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THE POST

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SERVING THE COMMUNITIES OF THE DALLAS & LAKE-LEHMAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS

HL man charged in 3 robberies

WILKES-BARRE TWP. — Robert Joseph Baldoni, 26, of Harveys Lake, is arrested by Wilkes-Barre Police early Tuesday morning in connection with three robberies.

Baldoni is accused of robbing a Turkey Hill Minit Market at the intersection of Routes 415 and 118 in Dallas Township, the Sheetz on Route 309 in Wilkes-Barre early in the morning of December 29. He is also charged in a robbery at Big Lots in the East End Centre on Kidder Street in Wilkes-Barre Township later that day.

According to police, in the morning robberies Baldoni entered the stores and asked to buy a pack of cigarettes. When the clerks opened the cash registers, he grabbed a handful of cash and fled.

Dallas Township police were aided in identifying the suspect through a license plate number obtained by a Turkey Hill clerk. Police learned the vehicle was registered to Baldoni's father, Robert Baldoni Sr.

Wilkes-Barre Township Police said Baldoni entered Big Lots at 7:50 p.m. Monday, approached a cashier, and when the cashier opened the register to accept payment, Baldoni punched the cashier in the stomach, grabbed cash and fled.

Township police said he fled the scene in a 1991 Pontiac Sunbird operated by Ryan Anthony Brock, 22, of Shickshinny.

Baldoni faces multiple charges, including robbery, criminal conspiracy to commit robbery, simple assault and theft, police said.

He is held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$20,000 bail, police said.

Brock is charged with criminal conspiracy to commit robbery and also is held at the county jail in lieu of \$20,000 bail, police said.



POST PHOTO/ERIN YOUNGMAN

Amy Newhart, center, and Colleen Scanlon have taken over the pub in the center of Dallas, renaming it Libations. They served Jack Novitski on recent evening.

Dallas pub being transformed

By ERIN YOUNGMAN
Post Staff

DALLAS — New owners, a new interior, plans for changes to the exterior — the former Main Street Pub is now Libations and the proprietors have a lot in mind for the business.

Amy Newhart of Kingston and Colleen Scanlon of Wilkes-Barre took over the Dallas Borough bar September 2.

Along with physical and aesthetic improvements to the building, the pair are working with the Our Dallas — Today and Tomorrow visioning group to open their establishment for community-wide monthly entertainment.

They've built a kitchen and think the soon-to-be-added full menu will be a big draw for area residents. It will provide dining for fami-

"This was our dream and we were well aware it would be harder before it would be easier."

Colleen Scanlon
Co-owner of Libations

lies during the day, and stay open until 1:30 a.m.

"I think what we really want to project is that Libations is a bar for everybody, young and old," said Newhart.

In fact, a Tuesday evening trip to Libations finds long-haired, blue-jeaned college stu-

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POST PHOTO/RON BARTIZEK

Kingston Township Supervisors Paul Sabol, Carl Goodwin and Neil Allen shook hands after finally passing a 2004 budget.

Budget passes with 10-mill property tax

By RONALD BARTIZEK
Post Staff

KINGSTON TWP. — Supervisor Carl Goodwin, who on December 10 supported a property tax rate of 10 mills, proved to be the deciding vote in its final adoption at the December 30 meeting approving a 2004 township budget, but not until the failure of his attempts to cut the rate by half.

Tuesday's meeting was the ninth in a marathon series of budget hearings since October 27. If the supervisors had not reached agreement by December 31, the township would have been unable to collect taxes, adding more strain to a budget that was already stretched thin.

But, like every other step along the way, final passage did not come easily. After first rejecting it, the supervisors adopted a budget that included \$194,500 in revenue from a 10-mill property tax. The legal se-

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Rave's closing retail stores to focus on landscaping

Chain stores, economy, even the weather, made going tough

By RONALD BARTIZEK
Post Staff

SHAVERTOWN — The decision to close the retail side of their operations did not come easily for Rob and Scott Rave. But they saw that increased competition and other factors would continue to make the garden center business difficult, and they feel concentrating on a healthy landscaping operation will pay dividends.

The Raves have decided to close the three locations of Rave's Garden Centers stores, in Shavertown, Chinchilla and Ashley. Liquidation sales began last week, as "for sale" signs went up at the properties. The Rave's Ski Loft stores will remain open, and plans are to continue that side of the business as well.

"Telling dad was probably the toughest part of the whole thing," said Rob Rave, 48.

Robert Rave Sr. and his brother Lou started the business in 1950, on a small lot near Caddie LaBar's on the Dallas Highway. Lou and a crew spent each day out doing landscape work, while Bob Sr. ran the 12' by 12' store.

Rob Jr. and Scott, 45, bought the business from their father in 1996. Lou Rave died in 1998.

The stores have about 15 full-



FOR THE POST/PETE G. WILCOX

Rave brothers Rob, left, and Scott are closing all three of their stores in order to concentrate on their landscaping and ski shop businesses. They are shown in front of the Shavertown store.

time employees and an equal number of part-timers, although the actual number varies with the season. Many are laid off during the first quarter of each year, returning as business picks up.

The landscape business, which specializes in custom design and construction, should employ 25-30 people in the spring. "We've been building employees there," while cutting back in the stores, Rob said. Some store employees are likely to make the switch to the landscape operation, he said.

Scott Rave said a combination of factors led them to turn toward the landscaping side of the business. New competition from large retailers like Home Depot and Lowe's was one consideration. At one time, larger stores didn't offer the selection to be found at a dedi-

cated garden center, but that is becoming less the case.

Attorney Bernard Walter has an office across Route 309 from Rave's, and has been a steady customer. He will miss the store.

"Rave's has been a well-managed family business that hand-picked its plants and merchandise instead of buying en masse," Walter said. "This community will miss their fine stores."

Two other factors beyond their control led to stagnant retail sales. "The weather has been really devastating the last two years," said Scott.

And the aftereffects of the 9/11 terror attacks and stock market decline took a bigger toll than previous economic slowdowns. "It was a different thing," Scott said, as business did not recover as it

had before.

While he was careful not to lay blame entirely on the chains, Scott said they clearly had an effect, particularly in a region where population is not growing. "They all take a piece," he said.

Adjustments in product lines have helped keep the business viable. Sales of Christmas merchandise became more important in recent years, and the stores had become known as a source for high-quality outdoor furniture. But even those markets have become more competitive, to the point that the half-price sale became the stores' biggest day, Scott said.

While the retail business was struggling, the brothers saw growth in landscaping, but more difficulties for the stores in the future. "Now we can put all our effort into a business that's profitable," Rob said. "It just makes sense to get out while we're on top. If we wait longer it could be a problem."

Landscaping has been consistent. "Each year we do a little better," said Rob, and 2003 was the best ever despite all the rain. It is a field where service and creativity are important selling points, something the chains can't offer, he said.

They will concentrate on custom design, and making use of unique plants. "We've really developed a network of sources," Scott said, beyond the standard suppliers. The company also devotes a lot of energy to incorporating flagstone and brick patios into its designs.

While the landscape business is

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POST PHOTO/RON BARTIZEK

Prize-winning pose

Ron and Maryann Strohl have been entering the Kingston Township Holiday Decorating Contest for many years.

And their house at 223 Cliffside Avenue in Trucksville has been a consistent winner. This year they placed second with an imaginative — and extensive — display of lights, reindeer and holiday figures that dazzled the judges. The couple takes great pride in their effort, which Ron Strohl said is made for the neighbors and 13, soon to be 14, grandchildren.

Their talent shows on the inside, too, where a rotating tree towers over a Christmas village. And they're not done yet. "We add something every year," Ron said. "We have big plans for next year."

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