Grow Pittsburgh Takes Reins at Garden Dreams

Mindy Schwartz, the owner of Wilkinsburg's beloved Garden Dreams Urban Farm & Nursery, recently moved to Maine. But first she put the Garden Dreams in the capable hands of Grow Pittsburgh (an organization she helped to co-found). Grow Pittsburgh is a nonprofit that focuses on supporting food growing projects and gardens across Allegheny County.

“We work with backyard gardeners, community gardeners, school gardeners and urban farmers towards helping people of all ages learn how to grow food and realize the many benefits that gardens can bring to our lives,” said Jake Seltman, executive director.

Seltman sees the Wilkinsburg property as a great opportunity to grow more seedlings in order to supply the school, community and backyard gardeners that Grow Pittsburgh supports.

In addition, he said, “We will also have an opportunity to expand our educational programming to youth and adults in Wilkinsburg and beyond.”

He projects that for 2020, Garden Dreams will operate in a limited capacity with some open weekends where customers can purchase seedlings as they are accustomed to doing. In addition, seedlings from the nursery will be available for sale daily at the East End Food Coop and at The Frick Art and Historic Center Greenhouse. Then, in 2021, the urban nursery will have expanded hours and programs.

In the meantime, Wilkinsburg residents will be asked for their input at events like a community visioning session on Thursday, March 19, and open house celebration on April 18, which will include a free seedling for attendees.

Grow Pittsburgh, which also operates Braddock Farms, Shiloh Farms and the Greenhouse at the Frick Art and Historic Center, plans to keep the name “Garden Dreams.”

Seltman envisions improvements and expansion at Garden Dreams. Fundraising to build two climate-controlled greenhouses is in process.

According to Jake Seltman, the executive director of Grow Pittsburgh, says the name will not change and that the urban farm and nursery will continue to operate, eventually with expanded programming and a new climate controlled greenhouse.
Special Meeting for Representatives of Wilkinsburg’s Congregations

Preservation Pittsburgh’s Religious Architecture Heritage Committee (RAH) has been working in Wilkinsburg for the past four years to connect with the various historic sacred places—both to help congregations, as well as to let the general public learn more about their sacred places.

Their work has resulted in public walking tours, a photo contest, and workshops. The most recent event was Sacred Spaces II: An Architectural Tour of Wilkinsburg in October with 12 worship spaces participating, some with special performances. Given the positive feedback and interest, they are planning another tour for fall 2020.

In addition, RAH would like to help Wilkinsburg’s historic sacred spaces build a sustainable future. They are exploring the possibility of working with Partners for Sacred Spaces, a funder, consultant, and connector for the nation’s older religious structures and congregations.

Partners has 30 years of experience. According to their website, they are “the only national, non-sectarian, nonprofit organization focused on building the capacity of congregations of historic sacred places to better serve their communities as anchor institutions, nurturing transformation, and shaping vibrant, creative communities.”

To learn more, RAH invites all to a video conference call with Partners on Saturday, February 29, at 10 a.m. at the Wilkinsburg Community Development Corporation (Lohr Building, 725 Wood Street). RAH especially wants representatives from Wilkinsburg’s sacred spaces to attend this meeting. There is no charge, but RSVPs are required and space limited. Attendees will learn about Partners’ New Dollars/New Partners for Your Sacred Place ten-month training program.

For further information, visit www.preservationpgh.org/religious-architectural-heritage-committee. RSVPs can be sent to info@preservationpgh.org.

Free Community Meals at SAUMC

South Avenue United Methodist Church offers the Wilkinsburg community a once-a-month free breakfast (usually the third Sunday at 9 a.m.) and a once-a-month free brunch (usually the fourth Sunday at 11:15 a.m.).

A Parks and Recreation Update

The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, with Council members and residents, held two meetings last fall planning renovations for Rosa Parks park.

Ideas include a small basketball court, pavilion, water fountain, playgrounds, and picnic table area. Meetings will continue over the winter and spring.

Rosa Parks park is located behind the homes bordering Franklin, Peebles, Rebecca, and S. Trenton. It was initially installed as part of an urban renewal effort in the 1960s.

Renovations to Whitney Park are about 80% complete, awaiting installation of a basketball hoop, electrical drop and lighting, picnic tables, and water fountain in the spring.

Grass was seeded in the fall in open areas. Families have been bringing their children to play on the two new pieces of playground equipment when days have been warmer this winter.

Family Movie Nights at Eastridge

Hilltop Block Watch with the Wilkinsburg Library presents Family Movie Night the last two Fridays in March and first Friday in April.

Residents should mark their calendars for Friday, March 20, March 27, and April 3 at 7:45 p.m.

Attendees will enjoy an evening watching a popular movie on the big screen at Eastridge, 1900 Graham Blvd (near Graham Blvd. and Laketon Ave.)

“Sleeping Beauties” Research Study

A research study on the effect social media has on sleep is looking for African-American girls ages 11-14. Two 45-minute visits are required. Mothers will be compensated $25; daughters $30.

For more information, contact Dr. Willa Doswell at 412.624.8977 at the University of Pittsburgh School of Nursing.
2020 Brings Continued Progress in Wilkinsburg

The Borough of Wilkinsburg continues to take a multi-faceted revitalization approach in 2020. Numerous plans are underway, both continuing the success of already completed projects while seeking funding and planning for additional improvements.

This year, residents will see the completion of the Ardmore wall and green space project. To date, the wall and sidewalk above the wall are near complete awaiting the installation of a railing. Phase two of the project will include sidewalk lighting, landscaping and a “Welcome to Wilkinsburg” wall—expected to be complete by June. Additionally, the Wilkinsburg Historical Society is working to replace the deteriorated Lincoln Statue, which will enhance the park space above the wall.

Completion of Borough Building renovations will also be celebrated in this year. New administrative and code enforcement offices, fire department facilities and bathrooms are a part of the renovation. Still to be completed is a third floor children’s bathroom and auditorium renovation. The third-floor auditorium has been used primarily as storage for more than 20 years. It has been cleared out to use as a gathering space with a stage that can hold more than 100 people.

A ribbon cutting will take place in the spring to mark the completion of the Whitney Park improvements started last year. New playground equipment, basketball court, sidewalks, parking lot, lighting and seating were a part of the project. New equipment for Hunter Park, as well as planning for improvements to the Rosa Parks Park will happen this year. A parklet is also in the final planning stages at the corner of Wood Street and South Avenue.

Wood Street will see the long awaited two-way street conversion this spring. The project will allow motorists to better access businesses on Wood Street by directly turning off of Penn Avenue onto Wood. A bike lane on Ross Avenue from Hay Street to Swissvale Avenue is part of the plan.

Underground, the Borough will also be improving the problem of overflow of stormwater into the sanitary sewer system. Lining of a portion of sewer lines on South Avenue will begin in February and seeking of additional funds to deal with cross-connections of stormwater lines into sanitary lines is well underway.

Other projects being worked on include bus stop improvements at South Avenue across from Save A Lot, $400,000 in blight removal, Eastridge Community Center improvements, 800 Block of Penn Avenue planning and sidewalk improvements on Penn Avenue near the Ardmore Wall.

The Borough is also looking forward to completion of other significant projects at Graham Field by Chatham University (see page1) and the completion of the train station renovation by the WCDC.

PA Department of Transportations has announced the paving of Ardmore Boulevard from Coal Street to Brinton Road and paving of Penn Avenue from the split at Ardmore Boulevard to Beulah Road.

No New Taxes

In December, the Wilkinsburg Borough council approved a budget with property taxes at 14 Mills. The council has not increased property taxes since 2004 making 2020 the 16th year without a Borough enacted property tax increase.

Borough Council credits the hard work of staff to curb spending and look at more effective ways to improve revenue.

The Borough general fund operates with a budget of approximately 15.2 million dollars. The majority of revenue comes from real estate taxes (5.2 million) and Act 511 taxes including wage (3.1 million). Largest expenditures are Police (3.7 million), Fire (1.8 million), Public Works (1.1 million) and garbage collection (1 million).

Most 2020 meeting schedules were not available at the time of publication. Check www.wilkinsburgpa.gov for updates. All meetings are in the Borough Building at 605 Ross Ave.

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<td><strong>3/4 (Wed.) 7 P.M.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>3/18 (Wed.) 7 P.M.</strong></td>
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WCDC Receives $3M Grant from Neighborhood Partnership

The Wilkinsburg Community Development Corporation (WCDC) was recently awarded a six-year, $3 million grant from the Neighborhood Partnership Program (NPP). The grant represents the third NPP award since the organization’s doors opened in 2010, and renews the WCDC’s ability to execute programs that enhance the Wilkinsburg community, specifically through the revitalization of its central business district. The grant provides funding through The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania’s Department of Community and Economic Development’s (PA DCED) Neighborhood Partnership Program (NPP) and made possible thanks to TriState Capital Bank, Highmark, Dollar Bank and the PA DCED.

“I would like to sincerely thank all of our stakeholders, including the PA DCED and our corporate sponsors, for their partnership in our work to positively impact the Wilkinsburg community,” said Tracey Evans, WCDC executive director. “We are proud of the work that we have accomplished in the last ten years. We have seen major, multi-million dollar projects like the Lohr Building and the Train Station go from concept to near completion, and programs to help small business owners lead to local entrepreneurship.

“We look forward to continuing to make progress in our goal to help Wilkinsburg return to the thriving, prosperous neighborhood it once was—a place where people of all ages and backgrounds increasingly want to live, raise their families and do business.”

A Decade In Review

As a result of the NPP’s past support, Wilkinsburg is making significant progress. Residents’ lives are being improved every day. Since the WCDC opened its doors in 2010, $100 million—how much public and private investment has occurred.

400—total number of local entrepreneurs that the WCDC supported through grants, workshops and technical assistance.

300—number of positive positive press stories generated.

200+—number of Good All Over banners, trees, benches, garbage cans, planters and bike racks installed

100—number of vacant storefronts filled and new businesses that relocated here

The WCDC has also led the revival efforts of two landmarks in the Wilkinsburg business district: the Wilkinsburg Train Station and the Lohr Building. These anchor buildings were vacant for a combined 50 years, and now represent a $9 million investment that will bring over 20,000 square feet of office or commercial space to the market.

A Focus On The Future

The WCDC is making great progress in positioning Wilkinsburg to become the next great Main Street community regarded as a center for creativity, diversity and entrepreneurship. The new year brings with it the much-anticipated completion of the Lohr and the Train Station—two multi-million projects that will significantly impact the business corridor. The WCDC will focus efforts on ensuring these buildings are occupied by businesses that will contribute to revitalization.

This is all part of the WCDC’s six-year strategic plan, which focuses on three major strategic initiatives, each with its own series of goals, objectives, strategies and tactics that will guide the organization’s efforts:

• Business District Prosperity—facilitating the redevelopment of the Wilkinsburg business district, its regional identity and assisting the businesses that call it home.

• Community Vitality—working in partnership with the Borough, residents, business owners and other community stakeholders to tackle issues that challenge us in ways that will enhance success for all.

• Organizational Excellence—operating our community development corporation with efficiency and effectiveness to enable long-term impact.

Evans added, “Just as Wilkinsburg’s challenges didn’t arise over a 10-year period, so too will they not be solved in this short time. We still have a lot of work to do, but the strategic plan will help us to realize our vision of Wilkinsburg as a prosperous, healthy and inclusive community.”
As the New Year Begins

As the new year begins, I would like to take a few moments to reflect on some of the amazing things that happened in the Wilkinsburg School District at the close of 2019, and give thanks to those in our community who have made substantial donations to our students.

On Thursday, Dec. 19, Turner Intermediate School hosted the annual Literacy Light Up Night. Dinner was served in the school cafeteria from 5 to 6 p.m. Guests were able to enjoy games, art, music and treats. Those who attended were able to take in student work, which was on display throughout the building. This is a wonderful event for families and an opportunity to explore the new-and-improved Turner.

On Tuesday, Dec. 17, first graders at Kelly Primary School received gifts from the First United Church of Christ of Harrison City and the Westmoreland/Fayette Boy Scouts. This is the third year for this generous donation. Students were selected by families who then bought gifts for each student. Gifts were delivered by Santa and his elves. Teachers also received goodie bags with items for their classrooms.

As we move into 2020, more exciting news is coming for our District. I look forward to sharing it with you.

I would like to wish our families and the Wilkinsburg community a very happy and healthy new year!

TURNER INTERMEDIATE HOSTS LIGHT UP LITERACY NIGHT

Turner Intermediate School hosted a Light Up Literacy Night on Thursday, Dec. 19. Dinner was served in the cafeteria. Guests were able to enjoy games, art, music and treats. Student work was on display.

UPCOMING MEETINGS AND EVENTS

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<th>Date</th>
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<td>7 P.M.</td>
<td>School Board Legislative Session</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/28 (Tues.)</td>
<td>ALL DAY</td>
<td>Kelly Primary School Winter Concert</td>
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<td>1/31 (Fri.)</td>
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<td>End of 2nd Nine Weeks Grading Period</td>
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<td>Kelly: School Wide Assembly</td>
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<td>2/11 (Tues.)</td>
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<td>Pre-K Field Trip</td>
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<td>2/17 (Mon.)</td>
<td>ALL DAY</td>
<td>Presidents’ Day—No School</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/18 (Tues.)</td>
<td>7 P.M.</td>
<td>School Board Planning Session</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/21 (Fri.)</td>
<td>1:10 P.M.</td>
<td>100th Day of School—Early Dismissal</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/25 (Tues.)</td>
<td>7 P.M.</td>
<td>School Board Legislative Session</td>
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Board meetings held at Wilkinsburg School Administration Building, 718 Wallace Avenue, 15221
Wilkinsburg residents have probably noticed that many of the Borough’s trees have been taken down in 2018 and 2019 and that there are still trees standing with a big X painted on the trunk.

Thanks to the Borough’s Shade Tree Committee’s environmental partners at the Nine Mile Run Watershed Association, a complete inventory of the Borough’s public trees (the ones along our streets) was made in the summer of 2017.

Professional arborists mapped the trees’ locations and recorded data about each tree’s species, size, and condition.

Unfortunately for the Borough, about 60 trees were identified as at risk of failure. This means that the tree is considered in poor enough condition that parts or even the entire tree could fall, endangering both property and human life.

Because the number of such trees was unexpectedly high, the results were confirmed by yet another arborist, who also painted a large X on each tree that would have to come down.

About half the work was done in 2018-19, and they plan to complete the rest of in 2020.

The loss of these trees has been a major blow to our urban forest in Wilkinsburg, but the committee and others are trying to step up planting efforts. For example, 14 new street trees and at least 7 new park trees were planted in last year.

The Shade Tree Committee has plans for new plantings on Graham Boulevard in the spring and for an entirely new program for planting front yard trees that will serve as street trees but without disrupting sidewalks.

Look for more information about this innovative program soon.

Visit the committee’s page on the Borough’s website along with NineMileRun.org to find out more about Wilkinsburg’s urban forest.

PUCS New PreK-4 Employs Play and Exploration Curriculum

Pittsburgh Urban Christian School (PUCS) has launched a PreK-4 class that connects with its curriculum and approach: cultivating caring hearts and curious minds by educating the mind, body, and soul. Since 1981, PUCS has employed a play-based education to tap into students’ natural curiosity in the heart of Wilkinsburg.

PUCS is committed to leveraging its successes to influence the educational landscape in Wilkinsburg.

The pre-school currently has eight students enrolled with a lead teacher, Hannah Williams, an alumnus of PUCS and a teaching assistant, Reena McCormick.

Beyond learning numbers and letters, creating some masterful art pieces and singing songs, students have already had the opportunity to explore countries and continents: stories from Japan; creating and eating Gallete de Rois from France and mango lassi, banana chips and paratha from India; and hearing stories from Pascal from Nigeria.

Students have recess outside daily (weather permitting) and quiet time following. They have even had the opportunity to go to gym. The play and exploration curriculum prepares them to succeed in Kindergarten.

Staff will be hosting many opportunities for families to explore PUCS this spring. In addition, because of the generous support from the Wilkinsburg Bible Chapel, PUCS still has a scholarship available for this program 2020 and the academic year to come.

Wednesday chapel and tours are January 22, February 26 and March 25 9 a.m.–10:30 a.m. Thursday classroom and tours are February 13 and March 12, 9 a.m.–10:30 a.m. Evening open houses are February 13 and March 18, 6 p.m.–7:30p.m. A Parent Association Preview Night is April 23, 6 p.m.-8 p.m.

For more information, visit pucs.org or email office@pucs.org.
Chamber Membership Offers Benefits to All

The mission of the Wilkinsburg Chamber of Commerce is to promote the growth, prosperity and vitality of Greater Wilkinsburg through educational and charitable activities aimed at helping people to improve their lives and the lives of those around them through entrepreneurship and access to a positive business community.

Chamber membership offers:

- **Opportunities** to highlight your business at monthly After-Hours Networking events
- **Promotion** at community events including the Wilkinsburg Thursday Open Market
- **Access** to other community leaders at WCC meetings, networking events and fundraisers
- Business **education and support** through partnerships with Chatham University Women’s Business Center, Mansmann Foundation’s Peer Mentoring Groups, and WCDC
- **Representation** at Borough meetings
- **Listing** on WCC website
- Periodic **spotlight** articles in the *The Wilkinsburg Sun* newsletter
- **Promotion** of your business and events in the monthly e-newsletter

Positive change is possible when our community works together. The Chamber invites you to make a difference and become an active member in the Wilkinsburg Chamber of Commerce.

*If you have any questions regarding membership or Chamber activities, please call 412.242.0234 or email wilkinsburg.pa.chamber@gmail.com.*

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**Events at Your Library**

The following are highlights of February events at the main branch of the Wilkinsburg Library. For more information, call 412.244.2940, 412.244.2944 (Children’s Dept.), or 412.342.0056 (Eastridge Branch). Or email Wilkinsburg@einetwork.net. (The library website is currently under reconstruction.)

**Morning Story Time**—Mondays at 10:30 a.m., Children’s Department.

**Evening Story Time**—Tuesdays at 6:30 p.m., Children’s Department.

**After School Maker Lab**—Tuesdays at 4 p.m., Children’s Department

**50+ Club**—Tuesday, February 11 from 9:30 a.m.–3 p.m., 2nd Floor Council Chambers.

**Legacy of Jazz in Western PA**—Thursday, February 13 at 6:30 pm, 3rd Floor Auditorium.

**Civil Rights vs Southern Strategy, Lecture and Discussion**—Thursday, February 27 at 6 p.m., 3rd Floor Auditorium.
Double Your Contribution to the Lincoln Statue

Take advantage of an opportunity to double the value of a gift to the Lincoln statue!

In honor of Lincoln's birthday, all donations in February and March of at least $10 will be matched by a generous Lincoln fan who wants the statue project to succeed in Wilkinsburg.

Over a century ago, in 1916, a sheet copper statue of Abraham Lincoln was unveiled at the intersection of the Lincoln Highway and Penn Avenue. Lincoln on the hill was a source of pride. The statue was a way to honor the slain President and inspire the citizens of Wilkinsburg. Over the years the statue became weathered, damaged, and cracked.

Now the distorted statue has been moved to the Borough building, and the Wilkinsburg Historical Society has spearheaded an effort to raise donations for a new bronze statue of Abe.

Please give online at www.gofundme.com/f/lincoln-statue-for-wilkinsburg or send a check to Wilkinsburg Historical Society, PO Box 17252, Pittsburgh PA 15235.

All donations over $100 will also receive a Lincoln bobblehead.

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www.jamesfloralshoppe.com

“Serving Pittsburgh for Over 100 years”

GARDEN DREAMS, from page 1

The new greenhouses would expand growing capacity to support even more urban gardeners and programs.

“In 2021, in addition to expanded seedling sales, we envision running youth programming, a farm share program, and any number of other programs the community identifies as key priorities,” he added.

Seltman has been with Grow Pittsburgh eight years and became executive director in 2017. “Throughout my time here, Mindy and the Garden Dreams staff have been great partners,” he said. “I was actually connected to Garden Dreams as a customer and volunteer before I ever knew anything about Grow Pittsburgh!”

About Grow Pittsburgh’s past and present involvement in Wilkinsburg’s many community and school gardens, Seltman said, “I appreciate the community pride and engagement and how welcome we have felt in exploring this possibility and in working with school and community gardeners over the past decade in the Borough.”

Metro Community Health Center

metrofamilypratice.org
412.247.2310

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February 2020