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# OUR PLACE, OUR TIME



**PROFILE**  
2021

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# Welcome to Profile 2021

Welcome to Profile 2021.

What a difference a year makes. This time last March, we had just entered all of the uncertainty regarding the stay-home order and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now, while the virus is still here and not going anywhere, a tinge of hope

has emerged among us. There are fewer new cases and fewer deaths from the coronavirus and residents are getting vaccinated to stop community spread.

In this edition of Profile, we use the theme, "Our Place, Our Time," to offer a broader look at not just the people, but also of the places and organizations

of Harrison, Marion and Monongalia counties.

These stories also explain that life goes on despite any uncertainty due to the pandemic and nothing is going to stop the people of the Mountain State.

**Eric Cravey**  
Editor

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## PROFILE

### Our Place, Our Time

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# IT IS PEACE



PHOTO BY EDDIE TRIZZINO

Renee Verbanic, right, holds drawstring bags she gave to the Marion County Quick Response Team from Communities of Shalom. From left are Janet Askins and Raven Lee of the Quick Response Team and Verbanic.

## Nonprofit's role is to nurture harmony in Marion County

**T**he United Methodist General Conference was in session in April of 1992 when riots erupted across Los Angeles after news broke that white police had been videotaped while beating Black motorist Rodney King.

Dick Bowyer, a retired minister, said the United Methodist Church, as a whole, saw the riots as an opportunity to extend a message of peace and love, and started that message with the Hebrew word, “Shalom.” The root word for shalom is shalam, which in ancient Hebrew means, “to make something whole.”

“When that was happening, the United Methodist General Conference was in session, and some of the delegates there felt the church needed to make a very specific response to what was happening in LA, and potentially other cities around the country,” Bowyer said. “Communities of Shalom grew out of

the uprising around the Rodney King incident in Los Angeles.”

Communities of Shalom is now an international movement that aims to provide people in individual communities with resources and aid. Communities of Shalom has existed for more than 20 years in Marion County, and provides schools, nonprofits and other agencies with resources to maintain a healthy community.

“Twenty-plus years ago, a bunch of us got the training in Marion County, and we’re still around,” said Renee Verbanic, certified prevention specialist for Communities of Shalom. “I got involved because





For the sixth year in a row, the Marion County Rescue Squad has received recognition through the American Heart Association for quick response times for people experiencing heart emergencies throughout the county. For this work, the American Heart Association honored the Marion County Rescue Squad with its Bronze Plus award for 2019

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PHOTO BY EDDIE TRIZZINO

Renee Verbanic holds a sign created by Communities of Shalom that has been distributed around the county.

I like the premise and vision of Shalom. I liked that they had four main categories to work in; health and wellness, economic and housing, multicultural relationships and spirituality. There is no stone unturned in those categories.”

Verbanic said she went through training alongside Bowyer and Jim Norton more than 20 years ago, to start the Communities of Shalom branch in Marion County. She said people in a few other counties started branches as well, but Marion County’s is the only one left in West Virginia. Bowyer said the movement started with a mission statement.

“We developed a mission statement, to be able to provide a safe and inclusive environment in the Marion County area,” Bowyer said.

However, the Communities of Shalom organization in Marion County now operates as a branch of West Virginia Prevention Solutions, and receives federal funding to promote mainly drug prevention.

“Shalom in Marion County is the nonprofit that helps manage the prevention money,” Verbanic said. “If you pull down the substance abuse prevention grant in your county, you’re talking alcohol, tobacco and other drug prevention.”

Communities of Shalom provides many Marion County organizations with resources to promote a healthy living. Some of these organizations include Marion County Schools, the Marion County Health Department and Friendship Fairmont.

“We have a lot of social-emotional curriculum we

provide for schools,” Verbanic said. “Everything has to be evidence-based. It has to be a proven technique or strategy to prevent the use of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, or certainly to reduce the harm.”

A typical day in Shalom’s office involves Verbanic receiving several calls from agency heads asking for materials or advice on prevention projects. One day, she gave packets of stress balls to a counselor at an elementary school, and then gave drawstring bags full of anti-substance abuse materials to members of the Marion County Quick Response Team. She said her job is all about promoting a healthy lifestyle, and she works to make sure students especially know how to take steps to maintain good mental health.

“Information dissemination is just one strategy,”





**“We’re hoping, through the Council of Churches, to do some programs on creating better understanding between different religions. One of the most exciting aspects of Communities of Shalom to me is the fact that there is no particular religion, race or anything else that divides.”**

— Jim Norton



PHOTO BY EDDIE TRIZZINO

**Renee Verbanic holds a T-shirt promoting positive and reinforcing thinking which she distributes through Communities of Shalom.**

Verbanic said. “Handing out brochures is just one of six strategies that work. Prevention education is the other one, that’s what curriculum is. Alternative activities, your kids can experience a natural high, if you will, without alcohol, tobacco or drugs.”

The work performed in Marion County by members of Communities of Shalom reflects that of other organizations across the world, Verbanic said. When the United Methodist Church first created Communities of Shalom, it took the form of small “Shalom Zones,” where volunteers provided resources that could be used by people in need.

“At the time, United Methodist [Church] started what they called Shalom Zones,” Verbanic said. “If you went to a Shalom Zone, you knew you could get food and perhaps take a shower. All around LA, they did that, and it spread nationally and now it’s worldwide.”

The goal of creating Shalom Zones was to find areas that needed help, and provide aid to those areas through resources that already existed in a community. Bowyer said groups internationally take on issues in a

community through an asset-based lens.

“The idea was to identify a certain area within a city and to approach the area by looking for its assets rather than focusing on the problems,” Bowyer said. “When you come at it from an asset-base, you take a different look at it. ‘What are the strengths, what are the people resources.’”

According to Verbanic, the actual work of Communities of Shalom now extends past what she and its other members do for these other organizations. Anyone who attends a meeting of Shalom is considered a member, and members frequently share information about upcoming volunteer opportunities, seminars, or they create those opportunities themselves.

“We probably have a core team of about 25,” Verbanic said. “We have great diversity on our team; young and old, straight and gay, people of color, then there is a larger hub of volunteers.”

Norton is the leader of spirituality for Marion County Communities of Shalom, and said the group attends a retreat every year to focus on spirituality.

He said to him, the diversity of people present in Shalom is one of his favorite aspects of the group, and he wants to see its culture of acceptance make an impact on the local community.

“We’re hoping, through the Council of Churches, to do some programs on creating better understanding between different religions,” Norton said. “One of the most exciting aspects of Communities of Shalom to me is the fact that there is no particular religion, race or anything else that divides.”

Verbanic said the definition of the word Shalom itself is meant to reflect all the ideas the group wants to promote. In a word, it means “peace,” but Verbanic said its meaning goes far beyond just a word. The broader definition is the values she wants Communities of Shalom to reflect.

“It means, ‘I wish for you everything that is good and healthy and wholesome,’” Verbanic said. “It’s a lot like the word, ‘Aloha,’ which has the same kind of roots. It is more than hello or goodbye, it is peace.”

— Eddie Trizzino



# MAKING RECORDS

Startup record label connects music lovers to Appalachia and beyond



**T**he music industry program at West Virginia University has long been a place where students can be creative and expand their knowledge of their craft in hopes of getting a break into the music business.

Now, underclassmen have the task of nurturing an entirely new record company and making it thrive. The established Mon Hills Music Group will soon release a compilation CD on its new record label Go 1st Records.

“I founded Mon Hills Records. Originally, it was just Mon Hills Records,” said Darko Velichkovski, director and creator of the WVU music industry program for graduate and undergraduate students.

SUBMITTED PHOTO  
Blues Alley Studios recording session



In a meeting with his graduate assistants and faculty who work with the label, it seemed that since the label was large enough with 60 or so students it was time to expand.

"We needed a place for the lower classman to kind of get their feet wet a little bit before they go to Mon Hills. Go 1st is a record label now under Mon Hills Music Group," he said.

Mostly freshman and sophomores are creating their own music projects. For them, it was decided that compilations would be their focus.

"They do compilation releases instead of particular albums or EPs for particular artists," said Velichkovski.

This spring will mark the first album release for the students at Go 1st. The album will consist of eight artists.

"It's always good under a music group to have a label that does just compilations because compilations are just a particular angle on the industry. It requires a different kind of approach," he said.

Velichkovski said some graduate students have been chosen to lead some of the departments of Go 1st. The underclassman are under the leadership of students who already have experience.

"Nothing that they do is just them doing it. Everything is checked and triple checked. Maybe by department managers or by general managers of Mon Hills Music Group in general or by the faculty," said Velichkovski.

Part of the experience of Go 1st is allowing the students to choose artists from the local music scene to be featured on the compilation CD. Students must research the market and go out into the

**"I make music that reflects the courage, strength and fortitude that are common threads connecting the people of our region."**

*— Aristotle Jones*



Appalachian soul man Aristotle Jones signs his contract with Go 1st Records.

SUBMITTED PHOTO





SUBMITTED PHOTO

**WVU music industry program students gather for a pre-production session with faculty and artists.**

community to find talent.

"It's basically an exercise in teamwork, in pitching and reasoning through your choices in talking to others in your team and making sure everything is in line," said Velichkovski.

He said he's proud of the students that they've agreed on these artists. The mission of Go 1st is that everything needs to align and sync up. He said all of the artists are regional and local and all worthy of attention.

"Our general mission of Mon Hills Music Group is to preserve and promote first of all local and regional talent and then go beyond that," he said.

The quality of the material is also important. Students must judge the creative, musical and technical quality of the material so it's worthy of public release.

Putting together an album of this caliber is a large undertaking. Velichkovski said it is one of the most rewarding things to see the students put together the compilation.

"Here, we actually get to see them creating something tangible out the intangible and it is the most

satisfying experience for us educators to see that," he said.

WVU music professor Joshua Swiger serves as the faculty general manager of Mon Hills Music Group. He said these eight artists featured in the compilation CD are new to Mon Hills Music Group. A five person management team with Go 1st is managing the rest of the students who, in turn, are managing the artists. He said there are times he feels like an engineer on a runaway train, but in a good way.

"These kids are really creative, they're really innovative and they're not afraid to just sit back and wait for a professor or educator 'oh, you should do this,'" said Swiger.

Tiffany Bunn, project and music manager for Go 1st Records, in the last couple years, Mon Hills has really been expanding. She said there are more musicians on the roster than ever.

"We get to learn things like how to produce a song, how to record, how to write press releases, how to make social media calendars. All sorts of things that are relevant in the music industry," said Bunn.

Go 1st doesn't operate like a typical indie music

label. Aside from the compilation album that will be released this month, Go 1st will also produce a music industry podcast.

The students also promote their artist as well as record, mix and master all the music themselves. Bunn said all the recording for the compilation is finished and this semester they really focused on promotion and releasing the album. The album will drop March 20.

"The purpose of Go 1st Records is to be a little bit more of a playground of our students than Mon Hills," said Bunn.

Bunn, who is a sophomore, said nobody has a set role at Go 1st. One week someone might be working on social media and next week they could be recording music. This way, everyone gets the opportunity to learn about everything.

Go 1st did all their scouting for talent in September using social media and the press. Bunn said they received multiple submissions this way. Students also scouted talent that they personally enjoyed and reached out to them.

"There is a ton of music talent in Morgantown just



because it's one of the bigger cities in West Virginia and a college town," said Bunn.

Due to COVID-19 and a ban on live music due to the risk of community spread, Bunn said, students looked at playbills from past shows they attended to see what artists were playing venues regularly. She said the pandemic has had both its challenges and benefits.

Aristotle Jones is one of the artists featured on the compilation coming out in March. He said he's been making music in West Virginia and Appalachia for many years. He's been a part of several different music groups, traditionally as a front man. He calls the music he makes Appalachian Soul.

"It's the kind of music you get when you're porch pickin' in West Virginia in the hollers but it's the other porches, not your bluegrass, country," he said.

A West Virginia native, Jones said his music connects people to Appalachia despite where he is performing at the time. He said he loves sound and music and he loves to be inspired.

Jones said Go 1st is an interesting collaboration. He was invited to be part of the compilation CD after responding to an online post looking for talent.

"It does give artists in the area an opportunity to kind of get that next level of distribution and the next level of what the music industry outside of just the grassroots methods," he said.

He said working with the students and staff is beneficial because the label has everything Jones needs, such as photographers.

"I've gotten to be myself and so I've really enjoyed our partnership," he said.

Jones said for him, the creative process can manifest in different ways. He said he doesn't just sit down and write a song. He said he has to hear a song in his head



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Here's a peek inside a Mon Hills Music Group recording session.

before he puts it on paper. Each step is a universe within itself, according to Jones.

Going through Go 1st, the process started back in October to be able to be released in March. Jones said the more he gets into the professional distribution process the more he learns. He said one thing that's kind of eluded him over the years is being a signed

artist.

"I'm humbled by the fact that I get an opportunity to actually be out there, you know, not just as loud as I can scream but to have somebody else project my message. The great feeling to me is I'm excited to get started working more," he said.

— Sarah Marino



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# Bridges yet to build

## Since he was a teen, James Griffin has fought for racial justice and civil rights

Gladys Griffin would walk into what was then the A&P grocery store in Clarksburg and simply stand there and watch. She wouldn't go grocery shopping, nor would she even necessarily talk to anyone. She would just stand and watch, stand and watch.

The subject of Mrs. Griffin's attention was her son, James, who would spend his days as an A&P store clerk ringing up and checking out shoppers' groceries.

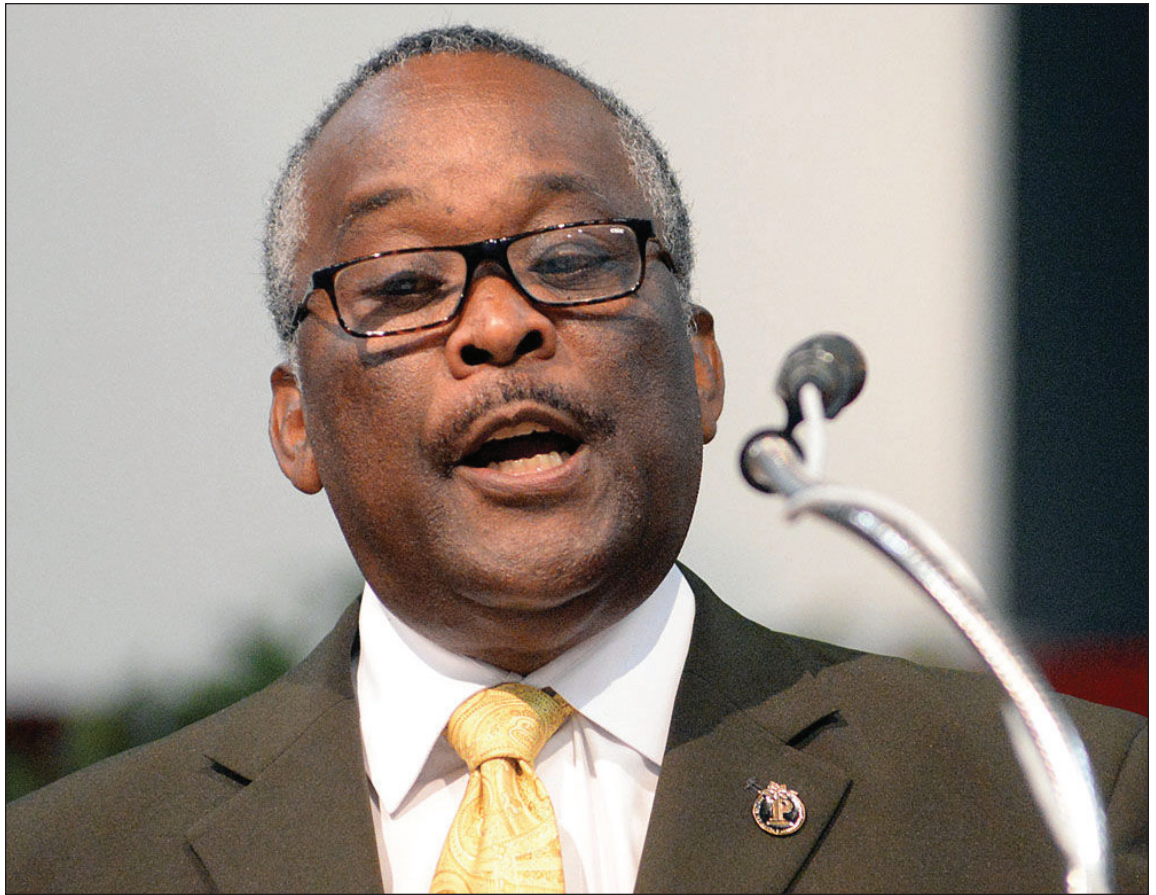
"I can recall my mother coming into the store and just standing there watching me run the cash register," said James Griffin, who worked at the A&P store while attending Washington Irving High in Clarksburg, "because she never thought she'd see the day when her son worked in a store like that and would be able to run the cash register."

Griffin's job as an A&P grocery store clerk all those many years ago now stands as one of the earliest moments of what has become a lifetime of breaking down racial barriers and advocating for civil rights within the local community and beyond. Over his many years at the frontlines of the fight for racial equality, Griffin has held a number of leadership positions and served on many community boards while also breaking through in multiple professional industries and receiving several recognitions and awards for his work.

"I was the first in a lot of things," said Griffin, who is now retired professionally, but still heavily involved in the local community, most notably as chairman of the Board of Governors at Pierpont Community & Technical College and chairman of the West Virginia Black Heritage Festival Board of Directors. "I am a product of the '60s, and our parents and our adults pushed us to be the best we could be. They'd (say), 'Don't let nothing stop you.'"

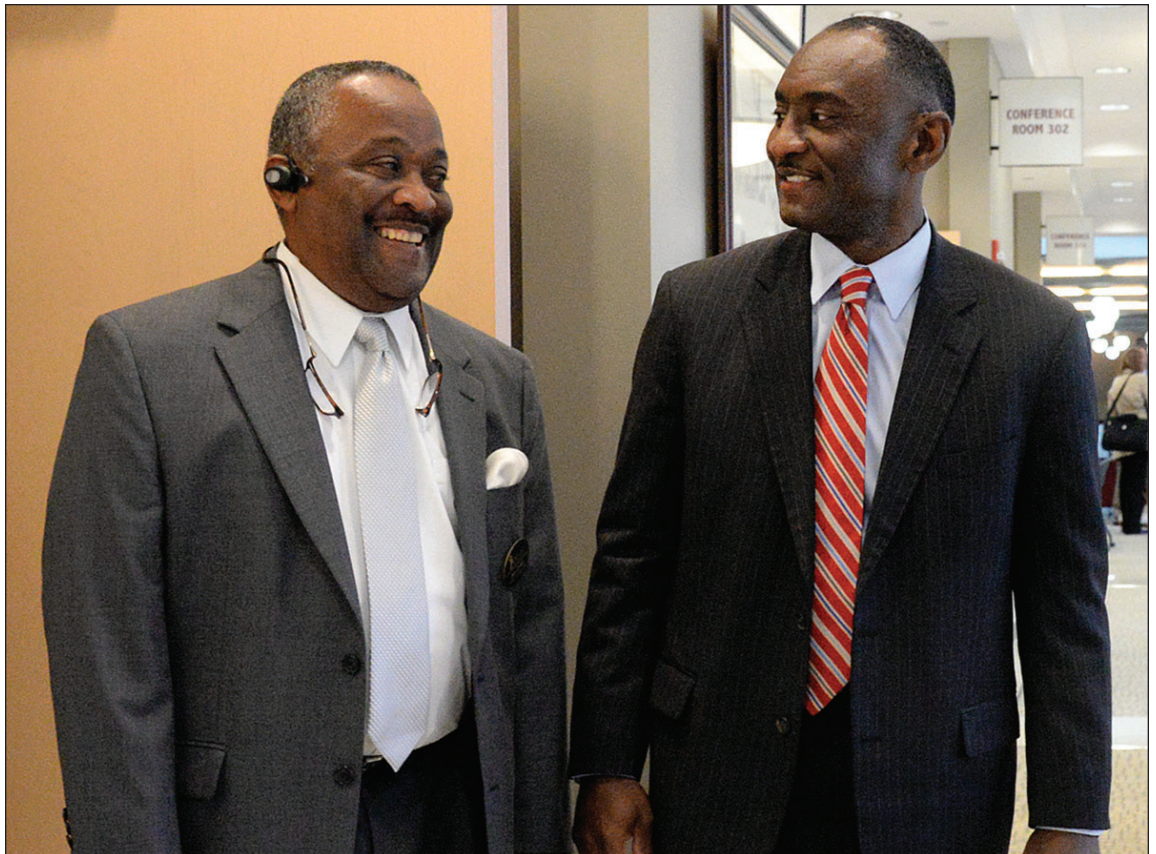
"And in my life, when I encountered opposition to things that I thought I should be able to do, (those people) didn't know it, but they were just motivating me to work that much harder so I could do those things."

Griffin, who has lived in Harrison County for the last 60-plus years, has leveraged his personal ambitions for community-wide gains within the local area as well as all of West Virginia. Griffin has been one of the local area's most outspoken and transformative leaders since he was just a teenager as far as advocating for racial justice and equality, and along the way, he's engendered a certain level of respect and reverence from fellow community



TWV FILE PHOTO

**James Griffin has accrued a lifetime of work as one the local area's fiercest advocates and leaders in the pursuit of racial equality and civil rights.**



TWV FILE PHOTO

**James Griffin, left, speaks with Johnny Moore, right, former president of Pierpont Community & Technical College. Griffin served as chairman of the board of governors and was essential in Moore becoming the institution's first ever Black president in 2016.**





SUBMITTED PHOTO

Griffin has been “the first in a lot of things,” he says, as a Black man breaking new ground. But he says establishing true social change starts with today’s youth.

members in all facets of his work.

“Jimmy has been someone who’s meant more to this community than most people realize,” said Jim Hunt, who currently works as the CEO of Amazing Cities, an organization based out of Clarksburg he founded to assist local governments achieve excellence through innovation and technology. “To me, the value of what Jimmy brings to the community — for all that he’s done as head of United Way and within his successful career — is what he does behind the scenes. What Jimmy has done is where there would’ve been issues or problems, his leadership working behind the scenes gets it resolved.

“He’s earned his respect in Harrison County and beyond through just being a solid individual and a helping hand in times of trouble.”

Griffin was the first ever Black chairman of the board of directors of the United Way and was a longstanding member of the Fairmont State University Board of Governors before he reached his term limit.

“He’s become respected in both the Black community and the white community,” said Greg Hinton, who works as a lawyer and senior professor at

Fairmont State who first met Griffin through their churches when they were teens.

But Griffin, first and foremost, has always been a champion for advancing the cause of the local Black community, as he entered into the public sphere of race relations as just a teenager when he helped to re-activate the Harrison County chapter of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and served as a youth leader with Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church.

“The first thing is, you always have to have confidence in who you are, and I always had confidence in who I was,” Griffin said of his early introduction and lifelong advocacy for civil rights. “I think some African-Americans were kind of ashamed of who they were because there was no teaching of Black history and they didn’t know our history and things we had done and the accomplishments we had made.”

Griffin recalls personal instances of racial discrimination during his own upbringing, recounting stories of how he couldn’t dine in at restaurants or was forced to sit in the balcony



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Griffin currently serves as the West Virginia state president of the Improved and Benevolent Protective Order of the Elks of the World, a Black fraternal order.





SUBMITTED PHOTO

**Griffin, center, was once the youngest NAACP president in the nation when he took over the position for the Harrison County NAACP chapter at 18 years old.**

at theaters. He remembers sitting down with some friends to eat at a pizzeria, only for the manager to turn off the lights and tell Griffin and his friends they were closed. Then, as soon as they left, the pizzeria turned the lights back on and re-opened, Griffin said.

Yet, the moment Griffin says really ignited and launched his life in racial activism was when a young Black man was denied entry into a nightclub and later arrested for trespassing. Without any legal representation, Griffin collaborated with others to reactivate the Harrison County chapter of the NAACP, where he would eventually become president at just 18 years of age, the youngest in the entire nation at the time.

“That’s how my civil rights career kind of got started,” said Griffin, who served as the NAACP president of Harrison County for 15 years.

“He’s always been an advocate for the underdog,” said Hinton, who has worked with Griffin on several community projects, including when he himself was elected mayor of Fairmont in the 1980s to become the first-ever Black mayor in a major city in West Virginia. “I think it’s about having a vision for a better future, and being willing to put yourself in a position to make that vision a reality. And I think that’s what (Griffin) has done. He saw how things were and he saw how things could become, and then he began to work to bring that to a reality.”

“When I first went into business in Clarksburg, I became aware of him as being someone in the community who was an advocate for civil rights and an all-around good guy,” said Hunt, who served as mayor of Clarksburg before establishing Amazing Cities.

While a member of the NAACP alongside the late

Allen Lee, who was then the Harrison County chapter president, Griffin gained a reputation as a fierce advocate of the local civil rights battle, Hunt said, and Griffin himself admits he’d broach racial issues and inequities at the time that few others would.

“Jimmy didn’t hesitate to speak up (with the NAACP), whereas Allen had been through a lot of experiences in a different lifetime than Jimmy; I think a lot of people looked at it as Allen as a kind of conventional leader of the NAACP whereas Jimmy was always kind of pushing the envelope advocating for things,” said Hunt, who became closer and closer with Griffin through the years, he said, via their late mutual friend, David Kates, who was Clarksburg’s first Black mayor and a pastor at Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church. “I think with Jimmy, a lot of people considered him a radical at that time. When Jimmy would stand up for someone or speak up for civil rights, I think a lot of people looked at that as him being a very radical person with the community.

“But then as time went on and the civil rights movement became more established, Jimmy became a community leader.”

“You can’t be afraid to bring it up just because you know it’s going to receive resistance,” Griffin said in regards to outspokenness. “Often times, you’d be surprised that you did have allies there at the table, but they felt like they were in the minority and weren’t going to bring it up. But once I brought it up, they thought, ‘Here’s somebody else I could partner with.’

“A lot of the things that I have done, whites have benefitted from it also, even more so than blacks. So I think that I have been able to gain respect in the community because once people see that you are capable of holding a position, they kind of look past

your color. But the other problem is getting someone to follow you.”

Professionally, Griffin abided by a similar tenor during his career with Union Carbide, now GrafTech, where he started as a laborer in 1966 after landing the job through a connection with a woman in his church who worked in the plant’s central office. Working in an industry that was still mostly foreign, and certainly still discriminatory, toward African Americans, Griffin ascended to new heights in 1972 when he became the first-ever Black manager of Union Carbide. He immediately began working to change the application process.

“I had a man who told me if his father knew he was taking orders from a Black man, he’d be turning over in his grave,” Griffin said thinking back to when took over the manager position. “I told him, ‘He better start turning.’”

Despite his managerial status, however, Griffin still endured hate crimes in his professional life. On one occasion, he found a Ku Klux Klan card on his locker, and

another in which the N-word was written all over his office door. “It wasn’t an easy task,” he said.

“He’s loved this community,” Hunt said, “honestly, in a lot of ways, more than it’s loved him back.”

Griffin, who is also the state president of the Improved and Benevolent Protective Order of the Elks of the World, an Black fraternal order, as well as one of the founders of the Opportunities Industrialization Center in Fairmont, a training program for young people, received one of his more prestigious individual honors in February of 2018. He was recognized for his impact on the community when he was given the Federal Bureau of Investigation Director’s Community Service Leadership Award.

“That’s a big award,” Hinton said. “I mean the FBI, that’s a name.”

Despite all Griffin has accomplished professionally and in the fight for civil rights, he said, the overall racial climate of today remains combative and worlds apart.

“We have not as a country been able to learn how to deal with race,” Griffin said. “People see racial issues and they say, ‘That’s not our country, that’s not our country.’ That’s what you continually hear, ‘That’s really not our country. We’re not that way.’ Yes it is. That is how we are, and until we’re willing to accept that, that is our country and ask what we’re going to do about it to change our country, we’re going to have a problem.

“I don’t know if I’ll ever see that change in my lifetime, but I have great grandchildren now, and hopefully by the time they become adults, there might be a change.”

— By Bradley Heltzel



# DIGGIN' UP BONES

## Prehistoric Planet a hub of historic activity

Some fossils have been buried in West Virginia for millions of years, but you don't have to dig too deep in Barrackville to find a myriad of these wonders of science.

You just have to get through some cardboard boxes and maybe a few rolls of bubble wrap.

Prehistoric Planet is housed in a barn in Barrackville where paleontologist Ray Garton keeps fossils, fossil replicas and geological finds from archeological digs on which he worked across the country. The barn contains more than 40 years' worth of artifacts that Garton keeps for study, as well as for display when requested.

"I was always interested in science, but went from there and got involved in cave exploration and finding bones in caves," Garton said. "I went to school for geology and paleontology at WVU, and pretty much have been doing it since 1969, with my primary focus and passion being West Virginia fossils."

Throughout his career, Garton has traveled across the country looking for ancient artifacts to dig up for research and possible display. He mostly enjoys finding artifacts hidden deep underground throughout West Virginia, but the state is home to more rocks and Ice Age animal remains than dinosaur bones.



PHOTO BY EDDIE TRIZZINO

Ray and Mary Ellen Garton have been on many archeological digs together and have uncovered bones from around the country, some of which they keep in their barn.

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PHOTO BY EDDIE TRIZZINO

Paleontologist Ray Garton looks at a replica of a triceratops skull inside his warehouse at Prehistoric Planet in Barrackville.

“West Virginia had no dinosaurs, our rocks are much older than dinosaurs,” Ray Garton said. “But we do have a very good representation of Ice Age animals. Woolly mammoths, mastodons, saber-tooth cats, vampire bats were all found in West Virginia.”

You can’t walk too far in Garton’s Prehistoric Planet without nearly tripping over an artifact that dates back thousands, if not millions of years, but he said that’s not what it’s like on a dig site. Geological societies locate sites that may hide ancient artifacts a few layers below the surface based on context clues, and from there, it could take weeks of digging to find anything worth preserving.

In West Virginia, most of the well-preserved artifacts can be found buried in caves or buried in mountains.

“To find specific fossils, you have to go where the geologic rocks are the proper age, otherwise you are wasting your time,” Ray Garton said. “Cave exploring is huge — that’s where most Ice Age fossils are found in West Virginia.”

Garton said he has spent up to a year on dig sites looking for remains or even just clues for bones or geological artifacts. He said his most successful excursions have been in West Virginia, where he has

**“We were laying on an ant hill collecting fossils, and here comes an ant carrying a little crocodile tooth.”**

— Ray Garton

been the first to find several kinds of ancient artifacts. He found the first saber tooth cat remains in the state, as well as one undiscovered type of clam and an undiscovered species of trilobite.

“My wife and I, we found the very first saber tooth cat remains in West Virginia in the ‘90s in Greenbrier County,” Ray Garton said. “It was primarily some crushed bones and some teeth.”

Mary Ellen Garton, Ray’s wife and retired special education teacher, has been with Ray on many digs over his career. While geology and paleontology are not her specific fields of interest, she said it is exciting even from an outsider’s perspective to find ancient remains on a dig.

“The interest of finding stuff that you’re the first

person to see it, and some of the things we find are the first time they have ever been found which is really exciting,” Mary Ellen Garton said. “Just the thrill of finding something is really great.”

Ray Garton recalled a memory from a dig site he and his wife were on years ago, where they just happened to find a clue that led them to discovering an ancient species of shark. He said ants use many kinds of materials to build their nests and hills, which has led more than just he and Mary Ellen closer to ancient remains.

“We were laying on an ant hill collecting fossils, and here comes an ant carrying a little crocodile tooth,” Ray Garton said. “We took the tooth from it, it was a pretty interesting story.”

Items Ray Garton has dug up over the years can be found displayed in museums around West Virginia because he loans out bones and replicas of skeletons to organizations around the state for educational purposes.

While many of the artifacts in Prehistoric Planet are only replicas of actual bones and artifacts, Ray Garton said this is the case with fossils on display in museums around the country. They are, however, made to be as much like the original subject as possible, so one kind



of bone or skeleton, for example, can be viewed in several places at once.

He frequently asks different geological societies if he can make replicas of a fossil so he can study and display a new find.

"We have the three local rock and gem clubs, and they go on digs," Ray Garton said. "If I think it's worthy of museum display, I'll ask them to loan it to the museum. If they can't loan it, I ask if I can borrow it and make a mold."

Aside from his work in the field digging up and studying fossils, Garton considers himself an educator. The purpose for all of his work and research is to educate people about the ancient past, and share what lies beneath the surface of different areas. He often gets calls or emails from people who believe they have found a fossil. And while they are not always right, Garton said he tries to encourage digging enthusiasts to keep looking.

"The public is very, very interested in fossils," he said. "I get emails constantly from people who found this, found that and send me pictures of them. Most of the time, they are nothing, and I have to figure out ways to let them down in a way that they want to keep looking."

Nowadays, Garton does most of his work in Prehistoric Planet, which functions as a lab as well. He said, at the age of 70, he wants to get as many fossils and replicas as possible distributed to museums around the country and the world, to make sure they are more widely available to anyone interested.

Curtis Wiseman is a lab assistant at Prehistoric Planet who helps the Gartons keep everything organized, and communicates with outside organizations looking for information on different fossils they have. To Wiseman, the work is interesting because he gets to hold rocks dating back millions of years.

"I really find it fascinating," Wiseman said. "People ask me, 'What do you like about it?' And I say working with 400 million-year-old bones."

Ray Garton said anyone has potential to stumble onto ancient remains, it just takes a careful eye to know where to look. He said getting into paleontology can be a challenge, but finding a new bone after hours if not days or weeks of searching makes it all worth it, especially one he gets to take home and find out how old it is.

"I'm perfectly happy to stay in the lab," Ray Garton said. "A lot of people think paleontology is all about the digging. The digging is certainly important... A professional will maybe dig four weeks out of the year, and the rest of the time you're back in the laboratory."

— Eddie Trizzino



PHOTO BY EDDIE TRIZZINO

Ray Garton, owner of Prehistoric Planet, has images of different geological finds on display in the warehouse.



PHOTO BY EDDIE TRIZZINO

Prehistoric Planet is a barn full of bones and displays discovered in archeological digs. Lab Assistant Curtis Wiseman is shown here carrying a case to the second floor of the building.



# ‘Miracle worker’ helps patients discover their best selves



SUBMITTED PHOTO

**Dr. David Bannister officially took over Marion County Chiropractic Center as his own practice from Dr. Roger Kritzer in April 2019. At just 28 years old, Bannister is one of the youngest chiropractors in the surrounding area to have his own practice.**

He wound up for one his patented powerful serves, and in the next moment, his body practically melted into the ground. “I had a big serve because I’m a big guy — I’m not the typical tennis player that you see — and I came around on a serve and it just crumbled me,” said David Bannister, as he recalled the moment his body basically gave out.

Bannister’s affection and fascination for the sport of tennis had been the source of much joy and ample

opportunity in the years since he had picked up the sport, basically on a whim in middle school, he said, and now it was the culprit that, in an instant, had turned his body from spry and functioning to immobile and mangled.

“I mean, I couldn’t walk, I couldn’t do anything,” said Bannister, who was still in his athletic prime at the time and would go on to play tennis at Fairmont State University for all four years of his college tenure.

Bannister’s back was completely jacked up from

the incident, he said, and temporarily sidelined him from playing tennis until he visited his hometown chiropractor Dr. Scott Morris, who was also Bannister’s youth pastor.

Morris diagnosed and adjusted Bannister, which not only re-aligned Bannister’s tennis game, but also redirected his entire life’s work.

“I got up off the table and I was like, ‘(Shoot), this works. Holy cow! This is awesome!’” Bannister said. “That was kind of how I got into (chiropractic), and it



pretty much changed my life.”  
Today, Bannister, at just 28 years old, runs his own practice in Fairmont, as he took over operations of Marion County Chiropractic Center at 220 Virginia Ave. from the now-retired Dr. Roger Kritzer in April 2019.

“I probably talk way too much about how much I love my job, but I do love my job, and it’s because I get to help so many people,” said Bannister, a Charleston native and graduate of Riverside High. “Let’s say somebody comes in and they can’t play with their kids anymore because they’re in pain, or they can’t sit on the bleachers to watch their kid’s game because their back hurts. Me getting to take that pain away from you, that’s huge to me. That’s the stuff I can hang my hat on.”

“People come in and tell me they’ve done things they haven’t done in 20 years. They can play with their grandkids, or they didn’t have a headache this week when they used to have headaches everyday. That’s the cool stuff about my job.”

Fostering that type of high functioning, pain-free lifestyle is at the core of Bannister’s passion and fascination with chiropractic, he said. Essentially, he holds the power through his line of work to introduce patients to a more rewarding and flat-out better day-to-day lifestyle they didn’t even realize was possible.

“I’m more pain free now than I’ve been in my entire life truthfully,” said Mike Latocha, a patient of Bannister’s. “The experience with Dr. Bannister has been my best with any of the chiropractors I’ve visited in the last 30 years.”

“I love that function aspect of it,” said Bannister, who has now been working with Marion County



SUBMITTED PHOTO

**Dr. David Bannister performs chiropractic on children as well, sometimes before they are even 1 year old. He says infants may experience physical trauma during the birthing process that could require an adjustment.**



SUBMITTED PHOTO

**Dr. David Bannister and his wife, Lindsey, first met at church camp in Summersville while both were in high school. They now have two children, Luka, age 3, and Coen, age 11 months.**

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**“There are so many people who just get blown away by what we do because they have us in this little bubble of just low back pain. People are shocked.”**

— Dr. David Bannister

Chiropractic Center since June of 2018 when he started shadowing Dr. Kritzer. “A lot of people don’t realize they are functioning sub-optimally until they’re adjusted and they’re like, ‘Holy cow.’”

Bannister, who went to Palmer College of Chiropractic in Davenport, Iowa for his graduate program, points out that many people who may not think seeing a chiropractor is necessary may also potentially stand to benefit from a diagnosis and adjustment, be it in terms of long-term proactive care or an ongoing health problem they wouldn’t typically associate with chiropractic medicine.

“There are so many people who just get blown away by what we do because they have us in this little bubble of just low back pain,” Bannister said. “People are shocked.”

For example, he has treated patients who had been living with constant headaches and plantar fasciitis, and he even performs pediatric care related to the physical trauma some babies’ bodies go through during the birthing process.

“I tried everything and nothing worked like finally coming to see Dr. Bannister,” said Jennifer O’Dell, a patient who had constant headaches. “For me, it’s been life-changing.”

In one particular case, Bannister even treated a child’s gastroesophageal reflux issues, he said, wherein the pressure put on certain spinal nerves can disrupt the digestive tract. The child’s father even testified in church concerning his son’s “miracle case,” a term Bannister uses for health issues the general population wouldn’t associate with chiropractic care.

“He got off medication, he changed his diet, and he’s been pretty much a different kid,” Bannister said. “That’s the stuff that when you go home, you’re feeling good about.”

“He’s probably the best chiropractor I’ve ever been around,” said Sheila Doshen, a patient of Bannister’s who’s dealt with hip pain, which at times has even made walking a painful experience. “I walked across the floor and there was no pain and then the tears really started flowing. I said, ‘My gosh, look at this!’ To me, he was just like a miracle worker.”

From children to adults to his own life, Bannister has seen chiropractic extend one’s period of functionality, minimize recovery time from injuries, and in some cases, seemingly work wonders. Throughout his tennis career in high school and at



SUBMITTED PHOTO

**Dr. David Bannister has successfully treated patients for chronic headaches and plantar fasciitis, in addition to more traditional structural problems within the body.**

Fairmont State, Bannister said he repeatedly returned from small tweaks and muscle injuries faster than teammates because of chiropractic. Still today, he recognizes the importance of it in his personal life to remain active in recreational tennis leagues as well as regularly play pickleball and golf.

Bannister and his wife, Lindsey, a Fairmont native and Fairmont Senior High graduate, also have two young kids, Luka age 3, and Coen, 11 months.

“Being a dad is super cool,” said Bannister, who first met Lindsey, at a church camp in Summersville while both were still in high school. “Like I never wanted even to hold babies before, and now I got kids and I’m watching TV crying because I’m so emotional about how much I love my kids. They make you soft for sure; I tell people all the time I’m soft now from

being a dad.”

Bannister’s family life along with having his own practice at such a young age — “I’m way younger than your average chiropractor who has the business,” Bannister said — means ideally he’ll be a part of the Fairmont community for years and years to come, he said.

“My wife is not going to let me leave (Fairmont). No chance whatsoever,” Bannister joked. “And I tell my patients, that means I’m going to be around — god willing — for a while. In this day and age, I feel like as soon as you start with a doctor, it’s like they’re retiring, whereas I got another 40 years ahead of me hopefully and will be able to take care of my patients for many, many years to come.”

— Bradley Heltzel



# Serving those who served

## Kip Price has spent his life advocating for veterans

From a young age, Kip Price was exposed to the work of military veterans and their impact on daily life.

Several members of Price's family served in the military, but growing up in Piedmont, he was even close to the home of a soldier in the Wereth 11, a group of 11 Black soldiers who were massacred by Nazi troops during the Battle of the Bulge. Learning this, he began researching the Wereth 11, which at the time was not widely available.

"My dad was a veteran, my three brothers were veterans," Price said. "What got me started a long time ago was the Wereth 11 because one of the Wereth 11 soldiers is from my hometown that I was raised in, Piedmont. I was raised only four houses from one of the heroes, James Aubrey Stewart."

Price would go on to memorialize not only the soldiers of the Wereth 11, but veterans of Fairmont and Marion County as well, and his work doing so has been recognized by state officials including U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin and U.S. Rep. David McKinley.

The Wereth 11 soldiers served in the 333rd Field Artillery Battalion came from all corners of the U.S., including Piedmont, West Virginia, were coming up from the town of Wereth, Belgium, hence the name. Price said he doesn't believe many people know the story, which is one reason he made it his mission to memorialize the soldiers and share the story with as many people as possible.

Over the years, Price has collected historical remnants from family members of the Wereth 11, whom he also spoke to for inside information about the soldiers' lives and the work they did in the military. He uses this information and the artifacts he has collected, which include many photos and documents, to make presentations about the Wereth 11 all over the country.

"We've got a nice display of things that we set up when we would do presentations about the Wereth 11," Price said. "There's still a lot of people who don't even know about



TWV FILE PHOTO

**Kip Price, left, talks with Asa Davisson at a park during a veterans ceremony in 2018.**

this story. We're trying to get out as much information as we can across the nation."

In recent years, Price has run a Christmas tree program at the Marion County Courthouse, where people can hang Christmas ornament bulbs with pictures of veterans on them, as a way of recognizing them for their service. Both the veteran Christmas trees and the Wereth 11 are passion projects for Price.

"The Christmas trees I think was 2015," Price said. "The Wereth 11, that has been going 20-some odd years or so."

For the veteran Christmas trees, Price first collaborated with Judy Wilson, a local historian, to bring the veteran photos to the best quality before hanging them. Wilson said she also helped compile the photos for a small catalogue that could be distributed to veterans and their families.

"We had a collection of veterans and we put out this little mini-catalogue and did the veterans Christmas tree for the courthouse," Wilson said. "We would honor veterans by giving them their own personal bulb on the Christmas tree."

Price now works with Maree

Reynolds, a local photographer, to make the Christmas tree bulbs. Reynolds said she was able to make even more additions to the project.

"I ended up doing 64 bulbs, and they came out absolutely wonderful," Reynolds said. "I put their rank, their name, the branch of service they were in, what wars they were in and where they were from."

Reynolds said she is glad she met Price because he gave her the opportunity to not only help honor veterans and military personnel, but meet many who live in the county and





SUBMITTED PHOTO

**Kip Price helped establish the annual veterans' Christmas trees in the Marion County Courthouse over the years honoring military service personnel.**

befriend them.

"He basically told me 'Take the ball and run with it,'" Reynolds said of the Christmas tree project. "I am very appreciative of even meeting Kip Price because if I hadn't met Kip Price, I would never have had the opportunity to do these ornaments."

Wilson echoed Reynolds, and said she may not have been able to participate in a veterans memorial project had she not met Price. Wilson said she is impressed with Price's dedication to his projects honoring veterans because he also frequently meets with military personnel and talks to them to learn their stories.

"Kip would bring them by or bring them out to dinner and do things like that," Wilson said.

Price said his work promoting the Wereth 11 in West Virginia led him to eventually traveling to Wereth, Belgium to meet people of the community who were familiar with the story of the massacre. He said meeting people who know the story was one of the most impactful moments of his life.

"That was a highlight of my career there, getting to go over to Belgium and meeting the wonderful people who have never forgotten the sacrifices these soldiers made," Price said. "They gave up their life to save the lives of those people in that building."

Reynolds said she is looking forward to working on

the veterans Christmas trees again this year because she believes they deserve to be recognized as often as possible.

"I really like doing things for the veterans," Reynolds said. "If there is a need out there, I try to fill it one way or another."

And although she doesn't still do the same work with Price that she used to, Wilson said she would jump at the chance to work with him to honor veterans again, especially local residents who still live in Marion County.

"I would do it again if I could," Wilson said. "It is always a worthy endeavor to be involved with the community."

Price said the work he does to honor and memorialize veterans is all for them, and he does not do it for his own recognition or for money. Now retires, Price said he wants to continue promoting veterans and the story of the Wereth 11 for as long as he is able.

"What I do now, it's all pleasure, it's all passion," Price said. "I love doing this to honor veterans and this isn't work. This is out of my heart to get as much honor and recognition for our veterans, which they deserve."

— Eddie Trizzino



TWV FILE PHOTO

**Kip Price holds a copy of the book "The Lost Eleven" by Denise George and Robert Child. The Wereth 11 are the men behind "the forgotten story of Black American soldiers brutally massacred in World War II."**



# A MINISTRY FOR ALL



PHOTO BY EDDIE TRIZZINO

Jenn Curtis stands in one of the cabins at Camp Ara.

## Christian camp opens in Marion County amid pandemic

Andrew and Jenn Curtis and Shay and Leigha Hickman had been planning to someday open a Christian camp for kids and adults when they were all working together in campus ministries in Norfolk, Virginia.

It was almost by chance they found the campground formerly known as Hickory Ridge, which Andrew Curtis said, by way of a 5-year-old post about the available property in 2019.

The four would go on to establish Camp Ara in Valley Falls where they now provide programming to kids and adults alike, and while it is based in Christianity, Jenn Curtis said the camp is open to everyone. The camp held its first event in September 2020.

**“ Our passion is bringing people to Christ when we can, but doing that in a way that isn’t uncomfortable or overly pushy for people who aren’t already Christians. ”**

— Jenn Curtis





PHOTO BY JENN CURTIS

**The lush green landscape at Camp Ara gives its guests a sense of peace and break away from the ordinary.**

“We are a Christian camp, but really our goal is to provide a place where people who wouldn’t ordinarily get to experience camp can come and do that in a Christian environment,” Jenn Curtis said. “Our passion is bringing people to Christ when we can, but doing that in a way that isn’t uncomfortable or overly pushy for people who aren’t already Christians.”

According to Jenn Curtis, Joe Perry, the founder of the Union Mission in Fairmont, originally started the camp as Mission Farms in the early-1950s. She said he used it to provide camping activities for kids on weekends while housing people without homes during the week. Both groups would farm the land and raise some animals to feed patrons of the Union Mission.

“He was the director of the Union Mission, so he purchased it trying to find a place that could shelter kids for camp, and they ended up housing people here during the week,” Jenn Curtis said. “They would actually farm the land during the week, have a service in the chapel over the weekend, and feed homeless people at the shelter with food farmed at the camp.”

Perry would eventually sell the camp in the ‘70s, when it was renamed Hickory Farms. Curtis said it was primarily a Christian camp in summers, but it would go unused for long stretches of time, including in the 2010s when the core four found it. According to Jenn Curtis, Camp Ara implements some of the

activity from both periods of its existence, but it now offers even more opportunities than ever before.

“Our focus is year-round programming, so we want to do traditional summer camp stuff, but really, we want to provide camps and retreats all year long,” Jenn Curtis said. “Some of them are date nights for spouses, some of them are just for women. We do child drop offs, so parents can get some time alone, and then we do programs twice a month also, and those are like retreats where we do marriage retreats, family camps.”

The programming is coordinated by the four owners of the camp. Andrew Curtis is its executive director, Jenn Curtis its marketing and communications director, Leigha Hickman is its finance director and Shay Hickman its program director; but they each coordinate and carry out the camps and events. Jenn Curtis said much of the activity is inspired by Andrew Curtis, who is an Eagle Scout who previously worked with scouting organizations, and also serves in the U.S. Navy for 15 years.

She said the spark that would eventually lead to the creation of Camp Ara came from Andrew Curtis being hit by a tractor trailer while riding his bike in 2015.

“He was saved through that experience,” said Jenn Curtis, Andrew’s wife. “He was an Eagle Scout... that had always been a passion of his.”

The different camp programs for kids offered

throughout the year are meant to help kids develop different skills not only in outdoor recreational activities, but in creative and personal areas as well. The camp spans 113 acres made up of farmland, woods, a lake and main campground, which currently has 23 structures from its cabins to its mess hall to its social hall.

Jenn Curtis said the owners plan out different activities which take place weekly, monthly or yearly in the case of the summer camp, and anyone is free to sign up to attend whichever programs they would like. Camp Ara offers drop off service for children’s camps, but Leigha Hickman said the camp often hosts activities meant to be enjoyed by parents and their kids as bonding experiences. Her favorite programming, though, is Explore Junior, where elementary-aged kids participate in different camp and farming activities.

“My favorite part so far from what we have been able to do is Explore Junior,” Leigha Hickman said. “Having the little kids here, we go hiking, we build things, we teach them about homesteading and gardening, I love that.”

According to Andrew Curtis, the activities offered at the camp are not all directly related to camping or scouting. The camp hosts multiple retreats that allow for individuals, couples or groups to participate in personal growth or development of a skill. He said





PHOTO BY JENN CURTIS

**The dining hall at Camp Ara.**

these retreats can be led by the four camp owners themselves, but they sometimes bring in speakers who are knowledgeable on a specific topic or field.

Andrew Curtis also compared the programming provided at Camp Ara to his time in the Navy, where he led his colleagues in different drills and projects. He said he enjoys being able to implement his past training in Boy Scouts and the Navy into Camp Ara because it has been a longtime dream of his to return to scouting and children's education.

"Between Boy Scouts, the church youth ministry and military, we just blended this unique organization," Andrew Curtis said. "The latter half of my career I was leading guys just like we're leading kids and families here. It's just a different setting, we're not overseas."

Leigha Hickman agreed that the four owners working together on the camp is a mutual dream come true, and to be so flexible in its programming makes the endeavor even better. She recalled the group's time working in student ministries when they brought up the idea to start a camp, and said they have come a long way from there.

"We have been serving with students and youth for a long time, we have done a lot of retreats serving in student ministries and with churches," Leigha Hickman said. "Every time we went, we said, 'We should do this.' We just love serving kids and being involved in individual development and growth."

Camp Ara has a Facebook page and a website, [www.awayatara.com](http://www.awayatara.com), which lists the camp's upcoming activities and events.

— Eddie Trizzino

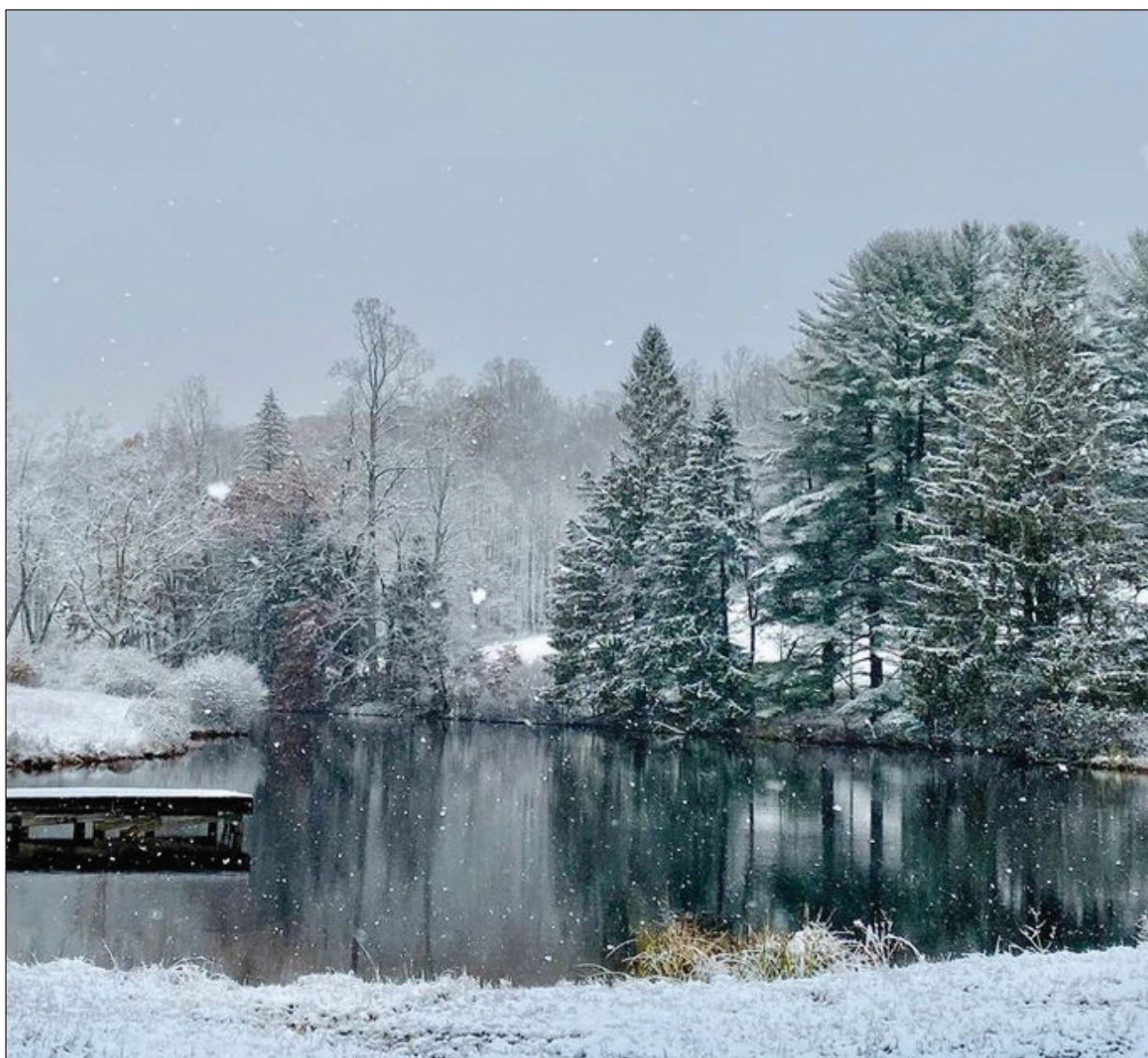


PHOTO BY JENN CURTIS

**Camp Ara becomes a winter wonderland that is picture postcard perfect when it snows.**



# FROM NIGERIA TO WEST VIRGINIA

## First job after nursing school: Michael Awotula and Israel Keshinro are on the front lines of the pandemic

Hospitals, more than ever, are in dire need of dedicated, hard-working nurses.

During the coronavirus pandemic, health care workers deal with the stresses of potentially getting exposed to the coronavirus, having to wearing extra personal protective equipment and dealing with a high volume of patients, some of whom are battling COVID-19.

One area hospital has gotten a boost by expanding its search for nurses to candidates from around the world.

Acuity Specialty Hospital of Morgantown, located on the Mon Health Medical Campus, hired two registered nurses in late 2020 who hail from Nigeria. Michael Awotula and Israel Keshinro are both from near Lagos, a city on the Atlantic Ocean.

Fresh out of nursing school in Texas, these two friends both say they want to continue their education and eventually return to Nigeria, but for now they are helping treat patients here in West Virginia.

Acuity, which specializes in long-term acute care, has occupied the fourth floor of the Mon Health facility since 2019, CEO Frank Weber said. The facility has 25 beds, 22 of which were occupied in mid-February.

Acuity's role in the local health care system is to treat patients who need intensive care for an extended period of time, ranging from several weeks to several months.

"Part of our mission is to open up beds and open up space in the other ICUs," Weber said.

This means that Acuity has seen its share of post-COVID patients who need the assistance of a ventilator to breathe, he said.

Awotula and Keshinro were recruited and hired through Conexus MedStaff, an agency that specializes in helping international candidates find jobs. Many hospitals have turned to agencies and partnerships with local colleges to fill nursing posts, Weber said.

"The pandemic came along and it really stressed the already low-number work force. There already weren't enough nurses in health care in general across the country," he said.

Awotula and Keshinro both grew up speaking English, the official language of Nigeria, and also Yoruba.

Nigeria is a West African nation



SUBMITTED PHOTO

**Israel Keshinro, a nurse at Acuity Specialty Hospital of Morgantown, stands in the hallway in the hospital. Keshinro and Michael Awotula, both natives of Nigeria, came to Morgantown together to work in the hospital and gain experience in the medical field.**

of about 201 million people. It has an Atlantic coastline and also inland desert regions. It is a diverse nation with numerous ethnicities, religions and languages represented.

Awotula said he grew up with a roof over his head and food to eat, but he saw firsthand that there are some in his country who are not so lucky.

He assisted his parents and fellow

members of their church, Foursquare Gospel Church, in helping refugees from the northern parts of the country who were displaced after attacks by Boko Haram forces, a terrorist group active in Nigeria and other African nations.

"I had opportunities to meet all these people and some of them, they didn't have a home. My mom would

**"There are a lot of areas where diseases that are not so deadly can kill people because they don't have the money to treat them."**

— Michael Awotula





SUBMITTED PHOTO

**Michael Awotula, a nurse at Acuity Specialty Hospital of Morgantown, stands in a hospital hallway.**

help them, cook for them and my dad would use the opportunity through the church to get medications especially for malaria, which is very prevalent there,” he said.

He came to the U.S. originally to study electrical engineering, a subject he enjoyed, but he later switched majors after reflecting on his experiences and thinking about how he could make a difference.

“I really want to help people. I want to go back at one point to open, hopefully, a health care facility to help people that don’t have the financial capability to provide health care for themselves, because I’ve seen it. There are a lot of areas where diseases that are not so deadly can kill people because

they don’t have the money to treat them,” he said.

Keshinro said that, from a young age, he also saw the positive effect that doctors were able to have in his community. In high school he volunteered with the Nigerian Red Cross Society helping treat people with injuries.

In high school he excelled at reading and science, which made him think he could become a doctor, he said.

His goal is to eventually enroll in medical school and become a physician, but for now he is working as a nurse to gain some real-world experience.

“I know it takes a lot of time and a lot of hard work, so I wanted to achieve something right now before I go back

in school to become an M.D.,” he said about coming to West Virginia.

The two friends first met while doing undergraduate studies at Panola College in Carthage, Texas.

They then both went on to get nursing degrees from the University of Texas at Tyler and are now roommates in Morgantown.

Both men said that, while they were fluent in English, moving to Texas was an adjustment because they often had a hard time understanding Americans who spoke in an unfamiliar accent.

Coming to West Virginia during the winter presented a new set of challenges.

They had to buy coats and winter boots and learn to deal with getting

around on snow-covered roads.

“The first time driving, I wish had heard about all-wheel drive and getting snow tires and all this good stuff to make it through the winter because I got stuck in front of my apartment. I’m not really going to forget that day,” Awotula said.

Many Americans aren’t familiar with Nigerian culture, though increased representation in the media can help change that, Awotula said. Some people were introduced to Nigerian cuisine for the first time in February when videos depicting fufu, a Nigerian dish, began going viral on the social media platform TikTok, he said.

Since moving here, the nurses have been doing a lot of cooking at home — and have been able to find some familiar African ingredients at a specialty food store on Mileground Road outside of Morgantown.

They also have had to deal with working in a hospital amid a deadly pandemic that has claimed the lives of more than 2 million people worldwide.

The pandemic has presented challenges at nearly every medical facility in the country, Acuity being no exception, Weber said.

“From my experience it has been a lot of long hours and we see some stress involved with it; the concern for their own safety,” he said.

Another issue is that family visitation is essentially prohibited for patients. This means hospital staff have had to help arrange video chats for patients to be able to talk with their families or find other ways to cheer them up, he said.

So far, Awotula and Keshinro have risen to the challenges of the time, Weber said.

“They are two outstanding young gentlemen. Their work ethic is remarkable. They handle themselves very well and they seem to roll with the punches,” he said.

Awotula said the pandemic has been stressful for everyone and he has often turned to prayer and meditation to help get through.

Keshinro said he works to stay up to date on the latest discoveries about how the virus spreads and tries to stay vigilant about wearing his personal protective equipment at work.

“It gets challenging. Sometimes it feels like ‘OK this is what I have to do in order to protect myself from this virus I have to be conscious of my PPEs and do all this basic stuff and I’ll be fine,’” he said.

While many have hailed health care workers as the heroes of the pandemic, Awotula said everyone has a role to play in fighting the virus so we can hopefully one day return to normal.

“It’s not just health care workers. Everybody’s got to wear your mask and do your part,” he said.

— Joe Genco



# From locals, for locals

## Co-op goes to great lengths for great eats



PHOTO BY WILDSKY CREATIVE USED WITH PERMISSION



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Mountain People's Co-op associate Breanna Love is one of the approximately eight workers at the store, each of whom have a passion for healthy foods and farming practices that align with the co-op's overall mission.

Mountain People's Co-op has been a staple in the local health food community since it started up in 1975.

Its history has been smudged through the years, some of it even forgotten. The original founders are no longer involved, and the entire leadership team has been overhauled countless times. The location has moved on multiple occasions, and the order of operations have changed too.

But through it all, the Mountain People's Co-op has always stood standing in Morgantown for 45 years now with one central mission.

"We're looking out for our community and the people in West Virginia," said Tia Johnson, who has worked at the co-op since 2013, and is now the store's assistant manager. "We're very community-orientated."

The Mountain People's Co-op, which was established in 1975, has operated under that all-encompassing motto to bring Morgantown residents and people throughout the tri-state area a totally new and fresh grocery shopping experience. The co-op is the state's only full-time health food market, according to the company's website, and revolves around providing its customer base with healthy, pure, and environmentally-friendly alternative food options compared to local chain grocery suppliers, such as Kroger and Walmart.



**“We try to have all organic practices as much as possible, especially with our local produce. And then with our grocery items, we try not to bring anything in that has additives, dyes, or anything harmful”**

*— Tia Johnson*

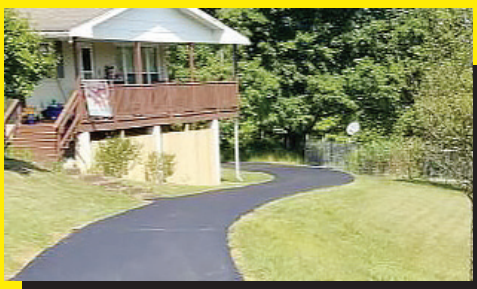


SUBMITTED PHOTO

Mountain People's supplies its store with plenty of fresh produce from local farmers daily. The store verifies local farmers' practices by visiting farms in person, requiring farmers fill out extensive questionnaires, and checking farmers for specific certifications, such as organic or biodynamic practices.

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SUBMITTED PHOTO

**Mountain People's Co-op operates as a true co-op, meaning each of its 700 or so paying members are part owners of the company.**

The central idea is to provide quality food options to the local public from local farmers.

“We’re just trying to bring, honestly, as much local food to our community as possible and being able to support West Virginians whenever we can,” said Johnson, who started at the co-op working as a cashier before becoming a department manager and now assistant manager. “We want to support people locally, we want to support people in our state, and we even want to support people in the tri-state area who are doing things correctly.”

The co-op provides its customers with the entire food base — meats, produce, dairy products, butters, jams, syrups, spices, teas and coffees — and they only contract and supply their shop through farmers who, either have certifications in organic, biodynamic, or naturally-grown methods, or have been verified by the co-op itself to practice such methods if they’re not officially certified, said Johnson and the co-op’s produce manager, Rachel Tritt. The co-op regularly visits local farms — pre-COVID, Johnson said — to both verify the farmers’ methods and build a stronger rapport with farmers and they also have potential supplying farmers complete extensive questionnaires to explain their agricultural practices.

“We try to have all organic practices as much as possible, especially with our local produce. And then with our grocery items, we try not to bring anything in that has additives, dyes, or anything harmful,” said Johnson, who said the co-op also tries to highlight local farmers with self-produced promotional videos and write-ups. “We’re in constant contact with (our farmers) typically, we do extensive research, and we’re pretty intuitive — if we don’t feel something is right, or if something feels off — we all take that into account before we bring any new account or new farmer on.”

“The supporting local part, I was very passionate about,” said Tritt, who started working at the co-op in August 2019 and took over as produce manager in December 2019. “The amount of local suppliers that we have here, and the very personal relationship we have with all of them, that was



SUBMITTED PHOTO

**The co-op prioritizes buying from local farmers first to meet all of its supply demands in areas such as produce, meat and grains.**



my first impression and probably the thing that I love the most.

“And then I’ve always just loved talking to farmers. I have two horses, so I’ve always bought hay from farmers, and they’re just great to talk to — they’re always upbeat and fun. So it’s very much the same talking to our produce suppliers.”

Mountain People’s, which also supplies a lot of their foods through Turnrow: Appalachian Farm Collective, a distributor that contracts with local farmers, Tripp said, prioritizes supporting local farmers, sure, but the store’s management team and oversight board, also gets so deeply ingrained in their process because of the commitment the co-op has to its customers. After all, many of those customers are also paying members of the store, who through their membership and the nature of Mountain People’s as a co-op, also have an actual stake in the company.

In addition to a company stake as a co-owner, members also receive store discounts, and both members and other people within the community alike can participate in classes, such as vegan-baking and making Kombucha, which Johnson teaches herself. Johnson said Mountain People’s currently has about 700 members.

“We know our members, and we care about our members; we know their faces and we know what they like, and if

we can’t find what they like, we’ll do extensive research for them. It’s not like working at Kroger or just a typical grocery store — we go above and beyond for our customers, and it’s not just because we like what we’re doing, it’s also because we care about our community,” Johnson said. “When you go into Kroger, it can be kind of difficult to find a manager to talk to at anytime, but our customers know they can talk to us directly, and if they have a question about something, we do extensive research for them and then we always get back with them and follow up with them.”

Mountain People’s customers and members are essentially an extension of the company’s overall mission itself, Johnson and Tritt said, wherein they invest and shop at the store because they also deeply care and prioritize what it stands for, in regards to supporting both local farmers and healthy and ethical farming practices.

“We’re essentially peers with our members,” said Tritt, who is originally from Hardy County. “A lot of them have been members for so long that everybody who works here knows them all personally. And funny enough, even though we’re not doing as

SUBMITTED PHOTO

**The co-op has a variety of coffees and teas, including Kombucha, for its customers.**

much face to face interaction with our members and customers because of the

pandemic, I feel like we’ve gotten to know a lot of them even more because we’re emailing with them daily and talking to them on the phone more, and I think it’s just given us a platform to be more interactive with a lot of our members and customers. That’s been a lot of fun.”

In addition to establishing a rapport with members through the interactive classes, such as Johnson’s Kombucha class, as well as day-to-day walk-ins — pre-COVID — Johnson said perhaps the largest commitment to customers comes in taking the time and effort to research any questions or concerns they have.

Practically everyone on staff at Mountain People’s, which Johnson said is only about eight workers, work there, in part, because they have a genuine interest in the food industry, from farming methods to the supply chain, and the majority of their customers have similar interests. Thus, Johnson says, it’s the Mountain People’s responsibility to truly get to the bottom of any questions and concerns customers have if they want to fully represent their mission as a company.

“You have to be dedicated; when you’re there, you’re actually putting effort into everything really. What’s also cool about working at the co-op, if you do have an interest in something, we want to provide and help you with that,” said Johnson, who said she herself has extensively studied and taken up an interest in herbalism since starting at the co-op. “But if you’re coming to work at the co-op as like any other job just to kind of get by, then it’s not really the job for you.”

“I moved here in 2012, and at that time, I was kind of changing my diet and how I started eating and I discovered the co-op. I started going in because I was really intrigued, and there’s so much stuff I didn’t know about food, until I worked at the co-op, whether it be produce, organic food, how distribution works.

“All of it is just really fascinating.”

— Bradley Heltzel



PHOTO BY WILDSKY CREATIVE USED WITH PERMISSION

Mountain People’s Co-op offers customers all natural bulk foods, such as spices and grains.





## Mountain Heritage Quilts Guild shares craft with old and new alike

**In** 1987, Fairmont resident Martha Offutt began asking different groups of people if they had any interest in quilting.

Within a few months, the Mountain Heritage Quilters Guild was formed and they began holding their monthly meetings at the YWCA in Pleasant Valley.

Now, after celebrating its 38th birthday in 2020, the Mountain Heritage Quilters Guild is the second-oldest quilting guild in West Virginia. Currently, the guild hosts around 50 active members.

“My grandmother was an avid hand-quilter. I have found memories of ‘Mom Mom’ quilting with friends in the summertime on the front porch of her log home,” said Guild President Lynda Sago.



Amanda Adams shows off her blue and gold quilt.

SUBMITTED PHOTO



# “I think maybe her motto was idle hands are the devil’s workshop so she made sure her granddaughters’ little hands weren’t idle.”

— Debbie McAteer

Sago said several of the Guild’s founding members stayed in the guild until their passing, including Offutt. Interest in the guild continued to spread and membership continued to grow. The guild holds their meetings on the second Friday of each month. A monthly workshop was also added to the ladies’ schedule where the quilters focus on charity quilts and helping one another with new quilt techniques and troubleshooting.

Sago said she joined the guild because of its reputation for being an active, community-service driven and progressive group.

She said she cannot recall a time when a quilt was not framed in her house. Sago said she is fortunate to continue her legacy and being able to honor the tradition of quilt making.

The guild does several service projects, which Sago said are a big undertaking but very rewarding. The guild does everything from quilt for children and families in need during difficult times or natural disasters to quilting for a newborn boy and girl born during National Quilting Month.

Guild member Debbie McAteer said she began quilting with her grandmother at a very young age. Her grandmother was a quilter and a seamstress and taught McAteer different things such as embroidery and working with sewing machines.

McAteer said she was around six or seven years old when her grandma introduced her to sewing.

“I think maybe her motto was idle hands are the devil’s workshop so she made sure her granddaughters’ little hands weren’t idle,” said McAteer.

She said her grandmother was patient with her in teaching. She said she still has several of her quilts. She made quilts for her daughters, McAteer and all her nieces and nephews.

“Hers was a strawberry applique quilt. We lived in western Kentucky and strawberries were a prominent crop there so they were quite popular,” she said.

She said her grandmother would also donate quilts to the PTA for fundraisers. At such an early age, McAteer learned a lot about public service and generously and passing down the tradition.

“She just attended school through the eighth grade so she didn’t have any formal training in art and her designs are so sweet and pretty,” said McAteer.

McAteer made her way to West Virginia when she was in her early 50’s and was new to the area. She attended a quilt guild meeting at the invitation of a friend.

“These women have just embraced me and we’ve just had a great time together. It’s not just a social group, they’re very active with their time,” said McAteer.

She said the hallmark of the group is the Quilts of Valor they make every year for veterans. In October, they are donated to veterans which, McAteer said, is a lovely dedication and ceremony. That relationship boiled over to the Veterans Administration hospital in Clarksburg where one of their projects there is hanging in the oncology unit at the hospital.

McAteer also said the group makes a quilt for the new year’s baby that is born in Fairmont each year. She said the ladies also have made Christmas placemats for the Meals on Wheels in Marion County so during the holidays the seniors would receive a cheerful Christmas placemat with their meals.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Glenna Schmid Pirner and Debbie Nestor Sisler use a featherweight sewing machine.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The Irish Chain/Canadian Leaf Quilt is presented by Kathryn Kemp Greenly and Mag Frisby to Tim McAteer, the groom and Deborah Hiltz, bride.





TWV FILE PHOTO

**At this 2019 Quilts of Valor presentation, Mountain Heritage Quilters Guild Member Kathryn Greenly, left, presents her husband Don with a U.S. Navy-themed quilt she made in honor of his service to our country.**

“We’ve just always got something going and that’s what I like about it. We don’t just sit around and talk,” she said.

She said experienced quilters will help newbies with their projects or if someone is having trouble getting a design to flow they’ll offer guidance to each other.

McAteer said it was sad once COVID-19 hit and the group couldn’t meet. She said Sago is very creative and innovative and the group has been able to meet online for several months.

“We’re determined to sew through the COVID pandemic together, one way or another,” she said.

McAteer serves as the special exhibit chair for the group. She said that role entails her promoting the group through different projects.

Recently the Guild had six wall hangings featuring different aspects of West Virginia history on display at the Welcome Center off Interstate 68. They also have an upcoming exhibit at Prickett’s Fort State Park. The guild will take part in various quilt shows and other community expos.

McAteer said, “Many hands make light work” to which she said the members of the guild collaborate well together. Every month, the group talks about new

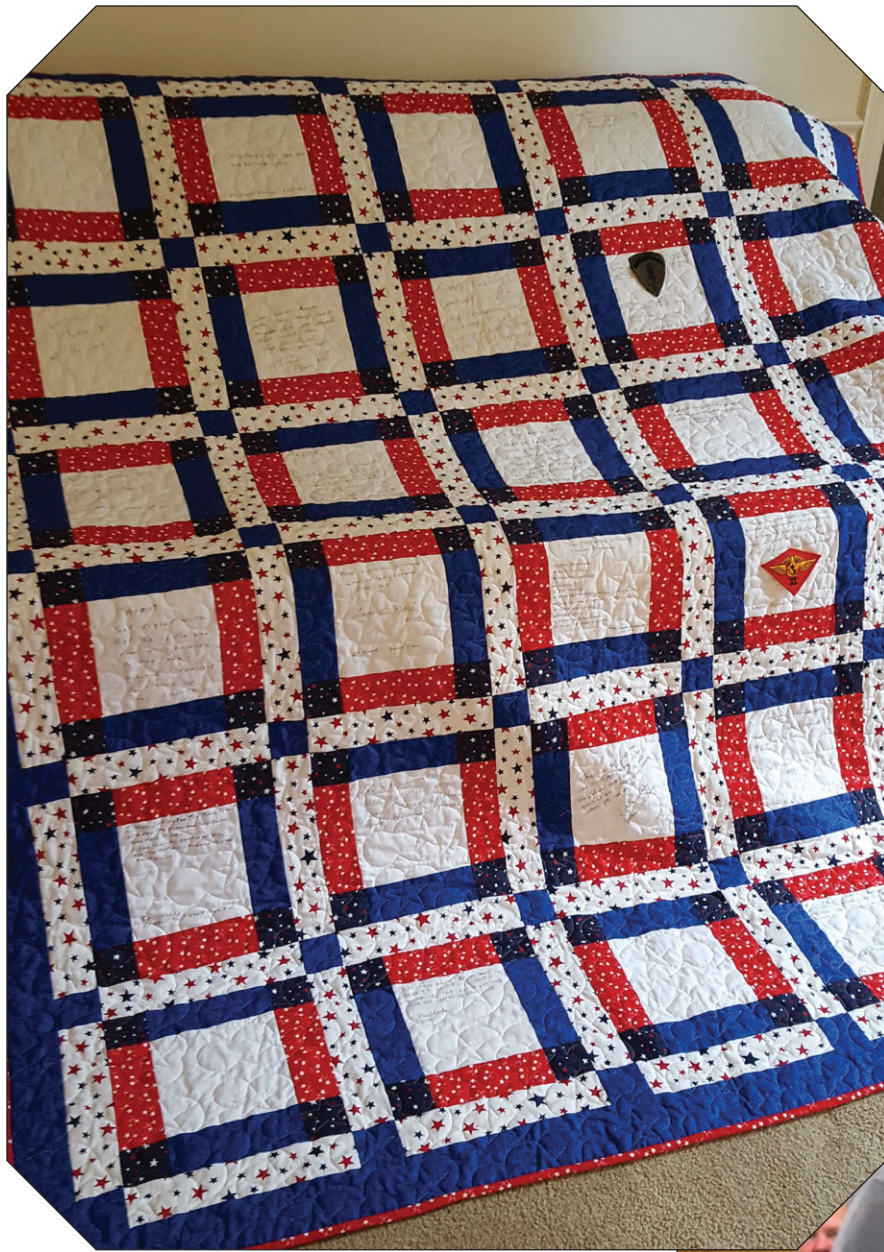
techniques or new patterns so McAteer said she is always learning.

“I love to work with colors. I find the rainbow interesting. Blending together of the colors,” she said.

She said she can barely trace her own hand but she can take squares, triangles and rectangles and put them together and make something pretty. She said this is inspiring and fulfilling to her.

McAteer grew up about 30 miles from the National Quilt Museum in Paducah, Kentucky. The quilting tradition didn’t just run deep in her own family but also her surroundings. Every third week in April, the





SUBMITTED PHOTO

This signature quilt is displayed at the VA in Clarksburg and signed by veterans.

museum would have a quilting show and it would bring in people from all over the world.

"I got to go and work the booth and meet a lot of people and just observe beautiful, beautiful works of textile art," she said.

She said quilting has just carried over to every aspect of her life. She also doesn't see quilting going away anytime soon.

Pauline Eshelman, Guild workshop chair, said she was not originally a quilter. She sewed for years and made all her kids' clothes. When her kids grew up and left home, she said she needed to find something to do. She thumbed through a book one day at a store and thought she would make a quilt.

"I thought, I know most everything about sewing. Well, I got the surprise of my life — quilting is not sewing. Let me tell you, it was two different ball games," she said.

Eshelman said she really struggled with her first quilt and made the mistake of making a king sized quilt at her first go. She said she still has the first quilt she had 25 years ago and looks at it today and thinks — "What in the world was I thinking?"

"I've learned so much joining the guild. They share

tips and just all kinds of neat little things. Once I got the knack of it, I just got hooked," she said.

After going down to Jackson's Mill one spring, she met two women who belonged to the guild who talked her into coming to a meeting. She met the women and has been a member ever since. She said it's been about 22 years.

At the workshop, members will come in with special projects or something they might be stuck on and help each other figure things out.

Eshelman is a hand quilter which means she does the whole quilt by hand. It can take her anywhere from six months to a year to finish one quilt.

"My favorite part, believe it or not, is sitting down at my quilting frame and hand quilting the whole quilt together and a lot of the girls think I'm nuts," she said.

Most of the ladies of the guild have their quilts machine quilted where they take them to someone who has something called a long arm machine. However the method, Eshelman said when the guild meets, it's a time to get together and chit-chat and share wonderful stories about their quilts.

"I hope this guild never dies," she said.

— Sarah Marino

SUBMITTED PHOTO

Mountain Heritage Quilters Guild Vice President Connie Pirner presents youngest Guild member, Leigha Floyd, with an original designed mini-quilt upon receipt of her a WV Golden Horseshoe Award.





# ‘HE DOES IT FOR THE PEOPLE’

## Surgeon earns national recognition for developing cutting-edge procedure



SCREENSHOT

Surgeon Adam Hansen explains slipping rib syndrome surgery in a video about the condition.

**H**e was 15 when the pain started. In 2013, Nick Cutlip’s ribs started rubbing against one another in a way that was physically debilitating and a trip to the nurse’s office in high school led health professionals to believe he was having heart problems.

“I was 15 and I was in gym class, they’re wondering why I’m not doing gym. I tell them I’m not feeling good so they send me to the nurse’s office,” Cutlip said, who lives in Charleston. “My heart rate was 166, and my blood pressure was 172 over 102.”

Cutlip spent the next several years looking for a doctor who could relieve his pain and repair his ribs, but found that many doctors either did not know how to help or didn’t even believe that his ribs were the problem. This led Cutlip to fall into depression because of the pain and the mental toll of trying to

explain it to others.

It was almost through chance that Cutlip found out about slipping rib syndrome, which had a definition that seemed to describe the exact symptoms he was experiencing. Through another bit of chance, Cutlip came across Adam Hansen, a WVU Heart and Vascular Institute thoracic surgeon, who Cutlip believed might be able to help.

“I would tell the doctors my ribs were popping,” Cutlip said. “So I got on there and looked up ribs popping, first thing that pops up, ‘slipping rib syndrome.’ I went to my doctor and said, ‘You need to find me a doctor that has something to do with slipping rib syndrome. She called an orthopedic place, and they ended up knowing Dr. Hansen.’”

Cutlip met with Hansen, who came up with a new procedure to remedy the rib cage from the inside and stop the pain associated with slipping rib syndrome. Hansen said the pain associated with the syndrome can “turn one’s life upside down,” so he helped Cutlip with a new surgery he hoped would cure the problem. Hansen explains the procedure as “not actually a very difficult surgery.”

“I take the dislocated end of the slipping rib, and I reconnect it with a really strong orthopedic procedure that allows the ribs to come together at the cartilage, but it doesn’t compress the nerve in between,” Hansen



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Lindsey Darnell, of Clarkston, Michigan, was 12 years old and running on her middle school cross country team when she started feeling popping in her ribs. Eight weeks after surgery, she said she was doing backflips on her trampoline.

said. “It’s really not very complicated. I can do it through about an inch-and-a-half incision and it takes me about a half hour and they go home the same day.”

Since performing this procedure on Cutlip in early 2019, Hansen has seen patients who have been living with slipping rib syndrome from around the U.S. because the procedure is not currently widely available or even known about.

Hansen said the ribs can fall out of line from one another, which can cause the chest area to collapse inward and push the fractured ribs out, which can lead to an individual experiencing chronic pain.

“We’ve got the eighth through the 10th ribs on each side that are more flexible, and they kind of piggyback and share a connection with that seventh rib,” Hansen said. “Since they are so flexible, they are used with breathing and twisting and bending, and basically they are joined with any of those motions. So since they are so flexible, they are a little more flimsy and weak, and can become separated from the rest of them.

“What it creates is constant compression on the nerve that runs between the ribs. That whole nerve can get fired up and feel like a hot wire or electrical pain, but it becomes very excruciating, and it has the ability to turn one’s life completely upside down.”



Hansen is a surgeon originally from Arizona, where he earned his medical degree from the University of Arizona College of Medicine. He said WVU Medicine recruited him to work at the United Hospital Center in Bridgeport where he has been a surgeon since 2013.

Hansen said he has now performed his slipping rib syndrome surgery on about 150 patients, and he has been published in medical journals where he explains the problem and how his procedure works.

"I did my first 30 cases and then published it in one of our most reputable surgical journals," Hansen said. "They were extremely interested in it, the doctors reviewing it, and they were very interested in how I had approached this problem."

Cutlip went through two different procedures to have his ribs repaired, and he said after a short recovery, the pain he had experienced for years went away, and gave him a fresh start.

"The second week of the first surgery I went hiking, I felt so much better," Cutlip said. "It was life-changing. I had put myself down in so much depression that I didn't know what to do with myself."

Cutlip said there is a Facebook group, "Slipping Rib Syndrome," where people who are or were living with the condition share their stories with others and offer advice and support. In the group, Cutlip recommends Hansen to anyone looking for treatment on slipping rib syndrome because of his good demeanor and well-meaning attitude.

Hansen said he enjoys meeting and treating victims of this condition because of the drastic life change that happens once a slipped rib is repaired. Cutlip is just one example of the turnaround that is possible, but Hansen said many people have similar turnarounds.

"It's just so fun to see a patient go from complete misery to satisfied within just a few weeks," Hansen said. "Their lives turn around, they get back to work, their relationships get repaired — honestly it's like playing a record backwards."

Despite garnering national attention for his work, Hansen said he does it for those living with slipping rib syndrome, many of whom have lived with pain for years and had no idea how to reach wholeness again. Having seen patients come from all corners of the country, Hansen said he has seen the desperate state people are in to get their ribs repaired.

"I just try to help these people, I feel bad for them," Hansen said. "They are miserable when they come see me and they are so motivated to get this fixed, they will fly as far as they have to."

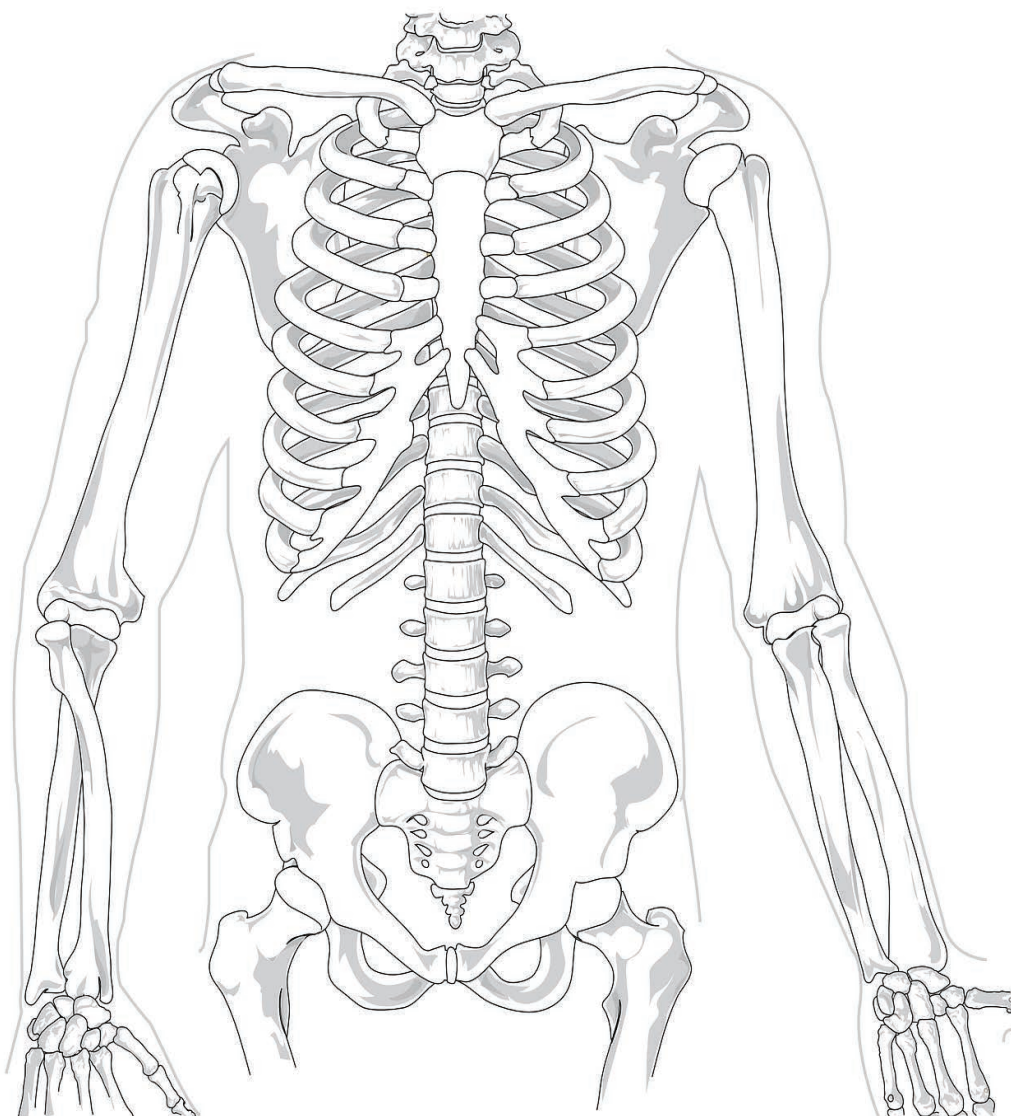
Cutlip credits Hansen with helping turn his life around by having the surgery, and said the two still talk once in a while. While there are some other doctors around the country who perform surgery for slipping rib syndrome, Cutlip believes Hansen is among the best.

"If there were more doctors like Dr. Hansen, the world would be a much better place, he absolutely does it for the people," Cutlip said. "Life is 100 times better than what it was before."

—Eddie Trizzino

**"The second week of the first surgery I went hiking, I felt so much better. It was life-changing. I had put myself down in so much depression that I didn't know what to do with myself."**

— Nick Cutlip



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# On the **FRONTLINES** of **HOMELESSNESS**

**Marissa Rexroad's advocacy  
helped earn her a Beacon Award**



SUBMITTED PHOTO

**M**arissa Rexroad saw a lot of individuals become homeless and end up getting stuck homeless for a long period of time when she worked for the Clarksburg Mission.

"The longer a person is homeless the more the negative impacts of that start to compound and I saw that as unnecessary suffering and felt like there's a lot that we can do to change the amount of time that people have to experience homelessness," said Rexroad, who now serves as housing and communications director for the United Way of Harrison County.

This is what Rexroad focuses on today. For her, the work is about limiting human suffering and getting people back on their feet as quickly as possible.

There are lots of moving parts in making sure people don't stay homeless. She works within a larger regional housing system that prioritizes who is most in need based on how vulnerable they are at the time they apply.

"Certainly for folks experiencing homelessness I think in the past in Harrison in particular we've not had a really coordinated systemic approach to addressing homelessness and that has resulted in lots of confusion for folks who become homeless," she said.

Rexroad said organizations in Harrison County are working hard to coordinate all these disparate parts and help people navigate services for the homeless so they can more quickly move people through the

system as a whole.

There's not a one size fits all solution to homelessness, she said, because each person's path to homelessness tends to be a winding journey with different complexities.

"Certainly mental health issues and disorders is a big one. Things like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Things like Substance Use Disorder and also things like economic instability and insecurity in their lives," said Rexroad.

There is also an emerging group particularly in Harrison County of transition age youth who're individuals 18-24 who are becoming homeless at high rates.

"What we're seeing there is a lot of folks who have





SUBMITTED PHOTO

Marissa Rexroad speaks to a person about services available to the homeless.

**“ It’s very difficult for somebody who is experiencing homelessness to also hold a job if you don’t have a place to shower, a place to sleep. ”**

— Marissa Rexroad

grown up and aged out of foster care systems, out of juvenile justice systems, folks who do not have stable families that are in tact and lack support very early on in their lives,” said Rexroad.

One thing that is consistent in many causes is trauma at some point in a person’s life. Often, adverse childhood experiences and lengthy periods of chronic stress are factors in a homeless person’s life.

“The work we do in Harrison County is certainly primarily focused on housing but bolstering the resilience of the folks that we’re serving is a very close second and something that we’re always looking at with each individual,” she said.

People may need help from medical and mental health providers, which Rexroad helps link them to so they get all the help they need to stabilize.

“We’re looking at the whole picture of the people we’re serving and making sure they have what they need to become stable in housing,” she said.

As the result of the pandemic, Rexroad said it’s been like driving a plane while flying it since April of last year. At the beginning of the pandemic, 10 vulnerable people were placed in a hotel and were housed for 30 days.

From that day on, it’s been about providing services to those who are medically vulnerable into housing as quickly as possible.

“It’s been difficult and certainly the conditions that the pandemic has created, have created more housing instability in our community that other agencies are working hard to address,” she said.

Housing is seen as a platform for reaching other goals, like employment or educational goals.

“Ultimately it’s very difficult for somebody who is experiencing homelessness to also hold a job if you don’t have a place to shower, a place to sleep, and so

for us, we don’t attach preconditions to our program. We really see housing as that foundation,” said Rexroad.

The One Foundation and Generation West Virginia honored Rexroad for her work with a Beacon Award, which recognizes young leaders within the Mountain State. She said her work can prove difficult but it’s work she feels privileged to do each and every day.

“I’m able to do this work because I’m bolstered by a number of close mentors and professionals in the field who have come together collectively and are really committed to changing the way people experience homelessness in Harrison County,” she said.

Rexroad works closely with the West Virginia Coalition to End Homelessness, the lead agency for all things relating to homelessness in West Virginia. Coalition CEO Zach Brown said about \$4.1 million of HUD money flow through the organization and into nonprofits in the region to provide housing for those in need.

Brown said it’s been a good relationship with Rexroad in helping the homeless in Harrison County. He said she has so much of a drive and passion to do the work.

“Every since Marissa’s been around in any capacity, first the Mission then The United Way we’ve always sort of coordinated with her and tried to help her out with whatever she was doing,” said Brown.

Brown said she’s a force of nature in and of herself and doesn’t need a lot of guidance. He said Rexroad has a passion for getting people off the street and into housing.

“Clarksburg has a fairly big and kind of in your face homeless problem at the moment so [we’re] helping her kind of wrap her head around how can we collectively attack that,” said Brown.

Brown said the Coalition will soon add a housing staff member and an outreach staff member to help Rexroad combat homelessness in Harrison County.

“There’s a lot of homelessness for a town that size right now and not a whole lot of service options,” said Brown.

Due to the pandemic, Brown said need for services has gone up. He said by the time COVID-19 is all over with, there will be a 40-50% uptick in homelessness nationally. Brown said he’s still dealing with a primary clientele and there’s secondary clientele that have been impacted by the pandemic.

Keeping an eye on the mission is important, which is housing people by any means necessary. Brown said he has a great crew of people he works with who care about what they’re doing.

Brown said he has seen an uptick of the number homeless youth in Harrison County and also older residents that are becoming homeless.

“We’re working with Marissa now to answer both of those questions. It helps us figure out exactly what kind of resources need to be there. How can we help? What do we need to do by way of planning to figure out what the next steps are,” said Brown.

Brown said, in this line of work, he does experience a lot of things that break his heart, not just for him but also for his staff.

“I guess what keeps me hopeful is the successes that we do have and knowing that we have a good plan to solve these problems,” said Brown.

Without his staff and people like Marissa, people might not have the hope to have those successes.

“We’re not a charity. Basically we’re being persistent to the point that if somebody needs us we’re there for them,” said Brown.

— Sarah Marino





# People are very appreciative for the help

Marion County Food Pantry sees drop in families served in the past year







PHOTO BY SARAH MARINO

Dewey Rice packs a box at the Marion County Food Pantry.

A table out front of a double door invites those in need of food in on a Jefferson Street corner.

Bruce Roberts, the director of the Marion County Food Pantry said the pantry has been everywhere in the 20 years he's been involved. The pantry was run by the Union Mission for some time, and then became an independent nonprofit.

He started volunteering in 2005 and took over as director in 2009 and said the pantry continues to gain ground and money.

"You don't volunteer to get the prestige but a couple pastors told me 'hey that's how you get your donations that's how you let people know you're a pantry,'" said Roberts.

Robert's main assistant, Dewey Rice, said the pantry moved into its current home around four months ago.

Back in 2007, Roberts said the pantry only got food from Save A Lot but he's since learned about the Mountaineer Food Bank.

"We got interested in going down there in 2008 and were able to buy a lot more for our buck," he said.

A friend asked Roberts to come to a meeting, and next thing he knew he was the president of the pantry. Roberts gives Rice credit as the worker of the bunch

**"Be good to thy neighbor  
and no better way to be  
good to thy neighbor than  
to take care of the needy  
and the hungry and  
to feed them."**

— Bruce Roberts, Marion County Food Pantry

— a jack of all trades.

"I can't give Dewey enough praise," said Roberts.

Even in times of the pandemic, Roberts said the numbers of people served at the pantry are way down. Rice said they figure is about 66% down. Roberts said he's surprised to have such a decrease in traffic and it's a topic of discussion a lot of the time.

"There's so much money being allotted for the people and different organizations like Connecting Link and United Way they're bringing food trucks in weekly at Palatine. I mean, it hurts us in a way but we're reaching out to other pantries," said Roberts.

He said if anybody is in need, if the pantry has the means they'll help. Rice said so much of the food comes from the food bank. He said most things they get cost them nothing. The products are oftentimes from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In giving USDA food, the pantry has to meet their guidelines, which includes nobody can be turned down.

"Our policy now, during COVID, and while we're not serving very many people we're serving anyone who comes through that door. So there's no guidelines now. We can't allow them to come in to do any paperwork. Eventually we'll get back down to running more efficient," said Roberts.

Rice said there are also many individuals who make donations as well as churches in Barrackville that donate time and money. Alongside what the food bank supplies, the pantry will purchase noodles, jelly and other items.

"People love their mac and cheese," said Roberts.

Rice said the pantry picks up food daily from Price Cutter. Anything they take off the shelf such as bread, sweets and vegetables will get donated to the pantry.

"When we get an over abundance of it which we do donate it, we take it to the Soup Opera, we take it to Scott Place," said Rice.





PHOTO BY SARAH MARINO

#### Volunteers pack boxes at the Marion County Food Pantry.

Roberts said he has a great group of people helping him and he credits them as to why the organization runs smoothly.

“Our board members are great. Each and every one of them,” said Roberts.

Rice said when the pantry moved into its current spot, the building was a complete wreck. A friend of his who retired from a construction company helped revamp it and got all the ceiling tile donated. Rice himself painted and put down flooring in the current space.

“Every bit of work was volunteer work,” said Rice.

Along one wall was a line of refrigerators. Some were donated, some were purchased. Inside were a plethora of different meats, such as shrimp, hams and chicken breasts ready to be donated to those who need them.

Roberts said people are meant to help others while they have time on the Earth. He said it’s a test of things to come and God says worship Him daily and praise Him daily.

“Be good to thy neighbor and no better way to be good to thy neighbor than to take care of the needy and the hungry and to feed them,” said Roberts.

Roberts said when people come through the door now, they ask very few questions of them. There are regular guidelines for being qualified. For one person, income can be no higher than \$1,383 a month. For a family of eight

they can bring in \$4,780 a month and still qualify. If someone comes for food, they receive a box of dry goods, a box of meats and fresh vegetables, bread and sweets. Their motto, according to Roberts, is to give not to judge.

Rice said he retired in June 2012 and by January he was bored. His wife worked with Roberts at church on a youth program.

“I said ask Bruce if they need help at the pantry. So she did and he said ‘tell him I’ll pick him up at 8 o’clock in the morning’ and it hadn’t stopped since that time,” said Rice.

It’s gotten worse, Roberts joked. He said he’s had some health problems and Rice has pitched in and does things he can’t quite handle.

When a delivery comes in from Mountaineer Food Bank, Rice helps unload the truck. In pandemic times, the delivery looks like 1,600 pounds of food. Rice said that’s nothing, he’s seen a time when 18,000 pounds of food came through the doors.

“It used to be standard, anything from 15- to 18,000 pounds, and at that time, we were serving like 185 families and 800 people a month. Well, you went through that food. Now, 1,600 pounds is more than we’ll give out next month,” said Rice.

The trucks are often unloaded by the pantry’s board members. Rice said the trucks used to be completely unloaded

by hand, but now they use a fork lift which cuts the time it takes to unload the truck by half.

Roberts enjoys his volunteers. However, he said so many of them are older they’re afraid to come out and lend a hand during a pandemic.

“Hopefully by June we’ll all be back

in,” said Roberts.

Roberts said he’ll work at the pantry as long as the good Lord allows him or until he gets booted out, which he has no fear of, he joked.

“Booted out as the manager? Oh, there’s no fear of that at all,” said Rice.

Roberts said it’s a joy helping people and that’s what keeps him going.

Darrell Carpenter sits on the board of directors for the food pantry. As a retiree, he was looking to volunteer his time with something that was helpful within the community. He said he got involved because his mother-in-law volunteered there for many years before she passed away from pancreatic cancer.

“One of her biggest concerns was who was going to take her place in the food pantry and that’s when I told her I would do it and got started doing it then,” said Carpenter.

Carpenter volunteers his time often to the pantry, though he did echo that things have changed due to the pandemic.

“We’re only open two days a month now and normally right now I’m there on days we are open which we’re trying to get by with less people so we just have the same people working all the time,” he said.

Carpenter said it’s a good feeling to be out there helping people in need, even though things are so different because of COVID.

“People are so appreciative of what help they get. I can say that for the majority of people we deal with, they’re very appreciative of what they get,” he said.

— Sarah Marino



PHOTO BY SARAH MARINO

Bruce Roberts, president of the Marion County Food Pantry.



# Coach, mentor, community leader

## Caring for others drives Corey Hines on and off the basketball court

**In** 2009, Cindy Stoller was diagnosed with cancer for the fourth time in her life, but this time it was in her stomach.

About the same time, Corey Hines found out his aunt was fighting her own battle with cancer, shortly after he took over as head girls' basketball coach at Fairmont Senior High, where Stoller's daughter was on the team.

"I found a cause, a cause I could buy into," said Hines. "My cause was Cindy and the (other) people going through that."

Hines' mission to support and empower his local community and those around him began with the Stollers.

"Any time you approach any program, you have to have a cause beyond yourself," said Hines, who is in his 11th season as head coach. "I found something outside of basketball to believe in, and her kids Emily and Abby, and (players like) Erica (Bowles), Tyra (Horton), all those people, they knew it was bigger for me than basketball."

Over Hines' next five-plus years as coach, the Lady Polar Bears and Cindy Stoller's battle with cancer became aligned almost as one. Ryan Sevier, Cindy Stoller's son, was and still is an assistant coach on Hines' staff, was constantly around the team and frequently gave motivational speeches.

As a team, Hines and the Polar Bears incorporated pink into their jersey design, made "Team Stoller" bracelets and banners, and annually held a fundraiser for the American Cancer Society.

"It was amazing to have that kind of support. It meant so much to us, and it kind of gives you a lump in your throat Corey's got such a big heart, and a lot of people don't see that side of him," said Cindy's husband Robert Stoller, who was on Hines' staff at



TWV FILE PHOTO

Hines grew up in Michigan, but his ties to Fairmont date back to his childhood when he would often spend summers with his grandparents who lived in the Friendly City.





TWV FILE PHOTO

**Fairmont Senior girls' basketball head coach Corey Hines, left, and assistant coach Ryan Sevier stand at midcourt before a game in 2016. Sevier has coached alongside Hines for the past 11 years at Fairmont Senior, where's he's Hines' "selflessness" first hand, he said.**

FSHS as an assistant coach until their daughter Emily entered high school in 2011.

"He's meant a lot because of the concern of Cindy and her cancer, and I think that was part of what he wanted to establish in his team was the kind of heart Cindy had."

"People have to know, basketball might bring you together, but basketball is not what's going to keep you together," Hines said. "You have to have something (else) that you live by."

The game of basketball, though, is at the forefront of Hines' life and his journey to where he is today as a prominent community figure and leader.

Throughout his upbringing in Michigan, Hines was a star on the court. He played in his home state through high school and received multiple smaller Division I as well as Division II offers to play ball in college, but he squandered such opportunities, he said, because of a flighty approach to academics.

"Our meeting ground was at the park because when we were growing up, the parks were the places you wanted to be to compete and play," said Deon Dobbs, who first befriended Hines 30 years ago when Hines and his older brother routinely spent their summers in Fairmont with their grandparents. "Corey had that all-around game; he was very explosive, had good post work down low, had a nice midrange shot, and definitely could handle it and kick it. Back then he could jump, too."

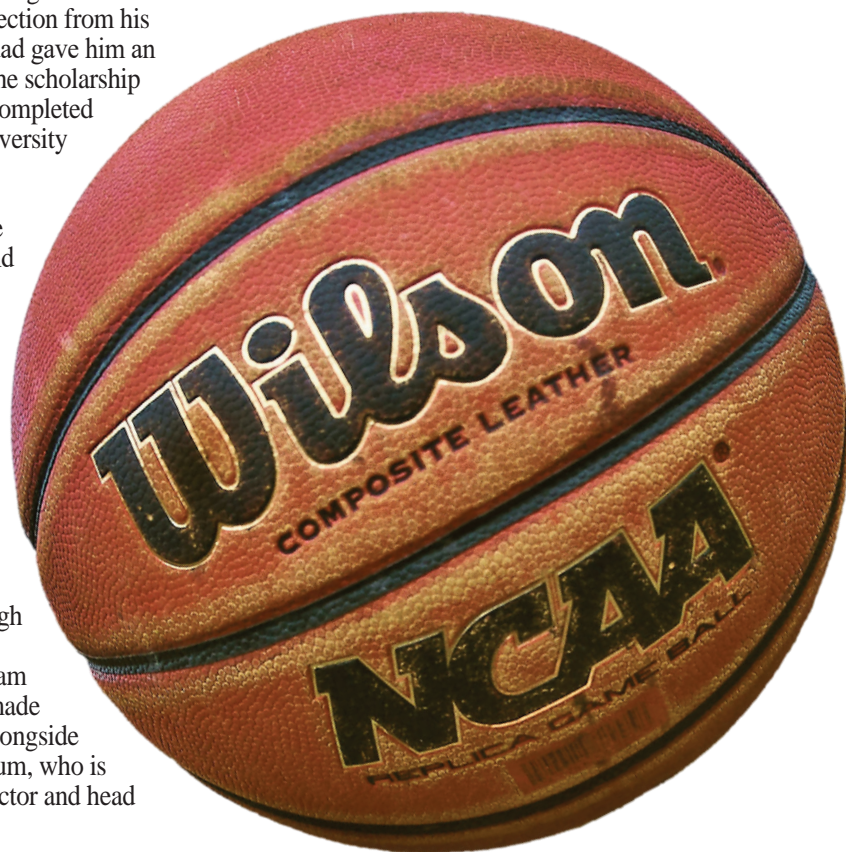
After high school, Hines accepted a scholarship to

play at Ohio Valley University, a private Christian college located between Parkersburg and Vienna in West Virginia, through a connection from his grandfather, David Brown. His dad gave him an ultimatum that he either accept the scholarship or go into the military. He later completed his studies at Fairmont State University before he entered coaching.

"It's kind of cool when I think back now because my dad let me make my mistakes. He let me find myself because at that time, my mind was everywhere as far as stuff I wanted to do," Hines said.

Hines started coaching in church league ball through his cousin, Kerry Marbury, and uncle, Frank Hines, and he then landed a head job at Monongah Middle School.

About the same time, Hines broke onto the AAU scene through his friendship with Dobbs when he took over Dobbs' AAU program West Virginia Rising Stars and made it into the West Virginia Reign alongside Roger Osborne and Ronnie Nuzum, who is the Reign's current program director and head coach.





**“As a coach or as a mentor, you have to want to be different, you have to want to make changes. It’s not just about wins and losses, because if you judge yourself by just what’s on the scoreboard, you’re going to miss out on a lot of things that are going on in the world.”**

— *Corey Hines*

Hines forged his connection to Fairmont Senior in the late 2000s when then-FSHS head coach Ashley Reed was looking for assistants for her staff.

“They needed a coach with the girls, and I was like, ‘Hell no, I’m not trying to coach girls,’ because the only thing you hear are the horror stories,” Hines said.

Hines did ultimately agree to join Reed’s staff at the recommendation of Dobbbs, and a year later when Reed stepped down, Hines got a phone call from the Marion County Board of Education offering him the head coaching position with the Polar Bears, which, still today, remains an emotional subject for Hines.

“My grandfather would kind of predict things in the future, and he told me years ago when I was coaching at Monongah, he said, ‘You’re going to coach at (Fairmont Senior) high school.’ I guess people call that speaking it into existence,” Hines said. “And my grandfather wasn’t still alive, but my uncle and my dad cried when I got the job.”

From that point forward, though, it wasn’t enough for Hines to simply be a basketball coach. He had to be a leader in the community and an extension of Fairmont Senior High.

“As a coach or as a mentor, you have to want to be different, you have to want to make changes. It’s not just about wins and losses, because if you judge yourself by just what’s on the scoreboard, you’re going to miss out on a lot of things that are going on in the world,” said Hines, who has led the team to four state championship games and state titles (2017, 2019) while compiling over 240 career wins.

Hines has dealt with his own personal trials and tribulations as a head coach, especially early in his career.

As the first Black coach in Fairmont Senior High history, Hines was subject to racially-inspired backlash, he said. Marion County Board of Education administrators received complaints related to his race and, even today, Hines still hears whispers with racial ties that question the Polar Bears’ aggressive playing style as well as the program’s funding mechanisms for its top-notch apparel.

Hines has also endured various devastating



TWV FILE PHOTO

Hines is currently in his 11th season as Fairmont Senior High’s girls’ basketball coach where he’s compiled 240 career wins and led the Polar Bears to a pair of state championships.



TWV FILE PHOTO

Hines has made a far-reaching impact within the local community by helping to create various scholarships and programs. He’s also a member of the board of directors at the Rashod Kent Foundation set up by former Fairmont Senior basketball player Rashod Kent to create social change and equal opportunities.





TWV FILE PHOTO

Hines has used his platform as the Fairmont Senior High girls' basketball coach to launch several community initiatives, including teamwide fundraising efforts for the American Cancer Society.

personal losses over his years as coach, with the deaths of his brother, Brandon Hines, as well as friends Joseph Harrell and Will Bridges having profound effects on him, he said.

"Losing those young people at those particular times...I mean, it's hard as hell to see youth in a casket. And when you see youth in a casket, if that doesn't change you, then I don't know what will," Hines said.

"Everybody has a testimony when they get to a certain spot in their life," Hines said. "And all of those things impacted me as far as my community awareness and wanting to be more involved in helping to make a difference."

Hines has since used his platform as coach to create a handful of scholarships and community initiatives, such as his support of the Stoller family and the American Cancer Society. Hines has also helped create multiple programs in his role with the Marion County Parks and Recreation Commission. He also sits on the board of directors of the Rashod Kent Foundation, a foundation set up by former Fairmont Senior High

basketball standout Rashod Kent that strives to create social change and equal opportunity.

"He's very selfless, and he doesn't let a name slip underneath the rug; if somebody deserves credit, he's going to make sure they get it, that's for sure. He knows those guys are working, and he'll be like, 'This guy deserves credit because of his hard work,'" said Sevier, who once played for Hines on the AAU circuit. "I would say that's one of the things people don't know about this guy is that there are a lot of people in this world who really respect that man, and for good reason."

"His uncle Frank was a cornerstone of our community, with after school programs, with midnight madness basketball, with starting football programs at Windmill Park. So from that standpoint, I think it's just been embedded in him through past generations," said Dobbs, who remains close with Hines today. "Doing extra things like that, that's just who he is. Community is what he's all about. That's one thing I can say about Corey is he has a big heart."

— Bradley Heltzel



TWV FILE PHOTO

Hines, right, poses for a photo with former Polar Bears standout Erica Bowles after she scored her 1,000th career point. Hines often refers to his former players' contributions to society outside of basketball as "his trophies that never collect dust."



# SHARPEN YOUR SKILLS

Axe throwing attracts players from  
every walk of life





PHOTO BY ERIC CRAVEY

The welcome sign inside Hillbilly Hatchets in Bridgeport encourages every guest to “embrace your inner hillbilly.”

Jacob Shisler picked up his axe, planted his right foot straight toward the wooden target and he used his left leg as an anchor. Holding an axe in his right hand, he raised it above his head, eye-balled the target and hurled the axe forward. A loud “whack” rings out. It’s another bullseye. Even though Shisler only became familiar with urban axe throwing last summer he has quickly grown into an enthusiast of the sport, which is one of the fastest-growing recreational activities in the U.S., if not the world.

“Really, it’s just enjoyable,” said Shisler, 19, an axe throwing coach at Mountain Man Axe Throwing in Star City, where he often participates in local tournaments at the venue. “I mean it’s satisfying to

hear the axe go into the board.”

Shisler recently parlayed his recently-developed skills into a 10th place finish at his first-ever regional World Axe Throwing League tournament held the weekend of March 7 at TimberBeast in Medina, Ohio. There, he earned points that could help him land a spot in the 2021 WATL World Championship.

“It was very nerve-racking at first, for the first day. Second day, it was alright and then, the last day, it was easy kind of. But it was still a little nerve-racking as it got closer to the end,” Shisler said.

The sport is growing so fast, the WATL has caught the attention of cable sports giant ESPN and has been able to offer as much as \$25,000 to the man or woman who earns the title of world champion.

**“Everybody loves it. We get a ton of repeat customers and a part of the reason is our coaches are so good. They know how to help people stick axes. It’s not as fun if you’re not sticking axes. Everybody wants to stick axes.”**

— Chris Atkins



PHOTO BY ERIC CRAVEY

Matt Lalka, 45, of Morgantown, displays the Zax. Children under the age of 10 can try their hand at the Zax, a plastic “axe” that has suction cups that help hit their target.

Mountain Man Axe Throwing was established in 2018 by Chris Atkins, of Morgantown, who got the idea after he and a friend ventured just north of Pittsburgh to an axe-throwing venue where he found out what axe throwing is all about. After a night of fun and “sticking axes,” Atkins admits he was hooked and decided the entertainment sector in North Central West Virginia needed new breath.

“I just thought it was really entertaining, it was fun to do,” Atkins said. “And I thought the way Morgantown is growing, it just needed more forms of entertainment. This kind of gives something fresh and new for everybody.”

Atkins first opened Mountain Man Axe Throwing in a 3,000-square-foot storefront in the Big Lots plaza





PHOTO BY ERIC CRAVEY

**Axe Throwing Coach Jacob Shisler aims for the cottonwood target at Mountain Man Axe Throwing in Star City.**

in Westover. The NCWV axe throwing phenomenon grew so large in his first two years that he decided to upgrade, so he moved the business to its current location at 428 Industrial Ave. in Star City. Now, guests have access to 6,600 square feet of space and eight arenas for axe throwing.

“As we were getting ready to open, I joined the WATL — they give you a lot of support and help getting started and they really help [owners] grow in the sport,” he said.

Like his fellow members in the WATL, Atkins set out to create a fun and enjoyable experience for his guests. Since he opened, he has repaid the favor and shared the same kind of advice he received to other axe throwing venues opening up around the U.S. He recently helped a venue get started in Arizona.

“When I joined, it was maybe five or six venues a

month opening, now it’s more like five or six venues a week [cropping up],” Atkins said.

Atkins said the goal for everyone who picks up an axe and attempts axe throwing is to hit the target, which for some guests can seem awkward or daunting or both. That’s where his staff of coaches come in to show guests the proper throwing technique and also discuss safety while at the venue.

“Everybody loves it. We get a ton of repeat customers and a part of the reason is our coaches are so good. They know how to help people stick axes. It’s not as fun if you’re not sticking axes. Everybody wants to stick axes,” Atkins said.

Shisler takes his role rather seriously, which is to help Mountain Man guests feel welcomed and allow them to have a good time. Again, fun in this case means “sticking axes.”

“Most likely, they’ll say, they’ll definitely be back because we show them a good time, make sure they’re getting their throws down, make sure they’re sticking to the board,” Shisler said.

Atkins’ crew also operates a mobile axe throwing unit that has traveled many parts of the Mountain State where guests can use the unit for everything from bachelor parties to Halloween parties and multiple types of special events.

Despite the negative economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, Atkins said, he plans to expand into Bridgeport with a new Mountain Man location by fall, “at the latest.”

“It’s a really great way to blow off some steam and I think everybody needs to be able to do that right now,” Atkins said.

Axe throwing seems to bring out a primal desire





PHOTO BY ERIC CRAVEY

**Dakota Smith, left, and Jacob Shisler, right, also compete in regional and national tournaments sponsored by the World Axe Throwing League.**

achieve with a dash of down-home ruggedness. Take the name of Atkins' business itself — Mountain Man Axe Throwing. He said it's reflective of the West Virginia mystique.

"The name just speaks to West Virginia roots. It's just kind of play on words in connection with our state," Atkins said. "The name just kind of adds to the theme."

While the name helps Atkins market his business, what really appeals to Mountain Man's guests is that everybody usually enters the venue at the same skill level because it's unlikely that every resident of NCWV has thrown an axe in their life up to this point. He said, that phenomenon is what makes axe throwing attractive — anybody can do it.

"This is a sport where you don't have to be six-feet-ten and 280 pounds," Atkins said. "Your blue-collar worker or desk job guy can step in and become pretty good pretty quickly."

About 30 miles to the south of Star City is Bridgeport where Hillbilly Hatchets opened Feb. 20, tapping into the same growing sport as Mountain Man.

A girls teen youth group from CenterBridge Church in Bridgeport had a girls night out at Hillbilly Hatchets. Their chaperone, Alyssa Greaver, the youth pastor's wife, did not pick up a hatchet on March 5, but she has done axe-throwing elsewhere in the

Mountain State. She likens axe throwing to bowling in that it can be done in groups or solo and once you do it, it's easy to get hooked.

"It's just something you have to start and then it gets easier once you've done it," Greaver said. "So, in bowling, you're trying to hit in the middle of the lane — same kind of principle, I guess, but I think it's a little more intimidating because it's an axe, but it's not as intimidating as it looks."

Hillbilly Hatchets' Manager Logan Dodd, who jokingly refers to himself as the "Head Hillbilly," said he believes their guests have enjoyed sticking axes in Bridgeport.

"I think everybody's intrigued because it's something different and then, when they come and do it, they have a blast," Dodd said. "I think it's kind of like adult bowling, if you will. You know how everybody goes and bowls and after a while, you say, 'OK, we've been bowling before' but this is kind of like the new bowling with a twist."

Like Mountain Man in Star City, Dodd said, the owners of Hillbilly Hatchets wanted to create a truly West Virginia experience for their guests, all the way from the wooden decor to the theme of the venue.

"We wanted to give it a West Virginia feel. That's where they came up with the name Hillbilly Hatchets

and they were like, 'That's perfect. We love it,'" Dodd said.

Like Mountain Man, Dodd said he and his crew of "Axe-perts" want to show their guests a good time. That means, stick some axes to some boards.

"I think everybody's just really enjoying it. I feel like everybody has had a good time. You hear how everybody's loud in here, everybody's enjoying themselves, they're laughing, they're filming," Dodd said.

While on the surface helping guests learn how to throw axes comes across as a way to keep guests returning to the axe throwing venue, Shisler and his co-workers believe there is something larger taking place — the WATL and its member venues are building a community that cares.

"It doesn't matter what your status in life is — young, old guy or a girl — everyone will help you out. None of that stuff matters in the axe-throwing world. It's just all about, 'What can we do to make you better, 'What can we do to make this whole experience better' and that kind of stuff," said Matt Lalka, axe thrower and operations manager at Mountain Man.

"There's just something about this that brings people together."

— Eric Cravey



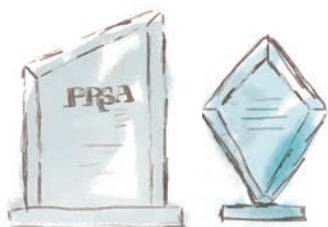
# Marion County

## *the Middle of Everywhere*

The Convention & Visitors Bureau of Marion County's "Middle of Everywhere" branding continues to resonate with audiences and stand out among others in the tourism industry.

**Marion**  
COUNTY • WEST VIRGINIA  
304.368.1123 • marioncvb.com

## Recent Awards



### PRESERVATION ALLIANCE OF WEST VIRGINIA

Heritage Tourism Award for Prickett's Fort  
Nominated by the CVB of Marion County

### PRSA CRYSTAL AWARD

Best Website

### SOUTHEAST TOURISM SOCIETY 2019 SHINING EXAMPLE AWARD

Best Marketing for our  
Middle of Everywhere Campaign

### GOLD ADDY

Cross Platform;  
Integrated Branded  
Identity Campaign

### GOLD ADDY

Online/Interactive;  
Consumer Website

## Economic Impact

Visitors to Marion County are responsible for:

**77.1** MILLION DOLLARS IN DIRECT SPENDING

**21.4** MILLION DOLLARS IN WAGES

**910** LOCAL JOBS



Scan to explore more of Marion  
by requesting a Visitors, Civil War  
or History Guide.

## Website Data



**WERE NEW VISITORS**  
**11%** more than the  
previous year

**97,346**



**SESSIONS TO WEBSITE**  
*from*  
**ORGANIC SEARCH**

## Social Media



TWITTER

**896,551**  
Reached

**1,901**  
Mentions



FACEBOOK

**541,030**  
Reached

**6,821**  
Sessions  
to website



# HEALTHCARE SERVICES

the community  
needs and deserves

**WVU Medicine Fairmont Medical Center brings world-class services – from primary care to specialty care services, such as heart and vascular care – to the community.**

Now, it is more important than ever that you not delay seeing your doctor if you are experiencing issues with your heart or limbs. Here, cardiology and vascular surgery experts at the WVU Heart and Vascular Institute provide comprehensive treatments and evaluations using state-of-the-art diagnostics.

Other services we offer:

- General Cardiology
- Step-down units
- Emergency Department
- MRI
- Full service labs and imaging



**855-WVU-CARE**

**WVU**Medicine.org/FMC