

The Juniata Observer

SATURDAY, 10 JANUARY 2026 VOL. 1 – NO. 1 ALTOONA, PENNSYLVANIA

WEATHER: RAIN TUES., FRI.; HIGHS NEAR 52F, LOWS 40F.

Civic Notices

JUNIATA CIVIC ASSOCIATION

Support local Juniata Civic Association Events. The January book review will focus on Nobody's Girl by Virginia Roberts Giuffre.

Meeting set for 1/14/26 at 6:30pm.

Correspondence

To submit news or editorial comment email info@juniataobserver.com

A Voice Restored for the North End

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD

It is with a profound sense of duty that The Juniata Observer returns to the ink-stained traditions of our predecessors. For too long, the distinct character of the North End—specifically our storied streets of Juniata and the burgeoning heights of Wehnwood—has been subsumed by the broader reports of the city at large.

Our mission is simple yet steadfast: to serve as the singular record for these neighborhoods. Whether it is a development atop the Wehnwood hills or a civic gathering near the old Fourth Street square, if it matters to the residents of the "Borough," it is front-page news to us.

Critics may point to the Great Annexation of 1929 as the moment Juniata ceased to be its own master. We respectfully disagree. Annexation may have unified our pipes and our paving, but it could never dilute the individuality of a people who built the greatest locomotive works in the world. We are more than a district; we are a legacy of industry.

The Wehnwood Pivot

The massive 45,000-square-foot facility at 431 E. 25th Avenue—formerly the iQor call center—is once again on the market. The Great Commission School has opted to move its expansion to a brand-new campus in Hollidaysburg.

The school received a favorable review for the Stowell Farm property. Consequently, the 25th Avenue building has been re-listed at an estimated \$2.2 million, marketed as a blank canvas for commercial or medical use.

Song Sung Blue - A heart warming film worth a trip to the movies

BY JUNIATA OBSERVER MOVIE NEWS

In a cinematic landscape often dominated by biopics of global superstars, *Song Sung Blue* arrives as a refreshing, albeit devastating, counter-melody. Released to critical acclaim, this 2026 standout isn't about the people on the cover of *Rolling Stone*; it is a love letter to the people listening in the front row. Directed with grit and grace, the film delivers a unique story that begins as a toe-tapping musical romance and transforms into a searing portrait of resilience, anchored by career-defining performances from Hugh Jackman and Kate Hudson.

Set against the working-class backdrop of Milwaukee, the film recounts the true story of Mike Sardina (Jackman) and Claire Stengl (Hudson). When audiences first meet them, they are two lost souls scraping by—Mike, a recovering alcoholic and Vietnam vet wrestling with his past, and Claire, a hardworking waitress and mother trying to keep her head above water.

Their romance is sparked by an unlikely catalyst: the music of Neil Diamond. Recognizing Mike's uncanny ability to channel the "Jewish Elvis," Claire pushes him to trade his generic impersonations for a specific persona. Together, they form "Lightning & Thunder," a tribute duo that takes the local circuit by storm. For the first hour, the film is pure, unadulterated joy—a nostalgic ride through anthem-like hits ("Sweet Caroline," "Forever in Blue Jeans") that sees two "ordinary" people finding extraordinary purpose. They blend their families, play sold-out dive bars, and even land a gig opening for Pearl Jam, creating a feel-good atmosphere that disarms the viewer completely.

It is exactly this warmth that makes the film's second half hit so hard. *Song Sung Blue* has been widely described as an emotional rollercoaster because it refuses to stay in the safety of the musical genre. Just as the couple reaches their peak, a harrowing tragedy strikes—a devastating accident involving Claire that permanently alters the trajectory of their lives.

The movie pivots sharply from a sequined fantasy into a raw domestic drama. The glitter fades, replaced by the harsh fluorescent lights of hospitals and the cramped walls of a home under siege by medical bills and trauma. It is here that the story finds its true depth, exploring the brutality of physical recovery and the mental toll of caretaking. The audience is forced to ask: What happens to the show when the music stops?

The film's success rests entirely on the shoulders of its leads, who display staggering range. Hugh Jackman peels away his Broadway polish to play Mike not as a star, but as a man holding onto sanity by a thread. He captures a heartbreaking duality: the charismatic showman on stage who can command a room, versus the terrified, vulnerable husband off-stage fighting to keep his wife—and his own sobriety—from collapsing.

Matching him beat-for-beat is Kate Hudson, delivering perhaps the most powerful performance of her career. Her transformation from the vibrant, driving force of "Thunder" to a woman physically broken and battling severe depression is difficult to watch but impossible to look away from. She avoids Hollywood glamorization, opting instead for a portrayal of pain that is quiet, unvarnished, and deeply human.

Ultimately, *Song Sung Blue* touches the heart because it redefines what it means to be a "legend." It suggests that the greatest performance of Mike and Claire's lives wasn't under the stage lights, but in the quiet, grueling work of staying together when the world fell apart.

By focusing on the beauty and pain of a regular American life, the film achieves a profound authenticity. It is a reminder that you don't need to be famous to have a story worth telling, and that sometimes, the most heroic thing you can do is simply sing the next verse, no matter how much it hurts.

Juniata Works

Strawberry Hills

Work continues on the Strawberry Hills complex. This 100-acre site, located between North 9th and 19th Avenues, is being transformed into a major soccer and multipurpose facility.

Heavy grading has commenced. Logan Township documents confirm the long-term vision to bring vital green space to the community.

The ICE Facility

The former ICE Armory Operations center has officially returned to city control. The 5.6-acre property was recently appraised at \$2.3 million.

Retail Expansion

At the corner of 25th Avenue and Juniata Gap Road, construction is active on the 7,500-square-foot Dollar General, replacing the former Pizza Hut site.

Yerty Auto Service Expands to Altoona with \$4.5M Lumax Site Redevelopment

According to a January 9, 2026 report by the **Altoona Mirror**, Roaring Spring-based Yerty Auto Service has acquired the former Lumax Industries facility on Chestnut Avenue to significantly expand its operations. The **Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development (DCED)** confirmed the deal earlier this week, announcing that the project is supported by a \$1.8 million low-interest loan which will help fund the estimated \$4.5 million renovation of the 140,000-square-foot site. As noted in state filing documents, the move will allow Yerty to consolidate its vehicle dismantling and shipping services, retaining 22 current employees while adding 10 new full-time positions to the local workforce at the property, which had been vacant since Lumax's closure in 2023.

ARCHIVES