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## 'Corner' druggists fight for their lives

By JACK HILSHER  
Post Correspondent

Another piece of America's treasured past is in danger of disappearing...the "corner drugstore." Whether on the corner or not, close to 2,000 of them have folded in the past year. That's 40 door-closings per week!

Because of this alarming trend, thousands of "neighborhood type" retail drugstores across the nation have banded together to protest current health insurance company practices, which they say are solely responsible for their plight. In effect, these druggists are fighting for their lives.

They have called a nationwide rally for next Wednesday, September 20, and named it "High Noon For Your Local Pharmacy." Their theme is: "They Can't Stop Us From Caring For You!"

Customers are being asked to visit their local pharmacy Wednesday, receive pamphlets with details and hear of what the pharmacists say are unfair practices steadily creeping into health care policies. Directed by Bob Pivais of Maloney's Pharmacy in Ashley, 25 such practices will be highlighted and explained. The public is being asked for support.

In downtown Dallas, Bob Fino wholeheartedly supports the "High Noon" rally. Fino, of Center Hill Road, has been in the pharmacy business almost 33 years and says, "We have customers in their 70s and 80s, even some 90 or more. They know us. We know them. We

See DRUGGISTS, pg 3



POST PHOTO/CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK

## It was a 'fair' day

David and Melanie Madeira helped daughter Hanna on the carousel at last weekend's Luzerne County Fair. It wasn't clear who was having the most fun. More photos on page 4.

## Board cool to \$6.5 million Vo-Tech plan

By RONALD BARTIZEK  
Post Staff

DALLAS - With one exception, members of the Dallas School Board agreed Sept. 11 to oppose a proposed \$6.5 million renovation project at West Side Vo-Tech, at least until they are better informed on the project.

Ernie Ashbridge, one of three representatives from the Dallas board to the Vo-Tech, said the plan as now structured would cost the Dallas School District \$1.5 million, and add 2 mills to local school taxes for 20 years. Dallas contributes a higher percentage to the school than other member districts because it is considered affluent by state standards.

Ashbridge asked the other board members to give him a consensus opinion about the project, so that the Dallas representatives would know what action to take at the next Vo-Tech meeting.

John George, another of the Dallas representatives to Vo-Tech,

disagreed that the project was too costly, or that a consensus was needed. "These are all preliminary plans," George said, indicating that he didn't believe the project was imminent.

All the board members agreed that the Vo-Tech's 25-year-old roof should be replaced. That alone would cost about \$1 million, but the work would not be eligible for state reimbursement, since it would be considered maintenance. Expanding the building would qualify for reimbursement, although Dallas would receive a lower share than other districts.

Ashbridge said the \$6.5 million renovation would not add any classrooms to the building, but would expand the existing ones. Clarence Michael, who served as a Vo-Tech representative for several years, said he questions the rationale behind the whole project. "Get a reputable architect and start from scratch," he suggested.

See 'VO-TECH', pg 8

## Westmoreland unlikely to make building plan cut

By RONALD BARTIZEK  
Post Staff

DALLAS - Renovating Westmoreland Elementary School was at the top of a list of options presented to the Dallas School Board Sept. 13, but the school's chances of survival are probably closer to the bottom.

Paul Degillio, an architect with Quad Three Group of Wilkes-Barre, presented the board with five options as a summary of the firm's preliminary feasibility study of district facilities. As part of the study, Quad Three will inspect all the district's physical facilities and present recommendations and cost estimates for repair or replacement.

While discussing the options, superintendent of schools Gerald Wycallis implied that it was unlikely the school board would vote to keep the Westmoreland school.

The options were:  
• Renovate and add classroom space to Westmoreland, and renovate the present administration building.

• Build a new K-5 elementary school on the Westmoreland site.

Renovate Dallas Elementary to house K-2. Build an addition on the Middle School to hold administrative offices.

• Build a new 3-5 elementary school at the Dallas Elementary site. Renovate Dallas Elementary to house K-2, and add to the Middle School for administrative offices.

• Build an addition to Dallas Elementary to house all the district's K-5 students. Build an addition to Dallas Elementary for administrative offices.

• Build an addition to the Middle School for elementary grades 3-5. Renovate Dallas Elementary for K-2. Build an addition on the Middle School for administrative offices.

One key hurdle to renovating the Westmoreland school is a state policy that precludes reimbursement for renovations to older, wood-frame buildings, so the district would have to bear all costs on its own.

No action was taken. Degillio said the building evaluation was nearly finished and would be presented with recommendations at the October meeting.

## Bevy of banks wants your business

By RONALD BARTIZEK  
Post Staff

The face of banking in the Back Mountain has changed dramatically in recent years, and more changes are on the way. According to bankers interviewed for this article, that's good for area residents, as more banks, some large and others small, vie for their business.

At the very least, people who want to do their banking on Saturday — and even Sunday — now have more places to do it. And most banks are striving to offer a full range of services to their Back Mountain customers.

Commonwealth Bank, a division of Meridian Bank, the fourth largest in Pennsylvania, plans to open a branch in the new Orloski's complex along Route 309 in mid-October. While Commonwealth is new to the Back Mountain, its president isn't. Bob Richardson joined Commonwealth a few years ago after a spending most of his career at First Eastern Bank, which has since been acquired by PNC Bank.

"I opened the Dallas office (of First Eastern), and managed it for several years" said Richardson, a lifelong Dallas resident. "I think that helped us to understand the market. I knew the opportunities and needs in the Back Mountain"

Commonwealth was acquired by Meridian in 1993, in a merger that didn't result in local consolidation since Meridian didn't do business here. Commonwealth has 63 branches in nine central and northeastern counties, while Meridian, with \$17 billion in assets, is headquartered in Reading.

Richardson said his bank had decided to come to the Back



Mountain in 1992, but an assortment of regulatory and other obstacles put off the opening until next month. The branch will share space with an Orloski's Quik Mart, so extended hours are part of the plan. A manager hasn't been selected, but Richardson said the branch would likely employ about eight persons.

Guaranty Bank, with headquarters in Nanticoke, is at the opposite end of the size scale from Commonwealth. With total assets of \$96 million, it is planning to open its fourth office in Pikes Creek. The bank intends to refurbish the old general store building at the intersection of Routes 29 and 118 for a full-service office.

"We're excited about where we're going," said Sheila Olsheskie, assistant vice president. "We feel the location is prime. We like the small town, rural atmosphere." Olsheskie said the branch would likely employ about five persons.

Banks can't just decide to open a branch on their own. They must receive approval from state or national regulators, depending on which holds their charter. Regulators look at the bank's financial strength and ability to support the new branch, as well as the target region's economics. One thing they won't allow, according to Richardson, is one bank to dominate an area. "It's a very competitive business," he said.

### Continued expansion

The new bank branches add to the choices in the Back Mountain, which were expanded last year with the opening of a Pioneer American Bank branch in Mr. Z's Market. That office was the first to offer Sunday hours, as well as

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Lake-Lehman volleyball team looked great in a 2-0 win over Crestwood. Pg 9.

■ Planners out  
Franklin Twp. supervisors suspend two from planning commission. Pg 8

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