

The Collegian

# commentary

## ERIE'S CIVIC CENTER

By Jim Martin  
Executive Editor

The Mayor's office and the town council of the city of Erie have been in the news a good deal on plans of organizing and building a Civic Center. Immediately upon thinking about it, my initial reaction is favorable. And it has been for the last 10-15 years that this idea has been tossed around the Erie community. Finally some action has been able to take place because of Federal funds being allocated to the city for assisting in the actual construction. Mayor Lou Tullio ("Big Lou") has been advocating that since the Federal government is willing to allocate money to the city, the city—without a doubt—should take the advantage of these funds, preferably by building a Civic Center. (This leaves much to be desired).

The citizens in advocating the blueprints for a Center are promoting it as the much needed life instilling drawing card for the downtown area. Presently, the economic decline of the downtown area has been staggering. Many street corners and blocks are vacant lots. Numerous merchants have moved out to other more profitable locations such as the Millcreek Mall at Routes 19 and 99, leaving the remaining few businesses fending added competition from these new outside areas. Along with the merchants, travel the customers causing the possibility of less earnings for the downtown merchants a growing reality. Continuing tersely, next the city's taxes are decreased because of the travelling salesman (or any tax-paying inhabitant who has moved), then services provided by the city's government for the community are cut to balance the tax base (revenues) that has been lessened due to the void that has been created.

The Civic Center would be a "drawing card" because it would lessen this aspect of Erie's plight. The Center's intention is to bring to the city of Erie an organized cultural, athletic and entertaining facility all under one roof. In

doing so, a multitude of activities would be provided to any and everybody inside or outside the Erie community. And all of this would develop and take place downtown. The tax base (revenues) would be built up again. So the Civic Center could very well indeed be a visible and viable attraction in building up a depleting economic market.

In addition, by increasing the enhancement of the downtown, the Civic Center would also increase the variety of the events and activities offered. This variety of shows would include a more cultural, informative atmosphere for all of Erie, city and county. Not only an economic benefit but also an upswing in cultural enlightenment is forecast by Civic Center enthusiasts.

What the city must understand and be able to grapple with successfully is the difficulty in the actual implementing, marketing and maintaining such a demanding enterprise as the undertaking of constructing a Civic Center.

In the immediate area, the county of Erie has a very similar complex in the Erie County Fieldhouse (ECF). This facility is able to put on several seasonal shows that are "big name" attractions and then fills the remaining dates on the calendar with lesser "big name" attractions but of equally important marketing value. The Erie area therefore is provided with a very good facility which in turn is able to supply the community with athletic and other activities on a regular favorable marketing (promotion and selling of events) schedule. The ECF during its first two years has worked toward a schedule that does not saturate the area with one too many similar events. It continues to mix and balance its shows. The management for the Fieldhouse must be on top of the economic marketing costs incurred to survive, then turn a profit.

The ECF is still carrying a debt—more aptly and properly called bonding—incurred at its outset. In building the arena, loans were needed from various

banks in Erie. An overwhelming majority is still owed. The costs for initiating this type of project are enormous (in the \$100,000's). Coupled with the implementing costs, the Fieldhouse must add to that bill an expected and actual loss incurred during the first two years. It is hoped in the third year the ECF will make a profit.

Initial financing for the Civic Center will not be enough to make this enterprise a lasting economic success. The odd \$7 million Erie is to receive many not even be half of the financial necessities needed in constructing such a complex. What could be encountered by the community—primarily city resident taxpayers—is a possible collapse and failure. The citizen who pays the most is the city taxpayer because he pays both city and county taxes while the county resident not residing in the city pays only county taxes. Simply, costs for the Civic Center will have to be paid almost entirely by the city residents (over the \$7 million Federal allocation).

How could the Civic Center fail? Very easily. The most apparent cause would be a disastrous recession or depression. Also an apparent single cause would be mismanagement. Barring a disastrous recession the absolute necessity of a knowledgeable management becomes the major key for unlocking the Center's success. For that reason, it is my conviction that the management should not be politically motivated in any way. That means no political appointments to the managing staff. The pitfalls that management will meet can be devastating and leave ruin to a "good idea."

One difficulty will be signing contracts. The next, obviously, is to sell them. Also, a very definite deterrent to developing a successful operation arises in a possible over-saturation of the Erie community market for events. This is directly probable because of the ECF.

The Fieldhouse is establishing itself as a big plus and drawing-card of events for the Erie area. (The aspirations held by Civic Center hopefuls). They have contracts for sporting events, concerts, exhibitions and many annual activities. An all-out head-on battle between the Civic Center and the Fieldhouse could very easily evolve. Competition would always run high. Being that the two areas are similar in purpose, the events held at each would be similar. If the supply is too abundant then the demand will fall off. The market will be saturated. The result may be able to control the maintenance cost; employee salaries, wear and tear depreciation, destruction, realty taxes, etc. Maintenance costs will increase. The Sears building's renovations and repairs will be extensive. (It is my opinion that the Sears building portion of the blueprints is opening a Pandora's box).

I have always been 'for' a complex like the Civic Center. But just right now may not be the time, despite the federal allocation. The time was right during any of the past 10 years before the ECF. It will again be favorable in three years or so. The city of Erie has moved too slow in the past and now may be moving too hastily. The population in Erie county is not that of the Pittsburgh area, yet the mayor's office thought fit to compare it on an equal basis. Pittsburgh has turned a profit of 20 million with its civic center but they draw from over 2 million people; Erie draws from maybe 500 thousand. It will be very difficult for two areas to survive, let alone one. The Fieldhouse has still not netted an over all year ending profit. The people are just not here.



## A Word From Our President

By Mike Woods  
SGA President

This article is a recent addition to the usual format of the Collegian. The editor and I felt it would be an effective means of communication between the student body and the Student Government Association. I sincerely hope that this article will serve to keep all of the students informed relative to issues which affect them.

First, one of the numerous alphabet organizations, PSL (Pennsylvania Student Lobby), is alive and kicking again in University Park. Following several resignations and various organizational roadblocks (snafu), the Student Lobby group is working on several major issues which shall be elaborated later in the article. Behrend is this year a member of this organization and as such will be integrally involved with the types of legislation (on a state level) which affects all of us students.

Those of you who were here last year are probably somewhat familiar with Penn P.I.R.G. (Public Interest Research Group). After several months of no correspondence, I happened upon a P.I.R.G. representative in State College at a meeting last weekend. I was informed at that time that the Ralph Nader founded consumer protection group was having problems with funding because of opposition from the Penn State Board of Trustees. It is felt that through certain pressures and the power of petition that the Board would acquiesce and aid P.I.R.G. in their development. Through this organization, the Penn State student would become involved with consumer issues state-wide and not exclusively within the university.

A committee at University Park is currently considering a request by security officers within the University system that they be equipped with firearms for "protection." This might not effect the Behrend College, but none the less, should be a concern to all of us whether we will be transferring to "Happy Valley" or not. A move such as this leaves much latitude for more tragic incidences reminiscent of the late 60's or early 70's to happen once again on college campuses.

Good news for the commuter populous. The SGA is currently working the establishment of a commuter council (like the JRC) to deal with issues that directly effect the largest segment of this college (I refer to the commuters). I believe that this sort of Council would afford the commuter student body and a opportunity for more valid input into the monstrous bureaucratic machine we call Penn State.

The Behrend College Radio

Station will begin broadcasting tomorrow afternoon at 4:00 p.m. I feel this is a positive and essential addition to the student services of the college and that it will facilitate better communication among the students. My personal thanks to the students who contributed their time, money, and equipment to the station and especially to Ed Fraetus who has worked tirelessly since last spring for the progress which has been made. We've come a long way since the first night we talked about it, Ed!

After several years of unsuccessful negotiations to open the RUB parking lot to students—it has been done. I met with Director Kochel last week and explained the student problem with evening parking in that lot. He has since notified me that students will be able to utilize the RUB lot from 6:30 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. Monday through Friday, and from 6:30 p.m. Friday night until 6:00 a.m. Monday morning. A small step for man and a small step for the students—but what the hell. Thanks, Mr. Kochel.

Now for some pertinent topics. I referred earlier to several issues which P.S.L. is currently involved in: these are the 19 year old drinking bill (for which SGA is circulating a petition) and a bill in the State House and Senate calling for the decriminalization of marijuana. The SGA has sent telegrams to the legislature supporting the adoption of both of these bills. We hope this will be of some influence to our conservative state legislators—but. If anyone wishes to write their representative, I urge you, and will list the bill names if you will refer to them—the 19 year old drinking bill is referred to as H.R. 559, and includes all alcoholic beverages. The bills introduced to decriminalize marijuana are referred to as S. 214 in the State Senate and H.R. 1699 in the House. From reliable sources, it has been indicated that the 19 year old drinking bill has an excellent chance of passage (finally!) but the legislation to decriminalize marijuana stands little opportunity for adoption as a function of the conservatism in the legislature. Oh well, maybe next year. Write them letters!

I hope this article serves an informative purpose and that all of the student body will keep abreast of what's happening politically at the Behrend College. The student government is only as powerful as the student body which they represent. This is the most active group of students which I have seen here for several years and I hope we can direct this activity into positive change for the student body. See ya' all later!

## Presentation of ROTC-- treaties for alienation

By Robert D. Frum

The basis of this article is the initiation of an ROTC program upon a college campus and the orientation and opposition derived thereof. The organization of ROTC ("Reserve Officers Training Corps.") on Behrend Campus, though separate from the university curriculum, was intended to be a facility of learning offered by the University (relation through association). As such, the ROTC became subject to all the rules, regulations, and

philosophical anticipations of a campus activity. It should be noted here that both the ROTC program and the college campus are graphic representations of, and extensions to, larger, detached bodies.

ROTC in itself constitutes an elite group open to the masses, with a structure so unique as not to be duplicated in size or type anywhere in the modern world. The creed and ethical code are based upon principles of honor

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The key for success (economically) for an Erie City Civic Center is the management. The management must be specifically educated in the required fields for developing and maintaining a profitable organization. The management will need two free hands from any political power. This will provide the best chance at 'making' the Civic Center. Several plusses

helping the Center's reality will be the completion of the Erie Hilton and the Mid-City Towers both being built downtown. Amtrak in Erie should be an aid as well.

What I hope for is a good economy and the support and enthusiasm of the Erie citizens once the plans are finalized for construction.

## Behrend Collegian

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or delete portions of all letters for publication purposes.

All letters must be signed, but names will be withheld upon request. Term standing, major, and hometown must be included.

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