

Middletown – Then (2002) and Now (2012)

By Sonya Comstock, Springmill

In 2002, the population was 6,361. Today, it is 18,838. Few choices for shopping or dining were offered to newcomers in 2002. McDonald's opened in 1999, and that began the start of major businesses to settle here. Buckworth's Hardware (opened in 1948) could only supply residents with so much, so the arrival of Lowe's in 2001 filled in the many items that new homeowners needed. The Fire Department (located on S. Broad St.) became the Boys and Girls Club, as a new Fire Department was built on Green St. (2000) with a beautiful banquet hall.

By 2005, Middletown welcomed Acme (2003), relocated from its former location on West Green Street (where the Town Hall stands now) and Super G (2004). The Dutch Country Farmer's Market opened in July, 2007. With the town exploding in population, the old Town Hall, located at the Academy Building at 216 N. Broad Street, was no longer adequate. A new Town Hall opened in November, 2005. The Old Academy Building became the home of the Middletown Historical Society and the Chamber of Commerce. With the population increase and an approved referendum vote by residents, the Town Council increased from four to six members in March, 2007.

New Castle County Police Department served Middletown for many years. Some changes in the service made the Mayor and Town Council determine having its own police force was the next step in moving forward and in February, 2007, the doors opened on the new Middletown Police Department on Del. 299. The Police Department has grown to 30 officers and two K-9 dogs.

Mid-County Lanes opened in 2006, and many residents formed teams and enjoyed bowling. The Everett Theatre closed in the 1970s and was about to be torn down for a parking lot, but with the determination of the late Ellen Combs Davis, it was saved, purchased in 1983 for \$40,000 and reopened to the public. When the ceiling collapsed in 2008, the theatre had to close, and major renovations took place. It reopened in May, 2009, and offers live entertainment and monthly movies.

Home Depot arrived in May 2007, and offered another place to shop for home supplies. The Hampton Inn came to Middletown in July 2006, and has been filled to capacity ever since.

When McKee Builders completed Springmill, they began another 55+ community (Spring Arbor), and the first owner moved in the beginning of July 2007.

We knew Middletown had "arrived" when a free-standing Starbucks opened in 2006, and the 75 Happy Harry's Pharmacies (of which four are located in the Middletown area) became Walgreens in 2008.

The restoration of the sidewalks on Main Street, from 2006 to 2009, was a major construction project, but the end result was all utilities were placed underground, antique-looking streetlamps were erected, brick sidewalks extended from the beginning of town up to Catherine Street, and street signs matched the town's new streetscape. The Eagle atop the World War I monument on Cochran Square was accidentally damaged in 2006 during the restoration of the monument. A replacement eagle now rests on the top of the monument.

To bring attention to Main Street, the Middletown Main Street Program was established in 2005. Outdoor entertainment is provided in the summer months on Friday evenings. A winter parade is held the Saturday before Thanksgiving bringing families to town for the day. Banners reflecting the seasons are

mounted on street lights. The Designer House Tours began in 2008 and offer visitors an opportunity to see how creative designers can transform an old home into a showpiece.

Cochran Square welcomed LaDolce Spa (2007), Tracy Roberts Salon (2007), Simply Elegant Jewelers (2011) and Fromage (2011). Witherspoon Inn (a tavern stop since the 1700s) brought Charles Sullivan to town to restore the bar (2009). Today, it is a place to enjoy a few drinks and light fare from Middletown Seafood, which opened in October, 2009. It is now called Sully's Irish Pub and offers outdoor seating in an enclosed patio area.

Cochran Square has become a fashionable place to enjoy the summer concerts with other folks. On Main Street, Louis Marie Bridal moved from Smyrna to Middletown in November, 2007 and is a popular place for formal dress wear. Dogtown (2011) offers hot dog choices from around the country. Immediato's Sandwich Shop opened in 2005 and then added The Bistro in 2008. Chopper Charlie's Barber Shop has been on Main Street for 56 years. Hatton's Clock Repair has been in business for 64 years. It was sad to see E's Café on Main close in June after 10 years of providing great soups and sandwiches.

In 1861, the town was incorporated, and in 2011, it celebrated its 150th anniversary (Sesquicentennial) by having a Victorian Ball on the actual date of incorporation with all attendees in period costumes dancing to music of that era. Monthly events followed with a large parade and town festival on June 18.

Maynard's Restaurant on N. Broad Street closed, but Element's appeared and then closed, and now it is 1861, which opened in September 2011. Los Abuelos Restaurant (July 2011) offers the best in Mexican food. Prior to Los Abuelos, the location had been a Grotto Pizza for many years. Now, residents have more ethnic restaurants to choose from such as the Nhu Vu Vietnamese Restaurant and the East Fusion Restaurant serving Chinese, Hibachi and Sushi fare. Sushi can also be found at Sushi Yama, in the plaza near Lowe's and Buffalo Wild Wings. Jake's Wayback Burgers is also in that plaza.

Kohl's came to Middletown in 2007 and was the first place where a person "could buy socks without going to the Mall" and was most welcomed and is still a great place to shop. Super WalMart opened its doors in 2008.

Johnston Controls, a large factory for manufacturing batteries, opened its second location on U.S. 301 in August, 2011. The original factory opened 50 years ago on Broad Street and still operates today.

A 100-acre park opened on Levels Road in May, 2008. Named Charles E. Price Memorial Park, it has several acres set aside for big and small dog parks. There are also playgrounds, picnic areas and walking trails in the park plus an eight-acre catch and release pond.

What's next – Christiana Care is building Phase 1 – an emergency hospital – which will be completed in 2013 and then other phases of care will continue. Amazon.com is building a 1.25 million square foot building to be completed by fall and will start hiring permanent and temporary workers. The U.S. 301 bypass project ongoing since the 1960s continues to weave in and out of our lives, and someday it promises to become a reality.

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