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THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

Jeffrey L. Heard
Publisher

Stephen T. Meadows
Managing Editor

Heard and Meadows join Juana Jordan, Brian Lawson, Edith Smith, Mae Stokes and Lou Ziegler of *The Valdosta Daily Times* and Greg Lofton of Valdosta on the newspaper's editorial board. "Our Opinions" are formed by that board.

▶ YOUR OPINIONS

Whites don't get the real drug problem

For years, drugs were considered a problem of African Americans and Hispanics. President Nixon's statement, "An end to heroin abuse should be a national priority" came only after it was discovered that young white boys were arriving from Vietnam hooked on drugs.

Initially, treatment centers were open to all persons, regardless to race. However, white people know nothing of black people as we are, but as they have perceived us. We black people are duped, bamboozled and willing to accept every label and phonetic hype — Weed and Seed, Alternative School, Inner City, Tough On Crime — lathered out by every politically motivated spin doctor courting the media and our vote.

Valdosta is not famous for adolescent gangs gunning each other down in the street. And to my knowledge, there has been no law enforcement personnel falling in the line of drug-related violence.

This overly used, implied anecdotal phrase, "War On Drugs," only allows for its utilization as a weapon, as fear was used of McCarthyism and its charges of communism.

Let us keep in mind that, to the masses, the drug problem is primarily rooted within black neighborhoods. If this were not the case, there would be "Weed and Seed" locations pin-pointed within white neighborhoods. The "Weed and Seed" formula is based on no more than hol-

low opinions of a misinformed few.

This Machiavellian approach to re-seeding a community supersedes God's order and undermines the laws of natural selection. The act of helping the down trodden has always been a stand of the liberalism movement. Here, it is used as a smoke screen for the conservatives who cater outwardly to Darwin's view of the survival of the fittest. Simply kill the lame, the intimidating and least desirable and have them replaced with their personal world view.

I know a man who fought in Vietnam, returned home with an addiction to heroin, partook in crime to support his habit, served two terms in prison and eventually became drug free. This same man went on to receive both undergraduate and graduate degrees from Valdosta State College. Yet, due to his having served time, his wealth of knowledge is ignored and he is counted worthless.

The best solution our government has is to throw the baby out with the bath water. We have enough of our young black boys in "alternative schools," branded "bad" and earmarked for the next available bus to the next available bed in the nearest prison.

If we do not began dialogue concerning this accursed plague, these prisons, inappropriately referred to as "corrections," will soon all be referred to by another name — "colored only."

**Rev. Thomas Babatu
Ayinde
Valdosta**

Ninth-graders largest proportion of dropouts

By Weenam Chua

THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

VALDOSTA — A large number of dropouts come from the ninth grade, when a student can legally leave school at age 16, according to Peggy Wilkes, Lowndes High School counselor.

By the time some reach high school, they are academically several grade levels behind their peers, said Gary Glover, principal of the Transition Center alternative school.

"A lot come to the ninth grade over-age, with limited reading and math skills," Valdosta High School Principal Charles Bonner said. "Some have been socially promoted."

When they hit ninth grade, social promotion will no longer carry them through school. They have to earn credits to move up.

Students who don't excel academically are likely to act out and become the chronically disruptive students at alternative schools, according to David Troy, principal for Westside Center. Troy estimates about 40 percent of 196 students he helped this past school year are ninth graders. "A lot of the kids express ninth-grade is a challenging year," he said.

A problem ninth graders face is the transition from middle to high school, a change that some children aren't ready to make.

"They just don't fit the mold for standard education," Wilkes said.

Counselors at a meeting with the school board Thursday suggested expanding alternative education to these students. A different atmosphere where students can work at their own pace with less distraction will

Continued from page 1A

Dropouts

benefit such students, according to Wilkes. But counselors want to apply alternative education models before students have to be sent to the alternative schools.

As Troy pointed out, there is a limit to what he can do for a 18 year old in the ninth grade.

Students at the alternative schools in general study at their own pace with guidance from tutors. The Lowndes School System is looking at a course of action that has been pursued by Valdosta — separating ninth graders from the rest of the school. Separating the ninth graders is designed to help the social and emotional transition from middle to high school.

"A lot of them are also overwhelmed at high school because of its size," Glover said.

To contact Weenam Chua, please call
244-3400, ext. 237.

▶ **YOUR OPINIONS**

Journalistic racism

story.

Mark George
Albuquerque, New Mexico

In light of your recent stories on the federally funded Weed and Seed program, I find it interesting that you failed to report the salaries of Pam Lightsey and any other white people involved in the project. Simply put, I am willing to bet Lightsey's salary far exceeds that of Deloris Mitchell Brown's (by four or five times).

I also wager that others involved with the project at the regional and federal levels make lucrative salaries no one bothers to question.

Though your publication has pursued stories in terms of exploring any "conflicts of interest" within Weed and Seed, you also never bothered to explore the history of how Lightsey (once the local Weed and Seed director) gained her position(s)?

In fact, it appears that you probably never thought to ask such questions?

With this in mind, two things are clear:

It is evidently OK for white people who do not live in Weed and Seed communities to make substantial money from their involvement in such programs.

Secondly, once again your publication reported one side of the story, the white side of the

THURSDAY

June 4, 1998

The Valdosta Daily Times

Rumored race riot fails to materialize

■ Middle school remains peaceful despite talk about clash

By E. RANKIN SCOTT
The Valdosta Daily Times

VALDOSTA — Lowndes Middle School's halls remained quiet Wednesday, despite fears of some parents' that a racial disturbance would take place.

Sixth-grade children celebrated the last day of classes with a pizza party in one wing, a seventh-grade class watched a movie and eighth-graders enjoyed potato chips and cake. About 90 of 1,070 students were absent, 20 more than average, said Principal Fred Davis.

"It's not unusual that 20 extra students would be absent on the last day of school. We always have a few of children leave early for

Most of the parents who had the presence of mind to call the school or their child's teacher just needed reassurance.

— Fred Davis,
principal, Lowndes Middle School

vacation," Davis said.

Several parents contacted the school Tuesday after their children reported rumors that the school's white population wanted to fight black students. Assistant Principal Josie Brooks said the racial tension originated after a group of white students wrote racist slogans in their yearbooks.

"They had written the words 'KKK' and 'nigger' in the yearbooks. One student had 'Killer' and 'KKK' written on his arm

with marker," Brooks said.

A black student saw one of the offensive books and showed some of his friends. The assistant principal said the incident ended in the suspension of the small group of students who had written the slogans and one black student who threatened to retaliate.

"We met with the black students, and we told them that they had a right to be angry, but they shouldn't allow what they saw in the yearbooks to control their

future actions," Brooks said.

Davis said the rumors of a rumble between races on the last day of school were just that — rumors.

"Most of the parents who had the presence of mind to call the school or their child's teacher just needed reassurance. They wanted to hear that their children would be safe here, and they trusted us when we said they would be. It says something about the confidence level on the part of the majority of parents," he said.

The principal said LMS administrators followed the same policies they have followed on the last day of school for years. Instead of ringing the bell at the end of the day, Davis walked the students outside. A Lowndes County Sheriff's Department patrol car was positioned outside the school at the start and end of the day.

Attention to school safety had already been increased after the shooting in Arkansas, he said.

"We put more teachers at posts in the hallway during class changes and lunch time. We've kept our ears open, and paid close attention to what students are telling each other," Davis said.

Parent Nina Keen kept her 12-year-old daughter home from school Wednesday.

"I just didn't feel safe sending my child to school on a day when there was going to be a potential race riot. I called the school, but no one would guarantee that nothing was going to happen to my child," Keen said.

Keen said she is transferring her daughter to the Echols County School System next year, because she is not satisfied LMS is safe.

Davis said his school is as safe as any other in the area. The racial tensions brought out in the yearbook incident are mirrored in other schools across South Georgia and the incident was isolated, he said.

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Heard and Meadows join Juana Jordan, Brian Lawson, Edith Smith, Mae Stokes and Lou Ziegler of *The Valdosta Daily Times* and Greg Lofton of Valdosta on the newspaper's editorial board. "Our Opinions" are formed by that board.

► YOUR OPINIONS

Let's bring the youth back home

Having left South Georgia eight years ago, I see that few progress has been made on the part of environmental racism. As a young African American girl growing up in Valdosta, I knew early on that poverty was synonymous with being black. When I left for Atlanta after my high school graduation, I swore that I would never come back. I did not want to raise a family in a place that continued to treat blacks as second-class citizens. My ideologies changed, however, after I realized that it would be a disservice to my race, to leave matters the way they were.

Therefore, I was appalled, to read about the misfortunes of the black elderly of Cook County. To rest their hopes on a city council that failed them, appears hopeless and sad. I wonder where are the black churches, politicians, business owners and professionals of the region? Will they not contribute? Cook County's elderly laid the foundation for many opportunities and landmarks of this area. Why must they wait on a government that obviously ignores them? Moreover, I wonder do the blacks of Adel continue to bank at Farmers & Merchants and the Bank of Lenox; surely these are not the only banks in Adel? When a financial institution breaks a promise, customers of the bank should break away and take their mon-

ey elsewhere (perhaps open a credit union, to fund their own ventures).

Do not misunderstand my point. I do not live by the "pull yourself up by your own bootstraps" philosophy. In fact, that is the problem. From what I have seen as a child and now as a recent citizen of Valdosta is that blacks do not forge together for the betterment of themselves as strongly as our grandparents. While reading another section of the VDT, I noticed an article discussing Habitat for Humanity's challenge.

Clearly, we must see that South Georgia is changing and growing. However, the black community remains the same, even worse. With a growing population of STD and AIDS patients in the area, my classmates are dying before their parents. If the youth dies, where is our future? If we continue to spiral downward at this pace, our heritage and legacy will be destroyed. When that happens our ancestors as well will have "shattered dreams". Obviously, my response is not to the lying bankers and racist city counselors (I will save that for another day), but to the black citizens of both Lowndes and Cook County. We must not allow any more disappointments. We must not facilitate a society that destroys what we must become. We must instead create an environment that brings our children home.

Davidae Stewart
Valdosta

A question of race ...

DEAR ABBY: I worked for civil rights in the '60s. My 10-year-old daughter grew up in a racially mixed church, a racially mixed neighborhood and a racially mixed school.

She has studied the history of slavery, Hitler, and other examples of what bigotry can do to a society, a country and the world. I have taught her from a

Dear Abby



Abigail Van Buren
Columnist

very young age that bigotry is wrong, period. At the tender age of 10, she has already lost friends because she will not tolerate racist remarks. I have patiently tried to explain why racism

was tolerated in the past in various societies.

A few days ago my daughter asked me a question I could not answer. "Mom, why is it OK to be a racist if you're black?" She went on to cite examples of racist remarks at her school, in the media, by politicians and on TV.

As I thought about it, she is correct.

Today's America does tolerate, and in a few cases, even encourages blacks to be racist against whites.

We wonder why there is violence in our schools. We despair over the white supremacist movement. We call for closer family support and guidance. Why do we not cry out against racism wherever it may be found? How can we move forward as a country, as a world, if we have not learned by our mistakes?

Please, Abby, help me out here! What can I tell her? —
MY KID'S MOM

DEAR MOM: Let's not point the finger only at black Americans. Bigotry is alive and well in EVERY community because it seems that some people have a need to feel "superior."

Explain to your daughter that racism cannot be wiped out by decree. Its demise must come from the realization that we have more things in common than we do superficial differences such as skin color or a foreign-sounding accent.

▶ YOUR OPINIONS

Setting the Lightsey record straight

Although I live 160 miles north of Valdosta in Macon, a letter to this paper dated June 3 came to my attention. The letter questioned how and why Pamela Lightsey came to hold the position she does with respect to her work with Valdosta's Weed and Seed program. I have the privilege of working with Ms. Lightsey, and wanted to write to shed some light on these questions.

I played a role in the hiring of Pamela Lightsey to work with the office of the U.S. Attorney for the Middle District of Georgia to help us with our community outreach programs. In order for our office to hire for this position, I was required to advertise the job opening to all citizens of the U.S. I had met Ms. Lightsey because she had volunteered her services to the Valdosta Weed and Seed effort for over a year. She did that work without being paid because she believed it would be a good thing for her community. In observing her work ethic, intelligence and compassion for others, I had hoped she would apply for this position.

As it turned out, I did not fully understand at the time how qualified Ms. Lightsey was for the job we were trying to fill. When she was 26 years old, her father was murdered by a 16-year-old. This was uniquely tragic since Ms. Lightsey had already lost her mother and brother in an automobile accident caused by a drunk driver. Because these separate criminal acts left her without immediate family, Ms. Lightsey was left completely on her own. Since that time, she has devoted herself tirelessly to working with the victims of crime, and, more recently, for the preven-

tion of crime. For all of this work, over a period of many years, Ms. Lightsey never sought nor received pay.

I had hoped Ms. Lightsey would apply for the position with my office, but I knew she could do so only at great personal sacrifice. I knew she was a leading candidate for the Weed and Seed coordinator in Valdosta — a position that pays in excess of what my office could offer. Further, in order for her to take our job she would also be required to bear the expense of moving her family from Valdosta to Macon.

Nevertheless, Ms. Lightsey did apply for the job in our office. Her application was one of many, and the whole group of applications had to go to the Department of Justice to be evaluated and ranked by personnel experts. Ms. Lightsey was awarded the highest ranking of all of the candidates who applied.

Ms. Lightsey has proven to be invaluable to our office in her role coordinating community programs. During her time in our office she has assisted with Weed and Seed programs Valdosta, Athens, Macon and Albany. She is much beloved by the 26 children who attended the Valdosta Drug Education for Youth (DEFY) Camp sponsored by Moody Air Force Base and the Office of the U.S. Attorney. I can say without reservation that this camp would not have happened without Ms. Lightsey's hard work.

I am writing to salute Ms. Lightsey, even in the face of those who find fault with the system within which she works. I know absolutely the world would be a better place if it were populated with more people like her.

Beverly B. Martin
U.S. Attorney
Middle District of George

Habitat for Humanity adopts new procedures

By Brian Lawson
THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

VALDOSTA — The local Habitat for Humanity chapter expects to add 14 families to its homeowner list in the next two weeks.

In the meantime, there is plenty of figuring to do as Ralph Jackson, the executive director for the Valdosta-Lowndes County Habitat for Humanity, calculates the value of each home to establish a closing price. That calculation includes determining the value of in-kind donations of materials, labor and other items. The idea behind the cost of volunteer labor is to ensure the homes aren't simply gifts, but residents pay for them, Jackson said.

Jackson also has to calculate costs related to unfulfilled "sweat equity" work hours on homes for some of the would-be owners.

A change in Habitat policy will allow resident families to pay \$10 per hour for any volunteer hours short of the required 500. The total will be added to the closing price of the homes.

Jackson said Friday he had determined the final cost on one of the 14 homes. The chapter hopes to close on all of the houses soon. Jackson said it hinges, in part, on the schedule of the chapter's volunteer attorney.

Please see HABITAT, page 3A

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Tuesday, June 15, 1999 Ag 1A

Habitat: Grant will be applied to cost of Sweet 16 homes

"We're trying to average the costs," Jackson said, noting the first house he tallied would cost \$28,500.

One added bonus for the 11 residents expected to gain ownership next week in the Sweet 16 neighborhood is a \$7,500 per home grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Jackson said the \$7,500 will be applied to the bottom line cost of the homes.

The local affiliate is also expected this week to evict a resident family for the first time, Jackson said. The Valdosta chapter has not transferred ownership to a resident family in more than four years. Part of

the problem has been an inconsistent record of payments, with periods where several residents were more than a month behind in payment. The plan to move forward on closing on homes also includes a commitment to tighten up requirements for payments, Jackson said.

The decision to evict the family was painful for Habitat board members, Jackson said, but it became necessary. The chapter hopes the decision will signal to residents the importance of keeping payments on schedule.

"We have to tighten up our policies," Jackson said. "This will send a powerful message."

Jackson said ownership also brings a concern the board wrestled with. That is, what to do if a resident family falls well behind on actual mortgage payments? A foreclosure process could require the property be auctioned on the courthouse steps. But, Jackson said Friday, Habitat officials have noted a quit claim deed could be applied to avoid the foreclosure and fear of losing the property to a higher bidder.

Jackson said the chapter is now looking for a family to move into the soon-to-be vacated house.

To contact reporter Brian Lawson, please call 244-3400, ext. 239.

THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

online.com

Tuesday, June 15, 1999

50 cents

Convergys will bring more than 300 jobs to Valdosta

By Taylor Bright
THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

VALDOSTA — The Convergys Corporation will soon bring more than 300 new jobs to Valdosta.

Convergys will open a new call center at the intersection of North Oak Street Extension and Boy's Club Road.

The company chose a private site over the industrial park at Azalea West.

Ken Garren, authority Director said, "We met with them after they had picked a site, but they wanted the private site," said Ken Garren, director of the Valdosta-Lowndes County Industrial Authority.

The county commission ap-

proved a zoning change and also a road to connect Inner Perimeter Road with the North Oak Street Extension to ease traffic.

Convergys picked the site because of its proximity to VSU and Moody Air Force Base, according to the Chamber of Commerce. They plan to draw part of their employee base from the two.

Local economic development officials said the company will fill a void left by the closing of the Levi Strauss plant. The Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce expects some of the former employees to work for the new call center.

The starting wage at the center will be \$7 per hour. The Chamber estimates the center

will have an annual payroll of \$4.5 million.

The Chamber also estimates the total capital investment in the area will be \$9 million dollars. They expect \$3 million to come in real property and \$6 million in personal property, which should be mostly equipment.

Continued from page 1A

Jobs

Chamber President Myrna Ballard said one misconception about the call center is that it will be a telemarketing center.

"Some people are actually afraid they may receive more telemarketing calls at home," Ballard said.

But that is not the case. The center will receive calls, not make them, she said.

Convergys has over 40 call centers across the world. They handle customer service calls from client companies. Clients include catalog ordering, telephone companies, and insurance companies.

To contact reporter Taylor Bright, please call 244-3400, ext.245.

Southside Recreation Center a true boost for community

Editor's note: This is the latest in a continuing series of stories about local organizations which benefit from the United Way.

By Jason E. Miczek
THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

VALDOSTA — With pool tables, a playground, tennis courts, an indoor learning area, two baseball fields, a basketball court and a large pool, the Southside Recreation Center is a second home to Brenda Jackson and her three children.

Jackson's children, Auburn, Stetson, and Sierra Randolph have come to the center for the past two years for a host of daily activities.

The center's goals are to build young mind's, bodies and spirits through education and recreation, according to Rachel A. Bradley, executive director of the Southside Recreation Center.

And it seems to be accomplishing its goals. Auburn, Stetson and Sierra can't wait to get to the center each day.

"It helps me out a whole lot because it's hard being a single parent and getting a babysitter."

Brenda Jackson
Mother of three

Auburn, a 9-year-old who enjoys the center's girls club and ballet classes, says she learns how to work and get along with people.

"I like the games you play outside," she said softly.

Stetson, an 11-year-old boy scout at the center says he benefits from the after school tutoring program offered during the school year.

He brought his average way up from what it was, said his mother.

"I like the teachers," Stetson said. "They taught me how to be drug-free."

Thirteen-year-old Sierra says she has learned about teamwork and being healthy. She credits the

center for teaching her to draw. Their soft-spoken mother, smiling at her children, says the activities offered by the center keeps the kids out of trouble.

"It helps me out a whole lot because it's hard being a single parent and getting a babysitter," she said. "They learn about things like God and get to play games. When they're here, I know they're going to be safe."

Funded mostly by the United Way, the center offers a variety of programs for all ages, ranging from an after school tutoring program, boy's and girl's clubs, ballet, and seasonal activities.

"For a long time this was the only place that people of color and people who live in this neighborhood could go," Bradley said. "We've been here since 1964."

The center is always looking for volunteers. For more information call Rachel Bradley at 242-6764.

To contact reporter Jason E. Miczek, please call 244-3400, ext. 254.



Paul Leavy/The Valdosta Daily Times

Brenda Jackson and her three children, Auburn, 9, Stetson, 11, Sierra, 13, and Randolph, at the playground at Southside Recreation Center in Valdosta.

WEDNESDAY

June 24, 1998

Discrimination lawsuit filed against Tenneco

By JODI M. SCOTT
The Valdosta Daily Times

VALDOSTA — Tenneco Packaging has been sued by three employees who are citing alleged racial and gender discrimination in the company's promotions process.

David Ward Sr., Beatrice Mercer and Helen B. Blair filed the lawsuit Monday in federal court, maintaining that Tenneco has violated federal anti-discrimination laws. The three claim to

have suffered \$10 million worth of "humiliation and embarrassment" from discriminatory practices, general harassment and retaliatory efforts.

Mercer and Blair could not be reached for comment. Ward declined to discuss the case, other than to say they "stand behind" their charges.

They are seeking unspecified compensatory and punitive damages and back pay based on salaries they would have received had they been promoted, accord-

ing to court records.

Warren Hazleton, of Tenneco's corporate office in Illinois, said he was not aware that the lawsuit had been filed and declined to comment.

Ward began working for the company in 1967 and now serves as a power house operator. Mercer, who began work in 1976, serves as a tall oil operator. Blair, who also started work in 1976, is a mill tester.

They allege that the company does not advertise or post its

supervisory position vacancies. Instead, promotions are made based on recommendations from various department heads. Those recommendations are sent to the mill manager and vice president of the company. The vice president selects those who are promoted. The last such promotions took place in January and February of 1997. No written criteria is available, according to court records.

Of the 250 to 275 hourly
See TENNECO, Page 11-A

Tenneco

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employees, only two blacks have been promoted to supervisor since the plaintiffs have been employed at Tenneco. The last black supervisor was fired in July 1996, according to the lawsuit. There have been "only a few female supervisors."

"A blanket practice of making (supervisory) promotions without posting or advertising has caused a disproportionate adverse impact selection rate of otherwise qualified African-Americans," the lawsuit contends.

The promotion process also led to less qualified white male candidates receiving promotions and denied equal opportunities for promotions to blacks and women, according to the lawsuit.

Ward, Mercer and Blair claim that they have been passed over for promotions, harassed due to their race and sex and made to train less-qualified employees who were promoted. Blair, filed a

complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission on March 21, 1997. Mercer filed her complaint with EEOC on March 10, 1997. The agency later found probable cause determination in their favor. Tenneco, however, refused to settle, according to court records. On Feb. 20, 1998, Blair was demoted from the position she had held for 11 years, reportedly due to poor performance.

The Valdosta Daily Times

Wednesday, June 24, 1998 11-A