

EDITORIALS

If we don't plan now, we'll pay a stiff price later

For years, informed voices have argued that the community of the Back Mountain needs to do a more effective job of planning for the rush of population and construction that is transforming the region. They have raised concerns about water supplies, loss of scenic vistas, recreation, traffic and more. While there have been occasional examples of local government responding to these issues, they have never been examined in a comprehensive manner, with all municipalities and affected constituencies represented. Judging by some recent events, we'd better hurry up and face these challenges, or they will soon overwhelm us. Think about it:

- Now that the Dallas School District has completed its "campus," it has no need for the land which the Little League fields occupy. And the temptation to get millions of dollars in revenue from a prime commercial tract may be too much to resist.

- A moratorium on new building permits is being imposed in parts of Jackson Township, because the sewage system is at capacity. Other towns aren't far behind.

- Commercial development is picking up steam, and some presently open fields could very well become strip shopping centers in just a few months or years.

- Even with all this, interest in moving to the Back Mountain remains high among newcomers to northeast Pennsylvania, and those who have lived in the valleys for generations.

For the most part, this is good news. More population can add to the prosperity of local businesses and to the diversity of the community. But it must be harnessed, or it will undermine the very features that attract people to the area. At the same time, more people put pressure on natural resources, and on social bonds. Youth sports programs already burst at the seams, with playing fields and other recreation areas wholly inadequate for the demand. Yes, forward-thinking individuals have begun to plan a regional recreation ground, but that project is stalled as organizers try to line up funding. Meanwhile, the demand grows.

It is impossible for each borough or township to meet these challenges on its own. The pressures are too widespread, and fluid — if one town moves to rein in runaway growth, it will simply slide over to the next.

Because we are all affected by what happens in the town next door — and the one next to that — it is critical that the towns of the Back Mountain get together to plan our future, while we still have the chance to exert some control. They don't need to wait until some as yet unknown organization creates the mechanism; surely our leading officials could approach the Luzerne County Planning Commission and ask them to help set up a framework in which to develop a plan. We'd better start soon, because it won't be long before it's too late.

Publisher's notebook

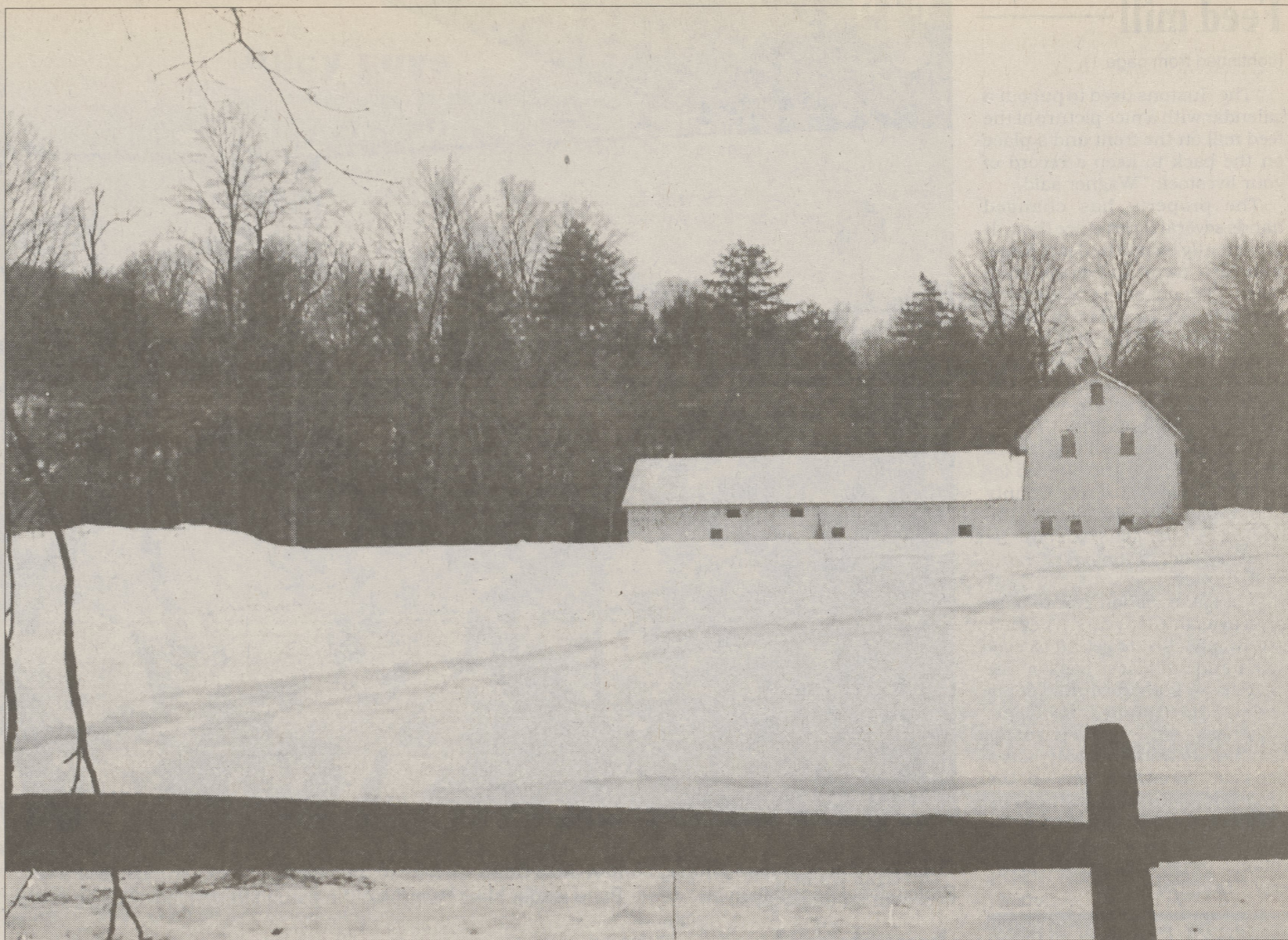
Ron Bartizek



I've been inspired by Ken Griffey Jr.'s decision to give up so much to be close to home and his family. If you don't know what I'm talking about, here it is in a nutshell: Griffey, perhaps the best baseball player of the present era, was unhappy playing in Seattle. I don't know whether the cause was the team's inability to get to the World Series, the lousy weather, or the deep fences in the team's new ballpark, but he told his employer of 10 years that he wanted to be traded. Players with his tenure can do that, and become "free agents," stepping up on the auction block to see who will bid the most for their services. Before letting him go, the Mariners offered Griffey \$148 million over eight years, but he turned it down. Rumor has it he could have garnered an even bigger contract with either of the New York teams, but the superstar said he'd rather go home to Cincinnati, where he grew up and where his father, a top-flight player in his own right, is a coach. So, Junior put family considerations ahead of money and signed for "only" \$117 million over nine years. That, of course, is just his salary for hitting and catching baseballs part of the year. He's likely to earn at least as much endorsing french fries and sneakers.

Anyway, Junior's sacrifice got me to thinking. I grew up in Connecticut, and pangs of nostalgia strike now and then. You know, wondering if the old fishing hole is still there, not getting to see family members except at holidays, that sort of stuff. So, I've decided to give this new mindset a whirl. I want it known in the newspaper community that I'd like to be "traded" from my present job, rewarding as it is, so that I can be closer to family and old friends. And I'm willing to make an even greater sacrifice than Junior. Instead of just under \$13 million a year, I'll sign a nine-year contract for . . . only \$13 million total. Potential employers take note: That's like getting eight years free!

You might ask: Why would anyone want to pay that jerk so much money. Well, let me tell you. In recent years, Junior has been the second or third leading home run hitter in baseball. Well, in recent years, The Dallas Post has been voted the second or third best overall newspaper of its size in the nation. I think that's a pretty even comparison. Need more support? Junior's got about 10 years left in his career. So do I. And I'll assure you of one other thing: I won't hang around past my time, like Dan Marino has done. Nope, when you decide I'm not up to the job anymore, just turn me out to pasture . . . with a check for the balance.



White barn, snow-covered fields along Hillside Rd. Photo by Charlotte Bartizek.

LETTERS

PG Energy land sale raise serious questions

Editor,
On February 3, Southern Union, the new parent company of PG Energy reported the sale of 40,000 acres of undeveloped land for \$12.3 million. As noted in the Times Leader article of February 10, 28,000 of those acres were "once classified by the PUC as watershed land set aside to protect the areas water supply." Since the agreement specified that the identity of the buyers remain secret, we can only speculate on their identity and their intentions.

This sale is major concern to all the citizens of Northeastern, Pennsylvania and the former shareholders of Pennsylvania Enterprises. (As a result of the sale, you are probably owners of Southern Union Stock.) The consumers and citizens must be concerned about the preservation of woodlands and watershed. The shareholders must ask if Southern Union acted in a financially responsible manner in selling a valuable property asset at \$300 per acre. The loss of this asset is not

only a financial blow but is also of potential grave environmental concern.

Since the buyers choose to remain anonymous, it only raises our level of concern. At this sale price, it is doubtful that they will lose money. George Lindemann, the CEO of Southern Union became a billionaire by buying and selling companies. It is doubtful he would have made this decision without something to gain. Who are the people that may profit at the expense of so many? Did they

have an appropriate arms-length relation to the former board of Pennsylvania Enterprises? These are only some of the questions that should be answered. I strongly urge you to contact your local and county officials and press for answers. Shareholders should contact George Yankowski at Southern Union (512-370-8305). We deserve answers. We deserve better.

Paul Niezgodza,
Jackson Township

Red Cross says thanks to donors who restored blood bank

Editor,
American Red Cross Blood Services, Northeastern Pennsylvania Region, would like to say thank you to everyone who responded to the recent plea for blood.

On Thursday, February 4, the blood supply in northeastern Pennsylvania hit a critical low point, forcing one of the 41 hospitals serviced by our Wilkes-Barre blood center to delay or cancel elective surgeries. The American Red Cross took this message to the public, asking for their help.

I am happy to report the response to our plea has been wonderful. Ten days later the blood

supply has come back up to comfortable levels and hospital order for blood products are being filled.

This would not have happened without the help of the terrific people who reside within our region. They realized the seriousness of our situation—the plight of the patients in our hospitals who need blood and they responded. Most of our blood drives met or exceeded their targets. Many times our blood donors faced a long wait due to the overwhelming response. They waited, and we are so grateful for their patience.

The emergency is over, for now. But no one knows what winter storms are still to be faced this year. And winter storms can seriously hamper our ability to collect enough blood to service the patients in our hospitals. The need for blood knows no season. Please help us to avoid another emergency. When you see the American Red Cross bloodmobile is coming to your area, please come and give blood. Our patients — your family, friends and neighbors — are counting on you.

Anyone who is at least 17 years old, who weighs at least 105

pounds, and is in general good health may give blood. If you have any questions about giving blood, or want to know when the bloodmobile will visit your area, please call 1-800-GIVE-LIFE.

Again, thank you to all who helped during this recent appeal for blood donors, especially the media who so willingly helped get our message to the public. Blood donors are the true heroes of northeastern Pennsylvania.

Chris Rodgers,
CEO, American Red Cross
Blood Services,
Northeastern PA Region.

What's on the Horizon?



Joseph Laver

Note to the reader: The Back Mountain Regional Land Trust is committed to producing one article each month dealing with "green" issues. Each author will be free to express his/her own opinions. Some may deal with land issues but others will deal with air, water, flora or fauna. We wish to provide you with "green" food for thought.

A unique idea and partnership between the Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP) and

'Green' across your TV screen

the Environmental Fund for Pennsylvania (EFP) - the GreenWorks of Pennsylvania Channel - is showing people of our state how they can help in protecting our environment.

For the past three years, EFP Executive Director Tim Schlitzer has produced an award-winning collection of environmental video programming in a television magazine format. Each month a new episode can be seen on 76 cable and public television stations as well as on line at www.greenworkschannel.org/

Stories on GreenWorks deal with issues faced by communities in Pennsylvania and around the world. "GreenWorks taps into the heart of activism - that people are

stimulated into action when something they hold dear is at stake," says Schlitzer.

Some of the shows being broadcast this season include the following topics:

Agricultural issues - "Stewards of the Land," "Air Quality and Health," "Environmental Education for All,"

Governor's Awards - "Pollution Prevention and Energy Efficiency,"

"The Healthy Home," "Erie and its Environment,"

Recycling - "The Can' Film Festival,"

plus "Pennsylvania's Environmental Heritage," "Environments in the City," "Greening our Communities," and "Water and the Way We Live."

GreenWorks Channel producer Christine Melbank has stated: "As GreenWorks Channel grows, users will be able to take advantage of live as well as on-demand programs, contribute their own environmental solutions in video and pictures and participate in programs through e-mail, chat rooms, and conferencing. You will see something new on the GWC almost every day."

Now that we are aware of this resource, we need to contact our cable operators and request that they air GreenWorks at a reasonable hour. Certainly, if you have access to the Internet, check out the on-line version at the address given above.

Joseph Laver is a businessman who lives in Trucksville. He is an active member of the board of Back Mountain Regional Land Trust.

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