

IT'S ABOUT TIME!



Winter’s grip finally eased on the Kanawha Valley and allowed the colors of spring to brighten our surroundings, including the front of DEP headquarters in Charleston. Judee Weese, who works in the building’s lobby, said visitors often comment on the landscaping’s beauty.

Office of Oil and Gas

Oil and Gas office has been big part of new deputy chief’s past

By Tom Aluise

Jason Harmon isn’t certain what challenges are ahead as he begins his new role as the deputy chief of the DEP’s Office of Oil and Gas.

“I’m sure there will be a little bit of everything,” he said. “I’m just excited for the opportunity to help.”

Harmon, who’s been with the agency’s Division of Water and Waste Management since 2010, will have plenty to do as the OOG strives to keep pace with the natural gas drilling boom in West Virginia.

And he’s not exactly coming into the position green.

Harmon, who has a Ph.D. in organic chemistry, has spent the past few years evaluating and approving water management plans that are included in well work permits for



New Office of Oil and Gas Deputy Chief
Jason Harmon has had a hand in reviewing drilling permits for several years.

horizontal oil and gas wells using large volumes of water in the drilling process.

“Oil and Gas has been a big part of everything I’ve done in the Water Use

See **OFFICE**, Page 6

Bandy on board as new EE chief

By Tom Aluise

Jeremy Bandy has received plenty of on-the-job training for his new position as chief of the Division of Water and Waste Management’s Environmental Enforcement Section.

And not all of it was at the Department of Environmental Protection.

Bandy worked

several years as a store manager at Save-A-Lot locations in Gauley Bridge and Oak Hill.

He persevered through 60- to 80-hour work weeks while attending college full time, and learned plenty about managing people and dealing with the public.

Bandy, no doubt, will be tasked with those same responsibilities in his new role with EE. He took over EE’s staff of roughly 100 employees on April 1.

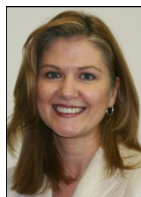
“You learn how to deal with people and how to communicate with people,” Bandy said of his tenure in retail management. “You learn how to plug holes when they pop up and understand the importance of having a game plan for what to do next.”

Bandy, a resident of Summersville, and a Fayette County native,

See **CHIEF**, Page 3

Transparency important for agency

Kelley Gillenwater joined the DEP in March as the agency's communications director. A native of Clay County, she formerly



Gillenwater

worked in internal communications for American Water and external communications for West Virginia American Water. The Marshall University graduate

also spent 10 years as a reporter for the Associated Press. Kelley lives in Culloden with her husband, Marty, and 9-month-old daughter, Piper.

1. Can you describe what you believe the DEP's basic communications philosophy should be?

I've followed the DEP for some time and have always found the agency to be very proactive about sharing information that would be of interest to the public. I want to see us continue that practice because I feel that as a government agency, we owe it to the people of West Virginia to be as open and transparent as possible.

2. Why is it important for our agency to have an open line of communication with the media?

We have an important mission at the DEP — to promote a healthy environment. That's a big



With Kelley Gillenwater

job and one we can't do alone. We need the media's help in getting the word out about how the public can help.

3. What are the best ways to let the public know about all of the good things the DEP does?

In addition to communicating through the media about all the good things the DEP does for the environment and through environmental education, it's important that the public sees us out and about. I think it's great that agency employees are so active in litter cleanups, presentations to schools and various organizations and taking part in community forums. Also, our in-house TV show "Environment Matters" is a great educational tool for the public and employees alike. Because employees are often asked by family members, friends and neighbors about different projects the department is involved in, I want to look for other ways to keep those employees better

informed about those projects so they can help spread the word. We're already doing a great job of that through the monthly newsletter and with the TV show, but I think we can build on that already strong platform with a more interactive intranet site, the development of a system to relay important and relevant information to employees as events happen, and coordination of all of these efforts through a new communications strategy.

4. How will your experience working for West Virginia American Water help you in your current position with the DEP?

My two years with West Virginia American Water and another three with the utility's parent company, American Water, have certainly helped me better understand the water company's position related to the recent Freedom Industries spill. I also understand much of the lingo and the processes associated with the water and wastewater industry, which is a big help. Also, because the water utility prides itself on being a "steward of the environment," I learned quite a bit about water conservation and other green efforts and have a real appreciation for how imperative environmental protection is.

See AGENCY, Page 10



Photo by Sandy Rogers

Traveling Earth Day

Because of time missed due to snow days and the water crisis, area schools were not able to commit to attending the Department of Environmental Protection's annual Earth Day celebration at the Clay Center. The event had to be cancelled, but DEP staffers were not deterred. A group of DEP employees took Earth Day on the road and visited Ramage Elementary in Boone County (above) and Rock Branch Elementary in Putnam County.

DEP awards ceremony set for May 28

The West Virginia DEP's annual Environmental Awards ceremony is scheduled for 1:30 p.m. on May 28 in the Coopers Rock Room.

The awards recognize the accomplishments of state industries, municipalities, educators and community leaders who strive to protect the environment, work to be good corporate neighbors and educate the state's citizens.

The awards are presented to those who share in the DEP's mission of promoting a healthy environment and practice environmental stewardship.

Twenty-one winners will receive awards this year.



ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

Travis Parsons, from the agency's Abandoned Mine Lands program, was investigating an acid mine drainage issue near the Witcher Creek area of Kanawha County when he couldn't help but notice some strange graffiti plastered on the side of a storage building. "I laughed pretty hard and thought, 'I've got to get a picture of that.' I figured it would get some laughs from folks when they saw it.

"Being in the field, looking for old AML problems, you come across a lot of funny and interesting things you wish you could share with others," Parsons said. "Most of the time, you're by yourself, so a picture is the only way to let others know what you've experienced. However, a picture doesn't really convey the full context of the surrounding area." Parsons didn't run across Pee-wee Herman on Witcher Creek. But, he did sink to his knees in drainage behind the building. "Muck boots don't do any good at that point," Parsons said. **Got an interesting photo from the field that you'd like to share? Send it to: Thomas.J.Aluise@wv.gov**

CHIEF

Continued from Page 1

has been with the DEP for 13 years, all on the inspection and enforcement side of DWWM. He has risen through the ranks and succeeds Mike Zeto in a position Bandy said he is still trying to digest.

"There are a lot of quality people in EE who I have a lot of faith in."

Jeremy Bandy
New chief of Environmental Enforcement

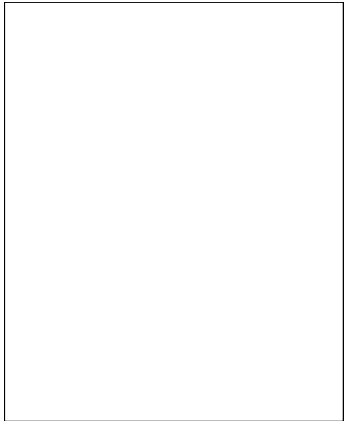
"There are a lot of extra phone calls and putting out fires, along with the day-to-day duties," he said. "And while I'm trying to get this job done, I'm also trying to figure out how to get things done in my former position until we get that job filled." As for formulating that game plan, Bandy said, "I

have a lot of ideas floating around in my head, but I'm not going to make any big decisions without input from others. "There are a lot of quality people in EE who I have a lot of faith in. It's a big relief to know you have people you can depend on already in place here." Bandy, who is married with two young daughters, spends much of his free time coaching soccer. He also has a black belt in karate and, until recently, taught classes in the sport.

This Boston Marathon was not about finish for runner

By Tom Aluise

To say you participated in the historic running of the 2014 Boston Marathon, one year after the horrific finish line bombings, should be enough to satisfy any runner, even those who fell short of their individual goals. Rich Boehm is the perfect example. Last year, the Division of Air Quality inspector was running in his first Boston Marathon and was a half-mile from the finish line when the race ended abruptly following the bombings. Because he didn't have the opportunity to complete the marathon, Boehm was invited back for the 2014 run on April 21.



The DAQ's Rich Boehm is pictured with his niece, Malia Kearns, who has spina bifida. Boehm's goal this year was to run the 26.2 miles in under 3 hours and 30

See BOSTON, Page 7

indepth

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Employees recognized



Employee of the Month

Karen Hanson, Office of Administration, was recognized as the December Employee of the Month.

Karen is always extremely helpful for whatever assistance is needed — whether it falls within her job duties or not. Anyone who has dealt with her has only good things to say about the great customer service she provides.

Her extensive knowledge of both FIMS and the agency as a whole gives her the ability to help people with a wide variety of issues. She has been very involved in the OASIS project, which is of great benefit to the agency.

She is one of the first to volunteer to assist with activities that help boost employee morale, both agency-wide and for the Office of Administration. In her day-to-day duties, she demonstrates the true meaning of central support.



Rewards and Recognition

Doug Hammell, Division of Air Quality, was honored with a Reward and Recognition Award.

Doug is dependable, dedicated, flexible, conducts himself in a professional manner, and accepts challenges for additional work, such as willingly taking on additional site inspections. He demonstrates great patience when dealing with concerned citizens and communicates well the requirements of state rules.

He volunteers on DAQ's outreach team that promotes a healthy environment by giving presentations and providing educational materials to kids and adults at various locations across the state.

He volunteers for Adopt-A-Highway cleanups around the Kanawha City headquarters and promotes a good working relationship with his co-workers and, in general, makes DEP a better place to work.

Youth Environmental Program

Youth Day celebration set for May 17

By Colleen O'Neill

And the award goes to...

"I love that day," said Diana Haid.

She was speaking about Youth Environmental Day, sponsored by the DEP's Youth Environmental Program (YEP).

As director of the program, Haid knows firsthand what the day represents.

"It's a day to honor youth groups and adults for their stewardship regarding the environment," she said. "We present more than \$15,000 in awards to deserving youth groups — those who have actively worked to restore and protect our environment, whether it is through litter and tire cleanups, recycling paper, cans, or used clothes, or planting trees or flowers for beautification.



Judges work hard to select award winners for this year's Youth Environmental Program Youth Day, scheduled for May 17 at North Bend State Park in Cairo.

Typically more than 1,000 kids attend Youth Day.

This year's celebration is scheduled for May 17, at North Bend State Park in Cairo, Ritchie

County. Because many groups travel great distances, a weekend celebration is planned.

See YOUTH, Page 7

From the DEP Safety Committee

Spring clean with safety in mind

It's time for spring cleaning. Unfortunately, most people don't realize that improperly disposing of certain leftover household products presents environmental hazards. Products that contain corrosive, toxic, ignitable, or reactive ingredients are considered to be "household hazardous waste" or "HHW." Such products, including paints, cleaners, oils, batteries, and pesticides, require special care when you dispose of them.

Improper disposal of HHW can include pouring them down the drain, on the ground, into storm sewers, or in some cases putting them out with the trash. Certain types of HHW have the potential to cause physical injury to sanitation workers, contaminate septic tanks or wastewater treatment systems if poured down drains or toilets, and present hazards to children and pets if left around the house.

However, federal law allows disposal of HHW in the trash. See if your community has a facility that collects HHW year-round. If not, check to see if your area designates certain days for the collection of HHW. If your community has neither a permanent collection site nor a special collection day, you might



be able to drop off certain products at local businesses for recycling or proper disposal.

To help avoid the potential risks associated with household hazardous wastes, below are some tips for individuals to follow in their own homes:

- Use and store products containing hazardous substances carefully to prevent any accidents at home. Never store hazardous products in food containers; keep them in their original containers and never remove labels.

- Never mix leftover HHW with other products. Incompatible products might react, ignite, or explode. Contaminated HHW

might become unrecyclable. Refer to the product label for proper disposal. Call your local environmental, health, or solid waste agency for instructions on proper use and disposal and to learn about local HHW drop-off programs and upcoming collection days.

- Consider using non-toxic cleaners. Vinegar and water is a great window cleaner. Toothpaste is wonderful for polishing silver. Use lemon juice instead of bleach.

Baking soda is an effective cleaner for sinks and tile and when you mix it with vinegar it is an effective drain cleaner.

2014 Make It Shine spring cleanup

Thousands of volunteers tidy up the state

Close to 5,200 volunteers with cleanliness as their objective spent the first two weeks of April picking up litter across West Virginia as part of the 2014 spring Make It Shine Cleanup.

At least one cleanup was scheduled in each of the state's 55 counties. In all, there were approximately 150 projects, said Travis Cooper, coordinator for the MIS program.

Cooper said by the middle of May he will have a good idea on the amount of trash volunteers were able to remove from the state's landscape.

On April 26, the spring Adopt-A-Highway cleanup brought another 4,627 volunteers out to remove roadside trash from the state's highways.



2014 Legislative recap

Three DEP bills make it through session

Three pieces of legislation introduced by the Department of Environmental Protection passed the 2014 Legislative session.

Following is a summary of those bills, along with bills introduced by others that passed the Legislature and impact the DEP.

Introduced by the DEP:

■ SB 485 — DOH Exemption from Permitting Requirements of NSPA.

Purpose and changes to current law: Under the Natural Streams Preservation Act, certain portions of the Greenbrier River, Anthony Creek, Cranberry River, Birch River, and New River receive some extra protections in order to preserve their scenic, recreational, botanical, historical, archeological, scientific, and cultural value. One of those protections is the requirement that anyone wishing to modify any part of the protected portions of those streams must receive a permit from the DEP. This bill exempts the DOH from that permitting requirement when it is constructing or repairing bridges, so long as that construction or repair leaves the stream navigable to boat traffic.

The DEP's thought process was, if DOH has to repair or replace a bridge, DEP will not deny its permit application, so why make it go through the added bureaucratic step when it already has to comply with a permit from the Corps of Engineers.

■ HB4411 (Special Session HB107) — Allowing Drill Cuttings into Landfills.

Purpose and changes to current law: The purpose of this bill is to allow for the receipt of additional drill cuttings and drilling waste generated from well sites at certain commercial solid waste



Photo by Kelley Gillenwater

Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin signs Senate Bill 373 during a ceremony at the Capitol. The governor's bill includes new regulations for above ground storage tanks.

facilities above the facility's existing tonnage limit if certain conditions are met.

The bill requires radiation and leachate monitoring at all facilities receiving drill cuttings and drilling waste. The bill requires the DEP to conduct an investigation and report to the Legislature on specified issues associated with the disposal of drill cuttings and drilling wastes at landfills.

The bill also establishes an additional solid waste fee to be imposed on the disposal of drill cuttings and drilling waste generated by horizontal well sites.

■ HB4480 — Allowing AML to Keep Earnings on Investment of AMD Fund.

Purpose and changes to current law: West Virginia receives a grant from the federal Office of Surface Mining (OSM) to operate and administer the Abandoned Mine Lands Reclamation Program (AML). That grant is received from the federal government and deposited into the Acid Mine

Drainage (AMD) Fund.

For years, AML has invested the AMD Fund and kept the earnings on that investment. Late last summer, AML decided it wanted to invest in higher earning investments. When it approached the Treasurer's Office about that, the Treasurer's Office advised AML that it does not have the statutory authority to keep the earnings on the investment of that fund. Thus, it started sweeping the earnings into the General Revenue, as per Executive Order 85-02.

OSM advised AML that such move by the Treasurer's Office was a "wrongful diversion" by the State of West Virginia of federal funds and that, if a bill was not passed to resolve the problem (i.e. obtain the statutory authority to keep earnings on investment and get back the approximately \$20,000 that has been swept from the Fund to date), AML's grant was at risk, and it also

See BILLS, Page 7

OFFICE

Continued from Page 1

Section (of DWWM)," said Harmon, who assumed his new duties April 16.

"I know a little bit about every aspect of the office ... enough to be dangerous. I'm looking forward to the opportunity and I'm a little scared."

James Martin, OOG chief, said Harmon is a welcomed addition to the office.

"We're excited about Jason's move to the Office of Oil and Gas," Martin said. "Jason's educational and technical background and expertise will be an asset to the office. We expect that his assistance will allow OOG to better manage our responsibilities and to stay abreast of ever-changing issues within the oil and gas industry."

A native of Princeton, the 35-year-old Harmon said the DWWM's Water Use Section has accomplished much in a relatively short time, including submitting to the Legislature last year the West Virginia Water Resources Management Plan.

The massive project is intended to protect and define the state's valuable water resources while promoting its availability for the public, tourism and industry.

The plan also considers the statewide economic development potential for industries dependent on a constant fresh water supply.

"I'm immensely proud of everything we've done," Harmon said. "We've built a lasting program and it has continued to change as needed."

Harmon is married and has a young daughter.

BILLS

Continued from Page 6

faces the possibility of penalties.

Thus, this bill allows AML to keep the earnings it makes on investment of the AMD Fund and directs the State Treasurer to restore to the AMD Fund the money that has been swept from the Fund into the General Revenue.

Introduced by Others:

■ SB454 – Defining “dam owner” for West Virginia’s Dam Safety Act.

Purpose and changes to current law: The Interim Agriculture and Agribusiness Committee studied conservation dams this past year and determined that the Dam Control Act does not have a definition for “dam owner,” but does have a definition for “noncompliant dam owner.”

Essentially, the dam owner was presumed to be the surface owner of the property.

This is, however, not always the case with agricultural dams. Accordingly, this bill defines the owner of a dam for purposes of the Dam Control Act to include: (a) A person who holds legal possession, ownership or partial ownership of an interest in the dam; (b) A person who has a lease, easement or right-of-way to construct, operate or maintain the dam; or (c) A sponsoring organizations, such as the West Virginia Conservation Agency, with existing or prior agreement with the Natural Resources Conservation Service for a dam or its appurtenant works constructed with assistance from the Flood Control Act of 1944, the

Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954, the pilot watershed program authorized under the heading “Flood Prevention” of the Department of Agriculture Appropriation Act of 1954 or the Resource Conservation and Development Program.

■ HB4339 — Allowing Certain Landfills into the LCAP Program

Purpose and changes to current law: DEP’s Landfill Closure Assistance Program (LCAP) was created in the early 1990s to assist with the closure costs associated with closing old, pre-law landfills where the operator did not have enough financial resources to close in a timely and environmentally sound manner.

This bill allows the Elkins-Randolph County Landfill to be placed into LCAP.

The bill was amended to allow the Pritchard Landfill (Wayne County) into the program for the purpose of post-closure maintenance and monitoring only, as that landfill was closed 14 years ago by the private company that operated it.

Because the universe of landfills eligible for participation in this program was defined in Code, the Code has to be amended to allow landfills to avail themselves of the program.

■ HB4346 — Setting Separate Emissions Standards for Fossil-Fuel Fired Power Plants.

Purpose and changes to current law: This bill creates a new code section to establish separate regulatory standards for carbon dioxide emissions from existing fossil fuel power generation plants.

These standards are to be integrated into the state’s plan to comply with Section 111 of the Clean Air Act.

The intention of the bill is to create flexibility and require consideration of additional factors in setting the emission standards. In setting these standards, DEP must consider consumer impacts, health and environmental impacts, energy demand, market factors, physical restrictions, overall cost, anticipated useful life of the plants, economic impacts of closure, site-specific factors affecting the reasonableness of the standards, and plant age and process factors.

SB 373 — Regulating Above Ground Storage Tanks.

Purpose and changes to current law: On Jan. 9, 2014, approximately 10,000 gallons of MCHM and PPH leaked from a faulty storage tank at Freedom Industries in Charleston. An amount of those chemicals reached the Elk River and contaminated the drinking water supply of a nine-county region, affecting roughly 300,000 people.

This bill allows the DEP to develop a program for the regulation of new and existing aboveground storage tanks. It requires operators of such tanks to register them with DEP and, in some cases, apply for a permit. The bill also requires an annual inspection of the tanks by a certified professional engineer.

The bill also amends the Water Resources Protection and Management Act to incorporate recommendations from the State Water Resources Management Plan.

BOSTON

Continued from Page 3

minutes. He was also raising money for the Mountaineer Spina Bifida Camp in Ripley in honor of his niece, Malia Kearns, who has the condition.

Last year, as part of his marathon participation, Boehm raised close to \$5,500 for the non-profit National Foundation for Cancer Research in honor of his late mother, Judy.

Boehm struggled with leg cramps this year at Boston and finished in 4:36, well off his goal. And while he is disappointed in his time, Boehm understands the importance of just being there ... and getting to run down Boylston Street, the final stretch to the finish.

“At the end of the day it wasn’t about any individual runner,” he said. “It was about the fact that I had a chance to get back to

Boston. I wasn’t happy with my performance, but I raised over \$4,000.

“The bottom line is in two years I raised over \$9,000 and those contributions came strictly from friends, co-workers and family. That says more about a person’s friends than the individual who is trying to raise the money.”

As for the race, the 39-year-old Boehm was on pace for a sub-3:30 marathon through 16 miles. At mile 17, the leg cramps began.

From mile 20 through 25, the race turned into a run-walk for Boehm. Sparked by the energy supplied by a huge crowd of spectators on Boylston Street, however, Boehm was able to run the entire final mile.

“The number of people there and the energy was crazy,” he said. “I finished and I’m happy about that. I will redeem myself another time.”

YOUTH

Continued from Page 4

Camping is available and activities are also planned for Friday and Saturday nights.

There are 835 group members in the YEP, which is comprised of 74,602 youths who represent all 55 counties.

Festivities begin on May 17 at 10 a.m. with the awards ceremony.

A hot lunch will be provided, courtesy of a catering company from Mineral Wells. After lunch there will be activities, including exhibits.

The awards presentation will continue at 1 p.m.

“It’s very rewarding to see these young people take an interest in the environment,” Haid said. “They learn ways to help the environment, and it’s information that they take with them as they grow.”



The DNR's Jim Fregonara had the kids' full attention with his snake demonstration.

Hangin' out at work

Close to 50 kids visit DEP for Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day

Whether it was simply to get a day off from school, or to hang out with family and friends, a record number of kids turned out for April's National Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day at DEP headquarters.

Lori Saylor, who organized the event for the agency, said 51 kids signed up. Forty-six showed up on April 24.

Although they got to meet with Cabinet Secretary Randy Huffman, made crafts, learned about the importance of water conservation and ate pizza, the kids' favorite part of the day was a visit from Jim Fregonara, the Division of Natural Resources' snake expert.

Fregonara discussed how to differentiate between venomous and non-venomous snakes; what do to do if you encounter a snake on a hike, or while playing in the woods; and also talked about how snakes get their names.

Toward the end of his presentation he allowed the kids to touch and observe a number of live snakes.



The kids began the day with a talk from Secretary Randy Huffman, who also fielded questions from the group.



Lleigh Lockhart gets up close and personal with one of the snakes on display.

Roll call

Here is the list of children and their sponsors who participated in the DEP's Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day:

Child/Sponsors

- ▶ Jacob Adkins/Jesse, Sandie Adkins
- ▶ Joseph Adkins/Jesse, Sandie Adkins
- ▶ Jaren Bailey/Chad Bailey
- ▶ Isabella Bandy/Jeremy Bandy
- ▶ Elijah Boyd/Stephanie Boyd
- ▶ Katelyn Boyd/Stephanie Boyd
- ▶ Xavier Brown/Tony Brown
- ▶ Kenzie Chapin/Patty Miller
- ▶ Haylee Chapman/Chad Bailey
- ▶ Josh Comer/Tonya Omblor
- ▶ Tayan Cooper/Laura Cooper
- ▶ Devlin Daugherty/Chris Daugherty
- ▶ Carl Fairchild/Scott Fairchild
- ▶ Brayden Foreman/Keith Foreman
- ▶ Peyton Foreman/Keith Foreman
- ▶ Austen Graley/Steve Graley
- ▶ Sydney Graley/Steve Graley
- ▶ Julius Hopen/Jamie Hopen
- ▶ Quinn Hopen/Jamie Hopen
- ▶ Austin Jarrell/Lynn Pugh
- ▶ Lucas Kees/Roy Kees
- ▶ Tabitha Kersey/David Kersey
- ▶ Tiffany Kersey/David Kersey
- ▶ Gracyn Lockhart/John Lockhart
- ▶ Lleigh Lockhart/John Lockhart
- ▶ Amanda Longanacre/Debbie Longanacre
- ▶ Kelly Longanacre/Debbie Longanacre
- ▶ Dylan McCumbers/Carrie McCumbers
- ▶ Kelsey McMeans/Myiinda Maddox
- ▶ Whitney McMeans/Myiinda Maddox
- ▶ Delaney Moneypenny/John Moneypenny
- ▶ Abigail Moore/Elbort Morton
- ▶ James Odin/Chris Daugherty
- ▶ Ruth Odin/Chris Daugherty
- ▶ Aaron Omblor/Tonya Omblor
- ▶ Serena O'Neill/Colleen O'Neill
- ▶ Walker O'Neill/Colleen O'Neill
- ▶ Hope Peterson/Jamie Peterson
- ▶ Bailey Pfost/Chad Bailey
- ▶ Maggie Rose/Susan Rose
- ▶ Eli Shrewsbury/Todd Shrewsbury
- ▶ Emily Shrewsbury/Todd Shrewsbury
- ▶ Natalie Sweeney/Matt Sweeney
- ▶ Mallory Szerokman/Cher Szerokman
- ▶ Stephen Taylor/Sue Taylor
- ▶ Abby Valentine/Chad Bailey

Freedom chemical spill

Cabinet Secretary Randy Huffman recently sat down with "Environment Matters" to discuss the Jan. 9 Freedom Industries chemical spill, remediation work ongoing at the site and newly passed legislation to better regulate above ground storage tanks. In case you missed the segment, click link to view:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pnO-eF3G8Sw&list=PLLyTaD88wM7gZAZNzrqdopyY>



Educational Reimbursement Program

Mastering your trade

Agency can help employees continue schooling

By Colleen O'Neill

“It’s a no brainer.”

That’s what Derek Hancock believes about taking advantage of the DEP’s Educational Reimbursement Program.

Hancock, a 10-year veteran of DEP’s Air Monitoring Section of the Division of Air Quality, knew he wanted to make his home at DEP.

“I made the decision, not too long after starting work at the DEP 10 years ago, that I wanted to make a career here,” said Hancock, who now works in the agency’s Division of Mining and Reclamation.

“I also could see how every course would add a new skillset or expertise that the DEP would benefit, as I would benefit, from having the degree. So, it was, more or less, a win-win.”

With an increasing awareness about the environment and how our industries may affect it, there are firms and agencies thriving on this fast-growing public focus.

And DEP, being the state environmental regulatory and restoration agency, definitely has a prominent place.

“A simple Google search will show that the environmental field is a good place to be right now with higher than average growth rates expected for the future,” said Greg Morris, an inspector with the DEP’s Environmental Enforcement Section.

Morris is using the Educational Reimbursement Program to pursue a master’s in Environmental Science from Marshall University. The program requires that the area of study must be relevant to the employee’s current job.

“Outside of medicine and technology, it’s probably the best career to be in, and it comes with a sense of satisfaction, knowing that what you do is hopefully going to make the world a better place for future generations,” Morris said.

“I’m learning so many things that I’m not exposed to normally,” said Megan Murphy, an environmental resource specialist with the Division of Water and Waste Management, Program Support Section.



The DEP’s Derek Hancock said continuing his education prepared him for challenges in his new position in Mining.

She believes that pursuing a master’s in Environmental Science will increase her value as an employee.

As the economy improves, there is an increase in the number of employees who use the Educational Reimbursement program.

“Everyone scoffs at the idea of having to sign a commitment with the state for taking advantage of the program” Morris said.

“But the way I look at it is no one knows where they are going to be in the next three to five years, including myself.”

If an employee leaves the agency after taking advantage of the reimbursement program, that employee must repay the costs.

An added perk is a better understanding of your field with the acquisition of new skills. These new skills will benefit the DEP and probably further the employee’s career.

“My favorite courses, so far, have had nothing to

See TRADE, Page 10

Agency transactions

Recent DEP hires

- Kristi Childress
Administration
- Donald Cogar
Office of Abandoned Mine Lands
- Kelley Gillenwater
Public Information Office
- Nancy Hunt
Administration

- Jeffrey Robinson
Division of Mining and Reclamation
- Jamie Shafer
Division of Land Restoration

Internal Transfers

- Keith Foreman
Division of Air Quality
- Nathan Parks
Division of Land Restoration

AGENCY

Continued from Page 2

5. What were your impressions of how state government, as a whole, handled the recent water crisis from a public communications standpoint?

I think state government did about as well as it could in handling public communications related to the water crisis, given the lack of information available about crude MCHM, the fact that the existence of the second chemical, PPH, wasn't immediately disclosed by Freedom Industries and the late decision by the CDC to advise pregnant women not to drink the water after the "Do Not Use" order had already been lifted. Looking back at a situation, you can always find things you wish you had done differently — things that weren't necessarily apparent in the midst of the crisis. The important thing is to move forward and to take the lessons learned from experiences such as this to improve how we respond to incidents in the future.

6. How big of a role should social media play in the communications plan of a state agency such as the DEP?

Social media is how many members of the public get the bulk of their information about current events. It's a popular communications tool that isn't going away anytime soon. While there are some pitfalls to social media, there are a lot of advantages too. I think we need to embrace social media as a way to not only get important messages out to the public, but also to gain valuable feedback about how we're doing and how we could improve in our goal to help preserve the environment for generations to come.

7. Have you learned yet what all of the acronyms and abbreviations used by our agency stand for?

I'm swimming in alphabet soup here! I think it would take decades to learn what all the acronyms

and abbreviations used at the DEP stand for. Luckily, everyone I've met here has been extremely helpful in helping me figure them out.

8. Who was the most famous person you interviewed during your time as a reporter for the Associated Press?

I had the opportunity to interview many of the cast members of the "We Are Marshall" movie including Matthew McConaughey, who is probably the most famous person I've ever spoken to. Oddly enough, though, the interviews with the actors in that movie, which chronicled the aftermath of a 1970 plane crash that killed most of the Marshall University football team and coaching staff along with many prominent members of the community, aren't what have stuck with me. What I enjoyed most was talking to and getting to know the 'real' people who lived through the tragedy — former coaches, players and members of the Huntington community.

9. What was the most important news event you covered while at the AP?

I helped provide coverage of the Sago and Aracoma mine disasters, two fatal coal mining accidents that occurred just a couple of weeks apart in 2006 that prompted stricter coal mine safety regulations. I consider these two news stories combined to be the most important, yet saddest and most traumatic, events I ever wrote about.

10. What are some ways you relax away from the office?

I have a 9-month-old daughter who is crawling and gets into absolutely everything, so there isn't much relaxing at home — at least not when she's awake! I do enjoy spending time with her and the rest of my family though. My husband and I are both Marshall graduates and big sports fans and we try to attend as many Thundering Herd home football and men's basketball games as possible. I also like to read and to travel.

TRADE

Continued from Page 9

do with my current job, but have taught me skills that I hope to use in the future," Murphy said.

"I've gotten to use ArcGIS software to map air and water pollution and learned about pollution exposure pathways and risk assessment techniques."

Hancock recently accepted a position with the agency's Mining program and is tasked with ePermitting and IRIS responsibilities.

"This new position was an amazing opportunity that integrated both of my graduate degrees," Hancock said. "It is complex work and a challenge and I

know that continuing my education prepared me for this challenge.

"I know grad school is a huge commitment. I just think it makes sense to take advantage of this opportunity and make a commitment to not only yourself but to the DEP."

If you're interested and want information regarding the program, please contact Chad Bailey, manager of Human Resources at ext. 1554.

The Educational Reimbursement Program policy is found at: http://depintranet.wv.gov/Depdocs/policies/policy_files.cfm?

DEP Retirements

Mark Priddy

Division of Water and Waste Management

Last day: April 30, 2014

Years of service: 14

Udyot Bachhawat

Division of Air Quality

Last day: March 14, 2014

Years of service: 13

Joe Ross

Division of Mining and Reclamation

Last day: March 21, 2014

Years of service: 23

Steve Graley

Administration

Last day: April 30, 2014

Years of service: 21