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11/6/09 • Publisher: NewsLanc.com, LLC • Combined Circulation: 80,000 monthly • Volume II, No. 92

Smithgall's strong performance against Gray

Regarding his recent campaign victory over Charlie Smithgall, Mayor Rick Gray was quoted as saying *"Negative campaigning may have an impact, but it doesn't work...If you run down the city that you want to govern, it's not going to work."*

Balderdash! An under-funded, write-in candidate in the primary from a minority party doesn't come within 314 votes of winning unless there is widespread discontent among the electorate.

And what does it mean that Gray received 468 fewer votes than fellow Democrat and City Council President Louise Williams?

Candidate Charlie Smithgall commented: *"I think it sends a message that the city is not happy with the way things are going. It's not a mandate at all."*

The city residents would be better served if Gray searches for other reasons for the close vote. It will help him do a better job as mayor.

COMMENTARY: LGH should provide public 'sharps containers'

Now that syringes can be purchased without prescriptions, it is especially important to arrange for their safe and proper disposal.

Syringe exchanges provide arrangements for clients to return needles. Even there, the percentage of exchange at best hovers between 70% and 80%. The ratio is even worse when syringes are passed out through third party distributors.

Furthermore, it is not in the public interest for people to save used syringes for later return, for fear that someone might accidentally become pricked and contract HIV/AIDS or Hepatitis. In almost all cases, users of syringes want to safely dispose of them.

The proper placement of used syringes is in 'sharps containers,' designed for that single purpose. Syringes can be dropped in, but they

cannot be removed from the hard plastic shell without a key. The containers or their contents are required to be returned separately to a public trash facility, since they are considered toxic waste.

In some cities, sharps containers can be found in restrooms and high drug traffic locations.

A service that Lancaster General Hospital could provide from its bountiful earnings would be to strategically locate sharps containers in the City and Ephrata, and then regularly deliver the needles for proper disposal, along with the hospital's other toxic materials.

This would significantly reduce the spread of disease and encourage addicts and others to use fresh syringes rather than to re-use and, worst yet, share old ones.

LETTER: Give Library System's money to the libraries

"The Library System of Lancaster County burdens all libraries in the County with its needless overhead. Information technology and Bookmobile functions should be spun-off into a small and efficient agency that serves all libraries in Lancaster County.

"The rest of the Library System needs to be dissolved, with its functions returned to the local libraries where it belongs. The resulting savings should provide more than enough money to make up for lost State funding."

The root of student homelessness

By Cliff B. Lewis

According to Ken Marzinko, coordinator of the School District of Lancaster Homeless Students Project, the greatest challenge in serving Lancaster's homeless students is a shortage of affordable housing in the area.

Lower working wages are not keeping up with the cost of fair market housing. A 2009 study by the National Low Income Housing Coalition demonstrated that a minimum wage worker in Lancaster would have to clock 83 hours each week to afford a two-bedroom apartment at fair market rates. This figure presupposes that 30% of one's income should be spent on housing.

Section 8 housing vouchers, which can subsidize a portion of one's rent payment, have lately been scarce, according to Anne Marie Theurer, Section 8 Program coordinator for the Lancaster City Housing Authority. Since early in this decade, when Congress stopped regularly granting new Section 8 vouchers, Theurer's

agency has only dispensed vouchers retrieved by attrition. The waiting list for Section 8 vouchers is not even open at this time.

As Marzinko put it, "I don't think the federal government, the state government, Lancaster County, or the city government can absorb [the need]. So it has to be the whole community pitching in and doing part of it."

Marzinko has lately spent time speaking to "Rotary Clubs, church groups, anybody that would listen" with a call for these private organizations to begin independently 'subsidizing' apartments and homes for impoverished area families.

For example, a club could jointly purchase an apartment complex, and charge a low rate for qualified families: "So instead of paying \$600 a month," Marzinko explained, "[The renter is] paying \$300, and the club is paying the difference."

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