

EDITORIALS

# Energy choice may be better, but it's not perfect

Pennsylvania is rushing pell-mell into deregulation of energy providers, but there are already signs that "energy choice" holds pitfalls as well as benefits.

In the Midwest, a stretch of hot weather led to electricity shortages and wholesale prices as much as 100 times normal when demand outstripped supply. While energy users may contract for a fixed price, suppliers who lack their own generating plants are at the mercy of those who do, and it is to be expected that some will fail. That is the normal scheme of things in a free market, but it's one thing for consumers to buy gasoline at a different gas station because their old one went belly up, it's quite another to find you suddenly lost access to power, or at least to power at a price you can afford.

Gov. Ridge may see energy deregulation as similar to breaking up the AT&T monopoly on phone service, but it's not really the same. For one thing, telephone companies don't deal with a product they produce, they simply carry other people's messages wherever they go. A shortage would come only if people stopped talking on the phone, which could happen if enough of us take to the Internet for communication. But that would simply mean long-distance companies would have to fight harder for our business.

Electricity (and soon gas) is a different story. Price gouging instead of stiff competition may be in store if supplies don't meet demand. This is not to mention the questionable wisdom of giving incentives to produce and sell more power, and this make more pollution.

Competition is usually better than monopoly, but it may be wise to take baby steps before jumping in with both feet.

## Publisher's notebook

Ron Bartizek



Ah, summertime, and the living is ... hectic! Whatever happened to those "lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer?" If they ever existed, they've been swamped by baseball, softball, summer camps and assorted sundry other commitments. No wonder we take summer vacations; it's the only way to get away from those endless summer activities. (Get it, "endless summer." Oh, well.)

We've belonged to the Newberry Country Club for the past several years, under the assumption it's a lot easier and cheaper to swim in someone else's pool than our own. I still believe that, but with all the distractions so far this season, we might as well be flushing the membership fee down the toilet. At least we've been playing golf, but that's food for another column.

If this sounds like complaining, it's really not. When I was a kid (I'm old enough to begin sentences that way), there was precious little to do besides skip stones. Why, stones had hardly been invented at that time, I tell my kids. We did, however, live only an hour from the beach, so occasional trips to the shore were a summer treat. Nowadays, our kids can choose from enough activities to make their heads spin, and our pocketbook shrink. It seems there are camps for everything from acrobatics to the zither, each costing \$75 to \$120 a week. So, all you need is money to keep your children occupied until the most important summer holiday for adults, the start of school.

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Hasay's district encompasses: Harveys Lake, Lehman Township, Jackson Township, Lake Township, Franklin Township, Ross Township, and Dallas Township's north voting district.

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Include a name and phone number where you can be reached.

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Bird house in the wetlands at Frances Slocum State Park. Photo by Charlotte Bartizek.

## A Case for conservation



Alene N. Case

During the past year, the Pennsylvania 21st Century Environment Commission has worked on a draft copy of a set of recommendations to submit to Governor Tom Ridge. Their charge, by executive order on July 1, 1997, was to "recommend methods and policies to improve the environmental quality of the Commonwealth and measure the results, while allowing for enhanced economic and social progress." A select group of 40 people ranging from the heads of various departments in state government to industry leaders to representatives of conservation organizations and environmental educators toiled together without pay to produce the final document which is due in Governor Ridge's hands on September 15, 1998.

On July 1, I attended an open house at the Woodlands in Wilkes-Barre. It was the last in a series of such forums across the state. And, it occurred only 10 days prior to the end of the comment period on the draft document that had been released in June. If I had not been on the board of an environmental organization and also had a friend who works for the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), I am sure that I would not have known about this meeting or gained a copy to review. Since one part of the charge to the commission in the executive order was to "Involve the citizens of the Commonwealth" in this process, I have serious concerns about the democratic aspects of the final product.

I suppose that I could give you details about the report itself, but I would much rather see the state put a copy in the mailbox of every household in Pennsylvania. Then,

## PA's environment in the 21st Century

I would like to see a personal invitation extended to all citizens to become involved in the many future actions and decisions that will result in the implementation of this report.

It is my experience that the audience at open houses and town meetings is made up of those with very narrow agendas or those who can afford to skip work (or, in some cases, those who are paid by their employer) to attend. A commission like the 21st Century Environment Commission desperately needs input from people of all ages, classes, and occupations. When the very first person who stands up to speak during a comment session expresses the well-rehearsed belief that this is all a conspiracy for the United Nations to "take over the world" (as The Brain would say), it is obvious that productive discussion of substantive issues will be difficult if not impossible. I kept wishing that some 15-year-old kid (none were there) would get up and talk about the difficulties of living in an inner-city neighborhood where heat and air pollution contribute to the family's respiratory health problems.

By and large, the report of the commission is well presented. It is sufficiently "pro-environment" that realtors and builders turned out in large numbers to express their reservations. It also makes mining companies nervous about future regulations. But, there are several problems that need attention before this document will have any real influence on the improvement of our environment and many of these problems relate directly to citizen involvement.

If poorer citizens, professional educators, researchers, lawyers, and interested volunteers are to be involved on a real on-going basis in such planning and assessment, their time must be honored with appropriate pay. We

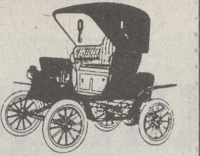
cannot continue to assume that everyone has the luxury of time to devote to good causes. For instance, professors are the perfect persons to be involved in determining the criteria on which assessment of progress should be based, but they should be given summer fellowships so that they can afford to devote their full time to this endeavor.

Another item that must be addressed before this document produces significant results is the long-term commitment of our state government. Citizens have long been way ahead of the legislators and leaders in terms of commitment to a clean environment. Somehow, public officials tend to talk about such things when an election is coming up or when the economy is booming and they feel that we can "afford it."

What they have not yet understood is that Pennsylvania citizens want to honor the state constitution which states: "The people have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania's public natural resources are the common property of all of the people, including generations yet to come. As trustees of these resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and maintain them for the benefits of all the people."

It is time for us to make our views known and our voices heard. The next century will only be as good as our planning for it. Phone 717-772-4770 or log on to <http://www.21stcentury.state.pa.us> and ask to be sent the final report. Ask how you can become involved in the process. Make it clear that you are unhappy that you were not consulted earlier. Let's all work to make the 21st century in Pennsylvania one in which people, plants and animals can live harmoniously together.

## ONLY YESTERDAY



### 60 Years Ago - July 29, 1938 TOLL BETWEEN DALLAS AND NOXEN IS ELIMINATED

A little more than \$350 has been raised by Henry M. Laing Fire Co. in its drive to collect \$1,500 to clear off its debts and to provide for maintenance. Volunteer solicitors will meet tonight in the hose house to make their second report of the campaign.

Thirty five telephone sets in Noxen homes have been converted into dial sets and connected with Harveys Lake exchange, Mike Kuchta, manager of Commonwealth Telephone Co. announced this week. As a result of the changing phones from Centermoreland to the Noxen exchange the former toll charge between Dallas and Noxen has been eliminated and calls from Dallas or Harveys Lake to any of the 35 homes will be free.

### 50 Years Ago - July 30, 1948 LESTER SQUIRE BECOMES LEHMAN PRINCIPAL

Lester B. Squire of Nicholson, assistant supervisor of Wyoming County Schools and a former principal of Lehman Schools was elected principal at a meeting of Lehman School Board on Tues. Squire was one of 15 applicants who applied for the position left vacant by H.O. Hendricks' resignation to become principal of Millersburg School.

The Executive Board of Back Mountain Memorial Library meeting last Tuesday heard Henry Peterson, treasurer, report that receipts from the Library's two day auction will exceed \$4,500. Board voted to buy five U.S. Savings Bonds until conditions are better for expansion. This makes a total of seven bonds held in a special fund by the Library Association to meet any future emergency and growth.

### 40 Years Ago - July 25, 1958 POSTAL STAMP PRICE INCREASED TO 4¢

It will take a four cent stamp to carry your letter next Friday and seven cents instead of six cents if you send it air mail. Postcards will take three cent postage. Anything postmarked before July 31 at midnight will be delivered at the old rate.

Back Mountain Little League All-Stars will clash with a strong Plains nine at Plains this afternoon for the district championship. By virtue of four wins over St. Therese's National, Newport, Kingston and Ashley (last year's district champs), the local lads now go in for the big one. No team in the history of the Back Mountain Little League has gone this far in playoffs and these boys have made the people of the community proud of them.

### 30 Years Ago - Aug. 1, 1968 THE DENDLERS CELEBRATE 64 YEARS TOGETHER

One of the high points of the Aug. 3-4 Jonathan R. Davis Fire Co. Horse Show this weekend will be the awarding of a Shetland pony as a gate prize at 7 p.m. Sunday. Horse Show officials announce that admission tickets are numbered and the winner must be present in order to claim this prize. Other gate prizes will be awarded during the show both Saturday and Sunday.

Mr. and Mrs. George Dendler, will observe their 64th wedding anniversary at their home in Ruggles, Aug. 4. They were married in New York. They have been residents of Ruggles for 58 years.

### 20 Years Ago - July 27, 1978 HARVEYS LAKE TO BUILD RECREATION CENTER

In a meeting last Thursday "continued" from July's official meeting the Harveys Lake Borough Council awarded a contract for construction of a recreation building, received a pair of amendments to the franchise proposal of Back Mountain Cable TV and heard a PennDOT representative discuss the state's plans for eliminating the winter's ice problem.

County wide "reinspection" begun recently by Luzerne County Assessors Office has drawn mixed reviews in the Back Mountain. While the program begun under the direction of Luzerne County Assessor Thomas Garrity has been generally referred to as a reassessment, Garrity emphasized that it is instead merely a "reinspection".

Q. Where do you find the most Back Mountain news and photos each week?  
A. Only in The Dallas Post