

INSIDE:

SPORTS: Where have the warriors gone? p. 6

OPINION: Death penalty not the best option p. 2

FEATURES: AIDS exhibit at Pack Place p. 4

COMICS: Soap Summary p. 8

Feb 9, 1995

The Blue

BANNER

"We must combine the toughness of the serpent and the softness of the dove, a tough mind and a tender heart."—Martin Luther King, Jr.

WEATHER: Mostly cloudy with a chance of light snow. Highs in 30s. Lows in teens.

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Mountain Trace Resident Says Man He Saw Night Of Fire Is Not Accused Murderer Police: Link Between Fatal Asheville Fires And Mountain Trace Fire Not Ruled Out

Will Rothschild
Staff Writer

A UNCA student and Mountain Trace Apartment resident says the man he saw minutes before a fire broke out in his building Dec. 11 is not Jamie Lamont Smith, the man Asheville police charged last week with two counts of murder and arson in connection with two different fires at local apartment complexes.

Asheville police and fire department investigators are yet to charge anyone in connection with the Dec. 11 Mountain Trace break-in and fire, and say they are not ruling out any possibilities, even if Jon Wolfe, a 21-year-old UNCA junior, says the man he saw just before a fire broke out in his neighbor's apartment was not Smith.

Wolfe said he has not been taken to a lineup in an attempt to identify the man he saw that night, just moments before the fire broke out. Wolfe did, however, say he does not think the man he saw that

night was Smith, who was arrested Jan. 27.

"Do you mean the guy who has been breaking in, killing and burning to destroy the evidence?," Wolfe said Monday. "No, lord no that wasn't him. I don't think so. I wouldn't say that... I don't think they are [the same person]. This guy was a shorter guy and I only saw him for like ten seconds and when you're not thinking about something you don't pay attention. I really didn't get a good look at him."

On Jan. 30, WYFF TV Channel 4 started its 6 p.m. newscast with a story on the possible link between Smith and the Mountain Trace fire, which occurred 10 days before the first fire Smith is charged with setting, a Dec. 21 fatal blaze at a Montford apartment complex.

Asheville police Lt. Ross Robinson, who is heading the ongoing Smith investigations, would not comment in detail on the status of the Mountain



A couple enters Mountain Trace Apartments where UNCA houses some of its resident students. Photo by Kara Merz

Trace investigation.

"Just to be honest with you, I think that [the Mountain Trace break-in and fire] will be a matter the DA will address at some future time in front of the grand jury," Robinson said Tuesday. "But we are not through investigating in that neighborhood at this point. Until we feel we are at a completion point in the investigation, there won't be any charges filed anyway."

Robinson also would not confirm nor rule out Smith or James Damon Davidson, charged along with Smith in the Dec. 21 fire at Grace Apartments on Chestnut Street, as suspects in the Mountain Trace fire.

"Our policy and our practice is not to name suspects," Robinson said. "I can't say that they are suspects and I can't say that we have eliminated them either. We are assembling the case prosecution summary now and anticipate that it could go

Please see "Fire," page 10

UNCA Professor's Childhood Friend Is Executed

Chris Small
Staff Writer

UNCA Assistant Professor of Psychology Pamela Laughon visited with convicted murderer and rapist Kermit Smith the Monday before his execution by lethal injection at North Carolina Central Prison in Raleigh.

"All of us knew that there was something not right about him," said Laughon who grew up with Smith, and went to the same high school.

Smith, 37, was pronounced dead at 2:12 a.m. January 24. He was convicted of the rape and murder of Wheelie Collins, who was kidnapped from North Carolina Wesleyan College along with two other cheerleaders, according to an article in the January 25 issue of the Asheville Citizen-Times.

Smith was sentenced to death in 1981.

His trial lasted four days, but the appeals lasted 14 years, the Associated Press reported.

"He wasn't aggressive [in school]. He was not hitting people, spitting at people, punching people. Those kids people will send to a mental health center very very fast," said Laughon.

Everyone picked on Smith, but because he made very good grades, didn't show much emotion, and never retaliated, nobody was scared of him or referred him to treatment in high school, according to Laughon.

"He [Smith] took out his whole lifetime of anger on one single innocent victim, and he said that many many times over the last few months," said Laughon.

Smith gave permission for Laughon to talk to her students about the case, and about him. He even wanted to talk to her students personally from prison somehow, but time ran out before this could be arranged, said Laughon.

When she came back from Central

Prison she walked them [the students] through the last two days of his life in some detail, including the execution.

"Most students in my classes were very mixed about the death penalty, said Laughon.

"I wouldn't expect them to have well-defined ideas about what is a really gray area."

Many of Laughon's students came up to her later and told her that they had done much thinking and talking to people about the issue, and were appreciative that they had been prompted to think about something on a personal level that they had not thought about for a long time, said Laughon.

There was empathy from some students and others were still pro-death, even after doing much soul searching, said Laughon.

"The story I presented was a biased story. It was just his story," said Laughon.

"I tried to be real careful with my students that I was not whining for the criminal, that I fully understood there was another story, but the only access I had was to the criminal's side of the story."

Laughon stayed with Smith's mother

Please see "Execution," page 10

A Time To Remember Heritage

Christin Hall
Staff Writer

UNCA has numerous events planned in celebration of African-American Heritage Month, which lasts throughout the month of February. All of the events, which range from lectures to musical performances, will take place on campus, and most are free for anyone to attend.

Angela Mahdi, president of the African-American Student Association (AASA), said the importance of African-American Heritage Month is to educate people about a part of history that is often neglected.

African-American Heritage Month exists "because we get no African-American history in the public education system," said Mahdi. "We all need to remember the purpose of Black History Month and study the history."

Tim Martin, a senior, said it is valuable for African Americans to remember their roots and the struggles of their ancestors.

"Black History Month is important because it helps you realize what people before us had to go through to get to where we are now," said Martin.

Carolyn E. Briggs, UNCA's coordinator of multicultural affairs, said the first upcoming event is scheduled for Feb.

17. David DuBois, son of the late W.E.B. DuBois, will speak about the life and legacy of his father, Briggs said. The lecture will be held in Lipinsky Auditorium at 7 p.m.

W.E.B. DuBois was an influential pro-temper for racial equality during the early twentieth century, according to *The Humanities: Cultural Roots and Continuities, Volume Two*. In an excerpt from his *The Souls of Black Folks*, DuBois wrote about the goals of many of the people African American Heritage Month commemorates.

"He [the black man] would not Africanize America... He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism... He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American," DuBois wrote.

Briggs said the purpose of African-American Heritage Month, also called Black History Month, is "to celebrate and focus on contributions of black Americans."

According to Briggs, the origin of African American Heritage Month dates back to 1925 or 1926, when Carter G. Woodson, known as the "Father of Black History," received official approval to designate a Negro History Week. Over time, Briggs said, Negro History Week

Please see "History," page 10

THEFT AND VANDALISM IN NEW PARKING GARAGE ROB STUDENTS' SECURITY

Andrea Lawson
Staff Writer

Four cars were broken into in the new parking deck and one in a campus parking lot last Monday. Several students blame a lack of security for the incidents.

"It's not a matter of where you park here, it's the fact that there's no security at night and there's nothing that can be done about it," said Richard Evans, a senior and literature major. "It's in no way the security's fault, it's a lack of security."

The break-ins began Monday afternoon in parking lot seven, located across from the Ramsey Library construction site. According to UNCA public safety reports, Jennifer Davis, a sophomore accounting major, discovered that her car window had been broken and a portable compact disc player had been stolen.

The parking deck break-ins began late Monday night. Evans said that he left his car in the deck at around 2:00 p.m. and was notified of the crime at 11:30 p.m. Public safety reports stated that damages to the vehicle included a broken driver's side window and window frame. Approximately \$2900 in property was stolen, including a stereo system and \$260 cash.

"It [the break-in] was done in a manner that would take time to do," said Evans. "It's not just like going in there and ripping out a stereo. It had to take at least 20 to 30 minutes."

Evans said that he thinks the person responsible for the crime was traveling on foot.

"They stole my wallet out of my car, but they threw it under somebody's car," said Evans. "That means they were on foot for at least part of the distance."

Items also were stolen from a vehicle belonging to Chris Brooker, a freshman. A passerby noticed a broken sliding door window in Brooker's van at

around 11:30 p.m. A CB radio was stolen from the vehicle, as well as the knobs from the van's radio.

"This has happened to me before, not here, so I really didn't get that mad," said Brooker. "It's just a major inconvenience."

Brooker said that the security officers were helpful, but additional security is needed.

"The security was more than helpful, but there just wasn't enough of it," said Brooker. "If the guy who was taking my report wasn't out on the streets, who is? It's a shame that they build a \$5 million building and they can't afford to put in a couple thousand dollars worth of cameras to protect the cars. Unless they put cameras in there, I'll never park in there again."

Two other students' cars also sustained damage. Cathleen Braddock, a junior psychology and philosophy major, was informed around 11:30 p.m. that her passenger side rear window had been broken and the convertible top damaged. The other student was informed around 1 a.m. that his

passenger window had been broken. Nothing was stolen from the vehicles.

Jeffrey Van Slyke, director of public safety, said that a man was seen running out of parking lot seven towards Sevier Street at about 1:00 a.m. According to public safety reports, a white male, 6'0", 180 pounds, medium build, wearing a white ball cap and a blue-green jacket was seen by two witnesses. The area was searched by an officer, but no one was found. Van Slyke said that the description "could fit just about anybody."

Van Slyke said that public safety officers patrol campus every night, but it is easy for break-ins to occur.

"Even as much as we monitor [the campus] at night and patrol, they obviously could be hiding anywhere and know our whereabouts to know exactly when to strike."

Please see "Theft," page 10