

THE GREEN PAGES

Preparing for flooding might just keep your company afloat



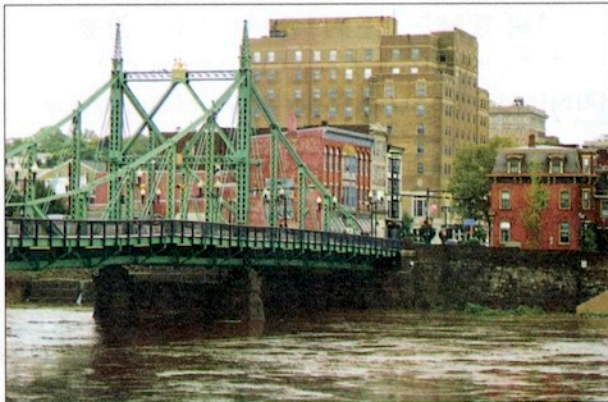
By **RUTH HEIL**
Business Journal Columnist

If Ted Kheel were alive today, he would show us that flood-related despair doesn't have to happen. He believed we could prosper alongside our waterways when we plan for the fact that rivers and tributaries flood.

THE GREEN SCENE

His leadership and optimism live on in one of his nonprofits — the Nurture Nature Foundation (NNF) and its Nurture Nature Center in Easton.

Kheel dedicated his career to resolving conflict. He served President Lyndon Johnson, the War Labor Board, the National Labor Relations Board and the National Urban League, to name a few. In short, he stood at the forefront of the major social issues of the '50s, '60s, and '70s and shared his wisdom in his book, "Keys to Conflict Resolution."



The Delaware River was rising steadily just east of the low section of Easton's downtown commercial district when this picture was taken Sept. 7. The tall building in the background is the Grand Eastonian Suites Hotel.

Rachel Hogan Carr, who directs the center, had the honor of working with Kheel for 10 years until his death at age 96 in 2010. She explained that he returned from the 1990 United Nations Sustainability Conference aware that "the most significant conflict he had to resolve in his life was

between economic development and environmental sustainability." Disastrous floods are a perfect example.

On a calm, dry day, you can sit by a river and see a clear dividing line between its waters and the land: the riverbank. What we don't see so clearly is a river's floodplain. The floodplain is as much a part of the river as the channel itself, but we forget that the river sometimes needs to reclaim this land around it, turning the area into an economy-versus-the-environment battleground.

With so many in just a few years, it can seem as if floods are occurring more often. However, Carr explained that historic photos of Easton confirm "there are lots of photos of homes and properties along the river that don't exist anymore. Repetitive flooding throughout the 20th century and the late 19th century (1896, 1903, 1906) ... consumed large areas of the downtown business district ... Those properties that were most at risk and closest to the floodplain have been historically consumed.

"In Easton, what's causing the flood problem is the river periodically wants to flood," said Carr. Thus the center's mantra, "Floods Happen. Lessen the Loss."

In addition to conflict resolution, Kheel was interested in historic preservation and land use. He brought excitement to the city of Easton when he worked to redevelop the Hotel Easton into the Grand Eastonian Suites Hotel.

Carr explained that during the abandoned building's rebirth, there were "three major floods in the region in 22 months, and people were feeling pretty devastated." In fact, the hotel was flooded on reopening day.

Meanwhile, NNF owned another historic building on Northampton Street — a few blocks up — in this city where the Lehigh and Delaware rivers meet.

Before improvements began there, Kheel wanted to know more about why the flood devastation was happening. He brought together a team to discuss the issue, inviting municipal officials, emergency management

personnel, local environmental organizations, floodplain managers, employees from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and even an author who wrote about past floods to the same forum.

The meeting revealed that excellent flood-loss-prevention technology and techniques already existed, but public knowledge did not. Education and outreach were sorely needed.

Since then, the building at 518 Northampton St. has been used to fill this need as it now houses the center. Since Nurture Nature had a proven ability to bring people together, NOAA granted it use of one of the agency's latest technological tools: Science on a Sphere. The center is now one of just 70 places around the world where you can find this marvelous hanging globe that turns ordinary data into dramatic, visual display.

The center intends to officially unveil the sphere this month. It can illustrate what happens during storms, what could happen during climate change, and a myriad of other Earth-related scenarios for which data exist (including non-scientific demonstrations about air traffic and Facebook connections). Your business can now take

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Easton

advantage of this amazing technology right here in the Lehigh Valley.

The room can be rented for events where-in select programming such as NOAA's Climate and Flooding presentation can appear on the sphere to create a unique experience for a business function. Meanwhile, the center will remain a resource for flood alerts, determining a location's flood stage, advice and checklists for developing an action plan and even information on how your community can work to reduce its flood insurance premiums. More information is available at www.focusonfloods.org.

The losses from flooding related to hurricane season 2011 are real and painful. That doesn't mean every low-lying business is doomed to suffer the same fate.

Protect yours today. Seek advice, make a plan and develop a strategy so you too can look forward with optimism.

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