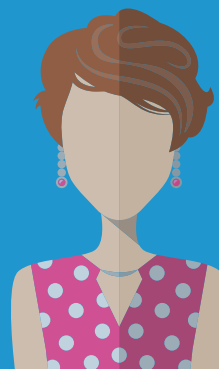
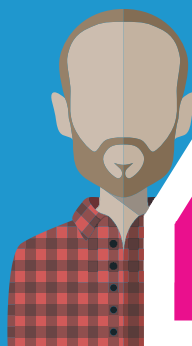
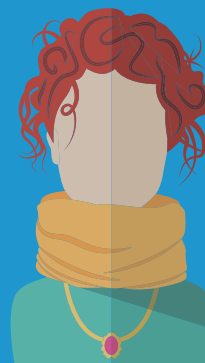
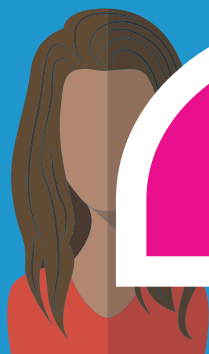
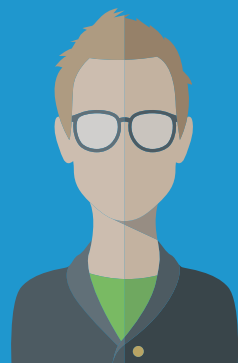
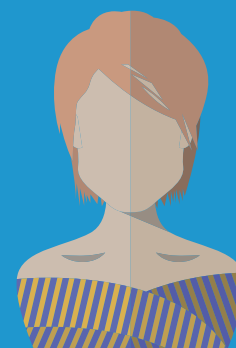
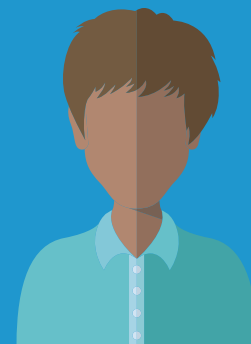
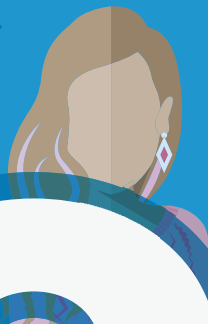


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Matt Jordan



James Froemel



Clay Marsh



Carlie Ice

PROFILE 20 People to know in 2020

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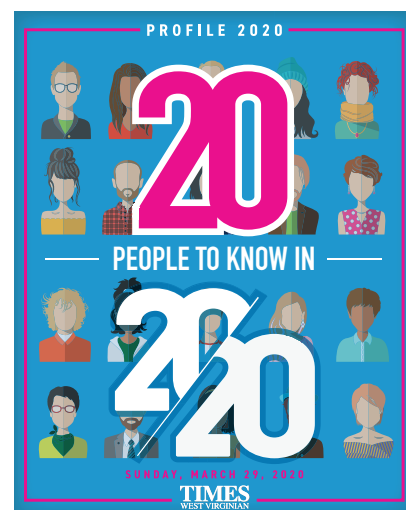
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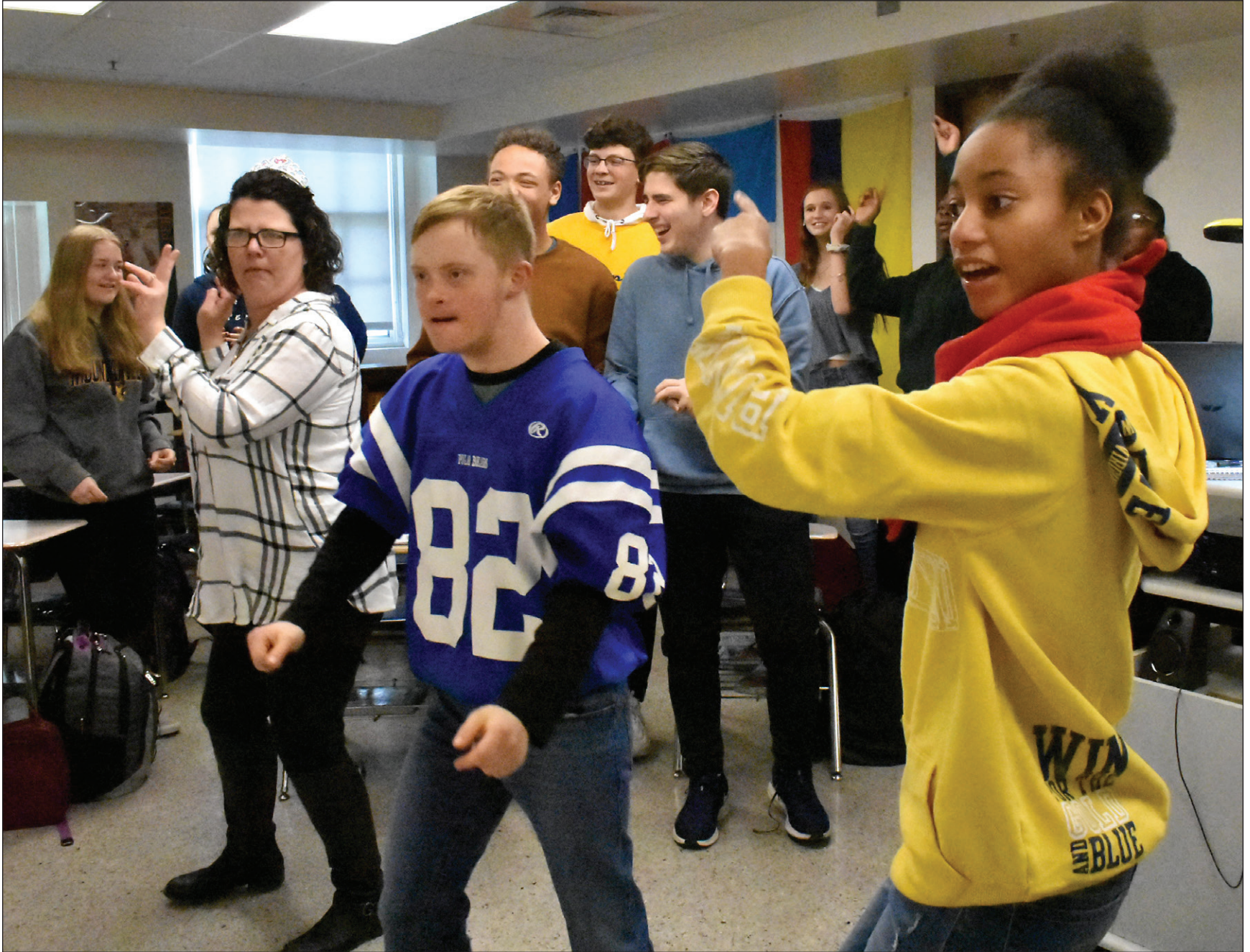
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Buddy maker



Natalie Summers, left, dances with students at Fairmont Senior High School.

Teacher shapes future role models in Marion County

STORY BY ERIC HRIN, PHOTOS BY TAMMY SHRIVER

Natalie Summers likes to pay it forward. “To see someone smile, that you can help someone, I like that idea,” she said.

It’s something she’s been doing ever since she was a teenager.

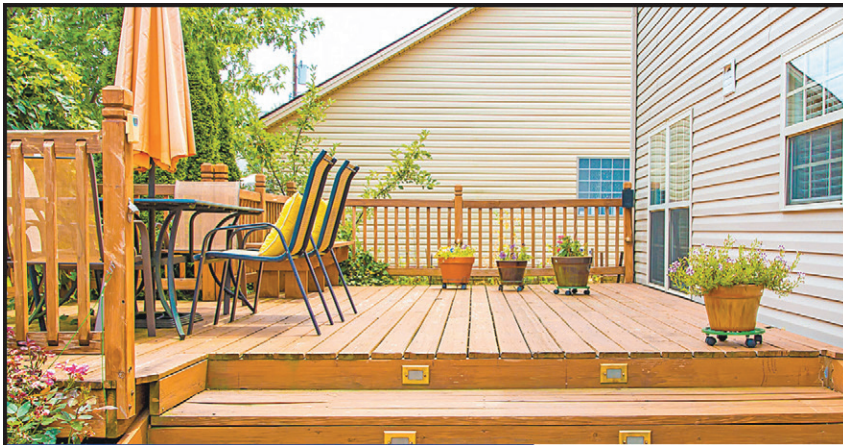
In high school, she followed her mother’s suggestion and joined several service clubs, such as Y Teens, that allowed her to serve the community.

Now a Spanish teacher at Fairmont Senior High, she continues to follow the calling of helping others.

One of her best-known activities is coordinating the Polar Bear Buddies program for Special Olympics athletes. It allows students to be “buddies” with the athletes.

It’s her fifth year with the Polar Bear Buddies program. Summers lets the buddies know how important they are to the athletes.

“I tell the kids, ‘you’re a role model,’” she said. “I say, ‘these athletes look up to you. So, you need to be a good role model, and it’s your time to shine.’”



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Natalie Summers poses with her Special Olympics students. Front row from left: Michaela Woods, Jaxton Earnhart, back row from left, Cali Posten, Summers, Akira Jones and Bradley Elder.

And they get to be with someone older, so all the kids get real excited.”

She said the buddies write a letter to the athletes to introduce themselves.

“In the letter, they have to tell them who they are, what they do, if they play a sport, how they’re excited to meet them and stuff,” she said.

At the Special Olympics, the buddies stay at the athletes’ side, serving all their needs. She said a strong connection is formed.

“Anything that kid wants, they’ll do,” she said. “And they get a bond. It’s beautiful.”

And it’s because of that bond that forms, the Polar Bear Buddies program benefits both the buddies and the athletes.

She said it gives the athletes a role model to look up to in their own community they can trust.

And she said it allows the buddies to fill this role, and give back to their community.

“It shows them that they are a role model,” she said. “You don’t have to be an athlete or a singer or someone famous to be a role model.”

Summers said she has a saying she tells her students who serve as buddies to the Special Olympics athletes.

She said she tells them that while the buddies make the athletes’ day by talking to them, the buddies are the ones who are being blessed because the athletes are a blessing.

“You don’t have to be an athlete or a singer or someone famous to be a role model.”

— Natalie Summers

When some of the buddies graduate high school, some return the next year to keep tabs on their athlete, the friendship has grown so strong, she said.

“I have kids that will come and sit in the stands the following year,” she said. “If they’ve graduated, my seniors, they’ll come back and they’ll sit in the stands. Or they’ll come to me (asking), ‘can we help?’ It just changes their lives.”

Summers said the buddies like how the athletes look up to them.

“A little kid looks up to them, I think that means a lot to them,” she said.

Aidan Green, 16, a junior at Fairmont Senior High, has been a buddy for Special Olympics athletes the last two years. He’s enjoyed the experience, and plans on being a buddy this year as well.

“I love it every year, it’s just a fun time,” he said. Last year, he was a buddy to a middle school

student. He walked around with the athlete and cheered him on.

Green said they formed “a pretty good friendship.” “I think he enjoyed it,” he said. “He seemed pretty happy.”

Green’s father, Fairmont Senior High Assistant Principal Jim Green, commended Summers for the work she does.

“She gives a lot to the school outside of her regular job, and really works hard to do whatever she can to provide for a variety of kids,” he said.

Summers said that when she started getting involved with Special Olympics, two Special Olympics athletes from West Fairmont Middle School, Akira Jones and William Rogers, inspired her to get involved. They were both in eighth grade at the time.

“When you first meet them, there’s just something about these two,” she said. “If they don’t change your life just by looking at them...I don’t know, they just melt my heart away.”

Now, they’re seniors and will be competing again in Special Olympics.

“I love them,” she said. “Anything they do, I’m there.”

She said her students also love them.

“There’s no one like those kids,” she said. She said they bring out the good in her students.



Natalie Summers recently was honored with a “Fridriendly City Spotlight Award.”

Summers said her efforts in involving the students in community service began with a benefit event she organized four years ago for Simon Rohaly, who suffered as a baby from a form of childhood cancer called neuroblastoma.

“That’s what started me into getting our kids more involved,” she said.

She heard that Simon was sick, so she asked his family if she could do something.

Summers then organized a “Simon Rohaly” theme for the first home football game at East-West Stadium.

“So, we sold shirts community-wide,” she said. “We had orders from all over the country for these shirts. To me, it was just going to be sell a shirt. Then, it was ‘add more on.’ So, we had a ‘Super Simon Day’ and everybody wore the shirt the day of the game. They uploaded to Facebook with the hashtag ‘Super Simon.’ Each school made banners and we hung them up in the stadium.”

The community support amazed her.

“But the thing that was most empowering to me was walking into that stadium and seeing our community,” she said. “That whole stadium wore that shirt. It didn’t matter. Even university people were wearing the shirt.”

Summers also said her parents, Larry and Maria Morris, inspire her to get involved with the community.

She said they volunteer at their church, and maintain the church bulletin board.

“They just are always giving back,” she said.

She said her three daughters also inspire her.

“They always want to do something good,” she

said. “They want to give back, and that inspires me. It makes me not give up.”

Summers has also become the Interact Club advisor at the high school, and runs the Polar Bear Angel Tree program for needy students.

“I think it’s wonderful, because they help out kids here,” she said. “I think the most important thing is to show our students first, we have a great community, and that we need to help our community. And when the kids help it, it makes our community better, which is a better life for them, too.”

She took over from former club advisor Leann Sayre.

Sayre said Summers is doing a great job.

“I picked a good one,” she said.

Sayre said Summers lives to help others.

“That’s how we knew she would be a good fit for this,” she said.

She said club members like Summers are who make the activities fun and important for them.

“That’s what you have to do with high school kids,” she said. “You have to make them understand it’s good to help others.”

She said Summers is caring, unselfish to a fault and amazing with the students. Recently, Summers’ work earned her the first “Friendly City Spotlight Award” from Fairmont City Council.

In presenting the award, council member Frank Yann said Summers “is active in the Polar Bear community both in and out of the classroom.”

“She is always there to help her students,

community members, and anyone that needs it,” he said. “Food drives, the Polar Bear Angel Tree, any time a fundraiser is needed, Natalie is there. She, herself, admits that she has a hard time saying the word ‘no.’ Her nomination for this award was sparked by all the amazing things she does with the Marion County Special Olympics to fundraise for the organization while building and fostering relationships with her students and the participants through Polar Bear Buddies.”

“These students are their shadows all through the Olympic games and serve as a Big Brother or Big Sister to help, encourage, and guide them through the games,” he said. “Even some of Natalie’s students who have since graduated high school still meet up with their buddy to go to the movies, have lunch, or just keep in contact with them on a regular basis long after their Buddy Duties are over.

“Natalie’s efforts have created lasting relationships that teach acceptance, understanding, but most importantly love for one another, a lesson that runs deeper than the one-day event. She hopes to be able to turn Polar Bear Buddies into an official Big Brothers, Big Sisters program in the future. This is just one shining example of the kind of person Natalie is, the kind of person she teaches her students to be, and the kind of person that is working to make Fairmont and Marion County a better place to live, work, and play. Thank you, Natalie, for your light, love, and lessons that you bring to your students and for helping make The Friendly City better.”

A life of caring

Chris Mullett to lead statewide nonprofit



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Here, Chris Mullett, former executive director of the Epilepsy Foundation of West Virginia, snaps a selfie at an epilepsy support group for adults and kids.

STORY BY ERIC HRIN

There's a new face at Burlington United Methodist Family Services Inc.

West Virginia native Chris Mullett will be joining the organization April 1 to fill the position of retiring President and CEO Michael Price. Price will work with Mullett through June 30 to ensure a smooth leadership transition.

"I was incredibly humbled and honored really," said Mullett, 54, of Bridgeport, the son of Charles and Patricia Mullett of Fairmont.

"Chris' background and personality will be an excellent fit for the Burlington family," Price said in a statement. "I look forward to working with him over the next several months before my retirement. Although I have enjoyed my many years with Burlington, I feel that I am leaving the agency in good hands."

Burlington United Methodist Family Services Inc. is a Christian nonprofit organization, based in Burlington, W.Va., that has a mission of "changing lives by preventing harm and providing hope and healing to hurting children and families." Its programs include group homes, foster and adoption services, and community-based children and family programs.

"The moment I'll remember most was from the Morgantown Walk to End Epilepsy last fall when a teen girl saw another teen girl and said, 'Do you have epilepsy?' 'Yes.' 'Me too.' I wiped away tears and they spent the rest of the event getting to know each other."

— Chris Mullett

BUMFS also has 24 locations around West Virginia that offer community-based therapy and many other services to families, and has offices in Pleasant Valley, Bridgeport and Morgantown. Each of its locations offers different services. For example, in Pleasant Valley, BUMFS offers a program for foster children called Safe At Home.

"Through Safe at Home West Virginia, providers are able to serve families with more flexible, targeted and individualized services, and more effectively engage public and private partners to better meet the needs of youth and families" states the BUMFS website.

Mullett said he was interested in the position because he has been involved in Christian ministry since he was 15 years old, when he went on mission trips to fight poverty in Appalachia.

"Appalachian poverty has always driven my passion to make life better for people who are struggling," he said.

In the 1980's, he traveled with the Appalachian Service Project to such places in Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia and southern West Virginia where he worked on housing rehabilitation for impoverished people.

He said this work meshes with Burlington's efforts to make life better for children and families.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

From left, Chris Mullett, former executive director of the Epilepsy Foundation of West Virginia, and advisory board members Barbara Hannig and John Magruder discussed the brain and seizures at a children's health fair.

When he and his wife, Trina Runner, read the job description, he said they agreed it was a great match for his passions, interests and experience.

He said his initial goal is to get to know all the employees with Burlington. He will work at the Burlington office in Keyser, but will stop from time to time at the Pleasant Valley satellite office in Marion County, located at Pleasant Valley United Methodist Church.

"My initial goal is to get to know every person in the organization, what they do, what motivates them, and beyond that, what do they need to have from me as the new CEO to do even better going forward," he said.

With the opioid crisis affecting families in West Virginia, he said he hopes to expand Burlington's work of placing children in need with foster families, but also to expand community programs that help at-risk families to succeed.

Mullett attended the February BUMFS Board of Trustees meeting to introduce himself to the management team he will be leading. "You know your jobs," Mullett told the board.

"My job is to make sure you have the tools to carry out your duties."

"I'm so incredibly humbled to be joining the BUMFS family," Mullett said. "I was called to ministry at age 15 when I went on a short term mission trip to Harlan, Ky. through the Appalachian Service Project. The youth group at Charter Oak UMC in Latrobe, Pa. and those summer trips formed my view of ministry and community. Burlington feels much like that."

Although Mullett was born in Fairmont, he was raised in neighboring Maryland and Pennsylvania. His education includes an undergraduate degree in sociology, philosophy and broad social science from the University of Pittsburgh Johnstown campus. He then earned his masters of divinity from Emory University's Candler School of Theology in Atlanta.

Mullett's biography is one of service to others. After Candler, he went on to serve as a United Methodist pastor for the next 12 years before planting a church of the United Brethren in Christ congregation. In 2006, he left

pastoral ministry to work at World Vision Appalachia in Philippi. He then went on to serve as the Clarksburg Mission Executive Director for 10 years. His last stop before joining Burlington was serving as the first-ever executive director of the Epilepsy Foundation West Virginia.

During the past year, Mullett said he has met some incredible people and traveled to both the State Capitol and the nation's Capitol to help educate lawmakers about epilepsy. Mullett described his time at the Epilepsy Foundation as eye-opening.

"The hurdles being faced each day by people in the epilepsy community are enormous," Mullett said. "I met some amazing people and look forward to maintaining those relationships. I'm hopeful that the connections between children, adults and families impacted by epilepsy will continue to grow."

Mullett said he made a lot of memories while advocating for families and children living with epilepsy.

"The moment I'll remember most was from the Morgantown Walk to

End Epilepsy last fall when a teen girl saw another teen girl and said, 'Do you have epilepsy?' 'Yes.' 'Me too.' I wiped away tears and they spent the rest of the event getting to know each other," Mullett said.

Nancy and Matt Ice of Fairmont and their teenage daughter, Carlie, worked closely with Mullett when he was executive director of the Epilepsy Foundation. Each member of the Ice family agrees that Mullett will be missed at the Foundation's Bridgeport office.

"Working with Chris has been wonderful and his support and encouragement of Carlie has been unwavering," said Nancy Ice. "He has been a huge part of the increase in her confidence level with advocacy. He will definitely be missed at the Foundation but we wish him happiness in his transition."

Mullett's wife, Trina, will continue her teaching duties at Bridgeport High School until their youngest daughter graduates next year while Mullett will reside in Downtown Keyser within walking distance of his new favorite spot, Queens Point Coffee Shop.

ROAD WARRIOR

Rivesville blues man gets inspiration from the road

Matt Jordan shows a photo of himself as a baby at the piano with his father.



STORY BY EDDIE TRIZZINO PHOTOS BY TAMMY SHRIVER

Music echoes from the living room filling every crevice in the house. Fingers dance across the piano, a blur over the black and white keys, they move from chords to flourishes with both hands, for which the player slides around the bench to pound out, and sometimes even leaps off his seat.

The source of the melodious sounds is Matt Jordan, a blues pianist who has toured nationally and internationally with his trusty piano, but resides, records and rehearses in a home just outside of Fairmont.

"I've been self-taught and been taking lessons for the last couple years," Jordan said. "But blues is kind of the roots of everything for me, because that's

"I could probably learn to play anything, but blues is the stuff that makes me emotional and really hits me on a wavelength I resonate."

— Matt Jordan

the stuff that I really feel. I could probably learn to play anything, but blues is the stuff that makes me emotional and really hits me on a wavelength I resonate."

Jordan considers Marion County his base, but has

toured all over the country with bands including, the Dennis McClung Blues Band, Reverend Horton Heat and currently and most recently with Lee Rocker of the rockabilly band Stray Cats. A multi-instrumentalist, Jordan mainly performs piano, but he wasn't always engrossed in music.

However, he remembers where he was when he discovered the power of music while riding in a friend's car in high school.

"I never took it seriously until I was about 16," Jordan said. "I started listening to Eric Clapton when I was in high school. I remember one time hearing 'White Room' by Cream and I remember just hearing that guitar solo and thinking 'That was pretty cool.'"



Matt Jordan rehearses at the organ.

Although he didn't seriously get into music until high school, Jordan said he grew up in Annapolis, Maryland in a musical family.

"My parents were always musical," Jordan said. "My mom was classically trained, plays violin and my dad was just a self-taught guitarist and taught himself how to play piano and bass and drums and actually had a recording studio when I was a kid. So I grew up all the time around music."

It wasn't until high school that the notes of the blues dug through Jordan's ears to his soul, and he started surrounding himself in music. For college, he relocated to Morgantown to study mechanical and aerospace engineering at West Virginia University, but found himself in Marion County after dropping out. He said he has always been interested in planes, and was in ROTC throughout high school and college to with the end-goal being the U.S. Air Force.

"I've always liked airplanes, so I have always paid attention to airplanes," Jordan said. "I spent my whole childhood just poring over airplanes... I can hear an airplane going by and at least half the time I can tell you what kind of airplane it is just by listening."

It was in his college years, however, that he got his first chance at playing in a band. He said he joined the Dennis McClung Blues Band around 2010, when he was 19, and played piano with the group.

"When he first started he didn't know much about music but he just grew so quickly," said Randy Franklin, who also plays piano with the Dennis McClung Blues Band. "He just grew so much in a couple years in learning to play the piano. He has become this really good piano player."

Jordan was able to grow his musical ability through playing with the band, but also made money as a career truck driver, which he found to be enjoyable and what he describes as a good builder of character.

"I love driving trucks, that's how I've made most of my money," Jordan said. "I paid off my student loans about two-and-a-half years after I dropped out with a lot of truck driving. You can make a lot of money truck driving and I did that for a while and broke even."

Traveling around the country making truck deliveries helped Jordan find material to write music about. He said otherwise, he may not have the stories to tell through song.

"I was attracted to the blues but I didn't know anything about the blues because I'm a man who has everything you could ever ask for in the most privileged country on earth," Jordan said. "So driving a truck, I meet every type of different

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Matt Jordan poses with his grandfather's air compressor.

people that you meet with truck driving, doing that for the better part of 10 years has taught me a lot and somehow made the music a lot better than if I had never gotten my hands dirty."

Jordan's storied truck driving career and personality had effects on his fellow band mates, with Franklin recognizing that this made him a good performer as well.

"Matt is definitely a different character," Franklin said. "That's part of what makes him appealing because he certainly wants to be a showman. In the right situation that could be a strong suit for him."

Driving the country over many hours-long journeys, Jordan had also become used to the touring life through truck driving as well. He said Reverend Horton Heat plays more than 150 shows a year, and the long hours on the road away from home could be grueling. However, playing with this group and Lee Rocker have been some of his favorite parts of his young career. He believes the grind of the road prepared him to be a solo artist.

"I've been to Europe. I've been to Scandinavia. I've been all over," Jordan said. "Playing with Lee Rocker is the biggest thing career-wise I've been doing. What I'm trying to do right now is get a solo career going, because I have enough of my own music that I think the world needs to hear."

Seeing the musical progress he has made over the years, Franklin believes

Jordan has the potential to keep improving, which could make for an interesting solo career.

"He's young and I'm sure he is going to keep getting better," Franklin said. "I think he has the potential to keep going on and on and on. It's amazing how much he's grown."

To Jordan, the musical career he has crafted through song is even comparable to the way he plays, seeing as how he never really had a plan for any of it. He compared it all to improvisational playing that usually can be found jazz music. He said he just lets the music take him where it will.

"It's great for me because playing jazz especially, you improvise, you make things up and you're like 'This sounds good I'll try this,'" Jordan said. "So a lot of the things I have done right have just been inspiration in the moment to just try something different. You have to be creative and you have to be driven and you have to be OK with falling flat on your face 100 times before you actually succeed."

Jordan's music is his website at mattsblues.com, and also on Facebook and Instagram. He is currently working on a solo album made up of songs penned over the last few years.

Email Eddie Trizzino at etrizzino@timeswv.com and follow him on Twitter at [@eddietimeswv](https://twitter.com/eddietimeswv).



Matt Jordan practices his show.

Leading by example

Kimberly Del Greco takes FBI's Information Services to new heights

STORY BY
BRADLEY HELTZEL

When Kimberly Del Greco took her first stride toward what has since become an almost unprecedented career of impact and achievement within one of the federal government's most cardinal entities, she was simply like many a college student. She was a freshman at Kent State University with future plans to pursue a career in fashion design, but more immediately, she was a 19-year-old in need of some sort of an income to support herself through college.

"My parents paid for my schooling but I needed to get a job to pay for my living expenses – food, rent, books," she said, "so I went to the university and applied for student employment."

The available jobs within the web of student employment yielded slim pickings, however, and Del Greco said the only real legitimate option she had was an opening at the university police department. For someone with ambitions of a career in fashion, the gig didn't exactly align with her program of study, but it was a paycheck.

"I had worked for five years at a dance studio while in high school, and I also did some things on the side for the superintendent's office when I was in high school," she said, "so I knew bookkeeping and how to keep records as well as structure and time management."

That rough baseline of skills from her prior work history was enough, and Del Greco accepted a position as an assistant to the police department's training instruction program.

"I call that a defining moment," Del Greco says now.

Now, 30-plus-years later, Del Greco works as a high-ranking official within the FBI and has crafted a truly ground-breaking career of achievement and prestige over her 25 years with the federal organization.

Del Greco, who is currently the Deputy Assistant Director of the Information Services Branch within the FBI's Criminal Justice Information Services Division in Clarksburg, has received multiple awards for her work throughout her career, including being recognized as a rare two-time winner of the highly-prestigious Presidential Rank award in 2007



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

and 2017. Also in 2017, she received the Security Industry Association's Women in Biometrics Award, and in 2006, she completed a one-year International Women's Forum Fellowship, where she earned certificates from Harvard and Cambridge.

Del Greco has also spearheaded landmark advancements within the CJIS Division. She established the FBI Biometric Center of Excellence and Facial Recognition during her time as Chief of the Biometric Services Section during the mid-2000s, and then in 2007 and 2008, she led White House efforts in gaining support for the sharing of information on known and suspected terrorists. She has also collaborated with foreign intelligence agencies on the sharing of biometric services and establishing worldwide protocols and procedures.

"She's just one of those rare individuals who not only has the institutional knowledge, but also has such a great and positive attitude about things," said Steve Morris, a retired FBI official, who worked with Del Greco for 15 years, including three as her direct supervisor. "For many years I've always valued her opinions and her perspectives — she's definitely one of my most trusted advisors and an individual I would always seek out for counsel."

"Her knowledge is deep rooted in her experience. She knows her business, she knows what she's doing and she's just a great executive. To say she is a consummate professional is an understatement."

Del Greco, who first began her career with the FBI in 1995, has become known as a well-respected leader within the organization who represents and embodies the FBI's mission but also genuinely cares for her employees and fosters a work environment that prioritizes their morale and future ambitions.

But way back as a freshman at Kent State when



she accepted her first job even remotely related to criminal justice or national security, it was simply to make ends meet as a college student. Her plans were still to pursue a career related to fashion even after she declined an invite to fashion design school in Atlanta because of the distance from her small hometown in Ohio.

"I was a fashion designer, I knew that was what I wanted to do," Del Greco said. "I used to draw dresses and my mom would sew them."

But Del Greco, it turns out, was cut out her role in the police department. She was orderly and prompt, a



total professional – “I was probably the best-dressed student in college because I had to work every day,” she joked – traits that lent themselves well to that line of work. And she received tough, but compassionate guidance from the two other women in the police department at the time – a lead trainer and a sergeant – related to accountability and how to conduct oneself, extremely influential lessons she says now looking back. Eventually, Del Greco’s work and fit within the police department led her to change her major to criminal justice and eventually a post-graduate position.

Del Greco eventually moved to Washington, D.C., for her husband Chris’ job with the FBI, where she worked both with the department of education and as a cheerleader for the NFL’s Washington Redskins, two formative jobs for her future, she says now. “The department of education got me a lot of experience in the legal arm, which was great to extend my police department experience, and the professional cheerleading, it really exposed me to what charity can do for people and organizations,” she said. “I truly feel like those few years in my life helped me with how I carry myself in the public today.”

Her various prior careers and experiences shaped her for that moment in 1995 when she joined the FBI as a “spousal hire” after Chris agreed to move to the organization’s West Virginia branch.

Since then, Del Greco, two sons and a daughter with Chris, has risen up the ranks of the FBI as a proven leader in both the CJIS and financial divisions of the agency.

“She’s always looking to not only support the mission of the FBI, but always puts the FBI first in so many ways,” said Morris, who most recently acted as the FBI’s Assistant Director for three years before

“My recommendation for anyone who wants to do a good job at work is that you stay true to who you are as a person and not let outside influences create something else that you don’t want to be.”

his retirement. “Her knowledge is deep rooted in her experience. She knows her business, she knows what she’s doing and she’s just a great executive. She’s a pleasant, positive and energetic leader, but she’s also very firm. She’s just a pleasure to work with.”

Talk with Del Greco and it’s clear she’s well-versed in all of the FBI’s intel – the technological services, the layered protocols, the vast amounts of information – the intricate components of the job highly specific to the organization and her position. But alongside all of that is a core, fundamental trait of leadership: Putting people first.

“On my computer, I put, ‘Lead by example: People first,’” Del Greco said. “I care about the staff, ask about their families, check in on people – I want them to want to come to work every day.”

Del Greco has invested ample resources toward growing herself and her staff as leaders but also collaborators. She’s read faith-based books in an effort to improve herself, and she urges her staff into purchasing various books on emotional intelligence and general connectivity with people.

“I think it’s really important that we have respect and collaboration and overall transparency,” Del Greco said. “I’m not a dictator – I mean I’ll



have to make decisions – but I’m all in on group discussion.

“I do believe in learning though, and I also expect accountability. At the bureau, we call it leading where you stand. It’s important for people not to say, ‘I want to be in this position, I want to be a supervisor, or I want to be a section chief,’ because then you’re so focused on driving towards that, you’re missing how you’re acting and working each day. My recommendation for anyone who wants to do a good job at work is that you stay true to who you are as a person and not let outside influences create something else that you don’t want to be. Stay true to your ethics, stay true to your morals, stay true to what makes you who you are.”

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Storyteller brings history to life

STORY BY JOE SMITH

As Morgantown native and travelling storyteller James Froemel approached the stage to audition for the West Virginia Humanities Council History Alive! Program, there was a little bit of doubt in the room — likely not from Froemel, who is quite experienced with his craft, but from those who were about to judge his performance.

Froemel was auditioning to perform for the program as Charles Schulz, a cartoonist best known for creating the Peanuts comic strip. If approved, Froemel, according to the Humanities Council, would be selected to portray his selected historical figure at venues including museums, schools, libraries, community centers, and fairs and festivals.

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James Froemel performs one
of his storytelling routines.

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PHOTO BY TAMMY SHRIVER

James Froemel takes a question for a child at the Marion County Library as he portrays Charles Schultz in March of 2019.

The History Alive! program's cast of characters often portrays historical figures that are no stranger to most high school and college textbooks, but there is no set list of characters for the program — performers propose their characters during the application process. Schulz is one of the lesser-known figures that had appeared on an application, but those involved in the selection process were intrigued and invited Froemel for an audition.

Still, there were plenty of doubts on just what the performance would look like, or just how well it would come across. But for those who hadn't had those doubts erased by the application would quickly have their mind changed by Froemel's in-person audition.

"Our performance typically focuses on people who are a bit more canonical in American history, and Charles Schulz is a little bit off the beaten path — but the Humanities Council was really blown away by the performance, by how vivid it was. On paper, they were a little bit skeptical because it's outside the normal range of what we do," History Alive! program coordinator Kyle Warmack said.

"We don't put out calls for specific characters. Performers submit applications with their character to try and join the roster. He got invited to audition, but there was some skepticism because our people weren't sure how Charles Schulz would fit with what we normally do. But it was a real-eye opener, and they were really impressed by the way Froemel brought the character to life."

Also known affectionately as "Sparky," Schulz was a World War II veteran who started drawing early in

life. The cartoons he created in high school that would serve as the basis for Peanuts originally was rejected by his high school yearbook. In 1950, he would first have the 'Peanuts' strip published in just seven newspapers. At its height, Peanuts was published daily in 2,600 papers in 75 countries, in 21 languages.

"I have a background in acting and I have performed around the state doing storytelling as well. In that circle I learned about the live performances of the Humanity Council. I've always been a fan of Peanuts and Charles Schultz' work so I thought this would be an interesting one to do. I was excited to propose that and thought it could have a broad appeal to both the older generations to little kids who have seen the recent Peanuts animated movie. Everybody has a different experience with it, so I thought it would be kind of fun," Froemel said.

"Especially as someone who created beloved cartoon characters like Peanuts and the gang, the kids can really relate to that. Froemel really brings that to life," Warmack said.

It's no surprise to those who know Froemel or that are familiar with his storytelling that he has the ability to do what he does as Schulz, though. Froemel has performed across the state telling tall tales as part of his brand as "West Virginia's Biggest Liar," which comes from his history as a three-time champion of the Biggest Liar in West Virginia contest held at the Vandalia Gathering in Charleston. The gathering is a unique competition where storytellers can take the stage and perform a five-minute story to win the "Golden Shovel" based in their technique, story development, originality and effectiveness.

"I have performed for school groups, libraries, retirement communities — a number of different places doing liar shows. They're kind of fun tall tales, just stories that I have written that wouldn't fit in the five minutes of the liar's competition," Froemel said.

"Coming up through the theatre, I'm always a fan of live presentations. I think the opportunity to share something with people and have people come around a story together, and it allows people to connect with stories and it's really rewarding to hear from people and share that with them."

JoAnn Dadisman, a member of the West Virginia Storytelling Guild, has become quite familiar with Froemel and his work through his appearances in guild events. She said her decades-long experience with the craft of storytelling tells her that Froemel's background and skill set is what makes him so effective.

"Storytellers are a diverse group: we are from different areas, have different life experiences, and see storytelling as a profession or a hobby. Some began to tell after retirement; others have told their entire lives. Some are natural tellers who grew up hearing stories from family members or dear friends. Others come to the stage from libraries, schools, the arts, the pulpit, or other professions which use language as a key to good communication," Dadisman said.

"Regardless of their background, all good storytellers have a passion for the spoken word and the value of story to enlighten, connect, and empower. James comes from a background in theater which means he brings so much to the storytelling circle: his experience with voice, body language, the spoken

word, and facial expression enables him to spin a tale that leaves his audience in awe.”

Froemel is certainly achieving his mission of sharing a story and connecting people with that story in his work with History Alive!.

According to Warmack, venues who want to book a performer through the program must first contact the performer and gauge their interest and availability, after which they can pursue an official request with the required payment. Froemel’s performance has attracted a higher rate of bookings than the average for the program.

During his performances, as during all History Alive! Shows, Froemel does a 15-25 minute monologue as the character and introduces their life and historical significance, followed by question and answer sessions with the crowd both in and out of character.

“The number of performances he gets called for, it’s a very high number for what we get on average per character,” Warmack said.

“It has become the most popular character in the History Alive! performances. I think everyone has some connection to Peanuts, and that’s a large part of the appeal. A lot of people know the product but not the story behind it — Peanuts connected with a lot of people in different ways but not a lot of people know about Charles Schulz, so there is some curiosity there,” Froemel said.

Froemel is entering the second year of a two-year contract to perform as Schulz, and recently signed a new contract to extend his work for an additional three years based upon the success he’s already experienced. Froemel has traveled from state border to state border performing, and estimates he has done about 50 shows.

In combination with his storytelling escapades at West Virginia’s Biggest Liars and other work across the region, Froemel has made quite the impact on numerous folks across the region who have come to share in his tales. He has played a pivotal role in helping keep the craft thriving across the state.

“James’ interpretation adds new layers to what a History Alive presentation can be, for he draws the audience into the life of a much loved American cartoonist whose work has enriched the childhood of most of us. In addition, James has also honed his skills as the teller of tall tales and taken his much deserved place among the Liars at Vandalia. His membership expands the work of the guild far beyond the addition of one member, and we are indeed fortunate that he sees the value in membership,” Dadisman said.

And though expression involved in performing and the entertainment aspect are both important to those involved with History Alive! Each performer gets to inform people of all ages about various historical figures and help them come as close to interacting with real history as possible, which is the primary goal of the organization.

“I think first of all, the program is very aptly named because so often when we think of history we think of things in textbooks, of museum items in glass cases. It’s hard to bring it to life in a way that’s both historically accurate and engaging, and that’s why I feel like history live is so important. You’re having the closest thing to a one-on-one conversation with that historical person,” Warmack said.

“It’s something that appeals to both adults and kids, and our most basic sense of engagement with history — wanting to be there and see it happen. The format is also unique, because it’s able to reach a lot of people. It can be scaled to anything. There will be



PHOTO COURTESY FROEMELSTORYTELLER.COM

James Froemel performs as Charles Schulz, creator of the Peanuts comic strip, at a library as part of the History Alive! series presented by the West Virginia Humanities Council.

audiences at [Rotary Clubs] with 30-40 people, and we can also do it in front of 800-900 kids at a school auditorium,” Warmack said.

And that historical aspect, along with the connections Froemel has made, the travels he’s taken, and the economical and educational benefits he’s discovered the program has made portraying Schulz is one of the most rewarding experiences of his career.

“The program is a really unique feature of

the Humanities Council and its also the most employable program — I’ve been everywhere from Williamson to Wheeling. It’s also really affordable, and for any organization to book one of these it’s just \$150. It’s really easy to set up, and we’ve had a great turnout in the places we have set it up. It’s helped me see a lot more of the state, and go to places I otherwise wouldn’t have time to. I’ve been introduced to some really great communities,” he said.

Follow Joe Smith on Twitter @joesmithwrites

From the gridiron to the classroom

Winding road led Nenad Radulovich to job at Fairmont State

STORY BY
BRADLEY HELTZEL

Just as his parents did decades earlier, Nenad Radulovich faced a life-altering decision. Should he continue his pursuit of a long shot dream with no guarantees, or fall back on a fail safe plan still full of rewards.

On the one hand, Radulovich still had ambitions and a belief that a career as a professional football player was both possible and attainable. But on the other, his passion for teaching and history offered a path to sustainable living without the cost of fretting the unknown or trying to maintain a broken body.

“I had to make a decision,” he said. “Do I stick with the practice roster and eventually try to make my way up? Or do I take the (teaching) degree?”

Radulovich, who grew up in Canada as the son of Serbian immigrants, Kosta and Milica Radulovich, who fled the communist regime to North America in 1958 and 1960, respectively, was just a year and a half into what he still dreamed of as a long and successful career in the Canadian Football League. But at the same time, he had been accepted into a master’s program with the opportunity to earn his teaching certificate.

Radulovich, who was making just \$800 a week as a practice squad member of the CFL’s now-defunct Ottawa Rough Riders, opted for the path of furthering his education and pursuing a teaching degree. After just a season and a half, Radulovich’s CFL career was over.

“It was really difficult because I really had ambitions to stick in the lead for a long period of time, but also the type of money you make in the CFL is not retirement, like you can’t retire off of that,” said Radulovich, who was selected by Ottawa in the 1989 draft as the first pick of the 5th round, or 33rd overall. “I was interested and I loved the game — I definitely enjoyed playing — but at a certain point when I realized the business side, I just wasn’t willing and I didn’t have the luxury of sticking it out on the practice roster and then the year after that hopefully being a backup and then the following year hopefully being a starter.

“By that time, I was looking at more practical things, especially my education.”

“He was always very academically motivated — school was most important to him,” said current University of Western Ontario head coach Greg Marshall, who was Radulovich’s offensive line coach during his career at Western Ontario. “It’s not that he wasn’t a hard worker in football, but I think he realized [academics] were going to be his future, not banging around in the CFL for a few years.”

Radulovich has since spent two decades teaching various social studies and history courses at the high school and college levels in Canada and the United



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Nenad Radulovich (51) of the Ottawa Rough Riders blocks during a practice in the summer of 1990.

States. He moved to the U.S. in 1998 after meeting his future wife, Nichole, and became an American citizen in 2005. Radulovich currently lives in Pittsburgh with his wife, Nichole, and his two daughters Daniela, 12, and Mara, 10, while working as an assistant professor of history and social studies at Fairmont State University, a position he’s held since 2006.

He makes the 75-plus-minute drive from his home in Pittsburgh to Fairmont five days a week, racking up 15,000 miles a year just by commuting.

“I honestly don’t mind. I’m kind of used to being a road warrior,” Radulovich said. “But for me, gas prices are a matter of life and death. When they go up too much over \$3 I start to feel it. One year they were \$4. That was very bad.”

Radulovich, whose primary responsibility as a professor at Fairmont State is to prepare social studies teachers for state certification, said he’s content with how his football career played out all of those years ago, but there are times, his mind still wanders to what could’ve been.

“Again, I made my decision,” Radulovich said, “but

there were times I regretted it, especially when I saw my colleagues later. I was back in school and I’d see colleagues who were playing.”

One of Radulovich’s former college teammates, he said, won a Gray Cup ring, the CFL’s version of the Super Bowl essentially. Another former college teammate, Tyrone Williams, he says, completed a rare feat of winning a Canadian National Championship in college, a CFL Gray Cup, and a Super Bowl in the NFL with the Dallas Cowboys.

“I think he holds the record for that combination of championships,” Radulovich said. “I don’t know of anyone else in history who had those three (championship) rings.”

There was a time, however, before Radulovich went the teaching route and even before he flirted with a CFL career, where he was a straight-up problem for opponents on the gridiron.

Radulovich grew up in Niagara Falls, Ontario, right on the Canada-United States border, with a comfortable upbringing after his parents’ brave quest to migrate from Serbia — then part of Yugoslavia —



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Fairmont State professor Nenad Radulovich, left, poses for a photo with his wife, Nichole, back, and his daughters Mara, front, and Daniela, right.

with nothing, Radulovich said.

"He was risking his life," Radulovich said. "In those days the borders were closed, so in the middle of the night, after several days, he crossed the border and made it to Austria."

In Austria, Kosta was labeled a displaced person and was given the opportunity to immigrate to Canada right away or wait three years and try to make it to the United States. Kosta chose Canada, and then two years later, Milica, who was Kosta's girlfriend at the time, migrated from Yugoslavia to Canada as well after going through piles of red tape with the Yugoslavian

government. Kosta then worked his way up as an entrepreneur in Canada, first owning a hotel and then a tavern, to provide a comfortable upbringing for Radulovich.

"He had zero. He had his coat and that's basically about it," Radulovich said of his father when he arrived in Canada.

As a kid, Radulovich said he immediately gained an interest in sports despite his parents' relative indifference. He was big into hockey as so many Canadians are, and he had a soft spot for curling as well, another sport specifically popular in Canada.

He played basketball, already towering over his peers at a young age.

"Myself, I was fascinated with football," Radulovich said. "I was very interested early, around the age of 10, in the first possible leagues for me to play in."

Radulovich, however, exceeded the 125-pound weight limit for the youth league and wasn't permitted to play. "I had to wait until high school really to start playing football," he said.

But once in high school, Radulovich, who was already 230 pounds with athletic gifts, was a two-way force as a tight end and defensive end, eventually drawing interest to play in college at one of Canada's 24 universities that have football programs.

There were no scholarships in Canada in those days, Marshall said, essentially making everyone into a walk-on who had to try out. Western Ontario, a college football powerhouse in Canada, offered an opportunity to Radulovich.

"Obviously he was big," Marshall said of Radulovich with a laugh. "He was very raw, but he was big. The one thing, though, is he was eager; he was very inquisitive, always asking questions, and no matter what you asked him to do, he would do it."

Western Ontario's coaching staff moved the hulking Radulovich from tight end to left tackle. "Everyone wants to be a tight end...but he couldn't catch," Marshall joked. Radulovich played tackle for six seasons with his redshirt [Canadian colleges offer a standard five years of eligibility], eventually becoming a multi-time all-conference pick to pave his path to the CFL.

"He had great personality. Everyday was positive," Marshall said looking back. "The thing that struck me about Nenad is that he looked after all of the players. He was the one who when he was a senior and he was a starter, he would look after the young players and take care of them and help them out."

"That's the one thing that stands out to me about Nenad: He cared. He absolutely cared about the football program, his teammates, his coaches and everyone within our program."

And that's the side of Radulovich that translates anywhere — to college football, to the CFL, and to teaching history as a professor at Fairmont State.

"I immensely enjoy teaching at the college level, and I enjoy especially preparing future high school history teachers," he said. "I've really enjoy it. It's been a lot of fun."

Email Bradley Heltzel at bheltzel@timeswv.com or follow him on Twitter @bradheltzTWV.






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Preserving local black history

Gladys Miller's goal is education

STORY BY ERIC HRIN

PHOTOS BY TAMMY SHRIVER

For Gladys Miller, working for the Marion County Historical Museum in Downtown Fairmont is more than just a job.

The role allows her to learn about West Virginia's black history, and share its richness with others.

"Mostly, I've learned about the prominent black people that's lived here in Marion County that I don't think, really, our children knew," she said. "It's really rewarding."

The executive assistant at the museum, Miller started a black history book.

"When I first started here, there was nothing regarding people of color in the museum, and I started a black history book, and it's made up of mostly Marion County people of color," Miller said.

She uses the book to acquaint children with local black history.

"It helps a lot of younger kids when they see it," she said.

Miller recalled a time when a grade school student was preparing to write a paper on Amelia Earhart several years ago.

Instead, she suggested he write about one of West Virginia's most well-known aviators, Rose Agnes Rolls Cousins, who completed the Civilian Pilot Training Program at West Virginia State College. After college, Cousins tried out for the U.S. Air Force training program for black combat pilots in Tuskegee, Ala. and was inducted as an honorary member of the Tuskegee Airmen in the 1980's.

Last year, Fairmont City Council adopted a resolution requesting the West Virginia Department of Transportation, Division of Highways, officially name the Coal Run Hollow replacement bridge in Fairmont in honor of Cousins.

Miller said the student took her suggestion, and then wrote a paper on Cousins. The interaction was somewhat of an epiphany for Miller.

"It reminded me that our children don't know too much about their grandparents, great-grandparents, right here in Marion County," she said. "There's so much that our kids don't know, and it's so sad."

Miller then started compiling the book on black history at the museum.

"I made this book so they can at least come and look through it," she said.

She said the book represents a very impressive group of people. She said there are "very prominent people in this book."

Some of those honored include Greg Hinton, the first black mayor of Fairmont and currently a professor at Fairmont State University; Charlotte Meade, a prominent school teacher and local columnist; Marlene Mitchell, the first black woman to serve as administrative assistant in the Marion County Home Incarceration Program under the Marion County



Gladys Miller sets up a display at the Marion County Historical Society.

"When I first started here, there was nothing regarding people of color in the museum, and I started a black history book, and it's made up of mostly Marion County people of color."

Sheriff's Department; and Kip Price, a local veterans advocate.

"She does an outstanding job," Price said. "She deserves a lot of credit."

He said Miller's book is a great educational tool.

"What a way to educate people that don't even know a lot of these people," he said. "They can come in and learn about them and be educated, and hopefully be touched from what their achievements have been."

He said it's important that their stories not be lost to time.

"I applaud her efforts," Mitchell said. "I like that she does that, and maintains that for the county."

She said Miller is very pleasant and easy to talk to, as well. Mitchell also likes how Miller includes living examples in the museum's black history book.

"I can go over and look at the book, and say, 'I know him,' or 'I know her,'" she said.

Miller spends about a couple days a week on the book, which she has been working on for nine years.

She has also learned about people she wasn't aware of herself.

"And there's so many that I did not know about," she said. "Because I wasn't from Fairmont itself, I was from a little town, Carolina."

After graduating from Monongah High in 1963, Miller married three years later and moved to



Gladys Miller poses by the stained glass window at the Marion County Historical Society.

Cleveland, Ohio, where she spent more than 40 years. During that time, she worked for 15 years as an optometrist assistant.

She came back home to Marion County when the optometrist she worked for retired.

"Being back home is great," she said.

While still in Ohio, Miller would come home to Marion County on the weekends and attend worship at Central United Methodist Church, where she met Dora Kay Grubb, the past president of the Marion County Historical Society.

After Miller retired and came back to Marion County around 2005, Grubb asked her about volunteering at the museum.

"Dora Kay and I became friends, and I had retired from work, and she was asking me, 'why not come and do volunteer work here,'" Miller said. "So, I started volunteering here for about a year, then I became vice president [of the museum]."

Then, when an employee at the museum resigned, Miller stepped down as vice president and became an employee of the museum.

Now, as the executive assistant at the museum, she works as a "behind the scenes" employee, a role she loves.

"Whenever we have any type of activities or events, I would do the work as far as behind the scene work, getting things ready," Miller said. "For instance, our history expo. With that, I usually have to pack books, pack artifacts that we're going to take to the history expo."

She also coordinates volunteers and makes sure arrangements are made for the food at events.

Grubb commends Miller and said she is impressed by Miller's volunteerism and reliability. Grubb described Miller as friendly and outgoing who has hardly missed any workdays.

"She always followed through with her commitments," Grubb said.

Grubb said Miller has initiative and great ideas. She's also impressed by

Miller's contributions to the museum, especially in the area of black history.

"During Black History Month, she always wanted to promote it and decorate at least one room in black history," she said. "I can't speak highly enough of her, she's an excellent person. She's very dependable."

"I first met Gladys when I came to the Marion County Historical Society Museum for information and she was a great help," said Joni L. Morris, executive director of the museum. "Now, several years later, I have the privilege of working with her."

Morris said Miller is "the backbone of the museum," keeping things organized.

"Whenever I need something, administrative-wise, Gladys usually knows where it's at," she said. "She is always on time, dependable and stays whenever needed. She always goes above and beyond. Gladys keeps me in line and reminds me of stuff I need to do if I forget, which I unfortunately do

a lot.

"She makes working here fun and even makes days that are stressful, not so much. Her unwavering faith in God shows and is a steady source of comfort for her and those who work with her. Gladys is always honest and completely trustworthy. The more I have gotten to know her, the more I have come to love her upfront, truthful 'til it hurts nature. I admire this about her because there are so many people now who will tell you what they think you want to hear or half-truths or 'blow sunshine' but not Gladys. Gladys is true-blue and I love working with her because of it. I always know where I stand," Morris continued.

Morris said Miller's contributions to the museum are so vast, they cannot be counted.

"Through the changes of directors, workers and now a president, she has kept things going for the Historical Society and the museum," she said. "For the last 13 years, she has been the strong main mast on a ship that has weathered some pretty bad storms. I truly believe if it had not been for her loyalty, dependability and hard work, the Historical Society and the museum would not be where it is at today. Gladys has not gotten near enough credit over the last 13 years she has worked here and I believe it is about time that everyone knows just how important this wonderful, intelligent and spirited lady is to our Historical Society and especially to our museum."

In the future, Miller said she hopes to start a black history room at the museum. She said one of things the room would feature is the history of black soldiers from West Virginia, mostly from Marion County.

"I'm going to try to find some artifacts that black people used back in the 1800's," Miller said. "I want to put that in the room. But I'm looking forward to it."

"This way, I'm hoping it will bring more black people to the museum. Because that's something I've learned, too. They don't come," Miller continued.

She thinks low participation from the black community is because the museum didn't have much black representation until she started her black history book.

Miller said her favorite part of her job is the fact that it allows her to remain active.

"It keeps me going, and it keeps my mind learning," she said. "Mostly every day, someone is bringing something in that they found of their ancestor, like in the attic or somewhere, and they bring it in to see if we want it."

Miller has two adult children, Walter and his wife, Regina, and Coilynn Buford, and three grandchildren, Devin, Tariq and Leah.

Mission of love

Physician Clay Marsh is changing the culture of medicine and West Virginia

STORY BY ERIC CRAVEY

Donning a pristine white lab coat, Clay Marsh greeted his guests and asked if anyone wanted a bottle of water or a cup of coffee and proceeded to his office where he took off the coat.

Underneath the lab coat Marsh, vice president of WVU Medicine and executive dean of the university's School of Medicine, was wearing a mauve-colored T-shirt that had a red outline of a heart on the front. In the center of the heart was the word love and just outside of the heart design was the name Luke.

Marsh had just returned from visiting with little Luke Pearson who was at the hospital that day for a check up after a January surgery for a cancerous brain tumor. In the fall of 2019, Luke was three when he was first misdiagnosed at a different hospital. His parents, Donovan Pearson and Brooke Holstein Pearson of Madison, W.Va., would later fight their way to Morgantown where Luke was properly diagnosed and is now on a path to recovery.

"I had to be there for Luke," Marsh said, smiling with a glint in his eye.

It's either ironic or kismet that the T-shirt Luke's parents gave Marsh was emblazoned with the word "Love." Marsh discusses love quite often when he speaks to groups about health care and, in recent years, the opioid epidemic in West Virginia.

"The answer to [the opioid epidemic] is not technical. The answer is love," Marsh said June 5, 2019, while addressing a group in Morgantown. "The answer is community. This is time for us to get community — to get community within our own families, because we know now in certain parts of West Virginia, over 75% of children live without biological parents."

In his role at WVU, Marsh often discusses self-love, connecting with others and showing authentic care

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PHOTO BY TAMMY SHRIVER

Clay Marsh, M.D. believes healing begins with first loving yourself.

and concern for everyone. He often cites various studies that report close, connected relationships are a pathway to a long, healthy life.

"Medical school was something that I found a great love and passion for and being able to help people and the intellectual sort of complexity of the field and the application opportunities and the helping people heal. I think it's just been extraordinary," Marsh said. "I feel so like Lou Gehrig — the luckiest man on the face of earth — to have found this profession."

The son of a journalist father and a stay-at-home mother, Marsh grew up in Charleston where he was Valedictorian at the now-closed Charleston High School. He went on to West Virginia University, where in 1981, he graduated with a degree in biology. Four years later, he graduated from the same school of medicine that he now leads today.

He jokingly describes his career path as happenstance and a series of unplanned events.

"I feel like I was drawn to this field by less sort of intentional things and more things just kind of fell into place and I think my grades were certainly part of what fell into place and I met

some really nice people," Marsh said.

After earning the medical degree, Marsh applied to multiple programs to continue the next phase of his medical education and his search ended up taking him not that far from Morgantown.

"I went to about 14 places in the country to interview after I graduated from medical school here to get the next part of my training," Marsh said. "I was committed to training in internal medical. And I went to a bunch of places, but I ended up going to Ohio State where I ended up being for a long time."

While at Ohio State, he met WVU President Gordon Gee, who at the time, was serving as president at Ohio State. Little did either Gee or Marsh know, at that first meeting, that they'd end up

"Clay Marsh is responsible for recruiting some 670 medical professionals to WVU Medicine. That's a great tribute to him and a great tribute to our hospital."

— WVU President Gordon Gee

having such a long friendship. Today, they live in the same neighborhood.

"He's my neighbor and we live about two houses apart so we get to see each other a lot in a different number of settings," Gee said.

Gee believes that if any one physician can re-shape the health and health care delivery of an entire state, it's going to be Clay Marsh. Gee says that change starts with the culture of the medical field itself.

"He believes in culture first. He believes in valuing and appreciating people. He believes in trust," Gee said. "Curiosity and creativity is how I see him."

However, Marsh is not achieving this huge goal in a vacuum. Gee said in the five years Marsh has been back at WVU, Marsh has lured some of the



PHOTO BY TAMMY SHRIVER

As executive dean of the School of Medicine at WVU, Clay Marsh, M.D., often checks in with medical students to inquire how they are doing.

most-talented medical professionals in the U.S. to serve on the School of Medicine faculty, as well as practice in different specialties of medicine under the WVU Medicine umbrella.

“He’s a pied piper. People love to be around him,” Gee said. “Clay Marsh is responsible for recruiting some 670 medical professionals to WVU Medicine. That’s a great tribute to him and a great tribute to our hospital.”

One such physician Marsh is responsible for bringing to WVU is nationally-recognized neurosurgeon Ali Rezai who had served as the director of the Wexner Medical Center’s Neurological Institute at Ohio State during Marsh’s time there. Rezai joined WVU Medicine in the fall of 2017 and now serves as director of the Rockefeller Neuroscience Institute, serves as an associate dean and is a John D. Rockefeller IV tenured professor in neuroscience.

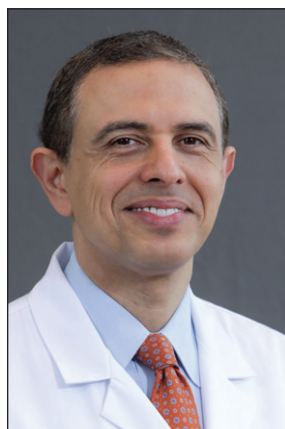


PHOTO BY JENNIFER SHEPARD
Ali Rezai, M.D. was lured to WVU Medicine by his friend and colleague, Clay Marsh.

Rezai says Marsh is simply the kind of person others want to be around. Rezai and his family often spend time with Marsh and his wife, including nights when Marsh cooks a healthy meal.

“He provides a very nurturing environment for our faculty. He’s not transactional in his relationships,” Rezai said. “He’s very caring and is always looking at the broader purpose. He is always studying how diseases are impacting society. He provides an environment where we can celebrate success. He’s a very positive person and he feels empathy for others.”

Rezai said Marsh is re-engineering the culture of empathy and medicine, a much-needed facet of health care, an industry known for having a high burnout rate

for physicians and other caregivers.

“Empathy is very important to have. He works with the medical students to understand their needs and why they are here,” Rezai said. “I think people buy into his culture — it’s not just a transactional element — people come here and know Clay has their back. He tells us to take time off and spend time with our families. He is physically strong and cognitively strong and he has created a very nurturing environment.”

Like many of Marsh’s friends, both Gee and Rezai admit Marsh is a voracious reader. Marsh said he has recently read a series of books on quantum physics and quantum mechanics, but he is also quick to quote such authors as Maryanne Williamson, the Sufi poet Rumi or New York Times best-selling author David Epstein. Marsh has also been known in different settings to discuss the meaning of the word ‘namaste,’ which loosely translated, means “The divine light in me bows to the divine light within you.”

“He’s a tremendous reader. He’s a speed reader and he reads like a book a day and he reads not just about science,” Rezai said. “He has a tremendous sense of creativity and imagination. He’s a very unusual person.”

While he is extremely educated, well-read and intelligent, Marsh’s care for his home state has deep roots. His brother, Sam Marsh, said his older brother’s love of West Virginia and the desire to change the culture is rooted in the coal camps where their grandfather toiled to provide for his family.

“Our dad grew up in a coal camp in Logan,” said Sam Marsh, a prosecuting attorney in Charleston. “[Dad] was one of the first in his family to go to college. We come from a long line of incredibly hard-working blue collar West Virginians. That sort of enabled Clay, through our dad, and him being incredibly familiar with those folks and that helped create an affinity for West Virginians.”

Gee is convinced that Clay Marsh is on track to accomplish his goal of changing the state.

“He’s a wonderful man. He’s a West Virginian through and through,” Gee said. “His No.1 goal is really to have a healthy environment for our state. He spends a lot of time focusing on the health of our

people.”

Marsh encourages those he meets to stop and take time to enjoy every interaction, from the sound of morning birds chirping to an unexpected phone call from a loved one. He believes those somewhat simple things carry great power to heal and grow.

“I think we love ourselves by appreciating that we’re all here to grow, we’re all part of the same thing and we are here to be able to create and if we can get out of our own way, we can create amazing things,” Clay Marsh said.

Reach Eric Cravey at (304) 367-2523.



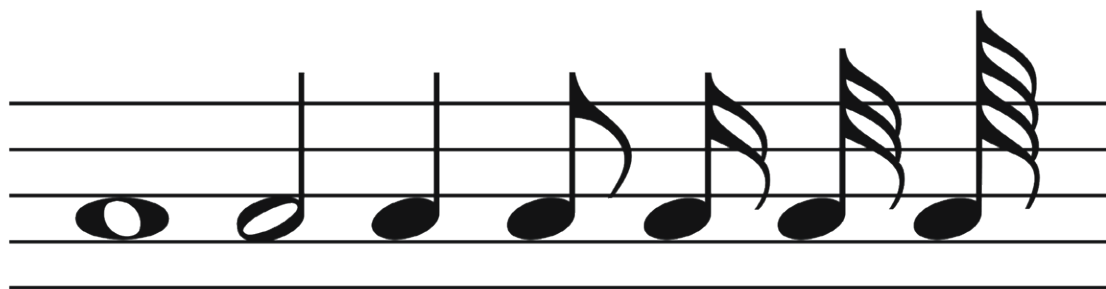
WVU PHOTO

From left, Clay Marsh, Brooke Holstein Pearson, physician Mark Lee, Donovan Pearson and Luke Pearson pose for a photo on Feb. 25 after Luke had a successful checkup for a brain tumor. Luke had surgery on the tumor in January at WVU Children’s Hospital in Morgantown. Luke’s mom, Brooke, gave Marsh a T-shirt celebrating Love and Luke’s success.

The love of all things lyrical

John Morrison, a linchpin of cultural arts in Fairmont

STORY BY ERIC HRIN



During a Sunday service, music fills the spacious interior of First Presbyterian Church on Jackson Street in Fairmont. People stand in the pews and sing hymns of praise. Before them, John Morrison of Fairmont plays the notes of the stirring organ music that reverberates throughout the sacred space. For Morrison, music is an exhilarating experience, something he's been involved with since he was a child when he learned how to play the violin and then the piano.

"It makes me feel alive," he said. "It's a great joy to live a life that's full of music."

He finds music a unique activity.

"It's a way to express yourself like none other," said Morrison, who is 42.

Morrison enjoys his work as the director of music and organist at the church, where he directs the chancel choir, the Cambridge Hand Bell Choir and plays the organ.

"It's a very friendly, welcoming church and the choir members are devoted," he said. "Many have been members for many years and there are some who actually grew up in the church and they're still singing."

Beyond playing music for the congregation, he also teaches others.

In the Department of Music at Fairmont State University, he has served as assistant professor of piano since 2012, instructor of piano and strings and choir and recital accompanist since 2006. In addition, he teaches in conjunction with the Fairmont State University Academy for the Arts Preparatory Department.

At the university, he likes helping the students, and doing his part to ensure that future generations of musicians continue to play.

"I like the challenge, too, of figuring out how best to help someone to do their best," he said.

Rev. D.D. Meighen, interim pastor at the church, said Morrison is a man of many abilities.

"John is one of the most creative and dedicated church musicians, choir directors and human beings I know. His skills are so diverse and inspirational," he said. "He leads and directs our Cambridge Hand Bell Choir, one of the most gifted hand bell choirs in Marion County; he plays the organ, piano and violin regularly with a beauty that people stay in their seats listening to his prelude and postlude selections; he works with the Fairmont State University Choir and Music programs to bring their music to the community and uses community resources to enhance our musical appreciation."

Meighen likes how Morrison brings programs at the church to life through his music.



SUBMITTED PHOTOS



“I think he’s an important part of the culture of Fairmont because so many concerts and programs that happen in this area, John is a part of. He plays for them, he helps organize them. He serves on the board of the Fairmont Chamber Music Society.”

— Sam Spears, associate professor of music at Fairmont State

professor of music and the Fairmont State University Department of Music coordinator, said Morrison is “one of the busiest working musicians I’ve ever met.”

“If he’s not in class teaching, he’s in private lessons with students from pre-college through adult,” he said. “He’s active in his church. He leads his church music services, and he’s very busy here teaching and accompanying students on campus. It’s almost like he never sleeps.”

Eichenbaum is impressed by Morrison’s accompanist work, which he said is “fantastic.”

Morrison also has been the West Virginia American Choral Directors Association Collegiate Honor Choir accompanist for several years, and the West Virginia All-State Children’s Chorus accompanist for several years, both of which have been in Charleston.

Morrison said he played piano to accompany the singing, which he enjoys.

“I love it,” he said.

Eichenbaum said Morrison works well with students.

“He’s very good-natured, and he’s very gentle with them, and he’s also very knowledgeable,” he said. “We are so fortunate to have him because the students love working with him and they think that he’s not only a good teacher but he’s also patient with them.”

Sam Spears, associate professor of music at Fairmont State and the director of choral and vocal activities, said Morrison is “an excellent teacher,” and “a terrific player and accompanist for the choir.”

“I can definitely say that I have never worked with anybody better anywhere else I’ve been,” he said. “So, he’s as good as anybody I’ve ever worked with.”

Spears said Morrison contributes not only to the university, but the community.

“I think he’s an important part of the culture of Fairmont because so many concerts and programs that happen in this area, John is a part of,” he said. “He plays for them, he helps organize them. He serves on the board of the Fairmont Chamber Music Society.”

Brenda Giannis, president of the

Fairmont Chamber Music Society, said Morrison is “an outstanding musician and a great member of the Fairmont Chamber Music Society’s Board of Directors.”

“As a director, pianist, violinist and organist, John is the consummate musician,” Giannis said. “I’ve had the pleasure of singing with the Fairmont State Community Chorus where John is the accompanist and does an incredible job. As a member of the FCMS Board of Directors, John attends our chamber music concerts, and board meetings, is a liaison for the FCMS and Fairmont State, and manages our Facebook page, including assisting with other volunteer tasks as the need arises. John is an outstanding contributor to the arts in our area and throughout the region and holds memberships in many musical and professional organizations throughout the state. His commitment to musical excellence shows in his performances, in the students he teaches, and the organizations to which he belongs, including the Fairmont Chamber Music Society. I’m so glad he’s a part of our community.”

Morrison has played organ and violin for the Vocal Tapestry community choir concerts and piano and violin for Fairmont Senior High choir concerts. He has played piano and violin for Maestri Vocale, a newly-formed men’s choir in West Virginia. Also, he gave the world premiere performance this past fall of “Green Bank,” a piece written by Eichenbaum for piano and fixed media, at the West Virginia Music Teachers Association State Conference in Huntington. Morrison said he also has performed with Peter Wilson, who grew up in Morgantown and serves in The President’s Own United States Marine Band.

Morrison said he loves classical music. He said he particularly likes to play music written by Beethoven, Prokofiev, and Ravel.

The late pianist Van Cliburn and violinist Itzhak Perlman are also inspirations for Morrison. He’s also inspired by classical pianist and West Virginia resident Barbara Nissman.

He also enjoys pop music.

“I love 80’s music,” he said.

“As a person, he is an active listener and relates the weekly music to the themes of the Sunday services, the needs of the people, and the special events being shared; whether that be Communion, the 200th Celebration of the city, patriotic or ecumenical services,” he said. “His cantatas for Easter and Christmas are always forward looking with modern themes and yet with a dedication to the past in words and melodies.”

He said the church benefits every week from Morrison’s contributions.

“Having served in 4 major denominations over my 53 years of ministry, I can say that John Morrison continues to exceed any expectation I have,” he said. “And, due much in part to John, it is such an enjoyable and inspirational time each Sunday to come and worship at First Presbyterian.”

Kimberly Steele, a member of the Cambridge Hand Bell Choir and the chancel choir at the church, commends Morrison for his abilities and virtues.

“He’s wonderful,” she said. “He’s so kind and he is so patient. He has a lot more faith in us than we do ourselves,”

She thought his talent was beyond compare.

“To me, his talent is unsurpassed,” she said. “My husband goes to church

just to watch him play.”

Steele recalled how Morrison once played the organ with the foot pedals with his feet, and the violin at the same time with his hands.

“He’s quite something,” she said. “He really is. We just stand in awe of him all the time.”

“He’s excellent in bringing in guest musicians,” she continued. “He’s good about using the talent he has within the church too. Everyone at church just loves him.”

Amy Koon, also a member of the church’s Cambridge Hand Bell Choir and the chancel choir, said Morrison is “excellent to work with.”

“He has a fantastic talent,” she said.

She said he always encourages the choir members, and picks musical selections that are appropriate, fun, at the choir members’ level and very pleasing to the audience.

“He is good at everything he does musically,” he said. “He is very, very musically committed to the church and our players.”

She said Morrison has been a “fantastic addition to this musical community,” both at the church and the university. She said also he works well with the students at the university.

Dan Eichenbaum, associate

SPREADING THE AWESOME

Carlie Ice educates others about epilepsy

STORY BY ERIC CRAVEY

Whether she's in the classroom, on the volleyball court or soccer field, 14-year-old Carlie Ice is tough competition.

Even when her soccer team wins, Carlie believes she's had a bad game because she didn't score a goal. As an eighth grade student at East Fairmont Middle School, that mindset has earned Carlie a reputation as a leader among adults and fellow students.

"I think she's a competitive person. She's never going to be satisfied. She always wants to do more and be more. She's passionate and she's got a competitive drive with athletics and academics, always wanting everything to be bigger and better," said Jim Zaveski, one of the school's assistant principals.

Being new in his position this school year, Zaveski said he had not met Carlie when she was in sixth or seventh grade. They met one day last fall when he was walking through the gym prior to volleyball practice.

"She was bouncing around, talking while putting up the volleyball net, she was so hyped, so I nicknamed her hype," he said.

While Carlie has earned a reputation as a high-energy teen, there are brief moments in her life when things slow down or get shaken up. That's because Carlie has epilepsy.

Her mother Nancy Ice — who is a nurse — describes the absence seizures Carlie has as brief periods of "being unaware."

"She had one of those periods during a soccer game and that scared us and it scared her because she didn't know what was going on at that point," Nancy said.

Nancy said the game had been a physical battle and Carlie was running along, and was chosen to kick a penalty kick, which can be stressful for teammates and parents on the sidelines. The rules for a PK are strict in that the kicker can only touch the ball once.

"Well, she ran up to the ball and just squashed it and just stood there. Her best friend was standing nearby and they've been known to devise plans and use trickery with each other because it's fun," Nancy said.

However, that day was no trick.

Carlie froze during an absence seizure in front of her team and the fans. When she woke from being unaware, all Carlie could hear were shouts of "Kick it! Kick the ball!" repeatedly to a point that her confusion multiplied exponentially.

"So, she kicked even though she knew that she shouldn't have because she knew the rules of the game and that upset her because she would have never done that had she not been confused like that," Nancy said.

A seizure is much like a lightning storm that takes place in the brain. During that time, the person is left completely unaware of what's going on outside

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SUBMITTED PHOTO

Carlie Ice, 14, of Fairmont, holds a proclamation about epilepsy in the West Virginia statehouse.

of their body because the brain has overridden all other bodily functions. The best safety precaution for onlookers is to ensure the person does not hit their head or walk into danger.

"She came off the field crying and very emotional, which was not like her at all. This was toward the end of the game and after the game, she just wanted to go because she was so upset," Nancy said. "So, I talked to her a little bit about it and we figured out that she probably had an absence seizure because she said she didn't know what happened."

Doctors originally diagnosed Carlie's absence

"I think she's a competitive person. She's never going to be satisfied. She always wants to do more and be more."

— Jim Zaveski, East Fairmont Middle School Assistant Principals

seizures when she was in second grade. Like many patients, she was prescribed medication because there is no cure for epilepsy, which manifests itself in various forms of seizures that have different names.

However, the medication's side effects were so bad, Nancy and her husband Matt Ice, decided to take Carlie off the pills and closely monitor her progress. In the meantime, her physician warned Carlie's family that because she had one form of epilepsy, she would be more susceptible to have convulsive seizures at some point in her life.

That day came last September at a volleyball practice. Carlie had her first convulsive seizure.

"After that convulsive seizure, I knew that I wanted to make sure that as many people keep her safe as possible because, as a parent, you kind of want to live in that world of denial a little bit," Nancy said.

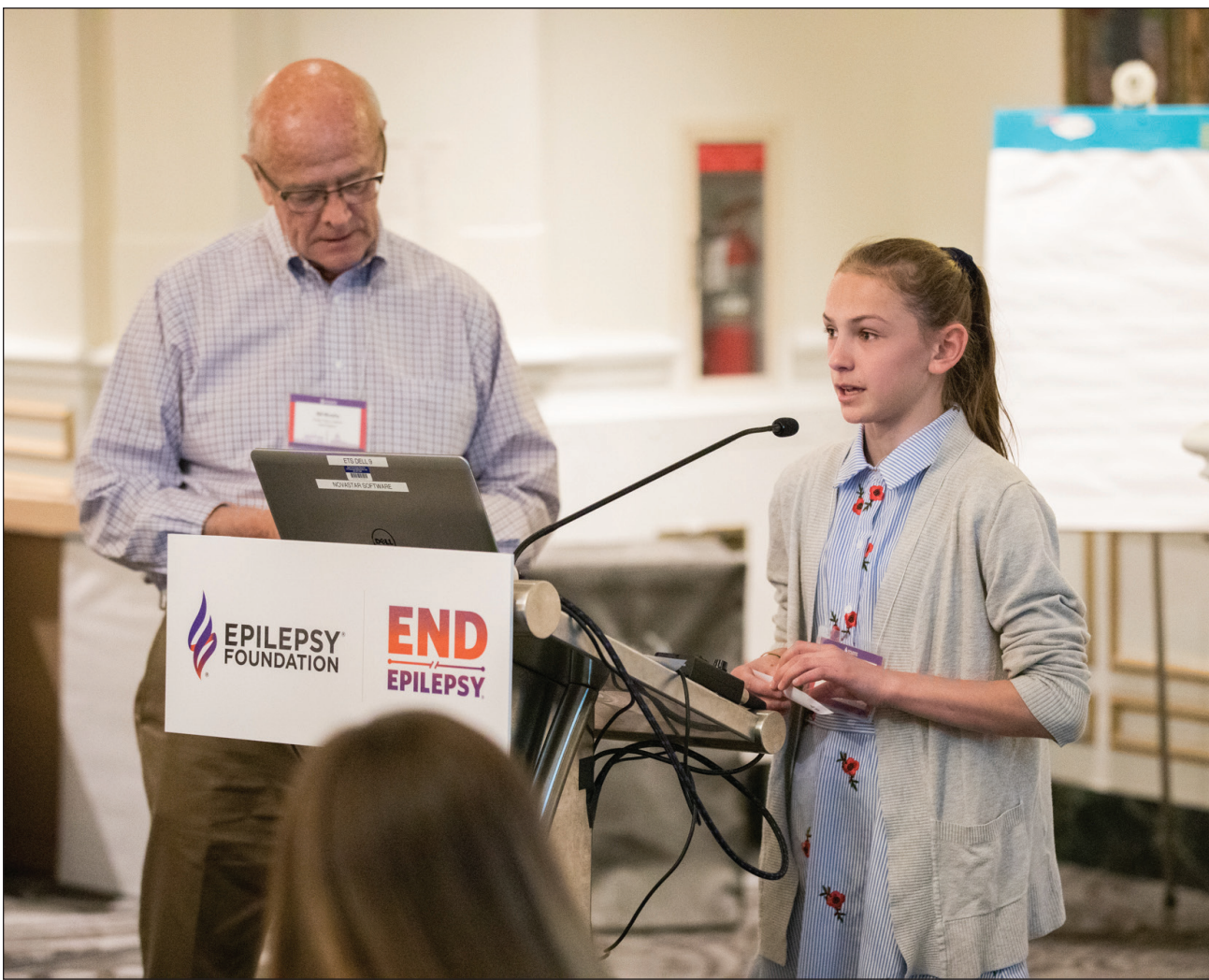
Nancy then set out to arm herself with information. That's when she found Chris Mullett and the then month-old Epilepsy Foundation of West Virginia whose office is in Bridgeport.

"I think I wanted to live in the world of 'Yeah, she has an increased risk, but it'll never happen,'" Nancy said. "And then, her first one did happen and I had her in my arms the whole time, luckily I was right side of her so I could lower her to the ground and keep her safe. And then, after that, I said, 'What if I'm not there.' You know, you've got to do what you can to keep them safe," Nancy said.

Like Zaveski, Mullett became impressed with Carlie from their first meeting. He asked Carlie to consider joining the Epilepsy Foundation's Teen Speak Up program, which involves talking to local, state and national lawmakers about the need for epilepsy research funding and seizure safety education and awareness.

Carlie admits she was reluctant to take on something so public and was scared at first. However, with a little help from Mullett, she said yes.

"So, I was kind of scared. Yes, I don't



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Carlie Ice is a member of the Epilepsy Foundation of America's Teen Speak Up program, which encourages teens to educate others about seizure safety.

know what to do but I also thought, 'If I mess this up, I'm going to look super bad and I'm going to make Chris look super bad' and so I wasn't sure if I wanted to do it because I don't like making other people look bad," Carlie said.

Through Teen Speak Up, Carlie has spent days on Capitol Hill in Washington where she made the case for epilepsy awareness with U.S. senators and representatives from West Virginia and other parts of the country. And yes, she was nervous the first time, but that subsided.



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Carlie Ice had her first seizure on the soccer field where she blanked out and stopped moving.

"I remember I tried to look at my notes and my hands were just shaking as I went to grab them. But, as the day went on, everything was great. I was happy because I knew I could do it now. Next time I do it, I shouldn't be scared at all," Carlie said, smiling.

Mullett said in the brief time he has known Carlie, she has grown in her level of confidence to become a great ambassador for West Virginia and epilepsy.

"Carlie is an amazing young lady and we've been very fortunate to have her as West Virginia's Teen Speak Up representative," Mullett said. "She is very proactive and educates the people around her about epilepsy and seizure safety. She has educated her soccer and volleyball teams, her classmates, teachers and many others."

Carlie said working with Teen Speak Up has given her confidence in sports and life, in general.

"It's just made me confident all around. Like now, I'm confident I can make a shot from half field in soccer," Carlie said.

Once fearing public speaking, Carlie teamed up with her best friend Drea Neissner to educate the entire student body — about 800 students — at East Fairmont Middle School on what to do if they ever see a person have a seizure.

"We told them facts about epilepsy and then asked them questions and if they got it right, we gave them a bracelet," Drea said. "We told a lot of jokes and, in some parts, we were serious but we messed around too. I think they definitely understood how serious epilepsy is."

And although Carlie and Drea will be heading to East Fairmont High this fall, Zaveski said he plans to continue the epilepsy initiatives Carlie brought to the



SUBMITTED PHOTO

As part of her involvement in Teen Speak Up with the Epilepsy Foundation of America, Carlie Ice met with U.S. Senators Shelly Moore Capito, (R-W.Va.) and Joe Manchin, (D-W.Va.) to lobby for funding for epilepsy research.

middle school. He wants to ensure the next student who has seizures who enters the school is as safe as Carlie is.

"If nothing else, she left a mark on me. I am on board with spreading the word about epilepsy awareness," Zaveski said.

Carlie said her work with the Epilepsy Foundation has changed her life.

"It means a lot because I know I'm helping people better understand that epilepsy isn't a thing we need to be scared of. It's not something we need to hide from someone, especially for the people who have epilepsy," Carlie said. "I'm a normal person, but there's just something else that makes me, me because every person's different, but this is just another thing that makes me awesome."

Reach Eric Cravey at (304) 367-2523.

Tech maker

Brad DeRoos
has been building
since he was a teen

STORY BY EDDIE
TRIZZINO, PHOTOS BY
TAMMY SHRIVER

Brad DeRoos spent about seven years of his life in a submarine cruising in the deep Pacific Ocean off the coast of California.

A 1979 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, DeRoos would go from his home state of Minnesota to pilot submarines for the military. While he enjoyed his life underwater and had a lot of fun working with the crew, he recalls one near-miss that still sticks in his memory from that time in his life.

"They have a little submersible that goes down, so I was a pilot on one of those," DeRoos said. "We had



PHOTO BY TAMMY SHRIVER

Brad DeRoos holds a pallet of colors that are available in their 3D printing process.

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a couple things happen that were nail-biting. I almost drove into a fishing net one time and cleared it by about three feet. It was an anchored fishing net, I could see it in the camera and just barely got over it.”

While DeRoos still works as a pilot of sorts, he hasn’t had to deal with any life-threatening near-misses like that in decades. DeRoos is the president and CEO of 4D Tech Solutions, a mechanical engineering firm that does contracting work for government organizations to create machines and technology.

One of the biggest projects the company has completed in the last few years is the RedTail LiDAR drone, which DeRoos gets to pilot for projects in West Virginia. However, DeRoos said the implementation of technology can be a slow process.

“The time from starting an idea in the technology world to getting something ready to where you can sell it, it’s not quick,” DeRoos said. “We just launched [LiDAR] a couple months ago and we’re just starting to get to the point where our search engine ranking, we actually show up.”

According to DeRoos, the creation side of the business is his true passion, and the business side is a result of that passion. He has been building since he was a kid, and his time in the Navy also brought him closer to his love for building.

“I developed an underwater manipulator arm, it was kind of cool,” DeRoos said. “The idea there was with remotely-operated vehicles that operate for long periods of time underwater. It was a very interesting research project to develop.

“It was actually that from 30 years ago that gave us some of the ideas for the ground robot we’re working on right now.”

DeRoos originally hails from Minnesota, and still bears some of the northern accent from his years there. He moved to West Virginia to pursue a career in the high tech field at the High-Tech Foundation, and the feel of the area led him to his move with his wife and five kids to Fairmont.

“While I was working there, I was actually travelling out here to West Virginia, working with some organizations, the High-Tech Foundation,” DeRoos said. “I just really loved the area, loved the people, the scenery, the pace of life. I did get a job with the Hi-Tech Foundation and ran the research and development group there.”

The location of 4D Tech Solutions is good for DeRoos, because it is near enough to Washington, D.C., where his contracting requests come from, to get to and from, but not inside the city where there are a multitude of technology offices. Since starting his company, DeRoos has made the trip to and from D.C. about once a month to meet with agencies, but luckily, he usually enjoys the drive.

“There are real upsides to being outside the D.C. beltway where a lot of this happens,” DeRoos said. “Usually when you get to a certain size, people set up an office in D.C. You have to be willing to drive, you have to be willing to pick up the phone.”

Being in Fairmont also allows DeRoos to hire local talent to work for 4D Tech, for projects that involve teams of people. He said he hires employees as well as interns from Fairmont State University and West Virginia University to work for him, and they get technology and engineering experience right in town.

“I get to do cool stuff,” said Matt Bartrug, mechanical engineer for 4D Tech Solutions. “In a lot of other engineering places, you’ll design a project but you won’t get to put it together. You get to go soup to nuts with projects here.”

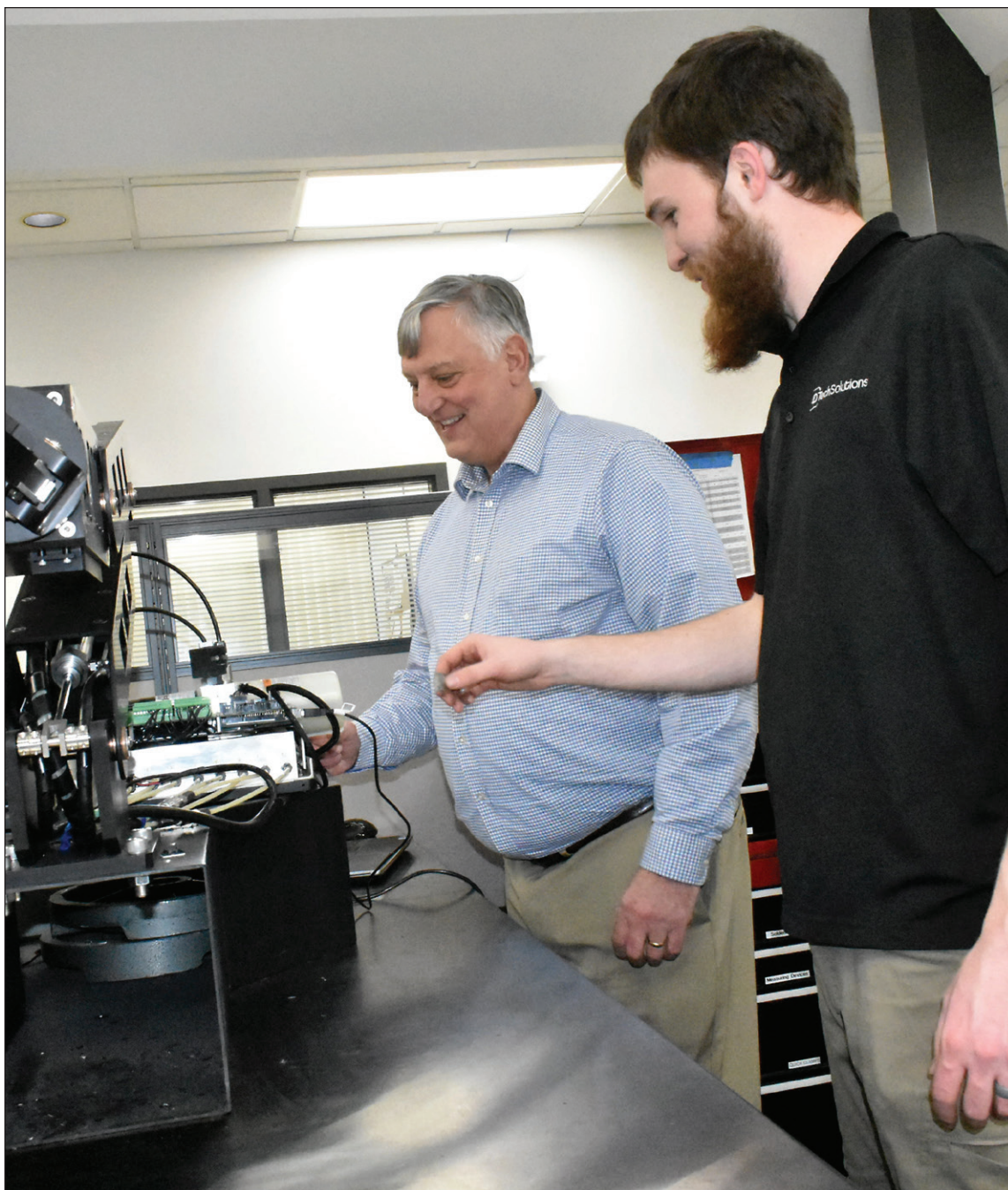


PHOTO BY TAMMY SHRIVER

Brad DeRoos and Matt Bartrug look over the mechanical arm, which is placed on one of its rovers for use.

DeRoos also gets to serve as a mentor to some of the blossoming engineers at the company, and his input on their work has been helpful to them as well.

“He’s very laid back, but at the same time, very intensely focused on things,” said Alex Rubenstein, applications engineer at 4D Tech Solutions. “It’s nice because he gives you enough leeway where you can work on your own thing and when you present it to him he says ‘OK, here is how we can make it better,’ and he uses his own experience to take you from step one to step five.”

Bartrug, too, said he enjoys working with and for DeRoos, because of the cooperative environment that exists when taking on a project.

“Brad’s a really good boss, and a good mentor too,” Bartrug said. “They’re very good at mentoring us and developing us professionally, which has been really nice.”

The work the employees do at 4D Tech is interesting to them, although sometimes a jumble of different tasks that all need to be completed.

“It’s not boring, that’s the best way to put it,” Rubenstein said. “You always have a new project to work on or a new idea to test. Yes, we have a lot

of different roles... which is fun, it makes the day exciting.”

DeRoos said he feels a kinship with the employees of 4D Tech, because their enjoyment for hands-on work is a near universal love for everyone there.

“Ever since I was a little kid... you just grow up building, you grow up making stuff,” DeRoos said. “Everybody’s got this kind of drive to make things or to figure out how stuff works. And that’s something we seek when we interview people.”

While he builds and engineers machines on a daily basis, one of the bigger projects DeRoos worked on recently was his home kitchen. He and his wife needed to repair the plumbing in their kitchen one weekend, which he was able to do himself through his experience in building.

“I ripped countertops out and redid the plumbing under my sink,” DeRoos said. “Then I’ve got a shower that I’ve got to work on. So, I still do a lot of hands-on stuff. It can be frustrating but it’s nice to see things get done, so I’m still hands-on.”

Email Eddie Trizzino at etrizzino@timeswv.com and follow him on Twitter at [@eddietimeswv](https://twitter.com/eddietimeswv).

Rolling up his sleeves for good



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Dennis Shreve, front left, poses with the high school participants in the Harrison County Rotary Club's last RYLA conference in 2019.

Community service is key for accountant Dennis Shreve

STORY BY EDDIE TRIZZINO

Dennis Shreve was once part of a team that moved an entire house.

A local doctor purchased land in Harrison County, but didn't want the house that was situated on the property, so he turned to local volunteers to help move it. According to Shreve, the whole process of moving the structure took about two years, but the work itself ended up being rewarding, and the house came out OK as well.

"We worked on getting an organization together and getting people and everything together and we had the house moved five miles down the road to an empty lot," Shreve said. "We gave it to Susan Dew Hoff Dental Clinic in West Milford and they used it for people who were coming in on mission trips to do things there. It was just a major, major undertaking."

This project is just one Shreve has undertaken through the Harrison County Rotary Club, a chapter of the international civic organization he was part of chartering in the late 1980s. Throughout his decades in the club, he has worked to spread the message of Rotary, which include community service and providing aid to people in need.

"Youth is part of it, and just service above self, helping out the community and helping internationally," Shreve said. "That is all part of Rotary."

Shreve was just a kid when he was first introduced to Rotary Club, going to meetings with his dad who



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Dennis Shreve, center, receives an honorary Rotary Club pin from Dave McMunn, left, in 1988, as his wife, Kenette, and his mother view the ceremony.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Dennis Shreve, left, stands by the cabins at Seneca Shadows with kids of the Rotary Club's Youth Exchange Program in 2015.

was in a club. This early introduction helped him get an idea of community service, a sense which never left him but led him to being a founding member of the Harrison County Rotary Club.

"I really started going to Rotary meetings with my father back in the 1960s," Shreve said. "I was a charter member of the Harrison County Club, which got its charter back in 1988. So I've been a part of that ever since that time."

Shreve has held different leadership positions throughout his time in the club, including district president, treasurer and more.

"I have been the treasurer of the district for probably 15 years now," Shreve said. "We just now have a brand new district which is all of West Virginia now except for the Eastern Panhandle. Our district used to just be Northern West Virginia, and there was a different district down in the south. We combined both those districts and now we cover all of West Virginia except the Eastern Panhandle, and I'm the treasurer of that this year."

Shreve said one of his personal favorite Rotary Club traditions are the Rotary Youth Leadership Awards. One weekend each May, Shreve and the members of the Harrison County Rotary Club take a group of high school freshmen to Jackson's Mill for a leadership convention, where the kids get to participate in a number of activities.

"It's a lot of training about leadership; it's some lecture but it's a lot of hands-on type things," Shreve said. "We've developed a really nice program, I have a huge staff of people and speakers who come in."

Shreve said working with the youth of the community is one of his favorite aspects of

Rotary Club. But because Rotary Club offers chapter memberships worldwide and is always expanding, this means he gets to work with people and kids from other countries and communities. In Harrison County, the members are able to do this through the Youth Exchange Program.

"For the last eight years, I've been a co-chair for the Rotary Youth Exchange in our district," Shreve said. "One is a long-term exchange where a student will come and stay for one full year and go to school, usually high school, or it could be right after they graduate high school. But they come and spend a whole year and they stay with host families."

Shreve and his wife have taken in a number of exchange students, several from European countries. He said the short-term exchange is designed to give the student an authentic American experience while here in the U.S.

"A student gets matched with a student in a foreign country and they go and stay with that family for three weeks," Shreve said. "Then that student comes back with them here to the United States and stays with that family for three weeks."

As an avid outdoorsman, Shreve likes to take these kids to West Virginia parks and nature spots, so they can experience what he believes to be the best parts of the state.

"When we have the exchange kids, I love to take them and show them things they usually don't get to see when they're with their host families," Shreve said. "We'll go to Seneca Rocks and climb the trail up to the rocks, and we'll do Spruce Knob and Seneca Caverns and just do all that stuff."

While working with the Harrison County Rotary Club has seemed like a full-time position

for the past years, Shreve has worked at McNeer, Highland, McMunn and Varner law firm as an accountant for decades, which has kept him busy over the years.

He said the firm has allowed him the time to work with the Rotary Club, and take part in the various Rotary Club projects. In February, he and the Harrison County Rotary Club worked with the Harrison County chapter of Sleep in Heavenly Peace to build beds for kids in need, as one of the group's outreach projects. According to Dave Lang, chapter president of Harrison County's Sleep in Heavenly Peace, Shreve has helped work on this endeavor in the past as well.

"Dennis is a Rotarian at heart, I used to be in the Rotary Club with him," Lang said. "He helped me build some beds here a couple years ago with the Harrison County Rotary."

Lang said the February bed-building day was also productive, as the Harrison County Rotary Club built a number of beds for Sleep in Heavenly Peace.

"We got 14 bunks and 28 total beds that day," Lang said. "They got me a generator and they came up with sheets and they actually worked with me to build a weekend in February."

Shreve said this work is the true heart and soul of the Rotary Club, and the bonds formed between the members and the people they help are what make the organization and its work so rewarding.

"It's been a lot of fun and it's always been a really close, tight-knot group of people," Shreve said. "We're not ones to sit back and just write a check. We want to get out and we want to do things."

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Seriously horsin' around



Hattie Tucker of Grafton competes with Ollie.

PHOTO BY NATIONAL SPORTS BROADCASTING

Hattie Tucker takes talents to Auburn

STORY BY ERIC CRAVEY

Hattie Tucker was two-years-old the first time she sat atop a horse.

While her pony Laddie brought her joy, she did what many children do as she got older. She explored other pursuits until she found her passion.

"I did do other sports growing up before getting into horses. I did gymnastics for five years as well as basketball and soccer," said Hattie, now 18.

When she was nine, Hattie began riding horses everyday on her parents' property near the Marion-Taylor County line and she competed in her first horse show while in fifth grade.

"At first, I showed in Western pleasure under the guidance of a previous trainer, Bobby Dean," Tucker said. "After showing in Western pleasure for a couple of years, I decided I wanted to do something more.

That is when I started reining — the discipline I still perform — and my parents purchased my first reining horse when I was in eighth grade. The horse I currently have is a six-year-old quarter horse and his registered name is Dun N Hollywood."

Reining evolved from the cowboy days of riding ranch horses with leather reins. It's a high-energy sport that requires discipline and, according to Iowa State University, the trainer and the rider have to be one and the same.

"There must be a high level of communication between the horse and rider," states Mary von Rentzell and Peggy Auwerda of Iowa State's Equine Science program. "There are many hours of dedication and practice in which a trainer will prepare horses for reining competition."

In reining, the horse is moving at 3.9 meters per second while it maneuvers through a pattern in the arena. Dirt flies everywhere and the rider gets an

adrenaline rush from the thrill of the ride.

Hattie's father, Pat Tucker, said she has accomplished so much in the equestrian field while balancing her work as a student.

"With the sport not offered at the school level, it requires a lot of self-ambition. This is definitely a huge part of Hattie's life as she not only motivates herself, but she rides everyday to excel herself," said Pat Tucker.

As she grew older, Tucker entered more competitions and become dedicated to perfecting her skills. And she started winning prestigious awards. She has competed against other women from all around the U.S.

"My horse was in training last year with Shawn Florida; Shawn lives in Springfield Ohio. Shawn has earned over \$6 million showing horses and I am blessed to be able to ride and show with him. I also have a trainer close to home as well, Larry



JOHN DOMINIC SETI PHOTOGRAPHY

Hattie Tucker of Grafton stands with her horse Abby.

Floyd. Larry is currently a resident of Barrackville,” Tucker said.

Floyd has been training with Hattie for some five years since he moved back to his home state from Oklahoma where he competed in reining professionally while also working as a trainer.

“The reining horse industry is the fastest-growing equine industry in the country and has been so for the

past 10 years,” Floyd said. “It’s very competitive, it’s a worldwide event.”

“Larry has learned a lot about the sport through his years of experience. Larry has traveled throughout the country showing and lived for a few years in Oklahoma where he rode and trained daily. I am blessed to see Larry and his wife Barb everyday and I could never express how thankful I am for

them both,” Hattie said.

Hattie’s training and showing over the years has paid off. Since winning competitions as young as age 15, she started getting called on by recruiters from university equestrian programs.

“The first school I was recruited by was Delaware State when I was a freshman. I explained to them that I was only a freshman and they said they

would contact me later on in my high school years,” she said.

Last year was a banner year for Tucker. She was ranked in the Top 15 by the All American Quarter Horse Congress, was a member of the East Central Champion Youth Team and was named in the Top 10 Year-End in the Buckeye Reining Series. These accolades were enough to catch the eye



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Pat Tucker, left, stands with his daughter Hattie on signing day at Grafton High School. Hattie signed to become a member of the Auburn University equestrian team.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Hattie Tucker sits atop her first pony, Laddie, which she got when she was two.

of Auburn University, which has won six National Collegiate Equestrian Association championships.

"I consider myself extremely competitive as I believe that if you weren't a competitive person then being a college athlete isn't for you," Hattie said. "I think that showing horses has helped me keep my grades up in high school, I knew that these were Division 1 schools and not only were they looking at how well of a rider I am but they were looking at how I was in school and how I am as a person overall."

This past December, Hattie signed a National Letter of Intent to become a member of Auburn's equestrian team. She plans to major in industrial engineering.

"I signed with Auburn because the first time I was on the campus I fell in love and it felt like home. Auburn's Equestrian team has been undefeated all year, they were SEC Champs and National Champions

in 2019," Hattie said.

While serving on the Auburn team, Hattie won't get to ride Dun N Hollywood. She's not allowed to have her horse at the university. Instead, in competitions, riders from opposing universities ride the same horse. The rider is given four minutes to practice their assigned mount with the horse. According to the NCEA, "the level of difficulty is demonstrated by the accuracy of the pattern and how the competitor uses the horse that she draws to the best of her ability."

Proud of his student's accomplishments, Floyd said he is confident Hattie is the perfect fit for Auburn's equestrian team.

"She is very accomplished. We're very proud of her and signing with Auburn is quite an accomplishment," Floyd said. "I was there as a person to ease her into things, but she had to do the

work. She has a lot of natural talent, but signing with Auburn took more than that."

Hattie is a senior at Grafton High School where she serves as vice president of the National Honor Society. She joined the National Technical Honor Society after taking part in a business administration competition. However, she is anticipating this spring's graduation and is looking forward to moving some 700 miles away to compete for Auburn's elite team.

"They are one of the only teams that you can tell they are behind one another and act not only as teammates, but as sisters. I have made a lot of friends over the years showing most of them are out of state and a couple of them are also going to Auburn," she said.

Reach Eric Cravey at (304) 367-2523.

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Renaissance man

Aaron Hess working to grow local arts scene, more

STORY BY JOE SMITH,

PHOTOS BY

TAMMY SHRIVER

On the corner of High and Walnut streets in downtown sits a building with quite the history. A sign hangs above the street marking the upper floor as the Monongalia branch of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, which has remained in the same location for decades, but the section of the building below has known many inhabitants.

Morgantown native Aaron Hess knows the building well. He can still remember days as a youth spent with his father, now-deceased city police officer Terry Hess, in the Oddfellows lounge, learning how to play billiards. For him, it was just another part of growing up in the city.

Now, in present-day, Hess has found another reason to visit the building, one that helps give back to the community that he was raised in. It's now home to the nonprofit venture Morgantown Art Party, which Hess is heavily involved in as a volunteer.

Founded by local entrepreneur Jillian Kelly, Morgantown Art Party serves as part live event space, part artist cooperative, and part local hangout space that hopes to become a bustling center of arts, culture, and community in the city. And while the original idea for the venture is Kelly's brainchild, she insists it never would have come together without Hess around.

"I think he would disagree, but he's been much more of an asset than he believes — he's huge. I wouldn't have taken the dive into renting out the entire space if I didn't have him on my team. He just fits perfectly, and has all these qualities I don't have that I need. My own shop is completely different because it's just me. This is about the community, it's for artists and musicians. And it made it very easy to give him responsibility and let him make decisions — I felt very comfortable right off the bat throwing things in his court because he always does such a great job," Kelly said.

For Hess, who left the city for nearly a decade before returning after his father died, joining the project is just one more way he has found to give back to the city and help revitalize his hometown, with the end goal of promoting and keeping alive the unique culture and environment alive in the region.

"As somebody that's local to the South Park neighborhood of Morgantown, and spent most of my younger years meandering the streets of downtown, I have a lot of attachment to downtown, as many of the merchants and residents do. My father taught me to play pool on the table upstairs in the same building in the Oddfellows Lodge. Things like the theatre, where I worked for four years, are now sitting vacant. I'd rather see downtown's store fronts used rather than rotting and sitting vacant, and bringing in a diverse group of people to foster the arts in Morgantown seems as good a use as any," he said.

A Special Cocktail

As a native, Hess understands that Morgantown and, by extension, the region of North Central West Virginia is unlike most places across the country or



Aaron Hess plays dodge ball at the Morgantown Learning Academy.

"Morgantown struggles with its identity in being a more cosmopolitan-minded town otherwise in the middle of rural Appalachia. In certain flavors, it seems like Morgantown has more in common with Pittsburgh than either has with the rest of the world. Appalachia just has its own flavor. And I think I took it for granted before I moved away from how unique and energetic the music and arts scene in Morgantown is."

even across the globe.

Those who have lived in the area even just a short period of time can often tell there's a certain feeling to Morgantown that doesn't quite line up with most of Appalachia. Politically progressive, packed to the brim with a melting pot of college students, and accentuated by an energetic nightlife and arts and music scene, Morgantown has a distinctly different feel than most towns and cities in the state. But it still manages to draw on that folksy, rural Appalachian charm that makes the region so special to outsiders and natives alike.

"Morgantown is complex because we have a different complexion in terms of demographics in terms of the rest of the state and even the region. Being a hub in the northern part of the state, being an economic hub and having the university, when tend to have a special outlook on life that is unique. We tend to be more open minded and introspective than other towns. It's an interesting place to grow up. I grew up alongside the children of other police officers as well as the children of college professors, and that dichotomy to me makes up the special cocktail of what Morgantown is," Hess said.

"Morgantown struggles with its identity in being a more cosmopolitan-minded town otherwise in the middle of rural Appalachia. In certain flavors, it seems like Morgantown has more in common with Pittsburgh than either has with the rest of the world. Appalachia just has its own flavor. And I think I took it for granted

before I moved away from how unique and energetic the music and arts scene in Morgantown is."

And after spending the better part of the past 10 years in Savannah, Georgia and Los Angeles, chasing an education and then a career, Hess has become acquainted with what is arguably the largest music and arts cultural hub on the planet. So, upon returning to his hometown, he noticed something that Kelly and many others in the region have struggled with for a long time.

"I can tell you as Jillian states it, she's been frustrated at how limited the options can be for artists and musicians in having venues to show their work, and currently there's a limited option in town for bands. In terms of fundraisers for nonprofits we wanted to have something that was accessible and still an impressive showpiece. We're hoping to have as diverse a calendar of events as possible," Hess said. "We're very flexible in getting together with people to fill up the calendar. We want another place downtown, because other than bars, downtown can be very limited in things to do at night. Our intention is not to be a rip-roaring Morgantown bar — if you want a place to come hang out with your friend and play Dungeons and Dragons, you can do that too."

"Most of my friends are artists and musicians, and I'm a more creative person myself. Seeing so many of my friends saying they were having trouble finding places to perform, artists coming to me and asking what they need to do, I thought that there's so much

talent that just doesn't have a place to go. That's when I decided I wanted to provide local musicians a place to play, local artists a place to show and sell their work. We want to bring the community together through art and music, and it keeps growing and growing," Kelly said.

Under the guidance of Kelly and assistance of Hess, Morgantown Art Party has grown in under a year to a rising hot spot in the downtown scene of Morgantown. It has already hosted numerous social gatherings, cat cafes, and music and art events, as well as recently hosting Para-Con 2020 and the 2nd Annual Weird and Wonderful West Virginia Festival. They are also currently working on obtaining a license which will allow them to sell alcohol.

And according to Kelly, the rise of the new space would never have happened without Hess and his level of involvement.

"His connections, he's very reputable. People see he's involved with something and want to get involved with it. He's such a go-getter, and does a great job of connecting me with people I don't know to get things we need. He's extremely easy to work with, which you can't always find with people. He's honest, he's professional, and great to work with. He's such a blessing," Kelly said.

A "Monster" Unleashed

When Hess returned to The Mountain State after his extended absence, he also brought with him another passion to inject into the Morgantown community, and it's one that isn't often seen out of high school gym classes — dodgeball.

"I discovered the adult dodgeball thing in LA and I was addicted to it as a way to kind of blow off steam, and I couldn't imagine not playing it when I came back to West Virginia," he said.

So Hess, in search of his dodgeball fix, secured a location — the gym at the Morgantown Learning Academy — and organized once-a-week playing sessions under the brand "Monster Dodgeball" which is open to the public for a \$5 fee. And so far, it's been well received by those who attend.

"I actually had a buddy of mine who started out with it initially, and he invited me to it. One of their things is to have people invite friends to build their brand. I've loved playing dodgeball since I was a kid, so I was like hell, yeah. I went super excited, and I got reintroduced back into the game and I've been hooked ever since," said Drew Wallman, a regular attendee.

"The attendance really waxes and wanes, we've been building up a little bit more recently. We've had a decent number in the last few weeks and we're hoping to build up and hit our high mark for the year, but



it's hard to predict honestly. We get new people most weeks, and we also have some people that have been coming for a week and a half. But whether we have six people or 20, we make sure we have a good time. All people need to bring is gym clothes and \$5," Hess said.

For the members of the community, the sessions provide an opportunity to meet new people, pick up a new hobby, and release stress once per week. Also, the exercise involved in the sport is part of its appeal.

"I think it's huge for a community. It's always good to be involved with new peers, and to have things in common. You get to meet people you may not have met otherwise, and it's also really good exercise — it's basically non-stop running around for two hours. Before I got involved, I didn't really have much going on in the element of exercise. I try to do what I can but it kind of brought that exercise element back into my life. I thoroughly enjoy those aspects of it, and playing is just a lot of fun," Wallman said.

"Part of my experience with it is that my family was a traditional old timey baseball family. And I still love it, but you might be there for three hours and do five things, and you can mess up one or two of those things and go home throwing your glove

over it. But you might make 100-200 mistakes in dodgeball, but you're hustling, and your ability to lean into and turn a day around is its real strength. You don't have to worry about whether you did a couple things wrong, but that you did 49 or 50 things right by the end, more things than in the beginning," Hess said.

Those involved with Monster Dodgeball also sing the praises of Hess for his ability to welcome people into the sport, teach them the basics, and make them feel accepted amongst the other participants. And for him, that's probably the biggest perk — because just like his work with Morgantown Art Party, the experiment with dodgeball is, even above his personal enjoyment, primarily to help benefit the city he calls home.

"When people ask me about it, the most amazing thing about it in my experience is watching people grow. When you're playing a sport and you're hitting plateaus, it feels like you're not getting any better. But seeing the look on people's faces when they suddenly develop a skill, it's a really cool thing. Seeing the satisfaction on other people's faces is the primary thing for me," he said.

Follow Joe Smith on Twitter @joesmithwrites

LaKiesha Hines-Greynolds is an inspiring woman.



As a single mom, she spent years working jobs to make ends meet. In 2017 she took a chance on something more stable and began the Step Up for Women Construction Pre-Apprenticeship Program provided by WV Women Work. She was an amazing student; working hard, studying and accomplishing her goals. After graduating, she was hired as the Program Coordinator & Job Developer and took on the challenge of helping to create the Step Up for Women Advanced Manufacturing Program.

Her first class began in January of 2018 and was extremely successful, now LaKiesha has 5 classes of strong, motivated women working in the field and supporting themselves and their families. She takes great pride in helping to give these women the confidence they need to do something they've never done and build a path to becoming self-sufficient.

LaKiesha, along with an experienced Robert C Byrd machine instructor guide these women in not only operating machines but providing soft skills training in resume writing, job hunting skills, and communication. The 10-week program also offers gas mileage reimbursement, clothing allowance, and job placement assistance to its students.

WV Women Work specializes in providing free hands-on training to women in non-traditional occupations throughout West Virginia with sites located in Bridgeport, Morgantown, Charleston, and Huntington. The Step Up for Women Manufacturing Program is now accepting applications for classes starting in June 2020. For more information, please find us online at www.womenwork.org/stepupamp or call 304-848-2283.



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Building confidence one basket at a time

STORY BY
JOE SMITH



As Fairmont State senior basketball star and Morgantown native Rachel Laskody leaned against a hallway wall in Joe Retton Arena, waiting to field post game interviews during her final season on the hardwood, the bright blue-and-red on a Morgantown High sweatshirt stood out against the eggshell white background behind her.

For Laskody, the sweatshirt — and by extension the colors and logo that adorn it — represents much more than just another institution among the hundreds scattered across a poverty-stricken state where the public school system ranks just 44th in the nation. Rather, that piece of clothing informs the world of her home, and the role it played in her becoming the person she is today.

“I’ve always got to be representing Morgantown,” Laskody said.

Without a doubt, if proper representation of her hometown and alma mater has been her primary objective in her collegiate sports career, then she has gone above and beyond where she has needed to.

Laskody recently finished her final campaign for the Falcons, which certainly cemented her impact and legacy on the program — as one of just two seniors on a team led by a first-year head coach. She was able to play a large leadership role in guiding the team to a 15-14 finish and a No. 6 seed in the Mountain East Conference Tournament in Wheeling, and laid the groundwork for a young team with a budding new culture to restore to previous heights.

Even more, Laskody’s performance statistically measures among some of the greatest Lady Falcons to ever lace up their tennis shoes, as she joined the 1,000-point club during the final stretch of the season and finish her Fairmont State career with 1,078 points, 648 rebounds, 123 assists, 96 steals and 79 blocked shots. Laskody’s offensive production was good enough for her to finish 27th in program history in career scoring, and second in career field goal percentage of .566.

But despite where she stands now in Falcons history, it wasn’t always assumed she would end up being near the force she is now. She wasn’t key to her team’s offensive production in any sense of the word during her Morgantown High days, nor did she ever crack the company of 1,000-point scorers as a Mohican. But those close to Laskody always knew she had the

“I just hope my love for the game and my grit on the defense rub off, and hopefully I can instill some confidence in other girls who don’t have confidence like I didn’t. I hope I impact them.”

athleticism, frame, and talent to be something special on the hardwood. And, somewhere along the way, something changed that allowed her to unleash the beast waiting inside.

Confidence is Key

Most casual basketball fans with no personal connection to Laskody or the program at Fairmont State never would have guessed, even just two years ago, that she would blossom into the standout she currently is.

To be fair, some of those who did know the team and Laskody weren’t quite sure what would eventually happen with her. They all realized just how special she could be, but whether she achieved that level or not in large part depended on whether or not she learned to believe in herself.

“It’s definitely my confidence. I had no confidence coming into college, I just knew that I could play defense, I could rebound, and I could run the floor well. Developing confidence in myself really helped me develop into the player I am now,” Laskody said.

“We all could see the ability and pure athleticism she had, and for her, she knows she has those abilities too, but she needs to have the confidence to use them. I think she started figuring out our sophomore year what she could do,” said Brooke Kurucz, a classmate and teammate of Laskody’s at Fairmont State.

Kurucz, who joined the program after a one-year stint with NCAA Division I program Akron, quickly bonded with Laskody upon coming to Fairmont State, at first sharing just a graduation year that eventually blossomed into a friendship and thriving partnership on the court.

“We know we have each other’s backs 100 percent, on the court, off the court, in the classroom, whatever. We’re always there for each other and what each other needs. Having her being the only senior with me, it’s great. I feel like we came in together and just clicked, and it’s cool it’s the two of us getting to finish out together,” Kurucz said.

As Kurucz and Laskody began to develop their relationship with one another both on-court and off-court as sophomores, Laskody felt like she finally had that hype man in her corner that she had lacked during her high school and earlier collegiate career. Now, with every workout, every practice, and every game, Laskody had someone with more faith in her game than she ever had herself. That, combined with a strong work ethic, desire to win, and the correct intangibles, was all that was needed to help Laskody come into her own as a player.

“Without a doubt, I give a lot of it to Brooke. She

Rachel Laskody forges a legacy at Fairmont State

was constantly on my back telling me how good of a player I am, how much confidence I need to have in myself, how it would make me so much better. She really just put that in my mind,” Laskody said.

Laskody also likes to shout out current Fairmont State assistant coach Kelli Jo Harrison — who was herself a standout for Fairmont State during her playing days and a two-year teammate of Laskody — in playing a role during her first two years as a Falcon. Laskody said Harrison had a huge role in shaping the type of mentality she brought to the floor, and for continuing to provide a mentoring role as a coach.

“Kelli Jo as a player on the court with me pushed me to be the best player I could be, and she challenged me every day in practice, even after she graduated and joined the staff,” Laskody said.

It was during that sophomore campaign where Laskody first began to come alive as a player, going from averaging just six minutes, 1.1 points, and 1.3 rebounds per game as a freshman to 21 minutes, 5.3 rebounds, and 5.8 points in just a year.

However, it was as a junior that she finally seemed to break out and become a star and a crucial figure in the locker room, averaging 16.7 points and 8.2 rebounds while starting every game. Her scoring would dip a bit in her final season, averaging just 14.4 points, but she would remain a pivotal piece of the starting lineup all year with also tallying 8.3 rebounds.

“She’s definitely developed that confidence — I think she really wasn’t sure how much of a scorer she could be and what her presence was, and then she had a couple of breakout games her sophomore and junior year and she’s just kind of rode that confidence high. It’s been great,” said Fairmont State head coach Stephanie Anderson, who has been a member of the team’s coaching staff in one capacity or another since Laskody joined the program.

“She’s turned into a great player here — a 1,000 point scorer, and, I mean, she wasn’t that in high school. That just shows how much the community and everyone here has put faith in her and let her grow,” Kurucz said.

The Laskody Legacy

Laskody’s career statistics compare from the prep level to the collegiate level, are a portrait of contrasts. While she certainly is now aware of just how well she finished her career at Fairmont State, she hasn’t the slightest recollection of what her numbers at Morgantown High looked like.

“Oh no, I don’t even think I was close [to being a 1,000-point scorer] — I’ve never even looked at how many points, total points scored there,” she said.

Perhaps that’s something that makes Laskody’s legacy at Fairmont State just that more impressive — she was never supposed to be the type of player who achieved that success, at least not in the opinion of those who saw her game in high school.

“I never thought I’d make it here. Coming out of high school, I definitely didn’t — it’s a great accomplishment,” she said.

But regardless of her background on the court at previous levels of the sport and in previous seasons at Fairmont State, her impact on the success Fairmont State has found in recent seasons and in the development of the current culture and attitude inside the locker room cannot be understated. And it’s clear now to both Laskody as well as those making decisions inside the program how big of an asset she truly became in her final two seasons.

“I’ve known Rachel for a long time and I’ve really been able to see her grow. She’s really maximized her talents and she’s been a great player for this program — and she does a lot of things that aren’t on the stat

sheet as well, which is great,” Anderson said. “She’s a player that didn’t score one hundred points her freshman year and didn’t play much, and she’s come on to be a player who plays almost 40 minutes a night and she’s a real threat in the scoring area.”

“I just hope my love for the game and my grit on the defense rub off, and hopefully I can instill some confidence in other girls who don’t have confidence like I didn’t. I hope I impact them. I’ve tried every year when the new class comes in to tell them I’m always there for them when they need anything on-or-off the court, and I hope someone else takes over that role,” Laskody said.

But what may impact Laskody personally more than any other aspect of her collegiate basketball career — more so than her team’s on-court success she played a part in, her legacy among the hallways of Joe Retton Arena, or the lessons she learned about herself as both an athlete an individual — is the excitement she has inspired among her hometown, and what it means that she’s been able to represent it with such outstanding success.

“It’s been honestly a blessing in disguise. I’m such a homebody, and I love being with my family and around my close friends. If you look at my senior night, I didn’t ask many people to come and we had family, friends, and supporters upwards of 60 people show up that I did not know was coming just to support me. The amount of people who tell me they keep up with me in the newspaper, it’s very humbling,” Laskody said.

“I love how close Morgantown is — everyone knows everyone and can keep up with sports. It’s just been a blessing to be able to represent Morgantown, and I’m very blessed I got the opportunity to play here. I wouldn’t go back and trade these last four years for anything else.”

Follow Joe Smith on Twitter @joesmithwrites



Laskody drives to the basket as Frostburg State’s Amanda Emory attempts the block in a game earlier this season.

PHOTOS BY TAMMY SHRIVER



Laskody goes up for two.

THE MAKING OF A CHAMPION

Eden McDonald tackles the world of dog handling

STORY BY ERIC CRAVEY,
PHOTOS BY
TAMMY SHRIVER

Reese the Bernese Mountain Dog walked up the steps of the grooming table and awaited Eden McDonald's command.

Eden, who is 14, pulled out a brush and began prepping Reese for what's known as a show ring demonstration.

"They do all this preparation before they go into the show, into the ring, and then they do it all again," said trainer Karen McBee, a member of the Clarksburg Kennel Club, an affiliate of the American Kennel Club.

McBee met Eden and Reese in late 2018 when Reese joined the McDonald family in Fairview as a Christmas present.

"I was really excited because she was really cute. I just loved her immediately," Eden said. "We were going to make her an outside dog, but we fell in love with her so she became an inside dog pretty quickly."

After watching a dog show on national television, Eden asked her parents if she could learn how to become an AKC dog handler.

Within weeks, Eden and Reese enrolled in McBee's obedience classes. However, Eden wanted to learn more than just the basics.

"She said wanted to show her in confirmation, so, I started working with her in confirmation," McBee said.

Eden learned how to teach Reese how to stand and do what's called ring procedure.

"I learned that if the person isn't doing it right, then the dog won't pick up on it easily and you have to do it right for the dog to know how to do it," Eden said.

Eden was hooked, so she asked McBee if she would help her break into the world of AKC dog handlers.

"I went out to her house and showed her how to groom her and then she went to her first dog show June of last year in Morgantown, which was a match show. A match show is a show where the dog and the owner may not be ready yet — it's like a practice run and she basically [earned] Reserve Best in that show. It means you're the bridesmaid and not the bride."

For a first-timer, "that's very good," McBee said.

And although Eden did not earn any points, "she was in the ring, she got that experience with the competition, the other people, the other kids and we also ran a juniors class where she also went Reserve in that," McBee said.

McBee, who has been teaching obedience classes since 1987, is somewhat selective about whom she chooses to work with one-on-one. It's also rare that she takes on a teenager.

"Eden's very easy to work with. She picks up very well. She listens and she's done everything that she's been told to do and she has the support of her family, which is really important at this time," McBee said. "She can go as far as she wants to go if she continues



Reese the Bernese Mountain Dog shows her owner Eden McDonald, 14, of Fairview, a little love.

to work at it, and practice at it."

But, showing animals is nothing new to Eden, who is in the eighth grade at Fairview Middle School. A 4.0 grade point average student, Eden has shown rabbits and sheep through the Fairview 4-H Club. Eden has also studied dance since she was four-years-old and now focuses on ballet, jazz and pointe. In December, she landed the lead role in the 5th Street Center for Dance's production of "Clara's Christmas Wish."

"I just want to be good at everything I do and succeed at it," Eden said.

"I knew in the obedience class how she was picking up and learning," McBee said. "You get people who work with their dogs, and the first week, you go through and you give them the basics. The next week when they come to class, if you know what you're doing [as a trainer], you can tell who's worked with their dog and who hasn't. She had worked with this dog to where that dog was doing everything right on. That's very unique for someone that age."

Eden's progress came as no surprise to her mother, Debra McDonald. Reese received an AKC Star Puppy certification and in a matter of months, went on to also complete Advanced Canine Good Citizenship

certification.

"The poise and the grace that she's developed from the dancing has helped her in the ring with her ability to show and she needs the gracefulness when she's running the dog around the ring," Debra said.

McBee said dog handlers are a tight knit group and offer many opportunities to network with breeders and handlers to learn new skills and advance in the craft. McBee said Eden has the opportunity to become part of a new generation of dog handlers in the AKC.

"A lot of parents will bring their kids in and they want them to learn to work the dog, but the youth doesn't always have the rapport built with the dog. They don't have the voice step to give the dog the commands or the patience to work with the dog because most of them want to be doing this all the time," she said, mimicking the gestures of texting a message," McBee said. "It makes a difference when you've got a youth or you've got a parent there."

McBee describes the commitment to becoming a dog handler as major.

She points to Eden's equipment and says, "Sitting right there is probably close to 6-\$700 in equipment. She's also lucky because her parents have a camper,

so they can camp on the show grounds and that gives her a chance to be around other show people and get acquainted with other people,” McBee said.

McBee said it’s an honor to ask someone to show their dog and that’s exactly what happened when Eden met Jeannie Bussey of Hartville, Ohio.

“I met them back in November,” Bussey said. “I was at a dog show and I was watching Eden in the ring with her dog and I noticed she had a nice easy way about her. Her parents were talking to my parents and I asked her if she would be interested in finishing off one of our dogs, Faith, just as a way to mentor her and help her grow.”

In Ohio, Faith — another Bernese Mountain Dog — is sort of an icon. She is a therapy dog that works with teens who have attempted suicide. A local hospital in Ohio has an entryway adorned with Faith’s loving portrait.

While showing Faith, Eden won the select award, which earned her points towards Faith’s quest for the Grand Championship title.

“My husband and I wanted to help Eden develop as a handler. Faith is very nice and Eden moves very well in the ring too so, I thought they would complement each other very well,” Bussey said. “As a breeder and a handler myself, I thought we need to develop the next generation and help them understand the breed, the Bernese Mountain Dog and help them be handlers and help carry on the traditions.”

Bussey said Eden beat a lot of professional handlers the day she showed Faith.

“She did a beautiful job of handling Faith in the ring,” Bussey said. “She showed her beautifully. She’s a wonderful young lady and I look forward to working with her when school lets out.”

“It’s a lot of hard work and just keep training and get better,” Eden said.

Bussey, who has worked with dogs for some 15 years, said if Eden sticks with it, she has a chance to apply for college scholarships as long as she continues to improve. She agrees with McBee that Eden could be part of the next generation of up and coming dog handlers.

“There are so many life skills these kids learn working as a dog handler. They learn to conduct themselves in a respectful way. There’s so much confidence and learning how to work with others, work through challenges and do it all in a positive way. I see these kids being able to really flower into adulthood,” Bussey said.

Reach Eric Cravey at (304) 367-2523.



Reese the Bernese Mountain Dog shakes hands with her owner, Eden McDonald, 14, of Fairview.



Eden rubs her best friend Reese’s belly.



Eden helps Reese down from the grooming table with her mom Debra.

THE QUEST FOR GAME



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Doug Hannah has taken hunting trips to Utah, shown here, Arizona and New Mexico.

Doug Hannah travels western U.S. for big game

Doug Hannah is adamant he won the lottery, yet, his winning ticket ended up losing him money.

"I got lucky, very lucky," says Hannah, who forked over an additional \$800 after hitting it big.

Such is the hobby of big-game hunting.

Hannah estimates he spends about \$1,000 annually on expenditures related to big-game hunting, with the majority of that being various application fees and licenses. But for Hannah, who has owned his own dentistry practice in Fairmont for the past 28 years, the potential payoff is worth it.

Scan the inside of his log-cabin-like dentistry office and the prizes line the walls, the grandest of which is a photo of a 56-inch elk he shot in Utah. Among the others are various pictures of giant elk and deer Hannah hunted down in New Mexico and Arizona.

"I still want a moose," said Hannah, who came up empty on his hunt for one in British Colombia along the Alaskan border.

Hannah, like many big-game hunters, has an extensive list of animals and locales still on his checklist, and he's always on the hunt to cross another one off. The majority of his \$1,000 annual costs are devoted to applying for various hunting tags, each for

STORY BY BRADLEY HELTZEL

a specific state's region, type of game and season. A specific tag, for example, would be for elk in a Utah region using a muzzleloader. Hannah applies for what he estimates are 20 tags per year in five different states, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, Montana and Colorado. Applying for so many tags in so many different regions increases Hannah's odds of drawing one, but it's still a long shot.

"Some states I've been applying for 10 years and I still haven't drawn a tag yet. Some of them take 15-20 years," said Hannah, whose self-described lottery hit was drawing that elk tag in Utah after just six years of annually applying for it, an approximately 1-out-of-2,000 chance, he said.

The chances of drawing most tags increases the more years one applies without drawing one, almost like buying 50-50 tickets at a local fundraising event because they're drawn at random. It essentially operates as a points system that resets after one draws a hunting tag. For example, Hannah says the odds he

draws another elk tag for Utah are slim to none.

"I'll probably never ever draw another elk tag — I won't live long enough," he said.

One can't even begin applying for the same tag until five years after winning it, making 2023 the next time Hannah can even apply for an elk tag in Utah.

Even for Hannah, who's a devoted big-game hunter in terms of allocating time and money, opportunities don't come around often.

"He figures out which are the best states for having a chance to shoot a rocky mountain sheep for example. He takes a fair amount of time to figure out which state has the best odds and which state has the best animals — the biggest sheep, the biggest elk," said Hannah's childhood friend Charles "Chud" Dollison, who has accompanied him on three separate big-game hunts in New Mexico.

Thus far in his big-game hunts out West, Hannah has been to New Mexico three times and each of Utah and Arizona once, drawing a tag in each of the three states over the past 10 years. "And I've been lucky," Hannah said.

There is an option in New Mexico to purchase a land-owner hunting tag outside of the drawing system, and New Mexico is also one of the rare states

within the drawing system that doesn't give preference to in-state hunters over those who are out of state, according to Dollison, who has also drawn a tag in New Mexico and accompanied Hannah on all three of their hunts there.

Hannah was also enamored without the outdoors, even early in his childhood, he said.

"I didn't stay in the house much, I wasn't that kind of a kid," Hannah said. "I was down in the creek flipping rocks over and looking for stuff. I was out in the woods."

Hannah started going hunting with his dad when he was just 5 or 6 years old, he said, carrying a BB gun. Dollison, who befriended Hannah in second grade, started tagging along on those hunts soon afterward, spurring his interest in the hobby as well.

The trio frequently took hunting trips to Slaty Fork in Pocahontas County, where they hunted for standard game – white-tailed deer, squirrels, turkeys.

"We certainly had a lot of fun," Dollison said. "We've had a lot of fun adventures together."

It wasn't until Hannah reached adulthood and established his career as a dentist until he was introduced to the idea of hunting bigger game in farther away places. His friend John Jezioro, who works as a chiropractor in Ohio, first peaked his interest after telling tales of hunting big game in Colorado with a friend from chiropractic school.

"That's kind of how it got me started in wanting to go out West," Hannah said.

Ever since, Hannah has turned big-game hunting into a full-time hobby, scouring options, crafting checklists, and living adventures.

"I mean to get as organized as Doug is to do that, but I do not get around to getting it done, let's just say that," said Dollison with a chuckle.

Hannah, who almost always opts for rustic-style hunting excursions out West where he stays in tents in the wilderness as opposed to campers or hotels, has amassed all sorts of experiences and stories. He's ridden horses and hiked on foot for miles to reach various hunting destinations. He's also seen fellow big-game hunters essentially waste a trip because they weren't in good enough physical shape to hike those required distances.

Hannah has toggled between rifles and bows and seen all sorts of different landscapes and climates. One time he even got separated from Dollison on a New Mexico hunt and didn't make it back to camp for the night, forcing him to pitch his tent and build his own camp until they re-united in the morning.

That almost limitless range of possibility and experiences, Hannah and Dollison say, is the true reward of big-game hunting, even more so than the mounts of game on the wall or the photos of kills in the scrapbook.

"For me, and I think it's the same for Doug, the hunting part of it is great and if you're successful, that's kind of a bonus," Dollison said, "but it's about getting out in the wilderness and seeing these places. The Western wilderness is just so vast."

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SUBMITTED PHOTO

Fairmont native Doug Hannah poses for a photo with an elk he shot in Utah in 2016.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Doug Hannah has been hunting elks and various other big game for years. His largest kill is a 56-inch elk he shot while in Utah.

BIKING FOR BUCKS

Tiffany Walker Samuels travels the U.S. seeking donors for cancer center

STORY BY EDDIE TRIZZINO, PHOTOS BY TAMMY SHRIVER



Tiffany Walker Samuels poses with her motorcycle.

Tiffany Walker Samuels routinely takes cross country trips to meet with new people in hopes of making a personal connection.

While she often travels by airplane or by car, Samuels enjoys another method of travel far more personal and closer to the ground.

"I bought a bike for my 40th birthday," Samuels said. "I had never been on a bike before, had never ridden one or even on the back of one, and so I just decided for my 40th birthday I would buy a bike."

Samuels now works as interim director of development at the WVU Cancer Institute, and travels around the country to meet with potential donors for the organization. While she enjoys the conversations she has with potential donors — many of whom are displaced West Virginians — nothing brings her more peace than riding her motorcycle.

"The best thing about it is that when you're riding, nobody can call you," Samuels said. "It's just you and the open road. It's a great stress-reliever, it's peaceful."

A lifelong West Virginian, born in Fairmont and a Fairmont Senior High alum, Samuels attended West Virginia University where she studied electrical engineering, while also working as a coal miner for Consol. While she would eventually go on to be executive director of the United Way of Marion County, Samuels said her experience in engineering is where she truly developed her communication skills.

"I really came into it because my mom suggested it. I always liked tinkering with things like taking them apart. If something stopped working, I was taking it apart to figure out what made it work. That and I love math," Samuels said. "I found a niche for myself in that engineering field because I could speak plain English. So I was always good at translating what the design engineers were working on to the actual customers, so I was sort of a digital interpreter."

Samuels would go on to move around the country through her work with Motorola, but would eventually come back to Fairmont for an opportunity at the United Way in around 2008.

"I worked as an engineer for Motorola through the early 90s to early 2000s," Samuels said. "I lived a little bit of everywhere then — Louisiana, Texas. But I moved back home in 2008, so that's when I took the position at United Way."

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From left, Tiffany Walker Samuels, Justice Samuels and Sierra Former pose at Eye Candy in downtown Fairmont.

According to Samuels, the United Way at the time struggled to meet its annual campaign goal, which both motivated and challenged at the same time. She believed she could help the organization get back on track.

"I had just moved back and I thought I could do something to help save the United Way in Marion County," Samuels said. "The goal I think was barely \$300,000 at that time. That's achievable and it was a shame that it hadn't happened. That's what made me take the position."

Although she knew the challenge would be difficult to achieve, Samuels said her work with Motorola helped her find a way to handle the fundraising goal.

At Motorola, she worked on projects involving circuit boards, which required planning and organization to execute. It was this experience that

taught her how to break a project down into smaller pieces that are easier to take on.

"It was the communication, but also the ability to take a big project and break it down into bite-sized chunks," Samuels said. "That's how I viewed the United Way and the United Way goal was, it's a large goal, but if we plan properly and break it down and make each step and each gift important, then it would sum up."

Her first year on the job was pivotal. Samuels wanted to reach the fundraising goal, but in the end, was having a difficult time coming up with the last few donations. She recalled a conversation she had with an agency director, that provided extra motivation for the last stretch of the campaign.

"My first year as director I thought I was going to fall short," Samuels said. "I had a director of an

agency come to me and say 'Are we going to make goal?' And I said 'I don't think so.'

"She said 'If we don't make goal then I don't get paid,'" Samuels said. "Now, it's personal to me because not only do I not want to disappoint that particular director knowing her paycheck relied on meeting goal, but also all the citizens of the county that rely on that agency to eat, to have a bed, to have heat."

Samuels said the United Way managed to reach the goal that year, thanks to the cooperation of the community. She said she tried to emphasize the impact of the United Way funded partner agencies, in order to gain the trust of the community and potential donors. She said this

approach for the United Way Campaign continues in this manner to this day.

For her position at WVU, Samuels said creating this atmosphere among potential donors takes a similar approach. Despite the fundraising goal being \$4.5 million rather than the United Way's \$300,000 goal at the time, Samuels helps donors understand that their donation matters each time.

"For my position at WVU it's all face to face, all the conversations," Samuels said. "It takes me all over the U.S. meeting people. It could be someone originally from West Virginia but is now from California in the movie industry, or someone at a PGA golf tournament."

Samuels said the low-end donation for the WVU Cancer Institute is \$50,000, but the people she meets with to make these large donations are normally sympathetic to the cause. When she sees a WVU hat or article of clothing, she knows she can make a connection no matter where she is.

"I get to travel across the U.S. and meet successful West Virginians," Samuels said. "There is a considerable amount of people in West Virginia that are wealthy, many are self-made. And then there are people who have moved outside across the U.S. who are equally successful, yet they still have strong ties to West Virginia. It's just a matter of reaching them."

A mother of four, Samuels also has somewhat of a working relationship with her daughter, Justice. Samuels opened the boutique Eye Candy in her garage in 2016, because she and her daughters wanted a local shop to purchase hair supplies.

"I have two daughters and there was no place around here to buy hair for them," Samuels said. "We would travel up to Pittsburgh every other week or so to buy hair or hair products. Traveling home one day I said 'We should just open our own store.' They said 'That's a great idea.'"

Eye Candy opened in downtown Fairmont in March 2017, and continues to sell hair and beauty supplies. Through the shop, Samuels provides beauty classes to those in need, from cancer patients to those losing their hair due to health reasons.

"There are a lot of people who need hair because of medical reasons," Samuels said. So they truly rely on wigs to really help pick themselves up emotionally and spiritually, so they really need some type of unit in order to face the world."

Still when she gets the chance, Samuels gets out on the road with her bike, sometimes with riding buddies she has met over the years. Her brother, Imani Beckwith, has been riding for about 15 years, and said seeing Samuels grow into biking has been exciting.

"It was interesting watching my sister learn to ride," Beckwith said. "She had the usual beginner's spouts and spills, but she didn't let those get her down. She kept riding and now she can ride with the best of us."

"We get out as much as we can... but yes, I still ride as often as I can," Samuels said. "I do get maybe just one trip in a year as far as distance, but I do try to get some short, just peaceful rides in here or there."

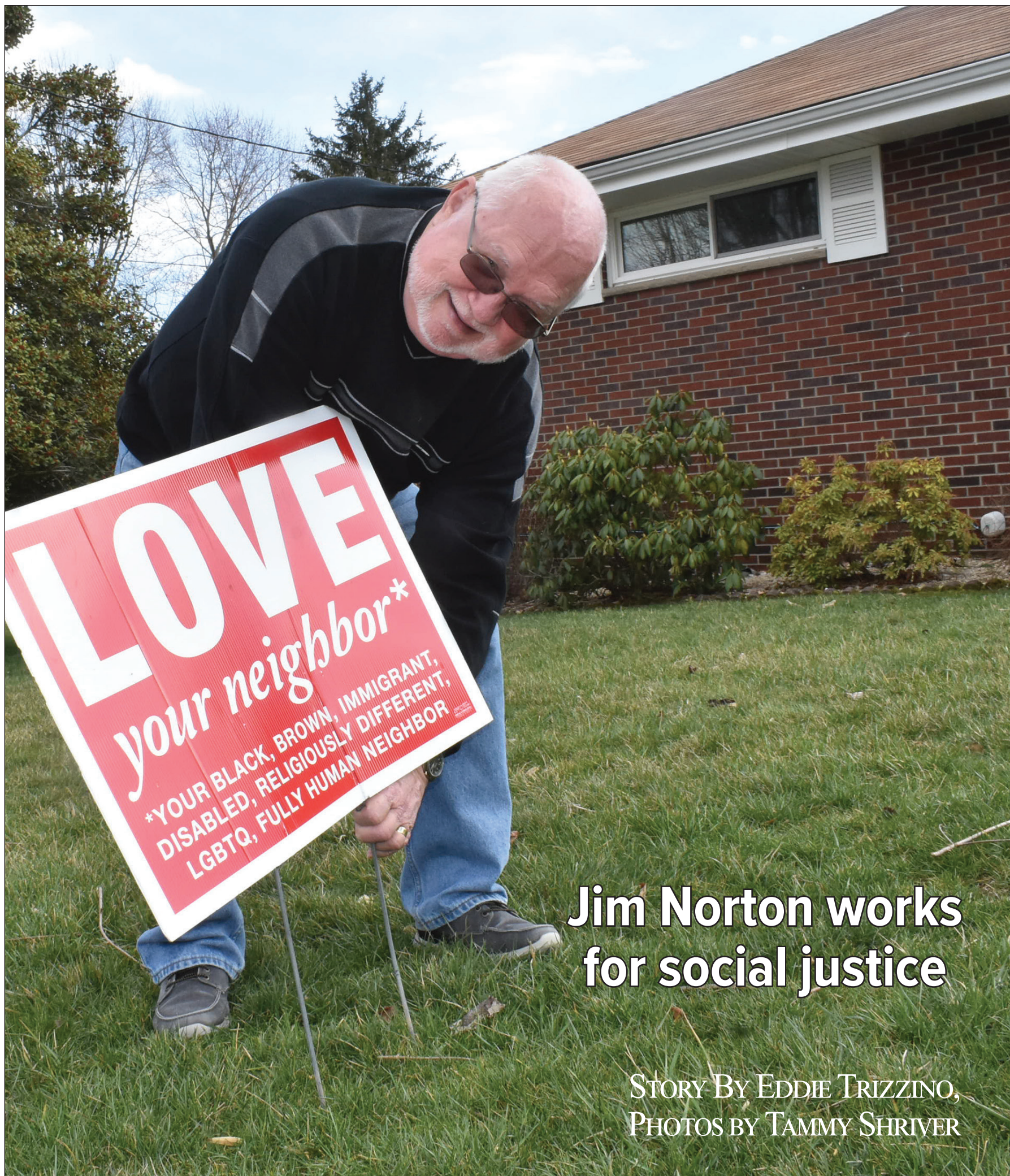
Samuels plans to continue working with WVU, while also looking for new ways to serve the community she lives in.

"I'm just always looking for new ideas, I'm the kind of person that doesn't really sit still," Samuels said. "Whatever I can do to help the community in whatever walk of life I'm in is just truly my passion."

Email Eddie Trizzino at etrizzino@timeswv.com and follow him on Twitter at [@eddietimeswv](https://twitter.com/eddietimeswv).



Tiffany Samuels works in her office at WVU where she is Director of Development.



Jim Norton works for social justice

STORY BY EDDIE TRIZZINO,
PHOTOS BY TAMMY SHRIVER

Polly, left, and Jim Norton have lived in Fairmont since 1990, and reside in a house off Mary Lou Retton Drive.



When Jim Norton wanted to ask for a drink as a small child, he would raise two fingers on one hand to his mouth in a drinking motion.

Norton communicated many wants and needs as a kid through nonverbal communication, and learned to speak English fluently a little later than the average kid.

"I grew up with deaf parents," said Norton, who along with his wife Polly retired to Fairmont after his career as a pastor in the United Methodist Church. "For the first three years of my life, I was what speech pathologists would say 'Speech delayed.' So communication was sign language."

Now 79, Norton carries with him the lessons he learned when he was growing up in the 1940s in Wheeling. He said the environment in which he grew up taught him lessons about quality of life and the disparities that exist between people who live under different circumstances. This is remains his fight today.

"We grew up in a government housing project,"

“ We grew up in a government housing project. On one side of the hill was the buildings that housed white families. On the other side of the hills was mostly segregated housing for African Americans. Our family was kind of outcast because of our way of speech. ”

Norton said. "On one side of the hill was the buildings that housed white families. On the other side of the hills was mostly segregated housing for African Americans. Our family was kind of outcast because of our way of speech."

"The personal side of why I'm so wrapped up in

openness and inclusion I think goes all the way back to those days, when I did experience that kind of prejudice."

Norton acknowledged that even through this prejudice, he knows that as a white man, he still did not feel the effects of racism at the time, but he

believes he should be part of the fight against it.

Norton's upbringing led him to pursue several programs at West Liberty University. He majored in English and minored in religion and philosophy and speech. His education developed even further his sense of social justice, and in turn, he believed being in the ministry would be a way of helping the most people.

"I got a good education there in several departments," Norton said. "In high school, my senior year, as I thought about what made sense for me, more and more the option of the ministry seemed the best. I saw it as a way to being available to people in helpful ways, and I wanted that."

The speech department helped Norton understand the science and biology behind deafness, and he continued this study at the University of Tennessee after his graduation from West Liberty. Learning about deafness also helped him to cope with his upbringing, he said.

"That was helpful in terms of processing my own stuff growing up the way we did," Norton said. "That was a great place to be in the 1960s."

Norton met his future wife, Polly Norton, in high school, and she also attended West Liberty with him. The two have been married for 58 years, have one grown son, and still live together on the West Side of Fairmont.

Norton said the couple moved to Fairmont in 1990, when Jim took over as pastor of Valley Chapel United Methodist Church. He said as a kid, his dad would take him and his younger sister to church, which was mostly bible study. While his religious beliefs shifted over the time he has been in the church, Norton said he believes God is true oneness.

"I think all of life is one," Norton said. "We're all connected to everything, and that is an insight that is coming from science. We're connected; we use all kinds of words to speak of God, and sometimes the words just can't pull it off. If I think of God, my favorite word these days is 'Oneness.'"

Norton's work in the Fairmont church has been appreciated by his peers, and his further work in the area has made him a common sight in the Fairmont community.

"Jim is a wonderful minister," said D.D. Meighen, a retired Fairmont Methodist minister who is currently serving as interim minister of First Presbyterian Church, where Norton worships. "He was always engaged with the church and the people in the ministry with him."

Norton stuck around the area



because he and Polly had a love for the City of Fairmont. In the years following his retirement, Norton became involved in several community initiatives that focused on human rights and social justice. Currently, he is involved with the Fairmont Human Rights Commission and the Fairmont Homeless Coalition, where he attends regular meetings.

"It just kind of happened," Norton said. "I'm in Communities of Shalom, I'm in the Homeless Coalition and I'm involved with Friendship Fairmont but I would like to be more involved with them."

Meighen said he is happy to have Norton attend meetings of organizations he also keeps up in.

"Jim goes to the Human Rights Commission and he goes to our Homeless Coalition meetings every month," Meighen said. "He keeps up in the community."

For Norton, this passion to be in community with others is what drove him to pursuing his passions in college, what drove him to becoming a minister, and what keeps him engaged around the city. It is a drive to relate.

"I think it's that same drive and energy that I got from the very

beginning," Norton said. "I want to relate to people regardless of how we differ. I want us to get to know one another, that's what drives me."

Norton said that he strives to do this as much as he can, and said he believes that if we take the time to learn about one another, the world could be different.

"I honestly believe that if you take time to sit down with anybody, they then become a part of you," Norton said. "I just want people to understand each other."

Email Eddie Trizzino at etrizzino@timeswv.com and follow him on Twitter at [@eddietimeswv](https://twitter.com/eddietimeswv).

Aiming for efficiency



Cindy Stover takes a call at the White Hall Municipal Building.

Town coordinator uses software to improve daily operations

STORY BY ERIC HRIN,

PHOTOS BY

TAMMY SHRIVER

Cindy Stover grew up in the Town of White Hall.

Now, as an adult, she plays a pivotal role in the North Central West Virginia community in her position as town coordinator.

"That was one of the first things that drew me into the job," she said of her formative years in the town.

Since April 2018, she's served as town coordinator.

Stover likes the sense of community that permeates the small town.

The care and concern residents and town leaders have for White Hall is not lost on her.

"It's a nice community, it's a very close-knit group around here, and everyone cares about their town," she said.

She likes working in a public service position, and the diversity of her duties as the town coordinator. She



said she's not just sitting at a desk.

"It's something new every day," she said.

Stover's responsibilities include supervising the administration and public works, budgeting and day-to-day accounting operations. Her skills are backed up with a master's of science degree in accounting she earned in 2011 from Strayer University and previous accounting experience.

Budgeting requires her constant vigilance.

"It's ongoing, you're constantly watching the budget," she said. "Along with that, we're doing a lot of things to try to get us up to speed technology-wise. We're trying to get things up into the next century, and using software to help us implement some new things with payroll, accounting software."

While she admits she uses a lot of technology in her job, not everything is so high-tech. Just lending a helping hand makes Stover happy.

"I enjoy helping people when they need it," she said.

Stover said she likes to hear everyone's thoughts, issues or ideas when they come in to the office. She meets a variety of people in her job.

"It depends on the project that we're working on," she said.

And Stover said there's always something new going on in White Hall.

"It keeps me busy, I like to stay busy," she said.

But Stover knows she is not alone. Running the town is a joint effort, one rooted in cooperation and dedication to the common good. Stover likes being

part of the team that keeps the town going.

"I just can't say enough about the team that we have here," she said. "I think I enjoy coming to work the most just because of the team that we have."

"There's a lot of different players. It's interesting. Everyone here gets along very well..."

Stover, meanwhile, approaches her job with an open ear.

"Just listening to what someone has to say" is important to her. She said listening is a big part of her job.

"Either an issue or an idea, you have to listen to what's going on around you," she said.

In addition to working with the public and her fellow employees, Stover also interacts with the White Hall Town Council, a task she said she enjoys.

"They are great to work with," she said.

Previously, Stover worked alongside former Mayor Guy Ward.

Ward continues to be impressed by Stover.

"I think she's a big asset to the Town of White Hall," he said. "She's doing a pretty good job."

He said that town coordinator was a new position when he served as mayor.

"It's similar to a city manager position, but we're not a city manager type of government, so we called her a coordinator, but it's pretty much the same duties," he said. "There's a few differences, but not a lot."

Stover also works with the White Hall Police Department. Police Lt. Les Clifton said Stover has played a vital role in budgeting.

"I just think since she's been here... she's been instrumental in the whole budgeting process of where we were then and where we are now," he said. "She's developed a lot of different ways to track the financial system here, which has been a big improvement as far as budgeting."

He said Stover's budgeting acumen trickles down to the police department, and makes a big difference.

"She always there to help, anything that we need as far as with the police department," Clifton said. "She plays an instrumental part in that as well."

He said Stover's ability to be there is appreciated, especially when the police department needs equipment or vehicles.

"When you have... a consistent tracking mechanism in place to help with the budget and everything, then it makes it a lot more fluid process," he said.

Clifton pointed out Stover's many positive qualities.

"She's just an outgoing person, she's a nice person," he said. "Like I said,



Cindy Stove sits at her spot in chambers at the White Hall Municipal Building.

she's always supportive of the police department when it comes to assisting the police department, whether it's obtaining equipment or finance and pay, different facets of the business."

One of the positive things Stover had a chance to witness during her tenure is the Town of White Hall moving into its new public safety building at 118 Tygart Mall Loop, next to Tygart Valley Cinemas last year. In addition to the town offices, the building houses the police department, EMS, fire vehicles and more.

A ribbon cutting and dedication was held last year. Then, in October, it was the site of the first-ever White Hall

Pumpkin Festival, promoting that sense of community that Stover enjoys.

"It's nice," she said of the new headquarters. "But we needed it. We had outgrown the other building and with the way the town is growing, this building definitely was needed so that we could handle that growth."

She especially likes the new town council meeting room, where residents who attend can experience the latest in technology. Guests can follow the agenda on large-screen televisions.

"It's nice, because we've been able to go, again, into technology," she said. "We don't waste nearly as much paper trying to copy everything for everyone,

so not only has it been cost-efficient, but it does take it into the next stage of technology."

When she isn't working at the public safety building, Stover, who lives with her husband Roger in nearby Pleasant Valley, has some fun hobbies like gardening.

"I love gardening and I love animals," she said. She has some cats for pets.

She grows flowers, but she isn't ruling out vegetable gardening.

"We might have a vegetable garden some day, but it seems like the animals always eat them," she said with a laugh.



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