

The Mt. Gretna Newsletter

Mt. Gretna, PA

"Not a place, but a spirit." Marlin Seiders (1927-2008)

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Some additional perspectives to mull over as the real estate outlook brightens

How people choose Mt. Gretna as a place to live

When you write a small community newsletter, all kinds of treasures flow downstream, always in good spirits, and usually accompanied by undiscovered insights that often prove helpful in a busy world.

Among the first to arrive last month was an unexpected gift from Dave and Dottie Taylor, who once owned a cottage here and now live near Gettysburg, Pa. They sent a rare pamphlet by the late Jack Bitner, who devoted the last third of his life to writing about the place where he spent summers as a teenager and later retired.

This slender, self-published paper-bound volume, titled simply "*Mt. Gretna*," was written three decades before his magnum opus, "*Mt. Gretna: A Coleman Legacy*," which appeared in 1990.

Throughout its pages, Jack had referred to Mt. Gretna as "she," the way historians wrote about giant sailing ships in years gone by. For 91 years, his love of Mt. Gretna was apparent in all that he did.

Shortly afterward, a brief telephone conversation followed with real estate veteran Fred Schaeffer. Fred is more sanguine about the outlook for home sales this year, a positive turnaround after the falloff in real estate prices a few years ago. At their new price levels, he says, Mt. Gretna's homes and cottages are more attractive not only to buyers of second homes but also to young families with children intending to live here year 'round.



Who needs Florida? On a mid-December weekend as temperatures hovered in the high 50s, Valerie Swarr and her husband, the artist Fred Swarr, stretched a sheet across their Campmeeting cottage, brought out a projector and invited the neighbors to enjoy outdoor movie nights, lifting Mt. Gretna's Neighborliness Index yet another notch. *photo courtesy of Marla Pitt*

If ever anyone was convinced that Mt. Gretna is a good place for youngsters to discover the world, it was [Pat Pinsler](#), who died last month following an illness. Pat knew from first-hand experience. She and her sister Mary Ellen had been among the handful of Mt. Gretna youngsters going to school on cold winter mornings in the 1930s.

Later that week, while I was out walking Winston in Timber Hills, I met up with newcomers Marla Hoffman and her husband Bob, who said they wished they'd moved to their Valley Road home sooner. She's in charge of training nurses at the Hershey Medical Center, and, since I had just returned from the Cleveland Clinic, she mentioned a short video on empathy the clinic had done recently for caregivers. As this [exceptional 4-minute film](#) attests, empathy can be powerful medicine. The film reminds us that all too often it is in short supply.

Such were the varied ingredients that came together last month, bringing yet another of the rewards that come from writing a newsletter. When deadlines near, diverse sources often coalesce into useful patterns.

So the following insights, formed with the help of readers, are a harvest to share, especially with anyone who might be contemplating the move to a new home or cottage.

Regardless of where you're looking--in a town, a sprawling community or a small neighborhood--you might start by asking if anyone ever took the time to write about the place the way Jack Bitner did more than 60 years ago. Is it a place that others, including aerospace engineers like Jack himself, could fall in love with? Did anybody ever celebrate its virtues in a poem, like the one by *Ladies' Home Journal* writer Ann Hark, whose cottage overlooked the lake? Or prop up an easel to paint pictures of its buildings, cottages and trees the way hundreds of artists have done over the years in Mt. Gretna? Or capture in photographs its sweeping beauty in a way that retired restaurant executive Earl Lennington did in those captivating [new note cards the Historical Society is offering this year](#)?

A reader who has purchased many homes in the course of a successful business career says he often found the best places to live by first stopping at a local cafe for a cup of coffee and a newspaper. But he didn't actually read much of the paper. What he was reading were the locals who came in and out of the restaurant -- how they treated their neighbors and those who served them. (Incidentally, he wound up buying a cottage here.)

What also becomes apparent in a place where you'd want to live is that those who made it their home lead interesting lives. Illuminating such qualities among newcomers and long-time Mt. Gretnans alike will be the aim of a new series we're starting this year, "Neighbors You Ought to Know." Brief, 100-word or so vignettes about people in each of the seven neighborhoods that make up Mt. Gretna, from Timber Hills and Timber Bridge to Stoberdale and the Heights. We expect to uncover some gems, and [we invite you to suggest interesting people you know that others may not yet have met](#).

Unusual as we Mt. Gretnans are, however, there's a commonality. We probably have more artists and painters, musicians and writers, sculptors and jewelers per capita than most other communities with a population of only 1,500. Those who don't paint, sing, take pictures or play music often create beauty in other ways, in their kitchens, flower gardens and throughout their homes. Their adroit touches appear wherever they go. Birds of a feather, leaving a trail of beauty.

Finally, there's what I call the "oxygen" factor. Twice in the past 25 years, we've had to summon an ambulance to our front door, most recently in September. Minutes after the 911 call, they rushed in. Fully trained volunteers who drop what they are doing in the middle of the day or night to answer another call. What they also had in common was that they were friends and neighbors who could call me by my first name. Friends bring with them a different kind of life-enhancing oxygen into your

living room. They are people you know, people you can count on, and people with empathy in abundance. Put that down on your "Where to Live" checklist under the essentials.

-- Roger Groce



A panoramic photograph along Pinch Road last month illustrates differing approaches taken in response to the gypsy moths' attack eight years ago. Left, the Pennsylvania State Game Lands' "start over" strategy. Right, Governor Dick Park's "spare the healthy trees" alternative.

On the road to Mt. Gretna, differing views and lingering questions

Which of three different responses to the gypsy moth attacks would have been best? Eight years after they devastated Mt. Gretna's oak trees, the months and the responses to them still stir lively debates.

State Game Land Forester Randall Bauman, who wasn't around when decisions were made to remove virtually all of the 10,700 trees on land west of Pinch Road, is nevertheless pleased with the outcome.

"We obviously didn't plan to have the gypsy moths, but they did fit into our overall goals for the area," says Mr. Bauman. Cutting the trees gave the Game Land's managers a chance to "start over." He says the forest is today more dense and in the next 10 years will be a regenerated, fully-stocked forest 30- or 40-feet high, better able to serve the game lands' nesting and food requirements for different animals."

While agreeing that the state game lands' forestry management aims were sound, Governor Dick Park board member Chuck Allwein

of Mt. Gretna remains content with his group's decision to spare most of the park's trees following the gypsy moths' attack. Park officials removed only about 4,000 trees and planted seedlings which were then encircled by fencing to protect them from grazing deer.

"The reason Governor Dick looks better than the game lands," he says, "is that we left our healthy trees standing. The Game Lands had different criteria and decided to start from scratch. From a best forestry practices aspect, they were justified in doing that."

Both the game lands and the park benefited financially from their decisions to lumber rather than allow trees to fall and regenerate the forest naturally.

Some local residents, however, believe the massive timbering operations were ill-advised. Among them are Timber Bridge residents Pat and Ned Gible.

"The destruction by the moths was a good excuse to timber these areas and to this day is part of Pennsylvania governmental action," says Ms. Gible, who summarized her views in a formal statement ([click here](#)).

"Management" of the forests on both sides of Pinch Road, she says, "is unnecessary and extremely destructive to the complex ecosystem of these forested areas."

Who's right? The answer may take yet another decade to determine.

Sightings



Don Davis, former Harvard Avenue resident who brightened Mt. Gretna's municipal activities as a member of the Borough council and other groups for many years, was honored last month for 45 years of service at Sysco, Inc., the food service company that supplies restaurants across the U.S. Now in his '70s, he serves some of Sysco's largest customers. "They all love him, and he's having too much fun to retire," says Mt. Gretna resident Sally Bomberger. "I've worked with him since 2007 and it's been a privilege. He gets up every morning with a smile and the enthusiasm of a man in his '30s or '40s."

* * * * *

Who needs rose-colored glasses when you've got plenty of friends, musicians who make house calls, and a giant pretzel through which to look out on the world? Not Nancy Hatz, the retired college professor and beloved music teacher whom celebrated pianist Leon Fleisher saluted from the Mt. Gretna stage last July on the first day following her 100th birthday. Even after she took a fall in October, nothing has stopped her from getting the most out of a life overflowing with friends and music.



Now comfortably ensconced at Masonic Homes in Elizabethtown, the redoubtable Mt. Gretnan is recovering. Guitarist Allen Krantz, guest artist at Gretna Music's concert in November, stopped by after his performance to make a late-night, post-concert house call to Nancy's room, where she listened to a command performance, right from the foot of her bed.

We're told she likes funny get-well cards. If you'd like to send one, [click here](#) for her address.



Among Mt. Gretna's most successful authors last year was Chautauqua resident Bill Gifford. His best-selling [*Spring Chicken*](#), published last spring, was just rated among the year's must-reads by *New York Post* book reviewer Joselin Linder. "Gifford offers up more than an often funny and engaging read -- he gives you tools to live for a long, long time," she says.

Recent Obituaries



Services for Bill Nolte, husband of Marilyn Nolte, associate pastor of Mt. Gretna United Methodist Church where the Rev. Mike Remel is minister, were held Dec. 23 in Lebanon, Pa. His obituary notes that he "took his final breath just as pastor Remel had finished praying for him" Dec. 16 at the Nolte home in nearby Spring Hill Acres.

In addition to her duties as the Mt. Gretna church's associate pastor, Reverend Nolte also serves a prison ministry in Lebanon.

A native of Cincinnati and a computer consultant following an early retirement, Mr. Nolte had spent much of his business career with IBM. Click [here](#) for the official obituary notice.

* * * * *

She was a Mt. Gretna original. One of a handful of youngsters who grew up here in the 1930s and '40s, Pat Pinsler, died peacefully on Dec. 23 in the presence of her family members and close friends.



Her complete obituary ([click here](#)) appears as an attachment to this newsletter and includes full details of her early life and retirement years in Mt. Gretna, as a dance instructor in New York City, and as an accomplished businesswoman and single mother who raised three sons on her own.

She is survived by her three sons, two sisters including Mt. Gretna resident Mary Ellen McCarty, and three grandchildren.

A memorial service is planned during the summertime, when, as her obituary notes, "Pat and her friends were always at their best."

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that contributions in her memory be made to the Mt. Gretna Area [Historical Society](#) or to Hospice of Central Pennsylvania. Her official obituary includes an expression of gratitude to her friends "who loved and cared for her so deeply, especially during the last six months."



Christmas Eve, 2015, along Rte. 117, across from the Boulevard street entrance to Mt. Gretna Heights

Jane Mourer photo

Calendar Update January 2016

Friday, Jan. 1:

New Year's Day Hike 'n' Kraut

A traditional, certified crowd-pleaser. Starts from Gov. Dick Park at 11 am with a three- to four-mile hike followed by hot dogs and sauerkraut at the Center. \$5

Sunday, Jan. 3:

Sunday Services at Mt. Gretna United Methodist Church, 8:30 and 10 am. Fourth and Boehm Avenues, Campmeeting. Visitors welcome



Music by the Fireplace Gov. Dick Park Nature Center, 1 to 4 pm

Monday, January 4:

West Cornwall Township special reorganization meeting, 6:30 pm at the township office. Newly elected Mt. Gretna resident David Lloyd tonight takes his seat on the board, whose jurisdiction includes Mt. Gretna Heights, the Campmeeting, and areas adjacent to Mt. Gretna along sections of Mine and Butler roads. Normally meeting on fourth Mondays of each month unless a meeting on the "tentative" schedule becomes necessary, the supervisors' next regular session will be held Jan. 25 at the township office, 73 W. Zinns Mill Rd., Lebanon at 6:30 pm. ([Click here for the township's 2016 schedule of both Regular and Tentative meeting dates.](#))

South Londonderry Township Supervisors meeting, 7 pm, 20 West Market St., Campbelltown. (The township boundaries extend to Timber Bridge, Timber Hills and Conewago Hill as well as to outlying areas along Butler and Mt. Wilson roads.)



Friday, Jan. 8:

Morning Bird Walks will be held this month, weather permitting, under the guidance of David Steinke. The group, known officially as the Mt. Gretna Bird Club, will meet today at 9 am in the Chautauqua parking lot and, following this morning's walk, will mull over plans for other dates and times in the month ahead, he says.

Although most of the group's walks are held locally, last month's visit to the Conowingo Dam in

Southern Lancaster County yielded a plethora of eagle sightings before the group returned to Mt. Gretna for conversation and lunch at their usual location, the Le Sorelle Café. Newcomers are always welcome.



First Friday celebrations continue at the Timbers all winter long. Tonight, nationally known quilting artist and Mt. Gretna resident Mary Zesiger will be displaying works seen in quilting magazines and shows. A National Quilting Association certified teacher for the past 25 years, she has won prizes throughout the country, including a top award in the "obsessive-



compulsive" division. And since Mt. Gretna just seems to overflow with talented artists, she'll be joined in the display area by handcrafted jewelry designer Kate Dolan, also of Mt. Gretna.

Music will be by Andy Roberts and Nicole Roberts (just in from Boston's famed Berklee College of Music, where her talented dad is also among the distinguished alumni). Their performance in the lounge downstairs will include classic arrangements in the styles of Ella Fitzgerald, June Christy, Mel Torme and Judy Garland.

Sunday, Jan. 10:

Sunday Services at Mt. Gretna United Methodist Church, 8:30 and 10 am. Fourth and Boehm Avenues, Campmeeting. Visitors welcome.

Monday, Jan. 11:

Mt. Gretna Borough Council regular monthly session, meeting room behind post office in the Chautauqua, 7 pm.

Thursday, Jan. 14:

Soups from the Ladies Auxiliary of Lawn Fire Co.: Chicken corn, vegetable beef and ham and bean soups offered in frozen containers. Also available are sausage gravy, spaghetti sauce, baked oatmeal and homemade potato filling. All from Lawn's down-home cooking doyens; 5 to 7 pm.

Saturday, Jan. 16:

Italian Pasta Dinner at the Mt. Gretna Fire Company. *Buon appetito* -- a winter highlight that everyone looks forward to in

January. The doors open at 4 pm, and the feast continues until 7. Yes, you can bring your own wine. Everything else you can imagine will be there: meatballs á la the famed Hideaway tradition with salad, Italian bread and of course, plenty of tomato sauce, plus desserts in an eat-what-you-want, pay-what-you-will extravaganza. All part of what the firefighters hope will be a scintillating start to their 2016 fundraising.



Sunday, Jan. 17:

Sunday Services, Mt. Gretna United Methodist Church, 8:30 and 10 am. Fourth and Boehm Avenues, Campmeeting. Visitors welcome.

Saturday, Jan. 23:

Mt. Gretnans near Sarasota, Fla. are invited to a party at the home of photographer Madelaine Gray. If you expect to be in the area, please drop her a note at madelainegray@earthlink.net.

Sunday, Jan. 24:

Sunday Services, Mt. Gretna United Methodist Church, 8:30 am and 10 am, Fourth and Boehm Avenues, Campmeeting. Visitors welcome.

Monday, Jan. 25:

West Cornwall Township Supervisors normally meet on the on fourth Monday of each month at the township offices, 73 South Zinns Mill Rd., at 6:30 pm. Tel 272-9841 for schedule updates and meeting agendas. [Click here for the township's 2016 calendar of supervisors' Regular sessions \(on fourth Mondays\) and Tentative meetings \(held only when necessary on second Mondays and announced at the previous Regular meeting and through notices posted on the township office door\).](#)

Wednesday, Jan. 27:

The Gathering Place meets today at noon in Fellowship Hall, Mt.

Gretna United Methodist Church. Freewill offering. Tip: A midday stop that offers the chance to meet new people and renew old friendships. Among those who enjoy these gatherings are former Mt. Gretnans who now live at Cornwall Manor and other area retirement homes.

Sunday, Jan. 31:

Sunday Services, Mt. Gretna United Methodist Church, 8:30 am and 10 am, Fourth and Boehm Avenues, Campmeeting. Visitors welcome.

Looking ahead:

Mardi Gras Party It's a Mt. Gretna first, sponsored by the Cicada Festival, Saturday, Feb. 6 in the fire hall with Cajun food, music and fun. A \$5 cover charge helps support the Mt. Gretna Fire Company. Costumes not required, but the Cicada's latest bulletin ([click here](#)) has suggestions for masks and other accessories. This BYOB affair starts at 7 pm.



"Superbowl" Sunday at Mt. Gretna United Methodist Church Feb. 7. The idea is simple, the results divine: everyone attending the 10 am worship brings cans of food or money for the Food Bank.

After the service, soups, bread and desserts are served in Fellowship Hall. It's all a part of what makes attendance at Pastor Mike Remel's tiny church a winner. Touchdown!



Harbinger of what's to come?

Gretna Music's presentation of New York



Bird pictures by the father of Mt. Gretna's Elaine Baum, Richard Marshall, taken in the winter of 2015

Philharmonic principal trombonist Joseph Alessi and Friends, with Allen Krantz (guitar) and Gilya Hodos (piano). Originally scheduled for November 1, this concert will now be presented Sunday, March 13 at 7:30 pm at Elizabethtown College's Leffler Chapel.

For additional information, see the Mt. Gretna Arts Council calendars in both print (summer) and [online](#) (year-round) editions. Also available by email during the summer is [This Week in Mt. Gretna](#).

A note from the editor

When I began writing this letter 15 years ago, I thought maybe 50 to 60 of my neighbors in the Chautauqua might like to read an emailed monthly report of goings on there. About eight years ago, we moved across Rte. 117 to gather more sunlight and, as I told Jack Bitner, to appreciate Mt. Gretna from a new perspective. He liked that. Jack especially enjoyed recalling that "Timber Hills was Mt. Gretna seven years before the Chautauqua was even founded," a perspective that sometimes brought consternation to the brows of dyed-in-the-wool Mt. Gretnans who looked upon Timber Hills as foreign territory.

Some 2,500 readers around the world now receive this letter, and many have kindly sent appreciative notes. Wherever they are, it's good to get a letter from home.

When I started the newsletter, it was composed, I believe, on something called a Commodore 64. Sometimes parts of it were written on a Radio Shack TRS-80, a portable model that sportswriters used to send play-by-play reports from the stadium directly into the newsrooms of daily newspapers.

My equipment today is not the latest, but it's serviceable. An HP portable that I lug to wherever my travels take me, supplemented by an ever-present iPhone 6. The iPhone is my handiest gadget these days. It's my computer, my secretary, my notebook and my intercom with family and friends all rolled into one.

It's become so handy that the news from my distributor last month, Constant Contact, wasn't surprising: By a margin of 53% to 47%, more people now read The Mt. Gretna Newsletter on smartphones than on laptops or desktops. That includes a vast number of readers in their 70s, 80s and maybe even 90s.

I started to see that trend creep in a year or so ago, but now it's official. My smartphone readers are in the majority. So this issue is the first to have been composed in a matrix designed especially for them. It is also, hopefully, a format that also works for those who read this letter on aging laptops and desktops.

Please let me know if this isn't the case at your house. I don't know what I can do about it. But I will pass any pertinent experiences on to wizards at Constant Contact who now see to it that readers in all parts of the world continue to get the news from Mt. Gretna for as long as I have the time, energy and strength to produce it.

Thanks for your kind indulgence in helping to make a rewarding pastime even more enjoyable.

Roger Groce
