



T-L Photos/MIKE PALMER

**CLAIMING ITS** first ever Class AA OVAC Cheerleading Championship was the River High School Pilots. The team is comprised of Brookie Albright, Kylie Brown, Stephanie Brown, Chacity Craig, Brittany Curtis, Kelsey Krempasky, Chelsea Lowe, Landyn Lucas, Felicia McCullough, Kelsey McGuire, Morgan Meyer, Renae Riley, Kristy Smith, Rachel Stewart and coach Angi McDonald.

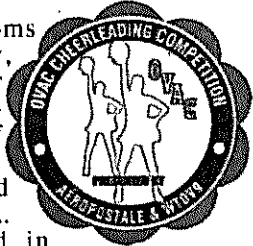
# CHAMPS CROWNED

• River, St. C. win respected divisions

By **MIKE PALMER**  
Times Leader Staff Writer

The 18th annual OVAC Cheering Competition took place at WesBanco Arena Saturday afternoon and four champions were crowned.

When the pom-poms were all put away, River had won their first ever AA title finishing ahead of Wheeling Central and St. Clairsville defended their title in class AAA.

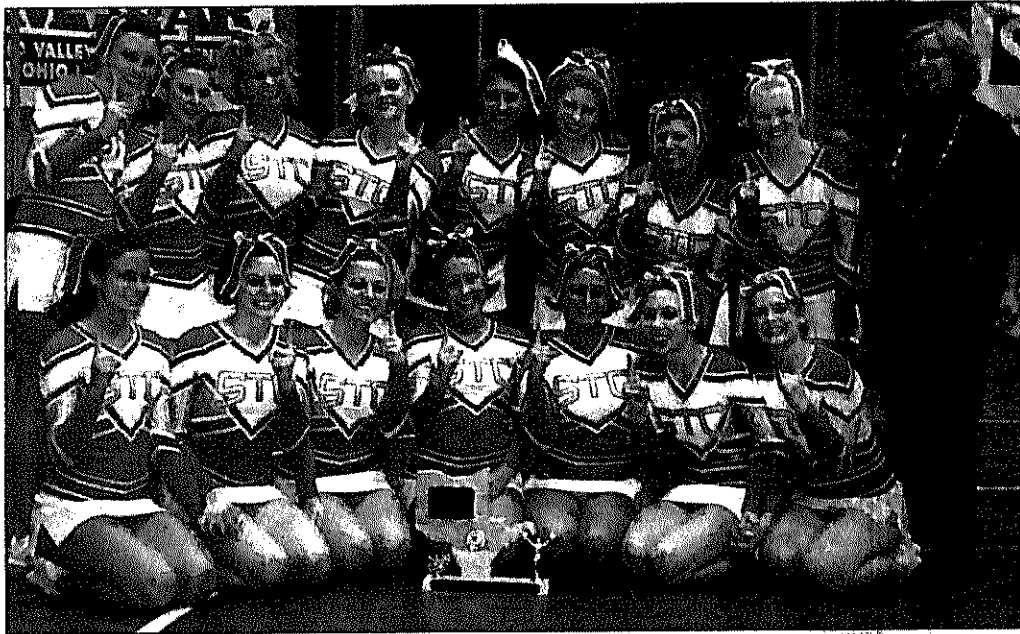


Toronto repeated in Class A and the Wheeling Park squad won the AAAA championship finishing ahead of the defending Mountain State champions Brooke in second.

River's first year coach Angi McDonald credited her seniors for providing leadership during the transition.

"When I came in as coach I was not sure

See, **CHEERING**, Page A2



**CLAIMING THE** Class AAA OVAC Cheerleading Championship at the WesBanco Arena was the Lady Red Devils of St. Clairsville High School. The team is comprised of Julie Avila, Cassi Baugh, Breanna Brothers, Lauren Cencula, Mallory Cooper, Erica DeFilippo, Lauren Holler, Alexis Laurine, Taylor Martin, Jamie Matkovich, Brittani Rauschenberg, Taryne Soukup, Emily Tennant, Cheryl Vicker and Stephanie Verba. The squad is coached by Joanne Verba and Laurie Verba.

## ● Cheering

Continued from Page A1

what we had," McDonald said. "I have to give credit to these six fantastic seniors, that I am going to miss next year, for all their help this season."

Pilot's senior squad member Landyn Lucas said the squad had made winning the AA crown their goal.

"After finishing second last year we knew we could get first and it happened," Lucas said. "We were excited to have a new coach and new uniforms. We looked good today, worked hard, went out and won the title."

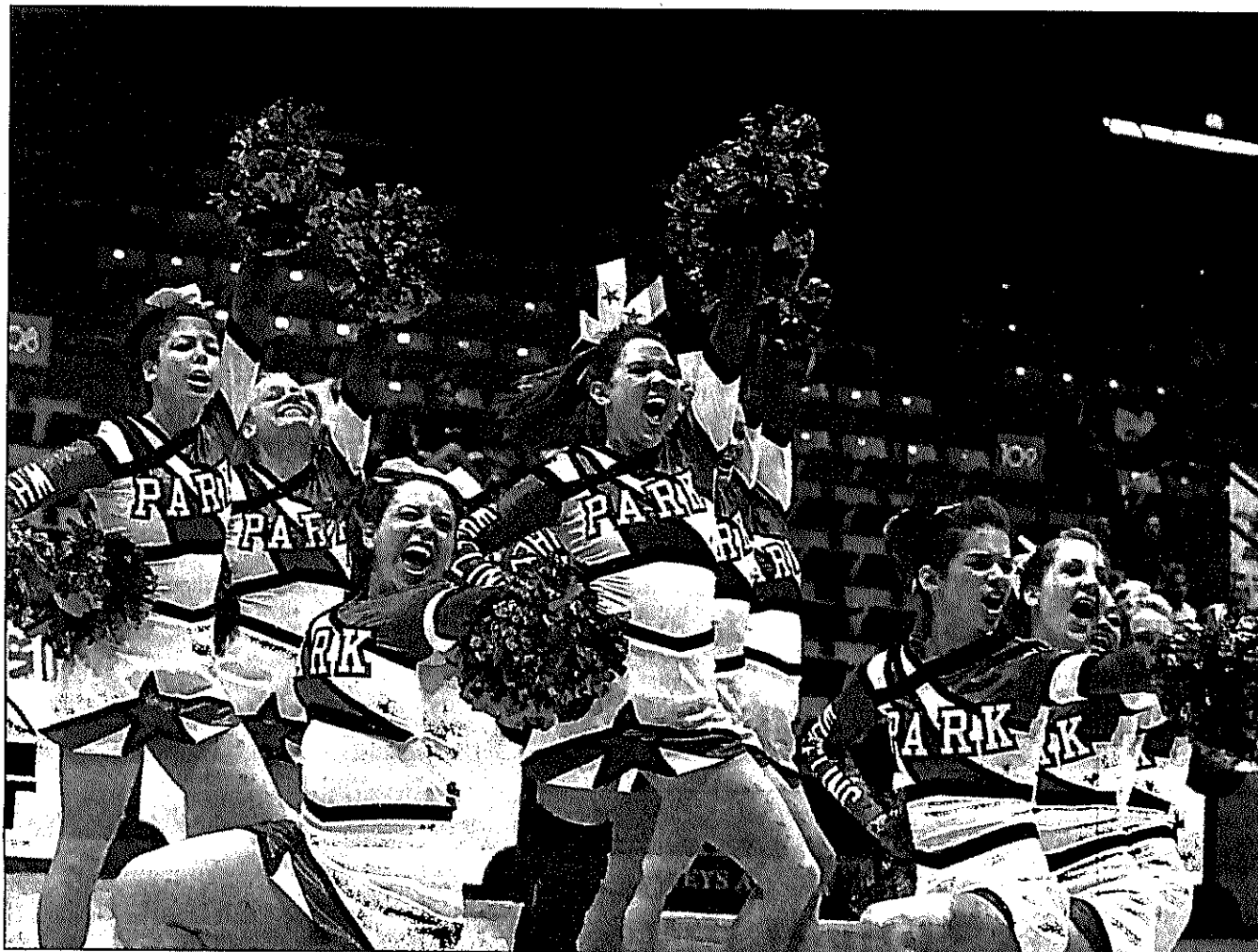
While River was celebrating their new title, St. Clairsville's coach Joanne Verba knew her squad would have to put together a great three minute routine to defend the AAA title. "There was a lot of extra pressure, this was our first back-to-back OVAC title," Verba said. "The girls started working back in June working four or five days a week, sometimes five, six hours a day, they are true competitors."

Devil's senior cheerleader Cassi Baugh agreed it had been a long road to reclaim their crown but this victory was even sweeter. "The year did not start off so great," Baugh said. "But we worked it out and made school history, to earn back-to-back OVAC banners."

Buckeye Local came in third place in the AAAA division, taking another step toward joining Weir as the only school other than Wheeling Park and Brooke to hold that title.

Palmer can be reached at mpalmer@timesleaderonline.com

## OVAC CHEERING CHAMPIONSHIPS



Members of the Wheeling Park High School cheerleading team perform their routine Saturday at WesBanco Arena. The Patriots claimed the Class AAAA championship, the program's 13th overall. Photo by Mike Palmer

# Baker's Dozen

## Wheeling Park wins 13th conference title

By MIKE PALMER  
For the News-Register

The 18th annual OVAC Cheering Competition took place at WesBanco Arena on Saturday afternoon and four champions were crowned.

When the pom-poms were put away, River had won its first Class AA title, finishing ahead of Wheeling Central.

St. Clairsville defended its Class AAA crown.

Toronto repeated in Class A and Wheeling Park won the Class AAAA championship, finishing ahead of the defending champion Brooke.

"It was a great day," Patriots coach Shawna Shepherd said.

Wheeling Park won its first OVAC crown since 2006 and its 13th overall. The Patriots have won the second-most conference titles. Wheeling Central has won 14.

Park was the final 4-A squad to perform its 3-minute routine.

"They were really excited," Shepherd said.

"They knew what they had to do and they did their best."

"The last thing I told them was to believe in yourself."

The Patriots' squad is comprised of 14 cheerleaders, five of whom are seniors.

"The seniors won the OVAC title as freshman, so this was an exciting way to go out," Shepherd said.

The conference crown was a fitting end as the Patriots have enjoyed a solid campaign.

"We qualified for state and were runners-up, something that hadn't been done in 19 years," Shepherd said. "And Class 4-A is such a tough division with Brooke, Weir and John Marshall. I think everyone stepped up their game this year."

Wheeling Park and Brooke have been the cream of the crop in 4-A, winning all but one of the titles. Weir captured the championship in 2003.

"It's become a good rivalry between us and Brooke," Shepherd said.

See, Dozen, Page B4



## DOZEN

Continued from page B1

River's first-year coach, Angi McDonald, credited her seniors for providing leadership during the transition.

"When I came in as coach I was not sure what we had," McDonald said. "I have to give credit to these six fantastic seniors, that I am going to miss next year, for all their help this season."

River senior Landyn Lucas said the squad had made winning the AA crown their goal.

"After finishing second last year we knew we could get first and it happened," Lucas said. "We were excited to have a

new coach, new uniforms, we looked good and we worked hard, went out and won the title."

While River was celebrating its new title, St. Clairsville's coach, Joanne Verba, knew her squad would have to put together a great routine to defend its title.

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One day after the Shadyside girls avenged a tough early season loss, the boys do the same/14

# OVAC Cheerleaders Ready to Take Stage

### Annual competition set for today at WesBanco Arena

By KATIE MATZ For The Intelligencer

Cheerleaders from all over the Ohio Valley will liven up WesBanco Arena today at the 18th Annual OVAC Cheering Competition, where 33 squads will compete.

Libby Shepherd, director of the event, said she only hopes bad weather will not be a factor for this yearly occasion.

"I hope the weather cooperates because I know all of the coaches are concerned about the lack of practice they have had due to the weather, but all of the schools are in the same predicament," Shepherd said.

Doors will open for the public at 8:30 a.m., but the event will begin at 9:30 a.m. with the Class A division, followed by Class AA, then awards. The afternoon session, Shepherd said, will start at approximately 12:45 p.m. with the Class AAA division, followed by the Class AAAA division and finish with awards.

Shepherd also said there will be performances by the three winners of the second annual Junior High OVAC, which includes Bridge Street, winner of the small middle school; St. Clairsville Middle, winner of the large middle school and Wheeling Park jayvee, winner of the junior varsity.

Each team will cheer it out while trying to top the champions of previous years and beat old rivals. The defending champions are Toronto in Class A, Monroe Central in Class AA, St.

■ Go Team! Doors will open for the public at 8:30 a.m., with the event set to begin at 9:30 with the Class A division, followed by Class AA, then awards. The afternoon session will start at approximately 12:45 p.m. with the Class AAA division, followed by the Class AAAA division.

Clairsville in Class AAA and Brooke in Class AAAA.

Shepherd said each squad is judged based on cheer, dance and overall impression, but only has three minutes to perform its routines.

"Each team has 3 minutes to incorporate cheer, dance and tumbling in any manner they choose," Shepherd said. "Judges look for facials, timing, spacing and use of the floor ... This is just a fun day for all the squads to show their skills and hard work and perform for their fans."

The teams competing this year in the Class A division include, in

the following order, Madonna, Paden City, Bishop Donahue, St. John Central, Valley, Toronto and Bridgeport.

The class AA competitors include, in the following order, Shadyside, Wheeling Central, Linsly, Monroe Central, River, Catholic Central and Shenandoah.

Class AAA competitors are, in the following order, Magnolia, Martins Ferry, Harrison Central, Tyler, Bellaire, St. Clairsville, Barnesville, Union Local and Oak Glen.

Finally, competing in Class AAAA division in the following

order, are Indian Creek, Edison, Weir, East Liverpool, Brooke, Steubenville, John Marshall, Zanesville, Buckeye Local and Wheeling Park.

Mary Kay Zitzelsberger, co-director of the event, said although this is her last year working alongside Shepherd, she will always remember how exciting the OVAC cheering competition is.

"It has been such an exciting time over all of these years watching all of the OVAC schools improve each year and make it such a thrilling competition," Zitzelsberger said.

"I only wish everyone understood the time and hard work all of these squads put in to make their routines as good as they are."

The event is open to the public. Admission is \$6 for adults and \$4 for students.



## Cheerleading CHAMPIONSHIP

Saturday, February 7 at WesBanco Arena



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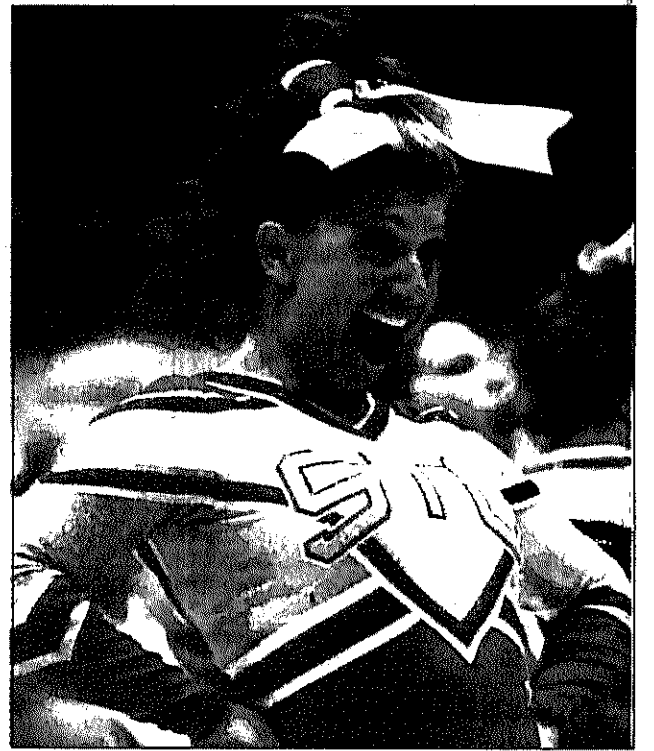
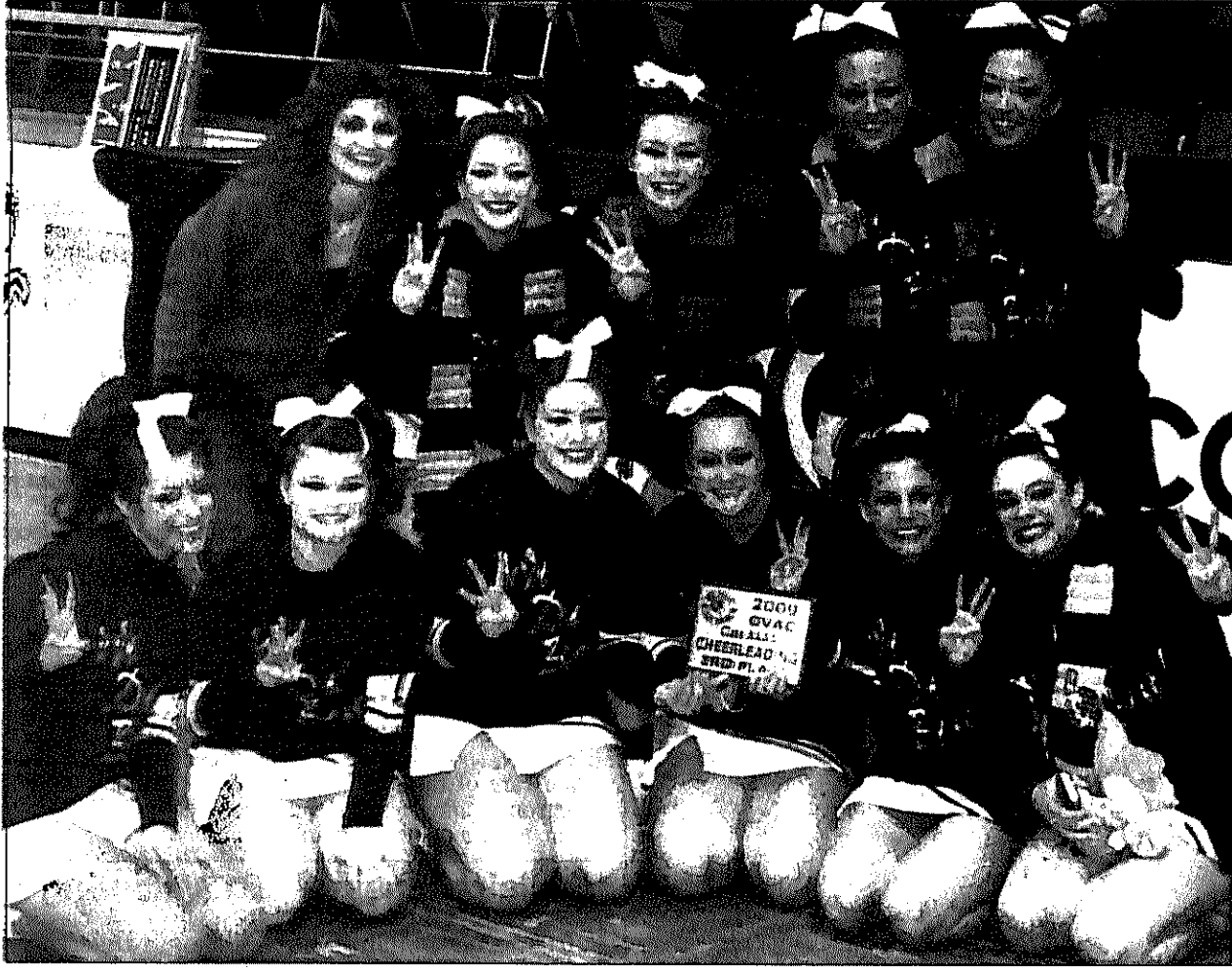


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# 2009 OVAC Cheerleading Championships



**TOP LEFT:** The Buckeye Local cheerleading squad gives the three sign after placing third in class AAAA. **TOP RIGHT:** Bellaire Big Reds Aiesha Scott strikes a pose during the AAA competition.

**AT LEFT:** Barnesville squad was hampered by injury as Kati Anderson, Tiffany Roberts and Brooke Swallie visited Wheeling Hospital Physical therapist J.T. Thomas prior to taking the floor for their performance.

**AT RIGHT:** Shadyside's Sommer Hans shows her winning smile during the Tiger's routine.

## CU

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**MIDDLE LEFT:** Bridgeport Bulldog's cheer squad members are grooving to the beat.

**BELOW RIGHT:** Union Local's Kristen Fraley is upside down during the Jet's tumbling routine.

**BELOW LEFT:** Harrison Central's Kasey Bethel

gives some Huskies attitude to the judges.

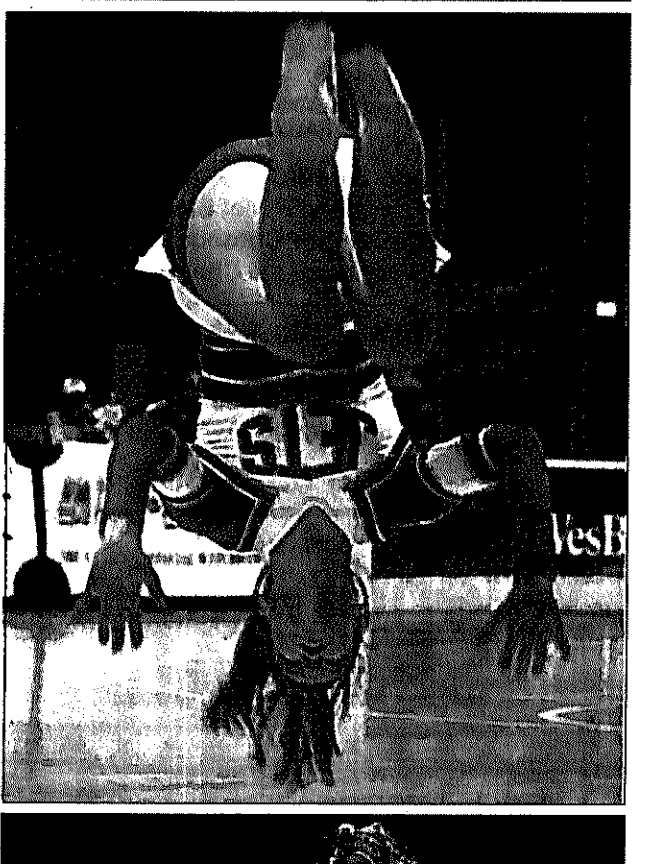
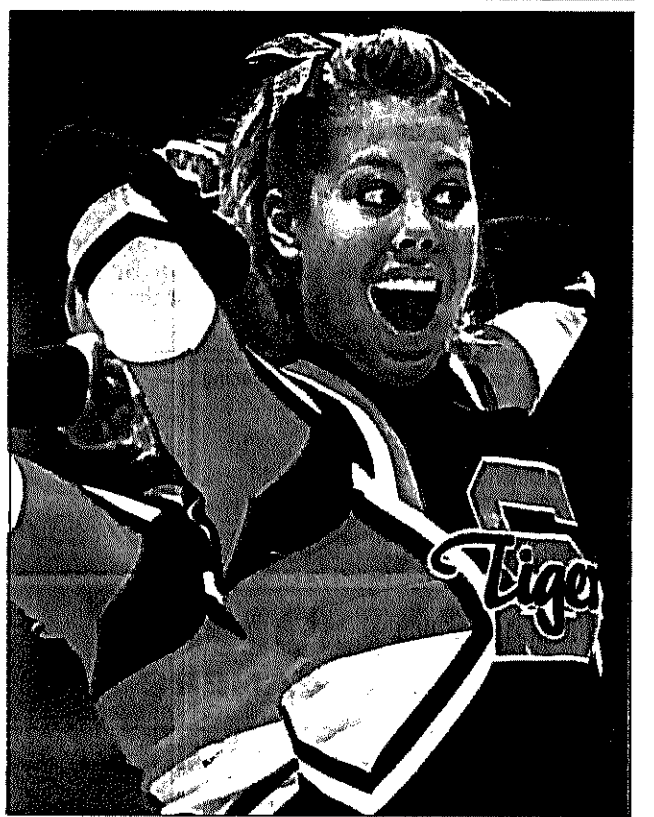
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**BOTTOM LEFT:** Martins Ferry's Elise Maguire and Jenna McSwords shout Go Riders.

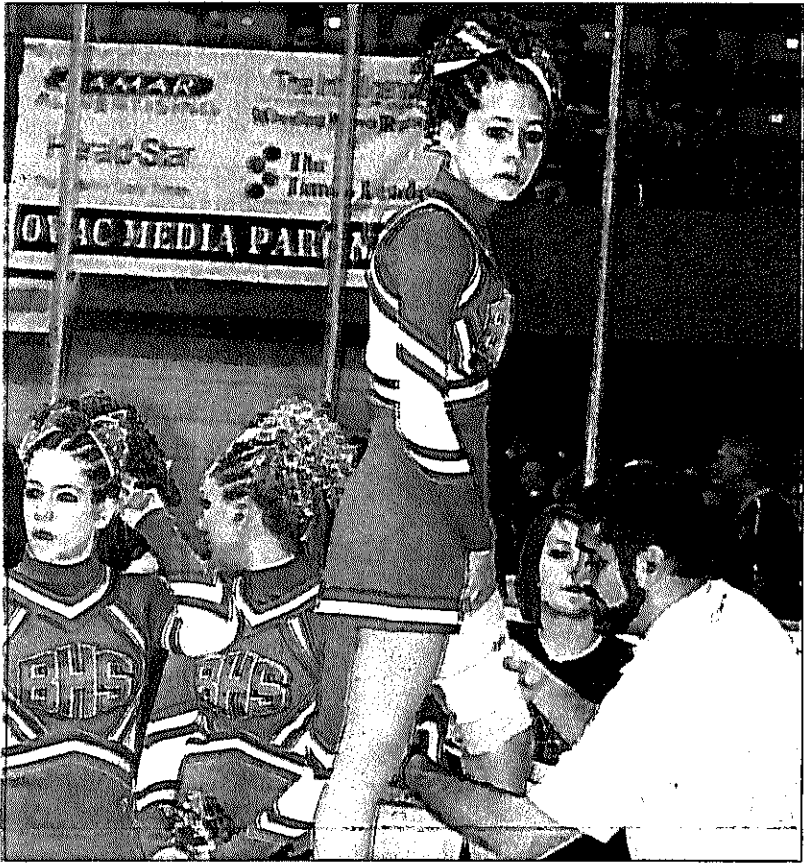
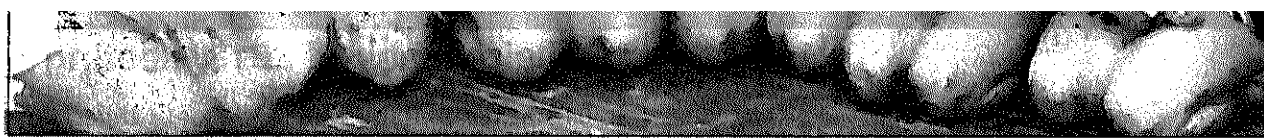
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**BOTTOM RIGHT:** River's Chelsea Lowe is enjoying the Pilot's pom-pom portion of their winning performance in AA.

T-L Photos/MIKE PALMER, AND JOE LOVELL







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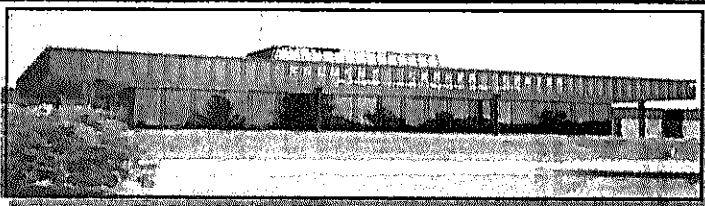
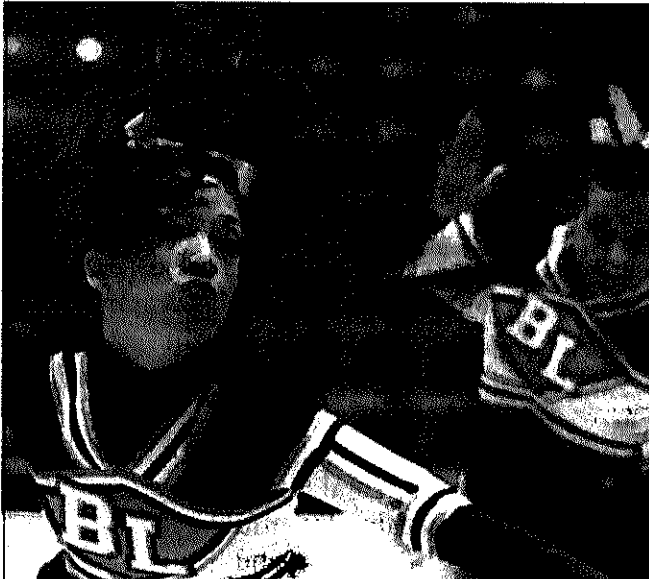
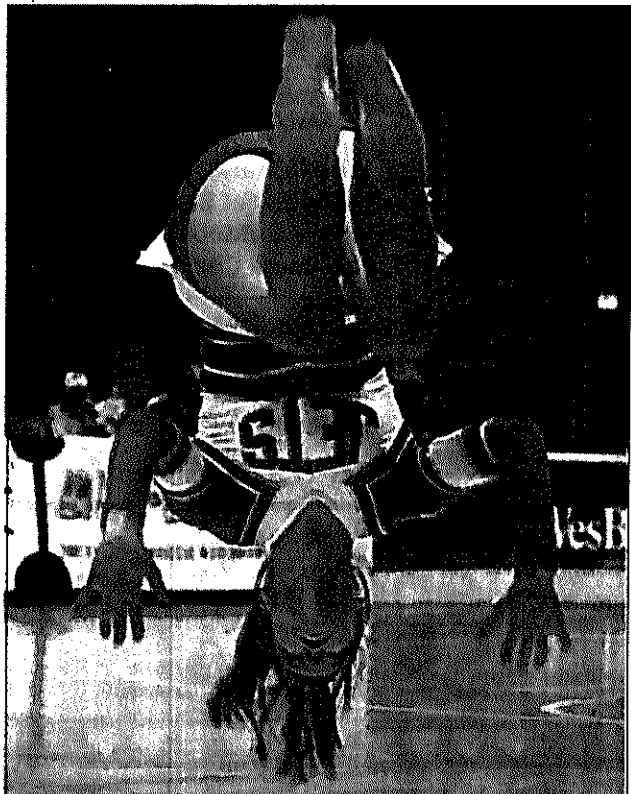
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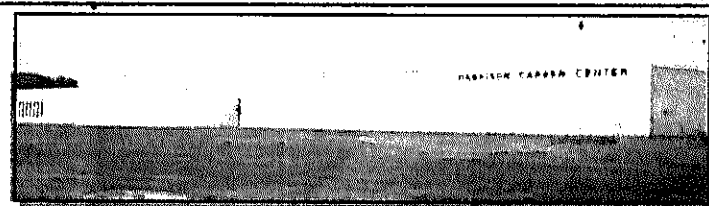


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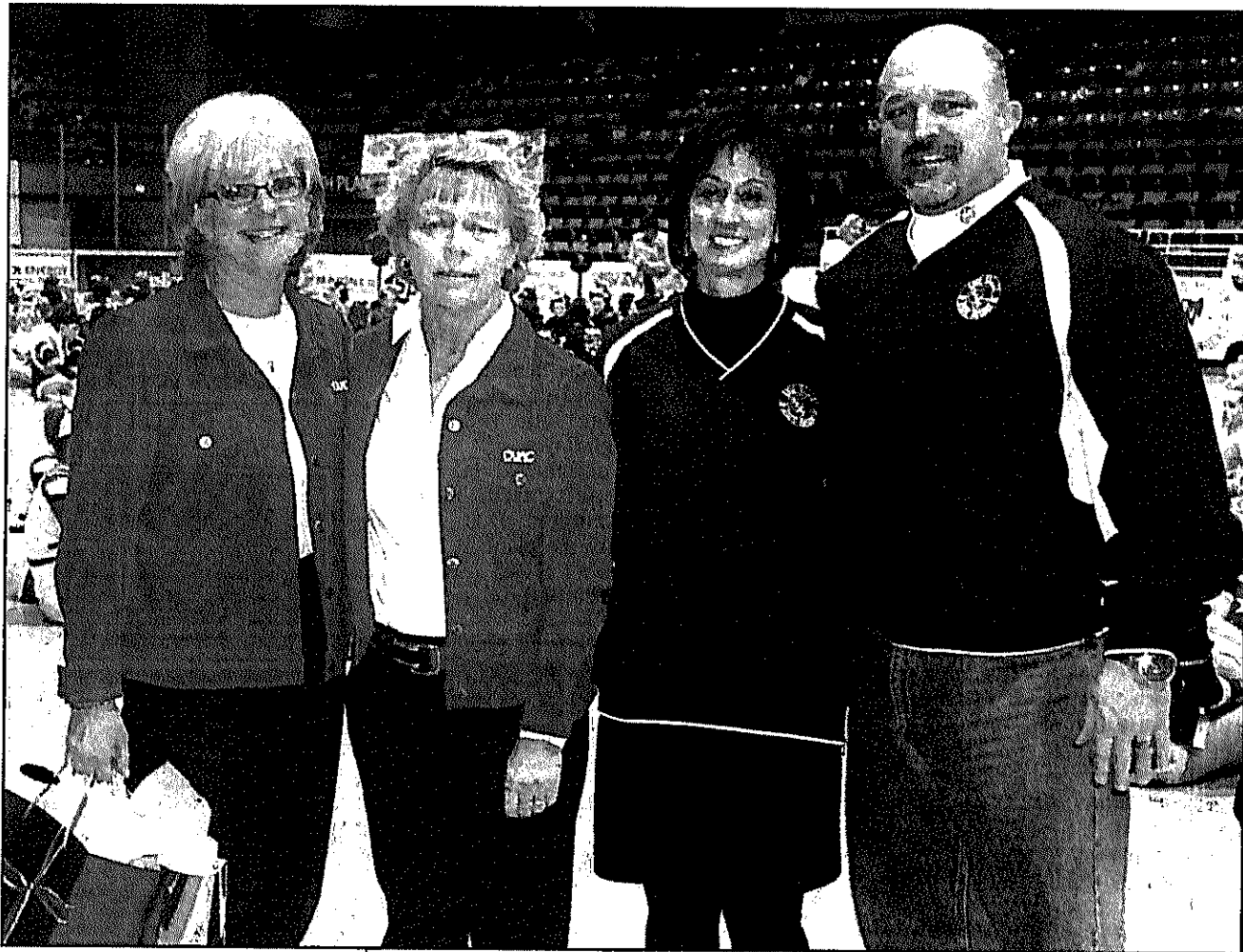
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## Dedicated Service



**MARY KAY** Zitzlesberger, far left, has recently retired from a long and successful tenure as co-director of the OVAC Cheerleading Tournament. She was honored this past Saturday at the 18th annual event at WesBanco Arena. Also pictured are, from left Libby Shepherd, co-director; Dianna Vargo, OVAC president and OVAC Executive Board Member Walt Skaggs.

T-L Photo/JOE LOVELL

### Our Opinion

## Cheering Champs

OFTEN times in high school athletics, cheerleaders are overlooked. Such was anything but the case Saturday at Wheeling's WesBanco Arena.

The 18th Annual OVAC Cheering Championships were staged with competition unfolding in four classifications. Instead of spurring on fans, the cheerleaders were recipients of the cheers.

Saturday's cheering showcase was the reward for countless practice, training and preparation from the dedicated spirit generators.

Each school was given three minutes to display its routine, shaped from months of rigorous work.

When the passionate programs had ended, two local schools emerged as champions, no easy task when facing such well-drilled competition.

River pocketed its first-ever cheering crown, prevailing in Class AA. The Pilots' title-winning effort takes on added luster when noting

they had to defeat the formidable charges of Wheeling Central.

St. Clairsville, meanwhile, always a force in Class AAA, did something extra special Saturday. The Lady Red Devils successfully defended the crown they pocketed last year. Back-to-back cheering championships speaks volumes about the St. Clairsville High program.

The Lady Red Devils are coached by Joanne Verba. The Lady Pilots are guided by first-year mentor Angi McDonald.

We commend both coaches -- as well as their squads -- on jobs obvious very well done. Your school and community should embrace your stellar accomplishments.

We congratulate all the schools which participated in the cheering extravaganza. We appreciate the time and effort needed to compete at such a high level.

The OVAC also deserves a note of recognition for allowing the cheerleaders their day in the sun.