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CONTENTS

BUSINESS

Blue Mountain K-9 -----	18
Blue Gold Development -----	9
Roman's Wellness Center -----	46

ECONOMY

Visit Mountaineer Country -----	4
WVU Athletics -----	24

ENERGY

Hope Gas -----	28
Mon Power -----	33

HEALTH CARE

Monongalia County Health Department -----	36
Vandalia Health -----	6
WVU Health System -----	38

INNOVATION

I-79 Technology Park -----	41
West Virginia High Technology Consortium -----	32
WVU Innovation Corporation -----	16

MUNICIPAL

Fairmont -----	13
Fairmont State -----	44
Morgantown -----	42
Morgantown Utility Board -----	40

PROGRESS

TRI STATE Business Journal

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Morgantown, WV 26505
304.296.6301
dominionpost.com

Editor

CANDACE WOLF
cwolf@dominionpost.com

Advertising Manager

Sabrina Ulrich

Contributors

Ben Conley
Benjamin Powell
Candace Wolf
David Beard
Jim Bissett
Spencer Ripchik



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West Virginia's Northern Star

Millions guided to Mountaineer Country in 2025

BY BEN CONLEY

BConley@DominionPost.com

MORGANTOWN –
“Who'da thunk?”

Visit Mountaineer Country CVB President and CEO Susan Riddle jokingly posed the question standing before the Monongalia County Commission during an April meeting.

Riddle was pondering aloud the idea that for everything on offer in the seven-county region that makes up West Virginia Tourism's Mountaineer Country region, it's what it lacks in some areas that

could make it a player in an emerging tourism frontier – the final frontier.

Call it a lightbulb moment ... or don't.

“This year, we even had international attention on our dark skies cabins at Coopers Rock that the state has done,” Riddle said, referencing the structures purpose-built for astrotourism – the travel trend focused on visiting areas with minimal light pollution for stargazing and photography.

For would-be visitors, the

initial five state-owned cabins are booked beyond the point of frustration ... right up to the point of opportunity.

The county, with its neighboring Chestnut Ridge Park, is considering getting involved, potentially in conjunction with an adjacent property owner who's already making plans.

“There is unmet demand there for that, folks,” Riddle said. “We need to be looking at capturing that unmet demand because you can't get into those cabins up there.

We've tried to do it, to do a giveaway. You just can't get in because there's not enough of them.”

And just as a growing number are tilting their eyes to the stars, millions are setting their gaze on Mountaineer Country – West Virginia's Northern Star – at least in terms of tourism.

Riddle ran through the numbers.

Based on data gathered through Placer.ai, a software that uses mobile data to track movement, Mountaineer



Country ranked tops in West Virginia for overnight stays and day trips in 2025.

The region – which includes Monongalia, Preston, Taylor, Barbour, Harrison, Marion and Doddridge counties – saw 4.2 million unique visitor trips in 2025, or roughly 295,000 visitors per month, on average.

“Visitors” are defined as persons traveling more than 50 miles to reach a destination.

All those numbers ultimately add up to big money.

According to the Visit Mountaineer Country CVB annual report, the total economic impact of tourism on

north-central West Virginia was just over \$309 million in 2025. Visitor spending was calculated north of \$830 million, supporting nearly 8,000 jobs.

Mountaineer Country generated \$1.8 million in lodging taxes over the same

12 months.

In simple terms, a lodging tax – sometimes called a hotel/motel tax – is up to 6% of the cost of lodging. Those taxes are split between the county or municipality and the area’s CVB.

While the Visit Mountain-

eer Country CVB represents the entire seven-country region, it receives lodging taxes from Monongalia, Preston and Taylor counties as well as Belington, in Barbour County.

“The impact of tourism across our region is real and measurable, from the local businesses and jobs it supports to the experiences that encourage visitors to stay longer, return often, and invest more deeply in our communities,” Riddle said, adding, “We see tourism as the gateway to residency.”

Ron Rittenhouse/The Dominion Post

The Wild Thread of High Street mural welcomes travelers crossing the South High Street Bridge to downtown Morgantown.

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expansion and growth, which has been four times over in the last decade.

“We lead with quality every day,” Lockwood said.

Keeping it healthy

Vandalia Health has been a proactive organization in terms of services, resources, finances and infrastructure.

Making sure the system’s buildings and programs are as “healthy” as its patients is key to Vandalia Health’s success, Atkinson said, highlighting the health system’s eye on efficiency and stewardship of resources.

Vandalia Health’s best practice and its “Why” of operation is “aligning ourselves with national standards,” Atkinson said. “All locations adhere to a standard level of care,” an assurance to West Virginians.



Courtesy of Vandalia Health
The Vandalia Health Mon Heart & Vascular Center cardiology team celebrates the completion of the 1,000th WATCHMAN procedure at Vandalia Health Mon Medical Center in Morgantown. Mon Medical Center is the first hospital in West Virginia to achieve this milestone.





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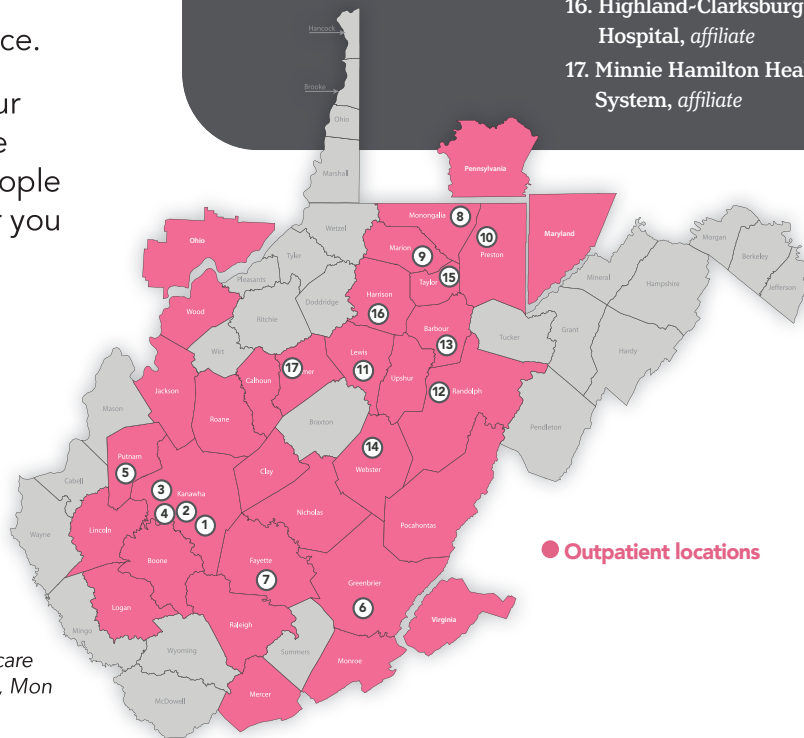
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Blue Gold Development builds foundations for growth

BY BENJAMIN POWELL
 BPowell@DominionPost.com

In Fairmont, a company rooted in hard work and precision is being recognized for shaping the region from the ground up.

Blue Gold Development LLC, led by co-owners Stephen Toth and Andrew Furbee, has been named West Virginia Blue-Collar Small Business of the Year by the U.S. Small Business Administration. The award highlights the company's rapid growth and impact across north-central West Virginia.

Specializing in large-scale excavation, demolition, concrete and mine services, Blue Gold Development plays a key role in building infrastructure

that supports communities and economic development. From municipal streetscapes to industrial parks and commercial sites, the company's work often lays the groundwork for future growth.

Founded on professionalism, quality workmanship and clear communication, the company has expanded from a small operation into a trusted partner for developers, municipalities and contractors throughout the region.

With more than 25 years of combined experience in heavy

civil construction, the team brings expertise in complex excavation, licensed demolition and abatement, and commercial concrete work. Their capabilities are supported by a

modern fleet of heavy equipment, allowing them to handle projects of varying scale while maintaining efficiency and reliability.

A strong safety culture is also central to the company's approach, with OSHA-compliant operations, ongoing training, and a focus on preventing incidents on every jobsite.

Toth said the recognition is especially meaningful given the company's history with the SBA.

"It's great recognition for our team," he said. "We worked with the SBA even before we started, and they've been a great partner throughout our journey."

He added that the company takes pride not only in its projects, but also in its role within the community through volunteering and giving back.

For Blue Gold Development, the award reflects both the company's success and its continued commitment to building stronger communities across West Virginia.



Photos courtesy of Blue Gold Development

Photo courtesy of Blue Gold Development



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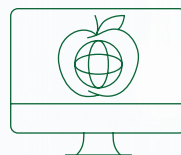
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Fairmont: Old economy meets new vision

BY JIM BISSETT

JBissett@DominionPost.com

FAIRMONT – Through the last days of the 19th century and into the 1970s, Fairmont was a full-on factory town.

There were the little plants stacked like LEGOs along the Beltline behind 12th Street on the West Side – and on the East Side, Speedway Avenue was the commercial artery that pulsed with Fairmont’s industrial, economic lifeblood.

Alcan Aluminum commanded the expanse along the heavily traveled thoroughfare, with S.M. Kisner and Sons, a sheet metal shop, and Owen-Illinois, the bottling company, right next door.

Just a couple miles down the road at the Speedway turnoff sat the sprawling Westinghouse Electric plant.

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, said plants operated.

On July 20, 1969, when Neil

Palatine Park is a lively spot in Fairmont for children’s play and music lovers’ enjoyment via the summer concert series.



Ron Rittenhouse/The Dominion Post

Motorists approach the city on the Fairmont Gateway Connector.



Armstrong made his one small step on the moon, the assembly line at Owens-Illinois stopped just long enough for employees to whoop and cheer as “The Star-Spangled Banner” played over the P.A. system.

Today, not one trace of the plant remains. S.M. Kisner has been shuttered for years. So has Westinghouse.

But the old Alcan plant is ready to launch a new trajectory for Fairmont’s economic mission.

On April 1 of this year, it was announced that Kibar Americas, a Turkish firm that does a global business in the rolled aluminum products industry, purchased the plant, which had only changed

hands once in its century of existence.

Kiber Americas COO Atilla Cetinel said the conglomerate was quite aware of the Marion County town’s work-ethic reputation.

“We see tremendous potential in the people and community,” the COO said.

People, for sure, Mayor Anne Bolyard said.

“Our residents have proven their resiliency time and time again,” the civic leader said. “Now, more than ever, we must band together, continue our investments in our community and charge ahead.”

The Kiber Americas acquisition has been part of a series of marketing initiatives taken on by the city over

past months.

Fairmont for generations saw its economic fortunes languish, while Morgantown to the north and Clarksburg to the south both prospered.

Now, into the 21st century, the factory town is ready to embrace new, mixed-used initiatives, City Manager Travis Blosser said.

That includes the retail-revamping of the Beltline: Through a matching grant from the state Department of Environmental Protection, Fairmont was able to demolish a large, former factory adjacent to East-West Stadium, to open a new branch of the rail-trail network that runs alongside.

Expansion plans include lacrosse and soccer fields for regional sporting events and spinoff apartment complexes and restaurants, which he said could naturally follow.

Momentum Park, which could open next fall, would be a Beltline centerpiece, with its climbing wall and skateboard

course.

Tax-increment financing and other money measures could bankroll projects to upgrade Fairmont’s aging stormwater and sewer systems, in keeping with the \$1 billion investment he’s projecting for that work by the year 2030.

“And no, I didn’t misspeak,” said Blosser, who grew up in Fairmont and Marion County. “That’s \$1 billion, with a ‘B.’”


Blosser likes the new emphasis on marketing he’s now seeing in the narrative of the city, and its citizens, these days.

“Slowly, but surely, we’re changing the narrative from ‘Why even try?’ to ‘Where do we start?’”



The Marion County Courthouse is a historic landmark in the county seat, Fairmont.



 **CELEBRATING PROGRESS**
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Alcan Aluminum once was part of the economic heartbeat of Speedway Avenue in Fairmont.

In year 4, WVU Innovation Corporation still growing

BY DAVID BEARD

For the Dominion Post

MORGANTOWN – Four years after taking over the former Mylan/Viatris factory and office space, WVU Innovation Corporation continues to grow.

Existing tenants such as GATC Health and EVAX are growing, while new tenants are coming in and WVUIC constantly courts more to fill the space.

“We’ve had a pretty good influx recently of startup companies,” said Vice President Erica Steratore. And some new WVU Medicine system tenants are moving in. WVUIC is up to 35 total tenants now.

Rob Snare, director of operations, said there are about 560 people on-site. That number will be about 750 by the end of this year and they’re projecting nearly 1,000 by the end of 2027.

“We continue to explore external tenants,” he said.

They’re looking to develop some lab space on one floor into shared space for up to 10 startups. These small startups, Steratore said, have limited resources. With access to an office and lab benches

and equipment on a fee-for-use basis, they could afford to pursue their research and their business goals.

Looking at WVU Medicine developments, Behavioral Health outpatient services will be consolidating on the fifth floor of the former factory side of the complex –

said. It makes things more efficient for Ruby and allows the labs to expand to handle the additional volume as the system recently acquired its 31st hospital.

The cafeteria space, Snare said, is a resource for businesses and the community. It’s available to rent out for

technology fields.

“We’re certainly trying to get more engagement with the K-12 events,” Steratore said.

One particular success story, Snare said, is the WVU Medicine Center for Nursing Education. There are two cohorts in school now and they’re taking applications for the third.

Anyone who’s walked through the giant maze of the former pharmaceuticals plant knows how easy it is to get lost. So they’re working on a wayfinding initiative – which will include signage for visitors to find their way and not lose hope of ever seeing daylight again.

Snare, who worked for Mylan for 12 years, recently attended an awards event where an award was given in the name of Mylan founder Milan Puskar. This led him to reflect

Submitted Photos



A symposium going on in the WVU Medicine Center for Nursing Education

giving it 46,000 square feet.

And three labs will be moving over from Ruby Memorial Hospital: cytology (the study of cells), cytogenetics (the study of chromosomes) and histology (the microanatomy of cells, tissues and organs).

“This makes a lot of sense to have them come out of Health Sciences,” Steratore

various functions.

The Bridging Innovation event at the end of April, for instance, brought two events to the cafeteria.

And the WVUIC hosts student events. They recently had more than 100 on-site where students heard from various tenants about job options in health sciences

on the revitalization of the building after the factory shut down.

“I really feel like he’s probably looking down on us, really thrilled with what we’re doing here,” he said, especially with the smaller startups, since Puskar started Mylan out of his car. “I take a lot of pride in that.”



WVU Innovation Corporation's new entrance



Construction of lab space for labs moving over from Ruby Hospital



WVUIC cafeteria



Lab space WVUIC will make available for startups



From service to success: Blue Mountain K-9 earns statewide recognition

BY BENJAMIN POWELL
BPOwell@DominionPost.com

What began as a retirement plan has grown into one of West Virginia's most recognized small businesses.

Andrew Pintus III, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran and former sheriff's deputy, is the owner of Blue Mountain K-9 in Morgantown, recently named West Virginia's Veteran-Owned Small Business of the Year by the U.S. Small Business Administration.

"I originally started this as kind of a retirement plan," Pintus said. "But it took off a lot quicker than I ever anticipated."

Located on Grafton Road, Blue Mountain K-9 offers boarding,

daycare and training services, with a focus on creating a one-stop destination for dog owners. The facility



features large fenced outdoor fields, indoor training spaces and dedicated areas for both group activities and individual care.

"I wanted this to be a place where people could come and get all of their needs met," he said. "Training has always been my passion."

Pintus brings more than 15 years of dog training experience, shaped by six years in the Marine Corps, including two overseas deployments, and 12 years in law enforcement. That background, he says, influences his approach.

"It's about structure, patience and building trust," he said.

Beyond training, Pintus emphasizes the broader impact his work has on the community.

"A lot of people are struggling with their dogs and don't know where to turn," he said. "If we can

help them understand their dog better, it improves their overall quality of life."

The SBA recognition also comes as the business continues to grow. Earlier this year, Blue Mountain K-9 expanded with a second location in the Cheat Lake area, made possible through SBA-backed financing.

As Pintus prepares to accept the award this spring, his focus remains unchanged.

"My goal has always been to create a place where people feel comfortable," he said. "Where their dogs are treated like family."

For more information, visit <https://www.bluemountaink9.com>.




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Owner Andrew Pintus III is seen training a German shepherd named Kaine inside Blue Mountain K-9's indoor training building, shown below.



Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post photos

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The right place, the right time

Baker continues to grow WVU athletics, while handling the pressure of the impact it has on the state

BY SPENCER RIPCHIK

SRipchik@DominionPost.com

On March 21, West Virginia women's basketball hosted the first round of the NCAA Tournament, which was the first time in 34 years. The Coliseum, Morgantown and West Virgin-

ia was a focus of the women's basketball world.

The NCAA logo was plastered all over the Coliseum, and hours before the game, the Coliseum had a line wrapped around the arena. The top sections of the arena were filled,

and down on the floor, the crowd was deafening.

"Let's go, Mountaineers."

Just a few minutes before the game, WVU's athletic director, Wren Baker, took photos with fans calling his name. After, with the whole Coliseum look-

ing down on the court, Baker looked around and took in the atmosphere.

"If it's a big game, and our student athletes need Mountaineer Nation behind them, they're going to be there," Baker said. "That's one of the things



An interior view of Hope Coliseum

Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post photos

that is really cool about this place.”

Baker was seeing in real time the product of his hard work, but it wasn't easy to get to that point. It's been stressful and time-consuming, especially being the athletic director of a program with the kind of impact that WVU has.

Baker hasn't been at WVU for long, either. He's come a long way since he was hired in 2022 after six years at North Texas. Baker's had to hire the right coaches and loads of them, raise money, spend it in the right places and put the programs in the right situation to thrive.

When Baker was first in the interview process, he didn't promise this NCAA situation for the Mountaineers. How could you? The program hadn't hosted in 30 years.

Baker interviewed over video call and then did an in-person interview in Atlanta. He took the job before visiting Morgan-

town and won the board over with a modern strategy, which was needed with the recent integration of the transfer portal and NIL.

“I probably talked the most that in a successful organization that you're constantly going through assessments of the people, the tools and the process,” Baker said. “Do you have the right people? Are you equipping them with the right tools? And that changes fairly regularly. Regularly, you have to evaluate those things, and that as we move into a new era of athletics, I would be in a constant state of evaluating those things. You have to.”

Baker took over the WVU athletic department at an interesting time in college athletics. The transfer portal and NIL had arrived, changing things drastically. College athletics became an “arms race,” as Baker called it, to increase revenue to build rosters to compete, especially in the Big 12, where

there are schools in Texas, who have access to a lot of money. Assessment was crucial to figuring out how to raise revenue.

When he was at North Texas, Baker, being a former coach, tried to go to at least one team's practice every day. Sometimes a couple in a day. At WVU, he still tries to get out to practices and still attends a majority of sporting events, but where he spends most of his time has shifted in this new era of college athletics.

Baker is more focused on sales and marketing of the athletic department to donors and companies to build rosters and be competitive in the Big 12, which is a top-four conference in most of the major sports.

“I think historically, I've spent more time than I do now on the team side, going to practice, traveling with the team, being around them, because I really enjoy that,” Baker said. “As the pressure on the business side to grow revenues

and expenses (increases), I think that part that you spend on the team side has shrunk considerably.”

Baker's been busy. He's hired numerous head coaches, which include some of the bigger revenue sports like football, men's and women's basketball and baseball. Men's basketball capped the season off by winning the Crown Tournament; baseball is positioned to make a run in the NCAA Tournament; and women's basketball had a historic year.

Baker also upgraded practice facilities and is working on a new Milan Puskar Stadium press box. He also worked in partnership with Hope Gas to sell the naming rights for the Coliseum.

With every decision, in the back of his mind, is the impact the athletic department has not only on Morgantown, but also on the state as a whole. West Virginia is one of the few states that doesn't have a professional team of any sort, and doesn't



A sold-out crowd packed Hope Coliseum on March 21 for the first round of the NCAA Women's Basketball Tournament.

have another Power Four school in its state. Marshall does exist and has Division 1 athletics, but it is not in a major conference.

WVU also contributes a lot to the local and statewide economy, which is why Gov. Patrick Morrisey is so involved in passing new legislation to help the athletic departments in the state.

“In West Virginia, like our state, the economy of our state is moved by a successful WVU athletic program,” Baker said. “Is it the only contributor? No. But it’s a substantial contributor... It contributes to the economy, and it brings eyeballs to the state and brings visitors in to help tourism. But also the more personal and passionate side of it all, just being the

state’s premier athletic program in a state with no pro teams and no other power conference teams. Just how strong our market share is and how much it means to people is a big draw.”

Baker is under a lot of pressure and is constantly reminded of being in charge of a machine that contributes so much to a town and a state. At North Texas, he wasn’t recognized. There are a lot more professional and collegiate teams to divide the state. In West Virginia, almost everyone knows Baker’s face, and they aren’t afraid to share their opinions on the state of the department.

“When I was at UNT, outside of the time I spent in the

office, I lived a fairly anonymous life,” Baker said. “Here, even if you wanted to distract yourself from the weight of it, you really can’t. Everywhere you go, it’s what people want to talk about. They know who you are, and they’re passionate fans. Whether it’s a thank you for something good that’s happened, or a question about something that’s going on, or in some cases, a complaint. In the state of West Virginia, virtually everybody has an opinion on WVU athletics.”

In a moment like the night of March 21, the pressure is kind of relieved for a moment. WVU athletics was making the state proud, even before the game tipped off.

After taking in the atmo-

sphere, Baker sat down in his seat, which was along the baseline. He watched the Mountaineers beat Miami (OH) to move to the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

“It is a pressure that you feel every day, but you also recognize it’s a privilege,” Baker said. “When you’re at a place that in two hours sells out a large arena for a women’s basketball opening round, like not very many places can do that. Most things in life, you don’t get to enjoy the positives of that and not take on the pressure that comes with it. I try to always balance that in my mind, anytime I’m reminded of just the impact that we have and the pressure of it all, what a great privilege it is to have that pressure.”



West Virginia’s Athletic Director Wren Baker gives his opening remarks before introducing the returning Rich Rodriguez on Dec. 13, 2024.

Hope Gas becomes ‘great’ partner, crucial for WVU athletics to compete

BY SPENCER RIPCHIK

SRipchik@DominionPost.com

West Virginia athletic director Wren Baker spoke at a Boy Scouts fundraiser in Parkersburg in 2025. Baker learned it was sponsored by Hope Gas. Baker’s daughter is a Type 1 diabetic, and at a fundraiser for that cause, there was a Hope Gas sponsorship. Everywhere Baker goes, he sees the Hope Gas logo.

“They’re everywhere,” Baker said. “I’ll take pictures sometimes and text them to Morgan O’Brien (CEO of Hope Gas) and be like, ‘Dude, is there anything you’re not sponsoring?’ They do a great job.”

In 2023, Hope Gas established a corporate headquarters right across from WVU’s campus. Three years later, the company made a historic splash, buying the naming rights to one of WVU’s oldest sporting venues, the Coliseum. On Sept. 25, the Coliseum, a 55-year-old venue, was officially called Hope Coliseum.

“The very first meeting I ever had with him, his charge to me was to think big,” Baker said. “And then whatever I thought thinking big was to think bigger than that. We immediately started thinking big in terms of both investment from Hope and our partnership, but also activation on our side, which ultimately included the Coliseum naming.”

There was some backlash from fans at the university because it’d been the Coliseum for the longest time, but WVU is trying to compete in a new era of college athletics. Baker is trying to surpass the \$20 million threshold of revenue sharing, and that number is supposed to increase by 4% over the next 10 years. The university also has to backpay athletes from 2016



WVU Athletics Director Wren Baker speaks during the Hope Coliseum press conference on Sept. 26

to 2024. This was all part of the \$2.8 billion NCAA v. House class action antitrust lawsuit that was settled last June.

Selling the naming rights and partnering with Hope Gas helped fulfill those requirements to stay competitive.

“I know that for some people, the name changing was a little bothersome at first, but it’s the world that we live in,” Baker said. “They’ve been a great partner. I think most people got it, understand it, and have come to terms with it.”

The partnership between Hope Gas and WVU is for 10 years, and O’Brien is continuously asking Baker how they

can help make the athletics department competitive in all sports.

“We have a contract that says they have to do a certain amount, and they continue to exceed that,” Baker said. “In fact, I don’t know that we’ve ever asked them for anything that they haven’t done.”

Besides the Coliseum and WVU, Hope Gas has had an impact on local athletics. The company sponsored the Morgantown and University High School’s MoHawk Bowl this season for football. The company also sponsored a high school basketball tournament in 2025.

Baker and WVU will look for

more partnerships and paths to new revenue outside of Hope Gas. WVU and Baker are in the early stages of the new press box for Milan Puskar Stadium, for which construction is expected to start after the 2026 football season. The NCAA just allowed colleges to have jersey sponsorships. Both of those will need a name on them.

Hope Gas will certainly be the conversation on those opportunities.

“Hope’s been a terrific partner,” Baker said. “From the first time that we met Morgan, he’s been a cheerleader for WVU. He’s been a supporter of WVU athletics.”

Hope Gas Morgantown Connector pipeline brings local gas to Morgantown

BY DAVID BEARD

For the Dominion Post

MORGANTOWN – The Hope Gas Morgantown Connector pipeline is bringing natural gas to Morgantown and boosting the area’s energy economy.

“The Morgantown Connector provides a variety of benefits to Hope’s customers and our business. Everything we do is to provide long-term benefits to our customers and communities,” Hope Gas told The Dominion Post.

Hope first sought state Public Service Commission permission for the project in September 2023. The pipeline was planned to run a total 30 miles from Wadestown in western Monongalia County eastward to the edge of Morgantown and then northwest to a site near Osage, at an estimated cost of \$177,437,169.

“The project is needed for Hope to maintain reliable natural gas service to its existing customers in the Morgantown area, and is not being undertaken to specifically serve a new customer or new customer project,” it said at the time.

The PSC granted permission in January 2024. Hope encountered opposition from landowners along the proposed right of way. Those

disagreements were settled in various ways and in May 2025, Hope provided a tour of some project sites to see them in various stages of development.

The Morgantown Connector is capable of handling 200,000 decatherms per day. A decatherm is a unit of heat energy equivalent to 1 million British Thermal Units of heat energy, according to various gas information sources.

Hope said, “This is enough to meet the current load requirements of Morgantown area homes, businesses and industry, and support future growth and economic development in the area. We have interconnect gas capacity to deliver 100% of the current requirements of Morgantown and areas beyond. We also can expand services when needed to meet economic development.”

And just as important, Hope said, the pipeline provides a redundant source of natural gas to serve customers in the area to avoid service disruptions.

“During the winter of 2024-2025, prior to the completion of the Morgantown Connector, there was a service issue from one of our providers that was impacting the delivery of natural gas,” Hope said. “At the time,

there was only one pipeline feeding gas into the area. Therefore, any issues had the potential of creating a large scale service disruption in Morgantown.

“With the Morgantown Connector,” Hope said, “we have more capabilities and redundancy. We can fully back up service in the event of an issue instead of being fully dependent on a single pipeline.”

And, with a new arrangement with Northeast Natural Energy, Hope Gas said, “The Morgantown Connector also provides our customers with more access to local production.”

Northeast – with offices in Charleston and Morgantown – announced the arrangement in March.

“There are areas of the country that do not have access to the natural resources we are blessed with here in West Virginia,” said Mike John, Northeast’s president and CEO, “and more that do not have the infrastructure in place that provides access to the energy needed to meet current demand, let alone the projected increase in demand that is being forecasted.”

“We are fortunate to be in a position where we have access to the energy our communities need,”

John said. “It takes teams of people working together to deliver this valuable resource – companies that produce the natural gas, companies that build the natural gas pipeline infrastructure, and companies that deliver the natural gas to the end users. With more projects like Hope’s Morgantown Connector pipeline, our industry can play an integral role in attracting future development to West Virginia and delivering energy to our neighbors who do not share our abundant resources.”

Since bringing the Morgantown Connector online, Hope Gas said, 90% of the easement/right of way has been fully reclaimed. And it is continuing to work on minor repairs to the remaining 10%.

Hope Gas is responsible for the ongoing maintenance of the right of ways such as mowing and cleaning the land, it said. “We are committed to the highest standards to ensure the right of ways remain visually appealing for our communities and beneficial for local wildlife.”

Ron Rittenhouse/The Dominion Post photo
A Hope Gas employee walks a right of way
near Mylan Park recently.



Photo courtesy of Hope Gas

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Site work underway for new NOAA supercomputer at High Tech Foundation park

BY DAVID BEARD

For the Dominion Post

MORGANTOWN – Site work is underway at the West Virginia High Technology Consortium campus in Fairmont for a new National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration supercomputer.

The high-performance computer system is called Rhea, named for the mythological Greek Titan – the daughter of Uranus and Gaia, and the mother of Zeus, Hera and Poseidon.

General Dynamics received \$99.3 million from NOAA through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to build Rhea, NOAA said. She will be installed in a new modular facility as part of NOAA's Environmental Security Computing Center at the High Technology Consortium campus.

NOAA noted that the environmental security computing center already houses the Hera high-performance computer.

At the time of the funding announcement, the U.S. Commerce Department said Rhea will add needed computing capacity for NOAA to expand critical research that supports the nation's climate resilience.

And it will strengthen NOAA's exploration and application of artificial intelligence and machine learning capabilities, which will ultimately improve weather, ocean and climate forecasting, ecosystem modeling and the use of satellite Earth observations to understand climate changes, Commerce said.

NOAA said Rhea features graphics processing units that will accelerate its use of AI/ML in such areas as monitoring marine life species, weather forecasting and modeling of specific environmental phenomena such as atmospheric rivers, fire weather, and hurricane intensification using Earth observations. The new computing capacity will also be used for weather and climate model development to improve drought, flood and wildfire prediction and forecasting.

The modular data center unit will house Rhea, storage, networking and switches, and be connected to the current high-performance computer center at NESCC, NOAA said. The project represents a novel approach to expanding HPC and provides



Site work is underway at the West Virginia High Technology Consortium campus in Fairmont for a new NOAA supercomputer.

David Beard/For the Dominion Post

room for several additional modular data centers to be added in the future to further expand computer speed and power for NOAA and other federal and private partners.

The computer's installation will strengthen NOAA's partnership with the West Virginia High Technology Foundation, which is committed to building a stronger, more diverse economy for the region," NOAA said.

Foundation President and CEO Jim Estep explained that NOAA plans to deploy Rhea to the campus this year to provide the initial resources to develop AI supporting infrastructure and AI products from NOAA's data portfolio. To prepare the I-79 Technology Park for the advanced supercomputing and cloud systems required by these operations, the agency launched an infrastructure expansion project in 2025. The site work at the park is part of that infrastructure expansion.

The I-79 Technology Park is the only site in the United States that collocates massive NOAA data collection through its ground stations operations with advanced, high-performance computing, he said.

NOAA said that once online, Rhea will be part of its Research and Development High Performance Computing System, which includes four other research and development HPC centers in Boulder, Colorado; Princeton, New Jersey; Oak Ridge, Tennessee; and on the campus of Mississippi State University in Starkville, Mississippi.

For those interested in big numbers, NOAA said Rhea will add about 30 petaflops of comput-

ing speed and capacity to NOAA's existing R&D HPC capacity of 35 petaflops, bringing the total to 65 petaflops. A petaflop is 1,000 trillion – 1 quadrillion – operations per second, and represents an extremely fast computing speed for a single machine.

An iPhone 16 Pro, for comparison, can perform about 2.58 trillion operations per second, according to check-mac.com.

In addition, NOAA said, it is integrating another computing system that will bring the grand total of R&D HPC to about 73 petaflops.

Estep provided some background on the foundation's recruitment of the NOAA operations.

Over the last 20 years, the High Technology Foundation has recruited operations from NOAA to the I-79 Technology Park in Fairmont.

Key NOAA operations recruited to the park include:

- Environmental Security Computing Center;
- Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellites – R Series (GOES-R) ground station;
- Joint Polar Satellite System (JPSS) ground station;
- Space Weather Follow-on (SWFO) "Solar 1" ground station;
- Enterprise Security Operations Center (ESOC) – NOAA's cybersecurity headquarters operation.

The foundation chose these operations for recruitment for primarily three strategic reasons, he said.

One, each operation provides hundreds of millions of dollars in

contracting opportunities for the business community. The availability of these contracting opportunities provides a reason why companies, especially technology companies, would want to be in West Virginia, i.e., it created a business case.

Two, the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) nature of this work means that the jobs associated with the work required higher educational attainment. West Virginia has ranked 50th in educational attainment for decades. "HTF believes this is the state's top economic handicap. Recruiting STEM-related operations directly helps address this important economic factor."

And three, recruiting these operations ultimately helps improve both economic development and economic diversification in West Virginia.

"This recruitment strategy allows West Virginia to build a business case for the expansion of its 'knowledge sector' that eventually can stand alongside other state sectors, such as coal, natural gas and tourism to build a stronger West Virginia economy," Estep said.

"It is essential that West Virginia participate effectively in the national knowledge sector because it has been and will be the fastest growing sector in the nation. Historically, West Virginia's participation has been held back because of its educational attainment position. This 'federal anchor recruitment' strategy represents an effective way to overcome this handicap."

Mon Power/Potomac Edison moving forward on new gas-fired power plant

BY DAVID BEARD

For the Dominion Post

MORGANTOWN – FirstEnergy sisters Mon Power and Potomac Edison continue moving forward on their planned combined cycle gas plant. It will be the first major power plant in Monongalia County since 2011, and FirstEnergy’s first plant since 1972.

Pending Public Service Commission approval, it will go up at their Fort Martin site outside Morgantown – adjacent to their coal-fired Fort Martin plant and their solar facility.

The companies filed in February with the PSC for prior consent and approval and for a certificate of need and necessity for a 1,200 megawatt combined cycle gas turbine plant along with 70 MW of solar capacity at three other sites.

The approval process has been ongoing, with the companies responding to discovery requests from parties that have intervened in the case.

So far, only nine letters of protest have been filed with the PSC. For perspective, Mon Power serves about 395,000 customers in 34 West Virginia counties. Potomac Edison serves about 285,000 customers in seven counties in Maryland and 155,000 customers in the Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia.

FirstEnergy first alluded to the possibility of building a gas-fired plant in March 2025. FirstEnergy President and CEO Brian Tierney broadly alluded to the possibility in a webcast.

Both of its coal-fired plants are aging. The 1,098 megawatt Fort Martin plant in Maudsville was commissioned in 1967. The 1,984 MW Harrison plant in Haywood was commissioned in 1972.

Mon Power and Potomac Energy fleshed out the plan a bit in their 10-year Integrated Resource Plan filed with the PSC in October.

They say they plan to keep both coal-fired plants open through 2035.

A combined cycle unit, they said, uses both gas and steam combustion turbines to generate electricity. In the gas combustion turbine, air is pressurized using a compressor, injected with fuel and ignited to generate high-temperature pressurized gas that expands to drive the turbine and generate electricity. The waste



The Dominion Post file photos Mon Power’s Fairmont headquarters.

heat from the gas turbine is then used to generate steam to drive a steam combustion turbine for additional electricity generation.

The IRP spans 447 pages. The companies said that they examined various scenarios considering customer load requirements, commodity prices, and supply side alternative costs – including fossil fuels, renewable resources and advanced generation alternatives – to come up with a “preferred plan.”

“The companies’ preferred plan balances reliability, affordability and positive local and environmental impacts while providing flexibility to adapt as market conditions and regulations evolve,” they said.

Power demand is growing. They noted that their most recent summer and winter peaks are the all-time highest recorded peaks in both cases. Over the IRP forecast period of 2026-2035, they project the residential customer count increase at a rate of 0.7% per year and retail sales to grow 0.4% per year.

“Also, should additional data center growth occur, this forecast could change drastically as the load requirements of most data centers are significant,” they said.

The IRP comments on the evolving power supply mix, where coal and nuclear have been the go-to baseload energy sources. But

intermittent generation – solar and wind – is growing while “new coal and traditional nuclear plants are no longer economically feasible due to evolving regulations and customer needs.”

So the IRP doesn’t include new coal or traditional nuclear, they said. “In their place, the natural gas combined cycle resource type is considered as an intermediate power plant that has the ability to adjust its output as electricity demand fluctuates.”

In November, with the tall chimneys and cooling towers of the Harrison Power Station looming overhead, FirstEnergy leaders formally announced their plan to build the new plant. And in February they filed for the PSC OK.

Pending PSC approval, the companies said construction on the gas-fired plant would begin as early as 2027 and it would go into operation by Dec. 31, 2031. They project the total cost for the plant to be \$2.476 billion, beginning this year and running through 2033.

The three proposed solar sites are at Wylie Ridge in Hancock County, Davis in Tucker County, and Valley Point in Preston County. Their total projected cost to build is \$182 million.

“Taken as a whole,” the companies said, “the projects will remedy

the companies’ capacity and energy deficiencies, support continued delivery of reliable, low-cost electricity for years to come and provide long-term customer and economic benefits. These benefits include meaningful rate stability, strengthened local and statewide economic development opportunities, and increased energy supply resilience for the Companies’ service territory.”

The companies told the PSC that they are considering two types of plant technology: one would have a 1,200 MW gross and 1,050 MW net output. The other would have 1,350 MW gross and 1,200 MW net output. The higher-capacity plant would cost an additional \$100 million.

The newer coal-fired plant mentioned above is Longview Power, just across the street from Fort Martin. It was commissioned in 2011.

And Longview has its own gas-fired plans. In November 2024, the PSC granted two Longview Power subsidiaries an extension on the timeline to start and complete construction of a combined-cycle gas-fired power plant adjacent to the Longview coal-fired plant.

Mountain State Clean Energy and Mountain State Renewables (originally Longview Power II and Longview Renewable Power) filed for the extension on Oct. 9.

They have until April 3, 2029 to start construction and April 3, 2034 to complete the job.

In April 2020, the PSC granted Longview Power a citing certificate for then-Longview Power II to build a 1,200 megawatt combined-cycle gas-fired power plant.

Longview Renewable planned a 70 MW solar facility, with 20 MW of that to be located at the Longview site and the other 50 MW in Pennsylvania.

The PSC gave the companies five years to start construction and 10 years to begin operation. Construction was to start by April 3 this year, and the citing certificate was set to expire April 3, 2025.

But the companies experienced several delays and in October 2024 they asked the PSC for extensions to start and complete construction, after economic conditions provided a “build signal” for new power generation projects.

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More ways to be wild and wonderful

Wellness Passport promotes public health

BY MARY WADE BURNSIDE
MonCHD.org

Monongalia County Health Department is out in the community more than some people might realize.

Environmental Health sanitarians inspect restaurants, hotels, motels, schools, tattoo and body piercing studios, pools and more.

MCHD Smile Express, the health department's mobile dentistry unit, travels to schools in five counties as well as to recovery centers, and makes special appearances at events, providing checkups and dental care to those without a dental home.

And Clinical Services, Threat Preparedness and MCHD WIC staff often set up tables at events to provide vaccines, naloxone, WIC sign-ups and information.

But with the creation of MCHD's Health Promotions, area residents will witness new levels of community engagement, and the new program also helps the health department fulfill a requirement in the West Virginia State Code.

"It's about the future of public health," said Dr. Brian H. Huggins, MCHD's health officer and the manager of MCHD Health Promotions, which is debuting in May. "It's about going into 'Public Health 3.0.'"

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Public Health 3.0 is a "call to action for public health to meet the challenges of the 21st century" in the fight against chronic disease.

Public health in general started with goals such as making public water potable and stopping disease spread and has grown to include disease and illness prevention, safety and other services.

Now, Huggins said, it's time to encourage activities that will help West Virginians improve statistics in the Mountain State that include high rates of diabetes, heart conditions and smoking plus a lower life expectancy.

To accomplish these goals, MCHD Health Promotions staff members will attend outreach events and work on building and maintaining coalitions with partners such as local hospitals and parks and businesses that prioritize activity.

The latter is where the Wild and Wonderful Wellness Passport comes into play.

These booklets will be distributed throughout the community, and individuals can collect stamps at participating partners such as parks, gyms, yoga studios, etc.

"Everyone who participates will at least get a small prize, like a sticker or a pin," said Katie Minor, director of Health Promotions.

Participants who earn 24 stamps are eligible for larger prizes, including the grand prize — a six-person cabin stay at Mountain Creek Cabins, near Coopers Rock State Forest. The drawing will take place in November.

Additionally, interactive classes will be held to help community members learn how to help themselves more.

"We will teach what we can teach and bring in subject matter experts for other topics," Huggins said, noting that the program already has partnered with the WVU School of Public Health in addition to the hospitals, parks and businesses.

Chapter 16 of the West Virginia State Code mandates services that health departments in the state need to provide to residents,

including community health promotions.

"The requirement is that you do one or two outreach events a quarter," Huggins said. "That's not enough to make changes. That's not enough to improve the health of the community."

"We feel Health Promotions is important enough to be its own program, and we are reallocating resources into this new program because it's potentially the game changer in Monongalia County," he added. "It doesn't mean we will stop our current activities; it means expanded services focused on outreach, prevention and providing resources to the community."

To prepare for the Health Promotions program, MCHD conducted its own Community Health Needs Assessment, a mandated survey, last fall. Using answers from nearly 1,500 respondents of different ages and from different backgrounds, Huggins and Minor, with the help of health department employees Morgan Johnson, Jacob Workman and Anina Smith, combed through data that helped them determine what issues should be part of the program's focus.

"In the CNHA, loneliness was so high and that's something we want to combat with health promotions," Minor said.

Added Huggins, "A lot of people think social media is keeping people connected, but what we are finding is that while connecting to people on social media, people feel more disconnected. There is a constant comparison of yourself to everyone out there."

The results of the CHNA can be found on MCHD's website, monchd.org, as well as the new

Wellness Passport website, wildandwonderfulwellness.com.

In late April, Health Promotions staff were also finishing up the Community Health Improvement Plan, which is an action plan based on the needs assessment.

Minor and other staff members will have a presence at both the Morgantown Pride Block Party on June 13 as well as Morgantown's National Night Out, to name two upcoming events.

"Our goal with Health Promotions is to show that the health department offers services to everyone in the community," Huggins said. "With that, we're going to be reaching out for feedback on what classes you'd want to see and what services you'd like to see, which are critical to building a healthier community."

Minor added, "Public health can be fun. There are so many resources that are ready to be used that will create a healthier Monongalia County, and the Wellness Passport is a good, fun way to explore those resources while cultivating a healthier lifestyle."





Ron Rittenhouse/The Dominion Post
Cherry blossoms canopy the Mon River Trail.



Photo courtesy Mon River Trail Conservancy
Walkers on Deckers Creek Trail

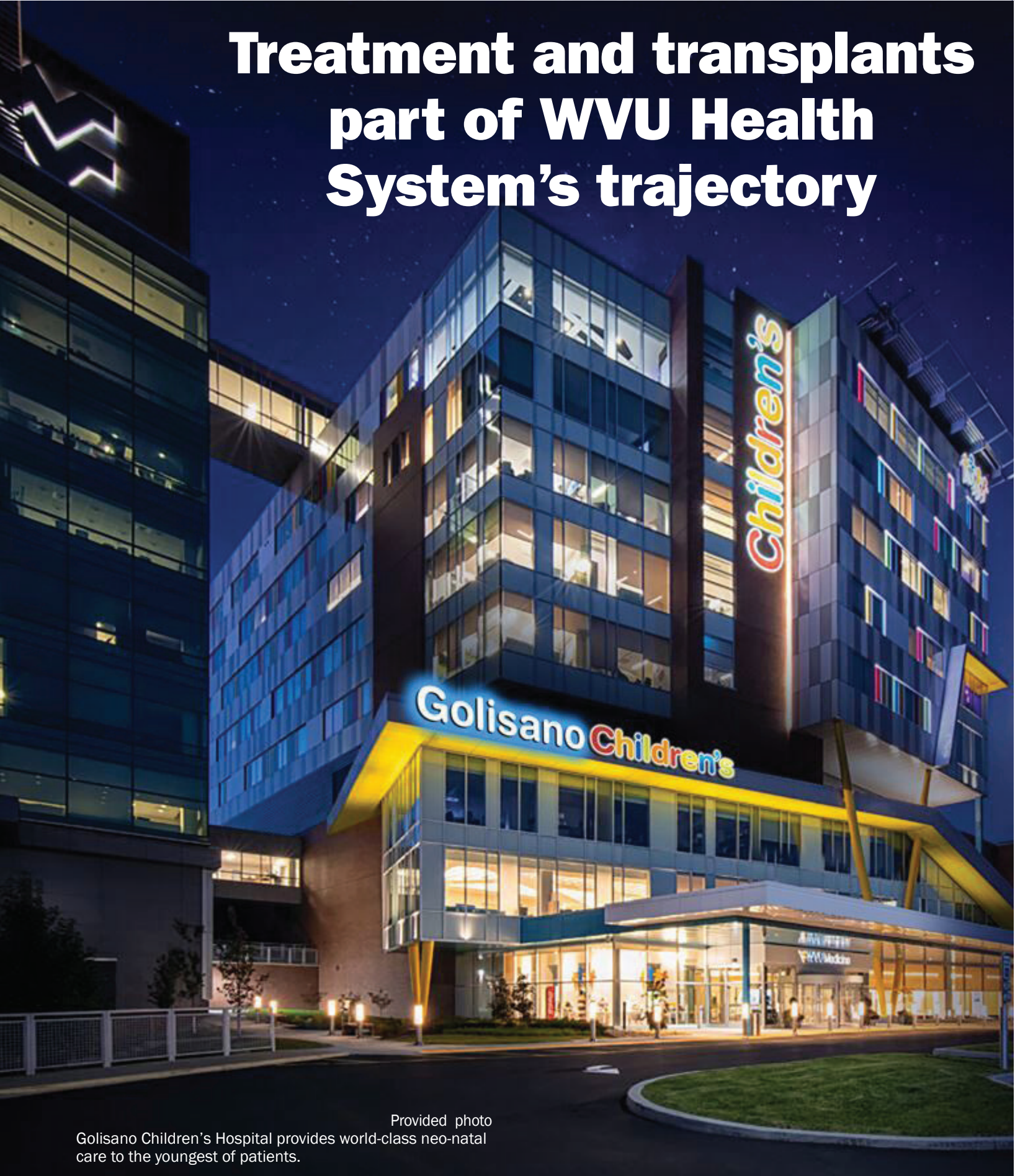


Photo courtesy Renee Rosensteel
Caperton Rail-Trail



Photo courtesy Renee Rosensteel
Mon River Trail

Treatment and transplants part of WVU Health System's trajectory



Provided photo
Golisano Children's Hospital provides world-class neo-natal
care to the youngest of patients.

BY CANDACE WOLF

CWolf@DominionPost.com

When the leader of an impressive and impactful organization like WVU Health System, with more than 3,500 licensed beds, 4,000 clinicians and 39,000 employees, answers a question with childlike enthusiasm, you listen.

Childlike? An appropriate reaction, because it's all about the kids.

Albert L. Wright Jr., president and CEO of WVU Health System, touts his system's world-class neo-natal care and current objective to provide pediatric heart transplants by 2027's end at Golisano Children's Hospital, among other treatment programs.

Wright's enthusiasm spills over to the continued expansion of the transplant program across the region and state. In addition to the established cornea, bone marrow, kidney and heart procedures, WVU Health System is aiming to have its liver transplant program up and running this year.

This type of progress fits the mission of WVU Health System, which operates under the WVU Medicine brand.

"Growth and investments are core to our mission," Wright says and explains that the mission at WVU Medicine is twofold: to improve the health trajectory of the communities it serves and to carry out teaching objectives.

WVU Medicine serves as an "academic hub," which, Wright emphasizes, brings immediate benefit to the Morgantown region, as the health system provides an access point to core care services as well as a gateway to highly specialized procedures, such as the aforementioned organ transplants.

A recently announced expansion initiative includes a commitment to Fulton County Medical Center in McConnellsburg, Pa., to invest \$17 million over the next seven years to modernize the hospital and grow its

clinical services, which in turn gives WVU Medicine additional access to population and more opportunity for developing specialty care.

Two capital improvement projects in north-central West Virginia will total an \$86.6 million investment for WVU Medicine. The Fairmont Medical Center - Phase III Expansion will involve the demolition of 80-year-old outdated structures and the construction of a three-story building with renewed focus on primary care and specialty care services to be completed in 2028. The expansion and relocation of outpatient behavioral health services to a new location within the WVU Innovation Corporation will meet growing demand for these services locally and is expected to be completed next year.

Being geographically situated near other health care networks, including UPMC, AHN and Vandalia Health, is a source of "healthy" competition and collaboration.

"The winners are the patients," Wright says, as networks compete to provide the best services and to hire the best doctors and other staff.

Oncology patients will benefit from WVU Medicine's expanded cancer clinical trials all around the state and in Uniontown, Pa.

Another source of Wright's enthusiasm is the WVU Eye Institute, which is slated for a fall 2027 opening. The \$233.5 million, 150,000-square-foot outpatient facility, designed to shorten wait times for patients who need subspecialty care, is catching everyone's eye as they travel along Van Voorhis Road in Morgantown. In integration with WVU Medicine's vision of an expanded regional health care delivery system, the institute is part of the 2024 capital projects.

With university President Michael T. Benson at the helm of the WVU Health System's Board of Directors, Wright says WVU Medicine is poised to deliver and invest in rural health in West Virginia and beyond.



Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post

The new WVU Eye Institute on Van Voorhis Road in Morgantown will feature eight operating rooms, expanded diagnostic and testing space, increased clinical capacity, and a multi-level parking garage with more than 1,000 spaces



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How much is too much?

MUB discusses expansion, capacity

BY BEN CONLEY

BConley@DominionPost.com

MORGANTOWN – During the Morgantown Utility Board's April meeting, the body approved an extension of its sewer system to bring in 88 proposed townhomes in the Hunter's Ridge development near the intersection of Point Marion and Canyon roads.

BC Allen Co. was awarded the project with a bid of \$387,076.

The action came about a month after MUB announced federal funding assistance for a \$16.6 million project to provide sewer service to some 375 homes in the area of Van Voorhis and Bakers Ridge roads.

Funding for these projects can come from a variety of local, state and federal sources, and typically include surcharges for new customers to cover the cost of any required borrowing.

But what about the cumulative impact over time?

Is there a funding mechanism to help offset future infrastructure expansions that may be needed to handle MUB's gradually widening coverage area?

That question was raised by board member Mark Downs, Morgantown City Council's MUB representative.

"I've spent some time thinking about these extensions quite a bit more lately and I'm curious. I would assume this sewage is going to be treated in Star City. So the concern is capacity – accommodating the capacity for each extension. We don't want to run into a situation where it's death by a thousand paper cuts," he said. "We might have plenty of capacity for any homes now, but each one incrementally adds volume ... As our community grows, we keep adding capacity in the system. We don't have an infinite supply."

Downs asked if MUB was building charges into extension projects to build a reserve against future capacity upgrades.

"We do not have a capacity development fee. So, in West Virginia,

without a capacity development fee, it's really first-come, first served," MUB General Manager Mike McNulty said. "Now we have excess capacity that can be available in our Star City plant because we have cells in the microfiltration that have not been built out. They're there for future capacity, but we will always be able to take that into account as developments come on."

MUB completed an \$85 million upgrade of its Star City wastewater treatment plant in 2022. According to the utility, the plant's current treated flow average is 10 million fully treated gallons of wastewater per day, but it has a rated capacity of 20.8 million gallons per day. Further, the plant was built to be expanded to up to 28 million gallons per day.

"Right now, I think we're very comfortable with the capacity that's available in Star City," McNulty said.

"And that's great. Our rate payers paid for that," Downs responded, referencing the 87.5% increase in sewer rates that took effect in July 2016.

In October, Morgantown City Council finalized a 100% rate increase for MUB customers in the Cheat Lake area ahead of a project to expand the Cheat Lake Wastewater treatment plant, which was exceeding 90% of its designed capacity.

That project is ongoing.

In terms of capacity development fees, they are in use in West Virginia.

For example, as of May 2019, the Berkeley County Public Service Sewer District requires a fee when a new structure is connected to the water and/or sewer district.

"I really think it's something to think about. It just seems fundamentally like a fairness issue to me. You know, we build, we build, we build, and then eventually some development comes along, and they're not going to pay for the whole plant to get upgraded. Presumably ... there's going to have to be a fee accommodation for that that gets



Ron Rittenhouse/The Dominion Post

The Morgantown Utility Board's Cheat Lake Wastewater Treatment Plant project is about 50% complete and is being supported through a 100% rate increase for Cheat Lake sewer customers. The utility board recently discussed capacity development fees that would build a reserve over time as the system grows to help fund capacity upgrades.

distributed to the whole system it's serving," Downs said. "I would like to see us at least explore that a little bit."

McNulty said MUB is continually monitoring capacity and does pass along costs if upgrades are required.

"We just did this a few months ago with a request for water service where we were going to have to upgrade – add a tank, upgrade the lines, add a booster. 'Hey, can't do it. Don't have the capacity on that section of our system. You have to pay for it.' And that's the way it works in West Virginia," he said.

MUB Vice Chair Tom Witt said the entire scenario would be easier

to navigate with proper planning.

"I think complicating everything is the fact this county does not have any land-use planning. If you had a county land-use plan, you know the areas that have been identified for residential, commercial and industrial, and you can project all your infrastructure – roads, utilities – up to 20 years in the future," he said. "Through that type of planning, you would then be able to establish at what point you have to establish a moratorium on any additional connections, regardless of whether or not you have a capacity charge that's levied on top of that to accommodate the developments."

Fairmont key player in state's emerging tech sector

BY JIM BISSETT

JBissett@DominionPost.com

FAIRMONT – To ultimately get to Mars, America's intrepid space sojourners are going to plot a trajectory that takes the county seat of Marion.

Technically speaking.

Fairmont is the home of NASA's Katherine Johnson Independent Verification and Validation facility in the I-79 Technology Park, just south of the city and in full view of the highway that gives it identity.

The IV&V is where software and other key components in the ongoing Artemis missions that ultimately hope to land astronauts on the Red Planet are vetted for safety and effectiveness.

It was established in 1993, just seven years after the Challenger shuttle disaster.

Other Fairmont-based vendors are taking lead roles in that work,



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including TMC Technologies, which is just adjacent to the park and the facility.

That includes all-important, all-encompassing "digital infrastructure" – flight simulators, navigation systems and the like, TMC's president and CEO Jeff Edgell said.

"We've got a 20-year association

with NASA, so when Artemis came around we were thrilled," he said. "We knew what this one was going to be."

For NASA, meanwhile, it's All

of Mountaineer connections."

The technology park takes in 400 acres. More than 1,200 report to work daily in the 30 or science-minded concerns that do business there, along with NASA.

Related, aviation and avionics programs are prominent both at Fairmont State University and its in-town sister institution, Pierpont Community and Technical College, which is located near NASA in the park.

Technology is the weave in the fabric which allows Pierpont to go, in particular.

Michael Waide, the tech college's newly appointed president, is also a licensed medical laboratory scientist.

Systems Go ... and Let's Go, Mountaineers.

Edgell hails from Buckhannon. Wes Deadrick, who directs the Johnson facility, grew up in Petersburg.

"A lot of our engineers at TMC and at the tech park are West Virginians," Edgell said. "We're proud

Photo courtesy of Facebook I-79 Technology Park Research Center



‘Wild Wild West’

Legislature preempts city’s work on ADUs

BY BEN CONLEY

BConley@DominionPost.com

MORGANTOWN – As one of the many avenues to address affordable housing and an overall lack of housing stock, the city of Morgantown has been exploring changes to city code regarding accessory dwelling units, or ADUs.

The American Planning Organization defines

ADUs as a smaller, independent residential dwelling located on the same lot as a standalone single-family home. They can be internal to the existing home, built additions to it or standalone structures – think mother-in-law suite or an apartment above a garage.

“Internal, attached and detached ADUs all have the potential to increase housing affordability, create a wider range of housing options



Ben Conley/The Dominion Post
Single-family homes in Morgantown neighborhoods, like Greenmont, will soon be able to have accessory dwelling units.

within the community, enable seniors to stay near family as they age, and facilitate better use of the existing housing fabric in established neighborhoods,” the American Planning Organization website explains.

Currently, ADUs are only allowable in the city’s Wiles Hill Overlay District, but city administration has been working in recent months with Morgantown City Council and the city’s planning commission to draft legislation making such units permissible in residential districts with owner-occupied homes. Further, the changes would have relaxed some restrictions tied to setbacks and height restrictions.

But whereas the city was looking to carve ADUs into city code with a scalpel, the West Virginia Legislature brought a cleaver.

Senate Bill 659, passed March 6, becomes effective June 4 and has a mandatory compliance date of Jan. 1, 2027.

“What it does, in brief, is require that cities allow an accessory dwelling unit on every lot

or parcel that has a single-family dwelling,” Attorney Ryan Simonon said, explaining ADUs per the bill must be a self-contained and independently accessed living unit with cooking, sleeping and sanitation facilities.

“It can be a manufactured home ... It has to be on a permanent foundation, but otherwise any manufactured home is permitted as an ADU,” Simonon said.

While the city was looking to implement restrictions requiring the single-family dwelling be owner occupied, Simonon said the law doesn’t appear to require the single-family dwelling to be occupied at all, explaining, “It looks like if there’s a structure there, an ADU can be constructed.”

He went on to explain that the city cannot enforce more restrictive setbacks than what’s in place for the single-family dwelling on the lot or parcel. Further, the city cannot enforce any design requirements on ADUs.

“There’s a list of things that

you can’t restrict. You cannot require additional parking or fees in lieu of parking to construct an ADU. You can’t require matching exterior design, things like roof pitch or architectural features ... You can’t require improvements to streets or sidewalks as a condition of building, but you can require they be repaired if they’re damaged by construction. You cannot have more restrictive maximum building heights, minimum setbacks, minimum lot sizes, maximum lot coverages or minimum building frontage than are applied to the single-family dwelling,” Simonon said. “They can be required to have water and sewer service, but they cannot be required to have separate water and sewer connections from the single-family dwelling. They’re allowed to share.”

Simonon said city staff will begin working to incorporate the changes into city code by the Jan. 1 deadline.

“I think our job as we update our code to comply is to make sure residents know that this is

something we have to do, because I think a lot of people are going to be upset in certain zones, certain areas, with someone putting a trailer behind their home and renting it out now,” Mayor Danielle Trumble said.

“I guess the good news is we got accessory dwelling units,” Councilor Mark Downs said, with a sarcastic chuckle..

“Not quite what we wanted. In a primitive fashion, yes,” Councilor Jenny Selin responded. “We got Wild West accessory dwelling units.”

Deputy Mayor Brian Butcher summed up the situation.

“It would have been better, like a lot of things with the state legislature, if they allowed our community, trusted our communities, I guess, enough to see what is right for them. Our town, Morgantown, is probably quite different than most cities in West Virginia,” he said. “So, unfortunate, but hopefully we’ll see some more affordable units out of it. That’s all we can hope for.”

The advertisement features a row of six award logos at the top: 'Morgantown BOM Original VOTE FOR BEST OF MORGANTOWN 2026', 'Morgantown BOM VOTED BEST OF MORGANTOWN 25', 'Morgantown BOM VOTED BEST OF MORGANTOWN 2021', '2023 Morgantown BOM BEST OF MORGANTOWN', 'The BEST of PRESTON Community 2025', and '5 The BEST of PRESTON Community 2024'. Below the logos is a list of services: 'Free Estimates', 'Financing Available', and 'Commercial and Residential'. At the bottom left is the Titan Roofing logo, and at the bottom right is a blue rounded rectangle containing contact information: 'CONTACT US', '304-244-9292', and 'www.titanroofingwv.com'. The background of the ad shows a large house with a blue roof.

The state of Fairmont State: Bridging the town, with its times

BY JIM BISSETT

JBissett@DominionPost.com

FAIRMONT – Josh Merritt was enjoying his elevated status last summer.

“Everything’s all textured and kinetic,” said Merritt, an architecture major at Fairmont State University. “It’s like it’s moving, breathing.”

He was talking about the massive mural he worked on which depicts the special, and spatial, relationship between his

school and the city of Fairmont.

What was being put to canvas, the student said, was also being imprinted onto commu-

nity consciousness.

Fairmont State art professor Joel Dugan, who is known for his large-scale public art projects across north-central West Virginia, debuted the piece last November: “The Living Bridge, Rooted in Fairmont.”

Said mural, which



Jim Biissett/The Dominion Post

Fairmont State art professor Joel Dugan gives scale to the massive mural he painted depicting his school’s relation with the city it calls home. Students in Fairmont State’s architecture program, which was awarded a prestigious designation, also assisted in the work.

Courtesy of Fairmont State University
Hardway Hall on the campus of
Fairmont State University



was installed at FSU's Falcon Center, shows the literal link of the school and town, courtesy of the iconic Jefferson Street Bridge – which was built in 1921 when Fairmont was crossing rivers of prosperity by way of its coal mines and factories.

Merritt was on a scaffold some 30 feet up as he helped with the fine detail on downtown's period architecture Dugan integrated into the painting.

"Integration," may be the best word of all, Fairmont State President Mike Davis said, for his town-gown philosophy.

For generations, Fairmont was a college town ... that didn't act like a college town.

Under the direction of Davis, that's changing.

School banners have gone up downtown and merchants are offering discounts and loyalty programs for students which weren't there before.

The campus is hosting more community events and developing more degree offerings to augment its already renowned teacher education and nursing programs.

Falcon Park, a nearly 9-acre wooded expanse at the very

top of Locust Avenue that was inspired by the confines of COVID in 2020, is now a certified habitat, by way of the National Wildlife Foundation.

People at select school events can even pour a pint of "Fairmont Fest," a craft beer introduced by a local brewery with ties to the school.

And more alumni are coming forth – to give back.

Kim Toothman, a Fairmont State graduate who now travels the skies over North Carolina and South Carolina as a neonatal intensive care flight nurse, recently established a

scholarship for the program at the school that she said gave her everything.

Besides logging all those clinical hours and air miles, Toothman also went on to earn a doctorate in the field as she progressed in her career.

She started at a little shy, she remembered. That part of her personality, however, was quickly grounded, as she lifted off to academic life on the Locust Avenue campus.

"I learned that I could dream big," she said. "And actually achieve it."



Roman's Wellness Center focuses on root-cause healing

BY BENJAMIN POWELL

BPowell@DominionPost.com

In Morgantown, a focus on whole-body wellness and patient-centered care has earned one local business statewide recognition.

Roman's Wellness Center, owned by Stacy Roman, has been named West Virginia Woman-Owned Small Business of the Year by the U.S. Small Business Administration, recognizing her commitment to alternative health care in north-central West Virginia.

Located on Blue Horizon Drive, the center takes a different approach from traditional medicine. Rather than treating symptoms alone, Roman and her team focus on identifying and addressing the root causes of health concerns.

Roman, a licensed massage therapist and doctor of oriental medicine, brings more than 27 years of health care experience to her practice. A Morgantown native, she returned after completing her education at the East West College of Natural Medicine in Sarasota, Florida, to open a clinic serving her community.

Today, the wellness center offers a range of services designed to improve overall health while minimizing stress on the body. Treatments include acupuncture for chronic conditions and allergies, as well as organic spa services such as massage therapy, facials and infrared sauna sessions.

Roman credits support from the SBA for helping her navigate the challenges of small business ownership. "The SBA office, especially Sharon, has helped me throughout," she said. "Just having that guidance for anything available to smaller businesses has been very helpful."

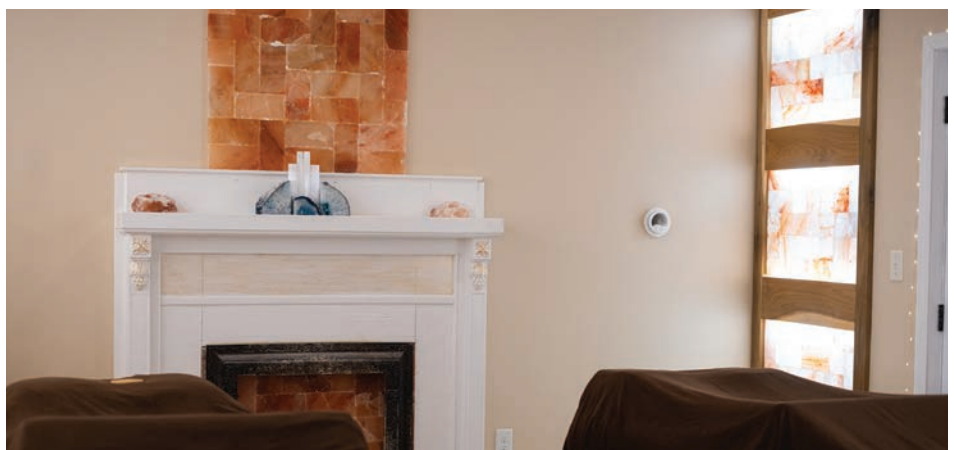
As she approaches 22 years in business, Roman said balancing entrepreneurship with family life has been both demanding and rewarding. "Trying to find that balance between being



Submitted photo
Owner Stacy Roman, center, poses for a group photo with her team Megan Luchuck and Brooke Phillips.



Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post photos
A photo of one of the many treatment rooms at Roman's Wellness Center and Brooke Phillips.



A view of Roman's Wellness Center upstairs salt room.

a mom and being a business owner is a little overwhelming, but good," she said.

Roman also emphasized the importance of serving the community she grew up in. "It's nice to be in Morgantown, where I was born and raised, and be able to bring a service that really nobody else in the community provides," she said. "We have a very close-knit group with employees and patients. When they come in, they become part of our family."

Roman is joined by a small team, including licensed aesthetician Megan Luchuck and licensed massage therapist Brooke Phillips, who help provide individualized care to each patient.

"Our goal is to keep Morgantown healthy and happy," Roman said. "We want to provide a natural way to stay healthy without pharmaceuticals or drugs that could cause side effects."

The SBA recognition highlights both Roman's success as a business owner and the growing demand for alternative health care options in the region.



Roman's Wellness Center is located on Blue Horizon Drive in Morgantown and has been open for 22 years now.



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2026 SCHEDULE



JUNE

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
	1	2 @WSP 6:35 PM	3 @WSP 6:35 PM	4 @WSP 6:35 PM	5 @SC 6:35 PM	6 @SC 6:35 PM
7 @SC 6:07 PM	8 OFF	9 OPENING DAY	10 TRE 7:00 PM	11 TRE 6:30 PM	12 TRE 1:00 PM	13 @MV 7:05 PM
14 @MV 2:05 PM	15 OFF	16 @ABD 6:30 PM	17 ABD 6:30 PM	18 ABD 6:30 PM	19 MEX 7:00 PM	20 MEX 7:00 PM
21 MEX 1:00 PM	22 OFF	23 @ABD 7:00 PM	24 @ABD 7:00 PM	25 @ABD 7:00 PM	26 TRE 7:00 PM	27 TRE 7:00 PM
28 TRE 1:00 PM	29 OFF	30 WSP 6:30 PM	ALL TIMES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE			



JULY

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
		1 WSP 6:30 PM	2 MV 6:30 PM	3 INDEPENDENCE DAY EVE	4 @MV 7:05 PM	
5 @MV 2:05 PM	6 OFF	7 OFF	8 @SC 6:35 PM	9 @SC 6:35 PM	10 MV 7:00 PM	11 MV 7:00 PM
12 MV 5:00 PM	13 OFF	14 @TRE 7:00 PM	15 @TRE 11:00 AM	16 @TRE 7:00 PM	17 @ABD 7:00 PM	18 @ABD 7:00 PM
19 @ABD 2:00 PM	20 TRE 6:30 PM	21 TRE 6:30 PM	22 OFF	23 @MV 7:05 PM	24 @MV 7:17 PM	25 @MV 7:05 PM
26 @WSP 4:05 PM	27 @WSP 6:35 PM	28 @WSP 6:35 PM	29 ABD 6:30 PM	30 ABD 6:30 PM	31 P ABD 7:00 PM	

AUGUST

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
						1 MV 7:00 PM
2 MV 7:00 PM	3 OFF	4 @WSP 6:35 PM	5 @WSP 6:35 PM	6 @WSP 6:35 PM	7 @TRE 7:00 PM	8 @TRE 6:00 PM
9 @TRE 5:00 PM	10 OFF	11 SC 6:00 PM	12 SC 6:00 PM	13 SC 6:00 PM	14 ABD 7:00 PM	15 ABD 7:00 PM
16 ABD 1:00 PM	17 @MV 7:05 PM	18 @MV 7:05 PM	19 OFF	20 WSP 6:00 PM	21 WSP 7:00 PM	22 WSP 7:00 PM
23 SC 5:00 PM	24 SC 6:00 PM	25 SC 6:00 PM	26 OFF	27 @TRE 7:00 PM	28 @TRE 7:00 PM	29 @TRE 6:00 PM
30 @MV 5:00 PM	31 @MV 6:00 PM	BOOM! = FIREWORKS NIGHT				

SEPTEMBER

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
		1 MV 6:00 PM	2 CHAMPIONSHIP GAME Location/Time TBD			

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