



BUSINESS BRIEFS

Economic Development News from Central Pennsylvania

Volume 28 - Number 6
2010

In This Issue

[Centre County
Commissioner to Be New
SEDA-COG Board
President](#)

[Showcasing Energy
Independence Seminar
to be Held in January](#)

[A Renewed Vision for
Lake Augusta](#)

[Rail Projects Generate
Economic Development
in Three Central
Pennsylvania Counties](#)

[Health Care Tax Credit](#)



Centre County Commissioner to Be New SEDA-COG Board President



Standing (L to R) First Vice President Frank Sawicki, Treasurer Malcolm Derk, and Second Vice President Joel Long; seated (L to R) President Jon Eich and Secretary Mary Simington

[Starts in 2010](#)

[Annual Average
Unemployment Rate](#)

[Quick Links](#)

[SEDA-COG Joint Rail
Authority](#)

[SEDA-COG](#)

[Energy Resource
Center \(ERC\)](#)

[East Lycoming School
District](#)

[New Berlin Energy
Independence Project](#)

[SUN Area Technical
Institute](#)

[Lake Augusta
Gateway Corridor Plan](#)

[Mifflin County
Industrial](#)

SEDA-COG's Board of Directors will be headed by Centre County Commissioner Jon Eich in 2011. He was elected at December's meeting of the Board. Commissioner Eich joined SEDA-COG's Board in 2008, and has served as its first and second Vice-President.

He has a long history with the organization, developed over years of service in the Centre County Commissioners office, and the Centre and Snyder counties' planning offices. From 1999 to 2003 Mr. Eich was Director of Administrative Services in the Commissioner's office, and was elected Commissioner in 2007. He also served in the Centre County Planning Office for 20 years, beginning in 1979 and rising to the position of Assistant Director. From 1976 through '79 Mr. Eich was employed in the Snyder County Planning Office.

Commissioner Eich is a native of New York State. He first came to Pennsylvania to attend Susquehanna University, Selinsgrove, where he earned a Bachelor's Degree, majoring in political science and economics. In 1992 he earned a Masters Degree in geography from Penn State.

The Board of Directors first Vice-President in 2011 will be Clinton County Commissioner Joel Long, who joined SEDA-COG's Board in 2008. Public service is a full time job for Commissioner Long. In the private sector, before becoming a Commissioner, he spent many years in sales, particularly with PennSel Communications Services, managing their Pennsylvania sales staff. Mr. Long also served as a member of Lock Haven City Council, dealing with such issues as downtown revitalization, recreation, and union negotiations with the police department.

Northumberland County Commissioner Frank Sawicki was elected SEDA-COG's second Vice-President for 2011. He joined the Board in 2008, following his re-election as County Commissioner. Mr. Sawicki retired from PPL Electric Utilities in 2003, where he had been a Senior Engineer. He holds degrees from Bucknell University in Lewisburg, and Susquehanna University. He served in Vietnam in 1969-70, and is a former Chairman of the Mount Carmel Township Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors.

SEDA-COG's Board has also re-elected Snyder County Commissioner Malcolm Derk as its Treasurer. Prior to being elected Commissioner he worked as Associate Director of the Susquehanna University fund and was a member of the Freeburg Borough Council, serving on the Building Committee and Planning Commission. Commissioner Derk is a graduate of Susquehanna University and has a background in public service and volunteerism.

Mary Simington, one of Montour County's two representatives on the Board, was re-elected Secretary. She was appointed to the Board of Directors in 1998, prior to which she was a member of both the SEDA Foundation and SEDA-COG Local Loan Review Committee, organizations she continues to serve on today. Professionally Ms. Simington has over 30 years in the banking business, and now works with the Selinsgrove law firm of Rudnitsky & Hackman, L. L.P.



Showcasing Energy Independence Seminar to be Held in January

[Development Corporation](#)

[Clinton County Economic Partnership](#)

[Community Resource Center](#)



[Save The Date For These Upcoming Procurement Events!](#)

[Government Contracting Express - Harrisburg - January 19](#)

[Government Contracting Express - Harrisburg - January 26](#)

[Government Contracting Express - Lock Haven - January](#)



The Energy Resource Center's monthly breakfast seminars are back! Don't miss this opportunity to learn about exciting energy efficiency, renewable energy and alternative energy projects occurring throughout our region! On **Friday, January 7th from 7:30-9:30am** at the Country Cupboard Restaurant in Lewisburg, three regional trailblazers will provide your school district, municipality, business, or manufacturing firm with examples of successful projects and processes that could be replicated for energy and cost savings at your facilities and operations.

Dave Maciejewski will provide an update on the innovative energy efficiency renovations and alternative energy projects that continue to reduce the East Lycoming School District's operational costs, and the school district's plans for additional renewable and efficient energy projects in the coming year.

Megan Epler will discuss the goals, achievements, process, and challenges of the Community-Wide (New Berlin) Energy Independence Initiative, a groundbreaking project taking place in New Berlin, Union County. This groundbreaking project, designed to be replicable by other communities, takes a community-wide approach to energy conservation and community-supported renewable energy from local sources for residents, businesses, schools, non-profits and government agencies to cost-effectively reduce New Berlin's reliance on conventional energy sources.

Dennis Hain will describe the energy conservation measures undertaken and savings achieved through energy-related upgrades completed at the SUN Area Technical Institute, a vocational school located in New Berlin, and the plans that the Institute has to reduce energy costs into the future.

Registration for this informational seminar and networking opportunity is \$25 and includes breakfast. For more information and to register, visit the ERC's website at www.seda-cog.org/energy.



A Renewed Vision for Lake Augusta

The lake itself is a center for boating and fishing, filled with watercraft of every kind from spring through late summer weekends. Shikellamy State Park, adjacent to the lake, is a popular spot for picnics, biking and walking, or just taking the dog for a stroll.

But a renewed vision is being shaped for Lake Augusta and its six miles of shoreline—a vision with even more potential for recreation, for enhanced access and public use, and for community and economic development in its connected towns. The 40-member Lake Augusta Committee is looking to the future, working with the SEDA-COG Community Resource Center on development of the Lake Augusta Gateway Corridor Plan. Following its organizational meeting in late September, the Committee recently held its second meeting, at the Greater Susquehanna Valley Chamber of Commerce.

Seven neighboring municipalities comprise the urbanized area of Lake Augusta and are showing signs of renewed interest in its future:

27th

Interested in Energy Financial Assistance?

Need technical assistance with a particular energy-related loan or grant?

SEDA-COG now offers assistance to businesses interested in pursuing grant and loan opportunities for renewable energy and energy efficiency and conservation projects.

For more information about the types of financial assistance services SEDA-COG can provide, contact Betsy Lockwood at elockwood@seda-cog.org or Ray Haden at rhaden@seda-cog.org or by phone at 570-524-4491.

Northumberland, Shamokin Dam, Sunbury, Monroe Township in Snyder County, Point and Upper Augusta townships in Northumberland County, and Union Township in Union County. Each of these municipalities contributes its own uniqueness to the larger Lake Augusta gateway community.

"The bottom line," says Joe McGranaghan, Shamokin Dam's Mayor, "is preparing a plan that each of us can buy into. We have to do what makes sense for our communities and we have to meet local interests. This plan can address issues that affect all of us. We can use it to shape new opportunities for the future."

Among individuals supporting the Lake Augusta project is Andrew Miller, Executive Director, Susquehanna River Valley Visitors Bureau, "The timing of this project could not be better. The strategies in this regional plan will enhance interest in historic Sunbury, Shikellamy State Park, Lake Augusta and the surrounding communities. Working together we can expand the appeal of the river and our historic towns and build our attraction as a destination for tourists and visitors. We can build community pride and grow the regional economy."

"The quality of the river and the heritage of our river towns is part of the quality of life that residents and visitors enjoy here" according to Trish Carothers with the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership. Current interest in the Lake Augusta effort stems from efforts to develop the larger Susquehanna Greenway, which is focusing on river towns, trails, and other projects along nearly 500 miles of Susquehanna riverfront in Pennsylvania.

Development of Lake Augusta and implementation of the Gateway Plan could result in numerous benefits including:

- Increased business opportunities for boat sales and water recreation equipment
- Scenic streets and parkways around the Lake
- Increased opportunities for exercise, fitness training, and related activities

Development would also mean construction jobs for streets, roadways, and trails, as well as new investment in riverfront-related housing and businesses.

Public-private collaboration is the key to shaping the Lake Augusta Gateway Plan, a view that is echoed by Tom Grbenick, head of SEDA-COG's Community Resource Center. He says, "This plan will help align public-private interests and ideas to stimulate continued waterfront development and reinvestment in our river town neighborhoods and businesses. It can create real prospects for good living, new business development and jobs, and bring new success to the regional Lake Augusta community."

Funding for the project has been provided through a \$125,000 PCTI grant from Penn DOT. PCTI — the Pennsylvania Community Transportation Initiative — stresses the use of "Smart Transportation" principles. Smart Transportation projects integrate financial elements, community needs, land use, and environmental concerns into transportation planning decisions and development to create a desired fit with the community and the environment.

With regard to the area transportation network "One size does not fit all," said Grbenick. "The Lake Augusta Gateway Corridor Plan will address motor vehicle movement, access and safety, but also the needs of pedestrians and bicyclists, the need for public transit, and the continued integration of rail service in the area." With the involvement of the Lake Augusta Committee and others in the region, SEDA-COG will develop a master plan to illustrate future development concepts for the gateway corridor and to depict Smart Transportation design concepts to enhance the area's potential for recreation and tourism, community and economic development.

As the Lake Augusta project moves forward and the communities' representatives gain a greater understanding of Smart Transportation, the communities will be asked to consider adopting Smart Transportation principles to provide a formal foundation for the plan and to guide future land use and transportation development in the gateway area.

The timeframe for completing the Lake Augusta planning effort is summer 2011. "Organizing communities and others with an interest in the project will take time and concerted effort," said Grbenick, "but we can't ignore this opportunity. We can't ignore one of our area's single most important assets and the transportation network needed to serve our future needs."



Rail Projects Generate Economic Development in Three Central Pennsylvania Counties



Rail-related activities continue to be a major force for economic development in Central Pennsylvania, as demonstrated by the recent completion of projects in two locations and initiation of another project in a third. Each of the projects involves partnerships between private or public industrial development interests and the SEDA-COG Joint Rail Authority (JRA), owner of five short line railroads in Central Pennsylvania.

One of the completed projects is in Lewistown, Mifflin County where traveling on Water Street will now be a little easier. The railroad track that runs through the street for several blocks has been reconstructed and was dedicated in ceremonies in late November.

A total of 1,114 feet of "street running track" were improved at a cost of over \$1 million. New pre-empted traffic lights will be installed at the intersection of South Main and Water Street in the spring. Good working track is essential in order for the lights to work correctly.

"It's like a 1,500 foot grade crossing," according to Jeff Stover, Executive Director of the JRA, which owns the tracks. The tracks are utilized by the JRA's Juniata Valley Railroad, which runs through the borough. Funding for the reconstruction project included \$200,000 from the JRA, and \$100,000 from the Juniata Valley Railroad Company. The Pennsylvania Capital Budget provided \$713,580 for the project through PennDOT's Transportation Assistance Program, and \$300,000 for the signal work was received from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Section 130 Safety Funds.

Robert Postal, President, Mifflin County Industrial Development Corporation (MCIDC), said the project benefits local industries as well as the community, "It strengthens the link between Lewistown Rail Yard and major industries like Standard Steel and Krentzman & Son. It offers community residents better access to downtown Lewistown over a much improved roadway."

The project had to be done quickly, according to Stover, "The availability of funds provided a short time frame in which to complete this project. With support from the Borough, PennDOT District 2-0, and the MCIDC, we were able to get it done."

"Another major consideration was Standard Steel, which is one of larger shippers on the Juniata Valley line. We had to minimize any interference with their operation. When Standard Steel went into its two-week shutdown this summer, we were able to complete a lot of the work. The Borough's willingness to repave Water Street was also a major reason for the project's success."

Fifty-three miles to the north, the Rail Authority teamed up with the Clinton County Economic Partnership and Avery Dennison, a local chemical company, to rehabilitate the Mill Hall Industrial Track, a 1.9-mile line between Draketown and Castanea in Clinton County. Just four years ago the line was little more than weeds and brush, rotted railroad ties, and rusting track. Rather than see the track pulled out of the ground, which would have left that area with little hope for rail service, the Economic Partnership decided to buy it and convey ownership to the JRA.

As the result of a \$432,223 rehabilitation effort there will be activity on the Mill Hall line in 2011, for the first time in years. The line will be operated by the Nittany and Bald Eagle Railroad (NBER), another of the JRA's five lines. In addition to a contribution of \$100,000 by Avery Dennison, \$97,000 was provided by the Rail Authority, \$13,223 by NBER, and \$222,000 by PennDOT through its Rail Freight Assistance Program. State funds were secured through the efforts of State Senator John Wozniak and State Representative Michael Hanna.

The newly refurbished track will serve WSP Chemicals and Technologies, PVS Chloralkali Inc., and Croda, INC., in addition to Avery Dennison.

While industrial development officials in Clinton and Mifflin counties are celebrating the completion of projects, their counterparts in lower Northumberland County recently began similar efforts.

The Rail Authority, owners of the Shamokin Valley Railroad, will construct a 2,000 foot runaround track at the eastern end of the line, adjacent to SEEDCO Industrial Park, and a 1,500 foot sidetrack servicing a wood products firm.

The total cost of the two projects is \$1 million of which \$700,000 will be provided through the Pennsylvania Capital Budget, and \$300,000 from the federal TIGER II (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) grant the Rail Authority recently received.

The projects got underway in December with a special event featuring outgoing State Representative Robert Belfanti, who supported the JRA throughout his legislative career. He helped the JRA acquire the Shamokin Valley line in 1989, and has assisted the Authority in securing Pennsylvania Capital Budget funds for needed rail projects.

Referring to the two projects, Stover said, "This is the first step to industrial expansion in lower Northumberland County. Not only is Timberend the first customer here, but our projects will help the SEEDCO Park, which has long been supported by Rep. Belfanti." In 2007, the Authority, in cooperation with SEEDCO, asked its consulting engineers to complete a feasibility study on the provision of rail service. The Authority invested \$7,000 of its own funds on the study.

Rep. Belfanti has supported the SEEDCO Industrial Park for years, securing funds for its development from a number of sources. When Governor Ed Rendell announced plans for the Industrial park in 2004, he cited the legislator's "...tireless efforts..." on behalf of the project.

Stover expects the two new projects to lead to increased traffic on the SVRR, which has been significantly upgraded over the last two years.

As 2010 draws to a close and the new year begins, the Rail Authority expects activity to continue at the same level or more. The TIGER II grant will generate projects in several Central Pennsylvania counties, and the region's burgeoning natural gas industry will keep local rail lines busy for years to come.



Small Business Health Care Tax Credit Starts in 2010

The new federal health care reform law provides tax credits to help cover the cost of health insurance. Small businesses will be one of the first groups to benefit.

This year, the law's new small business tax break will offer small employers who pay at least half of the health insurance premium for employees a tax credit equal to up to 35% of the cost of coverage.

Here are the facts:

- The tax credit is generally for small businesses with less than 25 full-time equivalent employees who earn up to an average of \$50,000 per year.
- Enacted as part of the Affordable Care Act, the credit was effective January 1, 2010. As a result, small businesses currently providing health care for their workers can receive immediate help with their premium costs.

- The credit is worth up to 35 percent of a small business's premium costs in 2010 and in 2011 through 2013. In 2014, this rate increases to 50 percent.
- Small businesses can receive the credit not only for traditional health insurance coverage but also for add-on dental, vision and other limited-scope coverage.
- Tax-exempt organizations are eligible for a 25 percent tax credit in 2010 and in 2011 through 2013. In 2014, this rate increases to 35 percent.

Find out more. Visit www.IRS.gov and download the 1-page form. Or consult your business accountant or tax advisor.

