

# Latino radio station gets approval for site

The AM broadcaster plans to serve Spanish-language listeners in Reading, Allentown, Lancaster, Lebanon and York from facilities in Robeson Township.

By Dan Kelly  
Reading Eagle

Latinos in the Berks County area may soon have a new source of entertainment and information as work proceeds on radio station Impacto Latino.

The proposed Spanish-language station — 870 AM on the radio dial — has been approved for a 48-acre site along Quarry Road in Robeson Township behind St. John's United Church of Christ.

The six antennas will have a minor impact on the countryside but the station and its content will provide a major benefit to the community, said Hector Dorta, sales manager.

Dorta said Impacto Latino, or Latin Impact, will be the first new AM radio station in the county in almost 50 years and will be the only regional Spanish-language station serving about 300,000 listeners in Reading, Allentown, Lancaster, Lebanon and York.

"If we had been on the air last year there wouldn't have been a federal-elections lawsuit (against the county) because we would have been on the air teaching our people how to vote," Dorta said. "This is going to benefit everyone in the region, and it started here in

Reading."

Because the station started in Reading, Dorta said he hoped city and county officials would take advantage of the opportunity to communicate directly with Latinos.

"We want to have (Police) Chief Broad, the commissioners, everyone on the station," Dorta said.

The project has cleared federal and local regulatory hurdles and township officials are waiting for the station to submit construction plans, said Doris L. Rea, township manager.

"The next step is up to them," Rea said. "They need to apply for building permits."

Attorney Stephen H. Price of Reading, who guided the project through the planning and zoning process, said station officials have spent the past few months finalizing engineering plans and organizing financial backing for the project.

"I don't anticipate they'll have much trouble raising funds, given the numbers of Spanish-speaking people in the market they plan to serve," Price said. "They will be the only daily media outlet for the Spanish community in the area."

■ Contact reporter Dan Kelly at 610-371-5040 or dkelly@readingeagle.com.



Reading Eagle: John A. Secogus

The North Fourth Street building that formerly housed Club Millenium has been donated to Opportunity House, which might use it as a learning center for children and adults.

# Group hopes to find good use for a former city trouble spot

A request to turn a building that was a violence-plagued nightclub into a community asset prompts the owner to donate it to Opportunity House.

By Jason Brudereck  
Reading Eagle

A city building that once housed a violence-plagued nightclub that thrived with late-night music might soon become a learning center for adults and children.

"We don't have any immediate plans for it today, but we're hoping to know what we're going to do with it in a few months," said Modesto D. Fiume, executive director of Opportunity House, 430 N. Second St.

The former Club Millenium at 124-126 N. Fourth St. was recently donated to Opportunity House, a facility formerly known as the Reading-Berks Emergency Shelter.

Fiume said the options include using it as an extra space for his nonprofit group's learning center, which cares for about 260 children while

their parents work.

The learning center is one of about a dozen such facilities in the nation that are open 24 hours a day, seven days per week, Fiume said.

Fiume also said a large second-floor kitchen could be used as part of a culinary program for adults.

Whatever happens to the building, police Chief Charles R. Broad said he is relieved it will no longer be a nightclub. Police had linked the club to shootings and other violence.

City zoning officials ordered the club closed in July 2002 because of various violations, but that order was appealed and the club reopened in August 2002.

It was closed the next month by the building's owner, 124 N. 4 St. Street Corp., after the club's operators defaulted on a loan from the cor-

poration.

In January 2003, the corporation's owner, Donald Helms of Vero Beach, Fla., agreed to a request from Albert R. Boscov to donate the building to charity.

Boscov, chairman of Boscov's Inc. and head of the housing-rehabilitation effort known as Our City Reading, said he wanted the building to provide a service to the neighborhood instead of hurting it.

Helms recently transferred ownership of the building to Opportunity House, which so far has only sold some furniture and equipment from the building.

Fiume said he needs funding to renovate the building, which he said is probably worth almost \$200,000.

"If nothing else, we can ensure that the building will be maintained," Fiume said. "It's not further decaying, so at least we can say that."

■ Contact reporter Jason Brudereck at 610-371-5044 or jbrudereck@readingeagle.com.

## Area digest

### Muhlenberg Twp. man injured by intruders

From our news staff

A 38-year-old Muhlenberg Township man suffered cuts and bruises when two men broke into his apartment, attacked him and tried to bind and gag him, police said Monday.

Erik Ayres of the 500 block of Eisenbrown Street ran screaming into the street after he escaped his attackers Saturday night, police said.

Ayres flagged down a couple driving by, who then called police, investigators said. The couple stayed with Ayres until police arrived. Police did not release the names of the couple.

Ayres was treated in St. Joseph Medical Center for cuts on his head, officials said.

Police gave the following account:

Ayres was sleeping on his couch about 11 when he was struck several times on the head. One attacker hit Ayres with a flashlight and the other hit him with a handgun.

The men tried to tie up Ayres with duct tape and demanded he give them money. Ayres fought back and escaped.

When investigators checked Ayres' apartment they found evidence of a struggle, includ-

ing blood.

Anyone with information is asked to call police at 610-929-5454.

### Grocer in city held at gunpoint

A city grocer was held at gunpoint briefly by a man who fled the store when the victim threatened to call police, investigators said Monday.

Thank Bui, 43, was working behind the counter of Thanh Hong Asian Grocer, 300 N. 11th St., Saturday about 5:30 p.m. when a man entered the store and asked for a \$20 phone card, police said.

Investigators gave this further account: Bui turned to get a card, and when he turned back the man was pointing a gun at him and demanded the phone card and money.

Bui backed away from the counter and threatened to call police. The robber fled.

The man was described as Latino, about 20 years old, 5-foot-6-inches tall, with a mustache. He was wearing a black kerchief on his head and a green, puffy coat with a fur collar.

No one was injured.

# Problems plague Muhlenberg High project

A malfunctioning heating system that resulted in damage to the cafeteria and gymnasium is among the latest difficulties.

By Shaun Lockhart  
Reading Eagle

Despite having a \$750,000 contract with a Harrisburg firm to troubleshoot, the Muhlenberg School District continues to be plagued by construction problems involving its \$20 million high school renovation project.

A heating-system malfunction recently caused a pipe to burst, flooding the cafeteria and part of the gymnasium and cutting off heat to sections of the building.

Dr. Joseph S. Yarworth, superintendent, said an extra check of the building by a diligent employee caught the problem Jan. 11.

Maintenance workers and Yarworth spent a few hours vacuuming up the water and getting the heating system back in operation.

If the employee hadn't caught the problem, administrators would have been forced to shut down the school for at least a week, Yarworth said.

Damage included some ceiling tiles in the cafeteria and some wet wrestling mats in the gymnasium. A damage estimate is being determined.

The Quandel Group Inc., Harrisburg, is contracted to oversee the project.

Frank Murphy, project manager, said Quandel's job is to make sure the work is done according to the contract — a job

### More battery casings found

From our news staff

More buried battery casings have been discovered on the Muhlenberg High School property.

The casings were found about 6 inches underground along a 150-yard trench in the school's front parking lot, said Dr. Joseph S. Yarworth, superintendent.

The discovery marked the second time battery casings were found at the high school since a \$20 million renovation project began more than a year ago.

The school district paid \$129,372 to Lyons Construction Service Inc., Mechanicsburg, last year to remove lead-contaminated soil at the site.

Battery casings have been found in other locations along the Fifth Street Highway during various projects, according to Muhlenberg Township officials.

Yarworth said he has heard stories that the area was once used as a dumping ground for used battery casings.

EHC Associates, Lancaster, an environmental-cleanup firm, is studying the high school site to determine a cleanup method. A preliminary test found that lead levels were not dangerously high.

School board President Mark Nelson said it appeared that only empty battery casings were dumped on the school site.

Yarworth said construction at the high school will continue without disturbing the casings while the district awaits results of the EHC Associates study.

he said the company is doing.

Murphy said that although Quandel is not responsible for the actual construction work, the company is doing its best to deal with problems as they arise.

Another recent problem in a separate portion of the heating system has left temperatures uncomfortably hot in the pool area, Yarworth said.

The swimming-pool work was completed months ago and the facility is in use by the district's swimming team.

The school board has decided to withhold \$11,000 from Foreman Architects/Engineers Inc., Pittsburgh, until it

has determined if the pool problem was a design issue or a construction flaw.

Foreman officials could not be reached for comment.

The recent problems follow a four-day postponement of classes at the beginning of the school year because of incomplete work.

Despite initial delays, the project is on schedule, said William T. O'Neil, on-site manager for Quandel.

"I think we are getting back on track," he said. "We are starting to meet (target) dates instead of missing them."

■ Contact reporter Shaun Lockhart at 610-371-5032 or stockhart@readingeagle.com.

# Synagogue property center of tax issue

Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom in Wyomissing Hills feels a house it owns should be exempt. A state court says otherwise.

By Mary E. Young  
Reading Eagle

A legal battle over where the property line begins and ends for taxing religious institutions could end up costing a Wyomissing Hills synagogue more than \$3,000 annually, if a recent Commonwealth Court decision stands.

As a house of religious worship, Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom, 555 Warwick Drive, is exempt from paying property taxes.

But the state court has ruled that it must pay taxes on a nearby property at 7 Vista Road. The house is occupied by Lucille Lott, the synagogue's caretaker, who is on call 24 hours a day.

The property is assessed at \$117,800. That amounts to \$3,182.36 in taxes that the synagogue would have to pay the county, borough and Wyomissing School District.

In the court opinion, President Judge James Gardner Collins stated that county courts and Commonwealth Court have denied exemptions to parsonages, or church-owned houses used by the clergy.

"If a clergy house cannot win exemption, a maintenance employee's house located half a block away from the synagogue should not either," Collins stated.

Alan M. Seltzer, a Wyomissing attorney who represents the synagogue, said the trustees are considering if they want to ask the state Supreme Court to hear the case.

The Supreme Court would have to be convinced that its decision would have impact beyond the synagogue before it would hear the case, Seltzer said.

Gerald P. Sigal, a Reading attorney who challenged the tax assessment in county court, said he believes the case would have that impact.

The courts are treating religious institutions differently than charitable institutions, which are granted exemptions for properties deemed necessary to their charitable purpose, he said.

And, the state assessment law says the exemption provided for places of religious worship should include annexed ground necessary for the occupancy and enjoyment of religious worship, Sigal said.

According to court records, the caretaker cleans and maintains the synagogue and must be available for services on evenings and weekends, special events and emergencies.

Edwin L. Stock, county assessment board solicitor, said the board issued the assessment in January 2003, after the synagogue moved to Wyomissing Hills.

The synagogue did not pay any taxes on its former location at 13th Street and Perkiomen Avenue, or on an adjacent house at 1318 Perkiomen Ave. that had been occupied by the caretaker, he said. But the exemption on that house probably was granted a long time ago, Stock said.

"The assessment board at that time exempted it, and nobody ever looked at it again to question whether it deserved to be exempt or not," he said. "I don't believe the caretaker's house should be exempt."

He said he is not aware of any other place of worship that has an exemption on property not used for religious services.

Commonwealth Court ruled that the tax-exempt status of the former property has no bearing on the status of the new property.

■ Contact reporter Mary E. Young at 610-478-6292 or myoung@readingeagle.com.

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