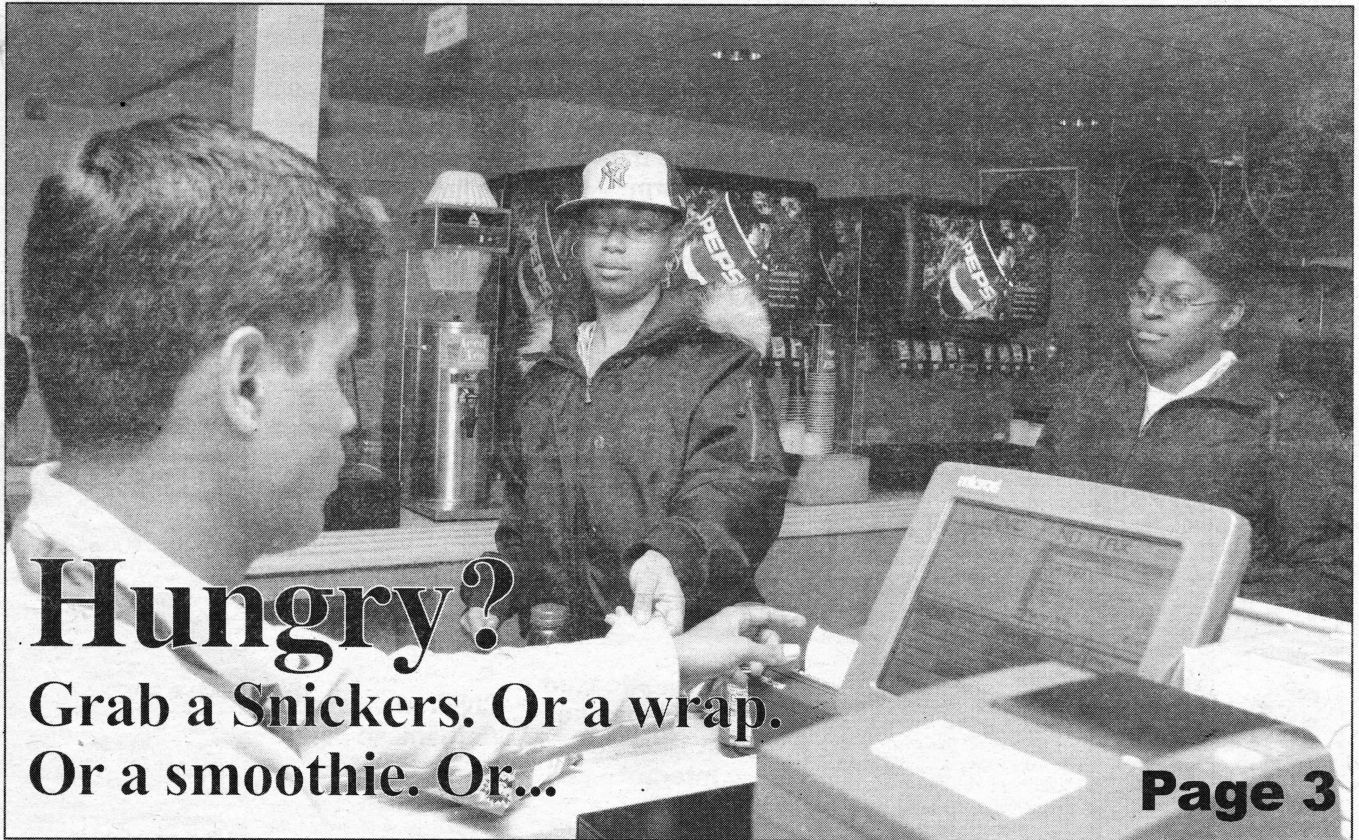


# The Commonwealth Times

Free

**'Morning-after' pills:  
contraception or abortion?**

**Page 4**



## Hungry?

**Grab a Snickers. Or a wrap.  
Or a smoothie. Or...**

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## Sports

**Men's  
basketball  
grabs ninth  
conference win**

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hip-hop  
community for  
a loop**

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## Editorials & Letters

**Taxes are  
essential for a  
democracy**

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# IN BRIEF

## CALENDAR

## FEB. 2 THROUGH FEB. 4

Monday, Feb. 2	Tuesday, Feb. 3	Wednesday, Feb. 4
It's never too early to start studying for final exams. Participate in the <b>Academic Success Workshop: Preparing for Finals Begins Now!</b> from noon to 1 p.m. in the Forum Room of the University Student Commons. For more information or for special needs consideration contact Darlene Pantaleo at (804) 828-6200.	Want to learn more about the Tompkins-McCaw Library at 509 North 12th Street on the Medical Campus? Check out the <b>Tompkins-McCaw Library Tour and Orientation</b> from 2 to 3 p.m. The tour begins at the first-floor service desk. For more information or for special needs consideration contact Lynne Turman at (804) 828-0638.	Wonder what the optical and electronic properties of conjugated polymeric fibers and films for applications in smart materials is? Find out at the <b>engineering research seminar</b> where Prof. Richard Gregory of Old Dominion University will speak. The seminar is from 3:30 to 4:55 p.m. at the School of Engineering on the Academic Campus, room 106. For more information, contact Anthony Guiseppi-Elie at (804) 827-7016.

### CAMPUS FORECAST



**Monday**  
**38/33**



**Tuesday**  
**47/30**



**Wednesday**  
**49/26**



**Thursday**  
**36/32**

### Five snakes terrorize bank

In other snake-related news, a man in Johannesburg, South Africa, could face murder charges stemming from an incident Thursday in which he apparently loosed five poisonous snakes, possibly puff adders, in a bank. One snake bit a bank contract worker, who was rushed to the hospital. The individual responsible for the incident, who has not yet been arrested by police, had been arguing with bank officials over the financing of a motor vehicle.

### A whale of a mess

A 56-foot-long sperm whale exploded in Tainan, Taiwan, last week after gases created by its decomposition built up inside it. The 60-ton whale's blood and insides splattered on cars and nearby stores, causing traffic to stop for several hours. A truck was carrying the whale, which had died after beaching itself on the island's southwestern coast, to a university for an autopsy when the incident occurred.

### Pour one out for your dead mates

An English landlord is selling cemetery plots next to his country pub, and local customers are buying them up. Julian Taylor turned a field next to the Church Inn into a cemetery after his father became ill and asked to be buried in the field, which is situated atop a hill overlooking a valley. Taylor said one pub regular was so enamored with the concept he has asked his friends to drink pints of beer in the cemetery Friday nights to honor his memory after he dies.

### Lonely camel escapes during storm

After running into a road, a stray camel in southern Sweden brought traffic to a halt. Several motorists called the police but it was some time before the skeptical officers believed them and went to the scene. Before the officers arrived, friends of the camel's owner found the lost animal and led it back to its stable. Owner Anneli Arvidsson said the 22-year-old camel's reason for escape was loneliness. The camel's closest companion - a horse - was taken inside the stable while the camel was left in the pasture, and the separation between the companions caused the camel to run.

### Cannibal sentenced for eating man he met through Internet

Armin Meiwes, 42, was sentenced to eight and a half years in prison Friday for killing and eating a man in what he said was an act of sexual fetishism. The sentence was less than life in prison, which the prosecution had sought, because the victim apparently wanted to be killed and eaten. The two met after the victim, known only as Bernd-Juergen B., 43, posted an Internet advertisement asking for someone to bite off his penis and kill him. Meiwes had constructed an elaborate room with a butcher's bench and cage where he cut Bernd-Juergen B. into pieces before eating 44 pounds of his body during a period of several months.

### Father and son plead guilty to mailing copperhead

Bob Sam Castleman and his son Jerrod, both of Arkansas, plead guilty Wednesday to charges that they mailed a copperhead snake in a cardboard box to a neighbor. The neighbor's wife opened the box, and the snake slithered out. Police then arrived and killed the poisonous reptile. Bob Sam Castleman faces 27 to 33 months in prison, and Jerrod Castleman faces 31 to 44 months - a longer sentence because he had been previously convicted on another charge. The two tried to plead guilty Monday but both tested positive for illegal substances, which delayed the proceedings.

### Children swallow Vietnamese coins

Six children between the ages of two and 10 were treated for swallowing coins during the recent Lunar New Year holidays in Quang Nam, Vietnam. The three new coins were reissued in mid-December by Vietnam's Central Bank after 20 years as part of a push to promote vending machine use, but at least 17 children have apparently mistaken them for candy since the coins were introduced.

## THE Commonwealth TIMES

ROOM 1149  
T. EDWARD TEMPLE BUILDING  
901 W. MAIN ST.  
RICHMOND, VA 23284-2010

### STAFF

Executive Editor  
**DEVON MARROW**  
CTEditor03@yahoo.com

Managing Editor  
**KENT J. BROCKWELL**  
rugbybrockwell@yahoo.com

News Co-Editor  
**MATT BUSSE**  
bussemd@vcu.edu

News Co-Editor  
**TANJA ZLATKOVIC**  
zlatkovic@vcu.edu

Production Chief  
**ANDREW BABB**  
andrew@toolatetorun.com

Graphic Artist  
**CANDICE ANDERSON**  
andersonc1@vcu.edu

Spectrum Editor  
**MELISSA LYNCH**  
lynchmd@vcu.edu

Associate Spectrum Editor  
**MICHAEL GLENNON**  
glennonm@vcu.edu

Sports Editor  
**TYLER COOPER**  
coopert@vcu.edu

Associate Sports Editor  
**JULIAN BENBOW**  
benbowj1@yahoo.com

Photography Editor  
**PAT KANE**  
kanepm@vcu.edu

Editorials and Letters Editor  
**PATRICK RYAN**  
ryanpm@vcu.edu

Business Manager  
**PRIYANKA GUHA**  
guhap@vcu.edu

Associate Business Manager  
**CHRISTINE MENDOZA**  
catchrisjay@hotmail.com

Advertising Director  
**SHELLY CHIANG**  
s2skchia@vcu.edu

Advertising Representative  
**MORGAN COPELAND**  
copelandmd@vcu.edu

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Cover photo by Pat Kane.

# News

## VCU ups dining choices

### New venues offer more for the hungry

**MATT BUSSE**

*News Co-Editor*

Those dining at VCU have a few more choices than in past semesters, such as new restaurants in the University Student Commons, new meal plan options for residential dining halls and a restaurant in the university's e2 Bookstore.

The Commons now offers a Sizzlin' Wraps deli where Montague's Deli used to be, a Jammin' Java coffee bar and even a convenience store where customers can purchase cereal, mixed candy and Pop-tarts.

In addition, Subway is scheduled to open in the Commons Feb. 14, said Dan McDonald, assistant director of business services.

McDonald explained how the new restaurants were chosen.

University officials conducted two surveys, one as recently as three months ago, to determine what kind of sandwich vendor students and faculty wanted.

"During that survey, the No. 1 concept that folks asked for was Subway," he said, adding that Quizno's ranked No. 2 and the Commons might have one in the future.

Anton Daniel, a senior forensic science and criminal justice major, could have been one of those surveyed.

"I can't wait till they open the Subway," he said.

McDonald said students and university officials both wanted a convenience store in the Commons for some time, but there was not enough space before the renovation.

"We're still in the process of defining the product that will be up there," McDonald said. "But we think that will be a nice addition to that area."

In addition to coffee, Jammin' Java also

sells Freshens-brand smoothies.

"It's getting busier and busier now that they (customers) realize the smoothies are over here," said Tarsha Johnson, a retail supervisor with ARAMARK, which supplies much of the university's food.

Bène Pizza was in the Commons last spring but not last semester because the Commons Café was closed for renovation.

"We've offered Bène before and it's been extremely popular," McDonald said. "It's a good pizza."

Other restaurants now in the Commons were there last semester, such as Nao and Zen, which serves Asian-style food such as noodle bowls and sushi, and Border Cantina, which offers burritos and fajitas. Chick-fil-A Express carries the chain's signature chicken sandwiches and nuggets.

Gabrielle Strauss, a sophomore, said she often eats Nao and Zen's stir-fry chicken. "It's OK, a little greasy" - but plans to switch to Subway when it opens.

"I'm probably going to start using the Atkins-approved stuff," she said, referring to a line of Subway items containing few carbohydrates to appeal to those following the low-carb Atkins diet plan.

Strauss said she thinks the Commons' restaurant selection is better than it was last semester.

"It allows for people who want to eat healthier food, it allows them a selection," she said, citing Chick-fil-A's salads as an example. "I think this is a pretty good selection for all students."

Other students suggested improvements to the dining lineup.

Daniel said he would like to see "a Chinese place that has real Chinese food... because their (Nao and Zen's) Chinese food is fake.



Subway is due to open Feb. 14 in the University Student Commons.

"And some barbecue," he added.

First-year marketing major Jason Adams said he wished the Commons had more fast-food and chain restaurants.

"Sort of like a food court like you see at the mall," he said.

Several students said they thought prices at the Commons' restaurants were high.

"I think they (the prices) are a little high for students," said Tammy Hollenberg, a first-year accounting major. "Some of the stuff is OK, like the Chick-fil-A because that's a normal price for them, but the pizza is a little high."

She paused, then added, "I buy it anyway, I just wish it was less."

Strauss said the Commons' advantage is its convenient location.

"I think you can get better food for the same price at other places," she said.

Students also expressed a desire for more available seating in the Commons.

"Last time I came up here (around 11:15 a.m.) there was nowhere left to sit," Hollenberg said.

"I wish they had bigger tables for large groups of people," Strauss said, explaining that she and her sorority sisters sometimes have trouble finding a single location for all of them. "But it works. We can pull tables together."

Despite the new eateries' debut, McDonald said he doesn't think traffic at residential dining halls such as Hibbs will decline.

For one thing, the Hibbs and Larrick dining halls, which are respectively located on the university's Academic and

*DINING continued to page 6*

## Trani: VCU has 'become a university'

**MELISSA LYNCH**

*Spectrum Editor*

Eugene Trani, spoke about how VCU has changed since he became its president in 1990 on "For the Record," which aired on PBS Jan. 29 and Feb. 1.

"The first thing and the most important thing is that (VCU has) become a university," Trani said.

He said his main focus for the near future is making VCU a more student-centered university.

A task force, headed by Roderick McDavis, provost and vice president for academic affairs, will gather information from other urban universities and VCU students to help make VCU a "student

university," Trani said.

The goal is to present a plan to the Board of Visitors in May. Trani has already met with the Student Government Association of the Medical Campus and will meet with the SGA of the Academic Campus today.

"What are we doing to give a more full experience at VCU?" is one of the questions that will be posed, he said.

"How do we have a vigorous student life that will be different from Virginia Tech or UVA?" is another question the president said they will consider.

Once the plan is put together it will be implemented over the next three years, Trani said.

He added that the increase in students,

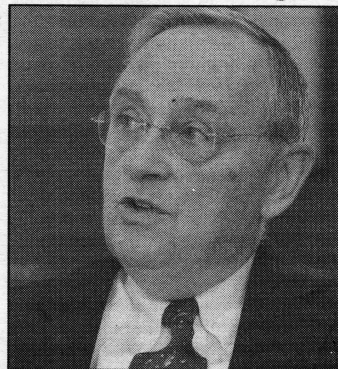
particularly out-of-state students, was one way in which VCU has "grown significantly."

"It's becoming much less of a commuter school," he said.

Other signs of growth are the construction projects on which VCU is working and planning.

The University Student Commons and Rhoads Hall are both in the middle of construction and the Monroe Campus is in the planning stages.

Trani said the Monroe Campus will have an engineering school and a business school. He also said there is a possibility that the VCU AdCenter might move into the Cen-



VCU President Eugene Trani

*TRANI continued to page 5*

# News

## Pro-choice student group opposes Plan B legislation

ERICA L. DE POMPEO  
Capital News Service

Medical students usually spend their time on such subjects as anatomy, pharmacology and surgery. But some also devote time to political science. They seek to influence public policy on health-care issues such as women's reproductive rights.

That is what Sally Hanson, a second-year student at the VCU School of Medicine, did at the Capitol last week. She leads a fight against proposed legislation that would ban emergency-contraception pills from Virginia universities and colleges.

"As future medical doctors, we feel that there is absolutely no need for excessive legislation regulating the private decisions between physicians and their patients," Hanson said in a speech Wednesday, which was Pro-Choice Lobby.

Hanson and dozens of other female students from Virginia colleges rallied at the Capitol to oppose bills that would prohibit clinics at state public institutions of higher education from dispensing "morning-after" pills such as Plan B to students.

The morning-after pill is a federally approved drug that can be taken up to 72 hours after intercourse.

Two Republican delegates, Robert Marshall of Loudoun and Prince William counties, and Kathy Byron of Bedford and Campbell counties, sponsor the bills. The legislation has been assigned to the House Committee on Education.

Marshall and some other abortion opponents consider the pills a form of abortion. They also say the pills promote irresponsible sexual behavior.

In April, Marshall wrote a letter to VCU President Eugene Trani asking the university to stop distributing Plan B.

Hanson said that preventing students from obtaining such prescriptions would be a "huge step backwards." Some students said the pills are needed because they prevent unwanted pregnancies, especially for women who have been victims of date rape and other sexual assaults.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration classifies the pill as contraceptive. It works the same way birth-control pills do, but in higher doses, by inhibiting ovulation, implantation and fertilization of eggs.

VCU Student Health Services dispenses Plan B pills, along with literature describing how they work, to students

between 200 and 250 times annually.

Betty Reppert, the services' associate director, has said, "Plan B is not considered an abortion drug as far as any legal issues are concerned."

The Family Foundation of Virginia disagrees. The Richmond-based organization supports banning emergency contraception for college students.



Sally Hanson

Victoria Cobb, the foundation's director of legislative affairs, said that "Nearly 80 percent of Americans believe that human life begins at fertilization. So-called 'emergency contraception' prevents the implantation of an already-fertilized egg, a human being with unique DNA. This is an abortion."

In Hanson's appeal to legislators, she said, "If you truly are dedicated to decreasing unwanted pregnancies and abortion ... make emergency contraception available."

"We need to face facts," Hanson said. "Many college students are sexually active. Even with the use of contraceptive methods, accidents happen. Condoms can break, women can miss pills, some women are sexually assaulted."

Last week's rally drew students from schools across the state, including the University of Virginia, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and James Madison University. They said access to emergency contraception is a personal matter in which legislation has no place.

Hanson belongs to a group called Medical Students for Choice, a non-profit organization of more than 7,000 medical students from the United States and Canada. The group works to make reproductive health care, including abortion, a part of standard medical education and residency training.

## Senator seeks compensation for wrongful incarceration

T.D. BROWN  
Capital News Service

Besides correcting people's vision, Sen. Benjamin Lambert III, D-Richmond, says he helps the state right its wrongs when blind justice produces bad results.

Lambert, an optometrist when not participating in the Virginia General Assembly, has sponsored four bills in the past three years seeking compensation for people who were wrongfully convicted and imprisoned.

Most recently, he has taken up the cause of Beverly Anne Monroe. Lambert's bill asking \$1.6 million for her is pending before the Senate Finance Committee.

"When I present a claim to the committee, they say, 'How many more you got?'" said Lambert, a Democrat whose district includes parts of Richmond and Henrico County.

"I say, 'How many did you screw up on?'"

On Jan. 14, Lambert filed his bill seeking compensation for Monroe, a former Ashland resident convicted of first-degree murder by a Powhatan County Circuit Court jury in November 1992. She was sentenced to 20 years in prison.

After serving about seven years, Monroe was freed when a federal judge

Jeffrey Cox of New Kent County. Cox was incarcerated for more than a decade for a murder that subsequently discovered evidence revealed he did not commit. The General Assembly awarded Cox \$750,000.

In 2003, Lambert sponsored a bill on behalf of Marvin Lamont Anderson of Hanover County. Anderson served 15 years in prison and five on parole for rape until a DNA test exonerated him. Gov. Mark Warner granted Anderson an absolute pardon, and the General Assembly awarded him about \$1.2 million.

This session, Lambert is sponsoring claims bills for:

- Julius Earl Ruffin, 50, of Suffolk. Ruffin was imprisoned for 21 years for rape. DNA testing proved he was innocent, and Warner issued Ruffin a full pardon. Lambert is seeking a \$1 million initial payment for Ruffin, plus \$2 million to be paid over 30 years.

- Monroe. Lambert wants the state to pay her a lump sum of \$400,000 by August and to award her monthly payments totaling more than \$1.2 million over the next 20 years.

Stephen A. Northup, Monroe's lawyer, said he certainly supports the bill.

"I think she deserves it," said Northup, an Ashland resident. "She lost every-

thing as a result of this case. She lost her house, her savings account ... Compensation bills are designed to help people like Beverly receive a least some payment for what they were put through," he said.

Lambert had been in contact with Monroe during her incarceration and while she was free on appeal. The senator said she wanted him to look into her case.

Monroe has always maintained her innocence in the 1992 death of Roger de la Burde, her lover and a wealthy Powhatan resident. De la Burde, 60, was found with a single gunshot wound to the head on a couch in his home. Authorities initially considered the death a suicide.

Lambert, who joined the Senate in 1986 after serving eight years in the House, said he is optimistic about his claims bills. However, they may face an uphill battle this year because of the state's budget problems.

Virginia has no limit on what the state can pay for wrongful incarceration. Several states do have limits. North Carolina, for example, has a limit of \$10,000 for each year in prison, with a total cap of \$150,000, according to statistics compiled in 2002 by the National Conference of State Legislatures.

*"I'm not a lawyer, just a legislator trying to take care of my constituents."*  
—Sen. Benjamin Lambert III  
D-Richmond

not to retry Monroe.

Monroe, 65, now lives with her daughter Katie in Richmond. Lambert's bill says she "lost income and a promising career during her more than 10 years of prosecution and incarceration." It also says Monroe "suffered severe physical, emotional and psychological damage."

The appeals court said the murder case against Monroe "can be fairly characterized as tenuous" and "Monroe had presented a strong defense," Lambert's bill noted. It also cited court findings that the prosecution had suppressed evidence that cast doubt on its witnesses and would have bolstered Monroe's defense.

"I'm not a lawyer, just a legislator trying to take care of my constituents," Lambert said. "We were just trying to do what we could to help."

This is not the first time Lambert pursued such a claim.

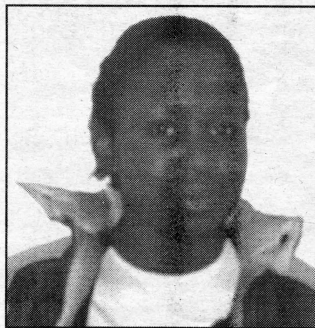
In 2002, he sought compensation for

# NEWS

## CT Hits the Streets

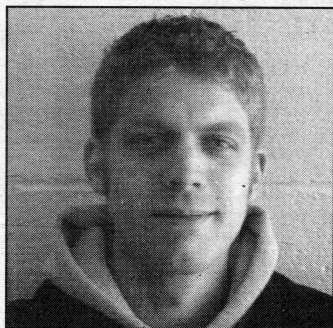
### Who will be the 2004 Democratic Party candidate, and why?

**TANJA ZLATKOVIC**  
News Co-Editor



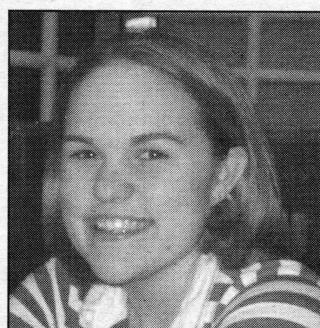
**Roselyn Igbani**  
First-year, pre-pharmacy

I'm not quite sure about that whole thing, but my whole family, we pretty much vote Democrat (regardless of who the candidate is).



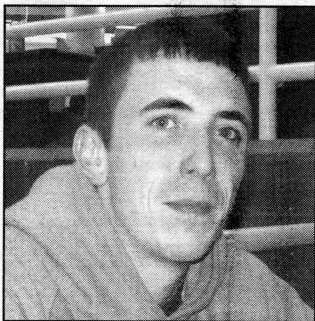
**David Tyson**  
Transfer student, kinetic imagery

John Kerry, because he's got it going on, working it out president-style.



**Jessica Rice**  
First-year, nursing

Oh, I don't know much about that. I've heard a lot about it on the news but I haven't been following it.



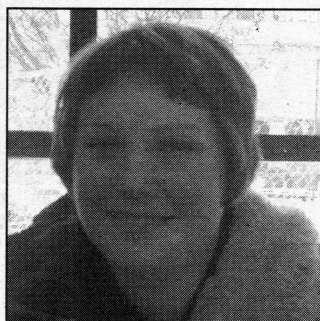
**T.C. Nunnally**  
Junior, electrical engineering

The only one I've really heard of is Lieberman.



**Mabel Martin**  
Junior, athletic training and pre-physical therapy

I'm not really sure. I don't know. I haven't been watching the news at all. The way things are going anyway, with the Republicans, I'm pretty sure the Republicans are going to win.



**Alison Chapman**  
First-year, art foundation

I'd probably say Kerry since he's most consistent in the primaries.

*TRANI continued from page 3*

tral Belting Building by the Jefferson Hotel. "If we can get some private funds" the Anderson Gallery might go to the Monroe Campus as well, Trani said.

The schools of engineering and life sciences also opened after Trani's term as president began.

Trani said the fact that the life sciences are "integrated between the two campuses" is something that helps VCU.

Trani also discussed his book, "The First Cold War: The Legacy of Woodrow Wilson in U.S.-Soviet Relations," on the program.

"The First Cold War" is about the tense relationship between the United States and Russia, and how Wilson understood this early on, Trani said.

"I've always been fascinated with why two countries who have so many similarities – big, wide countries, diverse countries – have had such a terrible relationship," he said.

After teaching at Moscow University in 1981 Trani found a "deep understanding of how loving and gentle the Russians are ... (but) we just feel no sense of commonness with them," he said.

His next book, which he said is about one-quarter finished, compares American relations with Russia and American relations with China. He projects its completion in 2006.

### Crime Log

**Jan. 26**

Male arrested at Main Hospital on East Marshall Street for trespassing.

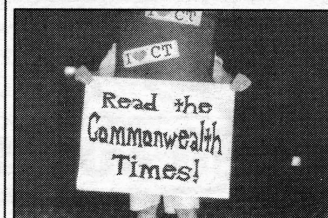
**Jan. 28**

Male arrested on West Broad Street for driving under the influence of alcohol.

**Jan. 30**

Male at Sanger Hall on East Marshall Street advised that between Jan. 21 and Jan. 27 an unknown person(s) removed state property valued at \$700 from a secured location.

Female at James Branch Cabell Library on Floyd Avenue advised that on Jan. 28 an unknown person removed personal property valued at \$190 from an unsecured location.



# NEWS

## DINING continued from page 3

Medical campuses, offer what McDonald called "premium dinners" most Wednesday evenings. For the cost of two standard meals, students can eat dishes such as imperial crab, stuffed flounder, grilled salmon and black forest cake, among others. The premium meals were available last semester.

Students can purchase residential meal plans where they're allotted either a certain number of meals per week or per semester. Per-semester plans, called "block plans," can afford a student as few as five meals in a semester or as many as 300, McDonald said.

"Some folks want to buy just enough to get by. Other folks want to eat all the time," he said.

Students can also purchase "dining dollars" for their meal plans and then use their VCU cards to purchase meals at the Commons or the dining halls.

Dining dollars offer several advantages. They're tax-free, which means students can avoid paying the state sales and city meals taxes they would normally pay when buying meals, McDonald said.

Also, students can use dining dollars to purchase food at Hibbs or Larrick for their friends.

One thing new this semester for the dining halls, McDonald said, is that students can purchase additional dining dollars for their meal plans in increments of 50 dollars.

"Last semester, if you ran out of dining dollars, you ran out of dining dollars," McDonald said. "You had to buy a full plan again."

The university is already working on additional services for hungry members of the VCU community.

The Shafer Court Dining Center is under construction at Shafer Court and is scheduled to open in fall 2004. Also, part of Hutton Hall on the Medical Campus could one day be a formal dining area.

Brian Ohlinger, associate vice president of facilities management, said the university is seeking the state's approval to spend \$5 million, funded through student fees, to renovate space in Hutton Hall into a Medical Campus Student Commons.



Students can now purchase a variety of groceries such as crackers, soup and cookies at the University Student Commons' convenience store.

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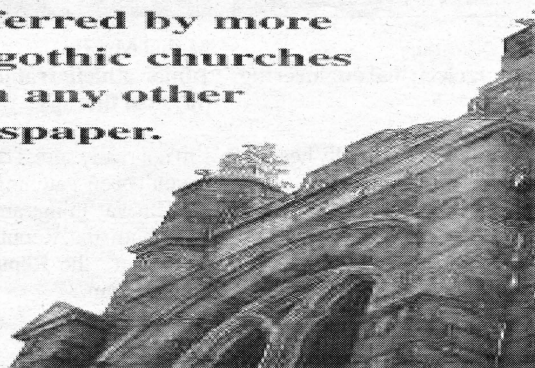
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B 1 bed... Bikini mode

spring break 2004...for local and statewide productions. No exp.,req'

brandnew w/warranty. \$110. Can deliver. New. Still in plastic w/ wa

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for VCU students

## Classified

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(up to 25 words)

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# SPORTS

## Doles, Pellot-Rosa lead Rams to ninth CAA win

**JULIAN BENBOW**  
Associate Sports Editor

If Virginia Commonwealth keeps shooting the three-pointer so well, the Siegel Center is going to run out of Wachovia T-shirts soon.

The Rams knocked down 11 threes, seven in the first half, and fans received free shirts after each one, as VCU (14-5, 8-2 CAA) in an 81-69 win over Hofstra (8-12, 4-6) in front of 6,069 fans at the ALLTEL Pavilion. It was the Rams' ninth straight win against a conference team at home.

"Revenge was on everybody's mind tonight," said sixth man Michael Doles, whose 14 points tied Jesse Pellot-Rosa's for the team high.

VCU lost its conference opener against Hofstra 66-61, but with forward Wendell Gibson out for the season with a knee injury, the Pride had to re-strategize.

"We had to find 35 minutes from the

rest of the team," head coach Tom Pecora said. "There were people playing so poorly we had to pull them out of the game."

The Rams, coming off a game with Towson in which they shot 58.3 percent from three-point range, didn't have to change much.

"We kind of fell in love with the three," Rams coach Jeff Capel said. "In fact, we shot too many."

Pellot-Rosa nailed three for VCU while grabbing four rebounds. B.A. Walker (9 points, 5 assists) and Drew Johnson (six points) each made two three-pointers.

Lost in the mix was Dominic Jones, who scored eight points before fouling out.

"The past two games, Towson and Hofstra have really focused in on (Jones), I'm proud he hasn't forced (anything)," Capel said.

Hofstra's Kenny Adeleke – considered a NBA prospect by many – finished with a double-double (27 points, 15 rebounds).

"Adeleke looked like he was playing volleyball out there just shooting the ball and going and getting it," Capel said.

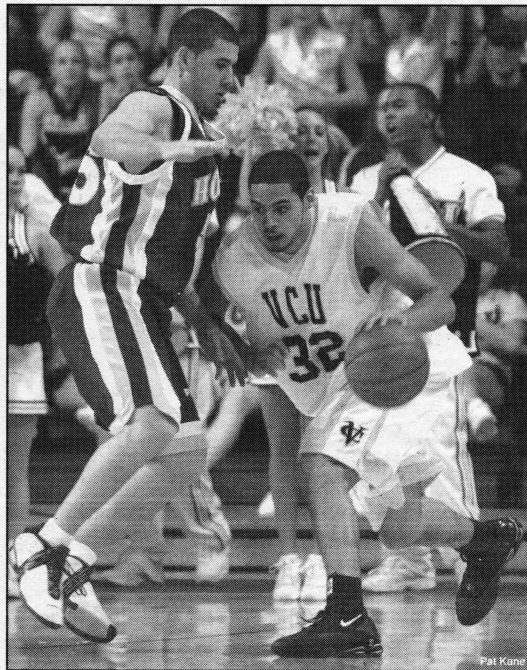
Carlos Rivera, who finished with 22 points and five assists, was one of only three other players to score for Hofstra. To Capel's dismay, Rivera scored ten of those points in the last five minutes of regulation.

"We really wanted to limit his touches," Capel said. "We did a really good job of that for the first 35 minutes. He just got loose there at the end."

The Rams' coach would prefer that his team play hard for all 40 minutes.

He said he tells them, "If

you think it's garbage time at the end of a game, then you're garbage."



Drew Johnson (32) went 2 for 3 in Saturday's game.

Men's Basketball	Conference			All Games						
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.	H	A	N	
VCU	8	2	.800	14	5	.737	9-1	5-4	0-0	
Drexel	7	3	.700	12	7	.632	6-4	5-2	0-0	
Old Dominion	7	3	.700	12	7	.632	8-4	4-3	1-1	
George Mason	6	4	.600	13	6	.684	8-1	5-5	0-0	
Delaware	6	4	.600	12	7	.632	7-2	5-5	0-0	
UNC Wilmington	6	5	.545	10	9	.526	7-2	3-6	0-0	
Hofstra	4	6	.400	8	12	.400	4-3	4-9	0-1	
Towson	3	7	.300	6	13	.316	4-5	2-8	0-0	
William & Mary	3	8	.273	6	14	.300	4-3	1-11	1-0	
James Madison	1	9	.100	4	14	.222	3-6	1-8	0-0	

## Penn State slashes Rams' winning streak

**JULIAN BENBOW**  
Associate Sports Editor

The Virginia Commonwealth men's hockey club scheduled a game for last Friday with Penn State, but should have prepared for hockey players from the state pen.

By setting the tempo early with lots of physical play, the Nittany Lions snapped the Rams' two-game winning streak with a 5-2 win Friday night at SkateNation. Penn State rattled VCU

its only lead of the night. Back-to-back goals from Penn State's Ryan Cell gave the Nittany Lions a 2-1 advantage, and they never looked back.

"What we were just trying to do is make sure we had good position on our forecheck," said Penn State coach Paul Gilligan on his team's physicality. "It wasn't really a plan."

Gilligan's team scored another goal – by forward Nick Gallo – before the Rams put their second score on the board. Brendon Jewell netted VCU's final score on assists from Matt and Zach Wentz.

The Rams racked up 10:54 in the penalty box for retaliating against Penn State's roughness. Forward Brady Cole, who had welts on his neck after the game from a Nittany Lion's stick, was called for cross-checking with just under five minutes remaining, while goalie Jeremy Sacra and defenseman Freddie D'Angelo each received roughing penalties as the game ended.

"We just weren't playing together as a team," coach Bocrie said.

Penn State..... 2 1 2  
VCU..... 1 1 0

First Period - 1, Virginia Commonwealth, Matt Wentz (Brendon Jewell, Craig); 15:30. 2, Penn State, Ryan Cell; 14:25. 3, Penn State, Cell (Derek Rieck, Gallo); 47. Penalties - Hurley, PSU (hooking), 16:10; Cole, VCU (interference), 9:28.

Second Period - 4, Penn State, Nick Gallo (Rieck, Barran); 9:22. 5, Virginia Commonwealth, Jewell (M. Wentz, Z. Wentz); 8:22. Penalties - Jewell, VCU (cross-checking), 15:03.

Third Period - 6, Penn State, Tom Fisher (Brian Hurley); 4:56. 7, Penn State, Hurley (Myles Petersen, Gallo); 5:18. Penalties - Cole, VCU (tripping), 17:50; Barran, PSU (hooking), 17:22; Cole, VCU (cross-checking), 4:56; Sacra, VCU (roughing), 3:33; D'Angelo (roughing), :54.

Shots on goal - Penn State 18-12-5 35, Virginia Commonwealth 5-15-9 29.

Penalty shots - none.

Goalies - Penn State, Wild, Virginia Commonwealth Sacra. Referee - Hoyt.

**The Commonwealth Times is seeking sports writers for the Spring 2004 semester. For more information contact Tyler Cooper: coopertt@vcu.edu or Julian Benbow: benbowji@yahoo.com**

early, outshooting the Rams 18-5 in the first period and hitting them with tough checks throughout the game.

"With the physical play, we tend not to go to that as much," said Rams coach Jim Bocrie. "We like to go into strategy."

Matt Wentz's goal at 15:30 gave VCU

## SPORTS

## Smaller schools challenge NCAA powerhouses

**JULIAN BENBOW**  
Associate Sports Editor

So what if Kansas is one of the most storied basketball schools in NCAA history? Who cares about Georgia Tech's 12-game winning streak.

What's that? North Carolina just hired Roy Williams to be their new head coach? Tell them to go get Roy Jones Jr.

Richmond, Virginia Commonwealth and George Mason are just three of the many small schools that are challenging some of college hoops' powerhouses. Richmond, who stunned then-No. 12 Kansas 69-68 at Allen Fieldhouse, was one of the few teams to come away with a win.

Colonial Athletic Association schools have played eight games against Top 25 teams this season, and despite the allure of a big name coming to a lesser-known basketball school, there are mixed opinions about the idea of playing these types of games.

"I don't believe it's the best thing to do," said Dr. Richard Sander, athletic director at Virginia Commonwealth University. "If you win it's a good thing. If you lose it doesn't matter. (Winning) doesn't happen very often."

The Rams traveled to Atlanta to play the Yellow Jackets on Dec. 29. Despite losing 86-65, Sander says the team "played pretty well down there."

"It gives us some confidence. Games against teams like that are faster. It helps you down the road in your conference. The

speed of the game isn't equal."

Despite the benefit of being well-equipped for league play, Sander says these games are very risky business.

"Richmond was lucky to win the game," he said. "They got some really good calls, which you don't get on the road. (It was) a great win for them, but that doesn't usually happen."

Because winning is so unlikely, Sander says it has a negative effect on the entire conference. With a loss, he said, the conference's Ratings Percentage Index (RPI) — a formula which takes into account Division I winning percentage, schedule strength, and opponent's schedule strength to determine at-large bids in the NCAA tournament — is negatively impacted.

"It's better to beat a .500 team than to lose to a team that went 30-0," Sander said. "You can't play anybody with a record good enough to lose to."

Tom O'Connor, in his 10th year as athletic director at George Mason University, has his own reasons for scheduling these kinds of games.

"When you schedule the game, you go into the game thinking you can win the game," O'Connor said. "The second thing is it can help you get ready for the regular season. Then there are also some financial considerations."

The Patriots took on the Maryland Terrapins on Nov. 25. They trailed 41-38 at halftime before losing 79-64. They also traveled to then undefeated North Carolina, where they led 49-47 at the break before losing 115-81.

Besides being ready for conference play, O'Connor doesn't see much else to take from a loss.

"I don't think there's such a thing as a moral victory," he said. "The NCAA doesn't count wins, losses, and moral victories."

Mike Maniscalco, host of a self-titled sports talk show on AM 910 in Richmond, agrees that if a team goes into a game with the idea of settling for a moral victory, you're expecting to lose.

"I really like testing what a team has, and the only way to test yourself is to play tougher competition."

Maniscalco also thinks these games can help with recruiting.

"I'm not saying that a kid in California would see this game and say 'I want to go to Richmond,'" he said. "But if there's a kid on the fence between Virginia and Richmond, who sees Richmond on TV against a team like Kansas (he may choose Richmond)."

O'Connor doesn't quite see things the same way, saying "I don't think any individual makes a decision on one game."

Maniscalco does, however, recognize negatives that come along with scheduling games like these. But to him, the pros outweigh the cons.

"I think there are costs," Maniscalco said. "One: Academically, you're taking the kids out of school. Two: You could go and get your brains beat out."

"Do I think it's a good idea? Yes I do. Play one or two on the road — or more if you can schedule them. For two days, what was everybody talking about? UR and Kansas."

## Upcoming Sports Events

## Wednesday, Feb. 4

Men's basketball  
vs. Drexel University, 7:30 p.m.  
Alltel Pavilion at the  
Stuart C. Siegel Center

## Thursday, Feb. 5

Women's basketball  
vs. University of Delaware, 7 p.m.  
Alltel Pavilion at the  
Stuart C. Siegel Center

## Saturday, Feb. 7

Men's ice hockey  
vs. George Washington University,  
9:30 p.m.  
SkateNation  
Glen Allen, Va.

Men's track  
vs. George Mason University  
Fairfax, Va.

Women's track  
vs. George Mason University  
Through Sunday  
Fairfax, Va.

Men's basketball  
vs. UNC-Wilmington  
Alltel Pavilion at the  
Stuart C. Siegel Center

For more information contact the VCU sports line: 828-7000. VCU sporting events are free to students with a valid student ID.

Correction: In the men's ice hockey story published Thursday, Jan. 29, 2004, The Commonwealth Times incorrectly identified the final score of Friday's game versus the Johns Hopkins Blue Jays as 9-1. The actual score was 9-3. We apologize for the mistake.



# Spectrum

## THE PERFECT SCORE?



Photo Illustration: Dave Tyson

## 'Perfect Score' barely passes

**MIKE NG**  
Spectrum Writer

Perfect? Ha!

"The Perfect Score" is a tale of lofty ambitions and unrealized potential. It has a lot to say, but just doesn't quite say enough. Perhaps the subject is too broad or perhaps the director felt that the plot couldn't handle all of its issues. Either way the movie falls short because it fails to achieve what it could have.

The movie is divided into two separate parts that loosely work in conjunction with each other. The first part revolves around setting up the characters and their unique issues with the Scholastic Aptitude Test.

A group of students plan to cheat on the SAT in order to achieve the goals of each individual.

With the subject of the SAT in hand, the movie actually does a fairly good job of covering a lot of the issues and myths that are involved with the test.

Matty (Bryan Greenberg) states that it doesn't cover any real-life problems and that if put into a job interview situation

with other more educated applicants, he would be hired because he can relate to co-workers and has better people skills.

Other myths involved are that the SAT is racist, anti-feminist or too pro-establishment. This is the part of the movie that shines the most, because it covers a great deal of ground and really explores the test and the stress that comes with it.

The second part, in which the group plans and then proceeds to carry out the heist of the exam answers, is less memorable. Much like "The Breakfast Club," each character goes through a change and figures out that the answers they were seeking come from different questions altogether.

The movie does a nice job of exploring the archetypes that each character fits in, however it fails to go deeper into each of the individuals.

Instead it provides a quick sheen of possibilities and only hints at really knowing any of the characters. It would have fared better if it had stuck with either dealing with just the SAT or the characters.

"The Perfect Score" uses just about every stereotype of typical American high

school students. The characters introduced have the feeling as if I had met them before in other and often better movies.

There is the near-valedictorian Anna (Erika Christensen), who must live up to her parents' standards and Desmond (Darius Miles) -- the jock who could care less about anything except his own sport. School reject Francesca (Scarlett Johansson), who denies all social conventions and finally the drug-addicted rebel Roy (Leonardo Nam), who has no real interests and is rather content with just living are another part of the misfit-clique. Slacker Matty and average student Kyle (Chris Evans) round out the cast.

The acting in the movie is insufferable for the most part, with the occasional exception of Nam, whose character was introduced with the MTV classic "Because I Got High" by Afroman. His comic timing playing Roy is fairly well done and is really one of the only likable characters in the whole movie.

However, it would be wrong to score the movie based on whether or not the plot has been copied or the characters have

been done to death in other reincarnations. Ultimately the problem comes from not doing more with the materials given.

Instead of really going deeper into the problems of the characters brought out overtly by the test, the movie would rather sit comfortably on its simplistic realizations and let the laughs and caper-nature of its plot do the thinking and the entertaining.

Overall "The Perfect Score" can only be graded as imperfect because it did not fully achieve its two objectives: to be funny and to take a critical look at adolescents and their fear of the SAT. The laughs were few and sparse and the social commentary was too lightly coated to provide any real meaning.

Why cheat yourself with "The Perfect Score" when you could just rent "The Breakfast Club?"

**"The Perfect Score"**  
★★ (out of 5)

## Spectrum

# Dizzee reinvents rap

## Rascal changes the science of hip-hop

ALEX WOOLRIDGE

Spectrum Writer

If rhyming monotonously about clothes, cars and women (and sometimes the bullets they've taken) is what being a rap star is all about, then count Dizzee Rascal out.

His peers may shoot up the charts by selling a 'thug mentality,' but he plays

your ears can survive Rascal's odyssey of unfamiliar sounds with such little preparation. It may be hard to swallow, but "Round We Go (Ain't No Love)" and "Brand New Day" could be more unique than the finest cuts from underground trendsetters

be explained in relation to other easy to digest artists.

Conclusion: With the music media

this album's impact. For once, rabid fans of the evolving and various forms of hip-hop get much more than their money's worth from the unforgettable songs on "Boy in Da Corner."

When an artist makes tracks as colossal as those of the legends that paved

YA DIZZEE YATZ

Photo Illustration: Dave Tyson

both focused lyricist and dedicated chemist on "Boy in Da Corner." When unprepared MC's try to combine a futuristic sound with their own styles, the experiment often blows up in their faces and perplexed fans rush to sell the coaster back to a music store before it loses all value.

Unlike the failures and miscues of the past, Dizzee Rascal controls the secret ingredients of brilliant taste and sharp skill that make his results worthy of the Nobel Prize for hip-hop.

Observation: Dizzee Rascal has done his homework. He has studied the classics, whittled away at his craft, and struck at just the right time. In some respects you could call him a cyborg made of the past and the present, but built with the unseen technology of 2050.

So which part is it that makes him so surprising? He's got Chuck D's venom and the swagger of Dr. Dre; he's as fun as EPMD but he drops lines with Guru of Gangstarr's confidence. And yet he sounds nothing like any of them, or anyone else for that matter.

Hypothesis: So what would happen if The Neptunes' style of production we hear on the radio hits was combined with the electronic madness of Aphex Twin and other Warp Records artists?

The results would turn out to be a lot like the beats on "Boy in Da Corner," ranging from the buzzing bass-led charge "Stop Dat" to the plucking of "Jezebel." Normally words like "thumps," "clanks" or "dings" wouldn't be used to describe hip-hop, but songs like "Cut 'Em Off" incorporate noises that no adjectives can come close to describing.

Experiment: There is certainly a common thread among all of the songs, but the songs are rarely redundant, simple or dull. The real experiment is whether or not

like Rjd2 and Prefuse 73.

The beats that decorate his frantic rhymes are more computerized than most techno, which makes the pilgrimage to Dizzee Rascal's "Brit-hop" world an essential vacation from mainstream rap.

Ironically, the title "Boy in Da Corner" may fit Rascal more than he realizes; he raps the way a man backed into a corner fights—with nothing to lose and only ground to gain by cramming more words into four bars than some guys get out in an entire verse.

Rascal's voice is difficult to ignore. Rather than wasting energy trying to describe how much of a loop his voice throws first-time listeners for, feel free to come up with your own variations about his voice and delivery being partly Busta Rhymes, partly your favorite Beatle, etc. Like everything else about this cornerstone of eccentricity, Rascal's voice is entirely beyond description and can only

swarming around Dizzee Rascal's exciting new sound, it would be foolish to argue over

the way ("Fix Up, Look Sharp" is every bit the classic that EPMD's "You Gots to Chill" or Public Enemy's "Shut Em Down" are), he can't go wrong.

After such a groundbreaking debut, Dizzee Rascal rises from unknown "Boy in Da Corner" to regal king on the throne, firmly wedged at the top as one of the hottest new talents. Now everyone is left eagerly awaiting his second album to see how much of his unique sound is a mixture of his influences and how much is his own brilliant creation.

**Dizzee Rascal**  
**"Boy in Da Corner"**

★★★★ (out of 5)



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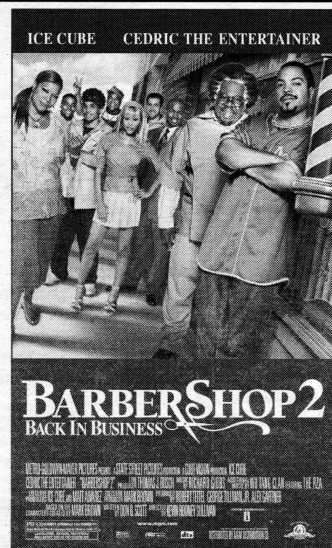
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**OPENS IN THEATRES FEBRUARY 6!**

# "THE BIGGEST PROBLEM WITH MEN/WOMEN IS..."

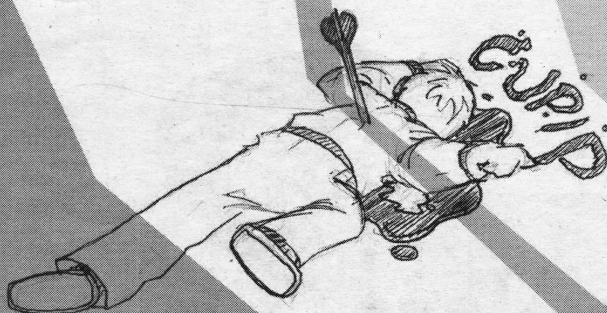
THE BIGGEST PROBLEM WITH MEN/WOMEN IS...

Cupid shot you in the back?

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This Valentine's Day the CT wants to hear from you.

Please submit your stories or essays (300 to 500 words) to [glennonm@vcu.edu](mailto:glennonm@vcu.edu) by Feb. 10th



All entries are subject to editing for style, grammar, and spelling. Be sure to include your name, age, major and contact information with your entry.

## Do you have a spectacular or extraordinary personal love story?

He sat at the beach...he carved  
a name on a tree...she wrote a poem  
to love him!...we were skinny dipping  
on the beach when...the proposal  
was in my fortune cookie...I was  
in love and she hugged me...there  
were many colors  
and she made  
me and she made

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All entries are subject to editing for style, grammar, and spelling. Be sure to include your name, age, major and contact information with your entry.

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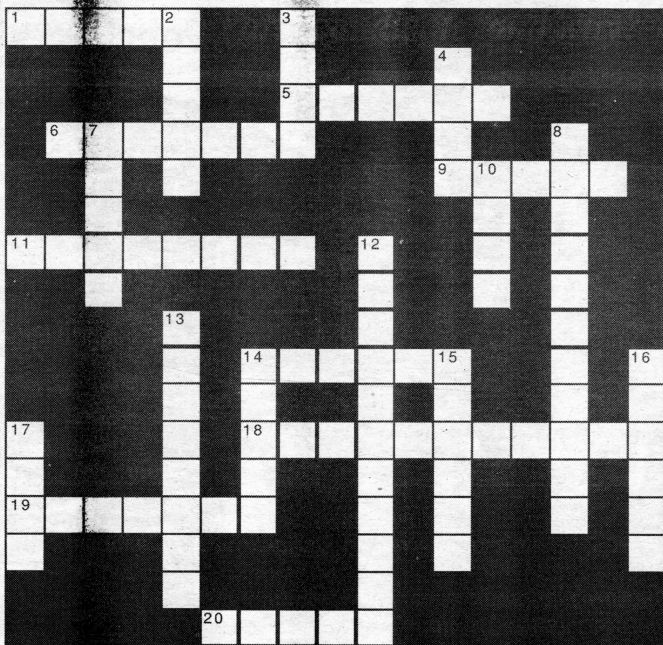


# Like being entertained??

**The Commonwealth Times is  
looking for Spectrum writers.  
Contact Melissa Lynch at  
828-1058 for more information.**

## Spectrum

## CT Crossword In the News 2



## Across

1. A pair of conjoined twins were taken off of ventilators and allowed to die in this state
5. The host of Jeopardy!, who crashed his pickup
6. Winner of the Australian Open
9. Computer animation studio, which announced it will part ways with Disney
11. A flu usually found in these birds is spreading in Southeast Asia

14. The latest Internet worm

18. This airline cancelled a flight from Glasgow, Scotland to Los Angeles over security concerns

19. A hostage standoff entered its second week at a prison in this state

20. Democratic leader, winner of Iowa and New Hampshire primaries

## Down

2. The large number of primaries on Feb. 3 earns it the name \_\_\_\_\_ Tuesday

3. The final movie in this series sweeps the Oscar nominations with 11 (initials)

4. "Pirates of the Caribbean" star, who received an Academy Award nomination

7. More than 50 Iraqis died in suicide bombings in this town Sunday

8. This firm will pay the Pentagon \$6.3 million following a kickback kaffuffle concerning their services to U.S. forces in Iraq

10. 117 lawmakers resigned ahead of elections in this country

12. The second Mars rover, which landed and got underway this week

13. Winner of the Super Bowl

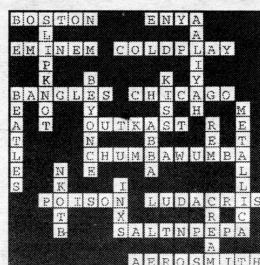
14. During the annual Hajj pilgrimage to this place, 244 died in a stampede

15. Our Chinese New Year

16. A federal judge ordered Exxon to pay \$4.5 billion in punitive damages from this taker's 1989 oil spill

17. The original "Tonight Show" host, who died this week at age 85

## Solutions from Jan. 29



## Zodiac Cookies

**Aquarius:** Fly in the face of authority. There's nothing authority hates more than people breaking the laws of physics.

**Pisces:** Life throws you a curve ball. It's up to you whether to swing at it or see if it drifts out of the strike zone.

**Aries:** When you're hot, you're hot. If you can be hot in early February, you'll be mighty popular.

**Taurus:** You're about to make a breakthrough. Hopefully it's not one of your limbs. Still, watch out for ice.

**Gemini:** You never cease to amaze, at least until people get used to your ability to do the impossible.

**Cancer:** You're losing your memory. Next week, your fortune will be the same thing, but you won't notice.

**Leo:** If you run circles around everyone else, there's a good chance you'll get dizzy and fall over. During that time, they'll all catch up.

**Virgo:** There is more to life than increasing its speed. You should also think about its ride and handling.

**Libra:** Drink responsibly: Pay for your own beverages.

**Scorpio:** When someone scratches your back, don't scratch his or hers. That's copycatting — figure out something else.

**Sagittarius:** The magic numbers this week are: 867-5309.

**Capricorn:** You experience a little hiccup in your plans this week. Just keep going, drinking water or holding your breath won't help.



Zodiac Cookies

## Happenings

## Monday, Feb. 2

**Devil's Workshop** plays jazz at Bogart's every Monday beginning at 9 p.m. \$6.  
203 N. Lombardy St. 353-9280

Café Diem hosts a **cover-free open-mic** night every Monday at 8 p.m.  
600 N. Sheppard Ave. 353-2500

## Tuesday, Feb. 3

Mary Hill Cole, a history professor at Mary Baldwin College, presents her lecture "**Elizabeth I: Daughter, Woman, Queen**" at the Library of Virginia at noon. Free admission.  
800 E. Broad St. 962-3500

The stories of more than **two dozen African-American aviators** await you at the Virginia Aviation Museum. The museum's celebration of Black history month features information on the Tuskegee Airmen and more. Feb. 3-27.  
5701 Huntsman Road. 236-3622

## Wednesday, Feb. 3

**Storyteller Atumpan** teaches the importance of the drum and the griot to communication in African society. 7:30 p.m. The event is free, but call ahead to register.

3400 Mountain Road. 501-5121

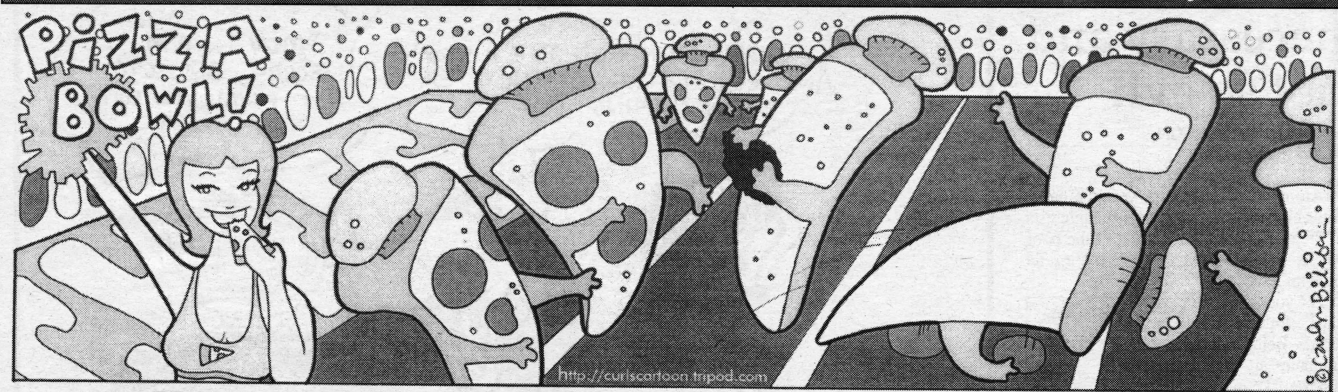
Deke Dickerson and the **Ecco-Phonics** play at Poe's Pub. 9 p.m. Free.  
2706 E. Church St. 648-2120

**Got something going on? Have the inside track on some hot info?**  
E-mail Melissa at [lynchmd@vcu.edu](mailto:lynchmd@vcu.edu)

# COMICS

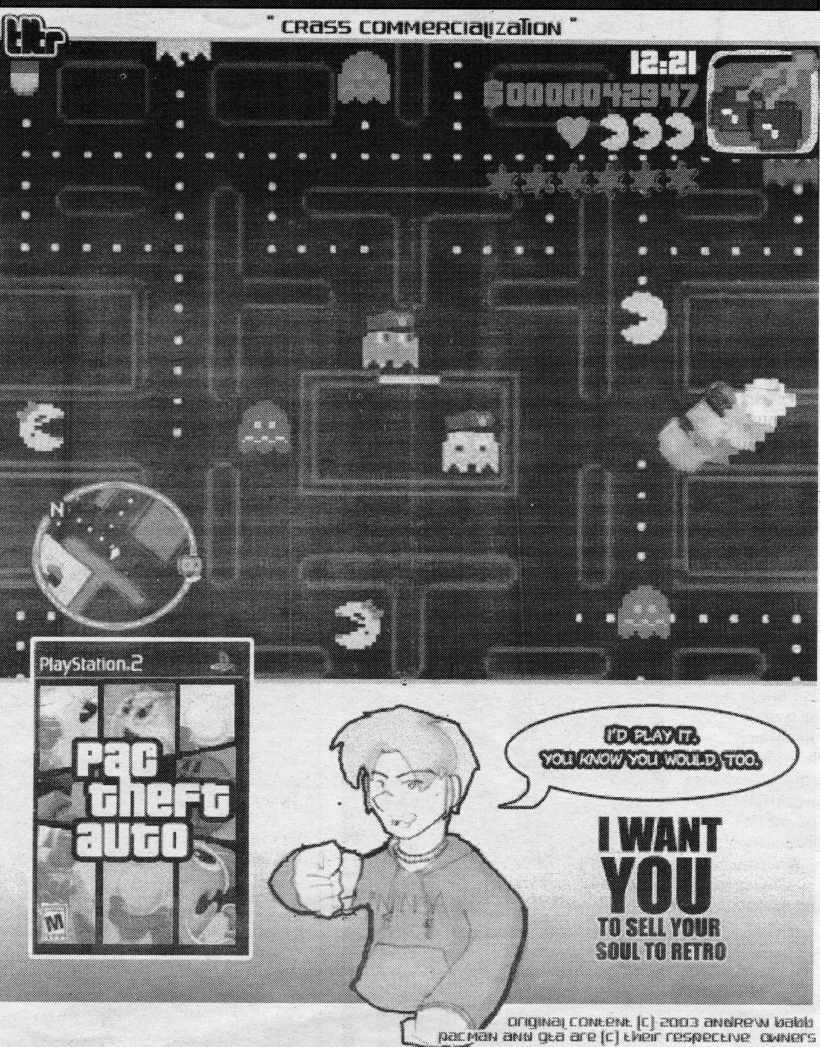
Curls

Carolyn Belefski



Too Late To Run

Andrew Babb



Cul de Sac

Chris Powell



# EDITORIALS & LETTERS

## Taxes, necessary and not so evil

**MICHAEL DICKINSON**  
Op/Ed Writer

Around this time every year the battle between those looking out for the interests of the rich and the well-being of the poor begins – and it takes place in the Virginia General Assembly.

As young people, we have a lot at stake in this debate. Being that college graduates are almost certain to make more money in the long run, it is people like us who in the future will be in the higher tax brackets.



Some college students have no idea what taxes are and how taxes are essential to maintaining a society that is democratically free and offers a fair chance to be successful and healthy to all those who are in it.

On its surface, having everyone pay from their individual income into a community fund may seem socialist in nature, where people work for the good of society – not themselves. However, the tax system is far from the negative aspects conjured up with the word "socialism." Taxes are essential to ensuring a democratic government. They provide for an intangible helping hand to those who have been less fortunate in this society.

It is an unbelievable thought that America is the richest, most technologically advanced country in the world, yet has a

huge number of people who have nothing and rely on monthly welfare checks to raise their families. Just because these children grow up poor they should not be limited to a high school education. Taxes help afford them the same higher educational opportunities that anyone else would receive by leveling the playing field between the haves and the have-nots.

Taxes help these children. Those who are ignorant may classify the poor that rely heavily on welfare as being largely African-American and from the inner city. This is a myth. While those in the urban areas make up a portion of those on welfare, there are just as many poor and out-of-work white coal miners, farmers and manufacturers who live in southern and western Virginia. During this term of the General Assembly, Democratic Lt. Gov. Tim Kaine has proposed using tax money to build a new four-year university in southwestern Virginia, which would provide educational opportunity to the children of low-income families.

### TRANI'S TELEVISION INTERVIEW...



BY MIKE TALLEY

Children, education and opportunity make up one facet of the tax debate. The other is to live free from fear of environmental sickness. A few decades ago companies operated free from regulation. Chemical and human waste was dumped directly into the James River. Many of the fish were not safe to eat and the water was not safe to drink. This problem, while it still exists, has been largely corrected by taxes.

State agencies, funded by taxes, inspect plants to make sure they are abiding by the regulations and not dumping out lethal poisons. Cities such as Richmond have built and continue to upgrade their sewer treatment plants, so that the wastewater dumped into the river is almost cleaner than the existing water. Using federal tax money, the floodwall was built in downtown Richmond, protecting countless businesses from devastating floodwaters.

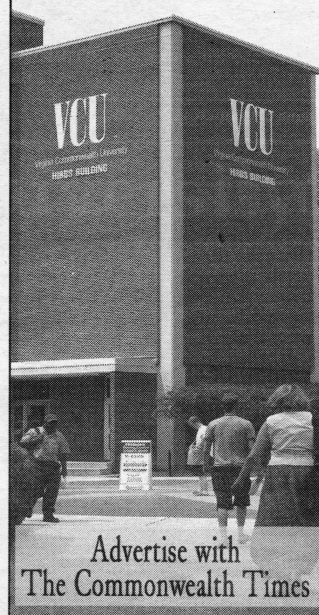
The key to the comprehension of the tax debate is that everything this government provides and does has to be paid for; it is not free. The companies and people that do the work do not automatically write it off, they want a paycheck so the money must come from somewhere.

There is no magic wand or magician's hat to pay for things that benefit us all, and contrary to what many people think, a money tree blossoming hundred dollar bills does not grow on the south lawn of Capitol Square.

Taxes provide many goods and services and ultimately, at the end of the day it is the

same philosophy we all must remember when making a purchase. Everything costs money but the benefits of what you are buying far outweigh the costs.

Want to reach the student body  
of VCU?



### THE Commonwealth TIMES

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Executive Editor

**PATRICK RYAN**  
Editor of the Editorial Pages

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Jeffrey Z. Qureshi • Lisa Chun  
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We reserve the right to edit all letters for grammar, style and space. Letters should not exceed one single-spaced typed page. Letters must be signed and must include daytime and evening phone numbers.

Please send letters to CTeditor03@yahoo.com. Mailing address: P.O. Box 842010, Richmond, VA 23284-2010. Drop box location: Room 1149, T. Edward Temple Building.

## Op/Ed

## Bush burns civil liberties in name of security

**TERRY BURTON**  
Op/Ed Writer

Imagine secret arrests, naming citizens "enemy combatants," restricting civil liberties and rights, broad-sweeping authority for law enforcement agencies and the refusal of basic rights to specific groups of people. If you think that this describes Nazi Germany, I'm sorry to say that you're wrong. What I've just described is the United States under the Bush Administration since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

In the past few years rights we've long taken for granted have been rolled back with little formal opposition, all in the name of national security. Those measures would seem to be ineffectual, however, as one only has to turn on CNN to hear how vulnerable we still are to attacks similar to those that fateful day in September.

The great statesman Thomas Jefferson once said that "those who would give up



*"If Bush is truly worried about finding WMD, then he should simply look in the mirror."*

freedom for security deserve neither." With the presidential elections coming up this November we have the chance to heed his warning. While I do not back any candidate in particular for the office of president, I feel that almost anyone can do better than Bush.

As of yet there has been no evidence found that Iraq had any weapons of mass destruction, which was Bush's primary excuse for pushing us into an unpopular war. When confronted with this reality, he now dodges the issue; preferring to hype the capture of Saddam Hussein and saying that the world is better off without such a despot in power. In other words, the ends justify the means. Whether that's true is not the case. If Bush is truly worried about finding WMD, then he should simply look in the mirror. His rush into an unpopular and unnecessary war has cost more American lives than the first Persian Gulf war, which was at least arguably justifiable.

Unless we want to see just how many rights and lives can be sacrificed in the name of national security, we must take the opportunity to remove Bush from office. While he may believe that we wouldn't dare to switch leaders in the midst of a large scale conflict such as the "war on terror," by following democratic process laid down by our forefathers we can show him just how wrong that assumption is.

## Letters from Londonderry: A little background before the real fun begins

**ALEXANDER MARRA**  
Special Correspondent

Hello lads and lassies, my Richmond friends across the ocean, I'm Alexander Marra. I won't be back in the United States until June 2. I'm in Northern Ireland right now, studying at the University of Ulster, the Magee Campus, in Londonderry.

This is a very interesting part of the world, a place where the locals speak a tongue that somehow resembles our own, yet is very often incomprehensible. A place where the green hills never stop rolling, and the sheep outnumber the people. It is a place with much history, very alive in the minds of its inhabitants, where a 400-year-old event dictates a person's political party, place of residence and even speech – for this town is only Londonderry to the Protestants and remains forever known simply as Derry to the Catholics.



Northern Ireland was, and is, a battleground for two groups so similar yet so bitterly at each other's throats. Here, they call it "The Troubles." Since Americans don't get much news from outside our own borders, I'll fill you in.

A long time ago the British Empire ruled lands all over the world and naturally ventured into its neighbor, Ireland. However, these people resisted fiercely and were only subdued after much hardship and cost to the crown. The native Catholic Celts were essentially made into slaves, working the lands they once owned to profit some English or Scottish Protestant transplant. The crown just carved out plots of Irish lands and declared them property of British nobles.

Finally, when England was busy in WWI, the Irish decided it was time to gain back what was rightfully theirs. After hundreds of years of political and religious persecution – Irish Catholics were forbidden to go to Mass, to vote or to own property at various times during English domination – they won their freedom. Well, almost. They couldn't quite complete the rebellion and Michael Collins, their leader, cut a deal with the English, letting them keep Ulster, the six northern counties. Today, it is common debate amongst Irish Catholics over Collins' decision to sign a truce, and this argument can divide families.

The Irish Catholics in Ulster have since been crying for unification with their brothers to the south ever since, and the English or Scottish descended "prods" have been pledging allegiance to the king and treating the Catholics like second-class citizens all the while.

Up until recently, with the Good Friday Agreement that former President Clinton

helped organize (they love him here because of it), sectarian violence was a common thing, with bombs going off everyday, no different than the situation in Israel. I know you have heard of the Irish Republican Army.

Our media loves to talk about those crazy violent Catholics who are in the same category as bin Laden's clan of cronies. But you probably have never been told of the Loyalist (Protestant) bands of thugs who have in recent years perpetrated 10 times as many attacks. There is only one IRA – well, now there is the "Real IRA" since the IRA declared ceasefire – but there are five Protestant gangs, including the Ulster Freedom Fighters, the Ulster Defence Association and the Ulster Volunteers to name a few.

Some of these heartless punks have been known to do such despicable things like throw bombs at little catholic girls on their way to school in a famous incident about three years ago. Lately, beatings, kidnappings and disappearances of dignitaries are more common. And finally, they have engaged in regular organized crime activities like drug running. Contrarily, the IRA has actually been quite well-behaved, and is now considered a guardian of the Catholics, whereby it basically serves as a vigilante force shooting drug dealers in the knees if they deal in Catholic neighborhoods.

All and all, it's not as scary as it sounds in this part of the Emerald Isle. As for Londonderry, a bomb threat about two months ago was all my roommates had to tell me about their stay here so far. They are also international students and have been here for nine months.

Walking down the street you might see a few reminders of "The Troubles" when you see "IRA" or "REAL IRA" spray painted on the wall of some abandoned building, or maybe a mural of the civil rights movement of the '60s painted on the side of someone's house. Or maybe when you see the red, white and blue – colors of the Union Jack (the British Flag) – painted curbs of a protestant neighborhood warning non-loyalists to keep out. Or maybe when you see the Irish flag flying its green, white and orange over a Catholic apartment building. I was told that once in a while a Unionist (aka Loyalist or Protestant) tries to remove it and gets shot at.

Yeah, it is different here. We are quick to paint America as a land of bigots where not everyone is accepted. But at least in America we are free to be who we are. For a land of so many different races,

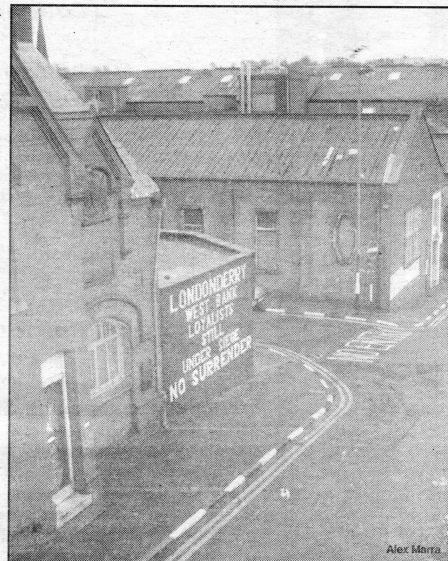
ethnicities, nationalities and religions we get along quite well. Here, two groups fight and bicker because they believe themselves so different, yet both are white European Christians who speak the same language – although Irish Gaelic is increasingly gaining popularity as a sign of ethnic pride amongst Catholics.

There may be a lesson for all of us in seeing the absurdity in that predicament. It is here where I have to tuck in my Virgin Mary medal so I don't get beaten by some backwards and brutal Loyalists. There are no Rosaries hanging from the rearview mirrors in Northern Ireland. And that cool wool hat I got in London can't keep my head warm because the Union Jack is finely stitched on the bottom front.

In America, we wear our identities proudly. We somehow can all come from such different backgrounds but at the end of the day all find comfort in the Star Spangle Banner. Loyalists will sometimes have "God save the King" – the melody of which is used for our "My Country 'Tis of Thee" – as a ring tone on their mobile phone to tick off nearby Catholics.

Our unity amidst such diversity is something we should all appreciate. I hope you learned something today. I promise the future Letters won't be so loaded with such boring things like history, lame political banter and feel-good inspirational God Bless the USA-style one-liners. Sometimes the moment just calls for it. Next time though, we'll be on to the more interesting matters of foreign countries, like those one liter engine go-carts they use for cars around here!

Till next time, I remain your faithful VCU correspondent.



Londonderry, Ireland.

Alex Marra

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S**Sunday, February 1, 2003**

*Spirit Competition Window Painting (Commons Lobby)*  
*APB Super Bowl Party\*\* with Spirit Commercials*  
*(Commonwealth Ballroom, 5 p.m. - 10 p.m.)*

**Monday, February 2, 2003**

*Homecoming Tip-off and Spirit Competition Scavenger Hunt*  
*(Park Plaza - 11:45 a.m.)*

*Picture Day with Rodney on the Academic Campus*  
*(Commons, 12:30 - 1:30 p.m.)*

*Spades Tourney Vegas Style (Common Ground, 7:00 p.m.) \$\$*

**Tuesday, February 3, 2003**

*Residence Hall Decoration Day- Vegas Casino/Hotel Themes*  
*Homecoming Court Meet & Greet with Candidates*  
*(Capital Ballroom, 5:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.)*

**Wednesday, February 4, 2003**

*Picture Day with Rodney on Medical Campus (Cabaniss Hall, Time TBA)*  
*Men's Basketball v. Drexel (Siegel Center, 7:30 p.m.) \*\**

**Thursday, February 5, 2003**

*Women's Basketball v. Delaware (Siegel Center, 7:00 p.m.) \*\**  
*Talent Show & Casino Night (Commonwealth Ballroom, Capital Ballroom*  
*and Plaza Lounge, 7:00 pm - 11:00 pm) \*\**

**Friday, February 6, 2003**

*Vegas Style Comedy Show - 2 shows*  
*(Commonwealth Ballroom, 7:00 p.m. & 9:00 p.m.) \$\$*  
*Homecoming Semi Formal Dance -*

*(Renaissance Center, Broad St., 10:00 p.m. - 2:00 a.m.) \$\$*  
*APB Films - Oceans Eleven (Temple Bldg., 7:00 pm & 9:00 pm) \*\**

**Saturday, February 7, 2003**

*"Chill & Grill" Pre-Game Party*  
*(VV Parking Lot on Floyd Street, 1:00 - 5:00 pm) \$\$*

*Parade with Pep Band*  
*Men's Basketball v. UNC - Wilmington \*\**

*LIVE on ESPN2 : 5:00 PM*

*Homecoming King and Queen announced at half-time*  
*Spirit Competition winners announced during game*

*After Party @ Hyperlink Café \$\$*

*APB Films - Oceans Eleven (Temple Bldg., 7:00 pm & 9:00 pm) \*\**  
 Events, dates, and times subject to change. \$\$ Tickets required \*\*Free w/ Student ID

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\*\*\*\*\*schedule subject to changes—all dates and times are tentative\*\*\*\*\*

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