

Urban Insights

JOINT Urban Studies CENTER

A partnership between College Misericordia, King's College, Luzerne County Community College,
Penn State Wilkes-Barre, the University of Scranton & Wilkes University

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From the Executive Director

In this edition of our newsletter we want to inform our readers about some of the issues facing our region, recent achievements of our Center and outstanding student interns. We would also like to highlight our Center's beginnings and announce our newest partners.

In this edition, we will address two key issues facing our region. First, Luzerne County has a large percentage of the population classified as the working poor who have limited or no healthcare. This number exceeds 30,000 residents. The working poor have to make choices everyday between food, shelter and health insurance as they live from pay check to pay check.

There are several reasons that we have so many uninsured and underinsured, but primarily, it is because we have such an extensive low wage economy.

Education is the second issue we present. Our region has a very low level of higher education attainment. We have such a strong network of higher education institutions in Luzerne and Lackawanna County yet our residents are not highly educated. This is due in part to a predominant blue collar economy and the fact that higher education is not always a valued commodity emphasized by parents. The small percentage of residents who are educated and don't leave the area hold the limited number of higher wage paying jobs. Many firms still report recruitment of employees from outside of our region because of the lack of individuals with degrees. It can be presumed that educated parents see the value and promote it in their households. While a four year degree isn't for everyone, vocational school, community college and other training cannot be minimized. Many of today's blue collar jobs require a higher level of skill due in part to automation.

While we do need to attract more businesses to this region and we do need to help our existing businesses grow, we also need to demonstrate that we have the workforce to fulfill their needs. Education is the key. Addressing this will help to reduce the number of working poor and allow our residents to have the appropriate preventative and ongoing health care. This too, is a benefit to the employer, who can then count on a healthier and therefore more productive workforce.

JUSC is releasing a report that is a follow up to The Brooking Institution Study on Pennsylvania. JUSC's report outlines recommendations that government, educators, business and non profits in northeastern Pennsylvania can utilize to improve our region. It is in this report that our readers will find ways to enhance K-12 education.

Teri Ooms
Executive Director
Joint Urban Studies Center

Interns Complete Fall '04 Semester

The fall 2004 semester ended with two students completing their internships and one student continuing her internship through the spring 2005 semester.

Gregg Fumanti, a senior at King's, has successfully completed all requirements for internship. Gregg is a business administration major and has completed research and analysis on bond ratings in Luzerne and Lackawanna counties that will be used as part of a larger JUSC study. Fumanti will graduate in May.

Kerry Zellner is a student at Wilkes. She has successfully completed research on legislation, government sources of revenue, transportation and the concept of regionalism as a tool for economic revitalization. Kerry graduated from Wilkes in 2004 and desired to further pursue her studies in political science.

Elvira Illiano is a senior majoring in communications with a minor in rhetoric. Elvira has completed research and analysis on census tract data that shows why our region consistently fails to meet state and national averages on a number of key census indicators. She will continue her internship through the spring semester and will graduate in May 2005.

It has been a pleasure to have these interns working at JUSC. All have shown responsibility, determination and a desire to learn outside of the classroom. We hope that their internship experience will help them as they begin to market themselves in the work world.

For more information on internships contact, Marla Doddo doddo@urbanstudies.org or 408-9850.

Our Beginnings



Bill Montague, a Wilkes University graduate, Wilkes-Barre native and successful businessman funded an idea that he believed would strengthen the City of Wilkes-Barre. This idea was the foundation for the Joint Urban Studies Center.

Montague has been employed by Mark IV Industries, Inc., Amherst, NY, since April 1972 and was elected President and a Director in March 1996. He served as Vice President of the Company, Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer. He began his career with Mark IV Homes, Inc. (a mobile home manufacturer) in 1969. **Mark IV Industries, Inc.** is a leading diversified manufacturer of engineered systems and components using advanced radio frequency, information display, diesel and gasoline engine, power transmission, air emission and fuel and fluid handling technologies.

Mr. Montague established a major challenge grant to provide seed capital to fund the Center. Dr. Tim Gilmour, President of Wilkes University, raised additional funds from the participating schools, many local businesses, foundations, community leaders and civic organizations. As a result the Center became operational in 2004.

Bill Montague, Wilkes Alumnus

The Center works closely with government and community leaders, other non-profits, faculty and students from our six partner schools, and economic development partners not only to actively engage in research and analysis, but also to translate the results of that research into strategies and action steps that can be used for revitalization. The Center also provides leadership development and community service opportunities for students.

Project Updates:

City of Wilkes-Barre Comprehensive Plan

JUSC has coordinated data collection and analysis of census tract information with Project Manager Pasonick Engineering to support development of the Wilkes-Barre Comprehensive Plan. A class from Penn State/Wilkes-Barre and student volunteers from College Misericordia recently completed their portion of the project. Work will continue for the next 18 months.

Brookings/Why Aren't We Average?

JUSC has prepared a paper analyzing The Brookings Report, "Back to Prosperity: A Competitive Agenda for Renewing Pennsylvania" from a local prospective. The JUSC report focuses on the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/ Hazleton Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and provides recommendations to help this area grow and prosper. JUSC suggests that the reader also review a companion study: "Why Aren't We Average?" This is a research paper studying the qualitative and quantitative issues from 1950 to 2000 that place our region below state and national averages on many of the key census indicators. This study puts into perspective the economic consequences of our failure to evolve with the rest of Pennsylvania's and the nation.

Public Financing Comparison

This report identifies the history and status of public financing in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties, the cities of Scranton and Wilkes-Barre and the methodology used by insurers and bond raters. The paper identifies strong similarities in the needs of the counties and communities and how bond raters use the collective strength of the region in rating each individual entity's bonds.

What is Regionalism and How Does it Work?

This report defines the term "regionalism" and illustrates how it is practiced across the country to enhance economic development, community revitalization and sustainability.

Art & Culture, Recreation and Venue as Community Revitalization Tools

This paper demonstrates the value and impact of investing in and promoting arts and entertainment to revitalize a community. The report outlines best practices from across the nation and identifies strategies for Wilkes-Barre.

Additionally...

JUSC is collaborating with the Chamber and Diamond City Partnership/Main Street Program on a progress report on achieving the vision for downtown. A draft is under review.

JUSC has completed research on health care costs associated with the uninsured and underinsured working poor in the area, housing and wireless technology.

Upcoming...

JUSC is working on a Diversity Project, analyzing the assets and gaps in terms of employment, transportation, housing, education, healthcare, crime, community relations, language barriers, citizenship and childcare issues impacting the Latino population in Hazelton. The project will identify best practices from other small, growing communities with an increasing Latino presence.

Volunteer Spotlight

This Fall semester, JUSC was privileged to have the assistance of volunteer Frank Franconi. Frank volunteered his time by providing JUSC with his expertise in research, analysis and writing. He has provided strategic consulting and business plan development for a variety of clients. His professional background includes twenty years of experience with Scott Paper Company. He holds an MBA with a concentration in Finance, Policy & Control from the University of Michigan and a B.S. degree in Agricultural Economics from Cornell University.

The University of Scranton Becomes JUSC Partner

The University of Scranton joins five other regional higher education institutions in northeastern Pennsylvania supporting the Joint Urban Studies Center, a research partnership located in the Innovation Center in downtown Wilkes-Barre.



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SCRANTON
A JESUIT UNIVERSITY

Scranton joins Wilkes University, King's College, College Misericordia, Luzerne County Community College and Penn State Wilkes-Barre as partners in the Center, which began operation in July of 2004.

The Center was established to assist in the revitalization of small- to mid-sized cities through the expertise and resources of its staff and its higher education partners and their respective faculties and students. It also serves as a resource for information and consultation on effective and efficient government, best practices, preparation of applied research, and strategy development and implementation.

"The University of Scranton is pleased to support the Center's efforts to identify strategies and opportunities for regional revitalization," said Rev. Scott R. Pilarz, S.J., President of The University of Scranton.

Dr. Tim Gilmour, Chairman of the Joint Urban Studies Center Advisory Board and President of Wilkes University states, "This is a great opportunity for all of us to work together to provide leadership in the region to help it address longstanding urban and economic development challenges and thrive in the years ahead."

The Center is currently working on projects for clients in the Wilkes-Barre area and the region. One of the Center's goals is to assist communities, local chambers of commerce, educators and other non-profit organizations to address current issues while preparing for the future.

Teri Ooms, Executive Director of the Center, noted that urban studies incorporates a study of all aspects of a community, city or region, including transportation, taxation, health care, housing, jobs, zoning, and community and economic development.

"Our work encompasses a range of community issues from urban sprawl, population and immigration to quality of life, the arts, culture, and community image and design," she said.

JUSC Partners with Northeast Pennsylvania Technology Institute for Database Project

The Northeast Pennsylvania Technology Institute (NPTI) and the Joint Urban Studies Center (JUSC) are combining efforts to create a database of educational resources in northeastern Pennsylvania. The database will include faculty members from local colleges and universities representing a wide variety of disciplines. This database will be utilized to provide resources to business and industry, government, the non-profit sector, and media when specific expertise is needed. Additionally, the database will be utilized to find suitable academics for research projects that JUSC or NPTI are conducting.



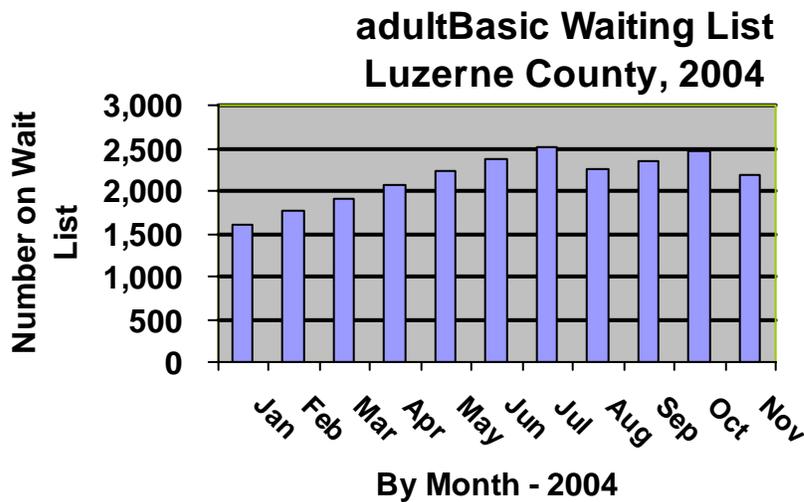
Working Poor Lack Affordable Health Insurance

Healthcare costs are a major concern throughout the nation. JUSC has completed some preliminary research on the impact of the uninsured and underinsured population of our region on the cost of healthcare overall and the drain on emergency room resources. There is an impression that these people are unemployed, but the fact is the majority are working either part or full time.

The primary reason why workers are uninsured is related to the cost burden and the trade-offs with other basic costs of living. Employment and incomes have been in decline reflecting a lagging economy and fewer job opportunities. Many live pay check to pay check. In response to double digit growth in health insurance premiums, employers have increased cost sharing requirements, reduced benefit coverage, and in some cases dropped coverage altogether.

Those who have access to employer-sponsored coverage have trouble paying their part of the premium or high deductibles and tend to cycle on and off coverage.

Pennsylvania has both a state Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and an adultBasic program for families that can’t afford health insurance. The State Insurance Department has recently reopened enrollment for the adultBasic program. A waiting list has been established due to the overwhelming response to enroll and a lack of funding. According to the PA Department of Insurance, the average waiting list for Luzerne County in 2004 was between 1600 and 2500 people.



Average wait time varies, as eligible people on wait lists are added to the program both when attrition occurs and when additional funds are added to the program. Current enrollment in adultBasic as of the second week of January was 37,396 statewide, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Insurance website, <http://www.ins.state.pa.us/ins/site/default.asp>.

Governor Rendell recently negotiated with all the Blue Cross partners around the state to increase contribution over the next five years to the fund for adultBasic. This will assist over 600 in NEPA to get immediate coverage. Another solution would be to create industry or sized based healthcare consortiums so small businesses can pool their resources to leverage healthcare costs.

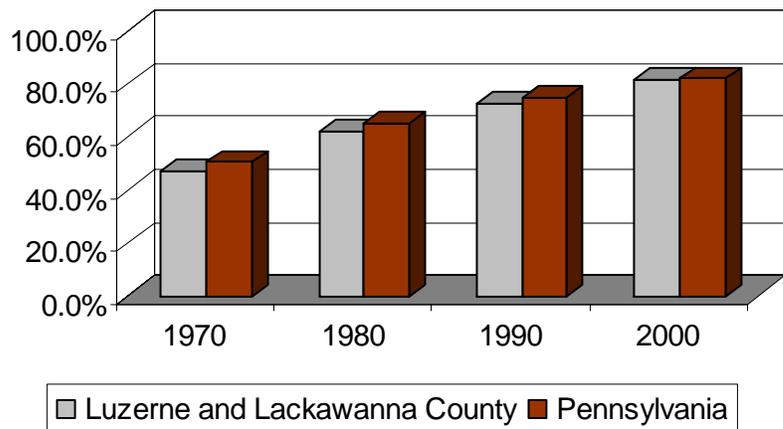
Educational Attainment Gains 1970-2000: Lackawanna & Luzerne Counties

Although Lackawanna and Luzerne counties still lag behind state and national averages for educational attainment, the gap has been narrowing.

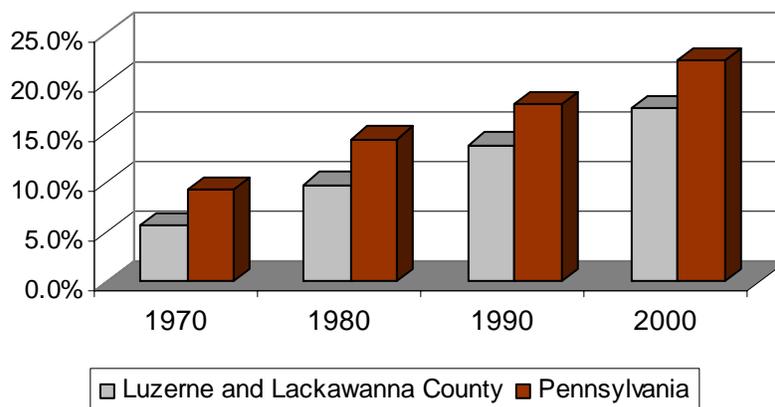
In 1970, the national figure for percentage of the population with a high school diploma or better was 55% compared to the local rate of 47%, a gap of approximately 8%. In 2000, Census figures indicate a rate of 84% for the nation and 81% locally. That is a narrower gap of approximately 3%. On the other hand, when looking at people holding a bachelors degree or higher, the gap is widening, although we have shown definite improvement from 1970, when national levels were at 11% compared to 6% locally. Census 2000 figures show the national rate to have improved to 26%, and 18% locally, widening the gap from 5% to 8%.*

Although we are doing a good job at improving the number of people obtaining a high school diploma, we clearly need to do a better job at attracting and retaining college and university graduates. The most obvious ways are to create jobs that match the skills of the graduates and place more emphasis on higher education attainment in K-12 within the region.

Persons 25+ Years Old Who Have Completed High School



Persons 25+ Years Old Who Have a Bachelor's Degree Or Higher



*Data source: "CensusCD, Neighborhood Change Database (NCDB) 1970-2000", GeoLytics, Inc., East Brunswick, NJ, 2003

“Transportation, Historic Preservation and You” Course to be Held April 23rd– King’s College

There are few public-sector programs that affect us more dramatically and in more different ways than transportation. The effects of transportation projects are evident everywhere, including in the historic neighborhoods of our communities. In Pennsylvania, millions of public transportation dollars are spent annually on a variety of historic preservation projects. From the repair and replacement of historic bridges, to transportation improvements through historic districts and archaeological sites, to the implementation of transportation enhancement projects on historic properties, transportation and preservation come together in some surprising and very important ways.

This half day course, co-taught by Preservation Pennsylvania, the Federal Highway Administration, and PENNDOT provides citizens, planners, and public officials with the basics of transportation planning and implementation and its interaction with historic preservation. If you’re interested in understanding the citizen’s role in planning and implementing transportation projects that work for the future and preserve the past, don’t miss this important training!

Topics will include: “Where Do Roads Come From? An Introduction to Transportation Planning;” “Foundations: NEPA, Transportation & Preservation;” “Historic Preservation Law: A Brief Introduction in Plain English;” “Where the Rubber Meets the Road: The Real World of Transportation Projects and Preservation;” and “The Citizen’s Role.”

For more information, call the Pennsylvania Planning Association at **717-671-4510**.

Local Average Hourly Earnings Indicator

In this and future issues, JUSC will present information on economic indicators and other statistical measures that impact our region, both positively and negatively.

According to data provided by the Center for Workforce Development, PA Dept. of Labor & Industry, the average hourly earnings for manufacturing at both the state and local level have risen, although the local wages still lag behind state average, with local workers earning approximately 94% of the average. In May, local wages were \$1.02 lower than state average. According to preliminary numbers, that gap is expected to have narrowed to \$0.86 in November.

	May-04	Jun-04	Jul-04	Aug-04	Sep-04	Oct-04	Nov-04
S/W-B/Haz	\$14.09	\$14.07	\$14.13	\$14.26	\$14.26	\$14.31	\$14.42
Pennsylvania	\$15.11	\$15.08	\$15.11	\$15.14	\$15.21	\$15.22	\$15.28

The aforementioned information is another reason why this region is having difficulty. While the difference many not seem significant, if you look at the number of people this affects and add up the wage difference, the number becomes significant. JUSC is completing a study of “Why Aren’t We Average?”. This study looks at this region’s performance in a number of indicators that demonstrate that we are less than the state average. The quantitative and qualitative causes are examined and a statistical analysis shows how much more wealth there would be in this area if we were average. In both this study and its companion, “The Brookings Institution Follow Up Report with Local Recommendations”, outline strategies this region can undertake to become average and beyond.

*preliminary data for November

Source: Center for Workforce Information and Analysis, PA Department of Labor & Industry

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Creating Active Community Environments Breakfast Conference Friday April 1

This conference is targeted to city and borough council members, borough managers, mayors, township supervisors, local planning or shade tree commission members or anyone interested in creating pedestrian and bicycle friendly places.

Charles Gandy, a nationally known consultant for pedestrian and bicycle friendly places will be providing a keynote address. Mr. Gandy, who lives in Austin, Texas, has served in Texas as a State Representative. He has a history of bicycle and pedestrian promotion that spans two decades and includes national programs and local projects across America.

The Creating Active Community Environments conference will feature presentations on the benefits of, and methods and funding for, improving the built environment for pedestrians and bicyclists. Topics of discussion will include promoting healthy lifestyles, economic development, and safety, and working with the region's developing trail network.

Other speakers include Leigh Ann Chaney, Chief Planner of Indiana County, PA, discussing Active Community Environments/Safe Routes to School initiatives in her county, and Vincent Cotrone, Extension Urban Forester for the Penn State Cooperative Extension, to discuss the impact and management of shade trees as important amenities for bicyclists and pedestrians. Information about funding programs will be provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation and the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor.

Slated for Friday, April 1, 2005 from 7:30 am to 10:00 am at the Waterfront Banquet and Conference Center in Plains this event is sponsored by the Joint Urban Studies Center, the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry and the Wyoming Valley Wellness Trails Partnership. A buffet breakfast will be served.

For registration or additional information please contact Michele Schasberger, Maternal & Family Health Services, (570) 823-7000.

JUSC is proud to sponsor this conference to provide communities in our region with opportunities to learn about enhancing economic development, healthy lifestyles and safety.

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