

2024

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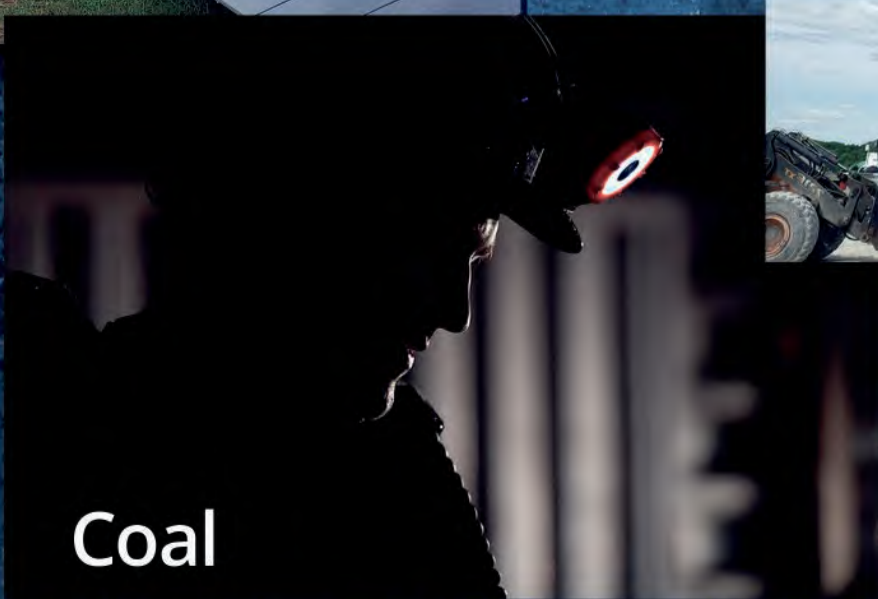
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UNIVERSITY

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

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

Gee, 80, will retire July 1, 2025, and a search process for his successor has begun.

It's hard for him to consider retirement after 45 years heading universities, he said, but "it's time. I've still got a lot of things I want to do."

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

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

The underlying issues



The Dominion Post file photo

WVU President Gordon Gee addresses the Class of 2027 gathered at Milan Puskar Stadium for a freshman event prior to the start of the 2023-24 academic year.

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

"Higher education has to fundamentally reimagine

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

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

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

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

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

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

But West Virginia's Legislature also created WVU as a liberal arts institution.

"We are Iowa and Iowa State combined. We are

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

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

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

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

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

But he will leave for his sabbatical year.

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

FAIRMONT STATE

New president has vision to keep FSU relevant

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

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

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

Fairmont State has enacted several notable changes aimed at bringing about positive change in the region. The Middle College Initiative is an educational and residential option for West Virginia youth aged 16 and older in the foster care system.

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

said Davis.

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

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

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

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

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

"Part of the process is

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

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

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

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

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

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Pierpont celebrating 40 years

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

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

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

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

In June 2023, the Board of Governors appointed Milan S. Hayward as Pierpont's fourth permanent president after the departure of Johnny M. Moore, who served in that role from 2016-21. The new president has had a glowing career in higher education and brings many skills to the table.

Looking ahead, Pierpont will help its students succeed with an innovative articulation agreement with Harrisburg University of Science and Technology in Pennsylvania. An articulation agreement is a formal arrangement between two colleges or universities that elucidates a transfer plan between program offerings. This particular agreement details a route for students of PC&TC's two-year Associate of Applied Science in Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA) program to transition into Harrisburg University's four-year Bachelor of Exercise Science (EXSC) program.

Earning an associate's degree at a community college before transferring to a four-year college is widely regarded as a cheaper way to get a bachelor's degree.

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

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

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

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

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

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WVU

Professors look for new academic options to attract more students

BY LINDSEY FLEMING
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Students on WVU's campus have plenty of new academic options to choose from in fields on the rise, from environmental engineering to esports.

The university's Board of Governors recently approved an online graduate engineering program during its regular meeting, as well as a new bachelor's degree in biology geared toward those looking for careers as doctors, dentists and physician's assistants and a second supply chain-focused degree.

Other programs previously introduced have had a chance to get off the ground. Professors who helped shape those undergraduate majors share how they're progressing and how students will benefit from such offerings.

Engineering Technology

The Benjamin M. Statler College of Engineering and Mineral Resources B.S. Engineering Technology degree program is designed for learners looking for a new route to get them into the wider world of engineering.

"One of the things we noticed is the need for a more hands-on approach," said Robin Hensel, a teaching professor in the college's fundamentals of engineering program, adding that while students in different disciplines all experience this, it usually happens in their junior or senior years. "Many students want to see what's applied a lot earlier."

In the case of engineering technology, students use manufacturing equipment in labs right away. This is meant to help them learn how to use the proper materials, sensors, electric parts and processes that will prepare them for careers in manufacturing, energy, industrial and technical service sectors, as well as become their own bosses, if they so choose.

"The state and region have a lot of manufacturing jobs, and those companies need workers," Hensel said.

And because manufacturing is so broad, Hensel added that graduates will be able to find jobs in everything from product design and testing to con-



WVU file photo

West Virginia University students in the undergraduate robotics engineering program will have opportunities to conduct research in robotics and participate in student projects and competition groups.

struction and automation.

In order to help them develop technical skills in certain fields, students must choose two areas of emphasis from five options: mechanical engineering technology, industrial engineering technology, engineering management and entrepreneurship, energy technology or multi-disciplinary engineering technology.

When the program started in fall 2023, there were 29 students registered. Now, there are 55.

"I would estimate we could have somewhere between 75 and 80 by next fall," Hensel said, adding that employers in the industry are already asking for graduates. "It just shows that there's a need out there."

Esports Business and Entertainment

When most people think of esports, they envision competitors on stage during tournaments, said Chris Scroggins, academic director of WVU's esports program.

Understandable, as such international events earn winners major prize money and can draw millions of viewers.

However, Scroggins said, "there are all different kinds of stakeholders involved."

Offered as one of the university's intercollegiate programs, the bachelor's degree in esports business and entertainment is designed to prepare students for all aspects of the growing, multibillion-dollar industry, as well as teach them skills that can be applied more widely.

"Look at disciplines

that have long endured, like marketing, finance, economics, digital media and production," Scroggins said. "This is a vibrant multidisciplinary offering with a core in esports that is the shiny thing to teach the other things."

The major, housed in the College of Intercollegiate Programs, also has courses delivered by the College of Applied Sciences, the Chambers College of Business and Economics and the Reed College of Media.

Scroggins said after the success of WVU's competitive teams, which launched in 2021 and have won championships in Call of Duty, Madden, Rocket League and Valorant, the administration became interested in the possibility of expanding esports into the classroom. That began with a minor in esports management in spring 2023, and now the major, which debuted this past fall for incoming students. He added that WVU is the first Power 5, R1 institution in the nation to offer such a major.

"We take a holistic approach to the esports curriculum and building a community. It's definitely innovative," he said.

It helps that students have access to WVU's competitive teams, some with members who have agents.

"It's a perfect way for them to learn, to pair them up with the teams, helping manage and coordinate events. It's really going to inform the curriculum side of things." Not to mention, Scroggins added, give graduates the kind of experiences future employers are looking for.

"They're going to have a great resume and a major that will make them highly employable."

Environmental Engineering

Lance Lin knows for a fact that students are interested in the new environmental engineering degree offered by the Benjamin M. Statler College of Engineering and Mineral Resources, as many have approached him seeking classes that cater to their passion for environmental issues like climate change.

Charged with developing the program, Lin, who is the chair of the Wadsworth Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, said it features four areas of emphasis — water supply and resources; water quality engineering for human society; air pollution, control and climate change; and environmental health, risks and public health.

Given that West Virginia is one of the primary energy-producing states in the country and deals with its fair share of environmental issues, Lin said the major is geared not just toward global issues, but local ones as well.

For instance, he taught an air pollution class and did a case study based on a Department of Environmental Protection report and an agreement between the state DEP and Union Carbide Corp. regarding ethylene oxide emissions. In 2023, the corporation and agency set new measures that limit possible emissions from the UCC facility in Institute. The colorless gas is a known human carcinogen, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

"We like to use real-world examples," Lin said, which helps engage students.

With 16 students enrolled in the major, he said he sees it as on track for growth, something that potential employers are anxious to see.

During WVU's career fairs, Lin said more than 200 companies visit the campus and "a majority are here to hire environmental and civil engineers. ... Our students, most of them have multiple job offers by the time they

graduate."

Robotics Engineering

While robotics engineering is one of the more recent additions to WVU's curriculum, Jason Gross, associate professor and chair of the Department of Mechanical, Materials and Aerospace Engineering, said many of the elements for the bachelor's degree program have been in place for some time, in part because "robotics is interdisciplinary in nature."

The university's long history of success in robotics competitions also plays a large role. Since 2011, WVU has taken home prizes in several national and international competitions, including nine first-place honors.

"We have a lot of faculty expertise," Gross said, adding there are also a handful of research labs already on campus.

Students in the program will explore mechanical systems, computer science and engineering systems, and be required to complete a year-long capstone project.

As with the other majors mentioned in this article, he said the market is more than ready for future robotics engineering graduates, citing a recent World Economic Forum Future of Jobs report ranking it among the fastest-growing professions globally.

"And we live 70 miles south of one of the largest robotics clusters in the world," Gross said of Pittsburgh.

Meeting with an industry group there recently, he said he discovered there are roughly 7,000 jobs available in the robotics sector in the area. Many West Virginia companies that have historically been interested in mechanical engineers are also looking for those with robotics degrees.

"Right now, we're ahead of the game," he said, as WVU is only one of a few universities in the nation to offer a robotics undergraduate program. "Fast-forward 50 years, and I think every single engineering college will offer robotics."

TEACHERS

Pay raises not enough

BY JIM BISSETT
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It almost seems like ancient history now, and it was only 2018 when it happened.

That's when West Virginia, in the most fundamental ways of the state's contentious labor history, took the nation to school.

That's when one woman carried a picket sign in Colorado that read, "Don't make me go West Virginia on you."

A nine-day work stoppage here, during a particularly frigid February six years ago, by teachers and other public employees put the Mountain State's traditional economic inequities under a glare even colder.

Public schools in all 55 counties were shuttered as the fight against low wages and teacher shortages rolled on.

Parents and their children joined teachers and cafeteria workers on picket lines (often in snow and freezing weather) for the duration of the movement that empowered public employees in other states to do the same.

Which is how that picket line worker — and picket sign crafter — in the Rocky Mountain State came to be inspired by the Mountain State.

Teachers and other public workers here would emerge from it all with a 5% pay raise in 2018, and that percentage has been a regular occurrence in Gov. Jim Justice's administration as elected lawmakers signed on with the paycheck heft.

Nearing the end of the 2024 legislative session, those employees got another one, which, the governor noted, marks four in a row under his watch.

"You remember way back when we did a 5% pay raise?" Justice said. "It was the biggest pay raise, percentage-wise, in the history of our state."

Justice, who is finishing his second and final term as governor, said that's a trend he wants to see continue.

"I know the job you do," he said. "I know how hard you work every day."

Such labor battles, in such states as West Virginia, don't always stay won, Sam Brunett told The Dominion Post previously.

"It's a revolving door," said Brunett, who teaches art at Morgantown High School and is finishing his term as president of the Monongalia County Chapter of the American Federation of Teachers, one of two such unions in the state.

He's referring to the ever-rising premiums for PEIA — the Public Employees Insurance Agency, which covers him, his fellow teachers and other state employees.

"This is like a train going in slow motion towards a brick wall," he said. "You already know what's going to happen."

Translation: Any raise you get is going to be eaten by your premium.

Benefits, he said, are why people take jobs.

And why people don't take jobs.

Brunett, who was named West Virginia's Art Educator of the Year in 2018, is going into his 30th year in the profession.

Now, he isn't so sure about aspiring teachers following him into the field.

Which, he said, doesn't make a very good lesson plan for state staring at a teacher shortage.

"This is going to keep kids away," he said of the rising cost of benefits. "We aren't gonna be able to recruit anybody."

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MONONGALIA COUNTY

District's 3 high schools on 'best of' list

BY JIM BISSETT

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Last fall, Monongalia County Schools ushered in the start of the 2023-24 academic year with some star-power, courtesy of U.S. and News and World Report.

The publication released its annual "best of" rankings for America's high schools and Morgantown High and University High again found themselves in rarified air, among the West Virginia listing.

Morgantown High notched No. 1 on the list for the Mountain State and University High was No. 3.

Among the top 50 on the list for West Virginia, Clay-Battelle came in at No. 43.

These days, the district is attempting to enhance and even redefine in some ways how it delivers its business model of educat-

ing young people in Mon.

As of this writing, school board members and district officials were still making the pitch for the Renaissance Academy, which would be the first-ever standalone high school devoted solely to STEM — science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

For that to happen, though, enough voters will have to say yes to the \$142.6 million bond measure on their ballot during the primary May 14.

That's how much it would take to build the facility on a tract of land overlooking Interstate 79 on Blue Horizon Drive.

Students would rotate in and out of Mon's three public high schools for deep dives into STEM and expanded offerings in

career technical education — all, the district said, without sacrificing core classes and extracurricular activities at their core schools.

The academy would be open to other students across Mon, including those who attend a charter school, a private school or are home-schooled.

Adult learners could also take advantage of the offerings in career technical education, which is a big plus for Nancy Walker, a longtime incumbent of the Board of Education who has helped ensure the construction of numerous school facilities across the county in her nearly 30-year tenure on the board.

"For us, it's always been about opportunity," she said.

"It's always been about giving our kids all the options and avenues they need to explore and make a career."

Meanwhile, products of Mon Schools do go on to traditional four-year colleges in relatively greater numbers than their peers across the Mountain State.

And that includes Harvard, Stanford and other marquee schools, which district superintendent Eddie Campbell Jr. says is a validation of that mission and intent to which Walker is referring.

"It's a statement of how we do business in the county, from pre-K to 12," he said.

"We start out with kids who are 4 years old and we stay with them and watch them across that stage for their diplomas," the super-

intendent continued.

"Then, they go on to achieve more than that. That's what really makes us proud."

Proposed STEM school aside, the district is still in the business of infrastructure improvements to house its students adequately and safely.

That mission got a boost in April when Mon received nearly \$5 million from the state School Building Authority, which doles out dollars for new construction and major renovation projects across West Virginia's 55 public districts.

More than \$4 million of that offering will go to the addition of e-gaming and robotics classrooms at MTEC, the Monongalia County Technical Education Center, which would eventually be retrofitted for

middle school instruction, if the Renaissance Academy bond measure passes.

The district is also earmarking \$887,000 to Mountainview Elementary, so it can revamp Safe Schools entrances to the building while also making needed roof repairs.

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Nancy Walker
Board of Education

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JUNIOR COLLEGE

Nursing program brings students to WVJC Morgantown

BY CAVAN TARLEY
CTarley@DominionPost.com

Over the past year, West Virginia Junior College (WVJC) has continued to maintain steady growth, including at the Morgantown campus.

Student enrollment has grown 21% at the Morgantown campus over the past 12 months, while WVJC as a whole has increased by 17%.

According to WVJC CEO Chad Callen, the increase in student enrollment at the Morgantown campus is largely coming from the nursing programs. WVJC Morgantown currently has 556 students enrolled, both on-campus and online.

While Callen sees the increase of enrollment as great for the college, he also wants to see the college grow responsibly without affecting student success in a negative way.

“It’s been a little bit of a challenge to grow like that, but a lot of the way we’re growing is with systems that are scalable,” said Callen. “Since the administration is in place, we’re able to have responsible growth that’s not understood by many.”

Callen credits much of the college’s success to the effort the WVJC staff put in to build a culture that prioritizes serving students.

“In order to be successful and achieve for your students and achieve the things that we’re achieving, it requires good people doing great work,” he said. “It doesn’t just happen — it’s the people that are making it happen.”

Samantha Esposito,



Photo courtesy of West Virginia Junior College

A pinning ceremony was held in December for graduates of the West Virginia Junior College Associate Degree in Nursing program. These nurses completed their program in November.

campus president at WVJC Morgantown, also attributed the success to the strong relationship between the students and the staff.

“One of the foundations that our organization is sort of built on is recruiting students, training students and placing them in their field of study,” Esposito said. “From the time a student reaches out to the time they graduate, we’ve been able to maintain that level of one-on-one.”

Esposito noted that the

career service department at WVJC also helps students find jobs in their fields of study.

“Our graduates get lifetime career service assistance,” she said. “Whether they graduated in 1990 and are coming back now, we will still help them find employment in their field of study.”

Over the past few years, WVJC has provided students with online programs, which has reshaped its delivery modality and increased its reach

as a college.

“Much of our growth is predicated on where the students are through our embedded learning partnerships with hospitals in West Virginia, through our online delivery, through our mobile simulation labs,” said Callen. “That is a significant differentiator in how we deliver our content to non-traditional students.”

During the past 12 months, Callen said, there has been a 100% pass rate in three of WVJC Morgan-

town’s online nursing programs for the first time. He considers that to be a great achievement.

“When we set out to take residential nursing programs and deliver them in this way, we received a lot of resistance from the nursing community,” he said. “There were concerns that nursing is complex and requires you to be in a classroom. We just didn’t agree, and we wanted to challenge conventional thinking to solve a problem in this nursing crisis. We expected

to get it eventually, but we didn’t expect to get it so quickly.”

WVJC has built partnerships with the various health care providers throughout West Virginia, including WVU Medicine and Mon Health. Callen said the junior college has also been “working with smaller independent hospitals to identify their needs and build a program to meet those needs.”

In the next 12 months, Callen said that much of the college’s focus will be on building new programs — especially in health care — that will be starting in 2025. One of the future programs is an online/hybrid Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) program, which will be available in select locations in West Virginia.

“We’re working with the hospital systems to identify what the greatest workforce areas of concern are,” Callen said. “Let’s prioritize those and let’s build out the same successful model, so that we can help ensure that the hospitals have what they need, and the health care providers have the workforce they need, so that we can ultimately ensure that our communities are better off.”

West Virginia Junior College was founded in 1892 in Charleston. It expanded to have additional campuses in Morgantown and Bridgeport, and online programs in select West Virginia locations. Nursing and business are among the fields of study the college offers.

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2024 Transit Levy

The first Transit Levy was passed in 2016 when the county cut transit funds and federal funds were also being cut. There was a dire financial need which could only be met with the support of the people of Monongalia County through the passage of the Transit Fund. No other funding sources have become available to support the transit system so we are seeking to continue the levy in order to maintain and increase service levels as our community grows.

Our Levy Promise is to provide the service that was cut in 2016 due to the county funds being cut, increase evening and weekend service, provide service to new growth areas in our community and to purchase vehicles. We have stood by our promise and continue to add service to our community as it grows.

- > We have added new and expanded service equaling 41,443 hours of service per year, a 57% increase over the hours of service being operated in June 2016.
- > Service has increased on the Gold Line, Red Line, Brookhaven, Cassville, Don Knotts, Orange Line, Purple Line, Blue Line, Eastern Circulator, Northern Circulator, West Ridge/Mylan, and Wadestown.
- > We have added service to new growth areas such as West Ridge, Mylan Park, Fort Pierpont, Suncrest Town Center and to the western end of the county to Wadestown.
- > Since 2021 the levy has allowed us to purchase and put in operation 20 new buses costing \$7,720,000, paid for with \$6,176,000 in federal funds and \$1,544,000 in local and levy funds.
- > Mountain Line provides service for thousands of working residents, employers, seniors, families, students, and citizens with disabilities.

How will Mountain Line use the levy money?

- \$456,500 - To reinstate county service cut in 2016
- \$1,200,000 - To maintain the added 41,433 hours of service and to continue to grow service as the community grows
- \$500,000 - To replace fleet vehicles as they reach the end of their useful life

How much will the levy cost taxpayers?

Renewing the Mountain Line levy will not increase your tax bill. The same levy rates are being requested as in 2016 and 2020. For the owner of a home with an assessed value of \$160,000, the levy would cost \$35.20 a year – \$2.93 a month. Keep in mind, the levy cost depends on the assessed value of your property, so the answer varies. To calculate your cost contact the Mon County Assessors Office or visit <https://www.assessor.org/>

More FAQs and information can be found at busride.org/transitlevy2024

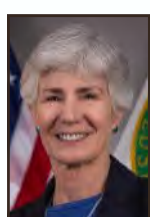
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ENERGY

NETL welcomes new director, Marianne Walck

BY DAVID BEARD
DBeard@DominionPost.com



Marianne Walck

The National Energy Technology Laboratory — with sites in Morgantown, Pittsburgh and Albany, Ore. — has a new director, Marianne Walck.

The Dominion Post sat down with her to learn about how she came into her new job and her vision for the laboratory.

Walck earned a doctorate and master's in geophysics from California Institute of Technology and a bachelor's in geology/physics from Hope College. She most recently served as deputy laboratory director for Science and Technology and chief research officer at Idaho National Laboratory. Her prior experience included 33 years at Sandia National Laboratories.

She had been in the Department of Energy's national lab system for almost 40 years, she said, moving from researcher to manager, then into executive management at Sandia in 2015.

Walck said 16 of 17 DOE national labs are contractor operated. NETL is the only government-owned and operated lab in the complex.

DOE chose a new contractor for Sandia in 2016 and Walck decided to retire, briefly. "I found out that I didn't enjoy being retired very much."

So, she started looking for the position in Idaho

and settled in there as chief research officer.

After five years, she started to think it was time to move on, possibly retire again, but was asked if she'd be interested in applying for NETL.

It was a good fit, she said. She's an earth scientist, and that dovetails with NETL's mission.

"The opportunity to lead a national laboratory that has a technical focus aligned with my personal interest was really too much to pass up."

She brings to the job a lot of perspective on the other national labs and operating in that ecosystem.

Her vision: DOE's lab system has three applied energy laboratories. The other two focus on nuclear and renewables.

NETL partners with and

is part of the Office of Fossil Energy and Carbon Management and focuses on sustainable resources and carbon management for the future.

"My vision for NETL is that we are 'it' for carbon management and sustainable resources." NETL also functions as a field office for DOE to enable projects done elsewhere, primarily for fossil fuel energy and carbon management but other things, too.

"What I want this laboratory to be known for is our work on carbon capture, transport, storage, beneficial use of mine tailings and rare earth elements, and sustainable use of our carbon-based fuels."

We asked Walck about what she sees for the future for coal and natural

gas from a technological perspective.

There's talk about electrifying everything, she said. "We can't electrify everything." Maybe the light-duty vehicle fleet. But the heavy duty fleet, airplanes, heating systems and buildings are more difficult to decarbonize without carbon-based fuel.

Right now, the U.S. energy portfolio is 70%-80% fossil fuel overall. "We can't just stop. What we need to do is make them less carbon intensive so we don't emit as much carbon into the atmosphere."

The U.S. is the most carbon intensive country in the world. It's not the most in volume, but the most per capita. "We have an obligation to reduce the carbon intensity in our system. And to do that, we need to

manage our carbon, and that's what sustainable resources and carbon management is all about."

She's in the process of moving from Idaho to this area. "I am really excited about being here in both Pittsburgh and Morgantown. ... It's just a fun time in terms of the kind of impact that we can have on the energy system as we move forward."

With the three labs working together on nuclear, renewables and fossil fuels with carbon management, "we can create an energy system for the future that's sustainable, and that's what's important from my perspective."

NETL has more than 1,300 employees and guides more than 1,000 R&D projects in 50 states with a total award value of \$5 billion.

PARTNERSHIP

Mon Power and NETL advance solar energy

BY DAVID BEARD
DBeard@DominionPost.com

Solar energy is making advances in West Virginia.

FirstEnergy sisters Mon Power and Potomac Edison are building the second of their five planned solar facilities in Rivesville, Marion County.

And the National Energy Technology Laboratory in Morgantown played a key role in flipping the "on" switch for their first site, outside Morgantown in Madsville.

Solar customers can power their homes or businesses or factories in two ways. One is net metering. Solar panels on the roof or somewhere nearby draw power directly from the sun. This accounts for some, most or perhaps all of the customer's needs. Any excess energy is fed into the grid and the customer receives credits against their power bill.

The other is solar credits. A utility has a solar site that feeds energy into the regional PJM grid — which receives that along with coal, gas, nuclear, hydro and wind power. The customer buys solar credits. They don't know if a particular electron powering their light bulb comes from a drop of sun, a piece of coal, a wiggling fish or the flap of a butterfly wing. But their solar credits indicate they've contributed to the utility's solar contribution to the grid.

SB 583, passed in 2020, allows the state's two electric utilities (Mon Power and Appalachian Power) to build or buy and then own and operate solar plants — four 50 megawatt plants totaling 200 MW per utility — in order to draw national companies to West Virginia that want a significant solar element in their energy portfolio.

Madsville is the first of five planned Mon Power sites, and the largest solar site in West Virginia. It sits on 92 acres adjacent to Mon Power's Fort Martin coal-fired plant, and the solar operation covers 80 of those acres, with 49,032 solar panels generating 18.89 megawatts. FirstEnergy notes that 1 MW of solar energy powers a national average of 173 homes, according to the Solar Energy Industries Association.

Madsville went online in January, and George Farah, FirstEnergy vice president of Utility Services, explained at the time that Mon Power's decision to pursue renewables coincided with the state's resolve to draw companies with green goals (via SB 583).

There would be no project without customers, he said, but it drew interest and subscriptions from residential, commercial and industrial customers wanting to obtain the solar credits. And it drew the interest of NETL's Morgan-

town site.

Sean Plasynski, who was NETL acting director in January, said that in summer 2022, NETL was asked to develop a carbon-free electricity implementation plan to demonstrate how it would comply with a Biden clean-energy executive order, with the specific goal of incorporating 100% carbon-free electricity by 2030.

As it happened, Mon Power reached out to see if NETL would be interested in a long-term solar power purchase agreement (PPA), which would meet the order's requirements.

So NETL developed a first-of-its-kind PPA for its Morgantown site. It will buy 100% of its usage, 29,000 megawatt hours, annually from the site. (The site feeds its power into the PJM regional grid but the PPA records all the power as being purchased from this site.)

The PPA made much more sense than NETL trying to build its own solar plant, he said, and allows it to reach the carbon-free goal ahead of schedule, by 2026.

"We at NETL are excited about this Fort Martin project, as it will advance the nation's clean energy goals and help support the domestic production of high-performance solar panels," he said.

Brian Tierney, FirstEnergy president and CEO, said of the opening of the

site, "This is a really proud moment for Mon Power. This is a win-win-win for the state, our customers, our unions, the country, all happening right here in Madsville."

Construction of the Rivesville site is just getting underway. It sits on a 27-acre brownfield, on both sides of Morgan Ridge Road, on property the companies own and once used as an ash disposal site for the retired Rivesville Power Station.

The Rivesville site is expected to be complete by the end of 2024 and will produce up to 5.5 MW of power.

NETL DEVELOPED A FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND PPA FOR ITS MORGANTOWN SITE. IT WILL BUY 100% OF ITS USAGE, 29,000 MEGAWATT HOURS, ANNUALLY FROM THE SITE.

DOE

Pekney makes finding ways to mitigate methane her mission

BY LINDSEY FLEMING
DPNews@DominionPost.com

Scanning the skies from a helicopter or with a drone, 25 meters, give or take, may not seem like a difficult distance to cover. But when on the hunt for what could be little more than a hole in the ground or a rusty pipe jutting up from a surface covered in leaves and surrounded by trees, that same area — the discrepancy between where a digital database says a well site is vs. its placement on a magnetic survey — seems a lot larger for researchers walking in the woods.

This particular challenge is something environmental engineer Natalie Pekney experiences firsthand when searching for abandoned and orphaned oil and gas wells across the country. The recipient of the 2022 Arthur S. Flemming Award, who works out of the National Energy Technology Laboratory's Pittsburgh office, has made it her mission to find the most effective approaches to mitigate methane emissions in an effort to address the climate change issues that leakages from such sites can cause.

The Arthur S. Flemming Award, previously given to recognizable names such as Neil Armstrong, Anthony Fauci and Elizabeth Dole, is one of the nation's top honors presented to federal employees.

At NETL, Pekney heads a program that uses a variety of technologies, such as magnetometers on helicopters and drones, to more precisely search large areas for the presence of abandoned and orphaned wells. An abandoned well typically refers to an unpro-

ductive well with a known owner or operator, while an orphaned well refers to a well for which no former owner or operator is known.

Since a magnetic survey requires the presence of steel casings, that method won't work for wells with wooden casings or those that no longer have metal casings. In these instances, well sites may have indentations in the land where drilling machinery once was or depressions made by the collapsing of wellheads. For those sites, NETL researchers can use light detection and ranging (LiDAR).

"A team at NETL pioneered and perfected the use of magnetometers on manned helicopters to find metal casings," Pekney said. "When my colleagues were working on this, I would sometimes go out on the ground to verify the results and you can smell that hydrocarbon smell or there would be bubbling, open to the atmosphere," which are signs of methane.

"That was shocking to me," she said. "I thought about all of these hundreds of wells open to the atmosphere, and we had instrumentation from Marcellus well research to measure possible emissions."

Methane, a primary component in natural gas, is the second-most abundant anthropogenic greenhouse gas after carbon dioxide, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. However, its lifetime in the atmosphere is much shorter than carbon dioxide, making it more than 25 times as potent at trapping heat in

SEE PEKNEY, I-9



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INDUSTRY

Future of coal, oil and gas depends how far ahead you look

BY ERIN CLEAVENGER
ECleavenger@DominionPost.com

Coal has been an important part of West Virginia for more than a century and it remains a major contributor to the state's economy.

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), West Virginia is the nation's second-largest coal producer, after Wyoming, and accounts for about 14% of U.S. coal production with coal being mined in 21 of the state's 55 counties.

Since the Marcellus shale boom almost two decades ago, the state is also the nation's fourth-largest producer of marketed natural gas.

But with social movements emphasizing a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions and the environmental impact of oil, gas and coal, what does the future look like?

Sam Taylor, director of the WVU Institute for Sustainability and Energy Research, said that it really depends on how far in the future you are looking and even then, there isn't a clear answer.

"Those fuel sources are

going to be in the mix for a little while," he said. "Our grid is going to have some coal and some natural gas on it for at least a decade and that is the safest answer anyone will give you."

At that 10-year mark, the answers are pretty safe and relatively simple. But it's when you start getting into 20 or 30 years that Taylor said the answers get little bit harder.

Part of the reason it isn't really possible to answer is that we don't know what's coming.

"The Marcellus boom, revolution," he said was a recent example. "That's not quite 20 years old now. At the time, no one really saw that coming."

"So what things are out there? What technological change — and it could be in a lot of different places is the thing right now — but what technological change gives you an impact like the shale boom? That's the kind of thing that keeps us busy, keeps us working," he said.

West Virginia has already begun looking at alternative energy sources, with about 7% of the state's total net energy generation

coming from renewable resources, nearly all of it from wind energy and hydropower, according to EIA.

Taylor said that every big solution right now has some big downside they are trying to figure out and the current landscape is really open-ended, with a lot of things in the mix together.

"You've got your classic oil and gas and coal; nuclear is picking up interest in our region. We know what's going on with renewables like solar and wind. There's been a lot of exploration around hydropower," he said. "We have, here at the university, a pretty robust program looking at geothermal and think there's some potential there."

"The reason why all of that is in the mix at the same time is that it isn't 100% clear which one would you go spend your money on. There's a lot of advancement going in a lot of places right now — in every one of them you're seeing technological improvement."

There is discussion surrounding the cost of renewable energy as well, Taylor

said. While many are cheaper up front, additional costs begin to add up when it comes to storing and delivering the energy. There is also social push-back on things like large developments of solar and wind farms that will also play a role.

"It's such a huge sector. The scales of energy production and consumption in the U.S. are staggeringly big. So, it's tough to think about any of these solutions as your one-size fits all," Taylor said.

"Thirty years ago, it was a pretty straightforward conversation. You didn't have a ton of other options and all your R&D went into trying to improve these technologies and now you've just got such a big landscape."

While it is unclear how things will change over the next few decades, Taylor said he believes that coal and oil and gas will diminish, but not any time soon.

Think of the transition from horses to cars, Taylor said, "that didn't happen in a decade, and for what it's worth, people still have horses."

NETL

Patent issued for laser technology

DPNews@DominionPost.com

Two NETL researchers were awarded a patent for improvements to laser technology that can be used to detect CO2 leaks more efficiently from underground carbon storage sites.

The technology also holds potential for use as an online sensor in a range of other hostile environments that require environmental monitoring.

NETL's Dustin McIntyre and Daniel Hartzler were awarded the fifth in a series of technology patents that cover aspects of a laser induced breakdown spectroscopy (LIBS) probe for underground storage site monitoring.

"Estimates are that carbon emissions should reach net-zero by 2050 to meet important climate targets," McIntyre said. "Carbon capture is likely necessary to reach these targets, requiring a long-term storage solution such as underground carbon sequestration in geologic formations. However, as with any subsurface activity, leakage can occur, potentially impact-

ing groundwater quality near storage sites. Rapid detection is essential to mitigate leakage."

A loss of containment at an underground storage site can cause subsurface brines or CO2 to migrate into aquifers and soils, potentially contaminating groundwater, a critical resource that millions in the United States rely on for drinking or for agriculture and industry.

Leakage can be detected by monitoring groundwater composition around underground storage sites known as geologic carbon sequestration (GCS) sites. A variety of analysis techniques are currently used to measure trace elements in groundwater. However, many of them have high equipment costs, operator training requirements and lack portability, requiring samples to be collected in the field and transported to a laboratory for analysis.

The technology is titled "Downhole Laser System with an Improved Laser Output Production and Data Collection." The patent number is 11885746 and became active Jan. 30.

PEKNEY

FROM PAGE I-8

the atmosphere.

In an effort to find out if, in fact, methane emissions were present at abandoned wells, Pekney and her colleagues headed out to parks in Pennsylvania with a field computer loaded with coordinates from magnetic surveys and various tools to see what they could find and, "yes, indeed, some were leaking measurable quantities" of methane, she said. "Things grew from there."

These days, due in part to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law — \$1.15 billion in federal funding made available to states in 2022 to create jobs cleaning up abandoned and orphaned oil and gas wells across the country — Pekney said NETL has seen an uptick in interest in their research. Many federal and state agencies are seeking the most efficient and cost-effective ways to find these sites, as well as determine those that release the most methane,

so, for instance, they can plug them in order of worst emitters.

She's traveled to several states, including Kentucky, Texas and New York, and the week of April 21, Pekney and a team from NETL headed to West Virginia for the first time to scan for possible well sites at Stonewall Jackson Lake.

The magnetic survey, conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Department of Energy, with the assistance of the U.S. Army

Corps of Engineers Pittsburgh District, uses drones to cover large swaths of land in search of possible metals buried in the area. If abandoned well sites are discovered, they will be monitored for possible emissions, said Jeff Toler, resource manager for Stonewall Jackson Lake.

There are roughly 6,300 orphaned and abandoned oil and gas wells already in the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection's database. The state has plugged 236 wells since

2020, according to Terry Fletcher, WVDEP's chief communications officer.

Toler said a grant package in 2022 started the process at Stonewall Jackson Lake, with the goal to monitor and correct possible emissions.

Even if no abandoned wells are found, Scott Hannah, a park ranger at the lake, added that the data will be useful.

"We will end up with a detailed map of the area that will be so valuable," he said. "If we ever want to cut

a road, we will know where possible pipelines are located."

For NETL's part, Pekney said this latest project in the Mountain State will also be beneficial.

"I'm looking forward to it," she said, when interviewed the week before the project was slated to start. "It's a challenging area to cover because of the lake and the shores. It's a very hilly area, which will make it a little more complicated. ... If we can do it there, we can do it anywhere."



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Area students take part in initiative to foster the next generation of outdoor stewards

BY KAITLYN EICHELBERGER
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In 2022, Susan Riddle, CEO of the Visit Mountaineer Country Convention and Visitors' Bureau (CVB), attended the West Virginia Governor's Conference on Tourism.

There, she discovered international nonprofit Leave No Trace (LNT) and its dedication to educating the public on environmental conservation. Fast-forward nearly two years, and the impact is clear: more than 1,200 students in West Virginia have been taught to honor, value and preserve the environment.

For nearly three decades, LNT has raised awareness and conducted research on environmental issues such as land and water pollution, risks to wildlife and damage to trails and parks. Recognizing the critical role of younger generations in future efforts, youth conservation education has become a prime undertaking of the organization.

Over the years, various institutions have documented a decline in children spending time outdoors. LNT posed the question: If the next generation is not properly exposed to the beauty of nature, how will they learn to take care of the world around them?

Leave No Trace youth programs across the country aim to solve this dilemma — and now West Virginia has joined this international mission.

"It is extremely vital that we share the importance of protecting our environment with our stu-



The Dominion Post file photo

One of the Leave No Trace sessions presented by the Visit Mountaineer Country CVB was held at Mylan Park.

dents," said Visit Mountaineer Country CVB Destination Developer Coordinator Stella Hehny. "West Virginia is a beautiful state filled with outdoor gems, and we must do everything possible to keep these areas safe for locals, as well as our visitors. Our students can make a huge impact on our local community's conservation and protection."

Visit Mountaineer Country CVB's Leave No Trace program officially launched in November 2023 in collaboration with the West Virginia Department of Tourism, the West Virginia Board of Education and LNT. Initially presented to Monongalia County 5th graders, the

program quickly expanded to encompass 5th grade classes in Preston and Taylor counties, too.

The program targets 5th grade students at a prime moment in their education to begin learning about their place in the environment and career opportunities in tourism.

To date, 1,243 students in Monongalia, Preston and Taylor counties have received Leave No Trace training and received certification as Youth Outdoor Stewards. This encompasses nearly all 5th grade classes in these counties, with only one class left to schedule its training.

Although the numbers are undoubtedly impres-

sive, the success of the classes is also measured in the ways it has authentically left a mark on each student now boasting a Youth Outdoor Steward certificate. The goal isn't simply to provide children with information, but to encourage a deeper comprehension and excitement about caring for their planet.

"Beyond numbers and data, Stella and I have been able to see the success of this [program] in each and every classroom we've been in," said Visit Mountaineer Country CVB Destination Developer Coordinator Kathryn Carter. "Success for Leave No Trace in West Virginia is also about fos-

tering a genuine understanding of outdoor ethics and stewardship among the next generation and teaching them about the tourism opportunities opening across the state."

A typical Leave No Trace lesson spans about an hour and incorporates interactive games and activities to reinforce the seven ideas touted by LNT: Plan ahead and prepare; travel and camp on durable surfaces; dispose of waste properly; leave what you find; minimize campfire impacts; respect wildlife; and be considerate of other visitors.

With each school visited and further research conducted by LNT, Visit Mountaineer Country CVB's program evolves to convey its mission in an even more engaging manner.

"Every school we visit is different in its own way. We have learned tips and tricks from each classroom on how to better our presentation and leave a greater impression," said Hehny. "Our feedback has been outstanding with the LNT program. The students ask great questions and truly seem interested in the presentation."

Lessons have continued with additional visits to previous schools and students show up to class wearing their Leave No Trace lanyards and eager to learn more. The lanyards remind students of the seven Leave No Trace principles, and a binder of educational games allows the learning to continue long after Visit Mountaineer Country CVB has concluded its lesson.

Looking ahead, Visit Mountaineer Country CVB aims to continue its program long-term and is already preparing for next year's lessons with the new group of 5th grade classes in Monongalia, Preston and Taylor counties — though it also hopes to expand through the rest of north-central West Virginia. The program's success has paved the way for other statewide efforts, with the West Virginia Department of Tourism launching its own Leave No Trace initiative joined by various CVBs across West Virginia ready to begin instructing 5th graders throughout the state on Leave No Trace values.

Beyond the classroom, though, the program intends to leave a lifelong impression present in each facet of students' lives. Whether camping with family or riding bikes with friends, students are encouraged to apply the principles of Leave No Trace in their daily lives.

It's never too late to strengthen your appreciation for the natural world and learn how to better conserve its beauty, however. Community members can support this program by receiving their own Leave No Trace certification through LNT's free online training and workshops for all ages.

"While it's important we start encouraging our youth to practice Leave No Trace, it's also important for all ages to apply the information in their outdoor pursuits," said Carter.

PRESTON COUNTY SCHOOLS

Superintendent, staff ready to wrap 2023-24 year, begin preparing for fall classes

BY JENIFFER GRAHAM
DPNews@DominionPost.com

Superintendent of Preston County Schools Bradley Martin said he and the staff are excited to wrap the current academic year this month, and they are looking forward to the coming academic year.

"This summer, we have multiple presenters at the Model School Conference, with Kingwood Elementary being named a national model school. We also have a substantial number of maintenance projects scheduled for this summer, and we anticipate two schools, Terra Alta East Preston and South Preston, to receive the VHI Save the Music Grant," he said.

Martin said the Board of Education also anticipates the receipt of funding from the West Virginia School Building Authority for the construction of a new secure entryway at Kingwood Elementary School.

"We are very hopeful for strong support for our levy initiative on the May 14 ballot," he said.

More can be learned about the school levy at prestonschoolslevy.com.

Martin said there are several summer building and ground works projects scheduled, including the completion of the Career and Technical Education school store, the sealing and striping of parking lots at Brucecon, Preston High School, Terra Alta East Preston and Aurora schools.

Also scheduled is the replacement of the Preston High School gym bleachers,

and the buffing and resealing of gym floors at Brucecon, Terra Alta, South Preston, West Preston, Central Preston Middle School and Preston High School.

He said other building and grounds repairs scheduled to be completed this summer include the installation of fencing at CPMS, Fellowsville and PHS; the completion of PHS track renovations (installation of hand railing along newly paved walkway, installation of handicapped seating, installation of new honors plaques, replacement of fencing along the parking lot); installation of security cameras at Terra Alta and Aurora; installation of a staircase connecting parking lots at Aurora; repair of a retaining wall at Aurora, adjacent to baseball field; the buffing and waxing of all hallway and classroom floors at all schools; the painting of Terra Alta gym; the completion of a secure entryway and replacement of all exterior doors at PHS; repair of exterior lighting in the front parking lot at PHS; window repair at Terra Alta; re-mulching of playground areas at multiple schools; the completion of the concessions stand and interior door replacement in the Pod-Classroom; and paving work at West Preston.

Martin said pending the West Virginia State Board approval during this month, the installation of a secure entryway and replacement of all exterior doors at Kingwood Elementary will be done. He said the district is set to receive

nearly \$600,000 from the School Building Authority with a 35% match using levy funds.

Martin said there are no large curriculum changes scheduled. He said schools will continue the use of science of reading techniques as directed by the WVDE, and the district will be implementing a new math textbook series at all grade levels.

However, the schools will be implementing parent engagement activities to help parents develop skills to help their children improve or excel academically. He said this will include school open houses and parent/teacher conferences.

Not all the changes Preston County Schools will be facing are positive. Martin said the loss of ESSR funds include the staff reduction of ESSR-funded positions and created a need to re-allocate funding sources for curricular programs and summer school expenditures beyond this summer.

Added to the loss of ESSR funds, the loss of levy funds will result in deferred maintenance of school facilities; larger class sizes with higher teacher-student ratios; the potential for future school closure/consolidation; possible student activity fees for extra-curricular activities; possible fees for community facility use; greater fundraising needs for trips and other needed items; continued staff cuts; and the continued loss of enrollment, according to Martin.

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HIGHER EDUCATION

WVU celebrates achievements in academic advising

WVU Today

West Virginia University investments designed to enhance the university's academic advising community and culture are paying off when it comes to student success.

"We know that our academic advisers play a high-touch, high-impact role in helping students navigate through their academic journeys at WVU," said Evan Widders, associate provost for undergraduate education.

"That's why, over the past year, we've invested in elevating the advising profession through a consistent, intentional and coordinated approach as we streamline best practices, policies and procedures across the advising community."

According to Widders, the university's renewed academic advising strategy has, in part, helped increase retention, persistence and graduation rates.

First-year student retention from the fall 2023 semester to the spring 2024 semester saw its highest rate in eight years at 92.4%,

while the four-year graduation rate continues to increase each year, reflecting a 7% jump over the past three years.

Director of University Advising Joy Carr credits regular communications and more professional development opportunities, coupled with proactive efforts to engage students in the process of tackling common challenges and advising concerns.

"It's great to see students and administrators are working together to enhance the academic advising experience," Carr said. "We know stronger advising practices lead to stronger student success."

Outgoing Student Government Association President Madison Santmyer agrees.

"It's been helpful to work with Director Carr and Dr. Widders to voice some of our concerns and better understand the changes taking place across the different colleges," said Santmyer. "We look forward to a more open dialogue between the SGA and administration moving forward regarding

advising and other topics."

The university community celebrated Adviser Appreciation Day April 23.

This past year, Carr has enhanced a weekly advising email to ensure the university advising community is well-informed and has access to the latest resources. But beyond the day-to-day transactions of academic advising, Carr also recognizes students' needs for consistent levels of care and support through additional advising strategies.

"Gone are the days when advisers simply help students schedule classes and answer questions about enrollment or grades," Carr said. "Advisers often find themselves on the frontlines of helping students manage mental health challenges, family issues, feelings of loneliness and isolation or not being as academically or personally prepared for college as they may have anticipated."

To help equip advisers to face these additional challenges, academic advisers are now coming together more frequently through

the Academic Advising Council to build community and learn from one another about how to hold difficult conversations, troubleshoot problems, manage conflict and motivate and inspire students through relationship building.

Colin Street, a rising sophomore from Morgantown who is pursuing three majors in two different colleges, said he appreciates his advisers' routine, high-touch points.

"Thanks to my political science adviser who sends out weekly emails about upcoming opportunities, I've already secured a legislative internship on Capitol Hill in Washington and have been accepted as a Roosevelt Network Fellow before the end of the semester," Street said. "I may not have learned about these opportunities or gained the confidence to apply had it not been for his consistent communications."

To share and learn about some of these effective approaches, the Academic Advising Council is now spearheading and hosting a

free annual statewide academic advising conference. In its first year, more than 150 advisers from across West Virginia attended the series of virtual workshops and discussions.

The reach, however, extends beyond the Mountain State. University advisers are contributing their expertise on a national platform through the National Academic Advising Association. By competing for regional and national awards and presenting their work, WVU advisers are positioning themselves as leaders in the academic advising field.

Others from across the country are taking notice. In February, Carr was awarded a full scholarship to attend the 2024 NACADA Administrators' Institute based on current WVU advising actions.

Students are also seeing a difference. Results from a recent advising evaluation survey cite positive and productive interactions between advisers and students. Specific highlights include: 93% of student respondents agree their

advisers are professional and courteous; 92% report their advisers are accessible; and 89% agree their advisers can answer their questions or connect them with someone who can.

"I could go on forever about how welcoming, kind and helpful my adviser is," one student wrote in the evaluation survey. "She has helped me with any question or concern I have had. She takes the time to get to know me and makes the effort to check in on me. It's safe to say she is the best adviser I have had."

This spring, a record-setting 830 nominations were submitted for the annual Nicholas Evans Excellence in Advising Awards, and 88% of those nominations came from students.

"I'm excited to continue this momentum in the months and years to come," Carr said.

UNIVERSITY ADVISERS ARE CONTRIBUTING THEIR EXPERTISE ON A NATIONAL PLATFORM ...

SUSTAINABILITY

FirstEnergy highlights recycling initiatives on Global Recycling Day

DPNews@DominionPost.com

To commemorate Global Recycling Day in March, FirstEnergy Corp. highlighted company- and employee-led initiatives that have resulted in more than 7,000 tons of recycled materials over recent years.

FirstEnergy's operational sustainability efforts have led to the recycling of:

- More than 1,500 tons of plastic, metal and cardboard materials.

- More than 5,000 tons of wood utility poles and reels.

- More than 650 tons of shredded paper.

- More than 50 tons of electronic waste, including computers and phones.

Dave Frederick, director of Environmental Services at FirstEnergy, the company is committed to sustainability.

"Our commitment to sustainability extends beyond our operational activities; it's deeply ingrained in our corporate culture, thanks to

our employees," he said. "Our recycling achievements underscore our dedication to minimizing our environmental footprint and contributing positively to the communities we serve."

Wood utility poles are one of FirstEnergy's largest waste streams, contributing thousands of tons of waste each year. Through the company's Wood Pole Diversion Program, all FirstEnergy electric companies divert worn or aging

poles from landfills into various reuse and recycling options available in each state the company serves.

Just last year, the company diverted more than 2,400 tons of wood poles, which found new life in farmers' fields and parks or were milled into lumber.

Additionally, through its Recycling and Investment Recovery Program, FirstEnergy manages the company's surplus assets, primarily wire and cable, through

reuse, refurbishment and sale. By repairing or processing materials and products for reuse, the company reduces new material purchases while creating less landfill waste and mitigating its environmental impact.

In 2023, company workers sorted and handled nearly 2.7 million pounds of scrap material. They also recycled more than 2 million pounds of cables and wires, which allowed the company to obtain credits

toward future purchases.

One of the standout aspects of FirstEnergy's recycling endeavors has been its employee-led initiatives. These include the NexTrex challenge, which has enabled FirstEnergy employees to collect more than 1,800 pounds of plastic waste over the past year.

Further, more than 250 pairs of employee-donated blue jeans have been repurposed into home insulation.

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AUGUST							SEPTEMBER						
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SC 4:00 PM	TRE 6:30 PM	TRE 6:30 PM	TRE 6:30 PM	@SC 6:35 PM	@SC 6:35 PM	@SC 6:35 PM							
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