

Proud to be a family owned and operated newspaper since 1902

PUBLISHERS

Paul R. Eyerly Sr.
1902-1946

Charles T. Vanderslice
1902-1957

Robert Eyerly
1957-1971

Paul R. Eyerly Jr.
1957-1979

BUSINESS & EDITORIAL

Paul R. Eyerly III
Chairman

Paul R. Eyerly IV
President

James T. Micklow
Treasurer

James P. Sachetti
Editor

Brandon R. Eyerly
Publisher

Sandra Sterner
Advertising Manager

Donald Whitmire
Circulation Manager

EDITORIAL

The story behind Wise turnaround

With more than 500 workers, Wise Foods of Berwick remains the second largest employer in Columbia County. A decade ago, the snack-food maker's future was anything but certain. That it's still in business and still here are reasons for the entire region to celebrate. Those jobs feed and clothe a lot of people.

The Wise turnaround is also worth considering in light of other political and economic developments making headlines:

■ With all the talk about America's evolving economy, it's easy to forget that we still do make things in this country. Not everyone is inclined or cut out to work in high-tech positions. Computers are integral to the making of even the most humble products, but there are still many jobs in manufacturing processes for which nothing but a human being will do. Although these positions may not command the wages or attention of jobs in hot-button fields, they are still important. It should be public policy to put as much energy into retaining such jobs as pursuing high-tech industries.

■ Note that Wise's fortunes were turned around the old-fashioned way, via private investment and restructuring.

Ten years ago, this would hardly have been worthy of note. But we are now well into an era in which government is viewed as the first and best solution to every economic problem.

Wise's fortunes were redirected by an investment firm, Palladium Equity Partners, which makes money buying companies, managing them back to financial health, then selling them at a profit.

Needless to say, this process involves some pain. Ailing companies are usually suffering from mismanagement, a part of which is the inability to make tough decisions.

When Palladium took over Wise, it closed manufacturing plants and laid off workers.

Such steps almost always generate public condemnation, mainly by the political class and by the news and entertainment media. For generations, the cruel, callous big business mogul who thinks nothing of the working man has been a stock character in Hollywood's closet of cardboard characters.

But after the credits roll — after the TV news crews have covered the layoff announcement and moved on — what most of us seldom hear about or realize is that some smaller, leaner companies survive, thrive and begin to grow again.

That's exactly what's happened at Wise, Susan Schwartz of our Berwick staff learned. With a new line of credit, the snack food manufacturer is investing in new equipment here, contemplating construction of a new, modern warehouse, and adding innovative products plus the marketing to support them.

■ If there's a cloud on the horizon for Wise, it's one that hangs over all of America's food-processing industry.

The political class is in the process of enlarging its portfolio to include regulation of what people may and may not eat. For better than a hundred years, it's been the job of the Food and Drug Administration to ensure that all consumables are safe. But there are influential people coast to coast and in Washington now arguing that it's also the job of government to decide what's good and what isn't good for people to eat, to encourage the former and — most ominously — to suppress the latter.

In other words, "Big Food" is taking its place with "Big Tobacco," "Big Oil" and other allegedly evil industries at the defendant's table in the court of public opinion. In only the most recent example, officials in Santa Clara County, California, voted to forbid fast-food outlets in their jurisdiction from including toys in child-themed promotions, such as McDonald's Happy Meals.

"This ordinance prevents restaurants from preying on children's love of toys to peddle high-calorie, high-fat, high-sodium kids meals," said Ken Yeager, the county supervisor behind the ban.

As such arguments are made more frequently — and as formerly freedom-loving Americans grow accustomed to being told what to eat — the makers of salted snack foods are sure to come under political assault.

We're not at the point yet where eating a bag of Wise's delicious potato chips becomes an act of civil disobedience, but that day is no longer unthinkable.

So enjoy a bag while you still can, support your neighbors who work there, and celebrate the fact that this pillar of the regional economy still stands.