

The 2022 PA Gubernatorial Election is starting to heat up. Read about candidate Jason Richey from Aliquippa.

Casinos make a phenomenal rebound in Q1 of 2021, but are they helping or hurting local economies?

The Pitt men's soccer program makes it to the semifinals of the NCAA D1 National Championships.

Rapper Rozei from Erie getting some national attention, hits a download milestone on Spotify.

THE WEST PENN TRIBUNE

A VOICE FOR WESTERN PENNSYLVANIANS

OPINIONS, NEWS & ISSUES FROM PITTSBURGH TO ERIE AND EVERYWHERE IN BETWEEN

\$3* // JUNE 2021



There's a new newspaper in town

Photo credit: pixabay.com

Newspaper start-up takes on the challenge

Newspapers; they're dying right? Conventional logic would definitely answer that question as a 'yes' every time. But is it really the newspaper that is dying, or just what people once thought of them?

A good newspaper is really an institution. An institution that freely thinks, that questions, and brings about change and reform when it is needed. And that's exactly what we are aiming to do with this newspaper start-up.

Those are two words most people never thought they would read in one sentence. It's a bit of a foreign concept in the year 2021 because most 'news start-ups' have started on the web. Traditional papers scrambled to go online and transform and keep up with the times, usually while

longing for the 'good old days' when newspapers ruled the world and their owners made a LOT of money. Newspapers were a mega industry, much bigger than most people remember.

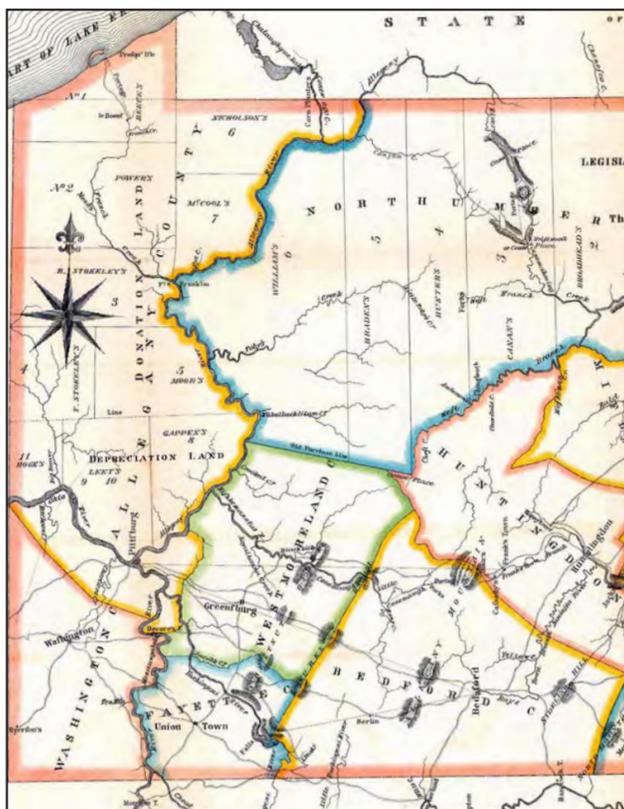
As the smartphone radically transformed how most people consumed their news -- aided in much part through social media networks -- the downward slope in profit for newspapers began. Most newspapers were desperately trying to hang on to profits that once were, failing to realize what was right there in front of them: a profitable business.

This newspaper is also a little different than a traditional one. All articles in this paper are editorials, and they're all anonymous (see article below for more information) and we welcome comment on each one.

Furthermore, the region needs a voice. We have over 3.2 million people living in western PA (about the population of all of Utah) and it seems like we hardly ever have a voice in Harrisburg. The big money and attention go to Philadelphia and the eastern part of the Commonwealth. This is frustrating. Which is exactly why we want to start thinking in regional terms, and start thinking about how issues affect the entire western district -- rather than just our individual municipalities.

We realize this is a large mountain to climb, but all we can do is try. Please consider supporting this newspaper by purchasing an issue, becoming a subscriber, or buying an advertisement. Further information can be found on pages A2 and B2.

Thank you.



This is the old survey map of western PA from 1791. Photo credit: <http://usgwararchives.net/maps/pa/county/>

What makes this paper different?

**ALL ARTICLES ARE OPINIONATED
ALL ARTICLES ARE ANONYMOUS
IT IS A REGIONAL PAPER**

Most newspapers only have one section dedicated for opinions. This paper is different because there are no limits to opinions. Yes, the articles will be factual with all the proper attributions and research done, but they all will offer an opinion on the topic being written about.

Because of this unique aspect, all articles in this newspaper are also anonymous. Some may think that is weird, but it is a necessary evil. Not only to protect our writers, but because it is difficult to get people to state their opinions. Maybe that's a direct effect from social media, maybe we just don't have as many; whatever the case, that's how we operate.

Some of the opinions you will not agree with. Write to us your opinion then on the topic and we will be happy to publish it in future issues. Direct all comments to westpenntribune@gmail.com.

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B3 UPMC'S 2019 IRS DOCUMENTS RECENTLY RELEASED

CEO Jeff Romoff raked in a cool \$9.5 million. But bigger questions loom for the large nonprofit, their 92,000 employees, and the role not just UPMC plays, but all nonprofits when it comes to property taxes.

D1 DIVORCE & COVID: THE OTHER PANDEMIC

How did the pandemic affect our love lives? Too much time together? A licensed sex therapist helps answer those questions.

A5 PERSONAL RAPID TRANSIT (PRT): A NEW IDEA FOR THE REGION

PRT is technically old technology still being used in places like WVU's Morgantown campus, but it could be adapted to help serve the region at large.

C1 WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE PENGINS?

After exiting the playoffs way too early, the Penguins have more questions than answers going into the off-season.

A4 CMU Study says bots are really the ones running the world

Research conducted by the University shows that artificial technology is propelling conspiracy theories online. Are we really surprised?



HOUSING MARKET Q&A

The pandemic has created a market where houses are selling at an all time high, supply is way down, and we attempt to answer some FAQs on the subject.

B3 & B5

BOOK REVIEW: "CORONA FALSE ALARM?"

In the height of the pandemic last summer, two doctors working in Germany wrote a powerful and controversial book questioning the shutdowns.

D1

PASSHE CONSOLIDATING STATE SCHOOLS

The PA State System of Higher Education has a new plan out to combine Cal U, Edinboro and Clarion Universities. We ask, does this all make sense?

A4

PA Turnpike Commission getting sued



AFTER IMPLEMENTING A CASHLESS TOLL SYSTEM, THE PA TURNPIKE COMMISSION IS FACING A POTENTIAL CLASS-ACTION LAWSUIT FOR OVERCHARGING MOTORISTS. THE SYSTEM NOT ONLY COSTS MORE TO OPERATE, IT ALSO DOESN'T WORK!

Well, it's happened. The first lawsuit against the PA Turnpike commission (PTC) since they instituted the all electronic tolling that debuted in the middle of the pandemic.

According to an article by Matt Miller from Pennlive.com on May 12, 2021, a motorist by the name of Julie E. Thomas is alleging she is a victim of a deliberate scheme by the commission to, essentially, screw people out of money without them realizing it. And if Thomas gets her way, the lawsuit will soon be declared a class action suit, opening it up the masses to try and get a chunk back from the turnpike commission (well the turnpike commission and Transcore, the Tennessee-based company managing the new people-less tolling system, who are also named as a defendant in the lawsuit).

It's no secret that tolls are the bane of every Pennsylvanian's existence, especially out here in the western part of the state where the only real toll road is the turnpike. There's talk of putting in a toll booth over one of the bridges going over i-79, but until that happens, we all enjoy relatively few toll roads. Which is just as well because tolls on the turnpike have risen for 13 straight years, the last one being a six percent increase in the summer of 2020.

However, for those not paying with an E-ZPass, they saw a considerably higher toll increase, a 45-percent one. 45 percent! These increases were allegedly justified by the "higher costs of administering AET systems" (we assume AET stands for automatic electronic tolling. It wasn't defined in the pennlive.com article by Ron Southwick on July 21, 2020). This article goes on to quote PA Turnpike Commission CEO Mark Compton, where he essentially blames the toll increases on the "quarterly transit payments to PennDOT and the resulting debt service that comes along with the legislatively mandated funding obligation."

Bitter much Mr. Compton?

Let's get a few things straight here. First, if the "legislatively mandated funding obligations" are such a burden to the financially unstable turnpike commission, why double down on an electronic tolling system that is projected to cost more? If the old system wasn't broken and cost less, then why did anyone try to go in and fix it? To top it off, this cashless electronic tolling system causes a potential class action lawsuit that could deal a heavy blow to the finances of the PTC. Furthermore, 500 people were laid off -- right in the middle of the pandemic no less. To do what? Go back to their couches and collect unemployment from a different state coffer?

Second, even though the turnpike commission and PennDOT

are technically two separate organizations, they both represent the taxpayers within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. So if the legislature is using the turnpike (one of the few toll roads in PA) to help finance other transportation related projects, what is so wrong with that? The alternative would be for PennDOT to start taking tolls on the roads they maintain. This has been discussed many times before (i-80 being the road brought up the most) and has always been shot down.

Okay so we all -- and quite frankly more so the truckers and out-of-towners who use the turnpike the most -- pay more on that road so all the other roads may remain free. Seems to make enough sense to us. To cry about it and make the excuse that this is the reason the turnpike can't seemingly make any money despite the ridiculous revenues being brought in makes Mr. Compton look and sound like an inexperienced business manager desperate for an excuse so he can keep his well-paid job.

No wonder the organization he runs is getting sued.

It's not like the turnpike commission isn't bringing in money hand over fist. Interestingly, a quick internet search doesn't detail how much money the PTC makes annually -- something one would think should be easily found. What was easy to find was how much the PTC has been "forced" to pay PennDOT over the years.

After some digging on the paturnpike.com website, we found monthly reports: <https://www.paturnpike.com/business/investors.fcra.aspx>

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The PTC was never able to manage money well, always overpaid for projects, and was always the cliched example of politicians receiving bribes for pork-belly work.

In April 2021, the PTC pulled in \$118,680,000. Yes that's \$118.7 million, in one month! Let's just do some quick math and times that by 12 to get an estimated annual revenue figure of something in the \$1,424,160,000 range (\$1.42 billion). So the \$450 million that the PTC pays to PennDOT annually is a nice chunk of the budget, roughly 30 percent, but it's not something that should be so unmanageable to "America's First Superhighway" that bankrupts them after being in

operation for over 80 years now.

Basically what we are saying is, the PTC deserves to be sued. Good for people like Thomas to stand up to these bullies and try to take back a little of what is rightfully hers, and to be frank, rightfully all of ours as tax paying citizens. The PTC is obviously making a substantial amount of money, despite themselves. The Thomas case shows this, as she was being overcharged because of using an older transponder not communicating well enough with the new systems in place. Thomas' lawyers will try and prove that the PTC knew about this problem and did nothing about it, which if true, definitely means a lot of Pennsylvanians were being overcharged for their tolls without ever realizing it.

We all have to admit that, since the advent of the EZPass, it has been a boon for toll roads. Toll booths that once backed up for hundreds of feet are now breeze-throughs. No more looking for quarters and dimes under the seat to pay the toll, or having to break a \$20 on a \$1.25 toll. But what the electronic tolling does do -- and in our eyes is a little sneaky of the PTC -- is completely eliminates knowing exactly what one pays going through the booth.

Knowing what you're paying has become a lot more confusing now, especially since the disparity between EZPass holders and regular toll by plate payers is so high -- a 45% difference! Back in the day, like five years ago, when one drove the turnpike, there was a nice little ticket that popped out upon entry that showed exactly how much it would be to get off at any one of the many exits that lay before the traveler. Now with the EZPass, we just never look it up, pay blindly, and let it hit our credit card whenever it needs refilled. Convenient? Yes. But easy to price gouge and hit a driver with an unknowing charge? Most definitely.

Even with all this shadiness going on, let's not forget that the overall strategy of raising tolls to unthinkable prices, in an effort to try and get out from under debt obligations, just doesn't work. In the Southwick article cited above, in the last paragraph there is a little note that Auditor General Eugene DePasquale said that these seemingly endless annual toll increases are "putting the turnpike on the road to ruin," and that the higher prices will drive too many people away leaving the debt load "unsustainable."

However much we slice and dice the problem here, the solutions are unfortunately obvious; the state needs to start tolling more roads to keep her head above the debt payment water, which seems to be rushing in from all around. During the pandemic, revenues plummeted (there was a 103 percent variance between April 2020 revenue numbers and April 2021), but oddly enough it may be the relief from Covid bills that may ultimately end this squabble.

Theoretically, if transit agencies and other transportation programs throughout the state receive relief payments from the Federal Government, then PennDOT wouldn't have to rely on the PTC for that relief. Theoretically, of course. Or they just take that money, plus all the extra money they make this year from the price increases, and have it mysteriously disappear into pork-belly filled road expansion projects just prompting them to go further into debt and never put an end to the toll increases.

The point is there's a smart way to do this, and then there's the continually dumb way of doing things, which has been going on for generations. The PTC was never able to manage money well, always overpaid for projects, and was always the cliched example of politicians receiving bribes for 'pork-belly' work. It is pretty astounding too. The Pittsburgh 'southern beltway' which is supposed to connect from near Monroeville down through Forest Hills and bypass the city before connecting back up with i-79 on the other side, is expected to cost somewhere in the neighborhood of \$125 million per mile. Makes one wonder if they are paving the roads with asphalt or pure gold at prices like that.

It's just so very frustrating when we pay so much to go towards the roads and yet find them in such deplorable shape. Maybe the answer is more tolls, but at a lower rate. West Virginia seems to take that strategy and, at least as a passenger, wouldn't mind paying 25 cents to use a road here and there rather than having to pay over \$50 to cross the state.

We don't know, but what we do know is the greed needs to stop and the grown men and women who run the PTC need to figure it out, because the current system is about to take an 80 year old proud superhighway, and leave it to crumble at the hands of mismanagement and lawsuits if they aren't careful.

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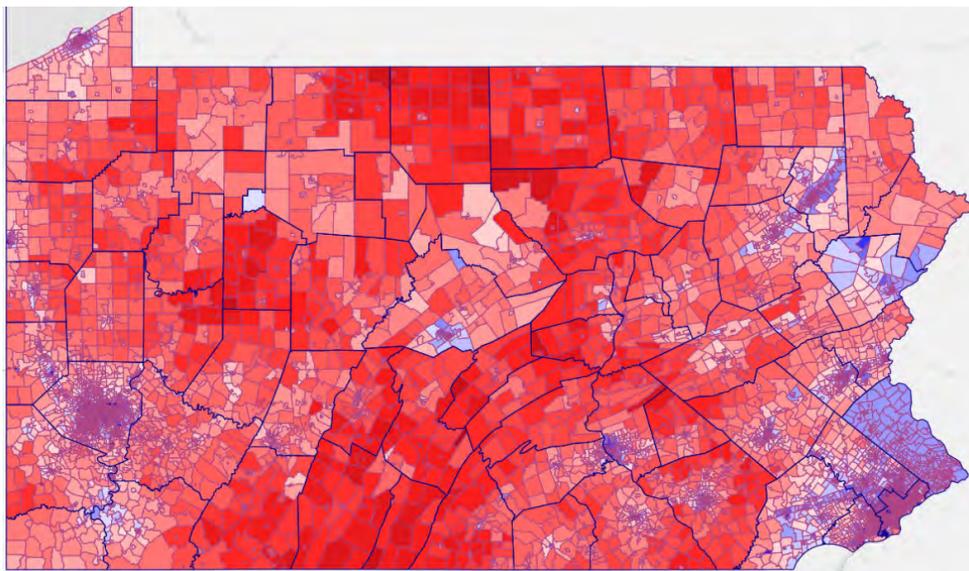
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2022 PA Gubernatorial election beginning to take shape, lines drawn



This is a map that shows partisan lean by precinct using data from the 2020 election.

Map made via davesredistricting.org

Only person from western PA in the race right now is Aliquippa native Jason Richey, a partner at K&L Gates

The PA gubernatorial election is two years away still, but candidates are already announcing and beginning their tours of the Commonwealth.

One of the latest to enter the race is Aliquippa native Jason Richey, a lawyer who currently resides in Sewickley and is a partner at K&L Gates – the same law firm who former Sen. Rick Santorum and the late Gov. Dick Thornburgh worked for back in the day.

(You probably remember Santorum who has ran for president multiple times and continues to be a commentator on national politics on various cable news programs and is still alive and well. Thornburgh, who is from Pittsburgh, was PA's governor from 1979 to 1987, then went on to be US Attorney General until 1991. He recently passed away on New Year's Eve 2020.)

So the pedigree is there for the republican Richey who touts his Quip upbringing and early blue collar work ethic amongst his many qualities that should help him relate to rust belt Pennsylvania. Honestly, that's refreshing coming from the Republicans who all too often come from the upper class families (apologies for the generalization).

In an article in the Tribune Review on May 21, 2021 by Deb Erdley his background is well covered saying he used to work as a roofer, busboy and McDonalds cook working his way through law school in an Aliquippa steel mill. The guy is a worker, 49 years old, and is a father to three teenage sons. It all looks really good on paper.

He's also from western PA, the only candidate so far. Other republican candidates are former Rep. Lou Barletta from Hazleton, former Montgomery County Commissioner Joe Gale, and state sen. Doug Mastriano, R-Franklin County, is also in the mix. From the democratic side, PA Attorney General Josh Shapiro is all but certain to be the candidate.

Obviously it's early and a lot can come out and be said in the next two years, but Richey at least appears to check all the boxes (for the most part) and has a very clear platform on which to run on. He's a true and red republican with wanting to eliminate the income tax and replace it with a higher sales tax.

That sounds great, and has worked well for states like Texas and Florida, the only problem with trying to do that in PA however is we've been used to a fairly low six percent sales tax for a long time now (not to mention no tax on essential items like food and clothes) and can be difficult to forecast the windfall at times.

Meaning that another tax, probably the property tax, will need to be raised at some point (as is the case in Texas) which Richey is careful not to mention because PA has strong feelings about property rights. That is, tax me as little as possible because why pay 'rent' to the government for something I theoretically own.

Tax barbs aside, he is also in favor of eliminating the Turnpike

Commission and Liquor Control Board LCB. We are all for the elimination – or at the very least intense reform of – the turnpike commission because they've been wasting toll payers money for way too long (see related article on page A2) and while it sounds good to try and eliminate the LCB and privatize the sale of liquor in PA, it's just such a mountain to climb and for what benefit? So we can maybe pay a little less for whiskey and find it at more convenient locations? We all like a drink just as much as the next newspaper editor, but it's really not all that inconvenient to go to a Wines & Spirits by 9 p.m. for any last minute wants. Is it really worth the political will? Besides, a nice compromise has been struck with wine and beer sales

66 Other republican candidates are former Rep. Lou Barletta from Hazleton, former Montgomery County Commissioner Joe Gale, and state sen. Doug Mastriano, R-Franklin County... from the democratic side, PA Attorney General Josh Shapiro is all but certain to be the candidate

now being allowed in gas stations and grocery stores. Progress has been made, focus more on the potholes Richey, that's what we are really concerned about.

Another classic republican stance taken by Richey is 'school-choice' or a waiver system for parents who want to be able to use public dollars to send their kids to potentially a private school.

To quote Erdley's article, he wants to provide "choice options for K-12 education while ensuring all public schools are the best schools in the mix by enhancing teacher pay and restructuring public education with an emphasis on providing training tracks for students who are interested in pursuing occupations in the trades or the military."

While we love the rhetoric on creating more pathways to the trades – as these are great paying jobs right now due to low supply tradesmen and women – it really does sound like trying to have his cake and eat it too. Creating "choice options" means de-funding public education, period. There is no other way to slice it. So how does he plan on paying teachers more while at the same time taking funding away from the public schools?

Sounds like a union fight just ready to happen and is going to be a non-starter for a lot of potential swing voters. Especially for someone who hails from Aliquippa where the tiny school district there is consistently ranked last in the 500 school districts within the commonwealth.

It's an easy conclusion for someone from Quip to think; the school isn't great, which means families who can afford to move into a better district will do just that, so providing more of a school choice for someone in Quip could help prevent people leaving and stabilize the tax base. The problem with that line of thinking though is it just completely leaves the rest of the kids in public school in complete disparity – more so than it already is – and the public school will ultimately fail (which may a hidden motive).

This is not an uncommon theme in PA where former city/borough schools all floundered when the middle class flocked to the townships where the schools were newer and the taxes were lower, but the common problem is trying to eliminate this divide between the haves and the have-nots, not compounding the problem through privatizing the schools.

Plus, we've been down this road before, nothing is ever 'free.' Having an option to go to a different school would at some point certainly require the family to pay some type of tuition on top of the tax money that leaves the home district when that transfer happens – already a problem with the PA Cyber School (especially over covid) where the home district is forced to pay for that student in Cyber School thus losing much needed tax revenue to help keep the school going. It looks like a money grab, smells like a money grab, and acts like a money grab; probably is a money grab.

Nitpicking aside though, Richey seems like a well positioned candidate from western PA, and someone we will certainly keep our eyes on. He's also in favor of municipal consolidation and regional police forces, which as much as we don't want to admit it, is desperately needed. Population is declining in too many areas to support all the structure that was built up in the region's heyday.

Call it a correction maybe, like what the economists call the stock market when it blips down, but simply put there are too many municipalities in PA which leads to confusion and inadequately funded public operations. Richey also seems to be aware of other political snafus like gerrymandering and bid rigging, which is great to hear because those are non-partisan issues that really need addressed by someone like a lawyer from K&L gates, who may be able to come up with some more sensible solutions.

Last word on Richey; we also like him because he understands that politicians bash each other all too much. It's easy to do in a campaign (and even easier to do after getting re-elected) but no matter what side of the aisle you're on, you are still representing the public. So any kind of intentional disturbance really is a disservice to the rest of us tax paying citizens. In Richey's words, it's easy to bash another candidate, but what are the solutions to problems?

That seems clear enough to us, and the kind of thinking that should be welcomed in Harrisburg, rather than the usual duck and cover.

LOU BARLETTA THROWS HAT IN RING FOR GOVERNOR

Lou Barletta isn't quite done with politics. At 65, he is far from retiring as he begins his bid to become the governor of Pennsylvania in 2022.

Barletta is a republican, catholic, Italian-American from Hazleton, PA who has served as the U.S. representative for Pennsylvania's 11th congressional district from 2011 to 2019 and the Mayor of Hazleton for 10 years before that.

His most recent political bid was in 2018 when he ran against Bob Casey Jr. for the U.S. Senate seat and lost with 42.6 percent of the vote compared to Casey's 55.7 percent. Though he was the heavily favored republican in the primary, beating out Jim Christiana by 27 percentage points.

The Tribune-Review ran his op-ed announcing his candidacy on Sunday May 23 where Barletta had a little ink to make his case to be PA's next governor. He starts it by telling the story of the business he and his wife, Mary Grace, started 37 years ago (which wasn't mentioned in the article, but a quick wikipedia search yielded it being a 'pavement marking company' called Interstate Road Marking Corporation which he sold for an undisclosed sum in 2000).

Right after he sold his business, he ran for Mayor of Hazleton and won handedly after failing to win a council seat two years prior. Hazleton, for those unfamiliar, is a fairly large city out in Luzerne County in the north eastern part of the state with a population of just over 25,000 – about the size of Monroeville for a western PA comparison.

Barletta's running for governor because he "fears that dreams like the one we lived have become increasingly unattainable for too many Pennsylvanians. I'm running because I've heard the voices of Pennsylvanians who believe that Harrisburg insiders have stopped listening, and worse, have made decisions that dramatically damaged their quality of life."

He goes on to criticize Gov. Wolf for a botched vaccine rollout, crushing small businesses, and stealing a year of school from children because of the shutdowns. It's pretty standard republican boilerplate rhetoric of getting the government out of the way to 'unleash the entrepreneurial spirit of the people.'

Barletta is a pretty solid ground soldier for President Trump during his presidency, and met with Trump on trying to repeal the Affordable Care Act – at least about trying to get separate legislation going that would prevent undocumented immigrants from accessing health insurance and other various tax credits. Trump allegedly liked Barletta back too, and helped him in his ultimately failed U.S. Senate bid.

We aren't going to pass too much judgement on Barletta here, if you like what he has to say and the traditionally republican policies, then he's your guy! Though we do find it a little funny that he calls out these 'Harrisburg insiders' for not following the voice of the people, when he himself could be considered an insider. If not that, then at least as a politician representing Pennsylvanians for the past 20 years.

He's not a career politician, as he made his money in business (probably had some government contracts along the way, but hey, that's how you play the game), but he's no outsider like how Trump was when he first ran for president either. We will see if he can ride that high that Trump created for many Pennsylvanians.

Only time will tell for Mayor Lou though! At any rate, we should have an exciting primary election for the republican candidate for governor to go on and face probably PA's Attorney General Josh Shapiro.

PA is decidedly purple. The governor's office as we went from the democrat Ed Rendell for eight years, then the republican Tom Corbett for four years, before going back to the democrat Tom Wolf for another eight years. So if history holds true, the winner of the republican gubernatorial primary in PA will end up being the 48th governor.

PASSHE consolidates 3 colleges in western PA

In early May 2021, the Pennsylvania State System for Higher Education (PASSHE) voted 17-2 in a two-hour special meeting to move forward into the public comment phase of a proposal to consolidate six state colleges / universities into three.

Out east, Bloomsburg, Lock Haven and Mansfield would be combined into one school; and out west here it is Clarion, California and Edinboro that are set to be gutted.

Though the consolidation plan is well over 400 pages, it does appear to be mum on some of the finer details on big questions about this highly controversial move. What we can infer is that each of these consolidations will result in a brand new name, yet the individual athletic programs for each standalone school – as well as the physical locations themselves – will all be preserved. Though they will all be managed by one leadership team, faculty, and academic programs.

To put it lightly, this plan begs a lot of questions. Larger questions such as how many jobs will be lost and how much of this incorporates virtual learning, to more trivial things like where exactly will this leadership team be located, who manages the athletic programs, and how much travel would this mean for some faculty and staff? Because the consolidations don't appear to be regionally based. California University is a two hour plus drive to Edinboro.

As for the athletic programs, each individual campus – at least under the proposed plan which is far from final – is supposed to retain all of their current athletic programs. Though what is much less clear is how the NCAA feels about that somewhat bold claim from the architects of this plan (roughly 1,000 people associated with PASSHE) and if that would even be approved with potentially smaller enrollments now for each campus. What if the NCAA comes back and says no and that some athletic teams need to be eliminated? Then that little detail could potentially bring the entire consolidation plan into question and probably bring a lot more public comment.

There are 14 total schools in the PASSHE system with five of them in western PA; Edinboro, Clarion, Slippery Rock, Indiana, and California. The other nine are scattered throughout the eastern part of the commonwealth with three of them within an hour of Philadelphia; West Chester, Cheyney, and Kutztown.

So we're sure the reasoning for consolidating the universities that were chosen was from a financial perspective. That is, these six universities didn't have the consistent enrollment needed to justify an entire campus. Though out east, Mansfield, Lock Haven, and Bloomsburg are all in the same north eastern corridor, which at least makes sense. Out west here, why wasn't it Slippery Rock, Clarion and Edinboro? Because they were afraid of ruining Slippery Rock's reputation but not one of the other three? It's like choosing which child you love more over another.

What makes even less sense is why geographically close campuses out east weren't looked at for consolidation. Cheyney and West Chester are, at least according to Google Maps, all of an eight minute drive between each other. So if closing one of the 14 campuses meant saving all the other ones, why weren't these two brought into the conversation?

If the idea of the PASSHE system is to provide a high quality educational experience to all corners of the commonwealth, then this consolidation plan falls short. We realize that around the major population centers that justifies having more schools, like around Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, but those areas are also served by various other colleges, community colleges, and universities to serve the population.

Places like Edinboro though basically serve as the community college for the Erie region since Erie County and Crawford County (the next county south of Erie) are not served by community colleges. In Erie especially, this has been a hot topic with much debate where essentially the compromise was the branch campus of Edinboro (located out on the west side of the City of Erie, called the Porreco College) would serve as the 'community college' in lieu of starting and funding a whole new school. Then, last summer, it

was decided that Edinboro would divest this location in a cost cutting plan requested and approved by the PASSHE in January of 2020.

Sidebar: In a goerie.com article by Valerie Myers on Aug. 13, 2020, she states that the intention of selling this campus was actually for a community college to be formed in partnership with the Northern Pennsylvania Regional College (NPRC). But the partnership between Erie County and NPRC fell through and now there's more uncertainty on exactly what will happen, if anything at all. There's a likely scenario that, especially in light of this consolidation plan, that the entire Erie region at large will not only lose their bid for a community college, but also lose the Porreco College too.

We feel these are pertinent questions especially when taking into consideration the financial impact each state school brings to the region. The University of Massachusetts-Amherst actually recently completed a study on this consolidation plan that estimates nearly 900 faculty and staff positions over the first four years of the plan, with annual loss of over \$11.6 million in state and local tax revenue. That number may be eye popping but makes sense, because for many of the rural and suburban areas these state schools are located in are large economic drivers for them, often the largest employer, and pay their faculty and staff relatively high wages compared to other jobs in the area.

Not only that, but there have been large investments made in some of these schools over the last several years which may never come to be fully realized through this consolidation plan. For example California University (Cal U, aka the Harvard on the Mon) has had six new luxury style residence halls built since 2000, a brand new Convocation Center (amongst some controversy) was completed just in time for the 2011 season, and there have been numerous other renovations and investments made at Cal U with plans for the enrollment to increase, not decrease under consolidation plans.

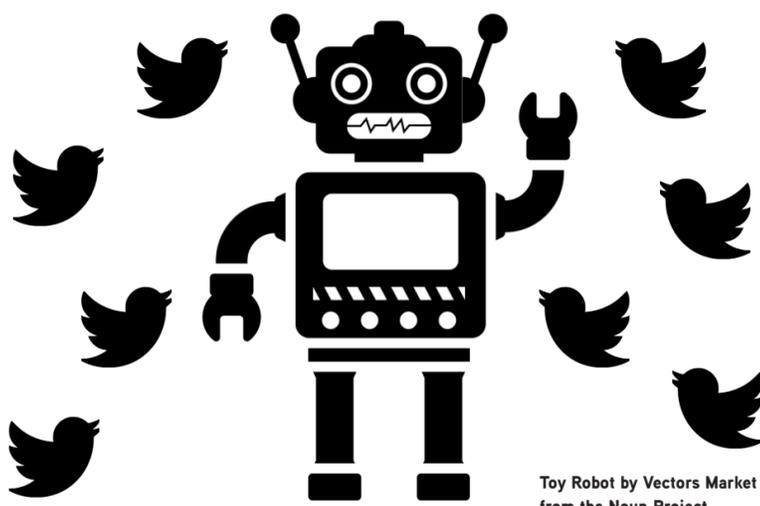
We understand that consolidation is inevitable, but according to an editorial appearing in the Tribune Review on May 2, 2021, "PA ranks 48th in the U.S. for support of its state schools." meaning that yes, though the PASSHE system isn't exactly 'financially viable,' compared to the other 50 states, they're holding their own just fine with the limited amount of state resources made available to the system.

In an article dated April 28, 2021 by Jan Murphy on pennlive.com, she quotes PASSHE Chancellor Dan Greenstein as saying he has told lawmakers that an annual increase of \$250 million in state funding – above the \$477.5 million already allocated – would be enough to scrap plans for consolidation. With the amount of money already invested in the 38 year old PASSHE state school system, this should definitely be something worth a little more conversation. The term 'pot committed' comes to mind here, which is a poker term meaning 'hey, you've already put in so much money in the pot to see the outcome, it doesn't make sense to pull out now before seeing the outcome.'

At any rate, surely there could be some other ideas thrown out there. We know PA has received funding from the federal government in related to the pandemic, might some of these funds be used? If the idea is to have more of a branch campus type approach like Penn State does, then why not then just consider making the PASSHE schools part of that system?

Greenstein, according to an insidehighered.com article dated May 3, 2021 by Emma Whitford, has said that this consolidation process is simply inevitable. And if the board does not approve it, then his recommendation would be to completely dissolve the system. Really, that is just a ridiculous statement to make at this stage: an all or nothing proposition prior public comment?

We understand the situation is dire, and probably amplified through covid, but some more questions need answered about the current proposal need before putting anything in ink. There are too many jobs at stake, too much money at stake, and too many Pennsylvanian futures at stake to bring this in for a landing just now. Yes, something needs to happen, but this 'compromise' makes little sense.



Bots on social media study

CMU COMPLETED A STUDY ANALYZING BOT ACTIVITY ON TWITTER AND OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS. THE STUDY WAS DONE A YEAR AGO AND FORESHADOWED MANY EVENTS THAT TOOK PLACE HELPING TO ERODE TRUST IN AN ALREADY FRAGILE SOCIETY

Around this time last year, Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) ran a study to see how social media – namely twitter though data from Facebook, Reddit, and YouTube were also added into the research – was affecting COVID-19 falsehoods being spread online and how much of the traction was being caused by 'bots' or real people.

Per the CMU Ambassadors' July 2020 newsletter where they published a release on the findings, "... CMU researchers since January have collected more than 200 million tweets discussing coronavirus or COVID-19. Of the top 50 influential retweeters, 82% are bots, they found. Of the top 1,000 retweeters, 62% are bots."

In an article by Teghan Simonton published on May 25, 2020 in the Tribune Review, she quotes researchers saying the strategy they see being executed through these 'bots' has Chinese and/or Russian fingerprints on it, and meant to try and divide the country and incite ridiculous theories aimed at persuading Americans to not trust their government.

The CMU study goes on to say that this misinformation or 'fake news' leads to conspiracy theories which leads to more extreme opinions, more extreme behavior, and less rational thinking.

"Increased polarization will have a variety of real-world consequences, and play out in things like voting behavior and hostility towards ethnic groups," said Kathleen Carley, lead CMU professor on the study in the Ambassador article cited above.

What's interesting, is that this study foreshadowed a lot of things and events that ended up playing out as we look back one year later. Specifically, the Jan. 6th attack on the nation's capitol and the repeated attack on Asian-Americans that has been well documented since the pandemic began. It could definitely be argued that at least some of the motive behind these actions were fueled by what people saw and read on social media platforms.

So, in a way, the strategy of foreign actors using bots to change public opinion and make Americans less

trusting of one another worked. They've succeeded in changing public opinion and, at times, radically altered the priorities of Congress and our government at large having a very real and tangible effect on how we vote and form opinions about issues.

It also seems that people are less trusting than perhaps they once were. We don't have a CMU study to cite and back up this claim with, it's just a generalization that we feel most people would agree that it's more difficult to trust one another (or the media, or the government, more on that later) than it once was.

Past generations talk of camping on the front lawn and walking as a youth across town to the store or park to hang out, often not coming back until after dark without cell phones to call home (let alone be tracked as today's smartphones are more than capable of doing for any concerned parent).

There was less concern for the safety of the child though because parents at the time trusted that society was intact so well that nothing serious would happen to their child, and that if they did get into any trouble, some kind passing neighbor would assist. We are pretty sure parents of today wouldn't subscribe to that thinking very well.

The media is also lumped into the category of "things that society used to trust but now don't." Whether that be sensationalism in the news or just a ploy to get higher ratings, the news as a product has degraded a bit and the overall industry has suffered.

It doesn't help that the 'media' is all lumped together as one broad statement. Local media talking about outrageous property taxes brought on by an overzealous school board is much different news than the daily coverings of our president and Congress aired on CNN, FOX, MSNBC, cable networks, etc.

The government suffers from this as well. People lament against the government / taxes all the time; though again, local government trying to stretch budgets to fill in potholes in the summer is one thing, compared to massive federal projects with budgets in the billions of dollars. Though 'government' gets put in the same category that includes the President of the United States, as it does the mayor of a small town less than 10,000 people.

It's no secret social media has exacerbated this general lack of trust that has slowly crept into the minds of general Americans. This unfiltered news is coming directly to the public without any kind of editor perhaps taking a second look at a story or a photograph, and checking out that it's true before putting it out in any

official capacity. So every single little incident involving government mistrust, the media angling a story, or even a (god forbid) child endangerment case, is aired out to the public without any filter or verification of it's truth.

Then these stories gain momentum and spread virtually for all to see, and thus opinions are formed and trust is

degraded further.

This is what we think the CMU study is trying to say in a very professional and analytical way: don't believe everything you read. Maybe that old proverb is just being said less and less these days, but also we don't think schools are exactly setting up students to view the world through an analytical or critical eye. Good journalists do this well. Bad journalists sensationalize, often for the benefit of a third party they may or may not be benefiting from.

Though we believe everyone should be a 'journalist' at least in the sense of putting yourself in an editor's shoes when reading / watching anything – whether that be on social media, a newspaper, a cable news broadcast, etc. – and deciding for yourself that if it were up to you, would that particular story have the right amount of trusted sources to make the cut to be in the final edition?

“Increased polarization will have a variety of real-world consequences, and play out in things like voting behavior and hostility towards ethnic groups.”

- CMU Professor Kathleen Carley in July 2020



WVUs PRT System at the Beechurst Station in Morgantown.
Photo by Brian M. Powell on commons.wikimedia.org

PERSONAL RAPID TRANSIT (PRT) SYSTEM: THE ANSWER FOR PA?

With a lot of talk about hyper loops and self-driving cars – which are great ideas, just not an immediate reality – sometimes it does more harm than good to having more of a more real conversation of ideas about public transportation.

Something that yes, may require a public subsidy, but is at least one that is manageable and runs well enough to not go bankrupt in under a decade. Through much research, reading through repetitive transit studies, and taking a look at transportation project all across the nation and the world; we believe the answer was right under western PA's nose all along, the PRT system built in Morgantown, West Virginia for West Virginia University (WVU) in 1975.

To give a little context on what exactly PRT is, first of all it stands for Personal Rapid Transit. The 'personal' part comes from the passenger being put in a smaller type of vehicle, something akin to the modern sedan or SUV. The Morgantown system vehicles are admittedly more like small buses designed for about 20 people.

The cars are powered by electricity through guide-ways on either side of the vehicle which also steer the unmanned vehicles and direct them to different stations with a top speed of a whopping 30 mph. This is where the 'rapid' aspect comes into play as vehicles don't stop at every station along the way. There are offline stations coming off the mainline (much like an exit on a limited access freeway) which means less stopping for a vehicle. If someone is going from station A to D, they don't need to stop to pick up or drop off passengers at stations B and C along the way.

This cuts down overall travel time for the vehicle while also allowing more places to access the system. The Morgantown station only has five stations over a roughly four mile route that is a dedicated right of way just for the PRT system and is also heated to prevent snow and ice build up during the winter.

A true PRT system is totally on-demand; meaning that when a passenger arrives at a station, they hit a button that calls for a vehicle, one arrives, passenger enters and then selects the station he/she wishes is going to inside the vehicle. It then whisks that person away directly to the final destination without stopping. This is how the Morgantown system operates during non peak hours, but because of how small the system is, during peak hours the system operates on a schedule system to limit wait times at each station. The system is far from perfect and very outdated as it was designed in the 1970s, making it very difficult to find replacement parts, but WVU engineers have found a way to keep it going and functioning all these years later. There are 73 vehicles total and, according to an article by Colin Booth on Nov. 1 2007 in The DA, WVU's student newspaper, the PRT has a daily ridership of around 16,000, with 2.25 million people riding it per year. Which is pretty crazy for a town with only about 30,000 permanent residents and 28,000 students.

The PRT solved a major problem for the City of Morgantown which is because of that swelling of people during the school year – not to mention WVU's campus is spread out through the entire town mostly due to the hilly terrain – the narrow roadways within the town become very congested very quickly when people are trying to get around from one part of the campus to another. A fleet of buses served WVU before 1975, but the buses had very long wait times as it was using those same clogged roadways to try and get students from one area to the next. Luckily enough for WVU and Morgantown, the 70s were a great exploratory period by the federal government and had an appetite for experimenting with different modes of public transit. Nixon's administration approved the Morgantown PRT (thanks to a lot of lobbying by then West Virginia senator Robert Byrd) but Nixon himself was also reportedly a huge fan of such a system, and essentially used for some positive PR before the next election.

Sidebar: It actually sort of backfired for Nixon though because, as these systems often do, there were numerous cost overruns and delays leading to a lot of questioning by the press at the time, and didn't become operational until after his presidency. In today's political climate, it is just a bit more complicated to secure federal funding for such a project – probably why even receiving federal money for replacing very much used tunnels into and out of NYC is a huge chess match – a senator these days needs not just vision to try

Hemlock Trees are under attack

WILL OUR RESPONSE HELP OR MAKE THINGS WORSE?



Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) on hemlock needles.
Photo attribution: USDA Forest Service - Region 8 Archive, USDA Forest Service / © Bugwood.org / CC-BY-3.0-US

Western Pennsylvania's Eastern Hemlock trees are under attack by a small insect called the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid. Infected trees in our area have a high mortality rate, although it usually takes several years for a tree to die after getting infected with the pest.

While you may not know the tree by its name, the Eastern Hemlock is one of the most important trees in our region. If you're familiar with any shady mountain pine groves or enjoy seeing snow weighing heavily on the branches of pine trees in winter, there's a very good chance you've been enjoying our state tree.

While the trees provide many aesthetic benefits, they're importance in the environment is even greater. They provide food and shelter for many animals.

Their shade helps keep mountain streams cool, which is beneficial for trout and other aquatic life that call Pennsylvania streams home. Their root systems even help prevent erosion of streambanks.

Without intervention, there is a very good chance we'll lose many of our hemlocks to the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid. Efforts are already underway to combat the insect in some of the most environmentally or culturally significant stands of trees.

If you have your own Eastern Hemlocks, you can diagnose them by looking along the base of the branches for a clearly visible white substance with a fuzzy or woolly appearance.

Most major efforts to combat the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid center on a two-pronged system of introducing a predatory beetle that will eat the insects and "soil drenching", which involves dumping or injecting insecticides like Imidacloprid around the base of the trees. Only the insecticides are available to the public.

The insecticides are considered a temporary measure to keep trees alive long enough to allow the introduced beetles and other native insects to begin

keeping the populations of Hemlock Woolly Adelgids in check.

While some degree of success has been reported with these approaches, they are not without their drawbacks.

While the predatory beetles are believed to only eat the adelgids, what happens if they adapt and begin preying on our own native insects? This wouldn't be the first time in US history that we've introduced a predatory insect only for it to turn into an invasive problem. One example that comes to mind is the Asian lady beetle.

Serious questions ought to be raised over "drenching" the soil with insecticides as well. One of the most common insecticides being used, Imidacloprid, is also implicated in widespread pollinator problems. It's a bit strange to see environmentally-oriented groups advocating for the disuse of insecticides in some situations but then drenching our soil with it in another.

What happens if the use of insecticides only leads to a resistant-version of the adelgid that is even more deadly to trees and impossible to control?

In the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid's native range in Asia, the insect doesn't pose a significant problem due to a combination of natural predators and host resistance. Host resistance is documented in other places as well, including locations in North America like British Columbia.

In other words, some trees are less likely to be affected than others.

While the intent to save trees is admirable, most people involved admit that there are far too many trees to actually try to protect them all. The Hemlock Woolly Adelgid is here to stay, and its presence will be felt significantly over the next few decades.

In the meantime, should we focus on encouraging stronger, more resilient trees? Or should we be dumping money into introducing more Asian beetles and filling our soil with insecticides?

and secure money for such a project, but also a huge PR / Media campaign behind him/her too in order to get proper attention from Washington D.C..

At any rate, the Morgantown PRT system truly is an engineering marvel; and though mired with some maintenance issues almost 50 years after being constructed and going through a major modernization project, is still a highly efficient system that keeps the town and university from shutting down. Being so close to WVU here in western PA and talking to people who have attended WVU, they like to throw around an alternative acronym for PRT: pretty rotten transit. This crinkles the nose a bit because, all it takes for a truly amazing system to receive negative perception is a bad nickname, and can ultimately kill a project. But the fact of the matter is the system isn't going anywhere and WVU's nationally recognized engineering program is tasked with keeping it going for another 50 years so realistically, there is no better alternative.

Up until 2000 the system was actually extremely reliable – up and around 98 percent. Then, it dipped to under 90 percent for the next 20 or so years forcing a major update of the system (though we don't feel that is unreasonable considering the average life of a vehicle is only around eight years). So even though a student's best known excuse for being late to class at WVU is the PRT broke down – and probably true at least half of the time – that student is late a lot less thanks to the system and wouldn't have allowed the university to grow like it did over the years. Though the system is free for WVU students, the cost for the general public is only 50 cents. 50 cents! That's crazy for the 21st century when the only thing that can be purchased for 50 cents is maybe a gumball or two. And since the system connects right to the hospital in town, a lot of permanent and

elderly residents use it to get there for treatments / appointments. During football games especially to, the PRT system is essential in getting the large amount of people who show up for a game to and from the stadium safely. Safety is actually the PRT's biggest pro (especially when dealing with a bunch of drunk college kids going to a football game) but even just for any given Friday or Saturday night where drinking is involved, taking the PRT is a much preferred option over drunk driving through West Virginia's windy roads.

A PRT system could easily be designed on a larger scale, and instead of running only a handful of miles like the WVU system does currently, there's no reason such a system couldn't operate over hundreds of miles. This type of system requires less substructure than any other elevated dedicated right of way because just a single car needs to be carried, not a large train. And with our hilly terrain in western PA, this type of system would be easier to build than cutting new roads and tunnels into the dense earth.

It's difficult to estimate costs, but some road projects are in the \$100 million per mile range. There are several PRT studies that estimate such a system could be built for a tenth of that cost at around \$10 million per mile. At any rate, it's something we feel is at least worth studying and much more feasible than past projects that have been brought up like the doomed maglev proposal, which was too much money and didn't go to enough places.

A PRT system has the potential to have a station at every little town and borough throughout the land, giving access to folks living there to the entire system. Since a vehicle doesn't need to stop at each and every station, there could theoretically be an unlimited amount of stations built into the system and have it expand over time. Now that's some long-term thinking!



'Call Your Own Foul' podcast goes into second season

Over 45 shows covering current events, political issues, media reactions, all in good jest

Call Your Own Foul is a podcast filled with humor, hot takes and news not covered by traditional media outlets. The three hosts have known each other for a while and (try to) moderate each other's biases through representation on all sides of the political spectrum. Most of the discussions are comedic in nature, but given the controversial subject matter, some debates can get pretty heated.

With a card-carrying Libertarian, populist Republican and "moderate" Democrat rounding out the crew, CYOF doesn't usually break news; but rather attempts to translate and predict it. Coming from very different backgrounds, each member provides a unique perspective on one of the three various forms of media consumption (Social

Media, Network News and Newspapers).

The podcast releases once a week, but due to busy schedules and unforeseen breaking news, the time of release can vary. Unlike all of their competitors, they do not torture their listeners with the lag and awkward pauses plaguing Zoom interviews. All three hosts meet in the studio for every tape, no editing, no mic-cutting, no censorship.

The overall atmosphere is very casual and often feels like you're listening to your friends at the bar. A cross between Barstool Sports and The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, CYOF takes a satirical approach to covering the weekly news.

Rather than focusing on human-interest stories and unreliable polls, this podcast focuses on

strategies being deployed by various political players and corresponding movements in the gambling lines.

Renewed for a second season, the gang has a slew of new guests lined up to help expand the pod's

perspective and approach even more controversial topics.

By the end of the season, CYOF episodes will be viewable on YouTube, but for now you can find them on Spotify and Apple Podcasts.



Call Your Own Foul Studio Set

Browse the library of CYOF episodes

May 29, 2021

"Your Right to Breathe" - CYOF hosts discuss getting to 70% vaccination rate, Wuhan theory, and more.

May 21, 2021

"We are not Alone" - CYOF hosts discuss the PA primary election, Joe Biden Gaffes, UFOs, and more.

May 12, 2021

"Off the Rails" - Things get a little out of sorts, but we dive in deep to the referendum questions in PA.

May 8, 2021

"Tower of Terror" - Two CYOF hosts are back from Myrtle Beach, and react to PA vs. SC covid rules. Also, vax passports, menthol cigs & more.

April 20, 2021

"Lucky Semen Club" - Discussions on civil unrest, law enforcement, and Hunter Biden's new autobiography (Spoiler: Only life achievement is his last name).

April 19, 2021

"Guns on Trains" - In this episode, CYOF hosts talk guns, myths about guns, infrastructure, and more.

April 15, 2021

"Alec has been Shot" - One of the hosts gets the vax, reaction on that, and on return from a trip to NYC.

April 6, 2021

"Word Warfare" - Speculation on vaccine passports, Georgia voting law, and much more.

March 30, 2021

"Vaxx for Thee, Not for Me" - Side effects of the vax? Reasons for taking it, or not taking it.

March 25, 2021

"Wait for the Facts" - Atlanta shootings reaction, the filibuster, being fired for Cannabis, Cuomo & more.

March 12, 2021

"CPAC 2021" - Reaction on the Conservative Political Action Conference

March 10, 2021

"American Royalty Story" - Main topic of this show is the Duchess of Sussex, Meghan Markle.

March 7, 2021

"Rush Limbaugh" - Comparing the impact of losing Rush Limbaugh to Ruth Bader Ginsberg.

March 6, 2021

"Money Printer go Brrr!" - The Stimulus Relief Package passed the Senate with no GOP support.



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Apple Podcasts



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Contact CYOF at callyourownfoul@gmail.com

BUSINESS PAGES



Photo by Jorge Royan, Wikimedia commons

WHAT IS THE REAL STATE OF THE WORKFORCE RIGHT NOW?

There's been a lot of talk about the state of the workforce recently as the economy continues to open up and rebound from the pandemic.

It's impossible not to notice all the 'now hiring' signs proliferated throughout the land. There's promises of signing bonuses at fast food restaurants and other incentives from the businesses to entice people to apply for open jobs.

It's a stark contrast from those of us who remember 2008 and 2009 where, in the midst of what's being dubbed 'the great recession,' even low paying entry level jobs were difficult to come by, let alone family sustaining 'good' jobs.

Of course this recent workforce crisis we are in is compounded by many other factors, not least being the extra incentive from the federal government to earn an additional \$300 / week if on unemployment compensation (UC). Also a factor is the elimination of such requirements when on UC like having to show going to interviews and attending workshops at the local CareerLinks. Though there is

“ We can't pretend these additional government benefits aren't having an effect [on the workforce], especially in the restaurant and entertainment industries where wages weren't exactly high to begin with. ”

talk about the interview and workshop requirements coming back earlier in summer, which at least provides for some light at the end of the tunnel.

We can't pretend these additional government benefits aren't having an effect though, especially in the restaurant and entertainment industries where the wages weren't exactly high to begin with, and are still being somewhat affected by the pandemic. But let's make this black and white; if anyone can earn just as much money (or close to it) by staying home and sitting on their couch, then who wouldn't do it?

Sidebar: Though what is interesting now is after a year of lockdowns, people are more eager than ever to travel and go out to eat (with all that stimulus money in their pockets) forcing up demand to unprecedented levels (at least temporarily), and with not a waiter or waitress in sight for restaurant owners. This has forced some bars and restaurants to cut hours and make other decisions, though we don't read too much into this as shutting down on a Monday for example was fairly common practice for bars and restaurants to begin with since they are, for the most part, all open on Sundays. They need a day to give people off, clean, and re-stock; barbers do the same thing, so please stop making such a big deal about it.

The stupid part about extending these benefits is two-fold. First, it was ramrodded through congress using a budget reconciliation technique that only required a simple majority for it to pass in the Senate. Which with the senate split evenly (50 democrats to 50 republicans, and the VP Kamala Harris with the tie-breaking vote), passing...

Continued on page B2

Casinos make bank in 2021

AS CASINOS MATCH BEST QUARTER EVER IN PA, RAKING IN OVER \$11.1 BILLION (Q1 2021), WHAT ARE THE REPERCUSSIONS? LIKE OTHER RETAIL GIANTS HAVE DONE IN THE PAST, DOES A NEW CASINO IN TOWN REALLY CREATE A BETTER ECONOMY FOR ALL?



As the recovery from the pandemic continues, casinos are breaking revenue records. Photo by Dennis Yang, flickr creative commons

Are casinos the new Wal-Mart? Obviously not in the same general retail sense, but in the way they affect the local economy. When Wal-Mart first arrived in suburban America, it completely gutted the old downtown and main street districts of the little towns that dotted the countryside.

There are many examples of this happening throughout Western PA. It happened in Erie with the commercialization of upper Peach Street which hollowed out the downtown stores. Even the ones like the Erie Sports Store that played the game and tried to go box store instead of downtown boutique sporting goods store and they still didn't make it. This happened in Hempfield Township which hollowed out the downtown districts of Greensburg and Jeannette. This happened in Venango County with the Cranberry Wal-Mart helping to kill off what was left of downtown Oil City and Franklin.

Towns have rebounded or hung on or found their way to fight the big box store, but the effects are undeniable. Where the Wal-Marts went, other businesses (mostly other national chains) soon followed, and as a matter of convenience, consumer behavior shifted to avoiding the hassle of having to make several stops in hard-to-park downtowns and instead settled into one stop shop living with nice large parking lots.

This has been much talked about in our region, and we're not trying to shame people here - we're all trying to save a buck where we can, and if Wal-Mart has the best price for a TV, then that's where the TV ought to be bought. Let's be frank here, the competition for Wal-Mart is generally another box store like Best Buy or Target, and not Al's TV store downtown on the corner next to the library.

No, this article is about casinos potentially having that same effect on the local communities they are moving into. For a long time, casinos in Pennsylvania were pretty scarce. There was one in Erie, and one in Washington PA south of Pittsburgh, and then there were the out of state options like Wheeling and the Indian Reserve ones in Western NY. Then, all of a sudden, The Rivers showed up in Pittsburgh. Lady Luck casino opened in Fayette County as an attraction at Nemacolin Resort, and most recently, one opened in Westmoreland mall about 30 miles east of Pittsburgh out in the suburbs.

This latest casino in Hempfield Township, in the former space of Bon-Ton Department Store, has been quite popular since it's slightly controversial opening during the pandemic in November 2020. By March 2021, it was raking in \$8.4 million in revenue (per a triblive.com article published on April 16, 2021 by Megan Tomasic).

Tomasic's main point in this article was that all of PA's casinos topped \$400 million in the month of March 2021 alone. This was a record, and one that will undoubtedly be broken in the very near future. An AP Story that ran in the Tribune Review's Business section on May 11th states quite plainly that the first quarter of 2021 matches the best quarter ever for casinos. Ever. \$11.1 Billion spent gambling in three months. That's a lot of dough.

Now obviously there are a lot of reasons for this. The Pandemic also showed some of the worst months ever for casinos. Many saw 50% declines, so it's only natural for records to be broken when society opens back up and needs to spend those stimulus checks somewhere. Plus, sports gambling has had a lot to do with the amount of money spent gambling in PA. How much of that is being done in person or over an app we aren't sure, but we do know that money is being spent, and therefore taxed, within the state.

We guess that's a good thing. The public gets a piece of the pie of all this excess money being spent gambling. Though we will forever hold our breaths that this gambling money is supposed to severely reduce or eliminate the property tax - a false narrative being fed to us from Harrisburg for what seems like forever, and the revenue source keeps changing, next up is marijuana - we think the real crime is the diversion of those dollars being spent from the local shop now being spent at another large corporation.

In that context, the casinos really are no better than the Wal-Marts when they came to town and took all

the retail stores and put them right in bankruptcy court. Now we fear casinos are doing the same thing. That \$8.4 million that was spent in Hempfield at the new casino, that's \$8.4 million that wasn't spent elsewhere in the community. Yes, we know, probably a large amount of that money would have just been spent on gambling at other casinos, or worse, in a casino in a different state. And that concern is real, and it happens, but for the chunk of that money that was spent there to eat or for entertainment the damage is real.

Let's face it, the population of Westmoreland County didn't just double overnight, there is a definite divergence of cash spent at the casino from the other local establishments in the area. They bring jobs with them, but the real money goes to the large corporate owners of these casinos. For example, the owner of the new Westmoreland County casino is The Cordish Companies, which operates a total of 25 other casino-related properties with headquarters in Baltimore, MD.

The casino at Westmoreland Mall was supposed to be the mall's saviour, but one could definitely argue that it merely just sucked dry the little of what is left there. There's a lot more cars in the parking lot, but are they really traversing the halls of the mall before or after gambling?

In a perfect world, those gamblers win and run off to Macy's to buy a diamond watch with their winnings. But far too often the opposite happens, and is a gambler really in the mood to go pursue the many fine retail shops in the mall after losing a nice chunk at the blackjack table? Most likely not, and for those who can afford to do so, just simply won't. It is the suburbs after all, there's some money but not like a city.

The thing about casinos is they used to be a treat. Something people traveled to and would turn into a trip. A draw to the area. Something else to do while in town for something else. Now it's just another Friday night out on the town.

Obviously the development is still welcomed. In this example, where the casino moved into a heavily renovated former Bon Ton location, was another large department store really going to swoop in and take up that space? Almost certainly not.

Did it save the mall in the sense that the holding company that owns it from Tennessee won't shutter its doors and let it crumble like so many other buildings in Western PA? Probably yes. So we don't want to lay on the criticism too thick here, just want to take a second to think for a minute about what the overall affect on the regional economy will be now that the landscape has been totally altered.

But for far too long Pennsylvania residents lived in the dark ages when it came to being able to do something as simple as put \$5 on the Super Bowl, but we don't want to overdo it either.

As with most things, the answer is a happy medium, and though the government has good intentions with trying to, at times, limit bad behavior; they're all too happy to take their cut of the gambling revenue as well without necessarily giving it back to the taxpayers in the form of other tax eliminations.

Might as well play the lottery right?

SELECT TOP PERFORMING PA CASINOS BY REVENUE IN MARCH 2021 (15 TOTAL IN PA)

Casino	County	Revenue
Parx Casino (1st in PA)	Bucks	\$61.5 million
Rivers Casino (6th)	Allegheny	\$29.5 million
Meadows Racetrack (9th)	Washington	\$20.9 million
Presque Isle Downs & Casino (12th)	Erie	\$10.4 million
Live! Pittsburgh (13th)	Westmoreland	\$8.4 million
Lady Luck (15th)	Fayette	\$2 million

*Comparing March 2021 revenue numbers to March 2020, there was on average a 161% year-over-year increase (including a 326% increase in sports betting alone) -- All facts and figures from gamingcontrolboard.pa.gov

Will wages finally rise?

Continued from page B1

...a bill with these extended benefits could be done on a party-line vote. This completely eliminated the usual compromise that goes into passing a bill into law, and the unemployment benefits are extended through summer ending on Sept. 4 2021. Let's not forget that extra \$300 / week is also on top of the usual UC benefit provided by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the stimulus payments, and the extra child care benefits.

The second stupid part about this \$300 / week benefit is that \$300 isn't created equally in every part of PA, let alone the country. So while some people may have really needed that money in more urban areas like New York, LA, and DC; people in Beaver, Erie, or Fayette Counties may very well be able to live off that money entirely, completely eliminating the need to look for work.

The thinking, probably, was that this extra UC money – equating to roughly \$1,200/month – probably was for people to be able to continue making their rent and mortgage payments in an attempt to head off a credit crisis with the banks and/or landlords. This helped prevent banks and property management companies from going bankrupt and forgoing payments to utility providers, landscapers, plumbers, etc., and more importantly, keep them paying their property taxes, too. And while that is fine in theory, and perhaps needed in the beginning stages of the shutdown where society really was at a stand-still, it should never have been extended to the point of summer 2021. The problem was President Joe Biden ran on this platform to help provide relief, and so once elected, he had to do something or fear the repercussions of a politician not coming through on a campaign promise – like that's never happened before.

To be fair to politicians – republican or democrat – 2020 was a tough time to be a politician. They were out there trying to make quick decisions around the pandemic with limited information and a lot of pressure, especially for mayors and governors. They were damned if they did too much and damned if they did too little. Try to pretend like everything was normal and play it off just wasn't really an option (Trump kind of tried this last spring and is probably one of the reasons he didn't get re-elected), or over-hype the pandemic as an excuse to spend as much money as possible in a short amount of time and we end up with a workforce unwilling to work (exhibit A: Governor Wolf).

As per usual, the answer was in the middle there somewhere. To provide relief for people out of work so no one went hungry or homeless, but also understand that the economy needed to stay somewhat open and the panic downplayed in order to get 'back to normal' as quickly as possible. It's just very difficult to tow that line when the facts about Covid were seemingly changing from week-to-week, along with the media speculating 24/7, and a bunch of other organizations (like sporting leagues) making very difficult decisions with limited information. For example, when the NBA shut down last spring, the rest of the world more or less followed to varying degrees. So we do have sympathy for political leaders during the pandemic, the difference is what they do after the pandemic and make sure the aftermath doesn't become even more political as it was right in the middle of a national election.

Something else needs to be starkly pointed out too: the state of the workforce before the pandemic was troublesome to say the least, and then

with all the disruption caused by the pandemic, it just amplified and sped out of the development of this problem. Western PA is the perfect example for this, where workers are slowly ageing out of their prime working lives and there's no one behind them to take their place. Baby boomers had less children than their parents did, and millennials probably even less. Meaning less of a pool to pull from when trying to fill entry level jobs, which are the vast majority of the openings right now at restaurants and other retail businesses.

Economists often talk about a ratio of jobs in the workforce in relation to educational attainment. That ratio is 1:2:7 which means for every one job that requires a master's degree or higher, there are two jobs out there that require a bachelor's degree, and seven jobs that require an associate degree or less. So no matter how large the economy may grow, this ratio should more or less remain the same.

However, more jobs than ever are requiring a bachelor's degree as just a base minimum qualification, potentially shifting this ratio a bit, but that's probably an overcompensation because of the overall supply of college educated young adults. The real workforce need is in the trades and retail / hospitality industries though, but a college educated person is going to expect a certain level of pay, thus the reason why there are so many openings in the 'seven' category of the ratio.

Happening at the same time in the 'one' category of the ratio, is an oversupply of labor there as well (too many lawyers, for example); thus forcing some of them to take jobs in the 'two' category, and 'two' category people needing to go down into 'seven' territory. Everything gets pushed down, and with wages not necessarily rising, it creates a negative cycle in the economy that is going to be very difficult to break. Before the pandemic, there were questions of when wages would eventually go up and why it wasn't happening naturally, kicking off a whole 'raising the minimum wage' discussion. The minimum wage issue, at least in the state the economy we are in now where no one is really hiring at \$7.25 / hour because the lack of supply of labor naturally keeps it up higher in the \$9-\$10 / hour rate (at least in suburban / rural areas), is a total non-starter. Why waste the political will on even trying to argue for it?

No, the real reason why wages aren't going up naturally is extremely simple; business owners are inherently cheap and don't want to have to pay a higher wage for what they were getting before. What they don't realize is the same worker they were getting five to 10 years ago at \$10 / hour was a complete and utter bargain compared to what they should have been paying. The clearance sale is over now, labor is not in large supply, and businesses are going to have to dip into their margins and pay their labor forces more in order to compete and stay viable. Normally, this is where unions would play their part, but the unions are also greedy and routinely overplay their hand. So then the workers end up at a standstill usually with nothing to show for it, when really the ask needs to be up front and simple; pay the workers more.

Corporations really struggle with this notion because their first obligation is to the shareholders, and an increase in the payroll generally means less money per share at the end of the fiscal year. Call it greed, or simply call it doing business in a world where fewer and fewer businesses are owned locally / by a family where there might be more wiggle room or understanding. A family

owned business may take the hit from a 50 percent margin down to a 30 percent one to increase pay in order to keep positions filled and the business afloat. Corporations however would never do that. They need to figure out a way to keep the margin at or above 50 percent or else they lose their jobs, so they will slash and cut and force retirements on people until the margin gets back to where their shareholders expect it to be, no matter what. Even nonprofits suffer from this and remain top-heavy with their pay for executives, while their hourly ground troops rarely see the benefit even when times are good (see UPMC article on page B3). If nurses and teachers really are so valuable to society, then they deserve to be paid more like a business professional and less like a high school student looking for some summer work.

There's also a gender wage-gap issue boiled in here as well. Generally speaking, there are more women who are nurses and teachers. So when they get paid less, is it really a labor market outcome? Or is it because of longstanding hiring practices where women always generally make less? We have our opinions on the subject, but in an economy where the standard of living desired by the middle class basically demands at least two people in the household to be working full time, wages for women also need to come up then too since the traditional single-breadwinner family set-up is just simply out of reach even for those who are properly educated and have a job in their field of expertise.

Ultimately though, we do feel that the onus is on businesses to raise wages. Will this get passed on to the consumer? Probably. Because of the lack of desire for shareholders to take less, but that was going to get passed on anyway. Many businesses took advantage of the pandemic to either charge more for a good or service, or cut hours / some other service normally included in the price. Constantly everyone is trying to get their cake and eat it too, when we know that just can't happen.

There's also a lot of talk about inflation right now because of the excess spending by the government during the pandemic. And yes, generally speaking, just printing money isn't a great policy because of the inflation worry; just open up the history book to what happened in Germany after WWI to find out what happens. Consumer prices are already on the rise because of the disruption of the supply chain during the pandemic. When that starts to sort itself out, prices will come down, but there should be enough leeway to pay workers more when the dust all settles – at least that is the gamble Biden and the rest of the democrats are playing here with their policy decisions.

The other final conclusion about the state of the workforce right now is that this pandemic really should have been an opportunity for the workforce to re-train, re-align, and come out on the other side better off for it. And maybe that's what's happening: lower skilled workers who we generally found working in restaurants and bars found their way down to the local community college or CareerLink and upped their education. Now that they did that, they don't want to go back to their old line of work. They expect a better job with better hours and better pay since they invested in themselves and upped their education / skill level. That's kind of difficult to prove in the moment, maybe years later after we've had time to digest the true outcomes of the pandemic we will have a better idea, but with the line at the local CareerLink not around the

block, re-training for a new career while on UC probably isn't happening at the rate that it should.

Why is that? Because for the most part, it's very difficult to teach people to have a strong work ethic, though that is something most colleges do do well: attune their graduates to be able to handle heavy (white-collar) work loads, so when out in the real world working, they are able to work faster than others. But for the general workforce, if that work ethic wasn't engrained from an early age in a family that all worked hard, some other motivational force needs to be there for people to naturally want to work harder for less pay.

Out here in western PA, where steel mills and manufacturing plants dot the landscape, a strong work ethic is taken for granted. When immigrants came here and worked hard to earn a better life, a strong work ethic was developed. This was then passed down to the next generation to have a strong work ethic and so on and so forth. Though somewhere along the line, that work ethic fell off. Maybe it's because after all that generational built up hard work, subsequent family members saw that life and just didn't want it. Maybe that wealth was built up so much after all that hard work, future generations just don't need to work as hard. Whatever the case may be, it actually shows the need for immigrants to come to this country and integrate as Americans.

That was how this country was built up after all, why is there always such a fight over immigration policy then? The easy notion is, why let more people in when there already appears to not be enough good paying jobs to go around – and maybe that was more true 10 or so years ago – but especially now more than ever when it is the entry-level jobs that are so open why not open the doors to expand the workforce? That's the only way the economy is going to grow unless people suddenly wake up tomorrow with more work ethic and less of a wage expectation.

Maybe we don't want to admit that to ourselves, that as a whole we Americans really are lazier than we think we are, but it's not even really about that. It's about being paid a family sustaining wage for the job being worked. Because every job, no matter the level, is 'essential' in the sense that it keeps food in bellies and roofs over heads. And if a job doesn't pay well enough to be able to afford a decent life, then guess what? That person is going to end up costing society more in the long run as he/she signs up for UC, and other benefits, which once on, is very difficult to get off and break that cycle.

This is why the state of our workforce is such an important issue. The economy in the region cannot grow without a well developed and educated workforce. Business, government, education, economic and workforce development agencies are all trying to address this issue simultaneously, which is great it's getting attention, but too often all these agencies and organizations are operating in silos trying to tackle just the small part they play in the overall problem. Maybe those solutions are working to reform UC, maybe it's marketing the region, or working to bridge the gender-wage gap, immigration reform, education reform; the list goes on.

But it's an issue that, because there are so many groups involved, often is unorganized and not up to the task of adequately tackling this very large issue. We need to start somewhere though, and getting the "Now Hiring" signs out of the windows and back in their basements seems like a natural first step.

BUY A BUSINESS CARD SIZED AD

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Please remit \$100 to:

PO Box 71
Jeannette, PA 15644

along with your business card / ad copy

Price is placement in one (1) issue.

Great for exposure, coupons, now hiring notices, etc.

*Contact us for information on additional advertising
724-374-8088 or westpenntribune@gmail.com

HEMP FARMERS STRUGGLE

Prices have fallen through the floor making what was once an exciting new crop even more unstable for farmers. The hope though is using it as a building material

Pennsylvania has started to dabble back into growing hemp the last couple years which had many farmers pretty optimistic about the cash crop coming back into the area. Though the results from the first crop have been questionable at best.

There was a lot of learning that went on most importantly, but the fact of the matter is the farmers had no one to sell too after harvesting. According to the Department of Agriculture, only about 10 percent of the applicants to the state were for processors, meaning a glut of supply and low prices for the 90 percent of those applicants who were the farmers.

All in all 829 permits were issued in 2019, and only around 500 were issued for 2020 (valid through Feb. 2021), which seems like plenty considering the market really has no use presently for taking the hemp and turning it into something useful enough to sell. Hemp hadn't been in the vocabulary for textile manufacturers, paper manufacturers, rope, oil, shoes, insulation, etc., etc, the list goes on for the many things hemp can be used to make.

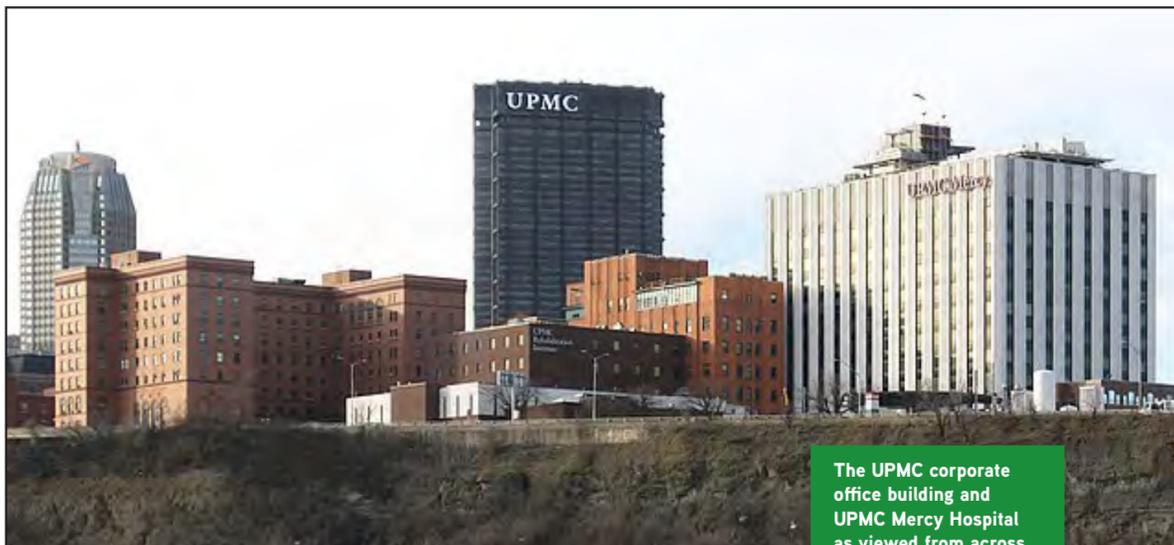
Jacob Tierney wrote an article about the poor market for hemp in the Tribune Review on May 23, 2020 edition that clearly documents this over-supply in the crop for an industry that's just barely crawling, let alone fully mature. For some reason, the economists in Harrisburg were somehow projecting that hemp would be a mainstream raw material in one simple year of growing. Why else would they issue so many permits?

To be fair, it seems like some farmers really jumped on growing this potentially valuable crop which contributed to the over supply, but the real reason is lack of processors. It's going to take some real creativity for hemp to find a nice niche in the market (could newspapers soon be...

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Gov. Tom Wolf visits a farm in Tyrone, PA in 2019 with Agriculture Sec. Russell Redding. Photo by governortomwolf on flickr creative commons.



The UPMC corporate office building and UPMC Mercy Hospital as viewed from across the Monongahela River, an impossible sight to miss when viewing the Pittsburgh skyline.

Photo by Cbaile 19 wikimedia commons

NONPROFIT UPMC PAYS CEO \$9.5 MILLION IN 2019

RECENTLY RELEASED IRS DOCUMENTS REVEAL EXECUTIVE PAY FOR UPMC, THE GIANT NONPROFIT CORPORATION WHICH EMPLOYS OVER 92,000 EMPLOYEES IN PA. BUT HOW DOES HAVING A NONPROFIT THAT LARGE AFFECT THE LOCAL TAX BASE?

\$9.5 million. That was how much UPMC CEO Jeff Romoff made in 2019. This was just made public via the Form 990s required by the Internal Revenue Service for nonprofits. This was a nice little half a million pay raise for Romoff from 2018, all of which was detailed in a May 15th article in the Tribune Review by Natasha Lindstrom.

It can almost be white noise in the background; the fact that someone from a nonprofit is raking in so much money. And to be fair UPMC isn't the only nonprofit to take advantage. For years the NFL was considered to be a nonprofit (up until 2015) which is just ridiculous based on how much money the NFL brings in.

The criticism isn't so much about executive pay -- though I'm sure the rest of the 92,00 employees at UPMC spread across 40 hospitals and 700 doctors' offices in the empire that is UPMC (according to their own website) would appreciate a pay raise -- but more about them paying their fair share in taxes. Especially local taxes.

UPMC is the largest non-governmental employer in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, yet pays nothing in property taxes. That giant skyscraper downtown? All those hospitals and doctors offices? As long as UPMC owns those buildings, they do not pay property taxes because of their nonprofit status. And since property taxes are basically the only tax that stays local -- that is which goes towards the municipality and school district that physical building is in.

(Technically a local earned income tax also stays local, though that can vary widely between municipality and isn't as reliable as a stable tax base generated through the property tax, and is probably one of the reasons PA will never get rid of a property tax.)

For the true nonprofit, the tax break makes sense. They are giving back to the community through some other type of service, and in return, don't have to pay property taxes. Churches have been getting away with it since the beginning of time. What's uncanny though is how large and powerful some nonprofits, like UPMC, have become.

They don't run your grandfather's

hospitals where each one was independent and therefore more integrated within the community. Now UPMC is a corporate behemoth looking for ways to cut costs, marginalize, and consolidate at every turn. They've bought up every independent hospital left from Erie to Kittanning. Their intentions are usually good, promising more money, updated equipment, and to forgive debt. Though again it is the communities that suffer from eventual disinvestment. It becomes harder to reach a person in charge. Corporate roadblocks are put in place. And the community loses what they remember as a truly local hospital. Especially when the guy at the top is making over \$9 million in an annual salary.

Slowly that money spent on healthcare services at the local hospital is being sent elsewhere, out of the community. So now not only are local municipalities continuing to lose

“ The property tax problem is one that has always been a sore point of contention, especially in places like Erie where LECOM owns a lot of the valuable real estate along Peach Street, and for the most part, doesn't pay tax on that land.

out on property taxes, but they are also suffering from the Wal Mart effect as those dollars flow to wealthy men and women living in wealthy areas, not back into the communities where it is really needed.

Let us not forget too that UPMC has an insurance division with over 4 million people enrolled (again according to their own website) paying into the machine. Health insurance in general is a weird, complicated, and generally stupid and unfair system that screws over the individual at any corner. Because by in large it is the insurance agencies that

charge the hospitals crazy amounts of money for simple medical supplies. Like \$50 ibuprofen pills and all the other discrepancies out there which are difficult to track down and prove.

The other thing to think about too is, on principle, it generally doesn't make sense for an insurer to also be the provider. The fact that we don't have some anti-trust law on the books to prevent this sort of thing from happening -- and maybe we do it's just not enforced -- is ridiculous.

These are problems that run deep and reform requires a lot of effort and will power. The property tax problem is one that has always been a sore point of contention, especially in places like Erie where LECOM owns a lot of the valuable real estate along Peach Street, and for the most part, doesn't pay tax on that land. To make it worse, the high volume of nonprofits in general in Erie severely hurt it's tax base. For years, the Sheraton downtown on the bay didn't pay a dime in property taxes.

Why? Because technically Erie Events, which is doing business as the Erie County Convention Authority, technically owned the property the Sheraton was built on. So they pay a lease to the Authority, but as a local Authority, Erie Events does not pay taxes on real property they own. This particular example was subject to a long and arbitrary lawsuit between the school district and the City of Erie which eventually led to them paying into the local coffers for the first time in history.

What's a good solution to all these problems? Well there is a mechanism out there to help mitigate this exact type of circumstance; they're called PILOTs, which stands for Payments in Lieu of Taxes. PILOTs are what something like a nonprofit or Authority pays to the local taxing bodies. They are a compromise. A dollar figure worked out that will probably end up being less than what a private company would pay at a true assessed value, but also not nothing. It helps keep everyone happy, but they are rarely used.

They're rarely used for two reasons. One, no one likes to compromise, so why pay something when the law technically says they don't have to pay anything at all? And second, because there is no real mandate for nonprofits to have to do a PILOT. If they are done, it's because of some type of political pressure or PR for the community.

To our knowledge, UPMC pays...

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It's been more of a sellers market than it ever has been in the past because of the pandemic. Photo by www.houseandhammer.com., flickr creative commons

It's a sellers market out there; pros, cons, FAQs if buying or selling

No matter where you live, or where you look, there's no doubt about it; the housing market is tight right now. Definitely a sellers market, and anyone who needs to buy right now better be ready to pull the trigger because the luxury of 'looking around' or trying to low-ball an offer on a house that needs some work just isn't going to fly right now.

Now that could all change in as little as 12 months, but it is curious for even western PA to be affected by the glut in supply due in part because of the pandemic. It's not unusual in large growing cities like Charlotte, NC and Austin, TX for houses being difficult to buy. Buyers need to be ultra-aggressive, and when possible, pay in cash in order to speed up the closing process.

In some ways, this can be viewed as a good thing for many downtrodden

communities throughout western PA. Towns that were once plagued by too many houses for sale, which drove the price down for houses and kept the area overall more depressed, are now getting some of that inventory moved and stabilizing the market. Areas where houses were once selling for \$150,000 are now selling for closer to \$200,000, which will have a direct effect on housing prices there in the future.

In other ways, the pandemic disrupting supply chains (in a market that is intensely global) is causing some very large ripple effects, some of which we may not have experienced yet. The price of lumber is simply absurd right now. A sheet of plywood costs over \$60! So bad time to be a home builder or...

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Why aren't PILOTs used more?

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...only two PILOTs. One in South Fayette Township in Allegheny County, and one for UPMC Hamot in Erie.

The catch though was it was only for 50 percent of the assessed value, and they were done during the negotiations over those particular deals, making it more difficult to go

back in town and challenge the other \$1.4 billion in estimated real estate holdings owned by UPMC. All this according to an old article in the Post Gazette published Sept. 26th 2012 by Jonathon Silver.

Silver does an excellent job explaining why PILOTs are so rare

and fell out of fashion after a 1997 bill favored nonprofits over local taxing bodies thus making it too risky to challenge large nonprofits like UPMC in open court. Though since 2012 we're sure their real estate holdings have only continued to grow, and their lawyers become more adept in

avoiding these payments in lieu of taxes.

Regardless of everything, we generally feel that with a CEO making \$9.5 million per year, they could stand to pay the local school district their fair share. Something is better than nothing.

Using hemp to build homes, buildings may help save industry

Continued from page B3

...printed on locally grown hemp rather than imported wood from Canada – trade that has become more contentious with Trump's tariffs and continued friction with our northern friends?), and for some people / businesses to take on some serious risk trying to produce a product that is unproven. Hard to get a loan for hunches.

The real sure fire product to be produced from hemp were the oils and creams that can be made from the crop. It's a pretty decent trend right now with the "CBD" product lines. The way it is most commonly described is there are two main acronyms to Marijuana' CBD and THC. THC is what makes someone stones and CBD brings the medicinal value of consuming pot (in some form or fashion) to the table.

The problem is breaking those two acronyms cleanly away from each other and figuring out a regulation to address keeping farmers from growing acres and acres of some plush Blueberry Yum Yum rather than the relatively safe hemp which can be used to grind down and make this 'CBD' oil. From reading about it, it sounds like 0.3 percent is the magic number; that is the hemp can't have more than 0.3 percent of THC in it to be considered for any 'legal' post production. And farmers may be forced to destroy their crop if it goes over the limit.

Some of those creative ideas need to come from some producing some out of the box products like houses and other building materials. As lumber and other traditional building materials become more

and more expensive, and with an oversupply of hemp, this could be what saves the industry.

Hemp, when mixed with lime, can be used to be formed into blocks and build up walls which can then be top-coated with a heavier lime mixture to be finished and painted. Hemp is a great insulator too, which means it's perfect to help regulate temperature and keep moisture from destroying the house.

Using hemp as a building material, in our opinion, is where the real exciting growth for the industry can come from, especially with lumber prices astronomically high in the aftermath of the pandemic. It has really become popular in the U.K. where large, commercial buildings are being built using it. Locally, the first hemp house in western PA was built in Lawrence County. According to an article dated May 24, 2021 on wtac.com, it was constructed using both hempcrete and hempwood and shaves utility costs by about 30-60 percent because of how great of an insulator the hempcrete is. It also absorbs moisture which severely reduces the risk of mold, rot, and insect damage. Again, it's something unconventional, but that's what it's going to take to really make the industry take off again.

That is of course unless marijuana becomes fully legal to consume with no limit on THC. Then the market can really go places, but that's a long way off with it still being a Schedule 1 drug on the federal level. That's a whole other argument though. For now, we would take a nice new neighborhood full of houses made from hemp.



This is an example of using hempcrete (mixture of hemp hurd, lime, and water) to make walls. Generally, a wooden frame still needs constructed first with the hempcrete used to fill the voids and then finished with a plaster or conventional items like siding for the outside or wood paneling on the inside. Photo by tomlene43 on flickr creative commons.

State of the media report: Changes in TV, internet, newspapers

Something curious happened with Show content was consumed on cable TV compared to 10-15 years ago. There were only a dozen or so channels to flick through to see if anything caught the eye during leisure and marketing was relatively straight-forward. Classic strategies worked quite well, i.e. flashy lights and good looking women.

Now-a-days, thanks to cable giants such as Comcast or Time Warner, viewers browse through shows they think we want to see. Producers bank on them liking the show, or sporting events – a big reason cable is still relevant – and stay tuned in long enough to sit through long commercial breaks.

It is no secret that consumer preferences change rapidly – media consumption was no exception. Newspapers thought they were reacting by building websites and social media. Cable companies thought they were immune from the fate of the newspapers simply because their pictures moved. But something as simple as the way cable was consumed, something no-doubt pioneered by the cable companies to "enhance the consumer's experience," could be their ultimate demise.

Think about it. In the old days, again only 10-15 years ago, longer ad commercial spots on cable were sought after because, the longer the commercial, the better chance of seeing it whilst the consumer gingerly clicks through the programming. Most people now (or at least a significant amount) do no such flicking. They see what is on. They see what is going to be on. They see what was on. They can record something if they wish (and yes fast-forward through the commercials just like the good ol' VHS days). And they have more tools than ever to watch multiple programs at once going back and forth during commercial breaks.

It is almost more advantageous for today's media buyers to purchase shorter ad spots in hopes that he/she will have the attention span long enough to sit through the ad, and the next ad, and the one after that, to finally return to the original program in order to hit them again with the repetition truly needed to create an effective brand. This explains exactly the rise in social media advertising on Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube where businesses can purchase the right to blast out

their message – generally short, catchy videos (or a meme) – to friends' friend's feeds and be able to measure the results far more effectively than Nielsen would ever be able to do.

On the other hand, newspapers never went through this transformation on how consumers consume content. A newspaper was read the same way in 2021 as it was in 1721. Sure, the layout has changed, printing technology certainly has changed, even how newspapers are put together has changed drastically in the last 10-15 years between different publishing software companies – the dominance and innovation that Adobe has shown is truly remarkable.

But back to the way a newspaper is read; articles are next to the ads, and if one really doesn't want to read the ads, that person may simply ignore them. They do not pose a barrier to the information, as is the case with cable and radio.

Newspapers also have the benefit of tradition and have been around for hundreds of years. There is a certain trust in that medium that cannot be replicated by the television or the radio, for that matter. One of the defining factors that were supposed to make newspapers fail in the tech era may well be what leads them to succeed in the subsequent act: consistency, and a way to consummate the best information out to the people in what is still a low-cost method en-masse.

Now, this isn't to say that the overall quality of journalism has stayed consistent. In fact, the opposite has happened. There has been a serious disinvestment in newsrooms across America as the news business continues to marginalize its own product. This, coupled with whoever's bright idea it was to give away content for free on a website, was really what brought newspapers to their knees. It is one thing to have consumer preferences shift and to start distributing via email or online subscription (that would be considered innovative), but often, when something starts out free, it's over. Just like taxes, it is much easier to raise them incrementally over time, but once they are cut, it is near impossible to instill a massive tax increase in a short amount of time. Revolutions were started over such a calamity.

Probably what's true: the giving

away of content is what led to the disinvestment in newsrooms as editors were continually asked to do more with less. This led to corners being cut, resources stretched thin, wages slashed – all the while making journalism a less desirable career – and the whole industry comes to a grinding halt forced to sit until something in the market changes. That something is either drastic voting by the people with their dollar (essentially finally realizing it is impossible to receive good, quality, unbiased news without paying at least something), or a massive restructuring of media in the public sector.

Consumers gained power and leverage in the media industry over the last 10-15 years, and that really shakes

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There has been a serious disinvestment in newsrooms across America as the news business continues to marginalize its own product.

things up. Consolidation mostly has been the result. Cable companies give consumers virtually no choice in certain markets, which would give rise to a credible competitor such as the internet (especially with the rise of live streaming and on-demand programming) but, in most cases, the cable companies control the supply of the internet too. At least the kind of quality internet needed to run Netflix and WatchESPN.

Consolidation happened a lot in the newspaper and printing industries as well. It is a natural reflex for presumably dying industries to resort to. But monopolies are illegal in this country (at least they are supposed to be), and the media industry is perhaps the most important industry that should not be monopolized because of the watchdog role it plays in society. The contrast

is cable companies were smarter and protected their product better. As a result, they continued to charge subscriptions and made their real margin on the ad revenue. Newspapers panicked and opened up the pantry, giving them no leverage to charge premium rates on their ad space. It's funny too because digital advertising never caught on like all the progressive paper editors thought it would. It is still a millions and billions dollar comparison when taking a look at digital versus print advertising's overall revenue figures (hint: print advertising is in the billions, not digital).

It comes down to a matter of access. To read a newspaper for example, no internet connection is needed. No intermediate device is needed to deliver the content. No real skill is needed really to open a newspaper, whereas some may be required to turn on a smartphone, table, or computer and access the information. A newspaper can physically be handed to someone for them to learn from and to pass along the product and the information, no matter the environment.

Technology has almost separated society into the haves, and have nots – and tech was supposed to help eliminate inequality. But as millennials found it difficult to get ahead in life without a bachelor's degree, it might be difficult for the next (or current) generation to navigate life competitively without a smartphone, for example. And what worth is a college degree anyway when anything can be Googled these days?

The bottom line is cable companies were smart, but now greed and consolidation will be their eventual downfall, not unlike what happened to newspapers. Newspapers still have their niche, and the internet is suddenly crowded with an endless amount of streaming services that aren't as affordable as they once were.

The consumer is the one who loses at the end of the day. We have been given a disservice through the quality of journalism we receive. But just as it is time for the people to rise up and demand a better government, it is also time for people to start demanding (and paying) for a media up to the task of serving this great country.

God bless America and the freedom of the press.

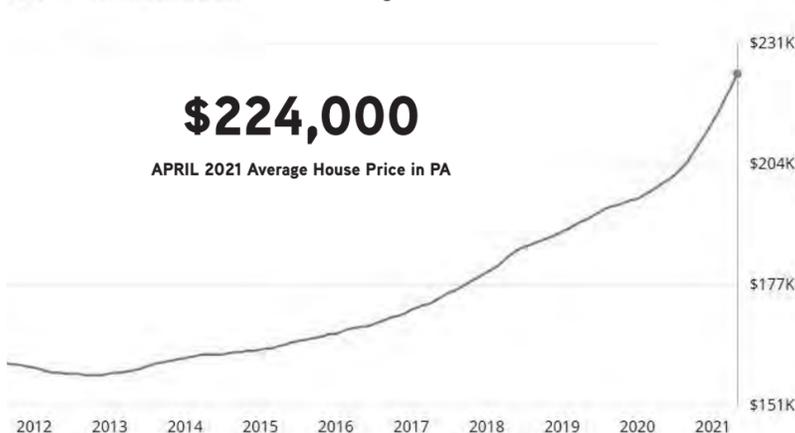
3.0% 65.6%

**AVERAGE 30 YEAR
MORTGAGE RATE**

**US HOME
OWNERSHIP RATE**

Q&A ON THE CURRENT STATE OF HOUSING MARKET

2021 — Pennsylvania \$224K PA Average House Sale Price from 2012 to 2021



All data sourced from the National Association of Realtors and zillow.com

Continued from page B3

...DIYer, and if it was one thing the lockdowns from the pandemic did, it was spur on projects around the house (probably because we were all sick of being at home, with many laid-off and nothing to do, so might as well build a deck!).

This increased price of lumber has had a direct effect on the price of used houses. It's pretty simple supply and demand. Less new houses are being built because of this price increase on lumber, which means less supply to fulfil even a normal amount of demand, thus existing home sales go through the roof!

So we are going to attempt to answer some questions here in this unusual market in an attempt to help out anyone either buying or selling a house now or over summer. Remember, this is all subject to a lot of opinion, nothing is for certain. This is just speculation and sound advice based on what we know as of now.

Q: This increase in existing home prices surely means interest rates are going to rise right? So should I still try to buy a house even if I am paying potentially more than it's worth or over asking?

A: With interest rates at an all time low – many banks are advertising rates under 3 percent – it really is still a good time to buy regardless of the deal because of the amount of money that will be saved in interest. In fact, part of the reason why prices have gone up, in addition to new builds coming on the market at a slower pace, is the interest rates. These were kept low to help spur on spending on capital improvement projects and investments (like a house), so it makes sense that all these factors are adding up to less supply, more demand, and existing home prices at an all time high.

Q: If I'm selling my house and getting more than I normally would, does that justify over spending on the house I have my eye on? Especially with interest rates low for the time being?

A: To dovetail the last answer into this one, the short answer is yes, especially if the interest rate on your current house is anything north of 5 percent. Simply refinancing would also save a lot of money, but if you are in a position where you have to sell and can also get a lower interest rate on the new house, then it's a no-brainer to go ahead and do it even if you are paying over asking price. There are a few caveats there obviously depending on how much over asking it is and how much work needs done to the new house. Paying over asking and then pilling on to that loan for a new roof, new windows, and a new furnace might be overdoing it. Then again, it's never been cheaper to borrow money, so long as it stays within your budget.

Q: What does getting pre-approved for a loan mean and how does that help me out in this current market?

A: A lot of people don't understand what getting pre-approved for a loan really means. Really all it is, is a statement from the bank saying the buyer can not only get a loan, but can get a loan to be able to afford houses within a certain price range. Every bank is different, but for first time home buyers the bank will actually give you a cap of what they will lend you. If you are selling a house to buy a new one, pre-approvals aren't as necessary because any real estate agent sees that asset and will know that you can probably afford the new one (if you plan on selling it that is). Regardless, a pre-approval is essentially required in order to work with an agent, because they don't want to take people out to show houses that their client can't even come close to affording. Something else to keep in mind too is to not see that pre-approval number and automatically assume that's what you can afford. Banks are still predatory to a degree (yes even after 2008) where the max amount they are willing to lend may not be exactly comfortable for your budget. It's the same with a credit card, just because the spending limit is high, it's generally not a good idea to max it out and just make the minimum payments. For example, if you are pre approved for a \$150,000 house, look for something in the \$80-\$100,000 range and realize that a house is a long term investment with work that will need to be put into it for that investment to really come to fruition. Buying something move-in ready at the top of your budget won't get you nearly the return on buying a house that even needs just some cosmetic updates. This is sound advice no matter what market we find ourselves in, but it rings truer in a sellers market because buying something move-in ready is going to cost a premium, meaning you will have to hang on to the property longer to see a sizable return.

Q: What are some other creative ways to incentivize sellers to sell if there's a lot of competition over a desirable house?

A: Well, the simplest way to get a seller to come to the table is to offer a cash deal. A lot of people roll their eyes at this because they can't even fathom getting together say \$250,000 together in cash for a home purchase. For a first time home buyer, yes that is a bit hard to expect unless a large inheritance just came your way. But for someone who has owned their house for the last 20 years and is now looking to downsize, paying cash isn't out of the question. The problem is timing. In order for most people to be able to offer cash, they'd have to sell their current house first, which is a fine option so long as you have somewhere to live in the meantime. Maybe family members or a friend will let you move in temporarily or for a low rent while you put all of your things in a storage container while the deal closes and you can pull it off. That's a lot of moving parts but it could all pay off in a nice pay day at the end of it all in a dream house if you play your cards right. Simply put, the more flexibility you have, the better deal you're going to get in real estate.

Some other creative options though if a cash offer just simply isn't on the table – and these are things generally done in hotter real estate markets in the cities – are to agree to let the seller live in the house, usually rent-free, while they are able to get their affairs in order and move out. This is a little uncomfortable, and again requires a little flexibility, but that could mean getting the house at or even below asking price if those terms can be agreed upon. Waiving inspections is a fairly common practice when trying to coerce a seller, and in this current market, is almost a given, especially with multiple parties vying over the same house. Another technique being tried out there is to send personalized letters to the seller trying to make a direct appeal. Almost like sending a little personalized note after a job interview in an effort to stand out, this letter to the seller usually draws on the fact that you plan on taking care of it, raise a family there, keep up the garden, yadda yadda in order to pull on their heartstrings and have them choose you over someone else. Just be careful with this method as it could backfire depending on how much personal information you divulge, or a seller might just find it plain weird, especially in western PA where that's not exactly common practice. But the most important thing to keep in mind if buying in this sellers market is to move fast. If you see a house you like, make an offer. I know a lot of people like to 'sleep on it' but that is simply a luxury that cannot be afforded in this current market. Granted

it's not as bad out in the suburbs or the country – and for those looking to buy that might have to be an option, to look for something a little further out from the city – but regardless of where you are buying it's better to move quick and think later. Because the alternative is seeing a house you really like, and then letting it get snatched out of your hands because you wanted to take an extra day to think about it or look at something else. It requires being decisive, but trust us, it will work out better that way than being wishy washy and then you end up with less of a compromise on the house you end up getting.

Q: I am looking for a fixer-upper, is that a good idea in this market?

A: Normally, we are all for the purchase of a fixer upper. Especially in the older towns of western PA where houses are well over 100 years old and could use some TLC. But there's just a tinge of reservation out there right now for house flippers because of A) the aforementioned lumber prices (depending on the scope of work that needs done) and B) because if the flip takes any longer than a few months, then the return might not be as good after prices are given a chance to normalize. The idea is to buy low and sell high, but if you have to pay a premium for a house that needs a lot of work, you go ahead and spend all that money and effort getting it move in ready, but then the bottom falls out from under the market as supply comes back, then just getting back to break even could prove difficult. That's not saying it's not a good idea – especially with those tasty interest rates (though most serious house flippers deal in cash anyways. Word to the wise, never mention the word 'flip' in front of a banker) – it's just good to be extra cautious in this market and really plan out the timeline and projects. In some respects though, it's never been better for house flippers out there because of the price of lumber. Buying an existing house means not having to pay exorbitant amounts of money for plywood. And, if you do time the market just right, the return on investment for a move-in ready house in a hot market may never be higher.

Q: I'm not sure I want to buy right now, are rental prices also on the rise?

A: So this is actually a pretty tricky question. Rental prices have been steadily climbing over the last 5-10 years even in areas where it has normally been extremely affordable to live. But on the other hand, it may be difficult to find a good starter house because of how high housing prices are right now. The high rental prices are in part because the housing stock in much of western PA is just getting too old, and with rentals generally not receiving the best maintenance, there's also been a dearth in supply of good quality rentals, allowing prices to climb. This has also incentivized home buying. Why rent an apartment for \$800 a month when a mortgage and taxes on a \$120,000 house will most likely come in under that amount? Plus, you're building equity too. Whereas in a rental, you are quite literally throwing money down the commode as there will never be a return on that investment. Sure, it's harder to save up for a mortgage, but what a lot of people don't realize is, for an owner-occupied house – especially for a first-time home buyer – you may only need 3.5 percent down. So even with closing costs, on a \$120,000 house, you really only need to scrape together something around \$5,000 to pull it off (give or take that amount if you can negotiate seller's assist). To rent, usually the landlord requires first and last month's rent and maybe even a security deposit which could total over \$2,000 for a \$800 / month apartment. Yes it is less, but another six months of good conscience saving can get you there pretty easily (depending on what your monthly expenses already are of course).

So we are always going to recommend buying over renting when possible, even if you do have to pay for maintenance costs if you aren't the handiest of people. Though with this market, it's going to require some work and a little good luck for a first time home buyer to find a good deal on a starter home that won't require too much work.

Q: I wasn't thinking about selling, but with prices at an all time high I'm seriously considering it, is it worth the risk? And do you think I can do it by owner instead of listing it?

A: It's a great time to sell! That's been illustrated quite a bit in this article. So again, if you have the flexibility to do it, then do it! Nothing wrong with making a quick buck in this potentially once-in-a-lifetime sellers market we find ourselves in. It could take your house another 10 years to get back to these type of prices if prices start to normalize next year. That's a big if, but the thing is it's basically guaranteed right now to make good money on your house. If you have a rental property, then now is probably a great time to think about offloading it. And to answer the second part of that question, yes you can probably get away without having to list a house in order to sell it. Especially if you're in a 'what do I got to lose' scenario where you have another place to stay if you do sell it, but if you don't then it's not the end of the world and you're perfectly content staying where you are for the foreseeable future. But it all comes down to that flexibility point we keep making. If you don't have to sell and can put a high price up on your house, especially in a for sale by owner scenario where you are saving on broker fees too, then why wouldn't you consider it? Take the money you make, go live by the beach for a year, and then come back and buy something you really like when prices (probably) come down. It's also a great time to downsize and retire early if you find yourself in that situation. Again, it would be better to have a temporary place to live (maybe an RV? Seriously it's not a bad option) while waiting to buy next season.

Q: How long do we think this sellers market is going to last?

A: Well as far as we know, no one can tell the future, so predicting it is always a dicey situation. But with the pandemic seemingly coming to an end here as we get into the summer of 2021, that should give the supply chains a chance to normalize and get everything back down to pre-pandemic levels. Inflation might linger a bit, and interest rates may start to creep up a bit, but the Fed isn't going to let that happen overnight. An optimist would say by next year, prices on houses – and actually just about everything, the price of used cars right now is also unimaginable, sell a car if you can! – will start to come down and it will be more reasonable to not only find a house, but pay a fair price on it. Especially in western PA, home sales always pick up in the spring and summer for the simple reason that it's warm out and easier to move. Home sales then usually dip off when the weather gets colder and then pick back up when the flowers start to bloom. So with the supply of houses already low, and then probably staying low throughout winter, come next spring it would make sense for a bunch of new houses to hit the market. But again, that's just using logic. Who knows what else could happen to throw that perfectly sound logic down the toilet with the rent check.

We wish everyone out there much success in this market. There's money to be made and opportunity is in the air!

What is geofencing marketing?

Geofencing marketing is a geographically based type of marketing. This is done by an invisible boundary drawn around a certain area, business, or event center that you are able to use to reach potential customers through their smartphones and mobile devices. This is able to be done through the use of WiFi, GPS, and Bluetooth.

Once a potential customer steps into the geographical boundary or some call it an invisible fence, these people are added to your target audience and are served ads. They will see these ads through apps and search and display ads. For the next 30 days, these ads will be served to anyone who was within the invisible fence that was created.

Geofencing is one of the best digital marketing tools around! Below are the three biggest geofencing benefits:

1. Enhance Local Sales

Since geofencing is geographically based you can target customers in your area by serving them ads or notifications that will lead to increased traffic. A fast way to increase traffic is to have limited-time offers or change promotions daily.

2. Increase Analytics And Tools For Metric Analysis

With sales being hard to measure, geofencing can give data that will help with your metrics and analytics. Once you know your ads are being served you can measure the store traffic and sales which will help in measuring what is working for your business.

3. Provide Personalization For Customers

Personalizing a customer's offer is a great benefit with geofencing. Review the purchase history of local customers and apply those filters to your offers and promotions. This will help in driving traffic to your business.

What Is Optimization? Why Is It Important?

Before we dive into detail about the strategies Corkboard uses to optimize your campaigns, let's first touch on what Optimization is. To put it plainly, Optimization is the process of taking a step back and looking at your active marketing campaign, looking at the data in detail, and making the necessary changes to efficiently and effectively use that campaign's marketing dollars as best as possible. It's important to use data to identify what is working well and what needs improving. You can optimize creative, targeting, placements and more. Does one piece of creative get more engagement than others? Does one set of copy lead to more conversions? Is one placement underperforming in reaching your target audience while another is overperforming but being under utilized? These are all examples of things we constantly monitor at Corkboard Concepts to get the best out of your digital marketing campaigns. It's like fine tuning a car to make it run to the best of it's abilities.

Optimization can be an intricate process but the reason why it is so important is relatively straightforward. Simply put, you want to maximize the ROI on your marketing investment and get the best performance from your campaigns as possible.

So now that we've touched on what optimization is, let's dive into some of the strategies we use to optimize your campaigns.

Digital Marketing Optimization Strategies & Best Practices

While every marketing campaign is different, the foundation of all optimization strategies at Corkboard starts with one thing - data. Regardless of the objectives or goals, the size or scope of a campaign, data analysis is the cornerstone of all our optimizations. By consistently analyzing data and



Photo courtesy of Corkboard Concepts

looking at important KPIs, we can identify and gather valuable insights on the performance of your campaign and make the necessary adjustments to maximize it's effectiveness. Does the data show that certain keywords yield a higher impression share with your target audience and that those keywords can be better leveraged? Are engagement metrics showing that certain creative is falling flat with your audience and needs to be reworked? Data and what it tells us is the driving force behind any revisions or tweaks we make to your campaigns to get you the best performance possible.

Consistency & Frequency:

Optimization is not a one-and-done process. An important part of our optimization strategy is the consistency and frequency in which we work to optimize a campaign through all stages of the marketing process. The digital landscape is fluid and constantly evolving and to keep your campaign performing at a high level, we are constantly monitoring and analyzing your campaign and looking for actionable ways to make your campaigns better. Optimization is a daily, weekly and monthly process at Corkboard Concepts.

A/B Testing:

One of the most effective ways to optimize a campaign is by taking a scientific approach to marketing through A/B testing. A/B Testing is an optimization methodology in which two versions of marketing assets (like ad copy, creatives, webpages, CTAs and more) are tested proportionately across users against one another to see which variants perform better. By looking at key metrics, A/B testing allows us to see what variations of an asset resonates best with your audience and yield the best results. Then in turn, we can implement those variations and increase the effectiveness of your campaign.

Key Takeaways

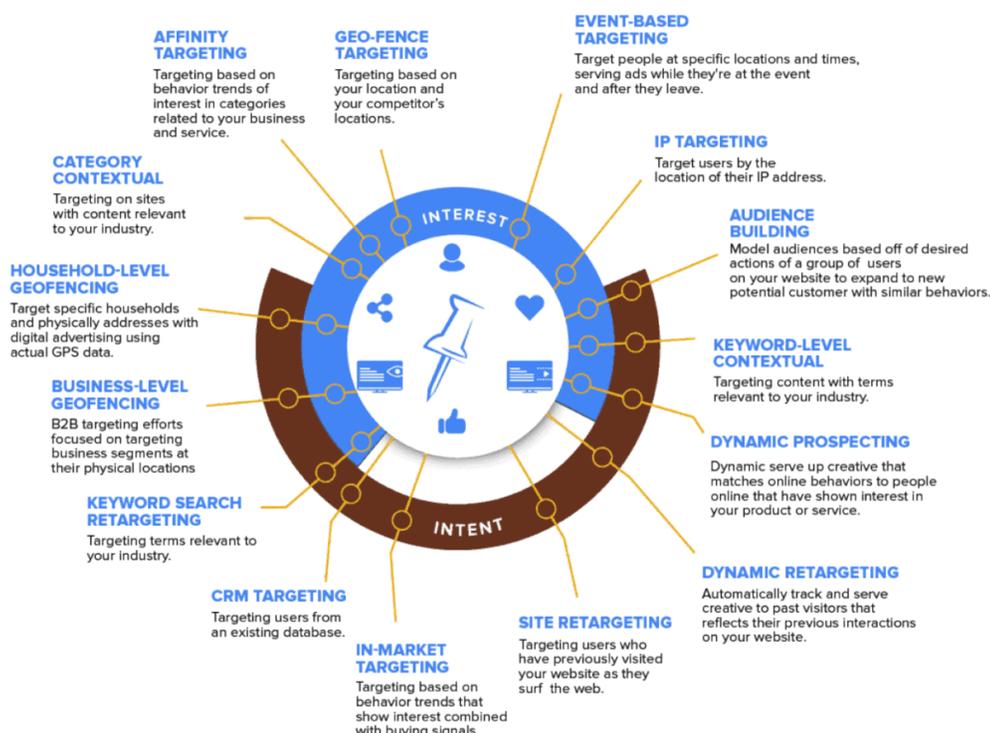
Getting the most out of your marketing and efficiently using your marketing budget is crucial to any business's success, and a well optimized campaign can provide a competitive advantage that allows you to stand out. At Corkboard, our job is just beginning when we launch a campaign, and although these are just a few of the strategies we take in optimizing a campaign, we go to great lengths to constantly provide the best performing digital marketing campaign possible.



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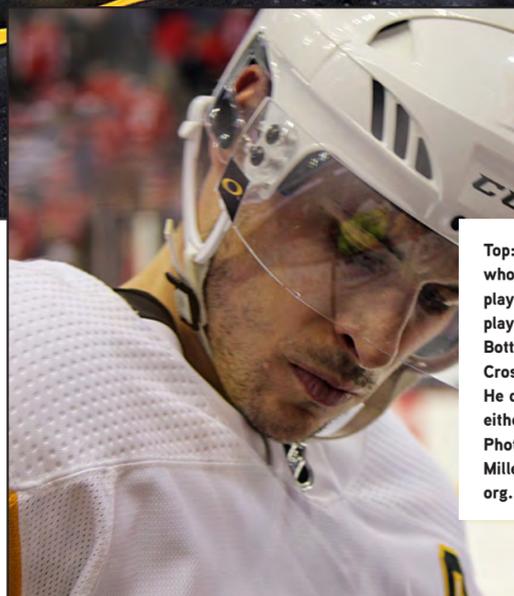
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SPORTS PAGES



Top: Tristan Jarry, who didn't exactly play well in the playoffs. Bottom: Sidney Crosby, the captain. He didn't play well either. Photos by Michael Miller on wikimedia.org.

What does the future hold for the Pens?

AFTER AN EARLY EXIT FROM THE PLAYOFFS THE PENGUINS FIND THEMSELVES IN A FAMILIAR SITUATION, ONE WITH NOT THAT MUCH CAP ROOM AND MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS WHEN IT COMES TO FILLING A ROSTER THAT CAN CONTEND FOR THE CUP

Another year, another disappointing and early exit from the Pittsburgh Penguins.

This year seemed different. The shortened season due to Covid seemed to help the veteran players like Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin to help set up a deep run into the playoffs.

Everything was going according to plan. After a rough start for goaltender Tristan Jarry, he seemed to right the ship and slip back into his all-star caliber self. The lone trade for veteran Jeff Carter, who won two cups with the LA Kings, seemed like a simple but genius move by the two new men brought in to replace general manager Jim Rutherford early in the season. Especially when he started showing up on the score sheet in the playoffs.

The Penguins ended up winning the division and were able to avoid a contest with the Boston Bruins who looked like the only formidable team to stand in their way from getting out of

the division and into the final four -- a new format this year because of covid where the teams within a division played only each other throughout the year and subsequent playoff matchups.

Then the Penguins ran up against a familiar and formidable foe, the New York Islanders.

The Pens have some history against the Islanders. Most recently, two years ago -- the last 'real' season not affected by the pandemic -- the Pens were in similar position as they rolled into the postseason facing an Islander team that seemed less than inspiring. That was of course, until they swept the Pens in four straight games.

This season everything seemed different from the start, even after losing the first game to the Isles in overtime, the Pens bounced back and took the next two in tight games, but games that they appeared to be in control of the entire time.

With the series tied two games a

piece, it was then the Islanders who took control. Islanders coach Barry Trotz is either a genius, lucky, or both, but one thing that was painfully obvious was how well disciplined his team was and how consistent they were too.

He got lucky with a hot goaltender in Ilya Sorokin, who is technically a rookie in the NHL but played the last eight seasons in the KHL league in Russia honing his skills. This is

noteworthy too because Semyon Varlamov was phenomenal in the regular season for Trotz and the Islanders, but was in net during the two playoff losses. Without Sorokin, and his great timing of playing well at the right time, the Pens probably win this series in five.

On the other side of the ice, the Pens had some goaltender trouble late in the season. Both Jarry and backup goaltender Casey DeSmith were injured, and even though Jarry bounced back fairly well from injury, DeSmith didn't even travel with the team to game six in New York; a game that ended up being the last one of the year for Pittsburgh.

Who would have thought that an injury to a backup goaltender would prove to be so detrimental to a hockey team? Especially one that won their division and the starting goalie wasn't injured along the way. But Pens coach Mike Sullivan had little choice but to keep Jarry in, even after a horrific blunder in double overtime in game five where he turned the puck over trying to clear the puck over the ice instead of making the simple play. First rule of hockey is to use the boards to clear the puck. Sometimes players...

Continued on page C2

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Who would have thought that an injury to a backup goaltender would prove to be so detrimental to a hockey team?



Phil Mickelson recently became the oldest golfer to win a major championship when he won the PGA Championship being played at the Ocean Course on Kiawah Island. Mickelson is 50 years old. Photo by Peetlesnumber1, commons.wikimedia.org

PHIL THE THRILL

PHIL MICKELSON DEFIES THE ODDS AND WINS PGA CHAMPIONSHIP HE STARTED THE WEEK AT 300-1 ODDS, ENDED IT WITH THE TROPHY

On Wednesday, I saw a video of Phil Mickelson teeing off with a driver at a course I am all too familiar with. When I played a round at Kiawah Island for the first time in 2018, it was an enlightening experience. A true masterpiece of my favorite golf course designer, Pete Dye. Walking through the dunes from hole to hole was incredible.

When I saw Mickelson's swing on Wednesday I knew I was witnessing something special, but I could have never predicted just how special. His flexibility and ability to have such a long, smooth swing at the age of 50 was truly something I could not believe. This looked more like the swing of a teenager than a 50 year old. He was hitting BOMBs, as Mickelson likes to say.

Unfortunately, it wasn't until the end of Sunday's round that I actually thought he had a real chance at winning the PGA Championship at Kiawah. Sunday morning I placed a bet on Mickelson to win, who was a +400 to +150 underdog against Brooks Koepka, even though he was leading, and got ready to root him to victory. I knew he wasn't going to play conservative golf because that has never really been Mickelson's style, but I was willing to take my chances.

Mickelson started off a little shaky with a bogey, birdie, bogey but with a chip in from the bunker on the 5th, in true Phil-the-Thrill fashion, he seemed to be off and rolling. He now had the momentum going his way and may...

Continued on page C2

Mickelson turns back the clock to win one more major

Continued from page C1

...have even struck a little fear into his closest competitor and playing partner for the day, Brooks Koepka. Then he proceeded to bogey the next hole. Obviously not ideal, but as I said, it was to be expected. He went on to have 2 more birdies and 3 bogeys on the back, but never lost concentration, taking his time with every shot and walking at a consistent pace throughout the entire round.

Koepka never was really able to put up much of a fight against Mickelson on an incredibly difficult

Kiawah course, but managed to stay within striking distance for most of the round.

Ultimately he was outlasted by Mickelson, who although had plenty of ups and downs, was able to keep his composure. He was met on the 18th fairway by what looked like thousands of adoring fans, who like all of us at home, could not be more excited about what they were witnessing.

After he hit his approach shot from the left rough on to the green, pandemonium ensued as everyone knew he had just won the 2021 PGA Championship.

Fans cheered behind him, eventually engulfing him. Security had lost control of the situation but Mickelson was a good sport about it as he always is.

A performance that is truly worthy of a special spot in the World Golf HOF, but is this the end of Mickelson's Major Championship wins or will he continue to surprise us?

Only time will tell, but I'd say Father Time has his work cut out for him with this version of Mickelson. I, along with many others, will be rooting for old lefty for a long time.

2021 PGA Championship payouts

1. \$2.16 million Phil Mickelson	Sungjae Im	Daniel van Tonder	Harris English
T2. \$1,056 million Louis Oosthuizen Brooks Koepka	T23. \$100,814 Chan Kim Jason Scrivener Hideki Matsuyama Martin Laird Billy Horschel Matt Fitzpatrick Patrick Cantlay	T49. \$24,883 Byeong Hun An Sam Horsfield Robert MacIntyre Rory McIlroy Harold Varner III Jason Kokrak	T71. \$19,350 Lucas Herbert Russell Henley Tom Lewis Lee Westwood
T4. \$462,250 Padraig Harrington Shane Lowry Harry Higgs Paul Casey	T30. \$59,750 Matt Jones Stewart Cink Viktor Hovland Webb Simpson Ian Poulter Jordan Spieth Joaquin Niemann Christiaan Bezuidenhout	T55. \$22,475 Matt Wallace Carlos Ortiz Alex Noren Joel Dahmen	T75. \$19,050 Daniel Berger Wyndham Clark
T8. \$263,000 Abraham Ancer Justin Rose Collin Morikawa Jon Rahm Will Zalatoris Tony Finau Scottie Scheffler Rickie Fowler Kevin Streelman	T38. \$42,000 Emiliano Grillo Tyrrell Hatton Richy Werenski Gary Woodland Bryson DeChambeau Branden Grace T44. \$31,300 Jason Day	T59. \$21,400 Cam Davis Robert Streb Dean Burmester Denny McCarthy Cameron Smith	77. \$18,900 Brendan Steele
T17. \$168,000 Aaron Wise Patrick Reed Charley Hoffman Keegan Bradley Cory Connors		78. \$18,800 Brad Marek	79. \$18,700 Rasmus Hojgaard
		80. \$18,600 Bubba Watson	81. \$18,500 Brian Gay

Notable golf tournaments on the schedule for 2021

June 17-20

U.S. Open - Torrey Pines, San Diego, CA
(Bryson DeChambeau defending)

July 15-18

The Open Championship - Royal St. George's
(Shane Lowry defending)

September 2-5

TOUR Championship - East Lake, Atlanta, GA
(Dustin Johnson defending)

September 21-26

Ryder Cup - Whistling Straits, Kohler, WI
(Europe is defending)

PENS HAVE MADE THE PLAYOFFS 15 STRAIGHT TIMES, BUT IS THEIR WINDOW TO WIN CLOSED?

Continued from page C1

...get away with it, but for it to happen in double overtime is just inexcusable.

It's easy to blame the goaltender for a loss. A good hockey team doesn't need to rely on a hot goaltender to win. Sure it helps, but a good structure where everyone plays in their position and keeps the puck deep in the offensive zone can make up for a lot of substandard goalie play. Yes, the goalie still needs to make the routine saves and plays, but so long as he is in position, comes out to contest shots, and doesn't let in any softies, it's more than doable.

There's enough blame to go around here in the early exit from the playoffs for the Pens though, and surely some of that blame needs to be squarely on the captain, Crosby. Crosby might as well be a god in Pittsburgh because he is so loved, respected, and revered. That's all deserving too. He plays a 200 foot game, is the model centerman for the most part, and isn't afraid to get physical when necessary.

The problem though, and this is hard to write, is he's lost a step. He isn't as quick as he used to be, and tries to make up for that by being flashy or making near impossible passes and shots. Sometimes it works and he looks like a star. Other times it doesn't and he looks like a fourth liner who would normally get benched for pulling off such risky plays. He barely registered on the score sheet too in the playoffs, collecting just one goal and one assist. And it wasn't like he was having a bad year; he scored 24 goals and 38 assists in just 55 games played in the regular season.

Maybe the pressure got to him? Maybe he tried to put too much of the team on his shoulders? Hard to tell, but one thing is clear, he's not the same "Sid the Kid" who first brought the cup back to Pittsburgh in 2009. Maybe he should have proposed to his longtime girlfriend when he was getting honored this season and that would have forced him to grow up a little and/or have some fun, change things up a bit. Screw superstition. That only works when the Stanley Cup is in the locker room at the end of the year!

In order for Crosby to stay effective though late in his career, and to be fair Malkin also, the Pens really need to roll four lines, add some speed, and play ultra aggressive. That's the only way to keep the playoff window open for this team. For the most part too,

that is what happened throughout the regular season. One of the best lines for the Pens was the Teddy Blueger, Zach Aston-Reese, Brandon Tanev line. This varied at points throughout the season with players being added in and taken away because of injury, but for the most part (especially before the Carter acquisition) this line was actually more like the second line than the fourth, which it was relegated to in the playoffs.

This line didn't show up on the scoresheet as much as it should have (though weren't given as many opportunities), but still held their own and was trusted by Sullivan to go up against some of the better lines of opposing teams, taking defensive end draws, and killing penalties. They did the dirty work needed to make a good team great, and scored enough to be dangerous -- at least in the regular season. Blueger had 22 points in 43 games and finished with a +10 rating, which is exactly the amount of points he had last season in 69 games and his +/- rating was 8 less. Tanev also got a lot of attention this year -- mostly because he isn't afraid to throw his body around out there and is wicked fast -- though finished with just 16 points in 32 games played this year.

The odd thing is Sullivan trusted this line so much in the regular season, but then when push came to shove in the playoffs; they routinely were given the shorter shifts, the defensive end draws, and taken off the ice even after they earned an icing. This meant putting all of the pressure squarely on Malkin and Crosby to get it done, and they simply just weren't up to it.

The best player of the playoffs was hands down Jeff Carter, which is a little ironic because when he came to center a line (and Malkin came back from injury) all the sudden that grinding / energy Blueger / Tanev line just wasn't as effective. All of a sudden the dynamic was thrown off and there wasn't room in the lineup anymore for

some of the speedier players like Evan Rodriguez and Sam Lafferty.

Instead they chose to put Freddy Gaudreau up a line (probably because he had more playoff experience, and to his credit, did score a goal) but he's simply just not as fast and left a lot of room for questions on if someone else in his position could have scored more. Same with Jason Zucker, and though he played somewhat better, still just didn't have the speed of some of the other guys.

There were a few other things Sullivan could have tried too. Blueger and Kasperer Kapanen showed some great chemistry at times this year, how good of a line would those two

and Tanev be in the postseason? Guess we will never know. Could have done something crazy too like move Carter up to the Crosby line (to be fair this was a Mark Madden take that we just happened to agree on), especially with such an over-abundant amount of centers. Carter's big body could have helped create some space out there for Crosby and replace a Jake Guentzel that just wasn't feeling it this series. It's no time to play favorites or placate a superstar in the heat of a playoff series, it's time for the coach to have a spine and make those bold decisions, no matter how his hall of fame captain may feel.

It's easy to play

Monday morning hockey analyst after the Pens lost, because no one really could blame Sullivan for not mixing up the lines when they all played so well together throughout the regular season. But after they lost and he failed to really make any lineup changes whatsoever, this could unfortunately put Sullivan in the hot seat as head coach.

We say unfortunately because overall, Sullivan has been a really great coach. The players respond to him, he has a great system, and at least at times is capable of pushing all the right buttons at the right time. He certainly did during the last two Stanley Cups

they won (and really truly honestly could have been three). Hockey is a weird sport with their coaches though, it's almost like no matter how well they were or are, all it takes is a little different perspective from a new coach that can make all the difference. We saw that first-hand in Pittsburgh when Mike Johnson was fired pretty early on in the season before Sullivan took over and ended up winning the cup with a team that looked like they should have been playing in Erie in the OHL.

Maybe Sullivan got out-coached here by a more veteran coach in Trotz, but really his team did just overall play better and got the goaltending needed to just barely outplay the Pens. The margin was quite thin, and all it takes is one bad goal sometimes to make all the difference. And when that bad goal comes in double OT, there's not much one can do.

All in all though it's definitely a disappointing season that leaves more questions than answers. Is the window closed for the Pens after breaking a record and making the playoffs for 15 consecutive seasons (longest streak by any other major North American professional sports league)? In a capped league, will Crosby, Malkin, and Kris Letang be able to stay together?

Are any of those three too washed up to be seriously cup hunting anymore? Should Sullivan remain the coach? Will the new GM Ron Hextall / President Brian Burke duo look to build a more physical team rather than a fast one and therefore gut what's left in preparation for a rebuild? What about the goalie situation too? We've never had these major goalie concerns before in Pittsburgh, is it time to sink some major draft capital or pull off a big trade to bring someone else in at that position?

Like we said, too many questions, not enough answers. Guess we should try to take the good with the bad though. The Pens have built themselves into a top franchise in the league, have great ownership (unlike some other sports teams in town) and have an arena that isn't falling apart, yet.

But boy would it have been nice to get past the Islanders and make one more run at the cup. If there were questions before about the window closing, then it's only getting narrower.

Better luck next year boys!



The elusive Stanley Cup
Photo by Alex Goykham on
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PITT SOCCER GOES DEEP

AFTER A HISTORIC SEASON, THE PITT MEN'S SOCCER TEAM FINISHED WITH A 16-4 OVERALL RECORD AND HAD THE CINDERELLA STORY GOING AFTER A DEEP RUN INTO THE COLLEGE CUP BEFORE LOSING IN THE SEMIFINALS TO INDIANA, A POWERHOUSE IN NCAA DI MEN'S SOCCER.

A PROGRAM RECORD FIVE PLAYERS WERE NAMED TO THE MEN'S UNITED SOCCER COACHES SOUTH ALL-REGION TEAM. THOSE PLAYERS ARE:

NICO CAMPUZANO



Goalie from Cantabria, Spain

JASPER LÖEFFELSEND



Defender from Cologne, Germany

VALENTIN NOEL



Midfielder from Niort, France

VELJKO PETKOVIC



Midfielder from Nis, Serbia

JACKSON WALTI



Midfielder from Vevey, Switzerland



PITT MEN'S SOCCER TEAM NOTES:

- Made it to the semifinals of the 2020 College Cup before losing to Indiana 1-0 on May 14, 2021
- Since 1989, Pitt has only had seven combined players on the All-Region team. This year alone they had five players named (above)
- 11 different countries represented on Pitt's roster

*Background photo by Geo Swan commons.wikimedia.org. Headshots courtesy of pittsburghpanthers.com

HEAD COACH JAY VIDOVICH RECRUITING PLAYERS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD TO MAKE TEAM NATIONALLY COMPETITIVE

Pitt Men's Soccer team lost in the NCAA Division 1 national championship semifinals against Indiana 1-0 on Friday, May 14th.

Pitt, as the 2 seed against the 3-seeded Indiana Hoosiers technically were the favorite, and it showed. Pitt was definitely the better team- at least in the first half- as they held possession for 61 percent of the time and had 6 shots, 2 on goal.

But Indiana got the shot that counts with 11:12 seconds left in the game, Indiana's #17 Herbert Endeley put a rocket of a shot past the Pitt goalkeeper, Nico Campuzano (from Cantabria, Spain). It was only their seventh shot of the game (second on goal) but it was hit true as Endeley neatly split two defenders, charged into the box, and let loose a cannon that went near-side top right and Campuzano had no chance. It was just the second goal given up by him and the Panthers in the last three NCAA games.

Pitt certainly had their chances. Overall they attempted 14 total shots, and Indiana goalkeeper Roman Celentano played brilliantly. He was well positioned the entire match and did well to keep the many crosses and corner kicks from finding paydirt.

The Panthers overall played

great, had more aggression, smart passes, kept possession. Prone to the occasional turnover but the defense played well on the counter as the Indiana players were looking to pounce at any moment of a slip up. One of the better players this year, #19 Veljko Petrovic (from Nis, Serbia) had a golden opportunity with under 3 minutes left in the first half as he took a great lead pass up the middle of the field, maneuvered himself in the box draped by defenders but with room to work. The kick went high, unfortunate for the Panthers as it was a grade-A look.

Just a few moments later with 90 seconds left in the half, Pitt defender Arturo Ordonez (from Salou, Spain) put a great cross into the box and midfielder Noel Valentin (from Niort, France and is also the Panthers leading scorer with 14 goals on the year) got his head on the ball but Celentano was right there for the save.

The scoring chance kept coming for Pitt in the second half. Perhaps the best scoring chance of the whole match came with 32:36 left as #21 midfielder Filip Mirkovic (from Belgrade, Serbia) took a one-timer from the top of the box and rung it off the bottom of the cross bar. The ball came straight down and very nearly crossed the line (they stopped the match for video review), but again, Celentano was determined to keep Pitt off the goal sheet and play went on.

Another chance came with 22:35 left off a corner kick for Pitt where an

Indiana defender actually had the wherewithal to boot the ball wide (though was very nearly an own-goal), and then another corner five minutes later found the head of #3 defender Raphael Crivello (from Bordeaux, France) though just went wide.

The last great chance for Pitt came with 12:20 left in the match where #15 forward Luke Mort (a local kid from

sound defensively the entire match, the scoring chance that led to the deciding goal all started from a failed clearance attempt by the Panthers.

Pitt was unquestionably the Cinderella story here though. It was their first College Cup appearance for Pitt, while Indiana is a dynasty in D1 men's soccer, having won the national championship eight times and have been to the College Cup an NCAA record 21 times. The pedigree at Indiana is also profound, especially with the Yeagley family. Coach Todd Yeagley has two sons on the team (his son Ben was a substitute in this match), and Todd's father Jerry was the Indiana coach before him with a 30 year tenure and many national championships on the table. Overall, the Hoosiers have eight national championships - a powerhouse for American college football to say the least.

Pitt men's soccer on the other hand was never exactly great. Four years ago the club had a six year stretch without winning a single conference victory in either the Big East or the ACC. Then coach Jay Vidovich started traveling around the world and recruiting players from all over to build up this championship caliber team in Pittsburgh. Vidovich previously coached the Portland Timbers 2 team in the United Soccer League (USL) which is the same...

Continued on page C4



Four years ago the club had a six year stretch without winning a single conference victory in either the Big East or the ACC.

Greensburg who went to Greensburg Central Catholic) found himself inside the box with a decent angle and had the short side pegged, but the hero-shot just missed and skipped off the corner - a phenomenal chance. Then the dagger came a minute later when Endeley for Indiana scored his goal and the Panthers couldn't answer in the last 10 minutes. The unfortunate part is, after playing so

What we love, but mostly hate, about baseball today

FUN BEING SUCKED OUT OF THE GAME

We want all the rules to go back to what they were. No more instant replay, no more seven inning games, no more runners on second in extra innings, no more instant replays.. Just give us baseball the way it was meant to be played. Pure. Baseball.

America's pastime. A timeless sport. Something just about every American kid grew up watching, playing, and agonizing over.

But baseball in 2021 is a lot different than baseball in 2000. Baseball used to be more about strategy, positioning, timing, and when push really came to shove and a run was desperately needed;

something called small ball was a strategy to get someone on base, have them steal, and bunt them around the bases.

Bunt is all but a forbidden word in today's game. And stolen base attempts are also at an all time low. To give the reader a better idea of what we're talking about here using statistics, we are going to quote a paragraph from offthebenchbaseball.com in August of 2019 by Bobby Mueller:

"This year, stolen base attempts are down for a fifth straight year, to 0.64 per game, and have reached...

Continued on page C4



As the game is being tried to be made shorter, instant replays disrupt flow to the game and take time. Photo by Keith Allison on commons.wikimedia.org

HISTORIC SEASON COMES TO BITTERSWEET END FOR PITT

Continued from page C3

...as the Pittsburgh Riverhounds SC. Through it all Vidovich has players from 11 different countries on the roster, but also with some local kids like Mort who was mentioned previously, and a few others from Norwin and Connellsville though did not play.

The quality of the game was really quite something for a contest between two American college teams. Probably because there were so many foreign players, but still I've watched some USL games with a lot less angst. The

most pitiful part of the whole thing was the weird format, at least for soccer. In the premier league in England all the FIFA games – really all the soccer / football played across the world – the clock goes up to 45 minutes for each half with stoppage time added on at the end for any time deemed wasted during the match by the referees. It seems strange at first, especially for us Americans who for the most part didn't grow up watching the simple yet complex sport, but watching it count down from 45 minutes to 0 with the clock stopping at times and

no stoppage time at the end was just confusing (as I'm sure it was for the foreign players in the match).

This was probably because of covid / just the way things are – and is a problem to have with all college tournaments – but not being able to have the game played at home here in Pittsburgh in front of raucous crowd of college students excited for the semester to be over was also a little disappointing. There was a decent crowd on hand, but nothing like it should have been between two teams of this caliber.

Look for great things in the future from the men's Pitt soccer team though. It sure is welcome since the basketball team can't quite get back to where they once were, and the football team playing always one step behind the rest of the top tier teams in the country. This helps put Pitt on the map and become more respectable for all the world to see.

Too bad they couldn't end up on the right side of this highly contested and competitive match, let's just hope it's the first step toward a legacy that can rival that of Indiana's one day.

Pitt

Pitt

Date	Opponent	W/L	Score	Att.
09/26/2020	at Notre Dame	W	3-1	0
10/06/2020	at Syracuse	W	3-2	1
10/10/2020	VIRGINIA TECH	W	4-2	55
10/18/2020	at Virginia	W	3-2	132
10/23/2020	at Louisville	W	4-1	0
11/15/2020	vs Duke	W	2-1	77
11/18/2020	vs Notre Dame	W	3-1	100
11/22/2020	vs Clemson	L	1-2	350
02/27/2021	DUQUESNE	W	1-0	0
03/05/2021	at North Carolina	L	0-3	351
03/13/2021	BOSTON COLLEGE	W	1-0	0
03/19/2021	at Duke	W	4-3	0
03/27/2021	at Virginia Tech	W	2-1	600
04/03/2021	NOTRE DAME	W	2-0	0
04/08/2021	VIRGINIA	W	5-0	0
04/17/2021	at Clemson	L	0-2	100
05/02/2021	vs Monmouth	W	6-1	300
05/06/2021	vs UCF	W	4-0	86
05/10/2021	vs Washington	W	3-0	74
05/14/2021	vs Indiana	L	0-1	266

Team Statistics	PITT	OPP
SHOT STATISTICS		
Goals-Shot Att.	51-237	23-193
Goals Per Game	2.55	1.15
Shot Pct.	0.215	0.119
Shots on Goal-Att.	126-237	94-193

#	Player	GP	G	A	PTS	SH	SH%	SOG	SOG%	GW	PK-ATT
8	Noel, Valentin	19	14	2	30	42	0.333	22	0.524	3	0-0
19	Petkovic, Veljko	19	9	8	26	39	0.231	25	0.641	2	0-0
13	Dexter, Alexander	20	7	5	19	22	0.318	17	0.773	3	0-0
10	Jacquesson, Bertin	18	4	7	15	35	0.114	20	0.571	1	0-0
2	Löeffelsend, Jasper	19	0	9	9	11	0.000	3	0.273	0	0-0
4	Washington, Bryce	20	4	1	9	8	0.500	6	0.750	2	1-1
21	Mirkovic, Filip	19	3	2	8	18	0.167	7	0.389	1	0-0
5	Ordoñez, Arturo	20	3	2	8	16	0.188	9	0.563	3	0-0
3	Crivello, Raphaël	18	0	4	4	6	0.000	0	0.000	0	0-0
24	Walti, Jackson	20	1	2	4	3	0.333	1	0.333	0	0-0
25	Peperak, Luke	13	1	1	3	3	0.333	3	1.000	0	0-0
11	Almeida, Rodrigo	7	1	0	2	3	0.333	2	0.667	0	0-0
15	Mort, Luke	17	1	0	2	15	0.067	6	0.400	0	0-0
14	Sena, Sito	6	1	0	2	5	0.200	2	0.400	0	1-1
20	Bailey, Matt	14	0	1	1	9	0.000	2	0.222	0	0-0
	Amrani, Anass	3	0	0	0	0	0.000	0	0.000	0	0-0
0	Campuzano, Nico	20	0	0	0	0	0.000	0	0.000	0	0-0
12	Clagette, Brandon	8	0	0	0	1	0.000	1	1.000	0	0-0
27	Harding, Anthony	3	0	0	0	0	0.000	0	0.000	0	0-0
7	Lara, Luis	7	0	0	0	1	0.000	0	0.000	0	0-0
18	Shigaki, Soshun	1	0	0	0	0	0.000	0	0.000	0	0-0
	Total	20	49	44	142	237	0.207	126	0.532	15	2-2
	Opponent	20	23	17	63	193	0.119	94	0.487	4	4-4

#	Goalle	GP	MIN	GA	GAA	SAVE	PCT	W-L-T	SHO
0	Campuzano, Nico	20	1843:22	23	1.12	66	0.742	16-4-0	6/0
	Total	20	1843:22	23	1.12	66	0.742	16-4-0	6
	Opponents	20	1843:22	51	2.49	72	0.585	--	3

Minor league baseball arguably more exciting now

Continued from page C3

...their lowest point since 1964. The use of the sacrifice bunt is also at an all-time low for the eighth season in a row. Teams are laying down successful sacrifice bunts at a rate of 0.16 per game, which is less than half as often as they used the tactic as recently as 2011."

Okay, our point is illustrated. And it's fairly obvious why small ball is on the decline; because home runs are sexy! Oh, and teams end up scoring more runs this way too. Thanks to an incredible amount of statistics and data, something called launch angle and slugging percentages have transformed the game to benefit the long hitter, while hitting for contact is as foreign as the game of cricket.

We know we aren't breaking any headlines talking about this, but it has just made watching baseball so boring; and let's be honest, baseball wasn't exactly known for being exciting in the first place. All it is anymore is strikeouts and home runs, with very little action in-between.

Baseball highlights used to consist of diving shortstops, show stopping double plays, over the shoulder grabs into the corners; things along those lines. Flip on MLB network these days (because ESPN doesn't really care about any sport other than basketball, something we're sure a future column will focus on), and all that is seen are monstrous homers and crazy amounts of strikeouts because every player is swinging for the fences.

Any baseball lover has probably been to at least one minor league ball game. Maybe the AA Erie SeaWolves or Altoona Curve. Maybe the single A short season Morgantown Black Bears. Or even a college game or very competitive high school game. We are prepared to make the argument that those ball games are actually more exciting to go to and watch than any given major league game in this power era.

In a minor league game, the pitchers aren't usually as good, which means more balls in play and therefore more to watch. Also hitters weren't putting every fastball left out over the plate into the bleachers, so it gives the position players more of an opportunity to make a play. Yea sure, there'd be an error every now and

again, but that also made the game fun because a routine ground ball to third base wasn't always a guaranteed out like it is in the majors. Maybe there's an overthrow, or a slight bobble and the runner has a chance. The point is, there's always a reason to watch in the minors, whereas the majors are just so sterile nowadays.

Okay, still, it's fun to watch home runs being hit and ultimately more runs are being scored than ever – something most leagues like the NHL and NFL strive for constantly. Although interestingly enough, a weird side effect of a 13-12 game that goes 11 innings is it makes the game crazy long. Like close to four hours long. I mean, might as well watch golf at that point. Game time is something the MLB has been trying (unsuccessfully) to rein in for several years now. But game time has done nothing but climb to over three hours on average for a 9 inning game. In 1979, a game was on average 30 minutes quicker.

For a game that went through a steroids era, a corked bat era, and more recently a juiced ball rumor; it sure is odd to have the home run take firm control over one of the oldest sports still being played professionally. And as much as the home run is coveted and sought after, we fear that it kills the game and may lead to its demise if not taken seriously.

Baseball never had the flash and full contact draw as football and basketball, but what baseball always had over the other sports were tradition. That and the fact that it is so widely played across America. Every small town across the country has at the very least a baseball field. The Little League World Series is a major international event televised around the globe from a small Pennsylvania town – the whole event truly is a tribute to baseball and how it is played

in every corner of the Earth.

Let's not lose that over strikeouts and home runs. We want to see the game played for another 100 years, and if that takes making the field bigger and the bats smaller, then so be it. Other sports have adapted, and granted not always for the better, but more often than not compromised make it work. Tennis is more exciting even with bigger racquets. Hockey goalie pads needed regulation and games are now higher scoring. Football isn't the contact sport it once was but that has taken away the tremendous athletic ability needed to play the sport.

The examples go on, but the fact of the matter is something needs done. Baseball is like the government: slow to change and not one for outside the box solutions, but people need to start thinking. A bigger outfield would be cool; maybe even add a fourth outfielder, which would give teams some more freedom to be creative with how to position players.

The shift has become such an interesting progression in the game with just about every team doing it in some capacity, and having a bigger field with more players on it would definitely give people reason to tune back into baseball. The 'juiced ball' theory isn't so much a theory anymore but more of a proven fact. Maybe that can be brought under control to keep the ball in the park more often. Sure a smaller bat would probably help too, but we don't to be watching stickball out there, just kept under control. There are probably better suggestions out there and if you made it this far in the article, please feel compelled to write in your thoughts so we can publish them in our next issue.

At the end of the day though, kids playing the game now are being taught to swing for the fences and go for

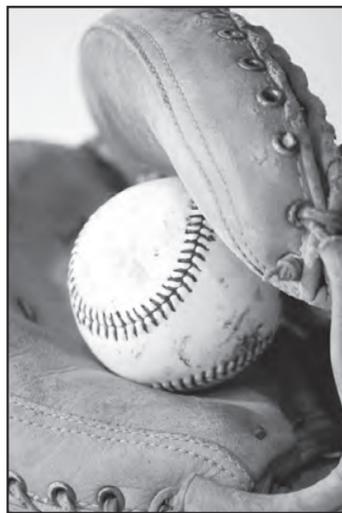
power. Because that's ultimately what's going to get a scout's attention and progress that short to the pros. Even catchers and shortstops – once put on rosters for their defensive prowess – aren't safe unless they can pump the ball out of the park with regularity. It has just changed the game so much that watching it has become a chore and uninspiring.

Our final qualm with baseball. Instant replay. We know, there were a lot of words just written about how much we don't like how the game has changed, and now we're going to throw in the hotly debated instant replay blurb in at the end of the article? Darn right we are!

Here's the short of it though; instant replay has done more than take the human element out of the game, it has taken the drama out of it too. This is true for all sports, but with baseball in particular there was nothing more exciting than a play at the plate – especially with the game on the line – and everyone looks to the ump for the call and knowing right then and there whether to scream in joy or anger. That suspense is all but gone now in the game, and for a game that is played at such a slow pace, that suspense was so impactful when it all came down to a single play like that.

We don't think instant replay is the poison to the game like how the home run and strikeout are, but if us stubborn baseball fans are already longing for the past era of shorter games with more strategy, might as well lump in instant replay with it. The ironic part is that instant replay isn't even really needed in the majors; the ump's are really just that good because it's so difficult to become a major league umpire only the best of the best eventually get there. And then once there, it's usually for a lifetime with no limit to how long an umpire can stay on the diamond. Where it's really needed is on the little league, high school, college, and minor league fields where the calls are more erratic and really can determine the outcome of a game.

That's why we understand why it's here and here to stay, to not let a bad call ruin a game. But it doesn't hurt baseball to have a little flare every now and again. Play ball!





IN THE GOLFER'S CORNER, WE DO OUR BEST TO ANSWER QUESTIONS ABOUT THE GAME AND HELP EDUCATE PEOPLE ABOUT THIS WONDERFUL, THOUGH OFTENTIMES COMPLICATED, SPORT. PLEASE WRITE TO US YOUR QUESTIONS ON ANYTHING FROM RULES AND ETIQUETTE TO SWING TIPS AND COURSES TO PLAY.

Q: I've tried golf and gone to the range a few times but lack the confidence to get out on a real course. What advice can you give about buying a first set of golf clubs and getting more involved with the sport?

Great question. Normally my advice here would be to go tackle a par 3 course. Though, unfortunately, those have become increasingly rare. There are a few shorter nine hole courses out there that are perfectly fine to get out there and learn on. Courses like Roberstshaw Acres in Hempfield Township, or Lukes Links which is a third nine at Norvelt. Really any course that has a third nine, like Cloverleaf, are all great places to learn in a low pressure environment and not have to necessarily act or dress the part to do so. Those are all courses in Westmoreland County outside of Pittsburgh, but there are plenty little 9 hole courses that dot the landscape. They don't need to be fancy or well kept, just long enough to be able to pull out the driver here and there and get a feel for hitting your irons. Which brings us to which clubs to purchase as a first set...

There are many different kinds of golf clubs out there, and more importantly, different kind of shafts too. A very good player – such as one you'd see play on tv, or a very low handicapper (more on the handicap system later, but the lower handicap you are, the better you are) – plays with stiff shafts and what are called blade irons. These irons generally have no cavity on the back of the club, look slim at address, and give off accuracy but not necessarily forgiveness for a miss-hit off the toe, a very common mistake. A cavity back club will give better forgiveness, overall distance, and generally help a high handicap golfer get better to the point where he/she will need to graduate to a more advanced club.

So having said all that, the perfect first set of golf clubs are something that have regular shafts in them (shafts come in senior, regular, stiff, and extra stiff – generally the harder you swing the more stiff shaft that is needed to keep control over the shot), and the irons have a cavity back. Don't spend too much money on this first set of clubs because, if all goes well, you'll be wanting to upgrade them within a season or two. I'd also recommend getting a complete set; something with a driver, fairway wood, maybe a hybrid, and a full set of irons down to at least a pitching wedge and it wouldn't hurt to have a sand wedge included or picked up along the way too. And a putter, definitely need to have a putter! From there you can work on slowly replacing clubs as your skill level improves. For those on a budget, there are many great off brands available. You can look online but a Dunham's or a Dick's Sporting Goods will have all you need. For those lucky enough to live close to a Play it Again Sports, or another type of used sporting good store, this is another excellent way to acquire a first set. Just make sure they aren't your ancient uncles clubs that have no cavity on the back of them and were made sometime in the late 80s.

You'll soon hate the sport, and unless blessed with an uncanny amount of natural hand eye coordination and skill, no one will never be able to hit blades with any kind of consistency from the get go. For those with a little higher budget, go with a name brand, and if possible, try to hit a few different kinds first before pulling the trigger. What's a name brand in golf? Can't go wrong with anything Titleist, Taylormade, Callaway, Ping, Cobra, or Mizuno on them. Each one of those manufacturers make clubs suitable for every golfer. Just don't be a hero and buy something you're not ready for, because the game is supposed to be enjoyed (at least as much as possible) and you want to give it a chance.

Again, if all goes well you will get much better in a fairly short amount of time – I'm talking getting down to breaking 100 on an 18 hole course, and after some short game practice,

maybe even breaking 90. And then once you get there that's when you need to seriously think about making some upgrades to your equipment and looking at a club that gives you a little more control while keeping as much forgiveness as possible.

Q: What is proper attire on the golf course, and some etiquette tips?

First, make sure to have golf shoes. A lot of people just wear athletic shoes out on the course, which if you're a kid, okay, your feet grow too fast anyway, but really consider investing in a pair because it makes a big difference, especially as you start swinging harder. It's just a must too if you're ever trying to negotiate a sidehill lie or some other type of awkward stance situation. A glove is nice, but not necessary. For a righty, gloves generally go on the left hand, and opposite for lefties. This helps keep a better grip on the club and prevent blisters. On a hot day it's kind of hard to golf without a glove because of sweat.

Golf etiquette is particular set of rules, and it can be frustrating if playing in a group of buddies who have golf experience and you're trying to get in on the fun, because a lack of some common miscues on the course can cause a shouting match fairly quickly. A few things to keep in mind out there: try not to move or make noise when anyone is hitting. This may sound stupid, but a lot of times on tee boxes or when people are putting, players are standing directly behind you (technically illegal for when putting) and it's really easy to cause a distraction. Stand off to the side and help your buddy look for his/her ball after contact – if they're keeping their head down like they should they'll thank you later for keeping an eye on it.

Another big one is to try and not walk in someone's line on the greens. If you followed my advice earlier on and invest in some golf spikes, those little plastic spikes cause indentations on the green which can very easily cause the ball to go offline. So when possible, walk around where a players ball or marker is and, when finishing a short tap in, be cognizant of where everyone else is on the green to try and not to step in their line (this is a good time to ask if a putt is good so as to not worry about it!). As far as dress is concerned, that can vary greatly on the course you're playing at. Some courses are more than fine to let you wear jeans out there. Some will kick you out for it.

If you're unsure about a dress code, play it safe and wear some nice shorts with no cargo sides, and a collared shirt tucked in. One other fashion tip; don't wear sunglasses, at least ones that have a slight magnification to them. It really makes a difference, especially with short shots and chips, much easier to chunk the ball (hit behind it). Golfers are known for sometimes making a fashion statement, which is cool and help keeps it popular, just make sure you have the game to back it up if you do it at the local courses. No one likes to see someone dressed up as Ian Poulter then go up to the first tee box and top it.

Q: Golf takes a while to play, what are some tips to help speed up pace of play?

Probably the most important thing in golf: do try and play fast. Golfers have a hard enough time keeping pace, and a round over five hours is just unbearable. If you are a beginner golfer hanging out with some players that are better than you, the least you can do is keep up and be aware when it is your turn to hit and all that. Technically the player who is furthest away from the hole should play first, and the player who scored the lowest on the prior hole

has 'honors' on the tee and should go first then too. But unless playing under the strictest of USGA rules, try to adhere to 'ready' golf. That is, whoever is ready just go ahead and hit the ball already.

Put your glove on while walking up to the tee and have a few balls and tees in your pockets at all times too, that can save a lot of time especially after one of your balls goes out of bounds. Don't be shy about throwing another one down right away and just getting a ball in play if you can't find it or have a pretty good idea it won't be found. Just keep play moving and everyone – the people in your group and the ones behind you – will all have a good time and get to the bar faster. Now, if there's no one behind you and have the whole course to yourself and just out there getting a few holes in, by all means drop an extra ball here or there and take your time out there. But if playing in a Saturday morning round at a local public course, keep pace. Most courses have a ranger too, and a good Ranger will prod you along and it's just not very fun to see Ranger Rick coming up to you for the third time in a round asking what the hell is going on.

Don't be afraid to let someone pass you also if need be, just be smart about it. If there's nowhere for the group behind you to go because the course is so congested, just don't worry about it and have a good time. But if you're in a foursome and there's two single handicappers behind you, next par 3 let them go ahead of you. Why a par 3? Because this is where groups generally get backed up the most since you can really only have one group on the hole at a time, unlike par 4s and 5s. There's also a right way to let people pass and a wrong way. The right way is to get up to a par 3, hit your tee shots, and then kindly wave the group behind you to come tee off and go on ahead.

Pre-hitting your tee shots helps save time and uncomfortable guessing if the group is out of the way ahead of you or not (in a par 4 or 5 situation of course). It's also a good idea to wave on a group, or ask if close enough, if a group would even like to pass. Some people are content just prodding away if they're truly in no hurry. But the single guy

out there in a cart with an expensive looking set of clubs? Yeah, you better let him go or else he's hitting into you all round and that's not fun.

Q: What other tips are there to getting better at golf? Will help?

The key thing is to really just have fun and try to make a birdie or two because that will really help you catch the bug and come back looking for more. Watch it on TV when you can too, because trying to imitate one of the pros, and just seeing how they handle themselves on a golf course, can help a lot more than you may think. For example, reading and preparing for a putt before it's your turn not only saves time, but will help the quality of the putt too. If money permits, it is nice having one of those yardage watches on your wrist, for the pure sake that it saves time trying to guess yardages. I prefer the watches over the range finders because the range finders are sometimes difficult to use and generally take up too much time anyway. The watch is instantaneous, and by the year 2021, is very accurate. But, if none of that is available, don't waste time trying to figure out the perfect yardage, especially if you're a 12 handicap or up. Look for the 200, 150, and 100 yard markers (just about every course at least has these marked off) and gauge what club to hit based on relative distance from those markers. For example if your 150 yard club is

a 7 iron, then hit an 8 iron if you're in front of the marker and a 6 if behind. Try to keep golf as simple as you can in the beginning, because once you get better trust me, it will get a lot more complicated.

Q: Can you help explain golf's handicap system?

It's kind of confusing. The handicap system attempts to take the difficulty of a course into play, this is what the slope and rating is for on the scorecard, to try and get a common denominator amongst all the courses in the world and assign a golfer a certain skill level. So whatever your number is, that is how many holes you get a stroke on those holes which are deemed more difficult than others on the scorecard. On a scorecard each hole has a handicap hole; therefore making the 'number one handicap' the most difficult one. A 'one-handicapper' then would get a shot on that hole and that hole only. An 18 handicapper would get a shot on every hole, and 9 handicapper would only get a shot on the 9 most difficult hole. A good way to just guess a handicap without having to put all your scores into a computer, is to look at how many shots you consistently are over par. If the course is a par 70, and you shoot 10 over for an 80, then that's kind of like being a 10 handicapper because the handicap number should get you down to around even on a good playing day. That's not a perfect way to look at it because an 80 on one course – a much difficult one – is a lot different than shooting an 80 on a short little dinky course.

Q: How do I know what club to hit for certain shots and from different yardages?

Try to prepare a little before your early rounds. Go to the range and figure out what an approximate 150 club is because that will be your baseline on what to hit for every other yardage. A good rule of thumb is every 10 yards is another club up or down. So to stick with the example from above, if a 7 iron goes 150, then a 6 iron should go 160ish, and an 8 iron should go 140ish. This can vary wildly based on conditions obviously, but it's a place to start. Also, spend some time on the putting green (or around the house on carpet) chipping and putting. Bar none, this is the greatest weakness for any newish player. Even for seasoned players who still can't seem to break 100 or 90, the short game can easily save multiple strokes on a hole. Just need to practice making good solid contact and making a repetitive motion. Don't try to flop it or hit any crazy shots either; just a simple pitch will do in most circumstances around the green.

Q: Which tees do I play from, what's considered a 'long' course in golf?

Don't bite off more than you can chew either if you're a mid to high range handicapper. Look at the overall yardage for 18 holes before choosing a tee box. Even for players who hit the ball far (250 plus yards off the tee with a driver) playing the blue or back tees may not be the best idea especially if you're spraying it off the tee.

6,500 yards should be about the absolute max for mid range handicap player, and even for single digit handicappers too, the game is supposed to be fun, not barely able to reach some par 4s in two and never getting a par 5 in two.

A nice compromise sometimes is playing a split tee. Play the blues on shorter holes and the whites on longer holes (though if you're keeping a score for handicap purposes that isn't the best advice because a course's slope and rating are calculated for each tee set), but if you're just out there having a game between friends then feel free to be creative, especially if you're in a group with a mix of long / better players and shorter / newer players to the game.

This helps pace too, there's nothing more uncomfortable than going all the way back to the back tees and topping / rolling a tee shot. Play to your level and have a great time.

Hit them straight everyone!

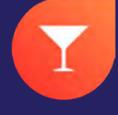
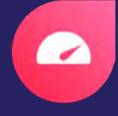
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Probably the most important thing in golf though, do try and play fast... try to adhere to 'ready' golf. That is, whoever is ready just go ahead and hit the ball already.



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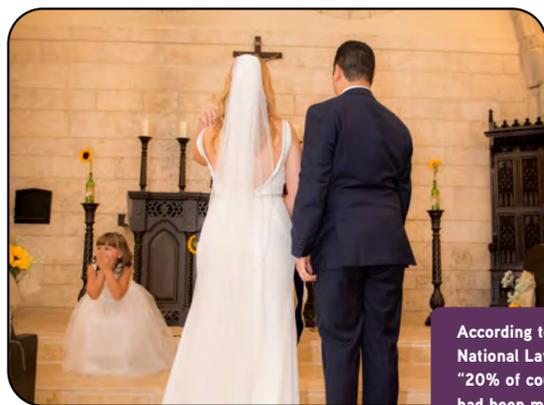
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CULTURE PAGES

Divorce & COVID: The other pandemic



According to The National Law Review, "20% of couples who had been married for five months or less sought divorce during this time period, compared with only 11% in 2019." Photo by Nitido 2007 commons.wikimedia.org

IN THE HEIGHT OF THE PANDEMIC, 1 IN 5 RECENTLY MARRIED COUPLES FILED FOR DIVORCE. SUDDENLY, WHEN THOSE WHO WERE TRYING TO SPEND MORE TIME TOGETHER HAD ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD, WHY DID THAT AFFECT THEIR RELATIONSHIP SO DRASTICALLY?

At a time prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, many couples were begging to find more time together. Now, with the majority of the pandemic behind us, couples are seriously rethinking this once desired quality time.

The interest in divorce rate soared to over 34 percent during the height of the pandemic with 20 percent of couples who had married 5 months prior to the pandemic, choosing to end their marriage, according to an article dated Oct. 16, 2020 by Taylor Brownwell on The National Law Review's website.

So, are all relationships bound for a downward spiral, or is there a positive



A lot of couples went through elevated amounts of stress over the pandemic. Maybe this has opened eyes to possible problems and helped some couples seek out the help they need to keep their relationships healthy. Photo from Pixabay.com.

“

For some, a couple's counselor may be beneficial to aid in this conversation... turn off the phones, TV's, and music; sit down with your partner and just talk and listen.

outcome that can come from so much turmoil? Marriages, and relationships in general, typically follow a cyclical pattern.

We have the Honeymoon phase: Full of love, gifts, kind words and experiences. Followed closely by the maintenance phase: a majority of life happens here with a "comfortable" feeling settling in.

Inevitably, we then see an igniting

event phase: this could be an affair, death of a close friend or family member, loss of job, the list goes on.

After this igniting event phase, a person may elect to end the cycle and hence the relationship or continue in the relationship and enter the repair phase: this phase is spent reconnecting, communicating and getting back to basics. This reconnection will then lead back to the honeymoon phase and the cycle can start over again without intervention. What does intervention look like?

Most couples may need to sit down and discuss what their wants and needs are. For some, a couple's

counselor may be beneficial to aid in this conversation.

My advice? Turn off the phones, TVs, and music, and sit down with your partner and just talk, and listen. You might be surprised at what you'll find.

The good news is, the pandemic has opened people's eyes to the possible problems in their relationships. It has given them an amazing opportunity to get back to basics, communicate with their partner, and re-spark the flame.

Article by a registered Clinical Therapist working for WVU Medicine who specializes in sex therapy.

RESOURCES FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SUPPORT:

The National Domestic Violence Hotline

- 1.800.799.SAFE (7233)
TTY 1.800.787.3224
- Text "START" to 1.800.799.SAFE
- Log on to www.thehotline.org to chat live 24/7.

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Book Review: 'Corona, False Alarm? Facts and Figures'

THE BOOK HELPS US START TO IDENTIFY THAT ALL WE ARE HEARING MIGHT NOT BE COMPLETELY TRUE, MANY QUESTIONS ARE STILL UNANSWERED

Last summer, two doctors working in Germany wrote the book "Corona, False Alarm?" and it exploded in the German market, selling over 200,000 print copies and 75,000 e-books in just six weeks.

The book was timely as the coronavirus was a dominating topic that everyone was talking about, and this book bucked the trend from what we were hearing from most of the mainstream media.

In "Corona, False Alarm?" the authors, Dr. Sucharit Bhakdi and Dr. Karina Reiss, offered some pretty interesting analysis of whether radical protective measures - including everything from the lockdown, social distancing, mandatory masking, etc. - have truly been justified. They go on to ask the larger questions too, such as what the overall ramifications were for society, the economy, and overall public health.

Published by Chelsea Green Publishing, the book, albeit controversial, really does hit on some great points and opens the door to perhaps some larger questions, i.e. are we missing critical thinking in society today? No one seems to ask any

educated questions anymore. We just take everything as true and assume that all information that is published by the major media is 100 percent accurate. But as we should know, with a little common sense, there are many sides to the same story or theory.

Science is not always exact, and we need to keep an open mind to the possibility that what we are being told

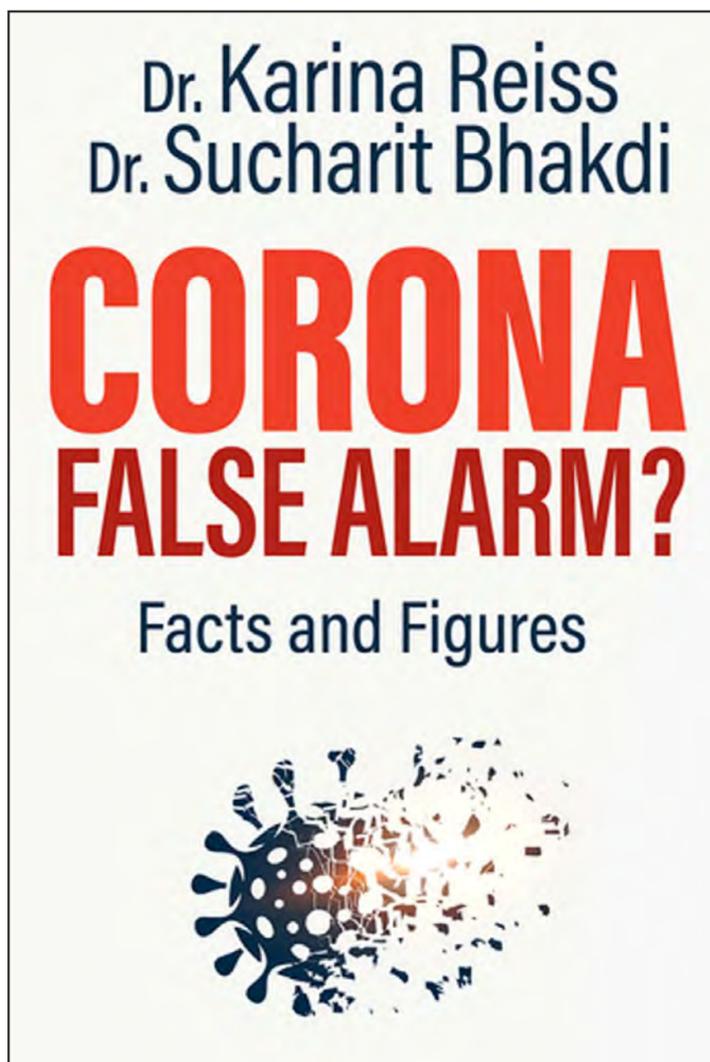
should not be taken gospel. Just because the news continues to repeat the fear factor of doomsday scenarios, does not mean that they are necessarily correct. It comes back to common sense and trying to do quality research on what we know from years of research of medical science.

Also what this book did well was analyze the data coming out of China to validate how this was going to play

out on a global stage.

Dr. Reiss and Dr. Bhakdi have done extensive research in "Corona, False Alarm?" and I highly recommend reading the book and using some critical thinking to decide for yourself on if we took the right path throughout the coronavirus pandemic. Did...

Continued on page D2



The effect the media played on the pandemic also studied

Continued from page C1

...our elected government officials do their duty and due diligence and absolutely do the right thing or was this a colossal failure, leaving the entire world maimed for years to come?

The other question this book asks is, was this just a media pandemic? The political scene globally is as complex as it has ever been and the vast majority of people cannot comprehend just how complicated the inner workings of all the relationships between Nations, regions and governments work and are intertwined. Without analyzing the global monetary involvement or the push by the heavily funded pharmaceutical companies to market more and more drugs to make big profits on the backs of the elderly and sick of our society.

Fear is always used to create a panic that pretty much removes all common sense and critical thinking skills that have been diminished. News and social media platforms have been grooming our society by playing the doomsday scenario over and over again. Early on, the numbers were not there and there was really no doomsday looming. The big question is, will all these leaders stand up and admit they were wrong? It takes very big and smart people to stand up and admit they were wrong. Questions are looming and we continue to hear the fear mongers still trying to drive home that death is around every corner.

The book helps us start to identify that all we are hearing might not be completely true and many questions are still unanswered. The preface is a good place for us to give you a look into how the world saw a potential pandemic looming all around us:

"The first months of the year 2020 were characterised worldwide by a single nightmare: Corona. Dreadful images took wing from China, then from Italy, followed by other countries. Projections on how many countless deaths would occur were coupled with pictures of panic buying and empty supermarket shelves. The media in everyday life was driven by Corona, morning, noon and night for weeks on end. Draconian quarantine measures were established all over the world.

When you stepped outside, you found yourself in a surreal world - not a soul to be seen, but instead empty streets, empty cities, empty beaches. Civil rights were restricted as never before since the end of the Second World War:

The collapse of social life and the economy were generally accepted as being inevitable. Was the country under threat of such a dreadful danger to justify these measures? Had the benefits that could possibly be gained by these measures been adequately weighed against the subsequent collateral damage that might also be expected? Is the current plan to develop a global vaccination programme realistic and scientifically sound?

Our original book was written for the public in our country and this translated version is tilted toward the German narrative. However, global developments have advanced along similar lines, so that the basic arguments hold. We have replaced

advance in the interest of mankind. We do not expect all readers to share our points of view.

But we do hope to ignite an open and much needed discussion, to the benefit of all citizens of this deeply troubled world."

Attribution: Reiss, Karina; Bhakdi, Sucharit. Corona, False Alarm? (p. 10). Chelsea Green Publishing. Kindle Edition.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Karina Reiss was born in Germany and studied biology at the University of Kiel where she received her PhD in 2001. She became assistant professor in 2006 and associate professor in 2008 at the University of Kiel. She has published over sixty articles in the fields of cell biology, biochemistry, inflammation, and infection, which have gained international recognition and received prestigious honors and awards.

Dr. Sucharit Bhakdi was born in Washington, DC, and educated at schools in Switzerland, Egypt, and Thailand. He studied medicine at the University of Bonn in Germany, where he received his MD in 1970. He was a post-doctoral researcher at the Max Planck Institute of Immunobiology and Epigenetics in Freiburg from 1972 to 1976, and at The Protein Laboratory in Copenhagen from 1976 to 1977. He joined the Institute of Medical Microbiology at Giessen University in 1977 and was appointed associate professor in 1982. He was named chair of Medical Microbiology at the University of Mainz in 1990, where he remained until his retirement in 2012. Dr. Bhakdi has published over three hundred articles in the fields of immunology, bacteriology, virology, and parasitology, for which he has received numerous awards and the Order of Merit of Rhineland-Palatinate. Sucharit Bhakdi and his wife, Karina Reiss, live with their three-year-old son, Jonathan Atsadjian, in a small village near the city of Kiel.

We also share the feeling that we need more discussion on all the science and medical knowledge available in the world today. If you would like to comment, please send us an email at westpenntribune@gmail.com and we will try to publish your thoughts in future editions.

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"The intent of this book is to provide readers with facts and background information, so that they will be able to arrive at their own conclusions."

-Excerpt from preface

a number of local events in favour of pressing new issues regarding the question of immunity and the postulated need for development of vaccines against the virus.

The intent of this book is to provide readers with facts and background information, so that they will be able to arrive at their own conclusions. Statements in the book should be regarded as the authors' opinions that we submit for your scrutiny. Criticism and dissent are welcome. In scientific discussions, postulation of any thesis should also invite antitheses, so that finally the synthesis may resolve potential disagreement and enable us to

Who are your Top Five Most Talented Actors? Pacino?

THIS ARTICLE STARTS BY ANSWERING THAT QUESTION WITH:

1) DANIEL DAY LEWIS, 2) JACK NICHOLSON, 3) LEONARDO DICAPRIO, 4) JOAQUIN PHOENIX, 5) DENZEL WASHINGTON.

BUT HERE'S THE REASON WHY IT CHANGES AND SHOULD INCLUDE AL PACINO. BY THE END, THAT LIST LOOKS LIKE THIS:

1) DANIEL DAY LEWIS, 2) JACK NICHOLSON, 3) LEONARDO DICAPRIO, 4) AL PACINO, AND 5) JOAQUIN PHOENIX



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Almost every time my friends and I are together, at some point there is a top five list that is brought up and argued over. Top five favorite fast food restaurants. Top five favorite states. Top five movies. The examples go on and on.

One that has come up more than once though - who are your top five most talented actors?

For me it is: 1) Daniel Day Lewis, 2) Jack Nicholson, 3) Leonardo DiCaprio, 4) Joaquin Phoenix, 5) Denzel Washington.

However, the other day as I was watching "Scarface" for the first time in close to a decade, it dawned on me how easy it is to forget Al Pacino. Scarface itself is one of the most over-hyped movies of all time, in my opinion. The story of a Cuban political refugee's rise and fall within the drug trade, written by Oliver Stone and directed by Brian De Palma, falls short of being the masterpiece it had the potential to be.

Even by today's standards, it is violent. Sorry, I need to be more descriptive, it is ridiculously violent. There is barely any plot, the pacing is terrible, with large skips and assumptions (not in a good way like the Sopranos), and most of the supporting actors fall short of portraying their characters convincingly. Not Pacino, though. From the minute he came on screen in the opening scene, until he falls into the blood soaked pool under the infamous "The World Is Yours" sign, he is hypnotic.

In the opening act of the movie he maintains a relatively sane demeanor, only showing flashes of how horrendous his character can be. He portrays the uncommon intelligence of the character well too, making sure the viewer knows that he is smarter than everyone else

around him, which helps make the meteoric rise in act two more convincing. By the end however, he has fully descended into madness.

His character for the entire third act is no longer sober, making one irrational decision after the other. This ultimately leads to the famous gunfight and line "SAY HELLO TO MY LITTLE FRIEND."

He portrays the downfall of his character perfectly, and without his performance I'd even venture to say that "Scarface" wouldn't even come close to the cult status it has today.

No one can get mad like Pacino. I think of the tirades in the "Godfather" (Parts one and two anyway, I prefer to pretend the third movie doesn't exist), "Scent of a Woman," "Dog Day Afternoon," and "Serpico," just to name a few. His methodical acting approach to really envelope his character is always present. In "Scarface" for example, Pacino was snorting powdered baby laxative instead of real cocaine, but because he was so committed to the character's drug habit, he ended up causing serious medical damage to his nasal passage.

Coming back to the first point I made (and the reason for this whole article), Pacino needs to be on that top five list. Maybe because he is well past his prime, he is easily forgettable. But when you really take a step back and look at his filmography as a whole, the iconic characters he has portrayed, it is tough to doubt his greatness.

And the next time someone asks me for my top five most talented actors list, it is going to read: 1) Daniel Day Lewis, 2) Jack Nicholson, 3) Leonardo DiCaprio, 4) Al Pacino, and 5) Joaquin Phoenix. Sorry Denzel, maybe "King Kong" does have shit on you after all.



RAPPER ROZEI FROM ERIE A HIT

'Ooo La La' SONG HITS OVER 29 MILLION LISTENS ON SPOTIFY. YOUNG RAPPER CONTINUES TO PUT OUT SINGLES, BUILD HIS BRAND, PUT ERIE ON THE MAP

Finally there's someone out there giving Erie a little 'street cred' by having rapper Carter Perkins - going by the name of "Rozei" - catching fire in a bottle with his song 'Ooo La La.'

The song is a hit and it's not just us who think so, it has 29.6 million plays on Spotify at the time of writing. Perkins is only 22, and lives in the Erie suburbs attending McDowell High School.

Rozei released 'Ooo La La' on Nov. 29, 2019 and has what appears to be 10 total singles on Spotify. His music is good; it has great beats, solid rhymes, and a consistent voice akin to Kid Cudi in a way. Makes for good gaming music and definitely has a feel of someone who has the potential to go mainstream if he keeps pumping out gems like "Ooo La La."

We strongly recommend readers search for Josh Reilly's article in the Erie Times News on May 20, 2020 as he does an excellent job of going in detail on Rozei's past and how he turned a hobby he is passionate about into something pretty darn successful and hopefully poised for something more.

It all started when his father got him a MacBook pro as a gift and he started messing around recording himself and adding in different effects to produce some pretty good sounding stuff. He was even just using the regular stock mic before finally making some upgrades, but it's a great story.

He did a semester at Penn State Behrend before dropping out to give this hobby a go. So far it seems to be paying off. His story is a great inspiration for anyone who has a hobby looking to take it to the next level, sometimes it just takes a little time and effort instead of doing what is expected.

What the article doesn't talk about too

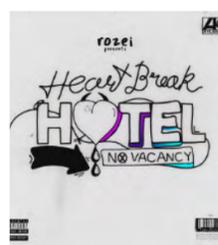
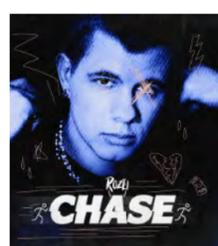
much though is how great it is for Erie, especially if Rozei's career takes off. Wiz Khalifa kind of helped to elevate Pittsburgh for rappers and other musical groups from the area, but Erie really has a phenomenal music scene and Rozei is a great testament to that fact. There are several clubs and establishments in Erie dedicated to this budding music scene and it's incredible to watch.

What's interesting too is that he is from Millcreek a.k.a "the suburbs." Though something kind of unique to Erie is that the "suburbs" (or at least how they are traditionally thought) aren't 15-30 miles outside of town. A fast motorist could get from McDowell High School to downtown Erie in under 15 minutes, if they know a few shortcuts. And Erie, for only having 100,000 people living in town and 250,000 in the county, is really a fully functional city complete with all the culture that comes with that designation. And with the suburbs so close, the whole region is integrated into that culture, not just Erie proper.

It should also be noted that, even though it's a completely different genre, the musical group Train is from Erie and has had many hits such as "Drops of Jupiter" and "Meet Virginia," so the area is no stranger to a band being able to make it big. Makes sense too because, as noted earlier, Erie really is a great music town.

During summer there are concerts every Tuesday on the bay, live music at the block parties on Thursdays, and several other free concerts at Presque Isle and other venues throughout town, so there's plenty of opportunity to have fun while drinking a cold beverage in beautiful summer weather up in Erie.

Here's hoping Rozei keeps it going all the way.



Album art from Rozei on his Spotify page for his singles

Looking for a great hors d'oeuvre?

BACON WRAPPED DORITO JALAPEÑO POPPERS IS THE ANSWER



Photos and recipe by @clem_cooks

Bacon Wrapped Dorito Jalapeño Poppers Recipe

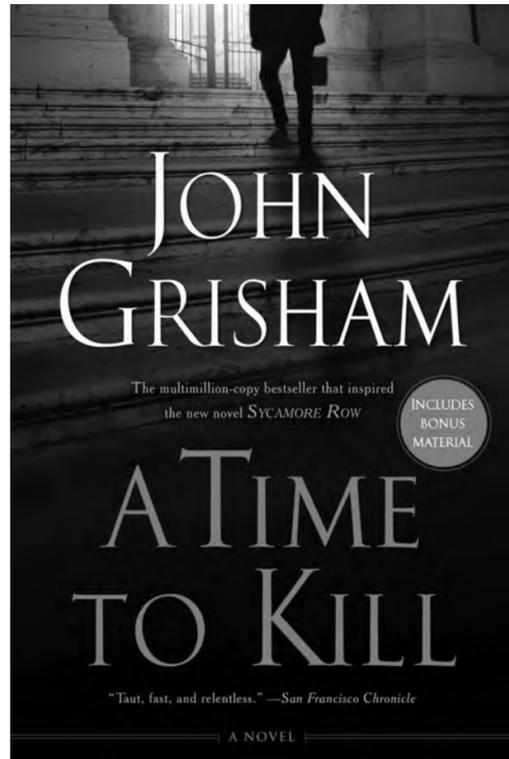
Ingredients

- 8 large jalapeño peppers
- 8 oz cream cheese
- 1 cup cheddar cheese, shredded
- 2 green onions, minced or 1/4 cup chives, finely chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 oz bag of Nacho Cheese or Cool Ranch Doritos (or a combination of the two)
- 16 slices of uncooked bacon

Instructions

- Slice the 8 jalapeños down the center and remove the seeds.
- In a bowl, combine the cream cheese, cheddar cheese, green onion, garlic, and doritos. Then use your hands to mix it all together and crush the doritos down into small crumb-like pieces.
- Form the filling into small logs and stuff it into the jalapeño halves.
- Wrap each stuffed jalapeño pepper with one slice of bacon, then place onto a parchment or foil lined baking sheet
- Bake in a preheated 400F oven for 25 to 30 minutes, or until the bacon is cooked to your preferred done-ness.
- Let the cooked peppers cool on a rack or paper towels to let the excess bacon grease drain off. Serve and enjoy!

'A Time to Kill' Book / Movie Review



ASIDE FROM THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE BOOK AND THE MOVIE, THERE ARE ALSO A LOT OF PARALLELS FROM THE RACE ISSUES BROUGHT UP IN THESE WORKS OF MEDIA AND TODAY'S RACE ISSUES BROUGHT ON BY THE KILLING OF GEORGE FLOYD

Considering "A Time to Kill" was written by John Grisham in 1989 and the subsequent movie hit theaters in 1996, this review isn't exactly timely.

Though, given all the racial turmoil we find our nation in right now, one could argue though perhaps the timing couldn't be any better.

For those unfamiliar, "A Time to Kill" is a book set in the early 1980's and is about a black man who killed two white men who raped and nearly killed his 10-year-old daughter. The book actually opens with this attack and is described in disturbing detail -- a big risk for Grisham in his first novel who was at this point an unknown writer/lawyer fresh out of a short stint as a politician -- then went on to illustrate how many holes exist in the legal system as the two white rapists would have likely been paroled well before their lengthy sentence was up.

Actually "A Time to Kill" barely got published, as Grisham struggled to find someone to print it. First run yielded only 5,000 copies and did not do well. If "The Firm" wasn't such a big hit -- you may remember it also as a movie starring Tom Cruise -- then maybe Grisham wouldn't have gone on to write 24+ books.

Carl Lee Hailey, the father of the victim, knew the two white rapists would eventually get off. So he acquired an M-16 and killed the two men right in the middle of the courthouse as they walked from trial back to the holding cell. The rest of the plot basically revolves around the main character/narrator Jake Brigance defending Carl Lee and (spoiler alert) eventually acquitting him for the murders. There is a lot of drama as the KKK resurges and attempts to murder Brigance and harm his family many times, but he survives and goes on to be the title character in two other Grisham novels that he wrote over 20 years later.

For those who may have just seen the movie, there was a lot left out and a lot of details that probably didn't add up to the casual viewer that only the book fully details. There are several examples, though I think the most glaring -- and most relevant to today -- was towards the end of the trial, the jury was deadlocked and leaning towards convicting Carl Lee of murder. Then, the rallying calls go out to all the black churches in the land and 5,000 plus people show up on the lawn of the courthouse in an effort to more or less scare the jury into letting Carl Lee walk free.

It works. The peaceful protesters, as it was called in the book, prevailed and what was being foreshadowed the

entire book finally culminates. In the movie, it wasn't exactly the protests that swayed the jury, but really a monumental closing argument by Brigance (played by none other than the great Matthew McConaughey) which turns the heart of the jury. To be fair, something like this happened in the book, but it was from a juror behind closed doors, and really was never even fully articulated by Grisham.

At any rate, this wouldn't be the first novel turned movie where several of the details were left out for various reasons. We could spend an entire article on other disparities, but besides the odd movie vs. book points, Grisham does an excellent job successfully illustrating racial unfairness in rural Mississippi during this time and really just how ingrained and generational racism truly is, not just throughout the south, but the region at large.

The central theme to both the book and the movie is, if the situation were reversed and a black person raped and left for dead a 10-year-old white girl, and the father of that white girl hunted down and killed the black man in cold blood, then there would be no question the white man would most likely be adorned a hero rather than come so close to the gas chamber, as did Carl Lee in the story. Vigilante justice was okay for whites, but when the blacks tried to do it, they were hung for it. It didn't help that, at least in the fictional world of Ford County, Mississippi (an hour south of Memphis) the county was about 75 percent white and therefore Carl Lee was placed before an all white jury.

Though that was another point Grisham makes throughout the novel, that all-white juries were the norm, even in counties where the black to white ratio was closer to 50/50.

This point is further brought out in Grisham's "The Last Juror" where a white man is essentially caught red handed raping and murdering a young widow, and a black lady is purportedly the first black person on a jury in Ford County during his trial. They couldn't get the death sentence for the murderer, and

John Grisham wrote "A Time to Kill" in 1989 and it was set in 1984. The movie came out in 1996 and stars Matthew McConaughey, Samuel L. Jackson and Sandra Bullock.



he instead gets life in prison, though is eventually paroled and tries to seek revenge on the jury that sent him away 10 years prior. A lot of critics call "A Time to Kill" Grisham's best novel, and though we haven't read all

of them, "The Last Juror" is certainly one of his finest works illustrating the same racism themes and going a lot deeper into the matter.

Why "A Time to Kill" is so relevant to 2020, though, is because of the George Floyd murder by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, which touched off a summer of protests, in the midst of a pandemic, no less. Thanks to video evidence, it was

clear what happened and Chauvin was found guilty on all three charges.

Were the real life protests in 2020 doing the same thing for Floyd as the fictional protests in Ford County circa 1980 did for Carl Lee? Certainly a good lawyer would argue what this undue influence on the jury certainly had an

effect. If either verdict had gone the other way, the fictional and real life juries should have been fearful for their lives because of the violence that may have ensued. More protests in real life Minneapolis were promised if Chauvin would have been let go free, and he got what he deserved because of the irrefutable evidence, but it certainly leaves many appeal avenues open.

There had just been too many examples for far too long of white men, regardless if they were a police officer or not, getting off too easy compared to their black counterparts. Therefore the black community had every reason to fight so passionately to prosecute in this case, and hopefully some reform comes from it too. Not just in the legal system, but also with the police unions to take a hard look in the mirror and realize that they can't just go on protecting bad cops from getting fired, especially when the ramifications result in nationwide protests.

The culture needs to change. We find ourselves right here at another breaking point. Another fork in the road. Another trial where the difference between right and wrong just doesn't seem as clear as it ought to be.

Let's just hope Grisham isn't done writing novels yet, because there is a lot more that needs to be written on this subject.

“ Besides those odd movie vs. book points, Grisham does an excellent job successfully illustrating racial unfairness in rural Mississippi during this time (1984)... ”



Racial injustice is a constant theme in John Grisham's writing. His novels are a similar depiction to the racial injustice we have seen and continue to see in this country in recent times. Photo by Phil Roeder, Flickr Creative Commons

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