

THE DALLAS POST

OPINION

New Sunshine Law will help everyone

As Harrisburg was emptying out for its annual July 4 legislative recess this year, Governor Thornburgh was signing a landmark piece of legislation affecting the way your local officials conduct business. This legislation, the "Sunshine Act," takes effect the first of the year.

With the stroke of a pen, the governor ended an intense nine-year lobbying effort by news media and citizens' groups to set new ground rules for local government decision-making.

The effort was well within the newspaper industry, and closely followed by all the local government organizations whose members were to be affected by any changes. It's important now that the public be aware of what is happening.

The legislature has taken a great leap forward to guarantee public access to local government deliberations. We in the newspaper industry certainly hope more citizens will take advantage of this access.

This, after all, is what "Sunshine" is all about.

Previous law required only that voting and formal policy-making occur in open session. Discussions and deliberations leading up to formal votes were frequently conducted in closed "executive sessions" or "work sessions."

It is important to note that not all boards and councils were abusive. Many valued the importance of public input and went out of their way to stimulate greater public involvement. However, there were some who took undue advantage of legal loopholes, and the legislature has not made a definitive statement that such abuses must end.

The new law, it must be emphasized, is a compromise. The legislative battle was lengthy and interesting because both sides were fearful. On the one side were citizen and media groups fearful that any "loose wording" in a new law would be unduly exploited.

Municipal governments, on the other hand, worried that overzealous reform might completely tie their hands. Understandably, officials wanted to be able to discuss sensitive personnel issues, such as hiring decisions and labor negotiations strategy, in private. They did not want to be penalized for gathering socially, or for attending a convention or background briefing.

And they wanted protection from purely vindictive behavior by disgruntled citizens. It is hard to govern without offending, and officials did not want Sunshine being used as a weapon by people with hidden agendas.

Credit must be given to the two senators who understood the need to reconcile the two fears by coming up with compromise language. Sen. Robert Jubelirer, R-Altoona, worked hard to ensure that the Sunshine reform effort stayed alive. Sen. J. Doyle Cormann, R-Bellefonte, agreed with the need for reform and worked to temper the law with protections for municipal officials.

At present, all camps seem satisfied with the changes which are coming. PNPA has been holding meetings statewide for reporters and editors. Our theme is to stress cooperation. We want our people to help local officials make the democratic process work.

The local government associations have also been emphasizing the need to accept change and accommodate the new law.

Our president, Bob Buckley, president of Gateway Press in Monroeville, said it well when he commented: "Our goal was to open up the decision-making process, not hamstringing local officials. We believe the system works best when people know what the options are and who favors which action. They can then vote and participate more intelligently."

The public has a great tool in the new Sunshine law, and we hope it will be used well in the days to come.

Raymond C. Jones
Executive Director

Pennsylvania Newspaper Publishers Association

Touch of love means a lot

Once again the holiday season fills our hearts with warmth and goodwill. For those of us who spend the holidays with loved ones, it is a blessed and joyful time of year.

But not everyone enjoys such good fortune. That is why, now perhaps more than during any time of the year, America's volunteers are needed and appreciated throughout the United States.

As the director of ACTION, the federal domestic volunteer agency, I know how much the touch of love and joy means to each person who comes in contact with our volunteers.

The 5,320 Senior Companions who offer daily attention to the frail elderly, the 19,000 Foster Grandparents who give guidance and affection to children with special needs, the 365,000 Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) volunteers who fulfill every conceivable need through community organizations and agencies - these older Americans know that during the holiday season, the extra hug, the attentive ear - every tender gesture gives comfort and hope to those in need.

Donna M. Alvarado
Director of ACTION
Washington, D.C. 20525



LIFE IN THE BACK MOUNTAIN

Holiday party held

The Dallas Kiwanis Club members hosted local Kiwanis, Lions and Rotary Clubs at its 10th annual Christmas party held at the Irem Temple Country Club. Visiting club officers who attended are from left, first row, Ray Vanyo, Swyersville Kiwanis Club; Bill Kalinowski, President, Dallas host club; Joe Gorman, Lt. Governor Kiwanis Division 15; Tom Casey, Harveys Lake Lions Club; and Oscar Norton, Mountaintop Kiwanis Club. Second row, Stu Oakley, Back Mountain Kiwanis Club; Joe O'Neill, Forty-Fort-Kingston Kiwanis Club; Jack Hannigan, Dallas Lions Club; Hugh Woodward, Dallas Rotary Club; Dick Sands, Montrose Kiwanis Club and Henry Spooner, Plymouth Kiwanis Club.

Something to think about...

Have you ever noticed how determined some people are to have a "great" time on New Year's Eve? It's almost as though they will never again have the chance to be happy and jolly.

Notice those same people at about 1:30 a.m. They are usually found sulking in a corner of the room feeling curiously sorry for themselves, like they lost their best friend.

Everybody kisses everybody else on New Year's Eve. Even if they can't stand each other at any other time, on New Year's Eve they kiss. Dancing and drinking and whistling and banging noisemakers are all a traditional part of the ritual.

I've always wondered why New Year's Eve is such a raucous affair. Perhaps the

Toby COLEMAN



din and hoopla are meant to scare off the bad omens so as not to spoil the baby New Year.

The best thing about New Year's is that it is a "new year," a chance to begin again - new hopes - new dreams - new plans.

The calendar starts fresh. The days and weeks and months ahead present new opportunities and new experiences. I love to look at a new calendar in anticipation of filling the dates with the special events and appointments and celebrations that mark the passing of time.

We do not know what the New Year will bring. We can though make a sincere effort to make it the best year ever, so that next New Year's Eve we can again kiss and dance and whistle and blow our horns in remembrance of the great year that was and the great "new year" ahead.

It's something to think about...
(Toby Coleman, a Back Mountain resident is a columnist for The Dallas Post. Her column appears regularly.)

Editor's notes

THANKS TO A GROUP of OB nurses from Nesbitt Memorial Hospital for helping to put me in the Christmas spirit.

I HAVE TO ADMIT IT - When it comes to Christmas time, I am quite the Scrooge. I never used to be like that until after my mother passed away in 1981. Christmas just never seemed the same.

And, instead of forcing myself to enjoy Christmas, it was easier for me to dread its arrival.

THIS YEAR, however, some of my nurse friends decided to get together and go Christmas carolling - something I had often thought of doing but never really got around to doing.

I was invited to go along with them last Friday and I can't tell you how quickly you get in the spirit of Christmas when doing some good for your fellow mankind.

WITH TWENTY OF US clearing our throats and leafing through our song books, we piled into two vans and started on our way.

BACK MOUNTAIN RESIDENTS among us were Shirley Wilson, of Beaumont; Maureen Banks of Trucksville; her three daughters, Holly, Tracy and Becky; and their friend, Ann, who wore a coat that said "Beth." (She said the coat belonged to her sister, but I really think she was pulling my leg.) Also amongst us was Sister Mary Catherine Winter, RSM, who resides in Kingston but is a member of the Sisters of Mercy, Dallas.

OUR FIRST STOP was the dialysis clinic across the street from Wilkes-Barre General Hos-

Dotty MARTIN



pital where Janet Brown, of Centerville, was undergoing one of her three-times-a-week treatments.

Janet, you'll remember, made the news when she underwent a kidney transplant at Geisinger Medical Center in Danville while her son, Carl, was undergoing reconstructive heart surgery in Arizona.

Unfortunately, Janet's kidney transplant was not as successful as we had all hoped it would be and she has been forced to return to dialysis treatments.

AS WE SANG to the approximately 20 dialysis patients in the clinic that night, it was humbling to think these people must sit for 4 1/2 hours three times a week, undergoing these treatments.

And, although the treatments reportedly make them feel better, it is a very tiring experience for all of them. I'd like to think, however, that our Christmas carols (as flat as we may have sounded) brightened their spirits just a bit.

OUR SECOND STOP was the lobby of General Hospital where we paged a resident doctor who was known by the Nesbitt nurses. Seems this guy is also a Scrooge when it comes to Christmas so the girls thought they'd try to cheer him up a little.

And it worked - after listening to two songs sung by the group,

the young doctor asked to hear "Silver Bells" and joined right in with the singing.

THE RETIRED SISTERS OF MERCY were more than thrilled to hear our Christmas carols later that evening.

With approximately 165 sisters residing in the Mercy Center, we had quite an audience for our singing and, when Sister Raymunda stepped off the elevator and broke into a dance that resembled the Irish Jig, we were even more in the spirit of things.

Sister Raymunda, who walked through Mercy Center with us, singing and dancing, informed us as we were leaving that she recently celebrated her 91st birthday - something not many of us could believe. But how could we possibly dispute a nun?

WE WERE WARMLY ACCEPTED at the remainder of our stops which included friends and shut-ins - all of whom were thrilled to see us and graciously listened to our "trying" voices.

ALL IN ALL, it was a good feeling. It was what Christmas is all about - sharing, caring and making people feel good about themselves and about the Christmas season.

A VERY DEAR FRIEND of mine sent me a Christmas card which I found to be very unique. When I attempted to share it with some other friends, however, they had seen it before.

At the risk of offering you something you are already aware of, I would like to share the story that appears on this card with my readers.

It goes like this:
He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant

woman. He grew up in still another village, where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty.

Then for three years he was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family or owned a house.

He didn't go to college. He never visited a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place where he was born. He did none of the things one usually associates with greatness. He had no credentials but himself.

He was only thirty-three when the tide of public opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. He was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves.

While he was dying, his executioners gambled for his clothing, the only property he had on earth. When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen centuries have come and gone, and today he is the central figure of the human race and the leader of mankind's progress. All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man on earth as much as that

One Solitary Life.

WITH THAT THOUGHT IN MIND, I leave you for this week and for this year. May the New Year bring only health and happiness to you and your families.

(Dotty Martin is the Editor of The Dallas Post. Her column appears regularly.)

Letters

Dallas woman defends Brownie's trimmings

DEAR EDITOR:

I recently read an article in another newspaper of someone's opinion about the Christmas tree at the Dallas Post Office.

This person stated they thought the tree looked ridiculous with all that "garbage" hanging on it.

My reply to that person's comment is this: "Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder."

When I look at that tree, I see little figures busily cutting egg cartons into the shape of Christmas ornaments, stringing plastic packing bits into yards and yards of make-believe popcorn

garland and yogurt cartons taking the shape of bells.

I see smiling, happy faces working together in the spirit of friendship and love.

There are rosy cheeks and frosty noses as these same young children work together with the help of dedicated vol-

unteers to show the community they care.

PEGGY POYNTON
DALLAS

(EDITOR'S NOTE: The Christmas tree at the Dallas Post Office is decorated every year by Back Mountain Brownies.)

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