

FINDING A WAY TO STEP UP

Damion Square enters his senior season ready to be a defensive leader | Sports 1C



Big Lots opens in Northport with a crowd, celebration

The Tuscaloosa News

TUSCALOOSA, NORTHPORT, WEST ALABAMA

SATURDAY, JULY 21, 2012 50¢

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Jobless rate rises locally, statewide

By Patrick Rupinski
Business Editor

Unemployment in June rose by more than 1 percent in West Alabama and across the state.

Alabama fared slightly better with its official unemployment rate of 7.8 percent, up 0.4 percent from May. But that rate is seasonally adjusted.

The state's non-seasonally adjusted jobless rate was 8.9 percent, 1.5 percent higher than May, and it's that rate that is comparable for the state's 67 counties, whose unemployment numbers are not seasonally adjusted.

Tuscaloosa County's unemployment rate was just under the state average. Its June unemployment rate was 8.8 percent, compared with 7.1 percent in May.

State officials, who released the figures on Friday, however, noted that while unemployment is up across the state, the unemployment rate is still less than it was a year ago when Alabama's non-seasonally adjusted rate was 9.8 percent and Tuscaloosa County was at 9.5 percent.

Ahmad Ijaz, an economist and director of economic forecasting at the University of Alabama's Center for Business and Economic Research, said most of the job creation in Alabama in June was in temporary and part-time jobs.

The unemployment rates rose in large part from more people entering the labor force and competing for the available work, he said.

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12 dead, 58 wounded at midnight screening massacre

Suspect booby-trapped apartment; neighbors evacuated



Eyewitness Jacob Stevens, 18, hugs his mother, Tammi Stevens, after being interviewed by police outside Gateway High School, where witnesses to a mass shooting were brought for questioning Friday in Aurora, Colo. A gunman wearing a gas mask set off an unknown gas and fired into a crowded movie theater, killing 12 people and injuring at least 50 others, authorities said.

PHOTOS | THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

By Thomas Peipert
and P. Solomon Banda
The Associated Press

AURORA, COLO. | As the new Batman movie played on the screen, a gunman dressed in black and wearing a helmet, body armor and a gas mask stepped through a side door. At first he was just a silhouette, taken by some in the audience for a stunt that was part of one of the summer's most highly anticipated films.

But then, authorities said, he threw gas canisters that filled the packed suburban Denver theater with smoke, and, in the confusing haze between Hollywood fantasy and terrifying reality, opened fire as people screamed and dove for cover.

At least 12 people were killed and 58 wounded — 11 critically — in one of the deadliest mass shootings in recent U.S. history.

"He looked like an assassin ready to go to war," said Jordan Crofter, a moviegoer who was unhurt in the attack early Friday, about a half-hour after the special midnight opening of "The Dark Knight Rises."

The gunman, identified by police



Investigators look over evidence found outside the back door of the Century 16 movie theater in Aurora, Colo. on Friday.

as 24-year-old James Holmes, used a military-style semi-automatic rifle, a shotgun and a pistol, stopping only to reload.

The suspect marched up the aisle in the stadium-style theater, picking off those who tried to flee, witnesses

SEE MASSACRE | 4A

Police: No racial motive in shooting

By Stephanie Taylor
Staff Writer

Investigators do not believe that the mass shooting in the Tuscaloosa area earlier this week was racially motivated.

The shooter, who wounded 18 people when he opened fire at a house in Northport and later at the Copper Top bar in Tuscaloosa, was looking for a specific person, who is black, authorities have said.

Residents of the Northport house found "KKK" etched into their vehicles and power box.

"I don't believe race was the driving issue with the Northport shooting, in that the person he was looking for appears to be a specific target," said Sgt. Kip Hart, assistant commander of the Tuscaloosa County Metro Homicide Unit.

"The shooting at the Copper Top had victims of different races and genders."

Nathan Van Wilkins, 44, has been charged with 18 counts of attempted murder and two counts of shooting into an occupied building. Investigators are processing evidence and expect to charge him with arson in relation to a truck that was burned at a mobile home in Northport at



Nathan Van Wilkins was charged with 18 counts of attempted murder and two counts of shooting into an occupied building.

SEE RACE | 4A

Heat, drought make more flavorful fruits, veggies

By Dinesh Ramde
The Associated Press

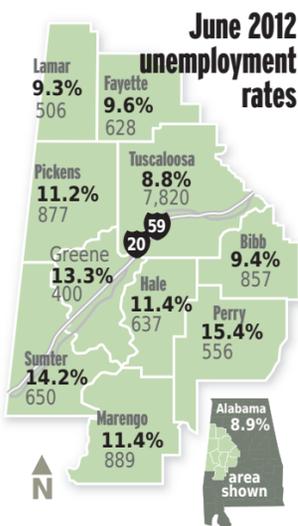
MILWAUKEE | Chef Dan Jacobs expected his recent batch of jalapeño poppers to be tame because peppers grown at this time of the year are generally mild. But he quickly discovered that his spicy appetizer carried an unexpected fire.

"Wow, those things are no joke. They are hot," said Jacobs, the top chef at Roots Restaurant and Cellar in Milwaukee. "At this time of year, they shouldn't be this hot. But the warm weather, the no rain, that's going to cause that."

Temperatures above 100 degrees and droughtlike conditions have baked parts of the upper Midwest for weeks, taking a severe toll on corn and soybeans. But the heat brought an expected benefit for peppers and other crops: Their flavors became unusually concentrated, producing some of the most potent-tasting produce in years.

In peppers, that means the difference between a lightly tingling tongue and heavily watery eyes. The effect comes from alkaloids, the

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STAFF GRAPHIC | ANTHONY BRATINA

THOUSANDS FLEE SYRIA
As rebels press and fighting spreads, residents escape to neighbor countries. | 3A

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High 90
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Colo. suspect was brilliant student

By Michael R. Blood
and Dan Elliott
The Associated Press



DENVER | James Eagan Holmes came from a well-tended San Diego enclave of two-story homes with red-tiled roofs, where neighbors recall him as a clean-cut, studious young man of sparing words.

Tall and dark-haired, he stared clear-eyed at the camera in a 2004 high school yearbook snapshot, wearing a white junior varsity soccer uniform — No. 16. The son of a nurse, Arlene, and a software company manager, Robert, James Holmes was a brilliant science scholar in college.

The biggest mystery surrounding the 24-year-old doctoral student was why he would have pulled on a gas

mask and shot dozens of people early Friday in a suburban Denver movie theater, as police allege.

In the age of widespread social media, no trace of Holmes could be found on Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, Twitter or anywhere on the web. Either he never engaged or he scrubbed his trail.

A longtime neighbor in San Diego, where Holmes grew up, remembers only a "shy guy ... a loner" from a

churchgoing family. In addition to playing soccer at Westview High School, he ran cross country.

The bookish demeanor concealed an unspooling life. Holmes struggled to find work after graduating with highest honors in the spring of 2010 with a neuroscience degree from the University of California, Riverside, said the neighbor, retired electrical engineer Tom Mai.

Holmes enrolled last year in a neuroscience Ph.D. program at the University of Colorado-Denver but was in the process of withdrawing, said school officials, who didn't provide a reason.

As part of the advanced program in Denver, a James Holmes had been listed as making a presentation in

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