

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Could it happen?

Two years ago, a retired Pottstown surgeon and businessman privately predicted that UPMC, the Pittsburgh-based hospital conglomerate, would buy Tower Health and then close Pottstown Hospital (but keep Phoenixville Hospital).

It seemed unthinkable at the time, but not any more.

Since buying Pottstown Memorial Medical Center in 2017, together with four other southeastern Pennsylvania hospitals, Tower Health (formerly Reading Hospital) has hemorrhaged red ink, greatly exacerbated by the pandemic.

The hospitals have generated \$400 million in operating losses since being purchased. Meanwhile, Tower

Health is \$1.5 billion in debt.

Pottstown Hospital is by far Pottstown's largest employer, with 1,000 employees prior to the pandemic — nearly 10 percent of Pottstown's workforce.

Beyond the jobs, Pottstown Hospital is arguably Pottstown's greatest asset, providing full medical services within minutes of every Pottstown home.

The borough took decades to recover from the closing of the Bethlehem Steel and Firestone plants. Losing Pottstown Hospital could be worse.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

CLOSING!
Bethlehem Steel shutdown is definite, company says

It's official. The Pottstown fabricating works of Bethlehem Steel Corp. will cease operations by the end of 1975.

In a brief statement to the press Wednesday morning, the giant steel corporation said the demise of Pottstown's and three other fabricating plants is high operating costs.

The high costs, the company said, were a result of high wages paid company employees as part of Bethlehem Steel's contract with United Steelworkers of America.

"Bethlehem told union officials unless employment costs in the fabricated steel construction division could be reduced to more nearly competitive levels, the company would be forced to establish a schedule for shutting down its remaining structural steel fabricating shops at Bethlehem, Leetsdale, Pottstown, and Torrance, Calif.," the spokesman said.

"The union advised Bethlehem that the company's proposal is unacceptable. Accordingly, the company has no alternative but to proceed with an orderly shutdown of these operations."

The California plant will be closed early next year. The Pottstown and Bethlehem plants will be phased out in the latter part of 1976 and the Leetsdale plant in early 1977.

The company asked union workers to take a 10 per cent cut in wages and fringe benefits but did not promise to keep the plants open if they did.

Pottstown, with 1,000 employees, is Bethlehem Steel's largest fabricating plant. It was purchased from McClintock-Marshall Construction Co. in 1951 and operated under that name until 1958, when it became the Pottstown Works of Bethlehem Steel.

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BETHLEHEM STEEL'S POTTSTOWN PLANT closed in October 1975, with the loss of 1,050 jobs. Then, in October 1980, Firestone Tire and Rubber Co. closed its Pottstown plant with the loss of 2,000 jobs. The closures were arguably Pottstown's worst economic blows in the 20th century.

Shift to Radials Forces Firestone to Close 6 Plants

By **IVER PETERSON**
Special to The New York Times

AKRON, Ohio, March 19 — The Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, responding to declining demand and a consumer shift to radial tires, will close five

a major restructuring of its North American tire operations.

The closings did not come as a surprise from a company that had a loss of \$13.8 million in its fiscal first quarter, ended Jan. 31. And the closings did not come as a surprise in an industry that has long

"The realignment is intended to meet changing market conditions by eliminating unneeded capacity that has been used mainly for the production of bias-ply tires," Richard A. Riley, Firestone's chairman and chief executive officer, said at company headquarters here.

POTTSTOWN HOSPITAL TOWER HEALTH
A Renewed Commitment to Serving the Community

THE LOSS OF POTTSTOWN HOSPITAL, purchased by Tower Health in 2017, could be an even bigger calamity to the community.