

## THE DALLAS POST

## EDITORIALS

## 20 years ago, Agnes brought out the best in region's people

Two decades ago, the people of Northeastern Pennsylvania were handed the biggest challenge in the region's history when flooding caused by Hurricane Agnes devastated large portions of the Susquehanna River basin. The magnitude of the disaster and the response to it will forever be a testament to the fortitude of the people who live here.

Fortunately, the tragedy was of great proportions in material damage, but comparatively slight in human terms. The response was huge in both.

The Back Mountain was affected both directly and indirectly by the storm, which left a path of destruction along waterways large and small. By far the most damage occurred in the Wyoming Valley around Wilkes-Barre, where tens of thousands of homes and businesses were flooded. But the story of the region's recovery included people from throughout the region and far beyond, as volunteers lent their time and talents to the task of rebuilding shattered lives, or simply shared their homes with those who no longer had one. Nowhere was that more true than here, as churches, homes and schools became makeshift shelters for thousands of evacuees, home owners offered bathing facilities and College Misericordia became a hospital. For some families, their stay in the Back Mountain lasted several weeks as they waited to return to their houses or to the trailers that were installed in Wilkes-Barre as temporary dwellings.

Some of the visitors returned permanently, choosing to move here rather than risk the prospect of another flood, with the result that much of the Back Mountain has gradually been transformed from isolated rural territory to suburban development.

If it does nothing else, the recovery effort stands as evidence of how much individuals, government and other institutions can accomplish when confronted with a challenge of unimaginable magnitude. It took more than 10 years to heal the physical marks of the flood; for some people the emotional scars will never go away. But in repairing the damage, a large community of hard-working, caring people came together and accomplished more than they ever may have thought possible.

Oh, sure, we've all heard the stories of graft and corruption during the recovery effort, and some of them are undoubtedly true. But the greed of a few should not mar the achievements of the many. As we look around our nation in 1992, it's easy to see where some of the spirit of 1972 could be put to good use.

## Lake-Lehman administrative costs merit a close look

The board of directors of the Lake-Lehman School District took the responsible step of listening to its constituency last week and mercifully killed a proposed 10 percent tax on amusements within the district. More important, board members pledged to find savings rather than impose more taxes in order to balance next year's budget.

Dr. John Presper, the only board member to vote against dropping the amusement tax, has made some provocative suggestions about where the savings can be found. Most of them have to do with streamlining administrative costs, and include eliminating two jobs, freezing administrative salaries for a year and switching the district's health insurance to a managed-care plan.

The school board must decide whether or not Dr. Presper's ideas make sense. If it's any comfort, they can take note of the fact that Lake-Lehman's proposed budget contains 53 percent more spending per student than the Dallas district on non-instructional expenses. There may be very good reasons for the difference; now would be a good time to state them.

The size of the districts' student bodies and budgets is remarkably similar. Dallas projects 2,452 students next year. Lehman plans for 2,328. The budget in Dallas is a little over \$14 million, as is Lehman's. But the two part company on how the money is divided. Dallas plans to spend \$5,857 per student, of which 67 percent is devoted to instructional costs. In contrast, Lake-Lehman proposes to spend \$6,149 per student, 51 percent on instructional costs.

It's really not that simple because the districts handle some things, like special education, differently. But it would be wrong to ignore the magnitude of the variation if there are savings to be found without damaging the quality of education provided to the students of the Lake-Lehman School District.

## Do you agree? Disagree?

Editorials are the opinion of the management of The Dallas Post. We welcome your opinion on contemporary issues in the form of letters to the editor. If you don't write, the community may never hear a contrasting point of view. Send letters to: The Dallas Post, P.O. Box 366, Dallas, PA 18612. Please include your name, address and a daytime phone number so that we may verify authenticity. The Post does not publish anonymous letters. We reserve the right to edit for length and grammar, but will call if we think editing might change the meaning.

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Spring show-off

Photo by Charlotte Bartzek

## Letters

## Proposed Dallas Borough zoning rules could endanger reservoir

*Editor's Note: Dallas Borough resident Joan Hiller provided a copy of the following letter, which she sent to the Dallas Borough Council, for publication in The Post.*

Gentlemen and Ladies of the Council,

With respect to some likely effects on our "Aquatic Resources", I would like to expand further on several zoning issues relative to Dallas Boro's "Conservation Area" that I raised on May 19th Special Meeting.

According to Webster, the meaning and purpose of "conservation" is to "protect from loss and decay in the interests of the general welfare." I suggest that the proposed zoning plan entailing multiple housing in Conservation District is actually a complete contradiction of the basic idea and, indeed, violates the expressed purpose found on Page 33 of Article 7.

In Article 7, (pp. 58-59, Sec. 704), note that there are fourteen different items which require "Specific Documentation" by a would-be developer of the Conservation area. However, conspicuous by its absence, there is no specific documentation requirement relative to the Huntsville Reservoir or its estuary system. Yet, originally, this was the primary purpose of zoning that area "Conservation". While detailed parking lot regulations are delineated, no environmental impact study (presumably a most important consideration) is even mentioned!

I suggest that the following specifics should be incorporated and that some additions and corrections to Ms. Pawlowski's statements should be considered:—

In 1987, at the request of the United States Environmental Protection Agency, the CONSERVATION FOUNDATION convened the "National Wetlands Policy Forum" to study protection of our vanishing wetlands—then disappearing at the rate of 500,000 acres annually. The Forum concluded that the fundamental defect in existing policy was the lack of simple, clearcut protection programs as well as conflicting jurisdictions and contradictory planning.

I can speak from two decades of experience with the massive red-tape and bumbling inaction of Government agencies relative to enforcement of Title 25, Chapter 102 or Federal Section 404 and the consequent loss of more than half of the Nation's wetlands. It's a fact that, locally, our wetlands are not on the designated maps of the Army Engineers. This compounds any effort to protect them from would-be developers.

In the absence of any clearcut protection of wetlands at the Federal or State level, the Policy Forum found the best (and perhaps only) protection to be at the local

level—suggesting that local zoning and planning is presently the "number one authority" (see fig. #1 enclosed)

Accordingly, it should not be assumed that the Federal or State Government, the Army Corps of Engineers, or any other agency is now protecting our natural waterways or wetlands. The responsibility is entirely ours!

With the present zoning in the Conservation District (Special Exception: 1 house per 2 acres) it probably is not economically feasible for a developer to build many houses. However the proposed "cluster housing" under "Conditional Use" is practically an invitation to large developers to come in.

Furthermore, from the standpoint of pollution, allowing a cluster of 24 houses on a 50-acre plot is not at all the same as constructing one private house on a 2 acre plot—as contended by Ms. Pawlowski. The concentration of nitrogen, phosphorous, lead, copper, petroleum products, anti-freeze, etc. around run-off and stream areas would be substantial. The nutrients and poisons would likely develop algae blooms in the reservoir, engender destruction of the wetlands, and promote devastation among the area's wildlife.

Therefore, I suggest a detailed environmental impact study be required to determine a precise analysis of runoff and storm water pollution using the +R55 Computation. This calculation determines peak discharge points and computes overall effects both before and after development of a given tract. It seems to me that the urban hydrology must be addressed and the burden should be placed on the developer rather than upon our public taxpayers.

In addition, requirements for sizeable "buffer zones" around the Huntsville Reservoir and the nearby wetlands should be imposed. In this connection the U.S. and Fish Wildlife Services is able to provide substantial informational resources and materials.

It should be obvious that the notion of providing for a mere 35 ft. space between any proposed housing development and area wetlands is ludicrous—unless, of course, the buildings are to be uninhabited!

Particularly with respect to the Boro's Conservation areas, I think that we need to weigh carefully the consequences of abandoning the present classification "non-conforming use" in favor of the "conditional use" designation as proposed in Article 7. Presently, zoning for "non-conforming use" requires a variance and the Boro has absolute power over its environment. Under "non-conforming use" the Boro can veto undesired development, but under "conditional use" requires a variance and the Boro has absolute power over its environment. Under non-conforming

use" the Boro can veto undesired development, but under "conditional use", a would-be developer could ignore any adverse Council ruling and simply appeal to the courts showing that all legal requirements have been fulfilled. Because our future is presently unknowable, I believe that the Council needs to maintain its options and to retain control of its veto power.

I believe that, presently, our conservation area is a great asset to our Boro and that its preservation will become increasingly more valuable as regional population pressures multiply. This beautiful open space around the Huntsville Reservoir is used daily by joggers, bird watchers, 4-H, hikers, equestrians, walkers, children—almost anyone interested in enjoying one of the most beautiful places on God's Green Earth. I believe that it is important that this asset be preserved so that future generations can enjoy the same things that we have enjoyed.

I believe that, insofar as possible, the bulk of the financial burden of new development should be borne by the developers rather than by the present resident taxpayers. Of course, we all will be stuck with increased traffic, rising water rates, escalating sewer rates, expanded police and fire protection, higher school taxes, and a host of other costs commensurate with growth.

Unmanaged growth in the Back Mountain has resulted in a saturation of housing, a "killer highway" and a greatly diminished "community character" which once attracted us all. Already, the prime land around the Huntsville and Ceasatown Reservoirs and around Moon Lake has attracted developers offering "country estates" to those who can afford them.

You may be aware that our "non-conforming use" zoning is reportedly one of the important considerations that persuaded United Water Resources and Real Estate Development Company (the New Jersey bidder for the land and water portion of Pennsylvania Enterprises recent auction) to abandon its bid. (Obviously, this land development company wasn't interested in just managing another water company.) It's equally clear, however, that placing our conservation area under a classification of "conditional use" would remove that existing zoning obstacle.

Huntsville Reservoir's water quality is still fairly good. Today, this beautiful area is still free for all Boro residents to enjoy. Let's keep this "Green Area" under adequate zoning protection or it certainly will put a lot of "green" in some out-area developer's pocket.

Joan C. Hiller  
Dallas Boro Preservation Ass'n.

## Only Yesterday

60 Years Ago - June 24, 1932  
SHAVERTOWN TO GET PUBLIC WATER

A stubborn blaze which kept Dallas, Shavertown and Harveys Lake fire companies busy for two hours damaged the beautiful home of A.L. Parks, Main Street, Dallas. Damage was estimated at \$15,000.

Within the next week Dallas-Shavertown Water Company will connect a 528 foot well at Shavertown with water mains serving that community, assuring residents of a constant and excellent water supply.

Dallas went into a tie for first place with Beaumont after winning a hard fought game with Kingston Township, 3-2.

50 Years Ago - June 26, 1942  
WALTER WILSON REPORTED MISSING IN PHILIPPINES

Fifth registration stations for men born on or after January 1, 1922 or before June 30, 1924 who will register for Selective Service on June 30 have been established in this area by Draft Board #1, of Wyoming and Draft Board #5 of Shickshinny. All stations will be open 7 a.m.-9 p.m.

The War Department has disclosed that Walter Wilson, son of Mr. and Mrs. William Wilson, Franklin Street, Dallas, is one of many U.S. soldiers missing in action in defense of the Philippines.

40 Years Ago - June 27, 1952  
SEVEN ONE-ROOM SCHOOLS CLOSED

Seven one-room schools in Ross Township will be closed this year and their 221 pupils will be transferred to a new 10-room elementary building in Sweet Valley according to a plan being worked out by the Ross Township School Board. Instruction will be offered from first grade through eighth with a possibility of a kindergarten added after the school is in operation.

Baseball fans who attend Back Mountain Memorial Library Auction on July 10, 11 and 12 will have something exciting to bid for when 24 official league softballs donated by Sheldon Evans and autographed by the Cleveland Indians will be auctioned. Another attraction will be an official baseball autographed by the New York Yankees, donated by Little Bill Phillips of Station WBAX.

Wed - Janice Lee Rummage to Pfc. David J. Blight; Ctherine Lukasavage to Raymond I. Mulligan.

30 Years Ago - June 28, 1962  
JERIS JORDAN, SCOTT ALEXANDER HONORED

American Legion School Award presented by Daddow-Isaacs Post 672 for outstanding boy and girl in eighth grade of Dallas Junior High School was awarded to Jeris Jordan, daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Lester Jordan, Trucksville, and Scott Alexander, son of Mr. and Mrs. James Alexander, Trucksville.

Back Mountain Baseball: Harvers vs. Dallas 21-1; Duke Isaacs vs. Strausers 17-10; Daddow Isaacs Legion vs. Westmoreland 11-3; Fernbrook vs. Shavertown 13-1.

20 Years Ago - June 29, 1972  
5,000 HOUSED HERE AFTER AGNES FLOOD

Susquehanna River crested at 40.60 feet causing the worst flood in the history of the State, leaving a loss of 28,000 homes and one quarter million people left homeless.

Major evacuation centers established in the Back Mountain were Dallas Senior High School, College Misericordia, Idetown Fire Hall, Jackson Fire Hall, Kingston Township Municipal Building, Ross Township School, Lake-Lehman High School. Many churches placed their evacuees in their parishioners homes.

First two babies born to date at Misericordia's Alumnae Hall were a son Mark to Mr. and Mrs. Robert Brandon, Larksville; and Lisa Marie, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Butera, Dallas.

Civil Defense personnel used the Dallas Borough Building as headquarters. U.S. Army helicopters brought in cargoes of supplies; Dallas Junior High School cafeteria and adjacent rooms were set up as a food distribution center for the Back Mountain 5,000 evacuees.

Personnel and inmates at SCID planned to dispose food stuffs and necessary supplies. The institution donated 1,000 blankets, 2,000 cots and thousands of sheets and pillow cases.

Debra Jane Schenck, Forty Fort and James William Davis Jr. were wed at 10 p.m. at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Shavertown, when rising waters cancelled their plans for an afternoon wedding. A flowered hat doubled as a bridal bouquet.