

John W. Johnson

A perfect life is an illusion

nation's Declaration of Independence...that all are created equal. All are not, in fact, created equal. And it is charitable to even suggest that all are even remotely equal. All humans are born with different strengths and weaknesses. That's empirically self-evident. But in pursuit of the notion that public education is among the principal sources of strength in a republican democracy, we nevertheless perpetuate the illusion of perfection; indeed, we have institutionalized the idea of perfection to the point where, among other things, young people commit suicide over bad grades.

At the same time vocational education in favor of the perfection to be found in the 'professions' has been deemphasized in public education. Much of the vocational education void has attempted to be filled by private industry, either through correspondence schools, hands-on training or a combination of both.

We've all seen the TV ads: "Learn to drive a truck," or "be a welder and earn big money," etc., etc. And, with the exceptions of road maintenance, the post office and defense, I'm all for private industry doing just about anything in place of public institutions, be they governmental or educational.

However, many of those so-called private vocational education schools are primarily in business to lure dollars from ill-informed students, and not in the business of providing an education.

Part of the reason for this is that students who would be drawn to such hype are not prepared to make judgments about the quality of such courses; to expect otherwise begs the question of a need for vocational training in the public education system where the entire process is subject to public scrutiny, higher standards and more stringent expectations.

Be all this as it may, both parents AND teachers are not entirely happy with our educational system in general. For example, —Many teachers say parents are too permissive.

—At the same time, less than half of teachers surveyed say they are very satisfied with their jobs.

(This compares with 52 percent of the total public, and the biggest complaint seems to be that teachers feel they are primarily there to 'manage' as opposed to 'teach' students.)

Teachers, in general, are blamed far too much for society's ills; instead, much of the blame can be laid at the feet of:

—A mushrooming school bureaucracy having a negative effect on their work in the classroom. In 1960 there were 40,000 school districts in the U.S.; today there are 16,000. At the same time, over the past 20 years the number of principals and supervisors has increased 83 percent while the number of teachers has increased 64 percent.

—Television and the image it creates for students that they would be 'entertained' in the classroom.

—Perhaps, most importantly, teachers said that poor attitudes toward learning and little parent involvement with a child's education at home, were important factors in 'why Johnny can't read.' And if Johnny can't read, (or is unable to produce or service something with his hands) there's a good chance that he, and the children he produces, will go on welfare.

The at-home factor cannot be stressed enough. If parents continue to believe that it is the sole responsibility of public education to educate their children, then the quality of education will suffer. And paying lip service to involvement by joining a parent/school group does not entirely address the real issue:

The child must perceive that learning—vocational or otherwise—is not just a function of textbooks and classroom routine. He or she must come to understand that education is a lifelong process, and not something to be endured until one is old enough to quit.

This is where parents become involved with their child's education at home can make the critical difference between a child who was presented information and a child who learned.

And ultimately, this means the difference between a society which, in all ways, either prospers, or declines into an ever widening gap of both economical and intellectual have and have not.

Library news

Library is looking for a few good volunteers

By NANCY KOZEMCHAK

The Back Mountain Memorial Library has completed another busy, exciting year with a total book circulation count for 1994 of 89,161; 52,136 adult and 37,025 juvenile. Book Club circulated 2,808 books; Reference totaled 4,187 and Access Pennsylvania books totaled 1,702. There were 661 new adult borrowers and 669 juvenile borrowers added to the library. Re-registrations were adult 1,284 and juvenile 1,399. New books added, adult 1,657 and juvenile 317. Books withdrawn for the year, adult 382 and juvenile 240. Interlibrary loan books circulated 726. The library enjoyed many story hours with much activity in the children's room and varied programs and money making projects for the entire library.

The library is looking for a few volunteers who would be able to commit three or more hours a week at the library. There are many areas where our volunteers

do a tremendous job of helping with the work load of the staff at the library. Some of the areas that help is needed are shelving books, alphabetizing the daily circulation cards, filing cards in catalogs and slipping books at the main desk. The library shelves always need to be checked for correct filing and straightened. Any interested person is asked to stop at the library for information and a volunteer application.

New books at the library: "Carry Me Home" by John M. DeVecchio is a powerful and poignant epic that places the Viet Nam soldiers to their final battlefield—the home front. High Meadow Farm, in the fertile hill country of central Pennsylvania, would be their salvation. In Viet Nam, they had fought side by side, brothers in arms. Now in the face of personal tragedy and bureaucratic deception, they would create a more enduring allegiance.

"Nest of Vipers" by Linda Da-

vies is a gripping debut novel that reinvents the financial thriller, bringing it into the modern world of incredibly complex—and corruptible—markets. Sarah Jensen—smart, ambitious, independent, and beautiful—is one of the most successful currency traders in the City of London. When the governor of the Bank of England invites her to his office, she's intrigued. She hears of suspects of corrupt trading practices.

"The Time of the Cricket" by William D. Blankenship is a novel of classic mayhem in modern Tokyo. The novel follows the trail of Kay Williams, an American object d'art agent, and Cricket Kimura, Yakuza executioner for the Japanese mafia. Focusing on the legend and the present-day legacy of the sword of the Emperor Meiji, the story goes deep under the tightly woven Japanese social fabric to reveal an underworld rarely seen.



Generous program supporters

First Fidelity Bank has awarded a \$5,000 grant from the Mary J. Foster Trust to benefit children from low-income families. The grant will be used for tutoring services provided by the Mercy Institute of Educational Development (MIED) at Mercy Center, Dallas. Receiving the grant from Sr. Francel D'Andrea, RSM are the members of the MIED Administrative Team Sisters Ann Patrice Wassel, RSM, Bridget Clark, RSM, Mary Clare Dougherty, RSM and Patricia Ann Mundy, RSM.

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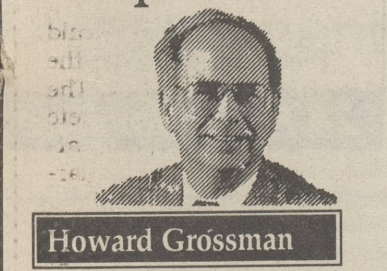
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The economic viewpoint



Howard Grossman

Individuals can make a difference in our future

nation, the spirit of states, the spirit of regions, and the spirit of counties, communities and neighborhoods. Witness the astonishing results of people in Northeastern Pennsylvania who have contributed so significantly to the region's economic growth and quality of life, such as Roy E. Morgan of Forty Fort, Thomas P. Shelburne of Centermoreland, Ernest D. Preate, Sr. of Scranton, and a host of other leaders who have lent their time, energies and monies toward the great causes of people's needs.

Much of American and much of Northeastern Pennsylvania, its beauty, spectacular natural resources, and richness and diversity are unlike any other country or most other regions of the nation.

People are inventive and create new ways to solve new and older problems as demonstrated by the growing number of partnerships of the private, public and not-for-public sector of the nation and the region. Those who stand and fight for their belief take much heat, but glow in success as exemplified by one person, John McGee, who fought for years for his vision of minor league professional baseball returning to Northeastern Pennsylvania.

In the tiny hamlets, villages, towns, townships and boroughs and in the cities of Northeastern Pennsylvania and the nation lie astonishing capacities for positive improvement and significant change. People like Dr. Ed Dessen of Hazleton who almost singlehandedly created a new and startling capacity to change the lifestyle of an entire community area. People like General Frank Townsend who rose to heights of citizen leadership during the days before and the days after Tropical Storm Agnes in 1972. These examples bode well for the future of this nation and region.

The one great failing which exists almost across the board, whether it be national, state, regional, county municipal or neighborhood is the inability to think

long term. No one seems to want to account for the generations ahead. Rather, the dark and ominous clouds which overarch the geography around us are those which relate to the absence and failure to account for those who will follow many decades ahead. This failure speaks to the difficulty of placing yourself in 1995 as if you were in the same place, the same region, and the same country in the Year 2035.

There is an organization called the World Future Society which attempts to accomplish this almost impossible task. The Society is based in Bethesda, Maryland with a worldwide membership. The Northeast Pennsylvania Chapter has been meeting at Wilkes University over the last few years through a group called Futurists. Difficult as it is, the Northeastern Pennsylvania community needs to substantially advance long range thinking.

One such task in a strategic sense has been the regional visioning project of the Economic Development Council of Northeastern Pennsylvania (EDCNP). The Council identified five major critical areas facing 21st century Northeastern Pennsylvania, developed policy papers around these five critical areas, and further defined specific actions which can be a guidepost for the region's future. Working with the four Penn State Regional Campuses serving Northeastern Pennsylvania at Wilkes-Barre, Scranton, Hazleton and Schuylkill Haven, EDCNP has published 17 reports on the regional visioning NEPA 2000 series.

Hopefully, this can serve as a springboard for the region to believe, act and implement changes and functions which can expand Northeastern Pennsylvania's horizons to combat the dark clouds and allow the positive sunrays to be the inheritance of regional 21st century life.

Howard Grossman is Executive Director of the Economic Development Council of Northeastern Pennsylvania. He lives in Dallas.