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Mountain Council of Governments beginning 2006 with membership drive

By **JIM DINO**

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The Mountain Council of Governments (M-COG) is going to begin the new year with a new effort – its first-ever membership drive.

M-COG Director Dan Guydish and Chairman Joe Yannuzzi said Thursday they are planning on traveling to non-member municipalities in early 2006 after new officials elected Tuesday have become acclimated to their new offices.

Guydish and Yannuzzi, as well as some M-COG members, feel that many municipal officials do not know what the M-COG represents or stands for, and does not know of its accomplishments.

"We will be making these visits beginning in January, after local governments reorganize," Guydish said. "I am developing a brochure to better outline what the COG does."

Aside from the in-person visits, Guydish – at the suggestion of Butler Township Supervisor Robert Shelhamer – will send out a form letter to those municipalities inviting them to join the M-COG.

In recent months, Guydish has been singling out various COG topics, and making them the focus of its monthly meeting, in order to potentially spur interest.

Unless otherwise scheduled, regular meetings are the first Thursday of the month at 8 a.m. in the community room of the CAN DO Renaissance Center, Church and Broad streets, downtown Hazleton.

"We invite all municipal officials to our meetings whether they are members or observers," Guydish said. "That means non-members can come to our meeting and see first-hand what we are doing."

Yannuzzi said the best thing about the M-COG is that it's free.

"We've been a COG for 15 years," Yannuzzi said.

Thursday morning, Guydish discussed some of the M-COG's recent accomplishments.

Guydish said he submitted an application for a grant to the state Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) to purchase a sewer camera that can be used by all municipalities that share in the cost of its purchase and maintenance.

"I talked to the northeast rep for DCED, and he said all of the paperwork was in order," Guydish said. "He said he would recommend it to DCED because the application is a joint one involving several municipalities."

On the Gateway project, Guydish said he is waiting for word from the state Department of Transportation (PennDOT) of its approval for the placement of signs for the gateway

project.

"We are also working on a final cleanup along Route 924 where we did some plantings earlier this year," Guydish said.

Volunteers from West Hazleton's Pulaski Club, among others, are assisting with the cleanup, Guydish said.

COG members are also members of the Pennsylvania Educational Joint Purchasing Council, which provides discounts on supplies in exchange for a membership fee.

Some M-COG members have taken advantage of that council and can also get a discount on a police car by joining a western Pennsylvania COG.

"That COG got a contract for police cars in which they beat the state's price," said Nanticoke City Manager Greg Gulick.

Freeland Mayor Tim Martin said the borough joined that COG that

cost \$130 a year to join.

Meanwhile, another project suggested by the COG membership involves Sugarloaf Township Supervisor Robert Stanzola.

He recommended the COG look for funds under the new, five-year road improvement program being sponsored by U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa.

"The funding is for road improvements that are of an emergency nature, like an area that has a lot of accidents," Stanzola said.

"It also applies to projects like sidewalks where kids walk to school."

Stanzola said local municipalities need help with fixing their roads.

"The roads are deplorable," he said.

"There's not enough money to fix them. We might have more leverage together."