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A road trip on your wish list? **B8**

German-style Christmas **B10**



Lean times at the library **A7**

INSIDE: Hoop dreams for 2016



Schools chief: End debate on standards

By **CHRISTINE SNYDER**
christine@spiritofjefferson.com

CHARLES TOWN — State schools superintendent Michael J. Martirano said Tuesday he hopes legislators put the debate over Common Core and statewide schools standards in the past and instead focus on ensuring teachers and students have what they need to succeed.

"We need to move beyond this," Martirano said in an interview. "So much of this is political, and I've heard the concerns. We've addressed the concerns and now it's time to move beyond this debate."

Added Martirano, who came to West Virginia's top schools job in mid-2014: "I have 600 classroom teacher positions unfilled across the state — that's something that's af-

◆ See SCHOOLS Page A8



Michael Martirano

CHARLES TOWN CITY COUNCIL

Candidates talk about boosting city's economy

By **BONNIE WILLIAMSON**
Special to the Spirit

CHARLES TOWN — Charles Town City Council candidates Michael W. George and Keith Veler offered their thoughts on getting residents more involved in Charles Town, and spending more money downtown, Monday night as they compete for a spot on the city's governing body.

A third candidate for the open Ward 4 council seat, Anthony T. Troxel, has withdrawn from the race, citing family commitments with his 8- and 9-year-old kids.

◆ See ECONOMY Page A9

BACK TO THE FUTURE IN CHARLES TOWN



G.W. Smith, who owns Bars and Booths at 200 W. Washington St. in Charles Town, wants to see the city position itself as a unique getaway for those in the D.C. area.

JULIE SMITH

Retro décor store points a way ahead

By **JULIE SMITH**
Special to the Spirit

Before G.W. Smith opened Bars and Booths in downtown Charles Town, he was a successful door-to-door encyclopedia salesman — that is, until a little thing called the Internet began slowing business down.

At a strategy session with sales managers

at a restaurant, a golden oldie came through the eatery's sound system and Smith found himself transported back to his youth — and on a path that would lead him to a new career.

"It reminded me of when I was 15 with no stress in the world," Smith said. "My mind just left the meeting."

The experience had such an impact on Smith that he decided to bring the '50s diner experience into his own home, renovating a back porch into an old-fashioned din-

er complete with a jukebox full of nostalgic music.

The project thrust him into the world of antiques and within six months Smith had rented several booths that spanned one-third of an antique mall in Falls Church, Va.

In 1997, he moved his business to Bunker Hill and with the help of his brother created a website to help boost sales. "We built

◆ See RETRO Page A8

What makes Christmas special? Community leaders detail what they hold dear

Ginny Fite finds a cherished tradition can morph into something new but just as wonderful.



Staff report

CHARLES TOWN — From asking rambunctious young people to hold off on opening presents until they've enjoyed an elaborate Norwegian breakfast to decorating with a precious train set that made its way back to West Virginia after more than 60 years, community members here find ways to make

Christmas something special.

We asked the mayors of Ranson and Charles Town, leaders of the arts, church and education communities, Jefferson County's sheriff and others to tell us about the holiday memories that mean the most to them and they shared stories of welcoming strangers to dinner, how health problems brought about new family traditions, even how one

man coped with a devastating Christmas loss.

Here are their stories:

GINNY FITE

A Christmas tree that isn't a tree

For years we cut down our own Christmas trees. We looked forward to the outing, even if it was raining or snow was on the ground. We felt like

pioneers for an hour — us against the elements. Something about tromping around in the cold, sizing up tangy-smelling pines to find the perfect one made us happy. My husband insisted on cutting the tree with his own handsaw while we stood shivering in a circle around him. We dragged

◆ See CHRISTMAS Page A4

Former Miss W.Va. speaks out about physical abuse, rape

By **CHRISTINE SNYDER**
christine@spiritofjefferson.com

MORGANTOWN — Former Miss West Virginia Spenser Wempe is speaking out about how she's rebuilding her life following a year-long relationship that involved sexual abuse, physical violence and rape.

The 23-year-old Shepherdstown native says she's gotten an "incredible" amount of positive feedback on a blog post she made Friday, the same day she graduated from West Virginia University with a bachelor's degree in political science.

"So many people have reached out

and shared their own stories — men and women alike," said Wempe, who competed in the Miss America pageant in Las Vegas in early 2012. "Some have even told me that I'm the first person they've ever told. Some people have come to me seeking advice because they know someone currently in that situation. I have been amazed at how many people [the story has] reached and how much support I have received from people I don't even know."

In her post, Wempe does not name the older young man, a football player, she began dating after connecting at a party in the fall of 2008 when she was just 16.

"The party was probably one of the

RIGHT: Shepherdstown native Spenser Wempe (shown here with her father William Wempe after she was crowned Miss West Virginia in 2011) describes how she ultimately was able to end the abusive relationship after confiding in her dad.

happier memories," Wempe writes, "but that is also why it took me so long to understand and accept what had happened to me. This is a story of two young people in a relationship built on control, manipulation, coercion, threats and eventually violence."

Wempe writes that she felt ready to

◆ See ABUSE Page A2



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Schools

FROM PAGE A1

fecting education that I need the Legislature’s help to accomplish.” State school board members set aside the controversial Common Core standards and last week adopted new standards, but some Republican leaders in the Legislature – including Senate President Bill Cole, who is running for governor – have called for additional changes.

Jacque Bland, communications director for the state Senate, explained Cole’s opposition in an email to the *Charleston Gazette-Mail* last week.

“Senate President Cole will look at the changes, and if they are Common Core by another name, he will move to repeal them and replace them with West Virginia standards that work for West Virginia, with a renewed focus on fundamentals like reading by the third grade and improving student achievement in math,” Bland wrote.

But Martirano said the standards now in place were created by West Virginia educators, whose know-how ought to be heeded.

“The teachers are the experts,” he said. “In no other profession do you see this. I’m not an expert in aviation so would I step in and try to tell the aviation industry what requirements an air traffic controller needs to have? Of course not. To have standards set by teachers and then ignore them – it’s completely disrespectful to the teaching profession.”

Martirano said he’s been “as

transparent as I can possibly be” during the debate over standards, but that legislators expressing concern that West Virginia’s current standards seem similar to the standards in place elsewhere ought to recognize language similarities aren’t a problem.

“You’re going to have similar language – of course you are,” he said. “There are only so many ways to lay out these ideas.”

For decades before national education standards became a political flashpoint, schools all across the country were aiming for the same objectives in the classroom, he said. Students taking high school algebra in different states needed to be on similar footing in a college math class for instance, Martirano said.

“For a long time, this wasn’t a controversy,” he said.

Martirano said he hopes legislators look at paying teachers a competitive salary and ensuring highly qualified educators are in the classrooms. “We’ve addressed the concerns about standards – now it’s time to look for solutions that will make a difference for students and teachers,” he said.

West Virginia now ranks 48th in the nation in teacher compensation, according to the state’s National Education Association affiliate.

Martirano, a former science teacher, holds a doctorate of education degree in school management and instructional leadership from Nova Southeastern University as well as a pair of master’s degrees and a bachelor’s degree, all from the University of Maryland.



Manning the market

Virginia Kincaid of Kearneysville takes her spot inside a vacant shop on Washington Street Saturday during Charles Town’s first-ever Christmas Marketplace. Kincaid – who owns Ginny’s Gems – and other vendors welcomed shoppers with music, specials and snacks.

ROBERT SNYDER

Retro

FROM PAGE A1

the website on a dial-up connection and we had no idea what we were doing,” Smith said.

Through his antique business, he began restoring jukeboxes, candy machines, mechanical kiddie rides and popcorn and Coke machines.

Then a customer requested a custom-made old-fashioned bar. Smith drew up a sketch and took it to a local cabinet maker who said he could do it, but the cost kept going up.

So Smith enlisted his brother — who

had no carpentry experience — once again. They went to Walmart, bought some inexpensive tools and built the bar from Smith’s drawing. They gave it a name – Roberta’s Bar – after the person who ordered it.

That led to Bars and Booths, the Washington Street retail store where Smith sells retro furniture, fixtures, decor and more. “We design and build everything,” Smith said. “We have customers in 40 countries and in every state.”

Smith said his business has been successful because of his exclusive, one-of-a-kind products that are made in the United States.

Charles Town should have more businesses like that, he believes.

“My belief is that Charles Town is very fortunate,” Smith said. “Our location is a perfect location within two hours of 10 of the 15 wealthiest counties in the U.S.”

Smith said he hopes city officials will begin focusing on promoting the downtown corridor to people who live outside of the area. Charles Town is an ideal getaway destination, he believes.

“Everything starts with a vision,” he said. “Then you make goals. Then you make plans. Then you make deadlines. When you do that, you’ve got a chance of being successful.”

Christmas

FROM PAGE A5

He had his first real enlightenment about sex when his dad, who had been in a terrible auto accident and could not climb ladders, pushed him up onto the roof and instructed him on the fine art of taking a specific “male plug and sliding it into the female plug,” and his mother playfully slapping his dad’s arm for mixing images of sexuality with Christmas decorations. Only Dad could do that and get away with it.

This was to be the week that his older brother would return home from Vietnam as a Navy seaman, and the Christmas lights would be lit the first night that he was home as a celebration. The excitement of the holiday was palpable.

The air was cold. The two-mile walk from school was brisk and filled with anticipation. You could see your breath and feel the tingle of cold against your skin as it seeped through your coat. As the kid drew closer

he noticed a car that he’d never seen before, parked in front of the family home. Curiosity caused him to slow his walk as he drew near.

The gray car had words stenciled on the side doors. “U.S. NAVY.” U.S. Navy? Had someone from the Navy actually driven his brother home from the airport? Momentary excitement gripped him as he dashed into the house.

As he entered the home, there was definitely something very changed.

His mother and father stood in the front room with two men in navy uniform. His mother was clearly weeping, almost out of control. His father stood next to her almost helpless. A man with broken body from the accident now had a broken heart as he tried to make sense of it all and comfort his wife.

The boy looked to his parents to tell him that what he knew to be true was not true. Something incredibly wrong sucked the life out of the family that day. Something horrendous evil drained the blood from his parent’s marriage

that day. Something overwhelmingly callous stole the joy from Christmas that day, and it would never be returned until that family became disjointed and distanced from the event and from each other.

“Do you know why these two men are here?” his mother whispered over the huge lump wrenching at her throat.

“Yes,” the boy answered, hoping he was wrong.

“Take this,” she replied, handing him two dollars, “and go get a haircut.”

Robotically he reached out, took the bills and walked silently out of the room, out of the house and proceeded numbly to the barbershop a few blocks away. He wept the entire walk, and then wiped his eyes, blew his nose and entered the shop. He did not tell friendly Bob, the barber, about what had just happened.

He knew the Christmas lights would never be turned on in celebration. He knew the community competition would go on without the family’s participation. He knew for the returning brother there would be no “fat-

ted calf” celebration.

On Dec. 21, 1967, my brother, Seaman Robert David Mason, 22 years old, lost his life in Da-nang, another casualty of a war that never made sense.

I write this in memory of my only big brother. I love you, Robert, and I miss you as if you only left us yesterday.

— John J. Mason lives in Shannondale. He studied Christian education at Bob Jones University from 1970 to 1975 and today serves as president of the Eastern Panhandle LGBTQ Alliance of West Virginia

PAMELA ELLIS
A poem for the holidays

Christmas Blessings
Balsam wreaths of green from the field
Advent candles lit while reading glowing
verses amid the evening shadows
Tinsel greetings from cherished ones
with memories of love ...
The happiest of times past and present

Carolers’ cadenzas of mystery and wonder
illuminate the road ahead
Giving, receiving, giving, receiving much more
An atmosphere of radiant spiritual abundance
here and to uttermost places unknown ...
Unspeakable joy!

— Pamela Ellis is the author of “The Path of Life Guidebook” and the executive director of Charles Town-based Harambee Conference

WES WELSH
Training his eyes on the future

Christmas morning 1952 my Uncle Donald Welsh and his younger brothers Wallace and Richard received a Lionel train set, and what a wonderful gift for young boys! My grandfather was a farmer and a train like that could have cost the equivalent of a week’s pay.

The train was played with for years. When the boys grew up and left home my Uncle Donnie took the train with him to the

city and it remained with him for all these years. When he retired and the family moved to Arizona from Maryland, the little train went along.

Then last year we received a call from Uncle Donnie offering to give the train to my son, Brandon. Brandon was excited and I was, too!

A few days later several large boxes arrived from Arizona and when Brandon opened the box he held up a huge metal Lionel steam that’s now displayed around our Christmas tree. As we watch it go around, I can picture Uncle Donnie and his brothers on the floor of the old stone farm house playing with that train so many Christmases ago. We have a large collection of Lionel trains and this one became the star of the show.

I wish my late father, Wallace, could have seen it again. So the train wound up back in West Virginia where it started over 63 years ago – after quite a few miles travelled. I can say we plan to keep it in the family forever.

— Wes Welsh lives in Kearneysville

Jefferson County Property Transactions

December 14-18, 2015

Olivia Falkenhagen to Julia M. Connell; LT CP 24; Charles Town District; \$195,000.00	1; Middleway District; \$205,000.00	South Mildred Street, PCL Two; LT 17; Charles Town Corporation; \$400,000.00
Scott Frazier Jr. to Ritesh S. Shah; LT 51; Charles Town Corporation; \$152,900.00	Gina M. Hunter to Peter Zorrilla; LT 191 PH IV; Ranson Corporation; \$231,000.00	Joyce Stanley Thornton to Mays Rentals LLC; PCL One: LT 25, German Street, PCL Two: LT 25 L/E outsale PCL 0.005 ACS; Shepherdstown Corporation; \$355,000.00
Raymond L. Johnson to Gregory M. Burch; P/O LT CT 1 AC T/W 20 foot access eas, and PCL CT 0.146 AC; Charles Town District; \$35,000.00	Marqus G. Outhier to Thomas S. Knott III; P/O LTS 18 and 19; Shepherdstown Corporation; \$600,000.00	Cheryl Phelps to Kevin W. Tsuneishi; LT 11, Charles Town Corporation; \$94,900.00
Shenandoah Springs LLC to NVR Inc.; LT 7, BLK F; Ranson Corporation; \$48,000.00	Pill and Pill PLLC to Bank of Charles Town; P/O LT 9 CT 3.5931 ACS; Shepherdstown District; \$243,000.00	East Coast Holdings Inc. to Gilberto Delgado Cruz; LT 32; Charles Town District; \$145,900.00
Shenandoah Springs LLC to NVR Inc.; LT 5, BLK F; Ranson Corporation; \$51,000.00	Timothy L. Brosseau to Tammy M. Vernaci; PCL CT 0.47 ACS; Middleway District; \$86,000.00	Geoffrey L. Hopwood to Edward L. Perry; LTS 11 and 11A SEC 24J; Harpers Ferry District; \$23,500.00
Robert E. Lee to John Wargo; LT	Albert S. Sudduth Jr. to Nancy C. Spensley; PCL One: northern one-half of LT 16, west side of	

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