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# Ledger-Enquirer

CRIME AND COURTS

## Understanding gang law

BY TIM CHITWOOD tchitwood@ledger-enquirer.com

To Columbus the law's becoming increasingly familiar.

It's the Georgia Gang Terrorism and Prevention Act, under which suspects were charged in a gang assassination at Peachtree Mall, and in a biker murder trial involving a shootout at a Macon Road sports bar.

The law sounds simpler than it is. It sounds like joining a gang, even

IN THE TRIAL OF THREE CRIPS WHO IN RETALIATION FOR AN EARLIER HOMICIDE GUNNED DOWN A MAN LAST YEAR OUTSIDE THE MALL, DEFENSE ATTORNEYS CHALLENGED THE GANG LAW REPEATEDLY.

a gang known to operate as a criminal enterprise, is illegal.

That would violate a basic civil right, freedom of association, protected by the Constitution.

In the trial of three Crips who in retaliation for an earlier homicide gunned down a man last year outside the mall,

SEE GANG, 5A



ROBIN TRIMARCHI rtrimarchi@ledger-enquirer.com

Xzavaian Traven Jones, center, was convicted last year along with Tekoa Young and Terell McFarland in the shooting death of Anthony Meredith.



SPORTS

### CENTRAL TOO MUCH FOR CARVER

Central puts up a strong showing in a 48-0 victory over Carver in their spring football scrimmage. 1C



ARTS

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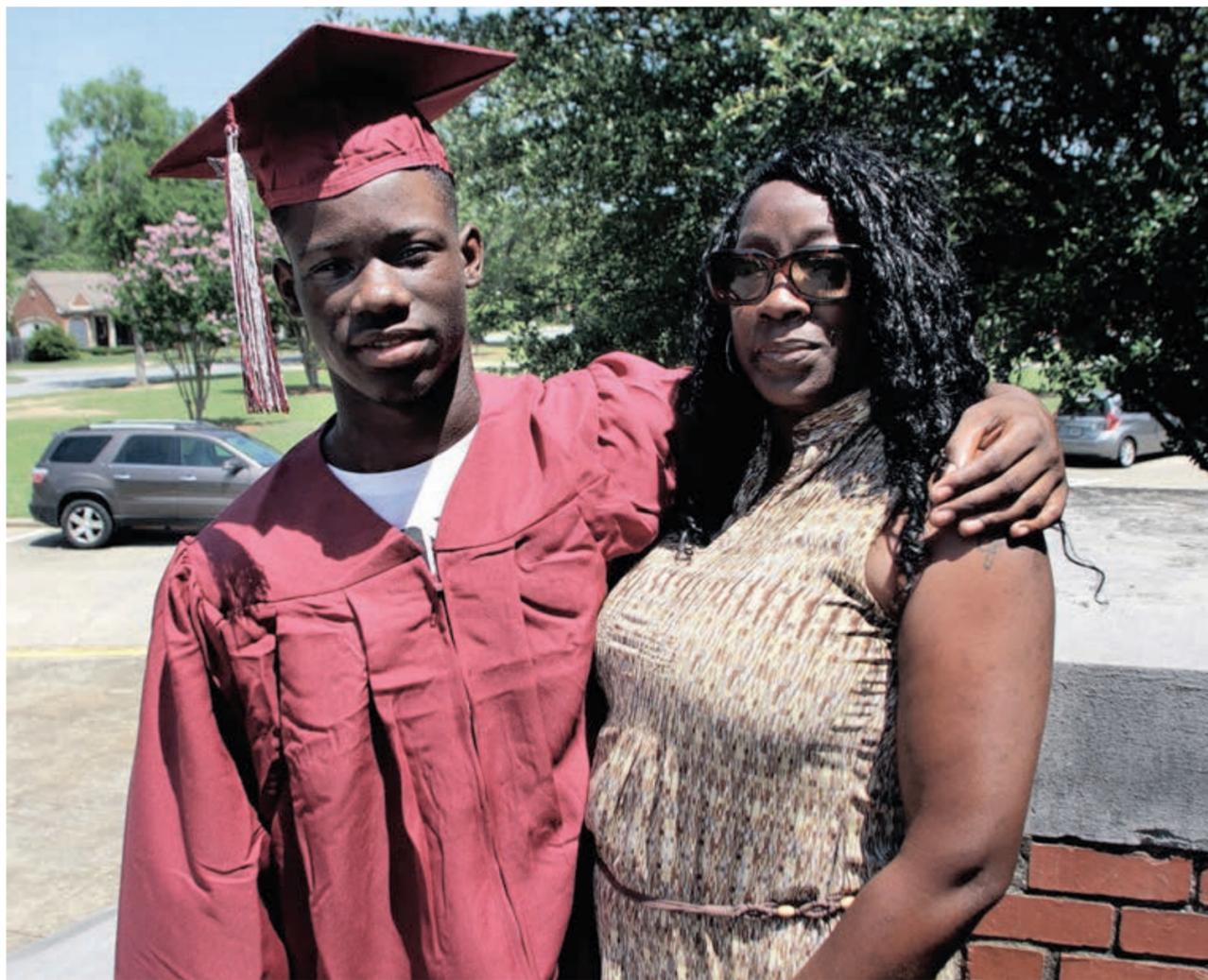
LaGrange, Ga., is home to an art museum with an unusual history. Its building housed a jail, furniture store and newspaper offices. 1E



NATION

### U.S., SAUDI ARABIA FORGE ARMS DEAL

The United States completed an arms deal with Saudi Arabia totaling \$110 billion Saturday. 4A



ROBIN TRIMARCHI rtrimarchi@ledger-enquirer.com

Royale Lampley stands outside Jordan Vocational High School with his mother, Cassandra Hudson Smith. Lampley is a member of the first graduating class of the Columbus Scholars mentoring program. Six of the seven members completed the requirements to receive that promise.

COLUMBUS SCHOLARS

## Promise becomes real for 6 grads

BY MARK RICE mrice@ledger-enquirer.com

Eight years ago, the non-profit corporation Columbus Scholars was established to provide

high-achieving but disadvantaged Muscogee County School District fifth-graders the advantages of mentoring and money for a better chance at a college education. Now, the first class of Columbus Scholars is set to graduate from high school

— and six of the seven members have completed the requirements to receive that promise. Here's how one of them did it. Despite growing up as the youngest of five children with a

SEE GRADUATION, 6A

MORE INSIDE

List of area high school graduations, 6A

VIDEO

Click on this story at ledger-enquirer.com for a video from our interview.

CHATTAHOOCHEE

### 'S-TOWN' PODCAST WORTH THE TIME

Compelling seven-hour podcast about a small Alabama town feels like a novel, but the story is real. 13A

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FROM PAGE 1A

# GRADUATION

single mother in a rough neighborhood, where “extraordinary things happen,” said Jordan Vocational High School senior Royale Lampley, he has stayed out of trouble by “going in the house early and going to school the next day.”

Royale earned an A average at Davis Elementary School, where he felt different from his neighborhood buddies. Columbus Scholars allowed him to continue pursuing academic excellence and feel accepted at the same time. “That made a bigger picture. ... Basically, if I stay on track, success will be at the end.”

His four older siblings graduated from Jordan, but only one of them attended college, so he intends to be the first to earn a degree.

Columbus Scholars and their parent or guardian sign a commitment letter that includes requirements to remain in the program. Among them: stay a resident of Columbus; continue as a student in good standing in the MCSD or college; maintain a minimum grade-point average of 3.0; attend weekly tutoring sessions if any grade is below a C and until the grade is a B at the end of the marking period; attend monthly enrichment sessions, such as educational or social field trips and guest speakers discussing life skills or college preparation.

Royale, who needed the tutoring only during his sophomore year after the first marking period, added these requirements as well: “You can’t get arrested or get anybody pregnant.”

He was zoned to attend

the now-closed Marshall Middle School, but he chose to attend Blackmon Road Middle School, which was closer to the home of his mentor, former Ledger-Enquirer executive editor Ben Holden (2004-10), founding chairman of Columbus Scholars. MCSD provided only one year of bus transportation, so Holden, his wife, attorney Melanie Slaton, and others helped Royale’s mother take turns driving him.

“People left work early or got to work late because of me,” Royale said, “so the only way I could pay them back was to not fail at Blackmon.”

Sending her son across town to Blackmon Road was important to Cassandra Hudson Smith for another reason: The greater diversity showed him “this is a world of many colors, not just black and white,” she said.

Royale was accepted into Columbus High, MCSD’s lone total magnet school for grades 9-12 and tied for No. 1 in Georgia, according to the 2017 rankings by U.S. News & World Report. But he chose Jordan, his zoned school, because he felt more comfortable there.

“I’ve been around Jordan ever since my first sibling graduated,” he said, “and all I knew was Jordan.”

And now? “The four years I’ve had here,” he said, “I wouldn’t redo them.”

He cherishes the family atmosphere.

“They’re always there for you,” he said. “No matter what the situation is, they will try their best to accommodate you on whatever problem you have.”

## PERSEVERANCE

Royale learned perseverance even before high school. His team lost every game during his eighth-grade season as captain of the Blackmon Road basketball team.

“Don’t ever give up,” he said. “... Quitting was never an option for me.”

Royale could say the same for his pursuit of his diploma. He decided to not play his sophomore year so he would have more time to study, especially for Advanced Placement classes.

Asked how he would have reacted if someone told him, before he came to Jordan, that he would prioritize academics over athletics, Royale said, “I would have laughed at you.”

He rejoined the team as a junior and was co-captain as a senior – and he’s on track to graduate with a 3.2 grade-point average.

Graduating from high school on time feels “unbelievable,” Royale said. “... It hasn’t hit me yet.”

Anticipating the moment he walks across the stage during the graduation ceremony, “It’s going to feel like Step 1 is complete, and I have more to accomplish.”

Step 2 is earning a bachelor’s degree at Columbus State University, where he plans to major in business. He wants to become director of the Columbus Parks and Recreation Department. He also wants to help fund and mentor the next generation of Columbus Scholars “to give back” to the community that has supported him.

## IMPACT

Holden “made a huge impact on me,” Royale said. “The way he guided me from when I was in fifth grade until now, he gives like a lecture about stupid people, what could happen if you do this or

that, and the background he comes from, it’s kind of similar to mine.”

Indeed, Holden said, his boyhood’s north St. Louis neighborhood “is considered one of the worst urban ghettos in America. I went to college on a scholarship from the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. The leading black journalist at the Post was George E. Curry, who died last August and was my mentor. This experience is the inspiration for Columbus Scholars.”

Smith, who said she hasn’t worked outside her home for a year while receiving workman’s compensation, sees Holden more like a big brother or father for her son than a mentor.

“Ben stood in the gap when I couldn’t be there or my brother or anybody else or his two brothers,” she said. “To me, Ben has spent more time with Royale than his father, and I just thank God for the program. I thank God for Ben, his family.”

“... He not only had the interest in Royale; he took interest in all the (Columbus Scholars), the boys and the girls,” Smith said. “He’s just an awesome person. If I had a thousand times, I couldn’t thank him enough.”

If it weren’t for Columbus Scholars, she said, “I feel Royale would be sitting here, but he wouldn’t have the mindset that he has. Ben showed him how to be a productive young male in the fifth grade. He took him under his wings, and he flew with him. He put him in his nest. Now, he’s given him the chance to get out there and soar on his own.”

The toughest time Royale gave his mother was getting tattoos.

“He’s stubborn like me,” Smith said. “Besides

SEE GRADUATION, 8A

## LEARN MORE

To donate, be a mentor or apply, visit [ColumbusScholars.org](http://ColumbusScholars.org).

### FIRST COLUMBUS SCHOLARS TO GRADUATE

Six of the seven original Columbus Scholars, who were selected as fifth-graders out of 35 applicants, have completed the requirements to graduate from high school and receive between \$2,000 and \$3,000 per year for four years of college after the program’s initial investment of \$7,500 for them. Here are their names, the Muscogee County schools they attended and the college they will attend:

- David Crall, J. D. Davis Elementary School, Marshall Middle School, Jordan Vocational High School, Columbus State University.
- Jha’Meisheia Griffin, Hannan Magnet Academy, Arnold Magnet Academy, Columbus High School, Georgia State University.
- Rawlanda Hercules, Clubview Elementary School, Richards Middle School, Hardaway High School, Wesleyan University.
- Royale Lampley, J. D. Davis Elementary School, Blackmon Road Middle School, Jordan Vocational High School, Columbus State University.
- Quandre Lewis, Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School, Arnold Magnet Academy, Columbus High School, Georgia Southern University.

- Niki Stout, Reese Road Leadership Academy, Richards Middle School, Columbus High School, Columbus State University.

### HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION SCHEDULE

**May 21:** Calvary Christian School, 3 p.m., CSU Lumpkin Center.

**May 24:** Glenwood School, 8 p.m., Phenix City Amphitheater.

**May 25:** Catapult Academy, 4 p.m., Columbus Civic Center; Early College Academy, 6 p.m., Columbus Civic Center; Central High School, 7:30 p.m., Garrett-Harrison Stadium; Russell County High School, 7:30 p.m., school’s stadium; Spencer High School, 8 p.m., Columbus Civic Center.

**May 26:** Northside High School, 4 p.m., Columbus Civic Center; Kendrick High School, 6:30 p.m., Columbus Civic Center; Chattahoochee County High School, 7 p.m., Panther Stadium; Grace Christian School, 7 p.m., Grace Baptist Church; Hallie Turner Private School, 7 p.m., Hilton Terrace Baptist Church; Smiths Station High School, 8 p.m., Panther Stadium; Columbus High School, 8:30 p.m., Columbus Civic Center.

**May 27:** Shaw High School, 9 a.m., Columbus Civic Center; Hardaway High School, 11:30 a.m., Columbus Civic Center; Jordan Vocational High School, 2 p.m., Columbus Civic Center; Carver High School, 4 p.m., Columbus Civic Center.

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FROM PAGE 6A

# GRADUATION

the tattoos, I've never been disappointed in him."

Holden also didn't approve of the tattoos, but he offered this perspective: "You know what? If that's the biggest problem we have ..."

He didn't finish his sentence. But the smile he shared with Royale and his mother made the message clear.

"He's an awesome child," Smith said of her son. "He's going to be a great mentor. He wants to give back to the city. ... I just see great things in my son's future."

## MENTORING

Royale and Holden got together frequently until Holden left the Ledger-Enquirer in May 2010, when he became director of the Reynolds National Center for Courts & Media at the University of Nevada, Reno. Now, he teaches media law at the University of Illinois and is a visiting faculty member at the National Judicial College in Reno. But he still regularly returns home on the weekends and stays connected with Royale during the weekdays, mostly via text messages. Their activities have ranged from the glitz of going to Atlanta Hawks games to the grit of playing basketball against each other.

Both expect their relationship to continue while Royale is in college.

"I'm going to help Royale as long as he wants my help," Holden said. "We have white kids (in Columbus Scholars), so this isn't a race program, but I know what it's like to be a young black man, and I had lots of people who helped me. ... So I'm going to help him not because I'm such a nice guy but because I don't think I have a choice. It's kind of my duty."

In fact, Holden said, he canceled his trip to join his wife's family reunion in California so he can attend Royale's graduation. "I'm going to be as proud as if he's my son," he said.

Jordan principal Amy Wohler is impressed with Royale for being "somebody who is prepared and is preparing to be a mentor himself."

Wohler notices Royale "constantly separating himself" from potential trouble. "He makes a conscious effort to not be a part of whatever inappropriate behavior might be going on," she said. "He's going to walk away. And that's not easy to do."

## MONEY

Columbus Scholars invests, through the Community Foundation of the Chattahoochee Valley, \$7,500 for each student selected in the fifth grade. The scholarship is estimated to produce \$2,000 to \$3,000 per child per four years of college, Holden said. "We're really careful, because the stock market fluctuates," he said.

In total, 66 Columbus Scholars are in the program now. Over eight years, with seven in the first class and 10 in each of the following seven years, 11 of the 77 inducted students have left the program. Approximately three were removed because they weren't meeting the requirements, Holden said, and the rest dropped out of Columbus Scholars or moved out of town.

The program has grown "beyond my expectations," Holden said. "I thought we would have three or four kids every year and we'd have half the money we've raised, maybe a third of it."

Donations and interest on those investments have amounted to more than \$600,000, Holden said.

**“ HE’S GOING TO BE A GREAT MENTOR. HE WANTS TO GIVE BACK TO THE CITY. ... I JUST SEE GREAT THINGS IN MY SON’S FUTURE. ”**

**Cassandra Hudson Smith**

He gushed about this community's generosity.

"There are more people who believe they are their brother's keep here than any place I've ever lived in," Holden said.

## MOTIVATION

Columbus Scholars is Holden's attempt to answer this nagging question he asked:

"Why is it that it's almost impossible in America, in a place where you're supposed to have a meritocracy, that kids don't go from being incredibly poor but smart to not just the middle class to essentially what's called the upper-middle class, to having advanced degrees, to having enough resources to fly around the world if they feel like it, to drive any car they want, eat any meal they want. Why do you not have social class mobility?"

"And the answer is there's no structure, and my structure was the Pulitzer family in St. Louis put me through college, paid for me to go to Mizou, and then I had a series of mentors." So the program's purpose, Holden said, is to help students "succeed to the limit of their ability and not be limited by the accident or the fortuity of how much money a parent or an uncle or an auntie happens to have."

Holden's father was a sharecropper in Mississippi until age 37, when he moved to St. Louis and became a brake shoe maker and a janitor. He was 30 when Holden was born.

Holden's older brother, Percy, was a 45-year-old principal of an elementary school in Dallas when he died from a heart attack - eight hours after their mother died Oct. 6, 2008. Holden vowed on his birthday the following year, "We need to stop talking about Columbus Scholars and start doing it."

Then, lo and behold, the Columbus Scholar he ends up mentoring has the same birth date as his deceased brother.

"I couldn't believe it," Holden said.

## EPILOGUE

Holden recently paid Royale and a friend to clean his home office. They found a photo of Royale posing at the Davis Elementary "prom" seven years ago. On the back is a thank-you note, written by Royale's mother on his behalf, with these words:

*"Thanks for all you have done and the impact you have had on me, maturing me to be a more responsible young man. Love you."*

That rediscovered photo was on Holden's kitchen counter Friday morning, and he brought it to the interview with the Ledger-Enquirer at Jordan.

Royale looked at the photo and said, "When I was little, I wouldn't smile that much. But I feel like I've done everything right since ... and I did it the right way."

Mark Rice: 706-576-6272, @markricelc

# Story of rogue agent clouds Border Patrol expansion

BY RON NIXON  
New York Times

BROWNSVILLE, TEXAS

Joel Luna was just the kind of job candidate the Border Patrol covets. He grew up on both sides of the border, in Mexico and South Texas. He participated in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps in high school and served in the Army, seeing combat in Iraq.

Luna joined the agency as part of a hiring surge under the George W. Bush administration, patrolling a rural area about 100 miles north of Mexico. But six years later, his decorated career came to a shocking end: He was arrested and charged with helping send illegal weapons to Mexico and ship drugs into the United States. He was convicted in January and sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Now, as President Donald Trump plans a similar hiring surge at the Border Patrol, Luna's case is casting a large shadow. The president wants to make 5,000 new hires, under a streamlined process that critics fear could open a door to other rogue agents like Luna.



DOUG MILLS / New York Times

U.S. Border Patrol agents listen to President Donald Trump at the Department of Homeland Security in Washington in January.

Agency officials, some members of Congress and the Border Patrol union say the current process has made it too hard to hire agents. It typically takes more than a year to vet candidates and get them on the job.

At the center of this notoriously slow and stringent process - which Customs and Border Protection, the patrol's parent agency, put in place after a number of corruption cases - is a mandatory polygraph test. Officials are considering changing the test, and in some cases

the agency would simply waive it.

"CBP has a big problem in not being able to hire agents because of the polygraph test," said Sen. Jeff Flake, R-Ariz., who has sponsored the legislation to make hiring agents easier and faster. "I'm not saying that we should get rid of the polygraph, but we want to make sure the process isn't an overall detriment to good candidates."

Three weeks ago, the agency began using a different lie detector test that takes less time than

the current one and asks fewer questions. And legislation moving through Congress would grant the agency the authority to waive the polygraph for some former law enforcement officers and military veterans.

Top officials said the changes would allow the agency, which is losing agents faster than it can replace them, to compete for qualified candidates with other law enforcement agencies more effectively without sacrificing standards. Applicants would still undergo a background check in addition to the shorter polygraph test, officials said.

"No one wants corrupt agents inside the Border Patrol," said Jayson Ahern, a former acting commissioner of Customs and Border Protection. "What CBP is proposing is a sensible way to weed out corruption but speed up the hiring."

But some current and former Department of Homeland Security officials said the proposed changes could expose the agency to corrupt individuals who could use their position to help drug cartels or human smugglers.

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