

FIRST news

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH | WHITESBORO-UTICA, NY
SEPTEMBER NEWSLETTER | 2026



Seeds of Hope

**MOHAWK VALLEY
GIVES**
POWERED BY THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
AND UPHOBIITY FOUNDATION

SEPTEMBER 18
24HRS OF GIVING



*Let's feed those who
are in need*

For more information please contact us at
(315)-732-5111 OR (315)-525-4013



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Seeds of Hope: Our Mission in Action

From a small closet at First Presbyterian Church to a vital ministry serving hundreds of families, Seeds of Hope has grown because people of faith saw a need and chose to respond.

Seeds of Hope has its missional roots right here at **First Presbyterian Church**. What began years ago in a closet at the church's Genesee Street facility has grown into an urban food pantry serving individuals and families who face food insecurity. Today, Seeds of Hope continues that mission with the support of its church partners and community.

Our Mission

"Our mission is to serve as a beacon of hope and compassion, providing nutritious food to individuals and families in need within our community. Rooted in faith and guided by the love of Christ, we strive to alleviate hunger, foster dignity, and strengthen our neighbors through service, prayer, and fellowship."

Food insecurity is about more than not having enough food. It affects health, learning, emotional well-being, and a family's ability to thrive. For children especially, not having

Continued inside

consistent access to nutritious food can create barriers that can affect them long after the hunger has passed.

Faith That Becomes Action
In Matthew 25, Jesus reminds us that caring for those in need is an essential expression of our faith:

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink..."

And when the righteous ask when they did these things for Him, Jesus responds:

"Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

Seeds of Hope is one way our faith becomes action. It is a tangible expression of the church reaching out to our neighbors and caring for "the least of these."

The need continues to grow. Seeds of Hope served approximately **2,000 households in 2024**, and by 2025 the pantry was serving an average of approximately **144 households each month**. Behind every number is a person, a family, a child, or a neighbor who needs a little help getting through a difficult season.

Mohawk Valley Gives: An Opportunity to Make a Difference
Friday, September 18, is Mohawk Valley Gives.

Mohawk Valley Gives, a giving initiative of the Community Foundation of Herkimer and Oneida Counties, provides an opportunity for local nonprofits to raise awareness and financial support for their missions.

Seeds of Hope will once again participate, supported by its five church partners:

First Presbyterian Church • New Hartford Presbyterian Church • Our Saviour Lutheran Church • New Hartford United Methodist Church • Faro de Luz Seventh-day Adventist Church

This is an opportunity for us as a congregation to come together and help Seeds of Hope meet the growing need in our community.

How Can You Help?

1. Help us reach our \$1,000 congregational match.

First Presbyterian Church has committed **\$1,000 as a matching gift**. Please prayerfully consider what you can give toward this goal. Every gift matters, no matter the size. Checks may be made payable to **Seeds of Hope** and placed in the offering plate or mailed to the church.

2. Share Seeds of Hope with your family and friends.

On **September 18**, invite those you know to support Seeds of Hope through Mohawk Valley Gives. You can use the link below or the QR code:



www.givemv.org/organizations/seeds-of-hope-food-pantry

A sample email with everything you need to share the campaign will be available soon.



3. Ask a local business to consider a matching gift.

Do you know a business that might be willing to help? A business gift of **\$100, \$250, \$500, or more** can become a matching challenge that encourages others to give. If you would like help approaching a business, please let us know. We would be happy to help.

Let's Put Our Faith Into Action
We invite you to **pray about how God may be calling you to help Seeds of Hope this year.**

- ☛ You can give.
- ☛ You can share.
- ☛ You can invite others to participate.
- ☛ You can connect us with a business.
- ☛ You can simply pray for the families who walk through the pantry doors.

Whatever you do, you are helping make sure our neighbors have food on their tables and are reminded that they are not alone.

We do this because we care. We do it because our community needs us. And we do it because Jesus calls us to love and serve others.

Together, let's make Seeds of Hope a powerful expression of our faith in action.



**MOHAWK VALLEY
GIVES**

POWERED BY THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
AND UPMOBILITY FOUNDATION

Fear Not, The Same God, The Same Mission — *A note from the Pastor*

God is always upending the status quo. Examples abound in Scripture. Abraham and Sarah were visited by three “men” (two angels and the Lord) who told them they would have a son. Abraham was 99, and Sarah was 90. Their status quo was altered with a baby one year later.

In Isaiah 43, the people of Israel are dominated by Assyria, and they anticipated going into exile. But God tells them,

“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.” (Isaiah 43:1)

Saul (later Paul) was persecuting the early Christians, including participating in the stoning of Stephen. While traveling to Damascus, the Lord appeared dramatically, and Saul (Paul) had an instantaneous conversion. While his conversion was quick, it took time for the early church to accept him. They had to alter their understanding of Paul as the one called to be God’s voice to the Gentiles.

My status quo was upended when I was called to be the pastor of this church. It involved arranging for movers, looking for a place to live, learning my way around the region, and adapting to the culture of the church.

I learned several status quos had been upended. The First Presbyterian Church of Utica had moved from its long historical location on Genesee Street. The Whitesboro Presbyterian Church had closed. There were lots of intense feelings around both experiences.

Once in town, finding the address on Apple or Google Maps was a challenge. The 1 Elm Street was still listed as the Whitesboro Presbyterian, and if I searched First Presbyterian, it took me to Genesee Street. When I attended events, I was introduced as the pastor of either one of these churches or a combination of both.

When various events took place at First Presbyterian Church, potential guests had trouble knowing where to go due to multiple internet search results for the address. When searching for the church, there are 13 First Presbyterian Churches with First within 25 miles and another 28 First of assorted denominations.

We are working to clean up a multitude of social media sites to make it easier for Sunday morning and event guests to find us and know more about us. We are also trying to be sensitive to those individuals who were part of the Whitesboro Presbyterian, that their presence and tradition matter.

There are numerous other signs that we are in a season of change with the “upending of the status quo.”

- **The Presbytery has voted to transfer the deed of 1 Elm Street to our congregation.** This change brings with it new challenges and opportunities. In preparation for winter, we are already moving toward improvements with a new roof. A “wish” list of needs throughout the building has been drafted and is in the process of being prioritized for future improvements.
- **While it's been 1 ½ years, your pastor is still new.** (For some it may feel like an eternity.) In this short time, I am grateful your leaders approved moving me from halftime to three-fourths time. Every leader brings their own personality and experiences that impact mission and ministry in a church.
- **The minister of music is now salaried.**
- **Intentional hospitality has become a priority.** Guests will decide to return to a church worship service in the first seven to ten minutes. Our intentionality increases the possibi-

ties that they will.

- **Seeds of Hope (SOH), while now a separate 501(c)3, continues to be a major mission partner.** This is illustrated by the staff of this church providing the majority of leadership and administrative support to raise funds through Mohawk Valley Gives the week of September 14 with a focus on September 18th. Last year \$10,000 was raised with a goal of \$15,000 this year. We address the high levels of food insecurity in our region among families by supporting SOH.
- **Another mission focus was Angel Tree.** Clothes, toys, and a Christmas meal are provided for several families. The names are provided by a social worker from the Westmoreland Elementary School. During the Lenten series this past spring, the same social worker told us there was more we could do to help underserved families in the community through the school. We are focused on helping school staff and teachers address student needs. We learned that 50% of the students came from families who are considered working poor.
- **Disciple-making is intentional with a Prayer Chain, Disciple Bible Study, and a Study Series based on *The Chosen*.** Much more will come in the near future through Plentiful Gifts, which provides training opportunities for our leaders to enrich and expand our mission and ministry.
- **Events are being planned by the Fellowship Team that focus on inviting people from the region, not only our congregation.** Outreach has been planned for the community, such as Trunk-or-Treat, with additional ideas in consideration. We are no longer on Genesee Street. We want to know our immediate neighbors.

All the above reflect new horizons for ministry. This includes a new name that looks to the future for God’s plan for our church but also looks back to learn from and celebrate the history of both congregations.

Looking back and looking ahead is reflected in the recently revised and approved vision statement, which integrates the work done in 2002.

Serving Christ and community with open minds, hearts, and hands

In a separate article, you can learn about Small Groups being planned for conversations about the above and much more for the future of the church. We’ll celebrate what we do well. Explore what’s being planned. Listen to your heart and thoughts.

**“Forget the former things;
do not dwell on the past.
See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up;
do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness and streams
in the wasteland.” (Isaiah 43:18-19)**

~Blessings Pastor George



Celebrating Cindy Molesky: 2026 Hunger Hero Award Recipient

We are thrilled to celebrate **Cindy Molesky**, a long-time volunteer and dedicated advocate for those experiencing hunger and food insecurity, as she receives the **2026 Hunger Hero Award** on **Friday, September 11, at Utica University**.

Cindy's journey with **Seeds of Hope Food Pantry** began in 2019, at a time when the pantry was facing a significant leadership challenge. The longtime volunteer roster was aging, and many were experiencing health concerns. A newly retired physical therapist, Cindy offered her willingness to help—and quickly became a dependable, creative, and passionate force behind the pantry's mission of serving families in inner-city Utica.

Cindy stepped into the role of Pantry Coordinator and worked closely with the CNY Food Bank to establish the **"Consumer Choice" model**, giving pantry patrons greater dignity and flexibility in selecting the foods their families needed. Through her dedication and persistence, she also helped rescue surplus food from restaurants and grocery stores so it could be redistributed through Seeds of Hope and other food pantries throughout Utica.

Then came the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the pandemic worsened, many volunteers understandably withdrew from participation. Cindy stepped up. Her commitment to the people who depended on Seeds of Hope never wavered, and she often worked single-handedly to keep the pantry operating during an extraordinarily difficult time.

Her service extends beyond Seeds of Hope. Recognizing the shared challenges faced by food pantries throughout Oneida County, Cindy became involved in the **Oneida County Food Coalition**. Since the Coalition became a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization in May 2026, she has served as its president, helping foster cooperation among the 26 member agencies working to address hunger and food insecurity throughout the county.

For years, Cindy has given countless hours as an unpaid volunteer. She has traveled many miles on behalf of pantry patrons, refuses compensation for her mileage, and continually looks for ways to make sure people have access to nutritious food and the support they need.

The **Hunger Hero Award** is a wonderful recognition of what those who work alongside Cindy have witnessed for years: her compassion, determination, creativity, and unwavering commitment to her community.

At Seeds of Hope, we are especially grateful for all that Cindy has given—and continues to give—to this mission. Her leadership has made a lasting difference in the lives of countless individuals and families.

Congratulations, Cindy, on this well-deserved honor! We are so proud to call you one of our Seeds of Hope family and are grateful for the heart and dedication you bring to the fight against hunger.



24 hrs. of giving...all day 9/18
JOIN OUR GIVING DAY!

Support us and give back on September 18, 2026

For more information, go to GIVEMV.ORG

Seeds of Hope MV Gives [9.18]

On September 18th, Seeds of Hope will participate in the Mohawk Valley Gives campaign. This is a crucial fundraiser that supports our mission to serve the local community. We encourage everyone to support this effort, whether through donations and by spreading the word. As we navigate this season of change and renewal, let us continue to support one another and live out our faith in meaningful ways. Thank you for always being an integral part of SEEDS OF HOPE.



*The grass withers and
the flowers fall, but
the word of our God
endures forever.*

Isaiah 40:8

forever

A Legacy of Faith — A New Identity

OUR STORY CONTINUES

In 2023, as a means of discerning the next steps for the congregation after the sale of the Genesee Street property, the Session followed a decision-making process that was based on discovering “Shared Hopes” that served as the foundation on which to build an effective plan of action. Included in those Shared Hopes was “to be able to discern what God’s plan is for us and to follow it.”

Once Session made the decision to move into the Whitesboro Presbyterian Church, we embraced it as God’s plan for us, dug in, did all the hard work, and made it happen!

Fast forward to 2026. The Session has been addressing the lingering identity issues and confusion that resulted from the move. What do we call ourselves now?

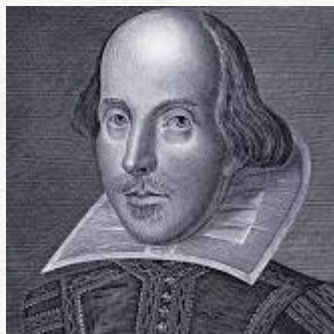
“First Presbyterian Church Utica, now at Whitesboro”?

“First Presbyterian Church Utica/Whitesboro”?

How about just “First Church”?

None of these names felt “right” for several reasons. We are not the same congregation we were in 2023. We now have a shared identity with members who were part of the previous Whitesboro congregation. And we are not located in Utica anymore. When people search for us online, the results are inaccurate or misleading. In fact, when Pastor George first came to visit us, he did a search on Google Maps, which brought him to the Genesee Street location! Similar confusion would result if we took on a name that was used by the previous Whitesboro congregation. On top of all that, there are many churches in Central New York with the name “First.” It was decided after much deliberation that a new church name was warranted.

As Shakespeare might ask,
“What’s in a name? That which
we call a church by any other
name would smell as sweet.”



The answer to Shakespeare’s question is that a distinctive name helps a church share its sense of identity, build a reputation & improve visibility in the community, and avoid confusion with other groups.

There is an accompanying spiritual significance when changing a church’s name. Throughout scripture, God changed individuals’ names to mark the beginning of a new covenant or a shift in their divine calling:

- **Abram** (“exalted father”) became **Abraham** (“father of many nations”) when God expanded his destiny.
- **Jacob** (“supplanter/cheater”) became **Israel** (“one

who wrestles with God”) after a profound spiritual breakthrough.

- **Simon** became **Peter** (“the rock”) when Jesus declared his foundational role in the early Church.

For a local church, a name change often signifies that the congregation is entering a **new spiritual season**, shedding an old identity and taking on a new one.

Earlier this year, the Session followed the same decision-making process, identifying a set of Shared Hopes, this time with the focus on hopes for a church name that better reflected our new, shared identity:

Shared Hopes for a New Church Name:

- ~ Needs to be descriptive of who/where we are now
- ~ Vibrant
- ~ Honor the past
- ~ Self-explanatory
- ~ Easy to remember (Keep It Simple (KISS))
- ~ Positive community image
- ~ Witness to God and service to community
- ~ Welcoming, shows a Spirit of Acceptance
- ~ Reflects Discipleship

Issues Considered in the Deliberation Process:

- ~ Name should not interfere or upset other churches
- ~ Unique enough
- ~ Need to consider congregational feelings
- ~ Can we own it?
- ~ Is it easy to remember? (keep it short(ish))
- ~ Is it easy to say?
- ~ Don’t want to reflect a totally new path

The Session followed this process:

- ~ Brainstormed name ideas
- ~ Identified negatives and positives for each name
- ~ Voted on preferred choice and acceptable alternatives
- ~ “Horizons Presbyterian Church” was determined to be the name that best fulfilled the Shared Hopes.

On April 19th, a Congregational Meeting was held in Fellowship

Hall after the worship service, where Pastor George, with assistance from Becky Willsey, described the above process followed by Session, and the congregation asked questions and provided feedback. Since then, a Communications Team has been formed to determine the steps needed to roll out the new name with a “soft opening” scheduled for October 4th.

The next step is to continue moving forward, together.

Please sign up to attend one of the small group gatherings scheduled during the month of September. Join the conversation, get questions addressed, connect, explore, and share your thoughts!

HORIZONS
— PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH —

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION THIS FALL

The CHOSEN

Come, See, Discuss!

Join us for a meaningful journey through **The Chosen (Season 1)** – the life of Jesus and His followers come to life.



We will watch one episode per Sunday for eight (non-consecutive) Sundays, then have a discussion afterwards. Each session concludes with a Prayer Focus and recommendations for further study.



“The series draws from the four Gospels of the New Testament. But it is noteworthy how often the show makes reference to the Old Testament – in quotes, allusions, or flashbacks – because the story of Jesus and humanity's deep-seated need for Him began at creation (Genesis 3:15). And so, the intertwining story threads from the Old Testament to the New Testament are intricate and profound – and also cool.”

– FROM THE CREATORS OF THE CHOSEN



START DATE
Sunday,
September 13



**ANTICIPATED
END DATE**
Sunday,
November 15



TIME
11:30 a.m.
– 1:00 p.m.



LOCATION
Upstairs
Conference Room



FACILITATOR
Rebecca
Willsey



Whether you've seen *The Chosen* or are brand new to the series, you are invited to come watch, discuss, pray, and grow together in faith.

We hope you'll join us! ♥

OUR STORY CONTINUES...

Small Groups Are Here!

We've been asking “Who are we?” and “Where is God leading us?” Now it's time to continue the conversation together!

Small groups are a chance to gather, share, listen, laugh, and dream as we explore our church's story, identity, and future. Whether you've been part of the conversation all along or are just getting started, we want you to be part of it!

Choose a Group That Works for You

Cindy & Peter Molesky's Home
Thursday, September 10 • 2:00 pm

Becky Willsey's Home
Wednesday, September 16 • 6:30 pm

Tom & Claudia Wattles' Home
Thursday, September 17 • 2:00 pm

Church
Monday, September 21 • 6:30 pm

Dimbleby's Funeral Home
40 Main Street, Whitesboro
Wednesday, September 23 • 2:00 pm

Sign up today and join the conversation!

≡ *Small Group* ≡
COMING THIS MONTH!

♥
Join in.

≡ **BE A PART OF THE CONVERSATION.** ≡



CONNECT

Build relationships and grow together.



EXPLORE

Dive into meaningful topics and faith.



SHARE

Listen, learn, and be encouraged.



♥ *All are welcome!*

Sign-up at Church or call the church office !

*Our story is still being written—
and you are an important part of it.*

welcome back!
WELCOME BACK!

Let's Start Fall Together Special Coffee Hour — Sunday, September 13

Summer may be winding down, but our church family is just getting started! Join us on **Sunday, September 13** for a special **Welcome Back Coffee Hour** as we kick off the fall season together.

Come enjoy a cup of coffee, something delicious, and—most importantly—some good fellowship with your church family. It's a great opportunity to catch up after the summer, welcome new faces, and reconnect with old friends.

So, save the date, bring your smile, and stay awhile!

Sunday, September 13 Special Fall Kick-Off Coffee Hour

Let's gather around the table, share some conversation, and celebrate the beginning of another season together. We hope to see you there!



Building Community, One Cup at a Time

Take a closer look at **Coffee Hour**. It may seem like a simple time to grab a cup of coffee and chat, but it is so much more. Yes, there may be some light conversation and everyday chitchat—that's simply part of being human. But beneath it all is something much deeper: **community**.

Coffee Hour gives us the opportunity to connect with one another, celebrate good news, offer encouragement, and be present during difficult times. It is a place where we can truly **"rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep."**

This simple ministry helps build relationships and strengthen our church family—**one cup, one conversation, and one shared dessert at a time.**

Would you like to help keep this thriving ministry going? **Sign up in the sanctuary for a turn to bring your favorite dessert to share.**

For more information, see **Sue DePasquale** or email Sdep53@aol.com.

PRAYER list

We believe in the power of prayer and the peace it provides in every season of life. If you or someone you know would like to be included on our prayer list, please contact the church office. @ 315-732-5111 or email @ fcputica@gmail.com.

As a community of faith, let us continue to uphold one another with love, hope, and earnest prayer.

"The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective." —James 5:16

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| • Reid Simpson | • Bill Smith |
| • Luke Graham & Family | • Walt Rosendale |
| • David Coons | • Rod Morgan |
| • John Dimpleby | • Kaylie & Tom Brown |
| • Mike Coluzzi | • Cheryl Logan |
| • Michael Taylor | • John Grotevant |
| • Wells Family | • Suzanne Barber |
| • Conner Family | • Kim Sacco |
| • Ashley McMillen | • Gina Rockwell |
| • Debbie Kiefer | • Marina Tata |

OFFICE HOURS

WE'RE HERE FOR YOU!



RETURNING
Wednesday,
SEPTEMBER 9TH!

OFFICE HOURS:
9AM-4PM
MONDAY-FRIDAY



★ **OFFICE CLOSED** ★
for Labor Day
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 7TH

BETH WILL BE
on Vacation
FROM SEPT 3rd-8th



PASTOR WILL BE
on Vacation
UNTIL SEPT 8th



If you need
PASTORAL CARE
please call the church office
and someone will return your call.

Thank you for your understanding! ♥

A Loving Response to God's Blessings

When we reflect on God's great love for us, how can we not respond with gratitude? One meaningful way we show our love is through generous giving to Christ's church. In many ways, our financial commitment speaks more clearly about our faith than words alone ever could.

We are deeply grateful for the gifts you have already shared with the church this year. As we approach the end of the year, we encourage everyone to stay current with pledges and to prayerfully consider your ongoing support.

A reminder: our **per capita contribution is \$46 per member**. This amount helps support the mission and ministry of the wider church beyond our local congregation.

Thank you for your faithful giving, which makes such a difference in the life of our church and community.



FOOD DRIVE CONTINUES through SEPTEMBER

THE FOOD PANTRY

is in need of non-perishable food items to support families and individuals facing food insecurity. Please donate such as **canned vegetables, pasta, rice, cereal, peanut butter, and canned soups**.

Urgently needed: Juices....the food pantry is completely out of juice. Large bottles of apple, orange, and any fruit juices are **VERY** welcome! Donations can be dropped off at the food pantry Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9am to 10:30am. You may also bring your items to the church and place them in the basket provided.

SEED'S OF HOPE
COMMUNITY FOOD PANTRY

**JULY
AUGUST
SEPTEMBER**

DROP OFF LOCATED IN THE FOYER

First church is responsible for food donations during July, August and September. We will be collecting juice and all kinds of non-perishable food items. Thank you for helping support those in need in our community!

NEEDED ITEMS:
PASTA, SAUCE, SOUP, SNACKS
CEREAL, JUICE...etc

Summer is past,
but do not fret...

With the start of fall

we welcome everyone back:

those who have enjoyed vacations
and camps,

Summer is past, and we have reason to celebrate!

Invite your friends and plan to
join us

as we **CELEBRATE** in
JOYFUL WORSHIP.

SCHOOL SNACKS = Fueling YOUNG MINDS



TOGETHER, WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

This school year, we will once again take on the roll of helping our local elementary school by providing snacks for students who need a little extra encouragement throughout the day.

HELP US ALL SCHOOL YEAR LONG!



SNACKS NEEDED:

- ★ Granola Bars
- ★ Fruit Snacks
- ★ Individual Packs of Crackers
- ★ Applesauce Cups
- ★ Pudding Cups
- ★ Cheese or Peanut Butter Crackers
- ★ Pop-Tarts
- ★ Pretzels
- ★ 100% Juice Boxes
- ★ Other individually wrapped snacks

HOW YOU CAN HELP:



Shop

Pick up a few items when you're out.



Donate

Drop off your snacks in the bin in the Narthex.



Make an Impact

Your generosity helps students stay focused, energized, and ready to learn!



Thank you!

TOGETHER, WE CAN PROVIDE MORE THAN SNACKS—WE CAN PROVIDE HOPE, KINDNESS, AND CARE.

LET'S MAKE THIS A GREAT YEAR FOR OUR KIDS!



Firstnews

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First Presbyterian Church | 11 Elm Street, Whitesboro, NY 13492

315.732.5111

"Opening Doors, Minds, and Hearts: Serving Christ and Community."

Rev. George Cooper | Pastor

Newsletter written and Edited by Beth Decker

E-Mail fpcutica@gmail.com | Follow us at www.facebook.com/fpcutica

In September the following people celebrate their birthdays. If you see them, wish them a happy birthday.

20 Tammy Bogner

24 Judy Miller

29 Gail Wilson

30 Jim Beaton



A LOOK AHEAD...

An illustration of a purple car with its trunk open, decorated with string lights and filled with pumpkins and candy canes.

TRUNK or TREAT

OCT 31st 2026

4 - 7 PM

.....

whether you're a kid or just a
kid at heart, we'd love to see
you there. All are welcome!

.....

First Presbyterian Church
1 Elm Street | rear parking lot
for details: 315-732-5111