

EDITORIALS

Maybe our news isn't 'big,' but it's important

It's always a pleasure to put together the annual review article for the last issue of the year. While large news organizations compile reams of copy about the "biggest" stories in news, sports, entertainment, ad nauseum, our list is different. We try to give readers a flavor for the entire community, not just its most sensational aspects, and that's why we include items about individuals, churches and other organizations that may not often make the front page, but are essential cogs in the wheel of the Back Mountain's life.

Sure, there are items that are too sensational to leave out, though thankfully not too many of them in 1997, a year that saw less crime and tragedy than some others. Lake-Lehman winning its first district championship in football, or Back Mountain native Louis Alar being honored for bravery are important events on our scale, though they don't rank highly with regional papers or television stations. That's fine with us; we know our place in the news hierarchy, and we're happy to fulfill it.

As for New Year's resolutions, ours are to work diligently to make The Dallas Post an even more essential part of the fabric of the Back Mountain in 1998. We might even become more colorful.

Local government must be more open in '98

A couple of government items stand out in our review of 1997, and neither are good news for the taxpayers and citizens of the Back Mountain. Instead, the conduct of the Dallas Township supervisors and Dallas school directors only added to mistrust in government, something that may be understandable when officials are hundreds of miles away but that shouldn't exist at the local level.

In Dallas Township, the supervisors developed an all-too-cozy relationship with the Cellular One company that led to approval for construction of a 280-foot phone tower on township land, in plain view of anyone traveling Rt. 309. There were several troubling aspects to this incident. First, that the township would lease township land to a commercial entity for 50 years, and second that the public's opinion was neither sought nor heeded. At the very least, when taxpayer-owned land is going to be used by anyone except the township, people should be invited to express their view of the arrangement, with the expectation that they will be taken seriously. Equally important in this case, when a structure is likely to have a negative impact on property values — and perhaps health — it is incumbent on authorities to investigate all the ramifications involved. It appeared the supervisors used the company as their resource, hardly an unbiased witness, and dismissed the concerns of citizens.

The school board was just as dismissive about public opinion in its adoption of new, intrusive anti-drug measures. This important policy was never discussed before being read at a meeting in the first step to acceptance, which occurred the next month despite protests from parents. One key element, random testing of athletes but not other students, is particularly discriminatory. At the very least, parents and students deserved a full explanation of what was being proposed long before steps were taken to adopt the plan.

This isn't the first time the board has acted as though it was beknighted and not elected to serve the public interest. The process of replacing Westmoreland Elementary was open only to the extent that organized parent groups forced it to be so, and even then not an inch more than necessary. In the end the new school was placed about where it probably was planned for all along.

In an age of suspicion and conspiracy theories for everything from the assassination of a President to the placement of traffic signals, it is imperative that government at all levels operate as inclusively as possible. While that ideal may be difficult to achieve at the national and state levels, it should be second nature locally.

Openness can be more time-consuming and prickly than acting without regard for public opinion, but it is also the best way to assure that decisions, once made, are supported by most of the people who must pay for them, and are affected by them. Welcoming comment also attracts more people to the process, which can bring new talent to bear on hard problems. That is the American way, and it needs to be practiced more in the Back Mountain.

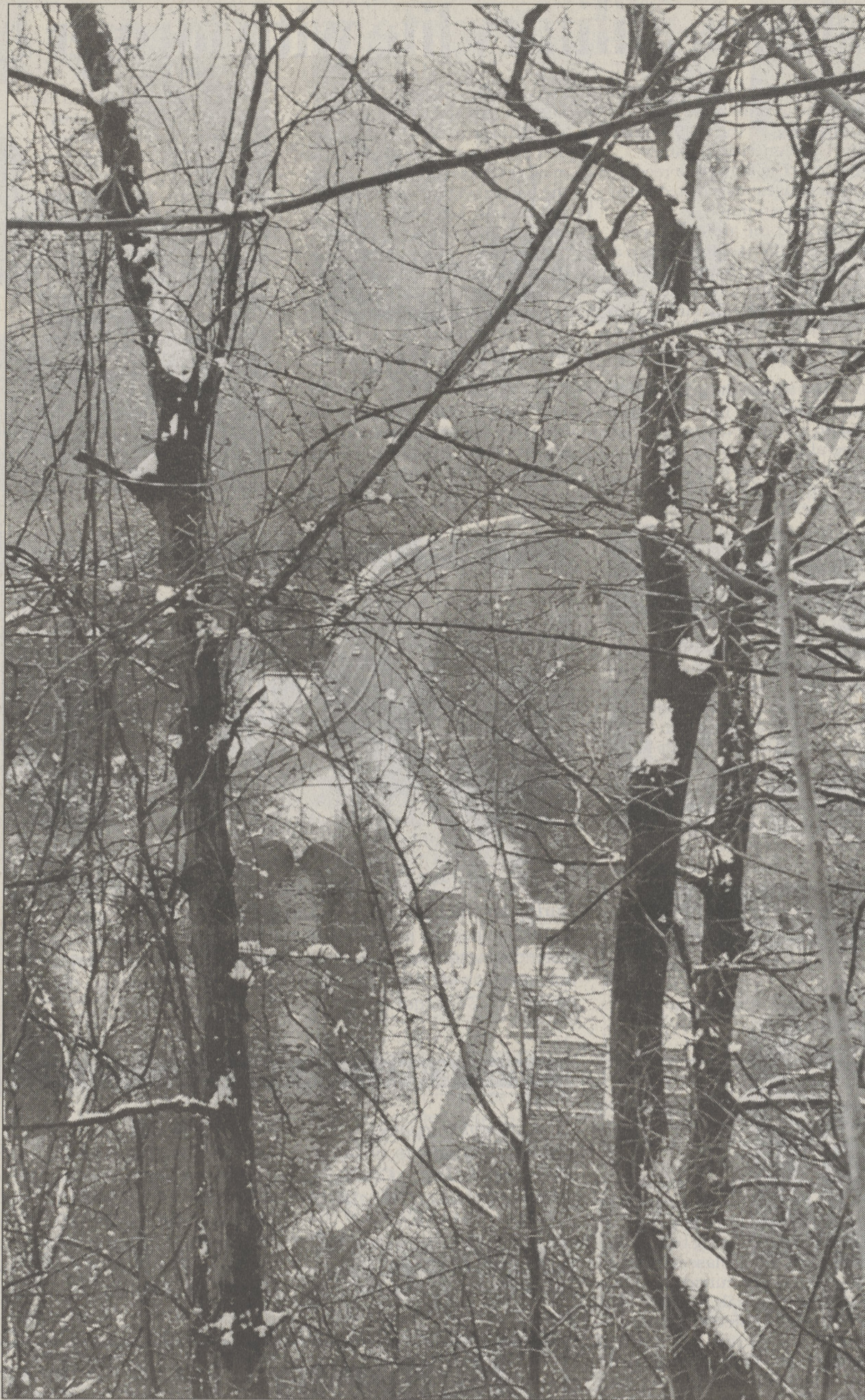
Letters, columns and editorials

The Dallas Post attempts to publish opinions on a variety of topics in many forms. Editorials, which are the opinion of the management of The Post, appear on the editorial page and are written by the editor unless otherwise indicated. Any artwork represents the opinion of the cartoonist, and columns are the opinion of the author.

Letters to the editor are welcome and will be published, subject to the following guidelines:

- Letters should not exceed 500 words.
- No writer may have more than one letter published during a 30-day period, except as a reply to another letter.
- Letters must be signed and include the writer's home town and a telephone number for verification.
- Names will be withheld only if there exists a clear threat to the writer.
- The Post retains the right to accept or reject any letter, and to edit letters for grammar and spelling, as well as to eliminate any libel, slander or objectionable wording.

In addition to letters, we welcome longer pieces that may run as columns. The author or subject's relevance to the Back Mountain will be the prime consideration when selecting material for publication.



Rt. 309, looking down from Dug Rd. after a fresh snowfall. Photo by Charlotte Bartizek.

Guest column



Sen. Charles Lemmond

At the end of the year, most people like to take stock of the months that have passed. As a legislator, I find this especially important, and would like to share with you some of the new laws and improvements to state government that the Legislature made in 1997.

Perhaps most important, we passed a thrifty state budget almost two months before the constitutional deadline. Not only was it an early budget, the spending plan held the line on expenditures, included tax cuts for businesses and needy individuals and made a major investment in education and the economy.

With the help of voters, the Legislature in 1997 amended the state constitution to create a "homestead" local tax exemption for property owners. Municipalities will now have the option of reducing property taxes for homeowners by exempting them from paying a certain portion of those taxes to school districts and other local governments.

Busy session highlighted by budget, tax measures

As a companion bill, the Senate also passed a sweeping local tax reform measure that could end Pennsylvania's dependence on real estate taxes and restore voter control over local taxes. The bill, now before the House of Representatives, would give municipalities the option of reducing property taxes and switching to a mix of sales and income tax.

Turning to health care, the Legislature passed a reform law that will allow state residents with chronic illness to qualify for group health insurance more quickly if they switch jobs or change health insurance companies.

On behalf of women, the General Assembly also passed a law requiring insurance carriers that provide coverage for mastectomies to offer full coverage for reconstructive surgery and prosthetic devices that restore symmetry. This measure also prohibits insurance companies from requiring that mastectomies be performed on an outpatient basis.

A package of new laws will protect against elder abuse by requiring employees at eldercare facilities who suspect elder abuse to report it immediately to their local Area Agency on Aging. In addition, suspected cases of

sexual abuse, serious bodily injury or suspicious death must now be reported directly to law enforcement officials. Potential employees also have to undergo criminal background checks under a new law.

What's coming up next year, as we enter the second half of the two-year legislative session?

The Senate's top priority is moving a lobbyist disclosure plan to the governor's desk. The bill, which I was pleased to oversee as chairman of the Senate State Government Committee, was approved by Senate and is awaiting House action. It would require lobbyists and those who employ them to register with the State Ethics Commission, list political action committee affiliations, and file detailed expense reports on the money they expend to influence state government.

Also, continued improvement of our roads, streamlining of state government - there are many worthwhile projects to move forward. As always, your suggestions and comments are welcome as we enter a bright new year.

Senator Lemmond may be contacted by calling, 675-3931, or writing, 22 Dallas Shopping Center, Dallas PA 18612.

LEGISLATORS' DIRECTORY

Federal Officials

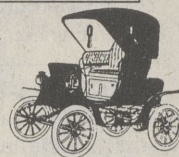
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State Officials
State Sen. Charles D. Lemmond (R) (717) 675-3931
22 Dallas Shopping Ctr., Memorial Hwy., Dallas PA 18612-1231
Lemmond's district includes the Back Mountain.

State Rep. George Hasay (R)
287-7505 or 542-7345 or 474-2276 or 477-3752
144 North Mountain Boulevard, Mountaintop PA 18707
Hasay's district encompasses: Harveys Lake, Lehman Township, Jackson Township, Lake Township, Franklin Township, Ross Township, and Dallas Township's north voting district.
State Rep. Phyllis Mundy (D)
283-9622 or 655-3375
Suite 113, 400 Third Avenue, Kingston PA 18704
Dallas Borough, Dallas Township except for the north voting district, and Kingston Township.

ONLY YESTERDAY



60 Years - Jan. 7, 1938

SEN. SORDONI SAYS HE WON'T SEEK REELECTION

On the eve of the day on which he was to begin his new term as tax collector of Dallas Township, John Isaacs, a resident of the Kunkle section of Dallas for more than 50 years passed away last Sunday night at the age of 61. In May 1919, he opened the general store at the crossroads in Kunkle which he operated until his death.

Senator A.J. Sordoni announced this week he will not be a candidate to succeed himself in the State Senate at the election this year. This is Senator Sordoni's 12th year as a senator from this district.

Directors of Kingston Township School District will meet Saturday afternoon for a tour of the township to inspect some of the sites suggested for the new Trucksville School. The Board met Tuesday evening to discuss possible sites but made no effort to select one.

50 Years - Jan. 9, 1948

'BILLY' THE PARROT PASSES AWAY AT AGE 30

"Billy" the 30-year old talking parrot that has been an important member of the A.C. Devens household for a number of years has passed away. Although "Billy" was not one who made friends with just anyone who came along, he was devoted to Mrs. Devens and followed her around the house all the day long.

Wyoming Valley Ski Club is operating a 500 ft. ski tow at Travers Park on Route 309, three miles beyond Beaumont toward Tunkhannock. The tow is open to the public and memberships cost \$1 per year and tow fees are 25¢ per day.

Now playing at the Shaver Theatre, "Romance of Rosy Ridge" starring Van Johnson, Janet Leigh and Thomas Mitchell.

40 Years - Jan. 10, 1958

REV. FRICK TO BE HONORED ON 80th BIRTHDAY

One of the best loved pastors in the Back Mountain will be 80 years old Jan. 23. His congregation will hold an open house in his honor the Sunday preceding. Members of the Huntsville Christian Church will honor Rev. Charles H. Frick in the church social room where a buffet supper will be served.

A new Burgess, three new Councilmen and a new auditor were sworn in at the reorganization meeting of Dallas Borough Council Tuesday night. Burgess Nort Berti, who received one of the highest votes ever accorded any candidate in Dallas Borough, was sworn in by retiring Burgess Herbert A. Smith who was completing his 16th year in that office.

30 Years - Jan. 11, 1968

FLOURIDE PILLS DEBATED FOR DALLAS SCHOOLS

Truckers hauled a huge 32 ton electric power transformer from the Hunlock plant of UGI to Dallas last week. It was delivered to Luzerne Electric's substation, Lake St. and Center Hill Rd. in a \$50,000 project to triple power capacity in the Dallas area.

A brisk interchange of opinion on the advisability of inaugurating a pilot dental program involving the use of flouride pills, characterized the Dallas School Board meeting Tuesday evening. Mothers of children will be invited to a program explaining the program and answering questions.

Sworn in as the first Democratic Justice of the Peace in Jackson Twp. in decades, Mrs. Lois Malak, Chase Rd. took the oath of office on Jan. 3 at Luzerne County Courthouse.

20 Years - Jan. 5, 1978

BACK MOUNTAIN EXPECTED TO GROW BY 5,000+

Charle Cigarski and Walter Zincavage newly elected supervisors of Jackson Township were introduced to township residents at the recent reorganization meeting.

The Luzerne County Planning Commission predicted the Back Mountain will increase in population by 5,733 persons by 1990. Dallas Township is slated to receive the greatest increase with 2,114. Lehman Township is expected to increase by 1,205 and Kingston Township by 915.

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