



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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The Newberry Italian Clubs: A Retrospective with Joe Mignano

A couple of years ago, the Sons and Daughters of Italy #138, a sponsor of *insideNewberry*, had to close its doors, but one of its longtime members, Joe Mignano, reflects on the Italian immigrant past of parts of Newberry and the Italian clubs that were one of the centers of that society.

Mignano, now in his early 80s, had grandparents on his mother's side from Naples and Rome and grandparents on his father's side from Naples and Rome, and his family's love of cooking may have been inherited from his Grandpop who was cooking for a monastery in Rome from the age of 14. Mignano has held a number of jobs, many of them simultaneous— 22 years in the Reserves as a Dining Facilities Manager, 17 years at the Genetti as a cook, several early years working with his father as a barber in South Williamsport, 17 years at Penn Wire Rope, 7 years cooking for the UU ("Double U") Steakhouse in Newberry, a few years doing a side business in seamless epoxy floors, and 10 years before retirement working as a cook at Penn College – but cooking has been a constant. Many of those years and after retirement, Mignano would cook in his "spare" time for one of the Italian clubs.

"I always have to keep moving," he said. "I would come home from work, take a power nap, and then go cook at the Sons of Italy. None of us got paid. At that time, everybody volunteered." Mignano cooked first for the Sons of Italy #2786 and then in later years for the Sons and Daughters of Italy #138.

That community spirit is what Mignano remembers fondly about his own time growing up in Newberry's "Little Italy," bounded by Prospect and 3rd Street, with a broad area behind Prospect that at that time was "all jungle." Born in a house on Prospect Avenue in 1944, Mignano's parents and grandparents were involved in both the Dante Alighieri Club and the Sons and Daughters of Italy in Newberry, along with the Sons of Italy Lodge in Williamsport. Both of the latter Italian clubs were part of national organizations, but Mignano believes the Dante Club was unique to Newberry.

The Italian clubs, like many groups organized by people immigrating to the United States at the time, provided a language community, connections, social support, and entertainment for the times the people were not working. The Dante Club band (pictured) would play shows at the club in the evening, and they would

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The Newberry Italian Clubs:

A Retrospective with Joe Mignano *(Continued from page 1)*

sometimes march in a circuit around the perimeter of Little Italy in Newberry. Mignano remembers seeing them march off, but then later seeing them complete the circuit a little inebriated since most of the Italian households along the way would greet them with glasses of home-made wine.

"Everybody had grapevines," he said. "All the families made their own wine from their own grapes, and when I was a kid, we could reach up and pick grapes off the grapevine." Though still part of the Newberry Italian community, Mignano's family moved over to Southside when he was a boy, moving into a house converted from an old fire station—one side had stabled the fire wagon and the other side of the building had stabled the horses that drew the fire wagon. But there were grapes in the new place as well, planted by his Uncle Ernie, a scandalous \$30 worth of grapevines (about \$360 in current value). Mignano and his cousin would be tapped by Uncle Ernie to wear the clean galoshes that were hung up in the rafters and tromp the grapes in their big tub to help in the wine-making process. "It was a good time to grow up here," he said.

One of Mignano's strongest memories involved his Grandpop's grapevines, which covered ten rows, each row 25 feet long, in his large backyard. His Grandpop had been in his 80s and was in good health, but Mignano was mowing the grass in that backyard one day when he saw his Grandpop coming out with an axe. "What's wrong?" Mignano had asked, alarmed because his Grandpop started chopping down one vine after another. In his Italian accent, his Grandpop's reply was, "I won't be here next year." He had wanted to clear away



The Dante Club Band got people on the dance floor in the Club, and it also marched around the streets of "Little Italy" in Newberry. Mignano, Sr., pictured center with the drum.

all but one vine ahead of time so that his wife would not have to deal with managing all those vines. A few months later, Mignano's Grandpop got short of breath and the family called an ambulance. He was sitting in his rocker-recliner when the medics came, and he said "un minuto" and gathered his strength to stand up. At the door, he looked around at his family with tears in his eyes and said, "I won't be back." And he was speaking the truth.

Mignano remembers the whole Italian community spending time at the Italian clubs. On Sundays, the community would go to 8:00 a.m. Mass, then walk back to the neighborhood for dinner and to hang out at the Dante Club. The kids would play together outside with the games provided for them – or just run around. Men would play quoits or other games and talk, and the women would sit on the club's broad porch and talk together. Mignano remembers going into the club with the men and sitting with them, they with a glass of wine or other liquor and he with his Coke, sometimes with a little something added. Like in "the old country," most of the kids had wine regularly, though the ratio leaned heavily toward Coke, 7up, or some other pop.

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The Newberry Italian Clubs: A Retrospective with Joe Mignano *(Continued from page 2)*



The members of the Dante Aleghieri Club, circa 1939.

The Italian Clubs were important both for their social life but also as a place for Italian immigrants to share resources – like the Irish immigrants before them and the Hispanic immigrants now, Italians were looked at with suspicion and prejudice. Mignano remembers running into soft forms of that prejudice when meeting the parents of a girl he was dating. “Oh, you are Italian – we love Dean Martin!” That’s what they knew of Italians, that and that we were Catholic,” Mignano said. “But I can’t sing a note.” A more threatening form of that prejudice was the potential violence if an Italian boy found himself alone in another ethnic neighborhood. “At the movie theater, my dad said they went to the restroom in pairs for protection,” Mignano remembered. “Even then, these big Irish boys found them washing up and they told them to take off their shoes so that none of the chickensh-t from their Italian backyards got

on the floors. So my dad and his friends walked back into the movie carrying their shoes. It was a little rough back then!”

One of Mignano’s grandfathers had been a teacher back in Italy and was well-educated, but many of the Italian immigrants were not, and they couldn’t read or write well. Mignano remembers people bringing letters to his grandfather to read to them, and when people in the community

needed help with legal matters or paperwork, Mignano’s grandfather was a regular resource for the community. “Half of the people who sat around the club talking with my grandparents didn’t speak English. I couldn’t understand what they were saying,” Mignano said. “But, oh did he have beautiful penmanship! It was like calligraphy. I would ask him, ‘GrandPop, can you write my name?’ And he would write it beautifully.” The Italian clubs provided these kinds of social connections so that community members could find a service they needed or so that families that were down on their luck could get a helping hand from the community. Before the Yellow Pages, the internet, or many government social services, different social clubs provided these kinds of connections.

Many of the early Italian community members worked on the railroads, and Mignano’s grandparents were part of a team of them that built

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The Newberry Italian Clubs:

A Retrospective with Joe Mignano *(Continued from page 3)*

the line from Williamsport to Elmira, New York. “The women would set up a tent and cook food and do the washing while the men would lay track, and the kids would run around. After they had laid about a mile of track, everyone would pack up the camp and move it a mile up the road. They got to Elmira a mile at a time that way,” Mignano said. He remembers that one of the houses on Prospect Avenue is actually built from four old wooden boxcars that one of the community members bought for cheap. He had some friends come help, and they unbolted the wood walls of the boxcar from their corners and used them to build the original frame for the house. On one of the walls of the house, the markings of the railroad company can still be seen. “But that’s how they did things,” Mignano said. “You had a bunch of blue collar workers who had come over from Italy, and they worked together to help one another out, plumbers and electricians and such.”

In his own career as a cook, Mignano may have gotten a little of that help, though his skills as a cook and dining manager made his employers want to keep him at their kitchens. Mignano left

high school to start managing a dining facility in the military reserves, but then the law was passed that all military employees had to have their high school degree. Mignano’s commanding officers, both helpfully Italian, told Mignano that they could overlook that requirement on the initial paperwork, but that he had to get his degree by May. Mignano pushed hard through night school and got his GED in time to keep his officers out of trouble.

Mignano’s history working for the Genetti also showed that people recognized his good work. After working for the Genetti for a while with no raise, Mignano left to cook for a hospital in Lock Haven, but the Genetti manager met with him and offered him a raise to 50 cents an hour. Mignano told the manager he would think about it, but once he got home, he reprimanded himself. “You dummy! You should have just taken the job! When are you going to get another offer like that?” But then the phone rang, and it was the manager, saying, “Ok, we’ll give you a dollar an hour—final offer.” At that point, Mignano was ready to say yes, and he even got a spread in the Williamsport Sun-Gazette with his picture and the headline: “Back by Popular Demand!” As an in-demand cook, Mignano was brought out of the kitchen many times to meet some of the famous people he had just cooked for, including Ice-T, the band Alabama, Bob Hope, Kevin Costner, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Davy Jones of the Monkees, and Gregory Hines.

Before the Sons and Daughters of Italy #138 had to close its doors, that was where you could always find Mignano. Cooking for the Sons and Daughters of Italy in his retirement years was especially rewarding because it was about more than the food. Mignano would come up with the weekly menu for Thursday and Friday nights, put it up on the Club Restaurant website, and order the food, but what the food brought into the Club was the community, and people would stay and talk and discuss the topics of the day together. The food was good, and the Club Restaurant almost always sold out, but like on the back porch of the Dante Club in the 1950s, or when a group of



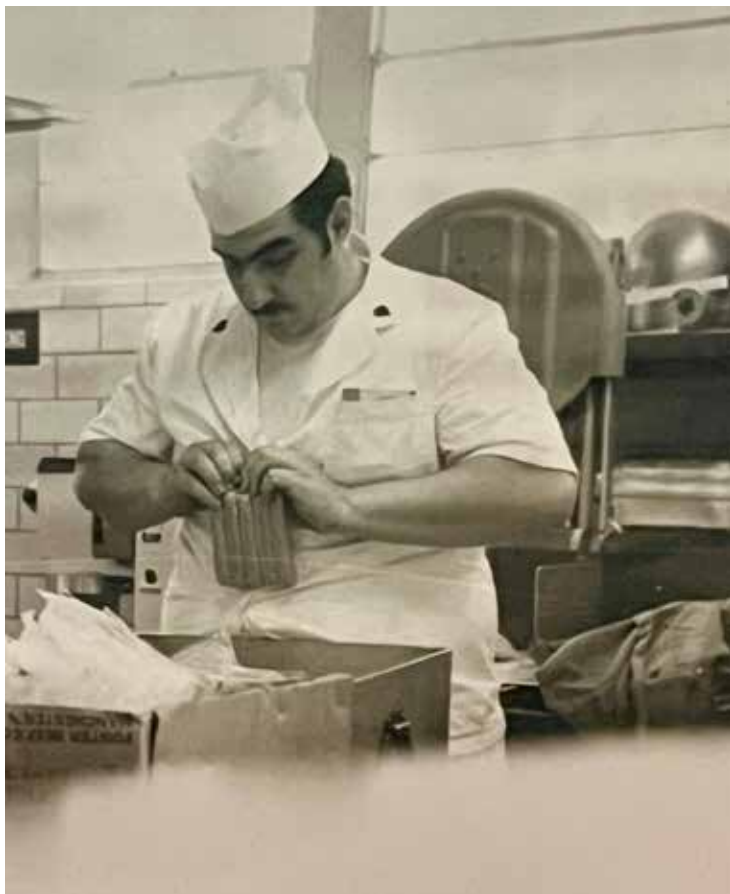
Mignano, Jr., brandishing the tools of his trade.

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The Newberry Italian Clubs: A Retrospective with Joe Mignano

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companions from Little Italy would work on a housing project together, or when the whole community would come out to cheer the Dante band as it wound its way through the streets, the best part was remembering and experiencing that you were part of a people. "I've never lived in Italy," Mignano said, "but I feel that I'm an Italian. I feel it here, in my heart."



Mignano hard at work in one of his early kitchens.

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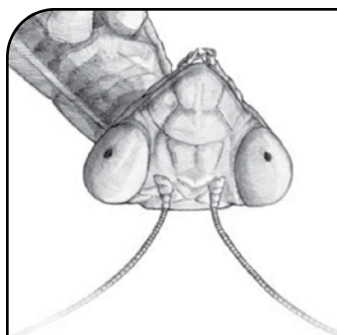


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First Fruits of Redevelopment Housing Program Ready for Buyer in Newberry

There are some exciting developments with the Redevelopment Authority (RDA) initiative in Newberry, an initiative that was highlighted in an October 2024 insideNewberry story.

To re-cap, in 2024, the City of Williamsport allocated \$2 million of Federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for a land bank/blight elimination program to address blighted housing issues. A "land bank" program allows the City to buy select blighted houses, renovate or rebuild them, and resell them, starting with some seed money for the first purchases. This program helps eliminate blighted housing (a bit at a time), opens up new housing for the Williamsport market, and provides a continuing source of income for the City to continue making those housing improvements over time.

With a spending deadline of December 2026, it was imperative for the RDA to expedite the Program. The first target was a long-vacant, fire-damaged row unit on Mosser Avenue in Newberry. It is the first blighted property to be purchased, renovated, and sold for home-ownership (not as a rental unit). Extensive rehabilitation work was undertaken over the winter, including the removal of burnt materials, installation of new electrical and plumbing systems, and enhancements such as new flooring, drywall, and kitchen appliances. The home can now boast a high efficiency heating unit



Renovated kitchen in Mosser Avenue home with new appliances and floor

and one and one-half gleaming new bathrooms.

The property is now ready for sale and will be marketed by local realtors, complete with a minimum five-year Owner Occupancy Clause to promote home-ownership in the City of Williamsport.

At a recent open house, Mayor Slaughter and Executive Director Skip Memmi thanked RDA Board Members Jennifer Matz, Tom McDermott, Jade Walton, Carol White, and Don Lundy for their work on this program. New projects are in development on Market Street and Park Avenue, and this housing development process is expected to bring further revitalization to our community.

~ By Mary Rucinski





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Newberry Youth Group Building Support for New Mexico Mission

For some teenagers, summer break is seen as a time for sleeping in each morning, binge watching TV shows all afternoon, and staying up late at night playing video games, but for a small group from the Newberry Church of Christ, this summer is also going to be a real life adventure as they travel to the “Land of Enchantment.”

The NCC Sr. Youth Group is planning a mission trip to a Navajo reservation near Vanderwagon, New Mexico, to help the church there with some building maintenance and painting projects as they also support Christian programs in that local area. The young people and their leaders are looking forward to the experience and being the hands and feet of Christ as they reach out to help those in need.

This spring they are planning on holding various fund raisers to help them finance this team project. Nathan Bierly, the NCC’s Youth Pastor, says that the group hopes to hold a combined yard sale and bake sale near the end of May. “Many of our senior youth also work, so it’s challenging to schedule fundraisers,” Bierly said. Bierly is marking his first year working with the youth at NCC, and though getting the youth group restarted has been challenging, he is excited to see the impact of this summer adventure.

For updates on the trip and info on how you might support the youth group, check out the youth group Facebook page *Newberry Church of Christ Youth Group* (if you find the old FB page first, follow the link on the first “comment” to the new FB page, which is regularly updated). To support the mission directly, you can scan the QR code.

The church youth groups meet on Sunday evenings, 5:00 p.m., at the Newberry Church of Christ Education Building at 2100 Linn Street.

~ By Liz Ward






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Get Your Antennae Up for WXPI “Newberry”

Local radio station WXPI, an independent station located at the Pajama Factory, 1307 Park Ave., is raising money through a GoFundMe matching grant to place a broadcasting tower on the top of the smokestack. If the money can be raised, the small station would be able to reach Newberry and would allow residents both to hear local radio

programming better and to produce shows themselves for the benefit of the Newberry community.

The station site supports the local communities of Williamsport, Jersey Shore, and the surrounding areas in Lycoming County. William Smedley, a current WXPI radio host, said that the station “offers opportunities for local residents to express themselves on-the-air and online,” and Newberry residents and groups are invited to contribute programming. WXPI offers airtime so that “regional nonprofits [can] promote their organizations and highlight their accomplishments [and] initiate new projects,” Smedley said.

Currently, WXPI provides radio programs such as Cowboy G, The Retro Classic Showcase, The Old Time Music Hour, The Rec Room Radio Hour, and more. Smedley hosts The Old Time Music Hour, featuring old Appalachian music and new compositions in similar genres, which are given historical and musical context by Smedley, a “former member of the Gnarled Knuckles String Band, who has played the 5-string clawhammer banjo and studied Old Time Music for over 42 years,” according to his site bio. WXPI fills its time slots with syndicated programs from their affiliate foundation, the Pacifica Network: Broadcasting Network for Grassroots Community Radio.

According to the site wxpiradio.org, the syndicated programs are meant to be replaced with local grassroots programming as such



Outside the office of WXPI 88.5 FM at the Pajama Factory. WXPI is trying to raise \$20,000 to place an antenna on top of the local smokestack to get a wider audience.

programming emerges from the community. But it is hard to build local programming without a larger local base, and for that, the station needs a better and more central broadcasting tower.

On the website, readers can access a GoFundMe page entitled “WXPI Needs You.”

The station is run by volunteers and is a non-profit, so it relies on donations to “Help Us Build the New Tower.”

On the site, you can go specifically to their page <https://wxpiradio.org/campaigns/make-the-tower-louder/> to read more about the capital campaign.

The matching grant to finish this project comes from the First Community Foundation Partnership of Pennsylvania (FCFP). As many readers know, a matching grant means that the FCFP offers up to a certain dollar amount as a grant, and they will give as much of that money as is matched by other individual donors. But these funds must be matched for WXPI to utilize them. Erin Ruhl, Director of Community Engagement for the Foundation, explains that the FCFP is excited to be part of supporting the grassroots community radio station. “[The Foundation] is proud to support WXPI with a \$15,000 grant from the Williamsport Lycoming Community Fund,” she said. She specifies that the FCFP is pleased to help WXPI “expand their reach and strengthen their service to the region. We believe in the power of local radio to connect, inform, and inspire, and we are excited to be a part of WXPI’s growth and continued success in serving the community.”

Yet, WXPI needs \$20,000 to activate all of the funds the Foundation will match. WXPI is seeking \$15,000 for the grant and the other \$5,000 to secure upgrades and other items the station needs. WXPI Engineer Curtis Musheno said

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Get Your Antennae Up for WXPI “Newberry”

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successfully moving the tower to this central and strategic location would allow local Newberry nonprofits to more realistically use the WXPI station to get the word out about what they can offer the public. The community station and the other community organizations can be mutually supportive.

Why is the current tower situation so much in need of a reboot? According to Musheno, the broadcast tower was originally located in Linden near Spook Hollow Road. However, Clear Channel (now iHeartRadio) bought that tower, and WXPI had to place their tower on the Freemason Building in Jersey Shore.

Musheno pointed out that “we can only point the signal down the river and hope to get as much [signal coverage] as we can.” Ironically, the station itself cannot be heard in the parking lot of the Pajama Factory. With a new tower, it would be able to reach a radius of 30 miles from the Park Street building. Starting up in 2011, WXPI “is now approved by the FCC to greatly improve its coverage capacity,” according to the site. This means it is a potential resource for both listeners and creators in Newberry. For Newberry and all the surrounding communities, WXPI is dedicated “to connecting, informing, educating, entertaining and inspiring the region.”

WXPI was started by Alison Hirsch, Isaac Conner, and Cynthia Staiman, and Musheno was



WXPI personnel got together recently to speak about the funding for a new tower. From left to right, Bill Smedley, Cynthia Staiman, Tonya Anderson, Cita Waltz, Curtis Musheno, and Michael Lundy.

To support WXPI 88.5 FM, visit <https://wxpiradio.org/>

A benefit concert, Antennafest, will be held at the Pajama Factory on May 17th at 1 pm.

also involved. “We were just a ragtag group of people. I mean, there were just a couple of us that used to meet at Wegmans or wherever,” Musheno said. Staiman had founded the Williamsport Guardian in 2008 to give voice to progressive perspectives, but one of the main goals of the radio station was to give local artists a platform.

One program that showcases local artists is called the Rec Room Radio Hour, hosted by Michael Lundy. “Right now, my show is an hour of 100 percent local music,” Lundy said. He would love for the station to be “100% local programming, 100% local music, [and] 100% local content.”

Musheno said his biggest hope for the station is to get all members of the community involved, especially Newberry. He said Newberry is one of the oldest neighborhoods in Lycoming County, so it would be fitting to have their voices included. “I would love to get everyone in each and every neighborhood a voice and let them discuss what matters to them [on WXPI],” Musheno said. ~ Don Everett Smith Jr.

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.

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2025 MUNICIPAL PRIMARY ELECTION • Tuesday, May 20, 2025

Neither the NCP nor *insideNewberry* endorses any political party or candidate

All 81 precincts will be open for in-person voting on Election Day from 7:00am until 8:00pm. Judicial, county, School Director, city, borough, and township offices will appear on the Democratic and Republican primary ballots. A list of all candidates who have filed to run for local offices is posted on the Voter Services website at www.lyco.org/vote.

In the City of Williamsport, three City Council seats will appear on the ballot.

Voters who are registered with the Democratic or Republican parties are eligible to vote on their respective party primary ballots to select party nominees to appear on the November ballot.

Voters who are registered with third parties (Green, Independent, Libertarian, etc.) are not eligible to participate in the primary, except in four townships where a local question appears on the ballot. In Cascade, Gamble, Mifflin, and Porter Townships, third party voters are eligible to vote only on the local ballot question.

Monday, April 21 – sample ballots for all precincts will be available at the Office of Voter Services and on the Voter Services website at www.lyco.org/vote.

Monday, May 5 – last day to register to vote or make changes to your registration before election.

Tuesday, May 13 – is the last day to apply to vote by mail. Applications must be received by Voter Services before 5:00pm. Faxed or emailed applications cannot be accepted. Postmarks do not count. Voters who will be out of their municipality for

**Polls are open Election Day
continuously 7 AM until 8 PM**

work or school or have an illness or disability must apply for an absentee ballot. Voters who are not eligible for an absentee ballot but still wish to vote by mail must apply for a mail-in ballot.

A voter who receives an absentee or mail-in ballot and appears at a polling place to vote in person on Election Day may only vote by provisional ballot, unless the voter surrenders the official ballot and official return envelope to the Judge of Elections at the polling place to be spoiled in order to vote a regular ballot.

Voters who experience an emergency after 5:00 pm on Tuesday, May 13 may be eligible to apply for an emergency absentee ballot. Contact Voter Services for more information.

Uniformed military and their dependents and overseas civilians apply for and submit absentee ballots in accordance with different requirements and deadlines. Contact Voter Services for more info.

If you are uncertain of where to vote on Election Day, contact Voter Services.

You may register to vote or apply for an absentee or mail-in ballot by the following methods:

- Register to vote online or apply online to vote by mail at <http://votespa.com>.
- Download an application from the Voter Services website at www.lyco.org/vote.
- Visit Voter Services on the first floor of Third Street Plaza, 33 West 3rd St, Williamsport.
- Call Voter Services at 570-327-2267 to request that an application be mailed to you.

~ Submitted by Forrest K. Lehman, Director of Elections and Registration

NEWBERRY POLL LOCATIONS

WILLIAMSPORT 6

West End Christian Community Center
901 Diamond Street

WILLIAMSPORT 7 - RECENT CHANGE

St. John's Newberry United Methodist Church
2101 Newberry Street

Eric SPIEGEL



for Lycoming County SHERIFF

*Proven Experience,
Knowledge and
Demonstrated Leadership
For 22 Years*

Paid for by Eric Spiegel for Lycoming County Sheriff Committee
Chairs Carol D. Sides/Sheriff Mark Lusk. Vicky Stillman/Treasurer
Tim Mahaffey & Scott Warner/ Honorary Co-Chairs

UPCOMING EVENTS

MAY 2025

- | | | |
|----|----------|---|
| 1 | THURSDAY | National Day of Prayer
(Observance) |
| 3 | SATURDAY | Kentucky Derby (Sporting Event) |
| 5 | MONDAY | Cinco De Mayo (Observance) |
| 11 | SUNDAY | Mother's Day (Observance) |
| 17 | SATURDAY | Armed Forces Day (Observance) |
| 17 | SATURDAY | Preakness Stakes (Sporting Event) |
| 26 | MONDAY | Memorial Day (Federal Holiday, All
Banks Closed) |
| 29 | THURSDAY | Ascension (Christian) |

JUNE 2025

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|----|----------|---|
| 7 | SATURDAY | Belmont Stakes (Sporting Event) |
| 8 | THURSDAY | Pentecost (Christian) |
| 14 | SATURDAY | Flag Day (Observance) |
| 15 | SUNDAY | Father's Day (Observance) |
| 17 | SATURDAY | Armed Forces Day (Observance) |
| 19 | THURSDAY | Juneteenth (Federal Holiday, All
Banks Closed) |
| 20 | FRIDAY | June Soltsitce (Season) |

JULY 2025

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|----|--------|--|
| 4 | FRIDAY | Independence Day (Federal Holiday,
All Banks Closed) |
| 27 | SUNDAY | National Korean War Veterans
Armistice Day (Observance) |

LINCOLN SENIOR COMMUNITY CENTER

STEP Building
(Old Lincoln School - Lower Level)
2138 Lincoln Street • Newberry

Let's Do Lunch!
Monday thru Friday • Call 327-5483
by 10:30 AM Day Before to
Order a Hot Meal

Bingo!
Mondays, Wednesdays & Fridays
12:30 to 2:30 PM