When the Kenova Grade School had to close in 2010, due to structural issues from subsurface drainage problems, a 1-acre block of property within the center of the town was left vacant, immediately transforming the once vibrant local area. With temporary school facilities located in the eastern end of the town, along with a new school building now under construction, the former grade school site, while on the main thoroughfares within Kenova, was becoming more of a detriment with each passing day. The Town of Kenova, after donating property for the new school, took ownership of the site, and in recent months transferred it to the Wayne County Economic Development Authority (WCEDA) for potential new development.

During environmental assessment work conducted using WCEDA’s current EPA Brownfields Assessment grant funding, it was determined that significant volumes of asbestos-containing materials were present throughout the structure. Since the structure had been deemed unsafe for occupancy, the decision was made to plan on complete structure demolition, opening up the entire block of strategically located property for extensive new potential development.

The WCEDA teamed with the WV Brownfields Assistance Center at Marshall University and the Town of Kenova to apply for an EPA Brownfields Cleanup grant to assist with asbestos removal, along with miscellaneous cleanup (fluorescent lighting, electronic ballests, etc.). The $200,000 application was approved by EPA in May of 2016, with site work to start later in the year. Don Perdue, Executive Director of the WCEDA, stated “with this EPA cleanup grant, we can begin the process to make a huge impact on future economic development efforts that will benefit both Kenova and much of the northern end of Wayne County. We can’t wait to get the structure razed, as several entities are expressing interest in the property for extensive new developments.” While the school, a main fixture in the community for over 100 years, will be greatly missed, a new chapter is starting with a bright future.
The West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection’s Division of Land Restoration (DLR) is starting a whole new chapter in their brownfields-related work. Beginning later this year, the DLR will begin utilizing their recently awarded EPA Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund (RLF), in the amount of $820,000. RLF grants provide funding to capitalize a revolving loan fund and to provide sub-grants for cleanup efforts at brownfield locations. As loans are repaid, that amount goes back into the fund for future brownfield-related use. While the fund can be utilized for sites located anywhere within the State, the Ohio River corridor is a primary target area.

Casey Korbini, Project Manager with the DLR, played a major role in compiling the successful application, and said “We are excited for this opportunity and look forward to providing yet another resource to assist West Virginia communities with brownfield redevelopment”. George Carico, Director of the West Virginia Brownfields Assistance Center at Marshall University, added “This is definitely a new chapter in brownfields redevelopment in West Virginia. Closed river loading terminals and former industrial sites along the Ohio River, or any former industrial or commercial site strategically located with existing infrastructure components across the State are prime locations for new developments, and this funding can play a significant role”.

This project will get underway later this year.

Groundbreaking Held for Golden Heart Apartments in Kenova

Golden Heart Apartments are now under construction at 1205 Chestnut Street in Kenova. This facility will be a new addition to Golden Girl Group Home, a nonprofit organization founded in 1983 specializing in working with dependent, neglected and pre-delinquent girls who are not able to make a successful adjustment in their natural homes or foster care homes. Along with their current Group Home in Ceredo, the added apartment facility will be an option for girls age 18 and older, reserved for pregnant single women, low-functioning girls, and runaways. A total of 11 apartments, plus a resource center, gym, classroom and nutritional center, will be included in the complex.

A previous site had been selected for this facility, but research conducted by the WV Brownfields Assistance Center at Marshall University concluded that potential historical environmental concerns were present, and using that site for residential use may require extensive assessment and remediation efforts. The Chestnut Street site was then reviewed as an alternate site, with the Wayne County Economic Development Authority using its existing EPA Brownfields Assessment grant funding to complete a Phase I environmental assessment prior to property transfer. No environmental impacts were identified, clearing the way for Golden Girl Group Home to secure the property and start apartment complex design.

A groundbreaking ceremony was held on June 9th. Site prep work and construction is underway, with plans for the facility to be open by early 2016.
The first graduates of the Coalfield Development Corporation’s EPA Job Training grant were recognized at a ceremony on June 22nd in Huntington. Twenty individuals received their certificates, and three have already found employment. The U.S. Department of Environmental Protection’s Office of Brownfields and Land Revitalization awarded a total of $192,300 in federal funding to the Coalfield Development Corporation to provide environmental workforce and job training in southern West Virginia. Marshall University’s Center for Environmental, Geotechnical and Applied Sciences (CEGAS) and the West Virginia Brownfields Assistance Center at Marshall University, a state-mandated program of CEGAS, have partnered with the Coalfield Development Corporation on this initiative. This program is targeted for unemployed and underemployed young adults, veterans, and coal miners in Cabell, Wayne, Lincoln and Mingo Counties, and is designed for participants to develop wider skill sets that improve their ability to secure full-time, sustainable employment in the environmental field that includes chemical safety, water quality improvement, and various aspects of hazardous and solid waste management.

The “Reclaim Appalachia: Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training” program includes instruction in asbestos abatement; 40-hour Hazardous Site Worker Training; lead abatement, renovation, repair; mold awareness; methamphetamine lab cleanup; chemical awareness, inventory, storage and handling; site surveying and blueprint reading; and job readiness and life skills training. Participants earn state or federal certifications and licenses, and advanced-level participants obtain an Associates Degree from Mountwest Community and Technical College upon program completion.

Key partners include the West Virginia Region 2 Workforce Investment Board, Wayne County Economic Development Authority, Southern West Virginia Community Action Council, Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, Veterans Employment Council, and multiple environmental and community-based organizations. Funding is being used to train residents for entry-level environmental jobs helping to clean up abandoned and contaminated properties in southern West Virginia.

Several in attendance spoke of the importance of providing training opportunities for the emerging labor fields. When the Job Training grant was first announced, EPA Region III Administrator Shawn Garvin was on-hand for the announcement, and stated he would come back to West Virginia to participate in their first graduation ceremony. Shawn stayed true to his word, and spoke about his interest in this program, stating “I’m a huge fan of our EPA Job Training Grant program, and enjoy attending these graduation ceremonies. Providing people with new skill sets and subsequent job opportunities is what makes this so rewarding to be a part of”.

The Coalfield Development Corporation is a not-for-profit organization, operating under the auspices of the Wayne County Economic Development Authority, that has been providing affordable homes, creating jobs, and generating opportunities for low income families in southern West Virginia since 2009.
While The City of Huntington is progressing on its current EPA Area Wide Planning and Brownfields Assessment grants, efforts from their 2008 EPA Brownfields Assessment grant are paying off. During the previous grant, a 2-block area along Bruce Street within Huntington’s Fairfield East community was identified as a target area for assessing properties, due to a concentrated area of abandoned houses and vacant lots, including trash piles and overgrown landscapes. Initial planning efforts included working with the Huntington Area Habitat for Humanity, which had been working successfully in other parts of Huntington, but not in this local area.

Numerous properties in the immediate area had Phase I environmental assessments conducted, and many abandoned structures had asbestos inspections conducted as part of assessment activities. The Huntington Land Bank assisted in the project by purchasing a number of these properties, and as asbestos-containing materials plus any other environmental impacts identified were dealt with, structures were razed.

Fast-forward a few years, and a major transformation process is now underway. Habitat is in the process of building ten homes in the Bruce Street area, including “simple” homes, one bedroom structures consisting of approximately 600 square feet, constructed with energy efficient building materials and supplied with Energy Star® rated appliances. A notable accomplishment in the Bruce Street Habitat housing is the first home completed under the Veterans Housing Initiative in Huntington. Working through the Huntington Veterans Affairs Community Resource and Referral Center, homeless veterans and their spouses are given an opportunity to own their own home. David Michael, Executive Director of the Huntington Area Habitat for Humanity, said “we’re in the process of changing the entire face of the Bruce Street area, one house at a time”.

So what’s next for Huntington and their Brownfields program? In addition to multiple former industrial sites of interest, additional Habitat housing sites are being evaluated in the West End of the city, utilizing the City’s current EPA Brownfields Assessment grant funding. Preliminary plans include additional veteran housing opportunities. As many as 20 homes could be built in the coming years at this location now under investigation. Transforming brownfield properties is often a slow process, but can provide some tremendous rewards.