



THE CT

NEWS
Hoverboards banned at VCU • 2

SPORTS
VCU Soccer alum goes pro • 5

SPECTRUM
Video games crunchtime • 6

OPINION
Journalism in question • 10



Monroe Park closure could devastate city's homeless

"Things have deteriorated to the point that soon, anyone who is homeless will have no place to go."

FADEL ALLASSAN
Print News Editor

A society without a name

Inside the Panera just blocks from VCU's freshman dorms, students chat animatedly, laugh and flirt in the many filled tables and booths — an escape from days filled with textbooks and studying in the wake of finals.

In an unfrequented corner of the restaurant sits Maria Montoni. She clutches a notebook in one hand and a bible in the other. A black plastic trash bag lies beside her seat; it contains all of her possessions.

According to a 2013 report by Homeward, a local social services organization, Montoni is one of more than 1,000 people living in Richmond without a home.

"I woke up age 54 last year realizing I've never owned my own home. That's okay if you're a little girl and your dad pays the bills," Montoni said. "It's not okay if you're 54 and you never learned life skills because your mother was an alcoholic

and your father wasn't there."

Aside from the education and skills necessary to find work, Montoni said her medical conditions have been a hindrance to stability her entire life.

Montoni said she discovered several years ago she suffers from sleep apnea, a disease characterized by episodes of stopped breathing while asleep and, as a consequence, severe fatigue when awake.

Montoni said her sleep apnea is in addition to traumatic brain injury from surviving sexual assault and domestic violence as a child.

Montoni is on a schedule though. On this particular night she will go to a weekly meeting for the homeless advocacy group ASWAN, short for A Society Without a Name.

On Dec. 6, ASWAN held a rally in Monroe Park to protest the threat of an 18-month closure, a move which the organization said will displace the homeless who congregate there and severely limit access to other services the park provides.

The Monroe Park Con-

—continued on page 3

U.Va. student allegedly arrested in North Korea

ANDREW CRIDER
Staff Writer

Third-year University of Virginia student Otto Warmbier was allegedly arrested in North Korea for "anti-state" acts on Jan. 2.

The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) announced Warmbier's arrest on Jan. 22 and said the "anti-state acts" were orchestrated by the U.S. government.

Four days later, North Korea claimed they conducted a test on a nuclear weapon, which increased tension in the region.

According to KCNA, Warmbier was arrested after entering the country "under the guise of tourist for the purpose of bringing down the foundation of its single-minded unity at the tacit connivance of the U.S. government and under its manipulation."

Warmbier had been in North Korea for five days over the new years holiday. He was entering the country with Young Pioneer Tours, a Chinese travel agency that specializes in trips inside the Democratic People's Republic of

Korea (DPRK).

Former U.Va. International Relations Organization President and fourth-year student Zuhayr Ahmed said the news of Warmbier's arrest was shocking.

"From what I've gathered, people are really just confused as to how this happened and why he was in North Korea in the first place," Ahmed said, "I knew two students who spent a summer writing a research paper in rural Zambia, but going to somewhere as dangerous as North Korea is unheard of."

Ahmed said there are some activist groups and departments at the university advocating for better conditions in North Korea.

"A lot of the focus is also on rehabilitating people who flee the North for better opportunities elsewhere," Ahmed said.

According to his now-deactivated Facebook profile, Warmbier is a member of the Theta Chi Fraternity and an Echos scholar at U.Va.

Theta Chi president Carter Levinson declined comment on

the situation.

According to U.S. Department of State deputy spokesman Mark Toner, the U.S. government was aware of the situation.

"The welfare of U.S. citizens is one of the Department's highest priorities," Toner said, "We have no further information to share due to privacy considerations."

Sweden will act as mediators for negotiations for Warmbier's release.



Third-year Otto Warmbier is a Theta Chi fraternity member and an Echos scholar.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LINKEDIN

OPINION

Goodbye, Greg

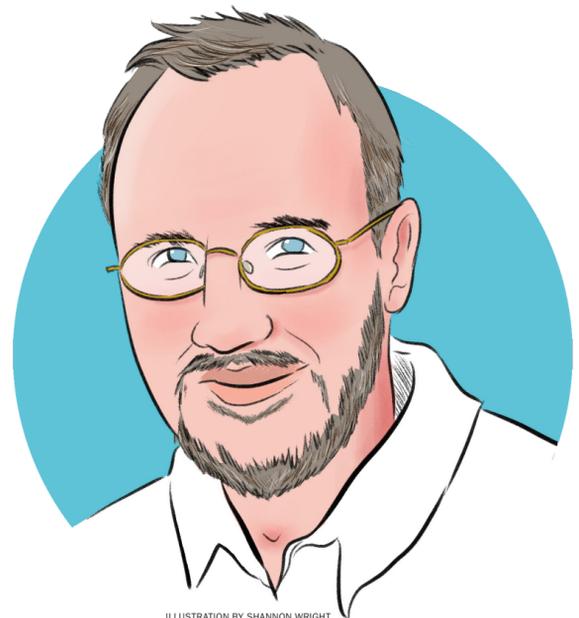


ILLUSTRATION BY SHANNON WRIGHT

Below, four generations of CT Executive Editors bid their farewells to Gregory Osina Weatherford, known by many as an award-winning journalist and editor, the Director of the VCU Student Media Center at 817 W. Broad street and advisor to more than a dozen student-run publications housed therein.

But for more than a decade of VCU students, Greg is so much more than just those titles — he is a mentor, father-figure, hand-holder during panic attacks and an unwavering moral compass, just to name a few.

Here's to 14 years of Greg's leadership and dedication to student achievement and excellence in journalism.

We wish him nothing but the best as he transitions into his departure from the yellow brick building so many of us call, or have called, "home." There's no sense saying "good luck," because we all know he won't need it.

Greg, on behalf of all of us, I hope you don't shed a tear as you

begin your tenure at the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia today, because we collectively shed way too many upon learning of your impending absence.

Thank you for everything, from all of us.

MECHELLE HANKERSON
Executive Editor 2012-13

This is honestly the saddest thing, I almost left work to cry when Greg told us.

Anyway, I only took one class with Greg in my three years at VCU, but I spent countless hours with him at the SMC. He was always encouraging, and was one of the main reasons I felt able to take on responsibility at the SMC, in class and in other internships.

Greg was also one of the most important teachers as I grew into the journalist I am now. I'm a pretty aggressive and fast reporter — when I get information, I'm ready to run with it. But Greg has always been patient and taught me that it's important to step back and think about facts instead of taking them at face value. That's the

difference between a good and a great journalist, in my opinion.

And Greg has always managed to be a teacher and a human toward his students, which has been so important. There aren't many professors, advisors — whatever you want to call him — who take a genuine interest in their students in a way that makes them feel comfortable. I liked to keep my life separate from all the work I did but there are always crazy things that happen and deep over to different parts of your life. Greg offered his help and support without pushing too hard.

It's a little hard to explain why Greg has such an impact on his students. He knows his stuff and he's a good guy who takes an interest in students' lives and works.

And just a random anecdote that I feel like encapsulates Greg so well: I was in one of his project classes during my fall semester of senior year, which was one of the most hectic semesters of my college years. I was working with The WaPo, it was the 2012 election season, it was my first semester as exec with no managing

— continued on page 10

How did winter break affect local businesses?

SOPHIA BELLETTI
Staff Writer

For Richmond's locally-owned businesses near campus, the dependency on students can make business tough when students are home on breaks.

—continued on page 6

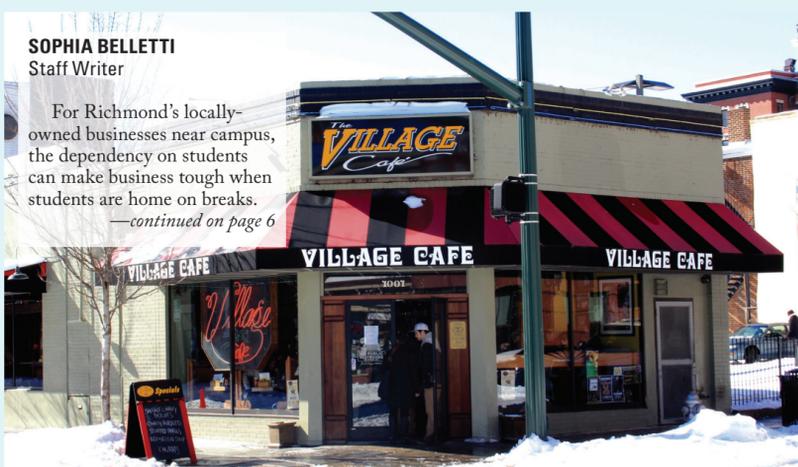


PHOTO BY ANDREW CRIDER

Located on the corner of Harrison and Grace streets, The Village Cafe is a local staple.



In this section: Education poll. RIC arrest. New VP. Hoverboard ban. MLK symposium. Ackell renovations. Park closure.

briefs

NATIONAL

22 Senate Dems seek deportation raid halt, break with Obama

Twenty-two Democratic senators asked President Obama on Friday to halt the recent round of federal deportation raids.

In a letter, the senators wrote that the raids were sweeping up mothers and children who face threats of violence and death when they are returned to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

The senators said the tactic of using highly publicized raids, sometimes in the pre-dawn hours, was “shocking and misguided.” They also rejected administration arguments that the operations would deter additional immigrants from fleeing the region to the U.S., saying, “That argument relies on the false premise that most of these people are not fleeing extraordinary danger.”

Brief by the Associated Press

Energy stocks lead a broad rally as the price of oil soars

Stocks are closing out their first weekly gain in four weeks, led by a surge in energy and technology stocks.

Oil stocks soared Friday after the price of crude jumped 9 percent, clawing back more of the ground it has lost since the beginning of the year.

The Dow Jones industrial average rose 210 points, or 1.3 percent, to 16,093.

The Standard & Poor's 500 index rose 37 points, or 2 percent, to 1,906. The Nasdaq composite climbed 119 points, or 2.7 percent, to 4,591.

Brief by the Associated Press

LOCAL

Deadly snowstorm hitting millions of Americans this weekend

One in seven Americans will get at least half a foot of snow outside their homes when this weekend's big storm has finished delivering blizzards, gale-force winds, whiteout conditions and flooding to much of the eastern United States.

The first flakes of what could become two feet or more of wet, driving snow began falling in Washington Friday afternoon, sloshing in from the Ohio River Valley looking just like the forecasts promised.

At least seven people died in storm-related crashes and officials have warned people to shelter in place as the blizzards continue.

Brief by the Associated Press

Virginia State Police investigate trooper's behavior

Virginia State Police have started an internal investigation of an Internet video that appears to show a state trooper harranguing a young driver for 10 minutes in a traffic stop.

The Richmond Times-Dispatch reports that the video, posted Jan. 2, the trooper can be heard telling the driver — who appears to be a young, African-American man — he was pulled over for an expired inspection sticker.

During the stop, the trooper says that he's an African immigrant, and accuses the driver of being racist.

Toward the end of the stop, the trooper tells the driver, “stop being an ass when somebody stops you.”

Brief by the Associated Press

VCU

Spanish university, VCU launch joint international Ph.D. program

VCU will introduce a dual-Ph.D. program this spring with international partner University of Cordoba (UCO). The program will award degrees from the VCU School of Engineering's Department of Computer Science and the UCO Department of Computer Science and Numerical Analysis.

“There are many advantages to this program for students,” said Sebastian Ventura, Ph.D., associate professor of computer science and numerical analysis at UCO. “They get dedicated advisers from both universities, and they get six months of experience collaborating with well-respected research teams abroad — in the U.S. for Spanish students and in Spain for American students.”

Brief by University Public Affairs

National Endowment for the Arts Awards \$10,000 in ArtWorks Funding for

The NEA announced awards totaling more than \$27.6 million in its first funding round of fiscal year 2016, including an Art Works award of \$10,000 to VCU to support TOROBAKA/FLASH: Cultural Intimacy In Motion, a national conversation originating at the intersection of four artists whose work explodes conventional notions of cross-cultural dialogue. VCUarts, in partnership with the Modlin Center for the Arts, present two dance collaborations and an in-depth discussion with the artists who made them.

The Art Works category supports the creation of work and presentation of both new and existing work, lifelong learning in the arts, and public engagement with the arts through 13 arts disciplines or fields.

Brief by University Public Affairs

Poll: Virginians support higher taxes for increased K-12 funding

SARAH KING
Executive Editor

More than two-thirds of Virginians think public schools aren't adequately funded, and most residents of the commonwealth would support paying more in taxes to enhance student performance, according to a statewide poll released Monday.

The Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute released the findings as the General Assembly prepared to convene on Wednesday. According to the CEPI's 15th annual Commonwealth Education poll:

67 percent of Virginians say public schools do not have enough funds to meet their needs

71 percent think funding substantially affects the quality of education

56 percent would pay higher taxes to improve K-12 schools

63 percent would be supportive if the funding targeted low-performing schools

“We try to put our poll out every year at the start of the General Assembly so that all the members, the governor and his executives can have an idea of what the opinions by region are around the Commonwealth,” said Robyn McDougle, interim executive director of the institute, based at Virginia Commonwealth University.

The survey could prove a valuable resource as legislators evaluate Gov. Terry McAuliffe's proposed budget for 2016-2018.

Although Virginians support increasing, or at least maintaining, the current status of K-12 funding, McDougle said the breakdown varies by political party, with Democrats being more supportive of education funding even if it requires tax increases.

Under McAuliffe's proposed

budget, education and health and human services would receive the most sizable portions of state funding in the upcoming biennium.

“I don't know that it'll help things go over more smoothly, but it's always good to have nonpartisan data,” McDougle said.

The state's Direct Aid to Public Education currently totals about \$5.56 billion. The proposed budget would boost that to \$5.83 billion in 2017 and \$6.14 billion in 2018. Most of the money would fund initiatives such as school breakfast programs for low-income children, higher salaries for educators and alternatives to disciplinary actions such as suspensions for at-risk youth.

McDougle said that in creating the poll, the CEPI collaborated with Peter Blake, director of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, and Anne Holton, Virginia's secretary of education.

“We showed them the questions and got some feedback on what questions they'd like to include,”

McDougle said. “We like them to be stakeholders just like other members of the community.”

The poll also found that most Virginians have concerns about high-stakes testing such as the state's Standards of Learning assessments.

“They believe the purpose of SOLs are to improve performance and achievement,” McDougle said. “But the way we're testing, the majority feel teachers are spending too much time focusing on the testing.”

According to the CEPI findings, constituents feel that because of the test-centric classroom environment, important material gets bypassed and that the SOLs put too much pressure on students.

The poll also asked about how safe people believe their K-12 schools are. Most Virginians — especially in the western and north-

▼ **67 percent**

of Virginians think public schools do not have enough funding to meet their needs

▲ **71 percent**

think funding substantially affects the quality of education

▲ **56 percent**

would pay higher taxes to improve K-12 schools

▲ **63 percent**

would be supportive if the funding targeted low-performing, low-income schools

ern parts of the state — said their schools were “safe” or “very safe.” The biggest concern was in the Tidewater area, where 28 percent of respondents felt their schools were not safe.

“Especially with everything we're seeing across the country right now, it's really nice to see our citizens feel where their children are going is safe,” McDougle said. She said respondents thought in-

creased school security and mental health services would help bolster safety in schools.

The governor's proposed budget would add \$35 million to enhance mental health treatment centers and services in 2017.

McDougle said her team will provide copies of the poll data to all members of McAuliffe's cabinet and the education and health committees in the House and Senate.

She said she will most likely present the results directly during committee meetings as well.

The Commonwealth Education Poll used a representative sample of 801 Virginia adults, interviewed by landline and cell phone. The survey was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International from Dec. 15-20. The margin of error was 4.2 percentage points.

FBI arrest Woodbridge resident at Richmond airport on terrorism charges

ANDREW CRIDER
Staff Writer

A Northern Virginia man allegedly en route to Syria to join the Islamic State was arrested on Jan. 15 at the Richmond International Airport.

The Department of Justice reported 28-year-old Joseph Hassan Farrokh was arrested at RIC on terrorism charges. Mahmoud Amin Mohamed Elhassan, 25, who officials say drove Farrokh to Richmond, was also arrested on terrorism charges in Woodbridge.

Farrokh, a U.S. citizen, had cleared the airport's TSA security

checkpoint prior to being apprehended by FBI agents at his gate. Farrokh has been charged with attempting to provide material support and resources to a terrorist organization.

Elhassan, who is a legal U.S. resident from Jordan, has been charged as Farrokh accomplice. Both men reside in Woodbridge.

Farrokh purchased a plane ticket on Dec. 21 from Richmond to Chicago, where he would then board a separate flight to Jordan and from there travel to Syria, according to an FBI special agent's affidavit in the DOJ's criminal complaint.

Elhassan introduced Farrokh to an FBI informant who he believed

was a Jihadist and could advise Farrokh on how to join ISIS, according to the DOJ. In total, three FBI informants posed as Jihadist during the investigation.

The FBI informant who Elhassan introduced to Farrokh had previously agreed to become an informant for the FBI to reduce sentencing for a separate criminal charge, according to the complaint.

Farrokh and Elhassan could face 20 years in prison if found guilty. An initial hearing is scheduled for Jan 19.

The FBI, DOJ and Airport Police declined to comment.



The DOJ said Joseph Hassan Farrokh, 28, was en route to Syria when he was arrested by the FBI.

Ninth VP added to Rao admin.

ANDREW CRIDER
Staff Writer

The search for a ninth vice president at VCU is underway following a December decision to split the responsibilities of the office of finance and administration into two separate entities.

According to Michael Porter, associate vice president for public affairs, the decision was a result of VCU's rapid growth and the administration having difficulty filling William Decatur's post as vice president of finance and administration when he vacated the position in May.

“As the university conducted a search for a vice president for finance and administration, it became clear that our current structure was not appropriate for the size and complexity of the university that VCU has become,” Porter said.

Porter added VCU was the only institution of its size with the finance and administrative functions combined under a single vice president.

“While that made for a great title, it also made for an enormous amount of work,” said

William Ginther, a VCU Board of Visitors member, in a statement to the Times-Dispatch.

Under the new structure, the VP for finance and budget will assume the responsibilities of overseeing the university's budgets, records, finances, grants, cash and debt management, taxes, and contract accounting.

The second position, VP of administration, will manage the university's human resources, facilities, police, procurement, and risk management planning.

VCU provost and vice president for academic affairs Gail Hackett heads the search committee for the new positions. According to Porter, the committee should fill the positions soon.

Until then, Brian Shaw will take on additional administrative duties to his job as senior executive director to the president while Richard Bunce, a former special advisor to president Michael Rao, will serve as VP of finance and budget.

Bunce, however, remains retired and will not be paid more than 29 hours each week, according to the Times-Dispatch.

Hoverboards banned inside all Monroe Park Campus, VCU Health properties

FADEL ALLASSAN
Print News Editor

As videos of hoverboards exploding due to their lithium ion batteries overheating continue to surface on youtube, VCU has joined a growing list of universities wary of the dangers posed by the transportation devices.

In an email to the VCU community on Jan. 15, students and faculty were alerted that the university had become the latest to ban

hoverboards, joining a list of public establishments, cities and even countries which have banned the popular gizmos.

“Effective immediately, Virginia Commonwealth University is prohibiting the operation, storage and charging of hoverboards and similar products inside all owned or leased property where VCU and VCU Health conduct business,” the email read, “This includes residence halls, classroom buildings, VCU Medical Center and related

medical enterprises.”

A day prior to the VCU announcement, students at Virginia Tech and Radford University received similar news. And just a week prior to that, James Madison University, Old Dominion University and the College of William and Mary issued the same ban. George Mason University banned the boards in December.

On Monday, Stanford University researchers claimed a solution that could prevent the boards' fi-

ery fates: a lithium ion battery that shuts down before overheating, although it could be months before the new battery is commercialized and ready to hit markets.

For VCU, the ban means hoverboard riders, including freshman Camara Morrison, will not be able to return to school from winter break with their new gadgets.

“I got mine in September but I never brought it to school although my friends wanted me to. I was thinking of bringing my hov-

erboard this semester,” Morrison said, “but I'm not mad at all because if I live on the 15th floor and if someone's board blew up and or caught on fire I'm screwed.”

Although Morrison acknowledges the fire hazard associated with riding his hoverboard, he says riding the device is a pastime that's simply too fun to give up.

“I still ride mine all the time,” he said, “I see little kids in my neighborhood that ride them in a squad too.”



Symposium panelists from left to right: Activist and filmmaker Bree Newsome, Richmond Police Chief Alfred Durham, the Richmond Peace Education Center's Adria Scharf, student Angelique Scott and professor Shawn Utsey.

Race relations, police brutality central to MLK Black Lives Matter symposium

MUKTARU JALLOH
Staff Writer

VCU hosted the first Black Lives Matter Symposium on Wednesday, Jan. 20 in the Student Commons as part of the university's week-long 2016 MLK Celebration.

More than 200 students, staff and Richmond community members filled the room before the 7:30 p.m. event began to address topics including racism, violence against blacks and solutions to other problems in the community.

Sitting on the event's panel were Richmond Police Chief Alfred Durham, VCU student activist and leader Angelique Scott, VCU psychology professor Shawn Utsey and nationally recognized activist, filmmaker and writer Bree Newsome. The discussion was moderated by VCU political science associate professor Ravi Perry.

Utsey said he believed change has to start with the national edu-

cation system.

"The most violent actions against us occur in the classrooms — not at the hands of police but in the classroom," Utsey said. "The minds of our children begin to become disfigured, and then we wonder why we behave toward each other like we do."

Another proposed solution was creating a level of understanding between the police and those disproportionately affected by acts of violence, although a lack of understanding was not what Chief Durham appeared to think the underlying issue is.

"If there was never, never another police-involved shooting of a black man, of a person of color, would the Black Lives movement be relevant?" Durham asked, to which some members of the crowd defiantly responded yes, saying the department must take ownership of state-backed violence against blacks.

Newsome, most known for being arrested for taking down the confederate flag at the South Carolina State House after the Emanuel AME Church shooting, also responded to Durham and received what appeared to be a more positive response from the crowd.

"When black people kill black people, they tend to go to jail; when police officers do, they tend not to," Newsome said, noting the divide in discipline and accountability in those situations.

VCU political science student Attalah Shabazz also asked whether the movement was inclusive to only black men and exclusionary toward queer or transgender women.

"A lot of the people who have been in front of the movement have been black queer women," Newsome responded.

As the event came to a close, members of the panel gave their concluding thoughts on the situation at hand and the importance of

working to end the problem of discrimination and racism on and off campus.

"I'm tired. I'm tired. We have a history that repeats itself. We continue to have polite discussions without answering the question, 'What are we willing to do for our liberation?'" Utsey asked, to which his question was greeted by a resounding silence. "We must be willing to die for our liberation," he concluded.

For some in attendance, the event had a strong effect.

VCU senior Sam Washington said he left the event more motivated than ever to do what he could to stand up to police violence against blacks.

"As a 22 year old African-American male in the U.S., it's definitely scary," Washington said. "With events like these, it reassures me that we're ready to fight against this and turn the tide."

Ackell residence center slated for \$7.5 million make-over

MEGAN CORSANO
Contributing Writer

VCU has set its sights on a new multi-million dollar project: the renovation of Ackell Residence Center.

The renovations are currently budgeted at approximately \$7.5 million. The building, an upperclassmen apartment-style residence hall, has not had significant renovations since it was built in 2001.

Allison Patel, assistant director of facilities at the VCU residential life and housing office, said the renovations will be primarily cosmetic, focusing on replacing kitchen appliances and surfaces, light fixtures, flooring and furniture.

Patel said the traditionally 12-month residence hall, which offered only 9-month leases in the 2015-2016 school year, will experience its first wave of renovations in May 2016. The second wave will take place the following summer.

According to Patel, the project was not prompted by significant student complaints of the building but this is a proactive effort to replace appliances and fixtures that are out of date.

Funding will primarily come from rent paid by students living in VCU housing. Currently, housing prices are not expected to increase following the Ackell renovation project.

Rebecca Luu, a senior who has lived in Ackell for the last three years, said some students are worried about how the renovation process will affect their current living situations.

"I've heard a lot of people complaining about them making it difficult for upperclassmen to keep their rooms and stay living on campus," Luu said.

Luu also said some of the appliances in the residence hall are already in need of repair.

"The agitator on our washing machine this year wasn't actually attached," Luu said. "The first time I tried washing sheets, I noticed it wasn't making any noise and just saw it floating with the rest of the laundry. Our microwave handle this year was also broken and just hanging by the top."

While these are just a few of Luu's concerns, in addition to what she said is a poor Wi-Fi connection in the back hall of the building, Luu said not every room in the dorm has issues that need such repairs.

“The first time I tried washing sheets, I noticed (the agitator) wasn't making any noise and just saw it floating with the rest of the laundry.
”

— REBECCA LUU

"I guess it's hard to picture what they are going to be renovating specifically when not every room is going to have problems," she said. "It's probably just because it's faster to replace everything than go to every room and check what works and what doesn't at this point."

The project is one of several recently funded construction efforts across campus. Along with the \$50 million Cabell library expansion, the university also recently funded the new West Grace Street Housing Centers, and has begun work on the new 41,000-square-foot Institute for Contemporary Art on Broad Street.

The new Grace Street Housing was completed and opened for residency in August 2015. The opening of the ICA was pushed back to 2017 following design modifications.

Park closure could devastate Richmond's homeless

—continued from page 1

servancy is the nonprofit group created to facilitate the renovation of the oldest park in the city. A group representative said the historic landmark is in need of major upgrades concerning aspects such as dried-out dirt and faulty sewage, which she said negatively affect the park's aesthetic.

In 2014 the Richmond City Council approved a plan establishing that Richmond pay half of the \$6 million to rebuild the park, while the Conservancy pay the other half through donations from the public.

The plan allows the Conservancy to lease Monroe Park from the City of Richmond for 30 years while the city retains the right to terminate the lease at any time. Under the plan, VCU will continue to maintain upkeep of the park.

According to their website, the Conservancy has raised almost \$1.6 million thus far. Although only totaling 53 percent of their goal, the website states the group hopes to reach their total in 2016 and will

“They're not just dispersing us, they're displacing our entire community.”

begin renovations shortly after.

ASWAN said the park's closure, recent evictions of local homeless camps and prison-like conditions of the city's cold-weather overflow shelters have contributed to the marginalization of Richmond's homeless community.

"They're not just dispersing us, they're displacing our entire community," Montoni said. "Things have deteriorated to the point that soon, anyone who is homeless will have no place to go."

Severance of services

The renovations would have a serious impact on the homeless in Richmond, according to ASWAN member Jess Izen.

Izen said hundreds of Richmond's homeless depend on the park's portable toilets for access to restrooms, since VCU and most private businesses typically bar the homeless from their establishments.

For years, local churches such as Powhatan Community Church and Second Presbyterian Church have been providing food, warm clothing and socks in the park for the homeless population as well.

Some ASWAN members believe that with Monroe Park closed, there's no guarantee those services will continue in a location as accessible as the park, which they say is located central to where many health

and social services are provided for homeless people.

Izen said the city and VCU have created a pattern of cutting services available to the homeless, and is concerned about whether nonprofits will be permitted to provide their current services without a license when the park re-opens.

Monroe Park Conservancy President Alice Massie said she could not guarantee nonprofits would be allowed to operate in the park without a license upon its reopening, but said it would still be accessible to anyone.

"We're not going to kick homeless people out of the park," Massie said. "It's still going to be public so I don't see a reason why nonprofits would not be allowed to be there."

Some members of People for Monroe Park, a group of churches partnered to help keep the park open, say the problem is more immediate though.

According to Valerie Burton, a People for Monroe Park member, there would be no place to continue providing current services to the homeless without a license while the park is undergoing renovations.

"We are potentially in crisis — to not be able to do what we do," Burton said.

Catherine Howard is VCU's Vice Provost of Community Engagement and one of eight directors of the Monroe Park Conservancy. Howard said the Conservancy is doing everything to ensure there's no break in services provided in the park on Sundays.

According to Howard, these efforts include a survey to identify service providers and invite them to a public forum hosted by social services organization Homeward, but the focus of the discussion should be finding an alternative to providing services in the park.

"The issue, for me, is people should not be getting fed and getting services outdoors in all kinds of weather," Howard said. "Why is the city not providing a place where people can go get something to eat inside?"

Howard also said she believes many people who come to Monroe Park on weekends for services such as food and warm clothing are not homeless or in desperate need, and are simply looking for a chance "to get free stuff."

Howard said the survey by Homeward is also looking to identify whether individuals who come to the park are really homeless.

"I think that you get a lot of people who are not homeless that come for those free services or free handouts, and that's what we're trying to get a handle on," Howard said.

Howard said this issue might provide an opportunity to longer-term solutions and she hopes that's the direction the conversa-

tions go.

"We're trying to be mindful and think about it now rather than waiting for the fences to go up," Howard said.

But neither the Conservancy nor city have a plan for where the homeless could use restrooms or receive current services when the park closes. They also have not found the long-term alternative Howard said she is hoping for.

“It's a business. Homeless people anywhere near VCU looks bad to students (...) and the politicians think homeless people downtown looks bad for Richmond.”

"It's a business," Montoni said. "They think homeless people anywhere near VCU looks bad to students who may want to go there in the future and the politicians think homeless people downtown looks bad for Richmond."

Out of sight, out of mind

Despite a grim outlook, some believe the homeless community has no choice but to continue fighting for the park to stay open. Among them are Montoni and Sababu Sanyika, a homeless VCU student and ASWAN member.

Sanyika said the homeless have run out of places to stay or use restrooms in Richmond and that VCU is part of the problem. In 2009, VCU implemented a policy requiring a valid government-issued photo ID to use the James Branch Cabell Library.

Previously, Cabell was accessible to students, faculty and the general public without much restriction, but the new policy effectively disqualifies homeless people from using the facility.

Sanyika says that he believes the policy

“Out of sight, out of mind — they want poor and homeless people out of the way.”

has led the VCU Police Department to engage in profiling, which has been a detriment to him.

VCU Police spokesperson Corey Byers confirmed Sanyika was charged with trespassing three times by VCUPD.

Sanyika says one of his charges came in Cabell when someone complained about

him being in the facility despite him being a student, he believes it's because he "looks homeless."

Policies like this one and VCU's aid in constructing the Conrad Center, a now-shuttered soup kitchen in Shockoe Bottom, have led Sanyika and other ASWAN members to claim the university and city are responsible for gentrifying the campus and downtown areas of Richmond.

"Out of sight, out of mind — they want poor and homeless people out of the way," Sanyika said.

Sanyika said this is why homeless populations have a tendency to move downtown. "The downtown area is essential to the homeless community," Sanyika said.

Another ASWAN member who is enrolled at VCU, Carlton Webb, said the park closing would be the homeless community's latest lost battle against the city and VCU.

"They closed (an encampment) down on Marshall Street, where people have been for a couple years, not too long ago and fenced it off," Webb said. "It's a plan to eliminate any reason for homeless people to be downtown."

Left in the cold

Members of ASWAN are also concerned with the conditions of the city's Cold Weather Overflow shelter.

The shelter is run by Commonwealth Catholic Charities and contracted by the Richmond Department of Social Services, which an ASWAN press release described as having "prison-like conditions."

The City of Richmond partners with several churches and nonprofits that provide shelters to the homeless. When there is an overflow of demand for shelter, citizens are transferred to the overflow shelter, which is the former Public Safety building on North Ninth Street.

The overflow shelter is open anytime between October and April when temperatures fall below 40 degrees Fahrenheit in the day or night. Anyone can use the shelter, although due to the facility's condition, some homeless people choose not to stay in it.

Sanyika said inside the facility, the lights stay on overnight and some people have to sleep on the floor with almost no space between them. Others, who sleep in chairs in the courtroom, are forced to sleep upright to save space.

"It's almost like a maximum security prison, anywhere you move they got a guard to make sure you're in your spot," Sanyika said.

Sanyika said armed guards patrol the building the entire time to ensure no one breaks the rules.

According to Sanyika, people sleeping on the chairs are warned by the guards to remain upright if they lay down; if they lay down again they are kicked out into the below-40 degree weather.

"I don't know why they have guards. They don't have a behavior problem with people in the shelter," Sanyika said. "People come in tired and glad to be out of the cold, maybe they talk for a little then they just go to sleep."

The Richmond Department of Social Services could not be reached for comment.

ASWAN members say they're hoping to change not only the way the homeless in Richmond are sheltered, but many of the conditions which they say further marginalize that community.

"Many people who are homeless in this city end up with no place to go," Izen said. "Then they are on the streets where apparently it's illegal for them to be, so they're just thrown in jail."

ASWAN's petition demands the city allow a reserved space for a permanent homeless encampment with bathrooms, trash services and shelter.

It also asks the Cold Weather Shelter be open at all times from October to April regardless of the temperature, the guards in the shelter be disarmed and the lights turned off at night.

The petition demands a series of meetings be held between ASWAN and representatives of city government and the

“At this point there needs to be public outcry to make it happen.”

Conservancy to ensure the interests of the homeless community are satisfied while the park is closed.

ASWAN is also asking a section of the park be kept open so the homeless can use portable restrooms, and service providers can continue to utilize the park — a request that members of the Conservancy say cannot be satisfied because of reasons relating to construction.

The petition also demands that the conservancy and the city give a guarantee that nonprofits will be allowed to provide services in the park when it re-opens.

"We don't have a lot of faith that (the Conservancy and City) will act on their own initiative," Izen said. "At this point there needs to be public outcry to make it happen."



sports

STAT OF THE WEEK

After going 5-5 in their first 10 games of the season, men's hoops registered a perfect record in their last 10 games, seven of which were in-conference match-ups.

Men's hoops wins tenth straight game, still undefeated in the A-10

SOPHIA BELLETTI
Staff Writer

ST. BONAVENTURE

VCU continues to lead the Atlantic 10 after beating St. Bonaventure University and maintaining their winning streak for conference play.

After going 5-5 in their first 10 games of the season, the Rams registered a perfect record in the last 10 games, seven of which were in-conference matchups.

Junior point guard JeQuan Lewis and senior shooting guard Melvin Johnson scored more than half of team's points: Lewis with 26 and Johnson with 21.

After the game, VCU head coach Will Wade said Lewis' ability to drive to the basket and score points has been a major factor in the Rams' winning streak.

"He's just knifing his way to the rim," Wade said. "You've got some trust in that. Got to let him go a little bit. He's been able to finish them and drive it in there, and you've got to believe in it."

Strong defensive rebounding on both ends of the court made for a slow start to the game. It wasn't until the third minute of the first half that either team started putting points on the board consistently.

The Rams went on a 7-0 run before St. Bonaventure could muster up two points. VCU's trademark defending and defensive rebounding kept St. Bonaventure scoreless for the first five minutes.

VCU held their lead throughout the first half until the final 50 seconds as St. Bonaventure's Denzel Gregg hit a free throw to give the Bonnies a one point lead.

VCU rebounded Gregg's second foul shot and Lewis drove to the basket, drawing a foul. Lewis sank both shots, giving VCU the 33-32 with 33 seconds left.

St. Bonaventure headed into the locker room leading the Rams 34-33.

St. Bonaventure ran down the clock until the final seconds of the half and put up a shot from the corner. The shot rattled off the rim but sloppy rebounding by VCU allowed for a second chance shot.

For the first half of the second period, VCU struggled offensively and the Bonnies continued to hold onto the lead. St. Bonaventure's senior guard, Marcus Posley, scored his team's first 16 points after halftime, giving St. Bonaventure an 8-point edge with 12:30 left to play.

Posley finished the evening recording 30 points, shooting 43 percent from behind the arc.

With 10:40 left in regulation, Lewis drove for a layup and got fans on their feet and the team's momentum going.

Lewis' layup was followed by two points from sophomore Justin Tillman, cutting St. Bonaventure's lead to 52-50, the closest the Rams had been all half.

Tillman scored 17 points and recorded seven rebounds against the Bonnies.

VCU regained the lead with 6:40 left to play, after a missed drive down the lane by Lewis was rebounded by Alie-Cox trailing right behind to bring the score to 61-60.

After that, the game was under VCU's control. With a 1:15 left to play, VCU extended the lead to 11 points, the largest it had been all game.

Both teams fought hard on the boards, VCU finishing with 45 rebounds and St. Bonaventure with 44. VCU forced 12 turnovers and recorded seven steals.

"It's not so much whether the shots are falling, it's about pushing their defense," Lewis said. "The defense gets tired. They're playing six or seven players (in their rotation), and when you're pushing the ball at them the whole time, they get tired by the end of the game and don't have any legs."



PHOTO BY BROOKE MARSH

Justin Tillman slams home a pass from Johnny Williams. Tillman is 31-of-38 from the floor in his last five games.

DUQUESNE

VCU recorded one of its highest scoring games of the season Wednesday night when Duquesne came to the Siegel Center for a 7 p.m. tip-off.

But for Wade and the rest of the team, a 93-71 conference victory wasn't enough.

"I wasn't really happy with how we played, to be honest," Wade said, noting the Dukes had 16 offensive rebounds and 21 second-chance points.

"I thought Duquesne competed harder than we did today. That's a problem so we've got to get that fixed," Wade said.

The Rams were 6-0 in the Atlantic 10, making them the No. 1 team in conference play. Hot off a nine game winning streak, VCU was competing at the same level as a top 25 team, averaging 77.7 points, 36.8 rebounds and 15.2 assists per game.

Despite the team statistics being higher than most teams in the country, including No. 13 University of Virginia, Alie-Cox shared Wade's thoughts, saying he didn't think the boys played to their highest level.

"We gave up too many second-chance points," Alie-Cox said. "They were out hustling us, out-competing us to 50/50 balls, stuff like that we work on everyday in

practicing."

Lewis shared similar sentiments, saying the team still had work to do.

"We're not satisfied," Lewis said. "We got to keep being better on offense and defense."

The first two points of the evening came from Lewis when he pulled up for an "in your face" jumper from the elbow on the Ram's second possession.

Lewis finished the night 4-4 from the line with 11 points and eight assists.

Brooks had a career high against the Dukes, recording 16 points while shooting 3-5 from behind the arc.

Alie-Cox also added 16 points, Tillman totalled 15 points and Johnson finished with 13 points to give the Rams a double figure lead.

VCU shot 52.5 percent against a team that arrived in Richmond allowing its opponents to make just 40.6 percent. From 3-point range, VCU was even better, sinking 10-17 (58.5 percent) with six players making at least one.

The Rams led 44-31 at halftime, only to have an 8-3 run by the Dukes to start the second half. That would be as close as the Dukes would get.

"I thought JeQuan's charge really changed the game in the second half," Wade said after the game. "We were struggling



PHOTO BY BROOKE MARSH

Junior guard Doug Brooks had a career high against Duquesne, recording 16 points while shooting 3-5 from behind the arc.

getting stops and JeQuan's charge really changed."

The Rams used a 10-0 run early in the second half to open a 57-39 lead, their largest to that point. After the Dukes scored seven straight points, Tillman scored five and Brooks connected from 3-point land in an 8-0 burst. The lead at its peak was 26 points.

"I thought they were the most physical team we've played," said Duquesne head coach Jim Ferry. "They play really hard, they're a really good team. The biggest key is JeQuan Lewis. He's playing like his ability to play. I think he's really making them play at a higher speed right now."

Women's Track & Field sees growth

ERIKA ROBINSON
Contributing Writer

The Rams women's track and field squad is looking to build upon its strong showing last year, and have already participated in two meets.

While the Rams welcomed 17 newcomers to the team, that did not stop them from starting their season on a high note. On Jan. 9, the Rams began their season at George Mason University, where they took third in the GMU Father Diamond Invitational.

The Rams 4x800m relay team finished third and set a school record with a time of 9:23.80. Members of the team were junior Emily Dyke, freshman Ashley Greenlee, sophomore Nichelle Scott and senior Elizabeth Stump.

The Rams 4x400m relay team also finished third with a time of 3:52.88. The relay team was led by senior leadoff runner Verna Hilaire-Lee, freshman and second leg Taylor Watkins, third leg Greenlee and freshman anchor Latrice Morris.

Other notable finishes were sophomore jumper Amiaya Carey, whose high jump reached 5'3" and earned her fifth place. Freshman jumper and hurdler Alliyah Stevens also finished fifth in the long jump with a distance of 17'11.5".

"The first meet of the year is always an opportunity to see where we are and evaluate the athletes after the winter break," said Head Coach Jon Riley. "Our women went out and competed hard. The staff wanted to see the athletes compete with passion and fire and that's exactly what they did."

On Jan. 13 the Rams traveled to Hampton University, where they took first place at the Hampton University Tri-Meet. It was a team effort that led VCU to get its first win of the season.

Redshirt-freshman sprinter Kia Carson placed second and third respectively in the 200m and 60m dashes where she ran times of 25.65 and 7.72.

Stevens, who built upon her impactful first collegiate showing at the GMU Father Diamond Invitational, had a personal best time in the 60m hurdles where she ran a 9.07. Stevens also participated in the long jump where she finished second with a 18'4".

In the 400m dash, junior mid-distance runner Iman Lee took first place, while sophomore Jasmine Lackey placed second with times of 1:01.51 and 1:02.59.

Again, Riley was enthusiastic about the way his players performed and enjoyed seeing older players show their leadership throughout the meet.

"Today was a great opportunity to learn and compete," Riley said. "We had some of our returners step up and show the young kids how to compete with passion. We are still a ways away from where we want to be but today we took one step closer."

The Rams will travel to George Mason University on Saturday, Jan. 30, to compete in the GMU Patriot Games.

From VCU to the pros: soccer captain Dennis Castillo signs



As a captain, Dennis Castillo led VCU to the Atlantic 10 championship final, which the Rams lost 4-1 to Dayton.

FADEL ALLASSAN
Print News Editor

As professional teams continued selecting players in Major League Soccer's 2016 SuperDraft, VCU men's soccer Head Coach Dave Giffard grew anxious.

He knew his captain from the 2015 season, senior defender Dennis Castillo, had the talent to make the selection — and for him, it was a matter of “when,” not “if.”

Castillo, a Costa Rican native, was drafted by the Colorado Rapids with the 37th pick in the second round. The Rapids acquired the pick in a trade by FC Dallas.

“I’m not at all surprised Dennis was drafted, he’s one of the top players in the country,” Giffard said, “In fact, because he’s international, it’s the reason why he went at pick 37 instead of 17 or something like that.”

Giffard believes that the MLS

Homegrown Player Rule, which cap the amount of non-American players teams are allowed on their roster, may have had a part in Castillo not being selected higher in the draft.

“He’s a great player and he’s consistent day in and day out -- that really is what a professional player is,” Giffard said.

Castillo was the 2015 Atlantic 10 defensive player of the year and was also selected for the NSCAA All-Midwest region second team, capping off his career with the Rams where he started 80 games, the most in VCU soccer history. He amassed 17 goals in his collegiate career.

Castillo was also a member of the Costa Rican U-18 and U-20 national teams as he led the Rams to the A-10 Championship final in 2015, which ultimately ended in a loss to Dayton University.

THE PRESS BOX

Men’s hoops brings much needed heat



BRYANT DRAYTON
Sports Editor

the country, having three players on the roster over 7-feet tall and an average height of 6-foot-7, giving Mo Alie-Cox a losing battle even on his best day.

The Georgia Tech game was no different. The Yellow Jackets, much improved from last season under Head Coach Brian Gregory, were able to match up athletically with the Rams, forcing the team into contested shots for the entirety of the contest. VCU only shot 32 percent from the floor, unusual at best for such a high powered offense.

But no loss hurt more than Cincinnati. It was the last shot for Wade to reel in his first big-time win at the Stu, a safe haven where VCU DOES NOT LOSE. Despite a great overall performance from Melvin Johnson, the Rams came up short in OT, putting a cap on the top-tier schools they matched up with in the non-conference.

After a bizarre 5-5 start to a season, most expected this to be a rebuilding year -- a season Wade would use to get his feet wet before totally acclimating himself to the program, before he could call it his instead of Shaka’s.

Five and five seemed synonymous with nothing more than mediocrity. How the team was able to regroup is beyond me — but boy did they ever.

Since their shaky start, VCU is on a ten game winning streak, seven of which having been conference games. The Rams sit at the top of the standings in the Atlantic 10 for first place. The season went from being one to forget to one to remember.

The Rams still have an ample amount of work to do to com-

pletely salvage this season, as the selection committee will harp on the OOC losses, but little has to change from what is already taking place.

To guarantee another trip to the NCAA Tournament, VCU will have to do what most of its teams have been reluctant to in the past — win on the road. So far, the Rams are 3-0 in conference road games, including the OT win against the other school in our city.

In the past two seasons, the Rams have gone 11-9 overall in away contests. A record this team can’t afford to resemble if they have any shot to advance come March. A tough task, but one the team can easily accomplish the way the guys have come together in these past nine games.

VCU is 4-1 away from the Stu so far this season. Thanks to Wade’s quick response to adversity, the team looks primed and ready to compete in its final 12 conference games of the regular season. Winter storm Jonas has the entire East Coast in a frozen Tundra, so it’s a good thing the Rams have decided to heat up at the right time.

Bryant is a sports advocate who’s always smiling. He is a senior print and online journalism major aspiring for a career as a professional or college football columnist. Bryant currently covers high school football games for the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

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The Rams are 13-6, four of their losses have come in their last five games in the conference.

O’Boyle and Rams struggle in Atlantic 10 play after solid non-conference start

ZACH JOACHIM
Contributing Writer

For women’s hoops, the 2015-16 season got off to a blistering start.

An 11-2 record heading into conference play would likely have had expectations sky-high for head coach Beth O’Boyle and her team. After splitting their first four Atlantic 10 contests however, it became clear that the intensity of the Atlantic 10 would test VCU as the non-conference schedule had not.

The Rams came their third week of conference play by welcoming Davidson College to the Siegel Center on Jan. 17, which was followed by a trip to Fairfax to take on George Mason University on Jan. 20, both games resulted in a loss for the Black and Gold, which puts the Rams at 2-4 in conference play and 13-6 overall.

An up-tempo first half seemed suited to O’Boyle and the Rams as VCU took a 29-28 lead into the locker room. The Rams would force double digit turnovers on the day as they continued to lead the A-10 in steals, turnovers forced and turnover margin.

The Wildcats came out with a purpose in the third quarter and a one point Rams lead turned into an eight point deficit heading into the 4th quarter. Davidson was able to dictate the tempo and slow down

the pace of the game to better fit their style by taking longer possessions, outscoring VCU 30-20 in the paint, outrebounding them 36-32, and outscoring them in second chance opportunities 11-6.

The Rams were able to lead a rally as a pair of Wildcat turnovers led to two Courteona Brelove layups to cut Davidson’s lead down to single digits. Junior guard Isis Thorpe made things interesting when a couple connections from beyond the arc reduced the deficit to just four points, but VCU was unable to complete the comeback and fell by a final score of 56-50.

Thorpe, who leads the Rams in points per game and 3-pointers, helped the team effort with 17 points, while going 5-11 from beyond the arc.

A strong effort from VCU Sunday was overshadowed by their poor shooting performance. The Rams shot 32.2 percent from the field, their lowest mark of the season, and were held to just six chances from the charity stripe.

VCU looked to turn things around against another A-10 foe George Mason University on Jan. 20. It would however, prove to be a frustrating night in Fairfax.

Although the Patriots led from start to finish, VCU was again able to force double digit turnovers

which converted into fifteen points. The Rams also doubled GMU’s second chance points output at 17-8, outrebounded the Patriots 37-30, outscored them in the paint, 32-18 and from the bench, 32-19.

George Mason’s wire-to-wire lead was helped by the fact that he Rams shot 32.8 percent overall and 1-14 from downtown. The Patriots, for their part, shot 53.3 percent from the field while going 4-11 from beyond the arc.

GMU starters outscored VCU starters 51-22. Ashley Pegram led the Rams with 11 points and 3 steals. However, the Patriots came away victorious by a final tally of 70-54.

The Rams will seek to turn the tables on conference play going forward, as they have now fallen to 2-4 in the A-10 after a non-conference start which O’Boyle would have hoped would carry over into the Atlantic 10.

VCU’s next test will come Jan. 25 at 7 p.m. when they welcome familiar foe the University of Richmond to the Stu. This game, originally scheduled for Sunday at U of R, has been flexed due to the winter storm. The Valentine’s Day matchup against the Spiders will consequently be moved uptown to the Robins Center and tip-off at 1 p.m.

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ARC FA/CPR/AED recertification course
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full certification course
[Jan 30, 9am – 3pm]

adult swim lessons session 1
[Jan 25 – Feb 28]
[register Jan 11 – 22]

children swim lessons session 1
[Jan 30 – Mar 5]
[register Jan 11 – 29]

U.S. master’s swimming
[Jan 25 – Apr 29]
[registration ongoing]

weekly activities
– belay clinic
– climbing skills clinic
– kayak pool session
– peak shuttle

wintergreen day ski trip
[Feb 6, register by 2/2]

intramurals
registration Jan 19 – 28 at the CSG
– basketball
– indoor soccer
– 4 on 4 volleyball tournament
– racquetball ladder (singles)
– tennis ladder (singles)

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spectrum



ON THIS DAY...

in 1980, famous musician Paul McCartney is released from jail in Tokyo and deported from Japan for marijuana possession.

How do local businesses cope with winter break?

—continued from page 1

RUMORS BOUTIQUE

The difference in sales at Rumors is like night and day, according to Rumors co-manager Shelby Guest.

Guest said the Premiere Thrift Boutique isn't as affected over summer break, and sales sometimes increase during those months.

"I think when a lot of the VCU kids go home, a lot of the area high school kids come in to shop," Guest said. "But in the winter we're always dead. It's insane how slow we are."

In past years, during winter breaks, Rumors has hosted sales and promotions in hope of attracting customers to the shop, but Guest said the efforts were not very successful.

"It never worked, oddly enough the only customers we had come in were moms."

RICHMOND BOOK SHOP

The old blue brick building nestled between cafes and pizza joints on Broad street has been home to comic

books, posters, novels and records since 1969.

Kathy Pritz and her husband have been the co-owners since 1995, and have become accustomed to the drop in business while VCU students are on break.

"You don't make much, your income is cut in half or so," Pritz said. "It gets quiet for a while but we still have regular customers that come in."

Pritz said their business is about 75 percent student-based.

During the slower weeks, Pritz said she uses the opportunity to make floor changes in the shop and list items for sale on eBay with hopes of improving the flow of business.

This winter in particular was worse than years past. During the early weeks of December, Pritz said the outside of the shop was occupied by sidewalk construction, making it difficult for customers to get their vintage fix.

"(The construction) really cut in," Pritz said. "We lost about \$1,000."

VILLAGE CAFE

This campus staple has experienced its fair share of VCU vacations since its founding in 1956.

Bar manager Jeff Rider said winter break is a lot slower than during the semester, and the staff uses the time to their advantage by taking care of house-keeping related activities.

"Summer break we still have a lot of regulars and the service industry crowd will come in," Rider said.

LAMPLIGHTER ROASTING COMPANY MORRIS ST. CAFE

The latest edition to the Lamplighter Roasting Co. family sits at the edge of the VCU campus on Morris Street.

About half of the shop's revenue is driven by student sales, according to kitchen manager James Leath.

"We scale back everything," Leath said. "Winter is pretty rough. Holidays and going home affects us the most."



These local businesses rely on students while classes are in session, but VCU's long summer and winter breaks sometimes force shops and restaurants to deal with a temporary drought.

RVA Game Jam challenges local developers



PHOTO BY BROOKE MARSH

RVA Game Jams tasks developers with creating video games in 48 hours. The VCUarts Depot will host this year's event.

SAMUEL GOODRICH
Contributing Writer

Big-budget video games go through a lengthy development process, often taking years and hundreds of thousands of dollars in production.

One event, however, aims to challenge developers by putting a 48-hour cap on the intricate process.

The 2016 RVA Game Jam will be held Jan. 28-30 at the VCUarts Depot and is free to the public. New York Times video game critic and "Shall We Play a Game?" podcast host Chris Sullentrop will deliver the keynote speech at 6 p.m. on Friday, and the Game Jam begins at 8 p.m. that night.

The event is a local spinoff of Global Game Jam, which aims to test developers' skills while entertaining and educating audiences on an often-misunderstood task.

"You can't make a full game at a Game Jam, but you come up with an idea and find out if people are into it, and then developers, sometimes, expand those ideas into full games," Sullentrop said.

Programming coordinator for RVA Game Jam Lauren Vincelli said game development is more than just writing code — it includes ele-

ments of art, design, music, business and media management.

"We felt like (Sullentrop's) articulate, explorative and introspective analysis of video games would provide participants with an important insight to the consumption of games," Vincelli said.

For nearly four years, Vincelli and Will Blanton, the other head of RVA Game Jam, have held many events in an attempt to connect the game development community of Richmond.

"We want to create a supportive, encouraging environment for people in the area to explore video game development," Vincelli said.

Teams have only two days to create a concept and game mechanics while also developing a prototype, which will be judged. Similar past events have produced award-winning, nationally distributed games.

Game Jams are sometimes the birthplace of many popular releases, including 2013's indie hit "Surgeon Simulator," and the more recent "Keep Talking and Nobody Explodes."

Vincelli said the event is intended for people to not only compete and hone their skills, but also network with others and mentor new participants.



Images from a submission to 2015's RVA Game Jam titled "Museum of Gris." Developers execute creative but realistic goals that combine coding, animation, audio and more.

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY RVA GAME JAM



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY COURTESY OF HTTP://VIDEOGAMESLIVE.COM

Altria hosts the multimedia, interactive VIDEO GAMES LIVE

Costumed performers take the stage at the Altria to perform internationally-renown scores from popular video games.

KRISTEN LAIR-BAKER
Contributing Writer

The Richmond Symphony Orchestra collaborated with legendary gaming industry icons to develop a multimedia concert on Jan. 23.

The concert featured electronic percussionists, solo performers, synchronized lighting and clips from video games spanning decades.

The interactive segments of the concert promote audience involvement more than a typi-

cal symphony performance. This participation includes audience members coming on stage to compete with each other as the orchestra plays in sync with the visuals displayed on stage.

CEO and producer of VIDEO GAMES LIVE Tommy Tallarico is on stage every show accompanying the orchestra on his guitar.

In addition to producing the event, Tallarico has worked in the gaming industry as a designer, producer, writer, games tester

and video game music composer for more than 23 years.

Another of Tallarico's renowned accomplishments, is his founding of G.A.N.G. (Game Audio Network Guild), which is a non-profit organization established for the purpose to educate the masses of interactive audio. In its first two years, G.A.N.G. provided 600 paying jobs to those in the industry.

Pre-show activities included a costume contest and prize giveaways. The post-show meet and

greet allowed audience members to meet performers of the concert, industry designers, composers, voice actors and other guests.

Since its creation in 2002, VIDEO GAMES LIVE has worked to demonstrate how artistic and culturally significant video games and their music have become on a global scale.

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Story of Virginia campaign raises nearly \$40 million

ADRIEL VELAZQUEZ
Contributing Writer

The Virginia Historical Society has exceeded its \$38 million goal for its Story of Virginia campaign. Individuals, corporations and foundations contributed to the campaign that was organized to update the 15-year-old exhibition.

The Story of Virginia campaign was launched in May of 2011 with an initial goal of \$32 million. VHS raised this goal to \$38 million in November 2012. The campaign contains three elements:

\$20 million for capital projects such as renovation of all public space on the main level and a larger Story of Virginia long-term exhibition;

\$8 million for programs such as

a website redesign and restoring the Charles Hoffbauer Memorial Military Murals;

\$10 million for the endowment.

“Our digital imprint is now worldwide in scope,” said VHS past chairman Claiborne Robins. “Our investments in technology have given us the opportunity to talk, in one week, to school students in Sweden about Pocahontas, to a classroom in the Dominican Republic about colonial Virginians, and to educators in Moscow about the Powhatan Indians.”

The mission of the VHS is to connect people to America’s past through the story of Virginia by collecting, preserving and interpreting the state’s history. The Story of Virginia exhibit alone contains more than 500 artifacts, maps,

letters and diaries ranging from the earliest tools shaped by humans to a satellite built by high school students in 2013.

“I think our emphasis on the importance of the lessons of history truly resonates with Virginians,” said Paul Levensgood, president and CEO of the Virginia Historical Society. “We all recognize that understanding our rich past is vitally important to confront the challenges of today.”

The campaign also provided significant funds to create a multi-purpose learning center with classrooms, a resource room for teachers, display space, and a studio with the streaming capacity to deliver programs to an international audiences. The international impact of the programs is important to the

VHS.

“We said from the start that this campaign was to help us put education at the core of everything we do, to help teach those lessons and further that understanding,” Levensgood said.

The campaign also funded an eighteen-month construction project that included the creation of 4,000-square-foot of exhibition space from relocated offices that now house galleries named for Virginia Sargeant Reynolds, Susan and David Goode and Cecil Hopkins.

The VHS will continue to seek funds for a \$2.4 million program to receive, store and digitize the rich archives that the Museum of the Confederacy is transferring to the Virginia Historical Society. Funding for this project will remain open until the goal has been reached, of which \$1.4 million has already been raised.

Other funding will continue to come in as the campaign remains open for more contributions.

“Our campaign will remain open until January 30, 2016 so that proposals still being considered by various individuals and groups can be accommodated and other specific challenges can be met,” Robins said. “Contributions committed to date and other anticipated support, exceed \$45 million.”

Supporters of the campaign include federal agencies such as the National Endowment for the Humanities, National Endowment for the Arts, National Park Service, National Historical Publications and Records Commission, and the Library of Congress.

Several private foundations supported the campaign and a large donation from Lora and Claiborne Robins, Sr. was also obtained. This included their home, Clear View, and its furnishings, along with a significant endowment.

“We have been fortunate in the past to have gratifying community support for our capital campaign... but it is still incredibly gratifying to know that so many feel so strongly about what we do at the VHS,” Levensgood said.

Levensgood also encouraged VCU students to come and see the new exhibits and updates to the museum.

“The campaign helped us add much more gallery space. And one gallery in particular, the Susan and David Goode Gallery, will allow us to display more of our collections, many of which truly blur the lines between art and history,” Levensgood said.

The VHS was founded in 1831 by John Marshall, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and the first president of the VHS; John Floyd, governor of Virginia at the time and the first vice president of the VHS; and J.P. Cushing, fifth president of Hampden-Sydney College and the second vice president of the VHS.

The DJ’s desk: “Swim” by Episode

JOSHUA BUCK
Contributing Writer

One of 2016’s earliest gems is a track called “Swim” by rising New York City band Episode. It’s a sunny, alt-rock number that the band wrote to stay warm during winter, and it certainly works to heat up this frigid Richmond January for three minutes.

What really makes this one pop is guitarist Eric Sherman’s swirling main riff. It gets hooked in your head on first listen. Combine that with Daniel Lonner’s vocals and you immediately start to get Stadium Arcadium flashbacks in the best possible way. The song vividly conjures up the end of a relationship, but with a hint of hopeful optimism for the future.

Lonner and Sherman had been in various bands together since high school before they linked up with drummer Brett Daniels and formed Episode. In 2014 they released the acclaimed “Hold On” EP with Lonner rapping and a rotating crew of vocalists. The band, however, wasn’t content with the sound and took some time off to refocus, eventually recruiting Giovanni Thatcher on bass.

The band hit on “Swim” early in the process of recording stuff for their forthcoming EP, and decided to run with the idea of Lonner handling singing vocals. It was a smart move. They emerge in 2016 dripping with beach vibes that they picked up from an LA recording session with producer Rex Kudo (Post Malone). Look for their (re) debut EP to drop in the next couple of months, just in time to become an indispensable part of your spring break playlists.

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The front of Virginia Historical Society’s headquarters. The organization works to preserve the state’s rich history through educational programs, installations and exhibits that feature hundreds of historical artifacts.

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Questioning journalistic integrity as companies become less transparent

JUSTIN JOSEPH
Contributing Columnist

2015 was an incredible year for journalism. Never before had the process of gathering and reporting news been subject to such heavy scrutiny, controversy and criticism.

2014 ended with the retraction of the now-infamous *Rolling Stone* article regarding a rape allegation at the University of Virginia. Shortly after, NBC Nightly News anchor Brian Williams was suspended — then demoted — for reporting inaccurate statements.

The ongoing election cycle has seen political candidates make numerous claims toward media bias and misrepresentation. Our society relies on journalists to give us the information we need to guide our personal lives and political views — but ethical violations indicate a willingness to use journalism to control the public for political and/or personal gain.

In the final months of 2015, it was hard to believe the American public had any more trust to lose in its news organizations. That is, until

American journalism hit its newest low by the end of the year with the secretive purchase of *The Las Vegas Review-Journal* in December.

The newspaper, which has the largest daily circulation in Nevada, was sold for the second time in a year for a tremendous profit. The new owners refused to identify themselves despite repeated calls to the paper's staff and the American Society for Professional Journalists.

It took almost an entire week of mystery and suspicion for Sheldon Adelson, chairman and CEO of the Las Vegas Sands Corporation, to reveal himself as the new owner.

Although the details of the transaction seem mundane at face value, Adelson's actions are troubling when put into context. Identified by *Forbes* as the eighth-richest person in the world, Sheldon Adelson is a mega-donor within the Republican Party and donated almost a hundred million dollars during the 2012 presidential election alone.

As a casino magnate and multibillionaire, Adelson purchased

the *Review-Journal* not for financial gain, but to increase his political influence. Despite its small population, Nevada is considered to be extremely important in the presidential election cycle.

The early date of Nevada's primary election and status as a swing state has caused presidential candidates to spend enormous amounts of time and money in the state. Adelson's acquisition raises a potential conflict of interest for the newspaper's stories on national politics and the gambling industry.

Adelson's strategy of secrecy has also been extremely concerning. By actively withholding details of the newspaper purchase, the businessman created a climate of uncertainty among his employees and the larger community. The situation made it impossible to disclose conflicts of interest and anticipate potential attacks on journalistic integrity.

Allegations of misconduct have already been made regarding Michael Schroeder, the former manager of Adelson's News + Media Capital Group

LLC. An increasing amount of evidence has implicated Schroeder in a plot to discredit a Las Vegas judge who presided over a wrongful termination lawsuit against Adelson.

After the casino owner argued with District Judge Elizabeth Gonzalez in court, *Review-Journal* reporters were ordered to monitor her cases. Their reporting was used in a highly critical article published by a Connecticut paper, and Schroeder himself is suspected of directing the entire smear campaign and engaging in plagiarism and other unethical activities.

This, along with similar controversies surrounding the newspaper deal, suggests that Adelson and his allies are not against violating journalistic integrity and interfering in news operations.

As a Nevada native, I am deeply disturbed by the entire situation.

I grew up reading the *Review-Journal* every day, a routine that made me a socially conscious and culturally aware individual. I continue to rely on the news in order



ILLUSTRATION BY RYAN SCHULTZ

to remain informed about current events. However, this definitely would not have been the case had a controversy like this erupted during my youth.

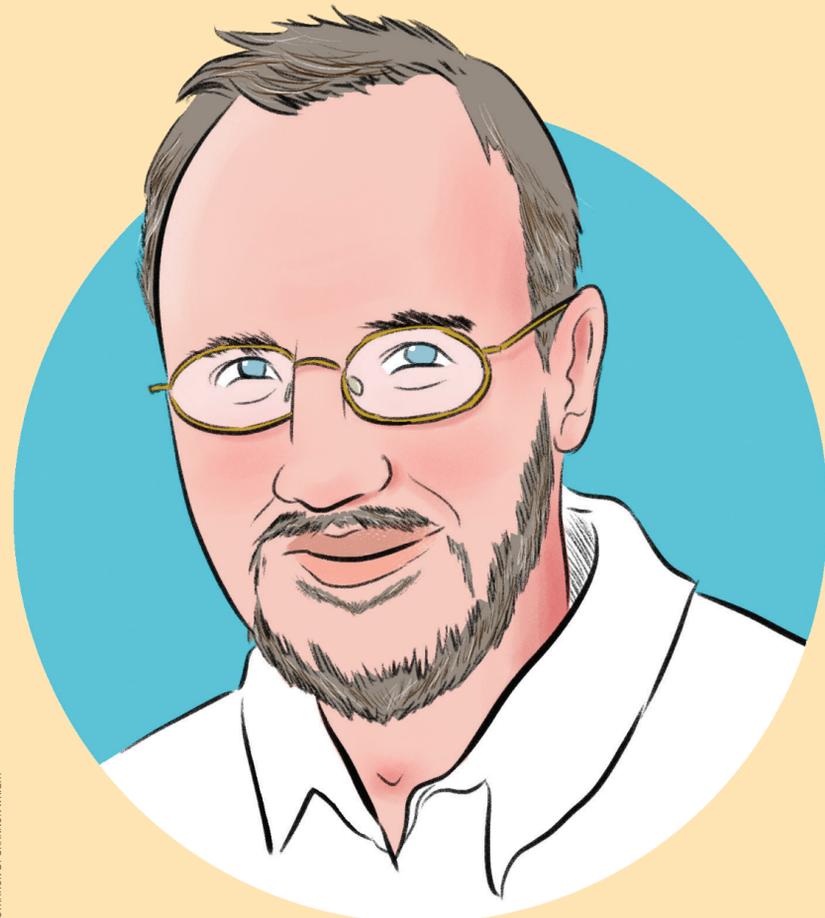
This is an issue of national importance. The American public must push for greater transparency in their news sources as journalistic integrity is under attack.

Owners of newspapers and other media sources need to refrain from interfering in news reporting and be open about potential conflicts of interest.

Although private companies are most interested in the bottom line, they must remember to abide by basic ethical guidelines. Failing to do so might result in the breakdown of journalism as we know it.

Goodbye, Greg

Greg Weatherford
Director, VCU Student
Media Center



— continued from page 1

editor AND I was turning 21.

In Greg's class, I was doing my first real, long-form enterprise project and it was hard. It was a lot of planning, a ton of reporting and even more revising. One of my drafts was due the day after my 21st birthday and I remember going to Greg's class and he was pushing me SO HARD. He wanted me to revise it a certain way and I had never done it before and I didn't know what else I could possibly report.

But I insisted on this particular day to have class with the lights off (for obvious reasons, I had just turned 21) and he agreed. He was asking me all these questions and telling me I had to go back AGAIN and change more stuff and I remember putting my head down and saying something like "I just turned 21, you're lucky I'm even here today." And he was just smiling and nodding. And then kept asking me questions.

That's Greg. Like, that was the most Greg thing Greg ever did to me.

MARK ROBINSON, Executive Editor 2013-14

I always tell people that working at The Commonwealth Times was the best decision I made as a student at VCU. It gave me on-the-job journalism experience and valuable clips. More importantly, it put me in Greg Weatherford's orbit on a day-in, day-out basis.

It was Greg who told 20-year-old me to drive to Virginia Beach to attend the funeral of a VCU student who was killed by a drunken driver. We -- journalists -- had a responsibility to bear witness to the tragedy, he said. I was scared, but I went because I didn't want to let him down.

It was Greg who guided me through a trying year as editor of the newspaper. While I was in pissing matches with the university's public relations staff, he talked me out of making decisions that would not have been fair. And, when I was nearing mental breakdown as a senior, it was Greg who tipped me off to an opening at *Richmond* magazine, where I've worked for the last 18 months.

Working with Greg made me a better journalist and a more compassionate person. He was the best teacher and mentor I've ever had, and I'm sad that other clueless, overconfident, ambitious students who walk into the Student Media Center won't have the chance to learn from him the way I did for four years.

CYRUS NUVAL, Executive Editor 2014-15

I'd like to think that I've become wiser and much more principled ever since I met you.

You taught me the necessity of a free press for our kind of society to work.

You taught me how powerful truth and honesty can be in

the kind of world we live in.

You taught me the importance of ethical behavior in a journalist's professional and personal life.

You taught me that you don't need to have studied journalism to understand the spirit of journalism.

Thank you for everything, Greg, especially for your time.

I'm glad to have met you and it was an honor learning from you.

SARAH KING, Executive Editor 2015-16

Greg, I struggled to write this signing-off piece and consequently stalled production a whole extra day trying to get out what I'm trying to say. If you were in the office today you would probably scold me, and I'm a little bruised you're somewhere downtown today instead.

Regardless, this is the best I could do to narrate the big and small, nuanced and not, ways you've shaped me as a person and pulled me through 2015 — a year that proved to be the most trying of my life thus far.

When bruises began blooming on my arms and face last year, you didn't pry — but made it clear you were there if I needed someone to talk to. When I suffered a broken nose, I remember you biting back tears. I think that was the first time I genuinely felt like I was undeserving of what I was enduring, and I can't thank you enough for that.

Last semester, as I prepared to begin my stint as Executive, I was in a near-frenzy for the majority of the summer. You probably thought it was because of school and work obligations, or maybe I was just that neurotic about the newspaper, but we both know those notions dissipated when I came stumbling into your office one day in August and blurted out, "I need a friend."

As I sat in your office, I began telling a twisted narrative by fumbling my words — unsure of how, or where, to begin. But as the words came together to form the story explaining the last year of my life, I distinctly remember feeling very calm sitting before you. I told you about how I slowly, then all at once, grasped the nature of living with and loving an addict.

I tore through sharing the injury of losing someone — watching husks form — from the bowels of silver spoons, the air of disassociation, manipulation and crack smoke wafting through the vents of my apartment. The pain of physical injury, unleashed temperament and reluctance to give up on the shell of someone. I told you about my arrest, and coming face-to-face with greed, guns and no glory in the kitchen. I think I began to sob when I finally reached the climax — a culmination of events that intertwined and seemed to explode on that otherwise warm summer day.

"The feds are about to raid our apartment and arrest him," I said as the tears started forming. I thought about how much I hate crying in front of other people. I thought about how I had left our apartment that morning, shortly after he stumbled through the door — the marked conclusion of a night-long binge — and fell asleep on the couch.

I told you about how I had looked at this man who I felt so inexplicably connected to, fearful for, someone who had stirred within me the type of "fearless alone" James Baldwin writes of, after forcing me to embrace so many months in ideological isolation, had barred me from feeling any form of connectedness to my peers. I had told him I loved him before walking out the door to the SMC that morning, and now, I had just learned he would be wakened from his sweating slumber to guns pointed at him, and a federal indictment being read aloud as handcuffs clicked into place.

In that moment of sheer desperation — I remember looking up at you, your mouth a little ajar, and thinking that it would be okay. That I would be okay. For the first time in more than a year, I genuinely felt like someone understood what I was saying and was not judging me for my age or by my decisions. I felt like you understood, maybe not the exact elements of my situation — but still, the underlying, abstract and conceptual human elements of the story. Together we were focused on a practical solution for the rapidly unfolding moments in time.

As I begin a new semester, I often think back on that day in August. I think about how I felt paralyzed day-in and day-out, for months, following his arrest. I was evicted from that apartment shortly after. I stared at a growing number of assignments and calendar days — constant reminders of the weeks I'd forgone attending class.

And despite the so many ways my waning academic performance could have easily been perceived as disappointing, or failure, you guided me through from the periphery, unconditionally.

You taught me to embrace failure. You told me to take ownership over the conditions we can and can't control. You dragged me by the collar to counseling when you realized I wouldn't go on my own. You pushed me to persevere even when I didn't think I had it in me to get up in the morning.

But I did, again and again, because the yellow brick building on Broad street was and is my home — it was a safe haven and escape from the immoralizing feeling of guilt that stripped me of any willingness to face my past. You helped me understand that sometimes all you can do is learn to let go.

This newspaper is the one thing I have thrown myself into wholeheartedly. For months, I felt like it was the only life-line I had left. It was liberating to pour over every aspect of this publication for hours on end, days at a time — to nurture copy and expand our print, digital and personal creative capacities.

When you said you were proud of our work, growth and achievements I felt a stinging in my chest that I hadn't felt in a long time. Gratification? When you told me this was perhaps the strongest the CT had been in years, possibly ever, I felt only a renewed, more keen, sense of purpose.

For the last three years, I had looked up to my predecessors — Mark, Cyrus, and although her legacy was before my time, "the reign of Mechelle." For every day I had awoken at dawn to escape the hellscape that was my home, for every night I was grateful the day was over — I never allowed myself to lose sight of my obligations to the CT.

Between bruises and missing chunks of flesh from my fingers, I had scrutinized my section as news editor. Despite the painful, often gruelling, introspective process of synthesizing the self, I did my damndest to build and rebuild and build higher this publication as executive editor.

And throughout it all, you never let me falter. For every hare-brained idea I came storming into your office with, I never felt anything less than respected as a peer. I think since that day I told you I needed a friend, you saw something in me and knew I was capable even when I didn't know it.

When I said I was going to redesign the website, and I didn't know the first damn thing about Wordpress, you told me to make sure the color scheme was consistent and the server didn't crash. When I said I wanted to start a summer camp for kids whose parents are incarcerated, you didn't even bat an eye as you gave me guidance on where to start.

For someone as blunt and wise as you are, you allowed me to take unprecedented risks with this publication while somehow securing my psyche.

When I sat in your office two weeks ago and you told me you had just accepted the position at SCHEV, I thought I was going to cry. But then you told me that you wouldn't be leaving if everything at the SMC wasn't "in a good place."

Jacob, Sam and Mark have a good handle on the finances and operations; the advertising and design staff will be fine; "And you know you can handle the paper," you told me.

Then: "I'd like to think I've taught students how to do things themselves, and take ownership of the process, rather than just do it for them," you said to me as I sat there reeling. "Teach a man to fish," I said blankly, and you smiled. "Exactly."

Greg, Thank you for the tips and tip-offs, books, wisdom, hard truths, advice, guidance, expertise and mentorship. Thank you for teaching me, and so many of my peers, friends and predecessors how to fish.

Godspeed.

COP CORNER

Measuring police success and accountability in the 21st Century

JOHN VENUTI
VCU Police Chief

In the United States there are 17,985 law enforcement agencies. As you can imagine, that total contains the best departments in the country and also includes those which are considered to be the worst.

Historically, crime numbers are used in the world of policing to measure the effectiveness of police departments. If crime is down, the department is doing a great job, if it's up, not so much. There is no standardization across police agencies to gather measurements about operations that are consistent from one agency to the next.

Does American policing desperately need some type of scorecard to determine what agencies are doing exceptional work? Right now it's the community's perception of an agency instead of reliable quantifying data that is the standard measurement.

In 2014, President Barack Obama signed an executive order to establish the Task Force on 21st

Century Policing. The impetus for the task force was the extensive distrust between communities and police departments. The work that followed was an attempt to re-shape policing in America.

Based on my 32 years of policing experience, the quality of leadership in a police department is essential to its success. An agency's culture should reflect the values and priorities of its leaders. Citizens should be able to determine an agency's priorities very easily, without question.

Once again there are no metrics to measure any of that.

A former police chief I used to work for would tell his staff "if you can't measure it, you can't manage it." I never fully understood this until I became a police chief. Since 2010, after arriving at VCU Police, I can tell you that we measure everything with numbers, from how many people officers speak with during an event to how many LiveSafe app downloads occur after new student orientations. It is impossible to establish strong

goals, evaluate our effectiveness and truly gauge our performance without these measurements.

Police agencies need new metrics and measures to establish trust and legitimacy with the communities they serve. Procedural justice is the fair and equal treatment of everyone by the criminal justice system. Procedural justice leads to trust and legitimacy of police agencies. The final report of the president's task force tells us you cannot have one without the other; both are critical elements. I think it's also possible to look at the programs departments implement, as well as the type and quality of training that departments are completing to establish efficacy.

In 2011, I created a perception of safety survey to establish a baseline of how safe people felt on VCU's campuses. This tool was created by the VCU Survey, Evaluation and Research Lab (SERL). When I implemented this concept I wanted the data collected and analyzed scientifically by an exter-

nal entity that was not affiliated with VCU Police.

The survey was created for purposes of transparency and so that the data would have credibility with the VCU community. In the most recent results 96.4% of the community members surveyed reported feeling either "safe" or "very safe" on our campuses. I believe that the high percentage of people that feel "safe" or "very safe" is directly tied to trust with, and legitimacy of, the VCU Police Department.

In my opinion, if people distrusted VCU Police officers the percentage of people that reported feeling "safe" and "very safe" would be significantly lower. I believe the survey is a usable metric to measure police effectiveness and to gauge trust and legitimacy with students, faculty and staff.

VCU Police have reduced officer involved use of force by 81% over the past five years. Complaints have also been reduced significantly.

Generally when a police officer uses force the question that

follows is: "was the force justified?" The VCU Police Department asks another question first: "was the force necessary?" If the answer to that question is "yes" then we can explore the justification of the use of force.

If law enforcement agencies want to reduce officer-involved use of force both of these questions need to be deeply explored. This is certainly a metric that departments can use. It's clear that America wants less force being used by police officers.

There is a paradigm shift underway in American policing with an increased focus on police establishing a guardian mindset. This shift strongly ties the mission of law enforcement to community policing strategies and objectives. Although tying standardized metrics to community policing and community engagement will be extremely difficult, a method must be established.



COMICS

Freakshow Coronation by Gareth Bentall



Back to School by Skye Lim



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