



# NORTH HILLS

COVERING THE NORTH HILLS, WEXFORD, SEWICKLEY AND THE SURROUNDING AREAS

## Group formed to coordinate recreation

By Matt DeReno

### AVONWORTH SCHOOLS

Big changes in recreation are expected in Avonworth School District and its communities now that the school board has given the go-ahead to a new group.

Residents may see more recreational programs being offered, and they will follow a new procedure for scheduling the use of a field or gymnasium.

The newly created group, Avonworth Shared Recreation Services, is intended to coordinate the use of recreational facilities within the school district and communities, apply for grants and fill gaps in recreational services.

The group will consist of three members: the school district, Ohio Township and ACORD, the Avonworth Committee on Recreational Development, which runs Avonworth Community Park and is made up of representatives from the school district's five communities — Ben Avon, Ben Avon Heights, Emsworth, Kilbuck and Ohio Township. The school board's approval was the final action needed to create the organization.

Details of how the group will operate still have to be worked out, said Richard Manning, a recreation consultant working with the group. Preliminary plans call for each of the three members to have two representatives on the Avonworth Shared Recreation Services board and to contribute to the organization's budget, expected to total \$70,000 annually. The group will advertise for a director, who will be paid a salary and benefits package totaling about \$54,500 annually.

Residents are not expected to see an increase in fees currently charged for recreation programs, but the fees will be collected by the Avonworth Shared Recreation Services, rather than the school district or municipality.

Manning told the school board in April that all money collected by the group will be put back into the organization. Once costs are covered, some money may be used to reduce the contribution made by each of the three members, he said.

### Schedules, grants, needs

A major goal of the group is to streamline scheduling of recreational facilities within the school district and its five communities by acting as a clearinghouse for information on what facilities are available, Manning said.

For example, if a softball team in Ben Avon needs a field for a tournament because its field is already in use, then the Avonworth Shared Recreation Services could arrange for the team to play on a field in Emsworth.

School district teams as well as community groups would schedule use of facilities through the new group, Manning said. Part of the director's job would be to prioritize groups' needs, he said, with school teams getting high priority.

The group also is expected to improve the chances of the school district and communities obtaining grants for recreational purposes because the joint effort would demonstrate cooperation among the district and municipalities.

In addition, the group also is expected to identify recreational needs and find ways to meet them. So far, Manning said, the organization has determined that although recreational programs in the area appear to be adequate for children of elementary school age, more services are needed for older youths and senior citizens.

### Some opposed

The school board's vote May 1 to go forward with the new group was 5-4, with opponents concerned about allowing a non-public group to handle the use of public facilities.

"I can't emphasize enough the dramatic action this board is proposing," board member Gary Short said at the May 1 meeting.

Short said he was not opposed to the concept of sharing resources or collaborating with other communities, but he

was concerned about the powers of the organization.

In a document he distributed to the board in April, Short stated: "The Pennsylvania school code vests authority, control and management of school district property with the district's elected representatives under the theory that elected directors are accountable to the public which elected them. I am unaware of any provision in the school code which permits a school board to turn over absolute control of all school property to a private organization."

School board member Jack Connors praised the concept of the group, saying the district's financial contribution would get it a full-time programming director, rather than the part-time athletic director it currently uses for scheduling, plus the use of the facilities in the other areas and the additional clout when applying for grants.

"Ohio Township and ACORD are not our competition," Connors said at the May 1 meeting. "We are the same people. We are all the same community."

Short also was concerned about whether residents were adequately informed about the proposal, saying it should have been placed on a ballot or residents should have been surveyed on the idea.

"I don't think there are 20 people in the electorate that really know anything about this proposal. I was not elected on a mandate from the people to turn over district assets for the use of what are essentially private individuals. This is too sweeping," he said.

Board member Eric Templin disagreed with Short at the April board meeting.

"The board is not trying to sneak anything through," he said. "In fact, I am sure the community would applaud our effort here. We have nothing we want to hide. This is something we should be celebrating."

Manning said a similar recreation organization has been successful in Thiusville, Crawford County.

Matt DeReno is a free-lance writer.

## Stadium complex moving forward

By Debbie Kopyva

Despite crumpling sewer lines, turr wars, rats and a landslide, construction of the North Hills School District's new Martorelli Stadium and Athletic Complex is moving ahead. Superintendent John Esaias said Monday.

"We are encouraged by the steady progress," Esaias said. "The construction of the home-side stands and press box as well as the visitor side — which includes restrooms, concession stands, storage facility and seating — is well under way. We anticipate that construction on the field house will begin soon."

A \$65,000 expenditure to replace the Center Avenue storm sewer is the latest in a series of hurdles encountered by the district. Engineering studies revealed that the bottom of the pipe, which runs under the football field, is beginning to erode. The line is functioning fine for now, but the school board agreed last week to pay for the replacement to protect the district's investment, said district solicitor Mike Withler.

Changes already had raised the price tag to about \$9.76 million, up from the \$9.5 million originally approved by the school board in January 2000. Dave Hall, director of fiscal services for the district, noted that the project has not exceeded the \$193,000 contingency fund.

"You can't do that big of a project without something coming up, especially with an older property," Hall said. The original stadium was built in 1961 by the Works Progress Administration. Project architect Chris Haupt of J. D. Astorino & Co. declined to comment about any additional changes that may be made to the project.