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DEFENDER

The Richmond

FREE

Bimonthly Newspaper of The Richmond Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality

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From cops, courts, KKK & right-wing legislators ...

Va. immigrants are under attack!



Photos by Hector Alas

When this banner was displayed on private property last September in Prince William County, it quickly became a symbol of the determination of the immigrant community to achieve equal rights and justice. Then, in October, someone tried to destroy it with a Molotov cocktail. That attempt failed, but a short time later the banner

was cut with some kind of sharp object. The vandalism followed the passage of an anti-immigrant resolution by the all-white Prince William County Board of Supervisors. This is just one example of the racist hostility now being directed against immigrants in Virginia.

5 YEARS OF WAR:

What has it meant for our communities?

March 19 will mark five years since President Bush ordered the invasion of Iraq. Since then, we have lost the lives of nearly 4,000 GIs and nearly 1 million Iraqis, plus more than a trillion of our tax dollars.

How long will we allow this madness to go on?

Join the Defenders & other community & anti-war activists to demand: "Money for Jobs & Education, not for Wars & Occupations!"

WED - MARCH 19

COMMUNITY VIGIL

5:30 pm - Broad Street side of Richmond City Hall
Co-sponsor: Richmond Peace Education Center

PUBLIC FORUM

7 pm, Asbury United Methodist Church
324 N. 29th St.
Richmond

See page 5 for details.

Special to The Richmond Defender from the Community Outreach Team of Mexicanos Sin Fronteras

Prince William County in Northern Virginia has become "ground zero" in the war now being waged against immigrants across the country.

Although people of color make up 40 percent of the county's population, all eight members of its ruling Board of Supervisors are white. Last October, the board unanimously passed a resolution that requires county police to investigate a detained person's immigration status if the officers have "probable cause" to think that person may have violated immigration laws. Undocumented individuals are then to be reported to the U.S. Department of Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) for possible

deportation. In addition, the resolution denies some county services to people who can't prove their legal status.

The resolution was drafted by the legal arm of FAIR, an extremist national anti-immigrant organization, and is clearly intended to be a model for other communities nationwide. The resolution will inevitably result in racial profiling and discrimination, not to mention creating an atmosphere of terror and desperation in the immigrant community and among people of color in general.

For more than 100 years, migrant workers from south of the border have been essential to many parts of the U.S. economy. Why do these workers come here? One reason is because the trade laws that benefit big U.S. corporations are often harmful to workers in Mexico, Hon-

duras, El Salvador and other countries.

The biggest example is the North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA, signed into law by President Bill Clinton on Dec. 8, 1993. The law took effect the following Jan. 1, and within one year Mexico's national poverty rate had doubled from 25 to 50 percent. With cheaper U.S.-produced agricultural and manufactured goods flooding the Mexican market, NAFTA had caused a massive loss of small farms and the displacement of millions of rural farmers and urban workers. As a result, millions of Mexican workers were forced to choose between lives of abject poverty at home or an uncertain and often dangerous search for work to the north.

NAFTA also cost many jobs in the United States, but that didn't stop Congress from

See **Immigrants** on page 7

Residents, RTO, LAJC express concern about Gilpin's future

By Phil Wilayto

Latesha Haskins was sitting outside her home in Gilpin Court, watching her children play. The 27-year-old mother of three has lived in her North 1st Street apartment for about a year. A reporter from The Richmond Defender was asking her how she felt about plans to "renovate" her neighborhood.

"I'm not worried myself," Haskins said, "because I don't plan to stay here more than another few years. I'm planning to buy a home. But I feel for the other people here and would be willing to try and help."

With 783 units, Gilpin is the largest of 13 public housing communities run by the

Richmond Redevelopment & Housing Authority. For several years, RRHA has been floating plans to tear down many of its 4,100 housing units and replace them with "mixed-income" housing that would include both owner-occupied and rental units.

Back in 1999, RRHA had a similar plan for the Blackwell community on South Side. The authority tore down 440 units and replaced them with 440 more - but only 75 of those rented for what the former tenants could afford. Altogether, slightly more than two dozen of the original tenants returned to live in the new Blackwell community, a development often described as a great success by city officials.

See **Gilpin** on page 4



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Gilpin Court resident Latesha Haskins, center, looks on as her brother Tikeon discusses the community's future with Defender Dieyah Rasheed.

"What must we do? We must complain. Yes, plain, blunt complaint, ceaseless agitation, unflinching exposure of dishonesty and wrong — this is the ancient, unerring way to liberty and we must follow it. Next, we propose to work." — W.E.B. Dubois, 1905

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 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.

regional & national news

Norfolk police shooting stirs protests

By Donnell Newton & Phil Wilayto

A fatal police shooting in Norfolk has some residents of this Tidewater city marching, protesting and calling for a civilian police review board.

James R. "Gucci" Dennis, 21, was killed by police officers last Halloween in Stanwix Square, a neighborhood just off Newtown Road. Police say he had turned a gun on two officers who found him firing shots at an unknown target.

The medical examiner's office has determined the young man died from a gunshot wound to his neck.

The case is currently under investigation by Norfolk's Commonwealth's Attorney's office. A special grand jury is to hear evidence shortly.

Dennis' family strongly disputes the police explanation.

His father, James Gorham, was quoted by The Virginian-Pilot newspaper as saying, "For them to say that he turned a gun on a police officer, I just can't believe that. I just won't believe that. It just didn't happen that way."

Sharon Gorham, Dennis' mother, recently spoke before Norfolk City Council, saying she had heard her son was shot "with his hands in the air from the back," and that she wanted an "outside investigation."

Dominique Jones, who lives in the area where Dennis was shot, has said she looked outside after hearing gunfire and saw the young man with his hands in the air.

The case has stirred civil rights leaders in the area into action. John Wesley Hill, a former president of the Norfolk Branch NAACP, is calling for the two officers involved to be suspended. The current president, James Rivers, has called on City Council to establish a civilian review board.

On March 4, several hundred people gathered at Norfolk's Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Plaza at Church Street and Brambleton Avenue, then marched through downtown. Some carried signs that read "Stop police abuse now," while others chanted "Justice!" Among the marchers were members of the Seven City Panthers organization.

Later that evening, several people, including Dennis' parents, addressed the City Council about the shooting.

Blacksburg residents say 'No!' to Wal-mart

By Daniel Breslau

Citizens of the Town of Blacksburg are in the midst of a battle to stop developers from using bait-and-switch tactics to bring in a huge Wal-mart store.

When landowners and developers in Blacksburg applied for a rezoning in early 2006, they described a project that fit the character and values of the town. It would be a mixed-use project, integrating small-scale retail and office uses with a range of residential options including affordable apartments. It would be a pedestrian-friendly project that would harmonize with the surrounding residential areas and with the public elementary school next door.

But once the rezoning was granted, the developers, Fairmount Properties of Cleveland, Ohio, quickly scrapped the mixed-use project and went to work on plans for a typical suburban "lifestyle center" (a marketing term for a glorified strip mall) anchored by a 186,000 square foot Wal-mart Supercenter.

The Blacksburg Town Council, soon after catching wind of this "bait-and-switch" in March 2007, drafted a new ordinance that would at least mitigate the worst features of this project. Ordinance 1450, modeled on similar ordinances in place across the country, would require a special-use permit for any retail establishment more than 80,000 square feet in area. But the developers then sued the town, claiming that they had "vested rights" and therefore are immune from any changes in zoning rules. The town's Board of Zoning Appeals, and then the Circuit Court, ruled in the developers' favor.

Now the town of Blacksburg as well as a citizen group, Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth (BURG), will be appealing the Circuit Court Decision to the Virginia Supreme Court.

As bad as a Wal-mart would be for the proposed site in Blacksburg, the case has ominous implications for the entire state. If allowed to stand, the Circuit Court decision will make it harder for places across the state to regulate local development as they see fit, and will tilt the playing field toward the rights of landowners.

Daniel Breslau is Chair of the Steering Committee of Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth.

Feds raid Harrisonburg meat plant

By Jeff Winder

Federal immigration authorities have raided the Cargill meat plant outside Harrisonburg, Va., as well as a nearby trailer park where a number of Cargill workers live.

The March 11 raids resulted in the arrest of four undocumented workers. Three await deportation, while the fourth faces prosecution on charges of selling false ID cards.

According to eyewitness accounts from inside the factory, federal officials spent most of the day interviewing employees and left with numerous personnel records. One worker, a member of the Virginia Immigrant Peoples Coalition, called coalition organizers to report the raid. Arriving at the factory, the organizers were greeted by several police officers who rushed their car, shouting threats of arrest. The VIPC members were able to photograph the license plate numbers of several unmarked police vehicles before leaving to interview residents of the trailer park who had witnessed the incident.

That night, representatives from various VIPC member groups held an emergency response meeting. Local activists made plans to print and distribute Spanish-language "know-your-rights" cards to Cargill workers, reach out to the families of those arrested and identify support needs.

Cargill is a privately owned, international producer of food, agricultural and risk management products and services. In 2007 the company reported net earnings of \$2.34 billion on total revenue of \$88.3 billion.

For information about the VIPC, visit www.vipccoalition.org.

Jeff Winder is a member of the Virginia Immigrant Peoples Coalition and an organizer with member group People United.

BWFJ Labor Banquet

North Carolina-based **Black Workers for Justice** will hold its **25th Annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Support for Labor Banquet** from 6-9 p.m. on **Saturday, April 5**, at the North Carolina Association of Educators Building, 700 S. Salisbury St. in Raleigh, N.C. Tickets are \$30. The Defenders will be sending a delegation of members and friends. Information: (919) 876-7187.

Correction: The photo of UE Regional Director Saladin Muhammad in the January/February Defender was taken by Defender staff member Garrie Rouse. The photographer was incorrectly identified.

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NEWS U CAN USE

Job fair

Goodwill Industries will hold its **Annual Spring Career Fair** Tuesday, April 1, from 2-7 p.m. at its main facility at 6301 Midlothian Turnpike. More than 30 area employers and community organizations are expected to participate. Free and open to the public. Registration begins at 2 p.m. Parking available on-site. Job seekers are encouraged to bring a copy of their resumé and dress in professional attire. Resumé paper and copy services will be provided at no cost during the career event. Pre-employment workshops March 31 will assist job seekers in preparing for the event. Registration is required for workshops. Information: Goodwill's Richmond Community Employment Center, (804) 675-9910 or visit www.goodwillcva.org.

Teen job symposium

The **3rd Annual Caution Work Ahead Teen Job Symposium** for youth ages 14-18 will be held Saturday, April 26, 8:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. on the Parham Road campus of J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College. Interactive workshops will focus on the development of soft skills needed for employment. Vendors will be available to talk about employment, volunteer opportunities and internships. Free and open to the public. Registration deadline is April 11. Sponsored by the Too Smart to Start Coalition, Ukrop's, Comcast, United Way, more. Information: Valerie Liggins Law at (804) 222-8194, ext. 3074 or e-mail lig08@co.henrico.va.us.

Free meals for groups serving children

Does your organization run a summer program for children in the Richmond area? If so, you may qualify to receive free meals for the children. Through its **Summer Meals 4 Kids Program**, Richmond Parks & Rec provides hundreds of thousands of free meals for children throughout the Richmond area every summer. Participation is free, and it doesn't matter what type of program you offer — even one-day events — as long as it serves children ages one through 18. Information: (804) 646-5698. **NOTE:** The deadline to enroll is March 14.

Tax preparation help

Individuals meeting certain eligibility requirements can receive free help in preparing their state and federal tax returns from a new **Tax Aide Center** operated by AARP Virginia at Senior Connections, the Capital Area Agency on Aging in Richmond. Appointments are required and can be made by calling (804) 343-3059 Monday through Friday, 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. The center is located at 24 East Cary St., 1st floor. Information: Harris Spindle at (804) 343-3041.

Learn CPR

The Midlothian Volunteer Fire Department and the Greater Richmond Chapter of the American Red Cross will offer **CPR Saturday in Midlothian** March 29, May 31 and July 26. Classes held 9 a.m.-5:30 p.m. at Midlothian Fire Station #5, 13420 Midlothian Turnpike, Village of Midlothian. A fee of \$33 per person covers all course materials. To register or for more information: (804) 839-6075 or e-mail midlothianvfd@gmail.com.

Youth soccer

Sponsored by Richmond Parks & Rec. for children ages 6-15. \$25 for Richmond residents, \$45 for nonresidents. Register 6-8 p.m. through April 4 at the Humphrey Calder Community Center, 414 N. Thompson St. Birth certificate required, plus \$20 for uniform fee. Teams practice week nights. Games are played Friday evenings or Saturday mornings. Information: (804) 646-1780.

community news

City civil rights trailblazers honored



Photos by Ana Edwards

Richmond women played a strong yet not always recognized role in the city's civil rights movement. From left: Ora Perry Lomax, Elizabeth Johnson Rice and Hilda Warden.

By Ana Edwards

Most accounts of Virginia's civil rights struggles tend to focus on lawsuits and the roles of attorneys, usually men. However, many women played critical roles in advancing the cause of racial justice in the state.

Three such heroes were honored Feb. 12 at a Virginia Commonwealth University forum titled "Richmond Women in the Civil Rights Movement."

In 1961, Ora Perry Lomax became the first African-American to be hired at a retail business in downtown Richmond. Starting at the Rayless Department Store, she later became the first Black saleswoman at Lerner's, L'Pell's, LaVogue, May Company, Newman's and Miller & Rhoads. Originally from Franklinton, N.C., Mrs. Lomax has served since 1971 as a youth and college adviser

with the Richmond Branch NAACP.

In 1960, Elizabeth Johnson Rice was one of 200 students from Virginia Union University who courageously marched downtown from the campus to participate in a sit-in against segregation at the Richmond Room Restaurant at Thalheimer's Department Store. She and 33 other students were arrested for trespassing, becoming nationally known as the "Richmond 34." Within a year, the defiant protest, along with subsequent boycotts and demonstrations, resulted in the desegregation of major businesses in Richmond. Mrs. Rice currently teaches science at Coolidge High School in Washington, D.C.

In 1950, Richmonder Hilda Warden, a 1935 graduate of VUU, was working for the city's Department of Welfare when she decided to apply to become a supervisor. To prepare for the position, the former school

teacher attempted to enroll at Richmond Professional Institute (RPI, now Virginia Commonwealth University), but was told the school's Board of Visitors had not yet decided whether to admit African-Americans. In 1951, after much persistence, Mrs. Warden and four other Black students were quietly admitted to RPI's School of Social Work. She went on to work as a counselor at VUU and the Richmond Department for Aging. Since 1984, she has worked as a legislative assistant to Virginia Sen. Yvonne Miller.

The sixth annual VCU Libraries Black History Month Lecture was sponsored by VCU Friends of the Library.

The program was moderated by Bonnie Winston, a Richmonder who was the first Black journalist to be hired by the city's daily newspaper. Ms. Winston currently works as a freelance journalist.

Black Marriage Day

Members of the Richmond Kwanzaa Collective will sponsor the 2nd Annual Black Marriage Day on Saturday, March 29. The free program is intended to provide single adults, married and unmarried couples and teens the information and skills necessary to develop healthy relationships, as well as build healthy marriages, families and communities.

This year's workshops will cover topics such as Blended Families; How to Talk to Your Children about Sex; Finances, Credit and Home Ownership; Living and Loving Healthy; and Courses for Teens.

The program is scheduled for noon to 5 p.m. at Richmond's East District Family Resource Center, 2405 Jefferson Ave.

For more information, contact Adia Blackmon at (804) 304-4154; e-mail: blackwomanpress@aol.com. For registration information and links to partner pages: www.blackwomanpress.com.



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Richmond children help fund clean water in Africa

Some disadvantaged families in Africa will soon have access to free, clean water, thanks to the efforts of hundreds of Richmond schoolchildren. PlayPumps International is a South African-registered Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that provides a unique water pump to communities in Sub-Saharan Africa. The pump consists of a "merry-go-round," the common piece of playground equipment. As children ride on the merry-go-round, underground water is pumped into an aboveground tank. Children in Africa will provide the people power, but children in Richmond provided money to help buy the pumps. This January, the 743 students enrolled in the city's Parks & Rec "Before and After School Programs" held bake sales, did personal chores, sold lemonade and undertook other projects. On March 4, they presented a check for \$1,800 to PlayPumps representatives at a ceremony at Chimborazo Elementary School. The Church Hill school was chosen for the event because its students had raised the most money of any of the city's 19 after-school groups. For information on PlayPumps International, visit www.playpumps.org. For information on Parks & Rec programs, visit www.RichmondGov.com/parks.

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Photo by Phil Wilayto

The Executive Board of the Richmond Tenants Organization. Except where noted, all members are presidents of the tenants organizations for their respective public housing neighborhoods. From left: Annie C. Mahdee, Gilpin Court; Joyce Keirney, Randolph-Maymont; Delores C. Robinson, Fairfield Court and RTO 2nd Vice President; Marilyn Olds, Creighton Court, RTO Treasurer and Vice Chair of the RRHA Board of Commissioners; Annie Giles, Mosby Court and RTO Acting President; Patricia Williford, Mosby Court.

Gilpin

Continued from page 1

Since last fall, The Richmond Defender has been investigating RRHA's current plans and posing the question: If you tear down 4,100 units, where will all the people go this time?

On this Saturday, three Defenders and two friends were distributing copies of the newspaper door-to-door in Gilpin and talking with residents to get their take on the neighborhood.

"Gilpin is a good place to be, but everybody's got to pick their own crowd," said a 42-year old resident who goes by the name "64." I raised my son and he ain't into gangs. I'm not into gangs."

Of course, bad things do happen, 64 said, but, "You can't control death. That's up to God."

Michael Hamer of Charity Street was enjoying the springlike weather with a half-dozen other middle-aged men. His complaint was that RRHA charges more when tenants start making more money.

"You come here and the rent is low, but then if you get a raise, they raise your rent," he said. "How is that supposed to help you? You can't get ahead."

Hamer also charged that RRHA is not doing routine maintenance, possibly in order to discourage people from staying.

Altogether, some 10,000 people live in RRHA public housing. The housing communities were established at a time when many middle-class people were leaving the central city for the suburbs. Today, they are moving back, and residential property near the downtown area is becoming very valuable.

For example, this is what RRHA's five-year strategic plan says about Gilpin Court, located just north of rapidly gentrifying Jackson Ward:

"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."

As the Defender noted in its last issue, the implication is clear: the land that Gilpin sits on is just too valuable for poor folks.

In an effort to get the views of people who have long dedicated themselves to trying to improve public housing in Richmond, two representatives from the Defenders met March 7 with members of the Executive Board of the Richmond Tenants Organization. (See photo above.) Representing the Defenders were Ana Edwards, host of the DefendersLIVE weekly radio program, and this reporter.

After a good discussion and exchange of information and views, RTO Treasurer Marilyn Olds was chosen by the rest of the Executive Board to make a formal statement for publication. In addition to serving as president of the Creighton Court tenants organization, Olds is the official tenant representative on RRHA's Board of Commissioners, where which she serves as Vice Chair.

"Everyone is talking about tearing down public housing, but why can't we build it up?" Olds asked. "Fix it up instead of demolishing it? Why can't there be a pilot program to see what can be done?"

"If you have a dog that goes out and gets dirty, you bring it in and clean it — you don't kill it. But they use the word 'blight' to make you think that everything is beyond repair.

"In terms of changes in public housing, the tenants need to be told what is really going on. Whatever happens, it has to be the choice of the people. But they can only make that choice after they've been given all the information, and not in a piecemeal way. Make sure everyone knows what their situation is. And what the law is. What are our rights?"

"Right now, people are saying, 'They can't just tear down public housing, where would everybody go?' And the answer is, they don't care. They don't care where you go, they just want you to go. It's like when people would say, 'They can't end welfare, what would everyone do?' Well, they ended

welfare.

"On this idea of mixed income, it's supposed to help people because then they live around other people who are doing well and it gives them the inspiration to do better. But I don't see how this is going to work. People go to college to get educated and separated. They don't go so they can live around poor people. I can't see someone living in a great big house that I have to clean, and then I'm living next door to them. That's not what they want.

"And if RRHA is going to build homes for people to buy, then the existing tenants should have the first option to buy those homes. And if they don't have the money to buy, then RRHA needs to work with them. And most people don't have the money. If they had the money to buy a \$100,000 home, they wouldn't be living in public housing. But if they can't buy, they should still be able to keep the option to buy in case their situation changes. Sometimes all the members of a family will get together to buy a home, so they would still want that option to buy.

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"If there's going to be a change," Olds said, "the Richmond Tenants Association stands for a one-for-one replacement of existing housing. The main thing is, we would like to see every person in Gilpin Court placed in a safe and sound environment, and also compensated for whatever expenses they might have if they have to move. There has to be a one-for-one replacement, and not just a verbal promise, but an approved, legally binding, written guarantee. What the tenants are promised, they have to get."

Housing advocates with the Virginia Legal Aid Justice Center made similar points in a recent op-ed piece published in Richmond's daily newspaper: "RRHA should commit to at least one-for-one replacement of any public housing units lost — and to a redevelopment planning process that is open and transparent."

The opinion piece was cowritten by Alex R. Gulotta, Executive Director of the Justice Center's Charlottesville office, and Cora Hayes, a public housing resident who serves on the center's Client Advisory Council.

Information Session/ Empowerment Workshop

The Richmond Legal Aid Justice Center will sponsor meetings in March in order to "raise awareness, empower residents, prepare residents and community members to speak out for one-to-one replacement, a transparent process and resident participation."

The meetings will be held at the Friends Association office in Gilpin Court at the following times:

10 a.m. Tuesday, March 18 & 25

7:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 25

Information: (804) 643-1086

Richmond police-related shooting still under investigation

By Phil Wilayto

More than a month after a Richmond man died during a police raid on his South Side home, the Richmond Police Department is still not ready to say exactly what happened.

The Medical Examiner's office, however, has determined it was a suicide.

At about 10:30 a.m. on Feb. 1, narcotics officers went to the home of Darnell Elliott, 45, in the 2200 block of Wright Ave. According to a police statement, the officers had a search warrant, knocked on the door and announced their intention to enter. Receiving no response, they entered the house, without the use of force.

According to police, the officers then heard a gunshot and saw a person fall to the floor, a gun beside him. The officers recovered a pistol and quantities of heroin and cocaine, police said.

Elliott's death — Richmond's first fatal police-related shooting in close to two years — is being investigated by the department's Police Force Investigation Team, which includes the Homicide and Internal Affairs units, currently the standard procedure for a police-related shooting.

The police statement explained that the internal investigation would be conducted in consultation with the Richmond Commonwealth's Attorney's Office.

Meanwhile, the state's Office of the Chief Medical Examiner was to conduct a separate investigation, to determine Elliott's cause and manner of death.

On March 7, the Defender was told by a police spokesperson that the police investigation "is pending the final write-up. The report is not released to the public but the findings are."

The Medical Examiner's investigation has been completed, according to Central District Administrator Arkuie Williams. "The cause of death was a gunshot wound to the head, and the manner was suicide," Williams told the Defender March 5.

Williams said that Elliott's autopsy was completed the same day he died, but that no other information would be available.

In an e-mail response to questions submitted by the Defender, police spokeswoman Cynthia Price stated that some questions submitted by the newspaper would not be answered.

"We do not release specific information as it relates to the investigation," she stated.

Those other questions included these:

- Is there evidence that Elliott owned the gun found at the scene of his death, or had it in his possession?

- Was the gun tested to see if it had been fired?

- Were Mr. Elliott's hands tested to see if he had fired a gun?

The Defender also asked about Elliott's criminal record.

"Virginia law does not allow law enforcement agencies to release criminal records," Price responded.

In response to an inquiry to her office, FBI spokeswoman Dennette Rybiski told the Defender that the FBI's Richmond office had not been asked to look into the shooting, either by other law enforcement agencies or any civilian organization.

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there are no borders in the workers' struggle

What We Lost & Won at the '08 General Assembly

By Cristina Rebeil, Attorney
VIRGINIA IMMIGRANT PEOPLES COALITION

Only a small number of bills affecting immigrants were passed by this year's Virginia General Assembly, but they will be sufficient to cause harm and increase racial profiling.

Altogether, the message being sent is that the already unendurable profiling and abuse committed by some members of law enforcement is not only acceptable, but laudable. Worse still, that crimes may be perpetrated on immigrants with impunity and that immigration status annuls personhood.

SB (Senate Bill) 113 opens the door to discretionary arrest when driving without a license. SB623 & HB445 create the first category of persons (the undocumented) presumed to be ineligible for bail. Other bills allow checking inmate status by questioning national origin. Multiple bills affect residential ordinances.

However, the most detrimental statement occurred in defeating SB441, which would have prohibited asking about the immigration status of victims/witnesses reporting crime. It is SB441 that sparks the issue for debate until the 2009 session.

Recently, the Virginia Immigrant Peoples Coalition (VIPC) was offered a "deal." Some legislators said they would vote to pass SB441 — if we "gave" the bail bill. In the end, and even if we could have ensured passing SB441, our community would find it unacceptable to aid part of the community by doing injustice to another.

When asked what we won, I say that the community's voice was heard fully for the first time. We did not play strategic games or sugarcoat the issues. We told legislators about how a Latina victim of an accident, instead of being asked by the police if she were hurt, was asked, "Are you legal?" We told how law enforcement unconstitutionally broke into a home and searched it without a warrant, handcuffing persons for three hours while asking, "Where are the Mexicans," and many other anecdotes and the humiliation and injustice they produced.

Several professional lobbyists approached me to say that this is the first year they really understood the issues at stake. They said we changed their mind. They heard us.

The people's voice is their power. We felt unjustified in trading it for the promise of a bill to be passed, especially without the community's collective consent.

Perdidas y Ganancias para Inmigrantes en La Asamblea Legislativa Virginia '08

Cristina Rebeil, Abogado
COALICION DE PUEBLOS
IMMIGRANTES DE VIRGINIA

Solo un pequeño número de propuestas que afectan inmigrantes pasaron, pero harán daño y aumentarán el perfilo. En resumen, el mensaje que envían es que los abusos y perfilo que ciertos oficiales han cometido, no solo son aceptable, sino causa de elogio. Peor aún, que crímenes pueden ser cometidos impunemente contra inmigrantes y que el estado migratorio anula los derechos humanos.

SB113 abre la puerta al arresto discrecional al manejar sin licencia. SB623 y HB445, crean la primera categoría de personas (los indocumentados) presumidos a no tener fianza. Otras propuestas permiten revisar estado migratorio de presos en base a cuestionar nacionalidad de origen, y muchas propuestas afectan leyes residenciales. Pero el mensaje mas dañino fue el derrotar SB441, que hubiese prohibido preguntar estado migratorio de víctimas/testigos reportando crímenes.

Es SB441 que abre el tema a debatirse hasta la session del 2009. Recientemente, se nos ofreció un "intercambio:" algunos legisladores dijeron votarían a favor de SB441 si les "dábamos" la propuesta respect a fianza. Al final, aún que hubiésemos podido asegurar que SB441 pasara, se le hubiese hecho inaceptable a nuestra comunidad que intercambiásemos ayudar a parte de la comunidad a cambio de aceptar que se tratara injustamente a otra parte.

Con respecto a que ganamos, yo digo que la voz de nuestra comunidad se escuchó por primera vez. No jugamos juegos ni encubrimos la situación de nuestra comunidad: les dijimos a los legisladores como una víctima Latina de accident, en vez de que la policía le preguntase como se encontraba, en vez se le preguntó "es legal?;" les dijimos como oficiales entraron inconstitucionalmente a una casa, esposaron a las personas por 3 horas preguntando "donde están los Mejicanos?;" y muchas otras anécdotas y sobre la humillación e injusticia que ello causó. Algunos cabildadores profesionales me dijeron que este es el primer año que entendían el punto de vista de nuestra comunidad. Me dijeron que habíamos hecho que cambiasen de opinion. Nos escucharon.

La voz del pueblo es su poder: sentimos no tener justificación en intercambiarla por la promesa de pasar una propuesta, especialmente sin tener el consentimiento collective de el Pueblo.

from the anti-war front



Photo by Phil Wilayto

'Impeach Bush & Cheney!' — Another Friday, another protest outside the Jackson Ward office of Congressman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott. From left: Richmonders Rain Burroughs, 44; Mary Delicate, 41; Chris Dorsey, 34; and Roger Hiltroth, 71. The protest, which sometimes draws up to 30 people, has been a weekly event since August. According to Burroughs, the group wants Scott to come out publicly for the impeachment of President George W. Bush and Vice President Richard "Dick" Cheney. She says Scott is being targeted because he is a "well-respected member of the Judiciary Committee," which has jurisdiction over the impeachment process. Congressman Scott did not respond to a Defender request for a comment on the protest and his stand on the impeachment demand.

Richmond vigil & forum to mark 5th anniversary of Iraq War

The U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq has cost the lives of nearly 4,000 GIs, more than one million Iraqis and more than a half-trillion dollars of our tax money. Wednesday, March 19, will mark the 5th anniversary of that war — and the beginning of its sixth year.

On that day, Richmond-area members of the Virginia Anti-War Network (VAWN) will sponsor a vigil and forum to provide Virginians an opportunity to express their opposition to the war.

The vigil, co-sponsored by the Richmond Peace Education Center, is scheduled to take place at 5:30 p.m., March 19, outside Richmond City Hall, 900 E. Broad St. The theme will be: "Bring the Troops Home Now! Money for Jobs & Education, not for Wars & Occupations!" All those opposed to the war are invited to attend.

That evening, VAWN will host a forum at 7 p.m. at Asbury United Methodist Church, 324 N. 29th St., in Richmond's Church Hill neighborhood. The forum is titled "Stop the War at Home & Abroad! How our struggles here at home are affected by the war."

In a sharp departure from most peace events, all the scheduled speakers are women of color, all from working-class struggles. They are:

LILLIE BRANCH-KENNEDY — Founder & Director, Resource Information Help for the Disadvantaged (R.I.H.D.), a Richmond-based prisoner advocacy organization;

JOANNE DAVIS — City Worker & Union Organizer with the Petersburg City Employees Association - UE Local 160; DIEYAH RASHEED — Richmond-based Community

Organizer with the Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality;

SIMIN ROYANIAN — Former Union Official & Co-founder of Women for Peace & Justice in Iran (Fairfax);

TERESITA JACINTO — Representative from the immigrant rights organization Mexicanos Sin Fronteras.

The forum will be chaired by QUEEN ZAKIA RAFIQA SHABAZZ, Founder & Director of United Parents Against Lead National, Inc. (Richmond).

The forum is free. Children are welcome and the church is wheelchair-accessible.

For more information, e-mail VAWN@mattaponi.com or call (804) 644-5834. (Phone contact is for this meeting only.)

Also, log onto: www.vawn.org.

'Winter Soldier' hearings to expose truths about Iraq & Afghanistan wars

Back in the winter of 1971, more than 100 U.S. Vietnam War veterans gathered in Detroit to talk about war crimes they said they had committed or witnessed while in Vietnam. This Winter Soldier Investigation, sponsored by Vietnam Veterans Against the War, exposed the fact that these atrocities were not isolated acts, but represented official U.S. policy, which GIs were forced to implement. The testimony played a major role in turning public opinion against the war.

This winter, from March 13-16, Iraq Veterans Against the War will sponsor "Winter Soldier: Iraq & Afghanistan Hearings."

The event, to be held in Washington, D.C., will not be open to the general public, but proceedings will be broadcast live online and on TV and radio.

Information: www.warcomeshome.org.

Iran work continues

VAWN members Simin Royanian, Rostam Pourzal and Phil Wilayto continue to speak out against U.S. policy toward the Islamic Republic of Iran. Pourzal is president of the U.S. chapter of the Campaign Against Sanctions & Military Intervention in Iran. Royanian is a founder of Women for Peace & Justice in Iran. Wilayto, editor of The Richmond Defender, was the organizer of the 2007 People's Peace Delegation to Iran. In January, the three activists spoke at a series of public meetings in North Carolina organized by the American Friends Service Committee. Events were held in Winston-Salem, Chapel Hill and Wake Forest. In April, they will present at the Historians Against the War national conference in Atlanta. They previously spoke at five events in Atlanta, organized by the AFSC and the International Action Center.

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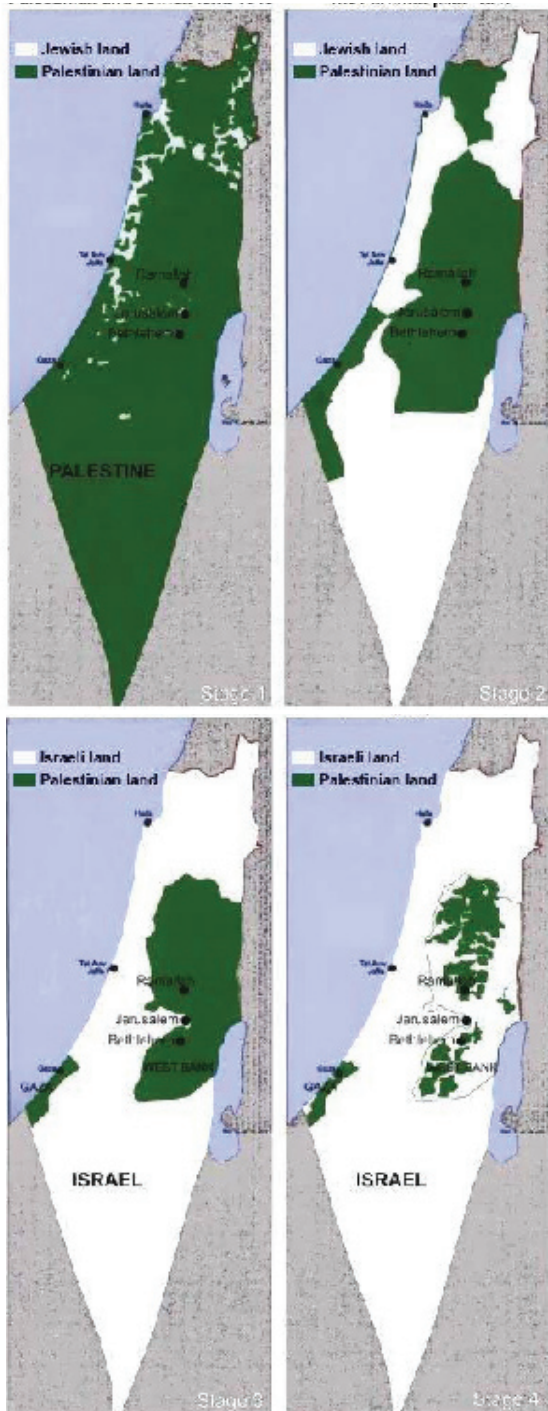
Palestine & 'Israel'

It's on the news almost every day: another suicide attack in Israel. More missiles launched from Gaza against Israeli settlements. The Israeli military is forced to retaliate — in self-defense.

Like Rodney King, we find ourselves asking, Why can't they just all get along? Impossible, we're told. The conflicts are too ancient. And the Palestinians, well, you know ...

Below are four maps of Palestine. The first shows how that land looked in 1946, before the establishment of Israel. The large, dark area is where the Palestinians lived. The much smaller, lighter areas were Jewish.

The second map shows how the area looked in 1947, after it was partitioned into Jewish and Palestinian sections. The third shows the progression from 1949 to 1967, as Palestine was gobbled up by an ever-expanding Israel. The final map shows the tiny, unconnected areas that the U.S. and Israeli governments want the world to believe could become a viable Palestinian state.



But the Israeli-Palestinian struggle is not an ancient conflict. There was a period of time — a long time — when Arabs and Jews, both Semitic people, both "People of the Book," lived in harmony and peace in historic Palestine.

But then the political philosophy known as Zionism gained dominance in the European Jewish community. The solution to the ancient oppression of Jews — in Europe — was to create a Jewish homeland — outside Europe.

Palestine was not the only possibility. Uganda was considered, along with other countries.

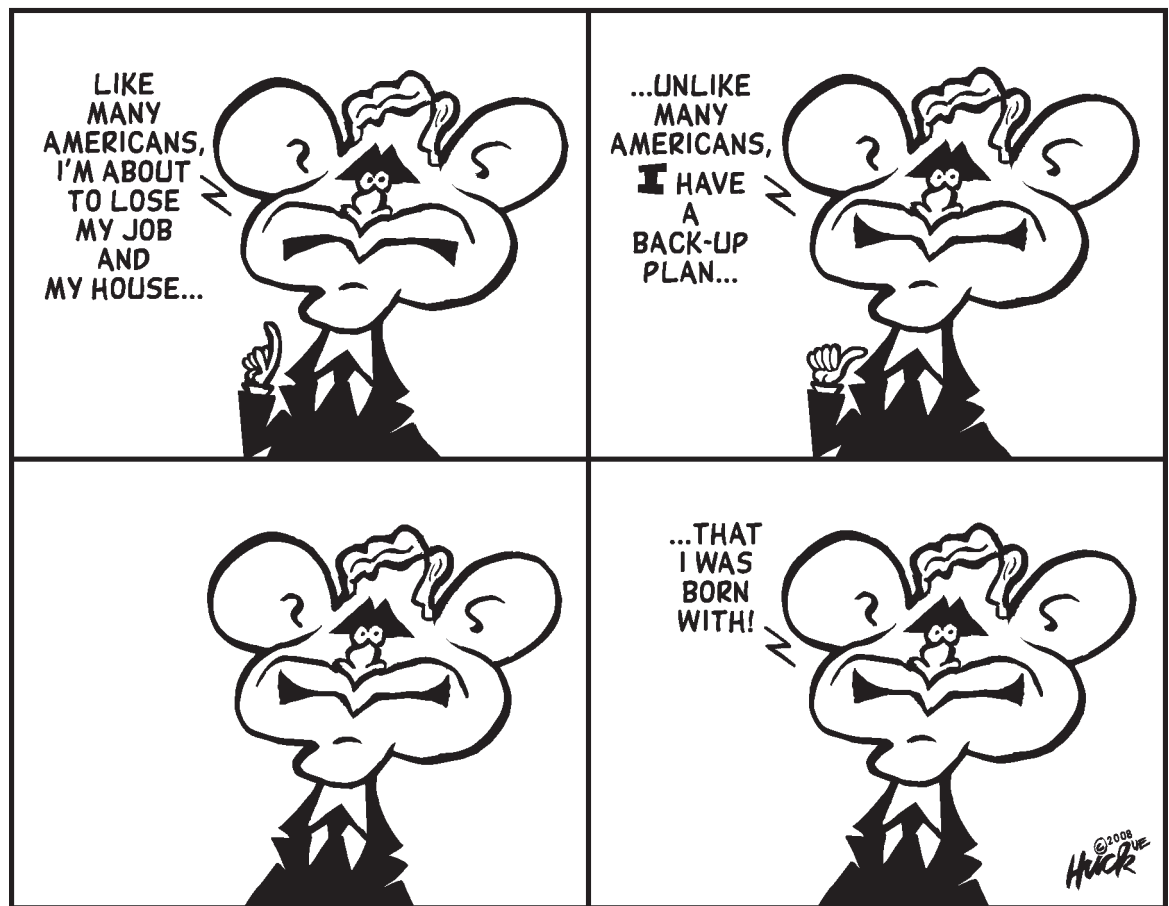
But certain European powers could see the value of creating a Western-oriented state in the oil-rich Middle East, and a Faustian deal was struck.

Today Israel is a death trap for the Jewish people. Locked into support for U.S. foreign policy by an annual U.S. subsidy of \$3 billion, it has become an international pariah. Touted in the West as the only real "democracy" in the Middle East, it has become an apartheid-like state that oppresses the indigenous Palestinian people in the same ways that white-dominated South Africa oppressed and exploited its Black majority.

Israel is a historical contradiction, a settler state founded at a time of worldwide decolonization.

That contradiction cannot last forever. It will eventually be resolved — through dialogue or through violence, but it will be resolved.

Palestine will be free.



Letters to the Editor

Not 'immigrants'

Today many people in the United States are in an uproar over "immigrants" coming across "our" border into "our" country. What gives them the right to think they can just come into "our" land?

The fact is, most of the people we see as Hispanics, Latinos, immigrants and illegal aliens are in fact Americans Native to the Americas. They are Native Americans.

Since 1492, borders and laws have been used to control indigenous people and our land and wealth. This even happened right here in Virginia. I am Occaneechee-Saponi Native American, indigenous to what is now called Virginia. Though our people have been living here for over 10,000 years, in 1714 I would have been an illegal alien standing in Richmond. Our "border" was the James River. By 1830, the border had shifted to the Mississippi River. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 and Trail of Tears was a mass deportation of illegal alien Indians from "white people's land." Eventually the border was moved to the Rio Grande River.

With each of these borders we have been illegal aliens whenever we crossed them. Since 1492, there have been many artificial borders put in place to control our land, our wealth and us. Deportation from our own homeland is nothing new. What we are witnessing today is the Indian Removal Action of 2008 and the 2008 Trail of Tears. It is just a continuation of a 500-year genocidal process.

Seventy million of our people have been killed in the invasion and occupation and the count continues to climb today because of the anti-indigenous perspective that we see and the actions that derive from it. Our people have suffered enough. We cannot undo what has been done in the past, but we can today choose to end the systemic disenfranchisement of brown indigenous Native Americans. We need to begin seeing the people that we refer to as illegal aliens and not belonging here in a new light.

We have as much right to be here as anyone else, if not more.

Barry Carter
MECKLENBURG COUNTY

Goldman calls for 'Unity Council'

The time is now for a "Richmond Unity Council." We need to stop the constant do-nothing bickering between the Wilder Administration and City Council.

Roughly 10 years ago, I wrote an article showing why a change to a new — Elected Mayor — form of local government would

lead to a big decrease in the murder rate. An elected Mayor, accountable to the voters, not the politicians on City Council, would get a police chief willing to do what it took to start winning the fight against crime. Many in elected office today disagreed.

But as predicted, the murder rate, the major crime rate, has dropped. Police Chief Rodney Monroe has done a terrific job with new ideas: he would never have been hired under the old system.

So I am confident a "Richmond Unity Council", consisting of 10 citizen members from across the city along with the eight top city elected and appointed officials, will likewise be successful in making progress on other pressing problems. Every three weeks, it will meet in open session, so citizens can be there as city leaders work to solve their problems and listen to their ideas.

If elected mayor, I will turn the page on the old divisive politics and start a new era of unity.

Paul Goldman
RICHMOND

[Paul Goldman, formerly a key aide to Richmond Mayor L. Douglas Wilder, is a now a declared candidate for mayor.]

Wanted: Sane school schedules

School schedules drive me crazy. Based on a long-gone farm family routine, they are now an obsolete burden to working parents. Children are out of school for approximately 15 weeks of the year,

not counting the occasional Monday or Friday off for sundry holidays and teacher workdays. Most working parents I know do not get more than two weeks off per year, so we start off with a disadvantage we are supposed to be able to work through.

If the average workday is 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., then how are parents supposed to get kids to twice-weekly activities that start at 4 p.m. or pick them up from activities that end at 5 p.m. — with a \$5 per five minute penalty fee charged if you're late? And there are many parents working second and third shifts who struggle to find care for their children at night.

I'm probably most frustrated by the summer months. One program actually advertises that they are only open four days per week and only in the morning. I'm still trying to find the clause in my employee handbook that says that during the summer months the children of employees shall accompany their parents to the office, loading dock or sales counter Mondays through Thursdays from noon to 5 p.m. and all day Fridays.

And I don't want to hear about some new charter or private school that will do it better than public schools. That will only solve the problem for a very privileged few. I want to hear that all school systems, public, private and other, will work together with after-school and summer programs to implement sensible, coordinated programs based on the standard employment hours of the community they live in.

M. E. Felton
RICHMOND

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Virginia NAACP president & others stand up for immigrant rights

By Phil Wilayto

When the Rev. Rayfield Vines Jr. was elected president last October of the 16,000-member Virginia State Conference NAACP, he said he wanted to move the civil rights organization in a more activist direction.

"Somehow we have changed from activity to advocacy," he said, "and under my administration I plan to take the NAACP back to activity — you know, protest in the streets, picketing, those kinds of things."

Rev. Vines, pastor of Hungary Road Baptist Church in Glen Allen and also president of the NAACP's Henrico County branch, proved to be a man of his word, as he joined more than 150 protesters Feb. 9 in Richmond in a march and rally for immigrant rights. Two days later, he participated in a press conference at the General Assembly Building and then a prayer vigil held on Capitol Square. The rally, march, press conference and vigil were sponsored by the Virginia Immigrant People's Coalition (VIPC).

Another recent example of interracial solidarity included an event held Jan. 21 at Capitol Square. Some 30 members of the newly formed People of Color Coalition gathered to demand payday lending reform, an end to racial profiling, increased educational opportunities for prisoners, immigrant rights and federal recognition of six Virginia Native American tribes that have been seeking it for the past eight years. Black, Latino and Native Americans participated in the gathering.

The Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality of Richmond have been active supporters of the immigrant rights struggle, coordinating security for mass marches and rallies,



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Virginia NAACP President Rev. Rayfield Vines Jr. stands alongside Cristina Rebeil, a lobbyist for the Virginia Immigrant Peoples Coalition. The two were speakers at an immigrant rights rally Feb. 9 in Richmond's Monroe Park.

speaking at public events and interviewing immigrant leaders for The Richmond Defender newspaper and the DefendersLIVE! radio program.

In April, white members of the organization People United plan to cross the southern U.S. border into Mexico and then return to the U.S. without passports. The goal is to protest the unfair targeting of undocumented immigrants in Virginia and elsewhere and to show opposition to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

six months alone, with more than 380 being delivered to ICE.

Many residents are now reporting what they charge is an "open season" on Latinos by some Prince William County police officers. Many complain of having become victims of racial profiling. Fear is causing immigrant families to move out of the county, causing businesses to close down as customers diminish. The county's home foreclosure rate is the highest in the Mid-Atlantic region and many immigrants feel they are being forced to walk away from their homes. Families have been separated as fathers and mothers have been detained, leaving their citizen-children to be cared for by family members or friends.

And besides the official repression, there are private organizations working to exploit the immigration issue. One such group, "Help Save Manassas," claims to be "the largest grassroots advocacy organization concerned with the illegal alien issue in Virginia." Started with support from the Virginia chapter of the so-called Minuteman Civil Defense Corps, it regularly shows up at immigrant rallies with video cameras to try and intimidate participants.

The group's president, Greg Letiecq, is a co-founder of the recently formed Save the Old Dominion, a coalition of anti-immigrant groups in Loudon, Vienna, Hampton Roads, Centreville, Culpeper, Stafford and Manassas. Letiecq previously made a name for himself in right-wing circles by running a shrill blog called "Black Velvet Bruce Li" that carries running comments by anti-immigrant racists.

Another Northern Virginian attempting to climb to glory on the backs of the immigrant community is Corey A. Stewart, a Letiecq ally and chairman of the Prince William Board of County Supervisors. After leading the charge for the county's anti-immigrant resolution, Stewart has now announced he intends to run next year for the position of Virginia's lieutenant governor. (Stewart's day job is special counsel with the Washington, D.C. office of the influential law firm Foley & Lardner LLP, where his specialties include international trade issues, like NAFTA.)

Then there are the violent racists who are encouraged to crawl into the open by the anti-immigrant atmosphere being created by the Letiecqs and Stewarts.

Last October, a banner displayed in Prince William County on the private property of an immigrant worker was attacked with Molotov cocktails and then cut to pieces. (See photos on page 1.) After that attack, leaflets promoting the Ku Klux Klan were distributed in the county.

The county's anti-immigrant resolution went into full effect on March 3, and it is expected that there will be further persecution of the immigrant community, resulting in many more arrests and deportations.

But immigrants and their allies and supporters in Prince William County are fighting back, with the support and leadership of Mexicanos Sin Fronteras (Mexicans Without Borders), a grassroots organization founded in 2000 in response to the harassment of local day laborers.

Last July, MSF organized three large meetings to listen to the community's recommendations for resisting the resolution. More than 4,000 members of the immigrant and indigenous community came together, along with Black and white supporters. The issues were discussed and resistance actions

were decided on, including an economic boycott over the Labor Day weekend, a massive march and rally on Sept. 2 and a one-day work stoppage on Oct. 9.

All three actions attracted massive participation, as well as local, national and international media attention. The Sept. 2 march and rally drew 7,000 participants, the largest number of people attending a protest event in Virginia in many years.

In response to the implementation of the county resolution, Mexicanos Sin Fronteras has developed a legal support program which provides "know your rights" seminars on a regular basis to the immigrant community. The program also assists persons in need of legal representation as a result of the increasing number of immigration and criminal cases. There's a hot line that allows the documentation and recording of cases of discrimination and racial profiling in order to build civil lawsuits in federal court.

MSF is also conducting a campaign of outreach, education, empowerment and mobilization of county residents. On March 2, another mass community meeting was held to inform and educate people about the resolution and how to protect themselves when approached by the police. More than 1,300 people attended this gathering.

Finally, MSF has played a leading role in helping to launch the Virginia Immigrant Peoples Coalition, a statewide alliance of immigrant rights groups and allies, including the Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality, People United and the Virginia Anti-War Network.

But to continue this work, MSF needs the support of progressive people from around the state. It needs immigration and criminal attorneys to provide volunteer legal representation to the many who cannot afford such services. It needs financial assistance for materials, printing, equipment and outreach. The all-volunteer organization would like to fund at least one part-time or full-time position to help coordinate this effort.

North and South, it's the working poor who are the victims of neoliberal economic policies like NAFTA and CAFTA. Our mutual struggle for justice and dignity requires all of us to stand in solidarity with our immigrant and indigenous sisters and brothers. As we establish alliances within our communities, across the state and across borders, we must develop bottom-up alternatives to divisive transnational economic policies, acts of oppression and environmental catastrophe.

Donations to support Mexicanos Sin Fronteras may be sent to the organization at P.O. Box K, Woodbridge, VA 22194. (If you need your donation to be tax-deductible, call 703-822-3485.)

You can also send a statement of support and solidarity from you or your organization or invite a speaker from Mexicanos Sin Fronteras to address your school, civic group or religious community.

For more information, visit MSF's Web site: www.mexicanossinfronteras.org.

Immigrants Continued from page 1

passing the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), which has forced millions more to flee northward.

Some people say, "I don't mind people coming here for work, but they should do it legally."

The problem is that, unlike 100 years ago, U.S. immigration law now favors those with more education, money and resources. The average undocumented worker in the U.S. has a ninth-grade education and virtually no savings. And applying for legal immigration status means paying a \$100 fee with virtually no hope of ever getting a visa or work permit. If these same conditions had been the norm in the 19th or early 20th century, many of the

European ancestors of today's legal citizens would never have been able to immigrate, simply because most of them were poor and uneducated.

Once undocumented workers arrive in the U.S., they find themselves the target of right-wing politicians looking for the latest "hot button" issue that will allow them to avoid creating jobs, decent housing, education and health care for all. A few years ago, that issue in Virginia was gay marriage. This year it clearly has been immigration. More than 150 bills dealing with immigration were introduced in this year's session of the General Assembly, many by politicians from Prince William County. (See article on page 5.) From Herndon to Culpeper to Loudon County, immigration has been the issue that politicians and reactionary "citizen" groups have loved to concentrate on.

But nowhere has the immigrant community been targeted harder than in Prince William County. According to an official county police report, more than 400 people have been arrested in the last



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Be sure and call ahead to make sure the information listed is current.

Note: Listing of an event does not necessarily imply an endorsement by this newspaper.

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RICHMOND - Ongoing

Through March 28 – FRIENDS AND MENTORS – This African-American art exhibit features the work of more than 30 artists who work in mixed media. Spotlight Gallery at Pine Camp Arts & Community Center, 4901 Old Brook Road. Sponsored by the Richmond Department of Parks, Recreation & Community Facilities. Information: (804) 646-3674.

March and April – AFRICAN-AMERICAN HISTORY IN VIRGINIA EXHIBITION – Tells stories of notable African-Americans and events in the Commonwealth through pictures and artifacts. Virginia Historical Society, 428 N. Boulevard. Sponsored by the Virginia Historical Society. Information: (804) 358-4901.

March and April – THE GIFT OF BLACK INVENTIONS – This exhibit is a result of more than 25 years of research by its curator, James E. Wright, Jr., and displays more than 125 inventions from Black creators. Black History Museum & Cultural Center of Virginia, 3 E. Clay Street. Information: (804) 780-9093.

April 2-May 6 — UNITED PARENTS AGAINST LEAD NATIONAL, INC. will be broadcasting over the Comcast Community Access Station at 6 p.m. Wednesdays during April, Lead Awareness Month.

RICHMOND - Events

Fri., March 7 – INTERFAITH PRAYER VIGIL – In observance of a national day of prayer for peace. 7 p.m., Ginter Park Presbyterian Church Chapel, 3601 Seminary Ave. Sponsored by the Richmond Peace Education Center and the Union-PSCE Peace Witness Fellowship. Free and open to the public. Information: (804) 232-1002.

Wed., March 12 — A VIGIL FOR UNITY - To remember Lawrence King, a 15-year-old shot to death Feb. 12 in Oxnard, Calif., because he was gay. The vigil is also to "make sure that what happened to Lawrence never happens here." 6:30-8 p.m., Gay Community Center of Richmond, 1407 Sherwood Ave. Sponsored by a wide range of Richmond organizations. Information: (804) 644-4800 or ROSMY@ROSMY.ORG.

Tues., March 18 — RICHMOND CRUSADE FOR VOTERS MEETING — 7 p.m., Military Retirees Club, 2220 Sledd St.

Tues., March 18 – RAGE, RAP, AND REALITY: AN EVENING WITH CHUCK D – Founder of Public Enemy will speak. 7 p.m., Jepson Alumni Center, 28 Westhampton Way. Free, but tickets must be obtained in advance. Sponsored by the University of Richmond. Information: (804) 289-8980.

Wed., March 19 – VIGIL & FORUM TO MARK 5TH YEAR OF IRAQ WAR – "Bring the Troops Home Now! Money for Jobs & Education, not for Wars & Occupations!" Vigil: 5:30 p.m. outside Richmond City Hall. Cosponsored by the Richmond Peace Education Center and the Virginia Anti-War Network (VAWN). Forum: 7 p.m., Asbury United Methodist Church, 324 N. 29th St. Sponsored by VAWN. (For more details, see page 5.) Information: (804) 644-5834; VAWN@mattaponi.com; www.vawn.org.

Thurs., March 27 – VOICES FOUND: MODELS OF INSPIRATION – Concert by the Norfolk State University Concert Choir and the Virginia Symphony. 7:30 p.m., L. Douglas Wilder Performing Arts Center, 700 Park Ave. Sponsored by Norfolk State University. Information: (804) 823-8600.

Thurs., March 27 -- SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: A JEWISH MANDATE – Lecture by Laia Katz, "Civic Leader and Social Justice Champion." 7 p.m., William Byrd Community House, 224 S. Cherry St. Information: (804) 643-2717.

Sat., March 29 — PAROLE BOARD REFORM MARCH — A Call to Gov. Timothy Kaine. 1-3 p.m. Gather on the Governor's Mansion Lawn, next to Virginia General Assembly Building. Sponsored by Exodus Group. Information: exodus19.4@hotmail.com.

Sat., March 29 – 2ND ANNUAL BLACK MAR-

RIAGE DAY – A program intended to provide single adults, married and unmarried couples and teens the information and skills necessary to develop healthy relationships, as well as build healthy marriages, families and communities. See page 3 for details. Organized by members of the Richmond Kwanzaa Collective. Noon to 5 p.m., East District Family Resource Center, 2405 Jefferson Ave. Free. Information: Adia Blackmon at (804) 304-4154; e-mail: blackwomanpress@aol.com. Note: Registration information and links to partner pages are on the Web site www.blackwomanpress.com.

Sat. March 29 – NGOMAAFRICAN DANCE COMPANY PERFORMANCE – Presentation of Zingaladuni II. 7:30 p.m., Booker Camp Concert Hall, 28 Westhampton Way. Tickets \$8 public in advance, \$10 at door. Sponsored by the University of Richmond. Information: (804) 289-8980.

Wed., April 2 – THE NEXT VANGUARD IN CIVIL RIGHTS: ABANDONING THE MYTH OF MERITOCRACY – Lani Guinier, Bennett Boskey Professor at Harvard Law School and the first Black woman to receive law tenure will speak about rethinking class and race in regards to affirmative action. 7 p.m., Jepson Alumni Center, 28 Westhampton Way. Free, but tickets must be obtained in advance. Sponsored by the University of Richmond. Information: (804) 289-8980.

Sat., April 5 — BLACK WORKERS FOR JUSTICE 25TH ANNUAL BANQUET & FUND RAISER — 6-9 p.m., North Carolina Association of Educators Building, 700 S. Salisbury St., Raleigh, N.C. \$30. Information: (919) 876-7187.

Tues., April 18 — RICHMOND CRUSADE FOR VOTERS MEETING — 7 p.m., Military Retirees Club, 2220 Sledd St.

Wed., April 16 – Sat., April 19 – THE MEETING – Award-winning play written by Jeff Stetson and directed by Chuck Mike. 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., Alice Jepson Theatre, 28 Westhampton Way. Tickets \$15 adults; \$12 seniors, UR alumni and employees; \$10 students; \$6 children. Sponsored by the University of Richmond Players. Information: (804) 289-8980.

Sat., April 19 — 1ST ANNUAL BLACK CAPA-CITY LITERARY ARTS FESTIVAL — An independent, grassroots event aimed at highlighting and promoting the works of African-descended people in the various fields of literature, from authorship to publishing to bookstores. 1-7 p.m., Nubian Village Academy, 2022 Sledd St. Sponsored by the Universal Negro Improvement Association, Prosser-Truth Division #456 of Richmond. Information: (804) 573-2519 or (917) 776-3598.

Important Dates in Black History

March 3, 1865 - Freeman's Bureau established by federal government to aid formerly enslaved Africans.

March 6, 1857 - U.S. Supreme Court issues Dred Scott decision.

March 8, 1977 - Henry L. Marsh III becomes Richmond's first African-American elected mayor.

March 10, 1913 - Harriet Tubman dies.

March 14, 1965 - Montgomery bus boycott ends when city's bus service is desegregated.

March 21, 1965 - Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. leads march from Selma to Montgomery, Ala., for voting rights.

April 3 — RICHMOND LIBERATION DAY — On this day in 1865, Union troops led by Black soldiers marched into Richmond, put out massive fires set by fleeing Confederates and liberated enslaved Africans held in the notorious Lumpkin's Jail in Shockoe Bottom.

April 4, 1968 - Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. is assassinated, sparking rebellions in 108 U.S. cities.

April 8, 1974 - Atlanta Braves slugger Hank Aaron hits 715th home run, surpassing Babe Ruth as the game's all-time home-run leader.

April 9, 1898 - Paul Robeson, actor, singer, activist, born.

April 10, 1947 - Brooklyn Dodger Jackie Robinson becomes first African-American to play major league baseball.

April 12, 1983 - Harold Washington becomes first African-American mayor of Chicago.

April 13, 1950 - Historian Carter G. Woodson, author of "The Miseducation of the American Negro," dies.

April 17, 1983 - Alice Walker wins Pulitzer Prize for fiction for "The Color Purple."

April 18, 1864 - More than 200 Black Union troops surrender, then are massacred by Confederate forces at Ft. Pillow, Tenn.

April 28, 1839 - The African Cinque leads a mutiny on the slave ship Amistad off the coast of Long Island, N.Y.

GAMES!

FACE PAINTINGS!

DRAWINGS!

GRAND PRIZE DRAWING - \$100.00 VISA GIFT CARD!

CLOWNS!

REFRESHMENTS!

GIANT SLIDE!

MOON WALK!

CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND LEAD AWARENESS DAY

SATURDAY, APRIL 26, 2008

PETERSBURG HEALTH DEPARTMENT PARKING LOT

10:00 A.M. – 2:00 P.M.

SPONSORED BY PETERSBURG HEALTH DEPARTMENT, PETERSBURG SOCIAL SERVICES AND UNITED PARENTS AGAINST LEAD

NOTED AUTHOR AND UNITED PARENTS AGAINST LEAD (UPAL) FOUNDER ZAKIA SHABAZZ WHO WILL AUTOGRAPH FREE COPIES OF HER BOOK "A CHILD IS A TERRIBLE THING TO WASTE"

PRESENTING THE UPAL NATIONAL ANTHEM!
IN A FEATURED PERFORMANCE BY BERNARD JOHNSON

- FREE LEAD POISONING TESTING FOR CHILDREN AGES 1 – 6 YEARS OLD.
- BLOOD PRESSURE SCREENING.
- NUTRITION INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO PREVENT CHILDHOOD OBESITY.
- SIGN-UP FOR FAMIS OR MEDICAID INSURANCE.
- CHIP PROGRAM INFORMATION TABLE.
- INFORMATION ON CHILD SAFETY SEATS.
- KOOL SMILES AND A WEALTH OF OTHER LOCAL RESOURCES.

DIRECTIONS OR QUESTIONS? CONTACT UPAL (804) 308-1518