equation since five years ago," Cesare said. "That's why the prices are increasing."

Cesare said small raises of 2 or 3 percent a year are planned for the next four years.

Michael McNarney, a Times Leader staff writer, may be reached at 831-7305.

To learn more about Nanticoke's trash hauler, J.P. Mascaro and Sons, visit its Web site at www.jp mascaro.com.

1/6/2004

Struggling Nanticoke seeks new city controller

By MICHAEL McNARNEY - mmcarney@leader.net

There might not be much money to control, but the city is looking for a new controller.

The vacancy was created when controller Joseph Dougherty was elected to City Council in November. Dougherty, who was appointed controller in September 2001, ran to fill an open seat on council.

The controller position pays about \$2,400 per year.

Nanticoke, with its shrinking, aging population, struggles with declining tax revenues. The city lost 11 percent of its population from 1990 to 2000, while the median age climbed from 42.1 years to 42.7 years, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Council discussed the vacancy at its reorganization meeting Monday morning at City Hall, City Administrator Greg Gulick said. The job will be advertised in the coming days, he added.

State law mandates the position be filled in a month and that the controller have an accounting background.

Dougherty, 36, is a sales representative for Colours Inc., a Wilkes-Barre auto paint and body shop supply business. He lives at 5 Christian St.

In other business, council:

Appointed members to oversee city departments. Bill Brown will oversee accounts/finance and community development; John Bushko will oversee parks and public buildings; Yvonne Bozinski will oversee public safety; and Dougherty will oversee streets and public improvements.

Learned that the Union Street bridge over Forge Creek on the western edge of the city will be replaced this year by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. Gulick said Pennsy Supply Inc. of Harrisburg was the low bidder at \$568,496.

It's anticipated that the bridge, a box culvert, will be installed starting Feb. 17. The job is slated for July 10 completion.

Michael McNarney, a Times Leader staff writer, may be reached at 831-7305.

1/4/2004

Nanticoke considers ice skating rink

By Robert Kalinowski , The Sunday Voice

Perhaps Nanticoke Mayor John Toole got the idea from another city - New York City, in fact. The city is considering placing an ice skating rink in the hub of town.

It won't be Rockefeller Center, but, cold-weather permitting, a portion of Patriot Square, Nanticoke, will soon be full of ice-skating local residents, young and old, having some wintertime fun for the next six weeks or so, Toole hopes.

Toole will have the Nanticoke City Fire Department cordon off a yet-undetermined parcel of the park with several large, old fire hoses, then fill the space with about three inches of water to freeze.

They will also make a smaller ice skating rink in the park for younger children, he said.

"I think it will go over well," said the mayor. "From what I understand, a lot of kids are looking for somewhere to ice skate."

Toole anticipates the rink will be open by the upcoming weekend, with well-below-freezing weather on the horizon.

Talks about the ice skating rink, Toole said, have been in the works for about two years, with liability concerns being at the forefront of the delay.

He discussed the idea with associations that own and run other parks in the city, and was told the cost of liability would be too high.

So Toole looked for land owned by the city which was covered under its insurance policy. Patriot Square, home to the annual Nanticoke Musicfest and Christmas in Nanticoke, came to mind.

Since the rink will only be a temporary structure - Toole thinks five to six weeks at maximum - the makeshift rink will be covered under the city's liability insurance, he said.

Toole wanted city taxpayers to know that this will not be a burden on them.

"It won't cost the city anything," Toole assured.

He said he's received complaints from city residents that there's nothing to do, especially in the winter.

"We're doing it for the community. It's something to try and create some activity in town," Toole said.

Toole anticipates there being music and possibly refreshment stands near the rink on certain days.

"I think it's going to be crowded," Toole envisioned. "Ice skating is popular now and a lot of kids have ice skates."

He said he'd ask the police and other authorities to keep an eye on the rink, both when people are skating and when the ice is unoccupied at night.

"Just come by and enjoy yourself," the mayor said, inviting local residents to stop by the rink when it opens.