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CITY

Morgantown has significant projects in works

BY BEN CONLEY
BConley@DominionPost.com

When you think about progress in the City of Morgantown, you can't help but point to the number of significant projects that are either wrapping up, in progress or just on the horizon.

We'll start at the top. By the time this special section is published, the public will have already gotten its first look at the newly renovated Morgantown City Hall.

The sandstone building at 389 Spruce St. turns 100 years old this year.

The city celebrated with a \$3.3 million birthday gift aimed at preserving the structure's historic facade while updating it internally to make the city building more secure and comfortable for both visitors and city employees.

On April 15, the city showed off just over \$1.7 million worth of improvements to Morgantown Fire Department Station 2, also known as the Norwood Fire Station.

The city's oldest fire station, the block building at the corner of Sabraton Avenue and Hillcrest Street became a home to the MFD in July 1949, after Morgantown annexed the City of Sabraton.

In addition to addressing issues with the building's foundation, plumbing and ventilation, the work done by Lytle Construction added a new dedicated



Morgantown City Hall was recently renovated and unveiled to the community.

workout area, expanded the living and kitchen space, new restrooms and six private bunk areas.

The newly renovated building also includes West Virginia's second Safe Haven Baby Box, allowing the safe, anonymous surrender of a child up to 30 days old.

Meanwhile, about a mile down the road from Norwood, March-Westin is working on a new \$14.2 million pool complex in upper Marilla Park.

The new amenities will replace the 65-year-old pool in lower Marilla Park currently gearing up for its final summer.

The new aquatic park

will include water slides, a sprayground area, a lazy river and a deep well with a zero-grade entry. The complex will also include a pavilion and sunshade areas.

In addition, BOPARC will move its administrative offices up the hill to share space with the structure that will include pool concessions and mechanicals. Doing so will free up the Marilla Center for more programmatic use in the heart of a redesigned lower park.

Due to a soggy April, the closure of East Brockway Avenue through the upper portion of the park will likely remain until at least

early June.

Other than that, work remains on schedule.

"You can see what will be the deep well of the pool clearly at this point. The buildings are also moving along at a good pace," BOPARC Executive Director Melissa Wiles said. "That said, there is still a substantial amount of work ahead of us and the overall project completion date is toward the end of this calendar year. It will be really exciting to see things progress over the summer."

And while all this has been in the works, a project thought to be the largest and most important in the city's history has contin-

ued at the Morgantown Municipal Airport.

The timeline on that is currently somewhat less encouraging.

Construction on the 1,001-foot runway extension began in March 2021.

Just over three years into what was initially projected to be a five-year project, the city has spent \$14 million of what's now estimated to be a \$62 million price tag.

Federal allocations to the project have consistently come in below the city's expectations. Smaller allocations lengthened the timeline and inflated the cost.

The city has recently made application to Sens. Joe Manchin and Shelley Moore Capito seeking \$30 million in congressionally directed spending in hopes of getting the work back on schedule.

Looking ahead, additional projects are on the horizon for BOPARC and the Morgantown Fire Department.

BOPARC's scaled back project to improve the Morgantown Ice Arena is anticipated to be in the \$3 million to \$4 million range and completed in phases to avoid closing the facility to patrons.

In March, BOPARC approved a \$355,400 contract with Omni Associates to steer the project to completion.

The opening phase of work will come in spring 2025 and address three

major components, the building's roof and the mechanical heart of the facility.

BOPARC has a \$520,000 grant through West Virginia's Land and Water Conservation Fund in hand to replace the building's roof. Those dollars must be spent in 2025.

In December, the board approved the purchase of a new chiller from Trane Manufacturing for \$195,680 and a new dehumidification unit for \$198,950 from CDI Products.

In order to accommodate the project, the upcoming ice season will end Feb. 2, 2025.

Lastly, the city is finalizing the purchase of property at the corner of Don Knotts Boulevard and Prairie Avenue to be the future home of MFD Station 1, which was built at its current South High Street location in 1954.

The city is purchasing the property, which is comprised of 11 parcels, from Merit Development for \$725,000.

The new station will be funded, at least in part, using \$6 million in congressionally directed spending, or earmarks. The city recently requested an additional \$4 million in earmarks for the project and will likely supplement whatever it receives with dollars from its capital escrow account.

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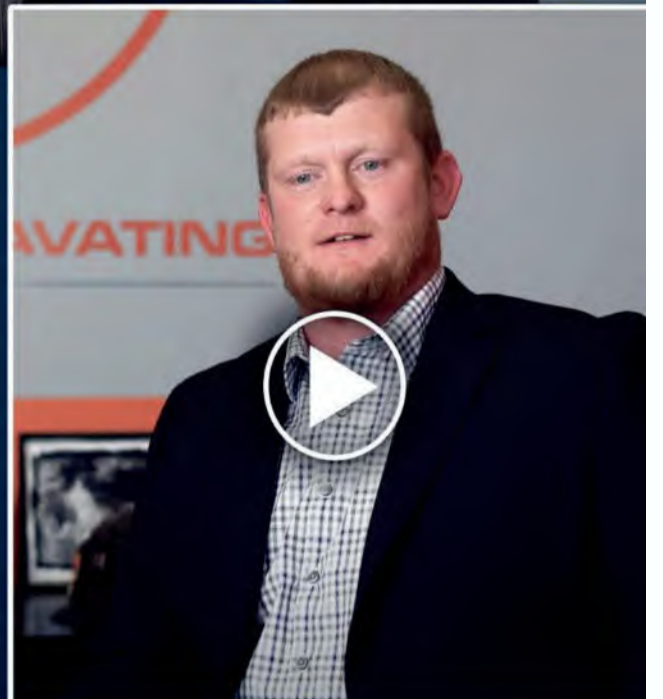


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MONONGALIA

Mon expects big broadband news

BY BEN CONLEY
BConley@DominionPost.com

Monongalia County Commission President Sean Sikora said he's confident the county will make a significant broadband announcement this month. "I think it'll be a big deal and I think it'll be a big splash across the state," he said. "It's real."

But for now at least, it's still a work in progress.

In December, the two major players in county internet service — Comcast and Frontier — were the two respondents to the Monongalia County Commission's request for broadband connectivity proposals.

The county's broadband team, led by Sikora, has spent the last five months working through the proposals and initiating negotiations.

The commission is looking to leverage nearly three years of extensive groundwork and more

than \$8 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds to get broadband into as much of Monongalia County as possible.

And time is of the essence.

Local governments must obligate any remaining ARPA dollars by the end of this year, with plans to expend those obligations by the end of 2026.

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

Ten firms responded.

Three years ago this month, the commission hired Ohio-based Ice Miller for \$250,657 to lead the process.

The resulting comprehensive broadband plan divided the county into

14 individual rings, or broadband plans.

The county already has advanced engineering for Ring 11, a largely unserved vertical strip across western Monongalia County previously identified as the area of most pressing need.

It was initially thought the county could use its planning and its ARPA dollars to bring in grants that would allow it to build the infrastructure from which internet service providers could connect to homes and businesses.

However, the scattershot nature in which billions in Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) dollars are being deployed prompted the county to change strategy.

At the end of April, it was announced West Virginia would be among the first states allowed to request BEAD dollars — some \$1.2 billion of which are coming here.

Sikora said he believes

the federal free-for-all is likely why the county didn't see more ISPs make the effort to respond to the county's request for proposals.

In the three years since the original agreement was signed with Ice Miller, the county has paid the firm an additional \$130,000 (approximate) for legal services, plus an additional \$250,000 (approximate) to broadband consultant LIT Communities for professional services.

"Both numbers are much less than we envisioned when we first started the execution phase, but we were also planning to be doing a lot more of the engineering and construction," Sikora said. "The state's direction on deployment of broadband grant dollars required that we pivot and go the current RFP route to get an ISP to build the infrastructure needed to connect our citizens."

REAL ESTATE

Market continues an upward trajectory

County sees interest rate, inventory challenges

BY KAITLYN EICHELBERGER
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In the heart of the Appalachian Mountains — with a front row seat to the burgeoning economy, community and culture of Morgantown — Monongalia County is reinstating itself as a hotspot for real estate as the local industry steadily recovers from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over recent years, the region has experienced its fair share of highs and lows, mirroring the ebb and flow inherent in the real estate market's delicate nature. While the uncertainties surrounding the pandemic dampened seller confidence, the market is now on a steady path to recovery, with industry experts optimistic for what the coming years will offer both buyers and sellers.

Last year, rising interest rates brought pause to many buyers. Rates peaked at around 8% last November, but dropped to approximately 6% as of April. Although this may appear high to some, local real estate experts emphasize the importance of contextualizing real estate matters like interest rates within the broader market landscape.

"I would say rates now really aren't that bad at all; they're actually more where they should be," said Brian McCommon,

2024 president of the Morgantown Board of Realtors and a Realtor at Mountain Ridge Realty. "When I was young, interest rates were like 15%, but some young people don't have that perspective. Yes, they're higher than they were three years ago, but that was artificially low. I think now we're at a happy medium."

Although the unusually low interest rates of a few years ago may sound appealing, decreased rates also created challenges for buyers and sellers of the time. Bidding wars and inflated home prices became commonplace. As interest rates are expected to stabilize, the compromise between the extremes of the past several years will offer a balance for today's buyers and sellers.

This doesn't mean interest rates won't prove an obstacle for some buyers. Interest rates have been problematic across the country and the issue has affected what buyers can afford, said Barbara Alexander, Howard Hanna Premier Properties owner and real estate expert of over 40 years. Alexander and McCommon expect interest rates to stabilize or decline further, though the unpredictable nature of interest rate fluctuation leaves uncertainty.

The typical spring uptrend is expected to breathe some life back into the market, while the end of the year and holidays may provide some difficulty with selling — however, there's truly no

SEE REAL ESTATE, I-15

GRANVILLE

Riverside town flourished then, flourishing now

BY KAITLYN EICHELBERGER
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Granville's rich history perseveres with booming entrepreneurship and an invigorated community.

Home is more than just a place to lay your head in Granville — it's a place where picnics with family, summer days on the Mon River and indulging in locally made cuisine are just the beginning.

Established in 1814, Granville, originally Grandville, flourished as a riverside town. The area boomed in the 1830s, grow-

ing with the coal industry's heyday during the early 1900s. By the late 20th century, the town offered a variety of services to its residents and visitors, including a diner, barber shop, elementary school and an annual carnival. While relics of its rich history now exist only in memories and photographs, Granville has entered a new era, taking another step in its centuries-long legacy.

In 2020, Nikki Bowman Mills, founder of New South Media, and Michael

Mills, founder of Mills Group, acquired 10 warehouses in Granville, once home to establishments like Bubba's Garage, DeCarlo Discount House and Office Shopper's Paradise. Their vision was clear: to cultivate a cohesive group of businesses that will platform the best of West Virginia and spotlight Granville as a beautiful community. With the development of New South Square, their plans have been brought to life.

Located along Granville's historic Main Street, New

South Square is a bustling hub encompassing retail and restaurant The F.A.R.M., event venue The Silo in the Square, pastry kitchen and caterer This and That Bakery and publisher New South Media.

At its core, New South Square is an extension of the Millses' goals to tell West Virginia's story and redefine the narrative surrounding the state.

"When I started my company, New South Media, my mission was to change perceptions of West Virginia,

SEE GRANVILLE, I-15

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SHOPPING

Morgantown Mall committed to community

BY EVA MURPHY
DPNews@DominionPost.com

The Morgantown Mall, a retail shopping hub in the region for many decades, is undergoing a transformation to serve the local community with fresh and innovative methods.

The new approach, said the mall's general manager, Felicia Posey, focuses on developing and nurturing relationships.

"We have connected with our retailers in new ways to engage our community and foster goodwill," she explained. This initiative is exemplified by the upcoming unveiling of the new Community Connections space this month.

The mall has prioritized community engagement for a long time now, such as partnering with Pantry Plus More to host food dis-

tributions that benefited over 500 Monongalia County families.

"In late 2023, we identified a greater need to serve the community in a more consistent way," said Posey.

The Community Connections space, strategically located near the Food Court, offers a dedicated venue for local nonprofits and service agencies to host events and outreach activities.

"This space is a way for us to help these agencies achieve their goals," Posey said.

Beyond the Community Connections space, Morgantown Mall continues to evolve as a lifestyle center in the region. With over 65 retailers and restaurants, including many locally owned businesses,

it offers an array of retail and dining experiences.

Several large tenants have reinvested in their presence in Morgantown by remodeling their spaces. JCPenny is sporting a refreshed look, and AMC Theater has added additional screens, cosmetic updates and luxuries like reclining seats.

Six-time "Best of Morgantown" award-winner Wong's Wok celebrates 34 years of business in the mall in September. All entries are made fresh daily from authentic family recipes.

Great American Cookies has recently transitioned to local ownership and has added a party zone where guests can celebrate special events with one of the signature cookie cakes. Those interested in learning more

about hosting a party in the food court can reach out to a member of the Great American Cookies team at 304-983-2638.

The mall has welcomed several new businesses to its roster in the last year. Hollywood Nails offers many services, including industry-leading nail designs, pedicures and waxing. Brand Eyebrows, situated near Dunham's, provides full-face threading.

Cultures Loaded Box, a popular local food truck, is set to open a space in the food court soon. The menu will feature foods like burgers, wings and Indian cuisine, as well as some innovative themed dishes for specific movie releases shown at the AMC Theater.

Looking forward, the mall plans to bring in emerging brands that will



The Dominion Post file photo

A new Community Connections space is coming to Morgantown Mall, near the food court.

continue to attract shoppers to the Morgantown area.

"All of that together really helps support small business growth and job creation in our community," Posey said.

With the launch of the

Community Connections space and ongoing initiatives to support local businesses and community organizations, Morgantown Mall demonstrates its commitment to engaging with the regional community for years to come.

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WESTOVER



Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post

The triangle in Westover is a well-known landmark.

Projects in the works, finally

BY BEN CONLEY

BConley@DominionPost.com

The long-awaited Holland Avenue project, new sidewalks and a city sales tax are all in the works in the City of Westover.

After years of frustration, discussion and planning, the city's Holland Avenue project is expected to go out for bids this summer.

That project will replace broken-down stormwater and sewer lines beneath about 2,000 feet of the road and address the large retaining wall along the avenue's lower section.

It will actually be the first of two major projects the city packaged together and financed at an estimated \$8.25 million.

The second is the replacement of the city's main pump station, which delivers all Westover's sanitary sewer flow beneath the Monongahela River to join the MUB system.

The Holland Avenue project is expected to go to bid in June, begin in August or

September and be completed in roughly three months.

The pump station project is expected to be completed in May 2025.

Westover Public Works Director Jason Stinespring said city residents will likely also see progress on a pair of sidewalk projects this summer.

According to Stinespring, an \$801,503 project to complete the fifth and final phase of the city's Dunkard Avenue sidewalk work will likely be underway by August, as will a \$1 million sidewalk project on Fairmont Road.

The Dunkard Avenue project is being funded by a West Virginia Transportation Alternative Grant and will run from the area of 15 Dunkard Ave. to the triangle.

The Fairmont Road work will construct a sidewalk and stormwater improvements along Fairmont Road, from Savannah Street toward Dents Run Boulevard.

That project is being paid for using a \$400,000 Community Development Block Grant, \$400,000 in Surface Transportation Block Grant dollars through the Morgantown Monongalia Metropolitan Planning Organization, \$100,000 from Mountain Line and \$100,000 from the city.

For its part, Mountain Line is requesting a 322-foot section of sidewalk along DuPont Road, from the driveway of its central office to its upper park-and-ride lot.

In addition to new infrastructure, the city will also have a new revenue stream coming online this summer.

The 1% municipal sales tax approved by city council in December takes effect with the July 1 start of the new fiscal year.

The tax is expected to generate approximately \$3.3 million annually for the city.

City leadership has yet to specify where it will direct those dollars.

STAR CITY

'We're doing good'

BY ERIN CLEAVENGER

ECleavenger@DominionPost.com

"A little progress each day will bring results," said Star City Mayor Sharon Doyle.

Those results can certainly be seen with the array of new businesses and opportunities opening up throughout the town over the past year and in the next few months.

Doyle said changes to the landscape include new eateries like Kome Asian Buffet and Bar located in the space formerly occupied by The Golden Corral.

The popular local pizzeria Pizza Al's also opened a new location that includes a bar area on Saratoga Avenue, near Dick Dlesk Soccer Stadium.

On University Avenue, Mama K's Kitchen is cooking up some delicious Italian foods and The Stray Cat Chimmie Shack is doing some expanding, Doyle said.

Mid-May, a new Steak 'n Shake will open its doors on Monongahela Boulevard and Mountain State Brewery is also set to open a second Morgantown location in the former Texas Roadhouse building.

New businesses and developments in the town didn't stop with food.



Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post

Star City is seeing growth in the addition of new businesses and the return of events.

O'Reilly Autoparts opened a location in the spot occupied years ago by Shoney's Restaurant, near Motel 6.

Guardian Storage Morgantown, a more than 600-unit, environment-controlled storage facility has also taken up residence behind the Aldi and CVS off Monongahela Boulevard.

Doyle said PACE Enterprises is also building a 13-unit independent living facility in the town.

"We don't have a lot of land usage right now, but we are filling up what we have available," she said.

It hasn't been "all business" in Star City over the past year, however, with the town bringing back a few beloved community events.

"We brought back our

Memorial Day event and our Christmas parade," Doyle said. "And both of those events were very well-attended."

A few events have been scheduled this summer for Edith Barill Riverfront Park, but Doyle said they continue to look for people to use park areas.

Otherwise, the town is working on maintaining the stormwater infrastructure and is reaching out for grants to try to get that updated.

"We're doing good," the mayor said conclusively and encouraged area residents to come see what's new in Star City.

"Help support a small business and help support a small town," she said.

WESTRIDGE

'Neighborhoods' provide retail, business and community

BY EVA MURPHY

DPNews@DominionPost.com

WestRidge has grown since the private, family-owned development company first broke ground in 2016.

With direct access to the I-79 high-growth corridor provided by the addition of Exit 153 that year, the 1,000-plus acres of land have become a dynamic mixed-use development that contributes to regional growth.

Since the building phase began, WestRidge has developed over half-a-million square feet of new retail, office and industrial space. The complex consists of five complementary "neighborhoods," each providing unique ways to engage with retail, business and the community.

The elite level of planning shows in the ease of access, lush landscaping and miles of walking trails and bike lanes.

The Commerce Centre provides over 150,000 square feet of distribution, high-tech office space and construction offices. The interiors of the prefabricated metal buildings are customizable to accommodate tenant needs, while attractive landscaping and patio areas complement the exteriors.

The master-planned Corporate Park features contemporary Class A office buildings and a manicured, suburban campus with easy access to WestRidge amenities and I-79.

The retail and business park achieved significant

milestones over the past few years, including adding several new-to-market retailers like HomeGoods, Kohl's and PetSmart. Most recently, Tidal Wave Auto Spa opened on Westridge Main Street in 2024. Bass Pro Shops, which first opened in 2021, completed an expansion in 2024, making the five-story, 50,000-square-foot space truly stand out.

According to WestRidge's director of External Relations, Megan O'Reilly, the development has witnessed remarkable growth. O'Reilly emphasized the commitment to expansion and innovation, hinting at exciting new expansion in the 2024 construction season.

"The Morgantown com-

SEE WEST, I-14

UNIVERSITY TOWN CENTRE

Just one undeveloped property left

BY CAVAN TARLEY

CTarley@DominionPost.com

Developed nearly two decades ago, University Town Centre has become one of the most prominent shopping centers in Morgantown.

With a number of businesses located on the hillside, University Town Centre is almost complete. As a result, there hasn't been as much business develop-

ment or growth over the past year.

"The growth in University Town Centre during the past 12 months has been low, because there's only one undeveloped piece of property today," said Jason Donahue, who currently works as the owner and broker of FEOH Realty. "It's almost fully developed."

University Town Centre has had three phases of busi-

ness development, which have taken over 20 years to complete.

In the first phase, the area was much smaller than it is today. Before working at FEOH Realty, Donahue worked as a development consultant at MonView LLC, which was heavily involved in building University Town Centre from the start.

SEE CENTRE, I-14

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SUNCREST TOWNE CENTRE

Development 95% filled

BY CAVAN TARLEY
CTarley@DominionPost.com

Suncrest Towne Centre has been moving at a steady rate of growth during the past 12 months.

According to David Biafora, one of the developers at Suncrest Towne Centre, 95% of the buildings are filled.

"We're quite happy," Biafora said about the position the shopping center is in.

Biafora added that he hopes to get more of the buildings filled during the next 12 months.

"At one point, we were at 99% and we'd like to see that again, and we think we can," he said.

The story of Suncrest Towne Centre first began in 2001, right after the terrorist attacks on 9/11. David Biafora, his brother Rick and a few other development partners — Pat Alexander, Larry Palumbo and Bob Toth — bought the land where the shopping center is now and discussed their plans for what types of businesses/offices would work in the area. As soon as the plans for permits and financing were handled, development work officially started around 2004-05.

After bringing more tenants to the area and committing to the leases, Suncrest Towne Centre was officially built in 2009. Kroger was among the first businesses to open during the first year of operation for the area.

The shopping center opened in the midst of a financial collapse during 2008-10. However, Suncrest Towne Centre managed to push through the rough economic climate. Biafora credits their ability to succeed during this period to



Submitted photo

Monthly Cars & Coffee events are among those held at Suncrest Towne Centre.

the location, quality and convenience of Suncrest Towne Centre.

In 2021, the Biaforas' business partners decided to retire, so the balance of their stock was sold to the brothers. Biafora's Inc. — which is run by the Biafora family — is the corporation that currently owns Suncrest Towne Centre.

The town center has a wide selection of stores, restaurants and offices in the area. In total, there are about 70 entities. Among the big-name brands with buildings at the shopping center are Hilton Garden Inn, Buffalo Wild Wings, McDonalds, WesBanco and Verizon.

WVU Medicine also has multiple offices in Suncrest Towne Centre. The WVU Medicine Urgent Care, Endocrinology, Nephrology and Rheumatology buildings are all located there.

Biafora believes much of the longevity of Suncrest Towne Centre is due to the range of businesses/institutions there.

"The mix of tenants is important in any place," said Biafora. "It's really nice for Morgantown and creates a lot of jobs and convenience."

He also associates the

growth of Suncrest Towne Centre with how well the shopping center is managed. "It's very well-kept and managed in this area, so it's a nice place to do business," Biafora said.

Apart from the various businesses located in the area, Suncrest Towne Centre also holds social events. Morgantown Cars & Coffee is held at Suncrest Towne Centre for people to meet up and check out unique cars. The event is typically one Sunday a month during spring and summer months.

Suncrest Towne Centre is also a popular spot for tailgating due to the convenient location to the WVU football stadium. A shuttle bus is available during home game days to transport fans.

In the next 12 months, Biafora expects that more business will come to Suncrest Towne Centre.

"We've got a list of tenants looking to get in," he said.

"We plan on maintaining and keeping Suncrest Towne Centre going with the trends," Biafora added. "Nothing too fancy, but we are continuing the stuff we've been doing for the last 15 years."

BUSINESS GROWTH

WVU supports and fuels innovation across the state

BY DAVID BEARD
DBeard@DominionPost.com

Part of WVU's mission is to advance the state's economy, and Gen. Jim Hoyer, vice president for Economic Innovation, and Erienne Olesh, executive director of the Office of Student and Faculty Innovation, are working on that.

Jim Hoyer

Hoyer's focus, he said, is "to help operationalize the land grant institution and its capabilities to grow economic



James Hoyer

opportunities in the state." In keeping with West Virginia's history in the energy and manufacturing

fields, part of that focus is growing the work in the national security space.

Another is to be an asset to the state and federal government. His office works with the state Departments of Commerce and Economic Development, the governor's office and the Congressional delegation.

Looking back at some accomplishments, he cited his work with Liz Vitullo in his office, the governor, Legislature and Marshall University to launch the Grant Resource Centers, focused on helping state and local entities to identify opportunities for federal and private grants to bring resources into the state to grow the economy and help with other projects — to help improve health and safety and to revitalize communities.

"That's been exceptionally successful."

He's also partnered with companies to fill positions with quality in-state students and repatriates. Ascend WV is an example of that work. "I'm excited about what's going on — particularly in north-central West Virginia and the growth."

His team has engaged with FCX, Azimuth and Trilogy Innovations in Bridgeport and Morgantown. Hope Gas has moved into the WVU Innovation

Corp. space. The Civil-Military Innovation Institute on Collins Ferry Road has a relationship with U.S. Cyber Command, which helps manage the National Center of Excellence for Cyber Security in Critical Infrastructure in partnership with WVU and Marshall.

"I think there are more opportunities going forward," Hoyer said. Students and faculty are getting opportunities to make impacts in the state.

Moving forward, he wants to exploit the success of the Grant Resource Centers to help more communities. An example is in Clay County — one of those affected by the decline of the coal economy — where the Civil-Military Innovation Institute is having more than 20 Clay County High School students participate as interns. "That's a big deal in a community like that."

He cited two goals. One is that companies already in state and those new to the state need a quality workforce. "We're going to have a unique opportunity to attract people in that 18-40 age range back into the state and keep people that age range in the state by helping match job opportunities with those folks."

And he wants to continue to grow opportunities in next generation technology.

"We are in a unique position in time" as the nation faces various challenges. "We've got to continue to bring manufacturing back on shore." He wants to grow those opportunities in West Virginia, revitalize some of that former capability to attract people here. "It's time for us to take advantage of those opportunities and be that national asset that we've been in the past."

Erienne Olesh

Olesh's office oversees WVU's innovation and entrepreneurship centers. It works with students and faculty interested in commercializing technology — forming startups and connecting with resources and training.

The WVU LaunchLab Network, located in Morgantown and Beckley,

serves as a comprehensive, one-stop innovation and commercialization center and has helped 322 businesses launch since 2014.

Looking at the office's accomplishments, Olesh cites movement in supporting startups and seeing growth in the number of startups coming out of WVU and across the state. As an example, the Morgantown startup surgical device company Endolumik now selling its innovative Gastric Calibration Tube across the country.



Erienne Olesh

"Across the board we've made a lot of positive movement in that direction." Right now, the office is involved in the Build Back Better Regional Challenge project and, working with Huntington-based Coalfield Development, has helped 11 startups to date.

Looking forward, the office is working with Pitt and Carnegie Mellon and other partners in West Virginia — under a National Science Foundation Regional Innovation Engines award — on an 18-month project to harness that legacy energy production infrastructure and deploy and reuse it toward the energy transition to enhance energy and grid resilience security.

That means, she said, taking new and emerging technologies and applying them so the region can continue to be important to the energy sector. The goal is to secure a smart and systematic transition to make sure communities are benefited and not negatively impacted by the transition. "I think that there's a way to get there. I think that we just have to work together to do it."

The old view of a backwards West Virginia is dying, she said, "We're just getting started in West Virginia. I think we have a really positive future ahead of us, fueled by innovation and entrepreneurship."

SPACE TRAVEL

Boeing is on the verge of launching astronauts aboard new capsule

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — After years of delays and stumbles, Boeing is poised to launch astronauts to the International Space Station for NASA.

It's the first flight of Boeing's Starliner capsule with a crew on board, a pair of

NASA pilots who will check out the spacecraft during the test drive and a weeklong stay at the space station.

NASA turned to U.S. companies for astronaut rides after the space shuttles were retired. Elon Musk's SpaceX has made nine taxi trips for NASA since 2020, while Boeing

has managed only a pair of unoccupied test flights.

Boeing program manager Mark Nappi wishes Starliner was further along. "There's no doubt about that, but we're here now."

Provided a tryout goes well, NASA will alternate between Boeing and SpaceX to get astronauts to and from the space station.

Both companies' capsules are designed to be autonomous and reusable. This Starliner is the same one that made the first test flight in 2019. Unlike the SpaceX Dragons, Starliner has traditional hand controls and switches alongside touchscreens and, according to the astronauts, is more like NASA's Orion capsules for moon missions.

One big difference at flight's end: Starliner lands on the ground with cushioning airbags, while Dragon splashes into the sea.

Boeing is committed to six Starliner trips for NASA, which will take the company to the station's planned end in 2030. Boeing's Nappi is reluctant to discuss other potential customers yet. But the company has said a fifth seat will be available to private clients. SpaceX periodically sells seats to tycoons and even countries eager to get their citizens to the station for a couple weeks.

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MYLAN PARK

KOA campground and more on the way

MORE INFORMATION

Mylan Park will host Free Play Freedom Day from 1-8 p.m. May 17 at the Aquatic Center. Visitors will be able to access the pool and splash pad area and The Hazel and J.W. Ruby Community Center Sports Complex, including the fitness center, for free. There will also be bounce houses, games, prizes and food trucks on hand.

BY LINDSEY FLEMING

DPNews@DominionPost.com

Outside of WVU, Mylan Park is the biggest driver of traffic to the greater Morgantown area, said Susan Riddle, president and CEO of Visit Mountaineer Country Convention and Visitors Bureau.

And those looking to take advantage of the park's facilities now have access to new amenities, with more on the way in coming months.

"We are fortunate to have the community partners that we have that enable us to work collectively to make Mylan Park a true sports tourism destination in the state of West Virginia," said Michael McGovern, Mylan Park's general manager. "Over the past 18 months, we've been able to plan and start to implement additions that will have new impacts to our economy, and more will come online in the next year."

Most recently, four existing grass softball and baseball fields made the transition to turf at the Anker Fields Complex, and a new fitness center opened at The Hazel and J.W. Ruby Community Center Sports Complex.

While softball and baseball fields were some of the first major venues available at Mylan Park, the transition from grass to turf eliminates concerns

with weather and cuts down on maintenance costs, said Leah Summers, a member of the Mylan Park Foundation board.

The fields got a facelift thanks to a \$3.5 million grant from the Water Development Authority to the foundation through Gov. Jim Justice's office. The funds also helped with other enhancements, including an additional grass field for multi-sport use, including soccer, lacrosse and football, the re-turf of an existing multi-purpose field and upgrades, such as paving and fencing, to existing support facilities.

In October, when the governor's office announced the funding, officials said the project is estimated to make an economic impact of \$9 million.

Summers said weather was on their side in order to get the fields turfed in a timely manner, as they had to be worked on sequentially, when not in use; and board president Ron Justice said teams are already taking advantage.

"We have a tournament this weekend with 30 teams," he said, when interviewed at the end of April. "This is one of the largest complexes in the state to host major events."

Summers said Mylan Park stakeholders are "always looking at ways to add value" for visitors as well as community members, which is how the new fitness center came to be.

"We want to give people a place to work out," she said, adding that one of the most requested components of the gym were Peloton bikes. The indoor-cycling bikes come with touchscreen tablets attached and allow users access to live and on-demand classes.

"We started with two," she said. "And we think interest may grow, so we could add more in the future."



Treadmills, free-weights, yoga balls, resistance bands and other exercise equipment are also available. Those interested in using the center can buy a MyPark pass for \$25 a month. McGovern said there are already 96 individual memberships and roughly 350 corporate memberships, which allow employers to offer access to their employees. And future visitors to the KOA Campground and Resort, which is in the works, will also be able to use the center.

"That's a major asset," said Frank Witt, campground general manager. "That's unmatched with most KOA campgrounds."

An official groundbreaking at the end of April means the \$11 million, 37-acre site is one step closer to completion.

Situated on reclaimed mine land next to the Anker Fields Complex, the campground will consist of

148 spaces for recreational vehicles, with 110 of those being drive-through sites, as well four cabins, four tent sites and a lodge, where visitors can register and purchase necessities they may need at a camp store. There will also be six showers at the lodge, a laundry room with four washers and dryers and an indoor community space for dining.

"We will also have some outdoor amenities, like two dog parks and a play area for children," Witt said.

Campers will have access to electricity, water, WiFi and all of Mylan Park's facilities.

And while some KOA Campgrounds close during the colder months, Witt said, "We will be open 365 days a year."

Phase 1 of the campground is anticipated to be completed by late fall. The entire campground is expected to be finished by

the early part of 2025.

"Fingers crossed, we'll be moving dirt by the end of May, beginning of June," Witt said.

Officials are also eyeing the beginning of June to mark the debut of another offering at Mylan Park—six outdoor pickleball courts.

Riddle said this comes after Mylan Park hosted the inaugural West Virginia State Pickleball Championship in 2023 at the 13 indoor courts in the Hazel & J.W. Ruby Community Center Sports Complex.

"There was such a huge demand," she said. "It made sense to construct the outdoor pickleball courts."

Pickleball is a hybrid mix of tennis, ping pong and badminton. As one of the fastest growing sports in the United States, Riddle said it attracts players of all ages.

"It's probably one of the top user groups in the new

facility," she said. "It's the most consistent and growing."

As of the end of April, the surfaces of the six outdoor courts needed time to cure and lines still needed to be put down.

"They could be open to the public by June 1," Justice said.

In September, Mylan Park will host the 2024 Pickleball State Championship.

"It will be perfect," Justice added, "because it should be warm enough to go and play on the outdoor courts."

"There is a lot going on," Riddle added, of the developments at Mylan Park. "It's important to note that the board leadership is laser focused and deliberate with the new things added to the existing campus. ... A facility isn't built if it can't be funded. And new additions are all enhancements for the community."

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- > We have added service to new growth areas such as West Ridge, Mylan Park, Fort Pierpont, Suncrest Town Center and to the western end of the county to Wadestown.
- > Since 2021 the levy has allowed us to purchase and put in operation 20 new buses costing \$7,720,000, paid for with \$6,176,000 in federal funds and \$1,544,000 in local and levy funds.
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More FAQs and information can be found at busride.org/transitlevy2024

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ADVENTURE WEST VIRGINIA

WVU's outdoor recreation and education program calming fears for second decade

BY JIM BISSETT
JBissett@DominionPost.com

Despite hailing from the same state as Wilbur and Orville Wright — and being a mechanical and aerospace engineering major, besides — Jeff Devlin had been walking around with a secret.

One that the WVU student from Bryan, Ohio, didn't necessarily want out there, seeing as it was related to all things altitude.

"I was terrified of heights," he confessed.

In no time at all, however, he ceased walking around.

Suddenly, he was hanging around.

Harnessed in the air, hanging around.

About 30-plus feet up, with his feet dangling — and loving every airborne second of it.

Should you be wondering, he didn't have to submit to hypnosis to fight the phobia.

Nor did he binge-listen to self-help podcasts.

All he did was go to work in the summer two years ago with Adventure West Virginia, the WVU-based outdoor recreation and education program now marking its second decade at the school in Morgantown.

"I've gotten a real feeling of fulfillment in helping people overcome their fears," he said.

Or, in other words, said Greg Corio, a WVU vice president who founded the program while a graduate student in 2004, don't be afraid to give it a shot.

Because, he said, when you find out what you can do outdoors, that confidence, like a jaunt across a



A WVU student climbs rocks during a previous Adventure West Virginia cohort.

WVU file photo

zip line, will propel you into success — even if you spend the rest of your professional life working indoors.

"And that's the thing," the assistant vice president for the university's Outdoor Youth Advocacy and Initiatives division said.

"You do find out what you can accomplish, even if you didn't think you could, at first. And a lot of our freshmen have never really been outdoors when they get here."

That's what Adventure West Virginia does.

It introduces the freshmen from, say, the concrete enclaves of New Jersey, New York and Philadelphia

to the travel-video majesty of the Mountain State's scenic climes.

He first pitched it as a pilot program to the university in 2003, as he was finishing his master's in recreation, parks and tourism services.

Corio's pilot graduated in to a full-time discipline and he did, too.

Under his direction, what was once an outdoor orientation program for freshmen has grown to include the WVU Outdoor Education Center in the university's Research Forest — where Devlin conducts those above-ground canopy tours — along with

the founding of Morgantown Adventure Outfitters on Walnut Street.

That's a store managed by Adventure West Virginia that does a brisk trade in outdoor gear.

"Brisk," is the word to describe the burgeoning recreation economy in the Mountain State these days.

In 2022, tourism brought some \$7 billion into state coffers here, Gov. Jim Justice announced last September at a state conference on tourism at Canaan Valley Resort State Park.

But as Corio notes, it isn't just about the outdoors. It's about the inte-

rior life, too.

There is that confidence, as demonstrated by Devlin, the program founder said — and there's something else.

A certain something that can only be hiked to, by way of experience, he said.

The Adventure West Virginia sojourners learn to coexist and problem-solve, especially when negotiating white-water rapids.

And, they get a bigger picture in the classroom, too.

Adventure West Virginia alums have a good graduation rate, Corio said — plus, they tend to stay friends after they make the

trek across the big stage for their diplomas.

He knew it going to work when he'd see freshmen on campus in those early days whom he knew had just gone through the unique orientation.

They'd toss up a hand and hail a hello to one another as they were walking to class.

"It's that community," he said. "That shared experience. They had been through something together."

UNDER GREG CORIO'S DIRECTION, WHAT WAS ONCE AN OUTDOOR ORIENTATION PROGRAM FOR FRESHMEN HAS GROWN TO INCLUDE THE WVU OUTDOOR EDUCATION CENTER IN THE UNIVERSITY'S RESEARCH FOREST — WHERE JEFF DEVLIN CONDUCTS THOSE ABOVE-GROUND CANOPY TOURS — ALONG WITH THE FOUNDING OF MORGANTOWN ADVENTURE OUTFITTERS ON WALNUT STREET.

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Buffett says AI may be better for scammers than society

BY JOSH FUNK
AP Business Writer

OMAHA, Neb. — Warren Buffett cautioned the tens of thousands of shareholders who packed an arena for his annual meeting that artificial intelligence scams could become “the growth industry of all time.”

Doubling down on his cautionary words from last year, Buffett told the throngs he recently came face to face with the downside of AI. And it looked and sounded just like him. Someone made a fake video of Buffett, apparently convincing enough that the so-called Oracle of Omaha himself said he could imagine it tricking him into sending money overseas.

The billionaire investing guru predicted scammers will seize on the technology, and may do more harm with it than society can wring good.

“As someone who doesn’t understand a damn thing about it, it has enormous potential for good and enormous potential for harm and I just don’t know how that plays out,” he said.

The day started early on a Saturday with Berkshire Hathaway announcing a steep drop in earnings as the paper value of its investments plummeted and it pared its Apple holdings. The company reported a \$12.7 billion profit, or \$8,825 per Class A share, in first the quarter, down 64% from \$35.5 billion, or \$24,377 per A share a year ago.

But Buffett encourages investors to pay more attention to the conglomerate’s operating earnings



AP photo

Shareholders wait for the Berkshire Hathaway annual meeting to begin May 4 in Omaha, Neb.

from the companies it actually owns. Those jumped 39% to \$11.222 billion, or \$7,796.47 per Class A share, led by insurance companies’ performance.

Throngs flooded the arena to buy up Squishmallows of Buffett and former Vice Chairman Charlie Munger, who died last fall. The event attracts investors from all over the world and is unlike any other company meeting. Those attending for the first time are driven by an urgency to get here while the 93-year-old Buffett is still alive.

“This is one of the best events in the world to learn about investing. To learn from the gods of the industry,” said Akshay Bhansali, who spent the better part of two days traveling from India to Omaha.

Devotees come from all over the world to vacuum up tidbits of wisdom from Buffett, who famously dubbed the meeting “Woodstock for Capitalists.”

Next Gen leaders

Munger’s absence, however, created space for shareholders to get to know

better the two executives who directly oversee Berkshire’s companies: Ajit Jain, who manages the insurance units; and Abel, who handles everything else and has been named Buffett’s successor. The two shared the main stage with Buffett this year.

The first time Buffett kicked a question to Abel, he mistakenly said “Charlie?” Abel shrugged off the mistake and dove into the challenges utilities face from the increased risk of wildfires and some regulators’ reluctance to let them

collect a reasonable profit.

Morningstar analyst Gregory Warren said he believes Abel spoke up more Saturday and let shareholders see some of the brilliance Berkshire executives talk about.

Abel offered a twist on Munger’s classic “I have nothing to add” line by often starting his answers Saturday by saying “The only thing I would add.”

“Greg’s a rock star,” said Chris Bloomstran, president of Semper Augustus Investments Group. “The bench is deep. He won’t

have the same humor at the meeting. But I think we all come here to get a reminder every year to be rational.”

A look to the future

Buffett has made clear that Abel will be Berkshire’s next CEO, but he said Saturday that he had changed his opinion on how the company’s investment portfolio should be handled. He had previously said it would fall to two investment managers who handle small chunks of the portfolio now. On Saturday, Buffett endorsed Abel for the gig, as well as overseeing the operating businesses and any acquisitions.

“He understands businesses extremely well, and if you understand businesses, you understand common stocks,” Buffett said. Ultimately, it will be up to the board to decide, but the billionaire said he might come back and haunt them if they try to do it differently.

Overall, Buffett said Berkshire’s system of having all the noninsurance companies report to Abel and the insurers report to Jain is working well. He himself hardly gets any calls from managers anymore because they get more guidance from Abel and Jain.

“This place would work extremely well the next day if something happened to me,” Buffett said.

Nevertheless, the best applause line of the day was Buffett’s closing remark: “I not only hope that you come next year but I hope that I come next year.”

WVU

Experts caution seeing isn’t believing with everything online

DNNews@DominionPost.com

Two West Virginia University experts with extensive knowledge of deepfakes and AI-assisted technologies sounded the alarm about their prevalence in daily lives at a time when headlines about potential AI-generated photos and videos, and questions by the public about what’s real and what’s, not persist.

Deepfakes — digitally manipulated synthetic images or recordings made to look like a person is doing something they didn’t do or to sound like a person saying something they didn’t say — can be created by computers or by people with even a small amount of tech savvy.

Laurel Cook, an associate professor of marketing in the WVU John Chambers College of Business and Economics, and WVU College of Law lecturer and legal scholar Amy Cyphert, weigh in on just how complicated the subject is.

“When navigating content, particularly online, adopting a perspective that



Laurel Cook

treats deepfakes and other tech-altered information akin to spam — similar to our approach with junk

mail or pop-up ads — proves advantageous,” Cook said.

“Common engagement-baiting approaches include using emotional appeals, especially those that incite anger, splitting the audience and being outlandish like using purposeful, yet incorrect pronunciation. Additionally, this type of content may include the theft or distortion of publicly available information. Such tactics are often combined with deepfake content designed to provoke an immediate response, usually in the form of word-of-mouth, which search engines and social media algorithms richly reward. This outcome may also negatively affect the bottom



Amy Cyphert

line for those who publish original content. When these tactics are used, healthy consumption of such content should include fact-checking and/or triangulating sources.”

Cook said deepfakes and other teach-enabled content are error-prone, but people need to be aware. “Regularly exercising discernment is also an important part of this discussion,” she said. “Deepfakes can be perceived as credible, overall, but small details in the eyes, skin and other parts of the face reveal flawed transformations. Looking at other static visual elements like shadows and hair, and dynamic visual elements like lip and eye movement, will help viewers determine if content is natural and credible. By adopting these practices, we are

attenuating the effects of deceptive tactics and contributing to a more informed and resilient online community.”

Cyphert said people often trust recordings, but shouldn’t always.

“Deepfakes are very concerning because we tend to trust video and the sound of people’s voices as evidence sufficient to believe what we’re hearing or seeing to be real. That’s just not the case anymore. I’ve been worried about this for years and I’m really worried about it in terms of election interference,” Cyphert said.

“There is evidence AI and deepfakes will play a role in the upcoming presidential election. We already saw it happen during the New Hampshire primary when a robocall using President Biden’s voice urged voters to stay home and not go to the polls.”

Cyphert spoke before the West Virginia Legislature during the 2024 session in Charleston. She said some states are looking to pass bills to regulate

artificial intelligence.

“Many people are trying to take action,” she said. “Some states have already passed bills to regulate the use of AI and creation of deepfakes. But, despite our best efforts to regulate it, there will still be problems not addressed by regulation. There are also potential constitutional issues that have to be addressed when we’re considering new laws to address deepfakes.”

“There are important First Amendment issues — is this art, is this parody — and there is a subjective nature to those answers. Then you have to figure out who the law will target. Will we prosecute the person who made the deepfake? Can we find them and are they subject to our jurisdiction? Do you also prosecute the people who helped spread the deepfake? What if they did not know it was a deepfake? Even with all these thorny questions, I think some reg-

ulation, if carefully crafted, could be better than none.”

Cyphert said laws may not stop people from creating harmful deepfakes, but could stop them from going viral.

“It might require working with social media companies, though locking these things down can sometimes fuel their virality and interest by the public. It’s also about getting rid of the bad without getting rid of the good. This gets really complicated,” Cyphert said.

“Education on the topic is important and there are some attempts at technological fixes like watermarks that humans can’t necessarily see but that could serve as some kind of detector to establish an image or recording’s authenticity.

“I don’t think the only answer can be to teach people to be skeptical because then they might be skeptical about everything, including reality.”

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FUTURE GROWTH

WVU Innovation Corp. is growing, filling former Mylan plant, advancing W.Va.

BY DAVID BEARD
DBeard@DominionPost.com

Two years after taking ownership of the former Mylan plant, WVU Innovation Corp. is growing and helping to shape the future of the state.

Its 1.2 million square feet of office, manufacturing, lab and warehouse space is now at 20% occupancy with 14 tenants, said President Stacey Armstrong and Assistant Vice President Erica Steratore.

A couple of them are often in the news: Hope Gas and the medtech startup firm Intermed. Hope Gas was the first tenant, moving into the facility in August 2022. Armstrong said the two are great community members and partners. "They've become everything that we thought they would be."

A 37,000-square-foot maze of antiseptic blue-tiled hallways and sterile white labs and pill-making chambers at the back end of the plant side will become the new WVU Medicine Center for Nursing Education.

There are more. Here are a few.

Agility is a national company that will help the WVU Medicine hospital system with bed storage to free up clinical space. Battelle, the world's largest independent applied science and technology company, is involved with the regional hydrogen hub and has space there. John Barnett, WVU medical school professor emeritus, heads ExesaLibero Pharma, working on preclinical toxicology and efficacy studies for a groundbreaking



David Beard/The Dominion Post

The WVU Innovation Corp. takes up part of the former Mylan Pharmaceuticals plant.

small-molecule drug for bone erosion.

Mountaintop Beverage needed additional warehouse space and has a two-year lease. "That's been an interesting experience with lots of truck traffic coming in and out," Armstrong said.

Yunigen is gearing up to start production of Scedamin, the first pediatric formulation of Hydroxyurea for kids affected by sickle cell disease in emerging markets like Africa, while also making it accessible and cost-effective in the U.S.

QubitSolve and Innova Pharmaceuticals have space there.

Evax, which makes an

ingredient for injectables, is helping the Innovation Corp. learn how to be a landlord for tenants seeking FDA approval, Steratore said — to learn how to support the tenant without getting involved, to understand shared risk, to develop standards of procedures for the site that meet FDA demands. "Which makes us really marketable and makes us a good space to land for those who are ready to grow to the next phase."

And WVU Medicine pharmacy will be leasing 20,000 square feet for a consolidated pharmaceuticals warehouse, to expedite distribution and storage across the whole system.

"What it does for the health system is it saves dollars," Armstrong said.

GATC Health Corp is another early tenant, announcing its plan to locate there in April 2023. GATC is a technology company tackling drug discovery and disease prediction through artificial intelligence.

When they first moved in two years ago, Armstrong said, the challenge was to figure out how to have multiple companies within the space. "We found we can do that. We've had some bumps to work through."

Part of the process was looking at the site in a different way, she said. Not as spaces — lab, office, ware-

house, manufacturing — but as types of work the tenants want to do: health care, workforce development, technology and just plain landlord-tenant like Hope Gas. And then facilitating the tenant's entrance into the community.

"I think that the thing we're most proud of is that three years after the announcement that this facility was closing," she said, "is when you drive by, the parking lot's got cars in it. At night there's lights on, you see activity."

And there's more work to do, more tenants to draw. That's a reassurance for those who feared the site would be shuttered, she said.

UNEMPLOYMENT

U.S. jobs post smallest gain in 6 months

Bloomberg News (TNS)

U.S. employers scaled back hiring in April and the unemployment rate rose, suggesting some cooling is underway in the labor market after a strong start to the year.

Nonfarm payrolls advanced 175,000 last month, the smallest gain in six months, a Bureau of Labor Statistics report showed earlier this month. A later release showed that business activity in the service sector — the largest part of the economy — weakened to the lowest level in four years, while prices climbed.

The jobs report signaled further evidence that demand for workers is moderating, but the data likely don't amount to "an

unexpected weakening" that Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said would warrant a policy response.

Powell noted that wage growth probably needs to "move down incrementally" for policymakers to meet their inflation objective.

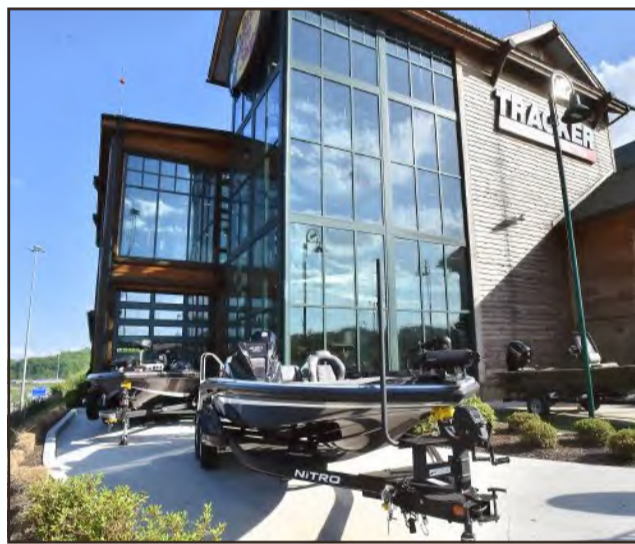
Average hourly earnings climbed 0.2% from March and 3.9% from a year ago, the slowest pace since June 2021. Some economists were expecting a stronger increase in part due to a new California law mandating a \$20 minimum wage for fast-food workers, which took effect April 1.

Employment was also weaker in the service-sector report, published by the Institute for Supply Management. Combined

with the jobs data, the figures represent a moderation in demand that may restrain economic growth.

Investors zoned in on the jump in prices in the ISM data, with Treasuries and the S&P 500 paring earlier gains.

"For those looking for a rate cut sooner than later, this deceleration in payroll growth is good news, and the weaker wage growth number makes it even better news," Olu Sonola, Fitch Ratings head of U.S. economic research, said in a note. "However, one month does not make a trend, so the Fed will likely need to see a few months of this type of moderation coupled with better inflation numbers to put rate cuts back in play sooner than later."



Ron Rittenhouse/The Dominion Post

Bass Pro Shops, in WestRidge, has completed an addition facing I-79.

WEST

FROM PAGE I-9

community should expect the addition of over 60,000 square feet of junior anchor stores this year and the commencement of construction for three to four new fast-casual restaurants that will open in either late 2024 or in 2025," O'Reilly said. She also noted that the forthcoming WestRidge Commons will redefine the landscape of entertainment and hospitality in the region.

WestRidge Commons,

which will be located across from Kohl's, is projected to encompass over 75,000 square feet of shopping options. It will offer an eclectic mix of national retailers, family-friendly attractions, diverse dining options and a hotel. The design and pre-leasing of WestRidge Commons is ongoing. This ambitious endeavor underscores WestRidge's commitment to creating an immersive and enriching experience for patrons while fostering prosperity within the community.

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CENTRE

FROM PAGE I-9

"University Town Centre was starting to be developed around 2002," Donahue said. "Mon-View and Console Energy sold property to Interstate Development, and Interstate development from the Target back down towards the Star City interchange — where Chili's is located."

University Town Centre was officially opened in 2005. Target and Best Buy were among the first businesses built there. Barnes & Noble, Dick's Sporting Goods and Giant Eagle were among the big-name stores that also moved in during Phase 1.

As development work expanded as a part of Phase 2, more big-name businesses/stores were added to the area, including Nissan, Walmart and Sam's Club.

Phase 3 of the development work focused on providing a diversity of businesses.

"One of things we did in the Phase 3 expansion is we tried to pick uses that were complementary, so that it would be well-positioned in the future in case e-commerce took off to the point where everybody bought everything online," Donahue explained.

Among the prominent businesses and venues added during this development phase were the Monongalia County Ballpark, Chick-fil-A and Hampton Inn & Suites.

University Town Centre has a variety of businesses, from restaurants such as Longhorn Steakhouse, to entertainment venues such as Regal Morgantown. Donahue attributes the destination's long-term success to the wide range of businesses.

"The overall development strategy was to appeal to as many people as possible, not one specific type of development," he said.

The overall growth in Mon County was another factor Donahue pointed to as part of the shopping center's success.

"When the population grows, you have more spendable income and retail can develop in that environment," said Donahue. "There wasn't a lot of retail activities for years, so when the opportunity arose for a location to accommodate that retail development, it has thrived because of the demand for it."

Despite the low amount of growth at University Town Centre this past year, there are still on-going projects in the area. WVU Medicine's rehabilitation center is almost complete, set to open sometime this summer. There is also a car wash in between Chick-fil-A and Wendy's that is still under construction.

In the next 12 months, Donahue predicts that the future will be bright for University Town Centre.

"I think it will be complete, I think it will be one of the successful projects that will be finished as originally contemplated and I think it will be very stable for the existing retailers and for the community overall."

"WHEN THE POPULATION GROWS, YOU HAVE MORE SPENDABLE INCOME AND RETAIL CAN DEVELOP IN THAT ENVIRONMENT. THERE WASN'T A LOT OF RETAIL ACTIVITIES FOR YEARS, SO WHEN THE OPPORTUNITY AROSE FOR A LOCATION TO ACCOMMODATE THAT RETAIL DEVELOPMENT, IT HAS THRIVED BECAUSE OF THE DEMAND FOR IT."

Jason Donahue
owner and broker
FEOH Realty

ANTITRUST LAWSUIT

Settlement could cost NCAA nearly \$3B

Plan to pay athletes would need federal protection if not employees

BY RALPH D. RUSSO
AP College Sports Writer

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — The NCAA and major college conferences are considering a possible settlement of an antitrust lawsuit that could cost them billions in damages and force schools to share athletics-related revenue with their athletes.

But even if college sports leaders create a new, more professional model for collegiate athletics they likely would need help from Congress if athletes are not classified as employees.

Two people familiar with settlement discussions related to House vs. the NCAA told the AP the association could pay out \$2.9 billion in damages over 10 years to resolve the class-action lawsuit — which is set to go to trial in January. Schools in the Big Ten, Big 12, Atlantic Coast Conference and Southeastern Conference could be on the hook for about \$30 million per year, which would include about \$20 million annually directed to their athletes.

The people spoke on condition of anonymity because settlement negotiations were not being made public, and emphasized a deal is far from finalized. Conditions of an agreement still must be approved by the NCAA board of governors and the presidential boards of each of the four conferences.

Yahoo Sports and ESPN first reported details of the potential settlement agreement.

U.S. District Judge Claudia Wilken, who already has ruled on several high-profile antitrust cases against the NCAA in the Northern District of California, ordered the sides to attempt to settle the case months ago. A more developed plan emerged from a meeting of NCAA and conference officials in Dallas the end of April.

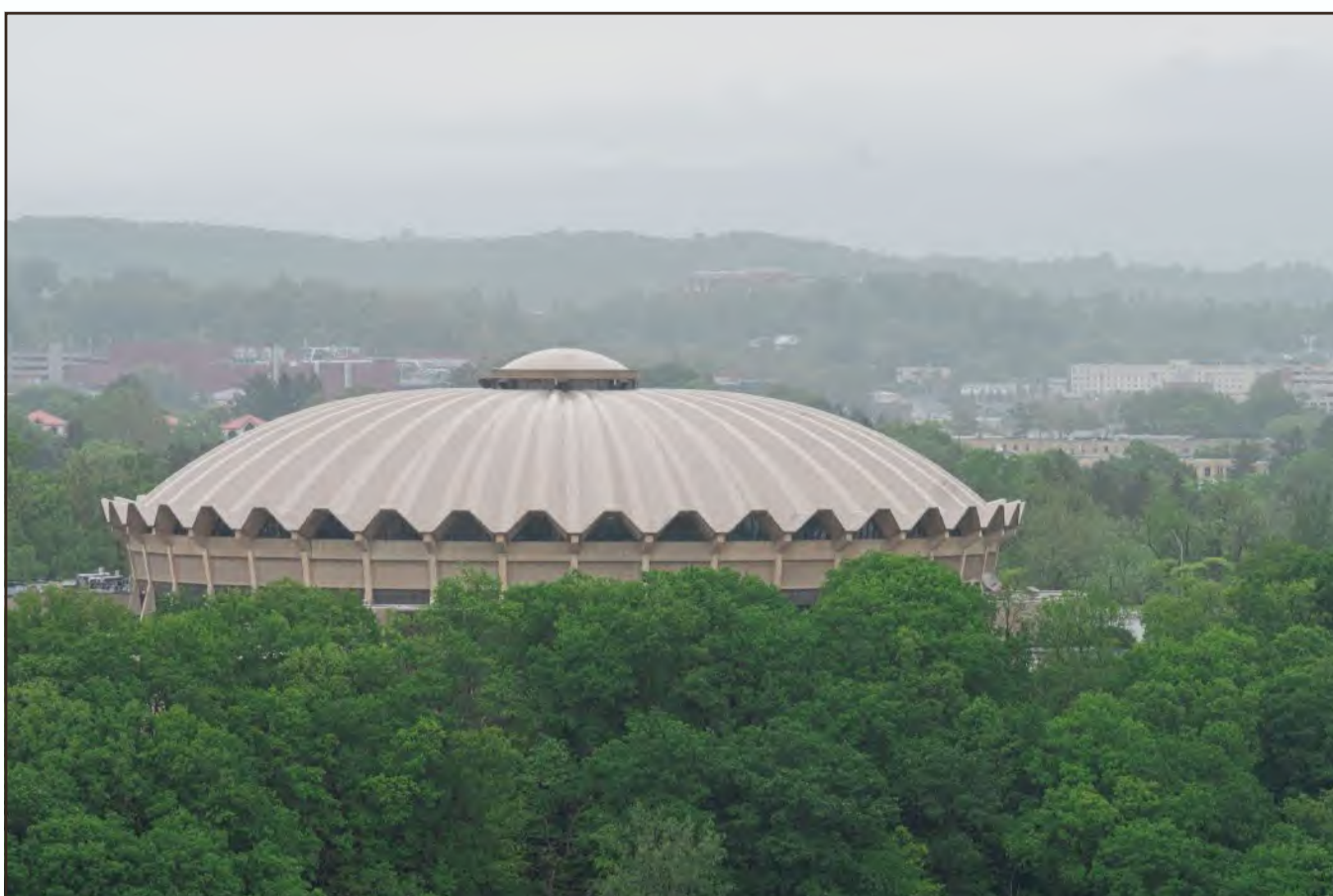
Earlier this week, Big 12 Commissioner Brett Yorkmark declined to discuss anything related to a possible settlement or the gathering in Dallas while speaking with reporters after his conference meetings in Arizona wrapped up.

There is quiet acknowledgement among many college sports administrators that a settlement of House is the best course of action. The case, brought by former Arizona State swimmer Grant House, contends college athletes should receive a cut of the billions of dollars in media rights fees that go to the power conferences and the NCAA, dating to 2016.

The NCAA is facing several other antitrust challenges to compensation and transfer rules, but House has become a catalyst for action.

In a previous filing, attorneys for the NCAA and the conferences contend damages in House will be \$1.4 billion, though in successful antitrust cases damages are tripled.

The NCAA and college sports leaders have been seeking help from Congress in the form of a federal law



Benjamin Powell/The Dominion Post

The West Virginia University Coliseum as seen from a hilltop in Monongalia County.

to regulate NIL compensation for several years, but there has been little movement on that front.

More recently the emphasis from NCAA President Charlie Baker and others has shifted to trying to prevent college athletes from being deemed employees.

Even with a settlement in House and a revenue-sharing plan, the NCAA and major conferences could still need a federal law or antitrust protection to prevent more challenges.

A separate antitrust lawsuit in Pennsylvania dealing with the employment status is also active.

“In terms of their legal options one is to go to Congress, two is to recognize the athletes as employees and enter collective bargaining agreements, the other one is to try to operate in a way that is more defensible under the law,” Tulane sports law professor Gabe Feldman said. “The door is still open to re-invent itself to either withstand litigation or gain more support for congressional intervention.”

Feldman said a federal law that denies college athletes employment status could face a court challenge without the NCAA and con-

ferences being granted an antitrust exemption by Congress.

“It’s hard to ask Congress to protect something that so many see as exploitative,” Feldman said.

A recent ruling from an National Labor Relations Board regional director paved the way for members of the Dartmouth men’s basketball team to vote to join a union. The school is fighting that decision.

Some type of revenue-sharing agreement or substantially increased payments to college athletes on top of scholarships seems inevitable.

Baker himself proposed in December creating a new tier of Division I in which schools would be required to pay at least half their athletes \$30,000 per year in trust funds. Baker also encouraged schools to bring NIL activities for athletes in-house instead of solely allowing them to work with third-party entities.

Baker’s D-I project proposal has mostly been tabled, but allowing — though not requiring — schools to pay their athletes seems closer than ever to becoming a reality.

REAL ESTATE

FROM PAGE I-4

good or bad time to buy or sell, said Alexander. People are selling and buying each and every day, all year long. Selling may even prove especially beneficial to the area’s real estate market, as inventory has been disproportionate to the number of buyers in recent years.

Low inventory has been a long-time issue, and more specifically, West Virginia has seen a lack of new constructions with an abundance of older homes in need of renovations. This is beginning to change, however, and new homes are being built throughout the rural parts of the state, as well as in areas like Morgantown. For those interested in the charm, potential or affordability of older homes, McCommon highlights an under-used resource offered by some banks for buyers of old homes — renovation loans.

Renovation loans offer a way to elevate neighborhoods and help those purchasing their first home. These loans can be used for renovations conducted by licensed and insured contractors, something McCommon hopes to see more of in the future.

Morgantown offers a unique market in contrast to the rest of the state. The economic influence of West Virginia University sways the real estate market, with new residents and businesses drawn to the area, and some transient WVU employees like doctors and professors providing consistent fluxes of buyers and sellers.

“It’s keeping us fairly recession proof, and that helps stabilize the real estate market,” said McCommon. “It keeps the market fresh.”

Despite the highlights of

“I WOULD SAY RATES NOW REALLY AREN’T THAT BAD AT ALL; THEY’RE ACTUALLY MORE WHERE THEY SHOULD BE.”

Brian McCommon

2024 president of the Morgantown Board of Realtors and a Realtor at Mountain Ridge Realty.

living in Mon County, it does prove more costly than the rest of the region, but not excessively so, according to McCommon.

Hailing from Washington, D.C., then living in a largely rural part of West Virginia, McCommon is familiar with the wide range of house prices — and Morgantown is fair when compared to other cities.

“Morgantown is expensive for West Virginia standards, but it’s not as expensive as places like New York City or Washington, D.C.,” said McCommon. “We are expensive for West Virginia standards, but in the big picture, it’s really not that bad.”

According to Forbes, the median listing price in the United States is approximately \$400,000, with sources like Rocket Homes and Redfin specifying a national median of \$420,000-\$430,000. The Multiple Listing Service used by realtors across north-central West Virginia indicates the local average listing price is approximately \$430,000, as of mid-April.

As prospective buyers in Mon County navigate the unsteady dynamism of the market, McCommon highlights the importance of seeking the guidance of a seasoned real estate agent to assist you through the process of buying or selling. An agent with the proper experience and training can help you traverse obstacles as they arise.

“We all hope that the rates do adjust a little lower to open the purchasing power of many more buyers,” said Alexander. “Nationwide, when a home sells at the median price for the area, it generates hundreds of thousands of dollars of economic impact.”

GRANVILLE

FROM PAGE I-4

not just how other people looked at us as West Virginians, but how we look at ourselves,” said Bowman Mills. “And how do we do that? By championing each other and championing other businesses — because we’re all in this together.”

The F.A.R.M. is proof of this endeavor. The market presents a collection of products by West Virginia vendors ranging from apparel and home goods to art and food, all curated by Bowman Mills during her travels across the state. As you venture further into the market, you find the food and recreation side, where freshly cooked meals or grab-and-go refreshments are served to patrons in a comfortable sitting area. The business showcases West Virginia from wall to wall, and when you purchase an item, you’re also purchasing its purely Appalachian story.

Yet, New South Square is more than a commercial venture. The community remains at the center of its

vision, with a variety of events and fundraisers. Beyond scheduled events, The F.A.R.M. has become a community cornerstone, a place for locals to gather. The local fire and police departments share their lunches there, students flock for after-school snacks and neighbors frequent the restaurant for freshly cooked meals that taste like home.

“It’s rewarding. We both grew up in families that had businesses, and we saw the rewards of owning their own businesses,” said Mills. “We’ve built great relationships around the folks that come in every day. We feel like we’re building community.”

Their hope is that New South Square will serve as a guiding light for aspiring entrepreneurs to plant their blossoming business in Granville’s fruitful soil.

“Our hope really would be that we could inspire and help elevate the area and that we could attract more young energy, too,” said Bowman Mills. “Hopefully we can inspire other people to take that leap and say, ‘You can be

the change; you can be a vested part of the community and help change the trajectory of that town.’ That’s what I really hope.”

Looking ahead, New South Square has plans for a mural welcoming visitors to Granville. Mills aims to collaborate with the town to assess the cohesion of the town’s amenities and pave the way for future growth.

Meanwhile, other newcomers planting their roots in the town include Dent’s Run Antiques and Artisans and Ultimate Shine Car Wash.

“It is refreshing to see more businesses looking at our community and the interest in making our town stronger and more attractive, not only for future business investments, but also for residents,” said Granville Mayor Patricia Lewis. “This and That Bakery, The F.A.R.M. and The Silo send out the vibe that small businesses can experience great success in small communities.”

Granville offers a stretch of flat land unique in the state, affordability

and breathtaking views of the Mon River. In 2022, the city enhanced this experience with the installation of the area’s first and only boat launch and a new piece of playground equipment at its public park.

Over the next several years, plans are in place to gravel and expand the boat launch’s parking area, install additional docks for fishing and consider handicapped accommodations for kayaking.

Before the year’s end, two new traffic signals will be installed on University Town Centre Drive, one at the intersection of Sesame Drive, Wendy’s and Granville Square, and another at Walmart and WVU Medicine.

“I would invite anyone traveling through our area to stop by and take a look at what Granville has to offer,” said Lewis.

As Granville embraces its rich history and steps into a new era, the hard work and warmth of its community remain center stage. Whether you’re passing through or putting down roots, Granville welcomes you with open arms.



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WEST VIRGINIA Black Bears 2024 SCHEDULE



JUNE

JULY

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	
		FRE 7:00 PM	FRE 6:30 PM	FRE 6:30 PM	@SC 6:35 PM	@SC 6:35 PM		OFF	MV 6:30 PM	MV 7:00 PM	@MV 7:05 PM	@MV 7:05 PM	@TRE 6:00 PM	
@SC 6:35 PM	OFF	@WIL 6:35 PM	@WIL 6:35 PM	@WIL 6:35 PM	SC 7:00 PM	SC 7:00 PM	@TRE 1:00 PM	OFF	@FRE 7:00 PM	@FRE 7:00 PM	@FRE 7:00 PM	WIL 7:00 PM	WIL 7:00 PM	
SC 4:00 PM	OFF	@MV 7:05 PM	@MV 7:05 PM	TRE 6:30 PM	TRE 7:00 PM	TRE 7:00 PM	MID SEASON BREAK					@TRE 7:00 PM	@TRE 7:00 PM	@TRE 6:00 PM
TRE 4:00 PM	OFF	WIL 6:30 PM	WIL 6:30 PM	WIL 6:30 PM	@SC 6:35 PM	@SC 6:35 PM	@TRE 5:00 PM	OFF	WIL 6:30 PM	WIL 6:30 PM	WIL 6:30 PM	TRE 7:00 PM	TRE 7:00 PM	
@SC 6:35 PM	ALL TIMES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE							TRE 4:00 PM	@MV 7:05 PM	@MV 7:05 PM	@MV 7:05 PM			

AUGUST

SEPTEMBER

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
				WIL 6:30 PM	WIL 7:00 PM	@FRE 6:00 PM	@FRE 6:00 PM	MV 6:30 PM	MV 6:30 PM	MV 6:30 PM	CHAMPIONSHIP GAME		
@FRE 3:00 PM	OFF	@WIL 6:35 PM	@WIL 6:35 PM	@WIL 6:35 PM	SC 7:00 PM	SC 7:00 PM							
SC 4:00 PM	TRE 6:30 PM	TRE 6:30 PM	TRE 6:30 PM	@SC 6:35 PM	@SC 6:35 PM	@SC 6:35 PM							
@SC 6:35 PM	OFF	MV 6:30 PM	MV 6:30 PM	MV 6:30 PM	FRE 7:00 PM	FRE 7:00 PM							
FRE 4:00 PM	OFF	@SC 6:35 PM	@SC 6:35 PM	@SC 6:35 PM	@FRE 7:00 PM	@FRE 6:00 PM							

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 PRE-GAME TEAM MEET & GREET

STAR WARS TICKET PACK

SATURDAY, JULY 13

4 TICKETS & 4 HOT DOGS
 2 LIGHT SWORDS & PRE-GAME CHARACTER MEET & GREET

INDEPENDENCE DAY TICKET PACK

WEDNESDAY, JULY 3

1 TICKET & 1 HOT DOG

LIMITED 4TH OF JULY BLACK BEAR SHIRTS

WV FIREWORKS EVERY FRIDAY NIGHT

HOME GAMES

STAR WARS NIGHT

JULY 13

Bark in the Park!

JUNE 26, JULY 27 & AUGUST 14

For more information and pricing, call: **(304) 293-7653**

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