



The

# Challenge

August 2001



## Challenge celebrates with picnic

The annual Challenge WV picnic was held July 27 at Holly River State Park in Webster County. Representatives from eleven counties attended the gathering, despite widespread flooding throughout the state.

A special ceremony was held at the Windy Gap School, a one-room building that was moved to the State Park and restored by members of the community.

Stanley "Judd" Anderson, who was involved in the restoration of



Inside Windy Gap School, Stanley "Judd" Anderson tells members of Challenge WV about the community's efforts to restore the old one-room school and preserve a piece of Webster County's past.

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## Coaches say big schools hurt athletics

While school consolidations have sometimes resulted in sparkling new athletic facilities, they have diminished athletic opportunities for students, according to an investigation by *Charleston Gazette* sports reporter Rick Ryan.

Ryan writes that counties with single consolidated public high schools "lag far behind their peers when it comes to athletic excellence."

He noted that 25 of West Virginia's 55 counties – 46 percent – have just one high school. But, he said, in the past five years, those schools have won just 24 percent of the

available state championships. The figure would be worse if not for Doddridge County High School and Wheeling Park, which have won 12 of 26 titles.

"There are a lot of ways to go, but consolidations aren't always the answer," said Ralph Hensley, offensive coordinator at Riverside High School and former football coach at East Bank. "I'm afraid we're consolidating way too much. Counties probably like it because it saves money, but athletics-wise, I think we're really missing out."

Ravenswood basketball coach

Mick Price told Ryan, "I think [problems posed by consolidation] are a combination of things. You're not going to have the number of kids participate in a county situation that you would in a single-school town. Now that kind of school might be smaller and might not be able to offer second-year chemistry to some students, but it still offers a lot of good things. Maybe they'll have all their kids participate."

Price pointed out that most county consolidations are in rural part of the state. "In an all-county situation,

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# This 'n that from around the state

• The West Virginia Kids Count Fund reports that the state of West Virginia lost 9.6 percent of its children between 1990 and 2000, the largest decline of any state in the union. The number of West Virginians under the age of 18 has dropped by 28 percent over a 20-year period. The shrinking number of young people could have enormous implications, according to Margie Hale, executive director of the West Virginia Kids County Fund. One sign, she said, is the continued school closings by county boards of education. "If you have fewer and fewer children, they are more precious than ever before," Hale said. "Our investment needs to be strongest and best so kids will have the promise of American life."



uses about 7,500 gallons of fuel every seven to eight workdays during the months school is in session, Shultz said.

• The president of the West Virginia Education Association is questioning why two state education officials got 17 percent pay raises while teachers only got two percent on average this year. Kenna Seal, director of the office of Education Performance Audits, and Clacy Williams, director of the School Building Authority, both had their salaries raised from \$85,000 to \$100,000 in June. WVEA president

Tom Lange said he wants teachers to get equal consideration.

• West Virginia is scheduled to receive \$9.76 million to renovate schools in counties where a high percentage of students live in poverty. State School Building Authority director Clacy Williams said the money is part of a \$1.2 billion national program that earmarks funds for urgent school renovations. The SBA has decided to award grants on a competitive basis and to set a cap of \$1 million per project. Counties with poverty rates above 40 percent (Calhoun, Clay, Gilmer, Lincoln, McDowell, Summers and Webster) could receive 100 percent grants, the SBA decided.

• State Schools Superintendent David Stewart said that, despite extensive flood damage, schools in Southern West Virginia should be ready to open for the 2001-2002 school year. Six Wyoming County schools and five McDowell County schools were damaged in the first round of flooding that hit the state this summer. Flood damage was estimated at \$2.6 million with Pineville Elementary in Wyoming County receiving the most severe damage.

• Marion County may save as much as \$75,000 a year by operating its school buses with a blend of diesel fuel and vegetable oil, transportation director Don Shultz said. Marion is among the first counties in the state to take advantage of an incentive offered by the Legislature, which will reimburse counties for 95 percent of their transportation costs if they blend fuels. Marion County plans to use 20 percent vegetable oil and 80 percent diesel in their school buses. The vegetable oil will come from midwestern states, primarily from soybean. Marion County

• For the first time in state history, a county school superintendent has a six-figure salary. The Kanawha County school board approved a four-year contract for Superintendent Ron Duerring, at \$100,000, making him the highest-paid county school administrator in the state. The average salary for superintendents is \$74,945, according to a report in *The Charleston Daily Mail*.

• Auditors identified more than 200 problems in Putnam County schools during an inspection in April. The audit marked the first time auditors used a new, tougher set of standards to judge the system. Kenna Seal, director of the Office of Education Performance Audits, called the inspection a "trial run" and said it "has limited use in making a statement about Putnam County."

"To look at the report, you'd think Putnam was a poor school system. It looks as bad as Lincoln County," Seal said. "That's not the case at all. They're producing about as well as any school system in the state."

• Gov. Bob Wise is setting up a statewide school safety hotline, despite the failure of the Legislature to fund the program. Wise has decided to shift funds from the public education budget to the state fire marshal's office to cover the hotline's costs. The hotline, expected to be operational when school starts, will be manned around the clock by the same staff that operates the statewide arson hotline.

• The Fayette County Board of Education voted 4-1 to hire Harry Hoffer to a one-year contract as superintendent. Hoffer said he plans to study school consolidation and the school system's financial situation.

# Picnic features visit to one-room school

Windy Gap, said the school was originally constructed in 1902, and the reconstruction was completed in 1991.

The total budget for the project was approximately \$3,500, he said, because of the involvement of the community.

Residents of the area have donated books and other items, and volunteers give tours and share information about the school's history.

Co-coordinator Linda Martin expressed optimism about the growth of Challenge WV, especially during the past year. But she said much work has to be done to stop the loss of public schools in West Virginia.

"Before Challenge WV the issue of small schools wasn't even on the radar screen," she said.

"Because of you and the work you have done, there is a debate going on about the value of our small schools and our small communities."

Webster County Challenge members Cindy Miller and Amelia Anderson coordinated the picnic.

The food was catered once again by Elizabeth Vaughan.

Nicholas County fellow Bob Henry Baber distributed books and shared information about how schools can apply for large quantities of free books and educational materials.



**Challenge WV members celebrated a year of achievement with a picnic at Holly River State Park in Webster County. Part of the celebration was held in Windy Gap School, at right and top right photo. The event was coordinated by Cindy Miller, shown above left with daughter Andrea, and Amelia Anderson.**

## Sports . . .

they'll have to run an activities bus for some of those kids and you know that's going to be quite taxing for some of them. And they might not even be home when they let them off - they'll have to go further after that. It's become more of a chore to be part of athletics."

Price told Ryan he knew kids in Pocahontas County who had to travel great distances just to practice. "Here, when practice is over, most of our

kids can walk home. You can call practice any time and most of them can get here."

Ten years ago Spencer High School became the first team in state history to complete a 14-0 season, Ryan wrote. Over a 20-year period, Spencer had winning season after winning season, including a stretch from 1990-91 in which the school won 29 of 30 games.

But all that changed after the consolidation into

Roane County High School. Since former coach Jim Hamric left, the team is 1-29.

"We had so much going at Spencer High," Hamric told Ryan. "We had so much tradition and so much excitement going in the city of Spencer. Now it seems dead and I hate it.

"I think they lost a lot of community support, lost vision and focus when it went from Spencer to Roane. I didn't think it was going to be that way."

# The Challenge

The Challenge is published monthly by Challenge West Virginia, a statewide organization committed to maintaining and improving small community schools and reforming education policy in West Virginia so that all of our state's children have the opportunity to receive a first-class education and the promise of a bright future.

Challenge members believe state education policy, which has resulted in the closing of a fourth of West Virginia's schools during the past ten years, does not serve the best interest of many children, especially those from low-income families who live in rural areas.

Challenge West Virginia is a program of Covenant House, an independent, non-profit organization in Charleston, WV, which is not connected to any other program by the same name.

To start a chapter of Challenge WV, to inquire about the fellowship program or for more information, contact:

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