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# LEBO BEAT

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## Special election scheduled for 42nd House District

Candidates selected following resignation of Rep. Dan Miller  
By Stacey Reibach

The resignation of state Rep. Dan Miller on Dec. 17, 2025, triggered a special election to fill the remainder of his term. Soon after Miller resigned, House Speaker Joanna McClinton set the special election for Tuesday, Feb. 24.

All precincts in the 42nd House District will be open for voting that day. In addition to Mt. Lebanon, the district includes Baldwin Township, Castle Shannon, Dormont and parts of Upper St. Clair.

Democratic committee mem-

bers from those communities voted Jan. 3 and selected Dormont resident Jen Mazzocco as their candidate. She defeated Upper St. Clair resident Alliyson Feldman to receive the Democratic nomination.

According to John Schnaedter, executive director of the Republican Committee of Allegheny County, Joseph Leckenby was selected by the chair, vice chair and secretary of the county committee

Meet the special election candidates; read interviews on page 4.

in accordance with Section 6.3 of the Republican Committee of Allegheny County bylaws.

The winner of the Feb. 24 special election will serve out the remainder of Miller's term, which runs through the end of 2026. The seat will also appear on the primary and general election ballots in 2026, and additional candidates may come forward to compete for a two-year term beginning in 2027.

## A photo a decade in the making



Mt. Lebanon resident and photographer Dave Dicello captured this image on a recent winter morning in Pittsburgh. For more on Dicello, his work, family and life in Mt. Lebanon, see story on page 13.

## A Conversation with Mt. Lebanon's Fire Chief

From volunteer firefighter to chief, he emphasizes training, accountability and community  
By Stacey Reibach

Kurt Christofel has been leading the Mt. Lebanon Fire Department since May 2025, bringing new energy and vision to the team. The Lebo Beat recently had the opportunity to interview Chief Christofel, offering readers a closer look at his leadership, priorities, and the challenges and triumphs of serving the community. Don't miss this inside perspective on the man at the helm of Mt. Lebanon's fire department.

**Q: Where did you grow up, and at what age did you realize that you wanted to go into the fire service?**

I grew up in Jefferson Hills, where my parents still live, along with my sister and her family. My father was a volunteer firefighter, though he retired before I was old enough to join. My grandparents owned a farm, and I spent nearly every weekend and summer there, learning the value of hard work and responsibility at an early age.

During the 1991 Stanley Cup playoffs, my family was in the basement with a fire going when, suddenly, it sounded like a jet engine. We were experiencing a chimney fire. A passerby noticed the situation and called the fire department. Watching the firefighters respond and manage the incident was my first real exposure to fire service operations. I was immediately hooked.

As soon as I was eligible, I joined the fire service and became a student of the profession. I have never stopped learning and continue to take classes and seek opportunities to better myself and serve my community.

**Q: You joined Mt. Lebanon in 2011 but had so much experience before that. Please tell us about your experience before coming to Mt. Lebanon.**

From those humble beginnings in 1991, I joined the Pleasant Hills Fire Company, which was a strong proponent of training and professional development. They encouraged me to attend any training I was willing to

take, and I continued to grow steadily as a firefighter.

In 2003, I became a Pennsylvania state fire instructor and began teaching classes. This role allowed me to build relationships with other instructors and learn from their experiences, contributing significantly to my professional growth. Teaching others challenged me to deepen my own knowledge and sharpen my skills, marking a period of tremendous development in my fire service career.

Around 2008, I became the volunteer chief of the Jefferson Hills Fire-Rescue Department, the community where I lived. In addition to my volunteer service, I worked as a contractor for the Department of Energy. During that time, I gained valuable leadership insights from the management team that shaped my approach to leadership and accountability.

One of the most important values I carry from that experience is, "Acceptance is the standard." To me, this means that if I choose to walk past something that is not absolutely correct, I

am accepting it as the new standard. This philosophy continually challenges me to hold myself and others to a higher level of accountability and excellence, pushing me to be a better firefighter, fire chief and human being.

**Q: What drew you to want to work for Mt. Lebanon? You had been with an all-volunteer company in Jefferson Hills. What was it like to come to a combination department?**

There were three primary reasons my family and I began looking at the Mt. Lebanon Fire Department. First, while I was comfortable in my career as a government contractor, the work environment became increasingly unstable due to political shifts. This instability led my wife and me to reevaluate our long-term situation and career direction.

Second, although we were living in Jefferson Hills at the time, my wife had previously served as a volunteer firefighter with Mt. Lebanon before we met, and we both wanted to return to the area. My stepson also had many friends in Mt. Lebanon,

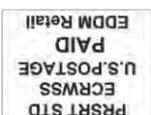


Mt. Lebanon Fire Chief Kurt Christofel. (Photo provided)

where he grew up, making the community a natural fit for our family.

The third reason was the Mt. Lebanon Fire Department's long-standing reputation for producing exceptional firefighters. In every class I taught that included a Mt. Lebanon firefighter, that individual consistently stood out among peers. They were driven, hard-working and personable. I already knew most of the career staff through my work as an instructor, as many of them were instructors themselves, and strong professional relationships were already established.

Continued on page 6



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# The LEBO BEAT

For Mt. Lebanon. By Mt. Lebanon. By Brion Palmer

From the beginning, the strategy behind *The Lebo Beat* was clear: Make it about Mt. Lebanon—but just as importantly, make it by Mt. Lebanon. The goal was to build a community newspaper powered by people who live here, love here and understand the rhythms of the community. That approach allows the paper to be authentic, transparent and genuine.

That goal has been met. *The Lebo Beat* is powered by a team of writers and contributors who bring deep professional experience, along with strong local ties, to telling Mt. Lebanon's stories. Below are some of the people behind the paper. More contributors will be featured in future issues.

Stacey Reibach and her husband, Andy—an emergency room physician at St. Clair Hospital—moved to Mt. Lebanon in 2005 and have never regretted the decision. Their children benefited from what Reibach describes as an outstanding education and went on to attend their colleges of choice. Professionally, Reibach worked for three Pennsylvania state senators from 2013 to 2020, followed by roles in community affairs and freelance event planning.

Jennifer Ganser lives on Firwood Drive with her husband, Dave, and daughters Lily and Josephine. A North Hills native and North Allegheny graduate, she returned to the Pittsburgh area knowing Mt. Lebanon's charm was the right fit for her family. Ganser earned a degree in communications media and journalism from Indiana University of Pennsylvania and spent a decade as a broadcast news reporter and anchor in Johnstown, Pa.; Charlottesville, Va.; Austin, Texas; and Steubenville, Ohio. She enjoys telling human-interest stories that highlight people making a positive impact and is passionate about volunteering with the Mt. Lebanon Relay for Life, benefiting the American Cancer Society.

Lauren Cefalo Moore is a Mt. Lebanon native who now lives just two blocks from her childhood home in Mission Hills. A graduate of Mt. Lebanon High School's Class of 1991, she went on to study advertising and creative writing at West Virginia University. Moore began her career in advertising and design before moving into corporate marketing, spending 12 years at PPG Industries. She now runs a freelance marketing business from home alongside her husband, John. The couple is raising their children, Charlotte, a junior, and Burk, an eighth-grader, in Mt. Lebanon and values the schools, athletics, businesses and neighbors that define the community.

Rick Shrum has been a professional journalist since 1975 and has lived in Mt. Lebanon with his family for more than 32 years.

Sarah Core is a writer, editor and graphic designer who has lived in Mt. Lebanon for more than a decade. A long-time newspaper reporter, she has covered stories ranging from murder trials to presidential campaigns. Core earned a bachelor's degree in English from the College of Wooster and a master's degree in journalism from Indiana University

Bloomington. Her father's family has lived in Mt. Lebanon since the 1960s, and she recently published her grandmother's memoir, *Zelie Girl*, which chronicles growing up in Western Pennsylvania.

Laurie Garvey is a lifelong Mt. Lebanon resident with deep roots in the community. She built her professional career in the customer experience space, shaping customer journeys at global pharmaceutical company GSK and later at innovative startups including BodyMedia, 4moms and GAMMA Sports. Garvey is committed to giving back and volunteers her time to causes that matter to her. She has served as an active board member of the Friends of the Mt. Lebanon Public Library since 2022.

Scarlett Sweeney is a senior at Mt. Lebanon High School and has lived in Mt. Lebanon her entire life. She is a co-founder of Mini-THON, an organization that supports childhood cancer research; editor in chief of the high school newspaper, *The Devil's Advocate*; manager of the girl's lacrosse team; a Medallion Ball recipient; and a Future Business Leaders of America national qualifier. She also works at a hair salon and as a nanny. Sweeney plans to study business with a concentration in marketing and a minor in communications, and she hopes to write for her college newspaper.

Marilee Kline has lived in Mt. Lebanon since 1998. She began her sports photography journey covering Mt. Lebanon freshman football in 2018 and expanded to additional high school sports in the years that followed. Highlights of her work include covering the 2021 state championship and photographing the Case Western Reserve Spartans, where her son, James, recently concluded his football career. She received the Blue Devil Club Youth Appreciation Award in 2022 and works as a freelance photographer for Mt. Lebanon Magazine.

Ken Lager is a Mt. Lebanon-based photographer with a passion for many aspects of the craft. His work includes covering fires for the Mt. Lebanon Fire Department, taking portraits for the Mt. Lebanon Police Department, photographing real estate throughout Mt. Lebanon and the greater Pittsburgh area, and creating family portraits for friends' holiday cards. He began his photography career covering the New York City Marathon and endurance races such as Tough Mudder while living in Jersey City, New Jersey.

Ken has lived in Mt. Lebanon since 2015 with his wife and high school-aged son. The family serves as dedicated foster volunteers for Animal Advocates and has helped place more than 50 cats into permanent homes.

Together, *The Lebo Beat's* contributors bring decades of journalism, photography, communications and community experience, along with a shared commitment to telling the stories that matter most to Mt. Lebanon.

Interest in contributing to *The Lebo Beat* continues to grow, and all inquiries are welcome. Those interested in working with or contributing to the newspaper may email me at [info@lebobeat.com](mailto:info@lebobeat.com). ♥

# STREET BEAT



Since we are in the heart of winter, we asked residents to share their secret to surviving the cold winter blues.

I survive by saying "we need to rent a place in Florida to see if we like it there"

– Barb D., Washington Road



I snuggle up with my wife in front of the fireplace and drink a bottle of good wine.

– Joe D., Thornberry Circle

"I was raised in Wisconsin where the snow was so high we had to keep a shovel, skis, boots and ice skates just to get to work or school.... So I love this!"

– Heather F., Helen Drive



Cuddle with my lovely wife in front of my fireplace with a glass of Bourbon. Also play lots of hockey.

– Jay R., Crescent Dr.

Always wear a hat and scarf outside, and listen to some Jimmy Buffett music with some boat drinks while the hockey game's on!

– Capt. M., Duval Street



About our interviewers: Mr. and Mrs. C have been Mt. Lebanon residents since 1967.

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# Meet the Special Election candidates *By Stacey Reibach*

## Joseph Leckenby Q&A

**Q: Tell our readers about yourself: where you grew up, where you went to college, what you do for a living, etc.**

A: I am a lifelong Mt. Lebanon resident. I went to college and law school at Duquesne University. I graduated cum laude in 2021 with a B.A. I double majored in political science and philosophy. I then continued my education at the Thomas R. Kline School of Law of Duquesne University, graduating in 2025. I am an attorney. In my spare time, I enjoy writing, engaging in public policy and rowing at the Three Rivers Rowing Association. I recently began curling at the Pittsburgh Curling Club. I am the Ward 1, District 4 committeeman on the Mt. Lebanon Republican Committee.

**Q: What made you interested in running for this House seat?**

A: I chose to run for this seat because I want to give the district a meaningful voice. Once elected, I will have a mandate to go to Harrisburg to draft policy, debate and vote on behalf of the constituency. I am excited for this opportunity to serve and act as a qualified, dedicated problem-solver.

**Q: What are some of your legislative priorities?**

A: Some of my legislative priorities are the following: (1) use active listening in policy drafting; (2) ensure consumer safety; and (3) provide appropriate oversight to the commonwealth. In addition, I hope to engage with communities throughout the district to ensure that the commonwealth is functioning properly for them. I plan to hold regular town halls and host numerous events to get to know constituents on a personal level.



Joseph Leckenby (Photo provided)

**Q: Many residents of Mt. Lebanon used Rep. Miller to help with state-related issues. What are your thoughts about the role of constituent services for a state representative?**

A: In addition to attending legislative sessions in Harrisburg, constituent services are perhaps the most important part of being a legislator. Whether it is assisting with unclaimed property, PennDOT, the Department of Revenue or other state agencies, these programs cannot function properly if people have trouble accessing them, and I will work hard to ensure that constituents have an effective state government.

**Q: What personal qualities would you bring to the House?**

A: I bring determination, resilience, a positive outlook and creativity. I uphold integrity and good citizenship. I have also developed friendships with numerous politicians, both Republicans and Democrats, and bipartisan cooperation and understanding come easily to me. I am a tech-forward individual and was an early adopter of AI. I want schools throughout the commonwealth to teach students ethical AI use, and I also want the commonwealth to strengthen its cybersecurity efforts. ♥

## Jen Mazzocco Q&A

**Q: Tell our readers about yourself: where you grew up, where you went to college, what you do for a living, etc.**

A: I live in Dormont with my husband and two daughters. I grew up in Hempfield Township and moved to the city to attend the University of Pittsburgh. I received an undergraduate degree in creative nonfiction writing and later earned a Master of Arts in teaching. I have taught English at Allerdice High School for 15 years, where I have also coached the debate team and sponsored the National Honor Society.

In my spare time, I love riding my bike. I enjoy using the region's trail system and commuting to work and around the South Hills on my e-bike. My family and I have recently developed a love for bowling, and we do that often. We also volunteer together at the Dormont Free Pantry when it is open on Sundays.

**Q: What made you interested in running for this House seat?**

A: Most importantly, I love being a public servant. I believe the more time we spend taking care of one another, the better. As a teacher in a city school, my students are diverse in many ways — race, religion and income. I have learned a great deal about how strong institutions, such as public schools, can provide opportunity, but they must be well funded and designed to support the most vulnerable. I want to fight for that at the state level.

I have also seen what a good representative can do for communities in the district. Rep. Miller was an excellent example. I have helped accomplish meaningful work in Dormont, and I want to do that on a larger scale. I believe I have the skills and experience to get things done in Harrisburg.

**Q: Talk about your time on the Dormont council and some of your accomplishments in that community.**

A: Serving on Dormont council has been an honor. The work of local government has a significant impact on residents' day-to-day lives. We have accomplished many important goals, including passing a nondiscrimination ordinance; reviewing Police Department policies with strong community participation; implementing a progressive paid family leave policy for employees; setting a \$15 minimum wage for employees, which we achieved several years ago; and updating the zoning code to allow gentle density and encourage development near public transit.

For me, the most exciting work has involved improving safe mobility for pedestrians and cyclists. In 2023, I wrote Dormont's Complete Streets policy and advocated for the establishment of the Safe Mobility Commission. We are preparing to imple-



Jen Mazzocco (Photo provided)

ment a new traffic-calming policy and are working with PennDOT on a road diet for West Liberty Avenue, scheduled for completion in 2027.

Safe mobility is especially important to me because I believe walkability defines our community and helps connect it. When people spend time in their neighborhoods, they build connections that strengthen resilience and understanding. That sense of shared belonging is essential as we work to address larger challenges, including protecting democracy and civil rights.

**Q: What are some of your legislative priorities?**

A: At the top of the list is affordability. Rising costs weigh heavily on families, from health care and utilities to housing and child care. While state-level options for health care and utilities are limited, we can pass legislation that makes it easier to build dense, affordable housing near transit and reduces the burden of child care costs.

As a teacher, public education is one of my top priorities. We must ensure Pennsylvania's public schools are fully and equitably funded and that strong programs remain in place for students with special needs and English language learners. I also want to ensure communities in HD 42 have the support they need to thrive, whether that means rebuilding aging infrastructure, redesigning roads to improve pedestrian safety, or maintaining parks and playgrounds.

Sustainable, long-term funding for public transit is also essential. All three T lines and several bus routes serve the district, and we must not only maintain service but expand it.

**Q: Many residents of Mt. Lebanon relied on Rep. Miller for help with state-related issues. Do you plan to retain any or all of his staff, and what are your thoughts on the office location?**

A: I plan to keep the office where it is and retain Rep. Miller's staff. The office has been in that location for nearly two decades and is centrally located within the district, accessible by public transit and across the street from a parking garage. The staff are exceptional — experienced, knowledgeable and talented problem-solvers. I would love for them to stay as long as they wish. ♥





# Chanukah celebration makes history in Mt. Lebanon

*Hundreds gather at Clearview Common to celebrate the Festival of Lights* By David Rullo

Hundreds gathered at Mt. Lebanon's Clearview Common on Dec. 17 to commemorate Chanukah on the holiday's fourth night.

The community-organized menorah lighting marked the first time the township publicly celebrated the Jewish Festival of Lights. The event included participation from all three South Hills synagogues — Beth El Congregation of the South Hills, Chabad of the South Hills and Temple Emanuel of the South Hills.

Held near one of the township's two Christmas trees, the event drew members of the Jewish community, local elected officials and residents interested in celebrating the holiday.

The lighting represented a victory for the Jewish community, which rallied at a January commission meeting to advocate for public recognition of Chanukah. The effort was initially led by Chabad of the South Hills Rabbi Mendy Rosenblum, who spent the past three years championing the placement of a public menorah and the idea of a Chanukah parade.

Rosenblum called the event "gratifying after spending so many years trying to get the menorah placed in Mt. Lebanon."

He said he was not surprised by the turnout, noting the significance of the menorah and how thoughtfully the event was arranged.

Mt. Lebanon resident Charlene Tissenbaum

planned the event alongside fellow residents Eva Gelman and Stacey Reibach. She said she was pleased by the larger-than-expected crowd.

The event, she said, would not have been possible without the support of the three synagogues and their rabbis; Bryan Neft, who helped negotiate the menorah's placement with the township; the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh; the Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh; and the township, which provided security.

"The fact that three residents were able to make this happen with the support of Mt. Lebanon is a tribute to the great place we live in," Tissenbaum said.

For Neft, the event was marked by both joy and sadness.

"Joy because we were successful in getting Mt. Lebanon to have a menorah for the first time on public property," he said. "The sadness came because the police and fire departments had to provide so much protection. It's sad that it has become necessary for us to pray in peace in this country."

Temple Emanuel of the South Hills Rabbi Aaron Meyer thanked Municipal Manager Keith McGill, the Rev. Noah Evans, chair of the Civic Engagement Board, the Mt. Lebanon commissioners, event organizers and the township's police and fire departments.

"I'm so grateful for our



The lighting of a menorah marked the culmination of Mt. Lebanon's Chanukah celebration. (Photo by David Rullo)



Hundreds attended Mt. Lebanon's first menorah celebration. (Photo by David Rullo)

friends and neighbors for making Mt. Lebanon a wonderful community in which to be Jewish," Meyer said.

City of Pittsburgh Controller Rachael Heisler also attended the event and said she was grateful to be invited.

"The event was so well attended, and in light of the recent antisemitic attack in Australia, it's more important than ever that non-Jews show up for their Jewish neighbors," Heisler said. "I was really glad to see such broad

support and attendance." Beth El Congregation of the South Hills Rabbi Alex Greenbaum summed up the sentiment shared by many in attendance.

"It was a Chanukah miracle," he said. ♥



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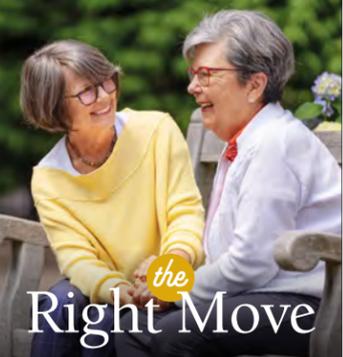
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## Fire Chief Q&A *Continued from page 1*

Transitioning to a combination department from an all-volunteer organization was a breath of fresh air. In Mt. Lebanon, the career staff manages much of the administrative workload that can overwhelm volunteer departments, including fire prevention, community risk reduction, outreach, training and vehicle maintenance. This structure allows volunteers to focus on what matters most to them — serving the community operationally — rather than being burdened by tasks that simply need to be done.

**Q: You're in your first year as Mt. Lebanon's fire chief. You took over from Chief Nick Sohyda, who had been chief for about 18 years. He was the chief when you joined the company. What are some things you learned from him that helped you rise to chief and take the reins after his retirement?**

I owe a great deal to Chief Sohyda. As I mentioned earlier in the interview, becoming a fire instructor significantly expanded my professional network, and Chief Sohyda was one of the instructors I connected with early on. While we initially taught a few classes together, our collaboration deepened about seven years ago when the Pennsylvania State Fire Academy restructured a program focused on leadership and incident command strategies.

Over the past seven years, I have had the opportunity to co-present this course with him, and there has not been a single class from which I have not taken

away a valuable lesson. Working alongside Chief Sohyda reinforced an important leadership principle for me: Leadership is fundamentally about relationships. If you want to accomplish meaningful, large-scale goals, you cannot do it alone. Strong relationships are what make those accomplishments possible.

**Q: Chief Sohyda had the vision for the Fire Training Center, located at the Public Works yard, which opened in 2025. How will this structure help your firefighters in their training?**

The training facility represents an incredible achievement for both the fire department and the municipality. For many years, the department developed innovative ways to train within the station or in donated homes scheduled for demolition. We installed mock windows in apparatus bays, built pallet-based house layouts and constructed temporary props that required significant time to assemble and dismantle after each use.

The new training facility allows us to keep these props permanently in place, enabling crews to simply drive to the site and train efficiently. Another major benefit is reduced travel time. Before the facility was built, the closest comparable sites were in Washington County or North Park, each requiring about an hour of travel in each direction. That travel time significantly reduced the amount of actual training and was not an efficient use of our volunteer firefighters' time.

In addition, the facility

will be available for use by surrounding communities. This demonstrates Mt. Lebanon's strong commitment to public safety and positions the department as a regional leader in fire service training and service delivery.

**Q: Many fire departments nationwide are struggling with manpower and funding. Does Mt. Lebanon face either of these challenges?**

Fortunately, municipal leadership in Mt. Lebanon recognizes the value of public safety. As a result, the fire department is funded directly by the municipality. While many departments struggle to raise operating funds through bingo, chicken barbecues or hoagie sales, our volunteers are able to dedicate their time to training, recruitment and community engagement rather than fundraising.

Fire department leadership works diligently to ensure efficient and responsible use of the annual budget. As a result, recruitment initiatives have placed the department in an exceptionally strong position. In fact, we are approaching capacity and would need to add additional gear lockers and other critical resources to accommodate a significant increase in volunteers.

One of our most successful recruitment tools has been the annual Citizens Fire Academy. Over the past two years alone, we have brought on approximately 12 new firefighters through this program. At a time when volunteer recruitment is a nationwide challenge,

Mt. Lebanon has been able to grow and sustain its ranks. Many departments would welcome the opportunity to face the "problem" of having more qualified volunteers than available space.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of Mt. Lebanon's recruitment efforts is the quality and diversity of the people we attract, both career and volunteer. Our members include business professionals, scientists, skilled tradespeople, attorneys, computer programmers and engineers. This range of backgrounds strengthens our ability to serve the community effectively.

**Q: What are some of your leadership philosophies? Are there policies or procedures you implemented soon after becoming chief?**

If I were to choose one leadership philosophy, it would be servant leadership. I believe everything in an organization revolves around relationships. My role is to ensure that members of the fire department have the tools, resources and support they need to be successful.

Every member of the Mt. Lebanon Fire Department adds value to the organization and deserves my utmost respect. My responsibility is to remove obstacles, empower personnel and help them reach their fullest potential. Servant leadership means putting the needs of the organization and its members first so they can perform at the highest level for the community we serve.

At the same time, I strongly believe in accountability.

I must hold every member accountable for actions and performance, while creating an environment where members can hold each other — and me — accountable. Accountability and trust must go hand in hand.

One of my first priorities was meeting individually with each firefighter to better understand what we do well, where we can improve and how I can help them achieve personal and professional goals. Those conversations helped build trust, strengthen relationships and reinforce a shared commitment to continuous improvement.

Over the past year, the fire department has been developing its strategic plan, which is updated every five years. This plan establishes the vision for the department and serves as the foundation for annual goals and objectives.

I believe this process is vitally important because it represents a shared vision, not the direction of a single individual. It reflects the collective input, experience and commitment of members and stakeholders.

**Q: Any final thoughts to share with the Lebo community?**

I am grateful to every member of the fire department and to all of our stakeholders, including the community we proudly serve. Our community is a model, not only locally but nationally, for the exceptional work taking place in local government, schools, community organizations and the municipality as a whole. I am humbled to be part of such a dedicated and collaborative team. ♥



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# Roots Natural Kitchen expands presence with Cochran Road location

Chain known for grain bowls and salads eyes community involvement *By Rick Shrum*

Roots Natural Kitchen has taken root in the South Hills.

"We have been doing well," said Dana Corso, manager of Roots on Cochran Road in Scott Township, about 100 yards from the Mt. Lebanon line. "We're still getting people who have not been here before, and there are people we see twice a week."

The fast-casual restaurant chain, which "has grown popular in college areas," Corso said, has been operating at 1644 Cochran Road since July 26. Roots serves customizable salads and grain bowls that emphasize fresh, natural ingredients.

The restaurant occupies a building formerly home to Bruegger's Bagels. The structure has been renovated and is brightly lit.

"We have been very steady both in-house and with our catering, and we have a drive-thru for people to stop on a day like today," Corso said recently. "They don't have to get out of their car."

Menu offerings include six signature grain bowls and four signature salads. The most popular grain bowl is El Jefe, followed by Balboa, while the Pesto Caesar is the top-selling salad.

"You can create your own salad," Corso said. "That's a popular option."

Roots does not offer breakfast items, but children ages 12 and under eat free with the purchase of an adult bowl.

The restaurant sits along a heavily traveled stretch of Cochran Road, near its intersection with Greentree Road. Several popular dining destinations are nearby, creating competition for a newer business.

"We feel we're unique enough to be competitive," Corso said. "We want to be the first choice when it comes to service."

Roots Natural Kitchen was founded in Charlottesville, Virginia, where the first restaurant opened in June 2015 and where the company remains headquartered.



Manager Dana Corso has supervised operations at Roots since July 2025. (Photo by Rick Schum)

Charlottesville is also home to the University of Virginia.

Over the past 10 years, the chain has opened 11 restaurants and now operates in seven states: Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware and North Carolina. Menus are consistent across all locations.

The Mt. Lebanon/Scott Township site is the fourth Roots location in the Pittsburgh region. The chain



Bama McKinley, left, and manager Dana Corso put together a bowl at Roots. (Photo by Rick Schum)

made its local debut on Forbes Avenue in Oakland in 2019, followed by locations in Bloomfield and Ross Township. A fifth regional restaurant is scheduled to open in Bridgeville in January.

Corso said the Cochran Road location employs about 60 people, including many high school students working part time. Community engagement is a priority, she added.

"We've done fundraisers here," Corso said. "We had a band fundraiser for Mt. Lebanon High School on Dec. 1. We're looking for other ways to stay involved."

Roots Natural Kitchen is open from 10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

Through its grain bowls and salads, Roots Natural Kitchen continues to establish itself in the South Hills. ♥

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## Bringing photographer Dave Dicello into focus

*Best known for his cityscape images, Dicello's heart is in Mt. Lebanon's small-town feel*

By Jennifer Ganser

It's very possible you have heard of photographer Dave Dicello, but it is equally possible you didn't know he lives in Mt. Lebanon on Folkstone Drive.

While many consider January the "dead of winter," Dicello's work is coming to life. He doesn't see snow, wind and ice as deterrents; rather, he sees them as a challenge, offering a new lens through which to capture his art.

He freezes moments in time — reflections in the river and sunrises over the city of Pittsburgh — often before most people begin their day.

"In the winter, I don't like to stop. Photography is just like working out. It's like a muscle. I don't want to get rusty. I go out every day," Dicello said.

His alarm goes off every day at 4:07 a.m.

"I couldn't go out early in the morning if Dana (my wife) wasn't there with the kids," Dicello said. "That's never lost on me. I can only do what I do because of them."

Dicello's dedication to closely monitoring the weather is paying off. His recent image of a train passing under the Duquesne Incline, with the backdrop blanketed in white, is gaining traction, having garnered more than 18,000 likes on Instagram.

"I've waited a decade for that picture," Dicello said.

Dicello oozes passion for

all things Pittsburgh. Born and raised in Bethel Park, he said his father sparked his interest in photography by taking him to Penn State football games as a child, where he would photograph the atmosphere.

Speaking of atmosphere, living in a place with a small-town feel was a long-time dream for Dicello. Mt. Lebanon provided just that for him and his wife, Dana. The couple moved to Mt. Lebanon in 2012, where Dicello revels in the community's walkability and small-town feel along Beverly and Washington roads.

He works full time as a financial analyst for Thermo Fisher Scientific and, in recent years, has become more involved in coaching his children's soccer teams. He beams with pride when talking about his son, Declan, 11, and daughter, Delaney, 7, noting that his own father coached him in baseball until he was about 16 years old.

When he's not coaching, he's capturing.

His images of Pittsburgh cityscapes, lightning strikes, sunrises and fireworks have garnered significant attention, including more than 170,000 Facebook followers and 153,000 on Instagram. Still, he is equally passionate about photographing Mt. Lebanon.

He can often be found perched atop the Washington Road parking garage, camera in hand, offering a



The Dicello family, from left, Dana, Delaney, Declan and Dave (Photo provided)

sweeping view of nearby businesses — including his favorite spot, The Saloon.

"Keith, the owner, bought a 6-foot print, and it's hanging in the corner of The Saloon," Dicello said. "Every time I go in there, it drives my kids crazy because I'm like, 'We've got to go over and see the picture.' I just love that."

While he appreciates people buying his work, Dicello said it's the stories he hears about people enjoying his images — and the sense of nostalgia they evoke — that matter most to him.

"That means more to me than anything else," Dicello said. "That always resonates with me and never gets old."

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, Dicello could be found hand-delivering his 2026 Anniversary Pittsburgh Calendar to friends and neighbors who purchased it online.



One of Dicello's other passions is coaching his two children's soccer teams. (Photo provided)



One of Dicello's favorite spots, The Saloon, is brilliantly captured on a recent winter night. (Photo by Dave Dicello)

"They're not just going to Mt. Lebanon. They're going to Germany and California, Alaska and everywhere," Dicello said. "But to be able to drop them off to my neighbors, whether they know who I am or not, is definitely cool."

The calendar features some of his favorite images from the past 13 years. He sold 3,000 calendars this year alone — an exponential increase from years past.

Looking ahead, Dicello said one bucket-list photo shoot would involve a helicopter ride over Mt. Lebanon to capture aerial views of its neighborhoods.

"I would love to go over Washington Road, Main Entrance, Cedarhurst, Virginia Manor," Dicello said. "Just capture those, because the neighborhoods are what really make Pittsburgh and Mt. Lebanon so special to me." ♥



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# Love Beat

*A Lebo Love Story: Alison and Steve Dyke*

*By Ali Dyke*

My name is Alison Dyke, and my husband and I have a wonderful love story to share. When we tell it, people often find it hard to believe—but they always agree it's an amazing story.

Steve, my husband, and I both grew up in Mt. Lebanon. We attended Markham Elementary, Mellon Middle School, and Mt. Lebanon High School. We were a year apart, with Steve in the grade above me.

One warm day in 1983 or 1984, my friend and I were walking on the Markham ball field near the Beadling side, heading toward the back field. We saw a friend of ours from school sitting on his bike between two boys. I knew immediately they were the Dyke twins. We chatted quickly with our friend, but neither Dyke boy spoke to us. As we walked away, I turned to my friend and said, "Steve Dyke is the cutest boy ever."

From then on, I would occasionally see him in the halls at Mellon and the high school. He never knew I existed, but I certainly knew him. My stomach would flip whenever I saw him, though no one ever knew. Steve was outgoing, and I was shy; my admiration remained my secret.

In 2004, I moved into a home at the end of Inglewood Drive. On the day we started moving in, my previous husband—who had also attended Markham, one grade ahead of Steve—was in the yard raking leaves. He said, "Guess who stopped by and heard we were moving in?" I didn't know, so he added, "Steve Dyke." My arms full of bags, I dropped them and asked

him to repeat it. Steve's parents lived around the corner, and his mom had told him that Markham alums were moving in. Steve lived up the street.

Six years later, our neighborhood planned a block party. Steve's boys were raising money for a dunk tank and a bounce house. During that time, both Steve and I had gone through divorces for similar reasons. I was raising my two boys on Inglewood, and Steve was raising his three boys up the street. His boys came to my house and I happily contributed.

Steve coached my son in soccer one year, and I found his involvement very attractive.

The block party arrived on a dreary September day. My two boys and I attended, and I immediately wanted to try the dunk tank—but I hesitated. I saw Steve mingling in the crowd but didn't approach. Standing near the dunk tank, I told my friend I wanted to go in. A voice said, "Then do it." I turned to see Steve. I agreed, removed my shoes and insulin pump, and climbed in. I was dunked over and over while neighborhood kids cheered—probably the only adult who dared. We spoke again briefly before I headed home.

I would see Steve playing ball with his boys on the street. He had



Left to right is Greyson Potter, Jackson Potter, Ali, Steve, Duff Dyke, Matt Dyke and Zach Dyke.

friended me on Facebook, but we hadn't contacted each other yet.

In December 2012, my parents had purchased a foosball table for my boys. I posted on Facebook about my concerns building it. Steve sent me a direct message asking if he could help. Shocked, I agreed. We spent hours putting it together two nights before New Year's Eve and had a wonderful, organic conversation.

A few weeks later, Steve asked me out on a date via DM. Despite a snowstorm, we drove to Shadyside for our first date. We return to that same restaurant every year to commemorate it.

Steve and I were married in July 2022. We will soon celebrate our fourth anniversary. We live happily in the Markham area with two of our

five boys and our beloved Chocolate Lab, Willow.

Steve often tells people that even though he didn't know me in school, he will never forget me as the "girl in the dunk tank." He says he found it very attractive.

We were always meant to find each other. It could have happened in 1983, 1985, or 1988—or anywhere in between—but it didn't. We often wish it had, because then we could have loved each other longer.

This is not a wedding announcement, engagement, or bridal story. It is simply a true Lebo love story that we wanted to share.

**If you have a "love story" to share (engagement, wedding, or anniversary) send information and photos to the Lebo Beat at [lebobeat.com](http://lebobeat.com).** ♥

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# Mt. Lebanon football team reun

## Players and coaches gather to relive historic PIAA championship season

By Eleazer Gorenstein Photos by Marilee Kline

Those involved with Mt. Lebanon High School's first state football championship knew they had something special even before the 2021 season began.

Four years after defeating heavily favored St. Joseph's Prep 35-17 in the PIAA Class 6A championship game, the Blue Devils

reunited for a luncheon to recapture the magic of that historic season.

"It was definitely a special game. It feels like yesterday, but that's something you remember forever, right?" said former Blue Devils standout and current Navy Midshipmen running back Alex Tecza. "Doing

that with your best friends is pretty cool.

"And to do it when you're supposed to lose games that year — when no one thought we had a shot against St. Joe's Prep — made it even more special," Tecza added. "They're a powerhouse school that recruits from five different

states and has won multiple titles. We were a school district with five square miles to work with. I'd be surprised if something like that happened again."

Players and coaches from the undefeated 2021 team gathered Sunday, Dec. 21, at Cefalo's Banquet and Event Center in

Carnegie to relive their accomplishments and reconnect, in some cases for the first time since that season.

Former Blue Devils head coach Bob Palko said returning to Mt. Lebanon from State College, where he is now an assistant coach at Penn State, was an easy decision.



Ben McAuley, Jake Schraven, Beckham Dee, and Daniel King



Alex Tecza, Eli Heidenreich, and Kade Capristo.



Coach Sean Veights, Ben McAuley, Jake Schraven, David Shields, Ezra Heidenreich, Miles Halter, and Fred LaSota.



Joey Daniels, Jack Smith, and Coach Palko



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# ites to celebrate 2021 state title



Players and coaches from the 2021 PIAA championship team.

"When I heard about the banquet, I thought it was a great idea," Palko said. "I haven't had the chance to see many of these kids since I've been at Penn State. You miss those opportunities when they come home. It made sense to do it now, before these guys graduate from college."

Joey Daniels, the team's senior quarterback in 2021, recalled feeling nervous heading into the title game but said the support of the Mt. Lebanon community was inspiring throughout the season.

"The turnout — not only for our home games, but also in Hershey for the championship — was incredible," Daniels said. "Even in the semifinal game in Altoona, seeing how many people traveled to support us was super special. Students, parents — it meant a lot."

That community passion continued the day after the championship, when Mt. Lebanon held a parade along Washington Road in Uptown to honor the team.

"The parade was pretty cool," Tecza said. "They told us we'd have a little

parade, and I thought maybe 100 people would show up. But it was basically the whole town."

Tecza recalled teammate Tommy Boehner climbing atop a fire truck at the end of the parade and hoisting the championship trophy.

"It was like a movie — something out of 'Rocky' or 'Rudy,'" Tecza said. "Everyone went crazy. That's a memory I'll never forget."

Tecza and teammate Eli Heidenreich were among several seniors from the championship team who went on to play college football. The two were the

only teammates to end up at the same school, both finishing their senior seasons at the U.S. Naval Academy.

They closed their collegiate careers with a 35-17 victory over Cincinnati in the AutoZone Liberty Bowl on Jan. 2 — a score identical to the 2021 state championship game. Tecza led Navy with 80 rushing yards and a touchdown, while Heidenreich caught five passes for 64 yards and a touchdown to lead the Midshipmen in receiving.

Tecza said that while attending Navy was his own

decision, Heidenreich's commitment helped solidify his choice. He credited Mt. Lebanon's school system with preparing both players for the demands of Division I football and the academic rigor of the Naval Academy.

As for the future, last month's banquet may have been the first official reunion, but it likely won't be the last, Daniels said.

"It was a great time to do this reunion," he said. "And I'm sure down the road, in however many years, we'll do it again and go back through all those memories. Who knows?" ♥

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## Mt. Lebanon lawns become stages for celebration

**Card My Yard Pittsburgh–South brings surprise sign displays across the community**

By Makenna Anthos All photos provided.

Celebrating life's special moments can be as simple as stepping outside to a joyful surprise on the front lawn.

That's the idea behind Card My Yard Pittsburgh–South, a family-owned business that creates professionally designed yard and indoor sign displays for birthdays, graduations, anniversaries and other milestones. The company is owned by the Risman family, with Alisa Risman serving as the primary owner.

A wife and mother of two, Risman understands how a thoughtful gesture can brighten someone's day. Her journey with Card My Yard began as a customer.

"We had used Card My Yard for our own family celebrations, so we already loved the concept," Risman said. "When we learned the local franchise owner was selling because she was moving out of the area, it felt like a unique opportunity."

Risman's background made the business a natural fit. A horticulture major at Penn State University, she

later spent five years working at Phipps Conservatory, where she developed a passion for creative design and visual presentation.

"While this business isn't centered on plants, it still allows me to tap into that creative side—designing displays that bring joy and help people celebrate meaningful moments," she said.

Card My Yard Pittsburgh–South serves Mt. Lebanon and surrounding South Hills communities, offering displays that can be installed outdoors year-round or indoors for events held inside homes or venues. Signs celebrate a wide range of occasions, from children's birthdays to welcoming home loved ones.

The business also partners with local schools to create displays for events such as fifth-grade clap-outs, the 100th day of school, Teacher Appreciation Week and welcome-back celebrations.

"Supporting schools and celebrating students and teachers in a fun, visual way



The Alisman family. (Photo provided)

has become one of the most rewarding parts of what we do," Risman said.

Some moments leave a lasting impact. Risman recalled surprising an older man with a birthday sign sent by a longtime friend in Texas during his first birthday after losing his mother.

"When he found out who sent it, he had tears in his eyes," she said. "Being able to bring joy during such a difficult time was incredibly



Card My Yard Pittsburgh–South, offers displays for birthdays, graduations, anniversaries and other milestones. (Photo provided)

meaningful."

Another memorable experience involved welcoming home a young boy in Bethel Park after months at Children's Hospital, where neighbors gathered for a parade and sign display.

Card My Yard Pittsburgh–South is designed to be stress-free for customers. Orders are placed online, with the team handling set-up and takedown, typically for a 24-hour rental.

"All the customer has to do is enjoy the celebration," Risman said. "Once the sign is set up, I send a photo to be sure it's exactly what they hoped for."

With every display, Card My Yard Pittsburgh–South is helping the South Hills celebrate life—one smile, surprise and special moment at a time. For more information, visit [cardmyyard.com/locations/pennsylvania/pittsburgh-south](http://cardmyyard.com/locations/pennsylvania/pittsburgh-south).♥

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## Here in Lebo, life is a cabaret

**Mt. Lebanon Choir Department Wows Audiences in 2026 Broadway Cabaret**  
By Lauren Cefalo Moore Photos courtesy of Spieler Photos

More than 125 Mt. Lebanon choral students performed in the 2026 Broadway Cabaret at the Mt. Lebanon High School Fine Arts Theatre Jan. 8–10. This marked the district's 17th annual Cabaret and the 10th under the direction of Ethan M. LaPlaca, director of choirs at Mt. Lebanon High School. Packed with Broadway hits, choreography and costumes, Cabaret delivered a lively medley of singing, dancing and comedy.

After taking over the choral program in 2016, LaPlaca set out to expand and enhance Cabaret. He proposed doubling the number of performances and creating two rotating casts, each performing twice.

"I thought it was a great way to maximize stage time and get everyone involved as much as possible," LaPlaca said. "The idea was fully supported, and we sold out all four shows within hours. We are so fortunate to have a district and community that supports and celebrates the arts."

With LaPlaca's leadership, student involvement—and competition—has never been higher. Through an audition process open to all choir students, nearly 40 solo and duet numbers were cast this year, along with 14 group numbers. Students rehearsed one to two times per day for nearly two months. Performances

were accompanied by LaPlaca on piano, Justin Bendel on bass and Tom Earley on drums.

"The show takes a considerable amount of work and coordination and couldn't happen without the help of students, parents and volunteers who so generously donate their time," LaPlaca said. He especially relied on student leaders, including the student directors from the three select ensembles: Triple Trio, Men's Ensemble and Chamber Choir.

High school junior Vincent DeLuca, Men's Ensemble student director, said Cabaret offers opportunities students might not otherwise have.

"It's always awesome to be able to perform songs you wouldn't be able to do otherwise," DeLuca said. "In my case, it was 'The Room Where It Happens.' Cabaret was a great opportunity to perform that song."

Show choreography and lighting are traditionally designed by a senior and junior from the choral program, who support one another as they learn to design, teach and lead aspects of the production. This year, those roles were filled by senior Addie Young and junior Grace Prendergast.

After the show, singer and costume manager Sophie Braun reflected on what comes next.

"Now that Cabaret is over, most of the kids in



Men's Ensemble performing "What a Game" from Ragtime.



Concert Choir performing "Merrily We Roll Along" from Merrily We Roll Along.

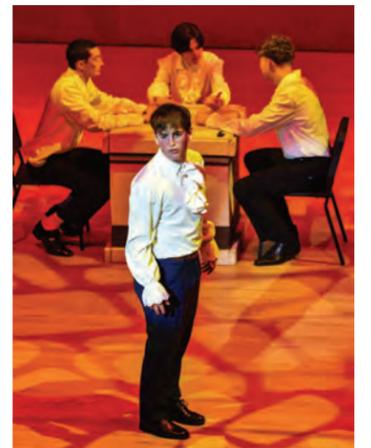
choir are getting ready to start rehearsals for our spring musical, Shrek, where I am lucky enough to be playing Fiona," Braun said. "I love choir and the friends and experiences it has brought me, and I can't wait for this spring with all of our rehearsals, costumes and shows."

Upcoming events include the Mt. Lebanon School District's Tiered

Choral Concert on Feb. 25, 2026, featuring choir students in grades five through 12 performing together in the high school auditorium. The Mt. Lebanon High School Choral Department's Masterworks Concert will follow on March 24, 2026, at Southminster Presbyterian Church, offering students the opportunity to perform in a setting known



Triple Trio Choir performing "Gospel Truth/Zero to Hero" from Hercules.



Vincent DeLuca, Quinn Conboy, Brogan Grey and Rocco Neidinger performing "The Room Where it Happens" from Hamilton.

for its unique acoustics and architecture. The season concludes with the Mt. Lebanon High School spring musical, Shrek, running April 30–May 2, 2026.

For tickets and more information, visit [www.mtlds.org](http://www.mtlds.org). ♥

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## Jet-setting pup puts down paws in Mt. Lebanon

**Bubbles the Chihuahua trades international travel for neighborhood walks and winter coats**  
 By Sarah Core All photos provided.

After trotting around the globe, a certain famous Chihuahua named Bubbles has planted her paws in Mt. Lebanon. Alongside her famous dad, actor Joe Manganiello, she has traveled to nearly 20 countries and hundreds of cities — and she has the European Union passport to prove it.

Since being adopted six years ago, Bubbles has become a world traveler, even picking up an Irish boyfriend along the way. Her thousands of fans follow her adventures on Instagram at @bubblesmanganiello. She has strolled the cobblestone streets of Galway, explored ancient monasteries in Armenia and even helped “hold up” the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

But this year, the 12-year-old Bubbles is embarking on her biggest journey yet: braving a Western Pennsylvania winter.

Manganiello and his fiancée, fellow actor Caitlin O'Connor, have returned to their roots with a move back to Mt. Lebanon. For Bubbles — a beach girl who “loves the sand” — trading California sunshine for snow may be her greatest adventure so far.

“She’s breaking in all her new puffy coats her parents got her for Christmas,” O'Connor said. “She’s enjoying the neighborhood smells and is trying to acclimate to the snow, but she’s having a hard time finding the right amount of grass during the winter.”

“Bubbles loves to walk around the neighborhood, and as soon as winter is over, she’ll be back on her normal long-walk routine — ready to bark at any passing Mt. Lebanon dog who will listen,” O'Connor joked.

As for Manganiello and O'Connor, they are happy to be back in Western Pennsylvania and closer to family.

“Everyone has been so nice and inviting,” said O'Connor, who is originally from Uniontown. She described their neighbors as “kind and warm,” noting that they’ve brought over cookies and invited the trio to a neighborhood block party.

Bubbles keeps her family on their toes no matter where they are. Between morning and evening walks, paw-cleaning time, face-kissing time, breakfast time, snack time, dinner time, more

snack time and, of course, copious naps in between, her schedule is packed.

“Bubbles knows when it’s 5 p.m. anywhere in the world, regardless of jet lag and intercontinental time zones,” Manganiello said. “She knows her eating times and will let you know if you’re late.”

However, Bubbles’ high-flying life as a world traveler wouldn’t have been possible without a chance meeting at an adoption event for Dogs Without Borders, a Los Angeles-based rescue.

“She fell in love with Joe when she met him,” O'Connor said. After asking to be picked up, Bubbles stayed in his lap for the entire event and didn’t want to move.

Bubbles had been surrendered because of a cyst believed to be cancerous and because she was peeing blood. No one was willing to adopt a dog who appeared so ill, and she was in danger of being euthanized.

Manganiello said he felt compelled to keep her. “Although she wasn’t meant to be my pet, she chose me.”

He stayed by her side through two surgeries and nursed Bubbles back to health. In return, he gained a fierce champion who loves him unconditionally.

“The past six years with her have filled my heart with so much love,” Manganiello said.

The star-studded pooch was most recently seen alongside her dad on NBC’s “Clear the Shelters” TV special, a nationwide pet adoption campaign that aired in August 2025.



Within minutes of meeting Joe, Bubbles had already found her person.



Caitlin and Bubbles at “The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon.”



Bubbles waits patiently for in-flight meal service during one of her many international trips.

Together, they promoted the importance of adopting from animal shelters.

“Dogs know when you save them, and they show you so much love in return,” Manganiello said. “It might very well be the best thing I’ve ever done in my life. People who have rescued a dog know the love of an appreciative pet — it’s magical.”

Bubbles is fiercely protective of her dad. At the last Pirates game she attended, she bit the Pirate Parrot mascot in the face. Manganiello joked that she

was expressing her displeasure with the current state of Pirates ownership.

“She wants a better team around Paul Skenes!” he said.

**Editor’s note:** Interested in rescuing a dog or cat? Animal Friends is located at the Caryl Gates Gluck Resource Center, 562 Camp Horne Road, Building 1, Pittsburgh, PA 15237; call 412-847-7000 or email speak@thinkingoutsidethecage.org. Humane Animal Rescue of Pittsburgh is located at 1101 Western Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15233; call 412-345-7300. ♥

### Bark Beat

Celebrating Mt. Lebanon’s beloved dogs

#### Meet Bubbles



- 🐾 Bubbles is a Chihuahua with a little Pomeranian and Vizsla mixed in.
- 🐾 My favorite humans are Joe and Caitlin and I’m a Daddy’s girl.
- 🐾 My favorite toy is my purple dinosaur.
- 🐾 My favorite human treats are white rice from Jade Grille and pita bread from PitaLand!
- 🐾 My favorite things to do besides snacking and napping are doing carpet runs and licking Caitlin’s face.
- 🐾 My humans think I’m special because I am very feisty and a great listener.

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# SPORTS

## Lebo girls wrestling builds momentum ahead of third season

Team leaders embrace growth, resilience and family-like bonds *By Scarlett Sweeney*

Since the passage of Title IX in 1972 opened doors for girls' sports, girls' wrestling has steadily grown, emerging in the late 1980s and 1990s and exploding in popularity over the past decade. In May 2023, the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association officially sanctioned girls' wrestling after reaching the required 100-school threshold, with Mt. Lebanon among those programs.

Lebo senior Paige Jox began wrestling as a freshman, inspired by her father, who had been involved in the sport throughout his life. She recently committed to Washington & Jefferson College to continue both her academic and athletic careers.

"The head women's coach at W&J, Coach Krenzela, has put so much time and effort into working with me and has believed in me and my skills, even through losses, which means a lot," Jox said. "I also love the plans he has for the team, like group activities, providing resources and taking trips to other countries."

Jox placed second in the WPIAL during both the 2023-24 and 2024-25 seasons, compiling a 70-21 record. Her success has helped spotlight girls' wrestling as a legitimate and growing sport at Mt. Lebanon. She said her proudest accomplishment was qualifying for nationals last year, where she won four matches.

Now a senior, Jox sees herself as a leader.

"I was part of our very first girls' wrestling team, so I feel really proud

being a senior and getting to see how the team has evolved," she said. "We're all really close, and it honestly feels more like a family than a team. My teammates are some of my closest friends, and I think of them as my sisters because of how much time we spend together."

Jox wrestles six days a week and lifts or does cardio beforehand, totaling nearly 15 workouts per week.

Junior Sophia Beanner began wrestling at age 11, also inspired by her father. As a freshman, she placed sixth in the WPIAL at 100 pounds and described this season's team dynamic as "incredible."

"I think of my teammates like my family," Beanner said. "We go through so much together. The hard practices, early mornings and late nights only bring us closer."

That bond became especially meaningful when Beanner learned she had a resurfaced childhood hip issue that doctors recommended repairing surgically. Instead, she chose to strengthen it so she could continue wrestling.

Her resilience and commitment have made her a role model for younger teammates.

"Since I'm an upperclassman and have experience in the sport, people see me as someone they can come to with questions, whether it's about wrestling or anything in general," Beanner said.

Throughout her wrestling career, Jox has faced her own challenges,



The 2025-26 Mt. Lebanon Girl's wrestling team. (Photo by Mike Sciuolo Creative Studios)



Lily Perri, freshman. (Photo by Pete Eberhart)

including struggles with self-confidence. She recalled breaking into tears before matches, questioning whether she could win.

"It wasn't nerves — it was straight fear," Jox said. "I felt so much pressure to live up to rankings and other people's expectations. The best thing I did was create the mentality that I can beat anyone if I put my mind to it."



Juliana Van Slyke, sophomore. (Photo by Pete Eberhart)

Now, she said, she approaches each match without focusing on rankings or opponents, maintaining the mindset that she can win.

On difficult days, Jox reminds herself that wrestling is a privilege — one not all athletes have, whether due to coaching, teammates or physical health.

For Beanner, motivation comes from remembering how painful losing feels, pushing her to work harder to experience the excitement of success.

Before mentally challenging matches, she turns to her father for reassurance.

"He reminds me to do what I know how to do and trust myself and my abilities," Beanner said. "I also like to visualize matches and think through different situations and the moves I can use."

For younger wrestlers, Beanner encourages perseverance through tough practices and frustrations, noting that the reward of success makes the hard work worthwhile.

Jox said the growth of girls' wrestling has inspired her to encourage others to join the sport.

"It's inspired me to be a role model for girls who might be new to wrestling and to show that anything is possible," she said. "It might seem scary at first, but wrestling is unique and will build confidence and teach life lessons you wouldn't expect."

As the team prepares for its first home tournament against Pine-Richland on Jan. 7, that mindset will guide Lebo's wrestlers onto the mat. ♥

### Upcoming High School Varsity Sports Schedule

#### Girls Wrestling

Wed., Feb 4 .....Fox Chapel.....7 p.m.  
Wed., Feb 11 .....Southwest PA Girls Invitational.....3 p.m.

#### Boys Wrestling

Wed., Feb 4 .....Pine-Richland .....7 p.m.  
Fri., Feb.6 .....at Pittsburgh Central Catholic .....7 p.m.  
Fri., Feb. 20 .....District 7 AAA (at TBD) .....5 p.m.  
Sat., Feb. 21 .....District 7 AAA (at TBD) .....9 a.m.  
Fri., Feb 27 .....West AAA Regional (at Canon-McMillan).....5 p.m.  
Sat., Feb. 28 .....West AAA Regional (at Canon-McMillan).....9 a.m.

#### Girls Basketball

Tue., Jan. 27 .....at Canon-McMillan.....6 p.m.  
Thu., Jan. 29 .....at Norwin.....7:30 p.m.  
Mon., Feb. 2 .....at Connellsville .....6 p.m.  
Thu., Feb. 5 .....Upper St. Clair .....7:30 p.m.  
Mon., Feb. 9 .....Peters .....7:30 p.m.

#### Boys Basketball

Tue., Jan. 27 .....at Norwin.....7:30 p.m.  
Fri., Jan. 30 .....at Connellsville .....7:30 p.m.  
Tue., Feb. 3 .....at Imani Christian Academy .....7:30 p.m.  
Fri., Feb. 6 .....Upper St. Clair .....7:30 p.m.  
Mon., Feb. 9 .....Peters .....8 p.m.

#### Boys Ice Hockey

Sun., Feb. 22 .....Bethel Park (Senior Night).....7 p.m.  
Thu., Feb. 26 .....Seneca Valley.....9:10 p.m.



Photos by Zachary Smith



## Beyond the field: The teams behind Friday night lights

*Color guard and marching band bring energy, spirit and teamwork to game nights*

*By Scarlett Sweeney*

While *Friday Night Lights* often centers on the football team, many other groups help make the magic happen. Without the color guard and marching band, the school's spirit would not be the same.

Color guard is a competitive activity that combines flags, prop weapons and dance. The season runs year-round, with multiple weekly practices and all-day competitions on Saturdays.

Senior and assistant captain Georgia McElwain has been involved in color guard since her freshman year. She said she was initially drawn to the program as a positive environment where she could meet new people and build friendships.

"Being both a senior and assistant captain has made me appreciate this season more than I ever have before, knowing it's my last year spinning with all of my best friends," McElwain said. "Being able to help my underclassmen teammates with various techniques has not only allowed me to help my team blossom, but I've also discovered things in my own technique to work on as well."

McElwain described the team dynamic as diverse, with members bringing different personalities and skill sets to the group. To her, however, the team feels like family.

"To me, color guard is like a second family — an extremely judgment-free zone," McElwain said. "I've made so many friends and relationships that I'll cherish forever. Both the activity and the people have helped me find my true self and allowed me to be my authentic self."

A typical three-hour color guard practice includes three main components: stretching and dance, flag warmups and tosses, and weapon line practice.

McElwain said her favorite competition was *Psycho* during the 2023-24 indoor season, which was based on the Alfred Hitchcock film. The team experimented with more aggressive facial expressions and techniques, earning a new high score in Mt. Lebanon's winter guard history.



For younger students considering joining color guard, McElwain encourages them to take the leap.

"My advice for someone thinking about joining the guard is to really go for it," she said. "There's no harm in trying something new, even if it's outside your comfort zone. Realistically, the only thing that can come out of this activity is something extremely positive."

On the other side of *Friday Night Lights*, trumpets, saxophones, drums and more energize the crowd from the first down to the final whistle.

Senior percussionist Anika Schmid joined the marching band in eighth grade after being inspired by her older brother, who played in the front ensemble. Watching him perform showed her how much he enjoyed the activity and helped bring them closer together.

That year's competitive show, *Kittyhawk*, featured multiple voiceovers, which Schmid was responsible for triggering during performances, a role she took on with help from her brother and her mother's involvement on the band board.

Since her freshman year, Schmid said her role in percussion has evolved significantly, as she grew from a quiet and nervous eighth-grader into a front ensemble leader.

*Continued on page 18*



The marching band performs at halftime of the Mt. Lebanon-USC football game in fall 2025. (Photos by Marilee Kline)

## Marching band brings back spaghetti dinner fundraiser

*Community favorite returns Feb. 13 with food, music and family-friendly fun*

*By Laurie Garvey*

The Mt. Lebanon Marching Band is bringing back a community favorite—their much-loved Spaghetti Dinner fundraiser—and everyone is invited to take part in a fun, feel-good evening.

The event will be held on Friday, February 13, from 5:30 to 8:00 p.m.,

at Mt. Lebanon High School. Guests can enjoy a hearty spaghetti dinner while being entertained by the school's talented Jazz Band ensembles, making it a perfect family-friendly Valentine's outing—or a relaxed night out with friends.

In addition to dinner

and live music, the evening will feature Valentine's crafts, raffle baskets, and a Band Spirit Table, offering plenty to enjoy for all ages. For added convenience, takeout meals will also be available.

Tickets are affordably priced at \$15 for adults, \$14

for seniors, \$10 for children ages 10 and under (children ages 0-3 are free). Tickets can be purchased online at [leboband.com](http://leboband.com).

Community support plays a vital role in sustaining the marching band's programs and performances, and this revived

tradition is a wonderful way to enjoy a great meal while supporting local student musicians. Mark your calendar, bring your appetite, and join the Mt. Lebanon Marching Band for an evening of food, music, and community spirit. ♥



## Lebo swim senior Lilly Evan commits to Holy Cross

*Evan cites balance of academics and athletics* By Scarlett Sweeney

After 12 years of early mornings, intense practices and thousands of yards swum, Mt. Lebanon senior Lilly Evan has committed to Holy Cross swimming, joining a competitive NCAA Division I program.

Mt. Lebanon girls swimming has seen recent individual success from athletes such as Sylvia Roy, now a swimmer at the University of Virginia who competed at the 2024 U.S. Olympic Trials. The Lebo team finished third in the WPIAL Class 3A standings at the 2025 WPIAL Championships, behind North Allegheny and Fox Chapel.

The team posted an 8-2-1 overall record during the 2024-25 season and went 6-0 in section competition, earning the section championship. During the 2025-26 season, the roster includes five seniors, including Evan.

Evan began swimming 12 years ago while living in

London, where swimming was mandatory at her school. She said she quickly fell in love with the sport after being placed in an advanced group at a young age.

Before committing to Holy Cross, Evan was in contact with American University, Colgate University and the University of Rhode Island. After visiting Holy Cross, she said she knew it was the right fit.

"I loved the balance of strong academics and a competitive Division I program," Evan said. "The team environment felt welcoming and supportive, and the coaches were approachable and genuinely invested in their athletes."

Evan will join former Mt. Lebanon teammate Ellie Reinhart, now a sophomore at Holy Cross who earned Patriot League Academic Honor Roll honors last season.

Evan primarily competes in the 100-yard backstroke

and 100-yard butterfly, in addition to freestyle relays. In college, she plans to continue swimming those events while adding the 200 backstroke. Her favorite event is the 100 backstroke.

Evan said her senior season played a significant role in shaping her development as a swimmer and preparing her for the next level.

"My senior season has been so special," she said. "It's given me the chance to reflect on the amazing friendships I've made and how much swimming has shaped me into who I am today."

Evan credited her parents and coaches for their support throughout her swimming career.

"My coaches have had the biggest impact on my swimming," Evan said. "They push me to work hard during practice so I can reach my goals. Outside of the pool, my parents have been my biggest support-



Lilly Evan (Photo provided)

ers, encouraging me to do my best in school and supporting me throughout my swim journey."

For incoming freshmen, Evan advised soaking in the experience while continuing to work hard.

"Set achievable goals, work hard and push yourself," she said. "But also make sure you're having fun along the way, because it goes by so quickly."

For younger swimmers interested in competing at the collegiate level, Evan encouraged getting involved

in the recruiting process early, including researching and visiting schools before junior year to reduce stress and stay organized.

At Holy Cross, Evan said she is most excited to compete at a higher level alongside teammates with a shared mindset.

"Everyone is motivated to push themselves and each other to get better," Evan said. "That's the kind of environment I want to be in."

The girls' next meet is scheduled for Thursday, Jan. 22, 2026, at Seneca Valley Senior High School.

As she wraps up her senior season at Mt. Lebanon, Evan is already setting goals for her future at Holy Cross.

"One goal for my first year is to contribute to the team right away," Evan said. "Whether that's through my performances in the pool or by helping create a positive and supportive environment." ♥

## Senior softball league seeks new players

Registration is open for the South Hills Senior Softball League, which organizes games for players ages 55 and older.

Those interested can get registration information by emailing SHSSLeague@yahoo.com. Registration forms must be submitted by March 30.

Formed more than three decades ago, the league attracts more than 150 players each year. Games are typically played at fields in South Park, Pleasant Hills, Baldwin, Brentwood, Bethel Park and Pittsburgh.

One division plays on weekday evenings, while another competes on weekday mornings. Teams in both divisions typically play twice a week. Tryouts and a draft will be held in April, with dates announced to registered players.

"Our players get a chance not only to rediscover a game they love, but also to join a strong community of friends," said Ron Sullivan, the league's commissioner. ♥

## Beyond the field

*Continued from page 17*



The color guard and marching band perform during halftime of the Mt. Lebanon-USC football game in fall 2025. (Photo by Marilee Kline)

"In my eighth-grade year, I spent a lot of the season quietly following my brother around," Schmid said. "The more experience I gained, the more I was able to help others in my section. This year, I ended up being one of the front ensemble section leaders, which allowed me to help make sure things ran smoothly."

Schmid believes the marching band enhances football games by energizing the crowd and encouraging more people to attend. One of her favorite traditions is when the

drumline plays a cadence in front of the student section during games.

She said there is a common misconception about marching band — that people don't always realize how physically demanding it is. According to Schmid, marching band is about 75% movement and 25% playing.

"What isn't seen is how much equipment we have to move before and after shows," Schmid said. "I've spent a lot of time lifting marimbas onto trucks and moving equipment up and down hills."

For Schmid, one of the most rewarding experiences was performing at a home competition dedicated solely to the marching band, as well as the friendships she has built along the way.

"It feels so nice to play for a crowd that's there just for the marching band," she said. "Some close friends of mine who had graduated but were in marching band with me came back to support me. Seeing them in the front row right before I played was one of my favorite memories of the season." ♥

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## Lincoln Elementary marks 100 years School plans public centennial celebration in April 2026

By Laurie Garvey, Lincoln School, Class of 1980

Lincoln Elementary School will mark its 100th anniversary in 2026, celebrating a century of education, connection and community. A public centennial celebration is scheduled for Saturday, April 11, 2026, honoring the generations of students and families shaped by Lincoln over the past century.

The celebration will be held from 1 to 4 p.m. ET on the school grounds and is expected to be a joyful, community-wide gathering that highlights Lincoln's rich history and enduring legacy.

The event is open to the public. Alumni, former faculty, families, neighbors and friends of the school are encouraged to attend. Whether you walked Lincoln's halls decades ago or are connected through family, friendship or neighborhood ties, the celebration offers an opportunity to reflect, reconnect and celebrate together.

For updates on the event—and to share Lincoln memories, stories and reflections that may be included in the centennial—visit [lincoln.mtisd.org/about/lincoln-100](http://lincoln.mtisd.org/about/lincoln-100).

The community is invited to join in honoring 100 years of Lincoln Elementary School while looking ahead to the generations still to come. ♥



(Photos courtesy of the Mt. Lebanon Historical Society)

## Police Beat

The Mt. Lebanon Police Department reported the following crime incidents over the past 28 days: 12/19-1/11

- 1-11-26, 11:50 p.m.  
Simple Assault  
400 Block Serpentine Drive
- 1-8-26, 12:20 PM  
Institutional Vandalism - Educ Facility, Govt Building, Etc.  
100 Block Cochran Road
- 1-8-26, 4:52 a.m.  
Use/Possession Drug Paraphernalia  
300 Block Lavina Avenue
- 1-3-26, 1:55 a.m.  
Possession of a Small Amount of Marijuana  
Cochran Road & Scrubgrass Road
- 12-28-25, 5:45 p.m.  
Communications with 911 Systems  
000 Block Academy Avenue
- 12-24-25, 10:34 a.m.  
Harassment/Physical Strike Kick  
400 Block Millbeth
- 12-23-25, 6:28 p.m.  
Criminal Mischief - Damage Real or Personal Property- Basic Charge-\$500 Or Less  
700 Block Shady Drive
- 12-21-25, 12:09 a.m.  
DUI - 2nd Offense  
Bower Hill Road & Cochran Road
- 12-19-25, 10:00 a.m.  
Institutional Vandalism - Educ Facility, Govt Building, Etc.  
100 Block Cochran Road
- 12-19-25, 6:34 a.m.  
A Theft by Unlawful Taking-Movable - From Building- Amount Taken Equals or Exceeds \$200  
1700 Block Theodan Drive

## The LEBO BEATS in Cabo San Lucas



The Hoover family — Tessa (left), Teagan, Mark and Jackie — embrace their "catch" and the Lebo Beat while fishing in the Pacific Ocean during a recent trip to Cabo San Lucas, swapping snow boots in Mt. Lebanon for sunshine and sea breezes. (Photo provided)

Send us your photos of you out and about in your Lebo Beat T-shirt for a chance to be featured in the paper. Email images and a brief description to [info@lebobeat.com](mailto:info@lebobeat.com). ♥

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