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BRIEFS

On the cover:

VCU Theatre reinvents Grease
Photo by Amber-Lynn Taber

Local & VCU

FEMA OKs aid to Louisa residents

Federal officials have reversed a denial of disaster aid for Louisa County homeowners who suffered property damage from the Aug. 23 earthquake that shook much of the East Coast. The turnabout, announced Friday evening, opens up federal grants and low-interest loans as well as unemployment assistance and crisis counseling to homeowners, renters and businesses affected by the magnitude-5.8 earthquake.

Gov. Bob McDonnell announced the approval on Friday, thanking FEMA and President Barack Obama.

“Many of our fellow Virginians who call Louisa home are hurting, and this is critically needed aid. ... The once-in-100-year earthquake that struck Virginia in August caused significant damage that was not covered by homeowner’s insurance. Many homes and businesses have been extensively damaged,” he said.

“This assistance is a key resource for families and business owners who have been trying to recover for more than two months.”

Brief by the Richmond Times-Dispatch

Memo says utility, U.S. covered up fault line’s existence

Dominion Virginia Power and federal nuclear regulatory staff members covered up knowledge of geologic faulting at the North Anna Power Station site in 1973, according to a U.S. Justice Department memo.

The company, then operating as Virginia Electric and Power Co., or Vepco, told the former Atomic Energy Commission in June 1973 that “faulting of rock at the site is neither known nor suspected,” even though the company knew about the existence of faulting at North Anna, the 1977 memo said.

Earthquakes occur as a result of movement on faults, and quakes can be powerful enough to damage a nuclear power station. Dominion’s two 980-megawatt nuclear reactors at North Anna have been shut down since Aug. 23, when a magnitude-5.8 earthquake hit central Virginia.

The power station shut down automatically without damage to safety systems, unusual release of radioactive material or risk to the public, company and NRC officials have said.

Though the quake did not involve the ancient fault at the North Anna plant, no U.S. nuclear-power station had been tripped offline by an earthquake before.

The Richmond-based company said the two reactors are ready to go back into operation, only waiting for Nuclear Regulatory Commission permission to restart.

Brief by the Richmond Times-Dispatch

VCU Police respond to weekend shooting

At approximately 3:15 a.m. Saturday morning, VCU police responded to shots being fired near the Monroe Park campus.

Police found two individuals injured, one with minor face injuries and one with a laceration on the hand, according to WRIC ABC channel 8.

Neither victim had been shot, and police say there is no longer a threat to the VCU campus.

Brief by Mason Brown

National & International

At least 69 dead in north Nigeria attacks by Muslim sect

Residents fearfully left their homes Saturday to bury their dead in northeast Nigeria after a series of coordinated attacks that killed at least 69 people and left a new police headquarters in ruins, government offices burned and symbols of state power destroyed.

A radical Muslim sect known locally as Boko Haram claimed responsibility for the attacks in Borno and Yobe states, with the worst damage done in and around the city of Damaturu.

The group also promised to continue its bloody sectarian fight against Nigeria’s weak central government. Residents nervously moved through empty streets, waiting for the next attack.

Boko Haram wants to implement strict Shariah law across Nigeria.

A Boko Haram spokesman claimed responsibility for the attacks in an interview Saturday with The Daily Trust, the newspaper of record across Nigeria’s Muslim north. A spokesman using the nom de guerre Abul-Qaqa promised that “more attacks are on the way.”

Brief by The Associated Press

Slaying plunges Colombia rebels into uncertainty

President Juan Manuel Santos on Saturday called on fighters of Latin America’s only major rebel force to accept the killing of their top leader as proof the movement is doomed and to surrender.

“This is the moment to decide to lay down your arms because, as we’ve said many times, the alternative is prison or a tomb,” Santos told combatants of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia a day after 63-year-old Alfonso Cano was killed.

But analysts don’t believe Cano’s death will lead the drug-funded rebels, known by their Spanish initials FARC, to crumble. While it’s a body blow to the insurgents, the rebels remain potent. They have depth in their leadership and resilience steeled in a half century of armed revolt.

Santos said Cano’s ranks were infiltrated by state agents, but refused to discuss details.

Brief by The Associated Press

Most of the unemployed no longer receive benefits

The jobs crisis has left so many people out of work for so long that most of America’s unemployed are no longer receiving unemployment benefits.

Early last year, 75 percent were receiving checks. The figure is now 48 percent – a shift that points to a growing crisis of long-term unemployment. Nearly one-third of America’s 14 million unemployed have had no job for a year or more.

Congress is expected to decide by year’s end whether to continue providing emergency unemployment benefits for up to 99 weeks in the hardest-hit states. If the emergency benefits expire, the proportion of the unemployed receiving aid would fall further.

Government unemployment benefits weren’t designed to sustain people for long stretches without work. They usually don’t have to. In the recoveries from the previous three recessions, the longest average duration of unemployment was 21 weeks, in July 1983.

Brief by The Associated Press

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NEWS

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FOLLOW-UP

Raising Cane sales pass IHOP sales in first week

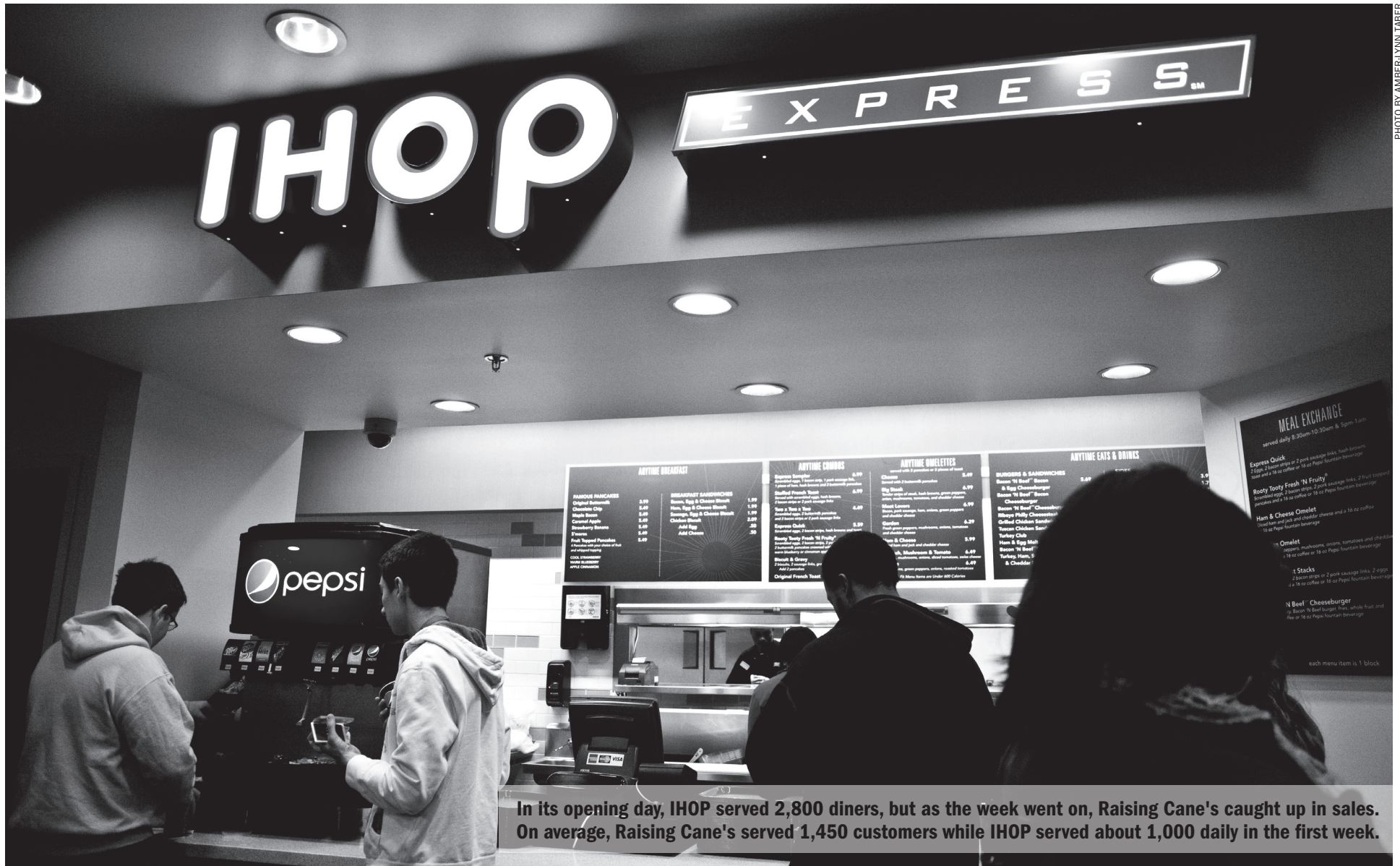


PHOTO BY AMBERLYNN TABER

Michael Pasco
Contributing Writer

About a week after its opening, the buzz surrounding the Laurel and Grace Dining Center is starting to wear down.

According to VCU's Aramark manager, Michael Martin, the initial excitement could be attributed to the IHOP Express, though sales suggest another student favorite emerging from the three restaurants.

Currently, Raising Cane's has the most sales of the three restaurants.

On opening day, the restaurant did modestly, but it has been on a steady rise ever since. They have an average of 1,450 customers daily, 775 of which are using meal exchange.

IHOP is in second place, with an average of 1,000 customers daily, 525 of which are using meal exchanges.

"We have work to do at IHOP in reducing ticket times," Martin said.

According to Martin, average waiting time for IHOP is at 6-7 minutes, but their goal is for it to be 4-5 minutes.

"Cane's ticket time is two minutes," Martin said. "So for every three orders Cane's doing, IHOP is only doing one. If a guy's in a rush, Cane's is the way to go."

"The sleeper (hit) for me is Croutons," Dining Sales and Services manager Tamara Highsmith said. "It exceeded some of our expectations."

Croutons, Salads and Wraps, which was moved from its old location in the Commons, has an average of 400 customers daily, with 340 using meal exchange.

"I knew (IHOP) would be successful. If there were surprises for me, it's how well Cane's and Croutons actually did,"

said Martin.

"We were not expecting (Croutons) to be that popular," Highsmith said. "We knew we had a group of people who wanted to eat healthy, and we're really excited they're taking advantage of it."

A big part of the success of the Laurel and Grace Dining Center may be in its variety.

"It's three locations in one place. It's kind of a destination to go with your friends where one wants to eat something very healthy and one is really craving pancakes," said Highsmith. "It's providing something for everyone."

VCU and Aramark are already working on improving all of the dining facilities for VCU students.

Blinds and shades are being added and they have already figured out how to push people through the lines faster.

There are also plans for menus to be expanded in the future.

Croutons will also be receiving a grab-and-go option for ready-made salads and wraps as well as packaged fruit and Lays-brand chips.

VCU and Aramark are looking to make the IHOP Express process even more efficient.

In addition to reducing wait time, waste is also going to be reduced by using just one plate per order for food as opposed to two.

"IHOP is actually looking at (VCU) to be a model (for) them for other expresses," said Martin. **CT**

Check out Spectrum's food review of IHOP Express on page 11.

Occupy RVA chooses Monroe Park as new location



Charlie Couch
Contributing Writer

Goodbye Kanawha. Hello Monroe. The Richmond and state police's Halloween raid of Kanawha Plaza left Occupy Richmond largely displaced. Since then, the group has been holding their daily general assemblies chiefly around VCU's Monroe Park Campus.

During their meeting Saturday, the collective finally came to consensus on their next occupation location: Monroe Park.

Occupiers plan to march to the park Wednesday evening and continue the local extension of the international Occupy Together movement, according to a recent post on OccupyRVA.org by William Carino, a member of the group's media team.

"At 7:00 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 9, we will meet at Gallery 5 on 200 W. Marshall St.," Carino said in the post. "There we will screen a short documentary on the Occupy Richmond movement called 'All Night, All Day,' created by fellow Occupier Kontra. After the film, we will march down to Monroe Park and begin our Occupation!"

While many protesters at Saturday's general assembly were ready to take action, others still had some reservations.

Chris Gillus was one occupier arrested Halloween morning and the first to receive bond.

As a member of the collective's outreach team, Gillus said he has some growing concern over others' opinion

that Richmond's portion of the national movement is purely student-based.

"I can say for a fact that a lot of people that I communicate with aren't even students," Gillus said. "But from the outside I can see how that perception would start."

Occupying Monroe Park may cause this image to increase due to the park's affiliation with VCU, Gillus said. To counteract this, Gillus said he's been pushing to reach more diverse communities in the city.

"If we were truly going to be the 99 percent, I want to see this park full," Gillus said. "I want to see a rainbow of faces out here. I want to see people from all different backgrounds and cultures."

On the Occupy Richmond's website, Carino echoed this sentiment: "The larger the group, the more successful our occupation will be! WE NEED EVERY SINGLE ONE OF YOU TO BE THERE."

Greg Gunter was another protester arrested the night of the raid. Gunter said he doesn't think that the full scope of the cost and benefits for Monroe Park have been discussed before the general assembly.

"If (Monroe Park) is what everyone wants to do, I have to support it," Gunter said. "Wherever we occupy, I'm going to try to support it as best I can, but there's been concerns expressed that haven't been given full voice."

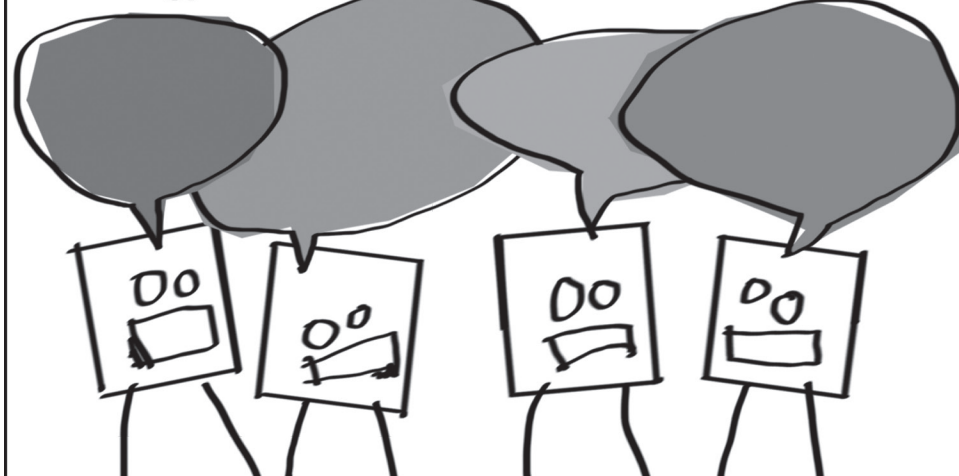
Gunter said he plans to withhold his full opinion of the location choice until he learns more about these concerns. **CT**



PHOTOS BY CHARLIE COUCH

Occupy Richmond has been conducting their general assembly meetings in VCU's Compass to try to pick a new location for occupation. Various locations were discussed, including re-occupying Kanawha Plaza and creating a nomadic location. Ultimately, the group decided on occupying Monroe Park beginning Wednesday, Nov. 9.

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VCU introduces electronic prerequisite-check system

Mechelle Hankerson
News Editor

In an effort to aid student registration and to help keep students on a timely graduation timetable, VCU has introduced Prereq Check, or Banner Enforced Prerequisite Checking Process.

Prereq Check is an automated process in eServices that will check to make sure all prerequisites are completed for a course.

Beginning with advanced registration for Spring 2012 (which began last Monday for the Honors College), students who have not completed the necessary prerequisites for a course will be unable to register for the specific course.

The system is automated in eServices and will not require anything from students, unless they believe there has been mistake and they actually have completed a prerequisite course.

Previously, prerequisite checking was not enforced through the registration process. This means students could have signed up for classes they were not technically qualified to take. Doing this could have forced students to go back and take lower-level courses to make sure higher-level courses were counted for credit.

While the system will be in place for all students, the Prereq Check website said transfer students may find the tool especially helpful in staying on track for timely graduation.

“Sometimes the courses that (students) transfer in don’t match specifically what’s in the (VCU) bulletin,” Director of VCU’s Transfer Center, Artis Gordon said.

According to Gordon, there hasn’t been a significant number of transfer students who have run into long-term problems because of prerequisite classes. He also said that so far, there have been minimal problems with the Prereq Check system.

For transfer students, the biggest problem might be the computer’s inability to recognize the transfer equivalent of a prerequisite. Gordon said with classes like Biology 151, the computer may not be able to recognize that a Biology 101 course is also sufficient.

“It’s an easy fix,” he said.

Transfer students can contact an adviser with any problems that relate to a course-naming issue to see if a transferred course corresponds to a VCU course.

Gordon also advises transfer students to make sure VCU has all transcripts on record to make sure the system recognizes all classes and doesn’t prolong the registration process. **CT**

Normal registration (all undergraduates except Honors students, graduate students and non-degree seeking students) begins Nov. 9.

For more information on Prereq Check, visit prereq.vcu.edu.

VCU offers health insurance plans to uninsured students

COVERAGE OF VCU'S STUDENT HEALTH INSURANCE PLAN (MOST COSTS COVERED THROUGH VCU HEALTH SYSTEM AND PREFERRED PROVIDERS ONLY)

- Doctor’s visits
- Diagnostic testing and X-ray examinations
- Physical therapy (one visit per day)
- Chemotherapy and radiation therapy
- Prescription drugs, when using participating WellDyneRx pharmacy
- Braces and appliances
- Home health care services
- Annual pap smear
- Maternity and well-baby care
- Mental disorder programs (can be used for inpatient or outpatient treatment); Includes alcoholism/drug abuse programs
- Injections, when administered at the doctor's office
- Any other state-mandated benefits

For a complete listing of benefits and complete information about VCU's student health insurance coverage, visit www.academichealthplans.com/vcu.

Andrianna Nicholas
Contributing Writer

This year, the United States Census Bureau found that 50 million Americans are uninsured and according to VCU’s Wellness Resource Center, about 4,000 VCU students contribute to the nationwide statistic.

According to Katherine Vatalaro, assistant director at the VCU Wellness Resource Center, this means about 11 percent of VCU students are uninsured.

The VCU Wellness Resource Center conducts the American College Health Association’s National College Health Assessment each year. The purpose of the assessment is to evaluate students’ health needs by conducting a random online survey of VCU students.

VCU senior Amaris Lemus is among the 11 percent of students going without a health insurance plan.

“I’ve been without insurance since

I’ve turned 18,” Lemus said.

In the past year Lemus said she has spent nearly \$1,000 in medical costs.

“I’ve had to go to the ER without insurance three times,” Lemus said. “I ... want to say that bronchitis cost me the most. My bill ended up being over \$400.”

Lemus said she does not have an insurance plan because of the high prices.

VCU, however, offers students a more economical option called the Student Health Insurance Plan. The plan outlines an entire year of insurance that will cost a student about \$2,000.

To be eligible for the coverage undergraduates must be taking six or more credit hours. Graduate students need to be enrolled for at least one credit hour while completing a thesis or dissertation.

The coverage is designed so that only active students may take advantage of the plan. The policy states that students

must actively attend classes for at least the first 31 days after the date for which coverage is purchased.

The plan also discounts dental and vision services, access to a 24-hour nurse line, coverage for traveling or study abroad and academic emergency services. Students can also add dependents to their plans, like a spouse or child.

“I think that if I had known about that insurance that VCU offered, I definitely would have considered it,” Lemus said. “It would have saved me a lot of money.”

According to Hill, 323 students are currently enrolled in the insurance program, but The Well is working to inform more students of the plan at various campus events.

“The Wellness Resource Center is part of Student Health,” Hill said. “We help advertise this insurance plan during presentations at New Student Orientation.”

The Well’s website said all uninsured students are welcome to visit its facility for any health concerns.

“The services at the Wellness Resource Center can be used by any VCU student because we are university fee-funded,” Hill said. “We do not ask for health insurance.”

The Well’s services are not the same as a traditional medical office, but rather focuses on a public health and prevention approach to keeping students healthy. VCU’s Student Health Services offers more medical care, such as immunizations and services more like a traditional doctor’s office. **CT**

For more information about VCU’s Student Health Insurance Plan, visit www.ahpcare.com/vcu.

SPORTS

In this section:

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Graham keys men's basketball's win in exhibition game • 9

Volleyball clinches CAA tournament berth with win over Georgia State

Quinn Casteel

Assistant Sports Editor

It wasn't pretty, but the VCU volleyball team will take any road they can get on, so long as it ultimately leads to the CAA championship game.

The Rams clinched the sixth and final spot in the conference tournament on Saturday night, defeating Georgia State at home in what was a four-set struggle.

"That was fun. It was awesome," said head coach James Finley. "It's great to be back in."

VCU cruised through the first set maintaining a commanding five-point lead throughout, playing with a pace and a swagger that showed they were the superior team. Seven unforced errors by Georgia State helped as well, but Jessica Ojukwu and Jasmine Waters were simply dominant up front for VCU.

"You've got to have a couple of go-to's," said Finley. "For those two in particular to be able to carry us is great."

Waters finished the night with 11 kills, eight of which came in the opening two sets. Ojukwu would finish with 10 kills to go along with 6 digs.

Waters and Ojukwu were pivotal in getting VCU the lead, but it was Kristin Boyd who came through in the end. The third and fourth sets were back-and-forth, but whenever the Rams needed to kill a Georgia State rally, it was Boyd who got the job done.

"She's been pretty amazing. We just want her to play like that from the beginning," said Finley. "We give her a hard time about that. We'll ask her if we need to make her mad before we start playing."

Boyd is notorious for stepping her game up at the end of matches, and Saturday night was no different. Eight

of her team-leading 12 kills came in the final two sets, both of which were won by VCU.

"I wish I knew," said Boyd on why she plays so well at the end of games. "I guess there's a sense of urgency with me so if I feel like my teammates aren't getting it done, and they need the extra push, I feel like I have to exert that little bit of more energy to get everybody going."

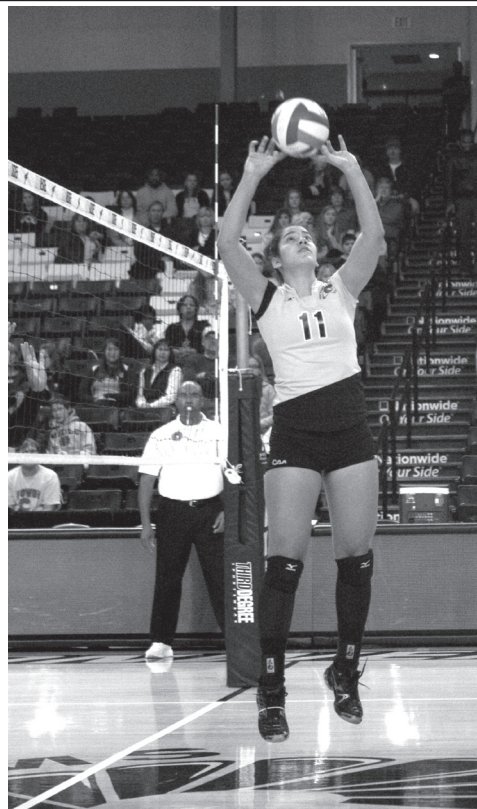
Another one of VCU's sparkplugs was Marisa Low, whose 15 digs were second on the team only behind Amanda Friday's 27. Low's biggest contribution was a dig that came early in the fourth set with Georgia St. still hanging around. On one of the longest rallies of the entire match, Low kept the ball alive, laying out with a full extension and completely sacrificing her body. VCU would go on to win the point and gained an emotional boost that would carry them through the rest of the set.

After Low's diving effort, the Rams would win the next five consecutive points and cruise to their third consecutive CAA Tournament appearance.

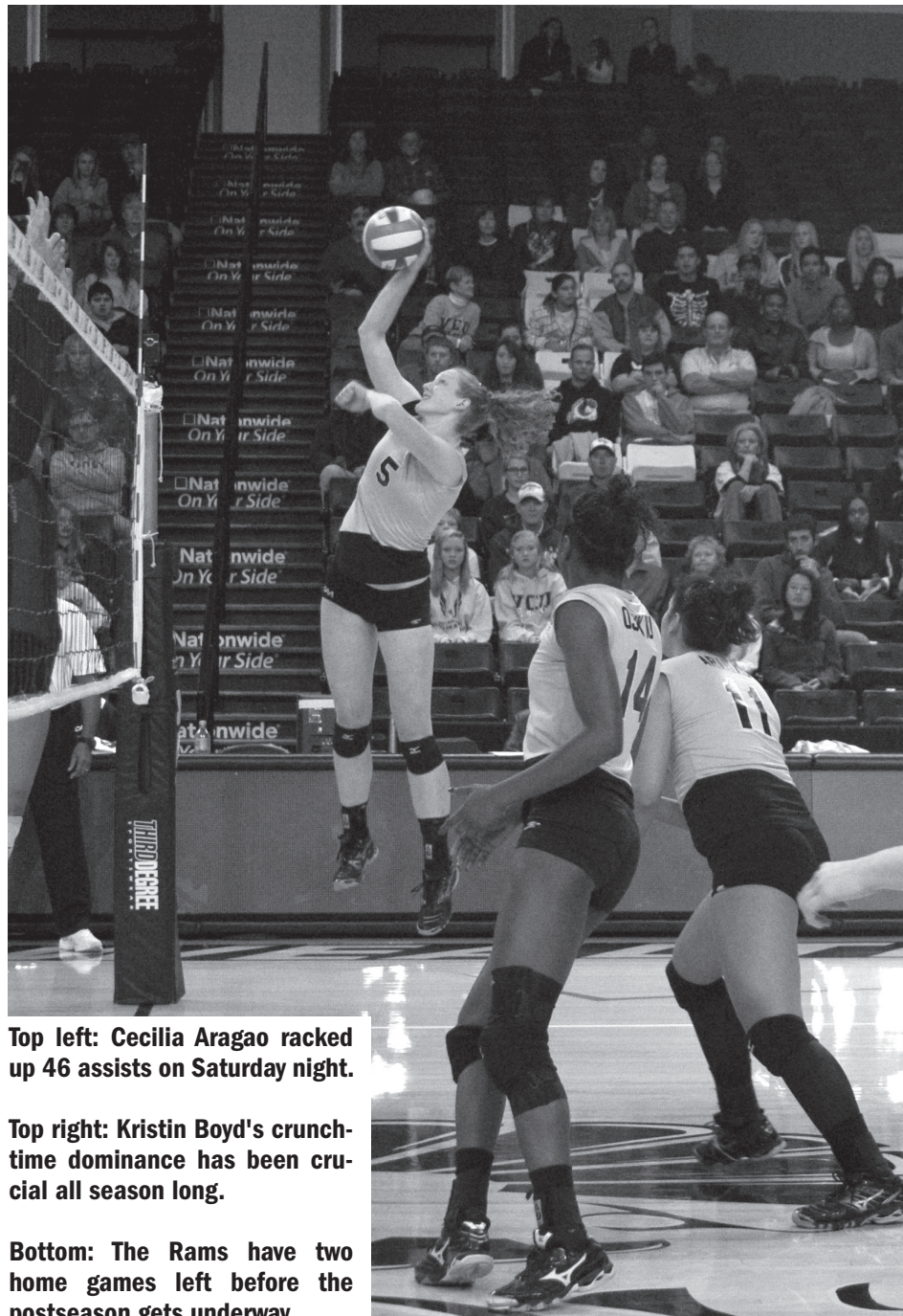
Finley said that he doesn't think the team is playing to their full potential, but they're well on their way.

"We've had our ups and downs this year," he said. "But you want to peak at the end of the season, and we're getting there."

Although VCU has clinched a slot in the tournament, they still have two regular-season matches left before the postseason begins. They will play host to William & Mary on Nov. 10 in their final conference game before playing Norfolk State on Nov. 15 for senior night. The playoffs begin just five days later. **CT**



PHOTOS BY AMBER-LYNN TABER



Top left: Cecilia Aragao racked up 46 assists on Saturday night.

Top right: Kristin Boyd's crunch-time dominance has been crucial all season long.

Bottom: The Rams have two home games left before the postseason gets underway.

PHOTO BY CHRIS CONWAY



VCU still has a shot at an at-large bid into the NCAA Tournament.

Women's soccer drops overtime heartbreaker in CAA Championship

Adam Stern
Executive Editor

A few weeks back, VCU's women's soccer team defeated William & Mary 1-0 to hand the nationally-ranked Tribe their first loss in 10 matches.

Sunday, in the CAA Championship game in Williamsburg, the Tribe returned the favor.

William & Mary defeated VCU 1-0 through a golden goal in the third minute of overtime after the two teams battled to a scoreless draw in regulation.

And just like VCU's win versus William & Mary on Oct. 23, the Tribe's victory halted the Rams' unbeaten streak at 10 games and means they will have to rely on an at-large bid if they are to make it into the NCAA Tournament.

VCU freshman Cristin Granados rifled off a career-high seven shots in the match, but none of them were able to find the back of the net. In the 103rd minute, William & Mary player Mallory Schaffer scored the game-winning goal to end the Rams' hopes and gave the Tribe their first CAA title since 2003.

Balanced scoring is the name of the game for women's basketball

PHOTO BY CHRIS CONWAY



Beth Cunningham's high expectations are a personal challenge to Courtney Hurt.

Jim Swing
Sports Editor

Head coach Beth Cunningham believes Courtney Hurt can be better.

Hold the phone. Hurt had possibly the greatest individual campaign in VCU women's basketball history in a 2010-2011 season that saw her lead the nation in rebounding (25.4 rpg) and double-doubles (25) while being the second-leading scorer in the nation (23.2 ppg). She was named First Team All-CAA to go with honorable mention Associated Press All-America accolades.

Yet Cunningham believes Hurt can be better.

"As a coach coaching her day in and day out, there's always things that we're working on for her to improve," Cunningham said. "I think that the deceiving thing is her numbers statistically maybe aren't quite where they were last year. People might think she's not having quite as good of a year when, as a coach, I think she can have an even better year."

On an experienced team that returns four seniors and two juniors, Cunningham hopes to see a more balanced scoring effort rather than just relying on Hurt to put up huge numbers every night. For that to happen, VCU will rely heavily on senior guard Andrea Barbour. The 5-foot-10-inch transfer from Patrick Henry Community College was a pleasant surprise last season, finishing second on the team in scoring (16.3 ppg) after sitting out the first semester due to ineligibility. Barbour and Hurt combined for a perfect one-two punch from

the inside out.

Joining Hurt in the frontcourt this season will be senior Chelsea Snyder, who started in all 31 games last season. In her first three seasons at VCU, the 6-foot-6-inch center has been seemingly insignificant. Snyder's biggest doubt has been her ability to haul in rebounds with two hands; however, she showed a glimpse of life in last season's CAA quarterfinals by grabbing nine boards.

And Cunningham expects big things out of big players.

"I think she gained a lot of valuable experience just having a first season where she actually was on the floor playing quite a bit," Cunningham said. "So I think you build a lot of confidence, especially the way

she finished the season, and now being a senior with her presence."

The Rams' will have an overwhelming senior presence this season. Between Hurt, Barbour, Snyder and guard Jennifer Lane, VCU has the luxury of enjoying a variety of scorers.

"We always really have high expectations for our upperclassmen," Cunningham said, "especially our seniors."

This year's group of seniors has combined for 67 wins, one CAA Championship and two trips to the NIT.

They haven't been to the NCAA Tournament since they were freshman in 2009, and this year an encore is on the radar.

"This is a group that, as seniors, they want to go out having played in another NCAA Tournament," Cunningham said, "and doing something that we've never done before at VCU." **BT**

"I think she gained a lot of valuable experience just having a first season where she actually was on the floor playing quite a bit."



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Freshman Graham leads men's basketball with aggressiveness

Jim Swing
Sports Editor

There were times in Thursday night's win over California(Pn.) when Treveon Graham was the most aggressive player on the court.

It's more than likely the raucous crowd of 6,675 at the Siegel Center didn't even know his name when he walked onto the hardwood.

But it was only a matter of minutes before they found out.

Just over a minute after he replaced Troy Daniels, Graham worked his way to the free throw line. The freshman guard wasn't afraid to shoot so he lobbed up a deep 3-pointer that sailed wide after he was slapped on the wrist.

His early aggressiveness signaled the type of night Graham had in store. The game-high 16 points and four rebounds kind of night that led VCU to a 71-48

win over California (Pa.).

"At first I came out with a little jitters because it was my first game," a soft-spoken Graham said. "But as the game went on I got comfortable in the game, and I just played."

Like any freshman in their debut game, the first-game jitters crawled through Graham's skin. But rather than moping around and dumping the ball off on his teammates, he didn't hesitate to take his chances shooting. In his first six minutes on the court, Graham took to 3-point territory three times, getting to the foul line on his first shot and missing the next two.

But that didn't deter his game. Toward the end of the first half, Graham battered and bruised his way in between two Vulcan attackers. After missing a layup, Graham hauled in his own rebound in front of two defenders before going back up with the ball and



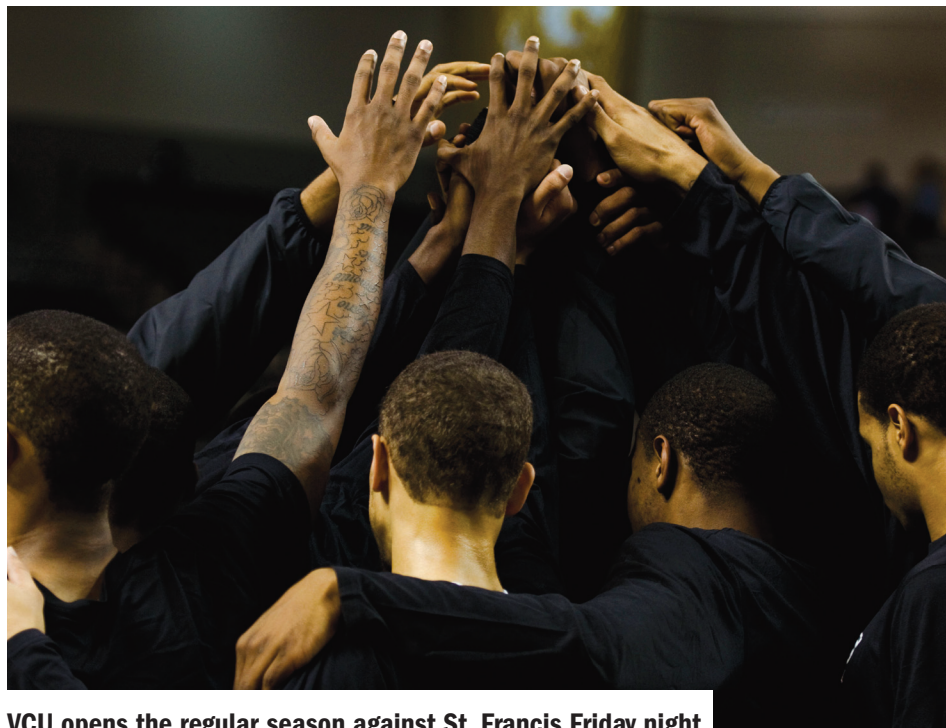
PHOTOS BY CHRIS CONWAY



Top right: Reco McCarter played 12 minutes in his first action with VCU.

Middle right: Treveon Graham's 16 points led the Rams on Thursday night.

Center: Rob Brandenburg is still battling for a spot in the starting lineup this season.



VCU opens the regular season against St. Francis Friday night.

earning a trip to the charity stripe.

"He's been amazing in practice. He crashes the glass well. He can defend well," senior Bradford Burgess said. "He's active on defense and offense. He's very aggressive on offense."

Graham's numbers could've been even better. He got to the free throw line six times, but only converted on 7-of-13 tries.

"He is very aggressive and if we can get him to go more than 1-for-2 from the line, he'd of had 20-plus points," VCU head coach Shaka Smart said jokingly.

In a new freshman class that boasts many unique characteristics, Graham has seemingly been left out of the conversation.

There's Teddy Okereafor with his English accent.

Jarred Guest with his Coach Smart-boasted rebounding abilities.

And most notably, Briante Weber and his relentless energy.

But that all changed Thursday night, when Graham took over as the go-to guy on a shortened staff.

"Today he was a sixth man," Smart said. "When you add those other three guys back into the mix, does he get the same amount of minutes? That's up to him if he really wants to battle."

Graham racked up 21 minutes, the most of any freshman on the roster Thursday night.

Smart has been asked the question time and time again: Who can be a secondary scorer to Bradford Burgess? If tonight is any indication of what Graham can do, Smart may have inched towards being able to answer that question.

"He's going to be able to score the basketball," Smart said. "I think he has the potential to be a big time scorer in this league and especially the way we play."

But for now, only time will tell. **CT**

SPECTRUM

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Dance alumna debuts in 'The Lion King' • 12

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Faculty 'Four Play' exhibit leaves you wanting more • 13

Theater review: Grease



Nick Bonadies
Spectrum Editor

Cory Johnson
Staff Writer

The lights come up on a soft grey-scale set. An archway of light illuminates a podium as a matronly Ms. Lynch welcomes the audience to Rydell High School. In the blink of an eye, teenagers in vividly fifties outfits rush the stage and the light show begins.

This weekend marked the opening of VCU's Mainstage production of "Grease," and it was a spectacle to say the least.

Though the set and lights were outstanding, most of the acting, microphone work and singing lacked chutzpah: If you plan on going to see "Grease," be prepared for lots of cheese. As a spectacle show there is a layer of campiness that can be expected, but this production holds nothing back. From the stunning costumes to the sideshow numbers from supporting characters, this show is full of flash.

The lighting helps beautifully with this, as it is one of the most elaborate aspects of the show. Swirls, spirals and circles of green, pink and blue dance around the stage and the audience. All of this is framed by a giant archway of light that changes color to match the mood of the scene.

The choreography makes up some of the most exciting parts of the musical numbers. The confidence and ability that the talent brings to the scenes are mystifying.

But a musical is not simply its peripherals; there is acting and singing involved, too. That is where the performance lacks.

There are some great, standout performances: Cat Wheelahan, third-year theater performance major, is pure and relatable as the female lead, Sandra D. - and she can sing stunningly. Katie Ford (Rizzo), Andrew Sease (Danny) and Jes-

sica Johns (Ms. Lynch) are also brilliant actors - especially Ford, who has one of the most emotionally sincere scenes of the show.

But none of the main characters were actually the best performer in the production.

Only mentioned as an ensemble member, Antonio Tillman stole the show - honing the outlandish performance of James Brown or Otis Redding, Tillman is fully committed to his songs and character. He plays with the audience, banters with the actors on stage and hypes himself - "Do ya like my suit, y'all?" His part came to fill more than twenty minutes of the two-hour show, and received the most applause of opening night.

He is so much fun that it's sad when he leaves. The crowd stood and clapped at the end of his first number as if saying, "Why can't you be in the show more?"

Outside of the aforementioned actors, the rest of the cast is slightly forgettable. It's easy to get lost in the shuffle in a two-hour musical with near-constant musical numbers, and most of the cast does. Intonation issues and a general lack of vocal standouts make most of the show fun to look at but not to listen to.

Some of the cast even looked as if they were phoning in their musical numbers, and punctuated each lyric with a look of disinterest.

The microphone work didn't help - balance and mixing during entrances and musical numbers was jarringly poor, but compensated for with the dancing, which was, again, on point.

If you love a good amount of flash and fun, "Grease" is for you; just be ready to wait for a song that matches the brilliance of everything else going on - or at least go to see Tillman bring the house down. **CJ**

VCU Theatre put their own spin on their production of "Grease," the 1971 musical made famous by John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John. The VCU production premiered on Friday, Oct. 4.

PHOTOS BY AMBER-LYNN TABER

Food review | Laurel Street Special: IHOP Express exactly what it sounds like

Nick Bonadies
Spectrum Editor

Laurel Street Special

This Commonwealth Times food review is the first of three courses in the Laurel Street Special—extensive review and commentary of the new dining options in VCU's Laurel Street Dining Center, served up by the most qualified and discerning of CT gourmands. Check out additional reviews of Croutons, Salads & Wraps and Raising Cane's in each Monday CT leading up to Thanksgiving.

Any student who has yet to try their swipes on a meal from the Laurel Street Dining Center – fresh from its grand opening on Oct. 24 – might wonder how IHOP Express, the International House of Pancake's venture into takeout, measures up to an actual IHOP.

Certainly most of the trappings are here: The Laurel Street Dining Center offers cozy cheap-chic booths that sing against your thighs as you sit, just like the real thing; the syrup flows from plastic tubs instead of plastic jugs, but still flows plentifully, provided you collect enough tubs at the register.

And perhaps the integral facet of the IHOP experience – squatting a booth and nursing coffee until the sun rises – is present to an extent. IHOP Express doesn't close its counter until 3 a.m., though the smell of unlimited coffee and buttery fresh-made pancakes is here replaced by the distinctive aroma of a

high school cafeteria.

Ambience aside, Laurel Street's IHOP offers a diverse-enough smattering of the “real” IHOP menu that, sure enough, tastes remarkably like it came from a “real” IHOP.

The difference lies in plastic trays vs. ceramic plates, and perhaps fact that the food arrives lukewarm during the late-night rush. But for a swipe's worth, IHOP's offerings are a decent amount of food, with all the delicious grease and sugar any IHOP regular has come to know and cherish.

One reviewer described the ham and cheese omelette as “suitably warm,” with the cheese melted to an appropriate degree in the omelette's goopy center. Another meal combo, a “French Toast Stack,” drew comments such as “the greasiest sausage I have ever consumed,” which may or may not have been a criticism; the toast itself would “be great if it were warmer” but satisfyingly moist. (Both of the aforementioned items are available for a swipe.)

Fittingly for the International House of Pancakes, the pancakes themselves are evenly-mixed, fluffy and otherwise delightful with a tub or two of “old-fashioned” pancake syrup.

Resist the temptation to envision a vast vat of eggs in the kitchen waiting for consumption: For the collegiate midnight munchies, IHOP Express is as good a choice as any to use a meal plan. If it really bothers you, take it home to the microwave. **CT**

Compiled from Spectrum staff reports



Top: IHOP Express opened Oct. 24.

Left: French toast stacks: two pieces of french toast served with two pieces of bacon or sausage and two eggs served any style

Right: Bacon and beef cheeseburger served with fries and fruit

Left: Ham and cheese or garden omelet served with two pancakes

Right: Pancakes

Right: 16 oz coffee

Left: Two pieces of sausage, bacon, and scrambled eggs



VCU Dance alumna makes Broadway debut

Mark Robinson
Assistant Spectrum Editor

For VCU alumna Donna Michelle Vaughn, a childhood dream has come true.

A 2006 graduate of VCU's department of dance and choreography, Vaughn, 27, recently made her Broadway debut as a member of the ensemble in the award-winning musical "The Lion King."

"It has been amazing," Vaughn said. "I can actually say that I'm living my dream."

Vaughn was enrolled in her first ballet and tap dancing class at the age of 3. By 8, she knew dance was her passion.

She cultivated her talent as a teenager at the Baltimore School for the Arts in Maryland before transferring to the Carver School of the Arts in Georgia her sophomore year.

After graduating from high school,

Vaughn turned down a contract with Ailey 2, the second company of the New York-based Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater; instead, she came to Richmond.

"When I got to VCU, I wasn't sure it was the place for me because it was more modern based and I was coming from more of a ballet based world," Vaughn said. "It forced me to become more versatile."

Despite her initial doubts, Vaughn became a standout in the department and participated in numerous student-choreographed productions as well as departmental features like "Between Ocean and Sky" that traveled around the country.

After completing her degree at VCU, Vaughn toured nationally and internationally with contemporary dance companies Hubbard Street Dance Chicago and DanceWorks Chicago.

In 2008, while visiting her mother in

New York, Vaughn auditioned for "The Lion King" on a whim. Six months later, she became an original cast member in the ensemble of "The Lion King" Las Vegas production. She was transferred to New York this past summer.

James Frazier, chairman of the department of dance and choreography at VCU and Vaughn's former teacher, was not surprised to hear she made it to Broadway.

"She could have done anything," Frazier said. "Donna already had a really high level of ability before she even came to VCU, and she continued to work at that level to continue to improve and go beyond."

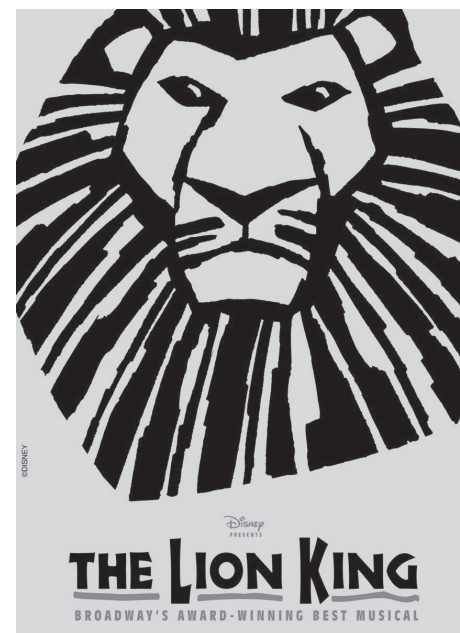
Scott Putnam, Vaughn's adviser during her time at VCU, believes her professional success shows the value of studying different styles of dance in a contemporary department.

"It shines a beautiful light on the department for incoming students to realize that this is a place where they can get a great education and be successful. For her, laying the groundwork and walking that path will inspire future dancers," Putnam said.

"It says a lot about Donna, but it also says a lot about what you're getting and

what you're experiencing in the educational process at VCU."

In its 30th-anniversary season, VCU Dance has achieved record enrollment with more than 100 total dance majors. **CT**



VCU Dance alumna Donna Vaughn joined the New York cast of "The Lion King" this past July.

THE SPECTRUM



THE SPECTRUM SCRUFF SEEKS FEMALE PARTICIPANTS

Contact robinsonmw@vcu.edu to have your No-Shave celebration tracked in the CT.

Mark Robinson
Assistant Spectrum Editor

In honor of No-Shave November, The CT will track the beard cultivation progress of four VCU students who will abandon their razors for the entire month. Each issue during the one-month, hair growing bonanza will document their progress.

DAY 7



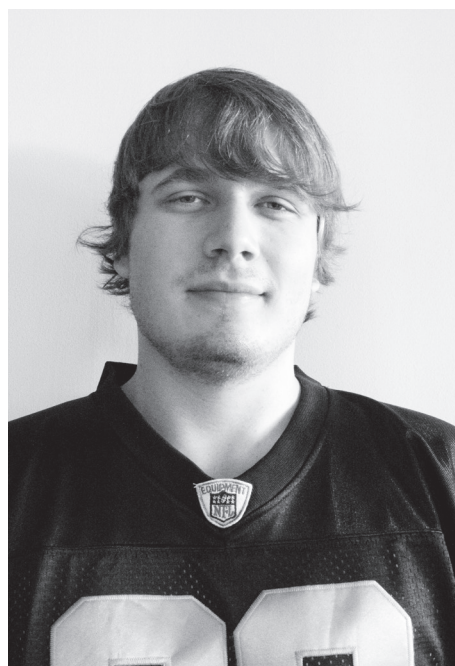
AARON MAUCK
THEATRE – FRESHMAN

"It's growing slow but steady. This is the point where I'd start to shave it. Where it goes from here, I don't know."



JAMES PATTERSON
AFO – FRESHMAN

"It's coming in quicker than I thought and I think it'll come in thicker too, hopefully."



TRAVIS RISINGER
MARKETING – SOPHOMORE

"Normally at this point I would shave the sides and keep the goatee, but I'm letting it all flow. You've got to keep the flow."

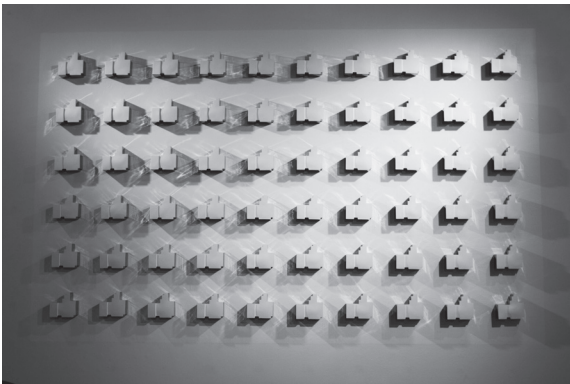


SEAN WILLIAMS
PSYCHOLOGY – SENIOR

"Since I've had a full beard for so long, it's comfy for me. My homeostasis is full beard, so getting back to it is nice."



PHOTOS BY AMBER-LYNN TABER



Clockwise from top left:
"Pearl necklace" by Stephanie Voegele; pho-
 tos by Stephanie Voegele
"Appalachian Micro-still" by Christopher
 McElroy
"Pearl Strand" by Stephanie Voegele
"Untitled" by Emily Hermant
"Ideally, It Would Be" by Ariel Brice

Campus gallery showcases craft and material faculty work

Samantha Foster
 Contributing Writer

The Fine Arts Building Gallery is currently showcasing the art of four VCU faculty members.

Playing off the number of artists in the gallery, the show is called "Four Play" and includes the art of Ariel Brice, Emily Hermant, Christopher McElroy and Stephanie Voegele.

Brice, who currently teaches in the clay concentration of craft and material

studies, describes her art as "the overlap between craft, design and art with humorous and thoughtful deconstructions of utility."

Her piece displays her humorous side. "Ideally, It Would Be" is a depiction of dozens of green, red and silver thumbs-up "like" symbols from Facebook.

Hermant crafted a sizeable wooden sculpture for the center of the gallery. Her work is "continually drawn to themes and modes of working in which simplicity serves as basis for complex,

layered work."

Hermant is teaching in the fiber concentration of the craft and material studies this year.

McElroy describes his art as "an investigation of bodily function and awareness in relation to degrees of psychological comfort and sanctuary."

McElroy contributed a collection of objects, all thought at some point to bestow the power of invisibility, including an Appalachian micro-still.

This year, McElroy is teaching in the

glass concentration of craft and material studies.

Voegele describes her art as aiming "to unify what lives beneath with what is worn on the surface."

Her pieces in "Four Play" include a collection of three rubber sculptures of women's upper bodies adorned with strings of pearls and photographs of the busts on their models.

Voegele is teaching in the metals concentration of the craft and material studies this year. **CT**

OPINION

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Does Obama student-loan reform go too far? • 15

Board of Social Services neglecting their duties



ILLUSTRATION BY HANNAH SWANN

Katherine Johnson
Columnist

Virginia's Board of Social Services recently made the decision to push back a briefing that concerned a ban on adoption agencies from discrimination based on sexual orientation to December.

Originally, the board was scheduled

to hear the briefing in October, but the change in date makes it seem as if the state is trying to avoid the issue of allowing gay couples to adopt.

It's clear that this is a case of people playing politics for self-interest.

The board is made up of members selected by Gov. Bob McDonnell, a Republican, whose members are of similar

political background. Their preconceived conservative leanings are affecting their decision before even hearing the briefing. Those who sit on the board should remember to fulfill their duties in providing homes to children, rather than the Governor's wishes or their personal beliefs.

This is not an issue that the board can continue to ignore. According to

the Family Equality Council, 1,300 kids in Virginia are eligible for adoption. If there's a loving, permanent home available to these children, shouldn't they be given it regardless of the sexual orientation of the adopter?

Children in the system are the ones being hurt should the board not reconsider the ban on gay couples adopting

children. As it is, there's a shortage of heterosexual families willing to take in foster care children or wanting to adopt.

The debate surrounding this issue is based largely on religion. Board members should not factor this into their decision due to the separation of church and state. Some faith-based adoption agencies, such as the Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Arlington, claim that by letting a gay couple adopt they're going against their "consciences and creeds." By opening adoptions up to a larger number of people, however, the children in the system clearly benefit.

Can anyone reasonably argue that the parenting of a gay couple isn't as good as that of a couple in a "traditional marriage"? In a society where divorce, separation and single parenting are common, kids should be placed in a stable, loving home. If the best candidate happens to be a gay couple, so be it.

Kids who are placed in a loving home with a stable lifestyle are going to excel and adjust regardless of their new family's sexual orientation. Since it's the department's goal to "help them live their best lives," they should pursue this and leave sexual orientation out of

the decision. All candidates should be given equal consideration when placing a child in a home and should be selected based on the best qualifications. The welfare of the child should be the state's number-one priority, while politics should be left out.

Last year, nearly 2,500 children were adopted; without the ban, that number could be doubled. At the end of the day, those on the Board of Social Services and the faith-based organizations that support the current ban don't know what it's like to live without a family. Think about the children. **CT**

the
ct

ADAM STERN SHANE WADE
Executive Editor Opinion Editor

Obama's student-loan reform ignites college debate

Shane Wade
Opinion Editor

The future of a college graduate doesn't look bright.

Although it's estimated that nearly 60 percent of future jobs will require more than a high-school degree, the shadow of student debt is sure to overshadow graduates and plague students. Just by the end of this year, American student-loan debt will surpass credit-card debt at \$1 trillion dollars.

That's nearly half the cost of a Kardashian wedding.

The issue of student-loan debt is intricate and has long-term implications on the national economy. Even if a student is able to repay his or her loan within a 20-year period, by the time you're 20, you've probably got a family to support and retirement to save for, making financing your children's education a nightmare.

Fortunately, there is help along the way, in the form of student-loan reformation, courtesy of President Obama. Obama's "Pay As You Earn" plan is an income-based student-loan reform that caps the amount graduates must pay for their loans at 10 percent of their discretionary income. It makes consolidating

federal student loans simplified and forgives the balance of a borrower's debt after 20 years of repayment.

In short, there's little in the form of immediate relief, but the legislation strikes at the core of the student-debt problem and paves a way for future economic growth by allowing graduates with families the opportunity to budget their child's education.

You'd be hard-pressed to find a student today that opposes such measures. But when Obama made a speech at the University of Colorado, he asserted his belief that government "should be doing everything we can to put a college education within reach for every American." I'm fairly liberal when it comes to politics and would normally agree with such a statement, but I couldn't help but find myself at odds with that assertion.

Whether or not we should encourage more students to attend college is a complex issue. Colleges are already dealing with overcrowding and student apathy. Increases in applicants will only encourage colleges to let in more students, even if only by small increments every year. Do we really need more students coming into classrooms, wasting valuable time and space?

But desire for students, whether it is

a good decision for them to attend college or not, cannot be blatantly ignored. College is a time for personal growth, self-exploration and empowerment. Even if you don't complete college, you learn valuable, long-term lessons and make invaluable connections. An increased amount of Americans attending colleges will lead to a better-informed populous that's better equipped to make smart financial and personal decisions.

The student-loan reform effectively meets the medium between those two extremes: It benefits students and graduates without much negative recourse to loaning institutions and doesn't incentivize indecisive students to pursue the college education that they would have otherwise abandoned by providing short-term relief.

I haven't personally come to a conclusion as to whether I agree with that statement or not, but I do feel that the president, by making that remark, has allowed Americans to engage in an under-discussed conversation about the value of a college education. **CT**

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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 to the editor can be sent to editor@commonwealthtimes.org

COMICS - Trying Too Hard "#Shoeproblems" by Andy Kay





Make it your gameplan.

**Complete Rams coverage
from The CT.**

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