

The MONTCO EXPLORER

SUMMER 2017

FREE

the best GOLF WEEKEND

Golfers come from across the U.S. to play here, and in this issue, we examine what attracts them

ALSO - IN THIS - ISSUE:



VALLEY FORGE
& MONTGOMERY COUNTY, PA



Fort John Moore: The newly restored redoubt at Valley Forge National Historic Park.



Philadelphia Folk Festival: The Philadelphia Folk Festival celebrates 56 years in Montgomery County.

The MONTCO EXPLORER

ALWAYS FREE



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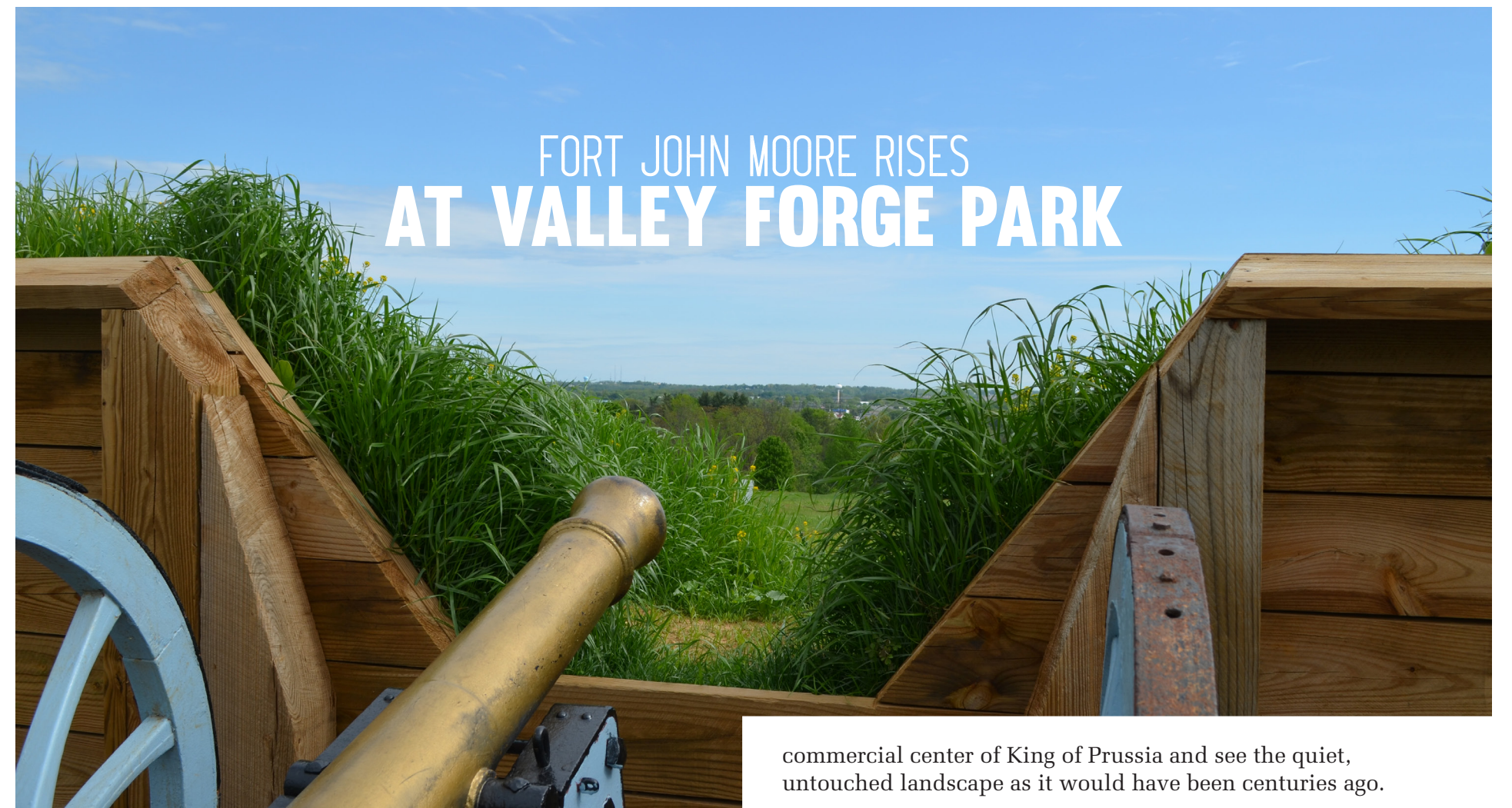
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The Montco Explorer

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FORT JOHN MOORE RISES AT VALLEY FORGE PARK

commercial center of King of Prussia and see the quiet, untouched landscape as it would have been centuries ago.

There are four additional redoubts throughout the park, but this is the most complete. Visitors are encouraged to pick up a map and to fully explore the historic landscape. But Parker believes Redoubt #5 will educate and inspire visitors in a new way.

“We hope that visitors exploring the redoubt will gain an appreciation for the tremendous amount of hard work, raw materials and sophisticated engineering that it took to construct and protect the encampment – a ‘city’ of approximately 12,000 people,” Parker said.

“It provides a tangible experience – like walking in a reconstructed hut – that enables you to touch, see and hear what it would have been like at Valley Forge during the encampment.”

Walking back toward the Muhlenberg Brigade, Redoubt #5 slowly sinks into the horizon, hidden by the hillside that it occupies.

It stands waiting, no longer as a warning to British soldiers but as a welcome to park guests to experience a piece of history that they otherwise may never know.



The curious structure rises above the hillside along North Outer Line Drive. The earthen walls are fortified with an abatis that resembles a horizontal line of wooden pikes.

It's an imposing site unlike any other in **Valley Forge National Historical Park**.

This is the newly restored Redoubt #5, also known as Fort John Moore.

According to Jonathan Parker, Chief of Interpretation for the park, the Continental Army would have strategically placed these throughout the encampment during the winter of 1777-78.

“At Valley Forge, redoubts and other fortifications helped reinforce the encampment perimeter, more specifically to reinforce the flanks of the line and provide strong points to protect the encampment in the event of an attack,” Parker said.

The fort is adjacent to the Muhlenberg Brigade Huts, just a short walk down a crushed stone trail.

Stepping inside the redoubt, there is stillness in the air. The wind that whips around atop the hills of Valley Forge is blocked by the tall ramparts. It feels like it would have been the safest place in the encampment.

“The word redoubt means ‘a place of retreat’ and is derived from the Medieval Latin phrase reductus meaning secret place or refuge,” says Parker. It would have been a place of retreat both literally and figuratively.

Two cannon stand at the ready in gun ports carved out of the walls. One port has been intentionally left open to give visitors the same view as the soldiers once had.

It just takes a little imagination to look past the sprawling



LET FREEDOM REIGN
AND neighborhoods sparkle

Montgomery County is a collection of neighborhoods, each distinct in its cultural backgrounds and neighborly traditions.

For large events like July 4, what that means is a wide variety of celebrations, from early morning parades to late-night pyrotechnics.

CONSHOHOCKEN

Independence Day in this formal industrial town rolls out with a pint-sized display of engineering and aerodynamics. The annual Soap Box Derby makes maximum use of the steep incline of Fayette Street, turning it into 1,000 feet of high-speed action.

The festivities are then resumed after dark, with a eye-and-ear popping firework display at Sutcliffe Park (800 Colwell Lane).

GLENSIDE

July 4 in Glenside is a triple-decker sandwich of things to do: An early morning kids program takes place at Renninger Memorial Park; it concludes with a free-for-all peanut scramble that sends the youngsters diving.

In the afternoon, one of the oldest Independence Day celebrations in the nation begins, as it has done every year since 1904. Popular viewing spots are at St. Luke's Evangelical Roman Catholic Church at Easton Road and Fair Hill Avenue; New Life Presbyterian Church at Jenkintown Road and Easton Road; and the sidewalks between Easton Road and Keswick Avenue.

When the last of the daylight is gone, fireworks burst in the skies over Abington Senior High School (2056 Susquehanna Road).

SKIPPACK

Marchers in the Skippack July 4 parade walk the same historic route as General Washington and the maneuvering Continental Army. Once the bands and floats have wrapped up, the crowd gathers to enjoy barbecue at a free concert.

Fireworks that night are at Palmer Park (Heckler and Creamery Roads).

NORRISTOWN

A 5-k celebration run at Norristown Area High School heralds the opening of Independence Day celebrating in Norristown. The remainder of the day offers concerts at the Elmwood Park Bandshell.

Adjacent to the bandshell, Elmwood Park itself (1325 Harding Boulevard) is the firing location for

the community's "bombs bursting in air."

KING OF DRUSSIA

A full-scale community picnic – with food, games, history and plenty of shady spots to lie back in – is set within Valley Forge National Historical Park. Tours can be by festive trolley or on foot, and performances include a stirring reading of the Declaration of Independence.

There are no pyrotechnics at Valley Forge itself; however, the sky bursts with color at nearby Heuser Park (West Beidler Road & Geerdes Boulevard).

POTTSTOWN

Pottstown has reinvented its July 4 celebration into a two-day extravaganza it's calling "GoFourth!" Running July 3-4 in Memorial Park, the party will bring carnival rides and attractions, arts, music and food to Memorial Park.

New this year is a professional laser light show, which organizers believe will be a large draw. It is being cited for its environmental friendliness and lack of dependency on weather. According to Mobius8, the show's principal performer, a bit of moisture in the air actually makes the stunning blend of music, lighting effects and laser technology even more spectacular.

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montgomery county
STUDIO TOUR

Montgomery County Studio Tour invites art enthusiasts, and the curious to experience and meet a variety of astonishing artists as they exhibit their works during this two-day event. This unique and intimate opportunity is FREE to the public, and presents a clearer understanding of their stories and creative process.

COUNTYSTUDIOTOUR.COM



Dairy farming has been part of Montgomery County, Pa., for generations. Our local bounty of bovines translates to excellent ice cream – and other frozen treats – throughout the area.

FroYo lovers at **Swirls & Nibbles** (Skippack) can theoretically blend an infinite number of flavor combinations from eight yogurt flavors and 40 toppings. The store also features an active calendar of kid-friendly events and specials like free toppings nights.

Shake Shack, King of Prussia (two locations), uses its proximity to one of the most historical landscapes in the nation to offer a custard dessert unique to the neighborhood: The Valley Forge Freeze blends chocolate custard, caramel sauce, cheesecake blondie, chocolate sprinkles and sea salt.

For a heaping cup of gelato – ice cream’s richer, denser, silkier cousin – it’s hard to beat the carry-out excellence of **Davio’s Galleria**, King of Prussia. Flavor options vary, but in general, the tried-and-true standbys are vanilla, chocolate, mint chocolate chip, cappuccino and salted caramel.

Merrymeade Farm, Lansdale, has one of the shortest links between cow and scooper; it harvests milk daily from the barn. Over 30 flavors are generally available, and Merrymeade crafts interesting combos like chocolate ice cream loaded with chocolate chips and raspberry sauce.

Family-owned **Zwahlen’s**, Audubon, has deep experience as both ice cream makers and chocolatiers, using Swiss recipes that originated when ice cream was cranked by hand. For I Love Lucy fans, there’s the “dizzy redhead,” an ice cream whirl of red velvet cake, raspberry swirls and chocolate chips.

If you consider ice cream more as a dessert than a standalone treat, try **Frosty Falls**, Bridgeport, where a funnel cake sundae can finish off a tasty sandwich. Frosty Falls is near the Schuylkill River Trail, where hikers and bikers can take a break and carb-up.

There’s no need to wait until Girl Scout Cookie season to enjoy Thin Mints; **Scoops**, Conshohocken, offers it as an ice cream flavor. Candy connoisseurs can dive into the Swedish Fish water ice.

Petrucci’s Ice Cream provides a “mobile ice cream store,” which brings its frozen delicacies to your home or office event. Or, if you prefer, head over to the King of Prussia location, easily identifiable from its giant rooster on North Henderson Road.

Dig into an ice cream treat in the retro setting of the **Weldon Soda Fountain**, Glenside. Banana splits and malted milkshakes are served up with home-style attention to detail. For an extra jolt to your sweet tooth, Weldon’s also sells penny candy, by the piece or the pound.

Whether you’re a plain-Jane vanilla or a chocoholic-Charlie with multiple toppings and sauces, it’s clear that the quality ice creams in Montgomery County can’t be licked.



The grand plans for the **John James Audubon Center at Mill Grove** should have visitors flocking to this historic home.

The property represents one of the oldest locations purchased for preservation by Montgomery County itself, with county ownership going back to 1951. It’s a fitting honor, however, considering its role in preserving the artwork and conservation efforts of one of the nation’s celebrated naturalists.

Audubon lived along the banks of the Perkiomen Creek only short time (1803-1805), occupying a property owned by his French father. But the appeal of the wilderness – coupled with an abundance of flora and fauna – solidified his artistic vision as illustrator and painter.

The museum weathered a 2.5-year closure, that reconfigured the exhibition space, updated the electrical system, reevaluated and modernized the fire-suppression capabilities and strengthened the overall architecture.

When it emerged at an April ribbon-cutting, the interiors sparkled under the gleam of deep cleaning and new lighting, refreshed but still retaining the character of its 1760s construction.

The center has a long history of attracting children and school groups, and the recent work done ensures that it will



continue to engage young nature fans. A stunning second-floor mural invites junior ornithologists to find a variety of bird species using cutout silhouettes of their avian body shapes.

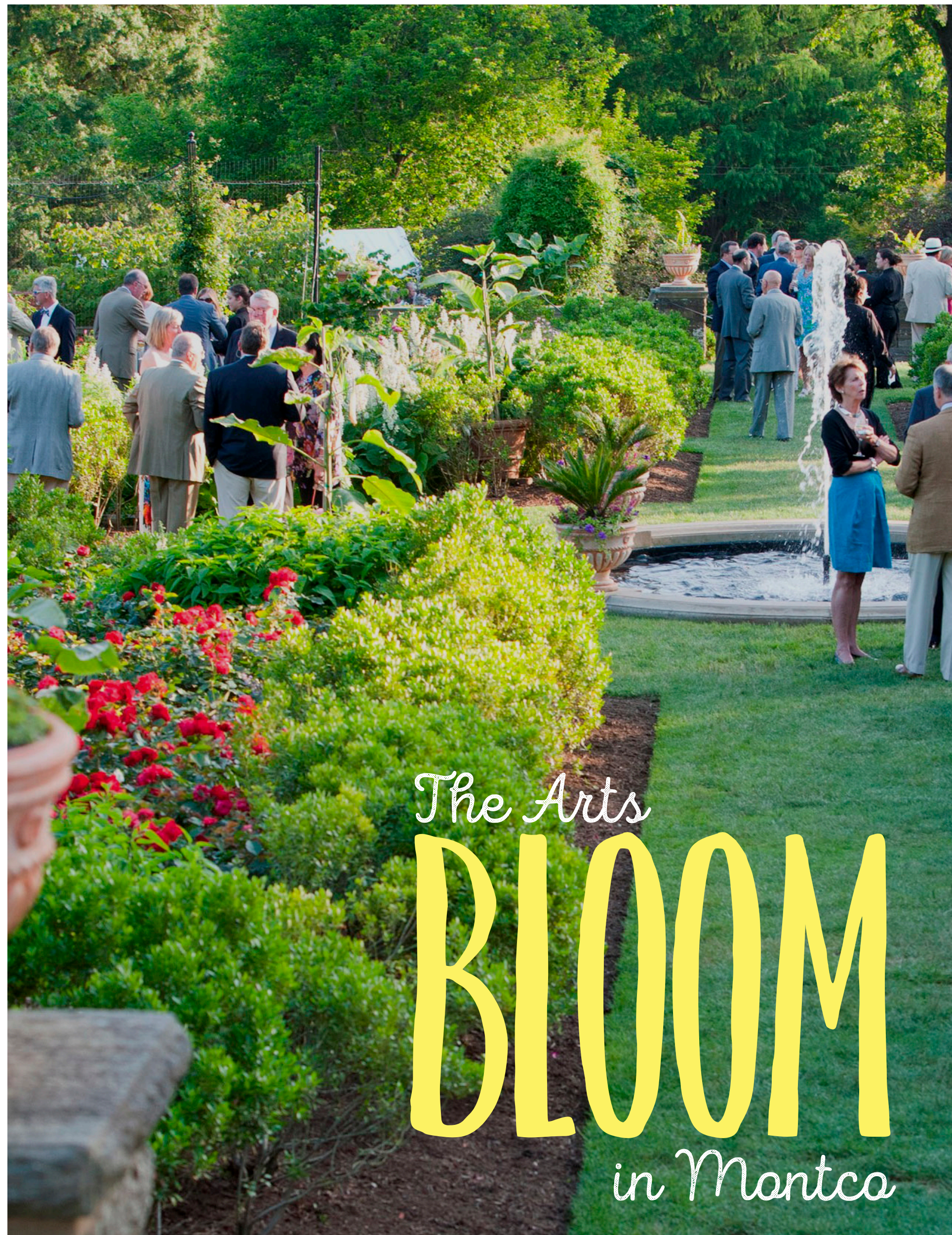
More is on the way. A \$12 million visitors center will showcase Audubon’s work, in both environmental preservation and illustration. The center’s treasured copy of Birds of America, Audubon’s magnum opus, will reside here, with the staff maintaining its tradition of delicately turning one page every week.

The new construction will connect to the existing house through an educational trail. As visitors pass from one experience to the next, they will track the life cycle of a baby bird.

Mill Grove’s existing visitor amenities, including its outdoor event space and barn, are not expected to change. Programming also remains in place, including a summer schedule of guided canoe trips along the Perkiomen Creek. These excursions depart every Thursday (5:30-7 p.m.) and every other Saturday (1-2:30 p.m.) until mid-September.

For a mere \$15, the center provides canoes, paddles, vests and guides. All that’s required of participants is an interest in viewing nature at her most appealing, bathed in the golden sunlight of a summer afternoon or evening.

Visit johnjames.audubon.org for more information.



The Arts
BLOOM
 in Montco

Spring has sprung and the gardens and arboretums in and around Valley Forge and Montgomery County are in full bloom. This region is referred to as “American’s Garden Capitol,” and for good reason – there are more than 30 public gardens within a 30-mile radius of Philadelphia, offering plenty of picturesque places to pay a visit. Beyond beautiful blooms, these gardens offer amazing art, architecture and history.

Here are a few to view:

Morris Arboretum of the University of Pennsylvania is the official arboretum of the Commonwealth. The expansive grounds of this horticultural haven offer 92 acres to explore. Favorite photo-worthy spots include the romantic rose garden and swan pond.

The site is open year round, with seasonal exhibits and family friendly programming. The beloved **Garden Railway**, celebrating its 20th year of operation, will open on Memorial Day Weekend to kick off the summer season. Visitors of all ages will be wowed watching model trains travel along a quarter mile of track that weaves through the gardens, passing by people, plants and replicas of famous Philadelphia landmarks.

A permanent, nationally awarded exhibit, “**Out on a Limb – a Tree Adventure**,” lets visitors stroll through the treetops 50 feet up in the air on a canopy walk – no climbing required.

The Arboretum also offers changing art exhibits. Now through October, visitors can experience the kinetic sculptures of Lyman Whitaker, featuring more than 50 “Wind Sculptures” – artwork moved by the breeze. The exhibit, “**Morris Arboretum in Motion**,” places the sculptures in “Wind Forests” to mesmerizing effect and is intended to make observers think about their surroundings and their own relationship to nature. All the sculptures are available for purchase.

Speaking of sculpture and nature, art aficionados will adore the grounds at **Abington Art Center**. The center strives to



create an intersection between art and ecology and sits on 27 acres which showcase sculptures and environmentally conscious works of art. The center curates art exhibits year-round throughout the grounds and inside the galleries, located in **historic Alverthorpe Manor**. Access to the gallery and the grounds is free, but for a fee, visitors can also sign up for a variety of workshops and classes, exploring everything from the culinary arts to plein air painting. As the weather warms up don’t miss the **Summer Concert Series** on the outdoor stage. Enjoy live local music on the lawn along with concessions from a variety of vendors. Concerts take place from 7-9pm, rain or shine, and are always family friendly and free!

The Barnes Collection may have moved to the Parkway, but the original grounds of the **Barnes Foundation** estate in Merion, Montgomery County, are still open to visitors. See where it all began and experience art in its “natural” habitat at the **Barnes Arboretum** every weekend from May through Labor Day from 11 a.m. – 4 p.m. General admission is “pay as you wish.” Guided tours are \$10. And parking is free! Albert Barnes had an eye for art and his wife, Laura, for flowers. Fittingly, their former estate is home to a 12-acre arboretum containing more than 2,500 flora and fauna, allowing art enthusiasts to experience a “living” art collection.





56 YEARS OF THE Philadelphia Folk Festival

Certain locations have certain signs that summer is on its way. In Montgomery County's Upper Salford Township, one of the signals of summer takes place at the Godshall family's 80-acre farm.

Starting in July, the tractors and tillers are stored in the barn. By August, their gnashing gears and humming motors are replaced by the sound of one of the most renowned concerts in the U.S.: the **Philadelphia Folk Festival**.

The first "Fest," as fans affectionately call it, was organized in Paoli in the early 1960s by the Philadelphia Folksong Society. As its popularity blossomed, it quickly outgrew its location.

In 1966, Fest came to Montgomery County. Spring Mountain provided the site, hosting acts on the expanse of ski runs that were dormant for the season. The extra space was appreciated, but the mountainous incline made for less-than-ideal viewing. Reportedly, the steep angle of the turf slid the crowds continually forward as the concert progressed, creating a jam.

Old Pool Farm in nearby Upper Salford Township provided not only the perfect topography but also ample room for camping, an integral part of the overall experience.

The addition of craft and food vendors and an extensive children's program to the mainstage music contributed to a multiday timeframe.

Behind the mainstage is a small footbridge that leads to Dulcimer Grove, an area for kids. The cool shade provides a quiet space for entertainment like jugglers, storytelling



and puppet shows. To dial back the energy even more, some concertgoers string up hammocks and take it easy in the grove for a while.

The fields used for camping provide easy access to the Perkiomen Creek. When the summer sun is at its peak, Fest attendees wade in the water to escape the heat. Hydration throughout the concert is key, so fresh well water is pumped to water stations throughout the property.

Philadelphia Folk Fest is a rain-or-shine event. Onstage, all the equipment, including giant screens that skirt the stage, are weatherproof.

Once the concerts, demos, workshops and informal jam sessions are over, the property is cleared and returned to its original purpose: an 80-acre hay farm. The site belongs to the Godshall family, whose two residences are easily seen from the campsites and who traditionally attend the concerts.

Headliners for this year's Philadelphia Folk Festival, August 17-20, include Graham Nash and Old Crow Medicine Show.

But prominent artists have been known to show up unannounced and sit in for a session or two.

So if someone onstage looks or sounds like Bob Dylan, Tommy Smothers or Bonnie Raitt for example, it might very well be them.

Tickets can be purchased online at pfs.org/philadelphia-folk-festival/.



Montgomery County boasts close to 100 miles of trails perfect for walking, running, hiking, biking and even horseback riding.

- No bike? No problem! Montgomery County's Zagster bike share program allows riders to rent bikes by the hour or by the day. Riders can join the bike share program by downloading the Zagster Mobile App, available for iPhone and Android, or by visiting zagster.com/montcopa. Bikes are available in three locations across the county:
- **Lower Perkiomen Valley Park in Oaks** located on the Perkiomen Trail near the intersections with the Schuylkill River Trail and the Chester Valley Trail
- **Norristown Farm Park** adjacent to the Salt Wing near the parking area that can be reached via the park entrance off Germantown Pike
- **Pennypack Trail** head, just off Huntingdon Pike in Lower Moreland

Sign up for a day-pass for a \$5 one-time fee. After that, trips under 2 hours are free and \$2/hour up to \$20/ride.

Interested in a little friendly competition? The 2017 Montco Trail Challenge is a family-friendly way to get out on the trails, explore the county and improve your health.

- To get started, simply visit www.montcopa.org/trailchallenge. You can pick up an official Montco Trail Challenge card at locations throughout the county or print a copy online.

Here's how it works:

- Visit any of the 13 listed Montco trails that are part of the challenge and look for special trail markers located at the trail heads
- Record each unique symbol from the trails you visit on your trail challenge card. Two "free spaces" are available to write in other parks, trails or historic sites explored during the Trail Challenge time frame. We suggest checking out our Patriot Trails at www.valleyforge.org/patriottrails. These Revolutionary War history tours allow you to follow in the footsteps of George Washington and his compatriots through web-based itineraries that take you on a journey through several sites of historic significance including the iconic Valley Forge National Historical Park
- Submit your findings online or in person at one of the locations listed throughout the county

There are three levels of achievement:

- **Explorer:** Complete 5 trails and earn a patch.
- **Adventurer:** Complete 10 trails and earn a patch and a medal.
- **Trailblazer:** Complete 15 trails and earn a patch, medal, and backpack cooler.

The Montco Trail Challenge runs through December 3, 2017. Entries must be received by December 8, 2017.

The Montco Trail Challenge is a collaborative effort of the Montgomery County Health Department, Planning Commission, Parks, Trails, and Historic Sites, and Commissioners.



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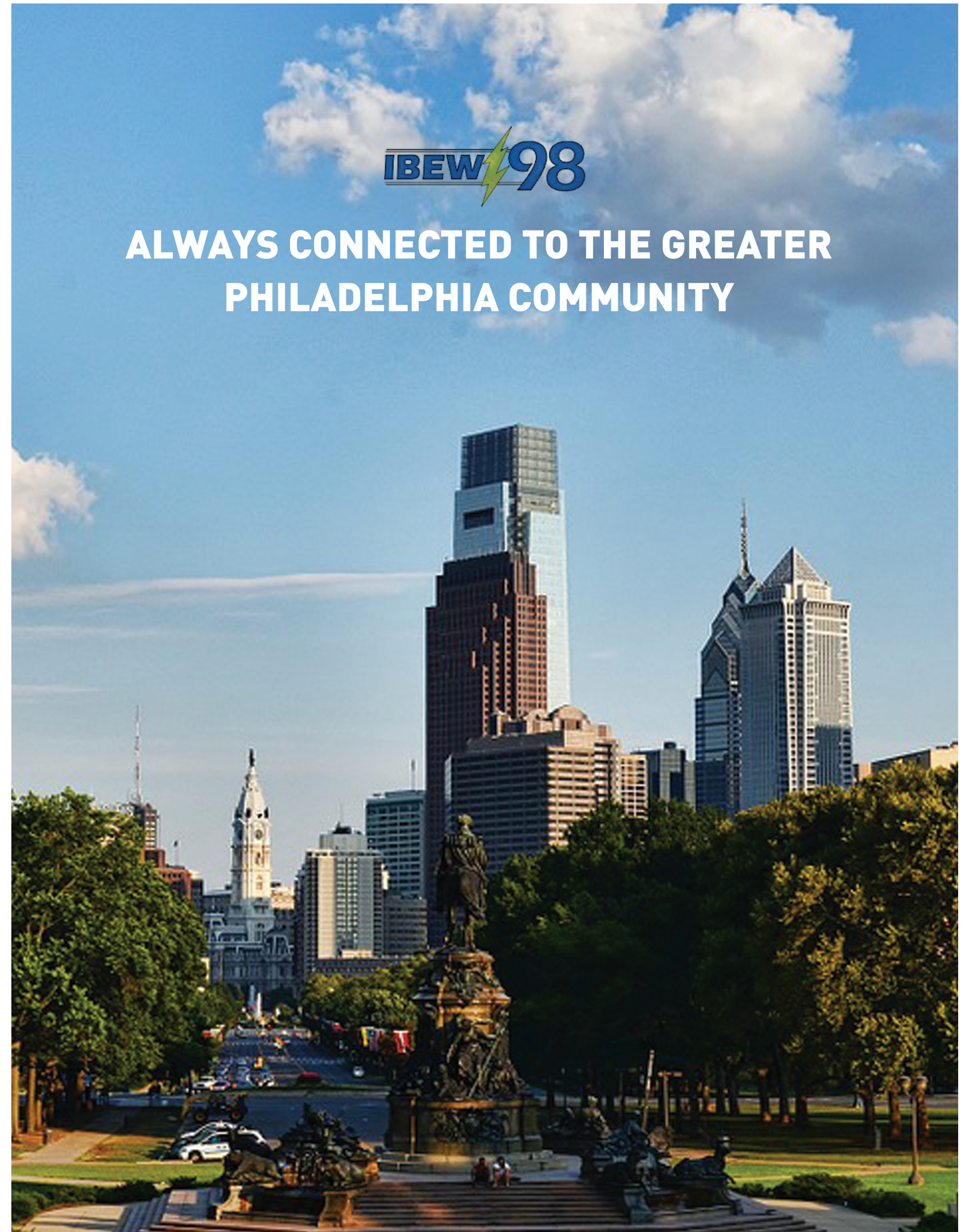





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GOLF SEASON IS
TEEING OFF



According to the National Golf Foundation, the sport of golf in the U.S. attracts 25 million players each year. They set off on 15,000 courses (public and private) to play 33,000 rounds of 18 holes.

But Montgomery County is emerging as a go-to spot for fans of the game.

What accounts for the upswing?

There is plenty of it here

- Montgomery County has 54 of the most historic, scenic and challenging holes in the nation.

We've been at the forefront of the golf industry for centuries

- Established in 1854, the Philadelphia Cricket Club (with ancillary courses in both Plymouth Meeting and Flourtown, Montgomery County, Pa.) is the third oldest club in the U.S., according to the U.S. Golf Association.
- The Philadelphia Country Club, Gladwyne, Montgomery County, Pa., was founded in 1890, earning its U.S. Golf Association distinction of being one of the first 100 clubs in the U.S.

Conditions are excellent

- Moderate temperatures, wide open spaces, gentle rains and plentiful sun keep our courses pristine

Even industry experts recognize how good golf is here

- Two Montgomery County, Pa., courses are consistently listed on Golfweek's ranking of the state's top 10 public

courses: Lederach Golf Club, Harleysville, and Raven's Claw Golf Club, Pottstown

We've got celebrity endorsements

- Commonwealth National Golf Club, Horsham, Montgomery County, Pa., was designed by Pennsylvania native Arnold Palmer. Its celebrity tournaments have attracted players like Michael Jordan, Mike Schmidt and Charles Barkley

Options are plentiful

- There is not a single zip code within the borders of Montgomery County, Pa., that doesn't have at least one location for a round

Convenience is a factor

- For business travelers who may be here on a conference, meeting or offsite, the average distance between a hotel and a Montco golf course is a mere 2.6 miles

There's plenty to do after that 18th hole

- 36 of our 54 county courses feature onsite dining; beyond those, there are 600 restaurants throughout our neighborhoods and boroughs, reflecting excellence in a wide variety of flavor profiles and ethnic cooking backgrounds

Within our borders are:

- 11 sites of historical significance
- 6 major malls
- 96 miles of connected trails
- 35 township, borough, state and federal parks
- 31 museums
- 18 theaters devoted to film and 35 venues for live performances
- 14 yearly arts and culture festivals

Grab your clubs; pick a course and give Destination Montco Golf a shot.





New Studio Tour

HIGHLIGHTS 50 MONTCO ARTISTS

This summer, we are excited to welcome the first Montgomery County Studio Tour, featuring 50+ artists and 20 studios from Pottstown to Bala Cynwyd. Montco Explorer sat down with Jeff Schaller, local artist and creator of County Studio Tour, to talk about his inspiration and motivation to bring the tour to Montco.

EXPLORER: How many years have you been running County Studio Tour?

SCHALLER: That's always a big discussion. "Officially," it's been six years. Originally, when I started, it was just me. I opened the doors to my own studio in Chester County. I worked with another artist and we both opened our studios to show our work. We did that for two years. But I would say the "official" start of the Studio Tour was when we came out with the catalogue. That made it legit.

EXPLORER: What was your inspiration for starting County Studio Tour?

SCHALLER: I decided to open up my studio for a weekend and I had about 200 people come through. And I thought it was amazing that all these people wanted to come out and see artwork. Other artists noticed and approached me and said they were interested in starting something. So I started inviting more artists and more

people came to the tour and it grew and grew. It's grown about 25 percent each year. And every year I'm amazed by the talent and creativity that comes out of the woodwork. I'm constantly meeting more and more talented area artists.

EXPLORER: Why did you decide to bring the Studio Tour to Montgomery County?

SCHALLER: I used to live there. I started my family there. I was involved in a lot of the art clubs and showed my work a lot in the county. I knew there was a great arts community in Montco and I thought the county could benefit from the chance to showcase its vibrant arts scene. County Studio Tour has had great success in surrounding counties and Montgomery County has so much to offer when it comes to arts and culture, I thought it was a natural fit.

EXPLORER: You went to Arcadia University and spent some time living in King of Prussia. Can you speak more about your special relationship to Montgomery County?

SCHALLER: As soon as I graduated from college, I got an apartment in the area. I wanted to settle there because it offered the best of both worlds. It was close to the city and the arts in town and close to Valley Forge for the scenery. I met many artists living in the area. It had a good vibe. I made connections with the community. I worked with the Upper Merion Township Parks & Recreation Department and painted a pavilion in Swedeland Park with kids from



King of Prussia and became more and more involved with the community. I made a lot of memories there. It has a special place in my heart.

EXPLORER: What are you most excited about in the inaugural year of the Montgomery County Studio Tour?

SCHALLER: I get to see Dale Roberts' studio. We both paint in encaustic – using pigments mixed with hot wax that are burned in as an inlay. We've crossed paths before at different art shows and talks and now I finally get to go see his studio. And I have some other friends like Anthe Capitan-Valais and Karen Love Cooler who I was in art groups with in Montgomery County. Now I get to go see their studios! Lorraine Glessner actually shows at my studio in Chester County, but she has her own studio in Montco. I'm happy to see her blossom here. And those are just personal connections. I don't usually get to visit the other studios when my studio is on the tour so this is an opportunity for me to see other artists too! Once this gets started and other artists catch on and believe in it...I know this is only the beginning. Montgomery County has so much potential.

EXPLORER: Are there any hidden gems in Montgomery County for people interested in exploring the arts?

SCHALLER: I actually painted murals on Main Street in Norristown – one on the side of the old Duff Company

features the old Norristown Main Street and Town Hall and another by the Norristown Transportation Center is of the old Valley Forge Hotel.

EXPLORER: What inspired you to become an artist?

SCHALLER: I always knew I was going to be an artist. It's the only thing I can do well. I always enjoyed it and I believed I could support myself and my family creating art. And I have. It's a great feeling to be able to do what you love.

EXPLORER: When did you know you wanted to make art your career?

SCHALLER: I studied art in college. I was originally a science illustration major – and then I saw the organic chemistry book, and it was huge, and I thought I would do graphic design instead. I was always a painter and I did my senior project in painting.

When I graduated I became a graphic designer. I started my family. I have three kids. My youngest son is 13. When he was born, I quit my day job and started painting full time. And just like I thought, I was able to make a living.

EXPLORER: Where else can we see your work?

SCHALLER: Go to any Iron Hill Brewery! My work is on the walls. There's actually a new one that just opened in Huntingdon Valley, and another in North Wales. Grab a bite and a brew and view some local art.

The Montgomery County Studio Tour will take place during the weekend of June 10-11.

Saturday, June 10 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Sunday, June 11 from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Learn more at montgomerycountystudiotour.com





crave montco ADDS FLAVOR TO BEAST OF A FEAST

When the **Elmwood Park Zoo** hosts its annual Beast of a Feast event on June 29, the event will have a whole new flavor.

This year the zoo is partnering with the Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board and its Crave Montco brand to take the food-tasting event to the next level.

“It’s the perfect event for our Crave brand,” said Ed Harris, Vice President of the Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board. “Our mission is to promote the more than 600 amazing restaurants that we have here in the county, and Beast of a Feast is the perfect showcase event.”

Last year, more than 1,000 guests sampled foods from 16 area restaurants. The goal for this year is 1,200 guests and 20 participating restaurants.

According to Jennifer Conti, Development Director for the Elmwood Park Zoo, the zoo’s annual fundraiser began as a black-tie affair.

“In 2004 we had this very formal, \$150-a-plate, sit-down dinner with a guest list of 300 people,” said Conti. “And, while the event was very successful, as the years passed, we realized the zoo itself is inherently fun and lively and so should be our annual fundraiser.”

Beast of a Feast, in its current form, began in 2010. This year will mark the first time for Crave Montco as the presenting sponsor.

In addition to the food-tasting, there will be complementary beer and wine, cooking competitions, animal encounters and live music throughout the zoo. The VFTCB will also unveil the summer edition of its Crave Montco Dining Guide at the event.

“It’s a party for the zoo, but it’s also going to be a launch party for us, our members and our sponsors,” said Harris. “And it will definitely be a party.”

Ultimately, the event is a fundraiser for the zoo. And according to Conti, it has been extremely successful.

“Starting with Evening at Elmwood in 2004, the fundraiser has made more than \$1 million for the zoo,” Conti said. “Last year was our most successful with more than \$90,000 raised.”

Harris believes the event has potential to become much more than a fundraiser, raising the profile of the zoo and the county.

“Beast of a Feast is already a great event for the zoo, but we want to make it one of Montgomery County’s signature events,” Harris said.

“There’s no reason that Beast of a Feast can’t continue to grow this year and into the future.”

Tickets for the event are \$50 for zoo members and \$55 for non-members and can be purchased online at www.elmwoodparkzoo.org.

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In general, Collegeville's reputation today reflects small-town peace and quiet.

But that wasn't always the case.

According to lore, residents protesting a fee to cross the Perkiomen Creek twice dumped a tollgate into the water and burned the toll house.

Fortunately, although the population is still passionate about its quality of life, tempers have mellowed over the decades.

Collegeville – named for Ursinus College as well as two schools that predated it – is only 1.6 square miles. But that small space has plenty to offer.

Collegeville Skydive can make a pro out of even a first-time jumper, pairing novices with experienced jumpers. Once the plane reaches 10,000 feet, it's Geronimo!

On the more sedate side, the **Perkiomen Trail** meanders through Collegeville before heading off toward Schwenksville. Under a canopy of greenery that deepens as spring evolves into summer, it's a popular stretch for runners, hikers, bikers, horseback riders, dog-walkers and moms with strollers.

Speaking of horseback, Collegeville is also home to **Red Buffalo Ranch**, which saddles up riders, pairs

them with guides and sends them into the wilds of nearby Evansburg State Park.

The local arts and culture scene is embodied by **Ursinus College**, whose Bomberger Hall hosts an active music series and whose Berman Museum overflows with creativity both indoors and out. The Ursinus campus is also the place to find a LOVE statue that doesn't involve a trip to Philadelphia.

A day of exploring Collegeville needs a good breakfast as a starter, and delicious options include Collegeville Diner and Corner Café 29, where the bacon strips exceed the diameter of the plate.

Lunch can either be sit-down (My Friend's Tavern or Tortugas) or on the go (Speck's for fried chicken; Collegeville Italian bakery for hoagies).

Pizza? Collegeville has three masters: Pizza Stop, Rocco's and Forno Antico.

Menus that are a bit more upscale are available at the **Providence Town Center**, a quick two miles south of Collegeville itself. The aroma of sizzling steaks at Firebirds Wood Fire Grill hits patrons as soon as they swing open the door.

It's also home to the Town Book Center and Café, an independent shop with an active events calendar. Bibliophiles come to participate in authors' readings, wine tastings (the store has its own wine bar!) and writing workshops.

There are plenty of tight-knit communities that make Montgomery County worth exploring.

But Collegeville earns a spot at the top of the class.



The Valley Forge Tourism and Convention Board Shows Its Commitment to the Arts in Montgomery County, Hires New Director of Arts and Culture

The Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board (VFTCB) has hired Jessica Willingham as its new Director of Arts & Culture. Willingham comes to the VFTCB from the Montgomery County Commissioners Office, where she served as Press Secretary. For the past five years, she has been the liaison between elected officials, the press and the public. She brings a depth of knowledge about the county and a passion for promoting the arts to this newly created position.

“Valley Forge & Montgomery County has always had a close connection to the arts community as evidenced by our many museums and galleries, but the offerings don’t stop there. The area has a vibrant performing arts scene with live music, award-winning playhouses, and historic movie theaters and is home to some of the finest gardens and arboretums in the country. We are excited to have Jessica join our team to market the myriad arts and culture offerings we have throughout the county,” said Mike Bowman, President and CEO of the Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board.

Willingham has worked with renowned jazz radio DJ Bob Perkins of WRTI 90.1 FM for over a decade. She has also forged many strategic relationships with the area creative community, collaborating with and promoting local artists, musicians and filmmakers.

Willingham attended Brandeis University and currently serves on the Alumni Association Board of Directors.

The VFTCB plans to officially launch the “Arts Montco” brand this fall and encourages everyone to explore the arts in Montco.



In preparation for Montgomery County’s high season for tourism – summer – area hotels have undertaken a host of improvement projects.

In total, the renovations represent a \$25 million reinvestment, ensuring that visitors who come here enjoy the comfort, style and amenities they deserve.

The reinvestment comes at a time when Montgomery County hotels have enjoyed record levels of room nights. Recent data for room occupancies are extremely positive, per data from STR Global, a worldwide hotel data benchmarking firm.

“These levels of performance began last summer with the Democratic National Convention, but the trend continued throughout 2016,” says Lisa Karl, Vice President of Sales and Strategic Partnerships. “Hoteliers are responding by allotting more resources for accommodation refreshes and expansions.”

King of Prussia’s Fairfield Inn Valley Forge, for example, is in the midst of a full renovation that will bring its guests a new breakfast area and fitness center.

Makeovers at **Normandy Farm Hotel and Conference Center**, Blue Bell, include high-tech ovens in the banquet kitchen. Of interest to both visitors and residents, the hotel has opened an onsite retail bakeshop, selling sweet creations from award-winning pastry chef, Sam Nahhas. The light-and-airy macarons fly off the shelves as soon as he stocks them.

When its new fitness center opens this summer, the **Best Western Inn at King of Prussia** will use it to encourage healthy lifestyles among its guests and the surrounding community. The unique space holds cross-fit elements and a yoga studio. Best Western has partnered with Jim Burdumy, holistic lifestyle coach, to help clients manage stress and improve their health and happiness.

In addition to improvements among the county’s hotels, new properties are joining the market. These include a **Residence Inn** in Collegeville, designed to serve the local corporate market as well as sports travel teams competing at the Greater Philadelphia Expo Center in Oaks.

The county’s hotel assets are marketed by the Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board as “Revolutionary Events.” The messaging is to encourage corporate meeting attendees to tack on time in the county to their before- or after-agendas.

“Fortune 500 global leading firms continue to select Montgomery County as a location for setting strategy and direction for their business,” says Edward Harris, Vice President of Marketing and Communications. “Aside from our modern facilities they’re also discovering unique team building activities for their staff from places like the iFly, Escape Room King of Prussia and Cooking Spotlight in Phoenixville.”

More information is available at valleyforge.org/meetings.

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This paper is brought to you by the Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board, a private, nonprofit, membership-based sales and marketing organization that actively promotes Valley Forge & Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. Our mission is to strengthen economic prosperity within the area by raising its visibility as a tourism destination for leisure and convention markets.



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