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OBITUARIES

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Bucy, Suzanne
Childs, Ruth
Feathers, Robert
Glenn, Sandra
Heyl, Charles
Shaffer, Helen
Smith Sr., Charles

**Coronavirus numbers
in West Virginia**

Total tests: 61,564
Confirmed cases: 1,347
Total deaths: 53
Mon County, 112
Marion County, 46
Harrison County, 33
Preston County, 14
Taylor County, 9
Find other COVID-19 numbers,
Page A-2
These numbers are the latest from state
Department of Health and Human Services.

PRESTON

**Floral shop
owner talks
pandemic
impact on
Mother's Day**

BY JIM BISSETT
JBissett@DominionPost.com

Kammie Lantz was hastening to the hydrangea stems when the phone rang.

Over the sounds of rustling and clipping—flower shop sounds—she answered, with a shoot of a chuckle.

"Thank you for calling. Yes, we're definitely busy, but I'm not complaining. How can I help?"

She had been giving variations of that greeting all morning.

That's because Kam's Florist, the Terra Alta enterprise she owns and operates with her husband, Jamie, had been tilling for Mother's Day.

And Mother's Day, even with a COVID-19 corsage, is still Mother's Day.

Except when it isn't. "Well, it's different this year for sure," she said.

"Our inventory is limited, but we're lucky we got to reopen."

The shop is known for her innovative designs and personal touches.

Her arrangements are adorned with notes, sayings and definitely a grouping of the recipient's favorite

SEE FLOWERS, A-2

ENTERPRISE

WHAT'S IN THE WATER?

Newburg borehole concerns some residents, environmentalists



Submitted photos

A borehole drilled after Whitetail Kittanning Mine closed continues to dump pollutants into Raccoon Creek.

MORE TO COME

This is one in a four-part series looking at the issues caused by water coming from an underground coal mine in Preston County. Tuesday: Homeowners continue to deal with contaminated well water.

BY JENIFFER GRAHAM AND
JESSICA NELSON
Newsroom@DominionPost.com

It's been more than 10 years since the Whitetail Kittanning Mine closed. More than one year since contamination was discovered.

Four households are still without a permanent water supply.

And a borehole continues to dump pollutants into Raccoon Creek.

The following information was gathered through research by The Dominion Post reporters and provided by Save the Tygart Watershed Association.

Every tale has its start

The story of the Whitetail Mine began
SEE WATER, A-4



Explanations of terms and events used through this series

BY JENIFFER GRAHAM
AND JESSICA NELSON
Newsroom@DominionPost.com

These explanations of terms and events used in the above story and throughout the series

may help offer a bit more insight.

• The Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement Western Region (OSMRE) says when a company submits a permit to open a mine, it must

also post a bond. The bond ensures there will be money to reclaim the mine should the company go bankrupt. According to Stan Jennings, president of Save the Tygart Watershed Association, the bonds are never

enough to cover the reclamation. A bond release is a three-phase process through which a coal company can be released from responsibility for the mine

SEE TERMS, A-4



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WATER

FROM PAGE A-1

long before water seeped into the yards and wells of four Preston County home owners. The legacy of one of the most productive mines in the state became shadowed by accidents, injuries and deaths. Fines for safety violations led to bankruptcy, and the now-closed underground mine changed hands.

For 10 years, Whitetail Kittanning Mine, outside Newburg, sat idle and filled with water. Eventually, with water began to escape, seeping along creeks, pooling in yards and contaminating residential wells. An emergency solution to prevent a blowout caused another kind of damage that has long-lasting consequences.

Of mines, wells and water

In 2006, the Whitetail Kittanning Mine was one of the top 10 producing underground mines in the state. By 2009, the mine was shut down as Kingwood Mining Co. LLC, a subsidiary of Alpha Natural Resources, faced \$736,000 in fines for repeated safety violations.

In 2014, Alpha settled the largest environmental fine ever made against a coal company: A \$27.5 million fine and \$200 million to reduce toxic discharges into hundreds of waterways across five states in Appalachia. It is unclear if any of the environmental violations were at Whitetail.

That same year, Kingwood Mining Co. submitted a request for a Phase 1 bond release for the Whitetail K-mine on Nov. 20. It withdrew the application on Dec. 17 after the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection asked it to submit a Post Mining Underground Assessment (PUMA) first. The bond release process allows a coal company to relinquish responsibility for a mine.

Alpha Natural Resources filed for bankruptcy in 2015 and, in 2017, transferred idle assets to the Lexington Coal Co. — including the Whitetail mine. As part of the bankruptcy and asset transfer, Lexington received “approximately \$204 million in cash at the time of closing and \$112 million in installment payments to assist in the fulfillment of bonding, reclamation, water treatment and other obligations associated with the conveyed properties and permits,” according to 2017 news reports. David Stetson, Alpha CEO, commented at the time, “LCC [Lexington] has a decade-long history of reclaiming properties in a diligent and environmentally responsible manner. And Alpha is providing LCC with adequate resources to meet its obligations to the communities in which the properties are located.”

Despite the exchange of paperwork, Whitetail sat abandoned and sealed — and filling with water.

It is unclear when a second Phase 1 bond release — this time submitted by Lexington — was filed, or when the PUMA inspections began. However, the first set of comments to the PUMA are dated September 2017. WVDEP reviewer

Joshua Bonner notes on Sept. 19, 2017, “the current K-mine [Kittanning seam] pool elevation appears to be above potential breakout elevation in the 7 Main section of the mine, beneath Raccoon Creek.” Bonner then suggests “a new monitoring well in a down-dip, unsealed section of the mine may be needed.” In other words, the Whitetail K-mine had the potential for a blowout and the water levels would need to be watched closely.

An update to the application’s comments made by public notary Paul Chrousos on Feb. 19, 2019, stated the water in the K-mine had been rising since August 2017. A monitoring well already at the K-mine as well as the F-mine (Freeport seam) would continue to be used to watch water levels, but after discussions with the DEP on Sept. 26, 2017, no additional monitoring wells were planned. On Dec. 20, 2019, the second application for the Phase 1 bond release was withdrawn.

Stan Jennings, president of Save the Tygart Watershed Association, said Save the Tygart became aware of problems related to the K-mine as early as January or February 2019.

“On York Run, we started to see these seeps coming up out of the ground,” Jennings said. “A month or two later, at Felloesville, there were two well casings where water was actually coming up out of the well casings, so we knew something was up.”

Jennings also said later seeps appeared along Little Raccoon Creek. Little Raccoon Creek flows into Raccoon Creek, which flows into the Three Fork Creek a major tributary for the Tygart River. Any contamination in one branch of the tributary system could cause problems in any body of water downstream. And after years of hard work to clean up the Tygart and Three Fork Creeks, Save the Tygart was alarmed by the seeps around Newburg.

On March 29, 2019, Felloesville resident Scott Rankin filed a complaint with the State Department of Environmental Protection’s Division of Mining and Reclamation about water springing up on his property. Water came up from underground and pooled on the surface of his yard. Both his house and yard had been damaged by subsidence, which happens when the ground sinks because of underground material was removed.

On April 23, 2019, Roger and Brenda Simons, who live on Possum Hollow Road, filed a complaint because their well — their source of drinking water — had been contaminated.

On April 26, 2019, Bruce Wilt filed a complaint because the well providing his drinking water was contaminated. On April 29, 2019, Theresa Bender and Gary Bell followed suit for the same reason.

After the various citizen complaints, the DEP conducted a compliance inspection on the Whitetail K-mine in April 2019. According to DEP Complaint Investigation Reports, DEP investigators determined the contamination residents had experienced was the result of min-

ing operations at the Whitetail Mine Complex.

In an email, Terry Fletcher, acting communications director for the DEP, said the inspection found that mine pool levels exceeded previous calculations, which caused artesian well locations and visible acid mine drainage (AMD) seepage along Little Sandy Creek.

The DEP ordered Lexington Coal Co. to provide an emergency drinking water supply within 24 hours for the four households that lost their drinking water. The order states: Within 72 hours, it must provide temporary water supply. Within 30 days, Lexington Coal Co. would have to begin activities to establish a permanent water supply or submit a proposal to the DEP secretary outlining the measures and timetables to be used in establishing a permanent supply.

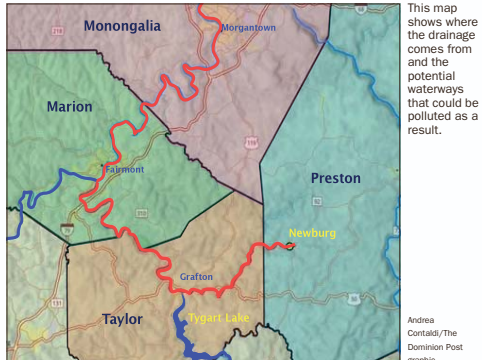
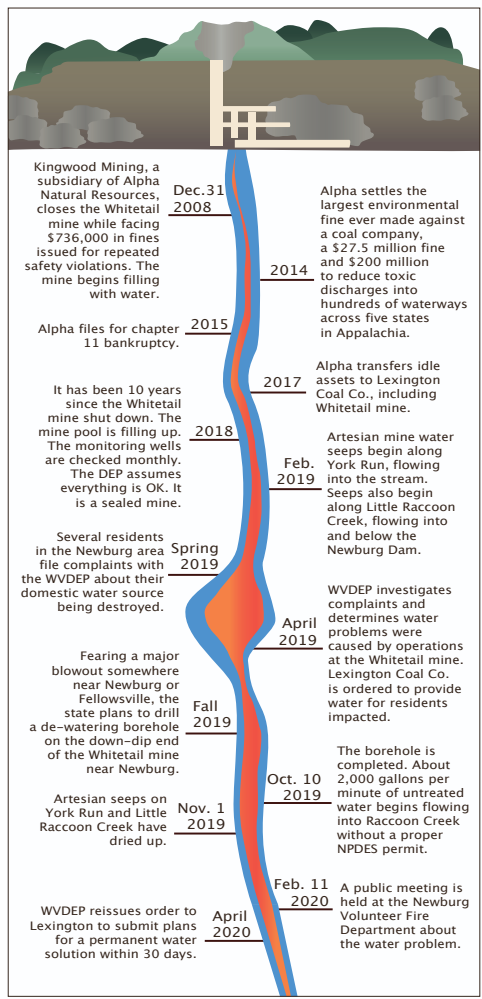
The above water replacement order was sent to Lexington Coal Co. on April 25, 2019, on behalf of the Simonses. Identical orders were sent on May 3, 2019, on behalf of Wilt, Bender, Bell and Bell’s sister, Patricia Cline. A satisfactory proposal for a permanent water supply still had not been submitted as of April 24, 2020, according to a letter from the DEP to Lexington.

An emergency solution

On Oct. 10, 2019, an emergency borehole was completed to let water out of the Whitetail K-mine before a blowout could occur. However, the permit for the discharge point had not yet been officially approved. The borehole, known as IBR No. 11 — is a half mile northeast of Newburg in Lyon and Reno districts of Preston County and releases water from the mine into Raccoon Creek. When the borehole was first drilled, water poured from the opening at around 2,000 gallons per minute, said Paul Baker, a chemist with Save the Tygart. The flow has since decreased to about 600 gpm.

Before the borehole was drilled, on Sept. 24, 2019, Lexington Coal Co. filed an application for an Incidental Boundary Revision. The DEP website says, “Application is required to allow minor shifts or extensions of the permit boundary into non-coal areas or areas where any coal extraction is incidental to or of only secondary consideration to the intended purpose of the IBR.” The provision permits 1.51 acres to add a de-watering borehole for the K-Mine in the Lower Kittanning Coal Seam to Permit U100798 — the Whitetail K-mine. The Incidental Boundary Revision is what allowed Lexington to access the land where the borehole was drilled.

According to the WVDEP website, Lexington has a pending modification for a Whitetail K-mine National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit, which determines the amount of pollution that can enter a waterway from a mine’s discharge point, such as the borehole. The application was submitted Sept. 29, 2019 as a draft to the Environmental Protection Agency, but it is not clear if this permit is for the borehole along Raccoon Creek. The



DEP did not respond with clarification in time for this report. However, Fletcher had said in earlier correspondences that the de-watering borehole site on Raccoon Creek is a permanent NPDES site.

A year after Lexington Coal Co. was mandated to

submit a proposal for a permanent solution to the potable water problem, the DEP still has not received a satisfactory plan.

During the intervening year, water has been delivered regularly to the affected households by Dean’s Water Service Inc.,

of Washington, Pa., in compliance with the DEP’s original order. However, the deliveries were meant to be temporary. Lexington still has not given the homeowners a permanent water supply to replace the wells destroyed by Whitetail’s mining operations.

TERMS

FROM PAGE A-1

and sometimes receive back part of the bond it posted when the mine opened. OSMRE says a “Phase 1 bond release may occur upon the completion of backfilling, regrading and drainage control, in accordance with the approved reclamation plan.” Similar guidelines exist for underground mines. A company must finish and receive approval for all three phases before the bond can be completely released.

According to a 2016 WVDEP document, a Post Underground Mining Assessment (PUMA) is required when an applica-

tion for a Phase 1 bond release is submitted, or the company must provide sufficient evidence that a PUMA is not necessary for the bond release process to continue. A 2012 policy requires hydrologic analyses for underdrainage mines and those with a potential for blowing out or other adverse impacts to ensure that any post-mine discharge meets water quality standards.

All dates regarding the PUMA and Phase 1 bond release are taken from documents made publicly available after the application for bond release was withdrawn. Despite the unusual timeline, these dates are correct according to available documentation.

According to Jennings, a mine’s down-dip section is one of the lowest elevations of the mine. Coal seams aren’t flat — they are contoured like the hills — so the down-dip would be a low section of the seam where water would likely pool. The Whitetail mine slopes toward Newburg, so the lowest elevation is just outside of town. The de-watering borehole (completed October 2019) was drilled in a down-dip section of the mine, which allows the water to be forced out by gravity.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) defines subsi-

dence as the “sinking of the ground because of underground material movement ... most often caused by the removal of water, oil, natural gas or mineral resources out of the ground by pumping, fracking or mining activities.”

According to the U.S. Geological Survey, “Artesian water is really not different from other groundwater, except for the fact that it flows to the land surface because pressure in the rocks underground force it to the surface,” such as the pressure that might result from water filling a sealed mine. Therefore, an artesian well is a well (man-made or natural) where pressure and gravity cause the water to flow to the surface without

pumping. The water pooling in Scott Rankin’s yard may have been a result of an artesian well.

According to the University of Kentucky Geological Survey, “Blowouts occur when hydrostatic pressure within flooded, abandoned coal seams becomes too powerful for the coal barriers to withstand.” Jennings added that, in a blowout, hundreds of thousands of gallons of water could rush out, destroying roads and houses. Two blowouts at the T&T coal mine in 1994-95 poured millions of gallons of acidic water into a main tributary of the Cheat River, according to the Friends of the Cheat website. Fish were killed as far as 16 miles downstream in Cheat Lake, and the Cheat River turned bright orange.