

FACILITIES

Mon County Schools still dealing with bomb cyclone aftermath

BY JIM BISSETT

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For Monongalia County Schools, it's the (unwanted) gift that keeps on giving.

The unprecedented "bomb cyclone" over the holidays, that is.

More than half of the buildings in the district sustained damage to some degree in the quick-moving Arctic blast that caused temperatures to plummet 30 degrees in 30 minutes, during the days just before

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

An icy shroud, with a vortex of dangerous windchills within, parked over the region and stayed there.

"Every bit of our damage is attributed to the cold weather," Superintendent Eddie Campbell Jr. said then.

Across Mon's district, pipes froze and networks of sprinkler systems separated, causing water to gush down hallways and into classrooms, ruining carpets and drywall.

Whole HVAC systems and cafeteria freezers were also infrastructure casualties of the weather.

For now, Campbell said, it's a matter of working through the paperwork.

No dollar amounts have been issued just yet to pay for the clean-up, but thank Santa for insurance coverage, he said.

Deputy Superintendent Donna Talerico seconded that, as she briefed Board of Education members last week on the status of the clean-up.

The bomb cyclone, in effect, is buying a gym floor at Ridgedale Elementary, she said.

Water damage, Talerico said, which is covered by insurance.

The floor right now is safe for basketball and physical education classes, she said, but the boards were soaked clean through.

It's either replace it now, or — like it or not — replace it later, Talerico said.

"All wood floors will deteriorate after they've been soaked in water," the deputy superin-

tendent said.

The district in the meantime is planning on purchasing a monitoring network for sprinkler systems. The network will alert administrators when a sprinkler fails, causing water to pour down.

Both Talerico and BOE President Ron Lytle thanked the principals, teachers and other staffers who responded during their holiday to tend to school buildings under the weather siege.

The sprinkler monitoring, she said, will go a long way in the winter.

After that, she said, she's offering weather wishes to Mr. Claus.

"I'm gonna hope that we never, ever have another bomb cyclone during the holidays again."

TWEET @DominionPostWV

'Educating students is our highest priority'



WVU photo file photo/Jennifer Shephard

LeJay Graffious (right) talks with WVU students as they enjoy meeting his English setters outside the Mountainlair, Feb. 8. Graffious was on the Morgantown campus for the Volunteer Fair where he shared information about the Old Hemlock Foundation.

Gee highlights service, students, changes at latest BOG meeting

WVU Today

West Virginia University President Gordon Gee said service is the cornerstone of everything the university does.

Not only is it a core value, but it reflects WVU's commitment to people — not only to students who attend the school, but to everyone who calls the state home.

During the regular Board of Governors meeting Friday, Gee highlighted several programs spanning the WVU system focused on helping people in communities across the state with economic development, education, arts, health initiatives and more. Many provide unique opportunities for students.

"Educating students is our highest priority, and I have been engaging with as many students as possible to learn about how we can better serve their needs," Gee said.

In addition to the upcoming awards season for students and faculty and updates about Academic Transformation and accreditation, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Maryanne Reed also touted WVU's recent participation in Undergraduate Research Day at the state Capitol.

"Our WVU students are helping to find new treatments for cancer, identifying ways that artificial intelligence can be used to detect mental health challenges, demonstrating the impact of trauma on language development, and building wearable devices to aid patients who suffer from mobility issues — just to name a few of their amazing projects," Reed said.

Reed also welcomed new presidents from the WVU Keyser Campus and WVU Beckley Campus.

"To be able to have that small town college

experience but be still a part of a tier one research university is our real strength," said Chris Gilmer, campus president of WVU Potomac State College. "It's really the best of both worlds. We are the first choice for community service, we're the first choice for educating students, and then we mean to be a good and committed community partner."

T. Ramon Stuart has returned to his native southern West Virginia to lead a new chapter in WVU Tech's history.

"I want to make sure that we leverage the expertise and world-renowned knowledge of our faculty and the ambition and aspiration of our students," Stuart said. "We're going to also make sure that we're preparing students for the careers of the future, not just the jobs of today. My passion, my love for this state that gave me so much, and I'm just so thankful these country roads have brought me home to the place where I belong."

Gee also welcomed Stuart and Gilmer. He acknowledged this is a tumultuous time in higher education. Universities everywhere are facing the challenges of inflation, fewer students choosing to continue their education and increasing financial pressures. WVU has outlined short-term actions with an eye on long-term strategies to manage its financials.

"Higher education is changing," Gee said. "We must change with it or be left behind."

And we will not be left behind. We must adapt — and we will — through innovative thinking, by working together and by always putting our students first."

The university will move forward with notices for proposed changes to five BOG rules to amend and clarify certain provisions and update the rules to reflect changes that have occurred since their adoption. Summaries of the proposed rules can be found on the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking website.

Members also heard updates on several previously approved real estate transactions, and the board authorized the transfer of property as part of the West Virginia Department of Transportation's plans to widen Beechurst Avenue in Morgantown where a reconfiguration will result in a new four-way intersection with Beechurst Avenue, Campus Drive and First Street.

Other board actions included approvals for new degree programs in psychology, neuroscience, engineering technology, scientific and technical writing, and professional writing and editing, as well as an additional \$1 million for renovations to the Evansdale Café kitchen to meet increased construction costs.

The next regular BOG meeting is scheduled for April 21.

"OUR WVU STUDENTS ARE HELPING TO FIND NEW TREATMENTS FOR CANCER, IDENTIFYING WAYS THAT ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE CAN BE USED TO DETECT MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES, DEMONSTRATING THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA ON LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT, AND BUILDING WEARABLE DEVICES TO AID PATIENTS WHO SUFFER FROM MOBILITY ISSUES — JUST TO NAME A FEW OF THEIR AMAZING PROJECTS."

WVU Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Maryanne Reed

COMMENTARY



ALDONA BIRD

Larson's designs are inspired by nature

WHEN I FIRST SAW STACY LARSON'S ceramics at an artisan show, I was immediately drawn to the bright, vibrant colors on one side of her booth. The other side was the opposite — muted colors and rough shapes.

The muted-toned works were planters (potted with succulents) in the shapes of rocks; the brightly colored items, such as vases, were in flowing shapes. I was hooked by the contrast in one maker's work and wanted to learn more.

"I am mostly inspired by nature, different plants and flowers," Stacy said. "Sometimes I just go for a walk outside in the woods, or in the arboretum; that always helps me get out of an artist's block."

Stacy said when she goes on these walks, she takes macro photos to capture details, and then refers to them when working with ceramics in the studio. She started making pottery in high school. "So I've been working in ceramics for over 10 years."

She started her undergraduate studies in jewelry-making and metalsmithing, but couldn't get away from her love of pottery. So, Stacy double majored in jewelry-making and ceramics.

"I love the material. I love to use porcelain, which is a white clay and the glazes turn out very bright," she said. "I'm really drawn toward pastel colors and bright colors. When I go out into nature I'm really drawn to the colors."

Stacy said that on her inspiration walks she is always drawn to bright colors, even if just to a tiny yellow flower. Ferns growing out of trees and moss on rocks also always catch her eye.

Many of her projects reflect both her interest in colors and nature inspired forms. "Several years ago I was making decanters based on specific alcohol, and the plants that are used to make them," she said. Elaborating, she explained she based the design of the rum decanter on sugar cane and the whiskey on corn, both with matching tasting cups.

More recently she made perfume bottles in the shapes of flowers — she has photos on her Instagram, which I recommend checking out.

SEE DESIGNS, A-5

CRIME

Suspect still sought in Summers School Road hit-and-run

BY ERIN CLEAVENGER

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Monongalia County Sheriff's deputies are still searching for a suspect in a hit-and-run involving a pedestrian on Summers School Road in Monongalia County nearly one month ago.

On Jan. 25, Donna Evasko said she was walking along a roadside footpath on Summers School Road that leads to Deckers

Creek Trail just below the Eastgate residential community. Something she's done many times before.

Evasko said she was carrying a tactical flashlight that lights up the entire road because it was around 6:30 p.m. and fairly dark.

"I'm on the straightaway right above the trail when someone comes down off the hill and hits me in the shoulder, sending me flying

5-10 feet," Evasko recalled.

The impact knocked the wind out of her and she said her nose began bleeding as she hit the ground. All she saw of the vehicle was it pulling away from the scene.

"All I saw was taillights," she said. "It looked like it was maybe a dark SUV, but I don't know, I thought I was bleeding to death."

Evasko said another vehicle stopped to help after

seeing her lying on the side of the road, but the suspect was nowhere in sight.

Mon EMS responded to the accident and transported Evasko to the hospital, where she was treated for several severe injuries.

"It resulted in two lacerations on my skull, which I had to have 13 staples, a broken collar bone, which I now have to have surgery on, and six broken ribs on my left side

and one on my right," Evasko said. "I have not been able to get back to work since and I am running out of funds."

Monongalia County Chief Deputy Mark Ralston said investigators have not received any new information or identified a possible suspect, but the investigation is ongoing.

Being that it has been almost a month since the incident, Evasko is feel-

ing some frustration and is hopeful someone will still come forward with information.

"I wanna get it out there," she said. "Somebody knows something."

Anyone with information on the vehicle or driver that may have hit Evasko is asked to contact the Monongalia County Sheriff's Office at 304-291-7260.

TWEET @DominionPostWV

HOUSE

Bill to make employment, training program mandatory for SNAP users

BY BRAD McELHINNY

WVMetroNews.com

Delegates are advancing legislation to require work training for most recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in West Virginia.

House Bill 3484 has a range of exceptions, including for parents caring for small children, but generally it would make the employment and training program mandatory rather than an option for SNAP recipients. Recipients already working or in

school would be among the exceptions. The policy would apply to recipients over 17 and under age 60.

The House Government Organization Committee advanced the bill Monday afternoon.

Kent Nowvickie, deputy commissioner of the state Bureau for Family Assistance, told committee members that when recipients are interested in the option of an employment and training program, they have greater success. "So we've been trying to work with clients to promote the

benefits of participating in this program, but mandating it may have a different effect," Nowvickie said.

Testimony indicated that making the program mandatory would result in a significant cost increase — generally, putting 40,000 people into a program currently operated on a budget of about \$600,000. But there was no fiscal note, and an attempt to refer the bill to the House Finance Committee was tabled by a vote of a majority of Government Organization Committee members.

"Our budget for the program is miniscule. This year we got \$600,000 from the federal government in administrative funds to operate the program," Nowvickie said, adding that the costs of making the program mandatory would not be covered fully by federal funding.

"And so, that would be a significant outlay of state dollars that we would have to use."

Delegate Kayla Young, D-Kanawha, followed up on that financial question.

"So would you be able to

help people more or less with the same amount of money but way more people?" she asked.

Nowvickie said the agency probably would have to change its approach.

"We would probably have to change what we're able to do for clients with the program and look at something like making the only component of the program that qualifies into something like supervised job search, which is a little less than we're able to do for these clients now," he said.

The administrative costs

of implementing a mandatory program would grow significantly, Nowvickie later said.

"This would require a significant outlay of state dollars," he said. "So we would have to do a lot of systems changes, build functionality into our eligibility system to operate this program. That would be at a 50% federal-50% state match. I can't speak to what that would cost. I would just be guessing, but I would be pleasantly surprised if it was less than several million dollars."

STATLER COLLEGE

Winners of VEX competitions announced

WVU Today

For the first time, West Virginia University's Statler College of Engineering and Mineral Resources hosted the VEX Robotics Competition over the weekend. The event was sponsored by the Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering.

"We were thrilled to host the inaugural VEX competition at the College," said Julie Gruber, outreach coordinator for the Statler College. "The VEX Robotics Competition allows students to fully immerse themselves in engineering, creative problem solving, design and teamwork. We hope that these students will be inspired to become the next generation of engi-

neers and computer scientists in the state."

Students were given a challenge in advance and had to design, build, program and drive a robot to complete the challenge as best as they could. More than 50 teams comprised of hundreds of middle and high school students competed in a variety of bracket-style elimination tournaments.

Middle School Awards:

■ Team Steel Devils III from Bridge Street Middle in Wheeling won the excellence award and were crowned winners of the robot skills competition and one of the tournament champions.

■ Team Steel Devils VI from the same school were tournament champions and received the judges award.

■ Team Robo-Raiders from Triadelphia Middle School in Wheeling won the design award.

High School Awards:

■ Team Iron Patriots Mk. 1 from Wheeling Park High School in Wheeling won the excellence award and were crowned winners of the robot skills competition and one of the tournament champions.

■ Team Iron Patriots Mk. 4 from the same school were tournament champions.

■ Team You Spin me Right 'Round, Ravenswood High School in Ravenswood, won the design award.

■ Team The Valley Project from Spring Valley High School in Huntington, won the judges award.

"These teams, many of

which visited our campus for the first time, dedicated countless hours to designing robots to play this game," said Gruber. "While it takes a lot of trial and error, students left the competition with skills in coding and experience in perseverance, collaboration, and critical thinking."

Winners of the middle school robotics competition received Engineering Challenge Camp scholarships and winners of the high school competition received Statler College scholarships.

Winners from both divisions will also advance to the state robotics competition, with the ultimate goal of advancing to the world championships April 25-May 4 in Dallas, Texas.

FAIRNESS

SAGA lobbies lawmakers

Newsroom@DominionPost.com

The Sexuality and Gender Acceptance (SAGA) Initiative had its own booth Monday and lobbied for LGBTQ+ youth at the Fairness For All Lobbying Day event at the West Virginia State Capitol.

The organization was successful in expanding its reach through networking with numerous LGBTQ+, pride and youth aid organizations.

The SAGA Initiative plans on hosting and attending other LGBTQ+ community and activism events.

The SAGA Initiative provides Gender-Affirming Care Packages (GAC Packs) to transgender youth in West Virginia.

Gender-affirming items encompass chest binders and boxers for trans masculine people, and bras and tucking underwear for trans feminine people.

When ordering a GAC

Pack, youth throughout West Virginia can customize what items they receive based on their needs, selecting from a range of items, including chest binders, TransTape, boxers, padded bras, tucking underwear, perfume, cologne and shaving razors.

The SAGA Initiative provides GAC Packs at no cost and covers shipping and handling fees.

The SAGA Initiative is a nonprofit based in Morgantown. It is co-founded by Aaron Reedy, president; Lonnie Medley, vice president; and Colin Street, treasurer.

Those interested in receiving a GAC Pack may order one at thesagainitiative.org. Those who would like to learn more about the SAGA Initiative can find it on Instagram at @thesagainitiative or can send an email to the-sagainitiative@gmail.com.

TEACHER

FROM PAGE A-1

the committee the department will launch a similar but distinct program this fall for classroom paraprofessionals to obtain a certificate. Paraprofessionals are a step above aides, she said, with more training and more authority regarding teaching and supervising students.

The committee passed an amended version with

some additional requirements proposed by the bill's lead sponsor. The vote was not unanimous. It goes next to the full House.

HB 3035

HB 3035 creates the Grow Your Own West Virginia Pathway to Teaching Pilot Program.

The bill was multifaceted, addressing reading and math education, but a committee amendment

pared it down to just the Grow Your Own portion; committee counsel said the other aspects were already handled in separate bills moving through the system.

The three-year pilot program will provide a career path for those interested in education careers, starting from high school through a post-secondary degree. It will offer a dual-credit path to obtain an education degree after three years at an eligible institution, plus

apprenticeship opportunities in the field and a classroom residency during the last year of instruction.

The Department of Education will report on the program annually to the Legislature and the state schools superintendent will recommend whether the program should be continued after completion of the pilot.

It goes next to Finance.

TWEET @dbeardtdp

DESIGNS

FROM PAGE A-4

"I feel like it tends to be the small things, that don't get noticed, that I'm drawn to," she said. This includes things like moss (if you do check out her Instagram, look for the mossy rocks cup set), and small details on flowers.

Lately in the studio Stacy said she has been referencing a photo she took of a rhododendron flower fallen into a creek.

Stacy is getting her graduate degree in ceramics from WVU, but she hasn't left behind what she learned in the other part of her undergrad double major: When working with metal and gem stones to make jewelry, Stacy learned that some stones withstand very high temperature.

In some of her works she has embedded stones into the porcelain before firing it. "That's been a fun side exploration," she said. Next time I see her

work in person I'm going to go on a treasure hunt to see if I can find any of these intriguing experiments with embedded gemstones

Stacy said she will participate in shows in May, such as the WVU pottery sale and The Co-op's Mother's Day artisan market.

"I want my pieces to inspire people to make nature more of a priority in their life," she said, be it going for walks or bring-

ing flowers into their homes.

ALDONA BIRD is a journalist, previously writing for The Dominion Post. She uses experience gained working on organic farms in Europe to help her explore possibilities of local productivity and sustainable living in Preston County. Email columns@dominionpost.com

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Fish Fry!

St. John's will be having a Lenten Fish Fry on Friday, Feb. 24th from 5pm—7pm in St. John Parish Center!

The cost is \$12.00 for adults and \$6.00 for children 12 and under. You may dine in or carry out, there will be no call ahead orders. Be sure to invite your family and friends! Spread the word!

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