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VALLEY
 VIRGINIA

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Shentel Might Ax Popular AMC TV Channels

Fee Impasse May Mean End Of Offerings Dec. 31

By **VIC BRADSHAW**
Daily News-Record

HARRISONBURG — Shentel wants its cable subscribers to know that their favorite characters from shows on the AMC cable network likely are walking dead.

Shenandoah Telecommunications Co. (NASDAQ: SHEN) announced Nov. 30 that it anticipates dropping AMC, WE and IFC from

its channel offerings when its contract with AMC Networks expires on Dec. 31. The companies, negotiating through the Kansas-based National Cable Television Cooperative, are at an impasse over terms of the contract renewal.

In the Harrisonburg area, Edinburg-based Shentel provides service to the Preston Lake development in Rockingham County and parts of Shenandoah County, primarily the areas along U.S. 11.

Chris Kyle, the Shentel vice president who handles programming contract negotiations, said

“We would like to find a way to reach a deal. This happens with all programmers. But it’s the first time I’ve ever seen something like this.”

■ Chris Kyle, Shentel VP

AMC Networks is demanding a major fee increase, placement of its IFC and WE in Shentel’s most popular service package, and the addition of its Sundance and BBC

America to that package.

“We would like to find a way to reach a deal,” he said. “This happens with all programmers. But it’s the first time I’ve ever seen something like this.”

For Shentel, Kyle said, AMC’s proposal would raise the fee it pays for network content to more than \$1.4 million from about \$500,000. Due to contract terms, he could not say how much customer bills would increase if Shentel agreed to AMC’s terms.

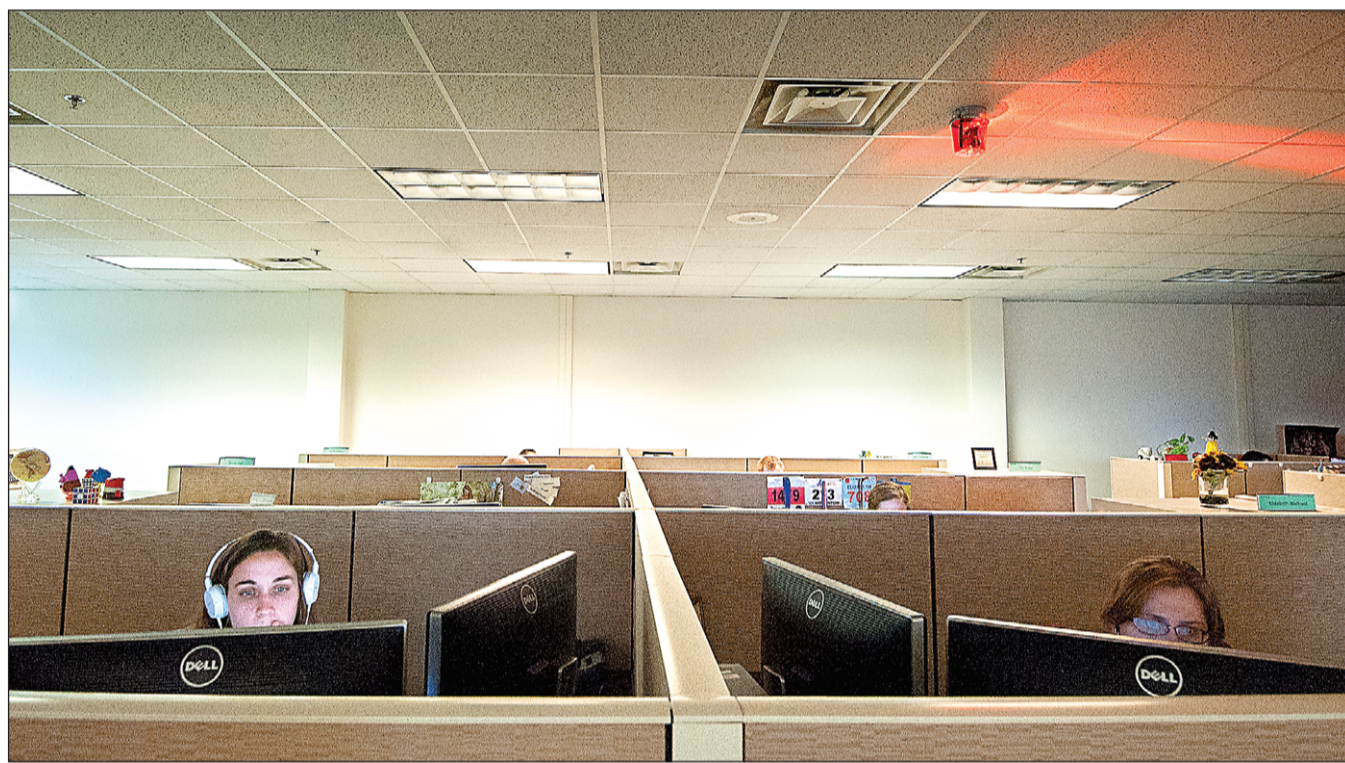
Georgia Juvelis, senior vice president of corporate communica-

tions for the network, countered that comparing the current contract to the new one isn’t valid because AMC has changed drastically since the existing pact was signed. It’s begun producing highly rated original content, a costly endeavor.

“While we are committed to continuing to negotiate with NCTC,” she wrote in a statement, “we are informing our loyal viewers who are NCTC customers that they are at risk of losing access to

See **SHENTEL**, Page B2

Eyes for Detail



Nikki Fox / DN-R

Michelle Atkins (left) and Beth Feehan, both patent classifiers in applied chemistry and biology at Serco PGPubs Classification Services, analyze patent applications Thursday afternoon. The highly secure Harrisonburg facility does work for the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

Classified Material

Patent Work Requires High Degree Of Security

By **VIC BRADSHAW**
Daily News-Record



Nikki Fox / DN-R

Brandon Clark, a Serco patent classifier for computer science, works Thursday. Serco processes an average of 1,600 utility patent applications a day for the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

HARRISONBURG — In a highly secure office building at the city’s northern border, a group of scientists and engineers spend their days reviewing the ideas behind products and technologies that will shape the future.

The building’s blinds are kept at angles of 45 degrees or greater so no one can peer through its windows and steal intellectual property off employee computers. Visitors are escorted around the building.

When a person that hasn’t been cleared by federal officials enters a cubicle-farm work area, a switch is flipped and a red beacon similar to those that once adorned police cars comes on to alert workers to keep the information they have out of sight.

The dozens of scientists and engineers who work for Serco PGPubs Classification Services process an average of 1,600 utility patent applications a day for the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

Their analysis helps make sure the right people at the federal office receive the patent application and provides a re-

search starting point for the bureaucrat that will approve or deny the request.

And it’s the only place in the nation where the work is done.

“We need somebody with technical training or a degree,” said Mike Goertzen, program manager at the site, about the fast-growing Serco local workforce that stands at 190. “They have to have subject-matter intelligence.”

Educated Workforce

The work Serco’s local employees perform is detailed and precise.

A utility patent could fall into one or more of 260,000 international classifications and 160,000 U.S. classifications, and employees determine what something is within those categories, said Goertzen.

Routinely it fits multiple categories; occasionally ideas are classified in about 50 categories.

Because of that, 97 percent of its employees have a bachelor’s degree or higher. About 4 percent earned doctorates. Every person that works on the patents has a public trust clearance from the federal government.

See **CLASSIFIED**, Page B3

Sidewalk Project Gets Green Light

By **RYAN CORNELL**
Daily News-Record

HARRISONBURG — A sidewalk project in Dayton that’s been on hold for five years finally has the go-ahead.

The proposed 1,700-foot concrete sidewalk would start where Bowman Road meets College Street and run along the side of Bowman Road closest to Cooks Creek.

A crosswalk would be installed on Bowman Road near Wilbur S. Pence Middle School, and the sidewalk would continue in front of the school until it connects with the existing sidewalk by Ashby Street.

Curb-and-gutter construction is included in the proposal.

Construction on the sidewalk previously had been slated to start as early as spring 2010, but reviews by state and federal transportation agencies kept pushing the date back.

Bill O’Brien, interim town manager for Dayton, said the Virginia Department of

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Shenandoah Schools OKs New Calendar

Division’s 2017-18 Aug. 7 Start Date Earliest In Area

By **KELLY CLARK**
Daily News-Record

WOODSTOCK — Shenandoah County students will start the 2017-18 school year on Aug. 7 now that the School Board unanimously approved a three-year instructional calendar mapping the district’s schedule through spring 2019.

The board voted 5-0 to adopt the calendar on Thursday. Board member Irving Getz was absent.

Under the new schedule, after the start of the 2017-18 school year, schools will close the week of Aug. 28, 2017, for the Shenandoah County Fair and reopen Sept. 4 after Labor Day. Additionally, the first semester will end on Dec. 22 and the second semester will start Jan. 4, 2018.

During the spring semester, schools will close the week of March 26, 2018, for spring break and reopen April 3 after Easter Monday. The school year will end on May 25, 2018, the Friday before Memorial Day.

The new timing provides 182 instructional days for students, two more than the state minimum. It won’t affect the 2016-17 school year, which starts Sept. 6 and ends June 13. The 2018-19 year will follow the same pattern as its predecessor.

Superintendent Jeremy Raley presented a rough draft of the calendar to the School Board on Nov. 12. Since then, Raley said, teacher workdays on Jan. 2 and the day after Memorial Day for the 2017-18 and 2018-19 years were added at the request of some teachers.

Raley said the schedule gives students more instructional time, satisfies FFA and

See **CALENDAR**, Page B2

Serco Lands \$95 Million Contract

By **VIC BRADSHAW**
Daily News-Record

HARRISONBURG — A company that’s been a fixture in the city since 2008 recently landed a new contract with its federal government client.

Serco Inc. announced Nov. 30 that it was awarded a contract to analyze and classify patent applications or reclassify existing patents for the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Those activities are performed at the Reston-based company’s PGPubs Classification Services offices on Technology Drive just in-

side Harrisonburg’s northern border.

The deal, which calls for a one-year base period with four yearlong renewal options, could pay Serco as much as \$95 million.

Serco has been handling initial utility patent classification and research work for the Patent and Trademark Office since it bought SI International in 2008, said Mike Goertzen, program manager at the site. SI International was fulfilling the early years of a 10-year contract for classification services when Serco bought the

company and took over those operations.

He said Serco competed against six other finalists to land the contract, and he credited the work of its 190 local employees with making the new deal possible. They have exceeded the contract’s quality requirement for 37 consecutive months and achieved greater than 99 percent classification accuracy in two of the last eight months.

“I think the contract speaks volumes to the great work our staff has done,” said Goertzen. “Winning or renewing the contract was based on

our excellent performance on our current contract.”

Brian Shull, the city’s economic development director, welcomed word of the new contract.

“This is great news for Harrisonburg,” he said. “Those are well-paid jobs, scientifically based jobs. This is a great employer to have.”

420,000 Choices

Goertzen said although the new contract will replace the previous deal, they will overlap. It could take as long

See **SERCO**, Page B3

Dozens Rally In Support For Islamic Center Of Va. In Bon Air

Muslims Face Increasing Scrutiny In Wake Of Attacks, Trump Proposal

Richmond Times-Dispatch

BON AIR (AP) — Dozens of Chesterfield County residents rallied around their neighbors of the Islamic Center of Virginia in Bon Air in support of religious tolerance Friday, the day when Muslims hold their congregational prayer.

"It's easy right now to separate and isolate the people in the Muslim community, and that's the opposite of what we need to do. We really need to be coming together," said Sara Berger, a Bon Air native who came with her child, mother and grandmother.

Chesterfield resident Bill Cavender, a political scientist with focus on Middle Eastern studies, said showing solidarity with Muslims in the area is an important signal.

"As someone who has lived with and traveled amongst and worked with Muslims for a good part of my life, I feel it is important for us local Richmonders to stand with them, especially in a time like this when there is so much confusion," Cavender said.

Muslims in America are facing increasing scrutiny and sometimes hostility in the wake of a deadly mass shooting in San Bernardino, Calif., by suspected sympathizers of the Islamic State and the terrorist attacks in Paris

last month that left 130 dead.

Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump on Monday added fuel to the fire with his proposal to bar all Muslims from entering the United States "until our country's representatives can figure out what is going on."

Trump's announcement came just one day after President Barack Obama asked the country not to "turn against one another" out of fear.

Trump's proposal did not resonate well within the 2,000-member congregation and the roughly 60 interfaith supporters who gathered Friday on the lawn of the 30-year-old Islamic Center, the largest of about a dozen mosques in the greater Richmond area.

"It's dreadful. It's not what the United States is supposed to be about and what our philosophy is supposed to be," said Bon Air resident Judy Holland.

Rabbi Ben Romer of the Bonay Kodesh Jewish Community in Chesterfield called Trump's remarks "reprehensible" and un-American.

"To make a blanket statement about over 1 billion members of a faith community and to demonize and dehumanize them as one group and to say 'keep them all out' is simply non-American," he said.

Romer, a 20-year veteran of the U.S.

armed forces, said he did not fight for philosophies like Trump's.

"I fought for the right for him to say things, but not ever to approve of that kind of an idea. I condemn his thoughts and his call for that sort of action in no uncertain terms," he said.

Ammar Amonette, the imam of the Islamic Center, said he was touched by the support from the community, adding that the congregation's outreach efforts following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, have "paid dividends."

"There are a lot of people in our community who are recent citizens or immigrants to the United States and they may feel maybe they don't know what their place is in this society, whether they are welcome or not. It really means a lot to them if people came out to support them," Amonette said.

Trump's remarks were "very hurtful" to American Muslims, the Imam said.

"We expect that our leaders would represent our highest American values, and the idea that you can be singled out because of your faith, and nothing that you have done or said personally, [and] that your religion would allow you to be legally discriminated against, that is very shocking to us," Amonette said.

“It is important for us local Richmonders to stand with them, especially in a time like this when there is so much confusion.”

■ Bill Cavender

Man Gets Two Life Terms For Murders Of Colonial Heights Couple

Five Years After Slaying

Associated Press

COLONIAL HEIGHTS — The Richmond Times-Dispatch reports that nearly five years after an elderly Colonial Heights couple were found slain in their Conduit Road home, one of their former neighbors was sentenced Friday to two life terms in prison for bludgeoning and robbing them of jewelry and money.

After a six-hour sentencing hearing in Colonial Heights Circuit Court, Judge Allan Sharrett sentenced Matthew F. Brady, 31, to spend the rest of his life in prison in the Jan. 21, 2011, killings of Joseph Bland, 84, and his wife, Evelyn, 80. Their bodies were discovered by family members after the couple failed to show up for a dinner engagement or answer their phones.

The judge, who called the case the most "horrific" act of violence in his 38-year career, sentenced Brady to life terms for each of the murders. He also imposed two 25-year sentences for the robberies of the victims. The robbery sentences will run concurrent with the life terms.

"The savagery and brutality is

shocking," Sharrett said in explaining his decision for a sentence above the state guidelines. He said the unprovoked killing of the elderly couple in the sanctity of their home demanded the additional prison time.

Brady, who at one time lived across the street from the victims, pleaded guilty on July 27 to two counts of first-degree murder, reduced from capital murder, and two counts of robbery. With Sharrett's acceptance of Brady's guilty pleas, the death penalty Brady originally faced was removed from consideration.

Friday's disposition capped nearly five years of legal wrangling that included more than 160 motions filed by the defense and the appointment of seven lead defense attorneys, ending with veteran capital murder attorney Craig Cooley, who also had been appointed as the first lead counsel four years ago but was dropped.

Brady was arrested a week after the slayings at a residence about a half-mile away on Lafayette Avenue, where his estranged wife and children moved after the couple separated in December 2010.

His former wife, Christina, had allowed her then-estranged husband to stay with her and their children, then

5 and 6, despite an emergency protective order she had filed against him several months earlier after alleging Brady had assaulted her.

As the case quickly progressed, Colonial Heights investigators executed search warrants at the Lafayette Avenue house where the Bradys were living, on Brady's wife's 2005 Nissan Altima and on Brady's parents' home in the 400 block of Wilson Avenue.

During the Lafayette Avenue search, police recovered \$920 in cash, jewelry, a tool box with tools, and a flat pry bar that investigators suspected was the murder weapon.

Autopsies performed by the state medical examiner's office determined that Joseph Bland suffered at least 17 blunt force injuries to his head and Evelyn Bland suffered three. Many of the blows fractured their skulls.

According to a transcript of an Aug. 20 hearing where a summary of evidence was presented by both the prosecution and defense, Kathy Bland, the victims' daughter-in-law, testified that she and her husband Joe Bland Jr., drove to the couple's home after they failed to show up for dinner and couldn't be reached by phone. When they arrived, they noticed that the couple's silver 2011 Mercury Grand Marquis was missing from the driveway.

City Good For Operations

Classified

FROM PAGE B1

Harrisonburg, Goertzen said, is a good place for the company's patent operations. It's close to multiple universities — a high percentage of its employees graduated from James Madison University, Eastern Mennonite University, Bridgewater College, the University of Virginia or Virginia Tech — and close to the Serco Inc. headquarters in Reston and Patent and Trademark offices in Alexandria.

It's one of the fastest-growing companies of its size in the area, a necessity to meet an increase in patent applications. He said the staff has grown 28 percent this year and 57 percent over the last three years, with 75 percent of the hires since 2013 on the production side of the operation.

The workforce should reach 210 or 215 in February. Goertzen said Serco has developed a profile of the type of person most likely to succeed in its environment. Those traits include exceptional reading comprehension and technical-analysis skills, the ability to work autonomously, and the willingness to make quick, decisive classifications.

Training is integral to the operation. "When no one else in the nation does what you do," he said, "you have to be able to train people to do what you do."

If you meet the criteria, Serco appears a good place to work. Forbes magazine ranked the parent company 39th this year on its list of the best places to work in America.

Goertzen said the local office promotes from within 99 percent of the time. He would not disclose salary information but said its pay is "competitive for the area."

The employees, he said, are community focused, volunteering with many local organizations.

"I think we have a huge impact here," he said, "but it's kind of a silent impact."

Right now, Serco is involved in more than just patent classification. It's helping the Patent and Trademark Office do away with its own classifications and transition to the international system, and the company recently hosted officials from the European, Japanese, Chinese, South Korean and world patent and trademark offices.

"We're doing great work here," said Goertzen, "and we're seen as a leader for the USPTO to make that transition."

Contact Vic Bradshaw at 574-6279 or vbradshaw@dnronline.com

U.S. System In Transition

Serco

FROM PAGE B1

as six months for the transition to the new contract to be complete.

The vast majority of Serco's patent-classification work, he said, will continue to be analyzing and making initial classification of utility patent applications and providing applicable research to help Patent and Trademark Office officials make their determinations.

However, the new contract provides an opportunity for Serco employees to classify plants or designs for the first time. It also includes some work to reclassification existing patents, which must be done as technology changes lead to the addition of classification categories.

"The classification system is a dynamic entity," Goertzen said. "It changes and adapts to technology."

The scientists and engineers Serco employs have about 260,000 classification symbols to choose from in the international system and 160,000 in the U.S. system, he said.

A single application could be placed into anywhere from one to 50 classifications, and about 40 percent are reviewed by more than one expert because they cross multiple areas of expertise. One word, Goertzen said, can change the way an application is classified.

The United States is transitioning to the international classification system, he said. Serco is helping with that process. Goertzen said the local office is on track to process 415,000 applications this year. The company plans to add 20 to 25 employees in February to handle the increased volume of applications it's receiving.

Contact Vic Bradshaw at 574-6279 or vbradshaw@dnronline.com

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Bids Likely Sought Soon

Sidewalk FROM PAGE B1

Transportation notified him this week the project had been approved and he expects the town will solicit construction bids this month.

Dayton began applying for grants in 2007 and has received full funding for the estimated \$700,000 project. Federal grants will cover 80 percent of the cost, with the town paying the rest.

When asked why the project may have taken so long to approve, O'Brien said: "My understanding is it's just the bureaucratic process these federally funded projects have to go through, and it's finally cleared the fence."

The project is one of the topics slated for Dayton's Town Council meeting on Monday. Council meets at 7 p.m. in the Council Chambers, 125 B Eastview St.

Other items on the agenda include a proposed well near Silver Lake and a public hearing on revising the town's charter. A meeting of council's economic development committee at 6 p.m. will review façade enhancement grant applications.

Contact Ryan Cornell at 574-6286 or rcornell@dnronline.com

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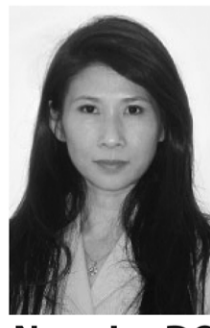
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Hours

Monday: 8:00 am - 4:30 pm
Tuesday: 8:00 am - 4:30 pm
Wednesday: 8:00 am - 4:30 pm
Thursday: 8:00 am - 4:30 pm
Friday: 8:00 am - 4:30 pm



Katy Lopez, MD
Bilingual in English and Spanish.



Ngoc Le, DO
Bilingual in English and Vietnamese.

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The Shenandoah Valley Choral Society
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Harrisonburg: Red Front Supermarket
Bridgewater: Bridgewater Foods Supermarket



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