

Without looking at the past, it's sometimes hard to understand the present, and the Mount Airy Museum of Regional History hopes to instill a love of the past in the area's young people.

"What we want to do is get kids involved with and excited about our community's history," said museum Director Matt Edwards.

In an effort to accomplish that goal, the museum is kicking off this year's season of the Jesse Franklin Pioneers, a chapter of the state's Junior Historian Association. The club started up again for the school year this week, with an informational meeting for parents and interested young people.

Edwards said the local club has been in existence since 2005, and has already garnered the attention of other clubs in the state. "The club is an extremely active part of our educational and outreach [program](#) here at the museum, and they're very good at what they do," he said. "We have twice been named the chapter of the year, and were the rookie chapter of the year the year it was founded." "From a track record of success standpoint, this club has been very successful in competing with other chapters in the state, and each year we participate in an annual conference in Raleigh," Edwards added. "We've had either individual or group [winners](#) every year the club has been in existence."

This year, the club's [activities](#) will focus on a theme. "For the past several years we've picked a theme that has ranged from cemetery history to old time radio," he said. "This year we're going with architectural history and how that ties into community development and the social growth of the community. It sounds very complicated, but it's a great way for us to teach local history in the context of the buildings kids see every day and what was happening when they were being built."

Club participants will also get the benefit of another first this year, Edwards said. "We've been able to bring in a community sponsor for the club," he said. "Chick-Fil-A is going to be sponsoring the club this year, and I'm hoping that partnership will let us ratchet up the quality of the program even more than in the past."

For the museum director, the club is just another way to share his love for community and its history. “Part of my job is to share the passion that I have for local history and to find ways to make it fun and exciting for kids during their daily lives,” he said. “That’s what this is about. It’s about finding a kid and connecting them with a nugget of local history and getting them fired up about it.” He smiled. “Engaging history and helping it come alive,” he said. “That was the goal from the beginning.”

For more information, contact Edwards or Amy Snyder at the museum at 336-786-4478.