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LEBO BEAT

Sharp, Local, Real.

School board passes preliminary 3.5% tax increase

Final vote set for May 18 as district outlines revenue for 2026-27 budget *By David Rullo*

The Mt. Lebanon School Board on April 13 approved a preliminary plan to raise property taxes by 3.5% for the 2026-27 school year, a move aimed at closing a projected \$1.2 million budget shortfall while maintaining current staffing levels.

A final vote on the budget is scheduled for May 18.

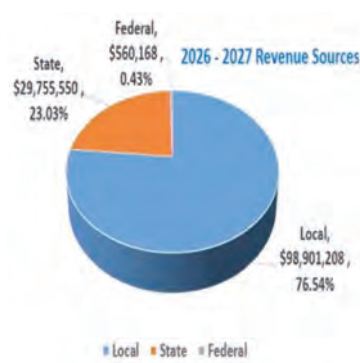
The shortfall was first discussed during the board's March meeting, when directors also unanimously approved a resolution allowing for a potential reduction in professional staff if necessary. It marked the third consecutive year the board has passed such a resolution, though district officials

said it has not resulted in furloughs.

With the proposed tax increase, no employees are expected to be furloughed if the budget is approved.

The 3.5% increase is below the 4.1% limit set by the state's Act 1 index, which caps how much Pennsylvania school districts can raise property taxes annually without voter approval. By staying under the index, the district avoids the need for a referendum.

The increase represents a millage rate rise of 1.083 mills, bringing the total rate to 32.033 mills for the 2026-27 fiscal year. District officials estimate the increase will generate approximately \$2.9 million in additional revenue.



Expected revenue sources for 2026-27 school year.

The district also outlined its projected revenue sources for the 2026-27 school year, with local revenue making up the largest share. Local sources are expected to generate \$98,901,208, or 76.54% of total revenue. These funds are driven primarily by

real estate taxes governed by the Act 1 index, along with other local taxes, pass-through funds and fees associated with school programs and operations.

State funding is projected at \$29,755,550, or 23.03% of total revenue. This includes subsidies and grants aligned with the governor's proposed budget and approved by the state Legislature, primarily through the Pennsylvania Department of Education and other state agencies.

Federal revenue is expected to total \$560,168, a small portion of the overall budget, and comes primarily from grants supporting at-risk and underserved students through

Title programs and Medicaid funding.

School officials said the combination of local, state and federal funding is necessary to support district operations, including salaries, benefits and academic programming.

Board members said the annual staffing resolution is a precautionary measure required when addressing potential financial uncertainty. In practice, the district has consistently balanced its budget without reducing staff.

Residents will have an opportunity to review the proposed budget before the final vote. If approved May 18, the tax increase will take effect for the 2026-27 fiscal year. ♥

FROM THE ATHLETIC DIRECTOR

John Grogan reflects on 26-year career ahead of retirement

Outgoing leader expresses gratitude to students, coaches and community

The decision to retire comes with a mixture of gratitude, pride, and reflection as I look back on the last 26 years of working with exceptional students, coaches, administrators and families.

Serving this district has been one of the greatest honors of my professional life. I have had the privilege of watching our student athletes grow, perform, achieve and learn the many life lessons associated with sports!

I am deeply grateful for the trust placed in me throughout my career. The relationships I've built have meant the world to me and will always be special.

I would like to extend my appreciation to the

district leadership for their support, and to our coaches whose collaboration, passion, and dedication have always inspired me.

Together, we have met challenges, celebrated successes, and worked toward the shared goal of providing a positive environment

for our student athletes.

Mt. Lebanon is a special place, and I have loved the opportunity to serve this wonderful community. ♥



John Grogan
(Photo provided)

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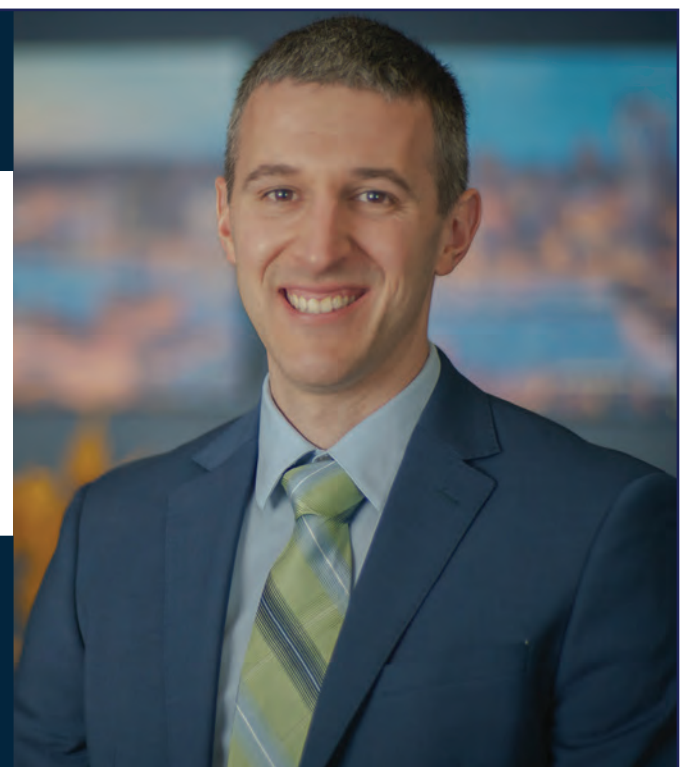
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Mt. Lebanon School District Calendar

MAY 1

JES Kona Ice Social
Time: 3:30 PM

High School Spring Musical
Time: 7:30 p.m.
High School Auditorium

MAY 2

High School Spring Musical
Time: 2:30 p.m. & 7:30 p.m.
High School Auditorium

MAY 4

Howe PTA Meetings
Time: Board 12:45 p.m. & General 7 p.m.

MAY 5

District Band Concert
Time: 7 p.m.
Mellon Middle School Auditorium

MAY 6

District Band Concert
Time: 7 p.m.
Mellon Middle School Auditorium

MAY 7

Jefferson Middle School
Dismissal for students at 2:00 p.m.

JMS Curriculum in Action Night
Time: 7-8:30 p.m.

MMS Orchestra Concert
Time: 7:30 p.m.
Mellon Middle School Auditorium

MAY 8

Kindergarten Orientation, District Wide
Time: 9:30 a.m. & 1:30 p.m.
No AM/PM Kindergarten Classes

MMS PTA Executive Board Meeting
Time: 9 a.m.
Virtual

JMS Talent Show
Time: 6-8 p.m.

MAY 11

School Board Discussion Meeting
Time: 7:30 p.m.
High School Room D205

MAY 12

FES to MMS Move Up Day
Time: 9:30 a.m.

High School Choral Concert
Time: 7:30 p.m.
High School Auditorium

MAY 13

MES to JMS Move Up day
Time: 9:30 AM

JES to JMS Move Up day
Time: 1:30 p.m.

MMS Curriculum in Action Night
Time: 7-8:30 p.m.

2 p.m. Dismissal for Students

JMS Choral Concert
Time: 7:30 p.m.
High School Auditorium

MAY 14

Howe to MMS Move Up Day
Time: 9:30 a.m.

LES to JES Move Up Day
Time: 9:30 a.m.

HES to JES Move Up Day
Time: 1:30 p.m.

JES PTA Meeting
Time: 6:30 p.m.

High School Percussion Concert
Time: 7:30 p.m.
High School Fine Arts Theatre

MMS Chorus Concert
Time: 7:30 p.m.
MMS Auditorium

MAY 15

HES Breakfast with Someone Special
Time: 8 a.m.

JES Breakfast with Someone Special
Time: 8 a.m.

MMS PTA General Meeting
Time: 9 a.m.
Virtual

WES to MMS Move Up Day
Time: 9:30 a.m.
FES PTA Executive Meeting
Time: 1:30 p.m.

WES Spring Carnival
Time: 5:30 – 8 p.m.
Playground

High School Percussion Concert
Time: 7:30 p.m.
High School Fine Arts Theatre

MAY 16

High School Percussion Concert
Time: 7:30 p.m.
High School Fine Arts Theatre

MAY 18

High School Band Concert
Time: 7:30 p.m.
High school Auditorium

School Board Regular Meeting
Time: 7:30 p.m.
High School Room D205

MAY 20

Howe Family Reading Night

PTA Council Meeting & Georgia Pogue Awards
Time: 9 a.m.

High School Senior Reception
Time: 2:45-3:45 p.m.

High School Center Court

High School Awards Night
Time: 7 p.m.
High School Fine Arts Theatre

MAY 21

Howe Family Reading Night (Rain Date)

FES PTA Meeting
Time: 9:30 a.m.

FES Foster Friend Award Presentation
Time: 1 p.m.
JES Family Fest
Time: 5-7 p.m.

WES PTA Volunteer Appreciation Celebration
Time: 5:30-7 p.m.
JMS Orchestra Concert
Time: 7:30 p.m.
High School Auditorium

MMS Band Concert
Time: 7:30 p.m.
MMS Auditorium

MAY 22

High School Theatre Daytimes
Time: 7 p.m.
High School Fine Arts Theatre

MAY 26

High School Spring Sports Recognition Night
Time: 7 p.m.
High School Auditorium

MAY 27

Washington Elementary School Field Day

Jefferson Middle School Band Concert
Time: 7:30 p.m.
High School Auditorium

MAY 28

Howe Field Day High School Prom
Time: 7-11 p.m.
Omni William Penn Hotel

MAY 29

Howe Field Day (Rain Date)

Mt. Lebanon Summer Enrichment

The MTLSD Summer Enrichment Program provides enrichment activities for students entering grades 4-8 in the 2026-2027 school year. The Summer Enrichment program's goal, to provide an intellectually stimulating environment for elementary students during the summer months, is aligned with the district's mission statement. Furthermore, the program specifically addresses student achievement process targets in mathematics, communication, technology, critical thinking, and cooperative work.

2026 Summer Enrichment Dates:

June 22-25

June 29-July 2

July 13-16

July 20-23

The 2026 Course Catalog will be released on May 8 at noon.

Registration will be open on May 23 at 10:00 a.m.

2026 Locations:

Mt. Lebanon High School

Mellon Middle School

Jefferson Middle School

Questions: Contact the District Summer Enrichment co-directors - Ben Polakoski or George Cogis at SummerEnrichment@mtlsd.net. Please send all questions via email, as phone calls cannot be answered or returned during school hours. ♥



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Good in the LEBOhood

By Tressa Glover, Creator & Host, *Yinz Are Good* podcast

I'm back with more of your good news, Lebo.

Inspired by my podcast, **Yinz Are Good**, this column shares stories of kindness and notes of gratitude from the Mt. Lebanon community. We've carved out a space to celebrate the ways we support one another, provide hope and build community.

One way we're collecting these stories is through our Kindness Crates, which make their way around town. The instructions at each crate station are simple: "Using the paper provided, please share who or what you're grateful for today, an act of kindness someone did for you, or a moment that brought you hope."

This month's notes come from the crates at Babb Orthodontics and Lebo Subs, which — just like last month — were filled to the brim.

So without further ado, here's what our neighbors are grateful for, what brought them hope and even some suggestions for ways to be kind to others:

From Babb Orthodontics ...

- My grandma makes me grateful. My friend once said, "Are you OK?" when I was not feeling OK.
- Mom
- I wish it was May, but ... I get my braces off today. — Everett

- Roses are red
Violets are blue
Babb Orthodontics is the best
You should think so, too

— Olivia

- I'm grateful for school. — Huck
- I'm grateful for my teachers being flexible for my online day. An act of kindness someone did for me was my mom helping me on a busy day. — Luna
- I'm grateful for pierogies.
- Reassurance that my granddaughter would be comfortable while getting her bottom braces applied today — and that the assistant would "pre-stretch" the bands to make her more comfortable later.
- Our two escape-artist dogs ran out on Saturday. A random neighbor helped me wrangle them and used his dog's leash to help me get one back to the house while I carried the other. — Emily

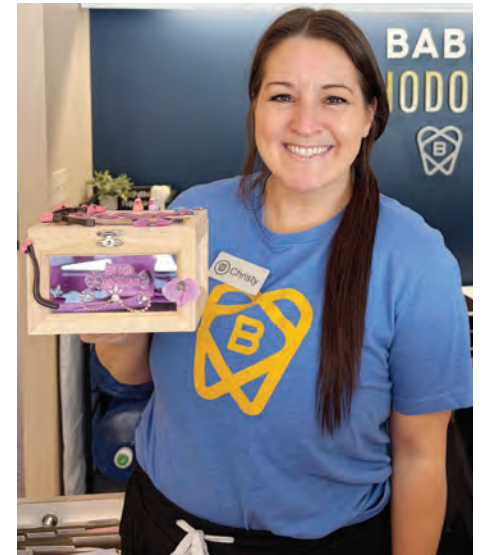
Ways you can be kind to others:

- Hold the door open for someone
- Compliment someone
- Treat others the way you want to be treated. — Love, Schenley

From Lebo Subs ...

- My house, family and Taylor

- I'm grateful for my girlfriend.
- Someone paid for my drive-thru order the other day.
- A moment that brought me hope was getting a new job after applying to hundreds and going through multiple failed interviews.
- I'm grateful for Emily
- The good people at Lebo Subs — kindness, good attitudes and good food
- I am grateful for my family and friends — and Sadie
- Grateful for my dad and mom
- I'm grateful for my girlfriend and family. My girlfriend bought me a sub, and my best friend gave me a Valentine's Day letter
- Grateful for friends and neighbors in Mission Hills — Orchard, Mission Circle and Jefferson Drive all rock
- We are thankful for you, Lebo Subs. XOXO
- Grateful for music
- Molly
- I am grateful I am on spring break right now. — Lillian B.
- I am grateful for my family and friends. — Nora
- My dog
- Ben
- I'm grateful for Amelia, Lilly and Katelynn
- I am grateful for my supportive



Christy Smith holds a Kindness Crate at Babb Orthodontics. (Photo by Tressa Glover)

family and friends — and, of course, my best friend, Em. A moment that brought me hope was when my friend said I could make it in acting

- I'm grateful for my family and my Lebo Subs co-workers

More to come from these crates — and others — next month. Our crates are currently located at Commonwealth Press, Lebo Subs, Rollier's and Salon Vivace.

You can also email your good news to yinzaregood@gmail.com. To listen to the **Yinz Are Good** podcast, visit www.yinzaregood.com. ♥

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Lincoln Elementary celebrates 100 years with community event

Milestone brings together generations of students, families and volunteers

By Laurie Garvey, Lincoln Graduate, Class of 1980

Ralston Place was closed to traffic for the event. The Mt. Lebanon High School Marching Band and cheerleaders greeted attendees out front, filling the air with energy and school spirit and setting the tone for a special afternoon.

The milestone celebration opened with remarks from Principal Ron Kitsko, followed by Mt. Lebanon School District Superintendent Melissa Friez and special guest Roberta Campbell, daughter of Lincoln's first principal. A citation from state Rep. Jennifer Mazzocco and a tree dedication led by Kim Yetter, a Lincoln parent and Mt. Lebanon Nature Conservancy board member, followed. The welcome concluded with a spirited Lincoln School song sing-along led by music director Rebecca Showalter before the doors officially opened.

Indoors, the celebration continued with thoughtful nods to both past and present. Visitors explored a historical classroom display and a current-day classroom, offering a glimpse into how learning at Lincoln has evolved over the years. The library was open, and the main-floor hallways showcased alumni photos paired with their elementary school pictures and a brief look at where life has taken them.

In the gymnasium, a video loop featured interviews conducted by current students with former Lincoln students — bridging generations in a meaningful way.



Lincoln Principal Dr. Ron Kitsko addresses the crowd during the Lincoln Centennial celebration. (Photo by Dan Shrensky, Lincoln School Class of 1974)

Along the downstairs hallway, a timeline highlighted key moments in Lincoln's history, including the arrival of the district's first male teacher, Eugene Holmes Schaffer, in 1949, and its designation as a National Blue Ribbon School in 2001, 2003 and 2013.

There were also beloved milestones, such as the founding of the Frosty Shop in 1973 by Betty Lou Snyder and other PTA parents — a tradition that has delighted generations of Lincoln students and continues to hold a special place in the hearts of many.

Guests were treated to an elementary school staple — milk cartons and cookies — along with Lincoln School merchandise for purchase, adding a nostalgic touch.

Outside on the back playground, ideal weather set the stage for a festive afternoon as old friends reconnected and new memories were made. A DJ kept the energy up while families enjoyed face painting, a balloon artist, a photo booth, temporary

tattoos and Kona Ice. A Mt. Lebanon Fire Department truck and a Medical Rescue Team South Authority vehicle were also on hand, giving children and adults a chance to explore up close.

As the celebration unfolded, the spirit of Lincoln's past and present was felt not only in the festivities, but also in the words etched into the building itself.

"I do not think much of a man who is not wiser today than he was yesterday," Abraham Lincoln wrote.

It is a reminder that growth is ongoing — shaped by experience, reflection and the people who influence us along the way. Looking back, it is often the small, steady moments that teach the most, quietly shaping who we become. Each day offers the chance to carry a little more wisdom forward than the day before.

The following snapshots offer just a glimpse of the more than 40,000 students who have walked the halls of Lincoln Elementary.

Volunteers behind the Lincoln Centennial

The event was made possible by the dedication of the Lincoln Centennial Planning Committee and numerous volunteers whose contributions were deeply appreciated.

Lincoln Centennial Planning Committee

Kim Allera, Current Lincoln Parent
Caryn Bevins, Current Lincoln Parent
Kristin Catasso, Current Lincoln Parent
Dana DiDonato, Current Lincoln Parent
Dyan Dolfi-Offutt, Current Lincoln Parent
Brieta Dougherty-Brill, Current Lincoln Parent
Abbie Hediger, Current Lincoln Parent
Ron Kitsko, Lincoln Principal
Lisa LoVerde, Lincoln Teacher
Lorraine May, Current Lincoln Parent
Rebecca Showalter, Lincoln Teacher
Brandi Smith, MTLSD Director of Communications
Jackie Smith, Current Lincoln Parent
Maureen Staub, Lincoln Librarian
Mary Ullman, Current Lincoln Parent
Tricia Warren, Current Lincoln Parent
Alana Zanetta, Current Lincoln Parent

GPS locked in: Lincoln School ... just 1,750 miles to go.

The Aikin family moved from rural Fayette County to Mt. Lebanon in 1956, drawn by the strong reputation of the school district. Their two sons, Kent (Lincoln Class of 1964) and Blaine (Lincoln Class of 1966), both attended Lincoln School.

Kent, who earned his medical degree in 1977 and went on to provide care across the United States, has been enjoying retirement in Dolores, Colorado, since 2022. For the centennial, he and his wife made the 1,750-mile journey back to Mt. Lebanon.

Blaine, a 1966 Lincoln graduate, has come full circle, now watching a second generation of his family walk those same halls. He takes great joy in seeing new memories

unfold with his grandsons Benjamin, a 2022 Lincoln graduate, and Thomas, currently a fifth grader.

Most meaningful of all was being interviewed by his grandson Thomas as part of the centennial project — a moment that brought their shared legacy to life.

Leading the way: Lincoln's first female safety patrol captain

By fifth grade, Ann Aldisert Becker (Class of 1979) was already stepping into leadership, though she may not have realized how historic it would be. As a safety patrol member, she was asked to shadow then-sixth-grade captain Greg Katshir in preparation for a day when the sixth graders would be off-site touring Jefferson Junior High. When that day came, Ann stepped in as captain.

Continued on page 20



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BUSINESS BEAT

Eaton Prep offers lower-cost SAT prep as test undergoes major changes

Mother-son team Christine and James Hessler blend in-person and virtual instruction to help students navigate digital, adaptive testing By Annabelle Thomas

Eaton Prep is a 10-class SAT preparation course offered by mother and son duo Christine and James Hessler. The Hesslers have adapted to the technological changes of the College Board and the shifts in standardized testing over the years in order to help students get into top programs.

After watching her own children receive scholarships and prestigious awards for their scores, Christine Hessler realized that providing tutoring could significantly improve students' lives. She had previously taught in Mt. Lebanon for 22 years and is a certified tutor in math and English.

"I saw it help my own four children so much," Christine said. "And then I thought, 'Where can I make a difference in somebody's life with just a few classes?'"

Christine and James started the program just over 10 years ago and hold sessions in the Mt. Lebanon Recreation Center for their in-person classes. In 2020 they expanded their operations to accommodate virtual meetings and have never looked back, now virtually helping students from across the world.

In-person classes usually hold around 25 students each, and Eaton Prep offers sessions year-round leading up to various test dates. According to a 2026 study by Private Prep, the average

in-person SAT course in America costs between \$700 and \$1,800. At Eaton, students pay \$495 for 30 hours of instruction.

"We're a family business, and we spend hundreds of hours getting our packets ready," Christine said. "We're more affordable than our competitors."

The SAT has evolved dramatically in recent years, with changes including the first-ever digital model and an adaptive bimodule format released in 2024. Though students may be intimidated by such changes, James assures that their classes can help ease test anxiety and build familiarity with the questions.

"We do a lot of practice tests, so that helps build their familiarity with the test," James said. "I think that takes a lot of the pressure off students who struggle with test anxiety. If they're not happy with their score, we can practice for a couple of months and then they take it again."

Along with the transition to online testing, the SAT became adaptive, meaning that the test adjusts to the individual user's performance. Though the test previously consisted of the same questions for each tester, College Board now uses their online SAT to give harder questions to high-performing students and easier questions to students who missed the mark in their first module.



James and Christine Hessler have helped many students gain admission to their preferred schools. (Photo provided).

"The test learning from you is definitely an eerie experience," James said. "You can feel it becoming harder, but that's a good thing."

In both the reading and math sections, the tester's performance in the first module determines how difficult the questions are in their second module. If students fail to perform well enough to receive harder questions, their score is capped. Christine and James have both worked to keep their course updated, however, and from their perspective, students are as prepared as ever.

"I asked the kids in the very last class before the SAT, 'Do you feel ready for the test?'" Christine said. "And they all raised their hands."

The Hesslers consider themselves lucky enough to get to work with motivated students who are eager to raise their scores and get into selective schools. For them, Eaton Prep's services can open the door to a bright academic future.

"Testing still remains important, especially for colleges, for universities and for the students that are really trying to aspire to a top program," James said. "We've helped many students get into the schools, and that's a rewarding thing for both of us."

Eaton Prep's next in-person SAT class will begin on June 14. For more information, visit www.eatonprep.com. ♥

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From graphic designer to owner, Panczyk builds Sunburst Sportswear

Mt. Lebanon graduate turns chance job into thriving custom apparel business serving local organizations By Lauren Moore

Mt. Lebanon High School 1995 graduate Aaron Panczyk grew up on Longuevue Drive with his parents, Mike and Mary; sister Kelley; and brothers Micah and Simon. Panczyk always had an interest in art and working with his hands but didn't have a clear direction for what he wanted to do after high school.

A few years after college while trying to figure out his calling, he ran into a childhood family friend at The Saloon of Mt. Lebanon who offered him a job. Panczyk accepted the job on the spot and the following Monday he started working for Sunburst Sportswear as its graphic designer. Six years later, he purchased the business. Since then, he's expanded the space, grown its capabilities and seen it become a staple township business.

Located on the corner of Castle Shannon Boulevard and Anawanda Avenue, Sunburst Sports-

wear is a custom apparel silk-screening and embroidery shop with the capacity to fill any sized order. Panczyk and his staff have served up team apparel to many Mt. Lebanon organizations, such as the Mt. Lebanon Soccer, Lacrosse, Basketball, Baseball and Softball Associations, to name just a few. Local companies represent the bulk of his business.

"We have gotten to know a ton of local business owners over the years," Panczyk said. "They tell friends and family about us and we keep growing."

That growth includes the addition of in-house embroidery machines with business partner Ben Weidman, also of Mt. Lebanon.

"Having everything in-house allows for complete quality control," noted Panczyk. "The embroidery side of the business has really taken off in the last year."

If you stop by the shop, you'll probably recognize

some shirts being printed as well as the people printing them. Panczyk employs two Mt. Lebanon graduates as well as his dad Mike, who is the shop's 86-year-old Chief Financial Officer and a former nuclear physicist.

Panczyk believes his success comes from hard work, relationships and his long-time love for art.

"When you own your own business, you have to be the one willing to put in the work," Panczyk said. "We especially love when we have the opportunity to get involved creatively and help create logos and graphics. Coming up with clever ways to communicate a message is the most fun part of this business and I think it's something that truly sets us apart."

Panczyk now lives in Mt. Lebanon's Cedarhurst Manor neighborhood with his wife Kate, a fellow Mt. Lebanon grad, and their daughter, Isla. In his free time, he



Aaron Panczyk fulfilling T-shirt order in the back workspace at Sunburst Sportswear, 445 Castle Shannon Blvd. (Photo by Lauren Moore)

enjoys spending time with his family, playing the guitar and coaching soccer. In fact, Panczyk has coached local teams for nearly twenty years, including the Mt. Lebanon boys varsity soccer team from 2020 to 2024, the Mt. Lebanon girls varsity soccer team from 2010 to 2015 and the Seton La Salle varsity soccer team from 2001 to 2008.

When asked what advice

he would offer young entrepreneurs, Panczyk had words of wisdom.

"There are no guarantees," Panczyk said. But if you believe in yourself and your abilities, you have the chance to be successful."

For more information on Sunburst Sportswear, visit them in person at 445 Castle Shannon Blvd., or online at www.sunburstsportswear.net. ♥



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Student-led Mini-THON gains momentum in first year back

Fundraisers and main event aim to unite the community in support of childhood cancer care and research

By Scarlett Sweeney

In 1973, Pennsylvania State University began THON, a dance marathon that raises money for childhood cancer research and support. Since then, it has grown into the largest student-run fundraiser of its kind in the world. In 2026, THON raised \$18,841,726.53 for Four Diamonds at Penn State Health Golisano Children's Hospital.

As THON has grown, Mini-THON was founded for students in grades K-12 to raise money for cancer care and research. This school year, Mini-THON was re-founded at Mt. Lebanon High School with a goal of raising \$10,000 in its first year.

Throughout the school year, Mini-THON has held various fundraisers, such as spikeball tournaments, bake sales and concession stands at sporting events, to help achieve this goal. The club's main event was held Friday, April 17, from 5 to 9 p.m.

Junior Ellie Shaffer's motivation to help co-found the club was the children she personally knows who are battling childhood cancer. Knowing how this has impacted those around her, she wanted to make a difference.

"I've seen how other schools in Pittsburgh have utilized Mini-THON to make a difference," Shaffer said. "We thought it was the perfect organization to bring to Lebo since we've seen the successful impact it's already had."

The club's first fundraiser was a competitive spikeball tournament that raised about \$300. Teams competed in bracket play while playing for a cause bigger than themselves.

At the main event on April 17, there were various tournaments, including spikeball, basketball and cornhole, along with other activities such as face painting, dirty soda

bars, PlayStations, arts and crafts and more. Raffle baskets donated by local businesses were also awarded.

For the main event, junior co-founder Caroline Rost was hoping to see between 60 and 100 students attend during the club's first year. She believes this year is more about getting started than having a breakthrough year.

"We hope to see 60-plus students and unite our school over such a great cause," Rost said. "No matter the turnout, I hope everyone there had fun and wants to come again next year. Our fundraising goal this year is \$10,000, so we are pushing to get as close to that number as possible, or even above."

As co-founders, Rost and Shaffer both describe the average week of Mini-THON as "pretty busy," but very rewarding. The two meet with six other co-founders about twice a week, along with frequent meetings with other club members.

"As we get closer to our final event, the past couple of weeks have been pretty busy," Shaffer said. "We have around two meetings per week that might include planning activities, reaching out to businesses and meeting with our adviser from Penn State, Katelyn, who brings a lot of great ideas and advice."

Although Mini-THON requires a significant time commitment, its impact motivates students to get involved. Rost highlights the strong sense of unity among participants, describing it as meaningful and a key reason for her continued involvement.

Rost said she saw her "why" most clearly at the club's first event, the spikeball tournament.

"During our spikeball tournament earlier this year, I saw students competing with friends, but also coming



From left: Bella Cafardi, Christina Hartung, Scarlett Sweeney, Emmy Smith, Lucy Sussman, Allie Miller, and Caroline Rost. Not pictured, Ellie Shaffer. (Photo provided)

together as a community to support families affected by pediatric cancer," Rost said. "It has been exciting to find others just as passionate about the cause as we are, and we have been able to expand our fundraising efforts and financial goals because of these dedicated people. I hope that in the future we can do a Mini-THON visit to a local hospital to see the impact we can make on our city."

As seen in neighboring school districts, Mini-THON has grown into a powerful organization that has made a difference in the lives of children and families. In the South Fayette School District, Mini-THON raised about \$1,000 in its first year. By 2025, that total had grown to \$350,492.58 for childhood cancer.

While expectations are more modest in the first year, co-founders and members hope the community becomes more aware of an issue greater than themselves.

For underclassmen looking to get involved in a meaningful club with leadership opportunities, Shaffer recommends joining Mini-THON.

"I think Mini-THON is a great way to get connected with a club that involves the whole school," Shaffer said. "It also allows for many ways to participate: planning activities, finance, advertising or simply attending events. I believe there's something for everyone in Mini-THON, and we would always love more help."

To donate, visit the Four Diamonds website and search for the school's event or a specific student's fundraising page. Donations can be made online and go directly toward supporting children battling cancer. ♥

(Editor's note: This event was being held at press time. We will report on the actual event and monies raised in our next issue.)

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Mt. Lebanon senior creates mural honoring class tradition

Ava Heidenreich depicts bocce tournament as symbol of unity and school spirit

Story and photos by Lindi Pastorius

When chosen to create the annual Mt. Lebanon High School 2026 senior class art mural, Ava Heidenreich understood the task. She knew what she wanted to do: represent the student body, depict something significant, and include the Blue Devils' mascot.

Typically, art murals are created to capture a moment in time, illustrate a purpose or present a unifying theme. More than just a mural, Heidenreich's art this year acts as a vivid time capsule to depict a favorite event of the senior class – a bocce ball tournament.

Each year, students are invited to participate in an in-school bocce tournament. All grades are encouraged to create a team and compete in the day-long event. Heidenreich says this is highly anticipated among seniors. "Everybody participates. It started just as a bocce team and then transformed into big school event that everybody looks forward to each year. Most of my friends -- if not all of them -- participate in a team. It's a fun event," Heidenreich said.

The perfect way to honor the senior class, Heidenreich decided to paint the annual bocce tournament, and found the perfect Blue Devils mascot to be Cole Gibbons. A standout in Mt. Lebanon for wrestling, Gibbons is also a leader

among students. Gibbons plays multiple sports and he is the student section captain for football and basketball games. "Cole is very significant for our class and so is his leadership. I felt like transforming him into an actual blue devil would be fun, and it would also represent the senior class," said Heidenreich.

Inspired by a photo of Gibbons playing in the bocce ball tournament, Heidenreich's mural reflects more than just him playing the game. "All of the colors on it are different shades of blue and gold, besides the bocce ball. It's bright green because it is supposed to draw your eye to it. It is this thing that's unifying the school, our class, everything," said Heidenreich.

After submitting a line drawing of her idea, Heidenreich felt it an honor to be chosen as the muralist. Creating a mural is not an easy task, and it's one that Heidenreich has been working on for months. Painted on a bulky wood slab, the mural is too large to take home, so she uses spare moments in the day -- such as lunch and study hall -- to complete it.

"I don't think I expected it to take this much time out of my day, but it has definitely helped me with my time management," Heidenreich said.

Despite the workload, Heidenreich is proud



Heidenreich working on the mural in March.

to leave such a legacy. "Graduating high school is bittersweet, but at the same time knowing that there's always going to be a piece of me here, with my name signed on it, and everybody who's walking by will see it, is good," she said. "Maybe they won't realize that I was the person who painted it, but it will always be here. That's very meaningful to me."

Beyond the mural, Heidenreich has served as a writing coach, a connections club leader, and the captain of the varsity soccer team for two years. Committed to attend Villanova in the fall with an NROTC scholarship, Heidenreich

plans on majoring in civil engineering. Although art may not be her focus in college, she has no plans to stop creating.

"It's a really great way for me to kind of clear my headspace and pass my time. I do feel like it's just going to be a recreational thing for me, more like a hobby, but I would love to learn other forms of art, like clay and crochet," Heidenreich said.

Her favorite thing about art is how one can contribute to the community with it, she said.

"In the past four years, we have had multiple beautification projects -- like the ribbon hanging over

the grand staircase. That year, everyone participated in making it and hanging it. I love that aspect of art," Heidenreich said. "At the end of the year after our show, we do other beautification projects. I love how we can just contribute to our community and our school in that way."

The final reveal of Heidenreich's completed and framed mural will be at the upcoming AP Art Show on April 24 at 7 p.m. After the event, the mural will move to a different location where it will join other murals, honoring the moments of history made in the halls of Mt. Lebanon High School. ♥



Heidenreich selected senior and Blue Devils mascot Cole Gibbons as the model for the Class of 2026 mural.

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Family Resources hires Mt. Lebanon resident as development director

Family support organization aims to expand local involvement

By Eleazer Gorenstein

One of the region's leading organizations in fighting child abuse and trauma has a Mt. Lebanon connection that is sure to bolster its mission. And there will be ways for Lebo community members to get involved, too.

Family Resources, a nonprofit organization with presence around Allegheny County, has an ambitious and honorable mission that centers around preventing and treating child abuse and trauma across Western Pennsylvania. With origins locally dating back to the late 1800s, Family Resources has grown into one of the region's largest prevention agencies, providing 10 trauma-informed programs that support children and families in various states: Before abuse occurs, during crisis and throughout healing. Their in-home and community-based services help families build safe, stable environments through counseling, parental education and practical support tailored to their needs. Family Resources works to keep families together whenever possible, ensuring children can thrive in safe and nurturing homes.

Josh Cramer, of Ashland Ave., was recently hired as the organization's Director of Development. Prior to

taking that role, he served on the Family Resources board for seven years, during which he saw the impact that Family Resources made on local families.

"The whole team of people working at Family Resources -- the teachers, therapists, social workers the site supervisors -- they're all doing work that changes not only the lives of children who have suffered trauma or are at risk of suffering trauma," Cramer said. "They change entire families' lives by educating them, keeping kids safe until their parents get home from work, helping kids in the preschool age that just don't have another school to go to. And seeing that has definitely worked, as it pushed me for the seven years I was on the board and continues to drive me today."

In addition to treatment programs geared to the county at large such as the Family Resources Therapeutic Preschool, in which Family Resources supports social and emotional learning for children ages 3-5 years old who have experienced trauma, Cramer would like to bring some programming that is directly accessible to the Mt. Lebanon community.

"I'd love to put a group together like a breakfast

club, or a coffee club, that gets together monthly or every six weeks or so," Cramer said. "There would be a social component to it, but a portion of that hour that we get together, for maybe 10 to 15 minutes, would be me talking about the Family Resources programs. I'd like to have 'graduates' of our programs come and talk about how they were helped kept safe and how they were eased along by some of our family intervention services where our in-home workers go in and work with families to keep them together and ensure that the kids have a safe place to grow up."

Cramer envisions having some of the Mt. Lebanon coffee shops possibly hosting this sort of program. The idea would be to have people pay \$10 per month to be a member of this club, with all proceeds going directly to Family Resources and its programming. This would also help to spread awareness of the organization locally.

Family Resources, as it happens, has further Mt. Lebanon connections: Resident Jeremy Gracik is a former president of the board, while Adam Viccaro sits currently on its board. The Saloon of Mt. Lebanon hosted two large fundraisers on its roof-



Josh Cramer with Mac and Cheese (Photo provided)

top deck in the early part of the 2020s and has donated to the organization.

"We already have some good momentum built up with Mt. Lebanon involvement here," Cramer said. "But now I really want to get more. Now that this is my full-time job, and this isn't something I'm trying to

cobble together in my spare time, I want to activate this community and really engage them in our mission."

To learn more about Family Resources or to get involved, please visit their website <https://familyresources.org/> or email Josh Cramer at jcramer@familyresources.org. ♥



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St. Clair Medical Orthopedic Surgery Offers Breadth of Services

By Eleazer Gorenstein

St. Clair Medical Orthopedic Surgery offers an assortment of advanced surgical techniques and innovative non-surgical treatments to help people regain mobility and improve their quality of life.

Dr. Shaka Walker, MD, one of the founding members of the hospital's orthopedic surgery group, has been with them for the past 10 years. His group is an established and highly talented one.

"Within our group, we take care of everything from broken bones to include things like hip fractures, wrist fractures and fractures around the shoulder to ligament injuries, meniscus injuries, cartilage injuries, arthritis -- of the hip, knee, shoulders and ankle -- bunions and diabetic foot infection," Dr. Walker said. "So, we really do the full spectrum of orthopedics with the exception of orthopedic tumors and then some pediatric orthopedic work in the very young ages."

Dr. Walker, who began his medical career as an orthopedic surgeon in the

United States Air Force, has been practicing in the Pittsburgh region since 2014. He specializes in orthopedic sports medicine; as such, a lot of the patients that he takes care of are local athletes, such as high school and some local collegiate competitors.

There are six other physicians in the orthopedic surgery group: Todd Balog, MD, who specializes in hip and knee replacements and revisions. As an example of his duties, if a patient had arthritis of the hip or knee or had previously had a replacement that has worn out, Dr. Balog would be the person who would manage that. James Mullen, MD, performs upper extremity and hand surgery, which includes things like shoulder replacements, rotator cuff repairs and carpal tunnel releases. Two podiatrists -- Dr. Stephen Alayli and Dr. Robert Mendicino -- specialize in foot and ankle surgery. They often take care of ankle fractures, heel bone fractures and other foot fractures, as well as arthritis in those joints,

and various ligament injuries of the ankle. They can also help with diabetic foot infections and the condition called Charcot arthropathy.

Richard Mitchell, MD, is the practice's other sports medicine physician, and he and Dr. Walker do things such as ACL reconstructions, meniscus repairs and meniscus debridement. They can perform shoulder stabilization surgeries and arthroscopic shoulder surgeries, in addition to some foot, ankle and upper extremity areas as well. A seventh doctor, Dr. Carmen Petraglia, is slated to join the St. Clair Orthopedic Surgery in May. Dr. Petraglia does both cervical and lumbar spinal surgeries, meaning surgeries of both the neck and lower back.

The Orthopedic Surgery group will also soon have the ability to perform diagnostic ultrasounds. This procedure will give the medical team the ability to look at tendons primarily in the hand, the carpal tunnel and shoulder. This will also allow them to perform ultrasound-guided injections in their offices.

These injections are precise, office-based procedures using real-time imaging to deliver medications—such as corticosteroids, anesthetics, or hyaluronic acid—directly into joints, tendons, or nerves.

For Dr. Walker on the sports medicine side, he said the diagnostic ultrasounds will give him the ability to do platelet-rich leverage plasma (PRP) injections in the office. This procedure occurs when a patient's blood is drawn and then centrifuged. The doctors then separate out the platelet and plasma fraction and concentrate the platelets. This can then be reinjected into the patient to reduce inflammation, repair tissue and alleviate pain. This treatment is commonly used for conditions like arthritis of the hip and knee, as well as for tendonitis of the elbow, such as tennis elbow or golfer's elbow, Walker said.

Dr. Walker noted he is truly proud to be serving the community at St. Clair Health and knows that a positive difference

in patient treatment lies in the pride he and the other practitioners feel.

"The biggest thing for us is that St. Clair is a community hospital," Walker said. "And we very much see our role as providing good service to the community that would be comparable to what they would get if they went downtown to the University hospitals, but in a much friendlier and more personal environment. Our staff are fantastic. They're very friendly and very easy to work with. The feeling that you get coming into our office is not like going to a typical doctor's office; people are going to greet you. They're going to smile, and they're probably going to know your name. That's the kind of feel that we try to create because honestly, the medicine is a big part of it, but I think that it's really the human connection that is the big reason for why we do what we do."

To check out more about the St. Clair Medical Orthopedic Surgery, check out their website www.stclair.org/ortho ♥



Dr. Walker meets with a patient post-surgery.

SPONSORED CONTENT



Historical Society honors area women for opening doors and reshaping community life

An exhibit and reception highlights trailblazers whose work in activism, public safety and public service helped redefine roles for future generations By Sarah Core

When teacher June Delano heard trees were being cut down in Bird Park to make way for a soccer field, she rallied her neighbors and friends. It was a wet June morning in 1984, and by the time the phone calls were finished, roughly 50 protestors had gathered at Beadling Road to halt the local soccer association.

According to her son Jon Delano, the newspaper dramatically reported that his mother had tied herself to a tree to stop the chainsaws. In reality, he confided, she'd had her college-aged daughter tie herself to a tree instead, while the volunteers cut around her.

"But by then it was too late," he laughed. "My mother was labeled a tree hugger."

Jon said the protest at Bird Park changed the course of June's future. It led to her running for commissioner, where she became the first Democratic woman elected to the Mt. Lebanon Commission in 1985. While she lost the vote 4-1 to build a soccer field, she co-founded the Mt. Lebanon Nature Conservancy and created "School in the Park," a program every third grader in the school district still participates in.

"My mother was an incredible woman," Jon said. "She would not be deterred by defeat. She



Former/current female commissioners gathered together to celebrate the first three women commissioners (pictured behind them) - from left to right - Kelly Frasch, Bonnie Van Kirk, Ann Strader, and Anne Swager Wilson. (All photos by John C. Schisler)

would try to turn defeat into victory in another way."

The Historical Society of Mount Lebanon honored over a dozen area women who, like June, made an impact in the community with a reception on Mar. 21 as part of the "Barrier-Breaking Women" exhibit.

Honorees included early 20th-century aviatrix Jeanne Picard, who is credited as the first Pittsburgh woman to fly a helicopter; Kathryn Peoples, the first Mt. Lebanon librarian; Mary B. Larsen, Carolyn M. Byham and Delano, who were the first three women elected to the Mt. Lebanon Commission, as well as slain FBI Special Agent Martha Dixon, for whom "Martha's Run" is held every April.

For Wilma McNeese, being honored for her work in co-founding the Black Association of South Hills (BASH) still comes as a surprise to her.

"It's humbling and surprising," McNeese said. "It never occurred to me that it was something that would lead to legend or trail-blazing status. It was just getting involved in the community."

Current BASH president Renee Mack said McNeese's work speaks to her visionary nature; she saw a need and made it happen.

Mack said BASH -- which serves as a social, civic and charitable organization -- is thriving nearly 50 years after its inception, and McNeese is still recruiting and mentoring young Black women.



Wilma McNeese with her family and friends from BASH.



Jon Delano and Susan Morgans sharing a nostalgic moment.

"(McNeese) has poured into us all she knows, but she has an expectation that we will pour our knowledge into the community we live in," Mack said.

For those women who were honored posthumously, friends and family said the exhibit has been bitter-sweet and nostalgic.

"It's funny how life has a way of weaving experiences through everything in life," Mt. Lebanon Chief of Police

Jason Haberman said. He was remembering how he first met Mary Eichinger, one of the first female officers in the township's police department.

When he was a teenager, Haberman said he experienced a situation that led to law enforcement involvement. Eichinger was the detective assigned to his case. He said that her level of compassion and care towards him and his friends



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Martha Dixon
(Photo by: FBI Wall of Honor)



Virginia Redpath Phillips
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Wilma McNeese
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Ruth Reidbord
(Photo provided)



Mary Kay Eichinger
(Photo by: TribLive)



Dr. June S. Delano (Photo by Mt. Lebanon Municipality)



Carolyn M. Byham
(Photo provided)



Mary B. Larsen
(Photo provided)



Chief of Police Jason Haberman with Historical Society vice president Jenny Wood and president Alyssa Jones.

is what helped him decide to become a cop.

Later in her career, Eichinger spearheaded investigating financial crimes against the elderly, earning the 2002 Officer of the Year Award from the Pittsburgh chapter of the International Association of Financial Crimes Investigators.

"She really was a force in law enforcement and was a groundbreaker," Haberman said. "I carry on

Mary's legacy. We really are indebted to her and her legacy."

Another honoree, Sally Lupovitz, was a local business owner and political activist who got her family members active in the causes she believed in.

"Had she lived to see this, she would have been very pleased and very proud," said Laura Horowitz, Lupovitz's daughter.

Horowitz said her mother

had her door-knocking at the age of 11. The result was her thinking that was a normal thing to do.

"She took on some stuff that was not easy in Mt. Lebanon," Horowitz explained. "But she was never shy about raising her voice for good causes."

The progressive Lupovitz, a delegate to the 1976 Democratic convention who hosted then-Presidential candidate Jimmy Carter

in her Mt. Lebanon home, worked to make friends across the political divide.

"It would have been gratifying to know that her efforts did not go unnoticed," Horowitz added.

Historical Society Vice President Jenny Wood said the "Barrier-Breaking Women" exhibit has been a labor of love as all these women have paved the path for each other.

"The good news is, it's not over," Jon said. "The truth is every single day there are women breaking barriers in Mt Lebanon and across the South Hills. I can envision another exhibit of barrier-breaking women of the 21st century."

Read more about the Mt Lebanon women featured in the Barrier-Breaking Women exhibit at: tinyurl.com/BarrierBreakingWomen ♥

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LEBO BEAT SPORTS

Mt. Lebanon baseball builds on tradition with standout talent Junior Graham Keen, a Vanderbilt commit, and senior Chase Smith lead team into season

By Scarlett Sweeney

Mt. Lebanon baseball has a strong tradition, with multiple WPIAL championships, a state title and recent success that includes back-to-back district titles in 2022 and 2023.

This season, the team is led by junior Graham Keen, who has committed to play Division I baseball at Vanderbilt University. Keen is ranked No. 2 nationally in the Class of 2027 by Prep Baseball and is considered one of the top prospects in the country.

After his freshman season, Keen was named Rookie of the Year by the Pittsburgh Union Progress and earned Big 56 Conference 6A All-Section honors. He has also shown versatility by playing in the outfield, first base, third base and pitching. Keen reaches the low 90s mph with his fastball.

Keen described his recruitment process as "exciting and fun," adding that he felt fortunate to choose Vanderbilt.

"[Vanderbilt] was the perfect blend of campus, location, conference and coaching staff," Keen said. "It was my favorite combination of everything."

Despite his commitment, Keen said his mindset has not changed entering the season. He remains focused on his teammates and leading with energy and work ethic.

"I'm excited to enjoy my time with my teammates and lead them with hard work, energy and gratitude," Keen said. "[Being committed] doesn't really change anything in my eyes."



Junior Graham Keen is the No. 2 prospect in the nation in the Class of 2027, according to Prep Baseball. (Photo by Zachary Smith)



Senior Chase Smith is committed to play Division II baseball at the University of South Carolina Beaufort. (Photo by Zachary Smith)

Senior Chase Smith, a right-handed pitcher and infielder, is also a key contributor. He has committed to play Division II baseball at University of South Carolina Beaufort.

For Smith, the season carries added meaning as his final year of high school baseball.

"I am very excited to play with all my best friends for one more year," Smith said. "I want to cherish all the practices and everything we do, and help the team win a WPIAL championship."

Since his freshman year, Smith

said his role and mindset have evolved.

"As a senior, I want to lead by example and prepare the team to compete," Smith said. "As a freshman, I was more of a role player out of the bullpen. Now I have more responsibility as a leader."

Keen said the team's chemistry has been a strength this season.

"Our team is a great group of guys who get along extremely well," Keen said. "We play for each other and share the goal of getting better every day."

Looking ahead, Keen hopes to mentor younger players while encouraging them to enjoy the recruiting process.

"Everything has a way of working itself out," Keen said. "Staying calm and relaxed is the best way to enjoy it."

As his career winds down, Smith credited the program for shaping his approach to the game.

"Lebo baseball has taught me to have fun, never take shortcuts and truly be a team," Smith said. "Enjoy everything, because it goes by fast." ♥

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Girls rugby builds program, confidence

Senior Eli Page reflects on team's growth, culture and community in emerging sport

By Scarlett Sweeney

In the summer of 2021, the PIAA Board of Directors approved girls rugby as an "emerging sport," and it was officially introduced in Pennsylvania in April 2021. In 2023, Mt. Lebanon formed its inaugural team as a spring sport, consisting of players from eighth grade through juniors under coach Bri Allen, with 17 players signing up for the first season.

Senior Eli Page was a member of that inaugural team. Her rugby journey began when a friend invited her to attend a clinic. Although she was initially nervous, the team's welcoming and supportive environment made her feel comfortable and inspired her to continue playing.

"The culture of my team is honestly probably my favorite thing about us," Page said. "You will never see any of us get overly upset or mad at anyone, and everyone just wants the best for their teammates. Even if you make a mistake, miss a tackle or drop the ball, no one will ever say anything about it. We move on, reset, give each other constructive criticism and move on with our game."

For those unfamiliar with rugby, one of the most important rules is that the

ball cannot be passed forward — it must always be passed backward. The game combines elements of soccer and football, featuring continuous movement, physical tackling and an emphasis on maintaining possession.

Since her freshman year, Page has watched the team's confidence steadily grow, transforming the way they approach each game.

"If you go back and watch our first games, we used to be really timid on the field," Page said. "I think that finally having so many more girls with experience, you can really see through the way we play that we are so much more confident. Even when we go into tough games, everyone just plays with much more confidence."

Throughout her experience with Mt. Lebanon girls rugby, Page has learned what it means to be part of a true community. The team's constant support has taught her the importance of trust, encouragement and always showing up for one another.

"This applies heavily while we're playing, but it's the exact same way when we're not," Page said. "You cannot play a good rugby game if there's only one



Teammates hoist Eli Page during a lineout to secure the ball, providing height and stability. The play is a legal, strategic move in modern rugby to gain a competitive advantage. (Photo provided)

person doing everything; it is very much a team sport, and we thrive when we're working together. Community is such a big part of the sport."

Page also said she has become very close with players from neighboring school districts, adding that competing against them is one of the highlights of each season.

"On the field, we tackle each other and hit each other as hard as we can, but at the end of the day, we walk off the pitch, and they're still my best friends who I love with my whole heart," Page said.

Looking ahead, Page hopes the team will continue to grow and attract more players.

"I really hope to see everyone grow and develop as players individually, especially because I've watched these girls since their first day playing rugby and seen how they have improved," Page said. "I hope they get to go to tournaments or fun events once we're more developed, and I will definitely be cheering them on from afar because I know they're going to do great things."

For underclassmen considering rugby, Page strongly encourages them to give it a try.

"100% do it. Rugby is the best thing that I've ever done, and I can't imagine not doing it," Page said. "If you're worried about not having played a sport before or about the contact, it seems scary, but there is really a role for every single person. Whether you're really fast or strong, you will find your place. The first game is nerve-racking, but after that it clicks, and it's such a rewarding feeling."

Page also noted that some players join the team with no prior sports experience. Despite that, many quickly develop their skills and become some of the most talented players on the team.

Over the past four years, Page said her favorite part of high school has been rugby season.

"When I get to be with my team again, I'm just so happy," Page said. "I love going to practice, going to lifts and team dinners. I love the time between games when we're waiting to go back on and everyone's just hanging out. I love all the people, I love all the coaches — just everything about the sport and this team. They are so supportive, and I know I always have my people there, and I'm really grateful for them." ♥

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Batter up, Lebo

Mt. Lebanon's adult softball league brings neighbors back to the field for fun, friendship and competition *By Mackenzie Palmer*

A common theme of adulthood is reminiscing on simpler times. For example, looking back and longing for the times when one could spend their day outside playing a recreational sport without worrying about the world. Indeed, while missing one's childhood is a common sentiment, why waste that time reminiscing when one can join an adult softball league?

This simple notion grew into an idea that would put local adults back on the field of play. With previous experience managing sports leagues, Timmy Defo, former president of Mt. Lebanon Soccer, started an LLC in 2017 to create the Adult Softball League, and they have been active every year since.

To sign up, it costs \$99 and Defo plans to keep it under \$100 for each of his leagues. If registration closes, the league still allows about 10 substitute players in case any team needs them. Substitutes only need to pay \$30 to play, for insurance purposes.

"Nobody's trying to make money on the programs," Defo said. "We're just trying to make sure we have things that can be expensive, like referees."

Registration opens around March 1 every year, and it stays open until the league fills up (or, around June 3). There is a 120-player limit, and



Players from the adult softball team pose together on the field. (Photo provided)

it usually fills up quickly. Defo predicts registration will be close to full by the end of May. While the Fall season brings more players, there are typically eight teams of 15 players in the Spring. They assign the coaches for each team, but usually the same coaches are present each season. Coaches also take feedback; they conduct surveys annually - mostly for safety reasons - but also in the interest of fairness.

Games are usually played at local fields, such as Middle Turf and Jefferson Field. The league uses an app called Game Changer for information about game times and locations, teammates, communication between members and more. The league also has a website that is sponsored by Dicks Sporting Goods, which is

<https://www.shsportzclub.org/>. The league usually has two or three sponsors who contribute to the league annually.

Pete Damron, a member of the softball committee and a coach for one of the league's teams, was present for the start of the league, and years later he is still grateful to be a part of it.

"I thank the players and coaches, committee and board for making this happen," Damron said.

There are usually 14 games each season that span seven to eight weeks, typically running until the first week of October. They also have a playoff and tournament at the end of the season. According to Defo, out of the 120 league participants about 75 of them are skilled, and there are probably 15 really good players.



Mt. Lebanon adult softball team poses for a photo. (Photo provided)

"Our league's pretty chill, and everybody seems to really like it," Defo said.

While the skill levels may vary, the league is generally recreational and social. Most people who are in the league have made many friends through it.

"It's competitive, but it's more about supporting each other and having fun," Damron said. "I love to watch players from other teams encourage ours. It's like one big team."

Damron describes how each year their softball family grows, and to this day, it is an evolving community that creates long-lasting relationships.

"I've developed so many relationships through this sport and this league," Damron said. "We have end-of-year parties, holiday celebrations, and team get-togethers after games. It's truly an awesome experience."



Interested in joining an adult softball team, send email to leboadultsb@gmail.com. (Photo provided)

Defo believes playing softball is a great way to not only meet new people, but to decompress.

"We do so much for the kids. Sometimes you really need something for yourself," he said.

If you ever were to feel the desire to jump back into your childhood, signing up for adult softball could be just the thing. You can send inquiries to leboadultsb@gmail.com. ♥

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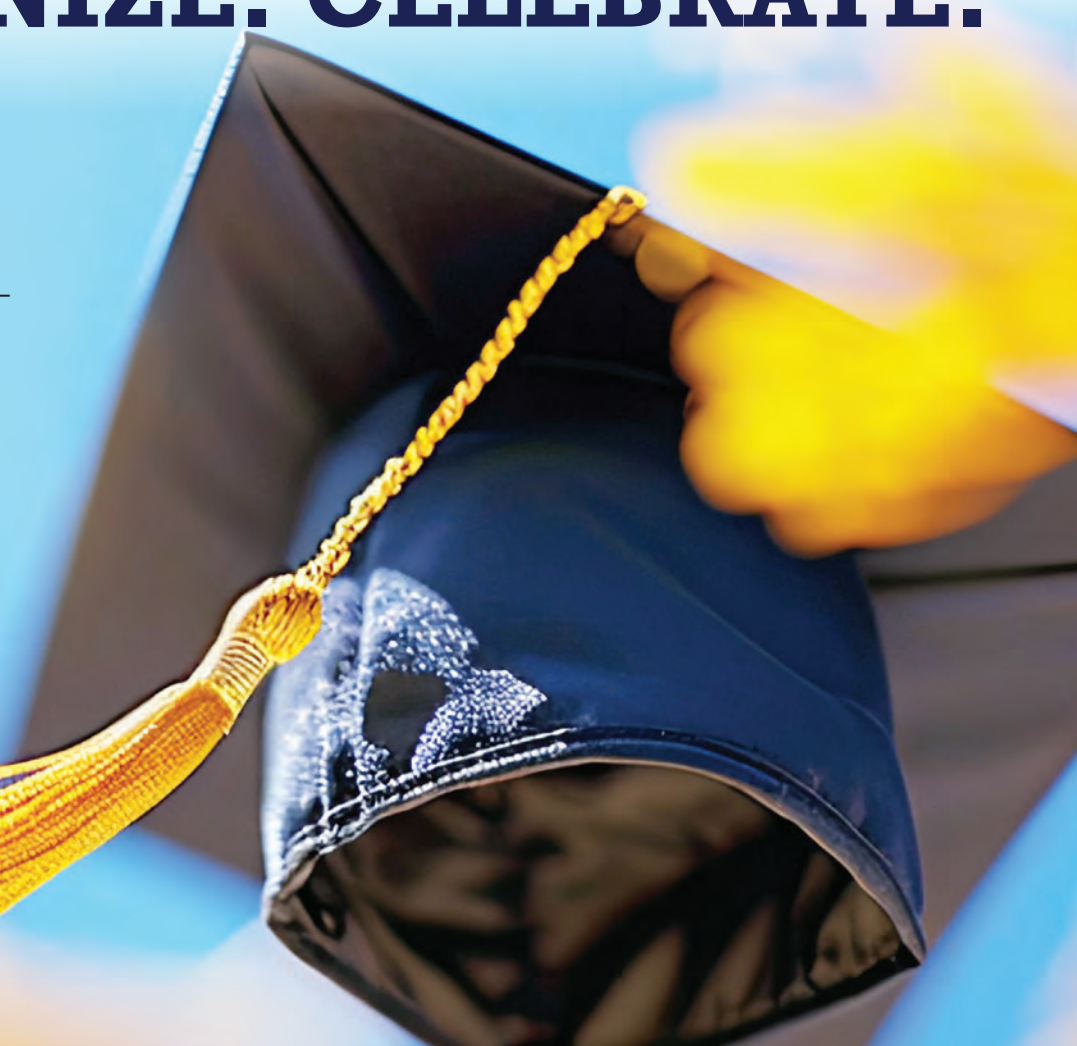
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CELEBRATE THE CLASS OF 2026

BECAUSE THIS MOMENT DESERVES TO BE RECOGNIZED



Kids of STEEL program gets Mt. Lebanon students moving

Volunteer-led initiative expands to all elementary schools, promoting fitness and healthy habits

By Annabelle Thomas

Mt. Lebanon elementary schools are encouraging kids to meet with adult volunteers to get active outside of the school day through Kids of STEEL, a P3R-powered program dedicated to giving kids in Pittsburgh a free way to move and stay healthy. After local parent Shannon Harpst heard about the organization and began her own site at Hoover Elementary School, the word slowly spread and now all seven elementary schools in the district host Kids of STEEL practices each week.

Harpst, a runner herself, heard about P3R and their youth programming at a separate event and was immediately inspired to bring it to Mt. Lebanon's children. The organization's free coaching materials give volunteers everything they need to coach kids through a training regimen with hopes to lead kids across the finish line of the Chick-Fil-A Pittsburgh Kids Marathon and the UPMC Sports Medicine Pittsburgh 5K in May.

"It was challenging at first, getting the word out," Harpst said. "But once people saw what was going on and how the kids were participating and excited about it, it spread throughout the district."

Kids of STEEL encourages kids to run in the events of the Dick's Sporting

Goods Pittsburgh Marathon Weekend in early May each year. And while they may only be running between one and three miles, they're alongside tens of thousands of adult runners. P3R's Senior Vice President of Youth Programming Amy Scheuneman says that seeing the kids on race day makes it all worth it.

"I love to see those kids finish and the smiles that they have on their faces," Scheuneman said. "They come back year after year, and they just say it's the best day of their life."

Kids of STEEL empowers coaches and kids alike to make their workouts their own and find fun in exercise. Specific routines and activities vary by site, and Howe Elementary School's site coach Jamie Matias finds that freedom inspiring.

"You own the culture of your site," Matias said. "I think that's kind of what is beautiful about this because it allows for a dynamic that is already there in your community to continue to thrive."

Practices at Howe Elementary usually consist of multiple warm-up laps, followed by multiple break-out stations of various games and activities to help kids get moving. At Hoover Elementary, Harpst typically leads the kids in timed walking and running intervals, followed by

playing some sort of game that keeps their heart rate moving. Even the schedules of each practice vary, with some schools hosting afternoon practices while others, like Hoover Elementary, invite kids to come to school early for their activities.

"The fact that they are excited to show up a half an hour before school to do the workouts says a lot," Harpst said.

Kids of STEEL offers kids the option to participate in a variety of events in addition to the May marathon weekend, including a turkey trot, a Fourth of July race and other sports clinics and events year-round. Matias finds that the real impact is in teaching kids how to care for themselves, no matter how fast they can get to the finish line.

"The end goal is running that mile for the kid's marathon," Matias said. "But that's not everything. It's really about character development, taking care of your body and fueling it with food, proper nutrition, rest and hydration."

According to P3R, there are over 350 Kids of STEEL groups across Western Pennsylvania and Mt. Lebanon groups often have waitlists after they reach their capacity of around 100 kids per site. The community's love of the organization and its volunteers is



Kids of STEEL in action running the Pittsburgh Marathon. (Photo provided)

clear, and it's largely due to P3R's dedication to making participation completely free. Scheuneman encourages adults of any age and experience level to volunteer, whether that means forming their own group or coming to a race and helping.

"Your time is well invested in our program," Scheuneman said. "You're investing in their lives, and

they're investing in you, too."

The Mt. Lebanon Kids of STEEL heat will be racing on Saturday, May 2, at 10:45 a.m., beginning on the North Shore of Pittsburgh. Race days contribute largely to Kids of STEEL's funding, and anyone is able to donate or find out more about how to get involved with Kids of STEEL at <https://p3r.org/programs/kids-of-STEEL>.♥



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Mt. Lebanon rec team celebrates teammate on World Down Syndrome Day

Sixth-grade players honor Josh Givens during championship game focused on inclusion

By Eleazer Gorenstein

Josh Givens and his sixth-grade recreational basketball team, the Buckeyes, walked off the court big winners of the Mt. Lebanon Recreation League boys' basketball championship game on March 21.

They may not have captured the title by the end of the contest as they lost 34-21, but they were all smiles nonetheless. That's because Josh's teammates made sure to feature him during World Down Syndrome Day, in which celebrating him was at the forefront of each of their minds.

Josh, 13, has Down syndrome but is very much a typical middle school-aged boy, according to his mother Joy Givens. Basketball and sports in general occupy much of Josh's free time and are some of his biggest passions.

"Josh loves playing basketball every winter, and he plays in Casey's Clubhouse (formerly Miracle League of the South Hills) for baseball," Joy said. "He loves playing team sports. And he hates losing! But he's gotten better about it and, to be fair, his teams don't lose very often. He really enjoys running out onto the field or onto the court with his friends, and he usually does a little dancing hop wherever he's going because he's so excited to be there."

Ever the team player, Joy noted that Josh will often try to cheer up his teammates on the bench if they are down or give a teammate a hug or pat on the back if they make a great play.

It's undoubtedly this spirit of Josh's that made his basketball teammates want to celebrate Josh enthusiastically once they made the championship game. The date of that game was significant because it occurred on World Down Syndrome Day. World Down Syndrome Day came to be because that date, March 21 (3/21), matches the 3 copies of chromosome 21, which is a unique trait to people with Down syndrome.

According to Joy, the day is designed to be a holiday that you can celebrate in lots of different ways.

"One thing that you can do is



Buckeyes look to score on a free throw.
(All photos by Joy Givens)



The Buckeyes.



Josh and his "sock rocking" teammates take the court.

'rock your socks,'" Joy said. "You can wear crazy or mismatched socks because the shape of chromosomes sort of resembles socks. So, wearing colorful or mismatched socks is a fun way to recognize that it's a special day. And when we got the playoff schedule, I realized that the final game was going to be on World Down Syndrome Day, if we made it to the championship."

And make it they did. Along the way Josh hit a buzzer-beater as the final basket of the quarter-final game, a feat he duplicated at the conclusion of the Buckeyes' championship game. When Josh's head basketball coach Flo Angelo



Josh leads the Buckeyes in the post-game handshake line.

was approached before the championship by Joy about having the team recognize the significance of World Down Syndrome Day, she was all in favor of it.

"I was fully on board," Angelo said. "I thought it was a fantastic opportunity, and a very natural way to integrate a little bit of awareness into the community. I was planning to secretly buy funky socks for the kids, but Joy kind of beat me to it. I thought it was a remarkably fun idea."

Angelo and her husband, Jim Angelo, who was an assistant coach for the Buckeyes, both knew Josh was a special kid from the get-go.

"(Josh) brought super fun energy to the team, and my husband has said that he is literally the most popular kid in Lebo," Flo said.

"He walks into a room, and everybody comes to him. After practice I had to start pulling Josh away because the team that was coming next wanted to talk to him and see him, too. He just is fun and has a lot of energy, and I think he's a bit precocious, which helps when you're playing and competing. He always came with a smile and was willing to do whatever we asked of him, honestly."

To learn more about World Down Syndrome Day, visit <https://www.worlddownsyndromeday.org/>. ♥

Lincoln Elementary celebrates 100 years (Continued from page 5)

The following year, she was officially named captain of the safety patrol, becoming the first female to hold the role at Lincoln School.

Ann took the job seriously, assigning posts, ensuring coverage and keeping things running smoothly. At the time, Nancy Kemmerer was the only adult assisting students, leaving safety

patrol members responsible for key crossings such as North Meadowcroft, Ralston and Bower Hill.

Ann recalls the job was not without challenges — including pulling distracted students off the playground to ensure they made it to their posts on time. She handled it with determination and a strong sense of duty.

In doing so, she did not just lead — she paved the way.

A friendship too good to split

Krissy Donahoe Opferman — my lifelong best friend — was my classmate at Lincoln. As the youngest of six and the only Donahoe child not to attend St.

Bernard, her parents chose Lincoln so we could stay together — a decision that shaped our lives.

Our friendship began long before kindergarten, in July 1968, when our families became neighbors. Born one day apart, we grew up side-by-side. Our mothers were best friends, and though they are no longer with us, their

bond lives on through us.

In every sense, Lincoln's centennial celebration was a success. From reunions and shared stories to laughter echoing through familiar halls, the day was a reminder of what makes Lincoln special. Generations came together not only to reflect, but to celebrate a legacy that continues to grow. ♥



Lebo Gift Gals *Your guide to gift giving*

Welcome to the second column of "Dear Gift Gals," (like Dear Abby or Ask Ann Landers), focused on thoughtful gifting and celebrating life's important moments. After serving the Mt. Lebanon community on Beverly Road for four years, we've heard many of the same gifting dilemmas repeatedly. We've helped customers choose the perfect gifts for hostesses, new babies, grieving friends and other special occasions. In this column, we'll tackle those kinds of questions and many more.



From left: Jennifer Brandenstein and Karin Smith, owners of Barefoot Stitches & Gifts on Beverly Road. (Photo provided)

With spring flowers blooming, it is not too soon to think about graduation gifts to celebrate one of life's most memorable moments — high school graduation. In Mt. Lebanon, we love to celebrate our students and their accomplishments. Although every student loves to receive cash as a graduation gift, it is thoughtful to consider other presents, like pouches to hold money or gift cards.

Some items that are meaningful as graduation gifts include:

- Personalized laundry bags in the colors of the college they are headed to (even include some laundry pods for a sweet touch)
- Monogrammed shower wraps for dorm living
- Rugged leather backpacks
- Personalized luggage tags for the adventurer (easy to slip cash into)
- ID holders for just the necessities (and cash)
- Pouches to store cords and essentials
- Luggage
- Wallets or passport covers
- Pittsburgh merchandise to remember home

We'd love for readers to be part of the conversation, so send your gifting questions or topic ideas to info@lebobeat.com. Your Lebo Gift Gals are Karin Smith and Jen Brandenstein, owners of Barefoot & Stitches on Beverly Road. ♥

Bark Beat *Celebrating Mt. Lebanon's beloved dogs*



Max is a Puggle, a mix of a Pug, Beagle and Gargoyle (Photos provided)

Meet Max

Favorite Humans: People I meet when I go for a walk.

Favorite Treat: Dirt.

Favorite Toy: I never found a toy that I couldn't ignore.

Favorite thing to do besides eat and sleep: Listening to extended jams by the Grateful Dead. Also, I am considered world-class when it comes to snoring.

Why my humans think I am special: I am widely known in my neighborhood and on Facebook as the Least Interesting Dog in the World.

Want your dog to appear in Bark Beat? Submit a photo(s) along with the answers to the questions above to info@lebobeat.com.



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Police Beat

The Mt. Lebanon Police Department reported the following crime incidents over the past 28 days: 3/13-4/13.

4/7 -2:48 p.m.
300 Block Washington Road: Theft/Larceny - Theft by Unlawful Taking of Movable - Larceny Amount Taken Less Than \$50

4/4-2:14 a.m.
100 Morrison Road: Assault - Recklessly Endangering Another Person, Negligence

4/3-4:16 p.m.
000 Block Academy Avenue: Theft by Unlawful Taking-Immovable-Amount Taken Equals or Exceeds \$200 But is Less than \$2,000

4/2-9:58 a.m.
600 Block Washington Road: Disturbing the Peace - Disorderly Conduct-Hazardous/Physically Offensive Conduct

4/1-10:44 a.m.
000 Block Hazel Drive: Fraud - Identity Theft, Basic Charge, Less Than \$2,000

3/31-5:58 p.m.
600 Block Washington Road: Arson - Arson-Recklessly Place Inhabited Building in Danger

3/31-11:25 a.m.
200 Block Birch Avenue: Fraud - Identity Theft Basic Charge-Less Than \$2,000

3/30-2:25 p.m.
300 Block Pennsylvania Boulevard: Disturbing the Peace - Disorderly Conduct-Fighting-Threatening Violent Behavior

3/29-7:14 a.m.
200 Block Whitmore Street: Assault - Aggravated Assault-General Firearm

3/28-2:50 a.m.
Coolidge Avenue & Shady Drive West: Assault - Resisting Arrest

3/27-1:45 p.m.
100 Block Cochran Avenue: Disturbing the Peace - Disorderly Conduct-Fighting/Threatening Violent Behavior

3/27-12:52 p.m.
000 Sunnyhill Drive: Fraud - Home Improvement Fraud

3/27-5:29 p.m.
700 Block Lebanon Avenue: Fraud - Theft by Deception-False Impression-Amount Taken exceeds \$2,000 But is Less Than \$100,000

3/27-4:37 p.m.
200 Block Main Entrance Drive: Assault - Terrorists Threats-General

3/27-10:12 a.m.
100 Block Cedar Boulevard: Fraud - Identity Theft-Enhanced Grading-\$2,000 or more

3/26-4:42 p.m.
100 Block Oak Park Place: Fraud Access Device Fraud-Use Another's Device Without Authorization-Enhanced Grading

3/26-11:00 a.m.
100 Block Cochran Road: Drugs/Alcohol Violations Purchase/Consumption/Possession/Transportation of Liquor/Malted Brew Beverage

3/25-3:39 p.m.
700 Block Gypsy Lane: Fraud - Access Device Fraud-Use Another's Device Without Authorization-Enhanced Grading

3/22-3:48 p.m.
100 Block Seneca Drive: Disturbing the Peace - Harassment-Course of Conduct/Acts Serve No Purpose

3/22-12:29 p.m.
300 Block Cedar Boulevard: Vandalism - Criminal Mischief-Destruction/Vandalism of Property-Basic Charge-\$500 or Less

3/21-10:55 p.m.
600 Block Florida Avenue: Assault - Harassment/Physical Strike Kick

3/21- 9:52 p.m.
400 Block Coolidge Avenue: Vehicle Break-in/Theft - Theft from a Motor Vehicle- Vehicle Contents, Value Taken Equals or Exceeds \$200 But is Less than \$2,000

3/20-8:44 p.m.
600 Block Washington Road: Assault - Simple Assault-General

3/20-6:02 p.m.
600 Block Washington Road: Assault - Terrorists Threats-General

3/16-5:57 p.m.
200 Block Buchanan Road: Disturbing the Peace - Disorderly Conduct-Hazardous/Physically Offensive Conduct

3/16-5:12 a.m.
100 Block Mt. Lebanon Boulevard: Assault - Harassment/Physical Strike Kick

Lebo Financial Answers

Ask the Advisor

Readers with personal finance questions can now get expert insight through the Lebo Beat. John McGowan, financial advisor with Carson Wealth will answer select reader-submitted questions and provide professional guidance on topics such as investing, retirement, estate planning, taxes, and other financial matters. If you have a question, you would like considered for a future column, email it to info@lebobeat.com. Here is the first answer to question submitted by a Lebo Beat reader.

I'm working on my estate plan and a little confused—what's the difference between a will and a trust, and why is it so important?

- Tom McDonnell

Hi Tom, thank you for your question.

Estate planning is a critical piece of the financial planning process. If you have ever been through an estate settlement process, you may know how time consuming and frustrating it can be — especially if there were no estate documents or beneficiaries listed on the accounts. By setting up the correct plan while you are alive, you can ensure all of your hard-earned assets are directed according to your wishes smoothly and with the least amount of taxes.

It is recommended to consult with an attorney to draft and review your estate documents to ensure that they align with current laws and regulations.

Trusts and wills are created as directives to transfer your assets according to a predetermined plan. There are several differences between the two which can help you decide which may be the best for your particular situation.

First, a trust allows your family to avoid probate which can be costly and add significant time to settling an estate. In addition, real estate cannot be included in a will and must pass through probate. Trusts are written in privacy and hold their ground more solidly than simple wills if contested by outside individuals (e.g. creditors, heirs at law, even if disinherited, etc.).

Wills provide significantly less privacy once the estate is subjected to the public process of probate. A will takes effect post-mortem, while a trust can be enacted during one's lifetime and will continue after death. An executor is named to a will who is responsible for distributing your assets upon death, whereas a trustee manages the assets of a trust according to your instructions and can be put in place in preparation for your children's future.

Trusts can add complex language to help protect your assets from future divorces or litigation. Certain trusts can also protect your assets and residence from nursing home costs, and special needs trusts can be created for children with disabilities to preserve federal assistance into perpetuity.

The final difference is the cost. Wills are generally simpler and less costly to create, while trusts are more complex and can get expensive quickly depending on the details and type of trust you would like to set up.

Your estate plan is not a set-it-and-forget-it type of situation. It should be reviewed every few years as laws and regulations change to ensure that your documents are still written within the scope of current law.

It is also equally important to have all your account beneficiary designations and account titling align with the documents that were created. There are many cases where people have spent the effort creating their documents but did not coordinate them with their financial accounts. This leads to a prolonged, frustrating process when attempting to organize the estate after passing.

When choosing to work with an advisor you should ask if they help coordinate your estate documents with your overall financial plan.

If you would like to have your question answered in a future section, please email them to Pittsburgh@carsonwealth.com

Questions answered in Lebo Financial Answers are provided by John McGowan, CFA MBA at Carson Wealth.

Lebo by the Numbers

A quick snapshot of the township we call home — proof that good things come in small square miles.

5 Commissioners

Guiding township policy and local decisions

9 School board directors

Helping shape Mt. Lebanon's schools

About 34,000 Residents

Neighbors make Lebo what it is

About 14,000 Households

Front porches, backyard barbecues and snow-shoveled sidewalks

About \$400,000 Median home value

Reflecting strong demand and the community's desirability

6 Square miles

Small footprint, big community spirit

43.2 Median age

A mix of young families, longtime residents and everyone in between

26,186 Registered voters

(as of Feb. 16, 2026)

Civic participation runs strong in Lebo

14,465 (55.24%)

Registered Democrats

7,415 (28.32%)

Registered Republicans

4,306 (16.44%)

No party affiliation / other

Source: Allegheny County Elections and U.S. Census estimates.

Corrections: March issue

Our reporting of student varsity letter winners and their academic achievements included errors. The correct information is below:

Cheerleading

First-year letter winners

Reese Lockwich/Blue Devil
Elizabeth Wolfson/Blue Devil

Boys wrestling

First-year letter winners

Henry Clark/Blue Devil
Abram James Hipolito/Blue Devil

John Kail/Mt. Lebanon
Asher Lucas/Blue Devil
Gabriel Mago/Blue Devil
Noah Streets/Mt. Lebanon
Stellan Strotmeyer/ Blue Devil

Second-year letter winner

Henry Battenfelder/ Blue Devil

Additionally, the byline for "Good in the LEBOhood" was incorrectly attributed to Jennifer Ganser. The story was written by Tressa Glover.

We regret these errors.

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