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TEN CENTS

PUC vs. PG&W: who regulates who?

park, pool proposed for area

A complete community recreational package which would include a swimming pool and equipment for volley ball, shuffleboard and basketball, has been proposed for the Back Mountain area by a representative of the Instant Convertible Playground Company.

George McCutcheon, chairman of Dallas Borough's Park and Recreation Authority, has called a special meeting of representatives of Back Mountain communities to discuss the Philadelphia firm's proposal this evening.

Mr. McCutcheon said that the recreational package includes activities for men, women and children from the age of six. Included in the plan is an open air shed with picnic tables which can be used for various rainy day activities. Deck tennis, billiards and table tennis are also listed as part of the package.

The cost for the complete community recreational package is given as \$7900 by company officials. Although no state matching funds would be available for a project of this nature, fund raising information would be provided on request by the company. Mr. McCutcheon said he had been informed that the entire unit could be installed in one week's time.

A representative of the Instant Convertible Playground Company met last Friday with several regional officials at the Hotel Sterling to outline the plan. Invitations to the meeting scheduled this evening have gone out to representatives of Kunkle, Noxen, Harveys Lake, Kingston Township, Sweet Valley, Lehman, Franklin Township, Lake Silkworth, and Dallas Borough and Township.

neighbors polled on x-rated films

The Back Mountain community appears to be evenly split on the question of controversial films, although a poll gives the edge to those in favor of X-rated movies.

Fifty-five percent of the respondents of a write-in survey conducted by The Dallas Post think X-rated movies should be permitted to be shown here, 45 percent were strictly against.

On the question of whether 18-year-olds should have the right to vote, 55 percent said yes, 45 percent said no. Opinions on that question followed exactly the same pattern as on movies, with one exception. That was that the right to vote could be given to 18-year-olds only if in military service.

Reasons for being in favor of or against X-rated movies ranged from "Freedom to choose the movie you want to go see, whether it is good or bad," to "They are a waste of money, time and intelligence."

On the question, "Do you think you should have the right to see any movie you wish?" the 55 percent in favor of the films replied "yes." Those 45 percent against the films, did not all

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2 youths struck by passing auto

Two 13 year old boys were seriously injured Saturday at 8:10 p.m. when they were struck by an automobile near St. Francis Cabrini Church, Caverton.

Ernest Pliscott, RD 3, Dallas, and James Prebola, RD 1, Pittston, were struck by a vehicle operated by Cecil L. Sutton Jr., 36 Franklin St., Dallas as they attempted to cross the road.

According to Kingston Township police, the boys had attended a skating party at the church and were being picked up by Mrs. Pliscott who was parked across the road. She called to them not to cross as the Sutton vehicle advanced. A companion, Susan Sosnowski, 13, RD 3, Wyoming, crossed safely.

Kingston Township Ambulance transported the boys to Nesbitt Memorial Hospital. Dallas Ambulance later took the Pliscott youth to Geisinger Medical Center, Danville, where his condition is listed as serious.



"Stairway to the mysterious" was the thought Scott Saffian remembers when he snapped this photo near Kunkle.

NLRB election at Natona

Settlement of the continuing union dispute at Natona Mill appeared one step closer Monday afternoon as March 5 was established by the National Labor Relations Board as the union election date.

Meeting in the Luzerne County courthouse for an informal conference with NLRB representative Solomon Spector Monday were representatives of the Communications Workers of America, Textile Workers Union of America, United Textile Workers, and the United Mine Workers, District 50. All four unions are seeking to represent Natona employees when the union contract currently held by the Amalgamated Lace Operative of America, a branch of the TWUA, expires Feb. 28.

Polling will be held in the plant cafeteria from 6:45 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. and from 3 p.m. to 5:15 p.m.

to accommodate workers from all shifts. According to information provided by Natona officials, approximately 280 persons will be eligible to vote in the election, including several persons on temporary lay-off. NLRB regulations stipulate that anyone hired by Natona after Feb. 7 will not be eligible to vote.

According to Mr. Spector, a union must obtain 50 percent plus 1 votes to win as bargaining agent at Natona. In the event that a clear-cut majority is not achieved, he said, a run-off election using the same voter eligibility lists will be held "as quickly as possible" between the two unions winning the most votes.

One Natona employee close to the situation suggested to The Dallas Post that a run-off election is quite likely between the CWA and the TWUA.

colleges ired by tax proposal

The possibility that legislation will soon be written which will tax real estate owned by tax exempt institutions has stirred up a veritable hornets' nest of opposition throughout the state. What was termed "deep concern" over bills which would tax land owned by institutions of higher learning was expressed Feb. 5 by Dr. Francis J. Michelini, dean of academic affairs at Wilkes College and spokesman for the six-member Association of Northeastern Pennsylvania Independent Colleges. Schools in this group include King's, Misericordia, Marywood, Key-

stone Junior and Wilkes Colleges as well as the University of Scranton.

Dr. Michelini testified before a special house committee hearing in Harrisburg, and he maintained that the schools he represented fully qualified for exemption as provided by law because they had enriched Northeastern Pennsylvania by their cultural, practical and academic influences.

Strictly from an economic viewpoint, Dr. Michelini said, the colleges warrant their tax ex-

utility influence appears high in state agencies

(Editor's Note: This is the third in a continuing series of articles regarding public utilities in Northeastern Pennsylvania, and the related regulatory agencies charged with protecting the public interest.)

by J.R. FREEMAN

Pennsylvania Gas and Water Company, the largest corporation headquartered in Northeastern Pennsylvania, was handed a slap in the teeth last week, when a Luzerne County coroner's jury of four men and two women ruled that the company was criminally negligent in the deaths of four elderly persons killed in a natural gas explosion last July 3 in Harding. The case is now scheduled to be brought before a grand jury by Luzerne County District Attorney Blythe H. Evans Jr.

The jury's verdict stemmed from testimony before County Coroner Dr. George Hudock, which held that the gas company, along with two of its colleague firms, Transcontinental Production Co., and Joyce Pipeline Co., were responsible for the blast which destroyed the Winters Boarding Home in Harding, killing four of its boarders and injuring seven other persons.

But the significant point brought out in the three days of testimony, besides who was responsible for the deaths, was just how powerful a utility can become when its leadership is so entwined with the regulatory agencies of the state that it is hard to determine who regulates who.

During testimony before the inquest, it was brought out that in the case of PG&W, at least, the Pennsylvania Attorney General, the Secretary of Mines and Mineral Industries, and indeed, the Governor himself, have little control over the sprawling \$61 million utility, even when saving of human life is a concern.

Bruce E. Ziegler, a state petroleum engineer, told the jury that he and other field inspectors and technologists had made a move through Mines and Mineral Industries Secretary H.B. Charnbury to stop PG&W from continuing the pressurized pumping of natural gas into storage wells across the Susquehanna River from where the Harding blast occurred. A special report on the cause of the blast delivered to Atty. Gen. William C. Sennett last Sept. 24 placed blame for the explosion on the storage facilities operated by PG&W, located near Ransom, close to the Lackawanna-Luzerne County line.

When the company refused to heed the bureau's directive, first delivered in person to company officials, then by telephone, then by telegram to Robert Evans, PG&W president, from the secretary's office by order of the governor, the company, days later, finally relented to release the pressure from its wells in the face of a meeting with the attorney general in Harrisburg, testimony revealed.

During the interim, investigators disclosed that more than 30 homes in the Harding area had become dangerously polluted with the murderous gas, which was seeping into residences through water wells. Many families were evacuated until the gas pressure at the storage wells was released, at which time state inspectors testified the gas seepage in the Harding area diminished.

Even in the light of such testimony, PG&W still maintains, through one of its legal counsels, Max Rosenn, that it was in no way responsible for polluting a large segment of the Harding residential section involving possibly 133 homes, nor in the gas explosions in the area. The jury, however, ruled differently.

Despite a rash of natural gas explosions in the territory serviced by PG&W, which accounted for more than half of all gas-caused explosions in Pennsylvania last year, (and the only gas explosion in which fatalities were listed) the company and its leadership is probably not unlike many other vested interest enterprisers across the country.

Rulison and Robert Evans, the father-son team who head the investor-owned utility and run it from what one Luzerne County assistant district attorney described as a "seat of the pants" approach, see as their primary goal as businessmen the necessity of showing their 13,000 stockholders a tidy profit, no matter what the cost to the general public and the more than 200,000 consumers to which the utility should be responsible.

In the case of PG&W, however, the general public or consumer is not often the prime source of concern. In most areas where PG&W is servicing customers, whether residential, commercial or industrial, the water and gas distribution company enjoys an almost complete monopoly, in

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