

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Hill School: style over substance

Here are the salient facts: Pottstown's tax base continues to decline as its government costs increase. The borough and the school district both raised taxes this year, and the borough already faces a projected \$1 million deficit for next year.

In 2017, the borough's largest taxpayer, Pottstown Hospital, was purchased by a non-profit and went off the tax rolls, costing the borough and school district \$1 million annually in tax revenues.

But the medical center is not Pottstown's most valuable property. With an assessed valuation of nearly \$43 million, The Hill School is worth almost twice as much as the hospital.

The school avoids an annual \$2.2 million real estate tax bill because of the tax-exempt status of its campus.

Ironically, the school serves a mostly affluent population, while the lion's share of Pottstown tax dollars support the Pottstown School District, which serves a student population that is 67 percent low income.

The Hill School trustees recognize Pottstown's physical and financial decline. In fact, a school white paper identified Pottstown as its No. 1 problem recruiting students and faculty.

Three years ago, the school identified an area lining the perimeter of the campus comprising about 600 mostly residential parcels, plus Edgewood Cemetery, it calls Hobart's Run.

The school hired a community organizer and recently added two more staff members. It bought a building for a Hobart's Run office and put up a sign. It hung "Hobart's Run" banners on lamp posts. It committed \$200,000 over two years to buy police cars.

But out of a \$175 million fundrais-

ing campaign it started four years ago, the school is only seeking \$5 million for an endowment — generating perhaps \$250,000 annually — for Pottstown. According to its website, it has only reached 16% of that \$5 million goal.

Last week, Hill School students joined Pottstown High School students in an annual fall clean-up of trash in the downtown.

On Saturday, Oct. 22, Hobart's Run volunteers will help clean up the neglected Edgewood Cemetery. The school recently donated \$5,000 toward the estimated \$15,000 cost of keeping the cemetery mowed. But considering Edgewood is im-

mediately adjacent to the school, and the school already mows acres of its own grass, the school could simply mow the cemetery itself.

Pottstown has great needs. The Hill School's public relations campaign has been outstanding. But real substance is sorely lacking.



Commentary by
Thomas Hylton

HILL SCHOOL FAST FACTS:
 100+ acre campus (tax exempt)
 522 students, co-ed
 28 states, 23 foreign countries
 Day tuition: \$40,740
 Boarding tuition: \$59,050
 Endowment: \$168,000,000
 2017 Budget: \$40,833,509

Pottstown's Tax Base shrinks

Year	Total assessments valuation
1998	\$816,841,351
2008	\$829,017,802
2018	\$772,000,000



GENERATING POSITIVE PRESS — Last month, the Hill School held a reception at the school honoring citizens who have made a contribution to the community. Activities like this generate positive headlines for the school and promote the impression it is working hard for the betterment of the town. In fact, the school devotes only a very small portion of its resources to preserve and enhance Pottstown.