

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## Pottstown could use George Bailey

In the next week, thousands of families will once again enjoy the 1946 Christmas classic, "It's A Wonderful Life." Jimmy Stewart portrays George Bailey, a likable young man who sacrifices college and the big world beyond in order to run the small-town savings and loan started by his father. Bailey feels life is passing him by as he helps the struggling families of Bedford Falls build homes of their own. But in his darkest hour, a guardian angel shows him he has enriched his town and earned the enduring love of his neighbors.

When my wife and I came to Pottstown in 1972, lots of people got their mortgages from locally-run savings and loans. We got a mortgage on our home in 1973 from First Federal Savings and Loan, whose president, Ray Elliott, was a 1931 graduate of Pottstown High School.

My boss, Bob Boyle, editor of the Mercury, put in a good word for us with Ray, a longtime acquaintance. First Federal had a showcase five-story office building at High and Hanover streets (now the BB&T

Bank building) designed in 1962 by Sanders and Thomas Engineers, which had its offices on the third and fourth floors. Sanders and Thomas itself got its start in 1945 in Whitney Sanders's ] house on Queen Street. Today the engineering firm, now known as STV, has offices worldwide, although none in Pottstown.



"It's a Wonderful Life" has grown to be one

Commentary by  
Tom Hylton

of the most beloved movies of all time. Ironically, the film evokes a way of life that has been largely abandoned by middle class Americans. They have forsaken towns like Bedford Falls, with their cozy main streets, diverse populations, and walkable neighborhoods, for big houses on spacious lots.

By the 2008 Great Recession, home buyers no longer got mortgages from local lenders, but huge impersonal institutions. Many were fooled into buying houses they couldn't possibly afford and ended up in foreclosure.

As a Pottstown School Board member for eight years, I'm always advised of the importance of our young people's education.

But how many of our graduates are going to stay here like George Bailey and contribute to the health and prosperity of our town?

If history is any guide, not many.

When I came to Pottstown, the borough manager, superintendent of schools, high school principal, police chief, borough solicitor, and editor of the Mercury all lived in Pottstown. Now, none of them do.

Pottstown could use a few graduates like George Bailey — committed to living and working in our town for the long haul.

