Strong Mayor, Strong Citizens

Richmond citizens asked for a “strong mayor,” and they certainly got one.

Last year, a broad consensus emerged around the idea that change was both necessary and possible in Richmond’s political leadership. While there were significant and justified complaints related to specific leaders (on city council and elsewhere), many citizens asserted that the need for change was about the leadership structure itself.

Richmond voters supported a shift to a strong mayor form of local government, in which the successful candidate must win a majority of votes in five out of nine city districts and a majority overall. Formerly, the mayor was elected by and from among the nine city council members. The old mayor had almost no independent power. The new structure gives executive-branch powers to the post.

In November, voters elected as their mayor L. Douglas Wilder, the former governor of Virginia and the only African-American in modern times to be elected governor of a U.S. state. With his name recognition, Wilder emerged from the pack of candidates as soon as he announced his desire to serve. Just inaugurated to the post, Wilder brought national notoriety and media attention with him.

Even before Wilder took office, sparks began to fly. In his acceptance speech he struck an aggressive tone, announcing that current officeholders and citizens should be ready for change. While at times acknowledging the need for bridge-building and consensus, he more often took on an abrupt and dismissive tone with his critics. He put leaders on notice that they might soon be sent packing. The police chief and city manager have already received their pink slips.

Leadership theorists tell us that in difficult times, people cry out for the “big man” leader to rise up and rescue them. Such leaders, whether charismatic or empowered in some other way, move themselves into positions to make tremendous change.

It is appropriate at this time to call for continued citizen engagement and vigilance. There is little reason to question Mr. Wilder’s intentions to effect (Continued on page 2)

From the Director

Dr. Doug Hicks is Associate Professor of Leadership and Religion and Director of the Center for Civic Engagement.

Fellowships Encourage Spirit of Engagement

For Chaplain emeritus the Rev. Dr. David B. Burhans, civic engagement is a “reason for being.”

“As a clergyperson and a proponent of the Christian faith, I came to realize early in my journey that one’s religion, if it is authentic, will consist of personal faith development and passionate concern for the welfare of others. Civic engagement became, therefore, a natural and essential part of my life.”

To honor and continue to promote that sense of responsibility on campus, the Center has launched an exciting new opportunity with its first class of Burhans Civic Fellows. The summer fellowship program, made possible by an endowment in Burhans’ name, supports selected students undertaking academically grounded internships at civic or social service organizations in greater Richmond and other areas.

Several research fellowships will also be funded through the Center for Civic Engagement. These competitive fellowships will be given to student and student-faculty projects that explore research questions with implications for understanding contemporary society and making change in social, political, legal, environmental or political spheres.

Students awarded the civic or research fellowships may receive up to $3,750 for their eight-week commitment. Faculty participating in collaborative research projects will receive $5,000.

Burhans, who developed a variety of co-curricular, character development and diversity programs during his 30 years as University Chaplain, said such involvements outside the classroom are a “critical” part of the university experience. Students’ education and personal growth become more intense when they move beyond the “comfort zone” of their day-to-day experience, he said. This may occur through exposure to different lifestyles and cultures or by going beyond book knowledge to investment in personal relationships. Or, Burhans said, it occurs “when students move beyond self-absorption to consider others’ needs.”

The multiplicity of needs in the greater Richmond area ensures that student interns and researchers of all disciplines will find avenues in the community through which they can apply their academic work. “Richmond has an incredible need for concerned citizens to collaborate in addressing homelessness, housing, race relations, drugs, crime, etc.,” Burhans said.

The Center for Civic Engagement is now accepting applications for both research fellowships and the Burhans Civic Fellowships. Application deadlines are Feb. 15 and March 4, respectively. Guidelines and eligibility requirements are available in the Center for Civic Engagement or on its web site: http://engage.richmond.edu.
FIRST PERSON: Tara Sulzen

In the Fall 2004 semester, I served as a mentor through Refugee and Immigration Services to a refugee family from Somalia. I took on the project to fulfill requirements for my Service to Society course; I chose the family because I wanted to meet and work with people for whom I would not normally volunteer.

The family I spent time with each week had come from a refugee camp in Africa in August of 2004. The family consisted of a single mother, Safia, and her two young children, Mohammed and Rehema. The intent of my partnership with Safia and her children was to create a relationship that would allow them to trust me and accept my help with adapting to life in the United States. They spoke very little English and knew next to nothing about American culture and customs.

I found that the language barrier was very difficult to deal with because the family could not fully express their needs to me or ask me the questions they may have wanted to ask. I also had trouble giving them instructions or making plans to meet because the language barrier was always an issue.

As a result, much of the time I spent with them became task-oriented, with my visits focused on getting things done or conveying specific information to them clearly. I often went food shopping with Safia to try to help her understand how to spend her money wisely and also which foods were not healthy for her children. For example, Safia would always want to buy cases of bottled water because she did not understand that it was safe to drink water from the tap in her home. I also gave her a small food pyramid to use as a reference for creating balanced meals for her children.

Sometimes I was overwhelmed by how much the family would have to learn to make it in our society, which is so different from the refugee camp they had lived in for so long. Yet my worries would subside when I saw how much all the neighbors in their apartment complex were helping them to adjust and feel included, especially because I knew that was something I probably could not do alone. Coming into this environment as an outsider made me much more aware of my own identity and role in society.

This volunteer experience was not something that left me feeling empowered or fulfilled, but I know it made me grow because of the challenges I faced with my family. I constantly had to question my motives and consider how I could best serve them with my resources and limitations. Being a family mentor for refugees was an incredibly unique experience which I am fortunate to have had.

Anyone who is interested in working with an immigrant family can contact Elizabeth Hayes, Volunteer Coordinator for Refugee and Immigration Services at ehayes@richmonddiocese.org.

Tara Sulzen, a sophomore, works for the Center for Civic Engagement as a Student Coordinator.

I constantly had to question my motives and consider how I could best serve (the family) with my resources and limitations.

- Tara Sulzen

(Continued from page 1)

positive change, but intentions are not the same as outcomes.

As Richmond faculty member Dr. Terry Price and other leadership scholars have analyzed, power can tempt leaders into committing at least two kinds of leadership failures. First, positional power can entice leaders to lose their will to work for the common good and, instead, to pursue their own accolades. A second kind of failure occurs when leaders come to think that they are “above” normal rules of governing and remaining accountable to citizens.

Good leadership requires the other city leaders, including the city council members, to assert their proper authority within a new structure designed to have executive and legislative balance of powers. It also calls for Richmond citizens to involve themselves in the rapid changes that are sure to take place. Effective and ethical leadership requires strong followers as well as strong leaders. If we see Richmond citizens take initiative alongside their elected leaders, there is a constructive and promising way ahead.

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TSUNAMI RESPONSE

The waves of the December 2004 tsunamis in Asia can still be felt here in Richmond, half a world away. The disaster struck home, literally, for scores of international students; for many others the mind-boggling scale of the tsunamis captured their imaginations and spurred them to act.

In order to coordinate the efforts of the UR community, the University organized a broad-based, student-driven assistance effort, titled the Spider Community Tsunami Response (SCTR). Overseen by a steering committee that includes the Center for Civic Engagement as well as the Chaplain’s Office, International Education and Student Activities, the SCTR’s program includes both fundraising activities and a variety of educational programs.

Sumika Raiguru, a senior and head of the South Asian Student Alliance, said she feels the tsunami’s impact on campus.

“I believe the damage caused by the tsunamis has affected us all, whether we had family there, friends vacationing there, etc.,” she said. Raiguru urged other students to get involved – and not only for the purpose of helping those in need. “Sometimes we don’t realize the benefits we have as Americans,” she said. “Many people there are now without homes, clothes, food, water … all these things that we here take for granted.”

The educational component of the SCTR aims to help students like Raiguru learn more about the contexts – economic, historical, cultural, political - surrounding the disaster and the subsequent aid effort. First up was a community-wide forum on Jan. 20 led by an expert panel of faculty, staff and students.

Students interested in further involvement were invited to apply for positions on a student committee charged with directing future SCTR programs, fundraising and fund disbursement. These students, with the guidance of faculty and staff, plan to research aid organizations and issues related to disaster relief so as to inform their direction of the SCTR.

“It is our hope that through this effort our students will learn the complexities, challenges and promise of such a communal act of assistance, and solidarity with those who have been affected by the tsunami disaster,” said Doug Hicks, director of the Center for Civic Engagement.

More information about the tsunami relief effort can be found on the CCE website: http://engage.richmond.edu.

Service Learning Comes to the Center for Civic Engagement

Faculty who want to incorporate service learning into their classes can now find assistance at the Center for Civic Engagement.

A practice that links academic curriculum studied in the classroom with service meeting the needs of the community, service learning helps foster civic engagement and provides a richer, more integrated university experience for students.

Amy Howard, program manager at the Center, explained the benefits of curriculum-based community service.

“By connecting what they study in the classroom with their experiences working in the community, students learn to think more critically, to make new connections, and to develop a greater sense of civic responsibility,” Howard frequently meets with faculty to discuss ways for them to include service learning in their courses and develop relationships with service organizations. The Center can also assist faculty with the material costs of including service learning in their courses.

For more information, please contact the Center at 484-1602.
calendar

brown bag discussions

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<td>January 14</td>
<td>“Campus Questions, Civic Answers: A Panel Workshop for Writing Quest IV Questions,” Ms. Liza Stutts, Class of 2004 and Quest II winner, Ms. Julie Tea, Office of the President, Dr. Doug Hicks, Director, Center for Civic Engagement</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>“Christianity and Al Qaeda,” Mr. Ben Campbell, Richmond Hill</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>“Global Warming in the 21st Century,” Dr. David Kitchen, Continuing Studies (Co-sponsored by the Environmental Awareness Group)</td>
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<td>February 4</td>
<td>“Effecting Change in Low-Income Neighborhoods, One Student at a Time,” University of Richmond alumnae working for Teach for America</td>
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<td>“Democracy in Iraq,” Mr. Scott Erwin, Class of 2005</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>“The Green Light: Fulfilling the Promise of Brown v Board of Education,” Mr. Brian Daugherity, History</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>“Fundamentals of Terrorism,” Dick Brushwood, Former Defense Agency Security Director (Co-sponsored by the Osher Institute for Lifelong Learning)</td>
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coming up

Community Awareness Week (March 14 - 18)
The Center will work with the student organizers of Build It 2005 to put on a four-program series addressing social issues and community needs in the greater Richmond area.

“Knowing Richmond: University and Community Engagement into the Future” (April 2)
Led by University President William E. Cooper, this program will bring together members of the university and community. Dr. Douglas Hicks, director of the university’s Center for Civic Engagement, will moderate a panel of community organization leaders, faculty, and students who will discuss various university-community collaborations. This final event is part of the campus-wide open house celebrating the University’s 175th anniversary.

Build It 2005! (April 4 - 10)
This student-led initiative involves partnering with three schools in Henrico County – Baker Elementary School, Rolfe Middle School, and Varina High School – as well as Habitat for Humanity and Ryan Homes to plan and execute a series of service projects in the community. Efforts will include building a Habitat house in Edgelawn, establishing on-going tutoring and mentoring programs in the schools, implementing programs to bring secondary students onto campus, and facilitating other projects in the classroom and on the school grounds. The Center will help foster the academic programs during Build It week and throughout the semester.

ongoing opportunities

Looking for a job, an internship, opportunities for research or just a good conversation about current civic or social questions? Look no further! We hope you will drop by the Center today!