

COMPLIMENTARY
JANUARY 2010



In Your Prime

Pennsylvania and New Jersey's 55+ Publication

Turning the Tide Against Negativity

**What's in a Name?
A History That's
Hard to Let Go**

**When the New Jersey
Sky Filled with Flames**

**Small Life Changes
Can Produce
Giant Rewards**



In Their Prime

Keep Hope Alive

What started as a simple desire to capture a small town's charm exploded into a grassroots movement to prove that positivity can prevail.

Geri Delevich and the other organizers of the first New Hope Celebrates gay pride parade six years ago, half-jokingly, wondered who would watch if everyone were marching.

The thought spiraled into genuine fear — for Delevich, at least — as they began the slow procession down the sparsely lined Bridge Street. But their concerns, Delevich realized, were unfounded the moment they cleared the final rise of the steep avenue and laid eyes on an intersection mobbed with people.

It was then that Delevich, 60, knew it was time to tell the last untold story of New Hope, the one about its embracing community.

A 34-year borough resident, Delevich promptly settled on a documentary as her vessel because, she said, it would likely lead her to the largest audiences. With her partner, Marilyn Cichowski, 54, helping to oversee the project, they formed a nonprofit in July 2007 and filmed 24 hours of footage last spring.

The response proved so overwhelming, both during the filming and in the weeks afterward, as word of Delevich's documentary spread, that she and Cichowski found themselves considering additional outlets. What resulted is a three-pronged, multi-media enterprise: the documentary, a book comprised of 57 separate contributions from 54 authors and a 15-song album — all sharing a single title, *Embraceable You*, and a positive message.

"It's giving the opportunity and the empowerment to be able to spread the good, as opposed to fostering the hate, and the fear and the one-upmanship," Cichowski says.

In contrast — fittingly so — to the troubling scene that Delevich imagined and which led to the inspiration for *Embraceable You*, all three components were unveiled at a sold-out, red-carpet premiere in November at the Bucks County Playhouse. Actors read excerpts from the book in between live musical performances and, of course, a screening of the movie. A united community anxiously anticipated its moment in the spotlight.

Something in the air

As momentum grew, it became apparent that there was no shortage of stories. Locals and outsiders began coming forward in mass, all with cherished connections to New Hope that they were eager to share. For some, it was their salvation. For others, their oasis.

The binding theme was the unconditionally embracing nature of the riverside community, which Delevich and Cichowski knew as well as anyone. Both visited as teenagers — Delevich grew up in Lower Bucks, Cichowski in Linden, NJ — and felt a surge of freedom the moment they set foot on Main Street. But they wouldn't come to recognize just how precious it was until they settled there later in their lives.



By Scott Edwards

The difference was that it felt almost magical as teens. Before they could pinpoint a source, all they knew was what they saw and that was that everyone and everything was at least a little off-center, which meant that no one stuck out, including them.

"When we came to New Hope, I remember we'd get dressed up," Delevich said, "wear your mother's old fur coat because it was like the place you went to do wild and crazy stuff — wear that funky hat — and no one would complain about it. You were just, like, fitting in."

Upon their return, both Delevich and Cichowski began to understand that that attitude wasn't quite as random — or intangible — as they thought as adolescents. It was the result of a set of beliefs that was carefully cultivated by a community that treasured diversity and equality long before it became politically correct to do so.

Living in an environment that fosters self-confidence, Delevich said, it's hard not to forge a bond and a desire to encourage it.

"People come here and they get involved and they feel accepted and they feel part of the community and they want to do more," said Delevich, who's in the midst of her third four-year term as a New Hope Borough Councilwoman. "I think I'm one of those people, that I feel very much accepted by the community and embraced for my differences."

A living, breathing example

Embraceable You, whether it be the documentary, the book or the album, feels every bit as intimate as it does universal.

On one level, it's a record of a small but significant sampling of people whose lives have been enriched by New Hope. The anecdotes vary, but there are many common threads, both in terms of experiences and landmarks.

Helping to root the project deeper in the community is its financial stake. Much of the fundraising to cover the production costs — every other aspect was done on a voluntary basis — was conducted locally, really locally in Delevich's case. The retired teacher made several sizable donations along the way in lieu of grants that never quite materialized.

On another level, though, Delevich and Cichowski treat New Hope as a model that they're elevating almost as proof to the rest of the world that such a place exists, that "Hope" is more than a presidential campaign slogan, that the talking heads on TV have got it all wrong because hate doesn't fuel the world's revolution.

"We're doing a shout out for acceptance, peace and harmony," Cichowski said.

"We're doing a shout out for New Hope and we're doing a shout out that says this is not a dream. It's a reality," Delevich said. "There are places in our country where people get along."

In this vein, the couple are applying to film festivals, but they also see the corporate world as a potential audience for the documentary, as a teaching tool for how to shape a diverse and harmonious working environment.

"Rather than having the uniformity, it's to open your eyes and see that there's a wealth that is beyond just dollar signs," Cichowski said.

The venue and any potential profit, they say, are irrelevant. The only thing that matters is that word spreads that there is new hope.



Copies of *Embraceable You*, the book and the album, are available at the following New Hope locations:

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| a.k.a., A Glenn Ricci Salon | Last Temptation | Mechanic Street Mugs | Topeo Gallery |
| Bliss Jewelry | The Living Earth | The Nevermore | Whatever's Hot |
| and Accessories | The Logan Inn | Not Too Shabby | |
| Farley's Bookshop | Me Salon & Spa | Salon Gratitude | |

Photos by (top) Looking Glass Studio and (bottom) Gordon Pulaski