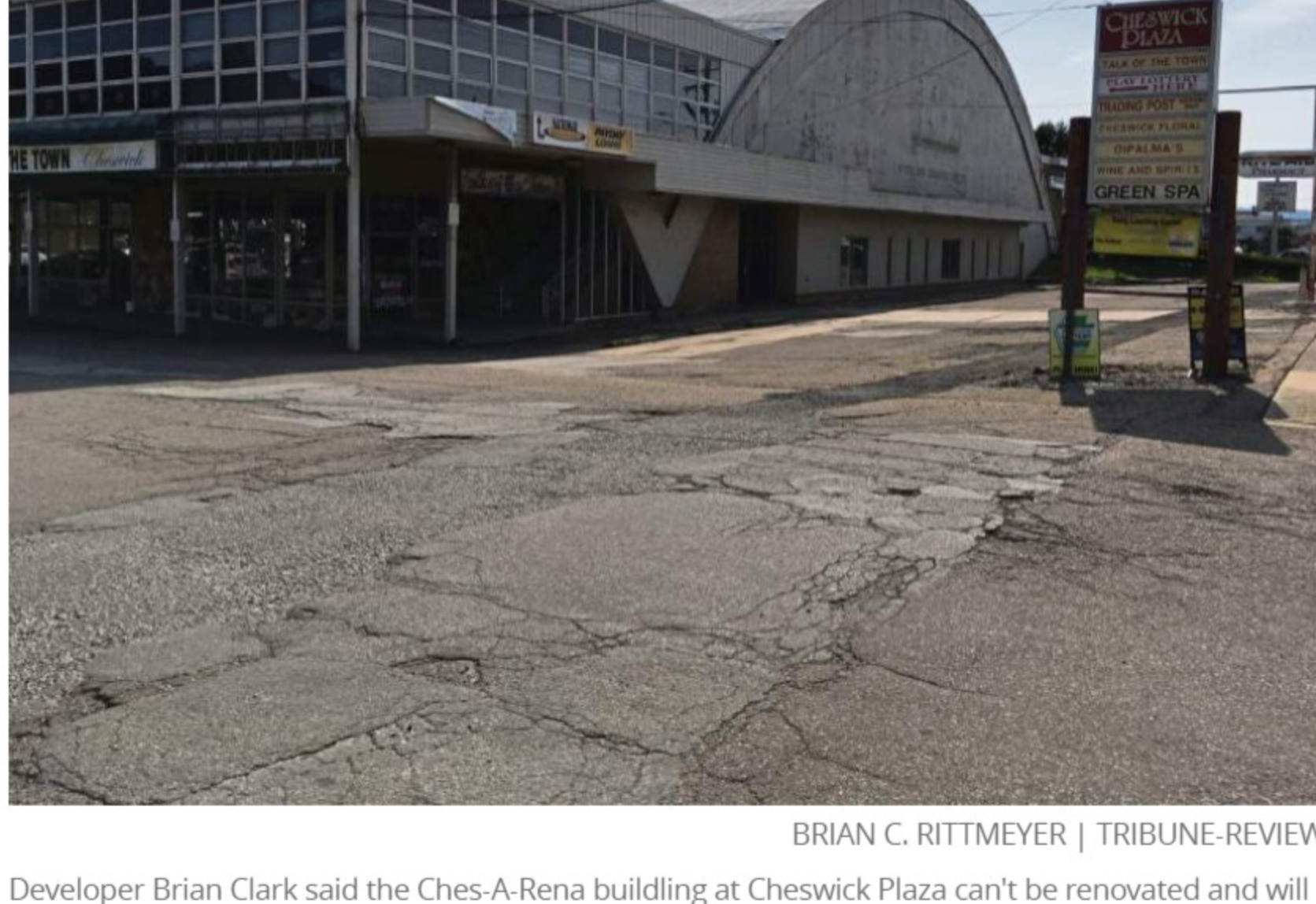


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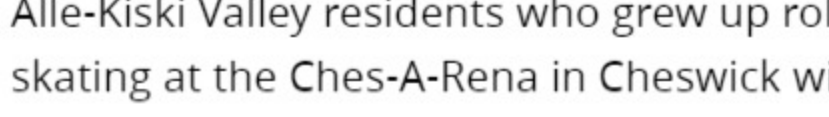
Ches-A-Rena in Cheswick to open Saturday for a look around before it's demolished

EMILY BALSER | Wednesday, March 21, 2018 8:36 p.m.



BRIAN C. RITTMAYER | TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Developer Brian Clark said the Ches-A-Rena building at Cheswick Plaza can't be renovated and will likely be torn down.



Alle-Kiski Valley residents who grew up roller skating at the Ches-A-Rena in Cheswick will get one last chance to walk down memory lane before the building is torn down.

Brian Clark, developer of the property, has arranged to open the building Saturday for people to come and walk through — although no skating will be allowed.

"We thought it might be a fun opportunity for folks to get in and take a look around," Clark said. "It is a community icon."

The space hasn't operated as a roller rink for about 20 years.

Previous owners in the early 2000s had a hard time getting the space to work as a music and event venue.

Clark said the cost of making repairs to the building to make it usable was cost prohibitive.

"Every time I walk in and look at the skating rink and see that the floors still in good shape, I get sick that we can't find a reuse for it," he said. "At the end of the day, if we can't make it structurally safe for the long term as we bring it up to code, it's just not a worthy investment."

Clark said he is donating hundreds of skates to Goodwill in Cheswick, located in the same plaza, so residents can own a piece of the building's history.

Last tenant to move out

Paul Haas, who owns the Trading Post Western Shop and a lottery business in the lower level of the Ches-A-Rena Building, is the last tenant. He plans to move across the plaza to a new location at the beginning of April.

"Progress has to go on, and hopefully (Clark is) going to be bringing something better than what's here now," Haas said.

Haas, who's been in the building for 24 years, said he's happy with the progress that's already been made in the plaza.

He said the move is bittersweet, but he sees it as a positive change.

"It's going to be a busy little plaza after he's done," Haas said. "I'm looking forward to that, too."

Memories, hopes

The building holds memories of birthday parties, weekend fun and first loves for many people in the area.

Council President Paul Jack recalls going to the Ches-A-Rena on Saturday mornings when he was a young child.

"It was just an exciting place to be and run around," he said. "Generally, your parents didn't go with you."

Jack said he appreciates Clark opening it up for the public to see inside after all these years.

"It's an iconic building, and it's a nostalgic place for many of us to have gone to," he said.

Cheswick Mayor Dan Carroll said multiple generations attended the Ches-A-Rena over the years, but skating fell out of fashion and hasn't made a comeback.

"It was always packed," he said. "Times have changed so much."

Carroll said residents have expressed a need for a grocery store to come into the property. Cheswick doesn't have a grocery store within the borough.

Residents have to travel to Harmar or Frazer to shop.

"That's probably the No. 1 need," Carroll said.

Firefighter training

The Cheswick Volunteer Fire Company will hold a training exercise in the Ches-A-Rena from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday for all the neighboring fire departments to practice search and rescue and other skills.

"We've invited all of the fire companies in the Valley from Blawnox all the way up into Harrison," Cheswick fire Chief Rick Franks said. "It gives us all a chance to work together."

Residents may experience low water pressure and possible discoloration during the training because the firefighters will be using the hydrants in the area.

Franks said it's sad to see the Ches-A-Rena go, but it's time to move forward.

"It was nice to have all those businesses there at one time," he said. "I think in the end it'll be a positive development for the borough."

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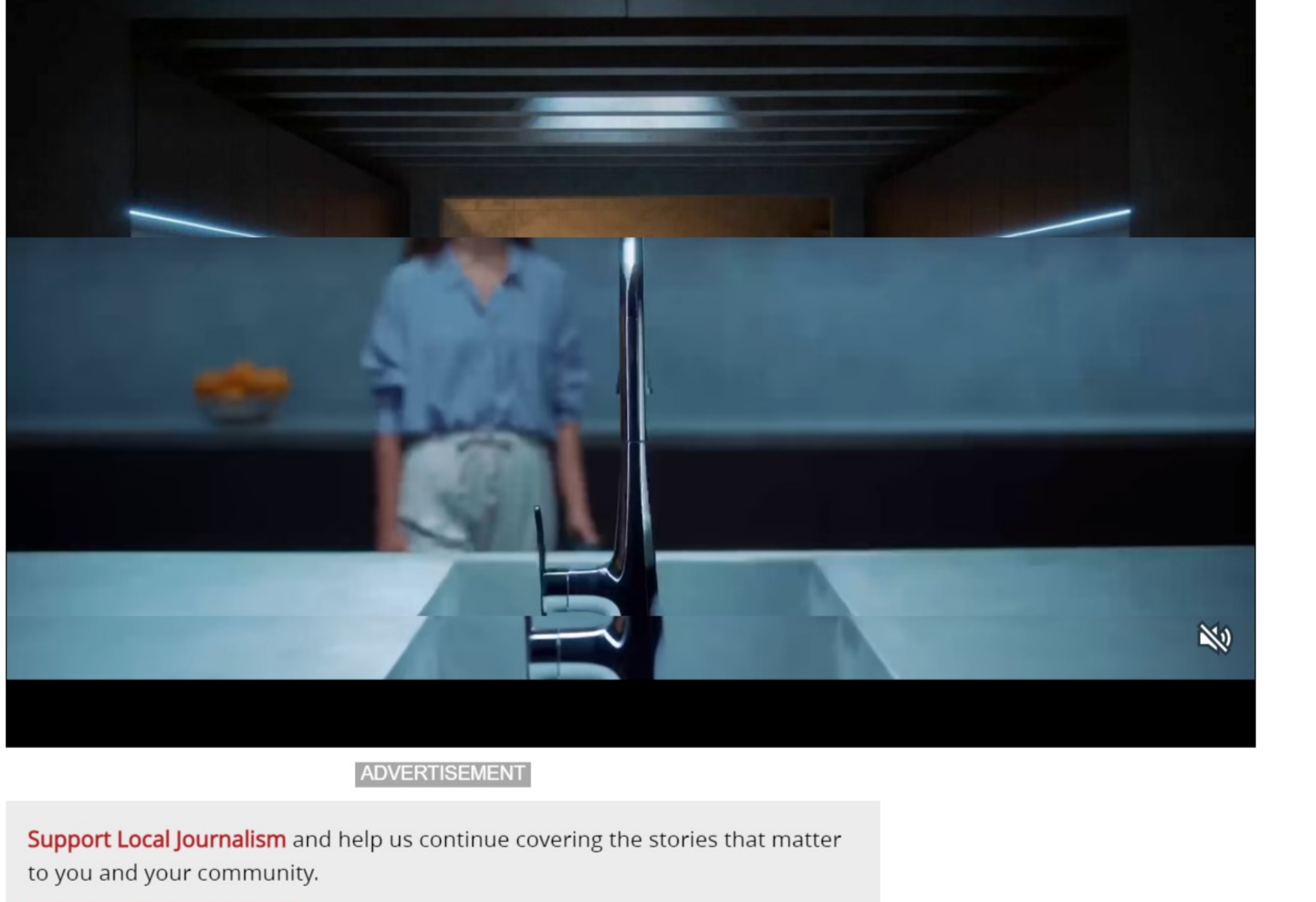
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