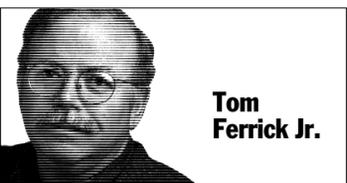


Philadelphia



Tom Ferrick Jr.

Phila. should be charter champion

Can it be only four years since the State of Pennsylvania passed Act 22, which allowed creation of publicly financed, quasi-independent charter schools?

My calendar says the bill was signed into law by Gov. Ridge in July 1997.

To the Republican governor, charters were a politically viable alternative to vouchers, which Ridge had tried time and again to sell to the legislature, only to watch the bills sink for lack of votes.

The idea behind charters was that they would be public schools but not part of the public school system, paid for by the local districts but free of many local district controls. A healthy hybrid, if you will.

The charter school movement was intended for the entire state. In practice, though, it has been pretty much limited to Philadelphia.

Outside the city, there are 31 charters, enrolling about 6,900 students.

Inside Philadelphia, there are 34 charter schools operating, with 14,100 students. And there is a long line of applicants in the city waiting to have more charter schools approved.

Is anyone surprised charters have been so popular in Philadelphia? It's a measure of how desperate parents are for an alternative to public schools.

In theory, charters weren't supposed to hurt the local district financially. In practice, they have.

Charters' cost

There are lots of reasons why. Let me mention one: In Philadelphia, about 30 percent of the charter school students come from parochial and private schools. The school district, which didn't have to pay for these youngsters before, now must pick up the tab for their education to the tune of about \$5,500 per pupil a year.

The Philadelphia School District estimates that it will run a deficit of about \$216 million the next school year and says 40 percent of that is because of the cost of charters.

The district has responded by trying to limit charters — their number, their scope, where they can open, etc.

You see the political dynamic. The district — and Mayor Street — intend to stay cool to charters unless and until the state comes through with more money to meet the increased cost.

Let me suggest another tack: I think the city should embrace charters. Instead of seeking to limit them, encourage expansion.

Bob O'Donnell, the former House speaker and an advocate for charters, has a number of good ideas about where charters should go. He wants the city to shake what he calls its "schizophrenia" over charters and form an alliance with the charter movement. He argues it will benefit both sides.

For instance, why not target them to areas where there is a demonstrable loss of middle-class residents?

New ideas

Why not install charters in existing school buildings to replace problem public schools? The city could even charge rent, and make some money off the deal.

Why not support the idea State Rep. Dwight Evans has advanced to convert 16 schools in his legislative district into either charter or independent schools? Evans is no amateur at this. He is a longtime advocate of charters and has already founded the West Oak Lane Charter School.

For this latest idea, he has enlisted an impressive list of supporters, including the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Teachers College at Columbia University, and Drexel University's Foundations Inc.

By the way, both O'Donnell and Evans agree the state should take steps to make sure the district isn't hurt financially for allowing charters.

For starters, how about a "hold harmless" provision that guarantees state reimbursement for money the district lost because of charters?

But why frame the argument as a petty political fight between a profligate district and a chintzy state government?

This city cannot wait another 25 years to make its public schools work. We cannot waste more children to the cause of incremental reform.

Why not seize the high ground and make Philadelphia nationally known as a laboratory for educational change?

Tom Ferrick's e-mail address is tferrick@phillynews.com.

Cell-phone accident reports can clog system

While they can bring help quickly, these calls are proliferating at such a rate that they may slow the very help being sought.

By Thomas J. Gibbons Jr.
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

It was not a life-threatening fire; but to some drivers on the Schuylkill Expressway on a warm spring morning, it might have appeared that way.

A huge pile of mulch burning near the highway at a recycling center in Fairmount Park sent ominous plumes of dark smoke into the bright, blue sky. First reported at 11:35 a.m., the

one-alarm blaze caused the expressway to be shut down temporarily because of decreased visibility.

To paraphrase Strother Martin in *Cool Hand Luke*, it was not a case of failure to communicate. When Philadelphia Police Department officials completed their tally, they found they had received cell-phone calls from 122 parties about the fire — a list so long it filled a six-foot computer print-

out.

While regional police and fire officials acknowledge that cell phones offer great assistance in getting police officers and rescue workers to a scene quickly, these officials also are realizing that the calls can burden 911 telephone lines and the people who answer them.

According to Philadelphia police statistics, the department logged 2.8 million calls to 911 in 1999. That number rose to more than three million last year — a sizable increase over the previous two years. So far this year, the numbers

have continued to rise steeply.

"They're jumping again considerably, to the tune of 25,000 a month," says Deputy Police Commissioner Charles Brennan, head of the department's Scientific and Technical Services branch. "For the first five months of 2001, we've received 125,000 more calls than we did in the first five months of 2000. This year, we're predicting that we'll handle 300,000 more calls than last year."

It's not surprising that as cell-phone use increases, so do 911 calls. The See **CELL PHONES** on B3



Students from the Gesu School in North Philadelphia are creating this mural on Main Street in Manayunk. It represents wildlife found in Fairmount Park. NetworkArts Philadelphia, a nonprofit group, is leading the students.

Making their mark through art

A program lets city students create mosaic murals — and a legacy.

By Rita Giordano
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Michael Miles, 13, admitted he hadn't been partial to fish before. He preferred the planets and the stars. Nor was he much taken with art.

But now, several ceramic, sculpted fish — carefully crafted, artfully painted by Miles — adorn a wall overlooking the Manayunk Canal. Fellow classmates from the Gesu School in North Philadelphia contributed aquatic invertebrates, mammals and more. In the next few weeks, mosaic trees will reach out over a river of tile and a bank of ceramic rock in a lasting mural-testament to the animals and fish of Fairmount Park.

"It's cool," Miles said. "You can come here one day with your kids and say, 'I was a part of making this.'"

Leaving a legacy, loving the arts, and learning are among the goals of NetworkArts Philadelphia, a nonprofit organization dedicated to teaching children through the arts that is behind the Manayunk mural. In seven years, NetworkArts has worked with about 6,000 children — mostly city students in places like Philadelphia, Camden and Chester — to create about 60 mosaic mu-



Gesu students Herman Davis, 12, (left) and Saed Briscoe, 10, work on the mosaic. Tiles are mortared to the wall, then the excess mortar is trimmed.

rals, said Josey Stamm, artistic director and a founder of the program. NetworkArts plans to start a sister program in Northern Ireland, she said.

Many of the program's undertakings have fused art and science, particularly ecology, said Stamm, who studied geology in college and

practiced law before turning to the arts.

That said, students at South Philadelphia's Palumbo School have used the program to learn about and celebrate jazz legend John Coltrane and choreographer Alvin Ailey. Children in North Camden See **MURAL** on B4

2 workers killed in second van accident

Following Monday's deadly crash in Wilmington, a van carrying 18 Hispanic laborers overturned in Lehigh County.

By Jonathan Gelb
INQUIRER SUBURBAN STAFF

A day after an overcrowded van filled with immigrant day laborers crashed on a busy Delaware expressway, killing three of them, two more people died yesterday in Lehigh County after a van carrying 18 Hispanic workers flipped over.

Yesterday's accident, which occurred at 7:45 a.m. at Route 309 and Mountain Road in Lynn Township, also left 16 injured, State Trooper Joseph Campbell said. The van's passengers, reportedly on their way to work at a nearby factory, did not speak English, police said.

Some of the 16 injured are in critical condition at Allentown Hospital, a hospital spokesman said. Police identified the two men killed only as Armando Cervantes and Sergio Lopez.

About 60 miles away, at Christiana (Del.) Hospital, Asan Wang, 37, nervously waited for news about his wife, Kusti Leman, 35, who broke a bone in her back and needed stitches in her face after the van flipped over on Interstate 495 in Claymont, a suburb of Wilmington.

The van was carrying 19 Cambodian, Indonesian, Thai and Pakistani workers returning to their homes in Philadelphia after working in New Castle, Del.

The accidents highlight some of the dangers that immigrant workers face as they struggle to adjust to a new country and find low-level jobs that many citizens would not do, im-

See **ACCIDENTS** on B4

South Phila. bookmaker takes stand

Michael Casolaro testified for the government in the racketeering trial of reputed mob boss Joseph Merlino.

By George Anastasia
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Michael Casolaro told a federal jury yesterday that he's been a bookmaker for most of his adult life.

In fact, the 47-year-old South Philadelphia gambling operative admitted that he is third generation. Both his grandfather and his father were in the numbers business, he said.

What's more, the soft-spoken government witness acknowledged from the stand that he was taking bets the night before he came to court yesterday to testify in the racketeering trial of reputed mob boss Joseph "Skinny Joey" Merlino and six codefendants.

And, in response to a question from a defense attorney, Casolaro said he hoped to be taking bets after he was done testifying for the day.

That, Casolaro said, would depend on "how late I get home."

Testifying under a grant of immunity, Casolaro spent most of the day outlining how he made tribute payments to the mob in order to maintain his See **BOOKMAKER** on B2

In the wreckage of a flood, victims' lives remembered

Residents of the Village Green Apartments left behind diverse legacies of music, laughter and love.

Inside

Nurses could not be forced to work overtime by hospitals and health-care facilities under a bill introduced in the General Assembly. **B2**

No blood drawn — yet — as Democrats and Republicans set about the once-a-decade task of reconfiguring the state's legislative districts. **B3**

A woman held hostage in 1999 at Norristown State Hospital sues, saying the incident could have been prevented. **B3**

Mark Singel, the former lieutenant governor, announces his support for Edward G. Rendell for governor. **B5**

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Mosaic murals let city students leave their mark

MURAL from B1 created a mosaic at Fifth and State Streets to highlight their community's racial and ethnic diversity. There have also been intergenerational projects.

Chances are, you've seen the children's work in such well-trafficked places as the Philadelphia Zoo's Carnivore House, the Franklin Institute, and the Academy of Natural Sciences. This summer, Camden high school students will work on a mosaic at the New Jersey State Aquarium's Children's Garden.

The program operates through corporate and private funding, and students participate tuition-free, Stamm said. Usually, she said, a school will request to undertake a project and students will go through a 30-week program on Saturdays of field trips, research, mural design, tile sculpting, and, ultimately, mosaic-mural-making. Schools also can choose a shorter in-house program.

Stamm said that while students selected for the program aren't necessarily the highest academic performers or the best artists, she hasn't been disappointed in the outcome.

"Without fail, they rise to the occasion every time," she said.

Others haven't been disappointed, either.

Gesu School's Fairmount Park wildlife mural — actually

two mosaics on two sides of the Smith Bros. building near Main Street and Green Lane — is not the first NetworkArts project in Manayunk. A mural about mill history is on a wall at the North Light Community Center.

"They have a way of engaging the kids in the process but making the murals really first-rate," said Kay Smith, executive director of the Manayunk Development Corp. "The kids really enjoy it."

So did youngsters in the Franklin Institute's Partnership for Achieving Careers in Technology and Science, said museum senior vice president Carol Parssinen. She also had much good to say about Stamm.

"They weren't just doing what she told them to do. It was a collaborative process," Parssinen said.

Barbara Cohen, a support teacher for gifted students at the Anne Frank Elementary School in Bustleton, hopes to get NetworkArts back for a second project.

"It was just a fabulous experience," she said.

The Gesu students working on their mural in Manayunk would agree.

Turquoise Sanders, 13, liked the field trips and learning about science firsthand.

"You see it for real, instead of pictures," she said.



The Manayunk mural takes shape through the work of Michael Miles, 13, (left) and Herman Davis, 12. "You can come here one day with your kids and say, 'I was a part of making this,'" Miles says.

The students seem to be very much involved in the making of the mural, fashioning creatures of the wild, then breaking up square tiles with a hammer and mortaring the bits to walls to create the mosaic wildlife habitat.

When the mortar dries, they chip away the excess with chisels for a cleaner effect. Clothes

get dusty and fingers get chalky, but no one seems to mind. It's all part of the joy of creating the mural, which is to be completed this week.

As the students worked on a recent day, the early reviews of the mural-in-process were all good.

"Very pretty," a passing jogger called out.

"Nice work," said a woman pushing a baby stroller along the canal towpath.

Desmond Shannon, 12, busy creating a piece for the riverbank scene, said he liked the fact that in years to come, many others may learn from what the students have learned just by looking their mural.

"I hope it goes down in history," he said. "I want to go down in history."

Rita Giordano's e-mail address is rgiordano@phillynews.com.

At the wire, Franks has financial edge

Reports show he has twice as much as GOP rival Bret Schundler to spend before the N.J. primary.

By Eugene Kiely
INQUIRER TRENTON BUREAU

Thanks largely to his late entry into the governor's race, Bob Franks will have a significant financial advantage over Bret Schundler in the final days of the hotly contested campaign for the Republican nomination.

According to campaign finance reports made available yesterday, Franks had nearly twice as much money in the bank as of June 12 — slightly more than \$1 million, compared with Schundler's \$532,352.

What's more significant is that Schundler cannot close the gap. The state's public-financing law caps how much can be raised and spent by gubernatorial candidates, and Schundler has nearly reached the limit.

Both candidates are expected to spend the maximum \$5.9 million. As of June 12, Schundler had used \$4.4 million on expenses subject to the limit, such as television commercials and direct mailings, and Franks had spent \$2.9 million.

That's largely because Franks entered the race only in late April — after acting Gov. Donald T. DiFrancesco dropped out and after Schundler had spent \$2 million running against DiFrancesco.

This means that in the final two weeks, Franks can spend about \$3 million while Schundler can spend no more than \$1.5 million — maintaining Franks' 2-1 advantage.

Charlie Smith, Franks' campaign manager, said that close statewide races are generally decided in the last 10 days, and that he liked the campaign's financial position.

"We are comfortable that we have the resources to communicate best here at the end," Smith said.

Bill Guhl, a spokesman for Schundler, conceded that "they do have a built-in advantage in that regard."

The spending gap could increase after tomorrow, when the Election Law Enforcement Commission is expected to is-

sue a decision that could reduce Schundler's campaign funds by as much as \$885,000.

At issue is whether \$885,000 worth of television commercials featuring Schundler and paid for by the New Jersey Scholarship Fund should be counted against his campaign's \$5.9 million expenditure limit. Maintained by the Diocese of Newark, the fund provides scholarships to children unable to pay for private-school tuition.

Regardless of how the commission rules, Franks has already scored political points with the scholarship issue — which he has highlighted in his latest television commercial. In the ad, which began airing Monday, he accuses Schundler of "taking money from needy children ... to pay for TV ads for his political campaign."

Schundler denies the allegation, saying the ads — which ran from November until March — helped raise money for scholarships.

Although resigned to the fact that his candidate will be outspent in the final days, Guhl insisted that the Schundler campaign would get more bang for the buck. While Franks has been spending heavily on television commercials that have run on the network affiliates, Schundler has spent much of his money on direct mailings and, to a lesser extent, radio and cable-TV ads.

"We don't think that's effective," Guhl said of Franks' advertising strategy.

David Rebovich, a political-science professor at Rider University in Lawrenceville, said the financial advantage clearly gave Franks the edge in a tight race.

"The additional money allows Franks to make the one-two punch," Rebovich said. "He can run ads saying, 'Like me, vote for me — and, by the way, the other guy is a bum,' which is what we have seen already."

Eugene Kiely's e-mail address is ekiely@phillynews.com.



Asan Wang visits his wife, Kusti Leman, in her room at Christiana Hospital. Leman, who was injured in Monday's crash, came to the United States with Wang and their two children three months ago.

New van accident leaves 2 dead

ACCIDENTS from B1 migrant advocates said.

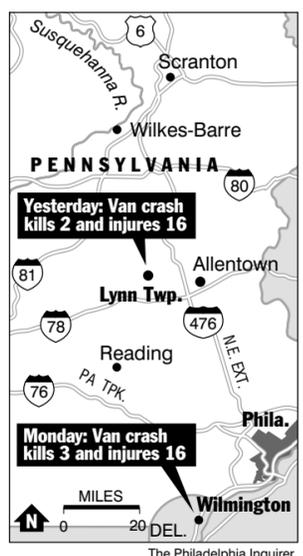
Aldo Siahian, who works at the Indonesian Full Gospel Fellowship Church, which assists Asian immigrants in Philadelphia, said shady temporary staffing agencies that recruit day workers are common in some immigrant neighborhoods. For clients such as packing factories, poultry plants or farms, the agencies sign up workers for temporary jobs and usually pay them in cash off the books, he said.

Accidents are not uncommon, he said. In January, a van carrying Indonesian workers to jobs in Scranton was involved in a crash that left two workers injured. Such accidents usually leave workers without health benefits or workers compensation, Siahian said.

Delaware State Police investigating Monday's crash said the workers were returning from Pack & Process Inc. in New Castle, Del. The company had no comment yesterday.

An occupant of the vehicle said the workers had been contracted by Lam Staff Service of Philadelphia, Delaware State Police Lt. Tim Winstead said. No such business is listed in Philadelphia.

Because of a language barrier, authorities are still trying to identify a number of the victims, including two of the



three who died, Winstead said. The first two victims died at the scene; both were teenagers. The third person died at Christiana Hospital Monday night.

According to police, the van ran into a gasoline tanker, crossed the median and flipped over in the southbound lanes. Debris from the vehicle, such as glass, sneakers and tote bags, littered the roadway as emergency workers tried to rescue the riders.

A number of the van riders were partially or totally thrown from the vehicle, Winstead said. Though the van was carrying 19, it had seats for 15 people, Winstead added.

Yesterday at Christiana Hospital, ministers counseled the patients' family members, who waited nervously for news from doctors.

"I'm worried, anxious, fearful and confused," Wang said through an interpreter. He and his wife, who are from Indonesia, have been in the United States for three months. "I'm worried for our two children," he said.

Thorn Khem of Richmond, Va., also waited for news about his father, Lam Khem, 72, a Cambodian immigrant who lives in Center City.

"They said he's in bad condition," Thorn Khem said. "I'm nervous and it's hard to even talk right now. I can't even describe it."

He said his father had body and head injuries.

Pennsylvania state police said they are still trying to determine exactly what happened yesterday in Lehigh County.

Trooper Campbell said a car sideswiped the van on Route 309, sending it airborne and onto its side. Police said that some of the passengers were thrown from the van and that the driver, Jorge Perez, suffered "major injury."

Inquirer Staff Writer Monica Rhor also contributed to this story.

Jonathan Gelb's e-mail address is jgelb@phillynews.com

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