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# Regional Reporter

*A monthly publication of the  
Mon Valley Regional Chamber of Commerce*

One Chamber Plaza - Charleroi, PA 15022

724-483-3507

**[www.mvrchamber.org](http://www.mvrchamber.org)**

Photo by Deb Keefer

CV108953

# Sports Hall of Fame seeking home for memorabilia display

**By RON PAGLIA**

*Reprinted with permission from Trib Total Media*

The Mid Mon Valley All Sports Hall of Fame is looking for a new home for its massive display of the history of athletes and athletics in this area.

And a new site must be found very soon.

"We received notice that the Belle Vernon Hotel is closing its doors on Dec. 31 and our display there must be removed," said Stephen V. Russell, general chairman of the Hall of Fame. "We're really in a quandary as to where our new home will be."

The Belle Vernon Hotel, located near the intersection of Route 51 and Interstate 70 in Rostraver, was formerly known as the Belle Vernon Holiday Inn. The venue has been owned and operated by Jay H. Lustig of Rostraver since 1995.

Lustig said the Hall didn't need to worry about moving by Dec. 31.

"We are going to begin a major remodeling and construction project after the first of the year and our concerns are that the Hall of Fame display might get damaged," Lustig said. "The items on display are a very valuable part of this region's legacy of outstanding players, coaches and teams. We are just as concerned as Steve and his Hall of Fame colleagues as to where they might relocate. But they don't have to worry about (Dec. 31) being a deadline to move."

The Belle Vernon Holiday Inn became home to the initial display of HOF memorabilia in the fall of 1998.

"A home (for the display) had been under consideration and review since August 1997," Russell recalled. "We were able to move into the Holiday Inn, thanks to the cooperation of Mr. Lustig and the hotel manager, Robert Palmer. (Lustig and his staff have been very gracious hosts to us over the past 10-plus years."

The display at the Belle Vernon Hotel site consists of

pictures, trophies, banquet program books, newspaper clippings and general memorabilia of Sports Hall of Fame personalities. They are spotlighted in large glass enclosed showcases owned by the Hall of Fame. Russell, superintendent of Belle Vernon Area School District, is the curator of the MMVASHOF exhibits.

"The displays have changed from time to time to bring it up to date as new members are inducted into the Hall of Fame," Russell said. "But the basic tenet has remained the same; that is, to preserve and perpetuate the tradition-steeped sports history of our area and to share it with the public."

Lustig said the Hall of Fame displays have been a popular attraction for patrons of his business.

"It has been good for the area in general," Lustig said. "It was a perfect fit for us and has been well received over the years. Patrons of our restaurant and lounge, as well as hotel guests, enjoyed looking at the individuals who are featured in the displays. Because (displays) are located in the main lobby of the hotel, people had easy access to view everything and we received very positive reaction. We felt it was a win-win situation for both parties when the Hall of Fame approached us (in 1998) and we were pleased to volunteer to provide the site."

Lustig, who purchased the Holiday Inn in 1995 from a business group that included the late Rose Calderone as part-owner and manager, said it is "unfortunate" that the 80-room facility is closing.

"It was a very difficult decision," he said. "This has been a second home of sorts, a regular meeting place to many people. It was like a family reunion on Sundays as people came here for breakfast or brunch. And there have been a countless number of high school and college class reunions, meetings of business and community organizations, and numerous social events over the years."

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# Martinko honored at holiday event

One hundred members and guests gathered at the Charleroi Elks Dec. 9 for the Chamber's holiday event.

During the program, Armand Ferrara reviewed the Chamber's busy and interesting year, noting that attendance at events has been great and membership has increased during 2008. Meaningful educational programs and outstanding speakers have made the difference in the level of quality offered to Chamber members during the past year.

Deb Keefer, Chamber Director introduced and

acknowledged Elaine Martinko, who recently retired from the Borough of Charleroi after 50 years of service.

Keefer described Martinko as "a beautiful lady with class and style, and a heart of gold."

She also noted that Elaine is only one of two municipal employees in the entire Commonwealth who share this distinction, so it is not only the community of Charleroi, but the entire Mon Valley region who is so proud of her.

As Elaine accepted an

appreciation plaque depicting the Monongahela River at Charleroi, she thanked the Chamber for the honor, and commented that her 50 years were happy ones because she loved her job and the people she worked with.

Sponsors for the holiday event were Highway Appliance, Residence at Hilltop, Staff Masters Tim's Secret Treasures and World Kitchen.

The Chamber's Pot of Gold, which was worth \$850 was not won, and will be increased to a \$900 jackpot for the next networking event.



Elaine Martinko was honored for her 50 years of friendship and support of the Greater Charleroi and Mon Valley Regional Chamber of Commerce Dec. 9.



From left are Shawn Staranko and Don Good of World Kitchen and Bernadette Rodgers of Corning Federal Credit Union.



From left are William DeiCas, PLS; Sandy DeiCas, Howard Hanna; and Lori and Dean Coulson, Coulson's Sales and Service.

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# Member spotlight



From left are Armand Ferrara, Chamber President and Julie Wisyanski, Manager and Secretary/Treasurer of the Elks. Not Shown is Ray Moluski, Charleroi Elks Exalted Ruler.

## Charleroi Elks has colorful history

The story of the progress of the Charleroi Elks #494 is an interesting and an engaging one.

The charter was granted May 24, 1899, and the first meetings were in the Masonic Building (known now as the Collins Building located on the corner of 5th and McKean).

At that time, the Elks met instant success. Later, when the quarters were transferred to the Charleroi Savings & Trust Building, plans were put into action for a new club home.

In 1904 construction on the present building was begun and its' completion and dedication followed in 1905.

Over the years the Elks Ballroom has seen many auspicious Charleroi occasions.

It remains to be one of the most beautiful buildings in the Mon Valley. The interior of the home has never been changed and still has an atmosphere of ultra-sophistication.

The Elks still rents out all the rooms of the building, such as the Main Ballroom, the Victorian room, and the Downstairs Ballroom. The upstairs bar is open to all members and guests. Through the years the Elks has had its challenges, but always seems to spring back to the place that it used to be.

The Elks now has Marianne Coulson managing the kitchen and the catering. Marianne has been in the food service and catering business throughout the Valley and is a wonderful addition to the Elks.

The Charleroi Elks is located at 301 Fallowfield Ave. and can be reached at (724) 483-4727.

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Charleroi Girl Scouts braved the cold to participate in Santa's parade.



At The Body Shop in Charleroi, from left, are Linda Staton, mother of owner; Bobbi Rodino, owner; Jason Rodino, son of owner; Cora Ducoeur, executive committee, TEAM Charleroi; Debbie Keefer, Executive Director, Mon Valley Regional Chamber.

# New fitness center opens in Charleroi

The Body Shop, a new Charleroi fitness center, is located at 526 Fallowfield Ave.

The gym is open from 1 to 9 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays, 1 to 7 p.m. Fridays and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturdays. Starting in January, Saturdays are "Kids Days" from 1 to 3 p.m. for children ages 8 to 15.

Owner, Bobbi Rodino started a healthy lifestyle a few years ago while experiencing some health problems.

"I needed to find an outlet for my stress and to keep my body healthy" Rodino said. "I found a love for martial arts, but my curiosity didn't stop there; I wanted to learn to box. I participated in a cardio kickbox class and after the very first one, I was hooked!"

"Then, during football season several years ago, some of the football moms became

interested in a starting an exercise class. The ladies began working out in one of their basements. "It took off like crazy!"

"Two turned into six, then eight, then 10, and soon enough, we didn't have any more room."

With the encouragement of friends and family, Rodino decided to turn her dream in to a reality and open a fitness center of her own. Son Jason appropriately named the new venture "The Body Shop."

For the past 16 years, Rodino has been employed as a licensed Paramedic in the South Hills of Pittsburgh. She earned her certification as a personal trainer and group fitness instructor from AFAA (Aerobic and Fitness Association of America) at Duquesne University. She is also certified in cardio kickboxing, circuit training, step aerobics, nutrition counseling and CPR instruction.

"I want to let people know that you don't have to weigh 100 pounds or be a size 0 to be beautiful," Rodino said. "Being confident and feeling good about yourself makes you beautiful!"

The Body Shop offers fitness classes in cardio kickboxing, circuit training, body sculpting and state-of-the-art cardio equipment including: treadmills, elliptical, recumbent bike, leg and abs machines, powerhouse gym with 300 pounds of free weights, jump ropes, dumbbells, four heavy bags and a fully matted floor.

"I supply the towels and as much water as you can drink," Rodino said. "All you need is a pair of workout shoes and a great attitude!"

Monthly community CPR training is available and just in time for New Year's resolutions an open house/grand opening is scheduled for Jan. 10 from 1 to 4 p.m.

Stop in and register to win a free month membership and try out the equipment!

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# Christmas comes to Charleroi

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Dillon Rigdon gives his Christmas list to Santa Claus at Charleroi's Christmas celebration.



Jeremy Reppert, an instructor at Mon Valley Career and Technical Center, poses with Tom Kokoska, a student who created a mailbox for this year's Santa Land.

## Santa mailbox made by MVCTC student

Tom Kokoska, a student from the Mon Valley Career & Technology Center, played a key role in Charleroi's 2008 celebration.

Kokoska spent several weeks prior to the event, creating this new Santa mail-

box. The new mailbox was painted and displayed in Santa Land, located at 501 McKean Ave. in Charleroi. Letters addressed to the North Pole were deposited here and delivered just in time for Christmas.

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Briana Brickner, the 2007 winner of Wake Up Your Dreams, presents this year's prize to Candy Butala.

## Butala is Wake Up Your Dreams winner

Wake Up Your Dreams is a Washington County vocal competition. The fifth annual contest was held at the Charleroi Area High School auditorium Nov. 14.

This event is sponsored by CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) for Kids, the Washington County Chapter. CASA is a national organization that provides

support for children in need through a volunteer network.

Contest participants compete for a grand prize of \$1,000 and a chance to record a single with Walt Maddox.

Congratulations to this year's winner, Candy Butala, from Charleroi High School. The prize was presented by Briana Brickner, winner of the 2007 competition.

## *Business Improvement of the Month*

# La Fiesta honored

La Fiesta Restaurante Mexicano located at 300 McKean Avenue has been selected by TEAM Charleroi as the business improvement of the month.

Owners Vincente and Cecelia Valdez opened this establishment in 2008 at the former Pizza Hut location.

Vincente Valdez learned cooking from his grandmother, a woman well known throughout her region for her cooking. She passed on some of her secret recipes to her grandson. Vincente proudly recreates these authentic Mexican recipes for patrons at La Fiesta.

Stop in and sample Grandma Valdez's legacy. The restaurant is open for lunch from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m., and dinner from 5 to 9 p.m. Mondays through



Vincente Valdez, owner of La Fiesta in Charleroi, accepts congratulations from Debbie Buck, Chair Design Committee, TEAM Charleroi.

Fridays. La Fiesta is also Saturdays and noon to 8 p.m. open from noon to 1 p.m. Sundays.

## Charleroi bids farewell to Cominsky



Cominsky

William Cominsky was a legend in the Charleroi area and the entire Mon Valley. His love for sports, youth and community were

confirmed by his actions. He passed away at age 90 on Dec. 20, 2008.

He was an employee of the Charleroi Lee-Norse-Ingersoll Rand World Wide Mining Equipment Co. for 30 years, retiring in 1980 as senior buyer in the purchasing department. He was very involved in civic and community activities.

In 1967, Bill was recognized as Charleroi Citizen of the Year by Charleroi American Legion Post No. 22 for Outstanding Service to Charleroi Community Projects, Social Life and Recreation. For 30 years, Bill was actively involved in developing and maintaining the Charleroi Recreation Park. During the 59th annual Charleroi Chamber of Commerce banquet, Cominsky, chairman of the Charleroi Trustees Community Park Fund, was named re-

ipient of the U.S. Rep. Austin J. Murphy's 22nd Congressional District Award in recognition of his many civic and community activities.

He served as a member of the Charleroi Area School District Board of Education for 18 years, serving 14 years as president of the board. In 1970, Cominsky received the Mon Valley Sportswriters and Sportscasters Association Award for Outstanding Contributions to Youth Athletic Activities in the Charleroi Area as a member of the Cougar Booster Club, Quarterback Club, Midget Football League, Dribblers Club and Charleroi Chamber of Commerce.

In 1977, he received the Charleroi Chamber French Fox Trophy. In 1982, he received recognition for 25 years of service to the Charleroi Cougar Booster Club and its programs. Cominsky formed the Basketball Dribblers Club and directed the Mon Valley YMCA Summer Outdoor Basketball Tournaments, and he was co-creator and director of the Cougar Booster Club High School Holiday Basketball Tournament. He served 16 years as the public address announcer for the

Charleroi High School basketball and soccer games and, in 1984, was presented with the High School Athletic Department Award for Years of Scorekeeping and Timekeeping in High School Football and Basketball Activities.

In 1989, Bill received the Washington County Coaches of the Year Award for Dedication to Athletics and Recreation in the Local Area. He was actively involved in the Mon Yough Colt and PONY Leagues, supervisor of WPIAL High School local playoff games, and he was a member of the Charleroi Advanced Baseball programs. He served as vice president of the Mon Valley Midget League Football Program. In addition, Cominsky was a member of the Charleroi Kiwanis Club, serving two years as president.

He believed 'the beat must go on, as much time and effort is needed to maintain, develop, use and promote the Charleroi Chamber Trustees Community Park for recreation for both young and the old. A baseball field in the park and the Head Start preschool are both dedicated to Bill and bear his name.

Bill was preceded in death by his wife, Levina, in 2004.

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# Save the date!

■ Jan. 6 — TEAM Charleroi Education Committee meeting, 8 a.m., Charleroi School District Administration Building.

■ Jan. 7 — Grand opening of the Children/Young Adult Center at the Charleroi Library. Festivities will begin at 4 p.m. and run until 7 p.m. The celebration includes refreshments, crafts, prizes and more!

■ Jan. 15 — TEAM Charleroi will host the quarterly Community Meeting at SPHS conference room A at 8:30 am. Committees will provide updates regarding the following topics: community safety issues including Neighborhood/Cougar Watch, Charleroi School District, Charleroi real estate marketing efforts and 2009 community events. These meetings are open to the public and all Charleroi residents and business owners are encouraged to attend.

Jan. 22 — The January Cougar Watch meeting will be held at Charleroi Fire Hall at 6 p.m. Trooper Brian Burden will discuss self protection. Charleroi's neighborhood watch program — Cougar Watch covers the communities of Charleroi, North Charleroi, Speers and Fallowfield Township. All meetings are designed to educate the public on crime including: what to look for, who to call and various ways to get involved and safely protect your neighborhood. All meetings last one hour and include a report from our local police regarding recent calls, a brief educational presentation and refreshments.

The December meeting included a self defense presentation by instructors and students from BCAC Academy of Tae Kwon Do. Additionally, Charleroi Police Officer Bill Gardner was in attendance with Officer Rex.


Upcoming agendas include:  
 ■ Feb. 26 — Charleroi Fire Hall, 6 p.m. — Identity Theft, Trooper Brian Burden

■ March 9 — Location TBD., Washington County DA, Steven M. Toprani

Cougar Watch meetings are open to the public. Volunteers are needed to serve as block captains and on various committees. With your help we can make Charleroi a safer place to live work and play.



Officer Bill Gardner and Officer Rex of the Charleroi Police Department attended the December Cougar Watch meeting.



July will be here before we know it and the Charleroi fireworks are a **MAJOR COMMUNITY EVENT.**

Therefore in 2009..... **THE COMMUNITY** will determine the size of the display.

Donations will be accepted through April 30<sup>th</sup>.

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Learn to save a life Jan. 14

The Mon Valley Regional Chamber of Commerce is very pleased to be a co-sponsor of a "Friends and Family" Adult CPR class to be presented Jan. 14 at the Mon Valley YMCA.

Addio Fiordigigli, EMPT of Life 1st will be offering two sessions of the course: from 9 to 11 a.m. and noon to 2 p.m. Each Mon Valley Regional Chamber member is permitted to send one employee to receive the training at no cost.

This is an introductory course to CPR and will teach all participants the skill of CPR that can be used on any person more than 1 year of age. This course will also cover how to manage a choking victim along with the signs of a heart attack and introduce participants to how an AED is operated.

Space is limited to 20 students per session, so reservations are encouraged as early as possible by faxing the form that will be available on the Chamber's Web site at [www.mvrchamber.org](http://www.mvrchamber.org) or by calling the Chamber office at (724) 483-3507. This is an outstanding opportunity to get quality emergency training close to home and at no cost. The opportunity to save

# Chamber update

a life is something everyone should always be prepared for.

## Conference set for business owners

Survive, and even thrive, in the current economy. If you are a business or CEO concerned about the economic crisis and how it will affect your business and how you can prosper during these challenging times, then mark your calendars for Jan. 27.

A free conference presented by Ken Sevick, ActionCoach certified business coach, will be held at the Willow Room on that date.

It includes a networking continental breakfast at 7:30 a.m. and a workshop from 8 to 11:30 a.m.

What You Will Learn:

- How to build revenue and position for rapid growth.
- How to reposition to fit the market.
- Why client retention is important now more than ever.
- How to effectively market your business in a down economy.
- Where to trim costs and still grow.

■ Why team building today is a key strategy.

■ What you should be doing to protect your business.

The Mon Valley Regional Chamber of Commerce is endorsing the event and is being sponsored by several local businesses so that the event can be presented at no charge.

Several giveaways are planned for those participants. Attendance is free, but seating is limited. Call 888-391-5666 today to register.

## 'Mardi Gras to Make a Difference'

On Fat Tuesday, Feb. 24, the Washington County Literacy Council will host its First Annual Fundraiser "Mardi Gras to Make a Difference" at Jeremiah's Junction at 6 p.m.

In the spirit of Mardi Gras, there will be plenty of food, drink and entertainment. For just \$50 per person, you and your guests can enjoy a fun-filled evening while supporting a worthy cause.

The Literacy Council hopes to raise funds to further its purpose of promoting literacy

by teaching low-level and non-reading adults basic literacy skills using trained tutors.

For more information, or to reserve your table of ten, please contact Amy Manko at (724) 228-6188.

## Rotary Club sponsors oldies dance

The Belle Vernon Area and Monessen/Rostraver Rotary Clubs are sponsoring an Oldies Dance on Saturday, Jan. 24, from 8 p.m. to midnight at Rostraver Central Fire Hall.

D.J. Jim Dudas of 95.3 FM - WJPA will provide the entertainment. Proceeds from the event will benefit the many Rotary community projects especially PolioPlus, a program which works to eradicate polio worldwide.

Tickets are \$25 per couple or \$15 per single. For information please call Gerry at (724) 562-4096 or Mitch at (724) 972-2325.

## ChamberChoice helps members control health care costs

Offering a quality employee benefits package while controlling costs is a common goal among employers. Members of the Mon Valley Regional Chamber of Commerce are eligible to participate in ChamberChoice health plans.

Health plan premium increases are not a new phenomenon, but it is the extremity of increasing costs and the growing number of working uninsured people that is cause for concern.

The partnership of the Mon Valley Regional Chamber of Commerce and the ChamberChoice program can help you. ChamberChoice representatives can help you implement cost management strategies, access new technologies, support you with administrative services and recommend plan designs that better control costs while continuing to provide quality benefits.

If you would like to talk about a fresh, no-nonsense approach to group and voluntary employee benefits, business services, creative finan-

## Plans for Mon Valley Mercantile on Track

The Mon Valley Mercantile retail co-op project is looking forward to a March 2009 opening date.

The operation will be located in the former Rite Aid Pharmacy site at Chamber Plaza and is planned to also serve as a retail incubator. Interested vendors continue to contact the Chamber of Commerce and response has been favorable to the concept.

Charleroi patterned its incubator after the Main Street Mercantile in Bradford, Pa. The two communities have similar demographics and economic conditions.

Bradford opened The Main Street Mercantile in June 2005, and since then, five businesses have graduated from the incubator to Main Street.

Rachel Wolfe, store manager for the Main Street Mercantile, said, "Here the whole community embraces it. It's a great place to shop. We have a little bit of everything and it's a great place to support local businesses."

Applications for the Mon Valley Mercantile are available by contacting the Chamber office or obtaining one on-line at [www.mvrchamber.org](http://www.mvrchamber.org) from the home page.

### Hours Set for Vendors Open House

Interested vendors may view the Mercantile space on the following dates:

■ Thursday, Jan. 22, and Friday, Jan. 23, from 3 to 6 p.m.

■ Saturday, January 24 from 10 a.m. to noon

**Note:** This is for potential serious vendors only - the expected opening will be March 2009.

cial arrangements, an employee wellness program, online and integrated administration, valuable Human Resources support and much more, please contact ChamberChoice's dedicated Client Resource Center today at 1-800-377-3539.



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# Highmark will offer programs at YMCA

Highmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield, along with the Mon Valley YMCA, will be offering the following programs at the YMCA, 101 Taylor Run Road, Monongahela, Pa. as follows:

## **Discover Relaxation Within**

Having trouble managing stress? This unique program helps you to deal with everyday stressors. Classes start on Wednesdays, January 14 through February 4 from 6:30 to 8 p.m.

## **Eat Well for Life**

Want to learn to Eat Well for Life? Join us for this specially designed program to help you discover easy meal planning tools, smart shopping strategies and healthy ways to cook great-tasting foods.

Classes start on Mondays, January 12 through February 2, and Wednesdays, January 13 through Feb. 3, from 1:30 to 3 p.m.

## **HOPE**

Want to develop stronger bones for a lifetime? (Highmark Osteoporosis Prevention and Education or HOPE).

This lifestyle improvement program focuses on helping you make healthy choices to improve your bone health and prevent or manage osteoporosis.

Classes start on Wednesdays, January 14 through February 18 (6 weeks) from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. and Saturdays, January 17 through February 21 from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

## **Clear the Air**

Isn't your health worth one more try? The Clear the Air Program is an important step to get ready to quit tobacco for good?

Clear the Air empowers

you to develop a plan to quit for good and prepares you for the challenging task of life-long tobacco cessation. You'll even receive coupons for nicotine replacement therapy.

Classes will start Tuesday, January 15 from noon to 2 p.m. and Thursday, January 22 from 6 to 8 p.m.

## **Personal Nutrition Coaching**

Want to find your perfect fit and reach your nutrition goals? Personal Nutrition Coaching — a one-on-one counseling service with a registered dietitian that's designed to help you address specific nutrition concerns, such as weight management, heart health and diabetes.

You can even record your food intake and physical activity with your own Lifestyle Log. Schedule your appointment today!

## **Diabetes Awareness and Prevention Program**

This four-week program is geared toward individuals who are diagnosed with diabetes or pre-diabetes, as well as those at risk for developing diabetes.

Class topics include: raising awareness about pre-diabetes and diabetes; reducing risk; nutrition and meal planning; physical activity; and stress management.† The program includes an interactive exercise component and a healthy cooking demonstration. Coming soon to the YMCA!

For more information on program rates call the MON VALLEY YMCA at (724) 483-8077.

Programs are free to Highmark members and available at a nominal fee for non-Highmark members.

## *YMCA track available*



Student athletes ages 10-16 can train for track and field season at the Mon Valley YMCA with Bryan Hoover, left, and Zach Sykes. This program, held Tuesdays from 6 to 7 p.m., begins Jan. 6 and includes training for sprints, distance, hurdles, jumps and throws. Call (724) 483-8077 for details.

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**724-489-0880** **MMVTA.com**



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