Judge tosses lawsuit targeting alumni center construction

By The Associated Press

MORGANTOWN -- West Virginia University's Alumni Association may rely on public funds, but that doesn't mean building its new $12 million center must follow the competitive bidding rules required of state agencies or subdivisions, a judge has ruled.

Monongalia County Circuit Judge Russell Clawges ruled summarily Wednesday in favor of WVU, the association and contractor March-Westin Co. in a lawsuit brought by labor unions.

The state Affiliated Construction Trades Foundation sued earlier this year, alleging the project should have been put out to bid.

Public funds partly support the association, the judge found, but the new center has been bankrolled largely by private gifts and donations.

"The ratio of these public funds compared to the total cost of this construction project renders the amount of public funding insignificant," Wednesday's ruling said.

Clawges also disagreed that the project qualified as a public improvement, which would require the association to ensure prevailing wages for construction workers. His ruling noted that the contract with March-Westin already includes a prevailing wage provision.

Clawges earlier refused the foundation's request to block construction pending the outcome of the case. The alumni association broke ground for the new center in June, and hopes to complete it by next fall.

"We're looking forward to continuing the building," spokeswoman Tara Curtis said Wednesday.

Foundation Director Steve White said his board has yet to discuss whether to appeal.

"I think the taxpayers lose," White said of the ruling. "They've lost protections at what they think is a public institution."
Lawmakers Look at Waivers, PROMISE as Loan Program

Report notes research, surveys when pointing out pros and cons of program

Story by Ann Ali

Operating the PROMISE scholarship as a forgivable loan program would cost four times as much per dollar than PROMISE as a traditional scholarship program, according to estimates from Community and Technical College System of West Virginia and West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission staff members.

Dennis Taylor, vice chancellor for administration with the state's CTCS and HEPC, provided a report on tuition waivers and student financial aid to an education subcommittee Nov. 27.

Taylor said the issue of tuition waivers rises during every legislative session, so the committees asked him to study waivers along with the pros and cons of possibly operating the PROMISE scholarship as a forgivable loan program, which could include stipulations for living or working in the state after graduation.

"If PROMISE loan forgiveness were based on a requirement that graduates live and work in West Virginia for a prescribed number of years ... it is probable that more graduates would remain in West Virginia after graduation," the report said. "But it is difficult to predict precisely how many because the availability of jobs for these graduates is of such importance."

The report said an alternative approach to PROMISE as a loan forgiveness program would be for students to perform a certain number of community service hours in West Virginia during college.

"From staff's perspective, converting PROMISE from a scholarship program to a forgivable loan program would dramatically change the nature of PROMISE," Taylor said. "Last January, a survey of the first class of PROMISE scholars showed significant numbers would not have accepted the award if it was a forgivable loan program."

The report said financial aid research suggests lower income and first generation college families are more likely than other groups to decline loans because of concerns about an ability to repay, so converting the scholarship to a loan would weaken the goal of the program -- to effect a culture change in West Virginia toward increased education attainment.

Taylor pointed out that in addition to increased cost, administering a loan forgiveness program requires significantly greater administrative resources because of it could include promissory notes, meetings with students, documentation to serve as the basis...
for forgiveness, requests for deferments and collection efforts for people who no longer live or work in West Virginia.

Taylor also broke down the business of tuition waivers for members of the interim subcommittee.

"A student's look at a tuition waiver is not a whole lot different from other scholarships and loans," he said. "The exceptions are for students who have scholarships that must be used for tuition and fees, for example the PROMISE scholarship, which might make them ineligible and not paying tuition also reduces a student's financial need.

"From a higher education institution's perspective, a tuition waiver is different from grants or loans ... because that money is available for the institution, and ... a waiver requires the institution to forego revenue that it otherwise would collect."

The report analyzed tuition waivers from academic year 2001 to academic year 2005.

Academic waivers accounted for 70 percent of those tuition waivers, and athletic waivers accounted for 12 percent. Taylor pointed out that West Virginia University funds its athletics tuition waivers through athletic revenue, so the institution retains that revenue.

The report also showed that during the 2000-2001 tuition year, 70 percent of tuition waivers went to in-state students. In the 2005-2006 academic year, 60 percent of tuition waivers went to out-of-state students. Taylor said the PROMISE scholarship is one factor in the split.

Taylor provided some recommendations for the Legislature to consider, including encouraging partial waivers. Institutions currently must abide by caps on the number of waivers to award, and even a partial waiver is counted toward that cap.

He also suggested the Legislature consider creating a scholarship pool and fund each award directly instead of mandating that institutions provide tuition waivers to various classes of individuals. Those may include currently mandated waivers for individuals who graduated from high school or obtained a GED while in foster care or children and spouses of Armed Forces members killed in action.
Biometrics continuing to play key role in area
I-79 Development Council chairman pushes high standards

By Jessica Legge

FAIRMONT — During an annual meeting Wednesday, the I-79 Development Council focused on successes in North Central West Virginia and the state and the important role of biometrics in the area.

“We have an awful lot to be thankful for along the I-79 Corridor,” Chairman Russ Lorince said during the event, held at the I-79 Technology Park Research Center in Fairmont. “We have a lot of talent in the region.”

Although West Virginia has a robust economy, the state has historically set the bar too low and needs to stop competing with itself, he said. If West Virginia sets higher standards and obtains the necessary resources, it will achieve further success.

Lorince said the I-79 Development Council is seeking public and private funding sources for the West Virginia Biometrics Initiative, a project council created to improve biometrics in the state. Mike Kirkpatrick, executive director of the Biometrics Initiative, gave a report of highlights from the past year.

The West Virginia Biometrics Initiative Web site, www.wvbiometrics.org, has received more than 1,000 visits since it was started in August. A newsletter, which is also on the Web site, is sent to companies every week and now has a worldwide audience.

“This is putting North Central West Virginia on the map as far as biometrics and identity management,” Kirkpatrick said.

He said the Biometrics Initiative is looking for businesses to complement existing companies in the area and has already gotten some interest.

Bob McLaughlin, I-79 Development Council president, said support from local companies is essential for these biometrics efforts.

“We do have a very solid foundation in the biometrics industry,” he said.

Larry Puccio, chief of staff for Gov. Joe Manchin, was one of the main speakers during the meeting Wednesday. He said the governor and his office have been actively promoting some of the state’s recent accomplishments.

Puccio reported that West Virginia’s unemployment rate is the lowest recorded in state history, and the economy grew 3.2 percent in the last year. He said the state also had record revenue rates in 2007.
“We believe that ... West Virginia is truly becoming business friendly,” he said. “We do think some great things have been done.”

Puccio pointed out several new economic development projects that have come to the region, including Northrop Grumman’s plans to establish a National Work Force Center in Fairmont. Although the state has made progress with economic development, West Virginia still has a lot of work to do and must fight to overcome challenges, he said.

“We are working every day to bring jobs to our state,” he said.

Daniel Bradley, president of Fairmont State University, provided information on the school’s recent successes.

“We’re trying to be the region’s university,” he said. “I think we’re on a roll.”

Bradley cited the merger of Fairmont State University and Pierpont Community and Technical College, NCA approval of the MBA program, student scholarship and other achievements. He also spoke about Fairmont State’s capital campaign that raised more than $8 million, its GEAR Up Grant, and Title III Strengthening Institutions Grant.

In recent years, the school has seen greater student success, more students at all levels, new faculty, and new and upgraded facilities, Bradley said. FSU is also involved in greater community outreach.

“Fairmont State is a wonderful asset in this region,” Lorince said. “It’s very clear that we have a dynamic educational institution there.”
West Virginia University officials have asked legislative auditors to check the books of the school's new Institute of Technology division.

WVU spokesman Bill Case said the request is part of a review of the various components of the state's flagship university, begun when President Mike Garrison took over last month.

But Case also noted financial and other problems at WVU Tech's Montgomery campus, highlighted at a Monday legislative interim meeting.

"There are some serious issues at Tech," Case said Wednesday. "Enrollment is an issue. High fixed costs are an issue."

The Legislative Auditor routinely reviews state agencies and programs. Its most recent audit of higher education institutions involved a review of food service programs at four other campuses in 2005.

WVU Tech officials were not immediately available for comment Wednesday, but Associate Provost Scott Hurst told lawmakers during the interim session that WVU Tech was losing money despite cost-cutting efforts.

With about 1,680 students, Tech became a division of WVU in July. It had been a regional campus of WVU since 1996, when the Legislature sought to keep the faltering school open.

Division status has allowed Tech to borrow $10 million on WVU's superior credit rating through a bond issue to renovate a residence hall and its student union. It has also merged its administration with WVU, and increased ties to that school's Morgantown campus.

"At the direction of the Legislature, we're investing in Tech," Case said. "We want to make sure we're doing that in a responsible way."

Take Back Tech, a group of concerned parents, former employees and spouses of former administrators, sued in June to block the merger. Among other complaints, the group says that Tech's main engineering program has fallen from fourth-best in the country to 45th.

Hurst told lawmakers Monday that Tech's core programs, particularly engineering, would stay at the Montgomery campus.
Geography Emerges in Distance Ed

If it’s been possible so far to paint a generalized picture of the online student — an adult starting a second career, for example, enrolled in a large institution such as the University of Phoenix — that’s only because the market for distance education hasn’t fully matured. Now, a new report suggests, that process is well underway.

As demand shifts to different age groups and students looking for specific types of programs, the era of “one size fits all” is coming to an end, argues a study by Eduventures, a research firm that provides advice and consulting services to its members in the online higher education market. Most notably, the idea that learning online renders geography irrelevant is challenged by trends in survey data.

Two-thirds of the 2,033 representative survey respondents — all interested in online education over the next several years — preferred to enroll in online programs located in their state, but only 47 percent had done so; the rest were enrolled in institutions located elsewhere. The report points to that finding as a signal that better-tailored programs and improved marketing could exploit a market demand for localized online education that hasn’t entirely been filled. Although Eduventures makes its full reports available only to paying members, charts provided to Inside Higher Ed point to a correlation between living in larger communities and a desire for online providers that are based locally.

The importance of geography is already clear in regulation. As an example, said Richard Garrett, a senior analyst at Eduventures and the author of the report, students in four states (Wisconsin, Nevada, Tennessee and Arizona) trigger “state licensure” even if they enroll in an out-of-state institution. There is also a gap between the expected jurisdiction of online colleges, he said, and the actual enforcement of the regulations.

As a result, it’s often difficult to separate the number of students within a particular state who are enrolled in online programs from those who are enrolled in a particular institution. Arizona, for instance, would register an unusually high enrollment because of the University of Phoenix, which serves students from across the country.

“I think the average school will primarily use online to serve the local population,” Garrett said in an interview.
But how will they serve their students (or their customers)? With a maturing market whose growth continues but at a slower pace, that’s potentially an open question. With competing online providers by definition equally available to prospective students, one possible direction is increasing specialization and tailoring programs to niche demands. Or, as Garrett suggested, colleges could concentrate on serving their local communities. Either way, it’s time to abandon the notion that “there is only one version of online,” he said, and for institutions to adapt their individual missions to craft their “own version of online.”

And while online education develops, the preferences of students are also up for grabs. While the greatest demand for 100-percent online education remains among people in middle age, the report found more growth among “traditional” students aged 18-24 (who make up the lion’s share of all students but only about 10 percent of online learners) and those over 55. At the same time, those who are not immediately receptive to distance education might not have any experience with online learning to begin with, Garrett said.

The following table tracks the preferences of 2,000 prospective postsecondary students for education that is entirely online:

**Changes in Demand for Online Learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>June 2006</th>
<th>September 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
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<td>35-44</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
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<td>45-54</td>
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<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A reluctance among potential students to embrace the concept of online education could also come from the way it’s often been marketed: as a convenience to busy adult learners with families and jobs. Much of the growth of online learning comes from people for whom the option is merely their second preference. If institutions start to move away from that definition of themselves, Garrett said, they might become more open to different kinds of students — for example, younger students who have fewer qualms about learning online.

“The online market is diverse; the online student is increasingly diverse,” he said.

― Andy Guess
Concord University’s Alert system online

By GREG JORDAN-Bluefield Daily Telegraph

ATHENS — Concord University has joined other institutions of higher learning in creating a new system that spreads the word quickly across campus when emergencies and problems occur.

The university recently set up a text messaging system which can alert Concord’s students, faculty and staff about emergencies, Tim Barnes, director of academic technologies said. Many students have cell phones, so anybody who has subscribed to the service can receive the alerts in seconds.

“We have approximately a third of the campus population that has signed up so far, which isn’t bad after being up for two weeks,” Barnes said Wednesday. “It’s an opt-in, opt-out situation.”

The system sends messages about police emergencies, non-police notices such as parking lot closings, and alerts about university closings and delays due to inclement weather, Barnes said.

“That’s really beneficial since some students come from as far as Oceana,” he said.

The new text messaging system is “completely independent of everything” at the university since it is housed off-campus, Barnes said. Messages can be still sent if power outages or other problems occur on campus.

Other institutions in and near Mercer County are considering text message alert systems of their own.

“Bluefield College is exploring the implementation of a text messaging service for crisis communication, a service that would reach students, faculty, staff, parents and other constituents instantly through text messaging,” Chris Shoemaker of Bluefield College in Tazewell County, Va., said

“We expect to complete our research phase, attempting to find the service that best meets our needs, and implement a solution sometime in the near future, hopefully by the spring of 2008,” Shoemaker said.

Across the state line at Bluefield State College, a text messaging system is among the alert systems being considered, said spokesperson Jim Nelson. The campus has only two entrances and seven buildings, making it easier to spread an alert, he said.
“We have an instant alert that makes every phone in the place blink,” Nelson said. Alerts can also be sent by all users e-mail, and the college is looking at an emergency pop-up system, he said.

Bluefield State also has floor monitors and evacuation plans for each building, Nelson said. Using sirens or loudspeakers to spread alerts across campus is being considered as well, he said.
University of Charleston President Ed Welch today named Charles Ryan dean of the university's new Graduate School of Business.

Ryan will oversee development of a curriculum, hire faculty and recruit students for the graduate school, which is scheduled to begin offering classes next fall. His appointment is effective Saturday.

The appointment follows Welch's June announcement that the university will develop a graduate school of business and locate it in the former Boll Furniture building in downtown Charleston. That announcement came shortly after a company established by Triana Energy founder Henry Harmon bought the building and donated the second floor to the university.

In late September an investment group led by Harmon acquired Charles Ryan Associates, the state's top advertising and public relations firm, which was founded by Charles Ryan 33 years ago.

Welch, Ryan, Harmon, and University Board Chairman Holmes Morrison talked about the developments late Tuesday.

"What is noteworthy about what the university is trying to do is, we want to enact a convergence between the needs and desires of the business community and the resources of academia," Welch said.

"We really want to have the Graduate School of Business serve the business community in a seamless way, so it's not a matter of just providing a technical education and producing widget operators," Welch said. "Nor is it a matter that we want to provide esoteric knowledge to people who will happen to go out into the business world.

"Rather, our vision is that our students will learn by working, by encountering real business decisions -- that business leaders should be a part of the faculty and the teaching enterprise and faculty members should be relating to business leaders.

"Charlie Ryan's successful leadership experience across West Virginia and beyond gives him both the personal knowledge to lead the program and the critical access to other business leaders needed to involve them and make the program successful."

Ryan said Welch first spoke to him about becoming dean shortly after Harmon's investment group bought Charles Ryan Associates.
"It was kind of out of the blue," Ryan said. "The concept was fascinating to me from the beginning. I was humbled, honored and gratified that Ed would consider me. The fact that Ed makes things happen really appealed to me."

Ryan said he also found it appealing that Harmon wants to have the school located within Harmon's corporate headquarters - "as a focal point for business, innovative thinking and a place to spawn new business. In my mind, that becomes a crucible of education and thinking we haven't had here before. How attractive that would be to students and businesses -- building a collaboration between the education and business communities."

Ryan views the graduate school as a business startup. "It needs a leader that will give it a profile, a business leader known throughout the state," he said. "I hope to articulate what the school is and hopes to be, and to provide the communications needed between the school, the business community and selected publics.

"I thought, 'What a beautiful, clean palette I have to work with,'" Ryan said.

"I look upon myself as a nontraditional choice to complement this effort," he said. "I will follow Ed's direction and the people at this table and try to create something that is exciting, unique and beneficial to everybody in the state. Henry has said that one of his goals is to help West Virginians create wealth. I believe that helping people participate in that is a blessing for me. Quite frankly, I can't wait to get started."

"We're delighted to have him here," Harmon said.

Harmon, a major underwriter of the university, was a member of the committee that planned the graduate school.

"One thing we were definite about was, we didn't want to replicate other programs," he said. "We wanted something to reflect the innovative nature of this school. So we were looking at putting together a program that will train the next generation of leaders. Charlie has demonstrated that he is a person who is very effective at doing that."

Morrison said that as chairman of the university's board for 13 years, "One of the things I look back on is, the business community and perhaps the university missed the opportunity to connect. We've never taken advantage of each other as we could. That's exactly what this does."

Welch said the Graduate School of Business will include the university's Executive Master of Business Administration program.

"Another major component of the graduate program will be a new master's program, a three-year Master of Science in Business, more intensive than an MBA," he said. "We're going to build it on the model of the pharmacy program, where there are prerequisites to admission. That means you may not necessarily have to be a college graduate to be admitted to the program -- you can be admitted because you demonstrate the skill, the knowledge necessary to be successful, and you've taken certain specified courses with great success."

Today's announcement was to be made at a press conference at the Geary Student Union Building.
In moves aimed at assisting Ryan and strengthening efforts to launch the new school, Welch also was expected to announce that:

* Richard Stull, dean of the School of Pharmacy, will assume additional responsibilities as Assistant Provost for Graduate Studies.

* Robert Bliss, chairman of the Herbert Jones Division of Business, has taken on additional duties as Associate Dean for the Graduate School of Business. Bliss will continue to coordinate the executive Master's in Business Administration program.
WVU Tech staying put, lawmakers assured

by The Associated Press

West Virginia University Institute of Technology remains in the red despite cutting costs, but state officials assured area lawmakers that its core programs will remain at the Montgomery campus.

The joint Legislative Oversight Commission on Education Accountability sought more details about the process by which the formerly independent school has become part of the state's flagship university.

"We are not going to move any of our programs anywhere," said Scott Hurst, WVU Tech's associate provost. "We're going to continue to grow out programs in Montgomery."

Hurst did not have figures on the school's losses, blamed both on capital improvement debts that predate the July merger with WVU and operating overruns.

But joining the WVU fold has allowed the school to rely on the larger school's superior credit rating to obtain $10 million through a bond issue, Hurst said. Those funds will help WVU Tech renovate a residence hall and the student union. The latter project includes a modern cafeteria for its nearly 1,700 students.

"That should be open by the time they return from Christmas break," Hurst said.

Delegate David Perry, D-Fayette and a LOCEA member, is among several area lawmakers who have expressed concerns about WVU Tech's future.

"We want to see that engineering will remain in Montgomery with the funds to make it the premier program it once was," he told Hurst.

Hurst said WVU Tech is seeking to reaccredit that and other core programs, while applying for accreditation for a new four-year program in computer engineering.

Perry also asked about reviving the school's defunct teacher education program, given the state's growing need for public school educators. Hurst said programs already offered by other schools suffer from a dearth of students.
"It would be another program that would be running under capacity and would be causing a financial drain," Hurst told Perry. "I don't think that it is at this time financially feasible."

Afterward, Perry said Monday's report on the merger was far better than the one presented by state officials in June, as mandated by the legislation that made Tech part of WVU. The alleged shortcomings of that earlier report is now the subject of a court dispute, Perry noted.

"Obviously, a great deal of collaboration has gone on between the campus in Montgomery and the one in Morgantown," Perry said.
Tech getting money, majors

By Tom Searls, Staff writer

West Virginia University Institute of Technology will see more money and some new academic areas of study in the near future, along with full support from WVU administrators, a Fayette County delegate said Monday.

Delegate David Perry, D-Fayette, said WVU has used the college’s bonding authority to gain $10 million for renovations on the Montgomery campus.

“The money was able to be obtained at a lesser amount,” Perry said of the bonding authority.

At the same time, WVU plans to add majors in criminal justice, computer technology engineering and athletic coaching.

Perry agreed with members of the Take Tech Back Committee that problems at the mainly engineering college that straddles the Kanawha-Fayette county line began more than 10 years ago.

“These things did not happen overnight,” the delegate said.

Less than two years ago, WVU officials and Gov. Joe Manchin agreed to move Tech’s engineering programs to South Charleston, but public outrage in the Tech community stopped that plan.

“I’m not sure this is the right way to go or not,” said Perry, who has spent his life working in public education. “I am sure it is an attempt to fix the problems.”

Without WVU’s financial help, Tech would have many more problems, he lamented.

WVU has agreed to spend $3.2 million to upgrade Tech’s engineering program, once considered one of the best in the East. So far, $900,000 has been spent, Perry said, with Tech’s program up for reaccreditation within the next year.

WVU has also picked up many of the administrative costs of Tech by absorbing some positions and “piggy-backing” others, Perry noted.

But a group representing the Take Tech Back Committee wasn’t satisfied. They were, in fact, angered that they were not allowed to speak at the legislative interim committee
hearing where lawmakers were updated on the progress of the WVU master plan for Tech.

“They didn’t explain the future of our school,” said Sonya Petry.

“WVU is gobbling us up and we’re fighting it,” said Gail Harlan, chairwoman of the group.

They called for reinstating teacher education majors at Tech, along with mining engineering.

“Based on projected teacher shortages, now is the time to reinstate the 4-year teacher education program with emphasis on mathematics and science,” Petry wrote in remarks prepared for delivery to committee members.

But Perry said that’s a hard major to sell currently. He pointed to small numbers of students with education majors at both WVU and Marshall University, the state’s two largest higher education institutions. Mining engineering, offered at WVU, is like a lot of other engineering programs across the nation with few students wishing to study it.

“It’s a changing market and Tech’s a changing institution,” Perry said.

More important in his mind, Perry said, is that he believes Manchin and WVU officials are ready to fund the renewal of the Montgomery campus, leaving all classes in Montgomery.

“I see this as the best shot in the arm,” he said.

Construction is ongoing at Montgomery to renovate Macklin Hall, a former dormitory, to be the computer technology engineering center and upgrading the student union.

“We’ve got to give the institution every opportunity to restore where it was,” Perry said.
State educators speak out

Officials: Modern world requires modern approach, global outlook

By NAOMI SMOOT/ JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

MARTINSBURG — A global economy could present new challenges for West Virginia’s educational system, according to public school administrators who gathered for a forum Monday at Martinsburg High School to discuss the effect a changing world will have on students and teachers.

“Public education in this country... is at somewhat of a crossroads,” said West Virginia Department of Education Superintendent Steve Paine, who told an audience that had gathered that teachers can no longer expect that they will be preparing students in the state to compete with children in neighboring states like Maryland and Pennsylvania.

Instead, those students must also be able to compete with students in India and China, he said.

Twenty-first century education, Paine said, requires teachers to build on existing successes.

While West Virginia’s schools have closed performance gaps and raised achievement standards for all of the subgroups monitored under the No Child Left Behind law in the last four years, an international educational gap is opening ever wider and needs to be addressed, Paine said.

But educating students for the future requires more than just addressing global needs, Paine said, adding increasing technology in the classrooms is also a must if educators hope to keep the attention of students.

Already though, both Paine and Berkeley County Schools Superintendent Manny Arvon agreed that teachers in Berkeley County are doing an outstanding job.

The success or failure of students depends on what happens in the classroom, Arvon said during his comments at the evening’s forum — one of seven being sponsored by the Berkeley County Democratic Association.

Arvon, like others who spoke, said teachers in today’s classrooms are attempting to prepare children for jobs in fields that do not yet exist. And this is being done in Berkeley County even in the face of numerous challenges.
Nearly 58 percent of educators in Berkeley County have been in the school system for five years or fewer, and are educating a growing student population, with roughly 3,800 new children entering Berkeley County’s school system this year alone, Arvon said.

Even in the face of all these challenges though, teachers were seeing successes. Eagle School Intermediate — a school inside the city limits with fourth- and fifth-graders from a variety of backgrounds — was ranked No. 1 in achievement in West Virginia recently, Arvon said. At the time of testing, nearly 90 percent of the school’s students were reading at mastery levels and were achieving goals set out by No Child Left Behind, with minority students at Eagle School on par with and outpacing the school’s white students.

“There’s no excuse. All students can achieve,” Arvon said of the accomplishment.

Still, more can be done to prepare West Virginia’s youth for higher education, said Shepherd University President Suzanne Shipley.

This year, 43 percent of Shepherd’s in-state students needed to take extra classes because they were not prepared for college-level courses in at least one subject area, and once they reach Shepherd’s college-level classes, they often have lower pass rates than their out-of-state counterparts, Shipley said. English courses registered a pass rate of 83 percent for out-of-state students and 77 percent for in-state students, while history courses saw a pass rate of 74 percent for out-of-state students and 68 percent for in-state students.

Graduation rates were no better. Nearly 44 percent of out-of-state students complete their educations within six years, compared to 40 percent of in-state students, she said.

Shipley said one way Shepherd is trying to address the issue is by ensuring that a new generation of highly qualified educators can soon enter the classroom. The school recently established a new masters of arts in teaching program to aid in this process, she said.
Forum: Schools drive growth

By BETH HENRY

SHEPHERDSTOWN — West Virginia is getting left behind in economic development by failing to attract its fair share of federal research funding, according to a speaker at an education and business forum held Monday in Shepherdstown.

Speaker Scott Sudduth pointed to the link between graduate research funding and increased economic development during the Gateway New Economy Council’s daylong forum, which featured five speakers and afternoon work sessions that discussed strategies to improve the region’s education systems and business climate.

Sudduth, a member of the Jefferson County Board of Education, serves as director of the Office of Federal Relations in Washington, D.C., for the University of California — the nation’s largest public comprehensive research university. Sudduth said that even though the Eastern Panhandle doesn’t have any large universities, the area’s higher education facilities can form cooperatives with larger schools such as West Virginia University. That would help jumpstart the region’s chances for attracting bright minds and successful high-tech businesses.

“The future is a knowledge-based economy, and West Virginia is losing in the race for federal research funding that helps stimulate that knowledge-based economic growth,” he said after completing his speech at Monday’s forum, which took place at the Clarion Hotel and Conference Center in Shepherdstown. “We need to strengthen resources across the state, and that means creating a center for excellence or a high-tech corridor here in the Eastern Panhandle.”

Sudduth said a number of federal agencies give millions of dollars in grant money to universities throughout the country each year, but West Virginia is getting left out. He said WVU’s medical school program, which has a Health Sciences Center for third- and fourth-year medical students, should be able to receive funding from the National Institutes of Health.

“It makes no sense to me that states like Arkansas and Puerto Rico receive three times the federal investment in medical research through NIH than the state of West Virginia, because our research facilities are not competitive,” he said.
Sudduth said he and other participants in the forum plan to encourage state legislators to focus on improving higher education and economic development, and therefore “embolden the state as well as the region — that’s the goal here today.”

Monday’s Gateway New Economy Council forum was called “A Pledge to Education/A Promise to Business,” and it attracted a variety of area educators, business leaders and government officials. Tim Pownell and Walt Pellish helped organize the forum, and they serve as Education Committee co-chairs.

Pownell said he hoped that everyone who participated would be able to think of ways that the Eastern Panhandle can utilize what the local education system already has at Shepherd University, Blue Ridge Community and Technical College, American Public University, Mountain State University and WVU’s medical branch.

“All our schools have a niche,” he said, adding that he would like area leaders to come up with ideas for using the schools to create more job opportunities. “We have a chance to make a difference.”

Other topics Monday included teacher recruitment, worker training and other business and education issues. In addition to Sudduth, other speakers were Suzanne Shipley, president of Shepherd University; Manny Arvon, superintendent of Berkeley County Schools; Bill Klingelsmith, training and recruiting manager of Quad/Graphics in Martinsburg; and Steven Paine, the state superintendent of schools.

The Gateway New Economy Council is a nonprofit organization of community leaders interested in building a balanced community life through new economic development. The council plans one or two forums each year. More information about the council is available at http://www.gnec.org.'
Giving New Meaning to ‘Program for Parents’

By Doug Lederman

Many community colleges have programs for parents — policies and tools for helping adult students balance child care and other demands of being a parent with the expectations of being a college student. But as two-year institutions have increasingly become a destination of choice for traditional age students, a small but growing number of the colleges have begun developing “parent” programs of a different sort: initiatives (of the type much more common at four-year colleges) to help the families of students both understand how to support their children, and draw boundaries so that students can make their way on their own. The community colleges are adding orientation sessions, informational Web sites, and other resources for parents — part of larger efforts to alter and expand student service operations to respond to the needs and demands of 18- to 24-year-olds.

“We’re being faced with the challenge of adapting a lot of our college policies to younger students — how that student thinks and operates, and understanding their culture,” says Beverly Walker, director of retention services at North Central State College, a two-year technical college in Mansfield, Ohio, that has added services for parents as the average age of its students has dropped precipitously from the late 20s to the early 20s in recent years. “In addition to worrying about our students’ children, now we’re having to deal with their parents.”

And sometimes they can be a handful to “deal with.” The already clichéd “helicopter parents” pops up in many a conversation about the parent programs that community colleges are developing, just as it does at four-year institutions. But while some two-year-college officials acknowledge that the programs for parents are designed in part to help professors and staff members play defense against intruding parents, preparing them to loosen the reins, most say the programs’ primary aim is giving well-intentioned fathers and mothers better information and tools to gently guide their children through the sometimes tough transition from high school to college.

Out of High School, Into Community Colleges

Enrollments of traditional age students are growing at two-year institutions, driven by the colleges’ lower tuitions and the comfort that many first-generation college students feel in staying close to home. That trend is just beginning to be evident in national data, as statistics prepared by the American Association of Community Colleges from information collected by the National Center for Education Statistics shows two-year-
college enrollment increases in all age categories under 30 and decreases or no growth in all age categories 30 and over between 2003 and 2005 (the latest available year).

If the trend is just emerging nationally, it is unmistakable at some individual colleges. Colorado’s Front Range Community College, which is getting a new program for parents off the ground, has seen the proportion of area high school graduates who enroll at the two-year institution climb by 1-2 percentage points a year in the last few years, to about 20 percent now. With that increase, says Kris Binard, dean of student services at Front Range, faculty and staff members at the college began reporting more and more inquiries from students’ family members. “We were hearing from a lot more parents who are a lot more demanding, wanting to know every moment, ‘How is my kid doing?’ ” Binard says.

In the initial stage of its new initiative for parents of students, the college added a parent component to its orientation program for new students. Students and their families meet together for the first segment, and then the students go out and “do their thing” with their peers. Meanwhile, college officials take a tour with parents, filling them in along the way on the information that federal privacy law allows the college to share (and not to share), what the academic cycle looks like, and campus offices to which parents might point their children when they run into different sorts of roadblocks.

Skagit Valley College, in northwest Washington, has had a program for parents for several years that Binard and other officials say they plan to imitate. (Others have had them even longer: California’s Palomar College, for instance, began its program about a decade ago, and now has hundreds of parents each year who attend its six parent orientations — five in English, and one in Spanish, says Diane McAllister, supervisor of the two-year college’s Access and Assessment Center.) The college began with a Web site, No Parent Left Behind, that contains a list of “10 things that every parent should know” and a guide to what student records a parent does and does not have access to (which contains the question: “Since I’m paying for my child’s education, why can’t I get a copy of his/her records?”) under the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, among other things.

Last spring, the community college worked with the local public schools and nearby universities to set up a parent information night for the families of prospective students, and this fall invited parents for the first time to new student orientation. About a third of participating students brought parents with them — “proof that we need to be responding in a more systematic way” to the needs and demands of parents, says Linda P. Woiwod, dean of students at Skagit Valley. “Parent academies,” designed to provide more in-depth information about the inner workings of key campus offices and processes, are next, Woiwod says.

**Mixed Feelings**

As is true of all college officials who deal with students’ parents — other institutions that have gone this route includes Metropolitan Community College in Missouri and
Maryland’s Harford Community College — two-year-college administrators are of two minds about their newest “clients.” Walker, of North Central State, counts herself among the guilty as part of a generation of parents who are arguably overinvolved in their children’s lives, including their educations.

“I have students come in for registration with their parents, and I start asking the student questions, and the parent answers,” says Walker. “I almost have to say to the parent, ‘I’m going to ask your son or daughter some questions now.’ We get used to doing that [when the kids are in elementary and secondary school], and we almost have to unlearn that and let our students go to college and learn the same things themselves. Our goal is to teach them how to be supportive without being overbearing.”

Binard, of Front Range Community College, agrees that “you are always going to have parents who are helicopters, or even bulldozers.” But over all, she says, “parents mean well — they want to know, ‘How can I help my child?’ ”

More typical than the parent who intrudes by answering questions meant for his or her child, Binard says, is the father she met with recently who wanted to know, “What can I do to help my student in this situation be more successful?” He didn’t want me to do anything for the student, but wanted to know what the resources were that the student might need,” she says. “So we try to answer their questions in that way: ‘If your student is getting a D in this class and is worried about not being able to do better, the withdrawal date is such and such.’ ‘Have them go to the advising office. Here’s the phone number.’

“Everything you read about retention says that the No. 1 person that many students go to for help is a parent,” Binard adds. “If we can make sure parents know what they need to know to help students, retention is going to be better. That’s what we all want.”

Given the large proportion of first-generation college students at many community colleges, some of the two-year institutions that have begun programs for parents are seeing an interesting side benefit. As Ohio’s Owens Community College transformed its original registration-based program for parents into Parent College 101, which travels to middle and high schools to help parents begin planning for their children’s college possibilities, the college has motivated the older generation, too, says Bill Ivoska, vice president of student services at Owens.

“It’s been so successful,” he says, “that the parents want to go to college, too.”
MU President Kopp visits Wayne High School

WAYNE, W.Va. -- Marshall University President Stephen Kopp visited Wayne High School on Monday afternoon to talk to students there about the importance of continuing their educations beyond high school.

The university president has made several similar trips to high schools this fall as part of an effort to try to reverse West Virginia's relatively low percentage of people with college degrees and to encourage students to consider attending Marshall.
U.S. Review of Accreditors May Produce a Showdown
Bush administration is expected to push colleges for more accountability

By PAUL BASKEN

Washington. A dispute over the federal agency charged with reviewing college accreditors may come to a boil at a key review session next month, when the waning Bush administration will have one of its highest-profile chances to try to force colleges to do more to demonstrate how well they help students learn.

The federal agency is scheduled to assess five of the six main regional accreditation bodies and decide if they deserve renewed recognition.

Some of the accreditors say the session has the potential to play out as a politically explosive showdown between the Education Department and the accreditors and colleges that have been seeking to take control of decisions about how institutions' performances are measured.

Earlier this year, the review agency, the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity, or Naciqi, penalized some smaller accreditors, like the Association of Advanced Rabbinical and Talmudic Schools, for failing to require their institutions to improve how they demonstrate their students' performances. Naciqi board members criticized the association for having insufficient data, like test scores, to measure student achievement at the colleges it accredits.

And now leading accreditors are worried that they may have to face the same sanctions.

"They're apprehensive, given the past several meetings," says Judith S. Eaton, president of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, an umbrella group of accreditors.

Since Margaret Spellings became education secretary almost three years ago, Naciqi has been stocked with administration appointees who have demanded that colleges use more measurements based on outcomes, such as graduation and job-placement rates, as opposed to using "inputs," such as the test scores of new freshmen. And now Congress, concerned by Naciqi's behavior, is considering whether to curtail the Education Department's authority to appoint all the members of the panel and will debate that as part of proposed legislation to renew the Higher Education Act.

At the crux of the dispute are questions of what the government should be forcing colleges to measure, who should get to define those metrics, and what accreditors should be doing to monitor institutions' quality effectively.
Throughout her tenure, Ms. Spellings has pushed for an emphasis on student outcomes. The Commission on the Future of Higher Education, which she appointed, questioned whether accreditors do enough to hold colleges accountable for their performances and suggested greater use of tests like the Collegiate Learning Assessment, which measures student achievement in reading, writing, and comprehension.

"Accreditation agencies should make performance outcomes, including completion rates and student learning, the core of their assessment as a priority over inputs or processes," said the commission's final report, issued in September 2006.

But some accreditors and college officials believe that Naciqi, in trying to carry out goals of the Bush administration, has been making demands on accreditors to overhaul their methods without the clear authority under federal law and without giving accreditors sufficient notice to prepare for the new standards.

Even though Congress has repeatedly moved to rein in Naciqi — and leading college associations themselves have agreed to provide more data on student achievement — that might not spare the nation's most-influential accreditors from one more battle, during next month's review session, over the degree to which U.S. colleges must prove the value they provide.

"I'm not sure they care what Congress is saying," Steven D. Crow, executive director of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools' Higher Learning Commission, says of members of the federal review panel. His group is one of the accrediting bodies due for renewal next month by Naciqi.

Naciqi members who were contacted by The Chronicle declined to comment on the record, citing the need to maintain impartiality in the midst of the debate over the agency.

"Since, as a Naciqi member, I am sitting in the middle of all that, I think I will have to take a pass," said Anne D. Neal, president of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, an outspoken critic of accreditors who was appointed to Naciqi this year.

**Tough Reviews of Accreditors**

Colleges need the endorsement of a federally approved accreditor for their students to remain eligible for government-subsidized financial aid. So Naciqi's push to have accreditors take a more critical look at how well colleges are serving students is crucial for the institutions.

So far the agency has taken that stance mostly with smaller accreditors like the American Academy for Liberal Education and the rabbinical and talmudic schools' group. Both groups failed to win Naciqi's endorsement for full, unconditional renewals of
their accrediting authority in the past year, with Naciqi demanding more evidence of student-performance assessment.

But at the federal agency's most recent review session, in May, the panel indicated that, at least in some cases, it is also willing to take a tougher position with more-prominent accreditors. It voted against extending the accrediting authority of a division of one of the nation's six main regional accreditation bodies, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges' Commission on Technical and Career Institutions. Naciqi's complaints included the group's poor record of measuring student learning.

The five top accreditors up for review in December are North Central's Higher Learning Commission, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges' Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges' Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' Commission on Colleges. The last group is due for a follow-up review at the session, after it was criticized in June 2006 by Naciqi on a series of matters, including the need "to more clearly define what SACS itself considers acceptable levels of institutional success with respect to student achievement."

The sixth major group, the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools' Commission on Higher Education, won Naciqi's endorsement for a five-year renewal this year.

**Accreditors Plot Strategy**

The six major associations, through their Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions, have been debating how they should respond to what may come their way at the December review, said the council's chairwoman, Barbara A. Beno. Ms. Beno is also executive director of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges' Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges.

The associations scheduled for review in December have received initial written reports from Naciqi setting out the expected areas of discussion, and none appear to seek broad changes in how much the accreditors focus on student assessments, Ms. Beno said.

But that is not necessarily reassuring, accreditors say, since Naciqi members often introduce such issues during the actual review sessions, or in final reports issued just days beforehand.

The division of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges that accredits four-year colleges, for instance, received its final status report only about three days ahead of its Naciqi review in December 2006, Ms. Beno said. That report set out a series of new questions on its policies for monitoring student achievement. The representatives of the accreditor nevertheless managed to win the agency's approval.
"They sort of took a due-process line of argument, and they were successful in showing the department both that they do a lot of monitoring and that the feedback that they got was inappropriately late," Ms. Beno said.

The Education Department has promised to deliver Naciqi's final reports earlier than it has in the past for the December meeting, at least a week before, Ms. Beno said.

Mr. Crow remains skeptical that Naciqi has changed its recent approach. Several panel members have shown themselves to be determined to fault accreditors for not doing enough to measure outcomes, such as student scores on standardized tests, he said.

"Naciqi has become a spectator sport," Mr. Crow said, "because you never know what may happen at any given Naciqi meeting, and you never know what may be the new agenda of the day."

**Congress Weighs In**

Colleges and their accreditors have been helped by Congress. Ms. Spellings abandoned an effort to rewrite rules governing accreditation this year after lawmakers from both houses and both parties, led by Sen. Lamar Alexander, Republican of Tennessee, protested on behalf of the colleges. The lawmakers argued that Congress, rather than Naciqi or others in the Education Department, should take the lead role in defining how colleges should measure student achievement.

Lawmakers are also debating a proposal in the legislation to extend the Higher Education Act that would give colleges primary responsibility to develop the measures of learning that their accreditors would use to judge them. That provision is included in the Senate version of the bill but was struck from the House legislation in committee this month.

Congress also appears intent on limiting in other ways the department's ability to dictate how colleges' performances are assessed. The House bill includes language that says measures of student achievement should be considered "in relation to the institution's mission, which may include different standards for different institutions or programs, as established by the institution." The version of the bill approved by the Senate contains similar language.

Both the House and Senate versions would also revamp Naciqi by giving Congress the right to select the majority of the review panel's members in order to limit the ability of the president to push his agenda on accreditation. The administration now names all 15 members.

The House version of the bill would also give colleges and accreditors an extra layer of protection against demands from Naciqi by creating a federal "accreditation ombudsman" who would try to resolve any complaints involving accreditation. The
ombudsman, according to the House bill, would also collect data on such complaints and issue an annual report containing recommendations for corrective actions.

**One Last Chance**

Naciqi, however, still gets at least one last chance at its meeting next month to make its mark on accreditation before any reforms could take effect, which leaves accreditors worried.

Part of the reason they are worried, Mr. Crow says, is that the federal agency's zeal for change appears to come from Secretary Spellings herself.

At the public event last year at which she received the final report from her Commission on the Future of Higher Education, Mr. Crow said, the secretary looked straight at some of her Naciqi appointees and said she expected them to help her carry out the commission's recommendations.
Bethany College President G.T. ‘Buck’ Smith Retires

By LINDA COMINS

BETHANY — Bethany College officials honored retiring President G.T. “Buck” Smith on Monday and announced the creation of the Buck Smith Center for Global Initiatives on campus.

Speaking at a reception in Commencement Hall, Wheeling native Gregory B. Jordan, chairman of Bethany’s board of trustees, said initial funding for the center is a $1 million gift from a Bethany trustee and his family. Jordan said the trustee’s name will be released after additional details of the fund are worked out.

Bethany trustees, faculty, staff and alumni attended the reception honoring Smith and his wife, Joni. Smith, 71, will be succeeded by Scott D. Miller, 48, who will become Bethany’s 19th president, effective Jan. 1.

Jordan said the Center for Global Initiatives is being launched because “our students need to be better connected with the world.” He said Smith will become the chief fundraiser for the new center and will work to develop initiatives to encourage Bethany students to become “better citizens of the world.”

The board chair lauded Smith for his three and one-half years of service to the college.

“He (Smith) has, through his leadership, positioned us to have the bright future we all want to have,” Jordan said.

Jordan recalled in April 2004, when Bethany was relying on a 10-percent draw from its endowment income and morale on campus was low, “we needed someone to lead us where Bethany has been.” He said, “A one-man cavalry rode into town” and began connecting to people, talking and listening to everyone.

“Buck Smith had time for everyone,” Jordan said. “The best thing he does well is connect with people.”

At Bethany now, fundraising has increased 85 percent, the freshman class is 20 percent larger than a year ago and Bethany’s draw on its endowment income is down to 5 percent, which is in the range of “best practices for small colleges,” Jordan noted.
The Pittsburgh attorney remarked he has “learned and unlearned” from Smith. Noting by his own choice, Smith’s salary from Bethany has been only $1 a year, Jordan said, “Sometimes in life you don’t get what you pay for — you get a whole lot more. Bethany College certainly did.”

In response, Smith said, “This has been my privilege, not a responsibility, not an obligation.” He recalled many years ago, as he worried about a particular responsibility, his wife, Joni, said, “It really isn’t your responsibility; it’s your response to God’s ability.”

Smith thanked his family for “the freedom and neglect of them” that accepting the Bethany position entailed and, noting his wife’s presence, said, “I am glad that she was able to join me in these final months.” He said his wife’s health necessitated a move from Cleveland to Arizona 35 years ago and they thought she would never be able to live in the East again. Her recovery, he remarked, is an example of “God’s ability coming through once more.”

Smith also told the audience, “I owe a great deal to all of the people in this room. I didn’t do this. We did this.” For the first time, he publicly thanked Ralph Robinson, the Bethany groundskeeper who inspired the college’s current catchphrase, “Permission to Dream.”

The retiring president concluded his remarks by drawing on the words of Alexander Campbell, Bethany’s founder and first president, to the 1860 graduating class. He said Campbell suggested the proper field of human action is “the exercise of kindness, of compassion, of tenderness, of benevolence and generous sympathy” for humanity.
Skilled workers hard to find in southern counties, panel hears

By Mannix Porterfield, Register-Herald reporter

CHARLESTON — Finding skilled workers is a major hurdle for manufacturing companies seeking hired hands in southern West Virginia, a legislative panel learned Monday.

Jim Skidmore, chancellor of the Community and Technical College System, told the Legislative Oversight Commission on Workforce Investment for Economic Development, he learned of the problem after surveying 588 manufacturers.

The research focused on job requirements and the type of positions expected to come available in the next three to five years.

“We read in the newspapers that the number of manufacturing jobs is decreasing, and they are,” he said. “But the demand for higher skilled jobs continues to increase.”

To meet that demand, Skidmore said the CTCS is eyeing programs that designed to provide the work force in major areas.

After discussing the situation with the Development Office, Skidmore said it was apparent that some problems exist in Beckley, Princeton and Bluefield in attempting to attract firms due to the lack of a skilled work force.

One means of dealing with this is to locate training centers inside the plants, possibly by according them some tax breaks and incentives, Skidmore said.

Ron Radcliff, director of the Workforce Investment Division, raised another issue — a difficulty in keeping tabs on Promise Scholarship graduates to fill available jobs and keep them in West Virginia.

“That’s the underlying premise of Promise Scholarship, isn’t it?” asked Senate Judiciary Chairman Jeffrey Kessler, D-Marshall, who suggested the law might need to be tweaked.

Radcliff suggested that Promise Scholarship users be given the option of signing a waiver that would allow personal data to be passed on to potential employers looking to hire graduates.
Skidmore said the use of Social Security numbers with the Bureau of Employment Programs might be an option.

“Now, in giving out names to companies, I think there are some security issues there,” he suggested.

Chairman Brooks McCabe, D-Kanawha, asked that the panel counsel look into the legal aspects of companies contacting Pro-mise Scholarship graduates.

Skidmore said talks are needed to determine the ground rules if a company seeks to offer internships, since these temporary jobs often lead to full-time employment.

“I’m sure we can work it out,” he said.