



In Pictures: What This Series is About

- *It begins with a simple question: Why is the promised practice facility for the West Virginia University marching band being moved to a privately-owned recreation center miles away from the WVU campus?*

A visual introduction to an exclusive Vernissage Magazine Investigation

They Say That a Picture is Worth a Thousand Words.

More than four thousand people contributed a total of \$1.25 million to build WVU's Pride of West Virginia Marching Band a dedicated, state-of-the-art practice facility on the WVU campus. The financial goal for construction was reached in 2021. A groundbreaking ceremony was held. But construction never began. Then, in late October of 2023, WVU officials announced that the band's practice facility would not be built on campus, as promised. Instead, The Pride's donated funds will be used to build a field for the band to practice on at a privately-owned recreational complex called Mylan Park.

The following week, seeking to quell controversy over the announcement, the University posted a FAQ which read, in part: "As the University continued to plan for a new practice facility, several issues evolved with the on-campus site." The FAQ noted '*drainage issues*' and '*space concerns*' at Hawley Field, WVU's former campus baseball stadium where the practice facility was supposed to be built. The WVU Foundation, the university nonprofit legally responsible for proper administration of contributions, has indicated it will use The Pride's \$1.25 million in donor funds to build a field at Mylan Park.

The articles that follow are an investigation into what donors to the Pride Practice Facility call a "bait-and-switch" operation, using their generosity to benefit a private, politically-connected entity. The following images illustrate their concerns.

Note: All of the photographs in this article were taken on the same day, between 1:30 and 2:30 pm, March 11, 2024.

THE PRIDE PRACTICE FACILITY THAT WAS PRESENTED TO DONORS IN SOLICITATIONS

BELOW: This is the Pride Practice Facility donors were promised in WVU Foundation solicitations. It features an artificial turf replica of WVU's football field, a covered pavilion for music rehearsal during inclement weather, and a climate-controlled instrument and uniform storage building with restrooms. The first phase of construction – which university internal records show was fully-funded in 2021 – was to have included the artificial turf field, stadium lights for evening practice, and a tower from which the band director would conduct practice:



THE PRIDE PRACTICE FACILITY LOCATION SPECIFICALLY PROMISED TO MEMBERS OF THE PRIDE AND TO DONORS

BELOW: This is Hawley Field, the location where the Pride Practice Facility was supposed to be built. This is the location promised to members of The Pride, and to donors in WVU Foundation solicitations. University records show that Hawley Field – WVU's former baseball stadium – was given to the marching band by the WVU Athletic Department for facility construction. This site is on WVU's Evansdale Campus, adjacent to the men's soccer stadium, the WVU Coliseum, and across the street from the College of Creative Arts, where the School of Music and WVU Band Office are located. This site is fewer than 200-yards from where The Pride currently practices. On the afternoon of March 11, 2024, Hawley Field was dry:



THE LOCATION AT PRIVATELY-OWNED MYLAN PARK WHERE THE WVU FOUNDATION WILL USE DONOR FUNDS

BELOW: This is the location at Mylan Park where WVU and the WVU Foundation intend to use donor funds to build an artificial turf football field for marching band practice and park rental. This site is five miles from campus, down a winding, two-lane road that highway studies declared “inadequate” over ten years ago. More than 300 students will have to carpool to this location for autumn afternoon practice, returning to campus in late evening darkness. On the afternoon of March 11, 2024, this site was wet and muddy, a large part of it covered by standing water:



A COMPARISON OF FACILITES

BELOW: The promised on-campus Pride Practice Facility included a covered pavilion for music rehearsal in inclement weather. To build that pavilion, the band would have to raise more money from donors. Mylan Park has offered to let The Pride use a picnic pavilion adjacent to the new field site, if it's not being rented. On the left is the pavilion as originally portrayed to Pride members and to donors. On the right is the Mylan Park picnic pavilion:



Below: This is the ground between the Mylan Park field location and the Mylan Park picnic shelter 'rehearsal pavilion':



A PANORAMIC COMPARISON OF THE TWO SITES

Below: Comparison panoramic views of the two sites. As noted, both of these photographs were taken between 1:30 and 2:30 in the afternoon on the same day, March 11, 2024.

Top Panorama: The on-campus Hawley Field location promised to The Pride and to donors in WVU and WVU Foundation solicitations. Hawley Field was given to The Pride by the WVU Athletic Department specifically for construction of the intended state-of-the-art Pride Practice Facility.

Bottom Panorama: The Mylan Park field location. WVU and the WVU Foundation intend to use the funds donors contributed for the Pride Practice Facility to build an artificial turf field on this site. That field will be made available for recreational rental by Mylan Park. Mylan Park Foundation officials have refused to answer the question of whether The Pride – whose private contributions are being used to build the Mylan Park field – will receive any portion of that rental income.



WHAT THIS SERIES IS ABOUT

The series that follows, *The Pride and Prevarication*, is the result of more than four months of investigation by *Vernissage Magazine*. These reports are based on publicly available records at the university, county, state, and federal levels, as well as emails and other communications obtained by *Vernissage* through the use of the Freedom of Information Act.

Over the course of this series of articles, *Vernissage* will examine the issues and individuals involved in this questionable diversion of public donor funds that appears to largely benefit a private entity, which has long desired an artificial turf football field.

In the next *Vernissage Magazine* article:

Our series begins in August of 2023, with a secret meeting of county commissioners, WVU administrators, and Mylan Park Foundation directors... and a back room deal for a long-coveted football field, paid for by donors who thought they were contributing to the on-campus, state-of-the-art practice facility that the Pride of West Virginia was promised.



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