Business as Unusual in Wilkinsburg

In this unprecedented time, this May 2020 Sun is different. Even though there are not many events and meetings to highlight, there are extraordinary people offering our community special care and service. This issue will highlight a small percentage of the good-all-over things that are happening.

Monique Gillespie, co-owner of Fetch! Pet Care, is still operating as an essential business for the medical and Wilkinsburg community. Fetch! offers pet care (dog walks, feeding, cat visits, boarding, pet sitting) while our pet parents are at hospitals, the office, and supporting our community. Contact them at www.fetchpetcare.com/downtown-east-pittsburgh or 412.407.6266.

Anyone washing their hands a lot lately? You might as well do it with quality, locally made soap. "The quarantine has made Lovett Sundries more of a family business than ever. Every day our two kids come in to our shop and curl up in the fort we made them to watch movies or draw and do crafts at our big work table...We’re shipping soaps, lotions, and household cleaning supplies to folks, nation wide, every day. We are also doing curbside pickup for locals. Right now, all soaps are 10% off, so wash your hands, stay safe, and stay healthy," says Jeff Lovett. Lovett Sundries is at 608 South Avenue. Contact them through www.lovettsundries.com.

Hanna Mosca (left), Grow Pittsburgh’s Farm Manager, is spending a lot of time in the greenhouse at Garden Dreams these days. They have opened their online store for seedlings and fresh produce available for pick up at Garden Dreams or for a delivery up to 5 miles surrounding Garden Dreams. Visit growpittsburgh-100872-103361.square.site.

The ordering period will start every Friday at noon and be open until their pick up and delivery slots are full for the week. Last week they sold out in about 3 hours! Now is the time to buy seedlings and to support Grow Pittsburgh as they settle in to their new digs on Holland Avenue in Wilkinsburg.
From the Editor’s Desk

Poet T. S. Eliot wrote that April is the cruelest month, and at first it seemed that way in 2020. The daffodils were poking through the earth and the trees were starting to blossom, but we were shut in our houses, wondering if we would be able to score enough basic supplies to live with some dignity.

But instead, April has surprised me by being a kind month in Wilkinsburg. The pandemic has brought out the best in a lot of residents, many of whom we highlight in this issue.

At this writing, the Nancy’s Revival (South Avenue) food truck has raised over $11,000 to give free meals to those in need and for health care workers. (If you want to donate, check out their Facebook.) Jameelah’s Kreations started sewing designer masks (see her Facebook).

On a personal note, I was trying to sell my childhood home in the borough for my parents who are now quarantined in a nursing home. The pandemic was throwing us so many obstacles. At the last minute when the plumber couldn’t complete his dye test for the closing, Wilkinsburg DPW workers appeared on short notice to wrest an old manhole cover from its base to save the day.

Our same DPW gave away spring flowers to any residents who would pull up in a mask. I picked up five purple hyacinths, which I shared with my neighbors on Penn Avenue.

The WCDC has been keeping us apprised about what convenience stores and restaurants are open to serve us (visit wilkinsburgcdc.org). And resident Eden Smith developed this logo to encourage us to patronize Wilkinsburg restaurants that can only stay in business with takeout now. (You can find the logo to share on our Instagram and Facebook.)

The Wilkinsburg Community Ministry is tirelessly distributing food, and the Wilkinsburg Family Support Center (WFSC) is operating a food bank once a month that caters to community needs. Located in Wilkinsburg for over 20 years at 807 Wallace Ave., Suite 205, WFSC is unique because they deliver. St. James RC church in Wilkinsburg also has a monthly food pantry distribution. To get contact info about these and other food helps in Wilkinsburg, go to www.pittsburghfoodbank.org/get-help/locator and type in 15221.

Compensated Study for Young Teen Girls

Girls between the ages of 11-14 are invited to participate in a study looking at the relationship between sleep health and use of social media. The study takes place by one-time phone surveys.

Moms will receive $25 for study participation and daughters will receive $30. If interested, contact Dr. Willa Doswell, University of Pittsburgh School of Nursing at 412.624.8977.
Wilkinsburg Borough COVID-19 Update

The Borough of Wilkinsburg continues to encourage residents to adhere to the Governor’s policies and orders regarding the COVID-19 outbreak. In the following paragraphs we will update you on the Borough concerns, plans and hopes for the coming months as restrictions will begin to ease.

Borough Council and Committee Meetings

Borough Council meetings held their first electronic meeting on April 15 per new emergency declaration guidelines. The Borough will continue to hold only one monthly meeting instead of two with the next scheduled for May 20 at 7 p.m.

Watch our Facebook page, sign up for text alerts, and check our website for ways to participate.

We are working to activate our boards, committees and commission meetings electronically in May. The Finance, Budget, and Capital Planning meeting; Joint Tax Committee Meeting; and Council Legislative Session are also planning to meet in some way in May. Check the borough website for updates and details.

Staffing and Operations

Our essential Borough services continue with police, fire, code enforcement and public works staff in full operation.

Support staff in administration and finance also continue to work. The libraries are closed with only managers working and providing information via social media and internet outlets.

We are hopeful that the libraries may be back in operation in June pending state guidelines. Parking ticketing has been suspended, but street sweeping will occur working around vehicles where possible.

Parks are open for safe social distancing activity and no use of playground equipment.

Our Borough building continues to be closed to the public but can be reached by phone Monday through Friday 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Drop off of documents is also available.

Programs and Events

It appears that most events planned for before the end of June will not be held. The Borough will evaluate the safety of holding gatherings at the end of May and make decisions pursuant to safety guidance from the governor’s office and county officials.

Projects

Currently the Borough has several projects funded with grants from various sources. They include Wood Street’s two-way conversion and bike lane, Wood Street and South Avenue Parklet, Ardmore Wall phase one, Ardmore Wall phase two-linear park and welcome sign, and South Avenue sewer lining project.

As of May 1, Council believes taking advantage of the grants attached to these projects makes it necessary to move forward with them in a timely fashion. General maintenance of things like roads have been difficult because products like hot pavement have not yet come online due to COVID-19 issues.

Finances

Like most local governments, the Borough of Wilkinsburg expects to have significant budget shortfalls in 2020 and into 2021. Things like wage taxes, liquid fuels (gas tax), and the regional asset tax (based on sales) are expected to reduce dramatically.

We are hopeful that the prudent management of finances in the past will allow us to keep up the essential services we offer daily, like fire, police, trash collection and others at existing levels.

Currently it is important for residents to follow the COVID-19 guidelines. Keeping our community healthy and safe depends on all of us.

—Donn R. Henderson, borough manager

Work on restoration of the railroad trestle overpass has made a lot of progress while traffic has been at a minimum.
When Dave Sevick, the founder of Computer Reach, realized that the organization was going to need more workable space, he searched nearly every neighborhood in Pittsburgh for a new location. It wasn’t until he arrived in Wilkinsburg that he found the perfect fit.

Since 2001, Computer Reach has been working tirelessly to make technology available to people most in need through refurbished equipment, computer literacy, training, and support. After receiving donated technology, staff and volunteers at the Computer Reach Warehouse refurbish the product and sell it at an affordable price to local, national, and international communities.

They found their ideal warehouse space at 1 DRV Drive in Wilkinsburg and immediately connected with the WCDC. “It was clear when we came to Wilkinsburg that our mission lined up well with the WCDC. Their priority was helping the people of Wilkinsburg, and so was ours,” said Sevick.

Computer Reach strives to bridge the digital divide that is growing rapidly around the world. “People still think of technology as a luxury, but it’s not. It’s essential for access to various educational and occupational opportunities.” Computer Reach is hoping to level the technological playing field from their new space in Wilkinsburg.

After finding the right building, Sevick quickly realized that he was going to need assistance navigating the approvals, permitting, and other requirements associated with a relocation. “Tracey Evans from the WCDC was the key,” he said. “She was fantastic. She told me who to talk to, about what, and in what order. When I told someone that Tracey sent me, the other person quickly replied, ‘Okay. Let’s talk.’ Her help was worth more than all of the money in the world.”

“I can’t express how appreciative I am for the help that I’ve received from the WCDC. Their support has meant a lot and I feel good that Computer Reach is here.”

In addition to refurbishing technology, Computer Reach offers digital literacy courses to individuals of all ages, including students, adults, and senior citizens. Participants learn critical digital skills, including basic computer hardware skills, internet, email, and social media safety. Their programs feature hands-on sessions with computers, providing participants with in-person opportunities to test out new knowledge, practice, and ask questions.

Computer Reach is quickly expanding, but hoping to remain in Wilkinsburg. “We take pride in our address. We hope to be anchored here for many years to come.”

To learn more about Computer Reach, visit their website at computerreach.org.

COVID-19 Efforts

The COVID-19 crisis has proved how many people in our community lack access to the devices or the connectivity required to successfully participate in 21st-century life. Computer Reach is currently working with partners like Neighborhood Allies on the Beyond the Laptops initiative to get computers in the hands of local families and students who are trying to work and attend school from home during the COVID-19 lockdown. Their volunteers and staff have begun the arduous process to ‘audit’ thousands of laptops—running checks on battery life and other components, then installing a new hard drive and downloading operating system software—all with a singular goal in mind, to bridge the digital divide. Learn more at beyondthelaptops.org.
A Message from the Superintendent of Schools—Dr. Linda Iverson

Apart, But Learning Together

Our school buildings closed in mid-March—just one part of an extraordinary, nation-wide effort to slow the spread of COVID-19. Luckily, schools are more than just buildings, and even when apart, we can stay connected.

Our teachers are providing students with grade-appropriate instructional materials, enrichment, and online learning activities across all content areas. To access, visit our website, www.wilkinsburgschools.org, and click “Learn at Home.” We are loaning iPads to families without a computer or other device, and providing pencil and paper instructional packets for those without internet access.

The district partnered with Opening Doors for Kids, Inc. to offer healthy and free brown bag breakfasts and lunches, which are prepared by volunteers. Please see the related article for more information.

Principals from both of our schools created videos to reach out to and encourage Kelly and Turner students via Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Check out our page to watch these creative and up-beat messages.

The COVID-19 situation evolves quickly, and so it is impossible to know what the circumstances will be as you read this. Through it all, we have prioritized communication. You can access details on everything related to our district’s COVID-19 response, including any news on the reopening of schools, by clicking the “COVID-19” tab on our website.

While we have been physically apart, all members of the Wilkinsburg School District family are always in this together.

Breakfast and Lunch Option for Our Kids

Many Wilkinsburg School District students eat breakfast and lunch at their school five days a week. The nationwide efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19 have not only closed schools, but many workplaces.

Knowing this meant some kids might not always have access to a nutritious breakfast and lunch, Opening Doors for Kids, Inc., partnered with the school district to provide them. “We had the cooks, we had the kitchen. It made sense for us to take this on,” said Michael Johnson, who is president and CEO of Opening Doors for Kids, Inc., and a Wilkinsburg school board member.

On Mondays and Thursdays while schools remain closed, students or their parents may pick up a brown bag of food between 9 and 11 a.m. from the back entrance of Kelly Primary School or from Turner Intermediate. The food is to be eaten at home, and there is enough for the days when food is not distributed. Instructional packets are also available at both sites.

Volunteers have prepared and packed food for about 80 students each day, according to Johnson. It’s often parents who pick up while the kids stay safe at home. Many parents have also picked up an instructional materials packet to keep their students’ minds fed as well. “They are thankful to us every day, for the meals and the educational program,” he said.

Opening Doors for Kids Inc, which is also known as Opening Doors for Youth and Families, provides many kinds of services and support to youth and families in need, including social services, employment services, youth leadership programs, and assistance with food and utilities. To receive services, donate, volunteer, or learn more, visit www.openingdoorsforyouthfamiliesinc.com or call 800.618.8582.

Teaching and Learning Continue at Home

The COVID-19 pandemic has closed Wilkinsburg school buildings, but thanks to a massive effort on the part of district teachers, administrators and staff, learning will continue in the comfort and safety of students’ homes.

On April 13, the district launched a new Learn at Home website. Assignments and educational materials for all grade levels and subjects are posted daily by Kelly Primary and Turner Intermediate teachers. To access these materials, parents and students should visit the district’s website, www.wilkinsburgschools.org, and click on “Learn at Home.” Both paper/pencil and online assignments are available for all grade levels.

Though these assignments are optional, completing them will ensure students stay on grade level and do not fall behind.

“I am strongly encouraging our students to do these online assignments and enrichment activities that their teachers are preparing,” said Superintendent Iverson. “The practice and review of previously taught skills this work provides will ensure students do not fall behind, and will be ready to return to class when schools reopen.”

Since not everyone has access to the internet, the district will continue to provide paper and pencil instructional packets.

www.wilkinsburgsun.com 5
Wilkinsburg Says Goodbye to A Community Leader

The Wilkinsburg community notes with sadness an active resident who passed away on Palm Sunday, April 5, 2020. Jean G. Kirkland greatly impacted our community.

For 48 years, Jean was actively involved in supporting the Wilkinsburg community. In 1970, she started as an election board worker for the 3rd Ward 6th district, and, with her late husband, Rev. Charles Kirkland, she was a pioneer in the development of the NAACP Wilkinsburg Chapter. From 1973-2013, Jean was the Judge of Election for the same ward and district. From 2013-18, Jean returned as an election board worker under the new (and present) Judge of Election, Linda Kirkland-Law, her eldest daughter.

Jean was elected as a Wilkinsburg borough council member in 1986. In 1987, Jean was elected to become the first African-American female president of the Wilkinsburg council, serving from 1987-1991. As president, Jean spent long hours meeting with residents to address concerns within the borough especially with the law enforcement department. She took time to communicate with the law enforcement department those concerns to establish a peaceful resolution among the Wilkinsburg Borough.

Jean was a crossing guard (1998-2003) and attended the Wilkinsburg Police Academy for residents (2001-03). Wherever there was a need in the borough, you would find Jean, as she served on many committees like the Wilkinsburg Weed & Seed. She was also a member of the Greater Pittsburgh MAD DADS Organization as a Division MOM.

In addition, Jean was a member of the International Association of Ministers’ Wives & Widows for over 35 years. She served in various positions, including President of the Silver Cord Pittsburgh Chapter and Pennsylvania State Chapter. Jean attended the University of Virginia to further her education within the association.

Jean was also blessed with the gift and talent of a musician. From an early age until her passing, Jean played the piano and organ for multiple churches, starting with Macedonia Baptist Church under the direction of Dorothy Walden. Her relationship with God was illustrated by her praise and worship. Her spiritual path as a Christian educator encouraged young people through summer programs and the Young Life Youth Ministries.

Jean’s 35 years of employment included Allegheny County Accounts Payable, Clerk of Courts, and State of Pennsylvania Accounting department. She worked under the leadership of notable people such as Robert “Bob” Pierce and Barbara Hafer. Jean retired in 1993.

On her 75th birthday, the Wilkinsburg Council Board provided a resolution to declare July 12th as Jean Kirkland Day.

Jean was affectionately and lovingly known by her name, “Jellan” or “Ms. Jean,” her big smile and her style as the “Hat Lady.” She was the loving, supportive, nurturing matriarch to her five children, seven grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

The Kirkland family says, “Thank you for being a part of Jean’s journey of life.”

Wilkinsburg Sun | May 2020
The Wilkinsburg Thursday Market is MOVING…

We are excited to announce the partnership between the Wilkinsburg Thursday Market and the Borough’s Art in the Park for the 2020 season.

Beginning June 4th through August 27th, the Market will be open every Thursday at the “Parklet on Penn Avenue” from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. with music and activities with Art in the Park scheduled from 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. The Market’s focus will be on fresh food and healthy habits.

More information on our vendors and activities to come.

Interested in being involved in the Market? Email info@wilkinsburgchamber.com

WILKINSBURG PROUD

There are many ways to demonstrate pride in our community – buy from local business, volunteer to help at community events, support community organizations and keep our streets clean and litter free.

The Wilkinsburg Chamber of Commerce believes that if it is good for the community it is good for business. The Chamber will launch a new initiative, Wilkinsburg Proud, with support from UPMC, Nine Mile Run Watershed Association and Pennwood Paint & Supply Company, to show our community pride by keeping our business district clean.

The first phase will begin with a clean-up of the 700 block of Penn Avenue in May and, with additional support, continue through the summer of 2020.

Volunteer for Wilkinsburg Proud!

Contact info@wilkinsburgchamber.com

UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, April 11  •  9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. 
Nine Mile Run Spring Stream Sweep

Saturday, April 11  •  11:00 am - 2:00 p.m. 
Shred-It Event & Facility Tours Guardian Storage

Brinton Rd.

Thursday, April 16  •  8:00 - 9:00 a.m. 
Chamber Board of Directors Meeting, 900 Wood St.

Saturday, April 18  •  Noon - 3:00 p.m. 
Garden Dreams Community Open House

806 Holland Ave.

Tuesday, April 28  •  5:00 - 7:00 p.m. 
Wilkinsburg After Hours

Wilkinsburg Borough Building

JOIN THE CHAMBER. BE INVOLVED.
MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

If you're not registered to vote, go to VotesPA.com. Call 412.350.4518 with election questions or to request an application for the new mail-in ballot. If you do not want a mail-in ballot, you can vote at the polls.

For further information, email E_Harris_Fulton@yahoo.com.

Primary Election—June 2
Presidential Election—November 3

This is the first time in 95 years that Kenyon Jewelers has been closed for more than a week. Owner Doug Duffus says they are still doing online sales, repairs and custom work, but the physical store is closed. He says, “Our hearts and prayers go out to all our friends and customers, our Wilkinsburg business community, public safety workers, our religious community and community leadership that all will stay safe and healthy.”

Call Doug at 412.731.6063 if you’re interested in discussing a custom project or bridal jewelry. You can find more info and items for sale at kenyonjewelers.com and Ebay.com/s4/kenyonjewelers and their Facebook page.

Haylee Ebersole, of Meshwork Press at 315 S. Trenton Avenue, along with her partner Kyrie Bushaw, is working to remain a space for the community while not existing currently in their physical storefront and workspace. In addition to the neighborhood “window” egg hunt, Meshwork is also able to write and mail cards for you via their online store. If you have a print-based idea for a project that might help engage the community, Meshwork would love to hear from you.

If you’d like to support Meshwork Press, their online store is open and shipping out orders of stationery and art prints on a weekly basis. Visit hello@meshworkpress.com or call 412.690.0022

Looking for some interesting groceries while you’re social distancing? Moses Onwubiko of Global Food Pittsburgh (912 Penn Avenue) is open everyday from 10 a.m.–7 p.m.. He carries Caribbean, Latin and African groceries and says he is regularly disinfecting the door handles and surfaces inside the store.
The East End Food Co-Op has new store hours: 9 a.m.–10 a.m. for senior and immune compromised shoppers, 10 a.m.–7 p.m. for the general public. Masks are mandatory for shoppers and staff. (Children under age 2 and those with medical issues that prevent them from wearing masks are exempt.) Featured are Cashier Natassia Corum (above) and Manager Carrie Larese (below). The Co-Op is technically in Pittsburgh, but they are Sun supporters and many Wilkinsburgers shop (and work) there, so we consider them honorary Wilkinsburgers!

Yvonne James of James Flower Shoppe on Wood Street in Wilkinsburg has been able to continue to deliver her amazing flower arrangements despite her store being closed during the pandemic. Customers can order online or call 412.731.3794.

Using no-contact delivery, she and her team are still bringing smiles and hope through their flowers. They are also still doing arrangements for funerals. What could be a better way to get over the Covid-19 blues than to receive a gorgeous bouquet of flowers from your neighborhood florist?

WE’RE HIRING!

We are looking for energetic, cooperative, and committed employees who share a love of good, healthful food and enjoy helping others through exceptional customer service.

APPLY ONLINE!

www.eastendfoodcoop.hiringthing.com

James Flower Shoppe

712 Wood St.  15221
412-731-3794
www.jamesfloralshoppe.com

“Serving Pittsburgh for Over 100 years”