

Craig school board feels the heat

A crowd of almost 100 citizens, many upset about news of recent departures of principals and teachers and of rumors of impending cutbacks, turned out at Craig County High School on Tuesday.

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A Cuppa Joe

Hot days intensify the haves, have-nots

No offense to Roanoke Valley dogs, but the dog days are here and it is so easy for some of us to take air conditioning for granted that we probably ought to stop and give thanks for it.

Then maybe we should contemplate what our lives would be like if, suddenly, AC became unavailable.

Scary thought, isn't it?



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My daughter, who is on vacation in South Carolina, told me by phone on Monday that rumor had the temperature there reaching 110 degrees.

That struck me as an exaggeration, but when a 19-year-old girl who has the ocean and a pool at her disposal says she is hot, you know the conditions are extreme.

Things are bad, man.

A friend of mine recalled growing up in the country and not minding the heat. He started despising hot weather when he served in Vietnam, where it was continuous.

He can't stand days like these, and neither can I.

Driving downtown on Saturday, I looked at old houses that showed no signs of having air conditioning or that were equipped with aged, sagging window units.

Naturally, those houses brought back memories of growing up in humid Baltimore, when the only AC in our house came from a gigantic Carrier window unit in my parents' bedroom.

On the most stifling nights, they allowed my brother and me to drag in mattresses and sleep in their room.

Next to basking in a cool mountain breeze, it was the best childhood sleep I ever had.

Some people aren't so lucky.

Imagine life during a heat wave in the poor sections of Roanoke.

How long would it take us to adjust to those conditions?

How happy would we look as we sat on our porches and hoped for a breath of wind?

My friend's recollections of life on the farm notwithstanding, most of us don't get used to hot weather, ever.

It feels worse as we age.

When I was young, window fans provided some relief.

Attic fans were a gift from God.

When my own family and I lived in Catawba, we sweltered during the hottest days, but the attic fan swirled the cool night air through our old house and had us scrambling for blankets by 3 a.m.

Now, my suburban house gets too cold on its lower level — frigid, in fact.

I often watch ballgames from beneath a quilt.

That may sound like the ultimate luxury, but I yearn for the return of fall, when temperatures refresh rather than exhaust us, when it's possible to sleep with the bedroom windows open and when, in one respect, at least, all God's children are equally comfortable.

BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY



ERIC BRADY | The Roanoke Times



JENNA DEUERSCHERL | The Roanoke Times

In the past three years, more than 700 volunteers with Friends of the Blue Ridge Parkway helped plant 2,000 saplings along Cotton Hill (above) in Southwest Roanoke County to preserve scenic views along the national park.

Seeds of the future

Volunteers hope that planting trees will save parkway views.

By Marvin T. Anderson

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Friends of the Blue Ridge Parkway is not having its usual fall planting this year, but Mark McClain has already begun to scope out endangered views in the Roanoke Valley portions of the national park.

McClain, president of the group's Roanoke Valley chapter, recently drove through the mountains on the parkway, observing the lush trees, wild animals and fields of blooming wildflowers. Then he got to the area around U.S. 220 in the Clearbrook section of Roanoke County — and saw construction sites.

With a large car dealership already there and a Wal-Mart superstore on the way, and with the National Park Service struggling from low funding and being short-staffed, McClain said it's more important than ever for volunteers to act to preserve parkway views.

"Because of financial constraints of the Park Service, people have to go out and do something," McClain said. "We can watch this become another Southern road or we can preserve something that can be natural history and human history."

After the valley's 28 parkway miles made a national list of 10 "last chance landscapes" in 2003, all six Friends chapters began to meet once a year with the Park Service to map out areas where scenic views are jeopardized by commercial and residential development.

In many cases, the scenery is impossible to protect.

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Former teacher sentenced to 15 years

Thomas Daniel Nuckles was convicted of sexually molesting a 4-year-old boy in April 2006 at his school.

By Mike Allen
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A Roanoke County judge sentenced a former day care teacher to serve 15 years in prison for sexually molesting a 4-year-old boy in April 2006.

Judge James Swanson said what



Thomas Nuckles
Will serve 15 years in prison for child molestation.

he found most disturbing about Thomas Daniel Nuckles' crime was the predatory manner in which he singled out a victim who was defenseless and unlikely to complain.

Despite his conviction for sodomy in March, Nuckles maintains he is innocent. He entered an Alford plea, meaning he did not admit guilt but chose not to risk a jury trial.

But the DNA evidence taken

from a stain on the boy's underwear overwhelmingly points to Nuckles. "As far as this court is concerned, his guilt has been determined," Swanson said.

After Tuesday's hearing, Nuckles' defense attorney, Joe Painter, said he wasn't surprised by the judge's sentence. "I think a jury would have probably given him a life sentence."

Although Nuckles, 49, has consistently said he did not commit the crime, he has not given an explanation for the DNA result, Painter said.

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Officials say shooting likely drug-related

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The victim of a weekend homicide in Roanoke was gunned down in a drug-related home invasion at his apartment building, prosecutors said Tuesday.

Friday night's shooting of Benjamin James Motley, 25, has aroused anxiety among residents of Brandon West Apartments, where neighbors found Motley lying in a breezeway with at least one gunshot wound.

"Initial indications are that it is going to be

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