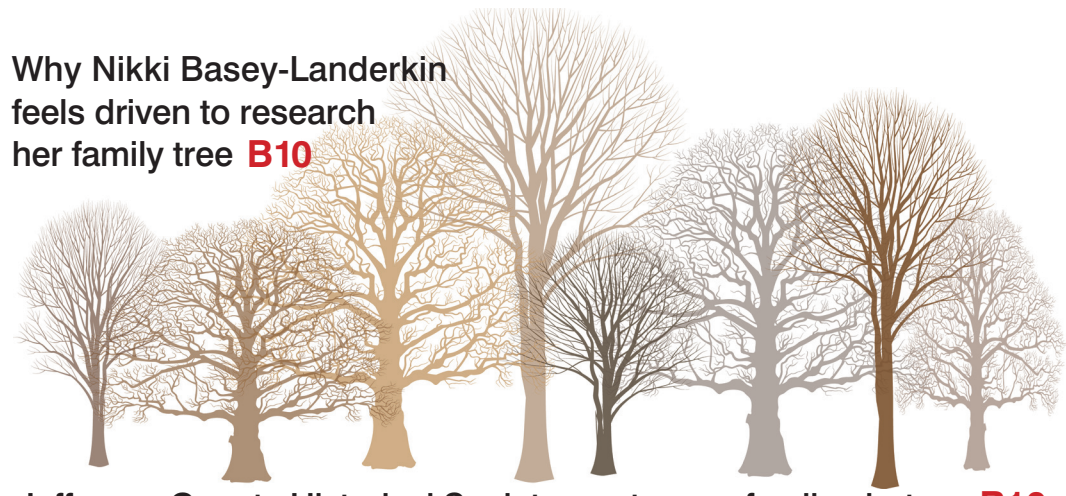


Why Nikki Basey-Landerkin feels driven to research her family tree **B10**



Jefferson County Historical Society wants your family photos **B10**

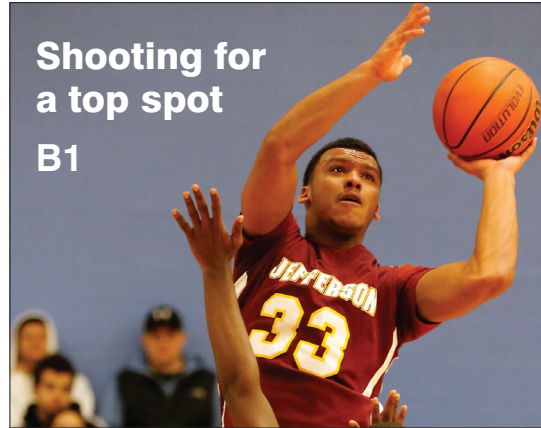


W.Va. native has 'Elf' esteem **C1**

Seams like a good idea? **B3**



Shooting for a top spot **B1**



Patt Welsh's breakfast tips **C8**

All Good organizer promises good for county

By **ROBERT SNYDER**
editor@spiritofjefferson.com

CHARLES TOWN — The organizer of a summer music festival set to happen in Jefferson County said the event will live up to its name.

All Good Music Festival and Camp Out owner Tim Walther said he wants to bring an event to the area that residents and visitors will enjoy and that businesses will benefit from.

"We've always been an event where we don't want to cost the community money; we want to bring economic activity into the community," said Walther, who lives in Jefferson, Md.

He cited a study prepared by AC Entertainment that concluded that a 2010 All Good festival generated \$2.1 million in economic activity for West Virginia, and almost \$700,000 for Preston County. The concert drew more than 23,000 patrons and more than

◆ See FESTIVAL Page A5

Pellish: Lower impact fee will boost growth

By **ROBERT SNYDER**
editor@spiritofjefferson.com

CHARLES TOWN — Jefferson County Commissioner Walt Pellish said he is confident that the decision last week by the commission to cut impact fees will reap dividends in the form of new building and increased revenue.

The commission voted 3-2 last week to cut impact fees on residential units from their current rate of \$13,070 per single-family unit to \$6,346.

The new rate goes into effect on March 1.

Under the new schedule, the rate for townhouses and duplexes will be \$6,908 per unit, while the rate for multi-family units will be \$4,456.

Impact fees are leveled against every unit of new construction in Jefferson County and are used to fund capital projects for emergency services, law

◆ See IMPACT Page A8



ROBERT SNYDER

James Tolbert says the progress blacks have made in America has been hard-won. He said he worries those victories can be undone by the indifference of younger generations who didn't live through the active days of the civil rights era and by forces that want to weaken blacks' political strength.

A civil life

James Tolbert remembers when his neighbors along Academy Street owned their own homes, when they tended to vegetable gardens in their backyards and when the businesses and bars and pool halls that lined South West Street bustled with activity on Friday and Saturday nights.

By *Robert Snyder*

It was a time when the old black neighborhoods of Charles Town — Big End, Dogtown, Potato Hill, Eagle Avenue and Boone in Ranson, near where American Public University's solar array stands today — thrived and prospered, Tolbert said.

Tolbert has been long been a fixture in the civic life of Charles Town and in Jefferson County's African-American community, and remains one of its leaders who served a vital role in the state's civil rights movement.

And he's witnessed many battles won — from improving access for blacks to better educational opportunities, lending, housing and jobs to the pressure the NAACP applied to

the state's school system to insist it abide by Brown v. Board of Education, the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark 1954 desegregation ruling.

At 82, he continues to work diligently to improve the life of the county's black community and to preserve its history. The battle is not won, Tolbert says, but what worries him is whether others after him will care enough to keep fighting it.

"There are new people moving in who just seem to want to be with themselves and don't know anything of the struggles and aren't concerned," Tolbert said during an interview this week. "It seems like as

◆ See TOLBERT Page A3

Crash victim 'generous with time and talents'

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

SHENANDOAH JUNCTION — A 32-year-old Shepherdstown man whose car crashed on his way home from work Feb. 17 is being remembered for his contributions to the American Conservation Film Festival and other community efforts.

Alex G. Kemnitzer, who died Thursday, was "always very community-minded," explained Jeff Feldman, president of the Shepherdstown-based film festival. "He was generous with his time and generous with his talents."

Though Kemnitzer had a business and economics degree from Shepherd University and worked for H&R Block in Charles Town, his involvement on the film festival's board of directors didn't center on his acumen for numbers.

"He'd just roll up his sleeves and contribute in any way we need-



Alex Kemnitzer

ed," Feldman said. "Whenever we had an event, he wanted to know how he could help out. He'd come early and help set up and he'd stay late and help clean up. He was just one of those people we could always count on."

Feldman said Kemnitzer, like his parents Susan and David A. Kemnitzer, had "strong roots in the community. He loved Shepherdstown, and wanted to give back to support the community he felt had always supported him."

Kemnitzer, who served on the ACFF board for six years, also was a longtime board member of Habitat for Humanity of the Eastern Panhandle.

The day of his accident, Kemnitzer took part in a Habitat board

◆ See GENEROUS Page A4



Susan Conklin of Ranson

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ROBERT SNYDER

ABOVE: James Tolbert, 82, remains active in restoring buildings with ties to local black history. **RIGHT:** In October, state Sen. John Unger presented Tolbert and other members of the African American Community Association of Jefferson County with \$20,000 for Fisherman's Hall. **FAR RIGHT:** In this snapshot from the 1940s, Tolbert (center) stands with friends. Except for his college years in Kanawha County, he's lived in Charles Town his entire life.



ROBERT SNYDER



Tolbert FROM PAGE A1

long as their family are making good they don't want to be involved."

For Tolbert, it's a concern that hits hard. He's lived in Charles Town all of his life and he has fought for civil rights from the formation of the county's NAACP chapter in 1963 and before that with the Charles Town Civic League.

Born in Charles Town in 1932, the youngest of four children, Tolbert graduated from Page Jackson High School in 1950, then completed a four-year tour with the Air Force.

His father, Edward Dabney Tolbert, was born and raised in a house on Academy Street that Tolbert now owns. A veteran of World War I, the elder Tolbert worked at Getz's Harness Factory in Ranson and later retired from a job as a custodian at the Charles Town Post Office.

Tolbert's mother, Ollie Lightfoot Tolbert, grew up in Berryville, Va., and worked as a teacher in Millwood, Va., and a social worker, retiring as assistant director at the Department of Public Assistance after 35 years there. Her father was a graduate of Storer College in Harpers Ferry.

Tolbert met his wife, Shirley, at the all-black West Virginia State College in Institute south

of Charleston, where he earned a degree in zoology in 1958. He soon went to work for the U.S. Navy Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., and then the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Martinsburg, where he worked in a radiology lab. Ultimately, he'd stay with Veterans Affairs for the rest of his career, even after switching to a job in personnel policy at the V.A.'s central offices in Washington D.C., but he continued to live in Charles Town and it was here that he and Shirley raised their three sons. A fourth son died in 1972 at the age of 13.

Tolbert's father was a Mason and was active in voter registration efforts for blacks, and both of his parents were active in their church. Tolbert said their activism had a big influence on his decision to get involved in his community and West Virginia's slowness to respond to the high court's Brown decision was what led him to fight for civil rights for blacks.

"There were a group of men and women here ... they were very, very concerned that the school board and state school board had done nothing to implement the 1954 school desegregation decision, and I joined them," he said.

Desegregation changed a lot for blacks, Tolbert said, but there were unintended consequences.

Storer College—established in 1867, making it the first school of

higher learning for blacks in West Virginia — lost its government funding and closed. Many black educators, teachers and administrators who worked at black public schools lost their jobs with the closure of black schools like Eagle Avenue Elementary School, Page-Jackson High School and Grandview Elementary School in Shepherdstown.

Patrons of black businesses began to go to white establishments and black businesses closed. Many longtime residents left the area looking for work as much of the industrial activity in Ranson began to slow down around the same time.

The effect of these changes continue to haunt the black community which, Tolbert says, lost many of its voices and much of its representation.

"We had guys that set a very good example for the rest of the community," Tolbert said. "We had a bunch of good people. Now we have a lot of people that don't understand and haven't been exposed to black history and what our forefathers did."

"We don't have that sense of community here like we did have."

Before desegregation, black schools focused on black history, Tolbert said, and students were made aware of their own history by people who understood it.

"The black national anthem,

everybody knew by heart," he said. "They didn't need a book or anything and it was treated the same way as 'The Star Spangled Banner. When you would sing 'Lift Every Voice and Sing,' you stood."

"The kids today aren't exposed to that any more," he said. "Now Martin Luther King is unpacked out of a box. They learn all kinds of stuff about Martin Luther King and at the end of Black History Month they take all that and put it in a box until next year and nobody discusses black history until the next year."

"A lot of people don't know what happened before Martin Luther King."

The lack of black history instruction has left black students indifferent to what previous generations encountered even as so many young minority students continue to lag behind academically, Tolbert says.

"They have got to do something about the achievement gap," he said. "It seems like all of our kids are being pushed towards athletics. They'd rather get an athletic scholarship than an academic scholarship."

"Everybody can't sing and everybody can't dance and everybody's not going to the NBA. They've got to look at real things," he said. "Young people need to think about setting up their own businesses; there is a need for that."

Tolbert and his wife set up a college scholarship for area black students, and he said he's encouraged that new state schools Superintendent Michael Martirano has noted how far black students lag behind. But he'd still like to see more black teachers and administrators hired in the public schools.

"We've got to resurrect our teaching tradition," he said. "We

need them and I think the white community ought to be concerned about that too. You don't want your children being exposed to just one race. They bring certain values to the table and blacks ought to have that opportunity too to share their values."

And not just black educators. Tolbert said the county needs more black police officers too. He said having more black representation among institutions is the only way to ensure black residents are given a fair shake.

Tolbert said civil rights leaders remain alarmed by cases such as the shooting of Wayne Jones on March 3, 2013, after encountering police as he walked in downtown Martinsburg. The Stephens City, Va., man was shot 23 times by five Martinsburg police officers and though West Virginia State Police admitted dash cam

◆ See TOLBERT Page A4

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Tolbert FROM PAGE A3

video of the deadly encounter was altered before being released to the public in late 2013, none of the officers faced charges.

He said Martinsburg police should have handled the situation much better.

"If you got five policemen over you and nobody else on the street and you're backed up against the wall," he said. "It's frightening. And it you've got mental problems on top of that — they should have recognized that ... somebody has to say something is wrong."

Tolbert said he believes New York Mayor Bill DeBlasio and Attorney General Eric Holder were correct to warn their children to be careful of the police. He said he often did the same thing when his own son Michael would visit from D.C.

"The last thing my wife would say to him was watch yourself going through Charles Town," Tolbert said. "We knew that many years ago what the police were doing. He'd lived in Washington for years and years but when he came to Charles Town we felt it was our responsibility to tell him to watch himself."

Tolbert and other county NAACP and blacks churches' leaders met last week with representatives from area police departments. He said he wanted



James Tolbert (fourth from right) was on hand for the re-laying of the cornerstone for St. Philip's Episcopal Church in Charles Town in 1984. Tolbert, who has belonged to the church his whole life, worries about the future of the Episcopal denomination in West Virginia.

to ensure a Ferguson, Mo., doesn't erupt here.

He said the private meeting went extremely well and he credited the willingness of the police departments to sit down to discuss their concerns.

"The police appreciated getting information from the community and they agreed that more training is needed in handling certain people," he said.

George Rutherford, also a member of the area and state NAACP, said the

meeting was intended to open up access to the police.

"I talk to the chief of police all the time," Rutherford said. "I want them to have a relationship not just with me; I want it with the whole black community. The police are not something we should be afraid of. They're there to help us. We want to know what we can do."

Tolbert reserves a special concern for the black churches, which he thinks have lost their way as attendance in

many of them continues to decline.

His own church, St. Philip's Episcopal — which was chartered in 1885 and remains one of the last black Episcopal churches in the state — is led by its laity, just a handful of members, and is visited by a priest who delivers communion twice a month.

He said the churches need to do a better job of being engaged in black issues.

Politically, he said he is alarmed for support among average voters for voter ID laws, which he said are intended in part to marginalize black voters.

Tolbert said real voter fraud can be found among politicians who gerrymander districts to get the outcome they want.

"The result is that black voters are concentrated into all-black districts that weaken their overall strength," he said. "A lot of our folks don't understand that you have to vote."

He's also suspicious of the charter school movement, which, he believes will manage to exclude black children, making the achievement gap even more pronounced.

"We've got to be more involved," he said. "I think blacks have to look at what's happening and how it's impacting where they live their properties and their families. They've got to look at that."

South West and Academy streets don't bustle with activity the way they did when Tolbert was a young boy. The bars and pool halls and taverns have long since closed their doors.

Tolbert remains active in the county's NAACP — he serves as secretary — and he's also active with the Jefferson County Black History Preservation Society, which has been busy restoring a number of historical structures in Charles Town, including Fisherman's Hall.

That building, which sits at the end of Academy Street along West Street, once served as a tabernacle for the Grand United Order of the Galilean Fishermen, a benevolent organization founded in Baltimore in 1856.

Tolbert remembers when the hall was a tavern when he was a boy — legendary showman Silas Green once performed there. On Sunday mornings, its owner, Rankin Taylor, would open the tavern up for the neighborhood children as a place to come hang out; Taylor would serve candy and popcorn and soda.

Tolbert said it's important that these old buildings be brought back to life to help remind everyone what the black community was once like and, he hopes, might be again.

"We want to see our institutions preserved," he said. "We need to make sure our history is documented."

Generous FROM PAGE A1

meeting, said the Rev. G. Edward Grove, Habitat's president/CEO.

"The board of directors and staff are grieving the loss of our colleague and friend," Grove said. "While one of the youngest members of the board of directors, he was our senior in years of service. He kept us historically grounded in the work of Habitat for Humanity in the Eastern Panhandle and he was our strong advocate for Habitat's work in Jefferson County. "Those of us who worked and shared with him will miss his passion and

commitment to the work of Habitat for Humanity in the Eastern Panhandle."

Kemnitzer threw himself into the work of Habitat as a board member even though he was only recently out of college, said Tim Pownell, who was Habitat's board president when Kemnitzer became involved with the nonprofit.

More recently, Kemnitzer volunteered with Habitat's ReStore in Martinsburg, where he worked directly with customers. He also served on Habitat's ReStore committee and as the board of directors' secretary, according to Grove.

"I'd heard from other board members that Alex had really stepped into

bigger and bigger leadership roles in recent months," said Pownell, a Shepherdstown banker who's no longer on the Habitat board.

Pownell said he hopes Kemnitzer felt proud of the contributions he made over the years.

"You know, when you help someone get a Habitat house, you're helping to end generational poverty. Now this family has a home and the children living there will grow up having equity in a home. It's a huge way to help, and Alex was a part of that. He made a very big difference in the lives of so many people in our community."

According to a news release from Sheriff Pete Dougherty, authorities were alerted to Kemnitzer's accident just before 9 p.m. by a 911 call from David Asam, who'd been driving on Flowing Springs Road when he spotted crash debris, then found Kemnitzer unresponsive behind the wheel of his Chrysler PT Cruiser in a field just south of Media Farm Lane near Old Country Club Road.

Kemnitzer's car had struck and sheared off a utility pole, then hit a fence, sending boards through the windshield and leaving Kemnitzer with "multiple severe injuries to his head and face," the news release stated.

After EMS workers freed Kemnitzer from the car, he was airlifted to Winchester (Va.) Medical Center.

Kemnitzer's funeral is set for 11 a.m. Saturday at Shepherdstown's St. Agnes Catholic Church, with a reception following at Trinity Episcopal Church in Shepherdstown.

Besides his parents, his survivors include cousins, aunts and uncles. His only sibling, his older brother Nicholas Kemnitzer, died at 21 in 2001.

His family say contributions in his memory may be made to the American Conservation Film Festival or to Habitat for Humanity of the Eastern Panhandle.

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