

## Pa. liquor officials: Buy mom some vodka

**PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER:** What to buy this Mother's Day to honor that special woman who lovingly nurtured you through dirty diapers, scraped knees, and your first date?

Forget flowers, chocolate, and breakfast in bed. Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board officials have just the idea for you: vodka.

The state agency is airing radio ads to make sure you know you can buy Mom all kinds of different vodka flavors – cherry! strawberry kiwi! tropical punch! – for rock-bottom prices at the state's wine and spirits stores. It even gives you a recipe for a good vodka drink...

## LETTER: Has Convention Center harmed downtown Lancaster?

*"I can't help but notice there are several homes for sale near the Vine St. side of the convention center, at least one of which has been on the market for many months (even after a significant price reduction). I wonder if it is more difficult to sell a home near the convention center than in other parts of Lancaster City?"*

*"...There appears to be fewer businesses in downtown Lancaster than there were two years ago. For example, the 100 block of East King St., the Hager Arcade, and even the 300 block of N.*

*Queen St. have an increasing number of vacancies. Meanwhile, the only 'new' development because of the downtown hotel and convention center appears to be a Subway at King and Christian, and the only new businesses being the Tropical Smoothie Cafe across from the hotel, and the Red Rose Segway Tours in the 300 block of N. Queen Street.*

*"ALL other 'new' businesses seem to be the typical turnover that we normally see, again with a slightly downward trend."*

## Monopolies, income mal-distribution and local mis-management

The 'Watchdog' was active in Lancaster affairs 40 years ago and then, despite local residency, only again within the past four years. He was shocked by the transformation over the decades from a paragon of democracy led by over thirty businesses headquartered here and local institutions to the concentration of power and influence in a handful of local powerhouses: Franklin & Marshall, Fulton Bank, High Group, Lancaster General and Lancaster Newspapers.

It took the recent publication of "**Cornered**" by Barry Lynn, perhaps the most important book on economics in a quarter century, to provide an explanation not only about the detrimental drift that

had occurred in Lancaster, but what has been a cause of the recent 'Great Recession' and the growing disparity among incomes between the top 3% of our population and the rest.

Early chapters established that, whether we are shopping in department stores, purchasing beer, selecting tooth paste or soap, picking food off the shelves in a super market, we see more choices today than ever. What we do not realize is one or two companies control so large a share of the market as to be able to dictate their will to both manufacturers and consumers. For example, two companies, a Belgian and South African, control 94% of all the beer... **[Continued on back]**

sold in this country! This was not the case prior to the Reagan Administration when laws constraining monopolies were reinterpreted. The same applies to most of today's economy although it is hidden from us.

Lynn notes "... one reason it has taken us so long to notice the return of monopolists to America is because they long ago seized control of both of our main political parties."

Now let us consider the article "**Ill Fares the land**" that appeared in the April 29<sup>th</sup> issue of *The New York Review of Books* by one of the world's foremost historians, Tony Judt .

Judt reports "*All around us, even in a recession, we see a level of individual wealth unequaled since the early years of the twentieth century. ...The wealthy,*

**INTELLIGENCER NEW ERA / AP:** *An article "United looks to business travelers" opens "United and Continental Airlines are counting on more business travelers – not higher fares for vacationers – to make their \$3 billion merger pay."*

**WATCHDOG:** In reality, this is but another example of the flood of mergers and acquisitions

**NEW ERA:** *Editorial opens "Conservative Lancastrians knew it all along – Arlen Specter was always a Democrat at heart. Since switching to the Democratic Party a year ago, Specter has repeatedly supported Democrats when they sought to head off Republican filibusters."*

*like the poor, have always been with us. But relative to everyone else, they are today wealthier and more conspicuous than at any time in living memory. ...The greatest extremes of private privilege and public indifference have resurfaced in the US and the UK, epicenters of enthusiasm for deregulated market capitalism."*

It turns out that the local concentration of power in a few hands that the Watchdog first recognized when he became drawn into the Convention Center controversy is really but a manifestation of alterations of the past three decades throughout the nation's economy and our body politic. Although exacerbated here in Lancaster by the internecine nature of our tight knit community which encourages, yea virtually requires, everyone to make 'nice' and not make waves, it represents the national trend.

during the past thirty years that has reversed the early and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century efforts to promote competition and ignored via reinterpretation laws to prevent such actions. The result: Economic stagnation and further enrichment of the top 3% of society (especially the top 1%) at the expense of everyone else

**WATCHDOG:** Sounds to us like a back-handed attempt to line up Democrat primary votes for Specter. Do the editors fear that Congressman and former Admiral Joe Seseke, Specter's opponent in the primary, would be a far stronger candidate in the general election?

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