

## OUR OPINION

## New building codes are better than none

Change is seldom easy, and may even seem harmful to those who cherish comfortable old ways. But some changes, no matter how frivolous they appear at first glance, are beneficial in the long run. That is the case with the approaching statewide adoption of a Uniform Construction Code, based on the Building Officials and Code Administrators (BOCA) regulations. By the middle of this year, every municipality in Pennsylvania must be prepared to enforce these codes, which apply to new construction and renovation of all types of buildings — residential, commercial, and industrial.

The BOCA code describes construction techniques that insure buildings meet safety requirements. The codes are updated and changed by national committees as new building material or methods are identified, and the state regulation, Act 45, requires that updates be adopted as they are made available.

In a nutshell, Act 45 requires that every construction project in Pennsylvania be designed and completed in a manner that is safe and secure, reducing the likelihood of destruction by fire or other disaster, or simply the possibility of inadequate engineering or shoddy workmanship.

So what's wrong with that?

In the eyes of some local officials, this regulation is unnecessary, since we don't build skyscrapers or employ substandard contractors. While the former may be true, you'll get an argument on the latter from anyone who has moved into a new home only to find water leaks, squeaky floors or cracked foundations. Like nearly half of the municipalities in Pennsylvania, some local towns have no building codes at all, and instead rely on the good intentions of builders. Most of the time, they are not disappointed, or at least they have no visible reason to feel that way. But these towns, and even some with codes on the books, don't sufficiently inspect construction projects to verify that what is being built matches what was on the plans, much less to assure that workmanship is up to snuff.

The complaints about code enforcement usually take two forms; it's cumbersome and paying for it will add to the expense of building projects. Both assumptions are correct, but they are worth their cost. Three Back Mountain municipalities — Dallas and Lehman townships and Dallas Borough — are planning to pool their resources in order to contract with an inspector, which will minimize the time required of public officials. The cost of inspections will undoubtedly be passed along to the property owner, but will likely be a tiny fraction of the total cost, and may even come back in insurance savings for owners of property that has passed muster.

Kingston Township has been the leader in the Back Mountain when it comes to building code enforcement, and the experience there would lead one to believe the benefits of strict enforcement far outweigh any drawbacks. A full-time zoning officer there makes regular visits to construction sites and observes that contractors are adhering to regulations that exist to assure the safety and integrity of homes and other buildings. The transition to this kind of oversight throughout the Commonwealth may cause some temporary distress, but once worked through, we can have more confidence in the quality and safety of our homes and offices.

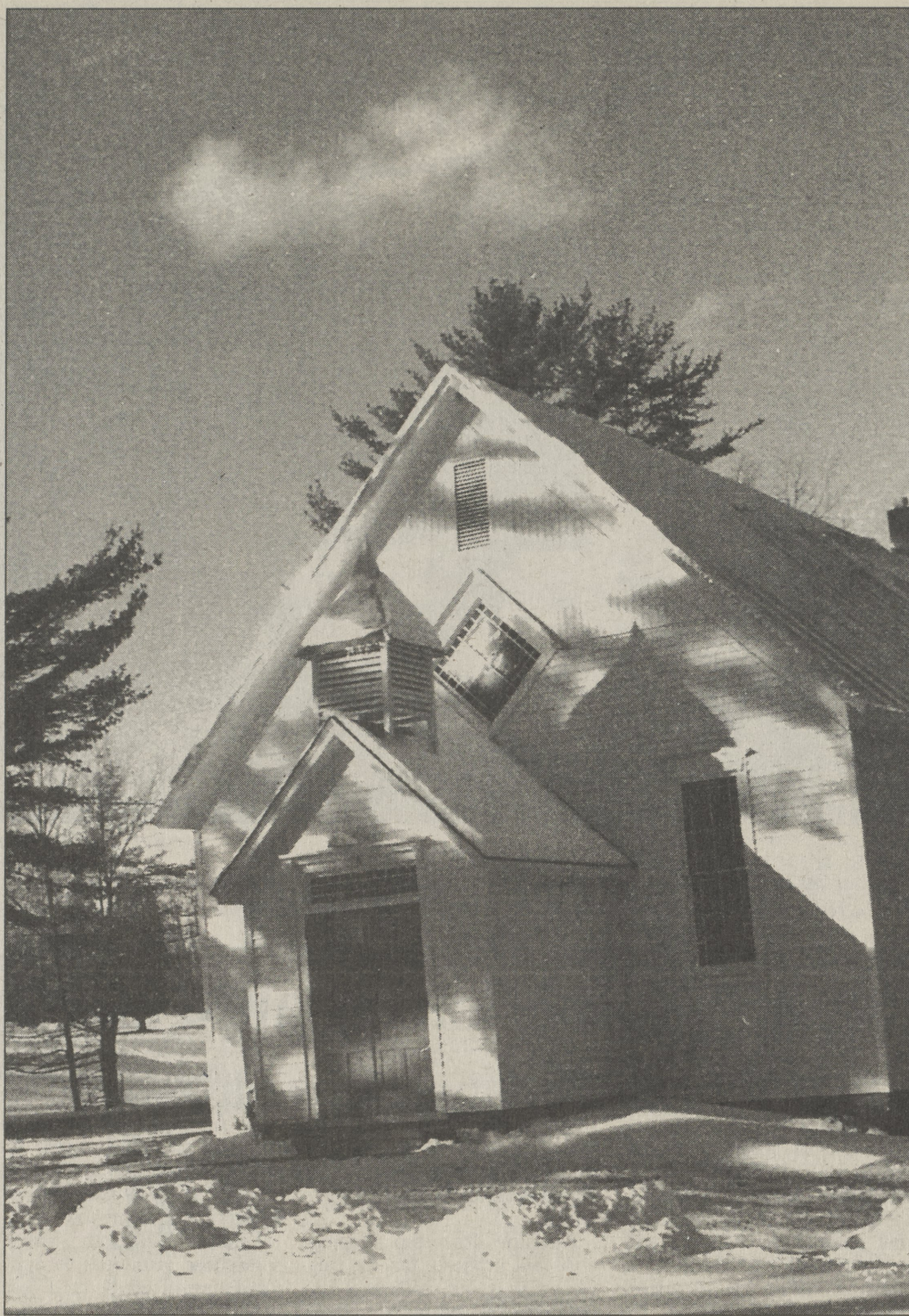
## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

As Pennsylvania slides inexorably toward adopting the motto, "State of Bankruptcy," I have a few suggestions for the Harrisburg hotshots slobbering over the prospect that slot machines will spew out cash to put their cousins on the state payroll. Besides, if we're going to finance schools with gambling chips, there's no reason why the Back Mountain shouldn't get in on the action, so to speak.

You've probably heard there's a move to put slots at horse racing tracks to support that "industry." I never realized ponies towing trailers were that important to Pennsylvania's economy, but there are other businesses that could use a boost as well. How about convenience stores, for example. I have no idea how many there are in Pennsylvania, but judging by our area, it must be millions and a lot of jobs depend on their success. Sure, you're more likely to see a unicorn crossing Route 309 than a Turkey Hill sporting a "closed" sign, but just think how much more cash the state could raise by focusing its effort where the bucks are already flowing like the Susquehanna at flood stage. Add the gambling take to lottery ticket sales and taxes on gas and cigarettes and you'd have a bonanza. There might be a small expense, though, since nearby towing services would need subsidies to drag out-of-gas cars off the streets for their busted owners.

Then there are the liquor stores. Now, as I understand it, Pennsylvania has state stores not to make money, but to protect its feeble-minded citizens from their worst instincts. By selling wine and liquor at its own stores, the state can have conscientious employees — who it doesn't appear are paid for providing expert service — keep an eye on us, so we don't down a fifth of booze on the way to Sunday dinner. Applying the same logic to gambling, state employees could cast stern glances at white-haired grandmas who are frittering away their PACE money. And the state could save a few bucks by offering the same level of selection we have in wine, say only three different slot machines instead of the dozens that confuse gamblers in other states.

Don't get me wrong, I have nothing against gambling. Why, just recently I came out even at a Super Bowl party, when the pool filled up before it got to me. It was one of the best bets I never made.



Sweet Valley study in black and white. Photo by Charlotte Bartizek.

## GUEST COLUMN

## What is patriotism?

*Editor's note: The Post is pleased to publish the winning entry in the 69th annual essay contest sponsored by the Dad-dow-Isaacs Post 672 American Legion, of Dallas. The theme of the essays was, "What is patriotism?"*

By ALLEN GONCZOL

You could probably look up the word "patriotism" in any dictionary and find a definition. It would probably say something similar to "love for one's country." But this is the United States of America, and patriotism means a whole lot more than that to us. Patriotism is not just a word with a simple definition. It's a feeling that's difficult to describe. You would have to live in America to truly understand the great feeling you get just by living here. Even though there are certain people who do not act very patriotic, there are some instances that bring out the patriot in all Americans.

A week ago when I asked my father what made him feel patriotic, he didn't utter a single word. Instead he put a CD into the stereo and the song that came out of the speakers was "The Star Spangled Banner." My father and I spent the next several minutes just sitting there on our hunter green couch enjoying the sound of our national anthem. When the song ended my dad simply said, "That's what makes me feel patriotic." I can understand what he means. Who can listen to that song without thinking about how proud they are to be an American?

One case that makes my heart swell with pride is every morning when I lay my eyes

upon the American flag. Old Glory is a symbol that all Americans appreciate. It represents more than the thirteen original colonies and the fifty United States. Red appears on the American flag to signify our valor and bravery. Our nation has never been afraid to stand up for what was right. The white background of the flag conveys our nation's purity and innocence. Just as an infant is pure as it is young, our young nation still has the qualities that make us both good willed and true. The color blue belongs to the design of the Old Glory to symbolize our vigilance, perseverance, and devotion to justice. The stars on the field of blue stand for the heaven that we try to create on Earth. The stripes appear as rays of light so that we may shine brightly like the sun.

Another time when I feel especially patriotic is when I see those who defend our flag. The United States has the greatest military in the world. The men that are a part of our armed forces have pledged to defend our homeland at all costs. The American military keeps us safe and protects our rights. If it were not for them, we would not have the ability to express ourselves.

We should also be proud that America has established a reputation as being extremely charitable. There is not a single country that cares more about the welfare of the entire world than the United States. When a conflict arises between other nations, we try to settle the dispute. America is also home to an uncountable number of charities that help everything from the diminishing rain-

forests to starving children. And we are not forced to contribute. Individuals in America choose to fund charities. But it isn't just charities that make us so thoughtful, it's also the kindness that you can see Americans displaying anywhere. Every place in the United States has tons of citizens willing to pull over and help someone with his car problems or assist a person who is having trouble getting his computer to work properly. It is this type of kindness that truly makes America what it is today.

Something else that we can all be grateful for is that the United States has become the world's melting pot. In our country, we have members of every religion, race, and culture imaginable. Our cultural diversity surely makes us special and unique. Furthermore, citizens of America can feel safe knowing that they will not be persecuted for any of those things. We protect the rights of all United States citizens equally.

Patriotism can be challenging to explain to people from other places in the world. Yet when they ask you to try, describe the reverence you feel when listening to the National Anthem. Talk about the way that you puff out your chest because you're proud of who you are and where you live. Tell them about the joy that you feel deep inside when you help others. Then with a gentle smile on your face say, "That's what patriotism is."

*Allen Gonczol is a junior at Dallas High School. More information about the contest is published on page 2.*

70 Years Ago - Feb. 23, 1934

## MAN FOUND FROZE TO DEATH UNDER GARAGE

— The body of Corey Fisher, age 65, was found frozen stiff about 10 Thursday morning in a packing box underneath the rear of Stanley's Garage on Main Street.

— As part of its program to bring good music to the com-



## ONLY YESTERDAY

community and create good fellowship, the Shavertown M. E. Church will present the Russian Orthodox Male Chorus of Wilkes-Barre.

— Breaking up a ring of petty stealing that has been going on in the borough, Chief Leonard O'Kane arrested several individuals on charges of stealing items off of vehicles.

60 Years Ago - Feb. 25, 1944

## WAR PROJECTS KEEP LEHMAN STUDENTS BUSY

— Students of Lehman Township School are doing a good job salvaging tin cans. From September 13, 1943 to January 31, 1944, they have turned in 28,876 tin cans — more than one ton per month.

— Pfc. Irving Ashton and Sgt. Richard Swelgyn, of Jackson, have written their families that they have had an unexpected reunion somewhere in the South Pacific.

— Lt. Evan Brace was, 23-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. David Brace, Huntsville Road, was instantly killed Tuesday morning when his plane crashed into a tree in a Florida swamp.

50 Years Ago - Feb. 26, 1954

## PUBLIC INVITED TO SEE LODGE BUILDING

— Members and wives of George M. Dallas Lodge F. & A. M. have received invitations to an open house to inspect the new home of the organization on Main Street in Dallas Borough.

— Sherwood Wilson, son of Mr. and Mrs. John S. Wilson of Sherbrook Farm, Huntsville, will be honored tomorrow for being one of the state's top speed boat racers.

— The championship for the Back Mountain High School Basketball League will be decided at Dallas Township Monday night, when Westmoreland and Harter meet on a neutral floor.

40 Years Ago - Feb. 27, 1964

## RASH OF CAR THEFTS

— A rash of cars stolen from this area in the past two weeks continued over the weekend, as two were taken Friday night, one damaged.

— The Back Mountain Protective Assoc. will announce at its next meeting the availability of three four-year scholarships for students in this area who could not otherwise finance college.

— Lester Hauck, Kingston Township Supervisor, will tender his resignation Saturday to Board Chairman, LaRoy Ziegler.

30 Years Ago - Feb. 28, 1974

## TELECABLE FIRM WANTS FRANCHISE IN BOROUGH

— Back Mountain Telecable requested that Dallas Borough Council award them a non-exclusive franchise in their municipality.

— A record \$12.6 million expenditure for construction and service improvements is planned for Commonwealth Telephone in 1974.

20 Years Ago - Feb. 29, 1984

## NEW DAY CARE CENTER

— WeeCare Foundations, a recently opened day care, joins Explorer Day Care and Raggedy Ann and Andy Preschool in serving Back Mountain working mothers and their children.

— Commonwealth Telephone Company customers Sweet Valley, exchange (477), are now benefitting from the latest developments as a new digital central office was put into operation February 25.

**THE POST**  
TIMES•LEADER Community Newspaper Group

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

Patrick McHugh  
PUBLISHER

Ronald Bartizek  
EDITOR

Justin Wisnosky  
ADVERTISING

Erin Youngman  
REPORTER

Greg Stauffer  
AD PRODUCTION MANAGER

## Fresh Air Fund seeks host families for summer

The New Year gives families an opportunity to make resolutions about activities they can do together in the coming year. In 2004, help the children of New York City by volunteering to be a host family for The Fresh Air Fund. Volunteering as a family is a chance to spend time together and to introduce children to volun-

teerism and community service.

Since 1877, New York City children growing up in low-income neighborhoods have experienced the joys of summer in suburban and small-town communities through The Fresh Air Fund's Friendly Town Program. By welcoming visitors into their homes dur-

ing the summer, host families give Fresh Air children a break from the sometimes dangerous, hot and crowded city streets.

For more information on hosting a Fresh Air child, contact Karin Spak at 655-9342 or The Fresh Air Fund at (800) 367-0003, or visit The Fund's Web site at www.freshair.org.

Q: Where do you find the most Back Mountain news each week?

A: Only in The Post