

Blackout BINGO
FIND THE NUMBER INSIDE TODAY

Boscov's
Father's Day Super Sale
NOW THROUGH JUNE 5TH

SEE OUR AD ON PAGE 6-A
the fresh grocer[®] Owned and Operated by Gerrity's
Limit 4 Per Variety
2\$5 FOR
TastyKake Family Pack Cakes
6.75 to 14.4-oz. box.
(Excluding Doublicious, Fruit & Yogurt, Snak and KandyKake Bars) Any Variety
SALE ENDS THURSDAY, JUNE 6th WHILE SUPPLIES LAST.
We reserve the right to limit quantities.
LOOK HERE EVERY WEEK FOR MOM'S DEALS AND PROMOTIONS!

State baseball/softball playoffs set to begin
SPORTS•1C

Back Mountain Library Auction set for July 11-14
LIFE•1B

INSIDE TODAY: TELL GISELLE, AROUND TOWN, BEYOND THE BYLINE

Sunday TIMES LEADER

116 YEARS STRONG

Sunday, June 2, 2024

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania • \$2.00



Connecting with the forest

Submitted Photo

The Hanover Reservoir, 17.5 acres in size, sits in the midst of 1,400 acres on Penobscot Ridge, with a great view of Wyoming Valley. The Hanover Reservoir was built by the Lehigh & Wilkes-Barre Coal Company sometime before 1885 to supply water for mining operations at the Espy Tunnel. It also furnished water to homes of the company's employees at that time.

New state forester: Outdoor recreation is booming in Pa.

By Bill O'Boyle
boboyle@timesleader.com

ASHLEY — American writer and humorist, Mark Twain, once said, "Buy land, they're not making it anymore."
Ellen Ferretti, Executive Director at the North Branch Land Trust and a former Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department Conservation and Natural Resources, paraphrased Twain's advice about land.
"I say conserve and protect land — they're not making it anymore," Ferretti said. "It's critical to appreciate, conserve and care for our natural

resources and the fabric of the wild that brings clean air and water, beauty and enjoyment to our lives for our health and well-being now and that of generations of people, plants and all manner of wildlife yet to come."
Ferretti met with Pennsylvania's new State Forester, Seth Cassell, this week at the Earth Conservancy offices in Ashley. Also attending were Terry Ostrowski, president and CEO of the Earth Conservancy; Nick Lylo, district forester, Pinchot Forest District, Department of Conserva-
See FOREST | 11A



Submitted Photo

Ellen Ferretti, executive director at the North Branch Land Trust and a former secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources, recently met with Pennsylvania's new state forester, Seth Cassell, left, at the Earth Conservancy offices in Ashley. Also attending was Nick Lylo, district forester, Pinchot Forest District for the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR); and Terry Ostrowski, right, president and CEO of the Earth Conservancy.

SEYMOUR HOLTZMAN: JULY 30, 1935 – MAY 28, 2024

Remembering 'a business genius with an amazing story'



By Bill O'Boyle
boboyle@timesleader.com

WILKES-BARRE — Evie Holtzman said her late husband, Seymour, was an eternal optimist who always did what he wanted to do and enjoyed every minute of it all.

Holtzman, 88, of Palm Beach, Fla., passed away Tuesday, May 28. Seymour was born in Wilkes-Barre to Max and Bella Holtzman (nee Spivak).
Holtzman is survived by his loving wife of 67 years, Evelyn (Evie) Holtzman; his sons; Marc (Kristen)

Holtzman and Steven (Qi) Holtzman; and his daughter Allison Holtzman; 12 grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.
Funeral services were held Wednesday, May 29, in Palm Beach, Fla.; followed by a committal service in Star of David

Cemetery of the Palm Beaches. In lieu of flowers, contributions in Seymour's memory may be made to Wilkes University at www.wilkes.edu or to a charity of your choice.
The Holtzmans would have celebrated their 67th
See HOLTZMAN | 2A

Mall's real estate tax assessment plunges

By Jennifer Learn-Andes
jandes@timesleader.com

The Wyoming Valley Mall's real estate tax assessment has plunged from \$68.7 million to \$13.6 million through negotiations with taxing bodies in a court-level appeal, records show.
Attorneys involved in the case say the new assessment reflects a nationwide value drop in many traditional shopping malls.
The dramatic reduction knocked the Wilkes-Barre Township mall from its ranking among the top five highest commercial real estate taxpayers countywide.
It also will sting impacted taxing bodies.
Mall owner Wyoming Valley Realty Holding LLC will pay a total \$375,201 in real estate taxes under current rates, which is a reduction of \$1.5 million, analysis shows.
A breakdown of the old and new yearly payments to taxing bodies based on present tax rates:

- Wilkes-Barre Area School District — \$1.26 million to \$251,156 (\$1.01 million less)
- Luzerne County — \$436,432 to \$86,576 (\$349,856 less)
- Wilkes-Barre Township — \$188,884 to \$37,469 (\$151,415 less)

Properties advance to court-level mediation when the owners contest county assessment appeal board rulings. At mediation, property owners negotiate with attorneys representing taxing bodies, with the option to proceed to a County Court of Common Pleas trial if they are unsuccessful.
In this case, an agreement, known as a stipulation, was reached in April to avoid trial, according

to the court docket.
Wyoming Valley Realty purchased the property for \$17 million in August 2021 and filed the court challenge that year.

Fair deal
Representing the mall owner, Attorney Francis Hoegen, of Hoegen & Associates in Wilkes-Barre, said his client had an appraisal concluding the property value was less than \$13.6 million.
During settlement negotiations, the mall owner also learned anchor tenant Macy's intends to close its store, Hoegen said.
"So in theory, our value could be even less because the original appraisal relied on income from the Macy's rent," Hoegen said. "We could be paying less based upon appraisals and changed circumstances with the loss of Macy's, but my client felt the deal was fair and as a result resolved the matter."
Macy's corporate communications released this statement:
"Our new strategy is designed to create a more modern Macy's, Inc. and enhance the customer experience. We intend to close approximately 150 Macy's stores while further investing in our 350 go-forward fleet over the next three years. A final decision on specific locations has yet to be made."
"There is a current evaluation underway comparing the potential real estate value and the future sales growth profitability potential," it said. "We look forward to continuing to serve our customers at this time."
Hoegen said he has handled numerous appeals for Pennsylvania

See MALL | 2A

A NEWS
Lottery: 3A
Weather: 12A
Business: D
Opinion: 5D

OBITUARIES
Court, Thomas
Duszak, Chester
Favini, Elizabeth
Kohut, Frank
Masters, Harry Jr.

McDonald, Cecelia
Newell, Terry
Novak, Raymond
Pezzner, Dorie
Regalis, Donald
Rinehimer, Dorothy

Santee, Lois
Smithey, Sallie
Stash, Mary
Teetsel, Robin
Vanchure, Michael Sr.
Verdine, Victoria

Weisenbacher, Kenneth
Wilson, Genevieve
Witczak, Leonard
Yarnell, Marie
Yetter, Joan
5A, 8A

Issue 2024-154
6 09815 10077

WE BUY HOUSES **NEPA CASH OFFER** **AS SEEN ON TV**
CASH OFFER!... within 24 hours!
570-855-SELL
www.NEPACashOffer.com

Biden

From page 8A

those plans change and Israel goes back to earlier tactics, “that might be a different story.”

Israel launched its war in Gaza after attacks by Hamas killed about 1,200 Israelis on Oct. 7. More than 36,000 Palestinians have been killed since then, many of them women and children. Fighting and Israeli restrictions on aid shipments through border crossings mean nearly all 2.3 million people in Gaza are facing severe hunger. U.N. officials say famine has already started in the north.

It was the Israeli operation against Hamas in Rafah that brought on the strongest warnings from Biden last month about how Israel was conducting the war and that the U.S. could cut its supply of offensive weapons. The population of Rafah had swelled to some 1.3 million as Israeli offensives to the north pushed Palestinian civilians south.

“If they go into Rafah,

I’m not supplying the weapons,” Biden told CNN on May 9. He indicated the red line as being an attack on “population centers” in the city.

At about the same time, U.S. officials confirmed that the administration had suspended a shipment of heavy bombs to Israel to ensure they were not dropped on Rafah.

Republicans’ condemnation of Biden’s move was fast and fierce. Soon after, the chief prosecutor for the world’s top war crimes court sought an arrest warrant for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the top U.N. court ordered Israel to cease its operations in Rafah, increasing the political pressure on the U.S. and Israel.

Brian Finucane, a former State Department official who is now a senior adviser for the International Crisis Group, notes “changes in tone and tenor” in the administration’s public comments toward Israel from around that time. Biden said the effort for a Netanyahu arrest warrant was “outrageous.”

Swoyersville

From page 7A

Swoyersville’s history in the coal mining industry. He pointed to the large patch of scarred land just to the north of Roosevelt Field, a reminder of the town’s past.

Charlie Jones of the Swoyersville Parks and Recreation committee was on hand to celebrate the 125th anniversary, and spoke to the culm bank reclamation project happening on that former mining land. He said a large piece of that land will be donated to the Swoyersville Parks and Recreation.

“We plan on developing that area along with some significant improvements to other parks,” said Jones about Swoyersville’s efforts to improve the current quality of life in the borough.

Jones said Swoyersville Parks and Recreation is always trying to do good things in the borough, regardless of

whether an anniversary is coming up or not.

“It’s the normal course of business,” Jones said. “Our council cares very much about making sure that the quality of life here continues... People benefit from being in the town, not just having a place to live, but a place that feels like home.”

Like Lykon and Jones, Kathy Breznay is a longtime Swoyersville resident who cares deeply about the community. She’s the president of the Swoyersville Kiwanis Club, and she put into perspective just how impressive 125 years of existence is for a borough in Luzerne County.

“When you think about 125 years that this town has been in existence, it really is mind-boggling, because it has gone through so much,” said Breznay. “Not only the mines, the flood, but trying to get it back together.”

Breznay said that efforts to keep Swoyersville strong past this late anniversary begins with projects like the



Sam Zavada | Times Leader

Swoyersville’s 125th anniversary celebration attracted a crowd from the West Side section of Luzerne County.

culm bank reclamation, and with events like the one held Saturday. The key, according to Breznay, is a healthy collaboration between local organizations and residents.

“Getting together to move forward is the primary thing,” said Breznay. “The town will not survive without everybody coming together, and we’re very fortunate that we do have these people that think enough about us to be here.”

Breznay sees some-

thing like the anniversary celebration as a stepping stone toward the future of Swoyersville. She acknowledged that there is a strong foundation being built in the borough by the young families who have decided to move into the area. With that in mind, Breznay sees the next phase of the borough’s life being even more successful than its first 125 years.

“I see [Swoyersville] moving nowhere else but up.”

Forest

From page 1A

tion and Natural Resources (DCNR); Geoff Shaw, EC executive administrator; Jason Tarnowski, EC project and operations manager; Karley Stasko, NBLT marketing and development director; and Emma Thompson, NBLT land conservation and stewardship coordination.

Cassell visited with the local partners to strategize for opportunities for more projects and partnerships to connect public lands for the benefit of the state and local residents.

Cassell said partners have been essential in building this public land base. This week’s meeting was to explore more opportunities to conserve land for public use. He said these partnerships have been essential to acquiring this land for conservation to sustain healthy forests, protect important wildlife habitats and expand recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

“Without these partnerships, we would not be successful,” Cassell said.

DCNR has had other recent investments in the region, including 2,500-acre Miller Mountain in Wyoming County, as an addition to Pinchot State Forest, as well as Vosburg Neck State Park and a new addition to the state park system.

Also close to the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton area, recent land conservation projects with these partners include the Hanover Reservoir’s 1,400 acres on Penobscot Ridge.

“It’s about balance,” Ferretti said. “In Northeastern Pennsylvania, there are many people and organizations from all walks of life and interests that work to make this a good place to live, work and play.”

Ferretti said North Branch Land Trust’s mission and role is to partner with landowners, communities and stakeholders to conserve and care for NEPA lands and waters.

“We partner with DCNR’s Bureau of Forestry because our mission and goals are very much aligned toward conserving and protecting our precious natural areas, ensuring long term health of our forests, providing low density sustainable nature-based recreation



Submitted Photo

A panoramic view of the Hanover Reservoir, 17.5 acres in size, on Penobscot Ridge.

and protecting watersheds and natural habitats,” Ferretti said.

And public funding plays a critical role in all conservation and nature-based outdoor recreation efforts in NEPA.

“We are extremely fortunate and grateful for the funding opportunities, supported by our local legislators,” Ferretti said. “Without these funds, NEPA would be at a severe disadvantage when it comes to protecting our commonwealth of forests, fields, mountains, farms, rivers and streams, critical habitats and overall spectacular places to enjoy the outdoors.”

But Ferretti said it doesn’t stop at conservation.

“Overall, when we ‘go outside,’ the hope of North Branch Land Trust and so many others is that we all model for others — teach, pass on, mentor and learn an ethic of care for nature — to ‘leave no trace.’” Ferretti said. “We need to ask ourselves why, after all this time, is there still litter along the roads, in streams, in the woods — anywhere other than a container?”

So what does it take to bring about an awareness of the connectedness of all things? How can a child learn that the plastic bag they throw on the ground by a stream may in fact kill a fish or turtle, so that they do the right thing and throw trash away in bins?

“Since the State Forester is involved in projects throughout the Commonwealth, having Seth’s participation at this week’s meeting to discuss our common goals of conservation in Luzerne County was a great opportunity to focus our collective efforts here in the greater Wyoming Valley,” Ferretti said.

State Forester Seth Cassell

Cassell said state forests are the largest single ownership in Pennsylvania, with 2.2 million acres.

“This land belongs to

the people of Pennsylvania,” Cassell said. “It’s our heritage that helps define our natural landscape. In a lot of ways it’s what makes Pennsylvania special — access to places like these close to population centers.”

Cassell said Northeast PA is an area where DCNR has been able build on the public lands with the help of its partners.

“It’s so important to conserve these lands to protect watersheds and conserve their ecological value — they provide habitat for wildlife and plants, they clean our air and store carbon to mitigate climate change,” Cassell said. “But they also provide sustainable timber to society — local, homegrown wood products that help our regional economies.”

Cassell said outdoor recreation is also booming — a \$17 billion industry in PA.

“People want to visit the wild places to hike and enjoy the outdoors, while also visiting the communities and amenities nearby,” Cassell said. “So why conserve these lands? They are vital for ecological conservation, quality of life and our economy.”

Cassell said NEPA is home to two forest districts — the Pinchot and the Delaware — which are 56,000 acres and 84,000 acres respectively.

“We don’t have solid numbers on usage on state forests specifically, but we know it’s increasing,” Cassell said. “Since the pandemic, we’ve seen increasing use and the numbers don’t seem to be going down. Many people are now looking for places to live with public lands nearby because they see outdoor recreation as being essential to their quality of life.”

Looking for partners

Cassell said DCNR is always looking for willing partners and landowners to make key investments that will benefit conserva-

tion goals, enhance community benefits and provide places for people to enjoy a variety of outdoor recreation activities.

“Our local conservancy partners are critical in building local support and working with landowners who are interested in conservation goals for their property,” Cassell said. “Northeastern PA is a great area to bolster our public lands. People are looking for places to recreate and enjoy the outdoors.”

Cassell said state forests are one of the few places you can go and enjoy large landscapes with what he calls “wild character” — that sense of a back-country experience where the forest alone shines as the main attraction. He said people enjoy hiking and scenic driving, but also hunting and fishing and rock climbing. Horseback riding and mountain biking are also popular.

“And many people enjoy the forest for peace and quiet and to enjoy the forest’s natural features,” Cassell said. “Trails are important to connect people to the forest. DCNR wants to invest in trails so more people can enjoy what the forest has to offer.”

About Pinchot State Forest/DCNR

• Pinchot State Forest has grown from 8,000 acres to 55,000 acres since the early 2000s.

• Pinchot State Forest is unique because of its direct proximity to the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton region. More than 2,000 acres are within city boundaries. It surrounds a large metro area and is close and immediately accessible to 500,000 people in Wilkes-Barre/Scranton and within 2 hours of the New York/Philly urban corridor.

• Many of the lands conserved are abandoned mine and former coal company land that have been restored and are still being stored ecologically.

• Pinchot State Forest

is named after Gifford Pinchot, two time governor and first USDA Forest Service Chief who was also Pennsylvania’s third state forester.

• Wilkes-Barre is also where Joseph T. Rothrock had roots in this region. He helped found the Wilkes-Barre Hospital. Rothrock was also a botanist and Pennsylvania’s first state forester who also led national efforts in forestry.

Earth Conservancy’s role

Ostrowski of Earth Conservancy, said the Hanover Reservoir is a part of the latest transaction with DCNR that was finalized last year. Ostrowski said approximately 1,400 acres along the Little Wilkes-Barre Mountain from Alden Mountain Road to Sugar Notch were conveyed from EC to NBLT and ultimately to DCNR to be incorporated into the Pinchot State Forest.

“As part of EC’s mission, we have committed ourselves to providing at least 10,000 acres of the original 16,000 acres purchased from the former Blue Coal Corporation for conservation as recreation or open space lands,” Ostrowski said. “The visit from State Forester Cassell on Wednesday highlights the importance of the partnership that we have with DCNR and NBLT which plays a significant role in helping us toward that goal.”

Ostrowski said EC has transferred approximately 8,100 acres of former Blue Coal lands to DCNR which have become part of the Pinchot State Forest, with approximately 5,700 acres of that total being transferred through partnership with NBLT.

“During the visit Wednesday, we discussed the history of the Pinchot State Forest and its dramatic growth over the past two decades due to partnerships such as this, as well as possible future opportunities which can

help EC reach our goal while providing quality recreational space for the residents of Luzerne County and surrounding areas,” Ostrowski said.

As for the Hanover Reservoir itself, Ostrowski said it is approximately 17.5 acres in size.

“We do not know the depth, but a little bit of interesting history on it is that the Hanover Reservoir was built by the Lehigh & Wilkes-Barre Coal Company sometime before 1885 to supply water for mining operations at the Espy Tunnel. It also furnished water to homes of the company’s employees at that time,” Ostrowski said.

Diverse opportunities

DCNR’s Lylo said Pinchot State Forest offers a diversity of outdoor recreation opportunities found on large tracts of relatively remote forest lands.

“Pinchot State Forest supports a multitude of resources, uses, and values, including water and air purification, recreational opportunities, aesthetic beauty, plant and animal habitat, economic benefits through the provision of wood products and environmentally sound utilization of mineral resource,” Lylo said.

Lylo said the state forest system comprises 2.2 million acres of forestland in 50 of Pennsylvania’s 67 counties.

Wildfire protection

Lylo said DCNR’s Bureau of Forestry is responsible for protecting the Commonwealth’s 17 million acres of public and private wildlands from damage by wildfire.

In addition to state forestry employees, Lylo said the bureau works with forest fire wardens and volunteer fire departments to promote the latest advances in wildfire equipment, training, prevention and suppression.

Pennsylvania wildland firefighters also assist with wildfire suppression efforts throughout the nation.

Pinchot Forest District is responsible for protecting 1.4 million acres of public and private forest land within Luzerne, Lackawanna, Wyoming, Susquehanna and Wayne Counties.