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Child obesity rising faster in rural America
Research dispells belief that farm areas make leaner bodies

Gene J. Puskar / AP
Ray Crawford, 16, of Windber, Pa., participates in an aerobics class for children. In ruraltowns across the nation, the percentage of overweight children has soared and childhood obesity is increasing at an alarming rate, health officials say.

AP Associated Press

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WINDBER, Pa.— When Ray Crawford walks down the hallway of his school, the beefy, 240-pound sophomore says he doesn't stand out much. Many of his classmates are heavy, too.

"We go to the Eat 'n Park to meet and chill, maybe don't eat the right things," he said, referring to a regional chain restaurant famous for its smiley-faced cookies. "There's not much else to do."

Here in his small hometown in the mountains of Western Pennsylvania and in other rural communities like it, many health officials say the tide of obesity is rising faster than anywhere else.

And new research appears to back them up, dispelling a long-held belief that in farm communities and other rural towns, heavy chores, wide expanses of land and fresh air make leaner, stronger bodies.

"Whatever the situation was, rural areas are leading the way now ... they're ahead of the curve," said Michael Meit, director of the University of Pittsburgh Center for Rural Health Practice. "Something's happened."

The Center for Rural Pennsylvania released a study recently that used state health figures to compare the body-mass index of seventh-graders in urban and rural communities — more than 25,000 students in all.

About 16 percent of urban students qualified as obese, according to the study, which is in line with national average for children ages 6-19. In rural school districts, however, 20 percent of students were considered obese.

More alarmingly, researchers found that during the years of the survey, between 1999 and 2001, the number of obese students in rural school districts rose about 5 percent, more than twice the rate of their urban counterparts.

The same trends are being reported from New

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Mexico to Michigan to West Virginia.

In Michigan, children in rural areas were 3 percent to 9 percent more likely to be obese, researchers found. In rural North Carolina children had a 50 percent greater chance of being obese.

Mostly rural states have done studies that don't distinguish between urban and rural children, but they have found the incidence of childhood obesity to be far greater than the national average.

More than a quarter of all fifth-graders in West Virginia are obese, where two-thirds of the population is rural. One in four public school children in Arkansas are obese.

"It is accelerating," said Dr. Darrell Ellsworth, director of cardiovasculardisease research at the Windber Research Institute.

Ellsworth is trying to start a childhood obesity clinic to stave off a wave of diabetes and heart disease he believes will overwhelm this region if nothing is done. In a room with 14 children doing aerobic exercise at the Windber Medical Center, he nodded toward the teens and adolescents, saying they will have a much higher rate of disease than their parents or grandparents.

Researchers are not ready to point a finger at any one culprit for rural obesity, but they have some theories. For one thing, with fewer family farms and more mechanization, children are not burning many calories, but they're still eating high-calorie meals.

"...Habits are passed vertically from Grandma on down, but the diet of three decades ago just doesn't work today," said Dr. Jeff Holm of North Dakota.

The Center for Health Promotion at the University of North Dakota School of Medicine, where Holm is senior scientist, is following about 500 third- to fifth-graders over three years with hopes of finding a pattern.

Fewer farmers does not explain why Windber, a former coal-mining town named after a coal-mining company, would have the same problem.

One connection might be found in the satellite dishes, computers and game consoles that have popped up in almost every town, regardless of the region's economic engine. The same technology is found in cities and suburbs, but health officials say it arrived later and spread much more rapidly in rural areas, changing behavior dramatically in a very short time.

The only other place where researchers are finding obesity rates similar to rural America is in the poorest, most troubled urban neighborhoods, suggesting that poverty may be the overriding cause.

In Tioga County in northeast Pennsylvania, where farming has declined and poverty has risen to about 20 percent, one in 10 kindergartners were found to be obese in 2001-2002. That number doubled for eighth-graders.

"We've seen it sneaking up on us, we've known it's a problem, and now it's reaching epidemic proportions," said Anne Loudenslager, who heads the Tioga County Partnership for Community Health. "We are using a good portion of our limited resources to stop this."

Wellsboro Area High School, the largest in the county with 580 students, will alter physical

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education next year to allow student choices: sports team-oriented, wellness classes, and traditional gym classes.

Dr. Ellsworth, in Windber, said he hopes to have several hundred children in a new health program this year. He calls himself an optimist.

During a recent health fair in Connellsville, about 40 miles to the west, Ellsworth found that 60 percent of adults tested had metabolic syndrome, a collection of unhealthy conditions that raise the risk for diabetes and heart disease.

"The numbers for obesity in children were nowhere near what they are today and you can just imagine what we're going to be looking at 10 to 20 years from now if nothing is done," he said. "That 60 percent ... that's going to seem like a pretty low figure."

Ray Crawford, who is 16, lifts weights year-round in preparation for football season. Round-faced and 5-foot-9, he looks every bit the lineman he is for the Windber Ramblers. Now he says he'll also take up cardiovascular exercise, along with the weight-lifting.

"I've started trying to take it easy on the junk food," he says.

Crawford's father died of heart disease about eight years ago. He was 45.

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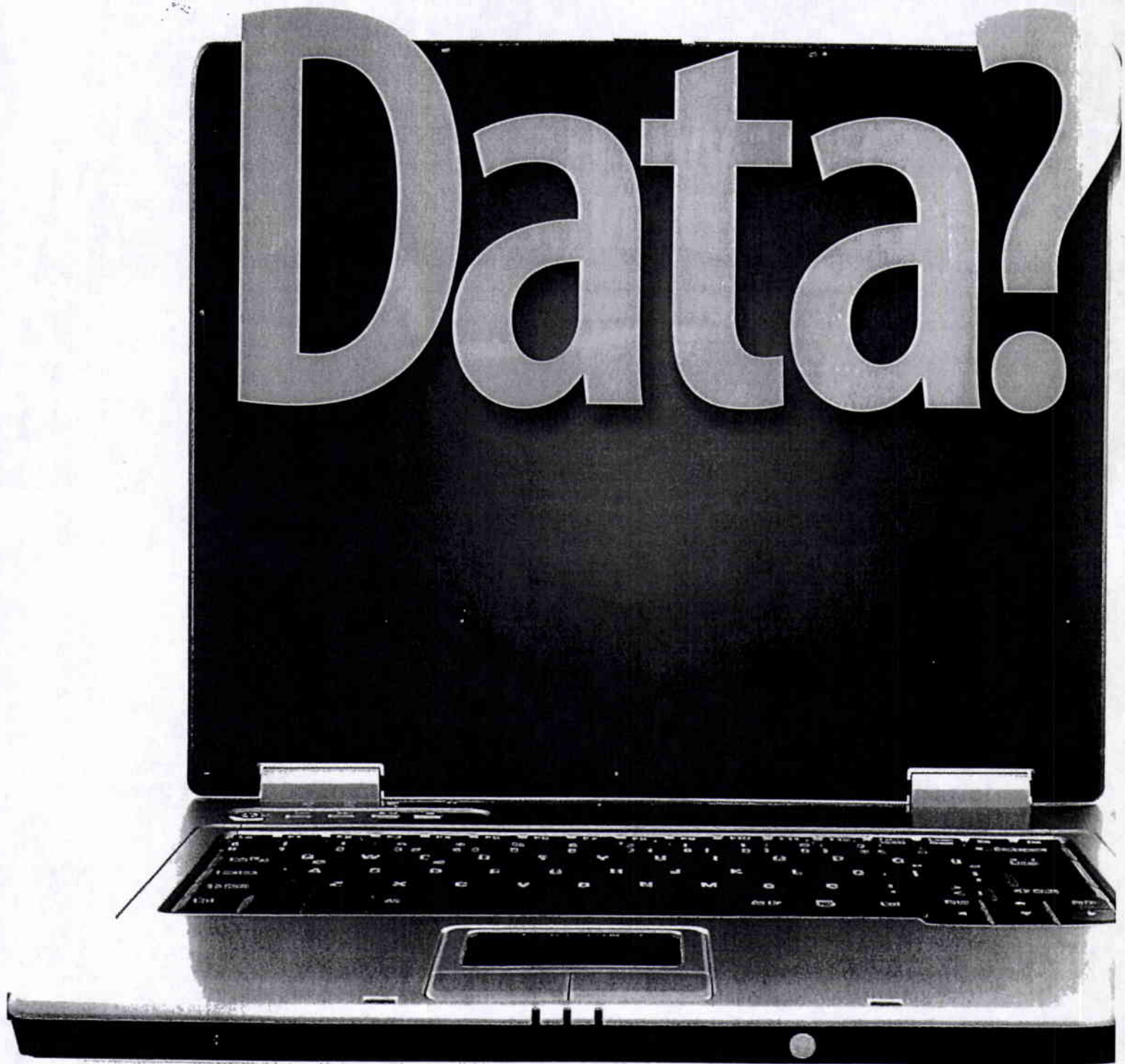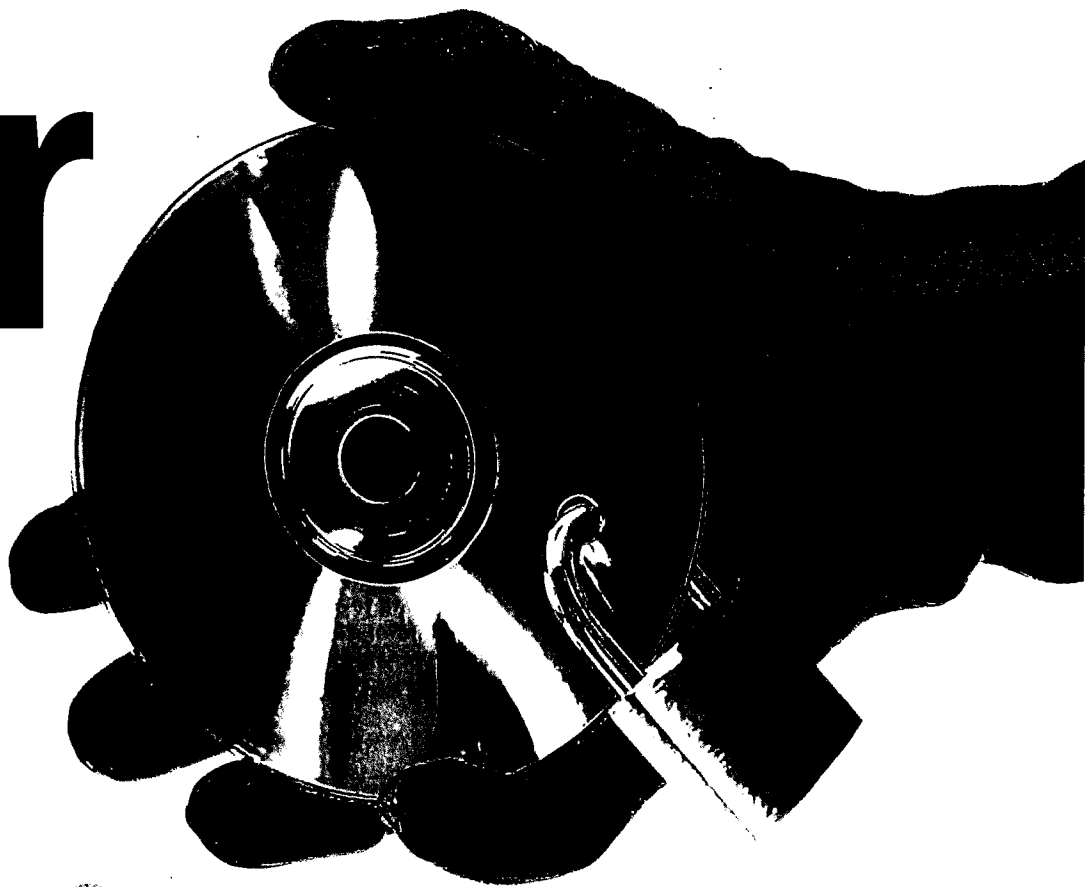# Pennsylvania TownshipNews

MARCH 2010 ◾ www.psats.org

Protecting Your Data

What Townships Can Do To **Secure** Their Computers

How Safe is Data?

Your

Simple Steps Can Help **Protect Your Township** from **Computer Crime**

BY JENNIFER L. HAWBAKER / ASSISTANT EDITOR

E-MAIL. ONLINE BANKING. LAPTOP COMPUTERS.

The very things that make the workday easier can also open townships up to a whole new world of crime. The good news, as Benjamin Franklin proclaimed, is that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Townships, whether they have one computer or 100, can take plenty of steps to make sure their information systems — and processes — are safe and secure.

COMPUTER SECURITY

Protecting township data requires more than setting up a secure Internet connection. Information can also be lost or stolen when employees take laptops out of the office to work off-site. Developing written policies and providing regular security training can help prevent such problems.
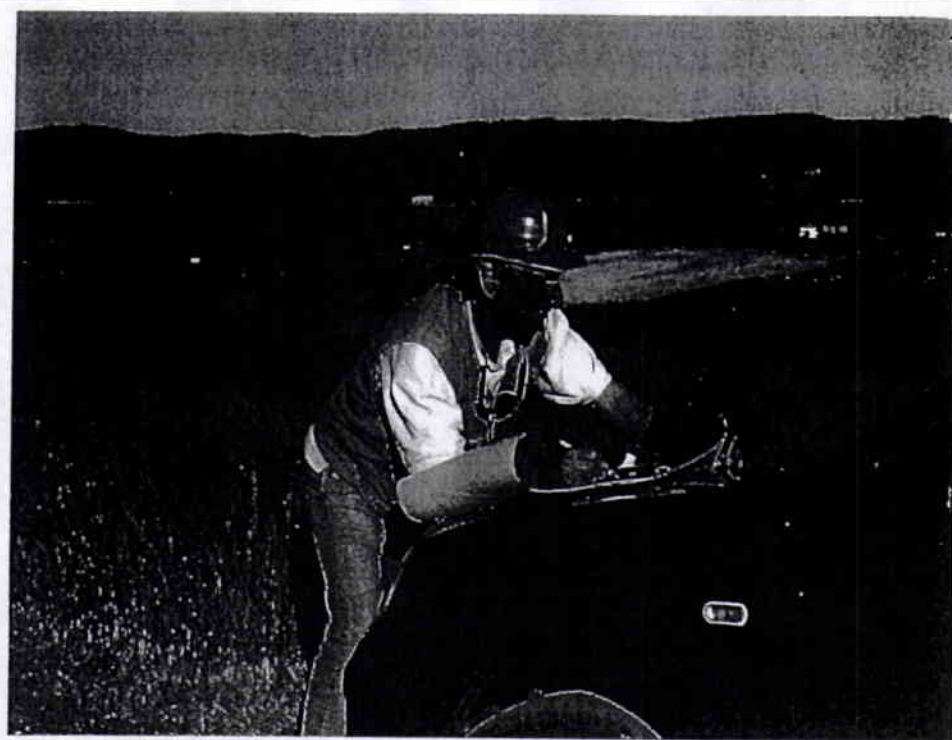
$102,000.

That's how much Monroe Township in Cumberland County lost to cyberthieves last October when they hacked into the township's bank account. The damage could have been worse, but the bank was able to recover a reported $36,000.

"We had a phone call from a bank in another state saying they were receiving a deposit that looked odd," secretary-treasurer Marge Metzger says. "We contacted our bank and froze all of our accounts, then we notified the State Police, and then the FBI got involved."

Monroe Township is far from alone. The headlines are filled with news of computer crimes against individuals, government offices, and even huge corporations. Just a month before the township's theft, in fact, the Cumberland County Redevelopment Authority lost more than $479,000 to hackers. (More than $109,000 of that had been recovered when the News went to press.)

In that case, the crooks used a computer virus to record staff's computer keystrokes. They learned the authority's bank access code, broke into the account, and directed staff to a phony Web site that said the online banking system was temporarily unavailable due to maintenance.

"That's the really intelligent piece of that theft," says Bryan Gembusia, a supervisor for South Middleton township in Cumberland County and a computer consultant. "Having that fake Web site gave the bad guys time to make the transfers before anyone knew what was happening."

In Monroe Township, however, Metzger says no one can yet confirm how the hackers broke into the bank account there.

"It's hard to take the proper procedures to prevent it when you don't know where or how it occurred," Metzger says. "We're having a lot of discussions with the bank, and we have installed additional security software on our computers as an added protection."

The township has the right idea. Prevention, the experts say, is a critical component of computer security. Thwarting Internet crime is just one piece of the puzzle, though. There's a lot more to consider when it comes to keeping electronic data safe.

Increasing awareness

In 2008, researchers from Penn State Altoona set out to assess the security of information systems and processes in municipalities statewide. Their focus was on rural Pennsylvania, but they also collected data from urban and suburban areas for comparison.

"Before the project, people didn't know exactly what municipalities were doing right or wrong," says Jungwoo Ryoo, Ph.D., one of the researchers and an assistant professor of information sciences and technology. "This pinpointed both strengths and weaknesses."

The researchers looked at three areas critical to computer security: infrastructure, computer literacy, and daily
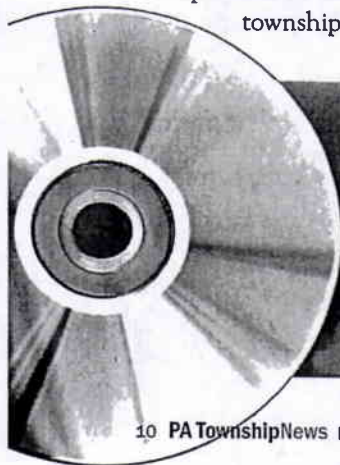
practices. Their findings appear in a report published last year through The Center for Rural Pennsylvania (*see box on Page 18*), and some are not surprising. For instance, budget, manpower, and a lack of knowledge can all contribute to less-than-optimum security levels.

"A lot of times, people have *computer* literacy but not *security* literacy," Ryoo says. "You can buy the technology to secure the system, but if people aren't using the technology correctly, it's almost good for nothing."

The report does more than detail security problems, however. It also suggests some simple — and even no-cost — solutions for both local and state government.

"Hopefully, people can learn from our report and make some improvements," says Charlotte McConn, M.S., another of the report's authors. "Right now, there's a lack of awareness of the need for security. Part of what we want to accomplish is educational, and part of it is policy making — increased awareness in the legislature so they can consider funding for security."

Some of the steps township officials can take, the researchers say, include pooling resources to share information technology staff who have security expertise; training staff on security awareness; and developing written policies to enforce sound, daily security practices.

They say that other levels of government can also be part of the solution by providing training, developing a centralized incident management system to track security breaches, and developing a Web site that promotes the exchange of ideas and best practices on IT security in local government.

The researchers hope this survey is just the first of many.

"I think an ideal situation would be

making this a periodic assessment of the different municipalities so we know the progress they're making," Ryoo says. "That's important because this is an area where things are changing all the time."

Tips for staying safe

Is it really worth the time and money it takes to keep up with the moving target of computer security? The answer, from township officials and computer experts alike, is an unequivocal "yes." The consequences of doing nothing range from minor work interruptions to identity theft and high-cost crimes. Here are some examples:

• Computers may be slow or unresponsive, display programs or messages that you haven't seen before, or suddenly run out of disk space or memory. These could be signs of a computer virus or malicious software running in the background.

• Private information about residents, employees, or the township may be stolen, including Social Security numbers, personnel and medical information, and bank account details. Thieves may access the information by hacking into the computer system or stealing a laptop or flash drive (*the floppy disk of the 21st century*) that an employee takes out of the office.

• The township's Web site could be disabled, preventing residents and businesses from finding the information they need.

• Hackers could use your township computer to break into or infect other computers.

The good news is that townships can do plenty to get up to speed on IT security issues and make sure technology is a help, not a hindrance. Turn the page for some tips from the experts interviewed for this article. ➤

COMPUTER SECURITY

1) Hire a reputable computer consultant or vendor to do a security audit for the township.

If they do the job right, they will think like a criminal and act like a criminal to make sure all the right defenses are in place. They will figure out what data is accessible internally from a township computer and externally over the Internet. They may even call the office, posing as a bank employee, and ask for a user name and password, says Tim Grattan, information technology director for the Borough of State College and the Regional Technology Program, a group of six municipal entities that share IT resources. He speaks from experience.

"We feel pretty confident about our work, but we wanted to have someone come in and find holes so we could fix them," Grattan says. "They exposed a number of vulnerabilities, areas that we needed to clean up, and we did that."

The price of an audit depends, of course, on the size of the job, but South Middleton Township's Bryan Gembusia advises local government officials to con-sider more than just the initial expense.

"It might cost $5,000, but if a thief can get into one of the township's computers, he could steal $200,000," Gembusia says. "It's almost like an insurance policy."

2) Install a computer firewall and antivirus software and update the software regularly.

The firewall blocks outsiders from accessing your computer, and everything on it, through an Internet connection, but it has to be configured properly. "If you install it and tell it to let everything through, it's like not having a firewall at all," Gembusia says. "If it's tough enough, however, somebody trying to get in will realize it's too much work and move on."

The antivirus software prevents, detects, and removes a host of bad things from your computer that could compromise data on that machine and on the entire network.

The software won't be much use, however, if you don't update it frequently. Just as the flu virus changes from year to year, computer viruses change, too, and new ones are appearing all the time. Chances are that your software vendor provides free automatic updates to ward off the latest threats.

"A lot of places don't keep their antivirus software updated," Grattan says. "Set it to get those automatic updates; sometimes they come out two or three times a week."

3) Update all software when prompted.

Most other software on the market today will also download regular updates to your computer over the Internet. It takes just a few minutes, costs nothing, and can help protect your information from hackers.

"When vulnerabilities in a program are discovered by criminals, people like Microsoft® are quick to figure out how to close that door," Grattan says. "They come out with a software update that shows up automatically on your computer."

4) Require passwords for computer access.

This is a simple, no-cost, but effective security precaution, Ryoo says. Township employees should have to create strong passwords — one with letters and numbers — and update them

> "If you don't know what **resources are available**, and if you don't know that you're **doing something wrong**, that's when you're **the most vulnerable**."

frequently. "Cracking those simple passwords takes no time," he says. "A password should not be something that could be easily guessed."

Grattan says that passwords should also never be shared. If you will be out of the office and want a coworker to check your e-mail, for example, he says the answer is *not* to share your computer password. Instead, set your e-mail account to forward your messages to that person in your absence.

5) Secure any wireless networks.

If the township is using a wireless network that's not secure, anyone in the area with a computer and the know-how can access your data. Check the setup instructions for your wireless router to learn how to limit access to the network or have a professional do it for you.

"I can open my laptop in almost any neighborhood in town and see who's got a wireless network," Grattan says. "Anyone with bad intentions can maneuver through that. It's like leaving all your windows open before you go to bed. You don't want to do that. Lock up."

Electronic records are subject to retention policies

DATABASES, WORD-PROCESSING FILES, SPREADSHEETS, AND E-MAIL are an intrinsic part of life for many township officials and staff. As with paper records, however, these electronic files must be managed in accordance with Pennsylvania's records retention and disposition schedules, policies, and guidelines.

To make sure your township is in compliance, view the applicable policies at www.phmc.state.pa.us. Click on "Records Management" at the top of the page, then "Local Government/Judicial System Services," and then "Electronic Records" on the left side of the page.

Townships may also contact Sue Hartman at (717) 787-3939 or ra-statearchives@state.pa.us.

6) Back up your files regularly.

In its "Local Government Cyber Security" guide, the Multi-State Information Sharing and Analysis Center recommends doing incremental data backups daily. Full backups should be done weekly, it says, and then stored off-site.

Matt Dallas, president of the municipal software company Dallas Data Systems in Pottstown, suggests a more aggressive plan. "We would recommend daily backups to some type of external device," he says, "but townships should consult with their information technology provider."

7) Develop a written procedure for disposing of and destroying old equipment — and follow it.

Hard drives, storage disks, flash
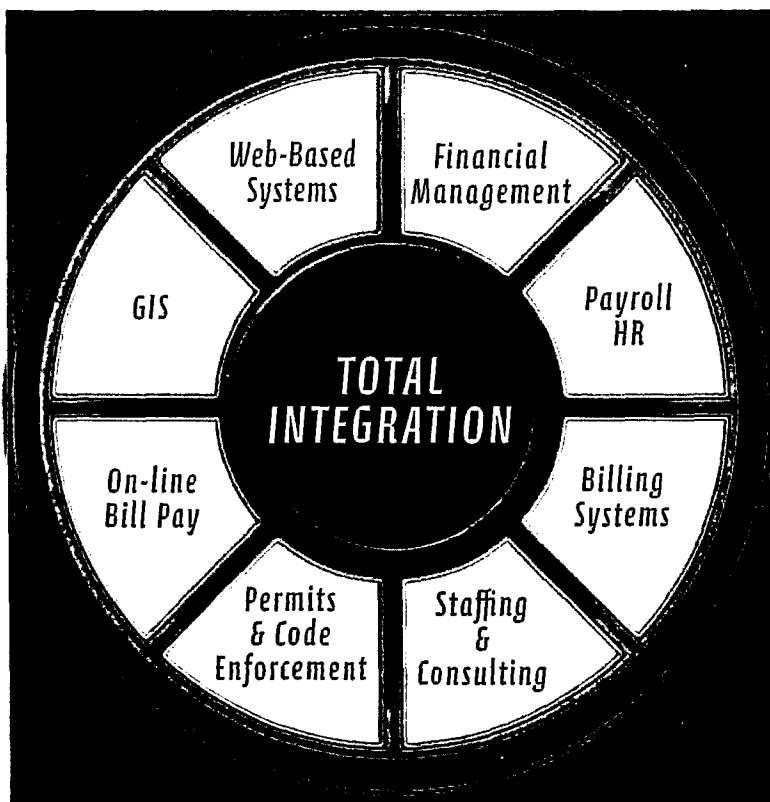
COMPUTER SECURITY

drives, backup tapes — all electronic media need to be disposed of properly (*and in accordance with the state's record retention schedule*). That means doing more than just erasing files and throwing this media into the trash. Even if you can't see a file name, it's still accessible to those who know where to look.

"These things should be electronically and physically destroyed," Grattan says. "You should be able to guarantee that none of the data from your organization is going to show up on the Internet if someone buys the equipment at auction."

Grattan's office spends a few hundred dollars to have an outside company dispose of about 50 hard drives a year, he says. Most townships could expect to spend much less.

8) Determine who can access what information on the township's

Every piece of a township's financial, personnel, and other information would very likely fit onto a portable storage device such as this flash drive. Supervisors and managers, as well as staff, should understand the capabilities, and potential security risks, of all technology devices in the township — and then work to prevent any problems.

computers. Change access levels as necessary and prohibit employees from installing software.

As more people have access to sensitive data, it's more likely to be misused

or compromised, either internally or externally. Also, not everyone needs to have "administrator" privileges on the computer. These allow for system modifications that could invite harmful soft-
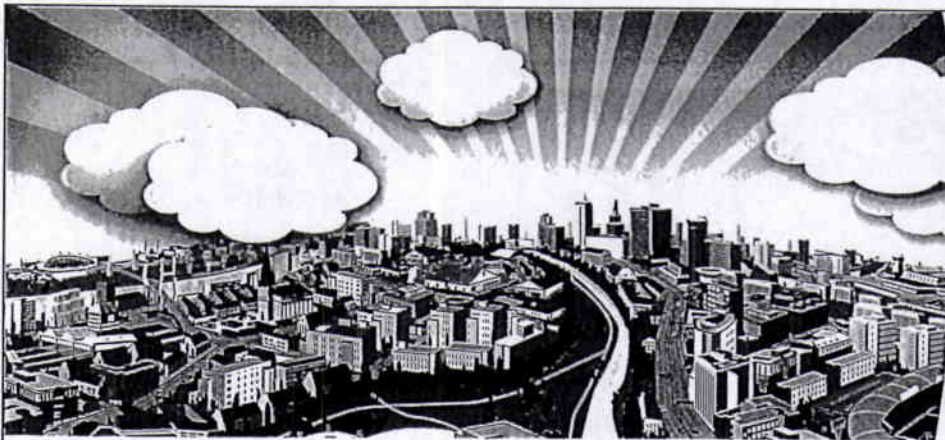
COMPUTER SECURITY

ware installations or data destruction by disgruntled employees.

Even something as innocent as downloading a new screen-saver can invite trouble, Grattan says. "If you were a person writing malicious code, you would want to wrap that in something pretty, in a package that somebody wants," he says. "Meanwhile, the back end of that download is capturing all your keystrokes and uploading them to a server somewhere, and you don't know that. All you know is that you have a neat screensaver."

Systems should also be updated when employees or interns leave the township to prevent them from accessing data.

9) Control off-site computer use and remote network access.

Township employees are known for being diligent and dedicated, and sometimes, that means taking work home. When they're using a township laptop or connecting to the office network remotely, however, security becomes an issue.

"If you take your work computer home and then hook it up to the Internet at home," Ryoo says, "your township security is breached."

Security is also a concern when employees access the township's computer network from home. In both cases, Ryoo and Grattan agree that alerting employees to potential issues is a good preventive measure.

"I've talked to our employees about the fact that their family is also using that computer," Grattan says, "and there's a certain amount of responsibility on the end-user side. They need to know that they have the keys to our network there."

10) Sign confidentiality and security agreements with anyone who works on the township's computers.

Include details on what they can and cannot do while working on the system. Samples are available online, Grattan says, and it's a good idea to have the township solicitor review the documents, too.

11) Require employee education on safe computing.

Classes should teach computer users what to watch out for, how their actions can affect IT security in the township, and how to prevent problems. Check out courses offered through PSATS, other government and computer industry groups, local colleges and universities, and private businesses. (*See the sidebar on Page 11 for information on the computer security workshop to be held in conjunction with PSATS' Annual Conference.*)

Plenty of information is also available online. (*See the sidebar at left for some informative Web sites.*) Also, Wombat™ Security Technologies offers a free training tool, developed at Car-

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> ## "A lot of times, people have *computer* literacy but not *security* literacy."

LOOK FOR ANSWERS ONLINE

Web offers a wealth of computer security tips

Isn't it ironic? The Internet, the gateway for significant threats to computer security, is also a great place to find information on protecting computer security. Check out these resources and learn how to prevent technology trouble in your township:

The Pennsylvania Information Security Office
- Offers two guides for free download — "Local Government Cyber Security: Getting Started, a Non-Technical Guide," and "Beginners Guide to Firewalls."
- Log onto **www.cybersecurity.state.pa.us**, click on "Local Government" on the left side of the screen, and scroll down to the links.

The Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office
- Offers a long list of valuable information on data security.
- Log onto **www.attorneygeneral.gov** and click on "Consumers" and then "Identity Theft Toolkit." Choose from the links on the right side of the screen.

The Multi-State Information Sharing and Analysis Center
- Provides for two-way information sharing between and among states *(including Pennsylvania)* and local government.
- The center's local government page offers an "Internet and Acceptable Use" Policy template and guides to erasing and disposing of electronic media, data backups, and responding to online incidents.
- To view this and other useful information, log onto **www.mslsac. org/localgov.**

Federal Bureau of Investigation
- Provides information on how to prevent crimes involving the Internet, identity theft, fraud, and more.
- Log onto **www.fbi.gov/becrimesmart.htm** and scroll down to view the options.

COMPUTER SECURITY

negie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, that helps employees identify and avoid potentially dangerous Web sites. (*See the sidebar on Page 20.*)

12) Set up banking procedures and controls.

The shock wave from last year's municipal bank account break-ins traveled across the state. In Centre County, it spurred the six municipalities that share IT resources through the Regional Technology Program to take a close look at their financial processes.

"All townships need to look at the controls they have in place," says Robert Long, CPA, the finance director for College Township in Centre County. "They also need to talk with their banks about what kinds of products they have to reduce the risk of fraud."

In his office, Long says, only a few

people are authorized to do online banking for the township. Plus, when one person initiates a transfer of funds, someone else must review and release it.

Grattan suggests that townships

READ ALL ABOUT IT

Survey assesses municipal computer security

In 2008, researchers from Penn State Altoona set out to assess the security of information systems and processes in municipalities statewide. Their focus was on rural Pennsylvania, but they also collected data from urban and suburban areas for comparison.

The resulting report, "An Information Systems Security Readiness Assessment for Municipalities in Rural Pennsylvania," details the strengths and weaknesses they found in the areas of infrastructure, computer literacy, and daily practices. It also offers suggestions for improvements.

To view the report, published through the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, log onto **www.ruralpa.org**. Click on "Publications" and then "Reports" and scroll down to the link under "Reports." A limited supply of hard copies is available by calling the center at (717) 787-9555.

determine the maximum amount they will ever have to transfer from an account in one day. Then, make sure that's the highest transfer your bank will allow. "By lowering that amount,

Address computer liability concerns with policies, training

While computer technology opens up a whole new world of information access, storage, and retrieval for townships, it also opens up some potential liability issues. Following are some possible areas of concern that township officials may want to address in written policies:

• **E-mail** — With the click of a button, you can send your words to anyone who has an e-mail account. It doesn't stop there, though. That person can forward your e-mail to others, and so on and so on. Pretty soon, your clever comment about a coworker can travel the globe — and that's not an exaggeration.

"Most people are more casual in their e-mail communications than in formal business correspondence," says Angela Thomas, Esq., a shareholder with the Mechanicsburg law firm of Latsha Davis Yohe & McKenna, P.C. "If they've become lax in their sensitivity to what they should and should not be communicating, if it becomes harassing or discriminatory, the employer can be responsible."

• **Social networking** — Many of the same concerns hold true for social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace, where you can post words, pictures, videos, and music for easy access by others. Sometimes, those postings offer a negative view of employers and coworkers or even discuss confidential information.

"This brings up the issue of the rights of employees to be talking about workplace concerns online," says Kevin Gold, Esq., a partner with the Harrisburg law firm of Rhoads & Sinon, LLP. "Employers are developing policies for proper use of these sites now. The message is that people need to think very clearly and carefully before they post something."

• **Downloads** — Copyright infringement and licensing violations may come into play if an employee is downloading files over the Internet onto a work computer, Thomas says. Illegal music sharing is a good example.

"When employees have the ability to use their employers' computer systems, they can expose the employers to various risks," she adds.

• **Equipment** — The office has become mobile thanks to the use of laptops and tiny devices that store tons of data, such as flash drives. While these are easy to transport between home and work, they can be lost or stolen along the way.

"The simple rule is 'don't take data off-site other than for a normal backup rotation,'" says Matt Dallas, president of Dallas Data Systems, a municipal software company in Pottstown. "I think employees and management really need to be conscious of what they are removing from the township and what the potential consequences are. They have to understand that it's a big responsibility."

Have a policy

Everyone who works with township equipment and data has a big responsibility, of course. Thomas and Gold suggest that township officials take two simple steps to drive that point home: Create a
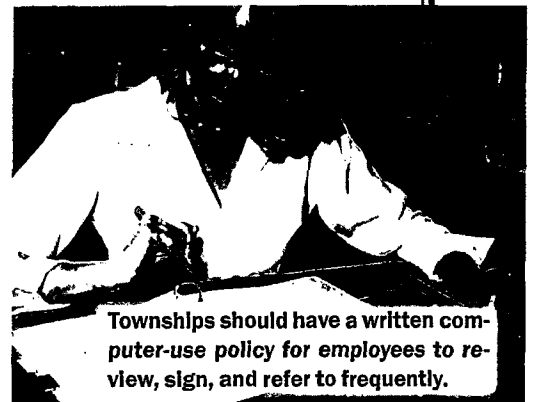
Townships should have a written computer-use policy for employees to review, sign, and refer to frequently.

policy and train all employees.

Policies should remind staff of what can be considered harassing, discriminatory, defamatory, or even libelous communication, no matter what the format or whether it's in an e-mail or posted online.

Policies should also state clearly what employees may and may not do on their computers at work, from accessing the Internet to using personal e-mail and downloading software. Spelling it out upfront can help prevent problems down the road.

It's a good idea, Gold says, to create broad policies that cover any type of electronic communication that would be used for work, including cell phones and the dangerous practice of texting while driving. "The problem from the employer's perspective is that you're trying to anticipate what's going to happen," he says. "Sometimes it's hard for employers to keep up."

Every policy, of course, should undergo a legal review before it is finalized. Check with your township solicitor or contact an attorney who specializes in employment law.

you will be decreasing your exposure if you do get hit," he explains.

Diligence is another key security precaution, Long adds. "Each and every day, we sign onto our online bank account and look at all the transactions to ensure that nothing looks unusual," he says. "It takes a little bit of time, but we find it to be well worth it. There are more benefits than just reducing fraud. We also catch things earlier, too — for instance, if someone bounced a check."

13) Find out if your township has computer fraud insurance.

A township's general crime insurance policy might also cover computer fraud. If it doesn't, consider adding it. And if it does, Long says, make sure the coverage is adequate.

"The cost to increase our coverage limit to a substantial amount was not that great," he adds.

It pays to address other computer security needs first, though, because the insurer will want to know what steps the township has taken to protect its information. "The more controls you have in place, the lower the risk for the insurance company," Long says. "Our approach was to increase our controls and then to protect ourselves further with the insurance."

Ongoing attention

That protection starts, however, with knowledge — the first line of defense when it comes to computer security.

"If you don't know what resources are available, and if you don't know that you're doing something wrong," Gembusia of South Middleton Township says, "that's when you're the most vulnerable."

He urges all townships to establish a relationship with a helpful computer

BEWARE OF SCAMMERS

Online tool can teach townships how to keep 'phishers' at bay, computers safe

With new technology come new crime and a new vocabulary, it seems. One of the most pervasive Internet scams in recent years, "phishing," can lead to identity theft and significant monetary losses.

In "phishing" scams, an unsolicited e-mail generally asks you to click a link that appears to be for a legitimate business, such as your bank. The link, however, actually leads to a phony Web site. It may look just like the real one but exists only to collect sensitive information such as user names, passwords, and credit card details.

Fortunately, there are some ways to tell a fraudulent Web site from the real one based on the URL, or Web address. An online tool developed by a team from Carnegie Mellon University, the founders of Wombat™ Security Technologies, can help you do that.

Anti-Phishing Phil™ offers two levels of free training online. On the screen, an animated fish swims around looking for worms to eat. Web addresses, some real and some not, appear where the worms are, and the fish (you) needs to decide whether they're legitimate, and therefore edible, or whether they're bogus and must be rejected.

The U.S. State Department recently licensed its use for its 55,000 employees worldwide.

To use Anti-Phishing Phil and learn how to recognize potentially malicious Web sites, log onto **http://wombatsecurity.com** and click on the link for Anti-Phishing Phil.

FROM WOMBAT™ SECURITY TECHNOLOGIES AT HTTP://WOMBATSECURITY.COM

Anti-Phishing Phil™, an online game from Wombat™ Security Technologies, teaches you how to recognize Web site addresses that could damage your computer and lead to identity theft.

vendor and remember that computer security is not a once-and-done thing. Like most aspects of township government, it requires regular attention if you want to achieve the best results.

"It's no different than with the vehicles or infrastructure we have to maintain," Gembusia says. "You can't just pave a road and forget about it for 20 years. You really have to stay on top of it." ✦

"You can buy the technology to secure the system, but if people aren't using the technology correctly, it's almost good for nothing."

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JANUARY 2011 ■ www.psats.org

Engaging
YOUR
Residents

How Townships Can Better
Connect with **Citizens**

Create a Task Force

Meet for Coffee

Start a Community Facebook Page

Reeling Residents In

To Get the Public Engaged, Experts Say Townships Need to **Bait** a Lot of **Hooks**

PHOTO COURTESY OF YOUNG TOWNSHIP, INDIANA COUNTY

One effective strategy for engaging the public is to put yourself out there. Experts encourage township officials to hold informal meetings with residents and to be a visible presence at community events.

Hold Informal Meetings

Meet with Residents on Their Turf

Visit Public Parks

Do a Township Newsletter

BY **JILL ERCOLINO** / MANAGING EDITOR

LIKE YOU, YOUR RESIDENTS ARE BUSY,

and they're being pushed and pulled in many directions. Hectic lifestyles are forcing them to make choices. Unfortunately, many are choosing not to be engaged in their community. So what can you, as a township official, do? The key is to create opportunities – interactive opportunities, from task forces and coffee circles to Facebook pages and e-mail blasts – that draw residents in and make it easy for them to step up and participate. As one expert says: "Open the door and they will come."

By providing meeting space for community groups and serving as an election polling place, townships can start building positive relationships with residents of all ages. Newsletters, web sites, and Facebook pages are other avenues for reaching out to all of the people who call your township home.

PHOTO COURTESY OF NEW GARDEN TOWNSHIP, CHESTER COUNTY
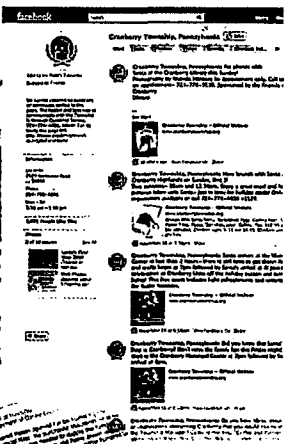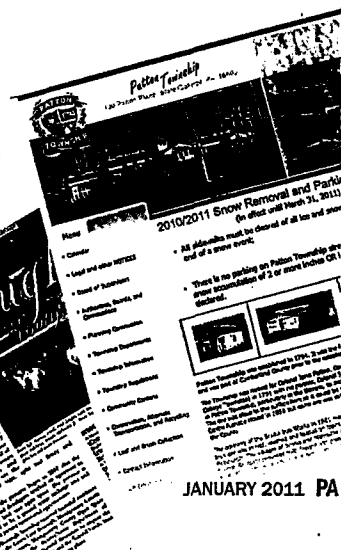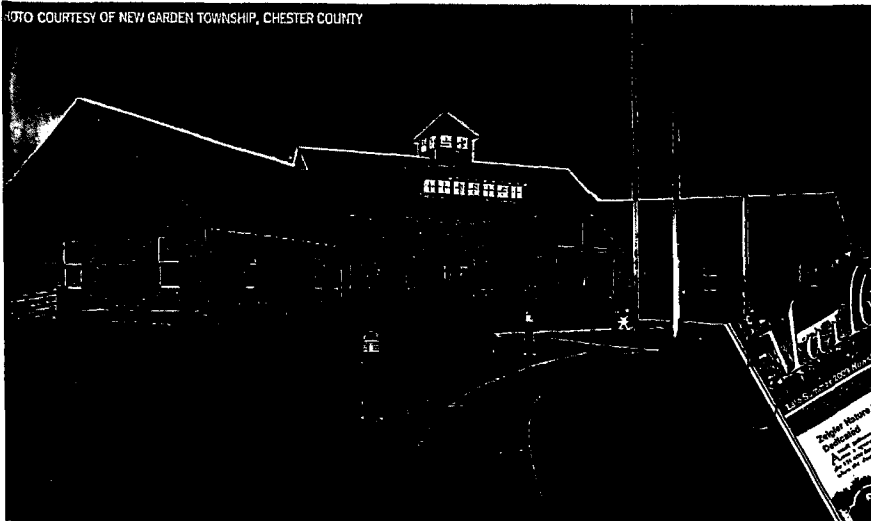
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The whole idea, experts say, is for you and your fellow township officials to reach out to a cross-section of constituents and develop a network of people focused on learning more about their community, bettering it, and exchanging rational ideas, not angry words.

That, they say, is what citizen engagement is all about.

A shrinking planning commission sends a clear message to Sandy Wright: Residents are too busy, too distracted with other things, to serve their community.

"In the last four years, we've had to trim our planning commission down from nine to seven and then to five just to be able to get a quorum," says the secretary for Greene Township in Beaver County.

It's a challenge, too, to get help planning and manning township events, including the upcoming bicentennial celebration and the annual South Side Community Day, which has been canceled next year because no one has volunteered to lay the groundwork.

"We've asked and asked," Wright says, "but it's hard to get people involved.

"They do tell us they want township government to continue because they see us as the only level of government that helps them," she adds. "They just don't want to be the one to step up and participate."

A similar scenario is playing out in Montgomery Township in Montgomery County.

There, participation in its Citizens University, a once-popular program devised to educate residents about township operations, has dwindled, public information coordinator Stacy Crandell says.

Convened once a week for seven weeks, the program opened a lot of eyes to the effectiveness of local government and swayed many residents to get involved. Interest, however, has died off in recent years, forcing the township to put the university on hold, Crandell says.

"We like to have at least five people sign up, but it's been a struggle getting those five," she says. "It's hard for residents to find the time. They have trouble committing to seven weeks."

Wright has seen this indifference elsewhere: The pews at church aren't as full as they used to be either. The way she sees it, God and government are taking a backseat to other pursuits.

"People's lives are so full these days," Wright observes, "and the ones who aren't busy doing things away from home are glued to their computers playing on Facebook."

Apathy, mistrust replacing unity

It's frustrating, right?

Here you are, a township official

who is trying to do the right things and make the best decisions for your community. You want your residents to be interested and involved in what's happening. After all, this is the place they have chosen to live and raise their families.

They should be invested in the township.

They should care.

But when you need help, you can't get it. When you ask for input and opinions, you're met with dead silence. And at township meetings, where you're contemplating important issues — issues that will impact many of your neighbors — you often find yourself talking to rows of empty seats or the same three or four familiar faces.

And on those occasions when a crowd does show up, it's often there to point fingers and gripe and grumble. There is no meaningful give and take, just lots of angry words thrown around.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a community as "a unified body of individuals," but that's a rare bird these days. Unity, it seems, has been replaced with apathy. In lots of townships, residents simply aren't engaged.

But why? Experts say one reason is the public has too many other things on its plate.

"We're all busy," says Pat Haggerty, a political pundit and grassroots motivator

who spoke at PSATS' Annual Conference last year. "There are only 24 hours in a day, and we all have to make decisions: Am I going to do this or am I going to do that?"

Many people, as it turns out, are taking a pass on their civic duties.

"We often look at voting as the ultimate form of engagement, and those numbers have never been real high," says Bev Cigler, Ph.D., a professor of public policy and administration at Penn State Harrisburg. "Nationally, voter turnout rarely gets above 50 percent."

Just take a look at last November's election. Every night on the news, people across the nation were screaming

Community has been defined as "a unified body of individuals," but unity has been replaced with apathy in many places. Why? Experts say one reason is the public has too many other things on its plate. Busy lives that include families, jobs, and other distractions make people less inclined to get involved in their township.

for change. Still, the governor's race and Pennsylvania's widely publicized face-off between Pat Toomey and Joe Sestak for the U.S. Senate weren't enough to get people to the polls. More than half of the commonwealth's 8.5 million registered voters opted to stay home, the Harrisburg Patriot-News reports.

A full calendar, though, is only one piece of the disengagement puzzle.

Nationwide polls suggest that the public is also harboring a lot of anger, mistrust, and skepticism about government, particularly the federal government. Researchers say much of this resentment stems from the dismal economy and Washington's inability to

"People's lives are so full these days, and the ones who aren't busy doing things away from home are glued to their computers playing on Facebook."

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quickly pull Americans out of the Great Recession.

"By almost every conceivable measure, Americans are less positive and more critical of government these days," the folks at the Pew Research Center say.

According to an April 2010 Pew survey, just 22 percent of those polled felt they could trust the federal government, and a mere 25 percent expressed a favorable opinion of Congress. The numbers represent some of the lowest ratings for both in the survey's history, Pew researchers say.

Although local government is often viewed in a much more positive light, Cigler says these ill feelings can trickle down to the municipal level and give residents another reason to divorce themselves from their communities.

"In opinion polls, local government often scores higher than state and federal government, but local leaders still encounter that skepticism," she says. "The public is frustrated. The economy is in the toilet. We've got a country full of angry people." *(For more about the public's positive view of local government, turn to the sidebar on Page 14.)*

Cigler's Penn State colleague, Kathy Brasier, Ph.D., agrees that this turbulence is changing the landscape.

"Things are different, and people are divided," says Brasier, an assistant professor of rural sociology who co-wrote a how-to guide on developing effective citizen engagement for The Center for Rural Pennsylvania. "We've got big problems that we haven't figured out how to deal with yet."

Given this unsettling state of affairs, she concludes that "we need public participation now more than ever." *(To learn more about the center's publication, Developing Effective Citizen Engagement: A How-To Guide for Community Leaders, see the sidebar on the opposite page.)*

So how do you, as a township official on the front lines, turn things around and get engaged with those segments of your community that are disinterested and disenchanted?

"People get passionate about national and state issues, and **they forget about local government,** but that is where we see **the most impact on our lives.**"

— *Supervisor Josh Troxell*
Patton Twp., Centre Co.

Well, successful local leaders will tell you to start with good old-fashioned communication and a willingness to listen, learn, and look beyond the obvious. These things can go an awfully long way toward breaking down barriers and building up public trust, support, and interest in the community.

The key, they have found, is to create opportunities — interactive opportunities, from task forces and coffee circles to Facebook pages and e-mail blasts — that draw residents in and make it easy for them to step up and participate.

"Open the door," Cigler says, "and they will come."

Are you only getting half the story?

Josh Troxell is a supervisor for Patton Township in Centre County. Before taking office in 2008, however, he was a chemical engineering major at Penn State who, as president of the Undergraduate Student Government, encouraged his peers to get involved in local government.

Why? Because that's where the rubber really hits the road.

"People get passionate about national and state issues, and they forget about local government," he says, "but that is where we see the most impact on our lives."

Troxell points to the Borough of

State College as an example. "There are 40,000 undergraduates in the borough — they spend 75 percent of their time there — and a lot of the issues that are being decided affect them."

Still, when he and his fellow students would approach borough leaders with their concerns — student safety on dark streets was a big one — Troxell felt the officials were tuning them out. Rather than shrug his shoulders and give up, though, he became even more politically active. At 29, he launched a campaign to unseat the borough's long-time mayor.

"We ran a great campaign," he says, "but we lost."

Soon after, Troxell moved to nearby Patton Township, where he ran a successful bid to become one of five supervisors.

He says his experiences with certain blasé elected officials have shaped the kind of local leader he is today. It's all spelled out on the business card that he hands out to constituents. At the top are three bold-faced words: unity, accessibility, and accountability.

"Those are the three principles that every public servant should strive for," Troxell says. "Elected officials should be serving the people, all of the people. Their job is to bring everyone in the community — *everyone* — together."

In many places, though, it's a vocal minority — the select few who call the office or are regulars at public meetings — that is helping to shape local policies and decisions.

"If this is what is happening in your township, you're only hearing from one side," grassroots motivator Pat Haggerty says. "You're only getting half the story, half the opinions."

Listening and learning

The whole idea, experts say, is for you and your fellow township officials to reach out to a cross-section of constituents and develop a network of people focused on learning more about their community, bettering it, and exchanging rational ideas, not angry words.

That, they say, is what citizen engagement is all about: Creating an atmosphere in your township where people feel invited to participate, where you have shown — not just said — that the door is open and that their input

ENCOURAGING ENGAGEMENT

Successful communities share some common characteristics

Increasing public engagement requires expanding the connections that tie the community together. According to *Developing Effective Citizen Engagement: A How-To Guide for Community Leaders*, published by The Center for Rural Pennsylvania, successful efforts share the following characteristics:

• **Inclusivity:** Past experiences, lack of knowledge, and cultural context can limit involvement by some groups. Township officials need to reach out to sections of the community that have not participated in the past and might not at first seem to be fertile ground for recruitment.

• **Diversity:** All members of the community need to participate to represent different viewpoints and interests. Viewpoints that seem unconventional sometimes turn out to hold the seed of a solution.

• **Equality:** Everyone participates on an equal basis. It should be clear that a small group does not control the decisions. Leaders need to ensure that open discussion occurs and all ideas are treated with respect.

• **Transparency:** The work of the community group needs to be open. Important roles cannot be reserved for those in charge. Public communication about the project needs to be clear and consistent.

• **Legitimacy:** Decisions made by the group need to be justified to all. Describe how all participants had input into the final decision.

• **Deliberation:** Create an environment that encourages people to share but also allows the group to prioritize some ideas. The process should lead to consensus.
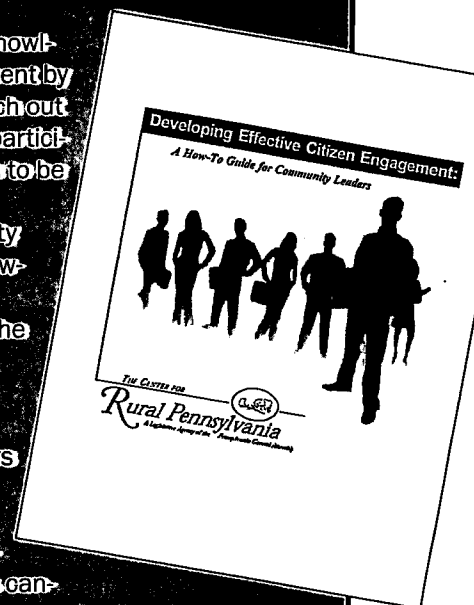
• **Substance:** Create opportunities for learning and using that knowledge in group discussions.

• **Influence:** The outcome of the process needs to influence community decisions and policymaking. Local decisionmakers should show their support early in the project. Leaders need to engage citizens as early as possible and support their continued involvement.

• **Ongoing:** The process should consist of more than one meeting and allow participants time to think about the issue before making decisions.

• **Accommodating:** Provide opportunities for people to gather in multiple places and at multiple times that are convenient for them. Remember that not everyone who wants to contribute can attend meetings at night, during the day, or in only one part of the community.

To download the guidebook, log onto www.rural.palegislature.us. Go to "Publications" and choose "Reports." Under the heading "Community and Economic Development," scroll down to find the publication title. Townships without Internet access may contact the center for a copy at (717) 787-9555.

Developing Effective Citizen Engagement:
A How-To Guide for Community Leaders

The Center for
Rural Pennsylvania

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and actions can make a difference.

Experts say that local leaders who make the effort to connect with constituents will reap many benefits, including:

- ample volunteers, ready and willing to serve on boards and help with events;
- access to a range of views to help you make informed decisions; and
- more voices to support local government when Harrisburg wants to do such things as force municipal mergers

and charge for State Police coverage. *(To learn how to motivate residents to be grassroots advocates for townships and how PSATS' Townships Today newsletter can help, turn to the sidebar on Page 19.)*

"True engagement occurs when citizens and officials listen to and learn from each other, working together over time to address issues or problems they believe are important," says Karen Thoreson, president of the Alliance for Innovation, an Arizona-based international network of local government officials committed to building stronger communities.

"It can be a transforming thing," she adds, "but local leaders need to commit to the notion that there is value to engagement. If they do, they will be building relationships that pay dividends over the long haul."

Just ask the officials in South Middleton Township, Cumberland County, where the creation of a Citizens Advisory Task Force has led to an outpouring of positive interest in the community. The task force, a group of 20 residents, was culled from every corner of the township and includes professionals, senior citizens, and stay-at-home moms.

"It's a good group," supervisor Duff Manweiler says, emphasizing that he and his colleagues deliberately appointed forthright people. "We didn't want a bunch of 'yes' people. We wanted conversations; we wanted opinions."

Township manager Barb Wilson says the task force was formed several years ago when it became clear at township meetings that the public really didn't understand local government. At the time, she adds, feedback from residents was spotty, too. Like most municipalities, South Middleton would send out surveys, but the results offered little insight.

"You can only write so much on a piece of paper," Wilson says. And the supervisors and staff yearned for more. "We're very concerned about residents and how they feel. We wanted to get face to face and talk about what's important to them."

She's glad the township made the effort. The task force has proven to be an invaluable source of information and assistance. "It has just worked out very well," Wilson says. "It clicked."

The members' input, for instance, has guided the township supervisors' decisions and led to the creation of an annual senior citizen expo. This event reaches a segment of the community that was being overlooked — something the township didn't realize until the task force was convened. The group also provided many helping hands during South Middleton's 200th anniversary celebration last summer.

One of the task force's most important roles, though, is that of goodwill ambassador. Wilson says the members take it upon themselves to spread accurate information to their friends and neighbors about the supervisors' decisions and township programs and services.

"It's always there helping us," she says. ➤

Pennsylvanians give high marks to local government in recent polls

Two recent surveys have confirmed what PSATS and its members have known all along: Pennsylvanians trust their local governments.

The studies were conducted by the Allegheny Forum, an arm of the Pittsburgh Foundation designed to gather meaningful feedback about municipal government and services, and Susquehanna Polling & Research, a Harrisburg-based public opinion polling firm.

In each, participants gave high marks to townships and their municipal counterparts.

"Township government works and is valued," PSATS Executive Director David M. Sanko says. "These studies and many others before them prove that. So now that Pennsylvanians have spoken — again — I wonder when the 'bigger-is-better crowd' is going to get the message?"

Data for the Allegheny Forum's 2010 survey was collected through a series of random phone calls, public gatherings, and online polls and forums. Of the more than 2,860 participants, nearly half, or 47 percent, said they trusted their township, city, and borough officials to make the best taxing and spending decisions. Far fewer said they would trust their county (27 percent) and the state (26 percent).

The findings were similar in the survey conducted by Susquehanna Polling & Research on PSATS' behalf. Those responding to the October 2010 telephone poll indicated that they had more faith and confidence in local government (27 percent) than in state (12 percent), federal (15 percent), and county government (11 percent).

"So now that **Pennsylvanians have spoken — again —** I wonder when the 'bigger-is-better crowd' is **going to get the message?**"

— David M. Sanko,
PSATS Executive Director

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"We found that our residents like to be engaged...that they want to be involved."

Think like a fisherman

Thoreson says communities like South Middleton Township are on the right track, and her organization, the Alliance for Innovation, hopes that more local leaders across the country follow their lead.

The alliance recently released a white paper, *Connecting Communities: Local Governments as a Partner in Citizen Engagement and Community Building,* that encourages local governments to build a deeper dialogue and connection with their constituents.

For a free copy of the white paper, log onto the alliance's website, www. transformgov.org.

"Local government is in the best position to connect with the people," Thoreson says, "and that gives it a huge advantage [over state and federal government], but it's something that officials shouldn't take for granted.

"Yes, they get calls at home, but they also have the ability to mobilize the public for the greater good of the community."

Experts stress, though, that meaningful relationships with residents, ones that produce real results, don't happen overnight. In essence, you're on a mission to build public trust in government — your government. And that's going to take time, effort, and a little creativity.

Sure, it may seem daunting, especially if like most township officials, you're overwhelmed with too many projects and too little time to accomplish them.

You might also be skeptical if you've tried to engage residents before — maybe you have put announcements in your newsletter or on your website — and your calls for help may have fallen on deaf ears.

The time has come then to re-evaluate what you're doing to draw people in and how you're doing it.

Newsletters and websites are great tools for conveying information about meetings and upcoming events, but many of your constituents may not be reading them or logging on. On top of that, newsletters and most websites don't promote interaction, the whole goal behind engaging the public.

"It's a one-way flow of information when what you're really looking for is give and take," Penn State's Kathy Brasier says.

That doesn't mean you have to scrap your traditional ways of communicating with residents — not at all — but it does mean you have to look beyond the tried and true and approach public engagement like a fisherman.

Think of it this way: You've got a lot of different audiences in the township so you have to bait a bunch of hooks to grab their attention. At least that's how Roy Wells, president and managing director of Triad Strategies, a Harrisburg-based public affairs firm, sees it.

"We're living in a 24/7 world of communication, and everyone gets their information in a different way — through the news channels, fax, phone, YouTube, Twitter," he says, "so take advantage of the different communication channels that people are using."

"You want to have a comprehensive outreach that builds an atmosphere of trust and communication," Brasier adds. "Government is all about connecting, so make sure you create as many opportunities as possible for people to do that."

Task forces, blogs (*or online journals*), partnerships with local newspapers and TV and radio stations, live televised meetings, a community Facebook page,
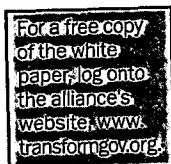
You have to look beyond the tried and true and **approach public engagement like a fisherman.**

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and informal get-togethers are a few options for reeling people in, educating and empowering them, and making your township more open and accessible.

"Another thing worth considering is making your township a hub for local meetings and get-togethers," PSATS Executive Director David M. Sanko says. "In some cases, the only time a township resident shows up at the municipal building is to pay taxes or buy a permit.

"However, by providing meeting space for 4-H, senior citizen, and community groups and serving as a polling place during elections, townships can start building positive relationships with residents of all ages, creating an interest in township government, and exposing them to what goes on in the community."

For instance, Lower Paxton Township in Dauphin County offers two community meeting rooms in its municipal building free of charge to local groups, such as youth sports organizations, homeowners associations, and area nonprofits.

"Those rooms are extremely popular," township manager George Wolfe says. "We probably have two to three meetings a week in them."

The township's outreach to residents doesn't stop there, though. Lower Paxton also operates The Friendship Center, a 62,000-square-foot recreational facility, and televises public meetings live on cable. The township negotiated access to the free channel through the franchise agreement with its cable provider — an option available to townships large and small.

In Patton Township, Centre County, officials also draw residents in by televising their meetings, posting them online, hosting a website, and sending out a newsletter, special mailings, and surveys.

Communities like these have the right idea. Experts say local leaders have to do two things when engaging the public: Keep it simple and, most important, go to the people — because chances are they're not coming to you.

"None of your strategies needs to be complex. I know of one local government that held its meeting in the parking lot of a local mall," says Karen Thoreson of the Alliance for Innovation. "The citizens were walking along and encountered this meeting in a place that they see as theirs. The officials in this case were making a statement: 'We'll come to you where you feel comfortable.'

"Meeting people on their own turf is so respectful, so unexpected, and so unlike what people think of government," she adds. "It's all about doing that something different to say that you care about what your residents think."

'The more informal, the better'

While formal township meetings serve a purpose, Thoreson contends that less formal approaches generate better dialogue. Therefore, she encourages township supervisors to shake things up and meet with residents at the local diner or even a resident's home.

"People act very differently in a private setting than a public setting," she says. "They're much more relaxed."

Kathy Brasier agrees: "It's the informal meetings that get people talking and away from grandstanding."

"Besides," Penn State's Bev Cigler says, "people appreciate the face to face. That's what small-town America is all about."

Jerry Andree, manager of Cranberry Township in Butler County, knows this better than anyone. For years, he has encouraged the township supervisors to walk the neighborhoods, visit public

> **"Government is all about connecting** so make sure you **create as many opportunities as possible** for people to do that."

A simple, direct message and *Townships Today* are all you need to grab the public's interest

Mike Long worked in the state Senate for nearly 30 years and knows the key to making elected officials stand up and pay attention.

"It's e-mails, letters, and phone calls from real people," says Long, co-founder of Long Nyquist and Associates, a Harrisburg-based government and public relations firm. "Numbers talk. The more folks who contact an official about a particular issue, the more they're going to grab his interest."

Pat Haggerty, a political pundit and grassroots motivator, agrees: "Imagine if you were able to get 50 residents to send a letter to a lawmaker or make a phone call. Think of the impact."

So how do you get residents jazzed up about an issue?

"You have to tune them into 'WIIFM' — what's in it for me? That's the key to all involvement," Haggerty says. "People will become engaged when you effectively answer that question.

"Show them the problem and the impact and then tell them how they can make a difference."

For instance, secretary Sandy Wright of Greene Township in Beaver County, a member of PSATS' Legislative Committee and Grassroots Lobbying Network, has created posters and form letters that have spurred residents to contact lawmakers.

"If you prepare the bullet for them," she says, "they will fire it."

Long advises townships to put the frills aside when explaining an issue to residents. Good, effective communication is clear and direct. Therefore, your message should simply focus on how an issue or legislation will affect residents' lives, especially their wallets, he says.

"Frame the information in a way that makes sense to your residents and then put it in your newsletter, on your website, and in an e-mail blast," Long says. "And make sure you give clear and specific ways for them to contact their legislators. Include their names, office phone numbers, and e-mail addresses."

Townships Today: An effective grassroots lobbying tool

Township officials, however, don't have to do all this work themselves.

A few years ago, PSATS developed the *Townships Today* newsletter. Written by the Association's staff for the intended audience of township residents, the quarterly publication puts timely issues into perspective for your constituents and explains how they can, and should, take action.

"*Townships Today* is an informational tool, but townships can also use it as part of a grassroots lobbying campaign," PSATS Executive Director David M. Sanko says. "We delve into the issues and answer that all-important question that residents want to know: What's in it for me?"

Recent newsletters have focused on legislation that would force municipal mergers and consolidations and impose fees on municipalities for state police coverage. *Townships Today* has also covered transportation funding and how court decisions and the lack of new money for townships are hurting local roads and bridges.

Karyle Woods, the part-time secretary for Damascus Township in Wayne County, doesn't have time to write a newsletter and is thankful to have *Townships Today*, which she distributes to residents at the supervisors' meetings.

"I make copies of it and put it on the table right next to our minutes," Woods says. "This way, residents can pick it up right along with the minutes.

"I like the newsletter because it helps explain the bigger issues to our residents," she adds. "They are aware of what's going on politically and can

PSATS developed *Townships Today* to help townships educate the public about local government and the challenges it is facing.

take it up directly with our state rep."

Barb Wilson, manager of South Middleton Township in Cumberland County, takes a different approach to *Townships Today*. She publishes the featured articles in her township's own newsletter. Residents read them and do respond, she says.

"I often get phone calls from people asking for more details, and then they call our legislators," Wilson says. "People like to be kept aware, and *Townships Today* is helping us with that."

For the most recent issue of *Townships Today*, log onto www.psats.org, click on the *Townships Today* icon on the right side of the home page, and choose the appropriate link. The *Townships Today* page also features an archive of past newsletters and free "bonus articles" that can be downloaded and used in township newsletters or posted on websites.

Don't know your Facebook from your Twitter?
Social media explained

With new technologies emerging every day, it can be helpful to define terms. Briefly, social media is a general term for Internet technologies that allow users to connect with each other, interact, and congregate online.

Common types of social media technologies include social networking (Facebook), media sharing (YouTube), blogs and microblogs (Twitter), and many more. The vast majority of social media technologies are free.

The following glossary gives a brief, and by no means comprehensive, introduction to these technologies:

Web 2.0. To differentiate from "Web 1.0" (in which the user's primary role was to view the information on the website), "Web 2.0" was coined as a broad term for technologies that allow the user to interact with the website and generate content. As an example, rather than solely watching a video on a website, users can actually upload their own videos.

Blog. Short for "weblog" — an informal online journal. This term can be a verb ("to blog something") or a noun ("read a blog"). Blogs often encourage readers to post comments and publicly discuss what has been written. Many blogs are essentially online diaries, while others are highly informative news or subject commentaries.

Social networking. Social networking is the act of connecting with others via Internet communities. Rather than simply interacting with a website, visitors use the site as a vehicle to connect with each other. Popular examples are as follows:

Facebook: The largest social networking site in the world, Facebook allows each member to post details about themselves (photos, description, likes/dislikes, etc.) and link up with friends, acquaintances, and others. They can then message back and forth, view profiles, play games, and interact in many other ways.

LinkedIn: Designed for professionals, LinkedIn is a business-oriented social networking site that allows users to post information and connect with other business professionals. It is commonly used as a recruiting and job-seeking tool.

YouTube: The world's largest video-sharing website where users can upload their own videos, as well as watch others' videos.

Flickr: A popular image sharing website, it could be described as the "YouTube of photos."

Twitter: This is a microblog site where users post messages up to 140 characters in length. Users update Twitter frequently and "follow" each other to see what others are saying or doing. A number of celebrities have helped to boost the site's popularity, but it is also a valuable source for official news. Each individual message posted on Twitter is a "tweet." The action of posting on Twitter is typically called "tweeting" or "to tweet."

RSS Feeds: Really Simple Syndication feeds offer a way of streaming, or directing, data from a website to a user. The user can deploy a simple application to subscribe to multiple RSS feeds. Then, rather than checking each site for the latest news, they receive all the news via RSS feeds in one application.

Wiki: This is a website that allows virtually anyone to edit and add to the content there. ("Wiki" is a Hawaiian term meaning quick). Wikipedia, the most famous wiki, is a user-generated online encyclopedia that was created to assemble as much human knowledge in one place as possible. While studies have shown that Wikipedia can be nearly as accurate as Encyclopedia Britannica, it needs to be used carefully since anyone can add to and edit the information.

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parks, hold meetings in driveways, and attend local events, including the pool's annual "Puppy Plunge," to build relationships with the public.

"The more informal, the better," says Andree, who schedules regular coffee-and-doughnut chats with residents at local restaurants. There, he says, "anything is game."

"Our goal," Andree adds, "is to actively engage the people where they live, work, and play. We look for every avenue to personalize government. It's our way of connecting the dots.

"You hear so much these days about how dissatisfied people are with government," he says, "but what we're saying with our outreach is, 'Don't put us in that group that you're so unhappy with.'"

Andree admits that it takes time and effort to make these personal connections, but this township of 30,000 residents repeatedly sees the fruits of its labor. It's never at a loss for public feedback, he says, and recently 82 people signed up to serve on a citizen advisory panel that will meet over the next year. Another 24 have agreed to participate on a committee developing a bikeway plan.

"Every township has to make choices," he says, "but if you allocate your time and resources to educating, communicating with, and being responsive to the public, it will come back tenfold."

Patton Township in Centre County is another large township with a population around 12,000. That makes it difficult for the township supervisors to connect with the public, but that hasn't stopped Josh Troxell.

"Rather than wait for people to come to me, I go to them. It's important to build those relationships," Troxell says. He attends civic and homeowners association meetings and also pays impromptu visits. "Sometimes, I'll just walk a neighborhood and talk to people."

In Damascus Township, Wayne County, secretary Karyle Woods does much of her connecting with the public at the municipal office, a hub of activity in this community of 3,662 residents.

Those who call and visit are encour-

Successful township officials connect with people where they are, and these days, they're hovering around the 21ˢᵗ century's version of the water cooler: the Internet. Roy Wells of Triad Strategies, a Harrisburg-based public affairs firm, reports that 47 percent of Pennsylvanians are on Facebook and cautions local leaders not to dismiss it as a fad. "It's no more of a fad than e-mail was a fad," he says.

aged to get active and attend township meetings. Woods gives new residents a brochure that includes, among other things, the supervisors' meeting dates and times. The township also posts meeting minutes and officials' e-mail addresses on its website.

And if a major issue arises, Woods will pick up the phone, dial up residents, and collect their thoughts.

"We just talk to people and let them know what's going on," she says. "We do that every day. We make it as easy as possible for people to participate, one way or another."

Internet = interaction

As the experts have said, successful township officials connect with people where they are, and these days, they're hovering around the 21ˢᵗ century's version of the water cooler: the Internet.

For a handful of years now, Roy Timpe, a supervisor for Maidencreek Township in Berks County, has been giving township residents an insider's view of local government through his blog. This online journal is an interactive experiment of sorts that allows the supervisor to say what's on his mind and collect comments from residents.

"Anything you can do to provide the public with insight is a good thing," Timpe says, noting that he had another motivation for starting the blog. "I'm hoping to get people thinking about the purpose of government."

Residents are paying attention. They mention that they read the blog and often send e-mails about improving the township. "Before the Internet, they would have had to come to a meeting," the supervisor says. "Now, they can just e-mail. It's opened the door for citizen input."

Timpe isn't alone in seeing the Internet's value, particularly for connecting communities with constituents. More and more local governments are using interactive social media sites and technology, such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, to reach out to residents and start a dialogue.

The beauty of social media, they say, is that it's free, gets messages out quickly, provides instantaneous feedback, and reaches lots of people with the click of a mouse. *(For an overview of social media sites and technology, turn to the sidebar at left.)*

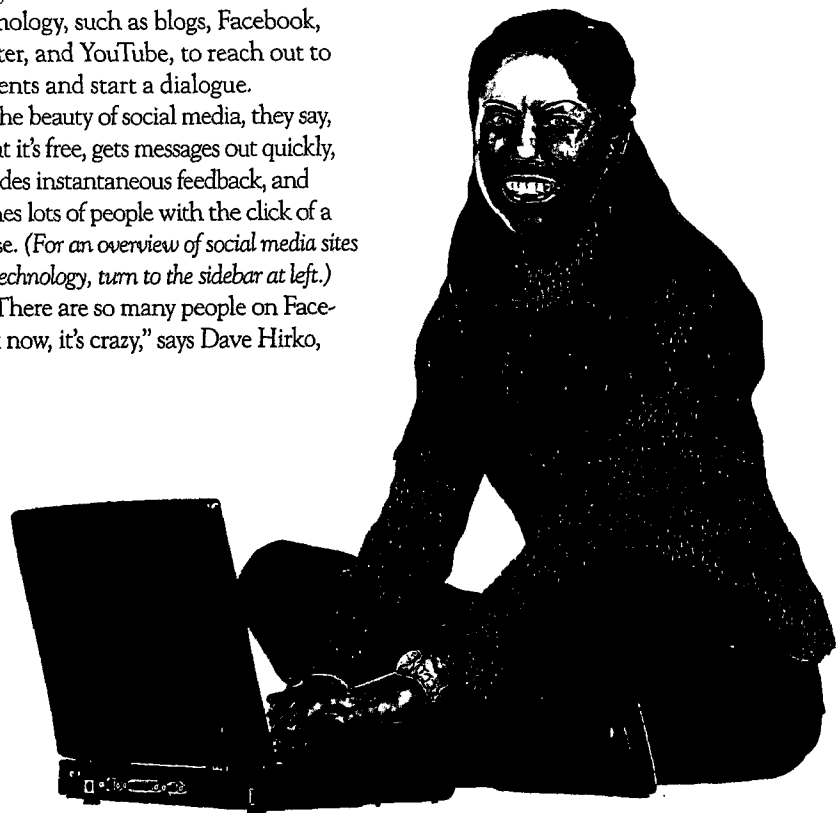"There are so many people on Facebook now, it's crazy," says Dave Hirko,

manager of Jackson Township in Cambria County, which has nearly 500 people who "like" its page.

According to Roy Wells of Triad Strategies, 47 percent of Pennsylvanians — people of all ages and backgrounds — are on Facebook.

"That means that one out of every two people is on Facebook," he says, adding that local government officials should not dismiss it as a fad. "It's no more of a fad than e-mail was a fad."

"Social media is the engine that's driving most communication these days," says Charlie Gerow of Quantum Communications in Harrisburg, which specializes in strategic communication, public relations, and marketing. "There are hundreds of millions of people on these sites — the numbers are staggering — and it's only growing. This is the way that the world is communicating. It's inescapable."

"These networks are a quick way to spread the word, but they're not for everyone," says David LaTorre, founder of LaTorre Communications, another public affairs and relations firm based in Harrisburg. "They're not for an organization that isn't committed to this new age of communication." ➤

REELING RESIDENTS IN

Still, township officials should not overlook social media's potential, which is worth exploring, says Ren Baker, CEO of the CDS Group, a Lancaster-based technology consulting company.

"People crave information, and this is one more way to give it to them," he says.

"This is an opportunity for local governments to have conversations they wouldn't otherwise have," Gerow adds, "and to tell a story to constituents who wouldn't otherwise hear them."

And slowly but surely, townships are beginning to dip their toes in the water.

In Cambria County's Jackson Township, the board of supervisors promotes community events, including trick-or-treat night and veterans ceremonies, on the community's Facebook page. "It's a good way to keep in touch with the younger residents," Hirko says. "They don't read our newsletter or come to our meetings, but they are on Facebook."

Officials in Tredyffrin Township, Chester County, use Facebook not only to inform residents but also to alert them.

Last winter, when back-to-back storms dumped 40 inches of snow on the township in a week, the board of supervisors realized it needed a way to have real-time communication with residents, manager Mimi Gleason says. Facebook, where information is posted and delivered in a matter of minutes, proved to be the answer to the township's problem.

Initially, she says, the township blocked the public from posting comments on its page, but eventually, it changed its mind. Facebook, Gleason says, has a feature that allows communities to delete negative posts. So far, though, this hasn't been a problem.

"One of our biggest challenges is reaching our residents," she says. "Facebook is just a simple, quick, free way to get the information out."

Facebook is so easy to use, in fact, she encourages other townships to check it out. "Play with it to get comfortable," Gleason says, "and just jump in."

Ren Baker agrees: "Go to your residents and make it easy. Ride the wave." ✦

PENN *lines*

Lighting the way

Observing 75 years of rural electrification in Pennsylvania

GROC.   MEATS
GENERAL STORE

Coca-Cola

LUX
For all fine
Laundering

We Want Lights!

SINCLAIR GASOLINE HC

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

PLUS Face to face
Slow down for dip

Jimmy Stewart Museum needs a boost

As a new year begins, the Jimmy Stewart Museum in Indiana, Pa., is facing an uncertain future. Even as downtown

The Jimmy Stewart Museum
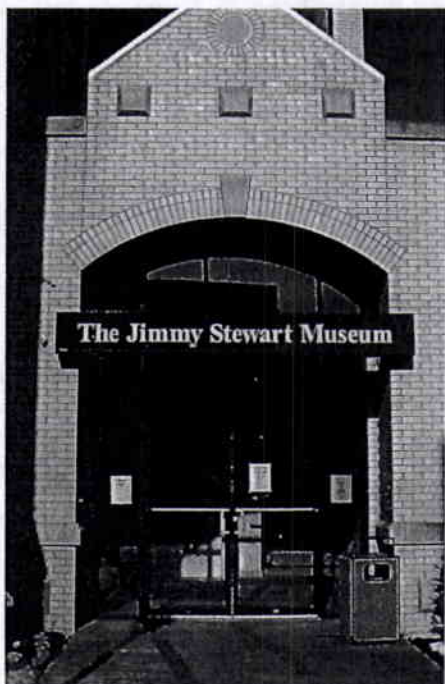
INDIANA STORY: Actor Jimmy Stewart is remembered in his hometown of Indiana, Pa., with a museum.

Indiana continues to thrive, the museum that honors its most famous resident finds itself in need of an influx of cash in order to ensure it will remain open.

Located at 835 Philadelphia Street in the west central community of Indiana, where REA Energy Cooperative is based, the museum is struggling as the past three years of a faltering economy combined with an aging population who identifies with the famous actor have curtailed attendance. It hasn't helped that state funding has dropped significantly during the past couple of years.

On-screen, Stewart played a number of engaging "all-American" characters, but perhaps is best known for his role as

George Bailey in the holiday classic, "It's a Wonderful Life."

Off-screen, Stewart was a Princeton graduate, a World War II hero who grew up in the small town of Indiana, son of a hardware store owner. The building that housed the hardware store still stands across the street from the museum. It was there that Stewart publicly displayed the 1940 Oscar for best actor that he won for "The Philadelphia Story."

The museum houses all kinds of memorabilia from Stewart's childhood in Indiana through his days as a bomber pilot to his years as a movie star.

Stewart died in 1997 at the age of 89. The hometown museum that honors him is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday and noon to 5 p.m. on Sundays. Adult admission is $7; seniors (62 and older), military personnel and students are $6; children 7 to 17 are $5; and admission is free for children 6 and under and members of the museum.

State's first Elk Country Visitor Center opens

Tourism promoters are hoping that the opening of the state's first Elk Country Visitor Center will help boost the amount of tourism dollars that flow into the north-central part of Pennsylvania.

The center, located in Elk County at 134 Homestead Drive near Benezette, will be open this winter from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday through Sunday. Promoters expect that the hulking creatures that can weigh up to 1,000 pounds will prove a popular tourist draw for the

LOOKING FOR ELK: The state's first Elk Country Visitor Center recently opened near Benezette in Elk County.

northwestern part of the state.

The center was built through funds contributed by the state and the Keystone Elk Country Alliance with $6 million from the state and matching amount from private funding. Situated on 245 acres within the heart of Pennsylvania's elk range and within the Elk State Forest, the center is a premier elk watching and education facility. It includes interactive exhibits, wildlife trails and viewing blinds, as well as year-round restrooms and parking.

Early fall (September and October) is usually the best viewing time, although elk can be seen at any time and in any location in the area, including walking down the streets of some of the county's small communities.

Although elk were once prolific in Elk County, humans — specifically their logging and hunting activities — decimated the elk population in the mid 1800s. Realizing the loss to the state, the Pennsylvania Game Commission started relocating elk from Yellowstone National Park decades ago, and the state now boasts that the Elk County area has the largest herd in the Northeast United States.

Residents reminded of changes in state game lands

The terrain in several rural counties of Pennsylvania has changed in recent months, and hunters are reminded that some of those changes may have taken place in areas where they have been staking out game for many years.

With the increased Marcellus Shale drilling activities on both privately owned land and state game land, there is an increase in equipment in the field. Although the well pads are typically very visible, on about five acres, painted well heads sometimes blend into the background.

In addition to the fact that hunters may find equipment in their favorite hunting spots, the amount of traffic in rural areas also has increased with the hike in drilling activities.

According to state officials, as of Oct. 1, 2010, more than 4,500 well permits had been issued in Pennsylvania with about 645 completed wells, 46 of which are on state game lands.

Two Pennsylvania areas named to 'best' list

Pennsylvania has two of the top 10 "Best Places for Military Retirement." The Harrisburg-Carlisle area and the Pittsburgh area were named as Nos. 5 and 8 respectively in the list compiled by USAA — a leading financial services provider focused on serving the military — and Military.com — the largest military and veteran membership organization — in conjunction with Sperling's BestPlaces.

Other top locations included: 1, Waco, Texas; 2, Oklahoma City, Okla.; 3, Austin/Round Rock, Texas; 4, College Station/Bryan, Texas; 6, San Angelo, Texas; 7, Madison, Wisc.; 9, New Orleans/Metairie/Kenner, La.; and 10, Syracuse, N.Y.

Twenty variables were reviewed for nearly 400 major U.S. metropolitan areas before the list was compiled. Variables included: military base proximity, military base amenities, Veteran's Affairs hospital proximity, military pension taxation, unemployment rate, recreation, arts and culture, major airport proximity, access to mass transit, natural disaster-prone area, climate, health resources, health indicators, crime, local schools, presence of colleges/universities, affordability, housing costs, housing appreciation (2007-2010), and economic stability.

Military retirees typically have retired relatively early in life, with the average age of an enlisted service member at retirement of 42 and the average age of an officer at retirement of 46, according to Military.com.

State offers 511 PA system

Motorists in Pennsylvania can check real-time road conditions on more than 2,900 miles of state roads by calling 511 or visiting www.511PA.com, a website that is free and accessible 24 hours a day. The system provides traffic delay warnings, weather forecasts, average traffic speeds on urban interstates and access to more than 500 traffic cameras.

Remembering historical events in rural Pennsylvania

Many historical events have occurred in rural Pennsylvania, and the Center for Rural Pennsylvania recently prepared a listing of events commemorated in rural counties since 1946 with the installation of blue historical markers by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC).

As of August 2010, there were 2,313 historical markers in Pennsylvania with 969 (42 percent) of them in rural counties. Those markers include 233 markers about
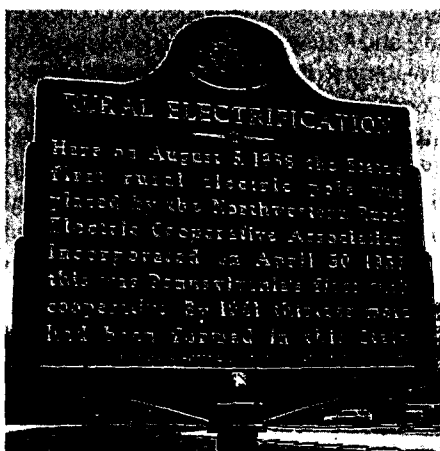
PHMC HISTORICAL MARKER: This marker commemorates the first rural electric pole placed by Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative Association in 1936.

people, 615 about places, 109 about events and 12 that detail other historical facts.

The top three topics of historical markers in rural counties, according to the PHMC report, include military and war,

industry and commerce, and buildings and settlements.

Of the 48 rural counties in Pennsylvania, Franklin County has the most historical markers with 70, followed by Washington County with 51 and Fayette County with 49.

Pennsylvania Farm Show adds attractions

The 95th Pennsylvania Farm Show, scheduled for Jan. 8-15, 2011, at the Farm Show Complex and Expo Center in Harrisburg, has announced it will feature several new attractions.

The Farm Show, which is the largest indoor agricultural exhibit in the United States, annually brings 6,000 animals, 10,000 exhibits and 300 commercial exhibits to Harrisburg to showcase the relationship between the state's 63,000 farms and 12.5 million residents.

New events this year include: a Parade of Agriculture on Jan. 8; new commodity exhibits; "green" improvements with energy-efficient lighting, motors and heaters, water-saving devices, and solar systems that provide hot water and generate energy; a celebrity team draft horse driving competition on Jan. 11; and Agricadabra, a high-energy, educational agricultural magic show offered each day for kids of all ages.

Returning highlights include: PA Preferred Culinary Connection with television's "Top Chef" contestants Ed Cotton and Tiffany Derry and the "World's Fastest Omelet Maker" Howard Helmer as guests; Farm Show Detectives, a learning station educational program; celebrity cow-milking contest; and Farm Show favorites, including a butter sculpture, high school rodeo, baking contests, and of course, the food court. ●

Borough News

The Official Magazine of the Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs

COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

*Su...ng safety through infrastructure upgrades*

Housing **Snapshot**

L ike Dorothy said in the Wizard of Oz, there is "no place like home." Recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2005-09 American Community Survey (ACS) provides for a snapshot of housing conditions in Pennsylvania boroughs.

During 2005-09, Pennsylvania boroughs had an estimated 1.14 million housing units. That's a 1 percent increase from 2000. Statewide, there were 5.48 million units which is a 4 percent increase from 2000.

During 2005-09, 91 percent of the housing units in boroughs were occupied and 9 percent were vacant. In 2000, 93 percent were occupied and 7 percent were vacant. Statewide the vacancy rate went from 9 percent in 2000 to 11 percent in 2005-09.

In the 2005-09 period, 65 percent of borough housing units were owner-occupied (homeowners) and 35 percent were rental units. From 2000 to 2005-09, there was a 1 percent decline in the number of owner-occupied units and a 1 percent decline in rental units.

During 2005-09, 31 percent of the 2.38 million residents living in
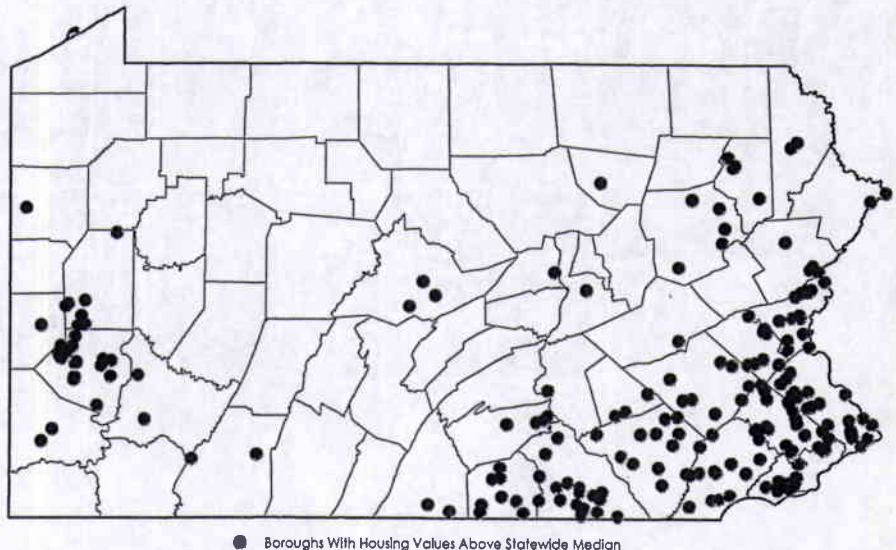
● Boroughs With Housing Values Above Statewide Median

ABOVE THE MEDIAN Boroughs with median housing values above the statewide owner-occupied median of $152,300 for 2005-09 as identified by the ACS

boroughs rented a home and 69 percent lived in an owner-occupied home. In 2000, 30 percent of residents lived in rental homes and 70 percent lived in owner-occupied homes.

Among borough homeowners, 62 percent had a mortgage and 38 percent did not have a mortgage. For borough homeowners with a mortgage, 74 percent had only one mortgage on their home and 26 percent had a second mortgage and/or a home equity loan.

The average value of a borough owner-occupied home in the 2005-09

period was approximately $149,200. Statewide the average was $199,000.

For renters, the average monthly gross rent was $702. The statewide average was $778.

During the period 2005-09, 67 percent of borough homeowners and renters paid less than 30 percent of their income for housing and 33 percent paid more than 30 percent of their income for housing. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development housing is considered affordable if a household pays no more than 30 percent of its annual income for housing. **(B)**
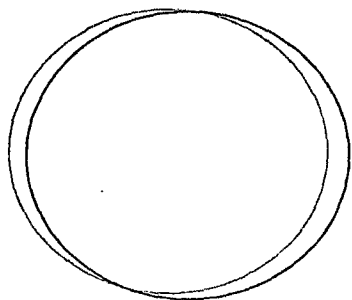
AROUND TOWN
shaping your world

UCC's Impact in Rural Municipalities

Research examines enforcement methods and costs

More than five years have passed since the implementation of the Uniform Construction Code (Act 45 of 1999) in Pennsylvania. The Uniform Construction Code, or UCC, was implemented to protect life, health, property and the environment, and to encourage standardization and economy in construction. It also provided oversight of code-enforcing entities.

For many rural municipalities, the implementation of the UCC in 2004 resulted in the regulation of the design and construction of buildings for the very first time. Those municipalities that chose to "opt-in" to the UCC accepted enforcement responsibilities that included: reviewing and approving building plans and documents, issuing permits, conducting inspections, taking appropriate enforcement actions to achieve compliance when permit holders fail to comply, and issuing certificates of occupancy. Municipalities that chose to "opt-out" deferred those responsibilities to the state or third-party agencies.

To investigate the potential
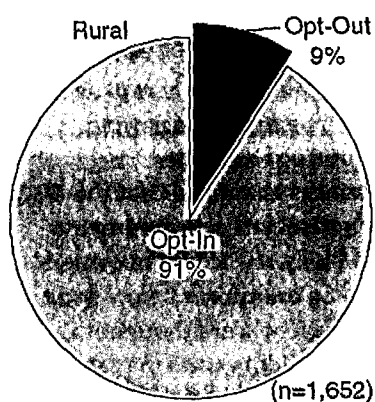
COMPARATIVE NUMBERS **Rural and urban opt-in vs. opt-out municipalities**

impacts of the UCC in rural Pennsylvania, researchers from Pennsylvania State University conducted a study in 2009, which assessed, to some extent, how well the UCC has met some of the goals outlined in Act 45. The research was sponsored by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania.

Survey of Officials and Agencies

Using a survey of municipal officials and third-party agencies, the researchers, Dr. Bohumil Kasal and Mike Turns, collected information regarding UCC enforcement methods and costs among opt-in municipalities. The
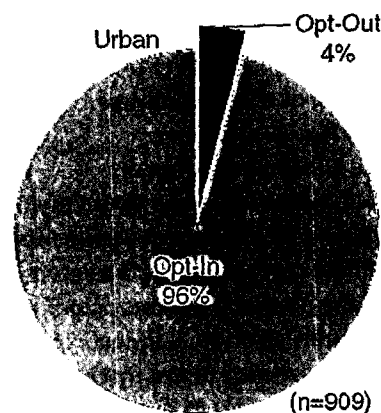
survey also collected information on the prevalence of municipal amendments to the UCC, which was analyzed as one indicator of the actual degree of uniformity provided by the UCC. The research compared rural and urban municipalities regarding UCC enforcement methods, costs, and prevalence of amendments.

The researchers also analyzed two sources of building permit data and recent trends in the number of permits issued in rural counties.

Finally, they assessed the potential impact of the UCC on homeowners' insurance premiums

as a potential cost-mitigating factor.

Meeting Enforcement Responsibilities

The research found that 93 percent of all Pennsylvania municipalities opted to take responsibility for UCC enforcement and administration. The analysis showed that the proportion of rural opt-in municipalities (91 percent) is slightly lower than urban municipalities (96 percent).

According to the study, an overwhelming majority of rural municipalities rely on UCC-certified, third-party plan review and inspection agencies to meet their UCC enforcement responsibilities.

Among urban municipalities, third-party code enforcement was also the most common enforcement strategy, but to a significantly lesser degree. Urban municipalities were also more likely to use their own employees to meet UCC enforcement responsibilities.

Board of Appeals and Fees

The UCC requires opt-in municipalities to have a board of appeals, to which permit applicants or holders can appeal UCC-related decisions made by the municipal code administration. Requests for variances are also heard by the board of appeals.

The research found that about 10 percent of rural opt-in and 11 percent of urban opt-in municipalities have not established a board of appeals. Among the rural and urban municipalities that have established a board of appeals, about 12 percent of each have not established a fee structure for charging potential petitioners or appellants.

Based on survey responses to seven possible construction scenarios, UCC-related fees charged to permit applicants were found to be highly variable and covered a wide range. The average UCC fee among rural municipalities for a 2,500-square-foot, single-family home was $1,081. For a "big box" store, the average UCC fee among rural municipalities was $49,571. Average UCC fees among urban municipalities were 20 to 37 percent higher than those of rural municipalities.

Code Uniformity

A major goal of the UCC was to provide increased uniformity of code requirements across Pennsylvania. More than 20 percent of rural municipalities said they adopted an amendment to the UCC. Urban municipalities had a much higher prevalence of amendments at more than 50 percent. On average, urban counties had greater code requirement differences than rural counties.

Impact on Insurance Rates

To determine if the UCC has impacted insurance rates, the researchers contacted several insurance industry professionals to learn if insurance companies consider building codes when determining their rates. The researchers theorized that the UCC and its associated requirements would likely reduce homeowners' insurance premiums below what they would be were there not a modern building code in place. This effect appeared to be relatively small.

Policy Considerations

Based on the results, the researchers suggested several policy considerations including: the possibility of eliminating a municipality's ability to opt-out of UCC enforcement; an evaluation of administrative fees, along with the overall UCC fee schedule, to determine if they are commensurate with the administrative services provided; the possibility of giving the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry the authority to impose sanctions on municipalities who fail to comply with their responsibility to establish a board of appeals; and requiring all municipalities to declare all amendments they are enforcing, since there seemed to be confusion over what constituted an amendment, and how to legally adopt an amendment.

Report Available

For a copy of the research results, *Impact of the Uniform Construction Code in Rural Pennsylvania*, contact the Center for Rural Pennsylvania at 717-787-9555 or info@rural. palegislature.us or visit www.rural. palegislature.us. **(B)**

This article originally appeared in Rural Perspectives, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania's newsletter, in September/October 2010 and is printed with permission.

pennsylvania
Borough
News

The Official Magazine of the Pennsylvania State Ass

Cultivating initiatives that can have an environmental impact
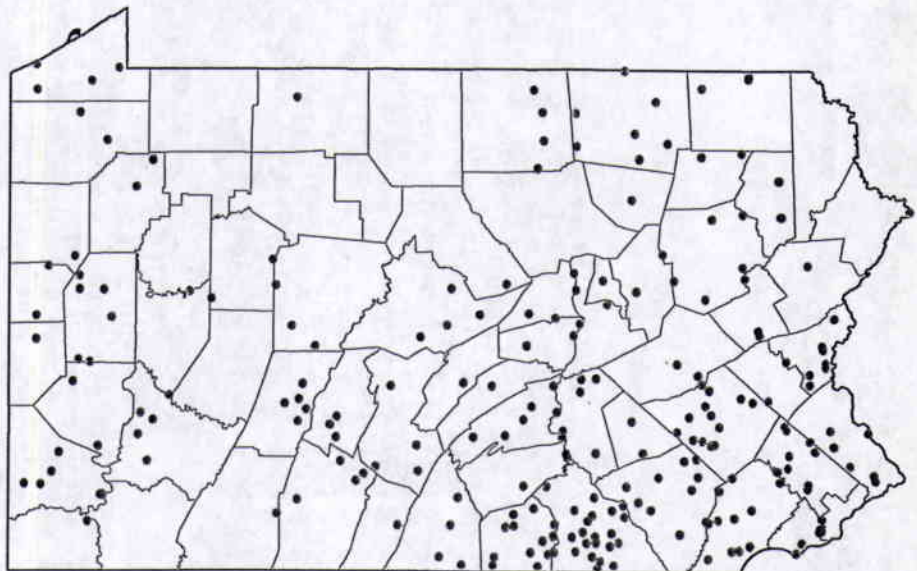
GREEN CULTURE

2010 Census **Overview**

Results from the 2010 Census show that 2.52 million Pennsylvanians call a borough their home. Putting this in some perspective, more people live in Pennsylvania boroughs than live in the states of Montana, North Dakota and Wyoming, combined.

From 2000 to 2010, however, the number of people living in boroughs declined 1 percent, or nearly 22,400 people.

Pennsylvania's total population in 2010, was 12.7 million, which is a 3 percent increase from 2000. Most of the population gain during this period occurred in townships of the second class (9 percent.)

GREAT INCREASE The U.S. Census Bureau shows the boroughs with a population increase greater than the statewide average of 3.4 percent from 2000 to 2010

Over the past decade, though, not all boroughs lost population. From 2000 to 2010, 341 boroughs, or 36 percent, gained population. These boroughs had the following characteristics:

- Average population of 3,100
- Located primarily in eastern and central Pennsylvania
- Significant increase in Hispanic/ Latino residents (135 percent)
- Increase in housing units (8 percent), especially single family (4 percent)
- Average household income of $60,900 and a poverty rate of 12 percent

There were 612 boroughs (64 percent) that lost or had no change in population from 2000 to 2010. These boroughs had the following characteristics:

- Average population of 2,400
- Located primarily in western Pennsylvania
- Increase in housing vacancy rates from 8 percent to 10 percent
- High percentage of senior citizens (18 percent) vs. the statewide rate of 15 percent
- Low percentage of adults with a bachelor's degree (22 percent) vs. the statewide rate of 26 percent

Despite the slight decline in population, boroughs are still home to a sizable portion of the state's population. In 2010, one in five Pennsylvanians lived in boroughs.

Over the past decade, Pennsylvania boroughs have become more diverse. In 2000, 8 percent of the population in boroughs was non-white. In 2010, this percentage increased to 11 percent. There were similar increases among Hispanic/ Latino residents.

To find out more about the population changes in your borough, visit the Census Bureau's website at www.census.gov. **(B)**