

WEST END LIVING

“The Most Wonderful Time of the Year”

The St. Patrick’s Day parade marks the unofficial start of spring for West Enders (and their party guests).

By Meghan Kita

Ever since Allentown’s St. Patrick’s Day parade moved to the West End, parade weekend is when the neighborhood comes out of hibernation — even when the weather doesn’t necessarily merit it. Just ask Kathleen Paxson, a Liberty Street resident and past winner of the parade’s house decorating and porch party contest. She hosts dozens of people at her rowhome each year, regardless of conditions. Her neighbors do, too. One March, it snowed, and they all shoveled their front lawns to ensure they could accommodate parade revelers.

“We had the party and people said, ‘Were you in a bubble? What happened to all your snow?’” she said. “It’s better attended when it’s warmer, but the troupers still come out when it’s not.”

Paxson, who moved to Liberty Street in 1995, remembers marching in the Allen High School band along the old parade route,

which went down Hamilton Street. Parade organizers relocated to the West End in 2008 hoping for better attendance, with then-parade-chairman John Chaya telling *The Morning Call* that the route had “more houses with front porches where people can actually view the parade.”

The porches have become almost as big a spectacle as the parade, thanks largely to the late Rosie Kennedy, who made her Liberty Street block (where Paxson also lives) an epicenter for lively porch parties and over-the-top decor. She won the house decorating and porch party contest many times; after her passing in 2023, the parade committee renamed it the Annual Rose Kennedy House Decorating and Porch Party Contest.

“She just loved St. Patrick’s Day and all things Irish — the

camaraderie in the neighborhood, she was a huge advocate. She went to all the events all weekend,” said Rosie’s daughter Rachel Kennedy Holmes, who now lives in her mother’s former home and volunteers on the parade committee. “She called it ‘the most wonderful time of the year.’”

Paxson calls it the same thing. She starts checking parade-weekend weather in January (44 degrees and cloudy, said the two-month extended forecast). She takes a couple days off from work to prep for parade day and a couple more to recover. Her new decor this year includes a fabric sheet that looks like the inside of an Irish pub that will cover her whole window;



PHOTO COURTESY OF KATHLEEN PAXSON

Liberty Street homes and partiers decked out for St. Paddy’s Day.

returning decor includes a blow-up leprechaun named Seamus. The year she won the contest, she thinks she may have been dancing on the sidewalk with Seamus.

But, “it’s not about the winning,” Paxson said. “It’s about people coming together and just having a really good time.” ■



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St. Luke's Uses AI in Hospitals to Head Off Cardiac Arrest and Other Problems

When you or a loved one is admitted to the hospital's medical-surgery (med-surg) unit St. Luke's University Health Network has an award-winning extra layer of care.

All med-surg units at St. Luke's use a proprietary artificial intelligence (AI) tool to predict, identify and rapidly address the needs of its admitted or under-observation patients to reduce unanticipated transfers to the ICU – and save lives.

It's like a superhero sidekick: AI that watches over people in the hospital every second of every day, awake or sleeping.

This tool looks at metrics such as heart rate, blood pressure, breathing, lab work, patient age and nursing documentation in real time at all 16 St. Luke's campuses.

The information is transmitted to the St. Luke's Virtual Response Center, which is staffed by a team of registered nurses who, depending upon a patient's deterioration score, can alert the patient's bedside nurse, a nursing supervisor, or in the more rapidly deteriorating patients, alert St. Luke's rapid response team (RRT) to identify and treat patients early, before they require transfer to the ICU or have a sudden cardiac arrest in the med-surg unit.

St. Luke's utilization of the AI tool called Epic's Deterioration Index has been recognized by The Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania (HAP) with a 2025 "In Safe Hands" Achievement Award" for the initiative that provided significant measurable gains in operational, quality and financial metrics while reducing cardiac arrest events, overall morbidity and mortality.

AI

This proactive approach led to a 34% reduction in cardiac arrests and a 12% drop in rapid response transfers to the ICU, with survival rates climbing from 24% to 36%.

Beyond clinical outcomes, the Deterioration Index predictive model has helped to deliver measurable budgetary impact, saving \$1.75 million in 2024 by avoiding unnecessary ICU transfers.

"Humans could essentially calculate these risk scores," said Julie Tanhauser, Information Technology Strategic Planner at St. Luke's, "but we can't continuously do it every second for every patient among hundreds of patients on our 16 campuses.

That's your AI piece."

The Deterioration Index trans-forms patient safety through predictive analytics.

Today, the initiative is deeply embedded in St. Luke's workflow for physicians, nurses and advanced practitioners so they are alerted immediately when a patient's Deterioration Index score crosses critical thresholds before something goes critically wrong, allowing providers and nurses a chance to intervene faster with the proper treatment.

As part of the Network's broader AI strategy, the Deterioration Index exemplifies how machine learning can be responsibly integrated into care delivery, improving outcomes while still preserving and enhancing clinician judgment.

This initiative has enhanced patient care outcomes by improving survival rates, diminishing unexpected ICU transfers, and lowering code blue (cardiac arrests) incidents over a period of three fiscal years. ■

Thank You to our West End Alliance Cornerstone Partners

WEA Cornerstone Partners commit to a year-long investment in our neighborhood and WEA activities. We are grateful for their support. For more information on becoming a Cornerstone Partner, contact Michael Drabenstott at (610) 417-0503.



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PHOTO BY BILL BASTA

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WEST END LIVING

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City of Allentown

List of City-Run Events 2026

**March
28**

**Mayor's 4th Annual
Egg Hunt**
Jordan Park | 12 – 2p.m.

**April
18**

Earth Day
Cedar Beach Park
12 – 4p.m.

**May
22**

Irving Street Block Party
Irving Park & Pool
3:30 – 6:30p.m.

**June
19-21**

**Juneteenth Celebration &
Basketball Tournament**
Cedar Beach Park
6/19 Flag raising | City Hall | 12p.m.

**July
04**

**Fourth of July Celebration
& Fireworks**
Cedar Beach Park
12– 10p.m.

**Aug
09**

Classics & Cruisers
Downtown Allentown
12– 4p.m.

**Oct
31**

Halloween Walking Parade
Downtown Allentown
11a.m. – 2p.m.

**Nov
01**

Día de los Muertos
Arts Park
2 – 7p.m.

**Nov Jan
27-06**

Lights in the Parkway
Lehigh Parkway
5:30 – 10p.m.

Monday Nights at Lights
11/30 – 30th Celebration
12/7 – Hanukkah
12/14 – Polar Express
12/21 – Christmas
12/28 – Kwanzaa
1/4 – Three Kings

Visit allentownpa.gov/cityevents for more info!

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COLLEGE NEWS

Muhlenberg College Launches "Summer Institute":

A Two-Week Immersive Experience for High School Students

Starting this summer, a new pre-college program at Muhlenberg College is designed to give high school juniors and seniors a comprehensive "test drive" of college life and academics.

The Muhlenberg Summer Institute is a two-week residential program running from June 28 through July 11 designed to foster personal growth. Participants can commute or reside in Muhlenberg's dormitories, and a range of activities will help them transition from high school expectations to the independence of college life.

Participants will move beyond the traditional classroom to engage in collaborative research and build professional portfolios that will benefit them in the college application process.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MUHLENBERG COLLEGE

The 2026 summer line-up includes:

■ **New Media, Journalism, and the Search for Truth:**

An exploration of news sourcing and the ethics of modern reporting.

■ **From Posts to Paychecks:**

A deep dive into the economics and monetization of social media.

■ **Innovation, Creativity, and Entrepreneurship:**

A practical guide to how businesses are launched and sustained in the modern economy.

■ **Human Rights Advocacy:**

Empowering the next generation of leaders with tools to effect global change.

■ **The Science of Play:** Learn what play can tell us about the connection between the body and mind.

■ **Acting, Movement and Storytelling — Devising the Narrative Choreopoem:**

A workshop focused on honing performance skills and original storytelling.

"We are very excited to welcome talented high school students to our campus," said Muhlenberg President Kathleen Harring, Ph.D. "These programs give students an opportunity to explore new topics led by exceptional faculty and will give them a real taste of college life. Aside from an eye-opening two weeks, students will come away with an experience that will really benefit them in the college application process."

More information, including course details, tuition and registration are available online at muhlenberg.edu/summer-institute. ■

Historic Oakmont Tennis Club 107 Years of Red Clay Play

By Ron Epstein

Tennis anyone?

That has been the cry of many West End tennis enthusiasts for the past 107 years, since the founding of the Oakmont Tennis Club in 1919.

It all began at the Allentown Fairgrounds immediately after World War I.

During the war from 1917-1919, the grounds were used as an ambulatory army base called Camp Crane. Soldiers trained there before shipping out to the fighting front in Europe.

The war ended in November of 1918, but the camp didn't close until April of 1919. In the meantime, the soldiers who were waiting to go home were bored and in need of some kind of recreational activity, and tennis was becoming a popular sport.

The officers at the camp built six courts near the Fairgrounds.

On March 16, 1921, local residents founded Oakmont Tennis Club as a not-for-profit organization. The name Oakmont comes from a large oak tree that was at the original location near the Fairgrounds.

Over the next two years, as tennis became more popular, Oakmont outgrew its original location, and in 1923 the club purchased property from 21st to Lucas streets and from Allen to Tilghman streets, (2101 Allen St.) and built nine red clay courts.

Beginning in 1926, Oakmont hosted the Pennsylvania Court Championships, attracting world class players to its courts. In 1947 the Clay Court Championships moved from Oakmont to the Country Club of Harrisburg.

Oakmont has hosted great players such as Jimmy Connors and Bobby Riggs, who appeared sometime in the 1960's, long before his match and comic foil with Billy Jean King. Also appearing in the sixties was Don Budge, famous as the first tennis player to win all four Grand Slam tournaments in one year. More recently Varvara Levchenko appeared at Oakmont. In addition, Merv Heller, who was a junior development Instructor there in the late sixties went on to become the President of the United States Tennis Association.

Keeping Oakmont updated

The tennis courts' original clubhouse was a one-room structure built in the 1920s. Later, a men's locker room was added, and in a few years, a ladies locker room and a kitchen and pro shop were added. The prefabricated structures were built by Sears Roebuck.

In 1999, all five of those buildings were torn down, and the present clubhouse was completed in 2000. It includes a social room with a TV, men's and women's locker rooms with day lockers and showers, a water cooler and a refrigerator in a mini-kitchen area.

The clubhouse has a porch with several white rocking chairs where spectators often sit, rock and chat with other members and watch tennis games.

Oakmont has also upgraded its irrigation system, remodeled its shed and put in a new clubhouse deck, fencing, custom court benches and new net posts and wind screens.

Before and during the 1960's, it was not uncommon to see about 100 kids playing tennis at the



PHOTOS BY BILL BASTA

junior courts as part of junior development.

While there were nine courts at Oakmont, the eighth and ninth courts were rarely used. The lots those courts were on were sold to a contractor to build the apartments and to another to create the parking lot in the back.

For decades, William Allen High School has used Oakmont for its the boys' and girls' tennis team.

What makes Oakmont special

In an age where hard courts dominate, Oakmont is one of the few tennis clubs in Pennsylvania to use red clay, which back in the day was brought in every two years or so from construction sites and cemeteries. Picks and shovels would be used by the labor force to screen the red clay that was placed on the courts daily. Sand was used as a topper. Later, they began to use red brick dust, which is made of pulverized brick.

In the early years, the lines on the courts were made daily using lime and water. Today the club members put down vinyl lines at the beginning of the season, which are applied to the red clay using 2,002 nails per court, a very labor-intensive ordeal. These lines remain in place until the club

closes in late October, when they are picked up, stored and used the following season.

Oakmont members work hard to keep the courts in pristine condition during the tennis season, March through October.

Oakmont is people

Oakmont has had many presidents in its history including Jeff Wenck whose family has helped manage Oakmont since 1959. His mother served on the board of directors from 1959-1987. Jeff has served from 1988-2023, and his son Kevin since 2005.

His mother and wife have both been secretary, Jeff has been treasurer, vice president and club president in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2017 and 2018. Three generations of the Wenck family have served Oakmont, and they are working on the fourth. The current president is Marc Basist.

"Our club is thriving, with a great mix of men, women, families and children playing," Basist says. "As a members club, we volunteer our time, which keeps our membership fees in check. In fact, our current membership fee is less than it was 25 years ago."

In 2019, Oakmont celebrated 100 years of tennis in Allentown's West End, and it's likely that a century from now people will continue to play on the seven red clay courts of the historic Oakmont Tennis Club.

If you want to learn more about or join Oakmont Tennis Club, visit Oakmonttennis.com.

Join before March 31 and you'll save \$75 off the membership fee. ■



Lee Butz Loved Growing Up in the West End

By Rob Stevens

At age 92, Lee Butz has never moved far from Allentown's West End, a neighborhood that holds a special place in his heart and lives vividly in his memory.

He was born in a half-twin on North 21st St. in 1933 and today lives just a few miles to the west with his wife, Dolly, in a spacious, modern home overlooking the Allentown Municipal Golf Course.

Butz recalls the joys and adventures of his early days in the West End as it grew into the home to thousands of residents, as well as businesses, schools and places of worship.

With a razor-sharp memory, he recounts tales of his youth in the area peppered with more vacant lots than houses and wild, open fields where his carefree childhood unfolded. Here, he and his pals would explore the mysteries of

their surroundings and play sports and Robin Hood.

They biked, played ball and swam at Cedar Beach when the pool was a mere "muddy pond" for cooling off on a hot summer day.

Moving West

When he was four, his family — Dad, Alvin, founder of the Alvin H. Butz, Inc. construction company, Mom Elmira, and his sister, Barbara, moved a few blocks west to a single, brick colonial on 26th and Allen Streets.

Butz and his friends were together and active all the time, he says.

"We played outside till it was dark, then hung out at home which became our 'clubhouse.'"

His father bought one of the first TV sets in the neighborhood, a small black-and-white flickering box that became a magnet for



Lee Butz (center) visited his childhood home at 26th and Allen Sts., guest of (L-R) Keenan Michalak, Margaret Michalak, children of Kristin Keenan—owner of the home with husband Eric Rutt—and Kristin's parents Mike and Maureen Keenan.

family, friends and neighbors. Some would view it from outside, stopping by as they strolled along Allen Street on summer evenings. They often were invited in to witness this fascinating, new form of entertainment.

But life wasn't all fun and games for kids. There was school, at Muhlenberg Elementary, to which Butz and his buddies would roller skate with "clip-ons"; Raub Junior High; and Allentown High School. There were home chores and homework, too.

During World War II, residents had to lower their window shades after dark so "enemy bombers wouldn't see lights of the town," Butz says. "We also did safety defense drills in school, and every neighborhood had an air-raid warden who wore a helmet and carried a gas mask and Billy club," he reports. "I'm not sure what the Billy club was for," he admits with a chuckle.

There were no restaurants and only a few grocery stores in the neighborhood. Muhlenberg College was nearby and Tilghman Street served as Rt. 22 linking the western counties to New Jersey and New York.

Current Home

Today, he gives an occasional tour of the home on Trexler Boulevard, which their son, Eric, an architect, designed in 2000. It's an impressive concrete, steel and glass structure with many right angles and views all around it.

"Eric is a great architect," his father says proudly. Butz and his wife are also parents of a daughter, Shari, and son Greg, who is currently the president and CEO of Alvin H. Butz, Inc., the successful and highly respected family-run

Lehigh Valley construction firm. All their children were born at The Allentown Hospital.

Guests marvel at Butz's collection of modern art, his high-end music listening room; historic baseball collection (with balls signed by Mantle, Ruth and Maris); and a 16-seat theater where the family watches movies and sports.

Butz lived at the 26th and Allen Streets home while attending Lehigh University where he majored in civil engineering, then joined his father's firm. He was drafted into the army and stationed for two years at Fort Knox, Kentucky, where he mostly played baseball, a life-long passion. When he and Dolly married, they bought a home at 22nd and Livingston Sts, then moved to their first Trexler Blvd. house.

"We never considered living anywhere else," he says. "We've had too many childhood friends and family to leave them."

He ran the Butz Company for 45 years, moving its headquarters to 18th and Allen Sts. for nine of them. He still serves as its board chairman.

Today, the West End bustles with commercial, residential and cultural life. The Butz family still attends, enjoys and generously supports the Theater District and dines in its restaurants.

Butz hasn't lived there since 1957, but he did visit the home on 26th and Allen last year, invited by Mike Keenan, father of Kristin Kennan, who owns the home with her husband, Eric Rutt. He enjoyed reminiscing with his hosts about his easy early days, deftly linking past with present.

"The West End was a wonderful place to grow up," he says. "And it's still a special place to live." ■

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The 67th Annual Allentown St. Patrick's Parade

will take place on

Sunday, March 22nd at 1:30 pm

Schedule of Events

West End Pub Crawl	Saturday, March 14	5:00pm	Sponsoring West End Pubs
Flag Raising	Tuesday, March 17	11:45am	Allentown City Hall 435 Hamilton Street
Coronation Celebration	Friday, March 20	7:30pm - 11:00pm (Doors open at 7:00)	AgriPlex, Charles Hall Allentown Fairgrounds
Irish Community Day	Saturday, March 21	Noon - 3:00pm	AgriPlex, Charles Hall Allentown Fairgrounds
St. Patrick's Parade Mass	Sunday, March 22	9:00am	Immaculate Conception Church, 501 Ridge Avenue
West End St. Pat's 5K	Sunday, March 22	12:00pm sharp	Memorial Hall, Muhlenberg College, 2300 block, Liberty Street
Grand Massed Pipe Band Exhibition	Sunday, March 22	1:00pm	500 block of N. 19th Street
St. Patrick's Parade	Sunday, March 22	1:30pm	Beginning at the Fairgrounds

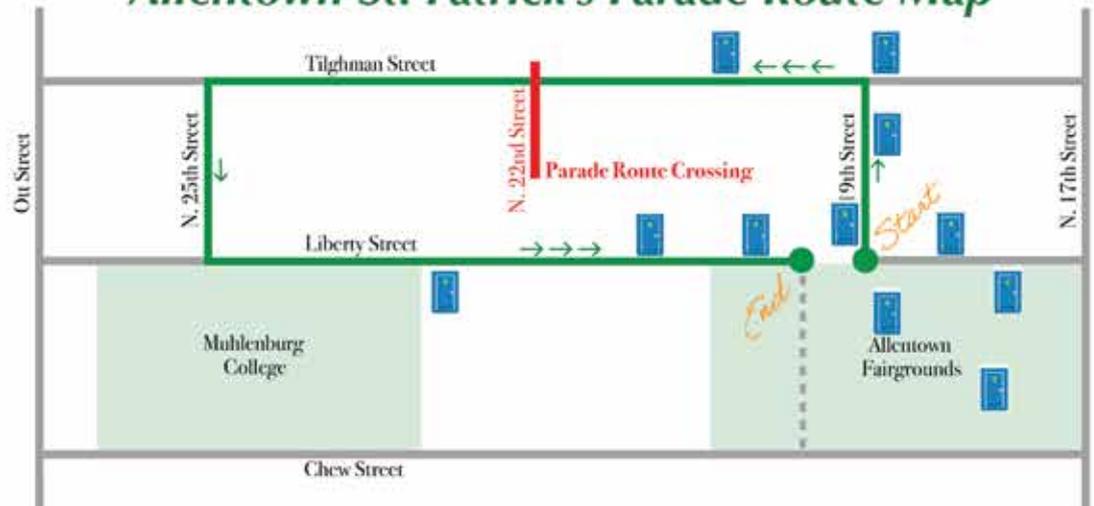
For event information or to purchase tickets, please visit www.allentownstpatricksparade.com



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Allentown St. Patrick's Parade Route Map





The West End Pub Crawl

Join us for a night out!

Fun in the West End...

Initiated in 2008, the 2026 West End Pub Crawl will take place on **Saturday, March 14** throughout the West End of Allentown. Run by the sponsoring pubs, proceeds from the Pub Crawl benefit the Allentown St. Patrick's Parade to pay for marching units and bands. There are ten sponsoring pubs; Volpe's, Cuzin's Pub & Grill, Ringer's Roost, The Shanty on 19th, West End Tap Room, Liberty Street Tavern, Sleepy Cat Urban Winery, Greg's West End Saloon, Weyerbacher Biergarten, Bagpiper's Pub. Assembly at each sponsoring pub starts at **4:30 pm**. The pub crawl begins promptly at **5:00 pm**.




Purchase a hat and support the Allentown St. Patrick's Parade!

Available at the Pub Crawl!

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Community Day

The whole family is welcome!

Learning and laughter...

The Annual Irish Cultural Community Day will be held **Saturday, March 21, 2026 from noon to 3:00 pm** at Allentown Fairgrounds Agri-Plex, Charles Hall. The Community Day is a **family friendly event** presented by the Allentown St. Patrick's Parade Committee, Inc. and is sponsored by the West End Alliance. The event features performances by The O'Grady Quinlan Irish Dancers, Irish themed crafts and games, face painting, art projects,

as well as bagpipe and Irish fiddle performances. Don't miss this chance to cheer on the winners of the Annual Parade Poster Contest who will be presented with their awards!

Upon entering, each child will be given a Passport which will guide them on their journey through the various areas of the event. Stations will be set up for the children to answer questions and learn something unique about Irish Culture. Each station

will "stamp" their passport, and when the children complete their "journey" they can enter their name into the drawing for some really great prizes! At Community Day admission, soda, snacks, flags and activities are **free!**

Participants in the **West End St. Patrick's 5K** race can pick up their race bags and numbers in the Ag Hall vestibule and then come in to join the Community Day!

Sponsored in part by...





The Coronation Celebration

You are cordially invited!

An exciting evening to start off the weekend...

Michael and Samantha Griffin will be crowned the 2026 King and Queen of the Allentown St. Patrick's Parade at the Coronation Celebration to be held **March 20** at Allentown Fairgrounds Agri-Plex, Charles Hall. The evening will feature the O'Grady Quinlan Irish Dancers, as well as the Mackay Pipe Band.



Passing on a tradition....

The honor of being King and Queen of the Allentown St. Patrick's Parade is held close to the hearts of those who have been chosen to represent the Irish Heritage of the Lehigh Valley. Each Queen proudly wears the silver crown pin emblematic of their reign. At each coronation, past Kings and Queens are recognized in a special way during the crowning ceremony, forming a semicircle around the thrones where the incoming royal couple will be crowned, signifying the bond among the former Kings and Queens and love for the newly crowned couple!

The Coronation Celebration begins at **7:30 pm** and the Coronation Ceremony takes place at **8:30 pm**. (Doors open at 7:00 pm.) Tickets are **\$25 in advance and \$30 at the door** and include a copy of the 2026 St. Patrick's Parade Program Book, complimentary beer, soda, and a door prize ticket. The event is **BYOB**. There is no cost for anyone under 21.



- Chinese Auction •
- Door Prizes •
- The O'Grady Quinlan Irish Dancers •
- The Mackay Pipe Band •
- The Coronation of the King & Queen •
- Recognition of Past Kings & Queens •
- The Dan's Camera City Photo Booth •
- Dance the night away with our DJ! •



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Congratulations to 2026 St. Patrick's Parade King & Queen **Mike & Samantha Griffin!**

Celebrating the Griffins!

Michael and Samantha are deeply moved to be selected as King and Queen of the 67th Annual Allentown St. Patrick's Parade, honoring their Irish heritage as well as the traditions of this auspicious occasion. Mike is from the 18th ward and traces his family back to County Mayo, while both Samantha's parents are from County Clare. Samantha's parents proudly represented

the parade as King & Queen in 2016, and the couple considers it a privilege to carry on that legacy. Michael and Samantha celebrated their 15th anniversary on November 6th and are dedicated parents, to four children: Tyler 25, Delaney 22, Sylvia 14 and Marcus 12. Mike and Sam actively support their community and have enthusiastically volunteered with the parade for over 12 years. Their community involvement

also extends to the Macungie Halloween Parade, and they are active board members of Mandee's Lunchbox, a nonprofit that help adults fighting cancer. This nonprofit has helped over 3,500 people with the help of Mike and Sam's dedication and love. The Allentown St. Patrick's Parade is proud to have this remarkable couple as our 2026 King & Queen!





Parade Day Spectacular!

It's a neighborhood affair!

House Decorating And Porch Party Contest!

The Allentown St. Patrick's Parade Committee invites you to participate in the Annual Rose Kennedy Porch Party & Decorating Contest! A tradition in the West End, prizes will be awarded for the "best porch party" along the Parade route. All homes are encouraged to show us your Irish style! Prizes will be awarded immediately upon conclusion of the Parade.

Food Drive

The Allentown St. Patrick's Parade Committee is committed to fighting hunger in the Lehigh Valley. Donations of non-perishable food items will be collected

at all parade events and along the parade route, as is tradition. The Parade is partnering with the Minsi Trails Council to help collect food the day of the parade which will be delivered to local food banks in need. Members of Boy Scout Troop 439 will be marching in the Parade to collect canned goods and non-perishable food items brought to the parade by spectators. In addition, brown paper bags will be distributed door-to-door in the West End neighborhood the week before the Parade. Please help with this important cause!

It all kicks off with a grand performance...

A Massed Bands Exhibition will take place immediately before the Parade at **1:00 PM** on **North 19th Street between Tilghman and Liberty Streets**. All pipe bands will perform in unison! After the parade the pipe bands will proceed to a Pub Crawl Sponsoring pub to perform additional tunes.

by a team of Belgium horses followed by Parade divisions, each led by a pipe band.



See it all...

Live on Service Electric Cable Tv the day of the parade, and rebroadcast on ATVN!

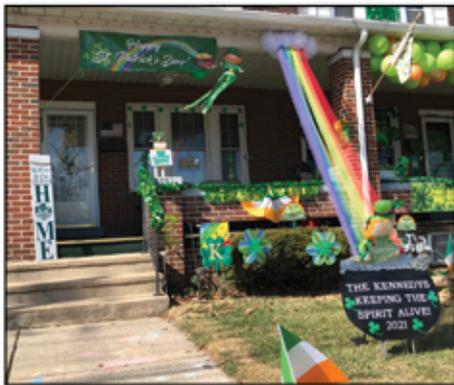
Check local listings for broadcast times.

Parade Co-Sponsor...



Please note that vehicles wishing to exit the parade loop the day of the parade may cross Tilghman Street at N. 22nd Street.

GIANT.



Record field expected for 16th West End St. Patrick's 5k!

The West End Alliance expects over 900 runners for the 16th running of the West End St. Patrick's 5k. The noon race allows participants to run through the beautiful West End and enjoy the pageantry of the Lehigh Valley's best St. Patrick's parade afterward. Registration is available at westendstpats5k.com until March 15 or the field limit has been reached. No race-day registration will be available. There is a \$37 registration fee through February 28; \$42 thereafter. Commemorative glassware, t-shirts and socks are available for purchase. Amenities include post-race food, personalized race bibs, indoor restrooms, and bib pick-up on Friday and Saturday in addition to race morning. The race starts and ends in front of Muhlenberg College's Memorial Hall on Liberty Street between 23rd and 24th streets. Proceeds from the race support neighborhood development efforts and beautification in the West End Theatre District.



Race Photo John R. Hoffman Sr.

Adding Value to Your Home

The best renovations increase your comfort – and your home’s equity

If you’re a homeowner

thinking of doing some remodeling, you may want to consider what upgrades make the most sense for building equity if you decide to sell or refinance. In this article, we’ll look at the best renovations for adding value to your home – and getting the most return on investment (ROI) – so you can plan your next project with confidence.

Short-Term vs. Long-Term Value

Adding functional space and square footage – such as a room or finishing a basement – are projects that add long-term value. Similarly, adding a bathroom is something most homebuyers will appreciate and it’s a renovation that will stand the test of time.

On the other hand, giving your kitchen a makeover with the latest design trend may boost your home’s value only for a few years – until buyers embrace a new style (remember granite countertops?).

Short-Term Value

If you’re planning to sell or refinance in the near future, going with projects that add short-term value can make sense. These might include:

- Adding a deck, patio, or porch. (Average ROI: 65% to 90%)
- Remodeling a bathroom. (Average ROI: 90% to 100%)
- Remodeling a kitchen. (Average ROI: 50% to 75%)

Long-Term Value

Other remodeling choices can provide long-lasting value. These include:

- Adding a bedroom. (Average ROI: 50%)
- Adding a bathroom. (Average ROI: 55%)
- Finishing a basement. (Average ROI: 70%)

Don’t Forget Curb Appeal

The outside of your house is the first thing buyers see and making a few moderately priced renovations

could boost your home’s value.

Here are a few to consider:

- Updating the exterior. (Average ROI: 50% to 95%)
- Replacing doors. (Average ROI: 90% to 95%)
- Updating the landscaping. (Average ROI: 100%)

How to Pay for Home Renovations

If you own a home, its equity – the value of your home minus what you owe on your mortgage – is an important resource you can borrow against to pay off debt or make home improvements. As a homeowner with equity, you have a few options when it comes to paying for upgrades and renovations:

■ **Home Equity Loans.** A home equity loan works like a second mortgage. Say you have \$50,000 in equity. You might qualify for a home equity loan of \$35,000. You receive the loan in a single payment, which you can use however you want. You then pay back the loan in monthly installments, with interest, just like your mortgage.

■ **Home Equity Line of Credit (HELOC).** A HELOC works similar to a credit card, with your credit limit based on the equity in your home. As you repay the outstanding balance, your available credit is replenished. You also have the flexibility to draw as much or as little as you need during the draw period. You can use a HELOC to finance home renovations or take advantage of the low interest rate to consolidate and pay off high-interest credit card debt.

■ **Cash-Out Refinance.** In a cash-out refinance, you refinance your mortgage for an amount that is equal to more than your current mortgage balance. The “cash out” amount goes to you in a lump sum payment and is yours to use as you see fit. You then repay the refinanced total in monthly payments with interest, like you do for your original mortgage.

Renovating your home can improve your quality of life as well as add value to one of your biggest assets. The type of renovations and upgrades you choose depends on your personal goals and current life situation. If you have questions or need assistance with financing, QNB Bank is here to help. Call us at 215-538-LOAN (5626) or visit our website at QNBbank.com. View our current home equity line of credit special at QNBbank.com/heloc-sale. ■



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APRIL 10 6-9 PM
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Nerd Nite: Straight Outta Compost unearths the strange and surprisingly riveting worlds of compost and foraging. Learn how yesterday's scraps become tomorrow's soil gold, discover the edible treasures hiding in your neighborhood parks, and laugh along as our presenters explore the science, myths, and mischief plants get up to.

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IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Neighborhood Eatery Earns Distinction for Health and Wellness



Lyell Scherline

By Paul Kita

Last October, Jay's Local gained recognition as a Blue Zones Project approved business. Just in case you're unfamiliar, the Blue Zones Project aims to improve the well-being of communities by way of nutrition, movement, purpose and belonging. While other Allentown-based businesses like Butz and City Center Group have earned Blue Zones Project approval, Jay's Local is the first restaurant in the city to do so.

"When we learned about Blue Zones and its initiative to make people healthier and happier, we knew it aligned perfectly with our concept at Jay's Local," said Lyell Scherline, owner of the 2301 W. Liberty St. restaurant. Because if you've been to Jay's Local for the food, you also know that the space also routinely hosts events, including pop-up shops, classes, and children's story times and sensory play activities.

Scherline said the Blue Zones Project process took a few weeks to receive final approval and was "fairly easy" given that the restaurant had long focused on healthy menu options like seasonal salads, high-protein wraps and produce-forward soups. (They also recently added two new Blue Zones inspired



plant-based protein smoothies called the Mighty Mule and the Chia Berry Charger.)

The Blue Zones Project designation is important for Allentown — and the West End — Scherline said. "If other restaurateurs see what we are doing with the help of Blue Zones, perhaps they will follow suit," he said. "Jay's Local is smack in the middle of a cozy neighborhood, minutes away from several local colleges, community centers, religious institutions and popular old and new Allentown hot spots. Any direction you go in from our quaint corner on 23rd and Liberty will lead to somewhere else within the valley that is or has the opportunity to make an impact." ■

From Bikes to Beers— Welcoming Beer Land to our West End

By Fred Jerant

Entrepreneur Bobby Patel

has already launched several successful businesses – a beer distributorship deep in East Allentown and another in Schuylkill County, as well as a sandwich shop in Exton, Pa.

But his latest venture – Beer Land – is located right in the neighborhood, in the building formerly occupied by Trek Bicycles.

instances, singles. “Our prices range from \$1.99 each, to \$35.99 for a full case,” Patel said.

He was drawn to the West End because of a widely known aphorism for a successful business: “Find a hole, and fill it.” “I noticed there were no beer distributors between 13th St. and the West End, and saw a good opportunity with little competition,” he said, “and so I’m bringing more convenience to the area.”

Patel added that the Tilghman Street location is good for foot traffic, and offers an easy-in/easy-out setting for his customers. “Many people don’t realize it, but we offer 15 slots of free parking. Our location is located adjacent to the west-facing side of the building.”

The store is handicapped-accessible, and staff will gladly help customers load their purchases.

Beer Land is open Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. ■

Beer Land
1728 W. Tilghman St.
(610) 351-1728
beerland1728@gmail.com
<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61576833032267>



Open since last May, the shop offers a wide range of beer and other alcoholic beverages. “We handle domestic and international brands, as well as many local beers,” Patel said. The store also sells items such as hard iced tea, “spiked” Arnold Palmers and a variety of adult slushies.

Depending on the product, customers can purchase 6-packs, 12-packs, full cases and, in some



PHOTOS BY BILL BASTA

Medicare Broker and Final Expense

Questions about Medicare? Did you know those on an Advantage plan can make a plan change until March 31st?



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Elizabeth McEvoy

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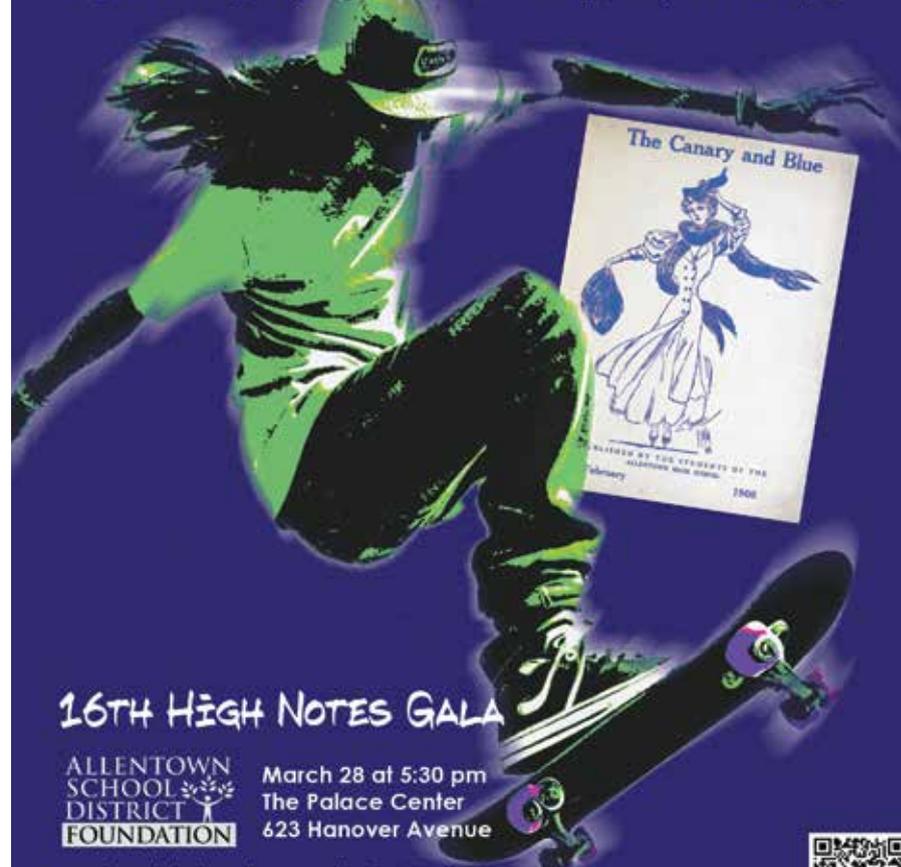
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COMMITTED TO THE PEOPLE

Dr. Patrick M. Sowards Legacy and Memorial

By Fred Jerant

The passing of Dr. Patrick M. Sowards

on October 16, 2025 created a significant void in the Lehigh Valley medical community, his many patients, friends and family members.

The well-known orthopedic surgeon graduated from William Allen High School in 1971 (he was a son of Allen's legendary coach and director of athletics J. Milo Sowards) where he was a star basketball player; the University of Pennsylvania in 1975, Temple University School of Medicine in 1980 and the Temple University Hospital Residency (1985).

"He was sort of an old-time doctor," recalled his widow Diane Sowards. "He really wasn't cut out for corporate medicine. He still made house calls when needed, and patients would drop by the house so he could take a quick look at their conditions. He didn't keep a strict calendar, either, often seeing patients at their own convenience."

"And he wasn't money-driven," she continued. "All he wanted was for his patients to get better without worrying about insurance or their ability to pay. In fact, he sometimes accepted bartering in lieu of cash, trading off medical care for snow shoveling, grass cutting, car repairs and other services."

He was also known to give patients his personal cell phone number and answer their calls directly.

Sowards was committed to the therapeutic power of exercise and movement which led him to open Iron Run Orthopedics at 848 North 20th St. in Allentown. The facility provided unparalleled



non-surgical solutions to joint and arthritic pain, combining physical therapy and rehabilitation services.

His own crippling experience with his knees (eventually alleviated by surgery) fostered his compassionate attitude toward his patients

Sowards had

a keen intellect and passion for learning, regularly devouring difficult books on physics, medicine, biology and other topics.

In addition, he was an inveterate practical joker. Diane Sowards recalled that his patients received top-notch medical care, as well as a dose of entertainment. "He believed in laughter as medicine," she said.

Daughter Elizabeth Sowards said Iron Run Orthopedics' exercise facilities remain open for former patients who wish to continue their own maintenance programs, and that his survivors are seeking a path to reinstate medical care services. "We hope to continue his legacy, influence and vision," she said.

Patrick is survived by his wife Diane Sowards of Allentown, children, J. Milo Sowards and his wife Kristen of Dresher, PA, Patrick T. Sowards and his spouse Scott Follin of Huntingdon Valley, PA, Elizabeth A. Sowards and her husband Aaron Todrin of Allentown, Margaret L. Sowards of Philadelphia. Patrick is also survived by grandchildren, Payton and Dylan Sowards, Penn and Victor Sowards, and Andie, Ronan, and Louis Todrin. He is also survived by his brother Michael Sowards of Allentown, and ex-wife Nancy Ehlers of Ocoee, FL. ■



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2025 Property Tax & Rent Rebate Open

The window to file the PA's 2025 Property Tax & Rent Rebate Program is now open. This program changed last year to make more seniors and people with disabilities eligible and make rebates larger.

Property Tax / Rent Rebate Applications
Giving money back to PA renters and homeowners

Homeowner & Renter Income	Max Rebate
Up to \$8,550	\$1,000
Up to \$16,040	\$770
Up to \$19,240	\$460
Up to \$48,110	\$380

Applications due by **June 30, 2026**

Rebates are filed based on income earned and property taxes & rent paid in 2025. See the chart for income limits and maximum rebate amounts.

Applicants must be 65 or older, widow/widower age 50 or older, or a person with permanent disability as determined by the Social Security Administration as of 12/31/25. Only HALF of Social Security counts toward the income limit. Interest, dividends, capital gains, wages and all other income is counted dollar-for-dollar.

Rebates can be filed online at MyPath.Pa.Gov. My office also helps prepare and file these rebates and would be happy to do so for you. Give my office a call (610-821-5577) to request copies of paper forms and instruction booklets or set up an appointment to get your rebate filed. File now to get your rebate by July 1. ■

Use of Hand-Held Devices Ban Illegal; Fines Start June 1

Law prohibits use of hand-held electronic devices while behind the wheel on the roadway. This includes when drivers are temporarily stopped because of traffic, red lights, construction or other delays. Here are some important details about the law to ensure safety:

- This is a primary offense--you can be pulled over for using a hand-held device
- Hands-Free devices (such as Bluetooth) are permitted
- Law went into effect in 2025; *Fines will be issued beginning June, 2026*
- Penalty: \$50 fine PLUS court costs & other fees ■



Let's Stay Connected

My office is located at 5100 W Tilghman Street, Suite 200 Allentown, PA 18104

- Phone: 610-821-5577)
- Email: RepSchlossberg@pahouse.com
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Celebrate Earth Month in the West End

By Meghan Kita

Want to help beautify the neighborhood? There are at least two opportunities to do so



this April, coinciding with Earth Month.

On Saturday, April 11, the Little Lehigh Watershed Stewards will be hosting another tree-planting event in Cedar Beach Park. Last spring, the group, in partnership with the Wildlands Conservancy and Allentown's Parks and Recreation Department, planted 97 native trees there. Participants can contact Project Manager Paul Younger at paul.r.younger@gmail.com or visit littlelehigh.org to get more information about participating.

On the morning of Saturday, April 25, the West End Alliance will be hosting a clean-up on 19th Street. More information will be posted on The West End Alliance Facebook page and website (westendallentown.com). ■

Where Is It?

Do you recognize this image? Identify its location in the West End Theatre District and you could win a \$25 gift certificate to a restaurant in the neighborhood.



PHOTOS BY BILL BASTA

Send your entry by e-mail to michael@drabenstott.com or mail to: M. Drabenstott, 2346 W. Allen St., Allentown PA 18104 By March 20, 2026.

One winner will be randomly selected from all the correct entries.



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Allentown Fairgrounds Gate 7 to infield, off Liberty Street

Congratulations to Stephen Link, Winner of our Winter contest!

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April 18 Choir Concert
April 24 Big Band Concert
April 25 WMUH Spring Concert: Gladie, Noun, and Hello, Operator?



For a full schedule, including times and locations scan the code or visit muhlenberg.edu/arts