

## JULY 2015

**George R. Jucha, Jr. (1964-2015)**



*Dianne Peterson Photography*

### **George Jucha, of Protect Our Parks**

George Jucha, a lover of nature and a leader of *Protect Our Parks*, was killed in an automobile collision on June 7.

George had become as an expert on fracking technology and a contributor to this newsletter. His friendship, knowledge and enthusiasm will be terribly missed.

In addition to his work in *Protect Our Parks (POP)*, George was a musician; business owner; hiker, explorer and advocate for animals; and adjunct professor of computer science at the University of Pittsburgh. In that latter role, he was elected as one of the most respected teachers in America in a national poll of

college students. His open and engaging spirit were also an asset to the fracking struggle. He was an effective listener, as well as a speaker, and learned from anyone he met.

Members of POP who attended memorial observances were greatly moved by the warm welcome we received from the Jucha family. We were also impressed by extent of their thorough awareness and support of George's work with POP.

Many of his photographs, videos and other documentation on fracking can be seen on his website at [www.ikno.org](http://www.ikno.org).

A proclamation in George's honor will be presented at the July 1 meeting of the Allegheny County Council.

### **What Happened to “Wait & See”?**

The “Wait & See” initiative, led by *Protect Our Parks*, was voted down by Allegheny County Council on February 3. The proposal (first ever to reach Council by public petition) committed county government to study and report the impacts of fracking at Deer Lakes Park before considering any further park leases.

Council rejected this idea, arguing instead that ‘opportunities should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.’ Council missed the obvious truth that it lacks any conceptual ‘basis’ upon which to perform such evaluations—a basis which the “Wait & See” proposal would have mandated.

Now the County Executive has gone even further, countering our “Wait & See” with his own “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” The Fitzgerald administration informed council that it will perform no oversight of drilling at Deer Lakes Park, because “It’s not a County project.” (The surface activity happens on private land, across the street from the park.)

So *Protect Our Parks* is taking up the county’s responsibilities—informing park visitors and neighbors of their rights under the law and the terms of the county’s lease, and encouraging them to report any problems or suspected violations to appropriate authorities. And, since the county doesn’t want to know, *POP* will be keeping an eye on what happens at Deer Lakes Park.



*Margaret Stanley  
(Allegheny County)*

### **Councilwoman Barbara Daly Danko**

Barbara Daly Danko, who served on Allegheny County Council while living with cancer, died at her home on May 6.

At the time of her death, Barbara was campaigning in the Democratic primary for reelection to her Council seat, defying County Executive Rich Fitzgerald, who had openly recruited another candidate to run against her. Two weeks later, voters gave her a resounding posthumous victory.

Barbara had incurred the opposition of Mr. Fitzgerald through her staunch opposition to fracking at the county parks, and her skepticism about fracking in general. She had sponsored a 3-year moratorium on leasing (which was defeated), as well as voting against fracking at Deer Lakes Park.

Terri Klein takes Barbara’s seat on Council until the general election; her replacement on the ballot will be chosen by party committee members. Allegheny County, and all of us whose future is at stake, have lost a wise and courageous friend.

**Marcellus Protest is a project of the Thomas Merton Center (Pittsburgh, PA): [www.thomasmertoncenter.org](http://www.thomasmertoncenter.org)**

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## **(W)Here's the Science:**

### ***Evidence is piling up [... and so is gas-industry b.s.]***

Back when the fracking bandwagon was just beginning its roll, Tom Ridge (our former governor-turned-pitchman) taunted those who saw trouble ahead. Dismissing concerned citizens as uninformed and emotional, he chided “Where’s the science??”

Now that damage has been done, and more is still occurring, we all can see in retrospect what some had known was coming. The results of time-consuming and meticulous research have been pouring in, first as a trickle and lately in a swelling flood.

- Directly contradicting years of industry insistence that water pollution “can’t happen,” a [study](#) by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has collected and validated hundreds of reported instances of impact to drinking water. (Because specific causes varied from case to case, EPA noted that the effects of fracking are not “systemic,” which makes it harder to find and eliminate them; but that phrasing is being exploited by industry defenders to suggest that EPA found no reason for concern, which is untrue. EPA also noted that lack of industry transparency has hampered their investigations.)
- A University of Pittsburgh study found that low birth weight (which, in turn, correlates to a host of early health problems) occurs more often with proximity to fracking. Pitt’s data from Pennsylvania concurred with prior research done elsewhere.
- A Drexel University paper on methane and other pollutants found that persistent emissions from compressor stations are a more significant source of air pollution than the short-term drilling and completion activities at well pads.

“Science” is weighing-in, but the industry is flexing its media muscle to distort and cherry-pick the researchers’ words into pro-fracking sound bites. When filtered through corporate news channels, the studies above come out sounding like this:

## ***Frackers Counter-Attack***

As communities begin to take control of their future, the oil and gas industry is hitting back. And they’re shifting the battle to their chosen terrain— where money and exhaustion work in the industry’s favor—to counter-attack with state-level legislation and threatening protracted litigation in the courts.

What has been characterized as a “SLAPP\* suit” has been [brought](#) in Butler County, alleging that political speech about fracking constitutes “tortious interference” in the private deals between leaseholders and drillers (including Range Resources). Theor filing asserts that public advocacy against drilling denies local landowners the income they would otherwise be receiving from their leases; and it calls for six-figure monetary judgments against those who have been speaking out. A defense is being prepared, based on constitutional protections of free speech.

In Texas, Denton reluctantly repealed its landmark ban on fracking, after legislators in Austin passed “HB-50” to make such ordinances illegal across the state. City officials, working alongside local fractivists, decided on a [tactical retreat](#), in the long-term interest of their battle to end fracking altogether.

\* **SLAPP** stands for *Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation*. This abuse of the legal system to intimidate critics is now so common that it has been given its own acronym.

- “[EPA] found no evidence that the contentious technique of oil and gas extraction has had a widespread effect on the nation’s water supply...” ([New York Times](#))
- “Lower than expected air pollutants detected at Marcellus drilling sites” [in the Drexel study] ([StateImpact—NPR](#))

By now researchers have done a lot of “science;” and it’s not obvious that any more science will turn the tide on fracking. The more critical question is (and really always has been), “How can we arrive at public policies that truly use the wisdom that’s already available to ordinary people?”

## **A Range of Resources**

Please check out our ‘Resources’ page at [www.marcellusprotest.org/resources](http://www.marcellusprotest.org/resources), and follow us on Facebook (at [Marcellus Protest](#)) and Twitter ([@Marcellus\\_SWPA](#)). Here is a sample of our recent recommendations:

[Dirty Energy Money](#): Find out which companies are pumping their dirty money into politics, and which politicians are receiving it. (Quick quiz: How much did Mike Doyle receive from Consol, Chesapeake, and EQT?)

[Shale Test](#): Provides free, certified environmental testing to lower-income families and communities who are impacted by fracking. (ShaleTest prepared a 2012 report on health impacts of fracking in Pennsylvania, [Gas Patch Roulette](#).)

## **Upcoming Events in July:**

**July 2, Squirrel Hill (Pittsburgh), 7:00pm: A Thomas Merton Center Forum, “Climate for Change.”** Multifaith discussion of Pope Francis’s encyclical on the climate crisis. Held at Episcopal Church of the Redeemer. Details in our [calendar](#).

**July 18, One Smithfield St., Pittsburgh, 1:00pm: Organizing for “Flood the System.”** Join [Three Rivers Rising Tide](#) to unify our efforts on social justice and climate justice. Actions and rallies will be taking place nation-wide in the fall.

(Updated details and a more extensive list of events at [www.marcellusprotest.org/event\\_calendar](http://www.marcellusprotest.org/event_calendar).)

**Updated information on these topics (with links to original sources), along with our calendar of upcoming events, and other resources, can be found at [www.marcellusprotest.org](http://www.marcellusprotest.org).**