



**JIM
DINO**

Area making progress, but some people still not satisfied

I grew up in this area, and I suffer from the same malady that many do – apathy.

But I fight it.

This terrible disease is common to people in other areas, I found out, not just here.

And it is just as potentially devastating.

This sickness causes us to

think that every bad thing happens only to us, everything from gas prices going up – “It’s higher here than anywhere” which isn’t true – to politics, from recreation to dredge.

Its most dangerous side effect is that it could cripple this area so that when something good does come along, we may pass it up.

Let’s start with the small stuff. In actuality, gas prices around this area are on the lower end of the high-price spectrum. I hear gas is \$3 a gallon in California.

Then there’s Funfest. I hear some people – let’s call them the Naysayers, although I’d like to call them something stronger because they really infuriate me

– criticize the largest celebration in Hazleton.

I hear people say “Aw, that again? I’m getting sick of the same thing. It’s going to die out. People are getting sick of it.”

That’s why there’s such a large crowd every year.

First Night Hazleton’s crowd is growing every year, too, even

though people also criticize the nonalcoholic family celebration of New Year’s Eve.

This is only the fifth year for First Night, but I hear the same things about it that I do about Funfest.

But, more people are coming

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because fewer people want to get drunk on New Year's Eve, for family reasons or because of the stricter drunk-driving laws.

Then there's the Pocono Market Fair. It took an entrepreneur from the outside to see the potential of a building that, aside from being a warehouse, hadn't had an active use in 25 years.

Yet the Naysayers are heard saying, "It won't last."

How do they know?

Someone does something positive, and there are people jealous of them.

Let's go on to the larger issues, like recreation.

A committee of dedicated volunteers held garage and food sales to develop the first four miles of what will eventually be a 16-mile hiking-and-biking trail – much of it along abandoned railroad beds – between Hazleton and Weatherly.

When further developed, the corridor will become a tourist attraction that, because of the trail, will now include Hazleton.

The Naysayers say it won't get finished.

"We always get screwed" is a phrase heard so much that it should be put on a bumper sticker. I'm not saying it's not true in some cases, but by no means is it true in all cases.

And all politicians – even with the negativity of that word – are not crooked, or "on the take." Except for a few, politicians are mostly honest.

I'm not a Pollyanna who believes everybody is straight. But it is mathematically impossible for *everybody* to be crooked.

That leads us to the dredge issue.

You may have asked yourself why opponents of using river dredge and fly ash to fill strip-mining pits think it's a bad idea.

I'll tell you why. McAdoo

ber that one? How about the Gould Battery site in Hometown?

This area has been taken for a ride when it comes to dumping toxic waste where it shouldn't be. Since the 1960s, Philadelphia has been looking at our strippings and trying everything to dump their garbage in them. They've tried to back door it every way they could have.

Wrong. There's a water table to protect. So I understand why the opponents feel the way they do.

I think the plan for filling the pits is a good one, because the proponents – including many state legislators, in particular state Sen. Ray Musto, who is an environmentalist – seem to outnumber the opponents.

But I'm still a little skeptical. There are two things I want to know.

First, what does the phrase "minimum EPA standards"

Agency decides if the material is safe or not.

The other thing I want to know is where the material is coming from. I have to go along with the opponents when they say they don't want dredge from New York's Hudson River in the ground here.

The Naysayers are also criticizing the larger development at the former city landfill, the Cranberry Creek Gateway project.

A joint CAN DO-Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce committee has purchased the land and will develop it. There will be a recreation of Cranberry Ballpark, and the other things they have talked about.

It used to be that economic projects – like the downtown shopping mall the late Michael Greco proposed – would never become reality.

But in the last few years, we are accomplishing things around here. Look at what's

Perhaps some of the Naysayers are really worried that some of the projects in this area will fail and hurt people. Their intentions are totally noble. Some people believe looking at abandoned mine workings, day after day, gives us that defeatist attitude.

That's why the chamber formed the Gateway beautification committee – and a community awareness committee to give the people around here a better outlook for themselves by pointing out the many positive aspects and projects we have in this area.

What I'm saying is that it isn't like it used to be. This area will probably never become a major metro area, because it would steal the unique character and quality of life we have now.

But it will grow, and become an even better area – if we believe it can, and work together to make it happen.

I think some of the Naysay-

at least some of them are sour apples that can't stand to see someone else accomplish something in this town, because it outshines what they've done, if they've done anything.

Unfortunately, there are some people who think an idea is a bad one if they didn't hatch it. Those people should be hatched, and spawned out of this community.

On a related note, there is something going on this weekend that shows the character of this community.

The annual Relay for Life for the American Cancer Society will be held, for the first time, at the Hazleton Municipal Airport because of construction at Harman-Geist Stadium.

We have a Relay team at the *Standard-Speaker*, and they are a dedicated group that holds fund-raisers throughout the year.

The group that puts on the Relay every year is a dedicated