

Small town values at play in Mount Wolf

By DAVID FLESHLER
Daily Record staff

It's baseball night in Mount Wolf. Twelve-year-old boys chase foul balls, turning them in at the snack bar for 50 cents each.

On a folding chair behind left field sits former Mayor Henry Mohr, listening to the Baltimore Orioles game on a radio on his lap. He doesn't normally take in two games at once, he explains, but he wanted to check out the Orioles' new pitcher.

On the field, the hometown Wolves are on their way to beating Jefferson, hoping to take their 10th straight Central League championship.



In the grandstand, Marty Hodges passes out pledge sheets for the Make-a-Wish Foundation, using a unique collection method: Fans pledge a certain amount of money for each single, double, triple or home run by their favorite player, paying up at the end of the season. Last year, they sent a local girl with leukemia to Disney World.

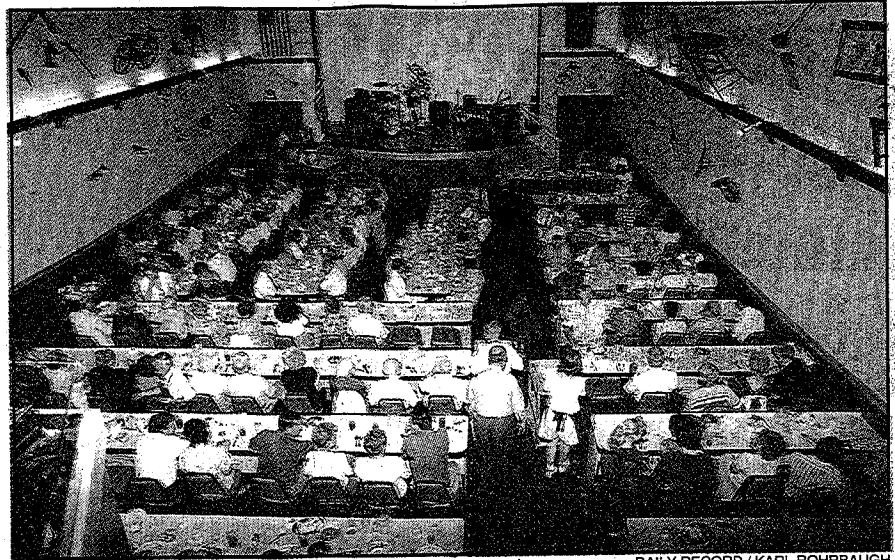
When Wolves star Keith Wentz hits a home run, Hodges observes, "That's worth about \$40 to Make-a-Wish right there."

The Mount Wolf team is one of the local institutions that remain in a town that has changed from self-contained small town to bedroom community of York.

Since the end of World War II, the bank, the grocery stores and other businesses closed or moved out of town, leaving Mount Wolf without a real business district. The old Knights of the Golden Eagle hall, which had housed a general store and a dancing school, stands vacant. Children attend junior high school outside the borough, which now falls within the Northeastern School District.

But the team attracts a legion of intense fans. The post office still doesn't deliver mail, forcing residents to claim their letters in person. Family-owned businesses such as Naylor Candies Inc. and The Original Barton's Bakery are thriving and being passed on to the next generation.

"I think the thing about Mount Wolf, what made it so unique, was that it was a classic small town, and it was a very successful small town,"



DAILY RECORD / KARL ROHRBAUGH

People go to see the Nashville Gospel Brass and Nottingham Four Quartet's performance at the Mount Wolf Gospel Theatre in town.

ABOUT MOUNT WOLF

Founded: mid-19th century
Incorporated: 1910
Population: 1,365
Features: Naylor Candies Inc., 289 Chestnut St., The Original Barton's Bakery, 541 E. Maple St., Mount Wolf Gospel Theatre, 98 S. Sixth St.

said Bill Zimmerman, a partner in The Wolf Organization, the company that descended from Adam Wolf's original store.

"Many of the people of Mount Wolf lived the classic small town life, where they walked to work, walked to school, walked to church and walked to ball games. To an extent, it's just

not like that anymore. It's still a small town, but it has more of the trappings of a bedroom community."

While the number of children has probably declined from its post-World War II peak, residents say the town remains an ideal place for families.

"It's still a small community where it's safe to walk the streets," said Mary Toomey, who has taught classical piano from her home for nearly 50 years. "It's still a great place to raise children."

Toomey serves afternoon tea twice a week, offering sandwiches of watercress, cucumber and egg salad to her husband and occasional guests. Every couple of years or so, she and her friends hold a May Day. Fifty or 60 people gather for sandwiches and coffee, make May baskets, and get to talk to people outside their immediate circle of friends.

"I think there is a civility you get with afternoon tea," she said. "I think some of the things we try to carry on are important."

Despite its name, Mount Wolf sits in a valley. It was a mountain only to the railroad engineers who had to drive their locomotives up a steep grade to reach the town's station.

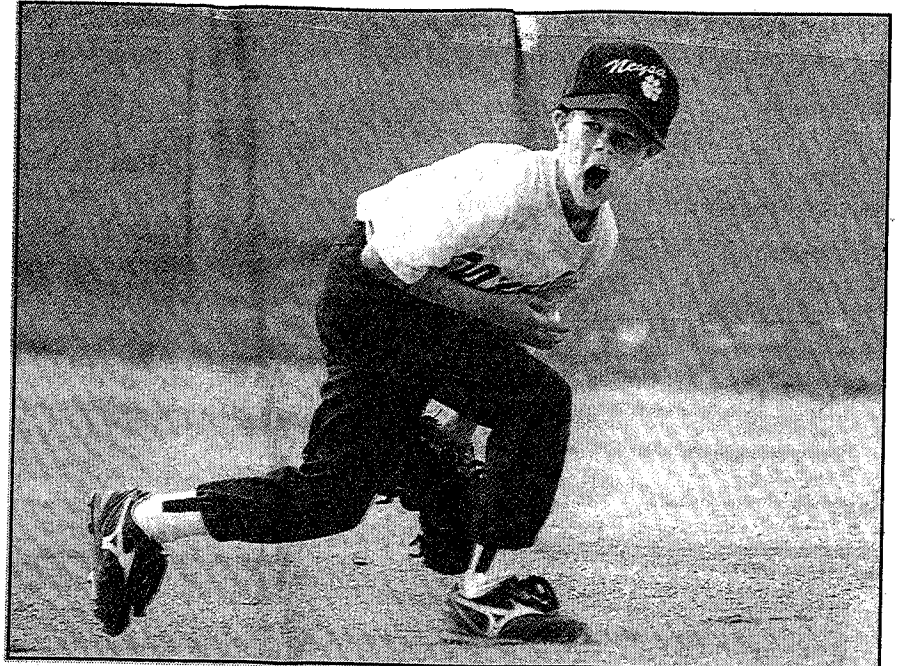
Shortly after the line was built in 1852, Adam Wolf of New Holland saw the need for a store and warehouse next to it. The town took his

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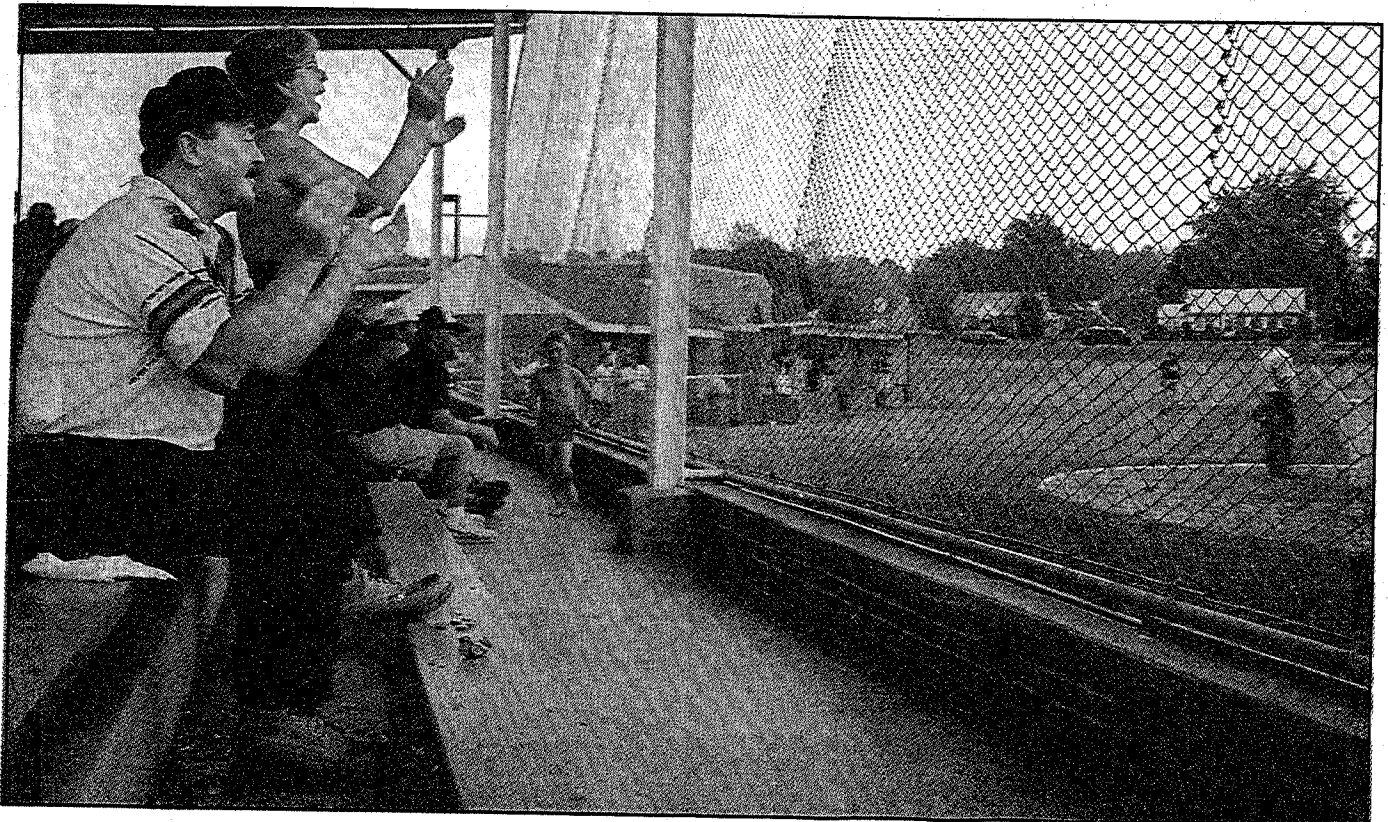
SUBMITTED

The Mount Wolf Wolves baseball team in about 1920 included: 'Earel, Geo., and Chas. B. Wolf, Totie Bare, Henry Hoff, Allen Melhorn, Alfred Malehorn, and Wilbur Eisenhower.



DAILY RECORD / ALLISON CORBETT

Brandon Gaskill, 8, runs for a grounder while his Mount Wolf Little League team, called the 'Neysa Orioles,' warms up for its game.



DAILY RECORD / ALLISON CORBETT

John Kellett, left, and Deb Shaffer, both of Mount Wolf, cheer on the Mount Wolf Wolves during the last inning Tuesday night.

Wolf

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name and his store grew into one of York County's biggest businesses, a chain of lumber yards with annual sales of \$200 million.

A good source of information on the town's past is Bradley Rentzel's well-written "History of Mount Wolf," commissioned 20 years ago by the borough council.

Mount Wolf wrote a page in York County's less-than-glorious Civil War history, right around the time the city of York surrendered without a fight to Confederate Maj. Gen. Jubal Early.

A battalion of Early's troops went north to burn the railroad bridge across the Conewago Creek, according to Rentzel. Although about 400 Union troops were camped nearby, they fled before Early's soldiers.

The Confederates went to the Wolfs' store by the railway and took shoes, boots, hats and other items, "paying" for the goods with Confederate money.

"It's an outstanding account receivable as far as we're concerned," deadpanned Tom Wolf, president of The Wolf Organization, seated in the conference room of his downtown York headquarters. "Our credit department continues to monitor it."

If anyone had a chance to leave Mount Wolf for the larger world it was Tom Wolf. Great-great-great grandson of Adam Wolf, he

holds a doctorate in political science from MIT, has studied in England and France and served in the Peace Corps. But Wolf decided against an academic career, coming home to work his way up in the family lumber business, starting as a forklift operator (although, presumably, with an inside track to the top).

In 1985, Wolf and two partners bought the business, which has grown at a steady clip since then.

"It's not a picturesque town," Wolf acknowledged. "It's not like a town in New England, or Marietta. But people come back. A lot of people have great affection for it."

Wolf became one of the county's few business leaders to back the Democratic Party, a departure from Mount Wolf's prevailing politics.

The town votes Republican. It stuck with Herbert Hoover in 1932, when most York County voters abandoned him for Franklin Roosevelt. Today, Republicans outnumber Democrats 345 to 274.

Wolf lives with his family in a wood frame house built by his great-great grandfather — although in a sign of the times, he commutes to his company's headquarters in downtown York.

Four branches of the Wolf family still live on "Mansion Hill," the rise that supports 10 houses that range from comfortable ranch houses to elaborately designed, pillared dwellings.

The Wolfs preferred to call it "Rabbit Hill" because of the 14 Wolf children that lived there during the 1950s and '60s.

The town has aged since then, when the baby boom generation was scurrying up tree houses, sledding down Mansion Hill and enjoying a reciprocal open-door and free-lunch policy among the town's families.

"There was a freedom to be kids," Tom Wolf recalled. "You had the run of the town. You'd get on your bicycle and go."

Among Mount Wolf's major exports is cholesterol, churned out in various forms at Naylor Candies Inc. and The Original Barton's Bakery.

Naylor is a company that's easy to miss, since from the outside it looks like an ordinary suburban house.

The house, with an addition in back, contains a 10-employee company that supplies the entire Cracker Barrel restaurant chain with butter mints, butter toasted peanuts and cashew crunch.

"All natural," said president Denny Naylor, as an employee stirred butter into a revolving pan of sugared peanuts. "No extra things added. No words you can't pronounce."

They make the candy in small batches, allowing employees to get the vat of peanuts or cashews just right before moving on to the next step.

"We have been fortunate to have good local help," said Charles Naylor, Denny's father, who founded the company with used equipment from Chicago. "Most within a five-minute drive or a five-minute walk from here."

Started as a pie-baking service in a garage, Barton's has grown to a 14-employee operation with branches in Manchester, Central Market and Eastern Market.

The family sold it to Rutter's but bought it back in 1989, adding the word "Original" to the name. It's a family business again, and appears likely to stay that way, said co-owner Pat Prowell.

"Our son and his wife are in the business with us," she said. "That's their plan, and I'd like to see that happen."

Pick up a map of York County, and you'll see what appears to be a single town, labeled Manchester Mount Wolf.

The towns grew together over the years, merging on the map if not in their borough halls. Although they are now separated only by a railroad track, the towns employ separate road crews. They support fire stations that stand about half a mile apart.

The towns have been rivals for more than a century, although relations have improved since their low point around 1870. That was the year a leader of Manchester's United Brethren Church accused the church's Mount Wolf mem-

bers of being agents of the devil, according to Rentzel's history. Able to take a hint, the Mount Wolf group withdrew from the congregation and founded their town's first church.

Since then, the rivalry has cooled, showing up mainly in baseball games. Mount Wolf Mayor Jim Kinder is a Manchester native, although, as he points out, he married a Mount Wolf girl.

For decades, they've talked of merging. In 1969, leaders in both towns put the proposal on the table.

One sticking point: the name. They held a contest, with a \$50 savings bond for the winning entry. People came up with variations on the towns' names: Mount Manchester, Wolfchester — even Wolf Man. They offered names like Gemini, Twinville, New Union, Hillsboro, Near York.

In the end, the two borough councils went with Northeastern Heights, a bland name that won few friends.

"I didn't like it at all," said Katherine Zimmerman, a member of the Wolf family. "It was too long, and it sounded like a nursing home."

Either way, it didn't matter. Voters in both boroughs squashed the proposal, with the Mount Wolf vote running 431-99 against.

Today, local officials still tread carefully around the merger issue.

Asked whether he would support a merger, Council President Ron Walker said, "I would certainly not answer that question in a straightforward manner."

Mount Wolf's baseball fans are proud of a team that won a stunning nine league championships in a row. But they worry that the players are aging. And they're still shaking their heads over the departure of the team's pitcher for the York Yankees.

A plaque on the grandstand memorializes longtime Wolves manager Larry "Rock" Brenner, who died of a heart attack in 1994, just before the Wolves clinched their eighth-straight Central League title.

They held his funeral at the baseball diamond, placing his casket in the third base coaching box and surrounding it with trophies, photographs and newspaper clippings.

"Some people thought it was absolutely ridiculous," Marty Hodges said. "But it was absolutely the right place to do it."

Although admission is free, fans pass a hat every game. Support from fans and players have given the team lavish facilities — high-quality dirt, pop-up sprinklers and a nice grandstand.

"It's a great community," player Keith Wentz said. "These people live and die baseball. It's a long off-season for a lot of people."