

EDITORIAL

Group home operators owe neighbors an explanation and apology

People living the area of Smith Pond Rd. in Jackson Township have every reason to be fearful for their safety in the wake of a violent incident that occurred in recent weeks. Warren Rensa, a resident of a group home there, escaped sometime in the morning of July 21, and allegedly ransacked and attempted to burn down a nearby home and barn. He was captured only after calling 911 from inside the house. This was at least the second time Rensa escaped from the group home; the last time, more than a year ago, he wandered into a baby shower at another nearby home.

This is exactly the kind of incident that worried neighbors and township officials when the group home opened early in 1999. Their concerns were heightened by the wall of silence presented by Human Services Consultants, the agency that operated the home at the time. Federal law allows group homes in residential settings to be considered family dwellings, negating the need for zoning approval. The result is that agencies operating such facilities are not compelled to ask permission to open them, or even to inform neighbors about their plans. Most of the time there is no problem locating benign, moderately retarded or handicapped individuals in these settings, which must be closely supervised. But Rensa may not fit that mold. Sources familiar with him say he can be extremely violent, and some suggest his antics are designed to get him a trip to jail or the confines of a mental institution, which may be the best place for him. Certainly he has shown a tendency to be difficult to control and contain, and a propensity to harm others. Yet he is back at the same home, while out on bail awaiting trial.

Group homes in residential settings have often been a contentious issue where they've been proposed and opened, but most experience with them has been without incident. Maintaining that kind of record, and building acceptance of these useful facilities, depends on operators' commitment to effective security procedures and on their willingness to let neighbors in on how the homes are run, and who lives in them. Step-by-Step, which took over the home on Smith Pond Rd. earlier this year, owes the people put at risk by Warren Rensa a full explanation of how this happened, and what they are doing to see that nothing similar recurs.

Publisher's Notebook

Ron Bartizek



The invisible man of American politics has been sighted. Al Gore began to come out of hiding last week, as a photo of the bearded former Democratic standard bearer appeared in U.S. newspapers. It seems Gore had retreated to Europe to lick the wounds of a contentious and unnecessary loss in last year's presidential race. You remember that, don't you, the one that was decided by the Supreme Court instead of the voters.

Anyway, after several months during which he sashayed around Spain and Italy, the former veep is prepared for re-entry. But aides say before he makes an appearance on domestic soil, the beard will go. I'm sad about that; it seems just as Gore is about to take on a personality all his own his timid political instincts tell him to back off and play the role of straight-laced everyman, if that everyman is a standard-issue company stiff. I marveled during the last campaign at how much Gore resembled a previous occupant of the White House, Ronald Reagan. Didn't seem to do him much good.

Meanwhile, on the GOP side of the political balance, George Bush let slip a comment that probably revealed more than he intended. Queried about recent cutbacks in oil production by OPEC nations, W seemed downright sympathetic to an action that will take money out of the pockets of Americans. "It's very important for there to be stability in a marketplace," Bush said, implying that cartels are a preferred system of private enterprise, at least when oil is involved. Perhaps the President has forgotten his campaign promise to march over to Saudi Arabia and demand that the spigots be opened wide for U.S. consumption.

Along the same lines, you'll undoubtedly be pleased to hear that an energy bill passed by the House contains an estimated \$30 billion in tax breaks for energy producers. Mr. Bush didn't ask for them, but I haven't heard any complaining that "our representatives" tagged them on. The way things are going, you might want to put that tax refund away for a snowy day.

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

The Dallas Post

TIMES LEADER Community Newspaper Group

P.O. BOX 366, DALLAS, PA 18612 • 570-675-5211

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PHOTO BY JIM PHILLIPS

Mike Tomalis pedaled past the Huntsville Golf Club during Sunday's triathlon.

What's on the Horizon?



Xxxxx XXXXXX

by Paul Lumia

(Note: This is the latest in a series of articles submitted by the members of the North Branch Land Trust on conservation or ecological topics.)

I read an interesting article in July 2001 issue of National Geographic the other day titled "Urban Sprawl...The American Dream?" If you get a chance, check it out. If not, I will fill you in on some of the more pertinent points and add a few of my thoughts.

As a long-time resident of this area, I'd like to state where I stand on the issue of development and zoning. In a nutshell, I believe it is a system in disrepair and in need of an overhaul. Let me explain my position.

Our development and zoning

For Better Or For Worse

practices are no different from the majority of communities throughout the United States. We are relying on antiquated zoning laws and development plans to shape and mold our community. The result is just what the National Geographic article discusses, urban sprawl — poor land use practices. Here are some of the facts on urban sprawl according to the National Geographic article.

Seventy million people lived in America's urban centers in 1950 and these regions covered 13,000 square miles. By 1990 the urban/suburban population doubled while the area it consumed quintupled to 60,000 square miles. The fastest growing communities are spreading out at a rate of an acre an hour and some of the biggest urban/suburban areas are larger than the state of Delaware.

Urban Sprawl is chewing up American farmland at a rate of 1.2 million acres a year. If you add to this forest and other undeveloped land, the total goes up to a staggering two million plus acres annually.

Sprawl means more driving, as we need to commute further to

work, school and shopping. More time in the car equates to less time for family, work, play, and a huge cost in fuel and on the environment.

As for the future, without change things will only get worse. We can expect 63 million more people living in the United States by 2025. This increase in population will require 30 million new homes. Most will be single-family detached units built at the existing fringes of suburbia, which of course will only exacerbate the existing problems.

So how does all this affect us? It's simple, we are part of the statistics listed above. Our communities are sprawling out; our farmland and open space are disappearing; our driving times increasing; our free time dwindling; our rural flavor evaporating. What's the answer? What do we do, if anything, to reverse these trends?

The zoning laws and subdivision/development regulations on the books in our communities are antiquated and in desperate need of repair. These tenets are based on outdated laws such as the U.S. Supreme Court decision

in the 1920s that gave legal protection to local governments that pass zoning laws in order to separate different land uses, such as the exclusion of multi-family housing from single-family neighborhoods.

Out of this Supreme Court decision and others like it have grown zoning regulations that encourage a single use for a parcel of land and thus promote a patchwork of different zoning over a larger area of land. Moreover, the majority of land use regulations covering single-family homes require large amounts of land per house without regard to preserving open space, greenways and community recreational areas. All this leads to sprawl and lots of travel time in cars.

To combat this we should be looking to overhaul all our land use laws and regulations. This can happen at the local government level as local officials have the power to make these changes. Rural areas on the fringe of urban centers should work toward establishing open space development plans and mixed use zoning areas in an

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70 Years Ago - August 7, 1931

BOROUGH COUNCIL HOLDS MEETING

A delegation of local citizens representing residents of Baldwin and Parsonage Streets met with borough council and asked that the borough take over the two streets and improve them. The streets will be taken over as soon as residents sign releases. Streets will be cut down, graded and foundations built and a carload of oil is expected soon. Forty eight school districts of the fourth class in Luzerne County will receive \$147,598.01, representing the semi-annual distribution of State aid to assist districts in paying adequate salaries for teachers. School districts in the Back Mountain receiving checks are: Dallas Borough, \$2,312.89; Dallas Township, \$3,649.97; Hunlock Township, \$1,995.58; Lake Township, \$3,079.1; Lake Township, \$3,140.05. William A. Austin, son of Mrs. Adie Austin, of Beaumont, received the Bachelor of Arts degree at the summer commencement exercises of Susquehanna University. In the same class receiving a similar degree was his brother, E.R. Austin, principal of Laurel Run

schools.

60 Years Ago - August 8, 1941

NEW DALLAS-LAKE BOULEVARD TAKING SHAPE

It won't be long before the first of an estimated 78,000 square yards of concrete is poured on the new Dallas-Harveys Lake Highway, according to construction superintendent William Butler of Hazleton. The first broad sweeping curve of the \$400,000 triple-land boulevard is rapidly taking shape. Oldest general practitioner in this region, Dr. Clarence L. Boston of Noxen, dean of Back Mountain physicians, celebrated his 82nd birthday recently. He served the town and countryside for nearly 60 years. Approved this week for four local school districts were payments of \$6,527.92 from the State, balance due since last September on annual State-Aid allocations for student transportation. Dallas township gets \$1,840; Kingston township, \$467.92; Lake Township, \$1,380; and Lehman Township, \$1,840.

50 Years Ago - August 10, 1951

COUNCIL APPROVES BUILDING PERMITS FOR \$29,000 WORTH OF CONSTRUCTION

Building permits totalling \$29,000 were issued by Dallas Borough Council at its meeting in the Library Building. Included is a new Gasoline Service Station to be erected by Atlantic Refining Company at a cost of \$18,000 for land and building on a plot of land opposite and southeast of Oliver's Used Car

Lot on Route 309. For the first time in Back Mountain history, a public school kindergarten will open its doors to the five-year olds in September. Ever since jointure was proposed between Dallas Borough and Kingston Township, the kindergarten has been in the making for children from Shavertown, Trucksville, and Dallas. At the Sandy Beach Drive-In Theatre, some of the shows which played were: "Last of The Buccaneers, in technical, starring Paul Henreid, Karin Booth, and Mary Anderson; "Born Yesterday", starring Judy Holliday, William Holden, and Broderick Crawford; "The Light of Western Stars", starring Victor Jory, Jo Ann Sayers, and Noah Berry Jr.; "Kill The Umpire", starring William Bendix, Una Merkel, and Ray Collins.

40 Years Ago - August 10, 1961

TIGHT SCHEDULE RESULTS FROM WORK STOPPAGE

According to a report given to Dallas school directors by Joseph Hoban, speaking for Lacy, Atherton and Davis, the new school will definitely be ready for occupancy in spite of a strike which stopped workmen for three days last week. Nationwide Insurance was given the contract for student and football insurance. Parents will pay \$2.50 per year for accident protection, and football insurance will be paid by the school. A Harveys Lake dentist and his wife will leave September 8, for Israel. They are Dr. and Mrs. J.G. Tilem who came here from Philadelphia. Dr. Tilem may do some teaching and educational

work there. At your local A & P Market some of the items you could buy: boneless round steak, 79¢ a lb.; whole chicken 25¢ a lb.; Duncan Hines cake mixes 3 pkgs, 95¢; seedless grapes, 1lb., 19¢; bananas, 1lb., 10¢; peanut butter, 24-oz jar, 59¢; 1 dozen large eggs, 57¢; San Giorgio spaghetti, 1lb pkg., 23¢; white bread, 2 1lb. loaves, 39¢.

30 Years Ago - August 12, 1971

FIRST LAY DEAN BEGINS DUTIES AT MISERICORDIA

Dr. Marvin J. LaHood began his duties as academic dean of College Misericordia. He is the first lay dean in the local college's history, and will be responsible for overseeing the academic programs of the college. Dr. LaHood succeeds Sister Regina Kelly, RSM, in the position of academic dean. She has announced her attended resignation earlier in the year.

Terry L. Hartman, son of Mayor and Mrs. Stephen F. Hartman, Dallas, joined the U. S. Air Force, Aug. 10. Terry graduated from Dallas Senior High School. He was assigned to Lackland AFB, San Antonio, Texas, for basic training.

Nine Back Mountain Area graduates will play in the 20th annual East-West Unico football game at Myers Stadium, Wilkes-Barre. The players are: Ken Engler, Bob Longmore, Mac Fry, Ray Kuderka, Gary Morris, and Ray Goeringer, Dallas; and Pepper Swan, Jeff Sieber, and Bill Kern, Lake-Lehman, will take

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