

## Reporter's notebook

# Groundhog isn't the only forecaster, or the best

By GRACE R. DOVE  
Post Staff

February 2 is Groundhog Day, celebrated in Punxsatawny, PA, by dingitaries in tophats and tailcoats who pull a rather irritated-looking groundhog named Phil from hibernation in his snug burrow in an attempt to predict the next six weeks' weather.

If Phil sees his shadow, we'll have six weeks more of winter. If he doesn't, spring will come early.

In the glare of television spotlights, the poor little guy usually can't help seeing his shadow - if he can get his beady little eyes open.

I wonder if Phil remembers this incident when he awakens from hibernation some six to eight weeks later, or if he has some rather hazy, weird winter dreams of strangely dressed two-leggeds and bright lights.

The observation of Groundhog Day came to America with the settlers.

This country's original inhabitants wouldn't have thought of disturbing the winter sleep of a four-legged. They (the four-leggeds, not the natives) tend to be rather grouchy, especially the bears.

We already knew how long and what kind of a winter we would have from observing the fall behavior of our forest friends.

The deer usually turn darker for the winter in late September or early October, which we call the Moon When the Geese Fly South.

This year I saw deer with dark coats the week before Labor Day, indicating an early winter.

The squirrels and winter birds at my backyard feeder were especially dark this fall. Since dark objects, fur and feathers absorb the sun's heat faster than light ones, it appeared to me that the coming winter would be cold.

In the old days, Native Americans also kept an eye on their dogs, basically domesticated wolves, for an indicator of the coming winter, since they spent most of their time outside.

Darker doggy coats, like the squirrels, predicted very cold weather.

Wolves usually shed their summer coats to grow in thick winter fur in mid-December, the Cold Moon. Early shedding also meant an early, cold winter.

I haven't danced with wolves lately (or even polkaed with poodles), but both my beagle and my husky/shepherd had extremely thick coats before Christmas.



My ancestors knew that the deer also forecast the weather.

They'll be out feeding heavily before a storm, then again right after it ends, and tend to congregate in the woods, where it's warmer, before heavy snows.

Old-timers also relied on the woolly-bear caterpillars for winter forecasts, which I have never understood. Something about the pattern of their black and brown fur is supposed to predict cold snaps and storms.

My first husband's grandmother, whom I dearly loved, liked to read the woolly bears, so late every summer I dutifully caught several for her.

She always missed by a mile.

My friend Rachael Fairchild recently told me that major weather changes around the times of the equinoxes or solstices are locked into weather patterns for the next three months.

She noticed it. So did the guys from Accu-Weather, who do the "Weather World" show on WVIATV.

The cold, snowy weather roared in right on schedule, around December 21, and hasn't let up since, Rachael said. It will probably be with us until March 21, no matter what the groundhog says.

Jackson Township road foreman Rich Manta watches bees' nests. If the nests are high off the ground, it means a snowy winter.

"We won't have lots of snow this winter," he said at a recent township supervisors' meeting. "The bees' nests are too close to the ground."

Sorry, Rich. The bees lied.

And Punxsatawny Phil will undoubtedly once again see his shadow in the glare of television spotlights, which we, digging out from the latest snowfall, will accept as proof that there are six more weeks of wintry weather left.



POST PHOTO/GRACE R. DOVE

**MOTHER NATURE WAS HERE** - Accumulated snow caused the roof over a truck storage shed at Commonwealth Telephone's Route 309 warehouse to collapse onto two delivery trucks January 28. Building supervisor Dan Schall said that the trucks sustained only minor damage.

## Snow downs

(continued from page 1)

moved into the home at 45 North Lehigh Street only two months ago.

"I only know her as Gail," she said. "Her car is still in the garage. I hope she's not under it."

A passing mailman provided her full name, Gail Kurtzer.

Patrolman Frank Ziegler and officers from Dallas Borough and Dallas Township had first tried to look for her underneath the debris, but finally decided to ask road foreman Butch Chamberlain to bring in a bucket loader to lift the fallen roof.

Before Chamberlain could call in the equipment, Mrs. Kurtzer and her son, Jared, returned home from an errand. His car had been under the carport until they left.

"We weren't even gone 15 minutes," Mrs. Kurtzer said. "I knew that the carport had problems and had called my insurance man about it this morning."

In addition to collapsing the carport, the weight of accumulated snow also warped the front of Kurtzer's two-car garage, jamming the door shut, and bowed the roof of her back porch.

Kurtzer said that she couldn't provide an estimate of the damage until her insurance man inspected it.

Shavertown assistant fire chief Tony Kaiser told her not to use the garage and the back porch until the snow was cleared from the roofs.

He said that possibly the vibration of the car leaving the carport caused it to come down.

Despite the commotion the collapse caused, Kurtzer said that she was glad that Mary Ann Fries was concerned enough to call for help.

"The best thing is that no one was hurt," Ziegler said. "Everyone wins."

## Make-up days

(continued from page 1)

the changes in the calendar before we can present it to the board," Wycallis said. "So far, it looks like they'll okay it."

These holidays are built into their contract and will be rescheduled for the non-professional employees to take at another time, he said.

### Lake-Lehman

Superintendent Dr. Nancy Davis said that two days of Easter vacation, April 5 and 6, will be makeup days.

The school board will discuss using a teacher in-service day, February 18, and Presidents' Day, February 21, as additional makeup days.

"If we had to, we could use April

1 (Good Friday) and 4 (Easter Monday) as additional makeup days," Dr. Davis said. "I don't really want to do that because families may have already made special plans for the long weekend."

If the school board approves the two days in February as makeup days, graduation would probably be moved to June 17.

"This is all tentative," she said. "We don't know how the weather will be for the rest of the winter."

Both superintendents said that their districts are studying adding extra days to Easter vacation next year, to be used as snow days if needed.

## To cancel or dismiss? Decision-making starts at 5 a.m.

Snow day, late start or early dismissal - how do school superintendents decide what to do in case of severe weather?

In the case of a possible late start, Lake-Lehman superintendent Dr. Nancy Davis gets a wake-up call between 4:30 and 5 a.m. from transportation coordinator Barbara Ross for an update on road conditions.

By that time, Ross already has discussed road conditions with the district's bus contractors, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) and officials in the district's six member municipalities.

Dallas superintendent Gerald Wycallis has a radio with a special weather frequency in his home to keep him informed of the latest winter storm forecasts. He also stays in touch with the National Weather Service at Avoca and watches the Weather Channel.

Wycallis also discusses road conditions around 5 a.m. on snowy mornings with officials in the district's four member municipalities and bus contractors, who have checked them earlier.

Both superintendents share information from neighboring Wyoming Area and Northwest school districts before deciding whether to call a delay or cancel school altogether.

"A cancellation is always our last resort," Dr. Davis said. In the case of a storm starting during the school day which may call for an early dismissal, the superintendents follow the same process to decide whether it's safer to send the students home early or wait until crews have had a chance to clear the roads.

In order for the day to be credited by the state, the students must be in school half a day, Dr. Davis said.

"As long as we complete a minimum 990 hours per school year, the state accepts it," Wycallis said, noting that Dallas exceeds this requirement.


## Students must complete 990 school hours per year

### Trucksville UM Women's Pork Dinner Feb. 12

The United Methodist Women of Trucksville will serve a family style Pork and Sauerkraut Dinner on Saturday, Feb. 12, from 5 to 7 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall of the Educational Building, on Church Road in Trucksville.

The menu will be: roast pork, sauerkraut, mashed potatoes, and gravy, mixed vegetables, homemade applesauce, rolls and butter, homemade apple or cherry pie, coffee, tea and fruit punch.

Tickets are available from any UMW member or the church office at 696-3897. The price is \$6 for adults and \$3 for children under 12 years of age. Seating is limited. There will be no takeouts.



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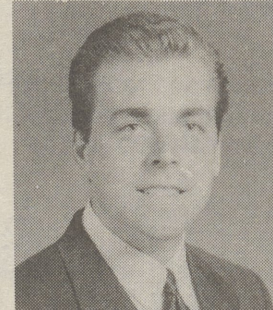
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**The Dallas Post**

Published Wednesdays  
**675-5211**  
Fax: 675-3650

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 366, Dallas PA 18612  
Shipping Address: 45 Main Road, Dallas PA 18612  
Office hours: Monday - Friday: 8:30 a.m. - 5 p.m.

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The Dallas Post (USPS 147-720)

Published weekly by Bartsen Media, Inc. \$18 per year in Luzerne and Wyoming counties (PA); \$20 elsewhere in PA, NY or NJ; \$22 all other states. Second-class postage paid at Dallas PA.

**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to The Dallas Post, P.O. Box 366, Dallas PA 18612.

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