

# Woman's body found

Authorities found the body of Carolyn Pope last Wednesday night near power lines in the Wrigley area, Hickman County Sheriff Randal Ward said. On Thursday afternoon, Mitchell Hinderliter and Christopher Hall were charged with abuse of a corpse, tampering with evidence and filing a false report, Ward announced. Both men already were in jail.

Ms. Pope was found wrapped in a rug and a tarp on Wednesday at about 8 p.m., Ward reported, and showed signs of decomposition.

Ms. Pope, 29, had been

missing since October 11 from her home in the Lyles area. She was the mother of a 5-year-old girl.

The sheriff said late last Thursday morning that an autopsy was being performed at the state medical examiner's office, and that he expected charges to follow.

In the press release issued last Thursday afternoon, the cause of death was not stated, and that further charges "are expected upon final report" from the medical examiner.

Persons with information should contact Detective Brady Cartwright at 931-716-0607.

The investigation began on October 13, though Ward said key evidence developed on the 23rd.

"A lead developed on Wednesday and we were following up on it," Ward said, with assistance from the TBI and the 21st Judicial District Drug Task force.

"We had a location where we were going to," he said. "We had searched it once, and got a lead on it."

Two TBI agents and two members of the drug task force were involved with the Sheriff's Department and (continued on page A6)



CAROLYN POPE

# Kids' welfare improves

The welfare of children in Hickman County improved in the last year -- from 79th to 57th among the 95 Tennessee counties -- according to the annual Kids Count report, released last week.

That is based on year-end data collected in four broad categories by the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth, working with the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Improvement was most significant in the Family and Community category, where Hickman County's standing improved from 84th last year to 52nd this year. Teen pregnancy improved from 94th to 42nd; school suspensions improved from 24th a year ago to 23rd. Substantial abuse and neglect rose slightly, from 6.6 per 1,000 to 6.9.

In the Health category, the county's ranking improved from 73rd a year ago to 38th. The child/teen death rate decreased to 23rd, from 76th; the percentage of children without health insurance decreased from 86th overall to 85th. Low-birthweight babies increased from 13th last year to 22nd among the counties.

Economic Well Being also showed improvement, from 68th last year to 63rd. Child poverty decreased from 66th to 43rd; median household income rose from 47th a year ago to 50th, even though this report shows an income

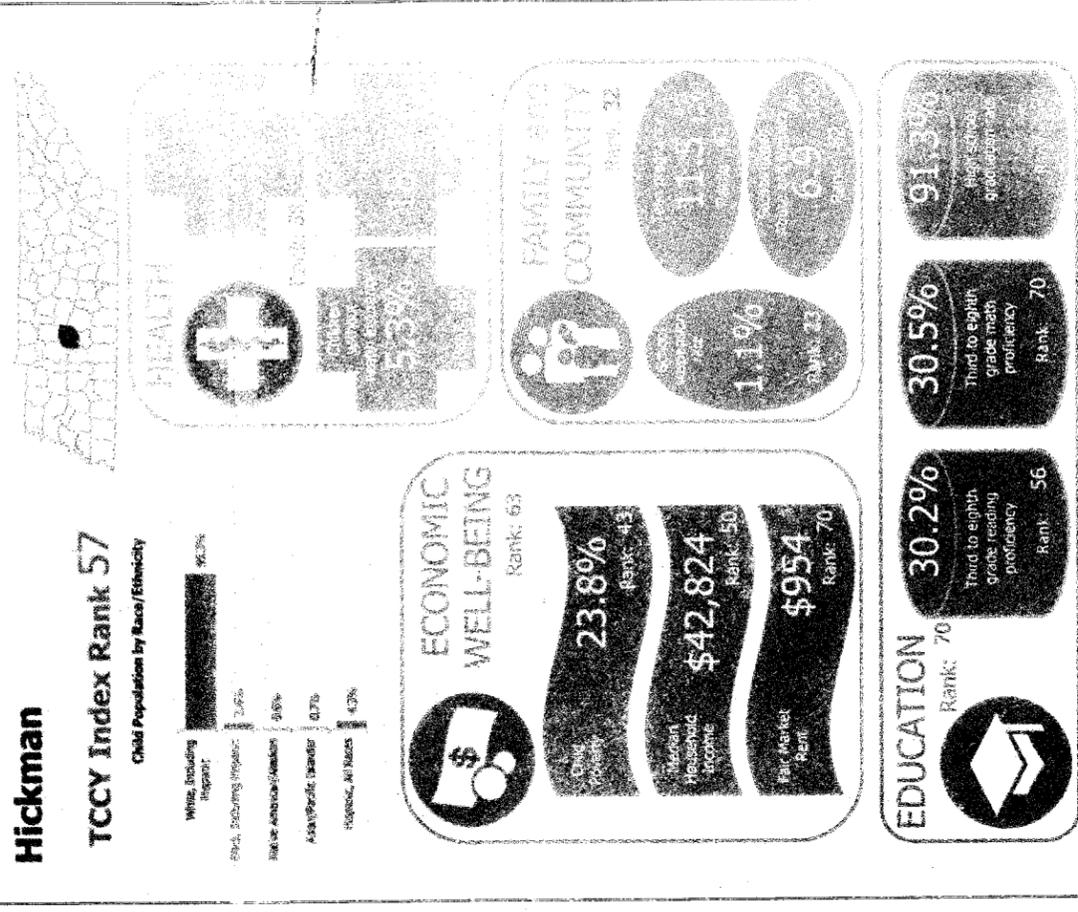
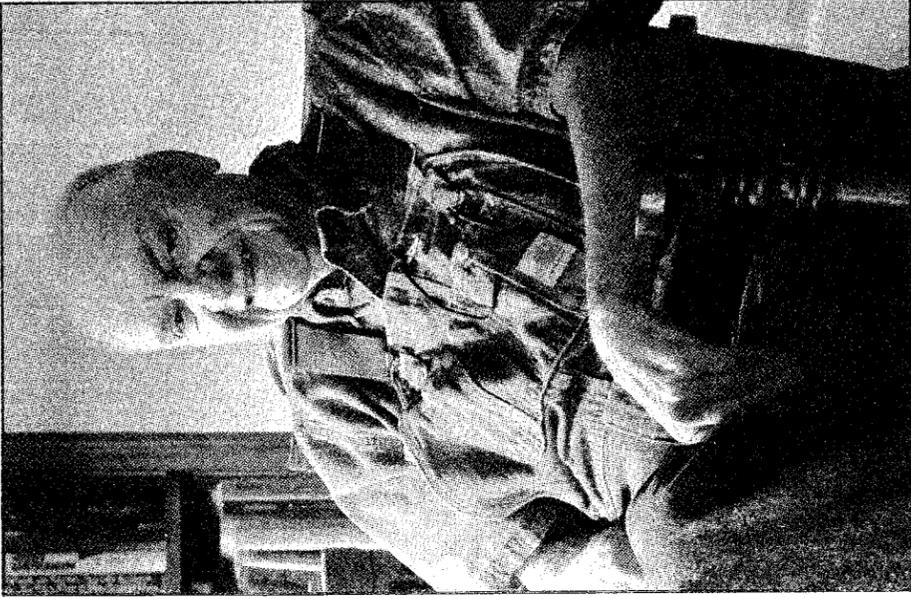


figure higher than the 3-8 improved from 67th ago.

A state report showed the 2019 graduating percentage at 94.4 percent, up from that 91.3 percent figure from 2018.

The full report is available at [www.tn.gov/content/tn/tccy](http://www.tn.gov/content/tn/tccy) under the Kids Count tab. (see chart on page A2)



K.C. Potter, at home in his den.

# Retired VU dean; farmer, now Potter feted for efforts aiding gays

By BRADLEY A. MARTIN  
K.C. Potter is credited with changing the world for gay students at Vanderbilt University, where he was a top administrator for more than 30 years.

These days, the dean emeritus for residential and judicial affairs prefers overalls, a walking stick and a good book. He lives on a farm in Lyles with Richard, his partner of more than 20 years, and their dog, Shadrach, who has inherited a full dose of Potter's friendliness.

Now 80, Potter has been inundated this year with notoriety, though he's able to pull back into his comfortable den, full of books, mementos and knick-knacks on the farm he bought here in 1972.

"Once you get started down this road, you don't have any control," Potter says of his somewhat uncomfortable encounter with fame. The latest accolade came just more than a week ago, when he was declared a Trailblazer at Vanderbilt for his work with students "during tumultuous times," as interim Chancellor Susan R. Wentz said at the October 18 ceremony.

Back in June, Potter was featured in a 26-minute documentary "Show Me the Way," a film available on YouTube. Producer and director Kate Kunath calls Potter "a pioneer" for his work at Vanderbilt, which created policy that protects gay and lesbian students against harassment; and for his ongoing efforts to find their way in what can be an unfriendly world.

Back in the spring, Potter was celebrated during the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the K.C. Potter Center, for the Van-

derbilt Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI) Life.

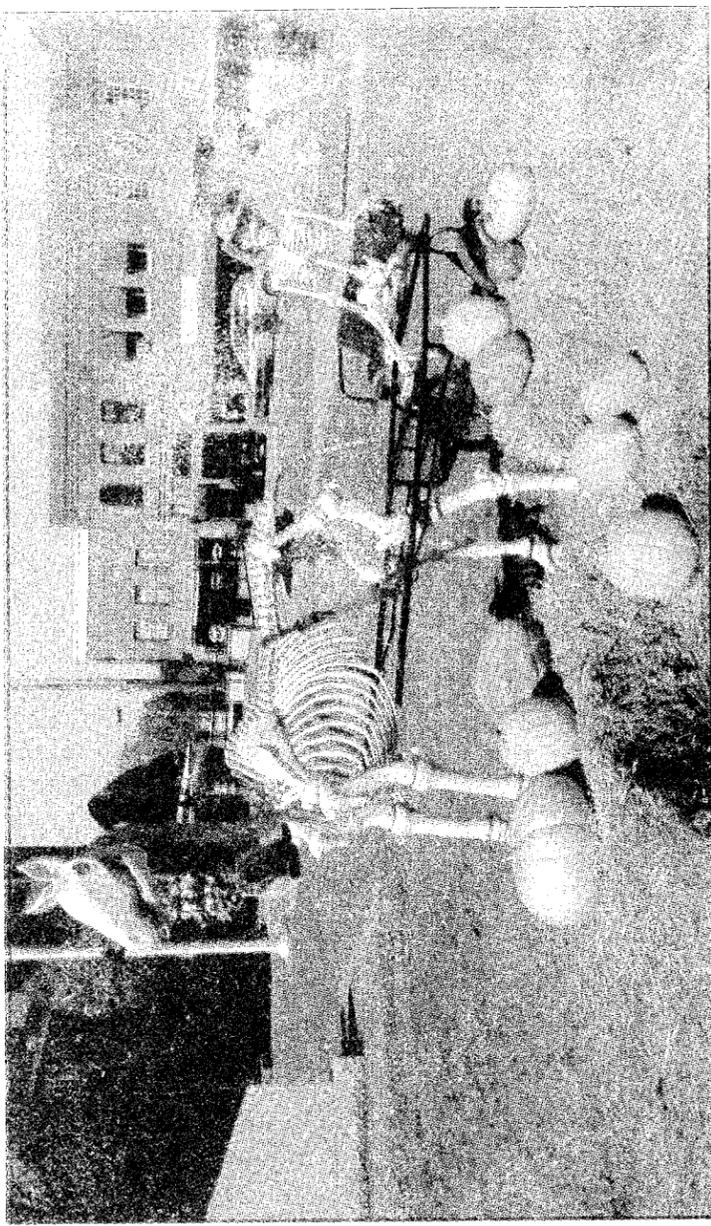
"I was humbled," he recalled, "and I felt maybe it should have been named for somebody else, or a group . . . There were a lot of courageous students that I dealt with over the years."

Potter's impact at Vanderbilt was possible because despite his realization during his professional career that he was gay himself, he did not allow that to be known. "I was entrusted with students, and it was my word whether or not they were going to be able to stay in school," he says. "Of course, that would be something that people would worry about in those days because they thought all gay people were predators."

"The main thing for me is that I wanted to be trusted, so I wouldn't come out."

Repressed was a state of life for gay students at the Nashville university during Potter's tenure; he said VU had "a homophobic campus" during much of his 33-year career, which began in 1965.

"Ever the fly in the ointment was when I realized over a period of time we'd had all of these suspicious suicides," he says. "I remember one where the boy took antifreeze; there can be no more horrible death, I think, than drinking antifreeze . . . Nobody had any inkling why he took his life." Then there was a male student who died from the injuries caused by his fall from an upper floor in Carmichael Tower No. 1. Potter saw it happen, as he entered his car. (continued on page A5)



Spooky

The Halloween gang -- it's Thursday -- sent its spokesman to the Square last week, all excited about . . . well, either you get it or you don't.

# K.C. POTTER

(continued from page A1)

"I quickly rushed down there and when I got to him I -- I was among the first -- and I looked in his eyes, there was no color, and I knew he was dead."

Potter said he did not know why, but a third incident provided clarity: a student who jumped from the 10th floor of a Carmichael Tower.

"I knew that he was gay because his roommate had come and said that, 'You need to move me because my roommate's gay; he's a nice guy but I don't want to live with a gay guy.'"

"And I had allowed the boy to move. And when I went up into the boy's room, there was all these medications from psychiatrists."

As it turned out, the student had tried to date girls. Potter knew this because after his death, "all of these young ladies were upset because they had turned him down. "He couldn't tell his best friends, usually," Potter said.

So while the Dean of Students was beginning to see a problem -- gay students committing suicide on his campus -- he did not have a way to attack it.

That changed when a campus publication included a report that advised VU students "don't stay in Carmichael Towers after dark because that's when the faggots come out." The derogatory term caused three students to complain via a letter published by The Hustler, the university's main student newspaper.

Potter contacted the one student whose name was at the bottom of the letter -- he was graduating from law school -- and set up a lunch with all three of the students; all of them were gay.

"We decided that we would start a group gay students," Potter said.

"They were willing to trust me . . . They were much younger than I and they weren't in the position I was in. They were not happy at all about being repressed."

When the fall semester began, he paid for a \$50 advertisement in The Hustler. It advised interested students to call a specific phone number; a call-back would provide the date and time for a meeting to discuss the gay situation.

"That's where it all started," Potter says. "For the next 10 years they met at my house every Thursday night."

The group meetings usually lasted two hours, said Potter, whose student dean responsibilities entitled him to a university-owned house to live in on campus.

Connections were made and friendships began -- a major step for students who had felt isolated anywhere outside of a classroom.

"They couldn't stop talking," Potter recalled. The regular discussion led to agreement: The group wanted gay, lesbian and transgender students to be recognized and protected by the university. Potter was a member of VU's Board of Community Affairs, and put together a petition his students could agree on.

## Richard's view

K.C. Potter's partner for more than 20 years, Richard was asked what should be known about the 80-year-old farmer and retired university administrator:

"What we should know about K.C. is that there's the two men. There's the professional Vanderbilt . . . and then there's the real person, who is Appalachian, growing up in Kentucky; that always stood with him."

"So even though he was on campus all those years in a Stetson hat and a suit and he used to have an old cigar in reality, he's just the overalls and on land, working the land."

"None of them would sign it," out of fear, he said, "so I got them to put an X on the line and then put my name by it. I went before the committee and said, 'I'm willing to swear that there's an individual behind each one of these Xs.'"

In all, between 20 and 25 Xs were included. Potter's credibility carried the day: The committee directed that a subcommittee study the issue further, with Potter as chair. He invited anyone at the university to testify about their thoughts during weekly sessions that lasted the entire semester, were recorded and then transcribed.

The result was a 252-page document, completed in 1991, entitled, "Report of the Community Affairs Board Subcommittee on Sexual Orientation and Minority Harassment."

Few of those who testified were gay, Potter says.

"It was the university chaplain, it was the dean of the divinity school, it was the university psychologist, it was the director of the campus counseling center, it was the student group on campus who was against it, the Christians. And then it was a professor -- anybody who wanted to come and testify."

The report's conclusion: a policy that protects sexual minorities.

After a year, the Vanderbilt Faculty Senate took up the report, though its chairman "complained that this report was too long." A new chair took the gavel next year and he -- Philosophy Professor John Lachs, still on campus, Potter says -- quickly arranged a hearing and the panel gave its approval.

Next: the chancellor, who "sat on it over the summer," then tabled it, explaining, "that he was not ready to pass it," Potter recalled.

The Board of Trust's Student Affairs Committee took it up the next fall, easily forwarding it to the full board. Potter added some weight to the report, polling comparable universities -- Duke, Emory, Southern Methodist, Miami -- to see if they had instituted policy protections for the LGBT community.

"They all already had done it," Potter recalled. "So I sent a memo to my superior and on up the chain, and it was done . . . it's definitely part of the official policy of the university."

That was 1993. Now, a quarter-century later, Potter says, Vanderbilt has installed a Vice Chancellor for Equity and Inclusion.

"That blew my mind," he says.

There's also this: From

the time the gay students began meeting, in the late 1970s, through the remainder of Potter's career, the suicide problem dissipated.

"There were not any suicides after the group started meeting, that I remember," says Potter during an interview earlier this month. "I hadn't even thought of that issue until you just now raised it."

Potter retired in 1998, but the Thursday night LGBT meetings did not skip a beat. First, the university chaplain's office agreed to provide a venue.

Then, in 2008, the university dedicated the K.C. Potter Center, a house just down from where the dean had lived.

"I know that the chancellor, in his speech opening it, made reference to the fact that some people questioned that we would set aside a special place for gay people," Potter said. "He said, 'Well, they said you don't set aside a place for the non-gay people. Well my answer to that is the entire university is for the non-gay people.'"

Potter's life turned entirely to the farm upon his retirement. It's a 177-acre spread upon which he built what he says was "a house for one . . ."

"I didn't really plan to take on a partner, but once I met him I was overwhelmed," Potter says.

He's speaking of Richard; last name withheld at his request, for business reasons. They met early the next year -- January 12, 1999, Potter recalls -- for dinner in Nashville.

Richard came to Nashville from California -- a musician, he had been working with singer Amy Grant -- and also had been married, to a woman.

"He was more used to this," said Potter. "It took a great deal of patience for me, because I had never been in a relationship before . . . learning how to do things together."

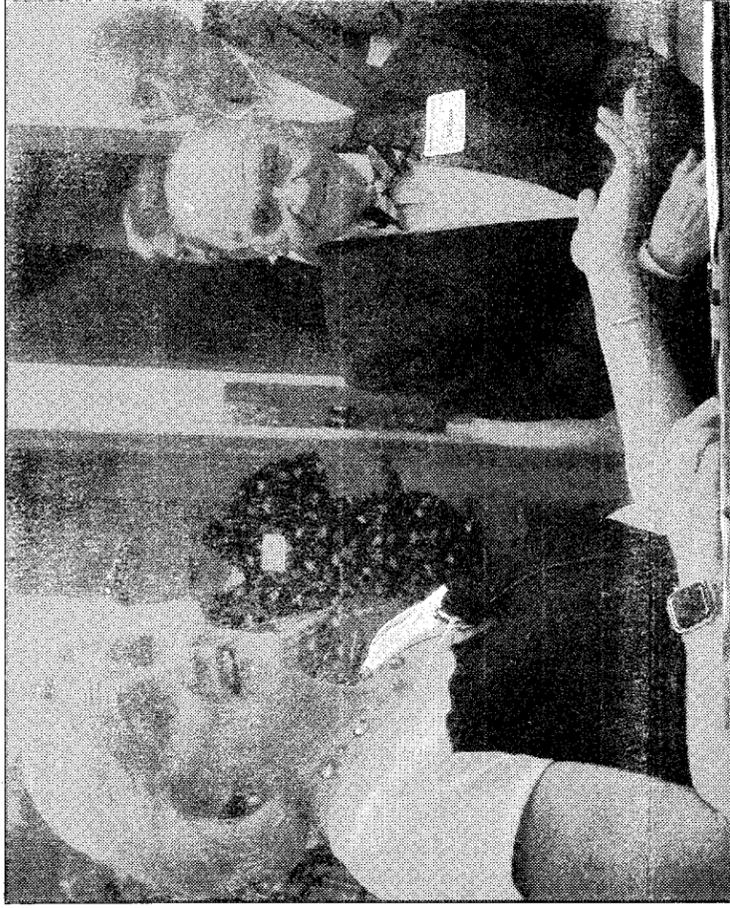
Their partnership is nearing 21 years. Potter is 23 years older, a native of Eastern Kentucky who earned degrees at Berea College and then a law degree at Vanderbilt before making his career there. Each says age has not been a factor in their relationship.

The retired Vanderbilt dean says he continues to mentor those who need support; it's an ability that he traces to summer-camp counseling in Upstate New York while in law school, as well as his work as a dorm supervisor at Berea.

Indeed, while his first job after law school was as a clerk for a state Supreme Court justice, and he emerged from that with three job offers as an attorney, he returned to Vanderbilt, starting as an



A portrait of Vanderbilt Dean Emeritus K.C. Potter was unveiled on October 18 in the university's Kirkland Hall. He was one of five so honored in the second year of the Trailblazer's program. Interim Chancellor Susan R. Wente (below) introduced the honorees.



## Gays here lack group

Gay residents of Hickman County generally keep to themselves, though a discussion group is needed to provide support.

That's the view of K.C. Potter, an 80-year-old gay man who has owned a farm here since 1972. He has been recognized by Vanderbilt University for his work there to create policy and conditions that have helped eliminate discrimination there.

"People who are gay in Centerville, some of them are open and in relationships, but most of them are hidden, especially if they are dependent economically," he says.

Fear of job loss over sexual preference is a real

assistant dean. "I should have known that I was not going to be practicing law," he says, instead immersing himself on a campus among thousands of undergraduates and their issues.

"There's no greater reward in the world, as far as I'm concerned, than to help somebody grow," he says.

Overcoming discrimination in the community is a goal that needs pursuit, Potter says. "We needed an accepting group that I hope would be mainly straight people," he says. One does not exist here, to Potter's knowledge. The group he helped established at Vanderbilt worked for more than a decade before achieving a policy that offered protection to homosexuals, and established a public meeting place.

A regular gathering also might help to offset a couple of myths about the gay lifestyle, he says. "One of them would be that we're predators, when in fact the studies show that the percentage of predators who attack members of the opposite sex who are children are straight -- 90 percent of them. So that makes sense, because 10 percent are gay and 90 percent are straight."

"So therefore it has nothing to do with whether you are straight or gay; it has to do with whether you are a predator; whether

er or not you are a victim.

"I'm not a psychologist but I know what the statistics are in terms of the suicides; we don't know when somebody commits suicide that in fact they were gay. So if it's successful, we don't know."

"But for those who attempted and were unsuccessful, the overwhelming majority of them are gay. So that's something that there is in fact studies done on, and it is shown that the majority of them are gay. Or, a much higher percentage than the non-gay."

Then there are religious beliefs, which often deem homosexuality a sin.

"Everybody has their own theories about that and I won't get into it; I've got mine. I'm a Deist; I'm not a person who is very religious in those terms."

"But I've had courses in the Old Testament; I've had courses in the New Testament; it's required at Berea (College, where he studied as an undergraduate). . . That's where a lot of people hang it."