

The Dallas Post

EDITORIALS

Turn old Dallas school land into a rec park

Regardless of whether the Dallas school board renovates or replaces the Westmoreland Elementary School, it seems certain the administrative offices, now located in a separate building on Church Street, will be relocated to the high school/middle school campus. That is probably a wise move in itself, and it leads to the question of what to do with the old office, and the former Dallas Township School next door.

Our vote would be to convert the space into a park and perhaps a recreation center open to children and teens (and perhaps seniors, too) from the entire Back Mountain. Most of the land the district owns there is now devoted to baseball and softball fields which are leased to Back Mountain Baseball for a nominal fee, which has been responsible for improvements and insurance. That arrangement could be perpetuated, but the balance of the site could be used for a playground, improved outdoor courts, and other facilities, such as a walking/jogging track.

This plan would require that the old school building be demolished, with the office building possibly converted to a teen center. It is well suited for this use, since it already is divided into large and small rooms and is surrounded by parking space.

The Back Mountain lacks a supervised environment for teenagers to get together, socialize and blow off youthful steam. There is no "campus shop" type hangout, no arcade, no indoor recreation opportunities aimed at youth. Perhaps there should be. This is not a task to be taken lightly, however. The landscape is littered with the carcasses of similar facilities that failed in their mission; some became centers of the antisocial behavior they were supposed to combat. It must be understood going in that a solid commitment of time and money is needed to operate a successful center, and if that is not offered, the project shouldn't be attempted.

Certainly, whatever is done with the available land, it should be for the benefit of the greatest number of people, and starting with a park would be the wisest use.

Bravo to high-tech police

The Dallas Township Police Department's recent advance into computerized crimefighting is an impressive example of practical uses for high technology. The system's best feature would appear to be its capability to display a photo lineup of criminal suspects which can be viewed by victims or witnesses. Because the photos are stored digitally, they won't deteriorate, and are available with the touch of a key. And it's fast. The operator can enter a set of characteristics such as height, eye color and hair color, and the computer will pull up several appropriate images to compare with the suspect.

There's more, of course. When an arrest record is entered, the name or other features can be cross-referenced for other charges. And all the information can quickly and easily be shared with other departments around the nation and the world.

Besides providing advanced capabilities, the system frees up officers' time by cutting paperwork and research time dramatically. That means they can be out and about more, which in itself is a deterrent to crime.

Chief Carl Miers says all departments will have this system in a few years, but he and the supervisors are to be congratulated for taking the lead in this region.

Publisher's notebook

Ron Bartizek

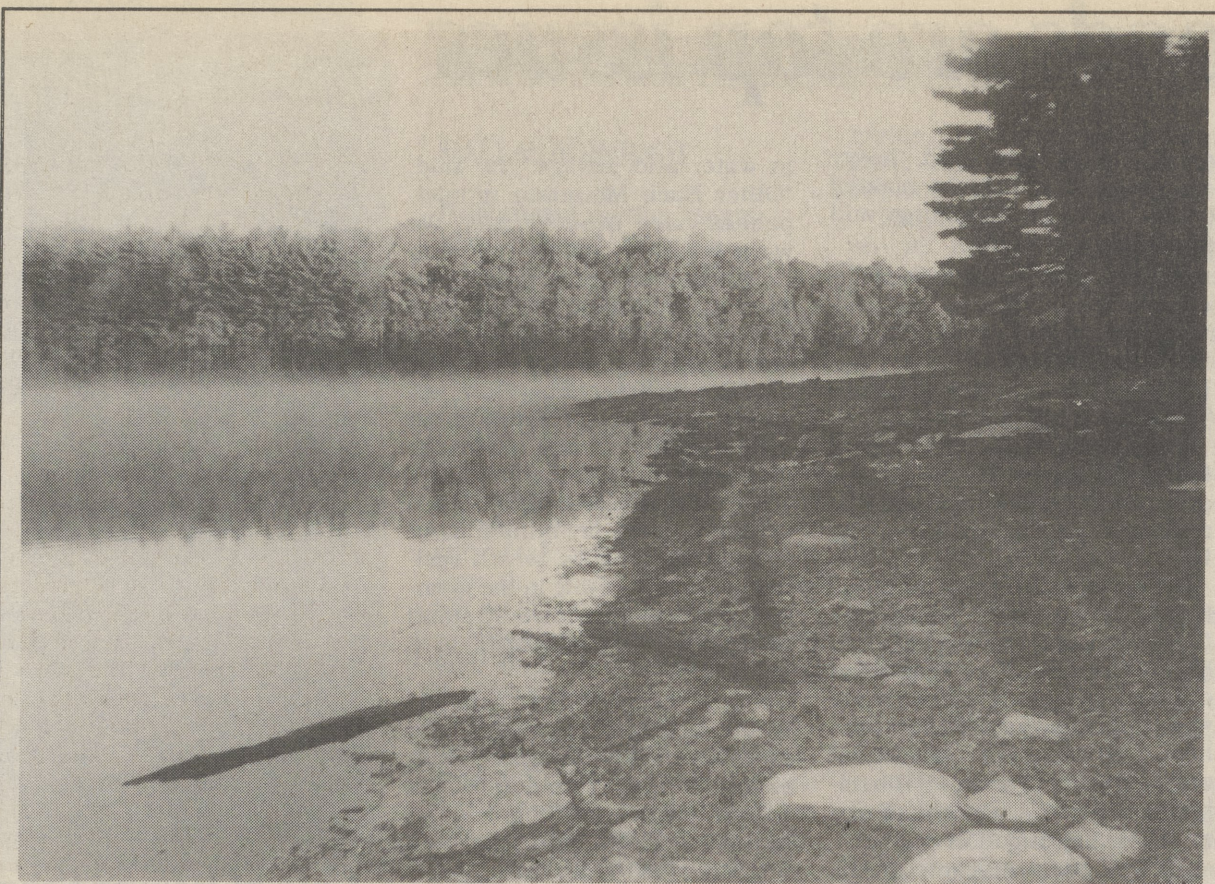


I got lucky last week, when the candidates for Luzerne County commissioner showed up at a meeting of the Back Mountain Business and Professional Association. We don't usually give this race much coverage, probably because the commissioners pay so little attention to the Back Mountain. This is only the second or third time I've seen a sitting commissioner visit our area in several years, and no one has ever come here for a non-political purpose that I'm aware of.

All the candidates sounded a similar theme; that government needs to make Luzerne County more hospitable to business. To some candidates that means lower taxes, to others a coordinated effort to attract new employers and assist existing ones. I think the latter idea has some merit, and certainly should be explored.

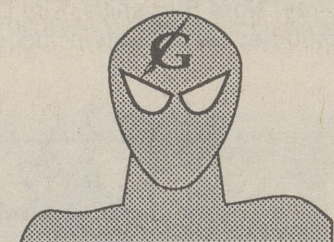
On taxes, reform is the operative word, with the goal to shift the burden from property taxes to an income or sales tax, or some combination. I agree with that in principle, since income or sales taxes lie heaviest on those who earn or consume the most, not those who happen to buy or build a new home or factory. But reform still strikes me as something of a cop-out from reassessment. No politician who likes his job will champion reassessment because they all believe a taxpayer revolt would insure the end of their career. They may be right, but that is still no excuse for perpetuating a system that is not only onerous but tremendously unfair. Without reassessment, reform will continue the unfairness.

Of course, the drive for reform isn't about fairness, anyway. It's about finding a plan that will throw off increased taxes in the least noticeable manner. Assuming consumption and income show growth, so will taxes, with no increase in rate.



Low water at Huntsville Reservoir. Photo by Charlotte Bartizek.

Ghostwriter



by Paul Rismiller

Now that the initial shock of seeing former football great/wife-beater/double murderer O.J. Simpson being left off the hook by a Los Angeles jury has worn off, it's time to revisit this ongoing soap opera calmly.

Did "Mr. Johnnie's" dealing the race card to a predominately black jury cause jury nullification?

Maybe, maybe not. Considering the Keystone Kops-style investigation by the LAPD, and the incomprehensible incompetence of the Los Angeles County Coroners office, I'm willing to give the jurors the benefit of the doubt. From their viewpoint (remember, we, as spectators, saw more damning evidence than they did) the prosecution failed to prove O.J.'s guilt "beyond a reasonable doubt."

Does the verdict mean there is something drastically wrong with the American judicial system?

Nah. Despite the hand wringing of various pundits, the system did work - if you consider the premise on which it is based - it is better for ten guilty men to walk free, than for one innocent man to be punished.

And I think that's exactly what we saw here - a guilty man walked. Remember, being found not guilty doesn't mean Simpson's innocent, and despite blather from one of the jurors about "garbage in - garbage out" in regards to blood evidence, there is absolutely no form of contamination that will alter DNA.

It also proves, sadly, the old adage about "Money talks, and B-----t walks."

Was the jury trying to send a message ala Cochran? Good Lord, I sincerely hope not!

O.J. acquitted by jury, but convicted by public

While the scenes of blacks cheering the verdict were disturbing, they are at least understandable considering the fear and loathing many blacks feel for police in general, and the LAPD in particular. But could twelve reasonable human beings free a savage murderer just to make a point about racism?

I, for one, give this panel more credit than that. If only because I'd rather not face the alternative.

It is truly heartening to me to see the whole Simpson circus start to unravel.

Just because the jurors came to a decision that defies the belief of millions, it appears their countrymen have considerably more sense - O.J. may have been acquitted in a court of law, but he has been convicted in the court of public opinion.

Exhibit #1: The Dream Team Nightmare - Robert Shapiro, showing rare humanity for a lawyer, walked away from the rest of the team with a clothespin on his nose as soon as the verdict was read.

It spoke volumes about the guilt of his client when Flea Bailey revealed that Shapiro originally wanted the Juice to cop a plea.

Even more revealing was a Freudian slip by Shapiro during a television interview, referring to Ron Goldman as an "innocent bystander", proving that he knew Nicole was the intended victim.

Exhibit #2: Despite the talk of a \$10 million pay-per-view farce, er, interview, apparently the PPV carriers would rather be locked in a closet with a rabid wolverine than touch this garbage. Who says crime pays?

Exhibit #3: The on-and-off TV interview. Even though NBC was inundated with calls condemning a "Dateline" interview with O.J., the network was planning to go for it right up to the moment the Juice got cold feet.

It's being booted around the press that O.J.'s lawyers were rehearsing him for the big event, but

pulled the plug when they found his performance, shall we say, less than convincing.

Exhibit #4: The Gray Lady's Non-Interview. Well, if you can't orchestrate a friendly PPV interview, and you can't gut out a potentially tough network sit-down, what's a tarnished "hero" to do?

Why, you just ring up a friendly journalist, that's what!

So, O.J. calls up an old buddy of his, who just happens to be TV critic at The New York Times, and tells him what's on his mind. If not what's on his conscience. That the "newspaper of record" actually published the resulting piffle is a sad commentary on the present state of a once venerable institution. First the Unabomber, and now this!

Even the New York Post, that most tabloid of tabloids, called the Times "the Scarlet Harlot" for publishing the "interview", and that reaction was about the same throughout the press and among public relations types - a disaster for O.J., even worse for the newspaper.

But the interview did let slip a few glimpses into the Juice's mind - like his crack about wanting to "knock the chip off Marcia's shoulder". What? No challenge to go mano a mano with Chris Darden?

Oh right, you like pounding on the ladies, don't you Juice? It sort of slipped my mind.

And his boasting about his "Jaguar, his Bentley, the mansion in Brentwood, and apartment in New York," how nice to remind us, particularly your supporters in South Central, that you're still solvent, even after paying your platoon of lawyers.

It all illustrates the attitude of O.J. Simpson - smug, arrogant, manipulative. He can even get away with murder.

Or can he? Despite his best efforts, and those of his sycophants, O.J.'s attempts to polish up his image have proven to be in vain. It makes you proud to be an American.

As I was saying



Jack Hilsher

Here is a bit of dialogue from a southern couple, old friends and long-time readers of my columns:

Wife: "Where do you suppose Jack gets the things he writes?"

Husband: (removing his pipe reflectively): "I think he reads a lot."

Wife: "Well he must remember everything he reads."

Husband: "Possibly, he does have more meat in his stuff than most of them do."

Well it's no secret, he haunts libraries and uses their copiers. He also uses computers which list magazine articles in their memories, and again, photocopy machines. That ain't plagiarism, son, that am research!

But these usually trusty sources failed me recently when I tried to get background for a column on one Robert L. Ripley, father of a newspaper feature called

It's true - believe it or not!

"Believe It or Not." Even some encyclopedias failed to mention him...it's as though he dropped off the earth, unseen and unheralded.

Too bad, but we'll run the item anyway. I did learn his middle name was Leroy. Ripley's fame came from a cartoon feature he started in 1918; he collected odd and unusual facts and happenings, showed them with little sketches, and became quite successful. His syndicated stuff appeared in over 300 papers and he once owned or franchised museums he started all over the country. They still draw crowds. People like to see two-headed calves, hairless rabbits or singing fish.

Ripley was only 56 when he died in 1949, and I have no idea how long any family kept his museums open or continued his column. He had one imitator, I think the guy's name was John Hix, but no one equalled his fascination with the odd.

He would surely have loved this one: In Austria, in 1885, in coal beds dating back dozens of millions of years (the humanless Tertiary period) a remarkable metal cube was found. Made of iron, carbon and nickel, it measured about 2 1/2"x1 1/2" and created a minor sensation, ar-

cles about it appearing in major scientific magazines in Britain and France.

"How," the questions came, "could it have been man-made when it obviously dated from a period where there were no men?" Another planet? An alien civilization? An early earthly civilization that disappeared without any trace? Nature? (But such exact cubical shapes do not appear in nature.)

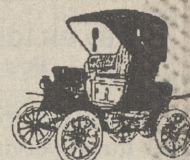
This (unearthly?) cube was put in the Salzburg Museum, and much later Russian journalist G.N. Ostromov decided to investigate. Officials told him the cube was lost, probably before World War II. The files were also missing. Ostromov published an article anyway and called it a hoax.

Some believe it was true, and that the cube was an advanced data collector, storing a record of earth events. They say the intelligence which planted it in the first place also removed it from the museum. ("They" have also contacted the tooth fairy.)

Ripley would have loved this little cube and would surely have devoted a whole "Believe It or Not" feature to it. As for me, all I can do is dust off the phrase I used awhile back for a column on U.F.O.'s:

"There are more things in heaven and on earth..."

ONLY YESTERDAY



60 Years Ago - Oct. 25, 1935 STATE LETS CONTRACT FOR NEW HIGHWAY

Prompt action by school physicians was believed to have checked the spread of a rash similar to impetigo in schools throughout this section this week. In Dallas Borough about 20 cases were reported and the children were removed from school until the condition is cured.

A contract for construction of 3.11 miles of reinforced concrete pavement 20 feet wide in Eaton and Monroe Townships was awarded by the State this week to Holmes Construction Co., Wooster, Ohio. Construction will be the first definite response to the long-time demand for a better highway between Dallas and Tunkhannock.

50 Years Ago - Oct. 26, 1945 VANDAL'S HIT PARRISH HEIGHTS CURFEW SIREN

The Atlantic Refining Co. will shortly make considerable changes to its property on Main Street, Dallas. The company will increase the capacity of its gasoline storage facilities by installing four 2,000 gal. tanks. Island pumps will be removed from Lake and Church Sts, and a battery of four new pumps will be installed parallel to the Lake Highway.

The Parrish Heights siren, one of two operated by Henry M. Laing Fire Co. as a fire alarm and 9 o'clock curfew, has been put out of commission by persons who climbed the tower on which it is erected and inserted some foreign object in its mechanical parts.

You could get - Small frying chickens, 41¢ lb.; Cod filets, 37¢ lb.; oranges, 2 doz., 45¢; carrots, 2 lg. bnchs., 19¢; Gulden's Mustard, jar 13¢.

40 Years Ago - Oct. 21, 1955 HUNTSVILLE CHURCH DEDICATES NEW WING

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Shavertown, will break ground for an extensive addition Sunday as a feature of the morning worship service. Plans call for a 17 foot addition to length of the present structure with a one-story 26 foot addition beyond to house primary Sunday School classes and an assembly room. Off to the side will be a two-story ell, 32x30 feet. The addition will add space for 11 classrooms, several multi-purpose rooms and a church office.

The oldest church and the oldest established organization in the Back Mountain marked its 112th anniversary Sunday when Huntsville Christian Church dedicated its new educational rooms at the morning service. Rev. C.H. Frick conducted visitors through five new classrooms, choirroom, nursery and sound-proof auditorium for mothers and young children. An open house will be held for the congregation and friends.

30 Years Ago - Oct. 21, 1965 DROUGHT, NO TANKER MAKE A FIRE HAZARD

Truckville and Carverton residents are in serious circumstances unless they are fortunate owners of a farm pond or swimming pool. With surrounding woodlands dry, Truckville Fire Company's tanker broken down, beyond repair and the fire company having a fire truck capable of carrying only 500 gal. of water, a terrific fire hazard looms for 1,000 homes in this area. Purchase of a new tanker for \$10,000 appears to be the answer.

Mr. and Mrs. Walter Kytile, Outlet-Lehman Road, observed their 58th wedding anniversary, Oct. 15 which was also Mrs. Kytile's 80th birthday. The couple has four children, nine grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

20 Years Ago - Oct. 23, 1975 AREA MERCHANTS STOP PARK-N-RIDE SETUP

"Not to hurt people who have to use the bus but for the benefit of the customers who use the shopping center" is how James B. Davis, spokesman for merchants of the Dallas Shopping Center explained the move by merchants to stop the set up of a park-n-ride lot by Luzerne County Transit Authority at the center's parking lot last week. Davis explained there are 18 businesses in the center and a limited amount of parking space.

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Ronald A. Bartizek
PUBLISHER

Charlotte E. Bartizek
ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER

Peggy Young
ADVERTISING ACCT. EXEC

Grace R. Dove
REPORTER

Paul Rismiller
PRODUCTION MANAGER

Olga Kostrobala
CLASSIFIED/TYPESSETTING

Jill Gruver
OFFICE MANAGER

