

FEATURED

## Armstrong County unveils its Bells Across PA bell

Bells Across PA is part of the America250 program celebrating America's 250th anniversary

By KIERAN WOYNICZ Staff Reporter  
Nov 20, 2025

1 of 4



In front of the Armstrong County Historical Museum and Genealogical Society, Inc., (ACHMGS) there is a new decoration — a painted bell. As part of the Bells Across PA initiative, the bell is a celebration of America's 250th anniversary and recently was unveiled to the public. Pictured are sponsors and speakers at the unveiling of the Armstrong County bell as part of Bells Across PA.

Kieran Woynicz | Leader Times

In front of the Armstrong County Historical Museum and Genealogical Society, Inc., (ACHMGS) there is a new decoration — a painted bell.

As part of the Bells Across PA initiative, the bell is a celebration of America's 250 anniversary and recently was unveiled to the public.

As part of the unveiling, speakers took time to discuss the bell America250 Branding and Design Director Bri Farrand was the first to speak, telling about the initiative.

"These fiberglass bells may not ring, but they are far silent," said Farrand. "Each one tells a story about community, creativity and pride."

The next to speak was state Rep. Josh Bashline (R-63) who said, "This project unites art, history and patriotism. It's hard to find a better way to ring in America's 250th birthday than combining our strong American spirit with our artist abilities."

Bashline concluding with, "As we take a moment to admire the artwork, let us hear about the courage that shaped the Commonwealth and our country. Let us always be reminded that freedom is never free, and should never be taken for granted. ... Let us be united, inspired and kind to one another as we stand strong and will never be defeated."

Next on the podium was county Commissioner Anthony Shea who spoke of the county's history.

He discussed the 1756 Battle of Kittanning, and how its commander John Armstrong Sr. would later recommend George Washington to lead the Continental Army and who would later be president.

He discussed Gen. Samuel McCartney Jackson, who was present for the Confederate surrender at Appomattox Court House.

"(Armstrong County has) had all kinds of generations that have served in the military – served in all kinds of capacities and business that got us where we are now," Shea said. "Our next generation will face a new world, cyber space and AI, but I know Armstrong County will be able to deal with it all."

After Shea, county Commissioner John Strate spoke and thanked all the sponsors for their help in making the unveiling a possibility.

Sponsors include: James R. Johnson, Rabbit Hole Collective, Sassy Soul Boutique, IMA Insurance & Charles "Chip" Echnoz, Rosebud Mining Co. and Snyder Bros.

Strate also thanked Zambotti Collision Center, "They shut their auto body shop down long enough to make the bell look even better than it did before."

And he concluded by thanking Toy's Landscape Company who did the brickwork for the base of the bell, adding that, "the bricks are from all the brick yards that were in Armstrong County previously."

And Strate concluded his message of gratitude by mentioning the ACHMGS for providing a place for the bell to sit on.

He then provided a bit of background of where the bell was painted – in a bathroom.

After receiving the bell to be painted, he and Cathy Strate, who painted the bell, realized it was too big to fit through any door.

To get in the studio they decided on taking out a bathroom window and fitting the bell though it.

Once the bell was in the bathroom they realized the bell wouldn't fit through the bathroom door.

"So, the bell sat in the bathroom for the entire time it was painted," he concluded.

Before passing on the microphone to the next speaker, he also offered thanks to Randy Cloak, who was the original head of the America250 committee, for all the hard work Cloak had done.

Strate then announced that the new head of the America250 committee would be Donna Weckerly.

Up next was the curator of the museum Jim Johnson, who told of the building's history.

"Cathy shows her talent and vision of the county's past and present through the images painted on the bell," Johnson said. "I'm pleased to see the bell housed right here, in front of the home of the county's history. I expect it to draw visitors from near and far; and it to serve as a conversation piece and visual education tool for those who visit the museum."

After Johnson, ACHMGS President Tyler Woodside spoke about the bell and its meaning to the county.

“(The bell) is not only a symbol of our nation’s upcoming 250 anniversary, but also a call to remember and preserve the rich history right here in Armstrong County. Our county has played a significant role in shaping what our country is today,” Woodside said. “The bell represents more than a moment of time, it connects us across centuries. It reminds us of the voices that shaped our towns, the hands that built our farms, factories, bridges and schools, and the hearts that carried hope through every challenge.”

Next to the podium Armstrong County Arts Council Executive Director Donna Weckerly spoke briefly of how the bell represents the county.

“Today’s unveiling is not just a presentation, it’s about a testament to what happens when a community believes in itself, works together and supports the arts,” Weckerly said. “When the Bells Across PA initiative began each county was invited to choose an artist and design for the bell. For us, that came with a few parts that had to be done quickly.”

She thanked everyone for working hard and quickly to secure sponsors and funding to have the bell delivered to Armstrong.

“The project has had more hands and hearts behind it than can be counted, each of you playing a very meaningful role,” Weckerly said. “Our county’s bell reflects our heritage, our resilience and our shared spirit.”

The last to speak was Cathy Strate, who painted the bell, and who first thanked everyone for making the bell a possibility, then told of her process in designing the bell.

“I wanted to portray the history as well as present day Armstrong County. What makes us unique and what defines us. Along with the sponsor’s help and research, we’ve attempted to include the histories of the small communities throughout our county,” she said.

She went on to detail the various aspects that went into the design, and how she incorporated the Great Dayton Fair, Jackson Mansion, Nellie Bly, Armstrong’s industrial past and its natural beauty with other parts from across the county.

She concluded with the following quote from Abraham Lincoln: “I like to see a man proud of the place in which he lives. I like to see a man live so that his place will be proud of him.”

“It is my hope that we are all proud of the place we live, and that we will continue to work together to preserve that heritage of the county and build a future so that our place can be proud of us,” she said.

For more information about the Bells Across PA initiative, visit: [america250pa.org/PPE:\\_Bells\\_Across\\_PA](http://america250pa.org/PPE:_Bells_Across_PA) — or follow the initiative on Facebook at: [facebook.com/America250PA](https://facebook.com/America250PA).

---

*Kieran Woynicz is a staff reporter for the Leader Times. He can be reached at 724-543-1303, ext. 1337 or: [kwoynicz@leadertimes.com](mailto:kwoynicz@leadertimes.com).*

---

**Kieran Woynicz**  
Staff Reporter

Learn more about your privacy options