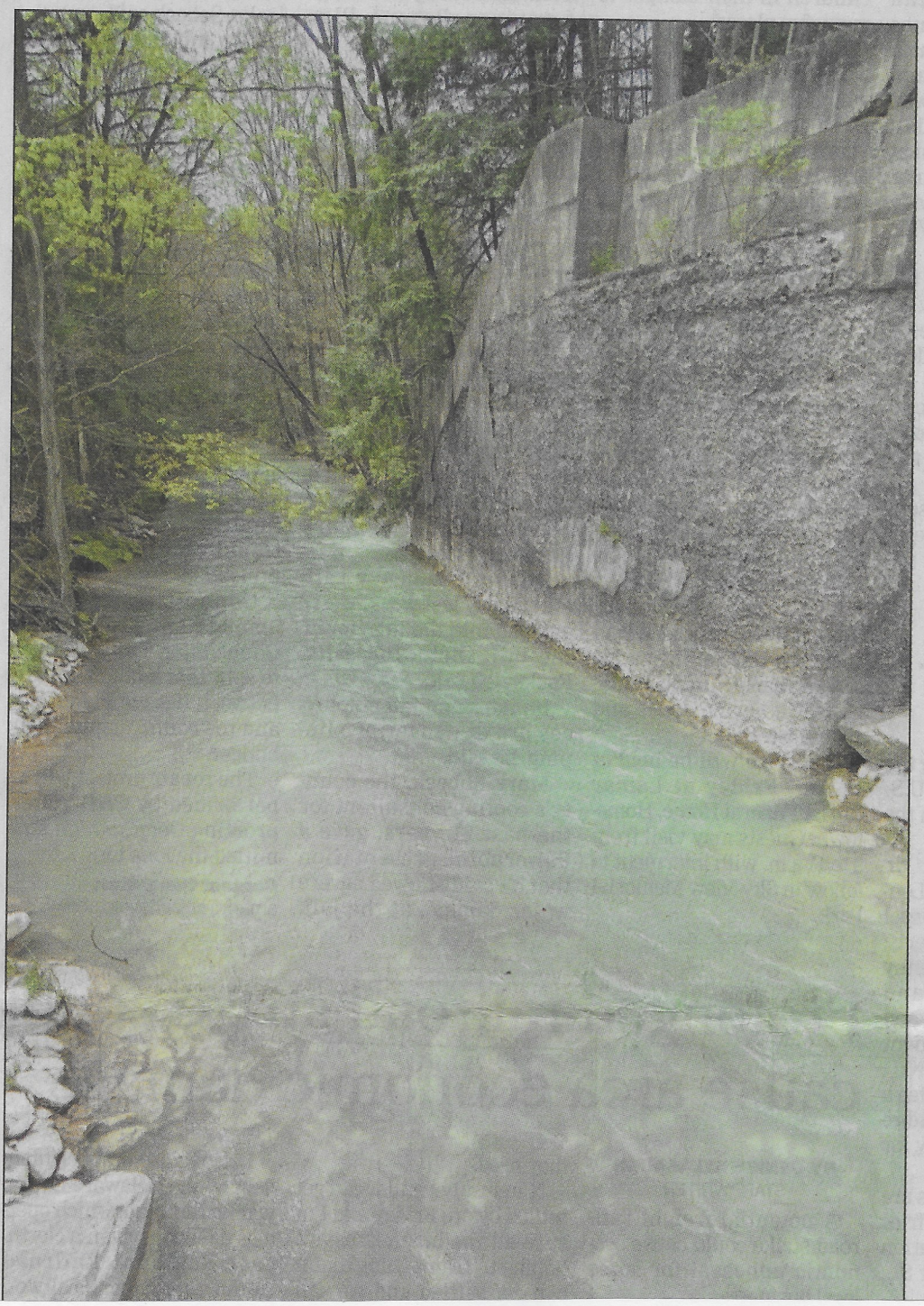
HAZLETON STANDARD SPEAKER - SEPTEMBER 15, 2022

Mine water a shortage solution?

Old idea pitched again, but HCA has doubts



BY SAM GALSKI
STAFF WRITER

A local businessman who for decades pushed for using purified mine water to supplement the local water supply recently revisited the concept with Hazleton City Authority officials.

But authority officials, who are in the process of exploring new sources for water, haven't committed to the concept.

R. Peter Haentjens, former vice president of Barrett Haentjens/Hazleton Pumps, Hazleton Environmental, and executive director of Eastern Middle Anthracite Region Recovery, approached board members about the mine water purification concept that was introduced locally in the late 1980s and evolved into a pilot program in the mid-1990s in Hazleton.

Haentjens presented purified mine water as an alternative to HCA's ongoing search for new sources and the authority's reliance on a pumping station at the Lehigh River.

The discussion took place as repairs are underway at HCA's pumping station, which was knocked offline during a storm about a year ago. Those pumps can feed as much as 5 million gallons of water per day into its reservoirs.

The pumps were vital to helping the authority overcome dry spells in the past and are key to helping the authority meet increased demand as industrial projects take shape throughout

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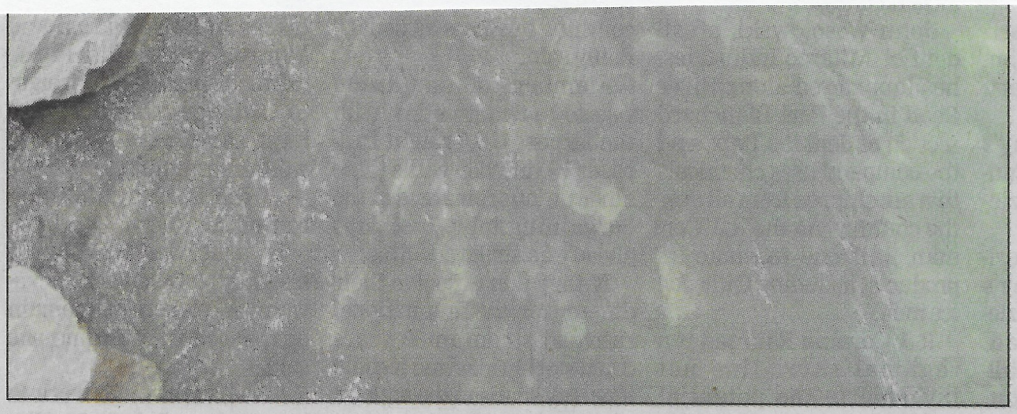

JOHN HAEGER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The Little Nescopeck Creek is among those locally that are affected by abandoned mine drainage. An old proposal to treat and use acid mine water for public consumption is new again.

WATER: Process involves removing metals

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Greater Hazleton.

The authority board has since asked customers to reduce nonessential water consumption by 25%.

That's when Haentjens approached the board about the possibility of incorporating treated mine water into HCA's supply.

"For at least 30 years, I'm promoting mine water for potable water," Haentjens said recently. "There's nothing new about it. The only thing that changed over the past 30 years is the equipment. The chemistry has not changed."

How it works

Haentjens said the process involves removing metals to get mine water to stream quality.

From there, it would go through filtration and disinfection, similar to the process at HCA's filtration plant, he said.

A news article published in the Standard-Speaker on Feb. 16, 1994, reports on a pilot plant that Hazleton Environmental used to purify mine water from the Hazleton Shaft Colliery east of Cedar Street.

A photo published at the time shows then Mayor John Quigley sipping a glass of purified mine water.

Haentjens said recently that an estimated 20 million gallons of water per day travels through that tunnel complex, which drains water from the Hazle Creek and Cranberry Creek areas.

Another 8,000 gallons per day is available from the Audenried tunnel, which discharges on the south side of Humboldt, Haentjens said.

Those two sources could more than meet HCA's needs, he said.

"When they have to look for groundwater, it's pretty hard to find around here," Haentjens said. "Between these two discharges, you don't have to look anywhere (else)."

The process for treating mine water could cost $1 to $2 for every 1,000 gallons, he estimates.

Authority reacts

Authority board Chairman Joseph Zeller III said the board hasn't had an opportunity to discuss the mine water proposal but said Haentjens did speak about grants that could potentially pay for a study that would gauge the feasibility of his proposal.

HCA Director of Operations Scot Burkhardt said engineers who completed a feasibility study mentioned purified mine water as a potential source, but said officials considered it a "last resort."

"We have really good quality water in our groundwater, reservoirs and wells," Burkhardt said, adding that authority officials are reluctant to add treated mine water to the mix.

Burkhardt said he's hopeful that pump stations at the Lehigh River will be operational in the next two weeks.

The HCA, meanwhile, is working to get other sources back online.

"We have a few areas that we're looking at — getting existing wells repermitted and possibly two new ones," he said. "It looks pretty good right now. It just takes such a long time to get through the permitting process (and) to get them online and tested. We do have the wheels in motion."

Board member John Keegan said that while the board didn't have an opportunity to discuss the mine water proposal, he said some authority officials "weren't convinced with the technology getting us to where we'd need to be with water that we can present to the public."

"We feel the water sources we're looking at will be easier to acquire," Keegan added.

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