

EDITORIALS

# Youth violence is a shock, not a surprise

Like a fighter who has taken too many punches, America is reeling from the shock of another teen shooting incident, this one in Oregon leaving four people dead and two dozen injured. Through the fog of our dazed senses, we're also wondering why these senseless acts of violence occur, and what we can do to prevent them. The answers are far from simple, which makes remote the prospect for corrective measures in our fast-paced, quick-fix society, at least until the violence becomes so overwhelming that we can no longer rationalize it.

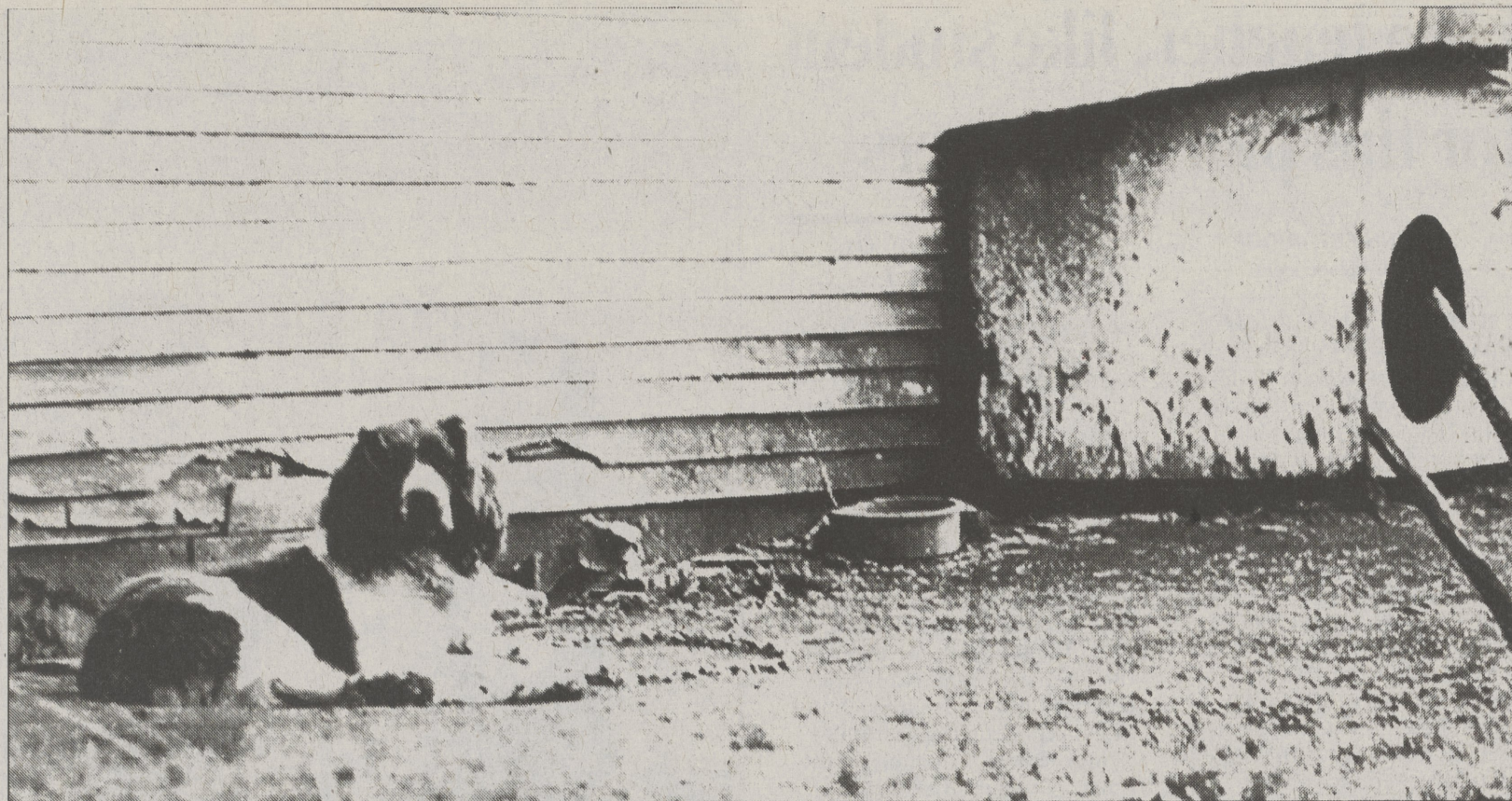
Surely, the greatest stimulant to vengeful murder in America is welcomed into our homes every day: Television shows not only glorify violence, many of them offer it as the correct and effective solution to interpersonal difficulties. This is not a new phenomenon; Baby Boomers were raised on shows like *Bonanza*, in which the good guys always won, often with guns blazing and fists flying. We are so inured to violence that you may have passed over the reference to boxing in the first sentence without even noticing how incongruous it is in this context. Movies offer even more fighting, shooting and killing per minute than television, frequently with humor, as in the *Home Alone* series, in which a young boy visits all manner of injury on bumbling would-be burglars, to the delight of the audience.

But our affinity for violence is only half the story, or maybe less. Violent thoughts alone don't kill people. Since most of us lack the strength or will to kill with bare hands, we need an instrument to carry out our aggression, and no nation in the history of the world has offered such a huge market for the most deadly weapons, guns. No, guns don't kill people all by themselves, but people with guns kill at an alarming rate, and the perpetrators and victims are less often criminals than a spurned lover ... or the unhappy kid next door. Yet, we spend billions of dollars to lock up penny ante drug pushers while true merchants of death not only escape our attention, they are actually defended by politicians too cowardly to take on the gun lobby and enact reasonable restrictions on the traffic in firearms.

Government acts counter to good sense in other ways. Using the death penalty as punishment makes legitimate the eye-for-an-eye mentality that spurs much of our violence. When the state shows by example that it is permissible to take the life of another person, some people — especially the young, impressionable or vicious — interpret that as a license to exact their own payment for perceived wrongs. The United States now holds a higher share of its citizens in prison than any other nation, yet we also have by far the highest rates of murder and other violent crimes. Something doesn't add up.

Then there's the media, the whipping boy for many critics in time of crisis. Do television and newspapers, along with minor news outlets, share the blame for our violent tendencies? Probably not, but it is certain that publication and broadcast of one crime can lead to copycat actions. If nothing else, the speed and reach of today's news outlets, especially television, bring gruesome scenes into our homes and minds far more quickly and completely than ever before. But the media's presence is not completely innocuous; there has been a paradigm shift in editors' sense of responsibility, so that almost anything now goes, hopefully before the competition, as news outlets scramble for circulation and ratings with which to lure more advertisers and make more money.

Ultimately, of course, we are our own worst enemies, and each murder has its own unique causes and consequences. But it is futile for Americans to deny that our society, made up from a little piece of each of us, condones — even celebrates — violence as a means to an end. On television and in the movies, that end is usually a good one, but in real life it seldom works out that way.



Dog days arrived early this year. Photo by Charlotte Bartizek.

LETTERS

## Youth musicians deserve recognition, as athletes do

Editor:  
I commend your editorial and feature article in the April 8th edition of the Dallas Post honoring the fifteen Dallas and Lake-Lehman high school musicians who have been selected for Regional band and orchestra competition. Your recognition of their dedication and long hours of hard work is a great tribute to the musicians themselves as well as to their band directors, parents, and

all the other devoted individuals who generously give of their time and talent to make these music programs the successes that they are.

The Dallas and Lake-Lehman bands are both award-winning bands. They spend many long hours practicing for their performances, and in order to enter and qualify for the many competitions that they participate in each year. One of these competitions, the

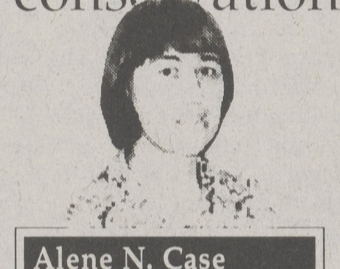
Atlantic Coast Championships, takes place in our own backyard at the Lackawanna County Multi-Purpose Stadium. It is the largest band competition on the East Coast drawing thousands of high school musicians from ten states. Your observations on our "sports crazy culture" are reflected by the minimal coverage that this tremendous two day event receives by the local media.

As the parents of two sons who

are dedicated to and thoroughly enjoy the band and music programs in the Dallas School District, my husband and I were delighted with your acknowledgement of the accomplishments of these other "all stars" and your recognition of their special gifts and talents. Thank you.

Vivian J. Bednarz  
Shavertown

### A Case for conservation



Alene N. Case

Note from A. Case: My husband recently wrote the following essay reflecting on the last 20 years of discussion and the current actions regarding the Susquehanna River in the Wyoming Valley. I wanted to share it with you. We all live within this watershed and we need to make informed choices as to its management. Listen with me to the Professor.

By Dr. J. MICHAEL CASE

The Susquehanna River drainage basin is a historical stage for a struggle between factions which degrade the land and aquatic resources and factions which work to conserve ecosystem function. The river and its tributaries are central players in this struggle and are generally viewed as adversaries to be tamed by constructed levees. I choose the word adversary because the people of this region imbue the river and its tributary system with attributes of incivility they identify in people and animals they dislike. Any recognition of the natural hydrologic response of a watershed to precipitation is readily abandoned by public citizen and politician alike when economic development presents its lure. In other words, short-term and short-sighted eco-

## Lament for our watershed

nomie motives obscure the fact that forest ecosystems buffer flood response through retention and transpiration of the storm water. In reality, large tracts of forests and wetlands provide better flood protection than levees. And, once the water is in the main channel, how easily we forget that rivers are meant naturally to meander, to spill onto flood plains, and to build natural levees. Insecure as river communities are, we assume the misguided duty to "tame the beast" and confine the channel system to the desired pathways.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is always willing to lend a hand to save communities from the perceived ravages of inland rivers and streams or the force of coastal storm waves and rising sea level. Their existence is predicated on hard-stabilization of banks or shores that encounter the energy of moving water. But, more often than not, the Corps' hard-stabilization projects are performed out of the context of the larger hydrological and biological realities of the watershed or coastal system.

I recall clearly, as a young professor, taking my hydrology students in October, 1978 to the federal courthouse in Wilkes-Barre to the first public hearings on the proposed levee-raising project. The meeting was acrimonious. Initially, we just listened without comment while the citizens of Wilkes-Barre blasted the Corps' engineers and their lawyers for wanting to build a levee system which would cause increased induced flooding above Forty Fort and down at Shickshinny. I re-

member one elderly Wilkes-Barre gentleman who asked, "How can you possibly justify saving Wilkes-Barre at the expense of our friends and neighbors above and below us on the river?"

Time is on the side on politicians and developers. Good arguments were ignored or forgotten. Toward the end of the hearings, some of my students raised a good point about whether or not we should also develop a comprehensive watershed management plan to ensure the integrity of essential forest and wetland regions. Perhaps my students were just trying to impress me that they had learned a fundamental point about surface water hydrology in my course. But, I don't think so. I was the one who was the recent immigrant to the area. They and their families were the ones who had endured the recent Agnes flood. These students clearly understood that you cannot "tame the beast." You must learn how to live rationally with a river. And, that requires two major commitments: (1) avoid placing yourself and certain activities on the flood plain where you expect the kinetic energy of flood flow to be dissipated and where sedimentation naturally occurs; and (2) conserve and preserve the watershed through diligent, thoughtful planning to delay the arrival of storm runoff in the distributary system. Alas, we have not learned our lessons.

So, now, the levees of the Susquehanna River are being raised again in the Wyoming Valley. The usual sacrifice is exacted — bottomland hardwood forests

of silver maple and black locust trees with attendant wildflowers and warblers are destroyed and displaced. Along with them, the channel shape, depth, and texture may change, perhaps eliminating a few more populations of freshwater mussels. Not surprisingly, the degradation of stream habitat by dams, levees, deforestation, and siltation is the single most important factor in the elimination of aquatic animals in Pennsylvania.

The new levee system will only be a "band aid," and, inevitably, future calls to raise the levees will be heard again and again. The work of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is a waste of time in a larger sense. The levees are a pacifier. In reality, without a comprehensive plan to protect the naturally absorbent surfaces of the watershed, storms will produce ever steeper, more energetic and erosive hydrographs. When the Susquehanna River again spills into the streets of our communities, washing away our treasures or coating them with mud, I will be there shoulder-to-shoulder to help clean up. But, when the flood is over, and you ask why this happened and why the walls were not high enough, I trust we will all consider seriously the fundamental lessons of hydrology and rivers. I pray that we will act to rebuild our communities and lives so that we can live at peace with the river — not at war against it.

J. Michael Case, Ph.D is a professor of Geoenvironmental Science and Engineering at Wilkes University. He lives in Shavertown.

### Publisher's notebook

Ron Bartizek



Moving may be one of the most revealing experiences in life, and what we see is often not pretty. We've just moved for the first time in nine years and two children, and the stuff we carted from one house to another tells at least a chapter or two in the story of our lives. We're glad it hasn't been published.

Being of the baby boom generation, moving is second nature, of course. We each packed and unpacked several times before meeting, and this is the fifth transplant together, so the boxes of old business clothes and the dozens of picture frames and perennially unframed artwork that go with them were not a surprise. Ditto for the glassware, pottery and accessories that haven't seen the light of day in 20 years. But now the kids have made their contribution to the clutter, including a box of stuffed animals that would be worth a fortune if they had TY tags on them.

As they have so many times before, pledges to clean out and throw out have crossed our lips, but this time it will be different. (Yes, we've said that before, but *this* time we really mean it.) If we make good on our promises, you can look forward to the most fully stocked odds 'n' ends booth ever at this year's library auction. But we won't tell you which items are ours.

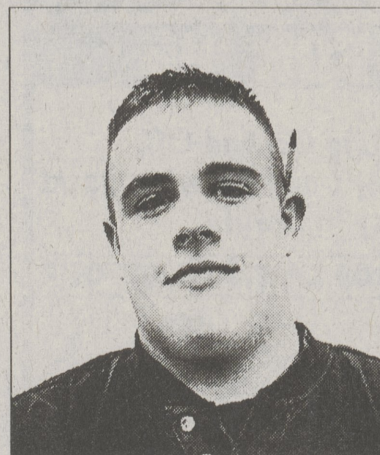
### WORD ON THE STREET

Q: What are your plans after graduation?  
Where asked: Lake-Lehman High School



NICOLAI YOBLONSKI  
18 years old

"I'm going to Temple University to study media arts."



NICK COSLETT  
18 years old

"I'm going to get a job over the summer and then attend PSU-Wilkes-Barre and go from there."



JAMES PITCAVAGE  
18 years old

"I'm going on a mission for my church for 2 years, then on to college."



BRIAN KEMPINSKI  
18 years old

"I'm going to take a year off and work and then go to college."

### Do you agree? Disagree?

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