

Group wants to study county government for possible reform

By RONALD BARTIZEK
Post Staff

Voters in Luzerne County will have a unique opportunity this November when they are asked to decide whether to form a commission to study the county's form of government. The names of 47 candidates for the 11 member study group will also appear on the ballot, though they will serve only if the commission itself receives majority approval.

The ballot initiative will appear because a group of residents, calling themselves Citizens for the Study of Luzerne County Government, petitioned for it. Under a state law passed in the early 1970's, counties and municipalities may change their form of government after going through a required process that includes formation of a study commission.

Jack Conyngham of Jackson Township heads the citizens' group, though he says he didn't plan to. He first refused the job when offered it, but agreed later. Now he's finding it is not easy to present the study plan in the face of opposition from established political forces.

"It's very difficult to get our perspective across to the public and stay away from personalities," Conyngham says. "The commissioners and row officers perceive it as an attack on their status."

Begun a year ago, the citizens' group is a loose-knit organization of about 80 members who meet monthly to plan their strategy. Conyngham rejects the charge made by some opponents that only wealthy liberals are involved in the effort. "I think the committee stands on its own merits; it's not elitist, it's not blue-chip. It's people from all over the county who want to study county government," he says. The organization charges no dues.

Conyngham also points out that party ties haven't come into play.

Ballot questions in November will establish a study commission and elect its members. They have two years to make recommendations

"To this day I don't know how many Republicans, Democrats or Independents are on the committee," he says. We have never discussed party affiliation.

And why should Luzerne County government be studied? Conyngham says, "I think it should be done for the simple reason that we have a system that is generally acknowledged to be in trouble in a changing funding atmosphere." He points out that declining federal and state contributions have added to the burden on local the local tax base, leaving inadequate budgets for county programs.

This November's ballot question is only the first step in a process that could allow reorganization of the county. If a majority of voters support a study, the top 11 vote-getters will be elected to the commission. That group will have up to two years to come up with recommendations, which must themselves be approved by the voters. Study commission members are not paid for their service, though out-of-pocket expenses are borne by the county. Conyngham estimates the total cost at \$60-75,000.

This isn't the first time that a review of county government has come to the voters. A study commission was voted in 1974, but its recommendations were voted down in a later referendum.

"Anything can happen," Conyngham says. "Our ideas will prevail only if enough people get the word that a majority of county taxpayers would like to see the government studied."

While the committee claims to

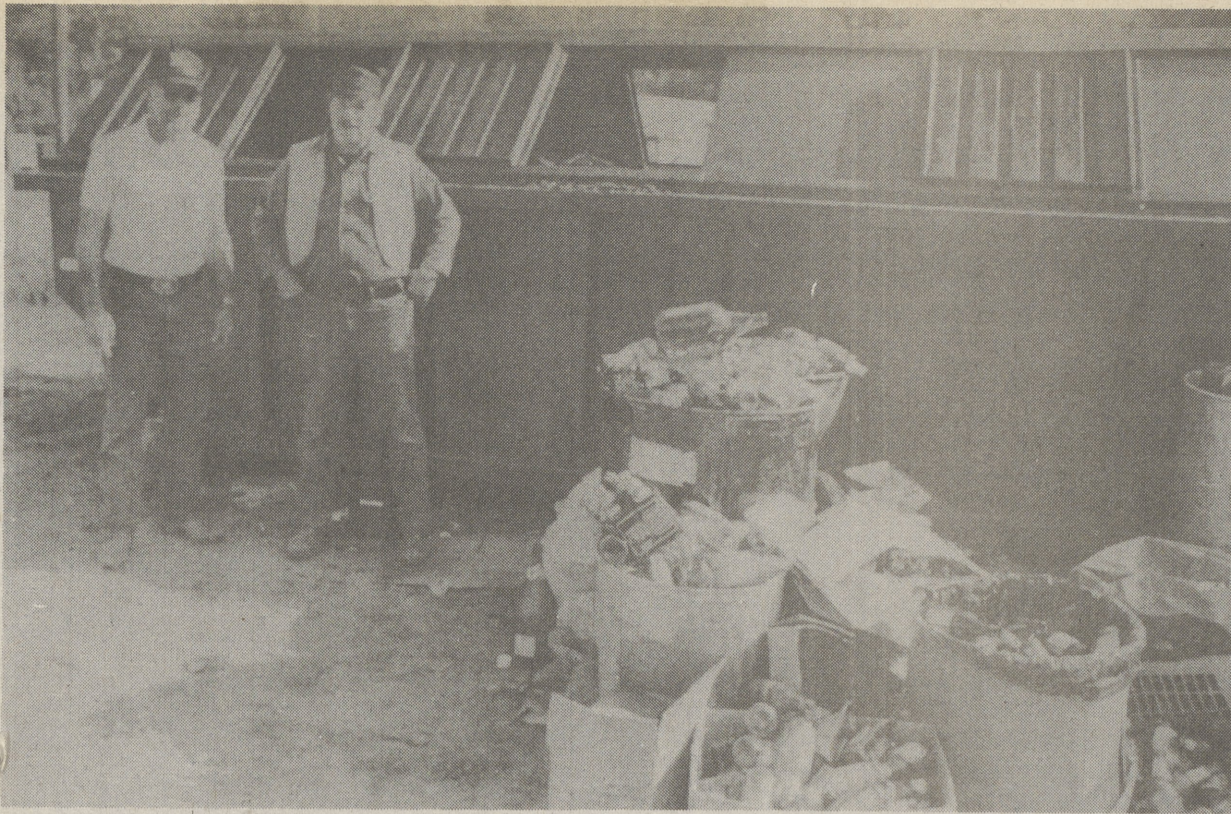
be apolitical, Conyngham remarks the process of convincing voters to vote a study is much like a bid for office. "We aren't running an election, though it's like forming a third party," he says.

The group has raised funds to publicize the need for the study, using some of it for television spots. To this point financial support has come from a limited number of individuals, but a wider appeal is planned after Labor Day. Two restrictions that apply to donations hurt the group's ability to raise funds: Donations aren't tax deductible, and corporations are not allowed to contribute.

One problem facing the group will be how to make the public aware of the differences among the 47 candidates for the study commission. Many of them are presently employed in county or local government while others are private citizens. Conyngham says his committee will invite all the candidates for interviews and will then choose who to support.

In the end, Luzerne County's political structure may have as much to say about the study as do individual voters, since most officials have opposed it. It is widely believed that the county Republican committee declined to endorse State Senator Charles Lemmond's re-election bid because he spoke for the study.

"The committee does not want to throw out the commissioners," Conyngham says. "It just wants to study county government." The voters will decide if it can.



VOLUNTEERS MAN THE RECYCLING DUMPSTER - Bill Wilson and Joe Neelson of the Harveys Lake Lion's Club are shown above as they stand next to the large dumpster used for recycling. Harveys Lake Borough is currently holding a weekly recycling program to which area residents can bring their recyclable objects. The recycling program is held every Saturday morning at the site located across the road from the borough building. (Post Photo/Rich Johnson)

Recycling

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recycling program," said Abod. The grant application is for \$70,000 and will help begin a joint program with Lake Township.

So far no word as been received on the application but Abod is confident the application is for a good cause and hopes the state will approve the funding.

thing. Once we begin going to Lackawanna County we won't have to separate and more people will be dropping their stuff off here," said Abod.

He stressed that the program is not a money-making scheme but noted that the borough is not los-

Residents can bring recyclable material to the borough site each Saturday

ing money with it either. "It is self-sustaining," said Abod. "We aren't making any money directly but we will begin to cut costs for the borough when the amount of garbage in the borough is reduced and we won't have to pay as much in garbage fees."

Another way the costs are kept low is that volunteers man the area. "We have people from the Lion's Club, the Little League, the Boy Scouts, and the Protective Association helping out along with borough officials," said Abod. "We are always looking for more volunteers and anyone who is interested or who has questions can stop by the borough building for help."

Abod also noted that the borough is not planning to stop at just a weekly recycling program.

"We have applied for a grant that will help institute a curbside

Restaurant

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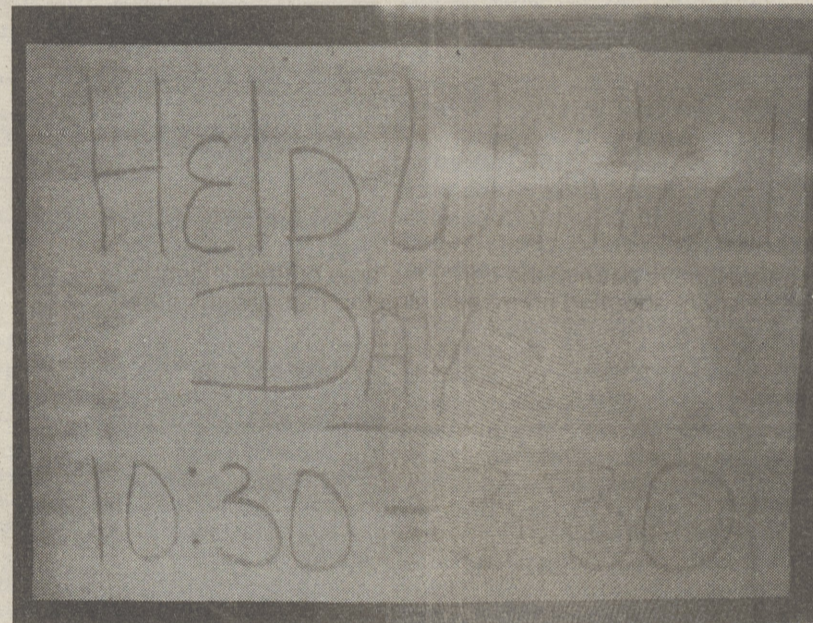
In an earlier story, published February 28, The Post reported that the owners were a physician, an accountant, a dietitian and an international chef. The partner who spoke with The Post at that time said he and his partners envisioned the local eatery as the first of a nationwide chain of stores, a goal that is apparently now abandoned.

One employee who has talked to the owners is Allison Labbate. She said that she spoke with Denise Cesare and was told that the checks would be coming, but she did not know when that would happen.

Labbate did not know that the closing was coming but said she was not surprised.

The place started showing signs of trouble during the last month, according to employee Trisha Bullford. She said that management had decided to cut back the number of employees who would work certain hours. "That wanted one person to do everything from preparation to serving and we usually had three people doing it," said Bullford. She added that she quit the place because she was "...tired of everything that was going on."

The employees also felt that there were financial problems when



NO LONGER WANTED - This sign is one of the few things left in the building where For Crepes Sake was located in Shavertown. The business closed and left town during the early morning hours last Thursday. (Post Photo/Rich Johnson)

management cut the pay from \$5.25 per hour to \$4.25 per hour. And when some of the employees tried to cash their paychecks two weeks ago the checks bounced. Other employees heard about this and are waiting until they know

that the checks will be honored before going to the bank.

Right now the employees are in a waiting game. They say they are concerned about getting paid, but the worst part is the uncertainty they now face

Triathlon

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who was entered also. I was able to beat them and that gives me some satisfaction," he said.

Besides co-workers and friends, Silverstein also saw another familiar face while out on the course. His wife was part of a team entered in the competition. She took care of the biking portion of the race for her team and the two met near the finish of the biking course.

"I passed her near the end," Silverstein said laughing. "I said hello and told her I'd see her later."

Wayne Devine of Harveys Lake also was pleased with his performance. "I'm satisfied overall," said Devine. "This is my eighth year and I think I did well."

Devine said he likes the local course because it is so challenging. He says it takes a lot of concentration to finish. "You can't really pay much attention to the things going on around you," he said. "You hear the crowd rooting you on but you can't tell where it's coming from because you are concentrating."

Silverstein said that the toughest part of the

"I know what to expect and when to expect it, and that helps a lot."

Gene Cannon, Dallas
5th year participant

whole race was the registration that took place on Saturday. But all the local athletes said they were pleased with the way the event was run.

"I really thought the volunteers were great. They are the ones who make this event," said Silverstein. Cannon also praised the work of everyone involved. "A lot of things go on with the event and that helps get the area recognized. It takes a lot of work and those people deserve a lot of credit."

Now that the Back Mountain race is over the professionals who participated are planning for the next event. The local athletes will go back to their jobs and in another year will probably be back to take on the local course.

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Lehman

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The supervisors first began to look at the ordinances in April when they decided to have them revised by Varaly Associates of Wilkes-Barre. When making the decision, the supervisors said that there were "holes" in some of the ordinances and that the changes should be made as soon as possible.

Simms said that the "holes" in the ordinances came about with the changing times. "The ordinances we are using were made in 1984 and now we are finding that certain areas are not real specific and we have to read into other areas," said Simms.

She said that there are not many

changes being made to the ordinances. "But the areas that are being looked at need amending," she added.

Some of the items being changed deal with penalties, hearings and general description of the ordinances.

"Some of the changes are for consistency and others are to better define what is there," said Simms. "The changes are going to make it much easier for us and for those residents who will be working with the zoning and planning ordinances," she added.

The meeting will begin at 8:00 on Monday at the municipal building.

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