

EDITORIALS

Real tax reform means regular reassessment

After holding the line for six years, Dallas school board members find it necessary to raise tax rates as much as 15 mills in the 1998-99 budget. It's never popular to raise taxes, of course, and the district's school board and administration deserve credit for managing their finances conservatively for the past decade. But even they would have to admit the district also has been lucky to be the destination of choice for professionals and other high-income families that have filled the region with expensive homes, and accompanying high tax bills. That good fortune has allowed Dallas to avoid the fiscal squeeze that weighs on Lake-Lehman, which is similar in size but far behind in tax receipts. And therein lies one of northeastern Pennsylvania's problems.

Unlike most states, Pennsylvania has no regular schedule of property reassessment, which means some home owners enjoy remarkably low tax bills, while others pay inordinately high ones. And they can live next door, in comparably valued houses, as long as one was built in the 1960's or earlier, and the other is new. This is a great benefit to school districts like Dallas, since a greater number of large new homes have been built there, but a penalty to Lake-Lehman, which hasn't enjoyed nearly as much growth, at least in large properties.

Most of all, the lack of regular reassessment is unfair, and in general stunts development. Sure, people with very high incomes — many of whom come from places where taxes are even stiffer — can build new homes, but artificially high taxes depress the market for more modest new houses that middle-income families can afford.

Reassessment is out of the hands of school districts; it can be accomplished at no less than the county level. But political realities make the prospect unlikely in Luzerne County and others like it, with a large stock of older homes, and home owners who vote. That's why tax fairness must be addressed by the State Legislature, the only body that can force a uniform system on reluctant counties. Now, that would be real tax reform.



Spring in bloom, along Lehman Outlet Road. Photo by Charlotte Bartizek.

Publisher's notebook

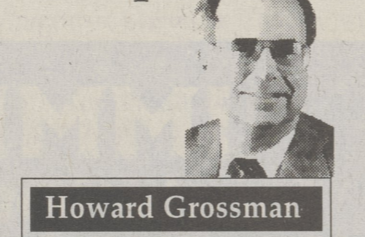
Ron Bartizek



Random thoughts:

- It was reported that about 80 million Americans watched the final episode of Seinfeld. Perhaps it's testimony to the show's message — or lack of one — that more people watched a one-hour sitcom than manage to get to the polls at election time.
- When I went up to the Game Commission office to take photos for an article, I picked up a bluebird box kit, which sells for about \$5. I remember seeing bluebirds when as a child in Connecticut, but they all but disappeared for several years, at least in part because the meadows they frequent were becoming subdivisions. The beautiful birds have been recovering lately, and we'll be doing our part by putting up a box, hoping to attract at least one family.
- Shooting ourselves in the foot: A group of farmers is suing the Federal Government because they aren't allowed to grow hemp, which is a relative of the marijuana plant, but produces a concentration of the THC drug too low to be hallucinogenic. The government says it has prohibited growing hemp because it would provide cover for marijuana, but don't you believe it. Afraid of being called "soft on drugs," politicians haven't had the backbone to make a distinction between the two plants, even as products made from hemp are imported, but our farmers are deprived of the right to farm it. And it's useful for everything from rope to newsprint. Now that tobacco farmers are mad about losing their market, something may come of this challenge to a misinterpretation of the 1937 Marijuana Tax Act.

The economic viewpoint



Howard Grossman

As the winds of change sweep across Northeastern Pennsylvania, are we racing with the wind or falling further behind. Change is occurring everywhere, although some would say that change comes slow to the Northeastern Pennsylvania region. Nevertheless, a great many changes have occurred in the Pocono Northeast.

- The region is no longer on a death march to oblivion.
- The region has created an employment diversity which few would have predicted 50 years ago.
- Commercial development has gone well beyond the demographics of the region which, in the urban areas, continue to show population decline.
- Parts of the region represent the highest growth areas of Pennsylvania.
- The region is engaging in visioning projects for 21st century life.

Region is changing with the times

ing projects for 21st century life.

- Partnering and collaborating occur much more than most people think, but still are insufficient for 21st century life.

For a long time in its history, Northeastern Pennsylvania was trying to catch up with other regions. Still two points plus higher in its unemployment rate than the nation and the State, the region continues to pursue a better economic destiny.

Some areas within Northeastern Pennsylvania are racing with the wind to accommodate rapid population change, but have not as yet undertaken the appropriate planning process to cope with growth. Other areas need to plan for their future based upon continued population decline. Such disparate circumstances are not likely to result in plans which can be copied from other places. Steps, however, are being taken in both growth and no growth counties of the region which can result in a positive change no matter the demographics.

For example, Monroe County is the second fastest growing county in Pennsylvania and has been undergoing a visioning process for at least two years. Schuylkill

County, a geographic place of 160,000 people, has not been growing in a population sense, but has virtually completed a countywide visioning process of major magnitude. Another place of cross current winds is the Greater Scranton Area where a visioning process is nearing completion. These examples represent techniques which are being used to bring these areas to 21st century life.

Specific areas within the region such as those which still constitute growth sectors including the Back Mountain, the Abingtons in Lackawanna County, Mountain-top and others should follow this lead and begin, expand or modify any efforts which have been taken historically to vision their future.

Growth areas are threatened with disruption as a result of the water utility services being split in a variety of directions and not being able to race with the wind. Educational services are under severe siege which may or may not be able to be maintained at the level desired in light of controversy over tax increases and other matters.

Engaging in new techniques to control and manage growth comes

slowly to Northeastern Pennsylvania municipalities. This is why draft legislation introduced by Bucks County State Representative David Steil is so important for due consideration and possible action in coming months in the State Legislature. It dramatizes the continuing importance of working closely with the State Legislators who represent this region of Pennsylvania.

There is no shortage of talent within the region to resolve these types of issues. It will take much more dialogue, increased cooperation and partnership and a sense of destiny for future life, but the job can be done. Growth areas can outdistance the growth which has surrounded them by appropriate planning and a sense of visioning how and in what manner they can challenge their future. As the clock winds down to the 20th century, the next two years should be used to achieve a sense of planning opportunity which can enhance the ability of Northeastern Pennsylvania to be the place for the future.

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

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.

Library news



Nancy Kozemchak

The Back Mountain Memorial Library will have a brand new permanent book store in the basement of the library in time for the 52nd annual Library Auction. This room is under the new addition to the children's room and has been the responsibility of Chris Riley as his Eagle Scout project to ready

Basement book store will be installed

the room in time for the auction. The room is 27 feet by 40 feet by eight feet which had recently been dry walled. The room has been given two coats of paint to the ceiling and walls; 22 pine bookshelves have been sanded, painted and spackled. The shelves are floor to ceiling and they line the walls of the room.

The room will replace the tent at the auction and will provide ample space for a year-round book store. The library provided the supplies for the job and the manpower came from family and the leadership and scouts of Boy Scout Troop 281 of Dallas. The project was completed on weekends and spring break. A requirement of

the project was at least one adult had to be present at all times to handle a situation that would arise. The project was completed in April.

The 52nd annual library auction will be held July 9-12. The Kick-off dinner will be held Mon., June 1 at Damian's Restaurant at Harveys Lake with cash bar cocktails at 6 and dinner at 7 p.m. The cost is \$25 per person, payable at the library with your reservation. The public is invited to the kick off party to enjoy a mini auction after dinner and help kick off the 52nd library auction.

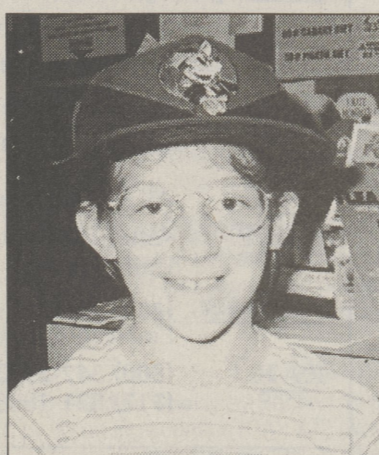
Sybil Pelton and Mary George, chairs of the odds and ends booth at the auction will accept useable

odds and ends for the sale. These may be brought to the library during regular hours. We will also accept books in good condition for the new book store which will be chaired by Jeff Matus and Bennie Matchett. Peggy Harvey would accept new goods and Karen Boback would like to receive antiques to be sold across the block. These may be brought to the library or could be picked up by the chairs if the library is notified.

The library is again selling current magazines for resale. These will be sold on the take out table for 10 cents each. These make an additional money maker for the library as patrons do enjoy buying them for their reading pleasure.

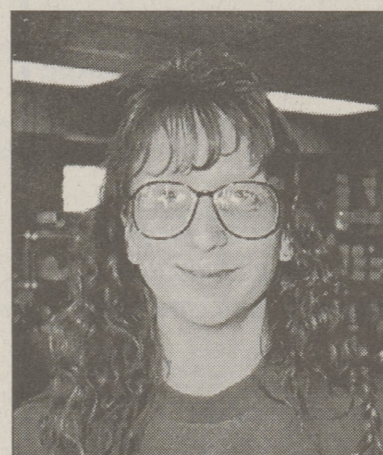
WORD ON THE STREET

Q: What do you look forward to doing the most this summer?
Where asked: Hoof N' Paw and Jeans



ELIZABETH LEWIS
Harding

"Swimming at Frances Slocum Park."



LEEANN MISSON
Dallas

"To be outside playing frisbee and going to the park."



LYNN VERRUGGIO
Wilkes-Barre

"Boating. Because you're always busy and never doing anything."



MARGEY MIKLOSI
Naticoke

"Anything to do with water. Boating and water skiing at Harveys Lake."

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