

Women's History Month

SPECIAL EDITION

The Dominion Post

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ATHLETICS

Shelly Poe

Women's
History Month

Poe scores rewarding, history-witnessing career in college sports communication

BY KERRI KOSTEN

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Shelly Poe's involvement in sports began early.

First at Riverside Junior High and then at University High School, she found a niche as a manager, scorekeeper and statistician for many sports.

"I got interested in sportswriting and stats etc. as a way to stay involved with my friends who were athletes, and we followed the Mountaineers and other teams through newspapers, radio and TV, so Mickey Furfari, Jack Fleming, Woody O'Hara, and many others were a part of our daily lives," she said.

Poe grew up in Laurel Point, just outside of Westover. She graduated from UHS in 1981.

"At that time, the WVSSAC had a very complicated mathematic formula that ranked the football teams in each class each week, and the top-ranked teams were the ones who would eventually make the playoffs," she said. "Whoever was entering the ranking points was not giving us enough for beating (Albert) Gallatin (in PA), so I went to Coach Harry Bradley and Coach Steve Lee and said I thought we were missing points. As it turned out, I was correct, so I got to go to English class late one day each week while we called the SSAC and made sure our number was correct. And we did make the playoffs!"

Sports has always been a big part of the Poe family. "Growing up, we also had WVU basketball season tickets and attended many football games at old Mountaineer Field downtown," she said. "My younger sister, Jill, played basketball and tennis at UHS and later was a Division I basketball coach for two decades. And my dad was an outstanding three-sport athlete at East Fairmont High in the 1950s."

Poe attended West Virginia University as a National Merit Scholar. She graduated with magna cum laude honors in 1985 from what's now the College of Creative Arts and Media. While at WVU, she worked four years as a student assistant in the sports information office.

Sports information is the conduit for information getting to the media and through the media to the fans, so it touches every aspect of the athletics program.

"The sports information folks need to be good communicators, highly organized, multitaskers and also have a good sense of what's newsworthy and what's worth preserving for history's sake," Poe said. "The highlight was obviously when Georgeann Wells became the first woman to dunk in a college basketball game."

Poe's career began immediately upon graduation when she was hired full-time as an assistant sports information director. She was the main publicist for women's basketball, gymnastics and baseball. She was then promoted to head sports information director in 1988, succeeding Joe Boczek.

"Of course, the football team went undefeated in 1988 and played for the national title, the men's basketball team had the longest win streak in the nation at 22 games, and we had plenty of amazing opportunities to introduce the Mountaineers and the state of West Virginia to the rest of the nation."

When she began, Poe was the only female head SID at a Division I football school as well as the youngest.

"Women in the business overall were very few," she said. "But the coaches I worked with, Kittie Blakemore, Linda Burdette and Dale Ramsburg, suggested I would do a good job and athletics director Fred Schaus and coaches Don Nehlen and Gale Catlett liked me and were willing to give it a try."

Though things were not always easy, Poe is grateful for the women at WVU who paved the way for her.

"There were many obstacles to being one of the first women in a lead role in such a male-dominated field, but no more so than women in all fields faced during that time," she said. "Knowing personally such trailblazers as Kittie Blakemore, Linda Burdette, Martha Thorn and Veronica Hammersmith, and knowing how much they had worked and invested to get women's sports going at WVU, was a distinct privilege. They made women's sports, and women's involvement in sports, possible, and my generation was able to get in the door because of their efforts."

Poe remained head SID at WVU until 2007, when she left for Ohio State to work with the Buckeye football program and Coach Jim Tressel.

"Ohio State had 36 sports, more than 1,000 student-athletes and more than 1,000 athletics employees and it was a wonderful learning experience to be there," she said. "At WVU, we did amazing things with the limited resources we had, but the resources in the Big Ten were much more extensive. You felt the tradition of Ohio State every day you were on campus and Buckeye alumni were a big part of helping them remain successful."

While there, she got to be a part of some historic moments including the 2010 victory over Oregon in the Rose Bowl.

In 2012, Poe began at Auburn University.

"Auburn, like WVU and Ohio State, is a land grant university that takes its connection to the people of the state very seriously," Poe said.

She got to witness one of the biggest single-season turnarounds in college football history as Auburn played for the BCS National Championship game at the Rose Bowl.

"Auburn has many wonderful and unique traditions," Poe said. "There's nothing quite like the eagles flying to midfield before football home games, or seeing the main intersection in town, Toomer's Corner, blanketed in toilet paper after a big win in any sport. And I had the chance to be right on the sideline for the Kick Six in 2013, perhaps the greatest ending ever to a college sporting event!"

Spanning her career, Poe has promoted a total of 21 postseason football teams, 16 All-Americans, and finalists for many national awards. She has also been lead publicist for men's and women's basketball, gymnastics, baseball, soccer, tennis, softball, and swimming & diving. She was the media coordinator for numerous NCAA and conference championships.

But her accomplishments don't stop there.

She has won several awards and honors including College Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA) 2006 Hall of Fame inductee, 2013-14 CoSIDA National President, 2012 CoSIDA Trailblazer Award, 2013 Arch Ward Award, 2016 CoSIDA President's Award, and CoSIDA Board of Directors (1999-2003, 2010-2015). She also chaired CoSIDA committees and task forces. She has also been a member of NCAA Media Advisory Group, an ex-officio board member, and Football Writers Association of America.

Poe reflects on her career fondly.

"I'm extremely lucky to have had such a career and gotten to know the people and share the experiences I have, and much of it is because of the great training and start I received at WVU," she said. "I'm interested to see where college athletics heads next, but I'm appreciative I was part of it during a truly golden age."



All photos submitted

Shelly Poe



Shelly Poe receives College Sports Communicators lifetime achievement award along with CBS lead college football producer Craig Silver.

She retired from Auburn last June and now lives on her family's farm just outside of Fairmont. She is staying busy with reading, gardening, baking, working on the farm and volunteer work.

"I volunteer for Joe Boczek's tremendous GameChanger effort in state schools," Poe said. "I speak to classes and professional groups quite often, and I'm still very involved with our national organization CSC (College Sports Communicators). And I like to help out at our church whenever needed."



Shelly Poe with Aubie the Tiger.



Shelly Poe with her family after Ohio State's 2010 Rose Bowl victory over Oregon.

BUSINESS

Women's
History Month

Pat Stewart



Stewart leaves lasting legacy that extends beyond real estate in the Morgantown area

BY MICHAEL GRIFFITH

MGriffith@DominionPost.com

MORGANTOWN - If you look up the word "trailblazer" in the dictionary, you may well find a picture of Pat Stewart.

Known for her undying work ethic and inspiring leadership, Stewart was a stalwart in Morgantown's real estate community.

In 1973, the same year the infamous Roe v. Wade case was argued in the Supreme Court, and the unforgettable "Battle of the Sexes" tennis match between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs (won by King), Stewart etched her name into the history books as well with the opening of her self-named realty company, Pat Stewart Realtors.

Born on St. Patrick's Day 1927 in Gassaway, Stewart was president of the West Virginia Association of Realtors in 1989 and the local board of Realtors. She was also president of the Monongalia County Chamber of Commerce in 1983. She started the Newcomers Club in 1976. Pat and her husband, Guy, were principal owners of WJCF-FM in Westover from 1981 to 1988.

Stewart wasn't just a business owner; she practiced what she preached, with a wide-ranging knowledge of the real estate world.

She could tell you about every inch of the Morgantown area.

She could crunch the numbers in her head when it came to space and dimensions.

And she could tell you how much of a hit your wallet may take with the new addition or renovation you were thinking of making to your property.

Stewart not only owned a real estate company, but also lived the business.

"She was always the first person in the building and the last person out of the building," Pat Stewart's son, Jeff, said. "This wasn't a job for her. She genuinely loved this business and what she did, and she loved to work. In real estate, you can work as little or as much as you want, but you're going to get out what you put in. She put in the time and effort

into something she loved and worked to become the best she could be."

To celebrate her 95th birthday, Stewart did nothing else but what she did every day, work.

Pat was the voice on the other end of the phone line when calling into the Pat Stewart Realtors office that customers came to know and love.

"Hey, what else am I gonna do?" Stewart told the Dominion Post in March 2022. "I have to keep coming in. If I don't, people will start realizing they don't need me around anymore."

Jeff said even an injury wouldn't keep his mother from coming to work.

"She was there every day," he said. "I remember she broke her leg one year, and she still came to work with her leg in a cast. It was not a job for her; it was who she was, and it showed."

Pat's husband and Jeff's father, Guy, was very supportive of his wife's ambitions.

Guy Stewart served as the Dean of Journalism at WVU, which gave Pat a built-in writer for her real estate business.

"She would have him write her ads for her," Jeff said. "He was a writer and loved to support his wife. I was blessed to have both of my parents and to have them instill things in me that I still carry with me today."

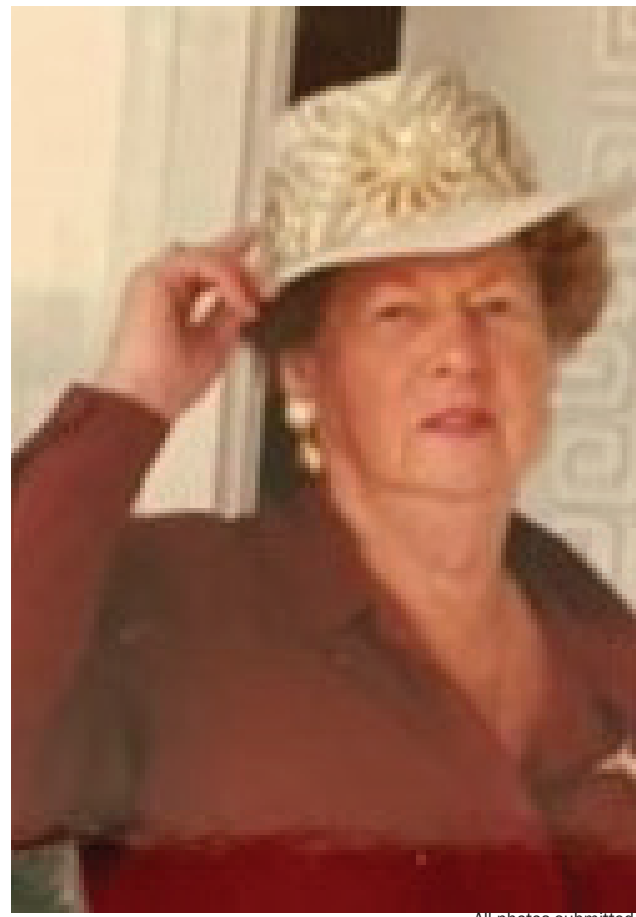
Stewart was also sure to support her fellow women.

"She inspired a lot of women in this town and in the industry," Jeff said. "She was a trendsetter. There weren't many women in the real estate business at all when she started, and then she had a series of women start under her."

Jeff says that when he joined the firm at age 19, he was the only man in the building.

"She was harder on me than anyone else," Jeff chuckled. "I had to learn the profession, not only for myself, but to gain the respect. Then I became one of the youngest brokers in the state."

Pat Stewart's legacy won't be forgotten for a very long time in the city of Morgantown, and not only for real estate.



All photos submitted

Pat Stewart

"She founded the Newcomers Club in Morgantown, which I still think operates today, and has done a ton of fundraising for Meals on Wheels as well," Jeff said. "She instilled in me the passion to give back to the community."

"She was one of a kind," he continued. "She taught me right from wrong, she taught me how to give back. I was blessed to have her in my life and will always hold on to what she taught me."

Pat Stewart of Pat Stewart Realtors attends the 50th anniversary celebration of her real estate business.



Leading Ladies

In honor of **National Women's History Month**

Presented by **The Dominion Post**



In honor of all WV SWA - Environmental Sustainability Leading Ladies – Past and Present

Solid Waste Authorities (SWAs) were created by the West Virginia Legislature on January 1, 1989, as a public agency in accordance with WV Code §22C-4-3. The purpose of the Monongalia County SWA is to protect the public health, environment and welfare and exists to establish programs based on source reduction, recycling, reuse, material recovery and litter control. Over the years the list has grown to include compost, repair, refuse, and repurpose. SWAs also strive to offer services related to disposal and recycling as funding allows.

At least one Leading Lady was involved with creating SWAs in 1989. Now, there are numerous Leading Ladies strongly involved, and invested, with operating, directing, or volunteering (on the boards or within the organization) in WV SWAs and other state and local environmental sustainability agencies including the Solid Waste Management Board (SWMB), the WV Department of Environmental Protection, to include their Youth Environmental Program (YEP), Project Water Education Today (WET) program, and the Pollution Prevention and Open Dump and Prevention Program (PPOD), to name just a few. When we think of environmental sustainability organizations, we also want to highlight the Leading Ladies at the WV Department of Agriculture (among others) and colleges and universities where you'll find a sustainability office like the one at WVU.

SWAs take a special and talented kind of Leading Lady to direct their organization. Depending on if they are establishing or operating a recycling center, or providing community opportunities, information and education, what you will find is that we all have a deep resolve of making a difference in our counties. SWA Leading Ladies work hard and have a passion for the work we do. It is really something to see and a great reflection of the field of Environmental Sustainability in WV. Young girls, and young ladies, would benefit from mentoring with these Leading Ladies to learn about the vast opportunities available in this field from operating a recycle center, helping residents, learning about commodity and sales of recyclable materials, to creating education materials, teaching, advertising, marketing, budgeting, hiring, training (and more), and planning for the future. In WV SWAs, there is a place, and need, in this environmental sustainability field for more Leading Ladies.

To learn more about SWA Leading Ladies and to support SWAs, find your local SWA by visiting the SWMB website and click on the Solid Waste Authorities tab. To learn more about the work Lynn Castro, Director of the Monongalia County SWA, does visit our website monongaliacountyswa.com



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Sharon Doyle

Mayor, Town of Star City

She became involved in Star City government elected to the town council in 1993 and has served on council, as town recorder and currently as Mayor.

Sharon's career spans from spending 13 years at the Dominion Post where she moved onto Mylan Pharmaceuticals where she retired after 28 years.

Along with serving on various boards in the area, she and her husband Bobby, both born and raised in West Virginia, have spent many years involved in the town.



Julie A. Knight

GRI, SRS, ABR, MRP, RSPS, GREEN
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Julie A. Knight is a dedicated real estate professional with over nine years of experience, specializing in assisting clients with buying and selling Real Estate.

Born and raised in WV, she is dedicated to ensuring her clients have personalized, attentive service in each transaction by imparting her expertise in the local market, creativity in design, and exceptional service.

Julie is affiliated with Old Colony Realtors of Morgantown, serving North Central WV.

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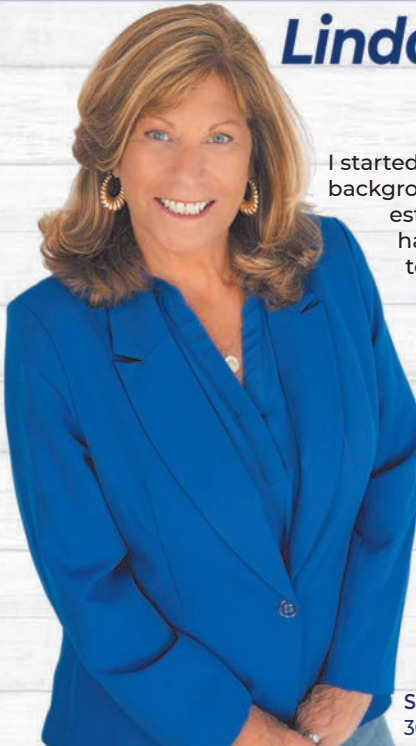
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Taylor Shultz

Taylor Shultz, a West Virginia native, serves as the Director of Awareness and Development at the Monongalia County Child Advocacy Center (MCCAC). With a deep-rooted passion for nonprofits and a heart dedicated to helping children, Taylor finds great fulfillment in her role. She takes pride in being able to make a positive impact on the community where she resides, supporting and advocating for the most vulnerable members of society. Taylor is grateful for the opportunity to utilize her skills and expertise to further the mission of MCCAC, ensuring that every child has a voice and receives the support they deserve.

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Linda Straface Kosten

Salesperson/REALTOR®
 ABR, GRI

I started my real estate career in 2000 with a background in commercial and personal rental real estate. During my years as a Sales Associate, I have sold everything from small starter homes to lots, to multi-million-dollar homes and commercial sites.

I have been asked what made me decide to become a REALTOR®. It is my love of people, homes and negotiating sales. I love what I do - connecting buyers and sellers successfully.

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COMMUNITY

Eleanor Green

Women's
History Month



Biggest need and biggest heart: Green led Winter Weather Posse for 17 years

BY ALISE CHAFFINS
For the Dominion Post

When Eleanor Green walked into the United Way on Spruce Street, she believed that God had a plan for her. She asked the director which project needed the most help and had the fewest volunteers, and she was told that they needed people to help seniors winterize their homes. Despite the fact that raking leaves is one of Eleanor's least favorite jobs, she spent the next 17 years organizing and leading the Winter Weather Posse that was responsible for helping seniors and low-income folks.

"In my first year, I was both a Girl Scout leader of my daughter's Girl Scout Troop and my son's Cub Scout leader. I was so scared we would not have enough people that I told all the Scouts that it was mandatory that they had to come work on the project and bring an adult," Eleanor shared. "Even though I couldn't have enforced that, I told them they had to come. Almost every single one came and brought a grown-up."

In her first year working the project, she estimates that they served about 15 homes with about 45 volunteers. In 2022, when the Winter Weather Posse ended, they helped at least 135 homes and had more than 500 volunteers. Eleanor moved from recruiting Scouts and their parents and began working with sororities and fraternities on the WVU campus, involving local students looking for volunteer opportunities.

When the Winter Weather Posse started, they were primarily tasked with raking leaves, putting up plastic on windows, turning flowerbeds, and maybe changing batteries in smoke detectors. As time went on, Eleanor developed a "special ops" team that helped with additional projects, including minor household repairs.

Dale Smith was a part of Eleanor's "special ops" team. He said, "The 'special ops' team went to nearly every house doing the things that didn't involve just raking leaves. We would change the batteries in their smoke detectors and their CO2 detectors. If they didn't have them, we'd actually install them for them. We would typically do the plastic on the windows. Some of them had a whole porch that they would like to have plastic put on for the winter so they could go out there during the wintertime. But one of the things I always remember is that even though it was a long day, and there was a lot of work, it was always fun."

As the years went by, Eleanor was not only able to involve more of the community in donating their time, but she found businesses that were willing to support the work that they were doing. Early in the project, she received a \$20 gift card from one business, but as the years passed, she shared, "I would walk into Kroger at the Suncrest Towne Centre, and they would know it was Winter Weather Posse season. And by the end, I had such a strong relationship with them that they would say, 'Just tell me what you want. We'll provide everything you want, gratis.'"

She has numerous stories from her time working with the Winter Weather Posse. One of the first years, she went to visit one house before they went for their workday. The homeowner asked if the team could rake not just the leaves, but also some hickory nuts that had fallen. Eleanor looked around and thought that would be a doable project. "Five weeks later, there

were a lot of hickory nuts on the ground, and this one volunteer, who was probably pushing 70, said, 'If I never see another hickory nut for the rest of my life, it will be too soon.'"

While the teams were able to help with the physical needs of those they served, they also helped in other ways. Eleanor shared the story of one person they were visiting to get her list of chores needing to be finished.

"She just kept probing. And I said, I just thought I'm not answering what she's asking. I realized that what she was really asking was if there was going to be anybody of color on her team. I hadn't set the teams yet, but I decided, oh, absolutely, you're going to get somebody of color on your team. She didn't get out much, and I bet she doesn't know anybody who's Black, and I thought, well, you will after this project's over." She continued, "I would never have put somebody on the team to be exposed to anyone being hateful. I told the leader about my conversation with her, and I asked him how he felt about being the team leader. By the end of the workday project, she asked somebody to please make sure to take a picture of the team at her house, and she wanted to stand next to the lead."

Holly Hartman-Adams worked on the Winter Weather Posse for years. She told us, "She brings joy and purpose to everything and everyone she touches. The WWP was her dream to give back to the community and teach the next generation about service and caring for those in need. She involved folks from all walks of life and ages. Many life lessons were learned by all. The kids got as much out of the day as the folks we helped."

While the Winter Weather Posse is no longer in operation, what drives Eleanor Green remains. "I'm a Methodist, and one of the foundational doctrines of being a Methodist is that we're supposed to serve the



Eleanor Green

All photos submitted

least, the last and the lost, which quite frankly could be any of us on any given day, including yours truly. You might not think what could come from just raking leaves. But the richness of what came out of the project was really something else."



Eleanor Green takes a photo at a WVU Mountaineers football game.



Eleanor Green was able to recruit volunteers of all ages to do the work of the Winter Weather Posse.

Leading Ladies

In honor of **National Women's History Month**

Presented by **The Dominion Post**



Celebrating Our

13 Year Anniversary



Lisa Biafore and her daughters, Rachel and Regina, are the owners of **The Tea Shoppe**, a charming and tranquil tea shop and tea room located in The Seneca Center. Each of these ladies has their own role in the business: Rachel is a Certified Pastry Chef making all the sweets in the shop, as well as functioning as the Front of the House and Event Manager; Regina is the Kitchen Manager and is responsible for all of the shop's social media; and Lisa manages the business side of things and is the tea "expert." To further her knowledge in all things "tea," Lisa has obtained several certifications from the World Tea Academy and is a Certified Tea Specialist and Professional, Tea Sommelier, Tea Blender, and Tea Health Expert.

At **The Tea Shoppe** you will find a selection of over 260 loose-leaf teas, teaware, and tea-related accessories. **The Tea Shoppe** also has an extensive menu including the traditional Afternoon Tea services, sandwiches, soups, quiche, paninis, salads, scones, and sweets – all made in-house.

The Tea Shoppe is the perfect destination for special occasions like bridal and baby showers, birthdays, and other special events. They also host many events for children, such as Princess Teas, American Girl Teas, and Tea Etiquette classes. To provide something unique for adults, we have Tea-vents such as Bridgeton, Witches & Warlocks, Galentine's Tea, Harry Potter Yule Tea, Murder Mysteries, Tea Tastings, Tea and Chocolate Pairings and more. We have also added special tea-vents focusing on famous authors, literary characters, Famous people in history, Actors and actresses.

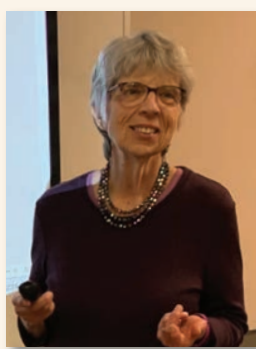
Over the past 13 years, Lisa and her daughters have implemented some creative and exciting new menu items and events, turning **The Tea Shoppe** into its very own niche.

Lisa A. Biafore, Certified Tea Specialist/Owner, The Tea Shoppe

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Rae Jean Sielen, manager and co-owner. She has been a frequent instructor at OLLI (WVU's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute) for many years and is a long-time member of Morgantown North Rotary.

For over thirty years, through Populore Publishing, Rae Jean has dedicated herself to preserving people's stories in beautiful books. These include family histories, accounts of personal and professional achievements, memoirs, and reflections on the joys and hardships of life. But she also appreciates bringing children's books, poetry, novels, useful reference manuals, and the delightful "miscellaneous" to life.

Populore's staff, a small team who bring diverse experience and abilities to the job, can help shepherd you through the process of self-publishing. For hardcovers, paperbacks, or ebooks—elaborate or simple, short or long, small or large quantities—Populore can help.

The good folks at Populore are ready to listen and help you find just the right way to complete your project. Check out www.populore.com for information about Rae Jean's upcoming OLLI workshops and to see examples of Populore's work.

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For over **25 years**, **Beth Clark** has dedicated her career to the art of hairstyling, creating beauty, confidence, and meaningful connection for every guest she serves. Since becoming owner of Tonique's Trilogy Salon in 2013, she has transformed the salon into a thriving space rooted in education, creativity, and empowerment.

Beth is passionate about continual growth and has pursued advanced education in color, design, and modern techniques throughout her career. She believes excellence comes from never stopping learning — and from sharing that knowledge with others.

Beyond working behind the chair, Beth is deeply committed to mentoring and developing fellow stylists. She takes pride in helping beauty professionals build strong technical skills, business confidence, and fulfilling careers. Under her leadership, Tonique's Trilogy Salon has cultivated a collaborative culture where artists support one another and guests receive an elevated, personalized experience.

For Beth, success is measured not only by beautiful hair, but by the confidence she instills in both clients and the professionals she mentors. Through dedication, education, and heart, she continues to make a lasting impact in Morgantown's business and beauty community.

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Shannon's passion for fair trade began 30 years ago while working for a fair trade company in her hometown of Pittsburgh, PA. That passion grew when she moved to California and continued working in the fair trade field until relocating to Morgantown in 2010. Realizing there was no place to purchase fair trade items in her new hometown, she opened River Fair Trade in 2016. She loves being part of the downtown community and continuing her mission to make fair trade accessible to all.

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Founded in the 1980s by mystery author David A. Stelzig, the Appalachian Gallery early on became a site for showing and promoting art created by West Virginians. When Laurie Nugent and Penelyn Van Orange took the reins in 2004, they expanded the offerings with handblown glassware by Blenko and Ron Hinkle Glass. Together with unique stoneware pottery, wooden bowls and ironwork, and a host of typical Appalachian gift objects, handmade jewelry, and printed staples that reflect the soul and spirit of West Virginia. As the business grew, the owners, thanks to an art-loving community and the enduring support from many local artists like Frank Ceravalo, Jeff Greenham, T. Anne Hawkins, Tom Milne, Robert Riffe, and Steve Pavlovic, expanded their displays and offerings greatly. The colorful, bold, and unique stained-glass creations of Penelyn Van Orange and her finely framed prints and cards quickly became a hallmark of the Appalachian Gallery. In 2011, the Appalachian Gallery moved to its current location, the "Sandcastle" building on Walnut Street. The elegant and unique structure with hand-carved oak features and stained-glass windows provides an exquisite showcase for the many treasures visitors can find on the two spacious floors of the gallery. The owners hard work paid off: Today, the Appalachian Gallery is the leading commercial art gallery in Monongalia County, providing an eclectic mixture of drawings, painted and stained-glass art, and vintage glass objects on display. And their professional framing services preserve the customers art, memorabilia, and achievements with impeccable style and function. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the gallery continued to be a staple to its customers, friends, and supporters in downtown Morgantown, opening six days a week with a strict mask and social distancing policy. Nevertheless, the community suffered a loss with Laurie Nugent's passing in the Spring of 2022. Appalachian Gallery held a memorial to honor her legacy, which will always be part of the organizations DNA.



As the sole owner and operator of the Appalachian Gallery, Penelyn VanOrange now stays on the course she and her partner set: To grow the local artists reach and exposure and familiarize visitors to the gallery with creations, techniques, and means of expression of the creative minds of the Mountain State.



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Rachel Babb



Morgantown Native Rachel Babb, owner of Honey Salon and Honey Bridal (2x winner of Best of WV Weddings) is ambitious in achieving one goal: to elevate the beauty industry from both the stylist and client perspective. She works hard to create a value-driven environment where stylists and clients can feel truly seen.

This means providing what the industry often lacks - work/life balance, continuing education, and collaboration over competition.

For clients - it's a judgment-free zone, a place where beauty is enhanced and confidence is restored. As a small business owner, Rachel is committed to growth.

She's currently enrolled in Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Business Program, has been mentored by industry leaders, and is an active member in the Mountaineer Chapter of Business Network International. She firmly believes success doesn't happen in isolation - it's inevitable when communities come together in support.

All her efforts culminate in a salon experience that's welcoming, empowering, and one you'll want to be part of. Check out Honey on IG @honeywvsalon or learn more at honeywv.com



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Leah Michael

is the founder and owner of Sudsberry, a handcrafted bath and body company known for gentle skincare and fun, sensory-friendly bath products.

A graduate of Fairmont State University, she holds two Bachelor of Science degrees in Business Administration with a concentration in Human Resource Management and Information Systems Management.

Inspired by her two children's struggles with eczema, Leah began formulating products to better support sensitive skin.

What started as a personal solution soon grew into a thriving business. Sudsberry has been voted "Best of Harrison County" for six consecutive years. Beyond her business, Leah is active in her community as a cheer coach and serves on the board of the Clarksburg Farmers Market, where she helps support and promote local small businesses.



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Leading Ladies

In honor of **National Women's History Month**

Presented by **The Dominion Post**



Stephanie K. Lemley

BROKER/OWNER, REALTOR, GRI, ABR, GREEN, C2EX, MRP, SRS

After obtaining her Broker's license in 2022, Stephanie fulfilled a lifelong dream by opening her own real estate company, Mountain Ridge Realty. With decades of sales experience, she skillfully guides buyers in finding their ideal homes and helps sellers navigate the often-complex selling process with confidence.

Stephanie has been licensed in real estate since 1997 and is a Graduate of the REALTOR® Institute (GRI). She also holds the designations of Accredited Buyer's Representative (ABR®) and Seller Representative Specialist (SRS), reflecting her commitment to providing expert service to both buyers and sellers at every stage of the real estate transaction.

In addition to selling real estate, Stephanie serves as a property manager for Morgantown-based rental company Dorsey & Kiger Rentals. She is also the long-term owner of Lemley & Associates, an insurance agency in Morgantown, which she has successfully operated for over 25 years.

Stephanie's extensive experience of real estate, property management, and insurance allows her to offer clients well-rounded knowledge and trusted guidance throughout the buying and selling process.

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As an experienced real estate professional, Gayla will provide you with an outstanding selling or buying experience. Gayla grew up in Sioux Falls, SD, and has lived in many different parts of the United States and Australia. Country roads took her home to Morgantown, WV, where she has settled for the last 30 years with her husband and two daughters.

Gayla knows about change and is committed to guiding her clients smoothly and happily through their entire real estate transaction. Continuing her commitment to her career and clients, Gayla also remains active on the Morgantown Board of Realtors, where she has served as President and Treasurer, as well as various other committees. Whether you are a buyer who needs help researching the market or a seller who needs help in pricing, preparing your home for showing, or targeting a specific market through advertising and open houses, Gayla will never leave a detail overlooked. Call her and see what a difference a commitment to excellence makes.

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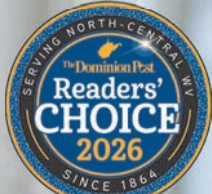
Deanna graduated from Fairmont State College in 1990, where she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Criminal Justice and Psychology. Throughout her years of employment, she has continued her training and education by attending multiple seminars, classes, and other training coursework relevant to mental health, substance abuse, suicide prevention, family counseling, parenting skills, child neglect and abuse, adult sexual abuse, domestic violence, etc. She is certified in Childfirst (RATAC) forensic interview model from the WV Prosecuting Attorney's Institute.

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Sherri A. Lowther, Broker/Owner, Sherri ranks as one of the leading professionals as a result of her remarkable work in the Real Estate industry.

Sherri has been working in the Real Estate industry since 1997. During her educational career, Sherri earned a Bachelor's degree in Finance from WVU. She also has the Graduate of Realtor Institute certification (GRI). Sherri is a member of the West Virginia Association of Realtors and a past WV State Board of Director in 2001. She has served the Morgantown Board for several years and was past President in 2001. She has been the recipient of numerous awards on the local and national levels, including Jane R. Labys Community Service award in 2000 and Realtor of the Year in 2001. On the national level, she won the National Sales Award for 2003, 2004, and 2005, that recognizes exceptional performance as one of the leading residential real estate professionals in America. Sherri was awarded the International Sterling Award through Coldwell Banker in 2016-2025, for being one of the top producers in the country.

Sherri has routinely demonstrated the vision, dedication, and diligence necessary to be successful in the business world. She is proud to be the Broker of a Alliance Realty. As Broker, she is dedicated to providing clients with the most-enjoyable experience of buying or selling a home, while developing long-term relationships that consistently exceed the expectations of her associates, clients, and community.



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Sherri A. Lowther
Broker/Owner

EDUCATION

Lindsay Smalls

Women's
History Month



Out of this world: Westwood teacher, business owner keeps it all in balance

BY BEN CONLEY

BConley@DominionPost.com

MORGANTOWN – Organized chaos. Structured disorder.

Whether she's in the classroom contemplating the reckless dance of the cosmos with a group of super-charged sixth-graders, or the barroom contemplating the questionable dancing of a beloved regular-turned karaoke aficionado, Lindsay Smalls thrives in the narrow gap between order and bedlam.

Hers is the hand adding and taking away the tiny counterweights that keep the scale in balance – loose enough to make things fun and keep everyone engaged; grounded enough to keep the whole thing from shambling to pieces.

And as both a science teacher at Westwood Middle School and half the husband-and-wife team behind Chestnut Street's Pour Choices Pub & Grub, she's developed a deft touch in that regard.

"I think the organized chaos that I call my classroom does help me with the organized chaos of the bar because they're very similar," Smalls said, laughing. "You're dealing with children who sometimes are weirdos and do crazy things. I like to make jokes and I'm pretty sarcastic about stuff. I do that in both environments and I think I do it pretty well in both. You've got to smile and you've got to laugh and joke with people. That's how you build relationships."

When it comes to feeling at home chatting it up in a bar environment, Smalls gets it honestly.

Her father is Morgantown folk hero Al Bonner, longtime proprietor of Greenmont's venerable Gene's Beer Garden.

The teaching? Not so much – at least not right away. "To be honest, I didn't want to get into education. I was really back-and-forth with it at first," Smalls said, explaining she initially graduated from WVU with a degree in journalism/public relations.

But once again, there was family to consider.

It was following the birth of her first child that the decision was made to return to school for a graduate degree in elementary education.

"I guess I really always knew I had a passion for teaching," she said. "I've had some awesome mentor teachers over the years. My aunt was a teacher. My mom was a substitute when we were in school. My younger sister is a teacher in Florida. My godmother is a teacher. All of these people have been influential in terms of my family."

For the last 15 years, Smalls has made every effort to be that same kind of influence for her students.

"I go out of my way for school. I find ways to get my students involved in as much extra stuff as we can. We worked with NASA on the Plant the Moon competition. We've worked with National Geographic this year. I try to seek these things out because I want my kids – and I call them my kids because they are my kids – I want them to see, even if they're not really interested in it, that there are other things outside of West Virginia. There are so many experiences in the world," she said. "I guess I'm tooting my own horn, but I just don't feel



Ron Rittenhouse/The Dominion Post

Lindsay Smalls poses recently for a photo in her Westwood Middle School classroom.

like they get that without someone going out and finding things to get them more exposure to stuff. I try to get them as much information as I can. If I don't know, I tell them I don't know and we figure it out together."

Science wasn't the subject Smalls selected. It just happened to be the position that was available when she chose to devote herself fulltime to the classroom.

The stars aligned.

"When they said it was science, I was excited. I love space. I love space science. I love talking about the history of the space race and everything that's gone on. I had a passion for that. When I was in school, I always loved science," Smalls said. "I knew that I could kind of shape it to be what I wanted it to be. And I've definitely developed and created my own style in how I run my class and what I think is important."

Like making sure all students know life-changing contributions to science and technology have been made by men and women of all races and nationalities.

"We do Black History Month. We put female scientists up and female inventors. When we do projects, I tell the class, we're not just doing the main characters. I want them to pick the woman who was maybe left to the side, or this person who may be lesser known. I feel like it's important that our kids see women and minorities in science throughout history. I'm not shoving it down their throats. It's just part of my curriculum," she said. "I mean, my husband is African-American. I have two mixed-race kids. I want them to see all aspects of everything, so that's how I treat my classroom."

That's also how she and her husband, Jamel, run their business, which opened in August 2024 with the goal of being a, "small, divy bar that we could make our own."

"Our motto is, 'Where friends meet,'" she said. "We get everything. We have board games. We have a huge crowd for karaoke. We'll have students drop their parents off here when they come to town before they go up to High Street. We'll have families come in on Saturdays and get hot dogs and play games. We're not trying to be a club or anything like that. We just like to have a good time – good music, food, that kind of thing."

Even so, Smalls admits she's not exactly a chip off the Bonner block behind the bar.

"I'm different from him. I'm a little more, I want to say, mouthy, I guess," she laughs, referencing her father.

"He's like the friend to everybody, and that's really how my husband is, too. They want to help out. They'll do anything. They'll give you the shirt off their back," she said. "It's nice that my husband and I have kind of teamed up together to do this because we really balance each other out, I guess. My husband is the inspiration and ideas behind everything and my teacher background kind of helps with keeping things in order and keeping everything in line with bookings and party rentals and bookkeeping, stuff like that."

"It's just a good time," she said. "And really, whether it's at school, the bar, whatever, I just want everybody to feel comfortable and included."



Lindsay Smalls, sixth-grade science teacher at Westwood Middle School, works on a science problem with her students. In the photo, from left, are Dominic Cottingham, Smalls, Pearl Swanger, Kayden Snow, Addison Lanham, Maggie Mapel, Anniyah Paugh and Maddie Roberts.

Leading Ladies

In honor of **National Women's History Month**

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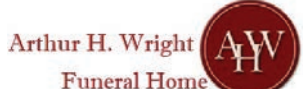


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Field Funeral Home
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Jennifer and her husband, Jerry, own and operate the Field Funeral Home in Masontown and the Arthur H. Wright Funeral Home in Terra Alta. We have been serving the families of Preston County since 2004 in our Masontown location and since 2015 in our Terra Alta location, which also recently celebrated the 130th year of faithfully serving our community. We offer traditional burial services, cremation services, memorial services and pre-arrangement services.

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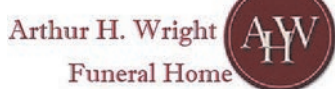


Denise K. Howdershelt

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Denise has been employed with Field Funeral Home for over ten years and recently finished mortuary school and obtained her funeral director's license. She is a lifelong resident of Preston County and is an asset to our funeral home family. We offer traditional burial services, cremation services, memorial services and pre-arrangement services.

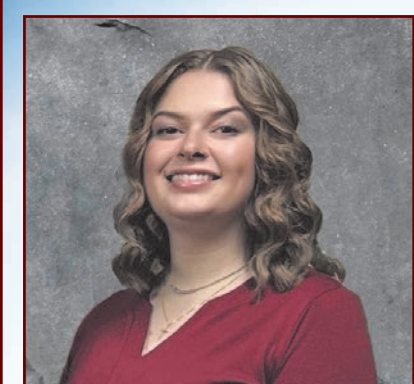
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Harleigh Wildesen

Funeral Director
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Harleigh has been employed and served her apprenticeship with Field Funeral Home and Arthur H. Wright Funeral Home. She recently finished mortuary school and obtained her funeral director's license. She is a compassionate director and monument designer that makes beautiful long-lasting tributes to the families that we serve. We offer traditional burial services, cremation services, memorial services and pre-arrangement services.

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Assisted Living Community



Alice Bissett, LPN Unit Manager, Wishing Well Assisted Living Alice Bissett, LPN, is the Unit Manager at Wishing Well Assisted Living, where she leads her nursing team with compassion, clinical excellence, and unwavering dedication to resident-centered care. With 20 years of experience as a licensed practical nurse, Alice specializes in geriatric care, chronic disease management, and long-term care operations. Under Alice's leadership, her team has consistently achieved outstanding results, including multiple successful state surveys with zero deficiencies. She has also guided Wishing Well Assisted Living to win two prestigious "Best Assisted Living" awards, recognizing the community's exceptional quality of care and resident satisfaction. Alice is known for her strong clinical judgment, positive team culture, and deep commitment to ensuring every resident lives with dignity, respect, and joy. She remains passionate about creating a true "home-like" environment where seniors and their families feel supported, loved and valued every day.



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Sabrina Ulrich

Advertising Manager



Since joining The Dominion Post team as an Advertising Account Executive in November 2020, Sabrina took on the challenge of crafting compelling advertising narratives that resonate in both print and the digital realm. Every day, she is driven by the belief that every message holds the power to leave an indelible mark. This foundation has been the cornerstone of her success in the dynamic field of advertising.

Graduating from West Virginia University in 2012, Sabrina has accumulated over a decade of experience in sales and client relations, primarily in the Morgantown and Clarksburg areas. Her passion for sales lies in the connections she forges with people and the fascinating stories she encounters, making every day a unique adventure.

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Barbara Miltenberger Green

Barbara is a graduate of Monongalia County Schools and graduated with two degrees from WVU. She taught music in many different schools, retired as a band director, and was honored to be chosen as the Randolph County, WV Teacher of the Year in her last year of teaching. Many of her family members are also teachers. Barbara is running to help keep Mon County Public schools the best in the state.

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Mon County Board of Education
Paid for by: Barbara Miltenberger Green for WV

ENVIRONMENT

Lynn Castro

Women's History Month

Wanting to make a difference, Castro lands at Monongalia County Solid Waste Authority

BY BEN CONLEY

BConley@DominionPost.com

MORGANTOWN – You never really know where the twists and turns of life will lead you.

Take Lynn Castro, for example. With a background in public health education, Castro always wanted to invest her time improving the lives of others through knowledge and understanding. What she did not envision is that she would one day do that as director of the Monongalia County Solid Waste Authority.

Castro was in her 50s in May 2019 when a medical emergency changed her circumstances, ultimately leading her to apply for a temporary, part-time book-keeper position with MCSWA.

“Basically, I needed a part-time job where I could sit down. I went to the interview and honestly didn’t even really think about it being the solid waste authority. I just thought it’ll be QuickBooks and I’ll be sitting. It’s something I can manage while I’m recovering,” Castro said.

What she didn’t realize at the time is that the part-time office manager conducting the interview was otherwise retired and ultimately waiting to hand the reins of the organization off to the right person.

Needless to say, “I showed up and we hit it off,” Castro explained.

“Once I sat down in the job, I started to realize there was all this stuff that I could do to help the board. I just kept at it, and more opportunities presented themselves the longer I was there,” she said.

It wasn’t long until Castro was the part-time office manager. Then she became the part-time director (similar job, different title). As of July, funding allowed the MCSWA Board of Directors to offer Castro full-time hours.

“No,” Castro says immediately when asked if she would have ever envisioned running a solid waste authority. “Now, of course, I love it because there’s so much to do to help not only the board and the solid waste authority, but help the residents in the county learn about all these different things they can do to help the environment, keep our area healthy and reduce the amount of waste going into the landfill.”

Solid waste authorities were formally established as public agencies in every West Virginia County on Jan.

1, 1989, for the purpose of developing comprehensive programs for solid waste collection and recycling.

The size and activity of solid waste authorities vary based largely on revenue.

At one point in time, the Monongalia County Solid Waste Authority serviced and collected its own recycling drop sites around the county. It even built and staffed a brand new sorting station in the Morgantown Industrial Park for a brief time.

That all changed in January 2015 when the board voted to cease recycling operations indefinitely after a confluence of factors brought about the rapid financial demise of the authority.

Today, Castro works alongside the board as a one-woman operation.

“In the time I’ve been there, essentially we haven’t been in a position to try to hire anybody else because there just isn’t the funding,” she said. “When they had the recycle center, that was a revenue-generated system. By the time I arrived, we didn’t have that, and we were just using the resources we get from landfill assessment fees.”

Castro said she strives to make the most of the resources available by focusing on outreach and events, all for the purpose of education.

Different topics, same goal.

“Sometimes I think, ‘I can’t believe this is what I’m telling people about, latex paint, toxic waste, light bulbs. The health education piece, I knew I’d always do that or teach or educate, but environmental sustainability is just not what I expected,’” she said. “But I’ve always wanted a job where I was making a difference. When you go into health education and public education, you’re essentially wanting to make a difference, however that is – teaching students or residents, or colleagues in training. In this job, I’m constantly in awe of all that I’m learning and how much residents want to learn. They’re very interested and they really want to make a difference by cutting back on what they send to the landfill.”

While recycling remains a priority, Castro said she’s made an effort to expand the authority’s educational effort to include projects and information sessions on topics like composting, waste reduction and water source protection.



Submitted photo

Lynn Castro

“We’re a resource. We try to build partnerships with other organizations. Pretty soon, West Virginia Women Work is creating a shed for our compost demonstration site. But that’s kind of what solid waste authorities do, which is a lot, honestly. Each one is a little bit different, but they’re constantly trying to educate the public and reach the public, and do as much as they can to promote recycling and keeping stuff out of the landfill. I’m a one-woman show, but that’s not just me. There are a lot of solid waste authorities with just one person. Some don’t have anybody. They just have their board. And so we’re all doing the best we can with the resources we have.”



Submitted photo

Lynn Castro never envisioned her path would lead her to being the director of the Monongalia County Solid Waste Authority.



Photo courtesy of WVU Public Health

Lynn Castro, left, works at Monongalia County’s first electronic recycling event with Shaelee Nelson.



Submitted photo by Eve Faulkes

Lynn Castro distributes Mon County SWA yearly calendars at an event at the Repair Cafe in 2024.

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GOVERNMENT

Charlene Marshall

Women's History Month



Empathy is the way for all for Marshall

BY JIM BISSETT

JBissett@DominionPost.com

MORGANTOWN – She didn't really say much in the immediate moments after the city council meeting broke that night. In the time it took her to walk to her car, however, Charlene Marshall had gotten herself good and riled. How do ya like that? Wouldn't even talk to me. She would go on to be elected to Morgantown City Council, where she was eventually appointed mayor – the first Black female then to rise to that position in any municipality in the Mountain State, in fact. Multiple terms in the West Virginia House of Delegates would follow. However, on this particular evening, at this particular meeting, she was Charlene Marshall, citizen. She had started going to meetings by then. She was getting to know who was on council, by then. She was getting into local issues, by then. Marshall and her husband, Rogers, had concerns about some things that were unfolding, in her neighborhood and on her street. They were thinking about their kids, and everyone's kids. Marshall hadn't signed up to speak that night. Those issues she was worrying over weren't on the agenda. And when she tried to ask her councilor some questions after the person elected to represent her district blew past – Well, that's rude – without even a nod. There were things that needed to be addressed and all she got was ... dismissed. "That's when I started thinking maybe I should run."

PERSONAL HISTORY, EVERYONE'S HISTORY

Eve Faulkes, the graphic artist and community activist who has worked with Marshall on several issues since, is unabashed in her admiration. "Charlene has lived this epic life," her friend said. "She's Black history and West Virginia's labor history. She's everyone's history. She's going into her 90s and she isn't done yet." As Faulkes sees it, Marshall didn't kick down any doors of racism. Not necessarily. She simply opened them and walked through – with grace, dignity and determination. At the old Sterling Faucet plant in Sabraton, Marshall was a political pioneer, even before city council and state office. The capable, hard-working employee made shop steward, and she was the first Black female to hold that post also. Don't think people didn't notice. But they quickly began noticing something else. Marshall was their voice, they found out, and that was all there was to it. If that overtime you were approved for didn't show up on

your paystub, you went to Charlene. If your floor supervisor was simply being unfair or unreasonable, you by God went to Charlene. For her, it wasn't about gender or pigment. It was about people. And growing up in the Osage coal camp at Scotts Run near Morgantown had everything to do with it, she said.

TRAGEDY (AND SHARED TRAJECTORY)

Osage was a miner's melting pot during north-central West Virginia's coal peak. Everyone was from somewhere else. There were Black families up from Alabama, Italians over from Calabria and whites from across Appalachia. And everyone was equal in Osage. Especially if you were a kid in Osage. That's because everyone's dad looked the same at the end of the shift – covered in coal dust – after emerging from the maw of the mine. Charlene was 5 when her father, Charlie Jennings died in an accident underground. She was a teenager when her stepfather, Ollie Crawford, perished in a cave-in. Her mother, Christina – everyone knew her as "Missie" – weathered on after both tragedies, keeping the household going for Marshall and her siblings – even if the widow's pension then was a paltry \$30 a month. Children of miners who were killed on the job got \$5 a month. Those benefits were increased, but only because the United Mine Workers of America wouldn't stop raising holy hell. "That's when I started paying attention to unions," the once-and-future shop steward said. She always paid attention to matters of race, even with the cultural buffer that was Osage. Those photographs of Emmett Till's battered corpse in JET and the Black newspapers grabbed you by the shoulders and made you look, Marshall said – and it was just as wrenching with the four little girls of Birmingham. April 4, 1968, was a Thursday. In the Marshall household, Thursdays were even busier that spring. Marshall had a night class at West Virginia University on labor relations and went straight from work to campus that day of the week. A group of students came over as she was getting out of her car to tell her Martin Luther King Jr. had been gunned down in Memphis.

CONSIDER THE GIFT

When Marshall looks back on her life in public service, she is glad and grateful, she said, that she and her fellow lawmakers and policymakers have been able to work together, to help elevate West Virginians, Black and white.



The Dominion Post file photo

Charlene Marshall, known for her outreach as mayor in Morgantown and a state delegate in Charleston, received an honorary degree during the West Virginia University of Law during the 2015 Commencement.

Empathy and awareness, she said, should be everyone's twin North Star. Which is why, every couple of years or so, she immerses herself in her favorite book for a re-reading. "The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks" recounts the life of the Black woman and mother of five who died from cervical cancer in 1951, when cancer treatments and cellular research were still in the doorway of medical breakthroughs. Lacks' cells were harvested by doctors at Johns Hopkins, without her knowledge or permission while she was still alive and undergoing treatments. Her family didn't know either, and the 2010 book delves into how racism can shade medical research – which isn't lost on Marshall. But those wondrous cells got the last word, Marshall said. Those wondrous cells, she said, opened doors to the polio vaccine, in vitro fertilization and other medical advantages aiding in quality of life and the prolonging of life, even. Those wondrous cells, Marshall added, have even – they had to have – touched the lives of those in society who are simply the cruelest, vilest and most intolerant. "Why would you want to be so harsh and hateful, when you don't know what was done for you?"



Patricia Bunner

A Life of Range, Leadership, and Relentless Curiosity

Patricia Bunner's story is one of extraordinary breadth. Over five decades, she has built a career that moves confidently between law, public service, the arts, academia, and deep-rooted agricultural heritage. Her path reflects a rare combination of intellectual range, civic commitment, and generational stewardship.

A Multifaceted Professional Journey

Bunner's academic background spans an array of graduate and doctoral-level seminary degrees, paired with a long legal career in national banking, savings and loan regulation, and securities law. She has served as a lobbyist, a columnist for The Dominion Post, and Chair of both the New York State and New York City Consumer Mortgage Review Boards.

Her leadership roles extend across decades of political and civic involvement, including long-standing service within the Democratic National Committee and 54 years of membership in the National Federation of Democratic Women, where she has received multiple awards and appeared as a guest speaker at the 2025 National Convention.

She has also held positions such as:

- Secretary of the Monongalia County Development Authority
- President of the United Taxpayers Association
- President of the Monongalia County Democratic Women
- Elected member of the West Virginia State Democratic Executive Committee (14th Senatorial District)
- Member of the Monongalia County Democratic Executive Committee

A Creative and Artistic Thread

Before her legal and policy career took center stage, Bunner spent several years as a jazz pianist and member of the Musicians Union in Washington, D.C. (1979–1982). She is also a published writer of fiction and poetry and a lifelong supporter of the arts and humanities.

Her academic and creative affiliations include Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Alpha Delta (Law), Phi Alpha Theta (History), Zeta Phi Eta Speech Fraternity, the History of Science Society, and the International Society for the Study of the History and Philosophy of Biology, as well as other academic and literary memberships

A Lifetime of Membership and Service

Across 50 years, Bunner has participated in an extensive list of professional, civic, and environmental organizations, including:

- U.S. Supreme Court Bar; United Arab Emirates Bar
- Admitted to practice in 9 states
- MacArthur Foundation Board
- Touchstone Guild, Society of St. James
- League of Women Voters (40+ years)
- Sierra Club life member
- NRA (50-year life member)
- Farm Bureau (30 years)
- Conservation International (consultant and member)
- Americans United for Separation of Church and State
- Music Teachers of America
- National Christian Ministers Association Ordained Unitarian Universalist
- WVU Alliance for Women's Studies and BPW Boards
- Morgantown Women's Club, Board, serving alongside Hazel Ruby McQuain and Vivian Michael
- Member of Morgantown Area partnership (chamber)

A Legacy Rooted in the Land

Bunner is the owner and steward of Antioch Farm, also known as the John Keck Farm, a 235-acre property established by Revolutionary War land patent. The farm has remained in continuous operation by the same family for more than 234 years. She is the great-great-granddaughter of John Keck II and Catherine Devine, continuing a lineage of land stewardship that spans generations, and preserves traditional ecological knowledge.

Current Roles and Candidacies

- Bunner is currently a Democratic candidate for:
- West Virginia House of Delegates, District 77
 - Democratic Congressional Committee
 - Senatorial District Committee
 - West Virginia Democratic Executive Committee, District 2

HEALTH CARE

Betty Puskar

Women's
History Month



Puskar: 'If you have the resources to help and you don't ... shame on you'

BY JIM BISSETT

JBissett@DominionPost.com

MORGANTOWN – When she wasn't brushing tears, Jorie Ftorek was gripping that steering wheel like a 9-iron – as she motored through one snow squall after the other during a tense, 6-hour, nonstop drive from Binghamton, N.Y., to Morgantown.

"I knew the work they did here," the former pro golfer told *The Dominion Post* in 2017.

"I knew Betty. That's why I wasn't going anywhere else."

She was referring to Betty Puskar, the Morgantown benefactor whose name by then was synonymous with women's health across West Virginia and the region.

During a self-examination, Jorie had discovered a lump on her breast. She picked up her phone, packed a bag and got into her car.

She saw a familiar figure waiting for her as she rolled up in front of the Betty Puskar Breast Care Center on the Evansdale medical campus at West Virginia University.

"You're gonna be OK, honey," the center's namesake said as she wrapped Jorie in a hug and spoke soothingly in her not-quite Tidewater accent.

"You're right where you need to be."

HOW LUCKY CAN AN UNLUCKY PERSON BE?

For 35 years, Betty put her health – and her empathy and altruism, too – out there for all women and all of West Virginia to see.

On Halloween 1985, she found herself in the middle of her own horror movie. She could identify with Jorie's fear.

Because that's when Betty found a lump.

An unsmiling oncologist came in with the X-rays and the charts and the diagnosis that changed everything.

Metastatic breast cancer.

They gave her a year. Maybe three, if she was lucky. They said it without irony.

TEXAS (DEEP IN THE HEART)

In a material sense, Betty was "lucky," however. That was the thing.

Her then-husband was a business magnate whose Mylan Pharmaceuticals generic drug company put Morgantown solidly in the arena of international commerce.

Milan "Mike" Puskar bought his wife an airplane ticket to Texas and the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, which was then one of the top treatment centers in the country for the dread disease.

Betty soldiered on, but the aggressive experimental regimen employed by the doctors in Texas was as tough as the cancer.

She was gaunt and bald from chemotherapy. She was weak and nauseated.

And very much afraid – though her seatmates on the plane and people she chatted with at the ticket counter never knew.

When her wig grew too hot and scratchy, she'd simply take it off her head and plop it onto her lap mid-conversation, punctuating the wardrobe change with her signature smile.

After a few months, she grew too wracked from the chemo to travel. That's when she started thinking about this business of luck.

Houston came to her. Her husband arranged for a chartered plane, which regularly flew the life-saving chemotherapy drugs to Morgantown Municipal Airport. Which set her to thinking.

Yes, she was quite ill. she said. Yes, she was dying, she said.

But so were a lot of other women in West Virginia, she mullied, as breast cancer does exact a terrible toll here.

And how many of them, she wondered, could afford the experimental treatments in Texas and the plane rides for appointments – not to mention the additional air deliveries of the medications that were (barely) helping her maintain?

Garnett and Gladys Howard's little girl already knew the answer.

ONE ROOM AT A TIME

Betty and her six brothers and sisters grew up in a house without running water in rural Virginia: Snake Run, near Covington, which is just about 20 minutes from Greenbrier County in West Virginia.

Garnett and Gladys did what they could, with a caveat. If you wanted something extra, they told their kids, like, say, that Daisy B.B. gun or nifty Zenith transistor radio, you'd better be prepared to mow a lawn or clean out a barn or something for the cash needed. You're on your own, there.

Betty waitressed, did secretarial work and operated the looms at a local textile mill as she paid her way through business school.

She was behind the lunch counter when Mike Puskar came in for a meal. He was setting up the first incarnation of his company in an abandoned roller rink in White Sulphur Springs. He was smitten, and asked her out.

Years later, when the cancer bent her to her bed in Morgantown, she made her imagination get a full-time job.

At the time, there were no standalone cancer treatment clinics in West Virginia. Not even Morgantown. So she built one. First, in her brain.

She wanted her Mountaineer sisters with the same diagnosis to have the same access and resources she had.

"I built the cancer center in my mind," she said, simply. She conjured the clinic, and placed it in Evansdale, where the other medical facilities were.

"On the days I was really down, I'd add another room."

When she finally emerged in remission from her treatment, she was armed with an edict: "Now I know what I want to do and what I'm going to do."

She put her marquee name to work, too. A first donation from her led to a tireless fundraising campaign.

Five years after her diagnosis, in 1990, the first patients began filtering through the doors.

Today, the West Virginia Cancer Institute includes the Mary Babb Randolph Cancer Center and Betty Puskar Breast Care Center.

Patients come from all 55 counties for hope and a fighting chance. Betty was 80 when she died at her home in Morgantown six years ago, but for Dr. Hannah Haz-



Submitted photo

Morgantown benefactor Betty Puskar turned a cancer death sentence into a fighting chance at life when she help found WVU's Betty Puskar Breast Care Center in 1990.

ard-Jenkins, it's like she's still here.

"As I often tell people, Betty Puskar was truly a hero for women in West Virginia," said Hazard-Jenkins, who is executive chair and director of the WVU Cancer Institute.

"She became a fearless and passionate advocate," the physician continued. "We were so fortunate to have this trailblazing woman helping change the face of cancer care in West Virginia."

AN EAGLE OF COMPASSION

Jorie Ftorek, meanwhile, got to know Betty through golf.

For 17 years, Betty was the face of the Betty Puskar Golf Classic, which was a Ladies Professional Golf Association tour stop at The Pines Country Club.

Jorie was a solid competitor in the LPGA then and consistently made the cut in Morgantown.

The golfers always got tours at the Betty Puskar Breast Care Center, where they were schooled on the importance of self-exams and early detection.

Sadly for Betty, Jorie died of a sudden heart attack in 2018.

But for 22 years, the golfer faithfully drove back and forth from Binghamton to Morgantown, keeping her appointments at the center with her friend's name out front.

If compassion were golf, Jorie said of the sport she played, Betty would be on the green in two – every time.

"She's the woman who saved my life," Jorie said.

Betty appreciated Jorie's friendship, but downplayed the praise.

"If you have the resources to help and you don't," she said, "then shame on you."



Betty, her daughter Johanna and grandson Kyle assemble in front of the bronze statue of her husband at Milan Puskar Stadium in Evansdale.

LEFT: Pro golfer Jorie Ftorek, left, poses with Betty for a snap at an awards ceremony. The two became friends over the years Jorie competed in the Betty Golf Classic, which was a stop on the LPGA tour for 17 years. When she found a lump on her breast, Jorie drove through a snowstorm from her home in New York state to Morgantown for treatment.



The facility that bears Betty's name is now part of WVU Medicine's extensive cancer treatment network.

SCIENCE

Women's
History Month

Dr. Michelle Richards-Babb



Mentors meaningful for Richards-Babb, her first-generation college students

BY ALISE CHAFFINS
For the Dominion Post

Being the first member of your family to attend college can be intimidating. Your parents can't offer advice on choosing classes, filling out the mountains of paperwork, or how to make it through your first year as a college student. First-generation students are more than twice as likely to drop out of school as their peers who have family members they can lean on. As someone who was a first-generation college student, Dr. Michelle Richards-Babb understands the struggles that these students face, and she works hard to eliminate as many of the obstacles between them and their degrees.

Richards-Babb is the Associate Chair of Undergraduate Studies in the Chemistry Department at WVU. But that wasn't always the plan. When Richards-Babb graduated from high school, she didn't go directly to college, but instead went to work with horses.

"I was really into horses, so I worked on some horse farms in Eastern Pennsylvania," she said.

"I wanted that to be my life. But it's really expensive, and I don't come from a wealthy family. And I realized quickly that wasn't going to work for me, and I just wasn't going to have the life I wanted. So, I went to college non-traditionally. I still worked at a horse farm, but I went to college in the evenings, and that's how I got started. I took all kinds of different classes. I think I started out thinking I was going to be an interpreter. I was going to go to Georgetown University and become a Russian interpreter, but that wasn't it."

As part of her desire to figure out what she wanted to study, Richards-Babb took a chemistry class, and that changed her life. "I did well, I studied hard. But at the end of the class semester, my professor wrote on my exam, 'If you ever get off the horse farm, you should consider a career in chemistry.' That really pushed me in the direction of chemistry, because someone believed in me."

That encouragement led her to a doctorate in chemistry from Lehigh University. She came to WVU as a Postdoctoral Fellow in 1993, eventually moving into a faculty position with research in chemical education, particularly the freshmen chemistry learning experi-

ence, undergraduate research, and STEM outreach. In addition to her work in the Chemistry Department, she is passing that hope on to students who were like her - first-generation college students.

One way that she does this is through work with the First2Network. Students who make it through their first two years of college are more likely to graduate than those who do not, so this organization offers support to rural, first-generation and low-income STEM students, making sure all can find success.

Through her work at First2, Richards-Babb has helped students not only succeed with their degrees but has also been able to create a way for them to be able to help others in similar situations. She told us, "I'm working with two first-generation students right now. They're chemistry majors, and one of them is really involved in the free tutoring we do here in Chemistry. They are also interested in going out into schools and talking about college life and what it's like. Letting students ask questions and then also selfishly, we talk about chemistry. We send out emails every two weeks to STEM students talking about all of the opportunities that they might be interested in."

In addition to her work with first-generation students, she has also run a number of summer classes geared toward undergraduate research.

"I was the director of The Office of Undergraduate Research for about six years. I created that office at WVU. I was really involved in a lot of things dealing with undergraduate research. Undergraduate research is a really big thing here at WVU now, those are the programs that we created. There were lots of disparate summer programs, but we created a symposium to bring all the programs together. I ran what's called the summer undergraduate research experience. It's a proposal that you write every three years, and you get funding from this state, and I ran that for quite a while."

As a woman in STEM, Richards-Babb wants to see women follow in her footsteps as well.

"I would say about half of our Chemistry majors are women and about half are men. Now, do they go on to be College professors? Probably not as many go that route, but I think the numbers are increasing. And the more women you can get in these leadership positions,



Submitted photo

Dr. Michelle Richards-Babb is the Associate Chair of Undergraduate Studies in the Chemistry Department at WVU.

in academia and such, the more amenable it is for other women to get in," she shared. "So, all of us working together makes things more positive and really supportive, which has been helpful. Getting more women in is really good, and then getting them to remain in STEM is even better, because we're here all supporting each other and working together."



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