Winter 2000

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Marshall University

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On the Cover: International Industries CEO Gary White takes a break from work at his South Charleston office. Photography by Rick Lee.
"Once we inked the deal, it was all systems grow."

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marshall university is on the 'cutting edge' academically

The next time somebody writes a history of Marshall University, I might be a footnote: The only university president in the country to be undefeated in the two major revenue producing sports — football and men's basketball — during his or her tenure.

My term in the Marshall president's office began August 1, 1999 and ended December 31, 1999. During that time the football team had a 13-0 record and the men's basketball team enjoyed a 10-0 run. While I certainly enjoy the distinction, I'm a little saddened too. It's easy to demonstrate Marshall's athletic prowess; it's not so easy to show how strong Marshall has become academically. And one of the things I learned during my five months as president is that we can be as proud of our academic progress as we can of our athletic successes. We only have to look at our successful alumni to see the strength of our academic programs and the influence of an outstanding faculty.

Having been involved with Marshall over many years in a variety of ways, I thought I knew the university well. I found during my months in the president's office that I had not fully grasped Marshall's magnitude nor its importance to the region.

As a Marshall undergraduate from 1954 to 1958, I considered such courses as bacteriology, inorganic chemistry and calculus to be among the more impressive subjects. But today, Marshall offers "Issues in DNA Technology," "Electronic Commerce," "Principles of Cell Biology and Molecular Biology," and a host of other cutting edge classes.

Obviously, the world has changed and so has Marshall. Today's students take challenging courses, many of which involve research and sophisticated technology. Marshall has come as far academically as it has athletically.

I'm likewise convinced that our new Marshall president, Dr. Dan Angel, will build upon the rich legacy of his predecessors such as Wade Gilley, Dale Nitzschke, Bob Hayes and, of course, Stewart Smith, and take Marshall to even higher academic and athletic levels and accomplishments.

While I've certainly learned a lot since August, I've also had some incredible experiences — rubbing shoulders with living legend Chuck Yeager; talking with "Rocket Boy" Homer Hickam; attending the National Football Foundation and College Hall of Fame awards ceremony and hearing an outstanding speech by our own Chad Pennington; chatting with Dr. Rita Colwell, director of the National Science Foundation; being embraced in a Herald-Dispatch photo by a guy a foot taller than me who looks like a mature Captain Marvel in a dress suit; enjoying a marvelous example of town and gown relations at the "Oliver!" production in Marshall's Joan C. Edwards Performing Arts Center; and being a "star" in an outstanding television commercial, "We are...Marshall!"

Being president of MU those five months has been one of the most exciting periods of my life. It's also been challenging, sometimes frustrating and, certainly, time consuming. A lot of people pulled together to support my efforts and I made it with body, soul and, I hope, reputation intact. My profound thanks go out to all of them.

The faculty was kind and helpful to the rookie president.

The student leadership, starting with Brandi Jacobs and Rogers Beckett, was extremely cooperative. Getting to know them has been perhaps the most rewarding part of my campus adventure.

Many very talented staff members and administrators served as a network to keep me from falling on my face.

Marshall's alumni and its group of robust friends did all they could to make my job easier.

The University System Board of Trustees and the Higher Education Central Office people were understanding and supportive.

Most of all, the people of the community — southern West Virginia and the Tri-State Area — maintained their love of Marshall and made my tenure a lot easier than it might have been.

A particular thank you goes to the Marshall Presidential Search Committee for moving with impressive speed to identify, employ and bring in my successor in the president's office. Now, I'm looking forward to the excitement of watching President Dan Angel — the big guy with the cleft chin in that Herald-Dispatch photo — take Marshall to the next level.

It's going to be a great ride! □

"Mike" Perry, chairman of Bank One West Virginia, served as interim president of Marshall University from August 1 (when J. Wade Gilley left to become president of the University of Tennessee) through December 31 when Dan Angel arrived from Stephen F. Austin State University to assume the Marshall presidency.
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marshall and advantage valley poised for progress in 2000

On Thursday morning, January 13, 2000, billionaire Jeff Bezos stood on the stage of the Marshall University Fine & Performing Arts Center and announced that his company, Amazon.com, would be locating its East Coast Customer Service Center in Huntington. The 36 year old Bezos, Time magazine's "Man of the Year," spoke to the overflow crowd of students, business leaders and economic development officials (including Gov. Cecil Underwood and Sen. Jay Rockefeller) with great verve about his company's decision to locate in the region and their plans for the future.

The historic announcement should come as no surprise to those of us living here. Amazon.com, like Toyota, United Airlines and other big name players before them, realizes what unique opportunities await them in the Advantage Valley region. The region, encompassing Greater Huntington, Putnam County and Metropolitan Charleston, offers much: more than half a million people; convenient location to other east coast markets; strong economic incentives for business; beautiful landscape; plentiful natural resources; a skilled and dedicated workforce; an unsurpassed quality of life; and, of course, Marshall University.

In fact, Marshall was a major factor in Amazon's decision to locate in the region. Bezos, speaking directly to the students during his talk, challenged each of them to help him with his ambitious plans for the future.

Perhaps the Amazon announcement illustrates best the reason why Marshall University decided to begin publishing two magazines in 1999. First, the university hoped to chronicle its impact not only in Huntington, but in Charleston and Southern West Virginia as well. The fact of the matter is Marshall University is more than academics and athletics. The institution also plays a pivotal role throughout the region in medicine, technology, culture, manufacturing and, most importantly last month, economic development.

And that is the reason the university decided to publish a second magazine in 1999 — originally named Gateway West Virginia but, beginning with this issue, the name has changed to Advantage Valley. The university wanted to do its part in promoting the burgeoning region between Huntington and Charleston known today as Advantage Valley. Marshall created the spin-off magazine to be mailed to 5,000 business leaders in the region to help them in their efforts to attract people and jobs. The magazine is not only an effective tool to that end, but a vehicle to help unite the often divisive Huntington-Charleston markets.

Finally, both the Marshall and Advantage Valley magazines serve to remind all of us in the region what a unique place this is to live, work and play. Little things are not lost in Advantage Valley. People here believe in neighborhoods where residents know each other by name, where the whole town turns out to watch the big ball game, and where time is made for worship and family. We have "big city" advantages and "small town" living. With those kinds of amenities and major players like Amazon.com taking notice, it appears that Marshall and Advantage Valley are poised for progress in the year 2000.
Occasionally, Gary White sleeps.

Once in a while, Gary White plays a round of golf.

Sometimes, Gary White tinkers with his red 1960 Corvette, the one his wife says he brought home in a box and restores in his spare time.

The rest of his life, the other 99 percent, Gary White is a little busy: running International Industries Inc. in Gilbert, W.Va., as its president and chief executive officer, chairing the West Virginia Roundtable, searching for a Marshall University president and serving on the state Board of Education.

Helping people.

"Gary's always trying to help other people," says good friend A. Michael Perez, chairman and CEO of Banc One West Virginia Corporation, and former interim president at Marshall. "He has a caring and compassionate heart."

by dave wellman
White, 49, is a native West Virginian who loves his home state. He was born in Logan, graduated from high school there, still lives there, still sings in the church choir there.

In the Mountain State, though, White is best known for his business brilliance, from his days as underground mining manager at Amherst Coal Company from 1975 to 1986 to his current position with International Industries. Many are surprised that White, who’s made it big in West Virginia, hasn’t left the state as others have before him.

“I’m extremely fortunate to be where I am,” he says humbly. Fortunate and thankful for people such as Buck Harless, his boss and owner of International Industries.

“I’ve worked with Mr. Harless for seven and a half years,” White says. “It’s a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. He has captured the right philosophy of life. His legacy will be his philanthropy and caring.”

The same, those who know him say, could be said of White and his wife, JoAnn. Caring just comes naturally for the Whites, who are the parents of a 27-year-old daughter with cerebral palsy. Jennifer is their life. She is why they live, why they breathe.

“Our personal life centers around her and her needs,” Gary White says. “Dealing with the challenges she’s faced, it causes you to have a different perspective on life.”

Jennifer’s dad smiles broadly as he talks about how smart she is, how she lets her parents know when her socks don’t match the rest of her outfit.

“We have learned to recreate with her at the lake,” White says. “We have a large houseboat and we go to Jenny Wiley State Park (near Prestonsburg, Ky.), that’s Jennifer’s favorite place to be. She’s been exposed. She’s a real rewarding part of our life.”

Gary White’s mother, Catherine, admires her son and JoAnn for the way they’ve devoted their lives to Jennifer.

“Through the way they’ve brought that child up, and the many, many lives they’ve touched, they just reach out to everybody,” Catherine White says. “They help people they don’t even know. They’ll go to any extent to help people.”

Simply, Perry says, White “has his act together.”

“He knows where he wants to be and he’s a dedicated family man,” Perry says.

Gary White’s business savvy and skills just came naturally,
“Education is the fundamental basis to diversifying our economy in Southern West Virginia. You need well-educated, well-trained people.”
— Gary White

his mother says. “He was always curious about everything,” Catherine White says. “Instead of looking at something, he’d take it apart and see what it did.” For example:

“Clocks,” she says. “When he was real small it was clocks.”

When White was six years old, his mother convinced her reluctant son that if he went to the dentist she would take him to the local auto dealer showroom and let him ride in a children’s model Corvette. Young Gary kept his appointment and took his first ride in a sports car.

“Ever since that day, I’ve loved cars. There’s just something special about a powerful, fast car. I drive my vintage 1960 Corvette for fun. The rest of the time I drive a Cadillac STS with the Northstar system. It’s the fastest domestic luxury car made. I appreciate products that perform well and both of these cars can flat out run.”

At Logan High School, White followed a rigorous college prep program that he says was analogous to today’s School to Work programs. “The curriculum dictated no electives, no study hall, and you had to go to summer school,” White says.

After his sophomore year, White was hired at Kroger where he worked 32 to 40 hours a week. His mind raced at an early age. He had to stay busy, had to be productive.

After graduating from Logan, White attended Marshall for two and a half years. He left Marshall to enter the work force, full time. (He later returned to complete his baccalaureate degree.) As White puts it, “I began my business career.” One of his first jobs was rebuilding and selling electrical mining equipment.

His father, the Rev. Glenn White, has been pastor at Central United Baptist church for more than 40 years. But, he also worked in sales to the mining industry and — like his son — always worked long hours.

In 1969, it was required that mines be electrically certified. White left the sales side of the mining business to become an instructor, teaching miners the necessary electrical information for them to be certified.

“I was a pretty effective teacher,” he admits. “I’ve even thought I might enjoy teaching again. It’s very rewarding.”

White worked in mining at Island Creek Coal Company and then Amherst, where he subsequently became an administrative manager and ultimately manager of underground mining. He left Amherst to become president of the West Virginia Coal Association, a position he held from 1985 through 1992. He’s worked for Harless since.

“He’s a successful person who never forgets from whence he came,” Perry says of White. “There’s not an elitist bone in his body.”

Gary White at the dedication of the ultra-modern 61,500 square foot Larry Joe Harless Community Center in Gilbert, West Virginia.

Perry and White have similar likes, such as Southern Gospel music. They’ve attended the popular Gaither Homecoming concerts together, and both enjoy singing hymns. White, in fact, is an outstanding singer, having earned all-state honors for three years in high school. While attending Marshall, he was the only person in the school’s 50-member symphonic choir who was not a music major.

White is deeply devoted to the education process in West Virginia, and he does everything in his power to see that it
continues to improve. Perry calls White a role model “as to
the importance of education, and what a person with humble
beginnings can accomplish.”

“He’s an extremely successful business person who proba-
bly has the highest commitment to education, K through 20,
of anybody,” Perry says.

That commitment again goes back to his love for the state.
The future of West Virginia, White says, is directly tied to the
state’s education system.

“The state of West Virginia the last 12 or 13 years has
moved light years ahead,” he says. “But there’s still a lot to
do. Education is the fundamental basis to diversifying our
economy in Southern West Virginia. You need well-educated,
well-trained people.”

The West Virginia Roundtable is an organization made up
of CEOs from major corporations in the state. Their goal is to
assist and promote public policy in West Virginia.

“We exist to bring the CEO perspective to policy making,”
White says. For example, the roundtable has been involved
in workers’ compensation reform and with the state’s energy
industry.

“The West Virginia Roundtable has completely reorgan-
ized itself in dramatic fashion,” Perry says, lauding White for
his leadership.

White acknowledges that hard work and self-initiative
enhanced his advancement in life. But, he’s quick to point
out that good timing and the contributions of others were
important as well.
I was involved in the coal industry when it was expanding," he says. "I’ve worked with some wonderful people who’ve given me a great mentoring atmosphere."

White is wise enough to surround himself with those good people. "He’s very intelligent and he has good people skills," Perry says. "He recognizes that there are many other good, honest, hard-working, intelligent men and women out there who’ve not had the opportunities he’s had. Those opportunities have caused him to have greater respect for the well-being of the people he cares deeply for."

When White started working for International Industries, Harless dropped his mother a note that said, "Thanks so much for having a son who has remarkable character and dedication to the task at hand."

What’s a mother say to that?
"I’m so proud of him," Catherine White says. "He always maintains his integrity, which makes me so proud."

One of these days, perhaps, White will ease up a little, and maybe find some time to do more fishing or play a little more golf. But don’t count on it.

"The problem with golf is, during that four hours out there I always think of so many productive things that I could be doing," he says.

Like, maybe, helping people?
Chief Justice John Marshall was one of the key figures, perhaps the key figure, in the development of the United States government as we know it today. And since this institution was named in recognition of his brilliance, we believe the time has come for Marshall University to place greater focus on the man, his life and his work. We are proud to bear his name and we will be even prouder to make scholarly contributions toward greater understanding of his pivotal role in this nation's history.

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November 8, 1999. It is an unseasonably warm Monday afternoon in Minneapolis, Minnesota, as Randy Moss pours a bucket of ice into the bathtub of his downtown Hilton hotel suite. Randy, who is staying there with his teammates, is going through one of his pre-game rituals that involves soaking in a tub of ice water. "Man, it gets me revved up for the game," he explains. The game he's talking about is tonight's Monday Night Football matchup between his Minnesota Vikings and the Dallas Cowboys on ABC.

He appears extremely relaxed and confident, ready for the challenge of facing Deion Sanders and America's Team on national television. He jokes around with former Marshall teammate Brian Reed, who Randy has invited up for the game, while drying off, getting dressed and preparing to leave for the Metrodome.

Downstairs in the lobby, Vikings fans are milling about, hoping to catch a glimpse of one of the players. Red McCombs, the team's billionaire owner, is conducting an interview with the media when a fan yells, "Hey Red," and holds up a sign that reads: "Throw Randy The Damn Ball!"

"All right, already," McCombs fires back, well aware that his team has been struggling all year to get the ball to its most talented player.

As Moss suits up, tapes up and runs through a series of stretches in the locker room, the crowd outside the dome grows increasingly larger. Thousands of Vikings fans adorned in purple jerseys begin marching to the enormous venue, nearly half of them sporting Moss' number 84 — the best-selling jersey in the NFL. Old men, young girls and little children, all wearing "Moss" on their backs, walk underneath a huge yellow billboard nearby that boasts: "84....and they said Moss couldn't grow indoors." Judging by the number of his fans, the money the Rand, W.Va. native must make on the sale of his jersey in the state of Minnesota alone must be staggering.

A lot has changed in Randy Moss' life since leaving Marshall University to play in the NFL. There's the money, the fame, the endorsements. Everywhere he turns someone wants a piece of him. Whether it's a harmless fan wanting an autograph (and everyone wants Randy's autograph) or a

This article was originally published in the Winter 2000 edition of the Huntington Quarterly magazine.
starry-eyed groupie, he is often hounded. He handles it relatively well, sometimes getting annoyed by it all, but most of the time oblivious to the madness.

Randy Moss is all about pro football. That’s all he’s ever dreamed about since his youth where he was a huge Notre Dame fan and an admirer of Chicago Bear running back Walter Peyton. On this night, he dons Peyton’s number 34 on his uniform towel in tribute to the NFL’s all-time leading rusher who passed away just seven days earlier.

Randy’s dream came true after two incredible seasons at MU where he broke nearly every school, conference and NCAA receiving record. After leading the Herd to a perfect 15-0 season and the NCAA I-AA National Championship as a freshman in 1996, he helped the school jump to Division I-A competition in 1997 where his talents gained national notoriety.

There were articles about the Thundering Herd All-American in Playboy, The Sporting News, The New York Times. Sports Illustrated dubbed him “the most gifted player in college football” and went on to claim that Moss had “the kind of breathtaking athletic gifts seen once in a generation.” And there were the plays: his incredible leaping catch over Nate Terry at WVU; the five touchdown performance at Ball State; and, of course, the middle screen pass and run at Army — perhaps the most replayed piece of tape in all of sports in 1997.

On that celebrated play, Randy caught a short pass over the middle and threw an elusive juke that left two defenders in the dirt. He then casually hurdled high into the air over a third defender and sprinted down the sidelines before stiff arming a fourth defender en route to an 85 yard touchdown. The beauty of it all was how easy he made it look. That one play transformed Moss into a superstar throughout the nation.

“Best play of the year,” ESPN’s Kirk Herbstreit told the Huntington Quarterly magazine in 1997 at the Heisman ceremony in New York City. Fellow sportscaster Chris Fowler nodded in agreement.

During his two years at MU, Moss was labeled “The Freak” by his teammates because of his uncanny combination
of size (he stands 6'5") and speed (he runs a 4.25 40). Players that tall just aren't supposed to be that fast. But, as many Marshall fans can attest, he never looked fast. In fact, he often looked as though he was moving in slow motion, never exerting much effort. To see Moss run is to see what he does best. He looks far more comfortable running than walking, moving with the grace and ease of a gazelle. Add to that his running back moves, soft hands and 39" vertical leap and you have constructed the ultimate receiver. But more than that, he is an incredibly versatile athlete. In high school, he lettered in four sports. Former Notre Dame Coach Lou Holtz called him the best high school football player he had ever seen. He was twice named West Virginia's "Mr. Basketball," once over former teammate and current NBA sensation Jason Williams. (He has hinted of one day playing in the NBA.) Pro scouts watched him play baseball. He blew away the competition in track. (He has expressed interest in competing in the Olympics.) There really wasn't a sport he couldn't conquer.

By the time Moss had finished his sophomore year at Marshall, he had shattered a stack of records and had earned a trip to the Downtown Athletic Club in New York as one of the four finalists for the Heisman Trophy Award.

In an exclusive interview with the Huntington Quarterly magazine following the Monday Night game, Moss looked back at his stellar career at MU with fondness. When asked to describe his favorite moment at Marshall, he pauses for a moment. He doesn't pick the Army game or the NCAA records or even his Heisman run. Instead, he goes back to his freshman year.

"My favorite moment at Marshall was winning the '96 National Championship. The fans stormed the field and carried the goal posts down Third Avenue. Man, that was crazy. I don't care if we were I-AA, we could have played with anyone that year."

Moss, who continues to follow the Herd with great interest, is not only high on Marshall fans, but many of this year's players as well. He thinks several former teammates have a shot at the NFL, most notably his favorite quarterback, Chad Pennington.

"Chad can flat out play," he insists. "I've been saying that for two years now. And he's smart. He's going to make some NFL team very happy."

As for this year's team and its Top 15 ranking, Moss isn't surprised. "The Herd is for real," he asserts. "They're having a great year and I'm really happy for the guys. I've got to find a way to get back for a game. I've just got to."

Back at the Metrodome, it's 30 minutes prior to kickoff and the arena is beginning to take on a purple hue. Dallas Cowboys star Deion Sanders trots out onto the field for his warmups and is greeted by a series of boos. Rock n' roll music pumps through the public address system as Sanders takes a couple of slow laps around the field. "Thunderstruck" by AC/DC blares from above as Sanders slows from his strutting and breaks into a little dance, his hips swaying, his arms cocked. "Primetime," as he is known, is in the house.

The first half of action is dominated by the Cowboys who jump out to a 17-0 lead. As has been the case for much of the season, Moss isn't getting many looks as he is often drawing double and triple coverage. Even when Sanders, the best defensive back in the NFL, lines up with him early in the

With his exceptional play in 1998, Moss won over the media and fans nationwide. The Marshall University standout garnered "Rookie of the Year" honors and a trip to the Pro Bowl in Hawaii. Today, his #84 is the highest selling jersey in the NFL.
second quarter, another defender rotates over to offer help. He is receiving a frightening amount of respect. No one seems to have the guts to cover him one-on-one and because of that the Moss-Sanders matchup never truly materializes.

Moss is growing frustrated. On the sidelines he pleads with his quarterback, "Just throw the ball up, Dawg," he says with his distinct West Virginia drawl. "They can't jump with me, golly." He makes no apologies for his native tongue or youthful exuberance.

Trailing by 17 points, the Vikings finally get on the board just before halftime when Quarterback Jeff George hits a leaping Moss at the back of the endzone for a 4 yard touchdown strike. "See, I told ya so," he quips. A loud cannon is fired as fireworks explode behind the goal posts. Moss is congratulated by his teammates but still appears frustrated. "I try to make suggestions to coaches in a cool way but nobody listens to me," he says later. "It's because I'm young. They respect my athletic ability but not my knowledge of football. And that's frustrating because I understand this game."

Entering the NFL draft in 1997 as only the 21st pick, Moss didn't sign the huge contract like fellow rookies Peyton Manning and Ryan Leaf who went number one and two in the draft, respectively. At the same time, it was not Manning or Leaf who garnered "Rookie of the Year" honors or a trip to the Pro Bowl last year either. Instead, it was Moss who lived up to his draft day prediction that he intended to "rip up the NFL." And that he did with lightning fast go routes, acrobatic one-handed catches and leaping grabs that struck fear in the hearts of defensive coordinators throughout the league. In fact, by the time Moss was done with his record-setting rookie season, NFL teams were rethinking their entire defensive schemes. Many teams, including the Green Bay Packers, who Moss embarrassed on a Monday Night game last year with two long TD strikes, were drafting defenders with proceeds from the cereal go to St. Joseph's Home for Children in Minneapolis and an orphanage/clinic in Mexico that Randy visited years ago with members of Charleston's Fellowship of Christian Athletes. He's spending more time in the community, visiting local schools and working with the "Make a Wish Foundation," a charity that grants wishes to terminally ill children. Typing his name on an internet search engine will yield over 3,000 hits, proof that he is already a sports superstar. Moss has achieved all this commercial success despite refusing to sign with big city agents in New York or L.A. Instead, he remains loyal to longtime friends Tim DiPiero and Dante DiTrapano, two Charleston attorneys who manage his career.

As the second half gets underway in Minneapolis, the team starts finding ways to utilize Moss and the Vikings finally start moving the ball and take the lead, 20-17. At the conclusion of the third quarter and with the momentum now in Minnesota's favor, Moss marches down the field pointing to the crowd. He begins waving his arms up and down, enticing the crowd of 64,111. At only 23 years old, his leadership is already emerging.

With the game still up for grabs deep into the fourth quarter, Minnesota moves to the Dallas 47 yard line and the Vikings get what they have been...

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"Chad can flat out play. I've been saying that for two years now. And he's smart. He's going to make some NFL team very happy."
waiting for all night. Moss, lined up wide right, is in single coverage. Quarterback Jeff George quickly takes notice and calls Randy's number. Moss breaks off the line of scrimmage and fakes a post pattern (as if he were going to run to the middle of the field) and then cuts back toward the sidelines and sprints toward the end zone. The little deception fools the Dallas defender and gives Randy just enough separation to turn on his speed. Striding downfield, he continues to gain speed and momentum much like a plane racing down a runway. At any moment, you expect him to take flight. George sees the gap and rifles a good spiral in Moss' direction. The entire Metrodome can see it coming as Moss, trying to disguise his intentions, keeps his hands by his side before firing them into the air at the last possible second to haul in a 47 yard touchdown strike. The cannon fires yet again, the fireworks explode, the crowd erupts. He is interrupted from his ritual of jumping into the waiting arms of Vikings fans when mentor Chris Carter hugs him and the two exchange a few phantom body shots as part of the celebration. Minnesota wins, 27-17.

In the purple-carpeted locker room after the game, a crowd of reporters huddle around Moss' locker. Nothing is said as he slowly removes his uniform and heads for the showers. The media members patiently await his return. Amidst all of the giant veteran linemen, most of whom have 10 years and nearly 70 pounds on Moss, the second year player appears out of place. He looks so young with his newly-acquired braces, his short haircut and lean frame, that he could almost pass for a high school student. It's hard to believe he's the NFL's brightest star.

Moss dries off before methodically dressing himself in stylish black pants, a crisp red T-shirt and matching red ball cap — all sports and leisure wear products he endorses under Nike's "Brand Jordan" label. The deal not only pays well, but earned Moss a chance to be courted by Jordan himself. His Airness flew the rookie out to Nike's headquarters in Portland last year and dined him before taking him to a Lakers game and an evening of black-jack in Vegas.

For a guy who just had a big night against the Dallas Cowboys on national TV, Moss doesn't seem too happy. He finishes dressing in silence, rises slowly from his chair and barks, "You got five minutes." The questions come hard and fast. And although it is apparent that he still doesn't like or trust the media, he manages to charm them nonetheless with that deep West Virginia drawl. When a reporter asks him about one of the loud cannons that misfired just seconds before teammate Chris Carter caught a touchdown pass, Moss remarks, "Is that what that was? Dang, that scared the hell outta meee." Everyone laughs. When the five minutes are up, Moss announces, "That's it," and grabs his duffel bag.

"Just one more question, Randy," a reporter pleads.

"Nope," he says coolly, and off he goes.

Weaving his way through traffic in downtown Minneapolis in his green Isuzu Trooper (some say it's "moss" green, but it's actually more of a mint green), Moss appears far more relaxed and animated. A sophisticated CD unit with a graphic display emits an array of colors from the dashboard as rap music rumbles in the background. It is now well after midnight and he is a completely different person from that guarded kid in the locker room. When the interview turns to his alma mater and memories of his college career, his enthusiasm is evident.

"A lot of my boys back in Huntington have a shot at the NFL," he says assuredly. "Doug Chapman. Now 'ol Doug is for real. He's got a shot. James Williams has the speed. I've talked to Nate Poole about his chances. There's Giradie Mercer, Rogers Beckett, John Grace and others. These guys could all make it but they have to prepare. They've got to work on their skills and be ready for the scouts and the interviews. If you're weak on catching, for example, you've got to work that ball machine."

Moss attributes much of his success at Marshall to Head Coach Bob Pruett and his ability to relate to the youngster's life experiences.

"Most coaches think they can relate to a young black man, but they can't. Bobby Pruett can. He's been to the streets. He's for real. If Coach Pruett stays at Marshall they could be a Top 25 team every year. Pruett's awesome, man."

Moss also explains that his college coach and current coach, Dennis Green, have a lot in common.

"Pruett and Green are exactly the same. They care. A lot of coaches just coach, but these two guys care about their players off the field."

Looking back on his college days, Moss ponders for a moment and sums up his contributions to the program.

"I think I've helped bring a little recognition to the university and opened the door for recruiting. And if Marshall can keep getting good recruits, they'll keep moving up."

Randy Moss has mellowed in some ways in the last two years. The greatest football player to ever suit up at Marshall University is now able to look back at his college experiences with the kind of warmth fans always longed for but seldom received. He recently told a Charleston reporter, "I just want to thank the people from back in West Virginia that give me support. I can't say nothing but thanks."

As for his alma mater, perhaps he said it best in a recent interview with WSAZ's Keith Morehouse. "I just wish nothing but the best for Marshall University. I call that my home (Marshall University Stadium)." Then, looking into the camera, he said, "You guys down there in Huntington take care of my house — 'cause it is mine."

Jack Houvouras is the editor of the Huntington Quarterly, Marshall and Advantage Valley magazines.
It's always
I was born with the sound of a railroad whistle in my ears, the mountains at my back and the river at my feet. Everyone in Huntington, W.Va., was born that way because the city was captive to those elements. The coal was spooned out of the West Virginia mountains, heaped into railroad cars, then loaded onto barges and pushed down the Ohio River. Huntington was the spot where the railroad met the river.

If you lived along the Ohio River, as I did, you could stand on the bank and marvel at the great, flat coal barges sliding past like dirty black wafers. At night, their searchlights would sweep the riverbank on each side; there was something thrilling about being frisked by light as you stood on the bank, hoping your mother didn't call you inside too soon.

Things are different in Huntington these days. Because the coalfields are no longer thriving, rail traffic has steadily diminished. In the past three decades, Huntington's population has inched back from about 74,000 to some 55,000. The river is still there, of course. The river and a memory.

At 7:37 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 14, 1970, as a cold rain pecked at the ground and a nasty fog rolled in, a chartered jet smashed into a scrabbly field about two miles west of Huntington's Tri-State Airport, some 30 seconds before it would have landed. Everyone aboard was killed instantly.

The crash site was a horrific mess of broken bodies, twisted plane parts and burned earth, upon which the chilly rain continued to fall, almost as if nature were trying to propagate the spot anew. Seventy-five people died on that plane, including most members of the Marshall University football team and coaching staff, along with a contingent of prominent Huntington residents who attended all the games, home and away. The plane was returning from Greenville, N.C., where the Marshall Thundering Herd had lost a squeaker to East Carolina University. To this day, the crash retains the dubious distinction of being the biggest sports-related disaster in U.S. history. The victims included 37 players, 12 coaches and university staff members, 5 flight crew members and 21 townspeople. Those deaths left 70 minor children; 18 of those children lost both parents.

To have been born and raised in Huntington, as I was, is to remember the crash, and how the city simply crumpled beneath the collective weight of its sorrow, as any city would. "For the people of Huntington," said Deborah Novak, a Huntington native who is making a documentary about the event, "it's like the Kennedy assassination. Everybody knows where they were and what they were doing when they heard the news."

I was watching television that night with my sisters: Cathy, 14, and Lisa, 8. I had turned 13 two weeks earlier. The three of us were sprawled belly-down on the floor, chins cupped snugly in palms, faces angled at the glowing rectangle like planets toward a sun.

In the middle of the show there was, unscrolling across the bottom of the screen, an announcement: Plane down at airport. Details to come.

The National Transportation Safety Board later would determine that the plane had come in too low for its landing, skimmed some trees whose branches extended into the approach path, and exploded when it hit the ground.

Two days after the crash, John Reed, then NTSB chairman, said, "If it hadn't been for those trees, he (the pilot) would probably have made it. It was that close."

My father, James Keller, taught mathematics at Marshall. With so many funerals happening simultaneously, Marshall's stunned athletic department was having a difficult time find-

with you...

by julia keller

A Chicago Tribune writer explains how the Marshall plane crash changed people's lives forever.

This article first appeared in the September 5, 1999 edition of The Chicago Tribune.
ing enough university representatives to attend them all. My father volunteered to give the eulogy at the funeral of Scottie Lee Reese, a 19-year-old linebacker from Waco, Texas. So my parents loaded Cathy, Lisa and me into our family's blue and white Volkswagen bus and took off for Waco, an approximately 1,000-mile drive from southwestern West Virginia. Scottie's funeral was held a week after the crash at the Tolliver Chapel Missionary Baptist Church.

I would like to say that I recall the words my father spoke there, that whatever wisdom and eloquence he summoned for the occasion enabled my 13-year-old soul to swell and grasp the enormity of the Reese family's loss.

But all I really can remember is looking around the church at those stricken people and their friends and wondering what they would do next. I meant it literally: What would they do when they went home after the funeral, and the day after that, and the day after that? How would they go on?

Almost 30 years after that plane disintegrated in a bleak West Virginia field, I found that I was still wondering. How did those with loved ones on the plane—the children, parents, siblings and friends of victims—ever resume their lives?

"Sometimes it seems like 30 years ago," said Keith Morehouse, who was nine when his father died in the crash, "and sometimes it seems like it happened yesterday."

Then and now, I wanted to know how people lived with such a loss, with the sudden, permanent demolition of the way they thought their world would be. Where does grief go?

Chester Reese is 71 now. He and his wife, Jimi, 72, raised six children in their Waco home: Ronald, Chester Jr., Scottie, William, Dwight and Cheryl. Four of their children went to Prairie View University, just outside Houston, Chester said. Scottie, though, received a football scholarship to a place they'd never heard of: Marshall University.

They heard news of the crash from a radio broadcast. "Scottie was a lovable boy. Very intelligent," Chester said. "I'm not saying it because he was my son, but he was good."

After nearly 30 years, the pain still is fresh each year, Chester said, almost as if it renews itself overnight, culling from the darkness new power to hurt. "You don't forget it. You don't. It's something that happened and you can't do anything about it. I have to accept it. I have my bad moments. I do." He paused. "I get in my car and I ride. I ride out to the cemetery and visit his grave. I have a cry." He paused again, longer this time. "Sometimes I can't talk about it."

Jimi described her son as "real friendly. Nobody was a stranger to him." He loved football, loved West Virginia, loved telling the folks back home about his adventures in a faraway place where the terrain was as craggy as Texas was flat, that seemed, in fact, like the exact geographical opposite of the land he knew so well.

"I think about him all the time," Jimi said. "Sometimes it seems like he's still around somewhere, like he can't be gone. When it gets round close to that day again, I start to think about it harder. Along about that time of (that) month, it gets pretty heavy. It ran through my mind the other day, how old he'd be, where he'd be."

Indeed, Scottie, and all of the young men on the Marshall plane, have now been dead longer than they were alive.

Her faith, Jimi indicated, remains a railing she can grasp when she feels as if she might be falling.

"I was brought up not to say, 'Why him?' My mother said, 'He was only loaned to you. The Lord wanted him back.' Never question what the Lord does."

Cheryl Reese's memories of her brother are clear, as clear as the air on a perfect football afternoon in the late fall. She still has the last letter he wrote to her from Huntington.

"I remember how he laughed," she said. "And he sure did eat a lot. His favorite was my mom's potato salad." The news of Scottie's death abruptly ended her childhood, Cheryl said. She was 10 years old. "It's just like yesterday to me. It was my wake-up call to life.

When I came in the house that night, my mother was crying. I remember getting mad and thinking, 'Who made my mom cry like that? Who's making my mom cry?'"

Then they told her what had happened.

Cheryl, 39, has always lived close to her parents in Waco. She works for the U.S. Postal Service. Fourteen years ago, she gave birth to twins. The girl, she decided, would be named Shayla. The boy's name came easy. She called him Scottie.
The first few weeks after the crash, Mary Beth Repasy recalled, she would go to mass every day, come home and lock herself in her bedroom. Then she would scream.

Repasy, 76, doesn’t scream anymore. The red wound of loss has been cauterized by time. But she remembers her son, Jack Repasy, who died at 20 aboard the Marshall plane, with a clarity that cuts through the fog of the intervening years.

He was a big, handsome young man, who looked a bit like former Denver Bronco quarterback John Elway. But it was in receiving, not passing, that Repasy distinguished himself.

He was best friends with two other Marshall players, backup quarterback Bobby Harris and offensive guard Mark Andrews, who had grown up in the same neighborhood and graduated, as Repasy did, from Cincinnati Moeller High School, a football powerhouse in Cincinnati. They, too, were large and good-looking, possessing the natural athlete’s confident swagger, that casual grace born of physical prowess and an absolute certainty that the world wished them well.

They borrowed one another’s clothes, wrestled on mattresses thrown on the floor, went fishing, gossiped about girlfriends. They did everything together.

On Nov. 14, 1970, they died together.

“THERE was one blessing. They went in a hurry,” Mary Beth Repasy said.

She has stayed in close touch over the years with Bob and Betty Harris, 75 and 73, and Ruth Andrews, 77, Mark’s widowed mother. The families have a mass said each year on Nov. 14 for their lost sons.

Bob Harris Sr. and Mary Beth’s late husband, John Repasy Sr., did their screaming in another way: They sought answers from the NTSB about the cause of the crash, never satisfied with the answers they were given from bureaucrats who seemed, to a grieving father’s way of thinking, to have something to hide. “We were both very angry,” Bob said bitterly.

The Harrises had driven to North Carolina to watch their son play. They asked him to ride back with them, but he said he needed to be with the team. They heard the news about the crash at a service station on their way home.

Right after her son’s funeral, Betty went back to work. “I wanted to be busy,” she said. “I had to be.” She called her boss at the Internal Revenue Service in Cincinnati, though, and told him to ask co-workers not to mention her son, not even to express sympathy.

It is only in the last few years, she said, that she has been able to talk at length about Bobby with anyone other than family members. She has six other children. What used to hurt — remembering Bobby’s smile, his laugh, the way he’d effortlessly pick her straight up off the ground, for he was a strong boy — now brings her a quiet peace.

A funeral for the three boys was held at Cincinnati

(Continued on page 34)
West Virginia Public Radio's showcase for an array of artists is a state treasure

First comes the familiar theme song:

"There's a spring in the mountains, and it flows down to the town, from the river to the ocean, it goes the whole world round, that spring of water goes the whole world round. There's a song in my heart, just a simple little tune. But the rhythm and the melody won't leave me alone, around the world, it's just a simple song."

A flashing sign cues the overflow audience in the Cultural Center in Charleston to applaud, but no prompting is necessary for the enthusiastic crowd is already cheering. Another edition of "Mountain Stage," a two-hour eclectic mix of musical styles and artists, both popular and virtually unknown, is on the air.

"Thank you so much," says host Larry Groce. "Welcome once again to 'Mountain Stage,' live performance radio from the Mountain State of West Virginia."

BY JAMES E. CASTO
Now in its 16th year of production, the made-in-West Virginia radio show is enormously popular, not just with its many loyal local fans who eagerly snap up tickets for each program, but with music lovers across the nation and literally around the world. The taped program is distributed by Public Radio International to more than 100 U.S. public radio stations, from New York City to Anchorage, Alaska, and by Voice of America worldwide on its satellite service.

With that kind of national and international radio audience, "Mountain Stage" has become what Gov. Cecil Underwood calls "a huge billboard for West Virginia that helps attract business and tourism." At Underwood's urging, the 1999 West Virginia Legislature voted a $200,000 appropriation to help fund this year's broadcasts, a first for a show that's often had to scrounge for the money it needed to stay on the air.

"I'm glad the governor sees this show as an important public relations vehicle for West Virginia, because that's how we've seen it all along," says Groce.

The state support came shortly after Columbia Gas Transmission Corp. signed on as a corporate underwriter to the tune of $50,000 a year. Other underwriters include Ashland Inc. and the West Virginia Roundtable.

It's a long way from the weekly musical program's humble beginnings in the early 1980s to winning a gubernatorial endorsement, its own line item in the state budget and a worldwide radio following.

"Mountain Stage" began with three dreamers, each still very much a part of the show:

Groce, the show's artistic director and laid-back host, who welcomes each performer to the stage and sometimes offers a tune of his own.

Andy Ridenour, who doubles as the show's executive producer, responsible for the 101 backstage chores needed to put each program together, and announcer.

And Francis Fisher, who, as the show's engineering mastermind, somehow makes sure all these many cables and connections work when that "ON THE AIR" sign flashes.

Texas native Groce went to college in Illinois and, after earning a degree in English literature, moved to New York City, where he played in the coffeehouses. Then it was on to Los Angeles, where he made two albums that nobody bought.

When Groce came to West Virginia as a resident musician, playing in the schools of Tucker, Barbour and Randolph counties, it was supposed to be a nine-month stay. He fell in
love with West Virginia and is still here. Putting down his
roots in the Mountain State, Groce continued to record and
in 1976 his “Junkfood Junkie” became a surprise Top 40 hit.
Along the way, the singer-songwriter hooked up with the
Walt Disney folks and has done a stack of highly successful
children’s albums for them.

Ridenour came from Washington, D.C., to West Virginia
to attend Concord College. He dreamed of being a baseball
player, but a stint at the campus radio station put broadcast-
ing in his blood. He was doing news for West Virginia Public
Radio in 1981 when he, Groce and Fisher put together the
pilot for “Mountain Stage.”

Initially, Ridenour split his workweek between news and
“Mountain Stage.” But by 1987, the musical show had
become his full-time job.

The three work together seamlessly, making a tough task
look easy.

Their job is complicated, Groce notes, by the fact that
they’re actually producing “three different
shows: a national show, a statewide show
and a local show (for the fans gathered at
the Cultural Center). What is good for one
of those shows may not be good for another.”

Thus, “Mountain Stage” is something of a
tightrope act, requiring that everything be
kept in balance.

How does it all come together?

“It’s magic,” says Ridenour. “We plan and
plan. Larry picks exciting potential guests
which I try to combine into shows that make
artistic sense. Then we schedule so the acts
we want on the same show are here at the
same time.

“We often work as close as two weeks
before the actual performance, especially
with established acts. They like to keep their
options open for last-minute opportunities.
For instance, we had the Crash Test Dummies lined up for a
show and a couple of weeks before the date they got an offer
to open for Elvis Costello on a European tour. Well, of
course, they went to Europe.

“That’s the down side of running this show on such a small
budget. But it’s part of the fun, too. We found another guest
and went on with a great show.”

Over the years, a host of the biggest names in music have
played on “Mountain Stage.” The list includes Emmylou
Harris, Bruce Hornsby, Judy Collins, the Cowboy Junkies,
Lyle Lovett, k.d. lang, Mary-Chapin Carpenter, Arlo Guthrie
and, of course, West Virginia’s own Kathy Mattea.

The show has hosted its share of musical legends —
including Joan Baez, Doc Watson and Bill Monroe — but
also lots of talented newcomers. Musicians Sheryl Crow,
Paula Cole, Ani DiFranco, Sarah McLachlan and Barenaked
Ladies appeared on the show before hitting it big.

One of the show’s real coups came in 1992, when it hosted
superstar band R.E.M. The group wasn’t interested in a U.S
tour for its album “Out of Time,” but agreed to do three pro-
grams — “Saturday Night Live,” “MTV Unplugged” and
“Mountain Stage.” More than 50 members of the national
media descended on Charleston for the show, which sold out
in 10 minutes. “After the R.E.M. show, we knew we could
handle anything,” says Ridenour.

Although most of the shows originate Sunday evenings at
the Cultural Center, “Mountain Stage” sometimes takes to
the road. It’s played in Boston, San Diego and at Disney
World in Orlando, among other locales.

Closer to home, “Mountain Stage” has been a frequent
visitor to Huntington and Marshall University, making three
appearances in 1999.

In January, when “Mountain Stage” teamed up with the
Marshall Artists Series to offer a program highlighted by the
popular South African group Ladysmith Back Mambazo, the
1,800-seat Keith-Albee Theater was sold out. In March, the
show was back, this time at Marshall’s Joan C. Edwards
Playhouse, with Rusted Root, a Pittsburgh-based
alternative/reggae band. And in June, as part of Marshall’s
first Jazz-Mu-Tazz Festival, a “Mountain Stage” concert with
guitar artist John Pizzarelli drew an estimated 4,000 people to
Harris Riverfront Park.

The show is scheduled to make a return visit to the Keith-
Albee on April 13, 2000, when it again partners with the
Marshall Artists Series, this time to present the Latin band
Cubanismo.

Tickets for “Mountain Stage” are available at all
Ticketmaster outlets. Program information is available by
calling (304) 558-5900 or by visiting West Virginia Public

James E. Casto is associate editor of The Herald-Dispatch in Huntington
and a long-time Mountain Stage fan.
Former Thundering Herd star Greg White is leading Marshall University basketball back to its days of glory with a young and talented team.

Despite being a West Virginia native and Marshall graduate, Greg White struggled with his decision to accept an offer to become the Thundering Herd's men's basketball coach.

Then an assistant coach at UCLA, one of the most storied and perhaps the most successful programs in college basketball, White wrestled with his options: stay with the Bruins, who have won more championships than any team in the nation, or go to the Thundering Herd, who had had five different coaches in nine years.

"I was faced with some unbelievably huge life-changing career decisions," White said. "I was not going to leave that job for just any program. I knew I was going to get a Division I offer, but I was not going to take just any offer. So I started thinking about the jobs I was really interested in. Then, the door opened."

Former Marshall president J. Wade Gilley was the doorman. After White applied for the position, Gilley offered him the head coaching job vacated by the loss of Billy Donovan to the University of Florida. After much deliberation, White accepted the offer following a one-year stint at UCLA with Jim Harrick, a Charleston native and the current Georgia head coach.

"A lot of thought went into the decision," White recalled. "I wasn't totally sure that it was the right decision for me."

Until he arrived on campus. Once here, White met with Gilley and Thundering Herd football coach Bob Pruett.

"Once I met with them," White said, "I realized, 'Gosh, maybe we can take this thing and make it something special.'"

by Jacob Messer
photos by Brian Tirkak
“Coach White does a great job recruiting players and a great job developing their skills. I can’t see this program going anywhere but up.”
— Cornelius Jackson, Thundering Herd point guard

But White knew making the men’s basketball program “something special” would be a difficult challenge and long process.

“There were problems when I got here,” said White, pointing out that during a plane trip to Huntington he jotted down a master list of improvements Marshall needed to make for the Thundering Herd to be successful.

The biggest problem, White says, was facilities.

“They weren’t up to the level where they needed to be,” he said.

So White devised plans to improve those facilities over a gradual process, as he also concentrated on the tasks of recruiting and leading Marshall in its transition from the Southern Conference to the Mid-American Conference.

“Those projects don’t just happen,” White said. “You have to have someone behind the scenes pushing them.”

Which Marshall did not have. Having five coaches in nine years is not conducive to a successful program.

“They weren’t here long enough to do the little things that make a program go,” White said. “There was too much change to get anything done.”

Unlike his predecessors, White is committed to the program and making it a success. That is why he is here today.

“We wanted a good coach,” former university president J. Wade Gilley said, “but we needed more than that. We were looking for someone willing to commit himself to building and maintaining a strong basketball program at Marshall University for a period of at least five years.”

The support has been paramount in the strides White has made with the program. Since his hiring, White has been the catalyst for improvements to the basketball offices, locker rooms, weight rooms and training rooms as well as the $5 million renovation of the Cam Henderson Center, Marshall’s home arena since 1981.

To make the arena more “fan friendly,” the seating capacity was reduced from 10,291 to 9,043 a year ago. Chairback seats replaced bleacher seating on both end lines, and camera platforms were installed to improve the quality of television broadcasts.

“The university was huge in making that happen,” White acknowledged. “Without the support of your administrators, that doesn’t happen. The university has been phenomenal.”

Two other projects are currently in the works to make the program more attractive to recruits and fans.

White said he currently is working on a picture project for the Cam Henderson Center corridor. He plans to hang 4-foot-by-5-foot photographs of the top 40 basketball players, both male and female, in school history on the walls.

Dr. Edward Grose, senior vice president for operations, said the university plans to completely overhaul the current sound system within the next year. Expected costs are between $150,000 and $200,000.

“We want something the fans can hear,” Grose said. “The current system is terrible. It needs to be redone and we’re going to redo it.”

As impressive as the improvements made to the program’s facilities are the improvements made to the program. After an 11-16 mark in its first season in the Mid-American Conference, Marshall posted a 16-11 record a year ago. The Thundering Herd has advanced to the Mid-American Conference Tournament the past two seasons.

“When we moved into the MAC we had to start from scratch,” said White, whose team was 20-9 in his first season at Marshall and the Thundering Herd’s last season in the Southern Conference. “I mean, the cupboard was bare.”

Putting together the top recruiting classes in the Mid-American Conference two of the past three seasons helped White and his team fill it up again. The initial class included current standout Travis Young, the Mid-American
Conference Freshman of the Year, and Joda Burgess, who also was an All-Freshman Team performer. Young and Burgess have averaged 12.6 and 8.1 points per game, respectively, in their first two years.

Last year, White added power forward J.R. VanHoose and point guard Cornelius Jackson. Vanhoose, an all-conference honorable mention selection, became the first freshman to lead Marshall in points (14.7) and rebounds (8.1) per game. Jackson, a transfer from the University of Tennessee, led the Mid-American Conference in assists with 145, an average of 5.4 per contest. Promising youngsters Tamar Slay and Edwin Johnson also were among those signees.

Among the newcomers this year are junior college transfers Marques Evans and Sean Wuller as well as sophomore Monty Wright and freshman Jon Bentley.

The secret to his recruiting success is easy, White says. “I’m from West Virginia and I played at Marshall,” he said. “I’ve been preparing for this opportunity all my life. Nobody can sell Marshall basketball better than me.”

Indeed. His energy and enthusiasm were key in signing such stars as Young, Jackson and VanHoose.

“He is very intense and he demands a lot,” VanHoose said of White, Marshall’s all-time leader in assists, “but that’s because he knows how to win. When he visited my house during my senior year of high school, he told me the way it was and the way it was going to be. He was very up front and very truthful. I respect that. That’s why I signed with him.”

Jackson and Young agreed with VanHoose. Both said the program is on the rise.

“Coach White does a great job recruiting players and a great job developing their skills,” Jackson said. “I can’t see this program going anywhere but up.”

It’s the same with VanHoose. “He respects this program because this is what took care of him,” VanHoose said. “Now, he is taking care of it. He wants to make this a top-notch program. And he will do it because he has the drive and desire.”

But to do that, Young says, the Thundering Herd must continue its trend of improvement. “Our first year in the MAC we had a losing season,” Young said. “Last year we turned that around. This year we have to look for improvement. There are high expectations for us.

“This is the team that has to start it. We have to lay the foundation this year.”

White says the foundation already has been laid. Now, the Thundering Herd must build on it.

“We need to continue to recruit like crazy,” White said. “Sooner or later, our great players are going to graduate and we’re going to need some players ready to fill their shoes.

“Great players take you to great heights. And right now, we have the Youngs, the Slays, the Jacksons, the VanHooses — those are foundation guys who can get you where you want to go fast.”

For the Thundering Herd, the destination is the top of the Mid-American Conference, rated the ninth toughest among the 31 Division I conferences. “Five years from now, we’ll be the elite dominant team in the MAC,” White predicted.

There is no rush to get there either, White says. “We just need to keep moving forward,” he said. “Certainly our goal is to win it, but you have to remember all the other teams have that same goal. We have to build the program brick-by-brick.

“We’re not there yet. We’re still an up-and-coming team. The MAC is a very difficult league. You can’t put a timetable on when you want to win it.”

Patience is important in building a championship program. “Marshall has struggled since 1988,” White said. “We just weren’t very good. And you can’t expect to solve eight or nine years of problems in two or three years.

“But all in all, I’m real pleased because we’ve made great strides. The general feeling around here and in the conference is, ‘Here comes Marshall.’ And we’re going to get there.”

Young does not think the Thundering Herd will stop there.

“With the way he recruits and as long as he keeps adding talented players, I can’t see this program not being a Top 25 program and not making the NCAA Tournament year-in and year-out within the next five years under Coach White.”

Jacob Messer is the former editor of MU’s newspaper, The Parthenon.
It's Always With You

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Moeller, site of so many of their athletic triumphs. As was the case for all the crash victims, the caskets were closed. Betty regrets that, even though she knows the reason.

"It makes you never quite believe it," she said. "You think he'll come walking along."

Ruth, who has two daughters, agreed. "We never saw Mark. It took so long to imagine him dead. You need to see him dead to accept the fact that he's not coming back."

The grief, all agreed with a chorus of nods, never goes away. It advances and retreats, it intensifies to an almost unbearable point and then backs off, but it never leaves.

"No," Bob said, shaking his head. "It's always with you." He added, "I didn't cry. I never have. I'm not able to. I wish I could."

He was the golden boy. Teddy Shoebridge was handsome and charming, with a big, sly, easy grin. He was a crackerjack athlete, too, a young man who would have had to choose between football and baseball. He was pro material in either sport.

Teddy was Marshall's quarterback. He came from Lyndhurst, N.J., a city just outside New York, where they still remember. The scoreboard at the Lyndhurst High School football stadium is named in his honor.

"He was a great kid. Just a great kid," said Ernie Salvatore, longtime sports columnist for the Huntington Herald-Dispatch. "He was a star, no doubt about it."

Salvatore, 77, knew them all. All the players on the 1970 team, their parents, the statistics, the personalities. It was his job to know. He has covered Marshall sports for 63 years.

When he thinks about the crash, Salvatore said, among the first pictures that cross his mind are the faces of Teddy's parents, Ted and Yolanda Shoebridge. Of all the parents, they seemed the most devastated, the most shattered, the most inconsolable. Years later, Salvatore recalled, Yolanda still would call him at the office late at night, sobbing into the phone.

"What could I say?" Salvatore said quietly. "What could I tell her?"

Terry Shoebridge, 40, Teddy's brother, described the family's sorrow this way: "My parents' heart was ripped out on that day and it was never put back."

To his brothers Terry and Tommy, 45, who still live in the Lyndhurst area, Teddy was a hero, an idol, practically a god. How could it have been otherwise?

In the dining room of the comfortable home that Terry, an accountant, shares with his wife and two young children, the Shoebridges gathered around the table to talk about their lost prince.

"I was 17 years old," said Tommy, a big, powerful-looking man who coaches the Lyndhurst High School football team. He was talking about Nov. 14, 1970, the day that changed everything.

"I came home and my mother was hysterically crying. My dad was pacing in the yard. I couldn't get a straight answer out of anybody."

Yolanda, 73, so frail from cancer that she had to rest between sentences, recalled that her parish priest was the one who arrived to break the news to her and her late husband, Ted Shoebridge, Sr. "In 29 years, it seems like yesterday and they're going to tell me all over again.

"He was No. 14. He loved 14 and 44, whichever number they would let him have. I see a license plate with 14 or 44 and I think, 'See? He's there. He's telling me he's there.'"

Yolanda and her two surviving sons have been interviewed many times about Teddy. When national magazines such as Time and Sports Illustrated or networks such as ESPN present stories about the crash — usually near the anniversary date, typically pegged to Marshall's surprising new reputation as a football powerhouse — naturally they head for the quarterback's family. Quarterbacks are always good copy. Quarterbacks are stars. Even in death Teddy Shoebridge is the go-to guy.

"I don't mind talking about him," Yolanda said, "because I want my son to live on and on. I'm not saying this because I'm his mother, but he was the greatest kid you'd ever want to know."

She has never let go. She never will. "My mother lives with this every day of her life," Terry said solemnly, almost in awe. You can talk about closure, you can talk about putting things behind you and getting on with life, but for the Shoebridges, time stopped on Nov. 14, 1970. Almost literally: In the family's garage, where Ted Sr. ran his car repair
business, hangs a 1970 calendar. The last date marked off is Nov. 13. The calendar was never changed, never replaced; it hangs there, waiting.

“I feel bad that I always told him, ‘Good things come to good people,’” she said, shaking her head. “That’s what I always said.”

In 1990, she and her husband returned to Huntington for the 20th anniversary of the crash. “I was so glad we went. It was the greatest trip,” she said. “It eased the pain some.”

The day after Teddy’s death, Yolanda went to church. The priest thanked her, she recalled. “He said, ‘You showed people you don’t hate God.’ I don’t. If you look and search, you see God is not a mean person.”

The team that died Nov. 14, 1970, was having a tough year. That made the crash all the more poignant; not only had Marshall lost that day’s game with East Carolina, 17-14, but, with the loss, the Thundering Herd had guaranteed itself another losing season.

In the previous 17 years, Marshall had enjoyed just three winning seasons. The record in that stretch: 51-113.

“Marshall was a poor school with no facilities,” said Salvatore, who had complained bitterly in his columns, year after year, about the lousy conditions in which Marshall athletes were forced to play, Fairfield Stadium in Huntington’s west end “had been falling apart as far back as 1940, the first time I saw it,” Salvatore declared.

West Virginia University, he argued, always had the state legislature’s ear, it was the priority. Marshall was the poor cousin, the afterthought. Marshall was the second-place state school in a second-rate state, a state that people made fun of. Still do, in fact.

As Salvatore pointed out, however, Marshall’s troubles only seemed to strengthen the bond between the city and the university. Townspeople rallied ’round the down trodden team. And then came the crash.

In the nearly 30-year span since that black November night, however, a remarkable thing happened: Marshall football has become phenomenally successful. Since 1990, the Herd has been the nation’s winningest college football team, with a record of 101-25. It plays in a shiny new stadium. The 1999 team recently won the Mid American Conference Championship, the Motor City Bowl in Detroit and finished the season undefeated and ranked 10th in the nation.

That renaissance is the subject of an upcoming documentary film for public television, “Ashes to Glory,” by Deborah Novak and her husband, John Witek.

“In my heart, I feel this is the greatest sports story ever,” declared Novak. “But I don’t think this documentary could have been made before now. Only now, 30 years later, are people willing to talk about this.

“Everybody has a spin on this story. But it’s a story of courage.”

It is also, of course, a story of change.

Dave Wellman, 46, Herald-Dispatch reporter, said, “Used to be, I’d go somewhere in the 1970s, and if I had a Marshall shirt on, people would say, ‘Oh, the plane crash.’ Now, they say, ‘Oh, Randy Moss.’” Moss is the former Marshall receiver and Heisman Trophy finalist, now a star with the Minnesota Vikings.

Marshall’s football success has brought about, perhaps inevitably, less emphasis on the crash. That was then. This is now. And now means, increasingly, sweet victory.

Wellman rested an elbow on his desk in a quiet corner of the Herald-Dispatch newsroom. “It was just so long ago,” he said.

He was a Marshall student when the plane went down. The first few days, he said, were “absolutely gut-wrenching.” The city, like the campus, was devastated. Store windows were draped
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in black. Everything seemed to be happening in slow motion.

Then time went by.

Keith Morehouse, 38, was one of the six children of Gene Morehouse, the broadcast voice of Marshall athletics, who died in the crash. Keith, sports anchor for WSAZ, a Huntington television station, is the play-by-play man for Marshall football.

He was nine when the plane went down. Over the years, he has been a frequent target for interviewers because his story is so wonderfully symmetrical — son picks up father's fallen microphone — but Keith never tires of such intrusions.

"Hundreds, both locally and nationally," he said, estimating the number of times he has been asked where he was on the night of the crash. "But I don't mind. For anyone who asks the question, it's the first time they've asked it. They don't know the answer."

He and his siblings were watching "The Newlywed Game" that Saturday night, Keith recalled. The phone rang. His mother answered it, shrieked — and everything changed forever.

"I remember my father as being very gentle, really nice. We'd listen to him on the radio, wrapping up the games," Keith said. On the bookshelf behind his chair is a black-and-white portrait of his father: a thin-faced, bespectacled man with a shy, earnest smile.

"In some ways, I feel kind of fortunate, as funny as that sounds. We will always remember him in his prime. We never had to see him grow old."

His mother, who died in 1989, never really recovered, Keith said. She moved away from Huntington after her youngest child left home, but her memories followed her wherever she went, always ready to tap her on the shoulder.

"She worshiped my father. She once told me that if she was in downtown Huntington and she saw him across the street, she'd still get chill bumps."

On a beach vacation after graduation from Huntington High School, Keith met a young woman who had just graduated from crosstown rival Huntington East. Her name was Debbie Hagley, a name that instantly resonated for Keith: She was one of six children of Ray and Shirley Hagley, the team physician and his wife who died in the crash.

Keith and Debbie, 38, were married a few years later, after both graduated from Marshall. They are the parents of two children.

"I don't think about the crash itself," Debbie said, "but once a day, for about a split second, it pops into my mind that I really wish my parents could have seen my kids." She and her siblings were raised by their grandparents.

Her grief, Debbie said, has had a discernible trajectory.

"It took several years to get to a certain point. But then, it came to a standstill. For the past 10 or 15 years, I've felt the same way. I'm OK with it. I say, 'My parents were killed in the Marshall plane crash,' and I can say it without crying."

She paused. "They were 33 when they died. I'm older than that now. Sometimes I think, 'Were they ever really here?'

On our way home from Waco, my mother rode in the back of the van, and my sisters and I took turns up front, sitting beside my father as he drove those lonesome miles from Texas to West Virginia.

When it was my turn, I kept hoping he would discuss the crash with me, because I would have felt so grown-up to talk about such a momentous topic. But he didn't. It was a long and quiet ride.

My father died in 1984, at 52, after a brief struggle with lung cancer. Never, in all of the conversations I had with him during the last solemn weeks of his life, did we talk about the crash or, for that matter, about his decision as a
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young man to remain in Huntington, spurning job offers from other universities throughout the years.

Somehow, the two ideas seemed linked in my mind: It was as if my father, like Huntington, could never quite shake the notion that he deserved whatever happened to him, that he was powerless to resist. Indeed, there was a kind of lyrical fatalism in my father, just as there was in West Virginia. He was a brilliant man, a gifted teacher and a troubled soul; he lived too long in the shadow of those mountains, I think, and allowed himself to forget that shadows move according to the position of the sun. They are not permanent.

When I return to Huntington to visit his grave, I am struck by how the city has transformed itself since the crash and all the sadness. Yes, the population has fallen; but thanks to a new medical school and overflow from the consolidation of other state schools, Marshall’s enrollment has almost doubled, from about 8,500 in 1970 to more than 16,000 today.

And there is, of course, that marvelous football team, the one in the bright green and white uniforms seen often this year on national television, the one that wins far more often than it loses.

Three decades is a long time, except when it isn’t. The question that had pushed me back to the crash — whither grief? — ended up pushing me forward.

“Look at the night sky,” Leon Wieseltier advises in “Kaddish,” his 1998 chronicle of the Jewish prayer recited in mourning a loved one. “You are not seeing only the light of the stars. You are also seeing the journey of the light of the stars toward you.” I asked about the progress of grief, but I learned about the purpose of memory.

I recall quite clearly my thoughts on that Sunday morning after the crash. I tried to imagine the scene inside the plane just before it hit. Who was sitting where? Who was talking to whom? Who was thinking what?

A plane burrowing through the night sky had always seemed to me — a kid whose first flight lay some 10 years in the future — like a wonderfully snug place, a capsule that would enfold you like the warm palm of a cupped hand. I had a picture in my mind of the passengers sitting in pairs on each side of the long, low-ceilinged row, and I could almost hear the wisecracks and the big, booming laughs, could feel the elbow in my own ribs when somebody asked his seatmate if he’d heard what that guy three rows up there had just said?

I could see the pilot and co-pilot, calmly efficient in their seats, facing a control panel decked out with lights and dials and switches, peering through the rain and fog for a glimpse of — yes, there they are — the lights of Tri-State Airport.

That was where my imagination always faltered. I did not, could not, envision the crash. I was not interested in the crash itself, only in the moment just before. Who was laughing, who sleeping, who thinking about his girlfriend or combing his hair? Who was coughing? Who was looking out at the river?

Because it has been almost 30 years since that night, the serrated edge of grief has been, for most of those whom had loved ones on the plane, rubbed by time into a smooth object. It doesn’t draw blood anymore. They can carry it around with them now. They can touch it at odd moments.

They can touch it in much the same way that, perhaps 40 years ago, some might have brushed a young son’s sleeping face with their fingertips, wondering what kind of man he would grow up to be, how many children he might have, what special destiny awaited him just down the road.

Julia Keller is a Chicago-Tribune staff writer and the daughter of the late MU Professor Jim Keller.

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