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DNA testing clears men

By CARLA BRANCH
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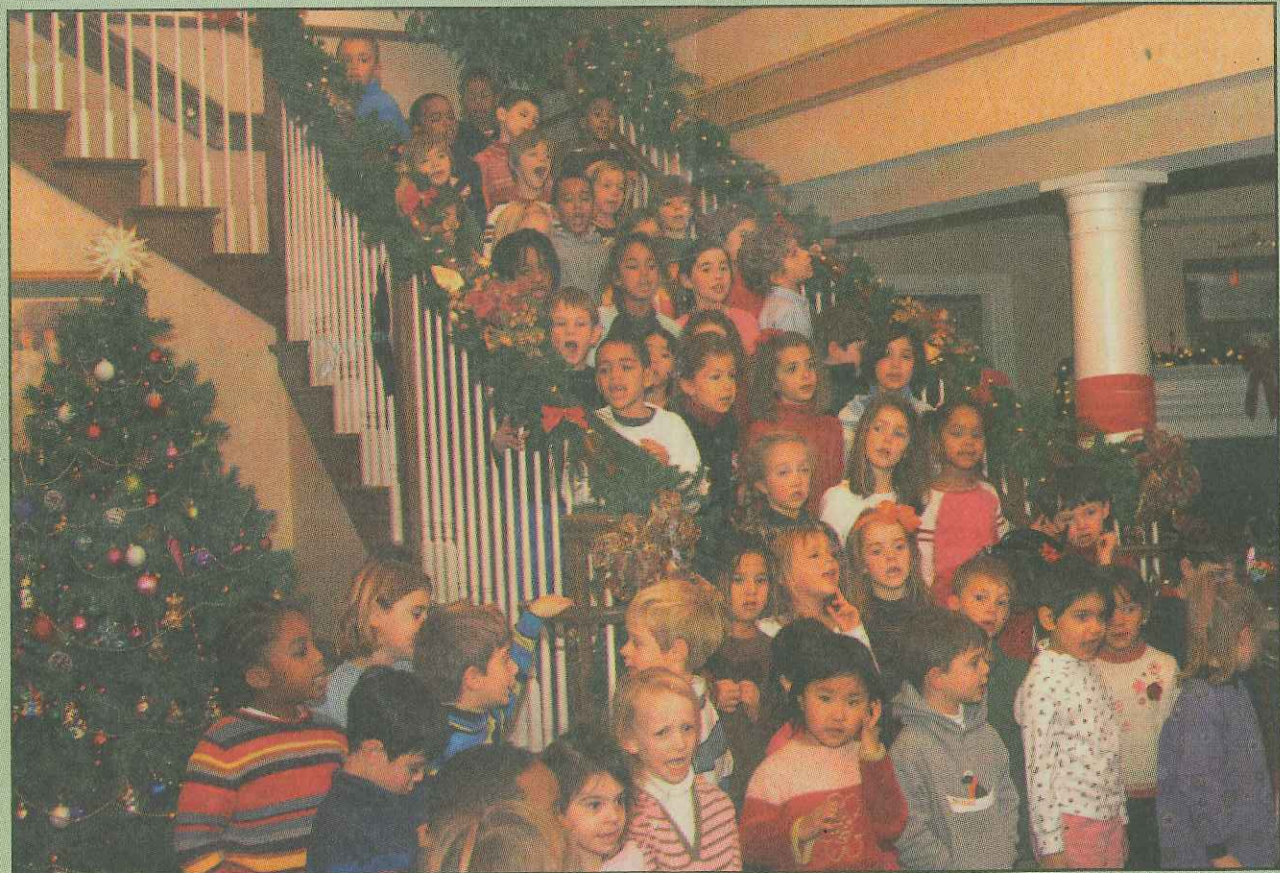
A man convicted of rape in Alexandria has now been cleared because of DNA testing.

Virginia Governor Mark R. Warner announced Wednesday that DNA testing has provided evidence to help exonerate two men, both of whom have served time for sexual assault but had already been released from prison.

The cases were investigated by the Commonwealth's Attorney's offices in Norfolk and Alexandria. As a result of their investigations, these Commonwealth's attorneys have requested that the governor issue absolute pardons. Both exonerated men have requested that their names not be released at this time. The governor has asked that the petitions go through the normal review but in an expedited manner.

"I can't comment on the facts of the case in which the defendant in Alexandria was exonerated except to say I have met with him and he is thankful that his innocence has been established," said Alexandria Commonwealth's Attorney S. Randolph Sengel. "Because we have a cold hit in this case, this is now an active and pending criminal investigation and we will do

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Holiday cheer at Sunrise

Kindergartners and first graders from Burgundy Farm Country Day School entertained residents at Sunrise Assisted Living on Duke Street Wednesday, singing favorite holiday carols and bringing good cheer to the seniors. Eugene Branch, music director at Burgundy, directed the children in the hour-long musical presentation, accompanied by Toni Rosch on the piano.

Alexandria Times Staff Photos/Mark Reinstein



Color engraving of 'Life of George Washington: The Christian,' 1853.

George Washington passes away at his Mount Vernon estate

On Saturday, December 14, 1799, George Washington died at his Mount Vernon estate. The following Monday, December 16, *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser* announced to the world General Washington's passing, in a small notice, at the bottom of page 3.

The front page of the Colonial daily featured an article on the efficacy of "Hamilton's worm-destroying lozenges" on infants and an announcement that one of the paper's "Good Readers" need to appear at the Alexandria Courthouse to answer the charge of falling two months behind on payment of a \$6-per-year subscription.

On A-1, there were also elegantly-worded advertisements hawking "50,000 feet of superior New England pine plank, tradable for 50 barrels of tar and 150 dozen herrings," and a five-dollar reward for the person who locates a stray coach horse.

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House and toys go up in flames

Sentencing for identity thief

There were small news

Sengel to head state forensic science advisory board

By CARLA BRANCH
Alexandria Times Staff Writer

The Virginia Department of Forensic Science has a new advisory board and that board's chair is Alexandria Commonwealth's Attorney S. Randolph Sengel.

Sengel was elected at the Board's first meeting earlier this month. "We are going to meet quarterly and will work closely with the staff in Richmond and with the four labs," Sengel said. "It is my goal to visit all of the labs and talk with those staff so that I can better understand their needs."

The Department of Forensic Science was established in 1972 as the Bureau of Forensic Science, evolving

into a state division in 1990 and into the Department of Forensic Science just this year. The department is a nationally accredited forensic laboratory system serving all state and local law enforcement agencies, medical examiners, and Commonwealth's Attorneys in Virginia. DFS examiners provide technical assistance and training, evaluate and analyze evidence, interpret results, and provide expert testimony related to the full spectrum of physical evidence recovered from crime scenes.

Since 1993, 240,858 DNA samples have been entered into the DFS data bank; there have been 3,104 hits, linking crimes to an individual.



Alexandria Times Staff Photo/Bob Lennox

Commonwealth Attorney S. Randolph Sengel

Because of this computerized matching system, 3,043 crimes have been solved: 1,882 breaking and entering/robbery/grand larceny/burglary cases, 562 sex crimes, 290 murders, 17 rape/murders and

292 miscellaneous crimes.

Goals set

The General Assembly created the Forensic Science Board to develop program and fiscal standards and goals gov-

erning the operations of DFS; develop long-range programs and plans for the incorporation of new technologies; review and comment on all budgets and requests for appropriations; monitor the activities of DFS and its effectiveness in implementing the standards and goals that have been set; advise the governor, DFS director and General Assembly on matters relating to the department and forensic science in general; review, amend and approve recommendations of the Scientific Advisory Committee; administer the expenditure of all funds and recommend actions to foster and promote coordination and cooperation between DFS and its users.

"One of our first goals is to develop a policy for setting priorities," Sengel said. "Right now, the squeaky wheel gets the grease, so to speak. So, if you have a case and want the

analysis expedited and you call often enough, it will get expedited. We need to give the staff at the labs some assistance so that they can point to a policy and everyone will adhere to it. Right now, a high profile case can take 90 days or so and other cases can take as long as 180 days."

Budget is, of course, another issue. "We need to take a look at the labs' resources and determine what they need to do their jobs," Sengel said.

A match from the DFS DNA data bank recently exonerated an Alexandria man who had served time for sexual assault and other matches have led to resolving several cold cases. "The staff in the labs and in Richmond do very good work," Sengel said. "I am pleased to be working with them even more closely than I have as one of the commonwealth's attorneys who use their services."