In short supply

Demand is so high that dealerships, repair shops are offering big bonuses

BY JOHN REED BLACKWELL
Richmond Times-Dispatch

Mark Smith doesn’t have any problems with business—demand is at his five franchise Midsouth stores in the Richmond area. The biggest problem he has is finding enough mechanics during the COVID-19 pandemic, and even before the pandemic, a finding that trained professionals are in such short supply, maintenance and inspection work at the stores.

“I have more business than I can handle, and I could put five or six mechanics to work tomorrow,” Smith said during a December interview. More recently in January, Smith said he had “caught a few breaks lately, and have been able to hire a few folks,” thanks to outreach and incentivization he offered. The shortage of auto technicians is so severe that Smith said he has offered signing bonuses of up to $10,000, paid out over a year, to qualified mechanics.

DOC refers prison incident to prosecutor in Buchanan

BY PATRICIA WILSON
Richmond Times-Dispatch

The Virginia Department of Corrections in 2015 closed an investigation into an incident in which an investigator believed a prison employee choked a restrained inmate, taking no disciplinary action.

But after the Richmond Times-Dispatch recently obtained a report on the case, Corrections Director Harold Clarke said he would refer the case to a federal prosecutor in Buchanan. The Virginia Department of Corrections Director Harold Clarke said through a spokesman that he had concerns about video footage showing what a former prison investigator concluded was a supervisor choking an inmate who was restrained by his arms, legs and chest. But Clarke wouldn’t acknowledge that the video shows the supervisor’s hand on the inmate’s neck.

The Times-Dispatch sent the video footage to the DOJ, which confirmed it would review the case.

Sturtevant, a former Republican state senator, will run in new 12th District

BY MICHAEL MARTZ
Richmond Times-Dispatch

Former Sen. Glen Sturtevant, who lost his seat in 2019 after one term, will run for election next year in a new Senate district in Chesterfield County and Colonial Heights that was drawn up by a federal court after last year’s redistricting. The new Senate district does not include the incumbent senator for the 12th, Sen. Stuarturn, who currently represents the Chesterfield portion of the district and Queens County.

Amid push to delay gas tax hike, who’s noticed at the pump?

BY MICHAEL MARTZ
Richmond Times-Dispatch

When Virginia’s gasoline tax rose by 5 cents on July 1, the average price for unleaded fuel across the state was $2.81 a gallon — the same as it was the day before the tax increased.

The same thing happened the previous summer, when the state imposed the first of two nickel-per-gallon gas price hikes. Over the next three months, the state’s gasoline tax increased by 10 cents per gallon.

In Nation & World

Amid Ukraine tensions, Russia toughens posture with West

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challenges worth working for. Car dealers and auto repair service providers compete to attract the best mechanics. One mechanic describes the same sort of market for parts that is attractive for automo-
tics and technicians and the need to offer them more than just incentives to keep mechanics to their businesses.

“It is the hardest position I have ever had,” said the dealer in the region.

Smith also has concerns about the younger generation realistic about what it means to work in automotive.

The tough time hitting me-
icians often means wait times for an appointment may stretch up to a month in some cases. Smith has also bought more than his car can be provided to customers while they wait for repair. Smith is working with local colleges to work with high school students who are interested in automotive. Smith believes that 20% of the technicians will be needed to replace the current workforce. Smith has already spoken to a number of students about the potential for them to work in automotive.

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