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Crime and Police News

Richmond police seek Fas Mart robber

RICHMOND — Richmond police are searching for a man who allegedly robbed a convenience store at knifepoint on Sunday.

The Fas Mart in the 1200 block of Westover Hills Boulevard was robbed at about 11:44 a.m. by a man who was captured on surveillance footage before running from the store, according to police.

Anyone who can identify the man in the surveillance photos or has other information that could help police solve the case can call Richmond Police Detective Jack Larry at (804) 646-1647 or Crime Stoppers at (804) 780-1000. Citizens can also text Crime Stoppers at 274637, using the key word "ITip" followed by your tip. Both Crime Stoppers methods are anonymous.

Albemarle County High School lockdown lifted

CHARLOTTESVILLE — A school in Albemarle County went on lockdown after a man with a knife was discovered on the grounds.

Albemarle County police said the man, a former student, was detained without incident.

Police say the man didn't make any threats and didn't enter the building.

The incident occurred at 8:30 a.m. Monday at Albemarle County High School. Police say staff questioned the man after he was seen on the grounds and discovered the knife.

The school was evacuated. The lockdown was lifted shortly before 11 a.m. Monday.

Neglect trial set for mother of slain infant

PULASKI — A trial date has been set for a Pulaski County woman charged with child neglect in the death of her 5-month-old son.

Police arrested 30-year-old Samantha Warden in February, a couple of weeks after the boy's body was found in a rural area of Draper.

The child's father, 32-year-old Howard Cole, is charged with capital murder and illegal disposal of a body.

Her trial is scheduled to begin Jan. 8 in Pulaski County Circuit Court.

Ex-police chief sues town, town council members

COLONIAL BEACH — Colonial Beach is being sued by a former police chief who alleges that the Town Council forced him to resign.

Kevin Blevins Sr. says in his lawsuit that he resigned under duress after the council gave him notice at its Jan. 10, 2013, meeting that there were sufficient grounds to terminate his employment with cause.

The lawsuit says the council didn't give him a specific reason for the cause of termination.

Blevins filed the lawsuit last week in Westmoreland County Circuit Court. The lawsuit seeks \$400,000 in damages.

Defendants are the town, five council members and one former council member.

Herring showcases drug-fighting plan

ROANOKE — Attorney General Mark R. Herring unveiled a five-part plan to combat drug abuse on Monday during the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police's annual conference.

The plan includes partnering with local and federal prosecutors, developing legislative solutions, prevention and education, and accountability for professionals who illegally make prescription drugs available.

The plan also includes a daylong summit on heroin and prescription-drug abuse.

— From staff and wire reports

Henrico meals tax for July: \$2M

At current pace, county will easily meet \$18M estimate for year

BY TED STRONG
Richmond Times-Dispatch

Henrico County's new meals tax brought in \$2 million in its second month, roughly matching the take from its first month and potentially putting it on pace to outperform revenue estimates.

County Manager John A. Vithoulkas announced the figure — which represents money collected on July sales and remitted to the county in August — on Monday morning at a meeting of the Henrico Business Leaders. The

tax came into effect June 1.

If collections continue at this level, the county will handily outpace the estimated annual take of \$18 million that was promoted as voters considered the tax ahead of November's election. Officials have emphasized in the past that they don't have baseline data for collections or know whether collections will vary seasonally.

Officials budgeted for \$18 million in revenue, which is to be split evenly between the schools' capital needs, such as buildings, and operating costs. Any money collected above the \$18 million will be set aside for use on schools' capital expenses in coming years.

Speaking at the same Henrico

Business Leaders meeting, Henrico schools Superintendent Patrick C. Kinlaw expressed gratitude for the meals tax and said the division might have had to eliminate teachers had the levy not been passed by voters.

The list of capital projects funded through the meals tax each year is created by the school district staff and approved by the county School Board. The schools have a backlog of maintenance work valued at tens of millions of dollars.

So far, the School Board has voted to spend a little more than \$500,000 of the meals tax money for capital expenses this year, which will be used for planning for a variety of projects ranging from the renovation of the fifth-

grade wing at Tuckahoe Elementary School to bathroom upgrades. More allocations are expected in the spring.

County Finance Director Eugene H. Walter said hotel/motel tax receipts have been high recently, and he suspects the two tax collection levels might be correlated.

Walter connected the high levels of receipts for both taxes to sports tourism in the county, pushing officials have been pushing of late.

"Families are coming in, staying in hotels, eating and shopping, that kind of thing," Walter said.

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Honoring the 'contemplation of freedom'

VUU ceremony opens the celebration of its founding 150 years ago

BY KARIN KAPSIDELIS
Richmond Times-Dispatch

Growing up in segregated Richmond, Randall Robinson learned in school where Rome was, and Paris and London.

"But nobody knew where Timbuktu was," he said, and that wasn't an accident.

Timbuktu was once a scholarly center of Africa with a university that had thousands of students, he said.

"I didn't know this as a child. I needed to know it," Robinson, a law professor and founder of TransAfrica, said Monday in the opening ceremony for the celebration of Virginia Union University's 150th anniversary.

"Many extraordinary things were built and accomplished in Africa in its antiquity," he said. And that lost history is one of the gravest consequences of 246 years of American slavery.

"We had lost all memory of what we had been in the world before the nightmare began," he said.

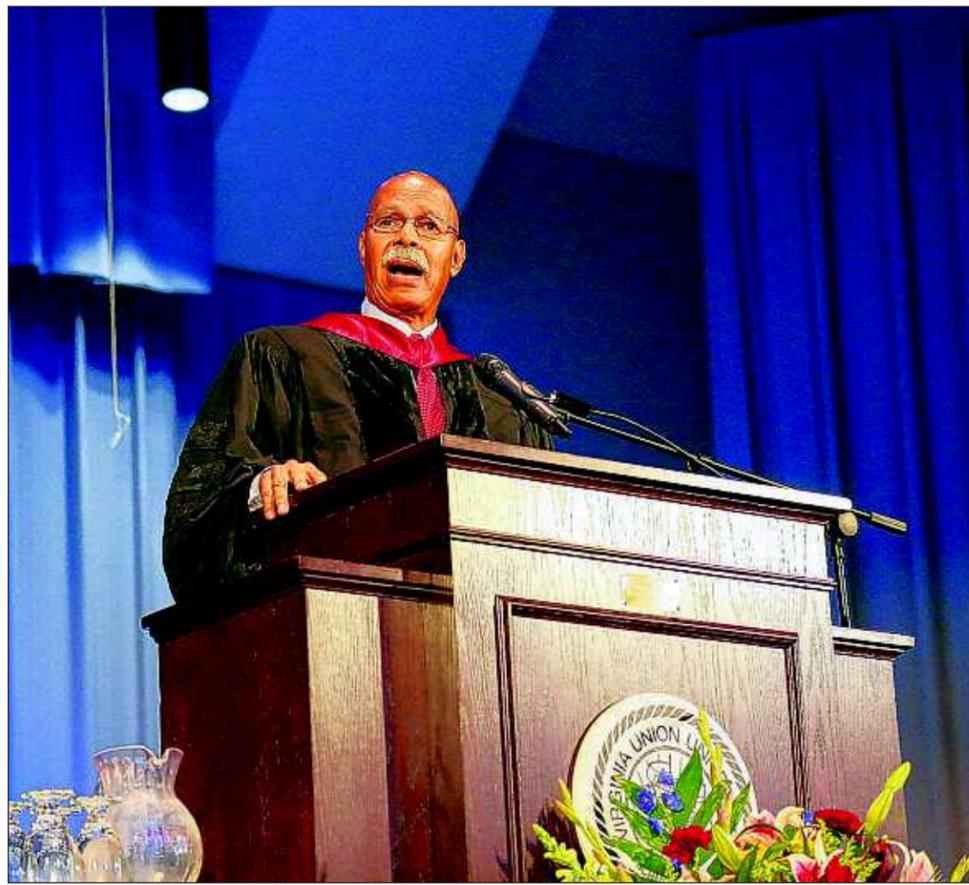
Robinson called Virginia Union, founded in a slave jail at the close of the Civil War, "a bridge to intellectual freedom and equality."

"The bridge is a miracle," Robinson said of his alma mater. "That we can sustain anything under the conditions that we have borne for 150 years is a miracle."

Robinson, who grew up in Jackson Ward and graduated from Armstrong High School, received his law degree from Harvard and is a professor at Pennsylvania State University law school.

His late brother, Max, an anchorman for ABC's "World News Tonight," also attended VUU. Their father, the late Maxie C. Robinson, was a legendary athletic coach at Armstrong and a VUU graduate.

Robinson spoke to about 700 people in the chapel of Coburn Hall as the keynote speaker in



Randall Robinson grew up in Richmond's Jackson Ward, attended Virginia Union University, then earned a law degree from Harvard. He spoke Monday at a ceremony for VUU's 150th anniversary celebration.

the first in a series of events commemorating VUU's founding in April 1865.

The American Baptist Home Mission Society established the Richmond Theological School for Freedmen and held the first classes in Lumpkin's Jail, a former holding cell for runaway slaves and auction house in Shockoe Bottom.

The society also was responsible for other historically black schools, such as Spelman and Morehouse colleges, said VUU President Claude G. Perkins.

VUU is "a contemplation of freedom," he said.

W. Franklyn Richardson, chairman of VUU board of trustees, said he was there to report

that "this intellectual bridge called Virginia Union still stands" and is strong enough "to bring the next generation over."

Yet he said there are still obstacles to overcome. "We're not blind to those who don't want us to cross the bridge," Richardson said.

The university, which has about 1,750 students on its campus on Lombardy Street, grew out of a merger between Richmond Theological and Wayland Seminary, which had been founded in Washington to educate freed slaves.

Virginia Union, Robinson said, has served for "150 years as a bridge to intellectual freedom through instruction, instruction

that followed the longest running global crime against humanity over the last 1,000 years."

Never cease considering the scope of the crime, he said, because in 246 years "we lost not only our freedom, but we lost our languages, our religions, our cultures, our customs, our mothers, our fathers, our sisters, our brothers."

"That we survived at all to stand here today is nothing short of a miracle," he said to applause.

The holocaust of World War II lasted 12 years, Robinson said, but "our holocaust lasted for one-quarter of a millennium."

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Embezzlement brings weekend time

Woman took \$20,000 from animal-aid group in New Kent County

BY BILL MCKELWAY
Richmond Times-Dispatch

NEW KENT — A woman troubled by alcohol and drug use who embezzled nearly \$20,000 from a volunteer group dedicated to controlling feral cat populations will serve weekend time in jail.

Despite facing a maximum sentence of up to 20 years on each of five counts, MaryBeth Andre, 50, was sentenced to one month plus 15 days in jail that will be served on weekends as part of a plea agreement approved Monday.

Andre offered to the court Monday a check covering the \$20,000 she pilfered from Operation Catnip of Richmond Inc. And she told New Kent County Circuit Court Judge Thomas B.

Hoover that she had been struggling from a drop in pay from a full-time job and that her volunteer work for the cat operation was out of a genuine concern for the welfare of the animals.

Operation Catnip, though, lost its tax-exempt status because of Andre's sloppy bookkeeping and pilferage, according to testimony Monday, and Andre even blamed her own colony of cats for some of her trouble.

She told the court that cats ate her computer wires on her bookkeeping equipment, making it difficult to make a full accounting of what was taken.

Hoover was not amused. "It sounds like a modern version of the dog ate my homework," he said from the bench.

Andre, of the 6500 block of Charles City Road, was charged after new leadership of Operation Catnip couldn't get Andre to turn over the organization's books for inspection.

When the board finally got a

look, they took evidence of embezzlement straight to the New Kent County Sheriff's office, where investigators issued arrest warrants.

Group members said the two-year embezzlement scheme included funds that went for many personal items for Andre, including plane tickets, cosmetics and everyday household costs.

Hoover said from the bench that he is stunned that community organizations don't require double signatures for every item paid for. Operation Catnip rarely carried a balance of more than a few thousand dollars.

The all-volunteer group has been operating nearly 14 years and pays the cost of spaying and neutering at clinics it sponsors. It is responsible for hundreds of operations that have helped cut the growth of feral cat communities.

The group has instituted numerous financial and bookkeep-

ing reforms and is trying to re-establish its tax-exempt status, according to leaders of the group.

Andre was able to drum up the restitution money from family members who cashed in their savings and retirement accounts, her lawyer said in court.

In a letter to the new board, Andre apologized in an awkward note full of misspellings and half-thoughts. "I know I failed the old board and the cats and I incredibly sorry," she wrote. "It was mostly due to my disorganization and picking alcohol over what is really important."

"We all trusted her and thought she was completely dedicated to cats," a member of the group said in April after Andre's arrest a few weeks earlier.

Andre will begin serving her sentence this weekend.

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