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RETAIL

Boyertown shop specializing in American-made gifts closing this month



BEN HASTY — READING EAGLE

Patsy Hahn, owner of Patsy's Potpourri of Gifts in Boyertown. Hahn is retiring and plans to close her shop at the end of March. She welcomes inquires from prospective buyers.

Owner of Patsy's Potpourri of Gifts, a Boyertown landmark for 12 years, is retiring

By Stacie Jones
 sjones@readingeagle.com
 @Berkscountry on Twitter

A distinctive red sign hangs from an ornate iron bracket, a bright "open" flag flaps in the breeze and in warm weather, hand-painted gourd birdhouses line the steps.
 For shoppers stepping inside

the welcoming cocoon of Patsy's Potpourri of Gifts, 30 E. Philadelphia Ave., Boyertown, time is short, since owner Patsy Hahn has decided to retire and close her gift shop.
 "I'm ready to retire," said Hahn, 65, who grew up in Phoenixville and now lives in Douglassville.
 Patsy's is a Boyertown landmark known for featuring Amer-

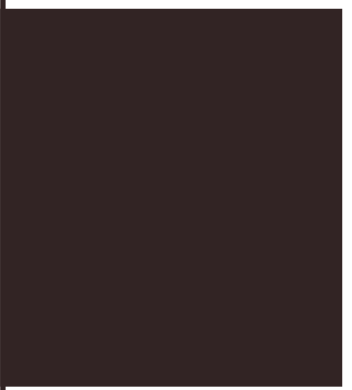
ican-made goods, many from artisans in Berks County.
 For 12 years, Patsy's has been on a prime spot at the corner of Philadelphia Avenue and Main Street. The shop has come full circle, having opened in March 2009 and closing at the end of March. In response to COVID-19 restrictions, Patsy's was closed for three months, reopening in early June.

"We're always sad to see any business go, especially one that's been here as long as Patsy's," said Jillian Magee, Main Street manager for Building a Better Boyertown, a nonprofit organization working to preserve the town's artistic, historical and agricultural heritage.

BOYERTOWN » PAGE 2



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Jewelry is a big seller at Patsy's Potpourri of Gifts, 30 E. Philadelphia Ave., Boyertown, which specializes in American-made products.



BEN HASTY — READING EAGLE

Boyertown

FROM PAGE 1
 “We don’t want to lose any businesses,” agreed Rachel Kehler, owner of The Peppermint Stick Candy Store, 26 E. Philadelphia Ave., next door to Patsy’s. Kehler said Hahn shared do’s and don’ts of retail

when she opened her candy shop in 2015. Rather than competing for customers, Kehler said she and Hahn have been friendly collaborators. Hahn said she is open to selling her gift shop business, including the name and any leftover inventory. She rents her space, which gets lots of pedestrian traf-

fic and is the center of downtown events such as

Coming out of Hibernation, traditionally held the third Saturday in April. (At press time, BBB was still discussing whether the spring celebration would be virtual, in-person or a hybrid).

With the exit of Patsy’s Potpourri of Gifts, that leaves downtown Boyertown with no gift shops.

Magee said Hahn has asked BBB for help in finding someone to take over the business, and that is BBB’s first priority.

The next best move would be finding an occupant — not necessarily a retailer — for the space.

“At this moment in time, we have two possible businesses that are interested in taking over that space,” Magee said Thursday.

Old-fashioned courtesies, with an emphasis on quality, are important to Hahn.

“Nothing in my store is mass produced,” said the shopkeeper, who always greets shoppers and sends home purchases in gift bags.

During the first two years she was open, she would lie awake at night, brimming with ideas and discussing them with her husband, Garth, whom she lost in 2016.

“I love people,” Hahn said, adding that her husband grew up in Boyertown. “I did it for the town.”

Patsy’s had extended hours for February, but over the years she was open three days a week. She is thankful for that because it enabled her to spend more time with Garth during their 24 years together.

As for her biggest sellers, the gourd birdhouses take that honor in a shop known for its pottery, jewelry, Christmas ornaments and cards. Styles range from primitive and traditional to modern. There are windchimes, photography, pet accessories, soaps and lotions (including Body “budders” from Bates Family Farm in Virginia, made with goat’s milk), baskets,

signs, Tastefully Simple spice mixes and even organic vegan chocolate.

As an independent, small shopkeeper, Hahn always participated in Small Business Saturday in November, and she liked to keep her inventory fresh by rotating in new things as older items were discontinued. She traveled to craft shows to find new artisans.

Hahn has held many jobs over her lifetime, but always had a hand in retail, and she is the sole employee of the shop other than occasional students hired during busy times.

Now she is hoping to sell everything, including shelving, fixtures and a couple of antique tables.

In the next chapter of her life, Hahn said she is excited at the prospect of having no schedule, with the freedom to have tea with neighbors at her 55-plus community — and traveling again once the pandemic is over.

“I’m not sad,” Hahn said. “I’ve worked since I was 14.”



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PANDEMIC

White Horse Village residents create a COVID-19 time capsule

White Horse Village

White Horse Village is marking time! Residents of the nonprofit senior living community in Edgmont Township, Delaware County, have created a time capsule filled with messages and items from the COVID-19 pandemic. The capsule, stored in the community's archives, will remain undisturbed until it is opened in 2030.

When the Resident Association came up with the idea of a pandemic time capsule, they turned to resident Sally Shabaker, a retired professional archivist.

Shabaker and archive committee volunteers Barbara Dawson and Patricia Hibschan began working on the capsule in April. The project centered on the theme "Together, We Can," a phrase that emerged during the early days of the shutdown as a term of encouragement for residents



COURTESY OF WHITE HORSE VILLAGE

White Horse Village resident, from left, Sally Shabaker, Barb Dawson, Marcia Hoover and Larry Woodward with the COVID-19 time capsule they were instrumental in creating.

and team members.

"Little did any of us know just how deadly this strange and previously unknown virus would prove to be," Shabaker said. "Soon, it became

apparent that the COVID-19 pandemic would be historically significant."

The time capsule contains all-too-familiar pandemic items, including

hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, toilet paper and a contact-free digital thermometer.

Several masks made by the White Horse Vil-

lage Quilters are also included, along with a comb and pair of scissors for in-home haircuts.

"Newspapers, a COVID-19 timeline, a flash drive with multiple photos and five pages of jokes and cartoons are also inside," she said.

All the items have been carefully preserved using archival materials and stored in a beautifully crafted birch box made by White Horse Village woodshop volunteers. Marcia Hoover led the effort to build the box for the time capsule along with Charlie Bates, Larry Woodward and others.

"We are asking future residents who open the box in 2030 to return the items to the time capsule after they have examined the contents and perhaps laughed at the jokes, smiled at a photograph or pondered the grim facts of the 2020 pandemic,"

Hoover said.

The capsule will be locked and stored in the archives for another 15 years. The hope is that the residents who re-open the capsule in 2045 will learn how the residents of 2020 coped and survived.

White Horse Village: Situated on 96 acres in southeastern Pennsylvania, White Horse Village is an active senior living community offering a full range of living options and healthcare services. The community intentionally creates opportunities for extraordinary living in a vibrant, diverse community through personal growth, connectedness, and relationships. As a nonprofit organization, White Horse Village reinvests earnings back into the organization to further the mission and vision. For more information, visit www.whitehorsevillage.com.

FUNDRAISING

White Horse Village VP re-certified as fundraising executive

White Horse Village

Susan L. Abtouche, vice president of mission enhancement at White Horse Village, has re-certified as a Certified Fund Raising Executive (CFRE). Abtouche joins over 7,200 professionals around the world who hold the CFRE designation.

Abtouche

"The CFRE credential was created to identify for the

public and employers those individuals who possess the knowledge, skills and commitment to perform fundraising duties in an effective and ethical manner," said CFRE International President and CEO Eva E. Aldrich, Ph.D. "As the certification is a voluntary achievement, the CFRE certification demonstrates a high level of commitment on the part of Susan Abtouche to the fundraising profession and the donors who are served."

In her two years at White Horse Village, a nonprofit senior living community in

Edgmont Township, Delaware County, Abtouche has worked collaboratively with the endowment fund trustees to create a planned giving program, enhance the donor engagement process and implement a donor database.

In late 2020, White Horse Village Endowment Fund was surprised and thrilled to receive a transformational gift of over \$500,000 in financial securities from a resident donor.

Individuals granted the CFRE credential have met a series of CFRE Interna-

tional standards, which include tenure in the profession, education and demonstrated fundraising achievement. They have also passed a rigorous written examination testing the knowledge, skills and abilities required of a fundraising executive and have agreed to uphold accountability standards and the Donor Bill of Rights.

About White Horse Village: Situated on 96 acres in southeastern Pennsylvania, White Horse Village is an active senior living community offering a full range of living

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AWARDS

Healthcare leaders to receive 'Women of Distinction' award



Nesbitt



Bryan

Harrison Senior Living

Kara Abdala Nesbitt, corporate director of marketing for Harrison Senior Living, and Jean Bryan, executive director at Harrison House of Chester County, a Harrison Senior Living community, are two of only 51 women chosen nationwide as "Women of Distinction" by trade publication McKnight's Long-Term Care News & McKnight's Senior Living.

The program, in its third year, recognizes women who have made significant contributions to the senior living or skilled nursing professions or who have demonstrated exceptional commitment to the fields.

Nesbitt was named an honoree in the Rising Star

category for women who are younger than 40 or have fewer than 15 years in the industry.

Bryan, who just celebrated her 25th anniversary with Harrison Senior Living, was named an honoree in the Veteran VIP category for women having more than 15 years of experience in the industry.

"I am so proud to be working with such capable and dedicated professionals," said Harrison Senior Living CEO Harrison Saunders. "Jean and Kara truly embody the values of Harrison Senior Living and are very deserving of this recognition."

Harrison Senior Living is a family owned and operated organization that was founded more than

50 years ago.

Having two Women of Distinction on their team demonstrates that Harrison Senior Living remains true to their core value of diversity and empowering the professionals on their team to strive for the highest quality and standards.

Nominations were judged by an external panel of industry experts. All winners will be honored at a virtual awards celebration on May 18. An educational forum will follow on May 19.

To see the full list of inductees, for more information about the program and to register for the events, visit www.mcknightswomenofdistinction.com.

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SENIOR LIFE

Chestnut Knoll celebrates employees with perfect attendance in 2020



COURTESY OF CHESTNUT KNOLL

Chestnut Knoll employees celebrating perfect attendance in 2020 are, from left, Kelly Rowley, Shirley Harkins, Amanda Garvey, Gussie Garvey, Anders Miller, Amy Hansen, Sam Gaugler, Kayla Grebe, Kathy Flicker, and Alexis Moyer. Missing from photo is Cindy Mehlman.

Chestnut Knoll

A group of employees at Chestnut Knoll in Boyertown managed to maintain perfect attendance throughout the pandemic, and, in keeping with tradition, the personal care and memory care community safely came together to celebrate these outstanding individuals.

Eleven employees were recognized for their perfect attendance record in 2020. Each was presented with a Visa gift card valued up to \$500 and celebrated with residents and management, who were also present to express their gratitude.

"In a year full of unprecedented challenges, this group proved fearless," Executive Director Shawn Barndt said. "They showed up for our residents, day in and day out. I can't express enough how proud I am to lead a dedicated team. They unanimously agree that the motivation behind their

success is their love for our residents!"

Chestnut Knoll is engrained in the Boyertown community and serves as one of the larger employers in the borough. Many employees have longstanding employment with Chestnut Knoll, and its notable reputation is due in large part to its caregivers and staff for serving its residents and clients for the past two decades.

"At Chestnut Knoll, we are neighbors helping neighbors and it's a difference you can feel when you walk through the door," Barndt said.

Congratulations to the following employees for achieving perfect attendance:

- 18 years: Kathy Flicker
- 4 years: Cindy Mehlman and Alexis Moyer
- 3 years: Samuel Gaugler and Shirley Harkins
- 2 year: Kayla Grebe
- 1 year: Kelly Rowley,

Amanda Garvey, Gussie Garvey, Anders Miller and Amy Hansen

Chestnut Knoll is an award-winning senior community offering Personal Care and Memory Care residences at an affordable month-to-month lease with no buy-in fees. Services include 24-hour personal care assistance with medical support, meals, housekeeping, social events and transportation. All residents have access to FOX Optimal Living, an evidence-based continuum of wellness and rehab services. Chestnut Knoll also offers At Home Services, available to seniors where they live. This service includes assistance with medication monitoring, personal care, companion care, light housekeeping and laundry, and transportation. For more information, call Jodie Daniels, assistant executive director, at 610-473-8066 or visit www.chestnutknoll.com.

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COURTESY OF JOHNSON & JOHNSON

A pharmacist preparing to give a COVID-19 vaccine.

By Mark Scoloro
The Associated Press

HARRISBURG » Pennsylvania lawmakers recently implored state officials to do better at getting COVID-19 vaccines to seniors, while the Health Department said the new approval of a third vaccine will help.

“This is unacceptable,” state Rep. Bridget Kosierowski, D-Lackawanna County, said during a House Aging and Older Adult Services Committee hearing. “The stories and phone calls, and the complications people have getting appointments. And there’s no communication. We have to fix that.”

Department of Aging Secretary Robert Torres said his agency is having employees from its subsidized prescription-drug and disabilities-services programs help older adults make vaccine appointments.

“I worry just as much as you’ve expressed about our seniors and getting them vaccinated,” Torres said, acknowledging “some practical realities in terms of the volume that we can handle at any particular time.”

At a separate press briefing, the Health Department’s senior adviser for COVID-19 response, Lindsey Mauldin, said more than 2.48 million vaccine doses have been administered in the state of nearly 13 million people. The great majority of them are the first shots of two required doses.

Pennsylvania received more than 500,000 doses last week, she said. The recent authorization of a Johnson & Johnson vaccine will help, but the state has not received its first shipment, she said.

“There is still not enough vaccine available to meet the current demands,”

Mauldin said. “There will be more vaccines coming, but patience is still required.”

Bill Johnston-Walsh with the state AARP said a survey of its members produced a harsh assessment of what he called the “confusing, complicated and challenging” vaccine distribution program in Pennsylvania, including jammed phone lines, crashed websites and overbooked schedules.

“We cannot stress enough how difficult this process has been for so many Pennsylvanians,” he told the legislative committee.

Many older people struggle to navigate online appointment systems, said Adam Marles, chief executive of LeadingAge PA, the umbrella group of more than 370 providers that serve some 75,000 older residents of Pennsylvania.



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SPOT OF T

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"David," by Michaelangelo

By Terry Alburger

Perhaps my favorite sculptor of all time is Michelangelo. He created incredible sculptures, such as my favorite, "La Pietà," a large depiction of Mary holding the body of Jesus in her arms. He also sculpted the incredible David, a massive 17-foot-by 6.5-foot likeness of the biblical figure. If you ever had the chance to see these masterpieces close up, you would marvel at the detail. It

is as near perfection as I have ever seen in art and is truly awe-inspiring. So how does one go about creating a masterpiece? There is a wonderful quote, attributed to Michelangelo, though there is no actual documentation that he uttered these words. When asked what difficulties he encountered while bringing the image of David to life through marble, his theoretical response was: "It's easy. You just chip away the stone that does not look like



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

"La Pietà," by Michaelangelo

David." Though these exact words likely did not escape his lips, with his incredible ability to depict even the minutest details of the human body, one has to wonder if it was not his philosophy. Can life really be that straightforward? Can you create a masterpiece using this concept? I think so. If you have a goal, a vision or a dream, the best way to attain it is to chip away at everything that does not look like the end result you seek. That might mean ignoring the naysayers, the friends or family members or even complete strangers that might be preventing you from achieving your masterpiece. It took Michelangelo over three years to create his statue of David. Three years of chipping away little by little at the formless chunk of marble, watching it slowly take shape, I imagine he had a few days where he got frustrated, per-

haps hit an impasse or was unhappy with the way it was progressing. He may have taken a day off, walked away and even contemplated quitting. It could not have been an easy process. But the end result made it all worth the struggle. He didn't waiver from his original goal, he did not decide to make it smaller or less impressive. He went for it. And his hard work paid off. So, what is your masterpiece, your dream? Big or small, victory is all in your perception. If you think you can succeed, trust me, you can. Whether it's an academic degree, a weight-loss journey or even downsizing or organizing your home. To quote a great line from the classic film "Back to the Future," "Anything is possible if you put your mind to it." During the past year, we have had our lives disrupted to the point of chaos. But now it's time

to reclaim them. With a vaccine being distributed, a better understanding of the virus and the precautions we can take to avoid contracting it, there is hope. I think it's time we got back to the business of living. Time to figure out just what it is you want to achieve and start chipping away. Learn a new language, take music lessons, improve your fitness level, run (or walk) a 5K race ... whatever you choose, make it happen. You can do anything. But, like Michelangelo, you have to envision what that final result will look like. And remove the rest. And remember, Michelangelo didn't save the scraps that fell from his work-in-progress. He got rid of the excess, the bits that did not look like his dream. So, let them go, don't look back. Keep your eyes on the prize and slowly but surely, your masterpiece will emerge.

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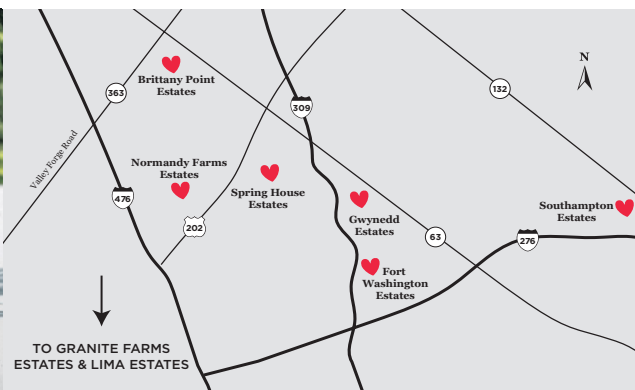
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TECHNOLOGY

Shopping online eases isolation for older adults

By Anne D’Innocenzio
The Associated Press

NEW YORK » In November, Paula Mont did something new: The 86-year-old, who hasn’t left her New Jersey senior living community in nearly a year, went shopping — online.

Mont used an iPad, equipped with a stylus to help her shaky hands, to buy a toy grand piano for her great-granddaughter. She picked it out from more than a dozen versions of the instrument on Amazon.

“It is like a wow feeling: I found it!” Mont said.

The internet has become a crucial link to the outside world during the pandemic, one that millions of people still don’t have access to. Among older adults, the lack of internet has even impeded their ability to get vaccinated.

But the pandemic has also motivated many who have been isolated at home or unable to leave their senior communities to learn something they may have resisted until now: how to buy groceries and more online.

People 65 and older rang up nearly \$187 per month online last year, up 60% from a year earlier, according to market research firm NPD Group’s Checkout Tracking. They still spend less than the total population, who paid about \$238 per month, but they are the fastest-growing group of online shoppers by age group.

Shopping is one of a slew of activities that older Americans now have to do over the internet, like doctor’s appointments and socializing via digital video like FaceTime. Such behav-



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Lynette White uses her tablet in San Francisco. The pandemic has sparked a surge of online shopping across all ages as people stay away from physical stores. But the biggest growth has come from consumers 65 and older.

ior was forced by necessity — older people face the biggest risk of infection, so it’s more dangerous for them to go out.

The transition online hasn’t always been easy, and children and senior living staff often have to help, an experience that can be both gratifying and difficult.

Barbara Moran, director of social programs for Atria Senior Living where Mont lives, says one of the biggest challenges residents face with their devices is that they are used to pushing, not tapping, as if they’re using a touch-tone telephone. She has to repeat tips often.

“I would lie if I didn’t say I was frustrated sometimes,” said Moran, who

sits with Mont — masked and gloved — in the facility’s dining room for weekly shopping sessions.

Internet retailers and delivery services hope people over 65 keep up the online shopping habit. Freshly, which delivers prepared meals, is adding smaller portions and low-sodium options aimed at seniors; grocery delivery service Instacart set up a phone support line; Target’s delivery service, Shipt, is scrapping its \$99-a-year fee for some low-income seniors.

Diane Shein, 73, of Bonita Springs, Fla., turned to Instacart and Amazon-owned Whole Foods for groceries because of the pandemic.

“I’m not sure how much it costs, but I don’t care,”

Shein said. “It’s very easy and safe.”

Instacart president Nilam Ganenthiran predicted that online groceries will be a “new normal” for older people even when the pandemic ends.

Still, there are many barriers, from struggling to use new technology to high prices to access.

People 65 and older are less likely than younger people to have home internet or a smartphone. Nearly 22 million, or 42% of Americans 65 and older, lack broadband at home, according to a 2021 study from nonprofit Older Adults Technology Services. Low-income and Black and Latino older adults are more likely to be left out, the

study says.

“We are asking them to stay at home, and yet a lot of seniors are not connected,” said Lauren Cotter of the Community Tech Network, a San Francisco nonprofit that trains low-income residents on technology and provides free tablets and hot spots.

Those with devices and internet may wrestle with how to use an app or fear giving out personal information because they worry about fraudsters. Online shopping scams cost Americans \$245.9 million last year, according to the Federal Trade Commission. And online grocery shopping, which includes tips and delivery charges, costs more than going to stores.

The pandemic has also exposed the shortcomings of the internet, which often fails to accommodate people with disabilities or an aging population with visual and hearing issues.

Iris Berman, 93, lives in an assisted living center in San Francisco and used to buy her shoes online. As her eyesight worsened, her son Eric Berman, who works in technology, would help her by sharing her screen virtually. He took over her shopping completely during the pandemic because her vision loss was so severe.

“None of these websites works well when they’re enlarged,” he said.

Then there’s the simple fact that older people did not grow up with the internet, so things may not come as intuitively compared with those who have.

Lynette White, 72, buys clothes and household items from Amazon and Target online on her iPhone. But she finds other apps, including the Safeway grocery one, too hard to navigate. When she tries to check out her shopping cart, she finds herself starting all over again. She says it’s frustrating that there are too many steps.

Still, she said she likes learning new skills, and her grandchildren, who she sends Amazon gift cards as presents, approve.

“They’re very impressed that at my age I am excited about technology,” White said.

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ASK RUSTY

Social Security's 'first year rule' explained

By Russell Gloor

DEAR RUSTY » I am 63. My birthday is 10/23/1957. I currently draw a small pension of \$14,000 and a salary of \$75,000. I'm



Gloor

contemplating retirement at the end of April this year and I'd like to start drawing Social Security beginning June 1st. I've been told by friends that I won't be able to start drawing it this year because I will already have exceeded the maximum Social Security allows me to earn in a year. Is this true? Should I postpone my retirement until the end of the year? Please advise. — Confused by Friends

DEAR CONFUSED » Yours is a perfect example of why you should always check with a reputable source when receiving Social Security advice from friends.

Whenever Social Security benefits are claimed before reaching full retirement age (FRA), the so-called "earnings test" applies. This sets an earnings limit, which for 2021 is \$18,960 annually — an amount you will have exceeded by the time you start your SS benefits in June. However, Social Security also has a special "first year" rule which applies to anyone who claims

early Social Security benefits mid-year.

The first-year rule essentially waives using the annual earnings limit in your first year and, instead, applies a monthly earnings limit for the remainder of the year after your benefits start. The monthly limit is 1/12th the amount of the annual limit, so in 2021 the monthly limit is \$1,580. Provided you don't exceed the monthly limit after your benefits start and during the period from June 2021 through December 2021 (and if you're fully retiring from work you won't), you'll not exceed the earnings limit during your first year collecting benefits. Note, your pension and other "passive" income doesn't count toward the earnings limit; only earnings from working count. So essentially, using the "first year" rule means your earnings before you claim benefits won't count, including any final pay you receive in the month you begin your benefits.

Starting in 2022, should you decide to return to work, you'll be subject to the annual limit, which will be a bit more than the 2021 limit because the limit changes annually with changes to the National Average Wage Index. The earnings limit applies until you reach your full retirement age, after which you can

earn as much as you like without jeopardizing your Social Security benefits.

In the year you reach your full retirement age of 66½, your annual earnings limit will increase by about 2.6 times, further mitigating risk of exceeding the earnings limit in the year you attain FRA.

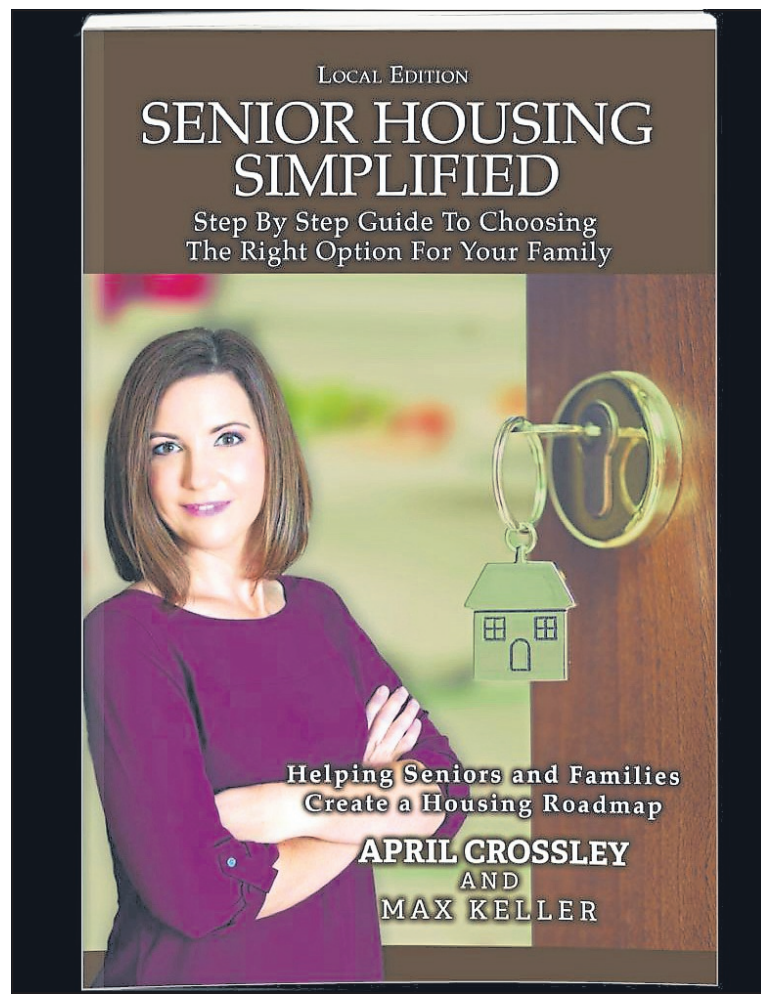
For awareness, if you were to return to work in any year between 2022 and the year prior to the year you attain FRA, and you exceed the annual earnings limit, Social Security will take back benefits equal to \$1 for every \$2 you are over the limit. In the year you reach FRA, if you were to work and exceed the increased limit, SS will take back benefits equal to \$1 for every \$3 you exceeded the limit by.

However, at your FRA you'll receive time-credit for any months your benefits were withheld because you exceeded the earnings limit, which will result in your benefit amount being increased slightly at your full retirement age. In this way, you may, over time, recover any benefits which were withheld because you exceeded the earnings limit.

Russell Gloor is a certified Social Security adviser by the Association of Mature American Citizens: <https://amac.us/social-security-advisor>.

BOOKS

Berks author guides through senior housing options



Reading Eagle

Local real estate investor and former healthcare worker April Crossley has co-authored a new book to help seniors and their families in Berks and surrounding counties deal with senior housing.

In "Senior Housing Simplified — Step By Step Guide To Choosing the Right Option for Your Family," Crossley and co-author Max Keller dispel the myths and misconceptions about senior

housing while helping seniors and their families navigate through the decisions and special challenges they are currently or will soon be facing.

"Too many people wait too long to plan and find themselves in a health crisis, a property crisis and a housing crisis, all in one," Keller said.

"In my 13 years of healthcare and 12 years in real estate I've seen time and time again that families are not having the necessary discussions to prepare for ag-

ing in place or moving to a senior housing facility," said Crossley. "This book provides a roadmap to plan for exactly what a senior wants and opens up discussions between seniors and their families to ensure their plan is followed."

"Senior Housing Simplified" targets senior homeowners or anyone who has a senior family member.

To request a free copy, visit www.heartandhomeproperties.com





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HAMBURG

AN ARTISTIC LANDMARK



JANIS MCGOWAN

Bill Rhodes' Hamburg yard catches people's eyes with its collection of colorful artwork.

Colorfully decorated property gets plenty of attention.

By Janis McGowan
South Schuylkill News correspondent

Some call it art. Some call it clutter. Still others

call it junk. Whatever you call it, passing by South Third and Grand streets in Hamburg, Bill Rhodes' lime green house with a yard full of eclectic art makes one take notice.

Rhodes' intriguing array of scrapyards metal artwork is boldly original, compelling and even a bit avant-garde. The dragons, aliens, ostriches and abstract pieces that are resi-

dents of his corner property are the genius of a septuagenarian with a lot of time and talent.

Rhodes is a man for all seasons. His interests vary from dancing to doo-wop, art to architecture. He grew up in Steelton and attended community college with an interest in architecture. He attended trade school to study welding. He spent 57 years as a welder, at one

time working at the Three Mile Island nuclear facility.

Eventually his career path morphed, and he became a pile driver supervisor working in the mid-Atlantic area. After retiring, Rhodes found he couldn't sit still and decided to use his welding skills coupled with his artistic mind to create a veritable cornucopia of sculptures.

What started with a

piece he designed for Cumberland Valley High School has grown into an entire yard filled with boldly colored, metal sculptures configured from reclaimed and recycled scrap. Rhodes scours local flea markets and scrapyards to find his treasures. Several of his favorite haunts are in Schuylkill County.

"Sometimes I get ideas first, other times when

looking through a pile of junk I find inspiration," Rhodes said when asked how he creates. "It may be something as simple as a kitchen utensil or as complex as an old carburetor."

Old things get new life

Rhodes bought the 220-year-old farmhouse a few years ago. The home had been vacant for years

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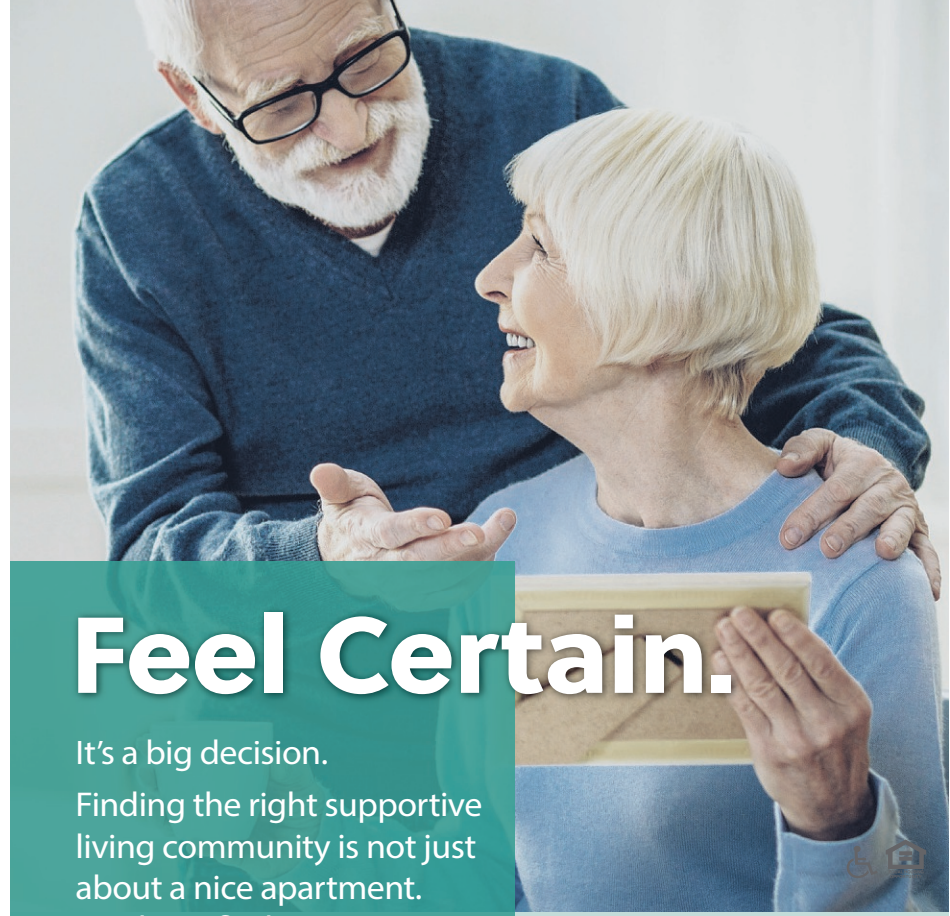
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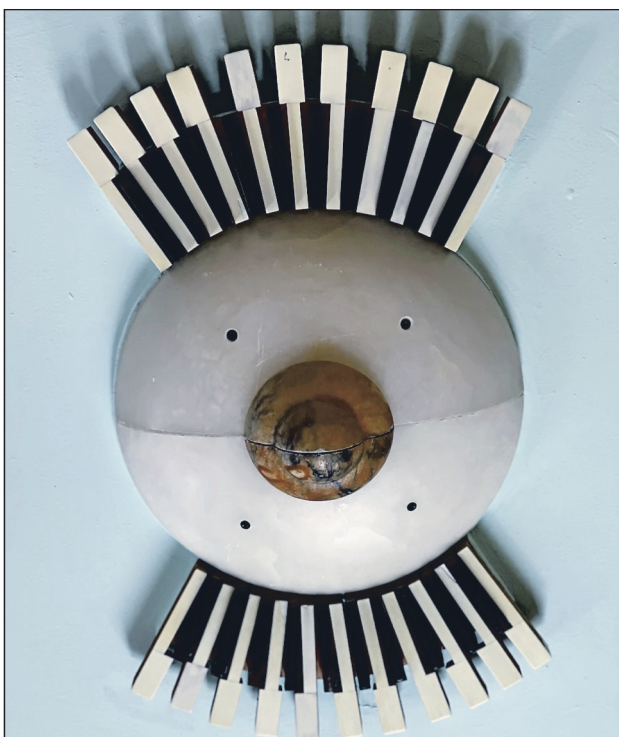


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This light made of piano keys is one of Bill Rhodes' favorite pieces.

Artistic

FROM PAGED 4

and was essentially uninhabitable. Slowly, the old, dilapidated home took on a new life. He tore out the guts of the home, reconstructing, reconfiguring and remodeling. He began by designing six apartments, one by one, each with its own unique style. As he remodeled, he lived in each apartment he completed until he finally moved into his own apartment on the second floor.

From the lime green house paint to the ornate dark green wrought iron railing, reminiscent of New Orleans' French Quarter, the exterior beckons visitors. Following Rhodes into his house, one gets a sense of Alice going down the rabbit hole in "Alice in Wonderland." A whole other world awaits visitors to his small apartment.

"Artistically eclectic" may be the proper way to describe his home. Every inch is reclaimed or repurposed. Old doors became windows, the front door became a room divider, wooden scraps were transformed into ceiling

art. The dissected string section of a piano hangs on the wall above his sofa and old wall sconces from a New York hotel of yesteryear are paired with the piano keys to create a light fixture that is one of Rhodes' favorite pieces.

"This piece is very special to me," Rhodes said. "It was designed by my dear friend and co-creator Dar Ray, an artist who lives in Hershey."

Ray is the creative talent behind many of his pieces. Rhodes gives her credit for coming up with many of the ideas for his creations.

"She (Ray) makes me better at creating," Rhodes said. "She comes up with an idea and I put it into metal."

Curiouser and curiouser

Rhodes began populating his garden with his whimsical creations years ago. His unconventional artwork has made his property a focal point in Hamburg. Locals are appreciative of his talent, and he welcomes people to stop by and take pictures or talk with him. Rhodes said one local woman told him that every time she passes by his home she feels like Alice in Wonderland.



Artist Bill Rhodes in his eclectic Hamburg home.

JANIS MCGOWAN

"I've never had the neighbors complain," Rhodes said, "and the city has even asked me to do a sculpture for them."

Rhodes laughs when he tells how he's had people from across the country and even from other countries stop to take pictures of his artwork.

"I tell people they are always welcome to take pictures," Rhodes said. "Why wouldn't I?"

Busier and busier

Rhodes is proud of his artwork. He's been creating it for 10 years and plans to continue for many more. When he stumbles on an idea, he becomes obsessed, working endlessly to bring his idea to life. His goal is to market his work, specializing in custom pieces. Finding a selling platform or middleman has been a big hurdle for Rhodes, who doesn't own a computer and

isn't interested in learning to use one.

"I'd like to do custom pieces for people and sell them," Rhodes said, "but it's hard to find a niche in which to sell them."

Age hasn't slowed Rhodes down. In addition to working and creating, he teaches a weeklong sculpture class called Whimsical Welding at Snow Farm in Massachusetts at least twice a year. With his guidance and inspiration, his students learn

the craft of welding old, tired parts into extraordinary pieces art. And searching through life's discarded flotsam and jetsam for that special gem to give new life to takes time.

"I hate to throw something old away, especially if it catches my eye," Rhodes said.

Rhodes' creations apparently catch many people's eyes. His garden keeps growing as he sows the seeds of creativity.

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