

## Customers

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cold patch and piles of gravel. The company has parked a backhoe on the empty lot.

"Our road looks like Bosnia," said Thomas Pavlichko. "From A to Z, I've never seen such an outfit in my life. We'll be back unless something is done with them."

William Tomayko, an employee of the Department of Environmental Protection, said he keeps a bucket in his shower so he can rinse himself when the water pressure suddenly drops.

He has seen 15 water main breaks on Hemlock Drive. NUI has dug up his front yard five times, he added.

"How long must we suffer with torn-up yards, mud in our streets and mud in our yards?" he asked. "During the 1995 drought a water leak went unrepaired for six days, with water running down the street. But if I had washed my car I would have had to pay a fine."

Like many other residents, Tomayko installed a sediment filter on his water line to keep mud leaking into the lines from blocking up the pipes in his home. He has also replaced every valve and valve seat in his home's water system several times.

"National Utilities keeps saying they'll make repairs as soon as the weather permits," he said. "What kind of weather are they waiting for?"

The audience applauded after Albert Babetski testified.

"I object to the fact that the PUC licenses this water company," he said. "The Shickshinny Water Company debacle should have tipped you off - you should have investigated them to the Nth degree then."

Pointing to Bontrager, he continued, "I challenge your integrity because I think you are untruthful. Did all of the loan surcharge we paid you go toward our system's new tank and line or are we paying off improvements to some other system?"

Barbara Hausen showed the commission a pair of extremely faded socks and sweats which she said were once hunter green.

"I don't own any more black socks," she said. "They've all faded to gray. The pressure is so low it takes a day and a half to do three loads of wash."

Her children get frequent rashes from the water, which she said often reeks of chlorine and has



POST PHOTO/GRACE R. DOVE

Officials attending the hearings were National Utilities president Joseph Bontrager, company attorney Anthony C. Lomma, consumer advocate attorney Gicine P. Brognola, PUC administrative law judge Debra Paist and attorney Wayne T. Scott from the PUC office of trial staff.

caused her to have two asthma attacks.

In the past 11 1/2 years, she has experienced 30 water main breaks in her front yard, which now resembles a swamp, Hausen said. The utility has taken up to three weeks to repair broken mains, even during droughts.

"Last Easter morning I had to take the children to my mother's house in Kingston to get their showers for church," she said.

When NUI repaired a leak in her yard three years ago, the workers broke one of the drain pipes under her new driveway, causing it to sink.

She also gave the PUC a journal, "A Year in the Life of a National Utilities Customer," of her problems with the utility for the past year as an exhibit.

"Not everyone at Oak Hill pays the same rate," said Marie Jones, who knows "at least five people" who aren't metered and don't have their own wells.

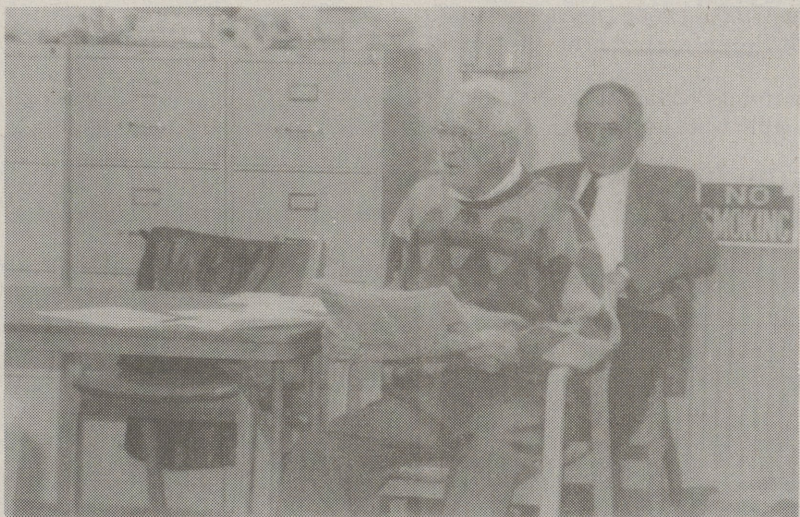
"It would be different if they treated us all the same or gave us a fair shake," she said.

Her water bill doubled after the meters were installed. During one two-month billing period she paid \$155.79 for 30,500 gallons - for two people. (According to recent press releases, NUI calculated its rate hike based on an average annual use of 48,000 gallons.)

"Many people are drilling wells up there because they can't stand this company and its broken promises," Jones said. "My water is

nearly as bad as Wilkes-Barre's - it tastes like fish. My white laundry turns gray and the colors look lousy. My laundry comes out dirtier than when it went in."

Since 1988 she has gone through three washing machines because of dirt coming through



POST PHOTO/GRACE R. DOVE

Oak Hill resident Charles Shafer was one of many residents to testify at the April 10 public hearings on a rate hike request by National Utilities.

the water pipes.

"A repairman told me my motor had burned up because of all the grains of stone and little pebbles in the water," she said. She has also added a second tank to her hot water heating system to help the grit settle out instead of accumulating in the pipes.

Lehman Township supervisor Ray Iwanowski, also a resident of Oak Hill, described the company's shoddy repairs to pavement which it has cut to access broken pipes and the many leaks in the system.

"During several dry spells there was water running down the street

who also have meters still pay by the old flat rate.

When his water bill jumped from about \$65 every two months to \$95, he and his wife began strict conservation measures, such as using "gray water" to flush the toilet, to keep costs down.

"Over the past 15 years, National Utilities has gone on a sort of feeding frenzy picking up small, financially-troubled water companies," Schleich said. "Now they're desperate for money to make necessary capital improvements. The seductive quality of rate increases is that eventually the company will get at least part of what they request."

Harveys Lake resident Michael A. Smith, a customer of the utility's Worden Place division, described an encounter with NUI workers last year, in which they used obscene language and cut his water line.

"We lost our water. My son found the shutoff valve to our house and turned it back on, thinking he was doing a favor for us," Smith said. "Shortly afterwards a NUI worker came onto my front lawn and cut my water line."

*"Why should we pay more for service when the service doesn't exist?"*  
Christine McManus  
Oak Hill

The workers responded to his question about the water line being cut with expletives, he said. Smith repaired the line himself.

Councilwoman Betty West, also a Worden Place customer, described her neighborhood's "temporary" water lines - leaky black plastic hoses snaking through the streets above the ground, along a stream bed and through culverts - which have been in place for nearly a decade.

Rhodes Terrace customer Keith Harry also complained about the poor quality and pressure of the water and the company's response to complaints.

"If more than one person on the street takes a shower the pressure fluctuates," he said. "Within 18 months I replaced three pumps on my furnace and one on the

dishwasher because they burned up due to the low water pressure. I have also replaced numerous seals and gaskets on my pipes."

The company requires at least two calls reporting problems before it will send a repairman out, Harry said.

After a water line broke on Christmas Eve in 1993, the company took several days to finish the repairs, he said.

"They left a 3 1/2 foot pipe sticking out of the ground in my driveway to locate the shutoff valve," he said. "I finally cut it off because I was worried it could damage my vehicles."

NUI finally filled the hole it had cut in the pavement for this job with cold patch asphalt the following August, Harry said.

"They didn't even tamp it down," he said. "The big, heavy guy doing the work stomped it with his feet a couple of times."

NUI has never applied to Harveys Lake Borough for permits to make pave cuts, although it's required to, he added.

"The water is so bad I won't even give it to my dog," said Kingston Township resident Marc Kovalchik, RN, a customer of the Midway Manor division. "I'm concerned about the water's possible health hazards. On our street within the last two years two people about 37 years old have died of cancer. Is the company testing the water for carcinogens?"

He said he either buys water or gets spring water from the public pump at Frances Slocum State Park for his family to drink.

Midway Manor customer Eleanor Rodda, a member of the Kingston Township Water Commission, said she also is concerned about the purity of the water.

"We never hear of any boil advisories," she said. "What about the young mothers who use tap water to make formula for their babies?"

Attending the hearings were PUC administrative law judge Debra Paist, attorneys Wayne T. Scott from the PUC's office of trial staff and Gicine P. Brognola from the consumer advocate's office, NUI president Joseph Bontrager and NUI's attorney Anthony C. Lomma.

Paist said she will make her recommendations by August 29. The PUC will hold three days of evidentiary hearings in June and render its decision by October 28.

## New signs will warn motorists of deaf child

By GRACE R. DOVE  
Post Staff

**KINGSTON TOWNSHIP** - The supervisors unanimously voted to help the mother of a hearing-impaired child by erecting warning signs on her street at their regular April 11 meeting.

"Could you please place the signs closer to the top of the hill?" asked Debra Darling, whose four-year-old daughter must wear two hearing aids. "The cars are racing on our road."

Township manager Jeff Box said he would order the 24 x 24-inch diamond-shaped signs, which say "deaf child," as soon as possible.

The first reading of an ordinance to adopt Ivy Drive and Maple Leaf Road in the Maplecrest II subdivision as township roads was unanimously approved. Maplecrest II is between the back of Sunrise Estates and Manor Drive.

Roads must be built to township specifications, pass an inspection by the township engineer and be guaranteed by a bond for 18 months before they can be

adopted, according to zoning officer Ben Gorey. Roads are deeded to the township and adopted by ordinance.

The supervisors also unanimously voted to advertise for three recreation counselors and a supervisor for the summer program and to buy a new office computer system from Time-Wise consultants for \$9,200.

The supervisors opened more than 30 bids for various road materials for the Back Mountain Road Materials Cooperative Pur-

chasing Program and unanimously tabled them for further study.

The supervisors unanimously voted to award the following bids: transfer containers for the spring cleanup to Danella Environmental for \$349, removal of underground storage tanks at the municipal building and garage to Linde Enterprises for \$5,520, and for repairing stormwater drainage pipes on East Center Street near the ambulance building to James T. O'Hara, Inc., for \$44,598.

### Corrections

- An article in last week's issue about new traffic signals in the Back Mountain incorrectly stated that the light being installed at Orloski's and the Dallas Shopping Center on Route 309 was being paid for by Orloski's. The cost is being shared by Orloski's and Humford Equities, owners of the shopping center.

- A photo on page 3 in last week's issue carried the wrong identification. Russ Ockenhouse was incorrectly identified as Norm Darling Sr.

## Dogs

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hold in a residential district to a total of four.

The supervisors unanimously authorized Bartlett to take a police officer to Niedzwicki's home, count all the dogs and cats and cite her if they total more than four. Bartlett said he will also cite her under the nuisance ordinance.

Bartlett reported he collected \$997 in fees and issued eight permits in March. Three permits were for new homes, issued to Michael and Cheryl Carey of Troxell Switch Road, Richard Stokes of 1315 Jackson Road and Richard and Jacqueline Dalmas of Crossen Road. He also issued a permit to repair a home belonging to Joseph and Janice Poluske, which was damaged by a fire.

In other business the supervisors unanimously renewed the police mutual aid agreement with Ross Township.

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