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# THE CHRONICLE

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## A GREETING FROM SANTA



Photo by Kevin Walker

Santa Claus waves to little Sienna Liles Friday night at the city's tree lighting ceremony in Corpening Plaza. Holding the little girl is her aunt, Debbie Gough. Hundreds of people attended the ceremony, which also featured music, food and special guests. To read more about the event and other holiday activities that took place over the weekend, see page C1.

## Chief says residents can trust department

New case has some wondering if police are overzealous in their work

BY T. KEVIN WALKER  
THE CHRONICLE

Police Chief Pat Norris defended her department last week amid new allegations that a former detective may have withheld evidence in a 10-year-old investigation that led to a black man being convicted of brutally beating a white woman.

The brutal beating of Jill Marker in 1995 has come back to haunt the department after a series of articles in the Winston-Salem Journal contained statements from the lead detective in the case, Don Williams, that he held back information from the defense team of Calvin Smith, the man who was charged and convicted of Marker's beating. Smith has always maintained his innocence. In the Journal series Williams, who is now retired from the department, also said that he was encouraged to withhold some of his investigation by Assistant District Attorney Eric Saunders, who denied that charge in a Journal article.

It is the second time in less than a year that the actions of police and prosecutors have come under close scrutiny. Law enforcement is still trying to gain public trust after the release a year ago of Darryl Hunt, an African-American who spent nearly 20 years in jail for the rape and murder of Deborah Sykes, a white newspaper copy editor. Hunt was released from prison after DNA taken from the crime scene matched up with another man.



Police Chief Pat Norris has been head of the department for less than a year.

Hunt supporters had always believed in his innocence and accused the police and prosecutors of ignoring evidence that pointed to Hunt's innocence.

Perhaps fearing that lingering questions about the Marker case would become another debacle like the Hunt case, Norris and District Attorney Tom Keith wasted little time before calling in the State Bureau of Investigation to look into the claim that Williams withheld evidence. Norris and Keith explained why they took this action during a joint news conference last week.

See Police on A10

## Homebuyers beware

### Legal Aid helps woman keep her house

BY COURTNEY GAILLARD  
THE CHRONICLE

Grady and Pearl Mills never missed paying a house payment in 20 years. They bought their home on Lansing Drive in 1983 from a private seller, who agreed to pay the bank that held the mortgage in Texas. Even after Mr. Mills' death in 1999, Mrs. Mills continued to make every payment on time.

But Michael Mills knew something had gone awry the day sheriff's deputies arrived at his mother's home questioning the whereabouts of Deborah Thomas, the widow of the man the Millses were buying their house from. The Millses' worst fears were realized when they found out that the mortgage had not been paid in nine months. Eighty-year-old

Pearl Mills was days away from being evicted from her home even though Thomas insisted there was no foreclosure pending.

"My mom's money (was being taken) and wasn't (being) sent to (the bank)," said Michael Mills, who is a local contractor. "By the time I had found out anything, we had three or four days before a foreclosure was coming on the house."

The Millses say they were able to get in contact with Thomas, who they say assured them that everything was taken care of as far as the payments were concerned. The Chronicle tried to contact Thomas for this story. She could not be reached by phone or at rental properties she owns. In fact, Liberty Heights, a boarding house



Gottsegen

See House on A9



Pearl Mills and her son, Michael, stand on the front porch of their Lansing Street home.

## Watt says with new senator CBC can make inroads

Local congressman is unanimously elected to head caucus

BY T. KEVIN WALKER  
THE CHRONICLE

Rep. Mel Watt said that he was humbled by the unanimous vote Monday by his colleagues that will make him the next chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus.

Watt - a six-term member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Charlotte - will take over the chairmanship from Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-Md.) on Jan. 4.



Watt

Around that same time, Watt said, the 43-member caucus will hold a retreat to formally organize an agenda for the upcoming congressional session. Watt said it would be premature for him to talk about the agenda issues he would like to see the caucus pursue.

"My role is to understand what the priorities are of the caucus and to organize the caucus in a way that maximizes the opportunity for us to be successful in achieving those priorities," he said by phone from his Washington office Monday. "It is not about Mel Watt's agenda as much as it is about listening."

See Watt on A11

## Local man steps out on faith with new Afrocentric political magazine

BY T. KEVIN WALKER  
THE CHRONICLE

At 36, Lawrence Long Jr. isn't old enough to remember the time when Malcolm X marched, Martin preached and Rosa wouldn't budge. Yet Long is hoping that he can help to reawaken the black consciousness that spurred the Civil Rights Movement through the pages of SoulTic, an ambitious political magazine he founded. The magazine's name is a play on the word politic.

"Life experience has taught



Long



me that politics affects our lives every day as blacks," Long said. "A lot of people in our community don't understand

politics. People perish by having a lack of knowledge. (SoulTic) is a source of knowledge."

The magazine had its coming-out party Saturday night at Meta's Catered Affair. More than a dozen of Long's friends, family members and supporters came out to help celebrate the release of the first issue - 40 slick, color pages of political commentary diced with a pinch of arts, business and religion.

A city native, Long said he first came up with the idea for the magazine three years ago. The idea was God-inspired, he said. "It was a vision," Long said. "I saw it as clearly as I am seeing you right now."

With no political, journalistic or graphic design experience, Long truly stepped out on faith to start the magazine. He says he keeps abreast of pressing issues through research and friendships he has formed with people around the globe. He wants to include

See SoulTic on A10



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