



Sports

WVU secures win over Cincinnati

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OBITUARIES

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- Conner**, Gary Lee
- Howdersholt**, Beatrice Marie
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- Michael**, Wilda C.

STATE

Democrats say party 'not finished' in W.Va.

BY JOSELYN KING
For the Dominion Post

WHEELING — The Democratic Party — both nationally and in West Virginia — is still alive, but it needs to do a better job attracting voters in rural areas if it is going to have a chance in winning future elections, says West Virginia Democratic Party Chairman Mike Pushkin.

Pushkin, also a member of the state House of Delegates representing Kanawha County, discussed the path Democrats next must take after overall crushing losses in this week's general election. Contestants saw Democrats lose not just the presidency and all statewide offices in West Virginia but also seats in both the House of Delegates and State Senate.

Pushkin suggested Democrats stick to the issues that most affect people's lives. They should look to protect funding for schools, fight for bills that favor clean air, water and the environment and "stand up for the marginalized," he continued.

"There will be just nine Democrats in the 100 members House of Delegates and two in the 34-member State Senate next session. Many of the seats won by Republicans went uncontested by Democrats.

The economy and high inflation was a large determining factor in the election, according to Pushkin.

Sam Workman, director of the Institute for Policy Research and Policy Affairs at West Virginia University, said in today's West Virginia, where tourism and recreation have become important economic

SEE DEMS, A-2

COMMUNITY

Nonprofit with historic ties looks to the future of Camp Muffly

BY BEN CONLEY

BConley@DominionPost.com

Ed Hawkins wrote the book on Camp Muffly. Literally.

The English major turned dentist is finalizing a nearly decade-long passion project

to document a place he's held dear since his first camp adventure as an 8-year-old boy. He's 76 today, or, as he describes it, "in overtime," and as he's dedicating the old camp's past to the page, he's also looking to its future.

On Friday, Hawkins was joined by Monongalia County Director of Parks and Recreation J.R. Petsko to announce the creation of the Monongalia County 4-H Youth Camp Commission, a nonprofit created solely to receive donations and

trust money for the camp and raise funds on his behalf.

To understand the commission's name, you need a little history.

The original Monongalia County 4-H Youth Camp Inc. SEE MUFFLY, A-2

REPORTING FOR DUTY



Ron Ritterhouse/The Dominion Post photos

At the WVU Mountainair Veteran Bunker, left to right, John Passwaters USMC/CPL, Alex Pieken, US Coast Guard, Petty Officer 2nd Class, and Andrew Stover, USAF/TSgt, talk to reporter Jim Bissett about their service.

WVU students who are military veterans talk about tours, campus

BY JIM BISSETT

JBissett@DominionPost.com

It was the Thursday before Veterans Day and the regulars were already falling in at The Bunker.

Alex Pieken was there with Andrew Stover. John Passwaters was present and accounted for, along with Marla Anson, who ducked in after a morning class.

Makaiya Nossek and Cody Hiet joined ranks, just for the vibe.

Most of the above are generally there, most days.

A vibe, they'll say, is what The Bunker has in abundance.

The Bunker. That's what WVU calls its central meeting space for its Center for Veteran, Military and Family Programs division.

If this were a war movie, The Bunker would be presented as occupying a classified location.

As it is, the expanse is tucked in a distant hallway on the second floor of the Mountainair student union.

"Just the way we like it," Pieken said, jokingly.

"Nobody knows where we are. We can get rambo-nious."

Getting studios is more like it, the 26-year-old U.S. Coast Guard and WVU business ma-



Cody Hiet, Air Force ROTC; Makaiya Nossek, Army National Guard; and Marla Anson, U.S. Army SPC, relax at The Bunker in the WVU Mountainair — that's what WVU calls its central meeting space for its Center for Veteran, Military and Family Programs division.

nor said, correcting himself.

"It's perfect when you want to study for finals," he said of the space, with its distinctive camouflage-blue walls, comfortable leather couches and reproductions of vintage photographs depicting WVU students and other young people of past generations who wore the uniform.

"And it's just a great place to decompress."

Because sometimes, he said,

you just want to keep company with your fellow vets.

Old soldiers — new students

Don't get him wrong, he said. He loves campus life. It's just that most of the students he encounters really aren't that much older than he was when he took the oath.

Which, he allows, can make for a disconnect.

SEE DUTY, A-2

INNOVATION

WVU Medicine celebrates advances in robotic surgery

BY DAVID BEARD

DBeard@DominionPost.com

In a science fiction movie, a tall, white headless robot with four multi-jointed arms tipped with spears would go rolling after you, likely spelling your doom.

For WVU Medicine, the robot and all its companion equipment is the future of surgery, allowing for more precise, minimally invasive surgery with tinier incisions and far less pain for the patient.

The new da Vinci 5 robotic surgery system was on display at the back of the room Friday at WVU's system-wide Robotics Summit, held at the Morgantown Marriott at Waterfront Place.

WVUM doesn't have one yet, said Robotics Director Kristy Ward, but it has an ever-growing robotics program and the DV 5 — with 150 technological advances over the current da Vinci Xi multi-port — is coming.

One of the most significant advances, said Jason Fromer, area vice president for the Eastern U.S., is force-feedback pressure sensitive technology in the hand controls at the console. With the previous robots, surgeons have had to learn to interpret how much pressure they're putting on the patient's tissue and organs by using their eyes.

Force-feedback pressure, he said, is the result of Intuitive's (the maker of the da Vinci's) longest-running engineering project. It gauges the pressure the tools are exerting and transfers that back to the hand controls so the physician can feel it. The pressure sensitivity is adjustable, for physicians of various experience levels, and allows for less force to be

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DUTY

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Pop culture references bumping up against military lingo, for example.

"Some of these kids, I don't understand what they're saying to me," said Pieken, who joined up right after high school. "I know they don't understand what I'm saying to them."

"Yeah, but that's because you're old," Stover said, causing the denizens of The Bunker to bust-up laughing. Pieken included.

And no, they said, basic training isn't like it's depicted in the movies — except sometimes when it is.

"They never get the uniforms right either," Pieken said.

Meanwhile, Pieken wore the uniform of Petty Officer 2nd Class, after six years in the Coast Guard. He finished his hitch patrolling the waters of Ecuador, Columbia and Peru during intelligence operations.

"I wasn't a good student in high school," the Boulder, Colo., native confessed, "so for me, the military was the best option."

Roger that, the regulators said, both about options and service to country.

Mountaineer roll call

Passwaters, who hails from Chesapeake Beach, Md., enlisted in the Marines after high school and completed his tour at the rank of lance corporal.

After spending a few years on active duty in the U.S. Air Force, Stover, who grew up in Martinsburg and now calls Morgantown home, is a sergeant with the Air National Guard, regularly flying on missions across the U.S. and around the world.

Anson, originally from upstate New York, was a U.S. Army specialist who left the military for Mom Duty. She has two teenage sons, and one will graduate high school the same time she graduates WVU.

Heit, also of Martinsburg, is awaiting his ROTC commissioning at the university.

Nossek, who grew up in Lumberport and is new to the National Guard, attends classes full-time, along with her military training.

All are members of WVU's Military Veterans Club, which regularly does events for charity.

That includes Monday's Ruck March and Food Drive, during which the group will join up with Morgantown's Veterans

Day Parade that evening.

Thank you for your service

Some who come calling at The Bunker at WVU in the present day, have seen combat or at least deployments to war zones.

Generally, though, they downplay it, as Stover, who has a couple of tours in the Middle East on his record, discussed in a previous interview with The Dominion Post.

Part of that comes from the right-of-passage markers, academically and socially of going to college, he said.

The rest of it, though — the act of not bringing attention to oneself, he said — is more nuanced.

Call it a matter of historical respect.

After all, he thanks veterans for their service, too.

"My experiences can't compare to what the people before me did."

Those who went before

In Morgantown and WVU, it's hard not to hear the echoes of the holiday that honors answering the call.

At Oglebay Plaza, right next to the Mountaintop, the most of the original USS West Virginia, the battleship that everyone

called the "Wee-Wee," rendered dead in the water during the Pearl Harbor attack, holds an honored placement.

Also on that plaza is a plaque honoring shipmate Dorrie Miller, a Black man serving as a steward aboard deck that Dec. 7th morning — who scrambled up top to rescue every wounded sailor he saw.

The Navy Cross would be pinned to his uniform for his selfless acts that day.

There was Morgantown's Tom Bennett, a conscious objector during Vietnam who still went.

He lost his life heroically saving others as a combat medic. He would be recognized with the Medal of Honor for his sacrifice.

And Foster Feathers, of Westover, who turned down a deferment for his war-related job to volunteer for World War II. He turned 21 on Omaha Beach two days after D-Day and was later wounded in the Battle of the Bulge.

Helen Shope during that same war journeyed from Booth, Monongalia County, to Baltimore. It was there, by stubbornness, she made herself outmuscle a rivet gun — yes, she was a Rosie who really did rivet — at a plant that made bombers at the height of the home front effort.

opportunity for the first in-person meeting. The various hospitals already have robotics committees and they will use their experiences to make recommendations to the system-wide committee, which will act as a resource to spread knowledge across the system and help standardize operations and care.

WVUM has the largest robotics program in the state. Nick Barcellona, WVU's chief financial officer, talked about how that can help the state's notoriously poor health status.

"While there are some challenges for us, we are leading the pack," he said. "And we have the ability to change the way we're delivering care, change the outcomes here. And instead of being somewhere here, we're not going to be number one overnight, but this is the way we get there, the work you're all doing here."

Ward said, "The big picture is that everyone in West Virginia can get the robotic surgery they need and stay close to home."

ROBOTIC

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exerted on the tissue.

Ward and other speakers described the many benefits of robotic-assisted surgery.

It requires smaller incisions. Time in the hospital is reduced, and patients can get home and back to work faster.

Ward said for an open hysterectomy (the traditional surgery with hand-held scalpels and large incisions), the patient would have a three- to five-day stay and four to six weeks of work. For a robotic-assisted hysterectomy, the patient is in for a day and usually back to work in a week.

"The difference between open surgery and minimally invasive surgery is a big deal for these patients," she said. "Patients love the minimally invasive surgery."

Robotic surgery reduces costs for the patient and the hospital, speakers said. Lower costs means higher revenue margins for the hospitals that can be re-invested to regularly improve care. Across the system, they can save \$10 million by converting all open sur-

geries and most laparoscopic surgeries to robotic procedures.

Robotic surgeries reduce surgery times, which allows for more per day — increasing service to patients and increasing hospital revenue.

Ergonomic surgical consoles can extend the work life of surgeons — by producing on their backs, necks and shoulders. And a solid program will help and recruit more high quality surgeons to West Virginia.

Speakers described the evolution of robotic surgery nationally and at WVUM.

Nationally, since 2012 laparoscopic surgeries have dropped from 56% of all surgeries to 43%. Open surgeries have dropped from 34% to 18%. And da Vinci robotic surgeries have climbed from 10% to 38%. It's expected robotic surgeries will overtake laparoscopic surgeries by 2025 or 2026.

WVUM, meanwhile, is beating the national average. From 2019-2023, laparoscopic surgeries have dropped from 50% to 28%; open surgeries from 30% to 13%; while robotic surgery have climbed from

20% to 60%.

In 2018, WVUM had three da Vinci — two of them at Ruby Memorial. Now, WVUM has 28 robots, both da Vinci Xi multi-ports and da Vinci SP single ports — with eight at Ruby and plans to acquire two more.

In 2018, WVU had 47 surgeons trained in robotics, now the system has 119, and Ruby has three more coming on board in January in 2023, when they had just 18 robots, they performed 4,594 surgeries, and will top that number this year. Since 2011, they've performed more than 28,000 robotic surgeries.

Dr. Meghan Turner, an ENT surgeon, told the audience that a traditional tonsil cancer procedure would involve splitting the lower jaw and lip and pulling out the tongue to get to the diseased area. With a da Vinci SP, she can just go into the mouth with the single port that has a 3D HD camera and multi-jointed instruments, and go right to the tumor.

A new system-wide robotics committee had its first meeting in September, Ward said, and the summit provided the

DEMS

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drivers, Democrats should be able to find a foothold, Workman explained. This is because protection of wildlife and environmentalism typically are issues Democratic voters find important.

The Democrats in the state haven't figured out their core voters, and they haven't been able to better differentiate themselves and better explain how their policies differ from Republican options, he said.

It also may be a while before the political pendulum swings back in Democrats favor, according to Workman.

Pushkin added that hopefully this past election "will wake the party up," and he rejects the notion that the party is on the decline.

"Now there are those saying the Democratic Party is finished, and they are wrong. The Democratic Party isn't finished," Pushkin said.

MUFFLY

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was the owner of the park when it was deeded to the Monongalia County Commission for \$10 in 1976. That deed mandated that "providing and conducting a recreational camp for youth and youth services," would remain the land's primary use or ownership would revert back.

The body basically went dormant in 2013, following a major overhaul in park management and oversight initiated by the county commission.

It did so as the named beneficiary of three trusts formed on Ralph and Jane Thorn, owners of General Woodworking Company, to be paid upon the passing of the couple's three daughters.

"This is a fiduciary responsibility that we have this money now and in the future that is going to be left to this named board. It needed to get its act together and get back on track," Hawkins said. "Where was this money going to go if we don't have a responsible group?"

So now, a decade later, it's back with a 501(c)(3) status.

The commission's initial lineup will include Hawkins, Kimberly Moyers, Ron Lytle, Bobby Doyle, Jacob Sikora, Holly Webb, Dan Cheslock, Keith Myers and Bobbie Conklin.

To date, the body has about \$135,000 in a money market account and \$320,000 that remains in trust accounts. It's ready and eager to accept tax deductible gifts.

Hawkins explained

CONTACT

Newsroom: 304-291-9425
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CLARIFY

The Dominion Post strives to publish accurate information. If a factual error does occur, notify Managing Editor Katie McDowell by emailing editor@dominionpost.com

Dominion Post.com

In Friday's report on Morgantown City Council's ward and boundary discussion, it was reported that Mayor Joe Abu-Ghannam was included in a group of councilors who met separately with GIS Coordinator Marvin Davis. That is incorrect. Abu-Ghannam met with Davis privately to better understand the mapping software.

the sole purpose of the money is to support Camp Muffly.

It will do so hand-in-hand with the Monongalia County Commission.

According to the Youth Camp Commission bylaws, "All projects picked for support will require Monongalia County Commission support and will benefit the camp."

In addition to being a lifelong supporter of 4-H and Camp Muffly, Hawkins is also a former county commissioner (2014-2020). He served with two sitting members of the commission. During his tenure, Petsko joined the county as superintendent of Mason-Dixon Historical Park.

"I'm a department of one. I have my staff at the parks, but for me to try to do a lot of things is very difficult. It's very rare that you have an individual from the outside who is so motivated, with personal skin in the game and wants to help so much," Petsko said. "It would be crazy to not want to work with Ed on this stuff. His motivation is to improve the park. That's all I want to do."

While Camp Muffly and its amenities are open to the public, there's no question it is inexorably bonded to 4-H.

"The one thing about Camp Muffly, it's always been a very special place for people — meaningful," WVU 4-H Extension Agent Becca Fint-Clark said. "We just want it to be amazing for the kids who get to spend time there. We want to make sure our kids have a great place to spend the summer, make memories, meet friends and just have a great time."

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