

12/31/2006

New day for Nanticoke

By Elizabeth Skrapits - eskrapits@citizensvoice.com - Staff Writer

Businesses, offices and housing going up in a revitalized downtown. An action plan for fiscal stability. New taxes. Repaved roads. Maybe even — at last — a skateboard park.

After years of decline, debts topping \$2.4 million, and denial about the depths of Nanticoke's financial problems, city officials and some residents are optimistic 2007 will mark the start of Nanticoke's transformation.

"I think you'll see Nanticoke become the greatest little city in Northeast Pennsylvania," municipal authority chairman Dennis Butler said.

Butler wants that to be the slogan for Nanticoke's comeback: "Wilkes-Barre can say 'I Believe.' We'll be 'The Greatest Little City in NEPA,'" he said.

The best part is, after years of disagreement leading to the lack of progress, there are city officials and people on the municipal and redevelopment authorities who want to work together, "to hammer out an equitable solution we can all live with," Butler said.

Things to come

The municipal authority is advertising for a new developer so its property on East Main Street next to the Kanjorski Center will no longer be an empty lot, Mayor John Bushko said.

"That parcel will be developed. The parking garage is going to go up," Bushko predicted.

The municipal authority also hopes to finally lease or sell the Kanjorski Center. The office building has been 80 percent vacant for more than a year.

Alden Road, parts of Market and Prospect streets, and Union Street will be paved with federal money, Bushko said.

Main and Market streets will get a new look. The final design hasn't been completed, but the project will include lighting, sidewalks, curbs, trash containers, "the whole nine yards," councilman Bill O'Malley said. Grant money is available to pay for it, but there is no word yet on how much the project will cost until all the engineering is finished, he said.

City officials are working with parties interested in some residential, commercial and retail projects within the city, O'Malley said. Nanticoke

Housing Authority is going to renovate the former Susquehanna Coal Building into apartments, Bushko said.

And Bushko hopes a skateboard park, delayed because of legal tangles with property ownership, will finally be created in the new South Valley Park on Lower Broadway.

The city has a \$140,000 grant and will use \$100,000 for a new public works garage, O'Malley said. The remaining \$40,000 will go to the South Valley Park.

"We have other funds there that are either in hand or on the way," he said.

Although the park should be started in 2007, it will take several years to complete, he said.

Whitney Pointe, an industrial and residential park on the Newport Township border, will have its grand opening in January, O'Malley said.

Optimists and naysayers

"I'm very optimistic," O'Malley said. "In one year we've gone from not knowing we had a problem to not only identifying the problem but coming up with an action plan to correct the problem."

When O'Malley and fellow councilmen Jim Litchkofski and Brent Makarczyk took office in January, they knew Nanticoke was in bad financial shape, according to accounts in *The Citizens' Voice* at the time. However, the councilmen didn't know how bad things really were.

The city was already in the state Early Intervention program for financially-troubled municipalities. One of the city's coordinators for the program, Bob Sabatini of Keystone Municipal Services LLP, suggested in February that council apply to have the city declared Act 47, or financially distressed, by the state Department of Community and Economic Development.

O'Malley and Sabatini gave a presentation in early March outlining the extent of the city's problems, which surprised the residents and officials in attendance. DCED Secretary Dennis Yablonsky gave the city distressed status in May. The state appointed Pennsylvania Economy League as Nanticoke's financial recovery coordinator, and the organization recently released a long-term Act 47 recovery plan for the city.

Hank Marks, as a member of the GNA taxpayer's association, has been a frequent critic of the school board and city council.

"We already hit bottom," he said. "We have nowhere to go but up."

Three other residents refused to go on the record with their views on Nanticoke's future in 2007, saying their comments were too negative.

But Theresa Sowa summed it up for them, expressing a vote of no confidence. When asked what she thought lies ahead for the city, she suggested city officials take turns buying Powerball tickets in the hopes of solving Nanticoke's financial woes.

"There's nothing, unless everybody buys lottery tickets," Sowa said.

Resident Jim Samselski isn't so cynical about city officials' efforts.

"I actually think they're on the right track. They're just hitting some bumps now," he said. "In 20 years we had a lot of uneducated people, a lot of mismanagement we have to get over."

Although city officials hope to get started and make significant progress in 2007, they know getting rid of Nanticoke's problems will take years.

After all, it took many years for them to develop.

"Bob Sabatini, PEL, the auditors, everyone agrees. We've got severe financial problems," O'Malley said.

The trouble was, previous city officials never instituted policies or controls that "any normal business would have to operate," he said.

In PEL's financial recovery plan — available at the municipal building or online at www.pelcentral.org/Nanticoke — the organization points to years of inadequate record-keeping, accounting, and financial management.

"It is unclear to PEL whether prior officials and City Council had a full appreciation of the magnitude of the growing financial problem," the report states.

Nanticoke's expenses kept growing while revenues stagnated and the tax base declined, making the city's deficit widen each year. Instead of finding

new sources of revenue or cutting expenses, city officials took out loans year after year, amassing a debt of at least \$2.4 million.

"That's not to fund streets, that's not to fund sewer improvements, that's not to fund recreation," O'Malley said. "That's to keep the lights on, put gas in the cars, and pay salaries. That's a very poor use of long-term debt."

Because of the situation, current city officials are faced with the unpleasant necessity of raising taxes. They plan to raise earned income tax to 1.5 percent and bring in a .33 percent "commuter tax" for non-residents. The earned income tax will be used to balance the budget, make overdue improvements to roads and city buildings, and even reduce the real estate tax that goes to pay off the debt.

"The problem is, these people encumbered us with debt that has no value. There's absolutely nothing to show for that debt. You can't point to a street, you can't point to a sewer," O'Malley said. "It's like paying your mortgage with a credit card."

What lies ahead depends on whether the city adopts PEL's financial recovery plan. There will be a public hearing at 7 p.m. on Jan. 3. The city has 25 days after that to decide to adopt or reject it, said Matt Domines of DCED's Governor's Center for Local Government Services Northeast Regional Office in Scranton.

If they accept it, the plan becomes a city ordinance. If they reject it, they have to come up with an alternative that is acceptable to the state.

"We're not here to point fingers. We're moving forward with the city of Nanticoke," Domines said. "We're looking into the future to get it to be a viable city that people want to live in and businesses want to move into."

12/31/2006

John Bushko, mayor of the City of Nanticoke, is looking forward to leading the city in a new direction.

"One of my goals is to work on the debt of the city and to get the city financially solvent."

Wednesday, advisors for the Act 47 recovery plan for the City of Nanticoke will hold a town meeting at 7 p.m. at the Nanticoke High School. One of the items on the agenda to be discussed is raising the earned income tax. The tax now stands at 1 percent. According to Mayor Bushko, one half percent of the money, or roughly \$800,000 earned from the tax goes to the school district. The other half goes to the city. Property tax brings in another \$437,000.

"I would like to see the earned income tax raised to 2 percent. That would bring in additional money for the city," said Bushko. "If the earned income tax goes up, we hope to lower the property tax."

Bushko hopes residents will turn out for the meeting.

One thing I admire about Mayor Bushko is that he is always open to better ideas and suggestions.

"The way I see it is that the people of Nanticoke pay all the bills. They have a right to be heard."

The mayor said he was pleased with the city's police and fire departments in 2006, saying, "We have very dedicated individuals in both departments."

The police department handled 6,250 calls in 2006. The police officers are doing a great job even though they are really understaffed. Right now the department has eight full time officers, a police chief, captain and detective. Recently because of different situations including injuries, deployment to Iraq, and regular vacation or bereavement time, Detective William Schultz and Captain Kevin Grevera have had to help patrol the city streets.

"It is difficult because it takes us away from investigations and other important duties that need to be done and we should be doing," offered Schultz.

The mayor noted the early intervention program calls for 15 full-time officers. "We need to work on getting more police officers," he said.

The fire department answered close to 900 calls this year up from 714 last year. The department employs 10 full-time firefighters.

"We have dedicated volunteers that work hand in hand with our paid people," said Bushko. "I don't think that happened as smoothly in the past."

Another upcoming positive improvement is the repaving of main roads in the city. According to Bushko, Congressman Paul Kanjorski was instrumental in securing grants to pave major roads including Prospect Street, the lower section of Union Street, and Alden Road.

The mayor said there is a need to build up the downtown and increase traffic going through that area. "I hope we can rent out the Kanjorski Center," Bushko added. "I would love to see little shops come into the downtown where people could stop to pick up things they need instead of having to run uptown."

"Nanticoke is a good city with great potential. What makes it that is the hard-working people who live here and take pride in their hometown. The people who make up our city council are intelligent, dedicated and they put in a lot of hours. They want to see the city improve," he added.

"I think the year 2007 is going to be a good one," he concluded.

12/24/2006

Helicopter spots shed fire at LCCC

By hruckno@citizensvoice.com

A fire Saturday at two Luzerne County Community College storage sheds damaged maintenance equipment for athletic fields and covered a large portion of the campus with a thick cloud of smoke.

The fire broke out around 1:30 p.m. in two sheds near the baseball field at Kosciuszko Street and Middle Road. No one was injured, and LCCC spokeswoman Lisa Nelson said only security personnel were working on campus at the time.

The campus closed for its holiday recess on Friday and will not reopen until Jan. 2, 2007, Nelson said.

A Life Flight 3 crew from Wilkes-Barre was on its way from Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center, Plains Township, to Geisinger Medical Center in Danville when it spotted the smoke and notified authorities, a Life Flight dispatcher confirmed Saturday afternoon.

When firefighters arrived, both sheds were fully engulfed in flames, but they were unable to determine which shed caught fire first. It took crews about a half hour to get the blaze under control, Nanticoke Fire Chief Michael Bohan said.

Crews hosed down smoldering items from inside both sheds and ripped apart the roof from one of them. Bohan said some heavy equipment was inside, along with old bathroom fixtures and wooden planters. Still, smoke continued to billow out of both sheds. Campus security personnel were notified, but as of 2 p.m. Saturday, no one had arrived at the scene. According to Bohan, the fire's cause is still under investigation. He plans to call in a state police fire marshal to determine what exactly happened.

12/23/2006

Their home is their Sanctuary

By mbiebel@timesleader.com

Like buccaneers in a crow's nest, Bernie and Toni Norieka command a spectacular view from their bell tower. At 75 feet above the ground and surrounded by four windows, here they experience the weather in ways most people usually don't.

"On quiet nights, you can hear the snow falling," Bernie said.

"It's beautiful during a thunderstorm," his wife added.

On less dramatic days, when it's calm and sunny, they might look down and see a parade – or whatever else is going on in the Hanover section of Nanticoke.

But how did this couple manage to include a bell tower in their home?

Easily. It came with the territory when they converted the former St. Joseph's Church into a house.

Other signs the building was once a church are abundant – from the stained-glass windows that say they were installed "auka" former parishioners (Bernie believes the word means "in memory of" in Slovak) to the grotto in the side yard to the plain black "poor box" attached to the banister of an inside staircase.

"Guests have put donations in there," Toni Norieka said.

"But I don't know where the key is," Bernie Norieka added.

Yet the house is now definitely a home – a modern one, with shower stalls, a whirlpool bath and, in the kitchen, 104 square feet of counter space plus two sinks, one for preparation and the other for clean-up.

"We cook everything," Bernie said. "Cajun, Chinese, Italian ..."

Still, even in the up-to-date cooking area, there are signs of tradition, such as a fruit press, close to 100 years old, that the Noriekas use to make their own sausage. A favorite painting depicts another Old World practice, that of gathering mushrooms.

"When you're picking as a kid, with your parents and uncles, you just learn which ones are poisonous and which aren't," Bernie said, pointing toward a tiny fungi in the bottom right corner of the scene. "This red-topper could be poisonous."

But well before you spot details in the artwork, the first thing you notice when you enter the Noriekas' home is the sweeping expanse of space and the relative lack of walls.

"I like the openness," Toni said.

"We don't miss walls," Bernie said.

Because the space is so large, the couple say, furniture that would have been too dark for their old home is set off to advantage. They've found pieces that work, perhaps not surprising, in other churches.

One table, carved with the words "in remembrance of me," came from a Baptist house of worship.

But collecting furniture was the easy part. Transforming the church, which had been built in 1915, into a house took a lot of work over two years, including the wearying task of removing layers of rubber tile to reveal the hardwood floor below. Bernie served as the general contractor, with help from handyman friends and professionals.

Some things couldn't be changed, such as the cross atop the steeple. Workers told the Noriekas it would be too difficult to remove it from the roof, so they left it there.

The bell, though it weighed 450 pounds, was another matter. The Noriekas were able to sell it to a Michigan man who restores bells. In another change, the couple extended the choir loft a few feet so they'd have more room for their master bedroom.

The Noriekas, who lived 28 years on nearby Espy Street, used to worship at St. Joseph's Church before the Diocese of Scranton closed it in 2002.

"Our daughter was a reader, and our son was an altar boy here," Toni said.

Now, it's simply home – a striking home where stained glass enhances a natural phenomenon.

"The rooms change color," Toni Norieka said, "from pale yellow to bright yellow to golden as the sun moves across the sky."

12/21/2006

Nanticoke passes 2007 budget that increases earned income tax rate

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

The city's 2007 budget passed by council Wednesday implies that a proposed earned income tax increase will be inevitable.

The \$4 million balanced budget is based on increasing the city's portion of the earned income tax from 0.5 percent to 1.5 percent as recommended in the fiscal plan newly released by Nanticoke's financial recovery coordinator, the Pennsylvania Economy League.

Added to Greater Nanticoke Area school district's 0.5 percent earned income tax, residents will pay a total of 2 percent.

Councilman Bill O'Malley pointed out that residents will pay 13 mills of real estate tax instead of 29 for debt service, a more than 25 percent reduction of the total 60 mills. A mill is \$1 on every \$1,000 of assessed property value.

"That, I think, is a positive. That helps balance out the earned income tax increase," he said.

Besides being used to balance the budget, there will be an additional \$700,000 in revenue from the earned income tax, O'Malley said. The surplus

money will go into a capital improvement fund which can be used for things like road repair and public works equipment and vehicles. In other business, Nanticoke police turned out in full force for a vote on changes to their pension fund, which was ultimately postponed. Council was prepared to vote on a cost-of-living increase for police retirees and on lowering the retirement eligibility to 20 years with the department, regardless of age.

However, O'Malley said it would not be a good idea, with the city in the throes of Act 47, or state-designated financially distressed municipality status.

The vote was tabled until city officials could meet with PEL and get answers to questions about how much the proposed resolutions would cost the city long-term.

Most of the police left after that, but O'Malley said he wished they hadn't. He wanted to tell them about an upsurge in vandalism and bad behavior that he said has all the neighbors in his East Ridge Street neighborhood complaining.

12/19/2006

Nanticoke authority will seek new developer for its project

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

Municipal authority members decided advertising is the fairest way to search for someone new to get their main project started.

The authority hopes to hire a developer in February, and could break ground on a mixed commercial and residential building on East Main Street as early as spring, authority chairman Dennis Butler said.

The board voted Monday for solicitor Dick Hughes to draw up an advertisement to be placed in newspapers from Philadelphia to Scranton and trade publications.

"Do I think we'll get people biting from Philadelphia? Probably not," Butler said. "But it proves we're not hiring politically."

By their January meeting, authority members will compile a list of questions for prospective developers, such as whether their firm declared bankruptcy over the last 10 years, and to give completion dates of three past projects.

The developer would invest in and own the new building, but the municipal authority would own a public parking garage to be built as part of the project, using \$5.6 million in federal grant money.

Recently, Nanticoke's municipal and redevelopment authorities dissolved a May 2004 contract with Impact PA, with a severance check of \$50,000 for the Turbotville-based developer. The previous authority boards bought buildings at 108-112, 116 and 120 E. Main St. and had them demolished in November 2005, but nothing was done with the site.

In other business, the 2005 audit newly released by the accounting firm of Zavada and Associates showed no problems, authority accountant Karen Hazleton said.

The audit found the authority had a "positive cash flow" in 2005, she said.

"We were in good shape at the end of 2005, but now we're broke," authority member Ron Kamowski said.

12/17/2006

CV News by: Pam Urbanski

If you are like me, you have purchased at least one poinsettia to decorate your home for Christmas. You might be surprised to learn your Christmas plant just might have been grown right here in Nanticoke.

Varsity Inc., located off Main Street next to Noble furniture, grows more than 20,000 poinsettias for the Christmas season. Varsity Inc., formerly Prices Greenhouses, sits on three acres of land and has seven greenhouses. Its poinsettias are grown for the Christmas season and distributed to buyers across and beyond the Wyoming Valley.

Leon Bogdan is the manager of this facility. He has worked at this location for many years.

"When I was in high school, I worked on the farms for Bob Price," said Leon. Now he makes sure not only poinsettias, but also annuals for the spring season, are grown to perfection.

"There really is a lot of work involved when it comes to growing these plants to maturity," added Leon.

The growing season for the red, white or pink Christmas plants starts in early October.

"Plants need to be transplanted into bigger pots and after about 20 days transferred to a greenhouse. They need to be carefully spaced, watered and fertilized. An important step is pinching the plant so you have more than one flower on the plant. The floors of the greenhouses are heated, allowing for just the right temperature of 72 degrees Fahrenheit. When the plant is fully grown and just needs color, the heat is turned off. The plants then await distribution."

After all these years has Bogdan grown tired of the work? "You have to like what you do," he said. I would say judging by his years of service and the quality of the plant that comes from the greenhouses, he loves his job.

PJP students spread holiday spirit

This past week the first grade and kindergarten classes of Pope John Paul II School brought the spirit of the season to the Nanticoke Municipal Building.

"This is an annual event our students look forward to," said first grade teacher Ellie Anthony. Each student had a hand in making decorations for the Christmas tree which they carefully placed upon the branches. After trimming the tree the students sang some Christmas carols.

Their hard work did not go without reward as they were treated to refreshments and some neat stuff to take home.

12/15/2006

Financial recovery plan for Nanticoke filed

Coordinator proposes raising earned income tax credit, other measures to help city

By Kalen Churcher Times Leader Correspondent

After years of trying to make do with not enough revenue, the city's money troubles are relatively easy to explain.

Its recovery plan, however, is more involved.

"In very simple terms, they cannot raise enough money to fund their operations. The reason they can't is because ... they operate under a third-class city code. Under that code, you have very limited tax-raising ability," said Gerald Cross, executive director of the Pennsylvania Economy League's Central Division.

On Thursday, the PEL, Nanticoke's recovery plan coordinator, filed its recovery plan with city hall. In May, under the provisions of the Municipalities Financial Recovery Act, also known as Act 47, the city was declared "financially distressed" by the state Department of Community and Economic Development.

The designation allows the city to partner with the state to improve its financial position. West Hazleton, Plymouth Township and Scranton share the same "distressed" status.

In order to keep pace with expenditures, the city has repeatedly borrowed money to cover costs, including a \$1 million loan in 2004, \$700,000 in 2005, and \$750,000 this year from the state.

"They borrowed over \$2 million in the last two years and that's basically equivalent to their annual operating budget," said Joseph Boyle, PEL research associate.

PEL predictions show that without intervention or additional loans, annual expenditures would exceed revenue by \$765,240 in 2007; \$926,389 in 2008; and more than \$1 million in 2009. Those numbers could change to a surplus of revenue – \$14,430 in 2007, \$19,303 in 2008, and \$36,129 in 2009 – if the recovery plan is successfully implemented.

"When your city doesn't have a lot of earned income growth, and it doesn't have a lot of property growth and it doesn't have a lot of any other growth except expenditure growth, the revenue just doesn't keep up with it," Cross said. "Nanticoke spent the last five years using debt as a substitute for cash, and that's not uncommon in local government."

As a result, the PEL has recommended raising the city's earned income tax credit from 0.5 percent to 1.5 percent. The increase could generate an additional \$1.4 million annually for the city.

Another suggestion involves implementing a 0.33 percent nonresidential earned income tax for people living outside the city's limits. According to the plan, the tax could generate \$225,000 to \$235,000 annually. According to the PEL, about 2,200 people were listed in 2006 as commuters to Nanticoke.

Money collected from the nonresident tax will not be used for city operations. Instead, the funds will be earmarked for capital equipment and infrastructure improvements that will benefit commuters.

On a brighter note, should the plan be adopted by council, residents could see a decrease in property taxes.

According to Cross, half of every real estate tax dollar goes toward debts. Currently, just less than 30 mills are dedicated to the debt service fund. The proposal calls for money in the debt service fund to be directly applied to the city's oldest debts, thereby eliminating one loan and a portion of another. Debt service millage could then be reduced to about 19 mills. A mill is a \$1 tax on every \$1,000 of assessed property value.

A lack of reassessment of city properties has been a major blow to Nanticoke. Even at the city's current 60-mill tax rate, about 57 percent of people in Nanticoke who own a single-family home pay less than \$150 a year to the city in property taxes. Seventy-four percent pay less than \$210.

"It's sad," Cross said. "They're paying property taxes at a 1964 rate and receiving 2006 services."

Services, as defined by the PEL, involve police and fire protection. Other services, such as refuse collection and sewage, are paid by residents.

The more than 130-page document also advises the city to adopt a formal accounting and bookkeeping system. According to the findings, "The city's accounting and financial management system and its record keeping processes have been inadequate. In fact, there is little reliable historical data for detailed line item revenues and expenditures." Furthermore, the city "does not have a financial reporting review process in place" making it difficult for council and administration to monitor transactions.

Cross acknowledged that transforming the city's financial situation will be a challenge but is optimistic considering the current council's willingness to move ahead.

"They're not afraid to say: We're going to get out of this hole."

The recommendations

Recommendations to Nanticoke by the Pennsylvania Economy League include:

- Raising the earned income tax credit from 0.5 percent to 1.5 percent.
- Implementing a nonresident earned income tax of 0.33 percent.
- Evaluating if all tax-exempt properties should receive such designation.
- Developing a strategy to solicit payments in lieu of taxes from the city's nonprofit entities.
- Initiating a more aggressive policy for collecting back taxes and other fees.

- Taking advantage of all discounts available to the city for making its utility payments on a timely basis.
- Creating a five-year capital plan that prioritizes the use of all capital funds.
- Designing a significantly better accounting and record keeping system.
- Designating one work session per month to review recovery plan implementation.
- Re-evaluating and modifying paid leaves, vacations and holiday pays.

A copy of the Nanticoke City Financial Recovery plan is available at City Hall or you can view it [here](#).

12/8/2006

Nanticoke will start charging a fee for residential, commercial permits

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The city joined other municipalities throughout the county and state in imposing fees for residential and commercial permits when council passed an ordinance Thursday night.

The ordinance also establishes fees for business and residential occupancy certificates, zoning hearings and plan reviews. The penalty for violating the ordinance is a fine of \$25 to \$300 per day plus magisterial court costs, and up to 90 days in jail.

Among the things people will need permits for are building new homes or businesses; putting on an addition; constructing a garage or shed; adding a porch, pool, patio or parking lot; and installing a new heating or air conditioning system.

Fees depend on the expense of the job. Residential permits start at \$30 for the first \$1,000 of work and \$10 is added for each additional \$1,000 of work — so a \$10,000 job would cost \$120 in permit fees.

The fees are similar to what other municipalities charge. Wilkes-Barre Township, on which Nanticoke's new ordinance is based, charges the same. Laflin Borough starts at \$45 for \$1,000 and goes by increments of \$15 for each additional \$1,000 of work, so a \$10,000 job would cost \$180 in permit fees.

But unlike most of its neighboring municipalities, Nanticoke never charged construction permit fees, said solicitor Joseph Lach. "It's one of those efforts to generate additional income," Lach said.

The financially-distressed city, which runs an annual deficit, has been seeking new ways to raise revenues.

12/7/2006

2 Nanticoke workers fired to make budget

Street department employees were laid off after union failed to OK health cost changes.

By Ian CampbellTimes Leader Correspondent

Two full-time street department employees were laid off in Nanticoke in order to make a budget the state could live with, but one council member Wednesday expressed regret at his vote, and asked if the layoffs could be revisited.

The short answer, from Mayor John Bushko, was no.

The layoff option had been on the table when the budget was in the planning stage last month, and council members made it clear that if changes to health costs weren't accepted by the union, layoffs would be inevitable.

Now, with the city's 2007 budget in the hands of the Pennsylvania Economy League, which is supervising the city's finances under its Distressed City status, the option is not available.

The names of the employees were not revealed at the meeting.

Gerald Cross, representing the league, told the meeting that the budget was under review, and would be returned to the city Dec. 14 so a public comment period could be held. On Jan. 3, there would be a public hearing on the budget at the Greater Nanticoke Area High School, and then the league would have a 10-day period to address the issues raised by public comments.

Council members were concerned that the public meeting was taking place on the same day as the first scheduled council meeting of the new year, but Cross noted the state was concerned that the full comment period be used, and Jan. 3 was the final day. They also wanted to ensure the availability of a stenographer for an official record, he noted.

He suggested council could either hold its January meeting earlier in the evening, or on a day prior to or after Jan. 4.

12/07/2006

Tax increase sparks debate in Nanticoke; financial recovery plan will be released Dec. 14

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A potential tax increase sparked discussion and disagreement at Wednesday's council meeting.

Nanticoke's state-appointed Act 47 coordinator, Pennsylvania Economy League, will make its financial recovery plan for the distressed city public on Dec. 14.

A proposal in the plan is an earned income tax increase. The city imposes a 1 percent earned income tax, with 0.5 percent to the city and 0.5 percent to Greater Nanticoke Area School District. An increase would bring the city's portion up from 0.5 percent to 1.5 percent, or 2 percent total.

"This isn't written in stone that we're going to do this, but chances are good we are," Mayor John Bushko said.

Each year the city runs a deficit of up to \$500,000 and must do something, he said.

Residents Dennis Butler and Hank Marks are both on the city's municipal authority, but Wednesday night they spoke as taxpayers — and opponents.

Marks, who served on GNA's Act 1 tax study committee, said on Monday it recommended to the school board a 0.5 percent income tax increase for property tax relief. That would bring total earned income tax for Nanticoke residents to 2.5 percent.

Butler said that large an earned income tax increase was unfair to working people.

"You're putting the burden for maintenance and support of this town on the backs of the minority of people," Butler said.

He prefers a personal income tax, which includes tax on earnings from such things as dividends and interest.

Under third-class city code, Nanticoke can't impose a personal income tax, PEL executive director Gerry Cross said.

A public hearing will be held Jan. 3, 2007, at 7 p.m. in the Nanticoke High School auditorium.

12/03/2006

There are many activities and events in Nanticoke to usher in the holiday season

Pam Urbanski

Yvonne Bozinski, special events coordinator for the City of Nanticoke, invites children and adults to the annual Christmas in the Park on Sunday, Dec. 10, from 2 to 4 p.m. at Patriot Park.

"Sunday, Dec. 10th is an opportunity for the community to come together." Children will be able to visit with Santa and let him know what is on their Christmas wish list. All children will receive goody bags and a stuffed toy. Cookies and hot chocolate will be served. The Nanticoke High School chorus will provide the sounds of the season.

Christmas at St. Andrew's

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church is sponsoring a Christmas program of Christmas stories and carols, today at 2 p.m. A short narrated program will be presented telling the Christmas story of Mary and Joseph and their journey to Bethlehem. Various carols will be sung during the program. "The Christmas Alphabet" will be presented by the church school.

Gifts will be given to the first 30 children, ages 5 to 11, who attend with an adult. Following the program, refreshments will be served and of course Santa will take time out of his busy schedule to visit with children.

The church is located at 12 E. Kirmar Ave., Alden.

St. Stanislaus plans toy bingo

St. Stanislaus Parish is holding its annual holiday toy bingo today. The doors open at 11 a.m. and the bingo starts at 1 p.m. There will be great toys, gifts and door prizes. The kitchen will be open for refreshments. The event will be held in the St. Stanislaus School Hall on Church Street in Nanticoke.

Help keep those in need warm

The Mother Teresa of Calcutta Social Concerns Ministry asks for your help in making sure that local families stay warm this winter season. They are collecting scarves, gloves, earmuffs and hats that will be distributed to families who need these items. Donations can be placed under the trees located at Holy Child, Holy Trinity, St. Mary of Czestochowa and St. Stanislaus churches. Anyone who knows of a family in need is asked to talk with the Rev. Jim Nash or call the parish office at 735-4833.

Origami at Pope John Paul II

Origami, the Japanese art of paper folding, will be held at Pope John Paul II School. Lynn Catnes, who was featured on the Home and Garden Show, will teach the class.

Festive Christmas models will be taught. The class will be held Monday, Dec. 11. Session I will be held from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. for students in grades two through four. Session II, from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m., is for students in grade five through adult. Class size is limited to 15 people.

Registration deadline is Monday. The cost is \$10. Classes will be held at Pope John Paul School's main building cafeteria.

Teen Mass at St. Stanislaus

The next Teen Mass for area youth will be held next Sunday, Dec. 10, at 7 p.m. at St. Stanislaus church. A gathering in the youth room will be held following the Mass.

11/29/2006

Local pro-wrestling group goes old school

By Stephanie DeBalko Weekender Intern

In this day and age, say the words "professional wrestling" and the first things that likely to come to mind are unnaturally huge muscles, a whole lot of expletives and a decent amount of T&A.

There is one group of individuals in our own backyard, however, looking to change all of that.

The World Wrestling Coalition (WWC) was started by Mark Spencer and Tommy "The Executioner" Rumsby. While Spencer is the promoter of the organization, Rumsby primarily trains prospective and current WWC wrestlers along with his son, "Tommy Thunder." The WWC is based in Nanticoke, where wrestlers are trained at Stars and Stripes Gym.

WWC members meet three times a week where Rumsby trains the athletes step by step, paying close attention to detail and honing certain skills. According to Spencer, the organization is open to both men and women as young as about 16 years of age, although those under 18 need special consent from parents to participate. While many wrestlers show up at the "practices" to work out and keep in shape, the program is currently working to train three prospective professional wrestlers.

The difference between this professional wrestling program and the professional wrestling that can be seen on television today is that the WWC is working to promote a drug free atmosphere. Essentially, Rumsby, Spencer and their entire crew are trying to bring the cleanliness back to wrestling, where the interest is more in the sport itself and less in the special effects.

"We're trying to bring wrestling back [to] the way it was years ago, where everybody can watch it grandmothers, even. We are trying to take a lot of the filth out of it and bring back the clean wrestling," Spencer said.

The WWC is also looking to do fundraisers for local high schools, an idea that coincides with the group's efforts to help children and young adults make informed decisions. The notion of cleaning up wrestling, says Spencer, meshes well with this fundraising goal, as both show young and pliable minds how it's more beneficial to get what you want by working for it rather than taking the easy way out.

The WWC is also a huge proponent of the idea that wrestlers should train drug-free. Wrestlers in the program are trained to use what they've got and build up their own strength without the aid of any unhealthy outside supplements, such as steroids.

"Too many wrestlers have died due to drug abuse or steroid abuse over the years, and we just don't want to see that happen anymore, so we're trying to build these wrestlers up into using what they have to get better technically, to build themselves up, but to do it naturally," said Chris Mochin, vice president of marketing and promotion.

Watching Rumsby train a new student in the ring, there is no surprise that he's got more than 40 years of experience under his belt. Rumsby details how each move should be done so well that even a wrestling novice would likely be able to pick up some technical moves under his tutelage.

The next event the WWC is planning will be December 2 at the Nanticoke Armory. This event, appropriately titled "Kristmas Kaos," will feature a showdown between Tommy Thunder and The Honky Tonk Man, as well as matches between Mass Destruction Dave Duncan and Heartthrob Vinnie Delicious, and between Jolly Old St. Nick Santa Claus and "The Iceman" Jack Frost. If you're looking for a classic showdown of athletic abilities, with just a bit of showmanship thrown in or good measure, than this affair is one you should surely check out.

11/28/2006

Nanticoke ready to begin redevelopment project despite lack of developer

By: eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

East Main Street needs redeveloping, and the city has a plan and some grant money in place to get started.

Now all city officials need is someone to do the job.

Previously, the municipal and redevelopment authorities voted to dissolve the May 2004 contract that gave Turbotville-based Impact PA exclusive rights as consultant and developer for the downtown revitalization project.

An agreement signed by all parties and a \$50,000 check the municipal authority wrote to Impact PA make the amicable split final, municipal authority solicitor Richard Hughes said at Monday's meeting.

"It came to a good conclusion," he said. "I think it bodes well for the future of Nanticoke."

The two authorities and city council all concur the best way to guide downtown revitalization is through the plan drawn up by Facility Design and Development Ltd. at the request of the South Valley Partnership, a non-profit regional group that includes Nanticoke.

The three entities all have to agree on a developer to follow the plan, preferably one who can contribute financing to the project.

Municipal authority president Dennis Butler said he wants to see prospective developers' financial statements and bonding to prove they are capable of completing the project.

He also wants a contract clause to ensure that no relative of any elected or appointed official or city employee will be employed by or receive any compensation from the chosen developer.

Chester Beggs urged his fellow board members to get started quickly so the municipal authority won't lose the \$5 million in federal Department of Transportation funding U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, secured for the project.

Hughes said he would see if council and the redevelopment authority would prefer to come to the next municipal authority meeting, to be held Dec. 18 at 7 p.m. in the municipal building, or schedule a separate joint meeting.

During the Dec. 18 meeting, an audit of the municipal authority's finances will be unveiled.

The authority will finally know how much money was spent and what for, and how much is left.

"That's going to be the answer to a lot of questions," Butler said.

11/24/2006

St. Francis Thanksgiving Dinner

By jconmy@citizensvoice.com

Resident Janet Smith made sure to leave a donation as she left St. Francis of Assisi Church early Thursday afternoon.

Smith and friends Chester Lubecki and Edward Terkoski had just enjoyed a Thanksgiving dinner and each other's company.

"I hope they keep it going every year," Smith said. "I don't expect to come here for free, I come here for the companionship."

“And it’s less cooking,” she said with a smile.

Between people dining at the church or those having meals delivered, about 300 people were served, said organizer Tony Volpicelli. This is the 23rd year volunteers from the East Green Street church have prepared Thanksgiving dinner for people of all ages. Members of its sister parish, nearby Saint Joseph’s, also help out.

“This is for people who are alone or have no relatives,” said Volpicelli, of Nanticoke. “You don’t have to be poor. This is for everybody. There are no distinctions.”

Most of the food is donated, Volpicelli said. The Sanitary Bakery provided all the baked goods — from deserts to the bread crumbs for the stuffing. About 25 volunteers handled the cooking and deliveries.

A half dozen Bishop Hoban High School students donated their time before leaving to have dinner with their own families.

Junior Ryan Gorski volunteered with his father, Bob, and brother, Robert Jr. His volunteering also counts as credit for the school’s community service requirement.

“It’s good for the community so I wanted to help out and get some of my community service hours,” said Gorski, a member of Saint Joseph’s.

Joe Modla, Nanticoke, was volunteering his time before he and his daughter, Frankee, were heading to Mountain Top for dinner with their family.

Modla was counting at the door and said both people dining in and deliveries were up from last year.

Smith plans to be a regular.

“We just enjoy being with other people so we don’t have to eat alone,” Smith said. “A lot of people just don’t have anyone.”

11/24/2006

Nanticoke residents could find Act 47 options distressing

eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

Nanticoke residents might receive an earned income tax hike next year, depending on what options city officials choose in a long-term financial plan for the distressed city.

But a potential bright side is that homeowners could see their property taxes go down.

The state Department of Community and Economic Development declared Nanticoke Act 47, or financially distressed, in May. The Pennsylvania Economy League, the city’s financial recovery coordinator, is working on a long-term plan so the city can get out of debt.

The plan will be made public Dec. 14, said Matt Domines of DCED’s Governor’s Center for Local Government Services Northeast Regional Office. A public hearing must be held within 20 days, and, 25 days after that, council has to vote to accept the plan, he said.

Gerald Cross of the Pennsylvania Economy League said it is too early for him to discuss what the recovery plan might contain, saying, “We are exploring all the possibilities for expenditure and revenue changes for the city.”

However, Mayor John Bushko was willing to talk about the draft of the plan city officials received, stating taxpayers had a right to know what might lie ahead.

“(PEL) gave us a copy of some options of what we want to do,” Bushko said.

Under current conditions, PEL predicts Nanticoke will have budget shortfalls of \$763,000 in 2007, \$919,000 in 2008, and \$1,022,000 in 2009, Bushko said. An Act 47 requirement is to avoid deficits for at least three years.

One option is to raise the earned income tax. Nanticoke has a 1 percent earned income tax, with .5 percent for the city and .5 percent for the Greater Nanticoke Area School District.

If the city raises its earned income tax to 1.5 percent total, it would bring in \$680,000 a year — enough to trim the deficit but not eliminate it. But if the city raises earned income tax to a total of 2 percent, it would bring in \$1,360,000. That would give the city a surplus.

It will also give city officials an opportunity to cut property taxes. Of the city’s 60.38 mill property tax, 29.38 mills go for debt service. One mill brings in \$3.51; the average property tax bill is \$211.93, Bushko said.

The city can use revenue from earned income tax for almost anything, including paying off debt. However, revenue from the 29.38 mills can only go towards debt. Bushko favors sharing the city’s debt burden between wage earners and property owners by reducing the debt service millage to 14.69. That would lower the average property tax bill to \$156.81.

Another possibility for new revenue is a commuter tax of .25 percent for the 2,200 people who work in Nanticoke but don’t live there, Bushko said. The \$175,599 a year it would bring in can only go for things like street improvements and fire and police services. City officials have to talk over the plan and decide which way to go, Bushko said.

They will be faced with some tough decisions, Domines said. And residents might not all agree with the plan, he said.

“At the hearings, maybe somebody will come up with a better idea, and we’ll change it,” Bushko said.

11/24/2006

Kevin Ryan

By Dawn Zera For Times Leader

Nanticoke resident Kevin Ryan, 47, lives in a fantasy world. And it’s a world he’s managed to translate artistically.

Step foot into Ryan’s home, and find everything neatly in its place, but look closely at the knickknacks and novel titles on the bookshelves, as well as the paintings on the walls, and it becomes obvious that Ryan is a man who does not discriminate when it comes to fantasies.

One bookshelf, for instance, boasts an impressive display of dragon and wizard paraphernalia. Another entire bookcase is devoted to Egyptology. A lamp sports an artist’s sculpture of a centaur. A sword takes on a decorative element on a wall. Ryan’s e-mail address also incorporates the word “sword.”

Ask Ryan what inspires him, and anything relating to fantasy comes up. Angels inspire him. He is a fan of novelist Anne Rice, who is known for her books about vampires. He loves the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy. Books about ghosts, comic-book characters, Conan the Barbarian, Native American lore, new-age music...

Ryan was an only child raised by his grandmother, and the fantasy worlds provided an extended family for him. A trucker by trade, an injury sidelined him, and he decided to take college classes to learn more about how to improve the drawing he had always done. With popular science fiction/fantasy artist Boris Vellejo (a Pennsylvania resident originally from Peru) as an inspiration, Ryan has expanded his art hobby to a point where he has displayed and sold his paintings.

And his work runs the gamut of fantasy. One vivid, detailed work showcases a dragon, another is a brooding portrait of a cat, and yet another piece highlights scenes from the Bible, which Ryan finds personally motivating. And there are daily experiences that prompt Ryan to pick up the paintbrush. One painting portrays a mysterious nighttime scene, typical of evenings when the moon is full, reflecting an eerie glow on ghostlike clouds.

"The night images, when the clouds are around a full moon, or there are lots of stars, make me want to paint. It is breathtaking. It inspires me. Sunsets inspire me. Sometimes, if I am driving, I just pull over to watch the sunset," Ryan said.

Clearly in touch with his spirituality, Ryan was moved recently to paint a portrait for a West Pittston woman, Lena Gregori, whose son died in North Korea nearly 60 years ago.

He had heard Gregori's story: She only recently had her son's remains returned and had only one photograph of her son in his military uniform. Breaking from his typical art, and using that photograph as a model, Ryan painted Gregori's son and presented the finished piece to her.

Ryan's not sure exactly why he was motivated to give such a gift.

"I guess I was just touched. I felt bad she waited 56 years to get her son's remains back, and I guess with a grandmom who raised me, she reminded me of that," Ryan said.

Ryan is raising two sons of his own, Michael and Christian.

For more information about his work, or to view pieces, visit www.groups.aol.com/drwfantasy and click on "art by Swordsbane."

11/16/2006

Police warn residents to beware fake checks

ELIZABETH SKRAPITS

Residents are warned to beware of fraudulent checks being issued by fake casinos, sweepstakes, lotteries or promotions.

Nanticoke Police Capt. Kevin Grevera said police have been taking reports from scam victims.

People are mailed realistic checks along with a letter instructing them to deposit it in the bank, usually by an urgent deadline, Grevera said. The victim is also asked to forward money by check or wire transfer, allegedly to pay for "processing, insurance and international taxes," he said.

The problem is that although the checks look legitimate, they are counterfeit, Grevera said. The money from the check is drawn from the victim's account, but the check bounces within a few days. The money sent to the fake entity cannot be recovered, he said.

The fraud perpetrators are very meticulous, even setting up phony telephone numbers, addresses and Web sites.

Grevera asks all recipients of these "prize check" scams to call their local police.

11/16/2006

Nanticoke council votes to cut city's road crew

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

City employees are getting a new system for purchasing supplies, but there will be fewer public works department members around to use it. Council voted 4-1 Wednesday to cut the road crew down by two after realizing it is necessary to pare down what seems to be an inevitable deficit in the 2007 budget.

Councilman Jim Litchkofski, the only no vote, said manpower on the road crew is not significant, and with two fewer men, the city might have trouble providing basic services. There are six workers, plus the director of public works and a building and grounds maintenance person. Since the city's ability to raise revenue is limited, expenses must be slashed.

If the city employees unions had unanimously agreed to switch to a different healthcare option — saving the city \$100,000 — personnel wouldn't have to be cut, Councilman Bill O'Malley said. But the police union turned it down, he said.

The only personnel who can be laid off are road department or clerical workers, Mayor John Bushko said.

The layoffs can be voluntary, or else have to be based on seniority according to the road workers' contracts.

"I don't want to see anyone lose their job, but by the same token, we can't keep going \$200,000 or \$300,000 in the hole every year," Bushko said. The "bare bones" budget O'Malley prepared contains a \$400,000 deficit that has to be filled in. He said he submitted a copy to the city's financial

recovery coordinator, the Pennsylvania Economy League, which is also working on a 2007 budget for the financially distressed city. However, O'Malley doesn't expect the organization to draw up a completely balanced budget, either.

"No matter if it is my budget or PEL's budget or whoever's it may be, we are looking at a significant deficit," he said.

Nanticoke's credit rating is so bad the city can't get credit cards to use for necessities such as fuel for its vehicles. But a new purchase card system through M&T Bank will allow city employees to "charge" specific things like gas and office supplies.

The cards will eliminate the need for petty cash, and allow the city to control purchases, O'Malley said.

On a related note, residents will soon be able to pay city taxes and fees, including refuse and permit fees, with their credit cards.

11/11/2006

CV News

It is an exciting time for students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade who attend Greater Nanticoke Area Education Center and Elementary Center. Students welcomed back MOTS, a pretty funky character who challenged them to read a certain amount of minutes each day. Last year the students came through with flying colors.

This year Cindy Evans, Parent Teacher Association president and creator of MOTS and the reading program, has come up with a new challenge for students.

"This year we are challenging students to exercise their bodies as well as their brains," said Cindy.

The program kicked off with an assembly where students were reintroduced to MOTS and her new little sister MIGLIA (Mee-Lee-Uh). "The children were thrilled to know we were continuing with MOTS and just love the new addition to the program," she added.

Each classroom was presented with a bag of playground equipment, compliments of the PTA. Classrooms that meet monthly walking goals will be rewarded with MOTS money that can be traded in for additional equipment that helps kids exercise during school time. They are also treated to parties, complete with frozen yogurt, veggies and dip.

Students are encouraged to walk as many miles as they can during recess for the school year and see how far they can walk as a group. So far they have walked 5,857 miles. That means they have just left Salamanca, Spain, crossed the Mediterranean Sea passed Monaco continuing on through Italy. They have crossed the Adriatic Sea and are about 44 miles past Turkey! Teachers map out the route in their classrooms.

"The students are really interested in figuring out where they are," said Cindy. One teacher even told her how her class looks forward to pulling down the globe to map out their route so far.

An exercise program that pulls in geography. Great!

The program has expanded this year to include families. Each month, the PTA hopes to sponsor a different event. Cindy and fellow PTA officer Jamie Miller came up with the idea to get families involved in the program.

In September, a wellness program was held for students, their families and friends. MOTS and MIGLIA were on hand to greet everyone and Joseph Long, principal of the Education Center, kicked things off with a walk around the elementary center. Everyone then returned to the education center for refreshments, games, a moonwalk and face painting.

Today, a second program will be held. The PTA is sponsoring a hoedown, complete with dancing, and a chili and apple pie cook off. Cindy and Jamie will be doing the cooking, which includes a sample of food from across the U.S.

Cindy tells me the purpose of this day is to let kids know that exercise isn't only about sit ups or running or even walking. During the program students will get their exercise by line dancing and square dancing.

"Kids need to know they can exercise in a lot of different ways and have fun," said Cindy, adding presenting food from different regions will introduce students to food they normally wouldn't eat.

The chili and pie cook off is open to students and their parents/grandparents. The event is open to the whole community and is free of charge. There will be food, games and fun from 3 to 6 p.m in the Greater Nanticoke Area Elementary Center and Education Center.

Hats off to all those involved with this program, especially Cindy Evans. You are changing lives.

11/10/2006

GNA junior ask board to settle teachers contract

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

Holly Mitkowski wishes the school board and teachers would come down to earth.

The future astrophysical engineering major enjoys science. She has been an enthusiastic participant in the Pennsylvania Junior Academy of Science, the Science Olympiad, and the Robotics program since she started high school.

But this year the gravity of a contract dispute has her grounded.

Mitkowski, a junior at Greater Nanticoke Area High School, and her fellow students are frustrated because their extracurricular activities have been jettisoned, she told the Greater Nanticoke Area school board Thursday. She asked the board to settle the teachers contract soon so students can get them back.

Although their contract expired June 30, 2005, teachers are still working under its terms as negotiations continue. Board members say teachers won't help with any extracurricular activities, including chaperoning dances and moderating clubs, without a new contract.

"If they're not getting paid for it, they won't do it," board member Cindy Donlin said.

Extracurricular activities are important to college-bound students, Mitkowski said. Many teach valuable lessons that aren't always presented in the classroom, she said.

"I've known a lot of students to get scholarships through these programs," she said.

Donlin promised Mitkowski the board would do what it could, including seeing if people from local colleges could help. "Just because there's not a

contract, I don't think you students should miss out on things," Donlin told her.

The negotiating committee, made up of Donlin and board members Gary Smith and Bob Rainieri, meets weekly with the teachers union. Main issues are salaries and health care.

They could not talk about how negotiations were going, but Rainieri said teachers have been picketing his business and Smith's house after school. "You can picket us, but don't interrupt the kids' education," Rainieri said, referring to the teachers.

11/10/2006

An honor for our heroes

Those who served in WWII receive a commemorative medal and citation during ceremony.

By rlieback@leader.net

After receiving a commemorative World War II medal on behalf of her father, a teary-eyed Judy Ruth sat down at her seat and took a Bible out of her purse.

Tucked away between the pages of Revelation was a picture of her father, Floyd Haden Ruth, an Army veteran who passed away on May 28.

"For my dad, military service was his life. He was proud to serve our country, and would be smiling to have the chance to receive this medal. Medals were everything to him."

And with medals, there are memories.

Many memories need preserving, according to state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Luzerne.

To further recognize World War II veterans for the upcoming Veterans Day this Saturday, Yudichak held a special ceremony at the American Legion Post 350 Thursday afternoon.

More than 100 veterans, including the deceased, received a commemorative medal and a special citation during the two-hour service.

"To shake their hands today is to touch history," Yudichak said. "They present not only American democracy, but indeed the free world."

Yudichak said the medals were only a "small token" for paying respect to the veterans, but are a symbol for "our lasting gratitude for their sacrifices."

After the Boy Scout Troop 418, Nanticoke, marched into the room, flags flying, and the national anthem was sung, the Wyoming Valley West choir, consisting of about 35 singers and a single piano player, performed a collage of patriotic tunes, including "America the Beautiful" and "Yankee Doodle."

The packed recreational room in the American Legion applauded loudly after each veteran was commemorated, tears rolling down many faces in the crowd.

"This was beautifully arranged," Nanticoke Mayor John Bushko said. "We can never forget our local veterans who fought so bravely for our freedom."

John Forgach, 74, a veteran of the Korean War, was also ardent about the bravery of the World War II veterans.

"When they (World War II veterans) graduated from high school, they didn't have the luxury of taking a summer off or going to college," the former American history teacher said. "They went off to the service and stood until the end. To repeat (Tom) Brokaw, they were the 'Greatest Generation.'"

At one point in the ceremony, a veteran stood up and congratulated Yudichak on his recent victory to secure his fifth two-year term in the 119th Legislative District.

"My victory was a lot easier won than yours."

11/9/2006

Gymnasts vault into Division I

By Jill Snowdon

Neither Amy Bieski or Nikki Lyons ever donned a high school athletic uniform, earned a varsity letter or competed with their classmates in a Wyoming Valley Conference sport.

Both, however, are going to Division I universities on full athletic scholarships.

Bieski, a senior at Nanticoke Area and Lyons, a senior at Crestwood, signed letters of intent to compete at the next level of gymnastics, Wednesday night at Northeast Gymnastics training center in Hanover Township.

Bieski is headed to West Virginia, while Lyons is taking her tumbling talents to Louisiana State University. They are the first gymnasts from Northeast Gymnastics to receive Division I scholarships.

"It's really cool that I am going to be doing this for a school," Bieski said. "(Northeast Gymnastics) is a club team and I never played a school sport so it'll be nice to say I'm a West Virginia Mountaineer and I'm an athlete at their college."

Both girls are Level 10 gymnasts and took up the sport when they were just youngsters. Bieski has been at Northeast since she was 4 and Lyons since she was 5. At that age, gymnasts are considered Level 4.

Long hours in the gym six days a week, 12 months a year for the last 12 years certainly paid off.

"Our sport is all year round and we train 22 to 25 hours a week," Bieski said. "It just takes a lot of time and dedication, but it's very rewarding."

At the club level, gymnastic competitions are few and far between. The girls compete in seven or eight meets a year, including the state meet, regionals and national competition. Lyons and Bieski have each advanced to the national level, which is where they were recognized by college coaches.

In college, gymnasts compete every weekend for 13 weeks – something Lyons and Bieski say will be an adjustment.

“It’s going to be tough, but my first meet (with LSU) will be in Cancun, so I’m happy about that,” Lyons said. “By the end it will be a lot harder when we get to the NCAA championships.”

Lyons had a long list of colleges that showed interest in her but she narrowed her official visits to Oklahoma, Illinois, Arizona State and LSU. She made her first visit to Baton Rouge and cancelled the others.

LSU has made 18 NCAA championship appearances under veteran coach D.D. Breaux, who has a 495-302-7 career record.

“It’s kind of neat to be one of the first in the area to get a full ride to gymnastics to a top 10 school,” Lyons said. “When I was little my goal was the Olympics but as I got older and saw how hard it was to make it onto the Olympic team, my goal went to getting a college scholarship to a top 10 school and that’s what I got.”

Bieski also had a number of colleges looking to land her on their roster, including Arizona State, Michigan State, Auburn and West Virginia. Like Lyons, Bieski made her choice after her first official visit.

West Virginia also has a well established program under the guidance of long-time coach Linda Burdette, who has compiled a record of 524-211-4 over 31 years.

“The girls were nice and the coaches were nice and that was really important to me because our coach (Lori Dexter) is so great,” Bieski said. “I couldn’t imagine going to a program that didn’t have a coach as nice and supportive as her.”

Dexter has coached both girls since they were no higher than a balance beam. She’s especially proud of their accomplishments because she knows the sacrifices that go into becoming a gymnast at the college level. Dexter trained out of the Allentown area when she was younger and went on to compete for Iowa University.

“They are extremely dedicated, that’s why they are getting full rides,” Dexter said. “They are here six days a week for 12 months so it’s a commitment from everyone...themselves, their families, even their friends.”

As the girls signed their names on the college forms, their families and friends gathered around to celebrate. Another group of eager supporters joined in. They were little girls bouncing and tumbling on the mats, training just as Bieski and Lyons did so many years ago.

“I’m really glad to be set an example for them because Nikki and I put in a lot of hard work and in the end, it really paid off,” Bieski said. “We’re going to school for free and there are so many talented young ladies here that I’m sure you’ll be interviewing many more gymnasts in the future.”

11/06/2006

Youth task force readies headquarters

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

The transformation of the building at 24 S. Prospect St. from Stickney Fire Co. headquarters to Greater Nanticoke Area Drug Task Force and Youth Task Force headquarters is nearly complete.

Although the official grand opening won’t be for a little while yet, members of the anti-drug group recently had a chance to show off their handiwork at the first public event, a Halloween party.

Down in the basement, where the Stickney firefighters once met for refreshments, several 10th graders from Greater Nanticoke Area gathered around task force president Frank Vandermark — who they affectionately call “Uncle Frank” — to assess what needs to be done.

There will be a snack bar and game room, with board and video games. There is a full kitchen, a bar and a small ornamental fireplace, which, even if it doesn’t work, adds atmosphere.

“This place is gonna be hot,” said youth task force secretary Sharon Provenzano.

“I can’t wait for this to be all done. It’s going to be sweet,” agreed task force president Kaila Sakowski.

In the main floor garage, there are pool tables, ping-pong and air hockey tables, and a piano. More play equipment is being donated, Vandermark said.

Upstairs, there is a computer lab and rooms where the task force and other groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous meet. The walls were painted in bright colors by the young volunteers.

Youth task force members, all Greater Nanticoke Area High School students, did most of the renovating themselves, Vandermark said.

The task force board agreed teens would feel it was really their own place if they put in the sweat equity. Which they did, at least twice a week, Provenzano said.

Heavy-duty jobs like the electrical system and air conditioning were provided free by local professionals, Vandermark said.

Next spring, the task force plans to lay concrete behind the building for a basketball hoop and an outdoor picnic area.

The Greater Nanticoke Area Drug Task Force was formed in August 2003 when police, school district officials and community members decided to combat a growing drug problem. The group aimed to give teens a recreation center, and to educate them about drug and alcohol abuse.

At first, meetings were held in the basement of St. Francis Church on East Green Street. But swelling enrollment led the task force board to seek a bigger, permanent home.

Nanticoke council leased the fire hall to the task force in June 2005. This May, council closed the Stickney and Washington Fire Co. buildings because the financially distressed city could no longer afford them.

The Stickney firefighters were reluctant to give up the building at first. They ended up being very cooperative, moving their equipment out of the Stickney building and into the main fire hall on at 2 E. Ridge St. and giving their fire truck to neighboring Newport Township, councilman Brent Makarczyk said.

The task force will honor the Stickney firefighters and their 121 years of service with a permanent exhibit in the fire truck bay, Vandermark said.

11/6/2006

Nanticoke search for developer will cost

There has been no downtown development for 18 months with Impact Pennsylvania.

By smocarsky@leader.net

A new developer will be appointed to handle downtown revitalization efforts, but it's going to cost the Nanticoke Municipal Authority \$50,000 to break ties with the old one.

Mayor John Bushko said Sunday that members of the municipal authority and the Nanticoke Redevelopment Authority voted at separate meetings last week to end a contract between the authorities and Impact Pennsylvania.

Bushko said municipal authority solicitor Richard Hughes negotiated an agreement with Robert Yoder, head of Impact, to release the authorities from the contract for a \$50,000 payment from the municipal authority.

The two authorities had been at a stalemate for more than a year on how to proceed with downtown development.

The redevelopment authority owns properties in the city such as the Kanjorski Center and several parking lots, and the municipal authority manages the properties. Both authorities and city council weigh in on downtown revitalization plans.

Bushko said release from the contract is "a good thing," because no downtown development has occurred in the past 18 months that Impact has had the contract, and he didn't like its terms.

"One man shouldn't have all the authority to do whatever they want downtown," Bushko said, referring to Yoder.

"According to the contract, he would be the sole developer (and) the general contractor and could hire any companies he wanted. The only people he would have to answer to would be the municipal authority. He had all the apples in his cart," Bushko said.

Attempts to reach Yoder on Sunday were unsuccessful.

Impact had proposed a \$23 million plan to redevelop the downtown. Authority members didn't support Impact's entire plan, but they wanted to build a new parking garage, which could attract new tenants in the authority-run Kanjorski Center on Main Street.

The 32,000-square-foot Kanjorski Center has been almost 88 percent empty since HealthNow, a Medicare claims processing company, relocated last October to Dallas. With the center's anchor tenant gone, the authority is going broke, having lost \$33,000 in monthly income.

Bushko said the cash-strapped city will have to kick in about \$40,000 to cover the municipal authority's operating expenses for that building next year if no new tenant is found.

"When they run out of money, the city is financially responsible for (the building). We can't just let it go and forget about it because you lose the building, we lose all our equity," Bushko said, adding, "We'll get (the money) somewhere."

Impact had proposed spending \$7.7 million from federal transportation grants on a 324-vehicle parking garage by the Kanjorski Center in hopes that additional downtown parking would attract new tenants.

Last fall, contractors demolished three buildings on Main Street to make room for an office building and parking garage, but the project hasn't developed since.

Bushko said most members of the authorities and council are impressed with a study with the South Valley Partnership had done on a 10-year development plan, which recommends the use of private investment for revitalization rather than only public funding. He said the municipal authority will appoint a new developer after discussions with the other entities involved.

"Right now, we're in a perfect position, where all the authorities and council are ready to sit down and talk. Before, everybody was going in different directions," Bushko said.

Bushko said municipal authority Chairman Walter Sokolowski and board member Steve Buchinski were the only dissenters in the votes to dissolve the contract with Impact. Neither could be reached for comment.

Bushko said Chester Beggs, who sits on both authorities, was the swing vote on the municipal authority. Beggs, Bushko said, previously supported Impact as the developer.

Beggs declined comment for this story.

Bushko said things started running smoother after council approved four new members to the municipal authority he recommended earlier this year – Henry Marks, Henry Kellar, Richard Butler and Ron Kamowski.

11/5/2006

Nanticoke cancels developer contract

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The city's redevelopment authority voted Saturday to dissolve a contract with the downtown developer, clearing the way for a new revitalization plan.

The board opted 3-2 to cancel a contract with Impact PA that gave the Turbotville-based firm exclusive consulting and development rights for projects on East Main Street and Market Street.

Last week the municipal authority voted unanimously to cancel the May 2005 contract after authority attorney Richard Hughes and Impact PA head Robert Yoder arranged an amicable agreement. The municipal authority must make a one-time payment of \$50,000 to Impact PA.

The redevelopment authority owns property in the city and the municipal authority manages it. Both share in decisions about downtown revitalization.

Redevelopment authority chairman Walter Sokolowski, who with Steve Buchinski voted against terminating the contract, said it was because he didn't like the idea of paying Yoder \$50,000 to leave when he has done his job so far.

Mayor John Bushko said Yoder has been "dragging his feet" with nothing to show after 18 months. Buchinski said because of bickering among both authorities and council, Yoder was never given clear instructions.

Yoder did not attend Saturday's meeting.

Impact PA's plan included a 324-space parking garage and more than 44,000 square feet of new retail and commercial space on East Main Street. State and federal grants would cover most of the approximately \$23.4 million project.

City officials and municipal authority members prefer ideas proposed in a regional strategic plan drawn up by Facility Design and Development Ltd. at the request of the South Valley Partnership.

The strategic plan recommends Nanticoke seek private investors for commercial buildings instead of using only government funding and placing parking throughout downtown instead of in just one parking garage.

Now the authorities and council need to select a developer to implement the plan. Bushko said some have already expressed interest.

Chester Beggs, who sits on both authority boards, made an informal suggestion after the meeting to advertise for developers to see if there are even more choices.

In other business, Henry Marks, who is also on both boards, said after the \$50,000 payment to Yoder, the municipal authority will only have about \$25,000 left. That won't be enough to pay for maintenance and bills at the 80-percent vacant Kanjorski Center on East Main Street unless the building is sold or rented.

The redevelopment authority appreciated councilman Bill O'Malley's proposal during this week's council meeting that the city set aside at least \$40,000 in next year's budget to help with the Kanjorski Center. However, authority members wondered if the cash-strapped and debt-encumbered city could spare the money.

The redevelopment authority wants an assessment done on three parcels of land it owns on Market Street. The authority wants to sell the parcels, which are all paved parking lots that don't seem suitable for building, to interested neighboring businesses, Sokolowski said. Besides getting money for the lots, the authority wouldn't have to pay to maintain, plow and insure them, he said.

"It's a gain for the businesses, and it's a gain for the city," Sokolowski said.

11/5/2006

[More News](#)

Off to the races at Pope John Paul

Pope John Paul II School will hold its annual Nite at the Races on Saturday, Nov. 18. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. and the races start at 6:30 p.m. Purchase a horse for the race and the donation at the door is \$2. Donation at the door without a horse is \$7. The evening will feature delicious food by Jack Rentko, raffles, and exciting harness racing via the big screen television. You must be 21 years of age to attend this event. For tickets or information call Brian Waugh at 735-0115. The school is located on Hanover Street next to Holy Trinity Church.

St. John's Lutheran plans dinner

St. John's Lutheran Church will hold a pork and sauerkraut dinner Saturday from 3 to 7 p.m. The church is located at 231 State St. in Nanticoke. Tickets are \$8 for adults, \$4 for children and free for children 12 and younger. Tickets will be available at the door or call Dale at 902-9051 for advance ticket sales. Takeouts are available.

Library plans fall fair

The Friends of the Mill Memorial Library will hold their annual fair Sunday, Nov. 12, from noon to 4 p.m. The fair will feature crafts, books, Granny's attic, face painting, food and baked goods. All proceeds will benefit the library. The library is located at 495 E. Main St. Come out and support the library. For more information, call 735-3030.

The school year is well under way at Greater Nanticoke Area. Students, faculty and staff have been busy.

GNA has a new queen. Students voted and a new queen and her court were named. Senior Amy Bieski was chosen by her classmates as the 2006-2007 homecoming queen. Her court consists of Vanessa Argento, Elisha Capie, Tracie Clothier and Stephanie Danko. The queen and her court were escorted by the Trojan cheerleaders before the Bishop O'Reilly and Nanticoke Area football game.

The proud parents of these lovely young ladies were also introduced. Amy is the daughter of Mark and Patty Bieski, Vanessa is the daughter of Tony and Joann Argento, Elisha is the daughter of William and Frances Capie. Bob and Elaine Clothier are the proud parents of Traci Clothier and Stephanie is the daughter of Matthew and Marion Danko.

Carrie Winters, last year's Miss GNA, was on hand to crown this year's Miss GNA. The homecoming court, student council and the Trojan football captains thanked Superintendent Anthony Perrone, Principal Mary Ann Jarolen, and teachers Dawn Marshall and Jean Makarczyk for their help in planning the festivities.

Also, students in all classes elected class officers for the 2006-2007 school year.

Senior class officers are President Amy Bieski, Vice President Jordan Lynch, Secretary John Glowaniak and Treasurer Justin Kreitzer. Junior class officers are President Jason Schenck, Vice President Joseph Hart, Secretary Keira Lohman and Treasurer Rachel Zerfoss. Sophomore officers are President Sean Bieski, Vice President Anthony Kuklewicz, Secretary Amanda Madajewski and Treasurer Nicole Jezewski. Freshman officers are President Breana Young, Vice President John Urbanski, Secretary Brenna McPherson and Treasurer Mariah Grabinski. Congratulations and good luck!

According to Amanda Coughlin, a senior writer for the Trojan Tribune high school newspaper, "The candidates are not only required to meet their positions in office, but they are also responsible to represent their entire class."

Students who are part of the Advanced Placement class write for the Tribune. James Carey is the advisor. "Students must be willing to take advice from their fellow classmates, suggest new ideas, and be ready to achieve these goals to help make the school year better," said Amanda.

GNA variety show set

Mark your calendars for Nov. 16. That is the day the GNA Chorus Parents Organization will present its annual Star Search Variety Show '06. Students in grades eight through 12 will audition Thursday. They are asked to keep their act two to three minutes long and may audition for two acts. Audition forms are available in the office.

The variety show will be held at 7 p.m. at the high school. Tickets are \$5 and include refreshments.

11/3/2006

Nanticoke will sell fire station

Council agreed to sell the Washington fire station for \$100,000 or best offer, as long as it is only for residential use.

City officials don't want the building used as a warehouse or for another commercial purpose, and then abandoned to become an eyesore, Councilman Brent Makarczyk said.

So far this year, the city has taken in \$2,724,837 in revenues and paid \$2,735,513 in expenses, for a deficit of \$10,676, Councilman Bill O'Malley said.

The 2007 budget is being developed. O'Malley suggested putting \$40,000 to \$50,000 in it to help maintain the Kanjorski Center, which the city municipal authority is responsible for, to protect the asset.

Budget issues might lead to "head count changes in the future," O'Malley said.

11/2/2006

Nanticoke council warned layoffs possible

City officials are working on 2007 budget, but big cuts still need to be made.

By IAN CAMPBELL Times Leader Correspondent

City officials are still some weeks away from a 2007 budget, and unless hard decisions are made layoffs might have to occur, council was told Wednesday.

One saving outlined by Councilman William O'Malley was a potential reduction of \$100,000 in health care costs. Police and fire staff had agreed to the change in health care, but other city groups were still to agree, O'Malley said.

If the other employee groups failed to approve the change, then the city might have to look at "possible head count changes," he said.

The current insurance program would involve an increase of up to \$16,000, O'Malley said.

Other insurance savings could come from the creation of an updated inventory of police, fire and street department vehicles to make sure the city was not paying unnecessarily for equipment it no longer owned or equipment no longer needing as much coverage.

O'Malley hoped to have that information by the end of the week.

The city also will need to consider spending about \$40,000 on the Municipal Authority in order to protect its investment in the Kanjorski Building, he said.

"It's in our best interests to protect our asset and keep the building in a good state of repair," he told council.

With the proposed budget still short "a few hundred thousand," this will likely add another \$40,000, he said.

Responding to a question from a member of the public about the impact of unpaid taxes on the city's current financial problems, O'Malley noted that unpaid tax costs were not a major part of the city's problem.

The tax collection rate of 88 percent was high, but at a total of \$463,000, city taxes made up a small part of the total revenue of \$3 million.

"Even with all taxes collected, we're still short an awful lot of money," he said.

11/02/2006

Nanticoke officials fear poll relocations will cut voter turnout

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Some residents and city officials said Wednesday they don't like having to go to Nanticoke Towers downtown to vote instead of the Honey Pot fire hall.

But Luzerne County Director of Elections Leonard Piazza said finding a polling place that fit federal guidelines in the Honey Pot section of Nanticoke was a sticky situation.

Over the past several months, the Luzerne County Bureau of Elections has consolidated polling places in cities and boroughs.

Nanticoke now has six wards instead of 13. The two main changes were moving voting from the Honey Pot fire station to Nanticoke Towers and moving some downtown voters to Holy Transfiguration Church on Center Street.

Mayor John Bushko, treasurer Albert Wytoshek and residents including Hank Marks complained at the council meeting about the new setup.

Bushko worried that voters — in particular elderly people who would no longer be able to walk to their polling places — would stay home on Nov. 7.

"I think they're going to lose 30 percent of the vote in this election," Bushko said. "Last time people didn't come because they were afraid of the (electronic voting) machines. This time they won't come because they changed the polling places."

When called after the meeting, Piazza said he did not think that would be the case.

Under the federal Help America Vote Act, polling places must be handicapped-accessible.

"Honey Pot (fire hall) is completely inaccessible and totally illegal if we use it as a polling place," Piazza said. "It does not even come close to meeting accessibility requirements under federal law."

When selecting new polling places, the bureau's first consideration is federal law, Piazza said. The second consideration is parking, and the third is finding a central location.

The problem is, Honey Pot is almost completely residential. Piazza said he couldn't find anywhere else in the area that would be handicap-

accessible. But he's open to suggestions from residents, although it's too late to change polling places in time for the election. "Oh, well, we'll see what happens Tuesday," Marks said.

11/2/2006

Officials believe porch fire is suspicious

A fire that severely damaged an enclosed rear porch of a home at 207 Fairchild St. on Wednesday afternoon is being considered suspicious, city firefighters said.

The homeowners, Ernest Turley, 68, and his wife, managed to escape the blaze without injury, fire crews said. Turley said he was in his front yard and his wife was upstairs when neighbors began to shout that the home was on fire. He said he went upstairs to help her get out of the home.

"She didn't even know," he said.

Turley said the fire erupted in a part of the structure where there is no electricity. He said he built the enclosed porch about 30 years ago and the fire appeared to begin on an exterior fiberglass panel.

Nanticoke police were called to the scene after fire crews quickly extinguished the 3:45 p.m. blaze and a state police fire marshal was being called to continue the investigation.

10/30/2006

Nanticoke cracks down on skateboarders

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Brian DeWeese sailed down the sidewalk of East Main Street on his skateboard Thursday.

The 12-year-old skateboards almost daily from his home in Glen Lyon to downtown Nanticoke. But lately he and other skaters have been avoiding what was once a favorite hangout: the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street.

Asked what the attraction was, DeWeese nodded at the building entrance. "Those steps," he said.

The front of the Kanjorski Center is a thrasher's dream. It's all concrete, with steps that let you start low and work your way up to the 8-stair jump. There are handrails to skim over and lots of space to practice your ollie.

But DeWeese and his fellow skateboarders are out of luck for now. Nanticoke's municipal authority just asked for a law-enforcement crackdown on kids hanging out at the Kanjorski Center, and a nearby proposed skateboard park is tied up in a legal tangle, despite community support, financial backing and equipment that's already purchased.

"The word is out from here to Hazleton this is a very good place to skateboard," Nanticoke Municipal Authority member Ron Kamowski said.

DeWeese said skateboarders come from as far away as Florida, but he doesn't know how the word got around.

The problem is, the skateboarders have torn paint off the handrails, waxed the steps, and broken edges off the window lintels, Kamowski said.

"They're costing us a fortune in damages," he said.

Skateboarders are especially unwelcome because the municipal authority is using a \$15,000 federal grant to get the Kanjorski Center cleaned up, to make it attractive to a new tenant. The building has been 80 percent vacant for a year.

At last week's meeting, the authority board requested solicitor Richard Hughes send a letter to the police department, asking for a continued presence at the Kanjorski Center. The board is also sending a letter to Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker, asking for a member of the municipal authority to be present at hearings involving skateboarding at the center.

"Whenever we're on patrol, we try to take extra efforts to go around the Kanjorski Center," Nanticoke Police Det. Captain William Shultz said. "It's a beautiful building that doesn't need to be destroyed by skateboarders," Shultz added.

Police arrested four skateboarders on Oct. 19; four more on Oct. 21, and five on Oct. 26, Shultz said. They are all being charged with trespassing, he said.

DeWeese is familiar with the increased police presence.

"I got fined for sitting right there one day," he said, pointing to the sidewalk in front of the Kanjorski Center entrance.

In fact, as DeWeese stood talking with the press across from the Kanjorski Center, a Nanticoke police cruiser went by twice within about five minutes.

"We have nowhere to go any more," DeWeese complained.

Shultz is in favor of a skate park because it would give kids a place of their own, where they wouldn't be a hazard to pedestrians or traffic.

An "X-treme Skate Park," planned as the first attraction in the proposed 134-acre Lower Broadway Recreation Park, has been in the works since 2003. Site plans are done, funding is secured and the South Valley Partnership already purchased the skateboarding equipment, said State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke.

"The reason progress is stalled is there are legal issues surrounding the land," he said. "We're ready to go, but we're a little concerned about setting it up and not being on firm legal ground."

Trying to track property ownership is a headache.

Attorney Joe Lach, who is solicitor for Nanticoke and Plymouth Township and is a member of the South Valley Partnership, said he is doing free legal work to try to straighten out who owns what.

On the land where the skate park is supposed to go, there are assorted parcels of property. Some belonged to long-gone coal companies or are easements for defunct railroads. Many are properties where homes and businesses were demolished for flood mitigation after Tropical Storm Agnes in 1972, but some transactions weren't done properly and titles are unclear.

“It’s like a huge reverse subdivision. It’s like taking a housing development that’s been in existence for 30 years with different property owners and trying to put them back together into the farm,” Lach said. “It turned out to be a lot more complicated than anyone ever anticipated when we first undertook this.”

Yudichak said the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources will provide the assistance of experts who have experience resolving similar legal snarls.

“Not being an attorney, I get a little frustrated at just how long it takes to work through some of these legal issues,” Yudichak said.

Lach can’t say how long it will take to sort things out.

“At this point I don’t want to create any false expectations. We’re doing this as quickly as we can,” he said.

DeWeese doesn’t think the skate park will happen any time soon — although he wishes it would.

“I’d pay money to go to one,” he said with a sigh.

10/25/2006

Over \$1 million in grants aids area rail

Officials say two Luzerne County projects will enhance jobs and cut truck trips for hauling coal waste.

By jlynott@leader.net

More than \$1 million in state grants will be coming to Luzerne County for two rail improvement projects.

The larger share, \$900,000, will go to HUD Inc. for construction of a two-track siding to connect to the Delaware & Hudson Railway yards in the Honey Pot section of Nanticoke.

Also, the Redevelopment Authority of Luzerne County will receive \$135,282 for track improvements along its rail system.

The funding is part of the \$20 million in grants Gov. Ed Rendell announced Tuesday for rail freight improvement projects throughout the state designed to stimulate economic development and reduce traffic congestion.

Calls to HUD’s office in Nanticoke and the redevelopment authority office were not returned.

HUD, operating as Emerald Anthracite II, plans to build the siding to the yards and extend a spur into the Whitney Pointe Industrial Park.

The connection will allow the company to ship coal waste by rail and cut 21,333 truck shipments per year, according to a release from the governor’s office. The project is expected to create 55 jobs and maintain 60 jobs.

The grant awarded to the county redevelopment authority will provide rail service to new customers, create 50 jobs, maintain 400 jobs and reduce truck trips by 26,436 annually, according to the press release.

State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, who helped secure funding for the HUD project, said it will make the property suitable for development. The site needs extensive reclamation work, he said.

“This gives us the best opportunity to have access to that site and get it out on rail,” Yudichak said.

In addition to the grant to HUD, the railway will receive \$1.8 million for work in the Honey Pot yard and to establish a connection to the main line, Yudichak said.

Pennsylvania Department of Transportation spokesman Kirk Wilson said that project has not yet been approved.

Yudichak said the grants, which require a 50 percent match by the recipients, create business opportunities by developing the park and providing access to a main line railroad.

“They really do go together,” he said.

HUD purchased the 400-acre former Daniel J. Flood Industrial Park in 2004 at a Luzerne County Sheriff’s sale for \$300,511.

That year the company received a \$249,000 grant from PennDOT to build a rail facility in the park to transport culm and fly ash from two mine-reclamation projects in the Nanticoke area.

Last year, HUD was awarded a \$100,000 grant to build track and a road crossing in Newport Township to connect with the facility in the industrial park.

In addition to the industrial development on the property, HUD plans to build a residential community on 78 acres designated a Keystone Opportunity Zone. The KOZ program provides tax breaks to property owners through 2010, when the program expires.

10/24/2006

Nanticoke’s municipal authority tries to break free from downtown redevelopment contract

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The municipal authority is trying to break a contract that locks in one firm as the sole consultant and developer for downtown revitalization.

The municipal authority voted Monday to enter a mutual agreement with Impact PA in order to cancel their contract. The firm has exclusive rights to construct commercial and residential buildings on areas of East Main Street and Market Street.

If the redevelopment authority, which owns the properties slated for redevelopment, also agrees to dissolve the contract, the municipal authority, which manages the properties, will make a one-time payment of \$50,000 to Impact PA. The city agencies will then be free to hire another developer.

Earlier Monday, municipal authority attorney Richard Hughes said he and the head of Impact PA, Robert Yoder, arranged an amicable end to the contract.

“Mr. Yoder was very upbeat and upstanding,” Hughes said.

“As he always has been with us,” municipal authority president Dennis Butler added.

The previous municipal authority board hired Impact PA in May 2005 as exclusive consultant and developer for downtown revitalization through

May 2010. Under the contract, the Turbotville-based firm was responsible for all aspects of the project to include arranging financing, designs, securing tenants and construction.

While waiting for Impact PA to present its plans, Facility Design and Development Ltd. was hired by a local non-governmental agency, the South Valley Partnership, to create a comprehensive plan for revitalizing Nanticoke and Newport and Plymouth Townships.

City council and the municipal authority were impressed with Facility Design and Development's plans for downtown Nanticoke. In July, council and the mayor expressed interest in using the firm's plans if the two authorities and city officials could reach consensus on it — and somehow get out of the contract with Impact PA.

However, municipal authority members say it is too soon to tell what will happen as far as hiring another firm.

"There is no other developer at this point," Butler said. "Nothing will be decided until everything is drawn up and executed."

10/15/2006

By: Pam Urbanski

Since this past week was fire prevention week, I thought it would be fitting for my husband David, a firefighter in Nanticoke for the past 22 years to write for this column.

Students, faculty and staff from [Greater Nanticoke Area](#), once again welcomed the Nanticoke Fire Department into their schools during National Fire Prevention Week, Oct. 8 through Oct. 14.

Fire prevention Week is a decades old program instituted by the National Fire Protection Agency to educate the public about the importance of fire safety. The Nanticoke Fire Department began offering the program to elementary school children after a fatal fire occurred in the city some 20 years ago.

"We felt it is our job to teach kids about fire safety along with the importance of having working smoke detectors in their homes," said Chief Mike Bohan. "If we tell them how smoke detectors can save their lives, hopefully they will go home and tell their parents what they learned."

Pre-school and elementary students learned about this year's theme "Watch What You Heat." Firefighters spread the word that more fires start in the kitchen than in any other part of the home. Teaching families and kids how to keep cooking fires and injuries from happening in the first place was part of this year's program.

The fire department's Fire Safety Trailer is a great model for this year's theme and was once again used as part of the program. The trailer is a furnished mobile home in which small children learn many important safety tips, including how to avoid burn injuries in the kitchen area.

Firefighters demonstrate how to keep flammable materials away from the stove and to keep handles on cooking utensils turned inward so they cannot be accidentally tipped.

In the bedroom area, theater smoke is used to illustrate the importance of knowing two ways out. The smoke detector sounds the alarm and the children are taught how to safely exit the room. Children are taught to stay calm, crawl low in smoke, and to feel an exit door with the back of their hand before opening it.

"Kids need to know that if one exit is blocked in a real fire situation, they need to find another way out," added firefighter Greg Grzymiski. "We tell our students it is very important to have an escape plan and to practice it."

Parents are reminded to review with their child what was taught during fire prevention week and to develop an escape plan in case of emergency.

The Fire Safety Trailer is available to any organization wishing to use it. Arrangements can be made by calling fire headquarters.

In addition, the department has once again teamed up with WNEP TV's "Operation Save a Life." Kiddie, a manufacturer of smoke detectors, donated 10,000 smoke detectors as part of the project. WNEP distributed them to local fire departments and fire personnel install smoke detectors in city homes free of charge.

The fire department recommends placing smoke detectors on every level in the home as well as in each bedroom. Arrangements for installing home smoke detectors can be made by calling fire headquarters at 735-5860.

10/13/2006

GNA's UGI Electric bill a shocker

District will have to pay 48 percent more for electricity, official says.

By JANINE UNGVARSKY Times Leader Correspondent

A recently approved increase for UGI Electric will cost Greater Nanticoke Area School District taxpayers 9 mills, according to the district's superintendent.

Anthony Perrone told the school board Thursday that the district's \$375,000 electric bill will increase by \$160,000, or more than 48 percent, when a rate increase approved by the state Public Utility Commission takes effect in January.

"That's nine mills of tax increase just for an increase in electric," Perrone said, adding that taxpayers will also be hit by an increase in their own electric bills. "All of us have to get together and write letters to the Public Utility Commission. That's an outrageous increase."

A mill is \$1 of tax on every \$1,000 of assessed property value.

Perrone also told the board that someone is ripping down signs at a school bus stop near the fire station in West Nanticoke. The signs post parking restrictions for the times when buses drop off and pick up about 20 to 30 students at the stop, he said.

"For some reason, after 35 years at least people don't want us to pick up kids on Poplar Street," he said. Perrone said police and other authorities have been notified and will prosecute the offenders. "The kids' safety is paramount."

In another issue related to student safety, the board discussed installing speed bumps in the newly repaved high school parking lot. The board also approved the installation of an above-ground propane tank to replace an old underground tank that is leaking.

The tank, which powers an emergency generator, will be on a concrete slab at least 10 feet behind the high school and secured inside a fence, the board was told.

In other business, the board approved a posting for two new special-education teachers. Perrone said 40 of 100 newly enrolled students require special-education services.

The board also approved the appointment of alternative-education teacher Deneen Zielinski, custodian John Gorka and cafeteria worker Deneen Marcinkowski.

10/12/2006

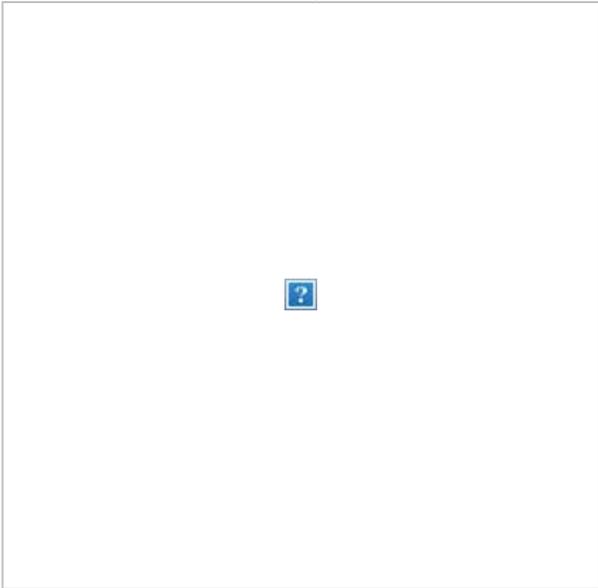
Plymouth Twp. bus stop ordinance should halt friction between Tilbury Fire Co. and GNA school bus drivers

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

A new township ordinance is expected to quench a smoldering controversy concerning a bus stop outside the Tilbury Fire Co.

The ordinance, passed by township supervisors Tuesday, creates a bus stop by designating part of East Poplar Street on either side of the Tilbury Fire Co. driveway a limited parking zone. Parking in marked areas on weekdays from 6:30 to 8:30 a.m. and 1:45 to 3:45 p.m. leads to a \$300 fine.

[Greater Nanticoke Area School District](#) and Plymouth Township officials opted to clearly designate where buses can park to end an ongoing feud between bus drivers and firefighters.



“Hopefully, this will make everything calm down now,” township Supervisor Chairwoman Gale Conrad said.

The area in front of the Tilbury Fire Co. has been a Greater Nanticoke Area school bus stop and transfer point for at least two decades. Problems arose recently when other signs limiting parking went missing. Neighbors parked in the bus areas, and firefighters said buses began to park too close to the firehouse.

Things escalated when bus drivers accused a firefighter of using a video camera to harass children. Tilbury Fire Chief John Rinehimer claimed the buses were blocking the fire station driveway and the firefighter was only taping the buses as evidence.

After receiving numerous complaints from parents and bus drivers, school district officials asked the supervisors to pass the ordinance.

Greater Nanticoke Area employees put up new no-parking signs at the Tilbury bus stop Wednesday. Weather permitting, on Thursday the district will have lines painted to further designate the no-parking zone in case somebody takes down the new signs, township code enforcement officer Charles Balogh said.

“We will strictly be enforcing this particular area,” said Balogh, who is responsible for doing so. “Our big thing is the safety of the children ... we’re ready to take a strong stance.”

Parking enforcement also should help Theresa Balliet, who lives by the firehouse. She said she doesn’t mind one bus at a time stopping in front of her house. But when the previous signs went missing, bus drivers started parking there two at a time because there were other vehicles in their spots. Balliet also was worried about liability. Residents have to clear snow off sidewalks in front of their homes, but “most people don’t have a whole big bunch of schoolchildren and parents on their sidewalks,” Balliet said.

10/10/2006

G-rated wrestling sought

By dweiss@leader.net

The Executioner wants to revive pro wrestling of old.

The wrestler, whose real name is Tom Rumsby, wants to see no more of the profanity and lewdness that pervades televised professional wrestling.

It's time, he said, to get "wrestling back to where it was."

Rumsby, along with promoter Mark Spencer, will be doing that next weekend with two local wrestling shows. One of the World Wrestling Coalition events is set for 1 p.m. Oct. 21 at the Garden Drive-in, Hunlock Creek, and the other is set for the next day at the same time at the Mountain Speedway, Hazleton.

Rumsby said his events won't feature steroid-laced wrestlers spewing swears and rude gestures at everyone. This will be some old-school pro wrestling, he said.

"In other words, don't offend families," he said. "No cursing, no gestures, just good clean fun."

Rumsby, of Nanticoke, has been running a drug-free wrestling school out of the Stars & Stripes Fitness in Nanticoke for months. And he hopes some of his trainees, along with some former wrestling stars, such as Honky Tonk Man, who appeared at a previous WWC fundraiser, can restore that image of pro wrestling in the upcoming shows.

Outside the two upcoming events, Rumsby and Spencer hope to create a regular venue, perhaps at the Tilbury Fire Hall, and even get the bouts on television.

A ticket to the event is \$5, he said. Each event has five bouts, he said.

10/8/2006

Lack of consensus stalls Nanticoke's redevelopment plan

By: eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

Although elected and appointed officials all want a transfusion of new life in the heart of the city, they still haven't reached consensus on how it should be done.

Downtown revitalization can't begin until the municipal authority, redevelopment authority and city council agree on a plan.

Council and the mayor have already stated they prefer the plan created by Facility Design and Development Ltd. for the South Valley Partnership. Municipal authority members informally indicated they prefer that plan as well, but have not taken an official vote, municipal authority chairman Dennis Butler said.

During Saturday morning's redevelopment authority meeting, chairman Chester Beggs said the authority still has to "dot its Is and cross its Ts on one or two more items" before making a decision.

The redevelopment authority wants to make sure it would be legal to hire Facility Design and Development: In May 2005, the previous municipal authority board hired Turbotville-based Impact PA for downtown redevelopment under a contract that could be difficult to break.

Recently, members of council and both authorities have expressed frustration about the lack of progress.

"This has been the situation since I've been on the (redevelopment authority) board," member Steve Buchinski said. "All three of us can't get together."

Henry Marks, who sits on the redevelopment and municipal authority boards, feels differently: he thinks there are enough people in all three entities who are willing to work together.

"We have to do what's best for Nanticoke," Marks said.

Butler suggested a joint meeting to try to move things forward.

One sticking point is whether a parking garage should be built next to the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street, and if so, how many spaces it should have. Some officials would prefer a surface parking lot at the site.

Another problem is that both authorities were having trouble getting "factual, iron-clad information" about their grants, Butler said. He said the municipal authority's accountant Karen Hazleton has been asked to provide a list of grants, how much has been used, and for what, in time for the next meeting on Oct. 23.

Something the two authorities and council agree on is that properties owned by the city should be sold. The redevelopment authority has compiled a list of its properties, and now needs to get them appraised in order to make decisions, Beggs said.

The redevelopment authority can't afford to pay maintenance and insurance on the buildings and properties, he said.

If they are sold, the money goes to the municipal authority, and the properties will be back on the tax rolls.

10/5/2006

Nanticoke residents decry ruined properties

Some tell council places are being used as drug houses and are a threat to children.

By Ian Campbell - Times Leader Correspondent

City residents told council Wednesday they want action on abandoned properties they believe are being used as drug houses, especially one next to St John's Church.

That building burned almost three years ago and the owners have promised to either fix or demolish the property numerous times, council was told. Instead, it has become a site for drug use, church representatives said, and poses a danger to children attending the church.

The building is not secured, and anyone can gain access through either the front or back doors, although some of the windows are boarded up, they said.

When approached during the daylight hours by police officers, those inside the building said they had the permission of the property owners to be there, council was told.

The matter has been before the district judge several times and should be resolved by the end of the week, but if it is not, said Mayor John Bushko, the city will act to demolish the property.

Residents also complained about a neglected property on East Noble Street that was apparently being occupied for similar purposes. The issue might be resolved next year with the compilation of a landlord database the city has developed. As outlined by Councilman William O'Malley, the database will help alleviate the city's expected financial shortfall by making sure all revenue sources, such as earned income tax, refuse and sewer fees, are properly collected. It will also impose some controls on absentee landlords. The occupancy inspections are also expected to contribute to the city's revenue stream, O'Malley said. In another matter, council voted to accept a \$3,000 offer for the American LaFrance fire engine it had available. Questions were asked about the anonymity surrounding the bid, and after a resident asked who the bidders were and when the bids were placed, Bushko made the information public. The successful bidder was John Cochran, no address provided. One bidder was not named by Councilman Brent Makarczyk as he did not have the name available, since it had been received at 5 p.m. Wednesday by phone at the fire station. That bid, for \$1,414.14, was unsuccessful.

10/4/2006

Plymouth Township ordinance should address bus parking concerns near Tilbury fire hall

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

Tilbury firefighters hope an action by the board of supervisors settles an ongoing dispute over school bus parking at the fire house.

Plymouth Township supervisors passed the first reading of an ordinance Monday that officially designates the road on both sides of the Tilbury Fire Co. on East Poplar Street as a Greater Nanticoke Area bus stop from 6:30 to 8:30 a.m. and 2:45 to 3:45 p.m. weekdays. Parking there during those hours means a \$300 fine.

Tilbury firefighters say the buses were blocking their driveway. Bus drivers counter that they weren't, and say a firefighter went too far when he videotaped children getting on and off the buses.

The area around the fire station, a bus stop for more than 20 years, is a transfer point for students, Greater Nanticoke Area Transportation Coordinator Janet Yezefski said. There are no homes there, and it's away from heavy traffic.

"We agree. We all have kids that go there. As far as town goes, it's probably the safest place to drop kids off and pick them up," Tilbury Fire Chief John Rinehimer said.

The conflict apparently began when neighbors started parking in the areas the buses normally stopped. Bus drivers began parking too close to the firehouse, Rinehimer said, which led to concerns about the ability to get fire trucks out in case of an emergency. State vehicle code does not allow parking within 20 feet of a fire station, he said.

Yezefski said she and GNA Superintendent Anthony Perrone got involved when parents called the district to complain about a firefighter videotaping children at the bus stop.

Melissa Helmecki and her mother, Cecelia Ackerman, drivers for White Transit, said they didn't block the driveway, so a firefighter's behavior with a videocamera was out of line.

Helmecki said she was pulling her bus into the lot at about 3:05 p.m. on Sept. 25 when she saw Tilbury firefighter Merrit Nash videotaping children getting on the buses. Helmecki said her 6-year-old son Ryan, who transfers at the Tilbury station to his grandmother's bus, was terrified.

"He was shaking and screaming 'why are they filming me,'" she said. "I asked (Nash), could you please stop the camera until the children get on the bus, but he just kept filming."

Rinehimer said he asked Nash to videotape the buses for evidence the drivers were blocking the fire station driveway, and stayed with him while he was doing it.

"That wasn't a case where it was maliciously done," Rinehimer said of the videotaping. "It's hard to video a bus without videoing a kid."

School district officials noticed the buses were only blocking the driveway by about 2 feet, but Yezefski said she could see the firefighters' point. "I spoke with Chief Rinehimer last week. I said we want a peaceful resolution," she said. "We won't block your driveway, you need to stop videotaping."

As far as Tilbury firefighters are concerned, it is. Rinehimer believes: "We did reach an amicable solution," he said.

10/2/2006

Mailbag letters to editor - Times Leader

Turnout made sale a success

I would like to thank all the city businesses for getting the word out about the city wide yard sale held over this past weekend. As participants in the event, the turnout was outstanding, and we did better than what we could even expected in sales. We had a lot of shoppers that did not reside in the city, and many had great things to say about the businesses that exist in the city for their courteous and friendly assistance and for providing information on the sales, as they had run out of maps that were being distributed at Patriot Square.

I know that we have our problems within the city i.e. the Kanjorski Center, empty businesses, the Main Street project and budget problems, but for these two days the city "shined." I hope that this project spurs on other things in the city; can you imagine what it would have been like if we could have had business filling Main and Market streets and having the "sidewalk sales" that we use to have when Woolworth's and The Leader Store headlined the downtown? Maybe one day we will get that back again. Thanks to all of those who organized this event .

10/1/2006

Pam Urbanski

There are a lot of activities and events going on in the Nanticoke area that I would like to share with you.

At Pope John Paul II School, classes to enrich your mind and strengthen your body are being offered. On Tuesday, students and adults are invited to an exciting hour of mental gymnastics as you learn Sudoku. Find out why the interest in these puzzles is sweeping the nation and learn to solve these popular puzzles. There is no math involved, but you will need to bring a pencil with a good eraser. The cost is \$8, which includes a 176 puzzle book for you to keep. Classes will be held at the main building on Hanover Street from 2:05 to 3:05 p.m. This class is for ages 7 to adult. Space is limited so call 735-7935.

Yoga "Stretching for Fitness" classes are being offered at Pope John Paul on Mondays, Oct. 16 through Nov. 20. This class will teach poses that gently stretch and strengthen the body. Participants will need to bring a non-slip yoga mat. Student ages 7 to adult are invited to participate. The cost is \$60 for six sessions. Mary Frances Giordano, a certified instructor, will teach the class. The time is 2:05 to 3:05 p.m. Call 735-6935 to register.

South Valley Chamber insurance

The South Valley Chamber of Commerce has announced that Chamber Choice, the insurance entity of the Chambers of Commerce, is in the process of upgrading its insurance packages for Chamber members.

Membership meetings will be held Oct. 2 through Oct. 6 at various sites in the Chamber's coverage area. For more information, contact Julianna at 735-6990.

Holy Child chicken dinner

The parishioners of Holy Child Church invite you to their delicious chicken dinner today at the Holy Child Grove. Dinner will be served from noon until 3 p.m. Takeouts are from 11 a.m. until noon. The dinner includes half a baked chicken, baked potato, vegetables, rolls, beverage and dessert. Tickets are \$8. Holy Child Grove is located behind the Guardian Elder Care Center on Robert Street. If Mother Nature doesn't cooperate, don't worry, there are plenty of covered pavilions. See you there.

St. Stan's auction

You know when the weather gets cooler it must be time for the annual Chinese auction sponsored by St. Stanislaus Church. The event will be held Sunday, Oct. 8.

Try your luck at winning one of the great baskets filled to the brim with stuff. Included are baskets for every member of the family. There will be refreshments and a bake sale. The auction will be held at the school hall on East Church Street. The doors open at 11 a.m. and the auction will begin at 1 p.m. For information, call Karen at 735-0729.

Tax reminder

Albert J Wytoshek, Nanticoke City tax collector, announces the 2006 Greater Nanticoke Area School District taxes and per capita taxes rebate period will end Monday. The tax office will have extended hours on Monday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Payments will not be accepted by postmark.

City and school taxes for the current year are payable at the Nanticoke Municipal Building Tax Office, Monday thru Friday between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m.

The 2006 city and city per capita taxes are now in penalty period until Dec. 15.

For information, call 735-2800.

Get ready for Oktoberfest

St. Francis Altar and Rosary Society is holding its annual Oktoberfest on Sunday, Oct. 8 at the parish center on East Green Street.

"You don't have to be German to enjoy this event," said Andrea Josefowicz.

There will be all homemade German foods and German beer. Tickets are \$8 for adults and \$3.50 for students. Serving will be from noon to 5 p.m. Takeouts are available. For more information, call 735-6903.

PJP School serve spaghetti

Pope John Paul II School will hold its spaghetti dinner Sunday, Oct. 15. Come enjoy a good homemade Italian meal. Serving will begin at noon and run until 3 p.m. The cost is \$6.50 for adults, \$4.50 for children, and free for children 3 years and younger. For information, call Esta at 592-7945 or Sue at 740-1424.

9/27/2006

Great Yard Sale was a great success

Editor:

The first annual Nanticoke Citywide Yard Sale which was held on September 16 and 17 was an overwhelming success. We would like to thank the many people that assisted in making this a success. They include: Betsy Cheshinski and all the girls in the Treasurers Department at Nanticoke City Hall that helped with the numerous phone calls, Karen Dougherty who was at Patriot's Park at 7 a.m. each day passing out maps and directories and entertaining the crowd and AllState Insurance who assisted in making copies of the directories when we ran short at 10 a.m.

Also, a thank you goes to the South Valley Chamber of Commerce, and Mayor John Bushko for all their help. And, thank you to the local press for their wonderful coverage of the event.

A very special thank you goes to the people of Nanticoke for their participation in making the first annual yard sale a success.

Watch out for "The Great Nanticoke Yard Sale Part II" coming to Nanticoke next year!

Nanticoke Civic Pride Organization

9/27/2006

Small crowd on hand for seminar on drug abuse in Luzerne County

BY ELIZABETH SKRAPITS - STAFF WRITER

"Bubble World" is not the kind of amusement most people would want to go if they knew the price of admission.

Unlike the Coney Island of Don Williams' teenage years, "Bubble World" is "the world of drugs, booze, and the whole lifestyle that goes with it." Williams, executive director of Clearbrook Lodge, used the amusement park metaphor to get across the pleasures and dangers of drug abuse in a seminar at Luzerne County Community College on Tuesday.

Although attendance was small — only about 20 people — and mostly members of the Drug Task Force and Youth Task Force, Williams and Nanticoke pharmacist Anthony Dougalas made an impression.

"I didn't know anything about the new drugs with Fentanyl," said Kaila Sakowski, 16, a junior at Nanticoke High School and president of the Youth Task Force. "That's a good thing to know, because I'll be getting out in the real world. I'm glad I'm finding out now before it's too late."

Williams' advice would be useful for when friends ask for help, she said.

"He was a fun person to listen to," Sakowski said.

An oversize sketch pad and black marker helped Williams illustrate what's in "Bubble World": Escape. Courage. Popularity. Pain relief. Fantasy.

"The number-one reason people pick up a drug is not stress. The real reason is so simple it's disgusting," Williams said. "It's fun."

But addiction takes a physical, emotional and financial toll on users and their families. Sooner or later rain comes down and bursts the bubble — unless an enabler holds out a figurative umbrella to keep the drug user from feeling the consequences of his or her actions, Williams said. Pain is the only thing that will stop the pleasure of drug abuse.

Symptoms are meant to show there is a problem — but leave the diagnosis up to professionals, Williams said. Certain symptoms of drug abuse such as rapid mood swings, loss of control, and strange behavior could also come from a different cause, like bipolar disorder.

Some of the tickets to "Bubble World" are what Dougalas calls the "drugs of the new millennium." Fentanyl a narcotic 100 times stronger than morphine, is hitting the streets in cut form, mixed with heroin, he said. Unsuspecting users can overdose so fast they don't have time to call 911.

The stimulant methamphetamine has not yet exploded in the Wyoming Valley area, although labs for making it and "ice," a stronger, smokable form, have surfaced, especially in the Tunkhannock area, he said. Methamphetamine and its variants are relatively easy to make, he explained. That is why a new federal law goes into effect Sept. 30 prohibiting pharmacies from selling more than one product containing their main ingredients, ephedrine or pseudoephedrine, per customer at a time.

9/26/2006

Federal grant program to promote reading rapped

Report: Program's directors pushed for grant to be spent on one firm's products.

By mguydish@leader.net

A federal grant program designed to improve reading in early grades garnered harsh criticism in a new federal report, including claims that the program's directors broke the law by pushing grant winners to spend the money on products offered by a specific private company.

But no such pressure reached the lone local school district in the program, Greater Nanticoke Area, an official there said.

The report was dubbed "The Reading First Program's Grant Application Process," and was released by the U.S. Department of Education Office of the Inspector General. Reading First targets money at low-income, low-performing students through grade three, offering money for five consecutive years to improve curriculum and teacher training. The money is funneled through each state, which had to apply for its share, then divvy it among eligible school districts.

The report contends, among other things, that the department overseeing the federal grant "intervened to influence a state's selection of reading programs" and "to influence reading programs being used" by local school districts, violating the rules spelled out in the law that created the Reading First program.

Specifically, the report contends that the department pushed reading programs sold by SRA/McGraw-Hill, and the documents include several e-mails to bolster that argument, including one from Reading First Director Chris Doherty urging an underling to criticize an alternative reading program offered by the Wright Group:

"Beat the (expletive deleted) out of them. ... Hit them over and over with definitive evidence that they are not (Scientifically Based Reading Research), never have been and never will be. They are trying to crash our party and we need to beat the (expletive deleted) out of them"

Doherty has since resigned.

No such pressure was put on Greater Nanticoke Area – either from the state or federal departments of education, according to Mike Pawlik, the district’s director of Federal Programs. The state provided a list of approved programs, including McGraw Hill, and Greater Nanticoke Area chose Houghton Mifflin.

Pawlik said the program has been successful.

Before it started, only about half the students in some classes could read at grade level. In the most recent tested, up to 95 percent of the kids were reading at grade level.

“We’ve made monumental changes,” Pawlik said.

Now in its third year, the program brings almost \$175,000 annually into the district for teacher training and student supplies, according to the state Department of Education Web site.

Pawlik said there is no way of knowing, at this point, if the local program will be affected by the critical federal report. State Department of Education spokesman Michael Storm echoed that sentiment on the state level.

9/24/2006

Members of the Greater Nanticoke Area Drug Task Force (GNADTF) continue to provide programs that educate and bring awareness to the drug problem in the Nanticoke Area. The newest program, Straight Talk, gives individuals who might be experiencing an addiction problem, or someone with a family member or friend who needs to be steered down the right path, an opportunity to sit down with a volunteer from the GNADTF. The volunteers have experience in dealing with drug addiction and or recovery and know what programs one might need to turn their lives around.

Officer Kevin Grevera from the Nanticoke Police Department and Don Williams, executive director of Clear Brook Lodge, both GNADTF members, came up with the program.

“We feel it is an important addition to our existing programs,” said Don. “We have programs in place that are good alternatives to getting involved with drugs and/or alcohol, to include a new recreation center, great programs that run from there and events and activities throughout the year for our young people.

“We have drug awareness programs,” he added. “It is time for a program that helps individuals take the bull by the horns, realize there is a problem, say enough is enough, and get good advice as to what their next step should be.”

This is a non-group setting where individuals can meet anonymously and confidentially for a one-on-one discussion with knowledgeable, experienced adults from GNADTF. Available volunteers can include, upon request, experts in the fields of medicine law, rehabilitation, and personal and family recovery. This service will not offer therapy, but rather is designed to meet the needs of individuals who are seeking answers or referrals in a confidential manner.

Personnel will be available for Straight Talk every Monday at 7:30 p.m. at the Stickney Building, 24 Prospect St. in Nanticoke. Appointments can be made by calling 762-4009.

Volunteers needed

Speaking of the GNADTF, Don Williams tells me that help is needed on Saturday mornings to complete the renovations being done at the Stickney Building and the new recreation center.

“We are trying to complete some painting and repair work so that we can open the recreation center as soon as possible,” he said. “If you can give a few hours on Saturdays that would be great.”

Work hours are 8 a.m. to noon. To volunteer, show up at the center or call 762-4009.

What every parent should know

An educational seminar sponsored by the Greater Nanticoke Area Drug Task Force will be held Tuesday at Luzerne County Community College Conference Center, Room 132.

The seminar aims to help parents, teachers and other concerned adults learn about the new illegal drugs being introduced in the community, signs and symptoms of drug and or alcohol use, as well as intervention strategies.

“Drugs of the New Millennium,” presented by Anthony C. Douala, R.H., Act 120 instructor and owner of the Medicine Shop in Nanticoke, will offer information concerning what drugs are out there and available to our young people.

“Tony will speak about the newer drugs to include designer drugs out on our street,” said Don Williams, executive director of Clear Brook Lodge. Behavioral signs and symptoms and intervention strategies will be the topic Williams will tackle.

“My goal is to get parents, adults, anyone who interacts with our young people, to become aware of certain behaviors that might indicate a problem and then seek out help,” said Don.

[More information on the Greater Nanticoke Area Drug Task Force](#)

Last chance to celebrate summer

Don’t forget to stop by the End of Summer Fling today at Holy Child Grove on Newport Street, behind the Guardian Elder Care Center in

Sheatown. The annual event, which benefits the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, has helped raise a lot of money for a great cause. Cystic Fibrosis is a chronic lung disease where mucus builds up in the breathing passage, lungs and pancreas. Treatment can improve survival and quality of life. And, it is fundraisers such as this that are making a difference. In 1995, children with CF did not live to attend elementary school. Today, thanks in part to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, the median age of survival is nearly 37 years. One hundred percent of the money raised from the End of Summer Fling goes directly to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. The End of Summer Fling features great homemade food and desserts, including a pig roast. Ten live bands will entertain, beginning at noon. There also will be games for the whole family. A bikers' run will be held with an 11 a.m. registration and noon start. Donation, which includes food, beverage and bands, is \$20 for adults, \$15 for those 13 to 20 years of age, and free for children 12 and younger.

Get ready for Oktoberfest

Ladies of the Altar and Rosary Society of St. Francis Church invites the public to their annual Oktoberfest on Sunday, Oct. 8, at the parish center on East Green Street. This is a great event featuring all homemade German food and of course German beer! Serving will be from noon until 5 p.m. and takeouts are available. Cost is \$8 for adults and \$3.50 for children. Tickets will be sold at the door as well as after all Masses.

9/21/2006

Nanticoke Area School District appoints tax study commission

Anthony Perrone, superintendent of the Greater Nanticoke Area School District, announced a tax study commission of local residents was appointed at a recent meeting of the board of education. The function of the Act 1 tax commission will be to gather information and to make recommendations. The new taxpayer relief act requires a so-called front-end referendum in next May's primary in all school districts. The ballot question will ask schools to provide property tax deduction to Homestead/Farmstead properties. In preparation for the referendum, the new law directs all school boards to appoint a tax study commission by Sept. 14. The commission is mandated to study the current district tax structure and then make a recommendation to the school board on the ballot question no more than 90 days after its appointment. The Greater Nanticoke Area School District will conduct a meeting for its commission, which will be run by the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, on Monday at 6 p.m. in the high school cafeteria. Guest speaker from the PSBA will be Tim Allwein. Taxpayers are urged to attend.

9/21/2006

Nanticoke officials will examine their to-do list

BY ELIZABETH SKRAPITS - STAFF WRITER

Council and the mayor decided Wednesday night that it's time to get serious about old and new business. Mayor John Bushko told council to prepare a list of unfinished projects to tackle, and Councilman Bill O'Malley asked his fellow officials to get started on the 2007 budget, which, for the first time in years, will contain a much-needed capital improvement fund. "The things we've started and haven't finished, let's look at for the next meeting," Bushko said. For example, earlier in the summer, council closed the Washington Fire Co., but nothing has been done about selling the building or the firetruck, he said. As part of following up on old business, O'Malley said he has a list of city-owned properties; council and municipal authority members have been talking for months about selling those that aren't going to be used in redevelopment projects. By council's next meeting O'Malley said he should have a landlord database finished. City officials are trying to crack down on problem properties and make sure owners and tenants are accounted for at tax time. In new business, council members will meet with department heads to plan 2007 expenses, to come up with a draft budget by mid-October and a complete one by the first week in November. The city's financial recovery coordinator, Pennsylvania Economy League, will assist. The process involves finding money somewhere, whether from the federal Office of Community Development, a loan, or tax money, for a capital improvement fund, O'Malley said. It would be used for projects costing over \$2,500, such as road repair and other infrastructure improvements, he said. City officials need to plan ahead for major expenses they might face, O'Malley said, citing a recent situation with police vehicles as a "classic example." A few months ago, all the city's police vehicles were non-functional, some so badly they couldn't be fixed, councilman Joe Dougherty said. The city had to borrow cruisers from Wilkes-Barre City and Hazle Township. Fortunately, two new cruisers could be purchased with \$25,000 given by the Nanticoke Housing Authority as part of a service agreement, plus some grant money obtained by state Sen. Raphael Musto, D-Pittston.

9/19/2006

Nanticoke put on mother of all yard sales CASEY JONES OPINION

While digging through a box on a porch in Nanticoke on Saturday I grabbed something furry, something stiff, something that looked exactly like the rear end of a dead dog.

And the very first thing to enter my mind was: "Holy (cow). Somebody is selling their dead dog."

Allow me to explain.

Already that morning I had seen people attempt to sell houseplants, holy Bibles, half-bottles of nail polish, a dirty bird cage and college textbooks including "Bacterial Plant Pathology: Cell and Molecular Aspects."

An everything-must-go mentality pervaded the town.

One lady on Noble Street spoke for them all: "I just want rid of this stuff."

Nanticoke folks let us poke through their attics, browse through their basements and dig through their drawers last weekend.

In fact, they saved us the trouble of going inside, and brought the booty to the curb.

More than 200 families participated in a city-wide yard sale that drew hundreds, maybe thousands, of bargain, treasure and curiosity seekers.

It was a great idea. I've never seen the like. But to call it a yard sale is misleading.

You name it, they had it

There were yard sales, sure, but also garage sales, sidewalk sales, porch sales, driveway sales, sales as far as the eye could see.

People sold everything but the skeletons out of their closet. It was a second-hand store's nightmare.

Snow blowers and lawn mowers. Sleds and beds. Books, toys, clothes, shoes, games, coats, costumes, holiday decorations and boxes filled with Christmas lights that came with no guarantees.

Some items, I believe, were overpriced.

One guy wanted 50 cents apiece for Nixon campaign pins. He claimed he is not a crook.

Other items struck me as too personal to purchase secondhand.

We saw combs and curling irons, lingerie and lipstick, an Emergency First Aid Kit for Lovers complete with whipped cream, warming gel and assorted massage oils.

Other offerings revealed buyer's regret.

There were steppers and skiers and treadmills and three different kinds of George Foreman fat-burning grills for sale. Safe to say Nanticoke has ditched the diet.

The important thing is that people spent time with their neighbors and got rid of some junk and picked up a little spending money so they can buy some more junk.

Participants didn't make much off me.

My largest single purchase was a bowl of Ham and Bean Soup for \$1.50 from the Lighthouse Worship Center, which served lunch in the church basement.

I bought an oil painting of a Polynesian beach scene for 50 cents, but only after the artist, yard sale participant Doris Ponko, agreed to sign it.

And my Schmidt's Beer bottle opener, which pre-dates twist-off caps, only cost me a dime.

I lucked into a plain black sweatshirt, never worn, tags intact, for 50 cents. I can wear it without being a walking billboard.

And I bought a red-white-and-blue ceramic bull with a bell on its neck for 75 cents, but I would have paid more. I found it emblematic of our nation's foreign policy.

But I passed on the fur seat cushion I found in the box on the porch.

Looks too much like a dead dog to me.

(Note: Thank you for the advertisement in the paper Casey! We'll see you again next year.)

9/18/2006

Nanticoke yard sale a great innovation

Genuinely new ideas for community improvement are hard to come by. So a lot of credit goes to J.D. Verazin, a member of the Nanticoke Civic Pride Group who came up with the idea of a community-wide yard sale.

This past weekend, all the residents of Nanticoke were able to put out items they want to get rid of. And bargain hunters were able to cruise the streets of Nanticoke checking out the many yard sales.

We're sure a lot of people had a lot of fun. And we think this has the potential to be an annual event.

Nanticoke Webdesign note: Plans are already in the process for next year's event. Thanks again. Please keep on checking back here, for there are many other people that deserve credit for such a huge undertaking.

9/17/2006

Just what they bargained for

Organizers of citywide yard sale hoped to draw people to Nanticoke. They were overwhelmed by the turnout at the first-ever event, which concludes today.

By elewis@leader.net

Baby strollers, books, clothes and tools. Even the kitchen sink complete with a faucet and hoses was available, but installation is up to you.

Either you want it, need it or you're a collector looking for hidden treasure, you'll probably find it at the first Nanticoke City Wide Yard Sales.

Nearly 225 homes throughout the city collectively had the largest yard sale ever seen in the region, perhaps the state, on Saturday. The event concludes today.

The idea of a citywide yard sale came from J.D. Verazin, a member of the Nanticoke Civic Pride Group, who thought about it two years ago after seeing something similar in another state.

"I thought it would be a good idea to get people to come into town," Verazin said early Saturday afternoon. "We're having a sale at our house and we've probably had more than 100 people come through in the morning."

The event began at 9 a.m.

By 9:45 a.m., organizers ran out of maps and booklets listing the addresses of homes having yard sales.

"I needed a traffic cop here this morning," said Karen Doherty, who was in charge of handing out the information to would-be bargain hunters at Patriot Square.

Doherty began the morning with 125 booklets and maps. She had to turn people away for a short time while Yvonne Bozinski, the pride group's civil events coordinator, was busy at City Hall making more copies.

"This is absolutely amazing," Bozinski said. "We wanted to find a way to introduce people to the city and I think we have.

"We were having our meeting a few months ago tossing ideas on what to do and J.D. (Verazin) said let's have a citywide yard sale. We all said, OK let's try it. I think we're going to be doing this annually," Bozinski said.

How did organizers plan the event? Children passed out fliers and churches during services announced the event a few months ago.

Bozinski said the telephone didn't stop ringing for weeks with homeowners wanting to take part. Drive or walk down any street and you'll likely find unwanted belongings that could be treasure for someone else.

"I'm looking for old baseball cards. I've come across a few but I'm interested in cards from the 1960s and 1970s," said Bill Quinn of Wilkes-Barre.

"I found matching salt and pepper shakers and believe it or not, the matching napkin holder for my table," said Betty Lingurie of Wilkes-Barre.

Lawn mowers, bicycles, toys, televisions, microwaves, purses, lamps, musical equipment and a fish aquarium without the fish are just some of the thousands of items being offered.

Verazin already has an idea for next year.

"We're going to ask people to include the top two or three items and list them on the booklet. That way, if you need a TV or something, you'll go right to that address," Verazin said.

9/15/2006

Nanticoke gets ready for a bargain-hunting weekend during its first citywide yard sale

BY ROBERT KALINOWSKI - CV - STAFF WRITER

If you're looking to do some bargain shopping this weekend, heading to Nanticoke might be a good idea.

More than 200 residents will participate in the town's first-ever city-wide yard sale.

Dubbed "The Great Nanticoke City-Wide Yard Sale," the event, organizers hope, will draw people to the town and help its residents part with unwanted or unneeded belongings.

It will run from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday.

There will be at least one yard sale on nearly every street in the city, including in the Honey Pot and Hanover sections, according to organizers.

J.D. Verazin, a member of the Nanticoke Civic Pride Group, came up with the idea when the group was contemplating what it should do for its monthly event in September.

"Basically, if you ride up and down the streets, you're going to see a bunch of yard sales," Verazin said. "The whole city will be involved."

Those coming to the city for the event are encouraged to stop by Patriot Park, where organizers will be gathered to give people booklets of addresses where yard sales will be held and a map of the city, Verazin said. However, Verazin predicts many more people who didn't pre-register will likely put things out for sale in front of their homes.

"A lot of times, it's all up to residents to advertise or put a sign up. Now, the whole city of Nanticoke is advertising for you," Verazin said.

Theresa Sowa, of Enterprise Street, plans to participate. What's she planning to sell?

"Whatever I have that I can get rid of. Why not?" she said. "I figure if I can't use it maybe somebody can."

Her early list of items for sale includes crafts, baskets, lawn chairs, a cabinet, and other household accessories.

"Even if I don't sell it all, I'm sure some things will go," she said. "I hope it goes over well not just for me, but for everyone."

Former city Councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski, the city's special events coordinator, said she's expecting an immensely successful day. Until now, the only word of mouth about the sale has been a park bench advertisement, announcements at city council meetings and advertisements in church bulletins — and the phone has been ringing off the hook in city hall with residents wanting to take part, she said.

"It's been an overwhelming response, really. People are very enthused about it," she said. "We wanted to introduce more people to Nanticoke, and we thought this was the best way to do it."

For more information on the yard sale, click [HERE](#)

9/15/2006

Cops: Mayor punched in bar fight

Nanticoke Mayor John Bushko, who also owns a bar, was trying to break up a melee Saturday, he said.

By KEVIN AMERMAN kammerman@leader.net

The city's mayor was punched in the face and a gunshot was fired during a fracas involving up to 30 people on Saturday, police said.

Tempers began to flare when two men who were in town for a wedding went to Tossi's Town Tavern on Front Street, owned by Mayor John

Bushko and his wife. The out-of-towners asked the bartender if they could watch something on a television, said Nanticoke police Sgt. Mike Roke. When the bartender wouldn't put what they wanted on the TV, they began to leave and a patron made a remark to them, Roke said. The men said they would return to the bar with friends and at about 10 p.m., they did.

The men began fighting with bar patrons and Bushko was punched in the face. Roke said the mayor received superficial injuries and said it's unclear if he was hit by a stray punch or someone meant to punch him.

Bushko said he was upstairs – the bar is attached to his home – watching a college football game when the fight broke out. “I was trying to be a peacemaker,” the mayor said, jokingly noting that he wanted the fight to end so he could go back to watching the game.

One local man, who was armed, was injured badly, police said. The man, whose name was not released, was assaulted by more than one of the men who started the fight.

“He was basically minding his own business and the guys approached him and started laying a beating on him,” said Capt. William Shultz. “His face was kicked in.”

The victim, who is licensed to carry a gun, fired a warning shot toward a wooded area, but it didn't help. He told police the men knocked him to the ground and stole his gun. Although he discharged a gun, he likely will not be charged because he did so to stop the incident, police said.

When officers responded to the melee, which they say involved 20 to 30 people, Roke said “everyone scattered.

“The only ones who stayed were basically innocent.”

Bushko identified one person as an aggressor. That person, whose name wasn't released, was questioned. Charges could be filed against that person and others, Roke said.

Police said they were told that the men who started the fight were in town to attend a wedding reception at House of Rhone, which is near the tavern.

Officers went to the reception to question people. “Nobody knew anything,” Roke said. “You want to get down to the bottom of it and you can't.”

9/15/2006

GNA announces support staff deal

By DAWN ZERA Times Leader Correspondent

The Greater Nanticoke Area School Board announced Thursday it reached an agreement on the contract with 85 support staff members, which includes maintenance and cafeteria workers, school aides and secretaries.

Retroactive to the 2004-2005 school year, the contract includes a 25-cent an hour pay raise in the first year, with subsequent 75-cent raises each school year to the length of the contract, which ends June 2008.

The contract also calls for support staff to pay 1 percent of gross salary back to the district for health coverage and prescriptions.

The previous contract expired June 2004. The district's teachers union contract, which expired June 2005, still is being negotiated.

Board solicitor Vito DeLuca negotiations with the support staff union focused on salaries and health coverage.

“The district obviously has an economic interest, and the people on the other side of the table were looking out for their own families. This was a very good compromise,” DeLuca said.

The board, at Thursday's monthly meeting, also appointed seven people to serve on the district's tax study commission: John Ravin, Robert Hughes, Frank Vandermark, Elaine Gregorowicz, Henry Marks, Jean Ditzler and Mark Yeager. In accordance with state mandates, the commission will look at information to make a recommendation to the board on whether to increase earned income tax or create a local personal income tax to replace revenue previously obtained from property taxes.

The first meeting of the commission is set for 6 p.m. Monday, Sept. 25 in the high school cafeteria.

9/13/2006

Pennsylvania State Education Association

10 school boards face grievances

Organization files labor complaints after the districts consider leaving health insurance consortium.

By mguydish@leader.net

The Pennsylvania State Education Association, the parent organization for almost all local public school teacher unions and support staff unions, has filed nearly 40 labor complaints and grievances aimed at 10 local school boards.

The move came in response to decisions by those boards to consider switching health insurance systems.

The boards each authorized written notices that they are considering dropping out of the Northeast Pennsylvania Health Trust, a consortium created by area school districts in 1999 to use their collective clout to lower health insurance premiums.

“We simply can't understand why the districts would want to destroy an organization that has saved the taxpayers literally millions of dollars,” said PSEA Solicitor John Audi.

Audi said the union took a two-pronged approach to the legal action, filing 19 unfair labor practice complaints with the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board contending the school boards broke the law, and 19 union grievances with the individual school boards claiming they violated contract terms.

The PSEA filed one complaint and one grievance for each teacher union and each support staff union. Only one of those 20 unions – Pittston Area teachers – is not represented by PSEA, he said.

The action was taken against Dallas, Lake-Lehman, Greater Nanticoke Area, Northwest Area, Pittston Area, Tunkhannock Area, Wyoming Area and Wyoming Valley West school districts, as well as against West Side Area Vocational-Technical High School and the Luzerne Intermediate

Unit.

The dispute stems primarily from how the health trust has handled a burgeoning surplus.

Some school boards wanted to see a large chunk of the extra cash – estimated in excess of \$5 million this spring – returned to school districts. But the trust chose to keep most of it in reserve and give districts a one-month, 50 percent cut in premiums.

School boards then started submitting notices that they were considering withdrawing from the consortium.

9/12/2006

Sept. 11 — through the eyes of children

By Robert Kalinowski Staff Writer CV

Out in the playground during the first month of her first year of school, then 5-year-old Alyssa Matthey sensed the world was changing before her young eyes on Sept. 11, 2001.

“I was in recess. My mom and dad came running up to me. They said I’m getting picked up because something bad was happening,” she recalls.

“We went home. My mom put on the TV and I saw the buildings blow up.”

Members of the incoming 2001 kindergarten classes are now fifth-graders. Most of them are now 10 years old and have spent half of their lives in a post-Sept. 11 world.

In Ted Sokolowski’s Greater Nanticoke Area fifth-grade classroom Monday, the Sept. 11 tragedy was ripe for discussion — and many students were able to vividly recall that fateful day.

Kerinne Dorris lived in New York City at the time. She remembers turning on the television with her mother after leaving school.

“They were showing the Twin Towers on fire. She (her mother) thought it was a movie. But, it wasn’t. It was on every channel,” Dorris said. “It was scary. I was crying.”

Sitting in class that day, Evan Saunders also had a sense something wasn’t right.

“I had no clue what was happening. Someone came into class and whispered into the teacher’s ear. She was always happy, but we knew something went wrong because she looked depressed.”

Sokolowski said he has talked to his students about Sept. 11 for several days and was impressed with how much they grasped. On Monday, he walked into class and asked, “How many planes crashed on that day?” and “What did the planes crash into that day?” For both questions, nearly every student raised his or her hands looking to answer. He even tackled the broad question, “What is terrorism?” Answers ranged from one student saying, “trying to blow up your shoe on a plane,” to another saying, “inspiring fear in an enemy,” more near the dictionary definition.

“I don’t know if people realize how smart these kids are,” Sokolowski said. “They listen and they learn. They’ve become very informed.”

Sokolowski said he thinks it was important to discuss the sensitive topic with the youngsters.

“You can’t hide it. They have to know the truth. They are now young ladies and gentlemen. They need to know,” he said.

Several of Sokolowski’s students have parents who are firefighters, police officers and in the military, which likely is a reason they are so informed on the issue, he said.

Lindsay Lane’s father is a volunteer firefighter in Nanticoke, and she said thinking about Sept. 11 hits home.

“I know if we lived there (New York) he would have went there and I don’t know if he would have made it home,” she said.

9/8/2006

A family is temporarily homeless after an electrical fire damaged their home in the Hanover section of Nanticoke on Thursday morning.

Nanticoke fire department was called to the single-family home at 132 Pine St. at 1:32 a.m., Fire Chief Mike Bohan said.

Christopher Gober, Mary Gober, Gelene Gober and Jeffrey Hero were in the house at the time, but got out safely, Bohan said.

“Everybody was out and accounted for when we got on scene,” he said.

The Gober family went to stay with neighbors, Bohan said. Their house sustained fire, smoke and water damage on the first and second floors, he said.

“It was, I would say, moderate damage to the structure. Two rooms were pretty much destroyed,” he said.

Fire officials believe the fire started in an electrical panel box in the basement, Bohan said, noting, “It was pretty clear cut that it was an electrical fire.”

One firefighter suffered a small cut, but there were no other injuries, he said.

Hanover Township’s fire company assisted Nanticoke.

9/7/2006

Nanticoke officials discuss development

South Valley Partnership calls for business incubator at Kanjorski Center.

By IAN CAMPBELL Times Leader Correspondent

Two weeks from now, the South Valley Partnership’s plan to redevelop Nanticoke may be in effect, as long as the Municipal Authority and the Redevelopment Authority can come to terms with details of the plan at their own meetings.

Plans were discussed at a meeting Wednesday night.

Among other things, the redevelopment plan calls for a business incubator at the Kanjorski building, an ATV park and new bus routes in the region,

including a loop from LCCC to downtown Nanticoke.

An April meeting revealed the cost of the two-year, three-community project would be \$135,000. Plymouth Township and Newport Township are also participating in the strategic plan. South Valley Partnership is a private, non-profit group.

Without a tenant in the Kanjorski Building, the Municipal Authority cannot meet an annual charge of \$120,000 to pay its loan debt, and the council, as guarantor of that debt, and itself currently operating with a shortfall each month, is not able to assume the debt either.

The city struggles to keep operating each month, according to council member William O'Malley, and this month is short \$80,000. In order to finance the added debt, 200 mills would have to be added to the current 60 mills, he said. A mill is a \$1 levy on each \$1,000 of assessed property value.

Representatives of the two authorities indicated they were essentially in agreement with the South Valley plan, as presented by planner Alexander Belavitz, who explained that several concerns about adding needed parking to help the breakdown of the Kanjorski Center into some form of business incubator operation could be resolved by creating an open parking area on land opposite the building, rather than erecting a new facility. "Parking follows development, but you don't build the parking first," Belavitz said.

If agreement exists, Belavitz said the first step would be to begin on a series of "catalyzing projects," the most important being work on the streetscapes of the city.

Uniform lighting and signs, fixing footpaths and planting in public areas were all key to that, he said.

9/7/2006

Planner: Nanticoke on 'cusp' of making things happen

BY ELIZABETH SKRAPITS - STAFF WRITER

If the city's elected and appointed officials can get solidly together behind an economic development strategy, Nanticoke's downtown could see renovations and public and private investment to a degree that hasn't happened in at least a generation, their planner says.

"You're right on the cusp of making great things happen," urban planner Alex Belavitz said Wednesday night to city council and Nanticoke's municipal and redevelopment authorities, both of which are responsible for downtown revitalization.

The three entities informally agree that the plan created by Belavitz' firm, Facility Design and Development Ltd., was the best way to go to breathe new life into the city's aging downtown.

The comprehensive economic development plan, drawn up for Nanticoke and Newport and Plymouth townships at the request of South Valley Partnership, contains recommendations on how the three communities can be revitalized.

There are several things that will act as catalysts for change in Nanticoke's downtown, Belavitz said. One is more parking, preferably in lots or garages scattered throughout instead of one in a central location as the authorities originally planned, he said.

The 80 percent vacant Kanjorski Center, a liability to the authorities, could be turned into an asset if it is subdivided to make it attractive to small start-up businesses, Belavitz said. Since vacant buildings next door on East Main Street were demolished, there would be almost enough parking there without the need to build a garage, he said.

Nanticoke needs to invest in itself. New sidewalks and street lighting are necessary for safety and aesthetic reasons, Belavitz said.

Carbondale mayor Justin Taylor, whose Lackawanna County municipality is experiencing revitalization after following a plan by Facility Design and Development, gave Nanticoke officials a pep talk about attracting private investors, which they and Belavitz agree is crucial. Some are interested in Nanticoke already.

"That happens when you have a plan," Taylor said. "Developers show up, and they show up left and right."

But even if the plan is adopted, most changes won't come overnight, councilman Bill O'Malley said.

Although the capital improvements in the plan are desperately needed — especially new sidewalks — Nanticoke is financially distressed and has to scratch even to pay its bills; there is no money for matching funds for grants, he said.

The city has a \$5.6 million federal transportation grant obtained by U.S. Rep Paul Kanjorski last year. However, before council and the authorities can decide how to use it, they must find out exactly what the grant can be used for, municipal authority member Henry Marks said, to the agreement of all three entities.

Additionally, the municipal and redevelopment authorities have to meet and formally decide whether they can and will adopt the South Valley plan and start implementing it.

9/02/2006

Nanticoke tenants left without water because landlord owes on the sewer bill

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This week while the Wyoming Valley worried about getting too much water, residents in certain Nanticoke rental properties had to face not having any.

The Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority shut off water for three multi-family residences at 127-125 Pine St., 221 Pine St. and 269 E. Green St. this week because their owner did not pay sewer bills for more than a year. The tenants' only options are to pay the delinquent fees or move out of the homes, which are considered unfit for habitation by code enforcement.

As the sky darkened Friday with the approach of Tropical Depression Ernesto, which is bringing rain to Northeastern Pennsylvania today, a woman emerged from the Green Street building with an armload of plastic jugs. The tenant, who asked not to be identified, said she was going to borrow some water from a neighbor. On Thursday she bought a cart load of water at the grocery store. Saturday she planned to ask her son to bring some.

"Now we know what they lived like in the pioneer days, like 'Little House on the Prairie' — but they had a well," she said.

The three properties are owned by Allan Herring. He did not return calls for comment.

The authority strictly deals with the property owner, not the tenants, WVSA spokesman Peter Gill said. Owners pay WVSA \$40 a quarter for each equivalent dwelling unit, which is a single-family home or apartment.

“(Herring’s) bill is well over a year overdue,” Gill said. “He supposedly told our people he was selling the property. We tried to work with him, and it just got worse.”

Under state law, WVSA can turn off water on properties with overdue bills, but the owner must be given notice. Besides the quarterly bills, Herring was sent a notice on July 25 that WVSA would turn the water off on his properties, Gill said. On Aug. 3 WVSA posted the properties to make the tenants aware; on Aug. 18 the authority sent Herring a 10-day notice, and on Aug. 23 posted the property again, Gill said. There was a final posting by WVSA on Aug. 28 to inform tenants again, then on Aug. 30 the water was turned off, he said.

To get it turned back on, either Herring or the tenants will have to pay the bills, Gill said. “If there’s any recourse between tenant and landlord, that’s a legal question, and I’m not a lawyer,” Gill said.

The first thing tenants in similar situations should do is look at their lease for direct or indirect language to see who is responsible for paying sewer bills, said attorney Bill Vinsko of Vinsko and Associates, Wilkes-Barre, which often deals with landlord-tenant law.

If there is no mention at all, or no lease, sewer payments are ultimately the landlord’s responsibility, because the sewer authority’s billing information would be in the landlord’s name, Vinsko said.

If sewer fees are the landlord’s responsibility but the tenants end up having to pay them, they can either deduct it from their rent, or try to get the money back from their landlord, he said. However, before taking any action, tenants must make sure their lease does not say that no bills can be deducted from the rent.

“If that’s in there, they just have to pay it and go after the landlord for it,” Vinsko said. “The bottom line is, always look to the lease first.”

In cases like the one in Nanticoke, there may be a way to get out of the lease early if the landlord did not live up to his or her obligations, he said.

The Green Street tenant said she has lived in the house for several years and hates to move, because her children and grandchildren live nearby.

Other tenants are fleeing the five-apartment house, but she said it will be hard to find another place she can afford, and anyway, she can’t do anything about it until Tuesday, after the Labor Day weekend.

8/29/2006

Nanticoke gives up grant

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Because it couldn’t afford to keep it, the city’s municipal authority unanimously voted Monday to return \$1.5 million to the federal Economic Development Agency.

Under the terms of the grant, which was originally obtained several years ago to expand the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street, the authority must use it to build a 54,000 square-foot office building that would create 100 jobs. Additionally, the \$1.5 million comes with the need to provide matching funds, which the authority and financially distressed Nanticoke don’t have.

Because of the city’s financial condition and the fact the authority is already struggling to find tenants for the 80-percent vacant Kanjorski Center, it would not be prudent to keep the grant at this time, municipal authority chairman Dennis Butler said.

“We’re not going to put the city in one penny of debt,” said municipal authority member Chester Beggs.

Now the redevelopment authority, which has several of the same members but is also responsible for downtown redevelopment, will have to write a similar letter to cancel the grant, Beggs said.

The Kanjorski Center is up for sale or lease by Lewith and Freeman, hired by the authority a few months ago to market the building after failing to find a replacement for HealthNow, its main tenant. There is no price on the building yet, but the real estate firm is coming up with one, Butler said. There have already been a few showings, he said.

The loss of \$32,000-a-month rent from HealthNow hit the municipal authority hard. But it received a desperately needed infusion of cash from a suit against the Medicare claims processing firm.

After HealthNow moved out in October 2005, the previous municipal authority board filed a suit claiming the firm owed more than \$800,000 in damages to the building. The suit was recently settled for \$100,000.

When the mediator’s and attorney’s fees were deducted, the authority received \$95,390, accountant Karen Hazleton said. After paying the monthly bills and a year’s worth of insurance on the building, the authority, which expected to be broke by about this time of the year, has about \$75,000 in the bank, Hazleton said.

The authority voted to sign a lease extension through February 2008 with the Kanjorski Center’s sole tenant, the state Department of Labor and Industry, which fills about 20 percent of the building. Rent remains \$4,962 a month.

8/27/2006

It's That Time of the Year Again

Pam Urbanski

Students in the Greater Nanticoke Area School District and Luzerne County Community College will be heading back to school this week. Pope John Paul II School opens its doors for another school year tomorrow, Aug. 28.

The Primary Center is located on East Green Street next to St. Francis Church, and the main building is located on H o v e r Street, next to Holy TrinityChurch.

Luzerne County Community College begins day and evening classes tomorrow, also. Students who attend our public schools, all located on

Kosciuszko Street, will head back to classes on Wednesday.

With the start of school and college classes comes increased car, bus and pedestrian traffic. Police Chief James Cheshinski offers some tips to help with the transition of summer time to school time.

"We are asking residents to avoid Kosciuszko Street for the first week of school. Please use an alternate route and allow yourself some extra time."

"Slow down," he stressed.

He ask drivers to be aware of children walking to school. "Drivers need to be extra cautious not only for the start of school but also throughout the school year," he said. "Please be extra cautious of students in the crosswalks. Be patient."

Chief Cheshinski also asks parents to talk with their children about crossing the streets in the cross walks where there is a crossing guard. "We also tell parents that if their child is walking to school to make sure they do not walk alone."

Students can check out their home room assignments this week. High school students in grades eight through 12 can check the bus port windows. Education Center students in sixth and seventh grades and elementary school students in grades third through five can check the front door windows on Union Street. Kennedy School's second graders can look on the front door windows facing Kosciuszko Street and K.M. Smith students who are in kindergarten and first grade can check out the front door window of their building.

In the words of Principal Dr. Mariellen Scott, "Happy New Year."

[Vist the GNA School District's website](#)

City wide yard sale

If you have been thinking about cleaning out a basement or attic that contains items you don't use, I have a great way for you to get rid of the stuff and at the same time make some money! **Sell it at the Nanticoke City Wide Yard Sale.**

According to Yvonne Bozinski, organizer of this event, it is a great opportunity to introduce Nanticoke.

"People love yard sales," she said. "We think this is a good way to meet people who live here and show what a nice town this is."

The yard sales will be held over two days. Saturday, Sept. 16, and Sunday, Sept. 17, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

"Everyone is welcome to sell at their homes or business," offered Karen Dougherty, another worker for the event.

Buyers are asked to stop at Patriot Park where they will receive a map of the city and addresses and home locations of those residents who are participating in the sale.

Call city hall at 735-2800, between the hours of 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. to pre-register for this event.

[Read more about the yard sale....](#)

Taxes are in the mail

Nanticoke City Tax Collector Albert Wytoshek announced the 2006 Greater Nanticoke Area School District property taxes and per capita taxes were issued Friday, Aug. 4. The rebate period will end on Oct. 2. Face value will end Dec. 1, after which penalty will be in effect until Dec. 15. Property owners are reminded that it is their responsibility to forward the tax statements to their mortgage/banking facility Anyone paying by mail and requesting a receipt is advised to enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Anyone who did not receive their tax statement is asked to contact the Nanticoke Tax Office at 735-2800.

Taxes for the current year are payable at the Nanticoke Municipal Building Tax Office, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. and 4 p.m.

The 2006 city property and city per capita taxes are now in penalty until Dec. 15.

8/23/2006

Turn coal building into apartments

The former headquarters of coal companies have made some distinctive modern-use buildings in Wyoming Valley.

The administration building of King's College on River Street is a former coal company office. So is the Guard Center, also on River Street.

These beautiful buildings preserve a part of local history and are very practical for the organizations that now own them.

So, along the same lines, the idea of renovating the long-vacant Susquehanna Coal Company headquarters on Market and Main streets in Nanticoke is an excellent one.

The city housing authority would get the property as a gift from businessman Ken Pollock. It would then renovate the building into 11 apartments of 700 square feet each and rent them to moderate income senior citizens.

The plan has a lot going for it.

\$1.5 million for renovation is already in place.

The idea of creating apartments in downtown Nanticoke fits with recommendations of planners who suggest a mixture of commercial and residential use for revitalization.

And the renovation would bring back to life a building with strong ties to the history of Nanticoke.

As Perry Clay, executive director of the housing authority said, "The Susquehanna Coal Company owned the whole town at one time. It employed everybody."

Official and public meetings still have to be held on various aspects of the projects. But it appears to have widespread support. We hope the project goes through.

8/22/2006

Former coal company building in Nanticoke may be converted into housing for seniors

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Nanticoke Housing Authority hopes to turn a blighted, but historic building into affordable senior housing, a move officials say could be the first step in downtown revitalization for the city.

Local businessman Ken Pollock is in the process of giving the Nanticoke Housing Authority the building on Market and Main streets that once contained the Susquehanna Coal Co. offices, Housing Authority Executive Director Perry Clay said.

The Nanticoke Housing Authority is an independent entity formed in 1966, with five board members appointed by the mayor. The authority is responsible for several elderly high-rise and low-income family apartment complexes, including Nanticoke Terrace, Oplinger Towers and Park Towers.

As its latest project, the authority has proposed renovating the former Susquehanna Coal Co. building into 11 approximately 700 square-foot apartments for moderate-income seniors, Clay said.

“Revitalizing that building is vital in jump-starting development,” said state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke.

So far downtown revitalization, particularly along East Main Street, is stalled because local, state and federal officials can’t agree on plans.

Members of the city’s redevelopment and municipal authorities will meet with council and the mayor at 7 p.m. Sept. 6 in city hall to try to work things out and seek public input.

The comprehensive plan drawn up by Facility Design Ltd. for the South Valley Partnership is favored by council as being the most practical for Nanticoke’s downtown. The housing authority’s intention for the Susquehanna Coal Co. building fits in with the plan’s recommendation of having a mix of commercial and residential buildings downtown, Yudichak said.

The housing authority is ready to start renovations. It has secured \$1.5 million in state, county and federal money, and the architects are in place, but the deed has not yet been transferred, Clay said.

Confusion arose at a recent Nanticoke Council meeting, when the subject of the Susquehanna Coal Co. building being in a state and local tax-exempt Keystone Opportunity Zone came up. It was entered in the now-closed program years ago.

City officials said they had received a request from Pollock for a rebate on 2006 taxes, which turned into a discussion on whether that building and others fit the KOZ criteria. But the KOZ point is probably moot because as a non-profit organization, the housing authority does not pay taxes, Councilman Bill O’Malley said.

“Pollock is generous enough to give the property to the housing authority. The housing authority is stepping up to the plate to give new life to a property that has been a problem for years,” O’Malley said. “We have two blessings right there. We’re not trying to throw a wrench into this. Pollock’s representative Tom Doughton did not return a message seeking comment Friday.

Although the authority is tax exempt, Clay said he planned to give the city payment in lieu of taxes.

The authority has already been good in that regard, including offering to pave Apollo Circle although it is a city street, paying extra garbage fees, and giving the city \$25,000 for the police department, which will be used for a desperately needed police car, O’Malley said.

The building is not desirable for private development, Yudichak said. It’s oddly shaped and in an awkward spot with no parking; the adjacent lot is city-owned.

“To get an adequate return on their investment from someone in the private sector without the resources of the housing authority would be very difficult,” O’Malley said.

Renovating the building also would preserve a city landmark. The building has probably been vacant since the Susquehanna Coal Co. closed in 1967. The company was created in 1869, when the Pennsylvania Railroad acquired the Pittston Railroad and Coal Co. and renamed it.

“The Susquehanna Coal Co. owned the whole town at one time. It employed everybody,” Clay said.

The turn-of-the-century Susquehanna Coal Co. building was designed by Wilkes-Barre architects McCormick and French, best known for their bank buildings and their work on the interior of the Luzerne County Courthouse.

8/20/2006

Nanticoke Area Notes

By Pam Urbanski

There is some really great stuff happening at the Nanticoke Housing Authority. I came to realize this after I was asked to include different activities sponsored by the Authority. I called to see what was different and why there seems to be so much more going on.

It is because a new director is on board. Perry A. Clay was hired a year ago to oversee the Authority and it’s programs. He came to Nanticoke from Lancaster City Housing Authority, where he was director for 15 years. He has quite a vision for the city and I am impressed with his enthusiasm and energy and his passion for making a difference.

“For many years the relationship between the City of Nanticoke and the Housing Authority had been strained. I have worked on that and am happy to say that we are now working together for the good of the community,” Clay explained.

Since taking the helm he has formed councils at each of the high-rise apartments and the low income housing in the city. “We held elections and councils were formed. These people are the voices of the residents,” he said. “It’s great.”

Clay has many goals but one major one is to help change people’s lives.

“Our low income housing is meant to be transitional housing, not generational. This is an environment beyond bricks and mortar,” he said.

This past summer he received a grant so 10 low-income children could attend Camp Kresge. He tells me there is money in his budget for supportive services. One project he is working on for the new school year is an after school homework club and tutoring program for students to receive tutoring and homework help. He has purchased 20 computers and programs to help with learning.

“The program is set up so that part of the time is spent on homework and review of school work etc. and the rest of the time will be spent working and learning on the computers.” Perry tells me he ran a similar program in Lancaster and it was very successful. “Parents tell me that over report periods their children do better in the classroom, their attitudes change and become more positive. Their behavior also improves. We need to change

the image of low income housing. Our kids deserve better.”

Simple things can help, he said. The kids told Perry their peers used to make fun of them and say to them, “Oh you are the kid that lives in the house with the blue door.” Over the summer, the doors were painted. Perry is now asking for some help.

The program needs some good volunteers on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 4 to 5:30 p.m. There will be no tutoring on days when there is no school or on holidays. Students, ages 16 and older are welcome to apply. The program will be held at two locations, in the community rooms on the 200 Block of South Street and the 200 Block of Apollo Circle.

To volunteer, call Perry at the Housing Authority at 735-1110. You must be a resident of the community of Apollo Circle or South Street to take part in the program. Students in grades first through eighth are welcome. Tutoring supplies will be provided along with supplies for arts and crafts. Two field trips are also planned. For more information, contact Perry.

Church travelers

St. Mary’s Travel is sponsoring a trip to Lancaster on Saturday, Nov. 11. Miller’s Smorgasbord, National Christmas Center Tour and American Music Theater Christmas Show are the planned events. The cost is \$89 for adults. Deadline to register is Monday, Aug. 28. Contact Helen at 735-5088.

Do you think there might be a better way than real estate taxes to fund our educational system?

If you’d like to take a close look at the Crestwood School District’s finances and make some recommendations on taxes and tax rates, the opportunity is now.

The Crestwood School District, like the 500 other school districts across the state, is looking for volunteers to serve on a tax study commission. The commissions are required under Act 1 of 2006, the Taxpayer Relief Act, adopted in late June. The legislation looks to offset school property tax rates with a greater proportion of income-based taxes and subsequently with revenue from slots casinos.

Tax study commission “expression of interest” forms are available at the office of Crestwood Superintendent Richard Duffy. Interested persons must complete the form and return it along with a letter of interest by Aug. 25.

The legislation requires school districts appoint commissions by Sept. 14. Depending on the response of residents, Duffy told me he expects the board, at its September meeting, will appoint either five or seven persons. There are some restrictions in the law regarding who can serve. Teachers, administrators and other school district employees cannot serve. The law requires the commission “reflect the socioeconomic, age and occupational diversity of the school district to the extent possible.”

Their job will be to study district finances, including historic and projected income tax and real estate tax, hold at least one public hearing and make a recommendation on taxes for the district’s 2007-2008 budget. The commission must deliver its non-binding recommendation to the school board by Dec. 13. Duffy explained the commission, to offset property taxes, can recommend an increase in the earned income tax or establishment of a personal income tax which taxes a wider variety of income. After considering the commission’s recommendation, the school board will make a decision and place the tax issue on the ballot of the May 15, 2007 primary election.

8/19/2006

School districts release information for upcoming school year Greater Nanticoke Area

Anthony Perrone, superintendent of Greater Nanticoke Area, announced classes open for students Wednesday, Aug. 30, for the 2006-07 school year.

Teachers will assemble Monday, Aug. 28, at the high school auditorium at 8 a.m. for a general meeting.

The cafeteria will begin serving lunch for grades one through 12 on Wednesday, Aug. 30.

Breakfast will be served in the Educational Center for students in grades six to 12 beginning Thursday, Aug. 31, at 7:15 a.m. Breakfast will be served at the Educational Center for grades two to five and at K. M. Smith Elementary for kindergarten and first grades, beginning Aug. 31 at 8:05 a.m.

All students who were eligible to receive a free/reduced lunch last year will remain eligible until Wednesday, Sept. 27. To become eligible to receive a free/reduced lunch for the 2006-2007 school year, parents must complete a new application for the students in their household and turn it into their teacher or use the Compass system for needy families before Thursday, Sept. 21. Students who qualify to receive a free/reduced lunch also qualify to receive a free/reduced breakfast.

The cafeteria will take prepayments for the lunch and breakfast program. These payments can be made in the child’s homeroom in grades kindergarten through seventh. The payments will be accepted in the high school office or the cafeteria for students in grades eight through 12.

Hours for the Greater Nanticoke schools are: Educational Center, 7:20 a.m. to 1:50 p.m.; Nanticoke High School, 7:25 a.m. to 1:50 p.m.; GNA Elementary Center, 8:30 a.m. to 3:05 p.m.; Kennedy, 8:30 a.m. to 3:05 p.m.; K.M. Smith, 8:30 a.m. to 3:05 p.m.; Pope John Paul School, grades one to eight, 7:50 a.m. to 1:50 p.m.; morning kindergarten, 7:50 a.m. to 10:40 a.m.; afternoon kindergarten, 11 a.m. to 1:50 p.m.

For more information and to visit the GNA Website go to: www.gnasd.com

8/19/2006

Citizens should study school taxes - From Citizens' Voice

Sticker shock is rolling across the valley as school tax bills arrive in the mail. The bills seem to go ever higher, to the point where they are literally painful.

People complain about them but basically feel helpless to do anything.

Perhaps that is in the process of changing.

Panels of citizens are to be formed in every school district to explore the possibility of switching some property taxes for income taxes.

Four area school districts have placed ads in the paper seeking members for these panels. They are Crestwood, Wyoming Area, Wyoming Valley West and **Greater Nanticoke Area**.

The other districts of the area will soon follow.

The panels will review the school districts' tax structures and make a recommendation to the school boards as to whether to hold a voter referendum on shifting the tax structure — reducing property taxes and increasing income taxes.

The total amount of taxes collected by the school district would not change. The change would be in who pays what part of the taxes.

The school boards would then decide whether to follow through on the panels' recommendations, or not.

Anyone interested in serving on a panel should get a form from their school superintendent's office.

We encourage people to do so. Any possibility at reducing some of the burden of property taxes is definitely worth looking into.

8/18/2006

Nanticoke will ensure properties meet criteria to qualify for tax program

eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

With a dormant Keystone Opportunity site about to become active and tax collector Albert Wytoshek's estimate that most of the city's other designated properties do not meet qualifications, city officials decided Wednesday to ensure the city won't miss tax revenue unnecessarily.

In order for the owners to receive the state and local tax abatements, KOZ properties must be current with taxes and up to building code. Now that council is aware of the criteria, Wytoshek will make certain back taxes are paid, and the city's building inspector will submit written reports on each building before owners can get KOZ benefits from the city, Councilman Bill O'Malley said.

But city officials are hitting a snag with the former Susquehanna Coal Co. building on Main Street, near Market Street. Its owner, Ken Pollock, is in the process of selling it to the Nanticoke Housing Authority and wants to activate the KOZ status.

The building has to be inspected before the city can allow the tax abatement, O'Malley said. However, building inspector Frank Kratz has been unable to get into the building due to the ownership issue, city administrator Tony Margelewicz said.

Pollock's representative sent Kratz to Perry Clay, director of the housing authority, who said he couldn't let Kratz into the building because the title wasn't transferred, Margelewicz said.

The city building inspector has the authority and responsibility to go into such properties, Mayor John Bushko said after the meeting.

"If no one's going to let you in, get a crowbar, pop the door and go in," Bushko said.

Inspections will begin next week of all KOZ properties on the city's list, he said.

"I don't know how some of those properties got on there," Bushko said.

The KOZ program, now closed to new properties, was developed in 1999 under former Gov. Tom Ridge. In exchange for state and local tax exemption until 2011, owners must either create jobs or redevelop blighted properties in the hopes of eventually bringing them back onto the tax rolls.

According to records obtained previously from Wytoshek's tax office, in 2004, Nanticoke stood to lose \$8,568 in tax revenue from 23 KOZ properties. Since not all of those properties were active at the time, the actual loss was closer to \$5,228.

Another KOZ is about to be activated in Nanticoke. Pollock's Whitney Pointe commercial and residential development on the border of Newport Township, built on land also formerly belonging to the coal company, has 10 homes in Nanticoke on the drawing board, Wytoshek said.

Although it is unusual, homes can be built in KOZs, like The Village at Tripp Park, a residential development in Scranton.

8/14/2006

A fun time, but not for businesses

The South Valley Heritage Days tried some different features to different degrees of success.

By rsweeney@leader.net

A festival is supposed to be fun, sure. And there's no doubt people who attended the South Valley Heritage Days had a good time. But vendors would like to have their version of fun too: some good business.

The crowd early Sunday evening of several dozen huddled near the bandstand and danced to the music of the Tones, completely ignoring the food stands as the vendors sat outside and grumbled about the sluggish sales.

An organizer of the five-day festival admitted attendance was low, but was pleased with the renewed event's result and said growing pains were expected, particularly because they gambled with several "experiments," such as bringing in NASCAR driver Derrick Cope and the No. 74 car.

"(We were) testing the water on a lot of things. Many things we did this year were innovative," said Jerry Hudak, a co-chairman of the festival with John Jagodzinski. "Some paid off and some didn't."

The experiments included an ethnic night, a firefighters parade and a motorcycle ride.

Years ago, a Nanticoke area development council ran the festival, but has since dropped it, he said.

Their experimentation might cost them some vendors next year, who have little hope for the fair in the Lower Broadway section of town and plan to search for greener fairgrounds.

Both Rick Gregory of Dalton-based Mister Rick's pretzel stand and Harveys Lake resident Henry Brucher of Kielbasa King described the turnout at Heritage Days as "terrible."

Gregory said he brought in only \$2,500 Saturday and \$35 Sunday. He hopes to recoup his losses when the Beach Boys come to Wilkes-Barre Sept. 3 and doesn't plan to return to this festival "unless somebody comes up with some proof it's going to be better."

Brucher blamed the small crowds on a glut of events during the weekend, including the Mud Bog in Plymouth and the Harveys Lake Homecoming Festivities, where he had a second vending truck he said "almost sold out."

That performance, with his hopes for the Beach Boys concert, should assuage the financial pain from this festival, where he said he didn't make enough "for the labor" to cover the entry fee. He also doesn't plan to return. "The biggest thing is the attendance."

Hudak was unfazed by the complaints, saying vendors reported above-average sales to him. "(I am) not too concerned because while some say they won't be back, we've had queries from others who want to replace them."

Besides, he believes the information garnered from the experiments was important. He said they've already given next year's planners some ideas, but wouldn't divulge any secrets.

"Out of this, we plan to come back with a bigger, better one," he said. "We wanted to (show) the people of the South Valley that there's a rejuvenation in the area. ... We're looking to regenerate this."

8/11/2006

Church ministers seek GNA tax forgiveness

By jdavidson@leader.net

The Revs. Daniel and Sylvia Thomas said they were obeying the will of God when they purchased a property at 2 W. Green St. in 2003 and established the Berean Lighthouse Church.

But they made a clerical mistake that could cost them tens of thousands of dollars; they registered the property in their own name rather than the name of their nascent church.

As a result, the church wound up on the county tax roster. The Thomases realized their error this year and legally placed the property in the church's name.

Now they are seeking tax forgiveness from Luzerne County and the Greater Nanticoke Area School Board back to 2003.

The Thomases came before the school board Thursday evening to appeal for tax exculpation, arguing they are a legitimate church that is exempt from state and federal taxes and should be exempt from county and school district taxes as well.

"It is now and always has been a house of worship, and it will remain a house of worship as long as we have breath," said Daniel Thomas of the church.

For its part, the board was reluctant to grant amnesty without an assurance that the county would do the same. School board solicitor Vito Deluca said if the board illegally forgives the church's back taxes, individual board members could be held liable.

In an emotional appeal, Sylvia Thomas urged the board to "do the right thing," and follow the lead of the City of Nanticoke, which earlier this month granted the church amnesty from all taxes since 2003.

The board did not rule on the issue Thursday night, but referred the couple to Luzerne County commissioners, saying that if they first granted the church tax forgiveness, the board would be in a better position to do so.

Also at the meeting, parent and student advocate Delia Bracero said she has been receiving phone calls from high school parents concerned about an alleged wiretapping incident in June.

According to Bracero, Greater Nanticoke Area High School Principal Maryann Jarolen allegedly taped a conversation she had with Superintendent Anthony Perrone without his knowledge or consent last month. Since then, Bracero says, seven or eight parents have called her with concerns about wiretapping at the school.

Perrone called the incident a "non-issue" that had been "resolved." There is currently no investigation into the alleged wiretapping and no criminal charges have been filed, he said.

8/9/2006

Nanticoke center offering 55 Alive driving course Driver Refresher Course at Nanticoke Senior Center

Nanticoke Senior Center, 2-6 North Market Street, has joined with the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) to offer a 55 Alive/Mature driving course. AARP has developed the eight-hour classroom refresher course to help drivers 50 or older to improve their skills and prevent traffic accidents. The class will take place from 12:30 until 4:30 p.m. March 22 and March 23.

Students must attend both sessions. There is a \$10 fee for the course and class size is limited. To register, call the Nanticoke Senior Center at 735-1670.

Registrants are reminded to bring their registration fee, a non-refundable check or money order for \$10 payable to AARP, a valid drivers license and a pencil. Refreshments will be provided. Instructor will be Terry McDaniel assisted by Nora McDaniel.

The 55 Alive/Mature course is designed to meet the specific needs of the older driver.

It covers age related physical changes, declining perceptual skills, rules of the road, local driving problems and license renewal requirements.

Volunteer instructors recruited and trained by AARP conduct the course, which is presented through a combination of slide presentations and group discussions.

All automobile insurance companies conducting business in Pennsylvania are required to provide a premium discount to graduates of the 55 Alive/Mature Driving courses, which is a state approved driver improvement course. When two persons are designated on the insurance, both must take the course in order to receive the discount.

Anyone wishing to have lunch on either or both days may make reservations when calling to register for the class.

8/8/2006

Before the first bell sounds, one teacher earns an 'A' for preparedness

In a class by herself

By badams@leader.net

"As prepared as I try to be, everything could get thrown out the window by the first day of school."

Linnea Wilczewski Third-grade teacher

Third-grade teacher Linnea Wilczewski is a get-it-done-today kind of woman.

That explains why she was in her classroom on Monday -- again.

"This is probably the tenth time I've been in this summer," she said.

That's OK. A couple of hours here and there help her achieve her goal. She'd rather organize her classroom for school now than wait until right before class starts on Aug. 30. "This goes with the territory," she said.

On this day, she's dressed casually in a T-shirt, jean shorts and pink flip-flops. A radio plays in the hallway, which smells freshly scrubbed.

But why not just wait until closer to the start of school to ready her classroom? "I would be beyond the panic mode," she said. She is a professed non-procrastinator in all areas of her life. She's got a lot of energy. She walks fast and she talks fast.

After 13 years of teaching in various grades and schools -- she's now at the Greater Nanticoke Area Elementary Center -- Wilczewski, 34, remains flexible in the opening days of school. "As prepared as I try to be, everything could get thrown out the window by the first day of school."

One of the first lessons her third-graders will get is how to pronounce her name. For that, she will rely on the same lesson her late father used in his classroom at Lake-Lehman. Francis Wilczewski used to tell his English literature students that they should think of "will and chess and ski" when saying his name.

It works, said his daughter. Her father taught for 33 years before he died of cancer two years ago. "He always has been and always will be my inspiration."

She credits him with helping her to be independent, to speak for herself and to have high expectations. Wilczewski tries to instill that in her students. She recalled one boy who was talented in art, but not in math. She told him on the last day of school that she wanted a signed piece of his artwork someday. "I hope he realized I believed in him. I hope he grows up to become an artist."

The desks in her classroom are already arranged in a big rectangle with a blue-green carpet in the center for the children to sit on during interactive reading sessions. It is there that they and their teacher will gather on a regular basis. Wilczewski likes to group them together so that students of all reading levels feel comfortable and help each other.

She is expecting 26 students, but it's too early for a class list. When she gets it, she will assign desks in alphabetical order rather than allowing the children to choose their own seats. That helps to send a message to them. "I am in charge of the classroom," she said. "I am the adult."

Wilczewski smiled and said that seating "adjustments" will likely have to be made, based on the dynamics of the children.

Each desk already has a big sticker with cartoon cats on it where the child's name will be written. Textbooks are piled neatly on each one. One science book has a big butterfly on its cover and a reading text has a turtle and a hare on the front.

Wilczewski said she and other teachers typically spend some of their own money on classroom supplies. She has arranged some school supplies on her students' desks, including a 10-cent spiral notebook, a colorful pencil and a yellow highlighter.

She had health problems last school year that sapped her stamina each afternoon and caused her to miss several weeks of work following surgery.

Wilczewski said her students were very supportive. Her doctor had told her to avoid chocolate because it can elevate the heart rate. The children told their parents that they couldn't give their teacher chocolate for Valentine's Day and that she was having surgery so she could eat chocolate again. That still makes her laugh.

Wilczewski is looking forward to feeling much better this school year. "You can't come here and be sick."

8/6/2006

Financial challenge accepted

By Elizabeth Skrapits Staff Writer

Nanticoke officials try to be open about the city's financial distress so residents won't be in for unpleasant surprises, but sometimes the officials themselves are surprised by how bad things are.

"They're significantly worse than anyone could have imagined when we came into office (in January)," Councilman Bill O'Malley said. "There was a lack of technical expertise in a number of different fields, especially finance, that would have allowed these problems to be recognized."

That lack of expertise should be remedied with the hiring of a new fiscal manager to work on a financial recovery plan with the professionals in the city's Act 47 team. They still have a huge task ahead of them, however.

"As a distressed city, we have to comply with the state," fiscal manager Holly Quinn said. "Party time's over."

Quinn officially starts her job Monday, but was in city hall Friday getting a tour from Mayor John Bushko. Council hired Quinn -- one of three applicants -- on Wednesday at an annual salary of \$35,000.

"Everybody that I talked to had very good things to say about her," Bushko said. "She had a terrific resume."

The 33-year-old Rice Township resident holds a master's degree in financial resources management for public administration. While she was deputy to Luzerne County Recorder of Deeds Mary Dysleski, Quinn said she helped put some financial controls in place.

While doing so, she and Dysleski found an undisclosed amount of money gone, Quinn said. The matter is still in the hands of Luzerne County District Attorney David Lupas.

"We never dreamed we would find money missing. We just thought we were making things more efficient," Quinn said. "It shows those controls

work.”

Since the state Department of Community and Economic Development selected the Pennsylvania Economy League as Nanticoke’s Act 47 coordinator three weeks ago, the non-profit organization has been gathering data and meeting with officials.

Quinn can’t wait to start working with PEL and her former co-workers at Albert B. Melone Associates, where she took a job after leaving the courthouse in 2005. Although she still considers Dysleski a friend, Quinn said she left because she wanted a bigger challenge.

The Melone accounting firm, which is also business manager for the Greater Nanticoke Area School District, was previously tapped by PEL as part of the Act 47 team. Other members include financial specialists from the law firm of Stevens and Lee for legal services and the Joint Urban Studies Center.

The center, made up of six northeastern Pennsylvania colleges and universities, provides urban planning research, analysis and consulting services. It also assisted in drawing up the South Valley Partnership Comprehensive Plan, which Nanticoke officials hope to use as a guide for downtown revitalization.

PEL should have the recovery plan drafted by December, but the team is only getting started, correcting errors and putting together solutions to the many problems, O’Malley said.

“There was a lack of initiative to go out and research whether or not the fees and taxes and revenues due to the city were actually collected on time,” O’Malley said.

As council’s finance chairman, O’Malley discovered this, and in addition, found some new ways to save money. By collecting the neglected taxes, putting insurance out to bid, and using cost-saving measures, the city has about \$435,000 it wouldn’t have had otherwise, he said. Changing health insurance alone saved \$100,000, payroll reductions added an extra \$38,000, and streamlining the phone system saved \$6,000, he explained.

Besides not collected owed money, previous administrations tangled the city up in debt. Former officials borrowed among the internal funds, took out loans to pay other loans, and used long-term loans to pay for daily operating expenses, which O’Malley said was entirely inappropriate.

“The easiest solution was to secure more debt, which solved short-term problems but caused long-term ones that, unfortunately, we have to deal with now,” O’Malley said.

If it sounds like things are snarled up, they are. The financial experts are still trying to find out exactly what Nanticoke’s total debt is. O’Malley could only estimate the debt is in the millions. The complexity of the situation makes it harder.

“We are probably at the lowest point we can be,” O’Malley said, but noted there was nowhere to go but up. “With everything that can happen and will happen in the future, this is actually going to work out real well for the city and the citizens.”

In the meantime, the task is daunting.

“There’s a lot of information. I feel like a gigantic sponge right now, trying to soak up everything,” Quinn said.

She added, “Well, I said I wanted a challenge, and I guess I got one.”

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8/6/2006

Community Project

Twenty-five community members completed a community project on July 22 in Nanticoke.

Participants included members of the Nanticoke Housing Authority, Nanticoke Terrace Resident Council, Nanticoke Conservation Club, EPCAMR, Office of Surface Mining/VISTA, the Luzerne Conservation District, Apollo Circle residents and local youth.

The group cleaned up an estimated 3 to 3.5 tons of trash in four hours time. More clean-up efforts in Nanticoke are in the planning stages for the future due to the large response that the event in July generated.

8/4/2006

Nanticoke officials examine garbage fees

Council is told revenues are \$40,000 below expectations, costs are above expectations.

By Ian Campbell - Times Leader Correspondent

Shortfalls in garbage revenues have forced city officials to look hard at garbage costs, council was informed Wednesday.

Councilman William O’Malley reported garbage fees had come in \$40,000 below expectations at \$620,000, while invoices from the garbage collector were totaling \$715,000. Those numbers presented two issues for council, the first being that the contractor appeared to be billing above the contract amount, and the second that in order to balance the accounts, funds would likely have to be transferred from a recycling grant.

O’Malley’s financial reports noted that cable-franchise fees were \$7,000 less than expected, the recycling grant was \$2,000 less than budgeted, while revenue from rental inspections, and health inspections were also less than budgeted.

Fire and police staff will help the city with occupancy permits and residency permit inspections, which is another field that is underperforming from budget expectations, he told council.

He also noted higher than expected levels of police and fire department overtime had affected the budgets of those departments.

Trash pickup came in for separate criticism when council noted that pickups were beginning at unreasonable hours of the morning, in some instances as early as 3 a.m.

A letter would be sent reminding the company of their service obligations, council agreed.

In other business, Mayor John Bushko noted all entities in the city would be holding a joint meeting 7 p.m. Sept. 6 to discuss remodeling the downtown business district and come up with a comprehensive plan for the future of the city. He urged all residents to attend the meeting, and encouraged them to be prepared to bring ideas for the project.

8/3/2006

Nanticoke will begin taking owners of city's problem properties to task

By Elizabeth Skrapits - Staff Writer

Council promised once again Wednesday night to start cracking down on problem properties — and this time they mean it.

Back in June, council pledged to residents that city officials and employees would work harder to crack down on problem properties. Some personnel issues held up the effort, but they are now being resolved, city officials said.

They say they also plan to spruce up the city in another way. There is about \$960,000 in federal money obtained by U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, that Councilman Bill O'Malley said would be used for East Market Street from the intersection with Main Street to the Nanticoke Bridge.

Improvements to the stretch of Market Street, such as streetlights and greenery, are part of a regional comprehensive plan drawn up by planner Alex Belavitz of Facility Design Ltd. City officials will ask him this week to start drawing up designs and seeking additional funding.

Although council and Mayor John Bushko have spoken previously about the need for better code enforcement — and O'Malley pointed out in his financial report that the city was far behind budget with inspection and permit fees — a resident drove the point home.

Linda Galazin complained about properties in her neighborhood with high weeds and uncollected garbage. One residence has about eight cars parked on an approximately 20-by-80-foot lot in the backyard, she said. The lifelong resident said she was tired of watching the city deteriorate. There is no ordinance limiting the number of cars residents can park on their properties, Bushko said. However, he assured Galazin she should start to see results on the other things within two weeks.

"The lady's right," Bushko admitted after the meeting. "I'm embarrassed. Really, I am."

7/31/2006

South Valley Heritage Days will host five-day regional festival

By Elizabeth Skrapits - Staff Writer

It isn't easy to plan a five-day regional festival in just three months.

There are vendors, bands and rides to book; events to staff; security and restroom facilities to arrange; and insurance to stock up on just in case anything goes wrong.

But somehow, South Valley Chamber of Commerce members Jerry Hudak of Nanticoke and John Jagodzinski of Wilkes-Barre Township did it.

Now the co-chairs of South Valley Heritage Days, the most ambitious project of the chamber so far, are hoping for good weather and a great turnout for the festival, which features a different theme each day.

The family-oriented event, which will run Wednesday, Aug. 9 through Sunday, Aug. 13 in the Lower Broadway Park in Nanticoke, is a celebration of the region and a chance for people to get to know its residents and businesses.

"We decided the South Valley needed a bit of a lift," said chamber president Hudak.

"We're going to try our best and see what happens," Jagodzinski said. "People ask me what I'm doing this for. I said, 'to revitalize things.' Everybody's in a rut."

The idea for Heritage Days came about in early May, when the chamber had placemats printed up with a list of upcoming local events. Restaurant patrons took the placemats home and asked for extras, Hudak said. Soon stacks of the red-and-black printed mats were popping up in other establishments.

"We've gone through almost 30,000," Hudak said. "People are really hungry for this kind of news, we found out."

The problem was, even though South Valley Heritage Days were prominently advertised at the top of the placemats, Hudak and Jagodzinski didn't have concrete plans.

"The only thing we knew when we went to the printer was we were going to have NASCAR Friday," Jagodzinski said.

NASCAR driver and former FOX Sports analyst Derrike Cope agreed to sign autographs and display his No. 74 Nextel Cup racer on Friday, Aug. 11. Cope is the driver for the team of Hanover Township-based McGlynn Motorsports, a South Valley Chamber of Commerce member.

With one day down and four to go, the chairmen had to hustle. Jagodzinski, an amateur planner who has helped with ideas for other events including the Plymouth Alive Kielbasa Festival, came up with the rest of the themes. He decided on Bike Night; Ethnic Night, a celebration of South Valley ethnicities; Firemen's Night to honor local firefighters; and Classic Car Night.

As president of Valley with a Heart benefits, which arranges charity motorcycle rides, Nanticoke business owner Rick Temarantz was a natural to coordinate Bike Night. He said it will be a great opportunity to look at bikes and for bikers to show theirs off.

For each of the five nights there will be carnival rides, food and merchandise vendors, music and games in the park. Jagodzinski and Hudak got two band shells and booked bands to play in them, including Jolly Joe, Stanky and the Coalminers, and Flaxy Morgan.

Everything came within the \$9,000 budget the chamber set, Jagodzinski said. Games of chance, including Instant Bingo and a Big Six wheel, will help make up the money spent on the event. Any extra funds raised will go to the chamber for economic development projects to benefit South Valley communities, Hudak said.

The only thing Jagodzinski said they couldn't get was ethnic heritage groups. He approached four, including a Polish heritage group, and all refused, he said.

"Next year we're going to change it to Community Days instead of Heritage Days," Jagodzinski said.

[More on Heritage Days.....](#)

7/30/2006

Nanticoke Area Notes

By Pam Urbanski

The South Valley Chamber of Commerce will host the South Valley Community Heritage Days, Aug. 9-13, at the fair grounds at Lower Broadway. The South Valley Partnership is the first successful regional chamber in the area that extends from Plymouth Borough and Hanover Township south to Berwick. The partnership has become an important part of promoting and assisting business in the South Valley area of Luzerne County.

This event is meant to bring communities and their residents together.

"We thought it would be a great idea to offer some summer fun at a time when most summer events in the area are coming to a close," said John Jagodzinski, who serves as co-chairman with Jerry Hudak.

"There will be something for everyone in the family as well as an opportunity to learn a little more about our area," he added.

It is also a chance to raise a little money for the South Valley Chamber. All proceeds will be used in the development of programs that provide for economic opportunity for South Valley businesses.

Each night will have a special theme. The schedule of events is impressive. For more information, call the Chamber at 735-6990.

Wednesday, Aug. 9, will be Bike Night, with programs from 5 to 11 p.m. Bikers are invited to meet at the high school parking lot at 5:30 p.m. A motorcade will then lead them through Nanticoke and Newport Township. At the fair grounds entertainment for the night will be Template.

Thursday, Aug. 10, is Luzerne County Community College/Ethnic Night from 5 to 11 p.m. The local college will be honored on this night and information about college programs and college personnel will be available. Windfall will provide the musical entertainment in the early evening, followed by John Stanky and the Coalminers.

Friday, Aug. 11, will be NASCAR Night from 4 to 11 p.m. NASCAR driver Derrike Cope will be available to sign autographs. Also, you will get look at his McGlynn 74 Nextel Cup race car. Cope, a veteran driver and former Daytona 500 champion, is racing for the McGlynn race team, which is based in Hanover Township and is a South Valley Chamber member. Jolly Joe and the Bavarians will take the stage followed by the Magics.

All those who attend Heritage Days on Friday night will be eligible to sign up for the Sundance Vacations' Ultimate Sports Giveaway in which the winner will be provided with six tickets and transportation to the sports event of their dreams. The winner can choose from the Daytona 500, the Super Bowl, the World Series, the NBA Playoffs, the Stanley Cup Playoffs or the Masters Golf Tournament.

Saturday, Aug. 12, will be Firemen Night from 2 to 11 p.m. Fire trucks will roll through the city starting at the high school parking lot to the fair grounds. Entertainment for the day will be provided by Hickory Rose in the afternoon and Flaxie Morgan in the evening.

Sunday, Aug. 13, the theme is Classic Cars and they will be on display at the Nanticoke Soccer Field directly across from the fair grounds. Cars will be judged and the top 25 will be given trophies. This event will be held from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. The Tones will take the stage. On this day the festival runs from 1 to 7 p.m.

In addition there will be a wide variety of ethnic foods and refreshments each day. Carnival rides, face painting for the kids, baked goods and informational booths will also be available each day.

Wow!

Hats off to all those from the Chamber who have planned and will help to carry out such an extensive community event.

7/29/2006

State report compiles information on alcohol, violence and other incidents in districts Safe schools State report compiles information on alcohol, violence and other incidents in districts

GNA reports most tobacco use

By mguydish@leader.net

After years of collecting – but not releasing – data on tobacco and alcohol in schools, the state has added those numbers to its annual “safe schools” report. The smokiest school district in Luzerne County is (drum roll, please) ... Greater Nanticoke Area.

The district reported 80 incidents (73 in the high school) related to the possession, use or sale of tobacco during the 2004-05 school year, nearly double the next-highest number of 46 reported by Hazleton Area (37 in high school).

It looks even worse for Greater Nanticoke Area if you factor in enrollment. In Hazleton, those 46 incidents were spread among 9,507 students, meaning there was one incident for every 207 kids. In the much-smaller Greater Nanticoke Area, there was one tobacco incident for every 80 kids. That's by far the worst rate in the 12 school districts that make up the Luzerne Intermediate Unit, which includes Tunkhannock Area in Wyoming County. The average for all 12 districts is one tobacco incident for every 205 students.

School districts have been required to compile and report these and other figures to the state for years. But until this year, the state publicly released numbers only on violence and weapons in schools. The old reports were called School Violence and Weapons Reports.

This year, the state changed the name to the School Safety Report, and added data on nonviolent incidents. The state also has introduced a new feature on its Web site that allows visitors to customize reports in a spreadsheet format. Savvy users can compile data that compares information from several years by county, school district or school, then manipulate the data using spreadsheet tools.

There are three caveats. First, the data are reported by the districts and there have been complaints through the years that different school districts, and even different schools within a district, reported things differently. One administrator's “assault” could be another's “harassment.” The state tightened the definitions of the terms last year in an attempt to fix that problem.

Second, the numbers are incidents reported, not all incidents. That is, if a school district or principal decide to crack down on something such as smoking, they can drive the number of reported incidents up, but it doesn't mean more kids are lighting Marlboros. School officials routinely argue that a high number of incidents simply shows they are aggressive in policing their schools.

And third, there are discrepancies between the spreadsheet versions of the data (called “comparison reports”) and the printed version, also available

on the Web site.

Here are some numbers derived from this year's report:

- Tunkhannock Area School District had the most alcohol-related incidents at seven, or one for every 443 students. The average among the 13 districts was one incident for every 1,375 kids.
- While the majority of tobacco incidents occurred in high school or junior/senior high schools and most of the rest occurred in middle schools, there were four tobacco incidents reported in three local elementary schools: Northwest Area's Garrison Elementary, Lake-Lehman's Lake Noxen and Greater Nanticoke Area's Elementary Center.
- Greater Nanticoke Area High School had the most overall incidents at 81, but 73 of those were tobacco-related. The others: two assaults, one fight, one knife possession, two controlled-substances possessions and two alcohol possessions.
- Wilkes-Barre Area's Meyers High School had the most arrests, 77. It also had the most arrests when you enrollment is factored in: There was one arrest for every 10 students.
- At the school district level, Wilkes-Barre Area had by far the most incidents, 162, with Greater Nanticoke Area second at 121 and Hazleton Area at 116. Wilkes-Barre Area also had the most arrests at 197, more than twice the next-highest amount, 74 in Hazleton Area. The number of arrests can be higher than the number of incidents because a single incident can involve multiple offenders.
- When you consider enrollment, Wilkes-Barre Area didn't do as poorly. There was one incident for every 43 students. Hanover Area had more, with one incident for every 29 students, while Greater Nanticoke Area had the worst rate, one incident for every 16 students (again, most of those were tobacco-related).
- All told, there were 729 incidents in the 12 school districts, and the majority – 215 – were tobacco-related. After that came harassment/intimidation with 84, fighting with 71, disorderly conduct with 65, other misconduct with 59, and knife possession with 51. There was only one handgun incident, in Wilkes-Barre Area, where the lone bomb threat also occurred.

7/20/2006

Nanticoke to revisit previously considered plan for downtown

By Elizabeth Skrapits

Council and Mayor John Bushko, tired of inactivity and unwilling to put the fiscally distressed city at more financial risk, said Wednesday they want to base downtown redevelopment on an existing regional economic development plan.

City officials want to provide the municipal and redevelopment authorities with some direction, Councilman Bill O'Malley said. Since the \$135,000 regional plan was drawn up by a firm with what O'Malley called a "well-known track record," including revitalizing Carbondale, council wants to see it implemented.

The South Valley Partnership hired Facility Design and Development Ltd. to draw up a plan for Plymouth and Newport townships and Nanticoke City. The regional plan was made public in April.

Suggestions for Nanticoke include seeking private investments for commercial buildings instead of relying on public funding, making improvements to streets, sidewalks and existing buildings, and placing parking throughout downtown instead of limiting it to one garage on East Main Street.

The parking garage was a main source of disagreement during a joint meeting of the municipal and redevelopment authorities Monday. Although U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski obtained \$5.6 million in federal transportation funding, some city officials are not sure the money can be used for a parking garage.

"How can I vote on something if I don't know what the grant requires?" municipal authority board member Henry Marks asked Wednesday. Some members of the authorities claim a parking garage of 120 to 240 spaces is necessary to get a tenant for the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street. Council believes a surface parking lot will suffice — and be a lot less expensive.

Getting private individuals to invest in downtown is crucial, instead of relying on government grants in the hopes of bringing jobs to the city, O'Malley said.

"There is not going to be a golden egg that comes in here and drops IBM in our lap," he said.

The city has to back any projects the municipal authorities come up with, so if they fail, the city — and its taxpayers — will take the financial hit, O'Malley said.

Council and the mayor implored residents to come to a special meeting to discuss the downtown redevelopment project on Sept. 6.

"This is a project that could really turn this town around," Bushko said. "It's our business district. Let's do it the way we want it."

7/19/2006

Nanticoke officials argue about downtown revitalization projects

By Elizabeth Skrapits

City officials all agree something has to be done to bring businesses and residents back to the downtown, but they still can't agree on what. The Nanticoke municipal authority, which is responsible for downtown revitalization projects, and the city's redevelopment authority, which is in charge of financing them, held a special joint meeting Monday.

But instead of coming up with concrete plans, members of the two authorities were more indecisive than ever about what to do with the vacant lot next to the 80-percent empty Kanjorski Center on East Main Street. The Yoder Group, hired in May 2004 to take on the revitalization project, is still awaiting orders.

Municipal authority chairman Dennis Butler wants a 120-stall parking garage with storefronts on Main Street and apartments upstairs. Redevelopment authority chairman Chester Beggs preferred a 240-stall garage. Municipal authority member Henry Kellar doesn't want an empty parking garage sitting next to a still-empty Kanjorski Center in 10 years.

U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, secured the city about \$2.5 million in the federal highway bill for road improvements and \$5.6 million, which redevelopment authority member Walter Sokolowski said has to be used for the parking garage. At the request of councilman Bill O'Malley, Sokolowski agreed to contact the U.S. Department of Transportation to find out exactly how the money has to be used.

Instead of building a garage, council and mayor John Bushko want it to improve downtown — fix the sidewalks, put in new lighting, clean it up — to make it more attractive to private investors, O'Malley said.

The municipal authority settled a lawsuit with former Kanjorski Center tenant HealthNow, receiving \$100,000 from the Medicare claims processing firm, solicitor Richard Hughes said. Without that settlement, the municipal authority would be broke, O'Malley said. The authority is in no financial condition to assume liability or risk at this time, he said.

"Typical Nanticoke," Butler complained after the meeting. "We have three experts telling us we need a parking garage to make the Kanjorski Center marketable, and once again we disregard the experts."

Both authorities decided to give the newly-hired Lewith and Freeman until the council meeting on Sept. 6 to get going with the Kanjorski Center, at which time the commercial real estate firm will be invited to share its marketing ideas with city officials.

The only other thing the two authorities agreed on is the need for their attorneys to find out whether Steve Buchinski can keep his seat on the redevelopment authority. During the last council meeting, Bushko appointed Ron Kamowski of the municipal authority to take Buchinski's place. The same members can serve on both boards.

The city's position is that Buchinski can't be on the redevelopment authority because he no longer lives in Nanticoke, does not pay city taxes and does not have a business there. Buchinski says he was improperly removed from the board.

7/16/2006

Citizens' Voice - Town Crier

Eighteen months ago, Tom Sadowski was an ordinary guy living a pretty ordinary life. He would work his shift as a firefighter in Nanticoke, then return home to his wife, Cathy. Free time would be spent working around the house and with family and friends.

But it was another job that he held that would change his life. Tom served with the Pennsylvania National Guard as a soldier in the 109th Infantry, 1st Battalion in Iraq. His home was a canvas tent. Army food replaced Cathy's delicious home cooking and there was no more green grass, just sand — everywhere.

After talking with Tom, I realize a little more what our men and women endure while fighting for our country. I might think twice about complaining about the heat in Northeastern Pennsylvania. The weather in Iraq is brutal. Most days the thermometer hovered around 120-plus degrees. Some days it would get to 146 degrees. Sand would be blowing everywhere.

One of Tom's assignments made the conditions even worse. He was a gunner on a humvee. The job of the 1st Battalion was route clearance and convoy security. "We basically looked for explosive devices before a convoy went through." For 12 to 14 hours, he would be in full uniform plus gloves and a netgator, which pulled over his head and face for protection. "It was difficult, but we all did whatever we had to do."

His other duties included teaching Iraqi soldiers and other foreign nationals to use weapons properly.

Every day was dangerous and life threatening. He remembers an incident when the turret on his humvee jammed up. "There was a car with Iraqis firing at us. That was a close call." What got him through? "For me at the start of every day I would pray. I would put my head down and say, 'God my life is in your hands,'" he said. "It is hard to explain but I would immediately feel calm and peaceful."

He missed his wife and family and friends very much. One of the toughest times came when he learned of the passing of his grandmother, Helen Harvey. "We were very close. But I feel gram and I are still very connected and that God and she had a plan."

A sign that his grandmother is watching from above came from a box that he randomly received four hours after he found out about his grandmother's death. Inside the box were some personal care items and CDs. "As I was holding the box a laminated card fell out from the bottom. It was 'A Grandmother's Prayer.' I broke down and cried."

Other tough times came when fellow soldiers were killed. Seven soldiers from the 109th lost their lives in the line of duty. "It never really made a difference whether you knew someone personally or not. You still felt the loss."

Back home, his wife Cathy was shedding some tears of her own. "I missed him a lot. Especially around the holidays," she said. "What helped me get through were prayers as well as the fact that he believed in what he was doing."

She explained it was hard taking on all that he did around the house. "I guess I took for granted what he did," she said. "I needed to take care of everything from taking out the garbage to fixing things."

A surprise came for her around Father's Day when she received a package from Tom with a CD and note inside. The CD included the song "You are My Unsung Hero." The note that accompanied it said, "You are always there for me. Quietly in the background, but always supporting me." Tom had a lot of praise for his fellow soldiers of the 109th. "Some people might think of us as weekend warriors. But each and every one of us that was deployed did a great job in some very difficult situations," he said.

I asked about media coverage. "Bad news sells," he said. "We all wish they would show the good things that are happening. The rebuilding of schools. When insurgents blew up pipelines, Americans rebuilt them in record time. The Iraqi people that stand in lines for hours to vote," he explained. "They want democracy in their country. It is just that they have lived a certain way under the rule of Sadaam for so long that they do not know any different and it will take a while to turn things around."

Now that he is home, Tom is planning on catching up on some lost sleep, eating great home cooked meals, and spending time with his family and friends.

He said he is proud of his service.

"I guess I always felt a need to pay back those who defended our country," he said. "I remember watching the events of 9-11 and thinking 'we have to do something.' I am the we."

"I know even more so now that the greatest place to live is the United States of America. I am glad to do my part."

[More on the 109th.....](#)

7/15/2006

Pennsylvania Economy League working with Nanticoke on debt

By Elizabeth Skrapits

This week, Nanticoke was assigned a guide to lead the city down the road to financial recovery.

The state Department of Community and Economic Development selected Pennsylvania Economy League as Nanticoke's financial recovery coordinator. The firm will help the city work its way out of debt, balance its budget, get loans and grants, and show city officials new ways to save money and make their departments more efficient.

PEL has four offices across the state, including one at 88 N. Franklin St. in Wilkes-Barre. The non-profit civic organization also serves as Act 47 coordinator for the city of Scranton in Lackawanna County and West Hazleton Borough. Plymouth Township, which was declared Act 47 in July 2004, has Pittston-based Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance as its recovery coordinator.

DCED Secretary Dennis Yablonsky declared Nanticoke financially distressed in May. The next step was to hire a coordinator to work with Nanticoke and state officials to develop an Act 47 recovery plan specific to the city's needs, DCED spokesman Kevin Ortiz said.

The state received four proposals from firms interested in Nanticoke, he said.

"The department believed that PEL basically assembled the strongest team of experts in areas that were relevant to Nanticoke's needs," Ortiz said.

"In terms of recommendations, PEL had an interesting approach to the use of their staff, where they were subcontracting expertise in specific functional areas that made the proposal more attractive. Also they had experience in labor relations and collective bargaining that was relevant to Nanticoke."

PEL Executive Director Gerald Cross will lead the team.

The length of the initial contract with PEL will be a year, at a cost of approximately \$150,000 to be paid by the state, Ortiz said. The contract will be adjusted accordingly when the recovery plan is in place, he said.

Although the contract with PEL is not finalized — sometimes it takes a while to execute them, Ortiz said — the firm can begin work any time.

In fact, PEL met with Nanticoke officials and started gathering information this week, Mayor John Bushko said.

"They gave us a list of things they want, like department heads, who's in charge of what, number of people in each department, job classifications — stuff like that," he said.

Bushko is anxious to see the city get going with the Act 47 process.

"Things don't move fast enough for me," he said. "To get into this seems like it takes forever. Then I'll be saying, 'when do we get out of it,' I know."

7/12/2006

LITTLE LEAGUE SOFTBALL

Nanticoke again wins district title

The 11- and 12-year-old team, which beat Plains, advances to play the District 29 winner Friday in the Section 4 playoffs.

By Isokolowski@leader.net

It wasn't your typical celebration. Instead of getting a bucket of ice water tossed on his head, coach Bill Rubasky was pelted with water balloons. That's what happens when your 11- and 12-year-old all-star team wins a district title.

Nanticoke defended its District 16 Little League title Tuesday with a 15-5 victory against Plains at the Nanticoke Little League field. Nanticoke will play the District 29 winner at 5:30 p.m. Friday at home in the Section 4 playoffs. Nanticoke will host the entire sectional playoffs, which run from Friday through Tuesday.

"It was hard," said Nanticoke's second baseman Sammy Gow. "Everyone was out to beat us since we beat everyone (last year)."

Nanticoke (4-0) celebrated with a water balloon fight and Queen's "We Are the Champions" blasting through the speakers from the announcer's booth. None of the girls on the team seemed to know the words to the song, but they did know how to celebrate.

It seemed like they could celebrate after taking a 9-1 lead into fourth inning, but Plains (4-2) rebounded with two runs in the fourth and fifth inning (and Nanticoke only scored one in that time), and the lead was cut to 10-5.

"We got kind of scared," said first baseman Hannah Rubasky. "We had to pump each other up."

Nanticoke came back to score five runs in the top of the sixth, putting the game out of reach, and Elizabeth Dougherty capped the scoring with an

RBI single.

Dougherty was batting second during the team's first two games of the tournament, and was moved to ninth for the last two games.

"I decided to put the little (Gabby) Grabowski up to second, and it worked out perfect," Coach Rubasky said.

Dougherty finished the game 4-for-4 with three runs scored and an RBI.

"I was happy," said Dougherty, who plays shortstop. "It was exciting."

Dougherty wasn't the only one hitting the ball for Nanticoke. Lindsay Roberts, who started the game at third but pitched 1 1/3 innings in relief, went 2-for-3 with a sacrifice bunt and a run scored. Brooke Chapin, who earned the win after pitching 4 2/3 innings, had a two-run single in the last inning and scored two runs. Five other players scored runs, and Gow hit the team's only extra base hit – a triple to start the game.

For Plains, Danielle Cerep went 3-for-3 with a run scored and an RBI. Shelley Black went 2-for-3 with a double, a two-run single in the fifth and a run scored. Lindsey Humanik went 2-for-2 with a run and an RBI.

Plains defeated Mountain Top 22-9 on Monday in the losers bracket final to advance to Tuesday's game. After trailing 8-3 during the game, the team rallied to tack on runs. The Nanticoke players heard about that, and it made them a bit worried.

"We knew they were ready for the game," said Gow. "They had a big win (on Monday)."

But, that's in the past now, and Nanticoke is the only D16 team advancing to the sectional tournament. It's familiar territory for the team, which has claimed four consecutive D16 titles (two as Minors, two in Little League). But, the team hasn't only been together as a Little League team. Of the 13 girls on the team, 11 play travel ball – and nine of those 11 are on the same team.

"We know how to play together," Gow said.

7/6/2006

Nanticoke Area Notes

By Pam Urbanski

The Greater Nanticoke Area Drug Task Force and Youth Task Force will sponsor their second annual Drug Awareness Walk and Picnic in the Park Saturday. This day is for bringing about awareness and prevention of drug and alcohol abuse in and around our community of Nanticoke.

"It is our hope that this event will bring together our community," said Drug Task Force member Debbie Reddy. We hope to continue to raise awareness of the drug problem in Nanticoke and of the Drug Task Force efforts to provide alternate and positive programs for the youth and resources to those that need assistance."

Registration for the walk begins at 9 a.m. and the walk will begin at 10. The two-mile walk, led by the Nanticoke Fire Department, will take participants down Market Street to Main Street, turning right onto Kosciuszko Street, around the Nanticoke High School, back down Kosciuszko Street turning left onto Green Street where it will end at Patriot Park with an old-fashioned picnic.

"We hope the community will come out and support our efforts and just have some fun," offered Don Williams, founding father and Drug Task Force member.

There will be informational booths dealing with the dangers of drugs and alcohol, and agencies that provide help and assistance. Members of the Youth Task Force will be on hand to talk about their many programs and healthy, positive alternatives to drug use. They will also paint faces and have a craft booth. Free refreshments will be served. The Nanticoke Police and Fire Departments will be on hand.

Debbie tells me businesses throughout the community are very supportive.

"Our businesses have been very receptive to this event," she said. "They really believe in what we are trying to do for our youth."

Each walker will receive a T-shirt and some nice prizes will be awarded in the park. Musical entertainment will also be provided. The Drug Task Force is always looking for volunteers and the Youth Task Force always welcomes new members. Look for a table to sign up for both.

What a great opportunity for the people in our community to come out and support these very important organizations. Take an hour to show your interest and support.

Youth Task Force keeps busy

Junior and senior high school students are invited to participate in a new computer program at the Stickney Building on Prospect Street, Tuesdays from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m.

"This is an opportunity for our young people to learn to use a computer a little better," said Don Williams. "They are also welcome to come and use our computers for school work or whatever they need."

Computer instructors will be on hand to assist.

An ongoing project for the Youth Task Force is the cleaning up of the cemetery located on Field Street in Nanticoke. Don tells me most of the family members of loved ones buried there are no longer around and so there is no one to take care of the property, which is now owned by the Nanticoke Historical Society.

"There still is a lot of work to be done, but we continue to cut down the high grass and weeds," he said.

The group hopes to rededicate the cemetery on Veterans Day in November.

Drug free bowling and roller skating have been a big hit with the group. Members participated in these programs presented in part by Wyoming Valley Drug and Alcohol.

They are planning more of these activities as well as a summer picnic.

Girls Night In continues on Wednesday evenings at 7 p.m. at the Stickney Building. This is an opportunity for girls to talk about issues that concern them. An adult facilitator is on hand to help guide the group.

[Visit the GNA Youth Drug Task Force webpage](#)

Church camp for children

St. Francis Parish and St. Joseph's Parish will hold a summer camp for children. Children in kindergarten to sixth grade are invited to this time of

encountering Christ living out the Gospel.

There will be crafts, games and music. The camp will be conducted by the Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. A noon Mass and then lunch will be held at the end of each session. The camp will be held at St. Francis Parish Center on East Green Street.

Cost is \$10 for one child or \$15 per family. Registration forms are available in the back of both churches. For more information, call 735-6903.

Church bingo planned

St. Joseph's Slovak Church will hold its monthly bingo July 23 in the church parlors on East Noble Street. Doors open at 12:30 p.m. and the games begin at 2 p.m. Refreshments are available and door prizes will be awarded.

Sign up for vacation Bible school

Corpus Christi Parish will hold its summer vacation Bible school July 24 through July 28 at St. Mary's Church hall and picnic grounds in Wanamie. Through Bible stories and skits, songs, crafts and games, children will come to realize "Jesus is our Greatest Treasure." Classes will be held from 9 a.m. to noon each day.

Registration deadline is July 15. For more information, call the parish office at 736-6372 or Phoebe Hillan at 736-6798.

Teen Mass offered at St. Stan's

Teen Mass will be held this evening at St. Stanislaus Rectory on East Church Street. All youth of the community and their friends are invited to attend.

Community car wash benefit

Nanticoke Terrace Resident Council will sponsor its annual car wash Saturday, from 8 a.m. until 1 p.m. at the community room parking lot located at 200 South St., located off of Hanover Street.

Proceeds for this event will support council activities such as community day, Thanksgiving food drives, Christmas parties etc. For more information, call the Nanticoke Housing Authority at 735-1110

Nanticoke: No problem with illegal immigrants

BY ELIZABETH SKRAPITS

STAFF WRITER

What might be an issue with illegal immigration in Hazleton is not a problem in Nanticoke, its mayor said Wednesday night.

Resident Theresa Sowa asked Mayor John Bushko if he considered joining Hazleton Mayor Lou Barletta in opposing illegal immigrants in his own city.

Barletta was in Philadelphia Wednesday, testifying at a U.S. Senate hearing on immigration that crimes involving illegal immigrants are straining Hazleton's resources, according to the Associated Press. Hazleton has received a large influx of Hispanics over the last six years.

Barletta recently attracted national attention with an ordinance to punish landlords who rent to illegal immigrants and businesses that hire them, and also make English the official language of the city. Hazleton council passed the ordinance on first reading, but has two more to go.

Sowa said she and other residents would like to see Nanticoke pass a similar ordinance.

"Stop it now before it starts," Sowa said. "It happened in Hazleton. It's going to happen here. Wait and see."

Although Sowa said there were "a lot of illegal aliens in Nanticoke," Bushko didn't believe that was the case.

"I just never gave it any thought because I didn't know it was a problem," he said.

Bushko said all official communications Nanticoke sends its residents are already printed in English only.

In other business, Bushko and Councilman Jim Litchkofski will represent Nanticoke's on a committee to determine whether Nanticoke, Newport and Hanover townships could and should have a combined police force.

Nanticoke police are down to one working cruiser and one in the shop being repaired. Wilkes-Barre City and West Hazleton Borough have offered to lend Nanticoke police vehicles while the financially distressed city finds grants or other funds to buy some, Councilman Bill O'Malley said.

Council gave permission to Anthony T. Graham of Wilkes-Barre and Robert Hagenbaugh of Hanover Township to transfer a liquor license, when one becomes available, to the city for their new restaurant.

The two men plan to renovate the former Kotsko's Tavern at 396 E. Washington St.

7/08/2006

Wyoming softens proposed sex offender ordinance

BY ELIZABETH SKRAPITS STAFF WRITER

First Street residents are wary about a proposed ordinance to restrict where sex offenders can live, but the borough's mayor assures them their neighborhood will not become inundated with sexual predators.

Wyoming Borough officials have prepared a revised ordinance to prohibit registered sex offenders from living within 1,500 feet of any school, community center, child care center, park or public open space within the municipality. State law does not limit where sex offenders can live.

Currently there are no restrictions in Wyoming. The ordinance originally called for a half-mile boundary around these areas, which would have essentially banned sex offenders from the borough altogether, according to an analysis by The Citizens' Voice. Borough council voted a week after the report to postpone a vote on the ordinance, explaining that it needed more work.

During that time, the restriction was scaled back to 1,500 feet to make the ordinance more likely to withstand a legal challenge, Mayor Bob Boyer said. A half-mile radius didn't make sense in a borough of less than 1.5 square miles; the original plan was modeled after ordinances in communities much larger than Wyoming, he said.

If you take a right from Wyoming Avenue and head down First Street, the side on your left is Exeter and on your right is Wyoming.

Residents on the Wyoming side of First Street were not happy to discover their neighborhood could be one of two small corners of the borough where sex offenders would be allowed to live.

"I'm appalled," said Anna Marie O'Brien, the mother of daughters ages 16 and 20. "I am absolutely flabbergasted."

Her neighbor across the street in Exeter, Jim Gordon - who also happens to be her brother-in-law - came out of his house.

"Oh, man," Gordon said when he heard the news. "I don't want any kid pervs -" he paused. "I don't care what kind of sex predators they are. I don't want 'em here."

As they spoke, several children on bicycles sped down the sidewalk. A boy on skates played street hockey.

Cindy Borzell said she knew council planned to change the ordinance to make it less restrictive.

"But I never thought it would be our street. There are too many kids in this neighborhood," she said.

The Borzells are angry enough about the amount of crime they see creeping into their formerly peaceful neighborhood: theft, drug use, trespassing.

"It's ridiculous. I'm disgusted with the whole town," Bob Borzell said.

The point of the ordinance is to keep children safe by putting a buffer zone around areas where sex offenders are likely to congregate, Boyer said. It is not meant to force them into certain neighborhoods, he stressed.

"Does that mean First Street, Moosic Street and Colonial Acres will be flooded with sex offenders? No. It just means that they are outside the 1,500 foot zones," Boyer said. "Legally we cannot say you can't live in Wyoming Borough as a sex offender."

There is nothing that can be done about the three sex offenders already living in the borough, but Boyer said he is trying to send a message that more are not welcome to move to Wyoming.

Borough council is set to vote on the ordinance at 7:30 p.m. on Aug. 14. It will not be voted on during Monday night's meeting because it was not advertised, Boyer said.

The borough paid the county to make maps outlining the living restrictions. The maps are available for public inspection at the borough building during business hours.

Nanticoke, which is the first Luzerne County municipality to pass a sex offender ordinance, has even stricter regulations: they may not live within 2,500 feet of a school, child care facility, recreation center or public park. Offenders who move into restricted areas have 45 days to move out, or face a fine of up to \$1,000 and 90 days in prison.

Councilman Joe Dougherty, who came up with the ordinance, said the city is 3.5 square miles, so most of it is out of bounds to sex offenders.

"Basically, every house that's here is off limits. But there are areas that can be developed - not many - where they can live," Dougherty said.

Despite the limitations, he intends to stay with the ordinance as it is, he said.

"I'm not going to back down. We need to look out for children and women," Dougherty said. "It's time people stick up for what's right."

Nichole Dobo, staff writer, contributed to this report.

7/6/2006

Nanticoke needs state loan to stay afloat

Councilman William O'Malley says strapped city is saving money in every way it can.

By IAN CAMPBELL Times Leader Correspondent

Despite saving almost half a million dollars so far this year, the city will still be running out of money in August without a state loan, city council was told Wednesday.

Councilman William O'Malley noted in his financial report that the city was ahead of its budget predictions at this time, but the financial state of the city meant that without emergency aid, the city would "hit the wall" by early August.

O'Malley noted the city's unionized employees had agreed to move to cheaper health insurance carriers, saving the city about \$100,000, and the city also saved money by pursuing delinquent taxes, trimming payrolls and building costs, as well as other smaller-scale savings, such as cell phone usage.

With all the savings, the city should be able to make a significant impact in its \$700,000 deficit by next year, O'Malley said.

The current account balances at the end of June stood at \$53,000 in the black, he noted.

O'Malley also reported that the condition of the city's police fleet was now reduced to one functioning vehicle, and one vehicle being repaired. As a result, the municipalities of West Hazleton and Wilkes-Barre City offered use of loaner vehicles until Nanticoke received grant funding for a new vehicle.

He expected the city would get the funding within 30 to 60 days, so the loaner vehicle would only need to be insured by the city for that period. Grant funding would cover the \$18,000 to \$22,000 price of a new car, whereas leasing a vehicle would have cost close to \$45,000, he told council.

In other business, pending an imminent appointment of an Act 47 recovery coordinator, solicitor Joseph Lach told council he was unwilling to present any ordinances, especially financial ones, that might be part of a likely Act 47 financial recovery plan.

The only exceptions he was prepared to accept were ordinances that would directly impact the health and safety of city residents, he said.

Also, council approved the transfer of a liquor license by Anthony Graham, for a vodka bar and restaurant planned for the city, despite the fact Graham and his partner no longer have a license available to them.

Graham had made application to bring a license in from Shickshinny, but that deal fell through, he told council.

However, he expects to obtain another within a few days, as licenses are no longer that hard to find within the region, and run between \$12,000-\$15,000 each, rather than the hundreds of thousands they used to cost.

Council granted the request on the condition he inform them immediately a license is obtained.

6/28/2006

Property levy

Tax relief bill gets signed here

In Nanticoke, Gov. Rendell shows how some seniors' property tax bills will end.

By kamerman@leader.net

Pennsylvania's governor served up tax relief to homeowners throughout the state on a Nanticoke woman's kitchen table on Tuesday. Gov. Ed Rendell visited the home of 88-year-old Nellie Hughes to sign Special Session House Bill 39 into law. Sitting at Hughes' kitchen table between Hughes and Isabel Haydock, a senior who lives on Hanover Street in Nanticoke, Rendell said the bill will eliminate property taxes for both women and hundreds of thousands of seniors across the state.

Rendell said the bill will provide \$1 billion worth of tax cuts annually to all Pennsylvania homeowners.

The bill ensures that more than \$250 million of the \$1 billion in gaming revenue will go to seniors with incomes of less than \$35,000, Rendell said. Prior to the bill, only seniors with incomes of \$15,000 or less were eligible for state refunds. Also, the amount the state will refund has been increased to up to \$650.

The bill also requires taxpayer approval before a school board can raise property taxes above the rate of inflation. There are exceptions for school districts with exceptional growth or ones with emergencies.

After signing the bill, Rendell stood with state Sen. Raphael Musto, D-Pittston Township, and state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, under a tent in Hughes' back yard in the pouring rain before about 50 residents, school board members and local officials.

Republican Lynn Swann, the governor's opponent in the November election, issued a press release, saying the bill "leaves 80 percent of Pennsylvania's property taxpayers without a nickel of relief."

Swann, who couldn't be reached by phone, stated in the release that Rendell broke his election-year promise to drop property taxes for all Pennsylvanian's by 30 percent.

"The last time Ed Rendell signed property tax legislation that he deemed 'historic,' it was called Act 72, and it was rejected by 80 percent of Pennsylvania's school districts," Swann said. "Since then, property taxes have skyrocketed nearly \$2 billion under this administration and Pennsylvania's homeowners have been left in the cold."

Rendell said criticism of the bill is unwarranted.

"I don't want to hear anyone tell me this isn't a substantial bill," Rendell said, noting that 42 percent of all seniors in Luzerne County will have the full cost of their property taxes paid by the state.

Rendell said Hughes' income, with retirement and Social Security, is about \$7,900 per year and she currently pays \$698 in property taxes. With the bill, she'll get a \$650 rebate, meaning her property tax bill will shrink to \$48 per year, Rendell said. The governor said her property tax bill will be completely eliminated after the first year. Meanwhile, Haydock's rebate under the new bill will cover her entire property tax bill in the first year, Rendell said.

"They are tremendous examples of the significant impact this will have on seniors," the governor said.

Yudichak said his office has helped Hughes fill out her tax forms and he helped arrange for the governor to sign the bill at her home.

6/27/2006

Nanticoke municipal authority hits snag on parking garage

By Elizabeth Skrapits Staff Writer

The city's general municipal authority board wants to get started on downtown redevelopment, but stalled somewhat on the first step: construction of a parking garage.

The authority is in the process of hashing out a workable plan to revitalize the downtown, starting with the block of East Main Street containing the Kanjorski Center.

During Monday's meeting, the board signed a contract to hire real estate agents Lewith and Freeman to market the center, which has been 80 percent vacant since October. The building's main flaw is that it has no parking nearby, authority president Dennis Butler said.

Butler, tired of delays, urged his fellow board members to take action, pointing out that a garage would take at least 18 months to build.

"We've got to get this thing up and moving," he said. "The Kanjorski Center is unleaseable without a parking garage."

However, other board members were more cautious. Henry Kellar said he would like someone who knows real estate to show the municipal authority how much more marketable the Kanjorski Center would be with a parking deck. Ron Kamowski said he might prefer surface parking to a garage.

One thing the board did agree on is that the size of a garage should be reduced from 400 spaces to 120, with the option of adding more spaces.

Board members would also like to see other parking garages elsewhere downtown, such as Market Street and another part of Main Street.

U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, obtained \$5.6 million specifically for the garage in the federal highway transportation bill last year.

Nanticoke redevelopment authority members say they control the finances. Municipal authority board member Chester Beggs said if the redevelopment authority — which he is also a member of — does not approve of the parking garage plans, it won't release the funds.

The municipal authority board decided to wait to take action until the redevelopment authority meets July 1 at 10 a.m. and city council meets July 5 at 7 p.m., to give everyone a chance to offer input on the parking garage.

Then, during the next municipal authority meeting, the board can ask downtown developer Robert Yoder to draw up some final plans to get started.

Under Yoder's contract, he will have to put together the financing, including getting grants and finding private investors, Butler said.

6/23/2006

Pre-kindergarten program at GNA school gets kids comfortable

Basic training

By sdelazio@leader.net

While 5-year-old Jonathan McDaniels dressed up in a firefighter's costume in the "imaginative play" area of the Greater Nanticoke Area Family Center, 5-year old Emily constructed an office building in the "building" area. "It's six stories high!" she said.

Others were painting and continuing to learn rules and skills they will soon use.

The [Greater Nanticoke Area School District](#), in conjunction with the Family Center at K.M. Smith Elementary, has developed a pre-kindergarten program called Test Drive. The program teaches students basic skills they will use when they start school in the fall, such as how to use the bathroom and cafeteria at the school and how to spell their names, so when they start school they are accustomed to procedures many people take for granted.

Everything the children do in the three days a week they are at the center is a learning experience – from posting the day's date and weather to being classroom helpers and the "line leader."

Diane Klish, Family Center director, said that during the first few days the children came to the program and were told to get in line, many of them didn't know what a line was, "so we had to teach them that too."

Beth Kartz, a teacher for the program, said "it's all about how school works. From raising your hand to being quiet." She said they try to be as hands-on as possible and do consistent things every day too, along with the new skills they learn. One student, Bella, who just turned 5 years old, said her favorite part of the day was eating lunch, and 4-year-old Carly said she liked to learn new things.

Klish said she and her staff, two teachers and two aides, asked several kindergarten teachers what they wished kids knew when they came to school. "It was surprising, because most said they wish kids knew how to spell their own names."

The students need to punch in a five-digit number into an electronic pad in the cafeteria to get lunch. "But first you have to teach them the numbers," she said. And, to learn how to spell their names, those 26 letters need to be mastered. Klish said the program was spearheaded by GNA Superintendent Anthony Perrone, who she said has had extensive experience with preschools. "Most of the learning children do is in the first five years," she said. "We saw the need for this kind of program because we see what happens when they aren't prepared for school."

The program was designed for those children who "fall through the gaps" and do not qualify for Head Start or their parents cannot afford preschool. It was originally intended for up to 12 to 15 students, but when 32 signed up, Klish said she couldn't turn them away, "so we doubled the size of the program." She said the superintendent was awarded a grant to fund the basic program, and because the program is only for a short time during the summer, they didn't need to cover expenses for nine months.

Perrone was unable to be reached because he is on vacation.

Last week students in the program learned how to ride the bus. "They road all through town and their parents picked them up at different places rather than at the school," Klish said. She said the elementary school buses are identified by colors, instead of numbers. "We have a fuchsia bus, a robin's egg blue bus and a light blue bus. Even a striped bus," she said, as she explained that the colors were on a piece of paper that was taped to the bus window.

That lesson on colors was introduced to the children Tuesday while they listened to a story, "Mouse Paint," told by one of their teachers, Wendy Skoniecki. Before Skoniecki began, she instructed the children to open their eyes, open their ears and close their mouths, and to give everyone some "personal space" by crossing their legs "crisscross applesauce," Skoniecki said.

When the story was over, the children were instructed to go to the dramatic play, imaginative play, painting or building stations, identified by colors, to learn skills and play with each other. To go along with the day's theme, children painted on a plain sheet of paper with the three primary colors: red, blue and yellow. After the fun painting was over, it was time to get down to business and paint inside the lines on a sheet of paper that had printed pictures of the mice from "Mouse Paint."

Even lunch, provided by the Commission on Economic Opportunity, was a learning experience. Tuesday's menu was ham and cheese pasta salad with mandarin oranges. Some of the kids were reluctant to try it, but Kartz encouraged them.

"Eat one of every color noodle," she said, "and see if they taste different. Then try the pink squares. That's ham."

Robin Figlerski, mother of 5-year-old Mandy, said she brought her daughter to the program "to associate with the other kids and learn the rules; like sitting and raising your hand."

She added that the program helps the kids get acquainted with the school so that it won't be such a shock when they get there in the fall.

Klish said she hopes the program does well enough that she and the other teachers are able to do it again next year.

"We're trying to pave the way for parents and children to enjoy school."

6/23/2006

'Slacker' remark irks union steward

A councilman unfairly criticized public works employees, says Kenny James.

By mbuffer@leader.net

Kenny James, the steward of the union representing city public works employees, is upset co-workers were depicted as slackers during a recent council meeting.

James said the comment from Hank Marks, president of the Nanticoke Area Taxpayers Forum, unfairly "made us look bad."

Marks said the city needed a public works director to keep city employees from slacking off, noting an incident in which two public works employees were watching TV while working as another cooked breakfast.

"It was during a snowstorm, and the guys were plowing all night," said James, who also is the vice president of Greater Nanticoke School Board. "The TV they were watching was weather reports. It wasn't like we were watching Oprah Winfrey."

The employees were cooking a hot meal in crock pot during the storm, which occurred this past winter, James said.

During Wednesday's meeting, Treasurer Al Wytoshek defended the employees, saying sometimes employee "bull s---" with each other during the workday.

Wytoshek sparked the debate by criticizing the decision to hire Anthony DePietro, a general building contractor from Nanticoke, as public works director at \$35,000 a year.

City council and Mayor John Bushko unanimously voted to hire DePietro. The new director replaces Paul Ushinski, who was fired in April for unspecified reasons.

James said the public works department needs more labor and less management.

"Nothing against the man they hired, but it's not necessary at this time," James said.

The city is in the state's Act 47 relief program for financially distressed communities and is going to run out of money to pay bills and employees by August or September.

The city is on course to spend about \$3.8 million this year and needs a \$700,000 emergency loan from the state to get through the year.

6/22/2006

Nanticoke considers stricter guidelines for landlords

By Elizabeth Skrapits Staff Writer

City officials want to take their ongoing crackdown on problem properties several steps further, but aren't sure how.

Getting absentee owners to take care of their properties and pay required taxes and fees is more than a financial issue for the financially distressed city: officials realize it is only fair to residents whose taxes are paid and properties are kept neat.

During Wednesday's meeting, Councilman Bill O'Malley said the city has to get policies in place immediately for landlords to register their apartments and tenants. He is using county records to compile a landlord database to keep track of property owners.

Many absentee landlords don't pay required expenses such as taxes, sewer and garbage fees; they don't live in the city, but use its services, O'Malley said.

"Every dollar they don't pay is a dollar burden for everyone who does pay," he said.

Police, fire, and public works department personnel will be on the lookout for abandoned vehicles, overgrown yards, and other eyesores, Mayor John Bushko said.

He suggested residents help each other with property maintenance.

"If your neighbor's sick, give 'em a hand. Cut their weeds for them," Bushko said.

Resident Theresa Sowa wanted to know if city employees will also be looking for junk-strewn properties, and was told they would.

As previous administrations did before them, council and Bushko lamented the length of time it takes to go through the legal process after citing a property owner.

One property had "rats and tall grass and snakes coming out of the house," but it took a long time for the building inspector to be able to do anything about it, O'Malley said.

The city has ordinances to deal with nuisance properties, but needs to put more teeth in them, Councilman Joe Dougherty said.

Within a few weeks the state will hire a financial recovery coordinator for Nanticoke as part of the Act 47 process. City officials will enlist the help of the state in reviewing the ordinances, O'Malley said.

6/22/2006

Nanticoke treasurer protests hire

Al Wytoshek says the cash-strapped city does not need a new public works director.

By mbuffer@leader.net

Over objections from Treasurer Al Wytoshek, city council and Mayor John Bushko on Wednesday hired a new public works director.

Wytoshek, who also complained about being excluded from a meeting with tax collector Berkheimer Associates, said the cash-strapped city doesn't need a public works director.

"You guys do not want to work with me," Wytoshek complained during Wednesday's city council meeting.

City officials said they hired Anthony DePietro, a general building contractor from Nanticoke, as public works director at \$35,000 a year. He replaces Paul Ushinski, who was fired in April.

Hank Marks, President of the Nanticoke Area Taxpayers Forum, said the public works director was needed to keep city employees from slacking off. He noted an incident in which two public works employees were watching TV while working and another was cooking breakfast.

"Why are we picking on the poor little guys all the time?" Wytoshek responded.

Wytoshek told council members and the mayor they were going to continue hearing his complaints unless they begin to work with him.

"You're out of order," Bushko eventually told Wytoshek. "I'm not going to listen to it."

The city is in the state's Act 47 relief program for financially distressed communities. To avoid another year-end deficit, city officials hope to get \$700,000 from the state in a no-interest loan.

The city is on course to spend about \$3.8 million this year and probably won't be able to pay bills and salaries by the end of August.

6/19/2006

Honey Pot Fire Co. prepares for convention

By Tom Venesky Staff Writer

Over the last year, members of the Honey Pot Fire Co. have rolled cabbages down North Market Street and have climbed into the ring with professional wrestlers.

There was a reason behind the unique fundraisers, one which will come to fruition beginning Thursday when the Six County Firemen's Convention rolls into town.

The convention, now in its 103rd year, brings together firefighters and their families from departments in Luzerne, Lackawanna, Schuylkill, Columbia, Montour and Northumberland counties, along with parts of New Jersey. It will be held from June 22-24 at the Kanjorski Center parking lot on Lower Broadway in Nanticoke. Chet Kopco, assistant chief with the Honey Pot department, said more than 100 departments will attend. "It's basically six counties working together on fire prevention and training," he said. "Most importantly, it brings us all together to share ideas and make new friends."

The event isn't limited to fire departments. Kopco said this year's convention will have many attractions for the public, including carnival rides, a parade, fireworks and plenty of vendors.

The community element is something the Honey Pot department has emphasized for years.

"It's going to be a learning experience for firefighters and the general public. Hopefully, it will generate some interest in firefighting and attract new members."

Members of the Honey Pot department have been planning for the convention for the last year, holding numerous fundraisers to fund the event. Aside from the usual bingo nights and breakfasts, the department held its first-ever cabbage roll last summer. The event invited residents to roll heads of cabbage down North Market Street, with the longest roll determining the winner.

"We know we're not going to make money on the convention, but we're doing it because it's an honor to host this event," Kopco said. "We want to showcase our community. Nanticoke isn't a lost cause, there are some good things about us."

Nanticoke Fire Chief Mike Bohan said the convention will be an "elaborate celebration" with plenty of attractions for the community and fire departments. As a firefighter, Bohan said the convention gives him a chance to network with other departments and share ideas on pressing issues, such as volunteer recruitment.

For Nanticoke, which became the third Luzerne County municipality to be declared financially distressed by the state last month, the benefit will be even greater. "It's going to bring a big influx of visitors to our town," Bohan said.

6/19/2006

Fire at Railroad Street home in Nanticoke

A fire in a double block home at 355-357 Railroad Street displaced two residents early Monday morning.

Deputy Fire Chief Dave Urbanski said the blaze in 357 side of the home started in the attic and is believed to have been caused by an electrical malfunction. The home's owners, Leon and Carol Figlerski, escaped the blaze. Carol Figlerski was taken to an area hospital, where she was treated and released, Urbanski said.

The fire was reported at around 4:26 a.m. Firefighters battled the blaze for about 40 minutes before bringing it under control, Urbanski said. The 357 side of the home sustained fire, smoke and water damage to the attic and a bedroom, as well as smoke and water damage to the first floor. The 355 side, which was unoccupied, sustained water damage, he said.

6/18/2006

Nanticoke Area Notes

By: Pam Urbanski

"The road to success is always under construction."—Unknown.

This past week Greater Nanticoke Area High School held class day and graduation ceremonies for 180 seniors, members of the Class of 2006. On class day, members of the community, faculty and staff presented close to 60 awards to students who excelled in academics, athletics, the arts, and to those who were of service to their community and school.

In her inspirational message to classmates, Sara Dudek, vice president of the senior class, told her fellow classmates, "Live your dreams and go above and beyond what is expected of you." She also presented a challenge to them. "Test your own limits to see what you can achieve."

Unsettling weather forced graduation ceremonies indoors, but it did not dampen the spirits of those receiving their diplomas. Valedictorian Lauren Bowalick thanked parents for their unending love and support. She also thanked teachers and administrators for their support and guidance during their high school years. "Our teachers taught us that without challenge there is no achievement," she said.

The evening was filled with pomp and circumstance, speeches and inspirational messages for students embarking on a new journey in their lives. According to the guidance department, 70 percent of the graduating class will attend college. Close to 3 percent will attend a technical school. Six percent will enlist in the armed forces and 9 percent will join the work force. Nineteen percent obtained scholarships totaling approximately \$1,940,300.00 with some additional scholarship money still coming in. The top 10 academic students are Lauren Bowalick, Ashley Chapin,

Amanda Gavin, Abigail Gesecki, Eric Brojakowski, Carrie Winters, Amber Robacheski, Erica Whitebread, Brian Madajewski, and Kaitlyn Malshefski. Congratulations and good luck in all your future endeavors!

Skate park still in the works

Several people have asked me if I know what is going on with the proposed skate park to be located in the Nanticoke Recreation Park at Lower Broadway. I talked with attorney Joe Lach, who is the secretary and spokesperson for the South Valley Partnership. The partnership is a not for profit organization that will oversee and maintain the park's initial phase.

"The hold up has to do with the ownership of the land." "There are a little more than 100 parcels." He told me some are owned by the city and the redevelopment authority. The ownership of some parcels is unclear.

"We are looking to resolve all issues so the land can be consolidated into one ownership through the city. Then we can decide in which direction we will go in regard to leasing the land from the city," he said.

After the issues with the parcels are resolved, the site work for the skate park will begin.

"The South Valley Partnership has already purchased the skate park equipment. We just need to make sure everything is done right so the park will be permanent."

6/17/2006

The Greater Nanticoke Area School Board Thursday approved a \$21.5 million budget for the new school year that includes a four mill tax hike.

By Bob Heim - Citizens' Voice Correspondent

Real estate taxes will increase from 245 to 249 mills under the \$21,497,990 budget for fiscal 2006-2007.

The \$5 per capita tax and an earned income tax of one half of one percent on residents of the district 18 and older were also reenacted.

The budget was approved unanimously as two dozen residents looked on.

The district anticipated receiving \$8,684,778 in revenue from local sources, \$11,190,356 from state sources, \$1,586,590 from federal sources and \$15,000 from other sources.

Principal expenditures in the new budget are salaries of \$8,760,917, followed by benefit costs of \$4,039,799. Total anticipated expenditures are listed at \$21,497,990.

In personnel business, Joseph Long was hired as elementary-secondary principal at a salary of \$70,000, and Brian McCarthy, presently a teacher in the district, was hired as assistant high school principal at an annual salary of \$60,000. Ryan Amos, an elementary teacher, and Rachel Jeffries, high school English teacher, were also hired.

Cafeteria prices for the coming school year for breakfast and lunch will remain unchanged. Paid breakfast will cost 50 cents; reduced breakfast will stay at 30 cents, and adult breakfast is \$1.20. Paid lunch for kindergarten through grade five is unchanged at \$1.30 and \$1.50 for students in grades six through 12. Reduced lunch will be 40 cents, adult lunch is \$2.50 and milk remains at 35 cents.

6/13/2006

Former fire official's house burns

By Wade Malcom Staff Writer

A little after 1 p.m. Monday, Bill Ives stood a few feet from police tape as an insurance company investigator took pictures of his home's charred remains.

Throughout his professional career, he was always "on the other end of these things" and on the other side of the yellow tape, helping console dozens of distraught families who had lost their cherished possessions.

Up until his retirement about two and a half years ago, he had been Nanticoke's fire chief for 19 years.

But at around 3 a.m. Monday, it was his home that was engulfed in flames.

The fire was "fully developed" when firefighters arrived at 65 W. Field St. Flames were shooting out of the home's roof and windows, said Nanticoke Fire Chief Mike Bohan. To their dismay, many of the firefighters instantly realized it was the home of their former chief.

They were relieved to find no one was injured in the blaze. Ives and his family were away on a camping trip. But the fire could not be extinguished fast enough to salvage anything.

"All the years I did this," Ives said. "You don't realize what it's like until it happens to you."

The fire nearly claimed two neighboring homes. The home at 67 W. Field St. suffered external damage and a moderate amount of internal damage, while the residence at 63 W. Field St. only sustained external damage. Residents of the other two homes rushed outside before the flames had spread to any greater extent.

Assisted by the Hanover Township Fire Department, Nanticoke firefighters had the blaze under control at around 5:40 a.m. About seven hours later, Ives stood in front of what was left of his home. The lower floor was gutted, the roof half caved in. His wife wanted to watch with him as investigators combed through the rubble. But he asked her to stay behind.

"It would have been too hard," he said.

A state police fire marshal also investigated the scene Monday afternoon. But because of the extensive damage the home sustained, Bohan said the exact cause of the fire could not be immediately determined, though he added the blaze did not in any way appear suspicious.

He also said the flames probably originated in the first-floor family room.

Mary Stout, 35, of 63 W. Field St., narrowly avoided becoming a victim, thanks to the Nanticoke Fire Department, she said. When she saw the high flames shooting out her neighbor's roof, she was convinced her home would be next. But the blaze was contained.

"They (firefighters) did a terrific job," she said.

Stout is still able to stay in her home, while Denise Chapura, 53, of 67 W. Field St., is temporarily staying with family members.

And Ives said he and his family members will stay in their RV until they figure out what to do next. On Monday afternoon, Ives spoke to his insurance company's fire investigator, Kevin Thomas.

"I can't believe, all these years you fought fires, one would bite you," he told Ives. "I'm going to do everything I can to find out what it was."

Ives thanked him. At around 1:30 p.m., after looking at his home one last time, Ives turned and slowly walked toward his car to leave.

"I'm gonna go be with my wife," he said.

Nanticoke Deputy Fire Chief Dave Urbanski said a relief fund has been established at PNC Bank to help victims of the fire. Anyone wishing to donate may call fire headquarters for more details.

6/12/2006

Retired fire chief's home burns

By rsweeney@leader.net

Responding to a fire engulfing 65 W. Field St. around 2:50 a.m. Monday, Nanticoke firefighters realized they had personal reasons to control the blaze.

The property, which firefighters found with flames coming "through the roof," is the home of retired Nanticoke fire Chief William Ives and his wife, Mary, who were on a camping trip.

"The guys had a lot emotional attachment to it knowing it was our former chief," said Nanticoke Line Chief Charlie Alles.

According to Alles, the house was recently insulated, so the fire burned inside for a while.

"I'm sure it burned for awhile before it burned through (to the outside) and a neighbor noticed it and called it in," he said.

Before firefighters could control it, the fire spread to 67 W. Field St., which sustained moderate damage to the exposed side and the attic, and 63 W. Field St., which received less damage.

The fire, which is believed to have started in the center of the first floor near a television, destroyed the house and caused the roof and second story to collapse into the first story.

Alles said the fire marshal considered the fire "unsuspicious" and "accidental," but the cause wasn't determined.

It took firefighters about 45 minutes to control the blaze and several more hours to completely douse it, Alles said.

"The only problem is it had a jump on us," he said.

No injuries were reported, and there were no pets in the house.

6/11/2006

Nanticoke Area Notes

By: Pam Urbanski

Last Sunday I attended a town meeting for parishioners of Catholic parishes in Nanticoke. The meeting was very well attended with several hundred people gathering together for prayer, information and discussion.

The catalyst for this meeting was the retirement of the Rev. John Krafchik, who has served as pastor of St. Mary's Church for decades. After 50 years serving God and his people, he will retire.

Monsignor Joseph Bambara, V.E. episcopal vicar, Central Pastoral Region, was pleased with the turnout at the meeting.

"What a wonderful testimony and commitment to you and your parishes," he said. "I believe this is a historic gathering of the faithful."

Monsignor told us that for now the six Catholic parishes within the City of Nanticoke will remain open, but change is inevitable.

"Together we will get through it," he said. "Ever since the first Pentecost 2,000 years ago, the Catholic Church has always faced challenges and change." He acknowledged that sometimes change is not easy. "We always need to find the best possible way to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ."

He reviewed with the group an interesting study where, out of the 200 dioceses in existence, 133 responded. Eighty-five dioceses — or half — said they are undergoing pastoral planning, restructuring and reorganizing.

"In those parishes where there is change, the most successful are those whose people quickly faced reality about their parishes and moved ahead in a positive way."

"Another important finding was that decisions for the future were imposed not from the top down, but rather emerged from the people themselves," he added.

I believe Monsignor was genuine when he told us that this was his desire for us, the faithful of the diocese and also the desire of the Rev. Jim Nash, the Rev. William Langan and the Rev. Carl Prushinski, who will continue to shepherd the flocks at the six Catholic churches in Nanticoke. Deacon Florian Giza and Deacon Thaddeus Wadas are also part of the clergy serving in Nanticoke

The facts presented at the meeting were interesting.

According to the 2000 census, the population of Nanticoke is around 10,000 people, and there are approximately 6,000 Catholics in Nanticoke.

According to surveys at churches in the city, around 2,000 or one-third attend Mass.

Luzerne and Lackawanna counties are the fastest declining counties in the diocese, while Monroe, Pike and Wayne are the fastest growing.

In 1965 there were 225 parishes and 450 priests. Today there are 210 parishes and 206 priests. With priest retirements and only about 13 young men

currently answering the call to a vocation to the priesthood, the estimate for 2010 is around 165 active priests.

Father Langan, pastor of St. Francis and St. Joseph churches, was grateful for the turnout at the meeting and positive about the future.

“We will bring together all of our resources to best serve the people of Nanticoke,” he said. “We must make the Body of Christ evermore strong and witness to those who have lost sight of Jesus and need him.”

Father Nash also remarked about how wonderful it was that all six parishes were well represented at the meeting and willing to talk about the future.

“I believe we have new opportunities for future generations. We will have a Catholic presence here in Nanticoke because of decisions we as a group will make.” Continuing he added, “I am excited about this new stage in our faith journey.”

After some discussion about the new Mass schedule, it was decided to try the schedule and then make adjustments as necessary. The following schedule will go into effect on July 3 for weekday Masses and July 8 for weekend Masses.

For now, Masses at St. Francis and St. Joseph will remain the same; Saturday Vigil Mass at 4 p.m. at St. Francis and 6 p.m. at St. Joseph, and Sunday Masses at 7 and 11 a.m. at St. Francis and 8:30 a.m. at St. Joseph. Weekday masses are Tuesday and Thursday, 7 a.m. at St. Joseph, and Wednesday and Friday, 7 a.m. at St. Francis.

For the parish community of Holy Trinity, St. Stanislaus, Holy Child and St. Mary’s, Masses are as follows: Saturday, 4 p.m. at Holy Trinity and St. Mary’s; Sunday, 8 a.m. at St. Stanislaus, 9 a.m. at Holy Cross, 10:15 at Holy Trinity and 11:30 at St. Mary’s. Weekday Masses will be Monday, 7 a.m. at St. Mary’s and 8 a.m. at St. Stanislaus; Tuesday, 7 a.m. at Holy Trinity and 8 a.m. at St. Stanislaus; Wednesday, 7 a.m. at St. Mary’s and 6 p.m. at Holy Trinity; Thursday, 7 a.m. at St. Mary’s and 8 a.m. at St. Stanislaus; Friday, 7 a.m. at St. Mary’s and 8 a.m. at St. Stanislaus

6/9/2006

Nanticoke housing board wants new site

The municipal authority will hire a real estate firm to market space in the Kanjorski Center.

By mbuffer@leader.net

The city housing authority wants to become a partner in the downtown revitalization project, housing authority Executive Director Perry Clay said during Thursday’s municipal authority meeting.

Clay said the housing authority would like to buy land at Spring and Market streets from the municipal authority for a new administrative office building. Clay also said the housing authority recently agreed to buy the Susquehanna Coal Co. building on West Main Street and plans to put housing units in the building.

Officials plan to disclose more details about the coal company building plans in the near future, Clay said. Municipal authority members said they want the housing authority’s plans to match their aesthetic vision of what a revitalized downtown would look like.

“I would like to see if your concept works with our concept,” municipal authority member Ron Kamowski said.

Also Thursday, the authority voted to hire Lewith & Freeman as a real estate agent to help sell the Kanjorski Center or lease space in it. The municipal authority, through a cooperation agreement with the redevelopment authority, owns and operates the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street.

The municipal authority has been struggling to lease space in the 32,000-square-foot Kanjorski Center, which has been almost 88 percent empty since HealthNow, a Medicare claims processing company, relocated in October to Dallas.

Officials hope a new parking garage by the Kanjorski Center would help attract tenants there. Municipal authority Chairman Dennis Butler said the authority can build a parking garage with \$5.5 million from federal transportation grants.

Without HealthNow as the Kanjorski Center’s anchor tenant, the authority lost \$33,000 in monthly revenue and is going broke. Since April, the authority’s fund balance has dropped from \$20,001 to \$11,161, officials said.

6/8/2006

Nanticoke considers loan

By mbuffer@leader.net

Now that the city is official a financially distressed community under the Act 47 program, city officials want to borrow \$700,000 to avoid another year-end deficit.

The emergency loan would have no interest, and the city can get the money by August if the application is finished in a week, officials said.

The city won’t be able to pay bills and salaries by the end of August, said Councilman William O’Malley during Wednesday’s council meeting.

O’Malley said the city is looking at a deficit this year of about \$700,000 – about \$50,000 more than the state’s latest projection. The city is on course to spend about \$3.8 million this year.

The city is eligible for Act 47 relief because of past problems associated with deficit spending. In recent years, the city covered deficits with unfunded debt borrowing, officials said.

On May 26, state Community and Economic Development Secretary Dennis Yablonsky officially designated Nanticoke as financially distressed under Act 47. The designation allows the state to partner with the city to improve its financial conditions.

By the end of the month, the state will appoint a recovery coordinator to work with city officials and develop a recovery plan.

Also during Wednesday’s meeting, council voted to advertise a job opening for a new finance director. City officials said Anthony Margelewicz, who was hired as city clerk and fiscal manager in February, will become city administrator. Council fired Greg Gulick as administrator in April.

6/5/2006

**The beat goes on at annual Music Fest
Despite the cloudy skies,
a crowd gathers for melodic tribute on last night of the outdoor Nanticoke event.**

By rsweeney@leader.net

Gambling that the ominous clouds above would produce little rain, about 200 people mingled in Patriot Square Park on Sunday evening to enjoy the 9th Annual Nanticoke Music Fest.

While John Stevens' Doubleshot set the tone with a selection of danceable polkas, youths made their own popping rhythm by throwing Snap Pops, which explode with a bang on the concrete.

Heather Evans, who was selling small toys and gifts from a booth, said she sold out of the popular, small explosives.

The three-day event culminated Sunday, and though the crowd wasn't as large as it was the first night, given the weather, people involved with the event were pleased.

"Basically, we break even, and that's all we want to do," said Yvonne Bozinski, who organized the event.

"The past two days were great. The rain scared (visitors) away, but it's coming back," Sylvia Mizdail said later in the evening while selling raffle chances for a collection of gift certificates to local restaurants. Called "A Taste of Nanticoke," the raffle is raising money for the Mercy Hospital special care unit.

The park has been the setting for live music since the early 1900s. To celebrate that, this year's fest highlighted the bands of Nanticoke's past, from the marching bands and orchestras of the first half of the past century to the four- and five-member acts that became the rage in the latter half.

Shirley Cottrino remembered her father, Steve, who, at 18, started playing the trumpet in the Peter Pace band in 1918. He later formed his own orchestra, Steve Cottrino's Sylvans and his Cadets, in the early 1930s and continued playing locally until 1979.

About 30 years ago, his band was asked to start the Wilkes-Barre Philharmonic, she said, which eventually merged with the Scranton orchestra to become the Northeastern Pennsylvania Philharmonic.

"He patterned himself after the Boston Pops. He was an admirer of Arthur Fiedler," she said.

In 1961, while Cottrino was playing summer concerts at the park, Dan Novak began headlining a series of bands, including the Original Trailblazers, Danny & the Excels and, in the 1980s, King Rat and the Vermin.

"It was a lot of camaraderie. I met a lot of people, did a lot of traveling," he said. "Ever since I was a kid, I enjoyed singing."

These days, though he's left the music circuit, he still plays informally with the members of one of his past bands and spends hours singing karaoke in his basement.

No doubt, others would agree with his reasoning: "Music makes me happy."

[More on Musicfest 2006.....](#)

5/28/2006

Nanticoke Area Notes

By: Pam Urbanski

If you are tired of being indoors, looking for something to do, a place to take the family, I have the perfect place for you! Next weekend, June 2-4, the Nanticoke Music Fest will be held at Patriots Square.

"The Music Fest will be a weekend filled with great music, food, games and kiddie rides," said Karen Dougherty, one of the event organizers. The theme for this year's celebration is "Music of Nanticoke Throughout the Years." You will be able to take a step back in time as music memorabilia, including pictures and articles from local musicians and bands, will be displayed.

The weekend begins with opening ceremonies Friday at 5 p.m. The band Hickory Rose, a premiere county-western band, will provide the entertainment from 6 to 10 p.m.

Saturday the annual Battle of the Bands will be held from 4 to 7 p.m. This is a great opportunity to hear some great local bands perform. Five bands will compete for the \$500 grand prize. From 7 to 11 p.m. Picture Perfect, voted Electric City's "best party band" for 2003, 2004 and 2005, will take the stage. This nine piece band puts on an entertaining, high energy performance that covers everything from funk and R & B to soul and Latin.

The final day, Sunday, the David Blight Dancers will dance their way onto the stage for a 4 p.m. performance. The John Stevens Band-Doubleshoot, a polka band that aims to introduce polka music to a whole new generation and who has performed across the country, will entertain from 7 to 9 p.m.

One of the best things about the Music Fest is that you can listen to all of these great bands for free! While taking in all the great entertainment, don't forget to try some of the great food, games and rides for the kids. For information, call 735-2800. See you there!

Tax reminder

Albert J Wytoshek, Nanticoke City treasurer/tax collector, announced the 2006 city property and per capita taxes face value will end Friday, June 9, and are payable at the Nanticoke Municipal Building Tax Office, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. The tax office will have extended hours June 9 from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Payments are not accepted by postmark. When requesting a receipt, enclose a self-address, stamped envelope.

Property owners are reminded it is their responsibility to forward their tax statements to their mortgage companies. Anyone needing assistance or an appointment may call 735-2800.

St. Joseph's bingo

St. Joseph's Slovak Church will hold a bingo Sunday, June 4, at 2 p.m. in the church parlors, 107 East Noble St., Nanticoke. Doors open at noon. Early birds are at 1:30. There will be cash and door prizes. Refreshments will be available.

Breakfast buffet

The parishioners of Holy Child Church invite you to their annual breakfast buffet Sunday, June 4, from 9 a.m. to noon in the dining hall of the church in Sheatown. The cost is \$6. For information, call 735-2281.

5/27/2006

Nanticoke will get state help

By mbuffer@leader.net

The Department of Community and Economic Development designated Nanticoke as “financially distressed” under Act 47, department spokesman Kevin Ortiz said Friday.

Department Secretary Dennis Yablonsky officially approved the designation, which allows the state to partner with the city to improve its financial conditions.

The state has 30 days to appoint a recovery coordinator for the city, Ortiz said.

The coordinator and the city will then have 90 days to approve a recovery plan, which “will enable Nanticoke to remedy its distressed status,” Ortiz said.

“We will use their guidance and try to move forward,” Mayor John Bushko said. “Some tough decisions have to be made.”

Under the Act 47 program, the state will help provide oversight and can offer additional loans and grants.

Bushko said the state will offer guidance to help improve tax collection, and he said a no-interest loan from the state will help the city pay its bills this year.

Without help, the city would run out of money to pay bills and salaries by August. The city is projected to spend almost \$3.8 million this year and only take in \$3.2 million in revenue.

In recent years, the city covered deficits with unfunded debt borrowing, officials said.

More than 10 percent of the city’s budget is earmarked for debt payments.

Yablonsky had 30 days to approve the city’s request for Act 47 relief after the state conducted a hearing on April 26.

Ortiz said the city met four criteria for Act 47 relief. Three criteria are associated with deficit spending.

The city also met the criteria because it failed to repay short-term loans in 2001 and 2003. The loans were supposed to be paid off in 12 months when anticipated revenue was collected.

Nanticoke is the 22nd municipality in the state to enter the Act 47 program since the act became law in 1987. Nanticoke is the third municipality in Luzerne County to enter the program.

West Hazleton has been in the program since 2003. The Pennsylvania Economy League is the borough’s recovery coordinator.

Plymouth Township has been in the program since 2004. The Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance is township’s recovery coordinator.

5/25/2006

Nanticoke OKs water shutoffs

The city is owed \$126,000 in fees. Notices will be sent to delinquent property owners.

By mbuffer@leader.net

Late with your water or sewer bills? City homeowners are forewarned that their water could be shut off if they don’t pay up.

City council on May 17 approved shutoff agreements with Pennsylvania American Water Co. and the Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority. The cash-strapped city is owed \$126,000 in fees from water and sewer bills, Councilman William O’Malley said.

Mayor John Bushko said the shutoff resolutions are needed because there were “no teeth in the ability to collect” water and sewer bills.

“If we have the authority to shut off water, people will come around,” Bushko said.

Solicitor Joe Lach said notices will be sent to property owners “in the event of unpaid bills.” They will be warned their water will be shut off, Lach said.

Bushko said delinquent bill payers will be charged “shutoff fees.” O’Malley said 246 sewer bills are unpaid, noting the city doesn’t supply water.

The city’s population is about 11,000, and the number of homes in the city is about 5,000. About 12 percent of the homes are vacant.

Because of the city’s financial problems, the city has applied for the state’s Act 47 relief program as a financially distressed community. The city could run out of money to pay employees and bills by August or September.

The city passed a balanced budget in December, but the city is now projected to spend almost \$3.8 million and take in almost \$3.2 million in revenue.

5/18/2006

Nanticoke officials sparring over fire hall

BY ELIZABETH SKRAPITS STAFF WRITER

Two volunteer organizations are clashing over the Stickney fire hall, and city council and mayor John Bushko are feeling the heat.

Council leased the Stickney building at 24 S. Prospect St. to the Greater Nanticoke Area Drug Task Force last June. Task force board members, frustrated that they are unable to use the building 11 months later, said Wednesday night they feel council’s deadline of July 1 for the fire company to move out is too long.

Members of the task force, a community group to educate teens about drugs and give them recreational alternatives, have put time and money into

fixing up the building, but still have to use the basement of St. Francis Church, task force board member Jim Samselski said. The city can't afford to keep the Stickney and Washington fire companies open. Council voted at its last meeting to close the fire house, allowing time for Stickney members to move their belongings to fire headquarters on East Ridge Street and sell the fire truck. Task force board president Frank Vandermark said the fire company has ignored previous deadlines. "It's not doing any good to be smooth," Samselski said. "It's the kids that are hurting."

Task force board member Lorri Vandermark reminded council that the task force did not ask for the Stickney fire hall, but when the kids petitioned for a building, it was what city officials gave them. The task force has put too much time and effort into fixing it up to walk away, she said. The fire company has also invested in the building, Solicitor Joe Lach said. Including buying a fire truck, fire gear, and building repairs and maintenance, the fire company spent more than \$250,000 over the last 15 years, Stickney president Bob Bray said previously. The problem officials are grappling with is how to deal with the best interests of the city, the task force, and the fire company in the most diplomatic way, Lach said.

Stickney members can either work with the city and task force amicably, or force city officials to take action, he said. Last week, Councilman Brent Makarczyk and Lach met with three Stickney fire company representatives for a discussion that grew emotional and ended without resolution. Lach said he and Makarczyk would approach Stickney members again. Richard Zarzycki, who has spent a total of 35 years as a firefighter with Nanticoke's Hanover Hose Co., strongly objected to the closing of the fire hall, saying it would be the death of the Stickney fire company. "I find it despicable that council would treat volunteer firefighters like an old piece of furniture and throw them out on the curb for garbage pickup," Zarzycki said.

5/18/2006

Nanticoke to sell delinquent tax liens to boost coffers

The city stands to gain \$180,000 as an outside company will collect past-due taxes from residents.

By MICHAEL P. BUFFER mbuffer@leader.net

City officials on Wednesday approved a deal to sell delinquent property tax liens that will bring in \$180,000 to the cash-strapped city. The deal allows the city to get its money immediately upon the sale, rather than waiting for the lengthy collection procedure. Under the deal, Municipal Revenue Services Inc. would work out a deal with a government authority and a bank to borrow money. The city would pay \$20,000 in transaction fees from \$200,000 in proceeds, officials said during Wednesday's city council meeting. The loan is eventually paid off as property owners pay their delinquent taxes.

The deal with Municipal Revenue Services would improve the certainty of cash flow for future budgeting. City council passed a balanced budget in December, but the city is now projected to spend almost \$3.8 million and take in almost \$3.2 million in revenue. Because of financial problems, the city has applied for the state's Act 47 relief program as a financially distressed community. The city could run out of money to pay employees and bills by August or September.

Under Act 47, the state partners with municipalities, providing oversight and offering loans and grants to aid in fiscal recovery. According to Municipal Revenue Services' Web site, Hazleton last year and Harrisburg in 2004 sold delinquent property tax liens for upfront revenue. School districts last year also approved deals with Municipal Revenue Services. The company Web site says those school districts included Wilkes-Barre Area, Wyoming Valley West, Pittston Area and Scranton.

5/14/2006

Mother's Day twice as nice for couple

After years of effort, a Nanticoke woman gets more than the child she wanted – a set of twins.

By KEVIN AMERMAN kamerman@leader.net

A Nanticoke woman has received the best Mother's Day gift she could have imagined. Actually, two of them.

Amy Charnetski, 32, delivered fraternal twins – a boy and a girl – on Tuesday at Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center in Plains Township. The new mom wasn't scheduled to have her babies before Mother's Day – the twins were born four weeks early. "It's euphoric," Amy said. "It's just the most wonderful thing in the world."

After 2 ½ years of trying to conceive and with the help of fertility drugs, Amy and her husband, Tony, found out Amy was pregnant on Sept. 27, the day before their third wedding anniversary. "That was a great wedding present," Amy said. "This is a great Mother's Day present for you too," added Tony.

Six-and-a-half weeks after learning about the pregnancy, the couple found out they were having twins. "I can't even express it in words how happy I felt seeing them," Tony said as he recalled the delivery. Amy was not sure Friday when she could return home. She's recovering from a C-section and said her twins need to gain weight. Ian was born at 4 pounds, 8 ounces and Abigail weighed 3 pounds, 8 ounces. "It's a miracle," said Amy as she held her baby boy. "They're so small, but so healthy."

While at the hospital, Tony said the staff has taught him many things, such as how to swaddle his babies and feed them. "Everyone here has been wonderful," he said.

Dealing with two babies will be pretty challenging, but the Charnetskis, who are both insurance agents for Unitrin Direct Insurance near Scranton, say they'll get help from family members. Amy said the babies are the first ones in her extended family in 14 years and Tony said his 4-year-old nephew is the youngest child in his family – so the twins should get plenty of attention.

While reflecting on the happiness of finally being able to celebrate a Mother's Day as a mom, Amy said perseverance has paid off. "Anything is possible," she said. "Never give up. Strive for what you want."

5/14/2006

Minute Monster at GNA - Citizens Voice

We all know how difficult it can sometimes be to get our children to turn off the television, log off the computer, hang up the telephone and read. For students in kindergarten through fifth grade who attend the Greater Nanticoke Area Elementary Center, K.M. Smith School or Kennedy Elementary, the task is a little easier. In fact, reading is fun and challenging.

It was Cindy Evans, mom and Parent-Teacher Association president, who was looking for a way to bring students and parents together after three Nanticoke elementary schools merged.

"I wanted to come up with something educational and fun for our students," said Cindy. "I also wanted a project that would help unite our parents." She created a great one. She took her idea of getting kids reading on a daily basis, while rewarding them for their accomplishments, to other members of the PTA and school administrators. "They were 100 percent behind the program," she said.

And so Mots (pronounced Mo), a blue, loving monster named after the French word for "words" was born. With a little help from some friends, the challenge was on for all reading minute monsters.

In September, Mots was introduced to the student body and faculty. Mots challenged the students to complete two million minutes of reading for the 2005-2006 school year. During the initial assembly program, the rules were explained. Students who wished to participate signed a pledge to read 15 minutes a day and were given pencils and T-shirts bearing the Minute Monster logo. A deal also was made that Mots would only talk to the students if they reached their goal.

To keep the students motivation high and the reading on track, monthly assemblies were held. For every month that students participated in the program they received a piece of foam that eventually "grew" into a bookworm. A mystery guest presented all minute monsters that reached their monthly goal of reading 15 minutes a day with rewards during these assemblies.

They also were treated to musical performances complete with songs written by Cindy for and about the students who participated in the program and even their teachers. To date, she has written five songs that have the kids very excited. "To see hundreds of kids, smiling and happy, excited about reading is wonderful," Cindy offered. "They always wanted to know what the next song was going to be like."

The monthly rewards are just as exciting as the first assembly we had," said Jackie McIntyre, Minute Monster chairperson. Mots even enjoyed the music so much that he read a book and learned to play the guitar.

Principal Mariellen Scott announced that Mots would be joining the band for the performance during an assembly. After that performance, 50 new students joined the program.

"Dr. Scott did a great job keeping the students motivated during the school year," Cindy added.

Eighty-five percent of the students participated in the program. I am happy to tell you that they have reached their reading goal of two million minutes of reading.

On Monday, May 22, the PTA will hold the final assembly. A huge celebration to include a parade is planned. Certificates will be given to readers and some cool prizes, donated by the PTA and local businesses, will be awarded. And Mots will finally talk. I'm sure when he does, Mots will have a lot of praise and positive things to say to PTA members especially program founder Cindy Evans, as well as Christine Mash and Brenda Wenner, who I'm told played key roles in the success of the program.

I have a feeling Mots will have great things to say to the students, parents, administrators, faculty and staff at GNA Congratulations kids and keep on reading.

Check out the Minute Monster at www.gnasd.com/kenschool.htm

5/13/2006

Greater Nanticoke Area will conduct health care benefit study

BY ELIZABETH SKRAPITS STAFF WRITER

Greater Nanticoke Area School Board wants to make sure the district is getting its money's worth out of the Northeast Pennsylvania School Districts Health Trust.

The board voted Thursday night to launch a health care benefit study, to be done at a cost of not more than \$15,000, with a final written study due no later than June 30, 2007. Health insurance costs are the district's biggest expense, and the board wants to make sure the money it is investing in the health trust is being spent properly, board President Jeff Kozlofsky said.

The board will appoint a committee to look at the health trust and check out alternatives, such as other health care consortiums, to see if the district can get health insurance that has benefits equal to what employees get now, but at a cheaper rate.

"If there are money-saving options, we're going to go for them," Kozlofsky said.

The health trust was formed in 1998 by 13 districts to curb rising health insurance costs.

The board accepted the retirement of federal coordinator Thad Wadas and K.M. Smith Elementary principal and former high school principal Thomas Kubasek.

Michael Wisniewski was hired for 12 months as a school police officer, at a salary of \$24,480.

Superintendent Anthony Perrone announced that auditors had just completed their work on the district's finances. "Our audit was perfect, except for one thing. We're getting an additional \$6,000 back we weren't anticipating," he said. Resident Hank Marks brought up Nanticoke City's bad financial condition and asked if the district could help by making the city a donation to buy a new police cruiser. The board questioned whether it would be legal to do so. Board member Kenny James said there were other ways the city could get money for a police vehicle, such as through government grants.

5/12/2006

**Nanticoke Area veterans retire
Principal Thomas Kubasek and federal coordinator Thad Wadas will be leaving.**

By JANINE UNGVARSKY Times Leader Correspondent

Two long-term employees in Greater Nanticoke Area School District have announced their intent to retire later this year. Former high school Principal Thomas Kubasek will retire at the end of the school year. School board President Jeff Kozlofski said that Kubasek, who is serving as principal of the K.M. Smith Elementary, has been with the district "more than 30 years."

Kubasek had served as high school principal for four years before he was moved to the principal's position at K.M. Smith Elementary School in 2005. The demotion caused a public outcry from some parents and students.

The board on Thursday approved the posting of the principal's job at K.M. Smith Elementary, along with the positions of principal of the Educational Center and assistant principal of the high school. Posting of positions for an elementary teacher, a secondary English teacher and a janitor were also approved.

The board also accepted the resignation of Thad Wadas, district federal coordinator. His retirement is effective Aug. 18. The board thanked both Wadas and Kubasek for their years of service to the district.

In other personnel moves, the board hired Mike Wisniewski as a full-time school police officer at a salary of \$24,480 effective July 1. Shelly Shales, confidential administrative assistant to the superintendent, will receive a pay increase raising her salary to \$33,000, effective July 1. Motions to appoint all fall and winter sports coaches were tabled. Kozlofski said that the board wasn't ready to act on the motions because the recommendations of the athletic director had not been received.

In other business, the board accepted the low bid for work on the K.M. Smith Elementary School roof. TGW Corporation was awarded the project with a bid of \$198,900.

Tuition reimbursement for teachers was approved as follows: Rebecca Mendrzycki, \$780 for six credits at Wilkes University; Tracey View and John Gorham each received \$390 for three credits at Wilkes University; Ami Stelma, \$390 for three credits at King's College.

The board also approved a second reading of the Wellness Policy and a third reading of the Bullying Policy.

Superintendent Anthony Perrone touted the district's two-day-a-week orientation program for next year's kindergarten students and urged the board to visit the program, which is intended to help the children prepare for full day kindergarten. Perrone said the kids were "amazing."

Perrone also congratulated the teachers and students involved in the Scholastic Scrimmage airing on WVIA-TV. He told the board the district students had finished second out of 39 schools from three intermediate units participating in the competition.

5/8/2006

Nanticoke Veteran Going for the Gold

BY HEIDI RUCKNO STAFF WRITER

Multiple sclerosis might have placed limitations on Doris Merrill's body, but her spirit is stronger than ever.

Diagnosed in 1957, the disease has progressed to a point where the 82-year-old World War II veteran from Nanticoke is bound to a wheelchair. But physical limitation has not slowed her down. Sports and volunteer work keep her extremely busy.

Merrill left Saturday for Hampton, Va., but the trip was not exactly a bayside vacation. She will spend the week trying to medal in the 20th National Veterans Golden Age Games. The competition runs through Friday.

The Golden Age Games is a sports and recreational competition for military veterans over 55, said Jenny Tankersley, the National Public Affairs Coordinator for the games.

"It is the world's largest adaptive senior sports event," she said.

This year, Merrill will be one of a record 612 athletes competing. She will participate in several events, including bowling, swimming and riflery.

Merrill considers bowling her strongest event, and her son Paul agrees. She has limited use of her arms, so someone hands her the ball and she uses a ramp to give it enough momentum to get down the alley. Her average score is a 170.

"Since I'm competing, I have a whole new way of life," she said.

Merrill got her first taste of adaptive competition on a trip to Puerto Rico seven years ago, when The Paralyzed Veterans of America got her involved with the Wheelchair Games.

She wasn't really sure what to expect, but was pleasantly surprised about the results.

"I did beautifully," Merrill said. I never would have believed that I could have done that well."

Merrill scored well in the wheelchair obstacle course, and her bowling score was the highest in the entire contest. Since then she's become a fixture at these events.

While she is a serious competitor, Merrill takes a casual approach. For her it's about fun and friendship, so she sometimes gets caught up in the atmosphere.

“You can’t believe the wonderful camaraderie we have. We look for each other,” she said.

An upbeat and social person, Merrill sometimes loses focus on the competition. She’ll get to talking to someone and forget that she’s got seven more frames to bowl.

It happened to her the last time she went bowling. At a recent practice session at Chacko’s, she socialized so much that she had an off night.

“The last time I was 143. My son was very upset with me,” Merrill said.

As his mother’s chauffeur and sometimes bowling assistant, Paul plays a large role in her sporting success.

She’s had a fair amount of it, winning several medals since she began competing seven years ago.

Paul said she usually wins several medals a competition, providing she keeps the socializing to a minimum.

Merrill will also travel to Alaska in July to compete another senior sporting event, but in the meantime she’ll keep herself busy volunteering at the VA Hospital.

5/4/2006

Nanticoke compliance failures disclosed

By mbuffer@leader.net

City officials on Wednesday disclosed some city failures to comply with state and federal law.

City employment applications dated back to 1976 and contained illegal questions that would have put the city in risk of a lawsuit, according to a memo from Robert Sabatini, a city consultant with Keystone Municipal Services. The city now has employment applications that meet current standards.

Some City Hall facilities need to be upgraded to comply with federal Americans with Disabilities Act, the memo said. The act requires that public facilities be handicapped accessible.

Sabatini didn’t want to disclose these compliance failures last week during the city’s Act 47 hearing. The city wants to be approved for the state’s Act 47 relief program as a financially distressed community.

Last week, Sabatini said he would share the information with a state official “off the record.” During Wednesday’s city council meeting, city Solicitor Joe Lach said Sabatini didn’t mean to leave “the wrong impression” that the city wanted to keep secrets from the public.

Lach noted that Sabatini had not briefed elected city officials on the compliance failures last week and said they were “functionally irrelevant” to the city’s financial problems.

In his memo, Sabatini said “there is no evidence of any willful disregard for the laws or criminal activity.” The memo also notes that city employees have failed to file I-9 forms, which confirm legal status.

The city also failed to display workplace posters that detail laws on minimum wage, workers compensation and veterans’ rights. The city displayed the posters in January, Councilman William O’Malley said.

Sabatini’s memo noted the city needed to use a technical civil service commission to hire building and health inspectors. Council voted to establish that commission during Wednesday’s meeting.

Also during the meeting, council voted to close the city’s Stickney and Washington fire stations. The volunteer firefighters at those stations will relocate to fire headquarters on Ridge Street, and the move is expected to save about \$7,000 a year.

5/1/2006

Friends remember at benefit

Proceeds for the event held in James Bertrand’s name go to the Nanticoke Volunteer Fire Company.

By rsweeney@leader.net

It’s been two years since the drowning of James Bertrand made headlines, but friends and family are refusing to forget.

And they’re trying to use that memory to help his favorite organization.

In April 2004, a Jeep vehicle in which he was a passenger drove off a dirt trail on Earth Conservancy land in Newport Township and sank in a waterhole. The female driver was able to escape, but Bertrand drowned.

His mother, Jackie Bertrand, has sued the conservancy, alleging it allowed its land to be used for recreation without ensuring its safety. The conservancy argues the driver did not heed posted warnings that vehicles are barred from the site.

On Sunday, however, the conflicts and arguments were forgotten for at least a day at the benefit in Jim’s name at the Holy Child Church Grove in Sheatown.

At the second annual Jim Bertrand Memorial Benefit, a reunion of sorts for people who knew him, music blared and about 300 people mingled and laughed while playing games and bidding on auctions.

Food and drinks were in ample supply, with a trailer sporting a line of beer taps and “The Cajun Microwave,” a massive wood-fired oven on wheels from [Marty’s Blue Room restaurant](#).

In the background, money flowed in for the Nanticoke Volunteer Fire Company, which was Jim’s “life,” according to his mother, Jackie Bertrand. “He couldn’t wait ’til he turned 18 to join the fire company,” she said.

The first benefit, on a bitterly cold day last year, raked in \$7,025 for the fire department, Bertrand said.

A “gentle giant” at about 6 feet 8 inches tall, Jim Bertrand was the last hope to carry on the family name, his mother said.

“It’s hard every day. It doesn’t matter,” she said of coping with his death. “But I really like the fact that he hasn’t been forgotten.”

The event was organized by Kristen Pawlowski, who was dating Bertrand at the time of his death, and his friend Mike Tomko. Through their grief, they bonded and plan to marry in September.

“We just wanted to do something wonderful for Jim and get all his friends together,” Pawlowski said, adding that it takes six to eight months to plan the event.

Frank Shepanski, Jim Bertrand’s best friend and a fellow firefighter, said the department wants to use the proceeds to help build a fire training facility dedicated in Bertrand’s memory at Luzerne County Community College.

“We would really like to use the facility and know that when we’re there ... he’s watching over us,” Shepanski said.

4/30/2006

Fire stations on chopping block

BY ELIZABETH SKRAPITS STAFF WRITER

Council and Mayor John Bushko, faced with a city on the verge of bankruptcy, are talking about closing two of Nanticoke’s five fire stations. However, the president of the Stickney fire company believes that since the organization is providing a home for the Greater Nanticoke Area Drug Task Force, the fire station should stay open.

City officials cited rising costs, declining emergency responses, and proximity to Nanticoke fire headquarters at 2 E. Ridge St. — both stations are less than half a mile away — as reasons for closing the Stickney fire hall at 24 S. Prospect St. and the Washington fire hall at Washington and Hanover streets.

Honey Pot Fire Co. No. 6 at 13 Honey Pot St. will be left alone. Its volunteers handle all its expenses and the station is self-sufficient. Hanover Hose Co. No. 4 at 108 Espy St. is also staying open because of its location — it is two miles away from fire headquarters, and near Luzerne County Community College.

Nanticoke’s central fire headquarters was formed in 1975 by combining the Pioneer Hook & Ladder No. 1, the Lape Hose Co. No. 2, and A. K. Mowery Hose Co. No. 3. There are nine full-time and four part-time paid firefighters and drivers in addition to volunteers.

In 2005, the city spent \$2,586 on Stickney and \$3,348 on Washington for utilities alone, councilman Bill O’Malley said. That doesn’t include other costs such as insurance and maintenance. Councilman Brent Makarczyk estimated the city spends \$80,000 on insurance for all five fire stations.

With rising prices, especially for fuel, city officials expect bills to increase drastically through 2006 and 2007.

“The way we’re looking at it is we’d get better use of our manpower and trucks ... if it was all centralized,” Bushko said. “You’re not doing it to be vindictive, you’re doing it because it’s a necessity.”

The non-profit Greater Nanticoke Area Drug Task Force, which educates teens about drugs, uses the second floor of the Stickney fire station as headquarters for meetings and a recreation center. The task force leases the building from the city for \$1 a year and pays its utility bills. Stickney members hold their meetings and events in the basement.

“The stipulation was when the drug task force came into the building, they would pick up much of the cost for the upkeep of the building and we would be allowed to stay there,” Stickney president Bob Bray said.

Bushko said it will be up to the task force to decide whether it wants to coexist with the fire company. However, he noted the fire company has so far been uncooperative about moving its furniture out of the second floor and allowing the task force to use the first floor, where the fire truck is stored.

The Stickney station has around 35 members, about 27 of which are active in the fire company, and approximately six who go to fires, Bray said. He fears closing the station will mean fewer volunteers.

“Volunteers are a dying breed. When I got in the company in 1972, our charter only allowed 30 active members and there was a waiting list,” Bray said. “The volunteer fire department, Stickney, means a lot to me. I think it’s a short-term solution, but it’s a long-term problem if you lose that volunteer base.”

Bray is aware that Nanticoke, facing a \$2.8 million projected deficit, held a hearing with the state Wednesday to request distressed status.

But, Bray said, “In my opinion, council and the mayor don’t know what’s being offered by the volunteers.”

Stickney members contribute to the maintenance and upkeep of the building, including putting in a new furnace at their own expense, Bray said.

Since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 2001, there has been grant money available, but prior to that, volunteers raised their own funds, even for purchasing Stickney’s fire engine, Bray said.

“When we bought it in 1992, the stipulation with the city was they would allow us to stay in the building for 20 years. We paid \$100,000 to buy and equip the truck with our own money. At the time, that was the best apparatus in town,” Bray said.

Since then, the city received funds for a new ladder truck and pumper, so there is not as much need for Stickney’s fire engine, he said.

According to data from the Nanticoke fire department, from April 2001 to the present, Washington’s fire apparatus responded to 21 calls. In the past five years, Stickney responded to 11 calls, the most recent in July 2001. During the same period, Honey Pot’s apparatus responded to 33 calls and Hanover’s to 73. Apparatus from Pioneer, headquartered at the central station, responded 645 times and Mowery’s apparatus, 474 times.

“The bottom line is, the trucks are not responding to many calls, the volunteers aren’t very active, we’re paying the bills, and we’re not getting much in return,” Makarczyk said of the Stickney and Washington stations. “When you’re financially distressed, anywhere you can cut, you do so. And if it means cutting buildings instead of manpower, it’s an easy choice for us.”

As when the three other stations consolidated, the volunteers, fire trucks and equipment from the Stickney and Washington stations would be added to headquarters, O’Malley said.

Nanticoke Community Ambulance leases part of the central fire station for \$800 a month, but there isn’t much room for its vehicles and equipment, Makarczyk said. If the trucks from Stickney and Washington are moved in, there will be even less space, Bushko said. City officials plan to talk to the ambulance company about taking over the Washington fire station.

“I just think it would be better all around. They would have their own facilities, they would pay all the utilities, plus they would pay us rent,”

Bushko said.

City officials expect fire company members rather than residents to oppose closing the stations.

“All the feedback I’ve been getting from the general public has been positive,” O’Malley said.

Resident Donald Perkoski lives on Green Street, near the Stickney fire station. Closing it wouldn’t bother him — the central department is the first to respond to fires anyway, he said. And with Nanticoke’s financial troubles, Perkoski believes it would be the sensible thing to do.

“At this point in the game, we need to save money,” Perkoski said. “A dollar here, a dollar there — it adds up.”

Employees and volunteers at fire headquarters seem to agree that five firehouses for Nanticoke’s 3.5 square miles is too many, Makarczyk said. Neighboring Hanover Township has six firehouses for 18.6 square miles, and they have been talking about consolidating those, he pointed out.

“We have to do this. We’ve been talking about regionalization. We’re trying to go that route,” Makarczyk said. “It’s very difficult for us to talk to Newport Township or Hanover Township and surrounding communities if we don’t have our own firehouses in order.”

4/28/2006

SOUTH VALLEY DEVELOPMENT

Business incubator, ATV park proposed

Partnership hopes to aid city, Newport and Plymouth townships.

By mbuffer@leader.net

“It’s an enormous industry.”

State Rep. John Yudichak On all-terrain vehicles in Pa.

The Kanjorski Center on Main Street could be used as a business incubator that provides office space for small businesses, according to a new plan to spark economic development in the South Valley region.

The plan also proposes an all-terrain vehicle park in Newport Township that could generate hotels, retail stores and restaurants. More than 100 people on Thursday heard details of the plan at the Luzerne County Community College.

It was a two-year project that cost \$135,000. The South Valley Partnership, a private nonprofit group, chose planning and architectural firm Facility Design & Development Ltd. to put together a “strategic plan” for Nanticoke, Newport Township and Plymouth Township.

The region has been struggling economically and has a declining and aging population. Buildings are aging and need renovations.

Even the 32,000-square-foot Kanjorski Center, which was built in the 1990s, needs to be renovated, according to the South Valley plan. The main problem with the Kanjorski Center currently is it is almost 88 percent empty.

The Nanticoke General Municipal Authority is in charge of the Kanjorski Center and has struggled to find tenants since HealthNow, a Medicare claims processing company and the building’s anchor tenant, relocated in October to Dallas.

The South Valley plan also proposes new bus routes in the region, including a loop from LCCC to downtown Nanticoke.

State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, defended the proposal for an ATV park after hearing a complaint. Noting the region has problems with illegal ATV use, Yudichak said the park could turn ATV use into “a regulated industry.”

Pennsylvania ranks second, behind Texas, in the number of annual ATV purchases, Yudichak said.

“It’s an enormous industry,” he said.

The state provided \$100,000 to the South Valley Partnership to fund the plan, Yudichak said. The Nanticoke Area Development Corporation, donated \$30,000, and PNC Bank donated \$5,000, Yudichak said.

4/28/2006

South Valley strategic plan unveiled

BY ELIZABETH SKRAPITS STAFF WRITER

More parking and green space, but fewer paved areas. More recreational opportunities and new and better places to shop and eat. Update the bus routes, fix the sidewalks, and put in some hiking trails.

Those were a few of the suggestions in the South Valley comprehensive strategic plan presented to the public Thursday night by Alex Belavitz, president of Facility Design & Development Ltd., and project manager Larry Radel. The architectural and planning firm was commissioned to come up with the plan by the South Valley Partnership, which consists of Newport and Plymouth townships and Nanticoke City.

The firm spent two years studying the communities. They worked out possible solutions to the communities’ problems, and came up with a plan that included specific suggestions for Wanamie and Glen Lyon in Newport Township, downtown Nanticoke, and the West Nanticoke section of Plymouth Township.

During the presentation, the approximately 80 people who filled the lecture room at Luzerne County Community College sat quietly, taking everything in. Afterwards, many stuck around to talk about what they had seen and heard. Some signed up to get involved in upcoming steps of the planning process, as state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, urged people to do.

Glen Lyon resident Janine Floryshak particularly liked the recreational opportunities in the plan.

“I don’t think enough emphasis is ever put on recreation,” she said.

Her husband, John Floryshak, liked the idea of turning old railroad beds into bike and hiking trails.

Their friends Chester Mack and Mark Kamionka, also of Glen Lyon, were a little more cynical. Asked if he was impressed with the South Valley’s plan, Kamionka said, “Not yet.”

A proposed all-terrain vehicle park in Glen Lyon sparked the most discussion among Newport Township residents. Yudichak said a regulated park would not only help stop the vehicles from being an illegal nuisance in residential areas, it would spur economic development. Pennsylvania is

second only to Texas in number of ATV owners, he said.

And, Yudichak added in response to a concerned resident's query, hunting would still be allowed in the ATV park.

4/27/2006

Distressed status for Nanticoke nears

The city's stagnant tax base and debt burden are cited by state official during public hearing.

By mbuffer@leader.net

The city is moving closer toward becoming eligible for the state's Act 47 relief program as a financially distressed community.

At the end of Wednesday's public hearing on the city's bleak financial picture, a state official recommended the city be declared financially distressed for numerous reasons, including a stagnant tax base, a declining and aging population and an overwhelming debt burden.

Dean Fernsler, policy manager for the Governor's Center for Local Government Services, announced the staff recommendation, which was outlined in a 14-page report.

Fred Reddig, executive director of the Governor's Center for Local Government Services, was in charge of Wednesday's hearing and will make a recommendation to state Department of Community and Economic Development Secretary Dennis Yablosky after reviewing hearing testimony and the staff report.

Yablosky must decide in 30 days if Nanticoke is eligible for Act 47 relief. Under the state program, the state partners with municipalities, providing oversight and offering loans and grants.

According to Fernsler, the city violated state law by borrowing \$1 million in 2004 without court approval. Court approval was needed because the money was used to pay off short-term loans from 2001 and 2003 that were supposed to be paid off in 12 months when anticipated revenue was collected.

During Wednesday's hearing, Robert Sabatini, a city consultant with Keystone Municipal Services, said the city has failed to comply with legal requirements. But when Reddig asked Sabatini to elaborate, Sabatini said he would share the information "off the record."

Solicitor Joe Lach said disclosing that information in public could lead to challenges to overturn city actions. After the hearing, Reddig said he wants to learn more about city failures to comply with legal requirements.

In recent years, the city covered deficits with unfunded debt borrowing, Fernsler said. More than 10 percent of the city's budget is earmarked for debt payments, which is a warning sign of fiscal stress, Fernsler said.

Since 2001, the city has run deficits that total more than \$2.4 million. The city passed a balanced budget in December, but the city is now projected to spend almost \$3.8 million and take in almost \$3.2 million in revenue.

No one during Wednesday's public hearing opposed the city's application for Act 47 relief. Hank Marks, president of the Greater Nanticoke Taxpayers Forum, said Act 47 "is the only option."

The city could run out of money to pay employees and bills by August or September, Councilman William O'Malley testified.

According to the city's Act 47 application, the city "has neither the financial resources ... nor the administrative capacity to effectively implement sufficient operational changes" that would lead to a reduction of "persistent structural deficits."

In its application, the city says it "has several poorly negotiated collective bargaining agreements that did not appear to be evaluated for financial impacts." The union agreements do not include layoff clauses, officials said.

Last year, the city paid a total of \$1.4 million in wages to 67 employees, including part-time employees, according to city records. The city paid 41 employees more than \$10,000 last year.

City revenues have been stagnant, and revenue rates are at their maximum amounts. The city property tax rate is 60.38 mills, which is expected to yield \$475,000 in revenue. A mill is a \$1 tax on every \$1,000 of assessed property value.

WHAT'S NEXT

In the next 30 days, state Department of Community and Economic Development Secretary Dennis Yablosky will decide if Nanticoke is a financially distressed community eligible for Act 47 relief. If the city is eligible, the department would have another 30 days to appoint a recovery coordinator, who would work with the city and develop a relief plan.

4/23/2006

Imagine Nanticoke with a revitalized downtown along Market Street, featuring new and renovated buildings, a community theater and a new town center.

BY ELIZABETH SKRAPITS STAFF WRITER

Imagine a riverside park, boat launch and hiking trail to Tilbury Knob in Plymouth Township.

Imagine an all-terrain vehicle park, a residential and industrial complex, and refurbished historical buildings in Newport Township.

All these suggestions and more are included in a recently completed strategic plan for Nanticoke, Newport Township and Plymouth Township.

The three South Valley Partnership member communities hope to bring many plan elements—which will require millions of dollars in public and private funding—to reality over the next several years.

The plan will be unveiled to the public at Luzerne County Community College in Nanticoke on Thursday at 6:30 p.m.

"If people in the South Valley don't come out for this—this is something that's going to affect the next 10 years—they're missing the boat,"

Nanticoke municipal authority chairman Richard Butler said. "This is probably the most important meeting residents can go to."

Plymouth Township was declared financially distressed by the state in July 2004, and Nanticoke, facing a \$2.8 million projected deficit, is also seeking state aid.

Newport Township doesn't have the same debt load, but with rising expenses and limited revenue, all three municipalities are facing similar problems. The three communities need to work together to better their economic circumstances, said state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, a proponent of the South Valley Partnership's efforts.

The planning and architectural firm Facility Design & Development Ltd., which has offices in Scranton, Wilkes-Barre, New York and State College, has been collecting data about the South Valley since mid-2004.

The firm's goals were to get an idea of what exists in the communities and to lay out guidelines for better commercial and residential development, more attractive downtown areas, and sensible long-term growth.

The \$135,000 planning project revitalize was financed through state grants, a donation from PNC Bank and by the Nanticoke Area Development Corporation, a local non-profit organization.

REACTIONS

Elected officials had a sneak preview of the strategic plan at Luzerne County Community College last Tuesday.

Plymouth Township supervisors were unable to attend the meeting, but have been supportive from the beginning, said Joe Lach, solicitor for Plymouth Township and Nanticoke and South Valley Partnership spokesman.

The plan sparked discussion among Newport Township officials, commissioner John Zyla said.

The two most important concepts for the township are Whitney Pointe, a residential and commercial development, and a proposed all-terrain vehicle park, Zyla said.

"I think that's going to be a good thing. As long as that's patrolled and licensed, that can generate revenue for the township," Zyla said of the ATV park. "We have ATVs riding up and down the road. They're all over the place. If we could get them in an isolated area with a buffer zone, it would be good for the riders and good for the residents."

Whitney Pointe, developed by Ken Pollack on the site of the former Dan Flood Industrial Park, contains a commercial site in Nanticoke and a residential site in Newport Township. It is expected to start with 10 or 15 homes, then expand to 30 or 40, Zyla said.

"I believe Whitney Pointe is really going to take off. That's going to be our start," Zyla said. "Plus we like the idea of the new homes—we have the most land for development."

Nanticoke Mayor John Bushko likes the idea of making Market Street the city's main thoroughfare.

Nanticoke councilman Jim Litchkofski is impressed with the research and vision that went into the plan, combined with "a healthy dose of common sense." He called the idea of turning the historic bank building on Main Street into a theater or culinary institute in conjunction with LCCC "fabulous."

"One of the things I liked most was trying to pull LCCC further into the community. It's an island right now," Litchkofski said.

WHY THE PLAN IS IMPORTANT

"Sustainable growth" is a phrase Alex Belavitz uses frequently.

"A vacant old building is depressing. A vacant new building is demoralizing," said Belavitz, president of Facility Design & Development Ltd. "You don't fix it with one brand-new office building on Main Street. You fix it with sensible revitalization efforts.

"That's why the strategic plan is not just about putting up pretty streetlights and nice new buildings," he said. Visual improvements make a downtown appealing. A community has to be clean and perceived as safe. It also needs easy accessibility and convenient parking, he said. A friendly, appealing environment attracts retailers, developers and consumers, who infuse the community with more tax money for additional improvements.

Progressive communities nationwide are always reinvesting in themselves, Belavitz said. For example, communities like Jim Thorpe and Bethlehem have character and charm that indoor malls don't, he said.

The trouble is, cities like Nanticoke were built up around a much larger population in the booming coal mining days. The population is now around 10,000, about a third of what it was at its peak. The city no longer has the tax base, but still has the infrastructure to maintain.

As a result, "If a developer knocks on the door, we're happy to roll out the red carpet and let them build whatever they want, wherever they want," Yudichak said.

"When commercial (development) came into Nanticoke, instead of saying, 'here's where you can go,' we said, 'where do you want to go?'" Butler said.

Sometimes officials are so focused on trying to lure large employers with hundreds of jobs that smaller businesses can fall under the radar, Yudichak said.

Corbett Insurance was looking for land to start an office in Nanticoke, he said. There was no inventory of available space, no plan for development, and no guide to determine the best places for particular types of businesses.

Fortunately, there was an available lot on Market Street that was once home to a convenience store, but it was by chance the agency found the location, Yudichak said. It just underlined the need for a comprehensive plan.

"It's been a point of frustration that even well-intentioned people don't have a fund of information for making good decisions," Lach said. "This plan provides that fund."

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

The South Valley plan provides a blueprint for the recovery effort, but it is a long-term vision and will involve small steps to bring it to life.

The plan is comprehensive, optimistic and rooted in economic recovery, Belavitz said.

"The community didn't get into the shape it's in now overnight, and it's not going to reform itself overnight. It went through several decades of decline, and it will take several decades to get back," he said.

"A plan's no good if it just sits in the closet. Now it's up to us and the other municipalities to implement it," Nanticoke councilman Bill O'Malley said.

"I just wish it would happen sooner instead of later," Zyla said.

4/22/2006

Loss of HealthNow hurts Dallas and Nanticoke

By Elizabeth Skrapits

The loss of HealthNow and the more than 200 jobs it provided has had a negative effect on two communities: Dallas Borough and Nanticoke City.

The loss of HealthNow and the more than 200 jobs it provided has had a negative effect on two communities: Dallas Borough and Nanticoke City. The Buffalo, N.Y. based Medicare claims processing company recently announced it was closing down operations at the Twin Stacks Center in Dallas at the end of June because it lost a renewal bid for a \$58 million government contract. "We are sorry to see HealthNow go. They were wonderful to deal with from the beginning straight through to the end," said attorney Lynn Banta, Twin Stacks owner.

"The Back Mountain will work a long time to bring back 200 jobs as good as those were."

HealthNow leased 30,000 square feet of the 100,000 square-foot commercial building Banta and her husband Richard Haas constructed from the former Natona Mills textile plant in 1999.

The closing of HealthNow might have an effect on Back Mountain shops and restaurants patronized by its employees. It will definitely mean a loss of tax revenue to Dallas Borough, including the \$52 emergency and municipal services tax each employee paid.

"I don't know what the financial fallout is going to be, but I know it's going to have a negative impact on our budget," said Dallas Borough Council president John Oliver Jr. "I assume it will be something that will get our attention."

Another company, with 50 employees and possibly more to come, is interested in renting approximately 11,000 square feet at Twin Stacks, Banta said.

"We'll fill the space. We're very fortunate here. We've always been over 90 percent full. But we won't replace 200 jobs," she said.

The loss of HealthNow was a blow to Nanticoke City last October, when the firm moved to Route 415 in Dallas from East Main Street, leaving 28,000 square feet of the 32,000 square-foot Kanjorski Center vacant.

Nanticoke officials understood the appeal of the Dallas location.

The Back Mountain is a growth area, as opposed to the South Valley, Nanticoke General Municipal Authority chairman Richard Butler said. And at Twin Stacks, there are amenities such as a restaurant, childcare facility, gym, and medical services, he said.

"They have a lot to offer. We don't have that," Butler said.

The Kanjorski Center doesn't even have adequate parking, although it is closer to Interstate 81 and other major highways than Twin Stacks, Butler noted.

Authority members are considering options for the Kanjorski Center, which still lacks a main tenant nearly six months later.

The authority is going broke without the \$32,000 monthly rent from HealthNow.

The municipal authority board will talk about dividing the Kanjorski Center into smaller office space during the regular meeting Monday, Butler said. There is a \$15,000 grant av

ailable specifically for the building, which will help, he said.

Also on Monday's agenda is the hiring of one of two commercial real estate firms to show interest in marketing the building: Lewith and Freeman and Mericle Commercial Real Estate.

"It'll be turned over to a company to market. That's definite," Butler said. "Once we get it filled, we can turn around and market it for sale. I don't think anyone's going to be interested in it empty."

4/20/2006

Nanticoke officials disagree about personnel

BY ELIZABETH SKRAPITS STAFF WRITER

City officials clashed over hirings and firings during their work session Thursday night.

The meeting was held one day after the city announced the firings of city administrator Greg Gulick and street commissioner Paul Ushinski. Tax office employee Karen Wolfe was given two weeks' notice she would be laid off.

Council and Mayor John Bushko installed a financial administrator a few months ago, and plan to revamp the street department with a new supervisor with more responsibilities and a new public works garage.

Bushko and council say the personnel changes made and to come will help the city in the long run, despite its bad financial condition.

Nanticoke is running a \$200,000 deficit so far this year. The deficit is expected to grow to \$799,000 by the end of the year, Councilman Bill O'Malley said. The city has \$2.8 million total debt overall. Lack of management, no fiscal control, and accounts that didn't balance were among the reasons for it, O'Malley said.

In response to an attack by tax collector Al Wytoshek, O'Malley defended hiring Tony Margelewicz for the newly created position of financial administrator at a salary of \$30,000. O'Malley said although the position was not budgeted for, cost savings in other areas paid for it. The city expects to save \$79,000 by changing health insurance providers and found \$700,000 in extra tax revenues not collected for three years, O'Malley said.

"It's unthinkable there was no accounting system. That's why we're financially distressed," O'Malley said. "An organization of this size does not succeed without fiscal input."

Besides improving efficiency and making the departments more cost-effective, O'Malley said council and the mayor want to change the management system to keep political influence out.

Council and Bushko plan to advertise for a street department supervisor to replace Ushinski. The new street department head will have additional administrative responsibilities, such as preparing the annual budget, performing inventories, and drawing up maintenance schedules for roads and parks, O'Malley said.

The decision to fire Ushinski, Gulick and furlough Wolfe was made in executive session two weeks ago, at which only council, Bushko, Solicitor Joe Lach were allowed to be present. They did not give reasons for firing Gulick and Ushinski, but said Wolfe had to be laid off because there were too many people in the tax office.

Wytoshek argued with council over Wolfe's furlough, claiming he was kept out of the process.

Lach said while it would have been more courteous for Bushko and council to inform Wytoshek they planned to let Wolfe go, they were not required to do so.

4/20/2006

Secret talk of firings criticized

A state newspaper organization sees the Sunshine Act violated.

By mbuffer@leader.net

City officials violated the state Sunshine Act by discussing the termination of the city administrator and two other employees in an April 5 closed session, according to Pennsylvania Newspaper Association attorney Teri Henning.

City officials needed to notify the three employees that matters involving their employment would be discussed in the closed session, and the employees were not allowed to request an open meeting, Henning said.

At Wednesday's city council meeting, council and Mayor John Bushko approved the dismissal of City Administrator Greg Gulick, street commissioner Paul Ushinski and tax clerk Karen Wolfe.

But officials actually told the employees about the dismissals on Tuesday, and during Wednesday's meeting, council members Joe Dougherty and William O'Malley argued what the vote was on April 5.

"It was a unanimous vote on the dismissals," O'Malley insisted.

Dougherty responded he opposed Gulick's dismissal on April 5, and Dougherty voted against Wednesday's motion to affirm all three dismissals. The Sunshine Act is the state statute that requires meetings by public bodies be held in public with limited exceptions.

The act says, "In all meetings of agencies, the vote of each member who actually votes on any resolution, rule, order, regulation, ordinance or the setting of official policy must be publicly cast and, in the case of roll call votes, recorded.

Solicitor Joe Lach said there was "less-than-clear communication between the mayor, council and myself" during the April 5 closed session that the dismissals would be made public at Wednesday's meeting.

Lach said he was not aware the Sunshine Act allows employees to request an open meeting. He said the April 5 session was closed to protect employee rights, noting some comments were "unflattering."

Officials didn't give a reason for firing Gulick and Ushinski. Wolfe was being dismissed because the Treasurer's Office didn't need a fourth employee and Wolfe had the least amount of seniority, officials said.

Tax collector Albert Wytoshek objected Wednesday and said city officials were acting like "Gestapo agents." He said he should have been informed of Wolfe's dismissal.

Gulick was replaced as the city's top administrator in February when council hired Anthony Margelewicz as city clerk and fiscal manager. Gulick said Bushko dismissed him Tuesday.

"He just told me I was not in their future plans," said Gulick, who was a paid \$41,994 last year.

City officials on Wednesday discussed plans to replace Ushinski, who was paid \$24,743 last year. Wolfe's yearly salary was about \$16,000, Bushko said.

More personnel changes could be coming because of the city's financial problems, officials said. The state has scheduled a public hearing on April 26 to determine if the city qualifies for Act 47 relief as a financially-distressed community.

4/19/2006

Nanticoke officials fire two, lay off third

BY ELIZABETH SKRAPITS STAFF WRITER

Nanticoke's council and mayor say terminating two employees and laying off a third was a necessary move, but another official believes it was political.

Mayor John Bushko and council terminated the employment of city administrator Greg Gulick and street commissioner Paul Ushinski, effective Tuesday, and gave tax office employee Karen Wolfe two weeks notice she would be laid off.

Officials did not give reasons for the termination of Gulick and Ushinski, saying it was a personnel matter. Councilman Bill O'Malley suggested the city's financial condition had something to do with it and more staff shake-ups are expected in the near future.

"The layoffs are naturally because of the financial status and efficiency reports we looked at for the departments," O'Malley said.

Tax collector Albert Wytoshek didn't buy the explanation.

"It's political revenge. When they took office in January, they threw me out of the loop because they said I had a big mouth," Wytoshek said.

"They're saying it's economy. That's a pile of hogwash."

Bushko said Wytoshek was not involved in executive sessions where the layoffs were discussed because the private meetings were only between mayor and council, who are exclusively responsible for hiring and firing under the city code.

“Leaving him out of the loop — with what? He can give input at any time,” Bushko said of Wytoshek. “We don’t exclude anybody, really.” Gulick, formerly an Ashley Borough councilman for 18 years, was hired by Nanticoke in February 2003 to replace Richard Muessig. The city administrator’s job includes obtaining grants and overseeing day-to-day operations.

The announcement that he was being terminated came as a surprise to Gulick.

“I asked why, and was told I wasn’t part of their future plans. That was it,” he said. “I packed up my desk, packed up my pictures and stuff, and went home.”

Gulick was not a union member, nor was Ushinski, because he was management. The other seven men on the Nanticoke street department belong to a union, as do the three tax office employees.

Wolfe, the most recent hire of the three, was with the office for about three years. Bushko and O’Malley said when Luzerne County started collecting its own taxes last year, there was one-third less work for Nanticoke’s tax office.

“Her layoff had absolutely nothing to do with her work history or performance,” O’Malley said of Wolfe. “She was probably one of the best workers we had, but we had to go by seniority.”

The state Early Intervention team, hired in early 2005 to help Nanticoke with growing financial troubles, said there were too many people in the tax office, Bushko said.

The previous mayor and council were supposed to lay Wolfe off, but when an extra \$10,000 turned up in the budget, she was kept on for the rest of 2005, Bushko said.

“Sooner or later it had to come,” Bushko said, adding, “Karen would be an asset to anybody that hires her. She did do a great job.”

Wytoshek said there is still a lot of work to do in the tax office, and he wants Wolfe back. He would also like to move his office out of the city building, alleging it was a “hostile environment.”

“There’s nothing political about this. It’s just the way things worked out,” Bushko said. “I can understand (Wytoshek’s) position. He’s trying to protect his workers, and I give him credit for that. But it wasn’t done to slap anybody around or anything like that.”

Asked whether he thought his termination was political, Gulick replied, “I can’t say it is, because I don’t know who’s going to replace me.”

Ushinski’s position will be advertised, O’Malley said, but Bushko said he wants to wait to hire someone to replace Gulick.

4/15/2006

For some, there’s no taste like home

Nanticoke Out-of-town shoppers return to the Valley for holiday foods

BY ROBERT KALINOWSKI STAFF WRITER

Angela Gorka Jones moved out of Nanticoke in 1951, but her appetite for the city’s signature foods never faded.

For more than 50 years, the upstate New York woman has returned to her hometown to complete her holiday food shopping.

At least twice a year — usually prior to Easter and Christmas — she makes the four-hour, 205-mile trip from Waterloo, N.Y., to stock up on homemade pierogies, kielbasa, candy and baked goods from several longtime family-owned businesses.

“I just love the things I can’t get at home. I don’t visit anyone. I just come, do my shopping and leave,” Jones said Friday afternoon amid her Nanticoke shopping spree while enjoying a lunch of pierogies and potato pancakes at Nardozzo’s Pizza on East Main Street. “The town has changed, but the food is the same — the traditional Polish food.”

Though the 79-year-old retired Spanish teacher made her pre-holiday trips by herself for decades, on Friday, like the past few years, she was accompanied by her daughter, Karen Moretti, 47, and 16-year-old granddaughter, Molly Moretti.

Their first stop was [Sanitary Bakery](#) on East Ridge Street, where they picked up several nut and poppy seed rolls and danishes. They next visited Park Market on East Broad Street for several rings of kielbasa, “Mom and Pop” pierogies, and a ham before dropping by next-door to Diamond’s Candy Shop for Easter treats to give to family and friends. Before lunch at Nardozzo’s — where they also got pierogies and potato pancakes to take back to New York — they canvassed two grocery stores for Easter dinner food, especially some items only sold locally.

Apparently many others share Jones affinity for the Nanticoke holiday delicacies. Each of the places she visited on Good Friday boasted long lines of people from throughout the Wyoming Valley and even others from out of state waiting to pick up their orders.

“For me, my whole Easter shopping, food-wise, is done in Nanticoke. It’s all the things I remembered my whole life — things I can’t get at home,” Jones said. “These are the same places my parents went to and took me to.”

In Waterloo and its surrounding areas in upstate New York, the only option for pierogies is the “Mrs. T’s” frozen variety. There are homemade candy shops, only stores that sell boxed sweets. Nut and poppy seed rolls are unheard of in any of the bakeries and there’s nowhere to get fresh kielbasa; stores only carry the packaged variety, Jones said.

Jones’ granddaughter, Molly, said she’s enjoyed returning to Nanticoke ever since the first time her grandmother took her shopping at Diamond’s Candy Shop prior to Easter several years ago.

“It was weird walking into a store and seeing the candy I got my whole life on Easter,” Molly said. “I thought it was from the Easter Bunny.”

Her grandmother’s occasional shopping trips to Nanticoke also made her believe early in life that the ethnic food was the norm around the country.

“Growing up I thought everyone ate pierogies until I mentioned it to my friends and they were like, ‘What is that?’” Molly said.

Molly’s mother, Karen, said she’s glad her daughter is learning about the family traditions.

“Nanticoke was part of my whole life too. We came to these places all the time,” said Karen, who remembers shopping at all the same places when she visited her grandparents when she was a youngster. “It’s part of our family history. It wouldn’t be Easter without this. It makes it special.”

4/14/2006

Nanticoke senior housing project aiding revitalization

BY ELIZABETH SKRAPITS STAFF WRITER

To city officials, the wooden skeleton rising from abandoned mine land is a sign of hope that financially troubled Nanticoke can eventually achieve its goal of revitalization.

"This is evidence that Nanticoke is going to come back," Councilman James Litchkofski said during a tour of the Lexington Village construction site Thursday.

When finished, Lexington Village will consist of a 55-unit senior independent living complex including a recreation center and a 66-bed Alzheimer's facility that will employ approximately 75 people. The development, located on 12.5 acres of former strip mine land down Koskiusko Street from Luzerne County Community College, is the largest new revenue-producing construction project the city has seen in years, officials said. "I think it's a good step for Nanticoke," Litchkofski said to his fellow Councilman Brent Makarczyk.

"I think it's a shot in the arm," Mayor John Bushko added, surveying the builders' progress. "This is all taxable, too."

State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, estimates the development will generate more than half a million dollars annually in economic impact for the city.

Work on the first independent living units is under way; the Alzheimer's unit will come later. The two parts of the project will cost a total of \$13 million, all privately funded, developer Dominic Ortolani said.

The only government money involved is approximately \$260,000 in state funding obtained through Yudichak and state Sen. Raphael Musto, D-Pittston. That grant went to reclaim the land, which was badly scarred from strip-mining.

"Looking back over a number of years, you'd never think this could be developed," Musto said. Behind him, workers from site contractor Stell Enterprises drove heavy machinery around the wooden skeletons of the first independent-living units.

Filling in the mine pits and making it level enough to build on took a long time.

"We had to move so much dirt it was amazing," Ortolani recalled.

Then construction was stalled when a prior contractor launched a lawsuit, which has been dismissed by Luzerne County court, Ortolani said.

"I was nervous for a while, because it seemed (Ortolani) kept hitting roadblocks," Bushko said.

"In this business, delay is the nature of the beast," Ortolani said. "Look at Wilkes-Barre."

The building contractor, Hanover Homes North, architect Robert Lack, and Ortolani hope to have the first housing units ready to move in by the end of summer, if the weather holds. There is already a list of people who have signed up for the independent living units, which will rent for \$900 a month. They are going to be about 1,000 square feet apiece, each with its own garage and porch, Ortolani said.

"I think the Alzheimer's unit will be filled before it is built. The need is there," Musto said.

4/14/2006

Nanticoke seeks cash from fire companies

Being considered are closing firehouses and making volunteer companies pay.

By mbuffer@leader.net

City officials are looking to save money by either closing some firehouses or getting volunteer companies to pay utilities at city-owned firehouses. Councilman William O'Malley said the utility cost is about \$10,000 a year at the Stickney, Washington and Hanover firehouses. Three weeks ago, O'Malley suggested the three volunteer companies at those pay the cash-strapped city for utilities.

This week, O'Malley said the city could close those firehouses and relocate Nanticoke's nonprofit ambulance service to one of the firehouses. The ambulance company is based at fire headquarters on Ridge Street.

The city fire department is a combination department with paid city workers and volunteers. Seven volunteer fire companies operate out of five fire stations, four of which are city owned.

Headquarters is staffed 24 hours per day, 7 days per week by 10 city employees. Last year, the city paid 10 full-time fire department employees a total of \$379,460 in wages.

Because of financial problems, the city has applied to be a financially distressed community under the Act 47 relief program.

The state has scheduled a public hearing for **April 26** to determine if the city qualifies for Act 47 relief. Under Act 47, the state partners with municipalities, providing oversight and offering loans and grants to aid in fiscal recovery.

4/13/2006

Nanticoke shopping for new health plan

By mbuffer@leader.net

City officials are looking to see if the cash-strapped city can save money on health care benefits.

The city is seeking offers to find a policy that's less expensive than its policy with First Priority, said Councilman William O'Malley. The city pays \$31,000 a month on health benefits, O'Malley said.

The city provides health insurance for 36 employees and 15 retirees, Fiscal Manager Anthony Margelewicz said.

The city pays health premiums without contributions from beneficiaries, but that could soon change, O'Malley said.

The city has applied to be a financially distressed community under the Act 47 relief program, and the state will probably want the city to demand employee contributions for health care coverage, O'Malley said.

But changes in the city's health care coverage must be approved by unions because health care coverage is part of collective bargaining agreements, O'Malley said.

The state has scheduled a public hearing for April 26 to determine if the city qualifies for the Act 47 relief program. Under the Act 47, the state partners with municipalities, providing oversight and offering loans and grants to aid in fiscal recovery.

4/13/2006

GNA chief unsure of retirement

Tony Perrone announced his retirement in 2002 but has remained superintendent.

By kwernowsky@leader.net

When quizzed by a member of the meeting audience Wednesday whether he was ready to finally start his retirement, Greater Nanticoke Area Superintendent Tony Perrone remained quiet.

Perrone originally announced his retirement in May 2002 and agreed to come back for at least one year and serve as superintendent without pay as he collects his pension. That was four years ago.

The 64-year-old Perrone began his career as a Spanish teacher in the district in 1963 and became the superintendent in 1996.

Board member Jeff Kozlofski ribbed Perrone Wednesday night, asking whether he would continue to act as the superintendent to which Perrone replied, "There's still a lot of work to be done."

Kozlofski said the board has looked at a host of applications for the position but added that no serious search has been conducted to find Perrone's replacement.

The school district is expected to restructure several administrative positions within the district and Perrone's guidance and experience is needed during the process, Kozlofski added.

"There are major changes in administration that I really can't go into details about," Kozlofski said, and didn't elaborate.

In other business:

- The board approved its \$12,636 contribution to the Luzerne Intermediate Unit.
- The second reading of an anti-bullying policy was unanimously approved. The board will vote to give final approval to the measure meant to clarify the procedure dealing with incidents involving bullies at next month's meeting.

4/11/2006

Nanticoke authority, city officials working together on revitalization

BY ELIZABETH SKRAPITS STAFF WRITER

Municipal authority board members were feeling positive about downtown revitalization after a closed-door meeting with the developer Monday. "I'm really upbeat about the city. I think things are going to take off," authority Solicitor Richard Hughes said.

Impact PA principal Robert Yoder, who is in charge of East Main Street redevelopment, sat down with the authority and other city officials in executive session for some serious talk about what's happening with the project.

Although limited in information they could give, board members said Yoder will continue work on plans for retail and housing space to be constructed on East Main Street, next to the Kanjorski Center. Ultimately, new construction depends on what the South Valley Partnership's comprehensive plan suggests for downtown Nanticoke, board chairman Richard Butler said.

Alex Belavitz, a municipal planner hired by the non-profit community development group, recently completed a comprehensive plan for Nanticoke and Newport and Plymouth townships. It will be unveiled in two weeks. The board asked Yoder to get in touch with Belavitz about the plan.

A \$1.5 million federal Economic Development Agency grant slated for the construction project is definitely being returned, Butler said. The grant specifically requires the construction of office space, and, with the Kanjorski Center 80 percent empty, the board does not believe more is needed. Yoder was also told to come up with plans for a parking garage for the Kanjorski Center. Its size will be based on the needs of new tenants, but the authority is eager to get started on the garage, Butler said. He estimated it could be completed within a year.

The authority will select one of the two bidders, Mericle Commercial Real Estate or Lewith and Freeman realtors, as exclusive marketer for the Kanjorski Center. Yoder was working on finding tenants and has a few possibilities, but he has agreed to the hiring of a professional real estate firm, Hughes said.

The municipal authority is still thinking about cutting up the building into smaller office spaces, but will wait to hear what the firm suggests, Butler said.

No decisions were made during the executive session, Hughes said. The municipal authority will discuss and vote on all the issues at its April 24 regular session.

Monday was the first time the new board met Yoder, who was hired by the previous authority board last year. Part of the problem was what Butler called a "communication breakdown," which he said has been cleared up.

Another notable occurrence was that after years of strained relationships between elected and appointed officials, they put aside their differences and agreed on plans. In addition to the municipal authority board, Mayor John Bushko, Councilman Bill O'Malley, Nanticoke Redevelopment Authority chairman Walter Sokolowski, and South Valley Partnership spokesman Joe Lach attended the executive session.

"What should thrill everyone is we're working together for the first time," Butler said.

4/11/2006

Nanticoke, developer make deal

Municipal authority and Impact Pennsylvania agree on plan, including a parking lot.

By mbuffer@leader.net

After meeting behind closed doors with the city's redevelopment consultant, city officials said Monday the downtown renewal project should begin to move forward soon.

City officials were not pleased with the \$23 million plan unveiled by developer Impact Pennsylvania on Jan. 14, and they complained that Impact owner Robert Yoder has been inaccessible.

But according to the chairman and solicitor of the city General Municipal Authority, Yoder and authority members on Monday agreed to a modified plan involving a new parking garage, which would be east of the Kanjorski Center on Main Street.

"I am very excited now," said Dennis Butler, chairman of the General Municipal Authority.

In January, Impact proposed spending \$7.7 million from federal transportation grants on a 324-vehicle parking garage. Butler said Monday that project details, such as the size and cost of the parking garage, will be disclosed April 24 at an authority meeting.

Also Monday, authority members officially rejected an offer for a \$1.5 million federal grant because of a requirement that the money be spent building 54,000 square feet in downtown office space.

The authority has been struggling to lease space in the 32,000-square-foot Kanjorski Center, which has been almost 88 percent empty since HealthNow, a Medicare claims processing company, relocated in October to Dallas.

Without HealthNow as the Kanjorski Center's anchor tenant, the authority lost \$33,000 in monthly revenue and is going broke.

Officials say a new parking garage would help attract tenants for the Kanjorski Center, and authority members on Monday said they plan to hire Lewith & Freeman Real Estate on April 24 as a real estate agent. Lewith & Freeman will help the authority sell the Kanjorski Center or lease space in it.

Hiring a real estate agent doesn't violate the authority's contract with Impact, which still plans to help find businesses to locate in the downtown, authority Solicitor Richard Hughes said. The authority voted to hire Impact last May.

Butler said Yoder agreed that the new downtown plan will be consistent with a development plan from the South Valley Partnership, which is interested in economic development in Nanticoke, Plymouth Township and Newport Township. The South Valley plan should be disclosed in a few weeks, Hughes said.

The closed meeting with Yoder lasted about two hours, officials said. Hughes said the meeting could legally be closed to the public because it involved a discussion of "leasing matters."

Walter Sokolowski, an aide to U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, attended the closed session. Kanjorski has secured funding for the downtown and has been a booster of Impact's plans.

Sokolowski also is a member of the city redevelopment authority, which is a partner of the municipal authority on the downtown project.

More details on the Nanticoke redevelopment project are expected to be disclosed April 24, at a meeting of the Nanticoke General Municipal Authority.

4/9/2006

Berlot to be honored as Woman of The Year by Woman's Club

The Wyoming Valley Woman's Club will meet Tuesday at Genetti Hotel & Conference Center in Wilkes-Barre with Ann MacFarland presiding. Lyndall Stout of WBRE-TV Channel 28 will be the main speaker and will be introduced by Rose Marie Panzitta. Chairperson Dorris J. Merrill will introduce the **Wyoming Valley Woman of The Year 2006, Alma Berlot of Nanticoke.**

Berlot is known as the coalminer's daughter for her dedicated work in spearheading the drive for the coalminer's statue dedicated last year at the corner of East Main and Kosciuszko streets. She is now involved with getting a stamp honoring the coalminers for their courage and bravery.

Berlot's father, Ed Salvatore, was killed in the mines. After her mother, Elizabeth Tulli, was killed one Christmas by a drunken driver, Berlot, organized a talent group of children and young adults to entertain nursing homes, veterans, etc., and called the group Make Someone Happy.

She received many awards from Clarks Summit and White Haven for her work with the mentally challenged and the Special Olympics.

For 10 years she worked as a practical nurse taking care of Alzheimer's patients.

Berlot is the wife of Alvin Berlot and the mother of four children: Dr. Alvin Berlot, attorney Melissa McCafferty, Gina Bunchalk, RNBSRN, and Madonna Trombetta, RN, now works for a fashion institute.

This award is given each year by the Wyoming Valley Woman's Club to any nominee for her outstanding contributions to the Wyoming Valley. Any members of the club may submit names and resumes of persons that fit these criteria.

4/7/2006

Nanticoke sets public hearing regarding its financial status

BY ELIZABETH SKRAPITS STAFF WRITER

Nanticoke officials are scheduling a public hearing to give the state reasons why it should declare the city financially distressed.

The hearing, which is the latest step in the application process for Act 47 status, will be held in the municipal building at 15 E. Ridge St. at 7 p.m. on April 26, council said at Wednesday's meeting.

Council and Mayor John Bushko unanimously voted on March 1 to apply to the state Department of Community and Economic Development for Act 47 status, after a presentation by Councilman Bill O'Malley.

The city's financial outlook is bad, with a projected \$2.8 million deficit, flat revenues and rising expenses, and the possibility of being unable to pay basic costs like salaries by September. Under Act 47, the city hires a financial recovery coordinator to map out a way to fiscal stability, and the state

helps with grants and loans.

Nanticoke's neighbor across the Susquehanna River, Plymouth Township, received Act 47 status in July 2004. Prior to that, its board of supervisors gave state officials evidence of the township's stagnant tax base, shredded credit rating, and more than \$800,000 debt.

Nanticoke officials will also have to present testimony and evidence to the state during the April 26 hearing, which members of the public are encouraged to attend.

In other business, council hired Andy Kratz and George Pavelitz as building inspectors. They will start as temporary independent contractors, later to become official city employees, O'Malley said. Kratz also serves as building inspector for Wilkes-Barre Township.

Sgt. Kevin Grevera was made detective captain. He will still be on patrol until the city can hire more officers, Bushko said. Officers Joe Guydosh and Mike Roke were promoted to sergeant.

"This way on every shift you'll have a senior guy in charge," Bushko said.

The three will get 50-cent an hour raises, "which isn't going to kill us at this point," Bushko said.

4/6/2006

Nanticoke debt-relief program hearing set

Meeting to determine if the city qualifies as financially distressed under Act 47 will be on April 26.

By mbuffer@leader.net

The state has scheduled an April 26 public hearing to determine if the city qualifies as a financially distressed community in the Act 47 relief program, Councilman William O'Malley said during Wednesday's city council meeting.

Under the Act 47 program, the state partners with municipalities, providing oversight and offering loans and grants.

Last month, Mayor John Bushko and city council applied for Act 47 help. The city is projected to run out of money to pay employees and bills by August.

City revenues have been stagnant, and revenue rates are at their maximum amounts. The city could raise its property tax rate with court approval, but the city would need a 465 percent property tax increase to balance its budget this year, O'Malley said last month.

If the city enters the Act 47 program, the state would hire a plan coordinator to work with the city and develop a relief plan. The city would have to approve the Act 47 relief plan.

Also at Wednesday's meeting, Bushko and the council voted to hire Andrew Kratz and George Pavelitz as code enforcement officers. City leaders hired them as temporary independent contractors.

They will be paid hourly rates for each job assigned to them, and their pay will be based on a schedule of rates for various tasks, officials said. The pay schedule was not disclosed.

Kratz wants to work as a city employee, not as an independent contractor, so he would be covered by the city's liability insurance policy, Fiscal Manager Anthony Margelewicz said. But Kratz wasn't hired as an employee after O'Malley said he wanted more time to research the financial effect of adding him as an employee.

Solicitor Joe Lach said the city's insurance policy would cover Kratz and Pavelitz as independent contractors if the city indemnified them.

Margelewicz said he wasn't sure that the city's insurance policy would allow that.

Also Wednesday, city leaders adopted a personnel policy. O'Malley said the city had no personnel policies in place.

He said terms of collective bargaining agreements would prevail if they conflicted with terms in the new personnel policy. The personnel policy will likely be amended as the city goes through the Act 47 process, O'Malley said.

Last year, the city paid a total of \$1.4 million in wages to 67 employees, including part-time employees, according to city records. The city paid 41 employees more than \$10,000 last year.

City council approved a balanced \$3.5 million budget in December, but an analysis of the city finances showed the city is on course to spend \$3.9 million this year and take in \$3.1 in revenue.

The city property tax rate is 60.38 mills, which is expected to yield \$475,000 in revenue. A mill is a \$1 tax on every \$1,000 of assessed property value.

4/1/2006

Nanticoke General Municipal Authority board members, upset with the developer of an East Main Street project, will speak to him next month before deciding if he should be fired.

Developer Robert Yoder, of the Turbotville-based Yoder Group, did not meet with the current municipal authority board or submit detailed plans for a new commercial building which may be financed, in part, with a \$1.5 million federal Economic Development Administration grant.

The municipal authority wants to return the grant in light of increasing evidence that the office space it is meant to build would not be appropriate for downtown Nanticoke. However, Yoder, hired last May by the previous authority, contradicted the board's wishes by speaking with federal officials in Philadelphia about keeping the grant.

"It's my understanding that Mr. Yoder had conversations with EDA indicating that he believes the project should go forward," authority solicitor Dick Hughes said.

Authority board members are unwilling to construct a 54,000-square-foot office building when the 28,000-square-foot Kanjorski Center next to the project site is mostly vacant. During its most recent meeting, which Yoder did not attend, the board asked Hughes to tell the EDA the authority might return the grant in two weeks, depending on what a forthcoming regional plan suggests for downtown Nanticoke.

South Valley Partnership principal Joseph Lach said the comprehensive plan of Nanticoke and Newport and Plymouth townships was completed Thursday and should be made public before long.

State Rep. John Yudichak, who previewed the plan, said it indicates the project is wrong for the city's downtown.

"It is beyond any concept of rational development," he said. "There are questions that have to be asked, other studies that have to be completed." In addition, the \$1.5 million grant has a 70 percent match, meaning the nearly bankrupt municipal authority would have to come up with \$3.5 million, Yudichak said.

Authority chairman Richard Butler was angry that Yoder did not speak to the board, his employer, before going to the federal agency. Board members are also frustrated at Yoder's failure to meet with the authority or show any concrete plans, documents, or drawings for the East Main Street redevelopment project.

"The prudent thing to do is wait until we meet with him. The emotional thing to do is fire him right now," Butler said, referring to Yoder. "He's had a year and there are no plans drawn up."

The only time authority members saw anything from Yoder's firm was when his representative brought basic site plans to a Jan. 14 public meeting. Board member Ron Kamowski said Yoder hasn't submitted any plans to the EDA.

Hughes spoke with Yoder, who is willing to get together with the board, possibly at its April 10 work session.

"The municipal authority will be meeting with Mr. Yoder to hear his opinions concerning the project so it can weigh properly the varying views and come up with a prudent decision about this grant," Hughes said. "If somebody has a good reason why we should build the building, we need to hear it. We can't make a well-reasoned decision without hearing all the facts."

3/30/2006

No license to loiter

Following complaints, Nanticoke police target teens loitering near school.

By kwernowsky@leader.net

"I don't see why you should just get fined for standing on the street on your way to school."

Joe Armstrong Greater Nanticoke Area High School student

Standing on the sidewalk with friends near Noble Street, Joe Armstrong smoked a cigarette and watched as police rolled up and told them to move along.

Armstrong, a Greater Nanticoke Area High School student, says if he smokes on school grounds he'll be suspended.

Now if he and other students hang around on the sidewalks and alleyways adjacent to the school they might get a ticket that could cost them \$300 or more. Several of Armstrong's friends were cited in the city's recent crackdown on loitering on neighboring side streets.

"I don't see why you should just get fined for standing on the street on your way to school," the 17-year-old wondered.

Some who live near the school say it goes beyond standing around smoking cigarettes. Fed-up residents say the congregation of the occasionally unruly students damage property, litter and use drugs in public view in the minutes leading up to the school day.

City council passed a resolution in October to erect several signs citing a law that refers to blocking public passageways. At least six signs are posted along Kosciuszko Street and several side streets and alleys where the students regularly hang out.

"Well, I don't think (students) should be hanging around on the sidewalks," said Kosciuszko Street resident Helen Shipkowski, who complained of litter and cigarette butts. "But for some time they've been hanging in the back of my garage and on the corner in the mornings and sometimes in the afternoon."

Nanticoke police began a crackdown in recent months on students they say have been warned not to block the alleys and sidewalks. Police issued more than 20 tickets, according to Capt. William Schultz. Six citations issued on March 7 included \$279.50 in fines and court costs each.

High school Principal Maryann Jarolen said she also contacted police to keep students off the grounds after school hours.

"You know how kids are; they don't hang out the right way," she said. "We kind of requested help when neighbors began asking for help about the noise and trash."

Schultz and another fellow officer said the recent enforcement of the passageway law has nothing to do with a man appointed to the city council in January who happens to live near the school.

"I could show you hundreds of complaints over the years from neighbors complaining about property damage. This is a way to try to help them move along," said Sgt. Kevin Grevera. "Some students are obstinate and belligerent and fail to comply."

Councilman William O'Malley lives at the corner of Kosciuszko and Ridge streets. He said that last year students ripped up his fence and that fights, smoking, drug use, property damage, litter and profanity are just some of the problems he sees and hears.

"The big problem is they don't move for the cars," O'Malley said. "They're loud, they're obnoxious and from what I gather, they're smoking and using illegal substances in plain view."

"My wife leaves to take my son up to school in the morning, she opens the garage door and she politely asked a bunch of kids to move, and she gets about 500 various obscenities thrown at her."

Schultz said the signs were put in place in October under former Mayor John Toole's administration. O'Malley wasn't seated on the council until earlier this year when he was appointed by current Mayor John Bushko.

Phyllis Stamile is the grandmother and guardian of a student recently ticketed for standing around after she dropped him off for school on March 7. She understands that officials shouldn't allow kids to hang about, but complained that the cost of the offense is too high.

"My beef isn't that they got the tickets, it's the cost that these people have to pay," Stamile said. "It's absolutely ridiculous. It's pathetic for Nanticoke to make this money off of these kids. There's going to be a lot of angry parents when they get these tickets."

Schultz said the summary offense carries a sliding-scale fine of up to \$300 that is set by a district judge. He said police have no role in how much those ticketed pay.

3/29/2006

**Authority wants developer to attend meeting
As downtown project languishes, members wait to hear from Yoder.**

By mbuffer@leader.net

Upset with how the city's downtown redevelopment project has not progressed, members of the city General Municipal Authority have asked developer Robert Yoder to attend the next authority meeting.

Yoder owns Impact Pa., which has proposed a \$23 million plan to redevelop the downtown.

Authority members don't support Impact's entire plan, but they want to build a new parking garage, which could attract new tenants in the authority-run Kanjorski Center on Main Street.

"We have got to get moving on the downtown," Authority Chairman Dennis Butler said at Monday's authority meeting.

Butler said he hasn't heard from Yoder since contacting him more than a week ago.

"Ten days is a little long ... 24/48 hours I should have a response," Butler said.

According to Butler, Yoder, of Turbotville, Pa., claimed he had found an unnamed anchor tenant willing to fill the vacant space in the Kanjorski Center. But on Monday, the authority proceeded with plans to divide the empty space in the Kanjorski Center for multiple tenants.

Yoder could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

The 32,000-square-foot Kanjorski Center has been almost 88 percent empty since HealthNow, a Medicare claims processing company, relocated last October to Dallas. With the center's anchor tenant gone, the authority is going broke, having lost \$33,000 in monthly income.

U.S. Rep. Paul E. Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, urged authority members to support Impact's \$23 million plan at a Jan. 14 meeting, claiming they could spend "free money" from federal grants he helped secure.

On Tuesday, Kanjorski issued a statement on the downtown situation.

"Since HealthNow left the Kanjorski Center and then lost its federal contract, Nanticoke faces both challenges and opportunities. I have obtained millions of dollars of federal funds to help revitalize Nanticoke, but ultimately it is up to the elected and appointed officials of Nanticoke to proceed on a plan to lead to the betterment of the city," Kanjorski said.

Authority members have said they were willing to lose a \$1.5 million federal grant because of a requirement that the money be spent building 54,000 square feet in downtown office space. They noted they are already struggling to find tenants for the Kanjorski Center.

Impact has proposed spending \$7.7 million from federal transportation grants on a 324-vehicle parking garage by the Kanjorski Center.

Last fall, contractors demolished three buildings on Main Street to make room for an office building and parking garage, but the project hasn't developed since.

Since 1998, Yoder has contributed \$1,000 to Kanjorski's campaign committee.

3/28/2006

**Nanticoke authority may return \$1.5 M
Federal grant earmarked to expand city center that's mostly vacant**

By Elizabeth Skrapits

The city's general municipal authority board wants to give up a \$1.5 million grant the previous board worked to keep.

The municipal authority is on the verge of going broke, and its board members are frustrated because they can't fill existing office space and the developer of the East Main Street project - which the grant is for - hasn't shown any concrete plans and isn't cooperating. That is why on Monday the board discussed returning the \$1.5 million to the federal Economic Development Agency.

The grant was secured several years ago to expand the Kanjorski Center, but plans fell through. Last year the previous authority board, afraid of losing the grant, fought for permission to use it toward construction of a new commercial and residential building on East Main Street, next to the Kanjorski Center. Under the terms of the grant, the authority must build a 54,000 square-foot office building that would create 100 jobs.

A March 23 letter from the EDA's regional office in Philadelphia expressed doubts that the project could be completed by the September 2007 deadline, solicitor Dick Hughes said. Board members agreed. By terminating the grant voluntarily instead of having it taken away, the authority has a better chance of being able to apply for other grants when the need arises, board president Richard Butler said.

One of the main problems with constructing a new building is that the Kanjorski Center has been 80 percent vacant since its main tenant moved out at the end of October, and the authority has not been able to find a replacement. With only \$4,800 a month coming in from the remaining tenant, \$19,000 in its accounts and \$14,000 in bills due, the authority has "a month and a half of life left," Butler said.

"Is there anyone here who would consider building a 54,000 square foot office building to go along with an empty 28,000 square foot office building?" he asked the other authority members, who did not.

The board opted to have Hughes contact the EDA to see if the agency would be willing to wait two weeks before the board decides whether to return the grant. That gives the consultant the South Valley Partnership hired an opportunity to unveil his economic development plan for Nanticoke, South Valley principal Joe Lach said.

He added that it was unlikely the consultant would say the city needs the new office building, but it was better for the authority to make informed decisions.

The developer of the East Main Street project, Impact PA and its affiliate the Yoder Group, has not submitted specific plans for the new building or

for marketing the Kanjorski Center, which it is solely responsible for under its contract. Although two commercial real estate firms made offers to market the Center, the authority can't hire either one until it gets a legal opinion on whether to do so would violate the contract, Butler said. The developer also hasn't shown any plans for a \$7 million parking garage for the Center, which the authority has other grants for and wants to move ahead with.

Butler said he has been having difficulty getting responses from Yoder Group principal Robert Yoder. The board asked Hughes write Yoder a letter asking him to come in person to the authority's next meeting.

3/28/2006

**City's OT pay adds to its budget woes EXCLUSIVE
Extra wages for 30 employees totaled \$115,635 in 2005.**

By mbuffer@leader.net

The cash-strapped city paid 30 employees a total of \$115,635 in overtime wages in 2005, adding to its financial woes.

According to city records, about 55 percent of last year's overtime pay went to the police department, with 13 police employees earning a total of \$64,015 in overtime pay.

City Councilman William O'Malley says overtime costs have contributed to the city's budgetary problems, forcing the city to apply for financially distressed status under the state's Act 47 relief program.

Employees receive overtime pay – time-and-a-half their regular hourly pay – whenever they work more than 40 hours in a week.

About 8 percent of the city's \$1.4 million in salaries went to pay overtime. City leaders are trying to reduce overtime costs by improving staffing levels and paying overtime only for necessary government tasks.

Mayor John Bushko says police overtime is costing too much. Overtime in 2005 equated to 11 percent of the police department's \$581,372 wage total.

The city has budgeted \$45,000 for police overtime this year, and Bushko wants to reduce police overtime by hiring more officers.

"We need to hire. We're short," Bushko said at the March 15 council meeting.

The police department has three vacancies for officers, and has been understaffed for more than three years, said police Chief James Cheshinski.

"Money has always been an issue," Cheshinski said. "The issue has been whether it's cheaper to hire or pay the overtime."

Cheshinski said injured officers out on disability have also pumped up police overtime costs.

"Sometimes we were down five officers," he said. "Mayor Bushko also realizes the fact you can't overwork the men, either."

The 13 police employees, all of whom earned overtime in 2005, include the chief, an administrative assistant, a captain, a sergeant and nine officers.

O'Malley said overtime costs for the police and fire departments were justified because of understaffing.

However, O'Malley called the street department's overtime excessive and "a total nightmare."

The city paid six street department employees a total of \$166,140 in 2005, with five department employees earning a total of \$21,602 in overtime pay. Overtime represented 13 percent of the department's wage total.

Last year, street worker Walter Paveletz was paid \$9,115 in overtime pay – the most of the city's 67 employees. Overtime bumped his 2005 wages from \$30,900 to \$40,015.

Councilman James Litchkofski has overseen the street department since his council term began in January. He said overtime in the department this year has been minimal because elected officials are more involved in authorizing overtime and because there was little snowfall over the mild winter.

The city paid 10 full-time fire department employees a total of \$379,460 in wages, with nine employees earning an additional \$17,907 in total overtime or 5 percent of the department's wage total.

Last year, the city also paid three sewer department employees a total of \$94,948 in wages, with the three employees earning \$12,109 in total overtime. It was almost 13 percent of the department's total.

The city employee paid the most last year was Cheshinski, who earned \$50,874, with \$893 in overtime and \$1,127 in holiday pay.

Unlike other municipalities, Nanticoke's police and fire chiefs receive overtime and holiday pay because they are covered under union contracts.

Fire Chief Michael Bohan was the highest-paid employee in the fire department, earning a total of \$45,483.17, with \$516 in overtime and \$2,312 in holiday pay.

Last year, the city paid 20 employees, including 12 police and six fire employees, more than \$40,000. The two others were Paveletz and City Administrator Greg Gulick, who was paid a salary of \$41,994.

The city paid 41 employees more than \$10,000. Part-time employees who earned less than \$10,000 include the mayor, who was paid \$2,500 last year, and the five city council members, who were paid \$2,400.

Bushko was elected last November, replacing John Toole as mayor in January. Bushko vacated his seat on city council, and O'Malley was appointed to fill Bushko's seat on council.

3/26/2006

The Greater Nanticoke Area Youth Drug Task Force has been keeping busy with various projects. They continue to work on their new recreation center and meeting place located inside the Stickney Fire House on Prospect Street.

Don Williams tells me adults and students have been busy cleaning and painting and are just waiting for some fire equipment to be moved. "We are looking forward to utilizing the ground floor for recreation. Our members now total more than 100, so we really need the space," Williams said. The upstairs has been transformed into a comfortable meeting place. A computer lab will allow for tutoring and homework help. A new SAT

computer program also has been installed. "The place is really going to benefit a lot of Nanticoke kids," said James Samselski, Youth Task Force adult leader.

With the increased membership and additional programming comes the need for more adult volunteers.

Samselski is asking adults who might be interested in volunteering their time to call the center. Help is needed Monday through Friday from 6 to 9 p.m.

"We will work out a schedule that fits the adult's hectic schedule," he added.

On March 7, members of the task force were invited to Tunkhannock High School to support students' efforts in starting a new youth task force program. "We really had a great showing on the part of our kids," offered Williams. "When students support other students, good things happen."

On March 23, members of the task force enjoyed a day of roller skating at Skate-a-Way in Wilkes-Barre. Students continue to practice for a play that will take a look at a drug addict's life, past and present.

The task force also is holding a hoagie sale to raise money to benefit a youth group at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, Miss. Their facility was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. "Our youth know how difficult it is to get a program up and running and then maintain it," Williams added.

Frank Vandermark, who took over as president of the task force, knew of the Biloxi group and the youth decided they wanted to help an organization that has common goals.

Hoagies will be available April 2 and can be picked up at the Honey Pot Hose Company. Contact any member of the task force or call 762-4009 to order.

3/24/2006

Nanticoke board leery of loan cost

Municipal authority fears paying \$442 a month would help empty its treasury.

By mbuffer@leader.net

The city's general municipal authority has asked the state to reconsider a request that the authority pay a monthly interest charge of \$442 to service a 1994 loan used to build the Kanjorski Center.

The authority owes \$271,000 from its \$900,000 loan provided by the state Department of Community and Economic Development, said department spokesman Kevin Ortiz.

The authority stopped making payments on the loan in November after the center's anchor tenant relocated to Dallas, leaving the 32,000-square-foot building 88 percent empty.

The authority lost \$33,000 in monthly income with the departure of HealthNow, a New York-based Medicare claims processing company.

Before HealthNow's departure, the authority paid the state \$6,261 a month – \$5,819 on the principal and \$442 in interest, Ortiz said. The state is allowing the authority to skip payments from November to April, but is requiring an interest payment beginning in May.

Authority Chairman Dennis Butler said paying the interest would "just speed up" the draining of the authority's coffers. The authority's fund balance is less than \$30,000, and it is on course to run out of money by the summer, officials say.

Authority members want to postpone all loan payments until they find another tenant for the Kanjorski Center or a new source of revenue.

"We'll review their request," Ortiz said.

Authority members have talked to representatives of two real estate companies interested in helping the authority sell the Kanjorski Center or rent space in it. The state Department of Labor and Industry, the Kanjorski Center's only tenant, pays \$4,800 a month in rent and has 12 employees in approximately 12.5 percent of the building.

Authority members may subdivide the empty space in the Kanjorski Center for multiple tenants. But developer Robert Yoder said he might have found a new anchor tenant to fill the vacant space, Butler said.

Yoder is owner of Impact Pennsylvania Inc., which has proposed spending \$7.7 million from federal transportation grants on a 324-vehicle parking garage by the Kanjorski Center. Yoder could not be reached for comment Thursday.

If the authority runs out of money, the city would be on the hook to pay the authority's bills and obligations, Butler said.

The city has financial difficulties of its own and has applied for financially distressed status under the state's Act 47 recovery program whereby the state would partner with the city and provide oversight and additional funding.

3/22/2006

Nanticoke asks residents' advice to rehab city

By mbuffer@leader.net

The city and its General Municipal Authority are going broke, and city leaders are urging citizens to attend and participate at meetings to offer their suggestions to revitalize the city.

"People need to get involved in this town if they want to see this city grow," authority Chairman Dennis Butler said at a recent authority meeting.

The only people who attended last week's authority meeting and didn't participate were a reporter and city Solicitor Joe Lach.

At the last city council meeting, Lach noted the low attendance at the March 13 authority meeting.

"It's an important part of the city's governance," Lach said.

Lach said the municipal authority could play in key role in revitalizing the city by creating new jobs and expanding the tax base.

The authority is reviewing a \$23 million proposal to redevelop the downtown, which includes \$7.7 million proposal to build a new parking garage.

But the authority is going broke because bills to operate the Kanjorski Center on Main Street exceed the body's revenue.

The authority lost \$33,000 in monthly income last fall when HealthNow, a New York-based Medicare claims processing company, relocated to

Dallas, leaving the 32,000-square-foot Kanjorski Center 88 percent empty.

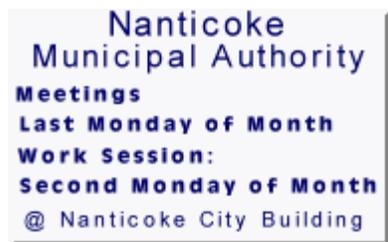
The city is also facing financial problems and is projected to run out of money to pay employees and bills by August. Mayor John Bushko and city council have applied for financially distressed status under the state's Act 47 recovery program.

Under the Act 47 program, the state partners with municipalities, providing oversight and offering loans and grants.

About 100 people attended the city council meeting on March 1 when officials had a presentation on the city's financial problems. Attendance at last Wednesday's council meeting was about 20.

If the city enters the Act 47 program, the state would hire a plan coordinator to work with the city and develop a relief plan. The city would have to approve the Act 47 relief plan.

Municipal authority members have talked to representatives of real estate companies interested in helping the authority sell the Kanjorski Center or lease space in it. State and federal grants, rental income and a possible sale of the Kanjorski Center could fund efforts to redevelop the downtown.



Sound of Music' most satisfying

Mailbag Letters From Readers - Times Leader

By: Alma Berlot

Bravo, bravo, to the cast and wonderful directors, musical, technical and lighting for a superb presentation of "The Sound of Music."

As my husband, Alvin, and I sat and watched the performance, we both had commented on the scenery which was not backdrops, but wonderful designing done by Bruce Phair, who always accomplishes a marvelous, realistic effect.

I had wondered before the show how he would do the scene in the abbey garden. Believe me, he accomplished the huge tombstone with a cross very effectively.

The production directed by Karen and husband Bruce Phair was done expertly. The nuns were a great plus because it showed the talent of many a student who sang beautifully. The children portraying the von Trapp children were always in full character and were excellent, depicting the difficult time spent on teaching. Everyone played their roles to perfection.

As I was watching the show very attentively, my eyes moved to the right to see Nancy Evans, musical director, really directing the show with vim and vigor, enjoying every moment with pride and sincerity.

Nanticoke should be proud of wonderful people like Karen and Bruce Phair, who give our children a cause to show their wonderful talents and expertise. Nancy Evans also is a great asset to our community and we would like to thank everyone including the melodious orchestra for a job well done.

3/18/2006

Nanticoke authority hopes for big renter

By: Elizabeth Skrapits Staff Writer

The possibility of snagging a major tenant for the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street could put plans to divide the building on hold.

The Nanticoke General Municipal Authority board, nearly broke and anxious to get tenants for the large Main Street building, considered cutting it into smaller offices to make it appealing to smaller businesses. The Kanjorski Center is approximately 32,000 square feet, 28,000 of which have been vacant since its main tenant, HealthNow, moved out in October 2005. Municipal authority president Richard Butler said he met with Robert Yoder - the developer in charge of the authority's East Main Street redevelopment project - who said he has a potential tenant interested in all the available space. Yoder will let the authority know more in about two weeks, Butler said. Two firms, Mericle Commercial Real Estate Services and Lewith and Freeman, gave presentations to the municipal authority at its work session Monday, Butler said. The authority is considering hiring a firm to market the Kanjorski Center if Yoder's tenant falls through. It might even sell the building outright. "We're hoping to find out something from Yoder before we lock in with them, because it would save us a considerable amount of commission," municipal authority member Ron Kamowski said. "But I still have a gut feeling that even if we get a tenant, we're probably going to be dealing with a realtor to keep it on the market for sale." The authority's board will discuss the matter further at the March 27 meeting. The board must do something about the Kanjorski Center soon because the municipal authority's bank accounts have been drying up since it lost \$32,000 in monthly rent from HealthNow. The \$4,800 monthly rent from the state Department of Labor and Industry - the only tenant in the center - isn't enough to pay utilities and maintenance. "The water's up to our nose," Butler said.

3/16/2006

Nanticoke takes another step toward distressed city status

By mbuffer@leader.net

City leaders on Wednesday reaffirmed a vote to apply for financially-distressed status under the state's Act 47 recovery program. Mayor John Bushko and city council members unanimously voted two weeks ago to apply for Act 47 relief, and on Wednesday, they approved a resolution that will be included in the city's Act 47 application. The state Department of Community and Economic Development will receive the application by tomorrow and schedule a hearing on the city's application in 30 to 45 days, Solicitor Joe Lack said. Under the Act 47 program, the state partners with municipalities, providing oversight and offering loans and grants. Nanticoke officials want state help because the city is projected to run out of money to pay employees and bills by August. City council approved a balanced \$3.5 million budget in December, but a financial review shows the city is on course to spend \$3.8 million this year and take in \$3.1 in revenue. City revenues have been stagnant, and revenue rates are at maximum amounts. Also at Wednesday's meeting, Councilman Jim Litchkofski said the city has agreed to buy a new computer software program that will detail street work and improve productivity and accountability. It will cost \$100 a month. Councilman William O'Malley discussed a new purchasing policy that would expand the role of Fiscal Manager Anthony Margelewicz in approving purchases. City officials also said they want to see if they can buy lids for recycling containers because strong winds have been blowing over residents' containers and creating a mess in streets. City Administrator Greg Gulick said the city would need to buy about 6,000 lids.

3/16/2006

**GNA official hurt in food fight
Superintendent slipped while trying to stop 'disorderly conduct' in the cafeteria.**

By kknapek@leader.net

Greater Nanticoke Area superintendent Tony Perrone was injured Wednesday after slipping and falling trying to stop a food fight at the high school cafeteria, according to police. Officer Michael Roke said Nanticoke police were called to the high school at 11:50 a.m. for "some disorderly conduct in the cafeteria area, some sort of food fight." "Mr. Perrone was somehow injured, I believe he slipped and fell and hit his head," Roke said. Roke said he was told by officer Brian Kata that Perrone was taken to the hospital. High school principal MaryAnn Jarolen, though, said Perrone was not hospitalized and went home after the incident. Perrone did not return phone calls seeking comment. Officers Joseph Kosch and Kata responded to the incident, Roke said, but had not completed their official report as of early Wednesday evening. Roke said he was not sure if any students were arrested, but that "there could be some charges pending." Jarolen said there are video cameras in the cafeteria and that she saw the incident, which involved juniors and seniors. She said some students involved might be suspended. Jarolen said that chili, mashed potatoes and chocolate pudding were served at lunch. She joked that "if they would have served carrot sticks and someone threw one, there wouldn't have been an incident."

3/14/2006

**Real estate firms may aid authority
But chairman says developer has found anchor tenant for Nanticoke's Kanjorski Center.**

By mbuffer@leader.net

Two members of the city General Municipal Authority on Monday talked to representatives from two real estate companies interested in helping the authority sell the Kanjorski Center or lease space in it. Without a new tenant in the 32,000-square-foot Kanjorski Center, the authority could go broke by June, authority Chairman Dennis Butler said. The authority manages the Kanjorski Center, which is 87.5 percent vacant because HealthNow, a New York-based Medicare claims processing company, relocated to Dallas in the fall. Representatives from Mericle Commercial Real Estate Services and Lewith & Freeman Real Estate attended Monday's authority meeting. The authority could hire one of the firms at the next authority meeting on March 27. Authority members have discussed subdividing the Kanjorski Center for multiple tenants, but Impact Pennsylvania Inc., the city's exclusive downtown developer, may have found a new anchor tenant to fill all the vacant space, Butler said Monday. Impact owner Robert Yoder hopes to get a commitment from a prospective tenant in two weeks, Butler said. Impact has proposed spending \$7.7 million from federal transportation grants on a 324-vehicle parking garage by the Kanjorski Center. Authority members have said they want a smaller, less-expensive facility. Butler said Monday he would be willing to build a downtown parking garage if grant money could be set aside for operational costs. Butler is concerned the authority won't be able to pay bills associated with a new parking garage. HealthNow's departure cost the authority \$33,000 in monthly income. The authority's fund balance has dropped from almost \$40,000 in January to less than \$30,000, officials said last month. The state Department of Labor and Industry, the Kanjorski Center's only tenant, has agreed to stay for another nine months, officials reported

Monday. The department pays \$4,800 a month in rent, and has 12 employees in approximately 12.5 percent of the building.

3/13/2006

Nanticoke had, could have, many good old days

Editor: of Citizens' Voice

Sooner or later, after many years of distress and confusion and just plain old hard times, I feel this community is going to band together and develop a plan more geared towards a long-lost "quality of life feeling."

Did your parents or grandparents ever tell you about how they left their doors unlocked during the day or windows open at night for that fresh air flowing through the house? How your neighbors knew every move the kids made and didn't fear the children or each other.

Walking to the Hanover Mall for some Renna's Pizza or hanging out by Ruminski's store or skating every weekend at L.S.

We, as mid-lifers even had a little taste of that. The concerts and other sporting events at the Armory. Hanging out in front of Burger King. The scents of pizza on every corner or some lobster and fries at Shipp's Inn.

I sure do miss the Blue Bird or the how about the Kove? Thank God the pizza's still the same ... and most in the same families we all grew up with.

Even some new welcomed newcomers. It hurt to see Y.T.'s go and all our money now going to the big box companies. That sucked.

I got the good feeling when I saw a renewed interest in the downtown area by small businesses. Support them.

If you are going to buy it anyway, see what they can offer and keep the money here.

There's this cool coffee shop a few yards from my house that turns into a pizza parlor late in the afternoon. Good food, conversation, and very reasonable.

We have excellent hairdressers and barbers in town ... and a new guy by the park.

Speaking of the park, how about the quality of meats at the Park Market. And you're torn between them and going up over Main Street to Jerry's Market. And if you go to Jerry's, you get hit with the smell of Geroch's Hoagies. I could probably eat at a different spot every day and it would take a month or so to visit every shop or restaurant or tavern.

Hey Green Streets, when are those Jonah crabs coming in again? Gingi's bringing some cool entertainment and another place to chill on the weekends. And that's only in town.

How about some chocolate from Diamond's?

I also get the pleasure of visiting our brother and sister communities of Hanover section, Alden, Glen Lyon, West Nanticoke, and Plymouth and visiting their shops and eateries.

How about the girl's basketball team, or the girl's softball team or any of the men's teams. Quality coaches and good family minded individuals.

We go out and field teams and fight regardless. That my friends, is the coal-miner mentality. We still fight.

Speaking of fighting, how about that group of friends and neighbors that kicked some tail in Iraq! How about our public servants? We have an excellent police force right now. And I'd like to see eight more of them instead of a \$24 million parking garage.

Sorry. Think the firemen need anything? Sure they do.

Fix the roads, beef up the public servant sector and make this one of those communities people rush to, to get away from it all. It's not as crazy as it sounds. Market ourselves as one of those places to be. And please, don't regionalize the police force. Every community everywhere should be afforded the funds to field a police force capable of full-time coverage.

John W. Krzywicki, Jr., Nanticoke

3/12/2006

Nanticoke Area Notes

By: Pamela Urbanski

Children who attend Head Start in Nanticoke and Shickshinny were a little warmer this winter thanks to some Nanticoke residents who have big hearts and nimble fingers.

Bernadine Aciukewicz spearheaded the project of knitting and crocheting hats, scarves and mittens for area kids. "It was brought to my attention that some of the kids might need some wintertime accessories," said Bernadine. She made a few phone calls to some friends and ladies from the Mercy Special Care Auxiliary. It wasn't long before the kids were wearing some new winter fashions. Helen Shipkowski is one of the knitters. She lives close to the Nanticoke schools. She hates it when she sees a young person without a hat, gloves or scarf and does something about it.

"Many times I will stop them and give them something warm to wear. They tell me they left it at home, but I tell them they need it right now," she says with a gentle laugh. "It's worth it to see the big smile on their faces."

She is retired now and doesn't want to sit around. "I want to keep busy and do some good."

The ladies also create beautiful lap robes for residents at Guardian Elder Care Center, Birchwood, Hampton House and the Villa and Mercy Special Care Hospital.

I know my Aunt Stella Lazur who recently passed away, loved to crochet for a good cause. "It really is wonderful that so many take time to think of others," offers Bernadine.

This is an ongoing project and Bernadine is looking for others to donate yarn and knit and crotchet for the coming year. If you're interested, you can give her a call at 735-0112.

It's your last chance

Today is your last opportunity to see a great performance as the students of Greater Nanticoke Area present their annual spring musical, "The Sound of Music."

Karen Phair and her husband, Bruce, co-directors, have put together quite a cast of talented young people. Karen Evans is musical and choral director.

Capt. Georg Von Trapp, a retired officer of the Imperial Navy, played by Tom McGrady, hires Maria, a Austrian nun played by Amanda Prentiss, as governess/nanny to take care of his seven children.

The cast includes more than 50 students in grades one through 12.

The final performance is this afternoon at 2 at the high school auditorium. Admission is \$6.

Veterans enjoy St. Patrick's party

A St. Patrick's party was held last Friday at the American Legion home on Broad Street in Nanticoke. Loretta Chumura and Richard Hart chaired the event. It was open to the public, but some very special guests were also there.

Veterans from the Veterans Administration Medical Center joined the party. The Sons of the American Legion, Nanticoke Post 350, the Nanticoke Home Association and the Nanticoke Ladies Auxiliary Post 350 sponsored the event.

"Each year, we bring some of our veterans down for the day," said Loretta. "We want them to know how much we appreciate their service to our country. They have such a good time and they love to be out among people."

A Civic Pride poster contest

Hey kids, get out your crayons, markers and colored pencils.

The Nanticoke Civic Pride Committee is sponsoring a poster contest in recognition of Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful Month in April.

"We need your ideas on how to keep the City of Nanticoke beautiful," said Yvonne Bozinski, who is a member of the committee.

The contest is open to children 7 to 12 years of age. Deadline to enter is March 20. Posters will be on display at local businesses. Winners will receive cash prizes.

Entries can be dropped off or sent to the Civic Pride Committee at the Nanticoke Municipal Building at 15 Ridge St.

Spaghetti dinner at St. Francis

Well, it's that time of year for the annual spaghetti dinner sponsored by St. Francis Altar and Rosary Society. I can't wait to taste the homemade sauce and meatballs. The dinner will be held Sunday, March 19, at the parish center on East Green Street. Take-outs start at 11 a.m. and the sit-down dinner is from noon to 5 p.m. Cost is \$7.50 for adults and \$3.50 for children. Children under the age of 6 are free.

Call Andrea Josefowicz at 735-5381 or Gerri Wasiakowski at 735-2058 with any questions or to purchase tickets. Tickets are also available at the door.

Easter bingo in Newport Twp.

The Newport Township Women's Activity Group will hold its annual Easter bingo Sunday, March 19, at St. Adalbert's Hall on Market Street in Glen Lyon. Doors open at noon. Games begin at 1 p.m. An afternoon of food, fun and prizes is planned. Admission is \$1.

3/11/2006

Mom lauds GNA for anti-bully program

The school board recently unveiled a policy to head off and investigate the practice.

By badams@leader.net

A Pittston Area School District mother who had problems getting her district to implement an anti-bullying policy praised [Greater Nanticoke Area](#) on Friday for taking initial steps to do so.

The school board this week conducted the first reading of the proposed policy that identifies early warning signs of bullying and describes the process for investigating suspected incidents.

Monica Thomas of the national group Bully Police said having such a policy and implementing it won't prevent all bullying, but it can help decrease it. "I think it's great that Nanticoke's working on that."

The policy is not final and changes could be made before its adoption.

Thomas has said her son, Joey, has been the victim of bullies at Pittston Area and at the Wilkes-Barre Area Vocational-Technical School. She has asked the district to adopt the new policy and she and others are circulating petitions that they plan to present at a board meeting.

Greater Nanticoke grandfather Carl Salloga attended his district's board meeting last month. He said he was appalled at the district's inaction after several students bullied his ninth-grade grandson, who is 14. He said several boys attacked the boy and bruised him by kicking him with steel-toed shoes. He said he might have been targeted because he is shy and takes medication.

Salloga said his daughter, who is the boy's mother, called the high school on several occasions and left messages. Salloga said school officials did not call her back. He said she is selling her home and his grandson is attending school in another district.

Superintendent Tony Perrone has said the district knew the identity of the bullies and they would be dealt with. Thomas said she sent anti-bullying information to the district after learning of the incident.

The district's proposed anti-bullying policy says Greater Nanticoke will have "zero tolerance" of bullying and that anyone witnessing it has the obligation to report it to a staff member. The policy details the procedure to be followed, to include contacting parents of possible victims and witnesses before interviewing the children and asking for a written statement.

3/4/2006

Quad-type vehicles appearing on city streets

Nanticoke looks at ATV problem

By mbuffer@leader.net

Mayor John Bushko says he will see what police can do to stop people from driving all-terrain vehicles on city streets.

“The noise drives me nuts,” Bushko said at Wednesday’s city council meeting in response to a complaint about ATVs driven along the 1600 block of South Hanover Street.

Bushko says he has heard ATVs whizzing around alleys in the city at 2 and 3 a.m. on their way to and from strip mines. Teenagers are usually driving the vehicles, the mayor said.

According to the state vehicle code, ATVs may be operated only on streets and highways designated and posted as an ATV road by the government agency with jurisdiction over the road.

ATVs – also known as quads or four-wheelers – may cross a road under certain circumstances, and they may be operated on streets during declared emergencies or when it’s necessary to cross a bridge or culvert.

“The problem is they are so difficult to catch, unless you have a helicopter,” said District Judge Donald Whittaker, who handles civil and criminal matters in Nanticoke, the borough of Plymouth and the townships of Newport and Plymouth.

The state Game Commission in the past six months has issued numerous citations for ATV use on mine-scarred land owned by Earth Conservancy in Newport Township, but no citations have been issued for ATV use on streets, Whittaker said.

Bushko said the number of ATVs being driven on Nanticoke’s streets has been progressively rising over the years.

“Maybe we can put a cop up there (by South Hanover Street),” Bushko said.

During Wednesday’s council meeting, a city resident said he has seen unregistered ATVs illegally getting gas at local stations. State and local officials have not confirmed it is illegal to pump gas into an unregistered vehicle. Another city resident at Wednesday’s meeting said unregistered ATVs can be and should be confiscated.

All ATVs in Pennsylvania, except ATVs used solely for business or agricultural purposes, need to be registered and titled with the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

The state had 222,373 registered ATVs in 2005, up from 207,182 in 2004, according to Christina Novak, spokeswoman for the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The state acknowledges a problem with unregistered ATVs but doesn’t have any statistics on them, Novak said.

A child under 16 can drive an ATV on land owned or leased by a parent or guardian and on other land if the child has a valid safety certificate or is under the direct supervision of a certified instructor. A child under 8 is not eligible for a safety certificate and is prohibited from operating anywhere except private property.

At least four children under 16 have been killed in ATV accidents in Luzerne County since 1999.

3/2/2006

City officials voted unanimously Wednesday night to apply to the state for Act 47, or distressed city status.

BY ELIZABETH SKRAPITS STAFF WRITER

Council members and Mayor John Bushko made the decision after a presentation by councilman Bill O’Malley and financial advisor Bob Sabatini of Keystone Financial Services, showing the extent of the city’s fiscal troubles.

Nanticoke faces a projected \$2.8 million deficit, its revenues are flat and falling far behind expenses, and by September, the city will be unable to pay even for essentials like salaries and benefits, O’Malley told the roomful of residents.

An occasional muted whistle of surprise or murmured comment broke the silence as they listened to how the city took out loan after loan and dug deeper in debt over the years to the point it is now seeking state help to recover.

It was like making home mortgage payments with a credit card — someday you have to pay the credit card bill, and in the meantime, interest has accumulated, O’Malley explained.

“I think it’s going to be kind of hard to reduce the expenses, especially since we need police and fire protection, so it looks like we’re going to have to increase the revenue side,” resident Joe Modla said after the presentation. “I don’t like the idea of raising taxes, but if that’s what has to be done, so be it.”

Although Act 47 would allow the city to raise certain taxes, city officials don’t want to increase real estate tax, and they don’t intend to cut services to residents, O’Malley said.

Sabatini said Nanticoke fits enough criteria to qualify for distressed status, and, if officials apply now, they should hear from the state Department of Community and Economic Development by July whether the city was approved.

3/2/2006

Sparse attendance at meetings is frustrating general municipal authority board members who are looking for input from residents on downtown revitalization plans

BY ELIZABETH SKRAPITS STAFF WRITER

“Show up at meetings. Find out what’s going on. Bring ideas. Disagree with us and give us reasons why,” municipal authority board president Richard Dennis Butler urged after Monday’s meeting, which was attended by two residents.

With a \$23 million construction project in the works, a diverse new board looking for fresh ideas, and a city facing massive fiscal problems, the need for community input is more important than ever, authority members say.

“If we do something stupid and blow a bunch of money - it goes back to the city,” Butler said. “If Nanticoke wants to survive into the future, people have to get involved.”

The city can’t spare the money to pay for the results of bad decisions by the municipal authority. City officials, facing a projected \$2.8 million

deficit, are considering having Nanticoke declared financially distressed by the state.

Council and the mayor are planning a presentation on the city's financial condition for Wednesday at 7 p.m., which they hope residents will attend. The Turbotville-based construction company, Yoder Group, and its related consulting firm, Impact PA, were hired last May by the previous board to design and build a commercial and retail complex with a parking garage next to the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street.

Butler said he is meeting with the firm's principal, Robert Yoder, to make sure he understands the vision of the new board. The municipal authority wants the project to include residential space and other components specific to Nanticoke's needs, based on public input and market and population studies being performed.

"Either we can come up with a meeting of the minds and make this a happy marriage or it's going to be an ugly divorce," Butler said of Impact PA. Although board members want to hold the project until things are worked out, they would like to see work proceed on the parking garage. They say it's necessary for revitalization because there is no parking for the Kanjorski Center or the new construction planned around it.

Authority board members Ron Kamowski and Chester Beggs said they will meet with Cong. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, on the \$7.7 million in federal transportation money the congressman has obtained for the garage. The authority wants to know whether some of it can be set aside to pay for the garage's operating expenses, such as utilities and security, until new tenants can be found for the Kanjorski Center.

To make the 80-percent vacant center easier to lease, the authority wants to subdivide it. By cutting up the 28,000 square feet formerly rented by one company into smaller office spaces, it would be more likely to attract several tenants who will hold leases of different lengths, so the municipal authority will not be faced with the financial impact of losing one major tenant, Butler said.

3/1/2006

State won't control Nanticoke

An official clears up misconceptions about what declaring distressed city status would entail.

By mbuffer@leader.net

The state will not run Nanticoke if the city becomes a financially distressed community under the state's Act 47 recovery program, state and city officials say.

"There are a lot of myths – the state takes over, the state will fire people," said state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke.

Municipalities don't lose autonomy, but they can face sanctions if officials make unwise fiscal decisions that are inconsistent with adopted recovery plans, said Fred Reddig, executive director of the Governor's Center for Local Government Services.

Sanctions involve withholding state funding, and they have been imposed one time since Act 47 became law in 1987, Reddig said. The state imposed sanctions against Scranton in 1998 when Scranton approved two collective bargaining agreements inconsistent with its Act 47 plan, Reddig said.

Under the Act 47 program, the state partners with municipalities, providing oversight and offering loans and grants to prevent municipal bankruptcies, Reddig said.

"It's not a state bailout," Reddig said.

City officials plan to discuss Act 47 at tonight's city council meeting.

Councilman William O'Malley plans to give an hourlong presentation on city finances, Mayor John Bushko said.

"When we say we don't have any money, we're not kidding. It's there in black and white," Bushko said at the last council meeting on Feb. 15.

This week, Bushko said he doesn't think the city can avoid entering the Act 47 program. An \$800,000 deficit is projected for this year, and estimated deficits totaled \$1.8 million over the past three years.

In December, city council adopted a \$3.5 million budget. City revenues have been stagnant, and revenue rates are at their maximum amounts.

To enter the Act 47 program, the city must apply to the state Department of Community and Economic Development, which would conduct a public hearing on whether the city should enter the program, city Solicitor Joe Lach said.

If the city enters the program, the state would hire a plan coordinator after soliciting proposals, said Lach, who is a familiar with the process because he is also the solicitor for Plymouth Township, which has been in the program since 2004.

"The biggest rap Act 47 gets is people look at it as loss of local control. That's not totally accurate," Lach said.

The Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance is Plymouth Township's Act 47 plan coordinator.

Since Act 47 became law in 1987, 21 municipalities have entered the Act 47 program. West Hazleton has been in the program since 2003.

2/28/2006

Nanticoke authority reviews plan

Members want to discuss details of the downtown redevelopment project with consultant, Rep. Kanjorski.

By mbuffer@leader.net

Members of the city General Municipal Authority said Monday they plan to discuss their new vision for redeveloping the downtown with its consultant and U.S. Rep. Paul E. Kanjorski.

Impact Pennsylvania Inc., the city's exclusive downtown developer, has proposed a \$23 million redevelopment plan that includes expanding the Kanjorski Center on Main Street and building a parking garage facility with an additional 54,000 square feet in commercial space.

Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, has touted the proposal, which would spend \$7.7 million from federal transportation grants on a 324-vehicle parking garage.

Authority members said they want a smaller, less-expensive downtown project that will not result in more empty government-owned space. The authority is running out of money because the Kanjorski Center, a 32,000 square-foot government facility managed by the authority, is 87.5 percent

empty.

The authority's fund balance has dropped from almost \$40,000 in January to less than \$30,000, officials said Monday.

But not all the news from Monday's meeting was that bad. Officials disclosed that they had \$15,000 from unspent federal grant money that could be spent on improvements to the Kanjorski Center.

When HealthNow, a New York-based Medicare claims processing company, left the Kanjorski Center and relocated to Dallas in the fall, the authority lost \$33,000 in monthly income.

Authority Chairman Dennis Butler said the authority should divide the vacant space in the Kanjorski Center for multiple tenants because he doesn't believe the authority can find one tenant to fill the empty space. He said he plans to meet with Impact owner Robert Yoder and hopes Impact will figure out how to divide space in the Kanjorski Center at no additional charge.

Mayor John Bushko, a Yoder critic, said he doubts Impact will do that for no additional money. Last year, the five-member authority had four different board members, and they agreed to pay Impact \$75,000 and various percentages of redevelopment project costs.

Authority members Chet Beggs and Ron Kamowski said they plan to meet with Kanjorski to discuss how federal grant money can be spent on the downtown project.

At the next meeting on March 13, authority members plan to interview real estate company representatives interested in a contract to sell the Kanjorski Center or lease space in the building.

2/25/2006

At the Center of controversy in Nanticoke

Kanjorski building was supposed to help revitalize the downtown, now it stands practically empty

By mbuffer@leader.net

When the Kanjorski Center on Main Street opened in 1994, it was supposed to spark the revitalization of the downtown.

But today the center, barely a decade old, is quite empty – 87.5 percent empty. That vacuum has created a big headache for city officials trying to redevelop the downtown.

Of the building's 32,000 square feet, 28,000 square feet is tenantless.

HealthNow, a New York-based Medicare claims processing company that occupied the space, relocated to Dallas in the fall.

HealthNow's 200-plus workers and their desks are gone. The only things left behind are the dirt stains on the carpet.

The state Department of Labor and Industry is the Kanjorski Center's lone tenant, with 12 employees.

The Nanticoke General Municipal Authority manages the government facility, and without HealthNow, the authority is running out of money. The center's monthly bills exceed revenues by about \$7,500.

In 2005, the authority hired Impact Pennsylvania Inc. of Turbotville as the city's exclusive downtown developer.

Impact has proposed a \$23 million redevelopment plan that includes expanding the Kanjorski Center and building a parking garage facility with an additional 54,000 square feet in commercial space.

The parking garage would be across from the Kanjorski Center, named after U.S. Rep. Paul E. Kanjorski, a Nanticoke native.

Kanjorski touts the Impact plan. The Democrat is also working to secure federal and state funding to carry it out.

But critics complain the plan is not based on any marketing study.

State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, criticized the plan's goal to "create a government village" in downtown Nanticoke.

Yudichak prefers private sector involvement to a project "all paid by the taxpayers and run by the government."

He also said Impact's plan is flawed because the company has "a motive to build buildings."

Last year, the General Municipal Authority agreed to pay the consultant \$75,000 and various percentages of redevelopment project costs. Critics pointed out that Impact owner Robert Yoder has contributed \$1,000 to Kanjorski's campaign since 1998.

New members now control the municipal authority, and they are putting together a new game plan for the downtown. They want to sell the Kanjorski Center and build a smaller parking garage.

"I want to get out of the real estate business," authority Chairman Dennis Butler said.

Butler said the authority should not build a parking garage until it either unloads the Kanjorski Center or leases space in the building. He says the authority can't spend money and create additional liabilities until it has more revenue.

The authority also owns the former CVS building next to the Kanjorski Center, containing another 15,000 vacant square feet.

"Right now, the municipal authority is not ready to assume the risk (of a parking garage). If it goes south, it can't absorb the loss," City Councilman William O'Malley said.

Kanjorski said he has talked to "prospective tenants" who will sign lease agreements after the authority commits to building the parking garage. He won't disclose names.

"They won't come if an empty lot is there," Kanjorski said at the authority's Jan. 14 meeting.

The empty lot across Broadway from the Kanjorski Center was created last year when the authority, under previous leadership, demolished three Main Street buildings. Those buildings housed Lecher's Hardware, a coin shop, a coffee shop and Galazin Cleaners.

Kanjorski has urged city officials to support Impact's plan by saying it would be funded with "free money" from federal and state grants.

"I don't know anyone who would turn down a free building," Kanjorski said at the January meeting.

Other officials dispute the contention that the project will not cost the city a penny.

"It's not free money," Yudichak said. "You have to invest it wisely. You should not just throw up a building, so politicians can cut a ribbon."

Butler wants downtown redevelopment to be a mix of small commercial and residential buildings. He is not interested in national retail chains, such as PetSmart, mentioned as a prospective tenant in a new authority building.

“If you live in Kingston, where are you going to drive to for retail shopping? Nanticoke or Wilkes-Barre Township?” Butler said. “Nanticoke is not designed for that kind of business.”

The types of businesses that can succeed in Nanticoke are coffee houses, restaurants and book stores, Butler said.

Authority member Ron Kamowski said he wants to see a 200-space parking garage, which would cost about \$2 million. Impact has proposed spending \$7.7 million from federal transportation grants on a parking garage with additional commercial space.

Butler said the authority should divide the vacant space in the Kanjorski Center for multiple tenants because he doesn't believe the authority can find one tenant to fill the empty space.

The Kanjorski Center was built to accommodate 300 employees of Travelers Insurance Co., which processed Medicare claims and was purchased by United Health Group. In 2000, HealthNow assumed United Health Group's Medicare claims processing operation.

The authority lost \$33,000 in monthly income when HealthNow relocated, and in January, the authority's fund balance fell from \$39,602 to \$32,931. The authority is responsible for utility and insurance costs associated with the Kanjorski Center.

Kamowski said the authority keeps the temperature inside the vacant portions of the Kanjorski Center at 55 degrees to reduce heating bills without risking frozen pipes.

Kanjorski contends the Kanjorski Center was poorly managed and should have a huge surplus. But rental fees were limited to 95 percent of market rate, said O'Malley, who managed the Kanjorski Center from 1994 to 2005.

During a heated exchange at the Jan. 14 meeting, O'Malley noted that Kanjorski's nephew, Peter Kanjorski, was authority administrator in the 1990s.

Butler said the authority made a mistake by relying too heavily on one major tenant. Kanjorski's critics blamed the congressman for HealthNow's departure, but Kanjorski said HealthNow was no longer a viable anchor tenant because it was going to lose its federal Medicare contract.

Yudichak said problems with the Kanjorski Center resulted from poor planning before its construction, such as not planning for parking.

“The Kanjorski Center has not been a success,” Yudichak said.

2/25/2006

Foes: Kanjorski isn't the city's dictator

By mbuffer@leader.net

Dennis Butler isn't your typical Nanticoke political appointee.

He isn't a longtime city resident, and he's a Republican in a city where the Democratic primary decides who holds local elected positions.

U.S. Rep. Paul E. Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, objected to Butler's appointment to the Nanticoke General Municipal Authority, disparagingly dismissing him as “a Republican from Tennessee” at a recent authority meeting.

Butler, who also goes by Richard, wasn't born or raised in Tennessee. He lived there from 1990 to 2000, but he grew up in Allentown.

“There is no politics being played here,” Butler told Kanjorski after the congressman claimed Butler's appointment was “politically motivated.”

Kanjorski criticized Mayor John Bushko and city council for appointing Butler, Ron Kamowski and Henry Kellar to the authority. Kanjorski said the Jan. 3 decision to replace three members of the five-member authority was wrong.

Chet Beggs is the sole remaining member of the authority, and another seat remains vacant.

“They made miles of progress. We were well on the way of having the project go,” Kanjorski said, claiming that plans to redevelop the city's downtown were progressing under the previous authority.

The new authority members do not embrace the redevelopment plan Kanjorski supports.

Kanjorski's rival, state Rep. John Yudichak, said the congressman has tried to bully and intimidate Nanticoke officials since voters sent him to Congress in 1984.

“He feels he runs the town,” said Yudichak, D-Nanticoke. “We welcome his input and solicit his support. But he's not the dictator of Nanticoke.”

Kanjorski tries to micromanage city affairs, Yudichak said.

“It's my way or no way. Use my money the way I tell you,” Yudichak said of Kanjorski's attitude.

Before his election to Congress, Kanjorski was the city's solicitor for 12 years.

Kanjorski did not reply to requests seeking a response.

Kanjorski's press secretary, Gretchen Wintermantel, requested a Times Leader reporter e-mail questions on Thursday. He had not responded as of 5 p.m. Friday. A phone message was also left with Wintermantel on Friday.

Butler, who will chair the authority, said he doesn't plan to let political bickering influence his decisions.

“I did not campaign or support John Bushko,” said Butler, a mortgage banker for Citizens Mortgage Corp. “Nobody has ever done me political favors. This is not going to be political. I'll serve as long as this doesn't get political.”

In the 1980s, Butler served two years on the borough council of Alburtis, a small borough in Lehigh County. He moved to Nanticoke in 2001.

2/19/2006

American dream realized thanks to Habitat group

Hard work pays off for a family from Bolivia when it takes the keys to its new home in Nanticoke.

By kamerman@leader.net

The moldy two-room cottage that Juan Orellanas and his family were staying in was a far cry from the living conditions he envisioned when he came to the United States from his native Bolivia six years ago.

But on Saturday, Orellanas said his dreams were fulfilled when a Habitat for Humanity representative handed him the keys to his new three-

bedroom home on West Ridge Street in Nanticoke.

"This is where I want to settle and raise my family," said Orellanas through an interpreter, while standing in his daughter's new bedroom, which is almost the size of his entire former cottage near Tobyhanna.

Orellanas and his wife, Mery, put in about 400 hours of "sweat equity" by renovating another Habitat for Humanity house in Wilkes-Barre, said Mark Rutkowski, president of the Wyoming Valley Habitat for Humanity.

The Orellanas' new home was actually slated for another family, but "personal problems" prevented the family from completing the necessary hours, Rutkowski said.

About 30 Habitat volunteers and representatives took part in a dedication ceremony at the Orellanas' new home Saturday morning. They sang, prayed and congratulated the family, which includes 7-year-old Yessenia and 2-year-old Edwin. The family rented a home in Nanticoke for about two years while completing their mission.

Juan Orellanas and his wife say they left their town in Bolivia for a better life and improved educational opportunities for their children. The first settled in Virginia, then went to the Poconos.

While living in their broken-down cottage, someone notified Sister Joel Marie Sheeche of St. Ann's Church in Tobyhanna that they needed help. "They have helped evangelize my life," Sheeche said. "They have so much to offer us, so many lessons to teach us."

Sheeche said Juan and Mery have shown a tremendous determination to provide for their kids. She predicts that Juan, who puts exterior stucco finish on commercial buildings for a living, will someday be a supervisor. Juan and Mery are learning English, their third language. They have learned to speak fluent Spanish and their native language is Quechua.

The Orellanas will have a no-interest mortgage, but the cost will be about 50 percent of the market value of the house, Rutkowski said. The United Methodist Churches of the Greater Wyoming Valley helped fund the home's renovations.

2/17/2006

Nanticoke officials say police need better funding but don't know where they'll get money

BY ELIZABETH SKRAPITS STAFF WRITER

Shotguns, bullets and bulletproof vests; tires, a typewriter, rubber gloves, computers and an unmarked car.

Those are just a few items Nanticoke police have had to buy over the last 10 years using their own money or by borrowing from future budgets.

"We did it because it was needed," Sgt. Kevin Grevera said. "We had to become a little self-reliant."

Mayor John Bushko and council agreed at Wednesday's work session that was unfair and the department needs better funding, although they don't know where the nearly bankrupt city will find the money.

In January alone, the city's revenues were \$129,096 and its expenses were \$233,465, for a deficit of \$104,369, councilman Bill O'Malley said. He anticipates the city will continue to spend more than it takes in at least until June.

"When we say we don't have any money, we're not kidding," Bushko said. "It's there in black and white."

Despite the situation, the new administration is aware of the financial strain on the police department and is starting to reimburse it for out-of-pocket expenses, Grevera said.

In the past, money got so tight officers had to bring in their own computers and buy a typewriter to write police reports. Grevera said he even donated an unmarked car. Four years ago, the officers renovated their headquarters, buying and installing windows for ventilation, and adding DUI, booking, and evidence rooms, Grevera said.

"Morale was just so low, the guys wanted to get together to change that atmosphere," he said.

At the time, police salaries ranged from \$28,000 to \$34,000.

When expenses go over the budget, officers are allowed to borrow ahead. Bushko said the department is probably through next year's budget already.

Officers purchase guns, bullets, and bulletproof vests from their annual clothing allowance of approximately \$600, Bushko said. He believes the city should be providing that equipment so police can use their allowance for uniforms.

There are 19 police personnel on the force, but the department is understaffed, Bushko said.

Luzerne County's new central court will cost the city money and manpower: prisoners have to be transported to Wilkes-Barre from the Nanticoke police department instead of being marched upstairs to the office of Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker.

If an officer is out of town, he will have to be called in and paid overtime to attend cases.

There is some government funding available for specific police needs.

However, grants don't cover everything, and the city is facing a growing deficit expected to hit \$1.8 million by the end of 2006. City officials plan to present a detailed description of Nanticoke's financial condition at the meeting on March 1.

2/14/2006

Kanjorski Center

Multiple tenants eyed for space

Impact Pennsylvania could decide how to divide space in Nanticoke site at no extra charge, official says.

By mbuffer@leader.net

The city General Municipal Authority has no prospective tenants to fill 28,000 vacant square feet in the Kanjorski Center on Main Street and should divide the vacant space for multiple tenants, authority Chairman Richard Butler said Monday.

The vacant space was occupied by one tenant – HealthNow, a New York-based Medicare claims processing company that relocated in the fall. The

state Department of Labor and Industry is the only tenant in the 32,000-square-foot Kanjorski Center, a government facility managed by the authority.

During Monday's authority meeting, Butler said the authority will probably not fill the vacant space with one tenant. He said the authority needs to find out how much it costs to divide the vacant space for multiple tenants.

A problem is the authority is running out of money and doesn't have much money to pay an architect to figure out how to divide the space. The authority lost \$33,000 in monthly income when HealthNow moved, and in January, the authority's fund balance dropped from \$39,602 to \$32,931. The authority is responsible for utility and insurance costs associated with the Kanjorski Center.

Butler suggested that Impact Pennsylvania Inc., the authority's exclusive downtown developer, figure out how to divide space in the Kanjorski Center at no additional charge. Last year, the authority agreed to pay Impact Pennsylvania \$75,000 and various percentages of a redevelopment project.

Impact has proposed a \$7.7 million parking/retail facility next to the Kanjorski Center as part of a \$23 million plan to redevelop the downtown. U.S. Rep. Paul E. Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, has secured \$7.7 million in federal transportation funds for the city, and he has supported the Impact plan.

But Butler said Monday the authority should not build a parking garage facility until it has tenants in the Kanjorski Center. The authority wants to hire a commercial real estate company to find tenants or sell the Kanjorski Center, which opened in 1994 and cost more than \$4 million.

The authority plans to interview real estate company representatives at a work session on March 13. Impact Pennsylvania has failed to find tenants for the Kanjorski Center, Butler said.

Kanjorski has said tenants will sign lease agreements after the authority commits to building the parking garage.

2/14/2006

'Net threat at GNA High probed

Student receives online message about a gun threat, causing police to be called.

By kwernowsky@leader.net

Police responded to Greater Nanticoke Area High School on Monday morning to investigate a threat sent to several students over the Internet. High school principal Maryann Jarolen said school officials increased security at several entrances to the building after a student received a message through his or her America Online Instant Messenger that someone planned to enter the school with a gun sometime after classes started.

"It's kind of like that old game, telephone," Jarolen said. "Apparently somebody started a rumor that there was going to be a student in the school with a gun. We are taking all precautions in case this isn't a prank."

Several parents pulled their kids from the school Monday morning after word of the message leaked out, but Jarolen wouldn't say how many kids went home.

Police questioned at least one student Monday who received the note on his home computer Sunday night, but the student couldn't recall who started the rumor because he receives online messages from about 200 different people.

"Right now we're taking precautionary measures," said police Capt. William Schultz. "No one can give us any information about a site or where the threat came from."

The Internet is quickly replacing word of mouth as a way for students to spread information, Jarolen said. The principal sent letters to parents warning them about the use of the online personal profile network MySpace.com after what she called a "few incidents earlier this year."

"It's a great way to communicate a rumor," Jarolen said. "To do it before, all you have to do was find the person with the biggest mouth. Now all you have to do is hit 'bing' and it goes out to 200 people."

MySpace is among a handful of popular profile Web sites where users can post personal information, pictures, music and messages about themselves.

Jarolen said as technology progresses, it becomes more and more difficult for schools and law-enforcement officials to keep track of who is doing what.

"The technology is way ahead of what law enforcement and school officials can do," she said.

2/12/2006

Bullying frustrates GNA grandfather

Carl Salloga says district officials didn't act in addressing problem with his grandson.

By badams@leader.net

Grandfather Carl Salloga said he is appalled at what he says is the Greater Nanticoke Area School District's inaction after several students bullied his ninth-grade grandson.

"I felt that we were completely ignored," Salloga said Friday. He said frustration prompted him to speak at Thursday night's school board meeting, where he told the board his grandson was attacked on and off school property.

Salloga said a Dec. 2 letter from a local legislator to the high school failed to bring action. "They asked the three boys if they did it and they denied it and that was it. My grandson is out of here, but if I can make this better for another child, that's what I want to do."

State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, said that after Salloga contacted him, he wrote the letter to high school officials. Yudichak said Principal Maryann Jarolen and the dean of students did act. "They reached out to the students involved and tried to address it at the school level."

Superintendent Tony Perrone said he thought the alleged victim's mother had talked to someone at the high school when the problems arose.

Perrone would not comment on what action high school officials might have taken.

Perrone said the district knows the identity of the alleged bullies and he plans to meet with their parents. He said the male students will have due

process to defend against the allegations, but that they could face expulsion.

Salloga said several boys attacked his 14-year-old grandson and bruised him by kicking him with steel-toed shoes. He said he might have been targeted because he is shy and takes medication for bipolar disorder.

Board members told Salloga they weren't aware of the situation and expressed dismay when he told them no action was taken.

He said his daughter, who is the boy's mother, called the high school on several occasions and left messages. Salloga said school officials did not call her back. He said she is selling her home and his grandson is attending school in another district. "The boy is an emotional wreck."

Perrone said he learned of the alleged bullying relatively late. He said he has an open-door policy and he does not know why he wasn't told sooner. He said he obtained a homebound instructor for the boy and wanted him to return to the district, but the teen was afraid.

2/10/2006

Nanticoke wants former store razed

By mbuffer@leader.net

City officials want the owner of the former Y-T Hardware building to demolish the crumbling eyesore on Main Street.

The city's engineering firm, Pasonick Engineering, concluded the Y-T building should be torn down immediately, said city Solicitor Joe Lach.

The building's roof began collapsing last week. Mayor John Bushko said he wants to condemn the building, which has stood vacant for more than a decade.

Lach said the city wants to get owner Joseph Darlak to demolish the building before the city condemns it, and is waiting to hear from Darlak's attorney, Stephen Roth.

"We can't wait forever," Lach said.

Roth was not available for comment.

The Y-T building stands next to vacant lots on Main Street, where three buildings were taken down in the fall. Those buildings had housed Lecher's Hardware, a coin shop, a coffee shop and Galazin Cleaners.

The city general municipal authority paid \$336,000 for the buildings and demolished them to advance plans to build a parking deck/retail complex.

The authority also wanted to buy the Y-T building, but couldn't come to terms with Darlak, officials have said.

Impact Pennsylvania Inc., a company based in Turbotville, Pa., has proposed a \$23 million plan to redevelop the city's downtown. Authority members, appointed by Bushko in January, have been critical of the project.

2/10/2006

GNA OKs budget; tax hike may be eliminated

By Janine Ungvarsky Times Leader Correspondent

The budget news is good for taxpayers in the Greater Nanticoke Area School District.

On Thursday, the school board unanimously passed a preliminary budget of \$21,270,540 that includes a 4-mill tax increase, but board members made it clear that the millage increase is tentative and could be eliminated if enough state funding comes through.

The original preliminary budget held millage at last year's rate of 245. Board member Gary Smith proposed the additional 4 mills be added to the budget as a cushion "until we find out if we get that money from the state."

Business Manager Albert Melone told the board that Gov. Ed Rendell's proposed budget includes increased funding for schools that could bring an extra \$800,000 to the district, but cautioned that the governor's budget still has to be approved by the Legislature.

The district's preliminary budget is an increase of \$466,869 over 2005-06. Debt service, increases in the costs for special needs education and staff benefits as well as higher energy costs accounted for the increase, Melone said.

A mill is equal to \$1 tax on every \$1,000 of assessed property valuation.

Melone said the average district home is assessed at just over \$3,000 and pays an average property tax of \$748 at the current rate of 245 mills. The district grosses about \$23,845 per mill.

Melone said the district is in negotiations with both the professional and support staff and that the proposed budget doesn't include any funds for increased salaries.

In other business, the board heard the concerns of a man who said his 14-year-old grandson had been bullied out of the district.

Carl Salloga related how his grandson, a ninth-grader at the high school, had been attacked several times both on and off school grounds by three boys who hit him in the face and kicked him with steel-toed shoes.

He said that calls to the district and a Dec. 2 letter to the high school from a local legislator failed to bring any action in the attacks.

Board members said they weren't aware of the situation before and expressed dismay that action hasn't been taken. "I don't know what to tell you. I'm so embarrassed," board member Sylvia Mizdail told Salloga. "I'll be at the school tomorrow to find out about this."

2/6/2006

Nanticoke offering home drug testing kits

BY HEIDI E. RUCKNO STAFF WRITER

As a general rule, the earlier a problem is detected the easier it is to solve.

That's why Nanticoke police are trying something different when it comes to solving the city's drug problem. Officers will hand out free home drug testing kits to anyone who asks.

“They were anonymously donated to us and a person had asked if we would anonymously distribute them to any parent who thought their children had a problem with drugs,” Nanticoke Police Sgt. Kevin Grevera said. Approximately 100 are available, and anyone who wants one can pick it up at Nanticoke Police Headquarters, 15 E. Ridge St.

The kits, which can be sold at retail stores for approximately \$25, can detect the presence of amphetamines, cocaine, opiates, marijuana, PCP and tranquilizers such as Valium in a urine sample, but they are not sophisticated enough to detect the amount of drugs in one’s system.

The department has no interest in the results, Grevera said. The police are not looking for people to prosecute; they are offering them solely as a community service, he said. In fact, officers will not allow any testing to be done at the police station.

As far as Grevera knows, Nanticoke is the only municipality to offer free drug testing kits. The theory behind it, he said, is to put a dent in the drug problem before users resort to violent crime.

“It all stems back to the philosophy that if you cut off the head the body dies,” he said.

The kits are fairly easy to use, but if someone runs into trouble interpreting the results all he or she has to do is call a local pharmacy. Tony Douglas, head pharmacist at the Medicine Shoppe, 69 Market St., has offered to help read the test results. He said anyone with questions can stop into the pharmacy, or call him at 735-5114.

Douglas, like other members of the community, thinks the test kits will help.

Also on board with the program is Greater Nanticoke Area Superintendent Anthony Perrone, even though the school district is not directly involved,

“I can’t second-guess the Nanticoke police because I tell you, they have been tremendous with this,” he said referring to the department’s aggressive approach to fighting the drug problem. “They are a resource for the schools.”

Perrone thinks the first step to solving a problem is accepting that there is a problem. He admits students in Nanticoke schools have had their share of substance abuse problems, but in his opinion the district is getting a handle on it.

“In Nanticoke there’s a lot of reach-out places,” he said.

Students in crisis work with school counselors as well as outside agencies, according to Perrone.

2/5/2006

Nanticoke officials bicker

By Elizabeth Skrapits - Citizens' Voice

Let them all sit in, and let the court sort it all out.

That was the consensus after old and new members of the city’s redevelopment authority met Saturday morning and controversy arose over who belonged on the board and who did not.

New members of the city’s General Municipal Authority, recently appointed to the redevelopment authority by Mayor John Bushko, showed up for what they thought was a meeting to exchange information with old municipal authority members. They found themselves in a redevelopment authority meeting they didn’t know was scheduled, but which attorney Susan Maza said had been advertised.

Maza, who was solicitor for the previous municipal authority and is serving as solicitor for the redevelopment authority, recognized former mayor John Toole’s appointments and swore them in.

But attorney Joseph Lach, who briefly represented the new municipal authority between Maza’s resignation in December and the hiring of attorney Dick Hughes last week, said he believed Bushko’s — not Toole’s — were the valid appointments.

Toole reappointed Steve Buchinski and appointed Robert Bray to seats on the redevelopment authority at the Dec. 7, 2005 council meeting.

Buchinski and Bray were previously on the municipal authority. Bushko rescinded Toole’s appointments on Jan. 25, and, during Wednesday’s council meeting, appointed current municipal authority board members Ron Kamowski, chairman Richard Butler, and Henry Kellar to replace Bray, Buchinski, and Mike Jezewski, whose term was up. Members of one board can also sit on the other.

Kellar was allowed to fill the vacancy, but Bray, Buchinski, Butler and Kamowski weren’t certain who would join Walter Sokolowski and Chester Beggs on the redevelopment authority board.

Maza produced a 1978 state Supreme Court ruling that “a newly elected mayor could not remove two persons from the redevelopment authority who had been appointed by his predecessor; mayor does not have the right to remove members of the redevelopment authority at his pleasure.”

Lach offered to give Maza case law to support his position later.

Ultimately both parties opted to let the Luzerne County court settle the matter.

“We’ll let a judge decide this,” Lach said.

Another dilemma, this one to be worked out by Hughes, is exactly what the redevelopment authority controls and what it doesn’t.

Property is owned by the redevelopment authority, but it is maintained and administrated through the municipal authority.

So when Sokolowski made a motion authorizing himself and Buchinski to contact Mericle Commercial Real Estate Services about negotiating the sale or lease of the Kanjorski Center, Butler objected, saying he was not sure the redevelopment authority could do that.

The new municipal authority board made a similar motion at the Jan. 30 meeting, to solicit proposals from commercial real estate firms to market the East Main Street building.

2/5/2006

Authority membership disputed

Contentious meeting sees new, previous appointees disputing who belongs on panel.

By mbuffer@leader.net

A judge might have to decide who holds two of the five seats on the city redevelopment authority, officials said during Saturday’s chaotic authority

meeting.

The dispute could give appointees of former Mayor John Toole a chance to keep some power and continue to promote a \$23 million plan to redevelop downtown Nanticoke. U.S. Rep. Paul E. Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, has supported the redevelopment plan and wants to use \$7.7 million from federal transportation grants on a parking/retail facility next to the Kanjorski Center on Main Street.

On Wednesday, Mayor John Bushko appointed Richard Butler and Ron Kamowoski to replace Toole appointees Bob Bray and Steve Buchinski on the five-member redevelopment authority. But Bray and Buchinski still hold the seats, said Susan Maza, who insisted she was authority solicitor and ran Saturday's redevelopment authority meeting.

On Jan. 3, Bushko appointed three new members to the five-member general municipal authority, and they have been critical of downtown plans supported by Toole appointees.

Kanjorski last month criticized Bushko for replacing three municipal authority members. Last year, the redevelopment and municipal authorities hired Yoder, a Kanjorski campaign contributor, as the downtown project's exclusive developer.

A cooperation agreement allows the redevelopment authority to own property, but the municipal authority manages the properties, collects revenue from them and pays the bills, officials said.

Bushko, who didn't attend Saturday's meeting, said he and council will consider disbanding the redevelopment authority if it doesn't cooperate with the municipal authority.

During Saturday's meeting, the redevelopment authority approved a motion from board member Walter Sokolowski, a Kanjorski aide, to consider hiring a real estate firm to market the Kanjorski Center, a 32,000-square-foot building owned and run by the authorities.

On Monday, municipal authority members said they wanted to hire a real estate firm for the Kanjorski Center, which has 28,000 vacant square feet because anchor tenant HealthNow relocated in the fall.

City Solicitor Joe Lach said Saturday's redevelopment authority meeting was invalid because Bray and Buchinski were no longer board members. Maza allowed Bushko appointee Henry Kellar to take a seat on the board.

Butler, who is chairman of the municipal authority, said Maza was no longer the solicitor of the redevelopment authority because she resigned as solicitor of the municipal authority.

In December, Toole reappointed Bray and Buchinski to the redevelopment authority, but on Jan. 25, Bushko and council voted to rescind those appointments, claiming they were illegal because Toole was a lame duck.

2/3/2006



Nanticoke building collapses; will be condemned today

Nanticoke officials are planning today to condemn the former YT Hardware building on East Main Street, which they say has become a safety hazard. The building, vacant for approximately 10 years, was already in disrepair when the roof collapsed further on Wednesday, Mayor John Bushko said. "It's been an eyesore for years," he said. "It should have been taken care of years ago." Nanticoke Redevelopment Authority had hoped to purchase the building for a commercial and retail devel-

opment proposed for East Main Street, but couldn't agree on the price with the building's owner, Joseph Darlak. The redevelopment authority purchased three buildings next to YT Hardware at 108 to 120 E. Main St. in September 2005, and the municipal authority had them demolished for the project. If the city condemns YT Hardware, its owner would have to pay for demolition, Bushko said. Darlak could not be reached for comment.

2/3/2006

Nanticoke officials pondering financially distressed status

By eskrapits@citizensvoice.com

The city's financial adviser suggested a drastic, long-term solution to Nanticoke's financial woes during Wednesday's meeting.

"Act 47 is, in my view, your best option," Bob Sabatini of Keystone Municipal Services LLP, one of the city's Early Intervention coordinators, told council and Mayor John Bushko.

Nanticoke is already in the state Early Intervention program for financially troubled municipalities, but its situation has grown so dire that having the state give it Act 47 — financially distressed — status is something city officials have to consider.

Councilman William O'Malley expects the city to spend \$800,000 more than it will get in taxes and other revenues in 2006. Combined with debts from the last two years, it adds up to a \$1.8 million deficit, he said.

Currently, there is \$222,000 in the general fund, but after bills and payroll, the city will be left with only \$18,000 by March 1, not counting any tax revenue that comes in, O'Malley said.

Nanticoke won't have enough funds to make it through the year, and isn't going to be able to cut its way out of the deficit, Sabatini said.

The city's revenues are stagnant — there are no new income sources such as housing developments — and the cost of running the city goes up each year.

Nanticoke's neighbor, Plymouth Township, was declared Act 47 in July 2004. The program is not a "bail-out": the state doesn't just hand over money. Instead, Nanticoke officials would receive a long-term financial recovery plan, be able to levy new taxes, and get additional resources from the state.

Council and the mayor will consider their options before their Feb. 15 meeting, at which time the subject will be discussed more fully, O'Malley said.

In other business, Bushko and council filled numerous positions. Attorney Joseph Lach was hired as city solicitor, replacing Bernard Kotulak, who Bushko said resigned verbally.

Anthony T. Margelewicz was appointed as city clerk and hired as fiscal manager. As fiscal manager, Margelewicz will be in charge of setting up new financial programs with O'Malley and overseeing daily operations of the city. His salary will be \$30,000 a year. The position existed previously, but was eliminated a year ago, Bushko said.

William Harvey was hired as building inspector and code enforcement officer at an annual salary of \$40,000. Sgt. Kevin Grevera was appointed as a deputy code enforcement officer.

Municipal Authority members Ron Kamowski, Richard Butler and Henry Kellar were appointed to replace Robert Bray, Steve Buchinski and Mike Jezewski respectively on the redevelopment authority.

Former councilwoman Yvonne Bozinski was appointed special events coordinator.

Dorothy Hudak was appointed to replace Ed Brosh on the housing authority.

2/2/2006

Nanticoke mulls recovery plan

Consultant recommends the state's Act 47 program to the financially distressed city.

By mbuffer@leader.net

The city can't pay its bills this year and should seek assistance as a financially distressed community under the state's Act 47 recovery program, a consultant told city council Wednesday.

City officials last year hoped joining in the state's Early Intervention Program would prevent the need to enter the Act 47 program. Robert Sabatini, a consultant for Keystone Municipal Services, worked for the city's Early Intervention Consortium and said Act 47 is the city's best option to solving its financial problems.

An \$800,000 deficit is projected for this year, and deficits totaled \$1.8 million over the past three years, said Councilman William O'Malley.

In December, city council adopted a \$3.5 million budget for 2006. The city property tax rate is 60.38 mills and could only have been raised with court approval or a higher debt payment.

A mill is a \$1 tax on every \$1,000 of assessed property value. Other city revenues and assessed property values are stagnant, O'Malley said.

City officials will meet with state officials about entering the Act 47 program and will discuss Act 47 at the city council meeting on Feb. 15, O'Malley said. Under the program, the city could qualify for no-interest loans to help pay bills, O'Malley said.

Plymouth Township is a distressed community in the Act 47 program. West Hazleton recently left the Act 47 program, Sabatini said.

Also during Wednesday's meeting, council and Mayor John Bushko hired Anthony Margelewicz as city clerk and fiscal manager. He will be the city's top administrator and supervise city Administrator Greg Gulick, officials said.

Council and Bushko also hired William Harvey as the city's code enforcement officer and appointed Joe Lach as solicitor. Lach is also solicitor of Plymouth Township, and Harvey worked as a code enforcement officer in Wilkes-Barre.

The fiscal manager's job was left vacant to save money. O'Malley said the city is in desperate need of fiscal oversight.

City officials have been busy making personnel and policy changes since Jan. 3, when Bushko became mayor and O'Malley, Jim Litchkofski and Brent Makarczyk began terms on council.

1/31/2006

KANJORSKI CENTER

Authority seeks real estate firm to deal with center

Nanticoke body wants a new tenant or buyer for building vacated by HealthNow.

By mbuffer@leader.net

The city General Municipal Authority is looking for help leasing space in 32,000-square-foot Kanjorski Center or possibly selling the Main Street facility.

Authority members on Monday said they want to hire a commercial real estate firm to find a tenant or a buyer. The center has 28,000 vacant square feet because HealthNow left in the fall and relocated to Dallas.

The authority lost \$33,000 in monthly income when HealthNow moved and is running out of money. In January, the authority's fund balance dropped from \$39,602 to \$32,931, accountant Karen Hazleton said.

"We don't want to be in the real estate business," said authority Chairman Richard Butler.

Butler also suggested paving and creating a parking lot on the site of a proposed parking/retail complex. Impact Pennsylvania Inc., a company based in Turbotville, Pa., has proposed a \$7.7 million parking/retail facility next to the Kanjorski Center as part of a \$23 million plan to redevelop the city's downtown.

U.S. Rep. Paul E. Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, has secured \$7.7 million in federal transportation funds for the city, and he has supported the Impact Pennsylvania plan.

The Kanjorski Center opened in 1994 and cost more than \$4 million. A problem finding tenants has been a lack of parking. The proposed parking/retail complex would include: a 4½-deck parking garage for 324 vehicles; 29,800 square feet in retail space; 15,000 square feet in office space; and 30,000 in potential commercial space.

Butler said his objection to the proposal is “the authority would own everything.” He said about 80 cars would fit on a parking lot next to the Kanjorski Center.

If the authority runs out of money, the city would be responsible for paying its bills, and the city is having its own financial problems. The city has accumulated \$1.8 million in deficits over the last three years, Councilman William O’Malley said. O’Malley suggested the authority use the equity of its property to borrow money.

Also Monday, the authority voted to hire attorney Richard Hughes as its solicitor and met with other attorneys handling a legal dispute with HealthNow. The authority is seeking more than \$800,000 from HealthNow, and the dispute is in a nonbinding arbitration process, said interim solicitor Joe Lach.

Last September, the authority hired Scranton firm Elliott, Greenleaf and Siedzikowski for the dispute. The authority wants HealthNow to pay for renovation costs in the Kanjorski Center.

1/31/2006

Nanticoke hires real estate firm to market largest asset

By Elizabeth Skrapits staff writer

The Nanticoke General Municipal Authority is destined for bankruptcy unless it sells or leases its largest asset.

The board opted Monday night to hire a professional real estate firm to market the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street. The 32,800 square-foot building has been 80 percent empty since Medicare claims processing firm HealthNow moved to Dallas in October 2005, and the loss of its main tenant means the authority’s expenses outweigh its revenue.

“We have to stop the bleeding, and the Kanjorski Center is a gusher,” authority chairman Richard Butler said.

Impact PA, the firm selected by the previous authority board to construct a commercial building and parking garage on East Main Street next to the Kanjorski Center, was supposed to search for tenants for the center, but has not produced any, Butler said.

The authority hopes to receive at least three proposals from large commercial real estate firms by next month’s meeting, Butler said.

The Kanjorski Center was built about 10 years ago for \$5.3 million total, all grants, and there is \$1.2 million left on the mortgage, said councilman Bill O’Malley, former building manager for the center. If the building is sold, the authority has to pay back a portion of the grant money to state and federal government.

The authority currently has \$32,931 cash on hand, accountant Karen Hazleton said. With some bills due and more on the way, and only \$4,900 coming in a month from the Kanjorski Center’s remaining tenant, the state Department of Labor and Industry, board members estimate the municipal authority will be broke by May.

According to its charter, if the municipal authority goes broke, it starts using city funds, Butler said.

However, Nanticoke, facing a \$1.8 million deficit from the past three years, is in even worse financial shape than the authority, O’Malley said. He suggested the authority take out a line of credit, which is a loan it would only have to tap into in case of emergencies. The board agreed to solicit proposals from banks for an amount to be determined based on how much repair the Kanjorski Center needs.

It also depends on what happens when a legal action filed against Health Now by the previous board in September 2005 is settled, Butler said. The former board asked for \$804,968 in expenses, mostly for returning the Kanjorski Center to its original condition.

Municipal authority temporary attorney Joe Lach said the authority and HealthNow are going before a neutral mediator to try to resolve the matter. If the non-binding mediation does not work, the next step is to go to an arbitrator, who will act as judge and hand down a binding ruling, Lach said.

1/29/2006

Nanticoke Area Notes

Celebrating Catholic Schools

By: Pamela Urbanski

This week students, faculty, and staff of Pope John Paul II School will join with approximately 8,000 Catholic elementary and high schools nationwide to celebrate Catholic Schools Week.

An annual celebration, it is a time to show the important role that Catholic schools play in educating America’s young people.

“Catholic Schools Week celebrates education that goes beyond preparation for a secular life, it prepares students for a Christian life,” said Robert Kaluzavich, principal. Continuing he said, “Catholic Schools Week is a time for the teachers, staff, students and parents of PJP II to celebrate the school and to let the entire community know what a great place this is to learn.”

Each year, a different theme depicts a thought about Catholic education. “This year’s theme ‘Catholic Schools: Character, Compassion, Values,’ points to the very mission of Catholic schools,” said Kaluzavich. “It is important that we impress upon our students how important each one of these are, especially in today’s world.”

To kick off Catholic Schools Week students and their families are asked to attend the Sunday liturgy at Holy Trinity Church at 10:15 a.m. or St. Francis Church at 11 a.m.

Following Mass, families that might be interested in enrolling their child or children at PJP are invited to an open house from noon to 2 p.m. today. The main building for students in grades two through eight is located on South Hanover Street, next to Holy Trinity Church. Students who are

interested in the three and four-year-old, kindergarten and first grade programs can visit the primary center on East Green Street, next to St. Francis Church.

Registration for all grades also will be held at this time and during the week from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. each day.

Week full of activities

Activities for the week include spirit day when students can wear their favorite team outfit or PJP basketball jerseys instead of the regular uniforms. The seventh and eighth grade students will host a math fair and the scholastic book fair begins at the main building.

On student appreciation day, students will be honored for their hard work throughout the year.

Catholic schools could not run without the Board of Pastors, principal, teachers, staff and parent volunteers, so a breakfast will be held in their honor.

Nanticoke Mayor John Bushko will stop by to speak to the students and State Rep. John Yudichak will be on hand to present a \$10,000 check from the Bravo/Bridge Educational Foundation.

"This scholarship would not have been possible without the support of Rep. Yudichak and a generous donation from Greg Cavoli at Enterprise Rent-A-Car," said Kaluzavich.

Ten students received scholarships from this donation.

At the primary center, students will have a vocation day. According to Eleanor Anthony, it's never too early for students to start thinking about their gifts and talents. "I think it is good that we encourage students, even from a young age, to think about where God may be calling them and to realize that God has a plan for their lives."

For more information, call the main building at 735-7935 or the primary center at 740-6150.

1/27/2006

Nanticoke officials find funds will not cover needed projects

BY ELIZABETH SKRAPITS STAFF WRITER

The new elected officials are prioritizing repairs to the city's crumbling infrastructure and looking for ways to finance them.

Many roads, sewer lines, and the municipal building need fixing, but there's no money. Since 2004, the city has accumulated a \$1.8 million deficit, Councilman Bill O'Malley revealed at Wednesday's council meeting.

Last year, U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, secured \$2.1 million for the city in federal highway transportation money, plus \$5.6 million specifically for a parking garage at the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street.

Kanjorski wants to add the \$2.1 million to the East Main Street project, but Mayor John Bushko would rather put it to the use it was originally intended for: repairing city roads. Alden Road, Lower Broadway, and Kosciuszko, Market, Prospect and Union streets are bad, O'Malley said.

The federal funds require a 20 percent state match and can only be used for certain transportation-related projects. Council made a motion to contact the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation to see about getting matching funds.

City Administrator Greg Gulick suggested two road crew employees be designated to go through the city street by street this summer, doing such necessary things as replacing street signs and repairing catch basins. The work would be paid for from the city's sewer fund and the liquid fuels fund — money the city is given each year for its roads from the state gasoline tax.

Councilman Jim Litchkofski, who is in charge of the road department, said residents can leave questions or suggestions for him through the municipal building.

The building needs a whole new electrical system and some cosmetic repairs, Councilman Joe Dougherty said. Bushko said the road crew will work on the building in rainy weather.

In other business, Bushko made a motion, which passed unanimously, to cancel all appointments made by the previous administration.

Former Mayor John Toole and outgoing members of council appointed Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker as the city's representative to Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority, and put former municipal authority members Robert Bray and Steve Buchinski on the redevelopment authority on Dec. 7 2005.

"I think as lame ducks, they're not legal," Bushko said.

The Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority already swore in William Kearney, who was Nanticoke's representative in the past, Solicitor Bernard Kotulak said.

1/27/2006

Retirement issues

For him, it's no small change

Nanticoke man driving force behind switch in state unemployment regulation.

By mbuffer@leader.net

A law that prevented older Pennsylvanians from receiving full unemployment compensation is off the books – thanks to Joe Gyskiewicz.

The Nanticoke man set the wheels in motion for new legislation that ended the practice of deducting half the weekly amount of a Social Security or railroad pension from an unemployment payment.

Gov. Ed Rendell touted the legislation during a recent ceremonial bill signing in Scranton. Gyskiewicz, 75, was there.

"I was penalized because I received Social Security," Gyskiewicz said. "I didn't think it was fair."

Four years ago, Gyskiewicz was laid off from a part-time job making transformers at Dennis Winding Co. in Wilkes-Barre. Instead of collecting a weekly unemployment payment of \$150, Gyskiewicz received a \$20 unemployment payment.

Gryskiewicz mentioned this to his next-door neighbor, state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke.

"I put the idea in this head (to change the law)," Gryskiewicz said. "John kept pushing it."

Yudichak, the lead Democratic sponsor of the new legislation, praised state Rep. William Adolph, R-Delaware County, and the AARP for promoting the bill.

Yudichak said it was unfair to deny "benefits to working seniors who return to the work force to help their families meet the pressing demands of rising health care costs, increasing energy bills and the drastic pension cuts being made by many of America's major corporations."

The new law will affect about 1,300 older Pennsylvanians, Yudichak said. But it is expected to help more than 40,000 as more Social Security beneficiaries return to work, he added.

Gryskiewicz retired as a department store manager before he started working part-time at Dennis Winding Co. He hasn't worked since, in part because he wanted to spend more time with his wife, Margaret, who became ill and died in January.

1/26/2006

Council OKs mayor's plan to use grants for paving

U.S. Rep. Kanjorski had hoped to use all the federal money for downtown revitalization.

By mbuffer@leader.net

City council on Wednesday unanimously supported a motion asking PennDOT for matching funds that would allow the city to spend federal transportation grant money on roadwork.

U.S. Rep. Paul E. Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, has secured \$7.7 million in transportation funds for the city, and he has touted a plan to spend that money on a parking/retail complex.

But Mayor John Bushko has proposed spending money from a \$500,000 grant and a \$1.6 million grant on roads. The city engineer will begin putting together a road-repair proposal this week, Bushko said after Wednesday's meeting.

Councilman William O'Malley made the motion to contact PennDOT about matching funds for road work. The federal transportation money requires a 20 percent match from the state or city, officials said.

The \$500,000 grant and the \$1.6 million grant are for the city, and a third transportation grant of \$5.6 million is for the city redevelopment authority, officials said.

In a July news release, Kanjorski said the legislation approving the transportation grants has flexible language that allows the city to use the funds "for revitalization projects such as paving and road construction and enhancement."

But Kanjorski has touted a \$23 million plan to redevelop the city's downtown and, under that plan, the \$7.7 million in federal transportation money would fund a parking/retail complex. Impact Pennsylvania Inc., a company based in Turbotville, Pa., unveiled the \$23 million plan Jan. 14.

The redevelopment authority and Nanticoke General Municipal Authority hired Impact Pennsylvania last May. But new members of the municipal authority are skeptical of Impact's plan, and Bushko plans to appoint two new members to redevelopment authority.

Council and Bushko on Wednesday voted to rescind two December appointments to redevelopment authority made by outgoing mayor John Toole. Bushko said Toole didn't have the power to make the appointments because he was a lame duck.

Also Wednesday, city council approved an ordinance that will prevent a sex offender from living within 2,500 feet of any school, child-care facility, community center, park or common open space. Nanticoke is the first municipality in Luzerne and Lackawanna counties with such legislation, said Councilman Joseph Dougherty.

1/25/2006

WVSA swears in Kearney

Donald Whittaker disputes move, saying Nanticoke officials chose him for spot.

By mbuffer@leader.net

District Judge Donald Whittaker maintains he's Nanticoke's representative on the Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority, but another man holding that seat was sworn into office Tuesday for another five-year term.

William Kearney, owner of a funeral home on South Prospect Street in Nanticoke, kept his seat on the 17-member board during Tuesday's meeting at the authority's Hanover Township complex. He has had the seat for 20 years.

Whittaker claims he has the seat because Nanticoke City Council and the mayor appointed him to the board Dec. 7. But a new mayor and new council members voted on Jan. 3 to reappoint Kearney.

The dispute could be ultimately decided in court, but Kearney has it now because he was the last man appointed to it, authority Solicitor Tony Panaway said Tuesday.

Whittaker read a city document that says Kearney was re-appointed to a five-year term that ends Dec. 7. But the Pennsylvania Municipal Authorities Act says terms end on the first Monday in January, authority member Pat Judge said.

Whittaker asked if he could have a copy of the law for his lawyer to review.

"If we're wrong, we'll bow out gracefully," Whittaker said.

The authority has been providing wastewater treatment since 1962 and has 17 board members from 14 charter municipalities. Wilkes-Barre has three members.

On Dec. 7, Nanticoke officials voted 4-1 to appoint Whittaker to the seat.

The four votes in December included votes from three lame ducks – Mayor John Toole and council members Bill Brown and Yvonne Bozinski.

John Bushko voted against appointing Whittaker on Dec. 7 and became mayor Jan. 3. Also on Jan. 3, William O'Malley, Jim Litchkofski and Brent

Makarczyk began terms on city council, and the vote to appoint Kearney was 4-1. Councilman Joseph Dougherty, the only council member left from last year, voted against Kearney's reappointment on Jan. 3. Whittaker was re-elected as district judge last year. His office handles civil and criminal matters for Nanticoke, the borough of Plymouth and the townships of Newport and Plymouth.

1/24/2006

Kanjorski, mayor divide on \$7.7M It's for project, says congressman. Bushko eyes \$2.1 million for roads.

By mbuffer@leader.net

Federal transportation grants would provide \$7.7 million for a parking/retail complex in the city's downtown, according to U.S. Rep. Paul E. Kanjorski.

But Mayor John Bushko has a different idea for spending \$2.1 million of that money.

Bushko wants to use \$2.1 million from two grants to repair designated city roads that can be fixed with federal funds, including Alden Road.

"That road should be done," Bushko said, noting surface and drainage problems.

Alden Road is a link to key businesses in the city, such as Reilly Plating Co., Bushko said. He added that the city could also use the federal grants for other roads, such as Market, Prospect and Union streets.

Impact Pennsylvania Inc., a company based in Turbotville, Pa., has proposed the \$7.7 million parking complex, which includes retail storefronts and office space, as part of a \$23 million proposal to redevelop the city's downtown.

Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, is a vocal supporter of the redevelopment plan.

"I am interested in getting the fullest extent to the revitalization of downtown," Kanjorski said of the funding. "If we have flexibility, I want to see it used for the benefit of the town."

Regarding Bushko's call to use \$2 million on roads, Kanjorski said, "I haven't talked to him sufficiently about what he has in mind."

Bushko said he supports "doing a downtown project" but wants to see private investment and ownership. Kanjorski has said the project would be "free" for city taxpayers because federal and state funding would pay for it.

But state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, disputes Kanjorski's contention that the state would provide matching funds.

The transportation money requires a 20 percent match from either the state or city, and Yudichak said PennDOT would not provide the match if the federal money is spent on a parking garage.

Kanjorski said "the funds are discretionary" and would likely become available "with the support of the state senator and legislator." State Sen. Raphael Musto, D-Pittston Township, represents Nanticoke.

City council ultimately may decide if the \$2.1 million from the two grants is spent on roads or the proposed parking garage. Those grants are for the city, while a third transportation grant of \$5.6 million is for the city redevelopment authority, Yudichak said.

The redevelopment authority and the municipal authority hired Impact Pennsylvania last May. The municipal authority handles administrative duties for the redevelopment authority.

1/24/2006

Nanticoke Targets Sex Offenders

Nanticoke officials are prepared to pass an ordinance one councilman hopes will make the city safer, by limiting areas in which convicted sex offenders can live

Council will vote Wednesday night on the final reading of the sex offender residency restriction ordinance which, if passed, would make Nanticoke the first municipality in Luzerne County to have one, said Councilman Joseph Dougherty, who proposed the measure.

"What's great about this ordinance is it doesn't just protect children, but women and everyone, really," he said.

Under the terms of the ordinance, which city police will enforce, sex offenders may not live within 2,500 feet of a school, child care facility, public park or recreation center. If an offender moves into a restricted area, he or she has 45 days to move out. Violators face a fine of up to \$1,000 and 90 days in prison.

The four or five sex offenders already living in the city would not be affected, Dougherty said.

He plans to bring a map to Wednesday's meeting showing restricted areas. [The map will later be posted on the city's Web site.](#)

In Pennsylvania, Megan's Law, named after 7-year-old Megan Kanka, who was murdered by a convicted pedophile neighbor in New Jersey in 1994, requires convicted sex offenders to register with state police. However, state and federal laws do not place any restrictions on where the offenders can live.

Dougherty said he got the idea for the supplemental ordinance from a newspaper he read while visiting his sister in Bucks County. Several communities there, including Bristol, Doylestown and Lower Makefield townships, have passed sex offender ordinances.

Allentown and Whitehall Township in Lehigh County and Northampton Borough in Northampton County have also passed sex offender ordinances, according to a Jan. 10 article in the Allentown Morning Call.

Despite concern by Nanticoke's previous administration, Dougherty does not believe the ordinance, which is based on similar ones from Bucks County and references others from Alabama and Iowa, could be considered unconstitutional.

"If someone wants to challenge it down the line, let them come forward," he said. "You don't know what the higher courts are ever going to do, but based on other ordinances, it's legal."

Dougherty, the father of four daughters, believes the ordinance is an important step in protecting the city's children from sex offenders. "When I grew up, it was easy. There weren't problems like this. Your child could roam at his own free will. Now you can't even let them play on the sidewalk without watching them," he said.

1/24/2006

Programs in Nanticoke help teens with drug problems, offer substance-free entertainment options for other youngsters

BY ELIZABETH SKRAPITS STAFF WRITER

The upstairs rooms of the Stickney Fire Hall on Prospect Street are being painted bright colors, blue and white, green-and-orange stripes, in preparation for the spring grand opening of the Greater Nanticoke Area Drug Task Force headquarters.

The drug task force, Luzerne County's first grassroots organization dedicated to raising awareness about drugs and providing young people with an alternative to them, and its offshoot, the Youth Task Force, are so successful they have outgrown their first location in St. Francis Church's basement.

The drug task force has an ever-growing roster of members, including Greater Nanticoke Area School District personnel, mental health and drug and alcohol treatment professionals, parents, clergy and city officials. The Youth Task Force, for ages 18 and under, started with eight or nine kids and has grown to about 85, said board member Don Williams, an associate of Clearbrook Lodge.

"That more of the kids are coming shows our message is getting out," board president Frank Vandermark said.

The task force started in 2003 when police Sgt. Kevin Grevera, frustrated by drug use among young people and saddened by the overdose death of a young man he had tried to steer away from drugs, approached the Rev. William Langan to discuss what to do.

Young people had few options for entertainment in Nanticoke, so providing them with a positive place to go was one of the first goals, Williams said. Langan volunteered use of the church recreation room.

"I was down there the one night," said Mayor John Bushko. "I bet there were about 60 kids there in the basement of St. Francis. They were playing ping-pong, checkers, they had music going," he said.

"It seemed like a good place for kids to go, instead of hanging out on street corners smoking like I did when I was a kid."

In June 2005, Nanticoke City Council voted to lease the Stickney Fire Hall to the task force for \$1 a month. The kids helped paint, and local businesses offered many services.

The task force pays its own expenses. Raising money has not been a problem for the group because of generous community members and business leaders, board member Jim Samselski said.

The task force holds outings and events; members do community service like cleaning up Patriot Park and cemeteries. There are also prevention programs, such as "Thugs and Drugs," in which addicts tell their stories.

Besides recreation, activities include teen-on-teen nights for discussing issues and offering advice. Girls wanted to speak about women's issues without men around, so task force member Renee Dougalas formed "Girls' Nights In."

"The purpose is to support one another, to let them know, hey, you're not alone, you're not the only one going through this," Williams said. "It's better than taking your feelings to the park and getting high."

As the kids get older and graduate from high school, there has been a membership turnover, Williams said. Some new kids are "rough around the edges," with poor anger-management skills, but the group teaches control, Williams said.

For legal reasons, counseling is not allowed, but mentors try to provide support and guidance, he said.

"They have a way with kids. It's not hollering and yelling, it's talking," Greater Nanticoke Area Superintendent Anthony Perrone said. "And it works."

Greater Nanticoke Area was one of the first school districts to publicly acknowledge it had a growing drug problem, Perrone said. In 2002, some students were found with heroin. Instead of trying to cover it up, district officials brought it into the open and made parents aware of the problem, he said.

The task force works closely with the district through high school Principal Mary Ann Jarolen, a founding member, Grevera said.

Possibly as a result, heroin is less common in Nanticoke schools this year, Perrone thinks.

Though there is still work to do, task force board members agree the primary mission of raising awareness has been successful.

In Nanticoke, overdoses have dropped and overdose deaths have decreased dramatically: two since 2004 as opposed to 37 between 2000 and 2004, Grevera said.

More than 20 people have gotten help getting treatment, Grevera said. "We will approach people rather than letting them hit rock bottom. We've had people go into the military, assisted them in getting jobs, some went on to college, some went to mental health treatment."

Other communities have taken notice of the success and want to start similar programs. The task force, in cooperation with the Stakeholders Committee created by Wyoming Valley Drug and Alcohol Services, will meet with representatives from two interested school districts this week: Crestwood and Hazleton Area.

1/22/2006

Wrestlers raise roof, money for charities

A grappling good time

By j davidson@leader.net

King Kong Bundy is an enormous man.

And to his young fans, who saw him in person for the first time Saturday night at the Honey Pot Volunteer Fire Company's wrestling benefit, he's also a legend.

"He's old-school," said 10-year-old Kyle Gregory, barely able to contain his excitement. "He's known for his strength and he always wins."

And win he did, easily defeating his villainous opponent, Brolly, and whipping the crowd into a frenzy.

It was clear to the crowd of about 200 at the Greater Nanticoke Area High School gym who the bad guys were. The first wrestler of the night, an Italian mobster type called Lucky Zaccone, came out throwing insults at the local crowd.

"I didn't come here for no cow tipping," he yelled. "I came here on Italian family business that none of youse would understand!"

The crowd booed and hissed.

And then out came his opponent, the folk hero Gino Caruso, clad in a green, white and red singlet and clapping to the sound of "Angelina," by Louis Prima.

And the crowd went wild.

The most passionate fans in the crowd Saturday night were also the youngest. Nine-year-old Joseph Kirschner, holding a sign in support of King Kong Bundy, said he wants to be a wrestler someday. It was a great night for Joseph. His favorite wrestler, The Honky Tonk Man, was the night's main event.

The Honky Tonk Man's opponent was billed as "the mystery opponent," but rumor flew it was 61-year-old Nanticoke resident Tom Rumsby, who would come out of retirement and enter the ring under his old moniker, The Executioner. Before donning his black mask and spandex, Rumsby hustled about the gym and kept the show running smoothly.

"We're real satisfied with the turnout," Rumsby said. "The Honey Pot guys did what they had to do and got the crowd warmed up."

Chester Kopco, a Honey Pot firefighter, was also getting warmed up for his first-ever wrestling match as part of the night's main event.

"I'm terrified," he said. "I'm 51 and I'm out of my league. But I've lost 15 pounds in three weeks training with The Executioner. But I'm still terrified."

The event was held to raise money to host a six-county firefighter convention in June, and to help fire companies in southeast Texas devastated by Hurricane Rita.

Donations to the Orange County Fire Fund can be sent to 35 Main St., Nanticoke.

(Nanticoke City Webdesign note: Please keep coming back and checking the "Fire Dept." section of the website for pictures from this wrestling event.)

1/22/2006

For Luzerne County Community College officials, the future is now

By Robert Kalinowski, Staff Writer

As the top officials for Luzerne County Community College, Dr. Patricia Donohue and Dr. Dustin Swanger study national and regional trends to map the future of the school that serves 16,000 students year.

Three trends in particular have caught their attention.

Since 9/11, they've realized the need for professional and well-trained emergency workers.

The recent boom in retail stores, restaurants and entertainment venues, and a growing number of metropolitan transplants and commuters in Northeastern Pennsylvania, make it clear the hospitality market will flourish.

Reports of staff shortages in the health care profession, most notably nurses, make them see immediate post-graduation jobs for well-trained graduates.

Donohue, LCCC president, and Swanger, the college's provost and vice-president for academic affairs, say these are signs of changing times, trends the school wants to tackle head on.

So, the infrastructure of the school's main campus in Nanticoke must change as well, they say.

The school's Board of Trustees last month approved a \$41 million master plan that includes the construction of a Public Safety Training Institute, a state-of-the-art health sciences building, a dramatic expansion of the hospitality facilities, and campus-wide renovations and changes.

"I don't think you'll see anything in Northeastern Pennsylvania that will rival what we're planning," Swanger said. "This will be a real shot in the arm for the region."

School officials will submit the plan to the state Department of Education later this month. If all phases of the project are approved by the state, the state would contribute half, or \$20.5 million, which is the state's capital project formula. Funding for the other half would come from a combination of money from Luzerne County, which normally funds a third of the school's operating costs, fundraising and/or loans.

Completion of the overhaul is expected to take six to eight years from whenever construction begins.

Health Science Building

The driving force behind the project is the need to expand the school's health sciences program. Interest is high, classes are at or near capacity, and there's no sign of a slowdown, Donohue said.

"We've expanded these classes as much as our facilities will allow," Donohue said. "Of all the facilities we have, much of it needs to be upgraded."

Donohue says staff shortages in hospitals, particularly among nurses, is a problem that only will get worse. Studies show a significant portion of the nursing work force is within 10 years of retirement, she said.

"We're going to have what is already a serious demand complicated by retirements," she said.

By expanding health science offerings and implementing the newest technology, LCCC could help attract potential nurses and train its students to be among the most competitive.

A proposed \$12 million building will serve students pursuing associate degrees in nursing, surgical technology, respiratory technology, emergency

medical services, dental hygiene, dental assistance and physical fitness, Swanger said.

A highlight of the new building will be new digital equipment, such as X-ray photography machines, he said.

"This is a huge step forward," Swanger said.

LCCC and other community colleges are already the stepping stones to careers in the medical profession. Studies show 60 percent of registered nurses are trained at community colleges, Donohue said.

"Our jobs are to keep them home, and there are plenty of jobs here for them," Donohue said.

"They usually have a job before they walk across the stage," Swanger said.

Public Safety Training Institute

When Donohue was the president of Harrisburg Area Community College in 1990s, she worked to build a public safety center, a facility used to train students interested in the emergency services field, as well as firefighters, police officers and paramedics in the Harrisburg Area.

Since arriving at LCCC in 2002, she has wanted to bring a similar facility to the area.

Currently, most fire departments travel outside Luzerne County to conduct their "live burn" training, a practice fire fighting drill on an engulfed prop building. Other training is conducted in throughout other parts of the county.

LCCC's \$9.9 million Public Safety Training Institute, which will be located on now-vacant land at Middle Road and Prospect Street, will centralize many of these training options. It will be available for credit and non-credit classes, as well as for public and private emergency departments and workers on a fee basis.

"I can't tell you how many time people have stopped me to say, 'I can't wait until you get this built,'" Swanger said.

It will be able to train up to 4,000 emergency workers per year.

The facilities will consist of modern classrooms, in-door shooting range, burn tower, rescue props, hazardous material props, an emergency vehicle operations course and more.

Hospitality field

Though there's not a need for a new building, LCCC officials say the school's hospitality training program is another focus of the master plan. In recent years, an influx of people have moved to the area from New York and Philadelphia and are commuting from the nearby Poconos to New York for work, Swanger said.

People from those areas are accustomed to various choices for fine dining, recreation venues for adults and kids and tourist attractions, he said.

The introduction of the Wachovia Arena, the subsequent commercial boom surrounding it, and the proposed casinos at Mohegan Sun at Pocono Downs and in the nearby Poconos, is a new market for Northeastern Pennsylvania, he said.

"It's a large industry right now, and it's only going to get larger. It's going to grow," Swanger said.

The school plans a major overhaul of its culinary arts kitchens. Built in the 1970s, they are outdated and wearing out. The norm back then was large industrial kitchens, but the current trends are smaller workstations, he said. Officials are also considering creating a day spa-like facility to help those interested in pursuing that field.

The master plan

There is more to LCCC's master plan. School officials want to renovate classrooms, improve technology, add high-tech conference rooms, create suite-style offices, add places for students to congregate, relocate several offices to centralize critical student services, expand the library, address campus traffic and parking issues and change building and campus entrance signage.

In conducting the master plan study, LCCC officials and its consultants thoroughly reviewed enrollment projections, professional needs, space utilization of the school's buildings and current education of employment trends.

LCCC currently services roughly 16,000 credit and non-credit students a year. Officials predict a surge in adult students in the next decade. The school needs to be ready to prepare those students for the future of the ever-changing work force, Swanger said.

Donohue and Swanger are hopeful the state will approve its comprehensively devised plan. Because it's too early to say what the state will determine, it's too early to discuss exactly how much local funding would be needed and from where it would come, they said.

"I think this project addresses the future needs of this community. It's going through a change," he said. "This positions the college to address those changes. It's bringing tremendous valuable resources to this community."

1/19/2006

FUND-RAISER IN NANTICOKE

Honey Pot-mania

Former-pro wrestler plans a smack-down for a cause

By jfox@leader.net

He's been out of the professional wrestling game for years, but Tom Rumsby still has some daunting arms.

Not to mention a Brooklyn accent strong enough to take down a full-grown man.

He's 61 years old, but Rumsby, a.k.a. The Executioner, is getting ready to return to the canvas to benefit his adopted town.

Saturday, Rumsby, with a few of his colleagues from the sport's earlier days, will take to the ring as part of a fund-raiser.

The barrel-chested wrestling veteran recently moved to Nanticoke to be closer to his daughter, and despite sounding like he'd be more at home in an episode of "The Sopranos" than this former coal town, the place has grown on him, he said.

About 10 months ago, he struck up a friendship with Tony Prushinski, president of the Honey Pot Volunteer Fire Co., and the two began kicking around the possibility of the wrestling benefit.

Nanticoke will host an annual six-county firefighter convention this June, a weekend-long affair that could cost \$30,000.

They hope to raise money for the convention as well as for fire companies in southeast Texas devastated by Hurricane Rita.

"This area is so close and they believe in each other so much. I wanted to be a part of that," Rumsby said. "I wanted to help them." Rumsby helped pull together the three-event card that reads like a main card from 20 years ago. "These are all guys from the '80s," said Chester Kopco, a member of the fire company. "That's when my kids were small and we used to watch all these guys." This time, Kopco will do more than watch. As one of the "The 911 Bees" – the other half of the duo is fire Chief Frank Wolfe – Kopco will team up with the Honky Tonk Man to take on 401-pound Big Dave Duncan. Kopco wouldn't divulge what costume, if any, he would be wearing, but said he plans to don spandex. "The Executioner and I work out at the Stars and Stripes Gym in Nanticoke," said Kopco, a wrestling novice. Apparently Rumsby has been showing him a few moves. "I showed him the ropes and he liked them," he said. "I want to show him the canvas. That's what I want to show him." Rumsby will wrestle in the third event, right after King Kong Bundy squares off against a mystery opponent. Wrestling with WWC champ Tommy Thunder – who happens to be his son – Rumsby is billed as Executioner #1. Wrestling since 1965, Rumsby was the original Executioner. The character's black mask spawned a number of anonymous successors, so to keep things straight, Rumsby tacks the #1 after his stage name. As he put on his mask on a recent afternoon to throw some holds on Kopco and mug for a photographer, he seemed displeased with its fit. "It looks like a freakin' Glad bag," he said.

1/17/2006

Regionalism ... consolidation ... cooperation; any one beats bankruptcy

It took two-thirds of a century for the area's anthracite mining industry to suffocate and die. It has taken only one-third of a century since that demise for many Luzerne County communities that hosted mines or served as the hometowns of miners and their families to reach financial distress. This city is one of those towns. Nanticoke is deep in debt and shows scant prospect of becoming fiscally solvent. The \$3.2 million in annual total tax income and fees can't fund necessary services for some 10,000 people. Late on a sunny January morning, Nanticoke's new mayor, John Bushko, sits in his office and declares bluntly, "If we don't partner with other towns shortly, we're done." The \$700,000 debt staring Nanticoke in the face and the inability of the city to pave streets, among other things, has Bushko and city council looking to make dramatic changes in the way Nanticoke meets the needs of its people. "We need regionalization or consolidation," Bushko says. He cites the dismal failure of an initiative seven years ago to start a Council of Governments in southern Wyoming Valley and he sees a COG or selling services to other towns as patchwork steps. Real municipal cooperation is needed, he says, and towns should not be afraid to explore all options. Bushko has been on the phone and he expects to meet with Newport Township officials soon. He sees Hanover Township as another possible partner. The mayor, full of enthusiasm at age 61 after 12 years on city council, wants to move and to move quickly. He laments towns eliminating or reducing police forces and questions the wisdom of any town relying on state police. "They (state police) might have one guy on duty at midnight and he might be in Buck Township. How is he going to help you?" Bushko asks. Bushko intends to foster a good-neighbor policy. He said he would suggest to Plymouth Borough that the borough and Nanticoke respond to calls in Plymouth Township, a distressed community that has no police force, until the township gets back on its feet. "The people deserve protection, and we might be next (in the same position)," he said. The mayor pointed to the redundancy of fire stations lined up like peas in a pod: Sugar Notch, Warrior Run, Askam in Hanover Township, Hanover section of Nanticoke, and then into the city where several stations serve mainly as social clubs, at a cost to the city of \$6,000 each annually. "Nanticoke has more fire trucks (equipment vs. population) than New York City," Bushko said. He wonders why Hanover, Nanticoke and Newport can't regionalize and save money. Echoing comments in this column, Bushko says old thinking must give way to new and change can be a win-win-win-win for paid firefighters, volunteers, towns and the citizenry. "Thank God for the volunteers," he says, seeing them as key to realignments. "We need a plan," Bushko says. He and Nanticoke's council are drafting a financial report that will be presented to the public in March. That report, state early-intervention efforts to head off distressed status and partnering concepts should be digested and debated, Bushko said. "If we do nothing, we're into Act 47 as a distressed community. We don't want that," he said. Regionalization...consolidation...cooperation. Any one beats bankruptcy.

Paul Golias, the retired managing editor of The Citizens' Voice, writes a weekly column on regional issues. He can be reached at pgolias@verizon.net.

1/15/2006

Nanticoke Area Notes

By: Pamela Urbanski

Firemen help a Texas firehouse

Volunteering time and serving others is nothing new for members of the Honey Pot Fire Company.

The company's latest undertaking involves taking care of fellow firefighters. Chet Kopco, assistant fire chief, came up with the idea to adopt a fire company in Vida, Texas, that was hit hard by Hurricane Rita. Orange County Fire/Emergency District 1 serves 200-square-miles with a population of 38,000 people.

"The town lost two fire companies because of the hurricane," Kopco said. "Not only are these firefighters trying to rebuild their own lives, they are trying to piece together a fire company."

Kopco is in the process of forming a coalition to help with the fundraising. He already has received positive responses from the Nanticoke Fire Department, Hanover Township Fire Department and Plymouth and Newport Township are about to come aboard. "It's good we can all work together," he added.

Kopco said he feels the system to help hurricane victims have failed to some degree. After talking with the fire chief in Texas, he thinks that FEMA and some of the insurance companies have not been channeling moneys to the Orange County Fire Department, as they should have.

All money that is raised by the coalition will go directly to the firefighters in Texas to help to rebuild their stations and buy the necessary equipment to make sure residents are taken care of in emergencies.

It's wrestling for a good cause

The Honey Pot Fire Company is hosting the annual Six-County Volunteer Fireman's Convention on June 22-24. This will be a great boast for the city because it will bring some 2,500 firefighters together. They will attend workshops, meetings and elect officers for the coming year.

For the city of Nanticoke, it will mean fireworks, a huge carnival and a silent fireman's parade.

To raise funds for the convention, the fire company is sponsoring a WWC Pro Wrestling Competition on Jan. 21, at the Nanticoke Area High School gymnasium. During the event, firefighters will take a collection for the fire company they have adopted in Texas. "The gym holds 1,600 people," said Kopco. "This is a big event. Hopefully, everyone will be generous and help fill our collection jars."

If you enjoy wrestling, you won't want to miss this one. The first event has the Honky Tonk Man accompanied by partners 911Bs (Kopco and Frank Wolfe, who is the fire chief of Honey Pot) versus former WWC wrestling champion, 400-pound Dave Duncan. Frank works out daily, so the only thing he is a little worried about is getting tossed around. "I hope Dave takes it easy on the throws," Wolfe quipped.

Kopco tells me he has been working out for the match, but that his wife is still a little nervous. "Anything to raise money for a good cause," Kopco added.

The second match will have WWF/WWE superstar King Kong Bundy wrestling Mystery Opponent and the third bout will feature WWC World Champion Tom Thunder and Nanticoke's own Executioner #1 (can you guess who?) versus Mr. Motion and the Heartbreakers.

The halftime show will feature 1993-94 world champion full-contact karate expert Sam Hyder. "We want this to be family entertainment," Kopco said. "That's why even though it is a fundraiser, they decided to keep the prices down compared to other places that host this type of event."

Tickets purchased in advance are \$10 for bleacher seats and \$15 for floor seating. At the door the price is \$12 for bleacher seats and \$17 for floor. Refreshments also will be available for purchase.

Tickets can be purchased at Stars and Stripes Gym, Ruminski's Market, Marty's Pizza and Bonks Bar. For more information, call 735-0508.

If you would like to make a donation to the fire company in Vida, Texas, you can do so by sending it to the Orange County Fire Fund c/o Omega Bank, 35 N. Main St., Nanticoke.

1/15/2006

Developer unveils plans for Nanticoke

By Elizabeth Skrapits, Staff Writer

Many city officials and residents have been asking to see downtown redevelopment drawings since the former municipal authority board hired developer Impact PA in May 2005.

They got their wish on Saturday, 11 days after the new board was appointed. Impact PA vice president Greg Patryna outlined the proposed East Main Street project in the Greater Nanticoke Area High School auditorium.

But city and state officials still have questions about funding and whether the project will succeed for the long term in a changing and competitive environment.

The project includes a 324-space parking garage, renovations to the Kanjorski Center on East Main Street, and construction of more than 44,000 square feet of retail and commercial space on East Main Street and Arch Street.

The Kanjorski Center, cited by city officials as an example of poor planning, does not have parking for its employees. Plans call for the \$7.7 million garage to be built with federal transportation funding.

Most of the \$23 million project will be offset by government grants, the rest, by equity in the form of tax credits, Patryna said.

U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, urged the municipal authority to get started on the project, telling the board the money is in place.

But State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, cautioned the board not to rush into anything.

He said \$11 million of the \$23 million is not a sure thing. The state's total \$4 million contribution to federal grants is not a certainty, and \$7 million in equity and other funding does not yet exist, he said,

The municipal authority would own the parking garage and other properties, Patryna said.

Private ownership is preferable because the city needs tax revenue, city councilman Bill O'Malley said.

His concern is that if the project fails, the city will be responsible for maintenance, mortgage payments and other expenses. And Nanticoke is not in a financial position to take on debt run up by the municipal authority, he said.

Municipal authority interim solicitor Joseph Lach asked what was done to assess existing business conditions and how the project will fit in with them.

Impact PA president Robert Yoder's firm, the Yoder Group, was hired by a former municipal authority board for the redevelopment project in 2000. The firm pulled out.

A market study was done at that time, but isn't being updated because the firm didn't see the need for the approximately \$15,000 expense, Patryna said.

"The best market study we have is all the people who are interested in moving in," Patryna said, a statement later echoed by Kanjorski. Things have changed dramatically in the area since 2000, municipal authority chairman Richard Butler said. Since then, Wilkes-Barre Township has grown and Wilkes-Barre City has started revitalization efforts, and both municipalities could be competition for Nanticoke in luring new businesses.

Yudichak also pointed out new developments in Nanticoke, such as the expansion of Luzerne County Community College and the construction of the Whitney Pointe industrial and residential park. He noted that Impact PA's contract requires the firm to commission a professional market study to determine the marketability of the proposed project, so not doing so could be a violation of the contract. Butler stressed that the municipal authority should not build until there is a five-year plan in place, but Kanjorski said there is no need for one.

Butler's concern was putting the municipal authority and city at financial risk by constructing a building and being unable to find tenants for it. "We're not going to put any bricks and sticks up until we get a signed lease," he said.

The municipal authority is already struggling with the problem. The Kanjorski Center is 80 percent vacant since the Medicare claims processing firm HealthNow moved to Dallas in October.

There is a lot of interest in the Center by potential tenants, Patryna said. There are also what he described as "major players" interested in leasing space in the new buildings at \$7 per square foot, he said.

After the meeting, Patryna said Impact PA had work sessions every few weeks with the previous municipal authority, and will do the same with the new board.

1/15/2006

Nanticoke plan received coolly

A Turbotville company unveils its proposal for a downtown parking and commercial building.

By mbuffer@leader.net

Impact Pennsylvania Inc. has a \$23.4 million plan to redevelop the city's downtown, city officials learned Saturday.

New members of the city General Municipal Authority doubted the Turbotville, Pa.-based company's plan existed and insisted the company disclose it at Saturday's meeting.

U.S. Rep. Paul E. Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, said the project would be "free" for city taxpayers, noting he has lined up federal and state funding for it. Some officials, including state Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, expressed doubts it would cost the city nothing.

The plan includes a new parking and commercial building along Broadway and East Main and Arch streets, a pedestrian bridge over Broadway from the parking deck to the Kanjorski Center, renovations to the Kanjorski Center and an expansion of the Kanjorski Center along Arch Street. The parking building would cost \$10.7 million and includes: a 4½ deck parking garage for 324 vehicles; 29,800 square feet in retail space; 15,000 square feet in office space on the second floor on Main Street; and 30,000 in potential commercial space.

Expanding and renovating the 32,000-square-foot Kanjorski Center would cost \$12.7 million. The center has 28,000 vacant square feet because HealthNow left in the fall and relocated to Dallas.

The municipal authority, with the city redevelopment authority, owns and operates the Kanjorski Center and is responsible for finding tenants. It also would own the parking building.

The authority approved Impact's contract in May. On Jan. 3, Mayor John Bushko and city council filled three of five authority seats with new members.

Authority Chairman Richard Butler, one of the new members, said he was pleased to see a conceptual plan, but he still expressed doubts it would succeed. Butler said Impact's plan was based on an obsolete marketing plan from 2000 and relies too much on government funding.

Butler said vacant buildings would cost the authority, which is going to run out of funds in February because it lost \$33,000 in monthly income when HealthNow relocated. Butler added he doesn't want to build the proposed facilities without signed leases.

Kanjorski said prospective tenants won't agree to a lease "if an empty lot is there." In the fall, three Main Street buildings – which housed Lecher's Hardware, a coin shop, a coffee shop and Galazin Cleaners – were demolished.

"You are not building the World Trade Center in downtown Nanticoke," Kanjorski said.

Kanjorski said he didn't understand why the authority would "turn down a free building."

Yudichak said later during the meeting: "It's not free money. It's taxpayer money, and you should use due diligence on how you spend it."

The state legislator said the grants for the project are based on contingencies and assumptions and said federal transportation grants that total \$7.2 million require the city to provide a 20 percent match. Yudichak disputed Kanjorski's contention that the state would provide the match.

Yudichak also said Impact's contract required the company to conduct a new marketing study. Impact representative Greg Patryna said the company will update the 2000 marketing study when "we are further along in the process."

Impact owner Robert Yoder was not at the meeting. Yoder has contributed \$1,000 to Kanjorski's political committee since 1998, according to Federal Election Commission records.

Also Saturday, former Solicitor Susan Maza said she and former authority member were not aware of the authority's work session on Wednesday. During Wednesday's meeting, authority members said they were disappointed Maza and the former members were not available for questioning.

1/12/2006

Authority focuses on finances

Group prepares for meeting with downtown developer as it faces dwindling cash balance.

By mbuffer@leader.net

Faced with running out of money in February, new members of the General Municipal Authority on Wednesday tried to get answers about authority finances.

But authority members were disappointed that former authority members and former authority Solicitor Susan Maza didn't attend the meeting and were not available for questioning. Wednesday night's work session was held to prepare for Saturday's meeting.

Authority members expect developer Robert Yoder on Saturday to produce concept and marketing plans for a Main Street redevelopment project, which began in the fall when three buildings were demolished. Those buildings housed Lecher's Hardware, a coin shop, a coffee shop and Galazin Cleaners.

Last Saturday, U.S. Rep. Paul E. Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, warned the authority not to interfere with the redevelopment plans because the city could lose more than \$21 million in federal and state grant funding. Kanjorski said plans will be based on unidentified tenants who want to lease space in a new commercial building.

That building could have between 20,000 and 60,000 square feet. The project also includes a parking garage for at least 300 vehicles and could be done by September 2007, Kanjorski said.

Authority member Ron Kamowski on Wednesday complained that previous authority members approved a contract with Yoder's company, Impact Pennsylvania Inc. of Turbotville, Pa., without seeking bids for the redevelopment project. Kamowski said the authority violated rules governing the use of a \$1.5 million federal grant by not seeking bids.

Authority Chairman Richard Butler complained about the contract terms. The authority agreed to pay Impact Pennsylvania \$75,000 and various percentages of the project's costs.

Mayor John Bushko said the authority owns 11 properties in the city, including the Kanjorski Center on Main Street. The authority is running out of money because it lost its anchor tenant in the Kanjorski Center, officials said.

The authority lost about \$33,000 in monthly revenue when HealthNow moved out of the Kanjorski Center in the fall and relocated to the Twin Stacks Center on state Route 415 in Dallas. The authority's cash balance at the end of 2005 was \$39,602.

Last week, Bushko and city council appointed Butler, Kamowski and Henry Kellar to the authority. One seat remains vacant.

Chester Beggs is the only remaining member, and he was the only member from last year to attend Wednesday's meeting.

1/12/2006

Nanticoke officials discuss city project, money woes

By Elizabeth Skrapits, Staff Writer

New Nanticoke General Municipal Authority members hoped to sit down with their predecessors Wednesday night for a constructive informal work session, but none of the former municipal authority members showed up.

So new board members Richard Butler, Henry Kellar and Ron Kamowski opted to question Chester Beggs, the only former authority member still on the board, about issues, including the East Main Street project and the authority's financial troubles.

A letter sent Saturday by former authority member Stephen Buchinski to city officials and the three new members said he and former member Robert Bray would be "willing to meet with the current members of the municipal authority in order to effectuate a smooth transition."

However, Buchinski, Bray and former solicitor Susan Maza did not attend, despite being invited, Butler said.

The intention was not to pick on Beggs personally, interim solicitor Joseph Lach said. However, Lach faulted previous boards for a lack of sound guidance and failure to "do their due diligence" before getting involved with projects.

A major concern of the new board is a contract with developer Robert Yoder of Impact Pennsylvania, and whether he has concrete plans for the commercial building he is supposed to construct at 108-120 East Main St.

The contract does not have a fee schedule for Yoder's consulting work, meaning he can charge anything he wants, and requires the municipal authority to pay him if he is fired without or even with cause, among other provisions, Butler said.

Kamowski said the previous board signed the contract with Yoder without having put it out for bid - a possible violation of government rules for the grants the authority hopes to use for the building.

Beggs defended the decisions, saying former authority members were on a strict timetable and feared losing a \$1.5 million federal grant for the project.

The board is asking Yoder or his representative to attend a special meeting Saturday to show his concept plans and financial and marketing studies to the public, Butler said.

On the financial issue, the 80-percent vacant Kanjorski Center on East Main Street means the municipal authority is not getting enough rent to pay its bills.

"It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know we're broke in February unless we get a tenant," Butler said, adding that he did not think it likely.

1/8/2006

Nanticoke Area Notes

By: Pamela Urbanski

Club provides a real 'boost'

Gerald Bavitz is a true Trojan basketball fan.

Mr. Bavitz recently brought me up to speed on the good work the Greater Nanticoke Area Basketball Booster Club has done over the years. I'd like to share a piece of history with you today.

Founded in 1986 by the late Milton Owens and several other men, the club's primary purpose was to help coaches and players in any way.

"They wanted to help out without interfering with the overall operation of the boys' basketball team," offered Bavitz.

Knowing that sending young men, who had an interest in basketball, to camp would enhance their playing skills, fundraisers were started and camps became a part of the program and proved to be successful. Supporters of the girls' basketball team soon became a part of the booster club. Currently, both clubs work together to ensure players and coaches have what they need.

Over the years, the club has provided such items as t-shirts, sweatshirts, hooded sweatshirts, jackets, warm-up pants, etc. The club also purchases visual aids such as game films, equipment that will improve a player's game and trophies for foul-shooting contests, sponsored by the Nanticoke Recreation Group.

In 1987, the first alumni basketball game, pitting players from previous years against each other, was held. Today, it is known as meet-the-player's night. The game showcases the talents of the present players. In 1988, the annual awards presentation banquet was started to honor senior members of the team. Awards also are given at this time for those who have been selected for outstanding basketball performances throughout the year. This required some funding, so in 1988 the first edition of a 12-page program book was printed. "The book is very popular and this year we will have a book that contains as many as 60 pages, some in color," Bavitz added.

In 1990, Nanticoke was put on the map when the girls' basketball team, coached by Rose Volpicelli, captured a state title. The booster club was proud to contribute toward the purchase of championship rings. The club also has produced the Wall of Fame, plaques that hang in the vestibule of the Sylvester Bozinski gymnasium. It is a way to pay tribute to those players, boys and girls, who at the conclusion of their high school careers earned 1,000 or more points.

It just didn't seem right to recognize only one of the state championship teams, so in 1993 the booster club invited players and coaches of the Nanticoke Rams basketball team that won a state title in 1961 to a dinner and awards presentation.

"It was a very nice affair," said Bavitz. "We had players from all over the U.S. attend."

One player, Joseph Shepela, couldn't attend, but he wanted to remember his alma mater. In 1994, he decided to offer an annual scholarship of \$1,000 for a senior boy and girl basketball player who displayed academic excellence. The award has now grown to \$1,500. The booster club acts as a liaison between Shepela and the school district.

Yes, the Nanticoke Basketball Booster Club is alive and well because of men like Bavitz and Joseph Czech, who also has been a member of the club since its inception. "I really enjoy being a member of the club," said Bavitz. "It's good when we can make a difference in the lives of young people. We need to keep them involved in positive things in their lives." Spoken like a true champion.

The booster club is always looking for new members. You can sign up at any home basketball game or by contacting Nick Pucino, membership chairman, at 735-2970. Meetings are held the third Wednesday of each month at Alden Manor.

Children's programs at the Mill

Cindy Higgins, children's program director at Mill Memorial Library, reminds children and their parents that winter sessions for children's programs begin Jan. 18. Preschool classes will be held Wednesdays from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. from Jan. 18 to Feb. 15 and March 1 to April 12. Monday night programs for those in preschool to third grade will be held from 6 to 7 p.m. Jan. 30 to April 3.

Christine Mash, library volunteer, will hold a program for toddlers and their parent or caregiver on Mondays at 10:30 a.m. from Jan. 23 to March 6. For more information, call the Mill at 735-3030.

Levandowski a collegiate scholar

Recent College Misericordia graduate Tiffany Ann Levandowski has been named to serve as a collegiate scholar in the 2006 International Scholar Laureate Program Delegation on Anthropology and Archeology. Selection for the program is based upon exemplary leadership and outstanding academic performance during college years.

Tiffany is a 2001 graduate of Greater Nanticoke Area High School. She is the daughter of Michael and Connie Levandowski of Nanticoke and the granddaughter of Bernard and Josephine Levandowski of Wapwallopen and Shirley Savage and the late Walter Savage of Plains.

1/8/2006

Authority, Kanjo feud in Nanticoke

By mbuffer@leader.net

U.S. Rep. Paul E. Kanjorski on Saturday warned new members of the city General Municipal Authority not to interfere with redevelopment plans for Main Street because the city could lose more than \$21 million in grant funding.

"I'm not stopping this from working," said Richard Butler, who became the new authority chairman Saturday.

Butler said he wants developer Robert Yoder to produce conceptual and marketing plans for the Main Street project, which is required in his company's contract with the authority.

"It is done," said Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke.

"But never produced," Butler said.

"Because it is not final," Kanjorski said.

Kanjorski said the final plan will be based on the tenants in a new commercial building, which could have between 20,000 and 60,000 square feet. The project also includes a parking garage for at least 300 vehicles and could be done by September 2007, Kanjorski said.

The project resulted in the demolition of three Main Street buildings, which housed Lecher's Hardware, a coin shop, a coffee shop and Galazin Cleaners. The demolition was done last month.

"My concern is we're flying by the seat of our pants," Butler said.

Authority members scheduled another meeting for this coming Saturday to see Yoder's plans and drawings. Yoder or a representative of his Turbotville, Pa.-based company was not at Saturday's meeting.

Kanjorski, who spoke on Yoder's behalf, warned authority members not to disclose in public the names of prospective tenants or terms of prospective leases because it could kill deals.

Yoder has contributed \$1,000 to Kanjorski's political committee since 1998, according to Federal Election Commission records.

Also Saturday, Kanjorski said it was unfair to blame the authority losing HealthNow as the anchor tenant of the authority-operated Kanjorski Center on Main Street. In the fall, the company relocated to the Twin Stacks Center on state Route 415 in Dallas.

Kanjorski said HealthNow was no longer a viable anchor tenant because it was going to lose a contract to process Medicare claims. The federal government officially gave the contract to another company Friday, Kanjorski said.

The municipal authority on Saturday also appointed Joe Lach as acting solicitor because Susan Maza resigned as solicitor. She is responsible for turning over authority records and documents.

On Tuesday, Mayor John Bushko and city council appointed Butler, Henry Kellar and Ron Kamowski to the authority. One seat remains vacant, and Chester Beggs is the only remaining member.

1/8/2006

HealthNow jobs uncertain

By Elizabeth Skrapits, Staff Writer

The loss of a federal contract means an uncertain future for one of the Back Mountain's newest and largest employers.

HealthNow, which moved to the Twin Stacks Center on Route 415 in Dallas Borough in October, employs 175 people. The New York-based Medicare claims processing company was notified Friday by the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services that it failed to receive a new five-year-option, \$58 million contract.

The loss of the federal contract makes the fate of HealthNow's local facility unclear.

"It's so preliminary right now for us to state how this could affect HealthNow and all our employees in Dallas," said HealthNow communications director Karen Merkel-Liberatore. "It will certainly have an effect, but at this point we don't know what to expect."

Federal guidelines require Medicare administrative contracts to be bid every five years. Liberatore did not know why HealthNow, which she said submitted a "solid" bid proposal, did not get the renewal.

In 2000, BlueCross and BlueShield of New York, operating as HealthNow, took over the federal contract from United Health Care, which operated a claims processing facility in the Kanjorski Center in Nanticoke. That contract, which expires June 31, 2006 required HealthNow to hire the United Health Care employees.

United Health Care, based in Minnesota, no longer operates a claims processing facility in the region. Now that National Heritage Insurance Company has the contract, there is no such guarantee, U.S. Rep Paul Kanjorski, D-11, said on Saturday.

A fact sheet from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services said National Heritage operations would be headquartered in Biddeford, Maine, and Hingham, Mass. The federal agency is not requiring the company to offer jobs to HealthNow employees. Approximately 278 HealthNow employees, including those in Dallas, are potentially affected.

When HealthNow moved from the Kanjorski Center to Twin Stacks, company officials signed a three-year lease contingent on the federal contract being renewed, said attorney Lynn Banta, owner of Twin Stacks.

A huge amount of work had to be done to modify space at Twin Stacks for HealthNow, Banta said, adding that Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services had to approve the facility and the lease before it was signed.

In Nanticoke, the city's municipal authority, which is responsible for the Kanjorski Center, spent more than \$200,000 to accommodate HealthNow, including hiring professionals to draw up plans for an expansion that never materialized, Kanjorski said.

But he claims he was not upset when HealthNow left his district for that of U.S. Rep. Don Sherwood, R-10.

"There was a lot of ado about nothing," Kanjorski said. "They (HealthNow) were not considered a likely candidate for this contract for the past six months. That's why it didn't bother me."

He said it was "grossly unfair" of HealthNow not to tell the municipal authority it might not get the federal contract.

The Kanjorski Center remains 80 percent vacant. By contrast, Banta said Twin Stacks has had at least 90 percent occupancy since she and her husband Richard Haas developed the center from the former Natona textile mill in 1999.

Finding new tenants if HealthNow leaves won't be a problem, she said. Banta, as president of the Back Mountain Business and Professional Association, is more concerned about the impact on the community from the loss of a large employer.

"We will just have to wait and see what happens. It would certainly be a blow to Twin Stacks, and a blow to the Back Mountain," she said. "We would hate to see them go, and we would do everything we could to work with anyone who had the contract to make sure that, as a business community, we were able to stay healthy."

1/5/2006

Nanticoke restaffs development board

The municipal authority has been accused of not making enough information public.

By mbuffer@leader.net

Big changes could be in store for the city General Municipal Authority, which has been under fire for not having an anchor tenant for the Kanjorski

Center and not having a East Main Street redevelopment plan.

The five-person authority has three new members and one vacancy. Chester Beggs remains on the authority.

A new mayor and three new city councilmen looking for change appointed the three new authority members Tuesday.

"We need to evaluate and start over," said Richard Butler, a mortgage banker and new authority member, who joins Ron Kamowski and Henry Keller, also freshly appointed.

Kamowski, president of K&K Electric in Nanticoke, said the authority will begin operating more openly and cooperatively.

"We will definitely make as much information as we can public," Kamowski said. "We will keep executive sessions down to an extreme minimum, personnel issues and certain financial contract negotiations."

The authority next meets Saturday.

Joe Lach, a founder of the South Valley Partnership, which is interested in economic development in Nanticoke, Plymouth Township and Newport Township, said the municipal authority has been very secretive.

Authority Solicitor Susan Maza did not return calls Tuesday or Wednesday.

At December's authority meeting, officials failed to disclose any type of spending plan for 2006, Lach said.

The authority lost more than \$30,000 per month in revenue when HealthNow, a Medicare claims processing company, pulled out of the Kanjorski Center, Kamowski said.

Lach blames the authority for HealthNow's decision to relocate to Dallas in the fall. The company had been the primary tenant in the center since 2000.

State Rep. John Yudichak, D-Nanticoke, said the city needs "a solid business plan."

He said he is optimistic new authority members will be able to use a comprehensive, regional plan, which will soon be completed by the South Valley Partnership.

Lach said the authority failed to disclose its plans for East Main Street before recently demolishing three buildings. There was some general talk of constructing a 60,000-square-foot office building, Lach said.

Kamowski said he wants to question developer Robert Yoder, who has a redevelopment contract with the authority, about the East Main Street project during Saturday's meeting.

U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, said criticism of the municipal authority is undeserved. He said the authority has "performed extraordinarily well" and is responsible for securing federal grant money, including \$1.5 million for the East Main Street project.

Politicizing authority business will hurt Nanticoke's redevelopment efforts, Kanjorski said.

The Nanticoke Municipal Authority meets at 10 a.m. Saturday

at Nanticoke City Hall at 15 E. Ridge St.

1/4/2006

New Nanticoke mayor, council see reason for optimism

By Elizabeth Skrapits, Staff Writer

The city begins 2006 with a new mayor, a youthful new council, and a reorganized municipal authority.

Mayor John Bushko and new Councilmen Brent Makarczyk and James Litchkofski were sworn in by Luzerne County Judge Thomas Burke Tuesday morning in front of a crowd of relatives and residents.

Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker gave the oath of office to re-elected tax collector Albert Wytoshek and controller Kevin Coughlin.

Minutes later, Bushko resigned as councilman and nominated William O'Malley to complete the remaining two years of his term.

The motion passed 4-1. Councilman Joseph Dougherty voted against it because he said it took him by surprise.

"I knew they were going to appoint somebody. But I should have been part of the discussion," Dougherty explained later. "What we need is open dialogue between mayor and council. No one should be left in the dark."

O'Malley, 38, ties with Dougherty, also 38, as oldest member of council. Litchkofski is 35 and Makarczyk is the youngest at 28.

"If the town's going to go, that's what you want - new ideas, young ideas," Bushko said. "This council isn't going to be business as usual."

O'Malley, who has a master's degree in business administration and is self-employed at a document-shredding firm, was building manager for the Kanjorski Center until his resignation a few months ago.

Bushko said he chose him because of his business experience and financial background, qualities the new mayor also sought in his municipal authority appointees.

Henry Keller, retired after 30 years in management positions at the former RCA Corp., takes the seat of Mike Borowski who resigned in March.

Richard Butler, a banker with real estate experience, replaces Robert Bray, and Ron Kamowski replaces Steve Buchinski. Both terms expired Dec. 31.

Kamowski owns 154 Market St., where HealthNow had additional offices before the Medicare claims-processing firm moved from the Kanjorski Center on Main Street to Dallas Borough at the end of October.

"The first six months are going to be tough. Everybody's flying blind," Butler said. "You've got downtown being torn down with no plan, you've got the Kanjorski Center empty ... Our biggest task will be developing a plan, and it has to be long-term. We're not going to solve all the past errors overnight."

Council and Bushko voted to re-appoint William Kearney as Nanticoke representative to the Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority.

The previous council and Mayor John Toole appointed Whittaker to the seat, amid controversy because Kearney's term had not expired. The sanitary authority did not seat Whittaker at its last meeting, Bushko said.

Solicitor Bernard Kotulak said it will be up to the sanitary authority's attorney to determine which appointment is official.

1/4/2006

New administration

Nanticoke changes political leadership

The municipal and housing boards get new members as city council reorganizes.

By mbuffer@leader.net

A new mayor and three new city council members took power Tuesday and began steering the city government in a new direction. Some of their first actions involved appointing new people to serve on the municipal and housing authorities.

"We need new blood all over," said John Bushko, who resigned his council seat Tuesday to begin a four-year term as mayor.

Bushko was elected mayor Nov. 8. City Councilmen Jim Litchkofski and Brent Makarczyk, who ran as Bushko's running mates in last year's Democratic primary election, also were elected Nov. 8.

Incumbent Mayor John Toole and his council running mates were defeated in last year's Democratic primary.

Bushko, Litchkofski and Makarczyk on Tuesday picked William O'Malley to serve on council during the final two years of Bushko's council term. O'Malley, 38, is a lifelong resident of Nanticoke. He is self-employed with a background in accounting and finance.

Councilman Joseph Dougherty cast the only vote against O'Malley.

"This is the first I heard of this appointment," Dougherty said.

Before the vote, Controller Kevin Coughlin suggested council request applications from city residents interested in the council seat.

"Thank you for those comments. I made the motion," Bushko responded.

Coughlin and Treasurer Albert Wytoszek were also sworn into office Tuesday. In November, they were elected to four-year terms.

Council and then-Mayor John Toole appointed Coughlin, a microfilm technician in the Luzerne County Prothonotary's Office, as city controller in February 2004, amid controversy. He is the son-in-law of Stanley Glazenski, a former Nanticoke mayor and retired county deputy clerk of courts.

Bushko on Tuesday nominated three people to the city municipal authority – Richard Butler, Ronald Kamowski and Henry Kellar – and three others to the housing authority – David Hornlein, Josephine Bashista and Christina Butrick. They were all confirmed.

Critics of the municipal authority are upset the authority approved the demolition of three East Main Street buildings without a plan to replace them. That demolition was done last month.

Critics are also upset that HealthNow, the primary tenant in the authority-managed Kanjorski Center, relocated to Dallas. HealthNow is a Medicare claims processing company.

Bushko said of the new municipal authority appointees: "They're businessmen. They have knowledge about downtown, and they will go out and pursue businesses."

1/4/2006

Nanticoke reverses sewer board vote

The new council's decision puts incumbent William Kearney back in the position.

By mbuffer@leader.net

District Judge Donald Whittaker's bid to serve on the Wyoming Valley Sanitary Authority board suffered a setback Tuesday.

City council and Mayor John Bushko voted 4-1 to reappoint William Kearney to the authority board, reversing last month's 4-1 vote to replace Kearney with Whittaker.

The four votes in December included votes from three lame ducks – Mayor John Toole and council members Bill Brown and Yvonne Bozinski.

Bushko voted against Whittaker's appointment in December and took over as mayor Tuesday. Also Tuesday, William O'Malley was appointed to serve in Bushko's seat, and Jim Litchkofski and Brent Makarczyk began serving the council terms they won in the Nov. 8 election.

Councilman Joseph Dougherty, the only council member left from last year, voted against Kearney's reappointment on Tuesday.

He questioned if council could reappoint Kearney after voting to replace him last month.

Solicitor Bernard Kotulak said authority solicitor Tony Panaway is responsible for deciding which appointment is valid. Panaway said the authority typically defers to municipalities regarding appointments.

The authority has 17 board members from 14 charter municipalities. Wilkes-Barre has three members.

Whittaker declined comment, a worker in his office said Tuesday.

"I don't think he ever should have been there," Bushko said Tuesday. "Change is good, but not all change is good."

Last month, Bushko said Whittaker's appointment was not legal because Kearney's term on the authority didn't expire until Dec. 31.

During the Dec. 20 sanitary authority meeting, Whittaker sat in the back of the meeting room as Kearney represented Nanticoke on the authority board.

Kearney, owner of a funeral home on South Prospect Street in Nanticoke, said Tuesday he asked council members to reappoint him.

"We are doing a lot of new things," Kearney said. "I have been there 20 years. I want to finish what we started."

The authority has been providing wastewater treatment since 1962.

Whittaker's December appointment was also disputed because Whittaker doesn't live in the city. Whittaker lives in Newport Township but can represent the city on the authority because he maintains a business – a magisterial office – in the city, Kotulak said.

Luzerne County is budgeted to pay the city \$12,500 next year to rent space in city hall for Whittaker's magisterial court operation.

His office handles civil and criminal matters for residents of Nanticoke, the borough of Plymouth and the townships of Newport and Plymouth.

Whittaker was re-elected to his post last year.



1/3/2006

Municipal finances among worries for new mayors

By Tom Long , Staff Writer

Nanticoke, Pittston get new leaders today; Kingston's Haggerty returns for third term

Three mayors begin new terms today in large Luzerne County municipalities. Two new men take office hoping to solve their cities' financial troubles, while Kingston Mayor James Haggerty plans to extend a history of balanced budgets into his third term.

Kingston, Nanticoke and Pittston all swear in mayors today.

In cash-strapped Nanticoke and Pittston, the entering mayors didn't hesitate in listing their top priority for 2006.

"Finances are going to be the main thing," said new Pittston Mayor Joe Keating. "Without money, you can't do anything."

"Get the budget in order," said Nanticoke's Mayor John Bushko. "Get the city running like a business."

In sharp contrast to many towns and cities in the region, Kingston starts the year without major financial headaches - and with a \$1 million surplus.

Employment and real estate values there are strong, said Haggerty - whose third term could be cut short if the attorney succeeds in his run to replace retiring state Sen. Charles D. Lemmond Jr.

Because Kingston has a municipal manager and mayor is only a part-time job, Haggerty said his campaign wouldn't interfere with city operations.

Kingston's government relies mostly on income tax, not property tax, so the city's revenue grows with wages.

Pittston and Nanticoke have struggled with largely stagnant revenue as property values stay flat and population slides.

"2005 will be our eighth consecutive balanced budget," Haggerty said. "Our financial picture going forward is very bright."

Bushko, however, realizes he will have major fiscal worries in Nanticoke.

"We have to get more revenue coming in," he said.

The new mayor called regionalization "a top priority," and hopes it might solve some problems for struggling, small towns.

In addition to withering funds, Keating is worried Pittston could have major problems because of mine subsidence.

Pittston's Mill Street suffered a collapse Dec. 23, and the

street could need a new sewer system. The city can't afford it, Keating said, and he hopes to attain state and federal funds.

Nanticoke Area Notes - By: Pam Urbanski

New mayor lists priorities

With the start of a New Year, the City of Nanticoke will have a new mayor and three new councilmen.

On Tuesday, John Bushko will be sworn in as Nanticoke's new mayor. I asked Bushko what some of his priorities will be when it comes to the city.

I found him to be upbeat about working with council and he wants to make the people a priority "All of us, myself and council are servants of the people," Bushko said. "We should always be mindful of that first and foremost."

The mayor-elect tells me he would like to make the city staff members more accessible to the people. "I think we need to take a look at possibly keeping open during lunch hour since that's the only time some people can't take care of bills or have questions answered. He said he expects all city employees to be helpful and cordial. "We're here to serve."

Bushko plans on meeting with all department heads and keeping the lines of communication open. "We have good people in our police, fire and street departments, he added. "I think we all need to help each other out."

Finances are Bushko's top priority He plans to watch how money is spent and wants more accountability when it comes to money in accounts. "I think all department heads have done a good job in keeping expenses down, but I think we have to do more."

He also believes that financial reports are too general and would like to have a better idea of what is in each account. Taking money from one account to cover a bill in another has been necessary and done frequently "I think we need to make sure that when we borrow money from one account it gets put back into that account."

The conditions of the streets also are a concern for Bushko.

"We need to keep improving our roads and repairing and paving as many as possible. He would like to utilize the regional equipment center and have city departments do the work. "I think we can save some money that way," he added.

He also intends to ask for job descriptions from city employees. "I think we need to know who is responsible for what and how they are accomplishing their duties."

Bushko also intends to develop a relationship with Luzerne County Community College. He said the college is a great asset to the city. "That facility is a gem in our own backyard. It's a great institution that we have neglected for too long."

The new mayor plans on working toward recreation for all residents. "The project in Lower Broadway will really be a boost for the city. They are doing good work there." He hopes the new development being built by Ken Pollock will add to the tax rolls. The new development planned for seniors on Kosciuszko Street is also a plus.

Bushko is looking forward to working with council. "Joe Dougherty, Brent Makarczyk and James Litchkofski are smart and hardworking

individuals. I think we will work well together," he concluded.

Fire at Oplinger Towers

Fire broke out in an elderly high-rise apartment complex Saturday afternoon, but no one was injured.

According to the Nanticoke Fire Department:

The fire started in the bedroom of apartment 526 in Oplinger Towers at about 2:30 p.m. All residents were taken to a day room on the first floor while firefighters battled the blaze.

The fire was put out quickly. The bedroom of the apartment sustained heavy fire damage and there is smoke and water damage in other parts of the apartment.

Firefighters said the cause of the fire is still under investigation, but it appears to be accidental. Emergency crews from Hanover and Edwardsville assisted.

HAPPY NEW YEAR - "2006"

1/1/2006

Some of the Times Leader's Sports Stories of 2005

- Greater Nanticoke Area head football coach Len Butczynski resigned from his alma mater after consecutive 1-9 seasons and a dwindling roster. Two months later another Trojans alum, Bob Colatosti, was hired to replace him.
- Greater Nanticoke Area junior Aimee Bono set a state record when she scored 11 goals in a 15-0 soccer win over Bishop O'Reilly on May 4.
- Greater Nanticoke Area (Class 2A) and Bishop O'Reilly (Class A) won District 2 girls volleyball titles on Nov. 3.