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Watchdog weighs in on Marriott “mold”

INTELLIGENCER NEW ERA: WGAL.com, broke the story, and an *Intell* article appeared headed “*Leaks trigger mold in new city hotel*” and continued: “*Leaking pipes left more than water stains in the recently opened Lancaster Marriott at Penn Square.*”

“Video that was shot before last month’s grand opening—obtained by WGAL from an unnamed source—shows water leaking from a pipe and areas of black and yellow mold growing on walls. News 8, which brought in a certified mold remediator to view the video, said their expert reported ‘extensive mold.’”

WATCHDOG: Both **WGAL.com** and the July 22 *Intell* breathlessly announced a story that **NewsLanc** declined to report over a month ago because it was considered a normal byproduct of new construction.

Apparently, all that the video reports is a water leak (there usually are many with new construction) and that mildew had grown on the

surrounding wall (it usually does if not detected for a period of time).

During construction, there will often be water problems from yet unfinished work on the roof, infiltration from improperly caulked windows, and leaks from HVAC condensate lines and from plumbing. While many problems are detected earlier, some may not be detected for a couple of weeks after wall covering is applied. A mild odor and sometimes visual signs draw attention to the problem.

The wall covering is stripped off. The drywall is cleaned and treated against mildew. If damaged or necessary to remove in locating a leak, the drywall is replaced. Then new wall covering is installed.

This even occurs in older buildings. It is considered a routine maintenance issue.

So, unless there is evidence that the problem was more widespread than usual, what is the big fuss?

School Board considers expanding facility rentals

At the July 21 School District of Lancaster (SDoL) School Board meeting, Vice President and Facilities Committee Director Michael Rowen said that his committee was recently presented with a request from a local Unitarian Universalist Church to rent the McCaskey East auditorium and cafeteria for a service. According to Rowen, this request sparked a significant and “*on-going*” discussion regarding the School’s parameters for rental use.

Rowen explained that, although the School already rents facility space to outside organizations, the permitted uses are fairly narrow: “*We do rent out our facilities to different groups that want to use it, [but] at this point, one of the criteria is that it is always based in childrens’ use—that it would benefit our kids.*” Rowen later qualified that the School does also rent to community groups like the Lancaster Recreation Commission which may not always be running child-related programs.

1999 Part II: Full-Court Press: Lancaster Newspapers takes sides

Excerpted from the nineteenth in the Convention Center series. By Christiaan Hart-Nibbrig

“PENN SQUARE COMPLEX IS HAILED AS ‘EVERYTHING THE CITY NEEDS’; STRONG PRAISE FROM CROWD OF NEARLY 300” — Lancaster New Era, front page, banner headline. August 26, 1999.

Dale High, Chairman and President of High Industries, had always enjoyed positive coverage from all three major Lancaster Newspapers. But now, as a Penn Square Partner, the items written about him started to read more like press releases from High’s personal public relations firm rather than credible newspaper reports.

The flavor of the aggrandizement is suggested from some of the Lancaster Newspapers’ headlines from 1999:

- *“PA. CHAMBER NAMES HIGH TOP BUSINESS LEADER OF ‘99” (Lancaster New Era);*
- *“DALE HIGH HONORED AS TOP ENTREPRENEUR OF ‘99” (Intelligencer Journal)*
- *“LOCAL BUSINESSMAN IS TOPS AMONG U.S. ENTREPRENEURS” (Lancaster New Era)*
- *“THE NEW ERA RED ROSE IS PRESENTED TO S. DALE HIGH” (Lancaster New Era)*

A typically gushy profile, **“The High Road”**, this one found in the *Sunday News*, September 26, 1999, begins:

“Inside the office building, prominent business executive S. Dale High sits scanning papers on a table.

Outside, a flock of Canada geese glides prettily past High’s picture window. ‘The whole squadron,’ High remarks later as he walks outdoors to the lush park that he incorporated into the Greenfield Corporate Center. ”

“The sturdy office complex at his back symbolizes the vibrant Lancaster County he would like to preserve for his three children, two stepchildren and eight grandchildren. ...”

The convention center and hotel project presented an ethical dilemma for Lancaster Newspapers. The company was a major partner in what would become one of the largest capital projects in the region’s history. Given the vested economic interest of Lancaster Newspapers, and the multi-millions of taxpayers’ dollars involved, questioning the impartiality of LNP seems natural.

One might have thought that the top editors at LNP would have strained to soothe those concerns by vigorously investigating the project’s viability, or perhaps even hiring an outside ombudsman to review potential conflicts of ethics and professional standards. This did not happen.

In 1999, it was clear that the top editors at Lancaster Newspapers were not interested in balanced coverage of the project, and, in fact, had decided to take a proactive role in promoting it.

There are several specific examples in 1999 alone that demonstrate the biased LNP coverage of the project. Here are some of them...

(Continued at www.NewsLanc.com under heading Convention Center Series)

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