

What's so special about Mount Wolf?

Gov.-elect Tom Wolf draws attention to small borough

Updated: Jan. 16, 2015, 1:15 p.m. | Published: Jan. 16, 2015, 12:15 p.m.

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If the mayor of Mount Wolf wants to know the news of the day or what's happening in the small borough, she goes to the local post office. "It's like a social hour when you go there to pick up the mail," said Mayor Maureen Starner. With a little more than 1,300 people living in the borough, which stretches less than a square mile, the town doesn't warrant at-home mail delivery. "It's a pain when you order something online that can't be shipped to a P.O. box, but it's nice to have that community center," she said.

The small town with the little post office has been getting a large amount of attention lately. It doesn't have a traffic light or coffee shop or retail center – and isn't listed as a must-see destination in York County – but it has something no other Pennsylvania community can claim: the governor. His neighbors couldn't be happier or prouder and jump at the opportunity to talk about their small town and its most popular native son. "Residents are just ecstatic. They're so proud someone from our little town made it to the big time in politics," Starner said.

Mount Wolf is eight streets long and mostly surrounded by farmland. It's home to Democrats and Republicans alike, and many of them supported their Democratic candidate for governor regardless of their own political affiliation.

The governor-elect lost his home county, but he won his hometown. Soon there will be banners throughout the borough announcing it as "the governor's hometown." It's not so much a Tom Wolf thing as it is a Mount Wolf thing. "There's a strong sense of camaraderie here. People care about each other. We check on our neighbors," Starner said.

To say the Wolf family has strong ties in the community is an understatement. The borough is named for the governor-elect's ancestors and is also still home to his parents and sister. "They've done a tremendous amount for this community," the mayor said.

Wolf and his wife, Frances Wolf, have a long history of philanthropy throughout many York County organizations, but Starner assured the family's goodwill starts in its own backyard. They've supported the local baseball team, park, school, and entire Mount Wolf area. People really hold them in high regard," she said. Mount Wolf is a "very caring community," and that's what makes it so special, she said. The people there don't just rally behind the wealthy businessman who's been elected to lead the state. They'd do it for anyone, the mayor said.

A few years ago, they helped Cpl. Matthew Hanes, a neighbor in East Manchester Township, who was wounded in Afghanistan. A Northeastern High School graduate,

Hanes was shot in the shoulder while on a mission in Kandahar. The shot shattered two vertebrae and left him paralyzed from the chest down. "The community took him and his family under their wing and helped with money, time and effort. It was heartwarming. This area helps its own," Starner said.

But benevolence isn't much of a tourist attraction. The mayor is concern visitors could be disappointed if they come looking for something big in the governor's hometown.

"We don't have that big thing to see or do. If they want to check us out, it won't take them long. We're kind of like Mayberry here. We're just a small, nice, all-American town," Starner said, referencing the fictional community in "The Andy Griffith Show." The mayor has enjoyed her slice of Americana in Mount Wolf for 15 years and still considers herself a newcomer. "Most people have lived here for 30, 40, 50 years," Starner said.

For borough resident Mary Toomey, the count is 85 years. Like the governor-elect, she still lives in the house where she was born. The lively musician and retired teacher quickly rattled off a list of reasons she loves Mount Wolf. "First of all, it's that quintessential small town. It's unique, safe, and secure for our children. Since it's only eight streets, there's that contained community feeling. We believe in helping the other when one is in need. We're very proud of our two parks. The land around our little community is not made into a lot of development so we enjoy seeing the cattle graze and wildlife and learning about nature," said Toomey, who added that she is not related to U.S. Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Pa., nor does she agree with his politics. Despite the governor's fame, she's hoping the life in the borough will stay the same. "We just don't think of it as ever changing. It's so funny to think we're really on the map now," Toomey said.

The borough was also home to John Brenner, who served as York mayor from 2001 to 2009, but Mount Wolf didn't get much attention then, residents said.

"This doesn't happen very often," said borough resident Jim Kinder, who was the mayor of Mount Wolf from 1986 to 2010. The governor-elect has generated some interest in his hometown, and residents love visitors, "but I don't think he'll be here all that often," Kinder said. "He may live here, but his schedule will be so hectic I'm sure he will be all over the state," he said.

Kinder grew up in nearby Manchester and moved to Mount Wolf in 1970. He's found it to be a "very cozy bedroom community. It's very homey. Everybody knows everybody." People might be surprised to know that the town with eight streets has three churches, Kinder said. "We also have a volunteer fire company that continues to grow every year," he said. There's also a large park and ballpark, Rock Brenner Memorial Field, which hosts an antique car show and festival every summer.

And he agreed the local post office is a community hub. "Everybody gathers there. We kid each other that we're gone no less than a half hour or 45 minutes when we go to the post office, which is just a half block away," Kinder said. "It's that kind of town. It's a good town to be in."