

## EDITORIALS

## Agency should clean up its own performance

Responding to the failure of states to adequately enforce anti-pollution statutes, the federal government is investigating the conduct of state environmental agencies. Pennsylvania is near the top of the list, since it became known that the Department of Environmental Protection reported only six large air pollution violations in 1995. A subsequent audit by federal authorities of the state data revealed 64 violations. One need only look as far as Clarks Summit for evidence of the department's failure to carry out its responsibilities, where a foundry was repeatedly found to exceed allowable levels in its exhaust stacks, but was seldom penalized.

The *New York Times* reported that our Environmental Protection Secretary, James M. Seif, responded sharply to the accusation that the state is lax, saying the federal agency had adopted a "bean-counting approach" and accusing the federal EPA of mounting a vendetta against states. When a state agency fails so badly at its task, stepping in to straighten out the mess is hardly a vendetta, it looks more like basic maintenance from this perspective. This is not, by the way, about new, tighter pollution standards, it's about enforcing the levels that existed two years ago.

It is ironic that this agency, which pursued the cleanup of relatively harmless mercury at Dallas High School with such zeal, should look the other way when major industries pollute the air and water. Or perhaps it's all too understandable that powerful corporations get kid-glove treatment while parents and students are inconvenienced.

We deserve better than this. The state DEP is charged with protecting the health of citizens, not the reputation of polluters, and if Mr. Seif can't accept that premise, perhaps he should look for another line of work.

## We're looking forward to walking the rails

"Rails to Trails;" it's a catchy phrase. More than that, it's a theme that melds old and new, past and present, and leads to a healthy, enjoyable future. The Anthracite Scenic Trails Association hopes by June 1, 1997 to formally open a mile of former railway bed between Luzerne and Trucksville, converted to a recreational trail. The effort, spearheaded by Judy Rimple of Dallas, is the first step toward creating a 47-mile trail that reaches as far as Dushore, open to hiking, cross country skiing, biking and jogging.

There are complications, but, spurred by the success of similar projects in other states, ASTA members are determined to overcome them. Short-sightedness and greed created one of the stumbling blocks when the railroad right of way was sliced into small pieces and sold off to owners of adjacent properties. Fortunately, all but one of them has granted easements for the trail, and a detour onto land owned by the state will bypass the holdout. Now the largest obstacle is money — about \$50,000 which is needed to complete the design and construction of the trail.

Pennsylvania's state government isn't noted for its generosity toward projects like this, but there is a matching grant available, if local contributors can raise enough locally to qualify for it. We hope they do, and urge our readers to give what they can toward a project that will offer new recreational opportunities to people of all ages.

## Publisher's notebook

Ron Bartizek



I think most of us, when we read George Orwell's chilling novel *1984*, assumed that the controlling, invasive Big Brother he described was a central government authority run amok. But it's beginning to look more like government and big business are conspiring to form something akin to Orwell's dire prediction.

Businesses naturally aim to dominate competitors and manipulate consumers. Vance Packard, who recently died, made a career of warning Americans of the danger of excess consumption, and in books such as *The Persuaders*, he decried seductive advertising used to convince people to buy needless items instead of saving or spending their hard-earned salaries in more productive ways. It's no accident that former competitors ally in attempts to dominate their markets, and nowhere is that more true than in large media companies. Watching CNN the other night, I was startled to see the second-leading headline be the launch of CNN/SI, which is a new venture of some sort for the network and *Sports Illustrated* magazine, which are both now cogs in the big wheel of Time Warner Communications.

Even beyond obvious cross promotion, the corporatization of news leads to distortions in coverage. The resignation of Michael Ovitz from Disney last week was reported prominently in the media, even though his departure has not the slightest impact on most people's lives. One has to wonder what was left off the front pages to make room for what should have been a big story only in the company newsletter and perhaps *The Wall Street Journal*.

## The Dallas Post

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Ronald A. Bartizek  
PUBLISHER

Charlotte E. Bartizek  
ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER

Dennise Casterline  
ADVERTISING ACCT. EXEC

Kylie Shafferkoetter  
REPORTER

Paul Rismiller  
PRODUCTION MANAGER

Olga Kostrobala  
CLASSIFIED/TYPESSETTING

Jill Gruver  
OFFICE MANAGER



Footprints in the snow, Frances Slocum State Park. Photo by Ron Bartizek.

## A Case for conservation



Alene N. Case

Very few things characterize the Christmas holiday season as much as the urge to share our resources with those who have less. The end of the tax year is also an impetus for many of us. All sorts of charities try to get our attention and our dollars in a wide variety of ways - they call us on the phone, they send us unsolicited greeting cards, they publish solicitations in the local papers, and they fill our mailboxes and television screens with appeals. But, many of us have become confused by all this and wish that there were a less intrusive and more controlled way to give to projects that are of particular importance to us.

Enter the Virtual Foundation, the brainchild of Randy Kritkauskas, President and Executive Director of ECOLOGIA. With the legal counsel of the Ford Foundation and a start-up grant given by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, ECOLOGIA has launched a totally new form of international philanthropy. Now, simply by logging onto a website (<http://www.virtualfoundation.org/>) on the Internet, anyone can choose to support the efforts of an envi-

## The virtual foundation: An innovation in charitable giving

ronmental group working in Central and Eastern Europe, the Baltics, or the countries of the Former Soviet Union.

The Virtual Foundation was designed to help groups acquire the funds necessary to complete small projects. Many times large foundations or governmental aid agencies are not interested in funding small projects. Smaller foundations can only fund a small fraction of the worthy proposals that are submitted to them. How do you tell a group in Lithuania that they have a great idea for a bird sanctuary but that there is no money available to help them? To address this problem, several of these smaller funding agencies have banded together under ECOLOGIA's leadership to seek money through the Virtual Foundation.

These organizations, such as the Sacred Earth Network or the Environmental Partnership for Central Europe, review and select proposals, generally in the \$250 to \$3000 (US) range, that deserve funding. These proposals are again reviewed and approved by the ECOLOGIA board of directors before they are posted on the Internet. The organization that posts the proposal agrees to manage the donated funds and to supervise the project. A management fee of 10% of the project cost

is added to be split between ECOLOGIA and the funding agency to cover posting and administration costs. There is no other overhead.

So, what happens when you log on to the Virtual Foundation? The first page you see is a very user-friendly layout of choices with a side-bar welcoming you to this concept and ending with this statement: "While other foundations have financial endowments, the Virtual Foundation's endowment consists of farsighted individuals and organizations, and their goodwill and generosity." From there, you (as such a farsighted individual) can easily move back and forth through such choices as About the Foundation, Director's Message, Search for Projects, Donate, etc. You can even get a list of donors, review a feature project, or sign the guestbook. In the future, there will be a section of reports of completed projects. One of the beauties of this "foundation" is that you can contribute exactly the amount of money you have available to contribute. If your elementary school class has been studying wetlands and you notice that the featured project is a bog restoration, your students can empty their piggy banks and donate \$61.15 to add to the \$50 already given to this project. Perhaps then a more wealthy indi-

vidual will see the interest of others and will cover the remaining \$988.85. Your class can keep up with the progress of this work and will be able to share in the feeling of accomplishment when the final report is posted. In fact, one of the stated goals of the Virtual Foundation is "to encourage donors and grant recipients to develop long term partnerships." This kind of interaction with overseas activists is a good way to involve young people in all sorts of environmental education. Perhaps you do not want to have your name displayed on the Donor page. Please do not let that discourage you - "Anonymous" has already contributed at least once. Or, perhaps you would like to donate in honor or in memory of someone. That also has precedents. That is the wonderful thing about the Virtual Foundation - each person or group can choose a project that is most interesting to them and can donate in a wide variety of ways. And, best of all, no one will call. If you want more information, you simply log on to <http://www.virtualfoundation.org/> or phone the website manager, Lydia Thompson, at (717) 434-9588.

Now we can really share our abundance with others in a common effort to conserve and protect the many resources of the Earth, Happy Holidays!

## Guest column



Joe Fritz

The Dallas Borough has no right to ban skateboards! They have been no threat, and they are good source of transportation. The Borough doesn't ban bikes, which mark roads, sidewalks and shrubs. They don't ban in-line skates, which do the same. And

## Why did borough ban skateboards?

why don't they ban cars, which are polluting the air right now? A skateboard is just another means of transportation . . . and I'm not the only one who thinks so.

Anthony Yenson says, "I don't like it. It stinks because they don't give us anywhere to skate. They should give us a place." Adam Reggie, who also claims to have been searched by police in the Borough for just being a "skater" says, "It's stupid because most of us don't have a place to skate. Our driveways are dirt or gravel. Rollerbladers or bikers don't get harassed . . . why do we?"

The Dallas Borough has said that the police were from Dallas

Township, but then what were they doing in the Borough? Kevin Callahan states, "I don't have a board, but I pretty much think it's stupid because I think it is pointless to ban something that hasn't hurt anyone." Justin Ash also says, "I think we should have a place to skate. They told us we can skate on our driveways, but most driveways are small and some not paved. What is the fun of skating on a flat surface? That limits the tricks greatly. The places people normally skate have curbs and steps, and I don't know many people with that on their driveway. So I think it's stupid for them to not let us skate around in the

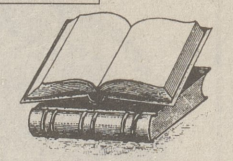
Borough."

Lee Griffin believes, "I think it was pointless. The people who skated will skate anyway. We did nothing wrong. It's stupid."

The Borough can't say that they are afraid of drugs or crime. All the skaters above, including myself, are "Straight Edge," which means no drugs, alcohol, etc. Also, all the skaters listed above have perfect police records. I think the Borough should worry about criminals, drugs, and other problems . . . and not worry about a few skateboards.

Joe Fritz is in eighth grade at Dallas Middle School.

## LIBRARY NEWS



By NANCY KOZEMCHAK

The Back Mountain Memorial Library has concluded the 5th annual fresh citrus fruit sale. The fruit sale is one of the projects the library "Friends of the Library" members sponsors each year. Jo Ann Hall served as chairman for the 1996 sale. Orders were taken for 420 boxes of fruit: 240 oranges and 180 grapefruit. As of last Wednesday, all orders have been

## Fruit sale expected to raise \$2,000

picked up and all money turned in. The library will net approximately \$2,000 for the fruit sale, which makes it another great fund raiser. The 'Friends' are a tremendous asset for this library and we are grateful.

The decorated Christmas Tree in the center of Dallas is a wonder to behold. I call it our mini "Rockefeller Center" Christmas tree. The Dallas Lions Club decorated the tree on the Dallas Post Office lawn. They had the help of a 'cherry picker' for the decorations, which is evident because they are placed neatly on the tree. That tree started very small and is now a great size and it has plenty of lights. Our thanks to the Lions

Club and the post office for a lovely Christmas entrance to Dallas.

**New books at the library:** "This Year It Will Be Different" by Maeve Binchy is a Christmas Treasury; that brings us the magic and spirit of Christmas in 15 stories filled with wit, charm, and sheer storytelling genius. Instead of homilies, she offers truth and nourishment for the holidays.

"Irish Lace" by Andrew M. Greeley is an exciting mystery and a touching Irish-American love story involving a Civil War controversy, a sophisticated gang of art thieves, corrupt politicians, and international terrorists. Nuala has moved to make a new life for her-

self in Chicago as an accountant. "Airframe" by Michael Crichton is nonstop reading; the extraordinary mixture of super suspense and authentic information on a subject of compelling interest. Three passengers are dead. Fifty-six are injured. The interior cabin virtually destroyed. But the pilot manages to land the plane.

"Charity" by Len Deighton is dated January 1988. The Moscow-Paris express train rattles through the Russian night carrying Bernard Samson and his grievously sick companion, Jim Prettyman, home. But for Samson, this is just the beginning of another long and dangerous journey.