

EDITORIALS

Finally, state gets results from National Utilities

The worst may be over for customers of National Utilities, Inc. (NUI). The water company, which at one time was more adept at blaming others for its own failures than at delivering usable water, appears to have responded to demands from the state Public Utilities Commission (PUC) that it shape up in order to ship out. After denying requests for higher rates, the PUC relented on condition that the company clean up its act and look for someone more responsible to take it over. The latter condition is still unanswered, but customers in the Oak Hill section of Lehman, who suffered as much as anyone under NUI's former management, report that service has improved markedly.

We urge the PUC to keep the pressure on NUI, and not let it slide back into its old ways, which resulted in sloppy repairs, dirty water and denial of responsibility for leaks that often were blamed on imaginary springs. NUI has shown that it will respond positively when given no other choice. It would be wise to keep things on that level until it consistently shows an ability to serve customers as they have a right expect.

Decent fares more important than new terminal at airport

The folks who manage the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton International Airport are disappointed that \$60 million they want for expansion seems to be slow in arriving. They want to build a new terminal, parking lots and access roads to the field, but the Ridge administration, which is swamped by similar requests from around the state, is slow to come up with the cash.

County commissioners, who keep a hand in the airport's operation, claim expansion is needed to attract more jobs to the area. We've heard that one before, and don't buy it. As with so many other amenities, the usual course is that demand drives supply, not the other way around.

If the commissioners want to spark economic expansion while helping out ordinary folks, they should direct their effort at attracting airlines that will offer reasonably priced flights from Avoca. As things now stand, the airport is doing less business than it did in past years, and no amount of bells and whistles will turn that around if less costly alternatives are a drive of an hour or two away.

Publisher's notebook

Ron Bartizek



Coastal snobs, one of which I confess to being, will be surprised to hear that the middle of the country has more to show for itself than amber waves of grain and cowflops. I can speak with authority, having just returned from a few days in Omaha, Nebraska. You can't get any deeper in the heartland than that!

What did I see in this old cowtown, you might ask. The answer is, plenty of interesting sights of both the natural and man-made varieties. For starters, Omaha has an outstanding public zoo. Or so I'm told. I didn't get the chance to go there, although my son did and he said it's outstanding. Or did he say, "Sweet?" Anyway, about 30 seconds after being introduced to an Omahan, he or she is sure to remark, "You've got to see the zoo, it's great." I did, however, visit an adjunct to the place where they keep monkeys, lions and parrots — a "safari" through a segment of grassland where the zoo maintains herds of elk and bison (or buffalo, if you insist, although incorrectly), wolves, antelope, sandhill cranes and other denizens of the plains. Feeling a bit like a tourist in "Jurassic Park, I observed that bison vary greatly in size, from the equivalent of a guernsey to the big daddy of the herd, who the narrator on our tour said stood more than 6' tall at the shoulder. I can't vouch for that, since the behemoth never stood up, but it was easy to see that he towered over his harem.

Not far from the safari is the Strategic Air Command Museum, a 2-year-old facility that houses dozens of aircraft from the cold war period. It's most impressive display is the SR-71 Blackbird spy plane, the fastest jet aircraft ever built. How's 56 minutes from California to Washington DC sound?

Our area could learn a little from the city of Omaha, especially the way they've developed the "Old Market," an area of formerly rundown warehouses and stores that has been turned into a lively center for dining, shopping and people watching. A couple of blocks away, a major business firm has developed a waterfront park area with boat rides on the Missouri River and frequent outdoor concerts. Sound vaguely like a step Wilkes-Barre or Scranton could take?

Your news is welcome

The Dallas Post welcomes submissions about Back Mountain people and events. To have the greatest likelihood of publication, items should be received at our office no later than the Friday prior to each issue. Items will be accepted Mondays, although much of the paper is already assembled by that time. Send or bring items to: The Dallas Post, 607 Main Road, P.O. Box 366, Dallas, PA 18612. Our normal business hours are 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

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Ronald A. Bartizek
PUBLISHER

Charlotte E. Bartizek
ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER
OFFICE MANAGER

Ken Brocius
ADVERTISING ACCT. EXEC

Bill Goodman
REPORTER

Ruth Proietto
PRODUCTION MANAGER

Joanna Cease
OFFICE/TYPIST/CLASSIFIEDS



Natural textures. Photo by Charlotte Bartizek.

LETTERS

Library auction was success thanks to volunteers, and you

Editor:

Having successfully completed the 54th Annual Back Mountain Memorial Library Auction, we would like to publicly thank the many volunteers that helped to make this happen.

We would especially like to thank the Dallas Borough Coun-

cil, the Dallas Police Department, the Kingston Township Public Works Department and the Kingston Township Supervisors for their excellent help and cooperation in this endeavor. The Dallas Rotary and Dallas Kiwanis, as always, came to our rescue. The Luzerne County Community

Service workers this year were exceptional, as were the help from all the volunteers that manned the booths, and the scouts that ran the children's auction.

Finally, we would like to thank the thousands of people who attended and participated in this most worthwhile community func-

tion -- without you we and the library could not be sustained. Thank you all and we hope to have you participate next year for the 55th.

Joseph Stager & Ernest Ashbridge
Co-Chairmen of the 54th Back Mountain Library Auction.

What's on the Horizon?



Sam Merrill

This is a monthly column written by members of the North Branch Land Trust, which is headquartered in Trucksville.

Some of the most valuable aspects contributing to the quality of life in the Back Mountain are the undeveloped areas — the areas of woodland, field, and stream corridors that constitute natural areas. These open spaces afford scenic views of unbroken woods or farmland — green and lush in the summer and snow filled in the winter — that give the area its semi-rural character.

Yet, new houses and developments are eating into these open spaces month by month, cutting away at the very thing that motivates many of the new residents to move to the Back Mountain and older residents who enjoy the area to stay here. In particular, new housing development, dutifully following current zoning regulations, partition each tract

Cluster housing makes good use of land

of land entirely into house lots leaving no unbroken open spaces.

Fortunately, there are alternatives. Communities across Pennsylvania realize that they can preserve open spaces and natural resources at the same time that they achieve development goals.

An answer lies in a different point of view about what zoning and subdivision ordinances are intended to accomplish. Currently a township might zone land as A-1 (minimum 2.5 acre lot-size), R-1 (minimum 15,000 sq. ft. or about 1/3 acre lot-size), etc. If, for example, a tract of land is zoned A-1, this means that each house lot must be at least 2.5 acres in size. Typically, a developer chops the entire area of buildable land in a tract into house lots, each of about 2.5 acres. While this plan ensures low-density housing, it leaves no unbroken open spaces.

Alternatively, clustering the houses within the subdivision leaves the remainder of the tract as unbroken open space, which can be used for a system of trails and recreation such as a ball field, etc. To permit this possibility, zoning ordinances need to be more flexible, benefiting both developer and township.

Suppose a developer wishes to cluster a group of homes, leaving large areas of open, undivided

land — a plan not permissible in an A-1 zone because of the 2.5 acre minimum. Rather than rezone such a tract to

R-1, which would in principle permit two or three houses per acre throughout the tract, a development known as a conservation subdivision can be permitted.

For example, in a tract consisting of 40 acres of buildable land (which would support a yield of 16 single-family dwellings at 2.5 acres per lot), the 16 dwellings could be clustered within a conservation subdivision with lots of 1.25 acres each, leaving the remaining 20 acres undeveloped and held in common. In general, *Growing Greener, A Conservation Planning Workbook for Municipal Officials in Pennsylvania* (Natural Lands Trust, 1998) recommends that overall tract density rather than lot-size be the principle that guides development in the various zones.

It is important that the status of the open space conserved in these developments be maintained through a permanent conservation easement. Such an easement might be managed by a land trust or by a homeowners' association. Successful developers of conservation subdivisions have found that most buyers pre-

fer homes in attractive park-like settings and that such homes sell faster at premium prices and appreciate more in value even though the house lots in a conservation subdivision are smaller. For example, developments built around a golf course are attractive whether or not most residents play golf.

Because conservation of undeveloped land is advantageous to the public, townships might consider incentives. They could allow additional dwellings if at least 50 percent of the buildable land is left permanently as open space. This 50 percent left as open space would be in addition to any non-buildable wetlands or steep-slope areas or areas required for streets or utility easements. Although a developer would still have the right to carve up all buildable land into 2.5 acre building lots, an incentive would permit developers and property owners to derive more revenue while at the same time encouraging the placement of houses in compact units. Thus, the residents could find more sense of neighborhood and community as well as jointly use the commonly held land.

Sam Merrill is a professor in the mathematics and computer science department at Wilkes University, and a member of the Kingston Twp. Planning Commission.

ONLY YESTERDAY



70 Years Ago - July 25, 1930 \$800,000 SPENT ON "SAFETY INSURANCE"

More than \$800,000 had been invested in "Safety Insurance" the previous year by the Pennsylvania Department of Highways, according to Samuel Eckels, Chief Engineer, who announced that 267 miles of guard fence had been erected along dangerous points on the state highways during the year.

St. Therese's Church held its fourth annual picnic at Fernbrook Park. The event was well known for its delicious chicken dinner and clam bake.

60 Years Ago - July 26, 1940 FIRE HYDRANTS WANTED IN DALLAS

Efforts being made to secure fire hydrants for Dallas were outlined by Harry L. Ohlman before the Dallas Rotary Club. Mr.

Ohlman headed a committee appointed by the Dr. Henry M. Laing Fire Company in Dallas, which had been conferring with the borough council and the Dallas-Shavertown Water Company in the proposal to construct pipe lines that would carry enough water for fire protection. He explained the savings that would come to local property owners through reduced fire insurance rates as a result of improved protection.

Mr. and Mrs. Olin H. Gordon, of Pikes Creek, celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary on Saturday, July 20, with an open house for relatives and friends.

50 Years Ago - July 28, 1950 DALLAS ON ALERT

America's expanding military program made itself felt in Dallas as army and navy reservists received alert and standby notices and three received orders to report for duty. Most of those ordered to duty were electronics technician's mates, electronic mates, radiomen, ship's cooks, water tenders and ships fitters. A local naval official stated that every man in the reserve was subject to recall to active duty and that within the next three months a large percentage of reservists could expect to be called.

40 Years Ago - July 28, 1960 POLICE START TO USE TWO-WAY RADIO

Police departments were trying to unite Back Mountain communities with a two-way radio. The service had proven to be invaluable in other communities and was expected to result in better service to the residents, and would greatly aid in times of Civil Defense, fire calls, ambulance calls, police calls and any other emergencies. To put the service into operation in Jackson Township, three units were required, one each for the Police Chief's car and home and one for the Assistant Police Chief's car. The total cost was estimated to be \$500.

You could get: Porterhouse steaks, 79¢/lb.; honeydew melons, 49¢; Velveeta, 2lb. loaf, 75¢; Ideal grape juice, 24 oz. bottle, 29¢; Strawberries, 2 16 oz. pkgs., 55¢; Keebler fig bars, 16 oz. pkg., 39¢.

30 Years Ago - July 30, 1970 CAR CRASHES INTO BEAUTY PARLOR

A vehicle driven by a Dallas resident went out of control and demolished the front steps of the Beatrice Flaherty Beauty Shop in Shavertown. Kingston Township police reported that the vehicle

was traveling on Route 309 in the passing lane when the driver applied the brakes and lost control of the car. Skid marks ran for 249 feet, crossing the center line to the bank on the other side. Skid marks then ran an additional 54 feet up the embankment to the steps of the beauty parlor. The driver and passenger were taken to Nesbitt Memorial Hospital but were not admitted as patients. Damage to the beauty parlor steps was estimated at \$300. Damages to the car, a Corvair sedan, were estimated to be \$700.

20 Years Ago - July 24, 1980 STUDENTS HAVE NEW REQUIREMENTS TO GRADUATE

Dallas students, starting with the class of 1983, were now required to have 15 credits to graduate, instead of the 13 credits that were previously needed. Each extra credit was the equivalent of a full, year-long course. Additionally, every student was now required to take English in their senior year. Officials explained that the district wanted to avoid putting students in the position of having substantially completed their credit requirements by the end of the junior year, a situation that sometimes led to reduced interest in school during the final year.