# inside ber



FOR WILLIAMSPORT'S WEST END PEOPLE'S PAPER



### insideNewberry

To honor the past...inform the present...envision the future, insideNewberry is published quarterly by Newberry Community Partnership (NCP) as a service to the neighborhood to promote community pride and facilitate communication between residents. schools, civic organizations and businesses. NCP is a non-profit community-based organization established in 2006. Please support our sponsors who made this issue possible!

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Mayor Derek Slaughter sat down with *insideNewberry* to explain the City's current status in its plan to improve Preziosi Park in Newberry. Though details of the exact route for the necessary funding are still being worked out, Slaughter and the City Council are hoping to break ground in late Spring or early Summer on a number of new amenities at Newberry's premier park.

The City has been upgrading parks all throughout its jurisdiction, and Preziosi Park is next in line. The park's playground equipment is still relatively new, but with money from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) still available, Slaughter wants to make sure Newberry's park has facilities that also appeal to teens, adults, and the 'silver' generation.

Two of the fairly certain additions are a basketball court and a pickleball court. The new basketball court will take the place of the bocci ball area that, unfortunately, never got the traffic that it was intended for. The basketball court surface will be made of a new noise-reducing material to which many municipalities have been transitioning in order to reduce neighborhood noise. Of course, there

is no such technology to mask the noise of children and others who are using the park, but that's the sort of noise that one would hope and expect to hear from a well-used neighborhood park. "If you're going to live near a park, you're going to hear kids playing, and sometimes yelling," Slaughter pointed out.

Pickleball is another type of game with a net, a ball, and paddles – a midpoint somewhere between table tennis and full-court tennis and it has been taking the country by storm. Just over the creek, the Memorial Park pickleball courts are

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Diane Reifsnyder sings at the Brandon Park Band Shell in 1947. (See Story, Page 4)

### New Park Amenities... (Continued from page 1)

regularly occupied, and the YMCA and Firetree Place devote their indoor gyms to pickleball patrons several times during the week. Though any age can play, pickleball has been especially alluring for older generations. Many of them use pickleball to stay active in a fun and social way, and now the older Newberry crowd will have some courts in their own neighborhood.

Some months ago, Slaughter and representatives of the Parks and Recreation department met with Tiffany Loner-Diemer, then-Regional Director of Williamsport AYSO, the recreational youth soccer league (https://www.ayso293.org/), to discuss field dimensions for a youth soccer field in Preziosi Park also. Technical measurements still need to be worked out, but if a soccer field can be set up, recreational soccer through AYSO would become more accessible to the younger children in Newberry. "The goal of recreational soccer is to make it available to any kid who wants to play," said Joshua Hill, an AYSO coach. "But getting kids all the way down to Jones field for practices and games isn't always possible for all families." Slaughter confirmed that the City has been looking for a way to get recreational soccer fields inside the city limits, and this looks like a good opportunity.

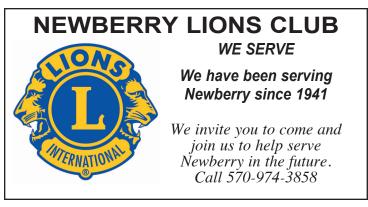


The amenity that is still in the rough planning stages is a Splashpad to help kids cool off on the hot days of summer. Splashpads not only have more moving parts to make their planning and construction complex but they also come with more regulations, and one major such regulation is that a public bathroom/changing room would need to be built and maintained. A public bathroom at the park would be a benefit to many more people than just those coming in bathing suits, of course, but public bathrooms also come with their own challenges, including maintaining safety and sanitariness.

Slaughter has been meeting individually with several different neighbors who live around the park, and he says the plan has been "well-received overall." While park foot-traffic will increase, and the sound of children and families along with it, data indicates that there are fewer crime incidents in neighborhoods after their parks are upgraded. Also, when more people use a park more regularly, it becomes a true "public area," which makes it safer for everyone. "Giving kids something to do is better than letting them mill around and find their own things, things which are sometimes unhealthy," Slaughter said, and he explained

(Continued on page 3)







### New Park Amenities... (Continued from page 2)

some of the points of the national 10-Minute Walk program, which promotes "access to a quality park [for all Americans] within a 10-minute walk of their home" (https://10minutewalk.org/). Better use of community parks, according to their data, improves physical and mental health, and it also builds the daily social connections that are the sinew of a community.

Safety is also explicitly part of the plans for an upgrade, with security cameras already in operation all around the park and more and better lighting to be added to the park.

To fund the upgrading of Preziosi Park, the City Council is looking at a combination of remaining ARPA money, a Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development grant (DCED), and Act 13 Gas Impact Fee money. ARPA money, federal post-COVID recovery money for communities, has been allocated in the previous city budget for several infrastructure projects, but ARPA monies not spent in the last budget are being reallocated where most needed in the new budget. By federal regulation, all those funds have to be allocated by December 2024 and spent by December 2026. Depending on the highest current needs in the city, some of those funds may be allocated for the Preziosi Park improvements.

To supplement that pool of money, the City Council approved a resolution in November to apply for a DCED state grant for rec and parks development money. These grants are competitive – not a sure thing – and according to the consultants contracted by the City, the grant proposal is likely to be more successful if the City has a revised Comprehensive Development Plan on file with the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). However, the city was encouraged by the consulting firm to file for the grant at the same time as it works toward that revised Comp Plan.

The third possible source of funding for the park is Act 13 Gas Impact Fee money. The city gets a small percentage from any gas wells operational in its jurisdiction, and that small but continual stream of funding can be used for any budgeted City item. While those funding details for Preziosi Park are

still being hammered out, jackhammers and bulldozers should be starting their work at the park in 2024. Comments or questions about the park can be sent to Mayor Slaughter at **mayor@cityofwilliamsport.org** or phoned in at 570-327-7566. The broader issue of the City's long-term Comp Plan for development will start in January 2024, guided by the consultant company. Watch for announcements about community meetings, which are a state-required step in developing such Comp Plans.





## Newberry Neighbors: Diane Reifsnyder, A Williamsport Performer, First and Last

Unless we get to talking to our neighbors, we never know what kinds of interesting lives they have led or what ways they have added their own skills to our community. One of my neighbors is Diane Marie Reifsnyder (Ellis), a longtime resident of Newberry, and I was astonished to learn how her history intertwined with the musical history of Williamsport and the city programs long ago that promoted music among the youth.

Diane lived on the Newberry side of West Fourth Street as a child and, after time in Garden View, has, for many years, been a resident of Arch Street in Newberry. When she told me her life was greatly influenced by Williamsport government, that didn't sound too exciting, but then I found out that city "government" opened the way for her to be a child performer and, later, she made her living in a very different role in our city government.

Diane talked about Williamsport Mayor Leo Williamson, serving 1940 to 1952, who originated the Brandon Park "Kiddie" and "Community" sings. These events occurred for at least a dozen years starting in the mid 1940's and were wildly popular. At one point 5,000 people attended a Kiddie Sing, and over 8,000 attended one of the Community Sings. It's hard to imagine, now, that many kids getting together at the park to learn songs and sing together, but Williamsport was known for its musical talent and its love of music. Diane started off singing in the crowd, but soon stood out.

When Diane was about four years old, her aunt noticed she was a natural performer and got her into voice lessons with Esther Ralph. She started performing at women's clubs, church events, and – regularly – on the Brandon Park stage. By the time she was five, Diane had a large repertoire of songs. Her favorite songs were "I'm Looking Over a Four Leaf Clover," complete with a giant green clover, and her signature song, "I Didn't Know The Gun Was Loaded," a humorous story-song, especially when sung innocently by a five-year-old! Diane recalls belting out.

"Oh Miss Effie was her name. Through the west she won her fame, being handy with the gun. But she drove the men insane 'Cause she'd whip out her pistol and shoot most any guy, and sing out this alibi.

I didn't know the gun was loaded and I'm so sorry, my friend.

I didn't know the gun was loaded and I'll never, never do it again!"



Diane Reifsnyder singing 'I didn't know the gun was loaded!' in her genuine leather cowgirl outfit.

You can hear the whole song on YouTube as recorded by, among others, the Andrews Sisters – search for <u>The Andrews Sisters - I Didn't Know the Gun Was Loaded</u>.

The more Diane performed, the more she got connected with different venues in the area – what we call "networking" today. For example, her favorite costume was given to Diane by Jim and Jane Claar, of the "Jim and Jane Show and their Western Vagabonds," a live country music show broadcast locally on WLYC and WRAK radio. Naturally, the costume was a "genuine leather"

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### Newberry Neighbors: Diane Reifsnyder... (Continued from page 4)

cowgirl outfit, complete with fringes, boots, hat, and a loud cap qun!

Young Diane also received encouragement from Bob and Dean McNett. The McNett brothers were regulars on the "Jim and Jane Show" and operated the "Radio Corral," an openair amphitheater off Rt. 15, near Montgomery. One of the earliest acts they booked, aside from Diane, was a young



Diane Reifsnyder with Dean McNett on the Radio Corral show in 1949.

singer from Alabama named Hank Williams.

Diane also competed in the local preliminaries of well-known band leader and radio and television personality Horace Heidt and his "Original Youth Opportunity Program." This program was the first traveling talent search show in America, long before Star Search or American Idol. Diane admits she was devastated when she did not win that competition and move on to the next level. Nevertheless, in 1951, she was scheduled to perform on the Atlantic City Boardwalk, continuing the showbiz trajectory. But little changes in direction often send us into a different future. Diane was unable to keep that Atlantic City engagement due to family issues, and her singing career soon abruptly ended.

Diane didn't let the end of that dream hold her down, though. She grew up, got married, had children, and built a rewarding career first working for the state and later the Williamsport Community Development Office. Then another opportunity arose. Years after her last public performance, Diane was again placed before the public eye, this time not singing about four-leaf clovers or supposedly unloaded guns but performing as the Williamsport City Clerk! Some of you may remember her, on television and in person, at City Council meetings. For twelve years, she read agendas, administrated oaths of office, took roll calls, and certified resolutions and ordinances as passed by City Council, all live and on the local

government television channel. It was certainly a different venue than an Atlantic City boardwalk, but as they say, talent will tell.

If you are or know a Newberry Neighbor with a story to tell, please contact **insidenewberry@ vahoo.com**. We would love to talk to you!

~ By Mary Rucinski

"I Didn't Know The Gun Was Loaded" written by Herbert Leventhal, Hank Fort "I'm Looking Over a Four Leaf Clover" written by Mort Dixon. Music by Harry M. Woods

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## Newberry Christmas Tree Lighting



At the NCP annual Christmas Tree Lighting on December 6, 2023, at the Brodart corner, the community gathered to light up the night and then enjoy hot cocoa and cookies while the kids visited with Santa.

### **Regular Meetings of Civic & Other Groups in Newberry**

**ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS (AA)** ...... 570-323-6297 Meets Wednesdays & Saturdays • 7:00 PM • WECCC If attending, use side entrance off gravel parking lot. The support group welcomes new members. For additional information, call the WECCC office at the number listed above.

**BOY SCOUT TROOP 14**......570-326 5569

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**CUB SCOUT PACK 14**...... 570-326-5569

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#### **NEWBERRY COMMUNITY**

Check our FaceBook page (@ncpcommunity) or email for information on meeting dates WECCC • 913 Diamond Street If you would like to present an idea or have a neighborhood concern, please call or email insideNewberry@yahoo.com to be placed on agenda.

**NEWBERRY LIONS** ...... 570-974-3858

John Sanso. President

Brad Hillman, Secretary • John Confer, Treasurer 2nd Tuesday • 6:30 pm • Lions Building • Newberry Park PO Box 4051 • Williamsport, PA 17701 We have health aids like walkers, wheelchairs and special beds. Contact Marc at 570-974-3858

RIGHT PATH TO RESTORATION ......570-323-2747

Held at Diamond Street Christian Church 822 Diamond Street • Every Friday • 6:00-7:30 p.m. Bible-based, Christ-centered program to assist anybody in their fight with habitual sins.

#### THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF PENNSYLVANIA

Please contact us at lwvlyco@gmail.com to get current information on meeting times and locations, as these have changed. Meetings are normally held monthly.

#### WILLIAMSPORT AREA CHRISTIAN MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT GROUP

Meets first Tuesday of Each Month • 7:00 PM WECCC • 607-432-4926

A Christ centered support for individuals and families struggling to maintain mental and emotional stability.

**NOTE:** These are active groups that welcome new members: let them know you'd like to attend. To be listed, contact the Editor, insideNewberry, 913 Diamond Street, Newberry, PA 17701 or insideNewberry@yahoo.com.





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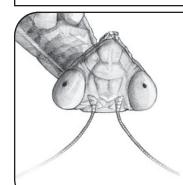
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### Steve Hulslander, Neighbor and Friend

Steve Hulslander, one of the pillars of the Newberry community, moved to Williamsport on a whim to attend Lycoming college in 1970, and Steve was our neighbor and friend. On October 8, 2023, he passed away at his home due to complications from ALS, or Lou Gehrig's Disease.

Steve's obituary in the Sun-Gazette is a good read (https://www.sungazette.com/obituaries/2023/10/stephen-nicholas-hulslander/), but I would like to add a more personal angle. A few years ago, our son "Sawyer" (think Tom Sawyer) started doing odd jobs for Steve and Julie. The ALS was probably starting to affect Steve, and he needed a spry young fellow to help with his many projects. At the time, Sawyer needed a little breathing room, and he found with the Hulslanders work, love, stories, and space to explore how to be a responsible young man. Sawyer and Steve also shared a love for games, especially board games. Sawyer would work and then play at the Hulslanders for hours.

Through Sawyer, we started to collect "Steve stories," most of which featured Steve's flair for making do in less than ideal circumstances with a cheerful attitude. One favorite was the story of Steve and a hitchhiker in a rusted-out car spinning down an icy mountain road, Steve calmly noting







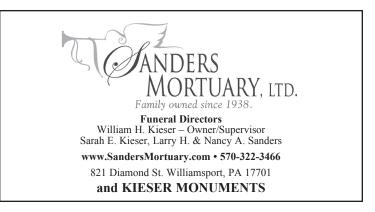
Steve Hulslander, bottom left, played guitar and banjo for the Morgan Valley Road Band, with (from top left, clockwise) Bob Garrett, bass, Lou Feist, drums, Terry Wild, trumpet, and Doug Banks, piano.

where they would hit. Providentially, there were no injuries.

When Steve's diagnosis was discovered, Sawyer had many difficult conversations with Steve about life, death, and afterwards. Hard conversation were part of their good relationship. When we got the call on October 8, the call came from our son, and we all met that afternoon at the Hulslanders. To us, this is what the word *neighbor*, and the word *friend*, can mean.

~ By Joshua Hill





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## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

#### **FEBRUARY 2024**

FRIDAY, 2/2 - Groundhog Day

SUNDAY, 2/11 - Super Bowl

**TUESDAY**, 2/13 – Shrove Tuesday (Christian)

TUESDAY, 2/13 - Mardi Gras

**WEDNESDAY**, **2/14** – Ash Wednesday (Christian)

WEDNESDAY, 2/14 – Valentine's Day

(Observance)

MONDAY, 2/19 - President's Day (Federal & State Holiday - Banks Closed)

#### **MARCH 2024**

FRIDAY 3/1 - Read Across American Day

FRIDAY 3/1 – Employee Appreciation Day

FRIDAY 3/1 - First Day of Women's History

FRIDAY 3/1 - First Day of Irish American Heritage Month

**SUNDAY, 3/10 – Daylight Savings Time Begins** (Set Clocks AHEAD One Hour)

SUNDAY, 3/17 - St. Patrick's Day (Observancer)

TUESDAY, 3/19 - March Equinox

**SUNDAY, 3/24 – Palm Sunday (Christian)** 

**THURSDAY**, 3/28 – Maundy Thursday (Christian)

FRIDAY, 3/29 – Good Friday (Christian)

SATURDAY, 3/30 - Holy Saturday (Christian)

**SUNDAY, 3/31 –** Easter (Christian)

### APRII, 2024

**MONDAY, 4/1 –** April Fool's Day (Observance) MONDAY, 4/15 - Tax Day FRIDAY, 4/22 – Passover Eve (Jewish) **SATURDAY, 4/23 –** First Day of Passover (Jewish) TUESDAY, 4/230 – Last Day of Passover (Jewish)

We welcome your tax deductible donations to support the continued efforts of the Newberry Community Partnership to bring quality of life improvements and community events to our neighborhood. Send contributions to **Newberry Community Partnership (NCP)** 913 Diamond Street · Williamsport, PA 17701 For information, message us on Facebook.