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Homestead Avenue progresses

By Paul Cmil
Correspondent

Residents of Homestead Avenue who live in the area of the proposed sewer upgrade have received appraisals on land where the City needs easements, but negotiations have not begun. A contract for the project was sent to Anrich on Aug. 28, said engineer Larry Mika. Test-drilling should begin in about two weeks, he said. .

The concern about easements is muted during this initial

phase, only two properties are involved in phase one and the test borings will not require the contractor to use the new easement areas.

Council President Michael Schweder has said that council will not approve an ordinance related to the easements if "meaningful negotiations had not taken place."

Attorney Tamer Ahmed, who represents Eaton Avenue resi-

"Property owners have the right to negotiate for a fair settlement, but the City is not acting in good faith."

— Beverly Phelan, homeowner

dents affected by the project, said "appraisals were received on Friday [Aug. 11] and no negotiations had taken place."

According to Michael Alkhal, director of public works, the City will be ready to start the project before the end of the month.

"We have identified the low-

est bidder and will be ready to start in two weeks," he said. Alkhal emphasized that the purpose of the legislation to secure easements was to make sure the project could move ahead without delays from property owners. Council then assured Ahmed that Alkhal would negotiate in good faith and unani-

mously approved the condemnation resolution.

Homestead Avenue residents were less than

impressed.

"Property owners have the right to negotiate for a fair settlement, but the City is not acting in good faith," said homeowner Beverly Phelan. "They just don't get done what they say they are going to do. I doubt the project is ready to start now.

It is upsetting that they will have enough money to pay for the dirt they need, but they won't pay for the damage the backup caused to my house."

And in regards to the project...

"The sewer pipe itself is pretty much standard, the manholes need to be custom fabricated," said Mika.

Paul Cmil is a freelance writer. Contact him via editor@bethlehem-news.com.

Car club fights rain during benefit show

By Angel R. Ackerman
Managing editor

Bruce and Judy Keen, of Palmer Township, are no strangers to car shows.

They brought out the 1964 Thunderbird convertible to the car show in Freemansburg on Saturday, despite dark skies and rainy weather. Bruce Keen said he likes to bring out the car, which he bought five months ago and has made his project to transform it from just drivable to a show car. He now considers the car "presentable."

But it wasn't just another chance to show off his mechanical baby. Saturday's car show was held in memory of Gavin Painter, the five-year-old local boy killed by a car on Washington Street, in Bethlehem, last year, said Tonya Thanhauser, a Freemansburg councilwoman involved with the show.

Mike Heckman, vice president of Impressive Impact Auto Club who lives in Egypt, sold Wendy Getz, Gavin's mother, his old house on Washington Street so he knows the family well. Most of the members of Impressive Impact Auto Club, the group that put together the event, know Getz and her children.

The cars and the cause—that's why the Keens sat out in the rain. Judy even had impressive spirits, wearing a balloon hat made by a clown on site.

Nineteen cars attended the show. More cars would have come if the weather had held out, Heckman said. The owners of the nicer cars don't want to bring them out in the rain.

But spectators made up for lack of cars with their fun attitudes, Heckman said. He was impressed with everyone's gen-

erosity, with people giving \$5 or \$10 without even thinking about it.

Wiulan Taueras, of Allentown, drove by the show and stopped by because of his own interest in cars. He's a newcomer to the area, so he wasn't aware of the show, its sponsor club or the cause.

The Gavin Painter Memorial Car Show ran from noon to 6 p.m. at Memorial Park at Cambria and Washington streets.

Thanhauser said proceeds, from the car show and a 50/50 raffle, went to the Painter family for Gavin's medical bills. His siblings distributed the awards.

Heckman said the event raised \$800, minus the cost of porta-potties.

"We would also like to thank the Borough of Freemansburg Council and Parks and



Photo by Angel R. Ackerman

Bruce and Judy Keen, of Palmer Township, with their 1964 Thunderbird convertible braved the rain for the Gavin Painter Memorial Car Show on Saturday in Freemansburg.

Recreation for allowing us to host this event in the Memorial Park on Cambria Street," said Thanhauser.

Impressive Impact Auto Club has members from throughout the Lehigh Valley region, as north as Palmerton and as east as New Jersey.

"Most of the club is there because we like cars and we like to upgrade them," Heckman said. "We try to do benefit shows. We are one of two car clubs allowed in the Emmaus Halloween Parade... We don't want anybody to get in trouble. We have a zero tolerance policy

for alcohol and drugs."

Angel R. Ackerman serves as managing editor of The Lehigh Valley News Group. Reach her via aackerman@lehighvalleynews.com.

So, what makes Wegmans special in the Valley?

By Angel R. Ackerman
Managing editor

It hasn't even been 10 years since Wegmans opened its first store in the Lehigh Valley—that would be the Tilghman Street store in 1998—but the Rochester-based grocer has made a significant impact on the region.

Wegmans aims to transform mediocre grocery shopping.

They tout their stores as "retail destinations," places where customers can find fresh, quality products; appealing take-out and distinctive service that comes from Wegmans employees who work at one of the 100 Best Places to Work, according to the annual Fortune survey. Wegmans consistently makes the list.

They not only made this year's list, but were number

two. (They were number one in 2005) With 32,000 employees, they qualify as a "large company" on the list. The next large company is another grocer, Whole Foods Market, at number 15 with 33,000 employees.

What makes Wegmans remarkable in the Valley is a rapid ascent to a high spot on a local list—local sales and market share among grocery stores. Figures from Food Trade News, and a report in The Morning Call, placed Wegmans at third in Lehigh Valley sales (behind Giant and Weis/Kings/Mr. Zs) but 8th for number of stores.

That means that while Giant may have \$435 million in sales and 15 stores, Wegmans with three Valley stores has \$155 million in sales. That's more than \$50 million per store, whereas Giant would be around \$29 million per store.

That makes Giant "one heck of a retailer," said Craig Hoffman, senior vice president, Pennsylvania division.

It also means Wegmans has made a niche for itself. Jo Natale—a marketing official from the Wegmans' Rochester, N.Y., headquarters—said that the Lehigh Valley stores are

"among the most successful" in the 71-store chain.

"I'm surprised at how quickly we've achieved customer loyalty," said Natale. "What works in Rochester works everywhere."

Wegmans has since pointed out that Food Trade News had low numbers. Since Wegmans is a private, family-owned company, it doesn't disclose sales figures. Hoffman said that the company does disclose sales figures to its employees and

store on Route 512 in Hanover Township, Northampton County, in 2001; and Lower Nazareth on Route 248 in 2002.

Presence isn't the cornerstone of the Wegmans experience. Many people consider Wegmans not only as a grocery store, but also as a place to meet friends and converse or a place to sit and read the newspaper with a cup of coffee, said Hoffman.

"Shopping doesn't have to be drudgery," Natale said.

Hoffman attributed the market ambiance as one of a big attraction locally. He said shoppers here have "a discerning palette," that they "like to cook" and "like the best ingredients."

The old-fashioned sub shop has proven very popular at the Tilghman Street Wegmans—it's the busiest sub shop in the chain.

What do people in the Lehigh Valley buy at Wegmans, compared to shoppers from other parts of the country?

The in-store bakery, the fresh seafood, prepared foods and the

cheese shop are very popular here, said Hoffman. Produce also rates high. When in season, Wegmans brings truckloads of produce from area farms, like Stouts Valley Farm, Easton; Shantz Orchards, Orefield; and Samoset Farm, Bath.

Natale said people shop at Wegmans for several reasons: employees, then ingredients and freshness, and prepared foods that are "restaurant quality," she said.

None of that would matter without good customer service, she said. Natale said the company's dedication to its employees, in their training and in simply treating the employee "right" leads to "the path to great customer service."

"Our people understand that they make a difference," said Hoffman.

Customers often develop relationships with employees, he added. He's seen people deliberately stand in line when they didn't have to because they wanted to talk to a certain cashier. Customers also feel comfortable asking employees for help, whether in planning for a dinner party or learning how to cook a new item, Hoffman said.

The company makes sure employees have the training necessary to answer those questions. Several employees from the Lehigh Valley have traveled

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Photos by Angel R. Ackerman

Steve Aloï (back turned), of Salisbury Township, and Jim Meldrum, of Northampton, hang photographs in the cheese shop at the Wegmans on Route 512.

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