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Wandering amid Jenkintown's small-town charm

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For every cookie-cutter office park and sprawling housing tract in Philadelphia's suburbs, there is a rejuvenated Main Street, chockablock with small businesses, neighborhoods with sidewalks, and neighbors who know one another's names.

Jenkintown, just north of the city, exemplifies the best of this inner-ring tradition. It's even got a train station (though one where the trains can be lamentably infrequent, due to SEPTA's apparent desire to punish anyone who runs late with a waiting time of at least 30 minutes).

The town square is right up the hill from the station. It is ringed by locally owned businesses like Velvet Sky Bakery (which provides the Flyers with cupcakes), the Rhinoceros Toy Store (where board games can be rented), and Painting With a Twist (which hosts wine-and-painting nights). All are part of Jenkintown's renaissance. Like most local towns, it suffered with the growth of malls and McMansions, but it's bouncing back, with new businesses opening and Help Wanted signs dotting the borough.

The town square shows off its little shops to advantage, and every Tuesday night in the summer Jenkintown hosts music there. The band Tropical Disease will play Smashing Pumpkins, Weezer, and Neil Young covers on July 22. Kids even get free ice cream.

Tuesday, the Jenkintown-based Pulley and Buttonhole Theatre Company is putting on a 35-minute performance called *How to Eat Like a Child*, an '80s-themed production for the offspring of the Reagan decade and their progeny. (The company's other productions this year include *Antigone* and *Jenkintown: The Musical*.) After the play, students from the School of Rock in Fort Washington will play covers of pop hits.

Afterward, it's easy to walk the densely populated, half-square-mile borough, which is home to bars, fancy restaurants, homey diners, and a gaming hall, for the Dungeons and Dragons inclined. You can even take in a show at the old-school Hiway Theater on Old York Road.

Jawnts: Music Series

Tuesdays at 7 p.m. through Aug. 26 at Jenkintown's Town Square. Get more information at recboard.net.