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The Mt. Gretna Newsletter

Mt. Gretna, PA "Not a place, but a spirit." - Marlin Seiders (1927-2008)
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Something about a pair of house finches on a limb attracted the eye of Campmeeting photographer Jane Mourer, who is also a professional storyteller. "I think they were waiting for me to disappear," she says. Her photo arrived just as Mt. Gretna Bird Club founders Sid Hostetter and Evelyn Koppel returned from a morning hike where they had spotted 40 species of birds. Tallying their records over the past seven years, they have recorded some 390 bird walks by 3,900 bird watchers making weekly treks for an hour or two, usually in groups of nine to 19. Then they return for a late breakfast. . . often accompanied by sticky buns. Such stirrings early on a Friday suggest that a spot where folks enjoy bird walks, photographers love storytelling, and breakfasts where sticky buns are a signature ingredient sounds like a nice place to live indeed.

Summertime in Mt. Gretna:

Things that wind up on the editor's desk

Probably the best reason for writing a newsletter in a place like Mt. Gretna is that you're among the first to see all the neat ideas that bubble up from 1,500 or so of the world's smartest people. Well, maybe 2,500 if you take into account those who come only in summer.

It's a town where Ph. D.s are everywhere. Yet whether Mt. Gretnans are scientists, bricklayers, artists or musicians, whatever they do, they're good at it. And even if they don't always agree on how the world ought to be run, they're focused on doing good things for Mt. Gretna. You get the feeling that everybody here knows they've stumbled onto something special.

What bubbles up from that creative fount this month includes things that didn't exist when this letter got started nearly 15 years ago. Take the Thursdays-in-July organ recitals, for example. Who would ever have imagined that some of the world's best up-and-coming organists would trek to this tiny community for a concert where people cram into an elegant and comfortable living room. Everyone may be elbow to elbow, but neither the audience nor the organists seem to mind.

Or the



Gifford

Writers Series, begun by a Chautauqua resident writer who this spring found his second book on *The New York Times* bestseller list. "Spring Chicken," Bill Gifford's fascinating exploration into the ways all of us can stay healthy well beyond the time anyone would have expected 15 years ago comes up on the schedule July 31.

Our introductory picture in this issue, glimpsed through the lens of Campmeeting resident Jane Mourer's camera, brings to mind that the fascinating world of birds was re-introduced to us only seven years ago when Evelyn Koppel and Sid Hostetter moved to town. They started

the Mt. Gretna Bird Club, now a year-round favorite.

Others know well what it takes to sustain an enterprise of exceptional quality in Mt. Gretna. Fred and Ruth Buch fulfilled a dream and converted an 1890s Chautauqua cottage into a permanent headquarters for the Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society, all within the space of time since this newsletter began. Over many years Charles and Charlotte Allwein and their family have nurtured the Jigger Shop to its path of prominence, the best of its kind in Central Pennsylvania. They have made it the first thing most people think of when they think of Mt. Gretna.



Hostetter

New or old, what sustains the best things in Mt. Gretna is a relentless quest for being the best. At a 40-year retrospective in the Hall of Philosophy last month, Dr. Carl Ellenberger recalled the trials of starting



Ellenberger

Music at Gretna, a series that *TIME* magazine cited as one of six of the best small music festivals in America. Through multiple near-bankruptcies and assorted other challenges, the series has kept going -- attracting talents that others hear only in venues such as Carnegie Hall. At the close of Dr. Ellenberger's talk, a questioner wondered if there wasn't some single turning point in Gretna Music's evolution that gave the series its resolute permanence. It fell to another person in the

room, former Gretna Music board president Drew Hostetter, a retired banker, to pinpoint the

series' defining characteristic: an unwavering devotion to excellence.

The unexpected bonus of sifting through the ideas that spring forth from such a community? A bracing affirmation, repeated almost daily. Lest anyone think for a moment that America is in decline, let them come -- for a day, a week, or a lifetime... let them come to Mt. Gretna.

-- Roger Groce



First Friday's All-Star Lineup

It's kick-off time for Mt. Gretna's Grand Illumination plus a chance to see the works of art students who are out with their easels this summer and hear performers at Mt. Gretna's shops, galleries and restaurants as the Independence Day weekend begins. The First Friday highlights, July 3:

Heights Community Building (62 Pine Ave.)

See the Mt. Gretna School of Art working studio and artworks in progress. Although no artwork is for sale, this will be a chance to meet the students and see the space they use for independent projects. Music on the porch by the Mt. Gretna group, Words in Flight. 5 to 7 pm.

3Summer Arts Studio, 14 Park Ave. will be open with displays of unique furniture and art work from local artists, says owner Patrici Reichenbach.

The Timbers restaurant features photographer Trevor Dixon, who's based a career on photography for clients such as Anthropologie, Grey Goose and Campbell's soup. Whether it's shooting in natural light or designing a studio setting, Trevor's technical abilities and laid-back, easy-going personality keep things running smoothly. The recent *Communication Arts Photo Annual* winner lives just outside Philadelphia and in Mt. Gretna, in homes recently renovated with wife Issa (his studio producer) and son Emmett.

Also featured: Summer jewelry designs by Ruth Loose and Kate Dolan. Music by the Roberts Quartet with featured guest Ron Waters, trumpet; pianist Andy Roberts, drummer Fred Griggs, bassist John Gingerich and vocalist Nicole Roberts. 6 to 9 pm.

The Gallery at La Cigale welcomes artists Loretta Moore, Barry Leader and Christine Goldbeck at a reception 5 to 9 pm. Live music by Liz Fulmer and wines from Hershey Vineyards. Bring the children for "marble chasing" with Margaret Ellis-Seidenberg in the parking lot, 5 to 7pm.

Mt. Gretna Gallery at Le Sorelle. Sharon Solie and Reaghan Harvey are featured. Resident artists in attendance will be Carol Snyder and Barbara Fishman.

Artist Solie says she was "looking for a new hobby after retirement and painting seemed a

perfect fit for living in Mt. Gretna." She joined an art association and after taking an Asian brush painting workshop found herself fascinated with the history and culture of Sumi-e. Reagan Harvey, 13, has been studying violin since she was four. A member of the Hershey Symphony Festival Strings, she also enjoys playing clarinet and hopes to attend a music conservatory. This is her third appearance at LeSorelle. Open from 5:30-8:30 pm.

At the **Hall of Philosophy**, works by Don Kensinger, Barb Kleinfelter and Janette Leid will be on display with rock music by Rob Gokey. Mt. Gretna Craft Brewery will offer hand-crafted beer and members of the Mt. Gretna Fire Department will sell hot dogs, potato chips and soda. 5 to 9 pm.

And at **Penn Realty's** offices along Rte. 117, featured artist Ryan Fretz from Cornwall will display what he calls "landscape art." Mr. Fretz uses local materials found in surrounding wooded areas for his creations.



The 2015 Art Show:

Smoothing out the traffic flow for MtG visitors and neighbors

Call it *kaizen*, the ancient Japanese process of continuous improvement.

Those who direct the Mt. Gretna Outdoor Art Show continually review every aspect of its operation, with the aim of making things better for both those who come to see the dazzling array of artwork as well as those who live nearby.

This year, one chief focus will be on making it easier for Mt. Gretna's close neighbors who annually absorb the impact of 12,000 or more visitors on local roads surrounding their homes.

For those who live in and around the area known as Cabin Point (which includes residents of Old Mine Road and Northwood Estates) the difficulties have been mounting over the years, and not simply because of the two-day show's heavy traffic volume.

West Cornwall Township supervisor Glenn Yanos points out that although residents receive passes to circumnavigate the maze of road signs, detours, road blocks and private security guards, those who wanted to visit them in their homes during the art show could not. "I have a pass to get to my home, but if my mom wanted to visit me she couldn't," says Mr. Yanos.

This year, the blockades and security guards will be gone in and along streets in West Cornwall Township, so traffic can flow normally in both directions.

"That doesn't mean that anyone who wants to get to Philhaven parking along township

roads can't do so," says Cornwall police chief Bruce Harris. "It's just that this year we're not mandating anyone to travel along those roads." The main entryways to the show will remain Butler Road off Rte. 322 and Rte. 117 off Rte. 72.

The art show traditionally provides no-charge parking at Soldiers Field across from the main exhibit area and at fields surrounding Philhaven medical center, located about 1.5 miles away. Art show visitors who park there are transported by buses to an entrance to the show located near the Jigger Shop.

Mt. Gretna Borough manager Bill Care says that he and art show director Linda Bell were never aware of the problems for people wanting to visit their friends and family who live along Old Mine Road and Northwood Drive. "This is the first time we've heard that," he said. But he quickly added that their complaints seemed reasonable, and "anytime we're made aware of a problem we do our best to solve it."

Ms. Bell will meet with her traffic committee this month to explore other possibilities for enhancing the art show experience for this year's visitors and residents. "It's a continuous process," she says.

The Mt. Gretna Outdoor Art Show will begin setting up on Friday, Aug. 14, with exhibitors arriving from throughout the country. The show officially opens at 9:00 am on Saturday and Sunday, Aug. 15-16.



Newsmakers. . .



Let the Gretna Music season begin. . . tonight!

Legendary pianist and conductor Leon Fleisher makes his first appearance in Mt. Gretna tonight (July 1), after a career that includes performances in Carnegie Hall and most of the world's other major music venues. In addition to a distinguished career that places him among leading musicians, he earned distinction for his triumph over a disability that forced him to play for more than 40 years with only his left hand. His long-fought recovery was achieved through experimental treatments and a determination that celebrates the human spirit. Joined by renowned pianist Katherine Jacobson in a duo

performance, this concert promises to be a highlight of the 2015 Gretna Music season, at the Playhouse at 7:30 pm. Tickets Tel. (717) 361-1508.

Children who taste like ice cream

When Bob and Patsy Oburn left their Timber Road home for Florida two years ago, they didn't leave Mt. Gretna forever. They return to "Plum Crazy," their Campmeeting cottage each summer and came last month with Isabella, a 21-month-old Yorkie who just made her debut on the Mt. Gretna Playhouse stage.



Thanks to a Facebook posting, Gretna Theatre's Renee Krizan decided Isabella would be just right for a part in a musical tribute to Patti Page. Isabella starred in her 30-second scene, "How Much is that Doggie in the Window?" A great way to sell tickets? It was enough to lure Oburn friends and Isabella fans from up and down the East Coast. Meanwhile, the Oburns keep a full schedule with polo tailgating, Patsy's reenergized love of cooking and Bob's golf, softball and annual cattle drives out west every fall. Often as not in the summer, you'll find them in the Campmeeting.

They're accompanied by Isabella, adopted after Patsy closed out her 31-year federal government career.

Isabella is not just the family pet but a therapy dog. She brings a smile to sometimes emotionless faces, says Patsy. She also loves her Mt. Gretna porch, tiny yard, and "all the little children around here who taste like ice cream."

If they look like long-time Mt. Gretnans, there's a reason



Few people love Mt. Gretna more than Larry McKenna and his wife Kathy. This year will mark Larry's 64th consecutive summer for this popular singer, writer and performer who'll appear on the Heritage Festival stage in the Campmeeting July 11. The 7 pm performance is likely to be one of the festival's most popular shows of the year.

Asked to share some favorite memories, Larry cited summers with family members, sometimes as many as 30 packed into one cottage. "It was all about the porch and every night was a gathering," he says. Daytimes were filled with visits to Mellingers for penny candy, usually followed by visits to Midge's pinball parlor.

The relatives still come to Mt. Gretna every year, he says, from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Ohio, North Carolina, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, Texas and Hawaii. "All handing down

traditions from one generation to another."

He also recalls sitting in the audience at the Playhouse in 1964, watching Bernadette Peters sing "I am sixteen going on seventeen" in *The Sound of Music*. Forty years later, just eight seats away while Larry was working on a Broadway show, there was Ms. Peters. "I wondered if I should ask if she remembered me from the Mt. Gretna Playhouse," he says. "I figured she would either laugh... or have me removed from the premises. I decided discretion was the better part of valor."

Larry and Kathy will be here July 11-25. "We can't wait," he says.

You don't need a suit and tie to know what you're talking about



Mark Mather, PhD, who grew up in Mt. Gretna and sometimes helped the late Jack Bitner dig for old bottles, was sitting at his desk last month when the call came from *The Wall Street Journal's* television network. Could he be on the air in 30 minutes to explain to a national television audience [what the latest population statistics mean?](#)

"He didn't wear a suit and tie to work that day, but I thought he looked just fine," says his mother, former Mt. Gretna Nursery School teacher Carol Mather, who lives behind the lake on Conewago Hill.

Her son Mark is a vice-president at the Population Reference Bureau in Washington, DC. He and his wife Kim are surfers, along with their two sons. He's also a half-marathon runner and writes songs, plays the guitar and loves to bake bread. Memo to Mt. Gretna historians:

Mark's Bitner-inspired digging pursuits yielded a collection of over 200 bottles, says Carol.

Best in the business

He took over as Fire Chief of the Mt. Gretna Fire Department a few years ago, one of many chiefs in the fire company's distinguished history. Last month, Lebanon County's Firefighters Association named Albert Sutcliffe (*inset, right*) "Fire Chief of the Year."



Al is not only Mt. Gretna's fire chief, he once headed the police force at nearby South Annville Township and formerly served as assistant director of public safety at Lebanon Valley College. Now an account manager at a local office of the Stockholm-based security and investigations firm Securitas, he and his wife Samatha live at the Chautauqua home formerly owned by his late uncle, the redoubtable John Hambright.



100 Years and counting

Former music professor Nancy Hatz celebrated her hundredth birthday June 30. A legend among Mt. Gretnans, she moved from the Heights a few years ago to a retirement home near Hershey. But her spirit, zest and enthusiasm as Mt. Gretna's No. 1 Fan has never dissipated. In recollections last year at a Historical Society gathering, she credited Playhouse stars like Pete Seeger and Paul Whiteman for helping secure Mt. Gretna's place in musical history.

At her [centennial celebration](#), the *Lebanon Daily News* recorded the proceedings. Former Mt. Gretnan Sheryl Mellor, who now lives on the Pacific island of New Caledonia, passed along [this Facebook account](#) of the fun. Another reminder that friends of Mt. Gretna and Nancy Hatz encircle the globe.

Calendars abound in the summertime

There's the Arts Council's *Summer Calendar of Events*, the gospel of summertime happenings in Mt. Gretna. Then Kathy Snavely's [This Week in Mt. Gretna](#), essentially the printed calendar with all the latest updates. And the Council's online calendar at its [webpage](#), faithfully attended by Mt. Gretna native Jennifer Veser Besse, who knows as much about what's going on as anyone.

All of this is by way of explaining why there's no calendar in this issue and why I'm likely to take next month off. Travels, visitors and community doings have a way of filling up my calendar. Plus, the older I get the more vacations I take. Every husband will understand: it's not only necessary for rest and renewal, it's also the best path to domestic tranquility.

P.S. A late-arriving bulletin just before deadline brought news of an event coming up next month that sounds, as we Southerners are wont to say, like a humdinger. It will help the Mt. Gretna School of Art, now in its third year, raise money for a permanent home. The event takes place at the newly refurbished residence of writer Bill Gifford and design director Elizabeth Hummer Aug. 2. [Click here for details.](#)