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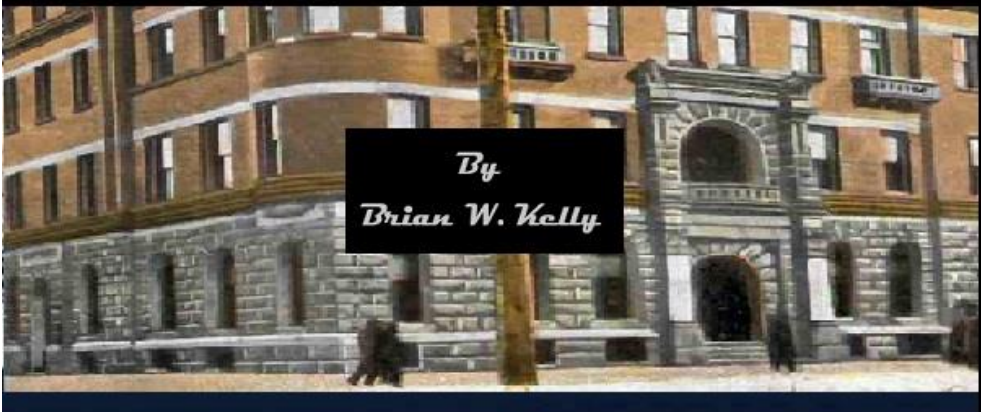
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Ghost of Wilkes-Barre Future



*The Spirit shows future Wilkes-Barre PA Officials how to create a better City.
Assure me Spirit that I may yet change these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life*



*By
Brian W. Kelly*

The Ghost of Wilkes-Barre Future

The Spirit shows future Wilkes-Barre Officials how to create a better city!

"Assure me {Spirit} that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life!"

In 2015, your author wrote a book titled, Wilkes-Barre PA: Return to Glory. At the time, I was running for Mayor of Wilkes-Barre and I was looking for a repository for my most salient thoughts about the City. I thought it would be much easier than it was to become the Mayor of my home town. I hoped the book would do the job for me in getting all my thoughts together to present coherently. I also put my thoughts and free downloads of the eBook on my web site. I had lived in Wilkes-Barre all my life and I had just researched what would be the best solutions to bring to the City—just in case God decided that I should be its Mayor. Wilkes-Barre does not have to be as it is.

I felt that the City's return to glory needed to begin with dreams and ideas as opposed to a dose of extreme politics to replace the politics of the past. Politicians had never moved the City off the mark. Like most in Wilkes-Barre, I was sick of politics at all levels of government. I built a catchphrase for my campaign and it was on the first page of the prior book that I had written:

Dreams and ideas; plans and actions equal LEADERSHIP

Wilkes-Barre PA had twelve years of the same Mayor who was a terrific Mayor for the first six of those twelve years. There was little leadership in the last six years as the Mayor appeared more interested in gaining a state office. It is tough to be a politician without getting sucked in. Having received 17% of the vote in the 2010 Congressional Primary v Paul Kanjorski, without a real campaign and no funds solicitation (no donations), I thought my formula might work for my City. I figured Wilkes-Barre needed a person who was not political but who understood the nature of politicians.

After getting just 5% of the vote of my friends in WB, I learned that I was wrong. Tony George, a fine affable man, is now our Mayor and he wants to be Mayor again, hoping to be reelected in 2019. No matter who becomes Mayor in 2019 for the next four years, I know it will not be me. So, instead of creating ideas that I can implement myself, I have decided to write this book for our next Mayor and Council so they know what to do to make Wilkes-Barre a better city in the future. Just being the prior Mayor will not do. Therefore, Tony George and all mayoral candidates in 2019, will have to be more accountable to the people as to their desire to take Wilkes-Barre from the doldrums and make our once great city even better. This book tells you what all the candidates must do to win your support. Wilkes-Barre does not have to accept the verdict of the shadows.

Brian W. Kelly

Lifelong Resident of Wilkes-Barre, PA

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The Ghost of Wilkes-Barre Future

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Dedication

To all the people that I have ever mentioned in the Acknowledgments of any book. Please check out www.letsGOPublish.com to read the latest version.

*Special Dedication to My wife Pat & children --
Brian P, Mike P, and Katie P Kelly*

*Additionally,
Dennis Grimes, Barbara Grimes; Gerry Rodski &
the inimitable Joyce Heck*

*Thank you for all of your support in my Writing and
publishing efforts.*

You all are the best.

*Special Thanks to Joe Kelly, Ann Flannery, Angel
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John Rose & Bernie Hummer
For your excellent research for this book.*

*Thank you also to Angel Irene Jachimiak, and
George Elias, my buddies From High Street for the
inspiration. Love comes in many forms.*

Preface

Is Wilkes-Barre doomed to a future of misery as was Ebenezer Scrooge in Dickens' A Christmas Carol? We all remember Scrooge's words to the last Spirit: "Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life!" Scrooge got his answer and he turned his life around. Wilkes-Barre must also ask the spirit of the future to help the City turn itself around first by electing Politicians who care.

I have two styles when I write a book. The original book *Wilkes-Barre PA: Return to Glory* (aka, my first Wilkes-Barre book) was my fifty-ninth book, written when I was just sixty-seven years old. I rewrote some pieces a year later with some new facts and corrections. Bernie Hummer's note shown later in this preface was the big change. I included Bernie's note in this book also. Thanks Bernie.

In terms of a writer, I am basically a tech guy who learned to write technical material by trying to convince IBM clients to do the "right" things with computer systems. I got good at it.

When I wrote tech books, which was about ten to twenty years ago, I figured out what I was going to say and then I outlined the book and then I wrote the book from the outline. I had to be careful to be sure every bit of advice was spot-on so for the finicky technocrats who would be reading the book, it would work. The outline for me in my recent books now is mostly mental. I have not built a written outline in about 100 books.

When I write a patriotic book or a book about trains, such as *Take the Train to Myrtle Beach*, which I wrote several years ago, I start out like I am writing a short piece for a newspaper or for one of the online tech papers for which I write frequently.

When I get past a page or two, I know that what I am saying is too big for a newspaper and I know that the online blogs to which I submit material, do not want more than five pages. So, I go where my thoughts take me and I don't stop until I think I have exhausted my material. Yes, it most often winds up as a new book.

In writing my first Wilkes-Barre book, which happened at the time I was planning to run for Mayor of Wilkes-Barre in 2015, I wanted to talk about a few dreams that I had and still have for Wilkes-Barre City. I also talked about some ideas, followed by plans and actions. Together the notion of dreams and ideas and plans and actions in

many ways is a definition of leadership. I hoped to be an effective leader for the City as its Mayor.

Without casting direct aspersions on prior Wilkes-Barre administrations, I always felt leadership was a missing quality despite how much the City executive at the time wanted to turn things around. In my experience with the City of WB, working as a computer consultant, I found Tom McGroarty to be the most on-duty Mayor I ever experienced. He may not even like me but that too is OK. He was a Mayor who worked very hard. He would be on the plow-truck the morning of a big snow storm, even before the driver came to work.

Anyway, unlike other writing ventures of mine, I kept writing my first WB book because I kept having more and more ideas. It got bigger and bigger and hopefully better and better. Moreover, this prior effort was to be a book about the glory days of Wilkes-Barre and how dreams, ideas, plans, and actions can help bring back leadership to bring forth days of glory to our fair city.

But, at the same time, long before the book was completed, I felt that I had written enough to be of interest to the two Newspapers that we have in our town. So, I took the beginning in which I talk about dreams, and the end at the time in which I talked about a safe city for bicycling, and I put the two pieces together

On January 13, 2015, I combined the ideas and submitted the piece to both local papers suggesting they might want to run it as a commentary, rather than a letter to the editor because it was a little big. The piece from 2015 was not printed and I was not called.

In that week in 2015 as noted above, when I submitted the "article," I transferred all of what I had written in unformatted prose to book format at twelve-point type and I was surprised that I had already written ninety pages of a book which I now euphemistically call *my first Wilkes-Barre book*. When I was still checking the book size back in 2015, I looked at the page count on the bottom of the screen and it was at 182 and most of what I had written was about Wilkes-Barre's wonderful past, not about its future, which is the focus of this book.

So, my guess at the time when all was said and done would be 250 or more pages. When I completed the book, I was surprised at

all that I had written. it was actually 384 pages in total. It cost so much to print that I had to charge \$16.00 per copy.

I loved writing the book about my City so much that I could not stop. Even when I was in final edit, trying to clean the book up of typos and oversights, I added more material about Gerry's Pizza, a mainstay in South Wilkes-Barre, as well as Sable's Music Center being acquired recently for parking and possible expansion. My kids had played on Gerry's sponsored team in the little league. The book was alive and it has been enlivened and updated even more after its initial printing.

I loved writing my first Wilkes-Barre book. It was fun. I don't like not having my trusty keyboard with me at all times as I get all kinds of good ideas at inconvenient times for things that could make it to a book. Nonetheless, I got a lot of ideas and good stories into the book despite not having a keyboard for fingers.

In addition to the focus of a return to glory, using dreams, ideas, plans, and actions, I decided to take a mental tour around my original neighborhood, the Rolling Mill Hill. I began the verbal tour at the South Wilkes-Barre Colliery. Because this tour is written down in my Wilkes-Barre book, I saved paper and did not a WB section tour in this new book.

In this book, I review the business routes of Central City, including the Public Square. I explore many of the important businesses and landmarks in the "business district" and what's new.

In this book, the focus is on advice to the next Mayor and the next Council. I went back to the web site material for when I ran for Mayor and I dusted off my plans to create a new motto for the City under my administration: *Wilkes-Barre: Safe, Affordable, and Clean*. Yes, I know they were to-do's then and they still are to-do's—very important. The major advice for City officials comes in the last four chapters of this book, right before the end.

This book is not intended to be at all political. Neither the federal government nor President Trump are focus points in any parts of this book. Consequently Democrats and Republicans alike can read the book about making Wilkes-Barre a better place to live without angst. I am not running for any office and I am a registered Democrat as is the current administration in Wilkes-Barre. This book is filled with ideas for any candidate running in either party to

help Make Wilkes-Barre a fine place to work and live. The people of the City need to read this book to be smarter in the selection process for Council and the Mayor in the elections of 2019.

In my Wilkes-Barre book, I did make some mistakes on some things. They are corrected in this book. Bernie Hummer, who once worked as a mason for the City along with his buddy and my buddy Tony Glzenski, both attend my church. Bernie gave me a note which I copied below to help smarten me up a bit on a few WB haunts that I had gotten wrong. I quickly came out with a new version of the book and if you happen to buy the latest version on Amazon, you will get the changes.

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0989995798>

Here is Bernie's note:

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I have a standard set of acknowledgments that I have posted on the Internet for the people who have helped me do anything regarding my book projects over the years. All their help keeps me writing. The help of all the people on the list was instrumental in my being able to write 59 books at that time (now up to 188 with this new book)

Since my first Wilkes-Barre book, I have written many more books. My 65th book is titled. *Great Moments in Notre Dame Football*. It is now in its second edition. I completed it in April of 2016 and I wrote four more books while I was putting together a 650-page book titled *Great Moments in Penn State Football*. The PSU book was my 70th. I finished it in July 2016 and it too is now in its second edition. I claim “dual citizenship” with Notre Dame and Penn State as my favorite college football teams.

I have written four more Penn State books and two more Fighting Irish books along with college football books about Alabama, Clemson, Florida Gators, Army, Navy, and Syracuse. In 2018, I began writing pro football books beginning with the world champion Philadelphia Eagles, then the Steelers, and then the Patriots. None gave me more pleasure than writing the first book about Wilkes-Barre, however, and I am enjoying writing this book as much as my first Wilkes-Barre book.

With this, I have written 188 books in total. All of my books that are current are available on amazon at [amazon.com/author/brianwkelly](https://www.amazon.com/author/brianwkelly).

As I have said a few times in this preface, I sure hope that you enjoy this book as much as I have enjoyed writing it.

You will see that I have taken just a few parts of my first Wilkes-Barre book and reused them in this new book. But, this is not intended to be a rehash of old stories. It is a new book with a new purpose. After asking The Ghost of Wilkes-Barre Future how to make the future better and brighter for Wilkes-Barre residents, I took what the Spirit had told me and I did my best as I wrote it down. I sure hope you like it.

Please note again, the last four chapters which describe the three-pronged approach to brightening the future of our City. Having a safe City; an affordable City, and a clean city are key to turning our Wilkes-Barre around. Those four chapters are in many ways a to-do list for any potential candidate for Mayor or Council to use as a guide for their success. They offer a clear blueprint for Wilkes-Barre officials to use to turn the City around. If a candidate chooses to ignore the exhortations in this book to create a fine City from what we have today, they will do so at their own political peril.

Sincerely,

Brian W. Kelly, Author

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About the Author



Brian W. Kelly retired as an Assistant Professor in the Business Information Technology (BIT) program at Marywood University, where he also served as the IBM i and midrange systems technical advisor to the IT faculty. Kelly has designed, developed, and taught many college and professional courses. He is also a contributing technical editor to a number of IT industry magazines, including "The Four Hundred" and "Four Hundred Guru" published by IT Jungle.

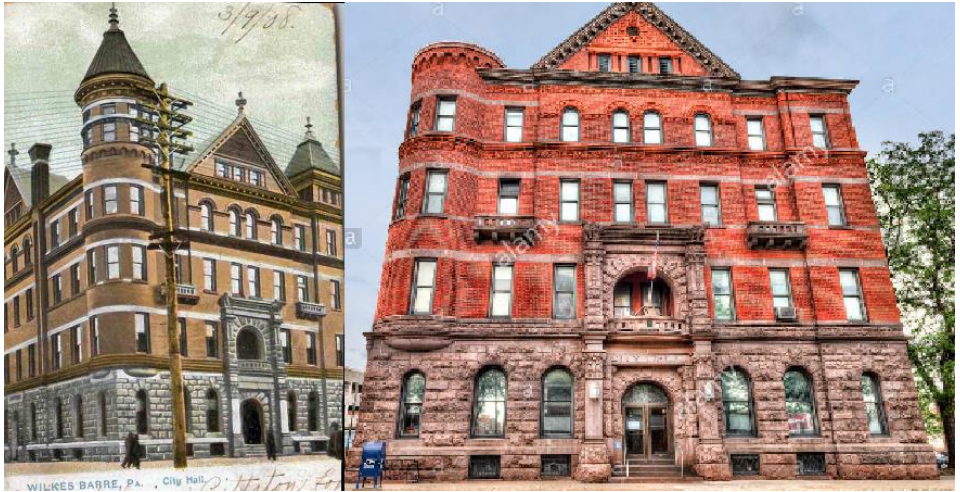
Kelly is a former IBM Senior Systems Engineer and he has been a candidate for US Congress and the US Senate from Pennsylvania. He has an active information technology consultancy. He is the author of 188 books and numerous articles. Kelly has been a frequent speaker at COMMON, IBM conferences, and other technical conferences.

In 2010, Kelly ran for Congress as a Democrat against a 13-term Democrat and, took no campaign contributions. He spent enough to buy signs and T-shirts, and as a virtual unknown, amazing the pundits as a nobody, he captured 17% of the vote.

Brian Kelly ran for Mayor and lost in the 2016 primary to the current Mayor of Wilkes-Barre, Anthony George. For six months or so after the election, he kept his donation site available at www.bookhawkers.com for unreimbursed expenses. It is now down. Better than donate, Brian would prefer that you buy a book. [Amazon.com/author/brianwkelly](https://www.amazon.com/author/brianwkelly). God bless you all.

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Chapter 1 Running for Mayor in 2015



Wilkes-Barre is worth the fight

After a nice career with IBM, when I hit 62 years of age, and after I had been on the faculty at Marywood University for a number of years, I figured it was time to give something back. So I decided to run for Congress in 2010. My family, friends and I got 1500 signatures and this got me on the ballot with 500 to spare. The Capitol Police in Harrisburg PA drew my number first so I got First ballot position in the election.

In a three-person race, though I tried to win in other ways, I wanted to be beholden to nobody. So, I took no political contributions. I spent about \$4,000 on yard signs and miscellany. I was pleased to receive 17% of the vote in District 11. It was a learning experience for sure.

When Tom Leighton appeared to be stepping down after three terms as Wilkes-Barre's Mayor, I figured I would give it a shot again. I ran for Mayor of Wilkes-Barre in 2015. This time I used my computer tech skills to build a web site that accepted donations. My friends and family chipped in about \$3500 for a campaign that cost me about \$7000 to run. So I was out \$3500 for the campaign. I'll never get it back but c'est la vie.

It was an expensive lesson for me. Without the backing of a machine, I regret to say, a regular guy in my opinion cannot be elected. My wife and I agreed that I had done my civic duty for life when I lost the Mayoral race after receiving only 5% of the vote. I had guessed that not being one of the politicians in NEPA would help. It did not help.

Darlene Duggins-Magdalinski, another candidate and I together, had no real chance against Tony George and George Brown. Their spent warchests gave them the notoriety to win. Dalene and I were too naïve to know we could not win with our limited resources when we began the process.

Councilmen George Brown and Tony George had major media blitzes in the newspapers, radio, and even television. As members of Council, they were already well-known and their media blitz had them on everybody's minds when it came time for the people to vote. Despite valiant attempts using economical vehicles, Duggins-Magdalinski and I together received less than 10% of the vote.

Tony George's margin of victory was very small. In fact, if all of Darlene's votes or all of my votes were in George Brown's column, he would have been elected Mayor.

So now it has been four years since I wrote *Wilkes-Barre PA: Return to Glory* and it has been four years since Democrat Tony George was heralded as the new Mayor of Wilkes-Barre after he defeated Frank Sorick of the Republican Party in the General Election to get the nod .

Mayor George has let it be known that he is going for a second term, and I have it from the horse's mouth that George Brown is coming back to challenge him in the Democratic Primary. It should be another interesting race. There may be more than two participants again in the primary but yours truly will not be one of them.

Early in his administration, I visited Mayor George at City Hall to congratulate him and to give him his own copy of *Wilkes-Barre PA: Return to Glory*. After having written a book and run a campaign hoping to be able to return Wilkes-Barre PA to its glory days, I admit that I have not seen the solutions that I identified in the book, implemented by the George Administration.

I still would like to see my City return to the glory days of its founding and by identifying in a publicly available book, the means by which this can be achieved, I believe that together we, the people of Wilkes-Barre, PA. can bring Wilkes-Barre to the top of its game again. Of course we need to find a candidate that thinks like us to get that job done.

And so, in this book, I will review and expand on a number of ideas that I published during my campaign. I had researched what was needed for Wilkes-Barre in many areas and all of my findings were available to all candidates on my web site and in the WB book. The ideas are well researched and well defined and this new book about an bringing Wilkes-Barre back to the top of its game again will amplify the recommendations already provided in my campaign site and the prior book.

You may recall the major crime problem in Wilkes-Barre and that the City was declared one of the most dangerous places to live in the country. I spent many hours working with a retired state police officer who was the principal, operating under cover, in bringing down a major US motorcycle gang.

With his help, I devised a unique solution to solve the drug crimes issue in the City. Being a third or fourth tier candidate in the primary, neither of the two city newspapers after interviewing me followed through on the jointly developed crime solution put forth and they backed other candidates for the Mayor's position. Even the newspapers ignored me as I was an unknown in the WB political world.

Though I made my plans available on my web site and offered help to the two general election candidates, both the Democratic Party and the primary winner chose to use local expertise rather than use the advice of the expert crime fighter I had found. Again, this new book will be available to the public, including all of the mayoral candidates. Perhaps if they absorb the recommendations outlined in the book, the candidates may opt to work for the people of Wilkes-Barre in bringing the City back to the top of its game.

As the primary wound down in 2015, on May 5, 2015, Citizens Voice Staff Writer Jacob Seibel wrote a summary piece that in general

describes the one-time that all of the mayoral candidates “debated” on the same stage. Here is his synopsis:

WILKES-BARRE — The five mayoral candidates sat before about 200 citizens Monday evening in the ballroom of Wilkes University’s Henry Student Center to lay out their platforms and answer questions on their plans if elected.

The Wilkes-Barre Downtown Residents Association, a nonpartisan organization, held the two-hour long forum, the first of which to bring all city mayoral candidates together before the public. Eileen Kenyon, coordinator for DRA, said the association sponsored the event to give people in the area a chance to come and listen to what the candidates had to say.

“We have to elect a mayor, and we hope this will let them make an informed decision,” she said.

Each candidate gave a brief opening statement before association members moderated a question-and-answer session during which they broached such topics as unpaid pensions of city employees, how to attract wage-earning residents, their assessments of city hall and city resources, and crime.

The primary race became more competitive in February when incumbent and three-time mayor Tom Leighton announced he would not seek a fourth term. The following are running in the May 19 primary election for the mayor’s position: George C. Brown III, 64, who retired from a career in business management for international companies and is a current councilman; Darlene Duggins-Magdalinski, 46, a community activist who founded the advocacy group “United We Stand Divided We Fall;”

Brian W. Kelly, 67, who retired from IBM Corporation as a senior systems engineer and currently works as an information technology consultant; Tony G. George, 63, former Wilkes-Barre police chief and current city councilman; and Frank Sorick, 42, Republican, realtor and president of the Wilkes-Barre City Taxpayers Association.

Crime dominated much of the discussion. There have been almost 10 shootings in the city this year, and just two years ago was the city's deadliest time in history — with 13 homicides. When association members asked how the candidates would bring more wage-earning residents into the city, all answered in terms of what was keeping those wage-earning residents out — criminals.

“Every candidate up here is saying the same thing: ‘Until we solve the crime problem, we’re not going to get people to want to move back to the city and raise their families here,’” Sorick said.

Brown, George and Sorick want to address the crime problem using traditional means, such as getting more police patrols in place and reviewing the city's budget to see if more funding could be allocated to emergency services.

Kelly and Duggins-Magdalinski, on the other hand, had different ideas. Kelly plans to restructure the police department and other emergency services if he is elected. He advocated for hiring a police commissioner and other top positions for fire and EMS that would oversee the city's emergency services. He said these top positions would be held by professionals who know how to manage emergency services and delegate responsibilities down the command chain.

Duggins-Magdalinski approaches the subject from a human interest angle in which she believes the city has to address the underlying causes of what drives people to crime, such as providing better tools to deal with substance abuse.

Association members asked candidates how they assessed the city's departments and agencies and which needed cuts and which needed more resources.

Sorick said emergency services was the main area that was understaffed and needed more resources. Eliminating some city positions, like the city spokesperson, which he characterized as useless, would help reallocate resources to other departments and agencies that need them.

Kelly said there were almost 300 city employees. Most of them, he said, make two and a half times more than the average Wilkes-Barre resident, and he would work on cutting down salaries. Duggins-Magdalinski expressed similar concerns and solutions, saying 69 percent the city's 2015 budget was salaries and benefits.

Brown and George, however, were less eager to voice what they saw as wasteful, both instead saying they would review a line item budget for the city in order to determine what could be cut and reallocated elsewhere.

My thanks to the Citizens Voice for this contribution *Brian W. Kelly*

Chapter 1 Appendix Titles & Stories

When I told my friends and family about this new book, I asked for title suggestions and any stories they had about growing up in Wilkes-Barre. The Ghost of Wilkes-Barre Future was picked by Brian P. K. It was submitted with some words by my oldest son, Brian P. Kelly

Here are the suggestions:

1. A Shining City upon a Hill Ronald R.
2. Wilkes-Barre Past, Present and ? Future Andy G
3. Wilkes-Barre home of the Big Hearted can return Tony W
4. Â Wilkes Barre Tomorrow Mike K
5. A Better Tomorrow for WB Mike K
6. A Brighter Future for WB Mike K
7. Wilkes-Barre: The Problem and The Solution Mike K
8. Wilkes-Barre, What It Once Was, What It Has become, And Is There A Future Mark G.
9. The Ghost of Wilkes-Barre Future Brian P. K
10. This is what makes W-B great Dennis "Bucko" G
11. Wilkes Barre Needs A Second Chance Paul R
12. The Rise and Fall of Wilkes Barre, PA Colette M.
13. A Shining City upon a Hill Ronald R.
14. Make Wilkes-Barre Great Again
15. Can We Make Wilkes-Barre Great Again

16. What Wilkes-Barre Needs
17. Making Wilkes-Barre Great Again
18. Altering the Future for Wilkes-Barre
19. A Wilkes-Barre Carol
20. Wilkes-Barre PA Needs a Second Chance
21. The Ghost of Wilkes-Barre Yet to Come
22. The Death of Wilkes-Barre
23. Can the Death of Wilkes-Barre Be Prevented
24. The Four Ghosts of Wilkes-Barre
25. Is Wilkes-Barre Dead or Dying?
26. Can Wilkes-Barre Be Saved?

My friend and a great IBM fixer, Andrew L. Glowach was kind enough to submit some stories of the WB Neighborhood where he lived as a kid. Andy is a kid at 82 today.

I was born in 1936; and am now 82, just 3 months short of 83. A life time of memories. Memories of Mom and Pop corner stores all over the North End, along with a hardware store just on Scott Steet, just up from the East End Bridge. (The bridge has since been removed.)

Tony the Ice Cream Man with double dips for .05¢. The farmer who came up our street each week selling vegetable from the back of his truck. I remember street cars, Laurel Lines and Air Raid Wardens telling us to turn off all lights as they walked up and down Thompson Street in North Wilkes-Barre.

The barn where they kept the mules for the mines up on the hill where Guthrie School was built and where we went to shop because Coughlin didn't have a wood shop.

Walking from North Wilkes-Barre down to Meyer's High School to swim in their indoor pool. The slaughter house just over the hill from Guthrie School where we got our fresh meats. Barbie and I still went there after we were married in 1958. I wonder if it is still there?

Walking the mile to school from Thompson Street up to Courtright Avenue from 1st to 8th grade. Coming home each day for lunch and walking back for the afternoon classes. Then home again at the school days end.

No buses back then.

Riding the Laurel Line to the parks that we went to for entertainment, Rocky Glen and San Souci and my Dad driving us out to Hanson's at Harvey's Lake.

The movie houses that we went to on the week-ends, getting in for 12¢ until you reached 13 then you paid adult price .25¢.

The Sterling on North Main Street, the Family, Opheum and Penn on South Main Street along with the Strand on West Market Street along with the Comerford and Paramount on Public Square. The rest rooms under Public Square which in later years were closed and sealed due to vagrants using them for living quarters.

My first ever time at working was walking the ponies at Christmas time in Pomeroy's on their upper floor.

Boy Oh Boy the memories!

GOD Bless, and may the new year be your best ever.

Andy

Thanks a million Andy and the same to you, my friend.

Chapter 2 Dreams: A Great Way to Start!



Start dreaming and don't stop

The worst sign for anybody about the future opportunities for a city is if the city's businesses are moving out of town. For years cranes with wrecking balls have been more commonplace in Wilkes-Barre than construction cranes.

One of the neighborhoods that was completely destroyed happened in my teens when the wrecking ball came down on the old bowery section of Wilkes-Barre. The area had become dilapidated and at the time as I recall, citizens saw their town being cleaned up. But, it happened far too often to be good for Wilkes-Barre and then the flood in 1972 almost finished off the town with too much federal money funding the wrecking ball instead of rebuilding projects.

It seemed like overnight that the one-time bastions of manufacturing began to disappear in Wilkes-Barre. The more it happened, the more it no longer was a sign of rejuvenation. Those my age either remember or heard their parents talking about how great manufacturing was in Wilkes-Barre during the war effort but that was the end of the hey day for Wilkes-Barre. Places such as those in following list of manufacturers and others literally disappeared over

the years and the wages in Wilkes-Barre decreased proportionately from the loss of such major industries.

- D&H Railroad
- CNJ Railroad
- Glen Alden Coal Company
- Lehigh Valley Coal Company
- South Wilkes-Barre Colliery
- The Vulcan Iron Works
- The Carriage Company
- Ma's Old Fashion Root Beer
- Eagle Bottling Works
- Stegmaier Brewing Company
- The Hazard Insulator Wire Works
- The Okonite
- Laddies Chips
- Hess Goldsmith Silk Mills
- Atwater Throwing Company
- Penn Tobacco
- Woodlawn Dairy
- Glendale Dairy
- Purvin Dairy
- Sheldon Axle
- Romberger
- International Color Corporation
- Ryman Lumber
- Scouton-Lee Lumber
- Robbins Door & Sash
- Muskin Swimming Pools
- Wilkes-Barre Lace
- E. A. Roos Meats
- Peters' Economy Store

Other Great Businesses Gone:

- Hotel Sterling
- Miners National Bank
- First National Bank of WB

- Acme Markets
- The A&P Company

When we in Wilkes-Barre, who love Wilkes-Barre dearly, and do know what it was, look to make her great again, we are not kidding. However, we are too often met with resistance from other good-willed Wilkes-Barreans who believe they are realists and that trying to remake Wilkes-Barre into a better place can never work. One of my pet sayings is: “If you think you can’t, you’re right!” That’s why some people get things done and others talk about how impossible it would be to do anything.

The latter say that Wilkes-Barre can never be OK again. I disagree. They cite the crime statistics and the danger to live in this city. They also suggest that nobody moves into a city when businesses are exiting and when the City cannot even keep its own high schools from leaving town for a “better deal.”

Folks, there is no question that naysayers are most often not doers. Nonetheless there is a yeoman job to get done out there for those in Wilkes-Barre and those from the past who still love the City.

We’d all be glad if some naysayers chip in to help. Betting persons might bet against us; but we must take one positive step at a time to bring back Wilkes-Barre no matter how long it may take. Other than leaving town, we have little choice. Moving forward of course begins with first stopping the backslide

In 2015, our council made about \$13,500 per year and they had a benefit package of about \$5,000 each per year. They Mayor makes about \$82,000 per year plus a full benefits package. Our next Council and our Next Mayor will make similar salaries. The City is known for its generous 3% across the board increases to all employees even in years when Social Security recipients receive no increase. I admit I cannot figure out those increments to already greater than average city salaries.

The Mayor and Council surely perform duties that are necessary but in terms of a positive image for the City, they could do more. Regarding an effort by a group called Save Our Schools to prevent the

District from destroying the City's three High Schools, the City officials are MIA. In terms of the School Board building a budget busting monstrous new school on top of a toxic land mass, Wilkes-Barre City officials again are MIA. Where are they? There are City paid attorneys who can at a minimum bring the District to court as they are about to harm Wilkes-Barre City. Why the City's officials do not understand what the loss of high schools will do for Wilkes-Barre on the negative side begs whether the caretakers of Wilkes-Barre give a sh-- | What do you think?

When one takes a snapshot of City officials, the conclusion is not positive as they have tacitly agreed that it is OK for this foreign entity school board that cares nothing about Wilkes-Barre residents to effectively abandon City High Schools and force Wilkes-Barre students to attend high school on top of a building that is about to be built over a toxic mine shaft.

Somebody looking at this in ten years would have to declare current officials as either incompetent or uncaring. I don't know. But in this instance, they are not representing the people of Wilkes-Barre. They can do much better if at some point, they choose to do so. The sooner the better. Why would WB officials remain silent as its city is destroyed by another governmental agency. I have not figured it out.

One can view the departure of schools from the City in much the same way as the Council and Mayor not having engaged in any meaningful way to stop a foreign governmental entity – in this case, known as the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board from expediting our city's trip to the proverbial bone yard. Citizens of the City have learned that this board marches to its own tune and it pays no heed to the people's wishes.

So far, our City leaders have let them call all the shots about the future of our town like as if it does not matter to Wilkes-Barre. It does matter, folks. When we elect new leaders in Wilkes-Barre in 2019, we must not put in those who are content with paying homage to outside entities. Wilkes-Barre must come first. If those running for office in 2019 want Wilkes-Barre to have no high schools, let them say so and let's make sure there is somebody running against them.

You may or may not know, dear lover of Wilkes-Barre that our current City officials have decided to wimpishly permit this school board to boss them around. The board for its part has made it clear that they see no value in having a major city anchor their school district. Instead they have decided to pull out of Wilke-Barre despite all of the available property from all the former manufacturing companies that already have abandoned the City.

You can tell this upsets me and it upsets most who care about the City as this is something that simply does not have to be. Elected officials can do much better than to say “not my job.”

The newspapers in Wilkes-Barre seem to be backing the school board. SO, the people of Wilkes-Barre ought to drop their subscriptions and get on to the Morning Call.

Bob Kalinowski of the Lehigh Valley Morning Call offered this terse epitaph on Wilkes-Barre’s High Schools:

Wilkes-Barre Area high school students will be under one roof when a consolidated high school is built after a vote by the school board on Tuesday night.

The Wilkes-Barre Area School Board voted 6-3 to add GAR High School into its consolidation plan, which is still being challenged by citizens who prefer neighborhood schools. GAR will become a middle school under the plan, expected to be completed in 2022.

Wilkes-Barre’s papers seem to be disinterested in fighting for their subscription bases in the City.

It is such a fait accompli, that Kalinowski felt he need not say that the one roof for the new school would not even be in Wilkes-Barre. The roof would be attached to a school in a different city. This would leave Wilkes-Barre with no High Schools at all. He also did not say that the less than intelligent school board was building the new school over a polluted mine shaft and the board was being mocked for their insistence on creating *Mine Shaft High*.

Wilkes-Barre officials unfortunately have chosen not to stick up for the City's interests in the project. They are simply absent from the discussion. One could conclude they think the Wilkes-Barre School Board meetings discuss agenda items concerning a City in California or Alaska, not Pennsylvania and certainly not us in Wilkes-Barre. I would suggest these same officials—if they want to represent City residents—begin to pay more than occasional lip service to the people who live in the City they purport to represent.

It is tough to know what WB officials think other than that they are not the School Board. The reaction from Wilkes-Barre officials has been so loud and deafening that nobody heard it. Somehow WB Council and the Mayor forgave the School Board or at least it seems so as they realized Wilkes-Barre City politicians might need the help of politicians in the School Board to get reelected in 2019. Concerned citizens of the City will hold that against them for sure.

The people are aghast of course but even the people are mostly asleep. They figured they elected politicians to handle it all for them but the politicians do not operate on behalf of the people's interest. What happens when politicians choose not to do right by the people?

Wilkes-Barre ought to know. How do you think all those manufacturing plants and more slipped away without detection? The people seem to have come to accept that there are political and greed reasons involved and that always trumps any reasons that might help the community.

When a son or a daughter is hired by any level of local government, or a nephew or a niece lands a job thanks to the power brokers, the politicians are too often forgiven. Nothing else matters but then when there is no son or daughter, or nephew involved in the graft, the citizens are outraged that their city is going down the tubes.

I ask all of Wilkes-Barre to keep the outrage going or nothing good will ever happen again in this town. Your neighbor is not going to make it right for you or any of us. You must do it yourself.

The symptoms on this one issue are that a dishonest school board has been bolstered by a lackluster City Council protecting their skins and a Mayor who figures the School District ought to be able to do what it

wants. So, tell me folks, why would an investor choose to come to Wilkes-Barre City to help rescue us when we elect officials that do not seem to care for the community one way or another?

I may be an optimist, but I am not naïve. I know that high crime and no high schools is a mixture leading to the doom of a City, but that does not mean that it must happen. Just like Scrooge found out when Dickens gave him a change of heart. Certain things may not have to be. They simply might be if good people choose not to act when needed. The Ghost of Christmas Future does not have to call in all of Wilkes-Barre's chips.

The lovers of Wilkes-Barre as they become aware of the travesty brought on by the school board of WB, know they need help from the City. Nonetheless, the good people of the City are undaunted as they believe what appears to be done is not yet done. The people are right, Wilkes-Barre politics must change to benefit the people.

Check this out from Dickens words:

EBENEZER SCROOGE:.

"Before I draw nearer to that stone to which you point," said Scrooge, "answer me one question. Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or are they shadows of the things that May be only?"

[Must the School Boards Dictates Be Honored by WB Officials?]
[Must they come to pass?]

Still the Ghost pointed downward to the grave by which it stood.

"Men's courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead," said Scrooge. "But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me!"

[i.e. WB Officials and the Board can change their hearts!]

[Maybe even the school board can be saved from damnation?]

...

"Am *I* that man who lay upon the bed?" he cried upon his knees.

The finger pointed from the grave to him, and back again.

"No, Spirit! Oh no, no!"

The finger still was there.

"Spirit!" he cried, tight clutching at its robe, "hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been but for this intercourse. Why show me this, if I am past all hope?"

For the first time the hand appeared to shake.

"Good Spirit," he pursued, as down upon the ground he fell before it: "your nature intercedes for me, and pities me. Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me by an altered life?"

The kind hand trembled.

"I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!"

In his agony, he caught the spectral hand. It sought to free itself, but he was strong in his entreaty, and detained it. The Spirit, stronger yet, repulsed him.

Holding up his hands in a last prayer to have his fate reversed, he saw an alteration in the Phantom's hood and dress. It shrunk, collapsed, and dwindled down into a bedpost.

So, the representatives of the people of Wilkes-Barre, who are revered Council Persons and those who are revered members of the school board, despite their misdeeds, are given another chance to do right for the people by the very spirit charged with taking them to their doom if it may be. Why cannot the Council, the Mayor, and the ignominious School Board not changed their ways as Scrooge did and make the past the past and make the future the gold and glorious days of a Wilkes-Barre to come. Please tell me "why not?" or better yet, te., le why and when it will happen!

I believe in Santa Claus. FYI, it is your author who speaks now. For years, my body type helped me play the jolly old elf on many occasions. I believe in everything. I believe anything can happen as

long as good “men” are ready to do their part. I think of a Scrooge-like dream about Wilkes-Barre PA. That is why I titled the book: “The Ghost of Christmas Future.” Whoops my name is not Dickens and so I cannot make that claim. Instead, let me say that I titled this book as *The Ghost of Wilkes-Barre Future*. I feel better already but the dreams are not completed and the undo’s have not yet begun.

I do my work by writing so that our fair City can stop its wayward way—this too-rapid downward spiral must be stopped and then our beloved City can return to some level of the wonderment and back to the wonderful things that gave Wilkes-Barre its glory years. I wish that these early years after the founding of our City can be returned to the citizens of good will in the same spirit. Those who do not think it is too late, feel the same way.

Anybody out there feel like they can go for a nice CMP with brownies on the side from the Boston Candy Shop? Wow, my good Wilkes-Barre friends, would that not be a great Wilkes-Barre refreshment if possible in the future. Shall we ask the spirit or hope it just comes some day? Sure, I’ll have one. Two dips! How about you?

Those of us, who were here before the 1972 Flood might be able to get in the mood for a brand new Wilkes-Barre just by thinking about the great Chile at the Europa Lounge. Mmmm Mmmm! It was on South Main Street right next door on the left side by Fowler Dick & Walker, The Boston Store, now Boscov's Boston Store.

The Ghost of Wilkes-Barre Past would say that our Wilkes-Barre was quite a town from its birth even before the Constitution was written, through the nineteenth and most of the 20th century. Most of our good fortune in these times came from the hard work of miners, and the long-suffering of their families. God never held a grudge against the hard working miners but it seems he does have a bone to pick about those who let all the good from anthracite coal slip away from benefitting the people in the long-term.

Mining brought with it a thriving economy that in the 1940's brought our city to its maximum population level of 88,000. Businesses were springing up everywhere as were marvelous theatres, restaurants, taverns, parks and even zoos. In the book, *Wilkes-Barre PA: Return to Glory* we examine these vestiges in our preparation for a rebirth.

Things were so busy in Wilkes-Barre that officials adopted the honey bee as the main focus of the City seal. Busy! Busy! Busy! Wilkes-Barre was busier than a hive of honeybees, and all of the people were the beneficiaries. A Can-do attitude prevailed. So how did this happen and then, what happened?

There were a lot of dreamers and just as many doers. They are well documented in early Wilkes-Barre history. The doing often began with the dreaming. The look and feel of Wilkes-Barre is still here but there are a lot of holes such as vacant lots that need to be filled to get things moving again.

I would encourage Wilkes-Barre residents to begin dreaming again and for former residents of this great city to dream right along with us as we return to glory or at least we stop the backslide. Those of us who are left may not be able to immediately bring back that glory but we can all work together to make Wilkes-Barre a great city like it once was. Won't the new days be great. Come visit us often.

Like the original WB book, aka my first Wilkes-Barre book, this book is intended to remind us of the power of the dream by offering a subset of the ways in which we, as a city, need to change to become something much better. Don't say you can't for I fear you will be right. Say you can and the world will open up to you and Wilkes-Barre, as the Ghost of Christmas Future prefers will prosper again.

Chapter 3 Big Ideas & Little Ideas All Count



In his famous *Temperance Lecture*, W. C. Fields challenged his audience with humor and reality. You remember perhaps by seeing some of his classics that one of his famous exhortations was: “*Don’t say you can’t swear off strong drink: I’ve done it a thousand times.*” For Fields, he was saying that it might be the 1001st time that does the trick. We should think that way. *Failure is contagious. Success is caught by so few that it does not spread.* BTW, that last saying is my own. The point here is of course is that we can. We can do anything. Never think less.

The will to be better is something God gives us. Despair is the home of the Devil. Dreams do not bring about anything but ideas. Few idea people are not great dreamers. Once your dream becomes an idea, you are on your way to a home run. Nobody in the bleachers has ever hit a home run. So, after you dream of being a cleanup hitter for the Yankees, you need to take that idea and get out onto the ballfield and practice and then when your time comes, swing hard, and watch the ball sail out of the park. Then, you can walk the bases, but not before.

Ideas are the first part of positive change. We know that ideas are spawned by dreamers and they begin most often as dreams. When in our most quiet moments some of us may begin to think of what it would be like if, say, the moon were actually made of green cheese; this is a dream that may become an idea.

I love thinking about the young and the young at heart who might envision the rides from the old Sans Souci Park, Rocky Glen, and Anglea Park. What if these rides could operate in your own back yard? As a seventy-year-old, it may not seem so exciting. But, as a seven-year old, not you're thinking. This too is a dream that may become an idea. Can there really be better dreams? What if your City helped develop dreams rather than tell you they cannot happen because...

Because I believe that we can do nothing without first getting started. I love thinking about getting started to do what we can even if we at first may think we cannot. I always wanted pieces of Sans Souci Park, now Hanover High to exist in my own back yard. How about you?

When I wrote my book, Wilkes-Barre PA: Return to Glory, I shared some of my dreams and now at seventy years old, I still have them. In some ways I am still a kid. I think that we can do whatever we choose in life if we care enough to do it.

As a kid, there was a place on Barney Street I believe, not in the busy area by Horton, that was a double block with a a mall path around both sides of the house and back to the front. My brother Ed, six years older than me, took me there. For a dime, you got three rides around the house in a homemade open-air car. There were two seats. The man had used some type of gas lawnmower engine and had a brake and a gas pedal and it was like a kids dream of driving a car.

I took that experience with my older brother and often thought of a set of train tracks, about the gauge of the old Hanson's train at Harvey's Lake, built around my house. I figured why not find a small locomotive to pull a few cars around the front and back yards? Look at this neat picture of the Tumble Bug which was a mainstay at Sans Souci.

Can the Sans Souci Tumble Bug fit in your yard?



Can you envision when the tracks of a mini-train hit the front and back porches, the underside of the porches would serve as tunnels, and of course, there would always be light at the end of the tunnels! This is both a dream and an idea. I'm ready to ride right now though I am seventy-years old. I have never lost my mental youth.

For some, the idea may be impractical and even "goofy;" but for others, like me it may be the motivation to bring on something entirely new that has never been done before--ever. If not Hanson's size, how about the train on the next page?

I have been dreaming all my life about great things in life. In most of my adult work, I had the privilege of dreaming as to how to make things better for businesses who happen to use IBM's largest computer systems. I hope to have the opportunity to bring to life some of my most practical dreams, and perhaps some dreams that may not at first seem practical to life in Wilkes-Barre City. I not only have some dreams, I have some ideas.

Since my buddy Tony George, the current Mayor has not invited me in to think about dreams for the City, I figure he is too busy or is not interested. Maybe he read My Wilkes-Barre book. I've got some ideas and some plans. I would like whoever is the next Mayor, George Brown or Tony George or somebody with a dreaming heart, that they think about the non-obvious and get some help from a dreamer—maybe even me.

I love the picture below. Don't you? Let's figure out how to do things. Let the naysayers figure out why things cannot be done. Let them spend all their energy on negatives so that one day they may wake up and learn that just about anything can be done unless you have ruled it out. Negative thought is not for me. Isn't this neat? Even for a seventy-year-old. You bet it is! The brain does not age. I can do anything. Can you?

How about this train for around the house? Literally?



Soon after I was married, after five years with IBM, I learned that I could solve any problem as long as there were people around to help fill up the information holes that needed to be filled for me to get the whole picture—both on the problem analysis side and on the solution side.

I have a number of pet sayings besides “*Nothing worth having in life is easy!*” One of my other pet sayings that has to do with solving problems is: “The only thing you can do alone in life is fail.” No man is an island and islands never do anything anyway. People do things. But even people do only the things that they have not ruled out. And, you can quote me on that too!

In my career with IBM, my peers would give me a problem and I would give them a solution. It just happened. IBM schooled us all well. I would then work with them, so they got the credit. I need no credit as the completed task is reward enough. Management sometimes thought my recommendations went beyond a mere

solution and sometimes they were phenomenally pleased. IBM made Systems Engineers such as myself, available to our business clients for dreams, ideas, plans, and actions. For me, that was when the real fun began.

I am a designer and a problem solver, and I do not quit until I get it right or in a rare instance, I conclude it really cannot be done. In my client IT shops, there are no marble edifices or ornate decorations standing as the result of my work. Yet, when a client is first able to write a check to pay a bill to IBM for a new system, or develop a new marketing strategy with the help of software that I designed, I smile inside an awful lot. Along the way to my unique solutions in all I do in life, I have lots of dreams and so I have lots of ideas that just the day before did not even exist. There is always a solution to a problem for those that know only those who can't are 100% right.

Chapter 4 Abbreviated Look at WB Glory Days

FORT DURKEE HOTEL

End of Run
PUBLIC SQUARE
WILKESBARRE, PA.

RATES, European Plan, \$1.50 up


150 Rooms 75 Rooms with Bath
75 Rooms with Shower Bath

**Mecca for Automobile
Tourists**

Garage in Connection

GEO. WOLFE, Prop. H. WOLFE, Mgr.

Absolutely
Fire Proof.



Fort Durkee was the City's original name

Originally, Wilkes-Barre was named Fort Durkee after Major John Durkee, a Connecticut militia officer, who was instrumental in its settling. In Colonial times, before 1776, Connecticut believed it owned a good part of Pennsylvania and so the Yankee (Connecticut) v Pennamite (Wilkes-Barre) Wars ensued. Fort Durkee had been built by New England settlers in the spring of 1769, on the site of present-day Wilkes-Barre.

And, so the History of Wilkes-Barre shows its founding as 1769, eight years before the Nation's Declaration of Independence. Please note that these were not yet the glory days of Wilkes-Barre. Things were a bit rough in the really early days. The City was eventually incorporated in 1806 after Major Durkee's death but the Major had a lot to do with Wilkes-Barre, its structure, and its beautiful river banks.

Wilkes-Barre had everything a city needed, with a bounty of water from the Susquehanna and numerous springs, and great soil for farming. The City grew even more rapidly after the discovery of nearby coal reserves and the arrival of hundreds of thousands looking to find peace and well-being in the New World.

The City reached the height of its prosperity in the first half of the 20th century when its population reached just over 88,000. Today the population is about half of that. WB was never as big as Scranton, its twin city to the North; but it was always a dandy place to live, and until the Agnes flood of 1972, it had many periods of glory—even some afterwards.

St. Boniface School was my intro to WB

Father Ward and Father Baier were good for the kids who came to the four-room school On Blackman Street. Regardless of Wilkes-Barre's storied past and what might have been for the people here, I know that as a young person, I found the City a marvelous place in which to grow up. I did not even know my family was poor until Grade School. I read about the median income in a Weekly Reader and went home and asked my dad about it. He made little of it. Then, I knew we were poor but I sure never felt it. Heck, in grade school, I was about 15 pounds or more overweight. We were never hungry.

Eventually, St. Boniface School (SBS) after second grade for me, grew four more classrooms. It once had a beautiful set of windows in the front onto Blackman street. I can remember them. Then one of the nuns, probably a powerful principal, insisted the front windows be replaced with a brick look and a finished inside as it was distracting she felt to the teachers who had to look out that window. The school never looked as good but Sabina Dierkes's house (Sabina was the church organist) and the future John Mager home were no longer in the sight of the teachers in four classrooms of SBS.

Reflecting on Wilkes-Barre, PA, many of us have fond memories of our youth spent in some of the finest public and private schools in the country. We were taught by some of the most dedicated teachers in the world. In grade school, the Nuns at St. Boniface made sure I knew the three R's including Algebra, and I admit I was very impressed with the grade school teaching when I went to Meyers for four years after "graduation" from St. Boniface. I was surely a lucky guy.

Since we are all of different ages, our vision of the greatest Wilkes-Barre there ever is affected most assuredly by our own ages and

experiences. It is also affected by the many recollections about our City that were passed down from our parents and grandparents. From all of this, we know that Wilkes-Barre is not at its best right now. Don't we all wish we could begin a process to return our city back to those olden days when prosperity could be seen on the streets, the stores, uptown, and the many operational factories and other businesses. Perhaps we could even save taxpayers a few dimes while we do it.

Would it not be nice if together, we could bring Wilkes-Barre back to its proper place in our dreams? Can we make Wilkes-Barre a great city again? I think so, The City surely has had some fine years of glory, and they were not all continuous. I am not just talking about the Hotel Sterling, which had been a symbol of Wilkes-Barre's glory for many years. (<http://citizensvoice.com/news/sterling-s-glory-days-1.1523588>). There were many other great things that many of us still remember.

Chapter 5 Public Square in Wilkes-Barre, PA



How many Cities have a public Square?

Growing up in Wilkes-Barre, I never would have conceived that some other town in someplace, USA would not have a center of town such as ours. My Aunt Nina, who was my mom's favorite sister moved with her husband Jim Brady to Bloomfield NJ after she got married in Wilkes-Barre's heyday. She and mom talked about going to something they called the Center in Bloomfield when they went shopping. It was in Bloomfield but like many towns, they had no Public Square like ours.

Shopping was great in Wilkes-Barre, especially the stores encircling Public Square in the heart of the City until about 1972. Wilkes-Barre got hit with a double whammy. First Crown Construction built the Wyoming Valley Mall. Shortly afterwards Crown's payday came when Wyoming Valley (more than just Wilkes-Barre) was sacked by the Flood of 1972 caused by Hurricane Agnes.

The Mall itself was called the Wyoming Valley Mall and eventually it drew shoppers from the Wyoming Valley and even towns farther away. When it was finished, it expanded to contain twenty-nine stores. There was nothing like it in Northeastern PA at the time. Work began on the mall in April 1968. The land was acquired from the Blue Coal Corporation. Before the mall could be built, illegally dumped garbage from the East Side Landfill Authority had to be removed. Without the flood, the mall may never have made it.

Sears served as a big anchor store on the one side of the mall and it opened before the rest of the mall in early 1971. Next was Pomeroy's which opened its doors in April 1972. Pomeroy's was a big anchor store on Public Square and very popular with shoppers. For a brief period, there were two Pomeroy's. Eventually the whole mall was opened up. It was not immediately successful despite how impressive it was. The people still shopped in downtown Wilkes-Barre and loved the beauty of Public Square and the downtown section of the City.

Then came the second whammy. I can recall planning to get my motorcycle drivers' license the prior week; but it kept raining and would not stop. By June 22, this torrential rain had been falling for days in Northeastern PA and Southern NY.

My wife Pat, who was my fiancé at the time and I decided to see a movie at the beautiful Paramount Theatre in Wilkes-Barre that Thursday Evening. Stanley Kubrick's *2001* was outstanding so we figured his newest film would be just as great. It was not. We saw the worst movie ever.—“*A Clockwork Orange*.” We may have walked out before it was over. It was that bad.



Right after the Square Was Flooded June 23, 1972

Ironically, *Singing in the Rain* was a big song in the movie and it was raining so hard on Public Square that night that there were flood warnings. Driving home that night, Pat and I did not pay much attention as we figured just the creeks would be affected as was usually the case.

By the next morning on June 23, 1972, the torrential rains from Tropical Storm Agnes led to the flooding of the Wyoming Valley. It looked bad in the morning, but it took a while for the water to top the dikes. That morning there were dire warnings and people from Wilkes-Barre and surrounds banded together on the river dikes to fill sand bags and create barriers to prevent the river from topping on the shores of Wilkes-Barre and surrounds.

A reasonably complete account of Hurricane Agness can be read at <https://pubs.usgs.gov/pp/0924/report.pdf>. The Times Leader offers an article about the big flood, which is also very powerful. <https://www.timesleader.com/news/local/663873/45-years-later->

[agnes-still-on-peoples-minds](#). The article was written on the 45th anniversary in 2017.

The downtown was wiped out, literally. Much of the wonder of Public Square disappeared as merchants took redevelopment dollars and tore down their businesses and got out of Dodge. The Wyoming Valley Mall did not become successful until then. The damage of Hurricane Agnes in 1972 was significant and the fact that businesses were paid to vacate Wilkes-Barre in retrospect was a big mistake for the sustenance of a viable and prosperous City. It was easier to take the money and run than it was to rebuild.

Fortunately for Crown and those needing a place to shop, the new Mall was on very high ground and it was not affected by the flooding. Eventually multiple movie theaters in the mall would replace the Paramount and the Comerford Theatres from Public Square. The mall opened with two screens inside, and later adding another three outside. Eventually, even these mall theatres did not make a go of it and the space was reused.

Two downtown screens were demolished during the mid and late 1970's, but the Paramount hung on. After the flood of 1972 all theatres eventually came back but the downtown was gone and business for theatres never really got good again. Before it was razed, many may recall that the Capitol/Comerford was divided into 3 houses: Barre East, Barre West & Barre Loge. It lasted until about 1977, closed, and was demolished shortly afterward.

The Paramount died shortly thereafter leaving Public Square with no movie theatres. Some say it was the economics of operating a large, single screen building, coupled with changed shopping patterns and the free parking associated with the mall cineplex, that forced the Paramount to close its doors in late 1977 and it transferred to a new owner.

During the later 1970s and early 1980s, when it was no longer a movie house, the theater was used as a venue for touring concerts and some closed-circuit television boxing matches. The Kirby web site characterized these attempts as “hollow echoes of the glory that had once been.”

The Redevelopment Authority did its best to make businesses whole during this time but the wrecking ball was always in site in the 1970's. Now, the stores are gone and two theatres are gone and the Paramount would have been gone but for the spirit and actions of some good people and some fine organizations.

Wilkes-Barre residents were not happy with the wrecking ball being the symbol of the post-flood Wilkes-Barre. So, a group of locals got together and called themselves S.T.O.P. (Save The Old Paramount.) before the cranes moved over to rip her down. They were very successful. Their first success was having the Paramount building added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. Even with this, the building was basically abandoned. Seven years later things began to happen

The late and great Albert Boscov decided to help the cause. Along with August L. Simms, and with the invaluable assistance of Fred M. Kirby II and the Kirby Foundation, in 1985, a team including local business and civic leaders, raised \$3.3 million for the acquisition and restoration of the theater. It was renamed the F. M. Kirby Center in honor of Fred M. Kirby I, the co-founder of the Woolworth's chain and a native of the Wilkes-Barre area.

Doors to the F.M. Kirby Center for the Performing Arts opened on Friday, September 19, 1986, to a gala performance of the American Ballet Theatre's premiere of its "Celebration Tour", featuring prima ballerina Cynthia Gregory and the Northeastern Pennsylvania Philharmonic. The Kirby is a monument to the can-do spirit needed again today to help again make Wilkes-Barre the fine city that it once was.



Public Square was never really Public Square again. Great stores and restaurants and hotels disappeared and now, in 2018, one of the newest hotels in the City has become a King's College student residence.



On the left side of the same block, the former grand Pomeroy's building is now a part of Luzerne County Community College.



The Square no longer has major department stores or any large stores at all. The buildings such as the Martz building and the Bicentennial

Building as well as former bank buildings on and just off Public Square have focal points for businesses that find the Square's central location advantageous for their clientele.

There are 24 bus routes run by the Luzerne County Transit Authority, but nobody takes the bus to Public Square anymore to shop. All of that can change if we elect the right people to help turn around the fortunes of the City.

Since 1972, Wilkes-Barre and Wyoming Valley shoppers have gone "up the mall" to shop and there is nothing in the wind to change that any time soon; but there can be.

Back when Public Square was something, with theatres, great restaurants, ballrooms, and major department stores, there was major unsubsidized bus service to help the folks get to the Square and thereabouts. Even my neighborhood in the Rolling Mill Hill Section had a Wilkes-Barre Transit Company bus stop a block from our house on the corner of Blackman Street and Brown Street. At one time, it was a trackless trolley and later, the Bus company had the busses converted to gasoline.

When we got to the corner too early for the Grove & Brown bus, and we needed to stay warm, we did not go across the street for a sundae at Peters' Ice Cream store because Wilkes-Barre is a cold-weather town. Instead, we walked towards the next prior bus stop at the corner of Parish and Brown.

Rather than stand in the cold at Blackman and Browns Sts, often we would walk to Parish Street if we did not see the bus coming our way. Brown was a straight street so we never missed the bus by switching corners. The bus we got was from our section of the City to uptown was known as the Grove & Brown. It not only got us to Public Square—it was fun. And it only cost a dime at the time.

To make my case about Public Square in the glory days of Wilkes-Barre, please permit me please to retrace some steps that I took when I wrote the book, *Wilkes-Barre PA: Return to Glory*.

Still pristine after many close calls

Let me ask us all to recall our most magnificent Public Square. You may know that over the years, many a business person tried to convince City Officials to commercialize this most valuable piece of Wilkes-Barre real estate.

Luzerne County Courthouse on Public Square circa 1905



Some wanted to put buildings on the Square and others wanted street traffic to go right through the center. Thankfully, prudent city officials used the German Word “NEIN” as the answer to those requests.

Luzerne County Courthouse circa 1908 River Street, under construction



Thankfully again, we still have a Square and none of these destructive notions were permitted by our City Forebears. In 1786, less than twenty years after Wilkes-Barre was founded, Luzerne County was established. Until 1909 or so, you may know that the "Square" was

the home of the Luzerne County Court House. From then on, it was a small diamond-shaped plot of land in the center of town remade for public use. Its use was intended to be a "park" for the citizens to enjoy.

Shhh!!!: Hangings in Wilkes-Barre in the 1800's

Hoping to attract visitors and investors, Wilkes-Barre Photographers were always cautious in the 1800's to not broadcast that there were any major crimes in the City. Nonetheless, like all major cities, Wilkes-Barre had its share of crime. Sometimes there were hangings and sometimes there were not.

Sometimes a last-minute pardon came in—even after one of two perpetrators had already met his fate at the not oft discussed gallows on Public Square. Sometimes the execution did not occur at all. Such is the case in 1829 of Henry Keck. A number of other executions are discussed at the following blog:

<http://wbpublicexecutions.blogspot.com/>

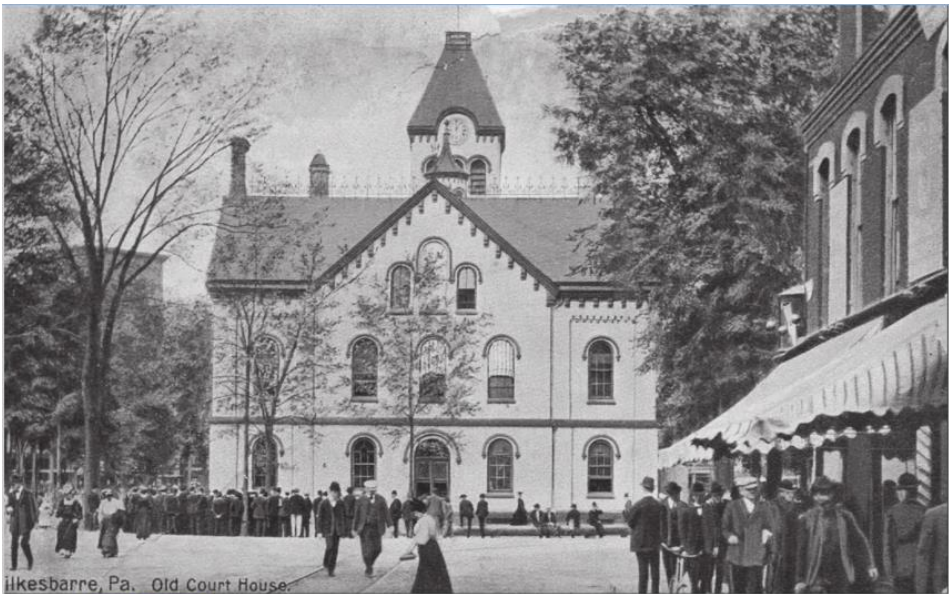
At the August Term of 1829, Judge Scott sentenced to death by hanging, one Henry Keck, who had shot and killed his father about a half a mile below Wilkes-Barre. Henry's mother viewed the killing as a family affair, which concerned nobody but themselves, and she expressed surprise when the officers of the law came to arrest her son.

He was eventually pardoned by Governor Shultz. This was considered an act of unbecoming and improper clemency, and excited great indignation among the people. Keck and the governor were not hanged but there was a hanging. Both were hanged and burnt in effigy in the public square at Wilkes-Barre. Yes, they were still alive after their effigies were hanged and burned.

After conveying the straw criminals in a cart through the streets, with caps ready to be drawn over their faces and with ropes about their necks, (Juff Hicks, the executioner, proceeded to discharge his duty in these words : " Henry Keck and Mr. Governor Shultz, you hab just two and a half minutes to stay on dis earth, and if you hab anything to say, say it now, or eber after hold your peace."

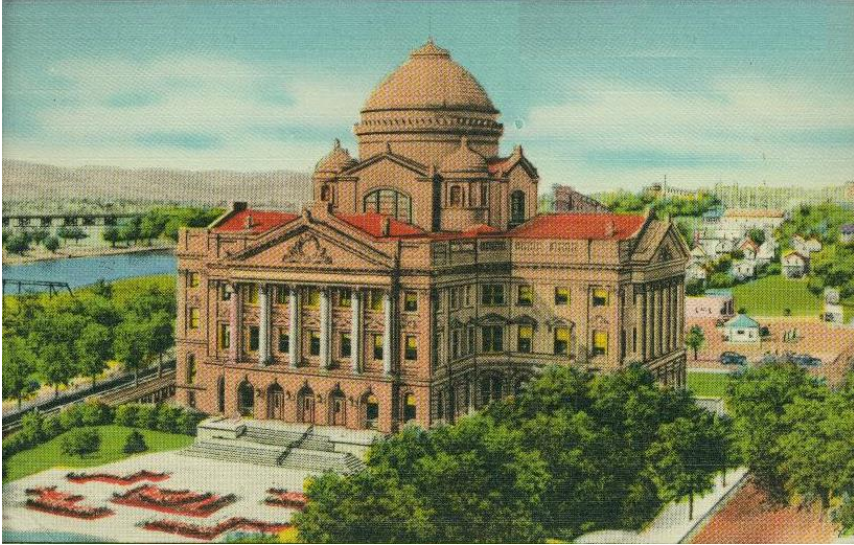
The effigies were suspended by their necks in the presence of a great multitude of people. Keck afterwards became insane, and wandered about the country from place to place. Seems like a case of early Karma.

Here below we have a picture from a book about the City in an area discussing Public Square. Care needed be taken to assure that the gallows on the Square was not in view. The picture below is of the Courthouse built directly on Wilkes-Barre Public Square which lasted until the Luzerne County Courthouse was built in 1909.



Public Square was a very busy place, as can be seen in this photograph from the late 1800s. Not seen in this photograph is something the county certainly would have wanted to be kept hidden—the gallows. Public Square had its own set of semi-public gallows in the yard near the courthouse. The last public hanging was on May 4, 1905; following that, and until hangings were outlawed, prisoners were hanged behind closed doors.

Luzerne County Courthouse 1909



Not referencing hangings or gallows at all, but rather spared from that by cautious photography, famous novelist Theodore Dreiser, over one hundred-some years ago offered a great compliment to Wilkes-Barre planners on his visit to the city in 1916. He said that the newly refurbished Public Square was "one of the most pleasing small parks I have ever seen."

Me too! Wilkes-Barre has always been a special place to live with lots of places to enjoy.

Dreiser would later become famous as an author with his timeless work, "An American Tragedy." This now famous man was just one of many people to fall under the spell of the four-acre diamond of grass and trees in the middle of Wilkes-Barre. Some of us now know it as the site of the Farmer's Market, and the rest of us know it simply as that magical spot right there in the center of our town with the great tree in the center at Christmas time.

Some of the history of the Square is not well known. For example, my research prompted me to ask my friends and cohorts if they can recall a nice fountain in the center of Public Square. I can recall this fountain as a child and I found pictures. Were these the real McCoy. I think so but I am not sure. Few can recall seeing such a fountain either recently or from readings about times past.

When Dreiser came to Wilkes-Barre, sure enough... there was a fountain right smack dab in the center of Public Square. It was a huge and ornate water fountain shown on page 19.

I have always said that Wilkes-Barre's return to glory begins with dreams and ideas. This fountain would look great again in a newly revitalized Wilkes-Barre. It was lighted at night by a string of colored bulbs. Can you imagine that back in the early 1900's?

These were surely the glory days of Wilkes-Barre. However, because of high water bills (The electric fountain used 30,000 gallons of water a day.) the magnificent statue of the Indian maiden Kankakee had to be dismantled and for the past eighty years, it supposedly has been stored in impregnable city vaults. Somebody unauthorized must have had the key.

My most significant memory of early Public Square besides dreaming that it had a beautiful fountain, was that it also had underground restroom facilities for both men and women. I can remember the men side myself as a kid. I must admit that I was afraid to go into a building that was not above the earth. It was like going into a crypt in a horror movie. But it was neat after braving it for your due relief.

Ornate Fountain Indian Maiden Kankakee circa 1911



FOUNTAIN, PUBLIC SQUARE, WILKES-BARRE, PA.

Less expensive fountain, once in working order center of Public Square!



The underground WB latrine looked like the steps to the nether world. Both restrooms had steps leading down to a door that appeared to not be part of any building... and of course there was grass growing on top of the surrounding area. As expected, it offered the great relief that was needed for a young man to continue his adventures on Public Square, completely dry on the inside.

It would be nice to find a Wilkes-Barra alum to offer a reward for the Indian maiden Kankakee. It would also be a neat idea to have an archaeological dig across from the Kirby where the underground latrine once existed. If we find it, maybe we can bring it back. That would be something.

Additionally, of course it would be nice to see a working fountain again right in the center of Public Square, with its own reservoir of water, so it did not have to flush gallons of costly water into the sewer.

Public Square was originally built to be an attraction because the City leaders at the time understood that attracting citizens into the downtown, or "uptown," as we Wilkes-Barre natives called it, would mean there would always be wonderful places to go uptown.

This is still a great notion. Retail businesses like locating where the people are, and the people like to be where neat things are always happening. That was Wilkes-Barre years ago and that can be Wilkes-

Barre again as we all work together to return *Wilkes-Barre* to Great City status again.

I can remember myself in the 1960's and 1970's and beyond, until the flood of '72 being uptown on the Square when Wilkes-Barre itself was still a nice attraction. Its historical stores and buildings were mostly intact in 1972. When asked "where are you going today?" Many of us would respond, simply "uptown." Uptown meant Public Square and the first two blocks of South Main Streets.

Today, other than Boscov's, the many attractions from the first two blocks of South Main Street are gone. May I repeat. Downtown Wilkes-Barre when we were growing up in the big City, was known as "uptown." Buses were filled with young and old, who held packages and huge shopping bags from trips "uptown." They were great days. And, I was schooled by my mom and grand mom as most of us were, to always give up a bus seat for a lady.

Chapter 6 "Uptown" in the Old WB Glory Days

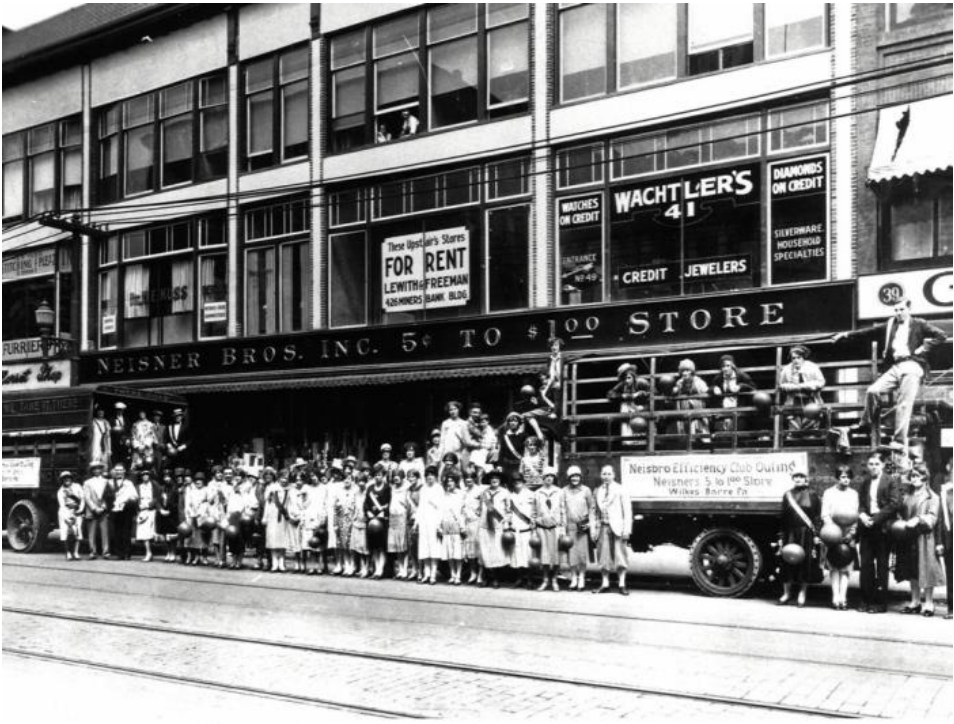
A South Main Street look in olden days from the WB Square



Great places to shop & the Square was there for resting and fun

Again, please indulge me as I go back to *Wilkes-Barre PA: Return to Glory* to fill-in some stories about Wilkes-Barre's past. Some may remember Fowler, Dick, & Walker, the Boston Store (now Boscov's); Pomeroy's—in its magnificently appointed building (now LCCC "Up-Town"); Kresge's, a unique store in which one could enter on S. Main Street, visit Aunt Clara's Toy Shop, and then exit on Public Square. That's not the end of the story. There is lots more.

How about the Neisner Bros. store at 41-49 South Main Steet? My Aunt Ruth worked in the center "Fountain," serving the carbonated fountain drinks of the day. They had great pizza, and a fare that made your mouth water, especially if you were a little kid. Aunt Ruth always made the "Kelly kids" feel special when we stopped to say hello.



Circa 1950 Neisners on South Main Street right down from the Square

There were tons of furniture stores and of course Bergman's, Bond's, John B. Stetz, The Hub, and the fabulous Lazarus store, all of which I would love to come back from the dead. Today, Lazarus is covered with asphalt and serves the public as an "Up Town" one level parking lot.

Always an attraction, the Peanut Man was always on the Square by the Peanut Shop, giving out Planters delicious peanuts. In the picture it is the same location as the Cigar store on S. Main Street and the Square. Wouldn't it be nice if we could get Nabisco / Kraft Foods to bring back the Peanut Man to the hometown of Planters Peanuts for us all to enjoy again?

Barnes & Noble from the Square

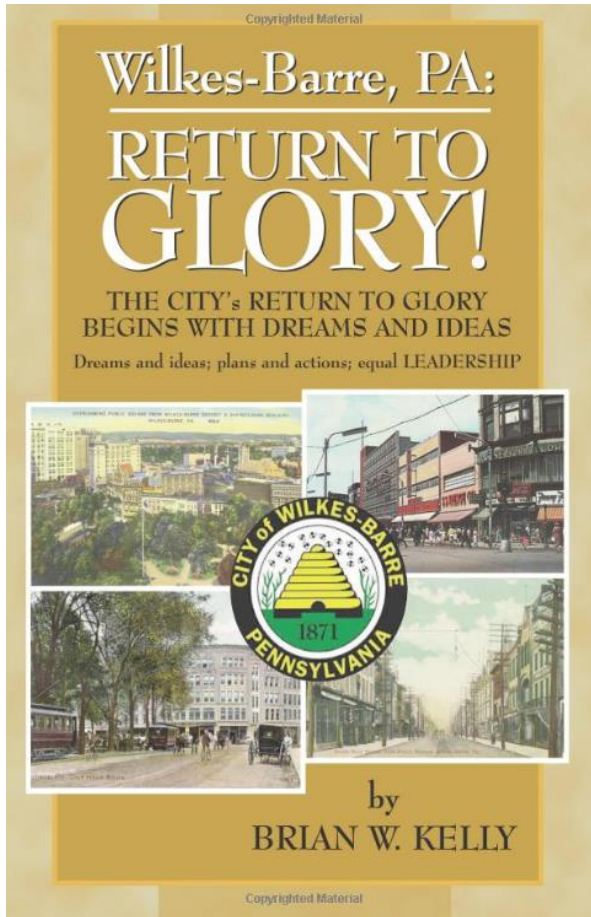
Here is how South Main Street looks today with a view from Public Square. You can see the Barnes & Noble Bookstore which serves both the community needs as well as the needs of King's & Wilkes University students for text books.

Barnes & Noble Picture -- Public Square shot--Frank's Photography Site



Barnes & Noble in Wilkes-Barre today also has a very nice coffee house and great coffee. One day I am hoping many from Wilkes-Barre will have the opportunity to enjoy a coffee there while reading a book signed by this hometown author. The predecessor book to this was provided complimentary for Barnes & Noble but B & N decided not to stock it so Amazon got all the sales online. The book is still available at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/0989995798>.

Here is a picture in case you have not seen the original WB book



Secret spots for free food

There were other spots on South Main Street across the street from Planters Peanuts main offices. The offices were located across from Hanover Street, about ten blocks from the Square. Not everybody knew of such "secret" places. But, a guy with a bike finds many wonderful things. I knew what was there and I brought many with me to enjoy the free popcorn. Of course we had to share it with the bees.

Yes, one of these places off lower South Main Street was so good that we as kids would sneak to the back of the buildings and eat the sweet popcorn by Hanover Street and Race Street. We never knew where this fine fare, overflowing in huge barrels, put out as waste, had come from. Nonetheless, we stubbornly fought with the bees to get our share. Somehow, we are all still alive. Best of all, we never even knew

we were poor. I can remember all the smiles, and none of us ever got stung.

Back to uptown Wilkes-Barre

Looking around the Square in my child's eyes, from Sout Main looking North, I can still see the One Hour Porterizing and Martinizing which was placed caddie corner from the Paramount Theatre. There was never a vacant parking spot on Public Square as I recall. The Comerford Theatre and the Paramount were huge attractions. The Comerford and a lot of other great businesses including the memorable Pizza Casa and Carmen's Pizza disappeared after 1972 Flood. The Redevelopment Authority was very generous.

Wilkes-Barre canopy system that kept shoppers out of the rain



After the flood, in addition to paying for the redevelopment of many flooded properties, Federal funding permitted Wilkes-Barre to build a huge metal canopy system to keep shoppers out of the rain. The intention was to compete in the warmer months about indoor facilities such as the Wyoming Valley Mall. Lack of painting and rust, and the scourge of dilapidation, unfortunately prompted City officials to rip it all down just recently. It lasted just about thirty years.

If you look at pictures of storefronts before 1972, such as in the old-time pic from an old-time era below, you will see that the merchants had already solved the shade/rain problem themselves without big government. The merchants simply extended huge attractive awnings over the sidewalks. No mall was necessary.



The awnings look pretty sharp. Now, without the canopies or the awnings, the malls are the only places that seem to get the shade from the sun and heat of the summer and they get dryness when it is raining or snowing. Of course nobody gets wet or sunburned by shopping the Internet either. With more people driving than ever today, it is good that there are so many parking spaces and facilities in the City. This is one of the things that has improved from the glory days. Dreamer that I am, we still have a lot more work to do.

Chapter 7 Easy to Get Around in Early Wilkes-Barre



The trackless trolley (bus) was the way to go

Wilkes-Barre residents of all ages found their way to Public Square for all reasons. It was a great place for out-of-towners with Wilkes-Barre roots also. My Aunt Nina loved coming to town, taking the Grove & Brown Electric Trackless Trolley and getting dropped off on the Square. Coming back on the bus, with my mother, she always had some nice items for my brothers, sisters and I.

Public Square with Pomeroy's; trackless trolley to Parsons; track trolley



Public Square was a great place to be. As a ten-year old and younger, I found myself to the Square often riding my 26" bike. I also took the Grove and Brown trackless trolley. I don't recall it being much more than a nickel or dime to ride.

Wilkes-Barre Public Square in the 1940's – A trolley with a track



Transfers got you from Rolling Mill Hill to almost anywhere!

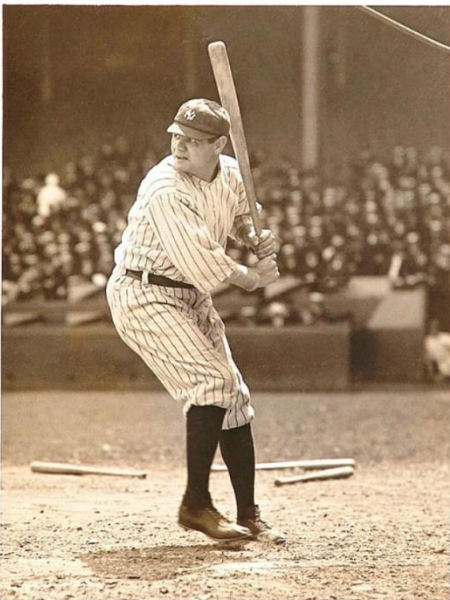
There was always something going on in the Wilkes-Barre area growing up. I still remember when the King and his Court were playing the Wyoming Valley All Stars in Kingston Football Stadium off Pierce Street. Not only did I find my way to Public Square on the Grove and Brown, but since there was no bus to Kingston Stadium where the game was played, I walked from the Square along with a lot of other walkers to see this great event. I could not figure out how

to get a transfer and worse than that, I did not know how to find a bus.



<< Eddie Feigner – King

I would have loved to have gotten on the bus below to Kingston, but I walked nonetheless and I saw the great Eddie Feigner and the four man softball team known as The King and his Court. . They tell me Babe Ruth used to play ball with the locals in the Fall across the Market Street Bridge in Artillery Park I never saw Babe play, but I played a lot of fun ball in Kirby Park, part of Wilkes-Barre and I saw where Babe hit his longest home run ever.



Some more information for those who may not know— Eddie Feigner and company, i.e. the King and his Court, the greatest team that ever stepped onto a softball diamond played its last game in late August 2011. (Like tribute Rock bands, they played without Feigner and most of the originals that I saw.) Eddie passed away in 2007. This team had been at its peak for 65 years!

I was no more than ten years old when I made this trek. Wilkes-Barre was a safe place to live and play. My biggest

surprise of this great game was that a young Tommy Yuhas (early twenties) of Wilkes-Barre (the Butcher at Peters Economy Store) got the only hit in the game for the Wyoming Valley All-Star Team. This was more than fifty plus years ago. Tommy did well batting against Eddie Feigner, the King, and his four-man softball team.

Electric trackless trolleys were like buses. See the connectors on top!



The King pitched from the mound and anywhere else he chose. Sometimes he pitched strikes from deep centerfield--underhand of course. He even threw curves from way-out there. The catcher had a tough time reaching Feigner on the return throw. Eddie Feigner, the King, was the pitcher, and the Court consisted of a catcher, and two fielders who played wherever they felt they needed to play to get outs.

All of this happened in Kingston's Football Stadium (known as Wyoming Valley West Stadium today). I could not believe I was there. It was impressive. I got there mostly because of the trackless trolley and some money I had made on my junk route. I was tired after all the walking, but it was great.

1960 President Kennedy

In the same vein, I am not sure if I took my bike or I took the Grove and Brown to Public Square on October 28, 1960, when I was twelve, to see the next President of the United States, John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Before Kennedy spoke on Public Square after his motorcade had arrived, on the way to the stage, he may have felt the hand of a twelve-year old that he was shaking. We did not have words or eye contact, but I sure knew what had happened.

During that October visit to Wilkes-Barre, Kennedy attracted thousands - even more than the large crowd that had greeted Republican candidate Vice President Richard Nixon just a few weeks earlier.

JFK on the Public Square in October 1960. There was nothing like it!





My cousin Arline, from NJ, told me just the other day that she had shaken Nixon's hand in Bloomfield, NJ, around the same time but she knew in her heart, like I did, that she was for Kennedy. Wilkes-Barre was something back then for sure. Kids like me, who could not vote were still interested in the City and we rooted for the Country big-time.

John F. Kennedy was not the first or the last President to visit NEPA. When the pundits wrote about the first Catholic President, many would include information about Teddy

Roosevelt who was a Wilkes-Barre visitor in this run for President at the turn of the century.

In the middle of the bottom picture on the prior page, is Wilkes-Barre's own Congressman Daniel J. Flood. Over the years, I have often imitated the Congressman, known for his unique handle-bar mustache. From a distance some think I am him when they hear my imitation. A former Shakespearean Actor, the Congressman was well at home on a stage of in any crowd. You could not have gotten closer to to-be President Kennedy than Dan Flood did in the picture above.

Chapter 8 You Can't Believe How Really Cool the City Once Was!



The Tones 1962

Ron Smallcomb - Tom Vest - Rich Flora - Ron Stefanko - Danny Herman - George Drugotch

Places to go; things to do; people to see

If something is cool once; it can be cool again. Don't you think? With some needed attention, Wilkes-Barre can be great again, and that sure would be cool.

When I talk to my peers about the late 1950's and the 1960's in Wilkes-Barre, we all seem to recall the dances at the YMCA Canteen, and those at the CYC. We had a great childhood in Wilkes-Barre, and as we grew into adolescents and teenagers. We had a great life *because of*, not *in spite of*, Wilkes-Barre.

You may remember Joe Nardone & the All Stars; Mel Wynn & the Rhythm Aces; and the late Ronnie Stefanko and the Tones playing at

the CYC for years when we were kids. Stefanko's rendition of Bobby Vinton's Blue Velvet was better done than the Polish Prince himself.

I can remember Ronnie Stefanko, not much older than I, who married my classmate, the late Bonnie Obelienis, shortly after high school. Last time I saw him perform, he was sharing the stage at the Catholic War Vets picnic just a few years ago with CWV President Ray Walton, a St. Boniface alumnus. Walton, an affable man, was smoking a big cigar, telling us all that we were having a good time. We were! Both of these great guys have passed on to the Lord but I want to tell Ray that he did not have to tell us it was great. Ronnie and The Tones were playing... 'nough said.

Meyers High School Class of 1965 booked the Tones to play in 2005 for our fortieth graduation anniversary celebration, shortly after the band made its comeback. Again, they were great!

BTW, the revitalized new Tones still play well and are out there as one of the few bands from "the days," that you can still listen to regularly if you choose. Vince Saracino, longtime member of the Tones & Vince Jr. handles the lead vocalist jobs—el magnifico.



At halftime, the dances at the CYC and the Canteen had what seemed like a half hour or so intermission. Most of "us" high schoolers at the time felt like we were released from the CYC or the Canteen into the uptown, with a return ticket.

The big stores at 9:15 PM or so were mostly closed but the places where a kid could get a soda, a malt, and a Hamburg or one or the other always seemed ready and waiting—as long as we behaved and we did not giggle too much.

There were some great places such as the Spa Restaurant on South Main Street across from Fowler Dick & Walker. The Boston Store, as well as the Europa Lounge right next door to the Boston Store. Within walking distance from the CYC and the YMCA was the phenomenal Boston Candy Kitchen and the Embassy Restaurant right there on Public Square – situated right by the Bus Stops.

The Astor Restaurant was by the Fort Durkee Hotel. If we were adventurous, we could saunter off to the infamous S&W Restaurant on North Main Street. Percy Browns fabulous and famous Delicatessen was right on Northampton between Washington and Main. So it was close to both the CYC and the YMCA.

We were between thirteen and sixteen years old for these dances, and none of these places uptown served alcohol—at least for us, and that too was good. It was such a great experience, we were not looking for diversions. We were there to suck up the greatness of the moment—and there were many... and we were not even grown-ups... yet.

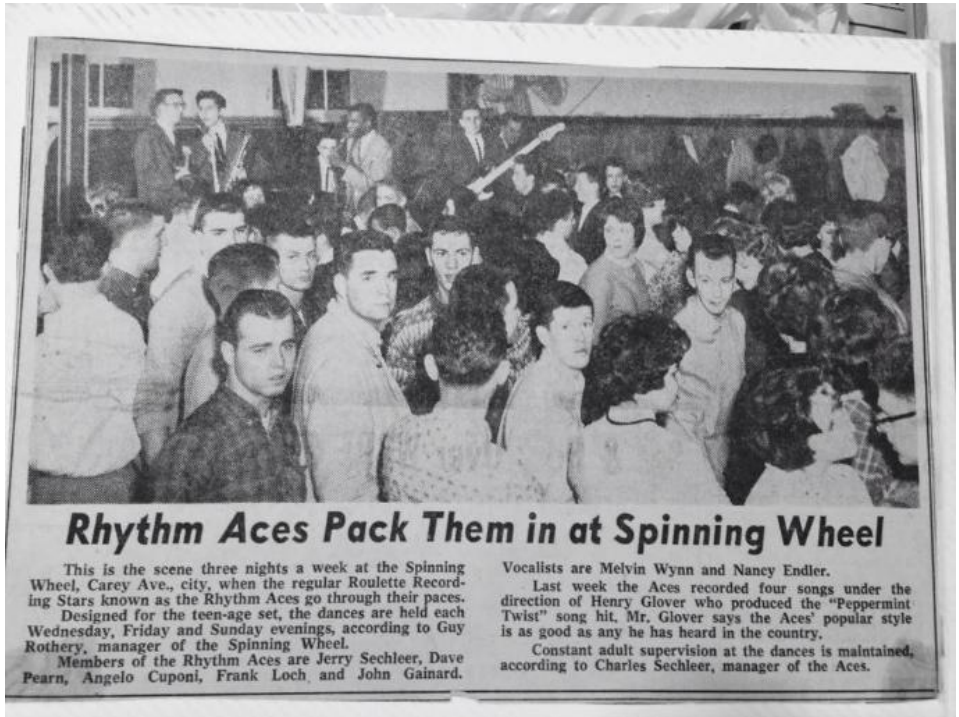
There was of course for teenagers, what I would call Public Square Sticker Shock. I am not sure if McDonalds had even hit the area yet but the prices were nothing like McDonalds or Handley's Diner, or Elias's South Wilkes-Barre Diner, where Schiel's Family Market now sits. But, for just a couple cents more, we were able to partake of the finest places that have ever been part of the Wilkes-Barre landscape.

Because these exquisite food stops were pricey, the boys and girls often traveled at halftime separately each paying their own tab. We always felt that there was something in "uptown" Wilkes-Barre for everybody. They were great days, and Wilkes-Barre itself added to the greatness.

When we were not on or by the Square for the dances, we might go "uptown" at other times for a milkshake or a banana split or just to shop or browse in the many great stores. Wilkes-Barre offered more than just uptown and so many of us did not travel so far all the time

for we could get all the treats we needed closer to home. There were places like the Stanton Pharmacy Fountain or Leggieri's Pizza or Angelo's Pizza, The D & R in Parsons and elsewhere, and of course there was Peters' Ice Cream Store in the Rolling Mill Hill. In South Wilkes-Barre, there was Luna Rosa, and in other areas of the City there were also great venues for teenagers who knew how to behave.

Chapter 9 Wilkes-Barre Was a Great City for a Young Adult

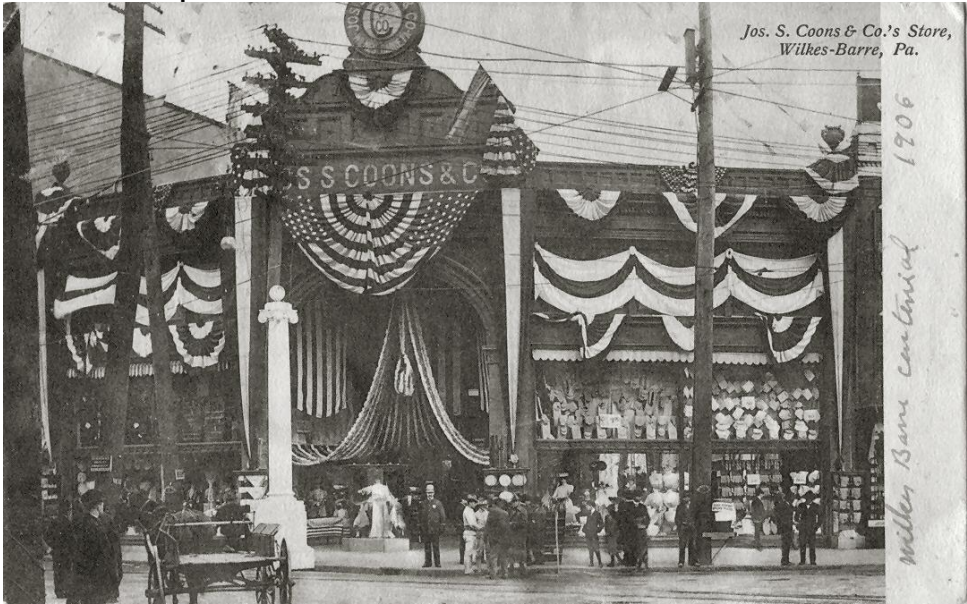


Eddie Day was not a state representative yet!

Eventually, as we got a bit older, and many of us were driving, we no longer went to the CYC and the YMCA for dances. Instead we went to the Stardust Ballroom (later renamed the Naked Grape) and the Granada Ballroom and the Starfire Room in Wilkes-Barre. Once kids hit sixteen, the "wheels," permitted us to travel to Hanson's Pavilion and of course the great dance room at Sans Souci.

I once thought the Stardust Ballroom, where I attended many a dance, was on the second floor of the Paramount Theatre. However, looking at an old Wilkes-Barre Almanac I discovered that work began in 1929 in tearing down the Joseph S. Coons & Co. store building at the corner of Public Square and East Market.

Joseph S. Coons & Sons –one of Wilkes-Barre's Finest Stores



As they said in the Wilkes-Barre Almanac, this was "to give place to a two-story building for stores and a dance hall, with a new theatre in the rear." The new second floor dance hall was the Stardust Ballroom and it always seemed to be on top of the Paramount to me or the news-stands right nearby.

When I wrote the first edition of the original Wilkes-Barre book, I thought that the Granada was right opposite the Stardust on Public Square and S. Main. However, thanks to George Elias, I learned that it was further down South Main Street in the second block. Official address is 162 South Main Street Wilkes-Barre PA, just up from South Street... but it too is long gone.

As noted, in my day, these second story haunts were on W. Market and South Main streets. In the 1960's a new place opened up in an old building. We were frequent visitors to the new Starfire Ball Room, the third Ballroom in Wilkes-Barre. This was run by Eddie Day and the Starfires. It was once the old Giant Market on 142 South Main Street right up from the Granada. The Starfires ran their dances upstairs. Those sure were the days.

Those who wanted to stay young found solace in Ricky Jones' and the Sutter Brothers' *Purple Haze*. It was as if when we needed these places as we grew up; they just showed up.



Further down South Main street and onto Carey Ave was another great dance hall. It was the last to go. The wrecking ball went to work just a few years ago and tore down a great place from my youth. Lots of folks had their wedding receptions there. It was just on the other side of Wilkes-Barre's Division Street, but it was technically located in Hanover Township. The Spinning Wheel served its last meal in 2007 and its last dance was about fifty years ago. I was probably there.

The Spinning Wheel opened up as a dance hall in the 1930s and I know when I was at Meyers in the 1960's it was a great place for

Friday night dances with Joe Nardone's All Stars with Billy Brown as the lead singer.



Photo Courtesy of Shirley Hanson... **The Rock and Roll Allstars from left to right: Leo "Lefty" Harkins, Bill Brown, Joe Nardone, Ray Nataitis, Jim Shatter**

In the never spoken category of “who played for Joe Nardone’s All-Stars, I have it on good word that John Anstett, the long-time City Assessor, who survived through several administrations, was a potential applicant for the All-Stars due to parental intervention. John still claims expertise in the Bugle and the Trumpet. Carol, his loving and lovely wife, may have fallen for the handsome knave assessor much sooner if he were a band member. Nah, word, as in the truth, is that at first glance, Anstett developed a special dialogue for Carol: “What are you looking for some good conversation, sweetheart? The heart of the lady was captured? . Please don’t tell their kids.

Joe Nardone’s groups over the years have been the best. They were the best and they are still great every time I see them play with Eddie Day Pashinski (Starfires/Nighttimers) at the Irem just once a year. Everybody from Meyers and many other high schools of yesteryear

are so thrilled to clap a hand, that we take our arthritis pills early in the day and we sneak in some Christian Brothers Brandy to ease our “Rockin Pain.” every summer.

Thank you Eddie and Joe. We love your sounds still. Those were the days in the 1960’s for Wilkes-Barre right before the flood years. In my home town, having something to do was always assured. Every weekend, there was always a decision about where to go because there was so much to do growing up.

Eddie Day & the NightTimers



Speaking of Eddie Day, here is an early picture above with his band known at the time as The NighTimers. Most of us know Eddie today as our State Representative. He is the one-time bandleader of the group above. My buddy Bob Fountain who for years was the bass and lead singer for another local mainstay band, Hollywood, and smaller group called The DUO did some time with Eddie Day et al so I am told.

All in all Eddie Day was the lead man in at least three bands—NightTimers, Starfires, and TNT and I am not sure what the order was. It sure made Wilkes-Barre a great place for growing kids who were almost adults.

With these greats, including John Anstett, who is waiting for his first public Bugle performance, as noted previously, there was the local King of Harvey's Lake and even the Spinning Wheel for I heard him there first—Joe Nardone and his All Stars.

I do recall when Joe Nardone, and the late great Bill Brown teamed up with the All Stars. Wow—especially at the former Spinning Wheel on Carey Av in S. WB—recently razed in anticipation of something greater! For those of us who can remember, nothing was greater than Billy Brown singing “Your Precious Love,” when there was somebody with or without you who made you want to sing along.

As you saw in the picture opening this chapter, Mel Wynn was also at the Spinning Wheel, Hansons and other venues with his Rhythm Aces. Mel's brother Jimmy Wynn was a great baritone also with his Royal Aces, and one of the two Sechleer brothers played with each of the "Aces." They were all great and they took their hand at making records that often hit the top ten on WARM's local chart. Wilkes-Barre not only heard and danced to great music, its best musicians produced and recorded it.

WARM
RADIO 590
5,000 WATTS

HITS of the
WEEK
ON THE
STATION
OF THE
STARS

JOE SHAVER
9 P. M. to 1 A. M.

These groups made listening to great bands in Wilkes-Barre a given. What a place to grow up! Many times, the local bands outperformed the greats who loved to come to Wilkes-Barre.

Besides the locals, there were also great groups and single acts from outside the area. The Granada Ballroom hosted many grand events even before I had entered High School.



When the youth action or young adult action was not on Public Square, the aforementioned Spinning Wheel on Carey Ave, was the home for many a great Friday or Saturday Night dance. To repeat, because it hurt seeing it go, for those nostalgia lovers, on January 20, 2015, the Spinning wheel, the place where, with the great music, my heart often beat much faster than normal, was whacked by the Axe Man. He did his part and the wrecking ball did the rest.

It will soon be a used car lot, so they say! At least it may be used for something that can help all of us. I wish the new entrepreneur the best. But, for the good of Wilkes-Barre, I cannot figure out why the young of today do not need such places as save and exciting venues for their own romantic interests. Women and men still fall in love I think. That may be another book, but not today.

I know that I smiled all the while I would walk from High Street to the beginning of Hanover township to get to the Spinning Wheel. I always got there early often with my cousin Rich Knaus and we would watch potential dancing partners come in after we were settled. We thought we could Twist and do the Mashed Potatoes with the best

of them. Getting asked on a ladies choice was scary but wonderful because it did not happen often for some of us.

The Spinning Wheel was in Hanover Twp. but very close to Wilkes-Barre's Meyers High School. And so, the Meyers people—I was one of them at the time---, and those coming to the Spinning Wheel for the music and romance from many other parts of the City, often got together at Luna Rosa Pizza (Where Gerry Ricci's Pizza is now) before or after the dance and some even while to get a nice pizza.

Luna Rossa had these seemingly magnetic steps. After or during a dance, or a Friday night football game, nobody seemed to be able to get off those steps. Lennie's Pizza (Sawicki) in the Heights, they tell me, was also a similar delight.

King's Dances & Outings

Eventually we graduated from our high schools in Wilkes-Barre and some went away to College and some stayed locally. Whether you went to King's or Wilkes, or Misericordia or Marywood, nobody could deny that in the mid to late 1960's King's College had the best outings of all. It was like the next step after the Granada and Sans Souci and the Spinning Wheel.

King's students and many from other schools would take over some magical venues such as Sgarlat Lake and Watahunnee Park. For the college aged, King's Auditorium filled in during the bad weather. It was like having the CYC back in business but we were in our late teens then and early twenties and so were the ladies from Wilkes-Barre, Misericordia and Marywood. I can remember watching the Misericordia and Marywood busses pull away with some lucky King's guys (all male then) getting a little peck on the cheek to see them through the next week.

From freshman year to senior year, there was nothing like a Friday night King's dance in the 133 N. River Street Auditorium or a Sunday Outing. Marywood and Misericordia girls literally did come to the dances and outings by bus-loads. At the time, King's was all-male, and the two M-schools were all-female. It was like watching a beauty contest if you were a Kingsman having the opportunity to watch the

ladies exit the busses for the dances. You did not have to be in College to be at these dances. At least, my wife Pat told me that.

We heard the music of a local group, *The Buoys*, who I believe were from Luzerne, PA. They had a hit national record, *Timothy* after they were so great at the King's dances. We also danced to the music of the Cobra's with GAR's Austin (Donny) people's as lead singer, and Gerry Rodski as lead guitarist. Gerry was one of us at King's at the time and he sure was great with the guitar back then. He still is quite a talent today sitting in with a lot of great local groups such as The Music Room.

If I were not happily married to the most wonderful lady in the world, Pat Piotroski Kelly, maybe I would not like WB so much. If I had not had the pleasure of raising three wonderful children, Brian, a top flight lawyer, Michael, a great DUI criminal defense lawyer, and Katie, the twice Steamtown Female Vocalist of the year, with a number of albums and original songs to her credit, maybe, just maybe I would not like WB so much. But, then again maybe I would like Wilkes-Barre anyway. I sure think so. I love my town. *Let's Make Wilkes-Barre Great Again!*

Chapter 10 The Wrecking Ball is NOT the Future of Wilkes-Barre?



Wilkes-Barre Preservation Society buys the oldest home in the city
cv11preservationp4Warren Ruda / The Citizens' Voice

I have a few sayings that reflect my way of thinking regarding bad things that may be or not be and whether or not things can be made better than any negative default. Here are some of them. I don't claim originality but unless somebody says any of these are *their favorite saying*, I claim them now because I think I dreamed them up. .

1. If you think you can't—you're right!

Of course if you think you can, you are better than half way to a solution.

2. Very few naysayers who never can, ever do.

3. Nothing worth having in life is easy.

If easy is what you want, and you will settle for nothing less than easy, plan to not be satisfied with life.

No author would write a book about making a city great again if they believed it could not be done. I do believe that we can Make Wilkes-Barre Great Again so let's go ahead, beat the odds, and just do it!

But of course, we must believe we can in order for our work to come to fruition. Before we talk more about how we are going to get Wilkes-Barre back on track, let's visit a place where positive thinking exists everywhere they go.

Preserving history is important

Destroying history is just the opposite. On March 11, 2018, Bob Kalinowski of the Citizens Voice wrote a fine article about a group of people with a can-do-attitude. They had just accomplished a major task for themselves and for the City. You saw the picture taken by the Citizens Voice of a preserved house at the beginning of this Chapter. Sometimes permitting a home to exist is a tough task when the forces that be want it ripped down.

Vacant lots are not as appealing as historical landmarks. The home featured here is the oldest residence in Wilkes-Barre. It looks pretty sharp doesn't it. Good people can do good things. Here is another snapshot of the house:



I am going to rely on the CV's Bob Kalinowski's fine writing to tell you about the house and the good people who gave the oldest house in Wilkes-Barre a new lease on life. Norman Vincent Peale would be proud of Kalinowski's article. He would also be very pleased with the Wilkes-Barre Preservation Society. I know that I am.

Norman Vincent Peale was an American minister and author known for his work in popularizing the concept of positive thinking, especially through his best-selling book *The Power of Positive Thinking*. If you need a dose of positive thinking in your own life, this story is a tribute to positive thinking and Peale's great book is a suggestion list for leaving the doldrums and changing directions to walk on the positive side of life.

W-B preservation group saves City's oldest home

WILKES-BARRE — by Bob Kalinowski, CV

The oldest house in Wilkes-Barre has been saved from the wrecking ball and will be transformed into a historical museum.

The property, built in 1793 and known as the “Butler House,” recently was purchased by the Wilkes-Barre Preservation Society after group members blocked its imminent demolition over the summer of 2018. Continued on page 52.

Many town officials in cities across the country possess the same faults. Wilkes-Barre has been a leader of the pack in this malady. Yes, one of the biggest faults of Wilkes-Barre officials over the years is that the wrecking ball has been their friend and not something called in only when all else fails. It became the solution for far too many things. There are numerous examples such as the demolition of Publica Square and the untimely wrecking ball for a recently remodeled Old Fell House with its historic coal grate.

In addition to the Butler House being in the sights of the wrecking ball, the building that once housed Wilkes-Barre High and then Coughlin High, is the oldest public school in Pennsylvania, having been built in 1909. Again Wilkes-Barre Area officials in the School Board for their own reasons, are salivating at the thought of sending the wrecking ball to finish off this High School and all the other High Schools in the City of Wilkes-Barre.

An alarmed citizenry has awakened and is trying to stop this. I hope they have as much luck as the group that saved the Butler House. It is surely tough to make a City great again when City Officials are content to permit all the high schools to be abandoned and perhaps torn down.

To many, the “new high school” is more than a wrecking ball situation for many in Wilkes-Barre. There is deep concern that with the continuing cost increases over the construction of the super school in Plains Township that, as the prices of real estate plummet in the City, the citizen base is moving out of town to avoid the big tax increase that is coming when “Mine Shaft High” is a completed project.

I have to repeat the disdain for history and historical buildings put forth by the current Wilkes-Barre Area School Board. Like many

before them, they show disregard for the public and their intrinsic duties of looking out for John and Jane Q.

Coughlin's old building as noted is the oldest public school in Pennsylvania being built in 1909. It is the older of the two buildings that makes up Coughlin. It is over 100 years old. The second building is about 60 years old.

With the construction of a second high-school in Wilkes-Barre in 1925 (GAR), the old building, formerly Wilkes-Barre High School, was dedicated as James M. Coughlin High School in memory of James Coughlin, who served as Superintendent from 1890 to 1918.

Because the School Board has a wrecking ball Strategy rather than a preservation strategy, the last class at the main Coughlin building was taught on December 23, 2015, after 104 years of continuous use. What a shame for the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board.

This did not come without a fight with a body known as the Save Our Schools group who have an active forum on Facebook. There were a lengthy series of meetings by the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board, where it was decided that Coughlin and another Wilkes-Barre Area High School (Elmer L. Meyers Junior/Senior High School) would close and combine after the Coughlin site was closed, and rebuilt.

The Coughlin Annex building would continue to house 11th and 12th graders until the new school was built. 9th and 10th grades students were to be placed in a recently renovated former Mackin Elementary School building. 11th and 12th graders were to be moved to the old Times Leader building next to Coughlin.

This board gets few things right. Few things that are supposed to be ever are and when they get close to happening, the price is way higher and the plan is worse than the original poor design.

Construction was supposed to be completed by early 2018, when both former high schools were to converge in the new school. However, the Board failed to take into account the realities of the purpose for the schools. It was thus unable to move forward with its plan to use the Coughlin site.

On March 5, 2018, the Board voted to purchase land in Plains, Pennsylvania for the merged high school. To say the least, the plan to build a huge super school over a mine shaft loaded with toxic material and reenlist the wrecking ball for all three existing WB High schools has been met with vocal opposition.

Right or wrong, somebody could probably make a strong case that the board members were corrupt and that they had to be getting a million dollars each for their complicity in this boondoggle. The push for their project to be completed with all of its imperfections is laden with too much fervor and anxiety for this to be a normal event to benefit the people. In fact the apparent desire of the board to pull this off as quickly as possible is unparalleled in local politics and perhaps even nationally.

If there were a national buffoonery contest for school boards, in the eyes of many with a stake in the game, the Wilkes-Barre Area School District Board would be odds-on favorites to capture first prize. It is highly unlikely that anybody on this board can possibly be working for the public's interests. Instead, their own selfish interests, whatever they may be, always come first.

Continued -- WILKES-BARRE — by Bob Kalinowski, CV

With bulldozers in the neighborhood on another job, members stood 24-hour guard outside the property at 313 S. River St. until they convinced the owner to halt the planned razing and let them buy the house.

They recently closed on the property for \$10,000.

“We knew about the historical significance of this building for a long time. When it came to the point we heard it was going to be torn down, it became a crisis,” said Gordon Williams, chairman of the preservation group. “That’s why we moved the way we moved.”

Houses razed for mansions. Not this one.

This white Connecticut Yankee-style home with green shutters was typical of the houses that once dotted what is now downtown Wilkes-Barre.

It's the last of its kind.

This one belonged to the descendants of Col. Zebulon Butler, the Revolutionary War soldier who commanded forces in the Battle of Wyoming and also represented the Wyoming Valley when it was part of Connecticut.

As local coal fueled the Industrial Revolution and created millionaires, the homes were razed for the mansions that now make up the River Street Historic District.

The Butler family, which had become one the area's wealthiest, decided to move this one, however.

The house was originally located at the corner of River and Northampton streets.

After the Civil War, the home was moved to its current location when the Butlers built a mansion.

The home, which has withstood several floods, had been owned by Yarosz-Zaorski Realty since 1990, records show.

It's been vacant since 2012.

Blocking the bulldozers

Over the summer, several nearby properties were being demolished and the real estate company asked the contractor to knock down 313 S. River St. next, members of the Wilkes-Barre Preservation Society said.

When they heard this, they stood watch round-the-clock outside the property while they tried to contact the owner.

“We walked up and down to make sure those bulldozers didn’t come toward the house,” recalled Linda Joseph, the group’s secretary and treasurer.

Ann Lewis, vice chair of the group and a local real estate agent, soon made contact with the owner. They agreed on a \$10,000 sale price and she immediately fronted the money.

“He needed proof we were serious,” Lewis recalled.

In the meantime, the group worked the past few months to incorporate as a 501(3)(c) nonprofit and raise money. A group of 16 downtown residents, the preservation society, the Downtown Residents’ Association and a local chapter of Daughters of the American Revolution combined resources to pay the \$10,000 and closing costs.

“The neighborhood raised the money,” said Wilkes-Barre Councilman Tony Brooks, who is director of the preservation society and lives nearby.

Butler house history

Brooks, who will become curator of the planned Butler House museum, said the group was glad to save history.

Zebulon Butler was a leader of the movement of Connecticut settlers to Wilkes-Barre under the Susquehannah Company. He built a log cabin for his family in Wilkes-Barre in 1773.

His son, Gen. Lord Butler, served on the Pennsylvania Supreme Executive Council following the revolution and personally knew Benjamin Franklin. Lord Butler built the existing house incorporating parts of his father’s log cabin in 1793.

Zebulon Butler’s grandson, Col. John Lord Butler, was an early anthracite coal entrepreneur for which the Butler Mine in Pittston was named.

A great-granddaughter, Sarah Richards Butler, married a Luzerne County judge and moved the home in order to build a mansion following the Civil War.

“Four generations of the Butler family lived in the house on the same plot until 1868 when the house moved from Northampton and South River to Ross and South River,” Brooks explained.

Past is future

Brooks noted the Butler House was documented by the Historic American Building Survey for the Library of Congress in 1939 and the information will be consulted in restoring the house to look like it did in the 1810s — which he said was “the peak time of General Lord Butler’s life.”

“The Butler House is a fine example of New England architecture and was popular in the 18th century until the Civil War,” Brooks said. “Connecticut Yankee settlers brought their architecture with them to Northeastern Pennsylvania.”

The preservation group plans to start fundraising to restore the building and create the museum. They are also seeking Federal and Regency period antiques as furnishings.

“Now the fun begins,” Brooks said.

Contact the writer: bkalinowski@citizensvoice.com
570-821-2055, @cvbobkal

Want to volunteer?

The Wilkes-Barre Preservation Society is seeking volunteers to help restore the Butler House and build a museum. Those interested can call 570-793-3631.

I hope that the inclusion of this great article by Bob Kalinowski in this book, will prompt you to invest some time and effort to projects such as The Butler House, The historic Wilkes-Barre High Schools, and Wilkes-Barre at large. Feel free to contribute in any way you can. Your help will be deeply appreciated.

In Dickens' *Christmas Carol*, it only might be!

Many of us as this book is being written, are celebrating the Holiday Season. We get treated at this time of year by heart-warming stories of all kinds, especially Tiny Tim in *The Christmas Carol* by Dickens. Here is a picture of "Marley's Ghost", original illustration by John Leech from the 1843 edition. This should get us all in the "mood."



You may all recall that the Ghost of Christmas Future was the spookiest of all the ghosts in Dickens' famous *Carol*. And so, here we are pondering the future of Wilkes-Barre, for many of the readers of this book—our city. Yet, in this effort, we have no guidance from Dickens' ghosts. Maybe we should be pleased. Maybe our fate is our own.

But, since there is an election for the Office of Mayor in Wilkes-Barre this year, I want you to know that the things that are written right here in this chapter and in other areas of

this book are not things that must be; they are things that simply might be. Only the things that have been written in the official book of Wilkes-Barre, with entries made only by the Mayors office are non-changeable. After all, they are in the past.

Would it not be nice if somebody who loves Wilkes-Barre and has the resources, stood up some day, and said: "I like that, and I can make some Wilkes-Barre dreams come true?"

Wilkes-Barre's overtaxed payers are not necessarily the ones to make such dreams of mine or anybody else's happen. But, I dream nonetheless, and I hope you dream too. It is our salvation from the pit

our city has dug for itself over the years. Somebody has to dream in order to come up with the ideas needed to get us out of this deep rut.

So far, no matter who the politician was or is, nor how long they stay on the job, one term or many, there have been few signs and few messages from any of them regarding future prosperity. This must change. The message must be told that Wilkes-Barre is open for business and the City like the reworked Scrooge after the three-ghost experience, will find its way to greatness again. Wilkes-Barre will not only become a great place to live, it can be made better than any of our dreams would take her.

Having set the stage, in this book, we discuss the future and we talk about dreams and plans and ideations, actions, and implementations. We have looked at some already but many more are coming in the rest of the book.

These are all coming up and those discussed will be reviewed again before we close. Dreams are only achievable if we think we want it, and of course if somebody else, other than beleaguered taxpayers, chooses to pay for it.

Even if as a City, we do not get to do the many dreams of mine—ever, we should ask ourselves, "Why not?" It sure would help the City if something good were to appear all by itself one day; that is for sure. But we do know that it will take hard work for the City to change its ways.

Chapter 11 Wilkes-Barre Citizens Must Make Good Choices



With good planning, many more dreams will come true. We all must demand that our newly elected administration by end of year 2019, whatever its makeup, grace us with a five-year, ten year, twenty-year and even a fifty-year plan. This plan must outline what is necessary for a positive future for our City. A great plan is a great start to making a once-great city great again. It helps to eliminate the negative chances of seat-of-the-pants management.

Good things do not just happen

George Patton, my almost favorite US General of all time (Pershing is my favorite), once said, "When everybody is thinking the same thing; somebody is not thinking." Without a plan, many people who want to say all is well, regardless of how things really are, look for excuses and then somehow, they "divine" that what happened must have been planned and therefore must be.

That is why mistakes and crises are tolerated. Government is well known for inaction as well as action that creates negative consequences. Rahm Emanuel is famous for his saying "Never let a good crisis go to waste." That's how politicians at all levels think.

Back when I was the IT Consultant for the City of Wilkes-Barre and I cautioned the administration about the need to prepare for the Y2K (Year 2000) work that would be necessary, I also pointed out the havoc that might occur without any preparation.

In other words I suggested the City plan to shield itself from the adverse effects of the millennial change. Problems were possible in central traffic signaling systems, accounting and tax collection systems, and others. Proper planning and preparation would mitigate the issues and possibly eliminate them

I soon learned a lot about the politician's perception of "crises" in government. My idea to plan was rejected. I did not know at the time that all Politicians welcome crises and do not fear them even if chaos erupts. I was told point blank by City Officials at the time that taxpayers will not pay for preparations and planning to avoid a crisis but they have no problem paying to solve a crisis even if it could have been avoided.

The fact is the bulk of bad happenings over the years in Wilkes-Barre were not in any plan because cities do not like to plan. They like to react to crises, thinking the people will support them. I hope the ideas in this book helps Wilkes-Barreans to no longer tolerate such bunkum.

Those days are gone. It is too costly for any of us in Wilkes-Barre to be dumb any more. We have learned that government at all levels siphons off what little wealth we have along with our freedoms. It is

time to pay attention. It is incumbent that we smart and strong leaders, who choose to plan for success, and who prepare to meet any and all contingencies.

It is time to demand that the thoughts of our leaders as to how to run the City be spelled out early in their candidacies, and regularly during their administrations. Finding out something horrible happened in the eleventh hour like the Hotel Sterling having to be ripped down because of poor planning, and not saved, is unacceptable. Was the wrecking ball at the Sterling part of some plan or was it the result of poor planning? We'll never know perhaps. Or maybe we all know.

If it were a plan, had the citizens approved such a plan? Does anybody know those answers? Why the secrecy when public servants are put in office to serve the needs of the public?

As a political babe in the woods, I ran for Mayor in 2015 in the Democrat Primary. I hoped that by not being a politician, it would help me convince the people that I could help return Wilkes-Barre to its glory days. That was my major goal. Many of the ideas in this book come directly from the research I did for the Mayoral election of 2015. I wrote just about everything down for all to see.

I had taken a real shot at public office once before in 2010 when I ran for Congress in the Democrat Primary v Paul Kanjorski. For this effort, I received 17% of the vote. District 11 at the time consisted of a population of about 701,000—mostly Democrats

My biggest takeaway from both of those experiences was that it takes a ton of time and a ton of money for a regular Joe to fight machine politics and City Hall. Still working at the time, I neither had enough time nor enough money to convince the multitude that I was worth their time.

You can see that the other regular Josephine on the 2015 Wilkes-Barre ballot Darleen Duggins Magdalenski was also overshadowed by the two politicians (City Councilmen) who were the frontrunners for Mayor. She fared out as poorly as I in the Democratic Primary.

The vote tallies for the two candidates who worked for the City as Councilmen proved my point. When the tally was done, I was lucky

to get any votes. I wished the winner Tony George, the best and I went on with my life. In Wilkes-Barre, Democrats always win. In the Fall 2015, Mr. Tony George became Mayor of Wilkes-Barre after he defeated Frank Sorick.

The results of the Democrat Primary in which I participated are as follows:

Tony George: 2,095
Brian W. Kelly: 242
Darlene Duggins Magdalinski: 186
George C. Brown: 1,944

The Democrat Primary Election was It was so close that if George Brown had received either all of my votes or all of Duggins-Magdalenski's votes, he would now be serving as Mayor.

In January 2016, I visited with the new Mayor, Tony George in his office at City Hall. I've known him for a long time. He and my younger brother Joe were good buddies growing up. I presented him with two copies of my 2015 book titled *Wilkes-Barre, PA, Return to Glory*.

The Mayor took one copy and placed it in the City's showcase and I told him to take the other for his own reading pleasure. I told him about the ideas in the book and offered to help if he ever wanted to discuss things with me. He chose to let the offer stand.

When he won the Mayoral contest on Nov 3, 2015, Mr. George was very pleased, and he offered these comments to the public shortly after claiming victory—because of his law and order background, promising to help cut crime in the city.

"I pledge to leave the City better than I found it. I pledge to make the city safer and be responsible to the taxpayers," said George in his victory speech. "My friends, I assure you that we will take Wilkes-Barre back. We will restore law and order." Nice Rhetoric for sure. Rhetoric is not *results*. That's why recently I asked the administration to answer a few questions but have yet to receive a response of any kind.

Since the current Mayor has all but announced that he is going for a second term in office, about two weeks ago, I sent the Mayor's office a note. I asked a number of questions to provide the Mayor the opportunity to write his own report card and give us a glimpse into his next term.

I told WB officials that my plan was to include the City's response, word for word, to the questions in this follow-on book to *Wilkes-Barre, PA: Return to Glory*. For his own reasons, the Mayor's office chose not to respond.

So that you know what I asked, I have included the note below to WB Administration below. I would think that anybody running for office again would want the free publicity. Why not want the people to know the answers to these questions.

I do know that the citizens of Wilkes-Barre have a right to know the answers and I would suggest we all demand as much from the Mayor. I would be glad to insert the City's answers right here in this book, once I receive them. Here is what I sent

Date: Wed, 12 Dec 2018 11:08:10 -0500
From: "Brian W. Kelly" <bkelly@ptd.net>
Subject: Note

Dear *Administrator*,

I was unable to see a Director of Public Relations or Communications Director title, so I am sure that you will know who best to direct this request for information. It is for my new book anticipated in January or February of next year. Thank you for your help.

My request is as follows:

I am in the process of writing a follow-up book to Wilkes-Barre PA: Return to Glory, a book that I wrote in 2015.

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01J6LONXS/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?encoding=UTF8&btkr=1>

I would like to include a letter from a current City Official that I can place in the new book.

I wonder if you might send me a note in response to the following questions:

Re: Public Safety

What changes have been made to City police procedures since the Leighton Administration?

What was the effect of those changes?

Is Wilkes-Barre a safer City than during the Leighton Administration?

If so, how and why; If not, Why?

Re: Public Administration

What changes were made to public policy since the Leighton Administration that made the City a better place to live?

What improvements have been made to the city during this time in terms of infrastructure and items such as computers, software, etc.

What are several areas that have been identified for improvement and are currently being improved or cannot be at this time. How? Why?

Do City Officials believe that there are 1. Too few, 2. just enough, or 3. too many employees serving the City in various ways.

Does the City plan to take any action to help the new groundswell movement to prevent moving the three school district high schools out of Wilkes-Barre City? Why? Why Not?

Re: The future

For the next four years, what is the City's plan for improvement in all of the areas above.

Thank you very much.

--- end of note to City ---

Several weeks after the May 2015 primary, after I had collected my thoughts, I decided to write a campaign wrap-up press-release. It ran in a number of blogs but was not published in either of the two major local newspapers.

The following is from

<http://wilkesbarrescrantonig.com/2015/05/27/brian-kelly-offers-wilkes-barre-city-a-mayoral-campaign-wrap-up/>. This is from a long-time blog--WBIG.

Brian Kelly offers Wilkes-Barre City a mayoral campaign wrap-up

27 May 2015 By [Press Release](#)

With [0 Comments](#)

Hello Wilkes-Barre:

I would like to thank all of my supporters and those who saw through the maze and chose to vote for my candidacy for Mayor of Wilkes-Barre. I sincerely appreciate your help.

Many of you still do not know who I am. I rarely made the blogs during the mayoral campaign. Mr. Yonki, WB's most popular political blogger, quickly identified me as somebody Mayor Tom McLaughlin would not approve of as a JFK Democrat. Another guy from WB Truth claimed that there were at least ten reasons why I was a Leighton plant. "Tom Leighton said so," was not one of the reasons, however. Nonetheless WB Truth came up with its own humorous top ten.

The two local papers predictably endorsed two Democratic candidates for mayor with funding who were already associated with City Hall as Councilmen. They still have seven months left. Voters apparently were not at all upset with any of the members on City Council during this four-year period in which crime records in the City were shattered.

Council was exonerated for having no crime solutions or solutions for solving property blight in the City. It was simply because Tom Leighton was so “bad, bad, bad!”

Leighton took the heat for Council, though admittedly he had his own sins. Voters could not come to blame Council for one thing. It was all Tom Leighton’s fault? So, nothing has changed since the election other than the faces. You make the call. Maybe Tony George or Republican Frank Sorick will change things big time. That would be nice.

The TV stations for the most part did nothing to help the voters decide or to help motivate them to go out to the polls and vote. At least WBRE-TV interviewed everybody on election day but the time allotted for the interview was apparently reduced at air time so WBRE Management chose not to let any of the voice parts of the candidate recordings be aired.

Instead, Andy Mehalshick, with the candidate apparently miming in the background, read stuff that was not ever said by some of the candidates. It was as if Andy was reading an inaccurate election news article while the candidates were silently mouthing in the background. So, only those who paid for a TV ad spot this campaign were heard on TV. Such is politics in NEPA.

The only people who voted for me and Darlene Duggins-Magdalenski were those who definitely wanted to change the City.

It did not matter. The Democrat and Republican voters had already made their decisions. The stay at home couch potatoes made their decisions easier by being no-shows. They more than likely made sure there was enough beer and fritos and dip to watch their favorite shows, with or without election news. One could conclude that Wilkes-Barre is not having a crime problem and few if any changes are necessary.

The winner of the Democratic Mayoral Primary in which I competed [Tony George] is already being touted as being our new Mayor to-be as that is typically what happens in Wilkes-Barre. Yet, George must

face Frank Sorick in the Fall and the winner of that bout will be Mayor of Wilkes-Barre.

I was on the Democratic Ballot and so I ran directly against Magdalenski, Brown, and George. Tony George, the Democratic victor is a fine man with many years of employment in Wilkes-Barre City Hall. He is very popular with everybody, including myself. Everybody likes him, including me.

His closest rival was another Democrat City Councilman who got about ten times the vote total as I got. The only people who voted for me and Darlene Duggins-Magdalenski were those who definitely wanted to change the City. Out of the voters who turned up at the polls, there were certainly very few wearing either of our buttons.

There were a lot of politicians who were there to assure a Brown primary victory and there were a lot of friends of Tony George to assure a George victory. Tony George won the nomination because he has more friends than the huge political class of voters who were heralding George Brown.

Nobody from the community with big bucks came up to me or any of my campaign cohorts and said they would finance a non-political person for office — at least not to me. The contributions from just one of George Brown's donors would have paid for all my campaign expenses. To be quite frank, I had little funding.

Ironically, when people who would have little funding themselves if they ran for Mayor saw that I had little funding, they lost hope. Funding had become a barometer for my worthiness to hold the office. The local papers, believe it or not, waited until the campaign finance reports to be released before they offered their candidate endorsements. The papers split their Democrat endorsements between the two most heavily financed candidates. Why was that?

I also ran as a write-in candidate on the Republican side. The total for write-ins was 252 while Frank Sorick, the Republican candidate, received 510 votes. The papers suggested that Frank Sorick was unopposed in the primary though this was not true.

Three out of the four incumbent Councilmen who ran were rewarded with either a Democratic nomination for reelection or were voted in as the Democratic Mayoral nominee.

Without proper financing compared with those well financed, two candidates were defacto unworthy. Thus 79% of Wilkes-Barre chose not to come out to vote for anybody. My discussions in 90% of the Wilkes-Barre neighborhoods where I walked myself, along with my keen adeptness at placing my campaign placards on the folks' porches with a quick wrist flick action did not apparently motivate anybody to brave the sunny weather on election day to come out to vote for me or for anybody else. [Too bad Wilkes-Barre, for that folks, you all should be ashamed.]

Besides the two popular councilmen running for Mayor on the Democratic side, Wilkes-Barre voters also rewarded Democratic councilmen Bill Barrett and Mike Merritt with another four years on Council, even though members of Council see themselves having no role and no blame for any of Wilkes-Barre's troubles. Wilkes-Barre voters clearly agreed.

The irony is that Brown, George, Barrett, and Merritt were the only vestiges of the Leighton Administration who were on the Democratic ballot. Wilkes-Barre voters gave them all an overwhelming vote of confidence. All received tons more votes than I did, a total newcomer to the City game, and how it is played.

Democrat George C. Brown got about 2000 votes himself in a valiant but losing effort to defeat the Mayoral primary victor Tony George. Nobody but the new guys — myself and Ms. Magdalenski were given get out of town fast tickets.

From the Democratic Primary election results, one can only conclude that Wilkes-Barre likes its leaders. For those considering running against the Wilkes-Barre establishment in the future, my conclusion is that there is little reason for anybody not already in office to take a shot at making the city safe, affordable, and clean. I do hope that scenario changes for the good of the City.

Let me repeat this in a different way. Three out of the four incumbent Councilmen who ran were rewarded with either a Democratic

nomination for reelection or were voted in as the Democratic Mayoral nominee. The only poor incumbent soul who was not rewarded with an opportunity for an office was George Brown, though he did receive 1700 more votes than Ms. Magdalenski, a smart lady in her own right, or myself.

If I had not plodded through 90% of the neighborhoods, unaccompanied, and in my own shoes, I might suggest George Brown worked the hardest...

I did see Tony George trying to convince my wife and my neighbors in South Wilkes-Barre to vote for him. I saw him and his wife and even the family dog campaigning as I was walking the neighborhoods. Tony George, our new Democratic Mayoral nominee, worked hard for sure.

Though in his four years on Council he was not in synch with Mayor Leighton, Mr. George has been part of Wilkes-Barre administrations for a long time and so I lumped both front-runners together as Councilmen when I made reference to my plans for the City. I will be sharing my plans with Mr. George or Mr. Sorick in the future if either chooses to entertain them.

The results of this election, in my humble opinion, suggest that either nobody in Wilkes-Barre is unhappy with its government and its handling of the issues, or that Magdalenski and Kelly have been flagged as dumb-ass buffoons for even trying to win a Democratic primary election as non-politicians in Wilkes-Barre. Thus, by reason of their insanity, a disease detected in time by the aligned voters, they were summarily identified and dealt with as only can happen in Wilkes-Barre politics.

By the way, besides George Brown, with an impressive vote total for Mayor, the only other currently sitting Council person to not win a nomination was Maureen Lavelle. She opted not to run for her second term. Her Democrat slot in the primary, which surely would have again been claimed as an incumbent if she ran, was instead gained by 20-year-old Beth Gilbert, who surely appears to be a breath of fresh air.

She defeated two other Democratic newcomers.

Perhaps Gilbert would have lost her Democratic Primary bid in Wilkes-Barre if Lavelle had run as our citizens do like to reward their officials for time in office by giving them more time in office, regardless of the state of the City.

I hope that if Ms. Gilbert prevails in the fall against Steven A. [Urban. Urban is a real guy but political for sure. Gilbert shows all of Wilkes-Barre that new blood is like running old clothes through the washing machine lots more times than they need to be clean. There is no chance they come out dirty. Perhaps Ms. Gilbert would be able to teach a few old dogs some new tricks. Let's hope so. I sure hope so!

Who is Brian Kelly?

Brian Kelly is a former IBM Senior Systems Engineer and college professor. Kelly ran for office so that Wilkes-Barre could have a Mayor from outside the current political system. Kelly's campaign platform included making the city more open and friendlier to business and making Wilkes-Barre a safe, affordable and clean city. Brian Kelly and his many ideas for a better city were soundly defeated on May 19, 2015.

Your author is now back in control of the text in this book. Some may smile and it is OK as I announce that I do not plan to run for any public office again, ever. No way Jose! There need be no concern by Wilkes-Barre City officials to not provide information for this book unless they are hiding something that should be shared. In fact, I would be pleased to offer a full page in this book even after the first printing, to any primary candidate for Mayor in 2019 who makes it to the ballot.

**Do we live in one of the most dangerous cities in Pennsylvania?
Wilkes-Barre City is not telling anybody.**

<https://www.pittsburghdefenselawyers.com/dangerous-cities-pennsylvania/>

In the analysis from pittsburghdefenselawyers.com on the most dangerous cities in Pennsylvania, the City chose not to supply its statistics. Why?

From pittsburghdefenselawyers.com

It's important to note that occasionally a city will not report their crimes to the UCR Program, which was the case with Wilkes-Barre, PA in 2015. As such, they are not included in our rankings.

Does that mean that Wilkes-Barre appears safer only because it no longer reports serious crime. I do not know. Does that mean there is less crime or that for reelection purposes, the City has figured out how to doctor the books. I wish I knew but it does not look good. If the Administration had agreed to be responsive for the information requests for this book perhaps the speculation would be unnecessary.

Last follow-up by former candidate Brian W. Kelly

The press release on the next page was submitted to the Wilkes-Barre Record site at www.wilkesbarrerecord.com in June 2015 several weeks after my primary election wrap up report that you just read, In it, I offered my assistance to Mr. George or Mr. Brown or Mr. Sorick, whoever would become Mayor in Fall 2015. It offers some positive thoughts for the City to return to glory.

I have not changed it for this book but I did add some comments this month. My recent comments can be identified by being enclosed in brackets [brackets].

Article Title: And George Brown Makes Three ???

Details

Written by Submitter

Category: [Uncategorised](#)

Published: 11 June 2015

Hits: 16297

[No Comments Yet -- Be the First!](#)

June 10, 2015 Press Release:

I have a much different outlook now that the election is over, and my vegetable garden is in, along with my wife's beautiful flowers. I have returned to regular daydreaming, and the Primary Election is no longer the premier item on my mind. So, as noted in a previous press release, I repopulated my campaign Web site with my original ideas for the City. Why should I want to do that?

[A while after the election I brought the campaign web site down]

There were a lot of dreams and ideas and plans in this site that continued to apply for the sitting Wilkes-Barre Council. Council has seven months left to do some effective work. Additionally, this note applies to the November Wilkes-Barre Mayoral Candidates who won primaries and those, such as George Brown, who may choose to take another shot at the voters through the write-in mechanism.

Like all Wilkes-Barre residents, I want the City to be safe and successful. So, as a vehicle to offer help for whoever emerges as Mayor, I am restoring my campaign thought web site as it was. I will post new ideas such as this press release as appropriate. I am not mounting a write-in campaign. The restoration of the site has nothing to do with a future Kelly run for Mayor. Kelly is not running for Mayor. The articles, downloads, and menu options may help Brown, George, or Sorick if they choose to look beyond their own campaign platforms.

Though the site name stayed as www.briankellyformayor.com, Brian Kelly (me) was no longer running for Mayor. I heard rumors that George Brown may try a write-in campaign. Good for him. He'd do better a second time as would Tony George and Frank Sorick. That's what democracy is all about. I would suspect that George Brown would have money left from the primary to go a long way to pay for a write-in campaign. I see some of his billboard signs are still up so who knows?

Yes, Citizens of Wilkes-Barre I certainly do wish that I were one of the candidates for Mayor, but God has other plans for me.

I made my run for Mayor so that I would become the Mayor of Wilkes-Barre. It was not so that I would ruin anybody else's chance to become Mayor, no matter what they may think. I ran for Mayor so that I could be the Mayor of Wilkes-Barre and thus, I could be a positive instrument to help make the City a better place to live. I planned to win the race. I still have major debt that anybody can donate to help me with.

Too many people seem to think that I ran only so that other candidates would lose. The supposition was that I did not care about being Mayor. Some speculate that I might have been paid to run. Again, this is not the truth. I did not run for Mayor so that Darlene Duggins Magdalenski would win or that George Brown would win, or that Tony George would win.

My objective was not to "steal" votes so that George Brown would not win. Nice theory but I ran so that I would win. Why would I be \$4000 in debt today if somebody had bankrolled me to mess up another candidate? I planned to beat them all. My plan just was not as good as theirs. Winning the primary was my goal-- not ruining somebody else's chances to win. I did not succeed.

On the Democrat side, I was simply beaten by two better campaigners with excellent funding. I was almost beaten by a third. I give them all their due credit.

On the Republican side, there were 252 write-in votes cast. Luzerne County staff chose not to count the write-in votes. Since I solicited Republican votes in all of my advertising, I could claim all

252 write-ins. However, even 252 would still not have been enough to beat Frank Sorick (496) for the Republican nomination.

I am not ever going to be Mayor of Wilkes-Barre and I am OK with that. [I am happily retired and writing up a storm] As a young adult, I got over not ever beating Mickey Mantle out for the center field position on the Yankees. Likewise, I have gotten over not ever becoming Mayor of my City. In fact, I got over it in the first non-tired day after the election - - just a day or two later.

Not being a candidate for Mayor now means that for me to help my city, I need to be able to discuss the ideas that I developed with those candidates who won the Primary Election. I promise to support the candidate who gives my ideas their best airing and who permits me to explain the advantages in as many meetings with them as it takes. So far, I regret to say, nobody has asked for a meeting with me. [In the end, I was not asked by any candidate about anything. That's why I am publicly offering many thoughts in this 2019 book]

However, I do have a strong feeling that the requests will be coming rapidly, especially if George Brown chooses to launch a write-in campaign. A Brown write-in campaign may help the City more than it even may help George Brown.

I do plan to endorse a candidate based on the job I think they will do for the City. Even if the candidate whom I endorse, does not win in November, I still hope to be able to work with the victor, if he chooses to permit me to help implement the best ideas for Wilkes-Barre.

[Because Mayor George chose to become incommunicado with me after his primary victory, and he did not respond (Dec 2018) to my recent request for information, I am offering my thoughts in this book about helping Wilkes-Barre so the people can demand more from Government than we typically receive.]

God knows we sure do need a few good plays called from above in order to help the City be safe, affordable, and clean. Right now, I do not know if any of the three candidates -- Brown, George, or Sorick will choose to alter their existing plans to incorporate the

notions I put forth when I was a candidate; but I do know those ideas are the best for Wilkes-Barre.

Citizens of the City have already decided that I am not their candidate to implement these ideas, but they have yet to vote on the ideas. Wilkes-Barre media outlets did not offer citizens good selection points with which to compare candidates.

As an aside, in my day job, I help companies solve problems and then I bill them for the effort that I put into the solution. I am a problem solver. If I were being paid at my IT consulting rate for the WB City solutions that I put forth over the six months of active work and six months of preliminary work before the active campaign, I would never have to work another day in my life.

I knew that just because I was a regular guy, regular guys would not necessarily vote for me. Ms. Magdalenski more than likely felt the same but I can only speak for me.

So, to have a chance at gaining their respect, I had to solve on paper many of the problems facing the City. To this end, I worked very hard trying to form the right dreams, ideas, and action plans. In this way, I knew that if elected, Wilkes-Barre's game plan for the future would be a winning plan.

Besides personal research, I interviewed some extremely bright people about the needs of the City, especially how to solve the major crime problem and eliminate the druggies and the gangs. The folks I spoke with like our City, and their ideas would have been a big part of any solution that I would have implemented as Mayor.

I would recommend these ideas and plans to the candidates who are in a position to become Mayor and to the candidate who actually becomes Mayor.

[Nobody asked me in 2015 as being elected was more important than solving the City's problems.]

I failed to become Mayor, but my effort was not a complete failure as it produced a lot of documentation that can be of great

assistance to building a new City plan if the unique approaches are examined properly, considered, and implemented. Therefore, I believe that as of today at least, I can still help any of the candidates - - those who prevailed in the primary election, and any write-ins.

I can help that the candidates have what I believe would be a platform for success that would help position Wilkes-Barre PA for a Return to Glory! In so doing, it would also assist the endorsed candidate, who espouses such positive action plans for the City, in a way that helps them achieve the honor of becoming the next Mayor of Wilkes-Barre. [Few candidates ask a nobody to help with their campaign, so I understand why my offer for help was ignored.]

Therefore, as noted above, I have decided to make myself available well before the Fall election to meet with the Mayoral candidates. Frank Sorick, Tony George, and now [potential write-in] George Brown are welcome to call.

They all know how to reach me. All of these candidates could use the votes achieved by Ms. Magdalenski and myself in the Primary Election. Besides those who did not vote in the Primary, there are about 700 voters who did vote and are in this category. They may find an independent endorsement to their liking.

If Mr. Brown teaches Democrats how to write-in the name BROWN as he is launching his write-in campaign, he again becomes a formidable candidate against both Tony George and Frank Sorick.

I do hope that at least one of the three candidates shows enough confidence in me that they will adopt the detailed plan for success that I have built for Wilkes-Barre. Based on their reaction to the plans I have produced for the good of Wilkes-Barre, I will eventually choose to endorse one of the three for Mayor.

My decision will be based on the look of their detailed plans for the City. The selected candidate would agree to implement a number of suggestions from my detailed list as favored by the citizens. These, of course would not be business as usual plans.

Each day, all of us must realize that the Mayor of our City has not yet been chosen. Tony George may be the front-runner, but he has not yet won. The people still have an opportunity to speak again for the candidate with the best ideas, even if those ideas have been enhanced since the Primary Election. I hope to help all candidates with some fresh ideas if they are willing to accept them.

This is not a light decision for Wilkes-Barre. Voters would know that I would examine in detail all of the platform points that each candidate proposes -- especially their crime program. However, just as important for our decision are the individuals the candidate will choose to administer the City. Who will they be? Will they be old guard or new guard or will they be of the people?

Personnel such as City Administrator, Public Safety Director, and other vital City positions are key to our success. Therefore, I would need to know this information before I endorsed a candidate and offered guidance to the electorate. Some candidates from past experience in these positions would move the city backwards, and so this is very important.

[Unfortunately, though Mr. Sorick offered his answers to the questions asked, Mr. George's team chose not to give the people of Wilkes-Barre any additional information.]

[R Candidate Frank Sorick was very helpful in putting together his written campaign strategy for helping Wilkes-Barre. Dem candidate Tony George chose to ignore my requests for information (a fellow Democrat). I endorsed Sorick in the Fall election. Frank Sorick is Republican but his game has not been politics. In Wilke-Barre, it is tough for a Republican no matter how good and competent a person may be, for them to beat any Democrat. In Wilkes-Barre, we get the government we deserve each time.]

I have been very lucky in this campaign. Unaligned voters (non-politicians and non-political-appointees) in the City came out for me on both sides of the aisle. There were many others who I met in my campaign walks that I know I had almost convinced to vote for me.

Unfortunately, the malaise in Wilkes-Barre is so severe that their apathy as just a part of a whopping 79% of potential voters who did not vote, was far too great to come out to the polls even on a sunny day.

I will encourage those who met with me and who spoke with me, to vote for at least somebody in the General Election. Our vote is the only mechanism by which we the people can effect change and help make our City OK again.

Again, I want to express my sincere thanks to the Democrats and the Republicans in Wilkes-Barre who voted for me in my deep desire to clean house at City Hall. I was an unknown and remain so but I am no longer running for office. Now, having no office to gain, I am hoping to help the people review and evaluate my well-documented plans for the City and vote for the candidate who they believe can achieve the best of the best.

My numbers in the campaign were very weak compared only to the well-financed candidates. In the fall, we cannot accept a 21% turnout rate. We need everybody to vote. The game is reset in the fall. This is your best chance to complain or endorse the policies you like.

Remember, the election is not yet decided. Despite whatever anybody says, it is not decided. The people actually do get another chance. To the extent that the non-voters especially are not happy, they need to know that if they can get off their duffs in the General Election, they can change the course of what will otherwise be history in Wilkes-Barre.

Most citizens of Wilkes-Barre are not happy with the idea of having poor government in perpetuity. What matters is that the future Mayor of Wilkes-Barre has the best plan to resurrect this City and prepare it for a return to ok-ness, and then to greatness, and then to glory. Along the road to glory, the winning candidate must have the best plan to restore civility and safety.

Remember that when people get a second look, they sometimes change their minds. Sometimes all it takes is a hard look in the

mirror. I have already had some of my most helpful supporters tell me that Frank Sorick is the guy I must support in the General Election.

One gentleman's rationale was that he had voted for me, a long shot, because he wanted major changes that would not occur with current Council members who had been idle for too many years. He noted that during those years, the City sank into its pit of drug / gang crime on its way to oblivion. His advice makes a lot of sense. A Republican would surely shake things up whereas a Democrat may simply sign up for more of the same. As voter in Wilkes-Barre, it is your call.

Many have spoken about Tony George's victory and what this does if George Brown chooses not to take a second chance as a write-in candidate. The winning margin was very thin. The worst thing that could happen to a Tony George assured victory is that Darlene Duggins Magdalenski with almost 200 votes to possibly offer and Brian Kelly with almost 500 votes to possibly offer choose to back a good guy like Frank Sorick or another good guy like George Brown if he chooses to run as a write-in candidate.

And, so, that is a big reason why I put my briankellyformayor.com web site back up. Look at the site. [For this book, I am working to reconstruct the web site.] Check out the crime ideas. There are many differences with the same-ole approach. Do you want a focused violent crime unit or business as usual? The current police chief may be a great guy who grew up when crime was more easy to solve and the big problem was not gangs and druggies and people thinking it is ok to shoot other people.

[I brought the site down but I still have the contents on my machine. So I will try to bring it back again as these thoughts are still the best for Wilkes-Barre, PA.]

Would the people not like a well-experienced Public Safety Director / Police Commissioner, who knows how to solve violent crime problems? The current chief would work for this new highly experienced individual. Saturation patrols will always help but a violent crime unit and a tough violent crime experienced Police Commissioner would be the most effective solution. Instead of a

fly-swatter, this new approach would be like spraying a can of RAID on the bad guys and destroying them rather than looking for the fly swatter each time a gunshot is heard in the City.

I do believe in redemption. Tony George is not your typical go along with the program guy. He is a good man as is George Brown. Tony George was not at all silent on Council and most of the time on the issues that were discussed, he was on the losing side. His ideas should have won a number of times. He always took the people side. For me, that is a step towards redemption.

Frank Sorick is a Republican Tony George. In City Council, George Brown has always been a good thinker who maybe now knows that the regular people are the most important despite his huge donor base. I would love to see George Brown adopting the Kelly plan for crime in Wilkes-Barre. Redemption can work well for both Brown and George.

When I meet with Mr. George and Mr. Sorick, and hopefully Mr. Brown if he runs as a write-in, I will know where Wilkes-Barre stands if it is placed in any of their hands. When I know, I promise to let you know at www.briankellyformayor.com, and at my favorite local web site, www.wilkes-barrerecord.com.

Please do your civic duty and vote in the General Election on November 3, 2015.

When you vote, you will know that you have helped Wilkes-Barre survive and regain its moxie in a tough world.

Without voters, we have no democracy. So, Please vote!

Chapter 12 Stop Sliding Backwards. Turn the City Around



Not all is negative for sure about Wilkes-Barre. Our mission is far from hopeless. In this chapter, however, we do look at the City with a reality camera. The state of the City, especially the inner sections and inner neighborhoods do need a lot of work.

The state of Wilkes-Barre is no one person's fault for sure. Much of the blight was caused by quick remedies by officials and merchants after the 1972 flood. However, the trajectory for the City from about 1930 to 1960 as most of the famous Anthracite Coal Mines that operated in the City disappeared slowly but surely began to slide downward. Together, however, we can first make Wilkes-Barre an OK city; then a fine city, and eventually with a great plan by the best City leaders we can elect, beginning in 2019, we can move to greatness again.

Wilkes-Barre population & income trend

Wilkes-Barre, whose population in its glory days approached 90,000 in 2016 clocked in with a population of just about 40,500.

The City population in its glory days (1930-1940) was heading for 90,000 but it suffered a major decrease in population after the anthracite coal industry bottomed out and high paying jobs were no longer plentiful.

In 1850, the population was 2723. After 1850, Wilkes-Barre's population exploded due to the discovery of anthracite coal. Between 1930 and 1940, Wilkes-Barre population peaked at about 88,000 and then began to slide steadily downward. The first decline was in the ten-year census from 1930 -1940 at -.5%. It has gone down every census since then. It has almost leveled off today, but the trend is still downward. Wilkes-Barre needs all our good strong people to make it in the long term.

In 1808, Judge Jesse Fell of Wilkes-Barre discovered a solution to ignite anthracite with the usage of an iron grate. The grate was a simple notion but without it, anthracite could not be burned effectively. It allowed for the coal to light and burn easier.

This invention increased the popularity of anthracite as a fuel source and led to the expansion of the coal industry in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Wilkes-Barre got its nickname, "The Diamond City" due to its high productivity when mining hard coal.

Once the mining companies pulled out of Wilkes-Barre, the median household income went down for Wilkes-Barre and currently, it is \$31,248. Between 2015 and 2016 the population of the City declined from 41,108 to 40,964, a 0.35% decrease but its median household income grew from \$30,945 to \$31,248, a 0.98% increase. Population continues to trend downward while income is increasing at a pace substantially slower than the national average or the rate of inflation. Meanwhile the cost of living in Wilkes-Barre is about 2% more than the national average. City officials should find out what is causing this difference as it is unsettling for sure.

Compare Wilkes-Barre to Bethlehem

Let's compare Wilkes-Barre to Bethlehem, a City about the size of Wilkes-Barre in terms of average population since 1850. It is just down the PA Turnpike from us. This will permit us to see if our fair City is doing either well or not so well.

Unlike Wilkes-Barre, which had a major peak of about 88,000 in population between 1930 and 1940, Bethlehem had no huge spike in any given year. Instead its population increased smoothly from 1850 and was fed by a number of major industries including Bethlehem Steel. Yet, even without Bethlehem Steel, today the population of Bethlehem is about 75,000 and growing steadily.

The median household income for Bethlehem is \$49,349 today compared with WB at \$31,248. The cost of living in Bethlehem is about 2% less than the National Average. Therefore the cost of living in Wilkes-Barre is about 4% higher than in Bethlehem. The median home price in Bethlehem is \$166,700 and the cost per square foot is \$116.00. Compare this to Wilkes-Barre, where homes are not as nice and the median list price of a home is \$65,000 and the cost per square foot is \$41.00.

Since 1850, when the census was 1500, the population of Bethlehem has steadily increased in most of the ten-year census periods. There have been just three times since 1850 that the population has decreased, and they were all small decreases—1960-1970, -.37%; 1970-1980, -.32%; 1990-2000 -.12%. Each decrease was less than a half percentage point. The largest population gain during this time was 1910-1920 at 14%.

The median household income in Bethlehem, with an average city size close to Wilkes-Barre over the years, is about 35 to 40% higher than the median income in Wilkes-Barre. The poverty rate for Wilkes-Barre is 35% and the poverty rate for Bethlehem is ½ that of Wilkes-Barre at 17%.

The point in this comparison between Wilkes-Barre and Bethlehem is to show that some cities with caring and hard-working officials at the helm can attract industry and good jobs and others such as those in

control of Wilkes-Barre for years have not been able to do so. Additionally, to improve Wilkes-Barre with such a low medium income and so many at the poverty level admittedly will take a yeoman effort.

City of Bethlehem employees earn an average of \$81,644, ranging from \$62,057 at the 25th percentile to \$96,503 at the 75th percentile, with top earners (the top 10%) earning more than \$117,715.

We know that the median wage for the employees who do not work for WB City is just over \$31,000 per year and we know that over 35% of Wilkes-Barre employees in all industries earn less than the poverty wage. City workers receive a median wage of \$73,278. To many citizens of the City, this seems to be very generous considering the low incomes of the citizens. If you work for the City, you would say wages are good but if you work elsewhere, they are not so good.

As noted, City of Wilkes-Barre employees earn an average of \$73,278, ranging from \$57,834 at the 25th percentile to \$85,408 at the 75th percentile, with top earners (the top 10%) earning more than \$101,787. Without a thorough analysis, no real conclusions can be made but one might ask if Wilkes-Barre taxpayers can continue to afford to pay its employees so well. It is a discussion that should be had, however.

With the right Mayor in charge, and the right Council, Wilkes-Barre can be improved one step at a time. Nothing good happens overnight. Short and long-term planning will be the keys to success. At IBM, where I spent 23 years of my working life, the management team used to say, *“plan your work, and then work your plan.”* I’ll second that for Wilkes-Barre.

In the Tony George Administration, citizens are not really sure how well we are doing. I sent the Wilkes-Barre administration a questionnaire to find these answers, but nobody responded. No City official can properly lead this City without communicating with the citizens. The Mayor’s office knew this book was coming and still chose not to offer a state of the City for me to include. Judging from the salaries we pay the people at City Hall, I would say they should be more accountable to the people. But they are not!

New blood is already helping!

In the last election, a new Councilperson was elected. She does not sit around wondering. She does not click the steel balls and say, “*O Woe is Me!*” She is a doer. She knows that with low wages and a high cost of living for City taxpayers, the City with its almost \$50 million budget needs to do more for those who provide those dollars.

With so many in poverty, it is not easy to move Wilkes-Barre ahead. But it would be easier for sure if the City officials were in synch with a plan to make the City whole again. Unlike many officials that we in Wilkes-Barre have seen merely shrug their shoulders at the problems they must face when governing, this young lady, who was just twenty years old when she ran is not content to sit still.

She took the oath of office seriously and she is a breath of fresh air for all of us. She is teaching old dogs new tricks, but it seems they resist. Perhaps with no communication, the hoi polloi will be kept in the dark. Perhaps that is the goal of the current administration. Nobody knows and the top officials are not talking. That is not good. We can do better than that.

I will end this piece now. It does set the stage for the difficulties Wilkes-Barre faces as it not only tries to stop slipping but it works to turn itself around and begin a journey to greatness. Having a Council person such as Beth Gilbert, wise beyond her years, with energy to spare, on our side, working for what is best for the City, is a welcome treat for sure. We need more people like Ms. Gilbert to assure a positive future for the citizens of our City. *Never say Never!*

<https://wnep.com/2018/06/13/a-call-to-take-action-on-blighted-properties/>

A Call to Take Action on Blighted Properties

POSTED 4:52 PM, JUNE 13, 2018, BY [CHASE SENIOR](#), UPDATED AT 04:55PM, JUNE 13, 2018

WILKES-BARRE, Pa. -- The sight of run-down housing units in the Wilkes-Barre area has angered city residents and a city councilwoman is trying to raise awareness to spark change.

City Councilwoman Beth Gilbert says she's tired of seeing run-down and condemned housing units around Wilkes-Barre. On her Facebook page, she says that until the issues are resolved, she's going to post pictures of blighted houses every day.

Those we spoke with believe it's a smart tactic.



A property on the corner of East Northampton and South Welles Streets isn't a welcome sight to neighbors. Vacant and dilapidated buildings have become a common issue in Wilkes-Barre.

"There's a lot of behavior going on inside these buildings that people don't know about. I just think they should knock it down," Taiwan Bradley said.

"Every street you see four abandoned houses, seriously," said Kelvin Awah.

Wilkes-Barre Councilwoman Beth Gilbert is fed up with seeing so many blighted properties in the area. By using social media, she's trying to prompt change and help get rid of all the properties that are hurtful to eyes.

[Getting rid of eyesores is absolutely necessary to make people want to continue to live in Wilkes-Barre and to move in from other cities.]

According to her Facebook page, she plans to post pictures of condemned structures hoping that city administration will take action.

Wilkes-Barre residents hope Gilbert's idea helps.

"It looks really bad. It would be nice to see where you take your kids to the park and have a nice area to take them to," Giselle Espino said.

At one apartment building, there are three units, all of which are condemned. We ran into some people who are looking for an apartment in Wilkes-Barre. They're frustrated by the sight of this because it takes up so much space and has no potential.

"I feel like they should knock them down or rebuild new houses, or fix them up and rent them out for people that are having a hard time finding spots to live. You have people in shelters and people waiting on Section 8 when they got nice houses and all that stuff and it's hard to get an apartment," Christopher Sparks said.

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Chapter 13 Can an Unusual Idea Be Good for the City?



I still love model trains and the big ones too.

Having just experienced a great Christmas season, I have to confess that my big LGB train that once circled the tree and now circles the Sun Room recently decided that it would run only in reverse. It served its purpose well for years. When I was sure I had bought all the presents I needed and then even some more, I went out to eBay to see if I could find a new engine for the train. I did but after upping my bid five times, it was not as good a deal and did not arrive until December 26. Humph! It is OK.

My next step was to find a flat-car attachment with a track sweeper so that this new engine does not get mired in the dust up on the shelves. I read that a Swiffer will do it and so as I write, a Swiffer is on the way. If I write another WB book next year, I'll let you know if all is well on the Train Front. I am excited now though to get it going soon.

Please know that despite the realistic odds against success for Wilkes-Barre that we presented in the last chapter, I am still convinced that we can do it. So, we are on to some more positive stuff but eventually in a chapter or two or three, we'll be returning to add some fixes to the mix to help make the City great again. Few good things ever get done without having a good dream, a good idea, and a good plan. Hold your horses, as we are about to take off.

Please let me get this thought out on the table and then some more. By the time I finish writing this book, the table should be full. It is not a goffy plan for sure, but it sure is unusual.

In the *Wilkes-Barre PA: Return to Glory* book and in a 2017 book that I call *A Wilkes-Barre Christmas Story*, I tell a story about how much I loved my bicycle as a nine-year old. I also tell how it got me everywhere, especially in the month of December when American Auto on South Main Street in WB and Wyoming Avenue in Kingston and other stores were selling those great Lionel Trains.

My bike and I would check out all the Lionel, HO, American Flier, and Marx trains that we could find uptown. There were no LGB's in my world back then. It was very exciting, and I always hoped to own my own train.

I am not including the chapters about the adventure in which I got my first train in this book. However, FYI, everybody who has read that account has found it to be very enjoyable. In case you have an interest, I'll give you the links again below:

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0989995798>

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/1947402161>

Choo Choo Woo Woo for Wilkes-Barre ????

My sons Brian and Mike also liked Lionel Trains as well as LGB. LGB did not come however to our house for about thirty years or so after I got my first train when I lived on High Street.

When my boys were little, they called trains either Toot Toots or Choo Choo Woo Woos. The names were taken by the time Katie was

born and she was OK as long as she got to run the trains with all of the older brother competition.

Without mincing words here, let it be known that I have often thought about a full-rail sized "choo choo" train circling the outer Square from say two blocks out. Within the train track circumference, there would be minimal City automobile traffic. Only vehicles to benefit the severely handicapped at say 5 miles per hour would be permitted. That's faster than most can walk, anyway.

There would be lots of free parking spaces on the perimeter and if there were not enough in certain areas, I figure we could build them without busting the City's budget.

Though improbable, it would be an even greater accomplishment if we could get the tracks on the river side of River Street and have them go all the way up to North Street on the river side of the dike from perhaps South Street. The tracks of course would need to be built like a fortress and would have to strengthen, not weaken the dike system in those places. It would be built to go under the Market Street Bridge and the North Street bridge before the tracks made their next right turn.

On the river side, further down towards South Wilkes-Barre from Wilkes University would be a spur and a little garage for the train to be kept dry in the off-hours and the off-months. Of course it needs a place to be locked up in the off-hours. The spur would take the train down to West Academy street and perhaps behind Barney Farms, where its garage and repair area might be located again, on the river side of the dike.

Moving from Wilkes University to King's College, going under at North Street, the tracks could then come up and make a right turn after, of course, going under the bridge. They would go up the Courthouse hill and then the North Street hill and eventually the tracks would come down to someplace around Pennsylvania Avenue. The tracks might need to be trestled or tunneled to go over River Street and other streets on the way. Hey, I am a dream and idea man, not an architect. We're still just dreaming.

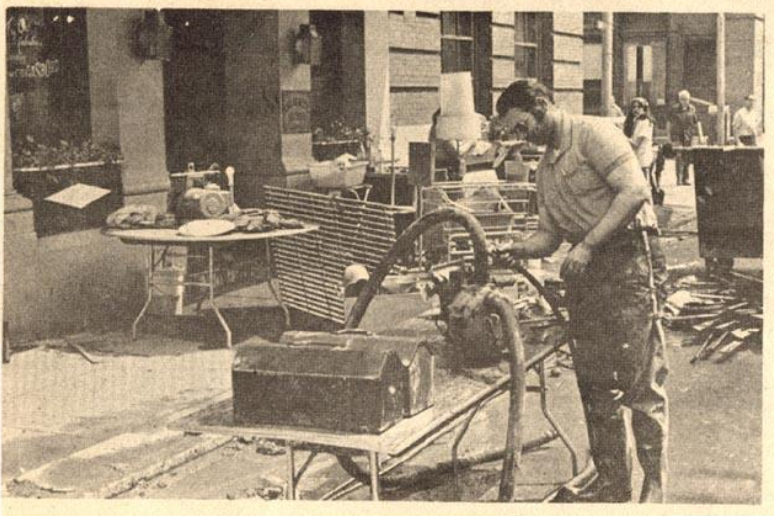
This notion is in the dream stage and has not reached the idea stage and of course, it is a lot of miles away from a plan. I have no idea as to whether the Army Corps of Engineers would approve or not the City's use of the river dike, or how long it would take but let's just say that nothing begins without a dream.

I have not mapped it all out, but I believe when there is a will, there is a way. I think it can work the more we think about it and the more we want it. Why not? Money is no object folks for if we cannot figure out how to afford it, we simply do not do it. But the dream will be out there for whenever we can afford it or for when the perfect Wilkes-Barre benefactor comes by.

We might need a little bridge over the tracks here and there or we might need to dig out a section and have the train go underground for a bit. Hopefully, it could be done without major, major expenses but we would have to do it right.

We do not have to try to get it all done at once but instead bring various parts online over time. The mental trip around the city that I am outlining is not complete yet. Our train from the dike at Wilkes to Penn Ave is just about half way down the tracks.

From 1972 'til today, Gus has been making Genetti's Inn ready for challenges



Gus Genetti washes pump as other employees wash office equipment.

After several more blocks on North Street, the tracks could turn right again to come down Pennsylvania Avenue, maybe on the opposite side of the Street from Gus Genettis or perhaps over by the old Stegmaier Brewery. There are some rail-beds there already, so we would have to see if they could be used. We surely would not want to take too many of Gus's parking spots. I bet Gus Genetti would be serving coffee outside his hotel the day of the first train ride, if we are so lucky.

Another option would be to go down to the boulevard and begin the trip back. This leg would take us down to South Street again. At this point, we would probably go under the bridge and head towards the river. The objective would be to not get in the way of traffic at all.

So, in my dream I see the tracks for this big train set being laid mostly underground with a heavy metal roof on top of it so that the tracks would not really be in a tunnel at times, but it would perhaps seem so.

Of course, we would figure it all out in time as these "dreams" again, are not yet "ideas." At the river, to begin our second run around the downtown section of Wilkes-Barre with Public Square in the middle of the trip, we would have to get to the other side of the dike and begin a new run.

I would suspect that the best way to do this part right in front of the Wilkes Center for the Performing Arts would be to go underground. Heck, maybe we would even have an underground Train Station there also so Wilkes Students can take the train all around Wilkes-Barre.

What a neat idea? Thank You! But, right now as noted, it is in the "dream stage." It is not crazy, but it is way out of the box, if not a bit off the wall. Perhaps some national figure like a rich ex-president or another philanthropist might consider underwriting the whole thing. Wilkes-Barre could again become an oasis of beauty and innovation in Northeastern PA, for all to see and for all to visit. And I am convinced that just as in *Field of Dreams*: "if we build it, they would come."

I do not care who helps but with the right people, Wilkes-Barre can show how it can be done. I am thinking that perhaps climate change

advocate billionaire, Tom Steyer or billionaire Libertarians, such as the Koch Brothers, or perhaps Berkshire Hathaway's Warren Buffet, or Microsoft founder Bill Gates might want to pitch in to help Wilkes-Barre in its trail back to glory. Why not?

How often do you think anybody asks these gents for a small handout for a city on its way back. In my original Wilkes-Barre book, looking at the great spirit of Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen, I wrote:

“Maybe Microsoft's Paul Allen, Seattle Seahawks owner, would like to help. God knows we could use the help.” Unfortunately in October 2018, Paul Allen passed to the angels. He was a great adventurer and a good man, and we will all miss him. Paul Gardner Allen was an American business magnate, investor, software engineer, humanitarian, and philanthropist.

Alongside Bill Gates, Allen co-founded Microsoft in 1975, which helped spark the microcomputer revolution and later, with some help from IBM, the company became the world's largest PC software company.

Paul Allen would have liked the Wilkes-Barre Project as we may choose to call it. Never say never. I bet there is a foundation out there in which noble causes such as ours can be fulfilled by making the proper request. I urge Wilkes-Barre officials, whoever they may be in 2019, to make such a request. Then, the dream can become an idea and a plan overnight.

Before he became President, while he was still loved by the media in 2015, and he had a hit show, my personal pick would have been the builder, Donald Trump as he would know how to get it done. I thought that perhaps he could team with a guy like Paul Allen. Just like there is no reason to rule out Paul Allen. There is no reason to rule out the Trump Corporation or the Trump Family, or Donald Trump himself if this project tickles his fancy.

My point is that there are a lot of good people just waiting for a town like Wilkes-Barre to help them move on to a great project where their fortunes can mean something to regular people such as the people of Wilkes-Barre, PA.

Maybe the Wilkes-Barre Project can help us borrow a name from Reno Nevada, which we know is "The Biggest Little City in the World." Wilkes-Barre can become "*The Funnest Little City in America*" or something like that. We could bring in the professional namers or have a contest to get the right name.

Hey, maybe Mr. Allen, a sports lover like many of us, has heirs who would help us bring a "Wilkes-Barre Barons" minor league team back to Artillery Park. We know this great field on the West side in Wilkes-Barre is now used by Wilkes University's Baseball Team. They could play every now and then if not permanently when Wilkes is not at home.



<< The Late Great Frank Pasquini

Can you imagine when the new Barons would play the SWB Yankees? And, why not? Good talk sometimes creates good dreams which sometimes create good ideas. Let's keep them coming.

If I had my way, I would have Wilkes-Barre's greatest funds development person of all time, my great friend Frank Pasquini, RIP, working on all these solicitations. He would bring them in for sure for Wilkes-Barre. I would need to contact God for that one I know. But God is always on my contact list. Our great friend Frank Pasquini, a can-do guy went to the Lord on March 2, 2017. Look at the gleam in his eye. Frank would have gotten it done.

I am not suggesting that all of these areas would need to be traffic free, especially in the beginning as we perfected the notion. Remember it is all still a dream. However, the speed limit within the two-block radius around the Square would need to be reduced to perhaps no more than 5 or 10 miles per hour, while we tried our best to make this work—if of course, most of us think it is a good dream worth putting into a better idea. Nothing worth having is easy. Would you not enjoy working on something like this?

Maybe the first part built would be the part on the other side of the dike. It could run from Wilkes to Kings on the river side of the dike. Why? Well, folks—why not? Wilkes-Barre could become the “Neatest Little City in the World.” I like that.

I know that this is an out of the box notion to say the least. We would have to think really big. A notion is something between a dream and an idea. Being out of the box is sometimes a very lonely notion. I hope somebody is out here with me but, rest assured, I am a quick study and I would be pleased to tell this story as it evolves—to anybody who will listen.

I would advise Mayor Tony George or the next Mayor, whoever is leading the City for the next four years and even after that, not to take action unless there is a consensus and a probability of success. That's why we need a guy like Frank Pasquini, and his friends with the Benjamins (\$100.00 bill) in the bank.

Even some of my good friends, who seem to favor the status quo, and would be happy with leadership remaining exactly as it is, would characterize my thinking as "off the wall," and perhaps even nutsy, rather than "way out of the box."

They would prefer to continue the long-term plan for the City, which as we know, to all of our chagrin, does not exist. The plan has not been written. I hope to change what is in the plan without having to ever become Mayor of Wilkes-Barre. You can help. Have you seen the current plan? Neither have I!

Think about this—Are these the ramblings of a mad man?

Think of this covered, warm and heated passenger train on these tracks in winter, with its windows wide open to the world in the summer. It would need a number of stops, say four—one at each corner at least, to make it effective.

In my ideal dream, the train would be electric, which might convince Tom Streyer to invest in the dream. Additionally, if I had my way, there would be no charge to ride this train. However, if a ticket were issued and verified at some stores, a small percentage (less than one percent perhaps) of the purchase price could be passed back to the

City in this electronic age to pay any expenses. These are just raw thoughts. It would be better if it were free.

I would not want any novel idea such as this to cost taxpayers as for sure the people in Wilkes-Barre, the County, and the School District are well overtaxed.

If this notion of a train circling Wilkes-Barre idea were made possible, it would surely be a remarkable accomplishment for Wilkes-Barre—don't you think? People would come far and wide to experience our experience as we took one big step towards making *Wilkes-Barre Great Again*. We would be a model of a city that stepped up to meet its challenges.

Our city would become a magnet for customers and patrons for our shopkeepers. It would spawn other industries and the job opportunities would benefit us all big time. Those living in this new city would smile each time they walked outside. After all, the success of our local businesses has a lot to do with our own success as a city.

Stop the Tram Car, please!

Getting around the new Wilkes-Barre Shopping District.

Between the four major perimeter train stops and Public Square, I can envision rechargeable battery powered electric tram cars carrying people from the various stops on the perimeter to the Square... just like at Disney World. Maybe Disney will give us a few of their Tram Cars to help us out! We'll have to ask a member of the Frank Pasquini clan about those possibilities.

There would be no need for a switching station at the Square for Tram Car transfers as each car would go the full route and hit all the streets and stop at every block within the perimeter in which an egress was made possible. It would be a nice ride unto itself. In my vision, this also would be no charge but perhaps we would ask for a donation, please. How many tram cars would we need? Thank you for the question. Answer: As many as we need!

As the big train stops at major Tram Car drop off points, there could also be entrepreneurs with push carts, like on the Atlantic City Boardwalk or the Far East. Perhaps you've seen these clever vehicles on the Boardwalk recently. They seat about two if large people such as myself are in the cart; three to four otherwise.

They have weather protection for short-distance travel on bad rainy days. With a strong push-man working to please passengers; expecting and getting his or her recompense (tips) for a job well done, the trip could be swift, full of great Wilkes-Barre sights, and a lot of fun.

These entrepreneurs would take their carts full of passengers over a smooth trail (provided by Wilkes-Barre engineers and craftsmen) to any destination within the perimeter, including another train stop. There would also be drop off rental bikes available as are now prevalent in major cities. Don't ask why! Instead, ask why not?

For a time as many recall from several years ago, Wilkes-Barre had these bikes available at Gus Genetti's. Bikes would be permitted to go anywhere in the train or tram area. There could also be defined bike lanes for personally owned bikes to get to and from safely. How about some bike parking spots within this area. There would be very few if any cars, and those that were permitted on the uptown streets would be going very slowly. Of course a challenge for City officials would be to use the parking spaces in the City without creating a danger.

Challenges are welcome and all problems are solvable with the right attitude. If you like any of the ideas that are presented in this book, ask the official you plan to elect as Mayor what they think.

Always elect the right officials and voice your opinion to the leaders of the City to represent your line of thinking for a great start on returning Wilkes-Barre to a higher level of greatness one step at a time. If your leaders have no interest in you, perhaps they deserve a return favor.

There are naysayers in every project. You may know that it took about fifteen to twenty years for the beautiful Luzerne County Courthouse to be finally finished in 1909. But, the forebears of ours at

least had a dream, then an idea, then a plan to make it happen eventually, and they took the action to make sure this beautiful structure now graces the River Common and River Street. .



Naysayers are good as long as they do not simply declare that Wilkes-Barre is not worth saving, and they move themselves and their belongings out of town. I would advise naysayers to stick around and see what Wilkes-Barre can do when we have a mind to.

I know it is easy to declare anybody like me with such dreams as a nut for putting such "out-of-box" solutions out there to be seen by the public. I am not running for office so there is no ulterior motive.

I would bet that since I know what I am doing in making these notions known, most psychologists would say that because I am coherent in that understanding, I am not nuts. Your opinion may differ but that is what life is about—honest debate before action.

But, then again, the final determination is yours. I think that if the Wilkes-Barre Project (The train and tram & people push carts, & bike paths) are not on your list of good ideas, please at least select officials that have an open mind about crime prevention and a more inviting public infrastructure that is clean and overall a City that is affordable.

I do encourage all of those who still use their brains, to think independently of government. Government pushes its thoughts upon us all but when we wake up, we find a great crony of government taking his or her cash to the bank. Let's hold government accountable so that we, the citizens of the City can get the best we can from living in Wilkes-Barre with an honest *no favorites* government.

I would suggest that we all use those God-given minds of ours to come up with our own dreams for Wilkes-Barre—big and small dreams alike. I suspect there are few in our City who would seek to achieve "deterioration." What candidate would want desolation or dilapidation to be their by-word.

We must all think for ourselves? What good is a city official who sits around waiting for another federal grant to pave a few streets or tear down a few more monuments or great homes or buildings? Our leaders must dream, come up with notions and ideas and goals, and take action to achieve. If a candidate does not want to serve the people, don't run for office, please!

I think we can even do a lot more than that, even if in the end, we cannot convince anybody to fund our Choo Choo train off and around Public Square. I sure am no Walt Disney, for sure, but can you imagine if the greatest Imagineer in America, was shut down simply because he chose to imagine?

Other ideas not requiring a train

What about all those vacant lots on major streets in Wilkes-Barre? What about all those great factories that once hosted manufacturers of "heavy metal" products. Well, we certainly know that we are too small a city to build a major industrial park, yet we once made Locomotives in the Vulcan Iron Works in Wilkes-Barre.

It is safe to say that if we had the sharpest people in the world working in our planning and zoning offices, we would make better choices than letting anybody wreck a historic building or one that could be helpful in helping the City. You can bet the historic Old Fell

House would be a site on the WB Train / Tram tour if it were not now a parking lot. Wilkes-Barre needs to smarten up.

We should therefore be able to invite light manufacturing and distribution industries into our city. Amazon is an example of a large distribution company. We have some major streets and then we have neighborhood streets, and we can identify and encourage business uses on certain of our major streets. I would strive for a what's happening place in each of our major City sections such as the Heights. We can do anything we want. Before somebody thought a farmers' market was a good idea once a week on Public Square, there was none.

Perhaps we can find a nice benefactor to buy one of our former swimming pool sites and build a nice city pool. I can see one of the major pool distributors from the Wilkes-Barre area, such as Aqua Leisure, Olympic Pools, D & L Pools etc., building a very large pool that is a double jumbo size version of one of their popular models. The distributors could also install sample pools on their property so that the Wilkes-Barre public can swim for a small fee in the humunga pool and recreate with volleyball etc on the grounds. Meanwhile, their parents could use the time to shop for their own in-ground or above ground pool from the sponsor.

Wilkes-Barre needs jobs for sure. Our median wage needs to be increased with some good jobs and good companies. They have snuck away from our town at a blistering pace. We must stop this jobs erosion with a plan. Having good workers and a positive community encourages companies to relocate here. Nice Parks and nice shopping areas matter. Clean matters. City officials would need to assure that entrepreneurs are incited to bring their trade skills right here.

They must be asked to set up shop in Wilkes-Barre. Maybe a company would show up that built mini trains in people's yards. OK, I may be stretching it but we all must remember that without dreams, no ideas come forth and no actions and implementations are brought forth.

Chapter 14 A City Full of Mini-Malls?



Handsome places to visit, sit on a bench, & shop

Why should anybody listen to anything from a man, who suggests Wilkes-Barre might prosper with a big train encircling our downtown? Ask yourself if the train idea would be good if we woke up tomorrow and it was all operational. Ah hah! It's getting there that is the problem, not being there! Let's figure out how to get our ideas in motion.

There are some pretty large vacant kits in our City in most sections and neighborhoods. Many of these are big enough to support a mini-mall. I am not talking about strip malls with big stores that often become rundown and unsightly. I am talking about attractive places that might include a nice restaurant and/or a great specialty grocery store and/or a gourmet fish market as the anchor. Satellite Thrift stores run by churches or the Salvation Army can also serve as nice anchors in the mini malls.

How about four to ten small stores linking up in the same area with parking or Tram Car or Push-Cart service close by. How about a

once a half-hour Cable Car gasoline vehicle that takes people from the High Rises to the mini-malls for shopping—and even brings them back!

I bet you have your own ideas for this. In other chapters of my Wilkes-Barre book, we looked at our uptown banks that were deteriorating – PNC Bank and Citizens Bank in particular. These all have parking available such as the Boscov's lot, Park 'n Lock etc. Why not make a few floors of the Citizens bank or the former First Eastern Bank into mini-malls?

Next thing you know, the “local” banks will want to come back down to Wilkes-Barre in a big way. I know a nice spot at the corner of West Market and North Franklin, where the next successful Wilkes-Barre bank can build or renovate its next building. Maybe for nostalgia purposes, it should be called The Miners National Bank! Then right down the road from that, somebody can build a huge hotel and call it the Sterling II. Anything is possible. Think about it!

How about a great new neighborhood mini mall?

One of my favorite neighborhood haunts has always been the Barney Inn in the South Wilkes-Barre Section. Its tradition of great food and great refreshments is well known even as the ownership has changed over the years.

The current place, CrisNics is as good as it gets. With regular fare such as Lobster and great steaks, and as my friends Barbara and Dennis enjoyed just a short-time ago, Liver and Onions, and a Haddock platter. Dennis said "the Liver & Onions was as good as he had in his life," and Barbara felt that her fish dinner was almost as good as Lobster Tail.



I love the Chris Nics' Reuben's, Irish fare, and their pizza with light cheese, extra sauce and extra onions. Can't beat it! And their drinks are fine too.

So, in my dreams, I see this little section of Barney Street cut off from the world and made into a mini mall with wooden sidewalks, hitching rails, bannisters, bike

racks, and a few wooden canopies. CrisNics already has a huge parking lot, and its own great canopy which covers its "outdoor pavilion" in the rear. Why not invite some horse groomers in to take the kids on some rides in the summer. Where else in WB can we get this treat?. It does not all have to come back to Public Square. How about Barney Square as a name for the SWB mini-mall. ?

The "Cris Nics" family is very supportive of Wilkes-Barre and I bet they would love to see their immense parking lot become a multi-story parkade, paid for by the efforts of guys with the same spirit as Frank Pasquini. There would be no traffic on this Barney Street block and the parkades would be accessible only from Waller or Regent Streets. It would take just a few steps to arrive at CrisNics or any other finery in the new Barney Square Mini-Mall.

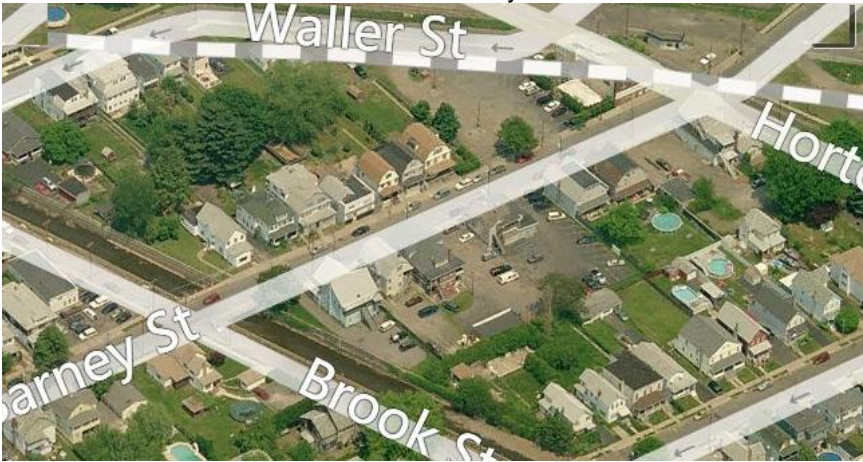
I also am thinking about a back alley in between Regent Street and Barney to take the traffic over the new bridge. It would be a shame not to use that brand-new bridge. Perhaps some novel store can emerge by the creek and make use of the creek when it has enough water. I am not sure what—right now but my noggin is always cooking something up. How about a stocked fishing pond?

Abe's and the Barney Street Lunch are already in place as two of the best Hot Dog luncheonettes in the State, and they would fit in perfectly in this new Barney Mini-Mall.

Both have a ton of parking that the possible alley from Horton Street or from Regent Street could reach effectively. For big time parking availability, there is a huge vacant lot right now on the corner of Horton and Barney Streets caddy-corner to the Cris Nics.

It is amazing what you can accomplish if you actually think it is possible. If you are not sure of what is possible, and what is not possible, that's where dreaming comes in. If you think Wilkes-Barre can afford none of this; that's where a great dreamer like Frank Pasquini comes in. All things are possible. By the way, as a reminder, the late and great Frank Pasquini did a great imitation of Congressman Dan Flood. And he smiled all the while.

Site of Potential Barney Street Mini Mall



There are also train tracks across from CrisNics, which might be a way to connect to the Public Square Choo Choo if that separate dream ever materializes. How about a quick way uptown and back down to Barney Street to CrisNics or Abe's, or the Barney Street Lunch or the new Barney Street Mini-Mall.

What about a SWB mini-hotel or bed and breakfast?

Ah, c'mon Brian are you nuts? While we are building the Barney Square Mini-Mall, we would need to dress up the existing houses a bit

with a common old-west or old-Wilkes-Barre theme as a façade or a real front-face. That's how I see it. CrisNics is already in-theme as is the Barney Street Lunch, but the irreplaceable Abe's might need a façade to make it look like the Abe's retro of yore.

Once we have the houses looking nice on the front, there may be those willing to sell to the site developer or make further changes to fit the business plan. I can envision craft stores in some of the houses or perhaps a Wawa or a multi-building hotel.

There are two or more large former bar and store buildings across Barney Street from CrisNics. One was once a store called Williams where as a kid, I window shopped and found lots of board games. They look like apartments now. If you live in one of those, or any home on this block on either side of Barney Street, fear not! My brother-in law, Bill says on the corner was a great place called Mahons which sold beer by the bucket in the war years.

Success breeds success! Nothing happens overnight in Wilkes-Barre or Scranton so there would be plenty of time for your voices to be heard. Owners of these facilities would have as we would say in the olden days—"first dibs."



If the owners were amenable, the buildings could become the anchor for a nice multi-building hotel to include other homes that remain on

the block. You would check in across the street from CrisNics and be assigned a room in one of the homes that were part of the "First Dibs Hotel Complex."

Obviously, this part would take a lot of planning; but can you envision how nice this would be? Why not? Again, benefactors and developers would be needed. The people left behind could not be left behind or this dream, almost reaching an idea, could never happen. Maybe they become owners or their separation packages are so huge, they would not want to say "NO."

There may be other areas of the City in vacant spots of town or almost vacant spots, where rejuvenation and a return to prominence is practical, but the folks may have already given up. Another slogan and a reality check may be necessary: *"No giving up in Wilkes-Barre will be permitted."*

I'd love to find the ghost of Frank Pasquini to make a house call on anybody, who seems to have given up on anything, and he will bring his personal buddy "ole cheerios" Gus Genetti in to work to close the deal.

My message in this chapter of course has been that to *Make Wilkes-Barre over as a New Wilkes-Barre* all starts with a dream. Dreams become ideas when they seem practical; ideas are translated into plans, and then action is taken to implement the good things that are planned. We can do whatever we choose. If we dream and ultimately pick our best ideas, we might even be able to get a lot of them done. Wouldn't that be nice?

Who knows what the next great idea will be for Wilkes-Barre? I am waiting to hear the existing WB Official Administration or the next if need be, fire off a few affirmations or a few counter ideas to the ones I have discussed in this chapter. Whoever the Mayor may be in 2019, we should not care so much if he or she embraces the notion of thinking through dreams and ideas that can be worked one way or another to become winning action plans and implementations. Nothing that has never been proposed ever works. It can't.

Chapter 15 Many Recreation & Fun Choices in Old Wilkes-Barre

KIDS DEFY OLD MAN WEATHER AT GRIFFITH SWIMMING POOL ON HEIGHTS



COURTESY OF THE WILKES-BARRE PRESERVATION SOCIETY On July 8, 1936, 5,000 kids broke the attendance record at the Griffith Pool in the Heights on the hottest day of that summer.

Sports, Swimming Pools, Games & Theatres

Besides the great restaurants and other eateries as we discussed in prior chapters, which catered to teenagers who had a buck or two to spend, in the “olden days,” there were many great opportunities to do neat things in Wilkes-Barre. Many of the places I mention are gone or are smaller in size; and their absence and/or right sizing has taken away much of the good feeling of our town.

A boy or a girl could play hardball, softball, wiffle ball, basketball, or football at Eyerman Park off Gilligan and Andover Streets; the Company Yard on High Street by Parish, Espy Park by Espy St. Parsons, Scott Street & WB Blvd, Huber Park in the Mayflower, Miner Park on Old River Road and Hanover Street, Pine Ridge in

Parsons, Coal Street Park off Coal Street. Kirby and Nesbitt Parks across the Susquehanna

There were a host of places across the city to play organized sports such as Little League, Teeners' League, and Senior Teeners' leagues. Soccer eventually came to Wilkes-Barre but it is a recent phenomenon. Most importantly, there were vacant lots upon which homes had never been built, such as the one by the Homestead Tavern on Brown Street and the one by Mamary's Funeral home on Parish before Mamary's was even there. There was vacant-lot football a-plenty. Every Neighborhood had its places.

And because there was not always a field or a vacant lot available, there was always the street where tag football, wiffle ball, and basketball were played from morning to night. And, of course there were the night time games—Hide and Seek, Relievio, Statue of Liberty and others that made life in Wilkes-Barre's “olden days,” , worth waiting for the sun to come up.

It was as nice as it could be. Nobody was poor because we all had Wilkes-Barre to make things better. Maybe neighborhoods would be closer and friendlier and safer today if we could bring some of these notions back. Maybe WB officials can fulfill a promise and make Wilkes-Barre safe, clean, and affordable. That would go a long way to accomplishing lots of other great things.

This nice article about Swimming pools in Wilkes-Barre was written by the Citizens Voice' Sarah Scinto Staff Writer and it was published JULY 2, 2017



A boy goes off the diving board where the Kingston pool was packed Friday afternoon. Mark Morancv02poolsp3



Kingston still has a nice pool.

Before the flood of 1972, there was the flood of 1936. It was very early in the year and the City got the Griffith pool operational after the flood of 1936.

Sarah Scinto's article follows:

On the hottest day in 1936, 5,000 children spent the day splashing and swimming in the Griffith Park Pool.

According to Wilkes-Barre city councilman and historian Tony Brooks, that hot July 8 day marked the highest attendance the pool had seen since it opened as the city's first public pool in 1917.

"Can you imagine that, 5,000 kids in the pool?" he said. "If that was still the case all these pools would still be open."

[Tony or the next Mayor: maybe it can be a bit like this once again so kids can socialize more in the summer. Kingston has managed to keep their pool going and it is doing well. What do they know what Wilkes-Barre doesn't?]

The Griffith Park Pool, like many others that once dotted the city, no longer exists, and as summer temperatures climb, publicly funded ways to keep cool have steadily declined in the area. Where Wilkes-Barre once had as many as five public pools in various city parks, lack of attendance and maintenance costs have left the city with only one public water attraction — the splash pad at the Coal Street complex.

The City has followed a county-wide trend. This summer, Kingston borough's pool is open, but the borough administrator said they may be the only one in Luzerne County other than a pool at Frances Slocum State Park.

"The last pool we had that was marginally functional was Coal Street," Butch Frati, director of operations for the city said. "It had a lot of issues."

[Butch: everything has issues especially when it is not cared for and maintained well. Nothing is free!]

Frati said maintenance costs and issues like leaks and availability of lifeguards prompted the city to close that last pool and open the splash pad that stands on the site today.

“It’s a quarter of the cost,” he said. “You have to maintain a pool, that takes care of itself. It chlorinates itself, it’s a pretty self-contained unit.”

Brooks recalled swimming in the Coal Street Park Pool as a child — even when it was an “aquadome,” a heated, covered pool open year round.

“The Aquadome came down maybe in 1980 because of expenses,” he said. “They converted it for just the summertime.”

[Poor leadership lets things get run down and then blames the fact that they are run-down on nobody taking care of maintenance... Dah!]
e

At one time, Wilkes-Barre residents enjoyed pools at Griffith Park, Miner Park, Hollenback Park and on Parrish Street or they could visit smaller, wading pools at Scouten Lee Park and Eyreman Park, Brooks said.

“Each one of them closed for lack of use over time,” he said. “It was part expense and lack of use that each of these pools declined over time.”

Forty Fort’s 81-year-old pool did open for the season, but an expensive leak forced officials to close the pool to seek repairs. “We were open for just a few days,” said borough manager Bonnie Arnone. “We were losing 40,000 gallons of water every day. Between the water and chemical loss it was \$500 a day we were losing.”

Arnone said Forty Fort values providing a community pool for residents, but this year, the borough’s financial responsibility to the taxpayers had to outweigh the value of recreation.

“You have a fiduciary responsibility ... to spend tax dollars wisely and you have to say, ‘Is this the wisest choice?’” she said.

Arnone has a specialist coming in to look at the pool and see if it can be repaired, but she's prepared for the possibility of bad news. "It may have outlived its lifetime," she said.

The pool had become a financial burden on the borough in recent years. Arnone said between lifeguard wages, chemicals, repairs, maintenance, water, electricity and other factors, the pool costs between \$40,000 and \$50,000 to run each summer.

"It's hard to make that money back," she said. "We've taken a loss on the pool for as many years as I've been here, which is seven." Council always budgets for the pool, Arnone said, because of the value it adds to the community.

"It's a community gem," she said. "It offers somewhere for kids to go during the summer."

But with pools popping up in backyards throughout the community, attendance and membership has dropped. Arnone said the borough even lowered membership and day pass fees last year in the hope of generating more attendance.

"It increased a little bit, but nothing dramatic," she said. If the pool can't be repaired, Arnone said council will have to weigh the benefits of spending potentially more than \$1 million to replace it or exploring other options, like a splash pad or other water attraction.

"We'll do the best thing for the community both financially and recreationally," she said. "By giving them something we can afford to give them."

When Kingston borough officials felt like their community pool was "struggling," municipal administrator Paul Keating said they decided to buck the trend and invest in the facility.

"It's very important to the community and it's always been," he said.

Kingston officials secured a \$750,000 grant and poured some borough funds into the pool to complete a \$1.4 million renovation that debuted last year.

“There was too much history and value in that pool to not keep it going,” he said. “It made sense for us to invest ... to turnover the pool for the upcoming generation.”

This year’s budget includes \$190,550 to maintain and run the pool through the summer, Keating said. He recognized how, for other communities, the sheer cost of maintaining a pool could become prohibitive.

“It depends on what your financial situation is and it depends on what your community priorities are,” he said. “We’re fortunate enough to be in a position where we have a healthy government.”

Attendance at the Kingston pool broke borough records in 2016, and Keating said the lack of other pools in the area will likely keep those numbers high.

“Last year was a very, very good year,” he said. “We ended the year, I believe, with about \$16,000 in our checking account and roughly \$13,000 in a money market account. I expect to do much better this year.”

Anyone from the area can use the Kingston pool, Keating said, provided anyone over the age of 18 signs a liability waiver and provides some form of identification for staff to keep on file.

“We have a lot of people using the pool from out of the area,” he said. “It’s the only public pool other than Frances Slocum in Luzerne County ... a substantial amount of people using the pool are not (Kingston) residents.”

Fрати said while a public pool is “off the radar” in Wilkes-Barre for the time being, city officials will look out for grants that might help bring residents more ways to keep cool in the summer.

“I do feel there’s a need for the pool, at least one pool,” he said.

[What a shame that Kingston and Forty Fort can maintain their pools but a much bigger City with a \$50 million budget has to punt on the people. Remember that when you vote people. Wilkes-Barre can spend more wisely than having 53 different job titles budgeted for overtime!]

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Pool hours and prices

Frances Slocum State Park

Open daily 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. until Labor Day weekend.

Daily swimming fees range from free to children under 38 inches to \$5 for adults.

A full fee schedule can be found at

<http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/stateparks/prices/index.htm>.

Kingston Borough Pool

Location: Hamilton Street at Lathrop Street

Season: June 10 - Aug. 1

Hours: Monday through Saturday noon to 8 p.m., Sundays 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. Thursday night is Teen Night from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. and swimming lessons take place Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to noon.

Fees:

Kingston family membership - \$209 plus \$1 for each additional badge

Kingston single membership - \$174

Non-resident family membership - \$255 plus \$1 for each additional badge

Non-resident single membership - \$199

Guest pass, 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. - \$8 per person

Guest pass, 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. - \$6 per person

Five day block pass - \$30

10 day block pass - \$60

Theme/Teen night - \$4 per person

Group rates available at kingstonpa.org/recreation/pool

Pools bring communities together.

Old fart politicians are why Wilkes-Barre has no swimming pools. I apologize for the effect that sentence may have had on your olfactory senses...but it is true. I'd get rid of the politicians before the pools. With a 2018 budget of almost \$50 million, it is hard to believe that there was not enough budget to keep a couple pools alive in a City as large as Wilkes-Barre. Our politicians somehow have little pride in their City and it sure bugs the heck out of me. That's why I ran for Mayor a few years back. Poor politicians and officials equal poor results. We got that for sure in Wilkes-Barre. If you think so, make

sure you watch who you vote for. Forty Fort and Kingston are not forcing our leaders on us so they can look good. We do it to ourselves.

Somehow the ice skating rink charges \$8.00 and \$4.00 for skates and they make it. Remember, at one time everybody in WB had to buy a patch for their bathing suit. Do our current politicians care about the people of Wilkes-Barre. Good question!

We are told that everybody has a pool today. Well, maybe people with some money have a pool but the poverty rate in Wilkes-Barre is 35%. We can do much better as a city but we have to choose our officials wisely. Make sure those you vote for think like you do.

Pools were all there was in the 1950's

Swimming pools are near and dear to my heart. My sister Nancy is 3 ½ years older than me. She and my brother Ed (mostly just Nancy) would walk me to Miner Park Pool almost every day in every summer that I can remember. The beautiful shade trees where Kistler School is now were the perfect venue for eating a jelly and peanut butter sandwich for lunch and washing it down with an orange drink or milk. Arriving early in the morning often we would often find George Jones, the maestro of City pools past, chlorinating the pool perfectly before letting anybody get in.

Miner Park Pool was a testimony to good planning in Wilke-Barre . It was round with a big pool and a little pool and a catwalk in between. It was huge. It had a ten-foot board and two small diving boards.

They were scary for me but I got to see a lot of great dives and divers. There were little openings under the catwalk and the catwalk was between the little pool and the big pool. Ironically, the little pool was little only in terms of the deepness of the pool whereas the big pool was lots smaller but the water was very deep.

Tough guys like me, who had just learned how to do the “dead man’s float” could watch all the action in the big pool without having to be in the big pool. Don’t try to tell me it wasn’t worth saving. It was an awful lot of fun. I have never seen a pool as nice. The fountain in the middle of the little pool was exciting enough that a bloke did not need to go into the big pool to get a jolt from the water.

The Charles Miner family had donated the land on which the pool and the park were built to the City for public recreation. The pool had a magnificent shower/fountain in the middle of the little pool that was very refreshing for all but very scary and a little over my head. I recall being scared when I was about five years old frolicking in the pool by the fountain.

It was a big trek from the Rolling Mill Hill to Miner Park, but well worth it. Thanks Nancy and thanks Ed for taking me.

Circa 1935, the Works Progress Administration was a big part of President Roosevelt's "New Deal." It was renamed in 1939 as the Work Projects Administration and served as the largest and most ambitious American New Deal agency. In its heyday, during the great depression the agency employed millions of people (mostly unskilled men) to carry out public works projects, including the construction of public buildings and roads and lots of walls and a lot of public swimming pools.

Wilkes-Barre benefited along with other US cities when the WPA began to focus on recreation. For years, its legacy was visible in our City. Thanks to WPA labor, the former Miner Park and Hollenback swimming pools were built. All Wilkes-Barre politicians had to do was maintain them. That job was too much for them, unfortunately.

Worse than that, for their own reasons, WB politicians gave the WB School Board the right to build a huge elementary school in Miner Park. They could have built the school anywhere in a city in which industry was leaving continually. Instead, the City politicians gutted the beautiful pool and the locker rooms and stole a lot of the park from the people. Somebody mentioned progress. I don't think so.

They even moved the Charles Miner Memorial which was at the end of Hanover Street across Old River Road by the shade house to the western end of the park. Sorry but it seems it was just another case of poor leadership—again—for Wilkes-Barre. I blame it on the voters, mostly the couch potatoes, who put these unclear thinkers in office. Try not to let it happen again! Vote in people who are forward thinkers...please. If you are not sure what politicians think, ask them. If they won't answer, vote for somebody else.

Before Miner Park Pool got the wrecking ball, with Griffith, Miner Park Pool, and Hollenback in full use, the City decided to build a new pool in the Rolling Mill Hill Section. It was a dandy and it was welcomed by the neighbors. It was called the Parrish Street Pool.

As a young tot still going to Miner Park pool for swimming, I can still recall hearing that a pool was coming to Parrish Street. It was to be located on Parrish at Lloyds Lane.

I remember it being built. It was a really something! I would see it every week on my way to the movies at the Hart Theatre on Hazle Street.

I can't thank the pool for my three great children being born but long before those days, when I was wearing my brother Ed's huge bathing suit and I had a big gut as an eight-year old from hard earned pizza, soda, ice cream, etc., I was discovered doing the dead man's float in the wading area of the Parish Street Pool. I was probably thinking about learning how to swim at the time.

My wife Pat spotted me at the Parish Street Swimming Pool shortly thereafter. The pool was very new, built in the late 1950's. It was a great pool and I was there almost every day in the summer along with a cadre of friends from High Street.

It was a lot of years after she met me that I finally met her. I knew who she was though. Very pretty! So I hid from her. She spotted me anyway. I did not know I had been discovered. She and her best friend Mary Sabola, also very pretty, used to dive off the ten. I watched and was honestly impressed. Eventually I got to cannon-ball off the ten-foot diving board and with my girth, I created quite a splash.

Thank the Lord that Pat Piotroski Kelly did not remember me until it was too late. We were married by the time her full recollection came back. When she saw me from a distance at the pool the first time, as she describes the incident with a big smile, I had a huge bathing suit and a larger waist than most of my peers. The bow on the string that tied my bathing suit was about a foot long. That's how oversized my bathing suit was. But, it never fell down.

My wife told me years later that she had remarked to her best friend, Mary, who, at the time looked like my wife's twin, that I was pretty icky looking. Hey, even I thought I was. Hah! She was not impressed by my fine duds and my butch-wax crew cut. She also commented on my crew cut, which never really worked for me with my curly hair. Until I met this same fair maiden after many years had passed, I was unaware these words about me were ever spoken.

I figure that if a bunch of old coal miners could be taxed without a wage tax enough to build and maintain four city pools, what a shame that those better off in the next generation could not do the same. Again, with poor leadership, a City gets poor results. Too bad nonetheless. The taxpayers are the only ones who can bring the City good leadership. We must know the plans of our politicians. Though keeping us safe from crime is important, it is not the only job of City officials.

Movies were within walking distance

Kids and adults in Wilkes-Barre did not have to go to the Mall or the huge Cineplex eight miles away in the 1940's to 1960's to see a first-run movie. The theatres were in our neighborhoods. We saw our share of these movies because the price was right, and the Goobers Peanuts were enough to get a hungry soul through a full double feature. I'd sure love to see community theatres come back. Maybe in some of the vacant lots in the City or in the new Mini-Malls?

It was not that the TV screen replaced the movie theatres. Nobody sat next to you when you were watching TV, other than your brother or sister if you were lucky or your mom and dad. And, of course with one b/w in the house, dads of the era picked the news and the adult dramas to watch. At least in my house my dad got home early from his day shift at the Stegmaier Brewery; and then he ate a nice mom-made meal and then he took a bath, said his prayers, and took a very quick nap. He did all that before he came down to take over the TV. Took it over, he did.

In the meantime my sister and I, after school, fought over the Mickey Mouse Club or Bandstand or the local show Swing Session or

Popeye. Nonetheless, it was never as fulfilling as going to the neighborhood theatre. I can remember being with all the boys from SBS school on a Friday Night and coming back with my brother and sister on Saturday and sometimes Sunday for another movie. The movies were cheap. On Friday night, there were also a lot of pretty girls, who to me at the time were prettier than flowers.

The St. Boniface school kids, about thirty or forty in a class, often went as a group to the Hart Theatre for some spooky shows on Friday nights. I suspect other grade schools did the same as there were lots of kids in the theatres at the time.

There were so many theatres in Wilkes-Barre that there is a long list of those that I had never seen nor heard about until I researched this book. These include the Gaiety Theatre (formerly the Nesbitt Theatre), S. Main St.; Capitol Theatre, Public Square; Grand Opera House, S. Franklin St. near W. Market St.; Irving Theatre, S. Main St. opposite old post office, etc.

We had a number of very much active movie theatres right in Wilkes-Barre in the neighborhoods and downtown, no more than a fifteen minute walk away from where anybody lived. The Hart Theatre was off the main path but it was very classy, situated on Hazle Street. Back then, Hazle Street was a fine Wilkes-Barre street. Movies at the Hart Theatre were typically twenty cents except on Sundays or if they had a Disney Movie. Then, the price was 25 cents. The Bucket (Crystal Theatre) where Cris Nics parking lot is locate today always offered shows at about a nickel less than the Hart.

When we got to High School, the places to go before the flood of 1972 were the Comerford on the Square and the Paramount. That was a big date in the 1960's. And if there were a few shekles left, there were all those great spots on the Square such as The Boston Candy Kitchen, to extend the date with a soda and something else.

The Penn Theatre on South Main Street disappeared perhaps even before the 1960's. It had been Poli's Vaudeville Theatre before it was the Penn. I remember my brother Ed, RIP, who took me there just one time as I recall.



The walk from High Street to South Main Street seemed to go on forever. The shows were exciting for sure and that is how Ed intrigued me to go with him. I remember the titles—a double feature with "Creature with the Atom Brain" and "The Beginning of the End" as the two movies. Maybe you were there?

It was the scariest adventure I had ever seen. For years it haunted me, especially since a good guy I had known as

"Frank Smith," who was Joe Friday's first partner in Dragnet, became one of the bad guys and he got an atom brain. I could not believe he would go bad. Wow, for me it was so real.

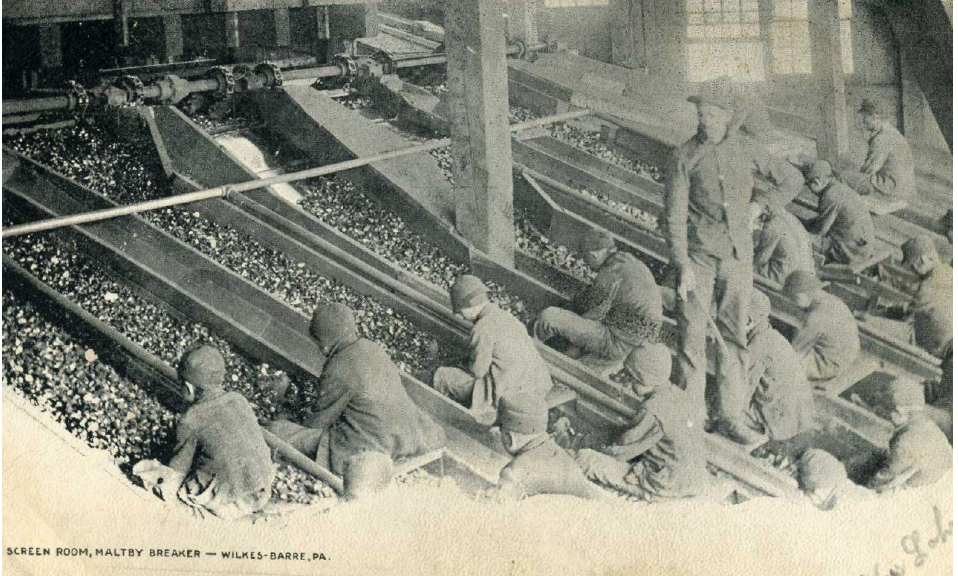
But, I loved the fact that the Penn Theatre was there in the same area as the roller rink (South Main Street Armory, and the fantastic GAR Building). To put things in full perspective. Back then, there were five theatres in Wilkes-Barre that I knew about and today there are zero.

We have to ask ourselves, "How is that better for kids or for the rest of us?" Taking our high schools out of our neighborhoods appeals to me just about as much. TV and Video games are no replacement for the social and friend network one created just by going to the movies and going to a local high school...

And the popcorn, huge pickles, and Goobers Peanuts were unbelievable! Maybe we should serve that stuff in the high schools also to encourage friendship.

The older generation, especially the corrupt and greedy Wilkes-Barre politicians who took away more than they added, really took a lot away from those who came after us. Poor leadership delivers poor results. Look at who is running for office and make sure their dreams are not always bad dreams. Make sure you believe in them before you vote for them. They make a big difference.

Chapter 16 The "Miners" & the Importance of Coal for Wilkes-Barre



Child labor separated the Coal into pea, chestnut, etc.

Miners made it better for the whole city

Wilkes-Barre, as many other towns in NEPA in the early days, was a mining town. Miners had tough lives. They would work 12-hour or longer shifts and there were many times in the winter, in which miners such as my uncle Gene McKeown, who lived on Brown Street and worked for Glen Alden, would go into the mine down about a mile underground, in the morning when it was still dark. When he would come out after his shift, it was dark again. For the whole winter, my uncle Gene, a wonderful man saw no daylight.

Uncle Gene was a miner all his life, but he became a specialist in train track and he and his crew laid miles and miles of track for the coal cars in the mines. His crew was so good they even got the call to build the train tracks for the old train ride at San Souci Park—the train that went behind the big swimming pool.

Like most miners of the day, uncle Gene took the opportunity when given to whet his whistle at a number of the taverns built in Wilkes-Barre during the Anthracite years. There were many taverns open pre and post-miner work-days so the miners would always be able to whet their whistles and their spirits, with a nip and often a schnorkie that would keep them going.

Only the light on his helmet and the few lights in the mines kept Uncle Gene's eyes from being all pupil. No wonder the miners enjoyed their respite at the huge bounty of taverns built just for them by Wilkes-Barre tavern proprietors across the City.

The whole day had passed by the time the miners were ready to call it quits. The good news was that there was plenty of work for the miners, who often started their careers just after they turned ten years old.

John L. Lewis's United Mine Workers' Union kept wages to the point where miners made a decent living. But, with all the coal dust, and the very long hours, the miners, both young and old had really tough lives, and their lives were shortened by the conditions under which they toiled.

Anthracosilicos (massive fibrosis of the lungs resulting from inhalation of carbon and quartz dusts and marked by shortness of breath) took down a lot of miners at the time and through the years after retirement.

The mines were a scary place to work as many over the years had lost their lives because of one type of accident or another. Many a miner chose not to call it quits for the day when the shift was over. Instead, he might put in some overtime and then he would find his favorite tavern (for some right across the street from the colliery), and they would enjoy a few Stegmaier's or Gibbons' (local beers) as well as a few schnorkies.

It was a tough job. So, in the morning, before the shift began, the taverns would open early enough to give those heading down the long shafts a few belts to help give them the courage to face yet another day with no sunshine.

In our home on High Street, a block from the main shaft at the South Wilkes-Barre Colliery, we used coal to heat the house and to cook. We had a Heatrola coal stove in between the parlor and the dining rooms to heat the whole house. It did not do the job but we did not freeze to death either. We had no furnace, ever. We had either a Pittston Coal Stove or a Wilkes-Barre Coal stove with an oven and a hot water back in the kitchen to heat the hot water for bathing and for baking bread and cakes. The cakes were great as was the corn meal mush!

Like most in Wilkes-Barre, coal from the sweat of the miners' brow was very important to our family as it provided heat for our homes, hot water, and we cooked with it. The miners and the mines also added big time to the economy of the City.

Unlike most in Wilkes-Barre when we were growing up, we had no coal furnace, just the stove in the dining room and the cooking stove in the kitchen. It was tough in retrospect but while we were living that way, we just thought it was how it was.

As a side note, after many years, on High Street, we got ourselves a Magic Chef Gas stove and gas was finally in our home. No longer in the summer did my father have to keep the fire dampened on the kitchen stove for cooking and baking, and of course hot water for bathing. The gas stove provided all our cooking needs. I can recall when we tried the first kettle test and it was from our perspective instantaneous that the kettle of water got hot on the new gas stove. We were in awe. We were cooking with gas from then on.

We still had the kitchen coal stove because the hot water plumbing was connected to it, and in the cold months, the Heatrola was not really enough to heat the whole house. Quite frankly, we all slept under a few blankets and a quilt each night to stay warm. There was no toasty furnace sending the good warm air upstairs. The stairway was also closed so the little heat from the dampened fire in the Heatrola did not go up the stairs.

A dampened fire means that the doors were mostly opened so that the coal did not burn quickly and would not need restarting in the morning. It took hours to start a coal fire so nobody let them go out in the winter, no matter how tired we were.

For the most part, the coal did not burn out overnight. Consequently on many a night, a glass of water on the bedroom dresser was often partially frozen in the morning—just a thin film of ice on the water line. For the Kelly family, all nine of us on High Street, that's just how it was. We had no idea it could be warmer with a furnace.

It was so cold in Wilkes-Barre and it was so easy for the water pipes to freeze with no heat that my dad would always run a small amount of water through all of the few spigots in the house. Running water does not freeze. There were no water meters then so there was no winter penalty for using lots of water to keep the pipes unfrozen.

Great book about the anthracite coal industry

Thomas Dublin and Walter Licht wrote a book about the Anthracite Region of PA of which Wilkes-Barre was a major factor. They called their book *The Face of Decline: The Pennsylvania Anthracite Region in the Twentieth Century*. Their 277 page book was published by the Cornell University Press in 2005 in Ithaca, NY. The book lists for \$65.00 in clothback and \$25.00 in paperback. Its ISBN is 0-8014-3469-6.

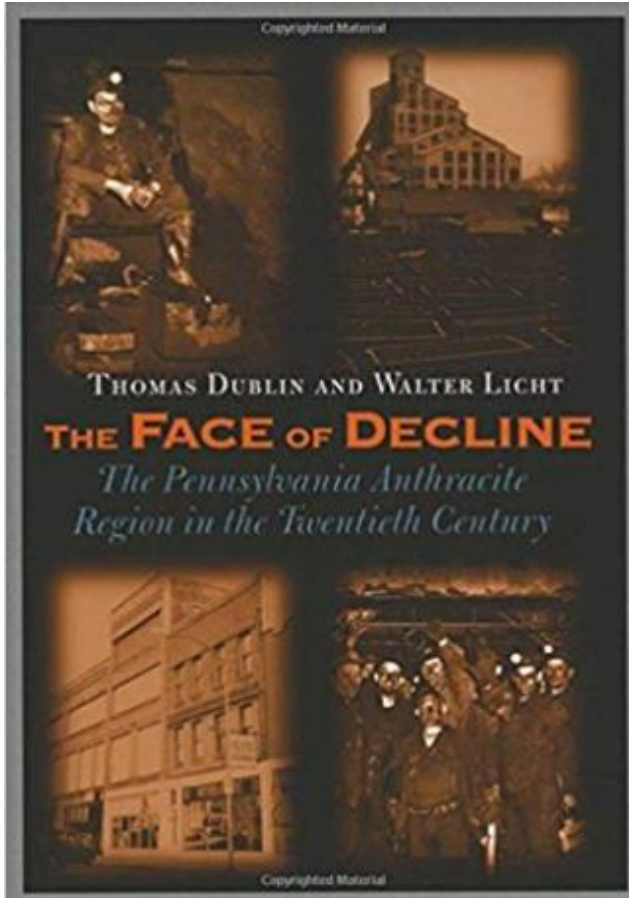
It was reviewed for EH.NET by William Boal, College of Business and Public Administration, Drake University.

I found the book on Amazon at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/0801484731>. At the time, you could download it in Book form from Kindle for \$9.59 or buy the hardcover for \$33.98. Additionally, paperback versions were available for as little as \$9.43. It is a great read for those interested in what once was the biggest industry in Northeastern PA.

The authors produced a great cover for their work. It is shown on the next page. The cover captures the feeling of many looking back on this era. There was nothing easy about a miner's life. I show the cover on the following page as we pick up with a nice professional review of the book.

Remember as you check out the review that the people did not complain as people of today would because technology had not brought a lot of improvement to regular folks. We expected to be cold.

The Review follows:



Perhaps no economic issue generates more public anxiety today than economic dislocation, as whole industries and regions are threatened by technical change, international trade, or sometimes natural or environmental disaster. The decline of a large industry is often frightening and difficult for participants and even policymakers to understand. To cope, we badly need the perspective of history. What happens to a region when its principal industry dies? What

happens to individual workers and their families?

This wonderful book answers these questions with a case history of the anthracite coal industry. Anthracite is “hard” coal, formed under greater heat and pressure than bituminous or “soft” coal. Anthracite gives off less smoke when it burns than most bituminous coals, making it better for use in urban areas. Anthracite coal fields in the United States are geographically compact, confined largely to three counties of northeastern Pennsylvania.

A century ago, when transport costs were high and alternative fuels scarce, anthracite was the preferred fuel for home heating throughout the northeast U.S. The book begins with the early discovery and development of anthracite coal in the eighteenth

century, continues through the coal boom of the early twentieth century when the industry employed about 180,000 workers, and ends with the death of the industry in the late twentieth century. As the title suggests, most of the book is devoted to the industry's gradual decline, which began after World War I.

The fundamental causes of that decline are well-known: falling prices of competing fuels and difficulties in mechanization due to adverse geological conditions. This book tells the story of how coal companies, the union, governments, and especially individual workers and their families responded to that decline.

Historians Thomas Dublin and Walter Licht, of Binghamton University (State University of New York) and the University of Pennsylvania, respectively, present the story from many perspectives, drawing on an impressive range of sources. In addition to the usual newspapers, secondary sources, and prior research, the authors dig into coal company personnel records, government investigative reports, and files of the Pennsylvania Power and Light Company's Industrial Development Department. Census data are used to measure broad trends.

Over one hundred personal interviews and a survey of residents and former residents tell us how those trends were experienced by miners, their spouses, and their children. The authors' main thesis is that institutions — coal companies, the union, and governments — failed to help the people of the anthracite region when the coal industry collapsed. Yet miners and their families were surprisingly resilient and resourceful, pulling through against the odds and sometimes at great cost.

The first chapter describes the beginnings of the anthracite industry. Hilly northeastern Pennsylvania was sparsely populated until coal was discovered sometime in the eighteenth century. Commercial production of coal required simultaneous development of transportation — first canals and then railroads. The late nineteenth century in the anthracite region saw increasing concentration in anthracite railroads and coal and increasing vertical integration between the industries.

Immigrants were recruited to work the mines. As in bituminous coal, many early mineworkers were from England, Wales and Ireland, but they were gradually replaced by immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe and from Italy. Mining was, of course, extremely dangerous, but beginning in 1889, Pennsylvania law required miners (workers at the coal face) to pass a safety examination and have two years' prior experience as mine laborers — a law that probably enhanced safety and incidentally made it more difficult for coal operators to replace strikers.

Most mineworkers were paid on piece — since about 1869, on a sliding scale tied to coal prices — but work was unsteady. Children and wives supplemented mineworkers' incomes by working in silk mills. Unions had little influence until a surprisingly successful strike called by the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) in 1900. The strike won higher wages for mineworkers and elimination of the sliding scale.

The second chapter describes the era of prosperity from 1900 to 1920, and the subsequent labor conflict of the 1920s. Improving coal demand through the First World War supported slightly increased wages and much increased working time. Child labor declined because of new legislation and rising earnings of parents. Ethnically-based churches and lodges provided support to families when workers were killed or injured on the job. The fortunes of the anthracite industry began to turn in the 1920s as demand for coal declined.

Frequent long labor strikes focused national attention on coal and resulted in appointment of official commissions of investigation and arbitration, but the authors criticize federal officials for their slow and reluctant responses. The authors also criticize the anthracite coal operators for refusing to recognize the union and grant the dues checkoff, arguing that recognition would have reduced the frequency and duration of strikes (obviously the anthracite operators had a different opinion). Interestingly, the authors do not question the wisdom of the union's rigid wage policy in the face of falling coal prices and consumer prices in the 1920s.

The third chapter, which describes anthracite mineworkers' response to the Great Depression, is especially interesting to an economist. The authors contrast the failure of coal operators, the union, and government to respond to the crisis, with the determined responses of ordinary mineworkers supported by their communities. Three responses by mineworkers are emphasized. The first response was a campaign for equalization of work. As coal prices fell, coal companies selectively shut down less productive mines, leaving some workers with no work at all, while others were unaffected. The destitution of unemployed mineworkers prompted local citizens to campaign for rotation of work among mines.

After a spontaneous strike, the major coal operator in the Panther Valley section agreed to a rotating schedule for its five mines. However, equalization campaigns in other sections of anthracite region were unsuccessful. The second response was a revolt within the UMWA, prompted by initial lack of union support for equalization campaigns. Suppression of dissent within the UMWA drove dissidents briefly to form a dual union, the United Anthracite Miners of Pennsylvania, from 1932 to 1935. The third response was "coal bootlegging," illegal and surreptitious working of closed coal mines by unemployed miners. Operators whose land was mined illegally were unable to shut down the bootleggers because of popular sympathy for unemployed miners.

To the authors, these three represent effective individual and community responses to an economic crisis, in the face of which institutions seemed powerless. To an economist, however, these responses represent more. They suggest a struggle of unemployed "outsiders" against employed "insiders" at a time when wages were too high to clear the labor market. The profitability and popularity of coal bootlegging in particular suggests that formal employment could have been increased substantially if union wages had been reduced. One wonders whether the anthracite region would have better withstood the Great Depression had the sliding-scale wage system not been eliminated three decades earlier by the UMWA.

The fourth chapter describes the final collapse of the anthracite industry. The Second World War temporarily increased the

demand for coal and decreased the supply of labor as mineworkers were drafted into the armed forces or took advantage of new job opportunities in defense industries outside the region. Employment in coal continued to fall during the war, but output increased and working time for remaining mineworkers rose. After the war, demand for anthracite fell sharply, as did productivity as veterans were given their jobs back. Financial pressures on coal companies became intense and they began to close. Employment in anthracite fell to 17,000 by 1961 and to 2,000 by 1974.

Describing the histories of three coal companies in detail, the authors argue that “financial machinations” such as leasing, bankruptcy, and buyouts accelerated anthracite’s decline, yet it seems clear that coal mines would have been forced to close with or without financial reorganization. Selective leasing of the most productive mines, in particular, seems like a predictable response to falling coal prices and “equalization of work” rules, which were by now written into union contracts.

Amidst anthracite’s general decline, the creation of the Anthracite Health and Welfare Fund seemed at first a heartening success. The UMWA in the late 1940s got the coal operators to agree to this fund, financed through per-ton royalties on coal output, to pay death benefits and pensions for miners. Unfortunately, as coal output fell in the 1950s and 1960s, royalty payments declined and the Fund was forced to cut benefits sharply.

The authors fault the union for diverting Fund assets into a UMWA-owned bank paying low interest, but surely the Fund’s main problem was the decline of coal output subject to royalties. A more genuine success resulted from a campaign by mineworkers and community activists (curiously without union support) for state and federal aid to black lung victims, enacted in 1965 and 1969 respectively. Though the union was not responsible for all the mineworkers’ problems, there is no question that autocratic rule and corruption in the UMWA did as much harm to anthracite workers as it did to bituminous mineworkers during this period.

The fifth chapter describes the efforts of communities in the anthracite region to attract new industry to replace anthracite, with mixed success. The authors focus on relatively successful efforts by

the cities of Scranton, Wilkes-Barre, and Hazleton. All three cities solicited contributions from private citizens — including working-class people — to develop new plant sites and subsidize relocation of employers.

The state government, through its Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority (PIDA), also helped attract new industry, but according to the state’s own evaluation, PIDA funds tended to go to counties that were already well-developed. Pennsylvania Power & Light, the region’s electric utility, also helped recruit new industry, and kept records which the authors exploit for this book. It is unclear how effective these redevelopment efforts were.

On the positive side, PP&L records show that incoming firms receiving assistance were larger and survived longer than incoming firms not receiving assistance. On the negative side, most incoming firms paid low wages and some left as soon as their tax breaks expired. Working-class people interviewed by the authors expressed resentment at the sacrifices they were asked to make to attract these firms. In any case, the anthracite region “bottomed out” in employment in 1960. Employment since then has grown, mostly in services. Employment in manufacturing, the target sector of these early redevelopment efforts, has ironically continued to decline.

The sixth chapter, based mostly on interviews, chronicles the responses of mineworkers who lost their jobs when anthracite collapsed in the late 1940s and 1950s, and of their wives. Individuals’ stories are told with sympathy and sensitivity. Some former mineworkers found jobs outside the region, mostly in New Jersey and the Philadelphia area, and eventually moved their families (the authors call them “migrants”).

Some former mineworkers commuted weekly to jobs outside the region, at least for a while (“commuters”). And some stayed in the anthracite region (“persisters”). Of the three groups, migrants eventually enjoyed the highest standard of living. Commuters endured grueling travel or weekly separation from their families, and many eventually moved their families closer to their jobs or found work closer to home. Persisters fared the worst economically, often suffering long-term unemployment, but kept

their old social ties intact. Among all groups, wives generally continued to work, although non-mining jobs in the region did not pay well. As might be expected, mineworkers who were disabled — for example, by black lung disease — or who were eligible for retirement had little incentive to move, and most chose to be persisters.

The seventh and most optimistic chapter describes the lives of children of mineworkers who lost their jobs in the late 1940s and 1950s. This chapter is based mostly on interviews and a mail survey of high school graduates from the Panther Valley section. On average, these children fared much better economically than their parents. With the encouragement of their parents, nearly all of these children completed high school and a substantial number went on to college or nursing school.

Although their parents could offer only limited financial support for higher education, a substantial number of children served in the military and thereafter enjoyed support from the GI Bill. After finishing their education, again with the encouragement of their parents, many children left the anthracite region permanently for opportunities elsewhere. It is noteworthy that the most mobile and successful members of the younger generation were those with post-high school education.

The final chapter summarizes the current condition of the anthracite region. In a number of respects, the region still bears the scars of the coal industry. Abandoned coal mines remain as eyesores and environmental hazards. Declining population has left empty houses, boarded-up storefronts, and even abandoned towns. Landfills and prisons have appeared throughout the region, welcomed by communities desperate for employment. The picture is not pretty.

Nevertheless, unemployment has receded in recent decades as younger workers have left the region and older workers have retired.

The book's great strength is description, as the above summary only begins to suggest. The authors show us the decline of anthracite from many perspectives: employment and population

statistics, national politics, labor struggles, intra-union conflict, community activism, and especially the struggles of individual mineworkers and their families. The description is thorough, nuanced, and careful, yet highly readable. The text is even supplemented with almost fifty photographs.

The book is weaker on causal analysis and prescription. The appendix tables include production and detailed demographics, but not coal prices or wage rates. Of all the “forces” that the authors identify as driving the rise and fall of anthracite, market forces are viewed as secondary. The authors criticize coal companies, the UMWA, and state and federal governments for doing too little to halt the decline of the coal industry or to help the region diversify by attracting new industry, but their arguments are not always convincing.

Should coal companies have kept operating at a loss? Such a proposal is obviously unrealistic for the long term.

Should the UMWA have fought more aggressively to keep the mines open? The authors point to European countries where mineworkers’ unions were able to negotiate much better terms. But those countries nationalized their coal industries after the Second World War so their mineworkers were effectively government employees. Public-sector workers can use the ballot box to pressure their employers into subsidizing their workplaces. By contrast, private-sector unions in declining industries have little leverage. Strikes only accelerate a private-sector industry’s decline, as this book shows. While there is no excuse for union corruption and autocracy, it is not likely the UMWA could have kept mines open much longer except possibly by making wage concessions.

Should governments have done more to prop up employment in anthracite coal? Romance and nostalgia aside, coal mining is still a dangerous and frequently disabling occupation. It seems wrong-headed to send workers down into mines for coal that is not needed. Moreover, subsidizing coal mines could have been quite costly.

Should governments have done more to recruit new industry to the anthracite region? Perhaps. Yet the authors’ evidence, while not

definitive, does suggest that such efforts did not usually bring a high return. The region was settled in the nineteenth century mostly for its coal, and had little else to offer new industry except an extensive railroad network, a large unemployed workforce, and a colorful past.

Should governments have prepared workers for economic dislocation through job retraining or higher-education subsidies? Here, the authors' own evidence is much more favorable.

Mineworkers themselves encouraged their children to get more education and those children that did so found economic security their parents lacked. But these children also left the region, in many cases. One senses that affection for place — so evident throughout this lovely book — has partially blinded the authors to the obvious value of education and out-migration for relieving hardship in a region dependent on a dying industry.

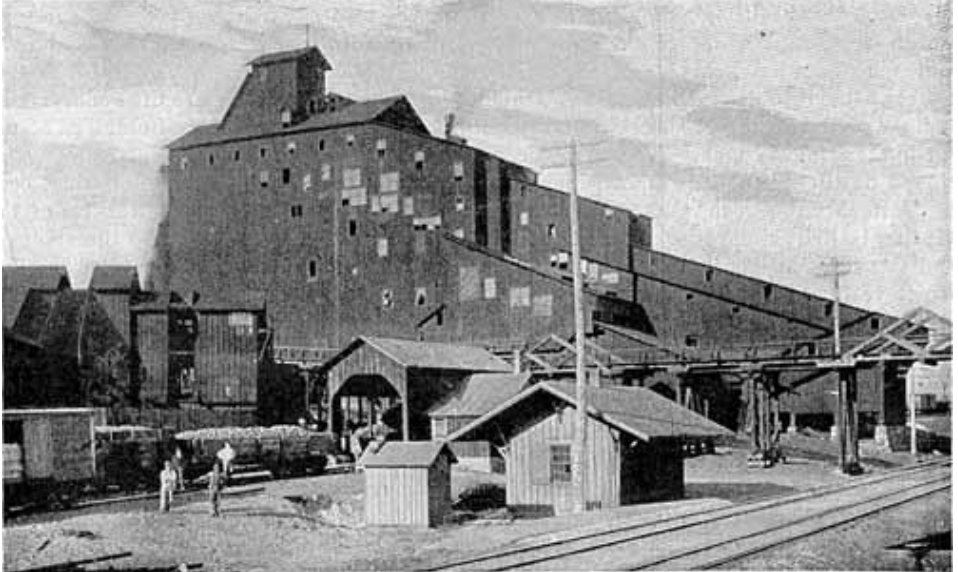
William M. Boal is Associate Professor of Economics at Drake University, Des Moines, Iowa. He is currently working on an econometric study of the effects of unionism on accidents in U.S. coal mining (including anthracite) in the early twentieth century.



Miner Pete Wenrich drills into wall rock to place dynamite at the RS&W Anthracite Coal Mine in Pottsville in 2003. (Carolyn Kaster/Associated Press)

Chapter 17 Will Anthracite Coal in NEPA Come Back Some Day?

A coal breaker was an ominous site with tracks galore for the coal cars



There is no question that Wilkes-Barre and surrounds is loaded with coal – the best coal for harvesting—anthracite coal. But for years, because of flooding and a diminishing demand, the coal companies in the area chose to cease operations. There is no denying that the anthracite is still ready when technology and attitude are ready to bring it in.

When I say it is huge. I mean it. Wilkes-Barre is a part of the largest anthracite coal deposit in the world. It is about 480 square miles of coal-bearing rock. It runs from northern Dauphin County through the valley past Pottsville, north to Hazleton and beyond to Wilkes-Barre and Scranton. If only!

As we noted in Chapter 12, the population and the economy of Wilkes-Barre began to slide with the deemphasis of anthracite coal as a staple from the 1940's onward. The population is now less than half of what it was when coal was clearly king. Wilkes-Barre, without mining today has one of the highest poverty rates in the country at 35%.

Did Mine Officials control all union activity in NEPA?

My dad thankfully was not a miner and was not at risk as miners were when coal was all-important. He was a union brewery worker at Stegmaier and he followed what was happening in the unions and in the breweries.

While the mines were still operating, my dad told me that the Miller Brewery came by looking to build a plant in Pittston. Northeastern PA was union territory, but the unions had their own agendas and my dad said they did not want Miller in town because they would take union workers and pay them more than the norm for NEPA. That was his perspective and he offered some backup.

It would not be good for the unions—or so the story goes. It is tough to find corroborating evidence for any of this. As the folklore goes, the union chiefs met with Miller officials and the supply of labor that Miller needed could not be assured as the unions wanted it to be available for mine activity. and so they went elsewhere.

It was not many years after that there were few workers deployed in the mines in NEPA and it sure would have been nice for Wilkes-Barre to have had the Miller Brewery eight miles away in Pittston.

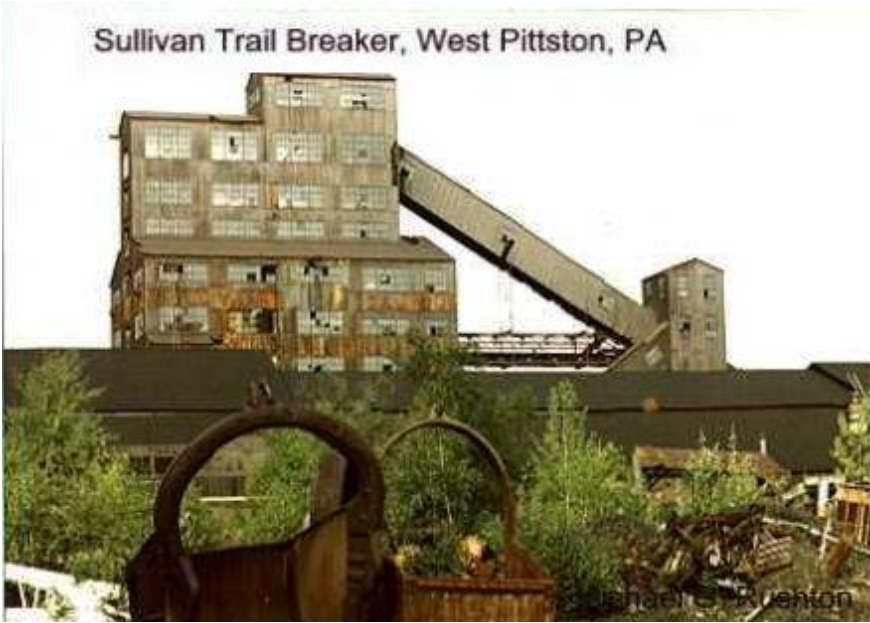
Something has to explain how as the mining industry left the area, that there were not a ton of good jobs and good companies coming to Wilkes-Barre. One thing is for sure, for any losses in jobs we have had over the last fifty years or so, we can't really blame the mines as they have been long gone.

Is Anthracite still vital in Northeast PA?

Some cowboys in the mining industry chose to say “NO.”

Let me first tell you about the Sullivan Trail Coal Company. Those of us in NEPA, who respect hard work, and have respect for those who go after treasures with improbable recovery should love the Sullivan Trail Coal Company success story. When a company like this succeeds, they should be heralded but not enough to invite other competitors into the foray. Sullivan Trail did such good things with flooded coalmines, they were able to buy a successor organization, the

Jeddo Coal Company. Not being into the notion of mining, per se, I can offer only what I found myself.



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<< Buy Coal Here Circa 1937

In my career with IBM, Sullivan Train ran its business on a large IBM System/3 Model 15. I was the IBM Systems Engineer that helped them move their business forward. Later the Jeddo company and all parts of Sullivan Trail moved computer operations to Wilkes-Barre.

By then, I was out of IBM and operated as an independent consultant to the company. I helped them move from old technology to new. It was from the System/3 to a System/38 and then to an AS/400.

Before we answer the question about the vitality of Anthracite, let's look at the tremendous success, a local Coal Company, Jeddo, has had in its Anthracite Mining Operations. The below story of Jeddo comes from their web site <http://www.jeddocoal.com/>

The people that make up Jeddo Coal Company have a long history in the Pennsylvania anthracite industry. In 1934, the company's founders pooled their resources and purchased the flooded Sullivan Trail Mine located in the Borough of West Pittston.

Contrary to popular opinion, these men believed that the mine was still commercially mineable despite a persistent flooding problem thought to result from seepage out of the nearby Susquehanna River. The water problem, in fact, was not related to the Susquehanna River, and with the use of more powerful water pumps, the Sullivan Trail Mine became a commercial success providing the necessary capital for the acquisition, development and mining of other coal properties.

The founding partners continued to aggressively expand their coal operations by acquiring additional coal properties throughout the counties of Lackawanna, Luzerne, Carbon and Schuylkill, including the prime coal properties of the Lehigh Valley Coal Company. Ultimately in 1964, they acquired a substantial coal property located near Hazleton, Pennsylvania, known as the Jeddo Basin Property.

The Jeddo Basin Property is currently the site of Jeddo Coal Company's major strip mining operations. Today, the heirs of these founding pioneers, along with a management company headed by Charles E. Parente, continue the business with the same commitment to hard work, quality and reliable and dedicated service to our customers.

For the answer to the question *Is Anthracite Still Vital in Northeast PA?*, we don't have to go back far in the archives of the Citizens Voice.

On June 12, 2015, Elizabeth Skrapits of The Citizens' Voice wrote an article titled *Anthracite mining remains vital in Northeast Pa.* Our thanks to the Citizens voice for this great perspective of an industry that was once everything in Pennsylvania. There may not be any collieries

open in Wilkes-Barre these days but as we have already discussed, there is coal in them thar hills.

Updated Jun 12, 2015 at 8:21 PM

WILKES-BARRE — Black diamonds might not have as many settings these days as they did a century ago, but they haven't lost their luster.

Although mining operations have scaled back considerably from the decades in the 19th and 20th centuries, when coal fueled the Industrial Revolution and beyond, there is still a stable market for anthracite — the hard coal that northeastern Pennsylvania has the country's largest supply of — for heating and industrial purposes.

“Contrary to what people are saying, we're still alive and kicking,” said Duane Feagley, executive director of the Pennsylvania Anthracite Council.

Anthracite, formed by higher temperature and pressure, has a higher carbon content and burns cleaner and hotter than bituminous or “soft” coal. The state has three large anthracite coal fields: the northern, which runs through Luzerne and Lackawanna counties; the middle field, which is in Carbon, Northumberland, Susquehanna, Schuylkill and southern Luzerne counties; and the southern field, which runs through Dauphin, Schuylkill and Carbon counties.

“It's not as big as it used to be, but it's still a vital part of Pennsylvania's economy,” said John Stefanko, deputy secretary for the state Department of Environmental Protection's office of active and abandoned mine operations. Today, about 95 percent of the anthracite mined is from the Hazleton area south, Feagley said.

Stefanko said there are 12 active deep mines in northeastern Pennsylvania — in Dauphin, Northumberland, southern Columbia and, in particular, Schuylkill counties.

However, the Knox mine disaster of Jan. 22, 1959, put an end to deep mining in the Luzerne-Lackawanna county area. Twelve miners died when the Susquehanna River broke through and flooded the interconnected underground mines in the area of the Port Griffith section of Jenkins Township.

Re-mining coal

Anthracite production is unique in that operators are re-mining areas that were previously mined, Stefanko said.

Feagley estimates that 98 percent of the anthracite produced is from existing mines.

Silverbrook Anthracite, an affiliate of the Casey-Kassa Coal Company, processes coal from anthracite blasted from a surface mine in Archbald and takes it to a breaker in Laflin, where it is separated and sized. The company also has a coal prep plant in the Nanticoke area.

“Everyone thinks ‘Oh, you just dig a hole and pull it out of the ground.’ It’s not that simple,” said Christina Kasa, whose family owns Silverbrook Anthracite. (The family uses an extra “s” in the original company name, Casey-Kassa.)

Kasa said mining involves permits, water sampling, bonding, visits from state inspectors and working with the Mine Safety and Health Administration of the U.S. Department of Labor.

Although millions of tons of anthracite have been mined since John and Abijah Smith shipped the first commercial load of it down the Susquehanna River in 1808, there’s still a lot left: “We’re probably talking tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of tons,” Feagley said. “There’s still plenty of coal in the anthracite coal mining region.”

With the goal of converting to “cleaner and greener” sources of energy, there has been a reduction in coal production as coal-fired power plants are closing or converting to natural gas.

However, since soft coal is mainly used in energy generation, “It’s definitely affecting the bituminous region more than the anthracite region,” Stefanko said. “There are ebbs and flows.”

Anthracite is unique in that production is relatively consistent, Stefanko said. He said that in 2011, 8.4 million tons were mined in Pennsylvania; in 2012, 9.6 million tons — overseas companies had mines flooded, so there was an increase in exports — in 2013, 9.1 million tons were mined, and it is estimated that 8.8 million tons were mined in 2014.

Of the anthracite mined, usually only 80,000 to 100,000 tons come from underground; the rest of production is split between refuse coal processing and surface mining operations, Stefanko said.

Stabilized market

Mike Mellish, an industry economist with the U.S. Energy Information Administration, also says the use of coal for energy is “kind of in a decline,” but it is still a pretty big share of total generation.

The game-changer for coal started around 2008, when natural gas prices plummeted, he said. That was about the time drilling for natural gas in the Marcellus Shale started to take off.

There are also more renewable energy options, including wind- and solar-powered energy generation, Mellish noted.

Mellish said the administration sees natural gas prices beginning to rise in the long term, “which stabilizes coal in our long-term projections.” But don’t expect new coal-fired power plants: The forecast calls for 20 percent of the existing ones to be retired without being replaced. Stefanko said the main reason DEP tracks production is that all active coal operators across the country have to pay a fee to the federal government for the abandoned mine reclamation fund.

This money is granted back to the coal mining states based on historical production, and, he noted, “We have probably the largest historical coal problem than any other state, which allows us to get the majority of grant money.” Last year Pennsylvania received \$44 million from the federal government for mine reclamation, Stefanko said.

DEP works with organizations, including the Ashley-based Earth Conservancy, to restore former mine land. The Earth Conservancy is committed to restoring 16,000 acres of mine-scarred land, mainly through the South Valley region. The nonprofit organization has already created multimillion-dollar industrial parks, donated land for recreational use and sold numerous parcels for construction of homes and businesses. Restoration and reuse of former mine land can help revitalize the economy, Stefanko pointed out.

Home heating

After World War II, oil and gas became more readily available, and people replaced their coal furnaces, Feagley said.

But recently, when heating oil and electricity became more expensive, there was a renaissance with coal heaters, he said. Many people are choosing coal instead of oil or wood, and you don’t get the same kind of creosote buildup with anthracite that you do with wood, he said. Coal-burning heaters and furnaces are still manufactured.

“Often people pick up coal to help reduce heating costs if they have oil or electricity,” Feagley said. “We’re seeing that market remain steady and growing.”

Feagley also noted that about 20 years ago, sellers started bagging the coal, making it more user-friendly. Back in the day, coal was delivered by truck into coal bins.

Natural gas prices are lower, so it's difficult to compete with that — but, Feagley pointed out, gas lines don't extend everywhere, particularly in rural areas.

Silverbrook Anthracite sells coal directly to buyers, mainly for home use. "I think the majority of our customers use it as a supplement to their heat," Kasa said.

There are also older customers who don't want to change over to a different home heating fuel, she said.

The company used to sell coal to Kingsford for use in making charcoal briquets, and sometimes sells it for use in landscaping, Kasa said.

Buy while it's hot

Just as people don't want to think about air conditioning in the winter, they don't want to think about home heating in the summer, Kasa said. But, she noted, "Summer is the perfect time to get your coal bin filled." It's cheaper, and there are no worries about it freezing into big chunks due to the water used in processing it, Kasa said.

In addition, rice coal, a popular size for home use, becomes scarce in the winter.

"We actually run out sometimes. I'm sure other companies do too," Kasa said.

Feagley said anthracite has commercial heating and industrial applications, such as in steel manufacturing and sugar beet refining.

Since it is rich in carbon, the highest-grade anthracite is used for water filtration, including in municipal treatment plants, Stefanko said. The high carbon content and the fact that it yields a high BTU when it burns make anthracite useful in metal smelting and fabrication, he said.

"There are a lot of uses still out there for it," Stefanko said.

Our thanks again to Elizabeth Skrapits and the Citizens Voice. Nice work!

It may take a long while before coal comes back as an industry to Wilkes-Barre proper because of the Knox Mine Disaster and the fact that water now fills the shafts and the tunnels, but King Coal is definitely not dead in Northeastern PA and the surrounding counties that have an abundance of anthracite.

Who knows when or whether underwater robots , aka water drilling drones will take their lunch pails and lights into the mines and be operated from way up on the dry earth. Then, I would expect that we will see mining in a big way return to the *Valley With A Heart*. Why not?

<https://papost.org/2018/12/12/a-new-coal-mine-is-opening-in-pennsylvania-is-trump-to-thank/>

Coal is not dead

Who knows what the future of coal is for Wilkes-Barre and surrounds. One thing we do know is that the mining of anthracite in the area is on the increase. In recent times, the President of the US has gotten some credit for his support of coal as a US energy source. Here is the beginning of a nice article by papost.org. The entire piece is available at the URL above. After this, we will close out this chapter on Coal and Wilkes-Barre.

PAPost.org is a digital-first, citizen-focused news organization to hold Pennsylvania's government accountable to its citizens.

The mission of PA Post is to connect Pennsylvanians to their state, and each other, with accountability and deep-dive reporting that is multimedia, digital-first, audience-focused and distributed statewide.

Here is the beginning of the referenced article:

A new coal mine is opening in Pennsylvania. Is Trump to thank?

The article is written by Jen Kinney, Keystone Crossroads

“We’re not dead yet, we’ve still got a pulse in Mahanoy City.”

(Mahanoy City) –Tom Maziekas’ house in Mahanoy City faces a row of empty lots. Rowhomes once stood there, but they suffered the fate of many buildings in this once-booming coal town in northeastern Pennsylvania: a fire, then rubble, now blight.

Scenes like this are common in the borough — dilapidated rowhomes, sooty with the exhaust of passing cars, empty glass storefronts, boomtowns that have seen better days.

But Maziekas, who has lived his whole life in Mahanoy City and is now the borough council president, is hopeful for the future.

“We’re not dead yet, we’ve still got a pulse in Mahanoy City,” he said. “Thank God Trump lifted all the regulations on coal...coal is gonna be king.”



In the picture above, Mahanoy City Borough Council President Thom Maziekas talks Dec. 4, 2018, about the struggles of his town that has a population of 4,100 residents of which 76% are unemployed. (Matt Smith for Keystone Crossroads)

From the campaign trail to today, President Donald Trump has promised he would bring back coal and manufacturing jobs to the United States — and he’s been specifically referencing Pennsylvania.

“The miners of Pennsylvania, we’re digging coal again,” Trump said in June 2017. “When I campaigned for president, I said we’d end the war on coal and put our incredible miners — and that’s what you are, you’re incredible — back to work.”

In the anthracite coal regions of Northeastern Pennsylvania, this optimism has been music to the ears of many.

After all, coal created places like Mahanoy City. Anthracite is a particularly pure, high-heat, high-carbon form of coal that, in the United States, is only found in this region. In the early 1900s, over 200,000 people worked the mines around Mahanoy City, including many of the town's then 16,000 residents...

Coal may help Wilkes-Barre in the future. It may not. The reserves are still here. We all must buckle up to see what form the next great rescue for Wilkes-Barre actually takes. So far, I am inclined to say: "We'll take it!" If it is coal, so be it!

Chapter 18 A WB Neighborhood Hero—Albert Peters



Wilkes-Barre Fire Station—Corner of High & Parrish Rolling Mill Hill

If I had a picture of Peters' Economy Store, I would gladly place it right here—right under the Fire Station. If you have one, please send it to me.

Peters Economy across from the SWB Colliery

The fire station shown above is built on top of a one-mile deep mine shaft that was once the main elevator to the South Wilkes-Barre colliery. Tracks would take empty coal cars to the shaft elevator. They would go down and connect with tracks in the mine tunnels. Then, the miners would fill up the cars and send them back up the elevator where they would go off to the **Breaker** on a different set of rail tracks to be broken to various pieces—like those shown in the Sullivan Trail Ad in Chapter 17..

I hope the steel under the Fire Station is strong. There is about a mile of vertical open space under the mine shaft. Across Parrish Street to the left of the Fire House picture above is Margarita Azul, a nice Mexican Restaurant, which was Arlene's for fifty or more years.

Straight ahead across High Street was the Peters Economy Store building which has morped into other businesses over the years. It

was a great store doing business on that spot until it moved to the corner Parrish & Brown streets.

When I was seventeen just out of high school, I drove the store's grocery delivery van. Great job! Great people—related to the Pete's stores and the famous Peters' Ice Cream. Caddy Corner from the colliery was my good buddy George Elias's grandmother's house where he spent his summers.

Butchie Peters, the current proprietor of the Peters' Stores and his brother Thunsie Paters the current consiglieri of the business, know what a great man their dad Albert Peters always was. Many neighborhood people would not have made it through the depression or the war without their orange "tick" books that were as good as cash at Peters'.

I know that Mr. Peters could never have been repaid for all he provided for people without the money to buy groceries, during their tough times. He was our neighborhood's savior for many. My dad loved him. He gave us credit and my dad paid from the book every week when he got paid by the Stegmaier Brewery.

Butchie Peters respected the work of his dad and he shared with me that his dad propped up a lot of needy people in the depression era and during the war and other times. I know that is true because everybody loved him. He was one of a kind. I suspect in other neighborhoods in the City, there are many other local merchants who were heroes during these tough times—the depression and then WWII. The Supermarket store had not really yet arrived, and because mostly everybody walked everywhere, everybody in the neighborhoods knew each other.

My father told me a great true story—they're the best kind—that happened at the end of World War II. Albert Peters called all the neighbors together to celebrate the US victory and the fact that the "boys" would be coming home. His own son Thunsie was still over in Europe at the time engaged in mop-up operations. The celebration event happened in the middle of High Street in this area of the City.

Mr. Peters bought a big keg of local beer and he put it in the middle of High Street, tapped it and provided all that was needed for the

neighborhood people to come out to celebrate this historic event in US history. It was all on Mr. Albert Peters. He provided everything for the celebration. It was a reason to celebrate and a great man and Wilkes-Barre hero to many, Albert Peters made sure everybody had a great time. I am proud to have been Mr. Peters' Wilkes-Barre Record morning paper boy in his home on Blackman Street for seven years.

In 2015 when Peters Ice Cream on the corner of Parish and Blackman sold my book, *Wilkes-Barre PA: Return to Glory*, I stopped by to see how things were going and to drop off some more books. At the same time, I gave Thunsie his own copy of the book. I had worked for Thunsie in my youth selling Ice Cream cakes and shoveling his sidewalk and whatever else he asked. That's how I got the money to buy my first train.

When I saw Thunsie and Butchie Peters and Johnnie Hyder in the store, I asked if I could read a few passages from the book. Thunsie could not see as well as when he was bowling nothing but strikes at the Wilkes-Barre Republic's six-lane Bowling Alley on Blackman Street before the fire in 1980. I was often his pinboy. They all agreed to permit me to read a passage.

I read the story of their dad and what a great a man he was and how he put on the famed WWII celebration on High Street. Thunsie noticed that he was not in any of the passages that I had read, and he told me why. He was still in the War overseas doing the mop up work after the US declared victory. In the 2015 book, I did not know this, so it did not make it to that book until the update.

I thank Mr. Thunsie Peters for his great service in the war and I hope he lasts forever. I was his boy Friday in many ways at the time. I was too young to mind the store but he found lots of other work for me to do for many years.

He made ice cream on Blackman and Brown for what seems like a million years and it was the best of the best. He is a good man, and he was a good boss. I always thought the best of him and still do. He is a man with a great sense of humor. Though I am 70 years old as I write these words, he still treats me like a ten-year old kid – not exactly but I figure his demeanor towards me is just in case he needs the snow

removed from the sidewalks in the future and the other “kids” are not available.

OK, I no longer have to shovel the sidewalks at Blackman and Brown but I do remember. It helped me be a better man. Thank you Thunsie. God bless you forever. Sorry I missed you in the last book. When this book is printed, I will be up the store looking for you with your very own copy. Yes, I will bring Butchie a copy also.

Chapter 19 High Street Was One of Many Neighborhoods



My house (the white one on left) is now a single dwelling It was 363-361 High

Something everywhere for everybody

Let me now walk you from around the South Wilkes-Barre Colliery, a block from my boyhood home, to the many places where the miners and the rest of the adults in our neighborhood would find both comfort and fun. Walking down the street, the last house on the far right above with the reddish roof is Margarita Azul's. It is across the street from the one-time Colliery / now Fire House.

The Colliery was, what we might say, in the foothills of the Rolling Mill Hill Section of Wilkes-Barre. It was the first thing you saw. It was so huge, it dwarfed both Peters' Economy Store and Arlene's Bar & Grill, the predecessor to Azul's. The Colliery took up all the land on the south side of High Street from Parrish Street to Dana Street.

The miners and the neighborhood folks and many from outside the neighborhood frequented the many taverns close by the colliery in the coal years, which before I was born were also the war years. Folks from the neighborhood and from all around Wilkes-Barre, frequented many of these spots long after the baby boomers were making demands from their young parents. There was and still is lots to do in

the Rolling Mill Hill; just not as much as in the older glory days or when I was growing up. .

I won't be telling a lot of stories of the great Rolling Mill Hill, my neighborhood, in Wilke-Barre but there are many stories that I told in the WB book. Please indulge me for a side-bar however, since I lived on High Street until I was 23 years old. Then, I moved 2 blocks away, a ½ block from High Street on Prospect Street.

Besides Albert Peters, I have a personal heroine who helped many besides me be better neighbors and better people. A wonderful lady, a neighbor, the daughter of Mary Nick Solomon, as she was known, and Nick Solomon. She was like a neighborhood guardian angel. She bugged me all my life about being something she thought I should be. How nice it was in my neighborhood to have such a wonderful lady rooting for me. Her family lived across High Street from our family and just two doors down from Peters' Economy Store.

She loved that I ran for public office in 2010 as a congressional candidate, and she kept telling me that I should run for Mayor of Wilkes-Barre. Well Irene, I heard you. I ran. I regret that we lost you to the Lord last year as you are one of the finest people I have ever known. It was my time to run. Thank you for the urging and for the confidence. I loved our strategy meetings about the signs in Wilkes-Barre and everything about you and your husband Ralph, and your son Ralph, both of whom love you to pieces. Me too!

Irene knew that I write a lot of books and four years ago, I was working on my fifty-ninth book – *Wilkes-Barre PA, Return to Glory*. A few years before that, she had asked me to work with her to write a book about growing up on High Street. I always planned to do it and her passing will not stop the two of us from getting that book done some day. When it is, I plan to dedicate it to Irene Jachimiak, (Irene Solomon) a princess of a lady—none finer.

My good buddy George Elias from High Street, reminded me in my original WB book before I brought it to Amazon, that I had missed a few folks from High Street when I wrote my acknowledgments. He is right! So, let me correct the record. First of all, Mrs Irene (Nick) Solomon Jachimiak was always my favorite resident from High Street.

I have a lot of folks there that I love like brothers and sisters. I have great regard for all my old neighbors. So before I get to the meat of suggestions to help bring our City back to life again, I am going to make a virtual trip around High Street and close surrounds right now. Please come with me.



Peters Ice Cream

Let's begin at Peters' Ice Cream Store (picture above). Think about me as a ten-year old shoveling this monstrous sidewalk. Moving from the corner of Blackman Street and Brown Street down Blackman to High and then to Parish, in that sequence, you would find my buddy "Thunsie" Peters' place. He is the man who invented Peters' Ice Cream.

I already divulged that I shoveled his sidewalks and I sold and delivered his delicious homemade ice cream cakes before I was ten years old. Angel Albert Peters Sr., Angel Emily Peters, and entrepreneur Butchie Peters, the current Godfather of the Peters' Ice Cream dynasty and Pete's convenience stores were all associated with the store.

All lived and worked in the High Street area. The ice cream of course was Thunsie's recipe. The Peters' lived on Blackman Street midway

between Brown and High. I was their paper boy for the Wilkes-Barre Record. They never complained.

Up just a little bit up from The Peters' homestead was Henry Vivian, who was a great barber and also one of my paper customers. After Vivian's, Stanley's Bike Shop took over in the same building. Now it is a house / apartment complex. Sandy Rapchinski finally settled the Stanley's bike guy down. Many a bike I bought for my kids at that place. Most were like-new but used.

Across the street from Stanley's was the Galardi family, WB Record paper customers of mine. They ran RoKay Flower on South Main Street. Going down the block from them a few homes, were the Nameys.

Leo's family was on the left moving down. They were right next door to the Alexander family. Down the street just a bit was young Russel and Lillian Daubert's home and down further was Daubert's Grocery store where Betty and Russel Daubert minded the business for years before they sold to Fritz., who sold and repaired Hoover Vacuums.

Across the street from Leo Namey was Albert Peters and then the Mike Namey family. All were my paper customers. The ones I skipped were not customers and I did not know them well. Mike Namey Sr. recently passed away.

My best buddy after William, who I will discuss in the next few paragraphs, moved to Back Mountain early in life. He lived in the second house up from High next to Mike Namey's. I called Bobby Broody--Bibska. His mom Julia grew Italian tomatoes in their small backyard. They were great. Bobby was a really nice person and he was a speedster on our vacant lot football games. Later Joan Kitchen and Andy moved into the Broody home.

Next comes angel Cathy, Ben and Lois Witos on the corner of High and Blackman. Across the street was the big Silk Mill. The Kelly's and McKeowns (my family) lived right next to the Mill on the left side of the double block. Down from the Witos's on High Street, there was first the Blaine family with Gerry, Billy, Carley, Ginger, & Cookie. Later in the same home were the Donnelly's. Dad and Mom Donnelly were Dan & Berti, and the kids were Jimmy, Larry, Debbie,

and Brian. Right next to them were George and Lizzie Volpetti and their son George, a fine football player at Meyers. .

The Volpetti's were the best. Their son is a great guy also. He is a legend as a great surgeon. I know from friends that one time after his dog was hit by a car and was almost dead, George operated on his own dog to save him. The Vet knew the dog anatomy and George had the micro-surgery skills to save the family pet. Except for one day when out of nowhere, George hit me between the eyes from across the street with an excellent pea shooter shot, George has a great record with me. We're both Kings College graduates. He's got me by three years.

Across the street from the Volpettis' at 363 High was my family. There is a picture kicking off this chapter that you can reference. We lived next to the Mill. There were nine of us in three bedrooms, and we were fine. Next door to us on High Street was the Sallitt family. I do not remember Mom and Dad Sallitt when I was really young but kids a bit older than me were George and Mary Ellen Sallitt.

Over time the Kitchens moved into this building with Red and Loretta, Joan and Chester. We loved them and their cats and Rinny the dog and Momma cat, for sure.

Then came a driveway and early on before I turned six, I played with my best buddy William, who was exactly my age. His siblings were Edna, Rudolph, and Johina. I ate the finest Syrian food at their kitchen table—mmmm!!! They moved south when I was five and it really ripped my heart out losing my best friend. I never saw him again. Hazel and Frank Nockley, Sr. moved in after them. Franky Jr. always had a great car such as his classic Ford Galaxy convertible. My High Street Buddy George Elias says it was a 1963.

Across the street from us again we have Angels Ruth and Joe Solomon—Ricky, Danny, & Marilyn, who are wonderful people, always ready to help. Ricky was a year or two younger than me and we played sports together all the time. Danny is now a Doctor and a great man.

Then next to the Solomon's were the Pahlers—mom & dad (John), Helen, Chazzy, Rita, Shirley, Jim, and Joe. It was a double block

with all Pahlers—great people including Regina and Sandy Johnson. Joe Pahler and Carly Blaine were always working on bikes. My dad bought a bike from Carly Blaine for me for \$1.00. It was my first bike. Carly had built it from junk parts from Solomon's Junk Yard across from the South Wilkes-Barre Colliery down High street from our house.

Across from the Nockleys were Ham, Zacqua, and Sadie Abraham. I shoveled their sidewalk also and cut their grass with Ham's electric mower when I was a kid. Ham was most concerned that I did not cut my toes off and that I did not cut the extension cord... I think it was in that order.

One house up on Holland Street from High today once lived my good buddy Irene and her husband Ralph Jachimiak and son Ralph. Irene is with God now, but she is still with us also. Ralph Sr. still lives on Holland. Also on Holland were Bobby Stanton, George Yuhas, Steamboat Joe Radzavicz along with Annie, Murph, and Barbara Feldman. Barbara now lives in South Wilkes-Barre. Later in my life, my dad would go to the Race Track with Ralph Jachimiak and Irene and Murph Feldman and they had a ball betting on the ponies.

Back to High Street and Holland. The Elias family lived on the left side all my life while on High Street. Mr. & Mrs. Elias, and Jenny, Helen, George, Eleanor, and Joseph "Skippy" Elias made a very nice family. I hope I did not miss anybody. I loved them all.

Across High from the Elias,' who are not the same Elias's as those on the corner of Parish and High, were Mike and Sam Barrouk. Mike was the grandpop of the family (Jiddou) who ran the great candy store right across the street from the end of Holland Street. After it closed when I was not much older than five, I missed it. But, all the neighbor kids including Steve Barrouk Jr. whose grandpop once ran the store, used to sit on the steps at night and discussed the matters of the world.

Mike (Jiddou) and Sam Barrouk lived on the left side of the house. On the other side of the double block was Steve Sr., Carmella, Steve, Jr. and Beverley Barrouk. Steve Jr. is active with the Chamber of Commerce. We have always been friends. Then, came the Eget family when I was an adolescent. Before them were the Davis's – Ernie,

Esther, and Emily. I had not seen George Eget in a while but we just made contact again a few years ago. Nice guy as always.

Dave (Dy) Amos and the Amos family including Jackie Dare lived right next to the Egets. Mr. Amos was a blacksmith and he rented the garage behind Arlene's Saloon to apply his trade. George Elias's grandparents lived across High street on the corner. We played hard-ball catch across High Street with the Elias garage and Dave Amos's Blacksmith shop as backstops. We were there almost every morning every summer. Mr. Amos was OK with that. At one point, the Zekus' family lived next to the garage after it had been vacant for many years.

After the Amos', there was Mrs. Louise Daelida / Hogan and Ann Lee Hogan and Michael Daelida, RIP. Michael died way too young. They lived right after the Amos's house and before the Zekus'. Ann Lee was my sister Nancy's really good friend after the Davis's moved out.

Emily, Ester, and Ernie Davis, his wife, and another daughter whose name also began with an E (maybe Edna), lived there before the Egets. The Davis' eventually moved further up on High Street / Virgin Lane right by the Roper family. My brother Joe and I, the Ropers' paper boy just said last night that all the Roper girls were both pretty and nice. We were the paper boys for 72-84 customers and we got to see everybody or so it seemed.

And, of course across from all of these folks (Egets, Amos's, etc) was Nick, and Mary Nick, Zeke, and Joey Solomon. Zyrah, Stan Fidrych's mom (Stan was one of us who played ball all the time on High Street) and Irene Solomon Jachimiak who lived there early on before these two daughters of Nick and Mary Nick Solomon were married.

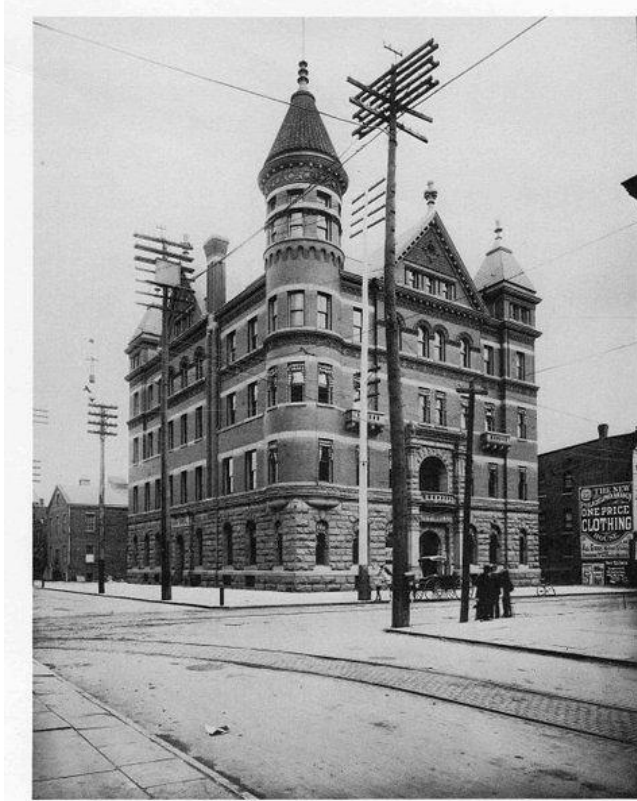
On the corner of Parish Street and High my good friend George Elias's Jiddou and Sittou lived. George spent lots of time with them. It made him more accessible to all the ball games and activities on High Street, which was a tar and stone creation. Every few years, the City would come by and patch holes and then an oil truck would come by followed by a truck dropping red stones. Eventually, there was a new street ready for traffic.

At the end of this first block on high from Blackman was Parrish Street. Across and just a little bit up, and that is as far as we are taking this sub-trip into the High Street subsection, lived Mr. Clem Eydler, and Mrs. Eydler, and my buddy Billy Eydler, who was an honorary member of High Street. Peters Economy Store was at that corner for years. The colliery was across High from them.

At the last corner of High and Parish long before Azul's fine place was Arlene Rowan's Saloon once called Tommy's Place. She ran her husband Tommy's Place and then renamed it to Arlene's a lot of years after he was gone. This tavern made the street a lot nicer for the miners across the way at the South Wilkes-Barre Colliery. The short wall outside the place was about chair height and the miners would come over from across the street and open their black pails and enjoy their lunches. I lived less than a block away on High Street so being a kid who hung around a lot, I got to know a lot of the miners. They sure enjoyed their lunches.

After work and I suspect before work, the miners would enjoy adult beverages at Arlene's. She ran a nice, clean, saloon right across the street from the colliery. A lot of whistle whetting occurred for sure. They had a nice but short shuffle-board and a huge dart room for the athletes in the neighborhood.

Chapter 20 Wilkes-Barre Sections



CITY HALL—WILKES-BARRE.

Look at the beautiful towers on the City Hall building to the left. Built in 1893, WB City Hall is a magnificent structure.

However, the towers seen in the picture that grace the building no longer exist. The “Hall” is just one block from Public Square on Market & Washington Sts. Today the Police Dept is right next door on N. Washington St.

To prove the picture is old, the towers exist. To prove the City at the time is old, look at the trolley tracks in the middle of the street heading from Public Square from East Market Street. Is that not neat. Maybe my idea of a train going around the city ought to be right on the street bed as shown in the City Hall Picture. It is funny how back when our parents did not have a pot to pee in, the infrastructure with a trolley could be built but today many think we can never afford a train with tracks around the City. I. of course, beg to differ.

When the towers were in disrepair, Wilkes-Barre decided not to fix them and instead cut them off. I ask in puzzlement, however: *“How much could it have cost to get some skilled masons at the time of their collapse to rebuild these magnificent towers?”* Not in Wilkes-Barre! Why? Like many things such as the one-time beautiful fountain on Public Square, and the beautiful swimming pools that once were a Wilkes-Barre

mainstay, our City Officials have used an Alfred E. Neuman “What me worry approach.” They always seek and find the easy way out.



<< City Hall Today-no towers

They got rid of the fountain and they got rid of the towers when there was an issue with them (maybe 50 years ago). They even got rid of the beautiful monument and garden at the end of Hanover Street for the Miner Family. It was always adorned ornately with the eye-catching flowers.

For the City ever to be great again, the public must hire politicians and elect officials who believe they can. We can no longer let it to chance. Worse than that we cannot vote for those who mock the idea of “Yes I can” because they believe they can’t. If a politician today believes they can’t; then they can do us all a forever by not running for Office. Please!

When I put the addendum into the original WB book, I had completed the "George Elias High Street Tour" and it gave me a start on the Angel Irene Jachimiak promise to write about High Street. . George of course is a longtime Wilkes-Barre resident and a long-time friend. Irene liked the addendum which included High Street and so did George. The High Street walk through in the prior chapter is what the beginning of a High Street book might look like. Thank you all for liking High Street and its many stories.

The City never seems to end

From High Street, as we chronicled in the *Wilkes-Barre: Return to Glory* book, you may recall that I went on to walk all of the Rolling Mill Hills Section as the first City section in that book. It began at the South Wilkes-Barre Colliery at the corner of High and Parrish streets, and at the end it came right back to the same block. Essentially, the

tour began where the Elias High Street tour left off if you cancel out the short run up Parrish a few homes to Billy Eydler's double block.

After the Rolling Mill Hill, I went to the next section and the next and the next until I had covered all the sections of Wilkes-Barre City. I loved writing about them all, but I won't repeat that here in this book.

For those who want to review the original work, it is available on the Internet in the book titled *Wilkes-Barre PA: Return to Glory*.

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0989995798>

Lots of stories in all sections of the city

There were many other neighborhoods in Wilkes-Barre's glory days just like ours (High Street) in the Rolling Mill Hill. There are still many great stories to be told. In the original WB book, we took a look at all of the other 'hoods' and sections and we told as many stories as we could.

But again all stories were from my own eyes or a designee such as my late cousin Pat Kelly (Parsons) and my nephew James Flannery (East End). Therefore, my coverage could not be as first-hand complete for nobody could actually be a native to all the many sections of Wilkes-Barre. In many instances, like I said, I got help from section natives who knew. They loved talking about their areas of the City and they loved seeing what they had to say when the book was printed.

It can be argued that some neighborhoods on the fringe and not close to the heart of their particular section, such as the Heights, the Mayflower, and the Iron Triangle actually are in multiple sections.

But the miracle of Wilkes-Barre is that each resident "knows" the section of the City in which they live. If you are not from that section, however, it is easy to be wrong. Other than Parsons and Miners Mills, both of which once were mapped out as Boroughs and originally had separate governments, the sections of Wilkes-Barre are somewhat mythical but nonetheless they are all magical.

Many of the taverns left over from the mining days are still in place in many sections of the City but most are not really thriving. The best thing I think we can do regarding neighborhood taverns, stores and activities is to support them to help bring back some of their former glory as we make our City a better place in which to live. The more we improve the city, the greater it will become.

I learned Tony Suchadelski's secret to running a successful saloon. His nephew Billy now runs the successor tavern to Tony's on Brown across from Jones Street. It is called Billy's Sports Bar. Tony's secret always was to keep his place neat and pristine. You work hard in order to do that. Like most modern bars, Billy's is somewhat darker than Tony's but just like his uncle's place, it is so clean you can eat off the floor.

I am not kidding. As a paperboy coming in to collect, I noticed that Tony's floor was actually shiny and waxed beautifully. It did look like you could eat off the floor. It was the cleanest of the many taverns in the Rolling Mill Hill, where I delivered the Wilkes-Barre Record.

A good City administration would provide the health inspections and perhaps even some down-home training to make sure the inside and outside of these older facilities can be maintained and beautified and kept clean for the whole City to enjoy.

The City can do this with a helpful hand, not a harassing tongue, reprimands, or fines. There is no reason why for simple electrical or plumbing issues, the city inspectors, to stay crisp in their trade could not help out a bit in the poorer areas to assure the job is done correctly. If the place's environment is not kept properly after help is given, then to protect the public, action would have to be taken.

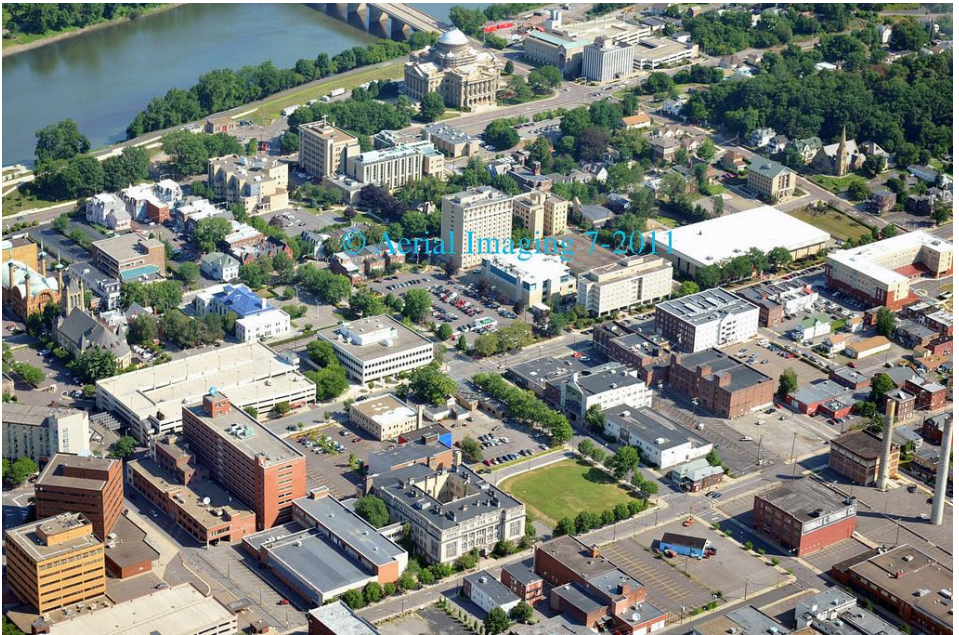
That would be the last remedy. Why not help a place in violation to get back in compliance rather than just evaluate and punish? An inspector can help Wilkes-Barre be a kinder, friendlier place. The establishment can donate to the City for help provided or parts used.

Just like me, you already know that nobody from the Rolling Mill Hill stayed 100% in their own neighborhood—even in the “olden days.” We liked other neighborhoods also. Just like we all got to Public Square a lot, and in the early days as a kid, my bike served me so well

in that regard, there were a lot of neighborhoods to explore. Adults and children often went to other sections of Town. Most of us came home at night, however to the Rolling Mill Hill, the Heights, South Wilkes-Barre or elsewhere as sleep was definitely needed.

These sections of the City in their glory days were just as exciting as the Rolling Mill Hill. Let's look at them below.

Twelve Discrete Sections & Neighborhoods



There are a number of sections and subsections in Wilkes-Barre. I shared with you in the last several chapters some of the streets in the Rolling Mill Hill Section. I put it on the top of the list of the City's sections below because it is where I grew up. It is the section of the city of which I know the most. Here is what I think is a fairly complete list of the sections in Wilkes-Barre PA.

- Rolling Mill Hill
- Iron Triangle
- The Heights
- North End
- Brookside

- Parsons
- Miners Mills
- South Wilkes-Barre
- East End
- Mayflower
- Goose Island
- Central City / Public Square

As noted, in the Return to Glory book, I take the time to tour all twelve sections of Wilkes-Barre. We're going to close this chapter by looking at the Hotel Sterling and that section of the City which included the Hotel Sterling and the two beautiful colleges in town – Wilkes University and King's College.

Signs of Decline

One of the most poignant reminders of Wilkes-Barre's recent decline from its days at the top is the startling absence of the once venerated Hotel Sterling from our skyline. This shot is from the Market Street Bridge from West Market St towards the Public Square. The Tower Building of the Hotel, which was located behind the front of the hotel and was in fact, the tallest structure in Wilkes-Barre.



Originally, when I wrote the first book, I was convinced that The Hotel Sterling was right down the street from Lowes and across the

street from Emmett Toole's. I was wrong on Emmett Toole's. Bernie Hummer, a friend from church and St. Conrad's Club gave me the correction.

Emmett Toole' Bar & Grill was located on 22 N. Washington Street. The politicians from the City kept it busy for years as it was so close to City Hall.

West Market was also a busy place with watering holes and eateries galore. Lowes' was at 35 W. Market; Treasure Island was at 59 W. Market; and Rooney's Seafood Restaurant and Grill was across the street where I thought Toole's had been. Its address was 40-42 W. Market Street. Those were the days. Thanks Bernie & John Rose for the data update. .

Some might call this a symptom of politics-as-usual, but we have got to believe the prior Mayor was very disappointed that he was not able to avoid the demolition of such a historic building (Sterling), and an opportunity for a Wilkes-Barre revival. Rooney's Treasure Island and Toole's were long gone for the saving, but Lowes Tavern packed it up just about five years ago.

And so, yes, right across the street from Lowes on West Market was a tavern by the name of Rooney's. I could not find much more information about it; but it lived there for years before it was torn down for the betterment of the City, or so I suppose.

Emmett Toole's will therefore never play a major role in Wilkes-Barre's return unless of course, we learn that it is really Emmett Kelly, the famous Clown, and he has been reincarnated to run the place. The Police Station now has taken Emmet Toole's place in the City landscape.

In the "not worth admitting" category, I had friends who could not figure a nickname for my first name of "Brian," so they found something to hang onto by remembering my last name was Kelly. Nobody called me "Grace," as in Grace Kelly but a few felt it OK to call me Emmett. I am always happy to be called—anything.

Wilkes-Barre loses when the wrecking ball wins

We all need to reflect on what we lost with the demise of Hotel Sterling and the most fabulous chandelier in all of Wilkes-Barre if not the whole Northeast. The Hotel Sterling was Wilkes-Barre's largest and most luxurious hotel while the City's population reached 88,000. Such a small city geographically had so much to offer. Today's young adults would pay dearly for that opportunity. It has passed but some of it is back, but not enough. We can and must do more! Just don't give up, please.

I am very skeptical about politics and politicians and their intentions. If I were given six million dollars, as I understand was turned over to CITYVEST, I would have fixed the roof of the Hotel Sterling first. Of course that is only if I did not want the building to decay away, which in fact, it did.

In searching for appropriate commentary and for appropriate pictures, I stumbled on one, source unknown. I do not know if this is real, but one thing is for sure. Both the six million and the Sterling are long gone. Can this picture be real? If it is, it tells us a lot. Can you imagine a casino where the Sterling once was? Did CITYVEST have a lot to gain?

CITYVEST Hotel & Casino????



The Sterling's guests from the time it opened included movie stars and nationally known politicians, who at the time at least, were not thought of as "bad guys." As commonly known, the Hotel Sterling

stood at River and Market streets for more than a century. Wilkes-Barre politicians let it die. Blame them and you will be right.

JFK's Motorcade in 1960 Passing the Hotel Sterling on River Street, WB



The Sterling hosted weddings, proms, and welcomings for dignitaries including President John F. Kennedy—shown above, Louis Armstrong and Danny Thomas. Its attractive marquee on River Street, seen in the above picture, was an inviting mainstay for those entering the City from the West side and all others.

By the way, the Kelly family from High Street were also guests of the Hotel Sterling. On our mom and dad's 25th Anniversary, my two brothers, brother Ed's wife Amelia, and my two sisters and I and my first girlfriend, Lucille Lewis, had the pleasure of taking our wonderful parents out to the Hotel Sterling's Sunday Smorgasbord. The Sterling was famous for this treat. Wow! I never saw so much food, and at 16 years old, when it was all over, I felt that I had eaten my share. Wilkes-Barre had it all. It was a great town for old and young. Such dreams need not ever die. Wilkes-Barre has more to give and then more to behold.

The Hotel Sterling opened the first time for business on August 14, 1898. It was a grand experience. Its first guests enjoyed a once in a lifetime treat. They experienced the biggest, most luxurious hotel Wilkes-Barre had ever seen. The property was named after businessman and investor Walter G. Sterling.

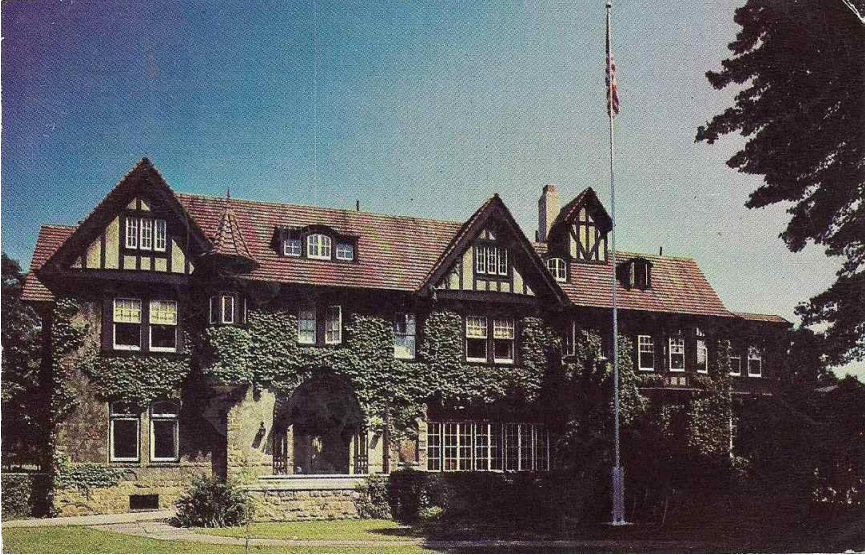
This grand hotel was seven stories tall and had a spacious, columned lobby that made it look as nice as the great metropolitan hotels all over America. Eventually, a huge tower was built. It was ripped down a few years before the main hotel was ever seen to be a potential casualty of political impropriety. The 14 story Plaza Tower had made the place the tallest building in Wilkes-Barre.

Wilkes-Barre was busy as bees in a hive in the early days of the twentieth century for sure and the new building was a reflection of just how well the city was doing economically. It had charm, and growing wealth and investor confidence. Everybody seemed to want to spend their precious bucks in Wilkes-Barre PA, which in the Wyoming Valley was in fact, the big city. Can we do that again? Yes, very patiently and with time.

The coal industry, upon which the whole area's economy was based at the time, was booming. I mean booming! Other industries followed to supply the needs of the miners and those making a big buck in this industry. Take a ride to Scranton and you will see huge homes. There are still some in the sections of Wilkes-Barre close to the river. Most of these mansions are now part of Wilkes University, a school with a beautiful campus right on River Street. Wilkes itself began as an adjunct location to Bucknell University. My son Brian, a Wilkes-Barre attorney, gained his BS Degree in Computer Science from Wilkes in 2002.

It had to be fun being in Wilkes-Barre when it was a boom town. Would it not be nice if we could arrest our tendency to stay on the other side of boom and bust back into a boom cycle for the City? Of course in the coal boom areas, industries such as railroading, manufacturing, and of course the selling of products as in the Hollenback store across W. Market Street from the Hotel Sterling were all rolling strong. Wilkes-Barre for years before the Flood of 1972 was a great place to live, work, and shop.

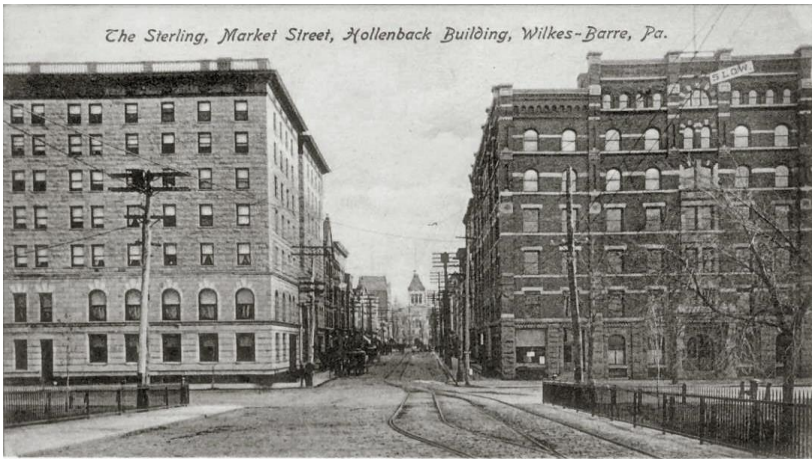
Bucknell Predecessor to Wilkes University Pre-1950's



For years before it was torn down, there was an apparent attempt to save the Hotel Sterling. Many cannot get over the fact that over six million dollars of taxpayer dollars were invested in saving the Hotel Sterling. Somehow, Wilkes-Barre gave up the dream of a revived Hotel Sterling! I hope it is the last dream we choose to give up on our way to making this once great City, great again.

By the way, the Hotel Sterling was not the first magnificent edifice to be torn down on this site. In 1870, before the Sterling, there was a wonderful Music Hall built on this site. It was the Wilkes-Barre Music Hall. I bet you did not know that. Look no further than the Sterling. Some of the old Music Theatre's original walls were strong enough to make it into the "new" Sterling as it was built.

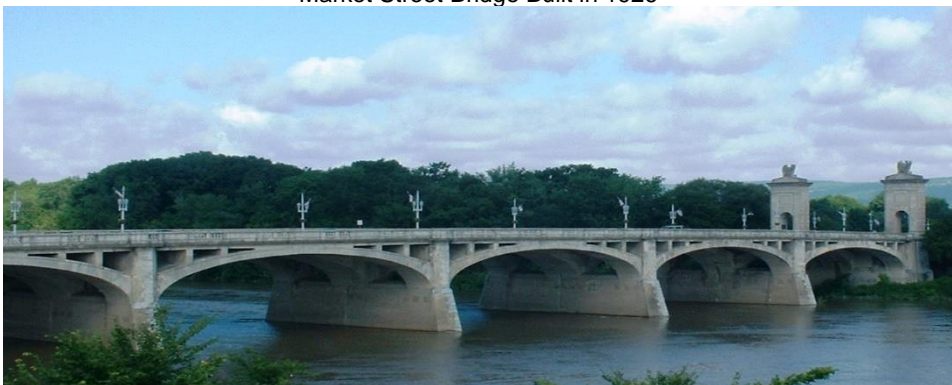
The picture of the Sterling on the next page was taken before the tower was built as seen in the picture on page 170. Notice also on the first picture on the next page that the towers of the Market Street Bridge are not there. That's because the new bridge had yet to be built. As we all know, the Market Street Bridge is a distinguished concrete arch bridge over the Susquehanna River between Kingston and Wilkes-Barre, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania. Few however know that the bridge was designed by the architectural firm of Carrère and Hastings and built between 1926 and 1929.



Wilkes-Barre Music Hall 1870 to 1895



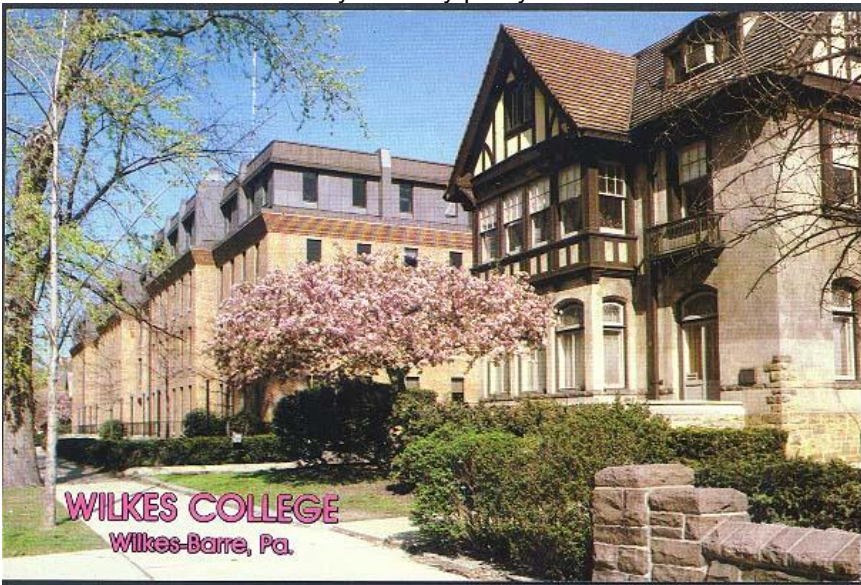
Market Street Bridge Built in 1926



See the towers on the bridge on the prior page. We already took a peek at Wilkes when it was Bucknell. Wilkes University was founded in 1933 as a satellite campus of Bucknell University, and it became an independent institution (College) in 1947. In January 1990, the institution was granted University status.

Moving down River Street from Hotel Sterling to the Wilkes University property today, we find one of the most beautiful campuses in all of Pennsylvania. Wilkes is also a very highly regarded university in Academic circle.

Wilkes-University – A very pretty view from River Street.



You can still see some of the grand buildings though some were destroyed in the 1972 flood. They once housed the well-oiled finery—the top citizens; the elite, and the best business people in Wilkes-Barre. From the huge mansions on River Street, these folks, who made life much better for all of the people in Wilkes-Barre because of their perspectives and investments, did not have too far to travel to attend great concerts at the Wilkes-Barre Music Hall.

There was another notable hotel set up even earlier in WB history right there by the Music Hall across West Market Street. This too was there when the Sterling was built. In 1831, The Phoenix Hotel was constructed on South River Street right near West Market. At four

stories, it was the area's first large hotel. In 1866, it was torn down to make way for the Wyoming Valley House, which itself was also a hotel. Historians who discuss this era suggest that there were lots of hotels; but there were not a lot of bricks at the time, and so large hotels were uncommon.

The Wyoming Valley Hotel River Street Wilkes-Barre



The old George. M. Hollenback dwelling and store was situated on the corner of the block on South River and West Market Street. It is pictured opposite the Sterling on Page 176. Perhaps the Hollenback Golf Course in the Parsons Section bears the name of this gentleman. Like the Phoenix Hotel, right nearby, which by the way had a nice bar called the Phoenix Tavern, the Hollenback place was a brick building. So, we know it was special.

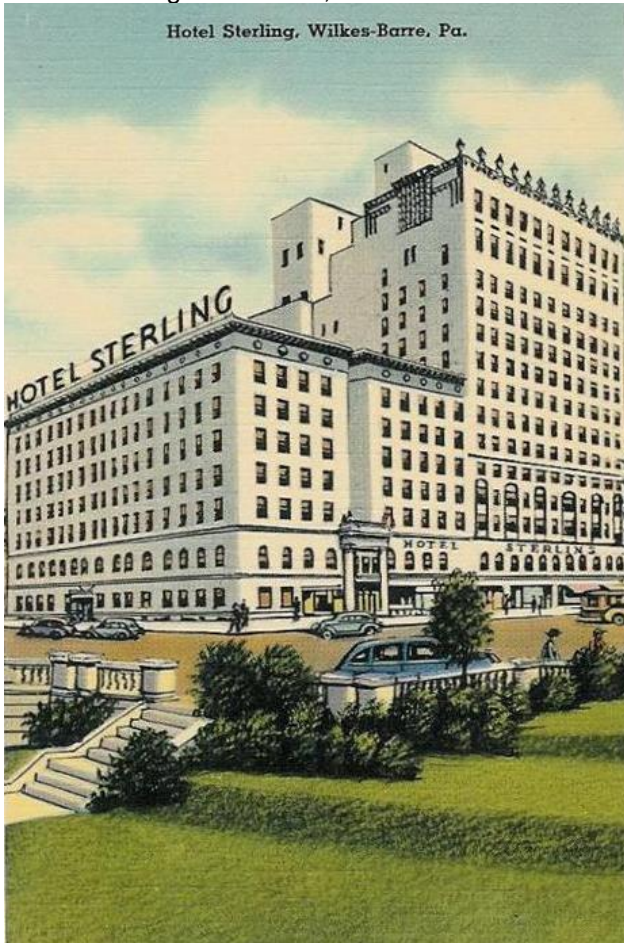
It was one of just four brick buildings in Wilkes-Barre at the time. The ground floor of this corner spot was a famous store for its day. In fact, it was a leading store in this part of the state. As noted previously, where the Wyoming Valley House stood—a spot where musicians and actors would practice their art, and live within their means, it had been originally occupied by what the locals called the Phoenix Tavern.

I found it funny that I have discovered fewer historical references to the Phoenix Hotel in early Wilkes-Barre times than to the Phoenix

Tavern. But, isn't that just like Wilkes-Barre. Are we not a town, where hard working people, often miners, from day one liked to enjoy themselves, and then some? Is that not one of the key notions to bring back a great Wilkes-Barre that the folks in this town will love. Why should it not be also a place where those from elsewhere might wish their own towns would emulate?

The Hotel Sterling, at West Market and North River streets. or the Sterling as we called it, quickly supplanted the Wyoming Valley House (Hotel) across the street and down a bit, for size and luxury and it lasted well into the late 20th century when, as we all know, it deteriorated and had to be demolished. I can't leave this section without showing the grand design of the Hotel Sterling.

Hotel Sterling With Tower, the Picture of Grandeur



It was neglect that brought it to its ruin. The neglect came from hoteliers taking too much profit as well as from City Officials not realizing the treasure in their midst. There it is on the prior page in all its glory. Would it not be nice if we could have a structure like this back again that merely needed repairs. Notice in the depiction, there is no dike system

Unfortunately, the Sterling itself was not represented by its own counsel at the time (about 2013) or it would have complained about its untimely destruction. Nonetheless, it was permitted by its poor hotel managers and also by inattentive Wilkes-Barre City officials to fall into major disrepair.

Eventually they all cried despair for city managers like to create crises so the public will forgive them. But the people were not in synch and we, the people, most of us at least, wanted the Sterling saved.

Regardless of the wishes of the people, City Officials, in an ignominious move, eventually declared that this monument of the hard work of miners and others who loved the city, had to be torn down. Yes, as hard as it is for me to write, the facts do not lie.

Demolition of this magnificent original 1897-built building began on July 25, 2013 and finished on July 30, 2013. Amen! Before this of course, the city annoyed us all with barricades and one lane traffic to help us accept its version of inevitability.

King's College Has Helped

Many know that in the 1960's as the Sterling's Hotel Business was not doing as well as in the glory years, King's College, headquartered at 133 N. River Street on the other side of the Sterling, was growing rapidly when I was a student there and it needed space for "dorm students." The College rented the top two floors of the Hotel Sterling, and used the rooms as an adjunct to their dormitory facilities. Later, King's rented even more.

King's College, formally The College of Christ the King, is a liberal arts college located in Wilkes-Barre, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, United States. Accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, King's has been ranked among the best colleges

in the nation by U.S. News and World Report for 16 straight years. Despite its founding in liberal arts, the college has strong science programs in Computer Science, Business, Biology, Chemistry, etc. It also offers a Physicians' Assistant Masters' Degree Program.

Many know that King's got itself going in 1946 but few know that the good priests from Notre Dame did not pick the Lehigh Valley Coal Building at 133 N. River Street. Instead, King's College began holding classes in 1946 in the same building where Wilkes got its start on Northampton Street. While I was a student, King's was pleased to be growing faster than it could handle new students. They brought back Northampton Hall in 1968 for classes at that time.

Before Bucknell Junior College / early Wilkes and then King's and now Luzerne County Community College, most men in the area went to Penn State or Bucknell Universities—if they could afford to leave home in the first place. Until my Junior Year, 1967, King's was an all-male institution.

My long-time friend, Bob Ell, who was the first Alumni Director in 1950 was also the first registered student at King's College. According to reports this is because of a generous aunt. I'll have to ask Bob about that. By the way, in the heyday of the Station on East Market Street, I came across three generations of Bob Ell's and we enjoyed a fine conversation. The 1st registered King's student is Bob II, and his son of course is Bob III. I saw the two surviving Bob Ell's at Frank Pasquini's wellness benefit several years ago. Both were doing well and looked great.

On the King's College Alumni Home Page (BTW, I am pleased to be a King's Alumnus—BS, and a Wilkes Alumnus, M.B.A.), King's recounts briefly its history. In 1841, Blessed Father Moreau sent Father Edward Sorin and six brothers to the United States. In 1842, they founded the University of Notre Dame du Lac, the first permanent foundation of the Holy Cross Congregation in the United States.

In 1946, the Congregation of Holy Cross accepted the invitation of Bishop William J. Hafey of Scranton to begin an independent four year college for men in Wilkes-Barre. It opened on Northampton

street but soon thereafter moved to its permanent address of 133 North River Street.

Many think King's had originally established itself in the old Lehigh Valley Coal Company building, down the road from the Sterling at 133 North River Street. Though not 100% exact, it is pretty close. The building was designed and built in the 1920's. Soon after 1946 King's moved into its new building. By 1965, when I first attended class, King's had already built a Science Wing, was about to bring on a second high-rise dormitory building, and it was planning the new gymnasium.

The Bishop was pleased to have these Notre Dame priests begin to teach the children of the many miners in our era how to gain a lot more than just a high school education. King's has been very successful in educating those of us, like me, who otherwise would be really poor. Thank you, King's College, for all you've done for all of us.

King's campus extends well beyond the picture below, but the picture does capture the essence of the early campus. The original Lehigh Valley Coal Company Building is in the center of the picture facing the river. You can just about make out the stature of Christ the King, several stories high, mounted on the top front of the building. This is a magnificent sight to behold. I then show a picture of the original building from 1916 when King's was not even a consideration.

King's College Facing North River –133 N. River St WB PA



When the mines were gone, King's persisted in helping poor people like Brian Kelly (me), and my two best buddies, Dennis Grimes and

Gerry Rodski, and others who needed a boost from God and his infinite knowledge, to progress in life. King's offers many majors including at the time Data Processing (IT), Business, Accounting, Biology, and Chemistry. Thank you again to King's.

Lehigh Valley Coal Company Building pre-King's 1916



Long after King's assured my dividend in life, my wife, carrying our first born marched unabated to the King's stage in 1980 to claim her King's College degree. Bravo King's. Two additional possible "Kingsmen" emerged from this union. My youngest son Michael, now a Wilkes-Barre attorney, graduated from King's in 2005.

Just recently, King's showed its interest in hotels again with the purchase of the Ramada Inn on Public Square. It was at one time the Sheraton-Crossgates, and before that until after the Flood, it was Bartikowski's Jewelry store and the Pizza Casa, on Public Square. The hotel structure was built after the flood of 1972.

King's opened the building in September, 2014. The first floor now houses classrooms and office space for the college's physician assistant studies academic major. It also has a public eatery, called Zime, and the Sue Hand art exhibit: "Anthracite Miners and Their Hollowed Ground," is displayed along two first-floor hallways. The sixth, seventh and eighth floors have already been remodeled for student housing. The capacity on those three floors is about 200 students. The second through fifth floors are used for offices, labs, and classrooms.

King's College New Building on Public Square Wilkes-Barre



I remember like yesterday that my tuition at King's in my first year was \$950.00 for the whole year. It went up a few hundred each of my four years. Those were the days when even tuition was affordable.

Across the street and up just a few blocks from King's is the magnificent Luzerne County Courthouse, (shown on Page 15). The fact that this structure is right here on River Street, a few blocks from the Square meant that in the first decade of the twentieth century, about 1909, Wilkes-Barre's Public Square had a Courthouse building that was vacant after the move to River Street. We all know the rest of that story because it was one of the first chapters of this book.

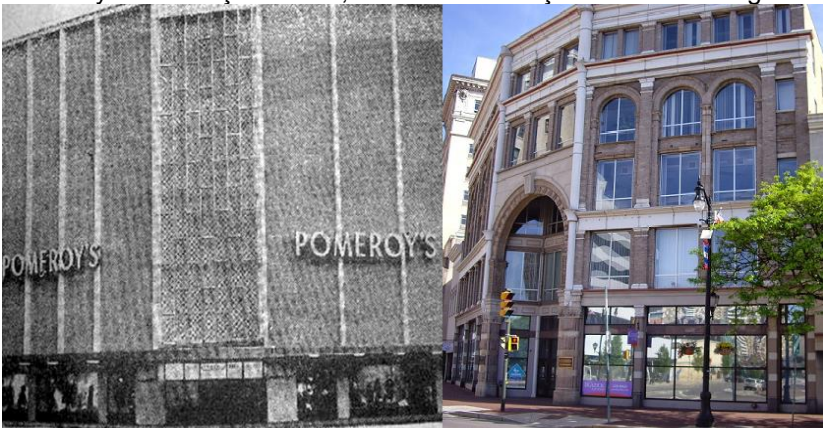
That concludes this section of the tour. Now, we will change our brief tour to pictorial form and take it back to Public Square

Chapter 21 A Brief Pictorial Look at Public Square

Pomeroy's in the 1950's before the Façade "Lift"



Pomeroy's with Façade—left; Redo with no façade as LCCC--right



The Hotel Sterling Annex, LCCC's First Building



This is the site of the original Luzerne County Community College. It formally began operations on October 2, 1967. The first class of 836 students attended classes in two buildings in downtown Wilkes-Barre on North River Street located near the Hotel Sterling. The college offered 11 programs at the time with tuition at only \$12.50 per credit.

I am pleased to announce that Wilkes-Barre has decided to save one of the buildings from the Hotel Sterling three-building complex. Plans are actually underway to renovate the century-old Sterling Annex for residential units.

Additionally, the long-gone Sterling lot is supposed to get a new building in the form of what is a proposed \$35 million, mixed-use project. We'll see. I would suspect the old Sterling if we add in the \$6 million plus this new \$35 million for construction, there was probably enough cash to rehabilitate rather than tear down the greatest hotel ever in Wilkes-Barre.

The four-story annex on River Street, once used as an ancillary ballroom and meeting space for the hotel, has been vacant since proposals to turn it into a college art museum or art gallery fizzled in

the early 1990s. The structure's boarded-up windows and deteriorating state stood out even more since the condemned landmark hotel which was demolished in 2013.

Public Square With Capital / Comerford Theatre & Hotel Durkee on left



See the red trackless trolley in the picture. It got its power by connecting to the electric lines above. I can recall drivers avoiding traffic sometimes and having to get out and reposition to “antennas” on top.

Comerford Theatre Later Became the Paramount



Ironically over the years, as noted, the Comerford was re-made on the East side of the Square where the Fort Durkee Hotel had been.

Coincidental to that, the 1938 Comerford Theatre became the Paramount in 1949 as the result of an anti-trust lawsuit. The ownership of the Comerford Theater at that time was transferred to the Penn Paramount Company and the building was renamed the Paramount Theater.

Kirby Center and the huge Luzerne Bank Bldg. on Public Square Today



Rodanos where Isaac Long's & Boston Candy Kitchen once stood



South Main Street from Public Square Circa 1900



Notice the telephone poles and the tracks for the trolley which were never there in my days growing up in Wilkes-Barre.

South Main from Public Square circa 1960



Percy Browns on Northampton St was a place everybody from the 1950's remembers



Percy Browns, Wilkes-Barre, empty of food gets ready to begin again.

YMCA Corner of Northampton & S. Franklin



“Ray” Hottle's is back at the same spot and the food is as great as ever!!



General Radio & Electronic South Main Street WB PA



When General Radio moved across the street from their original location into the old Acme Markets Building, Wilkes-Barre's first Honda spot was to the left of this picture. Across Wood Street was the American Clothing Company... later to become Torbik Locks.

In the same vicinity of South Wilkes-Barre by Wood Street, – right across the street, I think I can still smell Parlenti's fantastic Chicken Francaise so it too must have been close. Their Pizza was great also! Gone but not forgotten. Then down the street there was the Planters

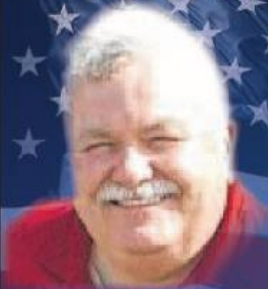
Peanuts building and Mack Bros. Hardware before to became Main Hardware.



Chapter 22 Can Wilkes-Barre Become Beautiful Again?

ARE YOU HAPPY WITH HOW THINGS ARE IN WILKES-BARRE?

If you are, then:
 Vote for your current elected officials. ... Vote for the Good Ole Boy Establishment and politics as usual. You've seen what they will do! Your vote will help keep everything the same.



DO YOU AGREE THAT WE NEED BIG CHANGES IN WILKES-BARRE?

If you do, then:
Vote Brian Kelly for Mayor!

You'll be voting for a Police Commissioner & a Special Violent Crime Unit to purge the drug masters and the gangs and thugs to make the City safe again!

And cleaner! And more affordable! When the City is safe, affordable, and clean... then jobs will come back quickly.

<p>MBA in Accounting & Finance Information Technology Consultant IBM Designer / Senior Systems Engineer; College Professor; Problem Solver JFK Conservative Democrat; Independent Not part of the political system or current administration Fully Committed to Wilkes-Barre's Future Lifetime Wilkes-Barre Resident</p>	<p>Major Platform Points & Goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wilkes-Barre is Open for Business • Safe, Affordable & Clean City • Add more businesses and better jobs • Revitalization and Growth 	<p>How to get there?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Build trust and improve management in all City departments 2. Commit to long term education plan for all City employees 3. Introduce merit-based recognition and promotion 4. Hire best person for the job 5. All employees serve the residents / taxpayers 6. Establish a culture of continuous departmental improvement 7. Establish a code of ethics for all city employees 8. Establish partnerships w/ hospitals, education, & businesses <p style="text-align: right;">More to come—www.briankellyformayor.com</p>
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Vote for a Safe City! Vote for an Affordable City! Vote for a Clean City!

VOTE BRIAN KELLY
For Mayor of Wilkes-Barre

Note to Republicans: Please Write-In BRIAN KELLY on Election Day! Thank you
www.briankellyformayor.com

This was the signature ad I used in my 2015 campaign for Mayor. I was hoping to gain voters in the 2015 Democrat Primary. My objective and it was in my theme, was to begin a return to glory for Wilkes-Barre by making Wilkes-Barre A safe city, an affordable city, and a clean city. If I had been elected, I believe that we all would be four years ahead of where we were in 2015.

As an unknown in politics and as naïve as I could be of the political process at the time, I would pass a lie detector test if I told you that I did not know that I had no chance to win. If I knew that my lack of funds, lack of notoriety, along with never having been a politician were so critical to convincing voters to give me a shot, in retrospect, like all my friends, I would have stayed home instead of running a campaign. I would not have run for anything.

So, in case you thought about asking, “No!” I am not running for Mayor in 2015 or ever again. I am done. But, now like then, I think my ideas for Wilkes-Barre to rise from the fink and ashes to a first-rate City are in the cards with the right dreams, ideas, plans, and actions. On that folks, I am not kidding

I was serious in 2015 when I wrote my first book about Wilkes-Barre being able to rebound from a host of issues. I have stayed serious about the prospects of making Wilkes-Barre a far more desirable place to live than it has been in recent times including its current state of affairs four years after I tried to get elected so I could improve things. I still believe that together we can make the City a much better place but we need to assure that those we elect feel as strongly as we do. I have already sent the current administration a request for information and unfortunately, they have chosen to ignore my request.

I would suggest that you write up a set of questions such as those I wrote (See page 67) plus your own and see what the administration’s plans are for Wilkes-Barre for the next four years if they are fortunate enough to be reelected. Go ahead and write them. It would help all of us in Wilkes-Barre if politicians believed we actually care.

Besides four thousand dollars, I invested the better part of a year in preparation and research to gain a *how-to* for bringing back glory to our City. I researched what was necessary to jump-start the Mayor’s office for the people in 2015. Why? Because I thought as Mayor, I could help make it happen.

In my unsophistication in the political process, I actually thought I could win. I have the correct educational background including an MBA in Accounting and Finance along with substantial IBM and IT expertise, and more than anything else, I lived in Wilkes-Barre just about all my life. I know what is needed for the City to succeed as a

City. The people chose Tony George as Mayor instead. I cannot change that. The plan he has executed as Mayor is nothing like the plan I constructed. The results have been predictable. I offered my help to the Mayor but he chose to not hear what I had to say.

In my campaign preparations, I devoted a lot of hours to fine tune my platform and my message. Unfortunately, I did not have the resources to get the message known by the people of Wilkes-Barre. And, so I lost the election as all the pundits expected.

Here I am back again but I am not running for anything. I still have all my work from the 2015 campaign available and much of it is written down in the Return to Glory book and on my computer. The rest is in this book. I have already dusted off a number of dreams and ideas and in prior chapters I presented them to you. The details are coming in the last four chapters.

I have put together my set of thoughts from my prior work and from new dreams and ideas from over the past four years about how to brighten the future for all of the people of Wilkes-Barre. They will be available for all in this book when it is completed.

I am making it all available again today so that the people and the politicians have a lot more to consider than business as usual. If the ideas are those you would pick, when the candidates come forth, my advice is for everybody to support only those candidates who think the kind of thoughts that you think.

Don't vote for a neighbor or a friend or a crony or somebody the Party wants unless they think like you think. Since you are reading this book, you certainly know how I think. At least you will know when you finish reading this work. I would ask that you consider my suggestions and of course vote for the best candidate possible for WB Mayor and for WB Council and also for the WB Area School Board.

I was just one man in 2015 who was prepared to do what was needed to be done to make Wilkes-Barre great. I was not kidding and I backed up my desire by spending about \$7,000 of which a number of friends and family gave me some financial help. My bottom line for trying to help my City cost me just under \$4,000 to conduct the campaign.

I lost by a ton more votes than I thought I would. I thought the people would love that I was not a politician. A politician won and a politician was first runner-up so I was way off the mark thinking a non-politician was what the people desired. Either my ideas were seen as bad or I was too unknown to be trusted. To say I lost by a zillion would be an understatement.

I wish I had the money back for sure now that I know what I know. However, I do feel good that I tried. I had a web site and ten Roscoe Advertising benches in the City for the length of the campaign. I had three ads on Service Electric for the duration of the campaign. I gave about ten speeches in various sections of the City—some of which, such as Public Square, actually had some attendance.




I gave yard signs like the one to the left to anybody who would put a sign in their yard.

I walked the entire city meeting people as I went along. I printed thousands of 5 X 8 inch cards that said who I was and offered my ideas and plans to return WB to its glory days.

When I did not get in a house, I left a card. I got good at shooting cards long distances to perfect landings on the door mats. I tosed them like baseball cards, flipping the coated 5 X 8 cards right onto the door mat. At the time, I was unaware this was against the law. I learned when one person in the whole city decided to complain.

Democrats & Republicans:
Vote Brian Kelly
 For
Mayor of Wilkes-Barre



Vote for a Safe City
 Vote for an Affordable City
 Vote for a Clean City

"When we have a safe city, an affordable city, and a clean city, we will be well on our return to glory!"

IBM Designer / Systems Engineer;
 College Professor; Problem Solver
 JFK Conservative Democrat; Independent
 Not part of the political system or current administration

www.briankellyformayor.com
Paid for his candidate

The front of the card looked like the placard to the left.

The back of the card had a mini-resume so people could get to know me. On the left is a picture of the front of the card.

Additionally, I wrote a book about Wilkes-Barre titled *Wilkes-Barre Return to Glory*. Several WB merchants such as Peters Ice Cream Store, Harold's Pharmacy, and Phillie Phanest made the books available for sale.

I also wrote a number of op-eds and submitted them to the two papers in

our town. Every now and then, the papers would print one of my essays. After the election in 2015 when Tony George decided not to use any of the ideas I had put forth for the campaign, I shut down the web site and moved on with my life.

In my original book on the City, I had a chapter titled, *The Road to Glory Must Be Built*. It was how I felt. I still hope I can help.

This is the back side of my campaign card. I loved flipping them onto the porches when the resident was not available.

Brian Kelly for Mayor of Wilkes-Barre, PA Brian's Qualifications; Platform Points & Goals

Qualifications:

- Professional Business Problem Solver
- Managed an Education and IT Consulting Business
- President of Wyoming Valley Computer Users Group
- IBM Corporation Senior Systems Engineer
- IBM Expert in Local Government Systems & Software
- MBA & MS-HCA Professor at Wilkes, King's Marywood
- Frequent Speaker at National Technical Seminars
- Author of 59 High Tech / Patriotic Books
- Lifetime Wilkes-Barre Resident
- Member American Legion & Catholic War Veterans
- Fully Committed to Wilkes-Barre's Future

Major Platform Points & Goals

- Wilkes-Barre is Open for Business
- Safe, Affordable, & Clean City
- Add more businesses and better jobs
- Revitalization and Growth

How to get there?

1. Build trust and improve management in all City departments
2. Commit to long term education plan for all City employees
3. Introduce merit-based recognition and promotion
4. Hire best person for the job
5. All employees serve the residents / taxpayers
6. Establish a culture of continuous departmental improvement
7. Establish a code of ethics for all city employees
8. Establish partnerships w/ hospitals, education, & businesses

More to come—www.briankellyformayor.com _

The Web site was canceled when Mayor George chose a different route.

Is 2019 Wilkes-Barre: a city ready to better itself

The "shoreline" of the eastern bank of the Susquehanna River has been known as the River Common for some time. John Durkee, the man who gave Wilkes-Barre its name saw the area as a place of beauty, and wanted it to be preserved for common use—for all the residents.

When he put his plan together for Wilkes-Barre City in 1773, he was quick to designate this beautiful area along the bank of the Susquehanna River as public ground; a.k.a. common ground. And so, the area by the river, long before any dikes were built, became known as the River Common. We still know it by that today.



As candidates, including myself were running for Mayor in 2015, a recommended initiative for them to execute was to help Wilkes-Barre return to its days of glory. One of the ways to do that among many was to recreate Wilkes-Barre as a clean city. I checked again today in December 2018, Wilkes-Barre, unfortunately is not yet a clean city. Moreover, with all the other issues facing the city, I hear little about anybody in official Wilkes-Barre demanding our city be clean. Yet, who wants a dirty city?

The River Common however is definitely beautiful again. It has been restored on both sides of Market Street.

Scum and dirt, unnecessary garbage, and unseemliness are still a part of the City just about everywhere else but the River Common and Public Square itself. The current City officials can do a lot better. The City officials we all select in the Democrat primary and the big election in November must do better.

Though nobody would be interested in Wilkes-Barre becoming a monitored nanny state to make sure nobody crosses the line, for sure, none of us want Wilkes-Barre to be as unattractive and dirty as it is in most sections of the City today. Yet it is. The malady persists from one city administration to the next.

I checked the web looking for typical pictures of the major neglect in the city and there are very few. This is good as the more pictures showing dilapidated properties and streets in need of cleaning and repair certainly would not serve the City's interests. WB officials need to thank both City papers for their kindness to the City in this regard. But would it not be better if the City officials decided that the best thing for Wilkes-Barre would be to clean it up. Why not?

A clean city is not enough. To the notion of a "clean city," we must add "and a beautiful city." Sometimes all it takes is a little paint, but it always takes a lot of pride, desire and strong will to make anything happen. Betsy Summers, the spunky lady who a while ago, the Times Leader endorsed in her attempt to unseat entrenched politician--State Representative Eddie Day Pashinsky, agrees with me. It is time for a big cleanup.

Summers has been saying for years in the Independent Gazette: "I will again be raising the clutter cleanup issue to our city council ... along with negligent street cleaning." Bravo Ms. Summers. "A clean city is the first step to restoring the pride that our community once demonstrated." Amen, Betsy! Who wants a dirty city? From the action Summers gets on her projects, it looks like City Officials are OK with the dirt and clutter and the trucks picking up their brushes so they don't have to empty the trucks in between neighborhood rounds.

Years ago, there was certainly more attention given to clean and beautiful. As I write this chapter, I still can remember the beautiful flowers every year placed at the memorial at Miner Park. It was opposite the end of Hanover Street on Old River Road in Wilkes-Barre. Nobody knows what happened.

Nobody in City Hall can tell me know as to whether it was Charles Miner who donated Miner Park or not, and what the stipulations were. I do ask myself and we all should: "Why is there a public school in Miner Park if a Wilkes-Barre prominent citizen donated land for recreation in Wilkes-Barre?" Is Miner Park a myth? Recreation and history are very important for a progressive city.

After the flood, somehow the very attractive and well-appointed Kistler School emerged on the property and the Miner Park memorial shrine to a member of the Miner family was removed, and I have not seen flowers since. I see the concrete memorial stone has been moved to an obscure location by the rebuilt shade house.

Worse than that, Miner Park Swimming Pool, with its magnificent fountain, disappeared forever. Look how much these kids in the picture below enjoyed the pool. Is your mom or dad in this picture? Was there no other place for a school? Politicians always look for the easy way **out**. We need to kick those politicians **o-u-t** who feel that way. If we let them run the City down even further, it is our fault.

I am sure there were good intentions for things like a new school but overall the good intentions have been setting Wilkes-Barre back, not moving us forward. Kistler School could have been built in a blighted area of South Wilkes-Barre or on stilts, higher than the dike before Barney Farms was ever built. Why take away space donated for a park by somebody who loved Wilkes-Barre? You tell me.

Miner Park Swimming Pool South Wilkes-Barre



Hollenback Swimming Pool, also built by the Feds with WPA money had been around forever and then it too disappeared. Back in 1938, there was a debate about the pool's filtering system. Some urged that hard coal would make a better filter than sand for the Hollenback swimming pool. Why is there no Hollenback Pool? If our grandparents who made little pay could afford a pool, why not us?

I have a friend who one time was my manager at IBM before we both retired. After living in beautiful Burlington Vermont and seeing how the well-to-do took care of things for everybody without raising taxes, he was amazed at his observations of Northeastern PA.

Hollenback Pool Parsons Wilkes-Barre – A Fun Place



Surely the Miner family, mentioned often in Wilkes-Barre's yearly almanacs, along with the Kirby family are few and far between. For their own altruism, they have really helped and always seem to help whenever they can.

By the way, about Burlington Vermont. It should be a place that our public officials ought to try to emulate. It actually comes as no surprise to me that Burlington VT recently caught national attention for its quality of living. They were ranked #2 in Kiplinger's 2013 "10 Great Places to Live" Without dreams, there are no ideas; there are no plans; and there are no positive actions. If those running for the office of Mayor cannot identify goals that the City's residents agree are important, why should we elect them?

I am concerned that those with affluence and real wealth in their time of prosperity in Wilkes-Barre, unlike the Kirby's and the Miner's, and more than likely some others, for their own reasons have not looked back at Wilkes-Barre even if our City were the source of their success. Why not? Why not help the City and the School Systems that gave such folks their boost in life?

It seems like when they had their fill, and they took enough for themselves, they move out of town and knocked the dust off their sandals back onto our City. Maybe they could have done better? Maybe they still can. I'd love to write a book about former Wilkes-Barreans who donated to bring some real Wilkes-Barre dreams to fruition.

My friend from IBM wondered why garbage and crap would be coming into NEPA from areas all across the East Coast, and few of the obvious "elites" i.e. our officials, stopped the garbage at our gates.

When his observations had turned him into a NEPA cynic, he was surprised that the town bosses did not insist that Wilkes-Barre take the garbage from all of the East Coast cities and simply let them back their trucks up and dump it all, toxins and all, into the old Wilkes-Barre mine shafts. They might as well have dumped them into the City's swimming pools.

The current corrupt Wilkes-Barre Area School Board want our Wilkes-Barre children to breathe in toxins all day while attending the WBASD Mine Shaft Super High. Only in Wilkes-Barre can the corrupt gain and maintain respect. Let's all stop that in the next election folks or we must forever hold our peace. -

After all, they don't exist anymore anyway. When all the great homes in a City are occupied by students in college residence halls / houses, how can anybody with affluence arise out of the WB ashes to help the City.

Let me repeat if it did not seem absurd the first time. One might suggest that the garbage brokers simply drop their loads down the mile or more deep mine shafts and never look at it again. Who would know? Maybe some have even done that. Do you think they have?

My former boss wondered why the prominent families in Wilkes-Barre / Scranton and surrounds seemed to care so little about the hoi polloi in the area. Maybe they all had already moved out? He wondered why the people left behind put up with the corruption, and in fact come out at election time and seemed to cheer for more of it.

He wondered why IBM located its plants in Endicott, NY rather than Wilkes-Barre PA. I had no answers. Why did Miller Brewery not locate here? My dad told me they were talked out of town by those wanting to keep cheap labor here? I don't know. Why was other industry kept out in the mining days? How did that help the regular people, the salt of the earth?

Were the entrepreneurs who wanted cheap labor in cahoots with the politicians? Now that there are no valuable pickings to pick, why don't they just let us alone instead of making it even worse? . When the mines crashed, there was nothing. The median income in Wilkes-Barre now approaches the poverty level.

I do know the answer now. I had not thought about it as you may have not. My former boss felt that the more well-to-do have a gain and run philosophy in this community. They run quickly. Once they collect their gains; they are gone. He said it is not like that in other cities. That leaves hope for America but why not Wilkes-Barre.

I hope he is wrong for the long-haul as sometimes just a friendly reminder can make somebody see the error in their ways. Unfortunately I see tons of evidence as you do that that he is spot on! What do you think?

Like most of you, I am aroused to do good most of the time, especially every Christmas when the multiple versions of Scrooge are shown despite it not being good for the current message of "*no religion no how.*" But, all of us must meet our maker some day so why not be good people who choose to do good things.

Like Scrooge in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* , don't you now believe it is never too late. Can we talk these people who have used their privileged status to pillage Wilkes-Barre and other NEPA cities to come back and help bring our City back to see the sunshine? Do we know their names?

In its glory days, you may recall that in addition to the City Pools, many Wilkes-Barre playgrounds had these one-size fits all wading pools with a fountain in the center for kids to play and then cool off in the summer. By the time I was old enough to see my first playground,

they were still there, but all were all dysfunctional, and there never was any water. Why? Ask the Mayor.

The standard fountains in the center of these empty wading pools which we great for bike riding but not swimming, no matter which park, were never operational. Could City officials be blamed for that? Why did our elders think such recreation was necessary and our current officials think it is not. What happened to Wilkes-Barre's good thinking?

I keep saying it because it is true and yet unbelievable. While I was growing up, Wilkes-Barre had three major pools--Hollenback, Miner Pool, and Griffith Pool, which eventually was replaced by Coal Street Pool. They are no more. All are no more and no WB official cares about such a major loss to the public. Meanwhile, City employees make two to three times the average wage of those who labor and live in Wilkes-Barre, PA.

As I shared with you in an earlier chapter, my wonderful older sister often walked me from High Street down Hanover to Old River Road to Miner Park Pool. It took a while, but it was a nice adventure. When I go away on vacation, I know, I am not looking to rent a private pool in somebody's backyard. Community pools were tops for WB residents because they provided great swimming, games, camaraderie, snacks, and a wonderful setting for all the residents. Your neighbor's permission was not required. When we go on vacation, when we are lucky, we get a nice big pool that in many ways lacks the splendor of our own public pools from back when.

Griffith is gone as is Hollenback, along with the most glorious of all the pools, Miner Park Pool, which was built on donated land? Even the two pools in the basement of Meyers High School (girls and boys) used for sporting events and swim classes when I went to Meyers in the 1960's are gone. Does the City and school District have a problem with swimming?

Where other PA cities enable great things for their citizens, Wilkes-Barre and its wrecking ball philosophy has a history of taking things that others are building and disabling the same things already built in Wilkes-Barre City. What a bunch of grinchies we have elected over the years for sure.

They tell me for years that an indoor pool does open up every summer religiously in Kistler School apparently so the City Officials can brag that Wilkes-Barre still has a swimming pool in the city. What a shame! There is no more bragging. What happened there?

Our City can no longer afford to have the big winners in Wilkes-Barre dump on the City and have the taxpayers buy huge rolls of Charmin to clean up their mess. It is not time to rob from the rich for sure. But for all the models our forebears in America and in Wilkes-Barre put together, they surely did not anticipate the level of greed that exists today in little old Wilkes-Barre PA in the political circles.

Why are there no WB Alums who still would like to help their city? Why do all the politicians seem to be related to former politicians. Do they think Wilkes-Barre owes them something? Is it not possible for somebody unrelated to the WB hierarchy even get a job in Wilkes-Barre government? No wonder the people are not inclined to vote after being snookered for so many years. The apathy is there to see at election time. This may be good for entrenched politicians but not for the people of Wilkes-Barre for sure.

Is it not time to think of others for a change? I think things can change for the good as people's hearts soften. Look how many trips the spirit had to make to convince Scrooge to do the right thing. It did not happen through taxation. It happened because of a big heart that was finally opened. Is there anybody out there with a big heart.

Surely as the people who made it big in Wilkes-Barre get older, they think more of eternity. Yes, they too will die and why not die after helping a once great City that helped them achieve greatness, be great again. Chances are they either are or once were Christians or Jews. NEPA is mostly a Christian & Jewish community. More than likely, like the rest of us, they love and worship a loving God.

You and I know that Christians and Jews and Hindus and others are taught to care about people. I would like to see all people come to grips with their eternity and consider how they might help others without government getting in the way. Everybody decides what charitable acts they choose to make. Helping out Wilkes-Barre City

will help all of the residents here and will help stage the City to be an even better place to live.

Should we invite the wrecking ball to gut the whole of WB City as our politicians seem to favor, while we permit ourselves to be annexed by a prosperous town like Clarks Summit? Why not think that every idea to avoid this misfortune ought to be explored. Why not? Doesn't Wilkes-Barre pay about \$50 million per year in taxes. Why can an Administration with that much money not make something good happen for its people?

I am definitely not talking about taxation. Taxation should be used only for necessities. I am not talking about tithing or anything anybody must do. The taxation system is not meant for reconciliation with the Lord so Wilkes-Barre officials should make no demands on anybody per se.

With a positive change in attitude about Wilkes-Barre, I would like to see a lot of ad hoc committees forming so that people can help people. I would like to see many volunteers coming forth to help this City in the future.

Would it not be nice if the Citizens' Voice and the Times Leader dedicated a reporter to the City to dig up great stories and find other writers who can give them a hand in helping opine about how to make Wilkes-Barre a delightful city again.

Without a citizenry, there are no newspaper readers. I know that if these two great scrappy papers in Wilkes-Barre set about to help the City in which they publish, the papers would be the biggest beneficiaries of the good will of the people.

If you happen to win the Lottery or you made your fortune here in the biggest city after Scranton in NEPA, and you would like to give something back or simply want to help us out as we try to make Wilkes-Barre a fine city again, you can bet we will all be most appreciative of your generosity of time and resources.

If you, Mr. prosperous former Wilkes-Barre alum, have a nice business, consider a branch location in Wilkes-Barre. If you want to build a new facility, there are lots of nice places all around this town.

There are a lot of unoccupied buildings that are begging for you to come in and set up shop. We will help you be successful as you help in our return to greatness.

City Beautiful

Before the demise of many wonderful public structures, from back in the early 1900's, and some from even before, Wilkes-Barre leaders at the turn of the century wanted the City to be as good as it could possibly be. Leaders today merely appear to want just one thing—they want to be reelected and reelected and reelected.

Is that three things? They have no problem bullying us all into thinking that the kids of the public won't get teaching jobs or City jobs or other political jobs in NEPA unless we elect the bully politicians to powerful positions. That's Bull!

The City can form a City Beautiful movement, which is as good an idea for today as it was back when. The founders of our City were not selfish leaders; in fact, they were selfless. Today's leaders should be donating to help the City; not sucking the life blood from the City. We all know that, yet we elect and reelect the most selfish of them all time and time again.

Through this Beautiful City movement of yore, the area by the river was further decorated. The original City Beautiful movement was a reform philosophy that aimed to beautify urban cities such as Chicago, Detroit and Washington, D.C. The movement swept through Wilkes-Barre when the city council permitted the Town Improvement Society to plant new trees on the common and to carve a footpath through it.

Wilkes-Barre leaders at the turn of the 20th Century understood that a beautiful City would help bring about a prosperous city for all. They were not in it for what they could get.

In 1906, Wilkes-Barre's first Park Commission was created. Again, the river bank was the object of attention. This time, the river bank was filled in, new footpaths and beautiful gardens were laid out and gas lamps were installed. This commission did not think that everything in this and other projects needed to be done with taxpayer

dollars, and so they encouraged local people of means to donate to the city. Land was the preferred item.

And so, that is why to this day we see such nice parks as Nesbitt Park (Wilkes-Barre across the river) and Kirby Park (Wilkes-Barre across the river), as well as the River Common, which we must remember was not always part of a levee system. And, of course there is Miner Park, the origins and stipulations of the gift from the Miner family created a marvelous park. Kids swam, had fun and did everything the Miner family hoped they would

At this point in its glorious history, Wilkes-Barre was a booming city. Its newly landscaped common area, sans dikes, gave inhabitants a most wonderful and spacious place to escape the City while still being in the City.

The recent improvements on the same area by the river on the east side are also beautiful, and we are very thankful for the results of this fine work, but all was paid by taxpayer dollars, and we are running out of those quickly.

For all the good work that was done in making the City beautiful, there were always those who, for their own reasons, did not care as much about its beauty and wanted beautiful areas to be replaced for commercial reasons. Over the years, Public Square Park for example was always at risk of being ripped out and replaced with roads and buildings.

How about no Public Square?

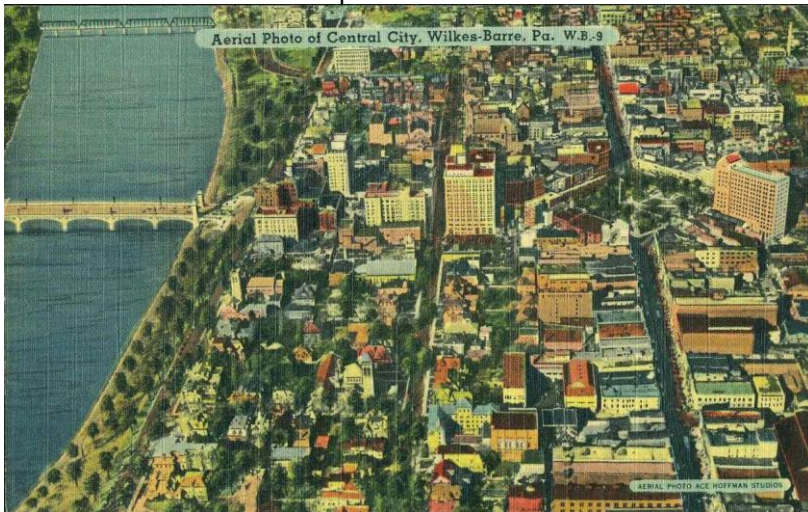
In 1930, for example, The Wilkes-Barre Almanac documents the attempts of City Councilman John Nobel to extend Main and Market Streets through Public Square. At the time G.A.R. Members had been proposing a monument to be built where Nobel wanted the new road to go.

Thankfully more insightful minds than Nobel's were making the decision though Council did entertain destroying the Square for this purpose. Without the criticism of the G. A.R. members and veterans of many wars, today, there might not be a Public Square.

The Dickens characters must help us all see our past, our present, and our future. Our politician's greed may have no way of being stopped unless the spirits of Dickens visit their hearts and take away the incessant need to get the best of everybody—even those with nothing. We are better people for sure.

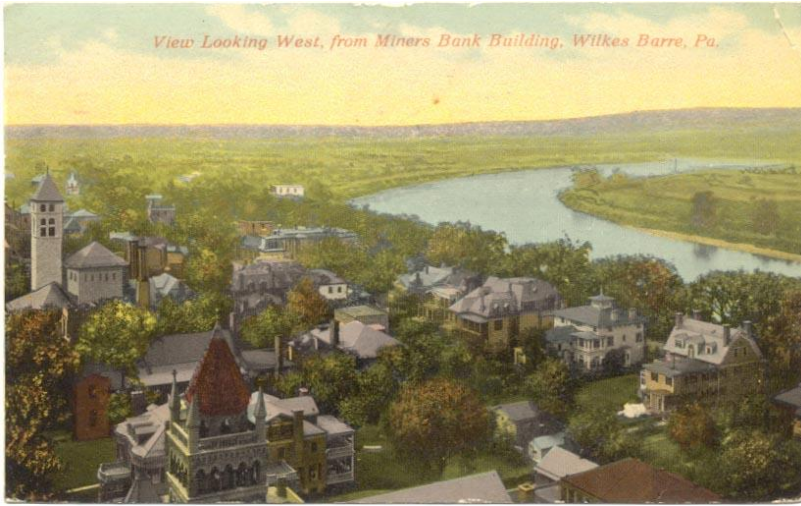
In its glory years of beauty and commerce, which lasted actually a long time until several years after the flood—about 1980, both sides of the Susquehanna River—all part of Wilkes-Barre, were beautiful. The fact that there were no dikes on either side of the river before 1936, made the eastern side of the River in Wilkes-Barre even more spectacular than it is today after the recent restoration. Of course the City residents are very happy with the Levee system as it has saved us a number of times from additional flooding.

East Side of Susquehanna River Wilkes-Barre Central City



The homes on Riverside Drive for example, prior to the 1936 flood had riverfront lots. It was beautiful. They surely were beautiful. Some liked their views so much that they could not be convinced that the 1936 disaster was not just the one flood of a lifetime.

Mansions on South River Street Wilkes-Barre 1917



Consequently, the residents along the river never expected another flood. As one might expect, the residents first complained when the dike system was initially built, because it destroyed their unimpeded view of the Susquehanna River. It certainly did ruin the view; but it also protected them and many other residents of the lowlands from normal river flooding until Hurricane Agnes came and surprised us all in 1972.

Nobody can deny that over the past fifty years, many of Wilkes-Barre's prominent citizens have in fact moved out of the city proper into the suburbs.

For those confused somewhat about the two meanings of suburb, this may help. In the United States and Canada, suburb can refer either to an outlying residential area of a city or town or to a separate municipality or unincorporated area outside a town or city. Therefore, we call Luzerne, Dallas, Mountain Top, Plains, and others, suburbs even though they are not in Wilkes-Barre proper. In fact, Wilkes-Barre and Scranton are both comparatively small cities in terms of geography and there are no areas of which I am aware on the outskirts but in the towns that are referred to as suburbs.

When I researched the pro-football players born in Wilkes-Barre, I noticed that besides those who graduated from City schools, a number graduated from high schools close by, but not necessarily in Wilkes-Barre itself.

I think we can figure out how to get more citizens of prominence to move back if we make the City worth their return. People of prominence are needed for Wilkes-Barre to be great again.

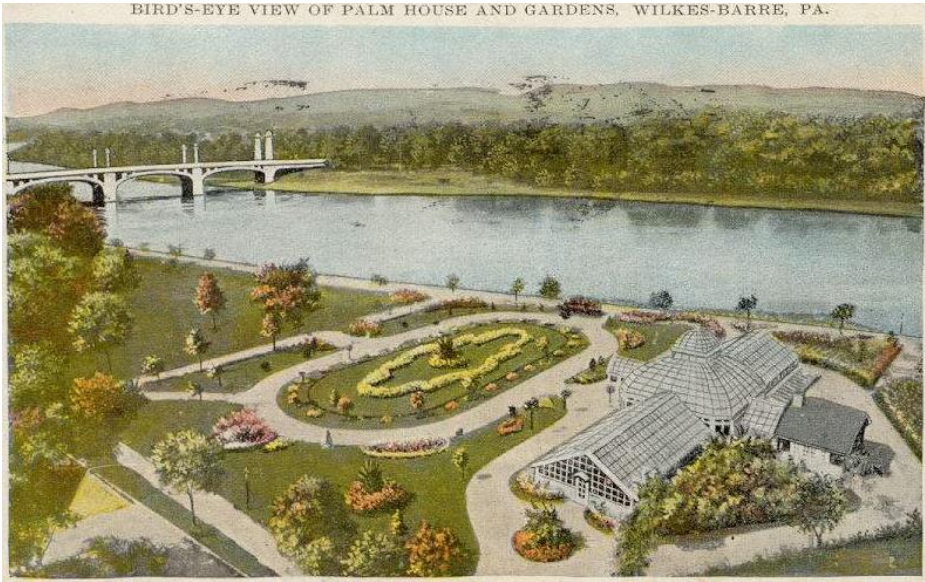
Would it not be wonderful if we had some societies in town who wanted to bring back gardens such as those by the Palm House in the below pictures or the gardens in the Miner Park of the 1950's. I rode my bike to see baseball being played in Miner Park in the 1950's.

And, when there was a holiday such as Memorial Day, as a bike rider, I settled in to look at the wonderful flowers at the Miner Park Memorial. It was beautiful. Nobody had great flowers like that in the neighborhoods. I wish I had a camera in those days to snap how wonderful the flowers looked. It captivated a young 26" bicycler from the Rolling Mill Hill for sure.

But in the interest of full disclosure, when I was little league age, I would have rather seen or played a baseball game in the park. Normally there was not a soul in Miner Park on the holidays per se. I'd say they were at Sans Souci on the Tumble Bug.

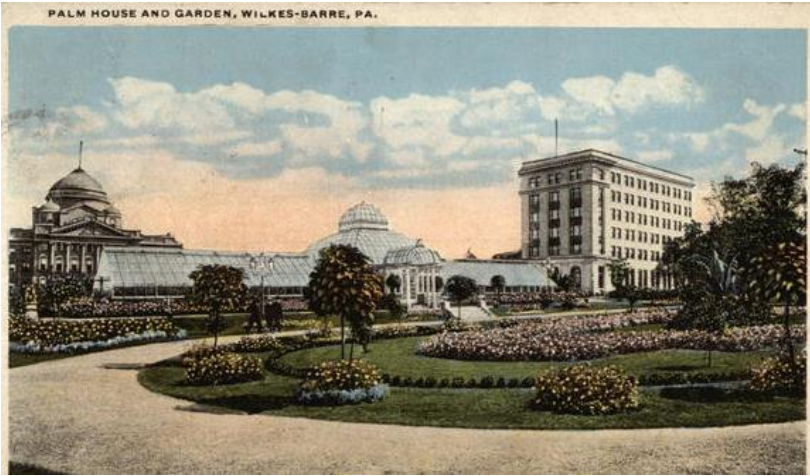
People do not forget their roots.

John Durkee, the founder of Wilkes-Barre was able to get land and other amenities donated to Wilkes-Barre City in its founding years and even afterwards. I would bet today, that if we had a good plan to make the city clean and beautiful, safe, and affordable, and if our City officials made it known that Wilkes-Barre would accept donations—just as John Durkee did—from property to cash to the moon, we would see the good people come in to help beyond expectation.



This is the first of three Pictures of the Palm House on North River Street on the Court House grounds Circa 1940. Look how beautiful this greenhouse structure by the Courthouse was, The prominent on Wilkes-Barre helped pull this beauty off. What happened? Our forebears saw beauty in the City as necessary for the attractiveness of the City. That is a good maxim for the future. The next picture shows how attractive the greenhouse / Palm House was. You can see the Courthouse in the background. The third picture shows the Palm House at a different angle with the Lehigh Valley Coal Company building, before King's College, in the background across North River Street.





Being realistic, before Wilkes-Barre residents can ever expect that we can see beauty such as the Palm Gardens above in Wilkes-Barre, we first need to accept that our leaders must dream, gain vision, and plan. Thus, we cannot vote-in leaders that do not know how to plan—even with a lot of paid help.

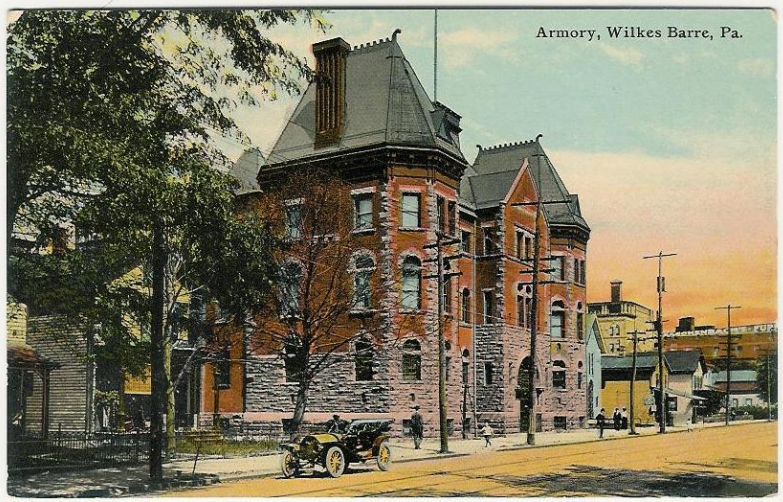
Wilkes-Barre City in anybody's administration must be prepared to take all donations from those that are glad we stand in the center of a community ready to reestablish its greatness. We need everybody's help.

We certainly need a good plan but we must also put an end to the carnage in order to gain this opportunity. Wilkes-Barre has ripped down too many buildings in its time and replaced them with Plasticville factories, hotels, and monopoly houses.

I'm not going to take us on another tour of Wilkes-Barre as we did in the Return to Glory book as this book is still available. However, it would help if we remember our past to know how much we can gain by trying to recreate the best parts.

We may not remember it all, but we have proof in the pictures that show our history. For example, does anyone recall the old South Main Street Armory? It was built as headquarters for the Ninth Infantry Regiment of the Pennsylvania National Guard in the 1880s.

South Main Street Armory – Third Block of South Main Street



This huge, fortress-like drill-shed was supplanted in the 1920s and turned to other uses, such as a boxing arena, a dance hall and a roller skating rink. Most of us saw it on the other side of the street from places like the American Auto. But like way too many Wilkes-Barre edifices, it found its way under the merciless wrecking ball.

Somebody got the bright idea to take it out and replace it with a parking lot. It is gone nonetheless and poorly built commercial structures and parking lots have replaced this great building and many others like it. It is tough to have a glorious city with the Axe Man being so busy tearing things down. In my youth I was at this Armory regularly, roller skating. Others were there for boxing matches. Others were there for Weekend Drills.

Though I could not roller skate today for sure, I skated formally indoors for the first time in this grand edifice. It is gone forever. The same Axe-Man plight fell upon the magnificent G.A.R. Building just down the street from the Armory.

Grand Army of Republic (GAR) Building on South Main Street by the Armory



This magnificent building was constructed in the late 1800's after the Civil War. Over 2500 men from Wyoming Valley fought in the Civil War. Over 1100 of them were members of the group that met in this armory-like building which disappeared from the scene after most of these veterans passed on to their eternal rewards.

That is the fate of all buildings that were masterfully built, and indestructible in their day. These buildings would be thriving today if it were not for the carelessness of their caretakers.

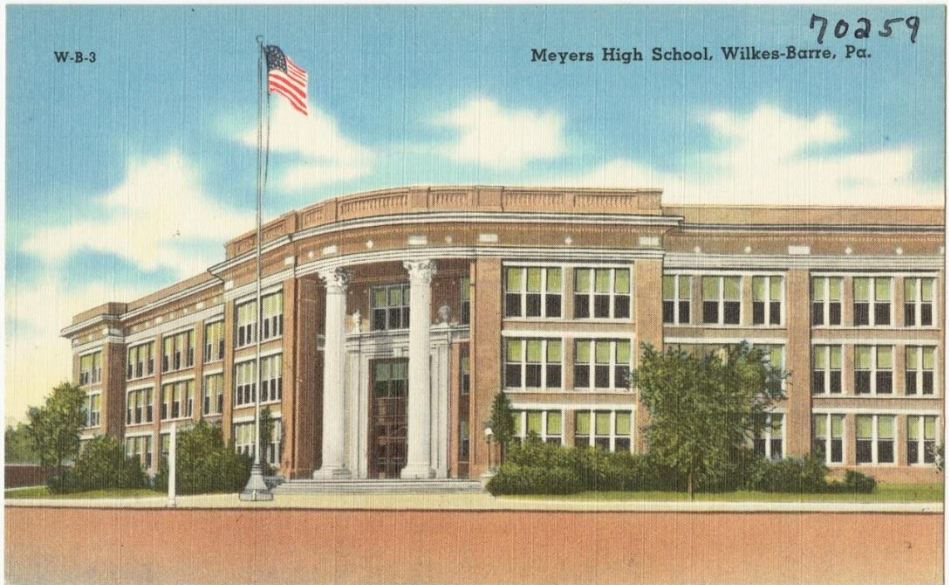
Shame on us but mostly those we left in charge... The buildings got a little dirty and eventually needed new roofs. These monuments to their day were not respected by City Officials over time. No cheap structure built to replace these huge pieces of stone will ever last as long or be as respected by the people. What do you do when you need a new roof? Do you buy the property next to you and tear it down hoping incessant rain will not affect your property if this one is gone? No, because you are not stupid!

Civil War Veterans at the GAR Building circa 1912



In the 1970's when I visited Europe on a student fare, I got to see first-hand the neglected Roman Coliseum still standing in Rome. Yet, it's been there for over 2000 years and nobody is clamoring to tear it down. It is not about to go anywhere unless some uncaring human, someplace chooses to rip it down

Chapter 23 Stop the Axe Man from Doing More Damage



Three City High Schools to be Demolished?

Meyers, G.A.R. and Coughlin are in danger of the Wilkes-Barre axman at the insistence of what some would call the corrupt Wilkes-Barre Area School Board.

From <http://preservationpa.org/uploads/2018-PresPA-At-Risk-newsletter.pdf>

AT RISK ELMER L. MEYERS HIGH SCHOOL Luzerne County 341 Carey Avenue Wilkes-Barre, PA Threat: Demolition Beginning in May 2008 and extending through April 2012.

[Yet, here we are at the beginning of 2019, and Meyers is still here, and it Is still functional and still in working order.]

Preservation Pennsylvania worked with the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the United States Environmental Protection Agency on a program entitled, “Helping Johnny Walk to School:

Sustaining Communities through Smart School Siting Policies.” This program encourages school districts to retain historic schools, to locate new ones in locations where a portion of students can walk or bike to school, and to use schools as a center of community activities beyond regular school hours.

The Elmer L. Meyers High School, built in 1930, stands as a testament to the importance of continuing such programs. As a Depression-era construction project, the school embodies the grand design of early 20th-century public architecture. It serves a diverse neighborhood and is located in a central location that children can walk to.

The Wilkes-Barre school board has planned to consolidate several of their schools, including Meyers and the historic James M. Coughlin High School, and build a new school approximately four miles from Meyers. The plan was created as a reaction to several feasibility studies done by the district indicating that renovation of their historic high schools would be cost prohibitive.

The plan ultimately concludes with Elmer L. Meyers being demolished in order to build a park. This historic school serves as a community anchor and ties the residents to the area. Losing this school would mean that children would be bussed out of town for school.

Wilkes-Barre Area Save Our Schools has been advocating for the school to remain in use, and locals are preparing a National Register nomination for the Elmer L. Meyers School. Preservation Pennsylvania hopes to work with the district’s school board and the local community to encourage the building’s preservation either as a school building or new community use.

Special landmarks do not have to be destroyed

Throughout this book, as we have discussed one neighborhood or section after another, we found a lot of holes in our City. There are many vacant lots where once magnificent buildings stood. The latest of course is the Hotel Sterling, but our history is replete with the Axe Man delivering damaging blows to our future, and the City wimpishly agreeing with the anti-public school board to take down one monument after another that can never be replaced.

We have two more monuments that are about to come down if they are not cared for—The Irem Temple Mosque, and The Hotel Sterling Annex. This must be stopped. There is recent good news on both of these as we know the Annex is being rebuilt and the Irem Temple Restoration Project is collecting donations to bring back the Irem treasure. See picture of The Irem Temple below:



Additionally, the Wilkes-Barre Area School District, whose mission is not to care about Wilkes-Barre per se, wants to rip down our three high schools and replace them with a huge Plasticville building in a different City. The new structure is to be built over toxic material and compared to the existing high schools, it may or may not last thirty years.

I am 100% against this and I wrote a letter to both papers about it. The Citizen Voice printed my letter on the day before New Year's Eve, 2014. Here it is in its entirety as printed. It says it just as I meant it. Many in Wilkes-Barre have thanked me for writing it as it represents the feelings of those of us who care.

LETTER TO EDITOR

Published: December 30, 2014

Editor:

The fixes required for Wilkes-Barre Area School District high schools have been depicted as unaffordable by taxpayers regardless of the approach — fix it or demolish and build it again cheaper. I don't think so. I don't buy it. It would have been interesting if the numbers and "plans" had been presented at Wednesday's meeting along with the impact on millage. We all know the school district has not been a tax bargain for local taxpayers. More importantly for all of us living in Wilkes-Barre Area, the question should be, "Do we really want to destroy historically important, well-built school buildings and replace them with cheap quality 30-year models?"

Wilkes-Barre High was established in 1890. It later was renamed Coughlin High after GAR opened in 1925. This old Coughlin school building is in fact the oldest public high school building in Pennsylvania. Can you believe some people want to tear down the oldest public-school building in the state? The Coughlin Annex structure was built in 1952. The original Coughlin building was occupied in 1909 though construction had begun much earlier. Citizens of Wilkes-Barre Area need to get involved and think about what is being proposed and we must ask ourselves if there are not better ways to solve this problem without doubling our already unaffordable school tax burden.

In March 2005, Clif Greim wrote an excellent piece titled “New Construction vs. Renovation for Older School Facilities.” Though 10 years old, it still covers the issue quite well. It is available for all to read online.

Greim offers readable counsel on the big decision for Wilkes-Barre Area:

“Generally, schools built in the 1950s or earlier have impressive architectural character and often are fixtures in their neighborhoods. They are structurally sound and can accommodate new systems. In addition, there is often strong sentiment to keep them in some form.

“Newer schools built in the 1960s and ’70s generally lack architectural character, are not energy-efficient and are constructed of cheaper materials. These get torn down more often or become hand-me-down conversions from high schools to junior highs or from junior highs to elementary schools.”

All of the buildings in question were built before 1950 other than the Coughlin Annex, which was built in 1952. I think it is safe to say that the same logic Greim discusses for post-1950 buildings applies to the Coughlin Annex.

I admit I was taken back by board members who said, “It’s going to cost a lot but it’s something we have to do.” I would ask whether they would vote to tear down historic Independence Hall if it were within their responsibility back in 1860? It helps to know that at that time, this famous Philadelphia structure was about the same age as Coughlin is right now. We all know that Independence Hall is the birthplace of America. We also know that the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution were both debated and signed inside this remarkable building. Independence Hall was built between 1732 and 1756 to be the Pennsylvania State House. It still stands and thrives.

Originally, this building housed all three branches of Pennsylvania’s colonial government. Yes, it was built even before the U.S.A. became the U.S.A. It is now two and a half times older than Coughlin High School and it has a lot of life left. Think of the famous graduates of Coughlin, GAR and Meyers, and think of all the memorable events at those schools. These buildings are special landmarks in our home area, and they do not have to be destroyed.

GAR is almost 90 years old and Meyers is the baby at 85 years of age. Why would we give up these historically significant, well-built structures and replace them with 30-year throwaway, square buildings made of sheet metal, plastic, and other cheap materials? We have historical buildings with grand designs, granite and limestone interiors, and exquisite stained glass auditoriums. Who are we to cast this all away so that in 30 years another study like this can be done as we rip out the structures to be built and go with even cheaper buildings with 20-year lifetimes or perhaps a modular school or a few trailers?

Where there is a will, there is a way. Somehow we lost our will with the Hotel Sterling after spending \$6 million without fixing the roof. Let's keep our will and our wits as the board tries to shove a huge millage increase our way ... for a less desirable outcome than the status quo.

One off-hand suggestion I have is to budget about \$1 million or more if we can afford it. We can bring in a great building contractor from our area to allocate five or 10 artisans just for Wilkes-Barre Area, to begin work on these buildings, one year at a time, one objective at a time. Let's get the hazards out of the way first. When real emergencies occur in the other buildings, we can dispatch this crew of experts along with Wilkes-Barre Area maintenance personnel to fix the problems posthaste.

I would also use our political representatives to get waivers for the beams that can withstand lateral forces. This is a very costly undertaking and should be ruled out immediately. Clearly all of the Wilkes-Barre Area buildings in question have not been blown over by big puffs of wind in the 85 to 105 years in which they have been standing and they are not going to be blown over tomorrow or any time soon. I would also try to get waivers for increasing the physical size of the classrooms. They seem big enough to have been able to be used for conducting classes for many years and surely they could continue to be used. Waivers would save a lot of money and they are practical and safe.

I would bet that the local and state historical societies would help in gaining the waivers. How can we consider destroying such history for a promise we know will be broken 30 years from now? After all,

citizens make the laws. If the laws do not fit, waivers are a good way to save money and still have the benefits of a safe school.

When all the emergencies are fixed, I would put the new team of artisans to work on one floor at a time of one building at a time. I would use as many vocational students to help in the effort as possible. Think of the training they would get. Additionally, Wilkes-Barre Area also has a lot of maintenance personnel, who I bet would love to learn new skills working with the best artisans in the valley in building, plumbing, electrical, carpentry and other endeavors. Where there is a will, there is a way. Nothing in life truly worth having is easy. Why give up the best for a solution that may not even be good enough to be second-best?

Brian Kelly

Wilkes-Barre

Have we not learned our lesson with the wrecking ball?

Chapter 24 Working in Wilkes-Barre



Site of the Vulcan Iron Works Where Huge Locomotives Were Once Built

Get a Job! Try 'n get it!

As small geographically that a town as Wilkes-Barre may be; there was once a busy time in our long history. During this time, it appeared that there was more industry in town than there were people. There was no problem getting a job in most of these glory years. Of course there were issues during the depression, but even then, the mines were still hot, and people still had to keep warm. Anthracite Coal was a savior in those days for many reasons. Those days are gone.

There was lots of work in Wilkes-Barre for anybody who wanted to work. Those manufacturing jobs are gone from here not too long after the mines stopped functioning. If there are some officials trying to bring back light industry to Wilkes-Barre, and being paid to do so, they are not being very successful. Wilkes-Barre may have a few spots in which we can support heavy industry. Don't forget the Vulcan Iron Works once made huge locomotives.

Look at the vacant lots on major streets where there was once industry or stores, or even car lots with cars. This explains why the

city's per capita income is much less than anywhere else in the state. There are no high paying economic sector jobs any more. The biggest payers are the public sector in government and school districts. We can do much better.

Wilkes-Barre once had lots of industry

I can remember even as a kid, many manufacturing and distribution industry plants and factories right here in Wilkes-Barre, PA. When I was in my early twenties working with IBM, there was still a lot of industry here. Did local policies and union favoritism cause these industries to bail to other industry favorable states?

Ask the one-time owners of Muskin Corporation in Miners Mills their opinion of that? Did all of Wilkes-Barre and our politics contribute to Muskin choosing Midway Georgia over Miners Mills in Wilkes-Barre? I was the IT consultant for Muskin in Miners Mills and then for a year or so later helping them in Midway Georgia. I know the answer. I do not remember any top officials in Wilkes-Barre offering to mediate a resolution. It may have been able to be stopped if somebody tried.

For many years in NEPA, I worked with IBM Marketing Representatives, who other companies would call salesmen. My job was to assure the installation of some of the biggest computers in the larger businesses in Wilkes-Barre and surrounds. IBM knew Wilkes-Barre had potential and its businesses responded to the new computer revolution by spending a minimum \$100,000 at the time to become technologically more capable.

You may remember Klein Candy and the Key Stores, in the 1950's on the first or second block from the Square. My dad would stop at one of those places with me in the Christmas season to buy good candy at the lowest price possible.

Klein engaged in other endeavors such as distributing convenience store products such as candy, canned soup, lettuce and vegetables, cigarettes and soda.

Klein's customers were anybody in business that would buy what they were selling. They even found gas stations who otherwise would not

be interested in anything, but gas and oil, proceed to sign up with Klein for convenience goods.

Pantry Quick's, Quick Mart's, Orloski's and the like were all served from Klein's huge warehouse in Wilkes-Barre. These stores most often sold gasoline in most cases and they still do.

Klein eventually bought the old Economy Store Warehouse in Hanover Township, just outside of Wilkes-Barre and they continued growing as a company. They expanded their business and became a billion-dollar enterprise operating in eight states. Wilkes-Barre was their home base. They were doing business in about eight states in the East when they had to sell the business because of financial reasons. Before this, they felt that they were invincible.

Unfortunately, for a lot of professionals who worked for Klein in technology and accounting, the company could not make it as it approached invincibility, and they had to sell the business. This all happened in the last ten years. Perhaps it was bad management? Perhaps it was too much debt? I choose not to judge.

The new Canadian-based company, Core Mark, though not American, is doing quite well in the same location, but without a lot of the excellent NEPA jobs that were once here. Core-Mark brought the big jobs back to Canada. It was another big loss for Wilkes-Barre and Hanover Township.

So, even Klein Candy, a very successful enterprise found they could not make it because they grabbed too hard at being big. So, with their huge debt, they were still able to sell the whole deal to a Canadian Company, Core-Mark for a profit.

Core-Mark as most businesses cared about one thing—the ability to sustain the business at the least possible cost. Therefore, as one of their first actions, they fired just about all of the professional people. As a side show, they got rid of their huge IBM computers and they hooked themselves up to their home office in Western Canada. The home base was using the same IBM technology as Klein so the adaptation was less costly.

The Phone bill had to have been enormous, but they got rid of a lot of US workers, who lived mostly in Wilkes-Barre. That's what we in the US, call competition, but in this case, Wilkes-Barre and Hanover Township lost while the Klein owners and Core-Mark gained.

Maybe tomorrow, these same people will consider lending a helping hand to Wilkes-Barre in one way or another. Perhaps establishing a business in Wilkes-Barre can once again become a good idea.

Unfortunately for Wilkes-Barre, the Klein story has been repeated in one way or another for far too long in Wilkes-Barre and throughout the Wyoming Valley. How could our officials let a billion dollar company with major roots in Wilkes-Barre get away without trying to get them to change their thinking?

Let's look at another major company, Kay Wholesale Drug. They were originally located just outside of the City right next to the former Leslie Faye building. Leslie Faye of course is another story. When Kay got bigger, they were too big for the Route 315 facility so they moved to the former Alta Footwear plant on the Sans Souci Highway right outside of Wilkes-Barre on the other side. They had grown their business from \$10 million to \$300 million by using IBM technology properly.

When larger competitors began to invest even more in their technology infrastructures and their marketing teams, Kay was taking in some profits for the owners, and so they fell behind their competition. When they could no longer sustain the business, they were \$50,000,000 in debt.

After work on September 27, 1994, 121 otherwise happy Kay Wholesale Drug Co. employees chipped in for an "it's-all-over" party, and afterwards, they all went home for good. The 54-year-old firm, which sold drugs at wholesale prices to pharmacies in an expanding number of states, shut down and began a liquidation process.

I have seen far too many endings like this in the greater Wilkes-Barre job market. Kraft Associates on Scott Street was another. Where is a countervailing force to help companies like these stay in business? We need to create an industry support group to help companies come here and be successful, and we need them to stay successful.

We need an industrial comeback

When I was in my teens, people would walk or take the bus to work or even ride a bike to work in most months of the year. Stegmaier Brewery, Gibbons Brewery (still open under a new name Lion, Inc.), Carter Rubber aka Carter Footwear, Craft Associates, who made fancy furniture were among the many Wilkes-Barre plants that hired hundreds and thousands of residents. Other than Lion, Inc., they are all gone. Now, for all intents and purposes, Klein is gone, and Kay wholesale is off the radar. Hundreds of jobs are gone for Wilkes-Barre and surrounds. With so many lost businesses and jobs, can we not begin a comeback

There are remnants of possibilities but try to get a job in manufacturing in Wilkes-Barre. I dare you. Try to find some place in Wilkes-Barre that makes something other than a pizza or a pie or a cup-cake. Even the 18-store Old River Road Bakery, and its successor, Boulevard Bakery, as well as the Barney Street Bakery, Kornblatts, and Keystate, are all gone. They were great, but it did not matter. Did Wilkes-Barre officials ever figure out why?

The major industry in all of Wyoming Valley in the 1970s was garment manufacturing. These shops made ladies dresses, pants, suits etc. Leslie Faye, originally just outside of Wilkes-Barre by Miners Mills had a billion dollar company headquartered right there on Highway 315 that went south sometime in the 1990's with hundreds of employees displaced. The company survived and moved what was left to the Hanover Industrial Complex, but then what? Was any of this good for the garment worker?

On May 6, 1995, Leslie Fay closed its last U.S. plant. Saying it was no longer possible to make dresses profitably in the United States. Leslie Fay Cos. said in its last hurrah that it would close its only domestic plant at the end of July 2018 and eliminate 600 jobs. Now Leslie Faye is gone, gone, gone.

There were literally hundreds of small cut and sew shops in NEPA. There were also other big-time apparel manufacturing companies such as Rex Industries and Carter Rubber. There was a huge Silk Mill on high street making textiles and just down Blackman Street a bit

was the Atwater Throwing Company, who also made textiles. So, what happened?

Planters Peanuts and the infamous Peanut Man were also a big part of the landscape. They of course were bought out and were moved from Wilkes-Barre. There was a time when all you had to do is want to work, and there was a nice job.



This job more than likely was in Wilkes-Barre and it was probably fun, and it paid well, just waiting for you to want it.

Additionally, the milkmen not only existed; they competed. Purvin and Woodlawn Dairies—Dolly Madison ice Cream, were in town also and they all contributed to the economy,

and their employees were tickled for their paychecks. Yes, they enjoyed working there!

There were also lots of lumber houses and there were lots of building of buildings and homes though much of the action was in the suburbs of Wilkes-Barre. Places such as Wickes, Ryman Lumber, and Scouton-Lee Lumber, and others had their day in the sun. And, of course there was International Color Corporation, and the Sunday Independent helping the newspaper industry.

Mining had its great days here for years headquartered by the Glen Alden and the Lehigh Valley Coal Companies. Miners worked in the Red Ash Mine, Prospect Colliery, Pine Ridge Breaker, Stanton Colliery, and the South Wilkes-Barre Colliery. Other industries included General Cigar Company, Penn Tobacco Company, and E A Roos, etc.

The Railroads were here big time in Wilkes-Barre with the Wilkes-Barre and Eastern Railroad and the Delaware and Hudson. Coal always needed rails for shipping.

Sports figures made a few bucks in Wilkes-Barre. Eddie White may be the only sports industrialist that I know about. In addition to entertainment, the sports teams such as the Baseball Wilkes-Barre Barons, and the Basketball Wilkes-Barre Barons were sports employers in our area until they disappeared. It was lots easier in the former glory days to get a good job—even in sports. Remember, not all employees in sports enterprises are athletes.

You may have heard of the Vulcan Iron Works, which I noted earlier in this chapter and other times in this book. They were a big-time manufacturer and employed lots of people and were very busy during the war years. They were right in the middle of South Wilkes-Barre. They were not into small stuff. They made train locomotives. They were a nationally known manufacturer of railway locomotives from 1849 to 1954.

The Delaware & Hudson RR Freight Station, its Round House, etc. Wilkes-Barre Coal Company, Wilkes-Barre Stove Factory. Selltex Factors, Hazard Iron Works, Wilkes-Barre Carriage Company, Ma's Old Fashioned Bottling Company, Eagle Bottling Works, John Zubris Sr.'s Star Beverage, and many others. People worked there and they got a fair wage in Wilkes-Barre's glory days. They are all gone.

So, how do we ever get back to those days? My best answer is that we take it up as a goal and every goal has a shot at being achieved. We dream; we come up with ideas; we plan; and then we take action. We never give up despite the corpses of huge companies that lay in Wilkes-Barre's wake. The wake shows us the task will not be easy.

Please do not elect slouches who simply want a piece of glory and are happy to take money from the people without giving back. We want the best leaders possible in place and we will follow the best elected leaders to a victory for a new Wilkes-Barre.

All things are possible but not when none of them are on anybody's agenda. Let's put the return to glory days of Wilkes-Barre on all our to-do lists.

Let's all stop saying "NO" to everything just simply because we live in Wilkes-Barre. Let's start by saying a big "YES" to everything simply because we live in Wilkes-Barre. When we think that we can, our return to glory will be right around the corner. Let's change the rise and fall of Wilkes-Barre, to the fall and rise of Wilkes-Barre. It's time. Yes, we can and then some. But we have to believe!

Chapter 25 Safe Biking, Jogging, & Walking



**Around Town Bicycles kicks off Saturday Morning Ride series
April 8, 2017 Times Leader Local, News, Top Stories 0
Katherine Pugh - For Times Leader**

WILKES-BARRE — The brisk weather Saturday morning didn't stop a group of about 30 cyclists from gathering at Around Town Bicycles for the start of their annual "Saturday Morning Rides."

A dream, and an idea for Wilkes-Barre

Please do not get sick of my dreams. I dream a lot about getting Wilkes-Barre City out of its temporary rut. While working to do that, I think we can at the same time be making our city safe, affordable, and clean. But that too is not all. Among many ideas that would help the city prosper, this idea would help our City become a city that is desirable by those people, such as entrepreneurs, who might fall in love with Wilkes-Barre as we all have. Maybe some people who can help can move here and gain some great opportunities for exercise and fun. We'll all love them for it.

Why not make the City better than it ever has been by making it accessible and friendly to biking, jogging, and walking from point A to point B. Providing recreational opportunities to stay fit and healthy is a critical part of being an asset to residents for any community.

And, so it is incumbent upon any mayor and council to want to be sure that there are bike paths and well-maintained sidewalks. These, along with walking and jogging paths would encourage a healthy lifestyle in safety. It would also make our City a lot more fun, and what is wrong with that?

So, let's examine the notion of safe streets and bike paths for both biking and walking. Wilkes-Barre is not a large city geographically and therefore mostly everybody in this City is within a half-mile of what could be interconnected bicycle facilities. Such facilities should be able to take those people on bikes or walking from very close to where they live to work, to shop, and to green spaces without fearing for their safety.

There are many gaps in today's pedestrian network though many sidewalks and handicap curb structures built in recent years have made the situation much better. But, the job is not yet done.

Clearly all of this is not in the Mayor's sole purview as there is a City Council involved, which in the past admittedly had been a rubber stamp for the Mayor's whims. Any mayor must develop a good working relationship with City Council to work as a team for the betterment of the City and its people.

First, there would need to be community meetings to assess needs. Then, officials would need to develop long-range plans to address those needs, while being consistent with funding availabilities and land-use requirements.

Would it not be nice if Wilkes-Barre adopted an enhanced bike sharing program that put say, 50 bikes in operation in 2019 or 2020? Yes, we have the beginning of such a program right now: <http://wilkesbarrebikeshare.com/>, so, for some this is not such a new idea. BTW, in addition to Gus Genetti, a major advocate of the program, the WB Rotary Club is behind the bike share notion for

Wilkes-Barre. Is it not appropriate that Wilkes-Barre's # 1 entrepreneur, Gus Genetti is behind the bike share idea in Wilkes-Barre?. It is nice of Gus to help out.

With more pick-up and drop off points, the program could be much better. There are many programs in other cities such as Pittsburgh, which added 500 bikes in 2014. Biking is good for a lot of reasons and if we make it safe, it can also save the expense of gasoline.

Major cities are placing more focus on biking and walking as a means of getting around with less focus on recreation for the sake of recreation. It is a great idea. In order for Wilkes-Barre to do this, we would have to examine our streets, and help quickly redesign those, with minimal costs, to be amenable as much as possible to both bike and pedestrian traffic.

We have some great parks and we have a huge bridge connecting parts of our City with recreation areas that are also part of our City. I am talking about Wilkes-Barre's Kirby and Nesbitt Parks. We can do lots more than we think. We have the asphalt path on the dikes which are blacktopped and are as nice a path as any, anywhere—and with a great view of the Susquehanna.

Even here, it would help to have pedestrian and bike lanes so that nobody is injured from not knowing the "rules of the "road." We don't want joggers being accosted by high speed bikes when both are merely recreating. And, we need to come up with a better way to permit pass-through when the top of the dike seems to end.

Where needed, we might try to carve out a special one way or perhaps wider two-way bike path in the dirt away from the asphalt on the dikes. We need to use our heads properly. Some things will work, and others will not. When the cost is not prohibitive, we can test out ideas and see if they work. But we first need dreams, ideas, and then plans, before we take action. What we do not need are negative thinkers.

The objective would be for our City to have significant, well maintained, bike paths, park bike paths and wonderful walking areas that can be shown as a commitment to encourage biking, jogging, and walking. And yes, of course, we would need to monitor this use so

that it continually works. Having a citizen committee interested in pedestrian and biking activities with the steady ear of the Mayor, whoever he or she may be, would help make this even more feasible.

Leading cities for bicycling are implementing innovative bicycle infrastructures (a.k.a. cycle tracks, green lanes, intersection enhancements, bicycle boulevards, etc.) to encourage people who are interested, but very concerned to ride a bike in the city.

We should examine ways to implement these types of innovative bicycle facilities to attract even more Wilkes-Barre residents to ride bicycles and to be assured that the chances are low that they will be harmed by cars or that they may harm pedestrians.

Clearly in our City as in others, in just about every neighborhood, besides the idea of safety period, one of the top concerns is drivers simply going too fast, driving aggressively, and/or not yielding to pedestrians. We need a plan in Wilkes-Barre to calm traffic and make our neighborhoods safer and more comfortable for us to walk and bike? What speeder does not regret the accidents they cause. Is everything so important today that we cannot take the time for safety. Neither you nor I think so.

We first must identify the problem areas and then put forth workable solutions. Have you ever heard a city official talk about making the city safer for pedestrians and bicyclists? Me neither? It is not on their lists of important items—aka—the items that will get them reelected. Well, folks it is up to us to put them there.

It all starts by making the public aware. Police can be counted on to do their jobs and to keep us safe. Our obligation does not end when there are police willing to help. All of us can drive more safely—but we could also use friendly, yet firm reminders.

Of course this program would involve more focused police enforcement of existing traffic laws. I know the police are stretched thin, but we may be able to use them to lead volunteer emergency police that could be used in problem areas. These extra people can be used in similar fashion to the school crossing guard system. Why not if it helps the kids, and if it helps the population of WB in general.

The “police” would be self-policing, with the authority to issue warnings to drivers that become part of their unofficial driving record. Local citizen patrols could be formed, and they could be asked to help create greater citizen awareness. After all, it is our City!

The Chief of Police must be intimately involved in the safety of cyclists and pedestrians as we permit people the free access to streets designed now only for automobile traffic. Bicycle and pedestrian safety should be a city priority. Hopefully, in due time, the City will hire a Public Safety Director with a major mission to make it all work, who reports directly to the Mayor.

The Public Safety Director would continually work in operational matters with the Police Chief and would also help codify and explain any new regulations needed so that Council can get them passed for the good of the City. When Council needs to approve them, the Director would present them to Council for their approval.

The Director would "direct" that the Chief apprise his officers of the City's priorities. They would need to look closely at jaywalking and gridlocking and to create awareness of potential problem areas and to alert motorists to requirements of giving bikers proper clearances.

If there is a will, there is a way. A nice billboard about bicycle safety factors may help our out-of-town driving guests as to how serious we are about protecting our bicycling and walking public.

To the extent it is possible with the problem of street parking today being the most efficient form of parking in our City, open streets would surely be wonderful. Even periodic open streets can be enormously popular events as we have seen in nearly 80 cities and communities throughout the U.S. As long as residents understand the goals and the rules, they will not purposely try to impinge on good ideas to help us all.

Open Streets temporarily restrict motor vehicle traffic on one or more streets at a time so that people can use them for scheduled physical activity—walking, biking, running, playing, or even a block party with

street dancing. The Mayor should work with community stakeholders to make Open Streets Wilkes-Barre a reality?

The City of Wilkes-Barre, must act as a cheerleader in the implementation of a comprehensive education program that is pervasive in its ability to increase and maintain a constant positive awareness related to traffic safety, infrastructure, and way-finding. It is one of our basic jobs

Wilkes-Barre residents want the Mayor to take the scarce resources of our City and use them to gain the most benefit for all the citizens in all areas. If the Mayor objects, let he or she object before the elections so we can recognize him or her by their limp.

Citizens want a brave Mayor that has always been an advocate for common sense quality of life issues, which certainly include bicycling and walking. Even our fine Police, who make Wilkes-Barre safe for us all, can be more visible on City Police bikes in our neighborhoods.

I do bike myself but not as frequently as when I was a kid. I can recall taking my three kids and a zillion neighborhood kids at times through the maze of South Wilkes-Barre streets over the Market Street Bridge, and into the most desolate "nature" areas of Kirby Park right by the river. They loved it. I loved it. But, today it is not as safe to do this as they say "homeless live there." Let's figure out how to handle the homeless. It must be safe for all as it is such a great adventure. The path from here to there should also be safe.

I make it a point to frequently walk the dike and sometimes even the streets in my neighborhood. I admit, I also use my recumbent bike and treadmill when it is cold like many days in NEPA winters. Not only do WB citizens get warned often about an expected "storm of historic proportions" arriving tomorrow. We actually get them from time to time. When the weather prevents it, exercise indoors or at the Y or at physical fitness centers in the City but most of the time. we should be able to have our streets usable for biking and other forms of recreation. I think we simply need to think about it and we can figure out how!

I understand how our open spaces, bike trails, jogging paths, and bike paths have been utilized where they exist. I have personally seen the difference when a road does not have a bike lane and I have come dangerously close to being hit by passing cars. This is not good for the cyclist or the driver.

If we can make it better, we should make it better. Over time, almost all identified issues can be solved. But we must identify and track them, and then solve them. Those that appear unsolvable may even be solved at a later time, as we get better at what we are doing.

I understand the prioritization and seriousness of bicycle/walking related issues. I know that safety is number one but let's start thinking about what we can do once we feel safe rather than wringing our hands wondering if that can ever be. It can.

Our police are great. With the proper leadership, they will make our City as safe as the safest cities in the country. If there are not enough police, the Mayor should be able to figure out how to give them better tools and if we still need more police, we should get more. The third secretary of a secretary can be attrited, when we need what we need.

Wilkes-Barre's Mayor must provide a comprehensive long-range plan, which would build on current assets. I think we need a one-year plan and also plans that go out five, ten, 25, and 50 years. The administration must also vigorously respond to new solutions. Public initiatives, undergoing constant review, should be brought forth, and examined, and implemented as appropriate.

I would expect that a Mayor could do this seamlessly but nothing worth having is ever easy so there will always be some lumps and bumps. I would expect that a good Mayor over time, would agree that before we see any smooth roads, we will encounter a lot of bumps on the way to a lot of great solutions.

I am not naïve enough to believe that Wilkes-Barre citizens can ride bicycles all the time as an alternative to nice warm transportation. But there are lots of times that we would be able to do just that. I know this from experience.

When I went to King's from 1965 to 1969, my dad forwarded some cash to me and "we" bought a Honda 50 for me to go back and forth to school from the Rolling Mill Hill. It was a two-mile ride or so. Though unable to achieve breakneck speed, a Honda 50 could travel a lot faster than a bike. It looked a lot like a moped without the petals.

When I reached King's after two miles for class in December and January of my first two years, with my multiple layers of hoods and masks, and other necessary clothing, I literally had ice forming from my watering eyes.

Yet, I took the little Honda, because it was easy and inexpensive to get where I needed to go, and there was no problem parking it. Since bicycles go slower, and since the rider does not always have to get to an 8:00 AM class, perhaps less icicles would form. I probably would have simply got a bike and did the same thing in about ten minutes if I had thought that was a good idea. I guess I just wanted my Honda 50 and I had to pay my Dad back for it, but it did get me there faster.

You may have heard of Somerville, a small community adjacent to Boston Massachusetts. It is at the top of the game for bike commuting in the Northeast, so says the League of American Bicyclists. Other top areas include Cambridge, New Haven, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh. Maybe one day Wilkes-Barre can be on such a list. Everything good starts with an idea. Massachusetts, by the way, like Pennsylvania, is not a warm state.

Somerville is dedicated to bicycling. The city has 14 miles of bike lanes, 6 miles of bike paths, and 25 miles of shared roads marked for bicycle travel. With all that in place, the city went forth and completed its first cycle track as a protected bike lane. A cycle track is in fact, a bike lane that is separated from the roadway and traffic by some form of physical barrier. Beacon Street, which runs into Boston, has never looked better.

And so, we have Wilkes-Barre Pennsylvania and Boston Massachusetts (Somerville), two cities with little more in common than long cold winters, and the hardiness of its people. The only objection I could think of to the utility of making Wilkes-Barre more bike friendly would be the cold weather we share with Boston.

Yet, Boston has proven it can be done and that the people love it. Soon, if we choose to move on this, other communities in NEPA would want to be involved.

Can we stretch Wilkes-Barre to Pittston

Stretch your imaginations, please. How about a nice bike / walking trail adjacent to the "cho choo train" that one day may be circling the Square two-blocks out, each day in the future. How about extending a train from Wilkes-Barre past Eighth Street and right on into Pittston PA, the home of the greatest Tomato Festival on the planet. I see there is a lot of track already on that side of the river bank. A bike path right next to it sounds like a pretty good idea.

Since a train around the city is more than just a little project, if we gain the interest in bicycling and we act on it, we can surely create a bike path along the same route. Even without the train, which I know is a dream, and not yet an idea, why not be able to ride a bike, reasonably unencumbered from Wilkes-Barre, along the river to Pittston? Now, there's an idea. While others say, "Why?" Let's help Wilkes-Barre be known in the future as "the City that says 'Why Not?'"

In June 2005, many of us recall that Mayor Thomas Leighton suggested to Wilkes-Barre residents and friends: "The biggest obstacle that we must overcome, is the negative attitude of a small, but pervasive, segment of our population. We must reverse this negative attitude. We must be taught how to believe again."

At the same time, the Mayor unveiled a new slogan for Wilkes-Barre: "I believe." The slogan turned up on buttons, key chains and signs distributed by the Mayor's office. Mr. Leighton's Pep Talk to the City was a good idea, no buts about it.

I believe we need to believe we can, but we also need to dream, to create ideas from our dreams, discuss those ideas with City leaders, decide what our priorities will be; plan to achieve them, and then get the job done.

Believing we can, is a great start in forming a great attitude. Those who believe they can, do! Those who believe they cannot are always 100% right.

In 2015 , Wilkes-Barre held a major election. We are embarking upon another election cycle in 2019 which, because we live in America, will give all citizens of the City the opportunity to bring in the leadership of our choosing. There is already leadership in place. The Current Mayor and a number of Council members are running again. Let's challenge them to reveal their plans to make Wilkes-Barre better before we reveal our vote at the polls.

After twelve years of hard work by Mayor Tom Leighton and his administration, our current Mayor and Council have had their own four years (2015-2019) to improve our City. Have they met your expectations?

Let them tell us all their accomplishments, their dreams and ideations, and how they see our future. Demand details. Don't take it on possibilities and potential happenchance. Don't vote for anybody already being paid by the taxpayers without knowing what they have done and what they plan to do in the future for the citizens of Wilkes-Barre, PA.

Let's see what they think of the "Choo Choo" project and the pathways / bicycles project for biking, jogging, and walking. Wilkes-Barre does not have to be number two in anything.

Of course, we will hit some potholes along the way for sure but we can look to the future now that local elections are in front of us again. We can see the opportunities for some great improvements. How about the Mini-Malls or the little town and hotel by Barney Street. What do our elected officials who want us to vote them in again think of these proposals? Yes or no?

Surely, we should thank Mayor Leighton and his administration and our prior Council before 2015 for their service and we must likewise thank Mayor George and his administration and our Council before 2019 for their service as we move on to select our next leaders for terms from 2019 to ????

If you think Mayor George and the current Council have brought the City closer to its glory days, you are obligated to reward them with your vote. Make sure you first know their accomplishments and their plans for the future of Wilkes-Barre, however so you can anticipate the future of the city with them in control.

Don't let anybody hide without giving you the information you need, and I need to make an informed decision at the polls. Unfortunately, when I asked for this information from the Mayor's office my request went unanswered. I hope you have better luck.

With effective leadership, there will always be new dreams and new ideas. Whatever the composition of our political officials, we must remember they work for us—each and every one of us. And so, it is up to us to help our leaders make the right decisions about our future. We have to engage the system until we correct it. We can achieve a better Wilkes-Barre one step at a time. We all want better for Wilkes-Barre? There is nothing political about safe biking, jogging, and walking so we should be able to get an answer.

We live in America. In our country and in our state and city, the people run the government. We often forget that, and we get stuck voting for politicians when we should be voting for representatives of the people. Public officials may think that they run the government but that is not true. It is the people. We the People are in charge. We determine the government we get, and we determine the government we choose to keep. Remember that in 2019 and always.

By having a vibrant city, when Mayor George finishes his time with the City, we need to be prepared to elect new leadership. If we cannot coax enough good men and women to represent us, then we seal our fate by bringing in politicians. Our goal must be to either keep the people we have or put the right people in place to replace them. They won't be hurt if you think they did not do a good job. We the public must take opportunity after opportunity to help shape our government with the best leaders. This will help us shape our City.

This is why I feel so good about our prospects as a City. We the people are in charge. Democracy means that every four years in

Wilkes-Barre, we pick the people we want to lead us for the next four years. Let's not blow our opportunity.

From reading the local blogs and talking to people for years about our City, it is clear that the citizens of Wilkes-Barre would like things to be better. They would like a safe city, an affordable city, and a clean and beautiful city. They would like jogging paths and bicycle paths. They would like safe roads to travel by car or by bike or when walking.

Surely, there have been great improvements in the uptown areas of the City and during the Leighton years, many have been substantial. Yet, the people you meet on the street continue to openly discuss making the changes necessary to put Wilkes-Barre back on the map again. The way I see it, Wilkes-Barre is a city ready to return to its roots. The people are sick of the dark days of poor government.

Who knows what the ultimate future of Wilkes-Barre may be in its return to dignity and splendor. One thing we do know is that one of the only factors that may separate us from a wonderful future is if as a City we choose not to pursue our dreams. Why should we not choose to be our best by electing the best people in the City for public office.

If the Mayor were to make a decree that would have consequences, he or she would decree that "Dreams are back in style in Wilkes-Barre Pa." Pursuing dreams about our community and its people is a prerequisite for bringing back the great days of Wilkes-Barre, PA.

Let the dreaming begin folks, and soon after, let our great ideas, plans, and actions help make our dreams come true. And if I might add, let none of us sit on the sidelines or somebody may deflate our goals. Get in the game Wilkes-Barre!

Now, how about going to a Wilkes-Barre bike shop and picking out a beauty!

Return to Brighter Days: The Short Plan

In the first chapters of this book, I wasted no time to reveal my big life secret. I am a dreamer; a technocrat; and a solver of problems. Living in Wilkes-Barre almost all of my life, like you, I have become somewhat disillusioned as many aspects of the City have deteriorated. Maybe I am partly responsible for not speaking up enough. Well, I am speaking up now. The dreams of the people have been the continual victims of the perpetrators. If I know that and you know that, surely our elected officials know that. I want to hear from them.

When I ran for Mayor, I asked Mayor Leighton for a few things to help me and other candidates be heard. I asked if he would open the Council room in City Hall so that during the campaign at least one or possibly two nights a week, the Mayoral Candidates and the council Candidates could deliver a platform speech and take questions from citizens.

The Mayor said that was not permitted legally. I have two lawyers in my family and they said that was hokum. Obviously, nobody at City Hall nobody's from the city to become known by the people. The two Councilmen for example had huge financial warchests where the two outsiders, Duggins-Magdalinski and Kelly were not so fortunate.

I would make the same recommendation to Mayor George right now. Let's see what his answer is. Of course, I am not running but this nonetheless provides a fine forum for the people to hear and question the candidates.

It is not easy to get the word out. On my web site so I could be heard, I posted the dates when I would be in each neighborhood giving a campaign talk and taking questions. I visited twelve different sections of the city and even when nobody was there, I gave a speech and every now and then a few neighbors would come out to hear what I had to say. Unless you have a lot of money in a campaign, it is tough to get a message out. Quite frankly, that is why we always wind up with politicians instead of regular members of the public in our important offices.

Not all politicians are bad but they know the political game well. The city needs to provide a regular forum for newcomers and regular citizens to speak on a regular basis even when there is no election in the future.

Like many who are not in elected office, I too know that I have a solution to the ills that plague Wilkes-Barre today. It is part dream for sure, but there are enough ideas and plans in the mix that if we were to let loose and execute them all, Wilkes-Barre's days of brightness would be well on their way.

Citizen & official action needed for City's return to glory

With new Wilkes-Barre leadership in place after our three-term Mayor chose not to run in 2016, it seems that we citizens may have again settled for the same old ideas from the past. After all, we elected our new leaders to get us out of our long-term funk. Our new leaders have not often spoken to us or they would have told us all that in order to get the job done, we all needed to chip in and help.

So, here many of us are four years later, and like a team depending on a good coach, we have been waiting for the Mayor and the Council to send in a few good plays. We have about ten months to go before we get another chance to change the status quo if we wish. For now, Mr. Mayor and the esteemed Council, please send in some good plays.

In the next several chapters as we wrap up the book, I am presenting the essence of my campaign platform calling for a safe city, an affordable city, and a clean and beautiful city. I have dusted these up just a bit from 2015 as the suggestions are basically the same. When I talk in these essays about what I will do as Mayor, please know that I mean that is what I would have done and it is what I believe the people should demand of the current administration in their time left in office and what I believe the new administration should do when elected. I would suggest that any newcomers or existing officials who like what they find in the next four chapters, that they may adopt the Safe, Affordable, and clean notion of Wilkes-Barre in their own campaigns in 2019 with or without attribution. Best wishes to all. Again, no worries, I am not running for political office but I do care.

Chapter 26 Advice to new 2019 Mayor and new 2019 City Council



Three parts make a whole plan

The three prongs of my campaign when I ran for Mayor in 2015 included making Wilkes-Barre a clean/beautiful city; an affordable city; and most of all a safe city. I could not think of a better way to become one of the best Mayors ever in the history of the City by providing these three elements of a great city to Wilkes-Barre residents. Who could ask for more?

You may ask: “Who am I to think that four years later I should be counted on to provide advice to the new Mayor and the new Council?” Here is why? “I am a citizen of Wilkes-Barre, PA and like you, I am tired of politicians not delivering on their promises. I have invested in understanding the solutions that can best solve our big problems.” I thought I could solve our problems by running for Mayor and becoming your Mayor in 2015, but I was unable to

become a politician overnight. I failed to get elected, though I tried very hard to do so.

However, I did spend the better part of a year in research and discussions with crime fighters from different parts of the country and I did find the best crime-fighting professional to lead our City into a new age in which gunshots were not a regular occurrence in certain neighborhoods, and drugs were not so pervasive.

I had the City's crime problem solved but I never became Mayor. I also researched how other cities solved the dirt and trash problems and the ugly streets. More importantly, I outlined how to make the City affordable even with a poverty level of 35%.

I was ready to serve but I was not elected Mayor. Yet, like many of you, I live in Wilkes-Barre and I am right here today ready to help. That's why I wrote this book. That's why the contents of this book can help Wilkes-Barre's next administration—even if it is a reelection.

So, I am offering as I did after my loss in 2015, the benefits of my research and my unique ideas to the new Mayor or the same Mayor as the case may be as well as the New Council so that Wilkes-Barre can become a safe city, an affordable city, and a clean city. In the next three chapters, I provide more details for the next Mayor and Council so that they can accomplish all three of these major goals for Wilkes-Barre citizens.

Making the city clean means a lot of things. It does not mean that the Ax man cometh or the wrecking ball comes again and all historic monuments that are left are again in jeopardy.

Speech in the Wilkes-Barre debate

This is the speech I gave at the Downtown Residents Association in the only “debate” of the 2015 primary campaigns season.” Their rules were very strict. Unfortunately for me, I had about four sentences left when they decided I could not say them. They did cut me off with no warning. C'est la vie. They put the stop sign up and I did not get the needed extra seconds to hit crescendo and finish my speech.

I knew my speech was tight for three minutes but I figured if my podium delivery was slightly longer (ten to fifteen seconds more), I would be able to finish it with an apology. I was wrong. We only got one speech before the Q & A, and three minutes was not a lot of time. But it was the same for everybody so it was fair. I was able to get my points in during the Q & A, but I admit that having been stopped in my tracks threw my game off just a bit.

I was the first speaker. In all fairness, once I was stopped as the first speaker all of the other candidates knew there would not be one second extra. We all knew ahead of time it was just three minutes. I misjudged the leniency factor but none of my opponents had the same issue. Overall it was fair but rigid.

Before we move to the detail chapters of the Wilkes-Barre solution, I am providing the text of this speech below. It will give the next three chapters a suitable introduction for solving the problems of safety, cleanliness, and affordability.

Because speaking and reading require different phrases, I have altered the speech below just a bit to add-in words that when spoken would have been done with some inflection. Thus, there were fewer words in the spoken speech at the debate than shown below. Here goes:

Good Evening to all. Thank you to the Downtown Residents Association for this event enabling the public to meet the mayoral candidates.

I'm Brian Kelly; a JFK Democrat w/ sane conservative family values. I ask Republicans to vote for me as a write-in.

Two favorites in this race are Wilkes-Barre Councilmen. Both are very well financed.

Their handsome faces are everywhere. Radio, TV, and Newsprint. I have no such warchest. Two of the Mayoral Candidates, the favorites, are City Councilmen.

Council has served over three years; it has 8 months left to go.

Is it fair they blame Mayor Leighton for everything while they hold top positions in this poorly functioning city??

Two councilmen have great plans if they become Mayor? Where have they been while on Council?

Why not pass ordinances to help the people right now?

Should Council take the next eight months off while Wilkes-Barre is blowing up from gangs and drugs and thugs? Why wait to be Mayor to have ideas?

I am not a politician; not part of the Administration; not from the special privileged families in WB who know somebody.

I Know Nobody. I Owe Nobody. I am Owned by Nobody. Like you, I don't like how it's been going in WB?" I love this city.

I am a problem solver. MBA in Accounting and Finance. I have the background to cut the budget to make this city affordable.

I solved problems for 23 years as an IBM Senior Systems Engineer in business, government, and hospitals.

Afterwards I networked the campus at College Misericordia; taught courses at Misericordia, Marywood, and King's.

My forte is solving problems—big problems like we have in WB

In my business career, I solved problems across the US at Sterling Bank in NY; Raymond Corp in Endicott; Harden Furniture McConnellsville, NY; Circus Circus, Las Vegas; Keystone / A&A Auto in Exeter; Penn Millers WB; Glassman High Voltage, NJ; Lackawanna Casualty Insurance WB, Dillon Floral- Bloomsburg, and many other companies.

*I've written 60 books. # 58 is **Wilkes-Barre PA: Return to Glory**. I am serious about turning our city around for keeps!"*

For six years, I served in the Military Police. Yet, neither the ex police chief nor I are modern crime experts.

We need real experts to make our city safe again. We cannot survive on legends.

My priorities are a clean, affordable, and safe city.

My first act as Mayor will be to hire an expert Police Commissioner.

The next act will be to create a special violent crime unit; hire a top quality expert supervisor.

Only our best police officers will be evaluated and selected. If need be, we will hire officers from outside.

This unit will fight only violent crime... no domestic or minor burglary or traffic violation calls.

Mission will be restricted to fighting organized gang drug crime and homicides that result-- like Willow Street [a murder just the prior week], which really raises the mark.

Violent crime is our biggest problem. What happens when the bad guys stop killing each other?

The City has been unprepared; still is unprepared. To the bad guys, we are like babes in the woods. They love coming to Wilkes-Barre to wreak havoc.

Same ole same ole has not cut it and will not cut it. We must crush this gang drug thug problem to bits. We have to stomp it down.

Police force must re-professionalize. No more pleading to fraud. No more officers being the bad guys. Police must get out of comfort zones so people can get comfortable living in WB again.

There is no choice but to win by outsmarting & taking down the bad guys. Lock them up for good or chase them out of town.

When no longer comfortable to conduct their nasty business, these gangsters will leave Wilkes-Barre as quickly as they found us.

Thank you again and may God bless you all

Chapter 27 Making & Keeping Wilkes-Barre Clean



Much of the next three chapters after this were written when I was in the running back in 2015 for Mayor of Wilkes-Barre. When you read this chapter, feel free to go back to Chapter 22 to look at the Palm House and other beautiful sites in Wilkes-Barre from the olden days. Nobody can tell me that the things our grandparents did for this City are impossible for us to do!

When I was with IBM. My peers from the Scranton Office and I found it humorous that top executives from IBM, who would fly in to meet with important clients (local business persons) with big systems issues, were such extreme optimists. Inevitably, the executive would promise delivery of the whole world and several appending galaxies by tomorrow or the next day. They would then get on the plane out of Avoca never to be seen or heard from again.

After being through this several times and finding our clients even more upset after the executives' unfulfilled promises, our sharp sales people created a counter argument for the customer. Immediately after the executive had lifted off from Avoca, the client received the catch phrase for the Scranton IBM team: "Nothing happens overnight in Scranton." It never did.

I am inclined to believe that nothing happens overnight in Wilkes-Barre either and that is the nature of the beast. But good things happen when good people decide they will get them done. It may take a bit longer than tomorrow, however for the good to materialize.

No matter how many tomorrows it takes, Wilkes-Barre will have its clean city. It will be cleaned incrementally one neighborhood at a time, and with God's grace, most of the neighbors will be pitching in. While the City's Administrators will be coordinating this effort, the Public Safety / Police folks will also be cleaning up the city one neighborhood at a time for another malady.

City officials will handle the businesses and the downtown area for the cleanup and the maintenance. We know we cannot do it overnight but by the end of a four-year term and hopefully long before the end, the City will be remarkably clean, and it will have lots less bad guys living in town. Like many things we will be doing, we will be partnering with unpaid city residents to make things even better.

Under my three-prong platform, the Wilkes-Barre **Clean City Action Committee (CCAC)** will be established by the City and its focus will be a project called The Clean City Initiative (CCI). A clean city is the objective. A goal is to turn the entire project over to the people when it becomes fully functional. There will need to be a liaison designated in the administration to assure this initiative is a priority.

The cost of cleaning up after others is too high so let's clean the City from top to bottom one time, and then let's maintain its cleanliness through caring neighbors, caring shopkeepers, and caring volunteers. The committee itself will be set up as a non-profit organization to focus on a lot of cleaning, some greening and the overall beautification of the City of Wilkes-Barre PA.

The CCAC's mission is to assure that Wilkes-Barre becomes and stays an admirable city, and one of which the residents can be proud. To do this, the committee will need to build bridges between quality of life resources and the various neighborhood groups, merchant associations, CCAC volunteers, and Wilkes-Barre citizens.

The Clean City Action Committee is to be designed to improve and enhance the physical environment of Wilkes-Barre through beautification, solid waste management education, riverfront awareness activities, and litter abatement programs. Among other things, its mission is to educate citizens; and encourage their participation in this worthwhile venture.

As a new organization, the group is to become an affiliate of Keep America Beautiful Inc., The committee will be set up to be successful using their proven methodology. Among other things, what I like about this organization is that we get to share a common philosophy that each of us has a responsibility for enhancing our community environment.



Keep America Beautiful Volunteers in Action www.kab.org

Like the 600 plus other affiliate cities and counties in the US, and some internationally, when we fire up, our small group will depend on volunteers to implement perhaps many worthwhile projects each year. Volunteers are sorely going to be needed for a variety of projects including litter cleanups, tree and flower planting, youth environmental education, marketing support, and more. Wilkes-Barre is a first-class city and we all will expect first class results.

Though the promise of a clean Wilkes-Barre focuses on beautification aspects such as cleaning up the loose dirt and trash on the sides of city streets and roads, parks, and public areas, as well as keeping residential areas and properties well maintained—and that means free of 18 to 24 inch-high weeds, baby trees, dust bunnies, and spent cigarettes mounds. The City will also be focused to assure that we remain a clean-air and clean water community.

Philadelphia, Allentown, Bethlehem, and Easton, as well as Pittsburgh may be great cities in which to live but their air quality is listed among the worst 25 cities in America for Air Pollution. The CCAC will work with City officials to assure that our area stays clean in all ways, but we admit we are looking for that which pleases the eye first.

Clean for a city can also be defined as being functional and in good repair. A piece of junk is a piece of debris is a piece of extra-large litter. For example, what purpose does it serve to have a rusty, broken down parking meter, or a stop sign where the paint is completely worn away? How about traffic signals that do not work? What good is it to have a beautiful fountain on our Public Square that is dry and an eyesore? What difference does it make to have once busy bridges becoming dirty, filthy eyesores in a major commercial area of our city?

Is the state of the City regarding something so easy to address as cleanliness a tribute to the inability of the City and its current leadership and resources to make things work? You tell me. I see what you see. Fifty millions of budget dollars does not buy much in Wilkes-Barre. It apparently gets spent on budgeted items but I see what you see. If every one of the 260 employees in the City made \$100,000 a year in wages and benefits, there would be \$24 million left in the budget for everything else. It should be available for projects to help the people. I do not accept that there is not enough money for Wilkes-Barre to be clean. Do you?

[Please remember that in 2019, I am not a candidate but I was in 2015]

If I have the good fortune to become the next Mayor of Wilkes-Barre things will be different for the better. Anything that is in place should work or it should be removed. If it is not in place and it should be in place, it should be built and maintained and be better than you can even imagine. Under no circumstances should any structure or any areas of the city detract from the appearance and overall function of the City.

The infamous fountain on Public Square

I have read with great interest that the rationale for example for having a once attractive, now broken fountain on Public Square is that the City, with a \$43 million budget (Now \$50 million) cannot afford the \$40,000 to fix the fountain. Yet, somehow, we can afford the fence installation to keep people away and the unattractiveness and the dirt and the feeling of ineptness we all get by looking at a city deteriorating in its center. Meanwhile we are completing major projects costing millions in other areas of the City.

If we like drawing people downtown to Public Square for nice events, would it not be nice for the visitors to be impressed? It helps if the place looks nice and is clean. Not so much now. The broken fountain with a fence around it is a public eyesore in the major business district and visitor center of our City. Moreover, where are the public bathrooms that are never open during events anyway. The bloggers don't seem to be able to find any available. Will King's make the old Ramada restrooms available so that there can be foot traffic again on Public Square?

Are the bathrooms on the square broken too? Do they exist? Would it not be nice for the Vo-Tech school to rehabilitate the underground latrines that once existed on the Square years ago when I was a kid? This would help us save a buck, provide a service, and teach Wilkes-Barre kids how to manage interesting projects that will live on after they graduate. It also would stop urination and defecation on Public Square. Maybe we cannot – not – afford such restrooms!

As with most new City action groups that will be formed by this administration if we are fortunate to be elected, donations from Wilkes-Barre citizens; citizens from neighboring communities; those citizens with a history of a residence in the greater Wilkes-Barre area; and of course those friends of the City who simply care about Wilkes-Barre—will be accepted for this project and all other projects. These gifts will be most appreciated. Would it not be nice if there were a way to bring a Percy Browns-like operation back into downtown? How about a Boston Candy Kitchen or even a Cheesecake Factory? Yes, without tongue in cheek, my administration would welcome such overtures.

A one time City monument becomes a decaying building— then a pile of debris



A one time City monument becomes a decaying building— then a pile of debris

This picture was one in a montage taken by a local artist before the Hotel Sterling a 113-year old landmark that once overlooked the raging Susquehanna River (Shown on the right in the above pic), was quickly ripped down. The Ax man did it. What a shame. You can see the dirt and the look of disrepair on the streets and sidewalks if you look closely enough. This is page 1 of Wilkes-Barre for many visitors.

As I understand it, over \$6 million dollars was invested in the structure but it was used to make parking lots out of several surrounding buildings and the leaky roof of the Sterling was never fixed. Thus, the building kept getting worse and worse. Six million dollars of the people's money was wasted. Before it was torn down it was a tribute to inept City management. Four years later, the area is still a pig-sty even without the Sterling. Why?

Doesn't that frost you? It sure gets to me. Would you have been able to build a roof for starters for \$6 million? By the way, it was \$6 million in federal tax money and casino profits that a company called Citivest claimed they poured into the property. Look at the picture and tell me if Wilkes-Barre City officials were adequate custodians over such a prestigious landmark. The City chose to rip it down but only after somebody chose not to fix it properly.

And then while the building was in such a sad state of affairs minus the \$6 million, a major section of the city on River Street was completing a beautification project on the river side while the Sterling side was continually maintained as a pig sty. How are City Officials not partly responsible for that?

In fact, the area for what seemed like forever was partially shut down giving visitors an even longer look at the demise of our City and the demise of a landmark that the people thought should be saved. Not being part of the Administration, I do not know what happened, but it would not have happened if I were in charge. Check the article on the Sterling demolition and the Historical Society right here:

http://opacity.us/article136_hotel_sterling_to_be_demolished.htm

Look at this snapshot from inside the Sterling on the next page. What a shame! Sure does not look too clean. Can you tell where any of the \$6 million dollars were spent? How could something this good get so bad? What about the things we cannot see?

Despite the travesty of the Sterling, I don't feel embarrassed saying that I love Wilkes-Barre. After all, I grew up here and I am happy to live here. Our fine City is far from a perfect City; but I know it can be closer to perfect than it is. There certainly is excessive taxation and a number of other issues of which most people are aware as they drive through the town. Unfortunately, because of the real issues from which they suffer, some City residents have a hard time singing any praise at all for our fair City or its leaders.



Surfing through the blogs about Wilkes-Barre, PA, there are an awful lot of people who care like I do about the City. There may even be some that care even more than I do but not many! There are also a lot of people who are disgusted with the dirty politics as well as what they call a dirty city in what overall seems to them to be the dirtiest area of the state. What a legacy!

If dirt and dust and debris and weeds had value, this would be a rich and prospering town. But they are not of value and they detract immensely from our otherwise fine city. And, so of our population, in our dirty city, over 35% of the residents find themselves trapped under the federal poverty level. That's not good.

Unfortunately it is not hard to discover dirt and dust and an overall blah look and feeling in far too many places in our City. We must give some credit to certain areas that have been improved but still are not as clean and as inviting as they should be. These include the Cinema on Northampton Street where Percy Brown's once stood—in Wilkes-Barre's one-time heyday.

I am not talking about the blah of the future, but the blah does represent the present and the recent past. My reason for writing is so that like the Ghost of Christmas Future we can make Wilkes-Barre Better and not accept its demise. Many bloggers show their blah and disgust for what has happened physically and politically with Wilkes-Barre when they write what is on their minds.

I agree that it should not be this way but it is. The bloggers do not feel good about the chances of the City surviving. Some go so far as to say

that no one cares about Wilkes-Barre. Of course that is their opinion based on their observations. They add that it is because it is a big part of Northeast PA, which they say no one visits —because it is an expletive hole. That's being kind from many of the posts I have read. Even those of us who love Wilkes-Barre cannot deny what has become.

Would it not be nice to tap much of that negative energy for positive purposes to help the City overcome its many issues? All things are possible. Some cite that in their opinion there are dirty towns up and down the Valley along with dirty bars. Some go so far as to call this area the arm pit of the state. Even those of us who love it here for our own reasons, wish it could be better. I think we can make it better but not without paying attention to details such as keeping Wilkes-Barre City clean if not pristine.

Does Wilkes-Barre Need a Ramada or a Crossgates?

In a series of posts from less than a year ago, a number of bloggers chose to comment that Wilkes-Barre had just lost its most modern hotel, the Ramada to King's College. Historically, the hotel was built as the Sheraton, who named it the Crossgates. Nonetheless, it did not survive as a Sheraton.

It was bought and became a Ramada. Recently it was sold to King's College, and this great college just made it part of its campus. But it looked so nice as an inviting hotel right on Public Square. What could be more attractive for businesses entertaining the possibility of relocating? Now, Gus Genetti's great hotel up the road from the Square is what we have after many hotels in the past have disappeared from the work of the wrecking ball. One or two new hotels in downtown Wilkes-Barre would be nice.

If there is nothing else, in my queries I have learned that there is an overwhelming disdain for taxes in Wilkes-Barre because they are unaffordable. Even the bloggers are aware of the tax implications of the Ramada going to a non-profit. And, so, King's plans for the Ramada were not all met with citizen approval. Many citizens think that the Ramada as a hotel added to the Wilkes-Barre good feeling. It was an attractive and clean establishment. Most of us saw no reason

for the only hotel on Public Square to become part of a private campus. This feeling is reflected in several blog comments below:

1. “Just more tax revenue the city will lose to a So called “Non Profit” What a joke!
2. “Oh wait, let’s just wait and let it become another Hotel Sterling.....instead of expanding the local colleges to attract more out of town or even local students to attend and then become professionals and stick around to better the area!!

By the way, <http://wbtruth.blogspot.com/> is one blog that has no love for how the City has been managed. When I had a Brian Kelly for Mayor site under the heading of “A Safe City,” you could get a perspective on how, if elected, I would deal with corruption at any level in Wilkes-Barre. Check out these last three chapters of this book where this article is now kept.

To put it candidly, there is no room for corruption in Wilkes-Barre. We simply cannot afford it. Besides, it is too ugly for our clean city initiative. In this section, we are talking literally about a clean city in terms of its beauty but to repeat, nobody wants to live in a city that is dirty—politically or otherwise.

From the Outside In—Bloomsburg is Attractive

When traveling through Columbia County, I have often thought how nice it would be if downtown Wilkes-Barre were as inviting as downtown Bloomsburg. In Bloomsburg, for example, the City has a wide range of companies and bustling establishments and stores that contribute to a vibrant local environment. The city look and feel is quite attractive especially near Main Street, Bloomsburg, for sure. In other words, when you appear on Main street in Bloomsburg, it actually looks like more than it is because it is well decorated, and it is clean.

The architectural heritage and the overall 'feel' of the downtown area in Bloomsburg make it a big draw for visitors. Nobody has to convince me to go to Bloomsburg for the FAIR or for picking apples or cutting down the family Christmas trees or whatever. Visitors to The Bloomsburg University campus, which directly adjoins the City's

downtown area are invited back by the pleasantness of the surroundings.

The University ranks as one on the really great things to see in Bloomsburg PA. Just as Wilkes-Barre has seen property deteriorate when leased out to students who are here for just four years, Bloomsburg, and most college towns in the state report some blighted and slum areas, once populated by working families that have been made less by student incursions (renting the places).

From my observations, unfortunately, Wilkes-Barre suffers from blight much more than Bloomsburg as our blight is almost immediately obvious whereas in Bloomsburg, you are deep into the community before you spot an issue. Wilkes-Barre needs about 10,000 Michael Anthony's to visit our city and hopefully soon. But since he is no longer available, we'll have to do it ourselves. I do think we can.

Wilkes-Barre could surely use more companies and bustling establishments and stores that contribute to a vibrant local environment. Unlike Wilkes-Barre, in its presentation on Main Street, the small community of Bloomsburg (14,000) shows off a charm that is catchy, and it makes you want to come back. My wife and I love that City.

When we first got married, we bought a fresh Christmas tree in Millville, which is right down the road from Bloomsburg about ten miles, and we celebrated after loading the tree into the van at Dick Benefield's Groaning Board at the Hotel Magee.

It was a great experience. We surely do not favor Bloomsburg over our city but... We love Wilkes-Barre and we live here but we would sure love anybody with an idea like Dick Benefield to come by for a visit—and yes, we would give a high five to any idea about setting up a nice Groaning Board in our fair City.

One more Bloomsburg story before I have taxed your patience. Most of us have been to the Bloomsburg Fair. I can recall a while back as a young man newly married, being at the Bloomsburg Fair, staying at the Hotel Magee overnight. My wife Pat and I, along with Kenny and Karen Evans, wanted to see Bob Hope in person. He was already seventy-five years of age. I can remember Mr. Hope beginning his act

by describing how thrilled he was to have landed at Bloomsburg International Airport. I thought he was kidding but he was serious. However, it was really Bloomsburg Municipal Airport—minus the International part. You can see it in the picture below.



The look and feel of Bloomsburg has not changed much for me over the years though it has changed in the residential areas. Residents say it is not as nice as it was in the years past. At least it is still nice but like all cities in this poor economy, it is tough doing well.

Wilkes-Barre needs to come up to the Bloomsburg or better standard so we too can enjoy a certain pride in the beauty in our city. Just by focusing on something important gives us all more of a tendency to help make it happen the way we want rather than if we ignore it. Wilkes-Barre will be a much cleaner and more beautiful city if you choose to elect me as your Mayor. I promise you that.

Big benefits to a tidy and clean city:

The material below was gleaned mostly from <http://cleancity.wordpress.com/> and a blog known as <http://blog.tidycity.org>. These are generic links / sites that people

have set up to help get the message across about the desirability of a clean city.

This is right up my alley as it is one of the three major pillars of my campaign for Mayor of Wilkes-Barre. These two particular links are not Wilkes-Barre specific, but they might as well be. As I went through much of the material that I have represented below, I rewrote and reedited it somewhat and used the name Wilkes-Barre so it would be more meaningful to those of us who choose to read this piece. It sure is refreshing to find so many people writing about having a clean city.

We have all heard the term that “cleanliness is next to godliness.” The choice between clean and dirty is almost always made in favor of clean. When work is involved, however, things slip into disrepair, clutter, and finally plain old dirt. Nobody is looking for work without pay.

Despite the obstacles in front of us, I know, and you know that we can make our city clean and we can keep our City clean if we choose to do so. If the people of our City think like us—that we can do it, they are right. If you think you can’t and they think they can’t you both are right; so let’s think we can. Few people who think they can’t ever can, and even fewer do!

We need a *can-do* focus about the beautification of Wilkes-Barre in all ways. Public cooperation is key. Without a buy-in from the public, none of us in the plain ole town of Wilkes-Barre can achieve much of anything. Together, however, we can have it all.

That is why having a clean city is one of the three major prongs of my campaign for Mayor. A clean city should help all residents know we mean business. So to keep our city clean, there must be a mass awareness by the public gained via all of the mass media and low media outlets available in Wilkes-Barre. I am talking about, newspapers, radio, TV, city officials and city employees. We have to believe we can do it. Maybe we need another euphemistic “I believe campaign” to test our mettle. We can if we choose, and it is about time we choose a big plus for Wilkes-Barre.

Litter and garbage and dirt in the streets is beyond our limits of tolerance. We can do better, and we will.

Of course in addition to being clean in a beautiful sense, the city must be clean in other ways to assure that our health is protected and assured. This should be a great concern for each individual person as well as the City as a whole. We must consider our environmental health to assure that all the physical, chemical, and biological factors affecting health, which includes air, land and water are under acceptable tolerances. It is important to us all. If we think we can, we can, and that is that!

Whose job is it to keep Wilkes-Barre clean?

Keeping our City clean is every citizen's duty. First it would be great if we all learned to love our City and then we all would be less inclined to do things that hurt Wilkes-Barre, PA. Maybe the City can coach the Kirby Center to have Wilkes-Barre days in which lessons on “clean’ and “beautiful” can be shown for free on the big screen?

Maybe local artists would perform for the elderly from the high rises for free for the privilege of playing on the Kirby Stage. Maybe it can be once every two weeks for all the high rises with donor paid transportation. Who would not contribute? Why not let the public pay a couple bucks admission to the Kirby for the same performances for general admission—if there is room. I know my daughter’s group, the great *Charming Beards* would sign up tomorrow. My son, a master keyboardist and a local lawyer, would be happy to play.

We need to get beyond the thoughts of some bloggers. It would be nice if just as the people liked to sing the Cohan tune “*It’s a grand old flag*,” we would be inspired to sing songs that may praise John Wilkes and Isaac Barre for founding our city. Of course we can also sing more modern songs yet to be written by local songwriters about Wilkes-Barre—and we can all smile when we do. Even if you may think we can’t, I know we can.

To make a clean city happen, it is up to all of us. Just a few principles and you and I can be on the same team. We all must be careful not to throw dirt or garbage anywhere that suits us. A strict law from Council should be enforced. We could make rules such as those in

Singapore, where there is a huge fine for detracting from the beauty of the City. We have to show we mean business, or we will wallow in the murk when we should be shining on the shore.

For Wilkes-Barre, since we are not Singapore, as a reminder, there should be a fine, but not a crippling fine because it is tough to live already in this City. The fine can be collected and used for city development / beautification purposes. So they have to read about themselves, we can put the violator's names in the paper or on the City Web site under some notable heading, and I would suspect few would want to brag about being such a perpetrator.

The bottom line on responsibility is that it is our duty to keep our city clean. Would we not like Wilkes-Barre to be the finest lady of them all? Our City represents the types of people we are—those of us who live in this City. We should represent ourselves well.

Snippets From the blogosphere

My campaign team and I cannot take credit for all of the content that we put forth, but we believe in it. Some is written for the PhD and some is written for everybody. We hope both will see the merits of our campaign and choose a Safe City, An Affordable City, and A Clean City as the way to go with Brian Kelly for Mayor of Wilkes-Barre. So, from the blogs, I gleaned the following material about clean cities. Most is right on the money. Some just expresses frustration.

How does *Wilkes-Barre: Safe, Affordable, & Clean* sound as a motto?

I rewrote the essence of some of the pieces in this blogosphere section for one of two reasons: It would read more smoothly or there would be little room for misinterpretation of what the blogger was saying. Since most bloggers do not give campaigns the right to broadcast their thoughts, there is no attribution on many of the items brought forth... nor are most word for word. I take no credit for the thoughts presented other than that for the most part, I most certainly buy into the notion that Wilkes-Barre should be a clean city. For this section, I will use italics in the headers.

Here we go:

To make and keep our City clean, a superset of the following simple steps can only help:

1. *Educate the people about it.*
2. *Do not throw away plastic bags.*
3. *Do not through garbage in any open area.*
4. *Grow a garden and learn about plants.*
5. *Taking it one step further, without becoming a whack, you can use solar energy because it does not produce any residue but be careful when discarding the panels which are not environmentally friendly.*

Transitional employment through community improvement

The Wilkes-Barre CCAC initiative will undoubtedly find that there is merit in providing transitional employment opportunities for those incarcerated in Luzerne County Prison. I can see things like community improvement / beautification activities such as street sweeping, graffiti removal, and perhaps even neighborhood greening. But, we would have to make sure there are no legal hurdles to cross and no substantive expenses to incur. Plus, there should be no risk as those incarcerated must be watched carefully.

In such a program, notwithstanding any buy-in from the incarceration facilities, low-income and homeless individuals may be used to help and paid a minimum or perhaps even less than minimum hourly wage. We would have to test the legality of this to see if wages can offset any public assistance or room and board—for a limited period, maybe several months. For prisoners, it would be as they prepare to rejoin the regular workforce. For others, it would be as long as appropriate.

As a science major and an IBM Systems Engineer, and as a Business Professor, I surely do not claim to be versed in understanding exactly what would be needed for this to be win-win for the City and the individual hoping to return to society ready to work. If there is no offsetting funding for this, of course, it may go into the bucket of good ideas that Wilkes-Barre cannot afford.

Participants who would work in such a Clean City Initiative program might be referred through the Department of Human Services, drug and alcohol treatment programs, social service agencies, shelter case managers, and even the criminal justice system. Nobody is interested in making it more dangerous to be a city resident and that is why such approvals would be necessary to bring somebody on board.

Partnering with other agencies to spit shine our City is not a bad idea. If our laws do not permit this, then city residents and others must point out the absurdity of such laws to those legislators with authority to make the system work for the people.

Such a program would work in conjunction with the aforementioned agencies and others to ensure that our accepted participants are first of all helping the City, and secondly that they are receiving the transitional support they need during their move from their current surrounds to economic self-sufficiency. Wilkes-Barre can help but only to the extent that the program benefits Wilkes-Barre.

Though Wilkes-Barre is empathetic to rehabilitation notions that will help other agencies bring their clients / consumers back into the mainstream, that would not be our primary mission. Our mission is selfishly to help in this endeavor only to assure that the participants help Wilkes-Barre in its goal to revitalize itself by becoming a clean city and perhaps the cleanest city in the state of PA, and perhaps even the nation.

The notion of “cleanliness is next to godliness” can teach all of us to keep our surroundings clean and to lift more than just a finger to help any other area that needs attention. Efforts to make our City a clean city will doubtless be seriously endless. Don't we all have to bathe regularly to present a modicum of appropriateness to our very own beings? That too is never ending.

Of course we are not talking about silly things here. It can be argued that a motivated person in clean mode can make every possible effort to make the City a clean and perhaps even a green city. He or she can surely visit several barren lands in the city and try to grow some plants and trees. Admittedly, that is not the clean notion of what we speak, and so we must spread awareness of what this really means so that the goals are not misinterpreted.

Public latrines can be constructed anywhere but especially near every landmark in the City so that the people won't discharge personal waste as a dog or a cat would do. I like the idea of a partnership with the vocational / technical schools. Public dustbins can be kept so that the City garbage doesn't lie anywhere in the public areas. Volunteers can maintain the cleanliness of the rest facilities.

We know that the Olympic motto is "stronger, higher faster," so those who donate time to the City for its beautification can join a strong team with high aims and objectives. When this begins, with your approval, we will be looking to help our community as soon as possible. God created this beautiful world and a beautiful Wilkes-Barre. Our Lord expects that the hands given by him to all of us should always work towards beautifying his creations.

I know few people who would like it if their home / house was filled with dirt and waste and there was a bad odor all around? Who would want to live in such a place? Nobody!

Our City should not give visitors, passers-by's, residents, or potential city business owners the idea that Wilkes-Barre is a place full of waste and bad odors. Of course all areas of the City are not like this but, all of us have found areas that are not up to anybody's standard of niceness. Nobody would suggest that anybody else live in such an untidy place or build their business where the people do not care enough to spruce up their own City.

We all clean our houses, our clothes, the utensils with which we eat, and most importantly ourselves; and we must do that every day. Why do we do that? We do that so we can maintain our hygiene and stay healthy and fit, and so that we can avoid having to sit in rot for any long period if at all. When we treat our City as one of our most prized possessions, our City will benefit from such kind treatment.

If none of us care to stay in a house that is not clean, why would we choose to stay in a City that is not clean and tidy? Just like we own the look of our homes, inside and outside, as owners or renters, or simply passers-by, we also own our City and as such, it is our duty to keep it clean.

Of course this is not just for us, but also for the people visiting our city and also for our future generations. Bad habits and good habits live a long time. Let's get into good habits. Nobody is looking to have tomorrow's Luau in a cesspool!

We all know that there are many ways in which we can do our part to keep our City clean. They include throwing garbage and waste in dustbins and not on the road. Even if we are not the perpetrators, suppose we observe plastic material or other debris being thrown onto the road. As dedicated citizens of a beautiful Wilkes-Barre, we should be motivated to pick up the problem and we should throw it into a handy dustbin.

We should not feel ashamed of our altruistic actions for our fellow citizens and they should do the same for us. We should teach whoever will listen, children, adults, and even septuagenarians and Octogenarians to do the same. We should use public toilets and, other than in a dire emergency we should not put our personal waste on the road, and even then, we should do our best to cover it or remove it completely.

Doesn't it disgust you that the moment you leave your home, somebody may know it is unattended, and they may choose to paint some nasty graffiti on your frontage? We know that nobody should do this but they do. Likewise, nobody who loves Wilkes-Barre should write on the historical buildings and monuments.

Most importantly we all must tell everybody in Wilkes-Barre about the advantages of keeping our City clean and we should promote campaigns and activities on this issue as it will help us all and help our children today and down the road. Nobody wants to take their kids to an unhealthy city play area?

These are important ways in which we can keep our City clean. But many people must be thinking, that we should do so. There are many advantages for keeping our City clean and green. The most important is because it will help us and all of Wilkes-Barre.

Would it not be nice for Wilkes-Barre to be a Tourist Attraction?

We can surely promote tourism as we make our City more and more attractive for the public. A major benefit of tourism across the board is that it increases the economy of the entire country. More importantly for us, when the folks are attracted to visit our City, it helps the local economy. Of course, tourists are only attracted to those cities that are beautifully carved and are rich in historical architecture.

Our 200+ year old City is rich in history and worthy of many visits from outsiders. However we must hold onto our architecture and never again let major assets, such as the Hotel Sterling disappear ever again. We need to fight the wrecking ball mentality of the past. Monuments are not rebuilt after they are gone.

If we keep our City dirty and if there are mounds of garbage and unsightly weeds all around, this will have a negative impact on tourists as they form their opinions of our culture and lifestyle. In other words, we will get few repeat visitors and we can forget about word of mouth telling a positive story about us. The moral of this is that we must keep our City clean and then we have a chance to attract more and more people to visit. This will improve life in Wilkes-Barre for all of us for sure.

Better health for the people of our City

We all know that following good hygiene practices will help us stay healthy and fit and thus will provide us with a longer life. Heaps of garbage and waste products and debris in our City as it has been in some places in the past gives rise to insects, mosquitoes and flies and worse. These in turn will lead to diseases like chicken pox, jaundice, perhaps even malaria, and many more diseases that are caused by unhygienic conditions such as old tires laying around. To demonstrate that this is serious, please note that there is a litany of diseases just from mosquitoes. These include the following:

- *Malaria*
- *Chikungunya*
- *Dog Heartworm*
- *Dengue*

- *Yellow Fever*
- *Eastern Equine Encephalitis*
- *St. Louis Encephalitis*
- *LaCrosse Encephalitis*
- *Western Equine Encephalitis*
- *West Nile Virus*

The message to all of us living in Wilkes-Barre is that we should prevent the accumulation of wastes and keep our City clean. Thus, in turn, this will prevent diseases from spreading and we can thus stay healthy and fit.

We all should pitch in to help preserve our environment

Throwing waste products such as plastic cans, wrappers and many other things in the parks, gardens and other places will surely degrade the physical environment. We have all learned that plastic items do not readily decompose, and accumulations of such non-biodegradable rubbish will lead to degradation of the soil and thus our environment. Most of us understand that the bottom line for we the citizenry is that we cannot haphazardly deal with our waste.

Unfortunately, because we are humans first, as caring as we may be, we must be reminded regularly to avoid throwing waste products in the public places. We have to convince ourselves to use dustbins and garbage cans to save our environment and preserve it. All of these notions are things we can do in spades if we choose.

Saving the City for future generations

Our future generations depend on our acting prudently beginning right now before it is too late. This present generation must take care to keep our City well maintained. We all would like our City to be preserved for our posterity and our progeny. We must be careful therefore that we do not destroy our natural resources and our reserves along with City monuments and historical buildings and of course our natural landscapes.

Our future generations need to be rich in history and culture and our natural scenery must be safeguarded and protected. We cannot act

selfishly. Instead we should care about our City rather than take the easy way out. It goes without saying that we also think about our future generations. We should not throw waste products here and there—destroying our environment and our shrines and important statues. The bottom line, to repeat, is that we must keep our City clean, so that down the road, our lives and those of our children will be much better.

Do things that attract multinational companies to Wilkes-Barre

Why should so many people in Wilkes-Barre be poor while it seems that the rest of the country has a shot at the American dream? Good question! Inviting multinational companies into our City will lead to economic growth and it will also be beneficial in many other ways.

For example, overall, there can be lower taxes and lower production costs, which in turn reduce the price of consumer goods, making the City more affordable. Local labor can be trained using effective techniques.

These will help the City prosper and provide many more benefits from the existence of better employment opportunities. Keeping our city clean is very important and it will help attract the multinational companies who offer such promise so that we can all take advantage of all the benefits which will accrue.

Attract even more employment opportunities

As stated, keeping our city clean will attract more companies to employ our people. Thus, it is very clear that the more fine-companies that we can attract, the more employment opportunities will ensue. It stands to reason so that smart citizens and not-so-smart citizens alike can discern that the more people that are employed, the fewer incidents of poverty will be seen.

In fact, learned scholars have correctly suggested that the rate of poverty will decrease as the rate of literacy increases. Thus, our City and all others will grow both economically and socially with stronger opportunities for jobs. The message of course is that none of this good happens without a clean city and it is up to all of us to keep it clean.

Wilkes-Barre gaining a high ranking among PA cities brings better visitors, new residents, and new business.

If we want our City to be best in all spheres, whether it is more employment opportunities, an increased literacy rate, decreased poverty rate, lower rates of taxes, better education facilities, better health facilities and even much more things, the image we project to all comers matters. To repeat to the point of boredom: We must keep our city clean and perhaps even beautiful and green.

To hold a top position in the ranking of the cities, we must demonstrate the ability to show tremendous growth economically, socially and industrially. Of course there are other factors, but, to not be shut down at the gate to achieve this, Wilkes-Barre must take the initiative to do what we must. We must avoid blight at all costs.

That means we, the citizens, must clean up after ourselves. We must plant trees, avoid throwing waste away indiscriminately, and we must create an awareness among all people in our fair city about the benefits of having a clean city and thus we can ensure the mandate to keep our city clean.

Here is a good example bringing out the good qualities among individuals

If we will keep our city clean, it will impart a civic sense in us, which will help us in the long run to achieve something big in life. It will teach us to keep our surroundings clean, which can also help us to impress any potential bosses who may entertain developing jobs in this area of PA.

Preserve our historic monuments

Wilkes-Barre is over two hundred years old. Yet, many citizens, especially the youth are so restless that they seem not to care. And, so we find useless things written on the walls of many monuments and buildings and public passageways. We also find the usual garbage and waste throwing going on in historic places and we find many thinking it is OK to use our monuments as latrines.

This destroys the heritage and defaces the monuments and historic buildings. But, worse than that, it destroys our culture. It keeps us down as an area, and it makes a lot of people give up. The message is simple: Keep our city clean.

By having a clean city there are major advantages.

Of course heaps of garbage and waste products that are accumulated on the roadside occupy an awful lot of space and they stink to high heaven. But, if we look at it just a little differently we find it is even worse than otherwise believed. Yes, garbage and waste occupies too much space in our City and by occupying real estate, it prevents the regular people from using such space for something constructive.

We like to use hyperbole in our explanations, so you get the point before we make the point. Lets say this space, covered with garbage at present, can be used for something constructive and useful, such as a whiffle ball field. At the lower level, perhaps it can be a fine parking lot, and working our way upstairs such poorly maintained space can be the seeds for a number of other productive ventures.

But, hey, if there is a proclivity among residents to throw waste all over this particular place, who does that help? Nobody! Therefore, without overt action, it will continually remain idle and it will be a welcome venue for flies, mosquitoes, fleas, ticks, stink bugs, gnats, and assorted various other insects, whose mission seems to be to bring disease with them to afflict our families. Who wants that?

When a place is not used for any fruitful work and it thus becomes a wasteland, what should citizens hoping for the finest Wilkes-Barre do to make things better? It is not complicated. If, rather than muck and mire, our citizens want our city to have more space for parking, light recreation, wider and cleaner roads, and many more advantages of more availability of space, the answer is obvious. We must keep our city clean and because we believe this is the truth, we should preach the same gospel to others.

Can you as one person make a difference?

In Wilkes-Barre and in all of our towns, it all starts with us. If we choose not to engage, that is the lesson of the town and the politicians

still run the place—clean or dirty. They do not care as long as they are reelected. So, the message is we must begin with ourselves, and then we can work up to larger projects. We all have it in our control to make sure we recycle, and we do what we can to remove the unsightly areas of our City. If we find our politicians are unsightly, we can do the same with them.

Once we have some success with our friends, it is wonderful if we can move on up to organize something like a whole block cleaning “party.” In this, you try to get as many people out to pick up garbage around your block as you can contact and who will agree. You can bet the elderly in your neighborhoods who have nothing left for beautification of their property would love a breath of fresh air from helping townspeople. I’ve seen great groups in Wilkes-Barre doing exactly that—but not enough.

If you are tied up listening to the radio or perhaps even the Rush Limbaugh show, or the TV stations decrying how bad our City has become, you are the right person to help us all out. Help the elderly in your own neighborhoods which also happen to be theirs. Help them in their neighborhoods clean up their yards. Surely with no help, these burdens may become unmanageable over time for them.

Try to arrange a clean-up day with City Council and the Mayor so the City can help in organizing and advertising. Wilkes-Barre is a great City only because its people know how to be great. All one would have to do is get the word out about a helping event and surely everyone would be picking up at least one piece of trash every day. Your city... our city... can be beautiful in no time.

Here are some specific posts from local blogs. When I copied these I did not write exactly where they came from. I would be happy to add attribution as requested. Additionally, I corrected major typo errors.

Telling kids what to do

This post came in on January 5, 2009. It is placed here unchanged:

“In public places, kids who walk around licking their ice-sticks or chocolates have this habit of dropping the stick or chocolate-wrappers, as soon as they are done eating. Parents or guardians seem to make

no note of this and ignore it entirely. And in worse cases take to doing it themselves or telling the kids to drop it right there. In movie theaters, shoving plastic cups and wrappers under the seats are a common practice. If you come down to the canteens, there usually are big trash bins there to drop the waste.”

“But unfortunately all public places do not offer trash bins you could show kids. So until we have some sort of arrangements coming, we will have to revert to keeping all junk in person, in bags or-----
- brown papers till we get out and spot a bin.”

“Please take to telling your kids to not drop things as and where they feel like. If you start showing them the right practices at a young age, they are likely to follow those rules through life.”

This was posted in [What we can do](#) | 2 Comments

This post is here to show us all that we can correct ourselves if we choose. When we choose to do the right thing. We all win!

Against throwing things out of car

January 5, 2009

“Throwing things out of cars has become a common practice here. People don’t think twice before dumping all kinds of food waste, papers and bottles out on the roads.

First reason why this happens is there is no awareness or a sense of righteousness that makes them wonder if there is anything wrong in it. In the future I hope kids would have a whole new subject at school on keeping your world clean. But those who already finished schools could only be made aware through strict regulations sent through media so everyone knows. We will need the help of the law and the government for this. I’d like to leave this thread open for suggestions on what we, as common citizens can do about it.

Are public messages saying “Please don’t throw out things from car onto the streets Keep your city clean” possible? In boards in big font.

There is so much of space used for ads in roads... so this should be possible too – it's to serve a good purpose.

Second reason is because people say they don't have a place to dump it all. It's quite easy to carry a big cover or packet to dump all your trash and keep it aside, or in the trunk until you find a garbage bin to dispose it. Please do that, since that can be done without depending on any higher authority, all by ourselves – it's quite easy and possible. By a small effort from our side, we can do a lot for the place we live in.”

Posted in What we can do | 5 Comments »

Lets keep our cities clean

January 5, 2009

A short intro to the blog. I am starting this as a follow up on my attempts to keep city clean.

Problem is there has just been talks without actions of any sort so far. I don't know what I can achieve through the blog, but when it's a community where people talk and comment, its likely to pull in more interest and when there are more people involved for any cause, actions are bound to follow. For the moment, I am taking up some threads I made in an orkut community started with the same intention:

<http://www.orkut.co.in/Main#Community.aspx?cmm=50968212>

This blog is entirely dedicated to write ups on keeping the places around us clean, wherever we are. It's not about Trivandrum, or Kerala, or India. It's about keeping our little world clean. And removing the myth that we can't do anything about it. If we can clean a room in minutes, a house in hours, and a compound in a couple of days, it is only a matter of time before we can keep our city clean. We don't have to take a broom and start from one end. If each of us did small things, every individual doing his part, which won't take more than a moment's time, there shall be a huge difference.

I hope everyone would join me in this, and make individual and combined efforts to have a clean city around us. See your city as your own little room, one that you wanted to see clean all the time. Where you won't throw waste papers and junk food on polished floors. Our cities are our rooms, our homes. Lets keep it clean.

Posted in [About the blog](#) | [2 Comments](#) »

*** End of blog excerpts***

Where did the “dirty Wilkes-Barre problem” originate?

Was it always here? Did we simply let it go on for too long? Since we are part of a much larger world, we can make excuses and say that there was a major upturn in environmental organizations & socio-responsible movements, and this made us ever more acutely aware that our town had many of the characteristics of an eyesore. It's not over by a long shot. We still do but we can change that.

There still exists a great disparity between this upturn & youth involvement in anything after intermural and high school sports. Youth seem to feel they have been disengaged from reality, doubtful of their own abilities, and confused by how to convert what they see online into ACTION! This is an issue with exponential repercussions, as the education and engagement of youth is the key to all futures! Wouldn't it be nice if we could harness that lost energy on something good?

Can we effect a Solution that will work?

Nobody claims to be a psychiatrist or a sociologist here but it makes sense that the notion of an idle mind being the devil's workshop is alive and well today. Put that mind on to something productive and the workshop can add real benefits for the individual and for the community.

The Clean City Initiative for Wilkes-Barre is designed to create a total attitude shift towards volunteerism. People of all ages will be able to join a volunteer corps--not just the youth. However, the youth will make this work and they will make the whole notion enjoyable and rewarding to the adults who want so much for it to succeed.

An objective along the way of course is to redefine volunteerism as fun, engaging, self-expressive, and rewarding. As we get better at this, we can invite citizens, and most especially the lost youth in our communities the freedom of choice—to choose how they get involved and at what level they get involved—and self-expression—to perform clean acts that are unique, and which express their inner creativity.

In giving youth the freedom to choose, and through utilizing some motivational techniques such as incentive-based programs, our Clean City Initiative brought forth by the Clean City Action Committee will engage to harness those efforts for large-scale, perhaps even county & state-wide, and we can even look for national results!

In Wilkes-Barre this is not just about the idea of the sustainability movement. In Wilkes-Barre it will be far simpler than that. Moreover, because we will not take sides on global warming, aka climate change, we will not step on anybody's ideology. In Wilkes-Barre our objective is to assure a future of being able to maintain and improve our soon to-be-clean City. It is also to educate and engage all who are willing, but especially our youngest demographic. The message is:

Get Involved! Please! Volunteers Wanted

Even if I should fail in my attempts to convince you that I should be your Mayor, I would encourage any candidate for Mayor to take and use the three-prong attack that I have outlined. Run with it as it is designed to move our city into the future as a safe city; an affordable city; and of course as a clean city.

The Clean City Initiative and the CCAC can do wonders for Wilkes-Barre. In all cases, citizens should insist that our City begin this effort as soon as possible. Why wait until after the election? Wilkes-Barre should right now be seeking champions to join the project team in all fields/skills sets. I wish I were empowered to say that “If you want to make a difference and promote positive change, why not start with helping us right now? Check out how you can become a My Clean City Ambassador!”

Would it not be nice to find youngsters from a primary school or middle school, or even a high school working with residents,

encouraging them to take responsibility for their neighborhood by keeping it clean? Overtures with names such as “little hands make big changes,” can make big changes to the way we act and think as a city.

Those little hands can encourage the bigger hands to care while taking part in litter picks, growing edible food and improving their school’s recycling methodologies. Would it not be nice to see members of the community recruit other members of the community to join in these activities, encouraging adult residents to keep their streets clean by not dropping litter and using their recycling bins properly?

Where such notions have been put forth, comments from community leaders include this one: "This is about developing children as citizens, ensuring that they have a positive future and a real awareness of the importance of not littering and taking care of the community in which they live. We’re hoping that local people will take an interest in the project when they see the children getting involved."

Projects all have costs but let’s see if we can ask people in our community to help in any funding costs such as t-shirts or signs or for garden seeds for vacant areas or for helping the elderly with their own victory gardens. Of course the City can fund this, but the idea is that we the people are the city and nobody wants taxes raised.

Don’t Flick It!

Don’t Flick It! A number of cities across the country have been getting on board for a lively anti-litter campaign that has real promise. It is called “*Don’t flick it!*” It is a cigarette butt anti-litter campaign. Think about the number one cause of litter everywhere, and then think about how when each of these little sticks get tossed hither and yon, they fly across the shallow sky like little torches. They continue to produce their noxious smoke and pollution until they go out all by themselves. At that exact time, they become environmental pollution. It is a fact that over 50% of all items found in mixes of litter are cigarette butts. Solving this problem can be a great start in creating a clean city.

In the US Armed services, the troops are trained by innuendo to not flick it. Every base has a part of the day used for something called police calls. These police calls line up the troops who then walk from

point A to B and they police the area. This means they look down and pick up every cigarette but that is in their path. It works. Less and less butts get picked up each time on military police calls.

You have seen it and so it happens far too often—a cigarette butt that isn't properly extinguished. Even when dropped on the ground as we walk, it can cause incredible damage. They've been known to blow into front-gardens where they've ignited a flammable object and within a few minutes a butt dropped without thought has damaged an innocent person's property.

They've rolled under cars where they've burst into flames and even blown into the faces of small children. Improperly extinguished cigarette butts have a lot to answer for. They are a menacing problem. However, extinguished or not, cigarette butts are still one of the major pollutants of our time for the toxicity they cause as well as the blight.

I am reminded of the old joke told by a “bum.” “Bum,” by the way, is a politically incorrect term meaning many things including a no-account as in a tramp or a vagrant. I am not for political correctness as it seeks to obfuscate the true meaning of speech by forcing the use of less emotionally charged words. PC will always fail because eventually the word or term used to replace the original will always become just as charged over time as the word or term it replaced. Thus in this case, we might as well use the term *bum*, because such people are always bumming cigarettes, small change or other items. You already know what I mean. It is an accurate term and it is already saturated with emotional charge. It ain't broke, so we should not be trying to fix it here. Back to my story.

As the one bum is chatting with another bum, he mentions how tough things are in the world of today. He says: “Yeah, look at my wound here. I was downtown yesterday getting some smokable cigarettes, and somebody stepped on my hand.” In the newer, cleaner Wilkes-Barre if the old bum ever chooses to come back, we sure hope he finds no cigarettes on the ground for the picking and we hope his hand stays in good shape.

Do you think we have a shot at ever stopping unsightly cigarette butts in parks, city streets and on sidewalks? People across the country are in the beginning stages of campaigns to do just that.

The **Don't Flick It!** campaign is designed to bring awareness to those who 'flick' their cigarette butts. They may not think so, but they are in fact littering. Throwing a lit cigarette butt is no different than throwing a candy wrapper or a gum wrapper or a piece of chewed gum. Cigarette butts are not biodegradable and are the major disfiguring pollutant in mostly any city's landscape.

Studies done by The Great Canadian Shoreline Clean-up and the Great American Clean-up report similar results. Cigarette butts and filters are the number one litter items polluting Canadian and American shorelines and waterways. In 2012 in Canada, for example, over 400,000 cigarette butts were collected as part of the annual Shoreline Clean-up.

Key messages from "Don't Flick It" campaign:

- Cigarette butt litter is unsightly and wrong
- Cigarette butt litter costs taxpayers to clean up
- Cigarette butt litter is harmful to the environment
- The community needs to do its part by preventing all litter.

What to expect

The mission of these committees and our own Wilkes-Barre committee, when it is formed, is to work towards the elimination of litter in the City through:

- Public awareness;
- Co-operation and communication;
- Promotion and education; and facilitation of community involvement

Aspects / Tools of Implementation

- Clean City Web Site -- active
- Unclean areas need to be reported and resolved
- Volunteers will help
- City focus with employees or groups to solve beautification problems

Goals for Wilkes-Barre Clean City Action Committee

As noted previously, some of the goals of the Wilkes-Barre Clean City Action Committee are as follows:

- To alter littering behavior through the development of the community's sense of ownership;
- To encourage community participation through public awareness campaigns and organized litter clean-up activities;
- To make the "Don't be a Litter Bug" phrase and image widely recognized by the citizens of Wilkes-Barre; and
- To improve the natural environment and beauty of Wilkes-Barre.
- Make all city people aware of the importance of keeping the city clean and green.
- Plant more trees, shrubs, and other greenery
- Etc.

Thank you all for your help in making and keeping Wilkes-Barre clean .

Chapter 28 Making & Keeping Wilkes-Barre Affordable



Our City must be affordable for its people

This article was written when your author Brian W. Kelly ran for Mayor in 2015. It has been refreshed somewhat for 2019 but there are still elements that reflect how things were in 2015. Here goes:

On the average, the people of Wilkes-Barre are very rich in spirit but unfortunately, not very rich in material wealth. Most, like my wife and I grew up in three-bedroom standard issue coal-heated homes. There was a Heatrola stove right between our dining room and what we called the “parlor.” Some other people in the City had coal furnaces to heat the whole house. Not ours.

Ours was a rental on High Street for which my dad paid \$25.00 a month for about 30 years before the landlord had to raise the rent to \$50.00. Nine of us lived in this small home. My dad took care of my

grand-mom and grand-pop on mom's side; as well as my mom and the five kids.

Despite having little, we never knew we were poor. We lived in Wilkes-Barre, and nobody in Wilkes-Barre knew they were poor. Wilkes-Barre is still not a well-to-do town; but we manage somehow. Surely, more and more of us are close to the end of our ropes financially. Powerball and the Megamillion lotteries for many offer much more hope than the local economy. Unfortunately, there is little industry and so it seems that unless you have a corporate or government job, life is tougher than in most places in the state.

Those of us with friends in city or county or state government over the last ten years have watched their salaries, pensions and benefits spiraling upward. Government officials have achieved only limited success negotiating union contracts favorable to taxpayers, even though taxpayers are less able than ever to handle the load.

Many of us remember quite vividly that for 2013, Wilkes-Barre Mayor Tom Leighton initially proposed a back-breaking 31% property tax increase on all Wilkes-Barre residents. The population was going down so why a bump in the taxes? Many wanted that answer; but it never came.

After sharpening his pencil, the Mayor settled for "just" 26%. This is substantially more than the meager raise in social security payments and the salaries of private sector workers who live in the City. It did not matter that it was unaffordable by the masses, the Mayor said Wilkes-Barre needed it. The implication was the *Wilkes-Barre needs the money more than you do*. I do not think so folks.

Meanwhile for city residents, the price of groceries, gas, rent, and home maintenance, and mostly everything else has been growing really fast. We all know that household incomes are not moving anywhere close to costs. If the federal government was not lying about the real cost of living in their published consumer price index, we would be getting a daily affirmation about how the cost of everything is out of control.

So, on top of everything else, the federal government enjoys cheating us all by telling us there is no inflation and then they tell SSR

recipients that there is no COLA increase because costs are not climbing. Yet, the storekeepers increase prices and for years gas was going up and up and up. How do SSR recipients with no other means keep up with it? They starve or stop paying taxes and lose their homes.

You have heard the underpinnings of the government rationale for cheating on the consumer price index. Economists convinced the government that when people cannot afford steak, they'll eat hamburger so they substituted hamburger for steak in the CPI cost formula to cheat seniors out of a raise. They said the protein was the same. Then when cans of tuna were cheaper, they moved from hamburger to tuna. Then, when people were beating the system by using cat tuna, they priced in cat tuna into the CPI instead of regular tuna. You can't find this on the Internet anymore as Google does its best to please the federal government. The public remains uninformed about the feds ripping off seniors.

I wrote a short book in 2018 that helps seniors come to grips with what the government is doing to them. It is called *Government Must Stop Ripping Off Seniors' Social Security!* It is available at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1947402641>

The point is that seniors in Wilkes-Barre received nothing extra to pay their 2013 City property tax bill. That's a fact. Seniors are going broke while City employees get nice wage increases. With a poverty rate of 35%, Wilkes-Barre leaders should be ashamed of what they are doing to the entire population of Wilkes-Barre. Dear Mayor and Council, the pockets are empty. Get used to it. Cut something! Cut something else and then Cut something else. How about giving the population of the City a break?

The average homeowner's property tax went from a 2012 payment of \$591 to \$744 in 2013. On the average, the amount was \$152, a 26 percent hike. Some pay a lot more than that. The Mayor also increased the price of several city fees, including recycling service and city-issued garbage bags. Even the increase in fees was beyond the meager increase in retirees' social security payments. This made an already unaffordable tax burden even less affordable.

There are those who say nothing can be cut or you'll lose services? What services? We pay all kinds of fees for any service the City provides. With 53 job titles of City Employees having large overtime budgets, I see no reason for tax increases. It is time for tax decreases so seniors can afford to live here.

Few people had the money to pay the Leighton increases without major cutbacks in their ability to live their lives. Yet while the City was going broke or, so they said in 2013, and thus needed a 26% bump in taxes, for 2014, all city employees received a 3% raise. Seniors got nothing. The citizens of Wilkes-Barre were not so fortunate. Some suggest that this clearly demonstrates that the full 26% increase in the millage rate for 2013 was not entirely necessary.

Many residents have family working for the City, and they are enjoying the fact that their relatives and friends have such fine wages and benefits. It is a wonderful thing when someone we know gets a job at the City or the County or the School District because that is one person who will be able to keep up with the cost of living. Unfortunately, the reality is those fine wages and benefits must be paid for by people who are barely surviving.

Average Resident's Paychecks v. City Worker Paychecks

As many know, the Mayor posts a budget document each year, and all are welcome to view it. The salaries for all City employees by title is included in this report. To demonstrate the disparity between the taxpayers and the wage and benefit receivers, I have taken this information and analyzed it further so that you can see the big differences between the payers / citizens and the receivers / employees.

It is not my intention to suggest that all of the employees of the City are not worth their wages, for I believe that indeed they are. However, to be honest, I do not see how Wilkes-Barre citizens can continue to last much longer under such a huge tax burden. Dear leaders, we cannot pay your stiff taxes. Figure something out.

The following chart from 2015 shows ranges of salary for city employees. This data is not presented this way in the Mayor's reports. The first chart below shows just those employee titles, whose salaries

are less than \$40,000 per year. There are only twelve or thirteen of them, and so, it is not difficult to write these in a chart, and it is not difficult for a taxpayer to read these titles, and salaries. Here they are:

Lowest Salaries of City Employees – Those less than \$40,000 per year. All others exceed \$40,000 and they have gotten four years of wages since this chart was established.

City Employee Job Title	Salary per year
Police Secretary	\$24,825
Parking Enforcement Attendant II	\$24, 931
Parking Enforcement Attendant I	\$27,702
Civilian Clerk II	\$31.328
Custodial Worker City Hall	\$32,450
Disease Specialist	\$34,472
Protective Inspection Clerk	\$35,444
CA Coordinator Comm. Director	\$36,050
Revenue Clerk III	\$37,806
City Assessor	\$37,863
Driver IV	\$38,030
Driver IV	\$38,030
Disease Specialist / Inspector	\$39,388

In this next chart, I show the distribution of salaries within various categories. We begin with the category in which the lowest salaried employee in the City, the Police Secretary, who makes \$24,825 per year is in the first grouping of employees making \$20,000 or more. We end with the Police Chiefs, and the City Administrator who are in a league of their own in the highest salary bracket—even higher than the Mayor's, and not including overtime. Here is the chart:

Salary Distribution within dollar categories:

Lowest Salary for City Employee = \$24,825
260 of 260 employees make \$20,000 or more
257 of 260 employees make \$30,000 or more
248 of 260 employees make \$40,000 or more
187 of 260 employees make \$50,000 or more
108 of 260 employees make \$60,000 or more
015 of 260 employees make \$70,000 or more

006 of 260 employees make \$80,000 or more
003 of 260 employees make \$90,000 or more
Highest Salary for any City Employee (Chief) = \$91,305

*** None of these salaries include overtime wages.

The highest city salaries in 2019 are now well above \$100,000. Moreover, in the most recent budget, fifty-three city positions were budgeted overtime. Fifty-three! Who are we kidding folks? Fifty-Three! There should be zero overtime. We all know that.

To help put these 2015 City wages in perspective, here are some numbers about the regular citizens who hold private sector jobs in Wilkes-Barre.

Statisticians have found that the median earnings for males in Wilkes-Barre is \$27,232. Across the state, the median wage for males is \$38,788. At the Federal level the median wage for males is \$38,921

The median wage for females in Wilkes-Barre is \$18,961. Across the state, the median wage for females is \$22,899, and at the Federal level the median wage is \$23,115.

Using these statistics, we can approximate the average wage of all employees, by combining the median values for males and females. There are slightly more females working in Wilkes-Barre than males. There is just a 3.8% difference in the number.

To average this out, for argument purposes only, because the difference is so small, let's use a 50/50 split in the number of females and males. The average of the two median figures would therefore be calculated in this way: Male median wage (\$27,232) + female median wage (\$18,961) = \$46,193. Now, to find the average (mean) -- not the median since we do not have the raw data, we simply divide \$46,193 by the number in the sample, which is 2 (male and female).

\$46,193 divided by 2 is \$23,096.00. Therefore for reporting purposes, the average wage for all Wilkes-Barre residents is \$23,096.

So, how do regular employees in Wilkes-Barre compare to those employed by Wilkes-Barre city. The lowest wage of any unelected city employee is \$24,825. Therefore, the lowest wage earner employed by

the City makes \$1728.00 more than the average wage of Wilkes-Barre residents who are not employed by the City.

Using the data from the tables above, we can approximate the median (most frequent / mid point) wage of a City Employee at just about \$58,000.00. That means that if all 260 employees were in a listing numbered from 1 to 260 in ascending sequence by wage, employee number 130 would be making \$58,000. Half of the employees would be making less and the other half of City workers would be making more than \$58,000.

If we take this \$58,000 wage and divide it by the average wage for Wilkes-Barre residents, which by the way includes the Wilkes-Barre City employees' salaries, we would have a calculation like this:
 $\$58,000 \text{ divided by } \$23,096 = 2.511$.

This means that the “average” City employee makes approximately two and a half times more in earnings than the average non-City worker. It is these taxpayers, making 2 1/2 times less who pay the salary of all City employees. These citizens of Wilkes-Barre are not fortunate to be employed in the much better jobs that exist in City government.

Not all police in the state of PA are in fat city. Considering the average income of residents, Wilkes-Barre treats officers quite well. In other areas of the state, the police wear the same uniforms, take the same risks and train to the standards of all Pennsylvania police officers. Yet state records show about 28 percent of municipal police officers who patrol communities in Western Pennsylvania are employed part time, making \$10.50 to \$16 an hour with no health benefits. It makes one think if Wilkes-Barre might be a bit too generous. Just saying.

WB Bloggers have an opinion

To City employees, they may find themselves scraping along with about 250 employees making over \$40,000 plus overtime. To Wilkes-Barreans, their numbers are not so good. On a number of blogs that highlight Wilkes-Barre issues, citizens of the City are outraged with the disparity. The recent 3% across the board raise did not go over well. The average Joe in the City makes so little that he would need

an 8% raise to match the average dollar raises awarded to city employees by the Mayor in 2014. Here is a typical blog comment:

“This really ticks me off because in this time of financial hardships for most, these city employees are getting a raise. How about we pave more roads and actually try to stop crime before it happens instead.”

The following is an open message carried in the Independent Gazette. It is addressed to Members of Wilkes-Barre City Council, the Mayor, and the Staff. It is well written and expresses the dire financial straits of a large percentage of city residents.

Here is another blog entries. This one is signed Ray Arellano:

“Before I am out of time, I wish to state unequivocally that I am opposed to any tax increase, or increase in any of the fees currently in force, except for maybe the parking.

I live in the Rolling Mill Hills district. My neighborhood is comprised of mostly septuagenarians and octogenarians, some of which are borderline ninety. At age 77, I am considered the “kid” on the block! Most are widowers or widows. They came up when there were no 401(k)’s or reliable pension plans, so most rely on their Social Security checks and meager savings.

All of them hope that they can outlive major repairs to their homes. They are one water heater or furnace away from a major financial crunch. They pee in their toilets three or four times before flushing to save on their water bills. They only put garbage out every other week because of the cost of garbage bags. They pay exorbitant school taxes even though they have not had a child in school in fifty years!! They cannot get to the store for groceries, so they have to pay to have what meager things they buy delivered.

They worked hard all their lives to pay their bills, raised a family, and through no fault of their own, have lived too long. Many have outlived their children, their families, and friends. They only turn on the light in the room that they happen to be in, and keep the thermostat in the low 60’s, using blankets for warmth.

When they last saw their mate, they had to continue trying to fly with one wing, and for a while they were successful, but now it has

become an insurmountable task. Waiting to die has to be the most depressing for them and some go to bed wondering if maybe tonight it will be over. If they are forced into a nursing home the speculators will buy their homes, and they will rent them to the dumpster overflow from out of state, until they are no longer habitable, then walk away.

It shouldn't have gotten to this point, and it wouldn't have if you had been better stewards."

Ray Arellano, Wilkes-Barre

Here are a few other comments from the Independent Gazette regarding the taxation situation in Wilkes-Barre. This one is from Linda Urban:

"A few comments for the City of Wilkes-Barre's elected and highly paid insiders. How much is enough? How much money do you need in order to be happy?"

You have brought our city to its knees and bankrupted us.

You have stolen from us. Your neighbors for the most part despise you after finding out just what you have been taking from us.

The practice of rewarding certain pals with excessively high paid jobs for votes in order to maintain your lifestyles is passe'. We know your game.

We live within our means and always have. We punched a clock or logged our hours and didn't expect a fellow employee to cover for our absence from our job.

We won't pay for your ridiculously excessive salaries and benefits, campaign donations to local pals, new homes, vehicles, gas, cell phones, vacations, pricey clothing and shoes, private school educations, or your family lifestyles with our money any longer.

You aren't special anymore. You are rather a disgraceful cornered den of jackels.

Your wealth and social prestige is all because of us so remember that when you walk or drive through our dying neighborhoods or bask in the sun aboard a cruise liner or on southern Florida beach. It's all because of the past Wilkes-Barre naive or foolish baited voters.

I suggest that those of you that have been milking us for decades go and try to find a non taxpayer funded job that even remotely compares to what the city salaries are. Even from years ago!

If it weren't for the city taxpayers in most cases many of you would be either moved on or living in a normal day to day survival mode.

Greed has destroyed our city.

So again, how much is enough?

Reduce your salaries or clean out your desk. We cannot afford your lifestyles.

Linda Urban, Wilkes-Barre

End of bloggers' comments

Do we pay too much in taxes?

The latest statistics which we have cited from 2015's election time above were provided for 2012. They show that 26.8 percent of Wilkes-Barre residents live in poverty. In 2018, the number below the poverty line is now 35%. That does not provide much room for city officials or any taxing authority to increase taxes or fees of any kind. In fact, it really says the pendulum ought to start swinging in the other direction. Wilkes-Barre must begin to reduce taxes, before the City or its people go bankrupt.

City residents believe that any increase in any taxes or fees is too much. Wilkes-Barre residents feel they already pay ala carte for services such as garbage, recycling, and even flood protection in addition to huge taxes. One could rightfully believe that "you pay for everything here."

Besides a safe city, one of my top objectives as Mayor is to create an affordable city and a clean city for all. At a minimum that means no tax increases or fee increases during my term(s). In fact, my pledge is to do my absolute best to reduce taxes—most notably property taxes. Increasing taxes or fees on a bleeding public needing a big break hurts Wilkes-Barre’s people even if it enriches the City government coffers.

Those of us with friends in city or county or state government over the last ten years, know that salaries, pensions and benefits have spiraled upward and out-of-control. Meanwhile with the economy in bad shape, taxpayers have not had it so good. City leaders achieved only limited success negotiating union contracts favorable to taxpayers during this period.

Worsening the problem for the public’s ability to pay is the lingering effect of a recession that has whacked Northeastern Pennsylvania with crippling poverty and for a time a 9.5 percent unemployment rate – the worst in the state. When things get bad, in recent times, Wilkes-Barre gets them worse.

Wilkes-Barre has been hit worse than the rest of the state and the nation. The unemployment rate in our area is the highest in a state which is now recovering simply because the former governor was an advocate of enhanced gas drilling. It is too bad that there is no oil or gas in Wilkes-Barre, and the coal mines have been shut down for more than fifty years. The current governor now wants to tax the drilling which will increase the people’s heating and hot water bills. How does that help the citizens?

I root for my City but facts are facts. In our City, as noted above, more than one in three people live below the poverty line. This means in 2015, these people are below a yearly income (2015) of \$22,811 for a family of four with two children. This is according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Meanwhile, though I do not begrudge them of their fair wage, the lowest salary for an employee in the City of Wilkes-Barre other than a parking attendant is substantially more than the average wage of most citizens of Wilkes-Barre.

The taxpayer’s ability to pay over the last ten or more years has been totally ignored. Yet, City salaries have increased substantially. In fact,

the most lucrative jobs in town are held by those who work for the City, the County, the State, and the federal government. How is that fair to the poor residents of this community?

There are few suggestions that increases in taxes have not been needed to pay for government services. Of course the money has been spent. But, one can argue that the price of such services is not affordable to a good part of the citizenry of Wilkes-Barre.

As we saw on the BK for Mayor site in 2015, some people, writing on the blogs are really, really upset. Yet, there are others who have even suggested this is OK: "We may not like to pay higher taxes, but it's just the flip side of government services. If we don't want to pay higher taxes, then we have to give up the level of government services we are used to." Well, maybe we do because people cannot go losing their homes to keep the City running.

What if a city cannot pay for the services demanded? Would the residents prefer to get less services or pay more from their meager wages to support City employees? More than likely, the City employees are getting fair salaries while the people in the community are working for slave wages because that is all that is available. Still it grates on citizens to have government employees making more than 2X the average for their community?

I have no survey results on that question but on balance, from reading the blogs, it is clear that citizens of the City are not happy that city employees are doing so well because the residents are sacrificing beyond their means.

It would take time get an accurate survey answer but logic dictates that those making less than the minimum salary for a City employee would suggest that maybe things are not fair.

There is a growing number of Pennsylvanians that have targeted the property tax, as the number one enemy of senior citizens in Pennsylvania. One group that takes this fight seriously is the Pennsylvania Taxpayer Cyber Coalition (PTCC). These folks are dedicated to equitable tax funding of Pennsylvania schools. They see the property tax as the enemy of mankind's ability to live in a comfortable home.

Their concern is that many people who own their homes outright and have for many years, find that they are paying more in property taxes per year, than they would be paying in rent. In many cases this is because of poor fiscal management by school districts and municipalities such as Wilkes-Barre, but sometimes it is because it is simply easier to give huge pay raises than to say no, “we cannot afford that.”

Property tax increases are the easiest way to steal from taxpayers. Considering that most home owners buy their homes so they do not have to pay rent, this is a perplexing phenomenon indeed. This group introduces the problem on their web site in these words:

“Many Pennsylvanians lose their homes and a lifetime’s work to sheriff’s sales each year because they can no longer afford to pay their property taxes. Senior citizens on fixed incomes are increasingly forced to sell their homes because of unrelenting increases in their tax burden. Young families cannot afford to purchase a home because the per-month property tax escrow is simply too high.

“Multigenerational family farms are being sold piece by piece to pay property taxes, devastating Pennsylvania agriculture. School districts in areas of the state with limited population and no commercial tax base are in distress and are unable to afford to give their children a quality education. Job losses, outmigration, and abysmal state economic performance caused by burdensome property taxes are devastating Pennsylvania’s economy.” The PTCC also notes the following:

“Over the past few years the PTCC and PCTA (*Pennsylvania Coalition of Taxpayer Associations*) has been asking homeowners to send us their real-life stories telling how relentlessly increasing school property taxes are affecting their quality of life. The response to this request has been overwhelming; the letters starkly demonstrate the frustration, fear, hopelessness, and anger that is widespread throughout ALL age groups and families from all areas of Pennsylvania over the lawmakers’ inaction in addressing this issue.”

“These politicians who refuse to support elimination and offer nothing but lame excuses MUST be shown that their inaction and

endless political games are jeopardizing the welfare and the lives of many thousands of Pennsylvanians. They **MUST** understand that what they are doing (or not doing) is destroying the future for good, honest people who only want to live their lives without the fear of financial ruin.”

If lawmakers truly care about homeowners in Pennsylvania, they will consider carefully the letters written to PTCC—two are shown below. These clearly demonstrate that just as in Wilkes-Barre with so many struggling to make ends meet, this is a contagion. Here are some **REAL** faces of the property tax issue and how the procrastination and cowardice towards eliminating school property taxes is affecting the lives of **REAL** people in a plight similar to the taxpayers of Wilkes-Barre.

PTCC Letter # 1:

“My husband and I wish to thank the Coalition for all the effort put forth to help save homes in Pennsylvania. Our local representatives have done nothing to show taxpayers they are serious about tax relief, just the usual rhetoric.

We personally have had to list our home for sale since last October due to the \$7,000 school tax bill we can no longer afford as working middle class residents. This is not a mansion, but a 200-year-old house that we have worked to restore for the last 16 years. We can pay our mortgage, but we can't possibly pay the \$584 per month tax payments.

The “relief” from slots is a total joke, a slap in the face of taxpayers. At today's oil costs it has become a choice to have heat or pay taxes. I am sure our home can't be saved in time, but my hope is others will benefit.

We are not sure we will ever own a home again in PA, renting is far more affordable and stable and after losing so much on this home at our ages (55 & 53), it does not make sense to start over again, until we move to another state that does not penalize homeowners.

It goes without saying that the taxes are keeping us from selling in this district. - Anonymous, York County

PTCC Letter # 2:

“My husband & I are on Social Security now, & though we have some savings, it won't be long before we have to use it for the ever growing taxes that are due in Spring & Fall.

The PA school tax is especially burdensome as you well know. We had hoped for a resolution to this long before now by the abolishment of that tax.

If our savings are used up with those taxes, what will we use when an emergency comes along?? With the ever-rising prices of gas & oil & food, the money we have to work with is getting less & less.

We urge you to please put into law the END of the huge Property tax before ours & the savings of countless others is gone, homes lost, & hope erased. We have worked hard all our lives to maintain & keep our home, & now the resources that we thought we had, are like water sadly slipping through our hands.

– Folks from Elverson, Chester County

Taxation Without Representation is still alive in Wilkes-Barre



The above reality check on government spending is from the Wilkes-Barre Taxpayers Association. Former Mayoral Candidate Frank Sorick is the long-term president of the group.

Though the letters on the prior page are not from Wilkes-Barre residents, they could very well be as we suffer from the same exorbitant taxation system as the rest of the state. That's why HB 76 is so key. I always liked Eddie Day Pashinsky and I still do but in this matter, he does not represent any of the hurting citizens of Wilkes-Barre (or so it would seem) in the current fight to help all of us keep our properties rather than give them up to the tax collector.

Besides PTCC, the people of Wilkes-Barre have another great friend in the Wilkes-Barre City Taxpayers Association. We should pay more attention to them. Our local group is working in conjunction with The Pennsylvania Taxpayers Cyber Coalition PTCC to get property tax relief for Pennsylvanians. I am willing to say right here, right now,

that if you are a Wilkes-Barre resident and you do not want fair property taxes, then I do not want your vote for Mayor. And, if I could give it back if you insisted on voting for me, I would do just that.

The groups have already held rallies together. On Friday August 22, for example, your friends from Wilkes-Barre held a rally in front of Pennsylvania House of Representatives, Eddie Day Pashinski's regional office, located at 152 South Pennsylvania Ave Wilkes Barre, PA 18702. Feel free to write the good representative a letter so he knows how you feel.

This rally was to bring greater awareness, and support for HB76 the School Property Tax Relief Act – aka The Property Tax Independence Act. Hard as it is to believe, Representative Pashinski has chosen to support the Teachers Unions rather than the people of his district. The teachers are not being asked to take a pay cut and this could help the elderly and the poor in Wilkes-Barre so I do not understand Representative Pashinski's position or the position of the unions. Nobody is doing union busting.

Our representative has publicly stated that he is against HB76, while at the same time, according to the Taxpayers Union, he has accepted substantial campaign contributions from the teachers unions, who, for undisclosed reasons are against giving taxpayers this relief. Frank R. Sorick is the President of the Wilkes-Barre City Taxpayers Association. Thank you Frank. This is not a joke. This is real. Who can be against fair taxes?

I have the feeling that after winning the Democratic Primary this year, Representative Pashinski felt pretty good about himself as nobody could touch him on the issues no matter where he stood. He had no opponent in the general election and had already captured the Democratic Primary. That is the only reason I could see him backing his buddies instead of his constituents.

I suspect he was surprised on September 22 of this year (2015), when the Times Leader broke the story that Wilkes-Barre resident Betsy Summers announced on the day before that she would support Senate Bill 76 if she was sitting in state Rep. Eddie Day Pashinski's seat. This is the main reason she decided to run against him as a Libertarian.

The WB Taxpayers association has a mock of a yard sign on their sight and it is very telling:

End School Property Taxes Now!

PROPERTY TAX
Independence Act
LIBERTY EQUALITY PROSPERITY
www.ptcc.us

Call your Legislator and tell them why 76 matters to you

Supporters of 76

- Senator Lisa Baker (R) (570) 675-3931
- Senator John T. Yudichak (D) (570) 883-4690
- Representative Sid Michaels Kavulich (D) (570) 562-2350
- Representative Tarah Toohil (R) (570) 453-1344
- Representative Mike Carroll (D) (570) 655-4883
- Representative Karen Boback (R) (570) 675-6000
- Representative Gerald J. Mullery (D) (570) 740-7031
- Representative Kevin Haggerty (D) (570) 342-2710

Opposed to 76

- Senator John P. Blake (D) (570) 207-2881
- Senator John R. Gordner (R) (570) 784-3464
- Representative Frank Farina (D) (570) 876-1111
- Representative Phyllis Mundy (D) (570) 283-9622
- Representative Eddie Day Pashinski (D) (570) 825-5934

Paid for by the combined efforts of Lackawanna/Luzerne County PTCC Groups

FYI, in November 2018, Democratic incumbent Eddie Day Pashinski defeated Republican challenger Sue Henry in the race for the 121st District in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. For their own reason, the people appear indifferent to property tax reductions. Many thought Henry’s stance on HB 76 made her a shoe in. Now it seems the people were just not paying attention to what could have benefited them the most.

The 121st District includes all of Wilkes-Barre. Pashinski and Henry live in Wilkes-Barre. Pashinsky was first elected to the Pennsylvania House in 2006 following the retirement of Kevin Blaum. He was reelected in 2008, 2010, 2012, and easily defeated Libertarian challenger Betsy Summers in the general election in both 2014 and 2016. There was no Republican nominee either time. It was not as easy to defeat Henry as some taxpayers apparently woke up from the deep fog.

The bill Henry backed aims to eliminate school property taxes by broadening and increasing the state sales tax by 1 percent and raising

the state's personal income tax from 3.07 percent to 4.34 percent. For most taxpayers, on the cusp of solvency, this would permit them to be assured that they would be able keep their homes for the long haul, and pay a small amount extra for sales tax.

“A lot of taxpayers are hurting, and it seems ridiculous that Rep. Pashinski wants to just ignore the fact that people are losing their homes and will continue to lose their homes,” Summers said. I think Pashinski made a big error in going against the people.

“We can never truly own our property because it's taken away from us if we can't pay the tax,” Summers said. “Something has to be done, and I'm not afraid to keep harping at them in Harrisburg.”

Good for you Betsy Summers. Thank you.

Nonetheless the people either did not believe it or they have more money than I think.

Property tax in PA is like having to pay rent all your life and eventually, you cannot afford the rent, and you are evicted.

What Can Wilkes-Barre Officials Do?

To address citizens' complaints that our City is becoming unaffordable, what can Wilkes-Barre city officials enact in terms of a lean budget in coming years that cuts the property tax rate and adds very few new employees and services and perhaps even cuts some. As Mayor if I were elected, and even now as a private citizen, I have the answer. It is the same answer that we all have been using in order to survive this poor economy. We have had to do it and we do not expect our City to make our burden worse.

Wilkes-Barre City must live within its means. If we cannot afford 260 employees to dote over us and provide for our every need, then we must reduce the size of the city workforce. Another option is to reduce the salaries of some of the employees who work for the City. But, it would be nice if we did not have to do that.

Can we afford an average salary of \$58,000. How about \$70,000? Can we afford a minimum salary of \$25,000? Can we afford a maximum salary without overtime of over \$100,000. You tell me. I can certainly say that my objective is to reduce expenses and lower taxes – especially the property tax rate. That is what I plan to do if elected Mayor.

If you cannot afford to buy groceries, what do you do? You cut back. While the population of Wilkes-Barre is declining every year, there should be no need for our budget to be ballooning out of control. We must fix this, or we will have no city. I am sure our dedicated City employees will do their part to help this city recover and once again be affordable.

The City income tax of course is reasonably low compared to most cities that impose such a tax, but compared to surrounding communities, it is higher than most. So, we need to look at that even though it is not as pressing as property tax relief. Many residents are saying no to all taxes and they are packing up and heading for greener areas to live.

With the School District getting ready to finance a big Taj Mahal High School, and the City always looking for more, who will be living here supporting City employees if we all decide to pack up and leave? With City employees' earnings increasing while the citizens' own earnings are decreasing, it is a tough sell to convince anybody in Wilkes-Barre that they should have to cough up a little more for the Gipper!

It would be nice if we could afford high salaries and a high number of employees to match. The facts “on the ground” sure are pointing to a conclusion that we cannot.

People Who Love Wilkes-Barre May Choose to Help Us.

Let's invite those with something to spare, who are good friends of Wilkes-Barre to help our city become affordabe. We should have a Donate to Wilkes-Barre Web Site so whatever we might receive does not have to be shared with Go Fund Me!

Besides many tax reduction notions, the City under the Kelly Administration would set up trusts / funds so that we can take gifts from residents who love this City and we can take bequeathments from prominent citizens and others who choose to direct the proceeds of their estates to the care of Wilkes-Barre City. If we had some revenue from those who credit Wilkes-Barre with part of their lifetime success, that would be wonderful. Of course we would have to promise to work hard to get ourselves back on our feet, so we would not need handouts.

To make this work, we first would need to announce that it is not a stupid notion to donate to your city instead of giving it all to an errant nephew or a church, which may be torn down tomorrow. Would it not be a great service for a resident to set up a will that includes Wilkes-Barre as a recipient? Many people feel a debt of gratitude for living so many wonderful years in our City that they would love to give something back. And, of course we need it to help make this city as great a city as these folks remember.

We would need part of a job description / job or a person in the Administration to become adept at grant writing and being able to solicit those Wilkes-Barre alums who may have the means to help the City.

To do this of course, we would need a well-structured schedule of gift accounting and gift recognition. It would be appropriate to see statues in Parks etc. for those so kind that they would choose to help our City. There have been those in the past such as the Kirby Family (Kirby Park), or the Miner Family (Miner Park) so that such benefactors can be recognized in the same fashion as the wonderful plaques in churches for donors being so generous for the wonderful causes for which they contributed.

In our case, of course it would be to keep our city safe, clean, and affordable. Thanks ahead of time for those willing to help Wilkes-Barre. Any Mayor, not just me, can ask the people who have more to give, to help in this way.

We must give credit where it is due, but we should not have to endure a 3% raise for city employees already doing OK in Wilkes-Barre when the Social Security bump is less than 2% and sometimes zero. Tom

Leighton has already done a good job in collecting a lot from nonprofits. Payments compared with Scranton and Hazleton are quite nice, and we must credit Mr. Leighton for that. His “windfall” came from Wilkes-Barre General Hospital and King’s College, who were major contributors to the \$437,000 prize from payments in lieu of taxes which the city budgeted in 2014. Unfortunately the dollars were used to give out raises to many people doing quite well.

And, so, my thinking is that Wilkes-Barre’s finest taxable commercial properties are now occupied by colleges, hospitals, and many other non-profits, many of whom do not directly benefit Wilkes-Barre taxpayers as The General and King’s did last year (2015).

I would be happy to stand corrected. However, I personally know of not one city scholarship granted by any of the colleges to a Wilkes-Barre high school student simply because they happen to be a citizen of Wilkes-Barre. I bet there are ten or twenty such students or more who could use such help. Do you know of any who got help?

I know of not one resident of the City who was treated to an extended hospital stay simply because they were a Wilkes-Barre resident. I know it is not so simple, but, I think you can see my point. The leader of Wilkes-Barre should do the best for Wilkes-Barre while the leaders of other organizations or institutions should look out for their best interests. I would like to see even more financial cooperation between the non-profits and the City.

The colleges and the hospitals and other non-profits gain substantial tax breaks that you and I would not have, and most people think these institutions help Wilkes-Barre. It may help some merchants downtown and this in turn helps the City, but for the most part, Wilkes-Barre is not the big gainer. Tuition in all colleges is a hundred thousand dollars or more for 4 years. Kids then go into hock for their whole lives trying to pay back their loans.

There is no deal of which I am aware, which gives residents of our City any priority in our City Colleges just because the student is home grown. That sure would be nice, and you can bet I will ask for Wilkes-Barre City scholarships. And, I will see what can be done to help the poor in our City who are in need of medical care.

There is some good news and bad news about the affordability of Wilkes-Barre's taxation system on its residents. Here is the good news:

The cost of living in Wilkes-Barre is 16.5% less than the Pennsylvania average and the cost of living in Wilkes-Barre is 15.2% less than the national average. So, if Wilkes-Barre residents had the same money as all Pennsylvanians on the average, and as all Americans on the average, we would be doing quite well on the cost side of affordability, independent of taxes. But our taxes are crippling and only a few citizens benefit from this in their paychecks.

There is more good news:

In Pittsburgh, the median price of a home is about \$120,000; in Wilkes-Barre, the median home value is \$52,800. This is good unless after twenty years, you are trying to sell yours. So, Wilkes-Barre Residents can theoretically afford a home easier than those in Pittsburgh. But, in what conditions are these homes, as most Wilkes-Barre taxpayers cannot even afford the paint to make their properties shine.

And, so there is bad news:

This results in more bad news as Wilkes-Barre home values have declined -1.7% over the past year and it is predicted that if they go up again—if- they will rise just 0.5% within the next year. Wilkes-Barre residents like to boast to Scrantonians that anything you can do I can do better, but so far it is not so.

Homes are more noticeably larger in the Scranton Area, and though they are not as inexpensive as Wilkes-Barre's properties, they are much more elegant, and the people buy them because they somehow have the money. In Wilkes-Barre few have the money to afford a Scranton home.

For example, the median list price per square foot in Wilkes-Barre is \$46, which is lower than the Scranton Metro average of \$89. The median price of homes currently listed in Wilkes-Barre is \$63,500 while the median price of homes that are sold is much less, so the sellers are always unhappy with a median sale price of \$51,485. The

median rent price in Wilkes-Barre is \$625, which is lower than the Scranton Metro median of \$750.

The bad news is that in a nutshell, life in Wilkes-Barre or Scranton is not as good of a financial deal as life in Pittsburgh using home values are a gauge. But, life in Wilkes-Barre sure seems to be somewhat worse than life in Scranton. Check the murder rate.

Minimize your tax burden by doing certain things:

Property taxes can be extremely burdensome for a homeowner. They tend to rise steadily over time and, even once you pay off your mortgage, the taxes keep on coming. The good news, however, which is minimal, is that there are some things homeowners can do to reduce their property tax burden. City officials should tell the people how to make their tax obligation be only as large as it must be. In our administration, we will have counselors to help the people make good financial choices as it can only help the City.

Permit me to repeat that property taxes can be extremely burdensome for a homeowner. For Wilkes-Barre City homeowners, this is more the rule than the exception. Property owners in Wilkes-Barre not only have to pay the real estate tax to WB City, at the local level; we also must pay a County Tax, a huge School District Property Tax, and a WB City income tax.

All tax rates mysteriously tend to rise steadily over time and, even once you pay off your mortgage, the taxes keep on coming. For some people, the tax is much more substantial than what they would have imagined as the amount for which they could rent their property to a passer-by.

There are ways that individual home owners can minimize their property tax burden. I will give tips in that regard but my goal as Mayor of Wilkes-Barre is to reduce the amount of taxes all of our citizens pay. If I can offer a tip for you to reduce your tax burden because of your special circumstances, I will do so. It is not a right to pay taxes. It is clearly a burden, which most Americans cheerfully take on to help their communities. But, have communities become too grabby? Is Wilkes-Barre asking for too much?

I would advise that you keep reading to learn some simple tips that any homeowner can follow to lessen the pain when tax time rolls around. (For related reading on tax issues and mortgages, see *The Mortgage Interest Tax Deduction and A Tax Primer For Homeowners*.)

<http://www.investopedia.com/articles/pf/06/mortgagepoints.asp>)

You might consider reading *The Mortgage Interest Tax Deduction and A Tax Primer For Homeowners*, for additional information about saving on real estate taxes. If you are already aware of these devices, then I regret stealing any of your time to evaluate them.

I found the information immediately below at:

http://www.investopedia.com/articles/pf/07/property_tax_tips.asp.

Here are some things you can do individually to help reduce your property taxes

Tutorial: Exploring Real Estate Investments

1. Request Your Property Tax Card ... And Study It

Few homeowners realize they can go down to the town hall and request to view (or receive a copy of) their property tax cards from the local assessor's office. The tax card may very well be a printout from a modern-day computer system. It provides the homeowner with information the town has gathered about the property over time. Wilkes-Barre's system may not have cards per se but the City has the information to give.

The card includes information about the size of your lot, the precise dimensions of the rooms, and the number and type of fixtures located within the home. Other information may include a section on special features, or notations about any improvements that have been made.

As you review this card about your property, note any discrepancies and then raise these issues immediately with the tax assessor. The

assessor will either make the correction and / or offer to conduct a re-evaluation. This tip sounds laughably simple, but mistakes are common. If you can find them, the City has an obligation to correct them.

2. Don't Build

Wouldn't it be nice if Wilkes-Barre had a number of pristine areas ready for development? Think again. Though the population is the lowest of all time, and at one-time Wilkes-Barre hosted over 88,000 residents, to get back to those levels, we cannot have a tax structure in place that causes every new Wilkes-Barre citizen to want to leave.

For some reason, Wilkes-Barre City officials think that everybody wants to live in Wilkes-Barre. And, so, any structural changes to a home or property in Wilkes-Barre, after you pay the required permit fee, will increase your tax bill.

Can you imagine a City that wants to be clean and beautiful, that chooses to whack its resident taxpayers whenever they marginally improve their properties? That's why Wilkes-Barre remains unattractive to passers-by, and to visitors, and to those who would otherwise like to move their 500+ employee organization into the city.

A deck, a pool, a large shed, or any other permanent fixture that is added to your home increases your tax burden in Wilkes-Barre. Is this really a good idea for a City that cannot even convince the offspring of its residents to stay and enjoy life in the City close to their families?

With this in mind, homeowners should investigate how much a new addition might cost in terms of property tax prior to construction. Call the Wilkes-Barre local building and tax departments. Do not spend a dime getting this information. They'll be able to give you a ballpark estimate. Write down everything they say as it may come in handy when they try to tell you they were only kidding.

3. Limit Curb Appeal

Tax assessors are given a strict set of guidelines to go by when it comes to the actual evaluation process. However, the assessment still

contains a certain amount of subjectivity. This means more attractive homes often receive a higher assessed value than comparable houses that are less physically appealing. It might just be the “gut feel” of the assessor who thinks you can afford it because your property is clean.

Some suspect that if the city street cleaners actually put their brushes down in your neighborhood, your assessment would be substantially higher than those neighborhoods where the trucks just give a salute or pass by with the brushes up!

Keep in mind, your property is essentially being compared to your neighbors' during the evaluation process, as well as others in the general vicinity. While it may be difficult, resist the urge to primp your property prior to the assessor's arrival (which is usually a scheduled affair).

Finally, if possible, don't make any physical improvements or cosmetic alternations to the home (new counter tops, stainless steel appliances, etc.) until after the assessor has conducted the evaluation. (When selling your home, a little primping goes a long way. Learn more in *Fix It And Flip It: The Value Of Remodeling*.)

In Wilkes-Barre, at least now, and in most cities, the assessors do not visit the inside of homes unless ordered to do so. Therefore, if you are inclined to improve your home do it inside. Meanwhile, if you can get some neighbors to pour graffiti on your exterior, you may have a substantially smaller assessment and thus less taxes to be paid. Does graffiti ink come in invisible ink cartridges?

I agree this makes no sense as all communities want all property owners to help make their communities attractive. But, officials want tax revenue before everything else. That is why HB 76 is so important. I can only promise that I will try to solve this problem in one way or another but just for the City Property Tax when I am elected.

The way it works, now, the next tax bill you get will show the higher tax based on the improvement. You may have made the improvement because your walls were falling apart but it does not matter to the taxman. When they do not do a complete reassessment, they whack all the poor souls who make small improvements. This is surely

counterproductive to attractive and clean neighborhoods. I will try my best to change that if I am elected your Mayor.

4. Research Thy Neighbors

As mentioned above, please remember that information about your home is available at City Hall. What many individuals don't realize is that in many cases, information about other home assessments in their area is also available to the public.

It is important to review comparable homes in your area and general statistics about the City's evaluation results. You can often find discrepancies that could lower your taxes. For example, let's say that you have a four-bedroom home with a one-car garage, and your home is assessed at \$250,000. Your neighbor also owns a four-bedroom home, but this house sports a two-car garage, a 150-square-foot shed and a beautiful swimming pool. Despite this, your neighbor's home is valued at \$235,000. Can you do anything?

Was there a mistake? There probably is an error - unless politics is involved, or your property has some other distinguishing characteristics that explain the discrepancy.

With all of this in mind; if an error is found, it pays to bring the problem to the assessor's attention as soon as possible so that you can get a reassessment if necessary. If politics are part of the process, you will be waiting a long time for a resolution, unless you get a lawyer, and the home you reference is that of a favored politico. I would love to eliminate property tax in Wilkes-Barre if I could. Maybe I can.

5. Walk the home with the assessor

Many individuals allow the tax assessor to wander about their homes unguided during the evaluation process. In Wilkes-Barre and surrounding locales, the assessors often do not visit the inside of homes though they may. But if they do, denying them access is a big mistake.

This not only can be a mistake; it can cost you substantially. Some assessors will only see the good points in the home - the new fireplace or the beautiful new faucets that adorn each sink. They'll overlook the

fact that other appliances in the home are out of date, and that the roof is warped, leaking, and needs replacing. Do not mess in the process of the assess.

To prevent this from happening, be sure to walk the home with the assessor and point out the good points as well as the deficiencies. This will ensure that you receive the fairest possible valuation for your home. Again, you may not get to do this, because many assessors evaluate your interior value based on how the outside looks.

Bonus Tip - Don't Shut Out the Assessor

Recent inquiries on my part revealed that you do not have to allow the tax assessor into your home in Wilkes-Barre. Please note that for years Wilkes-Barre has not checked inside homes and to the best of my knowledge, Luzerne County does not do so either. The information I put forth is the norm. But if they do want to go inside; beware. Why me Lord? Just let them in! What typically happens if you do not permit access to the interior is that the assessor assumes you've made certain improvements (such as added fixtures or made exorbitant refurbishments). This could result in a bigger tax bill.

Certain towns (not WB thank you) have a policy to the effect that if the homeowner does not grant full access to the property, the assessor will automatically assign the highest assessed value possible for that type of property - fair or not. I have checked in Wilkes-Barre and this is not what they do but the other taxing authorities in WB – County and School District may do what they need to do to increase their revenue. Just be careful!

At this point, it is up to the individual to dispute the evaluation with the City, County or town, which, incidentally, will be nearly impossible to win, unless access to the interior is ultimately granted, and the officials have no axe to grind against you as a taxpayer. The lesson: allow the assessor to access the home. If you've obtained permits for all improvements that you've made to the property, you should be fine.

Bottom Line

It can be hard to balance the desire for a beautiful home with the desire to pay as little tax as possible. However, there are some little things that can be done to reduce property tax without resorting to living in a dump. Remember to avoid making any improvements right before your house is due to be assessed. Check out the neighbors values. If they pay less tax than you but own similar homes, you could be in line for a tax reduction.

Don't assume that your tax bill is set in stone. A little homework and due diligence can help reduce the burden.

If you're still thirsty for tax hints, check out *Tax Tips for The Individual Investor*.

<http://www.investopedia.com/articles/01/112801.asp>

After you finish reading this, please remember that your fellow citizen of Wilkes-Barre, Brian Kelly is running for Mayor and if you want life better, you might consider voting for him for Mayor of Wilkes-Barre.

[Brian Ran in 2015 and got about 5% of the vote. He has no plans to ever run for office again]]

Thank you.

Chapter 29 Making & Keeping Wilkes-Barre Safe



Wilkes-Barre Was Once a Safe City

Wilkes-Barre was once a safe city; however, it no longer can be stated as such. I recently (2015) reviewed the (UCR) uniform crime reporting stats for the city and it is alarming that a city of our size can have such a high murder rate.

Whether it is true or perceived, we citizens have heard the negative opinions concerning our police department. Of course there are heroes within the ranks. I have been assured by qualified sources that most of our policemen and women are hard-working, honest people who give their lives to the community. I also understand that the families of these officers commit to the police schedule and sacrifices

as well. I will approach this city with an open mind, but I will not be a status quo mayor. The safety of our residents is too important to be an afterthought.

My office [Mayor] through the Public Safety Director and the Chief of Police will work in conjunction with local, state, and federal agencies to create a firewall to contain and resolve our increasing crime stats. I will task all departments and community groups to help restore pride to this city.

Make no mistake about this election (2015). With everything that is at stake, again it is your choice as to which direction the City should move. Some say we get the government we deserve. We deserve the best but often for reasons such as expecting a job for our kids or our nephews or nieces, we may not make the best decisions. The dirty politicians win in those cases.

This election is not about friendship and voting for the status quo—it is about survival and choice. Does our City survive another term of status quo? Are our children, parents, friends safe from the ever-increasing onslaught of crime? Will our home values tumble due to the negative publicity of our continuously increasing crime rate?

I would like to touch on another important subject here and that is our ability to afford the best protection we can get. I am keenly aware of public unions and our ever-increasing public pension burden. I believe we need to negotiate for fair practices, fair pay, fair taxpayer obligations, and fair service from Fire, EMS, and Police. All negotiations must be in good faith and must be the proper balance of affordability and service.

As your Mayor, I would establish a panel to evaluate, design, and encourage private development within our city. I will consider all avenues to draw businesses to Main Street Wilkes-Barre. These would include tax incentives- police foot patrols, bicycle patrols, parking options, etc. Like you, I want a vibrant, safe, clean, and affordable city for all to enjoy.

Public Safety – The Number One Priority

There are no good jokes about Public Safety because it is the only factor that a city government must deliver and must deliver well. Nothing else compares to providing safety and comfort to the citizens of our community. That is what it is all about. The people would rightfully care little about any City structure if there were no Police and no Fire and no EMT crews to assure their safety.

In this campaign, I hope you have already noted that I am appalled how our City streets and the City's overall look evokes a feeling that some cleaning crew someplace missed a few spots. Public safety issues show up in homicides and other crimes stats and we are reminded about these when we drive down the dirty streets of our city.

Sometimes we see so many eyesores from potholes to rough roads, to dirt piled up in the roadways that a visitor or a potential employer would conclude that keeping the City clean is not a priority. A dirty City is a workshop for crime. It seems to show the perpetrators that nobody in official Wilkes-Barre cares. If the City cannot be kept clean, how can it be kept safe? Compared to even smaller cities in Pennsylvania, we somehow do not measure up...but we should... and we can for sure—if we choose to do so.

One look and a normal person could readily conclude that the huge street cleaning machines paid for by taxpayer dollars pull up their brushes when the streets look too full of debris—especially at end of shift. Not cleaning out these big machines after a credited run would save the driver a lot of work cleaning the machine. Don't think that does not happen.

I am not saying that is so; but after all, somebody eventually must clean it all from the body of the truck—the brushes, and the whole deal. If the truck returns clean to the garage, such additional work is not necessary. Can this be? From my WB consulting experience, I know that it is. In my administration, we will find out. If it is so, let me assure you it will not continue to be so.

Take a trip to little Bloomsburg down the road from Wilkes-Barre and you will find a city well maintained, clean, and obviously attractive to visitors and potential employers alike. Somehow the small merchants

on Main Street, Bloomsburg are able to keep their places nice and they find Bloomsburg to be an affordable city also. Affordable and clean, however, does not trump safe. Bloomsburg also claims great police statistics, and from visiting the town regularly, and knowing the perception of University students, I would agree. Safety, even in a College Town like Bloomsburg is #1.

I am inclined to believe that we Wilkes-Barre residents are too forgiving. If we all looked further into this nice small town called Bloomsburg, we would also find that it is a safe city. Even though, just like Wilkes-Barre, it has its share of University students. A field trip to Bloomsburg and a major discussion with their officials and shopkeepers and students should be an important item on any new mayor's to-do list.

Just like Wilkes-Barre ought to be a clean city, and that is easy to evaluate with a trip around the City, it also ought to be a safe city but, we find that again, it is not. When such issues occur in a business, we blame management. It is time to blame current management again for the City's ills. City management makes all the decisions. They do not invite a person from Kingston in to see if things are going well. Wilkes-Barre officials are the heroes or the goats. Kingston is not involved.

Look again at our homicide statistics. Ask your friends. Ask your children; ask yourself! Has anybody ever tried to hustle you in downtown Wilkes-Barre or surrounds? Did you know whether they were carrying or not? Members of my own family have been accosted by such flagrant disregard for the law. We seldom hear of prosecutions for such actions because the people are too patient, and we endure too much. In my administration, for such abrasive crimes, our police will not be tolerant.

In fact, whether true or perceived, there are real questions by many as to whether the police always work their hardest for the people. As your Mayor, I will remain confident in the Police, Fire, EMS, and all city services. Trust, but verify will be the modus operandi of the new city management team.

My bet is that the current police and fire personnel will be our first line of defense in our endeavor to build a safer city. The management

structure, however, which permits second-rate results, must be changed.

It is my number one (# 1) priority as Mayor, to make Wilkes-Barre one of the safest cities in the country. Public Safety through fire protection, building protection, and most importantly through police protection is the tonic that can permit all residents to live well, without fear, while the public safety team deals with the bad guys. I would prefer to let nobody off the hook but if somebody must be let free, I would instruct the team to deal with parking violators last.

As many proud City residents, I live right here and I see how bad things have gotten in my City. I have lived in Wilkes-Barre for all but two years of my life. I love Wilkes-Barre and I want Wilkes-Barre to be at the top of the USA Safe City List! That is my # 1 objective for our City!

WB Needs a Public Safety Director

Few experts in police matters would argue the point that Wilkes-Barre is in dire need of direction and discipline within the police department. Though Wilkes-Barre is a relatively small city compared to giants such as Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, it is a city with considerable resources, though these resources are certainly not excessive. Yet, a \$50 million budget (2019) is far from chicken feed. Making each of those dollars work for City residents is a must. Having no oversight over safety, cleanliness, or affordability is not the way to assure city dollars do the most good.

In the safety area, there is no better resource to invest in than a Public Safety Director unless you are not interested in public safety. Not having such a position is like letting the police run the City without direction. No Mayor can serve as Mayor and Police Chief and Public Safety Director and do any of the jobs well.

The Public Safety Director position is designed to provide the direction and discipline sorely needed by the City. Many of the continuing issues in Wilkes-Barre would have been resolved internally long ago if such a position were filled and staffed with a competent officer with the authority to make it right.

Maybe the female police chief who recently stepped down would still be the police chief or maybe she would not have been appointed. That would have been the Public Safety Director's decision just like the Police Commissioner's job in *Blue Bloods*.

It is time for the Wilkes-Barre Police Department to reorganize and prioritize its commitment to the citizens of this city. We must assure that we have a well-organized, well-trained, well-disciplined, and committed set of officers. New officers that are hired as time goes by must be prepared to join the many professionals within the Wilkes-Barre Police Department, who proudly wear the badge of our City. Just recently as many know, nine such officers (2015) were commended publicly for bravery.

To assure that what is good either stays good or it gets better, when you select me to be your Mayor, please know that I am committed to building the safest city in the Commonwealth and in the Nation. Part of that process will be to establish a web-based program designed both to enhance public trust and confidence in all public departments, not just the police department, as well as providing services, which today are unavailable to the public.

The residents of Wilkes-Barre must have an outlet to contact any agency within city government with a formal complaint about an officer, public worker, or contractor and they must be assured that each and every complaint or comment will be investigated and reported to a board appointed by the Mayor. No overtime for getting the job done.

We all can speculate but with good reason that if such as system had been in place over the last twelve years, [Leighton Years] we would not have had all the negative press, which unfortunately was well-deserved. The Headliner for one of the major City problems [at the time] was a person that we will identify only as Mr. Glodzik. He was the City's one source Towing Contractor.

His arrest cemented the notion that he was not serving the City well. Yet it appeared that City officials were still ambivalent as to what to do about the quandary they faced. Would the citizens of Wilkes-Barre

be the winners or would the cronyism continue? Our system should prevent cronyism. Ask the next Mayor how that happens.

And so, if we had such a system, in which any member of the public could offer a comment or complaint, the issue would have made the headlines continually. Under the new Police System, it would receive an incident number and a phone call within 48 hours of the complaint. It would have been very difficult with the great newspaper coverage we get, for most residents to be unaware, and the prior Mayor would have been forced to action long before there was an arrest.

In such a system, internal investigations would immediately take place. They would not be public knowledge, but every citizen would have the opportunity to provide a statement concerning their specific issue / complaint.

I can assure you that in my administration, the new position of Director of Public Safety Director will be staffed by a highly qualified law enforcement officer or former police officer. This officer will be very familiar with policies and police procedures. He or she will also have strong administrative capabilities to evaluate current protocols and typical routines and will make recommendations to the Mayor for adjusting, significantly changing, or enhancing current practices.

As Mayor, my goal is to make the police department as well as the fire department and all city government areas streamline their operations to become part of a high-performance organization in the most cost-effective manner. I realize that this requires my full commitment to the City, its citizens, its current employees, and I am ready to make that commitment. I am a life-long resident of Wilkes-Barre City, by choice, and I care about our City.

My choice for Director of Public Safety has already been made if he chooses to accept the position. When I can offer the position to him, it will be a great day for Wilkes-Barre. Yes, my selection is as good as it gets for Wilkes-Barre or any other city facing the increase in crime that we are experiencing. This gentleman is not a politician; he is a career PA State Trooper, who has extensive investigative knowledge and many years as a police supervisor. He is a former undercover agent who has received multiple awards for his extensive undercover

activities. He retired honorably after 20 years of service to the PA State police.

I have worked with his man and I know his capabilities. I have witnessed his tenacity, his integrity, and his personal commitment to get the job done. I have personally asked him to assist me in transforming this City into the safest city in America. I am very pleased that he has committed to me.

In order to have this long-time protector of the people to sign up to give Wilkes-Barre a “fighting” chance against crime, your job of course is to make sure that you elect Brian Kelly for Mayor of Wilkes-Barre. I know that I found the best man for Wilkes-Barre to address its most critical need. The rest is up to you.

Mission of the Director of Public Safety

The mission of the Director of Public Safety is to assure the security and safety of all residents and patrons of the City of Wilkes-Barre through the oversight and execution of the public safety operational strategies of the Police Department, Fire Department, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), Emergency Management (EMA), Building Inspection / Code Enforcement, and the Community Action Team.

The mission of departments / sections under the purview of the Director also includes improving community and first responder safety through training, technology, fleet upgrades and increased community visibility as well as the enhancing and enforcing of team collaboration across all public safety areas.

The Director, through the various departments in the Public Safety Group, under the auspices and direction of the Mayor, is prepared to oversee and lead the overall public safety strategy for the City of Wilkes-Barre. The objective of a Director Position for these related departments is to create a professional and competent partner in the public safety arena to all businesses, and institutions, and individuals needing such services.

Looking forward into 2016, [written in 2015] a new and important program known as The Wilkes-Barre Initiative to Reduce Crime

(WIRC) will be operating under the auspices of the Mayor, and run by the Public Safety Director. The objective will be to reduce the number of homicides and other major crimes in the City.

We definitely need real experts to make our City safe again. We cannot survive on legends. It helps to repeat that the priority is to brighten the City's future by making Wilkes-Barre a clean, affordable, and safe city.

My first act as Mayor as noted will be to hire an expert Police Commissioner, who will serve also as a Public Safety Director. The very next act will be to address the incessant crime and murder problem in the city through the creation of a special violent crime unit. The supervisor of this unit will not be an ordinary policeman but a top-quality expert supervisor who knows how to deal with the worst of the worst.

Only our best police officers will be evaluated and selected for what may be a team of five officers. If need be, we will hire officers from outside. This will be an elite unit whose mission is to make Wilkes-Barre the city in NEPA of which the bad guys want no part. In fact, the bad guys won't even want to visit here because for them, it will be a crime career ender.

This unit will fight only violent crime... no domestic or minor burglary or traffic violation calls. Over 95% of the Police Force will be designated to regular duty. We have room for this special unit. The people of the City are not intimidated by traffic violations or parking issues or domestic issues but they are taken back at all the gun-toting bad guys, the drug trafficking, the gangs, and the murders. This administration will solve that, and we will run the bad guys out of town.

The mission will be restricted to fighting organized gang drug crime and homicides that result-- like Willow Street [a murder just the prior week], which really raises the mark.

Violent crime is our biggest problem. What happens when the bad guys stop killing each other? Will they leave or begin to terrorize the communities even more?

Our City has been unprepared. It is still unprepared. To the bad guys, Wilkes-Barre is a target city. We are like babes in the woods. For years, the bad guys have loved coming to Wilkes-Barre to do their pillaging because our countervailing force has been immeasurable against their willingness to torment our citizens. That, will end in the Kelly Administration.

The good ole boy network and same ole; same ole has not cut it and it will never cut it. We must crush this gang drug thug problem to bits. We have to stomp it down so that it never resurfaces again in our City. We do have the resources if we have the will.

There are lots of ways to get the job done but wringing our hands in despair and saying we are going to do what we know we are not prepared to do is no longer on the list.

The Mayor and the Director believe that a neighborhood camera system must be deployed and depending on funding, it should be in conjunction with a new gunshot detection system in specified areas within the City.

In addition, I know that the new Director of Public Safety is committed to strengthening the relationship between the community and all Public Safety Departments / Sections and will be implementing a new community outreach program for all nationalities and races, managed within the Office of the Director.

This program will enhance and coordinate all initiatives across the Public Safety Departments / Sections, other departments within City government, as well as with the Office of the Mayor. I will be a big player on this team.

The Director that I have already selected because I believe he is the best in the nation hates crime as I do and as you do. He is committed to leveraging partnerships across the law enforcement community within Luzerne County and surrounding counties / municipalities.

This commitment involves working closer with federal partners such as the Office of the United States Attorney, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms, United States Secret Service and others to leverage federal assistance in

addressing the crime situation within the City of Wilkes-Barre. We mean business. We will make the City safe once again. And all residents and all businesses will be glad.

Moreover, our federal partnerships will continually be enhanced with relationships between the Mayor, the Director, the Chiefs, and all department Heads within the Public Safety Group and City administration.

This will be in concert with the Pennsylvania State Police, Office of the Pennsylvania Attorney General, Office of the District Attorney of Luzerne County, Lackawanna County Police, Office of the Luzerne County Sheriff and all other local law enforcement agencies within Northeastern Pennsylvania. Our team of crime fighters will be trained to be the best it can be. *Don't mess with Wilkes-Barre* will be their slogan as they depart to other cities.

Contract Negotiations Is a Team Effort!

The Director of Public Safety will have a dotted line relationship with all other city departments / department heads to assure that the City is ready for any and all contingencies and emergencies.

Additionally, to assure Wilkes-Barre does not waste money, the City Administrator, Public Safety Director, Department Heads, and the Mayor's Office will evaluate all contracts, insurance policies, maintenance contracts.

They will assure that all contracts are legitimate and the services are performed according to the agreed upon terms. In other words, the good old boy network is a thing of the past. Cronyism in City affairs will not rule the City and in fact, it will not be tolerated. A safe city must be an honest city.

The Director will be helping the City in the beginning by assuring that all safety plans are in good order, and that all plans are good for the City. For example, three areas of past problems in particular, will be the first ones to be examined –

- Towing contract(s)
- Parking Authority plans / relationships
- Insurance contract(s)

Substantial savings can be afforded to the City if we negotiate our contracts properly and the Director will help assure that all work done is done honestly, and that the negotiators do not wind up winning while the City loses. No dishonesty!!!

Important Early Initiatives in the Safety Area – in no specific order

1. Assure all plans are updated including floods, a potential nuclear mishap, police protective service etc. These contingency plans include the actions to take to assure success

- a. Proper training- equipment
- b. Traffic routing- hospital & prison evacuation etc
- c. Looting prevention, etc

2. Review all City Insurance policies. Assure a proper bidding policy is in place as these amounts are substantial.

3. Work on Police credibility so that the public perception of an honest, disciplined force is maintained.

- Conduct Internal Investigations to assure credibility and honesty.
- Internal investigations assigned a control number
- Review by the Mayor, the Chiefs, and the Public Safety Director.
- If internal charges are substantiated; check procedures to
- decide action against employee. e.g. Suspension / Termination etc.

4. Contract bidding: Major Supplies, Equipment, Public Utilities contracts must be bid and issued on a closed bidding process which is open to all legitimate parties.

5. Automated Complaint System: Build / Improve a Web based public complaint system for all public employees.

6. Task Force Assignments for Police: Police need to be assigned to county/ state or federal task forces, rotated on a two year basis. This provides less opportunity for a member of the force to become uninterested. .
7. Crime Files: Informant files are to be maintained and reviewed on a monthly basis.
8. Undercover Financing: Such funds must be managed tightly - accounting expenditure records etc.
9. Preventative vehicle maintenance: An officer needs to be assigned for every department -- police, fire, public works etc. to assure the city's expenditures are properly made.
10. Reports Mandated: Departments must report all expenditures accurately each month with reviews.
11. General improvements: The following items are presented in a bulletized list.
 - When hiring those with prior investigative jobs such as state troopers, FBI agents, etc., if they already have a retirement pension, WB must negotiate not having to supply pension benefits. (Officer already collecting public benefits)
 - Reduce the number of city employees who are issued a car, phone, and Gas card.
 - Require all city employee to pay for partial health care.
 - Accept any voluntary wage reductions to help the city
 - Work to assure the pension payout system is fair to the city and the employees
 - Set up internal accounts so that benefactors can donate freely and clearly for specific or general city initiatives. Advertise this on all city correspondence – billings etc. Publicly praise city residents and others who choose to help Wilkes-Barre from the goodness of their hearts.
 - Enhance police and firemen fitness standards by encouraging physical fitness programs/ competitions to better serve the community. For example, there is a national competition in

which officers can. Most officers are good policemen as are most other city employees. As Mayor, I understand that I will be tested as will my director, chief of police, and the fire chief. We may in fact experience resistance at first. This is exactly why I'm reinstating the position of Public Safety Director. This position will be responsible for implementing the essential guidelines as part of a collective research effort to determine those that are necessary to fulfill my commitment to the city.

- I will not be bought by the same people who have driven this city into the ground. As mayor, I promise all of the citizens that I will not appoint a yes man or a person with an agenda to this important position. I will demand positive results from all entities under my control as mayor and those positive results will benefit all of the citizens of Wilkes-Barre.
- A strong, experienced public safety director will bring the background necessary to ferret out who or what are the problems, understand the problem, and solve it immediately. The Safety Director will have a relationship with the chief, who in turn must have a relationship with the officers and first line supervision responsible for the patrol/ crime investigations.
- The public safety director is designed to be a buffer for the chief of police- fire chief - public works. In many ways the Director will take the hit for all bad news, and then he or she will work to assure such things are one-of-a-kind issues. The Director will be charged with building procedures to assure the operational flow is proper.
- The Public Safety Director will revise and / or draw up the field regulations and code of conduct that must be maintained by all employees. The chiefs would be charged with making sure all policies are followed by all members.
- Violation of—or any conduct considered contrary to policy will be investigated and reported so that it can be investigated internally and either be substantiated or unsubstantiated.
- Discipline will be based on a progressive manner for insubordination and documented by supervisors. Criminal allegations against officers will result with suspension / without pay if charges filed. Desk duty until charged of investigation clears the officer.
- The use of vehicles by officers from city contractors must be terminated to maintain public confidence. Negotiations with the unions may be required if this is perceived to be a benefit.

Summary: How to create a safe city

Besides and effective crime fighting unit as discussed above, there is more to building a safe city. Without getting you bored, it is a given that the people have a major role in their own system. Our kids will not longer be in the middle of the street playing kick the can down the road—at least until we clear out the bad guys from our midst.

The people in the community have a major role. A blog at safewise.com includes an updated list of the eight simplest ways for the people to engage in this fight for a safe city.

- Know your neighbors. ...
- **Keep** up your yard, and encourage your neighbors to do the same. ...
- Be extra cautious when you go out of town. ...
- Close your windows and blinds at night. ...
- Improve the lighting on your street. ...
- Encourage outdoor activity. ...
- Know your local police department. ...
- Install a security system.

Nothing in life worth having is easy.

Wilkes-Barre is not alone in its fight for safety

While our City is closer to the bottom than the top of the Safe city list, we are not alone. Cities across the world actually are doing their best to fight crime in the streets, in the home, in the back allies, and in the heart of the cities themselves. Not every city succeeds.

Medium.com offers Wilkes-Barre and all other cities of the world six summary points to remember to help make our cities safe. It all begins with *Control*.

There is no question that the cities proper contain more people nowadays. This can also be said as “The urban population is growing, with over 50 percent living in cities.”

The World Health Organization estimates that by 2050, 75 percent of the people on the planet will be urban inhabitants, up from today’s 50 percent. The old methods of keeping cities safe are not going to continue to work when faced with advanced thuggery. Therefore, cities must pay attention and implement advanced technologies to add to the existing protection designed to improve the lives of its citizens.

For any city seeking safety as a priority, there are a number of major components that must come into play. By implementing the best techniques, cities can become safer and smarter at the same time.

Medium.com’s list of six steps for creating a safe and a smart city are as follows:

1. Control
2. Visibility
3. Connectivity
4. Advanced Communication
5. Action Plan
6. Sharing and Collaboration

These are not new concepts. We have already addressed these in the prior chapters but Medium.com has organized them in a way that makes them easier to remember and easier to focus upon. Let’s look at these six summary points briefly one at a time:

1. Control

Though it is not a bad idea to have satellite police stations spread across the city, there must be a centralized and well-equipped control room by Police HQ that is manned around the clock. This is a crucial part of the City safety picture as it focuses on the challenge of managing situations and incidents and appropriately handling the consequential masses of data that are collected.

The more we know about crime and criminals and their operating venues, the better we can handle the issues. Cities across the world are looking for solutions. Some have already found them.

Medium.com cites a system recently implemented in Nanded, India.

The Nanded City Council found an innovative way to enhance city security as well as meet its budget requirements. By creating a centralized command, control and communication center, which they call C-Cube, they are now able to monitor the entire city.

To achieve this, the city council did not do it alone. Instead, they worked with major security consultants and security solution providers. Below is a picture of their well-equipped control room, which has clearly become one of the keys to the success of the Smart City design in Nanded, India.



2. Visibility

Fighting blind is never a good idea. Visual information is extremely important for real-time handling of events, ongoing investigations, statistical studies (queues, crowds and traffic) as well as constant improvement through the debriefing of processes.

An observation and crime fighting camera network, located at critical spots around the city, is necessary to provide city operations centers with ongoing visuals relating to incidents, risks and progress of activities. Police across America are implementing such systems which first begin with cameras across the cities.

Visibility must also be smart: automating detection and using “machine vision.” Video analytics can instantly flag the incidents that need to be handled, pinpoint critical information as well as track specific people or objects. It is important for all of the tools to be integrated and managed by the centralized control room in our case, City Hall.

You can challenge me if you wish by telling me Wilkes-Barre City has over 300 cameras strategically placed to help provide the necessary data for crime fighting and you may say that this “lecture” on implementing a crime information system in this book is superfluous because it is in place already. Hmmmph!

It goes without saying that the system must actually work in order to show positive results. If everything is hunky-dory, why doesn't Wilkes-Barre have the wherewithal to report its crime statistics regularly. An information system based on live and recorded data cannot be an afterthought. It cannot be effective if it is unused because of a lack of education, a lack of maintenance, and / or a lack of concern. Wilkes-Barre has been funded but failed to use the tools given to provide its citizens with any benefits. Why?

We only have to look at a fountain on Public Square as proof positive that Wilkes-Barre does not maintain its resources well. Not only that, but the fountain tells other tales that the City would probably prefer were not well known. The fountain's neglect is a clear indicator about the ineffective management of resources of all kinds by City officials.

If for ten years, the City could not keep a small fountain on Public Square operational and defended to the hilt its decision to allow it to continue as an eyesore and not fix it, what can we expect of a very expensive crime prevention system depending on three hundred broken cameras?

It is too bad that we don't get even more investigative reporting from our local media sources but we must be thankful when we do get some insights from the outside press. Let's look at one story that tells an awful lot:

In 2016 Andy Mehalshick and Jayne Ann Bugda of the I-team reported the state of disrepair on the City's camera surveillance system. In the report, they concluded the system rarely ever works.

In Nanded City India and across the United States, these systems work effectively but in Wilkes-Barre Pa, the same team that maintained the fountain on Public Square were assigned to the camera project. What results should we expect? With a \$50 million budget we did not get it right--again?

The reporters visited the WB Police Department. That is where the command center for the camera surveillance system is located. Sources in the police department told Eyewitness News reporters that the entire system is almost always locked up. No officers have access to it. Cameras are just about everywhere you look in Wilkes-Barre... surveillance cameras but the servers for the cameras are for all purposes, in operative. How can that be in a city run by a Law and Order Mayor?

The reporters found that there are nearly 300 cameras located around the City but many of them do not work and even when they do work, there is nobody assigned to watch anything happening in the City in real time. They are not monitored.

Wilkes-Barre's crime system took a dive into the netherworld when the City took control of the system from a private firm in 2016. Their report did not mention if any City employee was even assigned to manage this major asset, which since it is now dysfunctional, has been wasted. Since then, the great shots these cameras may be taking in real time are no longer a factor in fighting crime.

There is always an excuse in Wilkes-Barre but rarely are there results. Mehalshick and Bugda did not use the word incompetence or ineptness to describe this major flaw. Let me do that. City officials say they want to revamp the system and are trying to find the money

to make that happen. So, the City is just a few dollars from success. If only taxes could be raised?

Now wait a minute. The City took over the fountain on Public Square when it was working. Now it is not working. Dah! It is not scheduled for repair because there is no money. Dah! The \$200,000 grant for the Square was earmarked for line painting etc. Whoops, I got off track a bit. We are talking about the camera system. But the stories are basically the same. No maintenance, then disrepair, and then no money to fix and then officials say it was not their fault. Then whose fault was it?

City officials have a problem with fountains from way back. Some City residents may be unaware of the beautiful fountain on the Square that was in place and operational closer to the turn of the 20th century. It may have been three fountains ago. Because it was using too much water, City officials shut it down and disassembled this treasure of absolute beauty.

They are said to have locked away the beautiful statue of Princess Kankakee in the City's special vaults for unused valuables. It was never sold but it disappeared. There was an investigation quite recently of this magical mystical fountain figure and the strange disappearance of the stature of Kankakee. The Indian maiden that was once centered there on top of the fountain disappeared. What happened? Nobody knows. It's gone. Perhaps it was hauled to the Island of Misfit Toys?

Mehalshick and Bugda ended their piece on the camera system with the following: " Word of the camera problems has some people who work downtown very concerned." Hmmph!

Wilkes-Barre almost had the visibility solution in place for crime prevention. Do the officials really care what it takes? Can we trust the caretakers of City assets to do the right job in the future for important crime fighting tools?

3. Connectivity

Another necessary aspect in creating a smart city is using IoT (Internet of Things) solutions. IoT is a system of interrelated devices

that can transfer data over a network. These innovative solutions improve city operations and increase safety through the smart sensing of daily life in the city—anything from license plate recognition to gunshot detection systems.

The objective is for the city's functional main systems to be connected and integrated. Then all relevant information can automatically be collected, correlated, and made actionable.

4. Advanced communication

Field professionals and the operators of the centralized control room require an advanced communication solution between them. This is another must-have item for a smart city. Using live broadcasts from any desired location and live first-hand reports from the field operators, from their squad car systems and communicating GPS units, a smart solution can notify the control area which operators are available and where. As a result, everyone involved can effectively collaborate with one another at any given time.

5. Action Plan

The system must have documented procedures for how to handle any security related incident or events, with the above advanced implemented technologies. Clearly this would take the communication to the next level and would result in constant improvement of the procedures for the benefit of the city residents.

6. Sharing and Collaboration

The success of operating a smart and safe City relies on the collaboration between the many departments: power plants, information systems, hospitals, schools, and law enforcement among others.

Creating a smart and safe city not only requires state-of-the-art technologies. It requires forward thinking and a relentless concern for perfection in use. It needs the seamless incorporation of technologies, communication, and smart implementation. More importantly, it

needs to be properly controlled to ensure the safety of the City's leaders and its citizens.

For Wilkes-Barre, if the City is able to ever make its partial camera system workable again and is able to implement the full six-point plan, it is incumbent on the Mayor and high-ranking City officials to assure the system provides the biggest possible gain for the city.

We surely do not need a fourth fountain if you get my drift.

Other Books by Brian W. Kelly: (amazon.com, and Kindle)

[Great Coaches in Navy Football: From Coach 1 to Coach #39 Ken Niumatalolo](#)
[Great Moments in Navy Football: From day 1 to coach Ken Niumatalolo!](#)
[No Tree! No Toys! No Toot Toot!](#) Heartwarming story. Christmas disappeared while 19 month old was napping
[How to End DACA, Sanctuary Cities, & Resident Illegal Aliens](#) . best solution to wipe shadows in America.
[Government Must Stop Ripping Off Seniors' Social Security!](#): Hey buddy, seniors can no longer spare a dime?
[Special Report: Solving America's Student Debt Crisis!](#): The only real solution to the \$1.52 Trillion debt
[How to End DACA, Sanctuary Cities, & Resident Illegal Aliens](#) . best solution to wipe shadows in America.
[The Winning Political Platform for America](#) Unique winning approach to solve the big problems in America.
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