**Morgan County Partnership moves forward with new leader**

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BERKELEY SPRINGS, W.Va. — A woman who recently retired with more than 35 years of experience with the West Virginia government has been hired as executive director of The Morgan County Partnership.

Kristin Willard took the helm Jan. 1 after Susan Caperton resigned due to illness.

Willard said she will continue to "engage, educate and empower the youth to make better decisions" relating to alcohol, drug abuse and tobacco.

"This is still our mission," Willard said.

Willard was the director of finance and data for the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and the Blind for more than 15 years. Before that, she was community services manager for the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources for 20 years.

She is married to Charlie Willard, the partnership's Teen Court coordinator.

The Morgan County Partnership was formed in 2006 to help build a drug-free community. It is a coalition of local individuals and organizations that includes the county commission, school board, health department, parks and recreation and law enforcement.

Through grant funding, the partnership offers programs that are designed for early intervention, Director Megan Scott said.

One program that began as a grassroots effort is the Parent-Child Academy that grew with the Partnership's help, said Gary McDaniel, a Morgan County Schools social worker.

The program began at Widmyer Elementary School, but has grown to include Warm Springs Intermediate School, and Greenwood and Pleasant View elementary schools, McDaniel said.

Selena Myer, the program facilitator, said it is designed to help students and parents develop the necessary skills to succeed both in and outside of school.

Parents will learn to identify positive behaviors that can be used as tools to change unwanted behavior, she said.

"Parents say it has really helped," Myer said.

Morgan County Teen Court is another program that has grown since it began two years ago.

Teen Court has held 23 trials since December 2009, Charlie Willard said.

Teen Court is an alternative system of justice for seventh- to 12th-graders who are primarily first-time offenders of nonviolent crimes. It is legally binding, the offenders must volunteer and a criminal record will not be created for the offense. Examples are underage drinking or tobacco use, shoplifting or vandalism, Charlie Willard said.

Community service of 16 to 40 hours is part of the offender's sentence, and each must participate as a juror in at least two Teen Court trials.

About 50 students are Teen Court members, Charlie Willard said.

Aidan McDaniel, an eighth-grader at Warm Springs Middle School, has been a prosecuting attorney for about four trials and served on the jury before that.

"I really do enjoy it. It's a lot of fun, but it's also important," Aidan said.

The teens who made mistakes have taken their punishments seriously, he said, and most of them have improved attitudes and their grades are better.

"It's really good to see. Our goal is to make sure we don't see them again," Aidan said.