

Lehman asked to take road

By GRACE R. DOVE
Post Staff

Five residents of Walnut Woods Road approached the Lehman Township supervisors to request that the township accept their road at their regular meeting Monday, February 15.

Harry Weaver and Mike Petrillo told the supervisors that they never knew when they bought their lots that Walnut Woods Road, built in 1984, was a private road. According to supervisor David Sutton, the township engineer has recommended that the road be paved with at least 1-1/2 inches of asphalt before Lehman Township accepts it.

Weaver and Petrillo produced an estimate showing that it would cost \$14,000 to pave the 1/2-mile stretch of roadway, which would cost the seven families living on the road \$2,000 apiece.

The supervisors asked township solicitor Peter Savage to research the legality of the residents putting up a bond to cover any needed road repairs for five years if the township accepts it and the road needs repaving.

Sutton will also ask the township engineer if a sealer coat of oil and chip could be substituted for repaving for the township to take over the road.

Supervisor Douglas Ide said that homeowners on four private roads have recently asked the supervisors to take over their roads, all of which are far below the township's minimum road standards.

Comm Center elects officers, directors

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The Back Mountain Communications Center announced 1993 officers at its regular meeting Tuesday, February 9.

Retired Kingston Township police chief Paul Sabol was named executive director, a newly created position in which Sabol, one of the center's founders, will continue in his previous duties but not be allowed to vote on any issues.

Frank Wagner of Dallas Township was elected chairman, with Bill Peiffer of Dallas Borough as assistant chairman, Dallas Borough Police Chief Jack Fowler as secretary and Nancy Kline of Nesbitt Hospital as treasurer.

Board members representing the five member municipalities are Joe Stager, Jackson Township; William Tippett and police chief James Balavage, Kingston Township; William Peiffer, Dallas Borough; police chief Carl Miers, Dallas township and Douglas Ide, Lehman.

Sabol said that the communications center's 1993 goals include working with the Luzerne County Chiefs of Police Association to design a county-wide 911 system that will allow the Back Mountain to keep its own regional terminal and upgrade equipment, and using a \$30,000 grant to set up a new site for the center, with more space and a good transmitter location.

Guards

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problems if they miss a dose, Vodzak said.

And overcrowding has forced a few inmates without cells to sleep in the housing blocks' dayrooms, according to prison superintendent John Stepanik.

One of these inmates, convicted murderer Tracey Marrero, housed in a dayroom while awaiting transfer to a restricted housing unit, has been charged with attempted murder after having assaulted corrections officer Howard Rice on G-block February 1. Rice was alone on the block, with a second officer at lunch and a third reassigned to another post.

Marrero reportedly stunned Rice by hitting him several times in the head with a very hard block of industrial soap, then removing his radio and repeatedly bashing his head and face against a wall.

"If a second corrections officer had been on duty on G-block with Howard Rice, there is no doubt in my mind that he would not have sustained the injuries that he did," Vodzak said.

Ironically, Vodzak said that the "lifers" (inmates serving life sentences) are one of the easiest groups to work with; they know that the prison will be their home for the rest of their lives and don't want anything to disrupt it.

"Overall, SCID is a well-run facility; superintendent Stepanik is very security-conscious," Vodzak said. "But the guards aren't properly staffed, so that men assigned to specific posts can stay there. Often men are called away from their posts on the cell blocks to cover the exercise yard, gym or other areas—like robbing Peter to pay Paul."

The guards' current contract contains a staff organization plan for the facility, which Vodzak says has not been met.

The unwritten rule of thumb in prison staffing is to have one guard on duty for every 50 inmates, he added.

SCID's superintendent John Stepanik agreed that his facility is one of the most crowded prisons in the state correctional system.

Its 22 units (cell blocks) house 2,122 inmates—668 men or 48 percent more than its designed capacity of 1,454 men supervised by 360 commissioned and 32 non-commissioned guards, Stepanik said. But he is not concerned that too few officers are available.

"I am quite comfortable with the staffing at SCID," Stepanik said. "I feel that we have adequate personnel to protect both the staff and the public."

Vodzak is concerned that not only is staffing inadequate, the standards for guards have fallen. He said that until recently guards were required to have five years experience before being assigned as block officers. Now only two years experience is needed, though Vodzak acknowledged that new guards get better training than in the past.

Describing the prison as "a quasi-military operation," Stepanik said that at least 52 officers per shift work on the cell blocks, with more guards at the main gate, towers, control room and other areas.

The union has filed a grievance against the Commonwealth, claiming that the prison is being

staffed without regard for the safety of its employees, Vodzak said.

Statewide hearings on the grievance, which an arbitrator has already ruled can be resolved through the union's current contract, are scheduled at the end of March.

After assaults on guards February 1 and 3, union leaders met with prison officials, who agreed to institute tighter security procedures for guards working on the cell blocks and for movement of inmates within the prison.

AFSCME Council Representative Ed Harry said that the union would like to see at least two guards on every block, but it doesn't have the final say in staffing.

That approval must come directly from the governor's office; the commissioner of corrections is a member of Governor Casey's cabinet, Stepanik said. A lack of funding often hampers hiring more guards.

"Funding is the key," Stepanik said. "Between the wages (\$8.75 to \$17.50, depending on seniority) and fringe benefits, corrections officers are very costly."

Although Stepanik hopes that the opening of five new prisons by the early fall will help alleviate overcrowding at SCID, but Vodzak disagrees. "A new prison is filled the day it opens," he said. "There's no room to transfer any new inmates in from other facilities."

Designed for 1,454 inmates, prison now houses 2,122

These facts about the State Correctional Institution at Dallas (SCID) were provided by prison administrator John Stepanik and AFSCME local 2496 president George Vodzak.

Capacity: 1,454 inmates. Currently houses 2,122. SCID is currently operating at 48 percent over capacity.

Housing units: 22 cell blocks, including four modular units, three "honor blocks," one cell block housing 80 older, ill or handicapped inmates and five restricted housing units. Inmates in restricted housing units are locked in their cells 23 hours a day. Smaller cell blocks house up to 36 inmates, with one block guard on duty. The three largest blocks house up to 198 inmates apiece, some doubled up in cells.

Inmates serving life sentences: 508.

Racial mix: 60 percent black, 30 percent white, 10 percent Hispanic, one Native American.

Corrections officers: 360 commissioned, 32 non-commissioned. At least 75 officers per shift work on the housing blocks, with others covering the exercise yard, gym, towers, main gate and dining hall.

Salaries range from \$8.75 per hour for new employees to \$17.50 per hour for those at the top of the pay scale.

Other staff: approximately 575.

Corrections industries on site: Inmates may earn up to \$180 a year working in the prison farm, metal shop, hospital or factories which produce mattresses, boxes, industrial soap, pajamas and garments for other government facilities.

Educational programs: Inmates have access to GED (high school equivalency diploma) tutoring, a law library and college courses. Several inmates have earned degrees from College Misericordia.

Trade schools: Inmates may attend schools in welding, electrical, plumbing, automotive, body shop, computer technology, pilots' ground school.

Inmates in most of these schools use their skills in repair, maintenance of facility and vehicles.

Recreational facilities: Inmates have access to three satellite dish antennas (no cable service is available), 3-4 movies a week, family picnics, special activities of interest to different ethnic or religious groups. Sports programs include gym, weight training, a boxing team and other intramural sports.

A chapel serves four religious denominations (Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Muslim). Various clubs (including Lifers' Club) help raise money for charities, sell Girl Scout cookies, etc. Community volunteers also help inmates in other outreach programs.

"These activities help keep the inmates busy, give them something to do with their energy and help to train the short-term inmates for trades after they are released," said prison administrator John Stepanik.

by Grace R. Dove

U.S.S. Ranger to hold reunion Aug. 5-9

U.S.S. *Ranger* (CVA/CV-6) will hold its sixth annual reunion of all hands (ship's company) including all detachments and air groups, August 5 through 8, 1993 in Memphis, Tennessee.

For information call 1-201-798-3599.

TUPPER FOR DISTRICT JUSTICE



My name is Jim Tupper and I am seeking your support for the office of District Justice in our community.

As a resident of the Back Mountain since early childhood I've seen our community grow and prosper until we now enjoy one of the best quality of life's found anywhere in Luzerne county.

I sincerely believe that this community and that that quality of life is worth fighting for. For ourselves . . . and for our children.

This year magistrate Earl Gregory, after twenty years of honorable service, begins his retirement from this very significant task within our community.

As a member of one of our local police forces for over thirteen years I've had a special opportunity to see and experience close up what it really takes to defend this community and I've worked hard to prepare myself for that defense. I am ready for the task at hand. With your help together we can insure that the next generation of our community will find life, Back of the Mountain, as safe, as just, as full of peace. . . as we find it today.

Today I and my friends, Democrat and Republican alike, begin the formal process to elect Jim Tupper District Justice of district #11-3-09, the magisterial office which serves our area. If you would be interested in signing one of my petitions or in circulating one of my petitions please feel free to call on us at either 675-0734 or 696-1741. I would be extremely honored to have you join us in this effort.

Public service is important and should never be taken lightly. I sincerely hope that you share my belief that a community that cares for its members is worth fighting for.

Together, we can make this vision a reality.

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