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Former Morgantown Mayor Ron Justice appears on CNN in 2009.

MORGANTOWN WEATHER 25°F snow

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28°F 19°F	27°F 12°F	25°F 12°F	23°F 1°F	27°F 0°F	32°F 16°F	30°F 9°F

LATEST NEWS

Ron Justice: It's been a good run, but I'm not going anywhere

January 4, 2025 5:30 pm by Ben Conley, The Dominion Post

MORGANTOWN — Today, the world knows him as Darius Rucker. Ron Justice knew him before the world called him Hootie.

They met in Justice's small Mountainlair office one day at the tail end of the 1980s.

The future superstar was coming to see the Greek Life advisor with a problem.

You see, he and his band had driven their old, blue van from South Carolina to play a show that, as circumstances would have it, ended up being boycotted by the WVU student body due to changes in the rush process.

Three students showed up to see Hootie and the Blowfish.

They played anyway.

And now their van was sitting dead on Maiden Lane.

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"So, this guy comes into my office. It's Darius Rucker. He says, 'I got a dead battery,'" Justice recalls, noting Rucker followed that line with, "I don't have any money."

So, the two men drive to Morgantown's new Walmart.

"He and I went to Walmart, picked up a battery and put it in his van so they could get back to South Carolina," Justice said. "He said, 'I can mail you a check,' and I thought, 'Ok, this guy ain't going to mail me a check,' but it's Ok. We got him a battery. It was fifty-some dollars. Sure enough, about a week later I got this check from Darius Rucker (signed) 'Thank you very much.'"

As fate would have it, Hootie and Blowfish went on to release one of the top selling studio albums of all time a few years later with 1994's Cracked Rear View, which sold more than 20 million copies worldwide and garnered the group two Grammy Awards.

Rucker has since picked up another Grammy and sold millions of records as a solo country artist. His version of "Wagon Wheel" is one of the five best-selling country songs of all time.

"Of course we didn't know it then. It's just funny how things change," Justice said. "That's always been one of my favorite stories."

He shared it recently with the Monongalia County Commission, which held an impromptu recognition of Justice's retirement after 40 years with West Virginia University.

He's retiring as WVU's director of local government relations, but the commission's appreciation was centered primarily around his years of community involvement.

He credits encouragement from a professor, Dr. George Taylor, with getting him interested in city government.

After an unsuccessful run in 1989, Justice was elected to Morgantown City Council in 1991. He ended up serving 18 years as a member of council, including seven years as the city's mayor.

He has served or is currently serving on leadership boards with BOPARC, PACE Enterprises, the Morgantown Monongalia Metropolitan Planning Organization Policy Board, the Monongalia County Development Authority, the Morgantown Area Partnership, the Mylan Park Foundation and others.

"I always think about what if that professor had never encouraged us to go do that. I would have probably never been on city council. I would have never ran to be quite frank about it," he said. "I've had the good fortune to serve with a lot of good people."

And to the community's benefit according to members of the commission.

"Ron is unequivocally the most important non-elected individual in this county in regard to pushing and driving economic development," Commission President Sean Sikora said.

Morgantown Area Partnership CEO Russ Rogerson agreed.

"Ron, I think, it would be easier to say what he's not involved in in our community," Rogerson said. "People don't realize the amount of work that goes on behind the scenes and the coordination and collaboration. The Partnership, that's what we were brought together to do, and Ron's been an absolutely critical part in that whole process on a daily basis."

Commissioner Tom Bloom, who served on city council with Justice, said he still recalls the former mayor tangling with famous council critic Milt Cohen.

"Through all these years, when I call, many people don't respond. You've always, everything I had a question or concern about, you were the one who'd call me back all the time," Bloom said.

While Justice said he appreciated all the kind words, he's not planning to go anywhere.

"I've had the privilege of working with a lot of good people. I owe everything to WVU. They've given me the opportunity, almost 40 years. It was 1985, in fact. So, you look back now, and I don't think of it as retirement. I don't do anything else. I kind of look at it as refired versus retired. I'll be doing a lot of things. You'll still see me at the MPO and other things. I'll be doing some work for WVU, but I think it's going to be a real exciting time for me."

What about that check from his now very famous old friend, Hootie?

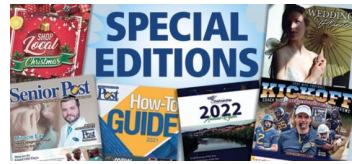
"Oh, I cashed it. I needed that \$60," Justice said. "Of course, if I had it to do over again and he wrote me a check, I'd probably kept it."

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Tags: Darius Rucker, Hootie and the Blowfish, Monongalia County Commission, retirement, ron justice, russ rogerson, Sean Sikora, Tom Bloom, west virginia university



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