

## OUR OPINION

## State should fully support libraries, which serve all

Supporters of the Back Mountain Memorial Library are putting a brave face on a potentially damaging cut in state aid, and given their past record, there's no reason to doubt they can make up for most or all of the \$50,000 shortfall. But it's a shame they are in this position at all.

State budgets across the nation are in shambles, and Pennsylvania is not immune from the dilatory effects of a down economy, although it has fared better than most. But it seems there should be better places to make up for revenue declines than public libraries, which provide universal access to books and other material that are critical components in an enlightened existence. Why, for instance, have we helped pay for four new sports stadiums in recent years if we can't afford to keep libraries fully funded?

Here are two statistics that illustrate the extent to which the local library serves us: the Back Mountain Memorial Library has more than 15,000 active borrowers and circulates more than 100,000 items each year. In a service area that is home to 34,000 people, that's nearly three for each man, woman and child. It is a safe bet that's a whole lot more use than those four stadiums are getting from us, and for a whole lot less expense.

Library board members and countless volunteers should not be asked to continually do more for the library, and there will surely come a point where their efforts, no matter how hard they try, won't be enough to overcome shortsighted governments at the state, county and even local levels. The annual four-day auction, which is entirely volunteer run, already provides nearly a fourth of the library's annual operating budget. Major projects, such as the outstanding children's area, have been made possible in large part by private donations.

Perhaps it's not too late for state officials to revisit the funding of public libraries and to look more carefully at how they wield the budget scalpel. Surely there are far less deserving programs that could be scaled back, if that is necessary at all.

In the meantime, you can help out while having some Halloween fun by visiting the first Haunted Library, which will take place next weekend. Preferably, you'll add it to your Back Mountain haunted house tour, and contribute to a variety of worthwhile causes as you share a fright with friends and neighbors.

## Helping kids half a world away

Folks around the Back Mountain have once again put their generosity to work for the good of others, in this case to bring hope to children on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

Volunteer supporters of Sister Sponsa Beltran's Our Lady of Fatima Rehab in Monrovia, Liberia collected hundreds of books that will be used in classrooms of a new school that has been built to serve the needs of children at the facility. Sister Sponsa founded and operates the Rehab center to care for young victims of Liberia's grinding poverty and ongoing civil wars, which flared up again recently. The books — mostly texts for every grade level — were packed into a shipping container along with clothing and other donations that are sent twice a year. The center depends on contributors in this area, particularly parishioners of St. Therese's Church, led by Eileen Rockensies, to provide respite from the rigors of the bleak life most Liberian people know. And Sister Sponsa has never been disappointed in the response.

## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

I don't know whether adding the phrase "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance is unconstitutional or not, but I know it has given me some uncomfortable moments. You see, I'm ancient enough to have learned the Pledge the old way in grammar school. (I guess that's an outdated phrase too; should it be "elementary learning center?") So, when I started attending events as a reporter, I would always stumble after "indivisible,"



RON BARTIZEK

because the new words sounded incorrect. I didn't even realize until quite recently that there had been a formal change, I just thought it was a regional variation.

Opponents of the phrase cite the constitutional separation of church and state, and I have to agree that both institutions are better off when kept apart. Besides, it's not as if this is a centuries-old tradition. The Pledge itself was adopted only in 1942, at the height of World War II, and "under God" was added in 1954. A few more years passed before word got around to all the schools, so most of my generation learned the original version.

I'll leave it up to the Supreme Court to make a legal decision, but I'll continue to skip over the "under God" part, thank you.

## Letters, columns and editorials

The Dallas Post attempts to publish opinions on a variety of topics in many forms.

Editorials, which are the opinion of the management of The Post, appear on the editorial page and are written by the editor unless otherwise indicated. Any artwork represents the opinion of the cartoonist, and columns are the opinion of the author.

Letters to the editor are welcome and will be published, if they are relevant to the Back Mountain.

Letters must be signed and include the writer's home town and a telephone number for verification.

Send letters to: The Post, 15 N. Main St., Wilkes-Barre PA 18711.



Great blue heron, casting a wary eye at the photographer. Harveys Lake outlet. Photo by Ron Bartizek.

## GUEST COLUMN

## Charter offers road map to progressive government

By HOWARD J. GROSSMAN

There is a time and a place for boldness and bravery. Such a time has arrived in Luzerne County. The citizens of the county will be given an opportunity that they may never see again. After more than two years of hard and dedicated work, the Charter Study Commission, approved by the voters of the county on November 6, 2001 has issued a 90-page report that carefully and thoughtfully creates a governmental vision for the county, modeled on the needs of this region and based, in part, on county charters that have been adopted elsewhere in the Commonwealth such as Lehigh, Northampton, Erie, and Allegheny. Why is this important to the future of the county? Here are a few reasons.

- A professional manager is needed to administer the day-to-day operations of county government.
- A structure of government that prevents arbitrary decision making, and is based upon thorough professionalism across the entire county and that is treated as big business with a budget over \$200 million is an absolute requirement for the decades ahead.
- A one-size-fits-all governmental structure that the county codes currently allow is inappropriate in today's society and economy.

• Creating flexibility in county government ensures greater public access and citizen participation.

• The county is today too large to effectively have only three county commissioners to represent the various areas of the county. There is a need for a representative legislative body.

• A County Executive with veto power provides appropriate checks and balances, a process that has worked for the federal government for hundreds of years.

• Administrative responsibility would be fixed with an elected County Executive appointing a trained, professional manager.

• The three county commissioners now act as both legislators and administrators. This is completely counter to the American system of separation of powers.

• County budgets should be required to be balanced, and if reassessment takes place, there should be a limit on the amount of taxes that can be levied for three years thereafter.

• There should be a strong code of ethics and conflict of interest provisions covering all elected officials, employees, and members of boards and commissions. Anti-nepotism provisions should be provided and there should be sound and uniform personnel practices.

• Citizens should have the opportunity to participate in county government by mandating public County Council meetings and special public hearings on major issues and by providing procedures for citizens to vote on ordinances passed by the County Council (referendum), and propose and to vote on new ordinances (initiative).

One of the most influential characteristics of the charter is the strong professional support given to its preparation by the most significant organization dealing with good government in the Commonwealth, the Pennsylvania Economy League. Its staff provided wise counsel and advice during the course of the work of the Charter Study Commission.

These positive attributes form the essence of the new charter and would transform Luzerne County government into a far more modern and far-sighted structure than has ever been conceived in the county's history. The commission report is an extensive treatment of a topic that is often considered dry and cumbersome. The document reflects a 21st century approach that has extremely critical and positive components that will advance the role of county government, and enhance the opportunity to attract economic growth through a modernized structure include

some of the most up-to-date features that governments elsewhere have adopted. It also includes a wise and deliberate transition process to enable the system to be effective in January, 2006.

No one will agree with all of the features found in any charter, since there will always be differing views on specific subjects. The proposed County Charter, however, is an exciting and dynamic approach that, in the future, could be sharpened and improved as new and unexpected events unfold. It establishes a strategy for the future that will enable those elected to county office to have effective tools to conduct governmental business in the most professional manner possible.

Those who run for office, both presently and in the future, have a responsibility to utilize a governmental structure that is meaningful and measured by outcomes, not an outmoded, inefficient structure that once served well the interests of an agrarian era. Today's and tomorrow's complex, technological era requires "creating the best." Such is the case for the County Charter to be voted upon on November 4. I urge you to vote "Yes."

Howard Grossman is a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners. He lives in Dallas.

70 Years Ago - October 20, 1933

## WILD HALLOWE'EN CELEBRATORS WILL FEEL LAW'S WRATH

Chief of police Leonard O'Kane issued a warning this week against any wild Halloween revels and promised arrest for any celebrators whose enthusiasm is responsible for damage to property or disturbance of the peace.



## ONLY YESTERDAY

275 employees of J.K. Mosser Tanning Company, who had been out on strike since Saturday because company officials refused to force five employees to join the Tanners' union, returned to their duties Wednesday.

State officers and Luzerne County officials of I.O.O.F., will participate tomorrow afternoon in the dedication of a plot of ground in Fern Knoll Burial Park here as a memorial to Odd Fellowship.

60 Years Ago - October 22, 1943

## WAR RESTRICTIONS WON'T STOP LEHMAN HALLOWEEN PARTY

Despite war restrictions, Lehman PTA will hold its annual Halloween Party at the school on Friday evening. Plans were also made to carry on the government project of supplying milk to school children at reduced prices.

A team made of Home Economic students from Lehman High School won first honors in the judging contest which was a feature of the Huntington Mills School Fair.

The winning team scored a total of 2630 points, while Huntington Mills and Dallas Township teams followed closely.

Struck by an automobile Sunday night, about a quarter of a mile down the highway beyond Milt Ruggles' store at Pikes Creek, a 150 pound black bear had three of its legs broken and had to be dispatched by Clifford Martin with a rifle.

50 Years Ago - October 16, 1953

## PARENTS DISCUSS KINDERGARTEN FOR LEHMAN-JACKSON-ROSS

The kindergarten question was raised at Wednesday's meeting of the Lehman-Jackson-Ross joint school board, and the supervising principal, Lester Squier, was instructed to meet with Mrs. Jonathan Valentine and others of her committee who are interested in the possibility.

Mr. and Mrs. Ted Wilson, Demunds Road, found themselves without water three weeks ago. For a week they hauled in water, then with their two children, Tex and Catherine, they moved to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Ted Wilson. Their dug well yielded nothing but mud.

Huntsville Christian Church started celebration of its 110th anniversary with a covered dish supper last evening at 6:30, followed by a fellowship meeting.

40 Years Ago - October 17, 1963

## ORANGE AIRMAN DIES IN BOLIVIA PLANCE CRASH

Charles Anthony Volack was flown back to the United States after losing his life in a plane crash in Bolivia. The military plane in which he had installed loud speaker equipment for psychological warfare, was lost. The pilot escaped with slight injury and a student is in critical condition.

Dr. Robert M. Bodycomb, prominent Dallas dentist, was honored October 13 at the annual meeting of the American Dental Society in Atlantic City, when he was made a fellow of the International College of Dentists. Dr. Bodycomb graduated from Coughlin High School in 1924 and Temple University School of Dentistry in 1928.

Some items you could buy at Gavy's Market in Trucksville were sliced bacon for 59 cents, stewing chicken for 39 cents a pound and Nestles Choc. Morsels for 21 cents a bag.

30 Years Ago - October 18, 1973

## AUTHORITY OPENS BIDS FOR SEWAGE SYSTEM

The cost of construction of Harveys Lake sewage system will be slightly below the \$5,460,275 estimated by Harveys Lake Municipal Authority engineers and far below

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15 N. MAIN ST., WILKES-BARRE PA 18711 • 570-675-5211  
dallaspost@leader.net

Patrick McHugh  
PUBLISHER

Ronald Bartizek  
EDITOR

Justin Wisnosky  
ADVERTISING ACCT. EXEC.

Erin Youngman  
REPORTER

Greg Stauffer  
AD PRODUCTION MANAGER