

TAX

(continued from page 1)

dence. Both also allow for sharing of the revenue, with school districts, limited to \$10.

The maximum tax rate is \$52 per person, and a municipality's take is reduced by whatever a school district claims.

If a municipality has not adopted a tax, the school district can collect the entire amount. That is what happens now in Dallas, Kingston and Lehman townships, and at Harveys Lake.

The legislation requires that proceeds from the EMS tax be used for "police, fire or emergency services; road construction or maintenance; or for the reduction of property taxes. This limitation does not apply to school districts."

To lighten the blow on low-income workers, the new act allows municipalities and school districts to increase the exemption level from a maximum of \$10,000 income per year to \$12,000. Jackson Township supervisors plan to use the maximum, raising their exemption from \$5,000.

How the new tax will be implemented and collected isn't entirely certain. Employers pay the tax, and it is normally taken out of an employee's first paycheck of the year. David Gordon, general counsel for Berkheimer Associates, a private tax collection agency, said the act seems to call for a single payment of the larger tax as well.

Employers can decide if they want to spread withholding of the tax over more than one pay period; they still will have to send it in at one time, along with an itemized list of employees.

For this year, amounts beyond \$10 are likely to require a separate filing. Gordon said that when the new tax first came up in December, an early issue was how to avoid a second collection. But given the time required to adopt, advertise and collect the new tax, that seems unavoidable.

Municipalities may make changes in taxes during the year. That means the EMS tax could be adopted at any time, and the money collected shortly thereafter.

"We'll all kind of muddle through this together," said Gordon.

— Ronald Bartizek



FOR THE POST/CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK

Too stiff to fly south?

Last week's snowfall caught these colorful flamingos by surprise. Or perhaps they were already frozen in place by chilly winter weather. In any event, they stood out in stark contrast to the dull background.

LIMITED

(continued from page 1)

the new tax should bring in about \$30,000 a year, money the township will dedicate to roadway maintenance.

"This will help immensely," he said. "We get nothing right now."

Lehman's take will be boosted because the Lake-Lehman School District main office is in the township, so Sutton believes each district employee is considered to work in Lehman, even if they work at the Harveys Lake or Sweet Valley school buildings.

The entire \$10 occupational tax now goes to the school district, which will continue to receive \$10 per person, leaving \$42 for the township.

Persons earning less than \$5,000 per year will be exempt from paying the tax, Sutton said, just as they are now.

The Jackson Township supervisors also voted to make the switch.

Chairman John Wilkes said the increased revenue would be dedicated to paying for road

maintenance, emergency services and rising insurance costs.

"To provide services or not to provide services, that's what it came down to," he said. (See separate story.) Solicitor Jeffrey Malak said the tax ordinance would contain an exemption for earnings below \$12,000.

Dallas Township does not even collect the occupational privilege tax.

"We talked about it, but we don't need it," said Len Kozick, township secretary. "Why tax the people more? Just because they passed it doesn't mean you have to do it."

The township is home to large employers, including Offset Paperback and Pulverman Enterprises. Unlike in some communities, a large percentage of the employees live in the local area, and Kozick feels it's unfair to tax them unnecessarily.

Lake Township Tax Collector Donna Kocher had a ready answer when asked if her town

had adopted the tax. "There's nowhere to work in Lake Township," she quipped.

And the township has no police department or local fire or ambulance department to support with the funds.

According to Manager Joe Moskovitz, Dallas Borough members considered the tax, but it doesn't appear to be in the cards this year.

"There's an interest in it, because it's one of the few ways to raise revenue," he said.

The borough now collects the \$10 tax, which is split with the Dallas School District.

There is a \$10 occupational privilege tax on workers in Kingston Township, but the Dallas School District gets all of it, said Supervisor Jeffrey Box. The supervisors briefly discussed switching to the EMS tax at their December meeting, and it may come up at meetings this week, but neither Box nor Manager Eddie O'Neill expects any action.

"I believe it's safe to say we're

not going to do it right now," O'Neill said.

The township may be looking for some extra revenue, though, since it will be receiving \$2 less for every Luzerne County property tax bill it collects. The county commissioners threatened to take over collection, then offered to pay the reduced rate of \$1.50 per bill. The township agreed, meaning a loss in revenue of about \$7,000, O'Neill said.

Harveys Lake Borough does not get any revenue from the occupational privilege tax. Carole Samson, secretary, said the new tax was not discussed by council when the 2005 budget was put together. "We just didn't feel we had the time," she said.

Franklin Township secretary Davida Roberts expects the switch next year. Currently, the township and Dallas School District split the annual \$10.

Tunkhannock Township took a middle path, adopting the new tax, but setting it at \$20.

Trio arrested on drug charges

JACKSON TWP. — Three people were arrested after police responded to a call of shots fired on Dec. 28 and uncovered what officials believe was a drug house.

According to police:

An officer arrived at 410 Chase Road at about 9:30 a.m. after a report that shots were fired in the area. There he saw Roy Boothe, 38; Arlene Angeli, 47, of Wilkes-Barre; and John Horn, 42, of Scranton.

Boothe told the officer he lived at the house and some friends were in the area and shot off some rounds as target practice.

The officer returned to the police station and learned Boothe was on probation.

The officer and Sgt. S. Davis returned to the house to wait for Boothe to return. At about 8:10 p.m. they saw Horn enter the house. Several minutes later, Boothe and Angeli also entered the house.

The officers went to the door and asked Horn if Boothe was at the house. He said no. The officers persisted and said they wanted to see him.

They found Boothe in the bathroom, where they also found plastic bags of heroin in the toilet bowl. Officers found a semi-automatic pistol magazine in the toilet tank. Officers also found a black pouch on a dresser that contained a used syringe and many bags of heroin in the dresser drawer.

After obtaining a warrant to search the rest of the house, police found 93 grams of marijuana and more drug paraphernalia, including scales and measuring devices.

Horn and Angeli were arraigned on charges of possession of heroin and possession of marijuana. Horn posted the \$2,500 bail. Angeli remained in the Luzerne County Corrections Facility as of Wednesday in lieu of bail. Boothe was being held on a probation violation.

The three are scheduled for a preliminary hearing before District Justice James Tupper Thursday, Jan. 13 at 9:30 a.m.

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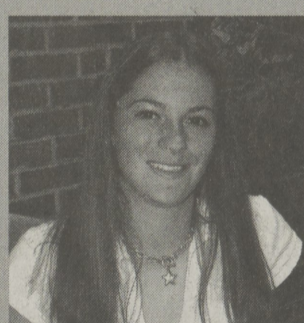
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