

OUR TOWN FOUNDATION

★ Shaping Hamburg's Future ★

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

FEBRUARY 14, 2024



Taste of
Hamburg-er Festival



Our Town Foundation is a charitable non-profit 501(c) 3 organization

STAFF

Deena Kershner, Executive Director
Gabriella “Gabby” Wilson, Administrative Assistant (resigned in June)
Bethany Sholl, Theater Manager
Stephanie Adam, Theater Coordinator
Lynn Weller, Assistant Director (hired in October)
Jessica Hoagland, Art Alliance Coordinator (hired in October)

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Collectively, the Board of Directors (Organization Committee) assumes legal and philosophical responsibilities for all program activities. The Board is solely responsible for establishing program policy, hiring staff, and determining the goals for the organization. They make recommendations to - and oversee the work of - the numerous committees, and they approve the annual program budgets and committee action plans. The Board of Directors strives to get everyone working towards common goals.

2023 Board of Directors

Jeff Pettit, *President*
Jeremy Hoagland, *VP as of Dec.*
Cindy Blefgen, *Treasurer*
Linda Wood, *Recording Secretary*
Stephanie Adam
Allen Madeira
Stephanie Menapace

Donna Palko
Gerry Schappell
Ann Steffel
Vreeland Wood
Joshua Youpa
Stan Henne – *Joined in Dec.*
Chris Yost – *Resigned in Nov.*

The Board of Directors (Organization Committee) is responsible for the following:

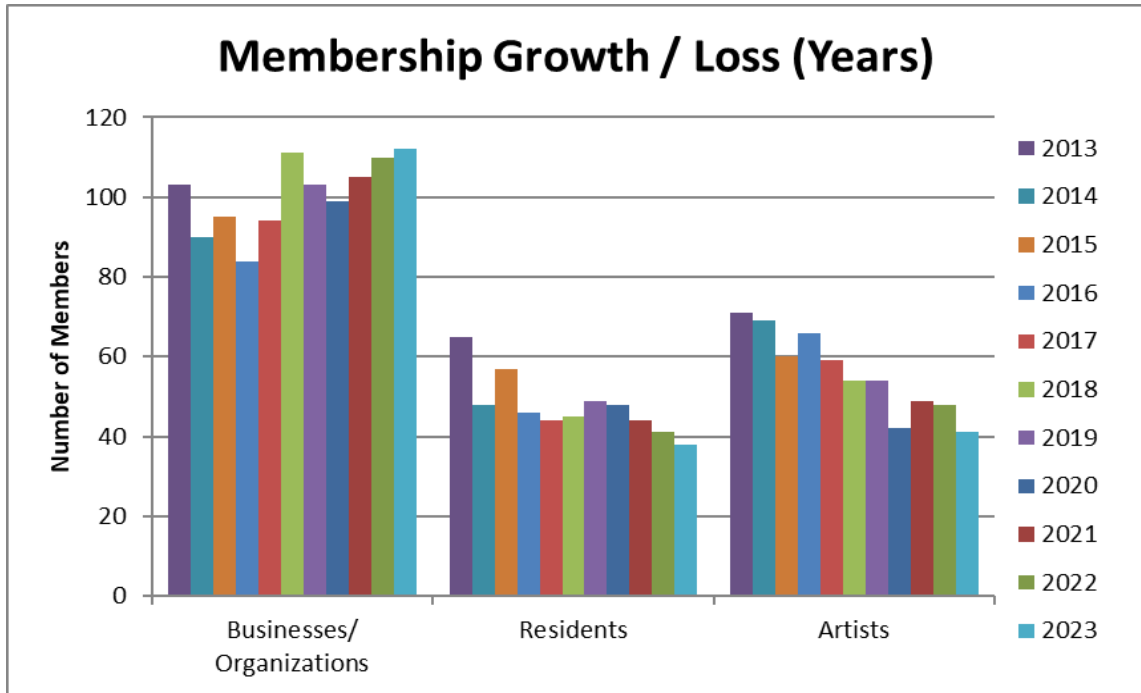
- Assuring sustainability of the organization
- Reviewing all financial aspects of the organization and approving the annual budget
- Assuring all policies and procedures are followed according to by-laws and government regulations
- Coordinates capital campaigns, membership drives
- Researching additional funding sources
- Networking with other organizations, public representatives, business owners and community leaders
- Assessing the borough’s assets, liabilities, and current trends and weaknesses
- Determining priorities and approving the committee’s annual work plans based on community needs and desires
- Seeking community involvement and media support
- Recruiting and managing the volunteer pool
- Overseeing the staff and the daily operations of the office
- Attending training sessions to stay educated on all aspects of implementing a Community Revitalization Program

Our Town Foundation Organizational Structure



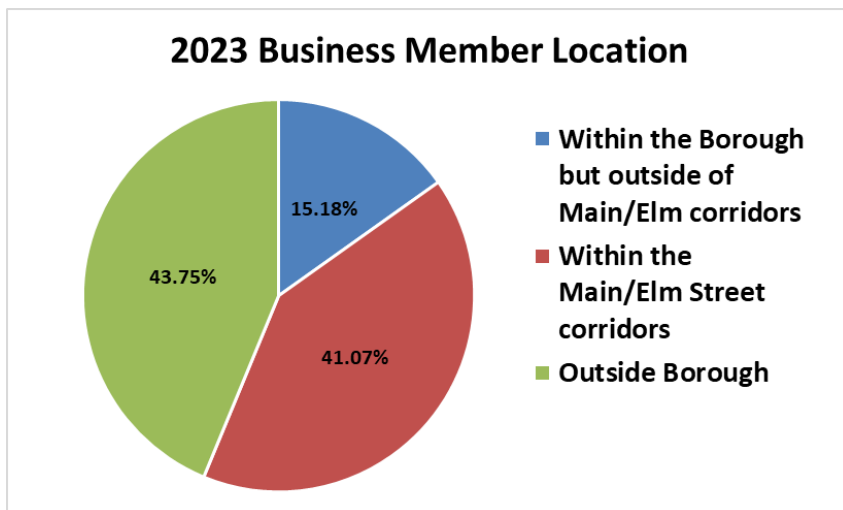
Membership

Through the generosity of donors who have faith in its program, the Foundation is able to carry out its mission. 191 residents, artists, and businesses were members of OTF in 2023. This was a decrease of 8 members from the previous year.



Business/Organization Membership (112 members)

Business memberships increased by a total of two members during 2023. Membership includes businesses located within the Hamburg Borough as well as surrounding townships and beyond. It is vital for the Foundation to support all businesses within the area, since they all play a role in attracting visitors, residents, and additional entrepreneurs into the community.

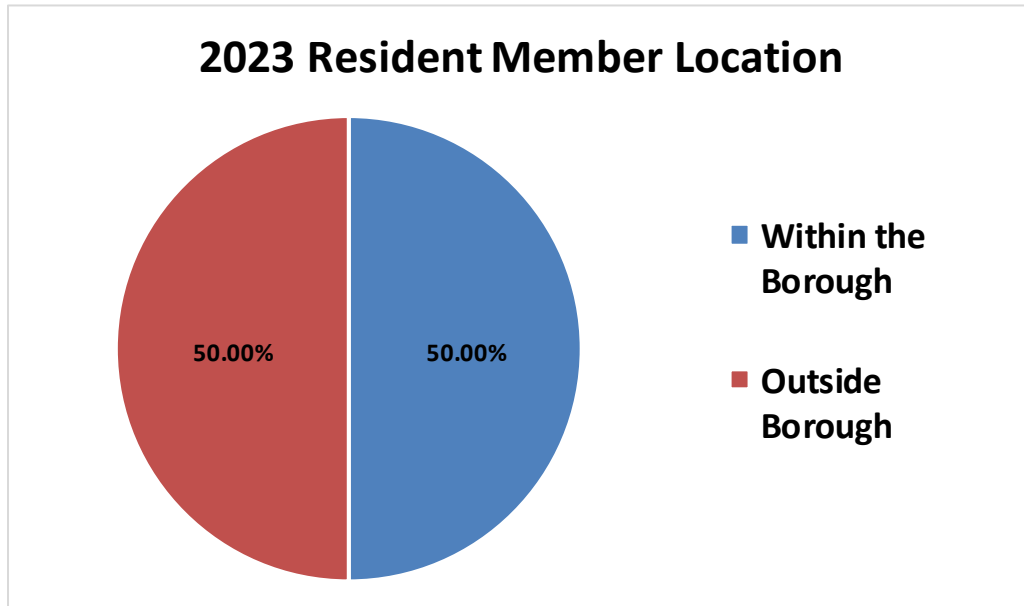


New Business Members – 2023

- Anytime Fitness Hamburg PA
- B's Sip and Paint
- Burkey & Driscoll Home Furnishings
- C & J's Realty, LLC
- Edward Jones Investments
- Fluoride-Be-Gone
- Francis L. Werley Inc.
- Hamburg Lions Club
- KRE Security LLC
- Liv Holistic LLC
- Mountain Trail Solar
- Pappy T's Pub Inc.
- Robert K. Bryan Orthodontics
- State Street Lanes
- V & M Towing Services Inc
- Zion Blue Mountain UCC

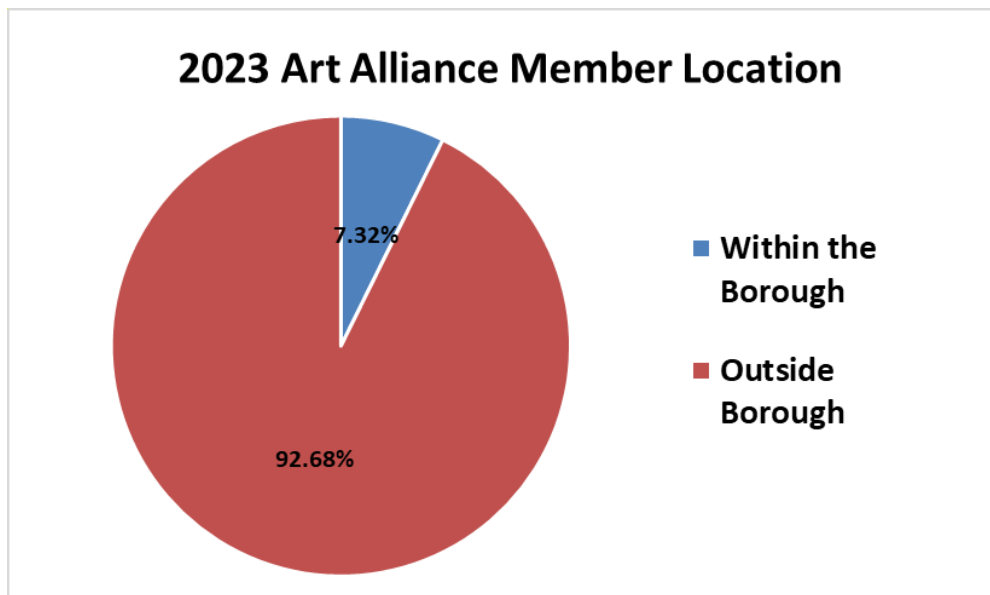
Resident/Family Memberships (38 members)

The residential sector also benefits from the Foundation’s revitalization efforts. As community improvements are made, the quality of life improves and the values of homes increase. Residents enjoy the many events and activities hosted by the Foundation. Resident memberships from within the Borough as well as the neighboring townships confirm that the greater Hamburg community supports the Foundation’s endeavors.



Artist Membership (41 members)

The Hamburg Area Arts Alliance (HAAA) is a group of regional artists who carry out its mission to support and showcase local artists and to advance the awareness of arts in the community. The Alliance consists of 41 current members. Of those members, 30 artists display and sell their work in the Art & Craft Gallery of Hamburg, providing residents and tourists a sampling of regional arts and culture.



Our Programs

The Foundation is an extremely diverse organization that reaches out to all facets of the Hamburg Community in an effort to maintain and further enhance this already very special place. In 2023, the organization celebrated its 20th Anniversary of its original designation as a Downtown Main Street Program. The organization has since evolved into a full-fledged Community Revitalization Corporation (CRC), expanding its efforts into several areas of the community. This requires partnerships with other organizations and numerous community volunteers to ensure that revitalization efforts stretch throughout the entire borough and nearby areas.

Over the years, Our Town Foundation has administered six different programs under their umbrella:

- Downtown Main Street Program
- Taste of Hamburg-*er* Festival
- Hamburg Area Arts Alliance
- Hamburg Strand Theater
- The Blueprint Community Program/Heritage Towns and Tours
- Southgate Neighborhood Revitalization.

Communities that are most successful are those that have grasped the concept that revitalization is not a project with a beginning and an end. It never ends. Just as sound management of any business remains imperative after its start up, the ongoing management of community revitalization projects is essential to economic stability and quality of life.

Main Street – Where it all Began

The Main Street Mission: To revitalize, promote, and preserve downtown historic Hamburg for our families and future generations to enjoy.

The Main Street Vision of Hamburg is one of vibrant streets adorned with restored historic buildings filled with shops, restaurants and professional services. The town will prosper from the abundant natural, cultural, and historic resources within the community. Hamburg will once again be the premier location in Northern Berks to shop, dine and be entertained.

Downtowns are the heart of a community; they are symbolic of a district's economy, quality of life, and public pride. A downtown is a long-term community asset that must be nurtured, maintained, and promoted. A thriving downtown provides an important civic forum where members of the community can congregate. The Taste of Hamburg-*er* Festival and other downtown events all reinforce sense of community. When viewing a movie at the Hamburg Strand Theater, or getting a bite to eat at our local eateries - surely you will see friends or neighbors. Having a well-developed, well-educated, financially stable revitalization organization is the best way to ensure that our downtown will be successful for the long term.



4th & State
Streets
Then and Now



The Hamburg Area Arts Alliance: The Cultural Movement

The Alliance's Mission: To support and showcase local artists and to advance the awareness of arts in the community.

The Alliance's Vision: We envision a community that engages the arts, both visual and performing. There will be public art on display; street festivals and gatherings for artists, performers and the general public; galleries and other spaces for group and solo exhibitions and sales of artwork; and educational opportunities in the form of art classes and workshops, lectures and presentations. People of all ages and races will embrace the cultural and artistic movement transpiring in the area.

Formed in 2006, the Alliance's continued success can be contributed to its devoted artist members – a team of creative and imaginative people who share a common vision of a community rich with culture. The future of the Arts Alliance looks strong as dedicated volunteers and members continue to carry on its mission of supporting the arts movement in the community.

During 2023, the Alliance

- maintained regular business hours for the Art & Craft Gallery of Hamburg
- hosted seven featured artists receptions for the public
- developed a new hamburgarts.org website
- offered blacksmithing classes in partnership with David Fisher plus six other art classes and workshops
- participated in the Hawk Mountain Arts Tour
- planned and hosted the Annual Bingo, Beer, and BBQ event which raised \$14,582 to support the Alliance's arts programming
- participated in several downtown Wine Walks
- held its annual Silent Art Auction during the Taste of Hamburg-er Festival



Participants at a Sip and Paint class hosted by Becky Kunkleman

Taste of Hamburg-er Festival

The annual Taste of Hamburg-er Festival is Our Town Foundation's signature event. Held every year on Labor Day Saturday, the event attracts thousands of people to the downtown. Starting as a three-block festival in 2004, it now encompasses eight blocks, three parking lots, and the grass lot on State Street. It was named one of the top twelve unique festivals in PA and attracts people from all over the United States. This year we celebrated the festival's 20th Anniversary!

The festival supports a broad range of stakeholders within the community, while serving as a major fundraiser for Our Town Foundation. Downtown businesses report an increase in sales due to the volume of people that are strolling right outside their stores. Businesses located within the festival corridor have the opportunity to display their wares on the streets to entice people into their shops. It is reported that this annual event is now the best day of the year for those merchants. Numerous nonprofits and churches also participate, either by selling food or offering an activity providing an opportunity to raise money for their organization and to network within the community. Regional artists and crafters are encouraged to set up displays and sell their artwork. Benefiting the most, however, are the restaurants and caterers who sell a variety of burgers and side dishes to the festival attendees.

The Taste of Hamburg-er Festival's Facebook page boasts 11,047 followers, up from 10,200 at the end of 2022. This represents approximately an 8% increase in followers.

Special activities for the 20th Anniversary Celebration included

- The American Xcellence Wrestling group entertained the crowd with professional wrestling matches and other fun activities such as wrestling trivia.
- The inaugural "You Lucky Duck" Contest gave participants a chance to win up to \$500. The contest was sponsored by Joe Jurgielewicz, Lowes, and Deitsch Eck.
- Special edition 20th Anniversary merchandise was sold.
- The professional burger eating competition included two fan-favorite professional eaters and four wrestlers competing for the burger eating title. Dan "Killer" Kennedy, was crowned the winner for 2023. Kennedy ate 24 Red Robin burgers in ten minutes and set a new record!

Other festival highlights include

- 59 businesses sponsored the event including Kinley Automotive Group/Manderbach Ford, the event title sponsor.
- Approximately 30,000 attended the 2023 event
- 1,804 highest number of burgers sold at one stand
- 12,988 burgers *reported* sold
- 138 people volunteered
- 1,375 *recorded* volunteer hours
- 35 burger stands
- 78 artists/crafter stands
- 34 home-based business stands
- 39 miscellaneous literature/non-profit stands
- 33 miscellaneous food vendor stands
- 18 downtown participating businesses
- 10 activity stands
- 4 stages hosting 11 bands and 11 individual performing artists



The Hamburg Strand Theater

The Theater's Mission: to preserve an historic landmark in downtown Hamburg, providing ongoing movie theater entertainment and a facility where special events are welcomed and hosted for the public's enjoyment.

Our Town Foundation feels that Downtown Hamburg's main attraction should be owned and preserved, not by any individual or company, but by the people of the Hamburg community. With that in mind, Our Town Foundation purchased The Hamburg Strand Theater in 2013 in an effort to preserve and protect this complex as a major asset and attraction in the community. With the Foundation's continuing investment totaling over \$267,000 for improvements and renovations, both interior and exterior, the Strand is once again a thriving community hub.

A special thanks is due to the great management team of the theater (Bethany Sholl - Manager, Stephanie Adam – Coordinator, and Jake Sholl – Projection System Technician). Without the dedication of this team, the theater would not be as successful as it has been over the past ten years.

Highlights of 2023

- Screened 33 featured first run movies, 12 Faith Nights and 11 Classic Nights
- Sold a total of 16,861 tickets
- Rented out the theater and/or party room on 58 occasions
- Screened a holiday series of movies including two sold out shows of the popular *Polar Express* Pajama Party
- The 2nd Drama Club Showcase was held in partnership with the Hamburg Area School District
- Partnered with the Hamburg Area School District to hold a short play entitled *Bad Auditions with Bad Actors*
- Hosted the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*
- Hosted a *Mamma Mia* Sing-along with dancers from Dance Pointe Studio
- Screened *Hamburg 1939* – black and white clips of historic Hamburg



State Street Square Development Project

In 2015, Our Town Foundation purchased a one-acre vacant lot in downtown Hamburg with a goal of developing the property into an outdoor community hub – one where friends and families gather to enjoy outdoor events, live performances, and cultural activities. These events will create an engaging, vibrant community; thereby, increasing the economic vitality of the town. In addition to stimulating economic growth, the project will assist with neighborhood stability, beautify the area, and create a sense of place for the residents. Business owners will benefit by the increased pedestrian traffic flow in the area and by having an opportunity to partake in many of the events and activities, either through sponsorship of the event, participating as a vendor, having a display area promoting their business on site, or employee/business owner volunteer participation. Residents will have additional day and nighttime entertainment options and activities in an outdoor environment.

Pre-construction activities including the storm water management and the gravel parking lot were completed in 2022. Construction of the shell of the building began in the fall of 2023 and was completed by the end of the year. The next phase of the project will be building a handicap accessible stage, funded in part by a \$40,000 T-Mobile Hometown Grant received in June of 2023. If funding allows, the Foundation will construct a kitchen area with two access windows for serving food and public restrooms.

In 2023, the Foundation initiated the State Street Square Capital Campaign to assist in funding the project. At the end of the year the capital campaign received close to \$30,000 in donations. Fundraising will continue until the project is complete.



Community Marketing: It's All About Image

Community marketing is not all about promoting the businesses – it also needs to promote the Foundation. We are aware that after many years of existence, there are still some people in the community that are not aware of everything the organization does and the benefits of supporting it.

There are several types of marketing that must be done for the town to be successful:

1. Market to the local residents – it must educate the locals on what Hamburg has to offer and on the importance of supporting their local economy.
2. Market to tourists – it must determine who the potential shoppers are, what they are looking for, who the competition is, and then promote assets to these visitors.
3. Market to business entrepreneurs – it must identify targeted businesses and persuade them to establish a business or expand in the Hamburg area.

The following outlines Our Town Foundation's 2023 marketing strategies for promoting Hamburg and highlighting its attractions and resources to residents and visitors.

The **Hamburgpa.org website** is one stop shop for all local Hamburg businesses and attractions, serving as an online directory of local resources. The site is maintained and updated by the Our Town Foundation staff.

E-mail "Hamburg Happenings" newsletters These attractive email blasts have allowed us to get information to its members and other subscribers faster! In 2023, a total of 31 newsletters were sent to 2,816 "Hamburg Happenings" subscribers. The newsletters included information on major Hamburg events and promotions.

Commerce Quarterly write ups are submitted quarterly to the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance. Each edition of this magazine features Berks County's four Main Streets. The magazine is distributed to Chamber members and throughout the county.

Our Town News Newsletter is an in-house multiple page newsletter that announces Our Town Foundation news including upcoming events, new initiatives, grant funding, etc. It is mailed to all Our Town Foundation members, distributed to downtown businesses, and available to download from the web. The newsletter is done entirely in-house by the staff and is distributed four times per year.

Online Calendars are another way to reach audiences within certain interest groups or a geographic region. Our Town Foundation uploads its events and other main Hamburg events to numerous online event calendars.

Social Media has been in full swing over the past year! Our Town Foundation officially manages several Facebook pages including Hamburg PA, Taste of Hamburg-er Festival, The Hamburg Strand Theater, and the Hamburg Area Arts Alliance. "Hamburg, PA" is OTF's primary Facebook page. 394 posts were made in 2023 to 2,902 followers. The Strand Theater has 8,055 followers and 454 posts were created. The Arts Alliance page has 870 followers and 425 posts were made. The Taste of Hamburger Festival has the highest number of followers at 11,047!



Find us on
Facebook



Brochures are a key way the Foundation connects with visitors to the area. Brochure distribution is performed by staff and volunteers to hit a wide range of locations including to the PA Welcome Centers for distribution along major highways. We also maintain brochure kiosks at Cabela's and the OTF office. A grant was received from the Natural Land Trust in 2023 to reprint the Historic Hamburg Visitor's Guide which will be completed in 2024.

Press releases and media alerts are sent to print, online, and radio media sources, so they can post the information on their website, write an article in their publication, announce it on the radio, or be present at one of OTF's upcoming events.

Advertising in local and regional publications is done throughout the year. In 2023 the Foundation paid for several ads promoting the town including ads in the PA Americana (Berks County Visitor's Bureau) Travel Guide, the *Reading Eagle*, and *Berks County Living Magazine*.

2023 Promotions and Events organized by OTF

The Hamburg Community Clean-up returned with 50 volunteers collecting 28 bags of trash and 6 bags of recyclables.

The Hawk Mountain Arts Tour and Sale – The Hamburg Area Arts Alliance set up a satellite location to this popular event at the Etchberger Community Park. Seven artists set up their displays along the scenic Schuylkill River to sell their artwork

Bingo, Beer and BBQ was organized by members of the Hamburg Area Arts Alliance. Approximately 325 people attended and over \$14,000 was raised to support the arts.

The Annual Garden Tour, organized by Kay Greenawalt and members of the Native Wildlife Habitat Committee, featured gardens of several residents in the Hamburg area. Participants picked up their information packet with a list of tour stops at the Art & Craft Gallery of Hamburg, prompting tour-goers to visit local businesses as they made their way to tour stops.

The Taste of Hamburg-er Festival was held on September 2nd. There was a good turnout with approximately 30,000 people in attendance. Several downtown businesses report that they have their best sales day of the year during this annual event. The festival also supports numerous non-profits, local restaurants and food truck owners, and artists.

Shop Small Saturday is a nationwide promotional event held the Saturday after Thanksgiving. This year, 22 small businesses in downtown Hamburg participated bringing shoppers into town. Shoppers were given a "passport" to get stamped at participating establishments. Once the passport was completed, they were eligible to be entered into a raffle to win one of two gift baskets with merchandise and gift cards valued at over \$250 each.

Holiday promotions were organized to assist local businesses with advertising any specials or promotions they may have had planned for the holidays (Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, and Easter). The Foundation designed a flyer for each holiday listing the participating businesses and what they were offering. Marketing was done through social media, print media, and local distribution of flyers.



Lynn Weller presents Maura M. from Hamburg with her prize. She was one of two winners of the 2023 Shop Small Saturday. give-a-way

Networking Mixers and Ribbon Cuttings were held at six businesses in 2023: The Warehouse of Hamburg, Burkey & Driscoll Home Furnishings, Interlace Communications, The Vibe Connect and Thrive, Lucky Leprechaun Winery, and Three Strands Community Center.

Seven **Featured artist receptions** were held in the Gallery.

Ten **art classes and workshops** were offered to the public.



Ribbon Cutting at The Warehouse of Hamburg

Activities at the Strand – Screened 33 first run, 12 Faith Night, 11 Classic night, and 7 special event movies

Hamburg Night at the Phillies was a fun time for all that attended. Hamburg Area Arts Alliance was one of the sponsors of the ballgame.

America 250 PA-Berks Committee – The Foundation’s Director participates in this committee to plan, encourage, develop and coordinate the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the United States and Berks County’s integral role in that event. A website is currently underway and you can see updates at <https://www.america250paberks.com>

Community Garden - The organization continues to manage a community garden located in Apple Alley. The garden was originally created in 2018 on a plot of land owned by Vreeland and Linda Wood. Ten garden boxes were available to rent during the first growing season of 2019. By 2022 the garden had grown to 15 beds, and they are rented for a small fee of \$30 each.



Community garden boxes located within the Hamburg Southgate Neighborhood corridor

Grants received in 2023

- \$40,000 Hometown Grant from T-Mobile
- \$3,380 Mini-Grant from the Natural Lands Trust Inc.
- \$500 from State Farm Insurance Neighborhood Grant program in support of the Native Wildlife Habitat Program

Our Town Foundation 2023 Volunteer of the Year

Jacob “Jake” Sholl



Jacob (Jake) Sholl became involved with Our Town Foundation in 2015 when his wife, Bethany, was hired as the Hamburg Strand Theater Manager.

Jake is the theater’s volunteer Projection System Technician and spends anywhere from two to five hours per week at the facility. He does all things with the projector such as downloading the weekly movies from the film companies, updating the projector's programs, trouble-shooting technical issues with the projector and server, communicating with the movie suppliers, and performing regular maintenance. He offered many hours of technical support during the installation of the theater’s digital satellite system enabling the theater to receive the weekly movies via satellite, rather than relying on hard drives from the film company.

In addition to operating the projection system, Jake pitches in anytime or anywhere help is needed including working the ticket counter or concession stand during weekly movies, special screenings, or other activities held in the theater. He also runs for concessions if necessary.

Jake also volunteers for the Bridge Church and as a coach for the Orwigsburg Area Girls Softball Association. He is very family oriented and enjoys taking his children to sporting events, especially the Phillies! Jake has great pride in his hometown theater and loves being able to spend time with his family there.

Special thanks to ALL of the volunteers who donated 2828 hours of their time in 2023. Their volunteer hours equal \$80,727 in labor costs, as per government statistics on the value of volunteers. Please note, these are only the hours that have been recorded by the volunteers and there are many more that volunteers fail to report

WAYS IN WHICH YOU CAN SUPPORT YOUR COMMUNITY

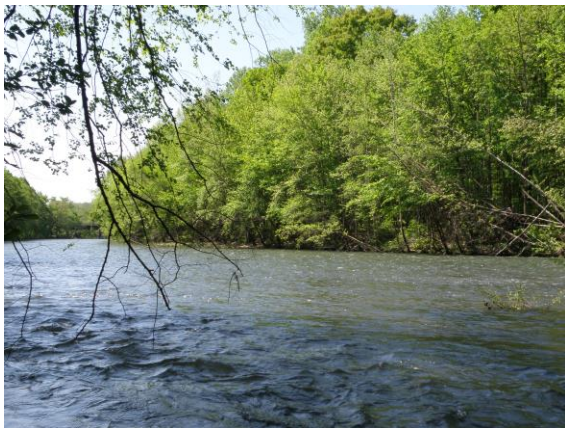
- **Shop locally**
- **Volunteer for events and other activities**
- **Serve on a committee**
- **Support the program financially**
- **Make suggestions for improvements**
- **Inform borough representatives and neighboring representatives of the importance of their continued support**
- **Share your knowledge of the program with others**

Your energy, funding, and commitment will help leave a vibrant and tangible legacy for our community and all who pass through it for generations to come.

For questions in regards to this report, or to discuss any revitalization issues please contact:

**Our Town Foundation Office
320 State Street
Hamburg, PA 19526
610-562-3106
otfmanager@aol.com**

Additional information on the community can be found on the web at www.hamburgpa.org



Natural recreational opportunities abound in the area.