

# New Projects Will Breathe Life Into Dauphin County

## A Press And Journal Editorial

As anyone who lives outside the Harrisburg city limits can tell you, the residents of the southern third of Dauphin County have always been just as crucial to the industrial, cultural and ethnic make-up of Central Pennsylvania as the state capital itself.

For proof of the area's significance over the past century, one only need look to the venerable Bethlehem Steel plant in Steelton, busy Harrisburg International Airport in Lower Swatara Township, the vast legacy of Milton S. Hershey in Derry Township, and countless other businesses, individuals and organizations which have helped to define and sustain this bustling region for decades.

Time has created some formidable challenges for the area's future, however:

- economic hurdles have changed the face of manufacturing in the mostly blue-collar community, as evidenced by the closing of the Fruehauf trailer plant two years ago;

- suburban sprawl has placed a premium on available land, such as in the rolling hills of Londonderry Township, where hundreds of new homes are slated for construction over the next several years;

- shifting populations throughout the area have created a local version of the American melting pot, with its rich blend of ethnicity and social strata, accompanied by all of the various growing pains and benefits that commonly occur with such progress.

Now, we are reminded almost daily, the 21st century is just around the corner. With that in mind, two aggressive projects have been initiated in southern Dauphin County which will help to sustain the region's reputation as a vital and influential part of the commonwealth well into the future.

The first of these two plans, the New Baldwin Corridor Coalition, will address the economic revitalization of the Route 230 corridor between Interstate 81 and the Middletown Borough-Londonderry Township border.

Prompted initially by Bethlehem Steel's continuing financial struggles and a decreasing tax base in the aging Borough of Steelton, the New Baldwin project has grown to include eight municipalities along the 13-mile stretch of Rte. 230 and numerous representatives from local business, industry, government and education.

According to the plan's creators, the goal of the Coalition is to "bring about a social and economic renewal" in the community. To accomplish the task, a business "incubator" and technology center will be established in Steelton, where new and developing low- and high-tech firms will set up shop and share their research. In addition, experiments in labor-management relations, municipal government and education will combine to make a futuristic "laboratory" of the entire New Baldwin area.

The second of the two new proposals is the Swatara Creek Greenway Project, which was created to preserve open space and recreation areas along the length of the stream in southeastern Dauphin County.

County officials first called for the action in 1989, when a task force was created to study the loss of land due to rapid development along the creek. As Dauphin County's largest tributary, the Swatara passes a number of historic and ecologically significant areas, including dozens of ancient Native American sites, the old Union Canal and Indian Echo Caverns.

In all, the protected "greenway" will include a 21-mile stretch of the winding Swatara Creek, from the Lebanon County line to the mouth of the stream at Middletown and Royalton. Future plans for the Greenway corridor include public hiking and walking trails, educational areas and a large County park in the vicinity of Middletown and Hummelstown.

Despite the fact that the New Baldwin and Swatara Greenway projects remain in the formative stages of development at this time, the vision and foresight which lies behind their creation deserve to be saluted and supported. Questions may remain about funding, feasibility and management of the proposals, but there is at least a serious commitment by the area's business and political leaders to achieve these goals over time as they have been presented.

Local residents will be called upon in the future to make their feelings known about each of the two objectives and to participate in the planning. Cooperation on the part of the community is critical if either project is to bring a breath of new life into the future of southern Dauphin County.