

COMMUNITIES

From staff reports

CLEVELAND

Breast cancer topic at luncheon

The Minority Women with Breast Cancer Uniting will hold a free luncheon 11:30 a.m. Saturday for anyone who would like to learn about the latest in medical treatment for breast cancer patients. The "Breast Cancer Survivors Wearing HATS (Hope Action Treatment Surviving) Luncheon" at East Mount Zion Baptist Church, 9990 Euclid Ave., Cleveland, will include a panel discussion that will cover issues from diagnosis to survivorship. The event is sponsored by the Health Equity in Cancer Program at University Hospitals Ireland Cancer Center. For information and reservations, call Geri Blair at 216-469-1917.

Run slated for Slavic Village

Starting time for the second annual 5k Morgana Run (walk/run) will be at 9 a.m. Saturday beginning at the intersection of East 75th Street and Aetna Road in Slavic Village. Prizes will be awarded to top male and female runners, and winners of several age groups. Refreshments, including pierogis, will be served. For more information, call 216-429-1182, Ext. 111.

EAST CLEVELAND

Free garden workshop

Residents are encouraged to bring their shovels and join a free garden workshop from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Friday at a garden on Belmore Avenue at Huron Hospital. The event, part of an effort to improve food access in the neighborhood, is sponsored by the New Agrarian Center in Oberlin. Among its programs is the federally funded City Fresh community food project, which helps bring locally grown produce into low-income neighborhoods. Call 440-935-3106.

GAUGA COUNTY

Wind power work session

The possibility of wind energy will be discussed during the county's monthly economic development work session at noon today in Building 8 at 470 Center St. in Chardon. Speakers from various organizations, including the Ohio Farm Bureau, FirstEnergy Corp., Green Energy Technologies, Environment Ohio and Cleveland Foundation, will explore the opportunities, the potential barriers and the financial obligations of wind power development. For more information, call Geauga County Community and Economic Development at 440-279-1790.

MAPLE HEIGHTS

Legal Aid to hold free clinic

The Legal Aid Society will hold a free clinic from 9:45 a.m. to noon Saturday at the Maple Heights Senior Center, 15901 Libby Road. Attorneys will provide advice and referrals on legal problems such as transfer of death deeds, powers of attorney and living wills. Other free clinics are set for 5 to 7 p.m. Wednesday, June 11, at St. Mary's School, 268 N. State St., Painesville; and 9:45 a.m. to noon Saturday, June 14, at the Spanish American Committee, 4407 Lorain Ave., Cleveland. Call 216-687-1900 or go to laslev.org.

LAW & ORDER

From staff reports

CLEVELAND

Thieves withdraw ATM

A group of thieves using two pickup trucks and a front-end loader lifted an ATM out of a wall at the Bridgeport Place shopping center in Cleveland early Wednesday morning. Lt. Thomas Stacho called it one of the most unusual crimes he'd seen in his 10 years as the Police Department's public information officer. Video showed two pickup trucks slamming into the Fifth Third bank machine, breaking it free from the building's foundation at about 3:19 a.m., police said. A front-end loader then picked up the machine and carried it away from the center, located on Kinsman Road near East 75th Street. Police, who learned about the crime at 10:45 a.m. when workers noticed the ATM missing, followed a trail of building pieces to the pickup trucks and front-end loader that had been left about a block away. Police did not find the ATM. Stacho did not know how much cash was in the machine. Police have no suspects.

AVON LAKE

Ax murderer spared death penalt

BRIAN ANTHONY HERNANDEZ
Plain Dealer Reporter

Carlos Christopher found mercy in a Cuyahoga County courtroom Wednesday, but not forgiveness.

A three-judge panel spared him from a death sentence for robbing and killing a South Euclid couple in their home. But the 20-year-old Christopher must spend the rest of his life in prison, with no hope for parole.

The decision brought a measure of relief to some of the victims' family members. Others left bitter.

Christopher used an ax to murder Richard Messina Sr. and Sandra Cover on July 29 while they slept.

"God may forgive him, but my family will not," Cover's sister Brenda Gregory told the judges before they sent Christopher to prison. "He will never see the light of freedom again, and I thank you for that."

Richard Messina Jr. told the judges he was disappointed with the decision.

"My dad wasn't given mercy," he said, breathing heavily. "While his adopted mother will get to visit him in jail, we get to visit a grave."

Common Pleas Judges Timothy McMonagle, Kenneth Callahan and Lillian Greene convicted Christopher last week and returned Tuesday to decide his punishment.

The defendant took the witness stand early Wednesday. He looked away from the families' menacing stares as he offered an apology but not an explanation for his crimes.

"I want to say I'm sorry for causing so much trouble and pain," he said.

Christopher and his 19-year-old girlfriend, Tabitha Messina, were arrested days after the slayings. Tabitha Messina, the slain man's daughter, also



TRACY BOULIAN | THE PLAIN DEALER

Lucy Anne Christopher talks with attorney John Pyle about her son's appeal rights Wednesday in Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court. Carlos Christopher was spared a death sentence but must spend the rest of his life in prison. Pyle represented him.

faces capital murder charges and is to go on trial later this year.

During closing statements, defense attorney

John Pyle argued that Christopher should be in prison with the possibility of parole. Christopher was provoked the night of the crimes.

"What we had here in this case is a war and those winds joined that tragic night was fueled by one word," Pyle said, referring to a racial slur he said Richard Messina Sr. used to refer to Christopher hours before the homicides. "Know this word. Not only is it a word that cutes persons of color, it tells them more than human. Words hurt. And this was them."

Pyle presented witnesses who describe Christopher's tumultuous childhood and how his experiences led to these crimes. Christopher was in a jail in Brazil where his birth mother was incarcerated for drug abuse and stealing. He died of AIDS in jail when Christopher was 17. Christopher also had language-based learning disabilities, dyslexia and attention deficit disorder. He used the drugs and alcohol.

He came to the United States at age 12 with a foster mother, Lucy Anne Christopher. Joann Bartell, the slain woman's mother, said the defense's argument was rubbish.

"My seven kids had rough childhoods, none of them turned into mass murderers," she said.

"He had more help than most kids get. He threw it right back in our face."

Assistant County Prosecutor Steve Devine said the killings were a bloodbath.

He said he hopes the state prison system will put Christopher in the "deepest, darkest dungeon" because he's a dangerous man.

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter:
bhernand@plaind.com, 216-999-4416

SURF'S UP ... KIND OF



LISA DEJONG | THE PLAIN DEALER

Edgewater Park never has the biggest waves, but high winds gave a surfer enough to work with a little on Tuesday. In addition to surfers being drawn out, sunbathing and swimming season has started. Lifeguards reported to their stations Saturday.

Investing in a new countywide land bank

Rokakis: Law could cut vacancies, boost tax base

MARK GILLISPIE
Plain Dealer Reporter

Cuyahoga County Treasurer Jim Rokakis is confident the state legislature will enact a law in November that will allow urban counties in Ohio to buy and sell vacant properties that have become the residue of imprudent, subprime mortgages and their resulting foreclosures.

Rokakis told a City Club forum on Wednesday that profits created by this countywide land bank could be

quickly with this crisis," Rokakis said.

The legislation his office has drafted has bipartisan support in Columbus and would include Lucas, Montgomery and Hamilton counties, which likewise have been hurt by the subprime lending crisis.

Rokakis said falling real estate prices eventually will lead to reductions in property taxes that go to already cash-strapped cities and school districts. A 10 percent reduction in assessed property values in Cleveland, Rokakis said, would cost the city \$10 million a year in general fund revenue and the school district \$3 million. Cleveland Heights would

that the median price of single-family homes in the county fell 26 percent from 2005 to 2007.

The land bank, Rokakis said, "is the only strategic way to stabilize the tax base."

While Cleveland has had a land bank for years, the city accepts only vacant parcels. Under the new law, city-sponsored land banks would still have the first option to acquire properties, Rokakis said.

Unlike Cleveland's land bank, the Cuyahoga County bank also would accept properties with structures, some of which could be rehabilitated as useful housing. Rokakis based his model on one used in Geneseo

was established in 2002 a taken control of more than 100 properties. It generates between \$8 million annually from delinquent taxes and additional money from property sales. Rokakis said the bank is part of a long-term effort to revitalize blighted communities.

Cuyahoga County's land bank could earn between \$6 million and \$8 million annually from delinquent taxes and additional money from property sales. Rokakis said the bank is part of a long-term effort to revitalize blighted communities.

"I have a hard time believing land close to the Cleveland University Circle and downtown won't be valuable again," F