

THE PRINCE GEORGE'S Sentinel

A Newspaper of Record

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Thursday, June 29, 2006

INSIDE

Largo HS principal under investigation

The county public schools system audit uncovered missing money, which was collected but never deposited into the school bank account.

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The art of puppetry

Circus, currently at the Puppet Co. at Glen Echo, is a perfect summer show. There's no plot and the show has no big lessons to teach.

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Bowie still searching for police chief

After voting to establish a city police department in Nov. 2005, the city of Bowie is still continuing its search for a police chief.

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Floods, Thunderstorms and Lightning

All thunderstorms are dangerous and the ingredient that defines a thunderstorm is lightning.

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Schools improve for third straight year

By Melissa J. Brachfeld
Sentinel Staff Writer

Prince George's County public school students improved their overall scores in reading and mathematics for the third year in a row on the Maryland School Assessments and outpaced the overall gains made across the state in both areas, according to preliminary results released last week for elementary and middle school students.

According to John White, a spokesman for Prince George's County Public Schools, students performing at or above the proficient level in reading improved two percentage points to 62 percent, compared to a five-point jump

to 60 percent in 2005. The percent of students performing at or above proficiency in math improved five percentage points to 57 percent, compared to an 11-point jump to 52 percent last year.

John Deasy, the chief executive officer of PGCPSS, said he was pleased with the increase in scores, but said that the school system should continue to push students to improve.

"We acknowledge these increases and the tremendous amount of work involved," he said. "However, these gains are not good enough. We can and must do better."

"We will work to accelerate this rise in student achievement immediately

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Merrill remembered for loving life, work

By Stephanie Samuel
Sentinel Staff Writer

University of Maryland staff and faculty mourn the lost of the well-known Maryland publisher Phillip Merrill, 72, by remembering his vibrant and giving spirit.

"Our hearts go out the Merrill family over this latest news about Phil's death," said journalism dean Thomas Kunkel. "Phil was full of life and vitality and that is how we will always remember him."

A boater discovered Merrill's body last Monday 11 miles from where his boat, the Merrilly, was

found. There was an anchor tied to his ankles and a shotgun wound to the head. Police and autopsy reports have ruled Merrill's death as a suicide.

The Merrill family issued a statement stating their shock and grief over the incident.

"We are shocked at the news and found it very difficult to accept."

The family also acknowledged that Merrill had begun to change following massive heart surgery.

"He was fatigued and unmotivated, a clear departure from his lifelong optimistic outlook and his

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Home buyers get tools for finding homes



PHOTO BY DANIELLE FERNANDEZ

The husband and wife team of Victorine and Robert Clarke held a home buying seminar at the Bank of America in Seabrook Saturday, June 24.

By Stephanie Samuel
Sentinel Staff Writer

The husband and wife realtor team of Robert and Victorine Clarke held the first of its home-buying seminars last week as part of an effort to help local residents of the Bowie and Lanham communities to take advantage of what they say is now a buyers' market.

"We can help them develop their needs with the advanced tools that we have and help them get to the fun part of actually finding a home," said Robert Clarke.

Robert Clarke said the 2,600

houses on the market this year in Prince George's County is more than three times last year's figure of 800 houses. This increase creates an environment that is friendly to homebuyers.

The Clarkes plan to host a series of housing seminars in the Lanham/Bowie area to help residents take advantage of this buyer's market. They held their first seminar outlining eight critical points to home ownership Saturday in a Seabrook Bank of America.

They offered personalized methods to finding the right home including the online house/condo search featured on their Web site.

The online tool allows people to access a complete list of houses, condos, rental units, lots and land based on personal preferences.

"You can go to our website and we can help you at your own pace," said Victorine Clarke.

The couple also gave audience members a booklet of homebuyer tips valued at almost \$50.

"We really want people in the community to think of us first when they are looking for a home," said Robert Clarke.

The Clarkes have been in real estate business together for over 10 years.

Robert Clarke began dabbling in

real estate after he bought and began managing a four-unit property. From there, he pursued a real estate license.

"It kind of goes hand-in-hand because some of the renters eventually want to be homeowners," he said.

"You don't have the house until you have the keys in your hand."

VICTORINE CLARKE
Realtor

Victorine Clarke assisted her husband behind the scenes until 2003 when she received her realtor's license. "I like to help people," she said. "I've always been around people being in a big family."

Victorine Clarke grew up in West Africa with 11 siblings.

She was also motivated to enter the real estate business with her husband to spend more time with their 2-year-old daughter, Mawa.

The pair has since been working

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COVER STORY/NEWS

Improvement seen as first step

MSA, from page 1

with a laser-sharp focus on improving instruction and leadership, and implementing a new internal accountability system in our schools to lift up chronically underperforming schools. There is much work ahead of us to fulfill our students' twin civil rights to access and acquire a quality education."

The MSA is a test of reading and math achievement that meets the testing requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. White said the MSA was administered in March in reading and math to all students in third through eighth grade.

He noted that final MSA scores and whether or not schools and systems made Adequate Yearly Progress will not be released until later this summer. In addition, the 2006 High School Assessment scores will also be released later this summer.

"Schools, students and parents have worked extremely hard over the

last three years to raise overall achievement, and we must continue to find ways to help all children learn,"

"These gains aren't good enough. We can and must do better."

JOHN E. DEASY

PGCPS Chief Executive Officer

said Beatrice Tignor, chairwoman of the county's board of education. "With increased resources from the county and state, the system provided opportunities for learning beyond the school day and designed targeted programs to identify and help students who need additional support."

White said schools making the largest overall combined gains in

reading and math included Morning-side Elementary School by 32 percentage points, Samuel Massie ES by 18 percentage points, Riverdale ES by 16 percentage points, Samuel Chase ES by 14 percentage points, Seat Pleasant ES by 13 percentage points, Judge Sylvania W. Woods by 13 percentage points and Overlook ES by 13 percentage points.

He said an analysis by grade level revealed reading gains in all grades except grade 6, where results remained the same at 63 percent proficient. Reading

gains in other grades ranged from two percentage points by second-graders to four percentage points in grades 3 and 7. All grades improved in math except eighth grade, whose performance declined by two percentage points from 37 to 35 percent proficient. Math gains ranged from one percentage point in sixth grade to eight points in fifth grade.

Remembering Merrill

Merrill, from page 1

irrepressible spirit," said relatives.

Many described Merrill as sometimes brash but generally vibrant and good-natured.

Kunkel, also the president of the American Journalism Review, wrote in a column dedicated to Merrill, "Phil was born loud and excitable, and he stayed that way."

Merrill also had a passion for news. He was the owner and publisher of a number of Maryland-based papers, including the *Capital of Annapolis*, *Maryland Gazette*, and *Bowie Blade-News*, and the *Washingtonian* magazine.

He was also a generous benefactor to the University of Maryland's College of Journalism.

Merrill donated \$10 million to the journalism school in 2001. Later the school was named the Phillip Merrill College of Journalism in his honor.

Kunkel and others said that Merrill was passionate about jour-

nalism as business and disseminator of news.

"Phillip Merrill served as a model for the profession of journalism and should be," said university president C.D. Mote, Jr.

Merrill and his family were also very involved in the university as well. Merrill and his wife, Eleanor, served on the UMD Board of Visitors. He also served on the board of the University of Maryland College Park Foundation.

Friends and family held a memorial service for Merrill last Thursday in Washington D. C.

Merrill was first declared missing after the Merrills were found adrift on the Chesapeake Bay abandoned June 10. Originally, foul play was suspected because he was an experienced boater.

Despite his apparent suicide, family members said that Merrill life was a full and happy one.

"Everyone who knew Phil had no doubt that he loved life and lived it to the fullest," they said.

Seminar shows home buying mistakes

Home, from page 1

together introducing buyers to viable housing options including their four rental units in Prince George's County, Washington D.C., and New Haven, Conn.

The seminars are their next new step in helping people come savvy consumers and prevent what the Clarkes call typical homebuyer mistakes.

"We've heard of so many mistakes," said Victorine Clarke.

In the seminar, Robert Clarke gave an example of a couple that almost lost a deal on their house because of major purchases made before the close of the sale.

"You don't have the house until you have the keys in your hand," said Victorine Clarke.

The Clarkes also mentioned more and more buyers are skipping realtors and using online information instead to find and purchase a home.

"If you don't want to use a real estate agent, that's your choice. We give you the information you need," said Victorine Clarke. "If you don't have the time, we're happy to help."

The seminar received a full crowd of interested homebuyers eager to hear the Clarkes' presentation. They also encouraged residents to take advantage of Bank of America's lending program for low to moderate income buyers in addition to their real estate expertise.

"We really want to be a leading team in providing homes in Lanham and Bowie," said Robert Clarke.

They hope to provide a pathway to home ownership through their continued series of housing seminars.

Group provides safe place for students to speak their minds

By Hortense Barber
Special to The Sentinel

Every Wednesday evening from 6 p.m.-7:30 p.m. at the Springhill Lake Recreational Center, an eclectic mix of 10 or more young people meet to discuss issues ranging from self-image to personal fears to family life.

The group, whose participants range from seventh-graders to college level, is called Youth Counseling and Guidance and is led by community volunteers Herbert Allen, Brian Butler and John Hill.

A full explanation of the group and its goals can be found on a flyer distributed to the community, "The main objective of this group is to give children the opportunity to be heard. This program will allow the youth to develop relationships with adults and hopefully allow the adults to help guide them around everyday obstacles with lessons from their own experiences."

During these sessions, no subject is off-limits and group members can freely discuss proposed topics or whatever might be on his or her mind that week.

Last Wednesday evening, the group gathered in the center's multipurpose room and began the meeting with both a review of the previous week's discussion on stereotyping and an introduction to that week's topic on image.

Since this week saw an abun-

dance of new faces, allowing many opportunities for awkward silence and nervous glances, the first question for discussion served as an ice breaker: If someone were to ask you to describe yourself to them, how would you begin?

This question yielded answers such as unique, weird and energetic.

Later in the meeting, as the postures relaxed and the uneasiness disappeared, the discussion progressed to the subject of fear.

The fear of failure, fear of getting into college, fear of absentee fathers suddenly appearing and fear of death were discussed.

"I want to allow them to have input without being condemned," said Hill, who led the group-wide discussion on self-image, "I want them to know that I'm not going to judge them. I want them to be honest with me, and I will be honest with them."

Parental participation in these meetings is strongly encouraged. In fact, at last Wednesday's meeting, there were four parents present.

One of the parents, Angela Laymon, came to show support for the group.

"I see this group as being a positive opportunity to give children a chance to express themselves," said Laymon.

Since joining the group about three weeks ago, she has noticed that her child is more open to talk around people.

Jennifer Golden, mother of a 14-

year-old girl and 9 and 10-year-old boys, wants to take an active role in mentoring the youth in the group.

"I want to connect with them on a personal level, because if you aren't able to come at them on their level, you won't be able to communicate with them at all," said Golden, "The youth today do have dreams, we just don't know it."

She looks forward to going on cultural trips with the group so they can see places outside of the recreational center and their Springhill Lake community.

"We need more funds so we can do more activities. Not everyone wants to play basketball," she said.

The meeting ended with words of inspiration and positive thoughts for the upcoming week. Candy bracelets and bubble gum, courtesy of Allen, served as parting gifts.

After the meeting, a few members were asked to reflect upon their experience in the group.

"I like that we are able to express ourselves freely in this group," said Teairra Easter, 16.

"I like that we can speak our minds," said Johnnie Glover, 13, along the same lines.

Allen, one of the group's original leaders, sees the purpose in the weekly meetings as getting the youth to realize their potential and the power they have in the world.

"The world has a lot more to offer now than it did when I was younger," said Allen.

Want to be heard?

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