

STATE

AT A GLANCE

Mobile man charged in racial graffiti case

MOBILE | Police have arrested and charged 22-year-old Thomas Hayward Lewis with spraying anti-Semitic images on a Mobile synagogue and racial graffiti at a city park.

Police spokesman Cpl. Charles Bagsby Jr. said a search of Lewis' home last week found an explosive liquid and other items possibly related to explosive-making materials.

The anti-Semitic images were spray painted on the Tree of Life Synagogue in west Mobile, making reference to the neo-Nazi type groups "Combat 18" and "Waffen SS."

Police also found similar spray painting at Cooper Riverside Park downtown, depicting threats against Jews and blacks.

Lewis, who is white, was charged with criminal mischief and two felonies: possession of explosives and possession of a controlled substance.

He was being held in the Mobile County Metro Jail. It was unclear if he had an attorney.

Charges against civil rights activist dropped

MONTGOMERY | Jackson Hospital has dropped criminal trespassing charges against former Chicago alderman and civil rights activist Dorothy Tillman.

Municipal Judge Les Hayes found Tillman guilty last October of trespassing at the Montgomery hospital during a dispute over medical records.

She appealed the conviction, and a jury trial in Montgomery County Circuit Court was set to begin this week, but Jackson Hospital released a statement Tuesday saying all parties agreed to drop all charges to resolve all remaining issues.

Hayes had given Tillman a suspended sentence of 10 days in jail and fined her \$350.

Tillman was arrested last March while she was in her hometown for the funeral of civil rights icon Johnnie Carr.

The incident occurred after Tillman's aunt became ill during the visit and was admitted to the hospital. Tillman asked for her aunt's medical records upon discharge, but staff members refused.

Woman admits filing false victim's claim

MONTGOMERY | A Birmingham woman has pleaded guilty to trying to steal victim's compensation money.

State Attorney General Troy King says it appears to be the first case prosecuted for providing false information to the Alabama Crime Victims Compensation Commission with intent to defraud the commission.

Meadow Rush pleaded guilty Monday in Montgomery to knowingly providing false information to the commission and possessing a forged death certificate.

King said Rush falsely claimed to be the wife of Julius Vance, who was shot to death in Birmingham in 2005. She submitted an altered death certificate to the commission and falsely claimed to have paid more than \$7,000 in funeral expenses.

Rush is scheduled for sentencing March 12. She could receive one to 10 years in prison and a fine of up to \$15,000 on each count.

State's unemployment rate 24th in nation

MONTGOMERY | Alabama's December unemployment rate of 6.7 percent ties the state with Pennsylvania for the 24th lowest unemployment rate in the nation.

A national unemployment ranking released Tuesday shows Wyoming has the No. 1 spot with 3.4 percent and Michigan is at the bottom of the list with the worst, 10.6 percent.

Alabama's rate is better than all neighboring states. Tennessee measures 7.9 percent. Mississippi 8 percent, and Florida and Georgia 8.1 percent.

— From wire reports

Senator makes 11th try for state smoking ban

By Phillip Rawls
The Associated Press

MONTGOMERY | State Sen. Vivian Davis Figures of Mobile isn't giving up after 10 years of trying without success to ban smoking in most public places in Alabama.

"I'm back," Figures said Tuesday. "This is the 11th year trying to get a strong clean indoor act passed in Alabama."

Figures, D-Mobile, said she

will introduce her bill when the Legislature convenes Feb. 3.

Figures' bill got further last year than ever before. The Senate approved it and so did the House Government Operations Committee. But the bill never got up for a vote in the House, despite an endorsement from Gov. Bob Riley, a former smoker.

Figures, who suffers from bronchitis and asthma, said she began working on the bill initially with only Smoke Free

Alabama helping her. But each year, the list of supporters keeps growing, and that makes her optimistic 2009 will be the year the bill will succeed.

At a news conference Tuesday in the Statehouse, she was surrounded by leaders of the American Cancer Society and several other health, medical and religious groups, including an official from the Alabama State Baptist Convention.

Joe Bob Mizzell, the con-

vention's director of Christian ethics, said people should take good care of the bodies God has given them by not smoking.

"It is not only a health issue to us; it is a spiritual issue," he said.

Figures, who is still putting the final touches on her bill, said it would ban smoking in enclosed workplaces, including restaurants, bars, retail or service businesses, shopping malls, theaters, sports arenas,

buses and taxis, health care facilities, day care centers and government buildings.

Layne Lunn, director of communications for the Alabama Restaurant Association, said the group would support a ban that covers both restaurants and bars so that there is a level playing field for the businesses. The association is opposed to a ban for restaurants only because customers would go to bars to drink, she said.



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