

EDITORIALS

Energy choice may bring more confusion than savings

Is it possible to be too free? That has to be one question raised by the rush to "customer choice" in utilities, a change that has just begun but already raises concerns about the wisdom of leaving all matters economic to the free market.

In theory, consumers benefit when they can force energy suppliers to compete for their loyalty. The companies, the thought goes, will do all they can to earn our business by trimming fat from their operations, and passing the savings along to us, the people who ultimately decide if they succeed or fail. That's the mantra of the markets, and it works pretty well most of the time.

But there can be pitfalls to blind adherence to market theory. In the case of energy choice, the 50 suppliers now licensed in Pennsylvania are free to pick and choose among customers, and the result is that only three of them care to pursue residential accounts in the Back Mountain and other areas served by UGI Utilities. All 50, though, are courting big industrial and commercial users, because that's where the real money is. Thus, residential customers may have more choice, but not nearly as much as commercial accounts, and they'll surely pay higher rates.

Then there's the issue of how much time a family or individual can devote to picking an electricity supplier. Businesses using thousands or millions of kilowatt hours each month will direct staffers to the task, since the net savings will pay the cost of investigation many times over. It's harder to rationalize the time a busy parent will have to shoehorn in around a full schedule of work and family activities, and the potential reward is much less.


Just as with long-distance phone rates and air fares, the savings will depend on one's ability to research and negotiate charges, since electricity suppliers will be free to adjust rates depending on competitive conditions. Thus you could find yourself paying more or less for power than your neighbors.

Most troubling is the paradigm shift that is taking place. Particularly in the case of public utilities, rates had been set in a way that small customers paid less than their usage volume perhaps "earned." In effect, they were somewhat subsidized by large users. That practice was a major factor in assuring that nearly every home in America has a phone, heat and other necessities of modern life. Now, the individual customer is an annoyance to many producers, someone whose business is hardly worth having, and who must pay for the privilege of the service. Watch closely in coming years, and you are likely to see the Post Office taking the same tack.

There will be arguments that it is socialistic to manipulate market forces so that services remain affordable, as though capitalism is a religion. It ain't so; a healthy society requires that we do what is practical to spread benefits as widely as possible, or we end up with an economic caste system that ultimately leads to decline. Even the inventor of modern management, Peter Drucker, recognized that unconstrained capitalism was destructive to the overall community.

For now, though, the large questions wait in the wings. The more practical concern is choosing an energy supplier as intelligently and quickly as possible, and then fending off sales pitches from others who may promise more than they can deliver, or who lure customers with eye-catching offers that aren't sustainable. Caveat Emptor.

Publisher's notebook



Ron Bartizek

If this is what El Nino does to our weather, I'm all for it! But my enthusiasm for warm, snowless winters is tempered by sympathy for our brothers and sisters in northern New York and New England and eastern Canada, who are suffering through the most horrendous ice storms in memory. Actually, we're the ones who are supposed to get ice instead of snow, and they're usually buried in the white stuff by now. I'll bet they never wished so hard for snow.

I was proud of my fellow New Englanders, the Maineiacs who were interviewed on the news the other night, but reporters based in New York and Washington were noticeably disappointed in them. True to their stoic heritage, they didn't cry or whine about their plight, just picked up and carried on with life. Of course, many are experienced wood burners, as I once was, and know how to cope when modern conveniences take a hiatus.

Among other issues, the chaos caused by falling poles, wires and towers adds weight to arguments for underground utilities, or evanescent ones. A story in last Sunday's New York Times mentioned that in "undeveloped" nations, like South Seas islands, everyone uses wireless phones and the natural beauty will never be despoiled by rows of telephone poles. Instead I guess they'll have to fight ugly towers on every hilltop, still less unsightly than a pole every half block.

Do you agree? Disagree?

Editorials are the opinion of the management of The Dallas Post, and are written by the editor unless otherwise indicated. We welcome your opinion on contemporary issues in the form of letters to the editor. If you don't write, the community may never hear a contrasting point of view. Send or bring letters to: The Dallas Post, 607 Main Rd., Dallas PA 18612. Please include your name, address and a daytime phone number so that we may verify authenticity.



Are you ready for this? Photo by Charlotte Bartizek.

LETTERS

There are still good, honest people around

Editor:
There really are good and honest people in the world today! I found out first-hand a few days before Christmas. I had stopped at the "Y" in Wilkes-Barre to get a gift certificate for my granddaughter. When I took my check book out of my purse, a bank envelope with money in it that had been saved for other Christmas gifts, an amount that I really could not afford to lose, fell out on the floor.

Some time later, I became aware that the envelope was missing. I retraced my steps to the "Y"...saying "only a miracle"...Well, God was merciful to me, and granted me a Christmas miracle. I would like the whole world to know the same "Charlie Sims" (from Plymouth). Charlie picked up the envelope and turned it in at the desk at the "Y".

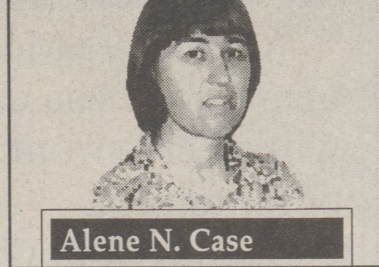
He, as well as the girls at the desk, could have easily taken advantage of the situation, but they

did not! Instead, the girls, I did not get their names, refused any "reward", handed me my envelope and wished us "Merry Christmas".

I can't thank Charlie and the girls enough for their goodness and their honesty...and all the others out there who truly do practice their Christian Faith! Our Lord's abundant blessings on them all!

Marilyn O'Connell
Dallas.

A Case for conservation



The sun is in and out of the clouds this morning. The thermometer reads 54 degrees Fahrenheit. And a bright red cardinal sings from the top of our neighbors' apple tree. We were awakened by rumbles of thunder at about six o'clock. Everyone wonders whether the calendar flipped to March or April when we turned to 1998.

I was planning to write a heavy philosophical column to set us all on the right road in the New Year. However, the natural wonder and beauty of the earth intervened to make me stop and watch the fog, as it were. Yes, on Wednesday my husband and I thoroughly enjoyed sitting on the levee in Wilkes-Barre watching the fog move above the Susquehanna River. Cold water from snowmelt in New York and northern counties of Pennsylvania was flowing downstream under layers of much warmer air. This contrast of temperatures coupled with the high humidity was the perfect prescription for the formation of fog.

"The ideal has many names, and beauty is but one of them," said Somerset Maugham. I wonder if he were sitting on a cold rock discovering that fog moves in waves when he wrote that. As Mike and I looked long enough at this blanket of fog, we realized that it was not static. It was moving, and that movement was quite similar to waves upon the

Easing into the new year

sea except that it was in slow motion. We would see some of these waves actually break against the levee wall and sometimes spill over it in a stream. Once a large wave rounded the bend below us and moved upstream toward the Market Street bridge. We are sure that some movement was with the current and some was against the flow. We think there may have been some effect of the bridge and other irregularities - natural and constructed - on these differences in flow.

I wonder how many people saw the fog from one of the bridges or from one of the many office and apartment buildings that overlook the river and thought it was simply a pretty blanket. One had to really stop everything else that one was doing to see the many wonderful changes that were happening right before ones eyes. Have you taken time to stop and watch the fog lately?

Cross-country skiing is another way to relax and let the beauty and wonder of the natural world sink into your consciousness. I had the opportunity to ski through fields near my sister's house in New York state after the big snow at the end of December. It was amazing how quiet it was. No one passed on the road at the end of her lane. It was just me and a few birds. Such solitude is very difficult to come by in our neighborhood. I crave it and I will cherish those moments for a long time.

On our way home from New York on New Years Day, we witnessed another of the wonders of the natural world. This time we did not need to stop to enjoy it. We saw one of the most colorful and protracted sunsets I can remember in Pennsylvania. The sun was setting in a clear western sky when

the rest of the sky was covered by thick low clouds. Since the ground was also blanketed with snow, the colors reflected not only off the clouds but all around us.

As the weather warmed and the snow melted, growing things have caught my eye as well. The rye grass cover crop we planted too late in the fall has sprouted and is up about an inch! By the time the next cold wave hits, it will be large enough to do the job for which we planted it - holding the soil in the gardens until spring. And last night my husband pointed out the luminescent lichens glowing on the rocks and walls just up the street from our house. I probably would have simply driven by assuming that it was water glistening as the headlights passed. It is good to have an observant companion.

My son just came in and recounted his experience whistling to - and with - several tufted titmice on his morning walk with our dog. Apparently the birds were as curious about this strange human as he was about their gathering to communicate with him. Again, in order to fully appreciate the wonder of the moment, he had to slow down and pay attention.

So as we look forward to this new year, let's resolve to make room in our schedules for the wonders of nature. As many people have correctly pointed out, we cannot effectively protect that which we do not understand or appreciate. And the first step toward this understanding and appreciation is simply to stop and look or listen. Slow-moving waves in the fog reminded me of this fundamental truth. Step outside and discover something for yourself. And, have a very wonderful 1998!



60 Years Ago - Jan. 21, 1938
SIX MAJOR HIGHWAY PROJECTS COME TO DALLAS

Six major highway projects in the Dallas section will be included in the 1938/39 road program which will be approved by directors of the Wyoming Valley Motor Club at its annual meeting next week. Norman Johnstone, secretary of the club promised yesterday. Inclusion of the highways on the club's program means that they will receive preference in recommendation to the State Highway Dept.

Kingston Township won a nightclub and a gas station and Courtdale won a laundry in a boundary dispute which ended this week. As a result of a new survey it was decided that Blaze's Club Piedmont and George Prater's gas station are in Kingston Township and the new O'Malia Laundry is in Courtdale. Attorney A. Turner, solicitor for Kingston Township was instructed this week to make proper adjustments in assessments.

50 Years Ago - Jan. 23, 1948
WAR FILMS TO BE SHOWN AT IDETOWN UM CHURCH

Captured Japanese Army films showing the fall of the Philippines as well as official U.S. War Dept. films of the war in the Pacific will be shown by Lt. J.H. Yerba, U.S. Army Recruiting Service at the monthly meeting of the Men's Bible Class of Idetown Methodist Church House Friday.

The League leading Dallas Borough quintet defeated Harter on the home floor Tuesday by a score of 52-39. This makes three successive League wins for the fast stepping Borough boys.

You could get - Rolled veal roast, 59¢ lb.; rib roast, 59¢ lb.; carrots, 2 lg. bnchs. 15¢; lg. eggs, 65¢ doz.; Ivory soap, lg. bar, 19¢; bread, lg. loaf, 12¢.

40 Years Ago - Jan. 17, 1958
SERVICE CLUBS HELP SCHOOL WITH VOCATION

Dallas Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs have been planning a unified effort to strengthen the vocational program in the Back Mountain Secondary Schools. Discussions have resulted with supervising principals of the area as well as principals from other school districts where vocational programs have been successful over many years.

The Dallas Kiwanis is taking charge of lighting for the Dallas Skating Rink contributing its services to a worthwhile civics and social project. Dr. Henry M. Laing Fire Co. pumped for over a day to fill the rink getting 60,000 gallons from Toby's Creek.

30 Years Ago - Jan. 25, 1968
NEW SEWAGE SYSTEM COMES TO AREA

Presentation of the Municipal Authority's tentative plans for a sewage system to serve the more densely populated areas of Dallas Borough, Dallas Township and Kingston Township municipalities, brought out a variety of questions Thursday evening.

Cost of the sewage system to the individual homeowners depends upon front footage with owners of corner lots up against it.

One of the highlights of the recent Dallas Community Ambulance meeting was announced that a memorial fund for William Wright is being established with the entire community which he served, privileged to contribute. The fund will be used to buy some special piece of equipment.

20 Years Ago - Jan. 19, 1978
END OF TAX PAID TRASH PICKUP AT HARVEYS LAKE

"If we had good garbage collection service, the two mill increase might have been worth it, but we don't," says Harveys Lake Borough Council President Robert DeRemer on the subject of the upcoming June 1 end of tax paid garbage pickup in the borough. R. Tattersall garbage collector under contract agrees having residents make their own private arrangements for service will be better. But he maintains that any omissions his service made were made for reasons of safety during bad weather.

Beginning in 1978 and thereafter residents of Kingston Township will be paying 1 1/2% income tax, 1% will go exclusively to the township with the other 1/2% to the school district.

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Ronald A. Bartizek PUBLISHER	Charlotte E. Bartizek ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER
Jessica Appolo ADVERTISING ACCT. EXEC	Kylie Shafferkoetter REPORTER
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