

Contact Us | Advertise | About Us | Home Delivery

HERALD Standard.com *"Your Local News Leader"*

online **UNIONTOWN, PA**

quick search: [GO](#) News Sports Classifieds Place A Classified Obituaries Yellow Pages Marketplace



Cloudy 46°5 Day Forecast



REGISTRATION

[Register](#) [Log In](#)

[home](#) : [news](#) : [local news](#) : [top stories](#)

Revitalization top story of 2004

By the Herald-Standard
01/02/2005

[Email to a friend](#) [Voice your opinion](#) [Print](#)

It was a busy year in 2004 for Fayette County and its surrounding area. It was a year that saw a judge overturn a 27-year-old murder conviction and continued development of a local business park, among other major stories.

The following is a list of the top 10 news stories of 2004, as voted on by the editors of the Herald-Standard.

1. Uniontown's revitalization

Uniontown's Main Street got a facelift this year when Joseph A. Hardy, a Fayette County commissioner, launched his George C. Marshall Plan II revitalization effort.

Originally, Hardy's plan called for streetscape improvements, such as new street and informational signs and new lampposts, trees and flowers along the sidewalks. He also offered financing to businesses that wanted to paint or remodel their facades, and several business and building owners took advantage of the offer.

But Hardy later purchased several downtown buildings, and his real estate company, Commercial Center Associates, has been working to attract businesses to fill those buildings. Some small stores have opened in buildings along Main and Morgantown streets, and officials are seeking anchor tenants to occupy the larger stores.

The revitalization also included construction of Eberly Square at the corner of Main Street and Beech Boulevard after crews razed the old First Federal Savings building, known to many as the "blue box" longtime eyesore.

The downtown revitalization has drawn the support of Gov. Ed Rendell, who in April allocated \$3.5 million from the Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program for the project and then delivered another \$2 million in August.

The city plans to use that money to build a parking garage and must come up with a local match for the state funding. The city has hired Fay-Penn Economic Development Council to manage the project.

2. Connellsville arsons

The arson-related fires that plagued the city at the end of 2003 continued throughout 2004.

Unknown arsonists again targeted residential homes, apartment buildings and businesses, along with

Advertisement

Save up to 70% on Life Insurance!

10 Year Level	age	male
Term Life Insurance	45	\$35.63
\$500,000 Policy	50	\$46.55
(Monthly Premiums)	55	\$80.91
	60	\$130.07

Click here! Free Quote!

- Local News
- Top Stories
- News
- Obituaries
- Law & Order
- Weather
- Religion
- Healthy Living
- Corrections
- National News
- Sports
- Sports Wire!
- Business
- Opinion
- JobSearch
- Place a Classified
- Place a Bright & Early Ad
- HSTV
- News 19
- Special Sections
- Features
- Weekend Events
- Entertainment
- Weddings And More
- Archives
- PA Lottery
- Personal Finance
- Directory
- Calendars
- Newspapers in Education

2004 Community Choice Awards

Interactive Media

Local Interest

Websites

Circulation

Contact Information

The Greene County Messenger

Visit Our Calkins Media Sites

Connellsville Area School District football stadium, despite a hefty reward offered by the U.S. Dep of Justice, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), which joined the investigation February, and the Fayette County Crime Stoppers.

Police have arrested three people in connection with two of the 22 intentionally set fires. Harvey U faces a Jan. 18 preliminary hearing in connection with an Oct. 22 blaze that destroyed his Sycamore residence, while police arrested two juveniles in connection with a Dec. 7 blaze that heavily damaged a portion of the football stadium.

In addition to a \$5,000 increase in the reward being offered by the ATF, the federal agency has added that more investigative resources and manpower are being added to the arson task force to catch those responsible for the incidents.

The ATF is offering a total of \$10,000 in reward money, while the Fayette County Crime Stoppers allocated \$4,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the individuals setting the fires.

SECTION LINKS

- [Photo Gallery by Herald-Standard Photographer Dave Rafferty](#)
- [Photo Gallery by Herald-Standard Photographer Christine McCormick](#)
- [Photo Gallery by Herald-Standard Photographer Paul Ruhter](#)
- [Photo Gallery by Herald-Standard Photographer Ed Cope](#)
- [Uniontown decorated for the Holidays](#)

3. Anchor Glass closes

Without warning, more than 300 Anchor Glass Container Corp. workers were notified Nov. 4 that their services were no longer needed.

Citing an excess capacity in the glass industry, officials told the South Connellsville Borough plant employees working the afternoon shift that bottle production would cease and the doors would be shuttered after more than 70 years in operation.

At one time, the plant was one of the county's largest employers, with many of the employees having decades of service with the company.

In December, law firms from across the country representing investors filed suit against the corporation citing that officials failed to disclose critical information about its production, which translated into the closure of the borough plant and caused financial losses to stockholders.

4. Munchinski conviction overturned

David J. Munchinski has been in jail nearly 20 years for the 1977 double murder of two Bear Rock Bullskin Township, men.

And while Munchinski continues to sit behind bars, a visiting judge who assessed his case over a period ruled in October that he should not be incarcerated. Citing numerous pieces of evidence that have swayed a jury to acquit Munchinski in the deaths of James P. Alford and Raymond Gierke, the judge completely vacated Munchinski's conviction.

Those pieces of evidence were never turned over to Munchinski during his trial or appeals. He got the information during a federal appeal several years ago.

The judge also took to task the conduct of former Fayette County prosecutors who handled Munchinski's trials in 1983 and 1986, and an appeal in 1992, because none of them turned over the evidence. (Solomon and Ralph C. Warman were both involved in Munchinski's initial prosecution. Both are now judges. Former deputy prosecutor John A. Kopas III handled a 1992 appeal.

The attorney general's office has appealed the ruling, blocking Munchinski's release from prison until appeals are done. Munchinski's attorney is trying to get the appellate court to release Munchinski. The appeal is pending. Munchinski's attorney has also vowed to pursue ethics complaints against Solicitor General Warman and Judge Kopas for withholding evidence.

5. Prisoner abuse scandal

With Fayette County and the surrounding area sending many of its residents to war overseas, local residents were shocked to learn in May that a Uniontown man was at the center of a scandal involving alleged mistreatment of prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

Army Spc. Charles A. Graner Jr., 36, is one of several members of the 372nd Military Police Company based in Cresaptown, Md., that have been charged with abusing prisoners at Abu Ghraib.

The case came to light when photos of Graner and other military personnel posing with nude Iraqi prisoners surfaced in April. Graner's attorney, Guy Womack, has stated that his client did nothing wrong and was following orders.



Graner, who faces a Jan. 7 court martial, has lived in Uniontown and worked at the State Correctional Institution at Greene, but is from Whitehall, a Pittsburgh suburb.

6. Slots approved

After a 10-year fight to expand gambling in Pennsylvania, the state Legislature finally passed and governor signed in July a plan to place 61,000 slot machines at 14 casinos throughout the state.

After flirting with legalizing riverboat gambling a decade ago, the Legislature ultimately decided on horseracing tracks. Or at least, that's how it got started. Political considerations expanded the plan to include gambling parlors in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and one yet-to-be-named city.

Two Pennsylvania resorts also will be getting licenses to operate 500 slot machines each. A frontrunner of these licenses is Nemacolin Woodlands Resort and Spa in Farmington.

Gambling is estimated to generate about \$3 billion a year, one-third of which is to be used for cutting property taxes. But it'll be a couple of years before the check is in the mail, because even the most optimistic scenario doesn't have a casino licensed and running until the end of next year.

7. Public housing disappears from map

As a means of combating a 25 percent vacancy rate and of changing the face of public housing, the Fayette County Housing Authority demolished two well-known projects in 2004: 150-unit Lemon V Acres in North Union Township and 100-unit Dunlap Creek Village in Redstone Township.

Fixtures on the county landscape for a half-century, those housing projects were part of the authority's master plan to downsize by 363 units. That effort included knocking out 106 of 192 units at Bierer Acres in South Union Township, leaving it with 86, and demolishing five units at the much smaller Snowden Terrace in Brownsville.

By the end of the year, taking all those units off-line had reduced the authority's vacancy rate to 12 percent, with 166 units available for rental. But an attempt to build 55 new public housing units as Highlands Estates on the 17-acre Lemon Wood Acres site generated some controversy, first because of difficulties with the funding package and later when a citizens group circulated petitions against the rebuilding.

8. Man shot by police

An attempted traffic stop turned deadly in May in the Brownsville Township community of Century

Kermith Sonnier Jr., 37, of Denbo Heights led police on a chase through borough streets before turning down a dead-end street May 5. According to police, Sonnier struck several police vehicles before being shot and killed by an officer.

One officer was injured during the incident.

A Fayette County coroner's jury ruled in October that the police were justified in their use of force. Attorneys for Sonnier's family have indicated their intent to file a federal wrongful death suit, though suits have yet been filed.

9. Fayette County Business Park

After the Fayette County commissioners voted to individually lift an industrial-use deed restriction on parcels already slated for sale, the Fayette County Business Park near Uniontown Mall shrank to 10 vacant acres.

And in the process the 277-acre park solidified its standing as the county's fastest-growing economic success, based on its quick development over a period of just three years. Leading the way in 2004 was a 20-acre parcel for Armstrong Development and a 25-acre parcel for Cedarwood Development Inc., both massive commercial projects.

Raymond C. Polaski, executive director of the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority that is charged with developing the former county home property, touted the fact that \$67,106 has already been added to the real estate tax rolls.

At full build out, Polaski said the park would generate \$1.5 million in annual real estate taxes for the

county, North and South Union townships, and the Laurel Highlands School District. He also notes that the projects in the pipeline would create \$20 million worth of new construction and more than 1,000 jobs, while the seventh - Armstrong's potential site of a Super Wal-Mart - would add 450 jobs to that total.

The success is so profound that the redevelopment authority is asking the three real estate taxing entities - the county, school district and township - to remove all Keystone Opportunity Zone status from its properties because tax breaks aren't proving necessary to fuel development.

10. Deer DNA leads to arrest

Seven years after Paul Joseph Horvat was found shot to death in a wooded area of Menallen Township, state police arrested a Uniontown man in his death, using deer DNA as one of the linchpins in the case.

Lawrence Joseph Cseripko, 59, allegedly shot Horvat after the two got into an argument over hunting. At the time of the Dec. 16, 1997, shooting, police gathered deer remains from the scene and preserved them, and took deer steaks from Cseripko's home.

As time went by and technology became more advanced, authorities were able to create a database of deer DNA and matched the deer steaks taken from Cseripko's home to the remains at the scene of the homicide. Police charged Cseripko in October.

After a preliminary hearing earlier this year, Cseripko's attorney said he plans to challenge the deer DNA pre-trial motions.

Cseripko was charged with a single count of criminal homicide, and the case is in the Fayette County criminal courts.

©The Herald Standard 2005

[✉ Email to a friend](#) [🗨 Voice your opinion](#) [🖨 Printer-friendly](#)



HERALDStandard.com
JOBSEARCH
YOUR LOCAL JOB SOURCE

Post resume for FREE & find
quality jobs today! **CLICK
HERE!**

[News](#) [Sports](#) [Classifieds](#) [Place A Classified](#) [Obituaries](#) [Yellow Pages](#) [Marketplace](#)

Copyright © 1995 - 2005 PowerOne Media, Inc. All Rights Reserved.