



Baseball

WVU takes
Big 12 title

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OBITUARIES

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Johnson, Mary

PUBLIC SERVICE

Blueprints: 60 years of getting foster kids where they live

BY JIM BISSETT

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FAIRMONT — Blueprints, the Washington, Pa.-based nonprofit that helps families across the region — foster kids, especially — is marking its 60th anniversary this month.

And while Emily Tannous, Hannah Hought and Lauren Stewart love a good celebration, work was still to be done for the staffers who make the Fairmont office in I-79 Technology Park run.

That's why — as they chatted with visitors who dropped in at their open house Friday — they were still working, working, working.

Laptops were buzzing, phones were chirping and the morning was full.

All the days at Blueprints are full, actually, said Lauren Stewart, who coordinates case-worker visits to the homes of the people who take in the kids, who, for the moment, have nowhere else to go in the Mountain State.

"We get attached to our families and our kids, especially," Stewart said. "You want their experiences to be positive."

Right now, in a state that has a population of 1.7 million people, give or take, there are more than 6,000 children and teens in foster care, according to numbers culled by the state Department of Health and Human Resources and other sources.

Compare those numbers to, say, Oregon, which charts close to 5,000 kids tended to by foster parents — among its more than

SEE KIDS, A-2

ROADS

DOH regional boss: I want to be a partner

District 4's Gaskins addresses MPO Policy Board

BY BEN CONLEY

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In what some may interpret as a sign of the apocalypse, a collection of local officials offered a round of applause Thursday as West Virginia Division of Highways District 4 Manager Earl Gaskins con-

cluded the latest stop on his mending fences tour.

Speaking before the Morgantown Monongalia Metropolitan Planning Organization Policy Board, Gaskins struck a very similar tone to the one taken in December, when he sat with leadership from the

city of Morgantown.

He explained that his career has been focused in the six-county district. He took over the leadership role in August.

"I didn't shoot to be the district manager, but the one thing I saw with the county being in

the weeds was, you know, we kept changing leadership, and every time we changed leadership, it affected everything. I've seen a lot of things happen that I really didn't..." Gaskins said, trailing off before finishing the thought. "I'm passionate about the department of highways, and I didn't like the way things were going, so I did

SEE PARTNER, A-2

COMMENCEMENT CONTINUES



Ron Rittenhouse/The Dominion Post

Parents and grandparents watch as WVU graduates and family are photographed Friday on Woodburn Circle. Graduation weekend continues with six separate ceremonies planned for today and Sunday

STATE

Law allows for better method to plug abandoned wells

BY DEREK REDD

For The Dominion Post

WHEELING — With more than 21,000 abandoned and orphaned oil and gas wells throughout West Virginia, state officials — concerned both with community safety and environmental protection — sought ways to make it quicker and easier to seal them.

A new law ceremoniously signed by Gov. Patrick Morrisey on Thursday will update oil and gas laws in the Mountain State to expedite the process of plugging those wells.

Morrisey gathered with local

officials at Wheeling's Heritage Port to sign House Bill 3336, which will take effect July 10. The new law allows operators to pierce the casings of abandoned and orphaned wells and fill them with cement without having to remove the well's central casing.

That's a change from previous state law, which required operators to remove most of the well's infrastructure before plugging — even if the casing was damaged or unsafe to remove.

As the people of Wheeling and the surrounding areas

know very well, abandoned and orphaned wells can pose a significant threat and safety risk and can potentially impact surface and groundwater drinking sources," Morrisey said. "So plugging these wells safely and effectively is critical to protecting these resources."

Morrisey mentioned a well near Warwood Marina that, when its pressure was released, forced the marina to close part of its parking lot and suspend operations until the state Department of Environmental Protection could come in and shut the well. DEP Secretary

Harold Ward said sealing that well cost \$185,000 and took months of collaborative and technical work to complete. Then, two Tyler County wells cost \$195,000 to seal.

"We were able to get those done," Ward said, "but that's \$400,000 for just three well-heads. So that lets you know the cost of what we're dealing with here."

West Virginia Del. Mark Zatezalo, R-Hancock, was the lead sponsor for the bill in the House. A hydrogeologist, he was approached to sponsor the

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