

SOUTH CHARLESTON

— **Richard McGinnis** has been named program coordinator for **Thomas Memorial Hospital's** diabetes education program.

McGinnis most recently was at the **Marshall University Diabetes Center**. He has a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and a master's degree in occupational safety.

Misty Ramsey has been named operations and administrative coordinator for the **Thomas**



McGinnis

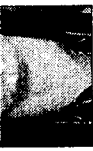
CHARLESTON — RMS
Strategies recently appointed **Sheri Skidmore** executive vice president. Skidmore, a 20-year veteran of RMS, will oversee the firm's account management and human resources.

ORGANIZATIONS

FAYETTE COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
OAK HILL — The **Fayette County Chamber of Commerce** recently recognized some of its mem-



Gary



Smith



Gore

HUNTINGTON REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

HUNTINGTON — The **Huntington Regional Chamber of Commerce** recently recognized some of its outstanding volunteers with its STAR awards.

The Star Chamber Volunteer award was given to **Priscilla Gray of Manpower Temporary Services**.

The Star Ambassador award was given to **Kathy Smith of The State Journal**.

TOURISM

OGLEBAY INSTITUTE

WHEELING — **Oglebay Institute** recently appointed **Angela Zambito** as the new advancement specialist. Zambito formerly was the weekend manager at the **Mansinn Museum** and also served as a development assistant and customer service representative for **Oglebay Institute**.

She has bachelor's degrees in history and French from **Wheeling Jesuit University**.

Researchers Work to Improve Wood-Plastic Composites

By **PAM KASEY**

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MORGANTOWN — The first generation of commercially successful wood-plastic composites was introduced about a decade ago. Commonly used as a decking material, the product sold well but fell short in performance. Now, scientists at **West Virginia University** are conducting research that could bring about a second generation of wood-plastic composites and create a new industry in the state.

"The problem with the original wood polymer composite materials — the original one was **Trex** — was that the plastics that are being used, the polyethylene in particular, is just not as stiff as wood," said **William Johnson**, engineering scientist for **Industries of the Future-West Virginia**.

"What that means, in practice, is that you have to put the supports closer

together. Sixteen-inch joist spacing would be traditional, but with these you might have to use 12-inch spacing to keep it from bowing," Johnson said. "It's manageable but undesirable."

The materials also are substantially heavier, up to twice as dense, he said. And the problems with existing wood-plastic composites go beyond their mechanical properties.

A research collaboration between **WVU's Center for Extrusion-Comounding of Additives for Superior Plastics Performance**, the university's **Division of Forestry and IOF-WV** is aiming to address these problems.

The center for extrusion compounding is working with the plastics, experimenting in particular with polypropylene, which is stiffer than polyethylene, Johnson said.

The center also sees promise in **ABS**, or acrylonitrile butadiene styrene,

what computer cases are made of. **ABS** is very stiff, Johnson explained. And while virgin **ABS** is expensive, the **Mid-Atlantic Recycling Center for End-of-Life Electronics**, or **MARCEE**, project in **Wood County** soon may generate large amounts of recycled **ABS** in search of an application.

At the same time, the problems of biodeterioration and weathering are under study by **Ben Dawson-Andoh**, assistant professor of wood science.

"The initial assumption," Dawson-Andoh explained, "was that the wood particulates in this material are completely encapsulated in the plastic. But we've done electromicroscopic studies that show it is not. The wood is exposed. So when it picks up moisture, these wood particles act as tiny islands for the fungi to grow."

His research has identified biocides that will eliminate the problem, he said. He's conducting research now to understand the chemistry of weathering better.

West Virginia is well placed for the

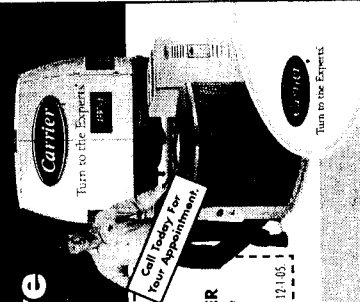
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