



Individuals make a difference

LHVA chairman personifies community service

By Natalie Gelb Solfanelli

The Lackawanna Heritage Valley is one of dozens of heritage areas that are recognized by virtue of their roles in the development of the United State of America and/or their respective state or commonwealth. Each heritage area celebrates its own particular characteristics, whether they are historical, industrial, agricultural, maritime, cultural, or any other aspect that is considered noteworthy and important to preserve.

One can list easily the many historical and cultural treasures of this region. It is more difficult, however, to define one of our greatest attributes - the sense of community. The devotion to community service, inculcated by generations of people who understood and honored this place where we live, manifests itself through social, spiritual, and civic engagement. For many, community service is as integral a part of daily existence as the mundane activities of eating, dressing, bathing and sleeping. Thousands of residents participate in PTAs, neighborhood associations, libraries, children's athletic teams, church and synagogue groups, soup kitchens, United Way agencies, arts and music organizations, fraternal organizations and a myriad of other interest groups. And every one of these individuals defines our communities and makes a difference in the life of its people.

Alan Sweeney, chair of the board of directors of LHVA, personifies community service. He is an invaluable source of wisdom, support, and enthusiasm for LHVA's staff. Thus it was that, in June, when the Pennsylvania Federation of Museums and Historic Organizations (PFMHO) notified its members that it would be recognizing individuals and organizations throughout the Commonwealth for service awards, the Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority nominated Mr. Sweeney. In a demonstration of excellent judgment, the PFMHO selections committee chose Alan to receive its annual "2008 Individual Professional Leadership Award." The award will be presented at a luncheon to be held in Hershey on Oct. 28.

Alan has been a community servant throughout his entire adult life. He not only chairs the LHVA, but also he has been president of the board of the Lackawanna Historical Society for the past 11 years. He is passionate about preserving our region's history, and he is generous in sharing his extensive knowledge with the public, through presentations to schools, clubs and any other group that expresses an interest in learning more about our past. He possesses encyclopedic knowledge on many subjects, especially the Civil War as well as the history of the

railroads. He has written "Journey along the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad;" "Scranton, Pennsylvania (Images of America Series);" and "Gateway to the Clouds: A Story of the Short Line Railroad, the Scranton, Dunmore, Moosic Lake Railroad, 1902-1926;" which he co-authored with his wife, the former Judy Hennemuth.

But Alan Sweeney's service to the community goes well beyond his love and devotion to its history. His service crosses many types of organizations, including social service, history, education and cultural enjoyment. He is a perfect example of how one individual can make a difference in the life of a community. The cumulative impact of his activities is impressive, and he sets the example for the rest of us. Although 360 people saluted him on Sept. 17 at the annual dinner of the Lackawanna Historical Society, many, many more in this region have unknowingly benefited from his years of service. He has created, implemented and supported programs that have been enjoyed by users of the Scranton Public Library and the Mid-Valley Library, clients of American Cancer Society, visitors to the renovated Soldiers and Sailors monument and General Sheridan monument on Courthouse Square, riders who have enjoyed trips on trains from Steamtown National Historic Site to Tobyhanna and Carbondale, and hundreds of children who have greeted the Santa Train in the Mid-Valley communities at holiday time. Alan has been responsible for making much of this possible.

For those who know him personally, Alan's work is legend. But there are many who don't know him or have no knowledge of how much he does. Although he is a colorful individual who is witty and entertaining, he is also a humble man who keeps a low profile, always working behind the scenes, planting and nurturing ideas, making plans and making them happen, whether it means working the phone lines, arranging events, selling tickets or dishing out food. He gives it his all, makes it happen, and then moves on to the next project. He is steady and solid and loyal to a fault. Alan is proof that one person can make a huge difference. He is a wonderful role model for everyone who wants this region to move forward and prosper.

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