

OPINION & Editorial



John T. Harding: Editor's Revenge Justice for all?

"No justice, no peace!" Federal judges will be getting long-overdue pay hikes as well as back pay for the six times they were denied scheduled raises. Two court decisions said

Congress was wrong in denying raises to nearly 2,000 federal judges throughout the country in 1995, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2007 and 2010.

The Congressional Budget Office, in a letter to Sen. Patrick J. Leahy (D-Vermont), chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, cited court decisions that "Congress may not withhold automatic salary increases for certain judges and that it improperly did so on six separate occasions." Result: Judges will now receive pay hikes automatically, as well as back pay for increases they should have received.

The total cost of compensating the judges for lost pay and coming increases will be some \$1.2 billion over the next 10 years.

Comment: It's a truism that money buys justice. Wealthy folks can hire squadrons of lawyers, while others must rely on Legal Aid from volunteers or government-sponsored agencies. At the same time, judges regularly leave the bench to return to private practice; that's where the big money is.

As it is, federal district court judges this year get a salary of \$199,100, and circuit court judges get \$211,200. At the U.S. Supreme Court, associate justices draw a salary of \$244,400, and the chief justice gets \$255,500.

Prosecutors also have the resources of government to investigate and pursue suspects for years, if need be, before filing charges, and then spending more time and money as the case moves through the court system.

Major corporations and the wealthy can often outspend the state in marshalling and continuing their defense, but legal resources for others are severely limited or nonexistent.

The question then becomes this: Is justice distributed evenly and fairly among all groups — economic, demographic, ethnic and racial — in America? Money talks, it has been said. And those with more money can talk longer and louder than those with less.

There's also a tendency among law enforcement officials to aim at easier targets to score points toward a perceived "quota" of sorts to build their reputation and show that they're doing their jobs well, by citing the number of convictions they have obtained. Moreover, there is less publicity over cases involving the unknown. In cases involving celebrities, major corporations, the wealthy and other credible figures, prosecutors lose credibility when they lose a case.

Meanwhile, our resident cynic points out that five of the six times federal judges were denied scheduled pay hikes were during a Republican administration, and the sixth was during a midterm election year with a Democrat in the White House.

"No justice, no peace!" the protestors chant. There's more to that than simply a demand for justice in individual cases. It applies to the whole of a just society, where all are created equal, and thus deserve equal treatment under the law.

Editor's Revenge is a regular online commentary on politics, journalism, economics and other subjects. John T. Harding resides in Doylestown.

Bucks County's Fire Prevention Week focuses on smoke alarms in homes

The deaths of John Sheridan, the president of Camden-based Cooper University Health Care and his wife, Joyce, in a fire that broke out in their Skillman, N.J., home, brings home fires to attention. Local firefighters are emphasizing the importance of safety measures.

Unfortunately, many home fire deaths result from fires where a smoke alarm is present but does not operate. This year's Fire Prevention Week theme focuses on motivating people to test their smoke alarms each month to make sure they're working properly.

The Bucks County Fire Chiefs and Firefighters Association would like to offer the following tips for ensuring a properly-working smoke alarm:

- Install a smoke alarm inside every bedroom, outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home, including the basement. Make sure the smoke alarms chosen bear the label of a recognized testing laboratory.

Fire Prevention Week events

The Midway Fire Co., Stations 5 and 15, will host an open house at 7 p.m. on Oct. 7.

Perkasie Fire Co., Station 76, will hold its open house from 6 to 9 p.m. on Oct. 9.

An awards contest for students will be part of the Springtown Volunteer Fire Co., Station 40, open house, being held on Oct. 9. Goodies, give-aways and a flu clinic will be part of the event.

Warwick Fire Co., Station 66, is holding an open house from 5 to 9 p.m. on Oct. 10.

Ivyland Fire Co., Station 62, will host its open house from 2 to 5 p.m. on Oct. 11.

The Lingohocken Fire Co., Station 35, will host a "Pizza and Prevention" open house during Fire Prevention Week by visiting area elementary schools.

- On levels of the home without bedrooms, install alarms in the living room, family room or den, or near the stairs leading to the upper level.

- Smoke alarms installed in the basement should be mounted on the ceiling at the bottom of the stairs.

- Install all smoke alarms at least 10 feet from a cooking appliance to help reduce the chance of false alarms while cooking.

- Smoke alarms should be mounted high on walls or ideally on ceilings. When mounting a smoke detector on a wall, install it no more than 12 inches away from the ceiling. For homes with pitched ceilings, smoke detectors should be mounted within 3 feet of the peak but not within the apex of the peak.

- Test all smoke alarms once a month by using the test button. Replace batteries as needed.

- Replace all smoke alarms once every 10 years, or sooner if they do not respond properly when tested and a change in batteries does not fix the issue.

Residential homeowners also may want to consider installing wireless interconnected smoke detectors, which help to eliminate the risks of an undetected fire by ensuring residents will be able to hear a smoke detector from anywhere in their home. The system works by setting off the alarms on every smoke detector in a home simultaneously regardless of which detector first registered a potential fire.

"Stopping by one of the many events scheduled within Bucks County is a great way to learn about fire safety," explained Rob Kay, co-chair of the association's recruitment and retention committee. "It is also an opportunity to learn about volunteering within your local fire company. People are often surprised to learn about the wide range of firefighting and non-firefighting opportunities that exist right in their community."

Interested in becoming a volunteer firefighter? The Bucks County Fire Chiefs and Firefighters Association is looking for able-bodied men and women to serve.

Inquiry forms are available on our association's web site, or call 855-4BCFIRE to speak with a member who can guide you through the process.

Bridget Wingert: Happy to Be Here A Doylestown architect's legacy

Standing outside Oscar Martin's house last Sunday, Jennifer Jarret, an architectural historian, described some of the details — and there were plenty, inside and out.

Details are in the brickwork — Flemish bond, a checkerboard pattern, on main walls; in the Flemish gable at the center; in the dining room's coffered ceiling; in shelves and staircases; and in the tiny library at the back of the house.

On this sunny and warm day, groups of walkers were learning about Oscar Martin buildings during the Central Bucks Chamber of Commerce's Excellence in Design Tour. This year, the focus was on Doylestown Borough. It was Sept. 28, Martin's 141st birthday.



Oscar Martin's home.

The architect built his house at Shewell Avenue and Union Street in 1902. When he was just 25, and he lived in it the rest of life. It is a brick house, a transition from the Victorian and Queen Anne styles of just a few years before, to the early 20th-century Craftsman influence.

On an opposite corner, the 1899 Meyers House, was Martin's first commission. Seeing one house



Details at the Medical Healing Arts building.

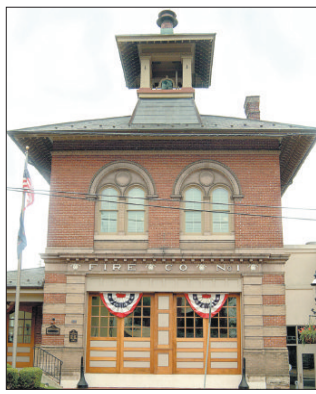


The unadorned Scheetz House on East Court Street.

across from the other allowed immediate comparison in styles — Queen Anne but simplified on one side, the Martin's more modern home on the other side.

Those homes show the evolution of the Martin style. The earliest houses were built soon after Shewell Avenue opened, on an industrial site that became the residential area we know today. Neighbors dubbed the Meyers House "The Lady" and the more imposing Martin House "The Lord."

The homes Martin built in following years would carry his stamp — rafter tails and broad overhangs with curving hipped roofs, quoining on corners with terra cotta mortar to match the joints, large windows and graceful staircases. It's believed that Oscar's father, Doylestown contractor Jonas



The Doylestown Firehouse.

MARK MARGRAFF

Martin, built the home to his son's specifications. The architect was one of 13 children in a family that moved from Dublin to Doylestown when Oscar was young. After apprenticing with his father, he enrolled at the fledgling Drexel Institute of Technology in 1892, studying architecture and engineering. He worked at architecture firms in New York and Philadelphia before starting his own business in 1896.

The tour meandered past the firehouse and other landmark buildings. Martin designed the Lyon Office Building, on North Main Street in Colonial Revival style, in 1901. He later moved his office to that building, probably on the third floor. Thomas Lyons was a jeweler with his shop at street level.

Another Colonial Revival building is Joseph H. Fretz's Grill, an addition to Fountain House, built in 1905.

Martin designed Dr. Willis G. Benner's Horse Hospital at 14 E. Oakland Avenue. It was built in 1895, when Martin was only 22.

Among Martin's designs on N Ashland Street, was the Musselman House. According to the tour description, "Diane Hering bought the home 12 years ago, after selling her business in Ocean City. Realtor Nick Molloy showed her many homes, and she was not impressed, so she resigned to give up on Doylestown for a while and go back to Ocean City."

When she was ready to give up, Molloy took a chance. He showed her the Musselman House. Molloy said he had one more he could show her, although it was not yet on the market. Entering the house at the back door, Hering said, "I don't need to see it, let's go write up an agreement."

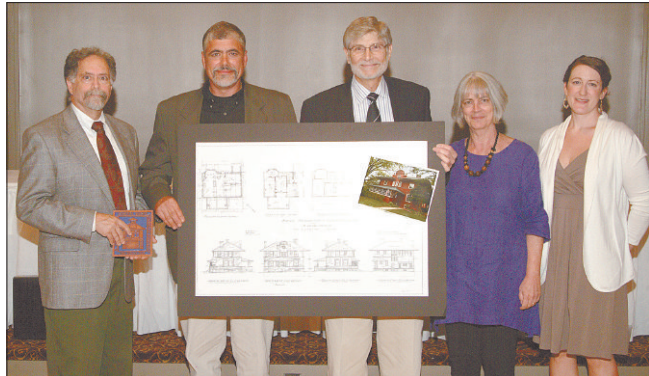
One of the most impressive Martin buildings is the Mary A. Beckman Memorial M.E. Church at 59 S. Main St., built in 1902. It is Classical Gothic Revival style, with pointed arches, crenellations at the top of tower, and buttresses. The stone is Wissahickon schist from Philadelphia quarries. The building has been a Baptist church since 1967.

Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie Style is evident in the 1909 stuccoed Erwin Scheetz House, on East Court Street. Nancy and Gene Brown have lived there 47 years. In the typical Martin cubic form, it has a pyramidal roof with deep overhang, large wrap porch, central front stair between living and dining rooms.

After Oscar's son, Fred F. Martin, graduated from Penn, he joined the business, which became A. Oscar Martin & Son. During World War I, Oscar Martin was appointed director of construction and materials for Bucks County. He was county engineer for 25 years, building more than 100 bridges and maintaining many of the schools in the county. Fred continued to run the business when his father died in 1942.

Martin designed houses and residential additions, and larger buildings, like the Melinda Cox Library, the firehouse and the Moose Hall, now the Standard Club, and the Order of United American Mechanics Lodge on Oakland Avenue, now the Medical Healing Arts building. The organization was a nativist fraternal beneficial society that formed in mid-19th century to protest the immigration of Germans, Irish and Catholics.

The architect left a permanent mark on Doylestown, visible at almost every turn in the center of town. His was a period worth noting in a tour of Doylestown's 20th-century evolution to modern architecture.



Many on the walking tour had attended a seminar on Oscar Martin's architecture during the week. Members of the panel included Jeff Marshall, president of Heritage Conservancy, Phil Ehlinger, planner and deputy borough manager, Ellen Concannon Happ, Doylestown architect and designer of a new kitchen planned for Oscar Martin's 1902 home on Shewell Avenue, and Jennifer Jarret, architectural historian, educator and Doylestown resident. The moderator was Mark Glidden of Stone-Griddens Above & Beyond Home.

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