

WORD ON THE STREET

"In effect, it's going to be creating an island in Ottsville."

Ottsville Volunteer Fire Co. Chief Tom Rimmer, about bridge closures in Tinicum

OUR TOWNS

The Intelligencer

NOW YOU KNOW

On March 7, 1911, President William Howard Taft ordered 20,000 troops to patrol the U.S.-Mexico border in response to the Mexican Revolution.

B

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COMMENTARY

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On the brink

The decline of Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia is explained in a single, startling statistic. Fifty years ago, 80 percent of Roman Catholics attended weekly Sunday Mass. Today, it's 19 percent.

With so few attending Mass and contributing to the collection basket, parish schools perish.

On Feb. 28, the archdiocese announced more school closings, including St. Thomas Aquinas in Croydon, St. Martin of Tours in New Hope, and Our Lady of Fatima in Bensalem.

That makes seven Catholic schools in Bucks County that have been shuttered in two years.

On the brink is one of the great educational institutions of Lower Bucks County, Conwell-Egan Catholic High School, my alma mater.

Last week, at a sparsely attended meeting at CEC (despite hundreds of invitations sent), archdiocesan schools Superintendent Mary Rochford said enrollment has dropped by half since 1995-96, when it had 1,390 students.

Asked what the enrollment would have to drop to before the archdiocese closed the school, Rochford said anything below 500 students makes it "difficult" to continue. The current enrollment is 689.

"The numbers have to go up," Rochford said.

Follow-up questions from the audience revealed anger and latent despair. No one knows what to do.

"It's like all of us are waiting for someone else to do something," Rochford said.

Ask 10 Catholics to account for the astonishing decline of a once prestigious school system and you will get as many answers.

Paying tuition in a down economy is a struggle for middle class Catholics, of course. Low birth rates contribute, too.

The big Catholic family has become politically incorrect in a greenie culture of self-worship.

The priest sex scandals have taken a toll, too.

However, Rochford said the largest contributor to the decline is that Bucks County's public schools are pretty good. Beyond that, educational choices available today have never been greater — charters, virtual and home schooling among them. Catholic schools have to compete in a tough environment.

But the decline of Catholic schools does not explain the breathtaking collapse in weekly church attendance among the archdiocese's 1 million members.

Pews began emptying long before the priest sex scandals were publicized. By the mid-1970s, only half of Catholics attended weekly Mass.

The present 19 percent practice rate is indifference never seen. It is an open secret among our clergy that many Catholic parents who send their children to parish schools don't go to Mass.

This shocks, not because parents choose to be spiritually aloof, but because their chilly disinterest denies to their children a sacrament that is the source and summit of the faith. Why be Catholic?

As with the decline of schools, decline in Sunday worship has many reasons.

Of course, blame rests with Cardinal Justin Rigali and his predecessors, Cardinals Bevilacqua and Krol, on whose watches the flock strayed. Leadership was needed to rally the faithful. Enough said.

Poor catechism plays a part. How many Catholics can explain transubstantiation, let alone name the Works of Mercy? The pseudo-enlightenment of secular academics has a role, too.

Colleges and universities that young Catholics attend are largely doctrinaire liberal seminaries, hostile to the church. Academics don't shrink from discrediting church teachings and traditions, as documented by Penn State Prof. Philip Jenkins in "The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice."

A high school buddy of mine, a late vocation to the priesthood, said the church itself must accept most of the blame.

After the Vatican II reforms in the 1960s, the church ham-handedly embraced the wrong culture at the wrong time. Vocations collapsed.

In an attempt at "relevance," clergy began spouting social justice slogans, rather than preaching timeless truths.

The good news is that Catholic seminaries which emphasize timeless truths are thriving, with young men eagerly joining. The religious orders stuck in the '60s time warp are, sadly, dying.

My buddy foresees in 20 years the church will have shed millions of dead-wood Catholics. Robust growth will commence.

Meanwhile, Catholics made anxious by shuttered schools (and next, parishes) should resist despair.

Despair is a mortal sin.

Grant helps fund advanced ambulances

Central Bucks Ambulance and Rescue Unit stationed the first vehicle near New Hope, which doesn't have another company offering advanced life support.

By CHRISTINA KRISTOFIC

STAFF WRITER

It used to take paramedics from Central Bucks Ambulance and Rescue Unit an average of 12 to 13 minutes to respond to a call in New Hope.

Now, the ambulance squad has a new advanced life support vehicle and paramedics stationed in New Hope, and its response times to crucial calls

Doylestown

average 2 to 3 minutes during the day-time hours, Chief Chuck Pressler said. The ambulance squad bought the vehicle with a grant from the Norman Raab Foundation in Buckingham, and keeps it at the Eagle Fire Co. in New Hope.

"I can't tell you how happy it makes me," Pressler said.

"That's some of the biggest expense

in providing any service — having the platforms to work out of. You don't want old vehicles because you don't need a truck breaking down at the worst possible time."

New Hope gets most of its ambulance service from the Lambertville-New Hope Ambulance and Rescue Squad. But Pressler said the Lambertville-New Hope squad cannot offer advanced life support — medications and defibrillation equipment.

Pressler estimated that it would cost more than \$500,000 for Central Bucks Ambulance to keep an ambulance and advanced life support vehicle at the

Eagle Fire Co. — more if the squad built its own station. He said: "There's not a lot of call volume to justify the cost."

The Eagle Fire Co. offered Central Bucks Ambulance a place to park an ambulance or advanced life support vehicle. Pressler said the fire company also offered to allow the paramedics to use the fire station when they're not on a call.

Pressler applied for a grant from the Norman Raab Foundation, a philanthropic organization that supports

See **GRANT**, Page B2



BILL FRASER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Kelly Krumenacker (left), founder and president of the Bucks County Children's Museum, and spokeswoman Mande Kuenzle talk about the museum, which is slated to open late this year at Union Square in New Hope. Exhibits are in the planning stage. The tree house (left), which was donated by FAO Schwarz in New York City, will be made into a reading nook.

Teachers get preview of children's museum

By AMANDA CREGAN

STAFF WRITER

Imagination is beginning to take shape at the Bucks County Children's Museum.

As local teachers gathered in what will be the museum's town square for a sneak peek, their attention turned to integrating education into the exhibits.

The museum, located in the former New Hope branch of the James A. Michener Art Museum at Union Square, is on track to open by the fall, said Kelly Krumenacker, president and founder.

The 5,000-square-foot space will feature elements unique to Bucks County, and will be geared toward children, primarily to age 8.

"It's a year-round facility that's really going to focus on the best of Bucks," she said.

Before crews begin breaking ground on exhibits in June, about 20 teachers gathered last week to craft curriculum special to the museum.

"In every single exhibit area there will be a curriculum tie-in," said Mande Kuenzle, museum spokeswoman, noting that the educational materials would be made available to teachers, who could teach exhibit-related lessons on the days before and after students take a field trip to the



BILL FRASER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The Bucks County Children's Museum at Union Square in New Hope is slated to open late this year.

museum.

Teachers from Central Bucks, New Hope-Solebury, Council Rock and the Bucks County Intermediate Unit schools walked by the charcoal drawings mounted along the walls, which will soon transform into an interactive space for kids to play and learn.

"Seeing the pictures on a large scale, you can really picture the kids being hands-on," said Kate Diebert, special education teacher at Cold Spring Elementary School in Central

ON THE WEB

A sneak peek of the museum at phillyburbs.com/news/local/the_intelligencer_news

Bucks School District.

Kindergarten teacher Brenda Flicker, of Cold Spring, was impressed with the designs.

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Tinicum

Closed bridges increase risks

Closed and soon-to-be closed bridges will block access for fire engines and other emergency responders.

By AMANDA CREGAN

STAFF WRITER

Some Tinicum residents could be on their own when it comes to battling a fire or any other life-threatening emergency.

Due to recent and planned bridge closures, fire, ambulance and police will have a difficult time reaching a section of Ottsville, in Tinicum.

"In effect, it's going to be creating an island in Ottsville," said Ottsville Volunteer Fire Co. Chief Tom Rimmer.

All major east/west routes will be blocked off in the rural Upper Bucks township.

Last week, Headquarters Road Bridge, near Sheep Hole Road, was shut down unexpectedly because it was deemed structurally unsafe.

PennDOT crews will begin work on a second Headquarters Road Bridge, near Cafferty Road, which will close to traffic once drainage repairs to nearby Dark Hollow Road are completed.

Work to a third Headquarters Road Bridge, near Tettermer Road, starts this week, but that project won't require any road closures, according to PennDOT.

The unexpected shutdown of Headquarters Road Bridge, near Sheep Hole Road, coupled with the long-term closure of the Geigel Hill Road Bridge (since 2002) has essentially chocked off emergency vehicle access to a portion of Ottsville, said Rimmer.

"We've just been cut off," he said.

The fire station is on Durham Road, near Headquarters and Geigel Hill roads.

Delaware Valley Fire Co. covers another section of Tinicum, but Ottsville Fire Co. is tasked with protecting the homes across the Headquarters Road bridges.

Though it's a longer, indirect route, the fire company is forced to take its 34-ton, 8-foot-wide fire engines and tankers down narrow, winding Clay Ridge Road, which has a bridge that restricts vehicles to 6 tons.

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Resident 'surprised but honored' by DRPA appointment

By MARGARET GIBBONS

STAFF WRITER

While known as a multitasker, Lansdale resident Joanna Cruz admitted it's been hectic even for her.

Lansdale

Informed last weekend that Gov. Tom Corbett intended to appoint her to the troubled Delaware River Port Authority board, the Republican lawyer immediately began to familiarize herself with the issues, duties and responsibilities of the agency in time for her first board meeting last Wednesday.

At the same time, she is trying to

wrap up cases she has as a part-time public defender in order to take up her new post as an assistant county solicitor with the county's Office of Children and Youth.

"I've just been spinning this week," said Cruz, 42, a Temple University Law School graduate who earned dual degrees in finance and English as an undergraduate at LaSalle University.

Cruz, a Lansdale GOP committee-woman, said she was "surprised but honored" when she received a call from the governor's office advising her of her appointment to an authority that has come under fire in recent months for alleged misuse of public money and

unethical conduct.

"I never lobbied for such a position," said Cruz, who is an associate with the Upper Gwynedd law firm of Kerns, Pearlstone, Onorato & Hladik, which includes Montgomery County Republican Committee Chairman Robert J. Kerns as a partner.

Cruz said she worked for Corbett's election as governor but not with any expectation of getting a position or appointment if he won election.



Joanna Cruz

Corbett, who was sworn into office in January, tapped Cruz as one of the state's six new representatives, including himself, on the authority. The other two Pennsylvania representatives remained on the 16-member board, which includes eight representatives from New Jersey.

Cruz said she had no prior experience with the authority but sits on a variety of other boards including serving as board president of ACLAMO, which provides social services for the county's Hispanic community, and the Elmwood Park Zoo.

Cruz said she has read news

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Museum

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"We're excited to see what (Krumenacker) has done and have it come to fruition," she said, looking around the tot-sized town square.

"It's going to be hands-on learning, interactive, and you're getting the history (of Bucks County), which a lot of kids don't know," said Flicker.

"We don't have anything around here like this," she said of the kid-centered museum.

Cold Spring librarian Trudi Rosencrans agreed.

"Location, location, location," Rosencrans said, noting that it's an easier trip to make with younger children than the Philadelphia museums.

It's a needed resource, Diebert said.

"It's an amazing resource in your backyard."

Passing by a hot air balloon out front, kids will enter the museum and walk through a large, red covered bridge, a staple of Bucks County history.

In the coming months, each bridge board will be available for adoption by donors, and would include the donors name on the board.

In the main square will stand a 14-foot, smiling clock tower, looking over a railroad car that children will be able to board and eat what they buy at the general store next door.

In that experience, the teachers saw the opportunity for kids to learn about money, locally grown foods and the history surrounding those who moved

goods via the railroads.

To the right is a big gazebo, which will be a daily platform for local musicians, storytellers and performers.

Round the towering tree house, which children can climb and settle in with a special book in the loft, kids will then approach the waterways exhibit and an artifact dig.

The group of teachers will create lessons on conservation and wildlife coupled with the history of the Delaware River and the canal.

Then on to a science-centered exhibit on landforms, featuring a rock-climbing wall with peep holes to show sediment layers.

And there is much more.

The museum continues to have strong support from donors, said founder Krumenacker, a former special education teacher.

Local volunteers have donated their skills and time, shaving \$200,000 from the \$1 million budget.

The children's museum has been a longtime coming, and fills a needed gap for local families looking for a fun, educational experience for their little ones.

"It's so family oriented," Krumenacker said. "It's just a missing piece of the puzzle."

Though it's slated to open in the fall, no opening day has been scheduled.

Krumenacker is anticipating 25,000 visitors a year.

An annual family membership would cost about \$100, and daily passes will be priced at \$7 for each child and adult.

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CARL KOSOLA / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

An Ottsville Fire Co. ladder truck makes its way down Clay Ridge Road as a motorist attempts to drive past on the narrow road Sunday afternoon in Tinicum. Recent bridge closures by PennDOT have created an island in the Ottsville section of Tinicum where fire, ambulance and police crews cannot readily respond to emergencies.

Bridges

Continued from Page B1

Isn't it risky taking fire equipment more than five times that weight across the bridge?

"I'm willing to take the chance, because we have an obligation to protect the people in our area. We've been left no other choice," Rimmer said.

The only other option is drive even farther to Hollow Horn Road and take the fire trucks through a creek and then head down Municipal Road, said Rimmer.

Regardless, with both Geigel Hill and Headquarters, near Sheep Hole, bridges out of commission, lives are at risk, said Rimmer.

A typical two-minute response time is now at least 12 to 14 minutes, he said.

"If you're trapped in your car, you're going to have to wait, and if your house is on fire you're going to have to wait."

Tinicum has no public water system, which means there are no fire hydrants. Ottsville Fire Co. relies solely on tanker trucks filled with water to fight fires, many of which come from nearby fire companies, such as

Plumsteadville.

Now, those other fire companies can't truck in additional water to fight fires, said Rimmer.

"If we have a large fire, I have no way to get a sizable amount of water out there to deal with it."

Rimmer says he doesn't have a solution to the problem, but there needs to be a fix.

Both Tinicum Township and PennDOT have blamed each other for delaying a project to rebuild Headquarters Road, near Sheep Hole Road, which was originally slated to begin more than five years ago.

The board of supervisors is considering whether to take ownership of the bridge from the state, with the intent of rebuilding the historic, stone bridge as a one-lane span. Or it could decide to give PennDOT permission to build a two-lane span, which is the state's preference.

The board is expected to make a final ruling at its meeting March 15.

Until Giegel Hill Bridge is completed in August, emergency responders are at an impasse.

"I don't care if there are two wooden planks that cross the (Headquarters Road) creek, we

TINICUM BRIDGE PROJECTS

1. Geigel Hill Road Bridge - Closed 2002
2. Headquarters Road near Cafferty - To be closed March 2011
3. Headquarters Road near Tettermer - To remain open during construction



4. Headquarters Road near Sheep Hole Road - Closed March 2011
5. Dark Hollow Road - To reopen March 2011

have to cross the creek somewhere," he said.

"I think people in the township need to know that emergency services are going to be delayed," said Rimmer. "Unless

some amicable solution is made, I don't know what to do. We're pulling our hair out here."

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Grant

Continued from Page B1

education, the sciences and charitable organizations, so he could get money to buy two advanced life support vehicles — one for New Hope and one for Doylestown. The foundation gave the ambulance squad \$60,810.

Steven Raab, the chairman of the board for the Norman Raab Foundation, said he believes the

ambulance squad is important to the community and it has helped him "a number of times over the years."

The New Hope advanced life support vehicle is already in service. Pressler said the vehicle for Doylestown is on order and he expects to get it later this month.

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Cruz

Continued from Page B1

accounts of the authority's troubles but comes to her board seat with no preconceived judgments.

"I will be looking at its contracts and decisions and the reasons for those decisions," said Cruz.

While she voted Wednesday to make Corbett chairman of the authority, Cruz said she has no intention of being a rubber stamp.

"I will make independent decisions as I always have based on what I feel is right," said Cruz.

The Montgomery County commissioners, sitting as the salary board, last week also signed off on Cruz' transfer from the public defender's office, where she has served since 2000, to the Office of Children and Youth.

On joining the Kerns law firm in 2008, Cruz went to part-time status as a public defender. The new post, which also is part-time and will take effect on March 14, has a more defined schedule that will enable her to continue building her private practice, said Cruz.

"The work is still as intense but I don't mind working hard,"

said Cruz, who will receive the same \$34,086-a-year salary she earned as a public defender.

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**BETTER HEARING
BETTER LIVING**

by
Ron Lucas

PROTECTING "TWEENS"

In an effort to inform "tweens" (children between ages 8 and 12) and their parents about the causes and prevention of noise-induced hearing loss, the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) has launched a national public education campaign called "It's a Noisy Planet. Protect Their Hearing." Among the goals that the NIDCD wants to achieve is dispelling the myth that hearing loss is solely an age-related condition. According to a survey conducted on the MTV Web site, nearly two-thirds (61%) of the teen and young-adult respondents reported having experienced tinnitus (ringing in the ears) or hearing impairment after attending a concert. The NIDCD's campaign is designed to modify youngsters' music-listening habits, among other things.

Prolonged or loud noise, such as music, has overtaken age as a cause of hearing loss in the United States. The problem of hearing loss is no longer reserved for seniors because children and teenagers tend to listen to loud music on their MP3 players or at concerts. If you have children, encourage them to lower the volume on music. If you notice your child having difficulty hearing you, call WETHERILL HEARING AID ASSOCIATES at 215-345-1444 to schedule a free hearing evaluation. Our office is located at 10 W. Oakland Ave.

P.S. The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders encourages the use of ear plugs at concerts, sporting events, and movie theatres, where sound levels can reach the upper 90 decibels.

Wetherill Hearing Associates
10 W. Oakland Ave.
Doylestown, PA
215-345-1444

Smithfield, Fayette County

Western Pa. fire kills

10-month-old infant

Authorities in western Pennsylvania say an early morning fire destroyed a home, killing a 10-month-old infant in his crib.

Firefighters in Fayette County were called to the Georges Township home at about 5 a.m. Saturday.

Smithfield fire chief Keith Dillow says the flames were brought under control in about 30 minutes, but the two-story home was a total loss.

He says the child's mother managed to get out of the house, but the infant was found in his crib in a separate bedroom. He was pronounced dead at Uniontown Hospital.

Coroner Phillip Reilly says the boy, Jace Haines, died of asphyxiation due to carbon monoxide poisoning.

The cause of the blaze is under investigation.

Associated Press

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