

CHESTER COUNTY DAY

Celebrates its Roots

BY AMY ALKIRE

In 1936, Mrs. William A. Limberger and her Women's Auxiliary to Chester County Hospital colleagues decided to arrange a house tour (the longest current running house tour in the country). Everyone applauded the idea, and "West Chester Day" was inaugurated featuring 22 homes in the Borough of West Chester. Tickets were one dollar, and visitors came from far and wide to enjoy the day. To mark the 75th house tour, the auxiliary celebrates its roots by going back to West Chester and southeastern Chester County.

Founded in 1938, the North Hill sector is a fascinating highlight of Chester County Day, it is the county seat's first neighborhood.



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Chester County Day will be held Saturday, October 3. Houses are open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The beneficiary is The Women's Auxiliary's 3D Mammography Pledge for Chester County Hospital. The tour features architecture, gardens, antiques, and art. Greek revival-styled homes and magnificent old trees lining West Chester streets are of particular interest.

The North Hill sector is a fascinating highlight, as well. Founded in 1938, it is the county seat's first neighborhood. A pristine lake enriches the district, and every house is unique. Originally the William P. Marshall farm and later the Abner Hoopes farm, John D. Jacob bought the land and converted it to building lots. Homes were constructed from the 1940s through the 1960s. One of these homes, which will delight Chester County Day tourists, is owned by Michael Pillagalli. The 65-year-old brick dwelling is the creation of popular cabinet maker Marshall Brinton.

A trellis or espalier will greet and captivate tourists. "I saw something similar in the south of France years ago," recalls Pillagalli. "When I bought this house, I thought the garage wall was a perfect place for attempting to duplicate the work. A checkerboard of ivy does give an attractive touch to the exterior along with boxwoods and other plantings."

Inside, woodwork throughout the home is immediately recognizable as Marshall Brinton craftsmanship. Baseboards are eight inches thick, moldings stand out for exquisiteness, and handsome bookshelves are capped by ogee curves. A



built-in cabinet is pumpkin pine in color and dramatized by raised panel doors.

Rooms included on the tour are the brick-floored kitchen, a den, dining room, living room, library, and an orangerie, which was added during restoration after a giant tree crashed into the house. This four season addition, which is utilized more than any other space in Pillagalli's home, features a brick floor, 10 windows, and a double sliding door. Natural light pours in nurturing a bounty of large plants. The centerpiece of the orangerie is a wrought iron table topped with an indoor umbrella embellished by four dogs chasing a fox.

All the bedrooms have canopy or four-poster beds. There is a *secret room* within Pillagalli's daughter's boudoir. "It's actually a finished peak-roofed attic over the dining room. There's a little day bed and hundreds of books and toys. My daughter is 30, but she won't let me change an inch of her childhood haunt."

The Pillagalli home is filled with antiques, too numerous to count. The local educator began collecting in his teens. "I was helping a neighbor clean out her garage, and she asked me to take a large box to the curb



for the trash truck. It was filled with antique Canton and Blue Willow china. My thought was to take the box home and save the china until I went to college or moved into an apartment. My parents wouldn't let me keep the china because of its value. So I marched back to the neighbor, who insisted I put it

with the trash. At that point, my parents allowed me to have the collections. I didn't retain the Canton, but added to the Blue Willow every time I could, and now have close to 500 pieces."

After that, Pillagalli went on to antique chairs. In the library, there are two nine-

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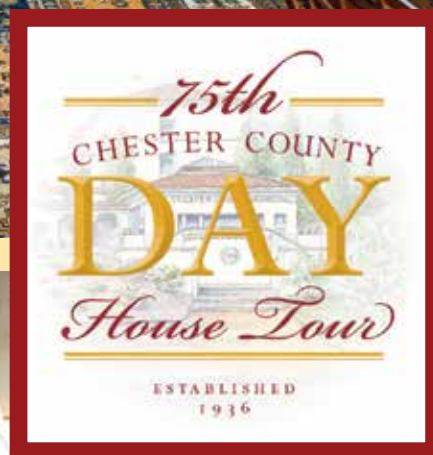
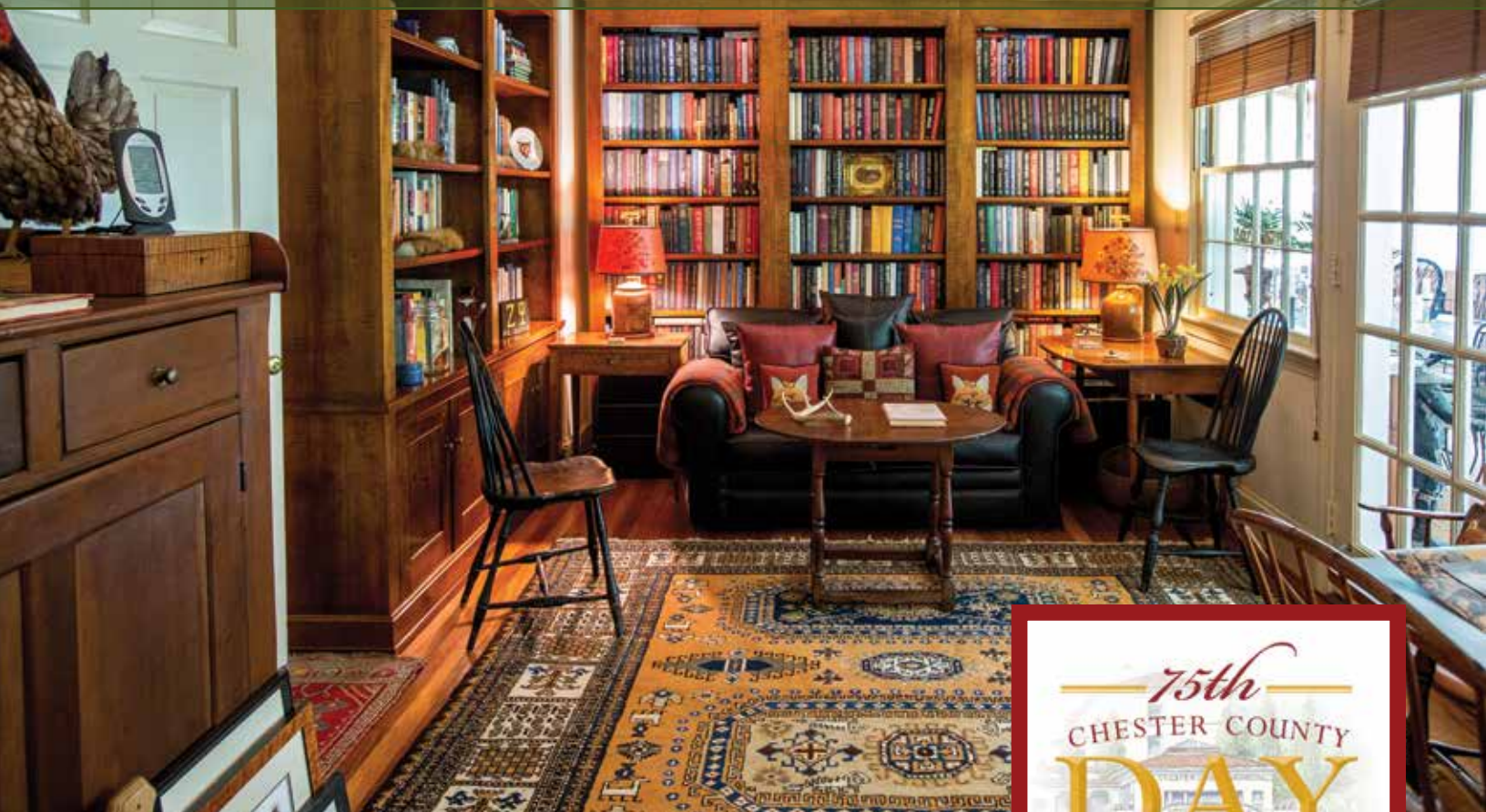
spindle bow back Windsor chairs, which he acquired many years ago for \$45! "From then on, I kept buying and upgrading. I have another set of Windsor chairs in the kitchen. I think Chester County Day patrons will like my tiger maple drop-leaf table from about 1820 because of its very fine combed grain-

ing. A Chester County high chest from 1750 has double raised panels on the side and three arched drawers on top."

Other not-to-miss antiques include a lap desk signed by William P. Marshall and an extensive collection of Canary Yellow Lusterware. "The Lusterware is my daughter's.

I bought her a child's cup when she was six weeks old. Now there are 45 pieces, which look beautiful on the Marshall Brinton wall shelves on each side of the fireplace."

Chester County art is another Pillagalli passion. His favorite work comes with an amazing anecdote. "I was attracted by a



painting at a gallery, but didn't buy it. When I decided it was a must-have piece, it was gone. The dealer said the owners took it back, but he wouldn't divulge their name. Through a series of negotiations, I was able to purchase the painting. I was absolutely astonished when I saw the provenance papers. The original owner of the art was the second owner of my house. Chills still go up and down my arms when I tell the story."

Chester County Day is replete with wonderful tales. Don't miss it. To enhance your Chester County Day experience, purchase a VIP ticket. Exclusive benefits include: wine and hors d'oeuvres at a private preview party and lecture on Sunday, September 27, at Vickers Restaurant; an exclusive visit to Broadlawns, the home of Dorene and Bill Winters; and a tour day lunch prepared by the White Horse Tavern and Wine Bar chef. For more information or to purchase a VIP ticket, contact TGavin@CCHosp.com with your request. A series of informative lectures will be held prior to October 3. Visit CCHosp.com for details and schedules.

Chester County Day tickets are available in advance at convenient satellite locations throughout the area, including the hospital lobby, the cashier's office, or at the lectures. Call 610.431.5301 for phone orders and more information. **CCL**



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