Editorial: On state welcome sign, Notre Dame valedictorian and the baby bust

May 11, 2008 @ 09:49 PM
The Herald-Dispatch

"Open for Business" is history.

Gov. Joe Manchin's slogan never caught on with everyday West Virginians, especially when it was placed on the welcome signs on bridges and highways entering the state.

Last week, crews from the West Virginia Division of Highways took down the "Open for Business" welcome signs and replaced them with signs bearing the slogan favored by most West Virginians: "Wild and Wonderful."

The first new "Wild and Wonderful" signs went up on the three Ohio River bridges in the Huntington area and on the Silver Memorial Bridge near Point Pleasant, W.Va.

"Open for Business" just never caught on, partly because West Virginians identify with "Wild and Wonderful." It's a lesson future governors should heed: Don't mess with "Wild and Wonderful."

Becoming valedictorian at the University of Notre Dame takes more than good grades. A candidate must also be active in student life, submit a resume, a letter of recommendation and a written and a recorded version of the speech he or she would give if chosen.

As it happens, the honor this year goes to Josh Hammack, a 2004 graduate of St. Joseph Central High School in Huntington. It's a rare honor, and one that St. Joe can enjoy as much as Hammack himself.

Another sign that West Virginia is an aging state:

Among the 50 states, only Vermont and Maine have a smaller percentage of people age 17 and younger than West Virginia. According to the latest Census Bureau estimates, about 21.4 percent of West Virginians are 17 or younger. In Vermont, it's 21.1 percent, and in Maine it's 21.2 percent. The national average is 24.5 percent. Numbers for Ohio and Kentucky are 24 percent and 23.7 percent, respectively. Utah has the largest percentage of young people, with 30.9 percent.

This is another demographic problem we have to face up to. West Virginia has become a state that is not as attractive to families as others. As with many other of the state's problems, it's something that a strong economy would fix, but that's the hard part, isn't it?