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Service Electric Cablevision Inc. sold five of its properties in Mahanoy City in December 2017 that included the main office building for the former Mahanoy City operation. The properties, which include the main office and three parking lot parcels on West Centre Street, and a garage on West Railroad Street, were purchased by Bennett Family Properties LLC, Lehighton, for \$105,000.



[The main office at 201 W. Centre St.](#) had been the headquarters of Service Electric Cable Television in the northern Schuylkill County area until January 2012 when

the Service Electric Hazleton operation acquired it. The Mahanoy City company, the first of the Service Electric companies, served the Mahanoy City, Frackville, Ashland, Tamaqua and Saint Clair areas.

The two systems were merged shortly thereafter, and in 2013 the Mahanoy City office was closed, with all operations moved to the Humboldt Industrial Park near Hazleton. Since that time, the Mahanoy City building has been vacant. “We closed this sale on Dec. 21, after about a year of going back and forth working with Mr. (Joseph) Bennett,” Service Electric Division Manager Timothy M. Trently said. “We still have some garages that when we’re done with them, we will probably put them up for sale.”

Trently explained that after the Hazleton company purchased the Mahanoy City operation, it was a practical move to combine operations onto one site. “When we bought it in 2012, the company had just recently finished a major multimillion-dollar renovation and addition up here in Hazleton. With the few employees down there when we took over the Mahanoy City system from the prior owner, it made sense to move everything up here. We couldn’t operate two locations doing duplicate things just a few miles apart.”

Trently said the sale is a good thing for Mahanoy City. “This is going to boost for Mahanoy City by bringing another business into town again. It’s should help with tax revenues,” Trently said. “It was something we were no longer using and why should we let the building fall into deterioration? It’s a beautiful building.”

Mahanoy City is a national landmark because cable television got its start through a General Electric appliance store owner who wanted to overcome the problem of mountains blocking broadcast signals. John and Margaret Walsonavage (Walson) erected an antenna on a nearby mountain in 1948 to receive television signals from Philadelphia and bring those signals to their store where they sold television sets. Eventually, homes along the cable were also connected, creating the first cable television system called the Service Electric Co.

Walsonavage was recognized by the U.S. Congress and the National Cable Television Association as the founder of the cable television industry, according to the Service Electric website. Walsonavage is also credited as being the first cable operator to use microwave to import distant television stations, the first to use coaxial cable for improved picture quality, and the first to distribute pay television programming (HBO).

Bennett Family Properties owner Joseph Bennett understands the legacy of the Service Electric Co. in Mahanoy City. “We are very pleased to have acquired such a fine building and respect

the legacy of the Walson family,” Bennett said. “We will certainly be keeping that in mind relative to our project. We plan on commemorating the fact that this is where cable television started.”

Bennett has known members of the Walson family for years, which gives him a personal connection to the heritage left by the family members. “I knew Mr. Walson’s son, and **John Walson** was a fine gentleman and we’re honored to have acquired a property that was owned by such a nice family who have done so much for so many people in the community,” Bennett said. “I used to deliver newspapers to Mrs. Walson in Allentown. That’s how far back I go with the family. I was their newspaper boy.”

Bennett’s plans for the properties are being kept under wraps right now, but what will happen will be announced in the not-too-distant future. “While I can’t right now say anything further, but we are truly looking forward to working within that community. Everyone we’ve met in Mahanoy City are really nice people.” Bennett said that the purchase and plans are a positive thing for the borough. “There are some exciting things coming to Mahanoy City,” Bennett said. – **Pottsville Republican-Herald**

The state Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding told lawmakers Tuesday that the Wolf Administration recognizes the importance of getting broadband available in rural Pennsylvania.

Speaking to the House agriculture and rural affairs committee at the Pennsylvania Farm Show, Redding said broadband access is a “key issue in terms of economic opportunity.” In rural parts of the state the issue of broadband access will have dramatic implications on a number of different areas, he said. That includes the push to provide better health care through tele-medicine, and the effort to make sure that rural schools are providing the same quality education available elsewhere in the state, he said. As a result, the Gov. Tom Wolf has made rural broadband access a priority, Redding said.

It’s an issue that people in both major parties have acknowledged the importance of. State Rep. Martin Causer, R-Potter County, the chairman of the agriculture and rural affairs committee, noted that President Donald Trump stressed the importance of tackling rural broadband access in his Monday appearance before the American Farm Bureau. Trump also signed an executive order calling on the federal government to “use all viable tools” to more rapidly deploy affordable broadband internet service in parts of the country.

According to the president’s order: Executive departments “should seek to reduce barriers to capital investment, remove obstacles to broadband services and more efficiently employ government resources.” There are 650,000 people in Pennsylvania who don’t have access to broadband internet where they live, and another 165,000 Pennsylvanians who don’t have access to any internet service at their homes, at all, according to Broadband Now.

Until now, Pennsylvania has largely tackled the issue through a series of “one-off” projects intended to provide better service in one area at a time, Mark Critz, executive director of the Pennsylvania Rural Development Council. Critz said there is now a sense that planners need to look at the problem on more of a statewide level. “We’re at a crossroads,” he said, noting that the issue is vital for the farming industry as agricultural businesses seek to tap markets around the globe. “If you want to sell to the world, you need to be connected to the world,” Critz said.

Closing the gap won’t be easy, he said. In a state of mountains and valleys, “we have a lot of topography that makes it difficult” to get broadband everywhere, he said. And it may just not make sense to seek broadband access from border-to-border, Critz said. “Do you need to cover the entire Allegheny National Forest?” he asked. But he noted that the state probably should look to get adequate service to satisfy tourists visiting the forest. Redding said that any solution will likely require cooperative from telecom companies.

Tuesday’s discussion certainly won’t be the end of it. Representatives of the state Public Utility Commission, the Rural Development Council, the Pennsylvania Telephone Association and state Rep. Kristin Phillips-Hill, R-York County, are scheduled to participate in a panel discussion on the topic Thursday at the Farm Show. Phillips-Hill has authored legislation that would call for a study to come up with recommendations on how the state could deploy broadband across the state, as well, as a separate study to determine if the telecommunications companies satisfied broadband requirements set in legislation passed in 1993 and 2004. – **CNHI.com**

Pennsylvania’s House Majority Leader Dave Reed says he’s considering running for Congress to succeed U.S. Rep. Bill Shuster, who announced last week that he won’t seek another term in

the southwestern Pennsylvania seat. Reed said Wednesday that he was surprised by Shuster's announcement, and will decide soon whether to run.

The 39-year-old Reed has been mentioned as a possible candidate for higher office since he put up a website a year ago called paforwardtogether.com that strongly suggested some sort of candidacy. Reed's been in office since 2003 and has been majority leader since 2015. The district includes all or parts of 12 counties, including Reed's home of Indiana County, as well as Altoona, Chambersburg and Uniontown. Shuster's held the seat since 2001 and is Pennsylvania's most powerful U.S. House member as chairman of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. – *Pennlive*

President Donald Trump will reportedly visit the Pittsburgh area next week. [Politico on Thursday reported](#) that the president will visit a manufacturing plant in Pennsylvania's 18th Congressional District, where a special election is being held in March to replace former U.S. Rep. Tim Murphy, a Republican. Vice President Mike Pence and other Cabinet officials were also expected to visit before the special election, according to Politico.

The race in the 18th District is between former federal prosecutor Conor Lamb, a Democrat, and Republican state Rep. Rick Saccone of Elizabeth. The district includes parts of Allegheny, Westmoreland, Washington and Greene counties. Mr. Trump plans to use the trip to promote the newly passed tax reform bill, Politico reported. A White House regional spokesman told the Post-Gazette that he was unable to confirm any details about Mr. Trump's travel plans. – *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

