
LEADING MORGANTOWN: THE EXECUTIVES, ENTREPRENEURS AND PROFESSIONALS WHO ARE SHAPING THE COMMUNITY'S FUTURE



Albert L. Wright Jr.
JIM HARRIS/PBT

Albert L. Wright Jr., president and CEO, West Virginia University Health System

As president and CEO of West Virginia University Health System, West Virginia's largest private employer, Albert L. Wright Jr. is hugely influential in Morgantown, where the health system's biggest hospital and its well-known specialty hospitals and institutes reside. Wright's tenure has seen unprecedented growth, not only in Morgantown, but also around West Virginia with the acquisitions of hospitals in Wheeling and Weirton, among others. He's also led the expansion of WVU Medicine into Pennsylvania, first with Uniontown Hospital and this fall with the upcoming acquisition of Independence Health System. And he's a former UPMC executive.

What's the health care landscape like, and how is WVU Medicine improving upon that?

We're working to build a comprehensive network of care that can change the health trajectory of West Virginia and the communities we serve in Ohio, Maryland and Pennsylvania. Over the past 12 years, we've expanded clinical services across our network to ensure people have convenient access to specialized care close to where they live. People no longer must travel to faraway places to get the care they need – in most cases, they can now receive that care much closer to home.

What are you most proud of, in terms of a project, in Morgantown? I'd say the overall growth and transformation of our academic medical center. ... Today, it's now a collection of highly specialized institutes and services, bookended by WVU Medicine Golisano Children's Hospital and the WVU Rockefeller Neuroscience Institute. And we're continuing to grow – to further expand our advanced specialty care, we're building a 150,000-square-foot facility for the WVU Eye Institute adjacent to our main campus that will open in 2027. We also plan to build a new cancer hospital connected to our main hospital that will be home to the WVU Cancer Institute. I'm also proud of the outstanding work of our institute leaders and department chairs to build the breadth and depth of their programs – from anesthesiology, critical care and trauma, and ear, nose and throat, to heart and vascular, orthopaedics, transplant and urology, among many others.

What's one misperception outsiders have about Morgantown? Faculty candidates are often surprised by what they find when they visit Morgantown. Once they've been here and experienced how vibrant the community is and all the amenities it has to offer – including its excellent elementary and secondary schools – they're often sold on coming here. In that regard, I think Morgantown remains something of a well-kept secret.

What is one of the places you most like to eat? I have many favorites. If you want a great burrito in a casual, family-friendly atmosphere, Black Bear Burritos is always a solid choice – my favorite is the Sergeant Peppers (B Side)! Mario's Fishbowl has the best wings anywhere, and a slice of pizza from Pizza Al's is a little bit of Heaven. If you're looking for something a little more upscale, Tin 202 in downtown offers great fare in a terrific

setting, as does Table 9 and 48 Donley. Oliverio's is always a great choice, and Stefano's has the best steak in town! There are many more, for sure, but these are some of my favorites.

What initiative are you most excited about at WVU Medicine? I'm very excited about the work we're doing in population health and chronic disease management. Our goal is to build a better mousetrap – a system of care that can better partner with our patients to help them live healthier lives, make healthier choices and ultimately achieve better outcomes that enable them to live their best lives. Peak Health (a health insurance agency of which WVU Medicine is a co-owner) is our primary entry point into this effort, and we've created tremendous momentum and energy behind that brand and its potential to change health outcomes. There's no looking back – we're here to help West Virginia get healthier.

What is a challenge for healthcare in the Morgantown region? Like any health system in the United States, some of our biggest challenges are related to the reimbursements and payments we receive through federal health programs, especially Medicaid. The policies underlying that program have changed significantly, creating new challenges that we and many other health systems are navigating. We're especially concerned about federal policies and funding decisions that could negatively impact our smallest rural hospitals and the communities that depend on them.

– *Paul J. Gough*

[Previous Story](#)

[Next Story](#)

Leading Morgantown: The executives, entrepreneurs and professionals who are shaping the community's future

[All Stories](#)