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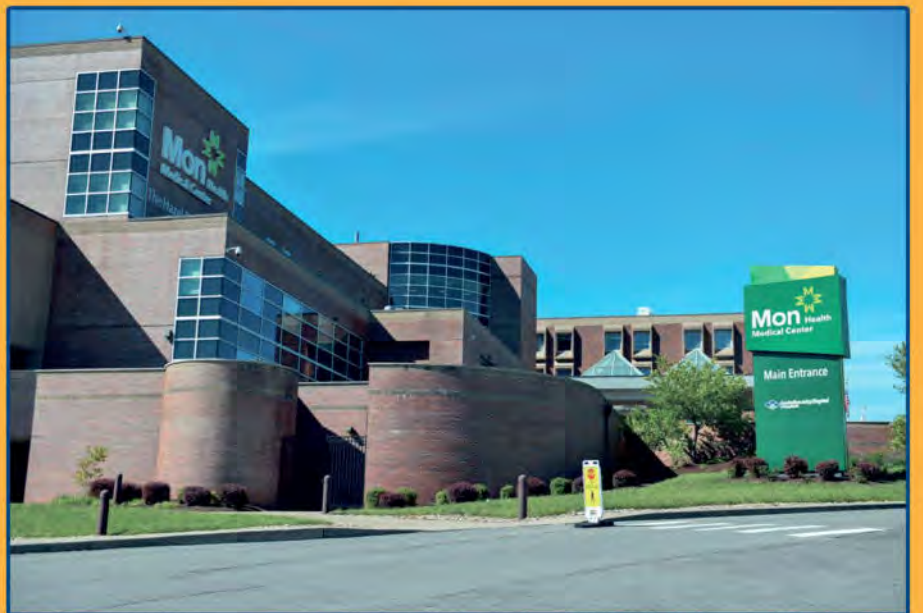
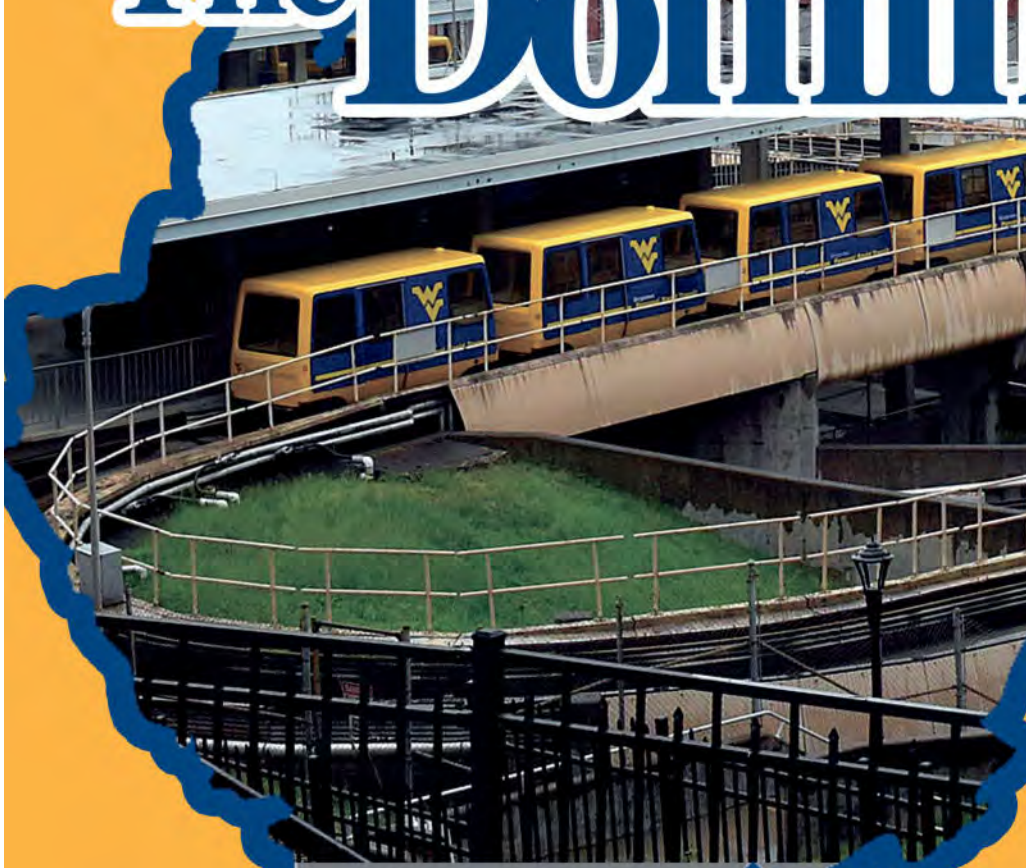


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MORGANTOWN

City plans projects to improve quality of life

BY BEN CONLEY
BConley@DominionPost.com

Transportation.
Economic development.
Housing stock.
Neighborhood connectivity.

For the city of Morgantown, the next year promises progress on a handful of projects, big and small, aimed at improving the vitality of the city and the quality of life for its residents.

Two of those projects — the extension of the Morgantown Municipal Airport runway and the development of a 90-acre I-68 Commerce Park — go hand in hand.

Activity on both is ramping up after the city received the required permitting from the West Virginia DEP in late April.

“So now they’re putting in all the silt fencing and filtration devices to protect our waterways,” Airport Director Jonathan Vrabel said.

“They’re mobilizing this week. Next week we’ll probably see them really start moving some earth.”

In February, Morgantown City Council voted unanimously in support of a contract totaling \$5,753,978.10 with Doss Enterprises for Phase 1 of the extension project.

It’s anticipated that it will take five years and cost in the neighborhood of \$50 million to add 1,001 feet to the airport’s runway.

Moving in concert with the long-coveted runway extension will be the development of the commerce park.

“The creation of the park is dependent solely on the amount of dirt needed and where for the runway extension. That’s what makes this project work. We’re creating two growth opportunities, really, using a single interest, and that is



Ron Rittenhouse/The Dominion Post photos

Doss Enterprises, out of Jane Lew, is the contractor for the airport runway expansion. Property that has been cleared will be filled in. Below is the new roof over the amphitheater seating at the riverfront.

fill for the runway creates flat, pad-ready sites for the business park,” Russ Rogerson said.

Rogerson is president and CEO of the Morgantown Area Partnership.

It was previously explained that some 4.4 million cubic yards of dirt will be needed to support the runway extension.

As earth moving begins, Rogerson said a host of players are working behind the scenes to plan the park’s future, including the creation of an airport TIF district to help build out infrastructure.

Rogerson said there is also a lot of focus on funds coming down the road as part of a federal infrastructure package.

Moving closer to the city’s



center, a plan to overhaul nearly 10 contiguous acres along Richwood Avenue should begin to materialize by this time next year.

In late 2020, the Monongalia County Development Authority, part of the Morgantown Area Partnership, purchased the property from the Giuliani family for \$11.8 million.

Rogerson said the next year will be spent creating a planned unit development

“THE CREATION OF THE PARK IS DEPENDENT SOLELY ON THE AMOUNT OF DIRT NEEDED AND WHERE FOR THE RUNWAY EXTENSION. THAT’S WHAT MAKES THIS PROJECT WORK. WE’RE CREATING TWO GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES, REALLY, USING A SINGLE INTEREST, AND THAT IS FILL FOR THE RUNWAY CREATES FLAT, PAD-READY SITES FOR THE BUSINESS PARK.”

Russ Rogerson,
president and CEO
Morgantown Area Partnership

with the city and the surrounding neighborhoods. The goal, he said, will be a new stock of housing aimed at addressing various needs as well as improved access to the university and downtown for vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists.

“I think it’s going to be a great example project in terms of revitalization; how you can revitalize a key area of the community that improves investment dollars in there, improves housing stock and housing availability and also addresses connectivity in all forms while looking like it belongs there,” Rogerson said.

“We want to have characteristics so that it just looks like a new and improved section of Morgantown and not like we plopped something down that belongs somewhere else.”

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WESTOVER

Holland Ave. up next for projects

BY GABRIELLA BROWN
GBrown@DominionPost.com

Westover, “the City on the Rise,” has continued to live up to its slogan this past year as it works to improve roadways and grow in land and population.

“One thing that we’re really happy about is we were able to do what we’ve done without it costing our taxpayers a dime,” said Mayor Dave Johnson. “The only way to do that was through annexation.”

The largest project the city took on this year involved the annexation and improvement of Solomon Road, which intersects Chaplin Road, west of the Gateway. Prior to West-

over taking the project on, the roadway had been poorly maintained.

City attorney Tim Stranko said Solomon Road was a rutted old farm road owned by the West Virginia Division of Highways, with no prospect of significant improvement by the state.

Meanwhile, housing developers have been building single and multi-family homes that use this roadway. Unable to get the WVDOH to repair the road, they came to the City of Westover for help.

“In exchange for annexation by petition into the city, Westover made an operations and maintenance agreement with WVDOH and funded,

designed and contracted for the road reconstruction,” Stranko said.

The city agreed to pay up to \$400,000 on the road, and the remaining balance would be paid by the developers in the area. Johnson said the total cost of the road was about \$460,000.

Within a few months, the city has turned the road into a paved, all-weather road that will be added to the city inventory for inspection, operation and maintenance. Stranko said the city estimates a 30-year pay-back period for the city’s investment from the tax revenues con-

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MONONGALIA COUNTY

Broadband project moving forward

Camp Muffly, Mylan Park, WestRidge also see changes

BY BEN CONLEY
BConley@DominionPost.com

Even by its own standards, there's a lot going on in Monongalia County. That includes what could potentially end up being among the largest projects ever taken up by the Monongalia County Commission.

In late 2020, before the faucet of federal funding was kicked wide open, the county put together a broadband commission and began drafting a request for proposals seeking firms to come in and detail exactly what it would take to provide broadband access to every resident in the county.

Ten firms responded. Commission President Sean Sikora said the list has been whittled down to two and the broadband commission has reached out to both seeking best and final offers.

"So probably within the next two weeks we'll have a recommendation to the commission in regards to our consultant," he said.

It's anticipated that the roughly \$20.5 million in American Rescue Plan cash coming the county's way will be included in the financing of this effort.

The commission is also hopeful the state will contribute. West Virginia is set to receive \$138 million specifically for broadband as part of the rescue package.

Development within the county also continues to progress, particularly in two areas tied to county TIF districts.

In February, Menards



Ron Rittenhouse/The Dominion Post

Misty Seum, Camp Muffly superintendent (from left), Lindsay Litton and Becca Lang look the park's pool, which is being renovated. It's expected to be ready for swimmers in July.

opened a 175,000-square-foot store that will serve as the anchor of WestRidge Commons, a retail-focused portion of the overall WestRidge development connected to the expanded University Town Centre TIF district.

A 70,000-square-foot Bass Pro Shops is under construction and slated to open this year.

Another 100,000 square feet of retail space, comprised of HomeGoods, Ross Dress for Less, Burlington, Shoe Carnival and PetSmart is anticipated in 2022.

WestRidge, which worked with the county and state on the construction of I-79 Exit 153, has now turned its attention to a redesign of Exit 155.

Meanwhile, major development is planned for the Morgantown Industrial Park.

The process is underway to create a second park TIF district that would not only allow for a significant expansion of the MIP, but set the stage for the construction of an I-79 Harmony Grove interchange, allowing direct interstate access to a new point on the western end of the park.

That development is anticipated to attract hundreds of millions of dollars in additional investment and hundreds of jobs, according to Russ Rogerson, president and CEO of the Morgantown Area Partnership.

In Mylan Park, the county opened its 4-H and extension building this past year. While any ideas of a grand opening were stifled by COVID-19, the county is creating a director position to oversee the facility.

Next door, Mylan Park is undertaking a nearly \$7 million expansion of the and J.W. Ruby Community Center.

The work will essentially double the size of the 48,000-square-foot building and has an anticipated completion date of April 2022.

Along with adding a

director to oversee the extension building in Mylan Park, the commission is also looking to bring in someone to oversee its own parks — Camp Muffly, Chestnut Ridge and Mason-Dixon Historical Park.

The position will serve as the point person between the commission and the three park superintendents.

"They'll serve as our contact with each of the parks so we know what's going on," Commissioner Jeff Arnett said. "We're really making a push to get those parks out there. Everybody knows Chestnut Ridge, but Camp Muffly is a hidden gem, as is Mason-Dixon."

Part of that push is a \$500,000 overhaul of the nearly 70-year old Camp Muffly pool.

Arnett said that project, which is currently underway, is tentatively scheduled for a mid-July to early August completion.

TWEET @DominionPostWV

STATE

Roads to Prosperity still in works here

BY DAVID BEARD
DBeard@DominionPost.com

Spring is here, and many of us are watching for the road crews to come and start filling the potholes on the obstacle courses that pass for secondary roads in West Virginia.

If you've lost a tire or broken a strut or just needed an alignment because of a pothole, you may not feel too prosperous, but Gov. Jim Justice's Roads to Prosperity program is still rolling along.

So far in Fiscal Year 2021 (which started July 1, 2020), as of May 3, RTP investments have earned \$1,061,365.49. Spending to date, according to the state auditor's Transparency website, was \$246,450,149.54.

Earnings in 2020 were \$15,394,246.42; spending was \$261,743,220.93. For 2019, it was \$21,375,093.11 earned and \$26,123,661.27 spent.

Keep in mind that Roads to Prosperity wasn't created to directly fill potholes. The money goes to build new roads and upgrade existing ones. The idea was that this would free more construction-related money in the state Road Fund to devote to maintenance — potholes, ditching and mowing.

Residents can track RTP projects at <https://transportation.wv.gov/driveforwardwv>.

The site shows 29 projects for Monongalia County; 23 are marked completed.

Of the rest:

■ The Beechurst Avenue at 6th Street project is to improve an intersection and widen the existing roadway for 0.1 miles to improve traffic

flow and mobility. No projected dates or costs are posted.

■ The Green Bag Road project is an intersection improvement and 1-mile-long widening project to improve traffic flow. It's estimated to start in June 2023 and conclude in December 2025 and cost \$16 million.

■ The \$2 million Laurel Point Bridge project is slated to run from April 2022 to June 2023.

■ The \$10 million Mile-ground-Airport Road project on U.S. 119 involves upgrading the three-lane facility to a four-lane facility to help eliminate congestion and improve traffic flow. It's slated to conclude in November 2022 at a cost of \$10 million.

■ Van Voorhis Road was the target of several projects. The one titled Van Voorhis Road Improvements involves construction to widen the roadway, improve drainage and add sidewalks from the junction of Mon County 67/1 to the junction of Mon County 60. No dates or costs are yet posted.

■ The \$12 million West Run Road bridge project is slated to start in October and run through March 2023.

Preston County has 12 projects listed, with 10 completed.

Of the other two, the \$900,000 Morgantown Avenue bridge project is slated to run from August 2022 to February 2023.

There are two North Preston Highway, W.Va. 26, projects. The paving project is marked complete. The \$2 million bridge project is set to begin in November and

SEE ROADS, J-4

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STAR CITY

Beautification, farmers markets continue in town

BY OLIVIA MURRAY
OMurray@DominionPost.com

The Town of Star City has undergone several changes in the past year, many of which directly resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Vaccine distribution in the state has recently allowed the municipality to begin looking toward the future.

Star City Mayor Herman Reid said city hall was locked down for a brief period last year, when Gov. Jim Justice implemented a statewide stay-at-home order. Despite the order no longer being in effect, Reid said the back door of city hall remains locked at all times.

A window was installed in city hall to protect staff and visitors. Staff and visitors are asked to wear masks and practice social distancing measures at all times when inside the city



A new pavilion at the Edith Barill Riverfront Park in Star City will be used during weekly farmers markets, which begin again May 14. They will be from 3 p.m. to sundown every Friday, with numerous vendors.

Ron Rittenhouse
The Dominion Post

hall building.

“We’re just following the guidelines from the CDC and the governor and the health department,” Reid said.

Star City Council meetings have also changed. Last year, council switched from in-person meetings to meetings held online via the Zoom webinar platform.

The public is still welcome to attend those meetings. They can receive the Zoom meeting link by emailing city hall and requesting the meeting link prior to the scheduled meeting.

Recently, council voted to only hold one meeting a month instead of two.

“We’ve realized since this pandemic that we

don’t need to meet every two weeks. Once a month will be plenty. We’re not going to do any in-person meetings until at least July. We’re going to see how West Virginia is trending then and we may still stay with the Zoom meetings just to protect everybody. It’s still bad in West Virginia,” Reid said.

Additionally, council’s pay underwent changes. Reid said a few years ago, council’s pay was decreased from \$80 a meeting to \$40 a meeting. Reid and council members decided council will now be paid \$100 a month regardless of how many meetings they attend to make budgeting a little easier.

Reid said Star City’s Christmas Parade, Memorial Day celebration, Scout meetings and a story time held by resident Sharon Summers were all cancelled last year due to the pandemic.

The municipality also had to contend with the issue of COVID-19 cases among staff members or the spouses of staff members.

“We’ve allowed some people to have 10 days off, 14 days off to quarantine. So that’s kind of hurt us a little bit. We paid everybody. We didn’t make them use their sick time or anything like that,” Reid said.

Reid said the municipality is taking a wait-and-see approach to bringing back some of those events. He doesn’t believe there will be a Memorial Day celebration this year, but he is hopeful a Christmas Parade will be possible.

The town is working on some beautification efforts, including finishing a retaining wall and some black-topping at Edith Barill Riverfront Park.

Last year, Star City held its first Farmers Market at Edith Barill Riverfront Park.

Reid said the Farmers Market will be held again this year, starting May 14 from 3 p.m. to sundown.

COUNCIL VOTED TO ONLY HOLD ONE MEETING A MONTH INSTEAD OF TWO.

J.W. RUBY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

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PULMONOLOGY

This year’s rankings include the WVU Medicine Urology Program’s **FOURTH CONSECUTIVE NATIONAL RANKING** and WVU Medicine J.W. Ruby Memorial Hospital’s designation as the **NUMBER ONE HOSPITAL IN THE STATE.**

In addition to Urology, which was ranked 40th in the country, Ruby Memorial Hospital’s Nephrology, Neurology and Neurosurgery, Orthopaedics, and Pulmonology and Lung Surgery programs were all recognized as High Performing specialties.

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William Wotring/The Dominion Post

Solomon Road, from Chaplin Road to a new housing development, is now in the jurisdiction of Westover. The city improved and paved the road and will maintain it as part of an annexation agreement.

WESTOVER

FROM PAGE J-2

tributed by the annexed area.

Through multiple annexations, the city has been able to fund these types of projects without raising residents’ taxes.

Johnson said since he first became mayor, he knew annexation would be the best way to bring funding into the city. This began in 2010 and the city has since grown from 287 acres to more than 800, acquiring developments such as the Gateway, Morgantown Mall and WestRidge.

Looking ahead, the next project the city is looking to complete is the reconstruction of Holland Avenue. This is one of the city’s main roadways just across the Westover bridge.

“We’ve had to patch it in different places, we’ve had to dig the road itself up to get down to the sewer line and we’d only fix what needed to be fixed at the time,” Johnson said.

Through the American Rescue Plan, the city recently received more than \$1.7 million, which can be used for projects like the development of Holland Avenue. The city plans to use part of this funding to complete the reconstruction.

Since announcing intent to work on the road, the city’s engineers have used cameras to investigate the roadway’s pipelines and observed a number of underground structural problems. The overall cost

“ONE THING THAT WE’RE REALLY HAPPY ABOUT IS WE WERE ABLE TO DO WHAT WE’VE DONE WITHOUT IT COSTING OUR TAXPAYERS A DIME.”

Dave Johnson,
Westover mayor

of the project will be available once the investigation is complete.

“We inherited a lot of legacy issues from a lot of our predecessors. They had this job that they didn’t do a lot, but they didn’t have a lot of money to do a lot, so that was really no fault of theirs,” Johnson said. “It is just that they were handicapped in a way, because they didn’t have the funds to do it. We do, so there’s no excuse not getting these things done.”

In the long term, one of Johnson’s main goals for the city is to continue growing its population, which is currently just under 4,000 people. Although he doesn’t believe he will see it in his lifetime, he hopes someday 10,000 people will call Westover home.

Soon, the city will also put together a new comprehensive plan, which is done every 10 years, and will expand on plans for land uses, including housing, economic development areas, recreation, transportation, infrastructure and more.

TWEET @DominionPostWV

ROADS

FROM PAGE J-3

run through May 2023.

As far as statewide maintenance, the Division of Highways has no 2021 numbers posted. For Jan. 1

through Sept. 30, 2020, it shows 6,293.27 miles of roadway ditched, 39,806.32 mowed and 14,843.3 miles patched. DOH repaired or replaced 47 bridges and paved 295.19 miles.

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The Dominion Post is looking for freelance reporters to cover regular stories in Monongalia and Preston counties. Applicants must work well under deadline pressure; have reliable transportation and their own computers. Freelance writers receive assignments and deadlines from an editor and are expected to interview sources, write the story and email it on deadline. Journalism experience is a plus, but not necessary. Knowledge of AP style is helpful. E-mail a cover letter and resume to newsroom@dominion-post.com

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY

Construction continues around campus

BY JIM BISSETT
JBissett@DominionPost.com

Transformative.

Rob Alsop used that term quite frequently in describing three key infrastructure projects that he said will put yet another distinctive signature on WVU in coming years.

Reynolds Hall on the downtown campus just might top the transformative list, the university's vice president for strategic initiatives said.

Commanding the space on Beechurst Avenue formerly occupied by Stansbury Hall, the \$97 million, 180,000-square-foot building will house the John Chambers College of Business and Economics.

It features windows and more windows to capture light and stunning vistas of Beechurst and Monongahela River that give the locale its identity.

Additions to the PRT station directly across from the building complete the external environs of the city's ever-evolving waterfront, Alsop said.

For years, Stansbury was the home to WVU basketball, most notably the golden age of the late 1950s and early 1960s, with Jerry West and Hot Rod Hundley.

The new Reynolds Hall, Alsop said, will be a slam dunk — with an entrepreneurial bent.

Its many features will include a high-tech "Ideation Hub" and Experiential Learning Pavilion, along with traditional lecture halls to launch the collaborative process.

The very names on the building, Reynolds and Chambers, are permanent markers to the business success of two trailblazing West Virginians, Alsop said.

Robert "Bob" Reynolds, a Clarksburg native and WVU B&E graduate, made



Ron Rittenhouse/The Dominion Post

Work continues on the WVU John Chambers College of Business and Economics downtown. Additions to the nearby PRT station will complete the project.

his name in international finance, notably with his innovations in the area of 401(k) investing and retirement plans.

John Chambers grew up in Charleston and earned two degrees from WVU on his way to becoming a Silicon Valley visionary.

The building is on track to its April 2022 target date for completion, Alsop said.

New heartbeat for Hodges

Directly across the way, renovation work on stately Hodges Hall is "99% com-

plete," Alsop said.

"We're down to moving in the furniture," the WVU vice president said of the \$31.5 million project coming in around a year ahead of schedule.

The nearly 70-year-old structure is the largest classroom building on the downtown campus, Alsop said.

He couldn't be more pleased, he said, that Hodges is getting a new heartbeat for the 21st century.

"It really needed extensive work," Alsop said.

First, the physical

infrastructure: Centralized heating and air conditioning.

"Lots of HVAC work," he said. "You're not going to see those single-unit air conditioners sticking out of windows anymore."

You will, however, see more students sticking around, he said.

In addition to its classrooms upgraded to today's technology, Hodges will continue to do what it has always done: foster ideas and discourse in the university setting.

The building will also

house Women and Gender Studies, Native American Studies and World Languages, Literature and Linguistics.

Put me in, Coach

Construction crews are continuing to blitz the work at Milan Puskar Center, the headquarters of WVU football.

The \$37.5 million game plan boasts an upgraded home team locker room and players' meeting room, Alsop reports.

A recovery suite and new equipment room are

also part of the offense.

Look for shifting lines of upgraded offices, also, he said.

The centerpiece will be the "Hall of Traditions" area, showcasing the gridiron greats — players and coaches — of what is essentially the Mountain State's home team on autumn Saturdays, Alsop said.

"That's going to be great for recruiting," he said.

Milan Puskar Center will be a fully occupied space come fall and the first home kickoff, he added.

Of cash, COVID and the community of WVU

Dollars for all three projects are steadily being doled out, Alsop said.

That's from a variety of traditional fundraising avenues he said — but it's mainly from the generosity of WVU graduates.

"We have a loyal family of alums from all over the country and all over the world," he said.

"And it's really heartening that all these projects are coming in, on time and under budget, in the middle of a pandemic."

"My hat's off to all the planners and all the construction crews," he continued.

While some of those crews battled positive cases and quarantines, no major work was missed because of COVID, he said.

"When the pandemic hit, we knew we still had these projects," he said.

"So everybody got together so we could get them done. I mean, it really is good, transformative work."

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MORGANTOWN MALL



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- Wong's Wok
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MON HEALTH

Medical center adds doctors, locations during busy three years

BY WILLIAM DEAN
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Mon Health System has been busy in the three years since president and CEO David Goldberg took over.

The system's three hospitals, Mon Health Medical Center, Preston Memorial Hospital and Stonewall Jackson Hospital, and 54 locations of care all met federal standards and provided excellent care, Goldberg said.

However, he said the locations all operated independently under the Mon Health brand. Each one had its own corporate services, such as human resources, risk legal compliance and marketing — services patients never see but that are required to keep things running. Those corporate services are now consolidated and serve the entire \$1 billion health system.

"We're becoming One Mon," Goldberg said. "We are advanced community medicine, laser focused on the scale of what's appropriate."

The COVID-19 pandemic made 2020 an unprecedented year and brought about a \$50 million revenue loss, Goldberg said.

Chief Financial Officer Lisa Simon said in March 2020, just before the pandemic hit, the health system was 9% above budget. In April, when Gov. Jim Justice ordered elective surgeries stopped, revenue dropped 47%.

However, Goldberg said no employees were laid off, and health insurance premiums weren't raised because they didn't want people on the front lines fighting the pandemic to



William Wotring/The Dominion Post

Changes have been made to Mon Health Medical Center during the past three years.

have to worry about anything other than taking care of patients.

During the past few years, Mon Health has added 30-40 doctors across different specialties, such as primary care, oncology, neurology, cardiovascular care and more. Goldberg said the growth has been purposeful.

About a year ago the region's only long-term acute care hospital, essentially a mini hospital inside Mon Health Medical Center, opened, Goldberg said. The 25-bed facility is for people who don't need acute care but still have longer hospital needs — people recovering from wounds, for example.

Opening in 2021 is the Mon Health Marion

Neighborhood Hospital. Its chief administrative officer, Dr. Christopher Edwards, said the micro hospital will have eight emergency room beds and 10 inpatient rooms.

The emergency room will offer full service and function the same as the ones already in the system — offering immediate assessment and a bed. The hospital will also have testing and imaging.

"The whole point is to be able to offer high quality care and services in the community of Fairmont and Marion County, so they don't have to travel outside of their home area to receive that care," Edwards said.

After Fairmont Medical

Center closed in March 2020, patients had to be taken to Morgantown or Bridgeport. Some parts of rural Marion County were already 20-30 minutes from a hospital in Fairmont and time is of the essence in cases such as strokes and heart attacks, Edwards said.

The growth isn't stopping there.

At the end of April, Mon Health submitted an application to build a replacement for Stonewall Jackson Hospital off Exit 99, Goldberg said. The \$55 million project will have the same design as Preston Memorial and be a smaller but more modern facility.

"WE'RE BECOMING ONE MON. WE ARE ADVANCED COMMUNITY MEDICINE, LASER FOCUSED ON THE SCALE OF WHAT'S APPROPRIATE."

David Goldberg,
president and CEO, Mon Health System

HEALTH CARE

Acuity is hospital within hospital

Newsroom@DominionPost.com

Acuity Specialty Hospital of Morgantown is now open to accept patients.

Located in Mon Health Medical Center, Acuity has recently been through a six-month demonstration period to prove to Medicare that its patients will have a 25-day or greater average length of stay.

The CMS rules that govern long-term acute care hospitals are different from those of a short-term acute care hospital like Mon Health Medical Center. Acute officials want people to know what types of patients go to a long-term acute care hospital.

LTACHs are for complex medical patients, those with respiratory issues, wounds, infections and/or cardio-pulmonary illnesses. It's a LTACH's specialty to care for a respiratory patient who has been on a ventilator for 96 hours or more; in fact, those hospitals are typically able to wean those patients in a very short amount of time.

Patients admitted to an LTACH must meet specific CMS acute care criteria.

The rules are that LTACHs offer intensive acute care services to medically complex and critically ill patients who have required three or more days in an acute care hospital Intensive Care Unit or who need longer term specialized care in the LTACH averaging 25 to 30 days.

Acuity has 25 beds on the fourth floor of Mon Health Medical Center.

Administrator Frank Weber leads Acuity's daily operations. He has been around since construction began last year. He now has a staff of 54 employee-owners. Acuity is the only 100% employee-owned hospital company in the country.

Acuity partnered with Mon Health to bridge the gap in the continuum of care for north-central West Virginia's sickest patients. Acuity has a strong track record of successfully operating LTACHs throughout the region.

If you should have any questions about Acuity, view the website at <https://morgantown.acuityhealthcare.net/>.

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WVU MEDICINE

Children’s hospital continues to grow, inside and out

BY WILLIAM DEAN
WDean@DominionPost.com

WVU Medicine Children’s spent much of 2020 dealing with the changes brought by a global pandemic, which brought about the increased use of telemedicine.

But, even with COVID-19, WVU Medicine Children’s has continued to grow, said Amy Bush, chief operating officer.

In 2020, the organization established a new Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation program to help kids with neurological and musculoskeletal conditions, such as spina bifida or cerebral palsy, be as active and independent as possible. Bush said two new doctors were hired for that program.

All of the efforts are with the goal to provide the highest quality of life for kids in West Virginia and provide them with the best care possible without having to leave the state, Bush said. As an academic medical center and land grant institution its their job to serve the entire state.

Construction on the new nine-story, 150-bed, WVU Medicine Children’s hospital, which broke ground in June 2018, continued through 2020. More is done inside and outside each day,

Bush said.

“The new hospital will allow us to provide care in an environment that has been specifically designed for kids, their families and our health care delivery team,” Bush said.

The entire space has been designed to create the “ultimate healing environment,” Bush said.

The hospital will house a pediatric ICU, a neonatal ICU, a pediatric acute care unit, pediatric emergency room, pediatric operating rooms, advanced pediatric imaging and a birthing center. Accompanying those are a number of labs, such as a radiology and endoscopy.

There will also be an on-site pharmacy, cafeteria, gift shop and private rooms. Bush said every patient room will have a window.

There will be two tunnels to connect the new WVU Medicine Children’s to J.W. Ruby Memorial Hospital. Bush said one will be for the helipad and one for mothers who need a higher level of care. With care for everyone being on the same campus, it means families won’t be separated during care.

All the health providers in the WVU system — from clinics around the state to the higher levels of care



William Wotring/The Dominion Post

WVU Medicine Children’s has always been a floor in J.W. Ruby Memorial Hospital. That will change when this construction project completes a new hospital for infants, children and teens.

available in Morgantown — work together as a family to take care of the kids, Bush said.

The hospital will bring more than 500 new jobs, which means there has been a lot of planning for hiring, onboarding and orienting new employees, Bush said. Workflow plans for care in the new building have been developed and Bush has been working with industry partners to set up various installations during different phases of construction.

Bush said the run up to opening is an exciting time at WVU Medicine Children’s.

TWEET @WillDean_DP

THE HOSPITAL WILL BRING MORE THAN 500 NEW JOBS.

STATE

Medical cannabis gets no help from lawmakers in 21

BY DAVID BEARD
DBeard@DominionPost.com

The 2021 legislative session was a bad one for efforts to breathe some life into West Virginia’s comatose medical cannabis program.

Officially authorized in 2017 when some Republicans revolted against their lead-

ership to pass the original bill, the program has yet to serve a single patient.

During the session, six bills related to medical cannabis were introduced: two in the Senate, five in the House. Two other House bills dealt more broadly with legalizing adult-use recreational marijuana.

The five House medical cannabis bills were DOA; they never saw a committee agenda. Two of them had Republican lead sponsors but that wasn’t enough to earn them a look.

The Senate passed SB 590 on March 24 with a bipartisan 26-8 vote. All five sponsors are Democrats.

It would have added edible forms of medical cannabis to the current list of allowable forms: pills, oils, topical, nebulizer or vaporizer (excluding dry leaf), tincture, liquid or dermal patch.

The House sent it to the Health Committee, where it sat dormant. It had a second reference to Judiciary where

it might have been received more favorably. And on April 6, with the session set to end April 10, Delegate Mike Pushkin, D-Kanawha, moved on the House floor to have it discharged from Health and sent to Judiciary. That failed, as a GOP counter-motion to table Pushkin’s motion passed

along party lines, 73-27.

So SB 590 died but one bill remained alive.

SB 231 was a bit more expansive and had two Republican and five Democrat sponsors.

It was introduced to remove various defects

SEE CANNABIS, J-8

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SHOPPING CENTER

Mall adds stores, helps with vaccines

BY JENIFFER GRAHAM
JGraham@DominionPost.com

Felicia Posey, general manager of Morgantown Mall answered questions posed by The Dominion Post about the mall and explained why she sees it as a true town center that serves the community of Morgantown and beyond.

During the interview Posey discussed how the mall became one of the nation's first and largest vaccine clinics, how COVID affected the mall and how it is growing and its plans for the future.

The Dominion Post: Has the mall seen growth? What growth is the mall anticipating over next year to two years?

Posey: Morgantown Mall is growing by leaps and bounds during the global pandemic. The center is positioned for redevelopment and began to make significant traction last year.

Three anchors opened in 2020 as a result of the redevelopment. Dunham's Sports relocated to Morgantown Mall in spring 2020 with great success thanks to increased product assortment and square footage supporting outdoor shoppers from the



William Wotring
The Dominion Post

Morgantown Mall added The Hub to allow workers and customers a space to work, connect and create.

ways for public use.

As vaccines become more readily available, we've experienced a surge in pent up demand as guests return to shops, restaurants and entertainment. With our guests' and retailers' health and safety as our top priority, Morgantown Mall is focused on the experience we create at our center. By providing a mix of things to do and things to buy, our center will continue to deliver the right combination of tenants, activities and events to keep shoppers engaged and returning often.

Retail To-Go is one example of how we have adapted. Morgantown Mall launched Retail To-Go, a convenient curbside pickup initiative, where shoppers can make an order at participating retailers and then arrange for a pickup at the designated location in the parking lot outside Entrance A between JCPenney and Dunham's Sports.

Recognizing the transition to a remote workforce led to further innovation of The Hub space at Morgantown Mall. The Hub is a space to work, connect and create. The initiative has been well received by many local business pro-

professionals, students and tenants alike.

Morgantown Mall has long been champion of small business with more than a dozen independently owned and operated housed here. These include Country Elegance, Four Horsemen Comics & Gaming, Off the Strip Sports Shop, Salon 304, 3 2 Go Self-Pay Market, House of Vapes, Gold Rush, Veracity Barbershop, Ace's Breakaway & Play Arcade, PhoneFix, JDM Structures, Bungee Jump, and ReTails by M-SNAP.

One of the nation's first and largest vaccine clinics was brought to life at Morgantown Mall through WVU Medicine Central Services and partnerships throughout Monongalia County. Thousands of guests traveled from more than 25 counties across the state to be vaccinated here.

**WITH NEW
LEADERSHIP JOINING
THE PROPERTY OVER
THE LAST YEAR, OUR
FOCUS HAS BEEN ON
INNOVATION AND
REINVENTING THE
GUEST EXPERIENCE.**

CANNABIS

FROM PAGE J-7

from the medical cannabis program. It added some new medical conditions to the list of those approved for treatment via medical cannabis, in keeping with what some other states are doing. It allowed the Public Health Commissioner to authorize additional forms of medical cannabis, including dry leaf, plant and edible and drinkable

forms (the last was an amendment to conform it with SB 590).

It trimmed some of the required courses medical practitioners must take in order to qualify to certify patients and cut the hours of required continuing medical education for a physician to be able to certify a patient from four to one.

It extended interstate reciprocity authority and made medical cannabis a bit more expensive by

raising the tax from 10% to 20%.

The Senate passed it in a bipartisan 29-5 vote on March 31. Like its predecessor, it was left to die in House Health.

It should be noted the dry leaf provision was recommended by the Medical Cannabis Advisory Board back in 2018 and annual efforts to expand the allowable forms have failed.

All this doesn't mean the program is totally dead.

The advisory board met March 18 and will meet again June 17.

The program website shows that 43 medical doctors and osteopaths have registered to certify patients to receive medical cannabis, including two in Morgantown, one each in Fairmont and Bridgeport and one in Mount Morris, Pa.

Last October, the Department of Health and Human Resources announced it had granted 10 grower per-

mits in Kanawha, Jefferson, Upshur, Raleigh, Berkeley, Roane, Mineral and Mason counties.

In November, DHHR announced approved processors. Nine of the 10 companies are also growers. The other is stationed in Cabell County.

And in January, DHHR announced the list of 100 permitted dispensaries: 11 are based in Morgantown, four in Clarksburg, three in Fairmont and one

each in Westover, Star City and Kingwood.

Also in January, DHHR announced that patients could begin registering to receive medical cannabis by going to medcanwv.org. DHHR Secretary Bill Crouch recently said while no product is available now, they expect the growers and processors to have their systems built out by late summer to early fall.

TWEET @dbeardtdp

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A young girl and boy are playing construction. The girl is sitting on the floor, wearing a yellow safety vest over a blue shirt and jeans, with a white hard hat on her lap. The boy is standing next to a red plastic wheelbarrow, wearing a blue plaid shirt, jeans, and a white hard hat. The wheelbarrow contains a hammer, a brick, and some cardboard. They are in front of a white brick wall.

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ECONOMY

Area to see new projects all around

BY WILLIAM DEAN
WDean@DominionPost.com

COVID-19 impacted everyone. Some businesses didn't survive, and some were forced to lay off workers to stay afloat.

But on the whole, in the big-picture economics sense, Morgantown and Monongalia County fared "better than expected," Russell Rogerson, president and CEO at Morgantown Area Partnership, said.

"I say that with a caveat that those who were impacted would disagree with that because it's real," he said. "The impact has been real. Layoffs, closures, I don't want to minimize the impact to those businesses that were directly impacted by it."

Federal relief helped some businesses, but many small retail stores, restaurants and bars are still struggling. It's important to keep supporting small business, Rogerson said.

One of the big-picture success stories of 2020 — the continued development at WestRidge — is a strong signal by businesses that they believe in the area's economy, Rogerson said. The development has a Menards, Dunkin' and a gas station. Construction on Bass Pro Shops is underway.

Rogerson said he thinks a store like Bass Pro Shops sends a great statement to people driving by on Interstate 79 about the community and what it can attract.

Another big win for the county in 2020 was launching the "hand-in-hand" projects of the runway extension at the Morgantown Municipal Airport and development of the 90-acre Interstate 68 Commerce Park, Rogerson said.

The extension of the runway to 1,000 feet will allow more types of planes to land and drive additional growth at the airport.

Downtown Morgantown saw the opening of Chase Bank and Chipotle along with some apartments in 2020. The multimillion-dollar renovation of the historic Hotel Morgan also finished in 2020 and the hotel reopened in early 2021.

In the coming years, the neighborhood off Richwood Avenue will get a similar treatment as Sunnyside did with a revitalization project. The 9.5-acre project will mainly focus on offering housing for professionals, students and workers, Rogerson said. There will also be some commercial and retail in support of the neighborhood.

A more immediate challenge is the pending loss this summer of the former Mylan plant now owned by Viatris as the result of a merger.

Rogerson said the closure will impact about 1,600 jobs and is a huge blow to the community. He said the Morgantown Area Partnership is doing everything it can to try to replace some of those jobs and help employees.

Diversifying the area's economy will help, Rogerson said. For example, the Morgantown Industrial Park is expanding and will bring traditional manufacturing jobs to the area. Part of that expansion will hopefully include an interchange from I-79 for direct access, Rogerson said.

"I think the important thing is our economy strategy is broad based," he said. "We have to do a little bit of everything that fits with the community."

Rogerson said the area needs to continue to improve itself with different types of housing, jobs, population growth and a vibrant downtown.

"All this work isn't specifically to bring Trader Joe's in but the better we do the more we'll be successful at bringing some of those amenities people want to see," Rogerson said.

TWEET @WillDean_DP

WESTRIDGE

Construction attracts leading retailers

Work continues on several shops

Newsroom@DominionPost.com

The WestRidge development team announced in January that five of the country's leading retailers officially joined the WestRidge tenant line up in the fourth quarter of 2020.

WestRidge Commons, off Exit 153 and home to previously announced Menards and Bass Pro Shops, will also soon be home to five popular off-price retailers: HomeGoods, Ross Dress for Less, Burlington, Shoe Carnival, and PetSmart. These five retailers plan to open in summer 2022, as part of the first phase of a more than 250,000-square-foot regional soft-goods shopping center at WestRidge.

The announcement of these five national retailers, combined with the 175,000-square-foot Menards and 70,000-square-foot Bass Pro Shops, means that north-central West Virginia residents will have access to over 500,000 square feet of brand new-to-market retail options in the next 12-18 months, and officially makes WestRidge its own "power center," according to the definition of such by the International Council of Shopping Centers.

Menards is already opened and Bass Pro is under construction. An opening date for the outdoors shop is expected later this year.

When WestRidge is combined with the nearby University Town Centre and Gateway developments, the I-79 corridor between Exit 152 and 155 officially becomes a "super-regional shopping center." These classifications are expected to help WestRidge continue to bring "new to market" retailers to the region.

New Jersey-based Burlington chose Morgantown as its first West Virginia location, based upon the strong and growing regional economic market, and specifically WestRidge Commons due to its unmatched access to Interstate 79 and adjacency to 1.5 million square feet of successful retail at University Town Centre.

This will be the third Ross Dress for Less location announced in West Virginia. Ross recently opened its first West Virginia store in Martins-



William Wotring/The Dominion Post photos

Bass Pro Shops is under construction at WestRidge, along Interstate 79. Below, more dirt is being moved to make way for another business in the development.

burg, and also announced another store in Parkersburg. California-based Ross is the largest off-price retailer in the United States, and opened 66 stores in 2020.

TJX Companies is bringing its second store concept to Morgantown, building off its successful TJ Maxx store at University Town Center. WestRidge Commons will be the second HomeGoods location in West Virginia.

Rounding out the January announcements for the WestRidge Commons tenant lineup is PetSmart, specializing in everything your furry, feathered or scaled friends could need, as well as Shoe Carnival, offering a wide range of brand-name footwear for the whole family.

These five junior-anchor, soft-goods retailers are all officially under signed leases and their buildings are now under construction. They are the first phase of WestRidge's planned soft goods shopping center, and this first phase is scheduled to be complete in early 2022. Specific grand opening dates will be announced later.

About WestRidge

At WestRidge, we are actively expanding Morgantown's super-regional shopping destination along I-79 between Exits 152 and Exit 155, which encompasses over 2.8 million square feet of existing retail and recently docu-



mented a 75-mile shopping draw. From home improvement to sporting goods, fashion to pets, WestRidge Commons brings everything you need to one place. Future retail phases, including outlots and retail shop space, are being leased now.

WestRidge also opened over 130,000 square feet of office space throughout the first half of 2020, and more announcements are planned later in 2021. Open and operational office tenants include: Leidos, Step-toe & Johnson PLLC; MVB Bank Inc.; and Larson Design Group. WestRidge worked with each tenant to design its specific space, and offered customized space planning and branding opportunities.



Menards opened earlier this year in WestRidge.

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SCHOOLS

STEM high school may be in Mon’s future

BY JIM BISSETT
JBissett@DominionPost.com

Eddie Campbell Jr., the superintendent of Monongalia County’s school district, used to be a principal at a high school just below the Arctic Circle in Alaska.

So maybe it’s not all too surprising, then, that the educator and administrator would employ an oil tanker analogy to describe the current state of education, pandemic-style, in the Lower 48, in the spring of 2021.

“An oil tanker doesn’t stop on a dime,” he said.

“It takes forever, and even longer than that to turn one around so it can change course.”

In spring 2020, he wasn’t quite sure which was the oil tanker: COVID-19—or Mon County Schools.

On March 13, 2020, Gov. Jim Justice ordered all schools across West Virginia shuttered, and shifted to remote learning.

There were as yet positive cases in the Mountain State, but everyone knew the lethal contagion would soon be nipping at the border counties, in particular.

Every building, all at once. All 55 counties.

Which prompted another observation from the superintendent as he now looks back.

“It’s amazing what you can get done when you really have to do it,” he said.

“The pandemic didn’t give us a choice.”

After that learning-curve spring, which saw the cancellation of all



Ron Rittenhouse/The Dominion Post

Eastwood Elementary was born of Mon BOE’s 2010-20 Comprehensive Education Facilities Plan.

sports and proms, teachers and students began adapting.

Seniors learned how to work ahead — for free afternoons.

One physical education teacher began bicycling to neighborhoods in his school district to do socially distanced classes in driveways and front yards.

Another art instructor learned video production, to his lessons a new dimension, a la Bob Ross.

“It wasn’t perfect,” Campbell said, “but we were getting it done.”

Now, with this academic year winding down, the dis-

trict is already looking to fall, and well past that, to the year 2030, in fact.

Steering toward STEM

Earlier this spring, the district completed the 2020-30 edition of the Comprehensive Education Facilities Plan, or CEF, which districts update every decade.

Call the CEF a paradigm-shifting owner’s manual, of sorts.

Mon Schools’ 2010-20 edition saw the construction of Eastwood Elementary, the county’s first all-environmentally built school.

A new University High

was projected and built from the document before that.

The newest CEF is calling for a new standalone high school devoted solely to STEM — science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Supplemental plans to retrofit the Technical Education Center were waylaid by the state School Building Authority’s recent denial to fund the work, but Campbell said internal planning sessions are set to begin — as he and other administrators look for alternate funding from within the operating budget.

“It’s still our priority project for 2021,” the superintendent said.

No herd-thinning allowed

The immediate priority, he said, are continued vaccinations of students, teachers and others associated with the local school system.

Another round of inoculations just wrapped up for students aged 16 and older, along with select family members.

That’s the only way, Campbell said, to hit the still-elusive herd immunity, to get back to normal.

Or, as he said, what will be relative normal after the pandemic cloud does lift.

Despite the delivery system ...

Michael Ryan, in the meantime, is looking forward to life in the district after COVID — precisely because of the indelible changes it will mark in Mon Schools.

Ryan is a former school counselor who is now chairman of the district’s department of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, which was formed earlier this year, partly in response to the pandemic.

“You always hear that ‘things will never be the same,’ ” he said.

“Well, they shouldn’t be, because we’re learning things. We can take the good from it and use it.”

Campbell agrees.

“We learned that as a school system, we can flip it around really quick,” he said.

However, he added, there is still an absolute in education, as he calls it, that these past pandemic months have reinforced for him.

Kind of a “You can’t teach an old oil tanker new tricks,” caveat, he said.

“We learned that nothing is going to replace the in-person, interaction between a student and a teacher in a classroom,” Campbell said.

“There are still kids out there who need that.”

TWEET @DominionPostWV

News tips

If you see breaking news or have a story suggestion, email newsroom@dominionpost.com or call 304-291-9425.

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INDUSTRIAL PARK

MIP ‘strategically located’ to attract businesses

BY GABRIELLA BROWN
GBrown@DominionPost.com

The Morgantown Industrial Park (MIP) is preparing for expansion, and with expansion, owners hope to bring jobs into the area.

“We think we’re strategically located and will be an attractive place for someone looking to build and to come into north-central West Virginia,” said Glenn Adrian co-owner of Enrout Properties, which owns MIP.

MIP is more than 500 acres in total. Currently, most of the development is concentrated on the eastern part of the park. During the past year, MIP has worked with the Monongalia County Commission, Morgantown Area Partnership and the City of Westover in hopes of expanding the western side of the park.

“The proposed development at the industrial park will have a positive impact on not only Westover, it will impact our entire county,” said Dave Johnson, mayor of Westover.

To fuel this expansion, the park has been working to establish an interchange in what is now known as the Harmony Grove TIF District. The goal of the interchange is to spur additional development within the park by giving better access to the interstate.

Adrian said the recent



Ron Rittenhouse/The Dominion Post

The Morgantown Industrial Park, in Westover, is more than 500 acres and has room to add businesses looking to be in the north-central West Virginia area.

approval of the establishment of a new TIF district, or tax increment financing district, by the Monongalia County Commission has been a big step for MIP. He said this will allow MIP to move forward with West Virginia development offices in terms of getting approval for expansion of infrastructure and roads.

As MIP looks to create direct access to the interstate, it also continues to bring new business to the area. Adrian said MIP will announce plans to add a manufacturing facility to the area within the next 30 days in conjunction with local and state officials.

He said because of COVID-19 as well as job loss

following the announcement to close down Mylan Pharmaceuticals, bringing jobs to the area is vital.

“I think this is something that has been a wake-up call for not only Mon County, but north-central West Virginia,” he said. “Jobs are important and these are blue-collar type manufacturing jobs — well

paying jobs — with benefits and things of that nature.”

Currently, businesses located in MIP are mainly located along the Monongahela River. This includes the SI group, WVU commercial laundry facility, Central Supply Co. and a Republic Services transfer station. Garrick Electric Co., Black Diamond Equip-

ment Rental and others also have locations on site.

Part of what draws businesses to MIP is that it is equipped to barge products in and out, as well as rail products in and out. These two abilities, along with looking toward access to the interstate, will make MIP a desirable location for manufacturing and distribution companies.

Adrian said significant studies are required before establishing an interchange becomes possible. These include looking at the interchange’s geometric design, studying traffic in the area and looking at environmental impact, including anything from noise pollution to impact on waterways.

MIP is in the midst of conducting these studies with Thrasher Engineering. Once complete, the studies will help determine the feasibility of an interchange with the West Virginia Department of Highways and the Federal Highway Administration.

“Really what we’re hoping to generate is the availability of industrial sites that, with the new interchange, would attract other types of manufacturing, distribution centers, things of that nature,” Adrian said.

TWEET @DominionPostWV

PRESTON

Development continues through pandemic

BY JENIFFER GRAHAM
JGraham@DominionPost.com

KINGWOOD — Although the past year brought new challenges, the Preston County Economic Development Authority continued its work to improve the county’s economic outlook.

PCEDA Director Robbie Baylor said the USDA released \$3 million in grant funds for the North Preston Broadband Project last June. Since that time, 84 miles of broadband fiber has been constructed to serve over 1,300 families.

“We plan to spend the rest of 2021 getting people hooked up to the fiber that has been installed, Baylor said. “We have three years from December 2019 to get the grant project completed, and it looks like everyone should be connected by December 2021, as long as there aren’t any complications. Prodigy has been working hard because they know how important broadband has become during the pandemic.

“In December, we applied for another \$3 million in USDA grant funds for broadband expansion,” she said. “If we are awarded this grant, we plan to extend broadband fiber in eastern Preston County from Cranestown to Silver Lake.”

Broadband isn’t the only thing the PCEDA has been working on.

The PCEDA received a \$2.2 million grant to work on the former Kinney Shoe Factory. Due to the industrial work that has been done on the property and the possibility of contamination, the PCEDA entered it into the WVDEP Voluntary Remediation Program.

“In January, we received our Certificate of Completion for the VRP,” Baylor said. “This certifies that the property does not have any environmental issues.”

This year, the PCEDA plans to rehab the existing 44,000-square-foot building and prepare the property for development.

“We will be bidding the roof replacement, electrical work, building remediation, road and site work soon,” she said. “There

should be quite a bit of work going on this summer.”

Baylor worked with the Preston County Chamber of Commerce and the Preston County Farmland Protection Board for several years to find a location that could house the organizations together. In November, all three moved into a new location in the Corner Mall of the Kingwood Plaza. Baylor said this provided the public with a one-stop shop for information.

Baylor said throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses needed information on the various grants, loans, restrictions and programs available.

“At the beginning of the pandemic, this information was changing daily,” she said. “We were trying to get information out to the businesses as soon as we received it.”

The PCEDA also worked with several businesses to address concerns related to the Governor’s guidelines during the pandemic.

Baylor said no economic growth can take place without utilities. She said in May, PSD 1 was able to switch back to its original water source with the completion of the work at the dam. Rowlesburg submitted an application for emergency funding for its sewer system, but the funding was not awarded. Baylor said they will be applying for traditional funding soon. She said the Preston County Sewer PSD has been working on a project to upgrade the Bruceton Sewer plant. This project should start construction within the next 30 days. Baylor said most of the design work on the Terra Alta water project has been completed. She said Tunnelton has started to pursue funding for upgrades to their sewer system.

“The pandemic has increased the number of businesses and site selectors looking at websites to determine if a place is a good fit for a business expansion or relocation,” Baylor said. “It is important that our website showcases Preston County and provides information on

everything we have to offer new companies from quality of place to our workforce. Unfortunately, our current website is outdated, but we are taking steps to get a new website developed. We have received proposals from firms that specialize in economic development websites and hope to have someone onboard soon to create a new website.”

Baylor said creating a new brand for the PCEDA is also a part of this work.

Baylor said more people are looking for outdoor activities since the beginning of the pandemic.

“Preston County has many of the types of activities people are looking for: mountain biking, hiking, rock climbing, fishing, hunting, trails, rafting ... the list goes on and on,” she said. “We are working with several organizations to showcase what we have available.”

Baylor said these types of activities are also help attract remote workers. She said more people now have the ability to work from wherever they choose, and Preston County is hoping to capitalize on this.

Baylor said businesses are continuing to look at expansion and relocation projects.

“We have been working with local companies on expansion projects throughout the pandemic,” she said. “While some businesses have been hurt by the pandemic, others are doing very well. We are starting to see an increase in the number of businesses looking for a new location. The biggest concern they have now is the cost of building materials and the time to get some of the materials. We hope to see this get back to normal soon.”

“WE ARE WORKING WITH SEVERAL ORGANIZATIONS TO SHOWCASE WHAT WE HAVE AVAILABLE.”

Robbie Baylor,
PCEDA director

SCHOOLS

Wotring: Learning forever changed by COVID-19

BY JENIFFER GRAHAM
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KINGWOOD — Superintendent of Schools Steve Wotring said there have been some big changes in Preston County Schools over the last couple of years.

“Some very positive things have happened within the last few years in Preston County,” he said. “After many unsuccessful attempts, we were finally able to pass an excess levy that will help fund our school system for the next five years. This funding has helped with HVAC issues throughout our county, allowed us to complete paving projects and, most recently, the addition of the new bleachers at Knights Stadium.

“The levy has also provided us with a coordinator for our virtual school programs, provided monies for field trips and has allowed the community to use our facilities at no cost. Through the pandemic we have been able to provide every student within our system with a technology device. Our PK-2 students use an iPad and our grades 3-12 students use a laptop. Our understanding of technology and the impact it can have on our instruction has grown exponentially. We continue to grow and learn every day.”

Wotring also discussed updating county schools and construction, as well as growth in several areas of the county that the board of education will need to consider in the future.

“We were very fortunate in Preston County to



William Wotring/The Dominion Post

Preston County Superintendent of Schools Steve Wotring said the Bruceton Mills area is growing, and the school board will have to look at an expansion at the school soon.

have voted and passed a construction bond, which provided for new and updated schools across our county. These projects were finished about five years ago,” Wotring said. “We do have areas of our county that are continuing to grow. We know we are going to have to expand in the Bruceton School as the population there continues to grow. We are also experiencing growth in the western part of our county and our school there is currently at max capacity. These would be areas where we would need to look at the next building projects.”

When asked about the lasting changes COVID will leave, he said the system would have to be revamped to meet the needs of students and teachers.

“We have learned so much through this pandemic. I truly feel that it has revolutionized public education forevermore. There is no going back to the way it used to be. We must use the knowledge we have

gained and adjust our instruction to meet the changing needs of the learner,” Wotring said.

“We must embrace technology and use it — not to replace the instruction, but to supplement it. Students need to be able to solve real world problems that will keep them engaged. Our society grew accustomed to working and learning from home. We now have to revamp our systems to meet the needs of individuals who don’t need us just to disseminate information to them, but teach them how to use the information to which they have access.”

He said there are no new building projects planned for the coming year.

“We will continue to look at projects that need to be completed in each school and will continue to look at the growth in the Bruceton and West Preston attendance zones to determine future projects,” Wotring said.

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