

EDITORIALS

New Dallas prison boss makes the right first moves

Ben Varner, the newly-appointed superintendent of the State Correctional Institution at Dallas (SCID) took a first step in the right direction when he said, "We definitely need to mend fences with our neighbors." The statement may carry both a literal and metaphorical meaning, given the recent escape due to faulty and lax security systems.

Varner appears to have moved quickly on the physical side, adding razor wire and having the alarm system checked. His 20 years as a corrections officer give him extra insight into the security demands of a maximum security institution, and may be useful when it comes time to butt heads with state prison administrators who have in the past been more concerned with saving overtime pay than with keeping criminals inside prison walls.

Pat Rusiloski, the main activist in the Citizens' Advisory Committee for SCID, is less than optimistic, though. While condemning the security lapses, she joined State Rep. George Hasay in words of regret that David Larkins, on whose watch the escapes occurred, lost his job just days after the breakout. They are too kind; even if Larkins was not directly responsible for the circumstances leading to the escapes, he must accept the consequences. This is particularly true because the public was misled about the status of electronic security systems that were supposed to replace guards in towers, but had not been fully operational.

We hope the new superintendent will continue to speak and act in a forthright manner about the prison, and will fight for the security measures that are needed to keep the inmates on the right side of the walls.

Taking side of a madman

Suppose your neighbor holed up in his house with a cache of weapons, many of them illegally gained, took sexual advantage of minors who lived with him and killed law enforcement officers when they knocked on his door to investigate. Then, after a few days waiting patiently for him to surrender, when the police tried to force down the door, he set fire to the house, killing himself and everyone inside. Would you be standing in line to defend his "rights" and to pin the blame for his death on the cops? That's about what is happening right now with re-opening of the tragedy in Waco, Texas that claimed the life of David Koresh and his followers.

It may turn out some FBI officials fudged a little when asked about the use of devices that could start a fire, but even so, the ugly image of so many Americans eagerly taking a number to imply wrongdoing by law enforcement — while conveniently forgetting the heinous behavior inside the compound — is more than a little disturbing. We may find out whether such devices were used and whether that information was covered up or simply passed over, but even so, it's hard to side against people confronted by a manipulative madman who obviously had not the slightest concern for the lives of his foolish followers.

Publisher's notebook

Ron Bartizek



Did you hear about the \$1 million club for 2000 elections? The one in which Republican donors are being asked to pledge \$250,000 a year for each year of the four-year election cycle? Oh, there were loud protests that no one was being strong-armed to make a solid commitment, they were just being asked ever so nicely to COME UP WITH A MILLION BUCKS!!

The Democrats, for their part, are veritable pikers, still handing out favors for a measly \$100,000 contribution. They need to get with the program, or they'll go the way of the Whigs.

Then there's the Senator from Kentucky who brazenly warned leaders of big corporations to back off from support of campaign finance reform, a thinly-veiled threat that legislation they favor might not get the same attention if the companies persist in trying to take the biggest bucks out of politics. That story should give us some insight into how perverted our politics has become. How often have you seen big companies asking that their influence be reduced?

The good Senator screamed loudly that restrictions on political donations stifle the "free speech" of the donors, and has said in the past that there shouldn't be any limit on campaign cash. Apparently, in his universe free speech is a commodity available on the open market to the highest bidder. I wonder when's the last time he entertained working families without health insurance. . .oops! It's the other way around, you get attention if you entertain him.

Unfortunately, there's probably no shortage of corporate "titans" who lack the scruples to limit their influence, since they feel they're entitled to all kinds of special privileges anyway, like annual pay 400 times that of their average employee.

My guess is the system will have to collapse before anything meaningful is done to reform political influence peddling, and even then the law of unintended consequences may prevail. Remember the birth of Political Action Committees? Along with the \$1,000 per person cap, they were meant to limit how much money an individual could put in the pockets of elected officials. The result has been "soft money," which has proven to be a cure that is worse than the disease.



Waiting for Van Gogh. Photo by Monica Marzani.

The economic viewpoint



Howard Grossman

The Millennium is around the corner; are we prepared for our future? In parts of Northeastern Pennsylvania so much is happening in the way of thinking about the future the answer can be given in very positive terms. There is more "visioning" underway in Northeastern Pennsylvania than any other region of the United States. Ten visioning projects have been completed in various stages of implementation or are in the early stages of initiation. This represents an exciting opportunity and positive accomplishment unlike any seen in the history of the region. Having experienced the most startling regional economic comeback in the history of the United States, Northeastern Pennsylvania is now readying its capabilities, assets, and attempting to correct its problems to be highly competitive in the 21st century.

On the other hand, there are certain areas of the region which need to take another step along the corridor of the millennium. Places where growth has occurred in substantial numbers in relation to the original population should join together through inter-municipal cooperation and begin the process of millennium planning.

Planning is not a bad word. In fact, most corporations that are highly successful have injected and invested in long-range planning beyond the imagination of most governments and non-profit organizations. Non-profit organizations, which at the minimum begin to look at how they serve customers, where they fit into the overall economic community, and where they can provide value added to the quality of life of a community, area, or region are those that are most successful. Governments, while expressing great interest in planning, sometimes disinvest in this factor and do not fully develop their capabilities and therefore may have some difficulty in surviving well into the next century.

The growth areas of Northeast-

Millennium thinking

ern Pennsylvania continue to be geographic places such as the Back Mountain of Luzerne County, Mountaintop, the Abingtons of Lackawanna County and most importantly, much of the Pocono Mountains. The Pocono Mountains represent the fastest growing set of counties in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. While population continues to decline in urban areas such as Scranton, Wilkes-Barre, Hazleton, Pittston, Carbondale, and other similar locations, there are exceptions to the rule which demonstrate that modern land use, zoning, subdivision regulations, planned unit development, and other techniques need to be applied to the creation of a growth management and development management strategy system which could benefit this and future generations.

As each year goes by, these areas of Northeastern Pennsylvania lose time and therefore, are not keeping a promise to future generations. There is a need for a considerable dose of long range thinking and planning by cooperative venturing between and among local governments, school districts, other outside entities such as county government, the region, state government, and to the extent feasible, the federal government. Additionally, the private and non-profit sectors need to be heavily involved in whatever planning takes place between and among these types of entities. Along the Back Mountain corridor, for example, there are at least eight municipalities that should be carrying out planning opportunities on a collective and cooperative basis. In the Abingtons, or the Clarks Summit-Clarks Green area of Lackawanna County, at least five or six municipalities should be joining together to accomplish long range planning.

There is one example which has some validity to these suggestions. When the Lackawanna Valley Industrial Highway was planned as a major investment of close to \$500 million along a 17-mile stretch between Scranton and Carbondale, substantial amounts of planning took place in what are defined as the mid-valley communities. At least 12 municipalities invested in long range planning activities. While it is clear that not every plan is implemented, that not every recommendation is followed, the opportunity to think

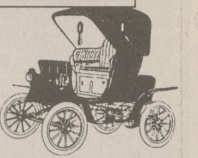
about an area's, county's, or region's future is critical. The investment of project activities in planning and community development in the Lackawanna Valley Industrial Highway example are strongly evident as key indicators of a better tomorrow.

As land use and growth management dominate the priorities in Pennsylvania, these issues will become more dramatic in the growth areas of Northeastern Pennsylvania. It is expected that within the next year or two, new legislative enactments will occur but this cannot be successful unless municipalities work together to accomplish the appropriate use of land and growth management techniques. Literally, to paraphrase President Abraham Lincoln, "We are engaged in a great Civil War, testing whether that community or any community will long endure." This is as true in Northeastern Pennsylvania as it is in any other part of the country. It is particularly evident in the astonishing growth occurring in the Pocono Mountains. In 1992, EDCNP, after a two and one half year study, published a report titled, "Land Under Siege: The Search for Managed Growth in Northeastern Pennsylvania." Many recommendations were made relative to the kinds of actions necessary to control and manage growth. Unfortunately, many of these recommendations still remain to be implemented.

Perhaps what is needed is a series of seminars and workshops targeted to the growth areas of the region which would bring specialists together to discuss ways by which these special communities within the region can "long endure." As the dawn of the new millennium approaches, it would be a wonderful opportunity to have growth area planning occur across the region within each of the municipal governments identified as being a targeted growth community. This would enable the political and citizen leadership to develop a planning process which will stand the test of the millennium time and be an important contributor to the generations whose future depends upon the decisions made in 1999 and the years following.

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

ONLY YESTERDAY

70 Years Ago - Sept. 14, 1929
CAUSE OF POOR WATER SERVICE INVESTIGATED

Residents of Parrish Heights seriously inconvenienced at times during the past two or three years by poor water service have recently put into circulation a petition asking for an investigation of Dallas/Shavertown Water Co. service by Pennsylvania Public Service Commission. A new pump was installed at the Heights well about one year ago, but even with this improvement in equipment, water has been cut off frequently during the summer months. Heights residents claim that there is plenty of water in the well and that faulty equipment is the cause of shut-offs.

60 Years Ago - Sept. 13, 1939
GOV. JAMES VISITS AREA

Gov. Arthur H. James will head the list of distinguished guests who will be here Saturday to participate in the program which will mark the dedication of the new \$150,000 Luzerne Boulevard. Gov. James will be the principal speaker at a dinner at Irem Country Club.

50 Years Ago - Sept. 16, 1949
KINGSTON TWP. TEACHERS PETITION SCHOOL BOARD

Two petitions asking for the reinstatement of James A. Martin as supervising principal were presented to Kingston Township School Board Monday. The first signed by Kingston Township Teacher's Association expressed the confidence of the faculty in Martin, and voiced the fear that absence of a supervising principal will endanger the school's effort to obtain a satisfactory rating from the Middle States Association of Secondary Schools. The second bearing signature of 111 residents of the township, protested the removal of Martin from his former post. The position of supervising principal was abolished six weeks ago, the Board giving as its reason decreased pupil enrollment.

You could get - Hams, 65¢ lb.; roasting chickens, 49¢ lb.; flour, 25-lb. bag \$1.79; McIntosh apples, 3 lbs., 25¢; cabbage, 5¢ lb.; green peppers, 2 lbs., 19¢; Supreme Bread, lg. loaf, 13¢.

40 Years Ago - Sept. 17, 1959
PETERSON RECEIVES AM. LEGION SERVICE AWARD

Henry W. Peterson, received the American Legion's Distinguished Service Award before a capacity crowd attending the second annual Americanism Night of Daddow-Isaacs Post #672 and its auxiliary Friday night. The award was in recognition of Peterson's service to his fellowmen as a churchman, president of Dr. Henry H. Laing Fire Co., long time treasurer of Back Mountain Memorial Library, originator of Back Mountain Halloween Parade and ardent worker for a half dozen other community projects.

30 Years Ago - Sept. 18, 1969
DALLAS BUDGET PROHIBITS EXPANDING BUS SERVICE

"We can't do anything because our budget will not permit it, it's as simple as that." With these words Dallas School Director Andrew Kozemchak, chairman of the district's transportation committee, dismissed any possibility of busing students inside the one and one half mile radius prescribed by law, a question which has been occupying minds of many Dallas Borough residents since school opened nearly two weeks ago. His statement followed both a turbulent school board meeting Sept. 9 and a joint meeting Friday evening of the school board and a special committee established to work out feasible solutions to the transportation quandary.

20 Years Ago - Sept. 13, 1979
ELDERLY APARTMENT COMPLEX PLANNED

Congressman Daniel J. Flood announced Tuesday that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has approved an application to construct 120 apartments for the elderly at a site near College Misericordia. The Congressman said the project is sponsored by Ecumenical Enterprises Inc., a non-profit religious affiliated corporation.

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Q: Where do you find the most Back Mountain news, week after week?

A: Only in The Dallas Post, the Back Mountain's newspaper since 1889.