

EDITORIALS

Zoning hearing was citizenship in action

The citizens of Dallas Borough were a model of local democracy during last week's hearing about a zoning change request for the former Dallas Family Practice building on Machell Avenue. Well over 100 people turned out for the meeting, at which a lawyer representing FPC Financial Corporation described the request to broaden the special exception that allowed the property to be used as a medical office. The potential purchaser intended to divide the building into separate offices, of a "commercial, professional and business" nature.

The audience was composed of nearby neighbors and dozens of other citizens, most of them opposed to the change. The building sits smack in the middle of an established residential neighborhood, and they feared that commercial use would disrupt the character and comfort of their section of town. The applicant tried to provide assurances that the building's occupants would be good neighbors, and no more intrusive than the medical office, probably less so. In the end, the

But this editorial isn't about a particular zoning hearing, or the building on Machell Avenue, it is meant to recognize the positive activism of local citizens who put the process of local government to use and achieved their goal. When a change in property use is requested, the borough or township must alert nearby neighbors so they have the opportunity to voice their opinions. While code books contain the details of a town's zoning, variances and exceptions are sought routinely. They also are granted with regularity, especially if those most affected by the change — close neighbors — don't care enough to show up and oppose the requests.

Anyone who doubts that American democracy still works, at least at the local level, should take heart in the result of this meeting. They also must be reminded that our system of government — just like the best companies, schools and families — works best when we are actively involved in it.

Media fuels hysteria in mercury story

Hysteria has displaced common sense in some cases as rumors swirl about mercury spilled at Dallas High School. Fear of poisoning has been whipped up by news reports that emphasize unproven claims and anything else that will scare people the most. Why do that? Because fear and other strong emotions attract attention, and many news organizations are today engaged in a race for recognition, not real news value.

Both Wilkes-Barre daily papers took liberties with some aspects of the mercury spill early on. *The Times Leader* led their first story with an assertion from a single unidentified source that Superintendent of Schools Gerry Wycallis had waited too long to close the school after mercury was discovered to be missing, and to contact police. *The Citizens' Voice*, while being more responsible in their article, chose to enhance a photo of a school bus with a green glow to make it look radioactive. Mercury is not radioactive. At the very least, news media must indicate that a photo has been altered so the careful reader is informed that the photo is phony. In this case, the manipulation was not only unethical, it was wrong.

Then, by playing up the unproven and unlikely claim of one parent that her child may have been poisoned, the TL has done its best to replace reason with unfounded fear of the unknown. That task is made easier when people mistake strong emotions and loud voices for real concern, which would be better addressed by learning about potential hazards.

There may yet turn out to be measurable health effects from the mercury, and there probably was no choice but to close the school until air could be thoroughly analyzed. In the meantime, the people of the Back Mountain would have been better served if someone in the larger media had taken the time and trouble to look into the real potential risks instead of simply reporting whatever they felt would attract the most attention and create the most stimulus to tune in or stop by the newsstand the next day.

Publisher's notebook

Ron Bartizek



Technology's a wonderful thing ... most of the time. One exception is the automated fax call we've been getting every few minutes of every weekday for more than a week. You probably know the signs, you pick up a ringing telephone, hear a click and then a series of beeps. Remarkably, Commonwealth Telephone said there isn't a thing they can do about it when we called to alert them. Now our only recourse seems to be hoping the person who's on the other end will read this note. I hope it's been a toll call.

A real hometown paper you can feel good about

The Dallas Post

The Dallas Post

Published Weekly By Bartsen Media, Inc.
P.O. Box 366, Dallas PA 18612
717-675-5211

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Sign of the Thanksgiving season. Photo by Charlotte Bartizek.

As I was saying



Jack Hilsher

One thing I'd like to ask St. Pete when I pass through his pearly gates, assuming of course that I do, is what happened to Noah's Ark?

Refreshing your memory from Sunday School days, Chapter 6 in Genesis says that God told Noah, "Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shall thou make in the ark, and shall pitch it within and without with pitch."

Then follows some description having to do with cubits which is difficult to follow. The story also exists with very little variation in Muslim, Scandinavian, Polynesian and American Indian folklore, but it remained for archaeological discoveries of ancient tablets to clear up things like size.

One, in 1872, found both scientists and theologians agreeing to the following assumptions:

The endless mystery of Noah's Ark

Size: 450' long, 75' wide, and 45' high. This would make it as tall as a three story building and half again as long as a football field. It was divided vertically into seven layers and horizontally into nine sections, totaling 63 compartments.

When fully loaded (two of every living thing, male and female) the ship weighed 100 tons. Such a boat of cypress (gopher) if pitched with resinous bitumen could stay afloat for a year, which is the time required to wait for the flood to subside. And so, 5,000 years ago, where did it land, and is any trace of it left?

Genesis points at Mount Ararat in Turkey, near where Iran and the old U.S.S.R. meet the Black Sea. Ararat is perpetually covered with ice and snow and stands almost 17,000' high. That's over three miles, and is not exactly a popular ski run. Natives claim to have found the remains and are said to have scraped pitch from it to make amulets.

In 1670 a Dutch monk searched for the ark but found only a hermit who claimed having been inside. The first modern ascent in

1829 was made by a German explorer who found nothing. In 1896 an archdeacon from India made three attempts and said he found it wedged in rocks and half filled with ice and snow. His fellow clergymen wanted to know "If he had also seen Mrs. Noah's corset hanging in her bedroom." He gave up after that.

In 1930 a New Zealand archaeologist found some "soggy and dark" pieces of timber far above the normal timberline. These samples did not survive. Then in 1952 mining engineer George Greene flew over the area and photographed a "huge structure protruding from the ice at around 16,000 feet." The photos were lost and Greene made no other attempt after facing ridicule.

Then in 1974 a Skylab orbiter took pictures of a location at 14,000' in a crevasse covered with transparent ice. Skylab interpreters said the materials "were clearly foreign to anything else on the mountain and were the right size and shape to be an ark."

A French explorer in 1956 had brought back pieces of wood from near the summit which were dated by a lab as being no less than

5,000 years old. In our own time, ark enthusiast hopes were raised and dashed again when a two-hour CBS special was shown in February of 1993. On it a man named George Jammal told of crawling through a hole in the ice into a wooden structure, saying, "We got very excited when we saw pens, like places where you would keep animals." George even had pieces of doctored pine (soaked in juice and baked in his oven) as proof that he had found the ark at last.

CBS admitted it had been duped but claimed it was entertainment and not a documentary. Archaeologist Richard Fox said, "The program abused my profession and insulted its practitioners and CBS is responsible." And that was that.

Fundamentalists today say they would like more expeditions but the Turkish government won't cooperate. It is believed a discovery would disprove the scientific theory of evolution and reinstate the authenticity of the Old Testament version of creation.

So, I will say, "St. Peter Sir..." but how am I going to get his answer back to you?



By NANCY KOZEMCHAK

The Back Mountain Memorial Library will be celebrating Children's Book Week from November 18 - 24. The theme for 1996 is "Sending Readers To New Heights with Take Flight...Read!". All children are invited to come to the library during the week for games, puzzles, adventure and fantasy. There are bags and book-



60 Years Ago - Nov. 20, 1936
WATER PUMP BELT SLASHED FOR SECOND TIME

Although the value of their taxable personal property is about \$80,000 less than it was last year, citizens of Dallas Township hold their claim to being one of the richest groups by ranking 10th among the 72 cities, boroughs and townships included in the listing of personal taxes announced this week. Valuation in Dallas Borough ranks 26th in the county also decreased since last year but assessments in Franklin, Jackson, Kingston, Lake and Lehman Townships are higher.

A belt on the pump at Shaver well of Dallas Water Co. in Shavertown was cut sometime Tuesday evening interrupting the supply of a number of consumers in that section until repairs could be

Youngsters invited for Children's Book Week

marks and stickers featuring hot air balloons and regular balloons. The reading record log uses the "Take Flight...Read!" theme with all sorts of airplanes featured suggesting topics for reading, such as non-fiction, poetry, biography, horror Sci-fi, and humor. All children are welcome in the children's room during Book Week for all the pleasures of reading and the fun items to take home.

The Book club will meet in the community room on Monday, Nov. 18 at 1:30. There will be book discussions and Thanksgiving projects to be discussed. The Book Club Christmas Tea will be held on Mon., Dec. 16, at 1:30. All

members of the community are invited to attend. There will be special musical entertainment and refreshments.

New books at the library: "The Third Twin" by Ken Follett is an electrifying tale of the chilling possibilities of genetic manipulation. A brilliant young research scientist makes a startling discovery. Using a restricted FBI database, she locates two men who appear to be identical twins.

"The Tailor of Panama" by John LeCarre tells of Panama who will gain full control of the Panama Canal on December 31, 1999. It is a Casablanca without heroes, a hotbed of drugs, laundered money

and corruption. The weight of global politics descends heavily on such a tiny and unprepared nation.

"The Laws of Our Fathers" by Scott Turow opens with a spectacular drive-by shooting in one of Kindie County's most notorious drug-plagued housing projects. The victim is an aging white woman who has not been seen before.

"M Is For Malice" by Sue Grafton also tells M is for money, lots of it. M is for Malek Construction, M is Millhous, hired to trace a missing brother and M is for memories, none of them happy. The prodigal son will find no welcome at his family's table. "M" is for malice.

40 Years Ago - Nov. 16, 1956
EQUIPMENT BEGINS TO ARRIVE AT LINEAR PLANT

The first big consignments of machinery from the Philadelphia plant of the Linear Corp will start to arrive at Fernbrook Park plant December 3. Actual production on a limited scale will start sometime around the middle of December.

A site was mapped out for the new high school and Lacy, Atherton and Davis were selected as architects at the Tuesday meeting of the Dallas Area School Board. Site announced by James Hutchinson chairman of Building and Grounds embraces 66 acres of the Arthur Neuman and Charles Lipp farms in Dallas Township, exclusive of the Neuman homestead.

You could get - Turkeys, 17 lbs. and over 43¢ lb.; cranberries, 1 lb. pkg., 19¢; sweet potatoes, 4 lbs., 29¢; carrots, 2 bnch., 23¢; apple pie, 49¢ ea.

30 Years Ago - Nov. 11, 1966
LEHMAN TOWNSHIP MULLS 1% EARNED INCOME TAX

Lehman Township Supervisors

voted to file their intent to levy a 1% earned income tax in order to protect their citizens if such goes through in the city of Wilkes-Barre. Rumor of a dress factory coming to Dallas Borough brought several residents of Lake Street out in protest at the Council meeting Tuesday evening. Reports had a factory going into the former Himmler Theatre and it was not zoned as an industrial area.

20 Years Ago - Nov. 18, 1976
SCHOOL BOARD SETS STANDARDS FOR BUS. MGR.

Director Gil Tough told Lake, Lehman School Board last week that qualifications for the district's new business manager are to include a college degree in accounting and four years experience in budgetary or office management. The new position approved by a 6-2 vote will carry a salary of \$10,000 to \$18,000. In outlining the qualifications for the position.

Members of Dallas Borough Council will meet Nov. 22 at 7:30 to open the applications for police chief, evaluate them and determine the applicants that they feel are qualified to fill the position of chief in the Borough.