

Area brownfields get grants

3 Preston sites to be given new purpose

BY CASSIE SHANER
The Dominion Post

Three Preston County groups received \$12,000 grants to support continued property redevelopment during the 2009 West Virginia Brownfields Conference on Tuesday.

The Phase II grants — issued through the Brownfields Foundation

Area brownfields

- The former Quality Glass site on Van Voorhis Road.
- The former Owens-Illinois glass plant property on Fairmont's East Side.
- An old service station site at the corner of W.Va. 7 and W.Va. 92 in Reedsville.
- The former Patriot Coal prep site in the community of Preston.
- A former glass factory site in Morgantown's Sunnyside area.
- Deckers Creek, due to coal mining along W.Va. 7.

for Overcoming Challenges and Utilizing Strengths (FOCUS) — were awarded to Friends of Deckers Creek,

Friends of the Cheat and the Rowlesburg Revitalization Committee, according to Robbie Baylor, direc-

tor of the Preston County Economic Development Authority.

Two other grants awarded Tuesday will benefit projects in Marion County and Brooke and Hancock counties.

Brownfields are abandoned or under used properties where redevelopment may be difficult due to the presence of a hazardous substance. West Virginia Secretary of Commerce Kelley Goes, the conference's keynote speaker, said Tuesday that there are more than 450,000 brownfields properties nationwide and "hundreds" in West Virginia.

The Friends of Deckers Creek grant will help redevelop a former service

station site at the corner of W.Va. 7 and W.Va. 92 in Reedsville. The organization is working with Reedsville Town Council, the landowner, neighboring landowners and local residents to develop a vision of profitable businesses and attractive facilities for the site and the entire intersection.

Friends of the Cheat is working to develop the former Patriot Coal prep site along the Cheat River for recreational use — including river access — and the Rowlesburg grant will go toward the old Rowlesburg High School site.

The school, built in 1910, was dam-

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aged during the 1985 Cheat River flood and deemed unfit for student use. It was used by Appalachian Wildwaters, a whitewater adventure company, and it now serves as the Janet and Imre Szilagyi Center for the Arts.

Other examples of brownfields include former factory, chemical plant, glass plant and gas station properties. Goes said many of West Virginia's brownfields are in rural areas that present unique redevelopment challenges.

"Brownfield redevelopment isn't always about going up and down the river and looking at chemical factories that used to be or glass plants that no longer operate," Goes said.

"A lot of [redevelopment in] West Virginia is about finding ways to get these brownfields cleaned up in these smaller communities, and to find funding and to find purposes for these brownfields and to look for a vision to repurpose that property."

About 179 people signed up to attend the conference, which continues today at the Waterfront Place Hotel. It provides networking and education opportunities for attendees, including WVU faculty members, local development officials and representatives from state and federal agencies.

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Kelley Goes, West Virginia Secretary of Commerce

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Stepan Nevshahirlian, an EPA project manager based in Philadelphia, was at the conference to learn more about West Virginia brownfields and meet grant recipients he works with in the Morgantown area.

"It's important for sharing information," Nevshahirlian said of the conference. "There's a lot of things going on that are on the cutting edge that people are able to share with others at a conference like this."

The key to brownfield redevelopment is breaking each project into small pieces that can be accomplished by several people, groups or agencies working together, Goes said. She recommended public-private partnerships to combat economic issues and land-use planning to encourage investment and community support.

"Green is in," Goes said. "You're recycling land, repurposing it. Embrace that. ... People can get behind that."

Morgantown Mayor Bill Byrne said there are several brownfields in the Morgantown area. City officials are working with the Northern West Virginia Brownfields

Assistance Center — located within the West Virginia Water Institute at WVU's National Research Center for Coal and Energy — to redevelop three acres of riverfront property in the Sunnyside area.

Like Goes, Byrne encouraged attendees to form partnerships to foster economic development — a strategy that has worked for Morgantown, he said.

"We think that partnership between the public sector and the private sector is the way to bring about needed change and opportunity," Byrne said.

The 2009 West Virginia Brownfields Conference is hosted by the West Virginia Brownfields Assistance Centers at WVU and Marshall University, the state Department of Environmental Protection, the state Development Office, the West Virginia chapter of the Air and Waste Management Association and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

It's also sponsored by Triad Engineering, Jackson Kelly, Thrasher Engineering and H.C. Nutting.