

4 minutes
to 5 weeks

Vacationers spin a solar eclipse into an epic South Pacific tour **1F**

Sunday Gazette-Mail

THE STATE'S LARGEST NEWSPAPER

wvgazette.com



IN SPORTS

WVU, Marshall
men lose **1D**

HELLO THERE, BIG BOY



KENNY KEMP | Sunday Gazette-Mail

Roy Dolin (left) and David Husband set a double cheeseburger on the hand of "Big Boy," who will welcome guests to the Culture Center's exhibit celebrating West Virginia's 150 years of statehood.

New sesquicentennial exhibit features the flavor of W.Va.

By Paul J. Nyden
Staff writer

BIG Boy got to hold up his big double cheeseburger at the state Culture Center on Friday.

The 4-foot cheeseburger is so heavy, it took both Roy Dolin and David Husband to lift onto Big Boy's hand.

With his smiling face, Big Boy will greet visitors arriving

at the West Virginia State Museum on Thursday for the opening of a special exhibition commemorating the Mountain State's 150th anniversary.

Betty Schoenbaum signed her name on one of Big Boy's feet. Her late husband, Alex Schoenbaum, opened the first of his restaurants on Charleston's West Side in 1951, which became a Big Boy franchise that later was named Shoney's.

The exhibit, which will remain at the Culture Center through the rest of the year, features 150 displays featuring individuals, places, artifacts and historical events — one for each year of the state's history.

Exhibits range from beautiful pieces of glassware to books written by West Virginia authors, from a miner's lunch pail to an ad for chew-

ing tobacco. They also include a little piece of wood from a historic Wheeling bridge, an original oil pipeline used in the 1880s and sculptures of the heads of President Abraham Lincoln, who signed West Virginia into statehood, and Booker T. Washington, who grew up in nearby Malden.

SEE **EXHIBIT, 8A**

GUNS IN AMERICA

W.Va. colleges ban weapons on campuses

State law does not require it

By Mackenzie Mays
Staff writer

West Virginia law prohibits "deadly weapons" on elementary and high school property, with the exception of armed security guards or police, but the state leaves it up to individual colleges and universities how to handle guns on their campuses.

None of West Virginia's four-year public colleges and universities permit weapons on campus, with schools outlining their own policies on the issue, according to the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission.

"When parents send their children to college, they are entrusting us with the most important people in their lives," said state higher education Chancellor Paul Hill. "Our colleges and universities have an obligation to not

only educate students, but also keep them safe."

About half of the 50 states specifically prohibit carrying concealed weapons on college campuses, according to an analysis last week by Mother Jones magazine.

Five states — Colorado, Mississippi, Oregon, Utah and Wyoming — allow concealed weapons on campus, according to the analysis. In several other states, lawmakers recently have introduced legislation to permit college students to carry concealed weapons.

West Virginia University prohibits possession or storage of deadly weapons anywhere on campus — including in cars parked on school property. (The Mountaineer mascot, who totes his iconic muzzleloader at sporting events, is exempt under state

SEE **COLLEGES, 9A**

Thousands march for gun control

Brett Zongker
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Thousands of people, many holding signs with names of gun violence victims and messages such as "Ban Assault Weapons Now," joined a rally for gun control Saturday, marching from the Capitol to the Washington Monument.

Leading the crowd were marchers with "We Are Sandy Hook" signs, paying tribute to victims of the December school shooting in Newtown, Conn. Washington Mayor Vincent Gray and other city officials marched alongside them. The crowd stretched for at least two blocks along Constitution Avenue.

Participants held signs reading "Gun Control Now," "Stop

NRA" and "What Would Jesus Pack?" among other messages. Other signs were simple and white, with the names of victims of gun violence.

About 100 residents from Newtown, where a gunman killed 20 first-graders and six adults, traveled to Washington together, organizers said.

INSIDE: Democrats may stand in way on gun measures **3A**

Participant Kara Baekey from nearby Norwalk, Conn., said that when she heard about the Newtown shooting, she immediately thought of her two young children. She said she decided she must take action, and that's why she traveled to Washington for the march.

SEE **MARCH, 9A**

'We kind of fell in love with them'

Oprah Winfrey Network to feature Mud River Pound Punchers

By Kate Long
Staff writer

Last March, eight Mud River Volunteer Fire Department Pound Punchers had lost 416 pounds in seven months. They

did it by pounding country roads, exercising in the fire hall and laughing a lot, five days a week, with little money and no gym, track or grocery store within easy reach.

"I guess our secret is the word 'fun,'" Melisa Ferrell said. "We enjoy each other and encourage each other. When one of us gets discouraged, the others pick that person up."

By June, they had lost 555 pounds. They released 555 helium balloons to celebrate.

As the balloons floated over



THE SHAPE WE'RE IN

ONLINE: "Our America" www.oprah.com/own-our-america-lisa-ling/our-america-blog.html

the mountain, a New York camera crew filmed their group hug. The camera crew

had been following them around for two days, sent by the show "Our America," on the Oprah Winfrey Network. After reading about the women in the Sunday Gazette-Mail, "Our America" contacted them for an episode about parents who want to help their kids lose weight.

The crew arrived in two rental cars jam-packed with camera and sound equipment to film the parents and kids.

SEE **SHAPE, 9A**



KATE LONG | Sunday Gazette-Mail

When the Mud River Pound Punchers walk country roads after school, their kids often come too. "We're like a big family," says 11-year-old James Toney (white vest), beside mother Annie. They are featured in an Oprah Winfrey Network episode Tuesday about parents' efforts to curb child obesity.

INDEX | 2A



SHAPE

FROM PAGE 1A

They filmed them walking in sunshine and pouring rain, eating and playing basketball. Dancing to eBay tapes, blowing up the balloons.

They filmed the green fire-house chalkboard with everybody's weight loss on it: Annie 101 pounds, Melisa 123 pounds, Karen 63 pounds. And so on.

The result: On Tuesday night, "Our America, with Lisa Ling" will feature the Pound Punchers in an episode about parents' role in child obesity. "They are in this show because we're in the midst of a devastating epidemic of obesity, and they are showing us something inspiring, something that's working," Ling said Friday.

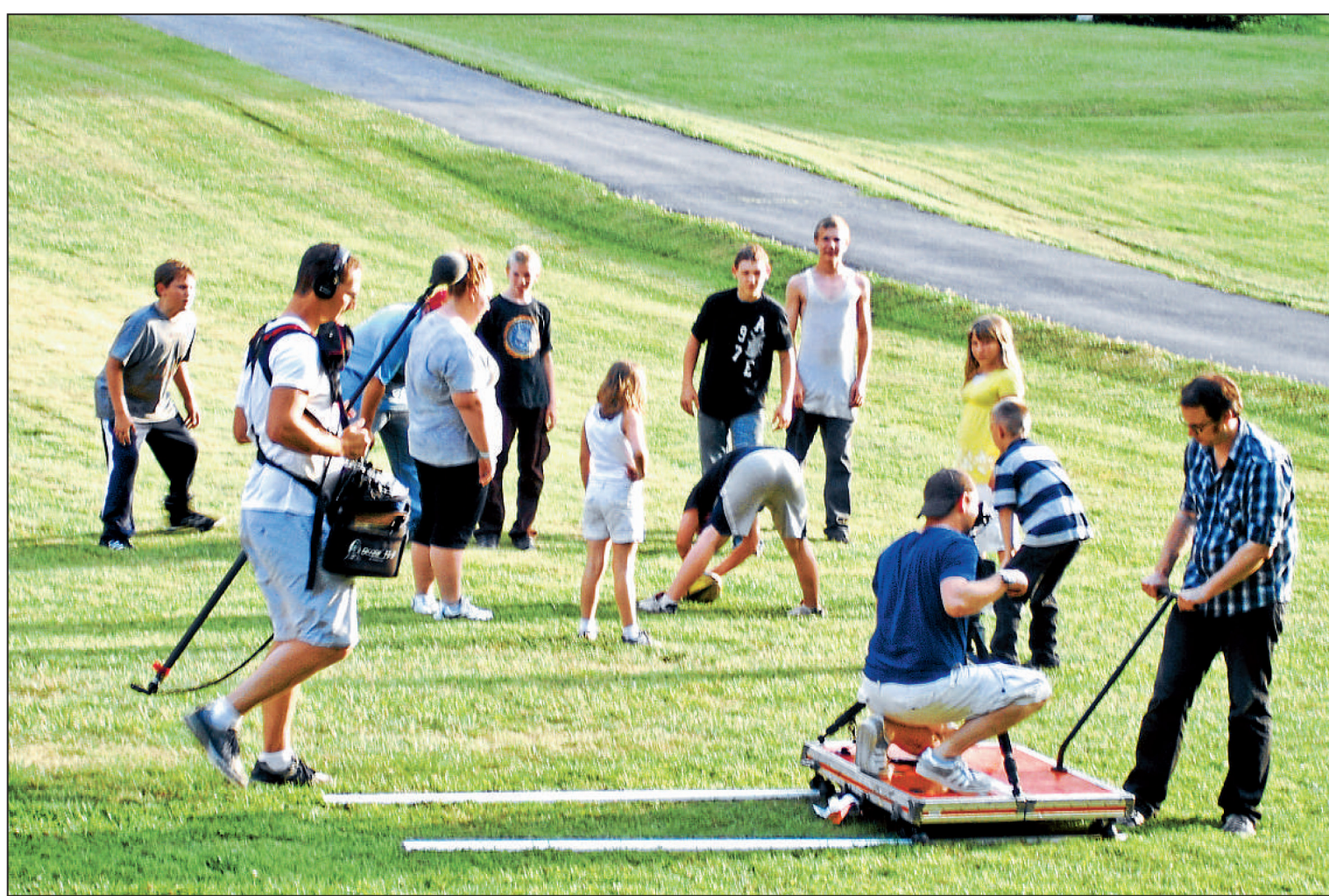
"They have a lot to teach the whole country," she said. "To tell the truth, we kind of fell in love with them," she said. "Our whole crew did. We're in awe of them. They are such earnest people with such sincere motivations, and they're so incredibly collaborative in their efforts to lose weight. They work together so well.

"Fundamentally, this episode is about the need for parents to step in and be role models for their kids, and the Mud River parents are great role models for their kids," Ling said.

The Pound Punchers have shed more than 750 pounds now. They're aiming for 1,000 by June.

But their role-modeling is about more than losing weight, Toney said. "It's about the community, too." In December, for instance, she and fellow firefighters drove from hollow to hollow every day for a week, delivering food and water to home after home, after Superstorm Sandy knocked out the power for a week.

"When our community needs us, we're there," said Pound Puncher and firefighter Karen Lawson. They're teaching the kids to have the same attitude. When the fire truck stopped at each house, her 15-year-old daughter Ashley, Melisa's 19-year-old son, R.J., and other teenagers jumped off the back of the truck to deliver food and water.



ANNIE TONEY courtesy photos

An Oprah Winfrey Network camera crew followed the Pound Punchers and their kids for three days in June to produce Tuesday's "Our America" episode. "The Mud River adults are not only saving their own lives," says show host Lisa Ling, "they're saving their kids' lives, too."

Each day now, Ashley Lawson gets off the school bus at the fire hall and works out with the Pound Punchers after school. She's lost about 30 pounds, so far. "Two years ago, I wouldn't take off my hoodie, even when it was hot, because I didn't want people looking at me," she said, "but we laugh a lot at the fire hall and, I don't know, it's making a difference."

Her friends are starting to come to work out, too. "The teenagers keep us laughing," Karen Lawson, Ashley's mother, said. "They'll say anything." The younger kids are quick to join their parents for a walk after school. The adults have taught them dance routines they can do together. "We're like a big family," said James Toney, Annie Toney's 11-year-old son.

"The Mud River adults are not only saving their own lives, they're saving their kids' lives too," Ling said. "They see that



Pound Punchers founder Melisa Ferrell and Lisa Ling, host of "Our America."

their own weight problem affects their children, and they've found they can change that."

Melisa's 19-year-old son often walks with his mom now.

"I used to be embarrassed of

her, but now she's my hero," he said. During the workouts, he baby-sits anywhere from four to a dozen kids, keeping them active. He has cut his soda pop consumption from more than 20 cans a day to an occasional can. He's lost more than 50 pounds.

Tuesday night's "Our America" episode is divided into three segments. First, there is an Arkansas 4-year-old who weighs more than 100 pounds and already has sleep apnea. A doctor tells the mother that, if he doesn't lose weight, "he will have the diseases like high blood pressure, diabetes, cholesterol problems It's a ticking time bomb." Then a Mississippi couple tells Ling they know their 347-pound 12-year-old needs to eat more healthy food, but don't know what's healthy or how to cook it.

The Pound Puncher segment is placed last, to show that change is possible, that "if you

can band together somehow with other people, you have support," Ling said. "It makes it easier. You can hold each other accountable and think of creative, fun ways to do this."

The Pound Punchers weren't allowed to see the show until it airs. "We're nervous as cats, because we just aren't sure how they're going to show us," said volunteer firefighter Annie Toney. "My stomach flops every time I think about it."

"When they asked us about doing it, we thought, well, if we do this, maybe it would inspire other people to get up off the couch and have fun together like we do," said Pound Puncher founder Melisa Ferrell. "But right now, we're kind of holding our breath."

She and the other Pound Punchers have heard people complain about the MTV show, "Buckwild," which many say casts the state in a bad light. "Oh Lord, I hope they don't make us look like that," Toney said. "We're so proud of what we do, and we're proud of our fire department, the way it helps our community."

They've thought of every minute that could be in there, like the time they sang "Country Girl, Shake that Thing" as they walked, "just cutting up, goofing with them, but maybe it ended up in the show?" Toney said.

"Oh, please tell them not to worry," "Our America" host Ling said when reached in Los Angeles on Friday. People who have seen the episode "have been so moved by them," she said. "Every one of us was inspired by our time with the Pound Punchers. I truly hope people from all across this country will be inspired, too."

This will be nothing like "Buckwild," she said.

The whole Mud River crew will gather at the fire hall Tuesday night to watch the show with their families and close friends. "I'll be happy if I don't have to duck my head," Annie Toney said.

"We'll all be happy if it turns out to be something that helps people," Melisa Ferrell said. "We also hope TV doesn't add 20 pounds to you, like they say it does."

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