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AN EDITION OF TIMES-SHAMROCK NEWSPAPERS



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FRIDAY, JUNE 6, 2008

50 CENTS

FBI, IRS investigating judges' connections

Courthouse sources verify presence of federal agents

By **DAVE JANOSKI**
Projects Editor

The FBI and IRS are investigating possible financial ties between two Luzerne County judges and a local attorney whose firm has made millions leasing a juvenile detention center to the county, according to two courthouse sources who say they've been interviewed by federal agents.

The sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the investigation, said the agents asked about the relationship between President Judge Mark A. Ciavarella Jr., Senior Judge Michael T. Conahan and Robert J. Powell, part-owner of the Luzerne County Juvenile Center in Pittston Township.

The two sources said they have been interviewed within the last several months.

Conahan and Ciavarella played

key roles in closing a county-owned juvenile facility in 2002, arguing it was decrepit and unsafe. Neither judge returned phone messages Thursday. Powell did not respond to requests for comment made by e-mail, phone and through a spokesman.

Powell's company, Pennsylvania Child Care LLC, has a 20-year, \$58 million lease agreement with the county that has been criticized as too expensive by state officials.



Ciavarella



Conahan



Powell

Faced with a threatened cut in state subsidies for juvenile detention and treatment that would cost \$2 million per year, the county commissioners

are trying to negotiate an end to the lease.

Last week, the Standard-Speaker revealed financial ties between the two judges and W-Cat Inc., a townhouse development firm owned by Powell's law partner, Jill A. Moran, who is the county prothonotary. The judges reported their inter-

See **INVESTIGATION**, page 2

FORECAST
Sunny, warm
High of 84
Details, page 14



Taylor Zumar
Valley Middle

Today's
DIGEST
SPORTS

Pens look to game 4
Dennis Bonvie said farewell to the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton fans in an emotional ceremony after the Penguins closed out the regular season against the Norfolk Admirals on April 12. Now, 20 games and almost two months later, here Bonvie is, still alive and kicking. **Page 18**

LOCAL
District eyes cuts
Hazleton Area school directors rejected proposals for eliminating student transportation services and athletic programs as they looked for ways to scale back on a 25-mill tax increase projected for 2008-09. **Page 5**

PAYING AT THE PUMP
A daily look at the average price for regular unleaded fuel in Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton.

\$3.96

SOURCE: MID-ATLANTIC AAA

STOCKS

Dow Jones Industrials	+213.97
Nasdaq composite	+46.80
Standard & Poor's 500	+26.85
Russell 2000	+19.56

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OBITUARIES
Dr. John A. Carrara
Teresa A. Monick
Agnes M. Sotak
Walter J. "Jim" Waltz Sr.
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NOTICE A DIFFERENCE?



David Quinn, Hazle Township, holds his granddaughter, Mariah Hudock, 3. Quinn received his reassessment notice Thursday.

Reassessed values began hitting mailboxes Thursday



But, he lives here, near Hillside Drive.



Quinn's notice gave him the new value for this home on Liberty Avenue.

By **KENT JACKSON** and **KRISTEN GAYDOS**
Staff Writers

Right assessment. Wrong house.

When David Quinn opened a reassessment notice that came from Luzerne County in Thursday's mail, he noticed an error on his address.

The envelope was mailed to him correctly at RR 2 Box 49K, Hazleton, which is in the Milnesville section of Hazle Township, but the location on the reassessment form said 1002 Liberty Ave.

When he looked up his property in a listing online, he found other errors. His house was listed as brick. It's really plank sheathed in siding. The listing said it was a townhouse; actually, it's a half-double.

To investigate, Quinn drove about a mile from his house to 1002 Liberty Ave., which is in the Chapel Hill section of Hazle Township. The property on Liberty Avenue is a brick townhouse more resembling the description that he read online.

His taxes seemed equally out of place.

They increased to \$1,623 from \$706. "I'm definitely appealing," Quinn said.

A resident at the Liberty Avenue address said her reassessment notice listed her correct information.

He and other residents of Luzerne County who think something is amiss with their reassessments have 40 days to appeal from when they receive notices in the mail.

See **REASSESSMENT**, page 3

Petrilla sees home value jump \$295K

By **MICHAEL P. BUFFER**
Staff Writer

More taxpayers, including Luzerne County Commissioner Chairwoman Maryanne Petrilla, learned reassessed values of their properties on Thursday.

On Wednesday, the company in charge of county reassessment, 21st Century Appraisals Inc., mailed a second batch of notices informing taxpayers in southern Luzerne County of reassessed property values. On Thursday, those notices were in mailboxes, and the latest reassessed values were posted on the reassessment Web site, courthouseonline.com.



Petrilla

"Oh boy," Petrilla said after being asked about her property reassessment.

Petrilla and her husband own a residence in Butler Township, which is currently assessed at \$15,680. The reassessed value from 21st Century is \$310,700.

"This was all to be expected," she said. "While nobody likes this to happen, the shock for everyone is why it

See **PETRILLA**, page 11

Gates gives Air Force leaders boot over nuclear standards

By **ROBERT BURNS**
AP Military Writer

WASHINGTON — With a grim look and even grimmer words, Defense Secretary Robert Gates revealed an internal investigation's jaw-dropping conclusion that the Air Force's standards for performing its nuclear weapons mission — the most sensitive of its jobs — had been in decline for 10 years.

Who knew?

Apparently not the Air Force. And if those at the top of the service did know, they

didn't act. And therein lay the reason Gates chose to oust simultaneously and unceremoniously the Air Force's top uniformed leader, Gen. Michael Moseley, and its top civilian official, Michael Wynne.

Gone. Just like that. One of the rare times in history that



Moseley



Wynne

the top two officials of a military service have been dumped at the same time.

At a Pentagon news conference, Gates said his decision was based mainly on the damning conclusions of an internal report on the mistaken shipment to

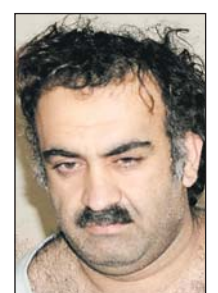
See **AIR FORCE**, page 11

Accused 9/11 plotter: I want to be a martyr

By **ANDREW O. SELSKY**
Associated Press Writer

GUANTANAMO BAY NAVAL BASE, Cuba — Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the reputed mastermind of the Sept. 11 attacks, told a military judge at his arraignment Thursday that he welcomes the death penalty as a way to martyrdom and ridiculed the proceedings as an "inquisition."

In his first public appearance since his capture five years ago, Mohammed wore dark-framed prison-issue glasses, a turban and a bushy, gray beard, and



Mohammed

was noticeably thinner — a stark change from the slovenly man with disheveled hair, unshaven face and T-shirt from the widely distributed photograph after his seizure in Pakistan.

He and four other detainees accused of plotting al-Qaida's

See **PLOTTER**, page 12

