

MIDLO MERGER:
BUSINESS GROUPS
JOIN FORCES TO
HELP PRESERVE
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JAMES HASKINS

POINT OF NO RETURNS

Before Walmart and Amazon, Sears pioneered the American retail experience. Now, the company is leaving Chesterfield – for good

BY RICH GRISET STAFF WRITER

Surrounded by empty shelves and bare showroom floor, the mannequins congregate eerily in one corner: headless, armless and naked.

Electric blue and fuchsia signs advertise slashed prices of 40% to 70% off as bargain hunters scavenge the increasingly empty clothing racks for deals. Apart from any curated display, a row of luggage stands near the escalators, stranded as refugees of one last sale.

“All Sales Final,” proclaims a sign. “No Returns.”

At Chesterfield Towne Center, it's end times for Sears, the last of its breed in the Richmond metro area. Once this two-story, 147,000-square-foot department store was the height of consumerism, selling a wide range of quality, affordable products to a mass audience. Now, like the luggage, this place faces an uncertain future.

The Richmond region's last remaining Sears, at Chesterfield Towne Center, is slated to close for good next month. What the future holds for the fading national retailer, and the mall, remains to be seen.

Last November, Sears owner Transformco announced that this location would be one of 51 Sears and Kmart stores to close in early 2020, leaving the company with 182 Sears and Kmart stores remaining in the United States. Just 10 years ago, Sears operated 3,500 stores.

It's another nail in the coffin for a company that was once the largest retailer in the U.S. Founded in 1892, Sears, Roebuck & Co. was the Amazon of its day, pioneering the idea of selling everything – appliances, clothing, tools and even homes – to everyone, first through mail-order catalogs, then through sprawling stores. Today, there's no other brick-and-mortar retailer quite like it, where customers can purchase seemingly anything under one roof.

“It was the largest retailer on the block for much of the century,” says Vicki Howard, an England-based

See **SEARS** on page 4

Daugherty seeks \$100M in new funds for schools

BY JIM McCONNELL SENIOR WRITER

The ink has barely dried on Superintendent Merv Daugherty's proposed operating plan, but school and county officials already are jostling to establish a narrative that will define Chesterfield County's fiscal year 2021 budget negotiations.

The superintendent and School Board members contend they need every penny of the \$777.3 million Daugherty

See **SCHOOL BUDGET** on page 4



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APPLYING HEAT

PARKER MICHELS-BOYCE

Long relegated to the political fringes, a gun rights advocate from Chesterfield finds his mark

BY RICH GRISET STAFF WRITER

With one hand, Philip Van Cleave shakes hands with protestors young and old, some in camouflage and some in dress shirts and khakis. In the other, he holds a small package of Cheez-Its and a roll of hunter-orange stickers that read “Guns Save Lives.”

As it turns out, he didn't need to bring the stickers. Here, at the Virginia Beach Municipal Center last Monday, it seems like nearly everyone in attendance is already wearing the sticker, a trademark of the gun rights advocacy group Virginia Citizens Defense League.

Making his way through this crowd of hundreds, Van Cleave is in his element, catching up with longtime gun rights supporters and meeting new ones who are attending a Second Amendment protest for the first time. With a slightly stooped posture, pale blue eyes and

white moustache, the Midlothian resident and VCDL president is an energetic 67.

In what has become a common sight around Virginia since Democrats overtook both houses of the General Assembly in November, Van Cleave and those around him are rallying to oppose gun control legislation that has been put forward by Democratic lawmakers for the 2020 session. That evening, Virginia Beach's City Council will hear its constituents' opinions on the issue.

Symbolically, this place holds special meaning in Virginia's gun control debate. It was here, at the municipal center's Building 2, that mass shooter DeWayne Craddock killed 12 and injured 4 last May before turning his gun on himself. In the wake of the shooting, Democratic Gov. Ralph

Philip Van Cleave, president of the Virginia Citizens Defense League, addresses supporters outside a Virginia Beach City Council meeting on Jan. 6. The council approved a measure of support for the Constitution and the Second Amendment later that evening.

See **VAN CLEAVE** on page 4

Rule change raises zoning transparency questions

BY JIM McCONNELL SENIOR WRITER

At its annual organizational meeting last Wednesday, the newly seated Chesterfield Board of Supervisors approved a procedural change that some citizens fear will reduce transparency on property zoning cases.

Previously, when a rezoning applicant made changes to a case after publicly advertising it, a rule dictated that the case be automatically deferred to the following month's meeting agenda to give board members and interested citizens more time to review the changes. By a 4-1 vote last week, the board eliminated that rule.

See **ZONING** on page 19

Supervisors show support for Second Amendment

Chairwoman, however, says county not a gun rights 'sanctuary'

BY JIM McCONNELL SENIOR WRITER

Chesterfield's Board of Supervisors last week unanimously approved a statement in support of the Second Amendment, joining more than 100 other localities across the commonwealth in formally affirming gun rights as enshrined in the U.S. and Virginia constitutions.

Following the board's inaugural meeting, however, its chairwoman emphasized that its action

See **SECOND AMENDMENT** on page 18



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Arts center on 'pause' as COVID surges

Pandemic leads
to leadership
shakeup, delays
grand opening

BY SCOTT BASS EDITOR

If there's a new car smell, new buildings have their own distinct scent – part sawdust, sheared carpet, hints of fresh paint. During a tour last week of the newly built Baxter Perkinson Center for the Arts & Education, Marly Fuller, the center's executive director, apologizes for the work in progress – most of the furniture, and the artwork for the walls, isn't here yet; the floors are a little messy; a few light fixtures are still waiting to be installed.

See **ARTS CENTER** on page 14



ASH DANIEL

COVID-19 restrictions have delayed the opening of the new Baxter Perkinson Center for the Arts & Education in Chester, but a virtual tour and a series of performances will be available for free beginning on Dec. 19.

County plans to privatize curbside recycling

Residents would have to 'opt in' beginning in 2023

BY JIM McCONNELL SENIOR WRITER

Chesterfield County is planning to scrap its existing curbside recycling program and adopt a subscription-based service model when the current contract expires in 2023.

According to a request for proposals issued Nov. 16 by the Central Virginia Waste Management Authority, Chesterfield households would have to "opt in" to continue having their recyclable materials collected from the curbside every other week as part of the regional initiative. This differs from the present model, under which residents must opt out to avoid being charged a biannual service fee.

Proposals from interested contractors are due by March 5, 2021.

CVWMA's board of directors – which comprises represen-

tatives from its member jurisdictions (Chesterfield, Henrico, Richmond, Hanover, Goochland, Prince George, Colonial Heights, Hopewell, Petersburg and Ashland) – is expected to select at least one vendor next June to administer curbside recycling under a 10-year contract (with two five-year renewal options) that takes effect July 1, 2023.

Chesterfield has participated in CVWMA since it was established in 1990 to increase recycling and help Richmond-area localities meet a state requirement to divert at least 25% of household waste from landfills.

"The county 100% supports recycling and wouldn't want to see [the regional curbside program] go away," said Scott

See **RECYCLING** on page 15

It's electric: Schools to add e-buses

BY JIM McCONNELL SENIOR WRITER

Whenever Chesterfield's school system resumes in-person instruction next year, its fleet of familiar yellow buses will for the first time include two that are powered not by diesel fuel or propane, but electricity.

Chesterfield was one of 16 Virginia localities selected earlier this year to participate in a pilot program funded by Dominion Energy – the initial phase of which will deploy 50 electric school buses on roads across the commonwealth.

Following a public hearing last month, the Board of Supervisors conveyed an easement to

See **E-BUSES** on page 7

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