

THE FRANKLIN DAILY

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Va. woman, 29, charged in beating death of boyfriend, 77

Duncan Adams

A 29-year-old woman faces a first-degree murder charge in the beating death of her 77-year-old boyfriend in his Bedford County home. A Bedford County grand jury returned the indictment Tuesday.

Kristina Pongracz previously had been charged with aggravated malicious wounding after a deputy from the Bedford County Sheriff's Office found William Herchenrider bleeding profusely and on all fours May 4 at the large home Pongracz shared with him in Goodview.

Herchenrider survived but spent months in the hospital and an acute-care facility recovering. Then, on Aug. 25, just hours after his return home, Herchenrider died while in hospice care, said Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Stephanie Ayers.

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In Bedford County Circuit Court last month, Ayers told the court that state medical examiners released autopsy results in December that ruled that Herchenrider's death was a homicide. Forensic evidence linked his death to complications that resulted from the beating, Ayers said.

She said then that prosecutors would seek a murder indictment. Pongracz was arrested May 5. County sheriff's Deputy Chris Brown testified in October that when he responded to the elderly man's home, he found Pongracz passed out in her underwear with "a

large amount of blood

smeared all over her body."

Authorities have alleged that Pongracz beat Herchenrider because he wanted to kick her out of his 3,730-square-foot home.

Herchenrider once served as an executive for Delta Star Inc. in Lynchburg.

The case has attracted national attention. The Nancy Grace show briefly considered highlighting it last week.

Pongracz's attorney, Public Defender Webster Hogeland, has asked the court to allow the defense to hire its own forensic expert to review the autopsy findings. The state would pay for the expert because Pongracz has no funds, Hogeland said.

Circuit Court Judge James Updike will review related motions March 14.

Pongracz remains jailed.



Photograph courtesy of: News Channel 8

State Legislators Adopt \$80 Billion Budget

Julian Walker

Major features of amendments to the \$80 billion budget Virginia's General Assembly passed Thursday and sent to Gov. Bob McDonnell to amend.

The general fund, which supports core services, totals nearly \$32 billion, half of it available for the fiscal year that begins July 1.

STATE EMPLOYEES — Employees will be required to pay 5 percent toward their retirement, but that will be offset by a 5 percent pay raise.

PUBLIC EDUCATION — Provides more than \$100 million for public colleges and universities to help stabilize tuition costs, increase student financial aid and increase the number of in-state undergraduate seats at high-demand schools like the Uni-

versity of Virginia and Virginia Tech.

— Provides an additional \$75 million for public education.

— Reduces spending for public broadcasting by 10 percent, or about \$400,000.

HEALTH AND HUMAN RESOURCES

— Places \$30 million into a trust fund to help address deficiencies in a Department of Justice report that said Virginia is warehousing those with severe disabilities in institutions instead of treating them in the community.

— Restores \$64.5 million for reimbursements for Medicaid health care providers that would have taken effect in July.

continued on page 1B

Appalachian Power Co. Spending \$82.7 Million on Local Projects

Brian Kelley

Electricity should begin to flow this week to the new Lake Forest substation in Botetourt County, the first of four projects in the Roanoke region that Appalachian Power Co. says are designed to bolster its ability to meet increased demand and to improve reliability.

Appalachian will spend \$82.7 million by the time the projects are completed in 2014. The company then will file a transmission rider with the state to seek to have customers pay for the work, which likely will mean a 7 cent monthly increase for the typical residential customer. That filing will be in addition to the base rate filings the company is required by law to file every two years.

For now, more than 700 people, both from the utility and hired contractors, are working or will work on the projects

designed with two purposes in mind: carrying more electrical load, and building so-called "double contingency" reliability to meet updated national standards. That means if one high-voltage line goes down, a second will be available to carry its load.

"It's just unbelievable all the people who touch a project like this," said Shawn Smith, project manager for the Matt Funk and Huntington Court reliability upgrades.

The work amounts to the most substantial physical improvements to the electrical system in the Roanoke area in the past two decades, said Paul Hanson, a senior engineer in asset planning who went to work for the utility in 1990.

"These aren't projects you design overnight," he said. Each has gone through a three-year process, involving meetings with affected property owners and residents and obtaining state ap-

proval. In two projects, substations were moved from originally proposed locations based on residents' suggestions.

All are designed with the goal of keeping the lights on, the heat pumps humming and industries that employ thousands supplied with power in the face of cars hitting electrical poles, ice and wind storms, lightning and even that bushy-tailed nemesis of reliability, *Sciurus carolinensis*. "Squirrels get on the power lines and where do they go? They follow the line back to the substation," Hanson said. To foil them, baffles are installed on the lines outside the substation's fence line.

continued on page 1B

What's Inside:

Franklin Facing Pothole Problems. found on page 1B

Farewell to a Local Legend found on page 2D

County Recommends Redistricting Plan, Public Hearing Scheduled

Rob Chapman

It's not quite a completed process, but Prince Edward is well on its way to approving a redistricting plan some three weeks ahead of schedule.

The County's three-member advisory committee presented a recommendation Tuesday evening and the Board of Supervisors agreed to advertise a public hearing on the proposal for their March 8 meeting.

There will be some changes as there usually are with growth/shifts in population data as detailed with a census, but at a glimpse the eight electoral districts would appear roughly as they currently exist.

Advisory committee member Paul Hoffman detailed at the Tuesday evening presentation that the committee "basically adopted the same philosophy that you instructed us to do" and outlined that they put a high emphasis on equalizing potential populations; put a lot of emphasis on contiguous boundaries (especially using boundaries that were readily identifiable, known to the community); put a strong

focus on not having any retrogression of the minority popularity, especially those districts that have historically had minority majorities; had a goal of keeping polling places in their districts, and a goal of not redistricting supervisors out of their districts.

"We had some challenges," Hoffman told the board. "The first and foremost challenge was what we...call the Longwood problem where the Census Bureau put virtually all of the Longwood student population in two census blocks - approximately 201 High Street - which meant that they weren't really distributed over the geography of the Longwood campus as they actually live, but they were sorta artificially lumped into these two blocks. Also, the Longwood population, at about 2,400, really skewed the population of the Farmville District, so we had a big adjustment to make there...in order to equalize the population."

continued on page 1B

Classified 6D
Comics 2C
Editorials 6A
Local News 1B
Obituaries 3B
Sports 1D
Tech News 1C
Television & Movies 4C

2500274