

# THE POST

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SERVING THE COMMUNITIES OF THE DALLAS AND LAKE-LEHMAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS

**DALLAS SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**RELAY FOR LIFE**

## Tax increase to take \$125 out of pocket

By CAMILLE FIOTI  
Post Correspondent

DALLAS TWP. – A 22-mill tax hike for the 2006-07 budget proposed by the Dallas School Board at Monday's meeting, isn't sitting well with a lot of taxpayers, according to board member Russ Bigus. He said he couldn't attend Monday's meeting because of family obligations.

"I think it's extremely high and I don't think it's needed," he said adding that the increase, which amounts to approximately \$125 per household. Nine of those mills will be used for the beginning phases of construction and building improvements.

A recent feasibility study done by the engineering firm Quad 3 Group outlined several options for the district, ranging from renovating the high school and Dallas Elementary School – at an estimated cost of approximately \$32 million – to a new, larger high school and new stadium which would exceed \$28 million. The top priority is addressing the lack of space at the high school, Dallas Elementary and Wycallis Elementary schools.

Based on the number of building permits issued for new construction, there will be at least a 1,000 new homes in the district next summer and not enough classroom space, said Bigus. He added Quad 3 also has an excellent ability to predict population growth using a computer-generated statistical growth forecasting program.

Bigus agreed the high school is in dire need of renovations and short on space, adding that many high school students are taking classes in the cafeteria. He said he doesn't see the need for a new football stadium or a totally new high school, however.

"We're still paying for the Taj Mahal projects of the past," he said referring to the middle school's 3-year-old, six-lane, 25-meter swimming pool and the unique log cabin-style construction of Wycallis Elementary School. "Fancy architecture costs a fortune."

Bigus said another option the board discussed is to use a building on state Route 115, near the Dallas Township municipal building, as an early childhood center and administrative offices or a special education center. The approximately 11,000 to 14,000 square foot building, which sits on 11 acres, is owned by Wyoming Valley Health Care Systems, Inc. and is 99 percent unoccupied, he said.

To remedy an immediate need for space, the district will lease a two-classroom modular unit at \$1,250 a month for 60 months, which will be ready for the fall. Business manager Grant Palfey said the beginning stages of construction, such as architectural design and bidding, should be completed within a year and without interrupting the schools.

Under Act 72, which will give school districts a portion of state gaming revenue for property tax reduction, Palfey said the state is granting an exception to the district to allow it to raise taxes above the mandated 3.9 percent. The exception was granted because the district's spending per student decreased last year from the previous year.

"We are taking a risk by not doing it this year," Palfey said. "This is a one and done deal."

The ongoing contract negotiations of the district's support staff and teachers were a heavy consideration for the 2006-07 budget, Palfey added. "There are a lot of open issues right now."

Bigus said Act 72 forces school boards to be financially and fiscally responsible.

"We want to make sure there's fiscal accountability, to squeeze the budget as tight as you can while maintaining educational excellence in the Dallas School District," he said.

The \$26.5 million budget will be voted on at the June 26 meeting.



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Members of the Offset Paperback team gather on the track of Mangesdorf Field at College Misericordia.

## Telling cancer to take a walk

By GENELLE HOBAN  
Post Correspondent

DALLAS TWP. – With whipping winds and plunks of rain, the fourth annual Back Mountain Relay for Life was cut short thanks to Mother Nature. The event was held last weekend at Mangesdorf Field on the campus of College Misericordia.

Relay For Life is the signature event of the American Cancer Society. At the event, individuals and teams walk around a track for a 24-hour period. The event is designed to celebrate survivorship and raise money to help the American Cancer Society.

The Back Mountain Relay For Life began at 5 p.m. Friday and was scheduled to conclude at 5 p.m. Saturday. But the weather didn't cooperate.

"It started raining around 2:30 a.m. on Saturday and the ground became saturated," said Susan Halbasch, publicity chairwoman.

"The stakes holding up the tents starting lifting when the wind picked up and we couldn't get them to stay in. We stopped the event as a safety precaution because we didn't want anyone to get hurt."

This year's theme was Carnivale and had plenty of music, food and games. Halbasch said it has rained at least one of the days every year since the inaugural event in 2003. The event is normally held for 24 hours because people who have cancer must battle it 24 hours a day.

"The Relay for Life in Wilkes-Barre drew people from a lot of dif-

ferent communities and that's how we came to form the Back Mountain Relay for Life," said Michelle Cassetori, chairperson of the event.

Twenty-five teams of 10, as well as several walk-on participants, strolled around the track to raise more than \$120,000 for the disease, which was donated to the Wyoming Valley Unit of the American Cancer Society.

The money raised will help with cutting edge research, education, advocacy and patient services.

"Our programs like Road to Recovery and Look Good, Feel Better are financed through donations," said Christine DeMelfi, the community income development specialist for the American Cancer Society.

"The Relay for Life doesn't focus on only one type of cancer," Halbasch said. "It goes for everybody and that's what is great about it."

The annual survivors' luncheon was postponed because of the in climate weather.

But Halbasch says a survivor and caregiver luncheon will be held in the near future. The time, date and place will be printed in an upcoming edition of The Post.

This year's honorary chairperson for the event was Beth Carey, a sophomore at Lake-Lehman High School.

"I was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma about a year ago so this was my first time participating as a survivor," the 16-year-old said.

"I got to light the first candle during the luminary service and walk



Susan Halbasch, left, and Jerry Phares get ready for the Relay For Life event.

**"The Relay for Life doesn't focus on only one type of cancer. It goes for everybody and that's what is great about it."**

Susan Halbasch  
Publicity chairwoman

the first lap around the track. It was an honor."

Cassetori, who lost her sister-in-law to breast cancer, said through her involvement with the Relay for Life she has met many wonderful people.

"It's a lot of fun," she said. "I do it in her honor. It makes me feel like we are making a difference because each year more survivors show up."

## Oliver hopes to continue NBLT success

By DAVE KONOPKI  
Post Editor

TRUCKSVILLE – Frank Oliver is passionate about his position as the executive director of the North Branch Land Trust, which helps preserve open land being lost to development. And he hopes members of the community are just as passionate.

"Tell me, who's against clean water and flood control or destroying family farms?," asked Oliver, who recently took over the executive director post from Linda Thoma. "We love land and we want to preserve it. In this state, we're losing roughly a land mass the size of Pittsburgh every six months to development. That would be okay if our population was increasing, but it's not."

And land is being lost right here in our own back yard. The office of the NBLT is located in Trucksville.

"In the Back Mountain, it's not hard to see a great deal of development," said Oliver, who lives in Tunkhannock. "We're not anti-development. We just want to see conservative development. We want people to think before putting a bulldozer on the property."

The NBLT made great strides in the 10 years under Thoma. The nonprofit organization grew from approximately 45 members to more than 450. And it has been able to protect more than 3,000 acres of land.

"I think there's a much deeper understanding in the community abroad of what a land trust does," said Thoma, a Dallas resident who now serves as the organization's director of operations. "We still have a long way to go, but conservancy and land trust is now being utilized at township level. The preservation of open space is now in their vocabulary."



Frank Oliver

Oliver hopes to build on Thoma's success. He says the addition of conservation specialist Rick Koval was a huge shot in the arm.

"Rick has built credibility for the organization," said Oliver, who has experience raising money for College Misericordia, King's College, the Tunkhannock Memorial Library, the Dietrich Theater, and Wayne County Memorial Hospital. "The demand for our services is increasing. As people learn about us, friends and neighbors call us."

Among the items listed in the NBLT's mission statement on the organization's Web site are:

- The North Branch Land Trust works in partnership with landowners and their communities to preserve the beauty and open landscapes that sustain us.
- Provides for the long-term stewardship of natural resources by the conserving and preserving forests and woodlands, watersheds and waterways, wildlife habitat, agricultural lands and open space in both rural and urban areas
- Protects and enhances scenic natural beauty and cultural landmarks.
- Provides this resource protection through acquiring and managing real property and interests in real property, public education, and non-partisan governmental involvement.

Oliver said he was encouraged by the overwhelming voter support for Growing Greener II during the last election. The voter-approved plan will invest \$625 million to clean up rivers and streams; protect natural areas, open spaces and working farms; and shore up key programs to improve quality of life and revitalize communities across the state.

"I believe from 73 to 75 percent of the people voted for Growing Greener II," he said. "It shows we're on the right side, politically, of the issue."

Oliver is also hoping more Back Mountain residents become active in the North Branch Land Trust.

"Our greatest enemy is indifference," he said.

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In a class by himself: Dallas three-sport athlete Mike Race has earned 11 varsity letters.



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