Drilling issues addressed at Keystone College

BY JEREMY BURTON
Times-Shamrock Writer

Wherever he goes, Daniel Farnham hears questions about the Marcellus Shale natural gas industry.

People want to know what the industry will really bring, how it will impact their water, roads, property and health. They want to know whether state regulators are doing enough to protect them, and what they can do to protect themselves.

But beneath it all, what Farnham hears is "fear of the unknown."

On Monday night, almost 100 Northeast Pennsylvanians crowded a Keystone College hall to hear Farnham, an environmental engineer who has tested thousands of water wells in the region. The Countryside Conservancy sponsored his speech, titled "The Reality of Natural Gas Exploration."

Some of Farnham's tests are part of the controversy between Dimock Twp. residents and Cabot Oil and Gas Corp. Admittedly weary from nearly 10 hours of legal depositions earlier Monday, Farnham gave a brief presentation and said there was much he could not talk about because of the ongoing lawsuit.

He told the crowd the risks of drilling should not be understated, but neither should the industry's benefits be papered over.

The drilling is like any heavy industry business moving into a rural area – it will have wide-reaching economic, cultural and environmental effects, and what people should understand is the reality of the industry, he said.

For example, heavy truck traffic and influx of "itinerant" workers with questionable accountability are both facts of the industry, for better or worse, he said.

Toward the event's end, after Farnham fielded an array of questions, the speech became more of a dialogue between individuals in the crowd. Rebecca Lesko of Wyoming County said it was good to bring together differing voices, people who realize Marcellus Shale is "not a black-and-white situation."

Lesko said she had family in Susquehanna County with gas leases, and she wished Farnham's comments were not tied by ongoing litigation.

"I'd really like to know what it is that's going on, not specifically for that case but for the area. Information is the most important thing we can arm ourselves with," she said.