

Former Gators again power O'Reilly in playoffs.

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FOR THE POST/CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK

Rob Kohli gets a hug from his mother Becky Kohli at a welcome-back party arranged by his family.

## Warm welcome for soldier with chilling tales of war

Rob Kohli served 11 months in Iraq, at a base that was frequently attacked with mortars.

By CAMILLE FIOTI  
Post Correspondent

DALLAS — The guest of honor had some stories to tell.

Last weekend, a welcome-home party celebrated Rob Kohli's return after serving 11 months in Iraq. His tour included some harrowing moments.

Because his was the most-attacked

base, it was nicknamed "Mortarville."

"We averaged at least one to two rounds a day," said Kohli, a sergeant in the Army Reserves. Most of them never went off, mainly because either they were duds, or just not armed properly. Luckily, he was never injured, although there were some close calls.

"We were pouring a concrete slab for our motor pool when a round hit. One of my fellow soldiers was injured." During a Halloween party last year, a mortar landed about three

feet away from his tent, but miraculously, it didn't go off. Kohli estimated that more than 100 soldiers would have been killed or injured if it had exploded.

On March 5, local rock band Concrete Road, led by Kohli's friend Jeff Zaykowski, made some noise for the soldier, playing throughout the night at the Dallas American Legion.

The humble, 27-year-old Dallas High School graduate didn't want any fanfare, said his oldest brother, Greg. "The first thing he wanted to do when

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## Saddle Ridge faces continued opposition

Road grades, runoff are concerns to township and neighbors of the property.

By RONALD BARTIZEK  
Post Staff

"A fully improved second entrance is impossible."

Tom Doughton  
Township engineer

DALLAS TWP. — The developer of the proposed Saddle Ridge subdivision and his engineer sparred with the Planning Commission at the March 8 meeting over road grades, but many other criticisms of the development are being addressed.

John Halbing is a member of the commission. After voting with other members to approve a simple subdivision that clears the way for Landview properties to begin planning a 140-lot

subdivision between Upper Demunds Road and Route 309, he switched roles to defend plans for the 100-lot Saddle Ridge.

One critical aspect of his project seems headed for resolution. In reviewing the original plans, an engineer for the Luzerne County Planning Commission called the street layout "nothing more than a long cul-de-sac." He recom-

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## Developers get tighter scrutiny

DALLAS TWP. — Would-be developers will now be held to a strict standard for submission of paperwork and plans. That was the word from township engineer Tom Doughton at the March 8 meeting of the Planning Commission.

"From now on, until every document is reviewed and checked off, we are not recommending approval," he said.

The new requirement was spurred in part by a review of storm water controls that had been promised in plans submitted over the last decade. When

the Department of Environmental Protection asked for documentation on 52 plans that have been approved, the township could come up with only 22 documents, Doughton said.

Development plans usually include supporting reviews by other agencies, such as DEP, the Luzerne County Conservation District and the Dallas Area Municipal Authority. Those also must be completed and reviewed before

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FOR THE POST/M.B. GILLIGAN

The JETS team from Lake Lehman High School took first place in the TEAMS regional level of competition last week. Pictured in front are Skye Nickalls, left, and Mallory Delaney. Standing from left are Matt Poremba, Steve Heindel, Caleb Piatt, Jason Wagner, Matt Shiskowski, Ryan Bloom, and Dick Morgan, team moderator

## These JETS take off

Lake-Lehman team wins regional math and science competition

By M.B. GILLIGAN  
Post Correspondent

LEHMAN TWP. — It was probably more than just the promise of ice cream that led eight bright and talented Lake-Lehman High School students to victory, but they are still holding their teacher to his promise.

The Lake-Lehman JETS team took first place in the regional competition sponsored by the Luzerne County

Society of Professional Engineers, an event that was held at the Penn State Wilkes-Barre campus last week. Sixteen area high schools were represented.

"It is a very rigorous competition called TEAMS," said Dick Morgan, science teacher and team moderator for Lake-Lehman. "It stands for Testing of Engineering Aptitude in Mathematics and Science."

The competition consisted of two parts. Each of the eight team members

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## Split decision on cell phone towers

Cingular wins approval of Mooretown Road tower, another near Rickett's Glen is tabled.

By KRIS WERNOWSKY  
For The Post

WILKES-BARRE — The Luzerne County Zoning Hearing Board tabled one request and approved another to allow Cingular Wireless to build mono-pole towers in Fairmount and Ross townships at a March 8 meeting.

A company attorney and several technical representatives were at the meeting to ask for a height variance from the county which normally caps structure heights at 35 feet.

Brock Riffel, a radio frequency engineer for Cingular, told the board the company hopes building new towers will improve reception along the state Route 118 corridor where his company's customers currently don't receive coverage.

In order to do so, Cingular wants to build a 160-foot tower and an equipment shelter on property north of Route 118, more than 2,000 feet from Red Rock Corners in Fairmount Township.

Jeff Hynick owns the property adjacent to where the company wants to place the tower near Red Rock Corners. He said the tower would obstruct the view from cabins he rents to tourists who come to Rickett's Glen State Park.

"I'm not against this," he said. "I understand the need for this, but I don't want it to affect my

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POST FILE PHOTO

Merle Thomas showed how deep the water was during a flood at his produce stand off Memorial Highway.

## Back Mountain loses a link to its rural history

Produce man "Merle" Thomas dies at 87, in the home where he was born.

◆ ON THE WEB

Read a 2004 profile of Merle Thomas and his recollections of the Back Mountain. [www.timesleader.com](http://www.timesleader.com)

DALLAS — Once, there were fields where stores and homes now stand. Merrill "Merle" Thomas knew that, because he had farmed those fields.

Thomas, 87, died March 9, in the same Rice Street home where he was born.

In 2001, neighbors turned out to clean up around the house, which Thomas said was built by his grandfather more than 150 years ago. They picked up debris around the yard and tore down a dilapidated rear shed, things Thomas

was no longer able to do himself.

For more than 60 years, Thomas' produce stand and small greenhouse, across from the Twin Stacks complex on Route 415, had been well-known for flowers, vegetables and fruits in the spring and summer, Christmas trees and wreaths around the holidays.

As a young man Thomas farmed fields around the Back Mountain with his Welsh father, Arthur. "We grew corn

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