

The DALLAS POST

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

Lake-Lehman board proposes tax increase

Two members partly blame mismanagement by former business manager.

By DAVE KONOPKI
Dallas Post Editor

LEHMAN TWP. — Taxpayers in the Lake-Lehman School District will soon take a hit in the pocketbook, according to a couple of district school board members.

And they're not very happy about it.

With almost no money in reserve, the district's school board voted last week to accept a preliminary budget of \$23.9 million that calls for a tax increase of 13.09 mills to 261.64 mills for school district property owners in Luzerne County. Wyoming County residents who reside in the district will pay an increase of 4.75 mills, raising it to 50.09 mills.

A mill is a tax of \$1 on every \$1,000 of assessed value. For example, if a Lake-Lehman taxpayer who lives in Luzerne County owns property with an assessed value of \$5,000, the 261.64 mills would equal \$1,308.20. In Wyoming County, the 50.09 mills would equal \$250.45.

The budget will be available for public view until it is voted on at the Feb. 12 school board meeting. State law requires preliminary budgets to be presented no later than Jan. 25.

Board members Mark Kornoski and Charles Balavage feel mismanagement by former district business manager Rick Bombick helped lead to the proposed increase. Bombick resigned in late 2006, replaced by the Albert B. Melone Co. Attempts to reach Bombick for this story were unsuccessful.

"The board was told by (Bombick) there was \$715,000 budgeted to pay a loan taken by the pre-

AT A GLANCE

The Dallas and Lake-Lehman school districts recently accepted preliminary budgets for the 2007-08 school year. State law requires the proposed budgets to be submitted no later than Jan. 25. Both school districts are also working without a new teachers contract. The previous ones expired last summer.

DALLAS: The school board has proposed a property tax increase of 9 mills, which would bring the total increase in the district to 29 mills over the last two years. The district is considering three options regarding construction/renovation for its high school and Dallas Elementary School. A public

meeting will be held at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 31 at the high school. The school board will hold a work session at 7:30 p.m. Monday, Feb. 5 and its next scheduled monthly meeting is Monday, Feb. 12. **LAKE-LEHMAN:** The school board has proposed a property tax increase of 13.09 mills for Luzerne County residents and 4.75 mills for Wyoming County residents. Last year, with district raised taxes 18.55 mills for Luzerne County residents and 10.1 mills for residents of Wyoming County. The school board is expected to vote on a final budget for the 2007-08 school year during its Feb. 12 meeting.

business manager," he added. Balavage agreed.

"There was a lot of mismanagement in our last administration," he said. "We weren't told anything, we were lied to. We asked the right questions. We got lies."

Not all school board members agree with Kornoski and Balavage. Board member Andrew Sokol, who calls Bombick a personal friend, says there are times tax increases are a necessity.

"I feel Mr. Bombick did what we felt was in the best interest of the school district," said Sokol, who was elected to the board in May 2005. "I'm a fan of him and I'm his friend. I was sorry to see him leave, but he was replaced with very competent people."

"It's an unfortunate reality that we have to raise taxes. People are going to suffer. I'm a taxpayer. I'm going to suffer. Unfortunately, public education isn't cheap."

Balavage didn't place all of the blame on Bombick.

"We spent like drunken sailors the last few years," said the seven-year board member, who added he will not vote in favor of a final budget that calls for a tax increase. "Some of the stuff we've been able to do is terrific, but that doesn't make it right."

Sokol also feels years without a tax increase have helped make this one a necessity.

"Prior to my election, we had seven years of no tax increases, he said. "Although that might be a popular option, it was a detriment to the school district. We're in a place now where we have to close that gap."

Despite what happened in the past, Kornoski says it's time to look to the future — especially with a new teachers contract on the horizon.

"We're going to work through it and get back on the right track," he said. "We're going to have to tighten our belts. We don't have a choice."

vious board to finish some things at the high school," said Kornoski, who hopes the tax increase can be lowered to approximately 6 mills. "Our new business manager can't see where it was budgeted. When we got the report

from the auditor, that \$715,000 had a big impact on our budget.

"We were also told there was \$500,000 for capital improvements. There are none. How does it happen? It happens when you have an incompetent former

SOUPER BOWL OF CARING



FOR THE DALLAS POST/CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK

Robert Phillips shows one of the pots used during a previous Souper Bowl of Caring at the Center Moreland United Methodist.

A truly super event benefits community

By GENELLE HOBAN
Dallas Post Correspondent

CENTER MORELAND — After reading about a service plan to make Super Bowl Sunday about more than just football, pizza and wings, Sheryl Phillips — mission chairperson at the Center Moreland United Methodist Church — put the idea into action at her parish.

More than 15 years ago, a South Carolina church began the Souper Bowl of Caring, a youth-led, grassroots movement of caring, which has resulted in thousands of young people joining together to battle hunger and poverty in their communities.

"I saw something in the paper about another church in the area doing it between eight and 10 years ago," she said.

The Center Moreland United Methodist Church will hold its annual Souper Bowl of Caring with a pile of weekend service collections by youth group members.

About a dozen youth between the ages of sixth grade through high school will collect money, canned goods and other nonper-

"It gives me a chance to really express myself and to help out the community."

Seth Jones
Age 10

ishable items from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Feb. 3 at Thomas' Foodtown Market in Tunkhannock. The event will benefit the Wyoming County Food Bank and the Commission on Economic Opportunity.

Also on Feb. 4, members of the youth group will collect money to benefit St. Vincent DePaul Kitchen in Wilkes-Barre after the 8:30 a.m. and 11 a.m. church services.

A soup lunch will follow the 11 a.m. service at the church on Creamery Road, where Jerry and Clara Mattocks will give a presentation about the Oriental Missionary Society Prayer Initiative in Ecuador.

"Some of the youth group members are used to doing the

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PHOTOS FOR THE DALLAS POST/CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK

Kyle Hazleton (center) helps Dallas wrestling teammates Scott Daube, left, and P.J. Precone get into the spirit of the meet.

An unhappy ending

By DAVE KONOPKI
Dallas Post Editor

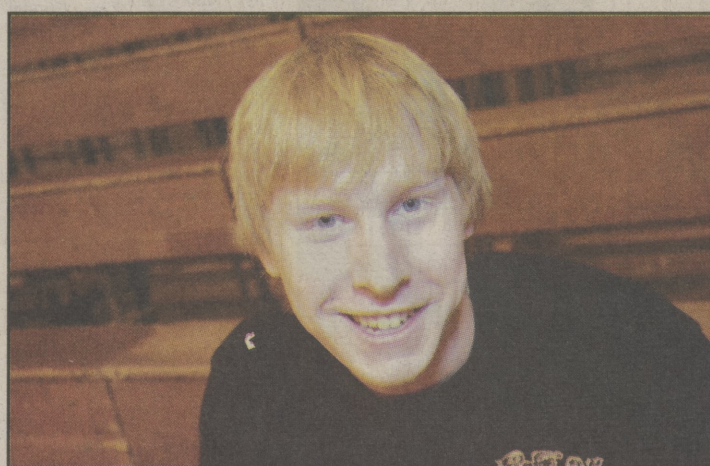
DALLAS TWP. — Kyle Hazleton's voice softens a little when he talks about what might have been.

After all, this was supposed to be his time in the spotlight. This was supposed to be the time when all of the losing became a distant memory. This was supposed to be the time when the person who didn't win a wrestling match for two consecutive years, finally took his place among the best in his weight class.

"This is the year I had been working so hard for," said the Dallas High School senior. "I was really looking forward to it. I just never got the chance."

A severe ankle injury suffered during practice in late November ended Hazleton's season almost as soon as it began. The Mountaineers were preparing to compete in the Bloomsburg Tournament when Hazleton and fellow senior Matt Hufford became twisted and Hufford fell on Hazleton's left ankle.

The result: a broken ankle and



Dallas senior Kyle Hazleton suffered an ankle injury in November, ending his season and his wrestling career.

torn ligaments. It took surgery, seven pins and a plate to repair the damage. Hazleton was in a cast for six weeks and recently began physical therapy.

"It all happened so fast," he recalled. "(The ankle) popped. It just didn't feel right. I kept hoping it was just dislocated or it was something that wasn't a season-ending injury. But in the emergency room, the doctor told me I needed surgery. I knew my wrestling career was over."

His wrestling career began in the eighth grade, when Hazleton — who played Little League, youth basketball, youth soccer, and youth football — decided to give the sport a try.

And it quickly became his favorite.

"I loved it," he said. "It's more intense than other sports. In baseball and basketball, you have to rely on others. Wrestling is a team sport, but when you're on the mat it's all up to you. There's no one

out there who can help you."

Despite loving the sport, he admits his early results weren't very impressive.

"I was horrible," said the son of Connie and Keith Hazleton of Dallas. "I didn't win a match in eighth grade or in ninth grade. There were times I thought about quitting. I wondered whether or not all of the work was worth it. But the coaches kept pushing me to keep trying."

One of those coaches was Dan Natitus, who became the high school's head coach when Hazleton was a sophomore.

"Wrestling is a very difficult sport to grasp in a short period of time," said Natitus. "There's so much to learn and it takes time. Kyle took a lot of lumps early in his career, but he never gave up. He kept working hard. He's such a great example, not only to other wrestlers but to everyone."

Hazleton won a few matches as a sophomore and began to come into his own midway through last season, says his coach. Last year, the Mountaineers won the

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