

MOUNT GRETTNA

magazine

After the Fall:
Lessons from
the Playhouse

LOG CABIN
COZY

PLUS ...

An Eco History of
the Area

A Local Artist Who
Was Born on Art
Show Weekend

A New Discovery
About Gretna's Role
In World War II

FALL 2026



Volume 2, Issue 4

mount GRENA magazine

FOUNDER + CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Stacy Schroeder

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Michael Vyskocil

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

Janice Balmer

EDITORIAL SOUNDING BOARD

Janice Balmer, Michael Long, Michael Vyskocil

ADVISORY TEAM

Janice Balmer, Meagan Cassel, Shannon Fretz,
Kevin Musick, Steve Toler

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Shannon Fretz Photography

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Linda Brain Beck, Meagan Cassel, Vicki Kensinger,
Vince Montano, Stacy Schroeder, Katy Shero,
Kevin Stairiker, Kevin C. Wells

EVENTS PLANNING TEAM

Janice Balmer, Meagan Cassel, Julia Krause, Stacy Schroeder,
Molly Stager, Steve Toler

DISTRIBUTION COURIERS

Brett Balmer, Janice Balmer, Cheryl Burke, Meagan Cassel,
Shannon Fretz, Vicki Kensinger, Julia Krause, Kevin Musick,
Hazel Nestleroth, Stacy Schroeder, Steve Toler



Mount Grenna Magazine is a free quarterly publication devoted to building community through stories and events that connect and inspire. We are a project of fiscal sponsor Humanitarian Social Innovations (HSI), EIN 46-4779591. Gifts are tax-deductible.

Contents of this publication may not be reproduced in whole or part for any reason without prior permission of the publisher. Unauthorized use of this publication to train generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies is expressly prohibited.

ADVERTISING: Contact Janice@MountGrennaMagazine.org or visit our website for our full media kit.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: Find free digital issues and print pickup locations on our website; we do not offer subscription by mail.

STORY SUBMISSIONS: Limited unsolicited submissions are considered per the policy on our website. We are not an open-submission publication.

Be Earth friendly! If not saving as a keepsake, please recycle print copies of this issue or pass them on to a neighbor.

MOUNT GRENA MAGAZINE

PO Box 205

Mount Grenna, PA 17064

MountGrennaMagazine.org



Located on Lenape Delaware and Susquehannock lands
Printed by Susquehanna Printing

CONTENTS



Page 27



Page 20

Photos clockwise from top left: Roy Thomas and Jennifer Schlener-Thomas inside their Gretna log cabin. Artist Morgan Pallas at work on a new piece. Winston, left, and Livie, Campmeeting dogs of Kevin C. Wells. *Inside cover:* A cottage porch along Muhlenberg Avenue in the Chautauqua. *Cover:* A fall view of Gretna's Lake Conewago. All photos by Shannon Fretz Photography.



Page 10

FEATURES

- 20 Confidential: Gretna Humans Under Observation
by Kevin C. Wells
- 24 The Gretna Effect
by Linda Brain Beck

DEPARTMENTS

- 4 Local History: War Games in Gretna
by Vince Montano
- 6 Field + Forest: The Land We Share
by Kevin Stairiker
- 10 Meet the Artist: Where the Wind Leads
by Katy Shero
- 12 Gretna Together: After the Fall
by Stacy Schroeder
- 27 Cottage Life: Log Cabin Cozy
by Meagan Cassel
- 32 Seasonal Contemplations: Abiding in the Fullness
by Vicki Kensinger

IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 Word of the Season
- 3 The View From My Porch
- 23 Bonus Feature: Fall Crossword (*answer key page 26*)
- 30 Gretna Trail Mix
- 33 Local Business Directory (*inside back cover*)

STORIES THAT CONNECT + INSPIRE



WORD of the SEASON

*Celebrating the beauty
of uncommon words*

WOODLARKING

WOOD-lar-king *verb/noun*

Wandering the woods with an eye for natural treasures, curiosities, and things worth noticing.

A word still finding its way: Woodlarking has not yet earned an entry in the major dictionaries. A verbal cousin of mudlarking — the long-established practice of searching riverbanks for objects of interest — the term is increasingly used for similar woodland wanderers.

Thanks to Shannon Fretz for this suggestion. What choice will inspire us next season?
Submit your favorite uncommon word at MountGretnaMagazine.org/contact.

THE VIEW FROM MY PORCH

I am devoting this page to a bit more about the Mount Gretna Playhouse story featured on page 12.

I was a newlywed when its roof collapsed in 1994, in the midst of switching jobs and preparing to direct a summer camp. I did not pay this period of Gretna's history the same attention I did this past fall when I encountered it again as a member of the Mount Gretna Arts Council. At the time, over 200 pages of minutes, reports, letters, and other materials from 1994-1995 were shared with us as we discussed the possibility of renewing our Playhouse operating lease.

Poring over the scanned documents — sometimes grainy, sometimes faint or in hard-to-read dot-matrix, occasionally out of order or missing pages — might have been off-putting but I found myself hooked. In fact, despite my eyestrain, it felt like a cliffhanger when the archived notes left off in March 1995 before things were fully resolved. I had many questions but could already feel the arc of the story waiting to be told.

For a few months, the story idea got shuffled among various issues and potential writers. However, it became clear soon after a meeting with the magazine's editorial sounding board this January that the story and I were not done.

I am simply fascinated by this chapter of Gretna's history. It has lived inside me this spring and summer, just as this season's Playhouse performances lived alongside our Gretna cottage. An early draft even had subheadings naturally falling into the classical elements of a five-act play, a pleasing artifice I nevertheless withdrew to keep the focus on the content.

My research expanded to include materials from the Mount Gretna Area Historical Society, over 70 newspaper articles from across the region, and conversations with a few key people still present in the community.

As a journalist, not living through this event was an advantage to me. I was able to approach it with curiosity and few preconceptions. As I often do when researching historical material, I absorbed the story until it began to play like a movie in my mind. I developed real affection and empathy for all the characters involved.

And now, the disclaimers.

At *Mount Gretna Magazine*, we are aware that this story can and has been told by many people in many ways. Even at this word count, not every important detail could be included. Even I could have written different versions of this tale. That is the nature of a complex story about a beloved place.

Many more people than those who are named played significant roles in what transpired over those 15 months and beyond. Not including them here does not devalue their contributions but highlights what a massive effort the Playhouse rebuild was. Our focus was on taming the unwieldy trajectory of the story, which each month had so many things happening simultaneously that their interplay was hard to convey. The quotes and names chosen were based on what was available in source documents to best tell the main story clearly in the space constraints we had.

You may find things that resonate and at other times wonder at phrasing or selection of detail. Storytelling in a close-knit community is especially prone to that experience, even at over 30 years distance. In fact, I think it hearkens to one of the sidebar musings posed at the end of the article. How can we hold different views of the same thing, recognizing that perhaps both can be true? I look forward to exploring this idea together.



Stacy

Stacy Schroeder
Founder + Creative Director
Stacy@MountGretnaMagazine.org

A HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ...

The Mount Gretna Tennis Club,
celebrating 100 years

AND OUR GRATEFUL THANKS TO ...

All who donated to *Mount Gretna Magazine's*
Summer Fundraising Campaign,
helping us raise **\$18,860** toward continuing to
create independent stories and events
that connect and inspire —
through our print magazine, digital platforms,
and in-person community experiences.

WE NEED YOU ... Help us mark important community
dates, from special birthdays to anniversaries of Gretna-
affiliated individuals, businesses, and organizations. We'll
include as many as space allows. Send information with
3-6 month's notice (pending where it falls in our printing
schedule) to Stacy@MountGretnaMagazine.org.



How the Pennsylvania National Guard prepared in Mount Gretna for World War II

Story: Vince Montano

On the former Mount Gretna Military Reservation, the Pennsylvania National Guard trained and mustered for the Spanish-American War, the Mexican Border Campaign, and World War I. From 1885 until the 1930s, Gretna was their training grounds. It is accepted history that, as the United States approached World War II, the Guard's training took place at its new home, Fort Indiantown Gap. By the end of the 1930s, the Gretna reservation had closed, its use as a training ground over.

Or was it?

My recent research into news archives and period publications of the Pennsylvania National Guard has cast new light on Gretna's military history.

The Guard returns to its former home

On June 12, 1941, a foreign enemy landed on Delaware Bay, invaded the eastern United States, and advanced with armored units into Pennsylvania. With the 44th Division at Fort Dix, New Jersey, defending Philadelphia and Camden, it was up to the federalized National Guard's 28th Infantry Division at Fort Indiantown Gap to defend the Commonwealth alone. They would make their stand on Gretna's former training grounds.

Fortunately, for Gretna's residents, the "enemy invasion" existed only in the fictional scenario created by 28th Division strategists. Maj. Gen. Edward Martin commanded a two-day "war games" exercise that would test the 28th Division's ability to advance troops and weapons for war.

In the division's largest mass movement of armed forces in more than two decades, 10,000 soldiers, carrying full fighting equipment, marched 20 miles from Fort Indiantown Gap to Gretna.

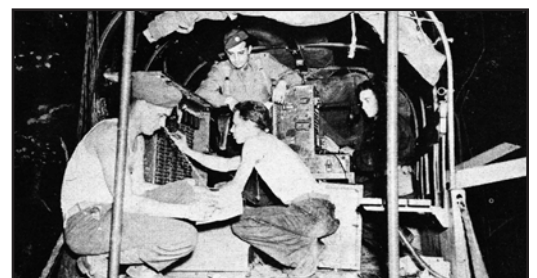
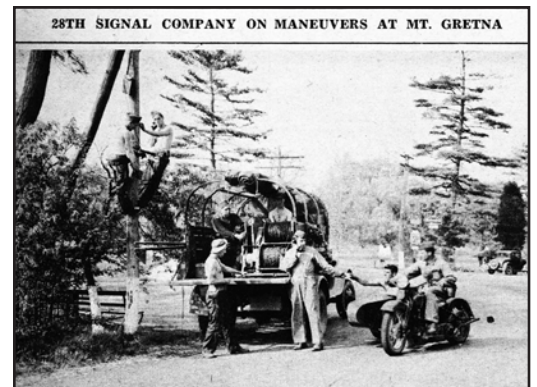
As three troop columns followed different routes, townspeople watched as regimental bands played marching music while soldiers passed through Ono, Bellegrove, Palmyra, Annville, Campbelltown, and Upper Lawn. Upon their arrival, field hospitals and kitchens stood among the 5,000 tents erected across six square miles of Gretna's training grounds.

Pvt. Harry Kohr, whose son Karl resides in Cornwall today, lived in Miner's Village and was a member of the Guard. He was here for the exercises and relieved to have avoided the long march by traveling to Gretna in one of the 1,600 military vehicles following the troops.

A "concealed bivouac" tested the troop's ability to hide their tents from aerial view, while a 103rd Observation Squadron airplane evaluated whether the camps were visible to the "enemy."

Communication networks were tested among brigades, the motorized column, Gretna, and Fort Indiantown Gap. Scouting patrols sought the "enemy" to their flanks and front. Officers' tactics were evaluated, and soldiers' physical condition was assessed. For the first time in the division's history, soldiers operated as self-contained brigade combat teams, employing modern blitzkrieg tactics.

For area residents driving Route 117 between Gretna and Colebrook, one can



Images this page, top to bottom: Headquarters unit of the 53rd Field Artillery Brigade travel in a convoy to Command Post Exercises at Mount Gretna. Cooks and commanders convene in a military policeman's kitchen within the field encampments at Mount Gretna. A photo depicts the 28th signal company on maneuvers at Mount Gretna. Members of the 28th Signal Company coordinate messages through wired and radio communications stations during war games at Mount Gretna. All images this page from The Pennsylvania Guardsman Weekly, gathered by the author courtesy of Pennsylvania State Library.

only imagine the sight of thousands of soldiers, tents, and vehicles that may have been visible from the roadway.

At a press conference in Gretna, Gen. Martin expressed his satisfaction: "The maneuver could not have been more successful... I am very much impressed with the high morale of the men and the willingness of each individual to do his part... The men are in marvelous physical condition."

July 1941 brought one final "war game" to Gretna when the 28th Division Headquarters, Special Troops, and all Brigade Headquarters in the division held Command Post Exercises. During this "invasion," officers became acquainted with an increasingly important phase of modern warfare: air-to-ground communications. The 28th Division Signal Corps coordinated radio messages with three reconnaissance airplanes from the 103rd Observation Squadron photographing "enemy positions."

Two hours later, individuals delivered the finished photographs to the command post. A pilot, Capt. George E. DeCoursey, directed troop movements via radio and dropped messages, notifying ground

forces that "invaders" would attempt to break through defense lines at Colebrook. Troops received orders to defend Colebrook and hold off the "enemy."

Soldiers with the 108th Field Artillery, armed with huge howitzer cannons, moved their guns into firing positions. While no one fired these 5-ton artillery weapons, the guns were sighted and serviced as if operating under wartime conditions in unfamiliar territory. During these mock battles, umpires supervised the exercises and prepared intelligence reports. Commanders and their officers planned missions using maps and theoretical attacks, synchronizing war-fighting functions, and demonstrating the ability to make quick, effective decisions under pressure. These command-and-control exercises tested internal operations, communications installations, and information flow. Simulated battle scenarios included a "night problem" and a plan to go on the offensive and drive back the "invaders" from Colebrook.

Gen. Martin concluded, "This maneuver is just like a football game. Every man must know his position and must play his part... Every detail had been very

capably taken care of. That's what I call real organization!"

Pennsylvania's 28th Division goes to war

Four months later, the enemy invasion became real when the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, drew the United States into World War II. The 28th Infantry Division served with distinction in Normandy, Northern France, Rhineland, and Central Europe. They were instrumental in halting the German advance at the Battle of the Bulge by constructing bridges for the Allied advance through Europe and assisting with the liberation of Paris.

In the shadow of Gretna's once grand and former military encampment, the 28th Infantry Division held its largest training maneuvers since World War I at Gretna, honing the skills to advance the Allied victory over Germany and broadening our view of Gretna's storied military past.

In that summer of 1941, the Mount Gretna Military Reservation served the nation, one last time, preparing the men of Pennsylvania's armed forces for the greatest war the world would ever know. 🍷



Vince Montano lives in Cornwall and is a historian, writer, and avid hiker. He's been exploring Mount Gretna and its history for more than 30 years and loves discovering ruins throughout the surrounding area from Gretna's National Guard days. He is a contributing member of the Mount Gretna Area Historical Society.

Left: Postcard image of the encampment at Mount Gretna in 1909. Courtesy of the Mount Gretna Area Historical Society.

A journey through
Mount Gretna's eco history



The Land We Share

Story: Kevin Stairiker

Photos: Shannon Fretz Photography

From the first step ever taken upon the fertile soil of Mount Gretna, the land has been marked by a push and pull between the humans who enjoy its lush exterior and the ever-evolving landscape itself. For every innovation or leap forward, we get that much further away from the area described in a 1900 pamphlet by Civil War veteran Capt. Charles McIlvaine:

“The charm of Mount Gretna is its primitiveness ... Mountain climber or oarsman, wheelman or pedestrian, scientist, preacher, literateur, poet can each day find that which invigorates, inspires, instructs and with all, health-giving air and water.”

A history forged in iron

Most of modern Mount Gretna history dates to early iron magnate Peter Grubb, who opened what would become the Cornwall Iron Furnace in 1742. For a furnace that would eventually come to burn an acre of trees a day just for the charcoal in which to power it, the furnace was well-situated in a high-density forest of oak and chestnut trees.

In 1796, a slave with the honorific “Governor” Dick escaped after working most of his adult life at the furnace. Ads from the time suggested that he decamped back to his home state of Maryland. Mount Gretna archival researcher Kathy Lindert recently came across documents suggesting that the hill that bears his name was dedicated before his escape, making it one of the few locales in the entire country named for an enslaved individual who was still around to see it.

The Cornwall Iron Furnace would see great advancements over the next many decades under ownership from the Coleman family, first with Robert Coleman and eventually great-grandson Robert H. Coleman.

Wanting to unite the initial furnace with others that had by that point come under his control in 1881 (after first inheriting his father's fortune with his sister, Anne, at the age of 9 in 1864), Coleman funded work on what would become the Cornwall and Lebanon Railroad. It was more commonly known as the “C & L” in 1883. This decade proved crucial for the century that followed, marking the end of the Cornwall Iron Furnace and the beginning of what would become a

50-year encampment of the Pennsylvania National Guard.

By 1890, Mount Gretna not only had its name, but it had also become a hot spot for merriment for tens of thousands coming to visit. Another railroad line, the Mount Gretna Narrow Gauge Railway, operated between 1889 and 1915. Both now live as part of the basis of the greater Lebanon Valley Rail Trail.

While the next 75 years would be defined by the various groups coming to stake a claim on the land, including the Pennsylvania Chautauqua, United Brethren Campmeeting, and others hoping to own a little piece of paradise, the Mount Gretna area itself also continued its subtle ecological changes over time.

Stories told in the landscape

The American chestnut trees that once fueled the very furnaces that helped pay for Gretna's expansion rapidly began disappearing not only in Lebanon County, but also across the country due to the planting of chestnut trees from Asia in New York Zoological Park, now known as the Bronx Zoo.

First planted around 1895, the overseas chestnut trees brought with them a previously unknown fungal infection that was not discovered until nearly a decade

later. Throughout the 1910s, efforts to save the American chestnut boiled down to simply destroying all diseased trees in blighted areas. However, blight spores picked up by wind and birds made the effort doomed from the start, and by 1920, every American chestnut in Mount Gretna and beyond was gone.

Perhaps Mount Joy resident and philanthropist Clarence Schock was inspired by the slow, tragic death of these trees. Between 1936 and 1941, Schock acquired 1,105 acres of land, including the hill named for Governor Dick all those years ago. In 1954, Schock and his wife Evetta deeded the land to the Mount Joy School District, later renamed the Donegal School District. He stipulated that the land "shall be maintained and preserved forever as a playground and public park," a monument to the great outdoors that still serves many daily.

All of Mount Gretna's history, that told above and much more eschewed through time and space, is of course but a millisecond on the timeline of our planet. This is still an area marked by its outdoor spaces, but much of even the most deeply wooded areas would look foreign to residents of the 19th century.

From the neighborhoods to the parkland, non-native plants, such as standard-issue

mile-a-minute, stilt grass, and privet, have edged out native plants to overtake much of the local ecosystem.

It's not just plants, either. A surplus of white-tailed deer feeds so vociferously on native plants that year-round fencing is utilized by residents and Clarence Schock Memorial Park rangers alike to protect them. Estimates say there are anywhere from 20 to 150 white-tailed deer per square mile at any one time, and they're hungry.

The deer and non-native plants form a powerful tag-team against restoration efforts, but all is not lost. Every forest has an ecological memory, and naturalist Wilson Alvarez, a certified permaculture designer, tracker, and nature-awareness instructor, describes Mount Gretna's forest as strong, albeit young at roughly 75 to 85 years old. A few areas are nearing the century mark, despite long periods of clear-cutting and logging.

Within that soil is the DNA for plants such as bloodroots, mayapples, and other spring ephemerals; they rarely get a chance to grow to their potential.

While some seek to hack away at any non-natives in sight, Wilson says that it is important to remember that in nearly every case, they will eventually grow back. The challenge lies in figuring out



Above left: Chicken of the woods. *Above right:* Wood asters. *Page 6:* View from Governor Dick Observation Tower looking west toward Mount Gretna.

FIELD + FOREST

the relationship within this ecosystem we all share.

Conserving Mount Gretna's ecological community

However varied restoration efforts have looked in the past, the modern era has been marked by grand conservation efforts by groups based right here. In recent years, the Army Corps of Engineers has returned to the old military training grounds to search for potential live rounds.

Ryan Fretz, president of the Friends of Governor Dick, says that the group planted trees in those clearings, with the military funding an additional 1,500 to 2,500 seedlings for more planting later this year. Similarly, at Soldiers Field, the wildflower restoration project is several seasons in now.

Frank Gentile of the Gretna Gardeners group describes volunteers performing backbreaking work in the sun for hours just raking before a single seed was planted. In that meadow's soil could be found common yarrow, little bluestem, and others dating back to when it was indeed still primarily a soldiers' field. Planted in 2024 and 2025, the meadow plants are currently establishing networks below our feet, waiting to bloom.

Trees that were once felled and sold now remain on the forest floor to complete the three stages of a tree's life — the living tree, the standing dead tree, and the fallen dead tree, each of which contributes to vital forest functions.

The forest as described by Capt. McIlvaine, with its "health-giving air and water," is thankfully not yet just a memory. However, we can only work toward what we remember, and the further we get from that idyllic past, the harder it will become to preserve it for all who will come later. 🌿

Kevin Stairiker is a writer in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Gracious help for this article was provided by Wilson Alvarez, Ryan Fretz, Frank Gentile, Elyse Jurgen, Deb Simpson, Doug Tallamy, and Jack Bitner's work Mt. Gretna: A Coleman Legacy. Kevin dedicates this story to the memory of Ad Crable — the journalist and outdoorsman originally assigned to it — a friend to Mount Gretna and the Pennsylvania wilderness.



Above: An American holly emerges from the forest floor.



SCAN FOR
DETAILS



MountGretnaMagazine.org

Let's get together at

SPEED NEIGHBORING

SUNDAY, OCT. 18, 2026 | 2-5 P.M.
Governor Dick Recreational Area

FOOD TRUCKS + MUSIC + GAMES + AND MORE!

Come for an hour or stay all afternoon.

Tips To Get Started

You don't need to change your life or surroundings overnight to begin making ecologically minded moves that will better both the home and heart. Several local and national experts offer the following tips.

Doug Tallamy, ecologist, author, and professor at the University of Delaware

"I think about four ecological responsibilities of every property:

"Every property needs to support pollinators. Every property needs to support the food webs. Every landscape has to manage the watershed in which it lies, and every landscape has to help sequester carbon to help combat climate change. Try to help even one of those, and you can feel good about yourself. No one is ever finished."

Elyse Jurgen, Waxwing EcoWorks Co. of Lancaster

"First, you have to see your space as an actual ecosystem, whether it's a meadow, a forest edge, or in a forest. Just pause and honor and acknowledge that your space is not in a separate world of humans. Letting that sentiment help guide this more compassionate process, it ends up being this lovely journey of curiosity. I think the beautiful thing to remember is that this all wants to be revived and built back."

Deb Simpson, Chautauqua resident, ecological steward, and community educator

"There are small things people can do, like not leaving party lights on all night. Go buy a native plant and stick a pot on your deck. That's how you start."

Take it Easy. Your Landscape is in Good Hands.



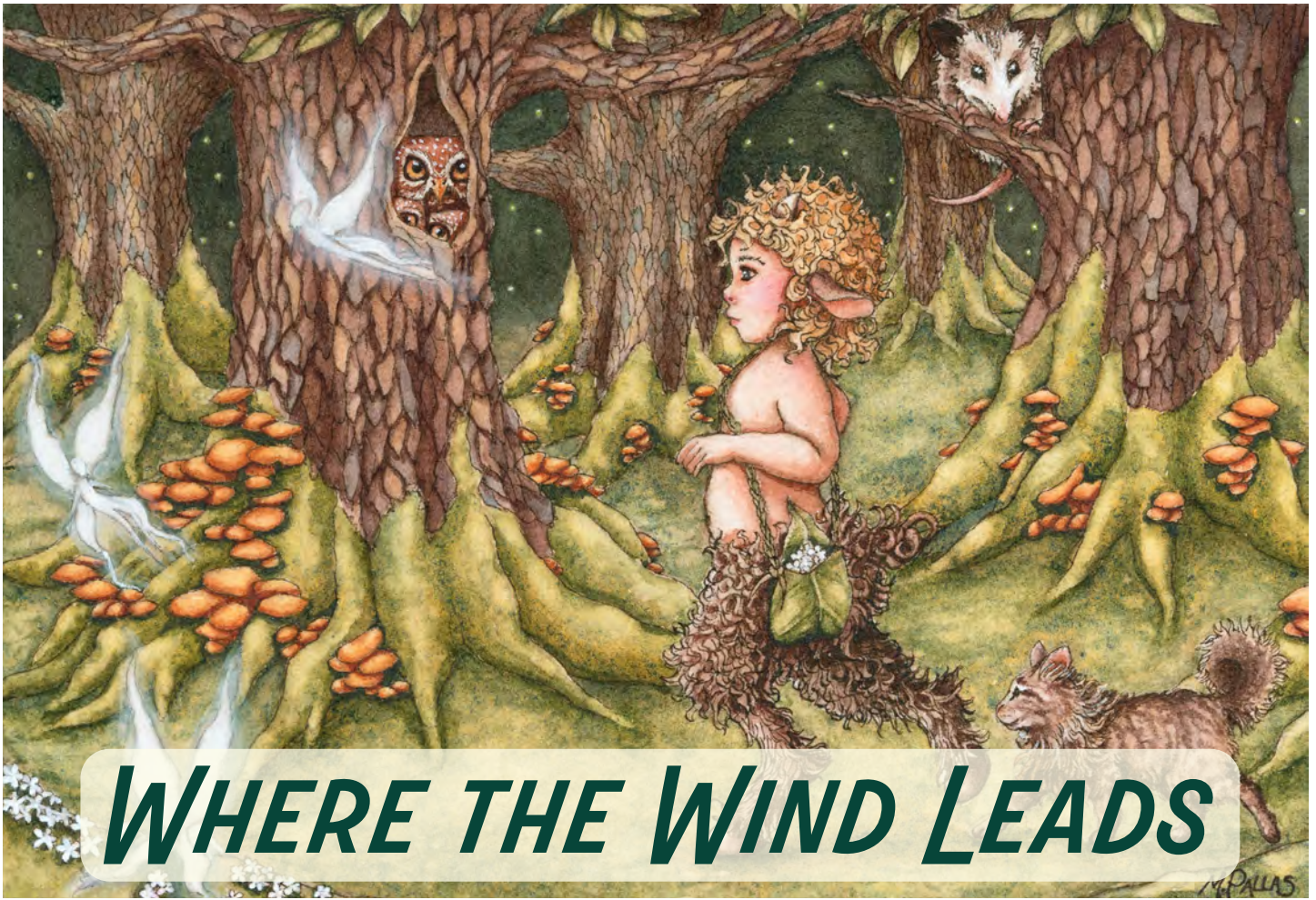
Good's Tree and Lawn Care

Let Us Care For Your Outdoor Living Spaces

TREE CARE • LAWN CARE • PLANT HEALTH



(717) 297-6440



Mount-Gretna based artist Morgan Pallas proves it's never too late to follow your muse and add some magic into the world.

Story: Katy Shero

Photos: Shannon Fretz Photography

Morgan Pallas recalls hauling her RV to the middle of Salina, Kansas, braving a 113-mile-per-hour windstorm. Born and raised in central Pennsylvania, she didn't envision visiting Kansas, let alone being there to be a part of an art show.

"You know, the locals there are used to the winds," Morgan recalls, "and I asked some of the artists around me at the show, 'What do you guys do if there's a tornado warning or something?' and they were like, 'Just zip up your tent and say a prayer!'"

Nevertheless, she says it was an "awesome show," and just one of the many stops she's made across the Midwest and East Coast, joined by her husband, daughter, and three cats (one being 14 years old).

Judging by the number and caliber of art shows she has participated in over the

last few years — and the upgrades and resources she and her husband, Dylan, have invested into her setup and art booth — Morgan might be mistaken for an artist who's been touring for decades.

However, the Mount Gretna-based artist says she's only been doing this full time for the last three years, starting around age 34 after having what she describes as a "wake-up call."

"I kind of had this 'What am I doing?' moment," she says. "I was a stay-at-home mom, and I had this lifelong dream of being a full-time working artist. My mom had cancer, and my dad got laid off, and this just put me into this mindset of 'What do I have to lose? Why am I putting off my dreams?'"

Morgan admits she has always been an artist. Her birthday was almost a "foreshadowing" of her future career. Her mom's water broke the weekend of the

Mount Gretna Outdoor Art Show — a weekend that was a particularly special one every year for Morgan's family.

"I went almost every year with my family, and I remember when I had my first decent-paying job and being able to buy my first piece of art there, this hand-sewn and dyed garment that I still have," she says. "As we'd walk through the art show, my mom used to say that one day I was going to be there."

That prophecy came true. In 2023, Morgan was selected to be one of the Art Show's "Emerging Artists," after spending several months committing to her craft every day.

"When my daughter was about 5 months old, I finally made time to sit down and draw. I drew out this idea I was envisioning, and I just suddenly felt like I came up for air and didn't realize what I needed this whole time was to create," she

says. “It requires consistency though. People would ask me, ‘Oh, how long did this painting take you?’ and I’d say, ‘Well, that’s about two weeks’ worth of nap time for my daughter.’ It had to all be very calculated.”

She describes feeling “imposter syndrome” at the Art Show, the first art show she ever participated in. She says it was a dream that had always felt “out of reach” in the past. Despite this, Morgan says she’s thankful for that first show, which served as a muse to make more art and commit herself to her blooming career.

Another muse, she says, is Mount Gretna itself. Much of her art is nature-focused, with paintings of whimsical woodland scenes filled with soft green lily pads, wide-eyed frogs, and playful red-and-white spotted mushrooms. Her goal is to evoke feelings of beauty and bliss and create art that captures the peacefulness and tranquility of Gretna.

“Inspiration is everywhere in Mount Gretna. It’s very much like everyone has fairy houses, and the old cottage community is so cozy. I’m constantly taking reference photos of things here that would be a neat element or piece of work,” she says. She adds that the area “makes your nervous system relax,” which she says helps with the tangible process of creating, too.

Morgan also draws inspiration from the energy of other artists, whether they’re located in Mount Gretna themselves — which she says the area oozes with talent and like-minded artists — or she meets them while touring. Acknowledging how challenging it can be to navigate the travels and day-to-day hustle of a full-time working artist, she leans into other artists’ words of wisdom to keep her motivated.

“When we bring our daughter with us, a lot of them say it reminds them of the days they were selling their



Page 10: *The Faun* by Morgan Pallas.

Left: Morgan at work outdoors on a new piece.

Bottom left: *A Friendly Forest* by Morgan Pallas.

Bottom center: Morgan with her husband and their young daughter.

Bottom right: *Waiting for Pan* by Morgan Pallas. Artwork images courtesy of the artist.

art, starting out, wearing their babies strapped to them and bringing their Pack-and-Plays to shows,” she says. “It’s scary at first, but they remind me that you just have to keep showing up.”

Showing up is exactly what Morgan has continued to do for the last three years. She has no intention to slow down anytime soon. Morgan offers her own words of wisdom to herself and to any aspiring artists, young or old, or anyone seeking to achieve anything in general.

“Work hard, be consistent, and you’ll make something you’re really proud of. The more you show up, the more the muse will keep feeding you ideas and wanting them to be born into the world through you,” she says. “Any creative endeavor makes the world a better and more magical place. It’s a blessing and a miracle to give something to the world around you, and it’s important we keep creating because seeing what humans can make inspires hope in others too.” 🍷

Katy Shero is a freelance writer, professional journalist, and editor. As a Palmyra native, she has many fond memories of visiting Mount Gretna while growing up. She most recently worked as the editor-in-chief for Susquehanna Style magazine before moving to Durham, North Carolina, in May 2025.





*This photo: The Playhouse today.
Photo by Shannon Fretz Photography.*

What examining a major event in the Playhouse's history can teach us about today

Story: Stacy Schroeder

Images: Courtesy of Mount Gretna Area Historical Society except as noted

For more than 130 years, Mount Gretna's Playhouse has anchored the community. Destroyed by fire in 1898 and rebuilt, it suffered another devastating blow when its roof collapsed in February 1994.

What follows is a window into that chapter of the Playhouse's history, drawn from original documents, photographs, and other contemporary materials. Their depth and detail made it possible to tell the story largely from the perspective of those experiencing it in real time, while keeping the chronology of an extraordinarily layered narrative intact — one that could easily fill a book.

Why cover this story now?

Management of the Playhouse is about to change for the first time in 30 years. Chautauqua leadership will resume oversight when the Mount Gretna Arts Council's operating lease expires next month (*more on that on page 18*).

A new fundraiser for the Playhouse is in progress.

And perhaps most importantly, enough time has passed to see that the heart of the story is not the building's collapse.

It is how the crisis invited our community to wrestle with what it means to live and work together — questions that still resonate today.

The crisis begins

The winter of 1994 tested much of the northeastern United States. By February 1994, storms had piled 18 inches of snow and ice — an estimated 150 tons — on the Playhouse's conical roof. Loud cracking sounds from its supporting trusses were first noted on Feb. 9 that year.

"We had a crew ready to go up and take the snow off," said Bill Care, Mount Gretna Borough's Superintendent of Public Works, to the *Lancaster New Era*, "but they [engineers] would not let us."

By Thursday evening, Feb. 11, three workers from a local contracting firm — suspended above the Playhouse by one of the largest cranes in the area — worked to reduce the load. Once deemed safe, a dozen employees climbed onto the roof to shovel, fueled overnight by the well wishes of passersby and hamburgers brought over from the local restaurant The Mount Gretna Hide-a-way. This plan may have succeeded were it not for a Friday storm that added over another 8 inches of snow.

SETTING THE STAGE

The Playhouse has always been owned by the Pennsylvania Chautauqua, a 501(c)(4) not-for-profit organization governed by a Board of Managers elected by and from among its stockholders, all property owners within the neighborhood's borders. In 1994, this Board oversaw operations for the Playhouse, while Mount Gretna Borough employees handled much of its routine maintenance. Required biennial inspections had consistently found the building to be in good condition.



Above: Hand-drawn flyer inviting the community to gather three days after the roof collapse.

Below: Clipping from the *Lancaster New Era* ("Gretna rolls up sleeves and begins planning future," Feb. 15, 1994, page 43).



Above: The front (Pennsylvania Avenue) portion of the Playhouse after the auditorium roof collapse.

Care and other leaders were back on-site early Saturday morning, Feb. 12, not long before the auditorium of the Playhouse fell. "The support posts all went outward, and it dropped right straight down," Chautauqua secretary Dale Grundon told the *Lancaster New Era*.

Becky Reed, whose cottage was located less than 100 feet away, described the event to the *Patriot News*. "It sounded like a mighty, rushing wind. Ten seconds — it was down," she said.

"It smells old," she added later, "like the perfume that's floating out of the cottages in the summer when somebody's sitting out on the porch."

Hope reigns

Three days later, leaders hosted a Playhouse revival meeting at Gretna's Timbers Restaurant and Dinner Theatre. About 150 people showed up. "It's kind of a wake for all our people to get together," Chautauqua vice president Chuck Allwein told the *Lancaster New Era*.

"We want to give the community — not just the Mount Gretna community, but the entire tri-county area — an opportunity to express what they want to express."

Chautauqua's Board, which had been closely following the situation, had already convened an emergency session that established a slate of new targeted committees that included contingency, architectural design, and fundraising. That night, they shared that the Playhouse's stage and restrooms were salvageable, with a tent being sought as a temporary replacement "roof." A small but inspiring piece of good news also emerged: Care had found and saved the Playhouse's finial. There was optimism in the room, with some embracing the opportunity to build something grand to last another 100 years.

In these early days, volunteer teams climbed through the rubble for artifacts, local theaters and high schools offered to host fundraisers, and newspaper coverage briefly extended across the country, thanks to an Associated Press piece.

By March, contingency committee chair Cynthia Condrack had secured two connected tents for the summer, providing seating for roughly 800, comparable to previous years. Gretna Theatre and Gretna Music, the two



Bill Care, public works supervisor for Mount Gretna Borough, takes a break from salvage operations at the Chautauqua Playhouse.

GRETNA TOGETHER

cultural organizations that rented the Playhouse, could now confidently move forward with ticket sales for their upcoming seasons. Mobile trailers would provide dressing rooms and a box office while the existing stage and restrooms would be reused.

Meanwhile, Chautauqua leaders worked to develop a design and find funding for the new building. They adopted “Rebuilding Gretna’s Glory” as the campaign motto.

Allwein, named as chair of the new architectural design committee, was encouraged to have his group brainstorm the “big footprint” design. As the committee gathered ideas from tenants, community leaders, and one another, the vision for the new Playhouse expanded.

In early March 1994, letters were sent inviting seven architectural firms to submit designs. Those competing for the bid were encouraged to go big, incorporating seating for up to 1,000 with modern backstage facilities tailored as much as possible to both tenants’ requests. They also faced an ambitious deadline: The building had to be ready for the summer of 1995 without disrupting performances already scheduled for the summer of 1994.

Leading through a crisis

The Board faced a trifecta of complications: a tight schedule, intense public scrutiny, and constantly evolving information. Meeting minutes reflect a push and pull between deadline-driven action and time for visioning and broader community engagement. That tension surfaced in several ways. Gretna Theatre and Gretna Music, for example, sought a greater voice in the planning process, while individuals also weighed in with letters of both support and concern.

Doug Bedell, chair of the public relations committee, was one of those writers. He shared his thoughts at a special March 30 Board meeting. Bedell was no stranger to navigating complex public crises. Fifteen years earlier, he had served as spokesperson for the Three Mile Island cleanup effort. He now held up issues he felt needed to be considered, including community perceptions and desires.



Above: The double-saddle tent erected for the summer of 1994 connected so that there were no poles or structures obstructing audience views. *Page 15:* Clipping from the *Intelligencer Journal* of the original design plans (“Mt. Gretna residents get peek at plans for rebuilt playhouse,” June 9, 1994, page 1).

Bedell asked these questions: Do we build to serve the community or a wider circle? Does being better necessarily mean being bigger? Do we want to be more than a summer place? Will the Playhouse be self-sustaining? How can we extend our support base?

The Board subsequently invited Bedell and representatives from Gretna Theatre, Gretna Music, and the Mount Gretna Arts Council to a facilitated visioning retreat in April 1994. They had already begun refining their process, including appointing a steering committee to better coordinate efforts.

Now they paused in this larger group to share memories of the Playhouse and to name opportunities and challenges around the rebuilding project. It was noted that it might not be possible to meet all the design hopes without increasing costs. Allwein pointed out that the two tenants had considerably different needs. Shopping the “big footprint” was once again encouraged, however, to excite donors and see if the money was there.

“I’ve been very impressed today. We spoke openly and freely,” Chautauqua president Karl Gettle said at the end of the retreat. “Continue to work together, work openly, continue to get true feelings out. Make a mistake, pick it up, go forward.”

Following the April retreat, the Board hired several part-time staff — Condrack

in administration and Bedell in public relations. A small office was also established on the second floor of the Chautauqua Lodge above Barb’s Buns (now Porch and Pantry).

Hidden costs

That spring, Chautauqua leaders discovered that rebuilding the Playhouse required far more than replacing its roof. It also meant examining nearly every associated budget item and transaction.

A new building promised substantially higher operating costs without any meaningful increase in rental income. Annual property taxes alone could rise from nominal amounts on the former structure to more than \$37,000 on a \$2 million facility, with insurance premiums also climbing. Leaders explored whether transferring ownership to either the Mount Gretna Authority (an entity connected to Mount Gretna Borough) or the Arts Council might avoid property taxation altogether, but neither option proved viable.

Questions also arose about the settlement from the insurance claim. The Board believed the company’s \$231,000 valuation may have undervalued the Playhouse and even considered legal action before deciding against it.

At the same time, the leaders examined whether the Chautauqua itself could be reorganized as a nonprofit to make

donations tax-deductible. The concept advanced as far as a stockholder vote on a related bylaw item before ultimately being abandoned. However, the idea would later reemerge in the creation of the Pennsylvania Chautauqua Foundation in 2001.

Meanwhile, the fundraising timeline was becoming urgent. Some wanted to capitalize on public goodwill and begin fundraising immediately, but a campaign required both a finalized design and a tax-deductible way to accept gifts. The Arts Council offered to serve as a temporary fundraising arm while those questions were resolved, and in late spring, the Board hired a Lancaster fundraising firm to guide them in launching the campaign.

Imagining a new Playhouse

By early summer 1994, at least 29 leaders and 47 volunteers were actively involved in the rebuilding effort. While work continued on many fronts, one task rose above the rest: defining what the new Playhouse should become. Without that vision, fundraising could not begin in earnest, and construction needed to start by September if reopening for the summer of 1995 was to remain possible.

Five firms submitted proposals ranging from \$1.2 million to \$4 million. Some

would have rerouted Pennsylvania Avenue or permanently closed Carnegie Avenue. One member of the architectural committee described the most ambitious design as a “\$4 million jewel that would be noticed in New York” while another coined it “an architectural monstrosity.”

The architectural committee selected two finalists to present to the Board. However, when it came time to choose, only the \$2.5 million proposal from a two-firm partnership based out of Baltimore and Harrisburg remained. Gretna-affiliated architect Philip Johnston, the other finalist, had withdrawn his firm’s proposal, believing the project had grown too large.

To gauge public reaction, Chautauqua leaders scheduled a June 8-9 unveiling of these plans at the Playhouse site. Multiple local papers covered the event in glowing terms, declaring that the design kept the charm of the previous building and incorporated appreciated amenities. Several locals, including the mayor’s wife, are quoted as giving personal approval.

The Board said it was waiting on community response to move forward. “We want input from all the people — this is our intent,” said Gettle to the *Intelligencer Journal*. “They can come and

talk to various people, and ask, ‘Why this, why that?’” Plans were “pretty solidified” but subject to minor adjustments based on resident feedback.

Publicly, the rebuilding effort appeared to be moving forward.

A turning point

Despite this promising debut, a study conducted that same month by the hired fundraising firm ground progress to a halt. Thirty community leaders and potential major donors had been approached. Their confidential responses, later leaked to the *Lebanon Daily News*, challenged assumptions upon which leadership had been working.

It showed support of a rebuild: “Without a playhouse, the Mount Gretna community will decline. It would be like having a puzzle with one piece missing,” one respondent stated.

But those responses also identified a local \$750,000 fundraising capacity, with concurrent regional campaigns limiting outside monies. “The design is far too ambitious for this community,” another respondent noted.

Moving forward required better communication and inclusion in decision-making. “Why are they asking



Intelligencer Journal photo by Barry Zecher

Architect Charles Alexander uses an artist’s rendering of the future Mt. Gretna Playhouse to explain its finer points to Leane Harrington.

GRETNA TOGETHER

my opinion now? Why didn't they ask before they made all the decisions?" someone commented.

One-third (10) of those interviewed asserted a general mistrust of Chautauqua's leadership to manage the project. "All of Mount Gretna will never come together around a building owned by the Chautauqua," one commenter stated.

For the volunteer leaders who had invested significant hours responding to the crisis, the findings stung. For those who had felt excluded, the study offered a voice.

"While the results hurt those who have been working hard," said Bedell at a meeting of the architecture committee, "info can now be used going forward."

Throughout July, Chautauqua leaders discussed how to incorporate these findings. Should they slow down and start over, as the report suggested? Had enough people been polled to trust the results? Were there ways to adapt what had already been accomplished? Allwein shared that costs might be able to be trimmed to \$1.75 million or possibly even \$1.5 million. The architectural committee had stopped the bidding process to avoid accruing more expenses while next steps were deliberated.

On July 23, the steering committee recommended that the Board and the Arts Council explore making the Arts Council the organizing hub for a new group that would oversee planning for a new Playhouse.

However, minutes from an architectural committee meeting soon after note, "The Arts Council does not seem anxious to take over the project, and it is not known if the Chautauqua Board would be willing to relinquish control."

"The Chautauqua is the most important entity of Gretna and the driving force behind many projects," said Arts Council president Tom Clemens at the Board's meeting in late July. "However, the Board of Managers [has not] recognized that Chautauqua is only 25% of Gretna and that other residents may not feel the need to donate to this project."

The press got wind of the study in early August. Under the headline "Unraveling," the *Lebanon Daily News* reported, "Building a new playhouse — one that can play the same role in the future that the old playhouse played in the past — is an effort that is beginning to fray the fabric of the quiet Mount Gretna community."

The goal of breaking ground in September 1994 and finishing by summer 1995 now appeared out of reach.

A dark day

As uncertainty grew, a second funding challenge loomed.

The Chautauqua had invested \$100,000 to ensure cultural programs took place that summer. Contingency funds were now expected to run out in mid-August.

The Board had a first option to rent the same tents for summer 1995, but only if it paid a \$6,000 deposit by Aug. 10. After that, the rental company planned to market the tent to other customers.



HEARTH AND HARROW

Located at Pleasant View Communities



Try delivery!
DOORDASH
GRUBHUB™



Burgers, sandwiches, brick oven pizzas, salads, signature entrées, and more!

Open **Tue-Sat** 11am-7pm & **Sun** 10am-2pm
hearthandharrowbistro.com | 717.664.6314





FUNK
CONSTRUCTION
Arthur Funk & Sons Inc.

At Funk Construction, we believe **strong communities are built from the ground up.**

That's why we're proud to support our local community and invest in the people and organizations **who make our neighborhoods thrive.**

Connect Collaborate Construct
FunkConstruction.com

There was not enough money for that deposit, let alone the full \$60,000 another temporary season would require. With no clear path forward, Gretna Theatre and Gretna Music were told to begin looking elsewhere for next year's programming.

It looked like the show might not go on for the summer of 1995.

Broadening the conversation

While the architecture, fundraising, and contingency committees were effectively on hold, the public relations committee was not. In August, Bedell organized a wider listening effort. He assembled a team of 20 volunteers from across Gretna. Coordinating with the committee but identifying themselves simply as concerned citizens, this team spoke with neighbors and staffed a booth at that year's Art Show, reaching 150 people. A member of the fundraising firm also spoke with potential major donors. After a discussion with the group, Bedell reported the findings to the Board.

Conversations affirmed the Chautauqua's decision to fund that summer's temporary structures — "It kept two arts organizations alive." It also reinforced public support for rebuilding while confirming concern that the proposed project had become too expensive.

Responses from potential major donors were mixed. One envisioned enlarging Chautauqua with nonresidential membership. Another would give only directly to the Chautauqua, and yet another urged waiting several years before acting.

Bedell mentioned that the Chautauqua was seen as being "apart from, and not greatly involved with, the wider community" but also stated that "none of Gretna's other entities has been very extroverted either." The need for consensus-building across organizations and neighborhoods was underscored.

A reversal of fortune

Though the Board met a day after Bedell's report was issued, a different set of documents was about to grab everyone's attention.

Gretna resident Betty Miller delivered this story's most unexpected turn when she arrived at the Board's September 1994

meeting with reconstruction plans for a tabernacle in Emmaus, 70 miles away. Miller was a familiar presence around the Playhouse, faithfully tending its landscape each summer with buckets of water hand carried from her cottage.

The parallels were striking: the same style of building, the same architect, and a roof collapse just one month after the Playhouse. But the rebuilding plan was dramatically different.

The Waldheim Park Association had assembled a team to reconstruct its tabernacle in just a few months for less than \$350,000.

Here finally was a new wrinkle that leaders could embrace. Chautauqua and Borough representatives visited the Waldheim site on several occasions over the next few weeks, including the day its trusses went up. The building's new truss technology was key: It made the roof both stronger and more affordable.

Within a month, meetings with the Waldheim project's architect, builder, and truss manufacturer were underway, and by mid-November, a brand-new set of Playhouse plans was assembled.

Nearly 100 stockholders gathered at the Mount Gretna Fire Hall on the Sunday of Thanksgiving weekend to vote on the proposal. This new plan was much closer

in size and style to the previous building, with the aforementioned stronger roof as well as improved seating and backstage areas. It fit naturally into the surrounding landscape with no required road changes. In fact, it provided enough room to widen Harvard Avenue by 12 feet. The anticipated price tag was \$550,000.

The stockholders approved. Now, if the weather cooperated and donations came through, a new Playhouse for the summer of 1995 might, just possibly, be back on the table.

A triumphant return

Thankfully, Mother Nature delivered, and, eventually, so did the donors. Ground preparations took place late in 1994, with the Arts Council formally agreeing to serve as the Chautauqua's nonprofit fundraising arm for the rebuild.

A new, re-energized fundraising team began raising the funds. Meetings took place at chair Tom Ebright's house on Harvard Avenue, with a direct view of the Playhouse site for inspiration.

In March, a crane returned to Gretna, this time to raise the game-changing trusses for the new building.

A May opinion piece in the *Lebanon Daily News* summed up the community's journey to rebuild. "... They moved quickly — perhaps too quickly — with



Above: The new Playhouse trusses as they went up in March 1995.



A crowd of 400 people listen Sunday afternoon as the newly rebuilt Mount Gretna Playhouse is dedicated.

a plan to restore the facility to its former grandeur — and then some. They stepped forward with an ambitious building plan, but then reality set in. They regrouped, and came back with a more modest proposal. And, they haven't looked back since."

On Sunday, May 28, 1995, the day dawned mild and humid beneath a cover of clouds. By the time people gathered for the Playhouse's 2 p.m. rededication ceremony, temperatures had climbed to around 70 degrees, with intervals of sunshine and a light breeze passing through the Chautauqua grounds.

The day was a far cry from the brutal cold and snow the previous year that had precipitated the need for this event.

Four hundred people gathered under the Playhouse's new roof to celebrate its return. The *Intelligencer Journal* reported guests were seated by ushers "no older than 20" at Chautauqua secretary Dale Grundon's insistence. "They are the ones who are going to have to take care of this down the road," he said.

The pastor of Mount Gretna's United Methodist Church offered the invocation, with leaders offering remarks alongside readings and music.

"Fifteen months ago, I knew this day would happen," the *Lancaster New Era* reported Chautauqua president Karl Gettle telling the crowd. "Nine months ago, I wasn't so sure."

"We've raised 60 percent of the cost to build and maintain the playhouse," Ebright announced in *Lancaster New Era* coverage from that day. "We hope to be debt-free by Christmas." He added that fundraising outreach would continue until remaining costs were covered.

A highlight of the event was the return of the finial to the Playhouse's roof. Two men had the honor of completing this task: Bill Care, who had recovered the finial, and local contractor John Balmer, who had restored it and was more accustomed to working at such heights.

"I didn't know finding it meant I had to get into a crane bucket and put the thing back up," the *Intelligencer Journal* recorded Care joking.

That day, the community had reason to celebrate. They had emerged, battered but resilient, from crisis.

The Playhouse once again stood ready to host the summer 1995 season that had nearly been lost.

And the curtain was now closed on a chapter as dramatic as any play ever performed on the Playhouse's stage. ➡

Stacy Schroeder, whose cottage neighbors the Playhouse, is the creative director of Mount Gretna Magazine. She is also the niece of John Balmer, the contractor mentioned above. Immersing herself in this story reminded her how much she enjoys historical research — something she hasn't pursued on this scale since co-authoring Nawakwa: 75 Years at the Camp in the Woods more than 20 years ago.

Left: Clipping from the *Lancaster New Era* of the Playhouse's May 28 rededication. ("Gretna dedicates playhouse," May 29, 1995, page 9).

Page 19: The Playhouse finial and cupola, summer 2026. Photo by Shannon Fretz Photography.

Postscript

The rebuilding of the Playhouse may have been complete, but its effects would continue shaping Mount Gretna for years to come.

Within weeks, Gretna Theatre and Gretna Music launched their summer seasons, joined by a new addition. The Cicada Festival was created in response to the community's desire for a broader range of performances and is still going strong today.

Final costs for the Playhouse rebuild and associated operating expenses eventually exceeded \$900,000, with the remaining financial obligations paid off within several years.

Questions about long-term management of the Playhouse persisted, as well as the need to maintain the tax-deductibility of the gifts that funded its rebuild.

These questions led the Chautauqua and the Arts Council to sign a 30-year operating lease effective Nov. 23, 1996. Under the agreement, the Arts Council leased the building for \$1 per year, assumed responsibility for its management, and shared oversight through a six-member operating committee evenly divided between Chautauqua and Arts Council appointees.

That lease expires this November, with Chautauqua's leadership choosing to resume management.

What If ...

Mount Gretna Magazine's mission is to build community. We seek to connect and inspire. Often, this work involves upholding common ground and sharing feel-good stories.

Sometimes, our work concerns inviting readers to explore how we can grow together around challenges we face.

The journey to rebuild the Playhouse captures so much of the community devotion that makes us Gretna. It also reminds us that Mount Gretna is anything but simple. Multiple homeowner associations, each with its own volunteer leadership and governance structure, exist alongside three municipal jurisdictions. Add in dozens of organizations and traditions, each with their own enthusiastic supporters, and it's easy to see why different perspectives emerge. Even communication follows its own Gretna rhythm, with some of the most efficient — though not always the most accurate — information exchanged in chance conversations outside the post office or on a Friday night at the Timbers.

All this shapes how decisions are made and how they are understood.

Of course, we frustrate each other at times.

Crises, such as what we experienced when the Playhouse roof collapsed in 1994, have a way of narrowing our perspective. Leaders and community members often experience the same crisis from different vantage points. What if the lesson of the Playhouse wasn't about what was right or wrong, but that each of us experiences only part of a much bigger picture? What if every perspective holds part of the truth?

Across Gretna today, we face some common issues, challenges that have urgency but are not yet emergencies: historic spaces that need upkeep. Environmental concerns, including trees and water. Infrastructure. Parking. Questions of year-round versus seasonal programming. Varied definitions of belonging: by neighborhood, by years of association, and by whether we call ourselves permanent residents, visitors, or somewhere in between.

These issues often come to the forefront during a crisis.

But what if ... we explored them now?

Inspired by reflective questions raised during the Playhouse rebuild, we've compiled a few of our own for readers to consider today:

What changes or improvements do we want to see in our community and what are we personally willing to do to help bring them about?

How can we work together on challenges that affect us across neighborhoods and organizations, even when our roles, responsibilities, and perspectives differ?

What can we learn from others addressing similar challenges — such as preservation of historic places, care of infrastructure and natural areas, and the scope and impact of visitor-focused programming?

Our Winter 2027 issue will explore how other communities respond to some of these same questions.



Above: Malika closely monitors her human (Sharon Stalker), and all who traverse the Mount Gretna Coffee Cottage's porch.
Page 21: Josephine gathers data from her Campmeeting cottage.
Photos by Shannon Fretz Photography.



CONFIDENTIAL:

Gretna Humans Under Observation

The official field notes of five local dogs

As told to Kevin C. Wells

Photos: Shannon Fretz Photography

Editor's Note: The following field notes were recovered from several well-chewed notebooks discovered beneath porches, beside walking paths, and suspiciously close to several tennis balls. The authors insist their observations are scientifically accurate.

Meet the Field Researchers

Josephine, companion to Ted Martin of Campmeeting. A recently adopted rescue dog who is blind, Josephine relies on her ears and nose rather than her eyes. She has become the coalition's wisest observer.

Livie, rescue dog and companion to Kevin C. Wells of Campmeeting. Despite having only three legs, Livie runs, jumps, plays, and investigates every squirrel, butterfly, rabbit, fellow canine, and friendly face she encounters. She considers every walk an expedition and every stranger a potential friend.

Winston, therapy dog and companion to Kevin C. Wells of Campmeeting. Winston is gentle, calm, and convinced that humans are generally doing their best.

Malika and Padme, service dogs to Brian and Sharon Stalker of Timber Road. Household supervisors and expert greeters, these dogs are firm believers that every returning human deserves an enthusiastic welcome.

OBSERVATION #1:

Two Distinct Human Habitats

Josephine: Our first discovery is that Mount Gretna humans occupy some surprisingly different habitats.

Padme: Describe yours.

Winston: Picture a forest.

Livie: Now tuck cozy cottages between the trees.

Josephine: Place them close enough that one porch conversation can drift to the next.

Livie: Then add neighbors walking everywhere.

Padme: Interesting.

Malika: Our humans have driveways, yards, and mailboxes.

Livie: You have your own mailbox?

Josephine: Different habitats.

Winston: Same wonderfully curious species.

OBSERVATION #7:

The Princeton Avenue Expedition

Livie: My dad always says, "Let's go get the mail."

Padme: My dad simply walks to the mailbox.

Livie: We walk all the way to Princeton Avenue.

Josephine: How long does the journey require?

Livie: That depends.

Winston: On how many neighbors we meet.

Livie: Yesterday we returned with two envelopes, one magazine, and conversations with six people.

Josephine: Remarkable.

Padme: Perhaps the mail isn't the real objective.

Winston: Our research supports that conclusion.

OBSERVATION #12:

Porch Sociology

Josephine: Each evening, Gretna humans gather on elevated wooden platforms called porches.

Malika: Refreshments are frequently involved. Even for us! Have you ever been to Tom & Kay's porch? Or Joe & Alexa's?

Padme: So are stories.

Livie: Sometimes they laugh before anyone has even finished talking.

Winston: No invitations appear necessary.

Josephine: Our findings suggest porches are where neighbors become friends and friends become family.

OBSERVATION #18:

Return-Home Ceremonies

Padme: When Mom returns from knitting, proper procedure requires immediate greeting.

Malika: Tail wagging is mandatory.

Livie: Even if she's only been gone an hour?

Padme: Especially then.

Winston: Humans seem comforted by knowing someone is delighted they've returned.

Josephine: A tradition worthy of preservation.

OBSERVATION #24:

Walking as a Social Activity

Livie: Humans never seem to walk in a straight line.

Josephine: Explain.

Livie: Someone waves.

Winston: Someone asks about a family member.

Padme: Someone admires flowers.



Left: Livie pauses mid-squirrel hunt for a “puparazzi” photo.
Below: Winston observes local activity from his post on a Gretna bench.
 Photos by Shannon Fretz Photography.



Malika: Someone bends down to pet a dog.

Livie: Sometimes they forget where they were headed.

Josephine: In Gretna, the journey appears to be more important than the destination.

OBSERVATION #31:

The Mystery of Kindness

A thoughtful silence settles over the committee.

Livie: Can I ask something serious?

Josephine: Always.

Livie: Why do humans rescue us?

Josephine: Dad welcomed me home even though I cannot see.

Livie: Kind people helped me heal. They couldn’t save my leg, but they saved me.

Padme: Mom and Dad have spent years preparing dogs to help people.

Malika: They celebrate every puppy who changes a life.

Winston: As a therapy dog, I’ve learned something.

Josephine: What is that?

Winston: Humans think they’re teaching us.

Livie: Aren’t they?

Winston: Sometimes.

Josephine: And sometimes we’re quietly teaching them.

CONCLUSION

Josephine: After months of observation, we have documented porch gatherings, walks beneath the trees, concerts floating through the atmosphere, mail expeditions, neighborhood greetings, and unusually high levels of friendliness.

Livie: Don’t forget ice cream.

Padme: Or welcoming humans home.

Malika: Or warming their feet whenever possible.

Winston: We’ve reached one conclusion.

Josephine: Gretna humans believe they’re just going about their daily lives.

Livie: But they’re really doing something much bigger.

Winston: They’re building a community.

Josephine: One porch conversation ...

Padme: One walk ...

Malika: One kind gesture ...

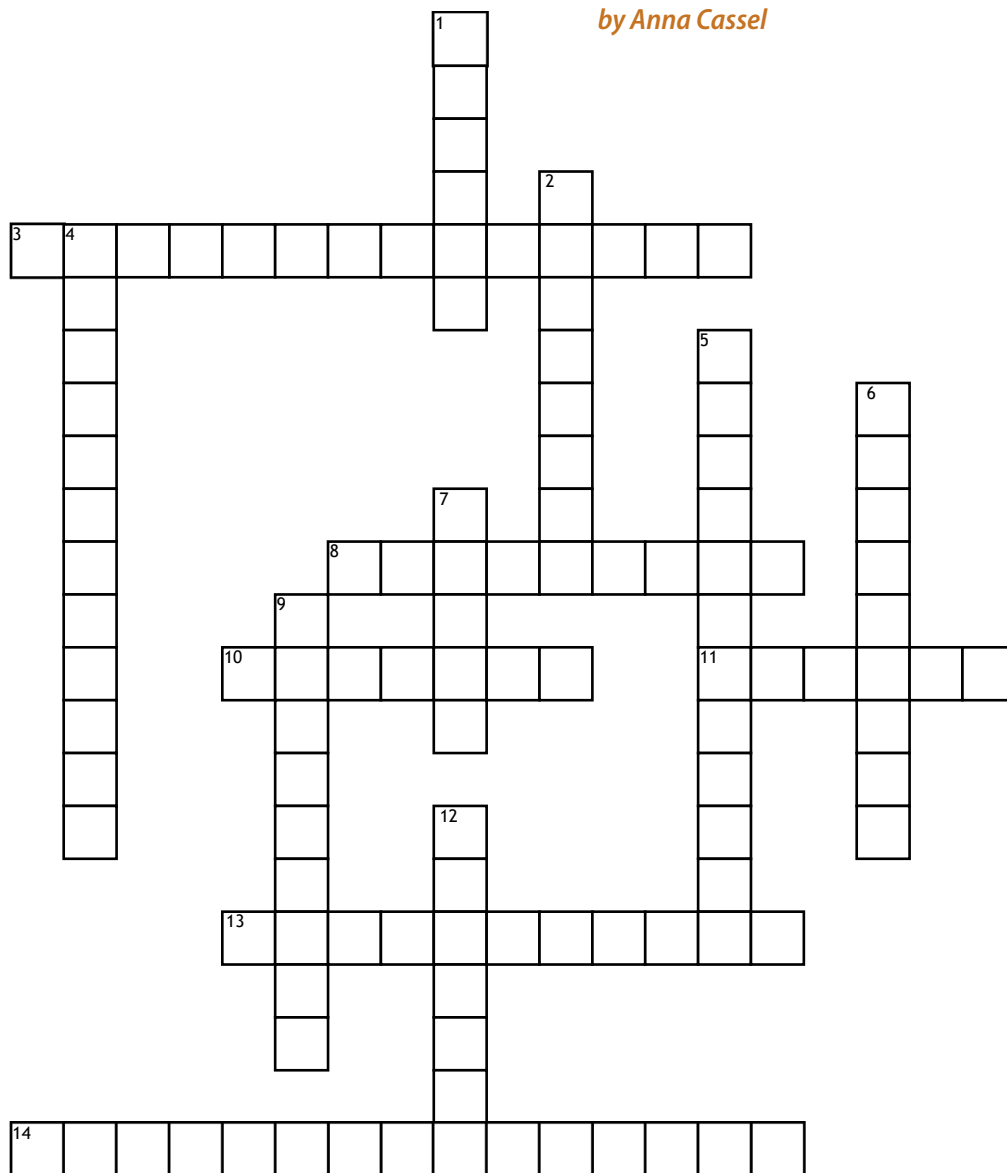
Livie: ... and one wagging tail at a time.

The meeting adjourned moments later when Livie reported an urgent squirrel-related development. 🐿️

Kevin C. Wells is a Mount Gretna resident whose work blends writing, education, and community service. He holds a Master of Science in organizational leadership, works in education administration, serves on the Mount Gretna Campmeeting Association Board of Managers, and supports local governance through the Derry Township Board of Supervisors. When he’s not writing, he’s often walking Winston and Livie through the Campmeeting, where many of this article’s “field observations” were undoubtedly collected.

FALL CROSSWORD

by Anna Cassel



ACROSS

- 3. Area for hunting in Mount Gretna
- 8. A man made of straw
- 10. A suspended outdoor bed perfect for snoozing
- 11. Nuts with a lid
- 13. The most popular Gretna neighborhood for trick-or-treating
- 14. Annual tradition with residents marching in costume

DOWN

- 1. They fall from Gretna's trees in many colors
- 2. Toast marshmallows over this
- 4. Let's count our blessings
- 5. Carved pumpkin
- 6. These animals collect nuts in the fall
- 7. An activity to do on the lake in the fall
- 9. This was originally home to train tracks
- 12. An ingredient used in many fall dishes

ABOUT THE CROSSWORD CREATOR: Anna Cassel's adventures growing up in Mount Gretna inspired this autumn-themed puzzle. A student at Palmyra Area Middle School, her Gretna favorites are bike riding on trails and swimming at the lake.

ANSWER KEY ON PAGE 26



Left: Sue Mechura (placing tile) and Rita van Alkemade (in scarf) play mah jongg on the porch of the Hall of Philosophy. The Chautauqua Summer Programs offered this activity on Monday afternoons throughout the summer of 2026.

Page 25: Bikers enjoy a local section of the Lebanon County Rail Trail.

The Gretna Effect

Aging in place takes on new meaning here

Story: Linda Brain Beck

Photos: Shannon Fretz Photography

Magical.

It's a word often used to describe Mount Gretna.

One quality making it magical is the active aging that occurs here, says Mount Gretna Heights resident Michelle Shay.

"There's a fountain-of-youth effect here. We walk. We get our mail. We have community events. Whether you like it or not, your neighbor knows who you are. And if you don't come out for a couple of days, they might knock on your door," she says. "I know so many people who have lived well into their 90s, even triple digits."

Michelle likens the effect to "Blue Zone" communities — areas where people supposedly live longer-than-average lives. The name comes from the blue ink researchers used to mark these regions on a map.

As part of this effort, researchers identified several lifestyle traits shared among these communities:

- Natural physical activity
- A sense of purpose
- Stress relief
- Healthy eating (along with some wine!)
- A sense of belonging
- Deep intergenerational family connections
- Strong social circles

More recently, the Blue Zone work has come under scrutiny. Some say the researchers used flawed data or faulty research methods to establish their claims of longevity. Additionally, one of the three creators trademarked the "Blue Zone" name, leading to criticism that the work had moved from science to pop culture.

Despite these objections, the traits identified through the research are widely recognized as contributors to wellness and longevity.

How does Gretna fit into this picture?

Longevity in the activity

Mount Gretna certainly has several factors that make it ideal for living longer, says Martha Peaslee Levine, M.D., professor of psychiatry and behavioral health at Penn State College of Medicine.

"There's much more interaction than I've experienced anywhere. It's the community — sharing a glass of wine on the deck or meeting new people when you go to events. Community is really the main thing," says Martha, a Chautauqua resident.

"We can't always pick family, but we can pick our neighbors and friends. I can attest to this being a community of caring," she continues. That sense of community helps combat loneliness and protect mental health.

Gretna's programs and events also help community members stay mentally sharp.

"Anytime you're learning something new, that's keeping you engaged," Martha says.

Gretna also gives those who live here a strong sense of purpose.

"In all of Gretna, there is a sense of something bigger than just each person," Martha continues. "Many people who live in Gretna are retired, but they had a full life of purpose before they moved here. It is hard to give that sense of purpose up. So, they find new purposes and pursue other interests."

Gretna is also set up for a lot of walking, which can help elevate mood and decrease depression, she adds.

"The whole vibe, the whole sense of Mount Gretna encourages walking," Martha says. "Even people who don't live here come to walk. There are unique pieces of art you discover or unusual cottages. There's a lot of adventure that invites you to get out there."

Walking into belonging

Jack and Ann Marie Stasko, who live about six miles from Gretna, travel here almost daily for a two- to three-mile walk.

Jack was born at his home in the Heights and, other than a stint in the U.S. Navy, has lived locally ever since. Together, Ann Marie, a Pottsville native, and Jack have lived in a home off Cider Press Road for 54 years.

They used to walk closer to home until traffic made it too risky. Then, they moved to the Lebanon Valley Rail Trail. Around the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, the couple started walking their current route from Soldiers Field up the Campmeeting hills and back again.

Although they weren't sure what kind of welcome to expect, they have felt the warmth of the community and have gotten to know multiple residents and their dogs.

"Here you have fresh air. We like to see the people we got to know," Jack says.

Naturally, their walk time often doubles due to their friendly chats.

A two-time breast cancer survivor, Ann Marie says she started walking to help with her recovery and then decided she could keep going.

"We feel better after walking," she says. "We always feel like we accomplished something for the day."

Former Chautauqua resident and author Bill Gifford agrees that cycling, hiking, and other opportunities for physical activity play a role in keeping the community healthy. In 2015, Bill wrote the book *Spring Chicken: Stay Young Forever (Or Die Trying)* that explores the science of human aging and includes references to several Gretna residents.

"If you're not active, that's a choice," Bill says. "The other thing it [Gretna] has in its favor is that it's hilly."

In addition to the sense of community and cultural engagement, Bill says Gretna benefits from a relatively high level of education. "High levels of education are strongly correlated with healthy longevity," he says.



Seyfert's Corn Maze
Photo by Kayla Williams

Pick your own adventure in the Lebanon Valley.

We invite you to explore the scenic trails, taste the fresh local flavors, and visit our welcoming towns and wide-open landscapes—perfect for outdoor enthusiasts, families, and weekend wanderers.

Visit our website for more information on accommodations, local dining options, and a full calendar of events.



VISIT
**Lebanon
Valley**

Where Small-Town Moments
Make Lasting Memories.

Discover more at VisitLebanonValley.com





Left: Community members gather inside the Mount Gretna Community Library for a July 2026 book discussion of Judith Tick's *Becoming Ella Fitzgerald*, led by Nicole Roberts (holding the book).

Below: A couple strolls along one of Gretna's many shady roads and pathways.



What to know about Gretna living

While Gretna has its magic, it also has challenges for residents as they age, says part-time Campmeeting resident Andy Berfond. He and his wife, Ellen, live most of the year in Lancaster. There, they are active with the Lancaster Downtowners, one of 300 local chapters of a national organization, the Village to Village Network.

Despite their name, Andy says the Downtowners aren't focused strictly on city living. It's more of a movement that helps people live in their homes as long as possible, he explains.

"Do we have that community spirit (in Gretna)? Yes, we do, but the year-round population is limited," Andy says. "Especially in the off-season, people are totally isolated unless you have neighbors who will look in on you to assist you to have what you need."

To age in Gretna, a person usually must be mobile enough to get up and down stairs. Although plenty of opportunities exist to get out, there are no doctors, dentists, or supermarkets within walking distance, Andy explains.

From his perspective, as long as people remain healthy and mobile, they can continue to enjoy the culture, spirituality, and common interests found in Gretna that make it a community of note.

In all, Martha concludes that not many places have what Gretna has — culture,

art, music, and engaging people in a natural setting that further connects the community.

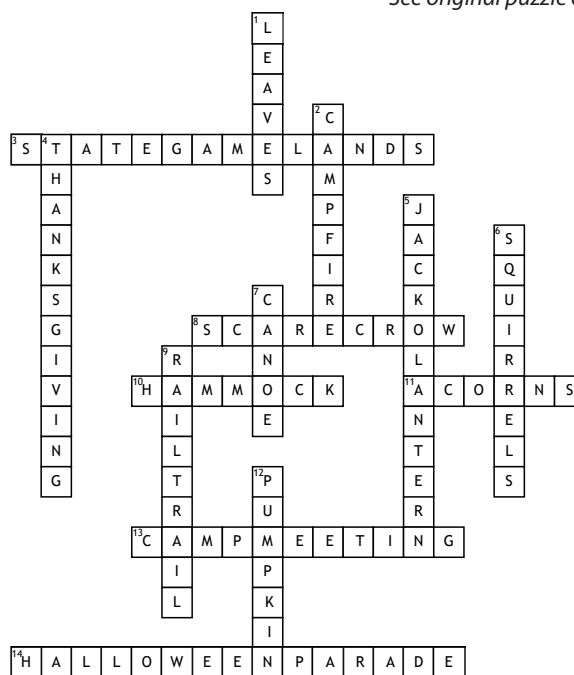
"It all intertwines to an extent," she says. "Each special thing seems to be here that amplifies the other."

While Gretna may not be perfect or qualify for a Blue Zone designation, most would still agree it's a magical place where the sense of community, purpose, and engagement will outlive us all. 🍷

Linda Brain Beck's diverse career spans corporate and academic realms. She teaches communication courses for HACC, Lebanon Valley College's MBA program, and Dale Carnegie. A seasoned speaker, she delivers keynotes and has given a TEDx presentation. With her husband, Ed, she co-manages a communications and leadership training company.

Answer Key for Fall Crossword

See original puzzle on page 23





Story: Meagan Cassel
Photos: Shannon Fretz Photography

Log Cabin Cozy



Top: The exterior of the cabin is well-kept and surrounded by greenery and colorful potted plants.
Above: Family and guests alike have many comfortable seating options both inside and outside the cabin.
Page 27: The entryway sets the tone of carefully curated rustic whimsy and natural treasures seen throughout the family home.

Of all the properties they might have admired in Mount Gretna, Roy Thomas and Jennifer Schlener-Thomas always had their eye on one particular Conewago Hill cabin. They never imagined, though, they'd be able to blend their love for Gretna and log homes.

One day in 2015, while they were out on a stroll, a “for sale by owner” sign launched their dream into reality. They bid farewell to their beloved tiny Campmeeting cottage of 20 years and set out across town to make “The Light House” their own.

Originally named for neighborhood developer Samuel Light, the cabin was built in 1946. It was the first structure to take shape on Conewago Hill after the Hotel Conewago was dismantled in 1940.

Four more log-style homes — among others — would follow on the loop overlooking Lake Conewago. Lumber for each was sourced from the chestnut forests in which Gretna was born. Construction followed a devastating tree blight that nearly eradicated the chestnut species.

Roy and Jennifer have sought to preserve this rich architectural legacy while infusing their own mountain style, too. Décor both inside and out — along with the cabin's new name, “The Moose Den” — is inspired by Hugo, the striking creature who presides over a carved mantle in the great room (*read more about Hugo in Gretna Trail Mix on page 4*).

Hugo is joined in the heart of the three-bedroom, two-bath home by a grand stone fireplace, expansive ceilings, and an open wooden staircase. This spot embodies the quintessential cozy log cabin vibe, making it one of Roy and Jennifer's favorites. From here, thoughtful touches carry into every meticulously curated corner of the house.

“My grandparents had a cottage on a lake in the Poconos near where I grew up,” says Roy of his inspiration, “so I was always in the woods.”

Roy's artistic talent is also on full display; he sketches and designs furniture, then works with carpenters to bring intricate custom pieces to life. The furnishings are complemented by Adirondack pieces that Roy and Jennifer gather on regular visits to the New York mountains.

The couple's fondness for the outdoors flows into a four-season sunroom, which they outfitted with heat to spend more time reading, puzzling, and enjoying the views year-round.

They're treated to 1.75 acres of wooded tranquility, most of it natural. A stunning landscaped oasis is carved into both the front and backyards, featuring water and fire features, plus a guest house. This time of year, Roy and Jennifer find it especially peaceful.

“Fall in Gretna, regardless of where you're living, is such a special time,” Jennifer says. “Up here, it is lovely. You are just in the middle of the season as these leaves are changing and falling. It's a very different perch from which we can experience the season.”

Roy and Jennifer share that perch with Conewago Hill neighbors they adore, but it's no question the full town tugs at their hearts.

"I still remember that first time I came to visit and was driving down Pinch [Road] thinking, 'What am I driving into?'" reflects Jennifer. "Just like we tell visitors, it feels like you're driving into a fairy tale, especially at dusk when all of those cottages are lit up. It's such a special place." 🌿

Meagan Cassel is a digital marketer and active volunteer in Gretna. She and her family are blessed to have Roy and Jennifer as wooded backyard neighbors.

Right: An aerial view of the cabin's grand living room, presided over by Hugo the Moose.

Below: Rustic twig chairs serve as a delightful resting place for a variety of potted plants.



Left: A prized hutch designed by Roy displays some of the family's treasures.

Below: The sun room, where Jen likes to work on puzzles, also sports a framed collection of Mount Gretna Art Show posters.

Turning your dreams into reality

ELM

RENOVATIONS & CONSTRUCTION

LITITZ, PA
717-626-8558
www.ElmRenCo.com



Gretna TRAIL MIX

Sweet, sometimes nutty, rarely salty — snippets of Gretna life and the stories behind our pages.



The Story of Hugo the Moose

Outtakes from “Log Cabin Cozy” on page 27:

Hugo brings quite the legacy to his namesake log cabin home. The moose was originally captured years ago on a hunting trip to Nova Scotia by a family friend of Moose Den homeowner Roy Thomas. Upon return to camp, the hunter and moose stayed behind when their group’s combined weight exceeded their helicopter’s capacity. Tragically, the helicopter crashed, and all on board perished. Hugo had saved his captor’s life.

Jennifer Schlener-Thomas purchased the moose for her husband Roy when their friend was looking for its next home. The massive creature was too big to hang over their original fireplace in Campmeeting, but that didn’t stop Roy

and Jennifer from including him. Hugo looked out the front windows from the tiny cottage’s staircase wall and has since made the move to his more fitting spot on Conewago Hill.

“Nothing says love like taxidermy!” jokes Jennifer. In all seriousness, though, she adds, “There’s something special about Hugo.” It’s no wonder the moose inspired the story and décor of their Gretna mountain home. — *Meagan Cassel*

More on the Gretna Effect

Outtakes from our story on page 24

Bill Gifford, the former Chautauqua resident mentioned in the “Blue Zone” story, has authored numerous books, including his most recent one called *Hotwired: How the Hidden Power of Heat Makes Us Stronger*. He also collaborated in writing *Outlive: The Science and Art of Longevity* with Dr. Peter Attia. He calls Gretna “kind of like a mini Blue Zone. It has a lot of key ingredients like other Blue Zones around the world.”

“There are a lot of things for people to get involved with and have a sense of purpose. You can’t walk to the grocery store, but you can walk to the pizza shop or the bar or a couple of theaters or a mountain and houses of friends,” Bill said. “Everyone can walk to the post office and see friends.”

— *Linda Brain Beck*

Gretna is a downshift if you let it happen. Walks and nature, listening to birds, wine on the porch. The only time this isn’t true is when the power goes out. Then stress is amplified!

— *Martha Peaslee Levine*

When we first came here, I met these amazing women — four of them — who were in their 80s when I moved here. They had lost their husbands when their kids were little and raised their kids independently at a time when that was not common. Mount Gretna was part of the stage that made that possible.

— *Michelle Shay*

Loving and Tending Our Land

For more, see “The Land We Share” on page 6

When we were young, anecdotally, it would be cool when you saw a deer. And now it’s like, “Get out of my way, deer!” In the neighborhoods, they’re brazen, they’ll stare you down and not get out of the way. — *Ryan Fretz*

I know that even if I’m trying to be a passive observer, if I see a non-native vine that’s climbing a tree, I have to cut it. It makes it a little less passive, because I can see where a

small interaction can make a big difference, and that activates me constantly. — *Wilson Alvarez*

I get emotional, because it's like a little hamlet, like there's a spirit here. Part of it is the nature and ecology. It is so special, and you need to keep it. I hear people say it's been here 134 years and it's fine. But things have changed. — *Deb Simpson*



Creative Reading Suggestion

Outtakes from “Where the Wind Leads” on page 10

Mount Gretna-based artist Morgan Pallas has built her career and created her nature-themed art on evoking inspiration from Gretna's fairy-like and cozy cottage feelings. She has also built her career on hard work and consistency, crediting the book *The War of Art: Break Through the Blocks and Win Your Inner Creative Battles* by Steven Pressfield. She says this book is a must read for any aspiring creators or someone simply looking for discipline.

“He talks about showing up every day and doing your work, and I find that to be so true. Show up, do your work, and inspiration comes in and keeps coming in. The muse will keep feeding you ideas,” Pallas says. — *Katy Shero*

Memories of the Playhouse Rebuild

For more, see “After the Fall” on page 12

The new Playhouse opened on June 10, 1995, with Broadway star Laurie Beechman performing to a standing-room-only crowd for Gretna Theatre's season opener. Laurie had donated to the rebuild. Gretna loved her, and she loved Gretna, staying in one of its Victorian cottages every year when she visited. Just three years earlier in Gretna's parking lot, her future husband had even asked her mother for permission to marry her. — *Stacy Schroeder*

As a member of Chautauqua's Board and the architectural committee for the rebuild, musician and founder of Gretna Music Carl Ellenberger advocated for acoustics to be a priority in the new Playhouse.

“It was remarkable ... the size of the [summer 1994] tent and the alacrity with which it went up. An amazing space to be in. The experience of playing on the stage, though, was not

that different from the old Playhouse. [Neither] contributed any enhancement or natural resonance,” he says. “It was like playing in a field with nothing to stop the sound.”

Carl thought his entreaties were in vain until acoustical modifications were made to the new Playhouse in its second year. “This Playhouse is one of the very best outside sites — and better than many inside ones — for live, unamplified music. I brag about it all the time.” — *Stacy Schroeder*

On the final fundraising effort for the Playhouse rebuild:

[Tom] Ebright was a genius. He went to everyone he knew and got them to contribute. We all did our parts but Tom raised much of it. Without Tom, we wouldn't have the Playhouse. — *Tom Clemens*

You can have a million ideas but they don't matter if you do not have the money. The first I felt confident we would have a new building is when Tom Ebright got involved. He deserves a lot of credit. I enjoyed this project. When everyone finally came together, it went smoothly and was awesome.

— *Bill Care*

Reader Voices: Gretna Time Capsule

The item I'd like to place in a Gretna time capsule to be opened 100 years from now is ...

A hymnal from the Tabernacle. — *Catherine Schrader*

A copy of the summer calendar book and the Chautauqua summer programs schedule. I'd also enclose the Bible Festival calendar, Cicada concerts, Music at Gretna, and Larry McKenna's Summer Concerts flyer. Together with the summer edition of *Mount Gretna Magazine*, they'd provide a great picture of the summer of 2026. — *Fred Opalinski*

All the knowledge floating around in Bill Care's brain from almost 50 years of employment here at the Mount Gretna Borough, Mount Gretna Authority, and the Pennsylvania Chautauqua. — *Betsy Goepfert*

A mug from The Jigger Shop! — *Téa Ceresini*

It has been 100 years of the [Mount Gretna] Tennis Club, so I'd add a tennis racket. — *Sandra Moritz*

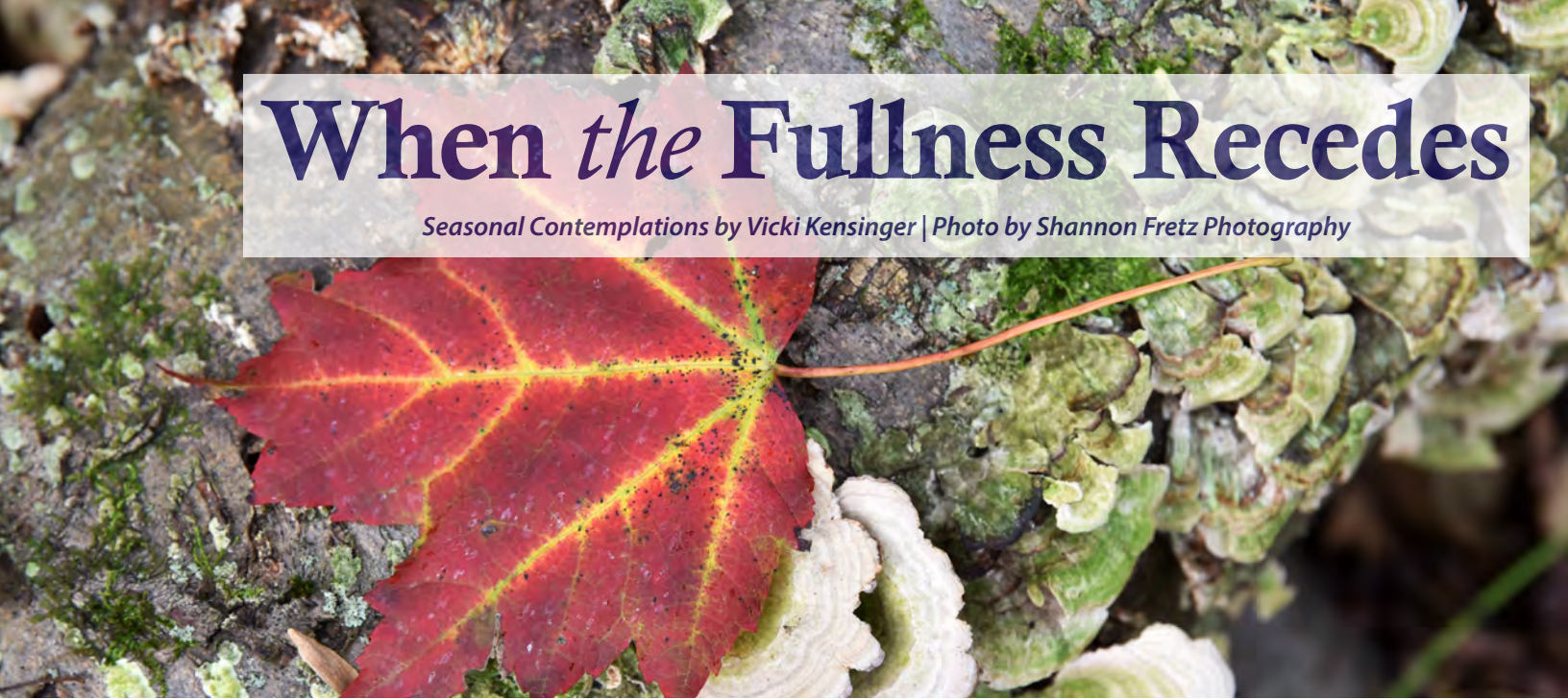
Readers ... this space is for you too! We invite you to share your short tidbits and witty observations of life in Gretna. We will publish as many as we can here, with a light editorial touch. Share stories via the form at MountGretnaMagazine.org/contact.

Our Next Reader Voices Question

Respond by Oct. 30 at MountGretnaMagazine.org/Reader-Voices

What's a small thing that makes our community feel like home?

Correction: On page 3 of our Summer 2026 print edition, we incorrectly identified MG Mercantile owner Dayna Bernard's last name. We apologize for the error.



When *the* Fullness Recedes

Seasonal Contemplations by Vicki Kensinger | Photo by Shannon Fretz Photography

As the circle of the year, and of our lives, turns toward autumn, there comes a welcome slowing down. As leaves let go and the canopy thins, opening to sky, a certain spaciousness is offered and received by those of us below. In that opening, we can see a bit farther. The fullness of summer dwindles and shifts, and the structure of the forest—the bones of trees—and the shape of our lives are more easily seen.

Summer was a season of abundance—the forest full of leaves, flowers, birdsong, movement and possibility. There was more than we could ever attend to. As we walked through those summer woods, we could not stop to notice every leaf, every flower, every small movement. Instead, we abided within the abundance, receiving what came to our attention and allowing the rest to simply be.

Autumn begins to quiet that abundance. The leaves let go. The flowers fade. The canopy opens. There is less demanding our attention, and in that lessening, there is space to notice what remains. What was hidden by the fullness of summer becomes visible: the shape of the branches, the structure of the trees, the spaces between them. The forest is not diminished by this letting go. It is simply revealing another part of itself.

Perhaps autumn offers us something similar.

Our attention is drawn from scattered busyness toward a more focused rhythm. The slowing may be welcome for some, while for others the more structured days of autumn return, shifting from carefree summer days to something more predictable and steady. Yet even within that routine, there can be a quieting of demand.

As the season progresses, a crispness in the air invites a bundling up in layers. Even as the earth itself is blanketed by falling leaves, so we blanket ourselves. What was exposed in the heat of summer is enfolded and drawn inward. Autumn invites us to hold some things close, to turn inward, and to reflect upon the season of our own lives as the wheel continues to turn.

Perhaps autumn does not ask us simply to do less, but to attend differently. To notice what remains when the fullness recedes.

To recognize what is ours to carry and what we might be ready to release. To make room for the quiet in which we can see, perhaps a little more clearly, the shape of the life we are living.

The trees do not resist the letting go. They release what they have carried all summer, making room for what comes next. And as the leaves fall and the forest becomes more transparent, perhaps we, too, are invited to look more honestly at the shape of our lives — the branches that have grown, the places that have endured, the things we are ready to release, and the things worth holding close.

What is autumn revealing to you? 🍂

Vicki Kensinger is a lover of the healing power of the written word and the natural world. Her daily journaling practice takes her into the wild terrain of the inner landscape, while her wilderness excursions carry her deep into the backcountry of Ontario via canoe. Mother of five and Gaga to 10, she lives in Mount Gretna with her husband, Don. She blogs at EmmaatLast.wordpress.com and AnAlgonquinAffair.wordpress.com.

AS YOU GO

For our first five issues, Vicki Kensinger has occupied a special place in *Mount Gretna Magazine*: the final voice readers encounter before closing each issue. She has invited us to slow down, pay attention to the changing world around us, and live a little more intentionally. We are grateful for the thoughtfulness she has brought to these pages.

Thank you, Vicki.

Beginning next year, this final invitation will continue in a new form. In each issue, this last editorial page will pair a full-page photograph with a few carefully chosen words, drawn from our readers, community, or story subjects.

This page will still be a place to pause after the stories have been told — a moment to notice. And we hope it will offer something to carry with you as you close the magazine and return to the world beyond these pages.

Local Business DIRECTORY

Our advertisers throughout this issue — including the businesses below — help our community thrive and make this magazine possible. We hope you will reach out, visit, and discover what they offer. Like to see your business listed here? Reserve your place by contacting Janice@MountGretnaMagazine.org.

AUTOMOTIVE

Cassel's Auto Service — 717-838-6741
CasselsAuto.com

CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

Mount Gretna Nursery School — 717-964-2208
MGUMC@verizon.net

DINING

Ancestor Coffeehouse and Crêperie — Three great sites
AncestorCoffee.com

ELECTRICIANS

Dourte Electric — 717-272-6522

FINANCIAL ADVISING

SWC Financial Advisors — 717-319-4043
SWCFinancialadvisors.com

INSULATION

Weaver Weatherization — 717-450-3286
WeaverWeatherization.com

MORTGAGE LENDING

Melissa Mattison NMLS# 446777 — 717-269-7283
Northwest.MyMortgage-Online.com/MelissaMattison.html

PLUMBING

Eberly Plumbing — 717-926-8724
New Construction Plumbing

REALTORS

Michelle Shay, Realtor — 717-813-3880
MichelleShayHomes.com

Rhoda Long, Realtor — 717-304-0248
RhodaLong.Homesale.com

RECREATION

Gretna Gearworks — 717-229-5010
GretnaGearworks.Bike

Get Away To Gretna

TURN YOUR VISIT INTO A WEEKEND.

Gretna and Lebanon County are ready to welcome you.

Set the stage

Book your stay. Find lodging, events, dining, and more.

Activities inspired by this issue

Go on a fall woodlarking adventure (pages 2 and 32)

Learn more about Gretna's history (pages 4 and 12)

Climb the tower at Governor Dick (page 6)

Grab some watercolors and create something unique (page 10)

Try to spot Gretna's canine field experts at work (page 20)

Experience the Gretna effect for yourself (page 24)

Curl up on a porch rocker (or in front of a fire, depending on the weather) to read this magazine

Discover Gretna in all seasons.

START YOUR EXPLORATION TODAY
MountGretnaMagazine.org/Mount-Gretna

Mt. Gretna



HIDE-A-WAY

.Restaurant.

TAVERN & DECK



MtGretnaHideaway.com