



PROFILE

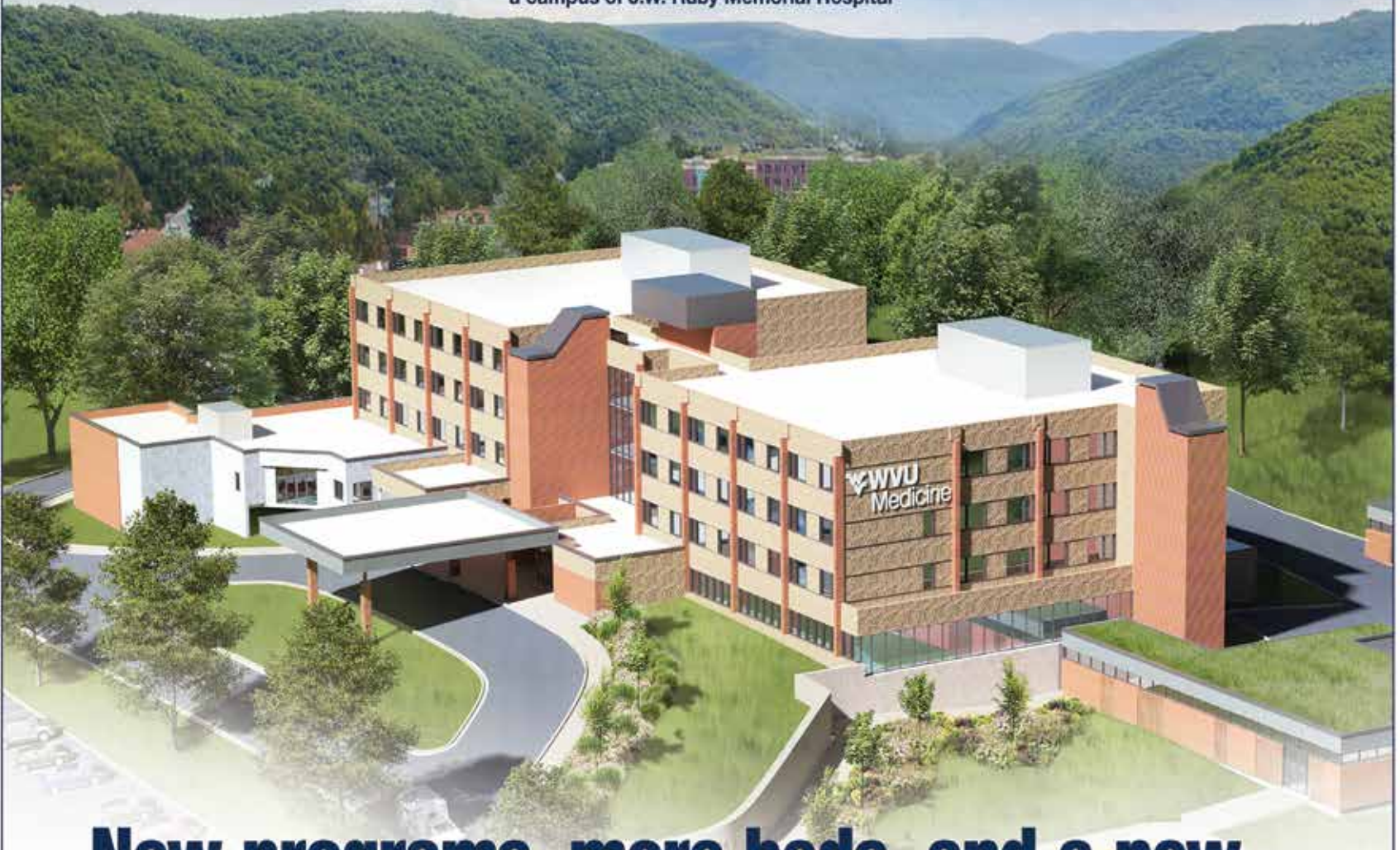
TIMES
WEST VIRGINIAN



**YEAR OF THE
WOMAN**

Fairmont Medical Center

a campus of J.W. Ruby Memorial Hospital



New programs, more beds, and a new life coming to Fairmont Medical Center

The multi-year investment represents a bold and necessary step to ensure people in Fairmont and Marion County have convenient access to WVU Medicine's broader network of specialty and subspecialty care.

12 ED Rooms

42 Inpatient Beds

Telemed Services

Outpatient Services

Imaging / Lab

HVI / Neurology Clinic

In Process (\$40m)

30 Skilled Nursing Beds

Central Energy Plant

Infrastructure Upgrades



LEARN MORE

WVUMedicine.org/FMC

Welcome to Profile 2022

As we've moved into our second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world around us is undergoing significant, and traumatic changes.

The price of a gallon of gasoline just topped more than \$4 in West Virginia and COVID cases continue to drop while the medical community holds its collective breath wondering if another variant is going to sneak up on the world in the same manner Omicron did last fall.

And yet, the world looks on in sadness and fear as Russian troops invaded the sovereign nation of Ukraine unprovoked.

In this our fourth year of Profile, we focus solely on women who are leading and truly making a difference in North Central West Virginia. Using our theme, "The Year of the

Woman," we hope as you delve into their stories, you are inspired by the courage they have shown and the work they are doing to make our lives more rich and enduring.

One thing you will see is that the work they do does not happen as solitary events, but with courage, connection and the relationships they continue to build in their respective communities.

Our hope is that you are as equally inspired as I was while editing these stories. So, it is our pleasure to present to you, Profile 2022, "The Year of the Woman." Enjoy!

Eric Cravey
Editor

Contents

4

**The Love Of
Storytelling**

10

**The Model
Mountaineer**

14

**Breaking Down Barriers
And Limitations**

20

**The Woman Who Needs
No Introduction**

24

**Lifting Up The
Community**

28

**Three Seasons In, It's
All About Growth**

32

**'Community-Minded':
Morgantown Teen Shares
Her Accomplishments**

38

**Simply A Blessing
To Serve**

41

**Using Concrete Proof To
Make Positive Change**

46

**Striving For A Seat
At The Table**



General Manager

Terri Hale
thale@timeswv.com
304-367-2560

Editor

Eric Cravey
ecravey@timeswv.com
304-367-2523

Advertising

**Jon Fox, Cathy Morrison,
Beverly Miller, Heather Pujals**

Cover Design

Jon Petersen
jpetersen@timeswv.com
304-367-2524

Contributing Writers

**Eric Cravey, Nick Henthorn,
David Kirk, Damian Phillips,
Savanna Shriver**

300 Quincy Street
Fairmont, WV 26554
P.O. Box 2530
Fairmont, WV 26555

Copyright 2022 | Times West Virginian
No portion of Profile Magazine may be reprinted in
any form or posted on the internet without permission
of the publisher.



Protection for your pride and joy

For the family you'd do anything for, life insurance could mean everything. I can help you find easy, affordable ways to protect their future. Call me today.

Like a good neighbor,
State Farm is there.®

State Farm Life Insurance Company (Not licensed in MA, NY or WI)
State Farm Life and Accident Assurance Company (Licensed in NY and WI)
Bloomington, IL
2001571



Lesla M Yoho, Agent
1010 Morgantown Avenue
Fairmont, WV 26554
Bus: 304-534-8840
lesa.yoho.f23n@statefarm.com

Join us for a bite at

MCATEER'S RESTAURANT

Since 1958

Stop in for
breakfast or
lunch!

Mon-Fri
7am-3pm
Sat-Sun
8am-1pm

1316 Locust
Avenue,
Fairmont, WV
304-366-3158



SUBMITTED PHOTO
Fran Kirk shown here performing in a Readers Theatre production of "It's a Wonderful Life."

The Love Of Storytelling

“I watched TV, I loved TV. When I was a kid, my mom would have to practically throw me out of the house because I wanted to watch TV. And I realized that it was a sense of story that I had been looking for,” said Francene Kirk, Fairmont State University professor of Communication and Theatre Arts and interim director of the Frank and Jane Gabor West Virginia Folklife Center.

In 2006, when the Sago Mine Disaster

occurred, Kirk was in New Orleans at the Sugar Bowl to watch the WVU Mountaineers play, but her eyes were glued to the breaking news. She sat in front of the television in her and her husband’s hotel room for hours watching as national news stations described what happened in Sago, West Virginia.

She heard that the families of the people who died were taken to a little church and she was curious about what had been said and

shared during that time.

“We talked about talking to these people and making theatre out of it, but then what we found was that, these people had suffered, you can’t go in and ask them questions,” Kirk said.

Then, later when she returned back to Fairmont, one student mentioned the 40th anniversary of the Farmington Mine Disaster and the idea was born. Kirk and Fairmont State students worked for three years researching,



ROGERS
ELECTRICAL

is an Electrical Contracting Company that specializes in the design and completion of "Turn Key" projects in the industrial industry.

Contact our Main Office for a FREE quote on any industrial electrical needs:

OFFICE LOCATIONS:
FAIRMONT WV • CLEMMONS NC

- Coal Industry • Pole Lines • Aggregate Industry
- Design/CAD • Oil & Gas/Midstream • Sub Stations
- Water Industry • Programming/PLC • Camera Systems
- Fiber Optics/Camera Systems • Emergency Work

246 BUSINESS PARK DRIVE • FAIRMONT, WV 26554
304.363.5752
Fax 304.363.8090
EMAIL: SALES@RECCI.COM • WEBSITE: WWW.RECCI.COM

“One Name For Funeral Service”



Ford Chapel 201 Columbia St. Fairmont Since 1962	R.C. Jones Chapel 1410 Country Club Rd Fairmont Since 1901	Degarmo Chapel Second St. Rivesville Since 1962	Allen Chapel 215 East Main St. Bridgeport Since 1906
--	--	---	--



304-363-3130

www.FORDFUNERALHOMES.com

078811606



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Francene Kirk telling stories at Fairmont Catholic School.

interviewing and piecing together a play titled, “Remembering No. 9: Stories from the Farmington Mine Disaster.”

“It took a while, but eventually we were able to make a play,” Kirk said. “Then we did the play here and we had a talk back with audience members and like 20 or 30 people stayed and people who had family members die in the mine stood up and told us their stories. It was almost revival-like.”

The whole process from start to finish — the decision making, the problem solving and the teamwork is what Kirk finds most valuable.

“It wasn’t just the story that mattered, it mattered that we were working together to find the story and people were sharing their story with us,” Kirk said. “When you ask me what I like best about theatre, I give you this long story to say, what I love about theatre is the collaborative search for story.”

Kirk said it took so much hard work with, “wonderful theatre students who are now all professionals in their own right,” but it is an experience that will always stand out because of the way people were generous with

their time and stories.

“I would say that Fran is one of the people who taught me how to be a professional,” North Marion High theatre teacher and one of Kirk’s former students Celi Oliveto said. “I remember turning

“I watched TV, I loved TV. When I was a kid, my mom would have to practically throw me out of the house because I wanted to watch TV. And I realized that it was a sense of story that I had been looking for,”

-Francene Kirk

in a paper and I had never had a teacher tell me this isn’t good enough.

“She was the first teacher that turned it back to me, and - like this is one of my fondest memories, it’s going to sound mean, but it’s not at all. I’m so grateful to her. Some people just kind of expect the bare minimum out of you and that wasn’t good enough for her.”

“She was a person that was like, ‘No, I expect more of you,’” Oliveto said. “I think that she’s one of the reasons that I got my [Master of Fine Arts] and decided to become a teacher.”

Kirk has degrees in communications, education and theatre. Throughout school, Kirk worked in theatre. She said she enjoyed being on stage and performing.

“Then, what I realized pretty quickly is it wasn’t the performing that interested me, it was the

storytelling,” Kirk said. “Which is probably a long way of saying that it is also what interested me about the Folklife Center.”

Before Kirk became a professor at Fairmont State, she started out at the Department of Education in Charleston, as the Coordinator for the Arts. Consequently, she worked with lots of artists.

One artist in particular, Pam Parziale, told Kirk, “If you’re going to support the arts in West Virginia, you have to buy art from West Virginia artists.”

As a theatre artist, she hadn’t considered visual art in the same way, but the conversation with Parziale sparked a new passion. She purchased an art print from a West Virginia artist in Shepherdstown, put it on her wall, and has been collecting West Virginia art ever since.

“That was the start I had of this love of buying West Virginia artwork. Then whenever I travel, I try to find a print or a photograph of something that reminds me of the place, but also supports some kind of artist there,” Kirk said.

The art decorates her home and when friends come to visit, she said, “It gives me great pleasure to say, well most of it is done by West Virginia artists.”

This love of supporting West Virginia artists carries over into her work at the Folklife Center.

“Because I run the Folklife Center, it doesn’t mean that I know that much about folklife,” Kirk said with a laugh, but she’s wrong.

“Before the advent of the coal industry, West Virginia was a subsistence farming culture,” Kirk said. “In other words, you didn’t work, you farmed the land. You raised your own food, you made your own clothes, you built your house and I think that’s something that is very misunderstood. West Virginia is one of the few places that you can make fun of and get away with.”

Kirk said that one thing many people don’t realize is that Appalachia is a government construct. In the 1960’s, during the War on Poverty and the Johnson Administration, there were a number of counties in the United States that were characterized as “economically

distressed.” These 420 counties, which stretch from Mississippi to New York, became the region we call Appalachia.

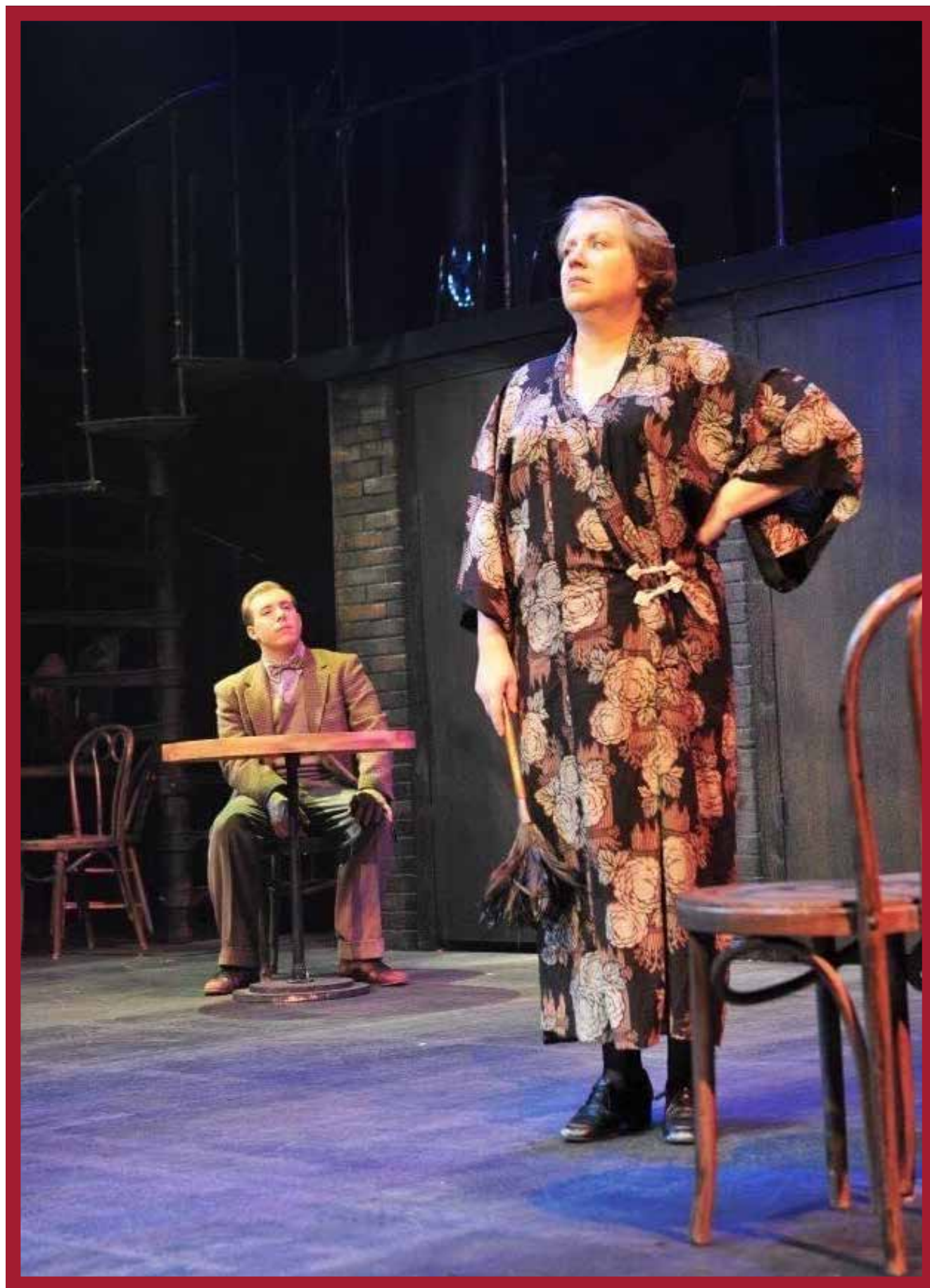
“I think anyone who has lived in Appalachia and has stepped outside of Appalachia, has been confronted with the stereotypes about Appalachia,” Kirk said. “I think because West Virginia is

the state that sits wholly in the Appalachian region, I hate to say it, but I think most of the stereotypes are mostly about West Virginia.”

The stereotypes that are usually associated with Appalachians originate from missionaries who visited West Virginia after the Civil War to establish churches. In order

to continue receiving funding, missionaries would send stories about the people of Appalachia to their beneficiaries.

“Very often those stories talked about how the people didn’t have shoes,” Kirk said. “If you talk to someone who grew up in West Virginia anytime before 1950, they’ll tell you about how in the



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Francene Kirk playing Fraulein Schinder in the Fairmont State production of “Cabaret” in 2011.

summer, they ran barefoot and they didn't put shoes on until they went to school. That was for a great many reasons and one of the reasons is the expense."

Kirk, who is a West Virginia native, spent a lot of her growing up moving around. In elementary school she lived in Jane Lew. She lived in Grafton in middle school and she finished high school in Glenville.

When she was looking at attending college, her father, a professor at Glenville State College, brought home the class catalog.

"I think I had always wanted to be a teacher, but I was exploring and I said, 'Maybe I don't want to be a teacher, maybe I want to get a degree in biology.' My dad said, 'Well you're going to want to get a teaching degree, so you can be at home in the summer with your kids.' So there's a lot of assumptions in that statement and the biggest one being, you will have children and that will be the most important thing in your life," Kirk said.

In 2018, Kirk was awarded the Abelina Suarez Professorship at Fairmont State. She spent five years working on a one-woman play about women who were educated before the implementation of Title IX. Throughout the process, she talked with women and listened to their work, education and life experiences.

"It was everything you'd expect it would be," Kirk said. "It was terrifying. It was rewarding. It was heartbreaking because some of these women's opportunities had been stomped all over because they were women."

Kirk said some women knew exactly what discrimination they had experienced, but some didn't realize they had discriminated against because, in a patriarchal society, they didn't have any other way to look at how relationships were supposed function.

"I remember one of the women, she's a widow and she was living with her daughter and her daughter's husband and they had a farm," Kirk said. "She talked about the things that this man did and how good he was at everything and how she couldn't



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Francene Kirk at a Fairmont State University graduation.

possibly have done those things and how important they are. I said, 'Don't you think you could've done some of those things if you've been taught to?' She said, 'Oh no, I don't think so.' Then I said, 'Well, do you think men are more important than women?' and she said, 'Yes.'"

They began talking about bailing hay, which is something the woman said she would never have been able to do. Kirk asked if she prepared lunch for the men who bailed hay. The woman said yes and Kirk asked if she thought that making lunch was just as important, since they can't bail hay without lunch. The woman said no. They talked about how the men age. Kirk asked if a man who was too old to bale hay and drove the tractor instead was still just as important. The woman said yes.

"But, she couldn't see that connection between what men do and what women do. It's not that what women do is easier, it's just that it's less valued," Kirk said.

"So that was a really, really

interesting journey for me to figure out that, if we culture people differently, then our perception of how people should behave will change and this idea that we call the patriarchy will be challenged by that. I've thought a lot about this."

"Fran contains multitudes, she's a very complex person," Oliveto said. "I think I would say first, like honestly from Harry Potter when Albus Dumbledore said Cedric Diggory was a fierce friend. I really think that's Fran in a nutshell. She is a fierce friend."

Kirk has taken up a variety of new hobbies. One of them is bike riding, which she took up because one of her friends, Bev Slagle, bought a bike that was too big and asked if anyone wanted it via Facebook.

"I came down and tried it and I hadn't ridden a bike since I was 16 years old, but rode it around and I said, 'OK I want it,'" Kirk said. "Bev said, 'Well if you're going to have a bike, I have to have a bike, so she went out and bought a bike that fit her. So, we've been riding and

not a lot, but enough to make us happy."

Kirk joked that the two do less biking and more talking, but she enjoys the time nonetheless. Her longest bike trip thus far is 11 miles, which she said is not a lot in the bike community.

"If you would've asked me three years ago what I liked to do, I would've told you all I do is theatre, but that's changed with the pandemic," Kirk said.

"Francine Kirk is a ball of positive, amazing emotion that you never know where it's going," said Dani DeVito, a member of Town and Gown Theatre. "She is a constant student. I have known very few other people who have wanted continuously to keep learning and growing in all different aspects of their life. She just craves more knowledge about things and wants to share that with everybody else."

"And I don't know if she's ever been bad at anything. She takes on all of these different projects and hobbies and she succeeds in all of them. She doesn't want to half-do something. She wants to do it right and she wants to do it really well."

Kirk said she has had many role models around her growing up. One of her biggest role models was her grandmother, Frances McCue. Grandma McCue, despite only attending school until eight grade, worked in a glass factory in Jane Lew. She had her own money at a time when many women didn't. She was hard-working and independent.

"She would always say to me, 'Get your education, no one can ever take that away from you,'" Kirk said.

Right now, Kirk is working on a one act play titled, "Us and Them," which will be performed this month. At the Folklife Center, she is working on "A Trunk of Traditional Tunes," which are a series of performances and lectures that focus on traditional West Virginia music that originated in places as Scotland, Ireland, Germany and Africa. She is also teaching theatre and communications classes at Fairmont State.

—Savanna Shriver



Promoting *the Middle of Everywhere*




THE CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU OF MARION COUNTY

Our purpose is to develop our area's tourism industry and advance Marion County as a vacation, group tour and meeting destination. The CVB staff assists travelers with lodging choices, direction and itineraries along with creating and publishing maps, brochures and information on area attractions and events.

SPREAD THE WORD!

Help us spread the word about the best places to visit in our area by tagging us in your hometown adventures! Whether you are attending one of our annual local events or exploring your favorite Marion County spots, snap a photo and tag us on Facebook and Instagram using #MyMarionWV.



-  @MarionCVB
-  @MarionCVB
-  @MarionCVB

#MyMarionWV



Do you have a Marion County Visitors Guide? Visit our website to request one of our visitor or history guides today.

Scan the QR code on the back of our guide to fill out a survey for your chance to win a Marion County gift box!



304.368.1123 • marioncvb.com

The Model Mountaineer



PHOTO BY WVU TODAY

This photo from 2017 was taken to announce Reed had been named the 2016 Scripps Howard Administrator of the Year.

Everyone has something they turn to when they feel the pressure of life weighing upon them. For West Virginia University's Provost, that something is baking.

"I started baking around the time... my dad was dying of cancer," said Maryanne Reed, who's occupied WVU's chief academic position since 2019. "That was when I was in my mid 40s. I don't know what it was, but I just started baking and it became a very cathartic

thing for me."

Now, Reed tries to bake every weekend as a de-stressing exercise from her academic duties. A kitchen that smells of sugar cookies or melted chocolate is one of the things Reed said gets her through to the next week.

With a job like hers, she certainly deserves a bit of relaxation, but one doesn't simply land a provost job without merit and merit is something Reed has in excess.

Born across the continent in Burbank, California then raised in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania, Reed was always sure she wanted to do something in the media field. After graduating high school, she went to the University of Massachusetts Amherst and majored in history.

Following a stint of freelance work, Reed made it into grad school at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism



WVU PHOTOGRAPHY

Maryanne Reed during a baking exhibition at West Virginia University. To her right is Joel Brown.

and earned her master's there in broadcast journalism.

Strait out of school, she got a job working in local news.

"I was hired as a general assignment reporter at the NBC affiliate in Elmira, New York," Reed said. "I worked my way up to producer then field reporter, then I became an anchor at the ABC affiliate in Rochester, New York."

While in her anchor position, she dipped her toes into academia as an adjunct professor at SUNY Geneseo, a smaller public university just outside of Rochester.

"I loved it from the moment I started teaching," Reed said.

She taught a course titled "Broadcast Journalism," which ended up being somewhat of a crash-course in everything journalism and was the only class of its kind at the university. The pace of the class didn't trip up Reed in the slightest and actually sparked the idea of becoming a professor in her mind.

The time came in Reed's career where she was faced with a fork in the path. She could either move to a bigger TV market as an

anchor or something else. That something else turned out to be academia.

She started sending out resumes all over for all sorts of positions, from TV news to professorships to teaching positions. One of the first callbacks she received was from WVU. That was 1993 and was the first time she had set foot on the Morgantown campus.

"I had never been to West Virginia," Reed said. "I came, interviewed and got the job."

Coming into the position, Reed didn't think WVU would be where she would build her career, but now, almost 30 years later, she's climbed her way to one of the university's highest positions.

REED IN THE REED COLLEGE

Before Reed was provost, she was dean of WVU's Reed College of Media. The college's namesake is not Maryanne Reed, but it's easy to see why one would think so.

After working her way up to the dean position in 2004, Reed completely modernized the college, and really focused on bringing the field of journalism into the 21st

century. The focus of the studies began to fall into specialized media creation, as opposed to the jack-of-all-trades, multimedia journalists the school was training before.

"Journalism, as a field, has changed dramatically over the past 20 years," Reed said. "Over the past 10, that change has been absolutely dramatic with the rise of the internet and social media."

When she landed in the dean seat, Reed described the curriculum as traditional — aiming to prepare students for careers in mass media. But as she saw the change in the air, she worked diligently to build a new curriculum that would better prepare her college's students for the modern media profession.

"As the field was changing, we had to change or risk becoming irrelevant," Reed said.

What was once the P.I. Reed School of Journalism received a name change in the update and is now the Reed College of Media today. Reed discovered that many modern students aren't too interested in becoming journalists, but rather "creators of media." Under that umbrella still lies journalism, but



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Maryanne Reed, left, and her good friend Ann Chester running at the RunTheBluegrass half-marathon in Lexington, Kentucky. The pair is dressed up in honor of April Fool's Day.

the scope has been broadened to encompass more modern career paths.

The changes pioneered by Reed have certainly paid dividends. The school has a long list of awards and accolades on its website and has been recognized as a leader in modern media on a national level.

SCALING HER REFORMATION

After serving as dean for 15 years, the position of provost opened, and Reed was persuaded by University President Gordon Gee to seek out that position.

"Gordon is hard to say no to," Reed said with a laugh.

Reed was named provost in 2019 and has been working diligently to scale up many of the same ideas she brought to the Reed College on the scale of the entire university.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Maryanne Reed and University President Gordon Gee together at a university function.

As Reed sees it, higher education is changing today in many of the same ways the journalism field changed when she was appointed dean. The public is starting to call into question the necessity of four-year degrees and a shift toward trade jobs and two-year programs is beginning to take place.

In a world of changing workforces and evolving expectations surrounding the college experience, WVU needed a forward thinker to lead the institution into the next era.

"The college of media has been one of our most forward-thinking academic units at the university. It required strong leadership and agility," Gee said. "[Reed] recognized very quickly the changes that needed to be made, and I just love her intellectual capacity and her willingness to make tough decisions. I felt that that kind of understanding would really benefit the university."

Looking ahead, Reed is planning to really improve the university's communication with the public and — rather than hide from the change coming to higher education — adapt to whatever challenges come toward the institution.

That tenacity in the face of challenges is one

of the top reasons Gee sought after Reed to fill the provost position. And what better test of a leader's tenacity than a global pandemic that reshaped the medium of education.

"I think our university has managed the COVID issues better than most," Gee said. "We've kept our staff safe, and our students engaged, and Maryanne is very much the center of that."

STILL FINDING TIME FOR LEISURE

Between her meetings, emails and phone calls, Reed still finds time for one of her passions, fitness. From running marathons to biking the rail trail to swimming laps, Reed described herself as a fitness enthusiast.

"Fitness is one of my primary hobbies," Reed said. "I'm one of those weirdos who loves running."

Reed has run several half-marathons and is all about getting into the groove of running where the rest of the world falls away and it's just breath, heartbeat and one foot after the other.

Alongside baking, fitness has become a way to wring the day's stresses out and sink into the oxymoronic wonder of relaxation while exercising.

Since her move to West Virginia, Reed has also learned to love hiking. Embracing the state's rugged landscape and enjoying the beauty behind the rough exterior is analogous



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Maryanne Reed on a hiking trip in Italy in 2019.

to Reed's love for the state.

There are many qualities that come with being a West Virginian — hardworking, friendly, steadfast. Despite not being born and raised in the Mountain State, Reed is the epitome of a mountaineer.

"I didn't just fall in love with West Virginia

University, I fell in love with West Virginia," Reed said. "I came here as a person who was not a native and I have come to love this place and appreciate it for everything that it is."

—David Kirk



*Proudly Serving
Marion County Since 1972...*

**MARION COUNTY
RESCUE SQUAD**

**Emergency Dial: 9-1-1
Non-Emergency Dial: 304-363-MCRS
400 Virginia Ave., Fairmont, WV**





SUBMITTED PHOTO

Marion County School Superintendent Donna Hage has a doctorate in education from Marshall University. She took over the school chief job in Marion County on July 1, 2021.

Breaking Down Barriers And Limitations



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Heading to the outdoors, such as Hocking Hills in Ohio, keep the Hage family connected to nature, but also helps Donna Hage and her husband Scott de-stress from their rigorous work week. From left, Scott, Magnus, Heston Rane, Donna and Cooper, the family pet who is named after Cooper's Rock.

Before she entered the field of education, Donna Hage was on a path to become a globe-trotting journalist.

Determined to not be straddled with debt when she graduated from West Virginia University, Hage worked two jobs in Grafton while commuting to campus in Morgantown. She got the bug for writing and journalism while working at The Mountain Statesman newspaper where she started out as a typist and eventually worked into the role of education reporter.

"I wanted to be a foreign correspondent," said Hage, who began serving as Marion County School Superintendent last July 1. "I wanted to travel. I wanted to go into war zones and then just a switch flipped and I went into teaching."

Hage attended Taylor County School Board meetings and wrote news articles about education. While not as glamorous as being a reporter, her second job wrapping and

packaging meat at the local IGA, helped her meet her financial goals and stay focused on her studies.

As a first-generation college student Hage saw a bigger picture for herself, a philosophy she carries with her today leading Marion County Schools.

That philosophy is rooted in lessons she learned from her parents who wanted her to have a better life than they had. Their circumstances were different as both her mom and dad dropped out of high school.

"Life just got in the way and so they both went to work at the time, which is what a lot of people did then," Hage said. "It's one of the reasons I'm so passionate about making students aware of opportunities that we have and the value of staying in school and building relationships with them so they can stay in school."

Her parents also instilled in her the love of music and reading and how to keep up on

current events, which fosters a connection to understanding culture and society.

She admits she grew "up on Country" music. With a warmth reflective of the relationship she had with her mom, Hage recalls the treasured albums she inherited in her mom's vinyl collection — Conway Twitty, Coal Miner's Daughter, Donna Fargo, Charlie Pride.

"And I still collect vinyl today," she said.

From there, she expanded her taste in music to everything from roots reggae the likes of Bob Marley to Pearl Jam and the musical poetry of Eddie Vedder. She also listens to Christian music and enjoys seeing music of all genres performed live.

"I particularly love live music and so during this pandemic, I struggled... the entertainment of it, the artistry, the creativity of it and so anytime I can be a part of live music, I very much like that," Hage said smiling.

(304) 367-9898

FLOYD Real Estate, Inc.

513 FAIRMONT AVE.
FAIRMONT, WV 26554

<http://www.FloydRealEstateWV.com>

Diane Floyd, Broker, GRI

Locally Owned & Operated
Reliable & thorough cleaning service

36 Years Experience

Follow us on Facebook at [CleaningservicesWV](https://www.facebook.com/CleaningservicesWV)

Cleaningservices.com, llc

304-694-8498 | everydaycleaningservices.us



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Donna Hage said hiking not only builds connection among a family, it teaches children to appreciate nature.

With that musical foundation, it's no wonder Hage further developed a love of the arts while a member of her high school show choir. One year, the show choir embarked on a 5-day trip to New York City, her first venture outside of the Mountain State. While there, she and her classmates saw several Broadway musicals.

"I really just got an appreciation for the theater. In high school, I was in a couple of plays, but I was not the star by any means — I was one of the extra singers and dancers," Hage said, laughing.

And although she has never taken voice lessons, she loves to sing in church where she has done a few solos as a soprano.

"I sing in church quite a bit. I don't consider myself a good

singer but I do enjoy it," Hage said.

Like her parents, Hage strives to provide her two children with opportunities she did not have growing up in Taylor County. Her 11-year-old daughter, Heston Rane, is a budding actor, so Hage is constantly juggling schedules to ensure she gets to auditions and theater rehearsals on time. Her 8-year-old son, Magnus, is into Minecraft and wrestling like his dad Scott, who was recruited to wrestle at WVU. (She met Scott in a WVU English class and, as she put it, "The rest is history.")

Literature and Books

By her sophomore year of college, Hage had switched her major to education and began taking courses about how to teach. It was in a class about how

to teach students how to read that she would learn another lesson about herself.

She became hooked on books and reading for pleasure.

"I became a huge fan in taking that class of Maya Angelou and Toni Morrison, those were writers that we discussed because the class was about taking adolescent literature from a multicultural approach and trying to stress to future teachers the importance of doing that and opening up the eyes of people who perhaps may have not been exposed to different cultures," Hage said.

While serving as CEO of a school system requires keeping abreast of leadership trends and staying motivated — which often come to her in the form of book recommendations from

school principals and other professionals in the community — Hage enjoys being transported to a realm of mystery and imagination through books about historical fiction when reading for pleasure.

"I love reading about the Roman Empire, Cleopatra, the Royals in Europe, Dragonsong, Game of Thrones — any work where the writer has created another world based upon the dynamics of society, I'm tuned into those, usually," she said.

Managing Marion County's largest employer and all of the duties of leadership, Hage has to stay focused and organized. She strives to set aside time daily to read books, however, when she can't she delves into an audiobook.

"I've always been that way with

my children, listening to audiobooks in the car and exposing them to things like that so, while I prefer to sit down and handle a book myself, because I take notes, I highlight, I'm very reflective with it...I've listened to a lot of audiobooks lately," Hage said.

"I keep an active list of things I'd like to read."

Importance of reading and books

Hage firmly believes in the power of the role model — anyone who sets an example of good for others to follow. She urges parents to serve as role models for reading by letting their children see them read, as well as read to their kids. Reading is fundamental to success in life, whether it's reading street signs or being able to do such things as apply for a mortgage.

"I think it's important to read anything — anything and everything," Hage said. "If it's a newspaper, if it's a comic book, if it's just simply a wrapper on a Dove chocolate or a bubble gum wrapper.

"I think to read those out loud — particularly to your children — is to important and even if you don't sit down with your child and read actively or listen to them read, just take an active effort in talking to them and asking them questions about that."

The opportunity that comes out of reading is conversation and conversation can lead to further exploration and learning while creating positive family memories. Hage also



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Magnus Hage, left, and his sister Heston Rane, are getting countless hours of time in the outdoors where they spend time with their parents, Scott and Donna Hage, Marion County School Superintendent.

urges parents to ask their children about the characters in their books and have them tell them what the characters are doing — skills that lead to reading comprehension and

further understanding.

"I think the dialogue that occurs back and forth between the parent and the child is important because it's helping those communication skills, it's helping them to think, it's helping them to be exposed to different things that they may not otherwise be exposed to," Hage said.

"But, also most importantly, it's showing them that we're interested in something that they're doing and that we're interested and that we value reading."

A huge proponent of public libraries, Hage urges families in Marion County and throughout West Virginia who may not have the means to buy books to take their children to the library or take advantage of the Book Mobile, especially during summer break.

"We have so many great programs in our libraries everything from puppetry to just going in and sitting and looking at picture books is so vital," Hage said.

Hiking and the outdoors

As a native West Virginian, whose husband grew up in Georgia's metro Atlanta area, Hage is determined to share her love of West Virginia's 'Wild & Wonderful' with her family. On any given weekend, it's likely she and her family hit the trail hiking or kayaking or both.

"Any time that I can get out into the woods — that's my peace and quiet," Hage said. "I love the water — I'm not a good swimmer —



Marion County Schools
It's what's inside that counts

Purpose, Pride, Perspective in the Pursuit of Excellence



***Together, in our
"pursuit of excellence,"
Marion County Schools is stronger
because of the support and our
partnerships with Marion County.***



MARY JO THOMAS, PRESIDENT
JAMES SAUNDERS, MEMBER • RICHARD PELLEGRIN, MEMBER
DONNA COSTELLO, VICE-PRESIDENT • TOM DRAGICH, MEMBER
DR. DONNA HAGE, SUPERINTENDENT

but I love kayaking.

"It's not unusual for me to put a kayak in the water at Prickett's Fort and just head out and enjoy that. I do like peace and quiet — there's comfort in solitude at times, particularly with this job — it's a difficult one and so if I can get a couple of hours in the woods, I do appreciate that."

Spruce Knob, Coopers Rock, Raven Rocks are familiar places of solace for Hage individually and with her family. She said just as the COVID-19 pandemic was beginning, she and her family traveled to New Hampshire where they learned what it means to take part in what's been called goat climbing.

"It was straight up. There was a lot of pulling at roots and very

rock-intensive, but it was a neat experience," Hage said. "It was good for my children to see that, but that probably was the last major family hiking trip that was over several days."

Leadership and community

Even before Hage began her role as Marion County School Superintendent, she took great steps to connect with the community.

"Last June, our Women's Network hosted a picnic and Donna Hage attended as a way to reach out and meet some of the people involved in our community," Marion County Chamber of Commerce President Tina Shaw said. "By doing that simple act, she made a number of great connections and set the

tone for her tenure here."

Shaw said it is evident that Hage wants to and is transforming education in Marion County.

"She is the right leader at the right time and we hope to have her as long as possible," Shaw said.

Hage has plans to bolster Career and Technical Education in the schools in order to create new pathways for students who want to remain in their home state and county and flourish here.

"She is also an example for young women who may see Donna in her role and think, 'I could do what she is doing one day,' which is huge for young girls," Shaw said.

Shaw said she and Hage have had discussions about restarting the Chamber's teen job shadowing program, which is designed to give students a hands-on glimpse into certain targeted fields before they graduate from high school.

At the picnic last June, Hage had no idea she would run into a colleague of hers.

While she served as an assistant school superintendent in Harrison County prior to being hired as school chief in Marion County, Hage worked closely with Tracy Miller, president of the Mid-Atlantic Aerospace Complex. Together, Hage and Miller worked to develop an aviation curriculum for all of Harrison County high school



PHOTO BY DAVID KIRK

Donna Hage, Marion County School Superintendent, jokingly says the furniture in her office reminds her of the popular 1980s TV sitcom "Newhart," which was set in a historic inn in Vermont.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Magnus and Heston Rane work together to climb a rock formation on a family trip to Vermont.

students that is taught at Bridgeport High School.

“Donna Hage is a person who truly gets it. She is all about creating pathways for kids through CTE and I think we are going to see some great things come out of Marion County because of her,” Miller said.

Miller worked so closely with Hage on aviation education that when Hage applied for her job in Marion County, Miller didn’t hesitate to write a letter of recommendation for Hage.

“I knew from working with her so closely that she would do a great job for Marion County,”

Miller said.

And, as many Marion County education leaders have already witnessed, Hage wants to constantly innovate and create new programs that help students explore and wonder. Plans are underway to establish a literacy and arts bus that will travel to

schools and provide student activities and lessons in a way similar to the school district’s STEAM Bus.

“We want to meet students where they’re at and give them activities they can do with literature and art because it is so important to be fully submerged in it,” Hage said.

What drives Donna Hage?

Prior to being a school administrator, Hage was diligent about maintaining a gratitude journal. She would set aside 30 minutes daily – usually first thing in the morning (she admits she is not a morning person) – to write down the things for which she is grateful. However, today, at the busiest point ever in her career, Hage’s journal has transformed into a list.

“I did keep a gratitude journal where every day I’d very diligently try to commit to writing things I’m thankful for just those positive affirmations because there are a lot of people that struggle in the world and I think we need to be often reminded to be grateful,” she said.

However, beyond being grateful, Hage said, lessons she learned from her hardworking father also keep her going. The owner of a sawmill who also worked in construction, she said her father instilled in her a competitive spirit. Today, she leans on his memory as a force for good.

“I would say a lot drives me including my late father in my head to remind me constantly to never be idle and work hard, earn the respect of others because I’m always striving to outwork the person next to me wherever I am,” Hage said.

“And, for my daughter and son to do everything with epic energy and kindness to everyone as I try new things and work to break down barriers and limitations others may try to place on you by saying you’re too young, it can’t be done, or that’s never been done.”

—Eric Cravey

The Woman Who Needs No Introduction



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Tina Shaw, president of the Marion County Chamber of Commerce



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Tina Shaw with her family, who surprised her at an award presentation at Muriale's.

Tina Shaw is known as the woman who gets things done and makes things happen in Marion County. The last few years have proved that.

In 2020, when Fairmont was faced with Fairmont Regional Medical Center closing, she led the way in advocating, meeting with the governor and forming a plan to keep the mainstay employer in the county.

Last summer, when a series

of floods basically destroyed the Disability Action Center's headquarters and put in jeopardy its ability to provide services, she organized a meeting of officials at state, county and city levels to brainstorm a solution.

"When the Disability Action Center joined the chamber, I learned very quickly that Tina is a champion of all businesses and organizations in Marion County," said Julie Sole, Shaw's friend and

director of the DAC. "She really brings out the best in people and digs out the solutions to problems in the community."

Shaw has been involved with Marion County's Chamber of Commerce since the 1990s. In 2003, after leaving her previous job as a corporate marketing director, she came under the wing of the chamber's previous president, Charlie Reese.

Since then, she's developed

her own style of leadership within the chamber and the community. To her, a chamber of commerce ought to be a facilitator and has made it her goal to not only stand for the business community, but to improve the quality of life for all of Marion County.

"Those two pieces make for a very well-rounded chamber," Shaw said.

Having been born and raised



TWV FILE PHOTO

Tina Shaw, president of the Marion County Chamber of Commerce, at her desk in the chamber's office.

in Fairmont, Shaw has a wealth of connections at her disposal and prides herself in being that person that any business with any challenge can come to for help, no matter their position.

"In the morning she's meeting with the CEO of a major hospital and the next hour she could be meeting with a small business owner that needs help getting their name out there," Sole said. "She just puts that hat on and champions that cause."

Shaw believes her chief duty is find a seat at the table for the right people. When something happens, she's the person that makes the phone calls and schedules the discussions, then she's usually the one at the table leading the talks.

The ebbs and flows of her job are what keep it exciting for her. While the thought of never

knowing what the next phone call could be about might sound terrifying to some, that's what keeps Shaw enthralled with her job.

From the start of her career, it was clear she would end up in a position of prominence in the community.

With a business administration and communication degree from Fairmont State University, Shaw was quick to climb in her professional life. Being from Fairmont, she had invaluable connections that allowed her career to get off to a quick start.

But the path toward the business world wasn't always Shaw's intention, when she first entered higher education, a business degree wasn't her first choice.

"It was actually theatre!" Shaw said. "That was actually why I

went to Fairmont State, I was awarded a scholarship for speech and theatre."

She competed on the university's speech and debate team and performed in various productions on the Wallman Hall stage in her time as a student.

However, as her academic career progressed, she began to stray from the nebulous world of art and gravitate to the more stable field of business. But Shaw still feels that the arts, and specifically her experience in theatre, are a big part of the reasons she's so good at her job today.

Memorization, cooperation, group work, communication and public speaking are all skills she gained and perfected on the stage and behind the scenes.

"It taught me how to be comfortable in a big group of

people, it taught me how to stand in front of 600 people and speak to them," Shaw said. "Everything I am today and everything I've achieved is because of that theatre background."

In her job of new faces and new situations, a quick mind and adaptable demeanor are both skills she credits to her arts experiences.

But now that her acting days are behind her, she still loves to support the arts, be they local or national. Aside from theatre, her other passion is traveling, and she and her family take many trips to New York where they are intentional about seeing Broadway performances.

Earlier in her career, she traveled often as part of her job, finding herself all over the United States and developed a

love for seeing the world. Now she takes yearly trips with her family.

Some of her favorite places she's been are Aruba, New York City and the Caribbean islands. Every time she goes, she's reminded of how fortunate she is to live in the United States and how fortunate she is to enjoy the privileges she's afforded.

But despite all the traveling and the sightseeing, West Virginia is still her favorite place and Marion County is still home. She's been offered no shortage of opportunities to leave the county, to take her career to new heights, but she's still here in Fairmont, working for the small businesses trying to stake their claim, and helping the big businesses looking to move into the neighborhood.

While the job at the chamber certainly would be hard to leave, the real challenge would be to leave her family in the area. Both she and her husband worked hard to obtain their stable careers which played right into their shared desire to raise their four children around family.

"I don't know what I would've done if I wasn't here near family during some tough times," Shaw said. "I've always loved this community and always thought this was a great place."

But Tina Shaw is one of the chief reasons Marion County is a great place. Her work at the chamber has brought attention to the county on a state and national level. Shaw has garnered the attention of her fellow chamber presidents and in one of them she found a close friend.

During the closure of Fairmont Regional Medical Center, Shaw grew close with Erikka Storch, the former president of Wheeling's Chamber of Commerce, whose area went through losing a hospital in a similar way that Fairmont did.

"She got out in front of that situation and she responded with action," Storch said. "It's one thing to know it, it's another to know something and doing something about it."

Storch has been rather impressed with Shaw since the



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Tina Shaw in Washington D.C. with one of her four sons enjoying the world famous cherry blossoms in the spring.

two became acquainted and admires her and what she brings to the chamber president's position. Having held the same position Shaw holds now, Storch is impressed by her openness, availability and her contagious positivity.

"She's a rockstar. Marion County is very lucky to have her and she's just such a delight to work with," Storch said.

But the reason Shaw is so committed to her job is not for the praise or the awards, it's for the difference she gets to make every day in the community.

Sole said that Tina Shaw doesn't need a last name, everyone in the community knows who Tina is when the name is dropped and that's exactly the kind of aura she's strived to create for herself.

And for her, the work is reward enough and that reward outweighs any potential lateral motion or monetary gains.

"The grass isn't always greener on the other side of the fence," Shaw said. "I love this community and I'm very fortunate to be a part of it."

- David Kirk



Lifting Up The Community

SUBMITTED PHOTO

Here's a dusk view of the hot air balloon at Windmill Park.

After riding in a hot air balloon, Fairmont native Romelia Hodges knew she wanted people in her community to experience the same thrill she had that day.

“He says to me, ‘I have never met anybody who enjoyed this more than you. You love this,’ and I do. You know, that’s the one thing about West Virginia, we’re so deprived of experiences that people take for granted in other states,” said Hodges, who serves as CEO of the Dunbar School Foundation Stop Program and as a West Virginia COVID-19 Taskforce Commissioner after her hot air balloon ride in Preston County.

Hodges said her main goal is to provide those experiences to West Virginians and particularly members of the Black community. For the grand opening of the Dunbar School Foundation Stop Program Clinic in Fall 2021, she made sure a hot air balloon made its way to Fairmont along with carnival rides at the celebration held at Windmill Park.

“I really get off on watching people’s faces, watching their enjoyment and their



SUBMITTED PHOTO

From top left to bottom right: Dre Hodges, Deacon Hodges, Patrick Hodges, Jazzellyn Hodges and Romelia Hodges pose for a photo.

SPRING IS HERE!

ALL SIZE DRIVEWAYS
AND MORE



Affordable prices
References
Work is Guaranteed

Licensed & Insured
Over 40 years experience

Senior & Veteran
Discounts

FREE ESTIMATES

ERNEST SMALL PAVING

304-363-4020
304-291-8400



www.ernestsmallpaving.com

Find us on



#WV032018



CENTRAL WV AGING SERVICES, INC.

Caregivers Needed in All Offices



Call us today for a free in-home assessment if you need assistance with meal prep, light housekeeping, laundry, bathing/grooming, grocery shopping medical transports, etc.

Wants you to know that the following services are available:

- Personal Care Services
- Medicaid Waiver Case Management
- Medicaid Waiver Homemaker Service
- Charity Care/ Helping Hands for Those Waiting on Waiver
 - Veteran’s In-Home Services
 - Worker’s Compensation In-Home Services
- Private Pay Homemaker In-Home Service- Competitive Rate
 - Free In-Home Assessments
 - UMWA Respite Services

“Serving the Elderly and Disabled Since 1974”

Evelyn Post, Executive Director
Fairmont 1-800-436-3780

Sutton 304-765-3668 Charleston 1-877-346-7585 Martinsburg 1-877-767-3997
Oak Hill 1-800-681-0886 Parkersburg 1-866-546-2164
Buckhannon-Corporate office 1-800-296-0069

079812108



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Romelia Hodges gave a speech at a vaccine clinic event for DFS Stop Program at Windmill Park.

enlightenment,” Hodges said. “Watching that to me is priceless; you don’t have to give me any money or anything. Just to see people happy and joyous for some time, to set aside all that is going on in society and just to enjoy themselves for a few moments — that is worth everything.”

Hodges spent the majority of 2020 and 2021 advocating and sharing information about the COVID-19 pandemic. After the first outbreak in West Virginia occurred on March 15, 2020 in a Black church service she attended, she and the majority of her family experienced COVID symptoms. She became rather adept at organizing, contact tracing and helping people who were sick out of necessity.

Tiffany Walker Samuels, COO at DSF Stop

Program, and director of development at WVU Schools of Nursing and Public Health and Hodge’s best friend, said they’ve known each other forever. Their moms were friends and worked as community advocates together in the 1980s and 1990s.

Hodges and Walker-Samuels planned several COVID testing and vaccination events for the Black community. Often times, information about these events was hand-delivered in the form of pamphlets to community members’ front doors.

They spent a lot of time walking during the pandemic. They walked because they liked the exercise, but it also served as a sanity break, Walker Samuels said. They would walk up to four miles a day, but on days when they had a testing or vaccination

event planned, they would walk up to seven or eight miles to ensure everyone in the community was receiving the information they needed.

With the opening of the DSF Stop Program, the two don’t have to walk quite as much. The goal of the clinic is to, “Uplift and unite African Americans in the region through a commitment to Black community health and well-being,” according to its website.

The program name stands for, “Stop the outbreak of the pandemic. So, we like to say, you can stop by and get tested, stop by and get vaccinated or just stop by and get information,” Hodges said.

“Neither of us have a medical background. So, that’s one of the things that is most impressive to me about Romelia. She



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Romelia Hodges, left, and Tiffany Walker Samuels, right, enjoy a girls spa day.

understands COVID-19 from a medical perspective, more than many of the medical professionals that I've spoken to," Walker Samuels said.

Hodges has plenty of learned experience. Her husband, Patrick, and two sons, Dre and Deacon, have a rare blood disorder, which has caused her husband and older son to have serious Long COVID symptoms. Her older son did not originally have COVID symptoms after the church service in 2020, but ended up in the hospital around Thanksgiving that year.

He required at least 20 blood transfusions before Hodges questioned doctors about the possibility of his sickness being COVID related. Doctors said no, but after another two weeks and five more transfusions, doctors realized that he did have COVID antibodies.

"In spite of it all, we are thriving, because we believe in taking whatever is thrown at us and turning that into something even better, as a learning experience," Hodges said about her family.

Hodges graduated from Fairmont Senior High School, where she participated on the debate team. She attended Fairmont State University and received her master's degree from Concordia University Irvine. For a period of time, Hodges travelled around the

country as a professional speaker. She credits high school teacher Katherine Raspa for some of her success and being a mentor.

"She was very, very stern; I had red marks all over my paper. I don't think I ever got an 'A' from her. But, I credit her with my resiliency in the ability to accept that failure or mistakes are OK; they're part of the learning experience," Hodges said.

"She's very transparent. She's very open to learning and embracing her own actions and being responsible for those. So she tends to be a very, very strong role model for many people who are in need," Clay Marsh, chancellor and executive dean for Health Sciences at West Virginia University said.

Marsh — who has served as West Virginia's COVID Czar — has worked with Hodges throughout the pandemic. He said she is a vocal and enthusiastic leader and a strong advocate for the entire state, but particularly within the African American community.

"What is wonderful about working with Romelia is that she is dedicated 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and her dedication has never wavered," Walker Samuels said.

When she's not working, she loves spending time with her friends and family and exercising.

"I love a good laugh. So if there's a comedy show or something like that. I love to dance.

I love to just let my hair down sometimes, because in the business that I'm in, it requires you to be kind of pent up a little," Hodges said.

Hodges walks Morris Park with her daughter, Dazzellyn, which gives the two of them time to have important mom-daughter conversations. Hodges is a very proud mom and wife.

"By my side, and my silent partners in all of that is my husband and my COO Tiffany Walker Samuels. Tiffany is there in the business aspect of it; we're going through the fire together. But on those nights when it all shuts down and I'm frustrated about this, that or the other, I have my husband to lean on for that," Hodges said.

As a friend, Walker Samuels said they love to get together and go for lunch or shopping, although there isn't much time for such activities lately.

"Romelia is a very thoughtful and compassionate friend. She loves girl friendships and she takes those very seriously and purposefully," Walker Samuels said.

Hodges has been named West Virginian of the Year and a WV Can't Wait Hometown Hero. She is most proud of the day she was finally able to get COVID testing for the 150 people who were exposed to the coronavirus on March 15, 2020.

Growing up in West Virginia as a Black woman was a bumpy road, Hodges said. Education was difficult because there wasn't always the ability to shine as bright as you could. Despite having fewer opportunities, Hodges learned to make the best of her situation.

"Although the obstacles are there, we have to learn how to overcome them. The best way to do that is simply to admit that they're there. We cannot deny the fact that disparities exist," Hodges said.

Amy Parks, Hodges' mom, was her biggest role model. Parks worked as an advocate throughout the Civil Rights Movement. She was a forced to be reckoned with, Hodges said. Hodges said her mother was the type of woman who had to kick the door open to get things done.

"To a stranger, the first thing I would tell them is to buckle in and be ready for a fun, exhilarating and challenging ride and know that whatever is discussed will be accomplished. So, she's not one for idle discussions. Their work will be done and problems will be solved. She's not one to waste time, although she's very friendly and outgoing. It's everything is with a purpose," Walker Samuels said.

- Savanna Shriver

Three Seasons In, It's All About Growth



TWV FILE PHOTO

Fairmont State coach Stephanie Anderson talks to the team during a timeout in a game this past season.

Coming out of college, Stephanie Anderson thought she would be a physical therapist.

She had a decorated basketball career through high school into playing at California University of Pennsylvania, but after graduating, her time on the hardwood might have ended.

But life had other ideas.

“Honestly, the opportunity just came to me,” Anderson said. “I was studying to be a physical therapist. I thought that’s what my career would be. But I knew people that asked me to coach their daughters for AAU, and I loved it.”

As a favor, Anderson accepted the role of head coach for the Morgantown Mavs AAU team, and coached them for three years. Some great athletes played for the Mavs, and with the attention they received, so too did Anderson herself.

“I was lucky enough to have one of the girls I coached on that AAU team — she was a college prospect,” Anderson said. “So coach [Steve] McDonald, who was the coach at the time at Fairmont State, he was recruiting one of our players, and he had come to our practices. His assistant had just gotten a head coaching job, so he offered me the position to be an assistant coach at Fairmont State.”

Steve McDonald, the winningest coach in Fairmont State women’s basketball’s history with over 350 career victories, came away from those recruiting trips with more than a new college recruit — he came away with his eventual successor.

Coming aboard with the Falcons, aspirations of physical therapy gave way to the sport that had stayed at the forefront of Anderson’s whole life.

“I knew coach Mac just from being in the area, he had recruited me coming out of high school,” Anderson said. “We had some similar contacts, he obviously did his research and called people about me, too.”

“We didn’t have too much of a relationship before he offered me the job, but we worked



TWV FILE PHOTO

Stephanie Anderson speaks during her introductory press conference in May 2019 in Fairmont State’s Feaster Center.



TWW FILE PHOTO

Fairmont State coach Stephanie Anderson huddles with the team during a game earlier this season at Joe Retton Arena.

together for five years, we had a great working relationship, and we got to know each other really well. I am extremely glad he offered me that position and got me into coaching."

Stephanie Anderson spent five years as an assistant for the Falcons, and after McDonald's retirement, Anderson was tapped to be the seventh coach in Fairmont State women's basketball history before the 2020 season.

In her first season, Fairmont State went 15-14, an improvement from their 13-16 record the year prior. For the Falcons players and their new head coach, how they improved came about much the same way — repetition.

"Experience — there's no substitute for experience," Anderson said. "When you're young you think it's black-and-white, and it's really not.

Experience brings you a lot, there's things you learn, and there's things you realize you did wrong, 'Ah, I should've done this differently, or this or that.'

"A part of that is constantly being humble, I think that's huge. Looking at yourself in the mirror and seeing what you can do better. Just paying attention to the different things that happen, that's the only way you can learn. Whenever times are tough, that's usually when we grow."

Growth would be an immediate and constant theme for Anderson and the Falcons. Unbeknownst to her, Anderson wouldn't have long to settle into her new role before the sporting world — and indeed, the world at large — would be turned upside-down in 2020, shortly after her tenure as coach started.

"It was hard, COVID was hard

for everybody for different aspects," Anderson said. "I think the community missed it, and we missed having our fans. We got used to it over the COVID year, but that's not something you really want to get used to. You miss having people there, it just brings that intensity and that excitement into the gym whenever you have people there, cheering for you."

Through the changes and

trials the pandemic threw on Anderson's plate after just one year as coach, the Falcons coach did learn from it, and re-affirmed what is important in a team.

"The COVID year, if anything, it showed us just how important it was for our kids to be around each other, to create bonds," Anderson said. "Throughout that time, the kids were just stuck in their dorms by themselves, couldn't eat out, and they just

 A person is sitting in a modern, light-colored wicker chair, leaning back with their feet on a white ottoman. They are in a bright, airy room with large windows in the background.

REGULAR CHIROPRACTIC CARE can soothe the nervous system which helps **DECREASE SYMPTOMS** associated with anxiety, depression and chronic stress.

DR. MARIE MASON
MASON FAMILY CHIROPRACTIC
304-534-8493

1414 COUNTRY CLUB RD., SUITE 2, FAIRMONT

missed opportunities to get to know each other, have team dinners.

"We really didn't think about it until we were about halfway through the season and we realized our players didn't even really know each other. The only time they'd see each other was at practice in the gym, besides that they were separated. It was tough, and we realized that all that time we spend outside the gym is just so important."

A 7-10 season in the COVID-shortened 2021 campaign proved to be an aberration, as the Falcons got back on the winning side of things this past season. Fairmont State went 15-13, losing to West Liberty in the MEC Tournament 79-70, despite coming back from a 19-point deficit in the third quarter to having a chance to tie with 90 seconds to play.

It was a deflating loss, but in times like that, Anderson's own past as a college basketball player at Cal (Pa.) informs her coaching style, and helps her connect with her players.

"It influences me a lot because what my players go through, it's something that I experienced," Anderson said. "I hope that's something that I'm able to bring to the table for our kids. I understand what they're fighting for, how hard it is, the ups-and-downs of a season, and how much pressure is put on you as a student-athlete."

Now with three seasons under her belt, Anderson has gotten a chance to watch players' entire careers from the sideline. Seeing their growth from beginning to end is a highlight for her.

"It's definitely the relationships," Anderson said. "I love the relationships I've formed through coaching, and the main thing about coaching is being able to mentor and inspire these young girls' lives."

"Basketball is a by-product of that — we get to compete, and we get to strive for winning, we're extremely competitive. The relationships that we build with these kids is extremely rewarding, watching them grow over their time here."

Growth is not limited to players, either. As she was an assistant not too long ago, Anderson has assistants now who have promising days ahead of them, and watching them advance in their craft is likewise rewarding.

"Miki Glenn is my main assistant, and she's been awesome," Anderson said. "I couldn't do this job without her. I think all of us are just as good as the people we put around us. Seeing her grow — she has an excellent mind for X's and O's, she helps push me in that area. She grows more comfortable being more vocal every single day."

"I want to see everybody that works with me, anybody that's around us, you want everybody to grow that's in your program. Whatever the future holds for her, I hope the best."

The next season will be the first year where Anderson will head a roster made up 100% of her own recruits. Up until now, players like All-MEC first team guard — and the MEC's all-time leading scorer — Sierra Kotchman, have helped carry

the load. Kotchman finished her final year as a graduate this past season. She was joined on the All-MEC first team by Alyssa DeAngelo, a Anderson recruit, who is only a sophomore.

Though Anderson was an assistant during players like Kotchman's recruitment, it is always an interesting situation when a new coach comes into a school and has to lead players who were recruited to the team by a different face.

"I think that's always an adjustment," Anderson said. "Different styles of play come into effect, and you're trying to blend the two. You're handed awesome kids who, with the coaching change, now they're in a different situation. You just have to make sure you're doing what's best for everyone."

"I do think it's a learning experience on how to blend the two for sure. That's part of it, that's part of the journey, and it's helped teach me what you need and what you don't need."

When it comes to recruiting, Anderson has also learned more over her tenure. Here again, her past as a player helps her in being able to relate to potential prospects.

"I think just in general, kids want people that are relatable, that are real," Anderson said. "I find it easier to talk to recruits when they're on-campus and I can talk with them in person, then it's easier to build a relationship with them. I don't think [being a former player] hurts, for sure."

The Falcons rostered four seniors this past year, and will look to replace their production

in the seasons to come with players like DeAngelo, as well as incoming recruits like Fairmont's own Emily Starn.

Even though this time of year is called the offseason, Anderson still doesn't get many days off. Recruiting fills in the space previously filled with practicing, and outside of basketball, there's no offseason for being a parent.

"There isn't much off-time during season," Anderson said. "It's busy. Whenever the season's over, then recruiting ramps up a lot, and that's your main priority. And then there's fundraising and all that. Then during the season it's all about the kids and game planning."

"I'm a mom of two. That keeps me busy. I love my kids, and pretty much outside of basketball, I'm a super family-oriented person. I love to hike, I love to be outdoors, but really I just love being with family whenever I'm not around basketball, that's the main thing, being able to balance the two."

Three seasons on the job has generated plenty of growth opportunities for Anderson. Though it might not have been the career she envisioned straight out of college, the leader of the Falcons is set to go full-steam ahead into the future.

"It was an opportunity that was too good to pass up. I had to see where that would take me. I loved it — I didn't know that was going to be my career choice, but it felt right. I couldn't imagine doing anything else right now."

—Nick Henthorn

Bridal & Fine Jewelry, Pandora, Kendra Scott, and More



white's
FINE JEWELRY

2600 Middletown Commons,
Suite 141
White Hall, WV 26554
304-366-7999
www.whitesfinejewelry.com

PERINE FUNERAL HOME
PROUDLY SERVING THE SHINNSTON AREA.



Patrick Kovalck
Licensed Director

Adam T. Perine
Licensee-In-Charge

1348 S. Pike Street, Shinnston, WV, 26431 • 304-592-5925
www.perinefunerals.com



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Anna Brusoe and her published book, "Reaching for the Stars."

‘Community-Minded’: Morgantown Teen Shares Her Accomplishments

Proficient in robotics. Girl Scout Gold Award. Church pianist. Published a book in multiple languages.

These are just a few of the accolades already notched in the belt of 16-year-old Anna Brusoe, of Morgantown, and she’s not planning to stop any time soon.

From an early age, Anna was taught about the importance of helping the community. That was a trait her mother was adamant about instilling in both Anna and her older brother.

The lessons came firsthand, as Anna was — and still is — homeschooled by her mother, Nigh-Anh Brusoe.

“I’ve always been taught and encouraged by my family to help the community,” Anna said. “I guess from when I grew up and when I joined the Girl Scouts. The Girl Scouts really helped push that further.”

The Girls Scouts were really a natural fit for Anna and her goal of community involvement. She credits her Scouting work to her older brother, who was in Boy Scouts

at that time.

“I wanted to do everything he was doing,” Anna said.

Luck would have it that a Girl Scout troop met in the same place that her brother’s troop met. She was passed between several troops because she wasn’t the same age as the other girls, but finally ended up settling in Troop 51102, where she is still a member today.

The first thing that comes to mind for most when hearing about Girl Scouts is, of



Valley Distributing Company
12th Street & Minor Avenue
Fairmont, WV 26554
(304) 366-1880

Budweiser

BUD LIGHT **BUD LIGHT NEXT** **BUD LIGHT SELTZER**

BUSCH **BUSCH LIGHT**

Michelob ULTRA *Michelob ULTRA ORGANIC SELTZER CUCUMBER LIME*

Yuengling **Natural LIGHT**

GREENBRIER VALLEY BREWING CO. **SCRECH OWL** **BIG TIMBER**



Fuel up and fill up at our new location
in Fairmont, West Virginia!

TAKE EXIT 137

Exxon **Arby's** **TERIYAKI MADNESS**

With over 100 locations across Appalachia,
Little General Stores proudly serve local communities.

course, their cookie sale. But that is only one aspect of the leadership program. In recent years, the Girl Scouts have shifted to the empowerment of the young women in its ranks. The organization propagates the slogan, "What do Girl Scouts do? Anything they set their mind to."

It's not hard to see that Anna has taken that to heart. She's earned the Girl Scout Gold Award — essentially the equivalent to the Boy Scouts' Eagle Scout — two years earlier than most.

A major piece of earning the Gold Award is identifying a problem in the community and addressing it with a real solution. Anna's solution was to write a children's book on her own. She did all the writing, research and even the illustrations.

Her book, "Reaching for the Stars," is all about various women scientists and the work they've done throughout history. Anna said the book has been distributed all across the United States.

"I was trying to think of some ideas for my [Gold Award] project and I saw online that another Girl Scout did something similar," Anna said. "I think, 'Hey I can do that too.'"

Anna's mother then suggested the book be translated in Spanish as well. Once they had it translated, it was rolled out in South America to be sold. Anna's major motivation for the translation wasn't to add to her accolades, but because, "There aren't a lot of resources on women scientists in Spanish," she said.

The book tells the stories of five women who changed history through their contributions to the sciences. Katherine Johnson, Jane Luu, Mary Golda Ross, Ellen Ochoa and Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin are the featured subjects.

To compile enough information to write a book, no matter the target audience, is no small feat. Anna went out of her way to find several women that the masses hadn't heard about, and it was serendipitous that the majority of the women she chose were also minorities.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Anna has studied the piano for over ten years. Before COVID-19 she would play for nursing homes in the area, now she uses her talents as a church pianist.

Jane Luu is a Vietnamese-born woman who co-discovered the Kuiper Belt, Mary Golda Ross was born into the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma and was hired as an engineer in World

War II to improve fighter planes. Ellen Ochoa became the first Hispanic woman in space as a crewmember on the Discovery shuttle.

Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin

made the discovery that the majority of the universe is composed of hydrogen after fighting most of her life to overcome barriers preventing a woman to enter into science,



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Anna Brusoe with her certificate for her Girl Scouts Gold Award, the highest achievement a girl scout can hold.

technology, engineering and mathematics field.

Katherine Johnson, born in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, was a Black woman who famously aided in the majority of

the calculations for NASA's Apollo missions and is the namesake for NASA's Katherine Johnson IV&V Center in Fairmont.

STEM involvement
Anna hopes one day to be

counted among those women and is aiming high already. Just a junior in high school, Anna is enthralled with math and science and dreams of being an engineer.

On top of her studies in school, she's part of Mountaineer Area Robotics, a subset of the First Robotics competitions. She's traveled all across the state and the country competing.

Just like how she got into the Girl Scouts, she credits her early involvement with robotics to her brother, who also has a knack for the sport.

"I guess we can see a pattern there!" Anna said, laughing. "I just love to program and code and seeing it all come together like that. It's just really fun."

In March, Anna traveled to New York for a robotics competition and later this spring, she's scheduled to go to Tennessee and then Texas for the world championship.

Anna is very thankful for all the funding that goes into the robotics teams in West Virginia, which allows her to travel and compete at no charge, and the same goes for all the other students.

"It's really reduced barriers for a lot of the members of the team," Anna said.

After high school, Anna said she's planning to apply to all sorts of engineering schools. Her top choice is the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, but she said if she doesn't get accepted there, West Virginia University has an amazing engineering school.

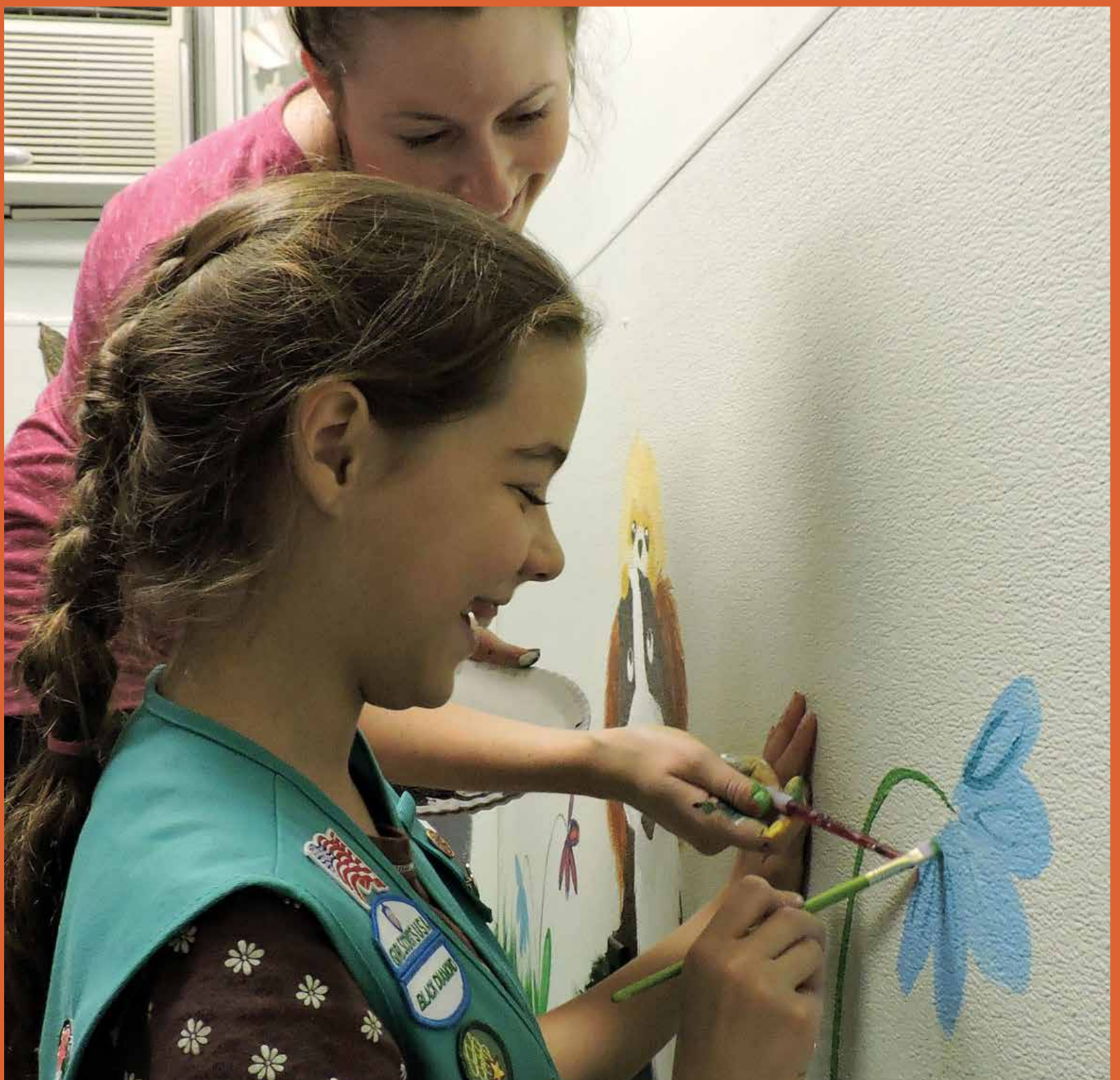
Family support

Nigh-Anh Brusoe, Anna's mother, has raised quite the young woman. Acting as both Anna's parent and school teacher for most of her daughter's academic career has given her the chance to instill many of her own ideals about community service and its importance to her children.

Brusoe could not be prouder of her daughter and all the things she has accomplished in just 16 years.

"[Anna] is very goal oriented and always puts in 100 percent," Brusoe said. "I always encourage her to try new things and I could not be more proud of her."

Brusoe attributes a lot of Anna's community-mindedness to their monthly family trips



TWV FILE PHOTO

In this photo from 2016, Ashley Teets, a graphic designer, helps a younger Anna Brusoe paint a mural at the Marion County Humane Society animal shelter.

where she would take Anna and her brother once a month to nursing homes to visit with the residents.

“We don’t have any family here, so I really believe that the older generation and the younger generation need to interact more,” Brusoe said. “The kids just love doing that. We tried to keep that up for a long time but then COVID hit.”

Before the pandemic forced nursing homes to limit or cease visitation, Anna would go in and play the piano for the residents. She

been practicing the piano since she was around five years old and is putting her talent to work now as a church pianist.

Overall, Anna attributes much of her success to her community, which she has spent most of her teenage years giving back to.

From the donors that allow her to travel for robotics to the elderly in the nursing homes applauding as she plays the piano, she has learned her community-mindedness from those experiences just as much as she

learned it from her family.

As she grows into her adult life, she’s grateful for the support she’s enjoyed over the years.

“It just means so much to me to have that support there and to always have someone to support me when I doubt myself or I don’t know what to do,” Anna said. “It just means the world to me. Because of that strong support system, I’ve been able to do so much.”

—David Kirk

MAKE YOUR

HOMETHATHE...

Star
of the show!

FOR OVER 114 YEARS

STAR FURNITURE HAS BEEN FURNISHING THE HOMES OF NORTH CENTRAL WEST VIRGINIA



5 Star Service

OUR 100,00 SQ FOOT DISTRIBUTION CENTER ALLOWS US TO KEEP THE FURNITURE YOU WANT READY FOR YOU!



5 Star Selection

OVER 120,000 SQ FEET OF SHOWROOMS IN 4 LOCATIONS LOCATED IN THE HEART OF OUR REGION MAKE IT EASY TO SHOP WHERE YOU WANT.



5 Star Values

WE WANT TO GIVE YOU THE LOWEST PRICE WITH THE HONEST CUSTOMER SERVICE YOU EXPECT!



University Town Center
I-79 Exit 153
In MORGANTOWN
304-296-7290
Mon - Thurs 10-8
Fri & Sat 10-9
Closed Sunday

Above Wal-Mart
in FAIRMONT
304-368-9111
Mon & Fri 10-8
Tues-Thurs 10-7
Sat.10-6, Closed Sunday

Below Wal-Mart
in CLARKSBURG
304-626-3700
Mon - Thurs 10-8
Fri & Sat 10-9
Closed Sunday

Tygart Valley Mall
in ELKINS
304-630-7827
Mon & Fri 10-8
Tues-Thurs 10-7
Sat. 9-6, Closed Sunday

Simply A Blessing To Serve

Photo by Damian Phillips

Pastor Stephanie Bennett, shown here at the altar of Barrackville United Methodist Church, is one of a few women ministers in Marion County.





SUBMITTED PHOTO

From left are Phil Burton, Rebecca Burton, Susan Harper, Sandy Doyle, Sharon Gump and pastor Stephanie Bennett at a March 2019 chili cook off, which raised funds to help those living through food insecurity.

Stephanie Bennett, who serves as the pastor of both the Monumental and Barrackville United Methodist Churches, has a welcomed warmth about her, a trait that serves her well as a minister.

A smile never leaves her face. Bennett was born and raised in Smithtown Unincorporated, a historic rural community between what is now Fairmont and Morgantown. Her mother and father, Steve and June Zelenak, provided for their family by working in glass factories in the 80's. Her parents and maternal grandmother introduced her to the United Methodist Church in her youth when she and her family were regular members of the Pisgah UMC near Cooper's Rock State Forest.

"I was always inspired by my grandmother's passion for being a disciple," Bennett said. "I felt a responsibility to further

my education and pursue leadership positions within the church; opportunities I wish my grandmother could have had.

"It's been a blessing that I'm able to follow my calling without anyone in the world having too much to say about it. The clergy is still a male dominated field, but I have always been blessed to serve very welcoming communities."

Bennett first attended East Dale Elementary School and graduated from East Fairmont High. During her teens, Bennett lost connection with the church as she did not attend regularly.

She continued her education at Fairmont State University where she studied for a Regent's bachelor of the arts degree. Then, as a sophomore in college, Stephanie reconnected with her roots and felt the church calling to her once again.

She completed her degree at Fairmont State and began her

path to becoming a minister at Dayton Ohio's United Theological Seminary. She completed her degree in religious studies in four years while simultaneously working as a Student Associate Pastor in Enon, Ohio.

Bennett joked that her church placements have had a bit of a pattern to them. Every five years or so, she seems to find herself calling somewhere her new church home.

From 1994-99, she preached at the Masontown UMC in Preston County. Then, from 1999-2004, she led St. Paul's UMC in Fairmont.

From 2004-09 she was appointed to the Johnson Chapel and Halleck UMC between Fairmont and Morgantown. And from 2009-15 she was assigned to work as co-pastor at Alder's Gate UMC in Sissonville with her husband, Brad Bennett. Since 2015, she has been the head of the clergy at Barrackville and

Monumental United Methodist Churches.

She and her congregations were quick to adapt to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Bennett displayed pride that her churches have never missed a service amid the pandemic. The same week West Virginia Gov. Jim Justice introduced statewide restrictions to slow the spread of COVID-19 in March of 2020, church leadership in Barrackville and Monumental announced they would begin holding Sunday service in the church's parking lot.

Bennett's sermons were broadcast to the fellowship's car radios via FM transmitter while she stood in the window of the church facing her congregation. A recent Sunday marked her 102nd outdoor service and the first time since March of 2020 that an indoor service has been offered at the Barrackville United



PHOTO BY ERIC HRIN

In 2020, members of Barrackville United Methodist Church donated 300 cans of various vegetables and money for the “Souper Bowl of Caring” to benefit the Fairmont Marion County Food Pantry in Fairmont. Stephanie Bennett, pastor at the church, holds a “Souper Bowl of Caring” sign in front of some of the food the church keeps on hand for the hungry.

Methodist Church.

Bennett said the outdoor service hosted more worshippers than the indoor service right after. Hybrid services, where Bennett preaches to her indoor and outdoor congregations simultaneously, have been held at Monumental UMC since June 2021.

She said the casual atmosphere of the outdoor services has attracted many new parishioners.

“At the outdoor services, people can text me if they have a question about my sermon or want clarification of the scripture. Our sense of community has not wavered in

these trying times,” she said.

Bennett hosts three services each Sunday: a 9:30 a.m. hybrid service at Monumental UMC, an 11 a.m. service in the Barrackville UMC parking lot, and a 12 p.m. service indoor at Barrackville UMC.

Bennett said while the future is always uncertain, the church has always led her where she’s needed.

D.D. Meighen, whose been a longtime United Methodist Church pastor and colleague of Bennett’s said, it gives him great pride to see how she has grown her ministry over the years serving North Central West

Virginia.

“Stephanie Bennett is a woman of exquisite character,” Meighen said. “When she and her husband discovered they could not have children of their own, they adopted Rachel and gave her the best life they could. She’s a strong advocate for youth activities and she sponsors the Bisons for Christ after school group for youth in Barrackville. Although she did not start the program, she has maintained its quality for the students in the community.”

—Damian Phillips

Using Concrete Proof To Make Positive Change



BY SAVANNA SHRIVER

Tabitha Lafferre assists Fairmont State University student Exavier Posey as he portions concrete to prepare for the Concrete Canoe Competition. The mixture is bagged and set aside to be mixed and placed into the canoe mold later.

Tabitha Lafferre's office is covered with family photos and office supplies she built out of Legos.

An assistant professor of civil engineering technology and the Surveying and Geomatics Engineering Technology Program coordinator at Fairmont State University, which she built from the ground up, Lafferree also serves as president of the award-winning American Society of Civil Engineers and is a member of the WV Northern Branch of the American Society of Civil Engineers.

"My grandfather's from here, [Fairmont.] His name was Tom Barnes and he worked on the 4T Arena, when it was being built," Lafferre said. "So when I was a little kid, he told my grandmother, 'Bring the girls out, I got something cool for work.' So she drives out there, and they brought trusses in that day... And I just stood there. Like a little kid, I stood there with big eyes, and I'm gonna start tearing up. But, it was right then, I was

like, 'Oh my god, I love this.' So that was it for me after that. I love construction."

Lafferre is originally from Clover, South Carolina, but she moved to Fairmont with her grandparents to attend Fairmont State University. On her first day as a civil engineering major, she had Professor Tia Como, whose office is just down the hall from hers today. Throughout college, she participated and served as a captain in the Concrete Canoe Competition.

The Concrete Canoe Competition is usually held annually, but there has not been one since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lafferre's students have started work on creating their canoe, which is made of a specific type of concrete that has a similar texture to play dough when mixed. After the concrete is laid, it needs to sit somewhere with very high levels of humidity for weeks to form properly.

Students divide into teams - who will race

the boat, who will mix and place concrete, etc. There is a regional competition, which includes schools from West Virginia, Virginia and usually Washington D.C., but not this year.

Fairmont State University has represented their region more than any other school in the region. They also have the most consecutive invitations to nationals. According to the ASCE website, the national competition will be held at Louisiana Tech University June 3-5 this year.

Lafferre was a non-traditional student and a new mother when she started college. She met her husband, John, who was a year and a half ahead of her, in the Civil Engineering Technology Program. They knew of each other because of the small program size. He finally got the nerve to talk to her after a regional competition, she said.

"So I was a canoe captain. He was the [steel] bridge captain," Lafferre said.



PHOTO BY SAVANNA SHRIVER

Tabitha Lafferre's Fairmont State University office is decorated with family photos and Lego office supplies she made, with some help from her daughter.

They started dating shortly after and throughout college. He graduated, then she graduated, and they became engaged in the spring of her senior year.

"It was really sweet," Lafferre said about their engagement. "So he got this ring for me and he takes my daughter upstairs and he said, 'Go ask mommy if she wants to marry me.' So my daughter at four years old, from the top of the stairs to the bottom of the stairs, forgot what she was doing. But she remembered that it was March and my birthday is in March. So she comes down with this ring and starts singing Happy Birthday to me."

"I was doing homework on the couch and I was like, 'What is going on?' And my husband just sits down and he's like, 'Well, you want to get married?'"

The two eloped the following August where they were married under trees in Lafferre's grandma's backyard with both of their families looking on.

"I cannot say enough great things about him. He's my rock. He really is," Lafferre said. "I swear my students, you know



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Tabitha Lafferre and teammates prepare for a Concrete Canoe Competition.

have their lingo and I try to stay hip or whatever. They say like, 'Tabitha and John are just goals.'"

Because the two are both engineers, they're able to bounce ideas off each other and often travel to steel bridge, concrete canoe, and other competitions together.

"She not only brings her expertise in the content, but she's also really taken the time

to learn how to be a good educator," Fairmont State Civil Engineering Technology Program Coordinator James Vassil said.

"The students think highly of her. People out in the industry think highly of her. Because of her, I want to hire her students, because I know how good of an instructor she is," Infrastructure Report Card Co-chair Rodney Holbert said.

Lafferre said she enjoys engaging and working with students and loves watching them succeed. According to ratemyprofessor.com, her classes are tough, but she is a great professor and has an amazing collection of Christmas sweaters.

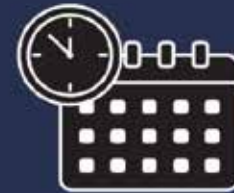
"I genuinely love Christmas so much. I kind of came from a poor background as a child, so Christmas wasn't always such a big deal. So, now I go overboard with my kids," Lafferre said.

She said she gets her whole family into the Christmas spirit. She has two daughters, Sidney, 16 and Rosalie, 9, who borrow her sweaters and her husband helps her pick good ones out from the store.

"My daughter's like, 'Mom, I'm stealing the one where the snowman is killing the other snowman with a blow dryer.' I'm like, 'OK, have fun today honey,'" Lafferre said.

When Lafferre isn't working, she enjoys walking while her daughter runs, spending time with her family and two dogs [one is a German shepherd puppy], and being in nature. She really enjoys rock music and

THE MCCC IS BACK! MARK YOUR CALENDARS!



APRIL

4th Member Happy Hour

5th Board of Education & Levy Forum

26th Men's Night Out

MAY

2nd Member Happy Hour

7th Leadership Marion Fundraiser

19th Leadership Marion Graduation

JUNE

6th Member Happy Hour

23rd Women's Network Picnic

AUGUST

1st Member Happy Hour

10th Annual Dinner

SEPTEMBER

9th Women's Wake Up Call

12th Member Happy Hour

30th Annual Golf Outing

OCTOBER

3rd Member Happy Hour

22nd Dancing with the Stars

25th NCWV Business Summit

Please visit www.marionchamber.com to learn more about our annual programs.



*Dates are tentative and subject to change.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Tabitha Lafferre was a cheerleading coach for FOP Colts and her daughters, Rosaile, left, and Sidney, right, cheered.

Green Day is one of her favorite bands. Last fall she went to the Hella Mega Tour, which included performances from Weezer, Fall Out Boy, and Green Day, with her older daughter and husband, who also love rock music.

"I'm kind of an introvert. I'll just sit on my couch and snuggle up with a book," Lafferre said.

She also enjoys traveling, but most trips are "Stay-cations" around West Virginia. Her family has a camp in Pendleton County, which is where a lot of her summer is spent.

"There's no cell service," Lafferre said. "So my kids, you

know, they can't ignore me. I have to have that family time and they need it. They need the time away from the screens."

They prefer trips around West Virginia as opposed to beach trips because they are much more peaceful, Lafferre said.

"I'm not trying to fight for beach space and then my kids are ready to go," Lafferre said. "They're ready to get back in an hour and eat. So we can have fun just down at the river and then my dogs can go too. I just I love being in the state; the beautiful nature and everything."

Her favorite book is "Great

Expectations" by Charles Dickens. It influences how she parents. She tries to emphasize that you don't need a lot of money to be happy.

"We don't have the biggest flashiest house. My daughter will go to a friend's house and say, 'They have a spiral staircase,' I'm like, 'That's cool, we don't have a house payment,'" Lafferre said.

"Obviously, being a mother is very, very rewarding. And just little things, like sometimes my daughters will say things and I could tell they picked it up from me and I just think, 'yeah, they listen,'" Lafferre said. "My

daughter, she wants to go into medicine, which is great. She loves geometry and she's loving trig right now. She likes algebra. So I'm like, 'You're an engineer, honey, but we'll let you figure that out,' Lafferre said with a laugh.

Besides being a proud mom, Lafferre has plenty of academic accomplishments. She puts the implementation and success of the Surveying Geomatics Engineering Technology program she created and the 2020 Infrastructure Report Card at the top of her list.

She recalls the day her program became accredited. She was in a call with the ABET Accreditation Coordinator for the entire engineering program.

"Afterwards, I texted I said, 'So that went really well, right?' and he said 'That went perfect.' And I started bawling, like I'm bawling in my living room and my husband comes in and he's like, 'What's wrong? What happened?' Through tears I'm like, 'My program is accredited.'"

The accreditation process began in 2017, she said. So, it had been a lot of work and was a huge relief when accomplished. Lafferre anticipates the initial accreditation to be effective in July. It will be the only accredited Surveying Geomatics Engineering Technology program and the only program like it in the state.

In 2020, Lafferre and co-chairs Dave Meadows and Rodney Holbert published the first Infrastructure Report Card in West Virginia. West Virginia received a "D." The report card is done across the United States every few years with ASCE. The goal is to use concrete proof to make positive change across the U.S., according to their website.

Holbert recalls the long process of putting the report card together. He was working on the project, which requires a lot of researching, recording and reporting, for five years prior.

Every year he reported, "I haven't made progress. I need more help. I have to quit. I really thought I was going to have to retire from my job full-time to do it because it was such a big

undertaking. And so Tabitha volunteered and made it all happen," he said.

"Dave Meadows and I, we described it the other day. It's like we're proud papas, proud dads in a way. Like, look at her. Look at what she's doing. We're just kind of sitting back really proud of our small part in maybe helping. But I really know, over the last two years, it wouldn't happen if Tabitha hadn't been the type of person that raised her hand and said, 'I'll do it, Rodney, I'll help you with this,'" Holbert said.

On March 3, Lafferre was awarded the 2021 Outstanding Advocate of the Year along with the Infrastructure Report Card co-chairs.

Being a woman in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics field isn't as scary as it might seem, Lafferre said.

"To any women or little girls sitting out there who are afraid to go into it because of that, don't be. The industry embraces that diversity and is very inclusive to women in the STEM field from my experience," Lafferre said.

She said, throughout her career, everyone has been helpful and supportive.

"When I interned with the Division of Highways, you know, I would show up with my hard hat and pigtails because really, there's no other way to wear a hard hat with hair," Lafferre said. "I cannot say enough great things about every person I've encountered."

Lafferre is a mom who graduated in three years from engineering school and went on to create a program to make it easier for others to do the same thing. According to Vassil and Holbert, she is hardworking, down-to-earth, fun to be around and the type of person to help anyone who needs it. She cares about her students and really wants to see them succeed.

"I went to a scholarship banquet, three of my girls won scholarships this past week," Lafferre said. "So, we went down to Charleston. One of them in their speech, she said, 'You know, you don't choose civil engineering, it chooses you and she's right.'"

—Savanna Shriver



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Tabitha and John on their wedding day.



CARPENTER & FORD FUNERAL HOME
Funerals / Burials / Cremation / Preplanning

We have proudly served area families since 1914.

In times of grief, making difficult decisions about how best to honor the memory of someone so important can be overwhelming. We are here to help with complete, professional and compassionate funeral planning services to meet your needs and respectfully celebrate the life and legacy of our loved one.



We appreciate your families allowing our family to help in your time of grief!

Director: George Gribben, LIC
209 Merchant Street, Fairmont • 304-366-4671
www.carpenterandford.com

0788418611

OUR LARGEST SELECTION EVER!
ON SALE NOW
IN STOCK AND READY FOR FAST FREE DELIVERY OR IMMEDIATE PICK UP

SETS STARTING AT JUST
TWIN SIZE SETS \$298
FULL SIZE SETS \$378

OVER 99% OF
OUR DELIVERIES
ARE FREE



WESTON FIRM
TWIN SIZE SET \$398
FULL SIZE SET \$498
QUEEN SIZE SET \$548
KING SIZE SET \$798

SNOWBIRD PLUSH
TWIN SIZE SET \$548
FULL SIZE SET \$648
QUEEN SIZE SET \$748
KING SIZE SET \$948

EMPIRE PLUSH OR FIRM
TWIN SIZE SET \$498
FULL SIZE SET \$598
QUEEN SIZE SET \$648
KING SIZE SET \$948

SNOWBIRD TWO SIDED PILLOWTOP
TWIN SIZE SET \$648
FULL SIZE SET \$848
QUEEN SIZE SET \$948
KING SIZE SET \$1,198

VANDERBILT FIRM
TWIN SIZE SET \$748
FULL SIZE SET \$898
QUEEN SIZE SET \$998
KING SIZE SET \$1,398

EVERY MATTRESS WE SELL IS DOUBLE SIDED

EMPIRE TWO SIDED PILLOWTOP
TWIN SIZE SET \$548
FULL SIZE SET \$648
QUEEN SIZE SET \$698
KING SIZE SET \$1,048

KEYSTONE PLUSH OR FIRM
TWIN SIZE SET \$698
FULL SIZE SET \$898
QUEEN SIZE SET \$998
KING SIZE SET \$1,398

VANDERBILT PLUSH
TWIN SIZE SET \$798
FULL SIZE SET \$948
QUEEN SIZE SET \$1,048
KING SIZE SET \$1,448

VANDERBILT TWO SIDED PILLOWTOP
TWIN SIZE SET \$848
FULL SIZE SET \$998
QUEEN SIZE SET \$1,098
KING SIZE SET \$1,498

SNOWBIRD OR FIRM
TWIN SIZE SET \$548
FULL SIZE SET \$648
QUEEN SIZE SET \$748
KING SIZE SET \$998

KEYSTONE PILLOWTOP
TWIN SIZE SET \$798
FULL SIZE SET \$998
QUEEN SIZE SET \$1,098
KING SIZE SET \$1,498

MADE EXCLUSIVELY FOR KING'S CORNER TRADITIONS PLUSH OR FIRM
TWIN SIZE SET \$898 FULL SIZE SET \$1,098
QUEEN SIZE SET \$1,198
KING SIZE SET \$1,598

King's Corner
717 MAIN ST.
SISTERSVILLE, WV
304-652-3032 304-652-4030

OVER 7,500 SQUARE FEET OF FURNITURE AND BEDDING SHOPPING FUN

OPEN MONDAY-SATURDAY 10 AM TO 5 PM OR CALL FOR AN APPOINTMENT

Striving For A Seat At The Table



PHOTO BY ERIC CRAVEY

Tracy Miller, president of the Mid-Atlantic Aerospace Complex in Bridgeport, said when COVID hit and she had to take part in Zoom meetings, she realized it was time to “Tracyfy” her office, so she clipped motivational sayings from a calendar and posted them on her wall, as shown here.



PHOTO BY ANGELEE WILEY

In this 2015 file photo, Tracy Miller, left, and Gloria Cunningham enjoy lunch at the fourth annual Women's Expo at the Robert H. Mollohan Research Center.

A small cork board sits atop Tracy Miller's desk sort of leaning against the wall.

Pinned to it are keepsakes from different events she has attended in her 10-year tenure as president of the Mid-Atlantic Aerospace Complex, an economic development agency based in Bridgeport that works to support and expand the aviation sector in North Central West Virginia.

"Before COVID, I had never 'Tracified' my office. My personal life is very me, but I come in and I do my job," Miller said. "And during COVID, I thought I really need this. I'd never hung my diplomas, I had never hung anything. You know you're doing Zoom more and people are seeing a little more of you and so I took a little more time ... to add a little bit of me in here."

One item pinned to the board is a simple orange piece of card stock made to look like a road sign similar to a "Road Crew Ahead" or "Safety Zone Ahead" sign. However, in Miller's case, the approximately 4-inch square sign reads "Women at Work." Pinned not far from it on the same cork board is her membership badge for the Marion County Chamber of Commerce Women's Network.

It's clear after a few minutes of

conversation that she is passionate about her job that, ironically, sits clearly in a male-dominated industry.

These women-powered themes, while run of the mill to the innocent bystander, are part of what drives Miller daily in her role as the public face for NCWV's \$1.1 billion aviation sector that is helping fuel households — and local economies — by supporting high-paying, in-demand jobs for the region.

"Tracy Miller is the perfect person for the role she has," Marion County Chamber of Commerce President Tina Shaw said. "Not only does Tracy work daily to serve the aerospace community in North Central West Virginia, she also is working tirelessly to spark interest among young women to consider entering the aerospace and aviation sectors."

Shaw said Miller is indeed active in the chamber's Women's Network where Miller has developed countless relationships with other peers who want to see women succeed in business.

"Tracy is probably one of the most passionate women I know and she has done way more than broken the glass ceiling she is redefining the possibilities for women in such a male-dominated industry. I think

girls look up to her every time she steps foot in a classroom," Shaw said.

And when Miller steps into a classroom, it's rather obvious she loves her work. Like the Wonder Woman shopping bag that's pinned to her office wall, Miller carries that theme a step further when she ventures into a middle or high school. She laces up her Wonder Woman Converse high-tops and puts on her shirt adorned with the words "Aviation Rock Star" and she is ready to fire up a group of kids.

However, her presentations can only go so far. She is a firm believer that the manner in which aviation is being marketed as a career option must change if the field is ever going to attract any shape or form of diversity, for example, young women.

"The only way we're going to get more diversity and more young girls interested in these jobs ... is you've got to see it to believe it. You've got to see pictures of girls in any job so that if they are to open their first book or whatever their first encounter is with aviation, if all they've seen is someone that looks white and male, it doesn't even cross their mind that that aviation job might be a possibility for them," Miller said.

One of Miller's jobs is to constantly be



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Wearing her Wonder Woman-themed high-top Converse sneakers and her Aviation Rock Star shirt, Tracy Miller is ready to make an aviation career presentation to middle school students.



PHOTO BY DANNY SNYDER

In this 2014 photo, Tracy Miller, president of the Mid-Atlantic Aerospace Complex in Bridgeport, stands in front of a promotional banner at her office.

in contact with school chiefs in Doddridge, Harrison, Marion, Monongalia and Taylor counties regarding aviation and aerospace opportunities, as well as Pierpont Technical and Community College's aviation program.

Before she became the Marion County School Superintendent, Donna Hage was an assistant school superintendent in Harrison County and she worked closely with Tracy Miller. Hage said one of the key aspects of getting young women interested in aviation is tied to their interest in math and science, which usually wanes during middle school.

Hage said she has worked closely with Miller on how to transform this dynamic.

"Tracy has always been an example of that for females who have pursued careers in math and science to show girls that should be interested in those fields and continue to be interested in them," Hage said. "She

stays true to that belief and has such follow through and encourages females in the field and she hopes to see the impact on that field in the future."

Hage, who was heavily involved in curriculum design and career and technical education in Harrison County Schools, fondly recalled the first time she had scheduled a working lunch with Miller after weeks of discussions.

Hage said she had specifically intended to talk with Miller at lunch about how the Southern Regional Education Board had developed a program to get students interested in the aviation industry. As it turned out, Miller, without any prior discussion about the SREB, had brought the exact materials to lunch to discuss with Hage.

"From there, we built a strong

relationship and she attended meetings, fostered grant opportunities for Harrison County and continued to support our students who would be interested in the aviation industry," Hage said.

A native of Charleston, West Virginia, Miller began her career as a middle school math teacher in the Charleston, South Carolina area after she graduated from West Virginia University. She was among of a group of a dozen education majors who were recruited to the Palmetto State to teach. She said she did it because she wanted to be near the beach. However, after three years of teaching about 150 students a day, she returned to the Mountain State to work on a master's degree in educational leadership.

"I missed all my family — and after three years, I got my master's degree to be a



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Tracy Miller, president of the Mid-Atlantic Aerospace Complex, has been known to speak at commencement exercises, such as this one at Pierpont Community & Technical College.

principal or a superintendent because I really wanted to be in the business world and I didn't want to go back to school and get a business degree or an economics degree, and I thought, 'what is the business of education?' It's running a school or running a school system," Miller said.

After completing her master's degree, Miller took a sales job where she traveled West Virginia selling air freight until the mid-1990s when she took a position with the state economic development office.

"And that's where you're essentially selling the state of West Virginia for businesses to invest here and that's how I got to know this aerospace industry sector," Miller said. "I love education and you can't do economic development without really focusing on the workforce component."

Miller cannot do her job without solid relationships, so she is constantly looking at ways to build and improve relationships

for the greater good of NCWV. In recent years, she has worked with sponsors to host a business after-hours event solely for the aviation industry and professionals from other sectors, such as architects and engineers, who can have symbiotic relationships with the Mid-Atlantic Aerospace Complex employers.

"So, developing relationships and getting companies to decide to continue to invest or reinvest in a community requires a lot of relationship building," Miller said. "So, my to-do lists are very long and ongoing because there's always a lot of back and forth with economic development."

Her work is not only noticed in NCWV, it has captured the attention of everyone from Gov. Jim Justice to U.S. Senators Joe Manchin and Shelley Moore Capito. Justice appointed Miller to the state's council for community and technical colleges and is the first woman to ever sit on the state

aeronautics commission.

However, it was letters of support for Miller's appointment to a federal panel called the Women in Aviation Advisory Board where she was appointed "under the last presidential administration."

"Thirty women from around the United States were chosen and we are just wrapping up what our recommendations will be to try to get more girls and women in the aerospace industry sector in any and all positions that are out there," Miller said.

She said the statistics for women working in the aviation industry are very disappointing.

"It's a very difficult journey to spend a lot of energy going uphill and blazing trails all the time," Miller said. "And we are learning that not everyone wants to do that."

-Eric Cravey



Join us on Saturday June 11th for Palatine Park's FIRST ever Ladies Night!!

Palatine Park gives thanks to all of the women in our community who helped hold everything together over these challenging past couple of years.

We have some great national female talent coming and we'll have some giveaways from some local businesses.

So ladies bring your friends and come out and enjoy yourself!!



Saluting the female leaders in our community who help to make our area strong!
Thank you!



**Randy Elliott,
President**



**Linda Longstreth,
Commissioner**



**Ernie VanGilder,
Commissioner**

Making **Sound Waves**

Melissa Carnes Rose is one of West Virginia's top business leaders... and she isn't slowing down!

Melissa Carnes Rose isn't your average business owner. A local girl from Mannington who dreamed of one day starting her own healthcare business, Melissa aggressively pursued her dream until one day finally opening a hearing health clinic of her own: Nardelli Audiology. As the largest hearing care practice in North Central West Virginia, she's been recognized for her efforts by being named a 'Top 40 Under 40', as well as being described as one of the top female business leaders in the state. Under her leadership, Nardelli Audiology grew while other businesses shrunk during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Safe to say that Melissa Carnes Rose will keep making (sound) waves in the local community for years to come!



NARDELLI AUDIOLOGY
HEAR BETTER. LIVE BETTER.

304-842-9428

NARDELLIAUDIOLOGISTS.COM

FOUR LOCATIONS TO SERVE YOU

CLARKSBURG

95 Rosebud Plaza #112
Clarksburg, WV 26301

FAIRMONT

177 Middletown Road, Ste. 5
Fairmont, WV 26554

FARMINGTON

100 Main Street
Farmington, WV 26571

BRIDGEPORT

111 Steele Street
Bridgeport, WV 26330

