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**December  
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# *Altoona Proud*

A Monthly Insight into all that is Altoona

## **National Impaired Driving Prevention Month**

Weekends and holidays are always dangerous times on our roadways, not only because of the number of travelers on the road, but also because of those who are driving while impaired. Two of the most celebrated days of the year, Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve, also are among the deadliest. That's why December has been recognized as National Impaired Driving Prevention Month. It serves as a reminder to plan ahead for safe transportation, especially during this time of holiday parties and travel.

Now in its 45<sup>th</sup> year, National Impaired Driving Prevention Month is a way to educate teens and adults alike about the real dangers of impaired driving. Last year, more than one in eight drivers admitted to driving when they thought they were close to, or over, the legal alcohol limit. Drunk driving was the cause of over 13,000 deaths in 2024, a level that has not been seen in the United States since 2007.

Alcohol, however, is only one cause of impaired driving. Prescription and over-the-counter medications, illegal drugs, opioids, marijuana and factors like fatigue and stress can also impair driving by causing drowsiness, visual malfunctions and delayed mental judgment and motor skills. You can learn more about the causes of impairment by visiting [www.nsc.org/impairment](http://www.nsc.org/impairment).

Make a plan for a safe ride home before celebrations begin. Designate an unimpaired driver, use public transportation, taxis or ride-shares or, if you are a host, provide alternatives like non-alcoholic beverages or overnight lodging.



**PLAN AHEAD FOR  
A SAFE HOLIDAY  
SEASON**

## 2025 Holiday Events

Lakemont Park and The Altoona Curve have partnered again this year to host the 2025 **Holiday Lights On The Lake!** This landscape of close to 200 light displays is open now through January 4, 2026, operating daily from 6:00 PM–10:00 PM. Watch for Loco's favorite decorations for a chance to win \$1,000! This year you can book your visit in advance at [www.lakemontparkfun.com/hlol](http://www.lakemontparkfun.com/hlol)



Experience the light displays by joining the **Walking Tour through the Holiday Lights.** This is a one mile, guided stroll through the festive lights. The cost is \$10 per person, with complimentary hot cocoa! The Walking Tour will be available on seven different Saturdays throughout the season, beginning at 4:00 PM. and ending at 5:30 PM. Reserve your spot in advance at <https://lakemontparkfun.com/hlol/>.

The 2025 Spirit of Christmas Parade in downtown Altoona is on Saturday, December 6<sup>th</sup>, beginning at 1:00 PM. The parade, including floats, local bands and performance groups will be broadcast live by Seven Mountains Media. Immediately following the parade, Party in the Plaza begins in Heritage Plaza, complete with a tree lighting, petting zoo, food and photos with Santa, ending with a fabulous fireworks display!



There is still time to register for the Blair Emergency Services Chaplain Platoon (BESCP) **Ugly Christmas Sweater 5K and 2 Mile Walk** on **December 6th.** Registration is available online or on event day. The Race / Walk begins at 9:00 AM at Heritage Plaza with lots of fun along the route. Visit [runsignup.com/Race/PA/Altoona/UglyChristmasSweaterFunRun5K](http://runsignup.com/Race/PA/Altoona/UglyChristmasSweaterFunRun5K) to learn more.

The Baker Mansion will host Victorian Christmas tours from November 21<sup>st</sup> through December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2025, with tours running Fridays through Sundays from 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM. Standard admission rates apply, and the Mansion will also have other holiday music nights. For more information, visit [info@blairhistory.org](mailto:info@blairhistory.org) or their Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/blairhistory](http://www.facebook.com/blairhistory)



## 2026 Sister City Group Visit



In March of 2026, Altoona will host 25 students and several delegates from St. Polten for a week-long visit, celebrating our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary as Sister Cities. We hope to give them some of the experiences that our single student had in October, but we need your help to make it happen. Expenses will include airport and excursion bus transportation, as well as lodging for the delegates. You can donate online as an individual, group or business at <https://centralpagives.org/give-now> and specify Sister City for your donation, or you can send a check to Central Pennsylvania Community Foundation (CPCF) and designate Sister City for your donation. Thank you in advance for helping our students to experience interactions and create friendships with students from our Sister City!



# Sister City Student Visit

From October 18<sup>th</sup> through November 2<sup>nd</sup>, Altoona hosted a student from our Sister City of St. Polten, Austria. Pirmin Rauscher, 18, was the winner of a competition in St. Polten in which one student from each high school competes before judges with a presentation. While here, he experienced new foods like milkshakes, Parlor Doughnuts, Chik-Fil-A, free drink refills, Meadows ice cream, Tom & Joe's breakfasts and steak salad with fries, which he named as his favorite food here!

He attended Altoona Area High School, giving presentations about his homeland and family to classes at AAHS. He attended high school volleyball, college soccer, Senior Night at AAHS final football game of the season, and even kept up with his workout routine at a local gym. Pirmin experienced disc golf, miniature golf, movies, touch football, and his first American Halloween, in costume!

He visited local landmarks like Baker Mansion, the Mishler Theatre, the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, SAMA, Horseshoe Curve and the Railroaders Memorial Museum. He spent a day in State College and at the Penn State Altoona Campus. With Mayor Pacifico, he visited Harrisburg, meeting both Representative Schmitt and Senator Ward, and saw Chocolate World in Hershey!

Huge thanks to the Mitchell Family, Mayor Pacifico and the Sister City committee members for helping Pirmin make wonderful memories, and to the local businesses and individuals who have donated to the Sister City Fund so we can continue this program.



# U. S. News & World Report Recognizes Altoona, PA

U.S. News and World Report, the global authority in rankings and consumer advice, has published their rankings for the top cities in the United States that are best places to retire. We are excited to announce that Altoona, PA has ranked at number 8 in a listing of 250 cities across the United States.

Rankings were based on how each city meets American retirees' expectations, measuring health care, taxes, population, job market ratings, affordability and, most notably, quality of life. The findings were created using surveys of individuals across the United States ages 45 and over, along with federal, state and local data rankings. Altoona was identified as a tax-friendly location, particularly for retirees, but also when compared to cities of similar size here in Pennsylvania.



In addition to being listed as the 8<sup>th</sup> best place to retire, U. S. News has published the rankings for the 16 Best Cities to Live in Pennsylvania and Altoona has placed 2<sup>nd</sup>, just behind Pittsburgh! Factors that determined the rankings included cost of living, home ownership and rental prices, median household income, commute time and age of population. The median age of residents is 39 years, comparable to state averages; however, there are more single people in Altoona (58%) than the national average of 46%.

Housing costs and commute time are both lower than the national average. Though median household income is lower than the national average, when comparing that with our housing costs, Altoona offers a better value than similar cities in the state. And, even with the recent tax increase in 2025, Altoona's tax rates remain below average compared to other PA cities of similar size.

This is definitely news to make us **ALTOONA PROUD!**

**On behalf of Mayor Matt Pacifico and staff, we wish you all a safe and happy holiday season and a prosperous 2026!**



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