

Sunday Gazette-Mail

THE STATE'S LARGEST NEWSPAPER

wvgazette.com

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Bail bondsmen seek rules

Most in West Virginia lack basic training for the job, industry reps say

This report is part of a series examining pretrial release programs, the cash bail system and West Virginia's growing prison and jail overpopulation problems. This story was produced in conjunction with the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York.

By Zac Taylor
Staff writer

Chasing down a bail jumper can be a tough job. Will Seay has the scars to prove it.

A few years ago, Seay tracked two absconders to a house in Washington state and kicked through the front door. When the men saw that his leg was stuck, they grabbed it and twisted until it snapped.

"That wasn't a fun trip back," Seay said,



Seay

helps release from jail.

Last week, he and bondsmen Tommy Weatherholtz and Bill Garvin traveled to Charleston to ask lawmakers to consider drafting legislation that would create a unified set of rules to regulate the bonding industry.

Bondsmen, who must track down and

rolling up a pant leg to show off a healed gash that spanned the better part of his shin.

Seay, the owner of a Raleigh County bonding agency, said he is one of a minority of West Virginia bail bondsmen who keep proper tabs on the criminally charged people he



Weatherholtz

sometimes forcefully apprehend clients who skip out on their court dates, are not required to have a state license or any type of training in order to do the job. Often, they don't even need to prove that they have the proper financial backing to post a defendant's bail.

"West Virginia is an open-carry state," Weatherholtz, of Jefferson County, told the Sunday Gazette-Mail. "So now, all of a sudden, you got a badge, handcuffs and a gun in someone's hand because Johnny Boy owns a farm down the road."

In September, legislative auditors released

SEE **BONDSMEN, 9A**



Courtesy photo

Bill Garvin, owner of Bill's Bail Bonds in Morgantown, wants lawmakers to draft legislation that would unify West Virginia's hodgepodge bonding rules, which vary widely from one county to the next.

IT'S A PRESSING CONCERN



LAWRENCE PIERCE | Sunday Gazette-Mail

Powerlifter Allen Baria attempts to bench press 903 pounds at a fundraising event at the Charleston YMCA for Ronald McDonald House Charities of Southern West Virginia on Saturday. The event raised more than \$1,500 for the charity. See story, Page 1B

SHALE GAS DRILLING

Marcellus jobs: Who's working?

Report on how many West Virginians were hired for gas boom lacks data

By Ken Ward Jr.
Staff writer

During his State of the State address two weeks ago, Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin praised the Marcellus Shale drilling boom, and said West Virginia is "making the most of the opportunities associated with our abundant natural gas."

But it's still not clear how many of the jobs created by the natural gas drilling frenzy have gone to West Virginians — or how large a share of those positions are being filled by out-of-state workers.

That's because a legislatively mandated report by the Tomblin administration, issued in November, did not include key data that lawmakers wanted about

residency of the natural gas industry's workers.

As companies raced to tap into the Marcellus Shale gas reserves and build associated pipelines and gas processing facilities, organized labor groups complained that companies were bringing in out-of-state workers to fill too many of the new jobs.

"The biggest question or debate regarding Marcellus is how many jobs has it created, who is getting those jobs — area residents or imports — and if the jobs are going to out-of-state workers."

STEVE WHITE
Affiliated Construction Trades Foundation

During a special legislative session in late 2011 that focused on new rules on Marcellus drilling, some lawmakers sought to get to the bottom of the issue. They proposed language to require companies to submit new reports to the state to provide a breakdown of worker residency.

SEE **JOBS, 9A**

Folks in Mingo County are running for their lives

'We're revising our own stereotype of ourselves,' says one health-conscious neighbor

By Kate Long
Staff writer

As rain threatened and fog circled the mountaintops, about 120 people — adults and kids — lined up along the Tug River flood wall for Williamson's monthly 5K run and walk,

chatting, laughing, greeting. Many were beginners. Schoolteachers, railroad workers, kids, housewives, grandparents, some had never run or walked a 5K before. There was excitement in the air. "My friend did it," one woman said, "so now I'm trying." Others echoed her.

At the signal, everyone ran — or walked — through town,

streamed across the Corridor G bridge, then headed up the steep road looping through the Williamson cemetery. City police cars with flashing lights kept them safe on the bridge.

In nine months, these monthly 5Ks have become a regular Mingo County community event, not advertised much beyond the county. They are one prong of a

many-pronged, multi-agency effort to improve the coalfield county's alarming health statistics.

In 2011-12, 39 percent of Mingo fifth-graders were measured with high blood pressure. Almost 40 percent of adults are obese, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control. The county leads West Virginia in hypertension. Mingo's early-death rate is one of the



THE SHAPE WE'RE IN

SEE **SHAPE, 8A**



KATE LONG | Sunday Gazette-Mail

Retired Williamson teachers Debbie Young, Mary Ann Elia and Dru Simpkins walk 4 miles a day, keeping in shape for monthly 5K runs, co-sponsored by the Mingo County Diabetes Coalition and the Tug Valley Road Runners as part of the Sustainable Williamson fitness campaign.

INDEX | 2A



INSIDE: Sustainable Williamson: 'A healthy conspiracy' 1C

SHAPE

FROM PAGE 1A

highest in the nation.

“We’re facing a situation no one agency can solve,” said Randy Keathley, Mingo County Schools superintendent, “so we’re working together as a county — as one, not as a bunch of individual agencies. It’s going to take everyone working together.”

About three years ago, a determined group of Williamson-area residents from multiple organizations, government offices and businesses decided to pool efforts and try to lower those numbers. They managed to develop an array of projects “that are starting to add up to real change,” said Dr. Dino Beckett, president of the Williamson Redevelopment Authority.

The monthly 5Ks are one of the most visible and least expensive. About 25 people showed up for the first one, last June. The next month, 70 came. The next, it was 100.

“Wait till warm weather,” said organizer Alexis Batausa. “Then it’s going to explode.”

Batausa, 29, helps the Tug Valley Road Runners organize the 5Ks as part of his job with the Mingo County Diabetes Coalition. His job description: Get people hooked on moving. Make it fun.

“Anyone who exercises a half hour three times a week is less likely to get diabetes and heart disease,” Batausa said. “This is something any county can do for its residents.”

The Tug Valley Road Runners sponsor high-profile marathons each year, such as the Hatfield & McCoy Marathon. They attract people from several states. “But these monthly races are for us, for local people,” said David Hatfield, club president.

Batausa is in the perfect position to inspire people. A Williamson High graduate, he ballooned up after graduation, then shed it by running. People look at him and think change is possible, he said.

Every week, in between 5Ks, he invites everyone to join his daily runs around Williamson. On the Tug Valley Road Runners Facebook page, he keeps up a stream of tips and encouraging chatter and tells when/where the next daily run will start.

Williamson residents have gotten used to seeing people run past.

“It’s contagious, the way they’re doing it,” said resident Rick Robinette, waiting for the 5K to start. “You see people running, then you see them again, then you want to do it, too, so you think about it, then



Mingo Diabetes Coalition employee Alexis Batausa (foreground) invites the public to come with him on his daily runs. “People in Williamson are getting used to seeing people run past,” he said.

maybe the next month, you show up, and then you’re hooked.

His wife, Suzanne, said the every-month schedule makes a big difference. “It’s motivating,” she said. “It makes me want to run in between 5Ks, to get in better shape, to see if I can do better next month.”

So far, it’s paying for itself, Hatfield said. They charge \$20 for adults, \$5 for kids. Everyone gets a T-shirt, and every child gets a little trophy. Sometimes, sponsors kick in. Williamson Memorial Hospital sponsored a recent run.

“Our aims go hand in hand with the aims of the Diabetes Coalition,” Hatfield said. “This is a good partnership.”

“What we’re doing is, we’re adding running and walking to the county cultural mix,” said Vicki Hatfield. “It’s not weird to run down the street anymore.”

Most Mingo adults are not going to jump up off the couch and start running, she knows. “But some will, and a lot more will think about it, so we’re starting there. It will spread.”

Mingo County has one of the state’s highest unemployment rates and lowest per capita incomes. “And walking or running doesn’t cost a dime, once you’ve got shoes,” she said. “This is something any county could do.”

“Something is happening around here,” said retired teacher Dru Simpkins, waiting for the October 5K to start. “Something is changing.”

People who run with Batausa see some of the changes. Sometimes, they run past the farmers market and the two new hoop greenhouses that supply it. They run past the community gardens where, in warm weather, elderly people grow corn in the middle of town. Sometimes, they run up the mountain to the new pick-your-own orchard. Or they run on acres outside town where the Redevelopment Authority is creating a recreation area with hiking/biking trails.

“It used to be that you never saw anybody out walking,” said Simpkins’ walking buddy, Mary Ann Elia, 59. She and her friends walk 4 miles a day now, she said. “Now we always run into people walking or running on the floodwall and in the streets.”

Scott Suttles, from nearby Pikeville, Ky., called it cultural change in action. “I think we’re revising our own stereotype of ourselves,” he said.

The next monthly run is a night run at 7 p.m. on March 22. Registration begins at 5 p.m. at 201 Central Ave. in South Williamson.

KATE LONG | Sunday Gazette-Mail

Reach Kate Long
at 304-348-1798
or katelong@wvgazette.com.