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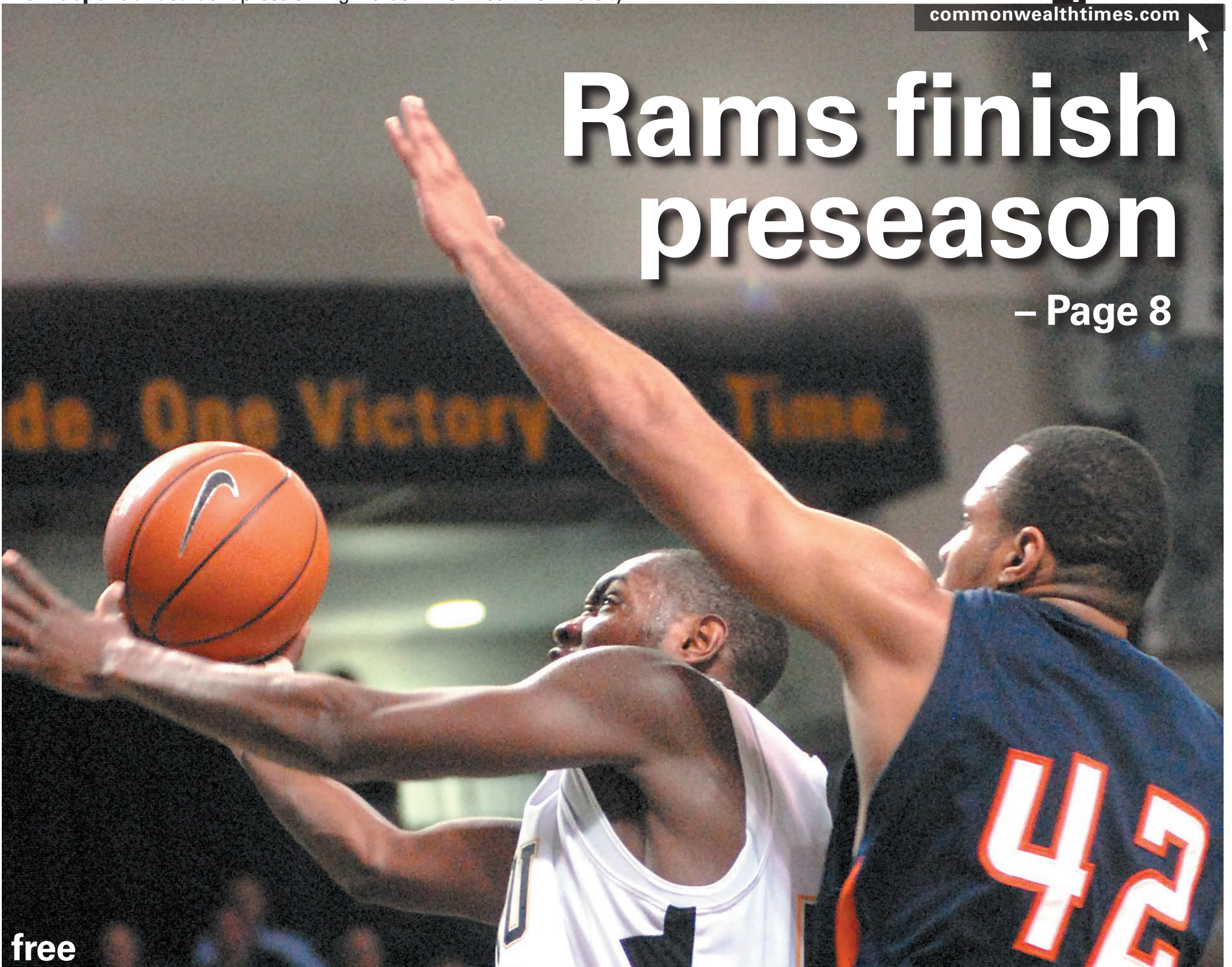


The **independent** student press of Virginia Commonwealth University

commonwealthtimes.com

Rams finish preseason

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free



briefs



Local and VCU

Va. earns D on preterm-birth rankings

Virginia earned a D on a March of Dimes report card ranking states on the number of babies born prematurely.

The nonprofit group said Virginia had a preterm-birth rate of 12.3 percent in 2005, the most recent data available. That's compared to 12.7 percent nationally, also a D grade.

No state earned an A on the report card released Wednesday. To earn that grade, the March of Dimes said a state would have to have a 7.6 percent premature-birth rate or lower. Maternal smoking and lack of health insurance were cited as the two largest contributors to preterm births.

The March of Dimes works to prevent birth defects, premature births and infant mortality.

Brief by The Associated Press

Miners' widows press claims against Massey Energy

Testimony is about to start in a lawsuit over the deaths of two men in a conveyor belt fire at a Massey Energy coal mine in West Virginia in 2006.

Attorneys representing the men's widows are expected to call their first witnesses Wednesday morning. They're trying to prove that Richmond-based Massey, two subsidiaries and Chief Executive Don Blankenship owe damages for the deaths of 46-year-old Ellery Elvis Hatfield and 33-year-old Don Bragg.

Both men died after getting lost in thick smoke at Massey's Aracoma Alma No. 1 mine.

Defense attorneys concede mistakes were made, but they're aiming to convince jurors the actions of the companies and Blankenship don't rise to deliberate intent to cause injury or death.

Brief by The Associated Press

Altria cuts jobs because of economic uncertainty

Altria Group, the owner of the nation's biggest cigarette maker, confirmed on Tuesday that it has started to cut jobs because of the widespread economic turmoil.

A spokesman declined to say how many cuts would be made but said they were planned for employees of parent company Altria and its cigarette unit, Philip Morris USA. Both are based in Richmond.

Altria Group Inc. also owns cigar maker John Middleton and is buying smokeless tobacco company UST Inc. to pursue growth outside of cigarettes, which are in less demand from American consumers.

Spokesman David Sylvia confirmed that the company is cutting jobs and said it is deciding how many layoffs there will be between now and February. He said departments that would lose employees have been told that there would be cuts.

Brief by The Associated Press

National and International

Gay couples start marrying in Conn.

Gay couples began marrying in Connecticut on Wednesday after a judge cleared the way, a victory for advocates stung by California's ban on same-sex unions last week.

With a final order entered, couples marched to New Haven City Hall to get marriage licenses and less than two hours after the final court hearing, Peg Oliveira and Jennifer Vickery were married in a brief ceremony.

The Connecticut Supreme Court ruled 4-3 on Oct. 10 that same-sex couples have the right to wed rather than accept a civil union law designed to give them the same rights as married couples.

Gay marriage is legal now only in Connecticut and Massachusetts. The unions were legal in California until a statewide referendum to ban gay marriage narrowly passed last week. The vote has sparked protests and several lawsuits asking that state's Supreme Court to overturn the prohibition.

Brief by The Associated Press

Police: Woman slain as she tried to leave KKK rite

An Oklahoma woman who was lured over the Internet to take part in a Ku Klux Klan initiation was shot and killed after the ritual went awry. The group tried to cover it up by dumping her body on a rural roadside and setting her belongings aflame, authorities said.

But the plan failed: By Tuesday, a local Klan leader sat in jail on a second-degree murder charge, and seven others were charged with trying to help conceal the crime.

The woman, whose identity was not released, was supposed to be initiated near the village of Sun, La. and then return to her home state to find other members for the white supremacist group.

It wasn't clear what rites awaited her at the campsite, but authorities believe the initiation had begun by the time the shooting happened.

Foster was charged with second-degree murder and is being held without bond.

Seven others – five men and two women ages 20 to 30 – were charged with obstruction of justice and were held on \$500,000 bond at the St. Tammany Parish Jail.

Brief by The Associated Press

Iran says it tests new surface-to-surface missile

Iran has successfully test-fired a new generation of surface-to-surface missile that uses solid fuel, making it more accurate than its predecessors, the defense minister announced Wednesday.

Mostafa Mohammed Najjar said on state television that the Sajjil was a high-speed missile manufactured at the Iranian Aerospace department of the Defense Ministry.

He said it had a range of about 1,200 miles, which could easily reach arch-foe Israel and even travel as far as southeastern Europe.

Solid fuel missiles are more accurate than the liquid fuel missiles of similar range currently possessed by Iran.

The official IRNA news agency said the test was conducted Wednesday and television showed the missile being fired from a launching pad in a desert region.

Brief by The Associated Press

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Natalie Allen cover photos



news



“ We joked about it, but we didn’t really think it would collapse. It looked stable. ”

—Vanna Vagorodnaya

Natalie Allen photo

Balcony-collapse patients recovering

Off-campus housing safety concerns arise within campus community

CATHERINE MACDONALD

News Co-Editor

Students injured when a balcony collapsed this past Friday are recovering, some from major injuries, despite reports injuries were only minor. The incident has some questioning whether students can judge off-campus housing safety for themselves.

According to Lt. Michael Oprandy, Richmond Fire Department’s public information officer, out of the 20 people transported from the 1300 block of West Cary Street to the hospital, about six of them had serious injuries. Two of them had life-threatening injuries.

“The rest were ... what we call ‘walking wounded,’ ” Oprandy said. “People who were able to get up on their own and move away from the affected area – strains and sprains and cuts and

scratches – stuff like that.”

Oprandy said the myriad injuries included leg, arm, clavicle and ankle fractures.

“There’s also the possibility that the patients have internal injuries too,” Oprandy said. “With a fall from that height, we have to assume that there might be some injuries on the inside that we can’t see from the outside.”

Lydia Teffera, a mass communications major and political science minor, said doctors were concerned about potential internal injuries she might have suffered. She was on the deck when it fell, and was rushed to the hospital because she could not breathe.

“(Doctors) found that air had gotten out of my lungs and gotten between them, so they had to hold me overnight again because that can cause a collapsed lung,” Teffera said.

Kate Purnell, a pre-nursing major, fractured two vertebrae in her neck when the balcony collapsed. She said she will have to wear a neck brace for several months.

“Basically, we didn’t think it would happen,” Purnell said. “People joked about it. They were like ‘, Oh, this is going to fall,’ but we didn’t think it actually would. Some people were trying to get people to go the balcony next door, but it was too late.”

Purnell’s roommate, Vanna Vagorodnaya, a mass communications major, fractured her knee in the accident.

“I thought it would be fine, because it was a ... pretty big balcony,” Vagorodnaya said. “I mean we joked about it, but we really didn’t think it would collapse. It looked stable.”

Off Campus Student Services Supervisor Martha Harper said students should

be more aware of their surroundings in order to prevent accidents like the deck collapse.

“Students are a special crowd that should really look at things, and they tend not to, (such as) rotten wood, a soft porch,” Harper said. “Maybe (the balcony) was visibly unsound, but maybe when you’re only 19 or 20 years old, you don’t know what visibly unsound looks like.”

Harper said she hopes the collapse will boost student awareness about the safety of their own apartments.

“This is such a horrible, unfortunate accident,” Harper said. “If it gets students aware that the world is not necessarily taking care of them, that they need to look for what’s wrong and take care of it themselves by calling somebody and noticing, maybe that’s a side benefit.”

BALCONY continued to CT6

Thursday, November 13, 2008

news · commonwealthtimes.com · CT3



Crowds redirected for Commons construction

KATE FRASER-ORR
Contributing Writer

The Subway inside of the University Student Commons is being remodeled and enlarged because pedestrian traffic has become so thick. VCU hopes to solve this congestion with new expansion projects.

VCU Dining Services and Aramark, which provide the University with most of its food, are funding the \$200,000 project. Dan McDonald, assistant director of VCU Business Services, says the construction should be completed by the first week of December and the new Subway should open soon afterward.

"The facility will probably open

Online@VCU is going to transfer to the Barnes and Noble on West Broad Street. Clark says Dining Services expect the Commons to be fully operational during the expansion and the move.

In the Commons, the sliding doors on Floyd Street have been shut off from public use in order to widen the entryway. People must temporarily use side doors to enter.

"I hate it. It's so frustrating," business major Daniel Ferguson said. "I know in theory, they're going to make it bigger, which is better because it's always congested over there. It's annoying because people stand there at the vending machines getting soda out and you'll be trying to get to class."

"The facility will probably open officially upon the return from spring semester,"

— Dan McDonald
Assistant Director, VCU Business Services

officially upon the return from spring semester," McDonald said.

Because of a bidding process, VCU initially wasn't able to begin construction during spring 2008. The construction company that offered the best bid was Virtexco Construction Company. The designer that was chosen is CEGG Associated, who worked closely with Aramark to complete designs.

"Food service designs can be fairly complicated because of heating systems," McDonald said.

McDonald said the project has been in the works for a long time. When the decision to renovate the Subway was made, the Online@VCU store had to be relocated as well as Bené Pizza and Pasta.

The reconstruction will involve a lot of repositioning. Jean Clark, the University Dining Services manager, says the registers will be on both Subway lines, and the convenience store will be moved to where Online@VCU used to be located.

VCU Business Services says

Kris Koerner, a chemical engineering major, isn't bothered by the obstruction.

"It's not really that big a deal. It's a little out of the way, but you can just go around."

Some students are concerned that VCU is doing construction during fall semester when the Commons is crowded.

"This school does a lot of construction now, when they could be doing it over the summer," said Nichole Savage, a vocal performance major. "It's probably necessary, but they could have done it at a better time."

Mike Martin, the resident district manager of Aramark Higher Education, says there really isn't a delay in the project's opening because VCU never committed to an official opening date.

"The project has taken longer than expected because of the Monroe Park campus expansion ... with the new restaurants," Martin said. "We just want to take the time to make sure everything is designed correctly."



Stephanie Power photos

The Floyd Avenue entrance of the University Student Commons is under construction causing inconvenience for foot traffic.



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BALCONY continued from CT3

Harper said Off Campus Student Services can offer advice to students who are worried about the safety of their off-campus housing. She said they host an educational piece every year about off-campus apartments called "Moving On, Moving Out," but attendance has been low.

"Only about 100 students show up out of the thousands that go get an apartment," Harper said. "We'd love to see more show up ... but sometimes when you call something 'safety,' students don't come."

Lt. Michael Oprandy said student renters should always contact the building owner to make sure their deck is built to code, but he says in this case, "common sense" could have saved those injured a lot of trouble.

"Don't overload the balconies. They're not made for 50 people on a small deck dancing or jumping up and down," Oprandy said. "In this situation, just having somebody regulate the amount of people that were on that deck would have prevented this from happening."

Information about "Moving On, Moving Out" can be found at www.usca.vcu.edu/offcampus

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Students fast for hunger awareness

CHRISTIAN WRIGHT
Contributing Writer

The 2008 Fast-A-Thon, an event sponsored by the Muslim Students Association, is scheduled Thursday all across campus.

Students, Muslim and non-Muslim, are fasting between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m., after which the MSA will hold a banquet.

The banquet, open to all students, will be held on the top floor of the University Student Commons. In years past, the group has had to turn away people during the banquet, because of overwhelming attendance.

Normally held during the month of Ramadan, Fast-A-Thon was postponed this year because the space required for the event was unavailable until mid-November.

"We aren't able to book the rooms for the banquet in the Commons during September, and we were forced to wait until now to hold this event," said Kairshma Qayum, organizer of the event.

For the event, students pledge to fast for the 12-hour duration, and for every pledge, participating local businesses donate \$2 to the Central Virginia Food Bank.

In recent years, the number of pledges has ranged from 4,000 to 4,500.

Designed to promote hunger awareness and social justice, the fast holds special meaning to Muslims involved this year. That's because changing the timing of the event, which normally runs during Ramadan, gives more meaning to the Ramadan fast for Muslim participants, said Zaynah Qutubuddin, former president of MSA.

Qutubuddin said Fast-A-Thon also allows non-Muslims to glimpse at what Muslim students do during their holy month.

"I do think there is a different message by having the event at a different time," Qutubuddin said.

Qayum also said the timing of Fast-A-Thon will make Muslim students more aware of the message and meaning Islam places on Ramadan.

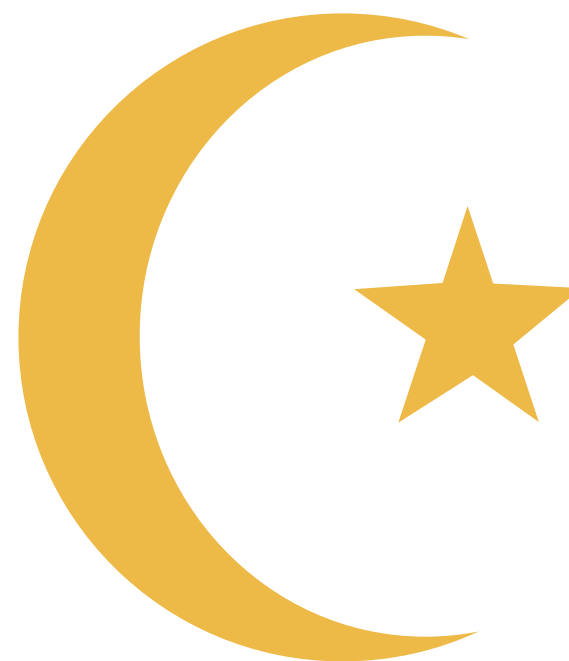
"It's not supposed to be, 'I fast on Ramadan, and then I'm done,' " Qayum said.

Qutubbin said the diversity of the students and the number of participants is impressive.

"From my experience, most students want to do it," Qutubbin said. "It also brings out so many Muslim students that want to volunteer and participate."

Even with the tie to traditional Islamic beliefs, Qayum believes the ideals of the fast are universal.

"Not only is it a physical fasting, it's a spiritual one as well," Qayum said. "It gives everyone another chance to improve these facets of themselves."



"Not only is it a physical fasting, it's a spiritual one as well. It gives everyone another chance to improve these facets of themselves."

—Kairshma Qayum

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sports

MEN'S BASKETBALL

Rams outlast Trojans in exhibition

JONATHAN HOWARD
Sports Editor

Usually, a 15-point victory is celebrated by the VCU Rams and head coach Anthony Grant. However, this was not the case Wednesday night at the Siegel Center after the Rams knocked off the Virginia State Trojans 79-64 in VCU's final exhibition game.

"My expectations are a lot higher for our basketball team in terms of how hard we play," Grant said. "Our execution, our discipline; the things that I am about as a coach, were not on display tonight."

VCU gave up 17 offensive rebounds on the way to a 45-34 disadvantage on the glass, committed 24 fouls and shot 23.5 percent from behind the 3-point arc.

"We just didn't play as good as we could have played," said sophomore forward Larry Sanders (Fort Pierce, Fla./Port St. Lucie).

Early on, it appeared that the Rams would take care of the Trojans in easy fashion after a Terrance Saintil (North Miami, Fla./Monsignor Pace) basket gave VCU a 20-10 lead and forced a VSU timeout with just under 12 minutes to play in the first half. The Trojans chipped into the lead slowly, taking a 10-point deficit with seven minutes to play and bringing it down to six, 36-30 at halftime.

Senior point guard Eric Maynor (Raeford, N.C./Westover) led the Rams in points and rebounds at the half with 10 and four respectively, but Grant decided to rest his star player in the second half in order to challenge his team.

"Maybe it was a message, or maybe it was just me



Head coach Anthony Grant was disappointed in his team's effort Wednesday night.

Natalie Allen photo

as a basketball coach trying to figure out what I have to work with," Grant said. "I know what I'm going to get out of him. There are some questions that we have to figure out at other positions."

In the point guard's absence, Sanders, Ed Nixon (St. Petersburg, Fla./Lakewood), Brandon Rozzell (Richmond/Highland Springs) and Joey Rodriguez (Oviedo, Fla./Lake Howell) stepped up their play to lead the Rams to victory in the second half. After a Michael Johnson basket brought the Trojans within three at 45-42, Sanders scored six of the next eight VCU points to give the Rams a nine-point lead. Virginia State would get no closer than seven the rest of the way, and a pair of Nixon free throws with 8:14 to play gave VCU a double-digit lead for good. As a team, the Rams turned around a 38.2 percent shooting performance in the first half with a 56 percent effort in the second.

Nixon and Rozzell led all scorers with 16 points each while Sanders finished with a double-double, 14

points and 11 rebounds. Rodriguez had a game-high 10 assists in the win. Brandon Macklin led VSU with 14 points.

VCU begins its regular season Sunday with a game against The Citadel, the first game of the Cancun Challenge for both teams.

By the numbers

Virginia State: Mines 7, Johnson 11, Chaney 10, Macklin 14, Willis 5, Lipscomb 2, Mills 0, Crockett 8, Washington 2, Springfield-Cobb 1, Idlet 2, Simpson 2. Totals: 22 18-26 64. 3-pointers: Mines, Chaney.

VCU: Sanders 14, Maynor 10, Rozzell 16, Pishchalnikov 3, Nixon 16, Saintil 5, Smith 0, Rodriguez 3, Burgess 12, Hinton 0. Totals: 27 21-29 79. 3-pointers: Rozzell 3, Maynor.

This week

MEN'S BASKETBALL

Sun., Nov. 16, vs. The Citadel (Cancun Challenge), Siegel Center, 4 p.m.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Fri., Nov. 14, @ Liberty (Preseason WNIT), Lynchburg, 7 p.m.

Nov. 16-20, TBA (2 WNIT games)

MEN'S CROSS COUNTRY

Sat., Nov. 15, @ NCAA Southeast Regional, Clemmons, N.C., 11 a.m.

VOLLEYBALL

Fri., Nov. 14, @ Hofstra, Hempstead, N.Y., 7 p.m.

Sun., Nov. 16, @ Northeastern, Boston, 1 p.m.



Basketball student section moved to corner

JACOB VAUGHAN
Contributing Writer

VCU students who watched basketball games from the first five rows of the sideline student section now will be forced to sit behind the baskets or in a newly provided corner section.

The entire middle section is being reserved for season ticket holders. In an attempt to offset the 270 seats lost along the sideline, the VCU athletic department has opened section 22 to students. This section, which is located in a corner of the Siegel Center, previously was reserved for single-game admission.

In addition, 112 floor seats and 14 "VIP seats," located behind the baskets, will be made available to students on a first-come, first-serve basis.

"Technically, students are gaining seats," said VCU SGA member Brittany Vogel. "It is just the location that concerns me."

This change, which was initiated by the athletic department, was made in hopes of bolstering – not reducing – the student voice at basketball games.

"Both coach (Anthony) Grant and I agreed that it may help the overall enthusiasm of our crowd with a more concentrated, intimidating student section," VCU Athletic Director Norwood Teague stated in an e-mail.

Since the coveted sideline seats are front-and-center and student admission is free, season ticket holders are not the only beneficiaries of the change. By moving student seats to a cheaper area, the athletic department

will be able to turn a profit by selling season tickets in the more expensive sideline sections.

"All the funds go to support the athletic department operations," Teague stated. "If we want to continue to build the athletic department, in particular the basketball program, we need to grow our funding to compete on a national level."

However, the new arrangement already has ruffled feathers. Because the sideline sections are highly touted among the student body, the students that frequented those seats usually waited outside the arena for hours before tip-off.

"It is going to be hard to make people who usually sit in those sections excited to sit somewhere else," Vogel said.

One of these fans, senior Jim Cummings, remains unconvinced the new seating compromise is necessary to improve the basketball program.

"Would you move the Cameron Craziest to the baseline down at Duke? I don't think so," Cummings said. "They might be trying to sell season tickets but we pay tuition every year."

Furthermore, the exchange of seating quantity for quality will not be enough to quell student dissatisfaction, according to Cummings.

"I just have a feeling they (the athletic department) are going to rub some students the wrong way," Cummings said. "This whole situation has honestly put a damper on my anticipation for the season. It really stinks."

Sports briefs

MEN'S BASKETBALL

VCU senior point guard Eric Maynor (Raeford, N.C./Westover) has been named one of the John Wooden Award Preseason Top 50 candidates for the second consecutive year. The reigning CAA Player of the Year averaged 17.9 points and 5.5 assists per game last season. Maynor also was tabbed as the CAA Preseason Player of the Year this season. Maynor will look to win the award over last year's winner, Tyler Hansbrough of North Carolina.

also...

Sophomore forward Myk Brown (Gainesville, Fla./PK Yonge High) will transfer at the end of the semester to finish his career. Brown, who played in 15 games last season, averaged 0.9 points and 0.7 rebounds. Brown said he felt he needed to go to a program where he could contribute more on the court.

FIELD HOCKEY

Sophomore Marle van Dessel

(Oisterwijk, The Netherlands/Odolphus Lyceum) was named second-team All-CAA at the league's banquet this past weekend. Marle led the Rams in points (29), goals (12) and shots on goal (40) and was third in assists (5) during the 2008 season.

WOMEN'S SOCCER

Sophomore Laurel Pastor (Springfield/West Springfield) was named first-team All-CAA, this past week, leading four Rams on all-conference teams. Pastor led VCU this season

with 20 points, including nine goals and two assists. Seniors Stephanie Power (Dartmouth, Nova Scotia/Dartmouth), Samara Stephen-Dowd (Vienna/Oakton) and Megan Flanagan (Franktown, Colo./Ponderosa) were all named to the second team. Power and Flanagan both recorded five goals and nine assists while Stephen-Dowd scored a goal and handed out two assists.

VOLLEYBALL

The Rams improved to 9-3 in the CAA and 18-9 overall this past

weekend with a 3-0 (25-12, 25-17, 25-21) victory over UNC Wilmington and a 3-1 (22-25, 25-23, 25-16, 25-15) defeat of Georgia State. Elisa Kuehnelt (Dresden, Germany/Sportsgymnasium) led the Rams with 10 kills and eight digs against the Seahawks while Laryssa Goncalves (Curitiba, Brazil/Colegio Dom Bosco) had 17 digs. In the victory over the Panthers, Jessica Ojukwu (Sao Paulo, Brazil/Colegio Dourado) led four players with double-digit kills with 13 and Goncalves added 16 digs.

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Goodell did a good thing

JONATHAN HOWARD
Sports Editor

NFL

Up to this point, I haven't really been able to form much of an opinion on new NFL commissioner Roger Goodell. I think he has handled the situation with "Pacman" Jones extremely well, but his lack of action with Jaguars receiver Matt Jones (who recently pleaded guilty to cocaine possession) continues to puzzle me. However, if there is one thing that I absolutely agree with him on, it's the retraction of the \$7,500 fine handed out to Giants defensive end Justin Tuck. Tuck was fined for what was deemed unnecessary roughness against Cowboys quarterback Brooks Bollinger. When I saw that Tuck was being penalized for the hit, I was dumbfounded. There was nothing dirty about it—in fact, it was a textbook

tackle. It might have been a bit late, but that is what 15-yard penalties are for.

The fact is, the game of football is a contact sport. I don't mean that to be an obvious statement that I'm trying to pass off as a revelation, but it seems that suits in charge of the NFL have forgotten that. If there is a type of hit that tends to cause injury (horse-collaring or chop-blocking), then yes, perhaps a fine should be given for its use. However, fining someone for tackling the quarterback in the same way that is taught in pee-wee leagues is ridiculous. For that reason, I'm happy to say that I agree with Goodell's decision to retract the fine and let the players play. Now if he'd only be so quick to deal with players who are breaking federal laws ...

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

I hate Charlie Weis. I hate his cocky attitude and the team he coaches. Nothing

would make me happier than seeing him fail and making Notre Dame the worst program in college football. However, I don't think the talk of him being on the hot seat is warranted. His teams haven't been national championship caliber, but this year's squad certainly has shown improvement over last year. More importantly, most of the contributors on this year's team are young—meaning they will be around for a few more years to only get better. Unfortunately (for me), Weis will probably be able to take advantage of this and turn the team back into a juggernaut, making the talk of him being in danger of losing a job all but irrelevant. Also, after last year's contract extension, could the Notre Dame administration afford the buyout (somewhere around \$20 million) to get rid of Weis? Probably not (especially in this economy), so for now, it's full steam ahead for the Weis Express.



Jonathan

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Pick'em

Week Eleven

A week did nothing to separate Alex Dynan and Associate Sports Editor Jerome Foster as both went 13-7 against last week's action. Executive Editor Matt Doyon joined the bunch at 13-7 but is still four games back. Sports Editor Jonathan Howard finally put together a winning record, 12-8, but has come to terms with the fact that he will finish in last place—again. On to this week's action ...



THIS WEEK'S GAMES	JONATHAN HOWARD Sports Editor	JEROME FOSTER Associate Sports Editor	MATT DOYON Executive Editor	ALEX DYNAN Co-host "The Aftermath"
	(96-92)	(110-78)	(106-82)	(110-78)
COLLEGE	COLLEGE	COLLEGE	COLLEGE	COLLEGE
Virginia Tech at Miami	Miami	Virginia Tech	Miami	Miami
Cincinnati at Louisville	Cincinnati	Cincinnati	Cincinnati	Cincinnati
South Carolina at Florida	Florida	Florida	Florida	Florida
North Carolina at Maryland	North Carolina	North Carolina	North Carolina	Maryland
California at Oregon State	Oregon State	California	Oregon State	Oregon State
Arizona at Oregon	Oregon	Oregon	Oregon	Arizona
Boston College at Florida State	Florida State	Florida State	Florida State	Florida State
Vanderbilt at Kentucky	Kentucky	Kentucky	Kentucky	Kentucky
BYU at Air Force	Air Force	BYU	BYU	BYU
Minnesota at Wisconsin	Minnesota	Wisconsin	Minnesota	Minnesota
NFL	NFL	NFL	NFL	NFL
N.Y. Jets at New England	N.Y. Jets	New England	New England	New England
Denver at Atlanta	Atlanta	Atlanta	Atlanta	Atlanta
Chicago at Green Bay	Chicago	Green Bay	Green Bay	Chicago
Baltimore at N.Y. Giants	Baltimore	N.Y. Giants	N.Y. Giants	Baltimore
Minnesota at Tampa Bay	Tampa Bay	Tampa Bay	Minnesota	Tampa Bay
Tennessee at Jacksonville	Jacksonville	Tennessee	Tennessee	Tennessee
Houston at Indianapolis	Indianapolis	Indianapolis	Indianapolis	Indianapolis
San Diego at Pittsburgh	Pittsburgh	Pittsburgh	San Diego	Pittsburgh
Dallas at Washington	Washington	Washington	Washington	Dallas
Cleveland at Buffalo	Buffalo	Buffalo	Cleveland	Buffalo

spectrum



'The Neon Man and Me'

From left: Slash Coleman, Shanea N. Taylor and Becca Bernard discuss their involvement in 'The Neon Man and Me.'

Natalie Allen photo

Collaborators provide intimate glimpse of one-man show

VERONICA GARABELLI
Associate Spectrum Editor

Playwright Slash Coleman chose to deal with death in an unconventional way after best friend and neon artist Mark Jamison was electrocuted while hanging a neon sign in 2004. Jamison began to write a care package for Jamison's newborn son, which eventually turned into the stage production of "The Neon Man and Me." The one-man comedy, with Coleman as its sole actor, was about his friendship with Jamison.

The following year, Coleman recruited Shanea N. Taylor, who received her MFA in theatre pedagogy from VCU to direct the stage production. The show went on to enjoy three national tours, and is making its local PBS debut this month, with VCU movement program graduate student Becca Bernard directing the television version.

Amidst a cramped coffee shop, Bernard, Coleman and Jamison sat down with the Commonwealth Times to discuss their involvement in "The Neon Man and Me."

The Commonwealth Times: Why did you decide to write a tribute to your friendship with Mark?

Slash Coleman: The main reason is because I think with friends, especially old friends, they carry a part of us that lives like stories. When he died, he took a huge chunk of my history with him. I guess I wasn't done with our friendship. I kind of wrote it, I think, as a way to bring back some of that. The show isn't so much about death as it is about the magic of friendship and the things that make us happy and the things that we really connect with—our best friends—rather than the dark phases of death. A lot of people, when they hear about the show, are like, "I don't want to see that show. It must be a journal about death." It's actually a comedy, so a lot of people are surprised by it.

CT: Becca, how did you get involved in the show?

Becca Bernard: Well, we had collaborated on other projects and I have a movement background and he needed ... a (movement) coach to work on the show before it went on TV. So, we were friends and partners before—artistically. He asked me to look at a piece, so we went into a coaching session to get it prepared for PBS.

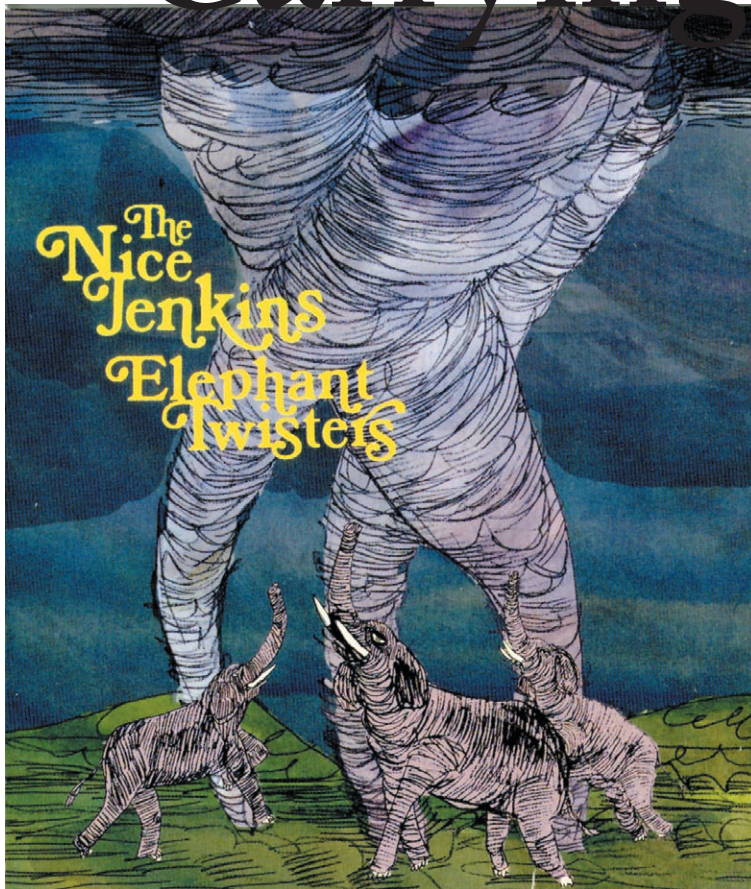
CT: Shanea, why were you interested in directing "The Neon Man and Me"?

Shanea N. Taylor: Well, quite honestly, it was my first directing project. I had never directed anything. I had coached a lot of people through many years in the theatre department in different roles. So, this seemed a little less intimidating. I was like, "I just have to deal with one person and everything is set and done with some of the preliminary work." (It was) the first time I read the script and talked to Slash and saw how excited and invested he was — that, in turn, got me excited.

In a weird way, I saw this guy (Slash) who had never done anything like this before and (he was) taking this huge leap and doing some-

NEON MAN continues to CT14

Carrying the torch of rock



ROBERTO CURTIS
Spectrum Editor

With crunchy Nord piano riffs, plucky, reverberating vocals and a rock-hard rhythm section, Charlottesville's The Nice Jenkins are on the frontier of rock and roll. What we see with their late October release, "Elephant Twisters," is a diverse representation of the directions this classic genre can go.

The album begins with "So What 2," a driving, medium-tempo tune featuring sweet electronic effects. A tribal drum beat keeps the mood up during the minimal parts, resulting in a constant flow of energy from the band. The lyrics are definitely memorable and cadence nicely with the ebb and flow of the music. "Love on the brain. Whisper to your heart or you will change." "You are insane.

You're fueled by the bourbon in your veins."

Track two, "Ladies," features a heavy vibrato synthesizer intro courtesy of Dana Radcliffe over top of steady, calm drum rim beats a la Adam Brock. The counter line to the lyrical melody sounds a little bare when compared to the lush effects placed on the lead vocals. The futuristic and Latin interludes throughout the song are both ominous and interesting and blend seamlessly with the various moods of "Ladies."

Because of a hard swinging piano intro, "Foreboding Love" immediately brings to mind a Fiona Apple or Elton John number. Bluesy and pulsating, the mood is one of torment, talking of change, the future and painful company. "We have not hallucinated in almost five years. The days of

breaking skin are over." The climax of the song is enhanced by stripped down piano solos, guitar interludes and electronic sequencers.

"So What 1" is not at all similar to "So What 2" but includes a cathartic melody that makes you want to belt out meaningless syllables in your car or living room. The melodica intro brought me to chuckling as the abrasive drum beat came in and blew it out of the water.

"Needs" starts off with a terrific lyrical melody and gives way to low-pitched organ lines and soulful back-up harmonies. The Nice Jenkins show masterful use of modulation and tension to take the song to surprising planes of space and stability while still making you want to jump around a bit.

Bringing the tempo and energy of the album down a

ROCK continued to CT15

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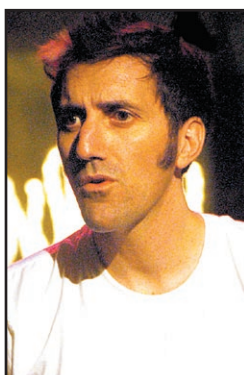


NEON MAN continued from CT12

so he gave me the big ol' matzo balls to go into directing and to try my hand at that.

CT: Since "Neon Man" was originally written for the stage, how did it translate to television?

Coleman: I think it tightened up the show and in a sense—made it better. Shanea helped me create a show that would work in any venue. A lot of the venues I worked in were really big, so I'd be running across the stage in certain places, and with TV, I had to run in place. So, it really contained my energy and it translated better to that audience. There were places in the script where sometimes I would look at audience members while (the producers) looked right into the TV monitor. The producer said those were just really winning moments because it was almost like I was talking to the viewer.



SLASH COLEMAN

CT: What aspect of your relationship with Mark did you bring to "The Neon Man"?

Coleman: I think the parts that were the glue were our friendship. It started with just a care package I wanted to give to his kid. It started as 300 pages of memories that I just wrote down.

To shape it into a show, it had to go from 300 pages down to 30 for the stage. Anything between Mark and I that didn't reveal something about our connection kind of went out the window. All those profound things reveal our connection to each other.

I think that's why a lot of people have felt that it's really rare to see a man onstage talking about a friendship with another man who's straight, you know? It got booked up in Provincetown, Mass., because it got the review it was a "Brokeback Mountain" between two straight guys that don't have sex. Romantic love is emphasized, love between a parent and a son and daughters and such but never just friendship. I think a lot of that glue is what helped promote it as a thing between friends. A lot of people leave my show and say they go home and call their friends they

haven't talked to in a while.

CT: Slash, why was it so important to make the PBS show a reality?

Coleman: After every show that I did, an invisible door opened. I'd walk through that door and it would take me somewhere else.

In the show I talk about a prophecy (Mark) left with me and said that from his church that he and I would play in front of millions of people one day. I had to show up and see if that prophecy was true. I'm still doing that. It frees me up to make mistakes and not do anything wrong and hide from the world.

With other projects, I had this pressure of, "Oh, I have to send this stuff for the press by then." If it's meant to be, it doesn't matter if I do everything right or wrong ... if the prophecy is true. So, I'm showing up for the prophecy and I'm stepping on some feet now that it's gotten bigger along the way.

A lot of people in the theater especially in the last year and a half, don't think I have the right to be where I am. I've started to feel that.

Taylor: I was going to ask you about that. A lot of people feel they are owed something because they've been practicing something for a certain amount of time. So, to have somebody who went around some of the schooling and traditional training, I think they are kind of threatened by that instead of seeing it as an opportunity.

Coleman: I've waited three years to get a real review of the show, meaning someone who would touch it and tell me what they really thought. For three years, the press wrote the same story, "Isn't it great he's raising money for (Mark's) son?" I was like, "Well tell me how it is besides this other (expletive). No one would because they were afraid."

So, year number three and a half, people finally did it and they started telling me they were not happy because I had gone the shortest route.

The thing is ... I've been on stage as a musician since fifth grade. I have as much stage time as a theatre person. Granted, it was much more unorthodox. I feel in the last four years I probably got eight years of grad school experience on stage.

CT: Shanea and Becca, the show is very intimate. How did you achieve that as directors?

Taylor: I don't know that I had anything to do with that. I think it's

Slash's presence and the way that his story was written.

I had a thing against one-man shows prior to working on this show, just because they felt very narcissistic. So, I worried about that a little bit. But ... it was told in this way that there was somewhere for everyone to fit into from word one. I don't know how he did it, but it was never anything I was worried about as a director—how he's going to keep everybody.

Bernard: In terms of how it's written ... there are sections that it's celebrating a story and there's a switch where Slash is pointing these 30 characters but then you know the characters personally. He switches from playing Gustav, to his mother, to him saying, "I don't know what to do here. I'm lost. I'm thinking of my friend." So (there's) that concept between the outlandish characters and the true feelings that he has as a person.



SHANEA N. TAYLOR

Coleman: I always say that's Shanea's famous answer, which she always deflects it back on to me. But really, I wouldn't have taken the first steps to bring it on the stage without having a director because she had space for me to channel those characters naturally. If she had been like, "Do this or that," I would have done it because I'm like a sponge where I don't have traditional training. It would have turned out different, the fact that she held that space and gentle direction.

It was very spiritual in the way she directed. I think that helped bring about that intimacy. If I would have had (Becca) come in, eventually it would have been a very different four years. It was a very different style at a different time. Having a director gave me the confidence to take it to the next step and do that first show and just take off.

CT: What different aspects did Becca and Shanea bring to "The Neon Man" show?

Coleman: The spiritual side in Shanea was essential in the beginning when the show was just an infant. You don't have to do much with an infant. You

don't have to take it to the zoo and show it the museum. You just hold it a little bit. Whereas, Becca came on where it's already four years old and she got to treat it a little bit different.

CT: How will college students be able to connect to "The Neon Man" show?

Coleman: I feel people in college don't know what they want to do with their life. They have really connected with the story because here is this guy who's really lost his whole life and here is his friend who owns a neon shop and isn't lost. This guy wanders all around the world after college not knowing what he wants to do. He's doing everything. I feel like most young people can relate to that.

Taylor: Hope, really. Hope in the belief that you can do anything, you have the right to tell your own story. I think after my first year of grad school, I didn't know what (I was going) to write a thesis about and then meeting up with Slash and him telling that story—those two things kind of melt together—the importance of owning your life and telling your own story and taking the necessary steps.

Bernard: From a personal standpoint, I'm just finishing my masters at VCU and I'm ready to take that next step. For the last two years, I've been like



BECCA BERNARD

"I want to get out of Richmond," and it's that same voice in the show—that, "I'm never going to come back to Richmond." But really (it's) just making you slow down and appreciate where you are. The fact (is) it doesn't matter where you are. It's what you're doing where you are.

"The Neon Man and Me," will air on PBS the following days: 11/17/08, WCVE & WHTS, 10 p.m.; 11/20/08, WCVE & WHTS, 1 a.m.; 11/22/08, WCVW, 11 p.m.; 11/24/08, WCVE & WHTS, 11 p.m.; 11/26/08, WCVW 10 p.m.

Photo Credits:

Slash Coleman photo by Tania Barricklo
Shanea N. Taylor photo by Slash Coleman
Becca Bernard photo by Randi Gellis



weekend calendar

THURSDAY 11/13

CHAMPAGNE 'N' SHOPPING: Hosted by Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. Evening of holiday shopping. Champagne, door prizes and café dinner. 5-8 p.m. Free. Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. 1800 Lakeside Ave. 262-9887.

HOLIDAY BAZAAR: Two days of fine gifts, seasonal decorations, antiques and food. 5-9 p.m. Free. Through Nov.14. 9 a.m.-5 p.m. St. James's Episcopal Church. 1205 W. Franklin St. 355-1779.

PET-FRIENDLY HAPPY HOUR: Features picnic foods, snacks and a cash bar. 6-9 p.m. \$8-\$12. Canine Café. 2519 Hermitage Road. 521-1318.

"THE WIDOW'S BLIND DATE": Written by Israel Horovitz. Drama about the reunion of three former high school classmates. 8 p.m. \$10-25. Through Dec. 6. Thursdays-Saturday. 8 p.m. Matinees on Nov. 16, 23, and 30. 4 p.m. The Firehouse Theatre. 1609 W. Broad St. 595-4849.

GUITAR STUDIO RECITAL: 7-8 p.m. Free. Recital Hall, James W. Black Music Center. 1015 Grove Ave. 828-1169.

"SHADOW PLAY": Presented by Theatre VCU. A mix of multimedia and performance art, this production explores the light and dark halves of creativity. \$8-\$20. 7:30 p.m. Through Nov. 15. Repeat showings on Nov. 20-22 at 4 p.m., and Nov. 16 at 3 p.m. Raymond Hodges Theatre, W.E. Singleton Center for the Performing Arts. 922 Park Ave. 828-6026.

WOODWIND ENSEMBLES: 8-9 p.m. Free. Sonia Vlahcevic Concert Hall, W.E. Singleton Center for the Performing Arts. 922 Park Ave. 828-1169.

FRIDAY 11/14

"PALLADIANISM AND ITS ALTERNATIVES": Presented by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Symposium on architectural history and the decorative art. 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Free. The Virginia Historical Society. 428 N. Boulevard. 828-2784.

PARASYTIC, GUIDED CRADLE AND UGLY LAW: 7-11 p.m. \$7. Alley Katz. 10 Walnut Alley. 643-2816.

VCU CABELL FIRST NOVELIST FESTIVAL: Guest speaker Travis Holland. The first-time author and VCU Cabell First Novelist Award winner talks about getting his book published for the first time. 7 p.m. Free. Richmond Salons. University Student Commons. 907 Floyd Ave. 828-6051.

THE RECLINERS: 9 p.m. Free. Café Diem. 600 N. Sheppard St. 353-2500.

THE SEEDS: 10 p.m. \$7. Cary Street Café. 2631 W. Cary St. 353-7445.

JUNIOR RECITAL: Kirby Goode, clarinet. 5-6 p.m. Free. Recital Hall, James W. Black Music Center. 1015 Grove Ave. 828-1169.

SATURDAY 11/15

SUNTRUST RICHMOND MARATHON: 7 a.m. Free. Seventh and Broad Streets. 285-9495.

FASHION SHOW: Presented by the YWCA of Richmond, Primrose Productions and Premier Magazine. Local boutiques and trends showcased. Proceeds benefit families affected by domestic violence. 7 p.m. \$25. The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. 200 N. Boulevard. 643-6761, ext. 142.

MARY ANNE RENNOLDS CHAMBER CONCERT SERIES: Performance by renowned orchestra ensemble, Hungarian Virtuosi. 8-10 p.m. \$10-\$32. W.E. Singleton Center for the Performing Arts. 922 Park Ave. 828-6776.

MODERN GROOVE SYNDICATE: 10 p.m. \$7. Cary Street Café. 2631 W. Cary St. 353-7445

SUNDAY 11/16

DAY AT LURAY CAVERNS: Presented by the Outdoor Adventure Program. 9 a.m. \$30-\$35. Outing Rental Center. 130 S. Linden St. 828-6004.

DISNEY ON ICE: Friends, Fun and Fantasy. 1:30 p.m. \$15-\$75. Richmond Coliseum. 601 E. Leigh St. 780-4970.

STICKY & SWEET EXTRAVAGANZA DRAG SHOW: A tribute to Madonna. 8 p.m. Free. Sticky Rice. 2232 W. Main St. 358-7870.

OBITUARY:

Rock legend Mitch Mitchell dies

ROBERTO CURTIS
Spectrum Editor

Mitch Mitchell, the final surviving member of the Jimi Hendrix Experience, died early Wednesday. He was 61.

Mitchell was put on the map with the debut of the Experience's 1967 debut album, "Are You Experience?" and achieved stardom alongside Hendrix with their other albums, "Electric Ladyland" and "Axis: Bold As Love." With discernable influences by great jazz drummers like Max Roach and Elvin Jones, Mitchell was regarded by many as one the

masters—instrumental in bridging the gap between pop and jazz.

Mitchell, who was on a four-day vacation, had just finished the West Coast leg of the Experience Hendrix Tour by performing in Portland, Ore., Friday night.

An employee at Portland's Benson Hotel discovered Mitchell's body and then proceeded to notify police.

According to a deputy medical examiner, Mitchell apparently died of natural causes, though an autopsy is planned.

The Experience Hendrix Tour brought together artists young and old to help spread awareness of the Experience's classic repertoire.

ROCK continued from CT13

bit, "When the Morning Comes" is a beautiful number featuring a standard "boom-chik, boom-boom-chik" rhythm. The song has a dreamy longing feel and the lyrics reflect this. "There'll be no talkin' of yesterday. No time to wonder if I'll be here again when the morning comes."

Like a disoriented ex-lover stumbling out of the bar drunk at 2 a.m., "Cowboy" is a swinging 6/8 meter lament about a man looking for answers. "I'm crying just to cry. Mama. Mama why? Tell me why is your love gone and I'm alone?" The name and feel of the song certainly lend themselves to a certain hot and

dry part of the continental United States. This is the first song on the album where electronic effects seem to not play as much of a prominent role.

"Ordinary Life," a wonderfully chiming, major keyed tune with slick rock elements, is like reading a rock and roll history book of the past decade. Elements of the Postal Service, Modest Mouse, Elliot Smith and Franz Ferdinand can all be picked out and appreciated.

The conclusion of the album "Down the Well" features an intro with a bizarre, almost unsettling melody. The calm is maintained by the gentle

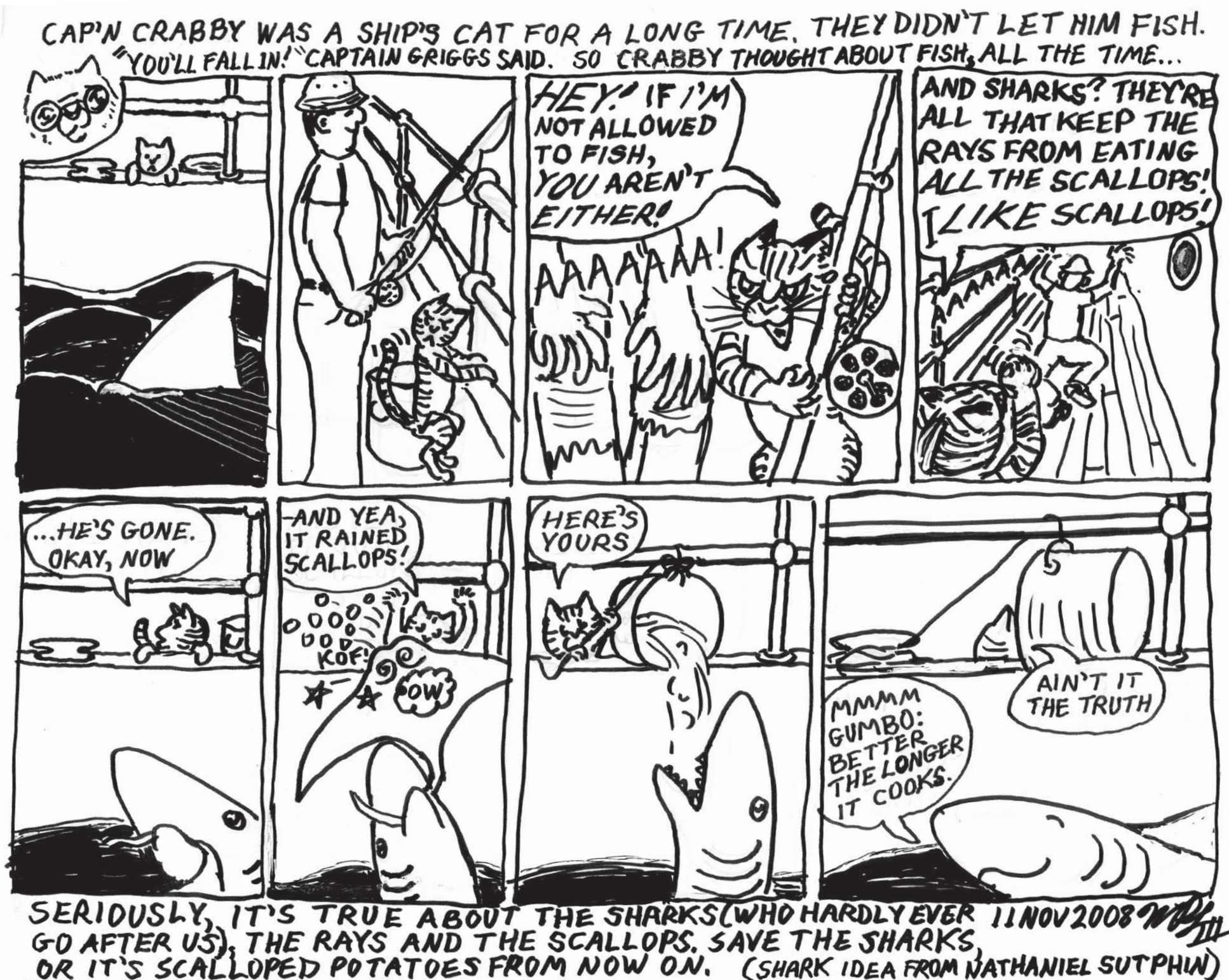
guitar chords and sustained into the body of the song with help from the melodic back-up vocals and trickling piano lines. As the song develops into another anthem, the singer's voice strengthens with the drums and consistency of the chorus. The sequencers return to leave a landscape of grey for the listener to contemplate where rock and roll will move next.

Grade: A
Download (don't steal): "Ordinary Life" by The Nice Jenkins.

comics

Pizza from Scratch

Bill Lemmond



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classifieds & comics

MEDIA

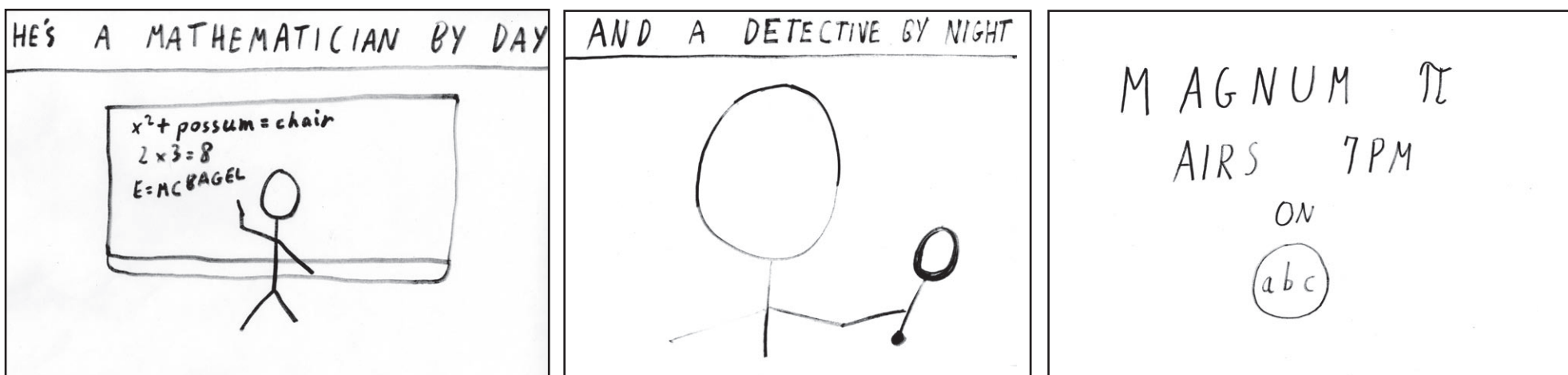
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DANCERS

Do you work as a professional exotic dancer and take classes at VCU? We're interested in talking to you. A student-led magazine at VCU is doing a feature on students who dance for private parties and in adult clubs. Serious inquiries only. Contact us at vcuink@gmail.com. Anonymous sources are welcome.

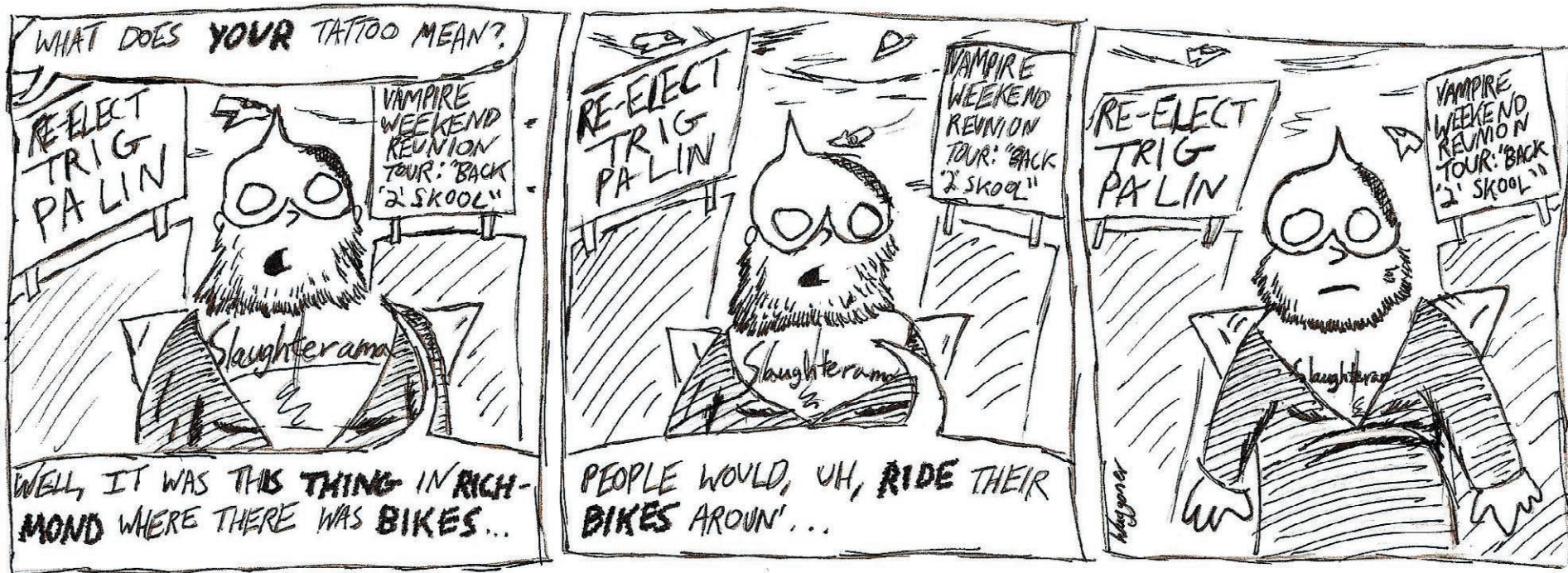
The Bum Diary

Rich Rose



Slippin' in the Tub

Jonathan Scheer and Nate Waggoner





opinion

Dear Editor,

As this semester comes to an end and the next one approaches, it's time to think about textbooks again. Which ones to keep, which ones to sell? Will you be looking early for next semester's required texts, or waiting until add/drop week? Buying books online, waiting in line or taking a chance with the stacks at the James Branch Cabell Library?

If you want yet another option, VCU has one—the university maintains a book-trading Web site for students. Anyone who is familiar with Craigslist or eBay knows the concept; students can sell and buy textbooks directly to and from each other. There is no middle man; you set the price. The students involved are the only ones who profit from the transaction.

Consider the benefit in this example: You paid \$27 for a used textbook for American Government. Now that the semester is over, and as a “student of American politics,” you'd like to sell the book back for some cash. Based on actual prices listed on the Web site, Virginia Book Company offers you \$11 if the condition is still good. You could take the money and buy lunch, or list the text on our book-trading Web site.

However, if you sell the text directly to another student for \$20, you both benefit. The buyer saves \$7, and you make \$9 more than the typical “buy-back” price, almost recouping the expense of the book. Now, you've got money for two lunches.

This is only an example. I think Virginia Book Company is a great store; I make a point of buying all my school supplies there, as well as the texts I can't find on the book-trading Web site. Moreover, it's important to support local businesses – especially when the next closest option is a corporate monstrosity that smells like a greasy ham sandwich – has managed to shove all textbooks in a corner behind the latest Dean Koontz novel, and invariably charges more money for books than the local alternative.

Students be advised—you have another option. I'm encouraging everyone on both campuses to take a look at the book-trading Web site. It is free, easy to use and recently has been reorganized

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



and updated. The only requirement is a university e-mail address used to log in when you buy or sell.

Ben Nelson
Communications and Technology
Committee
VCU Student Government Association



Dear Editor,

When an opinion editor for a university publication makes an elementary proofreading error, it still shocks me. In the Nov. 10 edition of The CT opinion section, Sarah Sonies wrote, “It is about America avoiding a mess by putting ‘more another’ unqualified candidate in the White House.” Does the opinion editor know that only adjectives, not quantifiers, can be stacked in front of the noun they modify? Of course she does. Does Gov. Sarah Palin know the difference between a country and a continent? Of course she does.

My point is that everyone makes mistakes that make them look foolish from time to time. Luckily, most of us are not in the national spotlight; cameras don't allow a second chance. Otherwise, we too could be judged fools for the dumb things we do.

In the same way that I can look past Palin's occasional gaffe or painful colloquialism to the popular and

skillful politician who has won local and statewide elections, I can forgive Sonies' simple – but glaring – proofreading error. I am assuming that Sarah Sonies is the opinion editor for a good reason. It would be a shame if everyone thought she were ignorant because of an error that could have been detected by revising at least once what she had written.

Sincerely,
Nathan A. Shifflette



Dear Editor,

First of all, I wanted to say how much I appreciated the thoughtful and generous article you wrote last week describing Sen. John McCain's concession speech and President-elect Obama's victory. It was nice to finally hear some kind words said about McCain, who is an American hero.

However, after reading your next article in which you blasted Gov. Sarah Palin one last time, I regret to say that I must wholeheartedly disagree with you on many fronts.

The Obama supporters and many McCain supporters – including myself – have said that we all need to come together and help this country move forward. In fact, you yourself said last week that you admired McCain's speech

in which he called for just that. Then, however, you turn around and begin to smear McCain's running mate one last time. I mean, honestly, isn't it time we moved on?

How are we supposed to move forward and come together when you continue to take shots at someone who represented our ticket in this election? I'm sure you are a wonderful person and I mean no ill will, but with all due respect, I am appalled at your continued assault on this woman. You certainly are entitled to your opinion and I rightfully accept that.

After reading your article, I am sad to say that the entire story is not being told. For instance, you made reference to Palin's lack of knowledge in knowing the difference between a continent and

LETTERS continued to CT19

the
ct

MATT DOYON **SARAH SONIES**
Executive Editor Opinion Editor

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Letters must be sent from a valid VCU e-mail address or signed with daytime and evening telephone contact. We reserve the right to edit for grammar, style and space.



LETTERS continued to CT19

a country when it comes to Africa. You cited a report aired on “The O’Reilly Factor.” However, according to The New York Times, these sources chose to remain anonymous and refused to go on the record.

There also was no mention of the several top McCain advisors who did go on the record and absolutely disputed everything you listed in your article. In fact, according to several blogs, campaign foreign policy advisor Steve Biegun said, “There’s no way (Palin) didn’t know Africa was a continent, and whoever is saying she didn’t must be distorting a fumble of words.” Biegun then went on to say that he and Palin had many conversations about Sudan and the genocide that is taking place in Darfur and that at no time did she ever mistake Africa for a country.

Also according to blogs, Biegun said he was part of the conversation that led to that accusation of Palin not knowing what countries were in the North American Free Trade Agreement, and it convinced him, “Somebody is acting with a high degree of maliciousness.”



Biegun was briefing Palin before an interview, and talking to her about trade issues. He rolled through NAFTA, the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), and the Colombia FTA. According to blogs, as he talked, people were coming in and out of the room, handing Palin things, etc. She was distracted from what Biegun was saying, and said, roughly, “OK, who’s in NAFTA, what is the deal with CAFTA, what’s up with the FTA?”—her way, Biegun says, of saying “rack them and stack them.”

“Somebody is taking a conversation and twisting it maliciously,” Biegun said.

Campaign Manager Steve Schmidt, along several others, also went on record with Politico, a political news and blog Web site, and adamantly denied all the accusations that unnamed sources were saying about Palin.

Let’s take this for what it is: people

within the Republican Party are already beginning plans for the 2012 primary season and they are trying to suppress Palin in an effort to benefit whoever their choice may be for the next election. Anyone who is not willing to go on record on something of this magnitude should not even be taken seriously in the first place.

Personally, I felt your article was overly critical of a woman who, among many other things, created an economic surplus in Alaska, secured a natural gas pipeline and inspired millions of people across this country. She was turning out crowds every bit as big as Obama. It seems possible that Palin may run for the Alaska Senate seat that is currently held

by Sen. Ted Stevens. I hope she does and gets to prove to America, once and for all, that she is far more intelligent and qualified than particular media outlets would like us to believe.

Sincerely,
Lee Vogler

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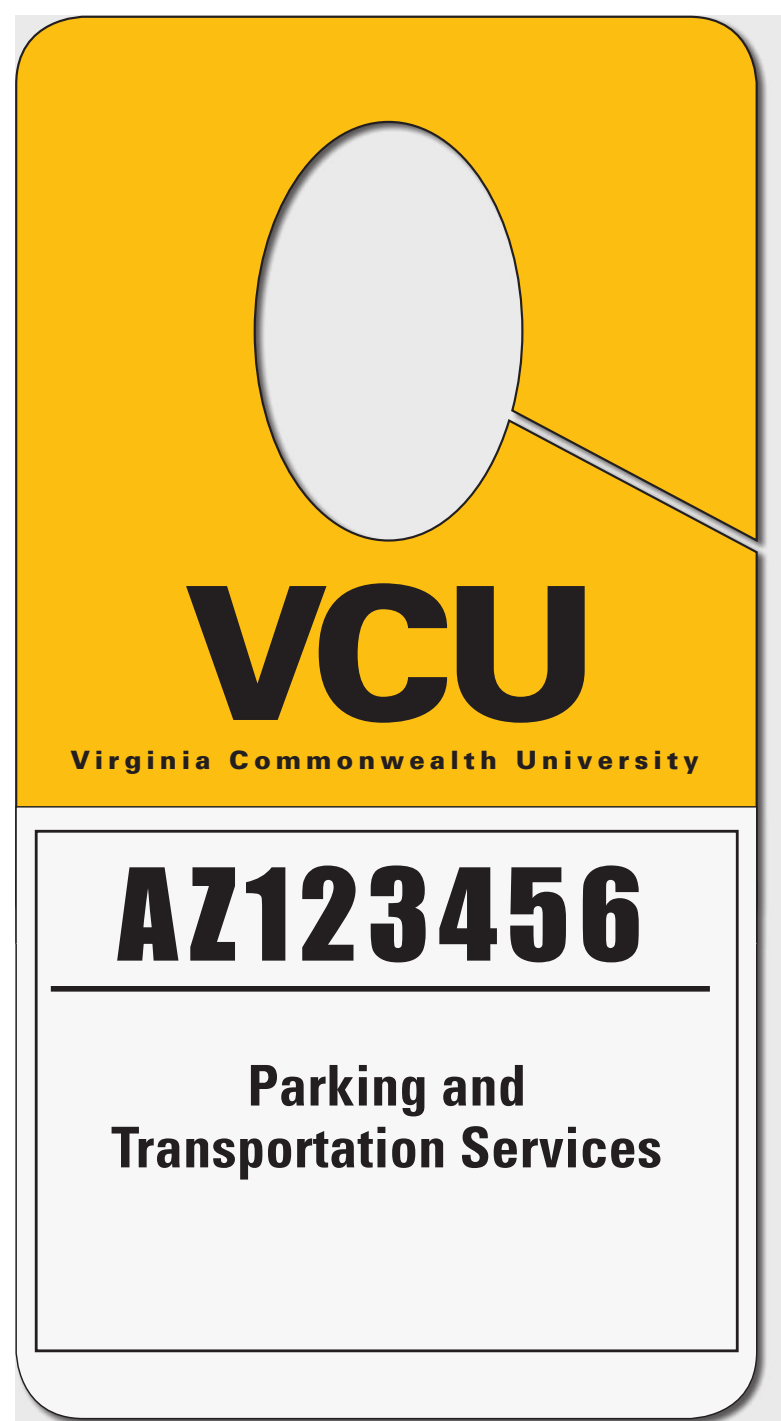
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