

Business Fair spotlights local services

Business people and the general public are invited to the first Business Fair and Card Exchange sponsored by the Back Mountain Business & Professional Association (BMBPA).

The event is designed to showcase local businesses and to provide opportunities for networking among exhibitors and attendees in a relaxed setting.

Twenty or more businesses will display their products and services Thursday, Oct. 26, from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at Stax & Co. restaurant in the Twin Stacks Center. The BMBPA member businesses will set up displays in the "Natona Room," adjacent to the main dining area. Complimentary hors d'oeuvres and soft drinks will be provided and a cash bar

will be available. There is no admission charge.

The businesses will offer door prizes, such as a stadium blanket, matching Thermos and canvas duffle bag from Pritchard Insurance; two seats on a shopping bus trip to the King of Prussia mall from Travel Junction; a 7" freshwater pearl bracelet from Ochman Coins & Jewelry, or a 1/4 page ad from The Dallas Post. Many free "goodies" will be available from exhibitors.

Major sponsors of the event are Stax & Co., Grange National Bank, The Dallas Post, and the Overbrook restaurant, which will also provide entertainment by "Windfall." Exhibitors include: Travel Junction, Lewith & Freeman Real Estate, Mailboxes Etc.,

Valentine's, The Dallas Post, TeleMedia, Grange Bank, the Overbrook, Ochman Coins & Jewelry, First Federal Bank, Wyoming Valley Abstract, Designs by Donnelly, Pritchard Insurance, TRR & Associates, Penn State Wilkes-Barre, First Federal Bank, Mercy Center, Stax & Co. and the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce.

Only two display spaces are still available. Any business that is not presently a BMBPA member may join the association for 2001 at this time by paying the \$75 annual dues, and may become an exhibitor by paying the \$50 fee.

For more information or to make a reservation, call Ron Bartizek at 675-5211.

Medics

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Life Support) and ALS inner-facilities (transportation between hospitals) provider. In the last two years they have also become regular ALS providers as well, and operate what are referred to as MICUs — Mobile Intensive Care Units, which provide pre-hospital ALS. Despite the company's success, Berlew says, "We're still the mom-and-pop ambulance service — you can call us any time and talk to the owners."

While they are fully capable of responding to ALS calls, TransMed primarily transports patients to and from institutions such as hospitals and nursing homes. "We probably have the largest number of skilled facilities in this area," Berlew said. They also do para-transports, or the transporting of wheelchair-bound patients.

When Wyoming Valley Health Care System announced in September that it was getting rid of its paramedic service due to financial losses, it also stated that it would be transferring its ALS services to American Patient Transport Systems, a Hazleton-based company WVHCS felt was, of the best transport services bidding, the best available option. (See separate article.)

APTS has apparently not made arrangements to meet with any of the Back Mountain ambulance companies thus far. APTS General Manager Dave Fatula was out of town and unavailable for comment.

Hazleton company has had run-ins with local volunteers

They've spent more in fighting us than they'll earn in fees.

Howard DeLaRue
President, West Hazleton Community Ambulance Association

American Patient Transport Systems (APTS), to which Wyoming Valley Health Care System (WVHCS) has chosen to transfer its Advanced Life Support (ALS) services, was said by WVHCS to have 11 years of experience under its belt. William Fuchs, Interim President and CEO of WVHCS, is on record in a September 27 press release touting WVHCS as having a "a long history of operating exceptional patient transport services."

In actuality, APTS has been in existence as American Patient Transport Systems since April of 2000, when it was bought by Carmen J. Maffei, District Justice for Exeter, Wyoming, and West Pittston boroughs. Prior to that it was known for 10 years as Hazleton Area Transfer Service, and was owned by Lawrence Sidari.

At the time Maffei bought HATS on April 10, he was quoted by several sources as having said that he hoped to cooperate with the volunteer ambulance companies in the community. "We're looking for harmony," Maffei said. In the past, HATS had been involved in disputes with the West Hazleton Community Ambulance Association (WHCAA) over placement on the West Hazleton Borough's call list. WHCAA, which has been in existence since 1954, underwent an internal shakeup in 1998 that resulted in a loss of efficiency in responding to calls. HATS stepped in to become first on the borough's call list, while WHCAA was bumped to fourth. By 1999 WHCAA had reorganized, regrouped, and substantially cleaned up its act, but HATS refused to yield, and convinced the Borough Council to keep it in its place as primary BLS provider for the borough.

One of APTS's first orders of business was to threaten to sue the Borough of West Hazleton "for breach of contract, seeking all damages available by law" if the Borough Council terminated its agreement with HATS/APTS for call-out procedures and reinstated "West Hazleton Community Am-

bulance Association as the primary provider of Basic Life Support Services on a full time basis," to quote from an April 13 letter to the West Hazleton Borough Council by David S. Fatula, General Manager of HATS and currently of APTS. He added that "In addition, we will pursue a claim against the West Hazleton Ambulance Association for tortious [sic] interference with a contractual relationship."

Next APTS ran an advertisement in the Hazleton *Standard Speaker* on June 10, attempting to discredit the West Hazleton Community Ambulance Association and promote itself. It began: "The West Hazleton Ambulance Association is squandering your \$\$\$ and trust!!!" and ended with a coupon to "clip and mail with no money. Register like hundreds of other West Hazleton residents have. Register with American Patient Transport Systems ('APTS')." The advertisement ran during WHCAA's annual fund drive and according to one of the WHCAA volunteers, was also mailed to the residents of West Hazleton. The year before, WHCAA had netted over \$17,000 in donations; after the advertisement, their total for that year was \$259, officials of the department said.

By June 16, APTS had slapped WHCAA with a lawsuit that nobody, including WHCAA, seemed to understand the rationale behind. To date they have neither dropped the suit nor given a full explanation of it. "We don't even know why we're being sued," said Howard "Barry" DeLaRue, President of the WHCAA last week. DeLaRue said the whole thing made no sense. "They've spent more in fighting us than they'll earn in fees."

New bus contracts too much, director says

By **BILL GOODMAN**
Post Correspondent

LEHMAN - After months of delays, the Lake-Lehman board of school directors awarded contracts to the district's transportation providers. The board voted to approve five year contracts for all major providers.

Back Mountain Transit Co., Inc. will receive a daily rate of \$4,553.61 for busing services. Back Mountain Transit was formed when Barrall Equipment Co. purchased Slimak and Sutton Transportation. The two companies had worked for the district for years. At the meeting, the board formally acknowledged the merger.

The board discussed the reasoning behind significant increases for the car/van providers. The new payments to the biggest car and van providers are about \$200,000 per year. Over the next five years, the increases would bring income to where car and van drivers for other districts are now. Board member Angelo DeCesaris presented his own analysis of the numbers provided by the business office. He said the increases amount to 90 percent over the next five years, or 3.7 mills. Decesaris said his analysis would be the minimum impact the raises would have. "If someone can justify this to me, I'd like

"It seems like it's way too much, but we've grossly underpaid them."

C.J. Boytin
School director

to hear it," he said. "Can we afford this?"

"That's a philosophical question," said Kathleen Williams, the district's business manager. "The adjustment is long overdue. I think it's fair. We're putting structure to this area of transportation," she said.

"I think we've put this off for too long," said board member C.J. Boytin. "It seems like it's way too much, but we've grossly underpaid them. I think we need to pass this and do it tonight." Boytin said the district would have to make cuts in other areas to avoid a millage increase. Lois Kopcha questioned where those areas would be.

Sandra Dobrowski, one of the school district's car and van providers, addressed the board. "You need to help us out. I can't serve the district in the best possible way if I can't be sure I can keep my vans on the road. The board needs to consider safety issues as well. All we ask is that we be treated fairly." The daily rates for

the car/van drivers ranged from \$89.19 to \$618.18.

With five year contracts in hand, providers will be able to get loans for new vehicles more easily, and plan for the future. They have been working with the board since earlier in year to negotiate the contracts.

Board members DeCesaris, Robert Allardyce, and Lois Kopcha voted against awarding any of the contracts.

In other business: • The board approved plans for the Ross Elementary school even though the costs were above the maximum voted on earlier in the year. The plans amounted to \$1,934,470, more than the original cap of \$1,765,000. Robert Allardyce voted against approval.

• Lois Kopcha asked for a job description of the position of board secretary. "It must be clearly defined before I'll vote on anything." The board recently voted to remove Kathleen Williams as board secretary. Jacqueline Moran was appointed as interim board secretary while a description of the position is created. Moran will earn \$5,600 per year.

• The board heard a letter of resignation from board member Edwin Kern. Gary Miller, president of the board, said Kern had moved outside the region he represented. Kern did not attend the meeting.

"If someone really wants to do the ALS service, we don't want to stand in the way."

Homer Berlew
Trans-Med

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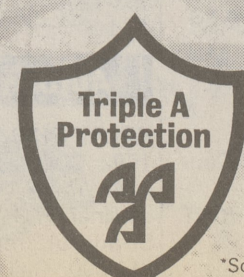
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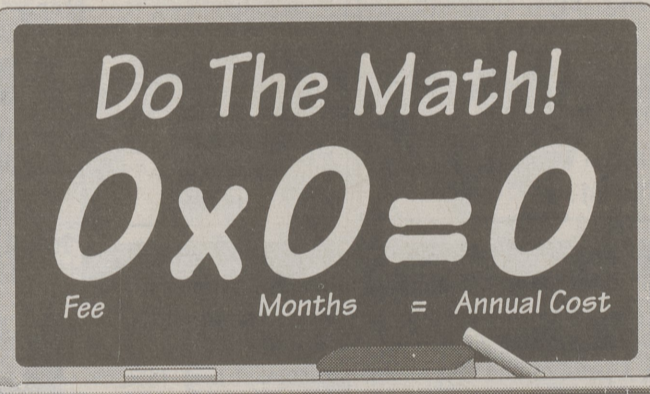
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