



The Challenge



July/August 2005

Challenge conference set for Oct 21

Challenge WV's annual fall conference has been set for Friday, October 21. The event will be held at Charleston's Embassy Suites from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Conference speakers and the agenda will be published in the September Newsletter.

Challenge WV is a statewide organization, committed to maintaining and improving small community schools. Anyone interested in attending should complete the registration form on page three of this issue or contact Linda Martin by phone (304-744-5916) or by e-mail at LBM94@aol.com. The conference is open to any interested party, not just those associated with Challenge WV.

Challenge Helps West Virginia Students



Challenge WV Fellows were working in August to distribute free items to WV school children and their parents (L-R) Jana Freeman, Paul Hamrick and Amelia Anderson ...



... books and other materials have been donated over the years which would help students in school (L-R) Carolyn Arritt and Carla Persinger).

"Is there no end to where these people will go? asks Martin

State school officials have launched a criminal investigation into the actions of three Mingo County school board members who have opposed the closing of their community schools.

Officials are claiming the board members have acted illegally, by meeting in secret.

Linda Martin of Challenge WV, who consulted with the three board members, said they never have met in secret.

Martin said state officials and wealthy Mingo County residents who will benefit financially from the consolidation plan are harassing the board members and Jim Lees, their attorney.

She says the high school closings are

part of an economic development plan in southern West Virginia, associated with the building of the King Coal Highway.

"If you think it is about the education of our children, think again," said Martin. "Is there no end to where these people will go to have their way?"

A coal company says it wants to donate the stripped land for the proposed school near Red Jacket, but a deed has yet to be delivered.

The site is ten miles from the nearest highway, but is near the yet to be built King Coal Highway, which will dramatically increase the value of all adjacent land.

The Mingo board members have refused to endorse the state's plan to build

the mega-million dollar consolidated high school, favoring instead community-based schools.

Charleston Attorney Jim Lees, who filed a civil suit against the State Board of Education and their School Building Authority, says the recent criminal investigation requested by school officials to the West Virginia State Police is "pure harassment."

"It's outrageous for the state school board to be getting the State Police to conduct a criminal investigation of people they're in litigation with," Lees said.

"I was furious," he said. "It irritates the hell out of me. We bring a lawsuit, and

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Former state superintendent McClung gets seven years in prison

A former assistant state schools superintendent who plead guilty to extortion and filing a false tax return in 2000, will spend seven years in a federal prison for his role in contracts awarded to help McDowell and Wyoming county schools recover from flooding in 2001.

G. A. McClung, 57, had also been McDowell County's interim superintendent after the state seized control of that system for poor performance.

Judge Joseph Goodwin ordered McClung to repay \$68,000 to McDowell County schools and \$37,500 to the state School Building Authority.

Goodwin told McClung he "dis-

honored his public office for private gain" and that the judge hoped a stiff sentence would send a strong message to other public officials.

"Honesty and respect of the law are paramount of any high ranking public official," Goodwin said.

Numerous other charges were dropped, including mail and wire fraud, fraud against a program receiving federal funds and filing false tax returns for the years 2001 and 2002.

McClung awarded contracts to his longtime friend, Phillip "Pork Chop" Booth, admitting he accepted loans, gifts and cash from Booth.

Booth died earlier this year before he could be sentenced on charges of wire fraud and engaging in a monetary transaction involving criminally derived property.

Prosecutors said Booth gave McClung \$50,000 in kickbacks, including cash, Kentucky Derby tickets and a vacation cruise to the Bahamas.

Booth's company, National Equity, received \$2.3 million in contracts to replace furniture and equipment in flood torn McDowell County, charging up to four times more than normal, and selling furniture and classroom equipment that no one needed.

Hagley helps lead effort to keep Mason schools

While many West Virginian's have lost their battle to keep schools in their rural communities, not so in Mason County.

Voting taxpayers were willing to go to the polls for their rural schools.

A groundbreaking was held in August at Hannan Junior-Senior High School, an event that was a direct result of what happened in March, 2004. For the first time in 54 years, voters in Mason County approved a bond issue.

The communities of Ashton and the Bend Area got to keep their treasured Hannan and Wahama high schools.



Darrell Hagley (pictured left) a former board president and member of Challenge WV, helped lead the effort to pass the bond.

He said the road to success was a lot like the

drive to Hannan.

"As many have said when they visit Hannan High for the first time, 'I didn't think I was ever going to get here,'" Hagley said. "Well, I knew we were going to get here. I just didn't know how long it would take us.

"I thank the taxpayers of Mason County for allowing us to keep our community schools," Hagley concluded.

Ramey engaging young people in social movements



Challenge WV fellow Thomas Ramey (shown left with Barbara Meyer) and newsletter editor Bob Weaver participated in a three-day workshop conducted by the Bert and Mary Meyer Foundation of Atlanta in Abingdon, Virginia.

Ramey helped the group focus on bringing young people into social and political movements. Ramey will be the subject of an article in a southern newsletter regarding his work with young people.

Barbara Meyer said "I learned how important it is to listen to people in communities who are experiencing the problems – because they are the real experts.

Many of the south's social leaders and activists came to Abingdon, to discuss the roots of their causes and plan for



the future.

"It is the grassroots leaders in communities who have a vested interest in that community and who understand the power dynamics of that community," she said.

The round table discussions by many of the south's leaders in environmental and social justice causes, focused on a discussion of the roots movements and ways of struggling.

The Bert and Mary Meyer Foundation has been a supporter of Challenge WV.

New state super says local boards should decide fate

The state's new school superintendent Steve Paine told state lawmakers he plans to shift the state's focus on infrastructure to targeting classroom instruction.

"We need to celebrate and reward the profession of teacher," Paine said. He criticized No Child Left Behind as inflexibly unfair to schools that make some progress toward the law's overall benchmarks, but still fail to meet them.

"Teachers and principals are not getting the recognition they deserve," he said. State Senator Donna Boley asked

Paine for his stance on school consolidation and long bus rides.

Paine said he believes county school boards should decide to replace or combine schools, although the state's behavior denies Paine's stance. He spoke of the value of community schools.

He praised Gov. Joe Manchin for his push toward developing virtual classrooms in rural areas using teleconferencing.

"Technology can be used in a major way to bring curriculum to rural schools," Paine said.

Martin

Continued from page 1.

we get investigated. It's like Nixon revisited."

State schools Superintendent Steve Paine said Department of Education investigator John Morrison, a former state policeman, issued a complaint about the three Mingo board members — Bill Duty, Mitchell Chapman and Mike Carter, to the State Police.

The complaint was filed by Mingo school board member Dr. James Endicott, who supports the closing of community schools. He and others have filed a separate suit against the three board members to force them to consolidate.

Paine said "There was a complaint about an open meetings violation," regarding the three board members and attorney Lees.

Thomas Ramey, Challenge WV fellow, said "If any group ought to be challenged about the violation of open meetings laws, it is the State Board of

Education."

Lincoln County's closure hearings were declared illegal, "Even the meetings where they hired their new superintendent were illegal," he said.

"These are wrecker-ball tactics" said Ramey, "Bureaucrats who use their political and intellectual arrogance to run over elected officials and our communities with cock-sure power."

"They have become incapable of knowing what is best for our children and our communities," he said.

The state agency itself has been riddled with corruption, from the former State Superintendent going to prison for stealing money to another former superintendent directing the purchase of school computers to his girlfriend.

Beside the continuing scandal of former House Education Chairman Jerry Mezzatesta, Asst. State Superintendent G.A. McClung was just sentenced to seven years in prison for extortion and filing false income tax returns.

"The list is long," said Martin.



Dr. James Endicott (pictured left) Mingo board member Dee Kapourales, former state school board President Howard Persinger and coal operator James "Buck" Harless filed a suit against Duty, Chapman and Carter, asking a judge to order the board members to close Williamson, Matewan and Burch high schools.

Endicott filed an ethics complaint against fellow board member Mike Carter, alleging Carter broke state law when he voted against closing a school where his wife worked. The Ethics Commission dismissed the complaint, but the charge caused Carter to spend \$16,000 out-of-pocket to defend himself.

Martin said "Lets have an ethical outcry over Dave Stewart," who just retired as state superintendent and went to work for an architectural firm to which his agency awarded mega-buck contracts for consolidated schools.

Challenge West Virginia's Annual Fall Conference

"Our Communities, Our Schools; A Community Conversation"

Friday, October 21, 2005

Embassy Suites, 300 Court Street, Charleston

10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

\$20.00 (includes lunch)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail address: _____

Total Number of Attendees

Registration Fee \$20 per person

Total Registration Fee: \$

List names of others who will attend with you:

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The Challenge

The Challenge is published monthly by Challenge West Virginia, a statewide organization, committed to maintaining and improving small community schools.

Challenge West Virginia's goal is to reform education in the Mountain State so that citizens have a voice in policy decisions and every child has the opportunity to receive a first-class education and the promise of a bright future.



Challenge West Virginia

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