

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Using newspaper to promote ideas

Two hundred years ago, Alexander Hamilton founded a newspaper called the *New York Evening Post* to espouse his political views. As our first Secretary of the Treasury, Hamilton believed in a strong central government and used the newspaper to promote his Federalist ideas. (The newspaper survives today as the *New York Post*, one of the nation's largest dailies.)

Ever since Hamilton's era, advocates for hundreds of causes, from abolishing slavery in the 19th century to promoting pre-school education in the present time, have used newspapers as a forum to champion their ideas.

While I don't have the acumen or financial resources to start my own newspaper, I have frequently used newspapers and other media to promote worthy causes — first as a staff writer at *The Mercury* from 1971 to 1994, and subsequently as an independent journalist, writing a book and more than 200 opinion pieces for newspapers throughout Pennsylvania and elsewhere.

Ten years ago, I decided to focus my efforts on my adopted home town of Pottstown. Since then, I have published 475 articles like this one as paid advertisements. While most advertisers are trying to sell services or merchandise like cars, houses, and furniture, I'm trying to sell ideas.

There are many worthy causes, of course, but the one dearest to my heart is promoting traditional town life. I am particularly well-qualified to advocate for Pennsylvania's traditional towns, because I have lived in them my entire 70 years — including Wyomissing, Mt. Lebanon, Reading, and Allentown. I moved to Pottstown in 1971 after I graduated from college.

My wife and I love Pottstown's historic architecture and small-town feel. Having grown up walking to school, I was careful to buy our house in 1973 just across the street from *The Mercury* — a two minute walk. My wife enjoyed teaching in



Commentary by
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Pottstown's Barth and Lincoln elementary schools for 35 years, both just a 20-minute walk from our house. She now walks almost daily to the Pottstown Regional Public Library, where she sits on its board and manages the Book Nook, its used book store.

Not having to commute a half hour each way to work during our careers saved us about 15,000 hours behind the wheel, the equivalent of seven years at work. It's also saved us about \$250,000 over 35 years for the surplus cars we didn't have to buy and maintain.

Equally important, we love the sense of belonging that Pottstown has given us. We wake up in the morning to the chimes of the Trinity Church carillon. We listen to the banter of the volunteers lounging outside the Phillies fire house. We exchange greetings with the dental hygienists going to Dr. Maressa's office down the block.

Unfortunately, there is a whole generation of Pennsylvanians who have no idea what a wonderful and enriching place a traditional town can be, especially for a child. In fact, most suburbanites think towns like Pottstown should be avoided.

Most likely, they've been seduced by 70 years of public and private policies which have given every incentive for middle class and affluent people to abandon our towns instead of improving them, and which have legally mandated land-use policies that randomly scatter homes, offices, and stores all over the landscape.

This lifestyle -- suburban sprawl -- has been a colossal blunder. It has consumed millions of acres of farmland and open space, degraded the environment, raised our cost of living, and isolated the poor from the middle class, stunting upward mobility.

This way of life is unsustainable. In the future, people will seek places like Pottstown to live and work. I hope to help make Pottstown even more desirable.



ALEXANDER HAMILTON
founded the *New York Evening Post* to espouse his political views. It still exists.