



Meet this week's Personality B2



Graduates' Diamond celebration! A6

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# Richmond Free Press

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VOL. 31 NO. 25

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

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JUNE 16-18, 2022

## Unsheltered Plans to house the homeless in Shockoe Valley disappear

### Forgotten no more



Regina H. Boone/Richmond Free Press

Left, Mayor Levar M. Stoney takes part in unveiling a new state historic marker for the Shockoe Hill Burying Ground, the long forgotten public cemetery for 22,000 Black people at 1305 N. 5th St. at the entry to Highland Park. Joining the mayor at the Sunday afternoon ceremony are Ana F. Edwards of the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project, left, and Lenora C. McQueen, a Texas resident who has led a four-year fight to preserve and protect the burial ground where relatives are buried and who has pushed for the cemetery's recognition and designation as a national historic site. Below left, Ms. McQueen proudly stands in front of the new marker that she successfully lobbied the state Department of Historic Resources to install. Below, the choir from Swansboro Elementary performs at the cemetery. The city opened the cemetery in 1816 as the last resting place for slaves and free Black people, and offered burials there until 1879. Now considered the largest municipal cemetery for Black people in the country, the 30-acre burying ground was promptly forgotten, with the city selling off pieces while allowing railroad tracks and highways to be run through the gravesite. The city recently repurchased 1.5 acres, and on Monday night, City Council incorporated the cemetery into plans for a slavery memorial and museum that are to be developed next to Main Street Station.

By Jeremy Lazarus

Plans for a year-round shelter open around the clock for the homeless have suddenly evaporated seven months after being announced.

Commonwealth Catholic Charities, which secured city support to add a 75-bed inclement weather operation to be used as a housing resource center at 809 Oliver Hill Way, has dropped its plans for developing the expanded space.



Ms. Lynch

CCC Marketing Manager Katie Dillon on Tuesday confirmed in response to a Free Press query that the project to provide a place for the unsheltered to stay during the high heat of Richmond summers, the freezing cold of winter and drenching storms has been dropped.

"Last week, we informed city staff that CCC cannot proceed with the development of the inclement weather shelter at our Oliver Hill Way location," Ms. Dillon explained in an email.

"The project simply faced too many challenges resulting in significant and extended delays," she continued. "Despite our very best efforts, substantial staff time and financial resources, the setbacks made it impossible to complete the

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## New RPS teachers to earn \$51,182 annually; bus drivers will earn \$23 per hour

By Jeremy Lazarus

Starting pay for Richmond schoolteachers will top \$50,000 for the first time after July 1.

At the same time, bus operators, still in short supply, will see their wages jump to \$23 an hour, with newly hired drivers with commercial driving licenses receiving a \$3,500 hiring bonus as well.

Those were part of salary changes that the Richmond School Board approved at a special meeting Tuesday night along with a finalized budget for the

2022-23 fiscal year that also begins next month.

With wages across the board rising 5 percent, the starting pay for a new teacher with no experience was set at \$51,182, effective with the start of the school year, up from around \$48,600 this year, and rising with each year's experience on the 48-step scale.

Superintendent Jason Kamras, who disclosed



Mr. Kamras

earlier Tuesday that he had tested positive for COVID-19 despite having been vaccinated and receiving booster shots, participated virtually in the meeting, which two members, Liz Doerr, 1st District, and Kenya Gibson, 3rd District, did not attend in person or online.

"Fortunately, and almost certainly due to my vaccination," Mr. Kamras wrote in the daily RPS Direct email "my symptoms are relatively mild - low fever,

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File photo/Richmond Free Press

## Gun buyback is on track

By Jeremy Lazarus

Richmond is on track to sponsor its first gun buyback program — despite substantial evidence that such programs are largely public relations gimmicks that do not affect gun violence.

Monday night, City Council voted 9-0 to approve the request of Mayor Levar M. Stoney to run a gun buyback program as part of initiatives to help quell the surge of shootings and killings mostly plaguing poor neighborhoods.

Five of the nine members signed on as co-sponsors June 6 when council held a special meeting to introduce the legislation and fast-track it for passage.

Among the most enthusiastic is 3rd District Councilwoman

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## Federal court issues July deadline for new elections lawsuit

By Jeremy Lazarus

A new lawsuit seeking to force new elections for the House of Delegates this November is on the fast track.

But it will take at least 30 days to gain a decision, making it dicey as to whether there will still be time for the court process to be completed in time to hold a vote.

U.S. District Judge David J. Novak Monday set the aggressive schedule at a hearing Monday that included the plaintiff, political journalist and author Jeffrey "Jeff" Thomas Jr., and lawyers representing the defendants, the State Board of Elections.

Judge Novak ordered both sides

to provide briefs and responses by the second week of July.

The hearing came a week after a three-judge panel that Judge Novak led dismissed the first lawsuit filed by political strategist Paul Goldman of Richmond.

In a reversal, Mr. Goldman has decided to appeal the panel's judgment that he does not have standing, or the legal right to bring the case.

He submitted his notice of appeal this week in part as a response to the panel's finding that he had some responsibility for the lengthy delay in hearing his case. He called that finding "completely inaccurate" and described his notice as an opportunity

to "correct the record."

Mr. Goldman brought the suit to uphold voting rights of Virginia citizens and enforce the requirements of the Virginia Constitution over the opposition from the Attorney General's Office.

At this point, there is near silence among elected officials and voting rights advocates over this new effort. Mr. Thomas has not issued a public statement, nor has Attorney General Jason S. Miyares, who has hired outside counsel to defend the state elections officials.

Mr. Goldman is skeptical that elec-

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Sandra Sellars/Richmond Free Press

**Divertido y feliz = happy and fun**  
Asia Anthony was among the La Palma dance group's energetic performers during Saturday's ¿Qué Pasa? Festival in Shockoe Slip. The Virginia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce sponsors the festival to showcase the diversity and beauty of Hispanic and Latin American cultures. The festival was canceled for two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. More photos on B5.

## Black history museum's interim director steps down

Free Press staff report

A leadership change appears to be in the works for the Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia in Richmond, though it is currently shrouded in secrecy.

What has been confirmed is that Dr. Marland Buckner Jr., who was named interim executive director after the death of Adele C. Johnson in April 2021, has stepped down after



Dr. Buckner

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### Free COVID-19 testing, vaccines

Free community testing for COVID-19 continues. The Richmond and Henrico County health districts are offering testing at the following locations:

- Wednesday, June 22, 8 to 10 a.m. - East Henrico Recreation Center Pavilion, 1440 N Laburnum Ave.
- Thursday, June 23, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. - Neighborhood Resource Center, 1519 Williamsburg Road.

Call the Richmond and Henrico COVID-19 Hotline at (804) 205-3501 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday for more information on testing sites, or go online at [vax.rchd.com](http://vax.rchd.com). The Virginia Department of Health also has a list of COVID-

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Meet this week's  
Personality **B1**



Nichelle Nichols  
was first to chart path **B3**

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VOL. 31 NO. 32

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

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AUGUST 4-6, 2022

## Big mistake on Lee statue protesters was in error

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

Twenty-five minutes before an 8 p.m. curfew was to go into effect, Richmond Police officers began firing tear gas and other noxious chemical agents to disperse hundreds of demonstrators who had gathered around the now removed Robert E. Lee statue in the city's West End.

More than two years later, the mystery appears to be solved as to why dozens of officers undertook what appeared to be an illegal action on June 1, 2020 — violating people's constitutional right to assemble peacefully and stoking the local fires of protest over the Minneapolis Police murder of George Floyd.

In a seven-page report released July 29, Richmond's top prosecutor, Colette W. McEachin, confirmed what Mayor Levar M. Stoney and then-Police Chief William C. Smith tried to tell an angry crowd of people who marched to City Hall the next day to protest the gassing — that the release of chemical agents at the Lee statue before the curfew took effect was a mistake.

She issued that conclusion in announcing that none of the officers who deployed chemical agents would face criminal charges, though the action has led to multiple civil suits for damages.

Mrs. McEachin determined that the officers acted after re-

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Mayor Stoney



Sandra Sellars/Richmond Free Press

### The city's 'Night Out'

The Richmond Police Department celebrated National Night Out, which it calls "the biggest citywide party of the year," on Tuesday, Aug. 2. The annual event brings together police and neighbors to support crime prevention during an evening of music and entertainment. Among this year's festivities were fun and games at the Satellite Restaurant, 4000 Richmond Highway in South Side. Below right, Acting Lt. Brian Sheridan of Richmond's Second Precinct plays a little b-ball with area children while above rappers ShaaBiggaa and Hiii Siddity of Girll Codee perform. At Meadow Park in the Fan, below left, Richmond Police Chief Gerald M. Smith chats with area residents Matt and Nancy Costello.



### City housing director, church leaders discuss shelter options

\$3M on the table for homeless

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

Ninth District City Councilman Michael J. Jones hopes a network of churches can be developed to provide shelter for the homeless during inclement weather, particularly during winter cold.

Dr. Jones, a full-time pastor himself, sought to make that happen by convening a meeting last week between a city official with money to spend and 15 to 20 pastors whose churches might have space that could be used.

The official was Sherrill N. Hampton, city director of housing and community development, who has \$3 million to spend with faith groups and nonprofits who would operate the shelter.

Dr. Jones got involved after opposing the city's plan to create a central shelter for 150 people at the Liberation Church, 5501 Midlothian Turnpike, in his district.

He rejected that idea, arguing that a decentralized approach that would have multiple sites to handle 25 to 30 people apiece would be better and have less impact on surrounding communities.

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Dr. Jones

### City jail inmate charged for attacking deputy

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

It took three weeks, but a Richmond City Justice Center inmate with a long rap sheet has been charged with the malicious wounding July 7 of a female deputy whose jaw was shattered

and who suffered other serious facial injuries in a brutal attack.

Sheriff Antonette V. Irving disclosed the arrest of Sakeem J. Bell on July 29 in a rare press release from her office concerning an action taken against an inmate alleged to have committed serious offenses.

Already jailed for a year awaiting a probation revocation hearing that is to be held later this month, Mr. Bell was arraigned Aug. 1 in the new case and is scheduled for a preliminary hearing Sept. 13 in Richmond General District Court.

Behind the scenes, the Free



Sheriff Irving

Press has been told that Sheriff Irving came under serious pressure to act to prevent the Richmond Police Department from taking over the case.

Ahead of her action, the Free Press was told police detectives had interviewed the deputy and were preparing to file charges against Mr. Bell if the sheriff, who has gained a reputation for not preferring charges against inmates, did not.

The sheriff, before bringing the charge, had sent Mr. Bell to Central State Hospital for evaluation. The Free Press was

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### Appreciation: Bill Russell lived a life like very few others

By Tim Reynolds  
The Associated Press



Courtesy NNPA

Bill Russell, the Boston Celtics legend, receives the Medal of Freedom at the White House in February 2011. Mr. Russell is shown accepting his medal from then-President Obama. The award is presented to civilians for being "the best of who we are and who we aspire to be."

Bill Russell hated autographs. Saw no point to them. If he was out dining and got approached by someone asking for his signature, Mr. Russell's usual response was to instead ask the person to join him at the table to have

#### Related story on A9

a conversation about life. The autograph-seekers almost always declined.

Oh, the stories they missed. Mr. Russell, the greatest winner in the history of team sports, died Sunday, July 31, 2022 at 88. The basketball legacy is beyond well-known: 11 championships in 13 years with the Boston Celtics, first Black coach

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Sandra Sellars/Richmond Free Press

### Ready to reel

Father and son fishermen, Denzel Terrell and 6-year-old Deion Terrell, trek the pedestrian bridge from Brown's Island to Belle Isle looking to land a big catch this summer.

### Conflict of interest sparks tense discussion for RPS School Board

By Holly Rodriguez

The Arthur Ashe Jr. Athletic Center arose as a topic of discussion during the Richmond School Board meeting Monday night.

But the potential conflict between the School Board and the city, regarding rights and ownership of the facility in light of Mayor Levar Stoney's Diamond District redevelopment plan,

was not the cause of discussion. A conflict of interest for the Board's legal counsel, revealed during executive session, was at issue for Vice Chair Kenya Gibson, 3rd District.

The public is not allowed to be present during the School Board's executive sessions.

Ms. Gibson said she believed the matter of the

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### Free COVID-19 testing, vaccines

Free community testing for COVID-19 continues. The Richmond and Henrico County health districts are offering testing at the following location:

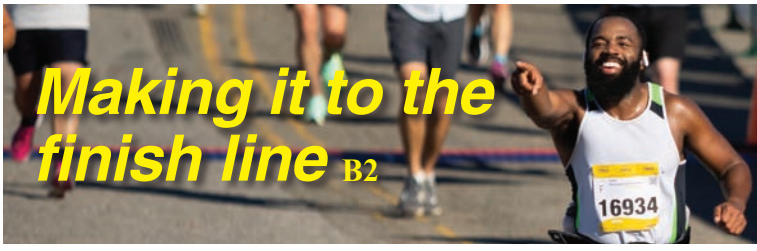
• Thursday, Aug. 4, 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. — Fulton Neighborhood Resource Center, 1519 Williamsburg Road.

Call the Richmond and Henrico COVID-19 Hotline at (804) 205-3501 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday for more information on testing sites, or go online at vax.rchd.com.

The Virginia Department of Health also has a list of COVID-

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RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

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NOVEMBER 17-19, 2022

## 'It feels like a nightmare'



From left, Devin Chandler, Lavel Davis Jr. and D'Sean Perry, the University of Virginia football players who were killed Sunday.

### UVA shooting deaths create wave of grief

By Holly Rodriguez

The three University of Virginia football players killed in an on-campus shooting on Sunday were remembered by their head coach as "incredible young men with huge aspirations and extremely bright futures."

Devin Chandler, Lavel Davis Jr., and D'Sean Perry were juniors returning to campus from a class trip Sunday night when authorities say they were killed by a fellow student identified as Petersburg High School graduate and former UVA football player Christopher Darnell Jones Jr.

The young men were journeying through periods of transition in their careers — whether it was bouncing back from a season-ending injury, changing positions on the team or transferring in from another school.

"They touched us, inspired us and worked incredibly hard," head football Coach Tony Elliott said in a statement.

Mr. Chandler was a second-year University of Virginia student from Virginia Beach and a wide receiver and kick returner for the UVA Cavaliers football team.

Mr. Davis Jr. was a third-year student from Ridgefield, S.C. preparing to graduate in December, and a wide receiver for the team.

Mr. Perry was a fourth-year student from Miami and a line-backer and defensive end for the team.

Two other students — identified by various news outlets as Marlee Morgan, and UVA running back Michael Hollins — also were hospitalized with serious injuries on Monday. In an email,

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Gayle Freeland waits to enter shelter 2807 Hull St.

### 2 City-supported shelters temporarily open for homeless

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

At 80, Gayle Freeland is struggling to keep a roof over her head.

The retired welder said her Social Security check only allows her to rent a motel room, at most, for two weeks, and then she is on the street trying to find a doorway or some other place to sleep.

That's why Ms. Freeland was grateful to learn that she could find a warm space to spend the night at the newly opened RVA Sister's Keeper shelter at 2807 Hull St. The South Side location was formerly the New Pathways counseling center.

Ms. Freeland was among the early arrivals at the 40-bed shelter for women and women with children that partners Kia Player, a licensed therapist, and Gerri Archer, a real estate agent, have opened, with a promise of city financial support.

"We just wanted to help people," Ms. Archer said. The shelter provides cots to sleep on and provides guests with two meals and counseling to assist in getting them off the street.

The shelter operates from 5 p.m. to 8 a.m. when nighttime temperatures drop below 40 degrees, which is predicted to be the

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## City reportedly has a \$70M general fund surplus

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

Richmond's treasury is bulging with unspent dollars, according to two members of City Council.

While neither would go on the record, both told the Free Press that they have been advised that City Hall will report a record general fund surplus of up to \$70 million from the 2021-22 fiscal year that ended June 30.

"It's going to be in that ballpark," one member said.

Although the surplus could end up smaller, both council members said the total in unspent

money from fiscal 2022 would be far greater than the \$29 million surplus the administration projected in May and would be separate and apart from the \$155 million the city has received in federal American Rescue Plan funds since 2021.

So far, Mayor Levar M. Stoney and his team have declined to confirm or deny the information and have not posted any financial documents that would disclose the amount.

City Hall has until Dec. 15 to submit its annual audited financial report to the state. That document would end the suspense.

If it turns out those two council members are

correct, the oversized surplus could be political bad news for the mayor and the council, both of which have rebuffed any cuts to city government or the tax rate. A windfall of unspent dollars would undermine arguments that the current property tax rate is needed to pay for essential services.

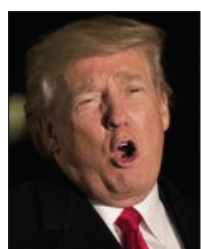
The members of the governing body have been besieged with calls from people facing surging tax bills as the value of property rises. This year, City Assessor Richie McKeithen reported values rose more than 13 percent across the city, with the home values averaging a record \$336,000.

"You're killing the city's momentum with a tax rate that is too high," said John T. Selko, owner and operator of Woodland Construction Inc.

Despite that, the council followed the mayor's advice Monday and refused to lower the current real estate tax rate from \$1.20 per \$100 of assessed value — substantially higher than in neighboring suburban counties — with only 4th District Councilwoman Kristen Nye and 8th District Councilwoman Reva M. Trammell opposing.

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### GOP wins slim House majority; Trump announces candidacy despite criminal problems



Mr. Trump

By Eric Tucker  
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON  
Republicans won control of the U.S. House on Wednesday, returning the party to power in Washington and giving conservatives leverage to blunt President Biden's agenda and spur a flurry of investigations. But a threadbare majority will pose immediate challenges for GOP leaders and complicate the party's ability to govern.

More than a week after Election Day, Republicans secured the 218th seat needed to flip the House from Democratic control. The full scope of the party's majority may not be clear for several more days — or weeks — as votes in competitive races are still being counted.

But they are on track to cobble together what could be the party's narrowest majority of the 21st century, rivaling 2001, when Republicans had just a nine-seat majority, 221-212 with two independents. That's far short of the sweeping victory the GOP predicted going into this year's midterm elections, when the party hoped to reset the agenda on Capitol Hill by capitalizing on economic challenges and President Biden's lagging popularity.

Meanwhile, Donald Trump's early announcement of his third White House bid won't shield

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Sandra Sellars/Richmond Free Press

### Helping hands

Wearing a thoughtful smile on her face, Richmonder Mekhi Anthony, 10, was among volunteers on Nov. 12 who assisted residents during the 5th Annual Thanksgiving Turkey Give-Away at the South Side Community Center on 6255 Warwick Road. This project was sponsored by 9th District City Councilman Michael J. Jones.

### Free COVID-19 testing, vaccines

Free community testing for COVID-19 continues. The Richmond and Henrico County health districts are offering testing at the following locations:  
• Thursday, Nov. 17 & Nov. 24, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. - Southside Women, Infants and Children Office, 509 E. Southside Plaza; 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. - Fulton Neighborhood Resource Center, 1519 Williamsburg Road.  
• Monday, Nov. 21, 8 to 10 a.m. & 1 to 3 p.m. - Eastern Henrico Recreation Center, 1440 N. Laburnum Ave.  
Call the Richmond and Henrico COVID-19 Hotline at (804) 205-3501 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday for more information on testing sites, or go online at vax.rchd.com.

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### Artist Paul Rucker awarded \$2M from the Mellon Foundation and Art for Justice Fund

Free Press staff report

The Mellon Foundation and Art for Justice Fund have awarded multimedia visual artist, composer and musician Paul Rucker \$2 million to create Cary Forward — a multidisciplinary arts space, interpretive center, artist/researcher residency and archival lending library, according to an announcement by Virginia Commonwealth University.

"The award and future center aim to address false narratives and preserve and promote the omitted histories of race and gender — in Richmond," states a VCU news release.

"This project will support Mr. Rucker's role at Virginia Commonwealth University developing creative collaborations connecting VCU and surrounding communities."

Mr. Rucker is curator for creative collaboration for the VCU School of the Arts and an iCubed Arts Research Fellow.

"Addressing false narratives and the denial of histories are two of the unspoken foundational goals of critical race theory," Mr. Rucker said. "Cary Forward will deliver its programming and initiatives from a place of 'show and tell' in how we approach shows and public engagement. The stories will include the ones that were not taught in

school and are now banned."

The space will house artifacts from Mr. Rucker's collection of more than 20,000 items of American history and offer visitors opportunities to connect



Mr. Rucker

their everyday experiences with visiting artists and scholars and a corps of traveling docents who will lead dynamic community-centered programs. Regular offerings will include exhibitions, public programs, a banned-book library, digital archives, publications and onsite print

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