



Meet this week's
Personality B1



Pillars of community
remembered B3

FREE

Richmond Free Press

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RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

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JULY 21-23, 2022

A more perfect union

City reaches negotiated agreement regarding collective bargaining

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

Collective bargaining is coming to City Hall for the first time – though it could take a year or more to have an impact.

Next Monday, July 25, City Council is expected to easily approve a landmark ordinance allowing most city employees who are not in managerial or supervisory positions to participate in unions that would

bargain on their behalf with the city on wages and other issues and represent them in disciplinary actions.

At this point, all nine council members have signed on as supporters of the legislation as has Mayor Levar M. Stoney, who finally dropped his seven-month effort to sharply limit the number of employees allowed to organize.

Passage will be a history-making mo-

ment that a significant number of employees believe will allow them to finally gain, as one put it, “a seat at the table” to negotiate health and safety issues as well as wages.

Public employee unions became possible in Virginia after the General Assembly removed the prohibition on collective bargaining for workers at the local government



Ms. Newbille



Ms. Larson



Ms. Trammell

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Regina H. Boone/Richmond Free Press

Muriel Branch, left, is the outgoing president of the AMMD Pine Grove Project, which has received a \$290,000 African-American Civil Rights grant stabilize the historic Cumberland County Pine Grove Rosenwald School. Her daughter, Sonja Branch-Wilson, will succeed Mrs. Branch as president of the family organization.

NPS grant to help preserve historic elementary school

‘This will allow us to dream ... it will allow restoration and interpretation’

By Holly Rodriguez

A Cumberland County school that was part of a vibrant African-American community for nearly 50 years is getting help from the National Park Service to preserve its location.

The AMMD Pine Grove Project has received a \$290,000 African-American Civil Rights grant from the NPS to stabilize the historic Cumberland County Pine Grove Rosenwald School. Immediate plans are to repair the roof and chimney. Long-term plans include a visitor’s center and green space for a nature park and an outdoor gathering space.

The project is the only one in Virginia, and one of 44 projects in 15 states nationally, to receive the funding. The \$16.2 million grant pool is dedicated to supporting “the continued preservation of sites and history related to the African-American struggle for equality” according to the NPS.

Pine Grove educated thousands of children from 1917 when it was built, to 1964 when it was closed, said Muriel Branch, former president for the project who recently passed the organization’s leadership torch to her daughter, Sonja Branch-Wilson.

Because the school was the only one for students in the community within a five-mile radius, “my siblings and I walked 3.5 miles one way to get to school

everyday,” said Mrs. Branch, who lives in Richmond. “This school did more than just educate us — it was our ancestral home.”

Although the school had been used for various programs since it ceased educating students, it fell into disrepair in recent years.

In late April of 2018, when Mrs. Branch, a retired Richmond Public Schools media librarian, learned the

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City leader to question silent sheriff about jail attacks

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

Richmond Sheriff Antionette V. Irving has been asked to appear before City Council’s Public Safety Committee next week.

Shocked by a Free Press report about a mentally ill male inmate’s vicious assault July 7

on a female deputy, the committee chair, 8th District Councilwoman Reva M. Trammell, wants to hear from the sheriff about the “process for securing mentally ill inmates and the safety of other inmates and personnel.”

The attack occurred at the Richmond City Justice Center, as the jail located in Shockoe Valley is called.

If the sheriff appears at the committee meeting next Tuesday, July 26, — and she

would be the sole focus of the meeting—this would be her first public statements about the assault, a prime example of the dangers staff and inmates have faced since she took command in 2018.

As has been her practice, the sheriff has issued no statements and has not responded to requests for comment from the Free Press and other media outlets. Nor is it clear that she will appear.

Meanwhile, the inmate alleged to have committed the assault, Sakeem Jamar Bell, reportedly has been transferred to Central State Hospital, while the deputy, who also is keeping mum, has undergone surgery and is home recuperating.

The Free Press has been told the sheriff has advised others,

including police officers, that the assault never took place and was so upset when the newspaper disclosed it in the July 14-16 edition that she temporarily barred distribution of the edition to inmates

and staff.

The assault, however, illustrates the jail’s deterioration of safety and security.

Since she took office, there

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Ms. Irving



Sandra Sellars/Richmond Free Press

Beat the heat

Youngsters beat the heat recently at the Blackwell Community Center swimming pool, 300 E. 15th St. Temperatures are expected to continue in the 90s through this weekend.

RPS approves stipends and hiring bonuses to attract new teachers

By George Copeland Jr.

Richmond Public Schools is taking big steps to find new teachers for the upcoming school year.

In a 6-1 vote Monday night, the Richmond School Board approved new hiring incentives in an effort to address a shortage in school staff across the city.

The incentives include a \$6,000 stipend for new teachers willing to relocate from at least 50 miles away from Richmond, a \$4,000 signing bonus for teachers in critical areas with two years of experience, and a \$2,000 signing bonus for all new teachers.

According to RPS Superintendent Jason Kamras, the school system hopes the incentives will help recruit 176 teachers before the 2022-23 school year. Federal stimulus funds will be used for the incentives, which come with a clawback clause in case any new teacher leaves early.

“This is not a problem that is unique to RPS,” said Mr. Kamras, noting similar shortages are happening across Virginia and the country at large. “I would like us to be a leader in solving it.”

Among the teacher vacancies at RPS, 63 are in elementary schools, 65 are in middle schools and 48 are in high schools, with River City Middle School having the most vacancies at 21. There are 222 vacancies for employees on teacher contracts, roughly double the number of vacancies last year.

According to board member Jonathan Young, 4th District, these vacancies account for roughly a fourth of all RPS teachers.

The sole dissenting vote in approving the incentives came from School Board Member Mariah White, 2nd District, who expressed concern that they wouldn’t address the root causes for the vacancies she’s heard from teachers. Some teachers believe the incentives might benefit certain educators over others and leave “hard-to-field” schools unable to bring in more full-time teaching staff.

“It’s not because of compensation — most of them are leaving because they’re being mistreated somehow,” Ms. White said, “and I think as a board or as an administration that should be looked into.”

Other concerns raised by board members included improving

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Mr. Kamras

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, July 21, 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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City reaches agreement regarding collective bargaining

Continued from A1

level. The law went into effect in May 2021.

Mayor Stoney announced the agreement on the ordinance with praise for the collaboration between the council and administration that produced a “responsive and responsible collective bargaining ordinance” that would benefit “our workers and our citizens.”

The final wording was approved July 15 after a last-minute negotiating session that lasted two hours.

The council vote is just the first step. Based on the timetables in the ordinance, the first talks between a union and the city are considered unlikely to take place before late spring or early summer next year.

For one, organizations that want to represent a group of employees must wait at least four months to request an election to become the recognized bargaining agent. The request needs to be accompanied by evidence that at least 30 percent of employees eligible to vote in that bargaining unit want that particular organization to negotiate for them.

Before any vote can take place, the city also must hire a neutral labor relations administrator (LRA) to write the policies and procedures, including those involved in holding an election.

The city has four months to hire an LRA or must work with unions to hire a temporary administrator to handle that work until a permanent administrator is hired.

Once rules are in place, it could then take 45 to 60 days for the administrator to organize and hold a mail-in election and certify the results — meaning, at the earliest, February or March 2023, or smack-dab in the middle of the development with the council of the 2023-24 budget.

Whether the administration would start holding contract talks immediately or wait until June when the budget process would be complete remains to be seen, but that is anticipated.

Development of the first contract would need to be completed by Dec. 1 for any proposals with a budget impact to be incorporated into the mayor’s proposed budget 2024-25 budget, the ordinance states. The ordinance also sets out a process for settling disagreements.

However, any tentative agreement between a union and the mayor’s administration would not go into effect until City Council voted to accept the terms, particularly those with a budget impact. Council also could reject the tentative agreement.

The ordinance, though, only applies to employees of departments that report to the chief administrative officer and the mayor.

Despite the whole-hearted council support, members of the governing body made sure that neither its appointees nor any employees who work for the auditor, city assessor, city attorney,

inspector general, city clerk, council chief of staff or other appointees could organize.

Employees of the sheriff and other constitutional officers as well as the courts, all state employees, also would be barred from participating in a city union. The new ordinance also would block employees in the Human Resources and Budget departments from securing union representation.

Still, the Virginia AFL-CIO is gleeful that Richmond is on its way to becoming a union bastion after a seven-decade fight to make it possible.

“We are proud to see a collective bargaining ordinance come out of our capital city,” stated Doris Crouse-Mays, president of the state’s largest union organization. “This will be a great step in improving the lives of city employees and the people they serve.”

The ordinance is modeled after ones that several Northern Virginia localities approved last year, which are still in various stages of implementation.

The city also is following in the footsteps of the Richmond School Board, which last year became the first school district in Virginia to authorize employee unions.

Three members of council are credited with spearheading the ordinance, Kristen M. Nye, 4th District, Reva M. Trammell, 8th District, and Stephanie A. Lynch, 5th District.

People close to the talks said that it would not have happened without Ms. Nye.

“This compromise creates a solid foundation for city employees to advocate for competitive pay and benefits and continue their service to our residents,” Ms. Nye, chair of council’s Governmental Operations Committee that led the effort, stated.

“This agreement marks a significant step forward for the City of Richmond and its employees,” added Ms. Trammell, who also is credited with ensuring emergency dispatchers could be part of a union representing fire employees.

“I have championed our employees for years,” Ms. Lynch stated. Several people who were involved said Ms. Lynch played a critical role in bringing the parties together and in securing compromise language on key items that produced legislation in time to vote on the final meeting in July. “I am ecstatic to have my colleagues reach an agreement that benefits employees.”

While union advocates gained most of the wording they sought, Local 512 of the Service Employees International Union lost its bid to have just three bargaining units, one for police officers, one for firefighters and one for other city employees.

At Ms. Trammell’s insistence, those involved say, the ordinance authorizes five bargaining units, one for police, one for fire, one for labor and trades workers, one for professionals, and one for administrative and technical employees, all of which could be represented by different unions.

The city’s chief administrative officer, Lincoln Saunders, previously unenthusiastic about having multiple bargaining units, waxed enthusiastic in the mayor’s statement.

“This ordinance signals to our employees that we hear them,” Mr. Saunders stated, “as we strive to make the city government a workplace of choice.”

To Council President Cynthia I. Newbille, the ordinance had to move forward.

“Collective bargaining was something that our employees not only want but need,” she stated. “Strengthening our employees strengthens our city.”

NPS grant to help preserve historic elementary school

Continued from A1

school was scheduled to be auctioned off due to delinquent taxes, she said she could not let it happen.

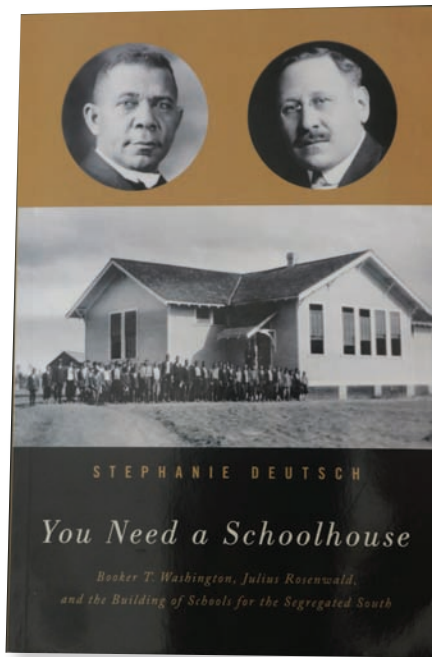
Mrs. Branch and her family gathered the funds among them to pay off the \$2,000 balance and got the deed for the property. Her family’s organization, Agee Miller Mayo Dungy Family Foundation, decided to start a project to save the school. Prior to this, the organization primarily existed for genealogical research and organizing reunions for the family.

Pine Grove Elementary School was one of 5,000 “Rosenwald schools” built in rural communities between 1913 and 1932. A collaboration between Black educator Booker T. Washington and former Sears and Roebuck president Julius Rosenwald, led to the “Rosenwald schools” being built in 15 states, mostly rural Southern communities. The Rosenwald Foundation provided some initial funding for the schools, requiring the communities surrounding the school to provide the additional funds needed.

Goochland, Rustburg, Gloucester, Buckingham and Cape Charles are other Virginia counties that had Rosenwald Schools, Mrs. Branch said.

For Pine Grove, Rosenwald’s foundation donated \$50 toward the \$1,550 price tag for the school’s construction. Mrs. Branch said the community hosted events to raise an additional \$500 — not a small feat for Black people in 1916. For the remainder, the citizens of the community requested funding from the Cumberland County school board.

AAMD calls the school a “Tuskegee Rosenwald school” to acknowledge the contributions of Dr. Washington and the Black architects who designed the first schools, created as a part of a pilot program near Tuskegee, Ala.



Regina H. Boone / Richmond Free Press

Muriel Branch and Sonja Branch-Wilson own a cherished copy of “You Need a Schoolhouse: Booker T. Washington, Julius Rosenwald, and the Building of Schools for the Segregated South” by Stephanie Deutsch. The book explains the evolution of Cumberland County’s Pine Grove School, which is being restored by Mrs. Branch’s family.

Pine Grove Elementary School has been recognized by the Virginia List of Historic Places, is on the National Register of Historic Places and has been placed on the Preservation List of Most Endangered Historic Places by the National Park Service.

Mrs. Branch and her organization have been successful in securing partnerships and other funding besides the NPS funds. A \$25,000 grant from Virginia Outdoors Foundation will help with the building’s security, lighting, restoring the well, and

creating a park and nature trail around the school, she said.

But the journey has not been without challenges. A developer has submitted plans to build The Green Ridge Recycling and Disposal Facility adjacent to the Pine Grove Elementary School site. The University of Virginia Environmental Law and Community Engagement Clinic has represented Mrs. Branch and her organization since 2020 in an effort to halt the landfill’s construction.

The permit for the landfill is under review with the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and the Army Corps of Engineers.

Beginning Sunday, July 31, Mrs. Branch said the organization will host community events and “visioning and empowerment” meetings to raise awareness about the project and hear what the community believes the school’s renovation should look like. The first meeting will take place at the Cumberland Community Center in Cumberland. Mrs. Branch’s cousin, Rev. Stephanie Hicks Willett, also will conduct focus groups to empower the community on how to advocate for themselves.

While the NPS grant funds are to be used specifically to stabilize Pine Grove, it also “will allow us to dream,” Mrs. Branch said, adding that her organization will sponsor “something in the community every month that combines events and fundraising.”

Mrs. Branch also said the organization is now working on a fundraising strategy to raise money for a survey of nearly 80 homes, paths, waterways, churches and more for the entire area to be named a rural historic district.

“There are about 25 of us who are still here and remember the school,” she said. “And we want to educate our community on the importance of preserving the past because this is our history, our community.”

Free COVID-19 vaccines

Continued from A1

19 testing locations around the state at www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/covid-19-testing/covid-19-testing-sites.

Want a COVID-19 vaccine or booster shot?

The Richmond and Henrico health districts are offering free walk-up COVID-19 vaccines at the following locations:

- **Thursday, July 21 and July 28**, noon to 4 p.m. - Richmond Henrico Health District, 400 E. Cary St., Pfizer for ages six months and older, Moderna for ages six months to five years old and ages 12 years and older, appointment only.

- **Tuesday, July 26**, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. - Henrico East Health Department, 1400 N. Laburnum Ave., Pfizer for ages six months and older, Moderna for ages six months to five years old and ages 18 years and older, appointment only.

- **Wednesday, July 27**, 9 a.m. to noon - Henrico Health Department West Clinic, 8600 Dixon Powers Drive, Pfizer for ages six months and older, Moderna for ages six months to five years old and ages 18 years and older, appointment only.

People can schedule an appointment online at vase.vdh.virginia.gov, vaccinate.virginia.gov or vax.rchd.com, or by calling (804) 205-3501 or (877) VAX-IN-VA (1-877-829-4682).

VaccineFinder.org and vaccines.gov also allow people to find nearby pharmacies and clinics that offer the COVID-19 vaccine and booster.

Those who are getting a booster shot should bring their vaccine card to confirm the date and type of vaccine received.

RHHD also offers at-home vaccinations by calling (804) 205-3501 to schedule appointments.

New COVID-19 cases in Virginia increased by 15 percent last week, according to the Virginia Department of Health, while hospitalization data from the Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association increased by six percent.

As with last week, the city of Richmond and counties of Chesterfield and Henrico are still at high levels of community COVID-19 levels, while Hanover County remains at a medium level of community COVID-19.

A total of 3,106 new cases of COVID-19 were reported statewide Wednesday for the 24-hour period, contributing to an overall state total of 1,925,915 cases in Virginia since the pandemic’s outbreak. As of Wednesday, there have been 452,530 hospitalizations and 20,839 deaths statewide. The state’s seven-day positivity rate rose to 22.7 percent on Wednesday. Last week, the positivity rate was 23.1 percent.

On Wednesday, state health officials reported that 71.8 percent of the state’s population has been fully vaccinated, while 81.9 percent have received at least one dose of the vaccine.

State data also showed that over 3.56 million people in Virginia have received booster shots or third doses of the vaccine.

Among those ages 5 to 11 in Virginia, 326,002 have received their first shots as of Wednesday, accounting for 45 percent of the age group in the state, while 283,339 children, or 39.1 percent, are fully vaccinated and 32,065 children have received a third vaccine dose or booster, making up 4.4 percent of that age group.

On Wednesday, 24,414 children from the ages of zero to four have received the first doses, making up 5.4 percent of the population in Virginia, while 92 are fully vaccinated. As of Wednesday, fewer than 159,000 cases, 942 hospitalizations and 13 deaths have been recorded among children in the state.

State data also shows that African-Americans comprised 22.1 percent of cases statewide and 23.1 percent of deaths for which ethnic and racial data is available, while Latinos made up 11.4 percent of cases and five percent of deaths.

Reported COVID-19 data as of Tuesday, July 19, 2022

	Cases	Hospitalizations	Deaths
Richmond	51,803	1,160	520
Henrico County	75,963	1,544	964
Chesterfield County	84,285	1,543	784
Hanover County	24,562	730	294

Compiled by George Copeland Jr.

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have been reports of deputies being knocked unconscious, being punched in the face, being spit on and having human waste thrown at them. According to sources, Sheriff Irving has not allowed deputies to file charges for the assaults.

But it is dangerous for inmates as well, according to federal court filings and information provided from families.

There are reports of at least one mentally ill inmate being sexually abused

and of deputies making sexual advances on inmates.

The most serious case involves the stabbing of an inmate, Rashid H.W. Holman, who had to be rushed to a nearby hospital on Feb. 18 of this year.

In his complaint in U.S. District Court, Mr. Holman stated that the inmate who stabbed him had previously stabbed three or four other inmates.

He stated that when he sought to bring charges against the inmate after being returned to the jail, he was blocked and

instead was himself charged with “having a sharp weapon, which I did not possess.”

Mr. Holman filed his civil rights complaint on April 20 after the sheriff and other top officials at the jail failed to respond to his complaint.

So far as he is aware, the sheriff never sought prosecution of his attacker. Commonwealth’s Attorney Colette W. McEachin said Wednesday that no information involving the stabbing of Mr. Holman has been referred to her office.

City leader to question silent sheriff about jail attacks

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RPS approves stipends and hiring bonuses to attract new teachers

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how RPS investigates and resolves teacher retention issues, the steep competition for qualified employees, and addressing the gap in institutional knowledge created by the vacancies.

In other business, the Board voted 6-1 to approve a new 2022-2023 school calendar, with only Mr. Young dissenting. The RPS academic year will now end on June 9, two weeks earlier than previously scheduled. As part of the approval, school closures have been reverted back to learning days and the district will reopen on Jan. 2, 2023.

In addition, there were unanimous votes

to establish a flexible arts curriculum for George Wythe High School and to begin securing historic tax credits for Fox Elementary School.

The School Board also unanimously voted to approve a new garage lease for district buses in a facility at 326 East 6th Street, after the bus garage on Chamberlayne Avenue caught fire in June. This facility would be a short-term use, with plans for a more permanent site still under development. RPS School Board Vice Chair Kenya Gibson, 3rd District, and School Board Member Dawn Page, 8th District, were not present for the meeting.

Mr. Kamras said that if RPS can’t find

all the necessary teachers within the next six weeks, it will use substitute teachers, combine classrooms and employ other options to ensure the school year moves forward. He also acknowledged that the incentives alone wouldn’t fully address the structural problems RPS is facing, but stressed that they would be an important benefit to potential employees, and could generate enough attention to attract teachers who might not otherwise seek employment with RPS.

“I do want us to be bold,” Mr. Kamras said. “I do want us to try to put everything we possibly can on the table to fill these vacancies.”

Meet this week's Personality **B1**



Emmy winner **B3**



Remembering Ramsey **B4**



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SEPTEMBER 15-17, 2022

Shine bright like a Diamond

RDP developers win \$2.4B, 15-year, mixed-use project in baseball district

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

After years of talk, Richmond is ready to launch the huge Diamond District redevelopment of 68 acres of mostly city-owned property in North Side

Monday night, City Hall announced the winner of a nine-month competition that drew 15 development teams eager to undertake the work.

The winner is RVA Diamond Partners (RDP), 45 percent of whose members are Black-owned businesses, including the nation's largest Black-owned investment bank, Loop Capital of Chicago.

As laid out in a support resolution headed to City Council, the winning team essentially envisions creating the equivalent of a small town over 15 to 20 years on the property that is bounded by Interstate 95, Arthur Ashe Bou-

levard, Robin Hood and Hermitage roads and railroad tracks to the south.

To be undertaken in four phases, the massive project is envisioned to involve \$2.4 billion in new construction over time, create thousands of construction and permanent jobs and a host of other benefits, including a new minor league baseball stadium and a major construction training center in South Side.

One caveat: The city is likely to receive relatively little revenue for its general fund from the development for years to come, despite Mayor Levar M. Stoney's claim that the project would generate \$156 million in taxes over 30 years, or \$5.2 million a year.

The reason: Virtually all of the new tax revenue the giant development is projected to create is to be devoted to paying off the debt for the projected \$85 million stadium and to cover



Courtesy City of Richmond

Rendering of Richmond's future Diamond District.

the cost of installing streets and underground utilities. Until the bonds are paid off, and that could take 20 years or more, those tax dollars cannot be used for any other purpose.

Even so, seven members of the council have

endorsed the project and are prepared to vote Monday, Sept. 26, to approve the resolution to move the project forward.

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Sandra Sellars/Richmond Free Press

Jubilant jumps

Cousins Neyia Hamilton, Joseph McDonough, and Keilani Jones took to the dance floor with their grandmother, Ayo Dowl, during Afro Fest RVA on Sept. 10 in Dogwood Dell. The theme "One Voice, One People, Many Cultures" included performing artists, a colorful "Parade of Nations" featuring 54 countries and nations, food, vendors, health screenings, a history tent, and children's play area. More photos on B2.

The Obamas' official portraits unveiled at the White House

By Darlene Superville
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON

Former President Obama and his wife, Michelle, returned to the White House on Sept. 7, for the unveiling of their official portraits with a modern vibe in an event that set humor and nostalgia over his presidency against the current harsh political talk about the survival of democracy.

While her husband cracked a few jokes about his gray hair, big ears and clothes in his portrait, Mrs. Obama, a descendant of slaves, said the occasion for her was more about the promise of America for people like herself.

"Barack and Michelle, welcome home," declared President Biden as the gathering cheered.

President Biden, who was Mr. Obama's vice president, praised his former boss' leadership on health care, the economy and immigration and said nothing could have prepared him any better for being president than serving with Mr. Obama for those eight years.

"It was always about doing what was right," he said.

The portrait of Mr. Obama, America's 44th and first Black president, doesn't look like any of his predecessors, nor does Michelle Obama's look like

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Andrew Harnik/The Associated Press

Former President Obama and his wife, former First Lady Michelle Obama, are shown at the unveiling of their official White House portraits during a ceremony Sept. 7 in the East Room of the White House.

RPS data suggests student improvement despite SOL scores

By Holly Rodriguez

Richmond Public Schools student Standard of Learning (SOL) scores are among the lowest in the state of Virginia this year.

But during Monday night's

RPS School Board meeting, Superintendent Jason Kamras attempted to soften that narrative with data claiming students have made strides in learning, despite recent test results.

In a 67-page presentation, John Grove, manager of data

analytics for RPS, explained the school division's measures for accountability, which include a proficiency rate and combined rate, both used in the state accreditation system, and a growth rate, only calculated and used by RPS.

He said evaluating students this way is a paradigm shift in evaluating RPS students, and the purpose of the metrics is to dig deeper into their performance beyond just SOL scores.

Proficiency scores, Mr.

Grove said, are poor measures of school quality, and growth measures are truer indicators of school quality. The presentation noted "Proficiency is important but shouldn't be the only measure to drive accountability."

Mr. Grove said the proficiency rate measures the percentage of students who passed or scored 400 or higher on SOLs. The combined rate measures the percentage of

students, grades three through eight, who have shown growth or passed the SOLs. And the growth rate measures the percentage of students who have shown growth "regardless of pass/fail status."

When RPS calculated school-level growth and proficiency in math for the division's elementary schools, for

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'I cannot mourn' Former colonies conflicted over the queen

The Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya
The coffin of Queen Elizabeth II, who died Sept. 8, left Buckingham Palace for the last time Wednesday, borne on a horse-drawn carriage and saluted by cannons and the tolling of Big Ben, in a solemn procession through the flag-draped, crowd-lined streets of London to Westminster Hall. There, Britain's longest-serving monarch will lie in state for the world to mourn.

The queen will lie in state for four days until her funeral Monday, with hundreds of thousands of people expected to file past. Eight pallbearers carried the oak and lead-lined coffin into Westminster Hall, placing it on a raised platform known as a catafalque.

Long after the queen's funeral, her death, as did her life on the throne, likely will continue to bring complicated feelings, included anger.

Upon taking the throne in 1952, Queen Elizabeth II inherited millions of subjects around the world, many of them unwilling.

Beyond official condolences praising the queen's longevity and service, there is some bitterness about the past in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and elsewhere. Talk has turned to the legacies of colonialism, from slavery to corporal punishment in African schools to looted artifacts held in British institutions. For many, the queen came to represent all of that during her seven decades on the throne.

In Kenya, where decades ago a young Elizabeth learned of

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The Associated Press

Members of the armed forces move the coffin of Queen Elizabeth II, adorned with a Royal Standard and the Imperial State Crown, during a procession from Buckingham Palace to Westminster Hall in London on Wednesday. Below, Kikuyu people arrive at a reception camp outside Nairobi, Kenya, on April 28, 1954, after 5,000 British troops and 1,000 armed police rounded up 30,000 to 40,000 men for screening, launched by the authorities after the capture of Mau Mau's "General China."



Soaring property taxes renew calls for cuts

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

Two members of City Council are proposing to cut the real estate property tax rate as the value of property surged by 13 percent — but it is unclear whether Mayor Levar M. Stoney or the majority the nine-member council will go along.

Kristen Nye, 4th District, and Reva M. Trammell, 8th District, introduced an ordinance Monday night that would roll back the property tax from the current rate of \$1.20 per \$100 of assessed value to \$1.16 per \$100.

On a \$100,000 property, the savings would amount to \$40 a year, but reduce overall city collections of tax by an estimated \$13.6 million. Each penny of tax raises about \$3.4 million for the city's general fund, which covers most city operations, rang-

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Free COVID-19 testing, vaccines

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• Wednesday, Sept. 21, 8 to 10 a.m. - East 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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RDP developers win \$2.4B, 15-year, mixed-use project in baseball district

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Only Kristen Nye, 4th District, and Reva M. Trammell, 8th District, have not signed on to the next big thing for Richmond.

Having suffered rejection on previous big projects, including the Navy Hill development for Downtown and the casino in South Side, Mayor Levar M. Stoney now has a legacy project.

The Diamond District was first envisioned in 2005 by then City Council President William J. Pantele. During the administration of Mayor Dwight C. Jones, the city reported spending \$19 million to clear buildings, relocate public operations and prepare the land for future construction.

Revived after being stalled for several years, the development is now seen as building on the existing boom in Scott's Addition.

The Diamond District will not be done in isolation. A variety of projects are already in the works for private property surrounding the Diamond District, ensuring increased energy and activity.

As the resolution noted, ahead is the first phase, which the city stated is to result in nearly \$630 million in development. The first phase involves 21 acres on the south side of the property for which the RDP is to pay \$16 million.

That money would largely enable the city to recover the cost of clearing and relocating city and school system shops and other operations and cleaning the land.

RDP also is to pay \$500,000 to reimburse the city for its costs of running the competition.

The company also has agreed to pay over time a total of \$51 million for the remaining 47 acres, but only as RDP begins additional phases, according to the resolution.

Among the first elements is the replacement stadium that is to nestle the railroad tracks and Arthur Ashe Boulevard. The stadium is to accommodate 10,000 fans, and RDP must have it ready for play in 2025.

The Free Press has been told the stadium is projected to cost \$85 million, though no figures have been made public. The new stadium is to be home to the minor league Richmond Squirrels and Virginia Commonwealth University baseball teams and also become a year-round concert and event venue.

Along with the stadium, the developers are planning an 11-acre park and a 180-room hotel, according to the resolution.

Other elements include 1,134 apartments, 20 percent of which are to be for lower-income people, with 20 for public housing residents with Housing Choice vouchers, and 92 for-sale homes, 18 of which are to be affordable for lower-income residents, the resolution notes.

In addition, the Free Press has been told the developers plan to work with the city and Richmond Public Schools to jumpstart a plan to turn a former Altria tobacco factory on Maury Street into a new technical center where students could learn construction skills. RDP is prepared to invest \$40 million to get the overhaul of the factory moving, the Free Press has been told.

RDP also must make efforts to ensure unionized workers are

employed, that construction workers are paid union-level wages and to give priority in hiring to Richmond residents team or subcontractors add people.

Along with Loop Capital, the major players on the team include Washington, D.C.-based Republic Properties Corp. and Henrico County-based Thalheimer Realty Partners. Thalheimer has already snapped up much of the available private property next door to this site and is making plans for other projects to complement the RDP work.

Black team members include Robert C. Bobb, a former Richmond city manager who runs a Washington-based consulting firm; artist Sir James Thornhill, a well-known muralist in Richmond; and the three co-founders of the Richmond Black Restaurant

experience, Shemicia Bowen, Kelli Lemon and Amy Wentz.

Kenneth Jones' Prestige Construction Co. also will be part of the construction team for the stadium and other portions of the project.

Also, Michael A. "Mike" Hopkins will play a significant role. Both of his companies, M Companies and Emerge Construction Group, will be involved in the project and he will develop the for-sale housing, including the first 92 units of duplex-style units.

Mr. Hopkins said the list of Black participants is long and includes participants in virtually every aspect, from the surveyor team to an interior designer. Black architects and attorneys also will be part of this development.

"There has been a deliberate effort at inclusion," he said.

The Obamas' official portraits unveiled at the White House

Continued from A1

any of the women who filled the role before her.

President Obama stands expressionless against a white background, wearing a black suit and gray tie in the portrait by Robert McCurdy that looks more like a large photograph than an oil-on-canvas portrait. The former first lady, her lips pursed, is seated on a sofa in the Red Room in a strapless, light blue dress. She chose artist Sharon Sprung for her portrait.

Scores of former members of President Obama's administration were on hand for the big reveal.

President Obama noted that some of them in the East Room audience had started families in the intervening years and feigned disappointment "that I haven't heard of anyone naming a kid Barack or Michelle."

He thanked Mr. McCurdy for his work, joking that the artist, who is known for his paintings of public figures from Nelson Mandela to the Dalai Lama, had ignored his pleas for fewer gray hairs and smaller ears. "He also talked me out of wearing a tan suit, by the way," President Obama quipped, referring to a widely panned appearance as president in the unflattering suit.

President Obama went on to say his wife was the "best thing about living in the White House," and he thanked Ms. Sprung for "capturing everything I love about Michelle, her grace, her intelligence — and the fact that she's fine."

Michelle Obama, when it was her turn, laughingly opened by saying she had to thank her husband for "such spicy remarks." To which he retorted, by way of explanation, "I'm not running again."

Then the former first lady turned serious, drawing a connection between unveiling

the portraits and America's promise for people with backgrounds like her own, a daughter of working-class parents from the South Side of Chicago.

"For me, this day is not just about what has happened," she said. "It's also about what could happen, because a girl like me, she was never supposed to be up there next to Jacqueline Kennedy and Dolley Madison. She was never supposed to live in this house, and she definitely wasn't supposed to serve as first lady."

Mrs. Obama said the portraits are a "reminder that there's a place for everyone in this country."

Tradition holds that the sitting president invites his immediate predecessor back to the White House to unveil his portrait, but Donald Trump broke with that custom and did not host President Obama. So, President Biden scheduled a ceremony for his former boss.

RPS data suggests student improvement

Continued from A1

example, it identified J.L. Francis (76 percent), Barack Obama (74 percent), John B. Cary (73 percent), Elizabeth Redd (73 percent) and Mary Munford (72 percent) as schools with the highest rates of growth in reading. The metric compared scores from the 2018-2019 school year (pre-pandemic scores) and the 2021-2022 school year.

SOL pass rates for each of these schools were: J.L. Francis (46 percent), Barack Obama (54 percent), John B. Cary (51 percent) Elizabeth Redd (42 percent), and Mary Munford (84 percent).

"J.L. Francis and Mary Munford, absolutely different populations [in terms of their scores], one with a 46 percent pass rate and the other with an 84 percent pass rate [on the SOLs]," Mr. Grove said. "Drastically different, however using the growth rate, you can see these schools are on par and absolutely exceeding in the division in

terms of growing our students."

Using a sports team metaphor, School Board member Jonathan Young, 4th District, said while he appreciated the fact that RPS students are showing progress, they are still far behind. And in order to compete on the world stage, the focus must be on getting SOL test scores up.

"Growth matters . . . but I am concerned that something is lost in moving the goalpost; and in recognizing that our students are competing against students around the world, my concern is we'll lose something if we focus too much on the paradigm shift," he said.

Mr. Kamras countered, "Our goal is proficiency and beyond. Let me be absolutely clear. We want to make sure we are being thoughtful and strategic about figuring out where we are getting the ball down the field, further, faster," he said. "What do we learn from that, how do we celebrate that, and where are we not?"

Mr. Kamras distributed a survey to teachers and instruction specialists in the division on Monday asking for feedback on three curricula used in RPS classrooms — Eureka for Virginia (math), EL for Education (English Language Arts) and Amplify (science). Earlier in the evening, the public comment period lasted more than two hours as mostly RPS teachers and principals spoke in favor of the current curriculum for the division. But in prior School Board meetings, teachers such as Kieasha King have expressed frustration with implementing the curriculum in their classrooms.

"Scripted curricula take away from teacher autonomy," she said at Monday's meeting. "I did not become a teacher to be a robot." A few others faulted the curricula as a core reason for the division's inability to retain teachers, saying teachers leave the division due to frustration when attempting to implement the curricula.

Free COVID-19 vaccines

Continued from A1

The Virginia Department of Health also has a list of COVID-19 testing locations around the state at www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/covid-19-testing/covid-19-testing-sites.

Want a COVID-19 vaccine or booster shot?

The Richmond and Henrico health districts are offering free walk-up COVID-19 vaccines at the following locations:

• **Thursday, Sept. 15 & Sept. 22**, 1 to 4 p.m. - Richmond Henrico Health District, 400 E. Cary St., Pfizer for ages 6 months and older, Moderna for ages 6 months to 5 years old and ages 18 years and older, appointments encouraged.

• **Wednesday, Sept. 21**, 1 to 4 p.m. - Henrico Health District West Headquarters, 8600 Dixon Powers Drive, Pfizer for ages 6 months and older, Moderna for ages 6 months to 5 years old and ages 18 years and older, appointments encouraged.

People can schedule an appointment online at vase.vdh.virginia.gov, vaccinate.virginia.gov or vax.rchd.com, or by calling (804) 205-3501 or (877) VAX-IN-VA (1-877-829-4682).

VaccineFinder.org and vaccines.gov also allow people to find nearby pharmacies and clinics that offer the COVID-19 vaccine and booster.

Those who are getting a booster shot should bring their vaccine card to confirm the date and type of vaccine received.

RHHD also offers at-home vaccinations by calling (804) 205-3501 to schedule appointments.

New COVID-19 boosters, updated to better protect against the latest variants of the virus, are now being shipped across the United States following approval on the federal level weeks earlier. The new Pfizer booster is approved for those age 12 and up, while the new Moderna booster is for those aged 18 and older.

As with previous COVID-19 boosters, the new doses can only be received after an initial two vaccine shots, and those who qualify are instructed to wait at least two months after their second COVID-19 vaccine.

New COVID-19 cases in Virginia dropped by 22 percent during the last week, according to the Virginia Department of Health, and data from the Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association showed hospitalizations statewide fell by five percent.

Richmond and the counties of Chesterfield, Henrico and Hanover are still at medium levels of community COVID-19.

A total of 1,683 new cases of COVID-19 were reported statewide Wednesday for the 24-hour period, contributing to an overall state total of 2,066,675 cases in Virginia since the pandemic's outbreak. As of Wednesday, there have been 454,714 hospitalizations and 21,646 deaths statewide. The state's seven-day positivity rate dropped to 17.7 percent on Wednesday. Last week, the positivity rate was 19.5 percent.

On Wednesday, state health officials reported that 72.5 percent of the state's population has been fully vaccinated, while 82.6 percent have received at least one dose of the vaccine.

State data also showed that over 3.7 million people in Virginia have received booster shots or third doses of the vaccine.

Among ages 5 to 11 in Virginia, 335,862 have received their first shots as of Wednesday, accounting for 46.4 percent of the age group in the state, while 292,596 children, or 40.4 percent, are fully vaccinated and 49,724 children have received a third vaccine dose or booster, making up 6.9 percent of that age group.

On Wednesday, 44,726 children from the ages of zero to four have received the first doses, making up 9.8 percent of the population in Virginia, while 29,119 are fully vaccinated, or 6.4 percent of the population. As of Wednesday, fewer than 172,980 cases, 1,032 hospitalizations and 15 deaths have been recorded among children in the state.

State data also shows that African-Americans comprised 22.1 percent of cases statewide and 22.9 percent of deaths for which ethnic and racial data is available, while Latinos made up 11.2 percent of cases and 4.9 percent of deaths.

Reported COVID-19 data as of Wednesday, Sept. 14, 2022

	Cases	Hospitalizations	Deaths
Richmond	56,264	1,196	535
Henrico County	81,058	1,605	1,006
Chesterfield County	90,226	1,644	809
Hanover County	25,888	781	316

Compiled by George Copeland Jr.

ing from police to parks.

Ms. Trammell, who pushed for a tax cut last year, really wants the tax rate rolled back 10 cents.

"People need relief. Everyone is saying, 'We can't afford these assessments that keep skyrocketing year after year'" she told her colleagues Monday. "I am hearing from people who are worried they will lose their homes because they can't pay the taxes."

Still efforts to cut the tax rate have been defeated in the past, and no other council members have signed on in support of a reduction. Behind the scenes, some members are already expressing opposition.

The renewed fight over the tax rate was launched after City Assessor Richie McKeithen issued the latest valuations of the 70,000 or so parcels that will determine the tax bill that will be issued in 2023.

According to his findings, the total value of existing property in the city, from homes and apartments to commercial property and billboards, rose to a record \$35.9 billion, a \$4.2 billion or 13 percent increase from last year's \$31.7 billion record.

He noted the 13 percent rise represents a 3.8 percent increase from his projection last spring and does not include the increase he is expecting as he and his staff turn to assess new construction and add those values to the total.

Since 2017, when Mayor Stoney took office, the value of property in Richmond has soared by \$14.4 billion or 66 percent.

The \$1.20 tax rate on real estate is

currently the highest in the Richmond Metropolitan Area, although it is also the lowest on record for the city since the tax was first imposed in 1870 to pay for public education.

However, the increase in property values means that owners must pay more to the city each year.

In 2017, City Hall built its budget on collecting \$252.5 million in real estate taxes. In this current budget year, 2022-23, the Stoney administration projected collecting \$387 million in real estate taxes. That represents an increase of \$134.5 million or 53 percent during his first six years.

While wealthier sections of the city have continued to see value increases, some of the more significant gains in value can be found in less well-heeled areas.

For example, Washington Park in North Side, a predominantly Black residential community, registered a 33 percent increase in property values. In the South Side neighborhoods of Swansboro and Newtown South, also places where Black homeownership has been strong, values leaped 25 percent or more.

And private property in and around three public housing communities in the East End, Creighton, Fairfield and Whitcomb courts, jumped an average of 25 percent in value, according to Mr. McKeithen's report.

Overall, the average value of a home in the city has leaped from \$189,000 in 2012 to around \$320,000 this year, according to real estate data bases, a 70 percent jump.

Councilman Andreas D. Addison, 1st District, said the driving force for the

'I cannot mourn' Former colonies conflicted over the queen

Continued from A1

her father's death and her enormous new role as queen, a lawyer named Alice Mugo shared online a photograph of a fading document from 1956. It was issued four years into the queen's reign, and well into Britain's harsh response to the Mau Mau rebellion against colonial rule.

"Movement permit," the document says. While over 100,000 Kenyans were rounded up in camps under grim conditions, others, like Ms. Mugo's grandmother, were forced to request British permission to go from place to place.

"Most of our grandparents were op-

pressed," Ms. Mugo tweeted in the hours after the queen's death Thursday. "I cannot mourn."

But Kenya's outgoing president, Uhuru Kenyatta, whose father, Jomo Kenyatta, was imprisoned during the queen's rule before becoming the country's first president in 1964, overlooked past troubles, as did other African heads of state. "The most iconic figure of the 20th and 21st centuries," Uhuru Kenyatta called her.

Anger came from ordinary people. Some called for apologies for past abuses like slavery, others for something more tangible.

"This commonwealth of nations, that wealth belongs to England. That wealth

is something never shared in," said Bert Samuels, a member of the National Council on Reparations in Jamaica.

Queen Elizabeth's reign saw the hard-won independence of African countries from Ghana to Zimbabwe, along with a string of Caribbean islands and nations along the edge of the Arabian Peninsula.

Some historians see her as a monarch who helped oversee the mostly peaceful transition from empire to the Commonwealth, a voluntary association of 56 nations with historic and linguistic ties. But she was also the symbol of a nation that often rode roughshod over people it subjugated.



Meet this week's Personality B1



A Year in Photos B2

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Ready to serve

Jennifer McClellan defends rushed primary after landslide victory

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

Richmond state Sen. Jennifer L. McClellan is on the fast track to Washington.

Sen. McClellan received an early 50th birthday present in winning a smashing victory in the Dec. 20 Democratic "firehouse" primary in taking her first step to succeed the late A. Donald McEachin as the 4th Congressional District representative.

The 17-year General Assembly veteran, who turned 50 on Wednesday, now only must best a lightly regarded Republican, Leon Benjamin, in the special election set for Tuesday, Feb. 21, to fulfill her quest to become Virginia's first Black congresswoman.

Mr. Benjamin, a minister, lost twice to Congressman McEachin, most recently in the Nov. 8 election that took place three weeks before Congressman McEachin's death.

For Sen. McClellan, a victory would mean she would give up her post as the senior senator for Richmond and end her role as a member of Verizon's legal team to become a freshman in Congress. She said she decided to do so to have an opportunity "to serve more people."

The only potential roadblock could be a federal lawsuit that

Please turn to A4



Virginia state Sen. Jennifer L. McClellan arrived at Diversity Richmond early on Dec. 20 to vote in a special "firehouse" primary. After winning the primary by capturing 85 percent of the 27,900 votes cast, Sen. McClellan hopes to make history in February 2023 by being elected the first Black woman to represent Virginia in the U.S. Congress.

City councilwoman wants to revive apartment inspections

By Jeremy M. Lazarus



Ms. Lynch

Apartment buildings in Richmond would have to undergo a city inspection at least once every four years and more often in the case of violations under a proposal that 5th District Councilwoman Stephanie A. Lynch plans to introduce in January.

The proposal will call for the Richmond

inspectors to check that rental dwellings are properly maintained and comply with health and safety codes, Ms. Lynch stated in confirming that she plans to introduce the ordinance next month to get on the council docket.

"Everyone deserves a safe and healthy place to live," Ms. Lynch, chair of the council's Education and Human Services

Committee, stated in explaining her motivation for legislation that would be the first a council member has introduced since 2007 when an effort to create a rental inspection program failed.

"Our community has long been impacted by 'slum landlords,'" Ms. Lynch continued, "and there are far too many people, particularly vulnerable residents

like the elderly, low-income families, undocumented individuals and individuals with disabilities who are forced to live in unsafe conditions."

Ms. Lynch said Richmond residents are entitled to live in a place that complies with the requirements of the state and local

Please turn to A4

First 2 years revealed President Biden's generational ambition

By Zeke Miller
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON

When he ran for the White House, Joe Biden told voters his presidency would be a bridge to the next generation. His first two years on the job have revealed it to be a much more ambitious venture.

As he nears the halfway mark on his first term, President Biden is pointing to legacy-defining achievements on climate change, domestic manufacturing and progress on the COVID-19 pandemic — all accomplished with razor-thin majorities on Capitol Hill and rather dim views from the public.

President Biden's legislative accomplishments extend to nearly every aspect of American life — although their impact may take years to be felt in some cases — and his marshaling of a global coalition to back Ukraine's defenses and of democracies against China's growing influence will echo for decades. He defied history in the



Associated Press photo

President Biden speaks about manufacturing jobs and the economy Nov. 29 at SK Siltron CSS, a computer chip factory in Bay City, Mich.

midterm elections, persuading voters to stick with his vision of long-term gains despite immediate concerns about inflation and the economy.

It turns out his conception of the job is about far more than restoring democratic

norms and passing the baton, as the 80-year-old president looks toward an announcement in early spring that he'll run again despite his record-setting age.

Please turn to A4



Mrs. Lacks

Henrietta Lacks statue concept drawing unveiled in Roanoke

The Associated Press

ROANOKE

The future statue of Henrietta Lacks will depict the historical figure from Roanoke standing with arms folded in a blazer, long skirt and heeled shoes, according to a recently released drawing.

The drawing was undraped in a brief ceremony Dec. 19, giving residents a first look at the concept for the planned statue to be permanently installed across from the city municipal building in fall 2023. About 100 people attended.

Roanoke artist Bryce Cobbs had only two photos of Mrs. Lacks, who lived from 1920 until 1951, from which to draw her, the first phase of a project for which a fundraiser collected more than \$160,000.

Blacksburg artist Larry Bechtel will begin the creation of the statue by crafting a 24-inch model in oil-based clay, guided by the drawing and recollections of Mrs. Lacks' family, including her only living child, Lawrence Lacks.

"This means a lot to my family," Ron Lacks, Lawrence's son, said at the event.

The finished work, a hollow bronze figure weighing about 400 pounds, will stand six feet high — six inches taller than Mrs.

Please turn to A4

Want a COVID-19 vaccine or booster shot?

The Richmond and Henrico health districts are offering free walk-up COVID-19 and flu vaccines at the following locations:

- **Tuesday, Jan. 3, 10 a.m. to noon** - Cary Street, 400 E. Cary St., Primary Moderna shots for ages 6 months to 5 years and age 12 and older, bivalent booster for age 6 and older, Primary Pfizer shots for age 6 months and older and bivalent boosters for age 5 and older, Novavax primary shots for ages 12 and older and boosters for age 18 and older and flu shots,

Please turn to A4

Color my world

Daniel-Oleg Imisioluwa Ogunjima, 6, enjoys coloring during a Dec. 27 Kwanzaa celebration at Hardywood's Ownby Lane location. During the week of Kwanzaa, Dec. 26 through Jan. 1, families and communities come together to share a feast, to honor the ancestors, affirm the bonds between them, and celebrate African and African-American culture.



Regina H. Boone/Richmond Free Press

RPS program receives \$20,000 grant

By Holly Rodriguez

Young Kings in Action, an enrichment program for sixth- through eighth-grade boys at Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School, a \$20,000 grant from the Ujima Legacy Fund, has been awarded.

The MLK school program is one of three grant recipients presented an award from Ujima at The Community Foundation on Dec. 15.

Tracy Brower, interim director of the Richmond Public Schools Education Foundation, said Young Kings in Action was born out of a need to help young men at MLK

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