

Mt. Airy author and labor expert 'On the Job' June 21

by Len Lear

I have been a long-time admirer of the work of Jane M. Von Bergen, 66, who retired in late 2017 as a labor writer for more than half of her 35 years at the Philadelphia Inquirer. Jane and her husband, I. George Bilyk, have lived in East Mt. Airy for more than 40 years and in West Mt. Airy before that.

But old journalists never really retire; they just find other outlets for their writing. In Jane's case, she has spent three years, on and off, traveling and talking to working people about their lives in Minnesota, North Carolina, Texas, California and New Jersey — sometimes multiple centers in the same state or city.

It is no secret that working people in the U.S. have seen stagnant or declining wages and working conditions over the last several years compared to previous generations, when children could usually expect to do better than their parents.

Jane and her collaborator, Celeste Monforton, interviewed more than 60 people. "At every center, we interviewed at least five to 10 people," Jane told us recently, "both staffers and workers. We also attended meetings and gatherings, including a dance, and talked with people everywhere we went. We also interviewed people from centers we didn't directly visit, including a virtual worker center, the Gig Workers Collective."

The result of that research is a new book, "On the Job," about the rise of job centers and fights for fair wages by Von Bergen and Monforton, which Jane will discuss virtually on Monday, June 21, 7 p.m. The event is sponsored by Big Blue Marble Books, 551 Carpenter Lane in West Mt. Airy.

In recent years there have been many articles in the major news media bemoaning the decline, even show death, of the organized labor movement which was so



Mt. Airy resident Jane Von Bergen at the finish line after completing the Broad Street Run on May 7, 2017. Later that year she ended her 35-year-career at the Philadelphia Inquirer.



One of the highlights of Von Bergen's career was rappelling down the exterior of One Logan Square for a story on innovations in corporate philanthropy.

powerful in previous generations. However, Von Bergen maintains that she has found a new kind of labor movement, "one that is happening locally, quietly and among our country's most vulnerable but essential workers."

She and public health expert Monforton uncovered the stories of hundreds of new, worker-led

organizations (often simply called "worker centers") that have successfully achieved higher wages, safer working conditions and on-the-job dignity for their members.

As a longtime labor reporter, Von Bergen said the safety of workers on the job has always been a particular focus of hers, as is the necessity of their being paid a fair wage for their work. "Jobs are not always wonderful," she said, "but when people go to work, at a minimum they should be paid, they should be safe, and they should not be subjected to harassment. People need to be paid! They need to be safe! When those minimum standards aren't met, I'm outraged."

"So often, workers are killed or injured at work in a blatant disregard for their safety. Sometimes the injuries take years to develop, like silicosis or serious debilitating back pain. Other times, there are fatal accidents that could have often been prevented. Any workplace can be dangerous, but in some more established workplaces, there are safety procedures and trainings. Many of the workers in our book don't have access to any kind of safety protection."

"They work in rough and dirty conditions that are conducive to injury. They aren't trained. They aren't given equipment. They aren't told about the hazardous (Continued on page 19)

Didinger details all there is to know about Philly sports

(Continued from page 13) added to the writers' honor roll at the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

As a long-suffering fan of Philly sports teams, I can say without reservation that every Philly fan would love this book. Every single page is filled with treasures and anecdotes — the good, the bad and the ugly — that flood the mind with memories of one's youth, teenage years and adulthood. In fact, when I got the book, I was already halfway through "A Farewell to Arms," a 20th century classic by Ernest Hemingway, who won a Nobel Prize for Literature, and this will expose me as a real yahoo, but I definitely enjoyed reading Didinger's book more than Hemingway's.

Didinger writes about his interviews with so many legendary athletes like Hank Aaron, Wayne Gretzky, Muhammad Ali, Julius Erving, Jack Nicklaus, Mike Schmidt, et al, and he has written film scripts for Hollywood stars such as Bruce Willis and Alec Baldwin. He went to the White House with the U.S. Olympic team and even explored the corrupt but fascinating world of professional wrestling.

The greatest game he has ever seen? Super Bowl L11 (Eagles beat the Patriots), in which more yardage was gained by the two teams combined than in any other game in NFL history. The best Philly athlete he has ever seen? Mike Schmidt (second is Reggie White). The most unforgettable Philly athlete ever? The late Tim Lincecum, Eagles linebacker who did everything to get attention but jump off the Ben Franklin Bridge.

The wonderful insights and amusing anecdotes never stop coming. For example, "Philadelphia welcomes Jeffrey Lurie (current Eagles' owner) with open arms, but Philadelphia always wel-

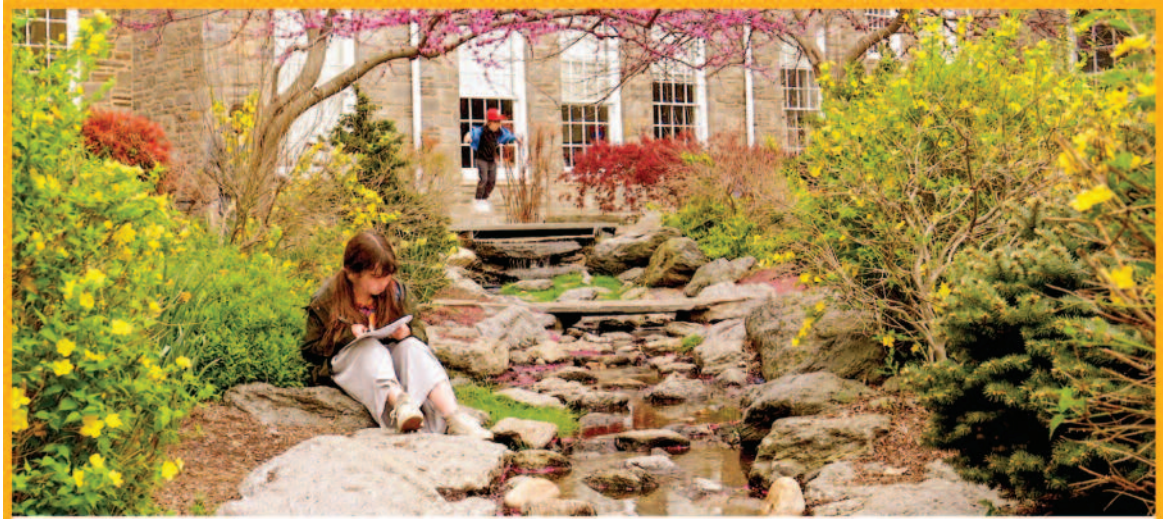
comes its football owners with open arms. That's because the fans are so glad to get rid of the previous owner that the new guy is seen as a savior, regardless of who he is. The fans always throw bouquets in the beginning, but in the end it's, well, snowballs."

Ray writes affectionately about Julius "Doctor J" Erving, who would stay as long as it took after games in order to satisfy every autograph request, and Charles Barkley, who "was known as 'the Leaning Tower of Pizza,' a reference to his 6'5", 270-pound frame. He had acquired many nicknames: 'Boy Gorge,' 'Chuck Wag-on' and, of course, 'the Round Mound of Rebound'"

During our two-hour phone conversation, Didinger made it a point to express the greatest respect for Ed Rendell, former mayor and governor, who has also been a post-game (Eagles) talker with Didinger on WIP Sports Radio and who also earned a section in the book. "I used to drive him home from the games. He lived in East Falls, one block away from us. I can tell you that he really does care about people, and he honestly believes that people should go into politics to make other people's lives better, not their own."

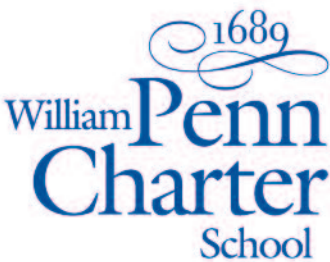
"The first year I worked with Rendell, I got a letter from a woman who said she was desperate, was losing her home, etc., and had tried to get help from the city, but no one would help her. Since I sat next to Rendell for two hours every Sunday, she thought I could do something. I gave her letter to Rendell, and three days later I got another letter from the woman, who said she heard from the mayor's office right away, and they gave her the help she needed!"

For more information, visit tupress.temple.edu. Len Lear can be reached at llenlear@chestnuthilllocal.com



Summer Reads for Young Children

With so many new books for children published every year, plus all our favorite classics, the choices can be daunting. Here are some books our librarians think children pre-K to grade 5 will enjoy.



View the suggestions, listed by grade, at penncharter.com/read2021.

Happy reading!

‘Ghost Protocol’ best of Mission: Impossible franchise

Each week, veteran film critic Bill Wine will look back at an important film that is worth watching, either for the first time or again.

The mission – to convert a classic TV series from the late sixties and early seventies into a viable movie series – seemed eminently possible when it kicked off on the big screen all those decades ago. And so it was. Which brings us to “Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol” (2011), the PG-13-rated fourth installment in a generally successful franchise that has had its ups and downs.

Flix

by Bill Wine



1996's “Mission: Impossible” was a spyro-technical thriller that was a mission accomplished – but barely, because it was a mission: impossible to follow. The follow-up, “Mission: Impossible II,” was a disappointing shoot-‘em-up action extravaganza that proved to be a mission: impossible to swallow. And the sequel, “Mission: Impossible III,” breathed new life into the franchise as something close to a mission: impossible to dislike. This fourth installment, “Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol,” registers as a mission: impossible to resist. Tom Cruise's Ethan Hunt, the leader of the Impossible Missions Force (IMF) – sort of a CIA within the CIA – is blamed along with



Tom Cruise reprising the role of Ethan Hunt for the fourth installment of the Mission: Impossible franchise, “Ghost Protocol.”

his team for a terrorist bomb that has destroyed the Kremlin. So the U.S. government initiates a black-ops “ghost protocol” and disavows the IMF -- as they are wont to do -- after which Hunt and his colleagues choose to accept an assignment designed to clear their name and discover who framed them. In the process, they hope to thwart a maniacal plan that could bring about a nuclear winter. Jeremy Renner joins the IMF team for this outing, playing an analyst with a top-secret background, and his colleagues are played by returnee Simon Pegg and newcomer Paula Patton, with the estimable Tom Wilkinson as the in-charge Secretary of the IMF and Michael Nyqvist as a nuclear extremist. The director, Brad Bird, is making his first stab at live action, after directing three impressive animated films (“The

Incredibles,” “Ratatouille,” and “The Iron Giant”). And he takes right to it -- these high-tech geeks are, after all, in a manner of speaking, The Incredibles -- bringing a master animator's pinpoint timing to the task. Bird flies high indeed, instilling a productive sense of humor, mostly delivered by the delightful Pegg; letting the featured actors each shine; showcasing Cruise's willingness to do most of his own stunts; establishing a sense of place in such exotic locations as Moscow, Dubai, and Mumbai; supervising the elaborate and dizzyingly exhilarating action sequences; giving the high-tech gadgetry the ingenious kick it deserves; dishing out just enough in the way of technical explanations for us to follow the narrative without being disenfranchised by the science involved; and maintaining a pace so breathless, we barely notice just how comic-

book preposterous most of what we're watching and accepting actually is. The combination of high-octane action, nosebleed-inducing high stakes, whirlwind globetrotting, and thick suspense that Bird conjures in “M:I – GP” is both laudable and applaudable. So much so, in fact, that this is the best of the franchise offerings thus far as well as a promise of more installments to come. And in mid-comeback, Cruise reminds us what a convincing and highly watchable leading man/action star he is, exhibiting the commanding Cruise control and charisma that has made so many of his star turns boffo at the box office. This mission you should absolutely choose to accept. Bill Wine is an Emmy-winning film critic who served in that capacity for WTXF and KYW Newsradio. He lives in Chestnut Hill.

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(Continued from page 18) chemicals they may be using. They are often worked too hard and too fast, so they get hurt through sheer repetition. When they do get hurt, and they often do, there's no medical help for them, or their immigration status makes them afraid to seek it.” When asked about people who have had a significant impact on their life, respondents usually mention parents and spouse, as Jane also did, but she added, “I would also have to thank my third-grade teacher, Mrs. Judith Greenberg at Muhlenberg Elementary School in Allentown, who told me I could write. “But the people in my stories have also been instrumental. Maybe it was a coincidence or perhaps a gift from God, but over the years, I had come to notice that whenever I needed to know something personal about growth or about life, somehow a person I was interviewing for a story would show up to teach me just the right lesson at the right time.” Von Bergen and her husband have two sons, Joseph and Michael. For more information, contact @JaneVonBergen or bigbluemarble-books.com. Len Lear can be reached at lenlear@chestnuthilllocal.com

AIM Academy Congratulates the Class of 2021!



Students Attending

- Allegheny College

Baylor University

Boston University

Bucknell University (2)

Cabrini University

College of Charleston

College Together

Colorado State University

Community College of Philadelphia

DeSales University

Drexel University (4)

High Point University (2)

La Salle University

Lafayette College

Lake Superior State University

LIFT Academy

Loyola Marymount University
- Lynn University

Moore College of Art and Design

Penn State University

Point Park University

Rochester Institute of Technology

Stockton University

Syracuse University

Temple University

University of Delaware (2)

University of Kentucky

University of Maryland

University of Miami

University of New Hampshire

University of Stirling

University of Tampa (2)

Ursinus College

West Chester University

York College of PA

AIM Class of 2021 Highlights

- AIM Academy's 10th Graduating Class
- AIM Academy's Largest Graduating Class
- 3 Students Joining College Level Athletic Teams in Golf, Swimming and Soccer
- Student Taking a Gap Year to Work as President of International Youth Organization
- Student Attending Flight School for Career in Aviation
- Pioneer Student Graduating After Spending Grades 1-12 at AIM Academy

135+ Unique Colleges & Universities Accepting AIM students

