

Daily Press

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2020

KATHERINE JOHNSON: 1918 - 2020

A NASA LEGEND

‘Hidden figure,’ a quiet pioneer in the space program at Langley in Hampton, became a humble national hero



JONATHON GRUENKE/STAFF FILE

Above: Katherine Johnson is photographed in July 2018, just before her 100th birthday.

Right, near: President Barack Obama presents the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Johnson at the White House on Nov. 24, 2015.

Right, far: Johnson poses for a photo at her desk at Langley Research Center.



ICHOLAS KAMM/TNS FILE PHOTO



COURTESY OF NASA

By MIKE HOLTZCLAW
Staff writer

Katherine Johnson, the NASA Langley Research Center mathematician who went from “hidden” to hero in her late 90s, died Monday morning at the age of 101.

In the early days of the space program, before the advent of modern computers, Johnson’s precise trajectory calculations — done with pencil and paper, or chalk and blackboard — put John Glenn and other astronauts into orbit and brought them safely home. She was part of a team of “human computers” who inspired Margot Lee Shetterly’s best-selling book “Hidden Figures,” which was subsequently adapted into an Oscar-nominated movie that turned Johnson into an icon of perseverance and dignity.

Johnson was always quick to point out that she was part of a team. When people would gush admiration and ask about her accomplishments, she would simply smile and say she was “just doing my job, like anyone else.”

“Hidden Figures” celebrated the story of a group of African American women who did landmark work at NASA Langley in a time and place when neither black people nor women were thought to have a place in science and technology fields. Shetterly, a Hampton native, was thrilled that her book cast such a spotlight on Johnson and other women whose contributions had gone largely unnoticed.

“She is so deserving,” Shetterly said in September 2017, when NASA Langley dedicated a new computer lab in Johnson’s name. “We celebrate celebrities and sports stars, and we talk about how wonderful it would be if we gave that kind of attention to people whose ac-

FORMER AIRPORT DIRECTOR'S FEDERAL FRAUD TRIAL TO BEGIN

Ken Spirito is accused of misusing public funds and obstructing justice

By PETER DUJARDIN
Staff writer

The former executive director of the Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport goes to trial this week on federal fraud charges surrounding a failed bid to bring a new airline to the airport six years ago.

Kenneth R. “Ken” Spirito Jr. faces a litany of charges — from misuse of public funds to obstruction of justice — stemming from a \$5 million loan guarantee to People Express Airlines, which collapsed a few months after it began service in 2014.

Fired by the airport’s board in 2017, Spirito is also accused of lying in sworn statements about his role in the airport’s plan to pay the debt. He faces a separate allegation that he put \$5,200 on an airport credit card to pay for repairs and warranty



JONATHON GRUENKE/STAFF FILE

Ken Spirito is accused of lying in sworn statements about his role in Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport’s plan to repay a \$5 million loan to the failed startup People Express Airlines.

to personal vehicles after car accidents during the workday.

The federal trial, with dozens of witnesses, begins with jury selection Tuesday in U.S. District Court in Norfolk and is projected to take at least two weeks.

Spirito, 47, was hired at the Newport News airport in late 2008, a young up-and-coming director of a fast-growing air-

port. He’s no longer in the airport industry.

Last week, a former People Express executive, Mike Morisi, was sentenced to two years in prison after pleading guilty to two fraud charges in the case, with 16 other charges dropped in a plea deal.

Spirito, on the other hand, is

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INSIDE

LANDMARK CONVICTION

Film mogul Harvey Weinstein was found guilty of rape and sexual assault against two women.

Nation&World

FAMILY SUES REGIONAL JAIL

Relatives of an inmate allege staff members did nothing to help him before his death.

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SATURDAY, MARCH 14, 2020

WIPED OUT

Schools closed: Governor orders shutdown for at least two weeks

State of emergency: Trump frees funding as virus rages, disrupts



KRISTEN ZEIS/STAFF

Deanna Shimkus, the Churchland bus lot zone leader, sanitizes bus seats at the Portsmouth Public School bus lot on Friday. All Virginia schools will be closed for at least two weeks.

BY SARA GREGORY
Staff writer

Editor's note: The coronavirus outbreak is a serious threat. We are taking every step to make sure our coverage is well-sourced and ethical. We believe providing facts reduces panic and empowers readers to make informed decisions about their health.

In an unprecedented move, Gov. Ralph Northam on Friday ordered all schools in Virginia to close for at least two weeks to limit the spread of the coronavirus.

Northam said he didn't make the decision lightly but the state must "do everything we can" to keep people healthy. The announcement, which will close schools starting Monday until at least March 27, follows his Thursday declaration of a state of emergency.

It's a change from his position from just a day earlier, when he said Virginia would leave decisions about closing to superintendents, in consultation with local health departments. The order covers public and private schools.

"I recognize this will pose a hardship on many families, but closing our schools for two weeks will not only give our staff time to clean and disinfect school facilities, it will help slow the spread of this virus," Northam said in a

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EVAN VUCCI/ASSOCIATED PRESS

LHC Group's Bruce Greenstein elbow bumps with President Donald Trump at the White House on Friday.

BY ANDREW TAYLOR, ZEKE MILLER, JILL COLVIN AND LISA MASCARO
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump on Friday declared the coronavirus pandemic a national emergency in order to free up more money and resources. But he rejected any responsibility for delays in making testing available for the new virus, whose spread has roiled markets and disrupted the lives of everyday Americans.

Speaking from the Rose Garden, Trump said, "I am officially declaring a national emergency," freeing up as much as \$50 billion for state and local governments to respond to the outbreak. Trump also announced a range of executive actions to bolster energy markets, ease the financial burden for Americans with student loans and give medical professionals additional "flexibility" in treating patients during the public health crisis.

He also announced a new public-private partnership to expand coronavirus testing capabilities, as his administration has come under fire for being too slow in making the test available.

Trump said, "I don't take responsibility at all" for the slow rollout of testing.

Later Friday, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced a deal

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STEVE EARLEY/STAFF FILE

Special coverage inside

Festival canceled: Something in the Water organizers pull the plug on popular Virginia Beach music event. **Page 2**

In short supply: Looking for toilet paper or hand sanitizer in Hampton Roads? Good luck. **Page 3**

Around the world: Channeling wartime rhetoric and tactics, global leaders appeal for solidarity as cases in Italy soar. **Page 11**

VIOLATIONS AT COMPLEX PERSIST

BY JOSH REYES
Staff writer

NEWPORT NEWS — The owners and management of Aqua Vista Apartments in Newport News had a month to address 312 violations city codes and compliance inspectors identified in 145 of 150 units at the complex in February.

Earlier this month, inspectors found that 109 units still had violations. The city has concerns with the contractor's proficiency and pace of work, according to Mike Nall, assistant director of



JOHN C. CLARK/FREELANCE FILE

Residents protest the living conditions at Aqua Vista Apartments, a public housing complex in Newport News, in January.

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INSIDE

GAMES GONE

From golf to NASCAR, sports leagues are shutting down because of the spread of COVID-19, much to the dismay of fans and players.

Sports

LUNCHBOX HEROES

Looking to save some cash by cutting out on ordering out? Here's how to pack a killer lunchbox.

Health



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JONATHON GRUENKE/STAFF

A protester stands in front of Virginia Beach Police officers in riot gear along Atlantic Avenue Sunday evening after a protest turned violent at the Oceanfront.

COMING TO TERMS WITH NIGHT OF CHAOS



STEPHEN M. KATZ/STAFF

Virginia Beach police investigate damage done to Lotus Fashions along the Oceanfront on Monday.

BUSINESS OWNERS, ALREADY REELING, FACE FRESH SETBACK AT OCEANFRONT

Officials estimate \$300K worth of property damage

BY ROBYN SIDERSKY, JANE HARPER AND STACY PARKER
Staff writers

VIRGINIA BEACH — What began as a peaceful protest at the Oceanfront Sunday night turned into a confrontation as some protesters vandalized businesses and city police

unleashed canisters of tear gas.

Now the city is left cleaning up in the aftermath.

The demonstration was in response to last week's death of George Floyd, a black man who pleaded for help as a Minneapolis police officer knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes. Since then, one of the officers has been charged and demonstrations have popped up across the country, some of them turning violent.

The Oceanfront protest began at Rudee Inlet. It was the final one in a weekend full of peaceful demonstrations in Hampton Roads — from Fort Monroe to the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel, to downtown Norfolk and Portsmouth.

But the one in Virginia Beach became chaotic, and as the sun rose Monday morning, business owners along Atlantic Avenue were surveying

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In Virginia Beach, police, protesters at odds on who to blame

BY ROBYN SIDERSKY, PETER COUTU AND JANE HARPER
Staff writers

VIRGINIA BEACH — When Taniaah Lewis got to the Oceanfront around 8 p.m. Sunday, she was a little nervous.

She heard there would be a protest happening and was going by herself. It would be her third of the weekend, after ones in Norfolk and Hampton.

Her unease dissolved when she saw how many people were there: enough to span four or five blocks, she estimates.

"I was overwhelmed by how much support I saw," she said. "It was like, refreshing to know that I wasn't the only one frustrated. I

wasn't the only one that felt the way I felt, especially seeing the diversity in the crowd."

But those feelings of relief didn't last long.

What started as a peaceful protest, with chants, singing and a steady march beginning at Rudee Loop, turned into a chaotic mess that led to canisters of tear gas being deployed and vandals smashing windows and setting trash cans ablaze. More than \$300,000 worth of damage was caused at the Oceanfront, two officers were injured and 19 people were arrested, according to city and police officials.

On Monday, Gov. Ralph Northam sent National Guard

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JONATHON GRUENKE/STAFF

A protester runs while holding a canister of tear gas that was sent into a crowd of people by Virginia Beach Police officers Sunday night.

BONUS PUZZLE PAGE INSIDE!

ONLINE AND ON THE ROAD

Amid coronavirus pandemic, more consumers are buying vehicles on the internet. **Business**

HAMPTON VA TO BRING BACK ON-SITE VISITS FOR SOME SERVICES

Facility, 3 outpatient clinics, expects June 10 start

BY LISA VERNON SPARKS
Staff writer

HAMPTON — Next week, Hampton VA Medical Center plans to bring back on-site health care services that had been stopped to slow the spread of COVID-19.

The facility, along with three outpatient clinics in Virginia Beach, Chesapeake and Elizabeth City, expects to offer some in-person visits beginning June 10. Between the four sites, as many as 58,000 veterans living in the region have access to the

clinics.

Some face-to-face services previously canceled — elective surgeries and other periodic check-ups that are considered more urgent than a routine follow-up — will be back on the calendar.

"The goal is to get up to 20%," Hampton VA director David C. Collins said.

Virginia is well into its Phase 1 reopening — with retail, churches and restaurants operating at 50% capacity and beaches now fully accessible to the general public.

Virginians also are required to wear masks inside public places.

While VA hospitals follow federal guidelines, Collin said hospital officials still use the number of new COVID-19 cases in Virginia as a barometer — and plan to proceed with caution in considering how it offers health care during the pandemic.

"The safety of veterans and staff is the highest priority. We don't ... want to get too far ahead of ourselves and have to scale back," Collins said. "That's really critical now. We are

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