

## Lewisburg groups work to build community spirit

# Picnic in the park

By PAT CROSSLEY  
Sun-Gazette Correspondent

**L**EWISBURG — Late afternoon sunshine fell on the brilliant green grass of an unexpected urban oasis on the last Thursday in August, as people filtered in to find a seat among the towering trees of Soldiers Memorial Park.

Located on Front Street, between Market and St. John streets, the 2-acre park features benches and picnic tables, which fulfilled their purpose during the second "Picnic in the Park" sponsored by the Lewisburg Neighborhoods Corp., working with the Lewisburg Downtown Partnership.

The event is the second in a number of events planned by the group to help people reconnect with the Susquehanna River.

Food vendors stood ready to supply the needs of those who didn't bring their own meals, while children played tag and climbed on the rocks at the end of the park. Once the bases for the former water towers of the Lewisburg Waterworks Co., in operation in the 1880s, the huge stones mark the antiquity of the park, which has been in existence for over a century. Adults sat and watched, enjoying the scene and the chance to relax and chat.

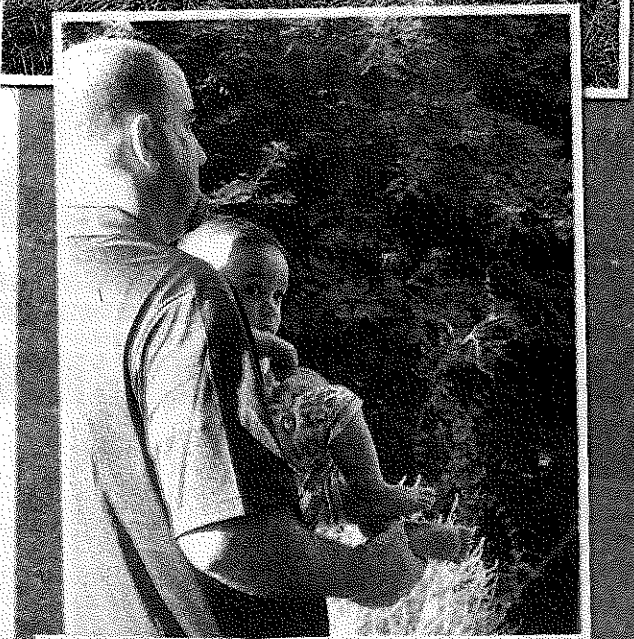
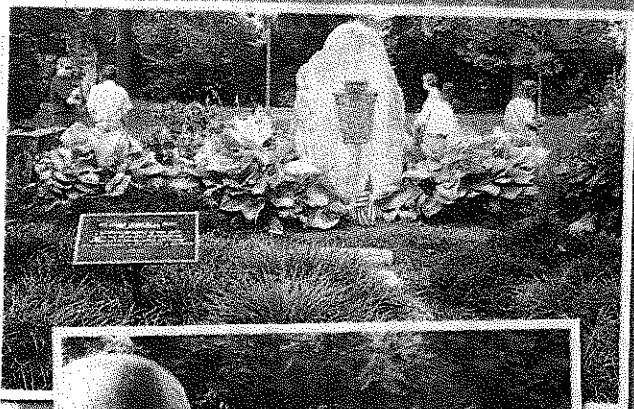
Like many towns in the early 1800s, life in Lewisburg at one time centered on the river. It was a source of commerce and a means of travel.

A system of canals connected communities along the West Branch of the Susquehanna. With the advent of modern transportation, in the form of railways, the river took a backseat to the much quicker means of moving goods and people from one area to another.

The canals are mostly gone now, and people are beginning to discover a new relationship with the river.

At the first picnic, held in May, "some people

(See LEWISBURG, Page B-4)



PAT BRODIE/Star-Gazette Correspondent

Families gathered on Aug. 28 at the Picnic in the Park event in Lewisburg's Soldiers Memorial Park. Second from bottom, Kevin Kelly, of Lewisburg, and his 7-month-old son, Gregory, admire the river. At bottom, Peter McHamara, Emily Dryden and Adele McHamara, 3, all of Lewisburg, share a picnic.



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(From Page B-1)

thanked us for introducing them to that area," said Samantha Pearson, executive director and Elmstreet manager with the corporation.

Admitting that the park has been underused, Pearson said, "It's used for the Lewisburg Arts Festival, but many people don't get this far. We want people to start thinking, 'I know where that's at.'

"It's very picturesque, but there is not a whole lot in terms of pavilions or anything like that," she said.

She also noted that there is a problem with underbrush that has grown along the river bank, obstructing the view.

"You can't actually see much of the river," Pearson added.

With this in mind, the group has scheduled cleanups of the area along the bank and in the river.

"We're trying to build community, build community around the river," Pearson said.

Activities such as this one are occurring all along the Susquehanna River as communities work to reconnect with their heritage as river towns, as part of the Susquehanna Greenway River Town Revitalization Program.

Among the goals of the River Town program is the

idea of connecting people with the Susquehanna River physically and culturally and involving them with the river and their river town.

According to Pearson, a member of Lewisburg's River Town team, official approval as a Susquehanna Greenway River Town should come this fall.

"Once we receive the OK, then this opens up opportunities for funding for projects, technical assistance and a design team," Pearson noted.

The group has plans for projects such as a boat ramp for kayaks and canoes and improved handicap access to the park and the river. An old railroad bridge that spans the river at one end of the park eventually could be used as part of an observation area.

"We're exploring potential ways of improving the area," Pearson said.

The River Town Program also encourages the participation of community organizations. Steve Everson, a chartered organization representative for Boy Scout Troop 538 and a member of Lewisburg's River Town committee, is working with Eagle Scout Carter Kerstetter, who is taking on the job of opening up new access corridors to

the river.

"This is a perfect project for the Eagle Scout," Everson said. "He can plan, organize, have fundraisers and provide the manpower for the work."

On this day, however, most people were focused on the beauty of the park and spending time with friends and family.

"I like all the community stuff," said Susan Cox, a Lewisburg resident. She, her husband Ed and daughter Lindsey were enjoying picnicking beneath the trees.

"It's an opportunity for bonding," said Lindsey, a high school senior. "People can get to know each other and you can meet new people. It's good for people who are new to Lewisburg."

The Coxes shared their picnic table with Bill and Linda Petry, owners of a local bed and breakfast, The Copper Beech Manor, who agreed that the park often is overlooked.

"Normally everything takes place at the other end of town," Bill Petry said.

Lou Noble, who taught school in Lewisburg for over 30 years, said she was aware of the park because she took her children to the Packwood Museum, located across the street from the park. She and Lesley Livingston, also of

Lewisburg, said this was their first picnic. Their grandsons, Jackson Tebbs, 5, of Williamsport, and Wyatt Noble, 6, of Lewisburg, played as they talked.

"It's beautiful," Livingston said.

Noble had nothing but praise for Lewisburg: "It's wonderful. It brings everyone together. Lewisburg is a lovely town, a growing town. There is always something cultural going on.

"We are very privileged, as far as the opportunities this community offers," she added.

Karen Herb, of Sunbury, relaxed on one of the park's benches, waiting for her granddaughter, who had opted to celebrate her birthday in the park, while two boys tossed a large Frisbee back and forth.

"The kids really have a good time," Herb said.

Even the smallest among the group, 7-month-old Gregory Kelly,

seemed to enjoy the park with his father, Kevin, of Lewisburg, as they looked at the view along the railroad bridge.

Another Picnic in the Park is scheduled for 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Sept. 25. Upcoming events are posted on Facebook at "On the River-Lewisburg" or "Lewisburg Neighborhoods."