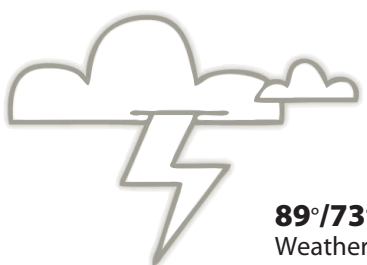




SUNDAY JULY 20, 2008

Daily Press

dailypress.com



89°/73°
Weather on C10

\$2.00

SERVING HAMPTON ROADS SINCE 1896

THE GOOD LIFE, G1

He's preserving St. John's Church

SPORTS, D1

Virginia Derby winner by a nose
Gio Ponti wins via a photo finish; view images from the race on D5



Gilmore, Warner mix it up at debate

Questions about offshore drilling and personal trust dominate the first U.S. Senate exchange between the two former Virginia governors.

BY HUGH LESSIG
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HOT SPRINGS—Democrat Mark R. Warner and Republican Jim Gilmore clashed on ener-

gy and tax policy Saturday in their first U.S. Senate debate, questioning each other's political integrity and command of the facts.

In several pointed ex-

changes, the two former Virginia governors hammered away at campaign themes familiar to people who have watched the two men spar from a distance.

The most prominent policy question: How much should the U.S. rely on drilling offshore for oil to reduce high gasoline prices? The larger and more personal question

focused on which candidate voters could trust in Washington.

Neither candidate commit-

Please see DEBATE/A7



Democratic U.S. Senate candidate Mark R. Warner, left, and Republican candidate Jim Gilmore debate Saturday. AP PHOTOS

INSIDE

Latest state political news and views in the Shad Plank. A12

Fallen star gets a fresh start

Once a millionaire entrepreneur in Hampton and now a convicted felon, David Merritt finds that life is about second chances.

BY LISA FINNERAN
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Gone is the Rolex watch, the Mercedes convertible, the sharp double-breasted suits, the lavish apartment.

Former millionaire, failed restaurateur and convicted felon David Juan Merritt today lives what he and others call a humbled life.

"I want to be a model for others that you can bounce back from failure," said Merritt, now a trainer at the Newport News Family YMCA. "I'm a much better person today because I had failure in my life and learned from it.

"I'm grateful to be here, grateful to have a second chance at life."

It's quite a change from his first life.

Please see MERRITT/A8



THEN: In 1989, David Merritt had plans for a renovation at the old post office in Hampton. They ended with a prison term. PHOTO BY DENNIS TENNANT/DAILY PRESS



NOW: Merritt works as a fitness instructor at the Newport News Family YMCA. PHOTO BY ADRIN SNIDER/DAILY PRESS

A look at David Merritt's journey

1986 Virginia Peninsula Chamber of Commerce names David Juan Merritt Small Business Person of the Year.

1989 Virginia Small Business Administration names Merritt the Small Business Young Entrepreneur of the Year. Entrepreneur magazine names Merritt one of the 40 hottest entrepreneurs younger than 40. In February, Hampton announces plans to sell the old Hampton post office to Merritt for \$250,000.

1992 Aug. 6: Merritt's — An American Restaurant and Bar opens more than two years behind schedule. **Aug. 13:** Merritt files for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. Later filings showed he owed 96 creditors \$1.7 million.

1993 April 19: U.S. Bankruptcy Court judge rules Merritt committed fraud when he filed for bankruptcy. **May:** After closing and reopening several times, Merritt's restaurant closes for good.

1997 Merritt found guilty of 82 counts of fraud and later sentenced to 140 months in federal prison and ordered to pay \$717,672 in restitution.

1998 June 23: Merritt begins serving his sentence.

2007 January: Merritt released from federal prison. He would serve six more months split between a halfway house and home detention before his official release June 22.

2008 He's a trainer at the Newport News Family YMCA.

Man whose 1999 sentence was vacated enjoys his 'freaky' freedom

Aquil K. Wiggins, released from prison Friday evening, spends his first full day out back in Hampton.

BY PETER DUJARDIN
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HAMPTON — A gentle breeze came in as Aquil K. Wiggins sat in a lawn chair Saturday afternoon outside his mother's place in Hampton.

Sure, he felt similar winds in a prison yard over the years. But it feels different now.

"It feels considerably more splendid out here," Wiggins said outside the house on Edith Court in the Fox Hill area. "Something must happen chemically to the

(air) molecules as they come through that barbed wire."

Wiggins, 31, spent more than nine years behind bars for a 1997 robbery and attempted carjacking that he says he didn't commit. He was released from prison Friday—five years early—and was

in Hampton that night. Wiggins' release was set in motion in March. The Daily Press had been asking questions about the case.

Hampton Commonwealth's Attorney Linda Curtis—reviewing the case before an interview

with the newspaper—learned a prosecutor in her office didn't share with Wiggins' attorney that a fingerprint found on the car involved in the carjacking didn't match either Wiggins or

Please see WIGGINS/A6

MORE TOP STORIES



RACE FOR THE WHITE HOUSE
Obama visits Afghanistan

The presumptive Democratic presidential nominee visits Afghan officials and U.S. troops, expressing support for both. C1

TAMARA DIETRICH

Why was a family torn apart?

Social Services messes with a Mathews County woman's attempt to adopt two foster children—and can't give a good reason as to why. A3

OPINION

Teen pregnancy

Why is teen pregnancy now a hot commodity? When did it become entertaining to the point of being the subject of film and TV? C9



NEWPORT NEWS

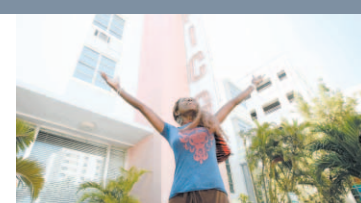
A red light for red-light cameras

The devices intended to catch drivers running lights at three intersections are unlikely to arrive until next year. A11

HAMPTON

Ronald Curry reaches out to the kids

The Oakland Raiders wide receiver and former Hampton High star hopes his program that rewards good behavior will be inspirational. A5



THE GOOD LIFE
South Fla. on the cheap

What's hot in South Beach besides the weather? Hostels—which offer thrifty lodging in Miami. G18

YOUR MONEY

Piecing the commodities puzzle

Agricultural, currency and commodity-based funds have shown resilience during stocks' decline in the turbulent markets. B1

Advice G16
Celebrity briefs G5
Classifieds E1
Editorials C8
Movies G4
Obituaries A14
Puzzles & Games G13
Scoreboard D11
Special Occasions G8



