

Star City

New Direction

Herman Reid came to the mayorship of Star City after a 40-year career as a police officer. “We were very much in the red,” Reid says of the state of his native town when he was first elected in 2015. “In my opinion, things weren’t organized.”

Once home to as many as 13 glass factories, Star City suffered from the decline of the glass industry and from the loss of coal mining across the region. But Reid sees things looking up for the town of 1,800. He points to the new Tuscan Sun Spa & Salon building on Boyers Avenue, which opened in 2017, as just one bright spot. A couple new dental offices and several other businesses have opened, too.

He also names a number of very large projects. Aldi is building its second grocery store in the area, opening very soon behind Golden Corral and CVS. The St. Mary Roman Catholic Church on University Avenue is undergoing a \$3 million update and expansion. And the Morgantown Utility Board is spending more than \$100 million to upgrade the 1965 sewage treatment plant to a state-of-the-art facility. “Luckily, that’s in Star City, so we get 2 percent of that,” Reid says. “We lost 84 Lumber and MUB bought that property up, but hopefully we’ll get another lumber yard back in.”

Star City has some of the best river and rail-trail access around, and more is coming. Town Council voted in 2015 to allow the installation of a canoe and kayak launch at the end of Van Voorhis; Mon River Trails Conservancy and Morgantown Area Paddlers opened that in 2016 along with restrooms and 30 parking spots, and it’s been very popular, Reid says. He hopes to add a similar launch facility at Edith Barill Riverfront Park, near Terra Cafe, in the spring of 2018. “Our small dock needs replaced, and I’d like to put a bigger dock in and put a kayak-canoe ramp in with that. Morgantown is putting one in and Point Marion’s going to do it, so paddlers will be able to go four miles, 10 miles. That’s a good use of the river.”

The town has also received a grant to construct a spur off the Caperton Trail that will improve connectivity between road and trail. “It’s going to go underneath



the Star City bridge so people don’t have to cross Monongahela Boulevard there,” Reid says. “We’ll have it come underneath the bridge and up beside CVS, and Morgantown is supposed to put a bike path in on that southbound side of the boulevard all the way into town. People could park at the Coliseum, grab their bikes, and ride down to Star City and get on the trail. It’ll be a nice improvement.” He hopes that will be done in 2018.

Meanwhile, the town is making improvements to the Star City municipal building on Broadway. “The Morgantown Public Library is thinking about putting a library upstairs,” he says. “We’re also working on putting a senior center up there, and I’ve talked to a lady about a wellness center. I think that would be great for Star City—the older generation, including me, could go there, get their blood pressure checked, get on the treadmill, stuff like that.”

Being mayor is both challenging and rewarding for Reid. “I’m one of those guys that believes in getting it done yesterday, and there’s a lot of red tape for getting things done—things don’t move as quick as I’d like to see them move,” he says. “But I thoroughly enjoy it. There are a couple of squeaky wheels, but 97 percent of the people are pretty satisfied with what I’m getting done with the council, and we’re definitely moving in the right direction. Star City’s just a great little town.”

CLAUDIO ENTERPRISES

Star City businessman Dominick Claudio has a vision for his town. The fourth-generation native’s most visible enterprise might be his first, Unique Consignment, which he started in 2012 to specialize in gently used furniture and home goods. “It’s grown to where we have a really good Facebook following and we ship, not huge furniture items, but small tchotchkes and trinkets that people from outside West Virginia are interested in. It’s become a destination.”



Claudio has since created a cluster of enterprises: Claudio & Company accounting firm, for example, and Appalachian Oral Surgery Center, of which he is part-owner. To lift the look of Star City, his Claudio Enterprises has bought and redeveloped properties on University Avenue to house his businesses and to lease to others. It also refurbishes old company houses on Herman Avenue that used to be called brick row, and doesn’t rent them but sells in order to anchor the street with residents who have a stake.

“My goal is to give Star City a village feel—give it some character again so it’s not just a pass-through for Morgantown,” he says. “With its proximity to Suncrest, it can be like an arts district, a nice walkable community, with small businesses and little cafés.”

Claudio also serves on Star City Town Council. “I’m trying to get crosswalks on University Avenue, working with the state Division of Highways,” he says. “We have an identity issue because the state calls it a highway, but this is our downtown district. I think they should let us have that.”