

EDITORIAL

# An unlikely voice speaks up for property reassessment

□ *Makowski's support could turn the tide; county plan should include a regular schedule of future dates*

This could be a watershed moment for Luzerne County, no pun intended regarding the recent 30th anniversary of the Agnes flood. County Commissioner Tom Makowski, long an avowed opponent of the reassessment of property, has changed his mind, and announced he now supports the concept.

Why is the first county-wide revaluation of property in nearly 40 years so important? Let us count the ways:

- The present system is unfair. Property values rise and fall — mostly they rise — over time and with changing circumstances. What once was an isolated field becomes a high-priced development; a vibrant factory becomes an empty hulk, or a neighborhood that was down at the heels becomes popular and pricey.
- Unfairness discourages new development. When houses of comparable size and amenities can have tax bills that are hundreds, even thousands of dollars apart simply because of their age, the incentive to build new homes shrinks. That's what happens now: if a house was built prior to 1965, it is still carried on the tax rolls at its mid-60s value. And it can't be reassessed on a sale, so can pass through several owners, each paying a higher price, while the assessed value stays the same. But if you build in 2002, you pay taxes on today's price.
- There are gaps. Aside from equalizing values, a thorough assessment process will undoubtedly turn up properties that are either missing from the rolls, or have been improved but not revalued. About the only reassessment that takes place now occurs when an addition is built onto an existing property. But even then, only the value of the addition can be counted, not the increased value of the entire structure.
- The present system only gets more inequitable as some property owners — particularly those with business property and expensive homes — challenge their assessments and win reductions. It's easy to do, since there are so many examples to choose from, and the challengers almost always win. And when someone's tax bill goes down by \$1,000 or \$10,000, everyone else's has to go up.
- "Tax reform" has fallen flat. There have been attempts, some genuine and some just political window dressing, to revise the basic tax structure in Pennsylvania, shifting the emphasis to the income tax and away from property. None have succeeded to any measurable degree, and even our present lame-duck governor doesn't seem to have the stomach to press for real change. So it has to happen here.

That last point turns conventional political wisdom on its ear. Many observers, including this page, have felt that reassessment would never be enacted at the county level, since it almost certainly will end the political career of any office holder who espouses it. Makowski is putting on a brave face and saying he doesn't think that has to be the case, but it's hard to believe he really thinks that. Perhaps he felt his future looked bleak anyway, or maybe he was dismayed at the fact that the county couldn't raise the millage rate any higher, but let's give him the benefit of the doubt — he didn't have to take this position, which is likely to make for the most uncomfortable few months of his public life. If he is able to shepherd reassessment through, he will have done a service to Luzerne County that more than offsets any perceived harm he may have wrought.

Reassessment is by no means an easy answer to all of Luzerne County's problems or those of the municipalities within it, and creates its own set of difficulties. Given the enormous number of properties that are underassessed, there will be howls of protest from every quarter. Some of the complaints will be legitimate, particularly if they come from elderly people living on modest fixed incomes. Commissioner Stephen Urban's condition that along with reassessment the county adopt a "homestead exemption" on primary homes may reduce the pain for many people whose property has risen in value, but whose income hasn't kept pace.

There should be at least one other component to any reassessment plan — a requirement that it be updated every 10 years. Committing that schedule to paper will assure taxpayers and developers they won't again face the degree of inequity that, hopefully, will be addressed in the next couple of years.

## Letters invited

Letters to the editor are welcome and will be published, subject to the following guidelines:

- Letters should not exceed 500 words.
- No writer may have more than one letter published during a 30-day period, except as a reply to another letter.
- Letters must be signed and include the writer's home town and a telephone number for verification.
- Names will be withheld only if there exists a clear threat to the writer.
- The Post retains the right to accept or reject any letter, and to edit letters for grammar and spelling, as well as to eliminate any libel, slander or objectionable wording.



Meadow, fence and sky on Huntsville-Idetown Road. Photo by Ron Bartizek.

## 55-Alive driving courses at Mountain Grange

Mountain Grange #567, Carverton, is planning three AARP 55-Alive Courses from 1-5 p.m. on the following dates: July 25, August 22 and 29, and September 19 and 26. Each course consists of a total of eight hours. Therefore, each date will be four hours each. The cost is \$10 per person.

Upon completion of the course, each person receives a certificate. The certificate can be sent to your automobile insurance carrier. Call your insurance agent to determine exactly what percentage discount will be given. Usually the reduction is 5-15 percent.

From Trucksville, turn at the traffic light onto Carverton Road, at stop sign, turn left (Eighth Street), building is across from Bodle Road.

You must register prior to the



70 Years Ago - July 15, 1932

### BOARD FAILS TO NAME SCHOOL HEAD

Attempt of Dallas borough school board to elect a successor to George Bowen, who resigned to accept a position as supervising principal of West Wyoming failed when the motion to elect Donald Wormley lacked the majority of votes necessary for passage.

Lee Tracy, of Pioneer avenue, who starred in Broadway, Front Page and other stage successes, signed a contract with Columbia Pictures to play the leading role in Night Mayor, a screen adaptation of Sam Marx's stage play of the same name.

At the Himmler Theatre, some movies that played: Symphony of Six Million with Ricardo Cortez; Devil's Lottery with Elissa Landi; Huddle with Ramon Navarro and The Sunset Trail with Ken Maynard.

60 Years Ago - July 17, 1942

### GOVERNOR JAMES WILL OPEN LAKE ROAD

Governor Arthur H. James will dedicate the new Lake highway at road opening ceremonies in Dallas. Taking an active part with him will be A. J. Sordoni, president of Wyoming Valley Motor Club. A parade will be held for this occasion.

Eighty volunteers to man the air raid observation post of the Aviation warning service which is being built in Rice cemetery on Huntsville Road has been issued by Paul Shaver, chief ob-

server. His appeal for help goes out to men and women.

In an effort to modernize and double the efficiency of its fire fighting equipment, Shavertown Fire Company has ordered a new booster pump outfit to be installed on its fire truck. A 200-gallon auxiliary tank for the storage of water will be installed on the truck.

### LAING FIREMEN TEST THREE PIECES OF EQUIPMENT

Members of the committee to select a new fire engine for Dr. Henry M. Laing Fire Company demonstrated a mack, a Ward-LaFrance, and a Central. Those who tested the apparatus were headed by Henry Peterson of the new engine committee, Ben Edwards, Fred Price, Nort Bert and Fire Chief James Besecker.

Road races will start at Senator Newell Wood's estate at Harveys Lake and consist of ten laps around the 3.5 mile course. Sixty-five cars are entered for the road race.

Kingston Township Supervisors passed an ordinance at the recent monthly meeting that houses should not be constructed closer than twenty-five feet to the street.

40 Years Ago - July 19, 1962

### NOXEN TEAM WINS PENNANT

Noxen team of the Bob Horlacher Little League won the pennant for the third successive year. The Noxen Little League team is managed by Harold Bennett and assisted by Tom Shalata.

Dallas Orchard exchange of Commonwealth Telephone Company will be converted to All Number Calling with each telephone number being composed of seven digits.

The final step in construction of a swimming pool at Our Lady of the Pines, vacation hom for nuns owned by Villa St. Theresa, Dallas was taken at Harveys

Lake. Pool was filled through the courtesy of the Idetown Fire Department.

30 Years Ago - July 13, 1972

### ZONING LAW SUSPENSION CAUSES AREA CONCERN

Officials of three Back Mountain municipalities have expressed their concern about what impact temporary trailer housing for flood victims will have on their communities. The officials realize, there is an emergency and wish to lend all assistance but fear consequences, such the financial burdens with sewer assessments

A Dallas Township road, No. 765, off of Lower Demunds Road, will be abandoned by the township Board of Supervisors. Supervisor Fred Lamoreaux recommended vacating the concrete road, due to its poor conditions caused by heavy rains.

Edward S. Barber, personnel director for Commonwealth Telephone Company of Dallas announced that plans were made to provide financial assistance for those company employees who were victims of the Agnes flood.

20 Years Ago - July 14, 1982

### MCCAFFERTY RESIGNS

In a move that stunned even his closest friends, John McCafferty of Carverton, submitted his resignation as a member of the Franklin Township board of supervisors. He gave no reason as to his resignation.

Joseph "Red" Jones, Oak Hill was appointed as the basketball coach for College Misericordia Men's Highlander team.

Fire destroyed a home and business in Jackson Township requiring the resources of six Back Mountain companies to contain. Alan and Nancy Dukes lost their home, which started in the garage, under the structure. Alan's place of business.



Carol King

## Check out auction pics on library website

The 56th Annual Auction was another great success. The weather was unusually cooperative, the crowds tremendous. Congratulations to all those who played any part in making it such a success. Take a look at the Auction pictures on the library's website, backmountain-library.org.

The winner of the Auction raffle for the grill was John Flynn. Jane Kishbaugh was the winner of the quilt raffle.

The Slightly Read Bookshop has closed for the summer and will re-open on Wednesday, September 4.

The Times Leader is sponsoring a reading program for children. It started on Thursday, July 11, and will continue through August 22. To participate in the contest, children must read "Luke in a Really Big Pickle," which will appear in the paper each Thursday. Three winners, randomly selected from entries received, will receive a full year of movie passes to Cinemark Theaters, Moosic. Visit the children's room at the library and pick up a copy of the July 11 issue, which contains the official reading contest game board, while the supply lasts. Call the library at 675-1182 for further details.

Bob Swartz has put on display in the library some of the toy cars and trucks in his collection. Some of the names you'll recognize are Matchbox, Hot Wheels (the favorites in our house 30 years ago), Johnny Lightning, and Corgi. Bob's e-mail address is Bobio58@aol.com.

## Luzerne County Fair lists entertainment

In celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Luzerne County Fair, the entertainment committee is excited to offer fairgoers some unique entertainers and attractions during the five, fun-filled days of this annual event.

Wednesday evening, Sept. 4, will feature a unique event last held during the Fair's 35th anniversary in 1997 - an Old time Fiddle Contest! Champion fiddlers from throughout Northeastern Pennsylvania will compete for \$500 in prize money; to enter, contact the Fair office for additional information.

Thursday, one of two Senior Citizen's days at the Fair, will feature a dynamic, family oriented show. Northeastern Pennsylvania's Premier Oldies and Dance Band, The Mudflaps, will perform at the amphitheater near a planned antique and classic car show.

The Wilkinsons, contemporary country music group will perform Friday evening. This father-daughter-son act will offer their hits "26¢" and "Fly" and other singles that had them nominated for many of Country Music's top awards the last several years.

Pennsylvania State Fiddle Champion, The Cramer Brothers Band will perform Saturday evening at the amphitheater. These six, multi-talented members will perform contemporary country, classic country and bluegrass while offering comedy and fun for the whole family.

Sunday, the second of the Fair's two Senior Citizen's days, will feature 11-time grammy award winner Jimmy Sturr and his Orchestra; Having recorded over 100 albums, this group will leave no doubt why they were voted "The #1 Polka Band in the Country" the past 10 years.

For additional information about the 2002 Luzerne County Fair, contact the Fair office at 675-FAIR or visit the Fair's website at www.luzernecounty-fair.com

## The Dallas Post

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