

Businesses helping replace statue

By Christian Giggenbach
Register-Herald Reporter

FAIRLEA — While authorities continue their investigation into last week's destruction of the Greenbrier East High School Spartan statue, local businesses are pledging money toward a new statue and offering rewards for information that leads to the arrest of those involved.

The school's benefactor of the statute, girls basketball coach Jim Justice, said Monday he would "absolutely" work on replacing the statue, which Justice said cost between \$25,000 and \$30,000 to build.

The Chicago-based company Invenergy, which plans to construct the \$300 million Beech Ridge Energy Wind Farm in Greenbrier County and is a member of the Greater Greenbrier Chamber of Commerce, announced Monday on Hoppy Kercheval's MetroNews Talkline radio show a pledge of \$1,000 for a new Spartan statue.

When contacted by The Register-Herald, Dave Groberg, project developer for Beech Ridge Energy, said he challenges other local businesses to raise enough cash to replace the statue.

"We were stunned that vandals destroyed this magnificent piece of art and assaulted the spirit of Greenbrier East High School," he said. "We want to express our immediate support for the school and the community, and to challenge other businesses and community organizations to offer financial support too. This was an unbelievable act of vandalism and our hearts go out to the Greenbrier East family."

School officials discovered the nearly 1,000 pound, 10-foot tall statue on the ground early last Thursday morning. Police believe the fiberglass and metal-frame statue was toppled after being pulled down by chains attached to a vehicle. School officials say someone may have stolen the right side of the statue's face.

Justice said from his Beckley office Monday he supports all efforts to replace the statue. An Atlanta sculptor designed the statue three years ago, including a hidden propane tank that allowed the statue's torch to be lit during special occasions.

"It's a wonderful community that rallies behind this great school," Justice said. "It's a terrible shame that in this day and time people get their kicks by destroying something like this. I will surely work with all those involved to see that somehow, someday we replace what we had."

Principal Jeff Bryant said Monday local businessman Gary Aide would soon be publishing notices in local newspapers about reward money for information leading to the arrest of those involved in toppling the statue. The amount of the reward is yet unknown and Aide could not be immediately reached for comment.

Bryant said leads are continuing to pour in about the incident, but nothing "definitive" has happened in the investigation. Friday, the school sent video from a surveillance camera to the State Police lab in Charleston in hopes portions of it could be enhanced to reveal who is responsible. He praised all those involved for coming to the aid of the school.

"It's remarkable and they all deserve our most sincere appreciation," he said. "We are hoping with a reward coming out and the community becoming so interested in replacing the statue that who ever is responsible for it's destruction will be caught."

A bit larger reward has been posted by a Fairlea businessman to help identify the person or persons responsible for destroying the Greenbrier East Spartan statue.

George Aide, whose family owns Red Oaks Shopping Center, Tuesday offered a \$1,000 reward for that identity as well as pledging an additional \$1,000 toward a new statue. The statue was valued by its benefactor, Greenbrier East girls basketball coach Jim Justice, at between \$25,000 and \$30,000.

"We want to show our support for Greenbrier East High and give notice to those who intentionally set to destroy school property that the community will not tolerate such actions," he said.

Also Tuesday, MeadWestvaco spokesman Roger Sherman pledged \$500 to the reconstruction effort. This brings the total to \$2,500 pledged thus far. Beech Ridge Wind Energy Farm put \$1,000 into the kitty Monday.

Anyone with information concerning these crimes should contact the sheriff's office at 647-7911.