

# CENTRAL PENN BUSINESS JOURNAL

LEBANON COUNTY

Nurturing a diverse business landscape

Inside this issue



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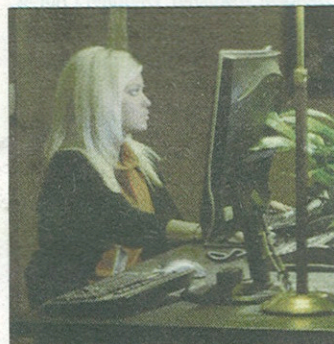


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## Inside Business

THE BUSINESS OF TRAVEL AND TOURISM



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## THIS WEEK ONLINE

THE **INSIDE VIEW**  
HEALTH CARE REFORM  
CENTRAL PENN BUSINESS JOURNAL

Join the Central Penn Business Journal on May 5 for an inside view of new federal health care laws. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit [www.centralpennbusiness.com/events](http://www.centralpennbusiness.com/events).

## LANCASTER COUNTY

# NEXT STAGE

Sight & Sound, consultant collaborate to prepare future cast of leaders

BY PAULA HOLZMAN  
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Glenn and Shirley Eshelman have built their business from a travelling slide show to staging professional productions for 800,000 people each year.

But three years ago, the owners of Sight & Sound Theatres faced a conundrum familiar to family-owned businesses everywhere: how to ensure the company remained family-owned and operated.

The answer has been a nontraditional arrangement between the business and a Lancaster-based consulting firm — one that continues to transform the way both parties work.

The tourism mainstay creates and stages Bible-based productions at its three theaters: the 2,000-seat flagship Millennium Theater in Strasburg Town-



PHOTO/AMY SPANGLER

The management of Lancaster County-based Sight & Sound Theaters is working with North Group Consultants Inc. to transfer the family-owned business from one generation to the next. Pictured are founder Glenn Eshelman, foreground; North Group President Roger North, seated; and Eshelman's sons-in-law, Matt Neff, left, and Josh Enck, who will become co-CEOs.

ship; a facility in Branson, Mo., which opened in 2008; and the 643-seat Living Waters Theatre in Strasburg Township, which is set to close after this year's

Christmas production.

Sight & Sound employs about 600 people, 500 of them full-time.

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## STATE

# Consensus emerging around fuel taxes

BY JIM T. RYAN  
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With the U.S. Department of Transportation handing Pennsylvania a daunting setback by rejecting a plan to toll Interstate 80, the governor and legislature will have to hammer out a hasty compromise to fix the state's transportation funding dilemma.

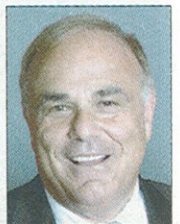
That won't be easy but is possible, business groups said. The largest obstacle for Gov. Ed Rendell and the legislature is finding common ground with each other, motorists and businesses.

That problem has contributed to failure of transportation funding ideas since 2006.

"You need consensus from the business community, from the motoring public for any plan to work," said Rich Kirkpatrick, a PennDOT spokesman.

Without a solution, the money for highways, bridges and transit available under Act 44, the state law mandating Pennsylvania Turnpike toll increases and tolls on I-80, would be cut by

please see **FUEL**, page 5



Rendell

## DAUPHIN COUNTY

# Stimulus could save ailing arts center in Midtown Harrisburg

BY ERIC VERONIKIS  
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The Harrisburg Midtown Arts Center is in financial straits, but a federal stimulus incentive could put the project on track for an August completion,

co-owners of the center said.

HMAC last year defaulted on a \$667,000 mortgage with Susquehanna Bank, according to legal papers filed by Susquehanna in Dauphin County Court.

But the owners still plan to open

two music halls, an art gallery, film office/studio, restaurant, community pool and retail area for musicians to sell merchandise, said John Traynor, a co-owner of the facility at 1110 N. Third St. Traynor said he and the other owners have put more than

\$1 million of their own money into the project because they believe in the Harrisburg arts community.

On April 6, the Dauphin County commissioners gave the owners

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**Behind the list** — In this week's Q&A, meet Jan Tobias-Kieffer, director of public relations and advertising at Lake Tobias Wildlife Park. **Page 23**

# STAGE: Experience led to launch of consulting firm's new branch

continued from page 1

The Eshelmans have four daughters, none of whom said they were interested in running Strasburg Township-based Sight & Sound, Glenn Eshelman said.

Two family members did appear to have the potential for taking the reins, sons-in-laws Matt Neff and Josh Enck, who both already held leadership roles at company. But the founders didn't believe the two men were ready to do that yet.

So on a recommendation, the Eshelmans brought in Lancaster-based North Group Consultants Inc. to help guide the transition. North Group specializes in providing assistance to privately held, family-owned companies.

As North Group began its initial assessment of the company, the unexpected happened: one of Sight & Sound's most senior executives resigned.

That left a leadership vacuum — one Eshelman said he didn't feel comfortable hiring an outside person to fill, only to jettison him or her when Enck and Neff were ready to take over the company.

So Eshelman decided to hire Roger North, the president North Group, as an interim chief operations officer.

From that perch, North could mentor Enck and Neff, as well as directly helping lead the company through its transition.

Sight & Sound faced additional challenges besides trying to pass the baton between generations: It was preparing to open its theater in Branson while coping with the effects of a rapidly souring economy.

A six-month contract for North Group turned into a one-year contract, and then one year into another.

North Group has been working with Sight & Sound for a little more than three years now. With each contract renewal, North said, he scales back his responsibilities and increases the roles for Enck and Neff.

"(North) didn't come in and try to change these men and their giftings, what they're good at," Eshelman said. "He enhanced that, he became a support to that, and one who grew them further — maybe not even so much in the ability of producing a show, per se, but in how to work with people."

North said he envisions the process will take three to five years. Enck and Neff eventually will be installed as co-CEOs, with Enck handling the creative side of the operation and Neff in charge of administrative functions.

The dynamic hews to the men's strengths, Eshelman said, and mirrors

"... To get good input and counsel from somebody who doesn't live in the mix of it every day, I think is good."

Glenn Eshelman,  
Sight & Sound Theatres

the dynamic between himself and his wife that made Sight & Sound work.

The family also has used the transition as an opportunity to gain outside perspective about Sight & Sound's operations and remedy weaknesses.

"We were able to identify that there was not a transparent culture here at Sight & Sound. There were a lot of what we called 'silos' and departments. Everybody was doing their own jobs really, really well; but overall, there wasn't continuity in communication," Enck said.

"There wasn't transparency in the financials. There was ... a lack of trust between family and leadership. Not entirely, but pockets of it. Enough for it to be inconsistent behavior, back and forth," he said. "We were a very reactive company, as opposed to being proactive."

With the help of North Group, Sight & Sound has established companywide core values that now guide everything from personnel issues to meetings, Enck said.

The company trimmed script-to-stage time for a show from three years to two and continued to ferret out ways the organization can be more accountable and efficient, he said.

North Group also has provided valuable feedback and introduced Enck and Neff to a group for second- and third-generation leaders of family-run businesses, Enck said.

"Over the three years, he spent a lot of time here," Eshelman said of North. "I think there were some weeks he was getting up to 30-35 hours a week."

The experience has changed North Group as well.

"I got to thinking, 'You know, nobody else is doing that,'" North said of his collaboration with Sight & Sound.

That led to the recent launch of a new branch of his company: North Group Executive Solutions. The group will provide interim executive leadership in the for-profit and nonprofit worlds, and has signed up two clients during the past month, North said.

He continues to scale back at Sight & Sound, but might not leave altogether.

"I would never envision the day

that we're without Roger completely, that the North Group would not have any involvement with Sight & Sound at all," Eshelman said. "The Bible says there's safety in a multitude of counselors, and to get good input and counsel from somebody who doesn't live in the mix of it every day, I think is good."

North's considerable time investment and institutional knowledge add an extra dimension to the transition, he said.

"One of the challenges I can see in this type of situation is realizing there's coming a day Roger (North) won't be here to hold (Enck's and Neff's) hand(s) anymore or to be on this property as much as he once was," Eshelman said.

But Sight & Sound's founder said he's confident that when his sons-in-law take over, the handoff will be seamless.

"The journey's been a good journey," he said. "I would do it all over again because it has worked for us successfully — very successfully. What we have seen transpire in the last three years here has not only been these men coming up to speed and coming into the knowledge of being able to step in those shoes, but so has our leadership team. It has definitely transformed our entire ministry and organization." ■

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