Over a year ago, John Colone was told that he needed a permit to host Hearsefest on his property in Hell. He came into the Township offices with an incomplete permit application just days before the event last year. I personally told him that this was unacceptable. The application is due at least 90 days prior to the event so that all concerned can have an opportunity to review the plans and recommend any changes necessary to protect the public. I also told him that I did not want to shut down Hearsfest so I allowed him to proceed without a permit but I stressed to him that it was the last time. I told him that we would shut the event down if he did the same thing in 2018. He held the event and the Township asked the County Sheriff for extra help in ensuring that roads would remain passable during the event, something that a permittee would be required to provide had he gone through the proper process.

Obviously, John Colone ignored me and the Township's Outdoor Assembly Ordinance again in 2018. I began to hear from concerned residents, in August of this year, who saw that the event was being promoted on various websites and social media. In fact, the event page on Facebook showed that more than 1,000 people had indicated they were going to the event and another 6,400 were "interested" in going. These numbers indicate that the size of the event was expected to be well beyond the threshold of 750 attendees that triggers the need for a permit in our ordinance.

Our Outdoor Assembly Ordinance serves a great purpose for our residents as well as visitors to our township who rightfully expect a safe environment while the event is happening. During the 90 day review period, the application is forwarded to the County Sheriff, the Health Department, Fire Department and the Township Board of Trustees. Each reviews the application, primarily for safety concerns, and signs off on the application. We also require liability insurance that protects both the sponsor and the Township in the event of a mishap.

The Health Department should be inspecting the food vendors on the morning of the event as well as ensuring that there is sufficient restrooms for the expected crowds. The Fire Department inspects the premises to ensure that it is safe in every respect. The Sheriff looks at crowd size and traffic issues to determine if extra personnel are needed. The Township looks at all of the above and more to ensure that our residents and visitors will be kept safe and not inconvenienced beyond reason.

We have nearly 200 homes whose residents use Riverbank and Silver Hill Roads as the ONLY way in and out of their neighborhood. With vehicles parked on both sides of the road, it becomes a single lane at best, meaning traffic can only move in one direction or the other. Without flaggers, this becomes a bottleneck for all concerned.

We have many other events that take place in our Township whose organizers go through the proper steps to obtain a permit. The most recent was just last week when Run Woodstock was held at the Hell Creek Ranch. They provided for plenty of off-street parking just a half-mile east of Hell. They also provided for Red Cross and EMTs for their participants as well as proper sanitary facilities for all. Amazingly, because they do this every year, without incident or complaint, the Township Board usually passes the permit approval with little or no discussion. If the Hearsefest organizers would work with the Township and the County to do things in accordance with our ordinance, future approvals might be just as easy.

I kept my word to John Colone and I kept my word to the residents who have suffered through years of unsanctioned events in Hell. This was not an easy decision for me but it was the right thing to do. We fully expect that he will defy the Township and that we will see an assembly of hearses in Hell on Saturday. The Township has arranged to have extra Sheriff Deputies on hand to ensure safety and traffic control. If it turns out they are not needed, they will be relieved.

Thanks!

Dennis Brennan
Supervisor