

New Virginia coalition calls march & rally to defend immigrant rights

See story on page 2.

In the Spirit of Gabriel, Nan, Nat Turner, John Brown, Mary Bowser, Elizabeth Van Lew & John Mitchell Jr.

DEFENDER

FREE

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Photo by Phil Wilayto

Gilpin Court, home to more than 2,100 residents, sits on some of Richmond's potentially most valuable real estate.

Bush fails in new 'Gulf of Tonkin' hoax

By Phil Wilayto

Back in August 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson lied to the U.S. public about what he falsely called an unprovoked attack on two U.S. warships by North Vietnamese patrol boats in Vietnam's Gulf of Tonkin.

In a fit of national outrage, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, giving Johnson authority to retaliate in any future incidents. The president used the resolution to justify greatly increasing U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, a process that resulted in the deaths of 58,000 U.S. GIs and more than 3 million Indochinese.

Johnson's own papers later revealed that the incident was a fraud. Former Defense Secretary Robert McNamara admitted in the film "Fog of War" that the whole incident had been fabricated.

This January, President George W. Bush came close to repeating Johnson's criminal deception. And, as with the Gulf of Tonkin Incident, the press dutifully repeated the official lies:

"... an Iranian fleet of high-speed boats on Jan. 6 charged at and threatened to blow up a three-ship U.S. Navy convoy passing near Iranian waters," reported the Associated Press Jan. 8. "The Iranian naval forces vanished as the American ship commanders were preparing to open fire."

The New York Times added its authoritative weight to the Pentagon reports of the alleged incidents:

"Five armed Iranian speedboats approached three United States Navy warships in international waters in the strategic Strait of Hormuz on Sunday, then maneuvered aggressively as radio threats were issued that the American ships would be blown up, military officials said Monday. ...

"The commander of the Hopper, a guided-missile destroyer, was 'very close to giving the order to fire,' said one of the officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak for attribution. 'We were perilously close to an incident where we would have taken

See **Hoax** on **page 2**

What's in store for Richmond's public housing?

RRHA is planning to tear down much of Gilpin Court and replace it with "mixed-income" housing.

2,109 people live in Gilpin Court.

Their average annual household income is \$9,128.

Their average monthly rent is \$185.

Where will they go?

By Jumaane Mali

Editor's Note: In order to get a better feel for what residents are thinking about the future of public housing in Richmond, Defender reporter **Jumaane Mali** and Defender community organizer **Dieyah Rasheed** recently spent an afternoon interviewing residents of Gilpin Court. With its 783 units, Gilpin is Richmond's largest public housing community.

January 23 was a beautiful day — sunny and unusually warm for the season. A lot of residents of Gilpin Court were outside. Children were playing in a carefree manner, elderly folks were walking and young people were washing their cars, doing chores or just hanging out.

It was a perfect day for Sister Dieyah and I to talk to people about the future of Gilpin Court.

One of the first people we met was Pearl Colley. Sister Dieyah, a longtime member of the Defenders for Freedom, Justice and Equality, asked Ms. Colley if she knew what the city has planned for Gilpin.

"I've been hearing some things," Ms. Colley said. "Many rumors. Why? What's going on?"

At this point, Sister Dieyah explained Richmond's history with gentrification, which was first tested with the Blackwell neighborhood on South Side.

When that low-income community was torn down, the residents were told they would be able to move into new low-income housing in the same neighborhood.

But that proved to be untrue. Only a small percentage of Blackwell public housing residents were able to return.

Ms. Colley was shocked. She told Sister Dieyah she knew of a few elderly residents of Gilpin who had recently been evicted because they couldn't pay their rent. If Gilpin were torn down, how could the residents afford rent in a neighborhood that wasn't meant for low-income people?

See **Gilpin** on **page 7**

By Matthew Freeman

Big changes are coming to Richmond's public housing communities.

The question is, what changes, and who will they benefit?

And what will happen to the 10,000 people who live there now?

By June, the Dove Court public housing community at First and Dove streets in Highland Park will be torn down. That's according to Valena Dixon, spokeswoman for the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority, Virginia's largest public housing authority, which runs the city's 4,100 public housing units.

RRHA plans to replace Dove Court's 60 units with "mixed-income" housing. Dixon told the Defender in late January that the authority had already received verbal permission for the demolition from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and was just waiting to receive an official letter.

Dove Court will be the first of the city's 13 public housing communities to be demolished, but it won't be the last.

According to RRHA officials, Gilpin Court is next.

RRHA Executive Director Anthony Scott was recently quoted in the city's daily newspaper as stating that the plan for Dove Court is a "mini Gilpin. It is a pilot."

The authority intends to use its experience demolishing Dove Court to perfect its methods of moving residents, arranging financing and developers and building a "mixed-income" community — one that offers housing to people with different incomes.

The concern is this: if Gilpin Court is torn down, will the new mixed-income housing include the

See **RRHA** on **page 7**

"Of all our studies, history is best qualified to reward our research." — Malcolm X, 1963

THE DEFENDERS for Freedom, Justice & Equality

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The Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality is an organization of Richmond-area residents working for the survival of our community through education and social justice projects.

We started out in June 2002. Many of us had relatives in the Richmond City Jail or state prisons and were concerned about the physical conditions of these institutions.

As we worked around these issues, we learned more and more about the connections between jails, jobs, poverty, racism, sexism, class, war and political representation. We began to organize around these issues as well.

We now have a bimonthly newspaper, a weekly radio program and a Web site. Our members meet twice a month to discuss issues and plan actions. We are affiliated with Blacks United for Action, the Virginia Immigrant Peoples Coalition and we are a founding member of the Virginia Anti-War Network.

If you agree with the principles below and want to work to make these ideals a reality, we invite you to join us. Together, we can make a real difference in the life of our community.

WHAT WE BELIEVE:

We believe in Freedom.

We believe that all people must be free to develop to their full potential as human beings. We must be free from hunger, from preventable diseases, from homelessness, from ignorance. We must be free to work and to provide for ourselves and our families. We must be free to pursue our education and to develop ourselves culturally and spiritually. We must be free from fear of the arbitrary use of police power and from the physical and cultural attacks of white-supremacist organizations. Women must be free from physical, cultural and emotional oppression. Children must be free from dangers like lead poisoning, asthma and sexual exploitation. Our youths must be free both from police harassment and the mindless violence of the streets. We must all be free from unjust wars fought in the interest of the wealthy few at the expense of the struggling many.

We believe in Justice.

We believe that every human being has the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And we believe that these rights are meaningless unless we also have the right to a job at a living wage, to decent housing, to adequate health care, to a meaningful education. We believe that all people have the right to stand equally before the law, to equal and fair treatment by the police, by the court system and in jails and prisons. And we believe that the death penalty is the ultimate exercise in injustice.

We believe in Equality.

We live in the richest country in the world. But it's a country that owes its tremendous wealth to the barbaric oppression of Black labor on a historic scale, as well as the theft of American Indian and Mexican lands, the cruel exploitation of Asian labor and the labor of waves of poor European immigrants. This country does not belong to the wealthy few who have claimed it for their own. As human beings, we all have an equal right to its resources. As descendants of those whose blood, sweat and tears paid cruelly for its development, we have a right to collective reparations. And as people who struggle every day with ongoing inequality, we have the right to affirmative action.

We believe that for any one of us to be free, we must all be free. We believe that for any one of us to have justice, we must all have justice. We believe that equality for anyone is impossible without equality for everyone.

As members of The Defenders, we pledge ourselves to defend our community, its men, its women and especially its children, from all forms of oppression.

We pledge to fight for a world where all people can live in dignity, freedom and peace.

Va. Immigrant Peoples Coalition calls for actions

By Phil Wilayto

The auditorium was packed, as close to 200 people gathered at St. Augustine's Catholic Church in Chesterfield County. They had come from Manassas, Woodbridge, Virginia Beach, Charlottesville, Richmond and many other cities and towns to discuss what to do about the scores of anti-immigrant bills being introduced in the Virginia General Assembly.

2008 was beginning to look like the Year of the Immigrant Scapegoat.

A huge banner over the stage set the tone for the Jan. 19 meeting: "La Comunidad Hispana de Richmond, Virginia presente en apoyo por la Dignidad, Justicia y Paz del Inmigrante" ("The Hispanic community of Richmond, Virginia, is here in Support of Dignity, Justice and Peace for Immigrants.")

After some introductory talks, the participants divided themselves into seven focus groups: organization, lobbying, public actions, fund raising, outreach, media and allies.

Each group then chose a representative to report back its discussions to the gathering as a whole. The seven focus groups were rearranged as six "commissions," with members of each commission asked to choose a representative to serve on a steering committee.

In this way — organically and democratically — a new statewide formation was born: the Virginia Immigrant Peoples Coalition.

The next order of business was deciding on a plan of action. Immigrant rights groups around the state had already decided to focus on Monday, Feb. 11, as Immigrant Lobby Day. After some discussion, a decision was made to hold a march in Richmond on Saturday, Feb. 9, followed by a day of vigils and

fasting at local churches on Sunday, Feb. 10, then a mass rally, press conference and lobbying on Feb. 11.

Much work remains to be done, especially in the area of allies. The 200 or so people at the meeting were overwhelmingly Latino. There was only one African-American, a civil rights representative from the United Food & Commercial Workers Union.

STAND FOR JUSTICE

Sat., Feb. 9, 1 p.m.

Gather at Richmond's Monroe Park for a RALLY & MARCH

Sun., Feb. 10

PRAYER VIGILS
in local churches

Mon., Feb. 11

9-10:30 a.m. - LOBBYING
11 a.m. - PRESS CONFERENCE
Noon - RALLY at Capitol Square

But the new coalition was not without its allies. Several young white organizers with the Charlottesville-based People United organization pledged to build support among non-Latinos. A representative from the Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality of Richmond promised that organization would talk with Black organizations and activists about building support for the march and rally. Breanne Armbrust, an organizer with the labor-oriented Jobs with Justice organization, discussed outreach to unions.

But time is short. Already, the scapegoating of immigrants by right-wing politicians in the state has encouraged an increase in

harassment and even violence against immigrants. KKK organizers from the Deep South have made recruiting trips to Prince William County. And law enforcement raids against immigrants have resulted in families being divided, with parents being deported out of the country as their children are taken away and put into foster homes.

Ricardo Juarez Nava is an organizer with Mexicanos Sin Fronteras (Mexicans Without Borders), one of the coalition's founding organizations. The Defender asked him why he thought forming a coalition now was so important.

"Because the immigrant community is not unified yet, so forming a coalition is part of the unification process," he said. "And it allows us to make stronger the relations between the immigrant community and the non-immigrant communities."

"Immigration is not only an issue for immigrant people, but of the entire community," Juarez said. "The reality is that we are workers. 'Immigrant' is a term that has been used to divide the workers and the communities."

"The immigrant policies always have the goal of the conservatives to keep dividing African-Americans from Latinos or immigrant workers from native workers, because this allows them to have greater control of the exploitation of all the workers."

It was fitting that the founding conference of the Virginia Immigrant Peoples Coalition took place just a few days after the birthday of the Rev. Martin Luther King. It was Rev. King who declared that "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

And today, in Virginia, that injustice is being directed against our immigrant sisters and brothers.

Hoax

Continued from page 1.

out at least one of the Iranian small boats. ..."

"Defense Department and military officials said that as the Iranian boats neared the American vessels, a radio threat was issued that the American ships would explode. The verbal warnings broadcast over the internationally recognized bridge-to-bridge radio channel said, 'I am coming at you, and you will explode in a few minutes,' an American official said. (The New York Times, Jan. 8, 2008)

President Bush condemned the alleged incident as a "provocative act."

The alleged incident conveniently happened just as Bush was about to leave on a Middle East trip aimed at rallying Arab states to join the United States in a coalition against Iran.

But just like the Gulf of Tonkin Incident, the Pentagon's version of the Strait of Hormuz Incident turned out to be false.

The Pentagon quickly released a four-minute, 20-second video with sound that showed five small, open-air Iranian speedboats buzzing in the distance, far from the U.S. warship.

A male voice in heavily accented English is heard threatening, "I am coming to you. You will explode in a few minutes."

However, the voice sounds different from one heard earlier in the recording and there is no background noise that would usually be picked up from a speedboat radio. (Guardian, Jan. 14, 2008)

Iran quickly issued a statement calling the tape a fabrication, pointing out that the audio and video portions seemed to have been artificially joined.

Pentagon officials responded that yes, the audio and visual portions had in fact been recorded separately and then combined, but insisted that both were taken from the incident as it happened.

However, more questions were raised.

For one thing, it turns out that there is plenty of precedent for similar threats — from a shore-based prankster well known to ship officers and sailors in the Gulf.

"Filipino Monkey" is the U.S. Navy's racist code name for a mysterious heckler whose mocking, profane voice is often heard in the Strait of Hormuz.

Commander Lydia Robertson, spokeswoman for the U.S. Fifth Fleet in Bahrain, soon admitted that "We don't know for sure where [the threats] came from. It could have been a shore station."

Chief of Naval Operations in the Pentagon, Admiral Gary Roughead, concurred: "Based on my experience in operating in that part of the world, where there is a lot of maritime activity, trying to discern is very hard to do." (Asia Times Online, Jan. 15, 2008)

Even the U.S. Navy's independent but semi-official Navy Times has claimed that the recorded threats are thought to have come from the infamous radio prankster.

Rick Hoffman, a retired captain, told the paper: "For 25 years, there's been this mythical guy out there who, hour after hour, shouts obscenities and threats. He used to go all night long. The guy is crazy."

"Could it have been a spurious transmission? Absolutely."

So why would the Pentagon and the Bush Administration deliberately misrepresented

an incident that apparently came very close to a military confrontation?

Because Bush, Cheney and their backers in the political establishment still want to go to war with Iran. After taking out Iraq, Iran is the last formidable obstacle to U.S. domination of the Middle East, which contains two-thirds of the world's known oil reserves.

That drive to war was temporarily derailed in November when the top 16 U.S. spy agencies released a National Intelligence Estimate concluding that Iran has no nuclear program, and hasn't had one since at least 2003 — if it ever did.

Bush and Cheney's reaction to the NIE bombshell was an arrogant "So what?"

"Iran was dangerous, Iran is dangerous, and Iran will continue to be dangerous," Bush told the media after the report's release.

But it's not Iran that's the dangerous party here. The U.S. military has prepared a plan to attack more than 10,000 possible targets inside Iran, which could destroy the country's entire infrastructure and murder many thousands of its people.

Half the U.S. Navy is now in the Persian Gulf, with nuclear-armed aircraft carriers, guided-missile destroyers, frigates, cruisers and submarines stationed off the coast of Iran.

Meanwhile, not one of the remaining Presidential contenders will say that he or she is against taking military action against Iran.

The only real deterrent to a new war in the Middle East is the determination of the Iranian people and its government, complemented by a strong, vigilant and determined anti-war movement here at home.

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community news

Homeowner reads Defender, gets free oil

By Queen Zakia Rafiq Shabazz

Ms. E.S. is glad she reads The Richmond Defender.

Why? Because it helped her receive 100 gallons of home heating oil – absolutely free.

The 60-something South Side homeowner was having trouble paying for the oil she needs to heat her home. Then she read the story in the November-December issue of the Defender about how the government of Venezuela was offering 112 million gallons of free oil to low-income people in the United States. Each qualifying household could receive a one-time delivery of 100 free gallons — worth more than \$300.00 at today's prices.

The Venezuela-Citgo Discount Heating Oil Program is a partnership between the South American country of Venezuela, which owns the Citgo oil company, and Citizens Energy, a nonprofit organization founded by former Massachusetts Congressman Robert P. Kennedy II.

So Ms. E.S. called the program's toll-free number: (877) 563-4645. She was asked a few basic questions about her household income and the number of people in her family.

Then she was told she would receive a card in the mail in three to four days. She was to verify that the information on the card was correct and return it to Citizens Energy. She was told she would then be sent a voucher she could use to buy the oil.

When Ms. E.S. received her voucher, she called another toll-free number, which connected her to the Energy Share hot line, which contacted a local oil company. Soon a truck arrived with her 100 gallons of free home heating oil. The entire process took only three weeks from the date of the initial call.

"I don't know what I would have done this winter without the program" said a grateful Ms. E.S., "I thank the Defender paper for making us aware that the program existed. This is a program that's family-friendly, and all it took was one phone call."

In the last Defender, we reported that applications would be taken until Feb. 29. However, a reporter who called Citizens Energy Jan. 29 was told that the nonprofit was no longer accepting applications this year for the free fuel, "as we have reached our program's capacity."

This was the third year in a row that Venezuela, under the leadership of its socialist president, Hugo Chavez, has offered the free oil.

You might want to keep Citizens Energy's number handy and call again next fall. It just might help to keep you cozy and warm in the comfort of your home.

Midnight B-ball's 5-Spot Drill

One hour of life-skills training followed by two hours of basketball. That's the program the **Richmond Midnight Basketball League** offers twice a week for boys. The program is available for girls upon request.

The workshops cover a variety of subjects, including education, leadership, recreation, relationship building, career development, social skills development, health issues and substance abuse.

The schedule: Mondays and Wednesdays at the Calhoun Community Center, 436 Calhoun St. The workshop starts at 5:30 p.m., followed by recreational activities at 6:30 p.m.

Contact: Robin Yarbrough at (804) 782-0700; e-mail: info@richmondmbll.org; Web site: www.richmondmbll.org.

Richmond's Master Plan: Most like it, but some question effect on the poor

By Ana Edwards

It wasn't easy to find a place to sit in Richmond's City Council chambers. All but about 10 of the 200 seats were filled, as members of the public gathered Jan. 15 to comment on the recently revised Downtown Master Plan.

Richmond's City Charter requires a review of the downtown plan every five years, but this was the first time a revision of the plan was developed in an open process.

Dubbed a "Design in Public," the project consisted of a series of discussion and design sessions held over a month-long period this summer. Committees were then formed to take the ideas suggested by the public and incorporate them into an overall vision plan.

Coordinated by Rachel Flynn, director of the city's Department of Community Development, and Deputy Director Brook Hardin, the planning process was managed by the Florida-based urban design firm Dover, Kohl & Partners.

Most of the dozens of people who spoke Jan. 15 supported the plan, which calls for the James River to be the foundation on which Richmond can build its identity and economic and aesthetic future.

Long recognized as the city's most important natural resource, the river already physically defines the city, even as city planners throughout the 20th century allowed it to become obscured by industrial development.

Most recently, the James has been threatened by proposals that would plopp private luxury high-rise buildings and gated parks right on its edge, effectively removing it from public access. The new, revised downtown plan seeks to emphatically put an end to that possibility.

Other components of the revised plan include regional cooperation; pedestrian-friendly and disabled-accessible street/sidewalk design; the elimination of most one-way streets; bike lanes and parking; smart street-front retail with residential units above; underground parking; more trees; and many more parks.

Given the fact that the overwhelming majority of those present at the hearing were white, it was encouraging how many people brought up the lack of attention paid to such critical issues as housing in adjacent areas. One speaker mentioned his frustration that the downtown boundaries included Oregon Hill but not Carver — two neighborhoods both adjacent to VCU properties, and Manchester but not Blackwell, neighborhoods that are both located just south of the river.

Some speakers mentioned the impending redevelopment of public housing neighborhoods such as Gilpin Court, just north of downtown, saying that communities of families are being threatened by the lack of a transparent transition plan. At least two people insisted that one-to-one replacement of these low-income housing units be provided to those forced to move during the demolition and reconstruction period.

One of the very few Black people present was Cora Hayes, a resident of the Fairfield Court public housing neighborhood and a longtime tenants rights activist. She reminded the commission that the plan by the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority to redevelop more than 700 nearby public housing units into mixed-income residential properties endangers the housing of hundreds of poor, Black families. Hayes also urged the commission to ensure that the transition plan includes one-to-one housing unit replacement for households displaced during the redevelopment process.

The few voices raised against the plan seemed to be most concerned that their private interests would be affected.

Allen Shaia, who identified himself as representing the majority owners of Mayo Island, was concerned about the emphasis on increasing green spaces that includes turning Mayo Island into public parkland. Shaia stated he believed that private owners would be better caretakers than the city of this important river-island real estate.

Brian Unger, head of Virginia Commonwealth University Facilities Management, fretted over the potential loss to VCU of control of street planning as their own master planning evolves to meet the perceived needs of its student population.

Jack Berry, executive director of Venture Richmond (formerly Richmond Renaissance), was very specific in identifying what bothered him. While apparently otherwise pleased with the plan's development process and its vision for Richmond's future, he complained of what he called its "proscriptive language" that he said seemed to dictate absolutes about such things as changing all one-way streets to two-way streets.

Berry also objected to the way in which all apparently undeveloped sites were to become green spaces. He called for a property-by-property assessment of appropriate use.

At base, the opposition seemed most interested in preserving its right to do business-as-usual, without hindrance.

Lawrence Williams, architect and candidate in the 2004 at-large mayoral election, expressed support for the development of green spaces for improving the urban landscape for all residents.

Thankfully absent from the proposed Master Plan is any mention of building a commercial sports stadium and entertainment complex in Shockoe Bottom, one of the country's most notorious former slave markets.

That scheme was defeated after mass opposition by nearby neighborhood associations, preservationists like the group A.C.O.R.N., and the Defenders, who opposed what they called the desecration of Sacred Ground.

The Richmond Downtown Master Plan can be viewed online on the city's Web site: www.RichmondGov.com/DownTownMasterPlan.aspx

DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN DISTRICT MEETINGS

The City of Richmond Planning Commission invites interested members of the public to continue the discussion on the Draft Downtown Master Plan. All are welcome to attend focused sessions on Downtown Districts:

Manchester (Manchester, Blackwell)
Thurs., Jan. 31, 6-8 p.m.,
The Bankuet Place, 1129 Hull St.

VCU and Downtown Neighborhoods (Monroe Ward, Oregon Hill, Carver)
Mon., Feb. 4, 6-8:00 p.m., William Byrd Community House, 224 S. Cherry St.

Shockoe Bottom, Shockoe Slip
Thurs. Feb. 7, 6-8 p.m.,
Main Street Station, 1500 E. Main St.

Broad Street, Jackson Ward
Tues., Feb. 12, 6-8 p.m., Jackson Ctr.,
Building/DHCD Board Room
501 N. 2nd St.

James River, Islands, Riverfront
Tues., Feb. 19, 6-8 p.m., Main Library,
101 E. Franklin St.

City Center (VCU Med. Center, Capitol Area, Biotech Park, Central Office District)
Wed., Feb. 20, 6-8 p.m., City Hall, 5th floor conference room, 900 E. Broad St.

Copies of the draft plan are available at all Richmond library branches and community centers and online at www.richmondgov.com/departments/communityDev.

NEWS U CAN USE

African-American Men's Health Forum '08

Free health screenings and lunch. 9 a.m. - 3 p.m., Sat., Feb. 16, Downtown Marriott, Richmond. Sponsored by the American Cancer Society. To register: (804) 527-3795 or www.cancerhealthforums.org.

Firewood for the needy

Many families in Metro Richmond rely on firewood as a home heating fuel. A significant number are not able to acquire that fuel on their own. **Project W.A.R.M.** endeavors to relieve that burden for as many of our less fortunate neighbors as possible. All requests must go through The Salvation Army. For applications and/or information, call (804) 225-7470.

Advice for fathers

Classes on how to be an effective father are now being offered at the Hotchkiss Community Center, 701 E. Brookland Park Blvd. on North Side. The classes are held Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6 to 7:30 p.m. The program is a partnership between **Father Focus** and the **Richmond Department of Parks, Recreation & Community Facilities**. New fathers, father figures, uncles, grandfathers and stepfathers are invited to attend. Information: (804) 397-3339; e-mail: cjones@FatherFocusRichmond.org; Web site: www.FatherFocusRichmond.org.

Umpires wanted

Richmond Parks & Rec is seeking an organization to provide umpires to officiate at its youth baseball and softball games. The department's baseball season runs from April through June with umpires typically officiating at several games on weeknights and Saturdays. All umpires will be paid and must be certified by Little League or the Virginia High School League. The deadline to apply is Feb. 8. Information: (804) 646-1208 or (804) 646-1175.

Calhoun water aerobics

Richmond Parks & Rec is now offering adult water aerobics classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays at the Calhoun indoor swimming pool, 436 Calhoun St. Classes are from 7 to 8 p.m. and cost \$25 for two months. Registration is on site and no advance registration is required. Information: (804) 646-1174.

Help with college financial aid forms

Feb. 16 is "Super Saturday," the day the **Virginia Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators** will offer college-bound students free assistance in completing the form (FAFSA) required by colleges, universities and private career schools to qualify for federal grants and loans. Financial aid professionals will be available from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at 25 sites throughout Virginia. A workshop that explains the federal and state financial aid process will be followed by a Question & Answer period. A \$100 Book Scholarship will be awarded at each site to be used at the winner's college of choice during the 2008-09 academic year. Open to parents and students of all grade levels, as well as adult students. Information, including what material to bring and the location of the Super Saturday sites: www.virginiacan.org/file/downloads/vasfaasupersaturdayrevised.doc. Or contact Suzanne Angheloni at (412) 953-4780; s.angheloni@afclending.com; or Mary Gore at (434) 797-8429; mgore@dcc.vccs.edu.

City Jobs

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community news

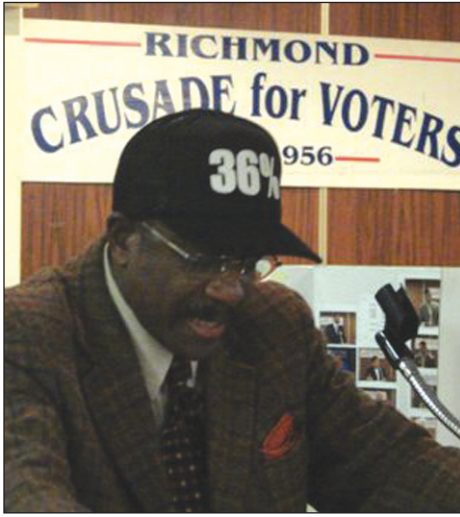


Photo by M. Ashton Cramer

The Rev. Rayfield Vines Jr., president of the Virginia State Conference NAACP, addresses the Richmond Crusade for Voters.

New Va. NAACP Pres. explains 2008 priorities

By Phil Wilayto

“We ought to call a moratorium on building prisons and hospitals!”

That was one suggestion offered by the newly elected president of the Virginia State NAACP. The Rev. Dr. Rayfield Vines III was addressing the January meeting of the Richmond Crusade for Voters.

His reasoning for a moratorium? Once a prison is built, he said, there’s financial pressure to arrest and incarcerate people.

And hospitals?

“They won’t be interested in keeping people well, as much as keeping their beds full!” he declared.

It was Jan. 15, the 79th anniversary of the birth of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Rev. Vines, who is also pastor of Hungary Road Baptist Church in Henrico County, was explaining his organization’s priorities for the 2008 session of the Virginia General Assembly.

At the top of the list, he said, was restoring voting rights for convicted felons.

“There are 377,000 disenfranchised people in Virginia,” Rev. Vines told the audience, which included four members of Richmond City Council, two members of the Richmond School Board and two state representatives, among other public officials.

Challenging members of the Crusade to



Photo by Phil Wilayto

NAACP brings demands to Va. Capitol

King Salim Khalfani, executive director of the Virginia State Conference NAACP (in cap), addresses a statewide gathering of NAACP branch members outside the General Assembly Building on Richmond’s Capitol Square. The Jan. 21 rally, called to draw attention to the civil rights organization’s 2008 legislative agenda, was followed by a day of lobbying with House and Senate legislators.

take up this issue, Rev. Vines explained that most disenfranchised Virginians are people of color, and most of those are Black men.

Demonstrating another top NAACP priority for the current General Assembly session, Rev. Vines donned a black baseball cap with “36%” emblazoned on the front in big white letters. That percentage is the cap on interest payments the NAACP wants to see imposed on so-called “payday loans.”

“The lenders say they can’t make any money with a 36 percent cap,” Rev. Vines said. “Well, if that’s true, then they ought to get out of the business!”

Another major issue for the statewide civil rights organization is making sure all students are being taught to read. “Teach students to read and they can teach themselves,” the NAACP president declared.

Hear an interview with Rev. Vines - Noon Monday



Feb. 4
DefendersLIVE!
with your host
Ana Edwards
WRIR 97.3 FM
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But Rev. Vines clearly intended to do more than just report on a legislative agenda – he was there to inspire his audience to action.

“It’s not enough to pay your \$10 (annual dues), be a member of the Richmond Crusade for Voters and go down and vote,” he declared. “If we don’t organize these communities, know who is registered and get them to the polls, you’re wasting your time.

“Numbers matter – and you’ve got to have a passion! Even as I speak, the hands of the clock are turning backwards!”

Rev. King left a legacy, the Henrico County pastor said. “Our challenge is to discover our own legacy, our own light.”

Rev. King was somebody, he said, but “it’s not enough to be something. We must do something!”

“Some of you are going to take in this information, feel good, go home and sit down and do nothing. You’ve got to do something!”

And in the end, we have to leave something behind, Rev. Vines said.

“Leave something in this world that was not here when you came,” he told his audience. “Martin Luther King left something. He left a movement that believed ‘We Shall Overcome!’ He left human decency!”

“You too have a light, and it’s up to you to let it shine!”

The Richmond Crusade for Voters meets on the third Tuesday of each month at the Military Retirees Club, 2220 Sledd St. Meetings are open to members and nonmembers.

The next meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m., Tuesday, Feb. 19.

our working lives



Photo by Ana Edwards

Building Unity — About 30 members of the newly formed People of Color Coalition gather on Capitol Square in a display of unity. The Jan. 21 rally was called to demand capping the payday loan interest rate at 36%; passing the Earned Second Chance Bill that would allow ex-offenders rehabilitation, education and preparation for a return to productive lives after prison terms; opposing discriminatory legislation aimed at criminalizing immigrant peoples; ending racial profiling; and granting federal recognition to the six currently unrecognized Virginia Indian tribes that have been seeking it for the last eight years. The event was coordinated in part by Cathy Woodson of the Virginia Organizing Project and Chief Kenneth Adams of the Upper Mattaponi tribe.

Durham sanitation workers walk, force payment of holiday pay

By Phil Wilayto

It was Jan. 4, the first payday after the holidays, and the 75 city sanitation workers in Durham, N.C., were missing their holiday pay.

So they did what any self-respecting worker would do: they went out on strike.

“The workers had expected that their pay for New Year’s or Christmas would be in their checks, and it wasn’t, so they refused to drive their trucks out,” said Saladin Muhammad, regional director for the United Electrical Workers Union (UE). UE has been organizing city and state workers in Virginia and North Carolina, including sanitation workers in Durham.

At first management responded to the strike by saying the workers would have to wait till the next payday to get their holiday money. But the sanitation workers stood firm and vowed not to go out until they got their checks.

“So management brought down the assistant city manager to appeal to them to go back to work,” Muhammad told the Defender. “At first he made a threat, said if they didn’t go back to work they could get in trouble. Then they sent down the big honchos to promise they would have the checks cut by the end of the shift.”

But still the workers refused to drive. After about two hours, management agreed to pay them first.

No one was fired for the action.

Although the strike was spontaneous, some of the workers belong to UE Local 150, and they called the union. Organizers were immediately sent to the job site and began meeting with the strikers.

“What we found out was that management hadn’t paid anyone the holiday pay – not the police, the firefighters, anybody,” said Muhammad. “But when the sanitation workers struck, everybody got paid. The sanitation workers are on the bottom, but their action benefited everyone.”

Of the approximately 75 workers in the Sanitation Department, about 70 are Black.

“The workers recognized that they had



Photo by Phil Wilayto

UE Regional Director Saladin Muhammad

to exercise some power for management to respond to them,” Muhammad said.

The following Monday, the workers and union organizers had a follow-up meeting and voted to initiate a campaign to demand an efficient policy on overtime pay. “Also,” Muhammad explained, “they wanted the right to grieve (contest) all acts of discipline.”

Another issue brought up at the meeting was the suspension of 124 workers who allegedly had been late in paying their city property taxes. Like any other late taxpayers, those workers had had their wages garnished or liens placed on their property, but they also were suspended without pay.

“It was double jeopardy,” Muhammad said.

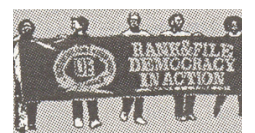
So now the sanitation workers had three demands: an official policy on paying holiday pay on time; the right to grieve disciplinary actions; and a reversal of the 124 suspensions imposed for late payment of city taxes.

The sanitation workers are now pressing those demands by collecting signatures on a petition directed to management.



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BLACK HISTORY EVENTS IN THE RICHMOND/TIDEWATER AREA - Compiled by Jamilah LeCruise

RICHMOND

Mondays, Jan. 28, Feb. 4, Feb. 11

Presentations on 20th Century African-American Artists

In celebration of Black History Month, the Richmond Department of Parks, Recreation & Community Facilities will present a series of talks on African-American artists by Kathryn Reid at Pine Camp Arts and Community Center, the department's award-winning cultural arts facility at 4901 Old Brook Road. Reid is a retired art teacher who taught for Richmond Public Schools and Virginia Union University. She has had a personal interest in African-American artists for many years and was personally acquainted with John Biggers, the subject of her first talk. Registration for one or all three sessions is \$5 per person or \$10 per family. To register, call the art department at 646-3674.

Mon., Jan. 28, 7-8:30 p.m. — **The Visual Language of John Biggers** — Learn how the artist incorporated African symbols and images from his childhood to create paintings and murals.

Mon., Feb. 4, 7-8:30 p.m. — **Painters from the Harlem Renaissance Era** — View and discuss the works of Harlem Renaissance painters, including Palmer Hayden, Archibald Motley, Aaron Douglas, William H. Johnson, and others.

Mon., Feb. 11, 7-8:30 p.m. — **Four Women** — Meet four women who worked in a field that was dominated by men. Augusta Savage, Meta Warwick Fuller, Selma Burke, and Elizabeth Catlett all made extraordinary contributions in the field of sculpture.

Fri., Feb. 1, 6-9 p.m.

“Tell Me Where You’re Marching, Tell Me Where You’re Bound”

Opening reception for a photography exhibit of former slave trade sites by guest curator and photographer Shanna Merola. Valentine Richmond History Center, Stern Gallery, 1015 E. Clay St. Free. Contact: (804) 649-0711; www.richmondhistorycenter.com/index.asp.

Fri., Feb. 1, 6 p.m.

“The Divine Lines”

Art Exhibition by Darrick Claibourne. Music by Shadee and the Bush League. Open mic.



“Jazz at Takoma Station,” Joseph Holston. Photo courtesy Elegba Folklore Society.

Propaganda Gallery and Studio, 101 E. Leigh St. Contact: Ralph Hawkins - (804) 253-4053 or mspace.com/thepropaganda1.

Additional Events at the Propaganda:

Fri., Feb. 8 — Richmond Youth Art Show
Mon., Feb. 18 — Veganism Event
Fri., Feb. 29 — African Diaspora Social

Sun., Feb. 10, 2-3 p.m.

“Tell Me Where You’re Marching, Tell Me Where You’re Bound”

Exhibit Talk. Valentine Richmond History Center, Stern Gallery, 1015 E. Clay St. Free. Contact: (804) 649-0711; www.richmondhistorycenter.com/index.asp.

Tues., Feb. 12, 7:30-9 p.m.

“Richmond Women in the Civil Rights Movement”

Panel discussion with civil rights activists Ora Lomax, Elizabeth Johnson Rice and Hilda Warden. Commonwealth Ballroom Monroe Park Campus, VCU Student Commons 907 Floyd Ave. Sponsored by Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries. Contact: Donna E. Coghill - (804) 828-6554.

Sat., Feb. 16, 1-4 p.m.

Historic Richmond African-American Heritage Tours

Valentine Richmond History Center, 1015 E. Clay St. Admission: \$20 adults, \$17 members and children 6-12. Limited space, reserve early. Contact: (804) 649-0711, ext. 301.

Sun., Feb. 17, 2-4 p.m.

UR Black History Program

Annual student-organized program. Alice Haynes Room, Tyler Haynes Commons Building, University of Richmond. Sponsored by the UR Office of Multicultural Affairs. Contact: Adraine Kennedy - (804) 289-8032 or akenned@richmond.edu.

Sat., Feb. 23, 2 p.m.

“Harriet Tubman: The Chosen One”

Professional actress and historian Gwendolyn Briley-Strand brings to life the courageous story of Harriet Tubman in a stirring 45-minute performance. American Civil War Center at Historic Tredegar, 500 Tredegar

St. Admission Fee: \$8 Adults \$4 children. Information: (804) 780-1865; e-mail: info@tredegar.org; Web site: www.tredegar.org.

Ongoing:

“Colors in Black”

Beautifully framed posters and prints by celebrated artists. Plus artifacts, dolls, instruments, cards, books, wearable art, oils and shea butter. Through Feb. 29. Gallery tours available. First Fridays ArtWalk: 7-10 p.m., Feb. 1. Also 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Mon.-Fri.; noon-4 p.m. Sat. and by appointment. Elegba Folklore Society Cultural Center, 101 E. Broad St. Information: (804) 644-3900 or www.efsinc.org.

“Tell Me Where You’re Marching, Tell Me Where You’re Bound”

Photography of former slave trade sites by guest curator and photographer Shanna Merola. Sponsored by the Valentine Richmond History Center, Stern Gallery, 1015 E. Clay St. Open Jan. 31-Aug. 31, Tues.-Sat., 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sun. noon.-5 p.m.; closed Mon. Admission: \$10, \$5 members. Contact: (804) 649-0711; www.richmondhistorycenter.com/index.asp.

Visit Historic Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church

14 W. Duval St. Established 1867. Tour, bookstore and luncheons. Call to schedule. Contact: (804) 648-7511 or www.smzbc.org.

NORFOLK

Thurs., Feb. 21, 6 p.m.

“Blackegorie”

Black History Month Jeopardy Lecture by NaOim Akbar, pioneer and psychologist in the development of an African-American-centered approach in modern psychology. ODU Webb Center, Norfolk. Sponsored by Old Dominion University. Information: www.odu.edu.

Tues., Feb. 26

Annual ODU Black History Month Performance

Dance Theater Program. 10 a.m.-noon and 8 p.m.-10 p.m., Norfolk State Theater, 700 Park Ave. Sponsored by Norfolk State

University Dance Department. Contact: Rhonda King at Ranking@nsu.edu.

Wed., Feb. 27, noon-1 p.m.

“African American Pioneers: Creating a Legacy of Help that Informed the Profession of Social Work”

Lecture Presented by Colita Nichols Fairfax. Brown Memorial Hall, B-126, 700 Park Ave. Sponsored by Norfolk State University. Contact: Beverly Murphy - (757) 823-8373 or www.nsu.edu.

Thurs., Feb. 28, 7 p.m.

Black History Month Lecture

ODU Webb Center, Norfolk. Sponsored by Old Dominion University.

HAMPTON

Sun., Feb. 3, 4 p.m.

80th Annual Faculty Recital Series

Performance by Dr. Marvin Western, clarinet. Hampton University Memorial Church, 530 E. Queen St. Sponsored by the Hampton University Music Department. Contact: Shelia J. Maye - (757) 728-6508.

Feb. 8, 2008 – July 26, 2008

“New Power Generation 2008: A National Juried Exhibition”

A national competition for contemporary art by people of African descent, organized by the Hampton University Museum. This year's juror is Napoleon Jones-Henderson, a mixed-media artist whose career as an artist and educator spans more than 30 years. Member of AfriCobra (African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists) since 1969. Currently executive director of the Research Institute of African and African Diaspora Arts, Inc., in Roxbury, Ma., and an associate professor of art at Benedict College, Columbia, S.C. For a prospectus, contact Vanessa Thaxton-Ward - (757) 727-5508; e-mail: vanessa.thaxton-ward@hamptonu.edu.

Ongoing:

Center for African American Life & History

Located on the second floor of the Hampton University Museum, the center is a reading reference room that focuses on African-American books and literature donated by the Tidewater Chapters of The Links, Inc. HU sophomores will serve as docents every Tuesday and Thursday from 10-2 p.m. Contact: Vanessa Thaxton-Ward - (757) 727-5508; e-mail: vanessa.thaxton-ward@hamptonu.edu.

FREDERICKSBURG

Wed., Feb. 6, 7 p.m.

Lecture by Jeffrey Johnson

Host and producer of The Cousin Jeff Chronicles on BET and former president of the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network. Woodard Campus Center Great Hall, University of Mary Washington, 1301 College Ave. A Cultural Awareness Series event. Free. Information: (540) 654-1044 or www.umw.edu.

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In our opinion

Combating the bull

The title of the half-page op-ed in the Jan. 27 edition of Richmond's daily newspaper was startling: "Combating the Trends: Military Service Can Alleviate What Ails Black America."

Written by Petersburg resident and U.S. Army Major Miles B. Caggins III, the piece was an energetic promotion for enlisting in the U.S. military, aimed at young African-American men.

"Now, more than ever," Major Caggins argued, "is a good time for black men to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by the military — particularly the Army. Service in the Army directly addresses most of the social plagues in the black community: education, health care, economic status, homeownership, and crime."

Then comes the kicker: Since the integration of the Armed Forces in 1948, Major Caggins argues, "... most positive gains made in the status of black Americans can be directly attributed to men who served in the military."

So much for the contributions of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X and Huey Newton — let alone Fannie Lou Hamer and the hundreds of thousands of Black women whose "service" was in the Civil Rights and Black Liberation movements.

The major can be forgiven a bit of hyperbole. After all, although the daily newspaper didn't mention it, Major Caggins, according to the (Petersburg) Progress-Index, is pursuing a masters degree in Public Relations at Georgetown University, a course of studies funded by the Army Advanced Civil Schooling program. Let's hope he at least received academic credit for the op-ed piece.

Of course, it's true that the military has long been a way for young working-class men, and increasingly women, to advance themselves in U.S. society — particularly young Black men. By the early '70s, the height of the Vietnam War, some 85 percent of all Black-owned homes had been purchased with loans made possible by the GI Bill, which also helped many veterans go to college.

But it's also true that many of the "social plagues" afflicting the Black community today can be directly or indirectly attributed to the effects of the Vietnam War itself.

By the late '70s, one third of all U.S. prisoners were Vietnam-era veterans, as were nearly half of all homeless men. Physical injuries and post-traumatic stress wreaked havoc with many lives, both of veterans and their families. Violent crime surged. The waves of returning vets, Black, Brown and white, were met with rising unemployment caused by the shift from a manufacturing to a service-base economy, plus the widespread distribution of hard drugs in low-income communities, itself a spin-off of the war.

This is not to denigrate or disrespect the efforts of those who have served in the military. Far from it. Many veterans have gone on to play critical leadership roles in uplifting the community.

But today is the wrong time for anyone — let alone young Black men — to be joining the military.

The military and the Bush Administration are in a tight spot. The country is bogged down in a brutal, unpopular war that has no end in sight. Having invaded Iraq on the basis of arguments that were at best were mistaken and at worst outright lies, President Bush and Vice President Cheney are now pushing for a military confrontation with Iran — an effort based on lies every bit as blatant as those they told to get us into Iraq.

Meanwhile, those who have joined the military are facing repeated and extended tours. Nearly 4,000 GIs have lost their lives. That's the official number — the Department of Defense doesn't count those who die of their wounds after being evacuated from Iraq.

The number of wounded is approaching 29,000. At least one in eight vets report some level of post-traumatic stress disorder, a condition that they and their families will be dealing with for years to come, and perhaps the rest of their lives.

And, as of Jan. 10, the DoD reports 153 GIs have committed suicide, while in Iraq.

No wonder recruitment is down, particularly in the Black community, despite increasingly generous signing and re-enlistment bonuses.

It's one thing to risk your life defending your country. It's another to risk it to expand the Empire.

Need a job? Trucking firms are crying for drivers. Join the Peace Corps. Flip hamburgers while you work your way through community college.

But don't join the military. We need you too much.



Letters to the Editor

Thank you

I pray this letter finds you in good health and spirit. I am writing this brief letter to inform you that I'm aware of you publishing the letter I sent you in the September/October issue of The Richmond Defender. I just want to say thank you. I really appreciate your help. Hopefully the article will bring us additional help/support in our struggle for equal rights and justice.

Ras-Solomon Tafari
STATE FARM

Editor's Note: Ras-Solomon Tafari is one of a group of Virginia prisoners who have endured more than eight years of 23-hour-a-day segregation because, as Rastafarians, they refuse to cut their hair. If there is an attorney out there interested in looking into this case, please contact the Defender and we will put you in touch with Brother Tafari.

Anti-Racists confront white supremacists in Jena

When a Mississippi-based white-supremacist group called the Nationalist Movement announced plans to

hold an armed march in Jena, La., on Dr. Martin Luther King's holiday this year, anti-racists from across the country responded. Hundreds traveled to that small town where, joined by local residents, both white and Black, they rallied against the racists, far outnumbering the 20 or so racists.

The commercial news media reported that only about 40 anti-racists showed up. For a video showing the true numbers, log onto:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6dV92TatJ2A#GU5U2spHI_4

A friend
RALEIGH, N.C.

"Power of Forgiveness"

I am writing to ask you for your help in promoting the film "The Power of Forgiveness" by Martin Doblmeier of Journey Films. It will be shown at the Virginia Holocaust Museum, 2000 E. Cary St., Richmond, VA 23223 (804-257-5400) on Sunday, Feb. 10, at 2 p.m. There is free admission and plenty of free parking. There will be a discussion following the movie with Martin Doblmeier and Dr. Everett Worthington, a VCU Psychology professor featured in the film. This

movie approaches the subject of forgiveness from an interfaith perspective, looking at current events on a national and a personal level.

For your information, the following organizations have given a financial contribution to the showing of this film: The Virginia Holocaust Museum, St. Edward the Confessor Parish, The Catholic Diocese of Richmond, Saint Mary Parish, Church of the Epiphany, Interfaith Council of Greater Richmond, Church of the Redeemer, Saint Joan of Arc parish, Richmond Peace Education Center, Refugee and Immigration Services, Transformation Retreats, Inc., Virginia Interfaith Center, The Kemba Smith Foundation.

This film was shown in Blacksburg after the Tech shootings. Over 400 people attended and it began a much needed process of healing for them.

Colleen P. Barranger
Associate Director of Domestic Issues
Office of Justice and Peace
Catholic Diocese of Richmond
RICHMOND

The Richmond Defender

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We welcome letters, while reserving the right to edit for clarity, length and style. To submit a letter to the editor or an item for the Community Calendar or to place an ad, contact:

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RRHA Continued from page 1

same number of low-income units?

When this reporter asked Dixon that question, the answer was not reassuring.

"Understand that one-for-one replacement is no longer a requirement for housing authorities across the nation," Dixon said. However, she added, "what's equally important is that we are committed to our 4,100 units that we currently have. We're looking at reconfiguration."

Sheila Hill-Christian, Mayor L. Douglas Wilder's new chief administrative officer, recently told the city's daily paper that "Some units of [Gilpin Court's] public housing will have to go to another place."

And Hill-Christian should know: she was RRHA's executive director when the authority was preparing its current five-year strategic plan.

That plan, posted on the agency's Web site (www.rrha.org), clearly lays out the agency's intentions:

"Gilpin, require[s] a detailed redevelopment, including selective demolition, and rehabilitation as a mixed-use and mixed-income development."

The plan makes clear why Gilpin's 783 units are in danger: "The Gilpin development has an excellent location and redevelopment potential into a mixed use, mixed income neighborhood." The plan calls the community "a prime location close to employment, city attractions, desirable shopping/restaurant areas [and] stable neighborhoods."

The implication is clear: the land that Gilpin sits on is just too valuable for poor folks.

(Note: Gilpin residents may be poor, but that doesn't mean they aren't working. According to a Demographics Profile posted

on the RRHA Web site, only 150 of Gilpin's 760 households rely on public assistance as their major source of income. Fully 240 have someone working, while 216 — the elderly and disabled — rely on Social Security.)

Another reason for concern is the city's experience with "redevelopment."

Blackwell was a public housing community just off Hull Street on the city's South Side. Before it was "redeveloped," it had 440 units, with the rent capped at a percentage of the residents' income.

Some 83 percent of those units — 365 — were torn down but not replaced.

Today, in the new Blackwell, only 75 units have rents set as a percentage of a resident's income.

RRHA has sought to win corporate backing for its redevelopment plans for Gilpin Court. The Virginia Biotechnology Research Park and Philip Morris USA helped fund a 2006 "redevelopment strategy" for the neighborhood.

That makes sense, since both institutions will be looking for nearby housing for their well-paid employees.

Last October, Mayor Wilder scheduled a meeting to publicly reveal the details of this redevelopment plan. But the meeting was canceled and has not been rescheduled.

On Oct. 17, the mayor's press secretary, Linwood Norman, was quoted in *Style Weekly* as saying that "There's behind-the-scenes planning going on, but the meeting was to kick that off."

Four months later, whatever behind-the-scenes planning is going on still has not been made public.

Officially, RRHA maintains that nothing specific is in the works. "There is no master planning process for Gilpin at this time," Dixon told the Defender. "There is not a firm timeline."

However, she said, "[Revitalizing Gilpin] is on our agenda, we're continuing to engage the [Richmond Tenants Organization] as well as residents, as well as the city."

Richmond City Council President William J. Pantele represents the 2nd District, which includes Gilpin Court. He told the Defender that, whatever plans are made, he would "make

sure the human element is given due respect."

"I've represented Gilpin Court for a while now," Pantele said. "I spend time there, I know a lot of people there, they're just the same as me and you.

"These are their homes, in some cases they've been there a long time. And so the swirl of rumor, or news reports, and occasionally very heavy-handed statements relating to their homes is terrifying to them, frankly. So I've made it really clear to the Housing Authority that as we move forward, it's going to be done in the right way and no other way."

For Pantele, that means advocating "one-for-one replacement" — replacing every unit of public housing with another unit managed with the same income-based rent plans.

But winning that demand may take a fight.

"I've not heard anything from the city administration about one-for-one replacement at

Gilpin Continued from page 1

We told Ms. Colley the Defenders want to hold a meeting in the neighborhood so residents can discuss the future of Gilpin Court. She said she would be glad to come, and would tell her neighbors.

Next we spoke with Ms. Shirley Williams, who was in a rush to get to work but took a few minutes to talk. Sister Dieyah explained that the city was planning on turning Gilpin into a "mixed-income" community.

Ms. Williams' facial expression showed that she was unaware of the city's plans.

"Oh, I didn't know that," she said. "What else do we have to deal with? Well, thank you, and I will try to make the meeting."

Another person we spoke with

was Keynen Neville, a young man who grew up in Gilpin. Once Sister Dieyah shared her history of freedom fighting, and I shared the importance of the youth becoming involved in civil rights issues, the spark became ignited.

"I will be there and will tell my people about this," he said. "Yeah, please call me!"

We moved on, meeting more residents and informing them of the plight on the horizon.

Sister Dieyah spotted a friend, Sally Coles, with whom she has a lot of history, and the two stopped to "catch up on old times."

I came upon a middle-aged man by the name of Ralph Faggins and explained what the future might hold for Gilpin Court. His response was, "Well, this is to be expected." He was very willing to provide contact information, so we could keep him abreast of developments.

Next we met Angia Johnson, a young lady carrying her food items to her home. Sister Dieyah discussed with Ms. Johnson the future plans for Gilpin Court.

Ms. Johnson's mouth opened in utter disbelief. She had been totally unaware of the city's plans.

"I have a family and don't know what to do," she said. "I can't believe this!"

Dieyah's compassion provided comfort for the distraught young lady.

One block later, we encountered Pamela Donawa and two gentlemen heavily engaged in conversation. There was mixed emotion when Dieyah and I shared the news. The three listened intently to the information provided, then Ms. Donawa said, "Oooh, that is messed up. See, they're always doing stuff like this. I don't know why they keep doing this to us. I just put my daughter into college. Now, I've got to worry about this."

All three said they were eager to attend a meeting and share their thoughts and feelings with city officials.

The biggest question we heard from the residents of Gilpin Court was "Why? Why are they doing this to us?"

Once the community meeting is conducted, the legitimate and sincere concerns of the community can be addressed.

from the anti-war front

RICHMOND — March 19 will mark the fifth anniversary of the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Iraq. At their January bimonthly statewide meeting, members of the **Virginia Anti-War Network (VAWN)** decided to mark the date with a public forum to be called "**Stop the Wars, at Home & Abroad.**" Speakers will report on labor, community and immigrant struggles here at home and explain how these issues are impacted by the war. Among those scheduled to speak are **Lillie Branch-Kennedy**, director of the prisoner advocacy group **R.I.H.D. (Resource Information Help for the Disadvantaged)**; **United Electrical Workers Union Local 160**; and the **Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality**. The forum is scheduled for 7 p.m. Wednesday, March 19, at Asbury United Methodist Church, 423 N. 29th St. in Richmond's Church Hill neighborhood. Information: (804) 644-5834 or e-mail DefendersFJE@hotmail.com.

WASHINGTON, D.C. — **Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW)** has announced plans for "**Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan**," from March 13 to 16. The event, to be held in Washington, D.C., "will assemble the largest gathering of U.S. veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan in history, as well as Iraqi and Afghan survivors," according to IVAW. The purpose is "to offer first-hand, eyewitness accounts to tell the truth about these occupations — their impact on the troops, their families," the United States "and the people of Iraq and Afghanistan." Information: www.ivaw.org/wintersoldier.

United for Peace & Justice has called for **Mass Non-Violent Direct Action Against the War** for March 19 in D.C. Information: www.5yearstoomany.org/march19dc.

Forty-five people, including **John Downing** of Northern Virginia, **Nancy Gowen** of Richmond and **Bill Frankel-Streit** of Louisa, were arrested Jan. 11 for disrupting business as usual at the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington, D.C. The protesters were part of a demonstration on behalf of **prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay**, some of whom have been incarcerated for six years without trial. About 300 people joined organizers from **Amnesty International** and **Witness Against Torture** in this second annual attempt to get the U.S. legal system to recognize the rights of Guantanamo detainees. In addition to those arrested inside, 37 people were arrested outside on the Supreme Court steps.

BLACKSBURG — An **Anti-War Vigil** is planned for Feb. 1 from 5 to 6 p.m. in front of the Blacksburg post office on Main Street. Sponsored by the **Coalition for Justice**. (Note: the coalition has a standing permit to vigil at this site on the first Friday of each month through May.) Information: cjlist@list-serv.bburg.bev.net or marbarbou@aol.com.

ROANOKE — **Heather Brutz** of the **Friends Committee on National Legislation** is scheduled to speak Jan. 28 at Roanoke College on the U.S. government's use of torture and how ordinary people can work to end that practice. The program is co-sponsored by the **Plowshare Peace Center**, the **Roanoke Quaker Outreach Committee** and **SAGE**. Information call Plowshare at (540) 989-0393.

Anti-death-penalty activist **Sister Helen Prejean** will speak March 12, 7:30 p.m., at the Wortman Ballroom, Roanoke College. Book signing to follow. Free. Sponsored by Plowshare Peace Center.

On Feb.

9, Plowshare will hold a **Truth-in-Recruiting Workshop** from 1:30 to 5 p.m. at its office, 1719 Grandin Rd. Cost is \$10 or whatever you can afford.

Feb. 16: Plowshare will hold its **Monthly Silent Peace**

Vigil from noon to 1 p.m. in front of the City Market building in downtown Roanoke.

NORFOLK — Norfolk's **Naro Expanded Theater** (www.narocinema.com) continues to be a venue for both progressive films and speakers. Recent programs have featured **Razmy Baroud**, editor of the online news journal www.palestinechronicle.com and author of "The Second Palestinian Intifada: Chronicle of a People's Struggle;" **Jeremy Scahill**, author of "Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army;" and **David Swanson** of **AfterDowningStreet.org**, who shared his experiences working with Dennis Kucinich's presidential campaign.

Author, activist and two-time Nobel Peace Prize nominee **Kathy Kelly**, founder of **Voices in the Wilderness** and **Voices for Creative Non-Violence**, visited Norfolk in December.

In December, more than 1,200 people attended Norfolk's sixth annual **Fair Trade Festival**, which opened the third annual "**Peace Festival – Light in the Dark**," co-sponsored by the **Tidewater Peace Alliance** and the **Naro Theater**.

On Jan. 21, 1,000 people marched in downtown Norfolk to honor Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. VAWN activist **John Long** distributed fliers with an update in the case of U.S. political prisoner **Mumia Abu-Jamal**.

Tom Palumbo of Norfolk, a founding member of VAWN and also a member of **Veterans for Peace**, is working on opening a GI coffeehouse, to be called **Off-Base**. The project will offer support services to GIs transitioning from the military back to civilian life. Plans for the nonprofit space include free Wi-Fi, fair trade coffee, a meeting space, lending library and short-term housing.

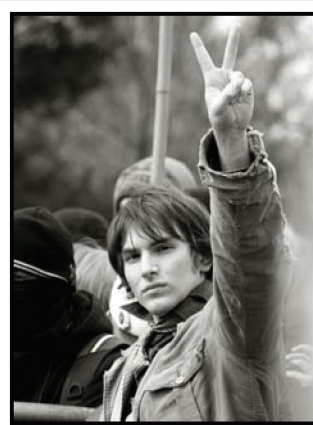
NORTH CAROLINA — Seven anti-war activists were arrested in October on the property of **Blackwater, Inc.** in North Carolina for re-enacting a massacre committed by Blackwater's private soldiers in Iraq. About 50 supporters of the protest lined the road leading to Blackwater, holding banners and reading a statement. **Catholic Worker** activists **Steve Baggerly** of Norfolk and **Bill Frankel-Streit** of Louisa were among those arrested, along with **Mary Graber-Grace** of Madison, Va., who was taken unto custody when she crossed the line into Blackwater property and knelt in prayer as the others were arrested. The seven were tried Dec. 5 in Moyock, N.C. All defendants were found guilty and decided to appeal the charges in order to obtain a jury trial. After a three-day jury trial, the group was again found guilty on Jan. 24 and sentenced to time served.

VAWN members **Rostam Pourzal** of the **Campaign Against Sanctions & Military Intervention in Iran (CASMI)** and **Phil Wilayto** of the **Defenders** toured three cities in North Carolina in January to speak on the topic "**Is Iran a threat to the U.S.?**" The tour, organized by the **American Friends Service Committee**, included stops at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, the Community Church of Chapel Hill, Wake Forest University, the Warehouse in Winston-Salem and the Community United Church of Christ in Raleigh. VAWN member **Simin Rouanian** of **Women for Peace & Justice in Iran** had been scheduled to be part of the tour but was unable to participate because of illness.

Thanks to **Ann Williams** of VAWN-Norfolk and **Sue Frankel-Streit** of **Little Flower Catholic Worker** in Louisa for information for this column.

ATTENTION GILPIN RESIDENTS:

If you would like to attend a meeting to discuss the future of your community, please call the Defender at 644-5834 or e-mail: DefendersFJE@hotmail.com.

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- ☑ Because war is failure at the highest human level, not an instrument of policy or an economic tool.
- ☑ Because we must invest in new technologies that will generate clean, renewable energy to reduce our carbon footprint, create new jobs and upgrade our infrastructure.
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- ☑ Because a healthy nation, in which everyone has access to high quality healthcare, is a prosperous nation.
- ☑ Because education of the highest quality is the springboard of individual and global economic advancement and stability.
- ☑ Because no public office should be for sale to the highest bidder.
- ☑ Because a sustainable environment and a sustainable economy go hand-in-hand.
- ☑ Because providing good jobs that pay a living wage reduce crime and poverty.
- ☑ Because we must "be the change we wish to see in the world."
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Census indicate that 1,072 people were
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The *Ten Year Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness in
the Richmond Region* has a mission for the community
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the future for those who cannot afford stable housing.

A copy of the plan is available on Homeward's website.

www.homewardva.org