



# THE WET HEN

## Guaranteed humbug the whole year through

Faithful *GreeneSpeak* readers know by now what to expect in this newspaper and this column in particular, but as the old year wraps up and the new one begins, we find it helpful to reiterate our goals and aspirations. To wit:

1. You won't find us publishing any glossy magazines full of politically correct feature stories written by and/or about politically correct people, just because they are public officials, or because they purchase the largest ads. Per our comments on the righthand side of this page, we fully respect the rights of other news organizations to print such fluff, but that's just NOT US.

2. You won't see this newspaper publisher walking into public buildings before the meeting commences to get the "real story" before we sit down and observe what actually takes place.

3. You won't find endless words of empty praise here just because this space must be filled with something and it's easier. If we praise somebody in this space, they've done something pretty outstanding.

4. You won't see this editorial space wasted on us telling you about the many events we've already listed elsewhere in this publication, such as festivals and fairs. Or whining about how busy we are trying to cover these events because we know you're just as busy as we are, trying to cover your own responsibilities. Our job is covering news and events; it keeps us moving, but it's not that hard. Why other newspapers continue to write such meaningless drivel is beyond us. Okay, well maybe "lazy" applies here.

5. You will notice that many public officials have an adversarial relationship with us. THAT'S THE WAY IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE. From the Pilgrims, to the rabble in arms, to the little lady on the bus, the people who speak out against oppressive authority AREN'T NICE; THEY'RE ADVERSARIES. *GreeneSpeak* wears the adversarial badge with honor. The average newspaper these days has so pandered to politicians and corporate advertisers that their pith, as well as their backbone, is gone. They're limp rags. But that doesn't mean it's wrong for *GreeneSpeak* to hold the hooves of those who feed at the public trough to the fire, or to ask "mean" questions and write down and publish exactly what they say and do. No fear – this is America!

6. You won't find public notices in this newspaper, which means we don't have to "watch what we say" about public officials at the risk of losing ad revenue.

7. You may also notice that we cover many stories you won't read anywhere else because:

A. Why would you pick up a publication full of stories already published in several others? There is no law and no Grand Poobah requiring every newspaper in town to print the exact same stories. Why most continue to do so is referred to in #4.

B. There are voices that wouldn't otherwise be heard. By now, readers know *GreeneSpeak* will investigate situations other newspapers won't touch. It's stressful and draining to produce such stories, which are often hard to read, but *GreeneSpeak* is a newspaper devoted to social and environmental justice. We make no apology for that.

8. We run a tight ship here at *GreeneSpeak*. We don't do anything too fancy; we don't get our name printed under the platinum sponsorship headings or offer cash contests, but we keep our little PT Boat skimming across the stormy seas. Our contributors and advertisers possess our passion for Greene County and for what's good and true and right. And that makes us feel honored to have them aboard, because we know that most of the real people out there reading *GreeneSpeak* are of a like mind – working against deadlines every day to make ends meet in order to have a better life for your family and community. And we're sure you want your precious tax dollars spent as reasonably as you spend your own income. (Fat chance!)

9. And finally, at *GreeneSpeak*, you will find FOCUS: on Greene County people, places, and things, and the political, social, economic and environmental issues affecting them. Every so often, well-meaning folks from nearby counties call and ask us to produce a similar product for their area, but we JUST DO GREENE COUNTY. Many news outlets seem to have lost their way, forgotten who they are, chasing after the latest gadgetry, which is certainly tantalizing but not a good idea if your core product suffers. So *GreeneSpeak* doesn't Twitter or have a MySpace or FaceBook. We don't even post our printed newspaper on our website; we have other pithy things on there! Nor do we add it to the junk mail in your box.

We're not concerned about competing against publications with far more resources than ours. We just go out and do raw reporting. There is no other way to get the real story. Armchair reporting with a mouse and cell phone produces wooden material that makes your eyes glaze over. So all you get from *GreeneSpeak* is a free newspaper designed to impact and inform the people who live here. But honestly, isn't that all you really want from a local newspaper?

Now, with everything in order, allow us to wish you a very politically incorrect merry Christmas in which you acknowledge the Child born in Bethlehem who brings eternal hope to a dying world. And please know that in the coming year, *GreeneSpeak* will be committed to providing you with plenty of HUMBUGH right here, because too many gadgets and too much fluff just tend to stick in our craw.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Why are anonymous letters allowed?

Dear Editor:

Your November edition contained several letters to the editor. Most surprising and disturbing was that you printed one of those with the writers' name withheld ("New business in Rices Landing," *GreeneSpeak*, Page 22, November 2009). I can't imagine the Pennsylvania Newspaper Association of which you are a member, condoning such a breach of professional ethics. Nor do I believe any publisher desiring to maintain their paper's integrity would do the same.

If this is a standard you continue to follow, it certainly doesn't accomplish your stated goal of improving the quality of life in Greene County.

Bob Willison, Rices Landing

### THE EDITOR RESPONDS:

Although the newspaper business has changed drastically in the last decade or so, one thing has remained constant since the Bill of Rights was born in 1791: the First Amendment protects anonymous speech in printed newspapers and these days, in any electronic form as well. The nation's first newspaper publisher, Ben Franklin, forged the anonymity trail when as a young boy, he wrote under a pen name in his brother's newspaper. His brother would not ante up and was jailed—a hard lesson the future Founding Father would never forget!

These days, in Pennsylvania, the Reporter's Shield Law provides absolute protection for a newspaper's confidential sources. According to the Pennsylvania Newspaper Association's website ([www.pa-newspaper.org](http://www.pa-newspaper.org)), "Journalists' ability to keep sources of information private and confidential helps to obtain the free flow of information.... Confidentiality is a privilege held by the journalist. The journalist cannot divulge confidential information without either permission from the source of the information or from an order from a court." In fact, newspapers can be held liable for revealing sources or other information they promised to keep confidential.

Thankfully, despite today's epic technological advances in communications, recent court cases regarding anonymous comments online have continued to uphold the First Amendment. (See "Guarding the unnamed writers of the Internet" at [www.rcfp.org](http://www.rcfp.org) for examples). Additionally, newspapers are free to establish their own policies for how and whether to print both anonymous and signed comments. For example, some print newspapers require signatures for Letters to the Editor. *GreeneSpeak* does not.

Where *GreeneSpeak* differs from some larger news organizations is that we welcome anonymous comments, but we require the person's name and valid contact information (which we keep confidential) both in our print product as well as our website. It's a balancing act to avoid publishing defamatory material while respecting the Free Speech rights of the commenters. (Please note: Criticizing the policies and decisions of public officials is NOT a defamatory practice. It's the American way!)

Fortunately, the Pennsylvania Newspaper Association, of which *GreeneSpeak* is a member, supports our stand. We contacted PNA Media Law Counsel Melissa Melewsky regarding Mr. Willison's letter. She notes, "The right to speak anonymously is guaranteed by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. The right to speak anonymously is universally recognized as a critical tool for maintaining an open and democratic society. While the source of a story or letter can lend credibility, it is not always advisable or possible to include that information. As an advocate for First Amendment rights, the PNA supports each newspaper's individual right to decide whether to accept anonymous contributions."

Thanks for your letter, Bob. Spirited debate is a beautiful thing.

### Shame on Wal-Mart

My wife and I have made it a holiday tradition to ring the Salvation Army bell around Christmas time. We find it a great way to help others while talking to people in the community. This year we were assigned to ring the bell in front of Waynesburg Wal-Mart. We showed up about 10:45 a.m. and the temperature was about 35 degrees with a brutal battering wind. After about 20 minutes, my wife and I were approached by two ladies, one of whom is mentally challenged. They were going to ring the bell at the other end of the store. The one woman was concerned for the safety of the other due to her condition, so I asked the greeter inside the store if we could step inside and ring the bell inside the breeze way. Her response was no. So I said please ask a manager, thinking that there is no way a store that sells all kinds of Christmas things and promotes Christmas would turn down charity workers when they needed warmth.

Well, was I wrong! They refused to let us in the store to ring the bell. I usually ring the bell at Giant Eagle and they let you inside the breezeway. I should have known that Corporate Wal-Mart would ruin the good will in our little town. When I think of Greene County I think of a tight knit community where the Salvation Army bell ringers are treated with respect. My fear of Wal-Mart changing our little community is gaining speed, as I am sure any other community store in Waynesburg would have not only welcomed us in, but would have served us a warm drink, especially the mentally challenged. So shame on you, Wal-Mart.

Andrew Harding

[EDITOR'S NOTE: The way we see it, Wal-Mart took one step forward by allowing the bell ringers to do their thing on store property, but then took two really big steps backward by not bending the rules a little in this situation. Maybe everyone who agrees should stop in and present the manager with a single lump of COAL....]