

Metro week in review; May 23-29

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Staff

Body

Ex-school chief indicted in construction probe

Former DeKalb County school Superintendent Crawford Lewis, former chief operating officer Patricia Reid and two others last **week** were indicted on charges they used the schools' construction program to run a criminal enterprise that benefited themselves and others close to them. DeKalb District Attorney Gwen Keyes Fleming said Reid, Lewis and Reid's secretary, Cointa Moody, received cash and perks in exchange for steering school construction work to Tony Pope, Reid's former husband. The four are charged with a total of 10 criminal counts, including violating the racketeer influenced and corruption act and theft by a government employee.

Reed names finalists for police, fire chiefs

Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed last **week** announced finalists for the city's police and fire chief positions. Reed's top candidates to replace former police Chief Richard Pennington include George N. Turner, a veteran of the Atlanta Police Department and current interim police chief; Cedric L. Alexander, with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport; and Robert Crump White, chief of police in Louisville, Ky. The fire chief finalists are Joel Baker, interim Atlanta fire chief; Kelvin Cochran, current U.S. fire administrator and the city's fire chief from 2008 to 2009; and Brenda Nishiyama Willis, who has been a firefighter for more than 32 years. Reed said he will make his final decision in June.

Reports mixed on **metro** home prices

Are **metro** Atlanta home prices rising or falling? According to a National Association of Realtors report released Monday, the median sale price for existing single-family homes in the **metro** area rose 7 percent in April from the same month a year earlier. Meanwhile, another report released last **week** was less optimistic. The Standard & Poor's Case-Shiller Index said seasonally adjusted Atlanta area home prices fell 1.3 percent in March from February, and 1.2 percent year over year.

Report: Teacher quit after affair with student

Metro week in review; May 23-29

Shiloh High School's Teacher of the Year recently resigned after admitting to having a sexual relationship with a 17-year-old student, according to files obtained by the AJC. Keenon Aampay Hall, 29, left her job as an English teacher at the Gwinnett County school amid allegations that she seduced a senior. Sid Camp, executive director of Gwinnett's Division of Human Resources, said Hall told officials she had a consensual sexual relationship with the student.

DeKalb judge's training tab nearly \$25,000

A DeKalb County judge spent almost \$25,000 in county funds traveling to conferences in Jamaica, Panama and the Virgin Islands over three years, an investigation by the AJC and WSB-TV found. Records show State Court Judge Barbara Mobley spent more than any of the county's six other State Court judges on travel expenses from 2007 to 2009. After receiving questions from the newspaper, DeKalb County officials said they are looking at freezing travel.

Limits lifted on class sizes in Ga. schools

Georgia public school classrooms could get more crowded next year. In response to shrinking budgets, the state Board of Education voted 9-2 Monday to lift all limits on class sizes. The move, which guts state rules that mandated 23 students or fewer in K-3 and 28 in grades 4-8, allows districts to raise class sizes by as many students as they choose without seeking a waiver from the board or the Department of Education.

More MARTA service, job cuts may be coming

MARTA could cut service by 15 percent and lay off 400 workers under belt-tightening measures tentatively approved Thursday. If the full MARTA board approves the plan next month, the transit agency will drop 41 bus routes, including the Braves shuttle; close bathrooms in every station except Five Points; and increase rail wait times by up to five minutes. MARTA expects to save about \$44.1 million in fiscal year 2011 and \$58.8 million the next year.

Metro jobless rate falls; area will add jobs in 2011

Metro Atlanta's jobless rate took a deep dive last month, falling to 9.8 percent in April from 10.4 percent in March, the state Labor Department reported last **week**. Meanwhile, Georgia State University's latest economic forecast predicted the area would add 42,500 jobs in 2011 and another 51,600 jobs in 2012. Both figures were downgraded from the previous forecast because of hard-to-gauge variables, such as the Gulf oil spill, said Rajeev Dhawan, director of GSU's Economic Forecasting Center.

Twins to be tried as adults in mom's slaying

More details emerged last **week** about a pair of 16-year-old twins charged with murder in their mother's death. Tasmiyah and Jasmiyah Whitehead of Conyers, who were arrested May 21 after a four-month investigation, have been charged as adults in the Jan. 14 slaying of Jarnecca "Nikki" Whitehead, who was found beaten and stabbed. Nikki Whitehead's friends said the girls previously had physically assaulted their mother. A grand jury is expected to hear their case June 7.

Teachers draw anger over KKK robes

Two Georgia teachers recently drew ire when they allowed students to don Ku Klux Klan robes on campus. Catherine Ariemma, a history teacher at Lumpkin County High School, was placed on paid suspension after receiving complaints about the students, who wore white hoods and sheets May 20. Ariemma said the students put on the costumes for a film project. Meanwhile, a spokeswoman for Gwinnett County schools said Stephanie Hunte, a teacher at Sweetwater Middle School, let her students wear KKK robes as part of re-enactments. Officials have launched a human resources investigation into the matter, the spokeswoman said.

It was a good **week** for ...

Metro Atlanta school superintendents. Although area school districts face severe budget cuts and layoffs of more than 1,500 teachers, local school chiefs are still bringing home plenty of cash. At least four superintendents here earn more than Vice President Joe Biden, and one --- Gwinnett County's Alvin Wilbanks, who earns \$382,819 a year --- makes almost as much as President Barack Obama.

Stone Mountain Park. The Memorial Lawn --- the setting for the popular Lasershow --- has gotten a \$4.1 million makeover, complete with new light and sound equipment, wider walkways and a restaurant with a take-away food porch. "This right here is the heart of the park, and it should be pretty," said Stone Mountain Memorial Association CEO Curtis Branscome.

"General" Larry Platt. And you thought his 15 minutes of fame were up. The civil rights activist-turned-performer who became a celebrity --- sort of --- earlier this year for his catchy "American Idol" audition piece, "Pants on the Ground," stole the spotlight again last **week** when he sang during the show's season finale. Maybe all the attention helped him forget about his legal battle with New York rapper Shawn Mims over the rights to the song.

Staff writer Michelle Ewing compiled this list from staff reports and news services. E-mail her at mewing@ajc.com

It was a bad **week** for ...

DeKalb workers. The cash-strapped county might have to lay off some employees, after all. Officials last **week** said the county is looking at ways to offset a \$8.7 million shortfall caused by a decline in the tax digest, including job cuts and library closures. In February, the commission approved a \$564 million budget that included \$50 million in cuts, along with an early retirement program that was designed to avoid layoffs.

Forsyth County drivers. A six-mile Department of Transportation project to widen Ga. 141 should have finished up a year ago, but the delays were so bad that the deadline has been pushed back to Dec. 31, officials said. "It's killing us," said developer Dewey White, who believes the project has thwarted deals to build on his land.

Web-based retailer Sportscrack. The online shop has been selling jerseys emblazoned with "J-Hey" and "Heymaker" --- nicknames for Braves outfielder Jason Heyward --- without authorization, alleges a lawsuit filed by Atlanta-based nonprofit L.E.A.D. Inc. L.E.A.D. co-founders C.J. and Kelli Stewart, who said Heyward gave their children's charity permission to use his nicknames on T-shirts and other items, want to stop Sportscrack's owner, Matthew Fairchild of Marietta, from selling the shirts and collect monetary damages. Fairchild, who claims he created the nickname, said he hasn't violated any laws. "Unless [Stewart] has the trademark, he's got no case and it's just silly," Fairchild said.

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Metro week in review

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Metro week in review; May 23-29

INVESTIGATIVE FORCES (63%); NATIONAL SECURITY (61%); PRIMARY & SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS (60%); ASSOCIATIONS & ORGANIZATIONS (50%)

Company: GEORGIA TELEVISION CO (50%)

Organization: US DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (55%)

Industry: REAL ESTATE (88%); CONSTRUCTION (88%); HOME PRICES (88%); HOUSING MARKET (83%); RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY (73%); INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRUCTION (73%); PRICE CHANGES (72%); EXISTING HOME SALES (63%); MEDIAN HOME PRICE (63%); PRICE INCREASES (63%); AIRPORTS (61%); REAL ESTATE AGENTS (60%)

Geographic: ATLANTA, GA, USA (94%); DALLAS, TX, USA (79%); LOUISVILLE, KY, USA (75%); FORT WORTH, TX, USA (53%); KENTUCKY, USA (79%); TEXAS, USA (79%); GEORGIA, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (92%)

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