

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Up and out of Pottstown

As I frequently point out in this column, the Pottstown School District is spending far more money per pupil than our community can afford. That's why we have the third highest property taxes in Pennsylvania.

The response is always the same: "The education of our students is vitally important." Yes, it is. But how many of our graduates are going to stick around and contribute to the sustainability of our community?

Last week, *Reading Eagle* columnist Jim Kerr provided a perfect illustration of my point.

Kerr grew up in Pottstown and is a 1981 graduate of Pottstown High School, where he served on the P.H.S. News. His father was a teacher and guidance counselor at Pottstown High School, and his mother was a district instructional aide.

After graduation from college, Kerr was a colleague of mine at *The Mercury*, where he was a very fine reporter. Later he moved on to the *Eagle*.

But when it came to raising a family, he chose neither Pottstown nor Reading. He and his wife bought a house in Amity Township, Daniel Boone School District.

This came to mind when Kerr wrote a critique of Pottstown's Fourth of July Parade in the July 10 *Eagle*. He allowed it was a good first try for the Rotary-sponsored event, but suggested there was room for improvement.

Of course, Kerr couldn't write about the Amity Fourth of July Parade, because there is no such thing. For that matter, Amity has no main street and no downtown. And the subdivisions which house most Amity residents have as much character, to my mind, as a plate of Nilla wafers.

Pottstown has a rich architectural and industrial heritage, including rail-

road tracks, bridges from coast to coast, skyscrapers, and the locks of the Panama Canal.

Amity's heritage consists of paving over some of the nation's finest farmland for suburban sprawl.

A big part of Amity's appeal is demographics. The Daniel Boone



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

School District is overwhelmingly white and middle class. Pottstown and Reading, on the other hand, have a high percentage of low income and minority students.

People often say they value diversity, but

they usually buy houses where everyone is just like them, and the prevailing income levels are similar (or preferably higher) to their own.

Decades of self-segregation by the middle class has concentrated the poor in places like Pottstown.

The big myth is that good school districts can lift students out of poverty and into the middle class. This is what our teachers and administrators, most of whom live in the suburbs, want to believe.

The truth is, this very seldom happens. What poor children need more than anything is to grow up in neighborhoods where everybody isn't poor. Schools alone rarely make a difference.

Mobility is a hallmark of America, and people have a right to live where ever they want (if they can afford it).

But if you fancy yourself a leader, perhaps you should live in the community you're trying to influence.

In Pottstown, unfortunately, the borough manager, superintendent of schools, police chief, fire chief, borough and school district solicitors, heads of the YMCA and YWCA, economic development director, and director of the Health and Wellness Foundation all live in the suburbs.

Is a newspaper columnist a leader? He should be.

So Jim, we appreciate your suggestions for improving the Fourth of July Parade, but what Pottstown needs, most of all, is residents like you.



JIM KERR and other editors of the P.H.S. News in his senior year at Pottstown High School, 1981.