

“Live Wires” Spark Eight Decades of Community Service

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“Business Men Form New Club” was a headline in the January 11, 1923, *Ellenville Press*, with the subtitle “Live Wires Recognize Needs of This Community.” The story told of the formation of a new club, with the objective of serving the community in any way possible “toward upbuilding its business and social life.”

William L. Douglas, a partner in *Rose & Douglas*, was elected president; Dr. Walter N. Thayer, Jr., superintendent of the *Eastern New York Reformatory* and a leading penologist, who was credited with the evolution of the “Napanoch Plan,” was elected first vice president; Ford Smith, second vice president; and Joseph Watson, secretary-treasurer. Deyo Johnson, grandson of the founder of *Bailey & Deyo*, and chief executive officer of *Deyo’s Lumber*, and Daniel Vanderlyn were named to the advisory board.

The first meeting was attended by 19 of the 25 charter members and was an enthusiastic gathering. Before enumerating the others present at the initial meeting, the *Press* continued, “The club is by no means a closed corporation and will welcome any applications for membership from any live business man.” Note the term: “business man.”

Press editor Louis R. Benedict devoted his editorial in the next edition of the popular weekly to a message of welcome to the new club, “a baby so young that it is as yet unnamed, yet by all appearances a healthy youngster and one that will quickly come into manhood’s estate in our commercial and social life.” A year earlier, Editor Benedict had urged younger business men to come forth so that the older business men, “to whom goes credit for all that we have today, were entitled to surcease from their labors.” In the January 18, 1923, editorial, Benedict complimented the new club that “its roster is replete with the names of Ellenville’s younger business men and doubtless many more will join now that the ice is broken.”

The “baby” was soon named, because an early “Constitution and By-laws” from the files of the *Ellenville Public Library and Museum*, possibly the first such document, clearly refers to **The Noontday Club**, which will meet every two weeks for luncheon, “on Tuesdays from 12 o’clock to 1:00 p.m.” Clearly, the time of the meeting set the name of the club.

The object of **The Noontday Club** was stated: “To serve the community in any way possible toward upbuilding and bettering its business and social life,” the same statement used in the first newspaper account.

Membership “shall consist only of active members, and shall be made up of adult male persons of good character and business reputation, who are interested in and willing to work for the welfare of this community,” the community having been identified in the document title as Ellenville.

A July 19th report, still in 1923, described an “outing” to *Empt’s Camp*, home of the *Wawarsing Fishing Club*, which was attended by 30 members and guests. The *Press* article described **Noontday Club** members as indulging “gastronomically in an extra feed once a month to vary the monotony of the usual weekly luncheons,” so it is safe to

assume that the club had increased its “noontday” meetings to once a week, in addition to an occasional evening “feed.” There was no mention of any kind of business activity, but the social aspects of the evening were thoroughly reviewed.

Five years later, the program for a “Business Men’s Dinner” under the auspices of **The Noontday Club** at the *Mitchell House* on April 17, 1928, (right) included a reprint of an April 12th editorial which suggested that the club was too social and questioned what would be accomplished at this dinner. “Let a few men get up and tell a few things that Ellenville needs, and then start something towards getting those things. A chamber of commerce would help this place a lot, and there would be no better time or place to organize one than at that dinner next Tuesday evening. There are enough things needed in this town to keep a live chamber of commerce busy for the next five years.”

The Noontday Club obviously took those comments to heart, because the next 75 years have been filled with activities “towards getting those things.” No chamber of commerce was formed for many years, so the club performed many of the functions of a chamber of commerce. They have been a service club in the finest sense of “service” and have adjusted their activities to needs appropriate to the time.

Since 1993, the **Ellenville-Wawarsing Chamber of Commerce and Noontday** cooperate in a joint **Holiday Lighting Program**, raising funds for purchase and repairs, plus volunteering to put up the lights at the end of November and remove them in January, replacing them with hospitable banners. The project originally focused on Ellenville, but soon expanded outside the village.

Noontday Club, networking with other groups and individuals, holds an annual **Halloween Fest/Devil’s Night Fest** series of events (incongruously called “Mardi Gras” until a few years ago) to give area children the opportunity to celebrate Halloween in a safe, supervised location. This included a parade of costumed children, prizes in a variety of categories, games, entertainment, and refreshments (photo below), all at no cost to the participants. ➔

