

Gas Boom County Strives to Create Conditions for an Economic Afterglow

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in the United States in 2010, according to figures released last year by the federal Bureau of Economic Analysis. Four new hotels have been built in town, and restaurants and bars have sprouted, including a barbecue place to meet the carnivorous needs of homesick Texans and Oklahomans.

"We're wrapping our arms around the industry," said Williamsport's mayor, Gabe Campana. "Drill, baby, drill!"

County officials, to help deal with the impact of the boom, examined the early effects on housing, roads, social services, and water and sewage infrastructure.

The college, part of the Pennsylvania State University system, increased efforts to train local workers, educating 7,000 students in short courses since 2009 and expanding two- and four-year degree programs as well. The initiative is part of its work with a consortium of colleges called ShaleNET, financed with a

Helping institutions adapt to go beyond local needs.

\$15 million federal grant.

Thanks to such initiatives, said Kurt Hausmann, the county's director of planning, "we are seeing more of our own Pennsylvania youth and young professionals getting into the gas industry now."

Local businesses have also stepped up to work with the industry. The Ralph S. Alberts Company makes custom molded polymers, anything from seats for amusement park rides to medical training mannequins. "We really have been able to adapt and almost continually change our identity to keep up with whatever new technology is coming around," said Edward Alberts, the company's president.

When the drillers came to town, the company quickly found a way to apply its expertise to the industry's needs, opening a business that constructs containment pens for drilling and storage equipment that are lined with heavy-duty spray-on polymer so that any spills do not contaminate the soil. The company is building the enclosures in Pennsylvania and Ohio, and drillers are talking to it about taking on jobs in Texas.

Despite the opportunities, the jobs do not suit everyone, said

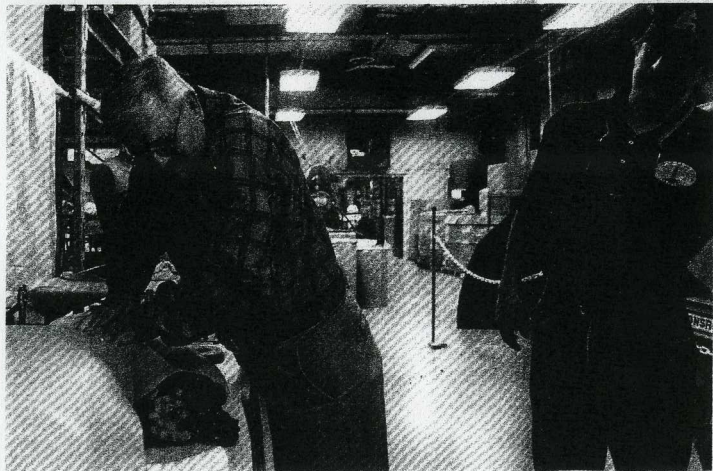
Westley Smith, who was raised in nearby Mifflinburg and designs critical welding processes for pipelines. Many people in the industry work six days a week, 10 hours a day, he said, and "a lot of people around here don't typically want to do that."

Tracy L. Brundage, Penn College's assistant vice president for work-force and economic development, said training courses often started with an information session attended by 200 people.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY NIKO J. KALLIANIOTIS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Above, a Pennsylvania College of Technology training site in Lycoming County. Left, Edward Alberts demonstrating a mannequin molded by his Ralph S. Alberts Company for medical training. The business, near Williamsport, has also started molding polymers for the natural gas industry.



The instructor begins with the "work ethic components" of these jobs, including the long hours and the requirement that workers be physically fit and drug free. "By break time," she said, "half of the room is gone."

Evan DiCioli, a 24-year-old Californian working on gas wells near town, said that while local residents might object to the inconveniences associated with the drilling boom, "this is calm" compared with the year he spent in North Dakota. Stores there were unable to keep the shelves stocked, he said, and men slept in their cars because hotel rooms and apartments could not be had.

Mr. DiCioli, who was enjoying a rare night off at Bullfrog Brewery, a restaurant downtown, added of those who disapprove of the

drilling going on around them: "Don't frown on the things people do to get natural resources out of the ground when you're using the resources."

Environmentalists contend that state and local governments have grossly overstated the economic benefits while playing down the environmental risks of shale drilling.

Anne and Eric Nordell started their organic farm in Trout Run, 25 miles from Williamsport, in the 1980s. From the highest point on their 90 acres, one can see drilling rigs and platforms on the surrounding hills, as well as deforestation that makes way for the drilling platforms and the roads to get to them. "We're just praying that our water will be safe," Ms. Nordell said.

"The first indication that we have any type of contamination, we will shut down," she added. "I eat the food that I grow, and I will not sell anything that's unsafe."

Ralph Kisberg, the president of the Responsible Drilling Alliance, an environmental group, said he was not trying to block the gas boom. "We know it can't be stopped," he said. But, he added, the state should benefit more from the removal of its resources.

A new state law, Act 13, includes fees for the industry that generated about \$200 million in revenue in its first year, but that amount is expected to drop off quickly. Mr. Kisberg said the state could receive far more money over time through a direct tax on the gas itself.

Mark Price, a labor economist at the liberal-leaning Keystone Research Center in Harrisburg, estimated that the industry had generated 20,000 jobs in Pennsylvania since the first quarter of 2008. While "any job over that time period is one to be lauded," he said, the total constituted less than half a percentage point of all employment in the state.

Mr. Price said he was skeptical that Pennsylvania could buffer the cycle of boom and bust, one the state had seen before with timber and coal. The area has already had a taste of what a bust might be like; natural gas prices have dropped in the past year, and drilling has slowed.

"You would think that there would be a sensitivity to this issue," Mr. Price said. "But memories are short."

Do not forget the Neediest!

Gas Boom County Strives For Economic Afterglow

By JOHN SCHWARTZ

WILLIAMSPORT, Pa. — The flames started slowly, emerging from the top of oil field equipment, and then quickly grew to a roar.

This was not an emergency, though it looked like one. It was a "burn exercise" for safety workers in the oil and gas industry, part of a new course at the Pennsylvania College of Technology.

A gas boom has brought companies and workers into parts of Pennsylvania that lie atop the Marcellus Shale formation, a rich source of both natural gas and controversy. The common economic criticism of the drilling industry is that it booms

and then busts, generating few local jobs and leaving little lasting economic benefit.

But Lycoming County, in the north-central part of the state, is trying to change that.

The county and its main city, Williamsport, are working diligently to position themselves not just as a host to the arriving companies, but also as a source of local workers for the industry and a long-term beneficiary of its local and national expansion.

The industry helped give the Williamsport metropolitan area the seventh-fastest-growing economy

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