

Joe Ferry: Upper Bucks Notebook

27 years later, groundbreaking stirs memories for Perkasio man

Standing just a few feet from where it happened, Gene Pritchard recalls the horror of June 26, 1988.

“You never know how one afternoon can change your life,” he says wistfully.

A little over four years earlier, Pritchard and his wife, Barbara, bought Leshers, an iconic variety store that had stood on Seventh Street in Perkasio for decades. It was the final piece of a plan they had worked so hard to put together.

But as flames roared and fire engines raced to the scene of a fire that would forever change the quaint borough’s downtown, Pritchard knew their dreams were about to go up in smoke.

“I looked up the sky and said

‘Lord, remember Job one more time,’ he says.

Two kids playing with matches sparked the blaze on a hot, windy Saturday afternoon. By the time it was brought under control, more than half of the historic town center had been destroyed. Among the \$9 million in damages was Leshers.

He still dreams about it at least once a week.

“I woke up that morning a millionaire and went to bed a pauper,” he says Pritchard.

As he speaks, a gaping whole filled with heavy equipment sits where Leshers once stood. A spanking new three-story building is going up there, part of an ambitious economic development plan designed to

breathe new life into the borough’s town center. Pritchard hopes whoever snags one of the retail spots on the first floor is successful but admits nothing will be able to replace what he had there.

“We didn’t create a customer base,” he says. “We created friends. There is a big difference. We would lose money on some things but you couldn’t buy a full page ad in the newspaper for what it cost.”

Indeed, Leshers was what Norman Rockwell would have come up with if he was asked to paint the quintessential small town store. With its old-fashioned soda fountain, glass cases full of penny candy, and creaky wooden floors, it was a favorite

destination for kids with a handful of change to spend.

Pritchard was one of those kids. One day as an adult, he stopped by Leshers for a soda and told the owner to give him a call if he ever wanted to sell.

Two years later, on his way one Sunday afternoon to Highland Park Camp Meeting, Pritchard got the call.

“It was meaningful beyond words,” he says. “Watching kids with penny candy...memories are where it’s at.”

After the fire, the Pritchards tried to rebuild Leshers. They borrowed \$500,000 through the Small Business Administration and opened Leshers II in a building down the block. But it was never the same.

Eventually, the Pritchards were forced to file for bankruptcy. They finally paid off the last \$100,000 they owed last year “by selling everything we owned.” All they have left are two 13-year-old cars and a small home in Florida. He works four jobs to make ends meet and dabbles in photography, magic, and ventriloquism to make a few extra bucks.

Despite the losses, Pritchard bears no ill will toward the young men who caused so much heartache.

“They destroyed the legacy I wanted to leave my kids,” he says. “But they did not destroy my faith. I’ve never been richer in my life with the faith I have in the Lord.”

Solebury manager outlines progress on Aquetong Lake
Area was drained to make way for natural stream

Nancy Albence

Township Manager Dennis Carney brought Solebury’s supervisors and residents up to speed on the status of the Aquetong Lake restoration at the Sept. 15 public meeting.

In late April, contractors began draining the lake and breaching the dam, which was built in 1870, allowing the waters from the spring to flow unimpeded into Aquetong Creek, the culmination of a 20-year process undertaken by the township to restore the creek to its natural state.

Approximately 300 million gallons of water flow from the spring daily. The Lenni Lenape revered the spring as a vital resource naming it “Achwe-tank,” the spring in the bushes.

“The lake has established itself very well,” commented Carney. “The soil is very fertile.”

“My suggestion, at this juncture, is to prioritize and focus on identifying problems of the stream, stream bank restoration, easier access for the public, establish a trail around the Judy House through the abandoned

lake stream and ultimately beyond the dam to the woods, a pavilion and picnic areas and parking” Carney said.

Supervisor Ed McGahan raised concerns about the trees growing in the stream bed.

“The trees are roughly 3½ feet high now. It will be costly to provide public access if we fail to address this issue now. We need a solution before a dense forest emerges.”

Carney responded that the township cannot access the area for at least a year and a half when the Army Corps of Engineers signs off on the project.

“The dry stream bed is currently under the auspices of DEP; the township has no access prior to signoff by the Army Corps,” declared Carney. “We need to hire a consultant next spring to identify weaknesses and offer ideas to assist in the stabilization of the streambed so that a plan can be submitted to the Army Corps and DEP before work begins. Unfortunately, dealing with these agencies takes at least a year.”

“If we are looking at that kind of timeline,” said Supervisor Bob Heath, “maybe we should

focus on what we can do, maybe with the Judy house.”

McGahan responded, “What do we want to do with the Judy House? A committee should undertake the exploration of potential uses. Do we want a community center? An educa-

tional center?”

“Further, we need a committee to determine a site for a pavilion, for parking access, for a trail across the stream around the spring and through the lake as well as restoration of the stream. We need to be aggressive with

Judy House renovations as well.”

Carney advised the board that renovations to the Judy house to date include the installation of a gas line, heat and electric and waterproofing of the interior walls.

Proposed code update carries penalties in Sellersville

Chris Ruvo

Convicted violators of the Sellersville Borough Code will face stiffer fines and longer stays in jail if Borough Council approves a newly proposed ordinance.

Council plans to take a formal vote on the ordinance at its Oct. 12 meeting in Borough Hall. Residents will be able to ask questions during a public comment period.

Should council approve the ordinance, which amends the Borough Code to reflect the proposed penalties, it will become law within Sellersville’s borders.

Council is considering putting the heftier fines and lengthier jail stints into the town’s code in response to a 2014 change in state law, which made changes to a municipality’s ability to enforce its ordinances, said Sellersville Borough Manager David Rivet.

“We’re updating the existing code to reflect the new penalties,” Rivet said.

The Borough Code is, in part, a collection of local laws that pertain

to a host of subjects. The code covers rules regarding everything from hunting, burning, construction, pet waste management and noise to disorderly conduct, nuisances, peddling/soliciting, and more.

Under the proposed changes, maximum fines for violating certain rules outlined in the code would be increased from the current \$600 to \$1,000. Similarly, the potential maximum imprisonment term would rise from 30 days to 90 days.

Violators could be charged for court costs and what is described as “reasonable” attorney fees incurred by the borough.

The higher maximum fine and longer maximum incarceration sentence would apply to many chapters in the code, including Chapter 48, which states that a dog owner or someone walking a dog is not allowed to let the canine urinate or defecate on the shrubbery, lawn or flower bed of another property. Doing so – and getting caught and prosecuted – could potentially subject a violator to the maximum \$1,000 fine and/or up to three

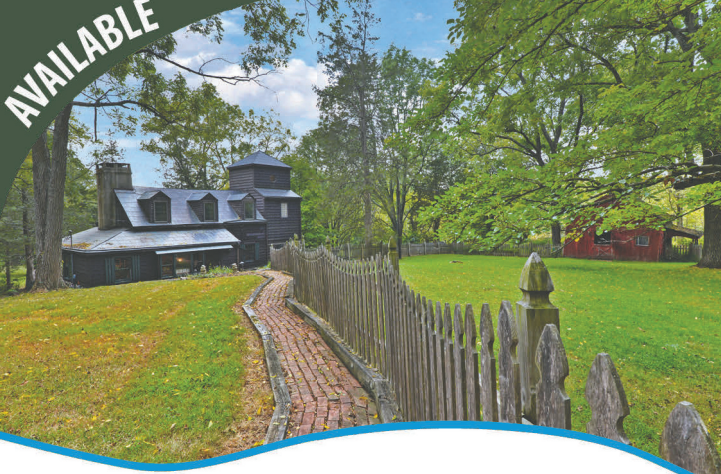
months in jail under the proposed ordinance.

Owners of nuisance properties could possibly incur similar fines. The code describes nuisance properties as those upon which “grass or weeds or any vegetation whatsoever, not edible or planted for some useful or ornamental purpose, (are allowed) to grow or remain upon such premises so as to exceed a height of 12 inches or to throw off any unpleasant or noxious odor or to conceal any filthy deposit or to create or produce pollen or to go to or produce seed.”


The borough code and the proposed ordinance with details on the new penalties council is considering are posted on the Sellersville website for public review at <http://sellersvilleboro.org/>.

While new penalties are proposed, it’s important to note that the maximum fines or prison stints would not necessarily be automatically levied upon violators. The proposed rules give authorities the discretion to fine or imprison up to those amounts.

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Route 32 to close four days in Tinicum, Plumstead townships

Route 32 (River Road) will be closed and detoured between Walters Lane and Point Pleasant Pike in Tinicum and Plumstead townships from 6 a.m. Tuesday, Sept. 29, through 6 p.m. Friday, Oct. 2, for construction of the new bridge at Point Pleasant, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) announced.

The four-day closure of Route 32 is required to allow construction crews to safely install new pre-fabricated concrete arches for the new bridge being built over Tohickon Creek.

During the four-day operation, passenger cars using Route 32 will be detoured over Point Pleasant Pike, Route 413 (Durham Road), and Dark Hollow Road. Local access will be maintained up to the construction zone on either side of

the bridge. Motorists are advised to allow extra time when traveling through the area. The contractor’s schedule is dependent on the weather.

Following this temporary closure, Route 32 will remain open to passenger vehicles as drivers will continue to travel over the temporary bridge that was built for this project. A truck detour around the Route 32 (River Road) bridge construction remains in place.

Construction crews are replacing the existing two-span reinforced concrete arch bridge on Route 32 with a new two-span precast concrete arch structure. It will have two 11-foot travel lanes, a 6-foot-wide sidewalk adjacent to the northbound travel lane, and three-foot shoulders.

The new bridge is scheduled to open in May.

Check out Angel’s gift shop for 10th anniversary gifts

Birthdays come and go but celebrating 10 years of running a retail business in New Hope is a pretty big deal.

As a way to say thank you to patrons who helped the business

become a success, Angel La Buda, owner of Angel’s Cards & Gifts, is giving away 10 presents to 10 lucky customers.

Stop by the shop in the CVS-Staples shopping center at Suga Road and Bridge Street for details or visit angelscard-sandgifts.net between now and Oct. 17.

The gifts include five \$25 gift certificates and five special gifts selected from best sellers in the shop.

Winners will be drawn by New Hope Mayor Laurence Keller, at 3 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 17.

Although winners don’t have to be present, all are invited to the drawing for bubbly and cake.



Angel La Buda shows some of her stock as she prepares for anniversary giveaways.



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