

LOCAL NEWS

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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2005

Teamsters calls for ouster of Serpas

Union that's seeking representation of Metro officers blames chief for rising crime and declining morale



Ronal Serpas, above, must go, says Teamsters local organizer Jesse Case.

By CHRIS JONES
Staff Writer

Less than a week after forcing an election that could make it the labor union for Nashville police officers, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters called for the ouster of Metro Police Chief Ronal Serpas, blaming him for rising crime and falling morale within the department.

"It is clear that Serpas is more concerned about Serpas than the city of Nashville, and it's time for him to go," said Jesse Case, the Teamsters' chief

local organizer in charge of the union's push to take over as the bargaining agent for Metro police officers.

On Dec. 1, more than 600 officers went to the polls and voted to decertify their representative group, the Fraternal Order of Police. The vote followed a campaign by the Teamsters that tapped into many officers' disapproval of policies enacted by Serpas since his hiring in January 2004.

Officials at both unions have pointed to the results of the election as a clear sign of dissatisfaction with Serpas.

"I think it was that low morale that drove the decertification vote," said Brock Parks, executive director of the FOP. "It's quite clear that (Serpas') policies, his philosophies, his methods have spurred the dissatisfaction within the police department."

A police spokesman said Serpas had not heard about the unions' assertions directly and would not comment.

Nashville Mayor Bill Purcell said he stands behind the chief. "The mayor supports Chief Serpas," said Molly Suddeth, Purcell's spokeswoman.

Teamsters officials also called on the FOP to support Serpas' removal. FOP officials declined to say whether the union would back the chief's removal.

"If there is such a move, we would

have to look into the viability of it," said Parks, the FOP's executive director. "I don't want to jump on board of an empty plan or promise."

Parks, however, said the union agrees that changes are needed to fix a range of issues that have repeatedly been raised by rank-and-file officers. Officers have said Serpas is too reliant on statistics, heavy-handed in disciplinary matters and not sufficiently responsive to issues of officer safety.

After Serpas was hired, the number of traffic stops soared. Some Metro officers claim they're forced to write too many traffic tickets to avoid being reprimanded.

Other officers have complained about having personal police cruisers

taken away, work shifts changed and vacation days taken away for not meeting the department's traffic citation quotas. Serpas has denied the existence of quotas and said he merely insists that officers put in a solid day's work.

Last month, the Teamsters brought two officials from the Washington State Patrol Troopers Association to Nashville to talk with local officers. The troopers from Washington, where Serpas was chief before taking the Nashville job, said officers there had similar complaints about the chief's methods.

Also last month, the FOP filed a lawsuit against the police department

► Please see SERPAS, 3B

"People willing to help you in any capacity that they can, I think that is truly a beautiful thing."
— Dennis Watson, one of first recipients of New Hope Construction's hurricane housing



Carpenters Bob Moore, left, and Glenn Kaufman are building a wall at the New Hope Construction warehouse in Hendersonville. The wall is for a house that will be shipped to Bedford County, Va., for a low-income family. The nonprofit organization also is building housing for hurricane victims in Hancock County, Miss.

Some Katrina housing built in Hendersonville

How to help

To provide immediate housing for residents along the Gulf Coast, particularly in Freeport, Miss., and neighboring hamlets in Hancock County, New Hope Construction of Hendersonville is providing permanent and transitional housing units — preferred house packages. The cost for the units ranges from \$15,000 to \$20,000 for the smaller, transitional units, while the cost to construct the larger units that can be placed on a permanent foundation begins at \$25,000.

Supporters may sponsor a unit or partner with groups to

sponsor a unit or several units. Volunteers are sought to travel to Mississippi to help assemble the units. Also, the organization plans to send truckloads of toys and household goods for the families before Christmas.

New Hope Construction is a nonprofit organization and contributions are tax-deductible. To help, call 822-0111 or 866-398-HOPE (#673). E-mail: info@newhopeconstruction.org or go to the organization's Web site at <http://newhopeconstruction.org>, then click on the Hurricane Katrina Relief link.

Nonprofit group ships easy-to-assemble homes to Mississippi hurricane victims

By JEANNE F. HUNTER
Staff Writer

HENDERSONVILLE — Three months after Hurricane Katrina ravaged the Gulf Coast, a local nonprofit organization wants to raise homes as well as hopes in the region.

New Hope Construction Inc., a 9-year-old nonprofit organization that designs and builds ready-made furnished homes, is raising money and sending teams of volunteers to build immediate housing in Hancock County, Miss.

Developed by eastern Kentucky native W. Russell

McLain, the homes are made of insulation, and materials for electrical, mechanical and plumbing systems are used to finish the house.

Average construction time for regular homes the nonprofit builds is 10 to 12 days, Meade said.

But it takes only three to five days to build the transitional homes designed for Hancock County, which borders Louisiana along the Mississippi Gulf Coast, said Jim Crowley, vice president and chief operating officer.

The units, he said, go up "like a jigsaw" puzzle.

Dennis Watson, 56, and his wife and their five children

Tip leads to suspect in slaying of music exec

Police arrest Maplewood High student, 16, on homicide charge

By SHEILA BURKE and CARA WALSH
Staff Writers

One telephone tip and possibly the lure of a \$27,000 reward helped police nab a 16-year-old Maplewood High School sophomore in connection with last month's killing of Warner Bros. Records executive Eric Scott Mansfield.

Acting on a caller's tip to CrimeStoppers, Metro police yesterday went to 2160 Rock City St., where they arrested Deonvelt Miller on charges of criminal homicide, aggravated robbery and two counts of unlawful weapons possession.



Deonvelt Miller

The teen is accused of killing Mansfield in an attempted robbery and carjacking in east Nashville on Nov. 11.

Mansfield, 33, was director of Creative Services at Warner Bros. Records. He and his live-in partner, David Miller, had two adopted children.



David Miller

David Miller, who is not related to Deonvelt Miller, said he was saddened but not surprised that the suspect is so young.

"Obviously, there's relief. That's the main thing," he said. "A lot of people think you're going to feel better, but you don't really feel better. His life is just as over as Eric's at such a young age."

The murder stunned neighbors in east Nashville and came as the city's number of violent slayings is soaring. Mansfield is among 96 people killed in Nashville homicides this year, up from 58 in 2004.

Months before the shooting, Mansfield had called his partner and told him he was searching for a place to park near their home, police said.

According to police, Deonvelt Miller told

► Please see MANSFIELD, 6B

School bus driver who used racial slur is suspended

By AILENE TORRES
Staff Writer

A Metro school bus driver has been ordered to attend diversity training after she used a racial epithet toward a group of black students at Hunters Lane High School, a district official said yesterday.

Dot Seay, who had been driving for Metro Nashville Public Schools since 1982, must provide proof that she completed the sensitivity training before she can return to work, said Olivia Brown, a district spokeswoman.

During testimony at an Oct. 14 hearing, Seay admitted that she had used a derogatory name when telling a group of African-American students to get away from her school bus in September, district officials said. Seay said she used the epithet after being verbally abused by the teenagers, and she acknowledged that use of the ugly word was inexcusable, Brown said.

"She never denied saying it," Brown said. "She knew it was the wrong thing to do the minute she had said it."

The students were not passengers on Seay's bus.

Reached at her home yesterday, Seay declined to comment.

► Please see SEAY, 6B

HOLIDAY WISH LIST | GLIMPSSES OF OUR NEIGHBORS IN NEED

Fire breaks up family, but mother grateful all survived

By KATE HOWARD
Staff Writer

Carolyn Taylor was up early cooking Thanksgiving dinner next door in her Ann Street duplex when she heard a boom.

She ran back to her unit and saw black clouds of smoke pouring out of a window.

She thanks God that she, her 18-year-old daughter and 2-year-old grandson weren't there at the time. On a typical day, Taylor said, her daughter would have been sleeping on the couch with the baby nearby at the one-bedroom

unit she rented. She knows the blaze could have been a lot worse.

Taylor said firefighters told her the cause probably was electrical. She is staying with her neighbor for now, and her daughter and grandson are staying with family in the area.

"Finding somewhere to stay has been so hard," Taylor said. She said she is missing a vertebra in her back and isn't able to work. She is surviving on the income from a disability check until the insurance claim is processed.

The family received vouchers

for clothing and groceries from the Nashville-area Red Cross to get them started again.

Taylor was able to grab some pictures of 2-year-old Corvianus, holding a football and showing his dimples with a wide grin. Photos that were behind glass probably will be salvaged.

Everything else, Taylor said, is lost to smoke and water damage.

"We have left what we had on our backs at that time," she said.

Kate Howard can be reached at 726-8998 or khoward@tennessean.com.

How to help

The Nashville area Red Cross has responded to 315 local disaster cases this year. Five were apartment fires that displaced families, including Carolyn Taylor's family. In one apartment building fire on Halloween, 18 families were left homeless and given more than \$18,000 in Red Cross aid.

To help local families such as the Taylors through a donation to the Nashville Area Red Cross disaster relief fund, call 250-4266.

At Tennesseean.com

► To see how you can help this holiday season, go to Tennesseean.com and type WASHLIST into the keyword search box.

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New Hope: Housing built for victims of Katrina

will get one of the first new homes. Bad weather and the Thanksgiving holiday delayed construction, which started two weeks ago. It is 90% complete and the home will be habitable soon, Watson said Friday.

They live in Pearlington, where virtually all the town's 900 homes were flooded and at least 300 destroyed.

What New Hope is trying to do in the community is a good thing, said Watson, a Marriott Hotel retiree who does antiques and custom upholstery.

"I am amazed at the number of people who came and donated their time and their skill. I applaud them for that. People willing to help you in any capacity that they can, I think that is truly a beautiful thing."

The cost for the smaller transitional units ranges from \$5,000 to \$20,000, depending on size, style and specifications. The units come with kitchen appliances, living room, dining room and bedroom furniture.

It costs at least \$25,000 to construct the larger, permanent unfurnished structures, which are at least 1,000 square feet.

The smaller units, mostly intended for Mississippi, range in size from 25 to 70 square feet, depending on the needs of the family.

"We design the homes and buy the materials in bulk and as a nonprofit, we do not have profits to give dividends to shareholders. There is no profit involved," said Crowley, former regional director for Habitat for Humanity.

Costs are also kept low because New Hope does not buy land when building homes and uses volunteer builders.

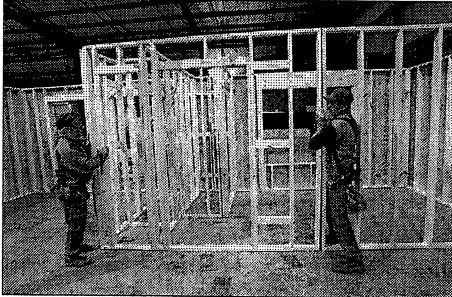
The goal is to collect donations and build several hundred homes, temporary units as well as permanent structures on foundations.

"We are here for the long haul to assist families who lost everything," Meade said Friday, via his cell phone, as he shopped for building supplies in Mississippi.

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, 60% of Hancock County's 49,000 residents are homeless.

FEMA's office in Jackson, Miss., said 35,000 manufactured units and mobile homes are slated for Mississippi, with 8,500 going to Hancock County.

To date, 6,966 units, or 82% of the FEMA trailers, are occupied in Hancock County. A FEMA spokesman said Friday that FEMA is sending them into the state at the rate of 200 a day.



Carpenters Bob Moore, right, and Glenn Kauffman of New Hope Construction are putting together a house at their warehouse in Hendersonville.

But finding adequate housing remains the biggest challenge, said Rocky Pullman, who represents Pearlington, Waveland, Bayou Phillips and other rural communities on the Hancock County Board of Supervisors.

Pullman, a Pearlington resident, is the board's president. Pearlington is in Mississippi's far southwest corner on the East Pearl River, 36 miles east of New Orleans and about 20 minutes northwest of the gulf.

"It was close enough to get inundated with water," Pullman said. "The day of Katrina, the gulf was in Pearlington."

Three Pearlington residents drowned in the storm, but the community's plight has faded from the headlines. The needs persist there and in neighboring hamlets on the Gulf Coast.

"Some people have not received their FEMA temporary housing — a trailer," said Pullman, whose family did get one.

"The weather is getting cooler down here. We had one night when we dipped below freezing. Housing is the most pressing issue, to get people out of harm's way."

New Hope Construction is working with members of the newly formed South Walton Hurricane Helpers, based in south Florida; the Seaside Community Foundation, also in

Florida, as well as the Red Cross and Habitat for Humanity of Walton County.

This coalition is coordinating volunteers, managing donations and screening buyers or tenants. As residents receive insurance settlements or other means of getting back on their feet, the goal is to pass the unit on to another family, Meade said. The units also can be converted to permanent housing.

"You do get discouraged because there is so much devastation, but you get over it by realizing that you are making a difference," said Meade, who was in Hendersonville for Thanksgiving but returned to Mississippi last weekend.

Out of the \$240,000 pledged, more than \$200,000 has been spent building lodging for volunteers and starting eight units, said Meade, who added that the volunteers also are collecting unused household goods and toys to help the families resettle.

While uncertain exactly how many homes will go up, Pullman said if New Hope Construction builds just two, "they will make somebody's life better than it was before."

"If they build 20, great, and if they build 40 or more, God bless them."

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Mansfield: Tip leads to suspect

FROM PAGE 1B

Investigators he walked in front of Mansfield's Volkswagen Jetta at the intersection of Chapel and Greenwood avenues with a pistol in hand. The teen told detectives that he wanted Mansfield's car and money, Metro Police spokesman Don Aaron said.

Mansfield accelerated to get away and the teen fired a shot at him, police said yesterday.

Mansfield drove a short distance before pulling over to the side of Chapel Avenue between Douglas and Merle streets.

When Mansfield didn't come home, his partner went looking for him. His housemate found the car with Mansfield unresponsive inside and broke out a window in the vehicle to get to him, Aaron said.

Deonvelt Miller also admitted to carrying someone else just minutes after killing Mansfield, police said. In that incident, Cesar Navarro was robbed at gunpoint of his 1999 Chevy Suburban as he and a friend sat listening to the radio in the 1500 block of Cabal Avenue, according to authorities.

Reached at home yesterday, the teen's grandmother said she didn't believe her grandson was guilty.

"I don't really want to talk about it, but I know he's innocent," Sara Chunn said. "My grandson is not capable of doing things like that, and that's why I said he's innocent."

After the killing, police beefed up their presence in the neighborhood and made sure that people on the street knew of the reward.

Warner Bros. Records put up \$25,000. *Out & About* newspaper contributed \$10,000, and CrimeStoppers gave another \$10,000. "There has been a very heightened police presence with both uniformed and undercover officers as we have turned to the community, both law abiders and law breakers, to try to get information on this case," said Aaron, the police spokesman.

East Precinct's undercover drug team has frequently worked the area since the murder, putting the word on the street about the substantial reward.

Deonvelt Miller is being held in the Metro Juvenile Detention Center. He is due in court for a detention hearing tomorrow.

Shaka Butler can be reached at 259-2144 or shakab@tennessean.com.

Seay: Driver must reapply after diversity training

FROM PAGE 1B

the complaint to district officials, Brown said.

Seay was removed from her route after a preliminary investigation.

Hunters Lane High School has more than 2,000 students in grades 9-12 and has a student-teacher ratio of 20-to-1.

The high school is one of two Tennessee secondary institutions that offer special comprehensive, pre-university curriculums during the last two years of study, according to the school's 2004-05 profile.

She was given a five-day suspension without pay for "conduct unbecoming" and mental abuse against a student, Brown said.

Brown said there had been no previous complaints of this nature involving Seay.

The name-calling incident happened a few weeks into the current school year.

The students and Seay reported the incident to Hunters Lane Principal Clay Myers, who reported

The school is located near the intersection of Dickerson Pike and Old Hickory Boulevard.

Seay is on medical leave unrelated to the incident. She will have to apply for a new assignment after she completes a diversity workshop conducted by Metro government for its employees, Brown said.

"She will be reassigned to a route outside of the Hunter's Lane cluster," Brown said.

Alyssa Torres can be reached at 259-8304 or alystort@tennessean.com.

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