



POST PHOTO/ERIN YOUNGMAN

Michael Kurtinitis an employee of ENCON, normally works as a maintenance mechanic, here he is shown working in production to help fill the recent boom in unexpected orders.

## ENCON

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meetings about the closing, they fully expected severance pay.

Employees claim after they went out and obtained new positions, they were not notified they would not receive severance pay until just prior to, or after their scheduled end dates of separation.

"Some went out and found jobs based on what they were told," said Michael Kurtinitis, a maintenance mechanic who is now working on the production line to fulfill orders.

"And two days before they were to leave, they were told they wouldn't get severance," said Lambert.

Sam Perry, former controller for ENCON who had been with the company for 10 years, says he is one of three employees who pursued new employment and lost their severance pay as a result.

Perry, who was unwilling to be interviewed for this article, said in a statement that he is pursuing legal action.

In the statement Perry said he volunteered to leave February 15, the first day of scheduled layoffs, and wasn't told until after he left that he wouldn't be eligible for severance pay.

"After I left my employment from ENCON I learned that I would not be paid severance. I was told I was not eligible for severance because I had another job. However, what someone was doing after they left the organization was never a factor in

*"When we got to February 15, we were not in a position to have reductions."*

John Ray  
ENCON General Manager

whether they were paid severance during the prior reductions in force that were made by ENCON," said Perry in his statement.

John Ray, ENCON General Manager, said although employees were told layoffs might start February 15, he said the date was never definite. Instead, he said, the date was given so employees would know their jobs would be secure for the 60 days following the closure announcement.

"The date of February 15 had nothing to do with severance," said Ray. "Back in December we had to pick a date of when we thought we might have reductions."

Ray said in the meantime customers came in with additional orders so many more than Kurtinitis, who is a maintenance mechanic, said he has been put in production to help meet the demand.

"When we got to February 15, we were not in a position to have reductions," Ray said.

He said since the reductions

did not occur, the employees were not actually volunteering to be laid off. They were voluntarily resigning, which is not covered by the severance pay plan.

Ray said previous layoffs had been accompanied by severance because employees were discharged for a lack of work.

He said with the recent increase of customer orders, a "lack of work" situation never resulted.

"We still have requirements for people's skills and qualities to meet our customers' needs," said Ray.

He said employees who stay until the closing date will receive severance.

Ray said in Perry's case, he should have known the policy better than anybody, since he was a senior executive and worked in the office.

He said following the employees' loss of severance, there was confusion in the plant about the policy. He said he then sent out an employee notice, dated February 13, explaining the situation. He said since then, the confusion has been cleared up.

A memo at the time of the announcement of the closing stated all employees would receive severance, without stipulation.

"Watlow (ENCON's parent company) is deeply committed to the well-being of its employees and the community in which they work. All employees will be offered severance packages in addition to unemployment benefits for which they are eligible."

## Chief

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as Chief Butler," said Robert Costigan.

"I feel Jeff's performance in the police department far outweighs any error in administration," said Joe Shaver.

Maryellen Prescott said the board set Butler up to fail when they didn't give him adequate preparation to fulfill his duties.

"Somebody should have mentored him and coached him," she said. "We failed him and the community by not giving him the tools."

"I'm in favor of council standing behind their decision (to hire him)," said Prescott.

"We probably lost the best

*"I feel Jeff's performance in the police department far outweighs any error in administration."*

Joe Shaver  
Harveys Lake

chief we ever had," said Wayne Shannon. "What better man could we ask for? We need him back as soon as possible," he said.

Ruth Eaton, council member,

responded to the comments. She said council had been discussing "all these issues" the community was supporting Butler on.

"We've discussed all these things and we'll continue along knowing that we have the support of the community," said Eaton.

In other police news, the board authorized advertising for two part-time officers.

Council also announced there will be a reorganization of the crime watch program. The meeting will be held at the Harveys Lake Recreation Center on Wednesday, April 2 at 7 p.m.

## Suspect in teen's killing pleads not guilty

**WILKES-BARRE** — Larry Tooley on March 13 pleaded not guilty to killing a 16-year-old boy and a judge scheduled his trial to begin in September.

Tooley, 46, and Tina Young, 33, are charged in the Nov. 8 shooting death of Casey Zalenski inside his Franklin Township home.

Police said the two broke into Zalenski's home looking for

money for drugs. Young waited outside as Tooley entered the home and shot Zalenski, police said.

Tooley is charged with first- and second-degree murder among other charges. Prosecutors are seeking the death penalty against Tooley.

Young, who had been a baby sitter for Zalenski and his brothers, is charged with second-de-

gree murder and other charges. She previously pleaded not guilty.

The two went before Luzerne County Court of Common Pleas Judge Peter Paul Olszewski Jr. Thursday for Tooley's formal arraignment on the charges and a scheduling conference, where Olszewski set a Sept. 2 trial date for the two.

## Assault charges against part-time cop held off

**KINGSTON TWP.** — Assault charges against a part-time Plymouth police officer will be dropped if the officer undergoes alcohol counseling and avoids further problems.

A clerk at District Justice James Tupper's office said Tupper ruled charges against Charles Benson will be held in abeyance for six months while he undergoes counseling.

Benson was charged with simple assault and harassment after police were called to his home during the early morning hours of March 11.

Benson's wife told police he arrived home at 1:45 a.m., kicked and threw her puppy, and later held a rolled-up kitchen towel to his wife's

throat, according to Dallas Township police. She asked Benson if he was going to strangle her and he didn't answer. He later told her he needed to find his gun, police said.

Dallas Township Police Chief Robert Jolley said police confiscated multiple weapons from Benson's home.

The clerk said Benson's wife and the arresting officer agreed with the decision to hold the charges in abeyance.

Plymouth police Chief Myles Collins has said Benson was placed on unpaid leave after his arrest. Collins could not be reached Tuesday for additional comment.

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## Lehman

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gelicola purchases the for sale property at Route 415 and 42nd Street.

Each of the independent living units will be approximately 1,200 square feet. The units will have two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a living room/dining room combination, an eat-in kitchen and a single car garage. Rent is expected to be somewhere near \$1,400 per unit per month and, according to Angelicola's team, the complex's primary occupants will be 55 and older.

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## Jackson Crime Watch meeting March 27

The Jackson Township Neighborhood Crime Watch will meet Thursday, March 27 at 7 p.m. in the Jackson Township Municipal Building. The topic will be crime watch sign verbiage and placement.

## Back Mountain Seniors

The Back Mountain Senior Citizens will meet at noon, March 20 in St. Therese's Church hall on Pioneer Avenue and Davis Street, Shavertown, for a covered dish luncheon to celebrate St. Patrick's Day.

Membership dues will be collected. Installation of officers by Roxanne Foy will take place.

New members are welcome. The club is non-denominational.

For information call 696-1828 or 696-3095.

## Business Fair planned

The Back Mountain Business and Professional Association is planning its third business fair and card exchange. The event will be held Thursday, April 24, from 4-7 p.m., at Stax & Co. restaurant in Dallas.

Member businesses can reserve display spaces at \$50 each by calling 674-4660. New members are invited to join and to participate.

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