

Future

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out, who else would be better qualified to answer questions about what students need than someone who recently graduated from the district? "Politics are my first love," he said. In high school he acquired the nickname "Senator" from friends that said he would make a fantastic politician. He hadn't made it to college yet when he made the decision to run for a seat and his interest doesn't stop at the board.

"I do hang out with my friends and everything, but I do make it a point to go to the board meetings."

Todd Buckley, 19
Potential Dallas School Board candidate

"I can envision myself as a senator or as governor — I am someone who listens to what people have to say."

A sense of obligation has also guided his decision to run for office, saying it's time for him to give something back to the community that has given him so much.

Buckley does not worry that his goals are forcing him to miss out on other more age-appropriate activities. He says he still has time to pursue his other interests, going out on Fri-

Ab sences

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Last year, the Lake-Lehman Middle Level Building and the district's three elementary schools missed the cutoff, although the middle level was rounded up to 95 percent. Seventh and eighth grade classes were moved to the renovated junior/senior high school this year.

The 95 percent level is not easy to achieve, said James McGovern, Assistant Principal at Dallas High School. "Not many schools fall in that category," he said last week.

McGovern estimates that Dallas is hovering right around 95 percent, and has improved over last year. That success has come through a focus on tracking student attendance and dealing with individuals, as well as using historical records to spot problem days.

One of those is the last day before winter vacation. McGovern said last year the school scheduled special programs and activities that led students to attend school rather than start vacation early, and attendance was normal.

"You've got to make these kids excited about education," he said, not simply expect them to come to school.

School policy does not mandate a call to the home of absent students, but it does require a parental excuse within 72 hours. If that is not received, the day is considered an unexcused absence.

With 40 to 50 students absent on any particular day, McGovern said there is not enough staff time to call every absent student's home.

Lake-Lehman does not call the homes of absent students, either, unless it appears there is a chronic problem. But warning letters are sent once a student has three unexcused absences, and even too many excused absences may result in withdrawal from class.

Bob Roberts, Superintendent, said more than 600 warning letters have been sent this year to parents whose children have missed five or more days.

Under state guidelines, accumulating more than three unexcused absences leaves open the possibility that the student's family becomes liable for fines of \$25 to \$300 plus court costs. Lake-Lehman sends formal notices to homes of students with three missed days, Dallas does not. "We'd rather call them personally," McGovern said.

Roberts said more than 16

day and Saturday nights with friends, playing golf and snowmobiling with his father.

"It's just like anything else. You know when you want to do something, you have to give 110 percent."

As the days since he lost his first bid turn into weeks, and the weeks into months, he sees his opportunities to learn, grow and become an even stronger candidate, multiply. "So do I think I'll be better prepared next time? Absolutely."

Young school directors unusual

A spokesperson for the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA) said although it is uncommon for people under age 25 to run for school board, it does happen. According to PSBA statistics, only .2 percent of all board members are under 25 years old. In the 25- to 29-year-old category, that number rises just slightly to .8 percent with the bulk of all board members between the ages of 45 and 54.

The four requirements to run for the position are listed on the association's website at www.psbpa.org.

- They are:
- Must be a resident of the district.
 - Must be a resident of the state.
 - Must be at least 18 years old.
 - Must be of good moral character.

"You've got to make these kids excited about education."

James McGovern
Assistant Principal
Dallas High School

excused absences for a full-year class or eight for a half-year class can bring withdrawal without credit. And after reaching 16 excused absences, a student must present proof from a doctor or other authority that it was necessary to be out of school.

But the district tries to work with families, offering an appeal process through which parents can explain excess absences.

"If you have 16 days of mommy/daddy excuses and 16 days with a doctor's excuse, you're fine," said Roberts.

While there are state laws that apply to truancy, McGovern said each district establishes its own policies. "We try to use common sense," he said, in an age when many factors may affect student attendance.

For example, the district "strongly encourages" families to take vacations when school is out, but sometimes parents cannot get time off that matches the school calendar.

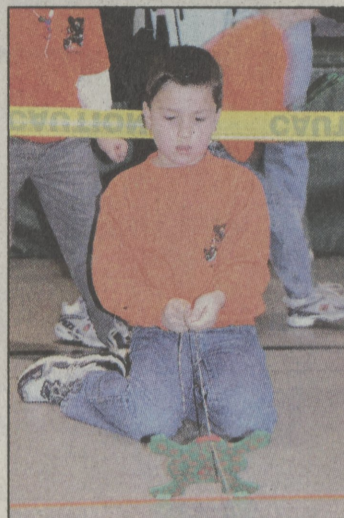
"You try to find a compromise," he said, "but sometimes it just can't happen."

Both schools try to turn unavoidable vacations into learning experiences, by reviewing educational aspects before the student leaves, or asking for a report when they return.

Dallas students showing chronic absence are referred to the home and school visitor, Norm Swithers. He tries to work with the student and family before taking any legal action, but sometimes there is no response.

Truancy cases are sent to District Justice James Tupper, who is frustrated that the law punishes parents, but lets students off the hook. "There's no teeth in it for students," he said.

But the consequences for parents can be serious. Tupper is awaiting a March 25 deadline, after which two mothers can be sentenced to five-days in jail for the truancy of their children. He said they, like many parents, did not show up for hearings or respond to judgments sent to their homes.



FOR THE POST/CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK

Scouting fun night

Cub Scout Troop 232, Gate of Heaven, held its annual Pinewood Derby and Raingutter Regatta in the school gymnasium. Cub Scouts and Webelos engaged in friendly competition that included racing balsa wood model boats and cars, and the "frog race" for younger troop members.

Clockwise from top: Eric Wojciechowski, Webelos 2, blew his Sea Dog home for a victory; Eric Stamer tried to get his frog going in the frog race; Anthony Huntington tried hard to keep his frog in line at the Gate of Heaven Scout tournament.

Fines

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failed," Swithers said last week. "You don't want to take a hard stance when there are issues we should be helping with."

Swithers tries to call the home when a student is out for two or more consecutive days. He finds that in some cases, parents aren't aware the student skipped school. And sometimes, he says, parents haven't bothered to let the school know the family is on vacation.

But occasionally it's obvious the student or his family aren't taking school seriously. Swithers has had cases in which he talked to a student on Monday, and they took Tuesday and Wednesday off. Then he knows he has a problem.

"When we get up around 10 or 12 days and there's no reason for it," referral to the magistrate may be in order. But

that doesn't happen often, perhaps 10 times a year, he said.

If found guilty, parents are subject to a fine of \$25 to \$300, plus court costs of about \$100, said District Justice James Tupper. In extreme cases, a five-day jail sentence can be imposed.

Lake-Lehman does not employ a similar position, in part because of the expense, since a Home and School Visitor must be certified and paid like a teacher. Right now, a secretary in the junior/senior high school office spends about half her time on attendance, said Bob Roberts, superintendent.

The school had a full-time attendance officer until a few years ago, and Roberts would like to see the position reinstated, particularly with the emphasis placed on attendance under the No Child Left Behind act.

Dirt road

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Raintree Road, a dead end with four houses along it, got the treatment. What's left is a portion of Glendalough Road that runs from Raintree back to the entrance of the development, completing a loop.

Wagner said the township has nearly 10 miles of dirt roads, and would like to pave them all, because they are more costly to maintain than paved roads. But existing paved roads may need more attention this year due to damage caused by a deep frost. That's what happened last year, too, delaying more paving for Glendalough.

Jackie Heffron's family lives next door to the Kuczuras, and she also is angry that the road hasn't been paved.

"I've had company that's gotten stuck," she said.

Heffron was encouraged when the paving started. "We thought the following year they would finish it," she said. But it's been more than two years and nothing has happened. When residents complain to the township, a crew throws down a stone and gravel mixture, but that quickly sinks be-

low the mushy surface.

"We dug that (portion) up a couple of times," Wagner said. "But they really don't have to go through there." That's because the upper part of the loop is either paved, or is very firm gravel.

Some municipalities have used county grant funds to improve roads, whether dirt or paved. But Wagner said those grants can be used only in low and moderate income neighborhoods.

"There are no county funds for this," he said at the March 16 meeting of supervisors. "You don't get county funds for a road in front of \$250,000 homes."

At that meeting, Phil Walter, chairman said there are a lot of other dirt roads that need paving before Glendalough.

and gender. The mailing address is: Luzerne County Treasurer, Courthouse, Wilkes-Barre, PA 18711. Return postage is not necessary.

The regular rates are \$8 for males and females; \$6 for neutered males or spayed females. The rates for senior citizens with disabilities are \$6 for males and females; \$4 for neutered males or spayed females. If you are applying for a license that requires the dog owner be a senior citizen (at 65 at the time of purchase), or a person with the disability, you must provide proof of age or disability to the county treasurer or agent.

Two die in 3-car crash blamed on snowstorm

By DAVID WEISS
For The Post

LEHMAN TWP. — Snow and poor tires on a vehicle caused a three-vehicle wreck that killed a couple and left another person injured on state Route 118 Tuesday morning, officials said.

Killed in the wreck were Francis Wivell and his wife, Barbara, of West Pittston, said Luzerne County Deputy Coroner Dan Hughes.

Police Chief Howard Kocher said the Wivells were westbound in a Suzuki Samurai when the driver lost control of the vehicle after 10 a.m. It is unclear which of the two was driving the vehicle.

The vehicle crossed into the eastbound lane, where it was struck in the side by another vehicle. The Samurai then crossed back into the westbound lane where it was struck by a single-axle truck driven by 40-year-old Donald McCue Jr. of Harveys Lake, Kocher said. The truck was travelling be-

hind the Samurai. Hughes said Francis Wivell, 51, was pronounced dead at the scene. His 45-year-old wife was taken to Wilkes-Barre General Hospital where she was pronounced dead at 11:45 a.m. The highway was shut down for three hours.

Both died of multiple traumatic injuries, Hughes said.

Kocher said Thursday the driver of the third vehicle, Larry Lanning, 39, of Shadybrook Lane, Dallas, was treated and released at Geisinger Wyoming Valley Hospital. McCue was not injured, Kocher said.

The weather played a large role in the wreck.

The chief said snow began falling around 9 a.m. and its intensity quickly increased, making for treacherous road conditions. He said the Samurai also had bad tires. The Wivells were wearing seat belts, but their small SUV was crushed when it collided with the larger truck.

This article appeared in original form in the Times Leader.



FOR THE POST/MADALYN RUGGIERO

Lehman Township volunteer firefighters Ron Wenrich and George Sabaluski stood near at the scene of a crash that killed two people Tuesday morning.

Slain pharmacist's wife faces firearms charges

By TERRIE MORGAN-BESECKER
For The Post

An attorney for Kimberly Kerkowski said she believes authorities filed a federal firearms charge against her March 12 in hopes of pressuring her into providing information about other cases under investigation.

Kimberly Kerkowski Jane Acri said the weapon involved, a 9 mm semi-automatic pistol, was formerly owned by Kerkowski's husband, Michael. The body of Michael Kerkowski and four others were unearthed in June at the Kingston Township property of Hugo Selenski, who has been charged with homicide in connection with two of the deaths.

Acri said she doesn't think prosecutors believe Kimberly Kerkowski has information about Michael's death. But the swift action in her firearms case — it's scheduled for trial in May — makes her believe authorities think she has information that would be useful to them in some case. What that case is remains a mystery.

"I think they're just trying to pressure her for any information she might have whatsoever," Acri said. "I'm really not sure what they're looking for. It's basically a fishing expedition."

Kerkowski was indicted March 9 on a charge of selling the 9 mm pistol to a known

drug user. The indictment does not name the drug dealer. But court papers accompanying the indictment say the case is related to a case against a Leo "Killah" Smith.

In February, Carey Bartoo, Kimberly Kerkowski's cousin and Selenski's ex-girlfriend, was indicted on a weapons charge in her alleged role in a Dallas Township burglary in which 19 firearms were stolen. Authorities say two of those firearms were sold to a Leo "Killah" Smith and several of his associates.

The firearms were among eight weapons recovered from Smith's Pugh Street home in Edwardsville during a raid on May 8, 2003, according to the indictment in the Bartoo case.

Acri said the U.S. Attorney's Office has not revealed name of the drug dealer to whom it alleges Kerkowski sold the pistol. Prosecutors won't provide that detail until later, when attorneys engage in pre-trial information gathering known as discovery.

Regardless of who the person is, Acri said Kerkowski maintains she did not sell the weapon and has no knowledge of any other case that would help prosecutors.

"I'm sure if she had any information she would be more than willing to cooperate with federal authorities. She maintains her innocence and has no information related to this case," Acri said.

Kerkowski was released from the Luzerne County Correctional Facility on her own recognizance.

Dog license sales

2004 dog licenses are now available at the following locations:

- Dallas Twp. — Hoof-in-Paw-n-Jeans, 675-4800.
- Kunkle — Pet Care Associates, 675-1621.

Licenses also will be sold at the Treasurer's Office in the Luzerne County Courthouse, Wilkes-Barre.

To obtain licenses by mail, send your name, address, telephone number, date of birth (if 65 or older), the dog's name, color, breed

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