

EDITORIALS

Westmoreland community demonstrates commitment

Westmoreland Elementary School parents, students and teachers are working hard to provide living proof of their contention that smaller schools are better schools, and last week's School Spirit Day poster contest offered a fine illustration of their claim. Dozens of students submitted poems, posters and drawings that sang the praises of the school, its teachers and its connection to the community. It was an impressive display.

The Dallas school board is exploring options for the 450 or so students in grades K-5 at Westmoreland, and the least attractive in purely financial terms is to maintain the facility in Shavertown. Engineering studies — and a state reimbursement system that rewards new construction over maintenance — combine to make an addition on either the Dallas Elementary or Middle schools more attractive on first glance. But those dry statistics don't capture the lifeblood of an effective community institution, or put down on paper the distinct advantages a close-knit school setting offers.

Today's emphasis on strict financial accountability isn't the best setting in which to trumpet the subjective advantages of a neighborhood school. To their credit, Westmoreland supporters are backing their argument with statistics of their own, which show small schools lead to better student performance. Still, it's hard to ignore the more humane argument that a school with a scale closer to its students lives is a logical alternative to factory-size structures.

The Dallas school board has more than Westmoreland to consider as it plans next year's budget and beyond, and other constituencies will ask that their concerns be addressed as well. That's why it is important for Westmoreland's champions to keep showing the vitality so evident at last week's event, if they hope to have any chance to save their school.

Flower show displays Back Mountain talent, dedication

Until four years ago, unless you were a flower and landscape devotee you might never have heard of the Back Mountain Bloomers. The local garden club operated quietly, lending advice and assistance to members and others who were intrigued with flora, with notices seldom appearing in anything but their own publications. All that changed in 1993, when the club pulled its resources together and put on its first Northeast Pennsylvania Flower Show. The rest, as the saying goes, is history.

This industrious group of floral enthusiasts will present the fourth edition of the show this weekend at the 109th Field Artillery Armory in Kingston. Led by Linda Thoma, club president, and Lora Marcolina Freifeld, who chairs the show, members have put together the second largest flower show in the state, and created a winner of the prestigious National Flower Show Achievement Award. More important, the event showcases the club's goals to promote knowledge of horticulture, design and conservation and preservation of natural resources.

The show, which is sanctioned by the Garden Club Federation of Pennsylvania, shines a spotlight on amateur and professional talent, and is sure to provide stimulation to anyone who takes the time to browse through the extensive exhibits. There's another benefit in attending; all proceeds benefit the Northeastern Pennsylvania Philharmonic, which sponsors the show.

Once again, Back Mountain folks are doing good things for the entire region, and their hard work is worth a look from anyone who is tantalized by the skillful display of flowers, plants and other natural elements.

Publisher's notebook

Ron Bartizek



The tone of some election campaigns led me to this vision: A candidate sitting on the sidewalk, looking a bit disheveled, and holding a sign that reads, "Will represent you for food." Some candidates for office appear to believe their worth is in direct contrast to the amount of pay they'll accept, running ads suggesting they'll do without wage increases, drive second-hand cars and otherwise live hand-to-mouth as they do the public's business. I don't disagree that some public officials are paid more than they are worth, or that most don't receive benefits far in excess of those offered to most of their constituents. But pledges of personal frugality — aside from usually being forgotten the day after the election — tell us little about a candidate's principles or priorities, which are vastly more important than if he or she drives a '96 Buick or a '69 Dodge Dart.

Political campaigns have lately focused more and more on the personal qualities of candidates, and less on their qualifications for office. The two don't always, or maybe even often, go together. If we reward the kind of mean-spirited campaigns that focus time and energy on criticizing opponents' personal habits while ignoring larger issues, we'll surely get the kind of government we deserve.



Lazy days of sprummer. Photo by Charlotte Bartizek.

LETTERS

Supreme Court case could affect county taxes

Editor:
A recent ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court negating a North Carolina county's Intangible Property Tax has raised some interesting and worrisome questions about Luzerne County's Personal Property Tax. In other Pennsylvania counties, reportedly suits are already being filed by some taxpayers clamoring for refunds covering the last five years.

The Court ruled that the intangible property tax was unconstitutional on grounds that a "forgiveness" or exemption clause which included the State's domestic corporations interfered with interstate commerce and

therefore counties have had no authority to impose such taxes. Nationally, this suggests a major shakeup for some counties wherein substantial revenues were derived from such sources.

The obvious questions, locally, are: What does this mean for Luzerne County taxpayers and for Luzerne County finances? Exactly how much in Personal Property taxes has the County been collecting? How much will it now have to refund (if any) and for how many years? Is the amount sufficiently large that it might even bankrupt Luzerne County? How much in alternative taxes will the County have to impose to replace

the missing revenues? What kind of alternative taxes are we talking about? (The Personal Property Tax is generally believed to be a "progressive" tax—paid only by a relatively few of the wealthy.)

Wouldn't a simple "fix" merely involve removing the "exemption" now given to Pennsylvania's domestic companies? But, in such case, wouldn't the County still have to repay all monies collected previously when the tax was "unconstitutional"?

Puzzling problems for taxpayers, lawyers and politicians....

Hugh P. King
Dallas

A Case for conservation



Alene N. Case

On March 22nd, my husband, Mike, and I arose quite early to go on a birding expedition with some of our friends who belong to the local Audubon Society. It took us about two hours to reach the Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area just north of Lancaster, PA. We had been told that we should see tundra swans and snow geese and other migrating birds there. But, we were totally unprepared for the show we were about to witness.

After getting our binoculars focused on some Canada geese pecking at left-over corn in some fields and some ducks swimming in a shallow pond, we turned our eyes and ears toward the sky. There, in wave after wave, the snow geese came flying to one of their major rest areas on their journey north to the Arctic. Mike was taking pictures, hoping to record the experience for future contemplation. When we got the slides back, we were again impressed with the notion that it looked very much like a graffiti artist obsessed with "V" gone slightly mad.

But, the most impressive part of the day could not be captured on film — the incredible music made by a choir of tens of thousands of birds! Snow geese sound similar to Canada geese, but their call is softer and more musical. And the hundreds of tundra swans certainly added some texture to

Here come the snow geese!

the chorus. The children who had come with their parents were also thoroughly caught up in this communication with nature. There was no need to try to look through binoculars or to be quiet (the big birds seemd totally oblivious to the staring humans) or any of the other frustrations that usually accompany such excursions. It was — for all ages — sheer joy.

Mike and I began our bird list in the mid-1970s when we lived in Nova Scotia, Canada. The 160 different birds on that list, like the snow goose, represent much more than dates and places carefully recorded in our Peterson's Field Guide. They represent our gradual acquaintance with the avian species which inhabit such a wide variety of natural and constructed sites. Some of the birds on that list are so common (robins, crows, cardinals) that we have seen them every year wherever we have lived. Others are quite rare — like the eagles we viewed at Rio Reservoir in New York State this spring. Some are from far away places like the beecatchers we saw in action in southern Hungary. Some (purple and house finches, brown creeper and fox sparrow) were first seen at our backyard feeder.

It is no accident that the environmental movement traces its beginnings to Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. Birds are a very good barometer for the general health of our environment. In the 1960s, the worry was chemical pollution. As our country has passed laws to limit and clean up such industrial contaminants, some bird populations have been able once again to spread across their former range. It is most gratifying to see an osprey atop each post and buoy along the Chincoteague Bay and to realize that without the ban on DDT this

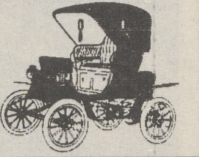
big fisherman would have gone the way of the dodo.

Today, birds are indicators of other kinds of stress. Many songbirds that migrate from Central and South America are finding less and less suitable habitat each year on both ends of their journey. Here, we are chopping up forests and fields for subdivisions and malls. And there, the tropical forests are being cut for agriculture and for profit. Many birds need wetlands, shallow ponds or fields as rest/feeding areas on their long flights. If these habitats disappear, they simply cannot make it to their nesting areas.

I am constantly amazed at the variety of habitats in which birds nest, feed, and over-winter. In order to bring back the bald eagle, it was necessary not only to rid the environment of DDT, but also to provide adequate fresh water streams and lakes with fish on which these big birds could feed. Warblers of various kinds feed at different levels in the trees. They are all eating insects. But, some feed on flying insects at the tops of the trees, while others gather caterpillars off the leaves, and others go for grubs in the bark. Sometimes six different warblers will be dividing the "goodies" in one tree!

Pennsylvania has 187 species of birds which nest in the state. Almost two hundred others visit during various times of the year. Seven of the nesting species are listed as endangered and another seven are threatened. Our challenge is to make our state once again hospitable to the birds and other animals which are finding it increasingly difficult to live here. As we do, our lives will also be enriched by the sights and sounds of healthier ecosystems. Long live the snow geese!

ONLY YESTERDAY



60 Years Ago - May 1, 1936 SCOUTS HONORED FOR FLOOD RELIEF WORK

Twenty-five Boy Scouts from Shavertown and Trucksville who worked tirelessly during Wyoming Valley's twin floods in March received citations on Wednesday evening at Wilkes-Barre. Without sleep the Scouts worked for three days running errands, directing traffic, helping refugees from flooded homes and delivering food-stuff by boats.

Mrs. W.L. Tracy of Shavertown recently returned from New York City, where she celebrated her birthday and that of her son, Lee Tracy, stage and screen star. She is planning a summer trip to Hollywood and a cruise on Lee's new 63 foot yacht. Tracy recently finished a part in "Sutter's Gold" now being released.

You could get - Chuck roast, 18¢ lb.; veal roast, 23¢ lb.; sugar, 10 lbs. 48¢; prunes, 5¢ lb.; Lifebuoy soap, 3 cakes, 17¢.

50 Years Ago - May 3, 1946 DALLAS FIGHTING IRISH TEAM CHANGES NAME

Tracing the history of Dallas area from 1796 to the present, Miss Estella Goldsmith of Dallas Township, teacher and descendant of pioneer settlers of the region, gave an illuminating talk before members of the Book Club of Back Mountain Memorial Library. She illustrated her talk with several old maps, one of them the property of Mrs. Albert Kunkle and another map she had drawn herself of properties owned by early settlers. She compared them with a modern map provided by Prof. Raymond Kuhnert.

When they discovered that there was not a single Irishman on their team, the Dallas Fighting Irish of the Teen-Age League, most of whose players came from the Brooklyn section of Dallas, immediately voted to change the name of their aggregation to the Dallas Brooklyn Dodgers.

40 Years Ago - Apr. 27, 1956 MRS. ECK IS NAMED MRS. WYOMING VALLEY

Rev. Francis A. Kane, pastor of Gate of Heaven Church, Machell Ave., Dallas, was among 440 clergymen of the three major faiths from five states who spent a full day at Fort Dix, NJ observing basic training, visiting barracks and chapels, eating in a soldier "chow line" and exchanging ideas with past chaplains at Fort Dix.

For the second time Shavertown carried off the Mrs. Wyoming Valley title when Mrs. Frederick Eck was hailed the winner of the 1956 contest at the Thursday evening Parade of Progress in the West Side Armory. Mrs. Charles Eberle was the 1954 winner. Eck is active in school, church and community work.

Now playing at the Hinmiller Theatre - "The Man Who Never Was" with Clifton Webb.

30 Years Ago - Apr. 28, 1966 POSTAL SAVINGS SYSTEM CLOSES SHOP

Postmaster Ed Buckley urged depositors with postal savings certificates to withdraw their accounts from Post Offices as soon as possible or as soon as the anniversary dates on their certificates are reached. The Postal Savings System was abolished March 27. Buckley pointed out that as of April 28, no deposits can be accepted and no new accounts can be opened.

Dallas Junior Woman's Club is collecting old or worn Bibles and New Testaments. These in turn will be sent to Mr. White's World Wide Bible Gift Ministry in Louisiana, where they are distributed to the needy regardless of race, creed and color.

You could get - Rib roast, 69¢ lb.; strawberries, 39¢ dry pint. Chase & Sanborn Coffee, 1 lb. can 79¢. Scott Paper Towels, 2 pkgs. of 200, 59¢.

20 Years Ago - Apr. 29, 1976 MARCHING KNIGHTS IN DERBY PARADE

Lake-Lehman Band members, families and friends, transported by five Martz buses, left for Kentucky Tuesday, where the band will compete in the Kentucky Derby Festival. They will march in the 21st annual Pegasus Parade on April 29.

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