



# VIEWS & VISIONS

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## Regional Development in the City of Wheeling and Upper Ohio Valley

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Victor “Vic” Greco is a partner and Principal Architect of the Mills Group – an architecture, planning and preservation firm with offices in Morgantown and Wheeling, West Virginia. He joined the Wheeling office in 2013.

Originally from Weirton, West Virginia, Greco began his architectural career in Baltimore, Maryland, with firms RTKL and Kann & Ammon. Upon returning to his home state, and prior to joining the Mills Group, Greco served as the Managing Partner at SMG Architects in Wheeling. He is accountable for overseeing the preservation and planning projects, strategic business development, firm administration and staff development at the Mills Group.

Since practicing in Wheeling, Greco has worked on over 600 projects, including The Health Plan Corporate Headquarters, The Boury Lofts, The Stone Center, the Flatiron Building, The Capitol Theater façade restoration, B&O Train Station restoration and many more.

Greco earned his bachelor’s degree in architecture from the University of Kentucky. His community service includes roles as Chairman of the West Virginia Archives and History Commission and member of the Wheeling Historic Landmarks Commission.

As a result of dedicated leadership and hard work, both presently and in the recent past, there is tremendous energy and excitement afoot in the city of Wheeling, West Virginia and the Upper Ohio Valley region.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, a wide variety of products – from glass and steel to pipe tobacco and cigars – were manufactured and exported from Wheeling, giving the city and region a real sense of vitality. The city’s ideal geographic location, where the National Road and B&O Railway meet the Ohio River, coupled with the overwhelming demand for its products, helped put Wheeling “on the map.”

Subsequently, the steady stream of business in and out of the city generated great commerce. Money flowed and the population grew. Restaurants, hotels and all forms of retail were in great demand. As the city expanded, spectacular architecture, art and culture began to flourish. The economic health of the region yielded a high quality of life, with respected schools, a variety of parks and great neighborhoods.

At the end of World War II, the steel industry and other manufacturing began to decline. The



Upper Ohio Valley region was not immune to this national trend. As the decades passed, this shift, along with a steady decline in population (particularly generations of college graduates and skilled laborers), contributed to the area becoming a stagnant and non-viable place for commerce.

However, a secure banking industry, the development of the Interstate Highway System, the continued importance of the mighty Ohio River and, most importantly, a proud citizenry kept the city and region anchored and afloat. And that has been the story until recent years.

*So, what is generating all of this energy and excitement?*

### Wheeling’s Heritage Port

In 2002, this was one of the first projects brought to fruition after the city was designated a National Heritage Area. Often referred to as the “welcome mat” to the city, the Heritage Port waterfront park



*Wheeling, West Virginia, circa 1950*





*Clockwise from top: The Highlands, The Health Plan and Boury Lofts*

has become a mecca for numerous festivals and concerts, including the Heritage Musical BluesFest (approaching its 19th year), Wine and Jazz Festival and the Italian Heritage Festival.

### **Cultural Resources**

The Capitol Theatre, WesBanco Arena and Oglebay Park offer citizens and visitors affordable, world-class entertainment and hospitality.

### **The Health Plan**

The new headquarters for this national health insurance company opened in downtown Wheeling in February 2018, infusing approximately 400 employees to the area. This influx of employees has brought life to the streets, demand on restaurants and a fresh and lively culture.

### **Downtown Living**

Thanks to state and federal Historic Tax Credit programs, several downtown buildings have been repurposed into convenient, modern and affordable housing. The Stone Center and Boury Lofts were developed through a public private partnership. The Flatiron Building and other buildings were developed by the private sector.

### **The Highlands**

Located approximately 10 miles from downtown, The Highlands is a popular shopping, dining and entertainment complex for both local and regional shoppers in the greater tri-state area. It features a variety of local and national retailers, hotels, auto dealers, restaurants, a movie theater and more. Currently, a \$30 million indoor sports complex is under construction that

will include soccer, basketball, volleyball and lacrosse facilities, as well as two multi-purpose outdoor fields. It is expected to be completed by 2020.

### **Oil and Gas Industry**

The oil and natural gas boom is a reality in the Upper Ohio Valley. Apartments, hotels and restaurants are at or near capacity, the number of service vehicles on the streets is mind-boggling and many large-tract property owners have done well with land leasing and royalties. Recently, a proposed methane cracker plant, to be located 12 miles to the south, reached a milestone by securing an air quality permit. If companies agree to build this plant, the development could resemble what's happened in Beaver County, Pennsylvania, where hundreds of

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Victor R. Greco

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permanent jobs and thousands of construction jobs have been created.

### Public Private Partnerships

Through tremendous cooperation from the West Virginia Economic Development Authority, Regional Economic Development Partnership, Brooke-Hancock-Jefferson Metropolitan Planning Commission, Business Development Corporation of the Northern Panhandle and various towns along both sides of the river, many large-scale projects and future development opportunities abound. For instance, Orrick is one of the first Global Operations Centers that opened in Wheeling in 2002. It was the first global insourcing center within a major U.S. law firm. C-Foam, a carbon foam product company, is designed to meet growing demand for ultra-high-performance engineering materials in the military, industrial, aerospace and commercial product markets. Abandoned brownfields sites are now the center of attention for new development.

### Higher Education

Though funding has been an enormous challenge, local colleges and universities remain a vital component to garner a path to advanced degrees. West Liberty University, West Virginia Northern Community College, Wheeling Jesuit University and Bethany College all offer valuable opportunities at affordable costs.

My wife and I returned to the Upper Ohio Valley 29 years ago to raise our children and to start a new business. We both grew up in Weirton, went off to school and eventually settled in Baltimore. At the time of our return, the city was marketing a renaissance designed to exploit the history, culture and industrial heritage of this place. Though it has taken time, diligent leadership and a spirited citizenry have brought this concept to fruition. The quality of the neighborhoods, schools, parks and culture built during the good times remain strong. Thus, pride has been restored and a good quality of life has been revived. ♡



## Building a Future in West Virginia's Eastern Panhandle

James W. Dailey, II

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In all cases, it is the planning process that affords all parties the time to consider the financial requirements, the growth and expansion potential, phasing stages, infrastructure modifications and every other aspect of a major construction project. As the saying goes, failing to plan is planning to fail.

The Eastern Panhandle, with its expansive topography and abundance of utilities, transportation services, employment opportunities, schools and government services, continues to be the shining example of growth and development for families and businesses in our state. ♡



## Redirecting Energy Dollars to Upgrade School Facilities

Jeremy Smith

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four buildings, this equates to an average of \$168,000 per year, per building, in wasted energy. Unfortunately, this is a common problem with new construction, because although energy-efficient design is code-regulated, there is very little incentive to follow the performance of the building after it is constructed and benchmark the energy usage unless a building owner chooses to do that themselves. Although some buildings in the state of West Virginia are performing well, the majority are not benchmarked and not actively managed to meet an energy benchmark metric.

### Wrapping It All Up

The space on these pages is not enough to fully explain and discuss this large subject, but I hope I have clearly illustrated how Guaranteed Energy Savings Contracts are beneficial to building owners. When executed properly, it is truly a win-win for all involved by redirecting dollars being sent to the utility company back into the classroom. Furthermore, the mission of helping underfunded school districts and universities is truly rewarding work that my company finds great purpose and pride in executing. ♡



## Public Private Partnerships: Tools for Constructing West Virginia's Economic Future

John R. "Rudy" Henley

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Connecting the efforts and capabilities of the full range of active participants, and making sure that silos don't inhibit opportunity, will be a good start. Such efforts are, by nature, long term. As the famed NFL coach Vince Lombardi said, "It's not the will to win, it's the will to prepare to win." ♡