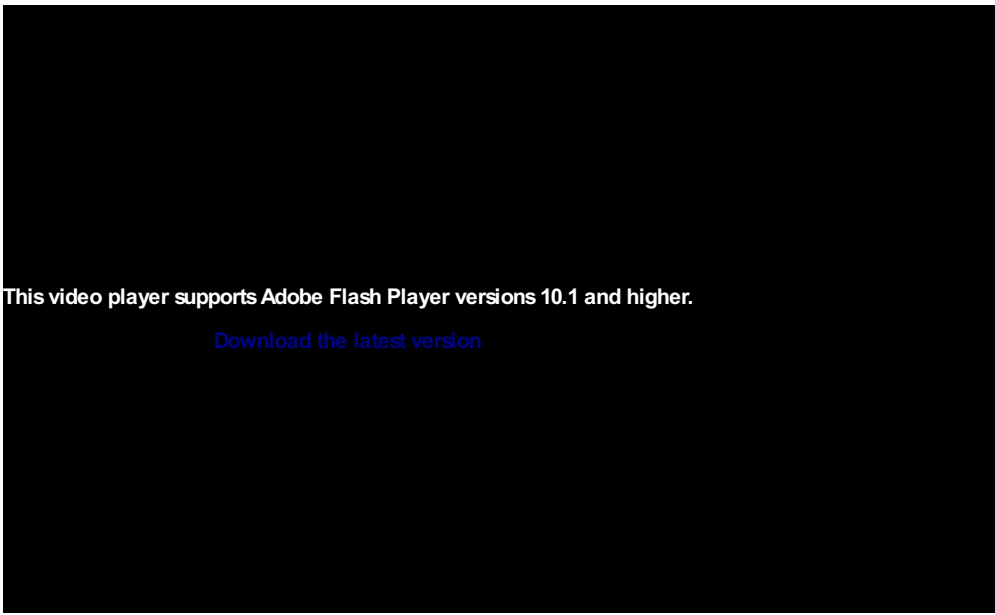


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Shale Boom Hits Williamsport: The Good, The Bad, The Ugly


Video Images



 [Marcellus Hits Williamsport: Part 1](#)

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Williamsport, Pa., used to be most known for housing the Little League World Series. Now it's known for Marcellus shale drilling. Back in October, we sent a crew there to find out how the drilling industry has affected all aspects of life since it first hit nearly five years ago. Our hopes were to show the Valley what it might expect as gas companies begin leasing and drilling our own Utica shale formation.

You can find out about what we learned and read the personal stories of Williamsport residents in the series of articles under the Living with the Gas Rush Tab. There's also an extensive list of other stories, video and images featuring anything from leasing and the environment to the economy and transportation on this Shale News webpage.

When Sun-Gazette reporter Dave Thompson moved to Williamsport in 2004, it was a scenic, sleepy community.

The former Greenville man compared the roughly 30,000-population city to Sharon, except nestled in the Appalachian Mountains and surrounded by state parks, game land and forests.

The area's industry is rooted in the lumber business, which produced the highest number of millionaires per capita in the country in the 1800s; on historic Millionaire's Row still stand 20 expansive mansions of all architectural designs.

The lumber industry gave way to innovations in transportation and the production of the first street car.

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Later came coal mining and dairy farming, and a home for the Little League World Series and Hall of Fame.

When the words Marcellus Shale popped up in 2006, Thompson said no one really paid any attention.

"We really didn't anticipate anything," he said. "I went to my first gas company open house in 2007. There was a bidding war. Gas leases shot up overnight. It became a gold rush at that point. It was kind of a surprise to everybody."

Marcellus Shale is a layer of rock thousands of feet beneath Pennsylvania, West Virginia, New York and parts of Ohio, including the Mahoning Valley. The shale is filled with natural gas. In our area, both the Marcellus layer, and in some areas the deeper Utica layer, show promise of enormous gas deposits. But until a few years ago, the technology to reach it didn't exist.

The process is just now beginning in the Youngstown area. But around Williamsport, gas companies have leased thousands of acres of property from landowners, forests and state parks over the past five years to get at it.

Now because of it, Williamsport calls itself the energy capital of Pennsylvania. This year, it was named the seventh fastest growing small city in the country. There are 553 active drilling sites just in Lycoming County, where Williamsport is located, and 1,562 next door in Bradford County.

Those who live there say Marcellus shale has changed everything.

"The countryside is seeing a big transformation," said Thompson. "The economic development aspect has been pretty astounding."

Williamsport itself is growing outward; retail businesses, restaurants and gas stations are flourishing on what's now known as "The Golden Strip" on the east side of town. There's a new Koh's right in the downtown area. There are two new hotels and several others being renovated -- a room is still hard to find.

For the first time ever, previously sparse industrial parks are filled up; land and space is in high demand by gas companies and businesses that provide their drilling materials.

There is no lack of "help wanted" signs; some say there aren't enough people to fill all the jobs Williamsport now has.

But Thompson said the rush has resulted in some unwelcome changes, too.

There have been reports of spills and well blow-outs. There are traffic issues, and thousands of people working for the mostly out-of-state gas companies are competing for housing.

There are rising rents -- Thompson's has gone up \$200 a month -- and growing incidents of homelessness. Shale drilling is driving the market up.

In some ways the area was unprepared for the transformation, he said, and is still playing catch-up and learning how the industry works.

"The gas companies are here, and they want to be here," said Thompson. "The farmers just think they're going to have a little green tank and get free gas."

Much has changed since Thompson wrote his first story on the Marcellus Shale in 2006.

"It's the good, the bad and the ugly," he said. "It could be significant in your community if you're not ready for it."

Shale Poll

Has expectations for shale drilling been overblown?
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doggy691 - 11/15/2011 5:04 PM ☆ 0 Votes ⚠ [Report User](#)

drill and cap and after that they will leave with all the money and you will have a bunch of vacant hotels and houses, and the gas companies will say thank you very much on there way out of town, then the'll sell it all to overseas, wait and see, welcome to greedy america.



t99hanks - 11/15/2011 10:16 AM ☆ 0 Votes ⚠ [Report User](#)

I read a bunch of stuff on negatives. There's a whole shale page.



LoveLycomingCo - 11/15/2011 9:08 AM ☆ 0 Votes ⚠ [Report User](#)

The ugly part was really glossed over in this report, in my opinion. Crime-related incidents are also rising; illegal immigrants living in cramped apartments, being overcharged by greedy landlords; landlords kicking out good tenants, doubling and even tripling the rent and renting only to gas workers, forcing county natives to move out of the area. Is it really progress when it (natural gas industry) impacts the quality of life?



db2sub1 - 11/15/2011 8:22 AM ☆ 2 Votes ⚠ [Report User](#)

In today's depressed economy with un- & underemployment rampant, Marcellus shale drilling is the best thing that has happened since the advent of steel with the discovery of iron ore in our area.

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