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Nifong's fate fuels justice debate

Was disgraced Durham DA sacrificed or rightly canned?

By Sommer Brokaw
THE TRIANGLE TRIBUNE

DURHAM — District Attorney Mike Nifong's suspension and subsequent disbarment has split the black community in the same manner of his prosecution of three Duke lacrosse players.

"These were a bunch of rich boys from the north who many people still believe did something to that young lady in that house, but because of their wealth, money and prestige they were allowed to walk away," said Victoria Peterson, a Durham activist and Nifong supporter.

"I think it was nothing but a lynching of a white man who stuck his neck out to try to make sure an African-American female got justice. I call it a white man's lynching because years ago in the South, whites who stuck their necks out for blacks were killed."

But Terry McMillan, who works in downtown Durham, said Nifong deserved to be disbarred because he withheld evidence to gain favor with the black community and win re-election.

"He was wrong from the jump," McMillan said. "And, what I'm mainly concerned about is the next woman who comes forward with an accusation of rape; how is she going to be perceived?"

Still, others agree at least partially with Peterson that, if not race, at least economics plays a role in justice.

"He has to be held responsible for what he's done, but, at the same time, we have to look and say, if we're going to do it to Nifong, then we also have to do it that way for those who do the same thing to many poor whites and blacks and Hispanics," said Jonathan Alston, a former Durham mayoral candidate.

"I think it all has to do with economics, whether you are black or white, you can buy justice."

Irving Joyner, a law professor at North Carolina Central University, agrees that money and power can affect justice.

"There is a disparity in the treatment directed to other prosecutors. Look at Darryl Hunt, Alan Gell, Ronald Cotton and other cases that involved minorities and poor people," he said.

"I don't think (Nifong's) transgressions were any worse than the Hunt case, the Gell case and the Cotton case."

But Joyner also said the

Please see IS NIFONG/3A



CHARLOTTE SCHOOL OF LAW

The Charlotte School of Law will move into a four-story, 102,000-square foot facility at the current Radiator Specialty Company site on Wilkinson Boulevard. The development is the latest high-profile facility to move to Wilkinson, once associated with blight and heavy industry.

Westside's story takes another turn

Law school's addition continues redevelopment drive

By Herbert L. White
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Northwest Charlotte is adding academia to its makeover.

The Charlotte School of Law will move next to Bryant Park at the intersection of Suttle Avenue and Wilkinson Boulevard, continuing a surge in development in the area.

Once associated with blight and heavy industry, Wilkinson has added several high-profile retail locales in the last five years, including a Wal-Mart Supercenter and Starbucks.

"This is great," said Mecklenburg County Commissioner Norman Mitchell, whose district includes Wilkinson Boulevard.

"When you get on this side of town, it's very beneficial. This is the new frontier."

The school will remain in its present location at 1211 East Morehead until the new building is completed next year.

The development, named after the city park on West Morehead, is the site of Radiator Specialty Company. A four-story, 102,000-square foot building will be built with classrooms, law library, offices, clinics, moot court, meeting space and student organization areas.

"We've worked very hard to secure a location that will best serve our current and future students," said Eugene Clark, dean of Charlotte School of Law SCHOOL/2A



Mitchell



MECKLENBURG COUNTY PARK AND RECREATION

Representatives from public agencies and non-profit community groups gathered last week for the opening of the new recreation center at Fairview Homes.

Rec center boosts Oaklawn communities

By Herbert L. White
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A recreation center is another step toward stronger communities at Double Oaks and Fairview Homes.

Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department and the Charlotte Housing Authority celebrate the opening of Oaklawn Recreation Center at Stroud Park Court last week, a milestone for both communities.

Once known as a breeding ground for poverty and crime, the new recreation center sits on a 2.2-acre site where once one of the largest public housing complexes in the city once stood.

The recreation center is the result of partnerships that changed the surrounding neighborhood. The neighborhood is now made up of new apartments, senior housing and single-family homes.

The 22,400 square foot recreation center cost \$3.3 million and includes a gymnasium, five classrooms, computer center, conference rooms, offices for community and government agencies, and day care center and Head Start program run by Bethlehem Center.

Most of the money for construction came from \$1.8 million in county bonds and certificates of participation and \$1.2 million HOPE VI grant.

Push to insure poorest children

N.C. House, Senate at odds over when — or if — to fund health care coverage

By Herbert L. White
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N.C. lawmakers and children's rights advocates are pushing the General Assembly to make health insurance for uninsured kids a budget priority.

North Carolina has the second largest slide in employer-based health insurance coverage in the U.S., leaving more than 264,000 without coverage and 87,000 without access to an affordable plan.

"Our health insurance system continues to falter, and close to 90,000 uninsured children are paying the price," said N.C. Rep. Verla Insko (D-Chapel Hill). "As a result, we are raising an unhealthy generation of children. We have at our fingertips a golden opportunity to rear the healthiest generation of children and give them the chance for success in school and in their life work."

Insko is a proponent of NC Kid's Care, a proposal to expand public health insurance coverage to children in families with incomes between 200 percent and 300 percent of the federal poverty guidelines.

Please see PUSH/3A



Insko

N.C. NAACP wants Raleigh to act on state's inequalities

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RALEIGH — The state chapter of the NAACP is calling on top state lawmakers to get moving on the group's legislative agenda, saying failure to address inequality creates an atmosphere where bias can flourish.

Officers of the civil rights group delivered a letter to Gov. Mike Easley, state Supreme Court Chief Justice Sarah Parker and leaders of the General Assembly in which they listed acts of racism across the state in recent months.

The lack of action on legislation related to bias creates an impression that the state is happy with the status quo, said the Rev. William Barber, president of the state chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

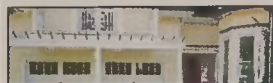
"When we fail to address these issues directly, we help create an atmosphere of acceptability, intended or unintended, to the radicals of racial supremacy," Barber said.

The state chapter unveiled its 14-point agenda at an event in February at the beginning of the legislative session. It was endorsed by more than 60 organizations, including black Masons, the Latino group El Pueblo, union organizers, and Green and Socialist party members.

The agenda endorsed issues ranging from expanding health care coverage to abolishing the death penalty.

The groups also asked lawmakers to provide more education money to comply with the Leandro school-funding lawsuit, create a "living wage" that would be several dollars more than the current minimum of \$6.15 per hour, and give collective bargaining rights to government employees.

Bills have been introduced to encompass most of those items, but only a few have received votes in committees or chambers.



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