

The DALLAS POST

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WILKES-BARRE, PA.

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AN EDITION OF THE TIMES LEADER

From church to community: 'The Gift'

Presented by Back Mountain Harvest Assembly, event is in its 20th year

SARAH HITE
Dallas Post Correspondent

"The Gift," presented by Back Mountain Harvest Assembly, is in its 20th year of production and, with an audience of about 10,000 people over the course of three days, organizers strive to make the outdoor live nativity bigger and better every year.

The Christmastime event has come a long way since its first run, said Lead Pastor Dan Miller, who said the church wanted to find a way to give back to the community during the holiday season.

"It was beyond hokey," said Miller of the first performance. "We decided 13 days before Christmas to do a live nativity, and we did it four days before Christmas so we only had about a week to put it together."

He said the perfor-



PETE G. WILCOX FILE PHOTO | THE TIMES LEADER
Patty Petts, playing an angel, sings 'Mary Did You Know?' to Sarah Makarewicz who plays Mary in the 2012 production 'The Gift' presented at the Back Mountain Harvest Assembly Church in Trucksville.

IF YOU GO...

What: "The Gift," a live outdoor nativity presented by Back Mountain Harvest Assembly
Where: Back Mountain Harvest Assembly, 340 Carverton Road, Trucksville
When: Performances will be held at 6 and 8 p.m. Friday, Dec. 13 and Saturday, Dec. 14; and at 6 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 15
Info: For more information, call the church at 570-696-1128

mance garnered an audience of about 200 people that first weekend and estimated it cost under \$1,000.

"We were holding flashlights for lighting," he said.

Now the larger than life event can seat 3,000 people at one show, and the church hosts five performances in one weekend. Miller said the production costs can range between \$30,000 and \$50,000, depending on the year.

"That first year God sent the right people, and the following year we had about 1,000 people come," he said. "But the show was better, too. We started working on it in August, not 13 days before Christmas."

Three years ago, Miller said "The Gift" had its largest crowd in history

- about 13,500 people in three days. Hundreds of people were turned away from the event, as there wasn't enough space to accommodate them.

"We had the warm weather. I'll never forget it," said Miller. "It was 48 degrees (Fahrenheit) on a Friday night, at the second performance. It's always cold at the second performance. That's when we had 4,000 people show up."

With such a large crowd, Miller said it's important to keep changing the show - adding a new segment here, changing a dance sequence there. This year the production will debut its first piece of original music written by members of the church.

"We want to get away from having to ask permission for music and

things," said Miller. "We'd like to one day have our own original show that we could trademark."

"The Gift" has a staff of about 300 people - there are more than 100 actors in the show and countless other production and general laborers to help ensure the annual event goes smoothly.

"There are volunteers who make 5,000 cookies to give away after the show," he said.

Even with all the changes and tweaks made to the show, Miller said the message of the story of the nativity and the birth of Jesus remains as powerful as ever.

"We've had a lot of unique experiences here," he said. "Once there was a little boy, he was only about 7 or 8 years old, and after the show was over, he was jumping on a hay bail, tugging on his mother's coat. His eyes were as big as saucers and he said to his mother, 'Now I know what it's all about!'"

Miller said sometimes the meaning of Christmas gets muddled with the "gifts and parties and the tinsel and

See GIFT | 8

Enjoying holiday spirit



BILL TARUTIS | FOR THE DALLAS POST
UNICO cheerleaders dance to 'the tune of Jingle Bell Rock' at halftime of the 2013 UNICO Game at Lake-Lehman High School football field. For a story and additional photos, please turn to page 13.

DALLAS TOWNSHIP

Dallas supervisor says township is in good financial shape

USAN DENNEY
Dallas Post Correspondent

Dallas Township is in good shape financially, Supervisor Bill Grant told residents at the Dec. 2 board meeting.

He also announced that the preliminary budget for the borough includes no tax increase and the township is ending the year in the black this year.

The 2014 budget includes changes to employee healthcare benefits and workers'

compensation insurance for firefighters. Grant said the township will also replace several older police vehicles and purchase a mini dump truck for the road department.

Two engineering firms made presentations to the board as both firms are seeking a contract to provide code inspections for the township.

Representatives of Barry Isett and Associates and BWH Construction Consultation Services, Inc. made a case for using

their services.

Gregg Parlick, representing Barry Isett, said that his company was a full-service engineering firm. He said the company is growing and is in the process of opening an office in Forty Fort.

Parlick said the company has a grantsmanship program which provides pro bono grant-writing assistance to clients. "We will put in grants for you," Parlick said.

Jason Humenanski of BWH Construction also

made a presentation. He told the board that his company's advantage is in employees who had hands-on experience within the fields they inspect. "If an inspection is called in in the morning, we're out the same day," Humenanski said.

Supervisor Liz Martin explained that the presentations were unsolicited by the township and the township appreciated the representatives attending the meeting to explain their services.

In another item of business, Martin said the township is looking to change banks. The township currently uses PNC Bank but PNC announced that \$300 in monthly fees will be applied to the account beginning in January.

Martin said the board is looking for better options and that she has found at least one financial institution which will provide services without a fee.

Discussion continues

on the addition of a school resource officer at the Dallas School District. The officer would work 75% of the time for the school district and 25% of the time for the township.

A grant has been applied for but township officials agreed they need more clarification on details of the agreement before committing to the plan. The immediate course of action is for the board's solicitor, Thomas Brennan, to meet with

Ben Jones, solicitor for the Dallas School District.

A reception was held after the meeting to honor Supervisors Grant and Frank Wagner on their election wins.



Submitted photos
Swing dance partners enjoy an evening at the John Paul II Center in Dallas in October.

Swing dancing is best at Christmas time

SARAH HITE
Dallas Post Correspondent

Christopher Carr has done the Lindy Hop from Boston to Milwaukee, and now he wants to help the Back Mountain community get in step with the beat of the big band.

Carr, 49, invites the public to share in his passion for swing dancing at a Christmas Swing Dance at the John Paul II Center (formerly Gate of Heaven School) on Saturday, Dec. 14.

He has held two previous events at the John Paul II Center with the hopes of meeting new people and starting a swing dance following in the area.

"It's a different kind of

dance environment here. The people who dance do a mixed ballroom type of thing, such as the fox trot and the tango and the waltz," said Carr. "You can do that at any other dance studio in the area. I am trying to create a swing venue for people."

Carr may have gotten interested in swing dancing during the revival of the dance genre in the late 1990s, but the Harveys Lake resident remained a faithful swing dancer long after the craze was kaput.

"It's personal. Swing is the music plus the dancing - it's a whole different experience, just learning it," he said. "You have to get your body habituated with the rhythm."



Christopher Carr, shown here with his swing dance partner in October, invites the public to a Christmas Swing Dance on Dec. 14 at the John Paul II Center in Dallas.

Girls are listening for the steps, but the guy thinks ahead, and it becomes like typing, when

See SWING | 8

