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A year of economic hope – and concerns

December 24, 2010

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The region's landscape in 2010 was painted literally and figuratively by the advent of the natural gas industry.

The industry's development of the Marcellus Shale deposits underneath our Earth took full flight during the year, with varied impact emerging. The economic development is obvious. Jobs and opportunity are springing up like mushrooms throughout our region.

There are, to be sure, concerns. The industry must be strictly regulated for environmental concerns. The movement of new people into the area also is putting pressure on the housing market, forcing rents higher and sometimes beyond the means of longtime tenants.

The positives and negatives of the industry were practically daily news during 2010. At the end of the year, however, the rational view of this industry must be that it has once-in-a-generation potential for our region. The only concern is that these economic gains not come at the expense of the region's stakeholders, its everyday people, who need to be ensured a means of survival amid this possible economic boom.

The industry's positive impact on the economy was a big part of the local portfolio in 2010 and a major reason why the region showed signs of recovery from the nation's economic malaise.

Also heartening were physical signs of a downtown Williamsport renaissance and an agreement a Kohl's department store in 2011, the first major retailer in center city in a generation. The transformation came fittingly at the climax of a decade of effort known as Our Towns 2010.

Politically, the region's voters were part of a sea change this November, with a Republican elected governor of Pennsylvania, a Williamsport man, Tom Marino, unseated Chris Carney in a congressional race with national implications, and Republican majorities being voted into both Congress and the state House.

The year was not without major social concerns locally, with bullying in our schools far too prominent in the picture and a spate of shootings in Williamsport at year's end bringing a new sense of trepidation locally.

The full-frame picture of our region in 2010 is one of hope mixed with legitimate concerns that must be answered for hopes to reach full positive impact.

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