

Laurelton kicks off 200th birthday party

By Evamarie Socha
The Daily Item

LAURELTON — Celebrations kick off tonight for the small village with a big birthday. It's Laurelton's bicentennial this year.

Founded in 1811, the little town in Hartley Township, western Union County, boasts about 300 residents and roots that go back to the colonial era. Some records document Laurelton as being settled as early as 1772 by John Glover Sr. along Spruce Run, now Route 45, according to the Union County Historical Society.

First on the festivities list is a tour of the historical cemetery and churches, one of which is



Evamarie Socha/The Daily Item

A Laurelton street sign.

Lincoln Chapel United Methodist Church, founded in 1792.

Led by the Rev. Mark Messner, of the church, the tour starts at 6 p.m. at the Old Lutheran Cemetery at Laurel and Ball Park roads.

And talk about old: The wooden gravestones have

Please see **PARTY, B5**.

THE VILLAGE TODAY

Laurelton has many events planned to celebrate its birthday. A full schedule is on the Union County West End Fair website, www.unioncountyywestendfair.com.

The website Sperling's Best Places (www.bestplaces.net) notes these facts about the Hartley Township village today:

- As of 2011, Laurelton's population is 305 people. Since 2000, it has had a population growth of 1.3 percent.

- The median home cost in Laurelton is \$117,400. Home appreciation the last year was -1.1 percent.

- Compared to the rest of the country, Laurelton's cost of living is 7.8 percent lower than the U.S. average.

- It's about 40 miles from State College, making Laurelton a suburb of sorts for the home of Pennsylvania State University.



The Palace Store and Hotel in Laurelton.

Photo provided

Laurelton to mark 200th anniversary

PARTY, from Page B1

long disappeared, but some community service workers are recording and cataloguing information on the deceased, Messner said, and eventually new headstones will be put in the cemetery.

Messner and resident Laurelton historian Robert Wagner are co-chairmen of the celebration, having mapped out four days of events featuring a nod to Laurelton's Revolutionary and Civil War roots as well as trades over the years.

About 100 volunteers helped put together events, such as the parade that will feature veterans and graduates of the former Laurelton High School.

The local senior center, housed in the same building, finds some alumni involved in activities in rooms they also had in school, Messner said.

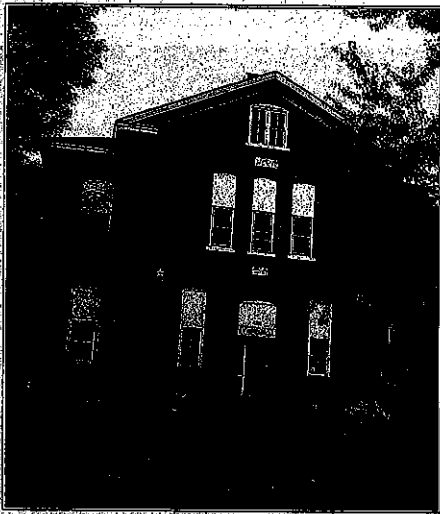
Hartley Township provided about \$1,500 for promotions, and 90 percent of bicentennial funds has been donations, he said.

"We've been blessed. People said this is a one-time event for you, and they gave freely," he said. "It's so heart warming."

Messner is in charge of church tours, the walking tour Friday and the closing vesper service Sunday, featuring John Lee, an actor who will portray a Civil War chaplain.

Wagner, also known as the "governor" of Laurelton, took care of the parade, set for 10 a.m. Saturday, plus events immediately following at the Union County West End Fairgrounds, including a Revolutionary War encampment and an antique car show.

Want to know how Laureltonians made a living back in the day? Check out the displays of pig butchering, spinning and weaving, trapping and black-



Laurelton's 1884 grammar school.

Photo provided

smithing, among others.

Messner said he feels lucky to be stationed in the Hartley Township town during such an important milestone.

"There is no greater honor than to sit down and have people share their personal stories," said Messner, a native of Lebanon County who has been in Laurelton for three years, having been transferred from Cogan Station in Lycoming County to the village.

Once there, Messner set out to learn as much as he could about Laurelton and found himself co-chairman of bicentennial planning.

"When you are a minster and you move in, you don't want to miss the major historical events of your new town," he said. "I was sent here to support the community and luckily got the

chance to pair with Bob."

Laurelton was founded during the lumber boom, though a foundry also provided for the local economy due to iron ore found in Jacks Mountain, Messner said.

Today, Laurelton is something of a bedroom community for State College, just 40 miles or so to the west.

"We have a very young community here," Messner said. "Taxes are low, it's very safe and houses are affordable."

Laurelton's claim to fame of late has been for a less happy occasion: The local elementary school shut its doors following a vote by the Mifflinburg school board to close it.

"The community is handling it OK," Messner said. "It was sad to see it go, but I think some people understand."