

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR
Responsible
 GOVERNMENT

Using newspapers 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 to promote worthy causes — first as a staff writer at *The Mercury* from 1971 to 1994, when I left the paper, and since then, as an independent journalist. In the last decade, I have written more than 200 opinion pieces for newspapers throughout Pennsylvania and elsewhere.

A year ago, I decided to focus most of my efforts on my adopted home town of Pottstown. Since then, I have published 33 articles like this one on *The Mercury's* Opinion page as paid advertisements. While most advertisers are trying to sell services or merchandise like cars, houses, and furniture, I'm trying to sell ideas. Happily for me, *The Mercury* now provides a place for that on this page — and as long as I'm paying for the space, I can pretty much decide the timing and frequency of my articles. This option, of course, is open to any writer/advertiser willing to follow the newspaper's guidelines.

So what ideas am I trying to sell?

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 60 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 was pleased to teach in Pottstown's Barth and Lincoln elementary schools for 35 years, both just a 20-minute walk from our house. She now volunteers at the Montgomery Early Learning Center in Emmanuel Lutheran Church, literally within waving distance of our front door.

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 60 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 -- is proving to be 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 and minorities from everyone else, stunting upward mobility.

It is now becoming apparent this way of life is unsustainable. In the future, more people will be looking to places like Pottstown to live and bring up a family.

Tomorrow: Building on our strengths

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