

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

More floods in our future

For those of us who were around in 1972, the catastrophic flooding in Houston last week was a reminder of Pottstown's own monster flood caused by Hurricane Agnes.

Like Hurricane Harvey, the damage came from rain, not wind. Both Harvey and Agnes hovered inland for several days and generated massive amounts of rainfall.



Commentary by
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Agnes dumped up to 26 inches of rain in parts of Pennsylvania. Harrisburg, York, Wilkes-Barre, and Reading were especially hard hit.

Pottstown got 8 inches of rain, but the worst effects of the storm came from the overflowing Schuylkill River, swollen by stormwater upstream. The river crested at double the flood stage, and backed up the Manatawny Creek, which submerged the first floors of buildings a block in from the creek.

Major industries like Bethlehem Steel, Mrs. Smith's Pies, and Doehler Jarvis shut down, and some never recovered. The Smith family sold its pie business to Kellogg's in 1978, and many blamed the flood as a contributing factor to the shutdown of Bethlehem Steel in 1975. Kiwi Shoe Polish, then located in the current Montgomery County Community College North building on High Street, moved to Douglassville.

At the time, Agnes was the costliest hurricane in U.S. history, although several have surpassed it since then, including Katrina and Harvey.

Flood hazards are the reason the original community college building on College Drive has a parking garage

on the ground floor, and why the living rooms and kitchens of most Hanover Square townhouses are located on the second floor.

Agnes was supposed to be a 500-year flood, but climate change is making weather extremes like heavy rainfalls far more common.

Until we recognize we can't just keep paving over the natural environment as we have done and continue to do, there will be many more devastating floods to come.

Think history won't repeat itself? There could be another Hurricane Agnes next week.



A SOUTH HANOVER STREET resident is evacuated by a Navy helicopter during Hurricane Agnes. Several South Pottstown homes were torn down after the flood.



DEMPSEY'S DINER, now the Potts and Penn Family Diner at High and York streets, is partially submerged in flood water from Hurricane Agnes in June 1972. Flood waters reached the area of our current borough hall and town park on High Street.