



THE STATE JOURNAL

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WVU photo by Mark Webb

West Virginia University President Gordon Gee visited with 4-Hers at WVU Jackson's Mill on July 18.

MISSION FOCUSED

WVU's President Gee heads into final academic year

QUICK TAKE:

■ Dr. E. Gordon Gee, WVU President, remains active and focused on education and health care as he prepares for retirement in 2025.

■ Despite his retirement plans, Gee continues to lead initiatives like the Education Collaborative and Ascend WV, impacting West Virginia's communities.

■ Gee plans to stay involved with WVU and West Virginia after retiring, cherishing his role in the university's annual activities and community engagement.

by John G. Miller
Executive Editor

No slowing down.
That's the impression one has af-

ter a fast-paced 30-minute interview with West Virginia University President Dr. E. Gordon Gee, who keeps a schedule that belies his 80 years of age and 40-plus years as a major college president.

Gee, who will retire July 1, 2025, isn't looking at this final year as president as a victory lap or swan song: He remains focused on the pillars of success he's worked to ingrain not just at the university but throughout the state.


When *The State Journal* caught up with Gee, he had just finished up his annual summer tour through the Mountain State, continuing his effort to reach each of the state's 55 counties throughout the year.

"I'm excited about where the university is. I think we're in a very strong position; we've made the right decisions for the right reasons," Gee said as he prepares to welcome students back to campus for the fall semester on Aug. 15.


He noted the school's commitment not only to education at the higher levels, but also helping to strengthen public education on the K-12 level through efforts like the Education Collaborative, as well as programs set up with counties around the state.

Gee said the university must continue to be a driving force in public

See GEE, 27




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Fairmont State adds two new executive leaders

From Staff Reports

FAIRMONT, W.Va. (WV News) — Fairmont State University President Mike Davis recently selected two new vice presidents to join his executive leadership team, marking a significant step for the institution.

George Wolf was named vice president of enrollment management, while Janna Bredeson was selected as vice president of student affairs.

The pair officially started in their new roles effective Aug. 5.

Wolf has 37 years of experience in enrollment management. He holds a Master of Arts in Human Resource Development and completed all doctoral coursework in Educational Leadership

and Policy Analysis.

As the inaugural vice president of enrollment management, Wolf will lead the collaborative development of a strategic enrollment plan that grows Fairmont State's student body in alignment with the University's vision, mission, and priorities.

To do so, he will oversee first-year recruitment and admissions, transfer admissions and orientation, financial aid and scholarships, and retention initiatives.



Wolf

"From the moment I stepped onto the Fairmont State campus I felt welcome," Wolf said. "More importantly, I heard a genuine commitment from everyone I spoke with to achieve Fairmont State's fullest potential. In my opinion, that potential is almost limitless."

Bredeson has 26 years of experience in various aspects of student affairs. She holds a Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri.

The vice president of student affairs



Bredeson

advocates for students at Fairmont State and supervises housing and conduct, health and wellness, accessibility, campus recreation, engagement/activities, career development, and veterans' services. Bredeson will lead the university's staff as they work to increase student engagement, which contributes to student achievement and wellbeing.

"Fairmont State University is clearly dedicated to enriching students' experiences, with a strong emphasis on their success inside and outside of the classroom," noted Bredeson. "I'm excited to collaborate with President Davis and the campus community to position the university as one of the nation's most innovative institutions."

Ashley Rhodes joins MVB Bank as NCWV market leader

FAIRMONT, W.Va. (WV News) — MVB Bank, Inc., has announced Ashley Rhodes has joined the company as a market leader in North Central West Virginia.

Rhodes will be dedicating the majority of her time to MVB's Harrison County and Monongalia County markets.

At MVB, Rhodes will utilize her years of commercial banking experience to focus on proactive treasury and deposit service solutions for new and current MVB Bank clients.

"Bringing Ashley to the MVB Team is a win for both the company and our clients," said Herman DeProspero, MVB market president. "She is bringing a wealth of knowledge, experience and expertise to her role. A number of our

business and commercial clients are already experiencing the benefits of having her on their side."

Prior to joining MVB, Rhodes worked 11 years at Huntington Bank. There, she served as Branch Manager, Business Client Manager and most recently as Vice President and Treasury Management Advisor.

At Huntington, she successfully educated and implemented cash management and fraud mitigation solutions for businesses over \$3 million in annual sales, among other achievements.

"I am excited to join an amazing group of people here at MVB and to work on a team that is committed to our clients' financial success," Rhodes said. "With over 18 years of banking experience, I will use my passion and knowledge of the industry to ensure our clients continue to receive exceptional service."

A graduate of Fairmont State University and native of Doddridge County, Rhodes now resides in Bridgeport where she volunteers at Shepherds Corner, The Mustard Seed, United Way of Harrison and Doddridge Counties and with the youth at Simpson Creek Baptist Church.



Rhodes

Trilogy Innovations appoints McKenna as VP of strategic growth

BRIDGEPORT, W.Va. (WV News) — Trilogy Innovations, Inc. recently appointed Bill McKenna as vice president of strategic growth.

McKenna will start in his new position in August.

"Bill's role at Trilogy is crucial to ensure we stay aligned with our customers and their needs in this fast-moving industry," said Trilogy CEO and Co-Founder Brandon Downey. "We couldn't be more pleased to welcome Bill and to leverage his immense expertise to achieve that endeavor."

With more than 15 years of experience in the Federal Information Technology arena, McKenna has significantly contributed to the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of State, and the Department of Justice.

In his previous role as the lead business development executive at World Wide Technology for Federal law enforcement agencies, he demonstrated skill in aligning technology solutions with the strategic objectives of these critical federal entities.

His expertise has been instrumental in implementing key initiatives and policies, in-



McKenna

cluding Sarbanes-Oxley compliance, FedRAMP, TIC 3.0, and Executive Orders 14028, 14058, and 14110.

McKenna's role during the COVID-19 pandemic was pivotal, as he led the deployment of thousands of employees to work from home using Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) technology. His work on Operation Warp Speed, which involved IT deployments for multiple agencies, including DHS, the Department of Health and Human Services, and DOJ, was particularly noteworthy.

These efforts underscore his ability to respond effectively to critical and emergent situations, ensuring continuity and efficiency in operations.

"What we have in Bill is an individual who knows the IT industry in both the public and private sectors," Downey said. "That knowledge, combined with his many other skills, will help continue strengthening our leadership, while further growing Trilogy's presence in the industry. We are confident that his extensive experience and strategic vision will drive significant success for the company."

McKenna holds a degree in Political Science from West Virginia Wesleyan College and is pursuing a master's degree in Homeland Security at George Washington University, where he is set to graduate in December. He and his wife, Melissa, recently relocated to Morgantown, West Virginia, as part of the WV Ascend Program.

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POINTS OF CONTACT

Questions in regards to a story, letter to the editor or corrections should be directed to Executive Editor John G. Miller at jmiller@wvnews.com or by phone at (304) 626-1473.

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Justice pitches plan to use some surplus funds to safeguard tax cut

QUICK TAKE:

■ Gov. Jim Justice has proposed an additional 5% reduction in West Virginia's personal income tax

■ To offset the estimated \$135 million revenue loss from the new cut, Justice has pitched a plan to allocate \$270 million from the state's \$826 million surplus into a reserve fund.

■ Justice may call a special legislative session to discuss this proposal, coinciding with lawmakers' interim meetings scheduled for Aug. 25-27.

by Charles Young
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (WV News) — Gov. Jim Justice, who often describes himself as a “numbers guy,” recently outlined the financial cal-

culations behind his proposal to further reduce the state's personal income tax by an additional 5%.

Justice suggested a strategy to mitigate the revenue loss by utilizing part of the state's budget surplus to create a substantial financial buffer — but it remains to be seen if lawmakers in the West Virginia Legislature will follow the governor's plan.

The additional personal income tax cut would be on top of the 21.25% cut Justice signed into law last year and the 4% reduction (set to take effect in January) that was triggered by last fiscal year's collections — represent-



Justice

ing a total reduction of 30.25%.

Justice has floated the idea of taking the amount the additional 5% cut would cost, doubling the figure and depositing it in an interest-bearing account.

It would cost the state roughly \$27 million in revenues for each percentage point the personal income tax rate is reduced, according to Justice.

“The cost is somewhere around \$27 million per percent cut that we make,” he said. “So if it's \$27 million and what we want to do is cut an additional 5%, you multiply five times 27 and you come up \$135 million. That's basically what it's going to cost, what we're going to cut out of the revenue picture for the state of West Virginia.”

Doubling the \$135 million figure would be roughly \$270 million,

which Justice said could come from the state's current budget surplus of more than \$826 million.

“We know this 5% (reduction) is going to cost us \$135 million and we've got \$836.6 million of surplus that's just sitting out there,” he said. “So let's do this: Let's take the \$135 million that this is going to cost us and multiply it by two. Let's do that and make it \$270 million. Then let's take \$270 million of the \$836 million and put it in the rainy day income tax fund.”

The income tax reserve fund, established last year with around \$400 million, would then have a balance of more than \$700 million, Justice said.

“And it'll be growing interest like crazy,” he said.

See SURPLUS, 31

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West Virginia ranks best in cost of living

So why do residents still feel strain? Experts point to lower incomes

QUICK TAKE:

■ West Virginia ranks lowest in cost of living, but residents still struggle due to inflation and wage disparity.

■ A one-person household in West Virginia needs \$39,386 pre-tax for essentials, yet the minimum wage translates to just \$18,200 yearly.

■ Economic improvements are expected at a national pace, leaving WV still lagging in income rankings despite low living costs.

by Jacob Martin
STAFF WRITER

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. (WV News)—In a recent study conducted by SmartAsset Analysis, West Vir-

ginia was ranked No. 1 out of the 15 states with the lowest cost of living.

While West Virginia does have the lowest cost of living on the national scale, average citizens are still feeling the price strain due to high levels of economic inflation and the disparity between the average state salary and the cost of living, officials said.

According to the study, West Virginia is closely followed by Arkansas and Oklahoma. In West Virginia, a one-person household needs a pre-tax income of \$39,386 to pay for necessities like housing, transportation, health care, taxes and other common expenses — as tracked by the (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) Living Wage calculator.

The median American yearly wage for full-time workers is nearly \$60,000, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

However, West Virginia's \$8.75 hourly minimum wage translates to just \$18,200 per year, the study says.

John Deskins, Ph.D., director of the Bureau of Business and Economic Research at WVU, said it wasn't surprising that West Virginia ranked so highly for the lowest cost of living.

Being a mostly rural state with a lower population, West Virginia naturally has lower costs such as for taxes and housing, officials said.

While the cost of living may be low for the state, West Virginia is ranked 49th in the nation for per capita personal income, Deskins said.

"Cost of living is just one side of the coin. The other side is that we are 49th for income," he said.

Matt Porter, assistant director for the Preston County Economic Development Authority, said cost truly is relative to a given location.

West Virginia may have the lowest



Deskins

cost of living, "but the wages are low in West Virginia compared to neighboring states. So, it becomes more relative, and we don't really feel that benefit," he said.

If a person is making a decent living in Pittsburgh but lives and pays West Virginia prices, their money will go a lot further, he said.

The increase in prices become more noticeable as the average median income remains the same, officials said.

Additionally, West Virginia's cost of living really varies from county to county, Deskins said.

More economically diverse areas will have significantly higher costs in West Virginia, as compared to rural locations, he said.



Porter

See LIVING, 26

W.Va. legislators looking to bolster housing market

QUICK TAKE:

■ West Virginia prioritizes homebuilding to support new workers amid housing shortages and slumped home sales due to high mortgage rates.

■ Increased industrial investments necessitate more affordable housing; many homes and rentals are currently unaffordable for median wage earners.

■ The BUILD WV Act offers tax incentives to homebuilders, leading to 602 housing units in development, with 46 already completed.

by Damian Phillips
STAFF WRITER

CLARKSBURG, W.Va. — Homebuilding has become a top priority in West Virginia where currently there are not enough homes to support a hopeful influx of new workers.

Although home sales have slumped at home and around the country, local officials see a need to prepare for an expanding industry sector.

"We need houses everywhere. We're creating jobs and development everywhere across West Virginia," said Mitch Carmichael, West Virginia Secretary of Economic Development.

The need for more housing has been necessitated by an increased number of new industrial investments that are set to bring thousands of employees to the state over the next five years.

However, a lack of affordable and available housing is already a crisis for many of those living in West Virginia.

A report by Advantage Valley, a Charleston-Huntington metro area business consulting firm, states that in the 10 counties surrounding its region, nearly 80% of homes on the market and nearly 50% of rentals were unaffordable to those making the me-



Carmichael

dian wage.

"Affordable housing alternatives should be part of future housing solutions in the region," the report states. "The local housing market offers a variety of product by age, quality, type and pricing, but limited availability and affordability remain challenges for most residents."

Home sales have been in a slump for more than two years, in large part due to steep increases to the federal interest rate in early 2022, which in turn caused mortgage rates to rise, said John Deskins, director of the Bureau of Business and Economic Research in West Virginia University's John Chambers College of Business and Economics.

In the previously mentioned region, sales have decreased 25% since 2022, and only 1.1% of homes remain vacant, the report found.

Although home sales have slumped, there is an increased demand for housing. This has been exacerbated by very

few housing developments across the state, Deskins said.

The areas with the strongest homebuilding are North Central West Virginia and the Eastern Panhandle. But a close third would be Putnam County, where developments have occurred to support those who commute to Charleston, Deskins said.

Of the 10 counties in the southern region, only Putnam County has seen an increase in total households since 2010, the report found.

Jefferson and Berkeley counties in the eastern panhandle have become bedroom communities to the Washington, D.C., Metro Area. Growth in these counties over the last few decades has even surpassed the growth of Monongalia County, Deskins said.

This growth has been so great, Deskins said, that population loss across the state also has been curtailed to a point.

See MARKET, 26

Energy project to use batteries made in W.Va.

by Charles Young
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

WASHINGTON (WV News) — A planned energy project in Maine will utilize batteries manufactured in West Virginia, according to U.S. Sens. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., and Joe Manchin, I-W.Va.

More than \$100 million from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will fund a multi-day battery system in Lincoln, Maine, which will use batteries made by Form Energy in Weirton, according to a press release.

“This investment is great news for

Weirton and signals that West Virginia will continue our proud tradition of helping power America,” Capito said.

“I am proud to see the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law continue to strengthen America’s supply chains and create new jobs right here in West Virginia,” Manchin said. “The Mountain State is now at the forefront of innovation as we lead the charge of bringing battery manufacturing back to the United States.”

Form Energy, which manufactures multi-day, iron-air renewable batter-

ies, announced its plan to invest in West Virginia at the end of December 2022.

“All the batteries for this pioneering multi-day energy storage system will be manufactured at Form Factory 1 in Weirton, West Virginia,” said Mateo Jaramillo, Form Energy co-founder and CEO.

The Maine project is projected to be the “largest energy storage project by energy capacity announced yet in the world,” Jaramillo said.

Form selected the 55-acre site of a former steel manufacturing facility

in Weirton for its first factory after a year-long, nationwide site selection process that included reviewing over 500 locations across 16 states.

Construction of the factory has been “substantially completed,” and the company is in the process of “ramping up its manufacturing workforce, ahead of starting high-volume production later this year,” according to Jaramillo.

The new facility is expected to create a minimum of 750 new full-time jobs and will represent a total investment of up to \$760 million.

W.Va. Public Service Commission approves major solar power plant

From Staff Reports

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (WV News) — A solar plant able to generate enough power to serve 90,000 homes was approved to locate in Nicholas and Clay counties, the Public Service Commission of West Virginia

announced Tuesday.

Deep Lake Energy Center, LLC, filed an application on March 25 to construct a 150-megawatt solar electric generating plant on a former surface mine. Approval was granted Monday.

The company, a subsidiary of Shell New Energies US, LLC estimated its capital investment would total \$386 million and produce more than 300 jobs during construction.

The commission gave its approval to a joint stipulation between PSC

staff and company lawyers that was filed with the Commission on July 17. The stipulation said work on the project would begin within five years and would be completed within 10.

See PLANT, 26

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W.Va. First Foundation sets goal to disburse funds this year

QUICK TAKE:

■ The West Virginia First Foundation, in less than a year and a half, has seated its 11-member board, hired an executive director, set up banking services, and has begun holding monthly meetings.

■ The executive director has already started the process of interviewing candidates for key executive positions.

■ The board is now working on a scoring rubric for initial fund awards, with the goal of developing and publishing this rubric along with applications by mid-September.

by Charles Young
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (WV News) — The West Virginia First Foundation, the private nonprofit organization established to manage and distribute the state's opioid settlement funds, is making significant strides toward fulfilling its mission.

Since its formal inception in March 2023, the foundation has seated its 11-member board, hired an executive director, set up banking services, and has begun holding monthly meetings. Most recently, it appointed members

to its Statewide Expert Panel, and set a goal to begin disbursing funds before the end of the year.

Executive Director Jonathan Board, who has been leading the foundation for the past two months, is the organization's sole employee so far. However, he has already started the process of interviewing candidates for key executive positions, including chief of staff, chief operating officer, chief marketing officer, chief financial officer, and programs director.

He was determined to expedite the hiring process, aiming to have these roles filled within the next 30 to 45 days, Board said.

"We are moving with haste," Board emphasized. "Our goal is to have folks on-board and ready to roll as quickly as possible."

During the foundation's August meeting, Board reiterated his commitment to getting the first tranche of funds from the state's opioid settlements out "between November and December of this year."

The foundation is responsible for managing more than 70% of the over \$1 billion West Virginia has received

from lawsuits against pharmacies, pharmaceutical distributors, and manufacturers for their roles in the opioid epidemic.

The remainder of the funds will be distributed to counties and municipalities, with the first of these local government distributions having begun in December 2023.

As of June 30, the foundation had more than \$224 million in its accounts and had earned over \$7 million in interest.

The board is now working on a scoring rubric for initial fund awards, with the goal of developing and publishing this rubric along with applications by mid-September. Submissions would remain open until mid-October, with awards expected to be announced in late November or early December.

The establishment of the Statewide Expert Panel marks a significant step forward in the foundation's efforts.

The panel, composed of seven individuals with expertise in areas such as treatment, prevention, recovery, corrections, health policy, law enforcement, and first responders, will

play a crucial role in advising the foundation. These volunteers will serve until Jan. 1, providing strategic guidance and ensuring that the foundation's efforts are informed by evidence-based practices and the lived experiences of those impacted by addiction.

"The panel will not only provide strategic guidance but will also ensure that our efforts are informed by the latest evidence-based practices and the lived experiences of those impacted by addiction," Board stated.

In addition to the panel, an Initial Opportunity Committee has been formed to assist with hiring staff members and developing the rubric and application for the initial awards. This committee includes foundation board members who have volunteered to help move the process forward quickly.

"We really want to get tools in the hands of doers," Board said. "We have to be mindful of where our communities are now, and the needs persist."

Senior Staff Writer Charles Young can be reached at 304-626-1447 or cyoung@theet.com

W.Va. attorney general talks next steps for Purdue opioid settlement

QUICK TAKE:

■ The Supreme Court's ruling on the Sackler family's bankruptcy could lead to a new settlement deal.

■ West Virginia has already received over \$1 billion from opioid-related lawsuits, with over 70% of future funds managed by the West Virginia First Foundation and the rest allocated to local governments.

■ Despite ongoing litigation, the First Foundation, which has over \$222 million in its accounts, remains focused on using its resources to address the opioid epidemic and support recovery efforts in the state.

by Charles Young
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

BRIDGEPORT, W.Va. (WV News) — When the U.S. Supreme Court last month struck down part of a deal shielding members of the Sackler family from lawsuits related to their company Purdue Pharma's prescription painkiller OxyContin, a \$6 billion settlement from which West Virginia would have received tens of millions was also invalidated.

State Attorney General Patrick Morrissey, during a recent press con-

ference in Bridgeport, said stakeholders from across the country are beginning to work on another deal that could prove even more lucrative for West Virginia.

"With the Supreme Court ruling that the bankruptcy code didn't protect certain individuals, i.e. the Sacklers, people are going back to determine what the new type of settlement would look like," Morrissey said. "So that means that you have states, counties and cities, private parties, all evaluating: What does that do to the existing settlement? Does it open up the door to more opportunities? That's a discussion that's happening right now."

West Virginia has brought legal action against pharmacies, pharmaceutical distributors and pharmaceutical manufacturers for their roles in the opioid epidemic.

To date, the various actions have netted "a gross amount of over \$1 billion" for West Virginia, Morrissey said.

"This dollar amount (from the new



Morrissey

settlement), whatever it ends up being, will be additive to what's already been calculated," he said. "That's critical, and I personally would like to get as many of these dollars in place (as possible) so that the foundation and counties and cities have meaningful resources to tackle the drug epidemic."

More than 70% of the funds received from opioid settlements with pharmacies, distributors and manufacturers will be managed and administered by the West Virginia First Foundation.

The remainder of the funds will go to counties and municipalities. The first distributions to local governments began in December and are expected to continue through at least 2036.

The foundation — a private, Section 501(c)(3) organization — is overseen by an executive director and a board of six members elected at regional meetings throughout the state and five members appointed by Gov. Jim Justice.

The foundation is still in the process of being established and has not yet distributed any funds. Its accounts contained more than \$222 mil-

lion as of the end of April.

Jonathan Board, who was appointed executive director of the First Foundation in March, has said the Supreme Court's ruling on the Sackler bankruptcy doesn't impact funds already in the organization's coffers.

"It really doesn't affect the First Foundation on any level," he said. "Our task remains the same."

There are likely to be legal challenges related to the opioid crisis in the years to come, but the foundation is already well-positioned to begin its work, Board said.

"There's going to be probably years and decades of ongoing litigation and re-litigation — we understand that," he said. "But we are very focused on our task, our duty and our responsibility to folks who are working in this space, individuals healing themselves and to the next generation."

Senior Staff Writer Charles Young can be reached at 304-626-1447 or cyoung@theet.com



Board



W.Va. Intermediate Court Chief Judge Scarr: Civil cases top dockets

QUICK TAKE:

■ Chief Judge Scarr discusses the Intermediate Court's smooth integration into West Virginia's judiciary and its ongoing adjustments and learning processes as a new court system.

■ Legislative tweaks to the court's jurisdiction and fee structures have been made for clarity and effectiveness, with more potential adjustments as the court continues to evolve.

■ Case statistics reveal that family law and administrative appeals are significant, with unexpected increases in civil cases and decreases in Workers' Comp appeals compared to initial predictions.

Editor's Note: Intermediate Court Chief Judge Thomas E. Scarr recently spoke at length via phone with WV News. The conversation ranged from the fledgling court's case breakdown to how its three judges believe they're adding consistency to part of the judiciary process in the state.

by Matt Harvey
MANAGING EDITOR

WV News: Good morning to you. Let's start with just the fact that the court's just turned two not too long ago. Tell me how the assimilation is going into the judiciary.

Chief Judge Scarr: Well, that part has gone very smoothly, in my estimation. There certainly have been little hiccups along the road. I think the Legislature did a wonderful job with the statute. They had to go back and tweak a few things, but in hindsight, it's just amazing. And even more so with what the Supreme Court did to get everything organized and structured, because they started year and a half before we were even appointed.

We played a role in the work before the court opened, but the majority of it was done by the Supreme Court. But we got a chance — obviously, we had to hire and create our staff, same with the clerk and the Office of Counsel. We had to deal with facilities issues, from courtroom to the chambers for the court, the clerk's offices and the offices for the Office of Counsel and so on, equipment, policies and procedures. Really just had to learn about each other and figure out ways to work well. None of us had been appellate judges before, so it was a learning process, still is a work in progress.

And we spent a lot of time with out-



J. Alex Wilson / West Virginia Supreme Court

Chief Judge Thomas E. Scarr believes the Intermediate Court of Appeals' assimilation into the judiciary "has gone very smoothly."

reach, trying to ensure that one, we were learning [from] those that are stakeholders in the process, from the public, lawyers representing parties and from those parties or institutions that are on either side of us, above us, the Supreme Court, and I hate to use the word below, but the cases that come to us, come to us from either the circuit courts, the family courts, and various administrative bodies — I think their number is 40 to 50, although we get most of ours from about 10 of the different agencies — and then the Workers' Comp Board of Review.

So we have, over time, interacted or met with each of those groups. Now I can't say that we've met with the 50 administrative agencies, but we have actually met and had conversations with probably three or four of the source of the majority of our administrative appeals, and we attend the Judicial Conference for the circuit courts, and so we spend time with them, and same with the family court judges. So we have those, those interactions. So we've tried to learn from them, and we have, I think. And so it's still continuing, a work in progress.

WV News: Let's go back a minute. You said that the Legislature made a few tweaks, so talk a little bit about that, and whether there are any more tweaks you think are going to be coming down the road.

Chief Judge Scarr: Well, I don't have a list, and it is not our role to decide what the appropriate answer is on any of these particular issues. But

there were issues early on, even after the court was first created and before we started, and then the court tweaked some filing fees. Before, [during an] appeal from the family court to the circuit court, they did not have to pay money. When [the Intermediate Court] was created, they did [have to pay fees] ... that [fee] was corrected or eliminated by the Legislature before we even started. So there were various tweaks.

I know this year the Legislature went back and addressed some issues about our jurisdiction. We don't have any original jurisdiction. That hasn't changed. We don't have extraordinary remedy jurisdiction. But what that included was not 100% clear. And I think initially, we did not hear injunction cases, the way it was written or the way it was interpreted. And that could eliminate almost every case, because lawyers could find a need in almost any case or a rationale to seek an injunction.

And we didn't think that was what was intended by the Legislature, and they did go back this past term and correct that. I know there were people that were talking that if you want to avoid the ICA, in your complaint, ask for an injunction of some kind. And so that was an example of one that was corrected. There are a few here and there in terms of clarity on rules on appellate process for certain types of administrative cases. So there are those things, and we'll continue to see those and learn as we go.

But again, how they're addressed is up to the Legislature. There are times we just have to say, 'look, we need a little clarity on this.' And so far, they've been responsive. And again, you don't want to take a knee-jerk reaction, because some of these issues kind of work themselves out. As we decide issues and all of a sudden what we thought was a key issue has been resolved and decided, and so it doesn't need to go further. But again, there have been tweaks, and I'm sure there will be more.

WV News: What are your numbers like now? And what cases are you getting the most of?

Chief Judge Scarr: Well, right now, and I looked — it's obviously a moving target all the time, but as of July 8, so that would be your two years plus a

week. But I caution you, the first two months we were created, we had no cases. I mean nothing filed. We anticipated that there would be a lot filed, particularly with some family law issues and some other things, but we didn't see 'em. I think our first case appeal was the last week of the second month. And then even after that, we started to get them, but it was a trickle. So we probably weren't up to semi-full speed until we got into 2023, so after the first six months.

But right now, I think we're just below 1,200 for that two-year period. But again I would, I would caution you, and if I'm running the numbers and looking to average it, I probably would say we've been operating full capacity for maybe 21 months. And I think that works out to about 57 appeals per month. So again, it's still when you try to average those numbers out, you're taking into account the first few months that understandably were slow getting going.

And of those cases, accumulatively, about 13% are administrative cases, which is pretty much what we predicted. I think our prediction was ... 10 to 20% on administrative, and again, cumulative, it's been about 13%. I think right now current, it's 15%. So we were pretty good at that. And what we did is we went and before we even opened, and tried to see how many of the administrative appeals there were. And then there were some changes in the law involving DMV cases and so on that we knew would affect it. So that's where we on that.

I think that the next number is family law. I think since inception, it's probably been 25%, or a quarter of our docket. I think we predicted a little bit more than that. We predicted 27 to 32%, but it is cumulative been 25%, and I think our current docket is more like 21% on family. Workers' Comp, I think again, going back and seeing the appeals from before our court, we projected 37 to 45%. And early in the court, in our existence, there were quite a few Workers' Comp appeals. Cumulatively, it's been 31%, but our current actual is more like 22%. So for whatever reason, those numbers aren't as high as we had predicted.

See SCARR, 26

STAYING SAFE AS THE WHEELS ON THE BUS GO ROUND AND ROUND

Tips to head back to school safely.



Walk to the bus stop with young kids and wait with them.



Stand three giant steps back from the curb.



Wait till the bus comes to a complete stop to get on.

Always walk in front of the bus.



Look left, right, and left again before crossing the road. Make sure the driver can see you.

Use the handrails when getting on or off the bus.



Drivers must stop when a school bus is flashing yellow or red lights.



Stay alert and slow down in school zones.



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WVU leaders discuss realigned academic units, search for president

QUICK TAKE:

■ WVU has established two new units as part of its restructuring efforts.

■ Leaders believe changes in college names and structures will not significantly impact students, who primarily focus on their specific majors and programs.

■ WVU is in the process of searching for a new president, as current President Dr. E. Gordon Gee plans to step down in 2025.

by Charles Young
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

MORGANTOWN, W. Va. (WVNews) — As students return to West Virginia University for the fall semester, they will encounter a restructured academic landscape following the university's recent "academic transformation" process.

The changes, aimed at addressing a \$45 million budget shortfall, include the launch of two new units: The College of Creative Arts and Media, as well as the Division for Land-Grant Engagement.

The new College of Creative Arts and Media was created by merging the College of Creative Arts and the Reed College of Media, and it now also houses three design-related programs that were previously in the Davis College of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

The Division for Land-Grant Engagement contains the Davis College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, WVU Extension and the Center for Community Engagement.

What a college is named or which college houses a particular major doesn't matter much to students, said Maryanne Reed, WVU provost and vice president of academic affairs.

"They think about their program; they think about their major. And since those haven't changed for the most part, I think that students probably aren't as aware of these changes as we think they would be," she said. "Really, truly, students think primarily about, 'What am I going to study? What's my major? What are the job



Reed

prospects?' and don't necessarily think, 'Well, my major is now in this college vs. that college.' I just think they're not thinking along those lines."

Jorge Atilas, associate vice president and dean for the new Land-Grant Engagement unit, agreed.

"The students couldn't care less, because they are only concerned with their major," he said. "So we have 20 majors that we are offering in the college."

Students tend to create their own culture and identities among themselves, regardless of how the university chooses to name or brand its units, said Keith Jackson, dean of the new College of Creative Arts and Media.

"They relate to their major and their school and then to the place or the building," he said. "The College of Creative Arts students call themselves 'CAC Rats,' have for decades, and they will continue to call themselves 'CAC Rats.' Folks in media, they love Martin Hall that is still there in their DNA. So those things won't change."

Both Reed and Atilas said it remains too early to tell if the changes have impacted enrollment numbers.

"We are seeing good numbers so far, although it's like the provost said — it's too early to say," Atilas said.

The details of the academic transformation process were developed collaboratively with input from numerous stakeholders, Jackson said.

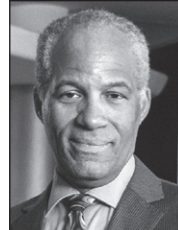
"We actually have 14 different working groups comprised of faculty and staff working on this," he said. "So it's been a year process to meld these cultures to start looking at possibilities."

As university leaders work to put these plans into action, WVU also will undergo the task of choosing its next president.

President Dr. E. Gordon Gee has an-



Atilas



Jackson

nounced plans to step down in 2025 when his current contract expires.

Reed, who has announced her own plans to retire in September, said she hopes the next president will bring an "enthusiasm and a passion for West Virginia University as a unique institution situated in a unique place."

Gee, who is 80, returned to WVU for his second term as president in 2014 after having previously led the university from 1981 to 1985.

"You've had some seasoned leaders in these roles who have brought stability to the university and who have been invested in making sure that we leave it in the best way possible," Reed said. "So a new leader, I hope, will come in and build on that and help to launch the university into the future but at the same time build upon the work that we have done to make this a strong institution."

Jackson said he hopes for a presidential candidate who will commit to staying at WVU for a while.

"To realize a vision takes time," he said. "To commit to a vision takes time, and to commit to a purpose takes time."

The next president must be able to "understand who West Virginians are to connect with them," said Diana Martinelli, vice dean of the new College of Creative Arts and Media.

"We're excited," she said. "We're excited to start a new academic year, to find that new energetic dynamic leader who understands us and who is committed to our purpose."

Dr. Patrice Harris, vice chair of the WVU Board of Governors and chair of the university's presidential search committee, recently announced a survey aimed at guiding the presidential search process.

"This four-question survey is your opportunity to engage in the presidential search process," she wrote in



File photo

West Virginia University President Dr. E. Gordon Gee, who will retire in June 2025 when his current contract expires, meets with a group of students.

a letter to the WVU community. "Your thoughtful responses will help frame the leadership profile and provide critical guidance to the presidential search committee as candidates are considered."

The survey, available at presidentalsearch.wvu.edu/home, asks respondents what "skill sets, experiences, qualifications, credentials and personal attributes" they would like to see in WVU's next leader.

It also asks them to weigh in on "key opportunities and challenges" facing WVU, as well as what makes them "proud to be a part of the WVU community and excited about the future."

The search committee held its first formal meeting in July. Members "reviewed the committee's charge, discussed the importance of confidentiality and outlined the various phases of the search process," Harris said.

The search committee is expected to begin screening presidential candidates and conducting interviews this fall, according to timeline from the university.

Final interviews and selection of a candidate will take place next spring, before the new president takes office in the summer.



Martinelli



Harris

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W.Va. Professional Charter School Board OKs funding

by Steven Allen Adams
Parkersburg News and Sentinel

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — The board that oversees West Virginia's young public charter school program awarded two sub-grants Thursday during its weekly virtual briefing.

The West Virginia Professional Charter School Board was awarded \$12.2 million last year over five years through the U.S. Department of Education's Expanding Opportunity Through Quality Charter Schools program. Four out of six public charter schools have applied for sub-grants through this program.

PCSB Assistant Director Dusty Hurley said Thursday morning that out of the four applications, only three applicants were eligible for sub-grants after the applications were reviewed by a three-person peer review panel.

"We've had a very great initial grant cycle. We're very pleased with how it has gone," she said. "The peer

reviewers provided quality evaluations to inform the board's funding decisions. ... After today's meeting, (Executive Director) James (Paul) and I will work closely with the funded applicants to finalize their grant awards."

The peer review team based their decisions on 12 evaluation criteria — including ambitiousness, innovation, academic programming, educational philosophies and curriculum, financial need, staff quality, leadership, governance, risk demand, universal access and facilities. There were two different application cycles: one for new schools and one for expanding schools.

"Please remember, in our competitions, peer reviewer recommendations inform but do not necessarily determine the board's sub-grant award decisions," Hurley said.

The Clarksburg Classical Academy was the only school that qualified for the new school category. The board voted to award a sub-grant of \$905,000

for a three-year period

"They are proposing a regular, rigorous classical education this fall," Hurley said. "In their first year, they will be serving kindergarten through fifth grade and plan to serve K-7 by the end of the grant project period."

For the expanding schools category, two schools were deemed eligible for sub-grants: the West Virginia Academy in Morgantown and the Workforce Initiative (WIN) Academy in South Charleston.

The West Virginia Academy, which has served students in kindergarten through 10th grade, is expanding to 11th grade this school year and 12th grade in 2025-26. Their goal is to increase enrollment by 20% or an increase of 100 students during the sub-grant reporting period. The school was awarded a sub-grant of \$1.59 million spread out over the next three years.

The WIN Academy, a charter school affiliated with BridgeValley Community and Technical College

focused on training juniors and seniors in nursing and advanced manufacturing careers, plans to expand the kinds of degrees it offers and dual enrollment options.

The board voted not to approve the sub-grant application for the WIN Academy after board staff raised issues with how the school might use the funds.

"Their proposed budget includes mostly costs for funding a dean in years two and three and in developing communication and outreach strategies across the grant period," Hurley said. "We have concerns about the allowability of these costs because the CSP statute and federal regulations limit funding for sustained personnel costs and promotional advertising. ... We will work closely with the academy to make sure that we finalize a budget that ensures expenses are allowable and support the proposed project."

See CHARTER, 26

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Senator discusses Hydrogen Hub funds

QUICK TAKE:

■ The \$30 million in funding recently allocated by the U.S. Department of Energy for the Appalachian Regional Clean Hydrogen Hub will be used for design and planning.

■ ARCH2 is part of a broader initiative to develop regional hydrogen hubs and will receive up to \$925 million from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The project spans West Virginia, Ohio and Pennsylvania, and aims to establish a comprehensive clean hydrogen ecosystem including pipelines, fueling stations and CO2 storage.

■ Leaders such as Gov. Jim Justice and U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin emphasize that ARCH2 will create economic opportunities and high-quality jobs, and contribute to energy independence and emissions reduction in the region.

by Charles Young
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (WV News) — The initial round of funds for the Appalachian Regional Clean Hydrogen Hub will go toward “design and planning,” according to U.S. Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va.

Capito, a member of the West Virginia Hydrogen Hub Coalition, said the \$30 million recently released by the U.S. Department of Energy will ensure the project is able to get off the ground.

“It will be further solidifying the partnerships and actually getting more specific,” she said. “In the initial phase, it was where we were going to be doing production and who was going to be using the product and how we’re going to build pipelines. This will be more granular and much more in the design phase.”

The Appalachian Regional Clean Hydrogen Hub, also known as ARCH2, is among the seven regional hydrogen hub projects announced by the Biden administration in October 2023.

ARCH2 will consist of hydrogen pipelines, multiple hydrogen fueling stations and permanent CO2 storage infrastructure in West Virginia, Ohio and Pennsylvania.



Capito

The project is slated to receive “up to \$925 million” from the \$7 billion in funding for regional hydrogen hubs that was included in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

ARCH2 is a “collaborative initiative” between the DOE, “private industry, state and local governments, academic and technology institutions, nonprofit organizations and community groups working together to build a safe and sustainable clean hydrogen ecosystem in Appalachia,” according to information from the ARCH2 website.

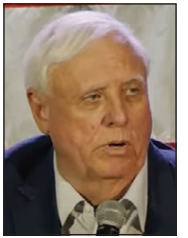
Development partners are: Air Liquide, CNX Resources Corp., Enbridge Gas Ohio, Empire Diversified Energy, EQT Corp., Fidelis New Energy, Hog Lick Aggregates, Hope Gas Inc., Independence Hydrogen, KeyState and Plug Power. Management of ARCH2 is led by Battelle, Allegheny Science and Technology (AST), GTI Energy and TRC Companies, with support from the National Energy Technology Laboratory (NETL).

The West Virginia Hydrogen Hub Coalition issued a press release last week celebrating the funding.

“West Virginia is an ‘all of the above’ energy state, and harnessing the power of hydrogen allows us to create new economic opportunities and high-quality jobs for our communities,” said Gov. Jim Justice, a member of the coalition. “I’m proud that West Virginia will continue its tradition as an innovative, energy-producing state.”

The announcement “adds to West Virginia’s ability to power this great nation well into the future,” said U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin, I-W.Va., who is also a member of the coalition.

“I was proud to help bring ARCH2 to the Mountain State, which will strengthen America’s energy independence, adding to our all-of-the-above approach to energy production through the expansion of hydrogen energy while lowering emissions and bringing good-paying jobs to our state,” he said.



Justice

Senior Staff Writer Charles Young can be reached at 304-626-1447 or cyoung@theet.com

US Supreme Court asked to halt power plant rules

QUICK TAKE:

■ West Virginia has requested an emergency stay from the U.S. Supreme Court to block new EPA power plant rules, arguing they exceed the authority granted by Congress and ignore previous Supreme Court rulings.

■ West Virginia officials, including Gov. Jim Justice and industry leaders, strongly oppose the EPA’s new regulations.

■ The EPA’s new rules aim to reduce pollution and improve public health by tightening emissions standards for power plants, updating mercury and air toxics standards, and enhancing wastewater and coal ash management.

by Charles Young
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (WV News) — West Virginia Attorney General Patrick Morrisey has asked the U.S. Supreme Court to issue an emergency

stay preventing implementation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s power plant rules.

The petition to the high court came just days after the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit rejected a request to block the rules. The request was brought by West Virginia and a coalition of other states.

“Our position remains the same: This rule strips the states of important discretion while using technologies that don’t work in the real world,” Morrisey said in a press release.

The EPA’s rules ignored the Supreme Court’s 2022 ruling in *West Virginia v. EPA*, Morrisey said.

“The landmark *West Virginia v.*



Morrisey

EPA is clear that Congress placed real limits on what the EPA can do, and we will ensure those limits are upheld,” he said.

At the beginning of June, U.S. Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., was joined by 43 Senate colleagues in introducing a formal challenge to the EPA rules through the Congressional Review Act.

“With this Congressional Review Act resolution of disapproval, every member of Congress will have the opportunity to protect America’s energy future, heed the warnings of our nation’s electric grid operators and adhere to the precedent set by the Supreme Court,” Capito said.

Numerous West Virginia officials and stakeholders in the state’s energy industries have vowed to fight the power plant rules.

Chris Hamilton, president of the West Virginia Coal Association, has

said the rules are “specifically designed” to force the state’s nine coal-fired power plants to close.

“What EPA is doing is economic suicide,” he said. “West Virginians will lose jobs. Americans will continue to pay increasingly more expensive power bills. Our state and national electric systems will become even more unreliable as the grid weakens and baseload power supplies are severely reduced. And just as West Virginia will likely import its future energy, America’s energy security will become more dependent on foreign countries and potentially foreign adversaries.”

Shortly after the EPA released the final rules package in May, Gov. Jim Justice held an event at Independence Hall in Wheeling, where he was joined by a group of coal miners.

See RULES, 15

Senate Committee advances Sen. Manchin's permitting reform bill

QUICK TAKE:

■ U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin's permitting reform bill has passed the Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources, marking a crucial step toward federal authorization overhaul.

■ The bill proposes a 150-day limit for judicial review of agency decisions and a 90-day deadline for the secretary of energy to process LNG export applications.

■ The bill has support from energy industry groups but strong opposition from environmental organizations.

by Charles Young
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

WASHINGTON (WV News) — A permitting reform bill led by U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin, I-W.Va., recently passed the Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources, marking a key step in his effort to overhaul the federal authorization process for energy and mineral projects.



Manchin

The proposed legislation aims to streamline project timelines and limit legal challenges, reflecting two years of work by the committee.

Manchin, who has made the reform his top priority before leaving the Senate, said the bill is essential for efficient permitting, despite anticipated opposition from environmental groups.

The bill includes a 150-day statute of limitations to seek judicial review

of an agency action granting or denying authorization for an energy or mineral project, unless a shorter deadline is established elsewhere in applicable federal law.

Additionally, the bill sets a 90-day deadline for the secretary of energy to grant or deny liquid natural gas export applications.

"There's no such thing as a 'perfect bill,'" Manchin said. "Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good, and we've tried everything we could to find that balance."

The legislation is a "targeted set of consequential reforms," said Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo., who helped craft the bill and is the committee's ranking member.

"It is going to boost American energy and mineral production. It will help lower costs for American families," he said. "It will strengthen our economic and national security and the security of our allies around the world."

The bill has been warmly received by stakeholders in energy industries and has been widely condemned by environmental groups.

A group of more than 360 environmental organizations collectively sent a letter to the committee members urging rejection of the bill.

"This legislation guts bedrock environmental protections, endangers public health, opens up tens of millions of acres of public lands and hun-



Barrasso

dreds of millions of acres of offshore waters to further oil and gas leasing, gives public lands to mining companies and would de-facto rubber-stamp gas export projects that harm frontline communities and perpetuate the climate crisis," the groups wrote.

Industry groups, including the Gas and Oil Association of West Virginia, have praised the legislation.

It addresses a "critical issue facing our nation that will support lower energy costs and job creation in West Virginia," said Charlie Burd, president of GO-WV.

"An abundance of clean-burning natural gas is one of the most important resources we're blessed with in America," he said. "Predictable and workable permit review timelines secure investment, provide surety and, hopefully, will help fast-track the buildout of the infrastructure key to bringing more of this energy produced in Appalachia to users across the globe."

Manchin and U.S. Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., have each advocated repeatedly over the last several years for reforming the federal permitting process for energy projects.

The delegation's efforts to pass legislation reforming the process have taken various forms over the past two years — as standalone bills, as deals with the White House and as part of larger legislative packages — but all have included reining in project timelines and limiting legal challenges against projects.

Manchin, who chose not to run for

re-election, said it's vital for the Senate to "get permitting done."

"That's my final goal — to get permitting done," he said last November. "And I'm determined to get that done."

Gov. Jim Justice, the GOP nominee for Manchin's Senate seat, has said he would also take up the cause of permitting reform if he is elected on Nov. 5.

"Absolutely, it will be a priority from my standpoint that we've got to have an energy policy," Justice said. "I'm going to carry the banner as strong as I can possibly carry it — that's for absolute dadgum sure."

During this year's regular session of the West Virginia Legislature, lawmakers adopted a resolution calling on Congress to reform the energy project permitting process.

State Senate Concurrent Resolution 16 asks federal lawmakers to revise current policies related to permitting and environmental review processes in the interest of promoting "economic and environmental stewardship by expediting the deployment of modern energy infrastructure," according to Senate President Craig Blair, R-Berkeley.

"The federal government's permitting process is a system of unnecessarily complex, redundant and uncertain (rules), thereby discouraging investment and job creation in the energy sector," he said.

Senior Staff Writer Charles Young can be reached at 304-626-1447 or cyoung@theet.com

RULES

(Continued from Page 14)

"The EPA and White House's tone is clear: West Virginia doesn't matter," Justice said. "We are being told to close our facilities and send workers home without considering the economic impact. All West Virginians need to support our miners right now."

The EPA says the power plant rules are intended "to protect all communities from pollution and improve public health without disrupting the delivery of reliable electricity."

The suite of final rules includes:

■ A final rule for existing coal-fired and new natural-gas-fired power plants that would ensure all coal-fired plants that plan to operate in the long-term and all new base-load gas-fired plants control 90% of their carbon pollution.

■ A final rule that would strengthen and

update the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards (MATS) for coal-fired power plants, tightening the emissions standard for toxic metals by 67% and finalizing a 70% reduction in the emissions standard for mercury from existing lignite-fired sources.

■ A final rule that would reduce — by more than 660 million pounds per year — pollutants discharged through wastewater from coal-fired power plants, ensuring cleaner water for affected communities, including communities with environmental justice concerns that are disproportionately impacted.

■ A final rule that would require the safe management of coal ash that is placed in areas which were unregulated at the federal level until now, including at previously used disposal areas that may leak and contaminate groundwater.

Senior Staff Writer Charles Young can be reached at 304-626-1447 or cyoung@theet.com



AP photo

West Virginia Attorney General Patrick Morrisey has asked the U.S. Supreme Court to issue an emergency stay blocking implementation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's power plant rules.

Diversified Energy is committed to retiring orphaned wells

As Diversified Energy Company's reach continues to expand, so too does its commitment to retirement of orphaned or unused oil and natural gas wells, a company effort that grows every year.

DEC Senior Vice President of Upstream Operations and Well Retirement Todd Tetrick explained that previously the company went through third-party contractors to close wells. However, he noted that it was more difficult to manage retirement costs and maintain consistent access to the contractors, so the organization now retires its own wells through Next LVL Energy, a wholly owned subsidiary headquartered in Bridgeport, West Virginia.

"We wanted to more efficiently retire our own wells while also serving as a solution to state-owned orphan and abandoned wells," Tetrick said.

DEC originally purchased Next LVL Energy in 2021 and has been quick to act on its goal of retiring wells. In 2023 alone, the company retired over 400 wells, and Next LVL Energy has enough rigs that, if fully staffed, would have the potential to make for 20 full plugging crews across the Appalachian Basin.

"Next LVL Energy retires for Diversified, and we still use third-party contractors, but

Next LVL is also out doing third-party work for other operators and state agencies, both through their state orphan programs and federally funded orphan programs," Tetrick said. "That helps us offset our own cost of retiring."

Diversified Energy Company Co-Founder and CEO Rusty Hutson said that it's important to have a large, efficient system in place to retire them, and Next LVL is accomplishing that goal.



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found that when we did the work ourselves, we saved a lot of money.

"We started to build that business from scratch, and then acquired a couple of larger businesses that did retirement. Now, we probably have one of the largest asset retirement companies in the Appalachian Basin and probably over 40% of the available retirement capacity in the Basin."

Executive Vice President of Operations Maverick Bentley said that roughly half of the total wells DEC closed in 2023 were in West Virginia, around 80 Diversified wells and 120 other state-owned orphaned wells.

"We are retiring more wells in the Appalachian Basin than anyone else," Hutson said. "There are wells sitting out there at their end of life and there could be problems on them. We can retire those wells and get that out of the system, making sure those liabilities are addressed immediately.

Bentley shares the company's commitment to operating the company safely and responsibly.

"It speaks volumes to Diversified that we took that leap of faith and wanted to show our commitment to not only acquire, operate and maintain the portfolio of wellbores, but when it came time to then retire and plug those wellbores, we have the capability to do so," Bentley said. "In addition to being able to service our own needs of retirement and obligation, we can now

"We were getting challenged from time to time about how we retire those wells over time," Hutson said.

"As we set these agreements in the states in which we operate about how many wells on an annual basis we have to ... retire, we



RUSTY

offer that service back to operators and state agencies. We're proud of the fact that we took that initiative."

While retiring orphaned wells is a necessity due to state and federal codes, that DEC's commitment goes beyond the operations of the company, and has an impact beyond fulfilling obligations and generating revenue.

"There are situations where safety concerns related to orphaned wells for decades," Tetrick said. "We try to address environmental concerns."

"It's part of our stewardship and retiring above and beyond what we feel like it's the right thing to do several years ago. We've exceeded them."

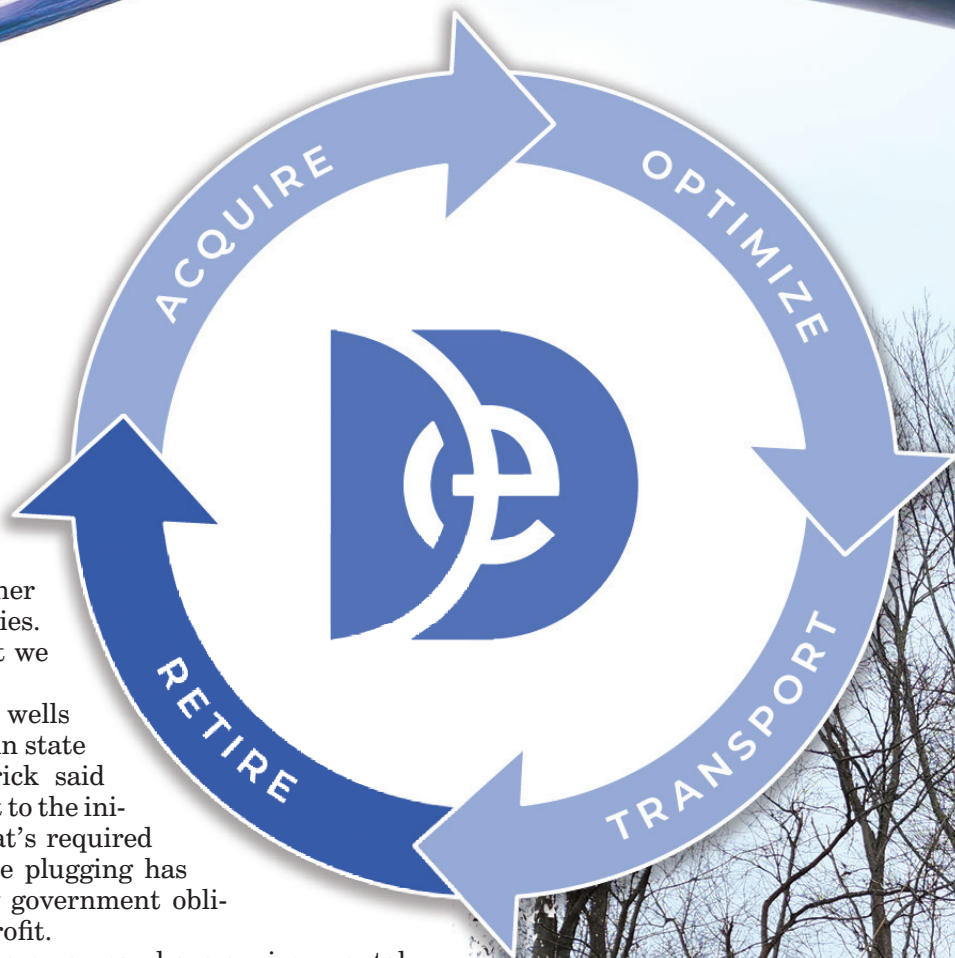
Bentley added that the company has "aggressively" retired wells.

"We were required to retire 100 wells or more, but we retired 200 of our wells without any mandate ... and that's through our ownership and stewardship work to achieve that goal."

"We consider this to be a good model as we go forward. It's not just how we secure financing, it's how we secure financial stability. It's an amount of focus on our operations that not just help manage the business, but help the management of the state agencies." ■



MAVERICK



to other agencies. It that we

ained wells certain state Tetrick said ment to the ini- d what's required and the plugging has filling government obli- ing profit.

ns where you can have environmental ted to wells that have been sitting there aid. "Those always rise to the top of the ress any well that's become a safety or n. wardship. We are much more aggressive d beyond what's required of us, because ight thing to do. We started doing that e don't just meet the requirements, we

hat in the past two years, the compa- y" doubled its commitment to retiring

d by the framework of our consent order r so, but in the past two years (each), we lls," Bentley said. "We're going beyond at's a testament to Diversified's overall dship of (wells) ... and Next LVL's hard accomplishment."

be a core part of our operating business d. Operating and maintaining the well- p is a significant priority we have, and ncial stability, but we put a near-equal r retiring and service business model to he retirement of our own wellbores, but of other companies and state and federal



NEXT
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West Virginia officials warn of Avian Flu risk

QUICK TAKE:

■ Four human cases of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) have been confirmed in the U.S.; biosecurity measures are crucial to prevent spread.

■ Use protective footwear, disinfect shoes and practice good hygiene to reduce risk; report symptomatic poultry to authorities.

■ Human risk is low, but avoid contact with sick animals, cook poultry and beef thoroughly and monitor for symptoms if exposed.

by Daisy Gibbons
STAFF WRITER

CLARKSBURG, W. Va. (WV News) — A total of four Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) cases have been confirmed in humans within the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Health officials urge individuals to use precaution through preventative measures to reduce the risk of contracting the virus and spreading it.

Practicing good biosecurity can prevent the spread of the avian flu, said Jennifer Friend, a WVU Extension agent in Harrison County who specializes in agriculture and natural resources.

“If you visit somebody’s farm, it is really important, especially if you have birds or if you have dairy cattle. You don’t want to wear the same shoes around those animals as you wear to your farm,” she said. “If you do, make sure you disinfect those.”

Additionally, plastic boot



Friend

Protect Yourself From H5N1 When Working With Farm Animals

H5N1 is a bird flu virus that could make you sick. Wear recommended personal protective equipment (PPE) when working directly or closely with sick or dead animals, animal feces, litter, raw milk, and other materials that might have the virus.

Wash hands with soap and water, then put on PPE in this order:

1. Fluid-resistant coveralls
2. Waterproof apron, if needed for job task
3. NIOSH Approved® Respirator (e.g., N95® filtering facepiece respirator or elastomeric half mask respirator)
4. Properly-fitted unvented or indirectly vented safety goggles or face shield
5. Head cover or hair cover
6. Gloves
7. Boots

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Personal protective equipment is important to wear when visiting farms and when in close or direct contact with a dead or sick animal, Harrison County Health Department Nurse Director Donna Riffle said.

covers protect shoes from contaminants, Friend said.

“Be sure to practice that good biosecurity of washing your hands and cleaning your equipment,” she said.

Separating symptomatic animals from a flock or herd can reduce the risk of spreading the disease, Friend said.

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has mandatory testing for interstate movement of dairy cattle, Friend said.

“Basically, they have to test negative for influenza before they are allowed to move to another state,” she said.

If poultry display influenza symptoms, the West Virginia Department of Agriculture or U.S. Department

of Agriculture should be notified, Friend said.

Four human cases of HPAI virus were confirmed in Colorado in July, according to the CDC. All cases were in farm workers who were involved in the depopulation of poultry at a poultry facility experiencing an HPAI outbreak.

The risk of humans contracting the virus is low, Harrison County Health Department Nurse Director Donna Riffle said. However, individuals should avoid any unprotected exposure to sick or dead animals.

Personal protective equipment should be worn when in direct or close contact with a dead or sick animals,

Riffle said.

“Close contact in this case is considered to be within 6 feet,” she said.

Poultry and beef should be cooked to safe temperature before eating, Riffle said, to kill any bacteria or viruses. Additionally, avoid unpasteurized products, Riffle said.

Individuals should monitor themselves if exposed to the virus.

“If someone feels they have been exposed, they need to monitor themselves for any



Riffle

new respiratory symptoms, including conjunctivitis,” Riffle said. “With any illness, if symptoms do develop, they need to isolate themselves and contact their clinician.”

Increased awareness of the virus can influence how widely the disease spreads, Riffle said.

“Just like hand-washing, the better we do with our hand-washing, the more effective it is to prevent viruses,” she said. “The same thing with any virus or bacteria — you do the basic things and it can help to eliminate or minimize the spread.”

No HPAI cases have been reported in Harrison County or West Virginia, according to Riffle.



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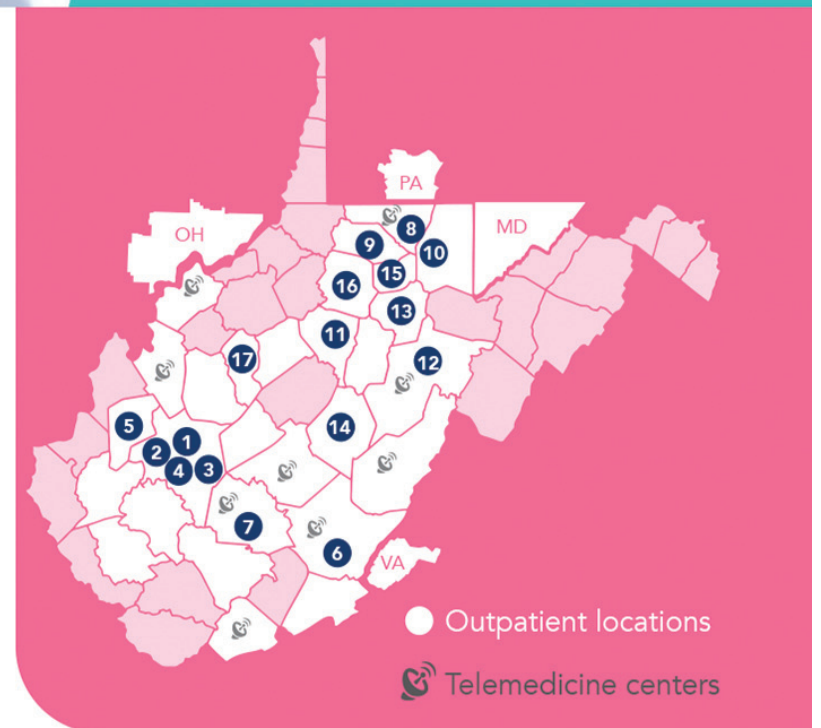
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- Kidney Transplant
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| 4. CAMC Charleston Surgical Hospital | 13. Broaddus Hospital |
| 5. CAMC Teays Valley Hospital | 14. Webster Memorial Hospital |
| 6. CAMC Greenbrier Valley Medical Center | 15. Grafton City Hospital, <i>affiliate</i> |
| 7. CAMC Plateau Medical Center | 16. Highland-Clarksburg Hospital, <i>affiliate</i> |
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Doddridge County High School gets a boost of 'PAWS'itivity

by **Damian Phillips**
STAFF WRITER

WEST UNION, W.Va. (WV News) — Doddridge County High School received a plus one to its headcount on Thursday— and a plus four to its paw count.

First lady Cathy Justice held an event at Doddridge County Park in West Union to introduce students to someone who may become their new best friend: Chloe, a 10-month-old golden retriever therapy dog.

Chloe is the 33rd therapy dog to be placed in West Virginia schools as a part of Justice's statewide initiative Friends With Paws, a spin-off of the Communities in Schools program.

"We're in 33 counties so far, and all the other counties have been contacted.

We're just waiting on final answers if they want the dogs or not. We feel we will go to all 55 counties with dogs," Justice said.

Chloe and the rest of the dogs put in West Virginia schools through Friends With Paws come from Ultimate Canine in Indiana, which trains three breeds for integration with students: Golden retrievers, Labradors and golden doodles.

The Labs and golden retrievers are bred for younger students who may be more eager to pet them. The golden doodles are a bit less suitable for elementary students as they are a bit more sensitive, said Vicki Shannon, chief of staff for the Office of the First Lady.

"After COVID, the kids didn't want to come back to



Staff photo by Damian Phillips

Therapy dog Chloe smiles for the camera.

school; there was a lot of apprehension in coming back. They didn't know what to

expect, and they were a little afraid. There were a lot of emotions, and kids just needed to reconnect. So these dogs are bridging that gap," Justice said. "They like the dog standing outside every day greeting them when they get off the bus. It's a staple in their life every day."

"Chloe was trained specifically for the upper grade levels. That's why the decision was made to place her at Doddridge County High School, and it's going to be a great fit," said Doddridge Superintendent Scott Cochran.

The process of bringing Chloe into Doddridge County High School began a few months ago, when the First Lady's Office reached out to the county's Holistic Child Department. The Doddridge Board of Education was im-

mediately on board with the idea, Cochran said.

"We've kind of kept it quiet just until the public announcement today, but we're so excited. It's going to benefit our school. It's going to benefit our students and provide another layer of support for our Holistic Child program and our Communities in School program," Cochran said.

Schools that admit service dogs from the program see better rates of attendance, better behavior and more engagement, Justice said.

In addition to schools, therapy dogs are becoming increasingly common to find in nursing homes and funeral homes to support people who need comfort in their time of need, Justice said.

See CHLOE, 26

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NOAA set to expand Fairmont-based supercomputing center

QUICK TAKE:

■ NOAA's Fairmont facility will expand its supercomputing center with a \$30 million investment to improve weather prediction capabilities.

■ The expanded center will help various industries, including agriculture and power grids, better prepare for extreme weather events.

■ NOAA's Fairmont facility is a crucial hub for collecting, processing and analyzing climate and weather data, positioning West Virginia as a leader in the growing commercial climate and weather industry.

by John Mark Shaver
FAIRMONT NEWS EDITOR

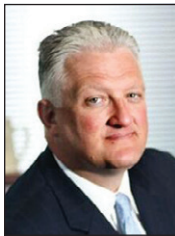
FAIRMONT, W. Va. (WV News) — The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's I-79 Technology Park facility is about to expand, as millions of dollars are set to be invested to support the federal agency's new supercomputing farm.

NOAA's facility in Fairmont, called the NOAA Environmental Security Computing Center, is home to the ground system operations for the agency's satellite programs, as well as the supercomputing center.

West Virginia High Technology Foundation President and CEO Jim Estep said recent investments made by NOAA will expand the Environmental Security Computing Center on all fronts.

"We are preparing to begin site development for a new supercomputing farm, which will be located just behind the research center facility," Estep said. "It'll be a large area that will house multiple modular units that have supercomputing systems in them. It's a significant investment, and the site work and supporting infrastructure alone is over \$30 million. ...

"The supercomputing systems will be several hundred million dollars. It will make a significant contribution to NOAA's computational capabilities and running models for all the climate and weather data they are collecting. ...



Estep



Submitted photo

The I-79 Technology Park is home to NOAA's Environmental Security Computing Center, and the federal agency plans to invest \$300 million into the park over the next three years.

Estep said the new "farm" will allow NOAA to better support a wide array of other organizations and industries, including power grid developers and businesses involved with the food supply chain.

"The demand for information associated with the erratic patterns in climate is growing exponentially, and NOAA is doing everything it can to keep up with that demand and trying to field these systems as quickly as possible," Estep said. "This new supercomputing resource for the agency is a core critical part of providing those answers."

It is imperative to always be developing better weather models because there is not only expensive infrastructure at stake when it comes to predicting weather like hurricanes and tornadoes, but also people's lives, Estep said.

He added that previously, long-term climate conditions were easier to forecast with accuracy, but weather and climate have changed to become more variable, and agencies like NOAA aren't able to predict patterns as far in advance anymore with current technology.

"This is significant, because you have industries — especially agriculture — that are dependent on under-

standing what the climate is going to do to weather patterns," Estep said. "Right now, for example, West Virginia is in a state of emergency because we're in a drought. The more heads-up you can give farmers or whoever, they can try to prepare for it and mitigate it. ...

"On a large level, where you're dealing with grocery stores and industrial farms, if they can't accurately predict what's going to happen ... it can have enormous impacts on the nation's food supplies."

Estep said the solution to this problem is to have better knowledge, and the only way to do that is to collect, process and study more data by using more supercomputing centers and satellite systems.

NOAA's Fairmont facility is the only location in the country that has all three of the agency's major satellite ground station programs in addition to a super computing capacity, he said.

"That means not only is most of the climate and weather data collected here, but it's processed here as well," Estep said. "That's significant in terms of the importance of this operation to the rest of the country and world, because climate change adaptation is one of the most press-

ing issues of mankind that we're facing today. ...

"The other significance is that most people have no idea there is a commercial climate and weather industry in this nation worth between \$7 and \$8 billion, and it's growing exponentially. ... The core resource for that industry is the data collected and processed in West Virginia. ... We have a vantage point where we can potentially capture a piece of this market for West Virginia."

Estep hopes the site work for the new supercomputing farm will be completed in February 2025, and the plan is to start bringing in the first supercomputing units by spring. While he doesn't know how many units will be in place by the end of 2025, he said there should at least be "a few."

"This expansion ... is just the beginning," Estep said. "NOAA plans to spend \$300 million here in Fairmont over the next three years to expand its operation across a variety of fronts, and I'm excited about that. I'm excited about the investment and how it will position us to be able to take advantage of some other opportunities."

Fairmont News Editor John Mark Shaver can be reached at 304-844-8485 or jshaver@theet.com.

NASA IV&V currently supporting a dozen missions

QUICK TAKE:

■ NASA's Katherine Johnson IV&V Facility in Fairmont supports various projects like Artemis, focusing on risk mitigation and software testing.

■ The facility boasts 100% customer satisfaction and significant educational outreach.

■ It contributes \$139.2 million to the economy and anticipates a promising future in both space missions and local impact.

by John Mark Shaver
FAIRMONT NEWS EDITOR

FAIRMONT, W.Va. (WV News) — NASA's Katherine Johnson Independent Verification and Validation Facility in Fairmont is supporting a dozen projects across the agency, and officials are excited about the plans NASA has for the future.

The facility, located at the I-79 High Technology Park, is focused on risk mitigation, according to NASA IV&V Office Lead Joelle Spagnuolo-Loretta, who explained that testing and adjusting NASA mission software is the facility's specialty.

"We make sure that, through our independent assessments, the software is going to execute as intended," Spagnuolo-Loretta said. "We differ from the development teams, which are actually the teams that are architecting, designing and implementing the software. We play that insight role of looking at all of the things they develop to make sure they're meeting the requirements and they're implemented correctly. ...

"It's that added assurance in a risk mitigation effort to make sure that the systems are going to work as they need to."

One of the primary projects that the IV&V Facility has supported for the past few years is Artemis, NASA's planned program to return humans to the Moon and, eventually, send them to Mars. NASA IV&V Facility Program Manager Wes Deadrick said the facility is working on Gateway, a planned space station that will orbit the Moon, and a project

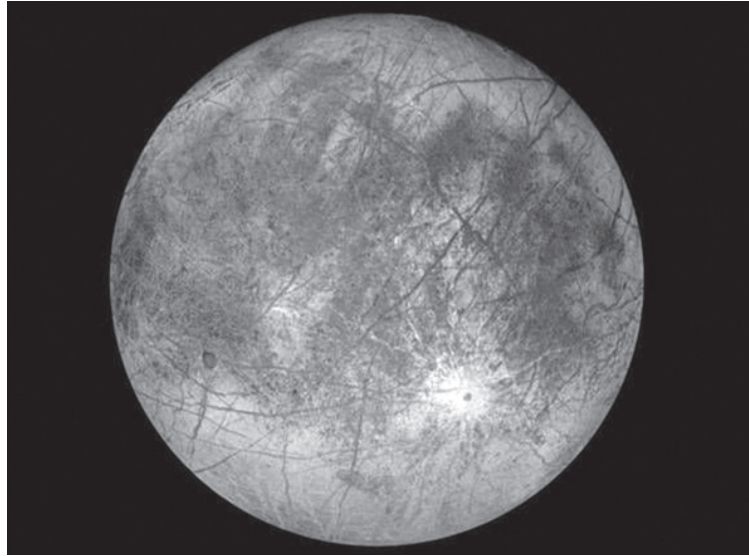


photo courtesy of NASA

NASA plans to send a probe to the icy Jupiter moon Europa with its mission Europa Clipper, which is set to launch in October.

that's central to Artemis's success.

"We're supporting a tremendously exciting mission, and the agency has a robust portfolio," Deadrick said. "Artemis is still a thing that excites us all. The idea of putting boots back on the Moon is something we're proud to be a part of."

Spagnuolo-Loretta said the agency is working hard to complete Artemis II and get it ready for launch, which is planned for September 2025.

"That's going to have a crew of four," Spagnuolo-Loretta said. "The astronauts were selected and they're training intensely for that. It's going to basically demonstrate our range of capabilities to not only go back to the Moon, but further into deep space. ... It's going to pave the way for the first lunar landing on the Moon with Artemis III ... which will actually bring astronauts back to the surface of the Moon. ...

"Our teams at IV&V are supporting not only the Artemis II development, but Artemis III and IV. ... We're pretty busy."



Deadrick

Spagnuolo-Loretta said there are two main categories of NASA missions: Those involving human exploration and those focused on science directorates. While missions like Artemis are, obviously, in the human exploration category, Spagnuolo-Loretta said that the science missions, such as Mars Sample Return or the James Webb Space Telescope, are important, too.

She points to the Europa Clipper, a mission that plans to send a probe to the icy Jupiter moon of Europa.

"They want to meet some science objectives to understand more about the nature of (Europa's) ice shelf and what ocean might be beneath it, along with the moon's composition and geology," Spagnuolo-Loretta said. "Around April 2030 is when we expect to be at the moon. It takes a while to get there, and it will hopefully launch in October of this year."

Deadrick said the facility just got its results back from its annual customer satisfaction survey, and was happy to report that the organization received 100% satisfaction for the third year in a row.

"It's very important that we are providing a service they value and doing exactly what we are trying to do, which is



NASA/Chris Coleman, Kevin Davis

A camera on the mobile launcher shows the Artemis I launch rocket and spacecraft lifting off as umbilical arms swing away to provide a clean path for ascent.

make the software on those missions safer and more reliable," Deadrick said. "This is not some soft survey. We're asking tough questions. ... Our teams are doing a good job of providing value to the agency and the project we're supporting."

In addition to the main NASA missions, the IV&V Facility is also committed to educational outreach.

According to the organization's 2023 program highlights, the facility held 47 educational workshops and reached over 2,700 students in 2023, and supported more than double that through hosting the second annual WVSSAC Robotics Champi-

onship Tournament at Fairmont State University.

Additionally, in 2023 alone, the facility estimated its labor income to be \$47.8 million and its total economic output to be \$139.2 million.

With all of the programming currently on its plate, Deadrick said that the IV&V Facility has a lot of work and testing ahead of it, but noted he's excited about the path NASA is on both in space and on the ground.

"We're doing well," Deadrick said. "We're prospering here in West Virginia, and the future is looking bright for us."

Fairmont News Editor John Mark Shaver can be reached at 304-844-8485 or jshaver@theet.com.

NCWV Airport's terminal building on track for November completion

QUICK TAKE:

■ Construction of North Central West Virginia Airport's new terminal, costing \$25 million, is advancing smoothly and is expected to be completed by early November.

■ The project is funded through a mix of federal, state, local and airport funds, including a \$19.267 million federal grant and a \$10 million bridge loan.

■ The new terminal is part of the West Virginia AeroTech Park, which will also host Pierpont Community & Technical College's expanded Aviation Maintenance Technology program.

by Charles Young
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

BRIDGEPORT, W. Va. (WVNews)—Construction of North Central West Virginia Airport's new terminal building is "cooking along," according to airport Director Rick Rock.

The \$25 million project has not experienced any significant setbacks or delays and remains slated for completion in the beginning of November.

"We're excited to get in there," Rock said. "We know that this terminal building is going to be in service for many, many decades to come."

Crews with Pittsburgh-based contractor Mascaro Construction got started on the project on April 1, 2023.

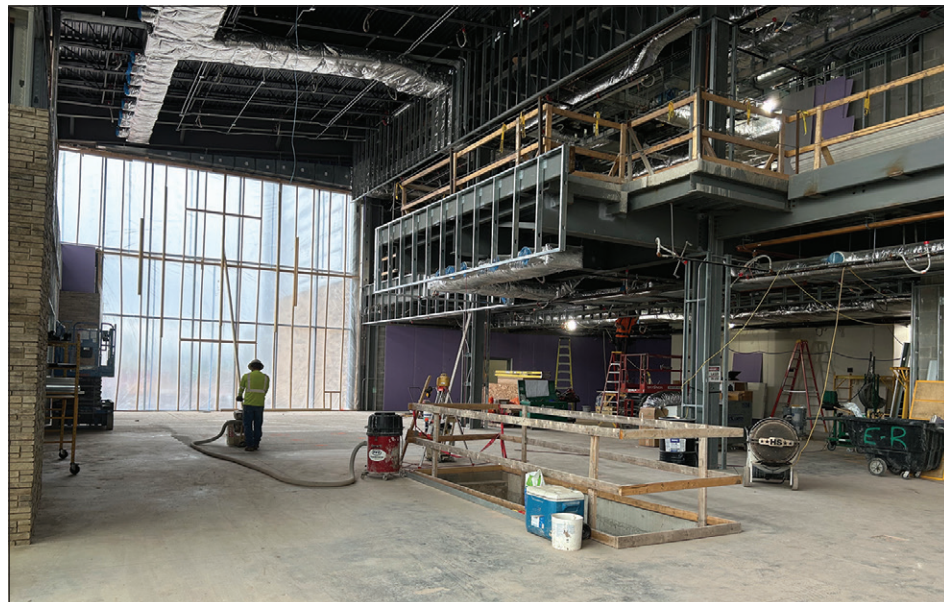
Anthony Bellotte, consultant to the Benedum Airport Authority, the body that governs the airport, said officials were pleased with how quickly Mascaro's crews got to work.

"These fellas were well prepared for the project, and when they showed up, they really hit the ground running," he said. "It seems like they are very organized and everything is moving along at the pace we had anticipated."

Mascaro was awarded a \$25 million contract in December 2022 to handle



Rock



Staff photo by Charles Young

A Mascaro Construction employee works on the interior of North Central West Virginia Airport's new terminal building.

construction of the terminal building itself.

Jane Lew-based Doss Enterprises was awarded a \$986,355 contract at the end of March 2023 to connect utilities to the site.

Grant funding from the Federal Aviation Administration will provide around \$19.267 million toward the project's overall cost, with additional monies to come from "state, local and airport funds," according to Rock.

Officials with the Benedum Airport Authority recently signed off on the paperwork needed to finalize the \$10 million bridge loan through Huntington National Bank.

"It's construction financing," Rock said. "Then we will permanently close on the long-term West Virginia EDA loan."

In August 2018, Gov. Jim Justice announced a \$10 million grant from the West Virginia Infrastructure and Jobs Development Council and made a \$10 million loan from the West Virginia Economic Development Authority available to the airport.

WVEDA loans are only applicable to finished projects, so the bridge loan funds will be used to pay costs associated with the ongoing project, Rock said.

"This (bridge loan) is the biggest part," he said. "We know we can complete the project. Now it's just going through a few bids that we're still going to get in. We have to finish the parking lot, and we do have a grant that we're working on for that."

Deputy Airport Director Shawn

Long, during May's Benedum Airport Authority meeting, said the grant for the parking lot is through the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

"We're eligible for up to \$1.8 million, out of an approximately \$3 million parking lot," he said.

Airport officials will continue looking out for and pursuing other funding opportunities for the project, Rock said.

"We're just trying to do it in the most financially prudent way possible," he said.

Bridgeport Mayor Andy Lang, a member of the Airport Authority and its Special Projects Committee, recently estimated the total cost of the terminal project at around \$54 million, but he said officials hope to have less than \$5 million in total debt obligation.

The \$5 million figure is a "goal," but the final price tag will ultimately depend on a number of factors, Rock said.

"As we go through and tally all the final numbers and the final bids and everything, we'll just have to wait and see what that number is," he said.

The new terminal building is being constructed inside the West Virginia AeroTech Park, a newly created development on the airport's property.

See AIRPORT, 27



Lang



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W.Va. Airports by Enplanements

About the Data: Enplanement data comes from Federal Aviation Administration CY 2023 Preliminary Passenger Boarding Data. Passenger Airline info comes from each airport's respective website.

AIRPORT		CITY	2023 ENPLANEMENTS	2022 ENPLANEMENTS	PASSENGER AIRLINES	WEBSITE
CRW	West Virginia International Yeager	Charleston	194,896	164,240	American Airlines, Delta, United, Breeze	https://yeagerairport.com/
HTS	Tri-State Airport/Milton J Ferguson Field	Huntington	88,888	91,091	Allegiant Air, American Airlines	https://www.tristateairport.com/
CKB	North Central West Virginia	Clarksburg	42,736	45,508	Allegiant Air, Contour Airlines	http://www.flyckb.com/
LWB	Greenbrier Valley	Lewisburg	8,328	10,048	Contour Airlines	https://www.gvairport.com/
MGW	Morgantown Municipal Airport-Walter L. Bill Hart Field	Morgantown	6,842	7,272	Southern Airways Express	https://www.morgantownairport.com/
BKW	Raleigh County Memorial	Beckley	4,882	5,004	Contour Airlines	https://flybeckley.com
PKB	Mid-Ohio Valley Regional	Parkersburg	4,391	5,032	Contour Airlines, American Airlines	http://www.flymovra.com/





Charlotte Destin- Ft. Walton Beach Myrtle Beach



CONTOUR

Orlando/Sanford Tampa/St. Pete

SCARR

(Continued from Page 8)

And then lastly is civil, and we did predict that that would be 15 to 20%, but cumulatively it's been 31%. And our current docket, it's about 42%. So we've had some greater number of civil than we than we anticipate.

WV News: Let's talk just quickly about frivolous cases. I mean, some people were worried about that. Have you seen that at all?

Chief Judge Scarr: Well, I guess that's in the eye of the beholder. As a practicing lawyer, I saw cases that I thought were frivolous, but sometimes they were successful, and certainly the other side often didn't think they were. So again, that's in the eye of the beholder. Clearly, it's not unusual. You see cases that are appealed not because they think they have a good argument, but

for strategy reasons, so that happens.

We do get appeals that are filed and never perfected, so they end up going nowhere. They're dismissed. By perfected, I mean, they don't meet the scheduling calendar, they don't file briefs, and the cases just go away. So for whatever reason, that does happen. Certainly there are cases that I can't say are frivolous, but as a judge, lawyer, human being, you kind of wonder, 'couldn't they have figured out a way to work these things out?' Because they end up spending a lot of time and money, sometimes for a small matter, relatively speaking. But again, to the people involved, even even what might be viewed as a small matter is very important for any number of reasons, including principle. And that's part of the reason for our system.

I certainly haven't seen a number of what I might consider to be frivolous cases that would cause any kind of alarm or concern.

PLANT

(Continued from Page 6)

The plant would be adjacent to a solar project being developed by Nicholas County Solar Project, LLC, certified by the commission in a 2022 filing. Nicholas County Solar is a subsidiary of Savion, LLC, of Kansas City, MO, which is a subsidiary of Shell New Energies LLC, whose parent company is Shell, plc., based in London.

The Deep Lake petition said the two lines would interconnect with an existing 138,000 kilovolt Gilboa-Junes Branch transmission line operated by Monongahela Power Co.

The project area is on a 1,521-acre reclaimed surface mine. Portions of the project area are being mined. Summersville is located approximately 11 miles southeast of the project area. The unincorporated communities of Gilboa, Zela, and Drennen are located approximately 5 miles to the south and Fola is located approximately 3.5 miles to the west.

Deep Lake of Kansas City is a Delaware limited liability company and a wholly owned subsidiary of Savion.

More information on this case can be found on the PSC website: www.psc.state.wv.us. Click on "Case Information" and access Case No. 24-0311-E-SCS-PW.

LIVING

(Continued from Page 5)

That's why West Virginia doesn't feel like it's the cheapest place to live for West Virginians, he said.

Regardless of location or any state's cost of living, the hard times that have fallen on average Americans partly come from inflation, Deskins said.

"The thing is, we have gone through tremendous turbulence in this country. When the pandemic hit, it is hard to recognize what a massive shock it had on the economy," he said.

Several million people left the workforce, constraints were put on the global supply chain and the government pushed out massive stimulus efforts, he said.

Additionally, there was a massive spike in oil prices, especially with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, he said.

"If you put all these things together,

that's what created this huge bout of inflation," he said.

"For many, many years we were used to 2% inflation in this country. From the mid '80s, it was common for the country's inflation to only rise by 2% every year," he said.

"Starting in 2021 and especially in 2022, we had this massive blast of inflation," he said.

At one point in 2022, prices were about 8% or 9% higher than they were in the previous year, he said.

Inflation has come down comparably and now sets at roughly 3.0%, according to the Consumer Price Index.

"To achieve that without putting the economy into a new recession in two years time, it's not bad," Deskins said.

Now, economic forecasters expect that the inflation rate will get back to the preferred 2% by the latter part of 2025, he said.

Like the rest of the country, the hope for West Virginia is that inflation will

MARKET

(Continued from Page 5)

Although economic growth has presented an increased need for housing in West Virginia, not many home builders are willing to build only a few homes, as their profit margins are better the more they build, said Harrison County Economic Development Corporation Executive Director Amy Haberbosch Wilson.

Last year, the West Virginia Legislature passed the BUILD WV Act to incentivize homebuilders in West Virginia.

The BUILD WV Act offers three tax credits: A sales tax exemption for building materials, a 10-year prop-

erty value adjustment refundable tax credit, and a potential municipal business and operating tax exemption.

So far, 16 BUILD WV Districts have been approved, along with nine projects that will yield 602 housing units. The total investment of these projects is estimated to be \$115 million, according to the 2024 BUILD WV Act Report prepared by the West Virginia Department of Economic Development.

Of the nine approved projects, one is completed and the remaining eight are still under construction.

This translates to 46 new living quarters available for occupancy that have been facilitated by the program, and 556 more expected to be completed over the next few years.

CHLOE

(Continued from Page 21)

"They're so effective. Dogs calm people down and make them feel all warm and fuzzy," she said.

Therapy dogs have even been found to increase reading level for students who are too shy to read in class, Shannon said.

Students with anxiety can request to meet privately with their teacher and the dog and read to them instead of in front of their class.

"The kids read to the dogs, and the dogs don't judge them if they miss a word," Justice said. "They come in and give the dogs big hugs. It's just incredible."

Chloe's introduction to students took place the same day as Doddridge County's back-to-school-bash, which was held on the same grounds at Doddridge County Park.

During the event, students were given free backpacks, books, water bottles, clothes and school supplies from a variety of vendors, said Zoey Dotson, community service specialist for Community Resources.

In addition to the giveaways, students were able to enjoy bouncy houses, foam cannons and food from a variety of vendors.



Dotson

CHARTER

(Continued from Page 13)

Paul said he believes the board staff can work with WIN Academy "to make them better prepared for future opportunities.

"I think with targeted technical assistance and with everything that (Hurley) and I have learned about managing this program, WIN Academy can have a very competitive application in the near future," he said.

Other physical public charter schools include Eastern Panhandle Preparatory Academy in Kearneysville and M.E.C.C.A. Business Learning Institute in Charles Town, which will begin this fall. Statewide virtual public charter schools include Virtual Preparatory Academy of West Virginia and West Virginia Virtual Academy.

continue to go down and interest rates will decrease, he said.

As for the disparity between West Virginia's cost of living and the average median income, better high paying jobs may be a starting point, but not the final solution, officials said.

"We will see growing prosperity in the state, but the real question isn't, 'are incomes going to rise,' but 'are incomes going to rise faster than the national average' — because if the income here rises at the exact same pace as the national average, we will stay in 49th place for income. We have to grow faster than the nation," Deskins said.

West Virginia is currently forecast to improve economically, but only at the same pace as the nation, he said.

"It implies that we will improve, but we are not going to gain ground on the ranking amongst the other states," he said.

GEE

(Continued from Page 1)

Gee said the university must continue to be a driving force in public education, which has been another goal of his during his second stint as president.

“Finishing up my tour, (I’ve seen how) the university has made such a difference in the lives of so many people,” Gee said. “I had a chance to visit Jackson General and the amazing work they are doing there. Just think: We now have a 25-hospital health care system that is the envy of this country. [Consider] the fact that no West Virginian needs to leave the state to get great health care, no child needs to leave because we have a great Children’s Hospital and we’re building a new cancer center.”

Gee has been a major visionary in the growth of WVU Medicine, starting during his first term as president back in 1981-85, when the system was first formed, and now as it has grown to be nationally recognized as one of the leading providers in a number of fields.

“I’ve always felt that health care was the missing component. It was the ‘tent pole’ for the future of West Virginia. And the reason is, when people aren’t feeling well, when they’re sick, when they don’t have access to great health care, when they have a health care desert, everything else is



WVU photo by Matt Sunday

West Virginia University President Gordon Gee met with local business owners and community leaders at Rivertown Cafe during his 2024 summer tour July 31 in Marlinton.

not worth anything.”

Both of those elements are mandatory for the university — and state — to reach another step on its mission: Expanding prosperity, not just on its own campuses and with its own students, but throughout the Mountain State.

“That’s why I saw the state as our campus,” Gee said. “Every corner of this state belongs to the university and this university belongs to every West Virginian.”

That’s why he’s so passionate about the work of university programs like 4-H, the Extension Service and efforts with community building, land use programs and others geared to reaching West Virginians where they are, from the cities and towns to the most rural locations.

“And the final thing, I never want to leave our university without two things:

Higher education and higher purpose,” Gee said. “... To keep our young people here, you have to give them a sense of place and purpose and a sense of the fact that they can accomplish something in the state that they can’t anywhere else.”

In the effort to keep — and attract — more people to West Virginia, the university and Gee have been key factors in the Ascend WV program, which has shown great success.

“We now have five sites in West Virginia, and we have the most extraordinary retention rate,” Gee said. “We’re at 97%, which is better than Tulsa, [Oklahoma] better than Bentonville, Arkansas. So people not only are coming here (through the program), but they are staying.”

With so many goals and projects, it’s little wonder



WVU photo by Brian Persinger

West Virginia University President Gordon Gee talks with JoAnne Stamp and others during an alumni and friends reception July 15 at Oglebay Resort in Wheeling.

that the man who hails from Utah but proudly proclaims West Virginia home doesn’t have much time to ponder retirement. But he knows it is time.

“... Every institution needs to refresh itself, and I need to refresh myself,” Gee said. “I may be retiring from the presidency, but I’m certainly not from my commitment to West Virginia and West Virginia University.”

“I’ll continue to do important things, but I’ll do it perhaps a little less structured.”

Gee plans to give the new president, whoever it is, plenty of space to grow into the position, but he will remain active, either from Morgantown or the home he had built at The Greenbrier for his retirement.

But that is still in the distance for Gee, who needed to move on to the next meeting and the next step towards another “new” school year.

“You know, I always find the beginning of school as one of the two most exciting times in the history over the university. The second is commencement, because you see all the students and all those families.

“But seeing the families at the beginning, bringing their kids, unloading ... I’m trying to visit with as many as I can, giving out cookies and just welcoming them.

“It’s a great time. It’s a very energetic time for me that, as I move toward retirement, those two things, those aspects I really cherish and I’ll miss.”

AIRPORT

(Continued from Page 24)

The park also will be home to the recently announced facility for Pierpont Community & Technical College’s Aviation Maintenance Technology program.

Airport officials are in the process of securing additional tenants for the park, Rock said.

“We’re talking to a couple of different potential lessees,” he said. “We’re working with Pierpoint and trying to put it all together.”

Pierpont’s new facility will allow for the expansion of its Aviation Maintenance Technology program. The program provides training in aircraft technology to prepare students to be qualified to take the Federal Aviation Administration Part 147 tests.

Offering a two-year associate degree and one-year certificates, students learn to perform maintenance, remove and replace components, troubleshoot and repair aircraft systems while developing plans to analyze and develop solutions for aircraft problems using approved

maintenance materials.

Funding for the new facility was allocated by the West Virginia Legislature through Senate Bill 1029. The bill earmarked more than \$52 million from the state’s general fund surplus to the West Virginia Department of Economic Development, including \$25 million for the Pierpont project.

“We have a potential of 800 jobs that they are trying to fill over the next three years,” said Del. Clay Riley, R-Harrison, during debate over the bill in the House of Delegates. “But they do not have enough avionics and aviation me-

chanics, so essentially, this builds that hangar that allows them to expand that program.”

Sen. Ben Queen, R-Harrison, said the decision to allocate \$25 million towards the facility demonstrates a “significant commitment to advancing education and technical training in our region.”

“This state-of-the-art facility will serve as a beacon of opportunity, preparing our students for fulfilling careers in the aviation industry and beyond,” he said.

In addition to the terminal building and Pierpoint’s

planned facility, the Aero-Tech Park will feature an expanded taxiway, an enlarged parking lot and will provide ample build-ready land for the continued growth and development of the region’s aerospace industry.

“There’s just not a lot of flat land around the state of West Virginia,” Rock said. “It is a unique piece of property and we want to make sure that we put it to the highest and best use.”

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Grappling with an education conundrum

While many eyes have been on the stock market and economic indicators in the past few weeks — and rightly so — there are other factors at play that could tremendously impact our future, especially here in West Virginia.

With higher education institutions and K-12 schools returning to classrooms soon, it is imperative that state and educational leaders continue to look for ways to strengthen West Virginia's educational system.

Over the past 10 years, and sometimes the trends go even further back, we have seen a confluence of factors that have led to challenges even greater than the state — and its education system — has faced before.

In a state still struggling to grow population, keeping its young people, as well as attracting others, must be a major goal. While leaders have done well in some areas, like increasing economic development projects in the hopes of providing more good-paying careers, there remains a significant disconnect.

While more jobs have been created and there has been some minor population growth in some regions, the

increase of jobs has really just made for a more competitive job market for those businesses and entities looking to hire.

The same scenario is playing out in our education system as universities, colleges and trade schools compete to lure students from the same declining base.

There is no question the state needs well-trained young workers in trades ranging from masonry to plumbing to HVAC. The state also needs health care workers in fields that don't require a four-year degree, such as radiology and other technicians who require two-year programs or less to be on the job.

Some of our best and brightest are opting for those careers because they see the demand and want to move on into their adult lives quicker than they can if they pursue four years of higher education.

That's left colleges and universities scrambling to attract more students, both residents of West Virginia and those from out of state, to keep enrollment numbers high enough to justify their levels of enrollment and investment.

Some have found limited suc-

cess. Some continue to struggle. And some private institutions have closed.

That type of "market correction" is playing out in the state's K-12 system, too, as counties deal with declining enrollments brought on by the state's low population and birth numbers. The situation has only been exacerbated by lawmakers pushing a school choice agenda, which provides parents and students with more choices.

While proponents of school choice, we also see the disruptive nature of some of the changes being implemented at the pace at which they've become law. We also believe that school choice shouldn't mean that homeschooling, private schools or virtual academies are left totally to their own accord with no accountability. There must be standards to protect our children in both the public and private settings.

With that said, though, school choice can be a positive influence on the state's education system if lawmakers have guardrails in place that safeguard public education for the masses while opening alternative opportunities for those who choose it.

Rapid depletion of state funding, combined with cumbersome state laws in regards to public education employment, put additional pressure on school systems as they work to adjust to provide the best learning experiences for students.

As currently designed, and with no expectation of a sudden surge of school-age children, the likelihood of declining numbers of students will lead to the public, private and homeschool industries competing for what students remain.

Competition isn't a bad thing, but in terms of public services like education there must be safeguards to protect what is provided to those who can't afford or utilize private choices.

But the underlying issue with education in the Mountain State is the same one that we must overcome to grow economic development — we need people. We need to recruit them and help more people find the treasures that are West Virginia. But we also must do more to keep the ones who are born here, which involves encouraging our young people to settle down and start families.

The one that got away

WVNews.com has reported on a major titanium project that had been announced for the Fayetteville, North Carolina, area. In our reporting, we shared that the North Central West Virginia region — primarily Harrison County — had been strongly considered for the project.

Various sources have confirmed with us that the top sites being looked at were in Harrison County, with the likely choice — if it came to West Virginia — being in the vicinity of North Central West Virginia Airport.

That would have made perfect sense since the airport is at the epicenter of the state's growing aerospace and aviation industry. The location also would have fairly easy access, not only through the air but with Interstate 79 and W.Va. Route 279 nearby.

Had the company chosen this re-

gion, it would have been likely the largest investment the county has seen, rivaling what's unfolded in other parts of the state.

The North Carolina project calls for an \$867.8 million investment that would lead to several hundred jobs. Reports indicate the average salary at the plant will be more than \$123,000 annually with the company's annual payroll impact of about \$37 million.

Much of the effort to lure the company — American Titanium Metal — to West Virginia happened behind the scenes, as is often the case when it comes to development projects.

We also have reason to believe that it originated locally, with the investors connecting with local entities in the initial process.

While local officials were tight-

lipped during the negotiation process, we were aware of the potential and understand that a number of entities had been advised of the possible investment. In most cases like this, informed parties likely had to sign nondisclosure agreements, so information was scant.

We understand those steps are taken to protect the companies involved, as well as investors, from possible competitors finding out information that would create an unfair advantage.

But now that the project has fallen through, it would be interesting to know why the company chose North Carolina instead of West Virginia.

We have been told by several sources that some state officials had concerns with possible financial arrangements and lacked the commitment to close the deal for the Mountain State.

This came after what we're hearing were several months of discussions and/or negotiations. At the end of the day, the state didn't close the deal.

Now that the project is on its way to completion in another state, we hope state officials will reevaluate the process of what unfolded — or in this case, didn't — in Harrison County and hopefully learn from it.

We aren't usually critical of West Virginia's development efforts because that has been a strong point of the Gov. Jim Justice administration.

We have reported and editorialized on the many success stories that have unfolded in the state, especially over the past five years.

But in this case, we're left wondering what might have been — and more importantly, how this one got away.

NORTH

WHEELING

The new flight school classroom at the Wheeling-Ohio County Airport is complete and has obtained certification from the Federal Aviation Administration.

Ohio County Administrator Randy Russell informed county commissioners Tuesday that the classroom has passed FAA inspection, and classes should begin there at the end of this month.

West Liberty University and Marshall University are partnering to offer aviation classes at the airport, which will serve as a satellite location for Marshall's Bill Noe Flight School.

The classroom space constructed there is complete "except for some gingerbread work," Russell said.

He added aviation students are expected to begin flying planes sometime after the "Wings Over Wheeling" air show on Aug. 24.

Classes begin at the school on Aug. 26.

In other matters, property tax collections exceeded 80% in Ohio County, and that means a bonus for Sheriff Tom Howard.

West Virginia State Code awards a bonus of \$1,500 to sheriffs who meet collection requirements, and commissioners approved that bonus for Howard on Tuesday.

Russell also announced the emergency absentee voting policy in West Virginia followed by Ohio County, which establishes the instances under which a voter may ask to vote an emergency absentee ballot on Election Day.

— The Intelligencer/ Wheeling News-Register

Teachers, principals and even support staff can experience back-to-school stress.

This school year, employees in Ohio County Schools will have the opportunity to participate in sessions aimed at increasing their mindfulness and improving their mental health.

The experience will be provided by Joelle Moray of Wheeling, a professionally licensed counselor and mental wellness coach.

Moray and Susan Nolte, human relations director for Ohio County Schools, worked together to obtain grant funding from a private foundation to cover the costs of the sessions. The name of the donating foundation is not being released.

"The program is called 'Workplace Wellness,' and it is designed to pro-

ACROSS THE STATE

vide stress management tools for employees," Moray explained. "It's not just for teachers, but for any employees of Ohio County Schools — administrators, staff and faculty."

Moray has provided the sessions for employees in many different industries, including banks, pharmaceutical companies and law firms.

"The focus is on 'psychoeducation,' where people learn what is happening to their physical body and mind in times of stress," she explained. "They learn about stress, anxiety, and what overwhelms them. Then they learn specific tools to process anxiety. We take people from the state of being super stressed out to a place where they can be fulfilled."

— The Intelligencer/ Wheeling News-Register

NORTH CENTRAL

KINGWOOD

With Aug. 20 being the first official day back for students, Preston High School features some new security measures to ensure student safety.

Earlier in the year, officials at Preston High School shifted their attention to needed security updates including replacing all exterior doors and building a new mantrap system at the main entrance, according to school officials.

Now, the facility updates are complete as students are ready to return for the 2024-25 school year, Principal Todd Seymour said.

"Most of the exterior doors now don't have handles on them; they are basically exits. There are very few entrances to the building now," he said. Director of Security Nick Schimble said a lot of the exterior doors were in serious disarray.

"Since the school is getting pretty old now, most of those doors (hadn't) been replaced and they have a lot of wear and tear," he said.

The main concern was making sure the entire building was secure, he said.

"Having a safe entry point is the biggest thing," he said.

Now, the main entrance of the school will be ready for the new school year, Seymour said.

Last semester, visitors were diverted to the Career and Technical Edu-

cation offices for check-in while the main entrance was being constructed, he said.

"Everything will go back to the way it was before. A-10 is the actual entrance people should be coming through now," he said.

— Preston County News and Journal

West Virginia Division of Highways crews have begun installing handicapped-accessible sidewalk entry ways in Kingwood and Preston County.

Approximately 150 sidewalks in the county are to receive the accessibility upgrade, with 55 set to be done in Kingwood alone, officials said.

According to the West Virginia Department of Transportation, in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act curbed ramps must be provided at all existing, marked and unmarked crosswalks, to ensure that every pedestrian can easily get onto the sidewalk.

Kingwood City Council Member Bill Robertson said the crews are working on sidewalks that fall under the Division of Highways' jurisdiction.

Most of the locations they will be working on will be around all of the state highway roads that run through town, he said.

"They govern the sidewalks along Main Street, for example, and the other streets that they are working on now," he said.

City Supervisor Bruce Pyles said the sidewalk updates have been needed for quite a few years.

"They will be doing all of Price Street, Brown Avenue, they will be working on Tunnelton Street ... I think they are doing the ones down Station Hill, too," he said.

It's better late than never, Robertson said.

"We certainly aren't going to complain while they are actively working on it now," Robertson said.

— Preston County News and Journal

MORGANTOWN

Researchers at West Virginia University are working to ensure small landowners and local communities, instead of large corporations, profit from the ability of Central Appalachian forests to remove greenhouse gas carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

So-called "forest-based climate solution programs" manage forest ecosystems in a way that enhances carbon storage by planting trees, for example, or by restricting logging.

To ensure these programs benefit both forests and local communities, a WVU team will spend the next four years investigating how different management practices affect Appalachian forest life — from the trees and other flora that grow there to the loggers, farmers, trail riders and ginseng gatherers who are also part of those ecosystems.

The project is supported by \$1.7 million from the National Science Foundation.

"To curb climate change, we have to reduce fossil fuel emissions. But we can also take advantage of our forests' ability to remove the carbon dioxide in our atmosphere and store it long term in wood and soils," said Steven Kannenberg, assistant professor of biology at the WVU Eberly College of Arts and Sciences. "In particular, the forests of the eastern U.S. are an incredibly large carbon sink. The amount of carbon dioxide they capture is equivalent to 40-60% of the region's fossil fuel emissions."

— WVU Today

EAST

MARTINSBURG

The Berkeley County Development Authority hosted its first Boost Berkeley Lunch and Learn Series on Tuesday, where people in the community were able to come learn more about running a small business.

Boost Berkeley brings the education aspect of its Build-Up Berkeley program and gives people the opportunity to learn more about what it takes to be a successful business owner.

Jennifer Smith, executive director of the Berkeley County Development Authority, was the first speaker in the series and shared more about the Build-Up Berkeley program. Build-up Berkeley was created to educate business owners and give them the tools they need to be successful. Participants attend classes once a week, and the program ends with its business pitch competition, where everyone presents their business for the chance to win up to \$10,000.

Through Boost Berkeley, even more business owners can experience Build-Up Berkeley classes themselves.

See STATE, 30

STATE

(Continued from Page 29)

“Build-Up Berkeley has a lot of great educational sessions, but they were only available to participate in the competition,” Smith said. “With Boost Berkeley, we can open those sessions up to the public and give other business owners the chance to learn and grow.”

— The Journal

SOUTH

BECKLEY

A project supported by the late Raleigh County Commissioner Dave Tolliver

is receiving new life with the help of current commissioners and the Trap Hill community.

During its Tuesday meeting, the Raleigh County Commission approved the reappropriation of roughly \$45,000 from the coalbed methane tax for construction costs associated with a new ball field for the Trap Hill Little League.

Jina Belcher, the executive director of the New River Gorge Regional Development Authority, said the money had previously been approved in 2022 and was championed by Tolliver.

However, Belcher said that at the time, commissioners designated the funds for pre-engineering work on a conceptual design for Trap Hill Little League’s new ball field.

The league’s new ball field is located off Bolt Road in Fairdale near the intersection of Maple Road and Roma Place.

Belcher said the commission gave the funds to the NRGRDA to hold and administer to Trap Hill Little League but since the funds were designated in 2022 they’ve only spent roughly \$5,000.

Belcher said this is because the league’s initial plans for the field fell through, and supporters have since taken it upon themselves to turn a wooded field into a new little league field.

— The Register-Herald

Construction on a long-planned connector route between the Hatfield-McCoy Trail in West Virginia and the Spearhead Trail in Virginia is now underway.

The new connector route will link both states and trails together. It will begin near Bramwell in Mercer County and end at the Virginia state line in Tazewell County, according to John Fekete, deputy director of the Hatfield-McCoy Trails Recreational Authority.

“It’s coming along real well; Fekete

said of the ongoing construction. “I think they are on the last leg of it. But there are other things we have to do. We are working with the Department of Highways because we have to have proper signage up for the connector. Once we get within 30 days of getting the thing open, we will make an announcement and let the public know. It’s going to be a great thing.”

The connector route will extend approximately eight miles and is an extension of the existing Pocahontas Trail system in Mercer County.

Fekete said the Hatfield-McCoy Trail Authority had to work with several land companies to secure license agreements for the new connector route.

“We did finally receive all of the license agreements,” Fekete said. “We are working with the mayor down in Bramwell, and we’ve been working on the construction side of it for probably three months.”

— The Register-Herald

OHIO VALLEY

RAVENSWOOD

Jackson General Chief Executive Officer Candace Miller

and provider Lindsey Bush were guests at the Tuesday, August 6, meeting of the Ravenswood City Council.

Miller, being new to her position, introduced herself to the council and explained a little about the new wing at WVU Medicine/Jackson General Hospital.

“We opened up the new wing a little over a month ago,” Miller said. “We just got a facility that matches how great our people are. If we can’t take care of you, we will get you to a place within the WVU Medicine system that can.”

Bush, who is originally from Ripley, recently moved to Ravenswood with her husband and children. She is a provider at the WVU Medicine/Jackson General Hospital clinic in Ravenswood.

“The Ravenswood clinic opened in December 2023, and since it has been open, we have had about 3,500 visits,” Bush said. “We stay pretty busy, but we are open seven days a week.”

Hours during the week are 11 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. and weekends are 8:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.

“We see patients 18 months and older,” she said. “We’re able to take care of coughs, colds, sore throats, rashes, anything acute. We’re also equipped for point-of-care visits, which means we can test you for flu, COVID, strep, urinary tract infections, and pregnancy. We get the results in 15 minutes.

That allows us to help you quickly and provide the best care locally.”

— Jackson Newspapers

RIPLEY

The Jackson County Commission voted on the distribution of funds the West Virginia State Legislature allocated to counties for fire departments for equipment, education, and projects. Jackson County received \$101,237.33.

Each department will receive \$20,245 in a unanimous vote by the commission.

Jackson County Airport Director Sam Dennis gave an update on an upcoming event on September 28.

“We will be having our second General Chuck Yeager Aviation Day that Saturday,” he said. “We have a lot of activities planned for children and adults. We hope to make this an annual event.”

Young Eagles flights will be offered free to 100 children. Drones will be demonstrated, firetrucks and vintage autos will be displayed, and science and aviation activities will be provided. A pancake breakfast from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. will be available.

“We will also have several notable speakers, including Victoria Yeager, General Yeager’s widow,” Dennis said. “She’s very invested in this event and is in close contact with us.”

Dennis requested a sponsorship from the commission.

“Anything you can do would be appreciated,” he said. “I want to offer everything for free.”

Information Technology (IT) Manager Greg Thomas had good news to report.

“The IT work is complete at the training center,” he said. “We’re down to the last six security doors to be installed, which are at the animal shelter.”

— Jackson Newspapers

The city is one step closer to having a mural at the junction of Route 33 and Route 21.

Mark McComas, and Neil Loprinzi, the Mural Guys, shared the proposed design with Mayor Carolyn Rader and the Ripley City Council at its August 6 meeting.

Kathryn Goodwin, whose family owns Vail Furniture, located where the roads meet, will have the final say regarding the mural’s design, which will be painted on the store’s outside wall. She had vetoed the original design, wanting it to be simpler.

“We’re hoping she will like this one,” Loprinzi said. “It’s much simpler but still has identifiable buildings and, of course, the courthouse.”

No business names are visible on the design due to a West Virginia Department of Highways restriction prohibiting what is deemed “advertising” on state rights-of-way.

Council members approved up to \$6,000 for the project, conditional on Goodwin’s approval, with \$2,000 as a downpayment to the Mural Guys. In an update provided after the meeting, Goodwin approved the design.

The work will be completed on panels attached to the building. Because this will save the artists time and effort, the Mural Guys donated the panels. The final piece will be 10 x 24 feet.

Bids for replacing the Starcher Mansion roof and street paving in Ripley were approved. Only one bid was submitted for each project.

— Jackson Newspapers

METRO VALLEY

CHARLESTON

Officials recently announced that Breeze Airways will soon begin service

to New York-Newark from Charleston, starting November 14. Newark International Airport is one of the three main airports serving New York City.

“This partnership with Breeze Airways continues to exceed all expectations, and I’m thrilled that the airline is expanding its service to connect West Virginia with the New York area,” said Gov. Jim Justice. “Airports significantly contribute to our economy, enhance tourism, and make our state more reachable. They are gateways to and from West Virginia, offering the world a chance to experience the beauty of our state.”

The announcement is the latest development in the partnership between Breeze, the airport and the state announced in March 2023.

The carrier has committed to adding five new destinations through the partnership. Breeze currently offers flights from Myrtle Beach, SC, Orlando, FL and Tampa, FL to West Virginia International Yeager Airport, all of which are performing well, officials said.

“Charleston has been a really strong market for us over the last year and we continue to see more opportunities for growth,” said David Neeleman, Breeze Airways’ Founder and CEO. “Now West Virginia guests can enjoy our affordable, elevated, and premium leisure service as they travel on the only nonstop flight from Charleston to New York.”

— WV News



Keeping up with today's business books



**Linda
ARNOLD**

So many business books, so little time

... I know I'm not the only one who finds it daunting to keep up with all the excellent business advice out there.

So, I've decided to curate some content and share it with you. Hopefully, these snippets will provide helpful nuggets

around popular topics.

Here are insights I've gained recently, gleaned from my own reading as well as observations from Shortform, Amazon and Modern CEO.

"Slow Productivity — The Lost Art of Accomplishment Without Burnout"

Cal Newport had me at hello with his earlier book, "Deep Work." I highly recommend this one, as it provides a blueprint for self-discipline to get important things done.

His new book is at the top of several charts, including Amazon's best-selling business books of 2024.

Newport continues his theme of "meaningful accomplishment" with real-life stories of executives who have learned to blast through the pervasive condition of many workplaces that confuse busyness with productivity.

"Ask: Tap Into the Hidden Wisdom of People Around You for Unexpected Breakthroughs in Leadership and Life"

How do you know what your customers really want? Or what your colleagues are thinking?

Author Jeff Wetzler, co-founder of Transcend, offers a hands-on approach

to making smarter decisions and coming up with creative solutions. The five steps of his Ask Approach focus on:

1. Curiosity — How can you awaken your curiosity to make new discoveries?

2. Make it Safe — How do you make it easier for people to tell you hard things?

3. Quality Questions — What questions will best tap into the wisdom of those you ask?

4. Listen to Learn — How can you really hear what someone is trying to tell you?

5. Reflect & Reconnect — How do you turn talk into action?

"Quitting: A Life Strategy — The Myth of Perseverance"

What are you saying "no" to — in order to say "yes" to the things that are most important?

Have you stayed in your current work situation too long — thinking that if you just work a little harder and keep at it, things will get better? Author Julia Keller, PhD, examines the fallacies that may come with this type of thinking.

Could this be "the great resignation" concept for business leaders?

"Triggers"

Authors Marshall Goldsmith and Mark Reiter explore the psychological and environmental triggers that trap us in negative or unproductive patterns of behavior.

Goldsmith is an executive coach who has worked with more than 200 CEOs and recommends strategies for breaking negative cycles. Reiter has also collaborated on the book, "What Got You Here Won't Get You There."

"The Procrastination Equation"

Who among us doesn't identify with

this topic?

If you delay important projects until right before the deadline, no wonder you feel stressed. While there's a theory that an adrenaline rush can help propel us toward action, the tradeoffs may not be worth it.

According to author, researcher and speaker Piers Steel, PhD, nearly 95% of people say they procrastinate. One of the coping mechanisms he explores deals with making unpleasant tasks feel more valuable.

The book explores reasons behind procrastination and its consequences, along with Steel's strategies for managing different types of procrastination.

"Finish What You Start"

Do you keep starting ambitious projects, only to run out of steam halfway through? Well, you're not alone, says author and psychology expert Peter Hollins.

Although it's easy to be enthusiastic about your goals while you're setting them, that motivation can fade quickly.

This book will teach you how to spur yourself into action by identifying your existing sources of motivation and designing an environment that constantly reminds you of them, according to the Shortform book summary subscription service (www.shortform.com)

"Anatomy of a Breakthrough"

Who among us hasn't felt defeated at some point in our lives — when our hard work comes to a grinding halt?

Adam Alter, professor of marketing at NYU and author of this book, proposes a range of solutions to help you pick up the pieces and regain inspiration.

By examining what it means to be "stuck" — and looking at the barriers that often cause this — Alter offers innovative techniques for moving forward.

"Make Time"

Do you often feel there aren't enough hours in the day? You have good intentions at the beginning of each day. And then all your meetings, projects and obligations creep in.

It's no wonder you feel overwhelmed. And then there are the distractions of email, social media and all those breaking headlines.

"We live in an information landscape designed to steal our time and attention," according to Shortform's observations of the book by authors Jake Knapp and John Zeratsky. Knapp is the cofounder of Character Capital, and Zeratsky is an investor and author.

Knapp and Zeratsky provide tips, hacks and lifestyle adjustments to help regain control of your day-to-day life.

Wrapping it Up

While this is just a sampling of the current business books out there, it gives you an idea of the topics being explored. Most of these are available in both print and audio formats.

Drop me a quick email at linda@lindaarnold.org if you'd like to see more book synopses in future columns.

Happy reading/listening!

©2024 Linda Arnold Life 101, all rights reserved. Linda Arnold, M.A., M.B.A., is the founder and former CEO of a multistate marketing company. She's also a psychological counselor and syndicated columnist. Reader comments are welcome at linda@lindaarnold.org For information on her books, go to www.lindaarnold.org or Amazon.com

SURPLUS

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There would be around \$550 million of the surplus left over after setting aside the funds, Justice said.

The governor said his plan would serve as the financial "safety net of safety nets."

"If we want to be super, super safe, do that," he said.

Some lawmakers are using the fear of potential lost revenues as an "excuse" not to pursue additional tax cuts, Justice said.

"That's the excuse, or the bush we're hiding behind, to be able to keep the money and do some pet project," he said. "Our lawmakers need to understand wholeheartedly that this is the people's money."

Justice has repeatedly said eliminating the state's personal income

tax will bring an influx of new residents to the state, as well as attracting investments and economic development opportunities.

"There is nothing that I know of that would drive more goodness to West Virginia than to get rid of our state income tax," he said.

Although he has not yet set a definitive date, the governor has previously said he is likely to call a special session of the Legislature

later this month to have lawmakers consider his tax cut proposal.

Lawmakers are already scheduled to be at the state Capitol in Charleston Aug. 25-27 for interim meetings. September's interim meetings, Sept. 8-10, will take place in Parkersburg.

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