

Downtown snow removal appears better than years past

After a heavy snowfall last February, *NewsLanc* reported a hazardous lack of sidewalk maintenance near Central Market, with “*pedestrian crossings blocked with three foot high plowed snow. Car passengers risked serious injury clambering over curbside frozen snow banks to reach the sidewalks.*” This week, however, downtown sidewalks and crosswalks are comparatively walkable, with the City taking serious measures to clear and even remove collected snow.

Mike Stauffer, co-owner of Ric’s Bread, was surprised on Monday to see a front-end loader working outside of his North Queen Street shop. “*When I saw the digger out there I thought, ‘Oh no, what happened?’*” said Stauffer, who initially expected to see a broken water line. In the several years that Stauffer has worked at the shop, he has never seen such equipment utilized for snow removal.

Catholic charities to give syringes to drug users

Times Union (Albany, NY): “*After 20 years of alleviating suffering for people touched by AIDS, Catholic Charities will take one of its boldest steps yet on Monday: passing out free syringes to IV drug users in two urban neighborhoods to prevent the spread of the disease.*

“*Anticipating criticism, the social services agency of the Roman Catholic Diocese of*

Albany spent five years planning and vetting the needle exchange program, which received approval from its trustees and board chairman, Bishop Howard J. Hubbard.

“*I understand there will be questions, but this is common sense,’ said Sister Maureen Joyce, CEO of Catholic Charities. ‘I strongly believe in this. It will save lives.’*”

LETTER: Healthcare just another business?

“I, too, had an eye-opening experience when my doctor recommended an MRI (the “pet” of the medical practitioners). I called to schedule an appointment and was told the MRI cost was \$3,000. I called my Highmark Health Insurance who told me I had reached my “cap” and the procedure would not be covered.

“Called my doctor and spoke to the secretary letting her know the price I was quoted for the

“test” and that if this was an indication of more to come...well, I’d rather be dead than medically bankrupt. She said if I paid \$1,000 up front, I could have the procedure. When I again called the imaging office, I was told, yes, that was so. I went in the next day, plunked down \$1,000 in cash, and had the MRI.

“Somehow, the numbers just don’t jive, do they?”

NEW ERA: An editorial, “*Victims’ families deserve better,*” opines:

“Lancaster County Judge Jeffery Wright erred in his sentence of a Paradise man convicted in the death of a young Gap mother in a fiery three-car crash in Salisbury Township in November 2008 that also seriously injured two women... Wright apparently was not sufficiently moved by grief-stricken family members who testified prior to Lebus’ formal sentencing recently... Prosecutors say judges can go outside the guidelines and impose stiffer sentences when circumstances warrant... We’re hopeful that, upon reflection, Wright will conclude that Lebus deserves a more severe punishment than the one he’s now scheduled to receive.”

WATCHDOG: We are appalled that the *New Era* editors would so abuse the power of the press to intimidate a judge into setting aside state sentencing guidelines and administering an exceptional punishment.

Rendell seeks \$136.8 million towards \$1.75 billion prison budget

“The proposed FY2010-2011 budget also provides for substantial increases in our Correction costs,” said Gov. Ed Rendell in proposing a state budget for Fiscal Years 2010-2010. “We have worked together on critical reforms over the years, yet the cost of housing prisoners in Pennsylvania continues to rise.”

The correctional facilities’ net operational capacity will soon increase to 48,980.

What was not addressed by the governor during the introduction of his prison budget on Tuesday was how many of the prisons were threats to society and how many were there as a result of marijuana and soft drug prohibition....

Especially disturbing is their suggestion that *“Wright apparently was not sufficiently moved,”* an impugning of the judge’s humanity. Are the editors privy to whether or not the judge struggled to control his emotions in order to do his duty?

Furthermore, the sentencing guidelines allow the judge considerable discretion, and five years and four months is no slap on the hand. (Had the accident not occurred, he may have only suffered a suspension of his license and probation.)

We ask ourselves, would we blame the *New Era* were the editors to criticize a judge for administering too harsh a sentence in a case? We think not. In this hypothetical situation, criticizing the judge for administering the guidelines would be a call for mercy. We are taught to *“Act justly and love mercy...”* It is our moral imperative to defend justice and also, when merited, to encourage mercy.

Also not addressed was how the prison industry has become one of the most powerful lobby groups and voting blocks for protecting the interests of its suppliers and workers.

According to a Justice Policy Institute report of January, 2008: *“The United States leads the world in the number of people incarcerated in federal and state correctional facilities. There are currently more than 2 million people in American prisons or jails. Approximately one-quarter of those people held in U.S. prisons or jails have been convicted of a drug offense. The United States incarcerates more people for drug offenses than any other country.”*

**The above have been excerpted from NewsLanc.com.
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