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FEATURED EDITOR'S PICK

## Canyon Rim Rotary hosts WVU delegation

By Steve Keenan [skeen@register-herald.com](mailto:skeen@register-herald.com)  
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1 of 6

Dr. T. Ramon Stuart, the WVU Tech campus president, from left, Dr. E. Gordon Gee, WVU president; and Major General (retired) James A. Hoyer, WVU vice president. Steve Keenan, The Fayette Tribune

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fayetteville.w.va. – A lively discussion referencing Alexis de Tocqueville, Abraham Lincoln, Mick Jagger, Beyoncé, the Montgomery Dairy Queen and Taylor Swift (well, Swiftie to be more precise) ensued here Thursday evening.

The root topic, though, was the importance of educating and preparing tomorrow's leaders today via the state's largest land-grant university and its division campuses.

The Canyon Rim Rotary Club hosted Dr. E. Gordon Gee, WVU president; Major General (retired) James A. Hoyer, WVU vice president; and Dr. T. Ramon Stuart, the WVU Tech campus president, in a special event. The three men joined Rotary members and other interested parties at The Gaines Estate Pavilion for an informal session on the state of West Virginia University.

"We have been through a change process (including reduction of faculty and academic majors), and it has not been easy," Gee said. "But the world is changing, and if we don't change with it, we're going to die."

In the university's ambition to be among the nation's leading research institutions, Gee said the focus is four-fold: 1) Education; 2) Health care; 3) Prosperity; and 4) Purpose.

"We think it's enormously important that all the young people get a good education, no matter where ... they find themselves," he said. "Education is critical to the future of our nation."

"You ° healthy, they can't think about education, the kind of job they have ..." He called WVU Medicine "one of the most progressive delivery systems of its kind in the country."

"We want to make certain we create jobs and opportunities," Gee said.

Also, the university strives to give students the chance to "speak their minds," he said, so "we don't eliminate anyone from being able to have the opportunity" to engage in conversation on the topics of the day.

Stuart, a McDowell County native, briefly discussed the path that led to his leadership role at WVU Tech in Beckley.

He also said that, in allowing students in the region to pursue their educational opportunities, "We must be steadfast and resolute in making sure that not only we can educate these young people, but most importantly that when we graduate these young people they have the ability to live, work, play and raise a family right here in southern West Virginia."

He said his mission directive from Gee was to "capture southern West Virginia." Supported by the "power of WVU and WVU Tech," he said, "we are going to help residents of southern West Virginia go places they've never dreamed of going before."

"As part of the WVU system, we are here in southern West Virginia to make sure that some of these young people here not only have an opportunity to get a great education, but most importantly we're trying to grow this state so they'll be able to live and raised a family here, too," Stuart concluded.

Hoyer said that it was good to be back in Fayette County "without responding to a flood, a derecho, a hurricane ... (in his former role as adjutant general)." He said his current role at WVU is to "help operationalize the land-grant institution," which is among those designed to lift up rural communities throughout the nation. Hoyer admitted he's still trying to

navigate the learning curve between the operational models of the military and higher education.

He said WVU Tech and Potomac State are the “aircraft carriers” and “are out there on the front lines” in delivery of the educational model.

Among Hoyer’s aims is “to get West Virginia back to what I saw it growing up, and what it can be.”

“We’re doing some great things on the economic development front,” but lack of workforce is a detriment, he said, pointing to “29,000 unfilled jobs in the state of West Virginia right now.” Among the possible solutions is to talk with Veterans face-to-face and make them aware of work opportunities. Also, making students in geographic areas of the state that are struggling aware of opportunities outside the area is another option, he said.

“We challenge you guys to give us ideas or tell us where we’re doing things wrong,” Hoyer said.

Thursday’s crowd featured a solid youth representation. Members of Leadership Fayette County and the Fayette Institute of Technology Junior ROTC added depth to the evening.

The JROTC color guard members included Cadet Command Sergeant Major Olivia Honaker, Cadet First Sergeant Johnnie Brown, Cadet Lieutenant Johannah Forren and Cadet First Sergeant Clayton Wood.

Leadership Fayette County members were among those taking part in a question-and-answer session with the WVU officials following their remarks.

Attendance at the event was very good, said Canyon Rim Rotary Club president Mike Smith, and “the presentations by all three speakers were well received.”

“The youth of our area made a good showing,” Smith added. “The Junior ROTC, led by Colonel (retired) Chris Selvey, presented the colors at the beginning of the meeting. Leadership Fayette County, led by Geoff Heeter, had a good turnout of this year’s and last year’s participants.

“They asked many insightful questions during the question-and-answer session at the end of the presentations. They also had the opportunity to talk directly with the WVU folks, who surely left with a good impression of these youth.”

The Canyon Rim club is a financial supporter via scholarships of Leadership Fayette County.

Matt Wender, past Rotary Club president and a former Fayette County commissioner, recalled past efforts to bring Gee to speak to Rotarians. That originally was about the time that WVU Tech relocated to Beckley from Montgomery, and Wender said it was decided it might not be a good time for a Gee visit. Then, Wender recalled getting voted out of (county) office in 2018.

A Gee visit finally occurred, he added. Gee is “a leader in higher education for four decades” who “still enjoys spending time with students and listening to concerns of people around the state,” Wender said.

In closing, Wender threw in his vote of support for WVU head football coach Neal Brown.

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
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