

## OUR OPINION

# While county fiddles, towns do a slow burn

You need look no further than Kingston Township to see the chaotic nature of the Luzerne County budget process. There, officials are impatiently waiting for the county to decide if and when it will take over collection of county property taxes, a job that is now in the hands of the township's part-time tax collector. In the arcane world of Pennsylvania's municipal code, Kingston Township's home-rule government structure makes it vulnerable to having this responsibility — for which the county pays about \$12,000 a year — yanked away as early as next year.

That yanking would be the county's prerogative, but it would be helpful to local officials to know if it will happen, so they can plan accordingly. The switch has been under discussion since the summer, and even now there is conflicting information about its status, as the county commissioners supposedly mull over options provided by the County Treasurer's office.

Here's the issue in a nutshell: Luzerne County pays Kingston Township \$3.50 per tax bill for collection services. In an ideal world, by taking on the work itself, the county could save nearly all of that expense.

By itself, Kingston Township isn't much of a problem, since its fees are a pittance compared to what the county pays the City of Pittston, at \$15.91 per bill or Nanticoke at \$10.77 per bill. The Treasurer's office projects annual savings in the neighborhood of \$600,000 by taking over collection in every municipality, most of which charge in the \$3.50 per bill range. Local officials say that savings estimate is way too optimistic, once the real cost of processing tens of thousands of payments is factored in.

Let's agree to disagree on those numbers. What is indisputable is that the county's foot-dragging creates uncertainty for the municipalities that now collect the county tax. Budgets for the coming year must be completed this month, and they include this line item, which in Kingston Township could mean the difference between a tiny surplus or a deficit.

And the county apparently hasn't considered a different and far easier way to dramatically reduce its expenses — simply cutting the rate it pays to local tax collectors. That's what the Dallas School District did several years ago, and state courts upheld its right to do so. Instead of reinventing the wheel, the county could simply set a standard per-bill rate, below \$3.50, and thereby save a huge chunk of money without disrupting a system that gives people a local office to deal with. Lancaster County uses this method, and gives municipalities the option to retain their own collectors or let the county take over.

Of course this option wouldn't require hiring additional county employees. Do you think that may be the reason it isn't on the table?

## MOMENTS IN TIME

The History Channel

• On Dec. 10, 1869, Wyoming territorial legislators pass a bill that is signed into law granting women the right to vote. Many legislators supported the bill because they thought it would win the territory free national publicity and might attract more single marriageable women to the rugged, isolated region.

• On Dec. 12, 1913, two years after it was stolen from the Louvre Museum in Paris, Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece "The Mona Lisa" is recovered inside Italian waiter Vincenzo Peruggia's hotel room in Florence.

• On Dec. 7, 1941, at 7:55 a.m. Hawaii time, hundreds of Japanese warplanes descend on the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor in a ferocious assault. The surprise attack killed some 2,400 Americans, rendered much of the U.S. Pacific fleet useless and drew the United States irrevocably into World War II.

• On Dec. 11, 1956, the Hays Code, the movie industry's tight restriction of language and subject matter, is eased slightly for the first time since its adoption in 1930. Actors could now mention abortion, drugs, kidnapping and prostitution.

• On Dec. 9, 1963, the last American-made Studebaker was produced, and the automobile factory in South Bend, Ind., closed forever. Studebaker, started during the Civil War, was once the world's largest manufacturer of horse-drawn carriages.

• On Dec. 8, 1980, singer John Lennon, a former member of the Beatles, the band that transformed popular music in the 1960s, is shot and killed by Mark David Chapman outside his apartment building in New York City. After the murder, Chapman waited calmly for police to arrive, reading a copy of "The Catcher in the Rye."

• On Dec. 6, 1994, Orange County, Calif., declares bankruptcy after a dalliance with high-risk investing leaves the affluent community's investment fund some \$2 billion in debt. It was the single biggest bankruptcy filing ever by a municipality.

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## Letters are welcome

Letters to the editor are welcome. Letters can be sent many ways: By e-mail to: [thepost@leader.net](mailto:thepost@leader.net) By mail to: The Post, 15 N. Main St., Wilkes-Barre PA 18711. By using the drop box located in the Uni-Mart convenience store on Route 309 in Dallas, across from the Dallas Shopping Center.



Punkin' wagon. Photo by Charlotte Bartizek.

## LIBRARY NEWS

## Fruit to be picked up at library Friday and Saturday



CAROL KING

Fruit that was ordered in the Friends citrus sale will be available for pickup at the library Friday, Dec. 10, from 4 to 6 p.m., and Saturday, Dec. 11, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Note that cheesecakes should be picked up on Friday to assure quality.

The Giving Tree project, sponsored by the Friends of the Library, is under way. There is one tree in the foyer and another in the children's room. For each donation of \$5 to \$25 — only \$1 for the children's tree

— a paper ornament will be placed on the tree. Please consider "giving" to aid the Friends in their continuing campaign to raise funds to lessen the library's deficit.

Library patrons are cordially invited to attend the library's annual Holiday Open House. It will be held on Tuesday and Wednesday, Dec. 21 and 22, from 1 to 4 p.m.

The Book Discussion Group read "The Professor and the Madman," by Simon Winchester in November. This is a nonfiction story about one of the many contributors to the renowned Oxford English Dictionary, a Dr. William C. Minor, an

American Civil War veteran and an inmate at an asylum for the criminally insane from 1872 almost continuously until his death in 1920. It sounds as though it is too gloomy a tale to enjoy, but it provides many interesting sidelights about medical knowledge during the Civil War, the treatment of dementia, and about the conception of the OED in 1857 and its eventual completion in 1927. The author sums it up by writing that, "it was the heroic creation of a legion of interested and enthusiastic men and women of wide general knowledge and interest; and it lives on today, just as lives the language of which it rightly claims to be a portrait".

70 Years Ago  
Dec. 7, 1934

### QUICK ACTION HALTS SPREAD OF SCARLET FEVER

Thanks to quick response by health officials, a threatened epidemic of scarlet fever has not materialized. More than 500 cultures were taken from school children, and 15 quarantines are still in effect. Only one case was reported last week.



### ONLY YESTERDAY

Chris Eipper, a Dallas Township farmer, raised 200 turkeys that averaged 15 pounds for this year's Thanksgiving, which sold for top prices at local markets.

The Depression hasn't stopped Howard Isaacs from selling Chevrolets for the J.F. Besecker Company. He exceeded his quotas in October and November, selling five and four new models respectively.

60 Years Ago  
Dec. 8, 1944

### SGT. PRICE RETURNS AFTER 66 BOMBING RUNS

Staff Sgt. Robert Price was back in Dallas after completing 66 bombing runs in Italy and Burma. A turret gunner, Price said he met only one other person from the Back Mountain during his time overseas, Ernie Lyon, a former teacher in the Dallas Borough schools.

Herman Sands & Sons of Carverton have selected as their new herd sire, "Montvic Pathfinder Peitge," a son of the noted sire, "Montvic Pathfinder." The new sire has a half-sister who holds the world record as a Junior four-year-old with 24,248 pounds of milk.

Climaxing a reconstruction program that started last December, Beaumont Union Church will be rededicated Sunday afternoon with services in charge of Rev. John Ten Hove. Trustees are Craig Herdman, J.H. Hadsell, Paul Nulton and Charles Smith.

50 Years Ago  
Dec. 3, 1954

### CARELESS HUNTER BLASTS BACK OF ELMCREST HOME

The siding along the back of a home in Elmcree owned by Mr. and Mrs. Byron Mitchell was blasted away by a careless hunter who was blasting away at a rabbit. More than 60 lead pellets were found embedded in the siding.

Classes at Lake-Noxen schools are interrupted until drilling is completed on a new water well. The school has been without water since Thanksgiving.

Charles W. Reed of Shavertown made his last run on a Wilkes-Barre Transit Company trackless trolley Tuesday, retiring after 40 years of service, 14 of them on the Dallas-Harveys Lake line. On April 30, 1939, Mr. Reed made the last run on the last streetcar serving the Dallas area before the tracks were abandoned and the switch made to buses.

40 Years Ago  
Dec. 3, 1964

### BULLDOZER STUCK WHILE DIGGING OUT POND

A large bulldozer belonging to Raymond Goeringer got stuck in mud while scraping out for a new pond at Caddie LaBar's place in East Dallas. It was pulled out with a Caterpillar tractor with help from Ted and Jimmy Dymond, Ray Strazdus, Bot Cyphers, Richard Strazdus and Bob and Keith Moore.

The worst automobile accident in several years left two people dead and three injured in hospitals. It happened near the intersection of Route 309 and Memorial Highway, when one car crossed the medial strip, hitting another head-on.

Ferris Fuller of Dallas, shot a pure albino buck on land in Lehman Township. It had nine points and may have been one of two that escaped last month from the Red Rock Game Farm.

30 Years Ago  
Dec. 5, 1974

### DEVELOPMENT OF BULFORD FARM RECEIVES APPROVAL

The Jackson Township planning commission and the supervisors approved a plan by V.P. Associates to develop 70 units on 181 acres at Bulford Farm. James Veras, president of the firm, said there is "nothing comparable" in northeastern Pennsylvania.

A barn on Mountain View Drive in Lehman that housed

horses owned by Dave Spencer Jr. burned to the ground, killing a colt and pony. Dave Spencer III, who led the only surviving horse to safety, was taken to Nesbitt Hospital with first, second and third degree burns. Fire officials suspected an electrical malfunction caused the blaze.

Dallas edged Lake-Lehman 12-7 to retain the Old Shoe trophy, in a game played Thanksgiving Day. The Knights scored first on a 16-yard touchdown pass from M. Kalish to Craig Yanchik. M. Wynn scored both Dallas touchdowns.

20 Years Ago  
Dec. 5, 1984

### NEYHARD RETIRES FROM NATIVE TEXTILES

Thomas Neyhard will step down December 31 after a 37-year career at Native Textiles. He began working at the plant, then known as Natona Mills, when he got out of the service. He retires as plant manager.

Maria Stahovec, Dallas, a junior at Bishop O'Reilly High School, achieved a rare perfect score of 10 from each of 15 judges at auditions for District 9 Choral Festival.

The Dallas High School yearbook placed second in a national critique and review conducted by the American Scholastic Press Association. Judges noted the yearbook's excellence in five content categories, particularly the publication of more than 1,000 photos, with 16 pages in full color. William Wagner was the yearbook advisor and Mark Rosing acted as editor-in-chief.

## Low-interest home loans available in rural areas

USDA Rural Development offers a subsidized government program designed to assist low-income, credit-worthy families and individuals in purchasing or building homes in rural areas.

To qualify, applicants must be under the low-income limit for the county in which they live (80 percent of median income), have an acceptable credit history, and meet certain debt to

income ratios. The current interest rate is 5.875 percent fixed (33 years). No down payment is required, and funds for repairs (and sometimes closing costs) may be included in the loan. The unique feature about USDA Rural Development mortgages is that the payments may be subsidized, or reduced, based on the applicant's income.

Call the Wyoming office at

836-4157, ext. 4, for more information. You may be prequalified over the telephone, if you supply your annual gross household income and monthly debt payments. Deductions to the annual gross income are made for the number of children in the household, child care expenses and persons with disabilities.

USDA Rural Development does not compete with other

lenders. In fact, USDA Rural Development will participate in a joint loan where another lender contributes part of the money as a first mortgage, and USDA Rural Development contributes the balance of funds as a second mortgage.

For more information on the programs offered by USDA Rural Development, visit the website at [www.rurdev.usda.gov/pa](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/pa).

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