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# the Wilkinsburg SUN

VOL. 17 NO. 5 February 2024

A FREE COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER BRINGING YOU GOOD NEWS ABOUT WILKINSBURG

## Harmony Dog Rescue: Helping Dogs in Crisis

Timothy Lydon is a Wilkinsburg resident, who saw a need: People experiencing crisis who needed emergency dog care. Lydon decided to step up and meet that need.

In 2023, he and Molly McAleer founded Harmony Dog Rescue, a non-profit. "Our mission is to provide safe homes for dogs whose owners are experiencing homelessness, domestic violence or medical emergencies," he said.

"Victims of domestic violence who wish to escape unsafe situations are often faced with the decision to either seek their own safety and leave their dogs at risk, or stay and protect the dog while continuing to live in danger themselves," he added.

Another situation that requires emergency dog care is when an individual

who is experiencing homelessness must be hospitalized. It can be difficult for those people to keep their dogs in that situation. Yet, as Lydon explained, they "rely on their dogs for companionship, affection and someone to love and nurture." Having their pet returned to them when they are able is very important.

Harmony Dog Rescue helps those who would otherwise be forced to surrender their pets because of a crisis.

A couple years ago, Lydon worked at the Humane Animal Rescue of Pittsburgh and he really enjoyed helping people solve their pet problems.

"We had a helpline that people could call to seek advice, and this my favorite part of the job. The hardest problems to solve were the ones that involved

emergency boarding," said Lydon.

The average animal rescue does not have the capacity to meet every emergency need. "It made sense to start an organization dedicated completely to providing temporary foster care for dogs," said Lydon.

The first two dogs that Harmony Dog Rescue took in were due to a domestic violence situation. The victim had called the police, who arrested the abuser for another crime he was involved with. The couple ended up losing the house, and the victim ended up homeless with her two dogs. While homeless, she ended up getting addicted to heroin for which she had to go to rehab. In the meantime, she needed care for her dogs.

The primary objectives of the rescue are to make sure dogs are not left in dangerous situations and that fewer of them are surrendered to shelters. And the ultimate goal is to reunite dogs with their owners.

While Harmony Dog Rescue is based in Wilkinsburg, they are leasing land in Zelienople in Harmony Borough. They are raising money to build a kennel on that land in hopes that operations will move there.

Lydon said that he has appreciated the support that he has gotten from Wilkinsburg. "We've had people from the community reach out to volunteer for us and we're so grateful for this."

Right now, Harmony needs dog walkers, dog cuddlers, and fosters. If you would like to get involved, email [info@harmonydogrescue.org](mailto:info@harmonydogrescue.org) or call or text them at 412.565.9789. For more information visit their website: [www.harmonydogrescue.org](http://www.harmonydogrescue.org).

photo by Jason Cohn



Co-founders of Harmony Dog Rescue: Molly McAleer and Timothy Lydon.

### In Search of Tree Huggers

The Wilkinsburg Shade Tree Advisory Committee is looking for volunteers. They work to protect, preserve, and expand the Borough's urban tree canopy. Trees

- provide shelter for squirrels, birds and other small animals
- keep homes cool in the summer
- reduce pollution and clean the air
- prevent soil erosion
- conserve water and prevent basement flooding
- increase property values, and
- even slow vehicle traffic.

You can join the committee meeting. Email [wilkinsburgshadetree@gmail.com](mailto:wilkinsburgshadetree@gmail.com), or text Chair Greg Sinn at 412.223.7442.

### Disposal of Oversized Garbage Cans

With the City of Pittsburgh sanitation no longer picking up garbage cans with a volume larger than 35 gallons, many residents have asked how they should dispose of larger cans that they can no longer use.

City sanitation crews will remove such cans provided that residents 1) place the empty oversized cans at the curb on their regular trash day; 2) clearly mark the oversized trash can with a note reading "Take Can"; 3) make sure that the oversized

can is empty. The city will not pick up trash in cans that are over 35 gallons in capacity.

### Free Museum Admission for Black History Month

That CATT & Tuskegee Airmen Museum in Wilkinsburg is offering free admission for Black History Month. The museum is open every Saturday and Sunday in February, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

Visitors to the Center for Aviation Technology and Training (CATT) will learn about the Tuskegee Airmen by viewing The Black Wings exhibit currently on loan from the Smithsonian Institute. The exhibit chronicles the story of African Americans, who, despite facing racial barriers, attained great achievements in the world of aviation. Activities include a cockpit flight trainer, a praxinoscope, a land-the-plane maze, wearable wings, airport play table, and an outdoor play space.

The Tuskegee Airmen Museum is located at the Sherwood Event Center, 400 Sherwood Rd. in Wilkinsburg.

### Park Triangle Neighborhood Meeting

The Park Triangle 2nd Annual Neighborhood meeting is on Saturday, February 24, 10 a.m.-12 p.m. at Covenant Fellowship Church, 1300 Swissvale Avenue. The committee will provide updates from the last several months as well as future plans. A light breakfast will be served.



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Lynne Gordon, Editor

### The Board of Directors

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the WDCD and Casey Droege Cultural Productions presents an art exhibit by local artist:

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# Borough Council off to Fast Start in 2024

Wilkinsburg Borough Council began 2024 with a mandatory organization meeting on January 2.

Boroughs are required to hold such organizational meetings on the first Monday (Tuesday this year due to the New Year’s holiday) in January, following a year in which there was a municipal election.

During the meeting, three new Council members and one re-elected member were sworn in by Judge Iren Evans, with Mayor Dante Comans presiding.

Councilwoman Linda Atkins (1st Ward) was sworn in for her second term after being reelected in November 2023.

The new council members include Renee Haynes-Johnson (1st Ward), Moses Workman (2nd Ward), and Natisha Washington (3rd Ward).

The Council also elected new officers at the organizational meeting. William Smith, III (1st Ward) was elected Council President. Renee Haynes-Johnson was elected Vice President. Linda Atkins was elected president pro tempore.

At the January 17 Legislative meeting, Council approved advertising its 2024 meeting schedule.

Council Work Sessions and Legislative Sessions will remain on the first and third Wednesdays respectively in each month at 7 p.m. in Council Chambers at the Borough Building. Meetings will be available via Zoom links posted on the borough events calendar at [www.wilkinsburgpa.gov](http://www.wilkinsburgpa.gov).

## Borough Council Committees

Borough Council Committees and Council member committee assignments are as follows:

### • Infrastructure, Blight, and Economic Development

(First Mondays at 6 p.m.)

Nicole Santella (chair, I & B), Michael McMullen (chair, economic development),



Renee Haynes-Johnson (1st Ward)



Linda Atkins (1st Ward)



Natisha Washington (3rd Ward)



Moses Workman (2nd Ward)

William Smith, Natisha Washington.

### • Finance, Budget, and Capital Planning

(Second Mondays, at 6 p.m.)

Renee Haynes-Johnson (chair), Pamela Macklin, Linda Atkins.

### • Personnel Policies and Procedures

(Second Thursdays at 2 p.m.)

Moses Workman (chair), Pamela Macklin, Linda Atkins

### • Special Events, Music, Arts, and Seniors

(Second Thursdays, 6 p.m.)

Linda Atkins (chair), Natisha Washington

## Down to Business

The new Council got off to a running start at the January 17 legislative meeting. Council approved a new four-year contract with the Service Employee International Union, representing portions of the Borough work force.

Council also awarded two contracts to responsible low bidder M and B Services for the installation of new traffic signals at the intersections of Laketon and Graham and E. Swissvale and Walnut.



## Business Spotlight: Vickey's Soul Grill



The Pittsburgh region isn't known for its Southern-style cooking, but Vickey Giddens of Vickey's Soul Grill is going to change that.

"My family is from Crystal Springs, Mississippi, and my father was a chef," says Giddens. "When I was 6 years old, I watched my father, and I let that be my dream, to be a chef like my dad."

Today, Giddens has two Vickey's Soul Grill locations: one at 655 Rodi Road and the other in Wilkinsburg at 807 Wallace Avenue in the Hosanna House. Both offer a menu that will make your mouth water.

"My popular foods are pork chops fried and smothered, deep-fried salmon croquettes, candied yams, collard greens, black-eyed peas, green beans, and mac and cheese. The oxtails are a number-one hit, and everything's Southern-style."

How did this Mississippi native end up in Pennsylvania? Giddens thought the region would bring great learning opportunities.

"Believe it or not, Pittsburgh has a lot of culinary schools. My passion for being somewhere brand-new drew me to

love it here, so I went to the University of Pittsburgh and took classes at Katz Graduate School of Business in the Health Department discipline. I was just so eager to learn."

In addition to Giddens' talent and drive, she credits her success to the Idea Foundry, a program that "takes your ideas and brings them into reality." Founded in 2002, Idea Foundry is a Pittsburgh-based global investor focused on social impact.

"They took my vision, dream, and goals and brought them to life. They got me a little kitchen inside the Y in McKeesport, and that's when it started to prosper from there. They saw that this woman really has something! People were flocking to me like never before."

The Idea Foundry connected her with Happy Valley Lunch Box, which helps entrepreneurs pursue their dreams. She worked with Lunch Box to grow Vickey's Soul Grill, where she completed six weeks of training "to blossom in the right way."

"My soul food isn't fly by night. It's legit and done professionally. Soul food has a bad rap, that you cook with a lot of fatty things.

Not so. I know how to reach your taste buds without all that extra stuff involved. I use the proper seasonings and herbs for each dish. Plus, each one of my items has its own equipment. I don't want to eat French fries and have them taste like fish."

Giddens says she does a lot of food research and even visits other establishments to compare. In addition to serving delicious Southern homestyle cooking, she believes Vickey's Soul Grill has a lot to offer to the community.

"You have to have real customer service skills and a passion for your food. I aim to please my guests. I'm one-on-one with my customers and love everyone I come in contact with. If something is not right, it'll be right before you leave this establishment."

Just as Vickey's Soul Grill flourished with the right support, the WCDC offers vital resources to help local businesses and entrepreneurs thrive. From developing your business plan to navigating financial hurdles and commercial development, the WCDC provides tailored assistance for every stage of your business journey. Connect with a network of peers and experts, and access valuable workshops and services right here in Wilkinsburg. Visit [wilkinsburgcdc.org](http://wilkinsburgcdc.org) to explore the many ways that the WCDC can support your business ambitions and contribute to our vibrant community.

You can find Vickey's Soul Grill on Rodi Road and the Hosanna House as well as spot it on a commercial airing on Channel 11, MeTV, and PCNC.



By Lydia Richardson—Public Relations Officer for Wilkinsburg School District

## Turner Intermediate Presents Disney's Frozen Kids

Turner Intermediate is thrilled to announce the start of the second year of the Disney Musicals in Schools (DMiS) program, sponsored by The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust.

Turner Intermediate will be performing Disney's *Frozen Kids* which was formally announced at the first rehearsal on January 11.

Up until the official reveal, many students anticipated this year's show to be *Aladdin* but were ecstatic to learn that this year's performance would be *Frozen*.

Building on the success of last year's rendition of *The Jungle Book*, once again there was an overwhelming interest among our students.

This year, Turner received a total of 86 student applications. While the musical can only accommodate 45 roles, the level of talent, commitment, and developing artistry in our students is truly exceptional.

The three-year DMiS grant through The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust has enabled Wilkinsburg School District to establish a self-sustaining musical theater program.

We are proud to introduce our dedicated musical team. This year's team consists of Shawn VanMastriegt as the director, Allison Sciuillo as the choreographer, and Clarissa Stewart as the stage manager.

In addition to the musical team, the entire Wilkinsburg community including staff, students, and families are welcome to volunteer. Those who sign up to volunteer will help to design costumes, scenery, and set pieces for this year's production.

Turner will host the first three performances of *Frozen* on Friday, May 3 at 6:30 p.m. and Saturday, May 4, at 2 p.m. and 4 p.m.

After the shows at Turner, Wilkinsburg students will showcase their talent at the Byham Theater Student Share Event on May 23, alongside the



photo by Lydia Richardson

Students being introduced to the *Frozen Kids* production at the first rehearsal.

other grant-receiving schools: Pittsburgh Dilworth PreK-5, Pittsburgh Faison K-5, Penn Hills Elementary School, United at Twin Rivers Elementary School, Urban Academy of Greater Pittsburgh Charter School and Young Scholars of Greater

Allegheny Charter School.

All are invited to join the school in celebrating the remarkable talents of our students by supporting this year's Disney musical.

Ticketing information will be available on the district website once it becomes available: [www.wilkinsburgschools.org](http://www.wilkinsburgschools.org).

### Wilkinsburg Parent Organization Opportunity

Does your child attend one of Wilkinsburg's schools? If so, consider joining the Wilkinsburg Parent Organization! We are looking for parents, grandparents, and other caregivers to join. This is a great opportunity to invest in your child's education.

Upcoming meeting dates are:

- Thursday, March 14, 6 p.m. at

Turner

- Wednesday, April 3, 6 p.m. at Kelly
- Thursday, May 9, 6 p.m. at Turner
- Wednesday, June 5, 6 p.m. at Kelly

For questions or more information, please email [WilkinsburgParents@gmail.com](mailto:WilkinsburgParents@gmail.com)

### School Calendar

#### FEBRUARY

**Thurs. 1,** Half-day inservice; half-day parent conferences

**Fri. 2,** No School

**Wed. 7,** 100th Day of School Celebration for Kelly

**Wed. 14,** Early Dismissal

**Mon. 19,** Presidents' Day—No School

**Thurs. 14, 5-6:30 p.m.,** Light Up Literacy Night @Storybook Forest (Kelly)

**Wed. 28,** Black History Month Concert at Turner

## February at the Library

*Black History Month presentation by Vince Neal, Saturday, February 10, 2 p.m.*—Council Chambers (2nd floor of borough building)

*Movie Matinee, Tuesday, February 6, 2 p.m.*—“Thanksgiving” in the Council Chambers (2nd floor of borough building).

*Eastridge Book Club, February 21, 6:30pm* —*Maybe you Should Talk to Someone* by Lori Gottlieb.

*Tea & Inspiration, Saturday, February 17, 11 a.m.–12:30 p.m.*—Have engaging conversations over tea!

### Children’s Department Events

#### Black History Month Activities

*A Walk-Through History, February 1–29*—How well do you know your history? Complete a paper trivia game and you will receive a small prize.

*Kahoot Trivia, Thursdays February 1, 15 and 29, 3:30 p.m.–5:30 p.m.*—The winner will receive a small bookbag with goodies. Great for ages 10 and up.

*Self Portrait, Thursday, February 8, 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.*—Using a variety of materials, like buttons, string, etc., create a picture of yourself.

*World Geography Game, Thursday, February 22, 3:30 p.m.–5:30 p.m.*—Team winners receive a prize. Great for ages 10 and up.

*Valentine’s Day Cookie Decorating, Wednesday, February 14, 3–6 p.m.*—Happy Valentine’s Day! Show your love by making a delicious cookie to give to your loved ones and for yourself.

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Upon successful completion of the training, participants will transfer to predetermined positions within UPMC.



### Environmental Services Associate Paid Training Program

**PAID FOUR WEEK TRAINING**

Mon - Fri 8am - 2pm

Training consists of how to clean all aspects of the hospital to meet required safety standards.

Participants are paid \$16.55/hr during training program.

Upon successful completion of the training program, participants will be considered for part-time or full-time positions with UPMC.

For More Information Contact  
Robert Sumpter  
Coordinator of Workforce Development, Hosanna House  
2nd Floor, Suite 207  
Email: roberts@hosannahouse.org  
Phone: 412-342-1326

## Thank You, Vicki

As the Wilkinsburg Chamber of Commerce completes its 130th year it recognizes its executive director of the past six years. Vicki Cherney has stepped down from the position she has held since 2017 to a well-deserved time to enjoy life by having time to herself, relaxing and traveling. Vicki, a one-time president of the Chamber, returned to the organization where she helped to steer the WCOC through its many changes and challenges.

Vicki directed the programs such as the 125th Anniversary Gala, Wilkinsburg Gives Thanks Breakfast, Christmas Cookies and Shop, Christmas Light-up Night, Wilkinsburg Renaissance, new business ribbon cuttings, business networking, business-owners education classes, job and health fairs and many community events. Most notably, Vicki oversaw the transformation of the 40+ year old Farmers' Market into the Open Market providing affordable produce to the residents of Wilkinsburg.

Vicki's dedication contributed to the relocation of the Chamber office after a building fire, developing partnerships with other organizations in Wilkinsburg and, most importantly, the establishment of the Chamber's non-profit, The Wilkinsburg Community Advancement Association.

At this point in time, Vicki will continue to participate and assist in the workings of The Chamber at a greatly diminished amount of time. Vicki, thank you for all you have done for The Chamber and Wilkinsburg.



CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
**WILKINSBURG PA**  
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