

## Town Hall Meetings are underway ■ Parkland reaches out to satellite towns

By **KATHLEEN SERINO**  
*Prospectus Writer*

Do you have BIG ideas that you would like Parkland College to address? If so, the Town Hall Meetings are where it's all happening and where you need to be. The college is organizing over 20 meetings in communities throughout District 505 for the months ahead.

The Town Hall Meetings at Parkland have been officially underway since the first assembly in Monticello on February 4. According to a press release from earlier last week, these meetings are designed to "learn more about the needs facing its district communities and how it might adjust its educational programs and services to fill those



needs."

According to Linda Moore, Vice President of Student Services, the meetings are a new

and improved version of the preceding Futures Conferences, which were held on campus but not all were able to attend the conferences.

"We were interested in reaching people who might not be attending the Futures conferences, and that the previous format perhaps has outlived its usefulness. They had been very informative and useful, but we were no longer getting new ideas to address in that format," Moore stated.

Moore added that that another purpose of the Town Hall Meetings is also to address some of these programs and services, which the communities may need but may be unaware that said provisions already exist.

Issues that have been dis-

cussed from the meetings in Monticello, Farmer City and Leroy include additional non-



credit programming, more fine arts opportunities for high school students, computer skills training and increased online classes.

Additionally, Leroy specifically mentioned the need for childcare assistance, as their only center in town is closing in the spring. They discussed the possibility of soliciting Parkland's elementary education majors who might be interested in working out some sort of opportunity for students to earn some experience while helping out the working families of the town. The community in Leroy also mentioned an interest in dual credit opportunities in theater programs for

See **Meet** on page 3

## Jabali Afrika captures Parkland's energy, spirit ■ Event part of Black History Month 2008 at the college

By **BRIANA WALDEN**  
*Photography Editor*

The halls of Parkland College were filled with the deep enchanting harmonies of Africa as students, staff, and faculty gathered to hear the sounds of Jabali Afrika during a noon-hour concert on Friday, February 8. This international touring band, skilled in intricate percussion rhythms and wearing traditional tribal costumes, brought out the spirit of African song and dance. Students, staff, faculty and community members filled chairs and lined

the walls of the Flag Lounge, as children sat in rows at the feet of the band to observe the performance.

The concert included original compositions with traditional African rhythms—many of which have formed the foundation for modern rock, jazz, and blues. Joseck Asikoye led Parkland in a sensuous love song with a call and response rendition of "Parkland ladies are so fine." Jabali also captured the attention and spirit of childhood, by having the youngest audience members join in a song called "Tree Tree Tree" that the musi-



cal group had performed on, Mr. Roger's Neighborhood in 1997. Moved by the spirit in the room the audience raised up their voices like that of a church congregation singing, "We love you. Yes we do. We love you. Yes we do." After the roaring applause, one student cried out, "We want to dance!" The band responded with pulsing rhythms and the children, the students, faculty and staff got on their feet.

Victor Elolo—"Belly Man"—took a break from the congas to teach several college students

See **Afrika** on page 3

Next week from the Prospectus, or catch our stories early online at [www.prospectusnews.com](http://www.prospectusnews.com)

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## Prospectus

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• The rules of correspondence: all submissions must be signed with a phone number and address. The Prospectus staff must verify the identity of letter writers. Correspondence may be edited to accommodate the space requirements of the paper. The deadline for all submissions is 12 p.m. of the Thursday immediately before the upcoming issue.

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# CHUCK SHEPHERD'S NEWS OF THE WEIRD

By **CHUCK SHEPHERD**  
*Lead Story*

Five of the 10 best-selling novels in Japan in 2007 were originally composed, and serialized, on cell phones, thumbed out by women who had never written novels, for readers who mostly had never before read one. The genre's dominating plotlines are affairs of the heart, and its characteristics, obviously, are simplicity of plot and character and brevity of expression (lest authors' sore thumbs and readers' tired eyes bring down the industry). Said one successful cell phone writer, for a January dispatch in *The New York Times*, her audience doesn't read works by "professional writers" because "their sentences are too difficult to understand."

### The Entrepreneurial Spirit!

•The New Lucky Restaurant has been around since the 1950s in Ahmadabad, India, serving diners among the gravestones located at various points around the tables. No one is certain who was buried under the restaurant, according to a December Associated Press dispatch, but Indians aren't much spooked by the experience. Said a retired professor: "Graveyards in India are never scary places. We don't have a nice literature of horror stories, so we don't have much fear of ghosts." The restaurant's main concern is that waiters know the floor plan and don't trip over the ankle-high monuments.

•It's the "holy grail" of beers, said a Boston pub manager, but, still, only 60,000 cases a year of Westvleteren are brewed because the Belgian Trappist monks with the centuries-old recipe refuse to expand their business (and even get on the phone to harass black-marketers). Westvleteren is sold only at the monastery gate, by appointment, with a two-case-a-month limit, at a price that's reasonable for retail beer, but anyone who gets it from a re-seller will pay 10 times that much. Producing more, said Brother Joris, to a Wall Street Journal reporter in November, "would interfere with our job of being a monk." Furthermore, said Brother Joris, referencing the Bible, "(I) f you can't have it, possibly you do not really need it."

•Life's Necessities: (1) In Jan-

uary, Taser International introduced the Taser MPH, a combination dart-firing weapon and MP3 music player (that holds 150 songs). (2) In November, Bergdorf Goodman in New York City revealed that it was offering showings of the Guerlain cosmetic house's "KissKiss Gold and Diamonds" lipstick, which retails for \$62,000 (housed in an 18-karat gold tube containing 2.2 carats of diamonds).

### Science on the Cutting Edge

•Latest Ape-Human News: The 4th Texas Court of Appeals in January affirmed a lower court decision that monkeys and chimpanzees have no legal right to file lawsuits against an animal preserve for mistreatment. In Apeldoorn, Netherlands, however, one prominent member of the family is full of human nature: Siby, an orangutan at the Apenheul Primate Park, has so far rejected all overtures to mate with other orangutans and instead appears smitten with blond female zookeepers, especially those with tattoos, according to an October Reuters dispatch.

•To learn how cockroaches socialize, a research team from Free University of Brussels created tiny robots programmed to act like cockroaches, doused them with the proper pheromones, and set them free within crowds of cockroaches to see if they could influence behavior. While some of the robots coaxed real cockroaches to follow them into an unshaded area (away from a dark area that most normally prefer), nearly half of the robots, despite programming, fell under the "spell" of the real ones and headed for the darkness.

### Leading Economic Indicators

It was not only banks in the U.S. that freely loaned money over the last few years, but also those in India, and not surprisingly, many of their debtors have recently run into trouble making payments. Indian banks, inexperienced at collecting from so many defaulting consumers, often prefer to hire "goondas" (thugs) to settle debts the old-fashioned way, according to a January Wall Street Journal report. Though iron-bar beatings are frowned upon, some bankers say it's their only recourse because of

the numbingly slow pace of the Indian legal system.

### Would "News of the Weird" Exist Without Alcohol?

(1) On Nov. 18, two inebriated men in separate cars, driving by the Carpet Classic Floor Studio in Highland Township, Mich., lost control at the same time, and both smashed into the store. (2) Christopher Dougherty, 22, the subject of a "drunk pedestrian" police call in Kingsport, Tenn., on Oct. 14, was tracked to a Hardee's restaurant, where he was face-down in a plate of gravy. (3) Tina Williams was arrested in St. Augustine, Fla., on Super Bowl Sunday, charged with DUI and failure to have her 1-year-old daughter seat-belted or in a car seat. However, a case of Busch beer was safely buckled up in the front seat.

### The Weirdo-American Community

Police in Madison, Wis., believe they ended the spree of vandal defecations in an apartment house on Schroeder Road (laundry room, hallways, items of clothing) with the January arrest of Ronnie Ballard, 19. At Ballard's first court appearance, Dane County Court Commissioner Todd Meurer set bail at \$1,400 and issued a ruling he said he never imagined having to make: As a condition of release, should Ballard make bail, Meurer ordered him to defecate only in toilets.

### Least Competent Criminals

A 53-year-old man from Vernon, British Columbia, was arrested in January and charged with robbing a CIBC bank. He had left his 20-year-old companion in the getaway car listening to the radio, but when the alleged robber got in with the stash, they discovered that the car would not start because the radio had drained the battery. The pair were captured in a nearby bakery, where they had fled, as law enforcement was plentiful in the area since the CIBC bank is located in a building with a Mounted Police station.

### Recurring Themes

Undignified Deaths: (1) A 25-year-old woman jumped to her death from a department

store roof in Tokyo in November and, as sometimes happens with such suicides, she landed on a pedestrian (who was hospitalized in serious condition). (2) At least five people choked to death in Japan over New Year's, as usual, from eating the extremely sticky "mochi" rice cakes that are a staple of the holiday. (3) In Ogden, Utah, in December, a 73-year-old woman was accidentally fatally run over by a motor home. It was unclear whether the first pass over her was fatal, but the driver behaved as others have: After feeling a thumping sound, he said, he stopped and backed up to see what he had hit, thus driving over the body a second time.

### Latest Alarming Headlines

(1) "Jilted Lesbian Rugby Player Killed Herself After Brutally Beating Lover Who Had Webcam Affair" (*Daily Mail* (London)). (2) "Man, 75, Hurt While Riding Pet Buffalo" (MSNBC.com version of an Associated Press story). (3) "Boy Glues Hand to Bed to Avoid School" (MSNBC.com version of an Associated Press story).

### Readers' Choice

(1) In Chaparral, N.M., in December, a loaded .357 Magnum was being traced by two men onto a pattern to create a custom tattoo design, but somehow, the gun went off. Both men were hit by the same bullet, one in the hand and the other in the arm. (2) A 77-year-old man in Des Moines, Iowa, who was trying to unclog his septic tank in the afternoon of Christmas Eve, lost his balance and fell in, head first with his legs sticking up. He remained in that position for about an hour until his wife saw him and called for help.

(Visit Chuck Shepherd daily at <http://NewsOfTheWeird.blogspot.com> or [www.NewsOfTheWeird.com](http://www.NewsOfTheWeird.com). Send your Weird News to [WeirdNewsTips@yahoo.com](mailto:WeirdNewsTips@yahoo.com) or P.O. Box 18737, Tampa, FL 33679.)

# Local/Parkland

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## Your guide to Prospectus News online

- Tips and tricks you can use
- Serve your community

By AARON GEIGER  
*Prospectus Editor*

For both new and returning students, as well as faculty, staff, and alumni, you'll now find a highly accessible and easily navigable online edition of the Prospectus. You'll also discover that the online edition offers a wide range of tools to help you become a part of the news!

Here is a guide to help you gain the most out of our online edition. Our staff strongly encourages individuals, classes, faculty members, and employees to contribute. This way, you can make a difference. You can promote change sometimes as simply as clicking on a poll that we provide. If you don't feel like writing an editorial, you can use our message boards to comment on articles. Is our reporting accurate? Is there something that we missed? Is there something that we covered that helped you? Your feedback can be crucial to improving the standards that you are surrounded by.

Start by going to [www.prospectusnews.com](http://www.prospectusnews.com). We are currently not attached to the main Parkland Web site, and we are working to purge our old Web site. The "front page" will show our top stories, often before they even go to print!

We'll also offer breaking news as events happen. We strongly suggest that you REGISTER with us. Your registration will be useful in several ways. You'll be able to comment and post material, you can sign up for an email edition of the Prospectus each time it's updated, and you can even sign up for breaking news.

Your registration will also help us find our demographics and we will be able to serve you better. Additionally, if you're an aspiring writer, and you

offer enough constructive comments and/or editorials, we can upgrade your status to an online reporter!

You will notice that we will feature a few categories: Front Page, News, Sports, Entertainment, and Opinion. In the future you'll find category links to Public Safety, the Center for Excellence, and other organizations and departments of Parkland that serve you.

We also have reserved space for departments such as Financial Aid, or New Employees/Faculty, Students of the Week, etc. The more people get involved, the more information we can provide. Are you an athlete? Did something happen that you witness and want to share with everyone? Did you get some wicked pictures of a buzzer-beating shot against Danville CC?

We also are working on our calendar section, which offers several types of event calendars. Currently we're offering a general calendar, as well as one for Black History Month, and we're going to post one for the Academic year. If you have an idea, or if you're an organization's leader or advisor, you can request to have access to edit your calendar online as events are posted. All you have to do is email the editor at [editor.prospectus@gmail.com](mailto:editor.prospectus@gmail.com).

Do you have a pressing issue that you would like not only the college to acknowledge, but also the world? Go the message boards, and use them for debate on topics that you find pressing. Do you want to write a message to the editor? Click on 'Letter to the Editor' for a quick way to say what you need to say. We will print your letter, and post it online, as long as you are registered and logged in, and that your letter is informative and professional.

Do you want to run a classified advertisement? They're VERY inexpensive and might help you to sell anything from textbooks to used cars. You can sublet your apartment, or make a request for graduation tickets for your extended family. Do you have a shout out for your friends or loved ones? We'll post 'em. Do you have a graduation announcement for your children (or yourself?) then let us know, and we can help you celebrate.

Perhaps you want to look at our past issues to do some research, or maybe find a picture of yourself singing at Parkland Idol. Visit our Archives section!

If you work for the television station or the radio station, consider creating Podcasts for us to post to the public. If you are a teacher and you want to post your information online for your students, and you're not entirely comfortable with the Internet, then ask us how to create a Podcast. We'll walk you through it, and eventually YOU could be posting them on our site on a regular basis.

Did your organization take a trip? Did your department celebrate a retirement? Take pictures, and send them to us, and we'll create a slideshow for the online edition.

Are you a student with an informative YouTube video? Let us screen it, and we might be able to post it for you.

Your choices are limitless, however you need to make a choice first. We have worked hard to provide you with these services, and we're asking you to make a difference. Visit our Web site, register, comment, participate, and give feedback. You are the community that we serve. Help us to make changes. Help us to bring Prospectus News to a higher level.

## AFRIKA

*continued from page 1*

how to belly dance, delighting the audience with the voluptuous moves. Each student who participated in the lesson took turns showing off their moves as the crowd laughed and applauded. The dancing crowd grew as more and more got up from their seats, inspired by Jabali Afrika's music.

When the performance was over, students rushed up to buy CDs and get autographs from the musicians. The students gave hugs and exchanged email addresses to stay in touch with the band that captured their hearts.

The four-member musical group kept the energy high throughout the performance. Victor Elogo, barefoot with sweat rolling down his face, passionately played the congas and a variety of percussion instruments, even using his elbows if needed. Dumisizwe Bhembe, wearing burlap and sporting

dreads, slapped out the throbbing bass lines and rhythms on various traditional instruments, as Joseck Asikoye rolled out the rhythm on his trap set. Justo Asikoye—Joseck's brother—played guitar and a variety of jimbays.

The show entertained and educated the audience on the beautiful and rich culture of Africa and left Parkland's atmosphere infused with their spirit of that great land. Parkland was truly fortunate to experience this talented band with a sound that's not often heard here in the Midwest.

To see more Jabali Afrika, their music "Percussion Discussion" will be appearing on the new PBS show "Road Trip Nation" airing on Sundays. You can visit them on the Web at [www.jabaliafrika.com](http://www.jabaliafrika.com) for air times and touring information.

This performance was made possible by the Office of the President and the Black History Month Committee, as part of Black History Month 2008.

## MEET

*continued from page 1*

their high school students since a dramatic arts program isn't offered there.

Although there are many more meetings to come and its too early to report on major decisions and changes, Moore said that Parkland officials are collecting a lot of data and will

compare all of the details to find common needs and concerns "that seem reasonable for us to address," she said.

As of now, Moore welcomes Parkland students, faculty, staff and others in the community to come to these hourly meetings and share your concerns. The next meeting is to be held at Perc Fecton Coffee House in Gibson City on February 18.

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## Student Life Presents: Brother to Brother

By **BETH VOIGT**  
Features Writer

How great would it be to see African American males getting some *positive* attention a lot more often? Are you interested in becoming a part of a story that does *not* use the phrases "black men" and "at risk" in the same sentence? Then Parkland's Brother-to-Brother (B2B) club wants to hear from you!

Brother-to-Brother is a social and academic support group targeted toward African American males on Parkland's campus. It is a student-led organization that will let your voice be heard, as the students involved in the organization set the agenda and choose the activities in which Brother-to-Brother will participate.

Brother-to-Brother was formed in 2002 to encourage African American males at Parkland College to achieve excellence both academically and in their future careers. Membership in Brother-to-Brother is open to all new and returning students, faculty and staff.

"We are continuing to build the group this semester and are in the process of selecting a few new officers," said Larry Taylor, advisor for Brother-to-Brother.

Now is a great time to get involved, since the club is cur-

rently recruiting for upcoming officer elections. A great chance for a resume-building leadership position, offices currently available in Brother-to-Brother include Secretary and Sergeant in Arms. The club is hoping to hold elections soon, so don't hesitate to get in touch with them!

While there are no requirements for membership in Brother-to-Brother, officers must maintain at least a 2.0 GPA to retain their position. Members of Brother-to-Brother not holding officer positions are known as Representatives, as they seek to uphold a positive image within the community.

"Statistically, it is shown that students who connect with the college in student organizations tend to have higher retention rates than uninvolved students," said Taylor, and Brother-to-Brother hopes "to help prepare African American males at Parkland College for both academic and career success."

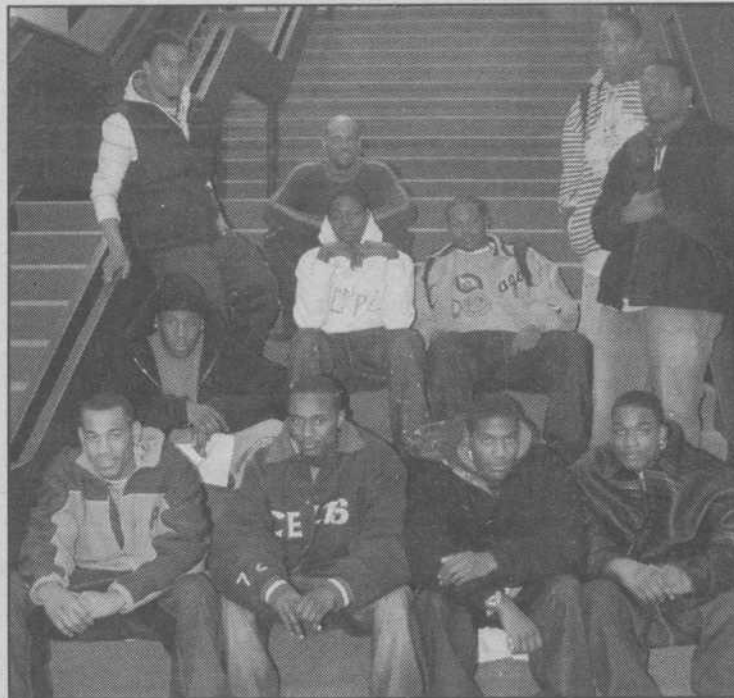
Not only do students more involved in college actually stay in college, participation in Brother-to-Brother can provide resume-building experience and leadership opportunities, generate important contacts here at Parkland and for the future, and allow for networking at Parkland, out in the community, and beyond. Students

involved in Brother-to-Brother develop both academically and personally as their participation and new friendships develop

One activity in the works for the club is their contribution to the upcoming "Welcome to Hollywood!" dance in April. Work-

years. The dance will be held on Saturday, April 5, and students, alumni, faculty and staff are all welcome to attend. Student tickets are only \$3 in advance, \$5 for couples, and are available in the Student Life office in X-153.

Brother-to-Brother meets twice a week. Club meetings are held on Tuesdays at 2pm and on Thursdays at 3pm in room X-150. Students do not need to hold an office to attend a meeting, and anyone who is curious about the organization is encouraged to come see for themselves. Still have questions about Brother-to-Brother? The club would love to hear from you. Contact advisor Larry Taylor via email at LTaylor@parkland.edu, give him a call at 353-2649, or stop by his office in the Center for Academic Success in room D-120. You can also speak with co-facilitator Greg Square by calling 351-2585 or visiting him in his office in A-259.



Briana Stodden/Prospectus

[The Brother-to-Brother group has joined with the UIUC student organization called Mentor, Teacher, Brother (MTB) to collaborate on upcoming student activities at Parkland College and the U of I. In effect, students that are members of B2B will also have membership in the MTB organization at UIUC.]

and increase throughout the school year.

Participants in Brother-to-Brother can look forward to a variety of activities this semester. They hope to host a number of guest speakers here at Parkland, and discussion sessions as well to create an atmosphere of open interaction.

This semester, Brother-to-Brother has been working on events for Black History Month. In conjunction with Sister to Sister, the Black Student Association, and TRiO/Student Support Services, the club co-hosted an activity for National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day on February 7. The students helped raise awareness on campus about the impact of HIV/AIDS in the African American community, and promoted HIV testing. Some members wore signs around campus to promote the event and raise awareness at the same time.

Members of Brother-to-Brother are involved in other event planning and fund raising activities as well. Participation in the planning processes necessary for these events will give members unique opportunities to demonstrate leadership skills as well as a chance to network with other "brothers."

ing with Parkland's Student Government, members will help plan and put on the first dance to be held at Parkland in about ten

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2/14



"When you say 'let's not and say we did,' do you mean let's say we can, or ... wait - I'm confused."

## The Mars Volta's Bedlam in Goliath:

- A taste of the unique
- A curse from the "soothsayer"

By **JASON HARDIMON**  
WPCD Correspondent

Fans of progressive rock have always had a taste for the unique, and for the past five years none have fed their appetite more than The Mars Volta. Led by guitarist/composer Omar Rodriguez-Lopez and vocalist Cedric Bixler-Zavala, this eight-man band also features collaborator John Frusciante of the Red Hot Chili Peppers.

With their 2003 debut, "Deloused in the Comatorium," which Guitar World has already seen fit to name the 55th great-

The Bedlam in Goliath, The Mars Volta's fourth studio album, was released in the U.S. on January 29. According to the band, the concept for this album evolved from the purchase of an archaic Ouija-type talking board by Rodriguez-Lopez on his travels in Jerusalem. The Ouija Board, later dubbed the "soothsayer," is blamed for streak of bad luck encountered during the recording process, which the band swears would have never have come to completion had Rodriguez-Lopez not disposed of the artifact and banned the mention of its name

occupying lower tempos. Right from the very start, this whole album is relatively fast paced, and relentlessly hard-hitting. As reflected by the cover art, designed by Jeff Jordan, the album also takes on a bit of an eastern theme which is most evident on the final track titled "Soothsayer," a brilliant attempt to convey the atmosphere from which the cursed Ouija Board supposedly came.

I'm sure that the Mars Volta will continue to push the boundaries of conventional music as long as they have the energy to do so. And one day, as fans and new listeners look back on their accomplishments, I'm willing to bet that The Bedlam in Goliath will remain one of their most appreciated efforts. Yet, I also believe that The Mars Volta, regardless of their undertakings, will always remain on the fringe, which is exactly where I would expect that they would like to remain.



est guitar album of all time, The Mars Volta abruptly cemented their place among the true greats of the genre. They have since released two additional studio albums, each more experimental than the last.

Despite a lack of significant commercial success, they have become known for both their tremendous ability to attract droves of intensely dedicated fans and the heir of mysticism surrounding the band members.

in the studio.

While Bedlam in Goliath is widely considered by critics to be a turn in a more conventional direction, its general sound is one that is bound to please the Mars Volta's existing fan base while also expanding it. Like the previous albums, there are strong elements of free jazz, hard thrashing rock, funk, and Latin flavor. However, unlike their previous works, Bedlam in Goliath for the most part avoids drifting into space and

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### Want to be a part of Parkland's Student Government?

In late March and early April, Student Government at Parkland College, will hold elections for the positions of President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, Trustee and Senators. The Office of Student Life will be taking applications for these positions until Thursday, March 6th.

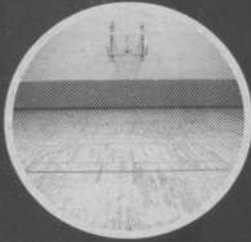
#### So, what are the benefits?

- Attend off-campus leadership conferences
- Networking with faculty and staff
- Office space with your own desk
- Interaction with all student groups on campus
- Assist with highly visible community philanthropic activities

If interested, please note the following timetable:

- Pick-up an election packet in the Office of Student Life on or before March 6.
- Application, petition, and essay must be turned in to the Office of Student Life in room X153 by 5:00 p.m. on Thursday, March 6.
- Candidates will attend a meeting in room X150 at 12:00 p.m. on Friday, March 7.
- Student elections will be held March 31, April 1 and 2 in the College Center.





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February 2008



Photography and Design By Briana Stodden

## Sociologist looks back at gangbanger field research

By CHARLES LEROUX  
Chicago Tribune (MCT)

CHICAGO—The cocaine dealers, members of a South Side gang, didn't know what to make of him. India-born, Brahmin-class Sudhir Venkatesh, wearing, that Saturday in November 1989, a tie-dye shirt, a ponytail and carrying a clipboard that held a questionnaire, clearly didn't belong in the stairwell of a high-rise housing project in a down-and-out, black ghetto neighborhood.

They thought he might be a spy from a rival Mexican gang and threatened him with a gun and a knife. They called him "Julio." Later he would be the "Ay-rab." Whatever he was, he was an exotic catch, one worth holding to show their leader.

In fact, Venkatesh was recently arrived from affluent, overwhelmingly white La Jolla, Calif. He had come to the University of Chicago to take a course in sociology, though his main interest was cognitive science, the study of the brain. He was 23. The path of his life was set. After the sociology course, he'd return to California and continue studies that would lead to a career working in the quiet, safe and clean environment of a research laboratory.

Instead, the next seven years would find Venkatesh delving into the often desperate, sometimes violent lives of residents and gang members within the drab "wall" of 28 public housing towers stretching for two miles along South State Street, the notorious Robert Taylor Homes. According to the Encyclopedia of Chicago, at its population peak, 27,000 people lived there. His immersion into that place would become so deep that Venkatesh would, for a day, lead the gang that had threatened him in 1989. It also would bring the young academic to the fine line between deep and too deep.

While the gangbangers debated his origins and his fate, Venkatesh sat on a cold, concrete stair. He took out his questionnaire and asked: "How does it feel to be black and poor? Very bad, somewhat bad, neither bad nor good, somewhat good, very good?"

The answer he got cannot be printed here, but it heralded the real beginning of his education. Then the man who would be his "professor" strode into the

"classroom."

Later, in a memoir, Venkatesh recalled the moment that would change the course of his life:

"They stopped talking when a small entourage entered the stairwell. At the front was a large man, powerfully built but with a boyish face. He also looked to be about my age, maybe a few years older, and he radiated calm. He had a toothpick or maybe a lollipop in his mouth, and it was obvious from his carriage that he was the boss."

Now, almost 20 years later, Venkatesh is 41 and a rising star in academic circles. He was in town recently from New York and his duties at Columbia University to promote his latest book, "Gang Leader for a Day: A Rogue Sociologist Takes to the Streets."

Over a falafel sandwich at a Lebanese restaurant near the University of Chicago campus, Venkatesh recalled that when he first saw the man he calls, "J.T.," the leader of a branch of a gang he calls the "Black Kings," he saw something familiar.

"I had done some reading on Chicago," he said, "from writers like Len O'Connor and Mike Royko, and I remembered how they described the powerful ward bosses, how when one would walk into the room, everybody would shut up. J.T. was just like that."

His comparison of J.T. to a politician wasn't far off.

Venkatesh learned the gang filled a vacuum created by a city government that mostly ignored public housing residents. The Black Kings brought order of a sort to life in the project while protecting its revenue streams—drug sales and "taxes" on local business transactions, even those as small as after-school candy sales from a lady's apartment.

The more time Venkatesh spent with J.T., the more he realized the gang leader wasn't interested in being a footnote in a dissertation about ghetto life. J.T. wanted to be seen as a force for good—he even somewhat justified selling crack as "keeping money in the community." The naive young student could be his biographer, a Boswell to his Dr. Johnson—had Samuel Johnson been a crack dealer who drove a purple Chevy Malibu Classic with gold rims. At the same time, Venkatesh saw

J.T. as his guide into the culture, organization and economics of a street gang, the world he desperately wanted to study. The two young men carving careers for themselves began a mutually advantageous relationship.

Venkatesh ate meals at J.T.'s mother's table; he sat in on gang meetings. When a rival gang sped down the street spraying a hail of bullets, he helped drag a wounded gang member to safety. When some squatters living illegally in the project—and paying a tax for that to the gang—beat up a crackhead who had assaulted a girl, he helped out with a kick in the ribs.



Sociologist Sudhir Venkatesh, author of the book "Gang Leader for a Day," looks back at his years of gangbanger field research where the former Robert Taylor homes once stood in Chicago, Illinois.

Antonio Perez / Chicago Tribune (MCT)

The title of the book comes from when Venkatesh told J.T. he didn't think being a gang leader was so hard. Try it yourself, J.T. offered. "One day," he said, "take it or leave it."

Venkatesh took it—with the understanding that he wouldn't have to touch a gun or do or plan anything illegal. He would just make the rounds of the gang's crews selling on the streets and sort out the disputes and confusions that arise among 250 young, uneducated, poorly paid and dangerous men. Mostly nothing happened. He made a few decisions that J.T. overturned, wriggled out of administering a punitive beating and that was it.

"Even though I was hanging out with drug traffickers and thieves," Venkatesh writes, "at heart I felt like I was just being

a good sociologist."

Was he? Or had he gotten so close to his subjects that he had lost objectivity? "Gang Leader for a Day," seems to indicate that maybe he had. He says no, and a previous book, "American Project: The Rise and Fall of a Modern Ghetto" contains much more of the statistical data that gives balance to the recently published memoir.

An indication of how far the "field" could be from the ivory tower came to Venkatesh on July 2, 1995. "That was the day I'll never forget," he said, "the day of the second drive-by. The first time, everybody got down

with the rest soon to follow. In the parking lot, J.T. handed him a note of introduction to a gang leader back East. Part way down the page, a phrase jumped out: "He's with me."

Venkatesh remembers smiling when he read that.

With the demolition of the Taylor Homes, residents (some of the gang's best drug customers) and gang members (many of whom were residents as well) scattered. J.T. tried to recruit new members in other parts of the city, but the kids weren't products of the projects. They didn't get what it had meant to be a gangbanger. On one of his visits back to Chicago, Venkatesh went along on a recruitment attempt in the predominantly black West Pullman neighborhood and recalls the experience in his book.

"My auntie said I should ask if she could join also," one kid asked. "Are you kidding me?" J.T. said. Another asked: "Is there some kind of training and do we get paid to go? I got to be at White Castle on Mondays and Thursdays, and my mama says if I lose that job, she'll kick me out of the house." J.T. walked to his car kicking stones into the air.

After a few years, J.T. went straight, managed a dry cleaning business for a while. He opened a barber shop, but it failed. Like many a CEO whose company has been pulled out from under him, he did a little consulting work—for remaining gangs.

"J.T. became," Venkatesh said, and he paused, looking for just the right word, "deflated."

Venkatesh was driven to the 4600 block on South State Street to be photographed amid the vast open space that lies where the Robert Taylor Homes used to be. We pulled into the parking lot, the only physical reminder of where years of his life had been spent and put in danger, where he and another ambitious young man had gone about their vastly different businesses and where his career had been launched.

"Back then, this area would be teeming with life," he said. "There'd be kids playing in the water from a fire hydrant." He stopped and chuckled. "I can't believe I'm romanticizing that place."





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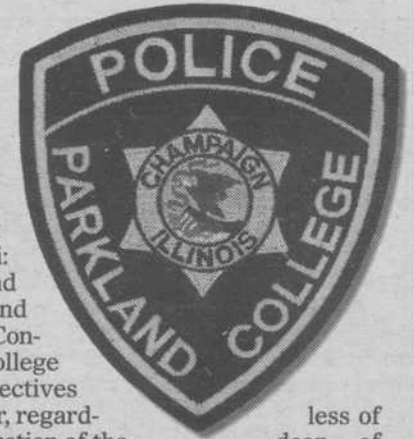
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## Weather Forecast

**Thursday Night:** A 40 percent chance of snow. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 19. East wind between 5 and 8 mph.

**Friday:** Cloudy, with a high near 28.

**Friday Night:** Mostly cloudy, with a low around 19.

**Saturday:** Mostly sunny, with a high near 34.

**Saturday Night:** Mostly clear, with a low around 17.

**Sunday:** Sunny, with a high near 37.

**Sunday Night:** Partly cloudy, with a low around 23.

**Monday:** Mostly sunny, with a high near 41.

**Monday Night:** A chance of snow. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 27.

**Tuesday:** Mostly cloudy, with a high near 37.

## CrimeStoppers seeks assistance

This week, CrimeStoppers and the Champaign County Sheriff's Office are seeking information about a burglary and an attempted burglary at two businesses on Prarieview Road in Mahomet.

On Monday, January 21, at approximately 4:00a.m., suspects shattered the glass door of the BP gas station, located at 603 South Prarieview Road, Mahomet. Two suspects entered the business and took currency, alcohol, and cartons of cigarettes. The suspects appear to be white or light-skinned

males, wearing gray hooded sweatshirts with the hoods covering their faces. They used either gloves of the sleeves of their jackets to cover their hands.



An attempted burglary occurred approximately four days later during the overnight hours of Friday, January 25, at the D & D grocery store, located at 201 North Prarieview Road, Mahomet. Entry was not

gained to the business at that time.

If you have any information about this incident, please call CrimeStoppers at (217) 373-TIPS or (217) 373-8477. The information you provide is confidential. You do not have to give your name or appear in court. CrimeStoppers will pay a reward if the information you provide leads to an arrest for these crimes. Cash rewards are also paid for information on other felony crimes or fugitives in the Champaign County area.

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W. Soccer	8 - 9 - 1, 4 - 4 - 1
Volleyball	39 - 13 (7 - 0)

# Illini and Knight?

By RICK MORRISSEY  
*Chicago Tribune (MCT)*

CHICAGO—I like Bruce Weber. I think he's a kind, decent man and a very good teacher of basketball.

I also know that those are not the pertinent issues among many Illini fans. The issues are that Weber is a below-average recruiter and that the program has steadily fallen since he coached Illinois to the NCAA championship game in 2005. He might be able to get the best out of his players, but he can't get the best players to come to Champaign.

### Which brings me to a question for Illini fans:

With so much dissatisfaction surrounding Weber the last couple of years, would you hire the now free and still loutish Bob Knight, given the chance? Or, as Knight's many detractors might say, would you be willing to sell your soul to the devil?

I know, crazy talk. The very thought of Knight rolling up the sleeves of an orange sweater is very, very painful for those of you who agreed with Lou Henson that the General is "a classic bully."

But it's intriguing crazy talk, is it not?

Knight stepped aside last week as Texas Tech's coach, allowing his son, Pat, to take his place. He has a record 902 career victories, the vast majority of them at Indiana, where he won three national champion-

ships. His resume speaks for itself. But so do his anger issues. And so does the reality that he sometimes treats his players like topsoil.

Obviously, this discussion is all very much hypothetical, but with some of Weber's critics continuing to call for his head, it's a legitimate discussion. When Knight decided to quit, he called his longtime friend, Minneapolis Star Tribune columnist Sid Hartman. Hartman wrote that "if a job in the Big Ten opened up, I am convinced he would give it great consideration."

So again: If you were Illinois athletic director Ron Guenther and one of Knight's representatives called to say he'd be interested in the job if it ever opened, what would you do?

I'd have to listen.

Let's get a few things straight. If Knight had been the Illini coach, it's unlikely he would have landed Jon Scheyer, who chose Duke over Illinois, or Eric Gordon, who gave an oral commitment to Illinois but went to Indiana instead. Weber has been killed for not getting either player.

Great players did choose Indiana when Knight was there—a certain Isiah Thomas comes to mind, but many more were disinterested for the sole reason that Knight was the coach. Very few exceptional players can handle his difficult ways.

But he was a good enough recruiter to move to the college basketball desert of Lubbock, Texas, and take Texas Tech to the Sweet 16 of the NCAA tour-

namment within four years.

In many ways, Downstate Illinois is a lot like Indiana. You could call it Indiana West and not be too far off the mark. People love their basketball in both places, often to excess. That love created an environment that not only allowed Knight to succeed in Bloomington, Ind., but to wield almost absolute authority.

It was not coincidence he ended up at a place like Texas Tech after Indiana University finally tired of him. An out-of-the-way school desperately wanted him.

Illinois seems fairly desperate to get back to the winning ways it enjoyed several years ago. Once you've tasted steak, it's hard to live on a steady diet of pork rinds. The 10-14 Illini have been unbearable to watch at times this season.

Guenther has talked about renewing Weber's contract beyond 2012, but with all the dissatisfaction among fans (pick a message board), it's a compelling question: What if?

Know this: Knight would not have stood for the poor behavior Illini fans exhibited when Gordon came to Champaign last week. No, it's more than that. It never would have happened in the first place. If there's going to be poor behavior, it's going to be exhibited by him.

As distasteful as hiring Knight might be, this is about victories. If it weren't, Weber would be worry-free. He's likable and knows the game. His players have had their share of off-court problems, which

doesn't make them a whole lot different from players from other programs. You rarely see Knight's players in the headlines for indiscretions.

As I've been saying for years, there is good and bad with Knight. It's OK to see the middle ground.

Like Knight, Guenther is a tough, no-nonsense guy. He doesn't put up with stuff. One ugly incident, and Knight would be gone. For that reason, Knight might not want to get within 100 miles of Champaign. He's used

to bendable athletic directors. Guenther isn't that.

Henson was correct in his assessment of Knight, and Illini fans weren't big fans of Knight either. But what if foe became friend?

If nothing else, it's fodder for a cold February day.

What would you do if one of the best coaches of all time expressed interest?

You'd be silly if you didn't consider it.

(c) 2008, Chicago Tribune.

## Illinois officials apologize for taunts at Indiana's Gordon

By TERRY BANNON  
*Chicago Tribune (MCT)*

University of Illinois officials apologized Friday for the behavior of some Illini fans at Thursday night's game against Indiana.

Hoosiers guard Eric Gordon, who initially had announced he would enroll at Illinois, was the object of some obscene taunts, and his family was harassed despite extra security at Assembly Hall in Champaign, where the Hoosiers pulled out an 83-79 double-overtime victory.

"The profanity and behavior by a small segment of fans Thursday night is disappointing and intolerable, and for that we apologize to fans of both teams," athletic director Ron Guenther and coach Bruce Weber said in a joint statement.

Gordon was taunted with chants of "Liar! Liar!" and

"Traitor! Traitor!" and was booed just about every time he touched the ball. After scoring one point in the first half, he led Indiana with 19.

### The entire statement:

"There was a great college basketball game played Thursday night between the University of Illinois and Indiana University, but the game has been somewhat diminished by inappropriate behavior by a number of fans in attendance. We value the enthusiastic support of the sellout crowds at the Assembly Hall, but above all we take very seriously the reputation of our basketball program and the University of Illinois. The profanity and behavior by a small segment of fans Thursday night is disappointing and intolerable, and for that we apologize to fans of both teams."