

ALBANY TOWNSHIP

HOMESTYLE PLAN

Ex-resident's charitable program aims to keep community tight-knit



BILL UHRICH — READING EAGLE

The New Bethel Church in Albany Township against the backdrop of the Pinnacle and Kittatinny Ridge. A former resident has set up a fund to benefit the community.

By Michelle Lynch
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The Albany Township of Walter Hamm's childhood was an idyllic place where community bonds were as strong as the muscular arms of the area farmers who scratched a living in the shadow of the Blue Mountains.

Hamm fondly remembers the intimate world of his youth. The centuries-old farm where he grew up was worked by generations of ancestors before it was taken over by his parents, George H. and Gloria E. Longenberger Hamm; grandparents, George D. Hamm and Pauline J. Levan Hamm; and an aunt and uncle.

As a child, Walter Hamm played in the fields and woods with his sister and their cousins after school let out and chores were done.

"I still own part of the family farm," he said. "It is still what I call home."

Hamm, 68, a retired Marine Corps colonel, left the area in 1976 for a more than 30-year career in the service.

"I got more sleep and more time off in the Marines than I did working on the farm for my dad," he said, laughing.

Though Hamm of Stafford, Va., has lived outside Berks County for more than 40 years, the tight-knit community of his youth has stayed close to his heart.

That's why he recently partnered with the Berks



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The village of Albany lies along Hawk Mountain Road in Albany Township.

County Community Foundation to create a charitable program aimed at benefiting the township's residents.

"When I decided to provide charity to Albany Township, I knew I did not want to do it by myself," he said, explaining why he turned to the foundation for help. "Leave it to the professionals."

The Albany Township Tomorrow Fund honors the memory of Hamm's mother and paternal grandmother and their lifelong efforts to support and improve the community around the family farm.

"The aim is to sustain and build the type of tight community I knew when I was growing up," he said. "The idea of community has evolved over time, but I think it is still important."

The endowment fund will award two grants of \$2,500 each year to organizations

and initiatives that benefit the people of Albany, Jason Brudereck, director of communications for the foundation, said in a news release.

A meeting to explain the fund and the application process has been scheduled, he said, but attendance is not a requirement for applying.

Grants must be spent for charitable purposes that enhance the overall community in the township, Brudereck said, and not just the membership of a single organization. Activities will be given preference over facility improvements.

Well-known artist Jonathan Bond of Albany Township said he can think of some organizations that might benefit from the endowment, such as the Kempton Community Center, Albany Township Community Center and Kempton Lions Club.

IF YOU GO

ALBANY TOWNSHIP OF TOMORROW FUND

What: Meeting to explain the fund and application process.

When: Today, 6 p.m.

Where: Kutztown Community Library, 70 Bieber Alley, Kutztown, PA 19530.

To apply: Visit bccfgrants.academicworks.com.

Deadline: March 15.

Information: Contact Jason Brudereck, director of communication at jasonb@bccf.org or 610-685-2223.

"Walter emailed me when he set up the fund," Bond said. "I think it is super that he wants to give back to the community."

Bond said he understands that strong sense of community Hamm described. The men, former classmates and friends since kindergarten, spent their formative years in the place Bond still lives and they both still call home.

"Although Walter moved away many years ago, I know he still has strong feelings for the place where he grew up," Bond said.

Hamm said he sees potential for expanding services, supports and activities — particularly for youth — that otherwise may be unavailable in the rural area.

"I know what it is like to live in the boondocks," he said. "It is a great place to live, but there is little to do, especially for young people."