

EDITORIALS

Tragic fire should be the start of reform

The fire at the Harveys Lake personal care home that ended nine lives should be the beginning of a movement to tighten regulations on similar institutions. Like a similar blaze in Sweet Valley a dozen years ago, this tragedy could have been easily averted, or at least minimized if facilities that provide care for profit were more tightly controlled.

To start, no two-story, wood framed structure should be allowed this use. At Country Manor, 100-year-old wood fed the fire as it engulfed the entire building in a matter of minutes. Old buildings simply weren't built as well as new ones in this respect, because materials and building techniques now considered standard weren't available decades ago. Even one-story structures should be required to meet strict fire codes, such as adequate separation of rooms by fire resistant surfaces and mandatory sprinkler systems. Not only was Country Manor an accident waiting to happen, it offered no resistance to flames once they broke out.

Any place that purports to offer care for elderly people who are unable to fend for themselves should afford even more protection. It should have an alarm system that is connected directly to emergency services, so fire and ambulance crews can be dispatched without delay. It should have fireproof surfaces in areas most likely to be the flashpoint for catastrophe. And it should have adequate staffing.

Only one worker was on duty for the 21 residents of Country Manor, a number that meets state minimums, but those requirements are clearly inadequate. Even on a regular night, when nothing extraordinary happens, a single worker will be hard pressed to keep up with 21 people's needs. Last week, extra hands likely would have led more residents from the inferno that Country Manor became.

As for those who would wring their hands over the expense of such regulations, let them explain to the families of the victims, or anyone else with an ounce of responsibility in their makeup, how they could cost justify the needless deaths of nine human beings.

Let's not gamble with Pennsylvania's future

Many members of the State Legislature think they've latched on to a sure thing in their plan to allow slot machines at horse racing tracks. The lure of easy money is just too strong for them to acknowledge that they want to lead the Commonwealth down a primrose path that looks attractive but contains thorny issues they'd rather not have to talk about.

Ever since state governments got into the lottery business, many observers have thought it was only a matter of time before more gambling was embraced in the hunt for new revenue, but without raising taxes. Gambling receipts, you see, come from a source that's invisible - except to those on the losing end of the deal. That includes not only the people who pump quarters into one-armed bandits, but those who suffer as a result; families, friends and employers of people who get hooked on the get-rich-quick dream promoted so scandalously by a government, that instead of looking out for the welfare of its citizens, increasingly seeks new ways to fleece them.

Slot machines may be closely followed by "riverboat" gambling, whose only connection to the Wild West fantasy is the consistent take by the house. If that farce becomes reality, scam artists in other regions, such as the Poconos, won't be far behind demanding their piece of the action.

It sounds old-fashioned to cite the unwholesomeness of gambling in arguments against it, when supporters trot out tales of economic growth and prosperity. But even the most math-challenged among us should be able to understand that when the house wins, they lose, whether the folks on the other side of the table are double-dealing card sharks or amiable state legislators.

Publisher's notebook

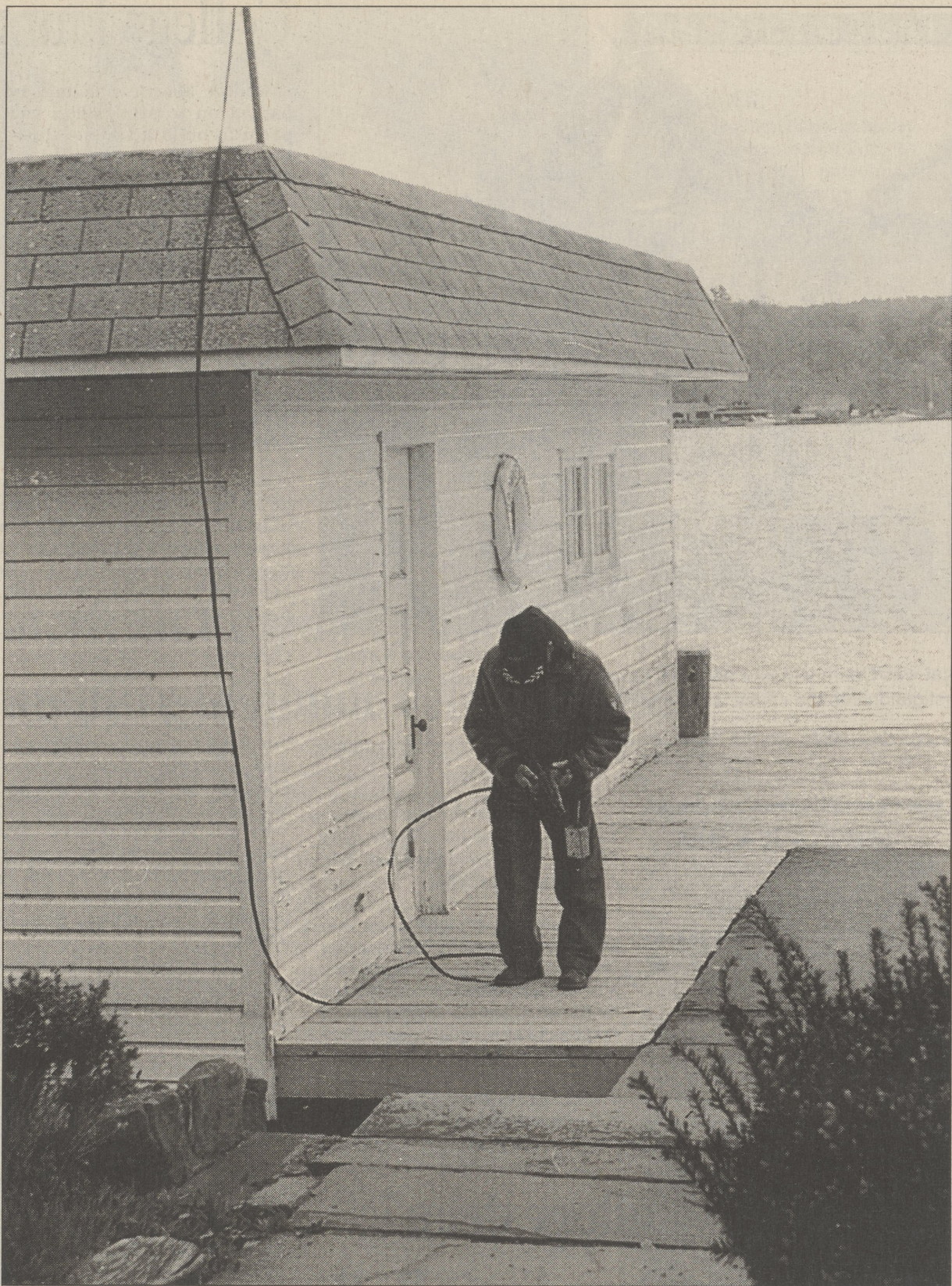


Ron Bartizek

Many politicians count on our short or selective memories when they make campaign promises, or they hope we're not paying attention. The best (worst?) of them may even believe that when they reverse course from supposed principles, they really haven't wavered at all, but are simply adapting to the new reality that has replaced the one that existed when they made their pronouncements. Thus President Clinton can baldly claim that he has upheld his pledge to run the most ethical administration in decades even as he turns the White House into a fundraising venue. Even VP Gore got in on the act, defending his fund raising phone calls because they were probably "legal."

Not that leading Republicans are pillars of virtue. Rep. Dan Burton, who heads a committee poised to recommend major telecommunications legislation, accepted a trip from AT&T to play golf at Pebble Beach, and attended three fund raisers hosted by the company. But he says righteously that he won't be swayed by such special treatment, since he's above such base motivation.

My solution to this nonsense? Limit campaigns to two months and contributions - including "in-kind" stuff like fund raising dinners and golf trips - to a maximum of \$1,000 for any individual or other entity.



Robert Brown, back at Harveys Lake from Port Charlotte Florida, checked down wires on his boathouse. Photo by Charlotte Bartizek.

LETTERS

Trashing of trail is bad sign for community

Editor:
This past Saturday our family took the first hike for this year of the Luzerne-Trucksville Rail-Trail. Let me say first that we had a wonderful afternoon - fueled up at "Taste of Traditions Restaurant" down at the Trail's Luzerne end and for the next hour we were treated to both the beauty of this great trail and, sadly, to the shock of seeing the vandalism that's been done to it since last fall.

Three of the bridges over wash-out gullies, that were built by some young men from Back Mountain as part of their Eagle Scout requirements, have been pulled completely out and heaved down the trail's steep bank. Another bridge must've been too difficult to move so its railings and foot boards are being ripped out one by one.

My guess is that some of the trail's dirt bikers have decided that having these dips in the trail available to them for bike jumps

is a higher order need than bridging these dips to allow children, grandparents and the general public safe passage. Further conjecture is that since the bikers weren't consulted when these bridges were put in, they didn't feel the need to consult anyone with their decision to take the bridges out.

Also disheartening, was the significant increase in the amount of "tagging" done, of course, on the most dramatic stone formations - both the natural stones at the Falls, and the man-made retaining wall.

This rail-trail vandalism and the innumerable acts of vandalism throughout our community need more than our head-wagging, our discouragement and our words of denunciation. A healthy body attacked by germs or trauma works immediately to both stop the agents of destruction and repair their damage. A body that is

ineffective to stop diseased activity and mend what it destroyed is "immune deficient"...and death by immune deficiency is a terrible way to go whether you are an individual, a community or a nation.

I'm not suggesting by this analogy that we round up our (youthful) offenders, tear the spokes off their dirt bikes one by one, and throw everything and everyone over something steep.

However, every effort should be made to apprehend the perpetrators and impose some significant, character-building consequences. If you know anything, speak up.

And, more importantly, the rest of us need to get on, or otherwise support the repair committees. Donations can be made to the "Anthracite Scenic Trails Association" P.O. Box 212, Dallas, PA 18612.

Mary Blanc
Dallas

The economic viewpoint



Howard Grossman

Surprisingly, the federal government has moved to provide additional funding for rural America. Despite cut-backs in subsidies over a number of years for farming and agricultural practices, rural America can benefit from certain provisions of the new Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act (PL 104-127) which is widely known as the 1996 farm bill.

The Act restructures the delivery of rural development assistance throughout the US Department of Agriculture, allowing greater flexibility and more coordination with local governments. Some of the positive steps taken to help Northeastern Pennsylvania and other rural areas of the state include the following:

- The infusion of an additional \$300 million into rural development and research over the next three years as part of the Fund For Rural America.
- New funding flexibility to allow local governments to meet

Farm bill a positive step

their varying needs through the Rural Community Advancement Program (RCAP)

- Establishment of Rural Business Opportunity Grants which can be utilized for a variety of purposes, including, among others, the following:
- Identify and analyze business opportunities including export markets.
- Identify, train, and provide technical assistance to rural entrepreneurs
- Establish business support centers
- Conduct regional community and local economic development planning
- Establish centers for training technology and trade

Additionally, the legislation reauthorizes water and waste disposal grant programs and increases authorized appropriations from \$500 million to \$590 million. The Intermediary Re-Lending Program will continue to operate as it does now under separate appropriation.

This is a program being administered in Northeastern Pennsylvania by the Economic Development Council of Northeastern Pennsylvania (EDCNP).

A Community Facilities Grant Program is established at \$10 million per year. Distance learning and medical link authoriza-

tion is provided through a new loan component to complement existing distance learning and medical link programs. The new loan program provides more flexibility.

Authorization is given for a new Venture Capital Program to demonstrate the utility of loan guarantees in attracting private investments in rural enterprises.

A new conservation title re-authorizes the Resource Conservation Development District program through the year 2002. This program exists in Northeastern Pennsylvania through the Pocono Northeast Resource Conservation and Development Council originally organized under the auspices of EDCNP.

EDCNP is monitoring the work being done to implement the new legislation. Communications are taking place with the State Director responsible for the program and with the Regional Manager located in Allentown, PA.

More attention will be placed on how to maximize rural development activities, through the region as a result of the passage of this landmark legislation.

Howard Grossman is Executive Director of the Economic Development Council of Northeastern Pennsylvania. He lives in Dallas.



60 Years Ago - May 28, 1937
MOVEMENT TO PAVE MAIN ST. IN LUZERNE

A movement to include the paving of Main and Bennett Streets, Luzerne, in any program for the construction of the long-awaited Luzerne by-pass enlisted new support this week as Luzerne business men pressed home concessions secured by a local committee, several weeks ago.

Twenty two seniors of Dallas Borough High School will receive their diplomas Thursday evening in the borough high school. Rabbi Louis Levitski of Wilkes-Barre will deliver the Commencement address.

The seventh annual commencement of Dallas Township High School will be held tonight in the high school auditorium with Judge John S. Fine as the principal speaker.

50 Years Ago - May 30, 1947
BANDS WILL CLOSE SATURDAYS FOR SUMMER

The First National Bank, Dallas, will be closed every Saturday starting June 14, continuing through the months of July, August and September. The plan which is being followed by Wyoming Valley Banks was approved at the meeting of directors on Wednesday morning.

The sides of the Barn in the Barnyard began to bulge this week as Dick Phillips and a score of workers scoured the countryside for household furnishings, antiques, live stock, garden and farm supplies for the Library Auction, June 7.

40 Years Ago - May 31, 1957
BMT ANNUAL HORSE SHOW IS BIGGER THAN BEFORE

The Lehman Township Volunteer Fire Co. will stage its 13th annual Back Mountain Horse Show July 4 with everything bigger and better than previous years according to Glenn Johnson, president. The show will open with a donkey baseball game in which prominent men from Back Mountain communities will participate.

A new automatic ice machine, one of the first of its kind in the area was recently installed at Orchard Farm Restaurant by the J.B. Co. The big machine delivers both bulk ice and cubes to customers who insert the proper amount of coins in the slot.

You could get - Smoked hams, 59¢ lb.; Beltsville Turkeys, 6-12 lb. avg., 49¢ lb.; Supreme Sandwich Bread, loaf 17¢; Swan soap, 4 reg. cakes, 37¢; Wisk Liquid, 1/2 gal. \$1.33.

30 Years Ago - May 25, 1967
ST. PAUL'S DEDICATES NEW PIPE ORGAN

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Shavertown held impressive ceremonies on Sunday morning dedicating its new pipe organ, the gift of the former Trinity Lutheran Church, Wilkes-Barre. Rev. Frederick H. Eidem, pastor, expressed great appreciation of the organ, saying it contributed to the service and was a token of the fellowship and generosity of fellow Christians.

The Back Mountain yesterday became a permanent site of Penn State University Center when ground was broken officially for new buildings, adjacent to Hayfield House and the conversion of the manor itself henceforth to be known as Penn State-Hayfield Commonwealth Campus. The property was originally owned by Mr. and Mrs. John N. Conyngham II who originally built Hayfield House.

20 Years Ago - May 26, 1977
TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN PLANS 15TH ANNIVERSARY

Lake-Lehman school directors adopted a tentative 1977/78 budget which includes a 10-mill increase and learned of a \$57,000 deficit in the current budget during a bleak school board meeting Tuesday evening. The proposed budget has a millage rate of 77, includes anticipated additio.

Trinity United Episcopal Church, Church St., Dallas is formulating plans for its 15th anniversary. June 12 has been designated as Anniversary Sunday. Trinity United Presbyterian was organized on June 19, 1962 by the Presbytery of Lackawanna with 123 members.

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