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Fourth-quarter spark leads FSHS past Raiders

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TIMES WEST VIRGINIAN



Fairmont leaders 'moving forward'

Year marked by changes in key positions in city

BY EMILY GALLAGHER
TIMES WEST VIRGINIAN

FAIRMONT — As 2015 comes to a close, Fairmont officials are reflecting on the year as well as looking forward to what's to come in 2016.

"2015 went great," Mayor Ron Straight said. "We had our glitches, but it was a good year."

The year brought changes in positions around the city. With the naming of a mayor, appointment of a new police chief and a new city planner and the hiring of a city manager, 2015 gave several positions new faces.

In January, Straight was voted in as mayor of Fairmont with a 5-3 majority vote from council.

That was the start of the changes around Fairmont.

In June, former city manager Jay Rogers resigned from his position with the city. City clerk Janet Keller was named interim city manager until Robin Gomez was hired and started as city manager in December.

In July, former police chief Kelley Moran retired from the force. Steven R. Shine, who has been with the Fairmont Police Department since 1995, was named police chief to replace Moran.

In August, Mark Miller took over as city planner after Kathy Wyrosdick put in her resignation.

Although each change was significant for the city, during the five-month period between Rogers' resignation and Gomez's start as city manager, Straight said the city went through "trying times" but was able to get through it.

"I can't commend the city employees enough who stepped up to the plate and did what they had to do," he said. "That's what kept us afloat, and it took everyone to get on board."

Within that time, Fairmont City Council approved ordinances putting home rule in effect and creating a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district.

The home rule ordinance was approved by council in September, nearly a year after Fairmont was selected to participate in the program. In October 2014, the city was selected as one of 16 municipalities to be folded into the state's home rule pilot program.

The program allows selected municipalities to have a little more freedom from state code restrictions to prosper, develop better services and improve the economic conditions in their city. Fairmont's plan focuses on job creation, vacant and blighted properties and long-term liabilities.

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2015 YEAR IN REVIEW

PART 1



(Editor's note: The following story represents the major news and sports events of the first half of 2015. The second half of the year will be featured in Thursday's Times West Virginian.)

New leaders, trials, championships highlight first half of 2015

FAIRMONT — There was good and bad that came from 2015, like any other year.

There were a lot of changes in the Marion County area, especially in leadership at universities and municipalities. There were a lot of arrests for drugs. There were a few big trials and lawsuits that caught the attention of the public, especially the lawsuit that pitted Manchin brothers against one another, which was eventually dropped later in the year, and the criminal charges brought against ex-Massey CEO Don Blankenship for the 2010 explosion at Upper Big Branch mine.

But there was a lot of celebration, too. There were a lot of accomplishments in local high school sports, and championships were won.

The first half of the year was jam-packed full of news, and here are just a few of the stories that made headlines:

Jan. 1 — Isaac Franklin Erdie, 25, of Fairmont, and Courtney N. Gibson, 18, of Morgantown, are arrested in a Fairmont home after deputies come to serve a warrant and discover more than 10 marijuana plants and prescription pain pills not belonging to Erdie or Gibson.

The state of West Virginia eliminates the business franchise tax. This is just one step of many in an effort to improve the business climate throughout the state.

Jan. 2 — Marion County Sheriff's Department Chief Deputy Ralph Wright and Cpl. Matt Love travel to Quantico, Virginia, to be certified to disable clandestine meth labs.

Avery Dawn Skelley, 6 pounds and 2 ounces, is born at 2:25 p.m. to be the first baby of the new year born in Marion County.

Jan. 3 — The Times West Virginian kicks off the seventh annual Gift of Love food drive to benefit food pantries in Marion County.

Jan. 6 — WVU names Shane Lyons as athletic director and associate vice president of the school, replacing Oliver Luck just three weeks after his departure.

Two to four inches of snow falls, causing the first snow day for Marion County Schools for 2015.

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Mine layoffs plagued West Virginia in 2015.



Changes to SNAP take effect Friday

Recipients required to be employed, in training for set number of hours

BY KELSIE VANDERWIJST
TIMES WEST VIRGINIAN

FAIRMONT — Changes to the West Virginia Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) guidelines for the new year will take effect Friday in Marion County.

SNAP is the food assistance program for eligible low-income individuals and families. It also provides economic benefits to communities in the state. The program is administered in West Virginia by the Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR) and governed by federal law and regulations of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Services.

Eight other counties that will be affected are Berkeley, Cabell, Harrison, Jefferson, Kanawha, Monongalia, Morgan and Putnam.

This change was headed by the federal government in October, but gave the state some extra time.

The changes were added to the guidelines because the statewide waiver expires Thursday.

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Coal industry on track for record low in mining deaths

BY DYLAN LOVAN
ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Amid layoffs and idled operations, the U.S. coal industry is close to setting a record low for on-the-job deaths in coal mines.

In late December, there were 11 deaths in coal mines nationwide for the year, putting the industry on track to best the record low of 16 set in 2014.

Pennsylvania is leading the nation with three deaths, the most in that state since 2008.

If the numbers hold, it would be the first time since 2009 that West Virginia did not record the nation's most coal mine fatalities. So far, West Virginia has had just two mining deaths, tied with Kentucky and Illinois, which had the most recent on Dec. 8. An equipment crash underground at the MC

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DEATHS

Peggy Burnett
Patricia Scritchfield
Josephine Trotta
Sarah Utzie
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EXTRA POINTS

Dalton Michael

Dalton Michael is a senior wrestler at East Fairmont High School who celebrated his 18th birthday Tuesday. The son of Doug and Nicki Michael, Dalton grew up in White Day and plans to study forestry and wildlife technology after high school. When he's not playing sports, Dalton is a social person who likes to hunt and fish. — Page 10B



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