

l town lives amid the suburbs

Tiny Bellefonte has acquired a comfortable, lived-in feeling

By ROLF RYKKEN
Staff reporter

When a former Bellefonte commissioner needed help in publicizing Santa Claus' pre-Christmas visit to town, he asked two men to distribute leaflets.

They did. But because the men were not from Bellefonte, they passed out leaflets in Gordon Heights, a development of more-expensive homes beyond the town line.

Lynda Lefler, the wife of the former commissioner, recalls this story with mild exasperation.

"There's such a fine line. It all gets lumped together," says Lefler, who replaced her husband, Bellefonte native Kemer Lefler, on the town commission. "I tell people I live in Bellefonte, and they'll say, 'Oh, that's near Sears.'"

Correcting confusion about the borders of this tiny incorporated municipality four miles northeast of downtown Wilmington is common for some of the 1,279 residents, who are plainly sensitive about the topic.

"My mother-in-law always says that anything bad that happens north of 41st Street is usually attributed to Bellefonte," says Ann Frampton, president of the five-member town commission.

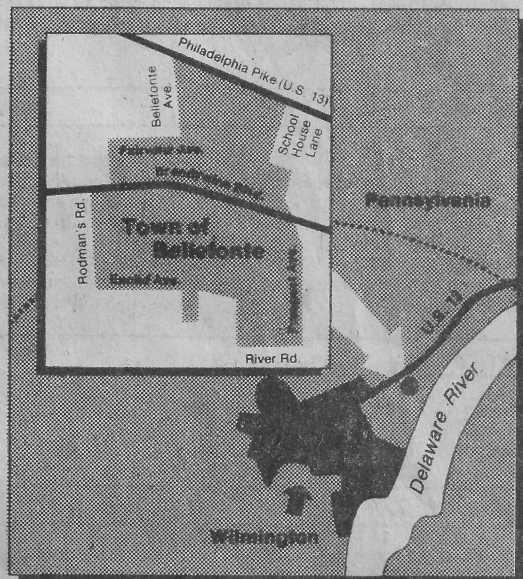
It's true that those unfamiliar with Bellefonte often tend to lump anything located within a hair's breath of it with what is within the town limits. Consider St. Helena's Catholic Church and School on Bellefonte Avenue near Philadelphia Pike (they aren't in Bellefonte), Peco's liquor store and the Wawa convenience store on Philadelphia Pike (they aren't either).

This sensitivity about the town's borders — about what is located here and what is not — has to do with municipal and individual identity.

"I feel like I'm in a small town," said Lefler, 31, who lives in a 260-year-old fieldstone house on Grandview Avenue with her husband and two children. "You can walk around, and each home has its own identity. Everything is different, but there is a closeness you can feel.

"It makes it unique that it is a town — an incorporated town. You feel part of something."

To Lefler, this feeling of belonging is especially strong. She grew up behind the Talleyville Volunteer Fire Company off Concord Pike (U.S. 202) — what one writer



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has called the suburban wilderness — and the difference when she settled in Bellefonte was striking.

In the suburbs, she says, "you're part of the mass."



To travel the 24 tree-lined streets in Bellefonte — over lanes with names such as Rosedale, Talley, Wynnbrook, Prospect, Maple, Rodman, Grove — seems not unlike wandering through some amorphous older suburban development, except for the variety of housing styles: Small bungalows, white Cape Cod-styled homes surrounded by white picket fences, plain brick houses, most with small lawns and backyards.

Many of these homes, according to a retired Bellefonte real estate agent, were originally built for less than \$13,000 and now sell for \$45,000 to \$65,000. That's still remarkably inexpensive compared to the surrounding communities, where \$100,000 is a common asking price.

There is a comfortable, lived-in appearance here that has been earned over the years by hard-working teachers, industrial workers, store owners, clerks, some well-to-do people and a new core of those "on their way up," as Commissioner Kathie Lichenstein, 28, describes them.

In the cases of many younger residents



Staff photo by Fred Comegys

Bellefonte barber Dominic Nardo at work in his shop.