

# VOICERICHMOND

## The Richmond

SERVING RICHMOND, PETERSBURG AND 7 SOUTHSIDE VIRGINIA COUNTIES

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FREE

# Gone too soon or not fast enough?

## *Sweepstakes gambling in Virginia catches on fire just as legislators outlaw them*

By Sylvina Poole

They operate under the guise of Internet cafes but lawmakers seemed to quickly catch on and outlaw Internet cafes that allow sweepstakes gambling.

“We have never allowed retail gambling in Virginia, except horse racing and the Charitable Gambling Association. Nothing like Las Vegas,” said Del. Clifford “Clay” Athey, R-Warren, who proposed House Bill 1700 to ban sweepstakes. “To me, they are Las-Vegas style casinos. The only difference is you are playing over the Internet and not in a casino. If we cross over and allow these types of games in Virginia, then what comes along with them is a criminal element.”

Athey, a lawyer, said sweepstakes businesses are using a loophole in existing law that says sweepstakes are not gambling. This loophole has paved the way for the so-called illicit casinos to operate.

Athey also said that restaurants that are just giving away free Internet time to entice customers should not have any problem.

In the Virginia Senate, Sen. Mark Obenshain (R-Harrisonburg), sponsored legislation to ban sweepstakes in the state. Gov. Bob McDonnell is soon expected to sign the pieces of legislation into law.

Still, there is an outcry of public opinion on the issue. Some feel that the businesses, some strategically located in some of Richmond’s poor and minority communities, needed to be gone before they caused too much harm. Proponents feel that the General Assembly’s actions were unnecessary.

Wanda Hester who lives a few blocks from a sweepstakes Internet cafe said they should have been allowed to operate in



*Del. Athey and fellow legislators have stopped Internet gambling in Virginia on its tracks.*

Virginia.

“These casinos are not only in Black neighborhoods, they are on Gaskins Road in the lily white West End,” she said.

“I take it as relaxation for an hour or two, just to relax my mind. The amount of money that has gone out of the state of Virginia, on the bus trips [to Atlantic City, for instance], could have stayed here. I think that the state of Virginia made a mistake in not allowing casinos because money could have been made here. Jobs would have been generated and people would have income.”

Hester said she has taken many bus trips to casinos out of state to seek diversions. To her the sweepstakes cafes in the city and in other parts of Virginia are “just a diversion.”

“If you choose to spend your \$20 there that’s on you. If you feel you don’t need to spend that \$20 on a grocery bill that’s your



problem. I don’t see anything wrong with it. I enjoy it,” she said.

For people who can’t afford a conventional vacation, Hester says they can find \$40 or \$50 and indulge in a short gambling vacation.

“That’s the shortest vacation you can possibly get,” she said.

Jimmy Morris doesn’t live too far from a new sweepstake casino and has an opposing viewpoint.

“I am not in favor of casinos of any type in our community due to the type of traffic and individuals that are entering in and out of the community. There must be a better way of supporting our community and establish good businesses to bring in revenue to the local economy other than a casino,” he said. “Insurance prices on properties could be affected by potential increase in crime and vandalism due to increased traffic.”

Once McDonnell signs legislation banning sweepstakes Internet gambling, Virginia will join seven other states, which have specific policies outlawing the practice. They include Indiana, Louisiana, Nevada, New York, Oregon, South Dakota, and Washington.

A new first-of-its-kind study by researchers at the University at Buffalo’s Research Institute on Addictions has found that after age 21, problem gambling is considerably more common among U.S. adults than alcohol dependence, even though alcohol dependence has received much more attention.

“No comparable analysis has been done previously and therefore none is available for a direct comparison of these results,” said Professor John Welte. “... But, given what we found about the persistence of frequent and problem gambling through adulthood, increased prevention and

# Bellevue celebrates 'Title I Distinguished School' recognition



*Bellevue Elementary School Principal Regina T. Farr with some of the school's high achieving students, most of whom participate in a 'Saturday Academy' meant to prepare them for SOLs.*

The Virginia Board of Education has recognized Richmond's Bellevue Elementary School as one of the state's "Title I Distinguished Schools" for raising the academic achievement of economically disadvantaged students. The awards, announced in a Virginia Department of Education press release recently, are based on student achievement scores on state assessments during 2009-2010 and the previous school year.

Bellevue's latest Standard's of Learning (SOL) scores were 97 percent in reading, 99 percent in math, and 100 percent in both history and science. Located in Richmond's historic Church Hill district, Bellevue also was one of only nine Virginia schools named a 2010 National Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of

Education.

"The question is now, how do we maintain it?," said Bellevue Principal Regina T. Farr. "We feel good about what we have done, but we have no time to rest on our laurels.

"We will continue to work steadily with our children, maintain a high expectation and focus on high quality work."

Farr, who just came to the school last September, said the foundation for the latest SOL scores came from a dedicated team of teachers and administrators that are hard working and caring.

"They care about the children, their needs and their families," she said, adding that the school's community partners, including volunteers; local churches, including Mt. Gilead Full Gospel; and

the local Boys and Girls Club, help the students excel.

Farr is an outspoken proponent of children from poor communities learning in urban schools like Bellevue, who are sometimes misjudged as not good enough or unwilling to learn. She said believing that school children like hers rarely do well is a "big myth" that should not be entertained.

"They are great kids who want to learn," she said, before inviting any critics to "come and see" what they are made of.

Bellevue, like most Virginia schools are now preparing for this year's SOL tests, to be administered in May. To help the students, the school is hosting a 'Saturday Academy' that allows students to get the help they need from teachers and

community partners.

The school is also gearing up to kick off a Big Brothers Big Sisters program that is similar to the one the community is familiar with, yet different in a way. The program, still administered by the Big Brother Big Sister organization, will allow mentors, volunteers from the community, to mentor children specifically from Bellevue.

In the latest statewide "Title I Distinguished Schools" recognition, Bellevue was one of 103 schools named for maintaining full state accreditation under Virginia's SOL program for two consecutive years and for meeting federal benchmark scores in reading and mathematics. In fact, average test scores in both subjects had to be at the 60th percentile or higher.

## Del. Morrissey opposes Gov. McDonnell's veto of the P.E. bill

Richmond legislator, Del. Joseph D Morrissey (D-74), is opposing Gov. Bob McDonnell's veto of legislation that would have forced school districts to provide 150 minutes of physical education per week for all elementary and middle school students by 2014.

Morrissey, a former high school teacher and wrestling coach, said the legislation was needed for a number of reasons.

"Students are becoming unhealthy. A lack physical education is leading to early onset of diabetes, obesity, and heart disease," he said in a statement. "Children need more activity during the day and if that means extending the school day

by 30 minutes to defer the cost of health problems down the road, well then, the ends justify the means."

"It used to be when many of us got home from school we threw off our school clothes, got into our play clothes, and stayed active until dark," added Morrissey. "Now, when you drive through a neighborhood, it is rare to see children playing outside."

The physical education bill (SB 966), co-sponsored by state Sen. Ralph Northam, a pediatric neurologist at the Children's Hospital of the King's Daughters in Norfolk, and Del. John O'Bannon, R-Henrico, was strongly opposed by school divisions concerned

about how to implement the unfunded mandate. O'Bannon said money was not provided because any elementary or middle school teacher can teach physical education and new teachers would not need to be hired.

"In my inaugural address, I stated very clearly that Washington does not always know better than Richmond, and, equally, that Richmond does not always know better than Fairfax or Galax," McDonnell said in a press release. "I have long opposed significant unfunded mandates passed from one level of government to another. Thus, I cannot in good conscience sign this legislation."

He acknowledged the legislation has a good objective, but the cost to implement could be in the tens of millions. Chesterfield County estimated it could cost \$6.9 million. In addition, the mandate of 150 minutes per week exceeds the time dedicated to any other single subject. "Our local school districts are facing tough budgetary times, and we simply cannot ask them now to incorporate an expensive new policy with no new funding," he said.

Still, Morrissey is hopeful that a bipartisan group of Democrats and Republicans will overturn the governor's veto during the reconvene session now scheduled for April 4.

# N2N service plan meant to solve systemic social problems

Richmond Mayor Dwight C. Jones recently launched the city's Neighbor-To-Neighbor (N2N) High-Impact Service Plan, to promote what his office calls "a new era of collaborative service and volunteerism in the city."

The plan is the product of an extensive three-month landscape assessment and consultation process led by the city's Chief Service Officer Paul A. Manning. The plan was launched during a kick-off event on March 24 at the Arthur Ashe Center. The plan came about because of a \$200,000 Cities of Service Leadership Grant awarded to Richmond last June, funded jointly by the Rockefeller Foundation and Bloomberg Philanthropies.

"The Neighbor-To-Neighbor Service Plan that we have created - which is intentionally collaborative and community-inclusive - is enabling us to leverage the power of civic engagement and volunteerism to become a safer, healthier, and more economically vibrant city," said Jones.

The N2N High-Impact Service Plan seeks to match community volunteers with six key service initiatives that align with the city's Balanced Scorecard and Anti-Poverty Initiative and address critical issues affecting the high-risk



Mayor Dwight C. Jones

populations of youth and the elderly who reside in Richmond. In the plan's second year, additional initiatives will be launched to serve people with disabilities. Year one initiatives include:

1) Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents: In partnership with New Jubilee Family and Educational Life Center, volunteer mentors will be connected to children of incarcerated parents for at least one hour per week. The program seeks to ensure better academic preparedness of elementary school students; raise the number of middle school students

See "Service Plan" on pg. 22

# New venture aimed at boosting inclusion

The Virginia State Conference NAACP, building upon on its decades of advocating for fair and representative Black business inclusion in government contracts, has launched a new venture aimed at "resolving this injustice."

"We are working with cities, counties and the commonwealth to change this awful disparity," said conference Executive Director King Salim Khalfani. To achieve that end, Kalfani announced the formation of The Matrix Network, "a central and pivotal source for Section 3, residents and businesses seeking to be an integral component of and gain greater participation in economic and community development strategies."

The Matrix Network is a joint venture of Section 3 and minority businesses to increase the workforce capacity of Section 3, minority and other disadvantaged entities in order to bid on and be awarded contracts and to fulfill the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's policies and procedures related to Section 3. The Section 3 program requires that recipients of certain Housing and Urban Development (HUD) financial assistance, to the greatest extent possible, provide job training,

employment, and contract opportunities for low- or very-low income residents in connection with projects and activities in their neighborhoods.

Section 3 requirements, according to the government, apply to entire projects or activities, regardless of whether they are fully or partially funded by HUD. According to Khalfani, The Matrix Network has a full roster of contractors, developers, technicians, tradesmen, women and specialists in various fields "that are carefully packaged to meet any workforce qualifications and requirements."


The mayor of Richmond and the staff of the city have set a goal of 40 percent participation in the school construction projects.

"The challenge was for joint ventures of small businesses to improve our workforce capacity and create a 'one shop stop,'" said Khalfani. "The Matrix Network has fulfilled that need. We will introduce The Matrix Network to the city and share our mission and how and why we came together."

Khalfani announced the new venture on the steps of Richmond City Hall in downtown Richmond, on Monday.

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# Local entertainer takes steps to help disabled neighbor

By Sylvina Poole

The first in a series of fundraisers to help a sick Richmond girl was held this past weekend thanks in part to Lashaun Jackson.

Jackson, also known as DREAM, an acronym for the Da Realist Ever And More, recently shared that when he learned of the plight of his neighbor, he knew he had to do everything he could to help. He decided to host several fundraisers on behalf of the family of Zh'Nae Hairston, a seven-year-old on life support.

Zh'Nae has an undetermined muscle disorder, according to Jeanette Hairston, the child's mother.

She said doctors had initially misdiagnosed her daughter.

"She has to be on a ventilator, a life-support machine," said Hairston.

Hairston shared that Zh'Nae has been on



Zh'Nae Hairston

the machine since February 2004. Because the equipment relies on electrical power, the family's electric bill has shot up to around \$13,000.

Hairston explained that there are two machines used for her daughter: One machine serves as a backup or for travel purposes when the family goes out and the other is used all day, everyday.



Lashaun "DREAM" Jackson

The electric power company allowed the bill to increase because the family presented a letter from the child's doctor.

"They said once we get the balance to zero, the electric company will put us on a budget plan," said Hairston.

"They don't have any kind of assistance. They are trying to reach out [but] no one is helping them so I put a fundraiser together for them,"

said Jackson who plans to start a nonprofit for disabled children called Dreams Come True. He hopes to counter the negative attention that rap artists sometimes garner. He wants the community to know that there are a lot of entertainers in the community who involve themselves in positive endeavors and he is one of them.

"I try to participate in anything positive that I can," said Jackson. "Anything positive that I can get my hands into, I try to participate in it."

On March 25, several area entertainers, along with family and friends, came out along with Jackson's Top of the South Musical to participate in the fundraiser.

Upcoming fundraisers will be held at Club Dream on Walmsley Boulevard starting at 10 p.m., with host of entertainers scheduled to perform.

For more information on the fundraisers for Zh'Nae Hairston call 804-728-7675. Donations can be made out to Zh'Nae Hairston, P.O. Box 313, Richmond, Virginia 23219.

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## Sigma Delta Zeta chapter celebrates anniversary

By Sylvina Poole

The ladies of Sigma Delta Zeta Chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. recently held a 10th anniversary celebration with a Finer Womanhood Dinner in Richmond.

This year's theme, "Celebrating Our Past, Charting Our Future" included a mixture of paying homage to the sorority's charter members and applauding the organization's young, future leaders called the "Pearlettes." The Pearlettes is a national youth auxiliary of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., of girls between four and eight years old who are mentored by the sorority to become leaders in their communities.

The event's activities began with a message from the sorority's president, Otelia Berryman Christian, who stressed the importance of the event to all attendees.

Berryman Christian said the annual event held an even greater significance because her chapter was celebrating its 10th year, yet, as the Zetas look forward, some of the group's efforts will remain the same.

"We will continue to render community service and making a difference in the lives of our members. We want the community to know that we are here. We are small in

number but we're big in deeds. And we are going to continue to do what we do for the community by reaching out touching lives and giving back," she said.

Nikisha Bailey served as the mistress of ceremony and the introduction of the members of the Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., Sigma Delta Zeta Chapter was performed by Jordan Walker-Rowe.

A musical solo performed by Shannon Ridley commanded a standing ovation from attendees. Lynette-Banks Harris, Eastern regional director of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., offered greetings to all participants and some powerful, uplifting words of encouragement and praise.

Tiera Coby, crowned Miss Zeta Phi Beta Eastern Region and a member of the Gamma Zeta chapter, said she was delighted to be a part of the activities, and especially her involvement with the Pearlettes. Nikki Adkins, president of National Pan-Hellenic Council Metro Richmond and member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. said she looks forward to continuing to seeing

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
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# President Obama is just “one of the boys”

By William Reed

Saying that “it’s time for Gadhafi to go,” President Barack Obama joined a coalition of colonialist countries to invade Africa. Ignoring protests from leaders of the African Union, Obama partnered with NATO’s (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) league of neo-colonialists to “get Gadhafi”.

Black Americans would do well not to drink from the same cup of Kool Aid as has Obama. We should be aware that Western media’s characterizations of Gadhafi as “crazy” and “a brutal dictator” deserve due scrutiny. Mainstream media in NATO countries have played a major role in demonization of Gadhafi to get the acceptance across the world these imperialists’ intervention in a civil matter.

Black Americans would do well to not to drink from the same cup of Kool Aid as Obama; who ignoring the call of the African Union, joined with old colonialist powers to “get Gadhafi”. The West’s mainstream media is enjoined in telling the same ole story: that Gadhafi “is crazy”, “a brutal dictator”, that “this is not about oil” and that “we will be in and out quickly”. The corporate media has played a superb role piling on in the demonization of Gadhafi toward getting the world’s outright acceptance of the imperialists’ intervention in an internal and civil matter.

Cleveland Rep. Dennis Kucinich said Obama has committed “an impeachable offense”. Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan said Obama should have a meeting with Gadhafi and that “you can’t order him to step down and get out, who the hell you think you are?”

Obama failed to notice the African Union’s caution that “Libya’s territorial integrity should be respected” and that “outsiders have armed Libya’s rebels to get access to the country’s oil”. Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe called Libya “an African issue that should get its solutions from Africans and not from Europe and America.” Mugabe was joined by South African President Jacob Zuma in saying that “the arming of the rebels in Libya by the Americans and other foreign western powers is a direct

attack on African sovereignty and a clear demonstration of foreign interference.”

Black Americans are as foolish as Obama if they try to perceive what is happening in Libya within a Eurocentric perspective. Libya’s system and the battle now taking place are outside of westerners’ imagination. Libya’s young people are well dressed, fed and educated. Libyans earn more per capita than the British. Libya’s wealth has been fairly spread throughout society. Every Libyan gets free, and often excellent, education, medical and health services. New colleges and hospitals are impressive by any international standard. All Libyans have a house or a flat, a car and most have televisions, video recorders and telephones.

Gadhafi has been target of aggression from the West since the 1980s. News coverage by Western media is oversimplified, misleading and stacked toward getting rid of Gadhafi. An array of anti-Gadhafi spokespersons, most living outside Libya, has been paraded in front of us. The media and their selected commentators have done their best to manufacture an opinion that Gadhafi is just another tyrant amassing large sums of money in Swiss bank accounts. In contrast to Western depictions, Libya utilized revenue from its oil to develop the country and its people. Instead of letting people know that Libya has one of the world’s highest standards of living, Western media and Obama will lead you to believe “we need to go save them”.

Before they endorse this move by Obama “to save the world” through military might, Blacks should ask themselves: “Which country has the bloodiest history of genocide, slavery, invasions, coups, installing and backing brutal regimes, bombings, massacres and mass destruction, including the use of nuclear weapons? Which government imprisons its own people, in particular its minorities, at the highest rate in the world? Do we want to continue these practices? America’s first Black President is proving himself “one of the boys” when it comes to participating in, and being a part of, imperialists’ interventions.



## The VOICE Unleashed

Even I have fallen victim to the hysteria that has characterized the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) Rams’ improbable run at the NCAA ‘March Madness’ tourney, and has them holding on to a coveted Final Four berth.

Like Rams fans who have, in the last two weeks, swelled with pride and giddiness, my usually reserved self is coming to terms with the fact that it is alright to dance and cheer in the streets at 2 a.m. if you are celebrating a major sports achievement. I even dug into the back part of my closet to uncover my one black and gold VCU jersey that I have not won for the better part of 10 years, since my senior year as a VCU School of Mass Communications student.

The men’s basketball team has taught naysayers that it is OK to believe in what you have not seen - the very definition of faith. They have also taught us that former NBA star-turned-commentator Charles Barkley really does not know it all when it comes to basketball.

Remember when Barkley and his ilk said VCU did not belong in the tournament, that their selection to play was ‘indefensible’?

The Rams showed them. And Barkley, with egg on his face Sunday, after VCU decisively took down top-seeded Kansas State’s Jayhawks, had the clear mind to apologize. He may not have said ‘I’m sorry’ for being a doubting Thomas, but his “well, now they can tell everybody to shut the hell up” will do just fine.

VCU’s win over Kansas has set up a historic game with Butler University’s Bulldogs in Houston, on April 2. These are two CAA teams, unranked in the NCAA, yet playing a Final Four game whose showing says a lot about college basketball today - that any team can win it all. They just have to work hard, work well and believe in each other.

Congratulations to the Rams and Coach Shaka Smart. They have done well, and I’m on their bandwagon. - MJ

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P.T. Hoffstader, Esq.



## Exploring the future of Black America

On Thursday, March 31, we will begin the debate about the number one issue facing the nation – the deep and persistent jobs crisis that has been especially devastating in urban communities of color. As part of the National Urban League’s annual Legislative Policy Conference in Washington, D.C., we will convene a free State of Black America town hall meeting on that day from 10 a.m. to noon at Howard University’s Cramton Auditorium.

A panel of notable policy experts,

scholars and journalists will lead a public dialogue about ways to end the jobs crisis in our communities. But the most important voices invited to this meeting belong to you – the student struggling to pay college tuition, the father who lost his job six months ago and is wondering if he will ever be able to support his family again, the single mother having to choose between child care and health care for her kids.

**Marc Morial**  
CEO, NUL

## Gluttons for military ventures

Neocons are notorious for being the country’s most trash-talking, ferocious, war-mongering chicken hawks who eagerly advocate U.S. military action, especially in the Middle East. There are few people more despicable than those who consistently cheerlead for the use of military force, yet themselves are unwilling to put their lives or those of their kin in the line of fire, in

wars they support. These are wars that have lead to the death and maiming of thousands of U.S. military personnel, mostly from low-income and working class families. Equally revealing of the insidiousness of the so-called neocons is their very selective choice of targets for their military ventures.

**A. Peter Bailey**  
Washington, D.C.

## Inflation and rising prices explained

We have heard the word inflation misused so often we just assume it to mean rising prices. But actually, inflation is the cause of rising prices. Inflation is an increase or inflation of money in the market place.

When government wants to spend money it doesn’t have, there are options as to how to come up with it. One is to float bonds; another is to borrow the money at the price of paying interest.

A third, in America at the federal level, is to print more money. That is the equivalent of me just taking my checkbook and writing in a deposit of however much I happen to want without making a deposit and the bank honoring it. Of course, I’m not able to do that - but our government does by putting more money in circulation. The result is the inevitable law of supply and demand. When there are fewer dollars vying for goods and services, prices go down; when there is more purchasing power, prices go up.

Right now we are facing a huge national debt, and we hear much about it being passed on to our children and grandchildren. And, certainly that is a concern. But it is wishful thinking that the effects won’t be felt before then. The printing presses are presently

going full speed ahead to pay for what has been legislated and that is inevitably causing prices to rise. The results are more gradual and therefore more easily tolerated.

When gasoline prices go up quickly and dramatically, as they are now, people are, rightly so, concerned and eager to take corrective measures. But, when prices go up a little here and a little there, the tendency is to overlook it. Consider the automatic acceptance of “cost of living increases” as being inevitable. Why should that be? The reason for it is the inflation of our currency. We have only to look back in time at prices in years past to see the results.

Just think of when a loaf of bread cost 15 cents and a new car a few hundred. Of course, income was much less then also, but inflation results in a loss in buying power along the way, and is detrimental to people on fixed incomes and the retired. If you are saving now for your retirement years, consider, at the present rate of rising prices, what will that money buy then?

Inflation is a hidden tax that we pay daily. And, run-away inflation is the hallmark of a collapsed economy.

**Sue Long**  
Richmond

## A vision to help Richmond and beyond

In 2010 I started [a] transportation service with one thing in mind, to help the teens and residents of Richmond city get to work.

With my own struggle in mind of not being able to get my teenage son Cameron to Doswell to work for Kings Dominion Theme Park, I realized how difficult it must be for many more parents to do the same.

I took a gamble and decided to take the one van I had, dedicate it with my logo “Seasonal Transport” and offer the teens in my community a ride. For a small fee of \$8.00 round trip, I transported over 300.

I quickly came to realize how much of a need this service is. With my salary from my full time job, help from good friends and family, I invested all I had to purchase three more vans to fill the need that came my way. From the small profit gained and my salary, I paid drivers, fueled my vans and made a difference in many lives. Not only did the teens worry no more about keeping their jobs, but moms and dads were given a helping hand in keeping their young people employed.

The Richmond home for Boys and Girls worked closely with me to transport all of their students that were working at Kings Dominion. I set up stops in South Side,

West End, East End and even got our VCU students to work. The name “seasonal” came about because each season, through youth organizations and on their own, our young people search long and hard for jobs. Finding them is hard enough, getting there is harder. So in their season of employment, I wanted to help them get to work easily.

To many teens it takes a great deal of responsibility to know they must budget themselves for their own independence. I am not a taxi service, I vanpool. Major employers like Kings Dominion and many others here in Richmond need Richmonders to work. We need to keep our community working and if we make it affordable they will continue to work in Richmond. This year, I offer the same service, getting employees of Kings Dominion to and from work all hours of the night. This service did not prove to be easy last year but with my dedication to the teens and others of Richmond I will do it again this year and every year knowing I am helping teens and parents stay gainfully employed.

My vision was small but the need to get teens to work is large. I have invested all my husband and I have to make it work.

**Sylvia A. Coppin-Smith**  
[www.seasonaltransport.com](http://www.seasonaltransport.com)

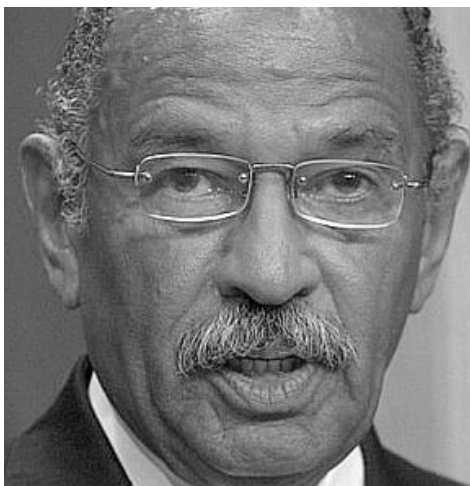
# Congressman initiates investigation of CBP religious profiling

DETROIT - Rep. John Conyers, Jr. (D-Mich.) has initiated an investigation into alleged religious profiling by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency in Michigan (CBP). These allegations charge CBP with improper and inappropriate interrogations singling out American-Islamic citizens.

“The allegations of religious profiling raised by Michigan’s Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) in Detroit should be of concern to all Americans,” said Conyers. “CAIR has alleged that U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents have engaged in a pattern of invasive body searches and interrogations concerning the religious beliefs of American-Islamic citizens while returning home from Canada.”

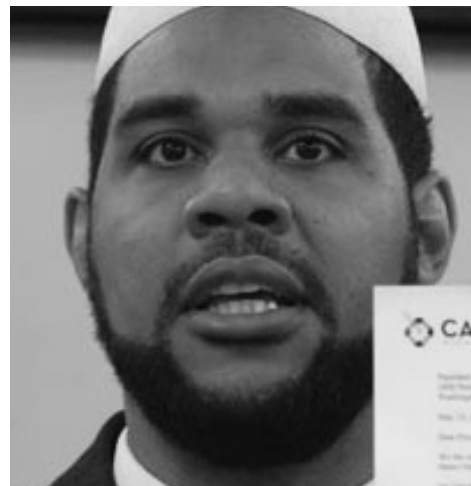
In CAIR’s letter to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, CAIR described the interrogations as follows:

The passengers hand their passports to an agent. The passengers are immediately told to turn their vehicles off. Within seconds, their vehicles are surrounded by agents brandishing weapons in their direction, whether or not there are women and children in the car. In some instances, there are snipers. The men are thrown



Rep. John Conyers, Jr.

against their vehicles, handcuffed, and taken inside for questioning. An invasive and humiliating body search is performed, which many have described as sexual harassment. Some are left handcuffed for hours on end, in many cases standing upright. Others are left in a cell. At least a dozen Muslim women of Somali origin have also reported being subjected to invasive and humiliating searches at the border that they felt were inappropriate and



Dawud Walid

a form of sexual harassment.

According to CAIR, American Muslims crossing the border have reported in alarming numbers that they are being subjected to extensive inappropriate questioning pertaining to religion and religious practices. A number of questions appear to be most common:

1. Do you pray five times a day?
2. Which mosque do you pray at?
3. Do you pray your morning prayer at the mosque?
4. Who is the Imam (religious leader) at your mosque?
5. Who else prays at your mosque?
6. Which Muslim charities have you donated to?
7. Which Muslim countries have you traveled to?
8. During your travels to these countries, have you been approached by anyone suspicious?
9. What do you think of Anwar al-

Awlaki?

10. Which Muslim organizations are you affiliated with?

11. Are you affiliated with any terrorist organizations?

12. Do you know any terrorists?

13. Are there terrorists in your mosques?

All in all, the process can take anywhere between two to 10 hours, according to CAIR, which notes that more disconcerting is that these same individuals report being subjected to the same mistreatment and inappropriate questioning each and every time they cross the border.

“With federal hearings on radicalization and intense scrutiny by law enforcement of religious institutions, the American-Islamic community today is living in a climate that has the risk of producing a siege mentality,” said Conyers. “I am therefore contacting the departments of Justice and Homeland Security to initiate an investigation of these allegations, and I will be consulting Judiciary Committee Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas).

“The American-Islamic community should know that the federal government will protect the interests of the community, while maintaining the appropriate focus on national security. These allegations of racial and religious profiling at the border are not new and have been supported by previous studies of the Government Accountability Office. For example, in 2000, the GAO found that the U.S. Customs’ patterns used to select airline passengers for more intrusive searches resulted in women and minorities being selected at rates that were not consistent with the rates of finding

See “**Profiling**” on pg. 9

## Is America a “Christian nation?”

RICHMOND - Join a panel of faith leaders, politicians, and educators on Sunday, April 3, 3-4:30 p.m. as they seek to answer this controversial question and other hot button issues during a community forum. This will be the fourth forum in a series of public presentations “Exploring Issues Vital to Religion, Public Policy and the Law,” hosted by a partnership of the First Freedom Center, the Religious Studies Program and L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs of Virginia Commonwealth University, and the University of Richmond School of Law.

The series seeks to inform and engage the public in important religion and public-policy issues that are in the headlines nearly every day.

Panelists at next week’s forum will also explore the larger issue of American religious identity, its history, and its place in government and public policy. Panelists include:

- John S. Edwards, Virginia state Senator (D-Roanoke)
- Michael P. Farris, chancellor of Patrick Henry College, and chairman and general counsel of the Home School Legal Defense Association
- Major Jalal Malik, U.S. Army, and volunteer Islamic faith group leader for the

U.S. Military in the national capital region. He will not be representing official views of the U.S. Army.

• John C. Rankin, president, Theological Education Institute (TEI) and the Mars Hill Society of West Simsbury, CT

In addition, the audience will be invited to ask questions.

The forum will debate that fact that in 2007, during the last presidential campaign, U.S. Sen. John McCain drew both praise and scorn for suggesting that the United States Constitution established this country as a Christian nation. Two years later at a press conference in Turkey, President Barack Obama casually noted that America was not a Christian nation. Other politicians and Christian faith leaders side-step the controversy, but they claim that Christianity has been “unfairly cleansed” from the public schools and the public square.

On March 13, this year, Rick Santorum, an aspiring presidential candidate, said that some Catholic politicians have “divorced faith not just from the public square, but from their own decision-making process.”

This debate is will be held at VCU Commons Theater, 907 Floyd Avenue, in Richmond.

## Bev Smith drives back pressure, Farrakhan takes Pittsburgh

By Ashahed M. Muhammad

PITTSBURGH - Minister Louis Farrakhan’s clarion call for Black empowerment and self-determination recently rang out across America during a nationally broadcast town hall meeting at the August Wilson Center for African American Culture in Pittsburgh.

Despite the attempts of critics seeking to influence and divide Pittsburgh’s Black community, Farrakhan joined syndicated talk show host Bev Smith for a three-hour conversation with concerned residents

to discuss “The Disappearing Black Community and How We Can Get It Back.”

“Up you mighty people! Up you mighty people! Up you mighty people!” said Smith, reminding those listening that Blacks are the descendants of those who survived slavery and built this country. “The only thing keeping us down is us—and I’ve paid too much of a price for you to be here tonight,” she told the standing room only crowd prior to going live on air.

During the days prior to the event, Smith received calls from Jewish and Christian leaders expressing their displeasure at her decision to invite Farrakhan to participate in the event. Several writings appeared in

See “**Farrakhan**” on pg. 18

## Keeping the Faith

### Safe space is sacred space

While I am no died in the wool traditionalist, not by a long shot, I sometimes have a bit of a problem with the words we now use to describe the places we gather together as the church. They are called “worship centers” or “multi-purpose buildings” or “auditoriums.” This is unfortunate. I much prefer the word used by our grandparents: Sanctuary.



Anywhere the church gathers, in a storefront, a gymnasium, an auditorium, or a thousand-year-old cathedral, that place should be a sanctuary. It should be a safe place, a place where people are welcomed into a better way to live and made to feel at home.

This welcome is far more substantial than saying “hello,” shaking hands, or sharing coffee and doughnuts in the fellowship hall (another questionable description of a church building). Maybe English Bible translator and martyr William Tyndale got closer to the mark when with his “plowboy” English he said that Christians should have a “harborous disposition.” To create secure harbors, a place for others to come in from the storm to be warm, safe, and healthy is a high and worthy calling.

I once participated in a retreat where several young people – in their 20s and early 30s – gave their unbridled, unedited assessments of the church. At times, their words were immature and selfish. At other times their words were blisteringly accurate. They were brutally dead on, and gave everyone in the room pause.

One young lady who spoke was Charis. Charis was a 30-year-old wife and mother of two who had spent her three decades in the church. Her father was a seminary professor, and Charis herself holds a masters degree in biblical studies. She was no cynical, jaded outsider. She has been a determined follower of Jesus most of her life.

At one point in her talk she said through her tears, “I am afraid of the church and what it will do to my children, what it is doing to me. I am tired of the church saying all the right things, but not practicing them. It is difficult for me to come into the churches we have created at this point in history and believe any of it really matters.”

Charis did not stop there. Her last remark was a hopeful prayer. She said, “I don’t want church. But I do want love, transformation, and community.” Love. Transformation. Community. Isn’t this, at least in part, what the church should be about?

Comfort, mercy, communion with God, entrance into the joyful reign of heaven, open arms and open hearts: These should be the natural overflow and outcome of life together with Jesus, as natural as flowers blooming in the spring when the rain falls and the sun shines.

We have spent too much collective time and energy focusing on the drivel, rather than on loving people. We fight and bleed over worship styles, which version of the Bible is the actually inspired one, and drawing up rules and restrictions for who can come to the Lord’s table and or who can or cannot speak in a pulpit.

We build all this structure and all these regulations on who is allowed in and who should be excluded, creating standards so impossibly high, Jesus Christ himself couldn’t get in the door. We have endorsed and supported legalistic minutia while neglecting the weightier issues of love, mercy and justice.

And meanwhile, people who are lonely, who are dying on the inside, who have had the absolute life beat out of them, who are racked by addiction and loss, who are burdened so low by the cares of this world they cannot lift their heads, will not even look in the church’s direction. They feel so badly already, and they cannot imagine that the church could somehow relieve or support them.

We must recognize these mercy-killing behaviors for what they are, name them, and by God’s grace let Christ remove them. For when the church becomes a place of welcome – a sanctuary – it becomes safe space, and safe space is sacred space.

*The writer, Ronnie McBrayer, is the author of “Leaving Religion, Following Jesus.” He writes and speaks about life, faith, and Christ-centered spirituality. Visit his website at [www.ronniemcbrayer.net](http://www.ronniemcbrayer.net).*

## Save the Date Free Health Seminars in April

The VCU Medical Center will be offering the following free seminars at the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden’s Education and Library Complex, located at 1800 Lakeside Avenue. Free parking available. Registration is required.

**Call (804) 828-0123 to reserve your spot today.**

**April 5 | 5:30 p.m.**

### Breast Imaging: Why Screening is Vital

Join Dr. Gilda Cardeñosa, medical director of VCU Breast Imaging, who will talk about the latest recommendations for mammography and answer your questions about breast imaging, including MRI screenings.

**April 12 | 5:30 p.m.**

### Lung Cancer Screening and Smoking Cessation

Join Dr. Mark Parker, from the Department of Radiology, as he discusses the new Lung Cancer Screening Program at VCU. Members from the VCU Smoking Cessation Program will also share information about how to kick the smoking habit.

**April 19 | 5:30 p.m.**

### Can America Survive the Looming Alzheimer’s Epidemic?

Join Dr. James Bennett, director of the VCU Parkinson’s Disease Research and Treatment Center, who will discuss degenerative diseases of the aging brain including Alzheimer’s.

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### Profiling From Page 8

contraband.”

CAIR, lauded Conyers’ move.

“We welcome Congressman Conyers’ concern regarding reported violations of American Muslims’ civil liberties and look forward to his leadership in addressing this issue in the Congress,” said CAIR-

MI Executive Director Dawud Walid in a statement.

Some federal agencies have long held CAIR to be an accessory to terrorist activities, pointing to the government naming it – among more than 200 other groups – as an unindicted co-conspirator in its case against the Holy Land Foundation providing support to Hamas. The FBI has discontinued its official contact with CAIR.

# VP issues action call to boost college graduation rates

Vice President Joe Biden recently issued a call to action to boost college graduation rates across the country and help the nation meet President Barack Obama's goal for the United States to have the best-educated workforce and the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020.

Speaking at the first annual Building a Grad Nation Summit, Biden – who has made college affordability and accessibility a key priority in his role as chairman of the Middle Class Task Force – called on each governor to host a state college completion summit, released a new college completion tool kit for states and governors to draw ideas from, and announced a new grant competition focused on helping institutions of higher education boost completion rates.

“Right now we've got an education system that works like a funnel when we need it to work like a pipeline,” said Biden. “We have to make the same commitment to getting folks across the graduation stage that we did to getting them into the registrar's office. The dreams and skills of our college graduates will pave the way to a bright economic future for our nation.”

To meet the president's 2020 goal, the U.S. will have to increase the number of

college graduates by 50 percent – turning out at least eight million additional graduates by the end of the decade.

“America once led the world in the number of college graduates it produces, and now we've fallen to ninth,” said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, who delivered opening remarks at the Summit last week. “While our educational advancement stalled, other countries have passed us by. We need to educate our way to a better economy, and governors must help lead the way.”

To help governors develop college completion plans, the administration is releasing a calculation of each state's share of the president's 2020 goal as well as a comprehensive college completion tool kit of suggested policies to help governors boost college graduation rates. The toolkit identifies seven no-cost or low-cost strategies that governors can use, fifteen related action steps, and a series of existing federal resource streams from which to draw. The strategies include aligning high school exit and college placement standards, linking state funding to college success in boosting completion rates, making it easier for students to transfer

among colleges, and re-engaging adults with some college experience but no degree.

“The best jobs and fastest growing firms, whether in biosciences, technology, manufacturing, trade or entertainment, will gravitate to countries, communities and states with a highly qualified workforce. In order for America to lead the world, every governor will have to lead the way at home,” Duncan said. The administration is also making a number of financial resources available to help governors execute their plans to boost college completion rates. Today, the Department of Education is announcing that it is accepting applications for the 2011 Comprehensive Grant Program, which is part of the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE).

The Comprehensive Grant Program will provide a total of \$20 million to colleges to implement plans that can increase success and improve productivity in postsecondary schools. The program aims to award innovative reform practices that have the potential to serve as models for the nation.

In addition to these grants, the administration has also proposed two programs in its 2012 budget. The First in the World initiative, which in its initial year

would provide \$123 million in competitive funds, would support programs that embrace innovative practices to accelerate learning, boost completion rates and hold down tuition. Secondly, states can also apply for College Completion Incentive Grants, which would give a total of \$50 million in awards to reward states and institutions for undertaking reforms that produce more college graduates.

The release of the college completion toolkit and announcement of financial resources follows a number of efforts by the Obama-Biden Administration to increase access to and the affordability of higher education. The administration has dramatically boosted Pell grant funding by more than \$40 billion; increased tax incentives for higher education by more than 90 percent through the American Opportunity Tax Credit; simplified the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, making it easier for students to apply for grants and loans; provided common-sense student loan repayment options with the Income-Based Repayment program; and implemented a program that forgives the debt of students who dedicate 10 years to public service after graduation.

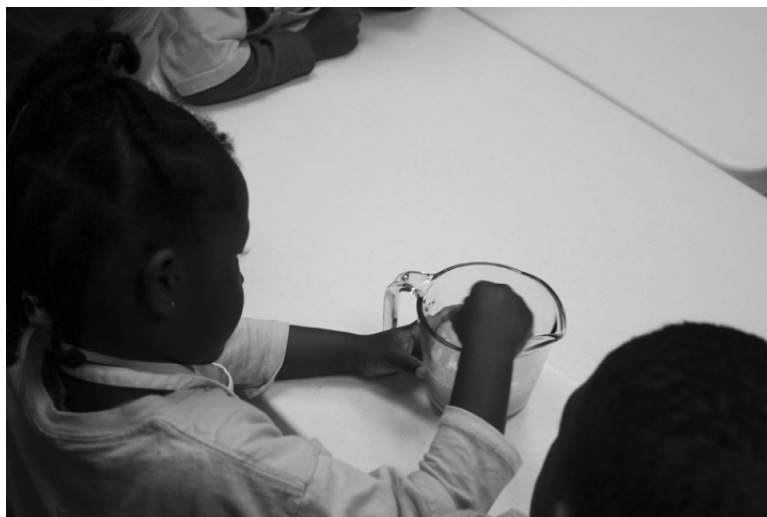
## Young chefs

Metro area students from Cold Harbor Elementary School recently had a day of cooking at Young Chefs Academy, a local, “cooking school just right for kids.”

The students made cheesy breadsticks and were involved in the process from beginning to end. This involved measuring flour, yeast, salt and other ingredients like eggs, which they also cracked and whisked.

The process also involved mixing the ingredients together to create dough; kneading the dough to become a soft, supple product; brushing the strips of dough with eggs, sprinkling cheese and watching their creations bake in the oven.

The students got to enjoy the final product with most of them declaring that it was “yummy” while others declared how they would make the breadsticks at home for their parents.



# Meeting of the Minds conference spotlights undergraduate research



*Front row: from left, Andrew Gibbs, Jasmine Williams, and Jessie Cohen. Middle row, from left, Darius Emrani, Emily Love, and Philipp Kotlaba  
Back row: Lucas Wells*

Arts and Human Sciences and economics in the College of Science. His research is on the undergraduate integration at the College of William and Mary. He is also a researcher on the NATO project and will be presenting on that topic with Emrani and Lucas Wells.

\* Philipp Kotlaba of Danville, a junior majoring in international studies and German in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, and psychology in the College of Science. His research is on "Ethnicity and Citizenship in Germany and Turkey: An Ironic Perspective."

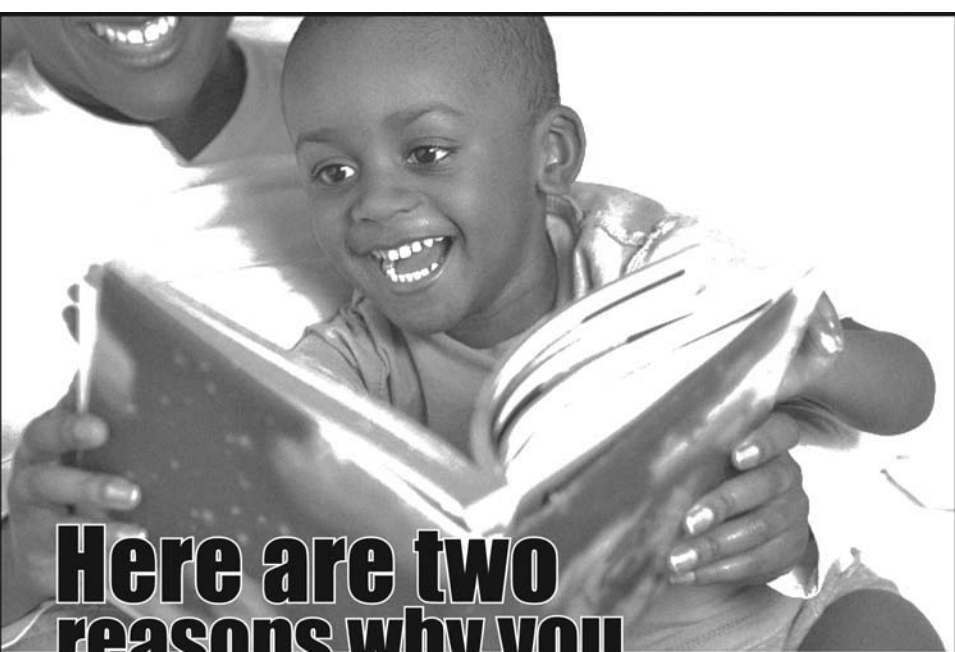
\* Emily Love of Danville, a senior majoring in English in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences. Her research is on "Dickens and the Manipulation of the Passions: The Case of Mrs. Joe."

\* Lucas Wells of Catlett, a senior majoring in electrical engineering in the

College of Engineering. His research is on "The Effect of Central European Defense Doctrine on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in the 21st century."

\* Jasmine Williams of Virginia Beach, a senior majoring in psychology in the College of Science and human development in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences. Her research is on emotion and is titled "Do You Experience the Right Type of Pride?"

The annual ACC Meetings of the Minds conference has become an opportunity for universities in the conference to highlight the diversity of research work being completed by undergraduates and for students to share their work with peers. Students present their work in one of three formats: oral presentations, posters, or models and exhibits.



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BLACKSBURG – Seven Virginia Tech undergraduate students will present their research projects at the sixth annual Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) Meeting of the Minds undergraduate research conference to be held at the University of Miami April 15-17.

Students selected to present at the undergraduate research conference were determined by a review committee coordinated by the Office of the Vice President and Dean for Undergraduate Education.

The seven Virginia Tech students chosen to participate in the conference are:

\* Jessie Cohen of Herndon, a senior majoring in English in the College of Arts and Sciences. Her research is on "The Dreadful Funkiness of Passion: Female Sexuality as Political Act and Discourse in The Bluest Eye and Sula."

\* Darius Emrani of Greensboro, a junior majoring in electrical engineering in the College of Engineering. His research is on "The Effect of Central European Defense Doctrine on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in the 21st century."

\* Andrew Gibbs of Chesapeake, a junior majoring in history in the College of Liberal



## 'Shaka'n the world' of college basketball

Shaka Smart is young but the 33-year-old VCU men's basketball coach (with microphone, bottom left picture) has led his players to do what very few college teams have done in Virginia. Reports indicate that only two Virginia teams have ever made it to the NCAA Final Four tournament: University of Virginia twice (1981 and 1984) and George Mason once (2006).

*Photos courtesy of VCU Creative Services*

# Haywood's

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# Search begins for actor to portray Tupac in anticipated biopic



*Tupac Shakur*

Morgan Creek Productions and Skee.TV are holding an online casting call for the highly anticipated motion picture "Tupac" based on the life of Tupac Shakur.

The casting call allows individuals who

exemplify Tupac to upload their video audition to [www.insearchoftupac.com](http://www.insearchoftupac.com).

Fans and entrants are encouraged to check the website often for announcements and additional opportunities during the course

of the month-long audition scheduled to end on April 18.

"We are excited to partner with Morgan Creek on this innovative casting call," said Scott "DJ Skee" Keeney, founder of Skee.TV.

"This audition process is a great example of utilizing today's ever-evolving technology to reach fans and actors around the world to pay homage to a hip-hop legend."

Speaking on requirements for the lead role in the biopic, Producer David Robinson said, "We're looking for someone with the right mix of raw charm and charisma for the role. At this point, we're more concerned about finding someone with the ability to give their entire heart into the performance than just looks and personality."

"Tupac" chronicles the life and legacy of Shakur including his rise to superstardom as a hip hop artist and actor, his imprisonment and controversial time at Death Row Records where he was steeped in the East Coast /West Coast rap war. He died in 1996 the victim of one or more gunmen.

"Tupac" will be directed by Antoine Fuqua whose has directed such films as "Training Day," "Tears of the Sun," and "Brooklyn's Finest".

The film will be produced by James G. Robinson, David Robinson and LT Hutton, and executive produced by Tupac's mother, Afeni Shakur. The screenplay was written by Stephen J. Rivele, Christopher Wilkinson and Steve Bagatourian.

## Ask Gwendolyn Baines

### My mother wants me to turn down my scholarships!

**Dear Gwendolyn:**

I read your column and noticed that most of your letters come from adults. I am 17 and scheduled to graduate in May. I am second highest in my graduating class. I have received at least six scholarships. Four of the colleges are Ivy League and two are small colleges in small towns.

I am so disgusted. Going away is fine with my father, but mom – I just don't know about her. I can't understand why she wants to keep me from getting a good education away from home. Our town is small and there is no university or college here – not even a junior or community college.

My father is educated but was never able to get a high paying academic job. After marrying my mother (who was pregnant before their marriage) my father stayed here because mom didn't want to leave her parents. Staying here really did hinder my father. He is such a wonderful person but sometimes I can see the pain in his eyes.

Gwendolyn, I don't want to give up my dreams only because my mother doesn't want me to move away. What can I do?

**Shirley**

**Dear Shirley:**

Have a talk with your mother letting her know that this is your time to leave – your time to seek a higher education –



your time to seek a job or start your own business after college graduation. You may even decide to get a master's degree or a Ph.D. Becoming a lawyer, doctor, accountant, or move into the high paying field of technology could possibly become an interest.

Shirley, your mother is part of 'ole school' thinking you will go astray from your upbringing. You mentioned that your mother was pregnant when she and your father married. It is amazing how she is thinking. Today's parents hope their children do not become addicted to drugs and all the other evils of the world. Let your mother know that whatever she fears you will do if you leave home, you can do --- at home.

*\*\*\*Got a problem? Write to Gwendolyn Baines at: P. O. Box 10066, Raleigh, NC 27605-0066 (send a SASE if you would like a reply) or e-mail her at: [gwenbaines@hotmail.com](mailto:gwenbaines@hotmail.com).*

## DJ Megatron killed in Staten Island shooting

DJ Megatron, the radio personality, hip-hop promoter and television host, was shot and killed early March 27 near his home in Staten Island, according to The New York Times. He was 32.

Born Corey McGriff, Megatron first made his name in Staten Island hip-hop circles as a promoter of local artists, something he continued during his stint as a DJ on famed New York radio station Hot 97, where he had risen from an intern to an on-air sidekick of popular personality Fatman Scoop. He had also worked at stations in Boston and Philadelphia. In recent months, Megatron had started to gain national exposure thanks to his appearances on BET's "106 & Park," where he'd hype up the in-studio audience during commercial breaks and conduct frank — and hilarious — man-on-the-street interviews.

"He will truly be missed," BET said in a statement extending condolences to his family. In recent weeks, he had become engaged to Shyleen Robinson, with whom he had a 10-month-old-son.



*DJ Megatron*

Megatron had also appeared in movies, including 2005's "State Property 2," starring Roc-A-Fella Records co-founder Damon Dash and rappers Beanie Sigel and N.O.R.E.

According to his manager, Megatron was shot and killed while heading to a store near his home in Staten Island at around 2 a.m. on Sunday. No arrests have been made in the shooting.

## Haircuts and health go hand-in-hand

No topics are off limits within the walls of barbershops in Richmond. Anything that affects men's daily lives will surface in the "shop" -- and everyone will put in their two cents.

That open dialogue inspired the Black Barbershop Health Outreach Program, a national effort that looks to turn the conversations toward health issues such as prostate cancer and guide men toward ways to prevent it.

"Health issues always come up in the barber shop, such as prostate cancer," said Emmanuel Gayot, owner of the Edify Barber Academy. "But the most common health issues that come up are high blood pressure and diabetes... As I see it, it is a place where men can feel comfortable talking about sensitive issues."

"I encourage my clients to get screenings," he said, "because I believe that it is better to know sooner than later."

The Barbershop program was created by the Diabetic Amputation Prevention Foundation, a non-profit group. The

program provides reading material and health screenings to barbershops on a number of health topics. The program will be conducting a 50-city national tour to provide screenings, including a stop in Richmond on Sept. 24. For more information, visit [www.blackbarbershop.org](http://www.blackbarbershop.org).

These screenings can detect symptoms in individuals before they even know they have an illness. In Richmond, roughly 98 African American men are diagnosed with prostate cancer each year. In Richmond, an average of 19 African American men died each year of prostate cancer from 2003-2007.

Common prostate cancer screening tests include the digital rectal exam, and a blood test that detects a substance made by the prostate called prostate-specific antigen (PSA). The widespread use of screening and increased awareness means that more people with prostate cancer are finding out about it early enough to successfully treat the disease. As a result, the five-year survival rate of African American men



*Emmanuel Gayot*

diagnosed with prostate cancer increased to 97.3 percent in the 1999-2006 period, the most recent years for which data is available.

*Erica Lee, Richmond correspondent for the Ozioma News Service, contributed to this story.*

## Ban on menthols seen as an opportunity to quit smoking

PARSIPPANY, N.J. – A new survey has uncovered the perceptions and habits of menthol cigarette smokers, particularly among African Americans, who disproportionately smoke menthols over any other group. The survey shows that menthol smokers feel "twice-addicted" – both to the menthol and to the tobacco – and most are attracted by the taste and feel of menthol cigarettes. Almost three-quarters (74 percent) of menthol smokers believe that menthol makes it easier for

them to inhale, when almost 40 percent say that menthol flavoring is the only reason they smoke.

Additionally, if the FDA were to ban menthol cigarettes, four out of five menthol smokers (82 percent) say they are likely to try quitting.

Almost all menthol smokers in the survey reported they want to quit, but were less likely to have tried quitting than regular smokers. They are also less likely to have tried using treatment," said

Cedric Bright, M.D., president-elect of the National Medical Association and associate professor of medicine in the Departments of Medicine and Community and Family Medicine at Duke University Medical Center.

"With the high interest in quitting among these smokers, more needs to be done to educate smokers about accessible resources, such as counseling and nicotine replacement therapy, which are proven methods for improving success rates."

According to data from the 2009 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 82 percent of African Americans choose menthol cigarettes, versus just one-quarter of adult smokers of other races. The survey shows, one-quarter of African American menthol respondents have not tried treatment such as nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) because they don't know enough about it, or they think they can quit cold turkey, or without treatment. In reality, smokers who try to quit cold turkey result in less than a five percent chance at success. Using counseling, along with treatment such as NRT, can double a smoker's chances of successfully quitting.

Other research shows menthol smokers smoke fewer cigarettes per day than those who smoke regular cigarettes. However, they may be inhaling as much if not greater nicotine levels creating a stronger addiction. Still, it's not the number of cigarettes smoked per day that determines what level of treatment a smoker should choose. Menthol smokers who plan to quit should be aware of their smoking behaviors when choosing the right NRT dosage – such as when they smoke their first cigarette of the day.

A new analysis, presented last month at the Society for Research on Nicotine and Tobacco, demonstrated that smokers choosing an NRT product should select their dose according to their time to first cigarette (TTFC) compared to the number of cigarettes they smoke per day. The study showed higher quit rates for those smokers who used the TTFC method to determine the strength of medication needed, showing that it is essential to choose the right dosage based on a smoker's level of addiction to quit successfully.

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## MARCH 31

### Learn to Build Fish Cages

Cooperative Extension at Virginia State University will conduct an aquaculture workshop on Thursday, March 31 from 1:30 to 5 p.m. at VSU's Cooperative Extension Pavilion located on River Road, Ettrick.

Free and open to the public, the workshop is designed to teach fish farmers and farm pond owners how to construct cages used to grow fish in ponds for fun or profit. Emphases will be on growing catfish in cages. Participants will learn about species to raise, cage design and location, as well as feeding and marketing.

Since the workshop involves hands-on cage-building activities, participants are encouraged to dress appropriately. Recommended gear to bring includes a 25-foot tape measure, tin shears and leather gloves.

To register or for more information, call Dr. David Crosby, VSU fish health specialist, at 804-524-5620 or e-mail [dcrosby@vsu.edu](mailto:dcrosby@vsu.edu). Anyone needing special services or accommodations in order to participate should call in advance to discuss arrangements.

### Mayor's Budget Presentation

The Richmond mayor's annual proposed budget presentation to Richmond City Council will be held on Thursday, March 31, 3 p.m. in council chambers, 2nd floor, City Hall, 900 E. Broad Street.

For more information, call 804- 646-5921.

## APRIL 1

### Middle School Mind Games

Have you lost your marbles?

Richmond Public Schools middle school students will engage in 'Mind Games' April 1, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Brown Middle School, 6300 Jahnke Road. These are a series of contests that will test their intellect, general knowledge, problem solving and creativity. This year's featured event is "Time Out!" a hands-on task that will challenge the students to create a time delay device inside a cardboard box that will allow a marble to pass through the box in exactly one minute.

## APRIL 2

### An Evening with Min Xiao-Fen

Internationally known for her virtuosity and fluid style, pipa soloist/singer/composer Min Xiao-Fen and her Blue Pipa Trio have received high acclaim for her classical, new music and jazz performances.

See her April 2, 7 p.m. for "Ancient Paths & Modern Directions" at CenterStage's Gottwald Playhouse, 600 E. Grace St. Richmond. For more information, call 804-771-530.

## APRIL 3

### Parenting is Basic 'Family Fun Day'

The Richmond Public Schools Parent Resource Center will sponsor "Family Fun Day" April 3 at the Children's Museum of Richmond as part of this year's Parenting is Basis conference.

The event, free and open to the public, will be held from 2 - 5 p.m. and will feature entertainment, storybook characters, exhibitors and other family activities.

The Children's Museum of Richmond is at 2626 West Broad Street. For more details, call Debra Hall, Parent Resource Center coordinator, at 804-780-6083.

## APRIL 5

### Cancer Survivors Reception

The Richmond Area Volunteer Leadership Council invites area cancer survivors and caregivers to a reception and open house at the Society's Virginia Volunteer Center in Innsbrook, 4240 Park Place Court.

The event, on April 5, 5-7 p.m., will feature a presentation from local American Cancer Society funded researchers on their grants and progress. A new caregiver toolkit designed as a resource for cancer patients and their caregivers will be available as well. Attendees will also learn about the many local volunteer opportunities with the society.

To RSVP to this event, call 804-527-3766.

## APRIL 7

### NAMI - CVA Event

The National Alliance on Mental Illness-Central Virginia Chapter (NAMI-CVA), is having their monthly meeting on Thursday, April 7, 7 p.m. at the Weinstein JCC, 5403 Monument Ave., Richmond.

The featured speaker will be Dr. Kathy Tierney, a psychiatric nurse practitioner who is director of the Crisis Stabilization Unit at Richmond Behavioral Health Authority. She will present information on "Earlier Intervention to Promote Positive Recovery Outcomes." The meeting is free and open to the public. For further information, call 804-285-1749.

## APRIL 8

### "...Overcoming the Law of Contradiction"

The opening of the "Divine Existence: Positive Affirmations and Overcoming the Law of Contradiction," art exhibit featuring original paintings and pastels by Kevin Greene, Chris Henderson, and Joseph Graham will take place Friday, April 8, 6-9 p.m. at the Whitley Gallery, 29 N. 17th Street, Richmond.

The exhibit pieces examine how humans are surrounded with two apparently contradictory things taking place at the same time. These works display a balance between negative and positive affirmations for both the artists and society. The artists have used negatives as a window for the creation of the positive. The works explore contradictory relationships such as the infinite and the finite, the conditioned and the unconditioned, the universal and the individual, among other laws of contradiction. The viewer's appreciation and understanding of these apparent opposites are assisted with poems and stories written by the artist for many of the paintings.

The Whitley Gallery is a 501(c)(3) non-profit charitable organization. For more information, contact Angela Whitley at [awhitley@thewhitleylawfirm.net](mailto:awhitley@thewhitleylawfirm.net) or 804-343-0027.

## Through June 1

### Grants for Nonprofits

The Bank of America Charitable Foundation has issued a call for applications for Richmond nonprofits and community leaders to apply for grant funding through the bank's grassroots philanthropic program, the Neighborhood Excellence Initiative. In 2011, the bank will provide more than \$400,000 through this program to revitalize the Richmond economy and support nonprofits tackling critical social issues in the community.

Now through June 1, Richmond area nonprofits and individual community leaders are urged to apply. Award recipients are chosen by local selection committees comprised of private, public and nonprofit sector leaders and chaired by local Bank of America executives in 45 participating communities. Applications and more information are available at [www.bankofamerica.com/neighborhoodexcellence](http://www.bankofamerica.com/neighborhoodexcellence).

# Ca. AG: Health care reform is still the law

SACRAMENTO (NNPA) - Ca. Attorney General Kamala D. Harris has filed a friend-of-the-court brief in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit strongly asserting the legality of federal health care reform and urging the court to uphold the law.

“The law strikes an appropriate--and constitutional--balance between national requirements that will expand access to affordable health care while providing states with flexibility to design programs that achieve that goal for their citizens,” the amicus brief states.

In December, a federal judge in Virginia ruled that the law’s requirement that individuals maintain health insurance or pay a fine is unconstitutional.

Attorney General Harris, joined by eight other attorneys general, rejected that view in a brief filed in Richmond, Va. They argued in the amicus brief that the Constitution gives Congress broad powers to regulate interstate commerce.

The failure of millions of Americans to purchase health insurance has a significant impact on the states. In 2008, the cost of uncompensated care was \$43 billion nationally. In California, the annual cost of covering the health care expenses of the uninsured is \$455 per individual and \$1,186 per family.

The new law’s minimum coverage provision will reduce the need to shift the cost of uncompensated care of the



*Attorney General Kamala D. Harris*

uninsured--and will thus reduce the expenses absorbed by the states and by individuals with health insurance.

Further, the brief states that the Affordable Care Act does not “commandeer the states to implement a federal

program” but rather provides them with important tools to cooperate in order to provide their citizens with access to affordable and reliable health care.

Other states joining California in this brief are Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Iowa, Maryland, New York, Oregon, and Vermont.

In January, the same group of attorneys general filed an amicus brief in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit regarding the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act.

To buttress the attorney generals’ effort in supporting the president’s Health Care Reform Act, Dr. James A. Mays, a primary care physician, who has been operating a clinic in South Los Angeles for decades, has written a letter to President Obama in which he stated, in part, “... I have three offices serving diverse groups of people. I would like to congratulate you on the passing of the Health Reform Bill. It is much needed.... The reason for the letter is to emphasize there will be a greater need for physician, office and clinic staff. There will be a great demand for more nurses of all types, technicians, medical assistants and receptionists....

This demand for medical care employees presents the ideal situation to institute a solid foundation of permanent employment in this respected profession and at the same time, provide positive direction for our young population...”

As someone who is on the frontline in providing health care service, Dr. Mays is uniquely qualified to highlight the positive, long-term effects of the president’s Health Care Reform Bill.

# In recessionary storm, bank branches fall in communities

By Doug Miller

NNPA - Bank branches responded to the Great Recession by checking out of low- and middle-income neighborhoods and opening in wealthier ones, according to figures from the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. (FDIC) and community advocacy organizations—a shifting of resources that once again has left minorities holding the bag.

FDIC records show that, following the disintegration of the subprime mortgage market in late 2008 and the attendant economic slowdown, the number of working bank branches in the United States decreased from 2009 to 2010. Approximately, 98,550 branch offices were operating in neighborhoods across America last year, down by nearly 1,000 from the previous year.

Earlier FDIC counts compiled by the National Community Reinvestment Coalition (NCRC), a trade association for economic justice in Washington, D.C., show that the number of bank branches in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods fell by nearly 210 from 2008 to 2009, while almost 360 new branches opened in

middle- and upper-income neighborhoods during the same period.

A recent New York Times article confirmed that the number of bank branches declined by 396 between 2008 and 2010 in low- and moderate-income areas, while in neighborhoods where annual household income was above \$100,000, 82 new branches opened during the same period. Median household income in low-income areas generally is defined as less than \$25,000 per year; in moderate-income neighborhoods, annual household income ranges between \$25,000 and \$50,000.

John Taylor, president and CEO of the NCRC, claims the disparity in branch numbers demonstrates definitively that more bank services are offered in predominantly white communities, while fewer—and more expensive—services are offered in communities of color.

“Most Americans think that people have the same options and access as a birthright,” he said, “but there really is a bifurcated financial services system.” Taylor also emphasized that “the physical presence of a bank branch cannot be overstated. It’s

a true (economic) stimulator by bringing traffic into the neighborhood.”

When bank branches pack up and leave, he added, fringe financial service operations such as payday loan offices, check cashers and pawn shops generally move in and fill the vacuum. “In the inner cities, what you have is people who have to go to finance companies for auto loans and check cashers for cash. The reward is that they get to pay a lot more (in interest). They shouldn’t have to pay more for the same service that a white family gets in the suburbs. It’s just downright un-American.”

Wayne A. Abernathy, executive vice president of the American Bankers Association, downplayed the overall reduction in branches, saying the numbers were too small to be statistically significant. “The net decline of bank branches out of nearly 98,000 branches is far too small of a sample to find any trends,” he noted. “It would be irresponsible to draw any conclusions from such thin information.”

“The fact is, the banking industry is the most highly-regulated and scrutinized

industry in America,” Abernathy declared, “and banks are regularly examined to ensure compliance with federal requirements to serve low-income neighborhoods. Banks want to serve all segments of society, and their record of compliance with federal requirements to serve low-income neighborhoods is outstanding.”

Asked if he thought the exodus of bank branches from low-income minority communities might be a violation of the federal Community Reinvestment Act, a 1977 law requiring banks to meet the credit needs of the communities in which they’re chartered, Taylor replied he was “convinced that they’re doing it [relocating from poorer neighborhoods] with the blessing of the regulatory agencies.” The Federal Reserve in particular, he maintained, still doesn’t routinely enforce service tests.

“They look the other way.”

As evidence, he pointed out that, even as the disproportionate effect of the subprime mortgage foreclosure crisis on Blacks and Hispanics became increasingly evident, “the Federal Reserve did not file a single case on the basis of racial discrimination.”

# Tuskegee Airman dies at 97



Henry Dawson McCullough

to Pittsburgh at a young age. He was educated in the Pittsburgh Public School system and then attended the University of Pittsburgh, where he earned a degree from their College of Business Administration in 1936.

After school he became employed with the YMCA as the Boys Work Secretary and then was appointed Assistant Regional Manager of the Bureau of Employment Security.

But, it was McCullough's time in the United States Army that would make his legacy live on forever. He joined during World War II and was stationed at Tuskegee Air Base in Alabama, where he became a First Lieutenant and one of 26 Pittsburgh residents stationed there. He was one of the Tuskegee Airmen, the first African American military aviators in the armed forces.

Along with being a Tuskegee Airman, he was also a member of the Pittsburgh Kiwanis organization, the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh and a member of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity.

Prior to this death, he was one of only two Tuskegee Airmen still alive.

PITTSBURGH (NNPA) - As a member of one of the most prestigious military units, the Tuskegee Airmen, Henry Dawson McCullough, of Point Breeze, was recently laid to rest after peacefully passing on at the age of 97.

McCullough was born on Oct. 13, 1913 in South Carolina and later relocated

## Farrakhan From Page 9

the Pittsburgh Jewish Chronicle with the oft-repeated claims of Farrakhan's "anti-Semitism."

Though saddened by the "unnecessary" controversy Farrakhan was unapologetic in his delivery of a clear message as a warner from God.

"I love the truth and I love you and I refuse to compromise my principles to get along," said Farrakhan. "My love of God makes me put my trust completely in Him."

The outside pressure proved to be too much for Melanie Campbell, president and CEO of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation. She backed out just days before the town hall meeting fearing the loss of future funding, according to Smith.

Undeterred, Farrakhan was joined by Rep. James Clyburn, (D-S.C.) and longtime civil rights activist and radio host Dorothy Tillman, who paid her own way and stepped in to fill the slot vacated by Campbell.

During his message, which set the tone

for the event, Farrakhan touched on issues plaguing Black communities: joblessness, poor education, terrible health, disunity, and moral depravity. All of these maladies contribute to a community that in medical terms would be described as having "flat-lined."

"Our problem is our fear—not white people—but our fear of them, which makes us act in a manner that is less dignified and less character building and instead of passing on a future to our children oft-times we pass on the legacy of our cowardice and we refuse to confront evil wherever evil is," said Farrakhan.

Regarding the scorn and abuse he has received as an outspoken and public Black leader during the years, Farrakhan said it is the price that must be paid for representing truth.

In the days leading up to the event, Smith received death threats at her home, and there was even a bomb threat at the August Wilson Center just hours before the event.

Yet, she never considered calling it off or changing her plans for the event.

# Capital campaign for Col. Charles Young monument begins

The National Veterans Coalition recently launched a fundraising initiative to fund a bronze monument of famous Buffalo Soldier Col. Charles Young that will be erected in Washington, D.C.

When completed, the bronze statue will be the first in the nation to showcase a Black military officer on a horse. An excellent equestrian, Col. Young was the highest ranking African American in all of the U.S. military at the time of his death in 1922; he was denied a promotion because of his race.

"We are pleased to have viable, bi-partisan legislation that will honor Col. Young with Brigadier General status," said Charles Blatcher, III, chairman and chief executive of the national group. "Now we are focusing our energies on funding the cost of the project."

One aspect of the million-dollar capital campaign is a Black History Poetry Poster series featuring tributes to American heroes Crispus Attucks, Frederick Douglass and Col. Charles Young. The set of four posters retails for \$55.

Corporate donors who meet financial



Col. Charles Young

criteria will receive a limited edition miniature bronze replica of the monument. All donations are tax deductible.

The Veteran's Coalition has commissioned renowned sculptor Antonio Tobias Mendez to create the life-sized statue of Col. Young. Mendez is recognized for producing the bust of Thurgood Marshall at the BWI Airport named in his honor in Baltimore

and the statue of Danny Thomas at St. Jude Hospital and Medical Center in Memphis.

The group has agreed in principle to house the monument at the University of the District of Columbia. The Coalition is also proposing to establish a \$500,000 scholarship for disadvantaged students.

Bi-partisan support of Col. Young's honorary promotion demonstrates his rightful place in American history, Blatcher said. "It's time for us to redress a time period that wasn't kind to minorities in the military."

Congresswoman Barbara Lee (D-CA) reintroduced the center piece of the Col. Young legislative package that grants him an honorary promotion to the rank of Brigadier General.

A strong supporter of the Coalition's efforts, Congresswoman Jackie Speier (D-CA) is sponsoring a bill that seeks National Trail Status for the route traveled by Col. Young and the Buffalo Soldiers when they served as stewards of Sequoia National Park.

Congressman Geoff Davis (R-KY) has come aboard as co-sponsor of the

legislation to give an honorary promotion to Col. Young. He also supports state efforts to designate Col. Young's birthplace as a landmark.

Congressmen Wm. Lacy Clay (D-MO) and Steven Austria (R-Ohio) have jointly proposed a law that grants National Landmark status to Col. Young's adult home in Xenia, OH, allowing the National Park Service to manage and preserve it.

This cooperative effort also includes support from the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. and the NAACP. Both groups have previously honored Col. Young for his many achievements.

In 1912, the Omegas selected him as the second honorary member in the fraternity's history. This year the storied, international brotherhood will celebrate its 100th anniversary.

The NAACP presented Col. Young with the Spingarn Award in 1916 for his exceptional work in Liberia. The Civil Rights group annually awards the Spingarn Medal for outstanding achievement by a Black American.

# Unlikely jockey's ups and downs detailed in new memoir

By Gregory Dale

NNPA - Sylvia Harris had reached rock bottom. She was homeless, she had lost custody of one of her children, and above all, she was battling mental illness. At her emotional peak, she needed an escape.

When a twist of fate elicited a fond childhood pastime—horseback riding—she finally found the answer to her whirlwind of despair. After utilizing the activity as outlet to curb her problems, she went on to break barriers in the process. Her story is detailed in the book, “Long Shot: My Bipolar Life and the Horses Who Saved Me.”

Released earlier this month, “Long Shot” is a memoir that captures Harris’ ascent from a single mother facing bi-polar disorder to her status as just the second African American female jockey in the country to win a major thoroughbred race.

“I don’t even know how I made it out alive,” Harris said as she reflected on her past. “I had low points before, but it had never gotten to the point where I was homeless. It was kind of devastating—to the point where I did not care what was going

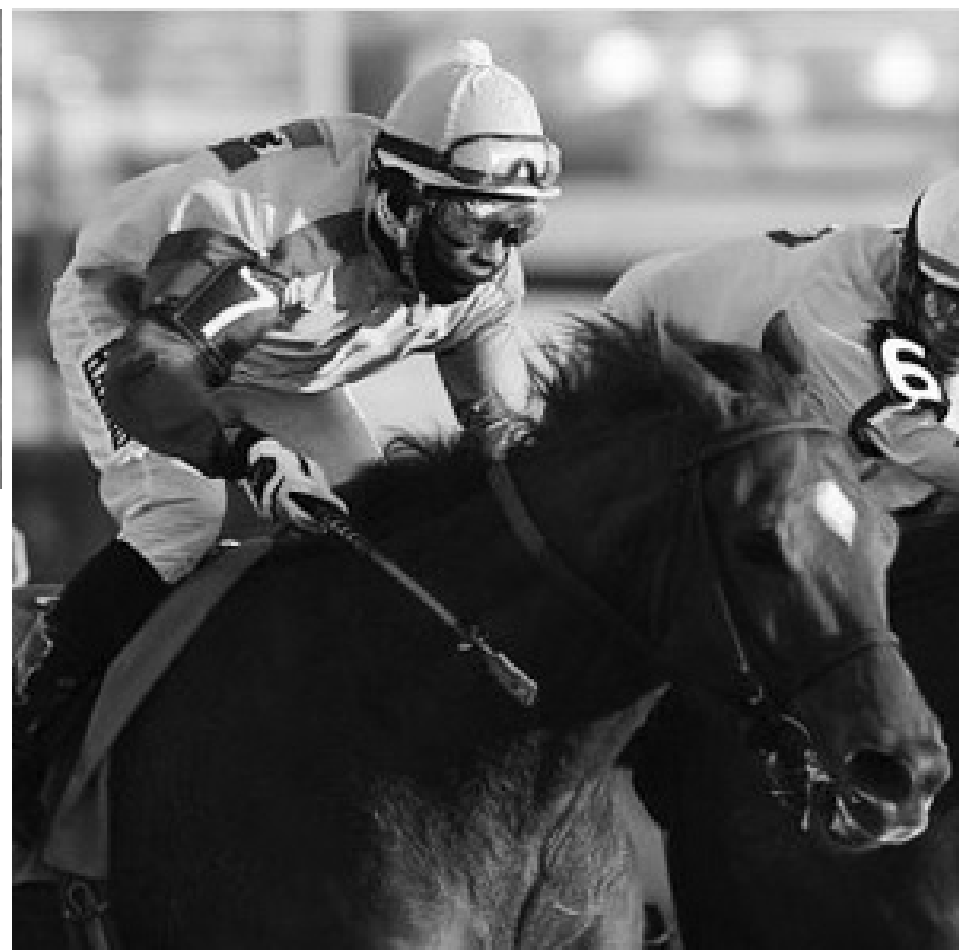


Sylvia Harris was diagnosed as being bipolar at 19.

to happen to me.”

Though she was originally born in Germany, Harris grew up in California. At the onset of her adult life, problems began to arise.

Harris’ manic behavior ranged from hearing voices, to spontaneous imaginary outbreaks and before long, she found herself alone on the streets of Orlando, Fla.,



## Hitler image angers store patrons in Fla.

By Nicolas Grizzle

NNPA - A protest outside a Rohnert Park supermarket drew police involvement last week thanks to a controversial sign featuring President Obama with a Hitler-style moustache.

“Obama has done so much for us,” said Rita Stedman, a German woman who was upset by the sight of the poster. “This is a nice town, Rohnert Park, why here?” Activists for the LaRouche Political Action Committee set up tables and signs outside Raley’s and refused to budge, despite multiple requests to vacate by the market’s staff and shoppers. Police were on scene, but told Store Director Brian King they had a legal right to be there.

The shopping center is owned by Coddling Enterprises, and King said police were looking into the legality of the gathering.

“This is killing our business right now,” said another employee. The protestors were not involved with, or cleared by Raley’s management. “It’s not Raley’s at all,” the employee said.

The reason for the attention-grabbing

poster is Obama’s health care bill, said Nicole James, who was one of the two women gathering signatures for the LaRouche Political Action Committee. “Hitler’s health care bill... is an exact replica of Obama’s health care bill,” she said.

James, 28, is an African American woman from Los Angeles. Her partner, Myhoa Steger, is 34 and has worked full time gathering signatures for the committee for the past eight years.

Steger said she was surprised at the opposition to the images, saying the response was not as negative in other cities she had been. “This is a really strange town, it’s messed up.”

James said about 15 people had signed up to receive more information in the four hours they were in front of the store.

Shopper Mary Jane Guerra was offended by the image on the poster. She said the two women started singing the National Anthem when she asked them to leave. “This is just not right,” she said.

“Some people have an emotional response instead of thinking things through,” said James.

struggling with her illness.

But, a breakthrough occurred while she was residing in a local shelter. After holding a conversation with a priest at the establishment, he discovered that she had a passion for horses, which she developed as a child.

“The priest told me, ‘OK, I’ll be right back,’” Harris said. “He was gone a few minutes and he said, ‘Get your stuff together and be ready in a half an hour.’” Harris explained that then he set her up with a job at a farm in Ocala, Fla.

She spent a considerable time at this location as a groomer and cared for the horses. At that moment, she immediately found solace.

“There was just something about the being or the essence of the horse that for me [was] very calming and therapeutic,” Harris said. I just have a very strong connection and bond with animals, particularly horses. I think it’s because they don’t judge us the same. They’re not verbal and cruel enough to hurt our feelings the way people do to one another.”

She later wanted to become a jockey. Though others attempted to discourage her from following her aspirations, she defied their opposition and acquired a license. She explained that

people would often tell her she was too old, and horseback riding wasn’t a sport that African Americans participated in.

“[When] people were telling me ‘no,’ it wasn’t because I physically couldn’t do it, because a majority of the physical part comes from the horse,” Harris said. It was because there are some color problems and color issues very much in effect in this country.”

Shortly thereafter, she made history after she won her first major thoroughbred race at 40 years old. This victory made her just the second African American woman to achieve this honor, the first being jockey champion Cheryl White.

Harris’ story quickly found its way onto national headlines, as people from across the country fell in love with her story.

Today, Harris continues to ride and compete. With the release of her book, she hopes to inspire others with disabilities in hopes they will accomplish their dreams, as she did.

“Just because you have a disability or challenge, that doesn’t mean that your dream can’t come true,” Harris said. “They may not come right away when you want them to, but they will, if you keep your faith intact.”

Special to NNPA from GIN

## Ugandan's work to protect human subjects



Julius Ecuru

U.S. President Barack Obama has tapped Julius Ecuru, a Ugandan environmental scientist, for an international research panel studying the use of human subjects in scientific studies.

The commission will address such

controversial studies as one in Guatemala where mental patients, soldiers and prisoners were injected and otherwise contaminated with syphilis by American public health doctors to study the course of the disease. No effort was made to cure all the infected patients.

Many other studies took place between 1845 and 1990 including the well-known testing of 400 Black sharecroppers in 1932.

However, the 37-year old Ugandan may draw fire over his work in bio-technology and genetically modified (GM) organisms. Schools throughout the U.K., the U.S. and parts of Europe have banned GM foods as unsafe and not fully tested. Other countries which have banned GM crops include Zambia, Venezuela, Hungary, and India for some crops.

The international panel will deliver its recommendations and findings to President Obama before October this year.

## Student-led protest held in Burkina Faso

The death of a student in police custody has set off massive student protests and the government closing of all universities, dormitories, and student cafeterias in this west African nation.

Authorities used tear gas to disperse thousands of students marching to protest the apparent murder of student Justin Zongo on Feb. 22. Red Cross officials said nearly 30 people were wounded at the rally.

Official reports stated meningitis as the cause of Zongo's death. But, the students claim it was police brutality. "There was a police blunder in Koudougou. We are in free country so we have the right to demand justice. Impunity is rampant in this country and it is frustrating", said student Ousmane Traoré.

"Burkina Faso's government appears worried about the possibility of a protest movement gaining steam," observed Alex Thurston, a blogger with the Christian Science Monitor. The country's rulers may be hoping to snuff out the movement before its turns its anger towards autocratic President Blaise Compaore.

A graduate of President Gaddafi's World Revolutionary Center, Compaore took power in a 1987 coup in which his predecessor, Thomas Sankara, was killed. He was voted president in disputed elections in 1991, 1998, 2005, and 2010.

The gold-rich nation has seen numerous general strikes over economic grievances and human rights violations.

## "All eyes will be on Nigeria's elections"

"Nigeria will have its legislative, presidential, and gubernatorial elections in April. It will be important for Nigeria to hold credible elections that are not only transparent, but also elections with results that are deemed free and fair and are respected by all parties involved in the contests. Although Nigeria had one general election in the late 1990s that by many accounts was considered credible,

it has not had the best track record on transparency or a fraud free process.

"The Constituency for Africa (CFA), like many other organizations and Africa watchers, are hoping that the 2011 elections will change the course of Nigeria's history and usher in a new era of democratic and political maturity." - *Melvin P. Foote, president and CEO, Constituency for Africa*

## Nigerians deploy against fraud in polls

With more than 29 million users of the internet across Nigeria, election officials and activists are turning to the web to monitor the country's upcoming national elections in early April.

Nobel laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka, and the chair of the national electoral commission observed the launch of reclaimnaija.net – a website based on the Ushahidi technology developed in Kenya to track activities at polling places nationwide.

Social media has also been called into action. ReVoDa, a new mobile application from the Enough is Enough Nigeria coalition, allows citizens to report violence/fraud, police behavior, election staff conduct, etc, from their respective polling units – and from their mobile phones. "ReVoDa turns eligible voters into informal election observers, and

allows monitoring organizations to draw conclusions about the legitimacy and accuracy of the elections," according to the site <http://eienigeria.org>

Meanwhile, close to a million people were discovered to be double-registered in the just-ended voter registration period, according to the Independent National Electoral Commission. Those involved will be prosecuted, said INEC chair Attahiru Jega, including some "high profile Nigerians."

About 73.58 million people registered during the exercise that ended on Feb. 5.

Meanwhile, eyewitnesses report more than a dozen deaths and the burning of campaign vehicles in the state of Akwa Ibom stemming from an apparent grudge match between supporters of current president Goodluck Jonathan and candidate Akpan Udoedeghe of an opposition party.

## Africans sound off on bombing campaign

A growing chorus of African leaders are loudly voicing opposition to the U.S.-led bombing campaign against Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi, allegedly aimed at disabling his air force but also, as U.S. President Barack Obama has said, "to tell Mr. Gaddafi he has to go."

"We condemn the obvious double standards and hypocrisy of the West in ignoring the ravaging bloodshed and abuse of human rights in Yemen, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia," said Dr. Koku Adomdza, President of the Council for Afrika International, a U.K.-based think tank.

"We urge proactive diplomatic and mediatory intervention and condemn foreign military intervention, since the latter will only escalate violence."

In Nigeria's capital city of Abuja, Foreign Affairs Minister Odein Ajumogobia expressed reservations at what he described as the 'complexities and contradictions of international foreign policy'.

The international community imposed a no-fly zone in Libya, seemingly to protect civilians, yet the same international community watches as women are killed in Cote d'Ivoire," he said.

In South Africa, President Jacob Zuma called for an immediate cease-fire and said his government would not support any

foreign effort to overthrow the government of Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi, which has been battling an eastern-based insurgency for the past month.

"We say no to the killing of civilians, no to the regime-change doctrine and no to the foreign occupation of Libya or any other sovereign state," Zuma said.

Zuma is part of a special committee appointed by the African Union to mediate the Libya conflict. The Union has also criticized the multinational coalition attacks on Libyan anti-aircraft and communications installations in which several dozen civilians were reportedly killed.

Other leaders speaking out against the bombing strikes include Namibia's President Hifikepunye Pohamba, the presidents of Zimbabwe and Uganda.

Dr. Jesse Jackson, during a visit to Trinity College Historical Society in Dublin, concurred with the African heads of state.

"Something had to happen to stop the genocidal march," he said. "On the other hand, the U.N.'s resolution was about containment and cessation not about aggression. It was not a resolution to wipe out Gaddafi but a humanitarian mission to save the victims of genocide."

# The VOICE flashes back to: Odetta Holmes

Odetta Holmes, known simply as Odetta, was a singer, actress, guitarist, songwriter, and a human rights activist, often referred to as “The Voice of the Civil Rights Movement”.

Her musical repertoire consisted largely of folk music, blues, jazz, and spirituals. She was an important figure in the American folk music revival of the 1950s and 1960s was anointed “The Queen of American folk music” in 1961 by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

She had operatic training from the age of 13. Her mother hoped she would follow Marian Anderson, but Odetta doubted a large Black girl would ever perform at the Metropolitan Opera.

Her first professional experience was in musical theater in 1944, as an ensemble member for four years with the Hollywood Turnabout Puppet Theatre. She later joined the national touring company of the musical Finian’s Rainbow in 1949.

She made her name by playing around the U.S. at the Blue Angel nightclub in New York City, and Tin Angel in San Francisco, where she and Larry Mohr recorded Odetta and Larry in 1954.

A blossoming solo career followed, with Odetta Sings Ballads and Blues in 1956.



*Odetta Holmes*  
(December 31, 1930 – December 2, 2008)

Many Americans remember her performance at the 1963 Civil Rights Movement’s march to Washington where she sang “O Freedom.” She considered her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement as being “one of the privates in a

very big army.”

Broadening her musical scope, Odetta used band arrangements on several albums rather than playing alone, and released music of a more “jazz” style music on albums like Odetta and the Blues in 1962 and Odetta in 1967.

Thirty years later she re-focused her energies on recording and touring and her career took on a major resurgence. The new CD “To Ella” was released in 1998, followed by three new releases that included “Blues Everywhere I Go,” a 2000 Grammy Nominated blues/jazz band tribute album to the great lady blues singers of the 1920s and 1930s. She also released a live grammy-nominated gospel album in 2007.

In 1999, former President Bill Clinton presented Odetta with the National Endowment for the Arts’ National Medal of Arts. In 2004, Odetta was honored at the Kennedy Center with the “Visionary Award” along with a tribute performance by Tracy Chapman. In 2005, the Library of Congress honored her with its “Living Legend Award”.

In November 2008, Odetta’s health began to decline. She had hoped to perform at President Barack Obama’s inauguration but didn’t make it.

On December 2, 2008, Odetta died from heart disease in New York City.

## Marine dad not done fighting ‘church’

Albert Snyder says he is not done fighting the Westboro Baptist Church and the emotional strain its anti-gay, anti-military protests cause families at private funerals. The Maryland man who lost his 20-year-old Marine son Matthew in Iraq in 2006 has fought the ‘church’ in the court system after Westboro members picketed the fallen lance corporal’s funeral five years ago. The case ended in the U.S. Supreme Court.

“It’s been a long battle, but I’m not about to give up just because some people on the Supreme Court said (the church) could do it,” Snyder told hundreds of American Legion members gathered for the 51st Annual Washington Conference in the nation’s capital. “I will continue to press for legislation to make the picketing and protesting at funerals a little bit harder for members of the Westboro Baptist Church.”

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled 8-1 on March 2 that the church is constitutionally protected when it demonstrates at military funerals. Church members typically hold up signs with slogans like “God Hates You” and “Fags Doom Nations” to impart its belief that military deaths are God’s punishment for America’s tolerance of homosexuality.

Snyder’s case included a lower-court verdict in his favor that included \$5 million in damages, but the case was later thrown out in a federal appeals court. The case drew national

attention, pitting the First Amendment against a family’s right to grieve in private.

Snyder’s legal team has worked on a pro-bono basis, but costs mounted. “Adding insult to injury, Mr. Snyder is responsible for paying Westboro Church’s court cost and legal fees,” American Legion National Commander Jimmie Foster told the crowd “This is simply an outrage.”

To a standing ovation, Foster presented Snyder a check for \$26,458.58 onstage at the conference to help cover his costs throughout the process. The majority of that money was raised online through The American Legion’s Burn Pit blog site.

“Veterans have probably been my biggest supporters over the past four and a half years,” Snyder explained. “I don’t think I could have done what I have done without the support of all of you and all of our active-duty soldiers and Marines. I know one person who has been with me through this whole time; Matt was a very loyal son; he was a very loyal friend and brother. And I know Matt would be supporting this 100 percent because he wouldn’t want to see another family go through what we went through.”

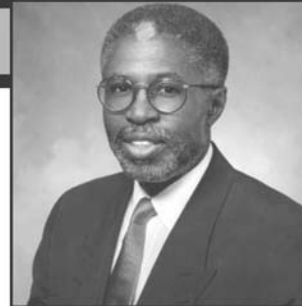
Snyder asked Legionnaires to contact their lawmakers and ask them to introduce legislation that would legally restrict the church from disrupting funerals. American Legion Riders and members of the Patriot Guard commonly provide security at funerals the church plans to picket.

## READING NEWSPAPERS IS A QUEST LIKE NO OTHER



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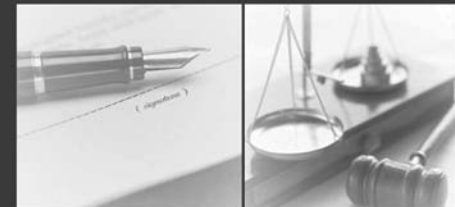


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## Service Plan From Page 3

transitioning to high school on time; and reduce absenteeism rates among high school students that are truant, at danger of dropping out, or who have dropped out of school.

2) Middle School Mentoring: In partnership with Communities In Schools, volunteer mentors will be recruited from local businesses to dramatically expand the number of middle school students matched with mentors.

3) Faith-Based Nurturing Parenting Collaborative: In partnership with the city of Richmond Early Childhood Development Initiative, volunteers will facilitate and support evidence-based parenting education programs that ensure better academic preparedness of elementary school students.

4) Economic and Personal Finance Education for Youth: In partnership with Junior Achievement, volunteers will be matched with a local classroom and work with age-appropriate curricula designed to teach elementary students about their roles as individuals, workers, and consumers and to prepare middle grade and high school students for key economic and workforce issues they will face.

5) Middle School Academic Enhancement and Mentoring: In partnership with Higher Achievement, volunteer mentors will be matched with middle school students to raise

the number of middle school youth successfully transitioning to high-school on-time.

6) Money Management Bill Payers: In partnership with Senior Connections, volunteers will be matched to seniors who need help managing their personal finances.

Each of the six service initiatives is made possible through collaborative partnerships with city of Richmond governmental departments, non-profit, and faith-based organizations. Partnering organizations were identified based on two primary requisites: First, they have missions and/or initiatives that align with the city's Balanced Scorecard and Jones' anti-poverty initiative; Second, they have executive leadership who are committed to working in partnership with the Richmond and each other to produce deeper results as related to the systemic issues facing Richmond's youth and elderly. As success is achieved, more initiatives with new partners will be added, including partners who serve residents with disabilities, which is the third priority population for N2N.

Joining the mayor for the N2N Service Plan Launch was Tom Folliard, CEO and president of Carmax. Folliard and his company have donated approximately \$400,000 toward the renovation of the city's Pine Camp facilities and outdoor basketball courts. Donations in excess of \$40,000 are given each year to help run the city's summer youth basketball league and a season ending awards ceremony.

## Esperanza Spalding: Grammy Award 2011 winner in Best New Artist category



*Esperanza Spalding*

### From Wire Reports

Esperanza Spalding may have won the Grammy for Best New Artist, but some have reveled in her talent for years.

A 26-year old, classically trained jazz and chamber music fusion musician and singer, Spalding has been making headlines in the jazz world since before her

2006 debut solo album, "Junjo." Having attended the Berklee Academy of Music, where she immediately became a professor after graduating at 20 years old, she began to travel with well known jazz musicians -- and then, the president.

Showing prescient hipness, President Barack Obama selected Spalding to perform at the Oslo City Hall when he accepted his 2009 Nobel Prize, as well as at a White House poetry jam.

"Chamber Music Society" is actually her eighth overall album, including her teenage band and collaborations with famous jazz musicians. But she's still excited to be considered Best New Artist.

"I feel really lucky that I got to be acknowledged on this stage in front of so many people who hopefully will get to experience my music, and I got there by doing what's really dear to my heart," she said after her win.

To earn the Grammy, she beat out an impressive field, including teen idol Justin Bieber, rapper Drake and band Florence + The Machine. Beliebers, as Bieber's are known, hacked into her Wikipedia page after the upset win, making changes such as saying she won, "even though no one has heard of her."

Clearly, that's not the case.

## Sorority Dinner From Page 4

the chapter doing great things in the community.

Greetings were also given by Cornelia Browner, of the Amicettes of Gamma Zeta Chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., of Rocky Mount, North Carolina. The Amicettes are girls between nine and 13 who are also mentored by the sorority.

Zetas national and local programs include endowment of its National Educational Foundation, Z-HOPE Projects, community outreach services and support of multiple affiliate organizations. Zeta chapters provide countless hours of volunteer service to educate the public, assist youth, provide scholarships, support organized charities and support legislation for social and civic change.

In 2000, the Sigma Delta Zeta chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority became



*Chapter members of Sigma Delta Zeta*

incorporated. Founding members include: Malissia Anderson, Lynette Banks-Harris,

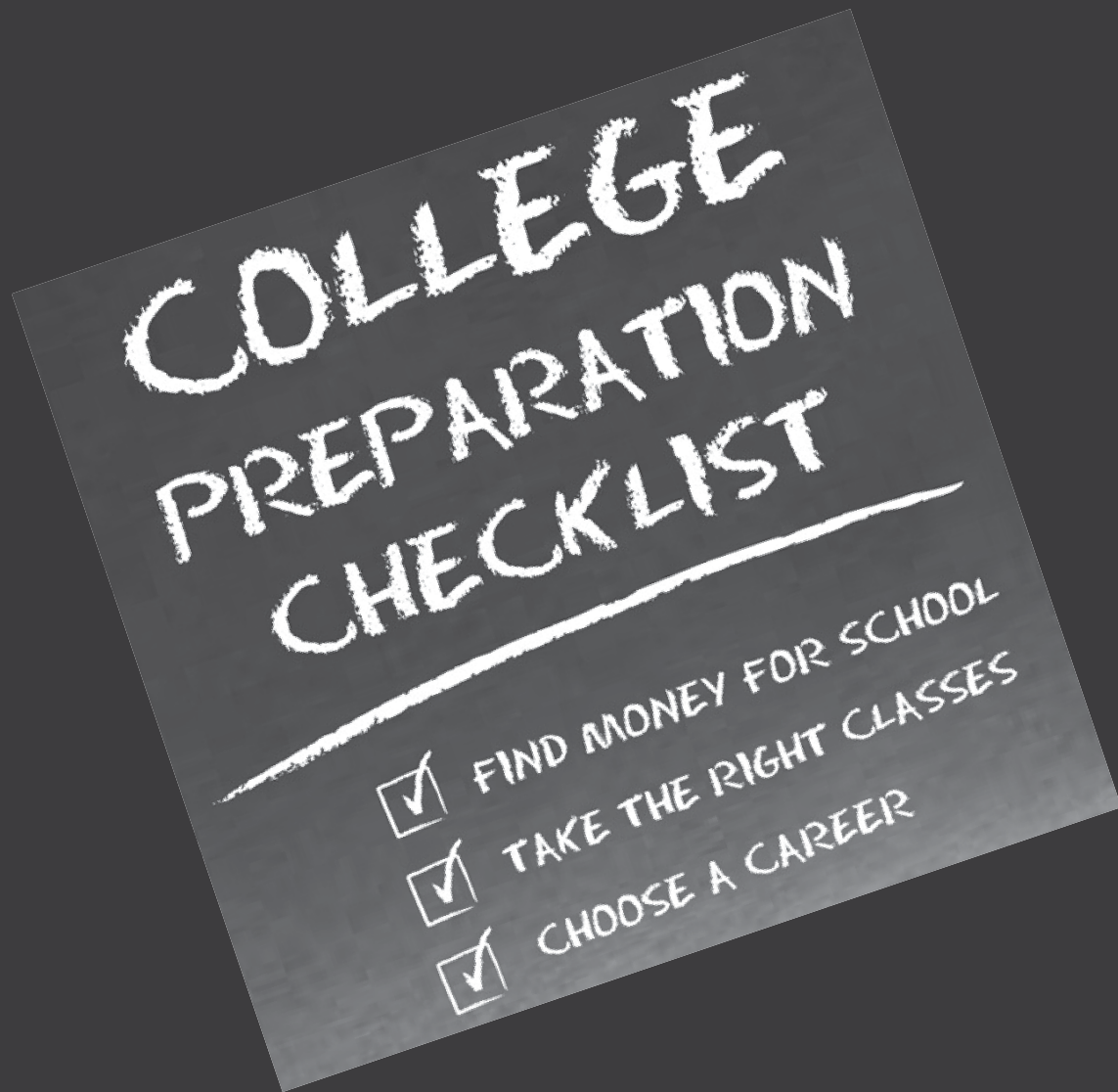
Otelia Berryman, Vernesha Brown and Tinkhani Ushee and strongly assisted by Stephanie Jackson.

The Sigma Delta Zeta chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority also recognized several outstanding members at the weekend event.



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