

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

You can't lead from behind

Perhaps the most fascinating movie filmed in Pennsylvania is *Gettysburg*, the rigorously factual account of the famous Civil War battle.

In one of the film's opening scenes, southern Gen. Robert E. Lee is shown conferring with his field commander, Gen. James "Pete" Longstreet. The following dialogue perfectly conveys the culture and values of the era:

GEN. LEE TO GEN. LONGSTREET: "In the fight that is coming, I want you to stay back from the main line. This army has lost too many of its veteran commanders ... and you, sir, have a very bad habit of moving too far forward."

(long pause)

GEN. LONGSTREET: "Can't lead from behind."

You can't lead from behind.

What an incisive statement on the need for commitment!

The 50-year decline of Pottstown has many causes, but the most important is the slow migration of its middle class to the fashionable, auto-dependent suburbs after the Second World War.

Until the late 20th century, Pottstown had a healthy mixture of residents of all ages, races, and incomes. Over time, however, the middle class segregated itself in car-centered communities that were too costly for lower income families to afford.

The concentration of poor people left behind in Pottstown has sapped our human and economic resources, and it has greatly diminished upward mobility for our low-income families.

In fact, the No. 1 impediment to academic achievement for Pottstown school children is the lack of middle class neighbors.

Regrettably, Pottstown's "leadership class" consists almost entirely of people who live in the suburbs.

Pottstown's superintendent of schools, its borough manager, its solicitors, its police chief, the head of economic development, the directors of numerous non-profits — all live outside Pottstown.

They are all trying to "lead from behind."

Last week, the Pottstown School Board interviewed candidates for superintendent of schools to replace Jeff Sparagana, who is retiring June 29.

We've selected finalists for another round of interviews to be held later this month, and we hope to elect a new superintendent in April or May.

Under state law, a school board cannot require a superintendent to live in his district. But a truly committed candidate should volunteer to do so.

Because you can't lead from behind.

Tom Hylton is a member of the Pottstown School Board. However, the views expressed are his alone and not the board's.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton



GETTYSBURG: Gen. James "Pete" Longstreet reminds Gen. Robert E. Lee: "You can't lead from behind."