



Meet founder of Christina's Love Foundation **B1**



Sacred sands

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Richmond Free Press

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VOL. 28 NO. 21

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

www.richmondfreepress.com

MAY 23-25, 2019

Epic fail

At least 280 Richmond Public Schools seniors won't be graduating in June, RPS officials say

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

Hundreds of Richmond seniors will not be allowed to graduate in nearly three weeks because they have not met the state standards for a diploma.

The Richmond School Board was told Monday that at least 280 students have been disqualified to receive diplomas based on a report that RPS Chief Academic Officer Tracy Epp provided on the impact of major flaws in students' transcripts.

While RPS Superintendent Jason Kamras' office acknowledged Wednesday that the numbers are incomplete, Ms. Epp told the School Board that, at best, only 810 students from the nine main city high schools would qualify to participate in graduation ceremonies that will begin Sunday, June 9.

And it could be fewer, she indicated, as only 507 seniors currently have met all the requirements and are "on track" to graduate. Another 303 students are considered "likely" to graduate, but there is no guarantee they will make it in the short time left.

Even if 810 students receive diplomas, that would be the smallest number in decades for a system that has graduated at least 1,100 students each year and often far more since before World War II.

It also would be a startling 28 percent decline in graduation numbers from a year ago when 1,110 students received diplomas, according to Ms. Epp's report.

The document looked solely at 1,090 students in the 12th grade who attend the five comprehensive high schools, Armstrong,

George Wythe, Huguenot, John Marshall and Thomas Jefferson, and four specialty schools, Franklin Military, Open, Richmond Community and Richmond Alternative School.

Those schools actually enroll 1,178 12th-graders, but some attend the Maggie Walker and Appomattox governor's schools and other programs, but still will receive RPS diplomas and were not included in Ms. Epp's numbers.

The 280 students not graduating were disqualified after a review of their transcripts found they had not passed enough state Standards of Learning tests, lacked a credential in career and technical education or were improperly scheduled so they never took one or more required courses, the report stated.

Please turn to A6



Ms. Epp

Unexpected gift elicits cheers, tears at Morehouse College commencement



Photos by Steve Schaefer/Atlanta Journal-Constitution via Associated Press

Shocked graduates, above, stand and cheer after commencement speaker billionaire technology investor and philanthropist Robert F. Smith, right, announces his family will provide a grant to eliminate the student debt of Morehouse College's entire 2019 graduating class, a gift valued at roughly \$40 million.

In the black

By Ronald E. Carrington

Commencement was a red-letter day for Morehouse College graduate Monte Hathaway of Henrico County and his family.

That's when the speaker at Sunday's 135th commencement ceremony on the Atlanta campus, billionaire tech investor Robert F. Smith, made a surprise announcement that has since gone global.

"My family is going to create a grant to

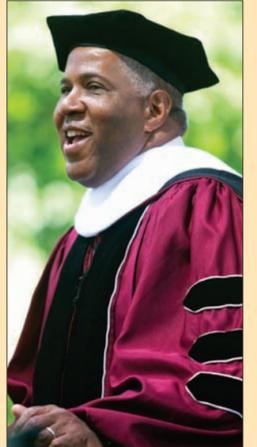
eliminate your student loans," Mr. Smith told the graduates during the event. "You great Morehouse men are bound by only the limits of

VSU graduation, B2

your conviction and your own creativity."

For a second, Mr. Hathaway, 22, was unsure of what he'd just heard. He turned to the other graduates seated on his row to

Please turn to A4



Regina H. Boone/Richmond Free Press

Bookworms and history buffs

Richmond School Board member and former principal Cheryl L. Burke leads an activity about acts of kindness Monday for second-graders from G.H. Reid Elementary School during the Black History Museum & Cultural Center of Virginia's Children's Book Festival. The event included the reading of "Each Kindness," a book by Jacqueline Woodson, tours of the museum's galleries and other activities. Each student was sent home with a bag of books at the end of the day.

Probe into Northam's blackface scandal 'inconclusive'

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

Was Gov. Ralph S. Northam actually one of the people in the racist photo on his Eastern Virginia Medical School yearbook page in 1984?

It's "inconclusive."

That's the bottom line from a report issued Wednesday by a nine-member team from Richmond-based McGuireWoods law firm, capping a nearly four-month probe into the issue that nearly tanked Gov. Northam's political career and tenure in office when the photo was made public on Feb. 1.

The photo first appeared on a conservative website and shows a tall person in blackface standing beside a shorter person in a Ku Klux Klan robe and hood.

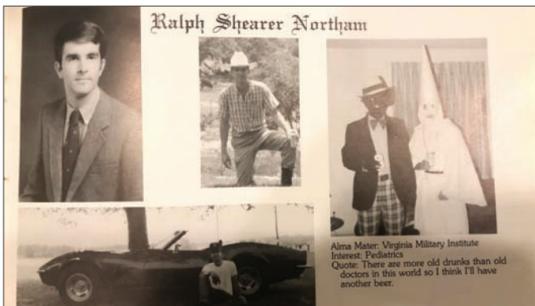
Gov. Northam initially apologized for the photo, but then denied being one of the people in it. In a news conference at the time, the governor acknowledged wearing blackface in a dance contest later in 1984.

"With respect to the photograph ..., we could not conclusively determine the identity of either individual in the photograph," according to the investigative report that EVMS paid for and involved six attorneys and three paralegals led by former state Attorney General Richard Cullen and George K. Martin, the managing partner of the firm's Richmond office.

After 30 interviews, "no individual we interviewed told us from personal knowledge that the governor is in the photograph," according to the report that is 54 pages long, including attached summaries of interviews with Gov. Northam and his chief of staff, Clark Mercer.

The team also said that it "could not conclusively determine

Please turn to A4



Eastern Virginia Medical School via Associated Press

The racist photo, shown above, on Gov. Ralph S. Northam's 1984 yearbook page from Eastern Virginia Medical School touched off a national firestorm and launched an EVMS-funded probe when it was posted on a conservative website in early February. After apologizing a day earlier, the governor backpedals during a Feb. 2 news conference, below, at the Executive Mansion, saying that he is neither person in the racist photo on his yearbook page. However, he admitted during the news conference that he wore blackface to portray superstar Michael Jackson during a 1984 dance contest. First Lady Pam Northam listened in the background.



Sandra Sellars/Richmond Free Press

Many Virginians still want atonement for racist photo, actions

By Reginald Stuart

Black Virginians are still debating and awaiting what bold steps Gov. Ralph S. Northam will take to revive and restore the once-strong link he maintained with African-American voters across the state, a wide range of interviews in recent weeks suggests.

"He has not been well received by many communities," said Valerie Slater, executive director of the Richmond-based RISE for Youth, an advocacy group that promotes community-based alternatives to youth incarceration.

"Acknowledgment and apology are not enough," she said. "Folks are waiting to see actions, not just pure words," said Ms. Slater, echoing comments offered by others in various parts of the state.

For sure, Gov. Northam has not bowed to early demands that he step aside following his blackface debacle and confession in early February in an attempt to quell any damage to the state and the Democratic Party's agenda to move Virginia into the political middle ground.

Staying in office has allowed Gov. Northam to ensure passage and vetoes of several pieces of legislation he and his Democratic peers had championed in the face of solid Republican legislative opposition.

Still, those who have stuck with the veteran physician during recent months say the governor needs to actively move ahead with healing wounds with the black community stemming from his 1984 medical school yearbook page showing a person in blackface and another in Ku Klux Klan robe and hood.

"If we make the governor resign his position, I don't think it will change a single yearbook," said Dr. Alvin Harris of Franklin,

Please turn to A4

Local News

Who's the fastest in the NFL?

George Wythe graduate wants chance to show it's him

By Ronald E. Carrington

Richmonder Kevin Snead is in the running to be named the fastest man in the NFL.

But he needs votes to land one of eight spots in the "40 Yards of Gold" tournament-style competition slated for June 22 in Miami, where eight offensive and eight defensive NFL players will run the 40-yard dash to determine who's the fastest.

After elimination rounds, the fastest offensive player will go head to head against the fastest defensive player, with the champion clinching a \$1 million prize.

Mr. Snead, a 2011 graduate of George Wythe High School, hopes the competition will get him back into the NFL. He had signed a free agent contract with the NFL New York Giants during rookie minicamp in 2017, but three months in he suffered a hamstring tear and was released by the Giants.

"Winning 40 Yards of Gold will provide an opportunity to get back into the league," the 27-year-old told the Free Press this week.

After running track in high school, Mr. Snead played football and ran track at an Arizona community college and moved to Eastern Michigan University before transferring to Division II Carson-Newman University in Tennessee.

He came into his own at Carson-Newman, winning the South Atlantic Conference championship in the 100- and 200-meter events. The sprinter also won All-American honors, and in 2016, set Carson-Newman's indoor record in the 60-meter dash with 6.77 seconds.

During the 2017 University of Tennessee Pro Day, he ran 40 yards in 4.22 seconds. The U.S Track & Field and Cross Country Coaches Association once referred to him as the "Fastest Man in College Football."

Since his injury, Mr. Snead has been working

to rebound with physical therapy. In 2018, he participated in the free agents spring league attended by NFL scouts.

But the next event may prove to open the door for him.

Mr. Snead said at last look, voting has put him at No. 5 among the offensive players and on track to run against Kareem Hunt, a 23-year-old running back from Ohio who was drafted in the third round by the Kansas City Chiefs in 2017 and selected to the Pro Bowl during his rookie year. He was released in 2018 because of domestic violence allegations and signed by the Cleveland Browns earlier this year.

"If people continue to vote, I will be sure to participate" in the tournament, Mr. Snead said.

As for Mr. Hunt, Mr. Snead said he'll be able to beat anybody he's up against.

The deadline to vote is Friday, May 24, at www.40yardsofgold.com.



Courtesy of Kevin Snead

Richmond native and former New York Giants wide receiver Kevin Snead is ready to compete for the title of fastest NFL player in the annual "40 Yards of Gold" tournament.

At least 280 Richmond Public Schools seniors won't be graduating in June, RPS officials say

Continued from A1

Those students now are being told they must take one or more courses in summer school or return to class next school year in order to receive their diploma.

"I would rather have a slightly lower rate, but know we can stand behind every

single (diploma), than have a higher rate and have questions about the authenticity of those diplomas," Mr. Kamras told the School Board.

Board member Kenya Gibson, 3rd District, described the situation as "appalling," particularly with students just learning about the impact of the transcript foul-ups so close to

graduation.

"It is incredibly frustrating to see students impacted by the actions of adults who didn't address these issues," said board member James "Scott" Barlow, 2nd District.

Students also are frustrated because even those who believe they are on track to graduate said Wednesday they have not been

informed of their status.

"We're just guessing based off of what we have done. They're not telling us who is going to graduate and who is not," said Kayla White, a senior at Armstrong High.

The transcript problem has been brewing for years, but came to a head last year when a parent's claims of transcript problems for her daughter forced RPS officials to start investigating.

In the process, Mr. Kamras asked the Virginia Department of Education to conduct an audit, which began at Armstrong and spread to the entire system, turning up at least 20 flaws that led to the creation of student records that were completely inaccurate.

Ms. Epp said that she and her staff had gone through senior transcripts at least eight times to try to find all the flaws.

While she indicated this year's upheaval has been unavoidable, she said a new process is being installed to protect students in other grades. Along with a revamped transcript, she said new policies and practices are being put in place to ensure transcript accuracy.

Writers Ronald E. Carrington and Nia Tariq contributed to this report.

RPS to hold school rezoning info sessions May 29

Richmond Public Schools is holding information sessions for parents and supporters to learn about the scheduled school rezoning.

The two meetings will be held on Wednesday, May 29, with the first at 5 p.m. at Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School, 1000 Mosby St., and the other at 6:30 p.m. at South Side Community Services Center, 4100 Hull Street Road.

Details about the rezoning and the process are available on the RPS website, www.rvaschools.net. RPS officials said Monday that the site includes an interactive map of current school zones and will continually be updated with news, information and feedback opportunities throughout the rezoning process.

Darin Simmons Jr., RPS' chief operating officer, also announced the names of the members of the new Rezoning Advisory Committee, which will hold its first meeting 6 to 8 p.m. Thursday, May 30, at the Richmond Technical Center, 2020 Westwood Ave.

Community members on the RAC are:

- 1st District:** Damian Pitt and Kim Gomez
- 2nd District:** Sarah Gross and Kelley Ryan
- 3rd District:** Theresa Kennedy and Katina Harris
- 4th District:** Mary Arginteneau and Deanna Fierro
- 5th District:** Beverly Henderson and Bernadett Carter
- 6th District:** Bernice Travers and Willie Woodson
- 7th District:** Lawson Wijesooriya and Sharon Burton
- 8th District:** Shannon Gonzales and Tia Redd
- 9th District:** Eugene Mason and Jerome Coleman

The RAC also will include School Board members Dr. Patrick Sapini, 5th District; Felicia D. Cosby, 6th District; and Linda B. Owen, 9th District; and RPS administrators Dr. Shadae Harris, chief engagement officer; Francis Elementary School Principal Kecia Ryan; and Jarrell Coleman, facilities planner. — RONALD E. CARRINGTON

Richmond Public Schools graduation projections

School	On Track	Likely June	Likely Summer	Likely 2019-20
Armstrong High School	8	100	23	31
Franklin Military Academy	44	3	0	0
George Wythe High School	84	43	45	34
Huguenot High School	160	71	43	34
John Marshall High School	86	12	23	8
Open High School	51	1	0	0
Richmond Alternative School	3	0	13	5
Richmond Community High School	51	1	0	0
Thomas Jefferson High School	20	72	15	6
Total Students	507	303	162	118

Source: Richmond Public Schools, May 20, 2019

Thomas Jefferson H.S. senior wants RPS to get its act together

By Nia Tariq

Treyshaun Bailey believes the way Richmond Public Schools is handling requirements for graduation is harming young Richmonders' chances at graduating through no fault of their own.

"I just felt like that was wrong, like you're messing up people's grades and transcripts," the Thomas Jefferson High School senior said. "That's messing up college and stuff like that ... it's just all in one mix."

Treyshaun was offering his view on a controversial report that Tracy Epp, Richmond Public Schools' chief academic officer, provided the Richmond School Board on Monday night indicating that at least 280 seniors would not graduate and would need to attend summer school or return for courses next year to complete diploma requirements.

Ms. Epp's report was an update to a Virginia Department of Education audit in November that found at least 20 problems in the transcripts for seniors who started 9th grade in the 2015-16 school year.

Along with updating transcripts, Ms. Epp noted that she and her staff were focusing on changes that would prevent future problems, including remedying course selection and scheduling, ensuring students' progress toward graduation was properly tracked and installing practices and technology to prevent further neglect of crucial student data.

Although Treyshaun is on track to graduate this June and play football for Vermillion Community College in Ely, Minn., in the fall, he's concerned that some of his peers are facing barriers to graduation that RPS officials created or failed to address.

"Blood, sweat and tears in class — you still get your work done, you come out with a good grade — but on the transcript and on the percentages for graduating, it doesn't look like that," he said. "I just feel like that's wrong."

Only 20 of the 113 seniors at Thomas Jefferson — that's 18 percent — have been identified as "on track" to graduate in June, Ms. Epp reported. Another 72 seniors are considered likely to graduate next month. According to RPS data, 21 Thomas Jefferson students either must attend summer school to complete diploma requirements or return next year.

"(When) you've got percentages graduating, you're making us look bad, like we don't know anything. That's not fair to us, that we have to sit back and not do anything about it," Treyshaun said.

In order to graduate with a standard diploma this year, according to the Virginia Department of Education, members of RPS' senior class must have completed 22 standard credits and earned six verified credits. A verified credit means a student has passed a state Standards of Learning test in a core subject such as English, math, science or history, in addition to passing the class itself.

Seniors also must have passed at least one "virtual" or online class and have earned a career and technical education credential.

"By far, (lacking verified credits) is the most common reason for a student being at risk," according to Ms. Epp's report. The report states that approximately 330 seniors have not met the requirement for six verified credits, though a majority could do so with SOL tests now being taken.

Treyshaun said that passing a course, but not the SOL is not unusual.

"I had a couple of friends who that happened to," Treyshaun said. "They went to their parents about it and their parents came up (to the school), and it caused a big conflict because that shouldn't be what you have to do to get a credit in that class."

RPS previously awarded a local verified credit automatically if the student passed the course and came close to passing the SOL test with a score of 375 to 390. Ms. Epp stated that that policy changed and every case must be reviewed.

Another 130 seniors might not get a diploma because they lack a required career and technical education credential, and another 70 seniors students might not get a diploma because they did not take all of the required courses due to faulty schedules.

That's a total of 530 students who need to pass one or more SOL tests or complete other requirements. At least 280 of the seniors must attend summer school or return next year.

"Y'all have got to find a way to fix that because y'all have kids out here looking bad (who) actually know what they're doing," Treyshaun said.

Moving forward, Ms. Epp reported to the board that seniors and their parents have been notified as to whether additional courses will be needed to earn a diploma. She stated that RPS is seeking to help by offering remediation to help students do better on an SOL retest.

Also, the school system is making sure summer school will give students the opportunity to complete the one or two courses needed to fulfill diploma requirements.

Update on RPS principal replacement

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

Dr. Sherry Wharton-Cary, principal at Elizabeth D. Redd Elementary School, is not among the 10 Richmond principals being replaced, but Rose Ferguson, principal of George Mason Elementary, is.

The Free Press incorrectly reported in the April 18-20 edition that Dr. Wharton-Cary was on the list of principals being removed. The report was based on information from two sources.

Neither the Richmond School Board nor the Richmond Public Schools' administration has publicly released any names.

The newspaper was alerted Sunday through a Facebook post that Dr. Wharton-Cary was not one of the 10 principals. Both sources apologized to the Free Press for naming her rather than Ms. Ferguson. The Free Press regrets the error.

The names of the other nine principals being replaced have been confirmed, the sources said.

They include Reva Green at George Wythe High School, Tamera Mines at Thomas Jefferson High School and Dr. William Royal at John Marshall High School.

Also, Cynthia Heckstall at Henderson Middle School, and five additional elementary school principals, Regina Farr at Bellevue, Kate Outten at Blackwell, Ellana Banks at Fairfield Court, Linda Simms at E.S.H. Greene and Kara Lancaster-Gay at Overby-Sheppard.

Ms. Lancaster-Gay is the only principal to appeal the removal decision to the School Board. However, the board voted May 6 to uphold the administration's decision. Nine of the 10 principals have filed for retirement, resigned or accepted a demotion.

Ms. Outten called the Free Press on Monday to say she decided to resign earlier this year and should not be included among principals whom RPS Chief of Schools Harry Hughes had designated for removal. Ms. Outten did not respond to a Free Press request to provide the date when she filed her resignation.



NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETINGS
Tuesday, June 4, 2019 5:30 PM – 6:30 PM
 Southside Community Services Center, Room A
 4100 Hull Street Rd., Richmond, VA 23224

Thursday, June 6, 2019 6:00 PM – 7:00 PM
 East End Branch - Richmond Public Library
 1200 N 25th St, Richmond, VA 23223

The purpose of these meetings is to solicit feedback about proposed service updates in August 2019, including extending service hours on two Southside routes (86 & 87), adding Sunday service to Route 2B North Ave/Jahnke/Midlothian, and creating a new route in Church Hill. Information gathered at these meetings will help GRTC collaborate with the City of Richmond on meeting the needs of the communities we serve.

Please send any routing questions or comments to:
 Email planningcomment@ridegrtc.com
 Phone: (804) 358-4782

Mail: Planning Division, GRTC Transit System, 301 East Belt Boulevard, Richmond VA 23224
 Meeting locations are accessible to persons with disabilities. GRTC strives to provide reasonable accommodations and services for persons who require assistance to participate. For special assistance, call Carrie Rose Pace at 804-474-9354 or email carrie.rosepace@ridegrtc.com at least 72 hours prior to the public meeting. Si usted necesita servicios de traducción para participar, por favor mande un correo electrónico a: carrie.rosepace@ridegrtc.com. GRTC Transit System's CARE and CARE Plus services provide origin-to-destination Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) paratransit services to residents of the Richmond Region. To schedule a reservation, please call (804) 782-CARE (2273), email webcarecvan@ridegrtc.com, or fax (804) 474-9993.

Local News

Former teacher claims he is banned from RPS without official explanation

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

A former third-grade teacher who sought to volunteer at Chimborazo Elementary School where he taught has been banned from all Richmond Public Schools property.

There's just one problem: RPS officials have been unwilling to provide an explanation for the ban to 30-year-old Malcolm Solomon or others.

The ban raises questions about RPS' commitment to encouraging participation of positive African-American male role models as teachers and volunteers.

Mr. Solomon earned a stellar reputation for helping his students succeed in the classroom based on results of state Standards of Learning tests, and there is nothing on his record that would lead to such a ban.

Last Friday, two high-ranking RPS officials met with Mr. Solomon. But Chief of Schools Harry Hughes and Chief Engagement Officer Shadae Thomas Harris offered no new information, he said.

Mr. Solomon said both acknowledged

that they had not reviewed the complaint that led to the ban or any information about him before the meeting. They also had not checked out posts on his social media accounts that allegedly were the basis for the complaint, he said.

"They were not very prepared," Mr. Solomon said. "They appeared to just want to listen to me. I want the ban lifted and my reputation restored. Nothing was resolved. All I got was a promise from them to continue to investigate."

Community organizer Omari Al-Qadafi, who along with Kinfolk Community leader Arthur Burton accompanied Mr. Solomon to the meeting, confirmed Mr. Solomon's statements.

RPS policy is not to comment on such matters.

Mr. Solomon said one issue that came up at the meeting was RPS' commitment to hiring and retaining black male teachers, particularly in elementary grades. He said he explained the hostile atmosphere he encountered at Chimborazo that led him to quit in 2018 and offered to provide insight to RPS' African-American male recruits

about what they could expect.

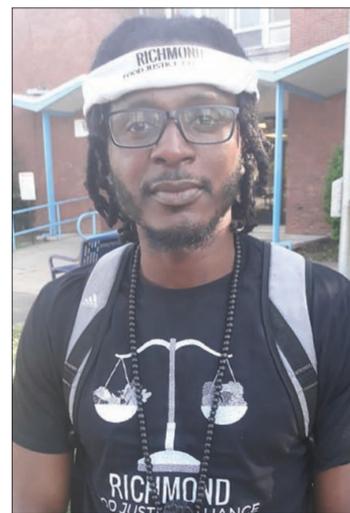
"Before hiring, what is needed is a thorough evaluation of the types of environments they are sending black male teachers into," Mr. Solomon said after the meeting. "Too often, administrators view black male teachers as threats because they challenge the thinking about students and the decisions being made and do not demonstrate submissive behavior."

Chimborazo students still remember Mr. Solomon and wish he were still at the school. Now working as a substitute teacher outside Richmond, Mr. Solomon taught with RPS for five years.

"He was the best third-grade teacher," said Naiim Byrd, 11, now a fifth-grader. Naiim greeted Mr. Solomon on May 24 as he stood outside the school with several supporters urging the ban be lifted.

According to Mr. Solomon, he returned to the school last fall as a volunteer "lunch buddy" to keep up with the students he had taught. He said the ban was imposed in February.

While he has not received any official documents spelling out the situation, he said



Jeremy M. Lazarus/Richmond Free Press
Mr. Solomon

he was told the ban resulted from videos he posted on his Instagram account, Mr. Solomon88, that supposedly contained disparaging information about the school system.

A Free Press review of the posted videos turned up nothing negative. The videos show him pumping the importance of learning to young listeners and urging children to do their best in school.

"What you see on my page, the encouragement and positivity, is all I

have to offer," said Mr. Solomon, who earned his undergraduate degree at Virginia State University and earned certification to be a school principal in graduate studies at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Prior to the last week's meeting, Mr. Solomon had gone to the central office several times to get an explanation, but he said no one would tell him anything or meet with him. After a Free Press query, Michelle Hudacsko, chief of staff to Superintendent Jason Kamras, set up the meeting between Mr. Solomon, Mr. Hughes and Ms. Harris.

Teacher alleges her ouster tied to blowing whistle on students' failing grades being changed

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

A first-year Spanish teacher who blew the whistle on a grade cheating scandal at Lucille Brown Middle School is to be fired.

The teacher, who does not want her name published, was notified May 24 in a letter from Richmond Public Schools Superintendent Jason Kamras that her contract to teach would not be renewed, though the School Board has yet to receive his recommendation that she be terminated.

While RPS does not comment on personnel matters, the letter raises questions about whether the firing is in retaliation for the teacher exposing the scandal.

Documents recently obtained by the Free Press show that, by late January, Mr. Kamras had been informed that staff at the middle school had changed the teacher's Fs to Cs for some students after the first grading period in November. To date,

nothing has changed for those implicated in the grade changes.

The documents include copies of an email on the grade changes that Mr. Kamras acknowledged receiving, as well as RPS grade documents showing the grade that the teacher submitted and the improved grade that was listed on a failing student's report card.

The teacher, who previously taught in Miami, was notified she could appeal her termination, but elected not to begin the process.

The Free Press was alerted to the grade-change allegation on Jan. 18 and initiated an inquiry to the middle school's principal, Dr. Stacy Gibbs Gaines. According to information the Free Press received, Dr. Gaines allegedly authorized the grade changes, although there was no evidence to support that allegation.

Kenita Bowers, then RPS spokeswoman, issued a statement to the Free Press on Jan. 24: "Our

investigation concludes that these allegations are inaccurate. The principal has confirmed that she did not have any involvement in a situation of this nature nor does she engage in the practice of changing grades."

In the statement, Ms. Bowers also said "there is zero tolerance for the practice of unethically changing grades in Richmond Public Schools."

The allegation was revived after the Free Press received documents in mid-May that show student grades in the teacher's Spanish classes were changed between the time the teacher submitted the grades and the time report cards were issued to students Nov. 12.

An updated statement from the teacher provided to the Free Press this month also points the finger at an assistant principal. According to the statement, the assistant principal directed the teacher to change the Fs earned by the students to Cs. The statement also notes that another staff member who works with

the school's counselors also told the teacher that the grades would be changed and, when the teacher disagreed, warned her not to do anything.

According to emails sent to Mr. Kamras Jan. 25 and Jan. 26, the initial January inquiry from the Free Press had repercussions.

The emails show that the teacher had been assigned a mentor at the beginning of the year to assist the teacher with creating lesson plans, developing class projects and becoming more successful in classroom management.

Soon after the Free Press inquiry, the teacher was told she was ineligible for a mentor and the logs of the assigned mentor's work allegedly were erased.

The teacher also reported being harassed by the middle school's administration beginning in late January and expressed concern then that a paper trail was being created to justify her firing at the end of the year.

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Meet LMR's board chairwoman B3



White House photographer returns home with book B4

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VOL. 28 NO. 50

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

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DECEMBER 12-14, 2019

America 2.0

Thousands turn out for the unveiling of artist Kehinde Wiley's 'Rumors of War,' which many cited as a turning point from a Confederate past toward a more inclusive city

By George Copeland Jr.

Kehinde Wiley's monumental statue, "Rumors of War," was unveiled Tuesday at its new home at the entrance of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, just steps from the headquarters of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and a brisk walk from the controversial Confederate statues on Monument Avenue it was created in response to by the artist.

"I'm nervous and overwhelmed by not just the amount of people, but the sheer history that we're dealing with," said Mr. Wiley, dressed in an eye-catching Nigerian print suit and Converse sneakers, in addressing an enthusiastic crowd of thousands gathered on the museum grounds.

The sculpture, depicting a young African-American man on horseback sporting dreadlocks tied atop his

Related story, editorial on A2 and A10

head, a hoodie, ripped jeans and Nike high-top sneakers, stands 27 feet tall, 25 feet long and 16 feet wide, not including the limestone base.

It provides an "alternative narrative" to the city's many Confederate monuments, Dr. Monroe E. Harris Jr., chairman of the VMFA Board of Trustees, said in a brief Free Press interview.

"This statue means so much to so many on so many levels," Dr. Harris said earlier Tuesday in addressing the crowd. "A black man on a horse in all of his regal splendor — it's never been seen before on this scale. It says that no matter what your background or your lot in life, you are important. This is a turning point for Richmond."

It is the largest sculpture created by the 42-year-old Mr. Wiley, who was commissioned to paint the official portrait of President Barack Obama in 2017.

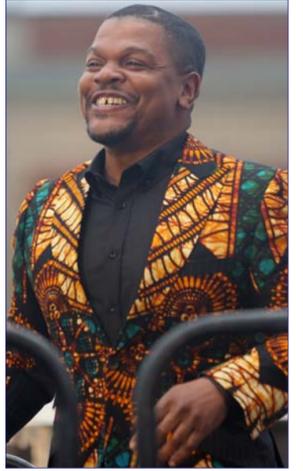
The inspiration for "Rumors of War" came during a trip Mr. Wiley took to Richmond in 2016 for the VMFA premiere of an exhibit of his work, "Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic." Seeing for the first time the equestrian statue of Confederate Gen. J.E.B. Stuart among the five memorials to Confederates lining Monument Avenue, Mr. Wiley sought to create a piece that

Please turn to A4



Photos by Regina H. Boone/Richmond Free Press

Kehinde Wiley's "Rumors of War" sculpture stands partially revealed outside the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts as Richmond Firefighter John Lukhard works to remove the drape caught on the figure's hair during Tuesday's unveiling ceremony. Right, artist Kehinde Wiley, 42, enthusiastically heads to the microphone to address the throngs of people awaiting the unveiling of the sculpture funded by private donations.



Trump 'betrayed the nation'

Associated Press

WASHINGTON

House Democrats announced two articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump on Tuesday, declaring he "betrayed the nation" with his actions toward Ukraine as they pushed toward historic proceedings that are certain to help define his presidency and shape the 2020 election.

The specific charges aimed at removing the 45th president of the United States: Abuse of power and obstruction of Congress.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, flanked by the chairmen of impeachment inquiry committees at the U.S. Capitol, said they were upholding their solemn oath to defend the U.S. Constitution. President Trump responded angrily on Twitter: "WITCH HUNT!"

Voting is expected in a matter of days by the House Judiciary

Please turn to A4



Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call via AP Images

Congresswoman Maxine Waters, center, chair of the House Financial Services Committee, joins House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Rep. Jerrold Nadler, chair of the House Judiciary Committee, during a news conference Tuesday announcing the articles of impeachment against President Trump.

Old Moore Street School continues to deteriorate during inaction over future

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

Jerome Legions is preparing to go on the warpath over the condition of historic Moore Street School.

Mr. Legions, who is president of the Carver Area Civic Improvement League, is furious that Richmond Public Schools is allowing the 132-year-old building in the 1100 block of West Moore Street to deteriorate. He is upset that the school system failed to cover a leak in the roof that has allowed snow and rain to damage the plaster walls and wooden floors.

"This is an amazing building, but it has a leaking roof, peeling paint and broken win-

dows," he said.

"We want something done about this building, and we want it done now," he said Saturday during a visit to the two-story, whitewashed brick structure that largely goes unnoticed behind Carver Elementary School.

Mr. Legions is aware that one or more public and private organizations have expressed interest in taking over and renovating the building that has been vacant for at least 20 years. He and others are concerned about inaction by RPS officials.

Richmond School Board member J. Scott Barlow, 2nd District, did not respond to a request

Please turn to A4

Vote on Navy Hill project expected on Feb. 24

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

Monday, Feb. 24.

That's the date on which City Council President Cynthia I. Newbille wants the governing body to take a vote on the controversial \$1.5 billion Coliseum replacement and Downtown development plan.

Dr. Newbille, who backs the Navy Hill plan, presented that date as she told her colleagues she didn't want a question mark still hanging over the Navy Hill District Corp.'s redevelopment proposal as the council begins deliberating the mayor's 2020-21 budget plan in early March.



Dr. Newbille



Ms. Lynch

The 7th District representative made the timing known during an informal session on Monday after a divided City Council agreed 5-4 to award a \$190,000 contract to C.H. Johnson Consulting of Chicago to review the massive plan.

The vote came despite council members' misgivings about the relationship between Johnson Consulting and a previously hired consultant, Hunden Strategic Partners, that is bullish on the project.

As the Free Press reported last week, the

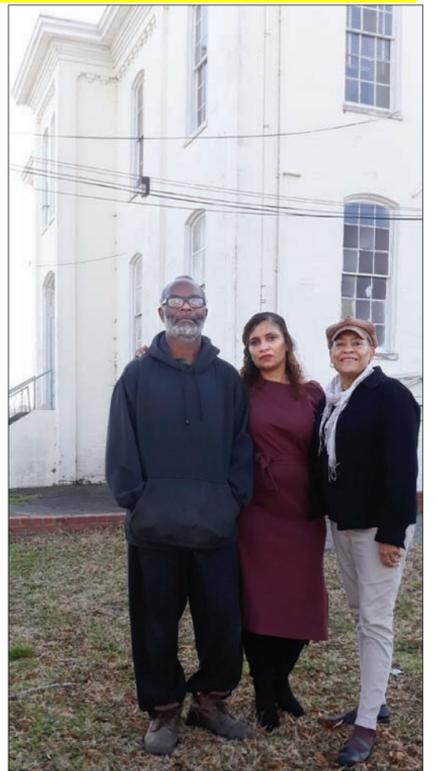
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Sandra Sellars/Richmond Free Press

Down with the beat

Members of the Dangerous Royalties Dance Team strut their stuff in the 36th Annual Christmas Parade last Saturday. Thousands of spectators lined the 2-mile route along Broad Street between the Science Museum of Virginia and 7th Street in Downtown to watch an array of floats, marching bands, character balloons bring the holiday spirit. Please see photo coverage, B2.



Jeremy Lazarus/Richmond Free Press

Jerome Legions, president of the Carver Area Civic Improvement League, stands with 2nd District City Councilwoman Kim B. Gray, center, and past civic league president Charleen Baylor outside the vacant Moore Street School in the Carver neighborhood.

Thousands turn out for the unveiling of 'Rumors of War'

Continued from A1

would reflect and respond to the imagery of "domination" the sword-wielding Stuart statue presents.

"I want this sculpture to be not about an individual, but rather about black men and their place in this society and, in a much broader way, a society that can say 'Yes' to black men."

He called the statue and the moment "consequential on a scale that goes beyond museum walls. It's about how we choose to give birth to the next group of people," he told the crowd.

While "Rumors of War" carries the element of destruction common to equestrian artwork and the Stuart statue, Mr. Wiley said it also carries an element of creation, while hopefully inspiring others "to feel just as engendered to the power that this sculpture represents."

"I think that what this thing represents is not just a story about race or gender, but a story about openness," Mr. Wiley said. "It's a story about America 2.0. The 21st century will have to be a series of yeses to moments like this."

Alex Nyerges, director and chief executive officer of VMFA, said the statue was funded entirely through private donations, rather than state funds. The Associated Press reported that it cost \$2 million, with the museum spending about \$600,000 to \$700,000 for additional expenses, including the cost of having the 30-ton sculpture shipped to Richmond and installed. It initially debuted on Sept. 21 in Times Square in New York City.



Photos by Regina H. Boone/Richmond Free Press

A crowd numbering in the thousands packs the front lawn of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and spills onto Arthur Ashe Boulevard, which was closed to traffic, to see the unveiling Tuesday of "Rumors of War." The sculpture initially debuted in mid-September in New York City's Times Square before being moved to its permanent home in Richmond. Right, the fully unveiled sculpture stands 27 feet tall, not including its limestone pedestal.



Programs at the ceremony listed the names of 56 donors, not including several foundations and family groups. Many are well-known area art patrons, including Dr. Harris and his wife, Dr. Jill Bussey Harris; Richmond Circuit Judge C.N. Jenkins Jr. and his wife, Dr. Pamela Royal; JMI founder and chief executive officer Ken Johnson and his wife, Dr. Lydia Johnson; University of Richmond President Ronald A. Crutcher and his wife, Dr. Betty Neal Crutcher; Jershon Jones, director of the transportation and logistics group for Harris Williams & Co.; Ken Dye, retired Comcast executive, and his wife, Sam Seely; and William A. Royall Jr., founder of Royall & Company and former rector of Virginia Commonwealth University, and his wife, Pamela K. Royall.

The actual unveiling of the statue was briefly stymied by the rain, which caused the silvery drape that covered the statue to get

caught in the figure's dreadlocks. Much of the crowd remained in place, however, as roughly 30 minutes passed before Richmond Firefighter John Lukhard climbed a ladder and used a pocketknife to cut the material away from the statue.

The crowd cheered and snapped photos of the fully revealed statue as the Richmond All-City High School Marching Band continued to play.

Deanna Scott-McDaniel, who drove from Virginia Beach to attend the ceremony with her mother, Davine Scott, and son, toddler Andrew McDaniel Jr., was excited, calling it "an honor" to be a part of a ceremony for a sculpture located on Arthur Ashe Boulevard on a day "celebrating African-American people and their accomplishments."

Richmond Mayor Levar M. Stoney expanded further on that connection in his remarks to the crowd. He said "Rumors

of War," along with the street being renamed in June for Richmond native and tennis great Arthur Ashe Jr. and the 2017 unveiling of the statue of Maggie L. Walker, the first African-American woman to charter a bank, represents a cultural shift within the city to move past a "complex" history while embracing inclusivity and equity.

"This moment firmly establishes that our city is not living in the past, but embracing the future and the good," he told the crowd. "Today, Richmond is embracing a future that is happening right before our eyes."

Other speakers Tuesday included Gov. Ralph S. Northam; Valerie Cassel Oliver, the Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art; and Sean Kelly of Sean Kelly Gallery in New York City, who represents Mr. Wiley.

While the sculpture is the

latest effort in Richmond to reckon with a troubling past, many people are offering additional steps to create a more inclusive future in the city.

Wendy Martin, a longtime volunteer tour guide at the museum, recalled a suggestion made by Chris Dovi of CodeVA, of turning the nearby UDC building into a slavery museum. It could be "a healing act of reconciliation" that would "show such grace on behalf of our city," Ms. Martin said.

Richmond City Councilwoman Kim B. Gray, 2nd District, this week announced she is seeking the council's support for a proposed monument to be placed on Monument Avenue to honor the 14 African-American soldiers who received the Medal of Honor for their heroism at the Battle of New Market Heights in Henrico County during the Civil War.

Councilman Michael J. Jones, 9th District, also has

introduced a resolution seeking local control of the city's Confederate monuments. Virginia cities have been hamstrung in removing monuments because of a state law that protects memorials to war veterans.

Mr. Nyerges said during a Free Press interview after Tuesday's ceremony that "Rumors of War" represents "a huge and seismic change for Virginia and America." Its presence, he said, could "change the conversation" surrounding the Confederate memorials and the Lost Cause narrative they champion.

Mr. Wiley didn't speak on the future of the Confederate statues during the unveiling, but he acknowledged the changing cultural tides.

"Art has always been about what we as a people say yes to. And those things change; culture evolves," he said. "There's something moving in the culture. There's something changing in these winds."

Meet Mr. Wiley's model for 'Rumors of War'

He lives in Brooklyn, N.Y., but Najee Wilson now has a permanent place in Richmond.

The 32-year-old artist served as a key model for artist Kehinde Wiley in the creation of "Rumors of War," which was unveiled Tuesday outside the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

"I was blown away," Mr. Wilson said in describing how he felt seeing himself in the finished product.

Mr. Wilson toured and spoke at bookstores and art galleries and was recognized by Richmond City Council after advocate and inclusion educator Chelsea Higgs Wise arranged to bring him to Richmond in connection with the unveiling.

Speaking last Friday night at Candela Books + Gallery in Downtown, Mr. Wilson said the face of the horse rider is a composite of six people, but the body and the torn jeans on the sculpture are his. He wore the same jeans with tears at the knees during his visit.

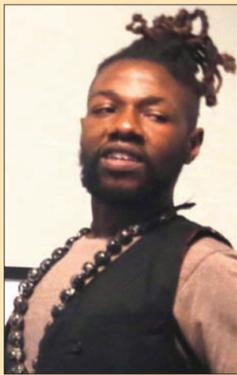
A native of Charleston, S.C., Mr. Wilson said the opportunity to work with Mr. Wiley began when he visited an art museum near his Brooklyn residence that was offering a retrospective of Mr. Wiley's work.

Impressed, Mr. Wilson said he sent a message to Mr. Wiley via social media asking if he could work with him. To his surprise, Mr. Wiley responded, "Yes."

A few months later, Mr. Wilson said he found himself at Mr. Wiley's studio talking with the artist and then spending hours being photographed from various angles, in various poses and with various facial expressions.

He said Mr. Wiley works with a team that can swiftly change the background in the studio or meet whatever scenic needs the artist requires.

For him, Mr. Wilson told City Council members on Monday, the sculpture is a prime example of the way "the creative arts can change the world we live in." — JEREMY M. LAZARUS



Mr. Wilson

Old Moore Street School continues to deteriorate

Continued from A1

for comment.

RPS Chief of Staff Michelle Hudacko stated that Moore Street is one of RPS' vacant buildings that a School Board committee will review.

School Board member Jonathan Young, 4th District, said the board's vacant property review committee that he chairs is still being organized. But he noted that because of the interest that has been expressed, Moore Street School would be a top priority after the board approves the final appointments at the first meeting in January.

He confirmed that several proposals are on the table. He said he expects the committee would interview the interested parties and make a recommendation to the School Board and administration within 90 days.

Separately, Mr. Young, apprised of the roof leak, said he also made a request Wednesday for RPS to cover any holes in the roof to prevent the building's further deterioration.

Moore Street School was built in 1886-1887, according to an RPS history, and apparently was one of the first new buildings at the time designed to serve African-American children in the city's segregated education system. Records indicate that then City Engineer Wilfred E. Cutshaw insisted the two-story, 16-classroom school be built to the same standards as

the other schools the city built that year primarily for white children.

Today, the empty building stands facing a loudly humming Dominion Energy electrical substation at the edge of the Moore Street neighborhood. It is situated in the rear of the more modern Carver Elementary School, which was built in 1951 facing Leigh Street.

Carver Elementary is attached to an addition to Moore Street School that was opened in 1917 and is still in use. The addition sits between the Carver building and the original Moore Street building.

Among those who want the building preserved and repurposed is City Councilwoman Kim B. Gray, 2nd District, who shares Mr. Legions' concerns and those of his civic association predecessor, Charleen Baylor, owner of the nearby Nutty Buttery restaurant.

Ms. Gray is critical of RPS for what she says is indifference to the condition of its historic but vacant buildings, including the old Moore Street School and the former 13 Acres School building on the Linwood Holton Elementary School campus in North Side.

"It amounts to demolition by neglect," said Ms. Gray, who has sought a new use for Moore Street School for 10 years.

One of her first initiatives when she was a newly elected member of the Richmond School Board in 2009 was to get the board

to declare the vacant building as surplus property. The building had been closed in the late 1990s.

At the time, City Council included language in its budget requiring the administration to produce a report detailing any structural problems at Moore Street School and providing an estimate of the cost to stabilize it.

"At least \$400,000 was set aside for that work," Ms. Gray said. "But it never could be spent and was diverted to other uses because RPS never secured a quit claim deed to return it to the city."

She said she learned about the issue after she took her seat on City Council in 2017 and has since been working to find interested parties that would consider using the building.

But she said a deal she currently is involved with to transform Moore Street School could collapse because of inaction. She declined to identify the organization or the proposed use, but said that deal is "languishing because RPS is not moving fast enough."

"This building is an important element of African-American history, and RPS needs to step up the pace," Ms. Gray said. "It's just not right to have this building stay empty when there are people who are ready, willing and able to fill it with a program that would be compatible with Carver Elementary and would benefit the community."

Vote on Navy Hill project expected on Feb. 24

Continued from A1

owner of Hunden, Robin S. "Rob" Hunden, launched his company in 2006 after working for five years as a vice president at Johnson Consulting. Johnson was a consultant in 1999 for the Greater Richmond Convention Center Authority, which also supports the Navy Hill project.

Along with a new Coliseum, the plan calls for development of a new convention hotel, more than 2,000 new apartments, new office buildings and a host of restaurants and retail stores in an area that includes the Greater Richmond Convention Center.

New 5th District Councilwoman Stephanie Lynch delivered the key vote that prevented the contract and the solicitation from being scrapped as Councilwoman Kim B. Gray, 2nd District, had proposed.

The contract is expected to be formally awarded to Johnson Consulting this week. It calls for giving the real estate, convention and tourism consultant 90 days to complete the work and another 30 days to make a formal presentation to City Council. Dr. Newbille said that such timing would carry the issue into the budget period.

While she led the fight to get the consultant and was a key player in setting the terms that were advertised, Dr. Newbille urged Betty J. Burrell, director of city procurement services and the person whose signature would activate the contract, to ask Johnson Consulting to agree to provide

a preliminary report to the council within 60 days, or around Feb. 15, so the council could have the information for the debate to occur nine days later.

Ms. Burrell said that decision "would be up to the contractor."

Ms. Lynch said she voted to allow Johnson Consulting to be hired in hopes of getting some questions answered.

While she campaigned as an opponent of the Navy Hill project, Ms. Lynch said she supports the concept of developing the 21 acres of largely city-owned property that lies in the 10 blocks that link the Coliseum and City Hall, along with two blocks south of Broad Street.

She said she supported hiring the consultant with the expectation of gaining information that she does not believe will be provided in the separate Navy Hill Development Advisory Commission report to be issued on Monday, Dec. 23.

The advisory commission is to hold its final meeting 9 a.m. to noon Saturday, Dec. 14, in City Council Chambers at City Hall, rather than at the Richmond Public Library Main branch as originally advertised.

Among other things, Ms. Lynch wants the consultant to provide a valuation of the city-owned property, which she said would be critical in determining if Navy Hill District Corp. is offering a fair price at \$15 million.

She also wants the consultant to address the issue of whether replacing the

Coliseum is a must as the Navy Hill group has insisted, or whether the city can seek bids for private redevelopment of some or all of the property and still have a robust project.

Ms. Lynch also said she is skeptical of an estimate by the city Department of Public Works that it would cost \$12 million to remove the Richmond Coliseum and clear the ground and would like the consultant's opinion on whether that estimate is on target or inflated.

The contract vote provided additional evidence of just how split the council is on the Navy Hill proposal.

Along with Ms. Lynch and Dr. Newbille, council members voting to move ahead with hiring Johnson Consulting included Andreas D. Addison, 1st District; Ellen F. Robertson, 6th District; and Michael J. Jones, 9th District.

Ms. Robertson expressed concern that the council had been barred from evaluating the consulting firms that responded to the city's request, but still voted for Johnson Consulting to avoid canceling the contract.

Council members voting to terminate the request, along with Ms. Gray, included Chris A. Hilbert, 3rd District; Kristen N. Larson, 4th District; and Reva M. Trammell, 8th District.

The Navy Hill project would need seven votes from City Council to move forward.

Trump 'betrayed the nation'

Continued from A1

Committee, which began deliberations on Wednesday, and by Christmas in the full U.S. House of Representatives. The charges, if approved, would then be sent to the U.S. Senate, where the Republican majority would be unlikely to convict President Trump.

In the formal articles announced Tuesday, the Democrats said President Trump enlisted a foreign power in "corrupting" the U.S. election process and endangered national security by asking Ukraine to investigate his political rivals, including Democrat Joe Biden, while withholding U.S. military aid as leverage. That benefited Russia over the United States as America's ally fought Russian aggression, the Democrats said.

President Trump then obstructed Congress by ordering current and former officials to defy House subpoenas for testimony and by blocking access to documents, the charges state.

By his conduct, President Trump "demonstrated he will remain a threat to national security and the Constitution if allowed to remain in office," the nine-page impeachment resolution states.

"If we did not hold him accountable, he would continue to undermine our election," Speaker Pelosi said later at a forum sponsored by Politico. "Nothing less is at stake than the central point of our democracy — a free and fair election."