

UNIVERSITY

Gordon Gee looks ahead at his last year as WVU president and his retirement

BY DAVID BEARD
DBeard@DominionPost.com

WVU President Gordon Gee talked with The Dominion Post about his vision for WVU's future — and his own — as he heads into his final year at Stewart Hall.

Gee, 80, will retire July 1, 2025, and a search process for his successor has begun. It's hard for him to consider retirement after 45 years heading universities, he said, but "it's time. I've still got a lot of things I want to do."

His three goals for this year: Finish strong, make sure WVU is positioned for a bright future and attract a good leader who will continue to move WVU forward.

Academic transformation brought tumult and pain to the campus. While it's no longer in the news every day, student comments at the April Board of Governors meeting showed the pain continues. Asked about it, Gee said, "I think that we are in the process of healing."

"The underlying issues



The Dominion Post file photo

WVU President Gordon Gee addresses the Class of 2024 gathered at Milan Puskar Stadium for a freshman event prior to the start of the 2023-24 academic year.

driving the transformation may have cropped up first at WVU, but they're nationwide, he's said before and said again. He didn't necessarily want to be first in paving that path.

"Higher education has to fundamentally reimagine

itself and reevaluate itself," he said. Universities nationwide have lost trust, gained a perceived lack of relevance and face the demographic cliff of dropping birth rates. "We're in an existential crisis in many ways."

On the flip side, he said, "I think we're very well-positioned." West Virginia is a small state with WVU in place as a leader and its largest employer.

Gee wants WVU to be the leading land-grant university that still focuses on

applied and fundamental research that is applicable to the people of the state. WVU has doubled research and health care services, and he wants to double that again, along with community building and economic development efforts.

He also wants to stabilize enrollment. "I think that the pandemic affected us as an institution more than many other institutions because we're surrounded by all these behemoths" in other states. "We feel good about where we are now."

Land-grant universities were created during the Lincoln administration. The federal government sold plots of land to states to establish colleges to teach agriculture and engineering, science and military science — along with classical studies associated with the liberal arts universities. Gee called it providing education for the masses.

But West Virginia's Legislature also created WVU as a liberal arts institution. "We are Iowa and Iowa State combined. We are

Indiana and Purdue combined. We're a unique American institution, because we're both a major land-grant university but also, we're also a major research and liberal arts university."

Gee said he doesn't have an exact picture of his post-retirement pursuits. He's focused on now.

"I will have a lot of opportunities, but I'm devoted to the state."

Gee was first president at WVU from 1981-85. He led other universities and returned to WVU as president "for a term" Jan. 1-March 3, 2014, when he took over as president for the second time.

When he returned to WVU for his second stint as president, he decided he would be a full-time West Virginian, he said. He will remain involved with WVU in some way.

But he will leave for his substantial year.

"I think it's very important to be out of town when the new president is here."

FAIRMONT STATE

New president has vision to keep FSU relevant

BY EVA MURPHY
DPMurphy@DominionPost.com

The milieu of higher education is changing at an exponential pace.

Fairmont State University's newly inaugurated president, Michael K. Davis, has a vision to keep the school relevant to its students and improve West Virginians' lives.

"Progress of a college campus lies in how much people believe that great things are happening," said Davis, who began his tenure in July 2023. "A lot of a president's job is to get people to think about how they might expand or enhance their own areas. Then I have to get out of the way and let people do what they're great at."

Fairmont State has enacted several notable changes aimed at bringing about positive change in the region. The Middle College Initiative is an educational and residential option for West Virginia youth aged 15 and older in the foster care system.

"Some foster students are in seven or eight high schools in a single year because they are being bounced around so often,"

said Davis. According to the National Institutes of Health, this disruption can contribute to a range of negative outcomes, including dropping out of school before graduation.

The Middle College Initiative, the first of its kind in the nation, is the result of Fairmont State University's collaboration with KVC, a nonprofit, state-licensed child placement agency. Foster care youth accepted into the program will live on-campus in Prichard Hall all year with round-the-clock support staff.

"Giving them a stable home and learning environment is impactful," said Davis. "It's going to be a life-changing experience, not just for the students, but for everybody involved."

The first cohort of the Middle College Initiative has been admitted and will begin classes this fall semester.

This year, the leadership at Fairmont State has undertaken a strategic planning process to identify how to best serve the community.

"Part of the process is

asking people to dream about the future," said Davis. "We're asking questions like, 'What sort of society do you want to live in? How can Fairmont State University help serve that society?'"

After engaging in conversations with all 23 units on Fairmont State's campus, leadership will usher in an era of university- and community-wide discussions.

"In the fall, we'll move into the implementation phase, where we take what we heard and design some new programs out of that," said Davis.

FSU aims to bolster future enrollment through targeted recruitment efforts and the launch of new programs. Notably, plans for an outdoor recreation major align with statewide initiatives to promote tourism and economic development.

"There are 20,000 unfilled jobs in the tourism and hospitality industry in West Virginia," Davis noted. "So, we think it's part of our job to help develop the next generation of leaders in that area."

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Pierpont celebrating 40 years

BY EVA MURPHY
DPMurphy@DominionPost.com

This year, Pierpont Community and Technical College celebrates its 40th year of serving the north-central West Virginia community.

It was formed in 1974 with the purpose of providing an accessible and comprehensive education that empowers its students to transform their lives. All these years later, it continues to evolve to meet the community's changing needs.

During the spring 2023 semester, Pierpont unveiled its brand-new Culinary Academy at the Middletown Commons in White Hall. The facility houses the school's Food Service Management Program, which features degree specializations such as Culinary Arts, Pastry & Baking Arts and Nutrition & Dietetic Technology.

The new facility has twice as much kitchen space and offers a classroom, locker rooms and other training spaces. With a focus on hands-on training and industry-relevant curriculum, Pierpont equips students with the skills and knowledge necessary to excel in the dynamic culinary arts field.

In June 2023, the Board of Governors appointed Milan S. Hayward as Pierpont's fourth permanent president after the departure of Johnny M. Moore, who served in that role from 2018-21. The new president has had a glowing career in higher education and brings many skills to the table.

Looking ahead, Pierpont will help its students succeed with an innovative articulation agreement with Harrisburg University of Science and Technology in Pennsylvania. An articulation agreement is a formal arrangement between two colleges or universities that elucidates a transfer plan between program offerings. This particular agreement details a route for students of PCC&T's two-year Associate of Applied Science in Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA) program to transition into Harrisburg University's four-year Bachelor of Exercise Science (EXSC) program. Earning an associate's degree at a community college before transferring to a four-year college is widely regarded as a cheaper way to get a bachelor's degree.

According to The Chronicle of Higher Education, while 80% of stu-

dents enrolling at community college intend to transfer to a four-year college, only 15% completed a bachelor's within six years. The articulation agreement with Harrisburg is designed to remove obstacles that might impede students from pursuing more advanced education after graduating from Pierpont.

Pierpont Community and Technical College is an established part of the higher education landscape of the region, but continues to find innovative ways to connect with the community. In 2024, the college hosted its first Experience Pierpont, an immersive "day-in-the-life of a Pierpont student" experience for local community leaders.

"The inspiration for [Experience Pierpont] is there still seems to be some air of mystery about what a community and technical college is," said Hayward in a recent press release. "This will be a regular event, and you will see this many more times."

Attendees of the inaugural event came away with a better understanding of the scope of Pierpont's offerings and an appreciation for how it supports not just students, but the community as well.

TERRA CAFE

FRESH LOCAL MADE FROM SCRATCH

GIFT CERTIFICATES IDEAS BASKETS

Customized Cakes & Pastries
*can be made Gluten Free

425 Industrial Avenue
Star City, West Virginia
304.554.CAFE
terracafevw.com/catering

Get local news and sports in The Dominion Post

Tired of poor fitting compression socks?
Can't get them on? Do they roll down or cut into your legs?

Don't be like Mama!
Come see us for a proper fit!

We don't just do compression!
We treat wounds of all kinds!

MONARCH WOUND CARE LLC
304-241-7667
200 Fort Pierpont Dr, Suite 105
Morgantown, WV 26508
monarchwoundanddilymph.com