Inside Berks

Welcome to the Center

David Kamioner

As some of us may have noticed, aside from the piles of trash and staccato of gunfire, Reading has a new attraction these days. It's a brand new Civic Center.

Now because I fought, in alliance with many others, an unsuccessful rearguard action to stop the building of this public works project, I have earned the stripes to comment on this matter. We, sponsored by local entrepreneur Joe Eways, took the Civic Center Authority to court to oppose the ridiculous and unfair hotel tax, went through the correct legal process to get thousands of Reading voters to sign a petition to put the question on a city ballot and even got other initiatives on the city ballot that would have made such future projects reliant on voter approval.

Well, we lost the hotel tax case in the PA Supreme Court, a bought and paid for City Council that was scared of the possible result refused to put the question on the ballot and when the questions we did get on the ballot passed by about a 3 to 1 margin, a barely sentient Berks judge actually tried to suppress the election results.

Such is representative, har-har, government in Reading.

At the county level, then Commissioners Reber and Pyle, flush with thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from Civic Center supporters, voted to impose the hotel tax. Only Mark Scott voted against the tax, putting his duty to the taxpayers above the possible windfall to his campaign coffers.

Since that time, Pyle was denied even renomination by his own party and now works for Sovereign Bank, as in the *Sovereign Center*. Do you think Pyle and/or the boys at Sovereign may have worked out a "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours" deal for his vote while he was in office?

Oh, perish the thought!

And Reber? Up for trial on public corruption and maybe on his way to jail.

Such were the shining paladins of public integrity that gave this project the green light at the county level, their respective political fates being a bit of sunshine in an otherwise cloudy sky.

But, the public sector idiots had lots of help.

Many local captains of industry, whose businesses were politically connected and thus not targeted to pay for a tax to fund the project, championed the cause as a way to reinvigorate downtown Reading. Of course, none of them were willing, and are still not, to put their own business or personal money into other city deals. After all, if you can risk millions in tax dollars that other people pay and simultaneously puff up your own civic ego, why risk a cent of your own?

Relatively soon though, after looking at stark facts, these nabobs decided to backtrack and publicly espoused that the project would merely stand on its own, not act as an engine for economic development.

How's that for changing premises in midstream?

Local media were better. Both local television news operations did a good job presenting both sides of the story, when no doubt advertisers and others leaned on them to overlook the obvious.

But the newspaper of record in the city and in unenlightened parts of the county decided, and continues to operate under the notion, that the supposed benefits the Civic Center would bring, not to mention to advertising revenues, mean more than concepts of journalistic objectivity or even consistency of principle.

But hey, in Calcutta-Upon-Schuylkill, that's par for the course.

So after all the controversy, the bottom line has become that the good guys lost on this one.

Thus, the thing is going up and only a fool or worse would now not wish for its sparkling success. It must be supported if only for the idea that if it goes belly up it will have been a very expensive lesson in common sense and likely not one that would aid the city right now in its hour of economic need.

But if it does not prove a panacea or if it bleeds red ink and begs for more public cash, it will be interesting to see what comical rationale and fevered finger pointing the current supporters of the Civic Center will engage in to cover up their involvement in a deal that brought hockey and circuses to a city that could have used those same millions to provide desperately needed more police officers and a decent trash collection program.

They'll look around and wonder why they ever lent their self-important names to a concept that was never based on economic reality, but on political expediency.

Funny though, I bet some of us could have told them why years ago.

You can reach David Kamioner at davkam007@hotmail.com or at 610-698-6440.

Berks-Mont Photo by Harold Hoch

Members of the Berks Agricultural Group recently toured the Rolling Hills Landfill in Earl Township. The tour included looking at some of the newest techniques used by the Delaware County operation. It was the first time the agriculture group examined the facility.

Bank has new services

Log on to www.harleysvillebank.com or www.securitynat.com to take advantage of new and updated features on the Security National Bank (SNB) newly redesigned website.

In addition to faster online access, customers can now open accounts online, fill out an easy-to-use redesigned loan application, contact a customer service representative at SNB with the click of a mouse and perform a number of financial calculations using enhanced calculators.

Customers can also read a variety of articles on financial topics by clicking on the new Wealth of Information link and a convenient site map is available to help users navigate through the site.

When customers apply online for free web banking, they can easily review their account, transfer funds and view paid checks. An optional bill payment system allows customers to pay bills online in seconds without purchasing stamps. There is a plus sign at the bottom of each page of the new site for customer comments.

"We wanted our customers to have comprehensive financial information available to them, presented in the easiest, most convenient format," said Fred Reim, president and CEO of SNB. "We wanted customers to be able to apply for banking services online," he added.

For more information on Web banking and bill payment at SNB, call 1-888-SNB-3100 or visit us online at www.securitynat.com.

Former first lady speaks

Former First Lady Barbara Bush will be the guest speaker at East Stroudsburg University Sept. 20 at 8 p.m. in the Abeloff Convocation Center.

The fee for tickets is $50 and $25 and free to ESU students. Call 570-422-3033 for details.

Fluharty is honored for service years

A leading insurance professional organization recently recognized Mark A. Fluharty, CIC, of Gerhart, Hartman & Ritner of Boyertown for his dedication and ongoing leadership in the insurance industry.

The Society of Certified Insurance Counselors honored Fluharty for 10 years of successfully maintaining the Certified Insurance Counselor designation which denotes significant commitment to advanced knowledge and customer service.

The CIC Program is nationally recognized for continuing programs for insurance professionals, with programs in all 50 states and Puerto Rico. The group is headquartered in Texas.

Anniversary scheduled for home

The Lutheran Home at Topton will hold its 105th Anniversary Day Fair on Sept. 29 and will be entitled, "A Heritage Harvest."

Activities, contests and entertainment for the entire family will begin at 8 a.m. and end at 6 p.m.

A youth dance will end at 8 p.m.

A sunrise service will start the day and will be followed by a flag-raising ceremony.

For Your Convenience…
New Laboratory in Your Neighborhood

Boyertown/New Berlinville Laboratory Services

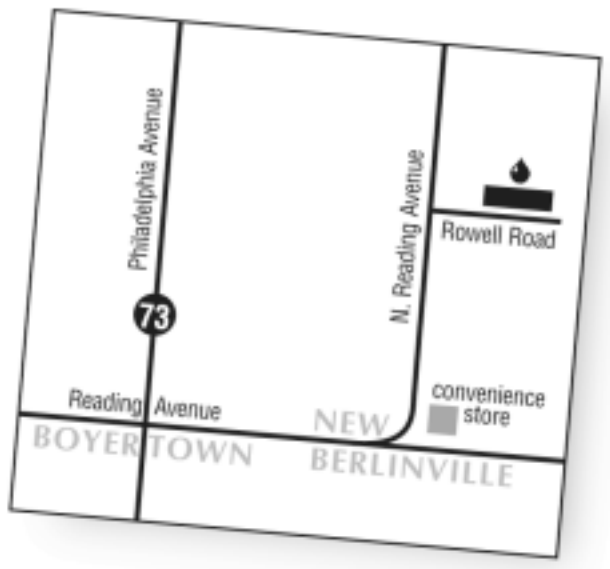
Our full-service, accredited laboratory is now open. No appointment is necessary for:
• Blood tests • Urinalysis

Open weekdays 7 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Boyertown Family Medicine
9 Rowell Road, Boyertown, PA
(just off N. Reading Ave. in New Berlinville)

For more information, call 610-367-6443

The Reading Hospital has 12 other laboratories in Berks County for your convenience:
• Bernville 610-488-9922
• Exeter Imaging Center 610-779-6632
• Exeter Medical Center 610-370-5013
• Northern Berks Medical Center (Hamburg) 610-562-9121
• Kutztown Imaging Center 610-683-3218
• Muhlenberg Imaging Center 610-988-4004
• Reading 610-921-4524
• West Lawn 610-678-8558
• West Reading (Doctors Office Bldg.) 610-988-8063
• West Reading 610-373-0221
• Womelsdorf 610-589-1066
• Wyomissing 610-374-4797



EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES? CALL 610-988-WORK

The Reading Hospital and Medical Center
www.readinghospital.org

The Eagle's Eye

by Jon Christman

September 2001

"Friendly Separation"

Towering above the land, gliding through the air, the eagle acknowledges the past, evaluates the present, and contemplates the future. From history till now and now till then, the eagle's eye serves as an eyewitness. It's eye sees…

With two sides taken, strong opinions exchanged, stubborn misconceptions forged, and ignorant conclusions drawn, a constitutional war is fought. However, many Americans remain naïve, complacent, or oblivious to this struggle. Exactly, what constitutional war is this? It is the longstanding issue of defining the relationship between church and state. Should they be separated? Should one possess control over the other? What was the Constitutional framers' original intent? Have we strayed from that? Or, have we steadfastly defended it?

A majority of the original thirteen colonies were chartered or founded with one of the primary reasons being religious freedom. Why? Early settlers were escaping the state established church in England. Due to the Conventicle Act of 1665, this church was the only one permitted, and citizens were not just expected to be there, but attendance was mandatory. Personal worship was forbidden for if the citizens ever disobeyed, imprisonment or even torture would follow. It was a mandate that English men and women had to abide by with no objections raised. Clearly, the state established church in England had become corrupt.

That is why it is no surprise to me, that centuries later the members of the Constitutional Convention remembered their ancestors' persecution and strived to prevent any similar event from happening in America. Therefore, within the First Amendment it reads: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." In England the law making body, Parliament, had constructed and passed a law that demanded one religion to be followed. In America the framers of the Constitution wanted to assure themselves and their posterity that our law making body, Congress, would never pass a law that commanded only one religion to be followed. They responded by creating a unique relationship between church and state that became a foundation in our society.

The state did not control the church, as the case was in England's past. The church did not control the state, as the case is in a theocracy. Rather, the church and the state were established as two independent bodies, separate from each other, but joined in a partnership to serve America. They had different purposes and duties. The state was to protect the body and the church was to feed the soul. Different roles, yet each had a major part to play in the foundation, education, and protection of the American person and each had a responsibility to the other. The church was to obey the laws of the state and provide the moral and religious framework of our nation. The state would in turn protect and defend the church's rights and also acknowledge and respect its influence. Neither was supposed to have control over the other; rather, there was meant to be a healthy balance between these two pillars of our society.

How is this balance achieved? The Constitutional Convention wanted the American people to have religious and civil freedoms as well as have these liberties defended. This is the essence of the American "state." However, the framers also knew the importance of the church affecting the state and they desired a prominent influence in that regard. Religion was not required of an individual to be involved in the state; but, the framers knew the heavenly blessings we had received and wanted God involved in their decision-making, nation building, and future growth. Why else would they pray before each of their gatherings?

In America red flags are raised whenever the words "church" and "state" are simply mentioned. A reemergence of the Constitutional framers intent seems almost impossible; however, if both sides merge from the extremes into the middle ground, they will see that it is there where the founders and builders of this great nation wanted the balance to be for the church and state relationship. They wanted the church and state to be working together, not against each other, to serve the United States of America. Independent of each other? Yes. Relying on each other, listening to each other, and respecting each other? Also yes. The church and state are not called to be antagonists, separated like foes on a battlefield; instead, they are called to have a "friendly separation."

This space provided through the courtesy of:

WEST MOTOR FREIGHT
Boyertown
Phone 610-367-2611 or 1-800-456-7885

BERKS-MONT NEWSPAPERS, INC.
Phone – 610-367-6041
Fax – 610-369-0233
E-mail
editor@berksmontnews.com

NOTE: Sponsorship of this column/series does not necessarily indicate endorsement of the views expressed in the column.