



/EDITOR'S PICK

Centuries of fun: Mahjong growing in popularity

SEP 7, 2024 BY KAREN MANSFIELD 8 MIN READ



Observer-Reporter





Karen Mansfield/Observer-Reporter



A clacking sound filled the dining room of Cheryl Hopper’s East Washington home as she and three friends swirled mahjong tiles on a table.

Every other Tuesday, the women assemble there to play Mahjong, a centuries-old game that has become downright trendy.

“I love playing. It’s like a shot in the arm for me, it’s so much fun,” said Hopper, who learned to play about a year-and-a-half ago after a longtime friend invited her to tag along to a Mon Valley restaurant where a group plays every other Friday. “I’ve known about mahjong for years and I’ve always wanted to learn how to play, but for a long while I couldn’t find anybody who played. Now, there are several

Observer-Reporter

Likened to the card game rummy, mahjong (sometimes spelled mah jongg and pronounced MAH-jahng), is a four-person tile game in which each person tries to be the first to make a winning combination of

sets and pairs.



In American mahjong, each player is dealt a hand of 13 tiles – engraved with Chinese characters and symbols from different suits (bam, dots and craks) as well as wind, flower and dragon tiles.

Each player takes turns drawing and discarding tiles until one player completes a hand and calls out “mahjong.”

Oh, but if it were that easy.

Mahjong is a game of strategy, skill, and a little bit of luck – you may never get that tile you need to complete the hand you’ve carefully cultivated on the rack before you, said Kathy Jones, who along with Mary Ann Sember started a mahjong club at the Jewish Community Center – South Hills in Scott Township in 2022.

Since Jones and Sember taught mahjong classes (four-week long, two-hour sessions), the club has grown from three members to 70.

They taught classes for 60 straight weeks because so many people wanted to learn how to play..

“It’s a great game. I like that it challenges your brain, and I like the camaraderie and the friendships that you build,” said Sember. “As a matter of fact, I knew none of the people here when we started the club, and after the first year, three of us went on a cruise, and we played mahjong onboard.”

Michael and Colleen Brennan of Peters Township picked up the game two years ago – Jones taught them at Monday’s Brewing Company in Peters Township – and the couple plays two times a week, at the JCC on Tuesdays and at the Galleria on Thursday nights.

For Michael Brennan, the game “was overwhelming to start.”

“It was very hard to pick up on. It’s not the way I think. I think very linearly, which is different from the card patterns we follow,” said Brennan, an engineer. “And it’s kind of like baseball – you’re not going to win every game and you’re not going to get a hit every at-bat. You’re going to lose a lot of games, so don’t get frustrated with that.”

Observer-Reporter



There are so many people you meet here. Look how many groups are here,” she said, as she glanced around the JCC, where 14 tables were filled with mahjong players. “It’s a cognitive game that keeps your brain stimulated, and I do like that, too.”

The Jewish community, in particular, has played a large role in popularizing mahjong.

Helene Schroder, who plays with Hopper’s Tuesday group, grew up playing mahjong with her family in the Catskill Mountains in upstate New York.

“My mother taught me when I was 9 years old. It’s a very Jewish game that my mom played, that’s how I learned. It has now become more mainstream, but when I was growing up, it was something the Jewish community played,” said Schroder.

Mahjong has made appearances in television shows and movies, including “The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel,” “Crazy Rich Asians,” and “Driving Miss Daisy.”

The game also has found new popularity among young people.

Each year, the National Mah Jongg League publishes a new card full of new combinations, and players must match one of those combinations. This year, the league celebrates its 87th anniversary.

Mahjong has also become a staple at Eva K. Bowlby Library in Waynesburg, Greene County, where players gather on Wednesday afternoons.

At a recent get-together, a group of regulars – Greene County residents Barb Creighton, Suzanne Cole, Sandy Whetsell, Jo Hoy and Nancy Oja – taught first-time player Jane Headlee, of Waynesburg, the basics of the game.

The group loves the concentration, the (mostly) friendly competition, and the connections the game provides.

Some of the players at the library – a dozen or more at times – have been friends for years while others have just recently met, and they come from all walks of life.

rom
“I remember after the first day I played, I thought, ‘I’m never going back because I’ll never get this because my brain can’t handle it. But after I went home and thought about it, I said, ‘Challenge yourself,’” said Hoy, laughing. “I’m so glad I went back. I really like it. It’s challenging in a good way.”

Hopper’s Tuesday group met through an advertisement she placed in a mahjong site where you can meet fellow mahjong players.

“I serendipitously found this group, and I’m over here every other Tuesday to play. It’s a smart group of women,” said Carolyn Carson of Collier Township, who plays in other mahjong circles, too. “We’re chatty. It is challenging and a whole lot of fun.”

To meet the demand of people wanting to learn how to play, local players, including Jones and Hopper, have offered to provide instruction to teach future mahjong players the ins-and-outs of the game.

There are several mahjong books and online apps for players to sharpen their skills, but the best way to learn is to play.

Joan Charlson of Canonsburg, who won two games on Tuesday after a drought of several weeks, attempted to learn how to play for two years before she met Jones, who offered to teach her.

“I tried learning over and over. I gave up. I took lessons, I paid for lessons, I had a book, I just couldn’t get it. Then I met Kathy and we started talking and she said, ‘I’ll teach you to play,’ and the rest is history. Here I am,” said Charlson, who also plays at the Galleria and with another small group and was wearing a mahjong dragon bracelet for good luck.

Charlson was a willing student, once bringing the mahjong card in a plastic bag that she propped against a water bottle and studied with Jones while they treaded in deep water in the JCC pool.

“She lets out a little shriek of joy every time she wins, and I’m so tickled,” said Jones. “I dearly love her. She tried so many times, and now she’s the resident expert.”

At the JCC, players usually bring their own mahjong sets. The tile sets can range in price from affordable (if you’re just dipping your toe into mahjong waters, you can find sets on Amazon or Mac.Bid), to quite expensive, depending on the material, craftsmanship, and brand.

Observer-Reporter

mahjong while she was growing up, owns three sets that were passed down to her: two were made in



the 1950s and one, from her godmother, dates back to 1918.

She plays mahjong on those antique boards every Monday for five hours with three childhood friends – Jones, who lived two doors down when they were kids, and sisters Elaine Goldblum and Marcia Cantor.

“We play without fail. How cool is that, that we’ve known each other all our lives and we get together to play?” said Simons, noting the group starts around noon and plays until about 5 p.m. They play at least five games an hour.

Games can take as little as 15 minutes to complete, so players can squeeze in several games during an hour.

“Some people can play a gazillion games in an hour and love it, and other people like to play three or four games in an hour, and laugh and talk,” said Sember. “There’s something for everyone in this game. I’m always happy to play.”

LATEST NEWS

Wild Things hold on, win Game 1

Tourism agency awards \$150k to seven entities in Washington County

Washington Park swimming pool has successful summer

Police determine threat to school districts to be non-credible

ARTICLE TAGS

fayette county

greene county

mahjong

washington county

Observer-Reporter





Listings » This Week's Top Events

September 25, 2024

Pittsburgh's top events: Sept 25-Oct 2

By CP Staff



Photo: Courtesy of Pittsburgh Art Book Fair

Pittsburgh Art Book Fair at Carnegie Museum of Art

Thu., Sept. 26

FILM • DOWNTOWN

The Substance. 5 p.m. Continues through
Liberty Ave., Downtown. \$9-11. [trustart.com](#)

Major in watching
NFL football

Students can sign up for
NFL Sunday Ticket for just \$199



FILM • OAKLAND

Screenshot Asia presents *The Cats of Gokogu Shrine*. 7 p.m. Frick Fine Arts Building-University of Pittsburgh. 650 Schenley Dr., Oakland. \$5-11.
screenshot.pitt.edu

TOUR • MUNHALL

Start the spooky season early with a special event hosted by **The Battle of Homestead Foundation. *Stories Behind the Stones: A Local History Evening with Homestead Cemetery*** invites participants to experience the last 150 years during a tour of 34 areas across a historic resting place. Join historians Kim Farrah, Kyra Mangold, and Russ Firestone as they highlight notable figures buried on the grounds. 7-8:30 p.m. *The Pump House*. 880 East Waterfront Dr., Munhall. Free. Registration required. battleofhomestead.org

Fri., Sept. 27

MUSIC • NORTH SHORE

Barenaked Ladies with Toad the Wet Sprocket. 7 p.m. Doors at 6 p.m.
Rivers Casino. 777 Casino Dr., North Shore. \$79-99. 21 and over.
riverscasino.com

FASHION • DOWNTOWN

Pittsburgh Fashion Week Runway Show. 7:30 p.m. Wintergarden at PPG Place. One PPG Pl., Downtown. \$25-150. pghfw.com

MUSIC • SHADYSIDE

Chatham Baroque presents *A Garden of Harmony: Austrian & German Music for Strings*. 7:30 p.m. Calvary Episcopal Church. 315 Shady Ave.,

Shadyside. \$20-45. chathambaroque.org

GAME SHOW • ALLENTOWN

Meet Cute: Cuffing Season with Pittsburgh Personified. 8 p.m. Doors at 5 p.m. Bottlerocket Social Hall. 1226 Arlington Ave., Allentown. \$10.
bottlerocketpgh.com

FILM • MUNHALL

William Shatner Live with *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*. 8 p.m. Doors at 7 p.m. Carnegie of Homestead Music Hall. 510 E. 10th Ave., Munhall. \$72.75-92.75. *librarymusichall.com*

THEATER • WEST END

Pittsburgh Musical Theater presents *Evil Dead: The Musical*. 8:30 p.m. Continues through Sat., Oct. 26. West End Canopy. 327 South Main St., West End. \$41.50-46.50. *pittsburghmusicals.com*

MUSIC • MILLVALE

Soul Coughing. 9 p.m. Doors at 8 p.m. Mr. Smalls Theatre. 400 Lincoln Ave., Millvale. \$35 in advance, \$37 at the door. *mrsmalls.com*

Sat., Sept. 28

TOUR • HAZELWOOD

Guided Walking Tour of Hazelwood with Matthew Jacob and Laura Zurowski of *City Steps of Pittsburgh: A History and Guide*. 10 a.m.-12:30 p.m. New France Brewing/Abstract Realm Brewing. 5009 Lytle St., Hazewood. \$5.
3riversoutdoor.com



Photo: Courtesy of Contemporary Craft

Community Day at Contemporary Craft

ART • LAWRENCEVILLE

Community Day. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Contemporary Craft. 5645 Butler St.,
Lawrenceville. Free. All ages. contemporarycraft.org



Photo: Courtesy of Pittsburgh Art Book Fair

Pittsburgh Art Book Fair at Carnegie Museum of Art

LIT • OAKLAND

Add some spice to your home library during the **Pittsburgh Art Book Fair** at **Carnegie Museum of Art**. The event features over 70 local, national, and international exhibitors selling art books, zines, and rare and out-of-print titles in the museum's Hall of Sculpture. Attendees can also participate in workshops and discussion around book and zine making, as well as what a press release describes as "publishing as an art practice, art and ecology, and publishing as an act of resistance." *10 a.m.-5 p.m. Continues through Sun., Sept. 29. 4400 Forbes Ave., Oakland. Free (museum admission not required). All ages. pabf.cargo.site*

TOUR • HOMEWOOD

Homewood Cemetery Walk with Prime Stage Theatre. *12-4:30 p.m. The Homewood Cemetery. 1599 S Dallas Ave., Homewood. \$20. primestage.com*

DANCE • LAWRENCEVILLE

Attack Theatre presents Game Day with the Seven Minute Dance

Series. 1-4 p.m. Attack Theatre Studios. 212 45th St., Lawrenceville. Free.

attacktheatre.com

PARTY • GREENFIELD

Alternate Histories Studio presents Greenfield Happy Hour. 3-7 p.m.

Alternate Histories Studio. 517 Greenfield Ave., Greenfield. Free. All ages.

instagram.com/alternatehistories

MARKET • DOWNTOWN

Market Square Night Market with MCG Jazz. 5-10 p.m. Market Square.

Downtown. Free. downtownpittsburgh.com

GALA • STRIP DISTRICT

Pittsburgh Opera presents the Diamond Horseshoe Ball. 6-10 p.m. Bitz

Opera Factory. 2425 Liberty Ave., Strip District. \$55-780. pittsburghopera.org

GALA • OHIO TOWNSHIP

Animal Friends presents Black Tie and Tails. 6:30-10 p.m. Animal Friends.

562 Camp Horne Rd., Ohio Township. \$200-500. thinkingoutsidethecage.org

FILM • ALLENTOWN

SUBCINEMA presents Virgin Beasts. 8:30-10:30 p.m. Doors at 8 p.m. Little

Giant Studio. 100 Asteroid Way, Allentown. \$10. subcinema.org

COMEDY • STRIP DISTRICT

Stanzi Potenza: Hot Girl Activism. 7 p.m. and 10 p.m. Doors at 5:30 p.m. and 9 p.m. City Winery. 1627 Smallman St., Strip District. \$22-28. citywinery.com

PARTY • LAWRENCEVILLE

brat girls with DJ gun.ray and Boo Barrymore. 9 p.m. Belvedere's Ultra-Dive. 4016 Butler St., Lawrenceville. \$7 before 10 p.m., \$10 after 10 p.m. 21 and over. belvederesultradive.com

Sun., Sept. 29

FILM • MULTIPLE LOCATIONS

Silence never sounded so good during a film series taking place at various Pittsburgh venues. The **Pittsburgh Silent Film Society** presents the **Pittsburgh Silent Film Festival**, a multi-day event celebrating the early days of cinema. The festival kicks off with a 100th anniversary screening of the 1924 Harold Lloyd comedy *Hot Water*, followed in subsequent days by *He Who Gets Slapped* starring Lon Chaney, the early LGBTQ classic *Michael*, the Austrian film *The Hands of Orlac*, and more. Each screening includes live musical accompaniment by local acts. *Showtimes vary. Continues through Sun., Oct. 6. Multiple locations. pittsburghsilentfilmsociety.org*

DANCE • OAKLAND

Pittsburgh Swing Dance Community presents Sunday Swing. 12-3 p.m. Schenley Plaza. 4100 Forbes Ave., Oakland. Free. pittsburghparks.org

OPEN MIC • SEWICKLEY

Autism-Friendly Open Mic. 2-5 p.m. *The Lindsay Theater and Cultural Center.*
418 Walnut St., Sewickley. Suggested donation. RSVP required.
bandtogetherpgh.org

ART • SQUIRREL HILL

Opening Reception: Judy Robinson and Kara Snyder: *The Art of Friendship*. 3-5 p.m. Continues through Dec. 20. JCC of Greater Pittsburgh:
American Jewish Museum. 5738 Forbes Ave., Squirrel Hill. Free. jccpgh.org

COMEDY • HOMESTEAD

Collin Chamberlin. 7 p.m. Doors at 5:30 p.m. *Pittsburgh Improv.* 166 East
Bridge St., Homestead. \$20-70. 21 and over. improv.com/pittsburgh

Mon., Sept. 30

MUSIC • NORTH SHORE

Sammy Rae and The Friends with Victoria Canal. 7 p.m. *Stage AE.* 400
North Shore Dr., North Shore. \$36-86. promowestlive.com

Tue., Oct. 1

MUSIC • GARFIELD

Bark Culture with Elsinore and Boydozer. 7 p.m. *Bantha Tea Bar.* 5002
Penn Ave., Garfield. \$10. facebook.com/tcrpsprsnts



Photo: Josh Flores

Wale: Every Blue Moon Tour at Roxian Theatre

MUSIC • MCKEES ROCKS

Wale: Every Blue Moon Tour. 8 p.m. Doors at 7 p.m. Roxian Theatre. 425 Chartiers Ave., McKees Rocks. Tickets start at \$31. roxiantheatre.com

Wed., Oct. 2

MUSIC • LAWRENCEVILLE

Rain City Drive with Belmont, Until I Wake, Siamese, and Nightlife. 6:30 p.m. Doors at 6 p.m. Thunderbird Music Hall. 4053 Butler St., Lawrenceville. \$25. thunderbirdmusichall.com





In-demand senior programming gets boost from Jewish Community Center in South Hills



JORDAN ANDERSON ✓
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
janderson@post-gazette.com

SEP 6, 2024

5:17 PM

Expanded senior services are coming to the South Hills.

The Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh first launched its “AgeWell” programming in this suburban area to reach older adults with less access to resources, especially during the pandemic. The demand for the activities quickly proved overwhelming.

That’s why the Allegheny County Department of Human Services is now adding AgeWell at JCC South Hills to its network of 40 senior centers across the county. The new partnership with DHS will allow JCC to expand its health, wellness and social networking services for local seniors.

Sharon Feinman, division director of AgeWell at the JCC, said she’s excited to see the programming’s potential with the county’s support. AgeWell is open to any Allegheny County resident who is 60 years of age or older.

“It just opens up so many doors and so many new opportunities,” Ms. Feinman said. “We’re trying to do a lot of new and unique programming. It blows my mind what the staff out here has been doing in such a short amount of time.”

AgeWell acts as a one-stop resource to local seniors, offering weekly classes and activities that cover everything from nutrition to safe driving to tech to medication management. JCC staff also provide informational and referral services to help meet housing, transportation and other basic needs.

The organization had only offered AgeWell programs at its Squirrel Hill center, but people living in the suburbs couldn’t necessarily reach those services, Ms. Feinman said.

With support of the Jack Buncher Foundation back in 2023, the JCC was able to garner enough funding to add the staffing and space needed to make AgeWell possible in South Hills.

“We've been advocating for several years to get funding out here,” Ms. Feinman said. “So finally, we said, you know what? We're going to do this anyway. We could show the county, we could show DHS, this is something that people need, they want, and we have the knowledge and experience to pull it off.”

That proved true — since its launch, AgeWell has attracted more than 1,000 members. The initial goal in the first year was to reach 200 registrations, Ms. Feinman said.

One of AgeWell's most popular offerings is the kosher style Grab-and-Go lunches, which will be offered five times a week thanks to the recent DHS partnership. The county is also able to fully cover the cost of the meals, so seniors can now enjoy them for free. A donation of \$3 is suggested.

“The need was even more than we thought,” Ms. Feinman said. “It was huge out here. There's a lot of surrounding areas that people are coming from because maybe they want a kosher meal, and there's no other places to get it here.”

Hayley Maher, department director of AgeWell at JCC South Hills, is eager to welcome more neighbors across the county to AgeWell. With a lack of socialization posing a growing public health threat to seniors, staff like Ms. Maher see the connections being made over a meal or mahjong game each week.

“The sense of community that AgeWell members in the South Hills have established in the short time the program has been running is incredible,” Ms. Maher said in a statement. “Many members have either made new friends within AgeWell or reconnected with old friends. There is something here for everyone.”

Allegheny County seniors can register for AgeWell in person at JCC's South Hills office at 345 Kane Blvd. in Scott. For more information, contact 412-278-1795.

First Published: September 6, 2024, 5:17 p.m.

Updated: September 7, 2024, 3:21 p.m.



Jordan Anderson covers social services for the Post-Gazette.

✉ janderson@post-gazette.com

Limited Time Offer

8 weeks of unlimited access for only 99¢!

GET OFFER

Important Disclosure

The Sprott Funds Trust is made up of the following ETFs ("Funds"): Sprott Gold Miners ETF (SGDM), Sprott Junior Gold Miners ETF (SGDJ), Sprott Energy Transition Materials ETF (SETM), Sprott Lithium Miners ETF (LITP), Sprott Uranium Miners ETF (URNM), Sprott Junior Uranium Miners ETF (URNJ), Sprott Junior Copper Miners ETF (COPJ) and Sprott Nickel Miners ETF (NIXL). Before investing, you should consider each Fund's investment objectives, risks, charges and expenses. Each Fund's prospectus contains this and other information about the Fund and should be read carefully before investing.

A prospectus can be obtained by calling 888.622.1813 or by visiting <https://sprottets.com/>.

The Funds are not suitable for all investors. There are risks involved with investing in ETFs, including the loss of money. The Funds are non-diversified and can invest a great portion of assets in securities of individual issuers than a diversified fund. As a result, changes in the market value of a single investment could cause greater fluctuations in the value of the investment than a diversified fund.



NEWS

61°

WATCH


[NEWS](#) [WEATHER](#) [VIDEO](#) [11 INVESTIGATES](#) [SPORTS](#) [DECISION 2024](#) [11 CARES](#)
[CHANGING CLIMATE](#) [HOME EXPERTS](#) [CARE CONNECT](#) [BREAKING THE STIGMA](#) [STEALS AND DEALS](#)

BREAKING NEWS | Southern Armstrong Regional police looking for missing 14-year-old 2/2



ATTACK ON JEWISH STUDENTS AT PITT

Pitt students want more campus security, communication from...

Resize:



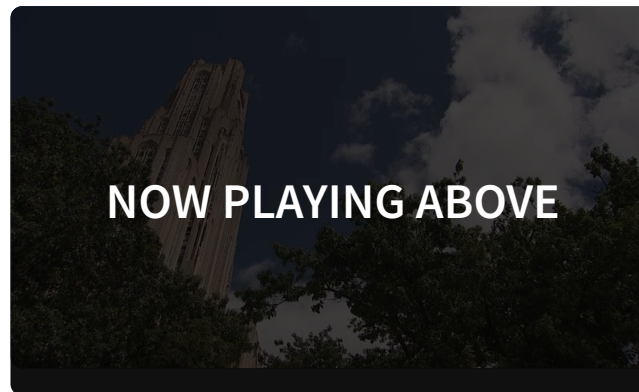
Live Streams



Drag to Resize Video

LOCAL

Pitt student s want more campus security, commun ication



Pitt students want more campus security, communication from leaders after attack on Jewish students



By Talia Kirkland,
WPXI-TV

September 02, 2024 at
7:56 pm EDT

from leaders after attack on Jewish student s



By **Talia Kirkland,**
WPXI-TV

September 02, 2024 at
7:56 pm EDT

PITTSBURGH — Just days after a hateful attack, University of Pittsburgh students are telling Channel 11 what they want to see from campus leaders in the future.

“How do I not know about that? How do I only know about that through other students,” Amelia Katz asked.

Katz is a freshman at Pitt and says she’s disappointed with how the university handled an attack on Jewish students. She told us she only learned of it through word of mouth on campus.

ADVERTISEMENT

[Read More](#)



“I am Jewish and hearing about that as kind of an afterthought to the whole situation was just a little jarring,” she said.



SPONSORED CONTENT

Get Access To Top-Ranked Care. [↗](#)

By **UPMC HEALTH PLAN**

According to police, a group of Jewish students walking on campus near the Cathedral of Learning were attacked last Friday evening. Court documents claim Jarrett Buba, 52, threw a glass bottle at the victims, hitting one on the back of the neck. As the glass shattered, another student’s face was also cut.

>>> **Man arrested for allegedly attacking group of students with bottle near Cathedral of Learning**

“You kind of think of college as like a place where different ideas can co-exist and different identities there can be a discourse around it instead of senseless acts of violence It is frightening in that regard,” said freshman Kylie Lavelle.

On Monday, the Jewish Community Center released a statement regarding the act of violence. It says in part:

“Nobody should feel unsafe or threatened because of their religious identity. The JCC is grateful to the University of Pittsburgh and local law enforcement for their quick response... There is no place for Jew-hatred in our community,” Jason Kunzman, CEO and president of JCC of Greater Pittsburgh.

Students tell us there’s still room for improvement and want to see the following changes:

- More security around campus
- Using the Emergency Notification System
- More open discussions about religion

Pitt told us they didn't use the ENS alert because the suspect was immediately arrested.

"Keep students in the know don't hide things because they feel like it, let everyone have the same amount of information," Katz said.

The FBI is currently investigating the incident.

Download the [FREE WPXI News app](#) for breaking news alerts.

Follow Channel 11 News on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). | [Watch WPXI NOW](#)

TRENDING NOW:

- [Grandmother beat 3-year-old, left her in bed for days before death, court documents say](#)
- [Man killed in McKeesport shooting](#)
- [Motorcyclist in critical condition after crash on Pittsburgh's South Side](#)
- [VIDEO: Man killed, 2 people hurt in early morning Clairton shooting](#)
- [DOWNLOAD the Channel 11 News app for breaking news alerts](#)

WHAT DO YOU THINK?



To what extent are you concerned about microplastics in the environment?

- ☐ Very concerned
- ☐ Somewhat concerned
- ☐ Not at all concerned
- ☐ Other / No opinion

* By clicking "NEXT" I submit my answers and consent to the use of cookies for research and advertising purposes; I have read and agree to the [CivicScience Privacy Policy and Terms of Service](#)

NEXT *