



Frenchtown Sun

A Frenchtown-Focused Civic Newsletter

Constant Contact now available for all residents

The borough has launched a new community-updates system, powered by Constant Contact. It will enable residents to keep up with what's happening in the borough. They'll receive updates on local news, events and important announcements. To sign up, please visit: <https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/sl/zNyK2m8>

Reserve Borough Park for personal use

Borough residents may reserve the use of Borough Park, located on Creek Road. The park can be a busy place during the warm weather months, so residents are encouraged to apply early. The application can be found at the Borough website and then emailed to clerk@frenchtownboro.gov or mailed to the borough clerk at Borough Hall.



Photographer: Paul Serra

Environmental Commission wants to control invasive vines with beetles



When you see leaves that look like this, you're looking at trouble.

As the soil warms up this spring, seedlings of the invasive and terribly aggressive Mile-a-Minute vine (*Persicaria perfoliata*) will sprout. Also known as devil's tail, giant climbing tearthumb, and Asiatic tearthumb, this vine grows extremely rapidly and can take over gardens and woodlands, overgrowing shrubs, trees and outdoor furniture and buildings.

Single plants can easily grow up to 25-foot-long or more in a single season. The almost perfectly triangular blue-green leaves are easy to identify, and the entire plant is armed with tiny, hooked barbs that will catch on clothing and skin.

How to control this plant? Pulling the seedlings when the plants are young is quite easy—although you might want to wear gloves to protect your skin from the barbs. A biological control agent, the host-specific Asian Weevil *Rhinoncomimus latipes* is available from the N.J. Department of Agriculture to combat this scourge. This beetle has been thoroughly researched and has been used to successfully manage Mile-a-Minute vine since 2004.

This beetle only feeds on Mile-a-Minute vine, weakening the plants and reducing their ability to set seed. Since this plant must grow from seed each year—decreasing the seed production is key to controlling it. The Environmental Commission is seeking funds to purchase some of these beetles with the intention of releasing them at the Frenchtown Preserve to help control Mile-a-Minute vine there. —Randi Eckel

About the *Frenchtown Sun*

The Frenchtown Sun is published monthly by the Borough of Frenchtown to provide its residents with local news and community updates.

The content of *The Sun* is guided by the editorial team of Ted Brandston, Randi Eckel, Rick Epstein, John Gattuso, Jeanne Herb, Amelia Rodriguez and Maria Whelan. John Dougherty serves as the Borough Council liaison.

The Sun is delivered monthly free of charge to all Frenchtown Borough residents. An online edition is available at www.frenchtownsun.net.

Borough residents can request postal delivery or contact the editorial team at newsletter@frenchtownboro.com or mail *The Frenchtown Sun*, 29 Second Street, Frenchtown, N.J. 08825.

Updates from Borough Council in April

Borough Council meets on the first Wednesday of each month at 7 p.m. Meetings are open to the public, and they are also live-streamed at:

<https://frenchtownboro.com/livestream>. The agendas for upcoming council meetings and minutes from past meetings can be found on the borough website.

At its April 8 meeting, the council introduced a resolution to adopt the annual municipal budget for 2026. This resolution will be acted upon at the council's May 6 meeting. Other resolutions that were approved by the council include:

- Hiring the street-sweeping services of the City of Lambertville.
- Authorizing the borough's participation in the Hunterdon Area Energy Cooperative Energy Aggregation Program. Frenchtown residents will be automatically enrolled, but they can opt out by returning a response card that is being mailed to each home. The program uses bulk purchasing to provide lower rates to consumers. For specific deadlines, detailed rate comparisons, or to manage your enrollment, visit the official HAEC website at <https://njaggregation.us>.
- Authorizing the borough's Environmental Commission to apply for a grant from the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions. If approved, the grant would provide funds for our Environmental Commission to host a community event to educate residents about local stewardship and invasive species management as well as to use a particular kind of beetle on borough public lands and parks to manage an invasive vine called "mile-a-minute."

- Authorizing a pilot program for the *Frenchtown Sun* and to apply for a grant from the Fargo Family Foundation to support it.

The council approved ordinances that:

- Authorize conditions for filming in the borough. The ordinance is consistent with the state's Film Ready program, which is designed to help production companies connect with municipal officials;
- Establish the salaries and wages for borough employees for 2026;
- Approve the start of Creek Road improvements using a \$410,000 grant from the state Department of Transportation.

Also at the April 8 council meeting, Parks Commissioner Bill O'Brien updated that the borough has received a grant from the county to purchase and install modular skatepark equipment in Borough Park in early summer.

Frenchtown Borough residents are reminded about the following:

- Property tax and sewer bill payments are due May 1. Payments can be made online, dropped off at Borough Hall or mailed in. If you have questions, contact clerk@frenchtownboro.com.
- The borough is still taking comments from residents on a draft plan for the 71-acre Thompson Tract located on Creek Road near Borough Park. The tract was preserved in 2023 for passive recreation. The draft plan can be found online and residents are welcome to offer comments by emailing them to clerk@frenchtownboro.com.
- Brush disposal and recycling in the Department of Public Works yard is available to borough residents and requires a permit.

[Continued from page 2] Landlords are required to make permits available to their tenants. All residents receive a DPW permit with their annual tax bill. Residents who did not receive or cannot find their permit may request one at Borough Hall by calling the clerk at 908-996-4524. A permit should be displayed on the vehicle's dashboard when visiting the DPW yard. The drop-off hours for brush disposal are the second Wednesday of the month, 8 a.m. – 3 p.m., and the last Saturday of each month 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. Materials that are not allowed include: treated lumber, non-compostable materials, including stones and metals.

- The Frenchtown Community Garden is a beautiful and productive space for borough residents. While all plots are already reserved for this year, borough residents may apply for a plot for next year; plots are assigned on a first come, first served basis. The application can be found on the borough website.
- LINK buses offer free transportation to all residents. LINK has fixed bus routes, for which no reservation is needed. For areas in Hunterdon County not on a bus route, LINK offers curb-to-curb service weekdays, 7 a.m. – 5 p.m. on a first-come, first-served basis. Learn more at <https://ridethelink.com>.

Meet your Borough staff



CHRISTOPHER (CHRIS) DEWIRE is Frenchtown's borough administrator and director of public safety. He was hired in March 2025, and he currently manages daily operations of all borough departments. He is the primary liaison between staff, the mayor, and the Borough Council. A lifelong resident of Hunterdon

County, Chris retired from the Readington Township Police Department in 2024 as a lieutenant and officer-in-charge. He is a former member of the Hunterdon County SWAT team and was a mobile intensive care paramedic at Hunterdon Medical Center for 25 years. Chris has two grown children and is proud to serve the Frenchtown community. Chris' email is: director@frenchtownboro.gov.



KURT FIEBIG became the borough's manager of the Department of Public Works in 2025. He has been a Frenchtown firefighter since his teenage years. He oversees the maintenance of borough roads, public buildings and grounds, parks, and water and sewer systems, serving the community that raised him. He manages a team of two employees involved

in snow removal, and recycling center operations and the beautification of borough land. Kurt grew up here and attended the Frenchtown School and Delaware Valley High School. Kurt's email is: publicworks@frenchtownboro.gov.



SAMANTHA GRAVELLE has been a smiling face in Borough Hall since October of 2023. She is Frenchtown's borough clerk. Her multiple municipal roles include secretary of the Planning/Zoning Board and the Shade Tree Commission, and the registrar of vital statistics. She is a mother of two and finds balancing home and work life very rewarding.

She has a wealth of knowledge about our beautiful river town and is happy to help anyone who stops in Borough Hall. Samantha's email is: clerk@frenchtownboro.com.



KELLY PICKERING is the Frenchtown librarian. She was born in Pittsburgh and received a bachelor's degree in English and psychology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She lived in New York City for 20 years, working as an elementary school teacher and later as a freelance copy editor. She moved to Frenchtown 20 years ago and

adores living in this beautiful river town. She loves cooking, skiing, and reading. Visit Kelly at the library—its hours are posted at: <https://frenchtownboro.com/library>. Kelly's email is: kelly@pickering.as.

Community Calendar

TUESDAY, MAY 5

- **Super Seniors, 11 a.m.-1:30 p.m.** Presbyterian Church, 20 Fourth St. Free for adults over 55 (but all are welcome; it's secular). Yoga with Priscilla, lunch, guest speaker Virginia Woo on the Butterfly Miracle.
- **Senior Medicare Patrol, 1:30 p.m.** Hunterdon County Senior Center, 4 Gauntt Place, Flemington. Valeria Escudero will teach how to protect yourself against Medicare fraud, waste and abuse.
- **Coffee with County Clerk Mary Melfi, 3 p.m.** Hunterdon County Senior Center, 4 Gauntt Place, Flemington.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 6

- **Veteran's Breakfast at the American Legion, 8 a.m.** 510 Harrison St.
- **Borough Council Meeting, 7 p.m.** Borough Hall, 29 Second St.

THURSDAY, MAY 7

- **Frenchtown School Car Wash, 12:30-3 p.m.** in parking lot beside school. \$5 per car.
- **Clam Night at the American Legion, 5 p.m.** 510 Harrison St.
- **Frenchtown School Spring Concert, 6:30 p.m.** 902 Harrison St.

SATURDAY, May 9, 7 p.m.

ArtYard's Aqualumina Festival of Light & Water
13 Front St. Registration recommended at artyard.org
Rain date: Sunday, May 10

TUESDAY, MAY 12

- **Frenchtown School Board Meeting, 6:45 p.m.** 902 Harrison St., in school library.
- **Environmental Commission Meeting, 7 p.m.** Borough Hall, 29 Second St.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 13, 8 a.m.

Veteran's Breakfast at the American Legion
510 Harrison St.

SATURDAY, MAY 16, 11 a.m.

Lions Club Coin Toss, Race Street and Bridge Street

SUNDAY, MAY 17, 8 a.m. – 11 a.m.

Breakfast at Darcy Lodge, 39 Everittstown Road, \$12 per person ages 13+, \$7 per person ages 6-12, children under 5 eat free; all-you-can-eat buffet.

TUESDAY, MAY 19, 8 a.m. – 11 a.m.

Super Seniors, Presbyterian Church, 20 Fourth St. Free for adults over 55 (but all are welcome; it's secular). Yoga with Priscilla, lunch, guest speaker Vickie Dole on Italian Gardens.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 20, 8 a.m.

Veteran's Breakfast at the American Legion
510 Harrison St.

THURSDAY, MAY 21, 5 p.m.

Clam Night at the American Legion, 510 Harrison St.

SATURDAY, MAY 23, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Frenchtown Farmers Market, New location: Sunbeam Lenape Park

MONDAY, MAY 25

Memorial Day observances led by American Legion
Ceremony in cemetery at 8 a.m. Parade steps off from Old Frenchtown Field at 10 a.m. with three stops at which rifle salutes will be fired and remarks made—at Doughboy statue, at Legion Hall, and at the river bridge.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 27

- **Veteran's Breakfast at the American Legion, 8 a.m.** 510 Harrison St.
- **Planning/Zoning Board Meeting, 7 p.m.** Borough Hall, 29 Second St.

THURSDAY, May 28, 6 p.m.

Frenchtown School Spectrum Showcase (art show and concert), 902 Harrison St.

SATURDAY, MAY 30, 8 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Hunterdon Country Shredding Event, County Complex, 314 Route 12, near Flemington

SAVE THE DATE:

- **Delaware Valley Regional High School's Class of 2026 Commencement**, Friday, June 12, 10 a. m.
- **Riverfest**, Sunday, September 6
- **Frenchtown School's Centennial Celebration & Community Day**, Saturday, September 26

Frenchtown is getting “age-friendlier”

In March 2025, Frenchtown received a \$70,000 grant from the state Department of Human Services to build community partnerships, assess the needs of our older residents, and create an “age-friendly” action plan. That plan is expected to be on the agenda at the June 4 Borough Council meeting.

The age-friendly effort is led by AARP nationally to help communities become more livable for the elderly. Frenchtown is already considered age-friendly, scoring 61 on AARP’s national Livability Index. The nationwide average score was 50. But we could be even friendlier.

More than 45% of households in Frenchtown include at least one person age 60 or older; the median income of residents age 65+ is \$67,596 as compared to Hunterdon’s average of \$90,843 for the same age group.

During the grant period, Frenchtown created an Age-Friendly Committee that updated borough demographics, created an inventory of services available to older residents, conducted a survey that received 206 responses, held listening sessions with key stakeholders, and hosted two town halls with significant participation.

The community-needs assessment found that:

- Older residents feel a sense of “not belonging” within the community and have limited access to information about news, civic happenings, and social opportunities, which seems to stem from the absence of a local news source.
- The county offers plenty of programs and services for older residents, but there are fewer programs within the borough and limited awareness of them.
- A “community connector” would increase the availability of services and programs in Frenchtown by serving as a “match maker” between local volunteers and older residents with specific needs such as home repairs, transportation, and food delivery.
- The borough government could consider the needs of older residents with regard to home renovations to support aging-in-place, promoting repair of sidewalks to support walkability throughout the borough, ensuring the safety and livability of the approximately 48% of Frenchtown’s households that are rentals, improving

parking downtown especially near Borough Hall and the library and strengthening the library’s ability to serve as a local “anchor” for all, including older residents and children.

- The borough is poised to use two grants to improve sidewalks and pedestrian access.
- That many residents and local organizations are eager to support age-friendly efforts, including the Frenchtown School, local businesses, churches, and service nonprofits.

To continue the age-friendly momentum, the state is allowing the borough to use its grant to implement several strategies that can serve as the foundation for ongoing age-friendly efforts. These include:

- Launching the monthly newsletter that you’re reading now.
- A free Operation Blue Angel program designed to assist Frenchtown residents who are at risk of a medical or life-threatening emergency. The program allows first responders to enter the home during a medical emergency without delays or causing damage. To read more about Operation Blue Angel or to sign up, go to: <https://frenchtownpolice.com/>. Contact Chris DeWire with questions.
- Earmarking funds for the borough to consider changes to current ordinances that would reduce the cost and burden of obtaining local approvals for medically necessary home renovations that would facilitate aging-in-place.
- Establishing a Constant Contact borough news service. See Page 1 to learn more.
- Setting up a municipal trust that would allow the borough to seek funds to support creating an age-friendly community-connector effort.

On June 4, the Borough Council will consider the Age-Friendly Action Plan, and may modify it and may pass a resolution adopting it. Updates on Frenchtown’s age-friendly initiative can be found on the borough’s website at:

<https://frenchtownboro.com/community-services/age-friendly-frenchtown/>.

Planning Board reviewing master plan

The Frenchtown Planning Board has just begun a five-year review of the most recent master plan re-examination report (dated 2021).

What is a master plan? It is a blueprint for a municipality, outlining a vision for the future of the borough consisting of balanced economic, social, physical, environmental, and fiscal planning. While not a set of laws or regulations, a master plan provides guidance to the borough when making land use, zoning, and capital investment decisions.

The 2021 master plan re-examination report identified items to be addressed over the next 10 years, and the Planning Board will be discussing the borough's progress on those items in the next few months at its monthly meetings at 7 p.m. the fourth Wednesday of every month, at Borough Hall (and streamed live).

Delaware Valley High School Honor Roll

Frenchtown students listed in the third marking period honor rolls include:

Distinguished Honor Roll: Amelia R. Rodriguez, Grade 9

Honor Roll: Vincent Edward Casagrande, Grade 12; Nya Mae Altamaier, Grade 11; Brianna M. Ferguson, Grade 9

County Senior Center offers bocce, Scrabble, cornhole, chess, grief support and more

Not all Frenchtonians are aware of the social opportunities at the Hunterdon County Senior Center at 4 Gauntt Place near Flemington. These activities are open to Hunterdon residents age 60 and over who are enrolled members of the Senior Center:

- Spring/Summer Bocce, Mondays & Tuesdays, 10 a.m.-12 p.m. (9 a.m. after Memorial Day)
- Scrabble Club, Mondays, 2-4 p.m.
- Chess Club, Tuesdays, 2-4 p.m.
- Cornhole, Thursdays, 10 a.m.-12 p.m. (9-11 a.m. after Memorial Day)
- Grief Support Group, second Thursday of each month, 10-11:30 a.m.

To register or find out more, call the Senior Center at 908-788-1359.

Former ArtYard visiting artist to give Frenchtown's "Jane Doe" a headstone



Wendy Louise Baker

A careful observer, strolling through the Frenchtown Cemetery, might notice a small, metal, grave marker inscribed: JANE DOE. It has been there since 1996, but this summer it may be replaced with a headstone with her real name on it: Wendy Louise Baker.

On Oct. 26, 1991, the body of a teenage girl was found by hunters in Warren County just off Interstate 80 not far from the Delaware River. Due to decomposition, the authorities could not determine the cause of her death, but it was declared a homicide.

No corresponding missing-person report could be found, and although a drawing of her was widely circulated by the State Police, no one recognized her. Because of a large tattoo of tiger on her left calf, she became known as the Tiger Lady.

With no one claiming the body, Frenchtown's undertaker Eddie Johnson arranged for her burial in the Frenchtown Cemetery in 1996.

In 2021 Andrew Sullivan, a visiting artist at ArtYard from Fair Oaks, Calif., learned about Jane Doe and visited her grave, "I would like to honor her by providing a gravestone to replace the current stake in the ground."

Andrew explains, "I have tried my best to be a more loving and attentive person, to care for, not only the visible world around us, but the invisible one as well."

Although Jane Doe had been unidentified for 30 years, the Warren County Prosecutor's Office eventually used DNA from a bone sample to figure out that the Tiger Lady was Wendy Louise Baker, age 16.

Wendy was raised by her stepmother until she ran away from Florida at age 15 before landing in Coatesville, Pa., where she had relatives. When she disappeared, they assumed she had run away again and was living her life elsewhere. Her cousin Cindy Baker said of Wendy, "I don't want to say [she was] a lost soul, but she seemed like she was kind of bounced here, bounced there, you know."

Wendy's granite tombstone will cost about \$750. Andrew said, "I am going to transport it across-country in my own car sometime in the latter half of June. It will be a pilgrimage!" —Rick Epstein

Borough considering parking meters

Turnover of parking spaces in downtown Frenchtown continues to be a significant challenge, particularly as warmer weather brings an increase in visitors. On weekends, many people park in municipal lots to access the D&R Canal Path, often leaving their vehicles for the entire day without visiting local businesses. This limits availability for customers who are looking to shop, dine, and support the downtown.

To address this issue, the borough is actively discussing the potential implementation of parking meters—an approach successfully used in many comparable river towns—to encourage greater turnover of parking spaces.

In addition to improving access to downtown businesses, metered parking would:

- Help ensure adequate funding for police coverage and EMS services during peak tourism months
- Create a dedicated revenue stream for downtown beautification and ongoing maintenance
- Shift a portion of the financial burden from residential taxpayers to visitors who utilize public parking

This is part of a broader effort to balance accessibility, economic vitality, and quality of life, particularly during the busy summer season.

Kathee's parking lot update

At this time, the Borough is not pursuing the acquisition of the Kathee's General Store parking lot, as the current property owner may be moving forward with a potential redevelopment of the site.

Zöe Tober wins school centennial essay contest

The winners of the Frenchtown School centennial essay contest are Zöe Tober, first prize; Joshua Sanchez-Quackenbush, second prize; and Rosalie Strasser, third prize. Zöe and Rosie are eighth graders and Josh is a seventh grader.

They were among nine students who wrote on the theme "The Next 100 Years," under the helpful supervision of Frenchtown School's Language Arts duo—teacher Beth McCann and aide Ken Nohe. Donated by an anonymous benefactor, \$100 will go to Zöe, \$50 to Josh, and \$25 to Rosie.

The contestants made predictions and recommendations for the future of Frenchtown and of planet Earth. Personal ambitions were also shared. Some efforts were serious and others were touched with whimsy.

The students' names were redacted so the essays could be judged "blind." The judges were Morgan Taylor, owner of Country Chic and president of the Frenchtown Business & Professional Association; Scott Sheldon, co-owner of the Frenchtown Bookshop; and Rick Epstein, local history enthusiast.

"The quality of the essays was heartening," said Rick, "and we're going to include some of them in a book that will be a souvenir of the Frenchtown School's centennial."

Zöe wrote, "Frenchtown is a beautiful place to live, a town so full of love and joy. Why isn't the rest of the world? Why do people hate? Why do we fight? I don't know, but I do know that out of all the hatred in the



The winning Frenchtown School essayists are (from left) Zöe Tober, first prize; Josh Sanchez-Quackenbush, second prize; and Rosie Strasser, third prize.

world, it is usually caused by sadness. And once you start using this angry façade when you're hurting, it can be hard to stop. That's because it feels easier than talking through the feelings you're experiencing."

Her hope is that "one day the love in Frenchtown will spread to other communities, and keep growing from there until we have real world peace. As we move into high school, I challenge everyone here to be brave enough to choose talking over fighting."

She urges, "Next time you see someone being mean, don't just do it back. You need to help them correct their own behavior or it will never change. And I can't stress this enough, but hate is rooted in sadness. You need to be an ally to the ones who are hurting, not an enemy. Peace starts now, it starts with you."

Frenchtown then & now

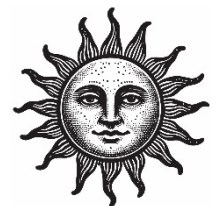
Race Street is in better shape nowadays, and current parental “best practices” preclude parking babies on it. Note the National Hotel in the background on the right. The PRINTING sign marks the site of William Sipes’ shop and office of his Frenchtown Star newspaper, and indicates the photo was taken no earlier than 1879 and sometime before 1885, when Sipes’ operation had moved to the

other side of Race Street. The buildings on the left were among the five demolished in 1954 and replaced by the yellow-brick building that wraps around the inside corner of Bridge and Race. The redeveloper was Edward Flecker, who did the plumbing for Hunterdon Medical Center and Del Val High School. The old photo is artificially colorized and maybe doesn’t do justice to the carpet the baby is sitting on. —*Rick Epstein*



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