

JAN - 7 A.M.

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CONTACT: Barbara Fajt (717) 787-7895

DEP offers grants to help clean up the environment

HARRISBURG, Jan. 6 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, is making applications available to organizations involved in restoring and protecting Pennsylvania's environment for the new "Growing Greener" watershed protection and restoration grant program.

Individuals also can complete an application online through the state Department of Environmental Protection's Web site at www.dep.state.pa.us.

"By providing people with the means to clean up the environment, we are taking the first of many steps in improving the quality of life for all residents," Scrimenti said.

According to Scrimenti, DEP will consider applications for the first round of "Growing Greener" grants that are received on or before Feb. 11.

To help explain the application process and provide advice on what types of information groups should include on grant applications, the Pennsylvania Organization for Watersheds and Rivers will hold two seminars Jan. 19 at DEP's Northwest Regional Office located at 230 Chestnut St. in Meadville.

The afternoon session begins at 1:30 p.m., while the evening session will start at 7 p.m.

Scrimenti encourages anyone with additional questions to contact DEP toll free at 1-877-724-7336 or by e-mail at

GrowingGreener@dep.statepa.us.

Additional information and applications also are available from Scrimenti's district offices at 9 W. Main St. in North East, 814-725-8664, or 202 N. Center St. in Corry, 814-664-9126.

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Residents can support breast, cervical cancer research

HARRISBURG, Jan. 11 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, said Pennsylvanians once again will be able to support breast and cervical cancer research at tax time through the income tax check-off program.

Now in its third year, the program allows taxpayers to donate all or part of their state tax refund to help fund grants for breast and cervical cancer research. Scrimenti voted for legislation that established the program in 1997.

"Since the program's inception, participating Pennsylvanians have helped to raise more than one-half million dollars for breast and cervical cancer research," Scrimenti said. "Every dollar contributed to the fund goes directly to breast and cervical cancer researchers in Pennsylvania.

"With the check-off program, Pennsylvanians can make a real difference in moving us closer to finding a cure and putting an end to these deadly diseases."

According to Scrimenti, 11 cancer researchers across the state were awarded grants in 1999, including researchers at the University of Pennsylvania, Temple University School of Medicine, University of Pittsburgh, Fox Chase Cancer Center, Magee Women's Hospital, Carnegie Mellon University and Penn State College of Medicine.

For more information about the income tax check-off program, or to find out how to become more involved, people may contact the Pennsylvania Breast Cancer Coalition at 1-800-377-8828.

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Scrimenti working to help downtown Corry recover from fire

HARRISBURG, Jan. 18 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, today met with a Ridge administration official to survey damage caused by yesterday's fire that ripped through five downtown Corry businesses and some second-floor apartments across the street from his district office.

Scrimenti met with Sam Wagner, director of the Northwest Regional Office of the Governor's Center for Local Government Services, to determine whether the state could play a role in helping the community recover from the destructive blaze.

"Right now, the Corry community is working to pick up the pieces, both emotionally and physically, of this devastating fire," Scrimenti said. "The fire not only displaced eight local residents and five area businesses, it also dealt a real blow to the downtown community and its efforts toward Main Street revitalization.

"I want to work with local officials, as well as the governor's office, to determine whether something can be done on the state level to assist our residents and businesses."

Scrimenti said he also is looking into whether he could apply for a Community Revitalization Program grant under the state Department of Community and Economic Development on behalf of the city or the Corry Chapter of the American Red Cross.

"We all are thankful that there were no deaths or serious injuries caused by the fire, and I want to commend our local fire departments for responding to the blaze so quickly," Scrimenti said. "Now, we must focus our efforts on rebuilding the community."

Scrimenti said the Governor's Center for Local Government Services works within the Department of Community and Economic Development to ensure that Pennsylvania's local governments receive the services and support they require. The center provides local governments with access to all state agencies under the governor's jurisdiction.

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Scrimenti requests meeting for residents affected by blaze

HARRISBURG, Jan. 25 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, this week asked the Governor's Center for Local Government Services to meet with property owners and tenants affected by last week's fire in downtown Corry.

In a letter to the center's Northwestern Regional Office Director Sam Wagner, Scrimenti expressed his belief that prompt reaction and response from the center's regional office was needed to help ease the devastation experienced by those residents involved.

"When you are the victim of such a tragedy, the magnitude of recovery doesn't really hit home until an attempt is made to bring back some semblance of normalcy to your life," Scrimenti said. "As an agency of the state, we can and should make those attempts to help provide that sense of normalcy."

Scrimenti said the meeting would give property owners and tenants an opportunity to find out what assistance might be available to them, as well as provide them some direction in the recovery and restoration of their properties.

Last week, Scrimenti met with Wagner to survey damage caused by the Jan. 17 fire that destroyed five downtown Corry businesses and some second-floor apartments across the street from his district office.

The Governor's Center for Local Government Services works within the state Department of Community and Economic Development to ensure that Pennsylvania's local governments receive the services and support they require. The center provides local governments with access to all state agencies under the governor's jurisdiction.

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Scrimenti welcomes Erie resident to House chamber

HARRISBURG, Feb. 2 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, today introduced Susan S. Spafford, Miss Pennsylvania 1999, to fellow legislators during the legislative session of the state House of Representatives.

Scrimenti presented the Erie resident an honorary citation from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives to commemorate her achievement as Miss Pennsylvania and to praise her for her work to promote music education in Pennsylvania's schools and communities.

"It was an honor and a pleasure to have Susan at the state Capitol and to introduce her to my colleagues," Scrimenti said. "Her belief in music education and her work on behalf of the children of our Commonwealth are to be commended. I trust her visit will spark renewed interest among legislators and the Ridge administration in bringing the importance of education to the forefront."

Scrimenti said Spafford met with Gov. Thomas Ridge and other state officials to discuss the importance of music education and its role in Pennsylvania's public schools. She also spoke to the state Senate about her work as Miss Pennsylvania and in music education.

Spafford, a violinist, attended the Fort LeBoeuf schools in Scrimenti's legislative district.

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State grant will be used to acquire 48 acres around lake

HARRISBURG, Feb. 2 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, is pleased to announced that a \$135,000 state grant has been awarded in the area from Pennsylvania's Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund.

The grant will help finance the acquisition of approximately 48 acres in Greene and Venago townships for the expansion of the Lake Pleasant Natural Area.

The grant will match the funds already invested in the project by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy.

"It is important that we continue to invest in the preservation and development of our natural areas," Scrimenti said. "The Lake Pleasant Natural Area is of tremendous value locally and beyond, and it must be preserved for future generations of Erie County residents, as well as all Pennsylvanians."

The Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund, also known as Key '93, is administered by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' Bureau of Recreation and Conservation. Funding from the program can be used to enhance or construct parks, recreational facilities, educational facilities, historical sites, zoos and public libraries.

Scrimenti said the total cost of the lake area project is estimated at \$270,000. The Key '93 grant will match the \$135,000 commitment made by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy.

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Scrimenti wants to increase pay for substitute teachers

HARRISBURG, Feb. 3 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, today appealed to members of the House and Senate Education committees on the need to pass legislation that would provide Pennsylvania substitute teachers better wages.

Scrimenti testified at a joint informational meeting of the two committees, which was held to examine staffing shortages in Pennsylvania's public schools. He discussed his legislation (H.B. 406) that would provide minimum salaries for short- and long-term substitute teachers.

"Right now, substitute teachers in Pennsylvania public schools are earning as little as \$45 to \$55 per day to teach our children," Scrimenti said. "School districts already have a hard time attracting substitute teachers due to the short notice that is given, and the extremely low pay only adds to the dilemma."

Scrimenti cited substitute teacher salaries in his legislative district as an example of the problem. According to salary figures from the Northwest Tri-County Intermediate Unit, substitute teachers earn from \$55 to \$75 per day depending on the district. For long-term substitutes, those who teach every day for more than a few months, only two of the 17 school districts within the Northwest Tri-County region offer a higher wage.

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Under Scrimenti's legislation, substitute teachers who are placed in a position and give instruction in the same subjects or to the same students for more than three months would be paid:

- No less than the minimum teachers salary provided by law, which is \$18,500 per school year, or about \$102 per day, or
- Ninety percent of the minimum amount provided to first-time teachers in a particular school district under union contract, whichever is greater.
- All other substitute teachers would be paid 60 percent of the minimum, at least \$60 per day.

"Substitute teachers are a part of our educational process that cannot and should not be ignored," Scrimenti said. "My legislation acknowledges substitute teachers as professionals and not just as babysitters or warm bodies in the classroom until the regular teacher returns."

Others who testified at the joint meeting were school administrators, full-time classroom teachers and substitute teachers from across the state, and representatives from the Pennsylvania School Boards' Association, Pennsylvania Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals and the Pennsylvania Association of Intermediate Units.

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Senior centers to be 'wired' to the Internet

HARRISBURG, Feb. 28 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, said two area senior community centers will receive grants to assist with Internet access.

The North East and Union City senior centers both will use their grants to buy computers, with the funding provided through the Department of Aging.

As part of a statewide program, Surfing the Web into the 21st Century, senior centers across Pennsylvania will be able to link with each other via the Internet.

"There is a growing interest among our senior citizens to use computers and access the Internet," Scrimenti said. "This program offers invaluable access to shared ideas, information and assistance for seniors throughout Pennsylvania."

The three-year program provides funding for computers, hardware, software or services, with the goal of establishing and maintaining a Pennsylvania senior centers Web site. Each center receiving a grant must provide ongoing information on their sites for the duration of the project.

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MAR 14 2009

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Scrimenti continues fight for volunteer firefighters

HARRISBURG, March 15 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, today introduced legislation that would establish a grant program for local volunteer fire departments.

Scrimenti's bill (H.B. 2349) would appropriate \$25 million in state funds to provide grants to volunteer fire departments for equipment, training and facility maintenance costs. Volunteer departments would not be required to provide a local match to receive the money.

"Out volunteer firefighters are continually being asked to perform heroic and life-threatening duties on a daily basis, oftentimes with older and more worn equipment," Scrimenti said. "These grants would equip our volunteer departments with the necessary tools to best protect our residents' safety and their property."

Scrimenti's legislation is part of a five-bill package introduced by House Democrats to boost local volunteer fire departments and make volunteering for local fire companies more attractive. The four other bills would create a volunteer firefighter pension system, provide college tuition reimbursement, offer accident and disability insurance and give graduation credit for approved volunteer firefighter or emergency services courses.

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"By offering incentives to our volunteer firefighters, we hope to attract more candidates and reward the commitment already made by our current volunteers," Scrimenti said.

Scrimenti also voted for legislation this week that would provide \$25 million annually for grants to volunteer fire departments. The bill awaits action by the Senate.

Scrimenti introduced the similar grant bill to ensure that Pennsylvania volunteer firefighters are covered in the event the Senate does not act on the other measure.

"For many years, I have advocated in the state legislature on behalf of the interests of volunteer fire departments," Scrimenti said. "We made a great leap for our firefighters this week, but I want to make sure that leap does not fall short in the Senate. Every bill we send to the Senate on behalf of our volunteer fire departments improves our chances of success."

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RADIO NEWS DIRECTORS PLEASE NOTE: An actuality from Rep. Scrimenti on this legislation is available at 1-800-452-3001, ext. 004.

MAY 24 2000

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Volunteer firefighters to get help from state

HARRISBURG, May 24 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, said vital aid for local volunteer fire departments came to fruition today when the state's 2000-01 fiscal year budget was signed into law.

The \$20 billion budget includes \$25 million for grants for Pennsylvania's volunteer fire departments. Volunteer fire departments throughout the state will have an opportunity to apply for grants for equipment, training and other needs.

The grant program is virtually identical to legislation Scrimenti introduced earlier this year.

"Public hearings conducted with the volunteer fire departments in my legislative district last year revealed that many of our departments are struggling to fight fires with older and worn equipment," Scrimenti said. "We also heard they are losing members, in part, because they must spend upward of 80 percent of their time raising money instead of answering fire calls.

"This is why I introduced legislation to help combat the problem and I will continue to support legislation and state budget appropriations that will assist our volunteer firefighters in doing their jobs."

Gov. Thomas Ridge requested \$15 million for grants for volunteer fire departments in his initial budget proposal. Scrimenti fought to have the amount increased to \$25 million.

He also supports legislation pending in the House that would create a volunteer firefighters' pension system and a college tuition reimbursement program, provide funding for disability and life insurance and a vocational training credit program, and establish a continuing volunteer fire department grant fund for equipment and other needs.

"The money put into the new budget is a great first step for our firefighters," Scrimenti said. "Now it is time for us to take a bolder leap and give our volunteer fire departments other resources that will assist them in carrying out their primary mission of protecting life and property."

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JUL 21 2000

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Scrimenti urges sentencing agency to release data

HARRISBURG, July 20 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, today urged the Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing to release all the information collected and examined for its report on individual judges' sentencing practices through 1998.

The report, which analyzes whether individual judges follow the commission's sentencing guidelines that consider current offenses and prior records, was mailed to Pennsylvania judges a few weeks ago. Scrimenti sent a letter to the commission regarding its actions.

At issue is the commission's decision to withhold information that would name individual judges and the races, genders, offenses and prior records of the defendants they sentenced. Commission Executive Director Mark Bergstrom said people could make mistakes in interpreting the data, which would be unfair to some judges.

"It is wrong for the commission to deliberately withhold information that could show whether a particular judge is sexually or racially biased when handing down sentences," Scrimenti said. "This information falls under the purview of the public's absolute right to know and I believe the commission is abrogating its responsibility to Pennsylvania citizens and taxpayers."

Scrimenti said the information excluded from the report is available for public use, but it is not easily accessible or contained in one place.

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Judges in all 67 counties submit their own sentencing information to the commission. The commission serves as a clearinghouse for the information collected.

"It is not in the best interest of the public nor does it make sense for the commission to spend time and resources on a study only to withhold a portion of its findings," Scrimenti said. "Furthermore, the commission is not charged to deny any information, especially based on an assumption that some segments of the public could misinterpret the data. It is wrong for them to make that assumption and wrong for them to act on it.

"As a member of the legislative body that created the commission, I am disappointed that its members would disregard the very reason it was established."

The Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing was created by the General Assembly in 1979 to write sentencing guidelines meant to ensure equal justice. The analysis was mailed to judges across the state, but not to individual lawmakers. Legislators and interested residents must request a copy of the \$150 report in writing.

For information or to request a copy of the analysis, write the Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing at P.O. Box 1200, State College, PA 16804-1200. The number is 814-863-2797.

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AUG 10 2000

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Scrimenti meets Rx bus en route to Canada

HARRISBURG, Aug. 10 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, today joined a group of traveling Pennsylvanians and consumer advocates in drawing attention to the high cost of prescription medications in the United States.

Outside a K Mart store in Erie, Scrimenti met a busload of senior citizens and others who are taking a two-day trip from Pittsburgh to Canada to purchase medications at prices up to 60 percent less than in the U.S.

Scrimenti said because prescription prices are drastically lower in Canada, bus trips like this are quickly becoming lifesavers for thousands of Pennsylvania residents.

"Prescription drug prices across America are skyrocketing at an alarming rate," Scrimenti said. "Americans pay the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs. What's more disturbing is that these high prices are for medication produced in our own country.

"Our seniors shouldn't have to worry about whether they can afford the medicine they need to stay healthy and the heat they need to stay warm in the winter. And they shouldn't have to take a trip outside our nation to get the life-saving medication they need."

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Scrimenti said that while the overall cost of health care is rising at an annual rate of about 5 percent, the cost of prescription drugs is rising at nearly 20 percent. Drug manufacturers typically charge U.S. wholesalers more than their counterparts in other countries, including Canada.

"The drug companies claim the high prices are needed to pay for research and development," Scrimenti said. "Yet people in other countries don't get hit with these high prices."

Scrimenti is co-sponsoring legislation (H.B. 2520) that would designate prescription medications as a life necessity, which would allow the state to regulate prices, as it does with milk and other essential products. A Fair Drug Pricing Board would set drug wholesale and retail prices based on the federal supply schedule and the price of drugs in Canada.

"This is a fair bill that is long overdue," Scrimenti said. "It is time for the Pennsylvania General Assembly to step in and give residents the help they deserve."

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Commission to release all information on sentencing practices

HARRISBURG, Aug. 10 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, today praised the Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing for its decision to release all information collected and examined for its report on individual judges' sentencing practices through 1998.

The commission yesterday reversed its earlier decision to withhold information that names individual judges and the races, genders, offenses and prior records of the defendants they sentenced.

Scrimenti wrote the agency in July, urging it to provide all information from the study to the public. The report analyzes whether individual judges follow the commission's sentencing guidelines that consider current offenses and prior records. It was mailed to Pennsylvania judges in June without the race- and gender-specific information.

"It was wrong for the commission to deliberately withhold information that could show whether a particular judge is sexually or racially biased when handing down sentences," Scrimenti said.

"It also was not the best interest of the public for the commission to spend time and public money on a study only to withhold a portion of its findings. I am glad the commission reversed its earlier decision and is now acting in the best interest of the public."

Scrimenti said the information excluded from the report was available for public use, but it was not easily accessible or contained in one place. Judges in all 67 counties submit their own sentencing information to the commission. The commission serves as a clearinghouse for the information.

The Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing was created by the General Assembly in 1979 to write sentencing guidelines meant to ensure equal justice. For information or to request a copy of the analysis, write the Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing at PO Box 1200, State College, PA 16804-1200. The number is 814-863-2797.

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SEP 8 2000

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Scrimenti to participate in America's Legislators Back to School Day

HARRISBURG, Sept. 7 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, will talk with students from the Corry Area and Harborcreek school districts as part of America's Legislators Back to School Day on Sept. 15.

The national event is designed to teach young people what it is like to be a state legislator and to help students understand the importance of a representative democracy. Scrimenti will talk to students of every age about his job as the area's state representative.

"I am delighted for the opportunity to talk to our young people about what I do as their state representative, but more importantly about the importance of public service," Scrimenti said.

"Aside from serving the best interests of our constituents, it is part of our jobs to take the time to let our young people know that they are important and that they can make a difference in the process. They are our future leaders, our future businesspeople, our future workforce, our future parents and the future of our communities."

America's Legislators Back to School Day is a bipartisan event sponsored by the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Center for Civic Education, the National Education Association, the American Association of Elementary School Administrators, the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

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Scrimenti wants prescription drug coverage for seniors on legislative fast track

HARRISBURG, Sept. 14 -- State Rep. Tom Scrimenti, D-Erie, is pleased that House Republicans have finally come to the table on one of the most important problems facing Pennsylvania senior citizens: the high cost of prescription drugs.

House Republicans unveiled their plan today, which Scrimenti said will help open dialogue and debate on the issue when legislators return to session Sept. 25.

"The senior citizens of Erie County and throughout Pennsylvania have suffered long enough under the burden of high prescription drug prices," Scrimenti said.

"I have been a longtime advocate for improving prescription drug coverage for seniors and I am delighted that the House Republicans finally heard my call for action. It's time that we move forward on this issue and come up with a workable solution that will provide real help for seniors in need."

Scrimenti said part of the Republican plan appears to be a slight modification of the state's prescription drug program for seniors known as PACENET, a second tier of the Pharmaceutical Assistance Contract for the Elderly. The proposal keeps the PACE/PACENET system intact, but changes the PACENET deductible from \$500 a year to \$40 a month, a net savings of only \$20 per year.

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"Very few seniors have seen value in PACENET because of the burdensome annual deductible," Scrimenti said. "I'm not convinced that this proposal will fix the problem, but I am eager for the opportunity to engage my colleagues in the discussion."

Scrimenti said 25,000 older Pennsylvanians have gone without prescription drug coverage due to the hefty deductibles and copayments, at a cost of \$12.8 million so far this year.

Scrimenti is sponsoring a more comprehensive plan called PACE Plus. It would make more people eligible for both PACE and PACENET. Seniors enrolled in PACENET would see the \$500 deductible eliminated.

"This issue needs to be placed on the fast track because the people we are trying to help cannot afford to abandon their lifesaving medications," Scrimenti said. "Coupled with spiraling drug costs, there is no issue of greater importance at this time."

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