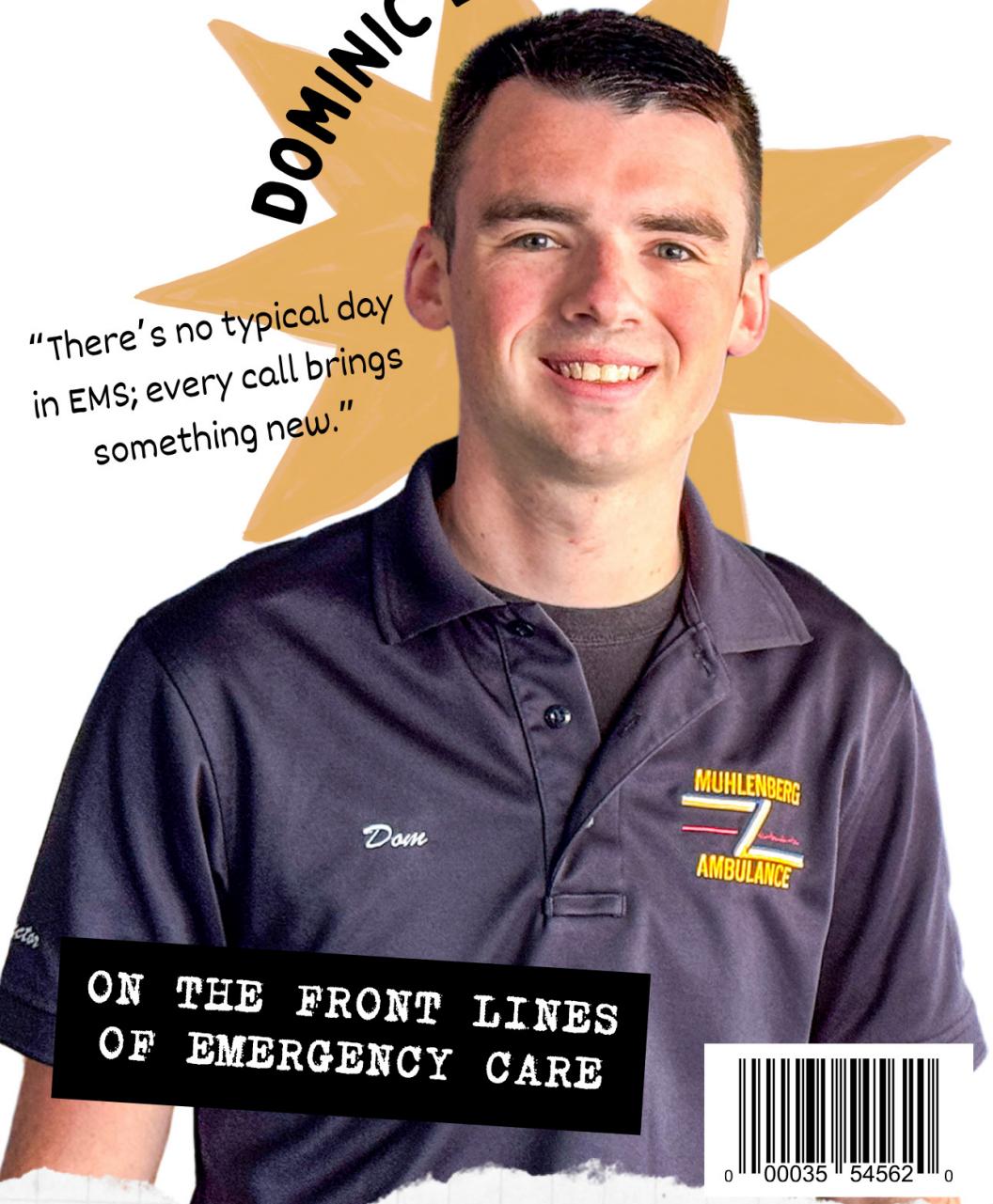


BERKS WEEKLY

VOL. 1 NO. 1

DOMINIC LOMBARDO

"There's no typical day
in EMS; every call brings
something new."



ON THE FRONT LINES
OF EMERGENCY CARE



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Editor's Note

For six years, Berks Weekly has told the stories of Berks County. Now, with this new Print Edition, we're bringing you a collectible snapshot of the best stories and community features. In this issue, you'll meet a dedicated teacher, a paramedic on the front lines, a local history enthusiast, a BARTA bus operator, and more. It's a celebration of the people and places that make Berks County unique. Thank you for supporting local journalism — and for keeping these stories alive, both online and now in print. — *Jason Hugg, Editor*

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Berks County's Distelfink statue gets refreshed with new paint, garden enhancements



Photo courtesy of Jessica Chernich, Berks County Historic Resource Supervisor

The Berks County Parks & Recreation Department's Distelfink statue at the Berks County Heritage Center recently got a 'glow up' and is now ready to charm visitors and be 'Instagrammed' for many years to come!

One of the most identifiable symbols of Berks County and Pennsylvania Dutch heritage, the Distelfink was gifted to the county in 1985 from the Berks County Arts Council and sculpted by Ramon Lagos.

Originally painted by Ruthanne Hartung, Stanley Seitz, and Johnny Claypoole, the statue was repainted in 2006 by Shannon Haig and Eric Claypoole and by Claypoole again in 2016.

During the most recent restoration in May, the historic bird was cleaned and primed before a complete repainting, base refurbishment, and garden installation.

The Parks Department is thankful for the community partners who contributed to the project. Their expertise and talents are now on display for years to come.

Painters (2025) – Eric Claypoole, Patrick Donmoyer and Andrew Shirk applied bright, fresh colors. Mason – Dane Clay refurbished the concrete base. Gardeners – Penn State Extension Master Gardeners under the direction of Gail Less and Linda Buerger designed, planted, and will maintain the dye garden at the statue's base. The project was made possible with funding from the Pennsylvania's Americana Region.

And now, the Distelfink is ready for its next close-up! Visit it any day at the Berks County Heritage Center, 1102 Red Bridge Road, Reading, PA, 19605.

To learn more about programming in the Berks County Parks, visit: www.berkspa.gov/parks or Facebook @BerksCountyParks.

Dominic Lombardo: On the front lines of emergency care

FIRST RESPONDERS



At just 24 years old, Dominic Lombardo has already spent nearly a decade in emergency medical services. As a paramedic and clinical coordinator at Muhlenberg Area Ambulance Association, Lombardo not only responds to life-threatening emergencies across northern Berks County—he also trains the next generation of first responders.

"I provide advanced life support care to sick and injured people who call for our help," he said. "And as clinical coordinator, I help run our training center. We teach CPR, EMT classes, and emergency responder courses. It's a mix of being out in the field and helping others start their journey."

Lombardo's own journey began at 16, when a ride-along with an ambulance crew sparked an unexpected passion. He originally envisioned joining the military after college, but the experience changed his path. He quickly earned his EMT certification and, by 19, had become a licensed paramedic.

"I thought EMT would just get me through college," he recalled. "But I ended up loving the work and wanted to keep going. It became more than a stepping stone—it became my career."

Though relatively young, Lombardo has already experienced some of the profession's unique challenges. One of the biggest early on, he said, was earning the

trust of both patients and colleagues. "Being young, I had to work harder for people to respect me," he explained. "There were times I'd walk into a home, and someone would ask, 'Are you even old enough to take care of me?' You learn quickly to prove yourself through your work."

That work includes long shifts—typically 18 hours at a time—rotating with two days off. Lombardo's days start before dawn and often include a mix of emergency calls, equipment checks, station duties, and training responsibilities. On quieter days, the team cooks meals together and unwinds like a family. But the pace can change in an instant.

"There's no such thing as a typical day in EMS," he said. "Some days we're out the door at 6 a.m. and stay busy until midnight. Other days, it's quiet until the evening. You always have to be ready."

As an instructor, Lombardo plays a crucial role in helping new EMT students get the experience they need to graduate. He oversees clinical ride-alongs, schedules training placements, and ensures students gain enough patient interactions before completing their certification.

Outside of work, he's a seafood enthusiast and an occasional golfer—though free time can be scarce. "We work a lot," he said with a laugh, "but I try to spend time with family and close friends when I can."

Lombardo's message to the public is simple: EMS is more than just a ride to

the hospital. It's often the beginning of a patient's care.

"When we show up, we can do EKGs, give medications, start IVs—right there in your driveway" he said. "Sometimes we're sitting still for a reason. We're doing vitals, talking to the patient, stabilizing them. That's part of the job."

He encourages community members to engage with EMS crews at township events like Spring Fiesta and RiverFest at Jim Dietrich Park—not just during emergencies.

"Come say hi. We're there to keep people safe, but we also want to build relationships," he said. "We want to be seen as part of the community—not just someone you see on your worst day."

For those curious about a career in EMS, Lombardo's advice is clear: do a ride-along.

"If you even think this might be for you, reach out to your local ambulance. We do ride-alongs all the time. No experience needed—just a desire to help people."

Muhlenberg Area Ambulance Association offers multiple ways to support its mission, including annual memberships that help fund operations and training initiatives. Community members can also reach out to request educational tours or inquire about volunteering.

For more information about training opportunities or ride-alongs, contact the training center at training@muhlems.org or call (610) 929-5774.

Lynne Angstadt: Building futures beyond the classroom

IN THE CLASSROOM

For nearly two decades, Lynne Angstadt has been a vital force at Conrad Weiser High School, where her passion for both business and education has left a lasting mark on countless students. Originally an accountant, Angstadt's journey took a transformative turn when she discovered her love for teaching, setting the stage for her long-standing career. Now, as the Internship Coordinator at the school, she has built an innovative program that provides students with hands-on career experience, a mission that is both personal and powerful for her.

"I loved accounting, but I like people," Angstadt shares with a smile, explaining how she transitioned from her early days in finance to her life's work in education. When she began teaching business classes at Conrad Weiser, she quickly realized the impact she could have by engaging students with real-world skills. That realization led to the creation of the internship program in 2017. Initially, the program started with just four students, but thanks to her tireless dedication and vision, it now serves around 60 students annually.

The internship program offers students a window into the professional world, allowing them to connect classroom learning with practical experience. Students have interned at a variety of businesses, from hospitals to architecture firms, gaining exposure to careers that they may one day pursue. For Angstadt, the most fulfilling part of her role is watching the students evolve. "I love working with the adults and the kids in this program. It's been really fun to see the connections and successes that

both the mentors and the students are getting out of it," she says.

Angstadt's commitment goes beyond pairing students with local businesses—she ensures that these internships are truly meaningful. For example, she speaks fondly of a retired physician, Dr. Becker, who continues to mentor students at Phoebe Berks. "He comes back every semester, working with students one-on-one, offering not just professional guidance but also a deep well of knowledge and life lessons," she explains.

Her focus on community ties is not just limited to individual success stories. Angstadt views the internship program as a way to strengthen bonds between the school and the surrounding community. Whether it's helping students find opportunities at Reading Hospital or working with future teachers in local elementary and middle schools, Angstadt's program highlights the power of collaboration.

"The connections can grow into so many other opportunities," she says, referencing how the program has fostered a sense of community and even brought some students back to Conrad Weiser as educators themselves. As impactful as the program is, it's not without its challenges. Angstadt notes that certain fields, like criminal justice and counseling, are difficult to access due to confidentiality and licensing restrictions. Yet, she remains undeterred, finding creative solutions to give students relevant experience. "We've had students interested in therapy, so

we find alternatives, like working with children, to give them a glimpse into the field," she explains.

Angstadt has also designed the program to prepare students for life beyond high school. From refining resumes to practicing interview skills, she makes sure her students leave with the tools they need to succeed in both college and the workforce. Additionally, she encourages students to leverage professional networks like LinkedIn, which has proven to be a game-changer for many. Watching a former intern build a robust professional presence after interning with an architecture firm is just one of many rewarding moments for Angstadt.

The feedback from parents and students alike has been overwhelmingly positive. Angstadt mentions how parents appreciate the opportunity for their children to step outside the traditional classroom setting and gain real-world experience. "A mother told me recently that her daughter couldn't wait to intern at the hospital," she recalls. "It's become something that all the students look forward to during their junior and senior years."

Her ultimate goal is to help students better understand the careers they want to pursue, and more importantly, to ensure they are equipped for life after graduation. "I'd love to see them get a better handle on what career they'd like to enter and figure it out before they put a lot of money into an education," she emphasizes. Angstadt sees her work as a way to ease the transition into adulthood, offering students not only a career advantage but also a strong network to lean on throughout their lives.

While her dedication to her students and the internship program is undeniable, Angstadt also values her time outside of work. Whether jogging with a long-



time friend, supporting the Philadelphia Phillies and Eagles, or testing new soup recipes at local restaurants, she enjoys the small joys of life. Family is central to her, and she looks forward to spending more time with her husband and daughters as she nears retirement.

Looking ahead, Angstadt hopes to continue making an impact, even after she steps away from her full-time role. "I still want to stay involved in some way with kids. I haven't decided exactly how, but I'll find a way because I want to give back and work in the community," she says.

Lynne Angstadt has built more than just an internship program at Conrad Weiser High School—she has created a legacy of connection, learning, and community engagement that will benefit students for years to come. Her innovative approach to education has inspired students, colleagues, and the broader community, leaving an indelible mark on the lives of all those she touches.

In Angstadt's words, "It's such a rewarding position, and in the end, seeing the kids beaming when they come back makes it all worth it." As she moves toward the next chapter of her life, her impact will surely continue to ripple through the community, one student at a time.

For four decades, Pennsylvania State Police Troop L's Camp Cadet program has been offering local youth a unique summer experience that blends discipline, teamwork, and law enforcement education. This year's camp — marking the 40th anniversary since Troop L launched its first program in 1985 — hosted 90 cadets for a week packed with activities modeled after a "mini police academy."

Held annually for youth ages 12 to 15, Camp Cadet's mission is summed up in its motto: "Grow through discipline, achievement through teamwork, and pride through respect." Trooper Ethan Brownback, Troop L's Public Information Officer and Camp Director, said this year's group stood out for their perseverance and commitment.

"This particular class has certainly evolved as one of our outstanding classes," Brownback said. "I'm very, very proud of these cadets — what they've accomplished, pushing themselves past pain, further than they've ever thought they could go."

Throughout the week, cadets participated in a range of demonstrations and training exercises, many of which offered rare, up-close access to law enforcement operations. The schedule included visits from the Secret Service, FBI, and local SWAT teams, where cadets got to handle specialized gear, witness flash bang and smoke bomb demonstrations, and fire a .22 caliber rifle — for many, their first time handling a firearm.

Other activities included horseback riding, scuba diving, and even a parachute landing demonstration. Brownback said these experiences are consistent with the camp's long-standing tradition of exposing participants to a variety of public safety careers.

On Friday, just one day before graduation,



FEATURE STORY

Troop L Camp Cadet celebrates 40 years with hands-on law enforcement experiences



cadets took part in a fire investigation program led by Trooper Corey Heimbach, Troop L's Fire Marshal. The training began with a live burn of a mock room inside a shipping container, which allowed cadets to observe fire behavior, examine burn patterns, and learn how investigators determine the origin and cause of a fire.

"In the container, we built a little mock room, burned it, and then had the fire department put it out," Heimbach explained. "We then showed them the fire patterns and evidence left behind. It's about exposing them to what we do as fire investigators."

The session also included a display of burned artifacts — from toy cars to cell phones — used to teach cadets how investigators identify objects in fire debris and determine whether they may have played a role in the fire's cause.

Camp Cadet operates as a nonprofit organization and relies heavily on community donations to cover its annual operating expenses, which total around \$55,000. Participant fees cover only a portion of the program's cost, making sponsorships and contributions essential to keeping the camp accessible.

Brownback expressed gratitude to the families who entrusted their children to the program. "We just want to thank all the parents and guardians who were willing to send their children here to Camp Cadet, and certainly the cadets for being willing to take this challenge," he said.

The 2025 Troop L Camp Cadet graduation ceremony is scheduled for Saturday, capping off a milestone year for the program that has shaped generations of young people through discipline, teamwork, and respect.

Bringing the past to life: Alexa Freyman's mission to preserve Berks County history

NEIGHBORS



For Alexa Freyman, history isn't just a collection of old photographs and forgotten stories—it's a living, breathing connection to the community she calls home. As the creator of Berks Nostalgia, Alexa has spent the better part of a decade documenting the rich and often overlooked history of Berks County, using a blend of writing, videography, photography, and drone technology to bring the past into focus for a new generation.

What began in 2017 as a personal project to document the fading malls of her youth has grown into a comprehensive multimedia platform with thousands of followers. "I started with the Berkshire and Fairgrounds Malls," Alexa recalled. "They were such a big part of my generation's experience, and I wanted to document that while they were still around." Armed with just a phone in the early days, she walked through the familiar corridors, capturing the slow transformation of these once-bustling centers of community life.

From those humble beginnings, Berks Nostalgia evolved into a broader exploration of local history. A pivotal moment came during the COVID-19 lockdowns, when Alexa found herself with time to delve into the history of Berks County's school system consolidations of the 1950s and 60s. "Every town used to have its own school system," she explained. "That project took a lot of research, but it was fascinating to see how the school districts we know today came to be."

Alexa's research process is a combination of digital sleuthing and traditional archive digging. Subscriptions to resources like Newspapers.com allow her to search through decades of articles from the comfort of home, but some projects still require in-person visits to local libraries and the Berks History Center.

Her most notable project to date has been the in-depth coverage of Stone Man Willie, the infamous mummified

man preserved at Theo C. Auman Funeral Home. "When they announced plans to bury him, I dove into every available record," Alexa said. Through her research, she uncovered a scientific study from 2004 detailing X-rays and imaging of Willie's remains—information that had never been widely reported. Her call for DNA testing and deeper investigation sparked renewed public interest and media attention, culminating in her most viewed article and video to date.

A key element of Alexa's work is her use of drone technology, which she added to her toolkit in 2022. "The drone has really elevated the way I can showcase historic buildings and sites," she said. "It gives a perspective you just can't get from the ground." From ornate architectural details downtown to the sweeping views of Berks County's landmarks, the drone footage adds a dynamic layer to her storytelling.

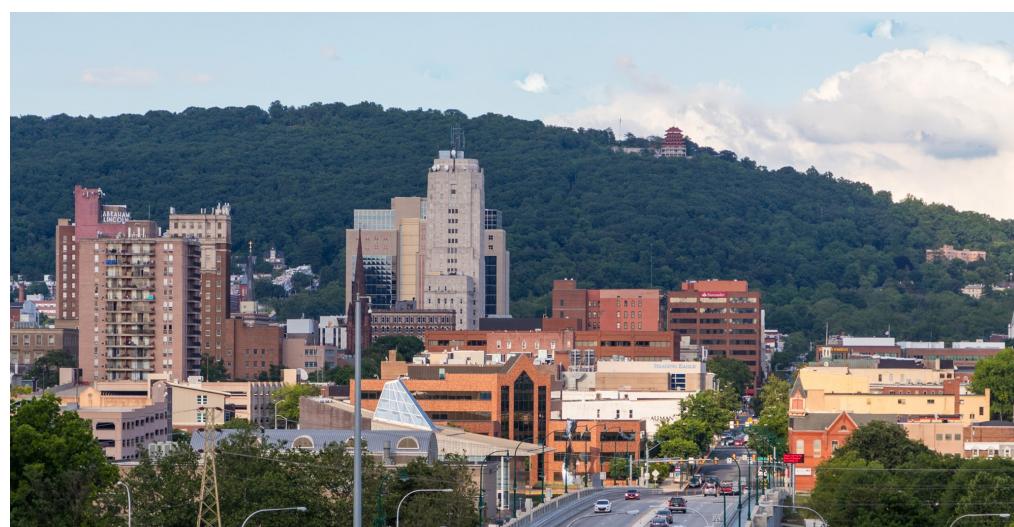
Berks Nostalgia has grown to the point where Alexa rarely has to seek out topics. "People now reach out to me asking if I'll profile their business or building," she said. She also credits her active Facebook community for providing a steady stream of ideas and inspiration.

Beyond Berks Nostalgia, Alexa stays connected to the community through her involvement with the Foundation for the Reading Pagoda, where she serves on the board. The group is working to restore and eventually reopen the iconic landmark, a project Alexa has been documenting through video. She also lends her time to Growing Wildflowers, a local nonprofit supporting families of medically complex children.

Looking ahead, Alexa hopes to turn Berks Nostalgia into a full-time endeavor. To that end, she recently launched a subscription model on her website, offering early access to articles and a way for supporters to contribute financially. "People have asked how they can support what I do, so this felt like the right next step," she said.

For now, Alexa continues to balance her roles as a mom of two, a web developer, and a local historian, sharing Berks County's stories one project at a time. "Even if this stays a passion project, I'll keep doing it," she said. "There's always more to uncover."

To explore Alexa's work, visit berksnostalgia.com.



Steven Newsham: Serving Berks County riders with dedication on and off the bus

PUBLIC SERVICE



For more than a decade, Steven Newsham has been a familiar face to riders of the Berks Area Regional Transportation Authority (BARTA). As both a part-time bus operator and the president of the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1345 (ATU), which represents his fellow operators, Newsham has built his second career around keeping Berks County moving — and making connections along the way.

BARTA plays a vital role in daily life across the county. On weekdays in the first quarter of 2025, an average of 14,300 riders used its fixed-route bus service. In 2024, that added up to more than 2.3 million trips. The system also provides shared ride paratransit services for seniors and people with disabilities, helping residents maintain independence and access essential services. For many, these buses are more than just

transportation — they are a link to jobs, medical appointments, grocery stores, and family.

Newsham, 68, began working for BARTA 12 years ago after spending three decades as a sheet metal worker in Philadelphia. After retiring from that career, he wasn't ready to slow down. He took a position as a motor coach operator for a local company, driving passengers across state lines and through cities he'd never seen before.

Those long-distance "over the road" trips sometimes stretched for days at a time, with destinations as far as Iowa or New York. It was during those years that Newsham discovered how much he enjoyed working with the public.

"I realized I might have missed my calling," he said. "I enjoy making friends with strangers. That's what we do."

At BARTA, Newsham now operates local routes — a shift from the cross-country pace of motor coaches to the steady rhythm of city and county streets. He worked full-time for 11 years before transitioning to part-time status, which allows him to balance driving with his union responsibilities.

A typical day for Newsham starts early — often by 4:45 or 5 a.m. He may drive a morning route, then spend part of his day addressing union matters. By early afternoon, his shift is often finished, but the phone can ring at any time. Operators know he's the person to call when they have questions, concerns, or problems that need to be resolved.

"I'm not a magician, but I try to do my best," he said. "They all know if they have a problem, where to go. Most of the time we're able to work it out, and that's a reflection of the relationships I have with management here."

Those relationships, he said, have helped create an environment where

disputes are handled through conversation rather than confrontation. He works closely with BARTA's leadership to address issues quickly.

"When people say 'union,' a lot of times they think there's arguing and fighting," he said. "There really isn't any of that here. There's discussion, and that's how we get things done."

While passengers see operators behind the wheel, much of the job happens off the road. BARTA invests heavily in training, from annual computer-based courses to off-site de-escalation workshops.

"There's mandatory education all year long," Newsham explained. "It's extensive — 40 to 50 hours a year, plus de-escalation training that's mandatory for all of us."

Those classes cover everything from safety protocols and customer service to handling unpredictable situations.



"When you open your door, you never know what your rider is going through," he said. "If someone's having a bad day, you can let it blow up into something bigger, or you can try to control it and de-escalate it. That's part of the job."

For Newsham, the relationships he builds are the best part of the work. Riders recognize him on the street or in the grocery store, and conversations often pick up right where they left off.

"If I go to a local store or a mall, I'm going to run into someone I know — someone I've had on my bus who struck up a conversation," he said.

Sometimes those connections happen in unexpected ways. On a recent ride from the transportation center, he joined two regular riders on a bus, chatting like old friends.

"It was like I was just another passenger," he said with a laugh.

Operators also play a role in looking out for the community. They are trained to recognize when a passenger may be in distress or when something on the street doesn't seem right, and they have direct lines to dispatchers and emergency responders.

"We're out there to help the public as much as we are to transport them," he said. "Transportation is a big part of it, but we're also keeping an eye on what's going on."

Although retired from his first career, Newsham isn't planning to stop working anytime soon.

"As long as my health stays well, I intend on staying here and continuing what I'm doing — because I enjoy it so much," he said.

For those considering a career in public transportation, he offers this advice: "Give it a shot. It's not for everybody, but if it is for you, it's rewarding."

He said the determining factor is a person's ability to handle difficult situations with patience and composure. "If you can handle the bad situations, the good ones are easy," he said.

Away from the routes and union meetings, Newsham enjoys time with his wife, children, and grandchildren. They often gather at their second home in Bethany Beach, Delaware, where weekends are filled with family dinners and ocean breezes.

A Philadelphia native, he still carries a love for the city's food culture — cheesesteaks and soft pretzels remain favorites. But it's the connections he's made in Berks County, he said, that keep him coming back to work every week.

"I'm happy to be here. I'm proud to be here," Newsham said. "I intend on staying for a long time."



Ryan Bradley: Cleaning up Reading, one block at a time

PUBLIC SERVICE

For Ryan Bradley, the path to becoming Reading's Clean City Coordinator was far from traditional. It wasn't defined by polished resumes but by lived experience, resilience, and a passion for community. Since taking on the role, Bradley has expanded the definition of keeping a city clean—beyond trash pickup to restoring pride, educating residents, and strengthening neighborhoods.

Bradley has called Reading home since 1996, arriving through a local halfway house after time in jail. Determined to rebuild, he pursued degrees and worked in drug and alcohol counseling, therapy, and gang prevention. After years in nonprofits, burnout pushed him to explore new opportunities.

"I was just burnt out from 2008 to 2020," Bradley said. "When I was asked to apply for the Clean City Coordinator position, I thought, why not? And here we are today."

While the job description focuses on managing litter, illegal dumping, and cleanups, Bradley has taken it further. He patrols problem areas, engages residents on social media, and helped launch Reading's Adopt-a-Block program. Inspired by efforts in other cities, he proposed mobilizing whole groups of neighbors instead of just block captains. City council approved the plan, and it's since become a model for grassroots involvement.

Bradley works alongside volunteers, providing supplies and leading by example. "Once you get the community to buy in, it gets easier," he said. "It's not always the whole block at first, but when people see the difference, they start to pitch in."



He points to Chestnut Street as a success story, where cleanups have reduced drug activity and fostered neighborhood pride. His duties also include graffiti removal, illegal dumping enforcement, and addressing homeless encampments—something deeply personal given his own past. "That's the only part I hate about my job, because I was once homeless myself," he said. "But I talk to people, and if they want help, I make the calls."

Bradley also works with other municipalities and pushes for stronger regional cooperation on dumping enforcement. "It's about collaboration. More cameras, more accountability," he said.

Beyond city work, he and his wife quietly organize turkey drives, holiday giveaways, and other grassroots efforts. "That's God's work," he said. "We don't need the press for that."

Through persistence and purpose, Bradley has proven that community change often begins with one person willing to pick up a broom—and inspire others to follow.

Shoemakersville letter carrier honored for 40 years of service

PUBLIC SERVICE



Longtime Shoemakersville letter carrier Robert Oswald was honored Friday for 40 years of service with the United States Postal Service. The celebration at the Shoemakersville Post Office on Franklin Street brought together co-workers, friends, and residents to recognize his four-decade career, including 37 years serving the local community.

Acting Post Office Operations Manager Al Tariq Franklin presented Oswald with a plaque, calling him a "model employee" and praising his Million Mile Award for more than 30 years of safe driving. "If we could give you a statue, we would," Franklin said. "This gentleman has been here for 37 years—he's a piece of the community."

Officer in Charge Sheena Bissell described Oswald as "wonderful" to work with and said she wanted to make the milestone a special day.

Oswald, who began his career in 1985, reflected on reaching four decades. "It's

been a long time. I'm not retiring, but forty years is a long time," he said. "The early years felt slow, but the last few have flown by."

He credited the relationships formed on his route with keeping him motivated. "Some [kids] will come to the mailboxes and be looking for me, whether it be lollipops or Smarties," he said. "That's what kept me going over the years—the smiles."

Oswald noted that delivering mail has often meant much more, from watching generations of families grow up to looking out for residents' well-being. His advice to new carriers: "Work hard, learn your job, and care about your customers. Do your job in an honorable way."

Franklin added, "We are the most trusted federal agency because of the dedication of employees like Robert. These connections make us more than just a business—we're a service."