

Santa Monica Daily Press

A newspaper with issues

LOTTO

SUPER LOTTO PLUS

3-5-8-24-39

Megamember: 19

Jackpot: \$7 million

FANTASY 5

10, 11, 16, 19, 21

DAILY 3

Afternoon picks: 4, 4, 0

Evening picks: 7, 2, 3

DAILY DERBY

1st Place: 05, California Classic

2nd Place: 01, Gold Rush

3rd Place: 08, Gorgeous George

Race Time: 1:47.50



NEWS OF THE WEIRD

by Chuck Shepard

A 14-year-old boy has made nearly a full recovery after a pal accidentally slung a steel rebar rod at his face; it penetrated 6 inches, between his nose and lip, knocking out two teeth and piercing his tongue (Spokane, Wash., September). And a man miraculously survived an accidental fall from a ladder onto an 18-inch-long auger bit firmly locked into his drill, penetrating his right eye, nudging his brain, and exiting above his ear (Truckee, Calif., August).



QUOTE OF THE DAY

"The trouble with incest is that you get involved with relatives."

— George S. Kaufman



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Economist says SM must get creative to stay competitive

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON
Daily Press Staff Writer

For Santa Monica's economy to rebound, it's going to have to reinvent itself.

"Nothing remains forever. Maybe you had a hot product and maybe the sizzle has gone out of it," said Jack Kyser, a chief economist for the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corp., which tracks and works with 88 cities in the county.

Kyser spoke to a group of about 100 business people at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium on Wednesday about the future of Santa Monica's economy.

"The economy is going to get better but for Santa Monica, you have some challenges," he said, adding retail is fading and people now want more of a Main Street shopping experience. "You have to be strategic."

Santa Monica might have once been a mecca for business, tourism and retail. But as recent economic trends have indicated, it's losing its edge — and staying competitive will determine how well Santa Monica attracts shoppers, tourists and new businesses.

Like any business, the city is forced to find new ways to stay competitive, particularly in its top industries — the leisure and hospitality, retail and business sectors.

"Santa Monica has held up fairly well in terms of tourism," Kyser said, adding the local industry has been able to hold its daily room rate to more than \$200. He said hotel occupancy rates held relatively steady last year — 64 percent — and it's predicted to climb to 75 percent this year. However, competition for the tourism dollar will inevitably get more fierce and Santa Monica must find inventive ways to market itself, Kyser said.

And while the tourism sector has been relatively stable, retail sales in Santa Monica have flattened out. Kyser said the competition in surrounding cities can no longer be ignored. Changes at the Grove on Fairfax Avenue, and new



Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press
Jack Kyser of the LAEDC speaks at the Santa Monica Civic Center Auditorium on Wednesday morning.

multiplexes in Century City and elsewhere are drawing more consumers because they have kept up with what shoppers want.

The demand for mid-sized retail stores like Robinson's May

See ECONOMY, page 5

Pier makeover



Del Pastrana/Daily Press
Professional make-up artist Gabriella Lopez prepares Suliana Gonzalez for a early evening photo shoot on the Santa Monica Pier Wednesday.

Hotels hope to spur profits through reorganization

BY JOHN WOOD
Daily Press Staff Writer

DOWNTOWN — In a move designed to increase profits, the company that owns Casa del Mar and Shutters on the Beach, two seaside luxury hotels in Santa Monica, is reorganizing its top executives.

The changes could mean a healthier bottom line for City Hall, which collects a 12 percent "bed tax" on local hotel rooms. This year, the city stands to earn more than \$17 million from the tax, said Steve Stark, City Hall's finance director.

As part of the changes, Armella Stepan, general manager at Shutters, is expected to take over

See HOTELS, page 5

State to monitor local college's finances

Santa Monica College may face 'immediate fiscal problems'

BY JOHN WOOD
Daily Press Staff Writer

With a thin wallet and uncertain economic outlook, Santa Monica College is in imminent danger of facing even worse fiscal problems, according to a report issued Wednesday by educators in Sacramento.

SMC is one of 13 community colleges with such low cash reserves that it's been placed on a fiscal watch list by the state's Chancellor's Office, which oversees all 108 community colleges in California.

At SMC, where officials cut programs, slashed classes and laid off employees to meet this year's \$200-plus million budget, things are especially bad. The local college, with cash reserves totaling just 1 percent of its budget, was accompanied only by Palo Verde and Compton as a "first priority" on the list.

"We're going to be in further communication with Santa Monica, in respect to what their recovery plans are. In our opinion, a prudent reserve is 5 percent," said Frederick E. Harris, an assistant vice chancellor for the state colleges. "In a worst case scenario, the Chancellor's Office has the authority ... to appoint a monitor that could go in

See SMC, page 6

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JACQUELINE BIGAR'S STARS

The stars show the kind of day you'll have:

★★★★★-Dynamic ★★★★★-Positive ★★★-Average
★★-So-so ★-Difficult

♈ ARIES (March 21-April 19)

★★★★★ You finally feel on top of your game. Your creativity starts to find solutions to what has recently come down. Get rid of the filters in your thoughts and the "should bes," and you will succeed. You are a dynamo let loose. Tonight: Allow the fun and games to begin.

♉ TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

★★★★ After recent events, you might opt to stay close to home, and who would blame you? In fact, if you can work from home, do so. Check out a piece of real estate carefully before saying "yes." There could be a hidden stream or leak there. Tonight: Finally, relax.

♊ GEMINI (May 21-June 20)

★★★★★ Now you can speak your mind and even share some of your ideas. You are well-received, and others seem to want to brainstorm with you. Return calls and catch up on messages. Don't stand on ceremony with someone important. A message could have been lost. Tonight: Join a pal at a favorite spot.

♋ CANCER (June 21-July 22)

★★★★★ You might want to express some of what you've recently been feeling. Use good sense with your finances, as money could be dripping out of your hands. Ultimately, this could cause you a problem. Take hold or find an expert to help. Tonight: Take a hard look at where you are spending money.

♌ LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)

★★★★★ The Moon in your sign adds an extra twinkle in your eyes that makes others feel like they want to be with you and say "yes" to you. Use your charms appropriately, but be aware that another could be doing the same to you. Tonight: Let the Lion in you roar.

♍ VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

★★★ Slow down and let others display their magic. How you see a situation could change dramatically if you pull out for a while. Not everyone has to agree with you, nor will they. This isn't the moment to express yourself. Tonight: Do something for yourself.

♏ LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)

★★★★★ Finally you will see the results of months of hard work. Meetings add to your relief as you gain supporters. Be careful with a flirtation or a child. This person could be playing you and not be as he or she appears to be. Tonight: You are the party.

♐ SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)

★★★★★ Others look to you for help and responsibility, a position you often love. Listen well to what someone shares, though it might trigger some personal thoughts. Plan on being the one in charge for several days. Tonight: It could be a late night.

♑ SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

★★★★★ You might be thinking of better ways to spark another's attention. You actually don't need to worry about this, because with your imagination, you naturally will. Laughter happens through a misunderstanding that is finally cleared up. Tonight: Hop on your computer if you find that relaxing.

♒ CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

★★★★★ You have someone quite generous in your life. You might want to say "thank you" in a special way. Understand what means a lot to this person, and you'll hit "bingo." Lunch out together might be perfect. Tonight: Discuss an investment.

♓ AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

★★★★★ Others run with the ball, which pleases you enormously. Share some of your imaginative qualities, and you will love what happens. Work with others, but be careful about getting overenthusiastic just yet! Tonight: Among your admirers.

♐ PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)

★★★★★ To some you act like you're in control, but you know that the only type of control you can have is over yourself. Push hard at work to complete your share of what must be done. You do want a weekend for yourself - don't you? Tonight: Take extra work home.

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LOCAL

Weller manages to stay quiet after tragic market crash

By Daily Press staff

Despite demands that he apologize publicly, George Russell Weller, 87, has stayed quiet since July, when he sped through a crowded Farmers' Market in downtown Santa Monica, leaving 10 people dead and 63 hurt.

At his arraignment Tuesday, Weller was escorted into and out of the LAX Courthouse by Los Angeles County Sheriff deputies and he did not attend a press conference afterward.

But lawyers for Weller, who pleaded not guilty and was ordered free without bond until his case is heard, did speak publicly. During a conference held behind the courthouse, they said they were disappointed with the charges filed by the LA District Attorney's Office. They added that the trial will be expensive for taxpayers, while emotionally traumatic for all involved.

Here is the full text of their statement.

"We again want to express, on behalf of Mr. Weller and the entire Weller family, our sincere sorrow and apology to all the victims and their families of the tragic accident at the Santa Monica Farmers' Market on July 16, 2003," said Bianco, with co-counsel Mark Overland standing beside him at the podium. "Those who know Mr. Weller and the exemplary life he has led for 87 years understand that he pays every minute of every day for the devastation resulting from those horrific nine seconds.

"But the tragedy was a horrible accident and these criminal charges are unwarranted. We have conducted our own extensive investigation of the events of July 16th. Two former Los Angeles County Sheriff investigators with more than 50 years of experience have interviewed more than 100 witnesses. Several 'human factors' experts have reviewed the data. And medical experts have conducted an exacting examination of Mr. Weller.

"Their conclusion, consistent with the finding by the California Highway Patrol Accident Investigation Team, is that the terrible events of July 16th were an accident, most likely caused by pedal misapplication — when a driver mistakenly presses the accelerator pedal believing it was the brake pedal.

"There were absolutely no warning signs that Mr. Weller would lose control of his car before he drove that day. After 73 years of near impeccable driving, the accident was simply unforeseeable.

"We are acutely aware that the events of July 16 resulted in the tragic deaths of 10 people and injuries to 63 others."

— DEFENSE STATEMENT



Russell Weller

"We are disappointed with the filing of criminal charges that will result in the needless expenditure of court time and taxpayer funds, and the unnecessary trauma the trial will cause the families of the deceased, those injured on July 16, and the Weller family.

"We are acutely aware that the events of July 16 resulted in the tragic deaths of 10 people and injuries to 63 others. The pain, suffering and heartache of the families and survivors must be unbearable at times. But no amount of pain, no amount of suffering and no amount of heartache can transform a terrible accident into a crime."

Asked if Weller intends to personally apologize to the victims and their families, Bianco said, "There are no plans for him to address the public right now."

— John Wood

surf report

Watch those tides. Our small W-WNW swell builds overnight and turns more W on Thursday, bringing waist-high sets before lunchtime with a few bigger waves hitting before sundown.

OUTLOOK: The swell mix will peak on Friday and Saturday with most west-facing breaks and beaches seeing waist- to shoulder-high surf.

Write us at wood@smdp.com and tell us what the surf is doing today at your local break.

Today the water is:

56°

**Sunrise: 7:01 a.m.
Sunset: 5:01 p.m.**

	LOW TIDE				HIGH TIDE			
	Morning	Height	Evening	Height	Morning	Height	Evening	Height
WEDNESDAY	2:06	2.46	3:49	-0.78	8:22	6.04	10:30	3.54
THURSDAY	2:40	2.42	4:2	-0.77	8:55	6.04	11:02	3.56
FRIDAY	3:15	2.41	4:54	-0.67	9:30	5.94	11:36	3.60

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The Q-Line

During an interview with the Daily Press, Santa Monica Mayor Richard Bloom outlined his top priorities in 2004 for Santa Monica. Among them are reducing gunfire in an eastside neighborhood, increasing arts in the city and helping the school district get financially stable.

Because politicians serve as constituents for the voters who live here, it might be beneficial for elected leaders to

know what residents think should be the priorities this year.

So this week, Q-Line wants to know, "What should officials focus on this year as their top priorities?"

Call (310) 285-8106 with your response before Thursday at 5 p.m. We'll print them in Friday's paper. Please limit your comments to a minute or less. It might help to think first about the wording of your response.

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LETTERS

Recycling information

Editor:

This is in response to a citizen inquiry regarding the recycling of plastic bags at Santa Monica's drop-off recycling center located at the city yards, 2411 Delaware Ave. (SMDP, Dec. 24, letters to the editor, page 4).

The Allan Recycling Company operates the public recycling drop-off center for the city of Santa Monica at the city yards.

The Allan Recycling Company had provided a bin for the recycling of plastic bags. However, the sign indicating that plastic bags could be dropped off for recycling was removed over a year ago. The Allan Recycling Company had discontinued the collection of plastic bags because there was not a recycling market for this commodity.

The public may continue to use the following recycling drop-off locations:

■ 2411 Delaware Ave. (Also includes a recycling buy-back program) Call (310) 453-9677 for further information.

■ Pennsylvania and Stewart avenues

■ Neilson Way and Hollister Avenue

The following items may be dropped off at the recycling locations:

■ Plastic Bottles (No.'s one through seven)

■ Clean plastic butter and margarine tubs

■ Glass jars and bottles (green, clear and brown)

■ White and colored paper, computer and fax paper

■ Cardboard boxes (flattened)

■ Clean aluminum food and beverage cans and foil (cannot accept with food)

■ Metal food and beverage cans

■ Steel aerosol cans (empty and caps removed)

■ Newspapers, magazines, paper bags and cereal boxes

■ Coupons and junk mail

■ Telephone books

■ Envelopes and envelopes with plastic windows

Items that cannot currently be recycled:

■ Yogurt plastic tubs

■ Plastic wrap, plastic bags, styrofoam boxes, and styrofoam cups and plates

■ Packing peanuts

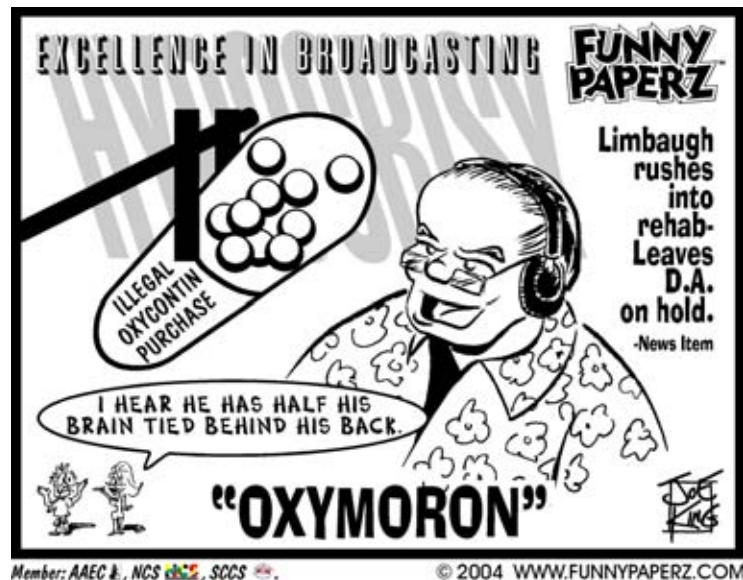
■ Wet paper or boxes with food or greasy residue

For Household hazardous waste:

■ Oil, paint, gas, chlorine and batteries. Call (310) 458-8255 for more information.

The city of Santa Monica and the Allan Recycling Company continue to monitor the markets for available recycling opportunities.

For further information, contact our customer care service at (310) 458-2223.



Regarding Ms. Weil's veggie-life question: "I would like to know if readers have found another way to keep refrigerated vegetables fresh for six days. I don't think cloth keeps them as fresh."

Our preliminary research has indicated that there are many responses to this question. We are certainly not an authority on this, but have found that many people use tupperware, while others indicate that the new refrigerators provide longer veggie life. It has also been noted that veggies should not be washed until they are ready to use, and many people keep them fresh in the refrigerator in plastic bags until they are ready to be properly washed and used.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond.

Celeste Peele

Solid Waste Operations Manager
City of Santa Monica

headline

NEWS
on the
EDGE

By Ron Scott Smith



Since I think of this as a serial, a sort of on-going op-ed soap opera starring the Washington foursome of Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and Ashcroft, with supporting roles ably filled by Toby Keith, the Dixie Chicks, Rush Limbaugh and Ann Coulter to name a few, a review of some past episodes with a brief update might be in order as we embark upon a third season. Happy and peaceful 2004 to you all.

THEN: (during the roll-up to war) Falling off the Wagon, Marching On to War— (SMDP, Feb 24, 2003)

"Guy walks into a bar. Uh oh, it's the President...Smacks a hornets nest with a golf club and shouts out, 'You're either with me or against me.' Don't look now but has the new sheriff in town fallen off the wagon on the way to war?"

NOW: He said, "Bring it on," and they're bringing it on. The hornets are angry and buzzing. The insurgency in Iraq appears out of control as world-class terrorists from near and far — fuller than ever of motive and venom — converge on the US occupied, formerly sovereign nation of Iraq. Bush approves — "better there than here" — goes his line, but 400 American troops are dead. "Now the left hand knows what the right is doing," he said recently to a reassured nation, but he held out his right hand when he said "left" and vice versa.

Letterman played the clip and all of America chuckled... all except for the 400.

THEN: (on the eve of war) Shock and Awe...March Madness is Upon Us — (Mar 20, 2003)

"The President spoke directly to Iraqi soldiers Monday night, 'Do not fight for a dying regime that is not worth your life,' he warned them. But in another stroke of twisted Bush logic, it is worth the lives of our own soldiers to fight against a dying regime, and there they go..."

NOW: And here they come by the day, home for good, to their own funerals, not one of which has been attended by the Commander-in-Chief who gave them their orders. The media is prohibited from photographing the returning caskets.

THEN: (during the Iraqification of Iraq) Push Her Button, Coulter Speaks for All That's Right — (Oct 30, 2003)

"The new Ann Coulter talking action figure has a button you can push to hear her bash liberals in her own voice. She says things like, 'Why not go to war for oil, we need oil.' The woman does not beat around the bush. Or the Cheney."

NOW: Is the war just another day, just another dollar for the Vice President and his pals from the old firm? A Congressional Research Service report reveals that he holds 433,333 unexercised stock options in Halliburton, which was awarded a billion dollar contract, without open bidding, to take charge of the battered Iraqi oil fields. Halliburton now stands accused of gouging- to the tune of some \$60 million- the price of the gasoline they sell. By the way, how many times have you seen the phantom Veep in public during his three years as number two? People would kill for a job like that.

THEN: (during post 9/11 terrorization of US) Ashcroft to Terrorists — This Looks Like a Job for Me" — (Oct 9, 2002)

"Like the cunning Inspector Porfiry, hot on the trail of a thousand Raskolnikovs, John Ashcroft is a man on a mission. He's hunting down domestic terrorists, and he's not stopping until he gets them. Good. Let him be obsessed with his hunt- as long as he's restrained from resorting to draconian search techniques...Besides, it's good for his health. He no longer has time to stress over degenerate stuff like the Spirit of Justice, the semi-nude female statue that stands in his Department of Justice."

NOW: The Attorney General issued a nationwide bulletin to police this Christmas Eve to be on the alert during traffic stops for people carrying almanacs. A person with an almanac, the report warned, "may point to possible terrorist planning." The man is on the case. But be careful what you check out at the library- John will know, if he wants to know. You've got to hand it to the top cop though- he got the one he wanted. Tommy Chong is off the streets, safely tucked away in prison. And as for that shameless Spirit of Justice? Her breasts remain hidden under the \$8000 drapes special-ordered by the Attorney General.

THEN: (during the California total recall) From Mouths of Babes: Get a Clue, 'Kalleefawnyuh' — (Sept 18, 2003)

"It is slightly unnerving to hear the governor-to-be stumbling over a language he's going to need every nuance of while attempting to dismantle the brick wall he'll likely run into in Sacramento ... State Sen. Pres. John Burton, Arnold's chief adversary, said, 'I think it will be difficult for him to understand this is not the movies, this is real

life, and that he's not the Terminator.' Uh oh."

NOW: In his upbeat state-of-the-state address just two nights ago, the new Governor was effusive in his praise of California's contribution to the national space program. He said, "I want to thank the many scientists at the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena." And then this in describing his managerial strategy: "I don't want to move boxes around, I want to blow them up." Burton winced. Uh oh.

THEN: (during the roll-up to anti-war) Woodstock Nation to Hip Hop Nation: Peace ... Bring it" — (Nov 20, 2002)

"A peace movement needs a cultural reference- a soundtrack — to galvanize it. Hip hop nation — peace. It's your turn. Make it not just something to say instead of good-bye. Give peace a beat, Dre. It's hotter than you think in here, Nelly. Step up your game ... somebody get mad."

NOW: Somebody got mad. But not yet in hip hop nation. Still bling blinging over there. Instead, from the unlikely genre that gave us Toby Keith's "boot up your ass" thing, and the boycott of the Dixie Chicks for criticizing the President, here comes country legend Willie Nelson and he's mad, and he's bringing it. We'll let him take this home with a couple lines from his new song, in which he predicts, "You'll never hear this on your radio."

"Babies dying/mothers crying/how much oil is one human life worth?"

And whatever happened to peace on earth?

How much is that soldier's life worth?

And whatever happened to peace on earth?"

LOCAL



Economist: Santa Monica, state 'not in a bubble'

ECONOMY, from page 1

and Macy's have fallen by the wayside and have put Santa Monica at risk, Kyser said.

"That is a problem for you and you have to look at that seriously," he said.

He pointed to other cities like Long Beach, which has reinvented itself as a destination for business conferences with its new meeting space, or Culver City, which is consistently talking to Kyser's firm about how to become more competitive. He also noted that a friend of his doesn't shop in Santa Monica anymore because she has to pay for parking, whereas other retail outlets provide it for free.

"Little things mean a lot. You have to think about your opportunities," Kyser said, adding doing a comparative analysis with other cities and stealing their ideas is not out of the question.

The challenge is to maintain the demand for Santa Monica, especially when a lot of businesses and restaurants are moving back to the center of the county, Kyser said.

The average salary for a worker in Santa Monica

dipped slightly last year from \$55,000 in 2002 to \$50,000 in 2003. The peak for employment in Santa Monica was in 1991 when 84,000 people had jobs here. That's compared to about 70,000 this year. And while unemployment here is slightly lower than Los Angeles County — 6 percent — fewer businesses are setting up shop in Santa Monica.

"A question for me is why are people not relocating in Santa Monica?" Kyser told the group. Perhaps it's because City Hall doesn't give incentives to businesses to come here. Kyser pointed to El Segundo, which actually waives a business' start-up fees if City Hall doesn't issue the proper permits in a set amount of time. Santa Monica government is notorious for its bureaucratic process, which costs new businesses an enormous amount of time and money.

New business in Santa Monica has remained flat for several years with about 6,000 establishments currently here. Of those businesses, 75 percent of them have between one and 10 employees, Kyser said. He added that there might be start-up businesses that haven't been accounted for and those that do exist are most likely "fragile."

Santa Monica enjoyed a slow and steady population

growth last year — 1,400 new residents moved here, bringing the population to 90,700. But there isn't enough affordable housing to keep up with the demand, Kyser said.

On a national level, Kyser said there was tremendous growth in the third quarter of last year and 2004 should see solid 4 percent growth. The next year looks even better, he added.

In California, personal income growth rose 3 percent, despite that a lot of high tech jobs were lost, as well as jobs within a wide spectrum of companies that are using labor overseas, Kyser said.

Doing business in California will continue to be a challenge in the coming years as energy and employee costs like worker's compensation and health benefits rise.

"It's gotten very expensive for any business to hire someone in California," Kyser said, adding that Gov. Schwarzenegger's plan to lure more business here will be affected by those increasing costs. The focus also should be to keep the current businesses from moving elsewhere.

"We are not in a bubble," he said. "They can move to another state or go off shore."

Bed tax expected to generate more than \$17M this year

HOTEL, from page 1

as director of corporate branding in the next few weeks. And Klaus Mennekes, general manager at Casa del Mar, has already begun his role as operations manager for both hotels, owners said.

The move is designed to make daily operations more efficient, raise occupancy rates and, ultimately, boost profits in the faltering economy, said Tim Dubois, president of the Edward Thomas Companies, which owns several hotels.

"We want better coordination," he said. "We own both hotels and it just made sense to streamline the decision making. Plus, we wanted to concentrate on new business development, which is what Ms. Stepan is working on."

Besides the bed tax, thriving hotels are important to city coffers for another reason — tourist dollars spent at local restaurants and in local shops account for millions of dollars in sales tax revenue. For every taxable dollar that is spent in Santa Monica, one penny goes to City Hall.

"As tourism increases, that would also increase our sales taxes and visitors, especially international visitors tend to spend a lot of money on meals, souvenirs and all that kind of stuff," said Dave Carr, the city's treasurer.

Carr added that although the budget predicts \$17.1 million in bed tax revenue this fiscal year, the last few months of

"Things are getting a little better over last year, but we've got along way to go before we can claim a recovery."

— TIM DUBOIS

President, Edward Thomas Companies

2003 saw higher hotel occupancy than what was expected. City Hall accountants are currently crunching those numbers and more is expected to be known when the mid-year budget is reviewed later this month, Carr said. Last fiscal year, \$17,058,749 was generated.

"Barring any kind of extraordinary circumstance, the (bed tax revenue) is going to be higher this year," Carr said.

The 12 percent bad tax is less than what is charged in some neighboring communities. With budget shortfalls painful in recent years, some have suggested raising that tax locally. But doing so has its consequences. Mayor Richard Bloom in a recent interview cautioned that raising the bed tax may drive a segment of the tourism industry elsewhere. He said the low rates act as a magnet, particularly for travel agents that buy hotel rooms in bulk.

To fill the vacancies left by Stepan and Mennekes, Dubois promoted two other workers from within the company. Henry Birmele, who most recently worked as a rooms executive at the St. Regis Hotel in

Century City, has taken over as general manager at Shutters. And James Barela, previously the general manager of a hotel in Albuquerque, NM., also owned by Edward Thomas Companies, assumed the general manager role at Casa del Mar.

"There are changes happening, there is

no doubt about it," said Mennekes, who worked at Shutters before moving to Casa del Mar.

Dubois declined to disclose specific sales figures for the two hotels. But he did say that although the 198 rooms at Shutters and the 129 rooms at Casa are often sold out on a weekly basis, occupancy at the hotels on a yearly basis is still down considerably over healthy years.

"Things are getting a little better over last year, but we've got along way to go before we can claim a recovery," Dubois said. "We're still in a post 9-11 environment, from a travel standpoint."



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SMC is most underfunded community college in state

SMC, from page 1

and run the district."

But that worst-case scenario — which last happened in the early 1990s at the Peralta Community College in the Bay area — is unlikely to occur, local officials said. Tom Donner, SMC's vice president of business and administration, said the school deliberately dipped into reserves to minimize painful cuts.

"We've been well aware of the watch-list status and the issue of having a reserve that's far below the 5 percent," he said. "The current year, our income and expenses are offset. In other words, there are no reserves that are being used up for the current year."

That's different from last year, when cuts were handed down mid-year, forcing the board of trustees at SMC to dip into reserves. Donner said the real issue is that SMC is severely underfunded, even more so than the other cash-strapped colleges.

"We get less money from the state for each of our students than any other district in the state does," Donner said, later adding, "We've been fighting that for quite a few years and we hope that we'll be able to win it eventually."

The reason for the disparity in funding is complicated and dates back to before the passage Prop. 13, which set level property tax rates throughout the state. Harris said when Prop. 13 went into effect funding levels were frozen, even though assessments weren't current for all schools. In the end, what's called "equalization" of funds has become an entwined, protracted dispute.

In the meantime, there's another reason the finances at SMC are unlikely to be taken over by Sacramento — Harris' team also is operating on a shoe-string budget.

"Our problem is that our office has also been reduced massively," he said. "I don't have the staff. I don't have a SWAT team full of people that can get on plane and get down to (SMC)."

Despite the lack of manpower, the report issued Tuesday indicates the Chancellor's Office will first verify the severity of the situation, evaluate the school's strategy to address the problem and continue to monitor it until the situation improves.

SMC spokesman Bruce Smith said SMC also was on the state's watch list in

"In a worst case scenario, the Chancellor's Office has the authority ... to appoint a monitor that could go in and run the district."

— **FREDERICK E. HARRIS**
 Assistant vice chancellor, college finance
and facilities planning,
California Community Colleges
Chancellor's Office

the mid 1990s when funding for community colleges was short. Just like in the '90s, campus officials will gradually rebuild reserves as the economy improves, he added.

"It sounds worse than it really is," Smith said. "We knew this was going to come and we weren't too concerned, because these are extraordinary times."

Lucky No. 13

A total of 13 community colleges were placed on a fiscal watch list by educators in Sacramento, with various priorities.

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Santa Monica
SECOND PRIORITY:

Ventura

THIRD PRIORITY:
 Coast
Contra Costa
Glendale
Los Angeles
Marin
Peralta
San Francisco
Victor Valley
West Hills

City of Long Beach owes EPA

By The Associated Press

LONG BEACH — The city must pay \$290,000 to the Environmental Protection Agency, half the costs for hazardous waste removal at a contaminated oil refinery site in the Signal Hill area.

The EPA spent about \$4 million since 1996 removing hazardous waste from the Enviropur West Corp. site.

The city will pay half of the \$290,000 agreed to in the settlement reached in June with the EPA. The other half of the city's payment will come from Ecology Controls Inc., which hauled the waste to the site, and the company's insurer.

City Attorney Bob Shannon said the city may seek money from the Port of Long Beach, which is believed to be the source of some waste hauled to the Signal Hill site.

Waste hauled to the site included diesel fuel cleaned up from accidents on city roadways, Deputy City Attorney Lisa Malmsten said.

"We were disposing of it lawfully," Malmsten said. "It was just Enviropur that let it sit there and walked away from the site."

Enviropur was an oil treatment facility from the 1970s until 1996, when it was abandoned. The EPA then cleared away hazardous materials and equipment and decontaminated the site.

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STATE



CALIFORNIA BRIEFS

Another reason to go to Camarillo

By The Associated Press

CAMARILLO — Some 12 million people a year visit Ventura County's top attraction, and it's about to get a lot bigger.

A major expansion of the now 120-store Camarillo Premium Outlets should get final approval this summer, city officials said Tuesday. The multimillion-dollar, 250,000-square-foot project would add more outlet stores, restaurants and upscale freestanding retailers.

"As we speak, the plans are moving quite nicely through all of the requirements here at City Hall," said Jim Jevens, the city's economic development consultant. "The style of the project will be significantly and noticeably different from ... the current outlets."

The project will be built on 20 acres alongside the Edwards Cinema theater multiplex and should be completed by fall 2005. About half the size of the current 450,000-square-foot outlet mall, the new shopping center was expected to bring up to 600 new jobs at least \$1 million in annual sales receipts.

High school weightlifter calls 'uncle'

By The Associated Press

RIVERSIDE — A former Rubidoux High School football player will not appeal dismissal of a lawsuit alleging negligent weightlifting techniques permanently injured his back and ruined his chance to play professionally.

Bryan Mason alleged that the back injury suffered in 2001 while dead-lifting 625 pounds shattered his dreams of an athletic scholarship. Mason's lawsuit, seeking unspecified damages, claimed school officials and the Jurupa Unified School District were negligent.

But a recent California Supreme Court ruling raised the burden of proof in such cases, Mason attorney Cory Weck said Tuesday. In Khan versus Eastside Union High School District, the court ruled it must be proved that a coach intended to harm a student or acted recklessly.

"It is unfeasible to believe it could be proved that the defendants intended to harm Brian," Weck said.

District Superintendent Rollin Edmunds said he was pleased the suit wasn't being pursued.

"When students engage in vigorous physical activities, there are some risks involved," Edmunds said. "We cannot ensure that students participating in those activities will not be hurt."

The suit was filed in March 2002, but it was dismissed last June by Superior Court Judge Sharon J. Waters, who said Mason should have known there were risks involved when he signed up for the football program.

Casino bringing more problems than money

By The Associated Press

SAN BERNARDINO — The county's share of state casino impact funds isn't enough to ease the anticipated increase in traffic, noise and other problems expected with expansion of the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians casino, city leaders said.

About \$1.5 million released to the county so far "isn't going to fix our problems, but I'm hopeful that money will come to the area that is most affected by the impacts of tribal casinos," Councilman Neil Derry said Tuesday.

Officials said they hoped a new county committee established to hand out the local share of Indian gaming mitigation funds will give the biggest chunk of the first installment to San Bernardino neighborhoods.

"I'm hoping the county makes the right choices," Derry said. "I hope it's fair and if it's not fair I'll raise holy hell."

The San Manuel reservation borders the city, county and Highland property. Some residents from all three jurisdictions have complained that the environmental impact of the gambling hall has increased since the tribe first opened a bingo hall in 1986.

The Board of Supervisors took the first step Tuesday in releasing the county's share of \$25 million of tribal gaming money being distributed statewide this fiscal year. The money is designated for public works projects and other services near casinos.

The board voted to form a committee of local officials — five selected by the county, two chosen by tribes — to determine how the money will be split among local governments.

Duck hunters survive Salton Sea

By The Associated Press

SALTON CITY — Three duck hunters survived six hours in the 50-degree Salton Sea after their boat capsized eight miles off shore.

Vince Sachak, 65, of San Jacinto, Jeffrey Morey, 36, of Poway and Morey's 11-year-old son, Ryan, took off early Saturday after launching their boat at Redhill Marina for a later rendezvous with friends in a Salton Sea duck blind.

It was a windy day and the swells in the choppy sea were cresting as high as 5 feet, filling the 16-foot boat with water, Sachak said. Sachak used his cell phone to call his son Mark in the other boat, then his vessel capsized.

"I still get chills every once in while," Sachak said Tuesday in recalling his six hours in the water. "I cough and still taste that Salton Sea in my mouth."

Mark Sachak called a 911 operator and a search began with a California Highway Patrol helicopter, two Imperial County sheriff's airplanes, dozens of deputies and rangers and more than 100 other duck hunters.

About 2:30 p.m., Sachak said, a boat arrived and they were rescued.



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STATE

California county looks to ban GMOs with Measure H

BY PAUL ELIAS
AP Biotechnology Writer

UKIAH — The center of the nation's anti-biotechnology movement can be found these days in a remote Northern California county where voters will decide whether to ban genetically modified organisms.

Specifically, Measure H would prohibit genetically modified plants and animals from being raised or kept in Mendocino County. Processed food made with genetically modified ingredients would still be allowed on store shelves.

Success on March 2 could galvanize similar movements from Vermont to Hawaii. Failure could cast the same pall over activists they felt after the 2002 defeat in Oregon of a proposal to require labeling of all food with biotechnology ingredients.

Activists and biotech lobbyists are increasingly targeting state and local governments in the battle over agricultural biotechnology's spread.

In 2001-2002, 158 pieces of legislation relating to biotechnology were introduced in 39 states, according to the Pew Initiative on Food and Biotechnology. Nineteen of those bills sought to restrict certain segments of the industry, including Maryland's five-year ban on engineered fish that passed in 2002.

But none has been as sweeping as the attempt in Mendocino County, a place where a frontier spirit holds sway.

The headquarters of the closely watched campaign is the Ukiah Brewing Co., located in the heart of this quiet, working-class town that lumber built.

"Biotechnology creates more problems than it solves," said Els Cooperridge, co-owner the brew pub, which uses only organic ingredients to make all its beer and food.

Regardless of the outcome, Measure H is still in keeping with a rugged, rural and remote county proud of its eclectic politics, quirky independence and somewhat hedonistic ways.

Its district attorney is a registered Libertarian who served time in prison on tax charges. Its sheriff is an outspoken proponent of the legality of medicinal marijuana and a backer of Measure H.

Wine grapes recently surpassed timber as the region's top-selling legal crop, though it's no secret that marijuana is the biggest cash crop.

Growing numbers of organic farmers are also staking out small operations in the arable land below the county's redwood-studded hills. Some 3,500 acres of the county's 18,000 acres of farmland are certified as organic, which means the crops were grown without pesticides and artificial fertilizers.

In fact, the law would have little practical effect inside Mendocino County if enacted, since there are no known genetically modified crops growing in the area, nor are there any commercially available biotech versions of Mendocino County's main crops.

And a biotechnology ban could benefit organic growers, who could use the law as a marketing tool, especially in Europe. Many of the county's winemakers are organic.

"Beyond the political quirkiness, there is some protectionism going on here," said Glenn McGourty, a University of California plant science adviser for Mendocino County who said he's neutral on the issue.

Coffee growers in Hawaii have similar economic issues.

"We are following this real closely," said Nancy Redfeather, an organic coffee grower near Kona. "It's extremely relevant to what we're trying to do."

Many Hawaii growers are campaigning to ban outdoor genetic engineering experiments of coffee plants for fear that accidental cross-pollination with their crops will ruin their business prospects, especially in biotechnology-averse Europe.

"We don't have staff trained in dealing with genetically modified organisms and no one in the country has a ban like this."

— DAVE BENGSTON
County Agricultural Commissioner

Similar movements are underway in Vermont, where several towns have passed nonbinding resolutions recommending biotechnology bans. In Texas, activists want to ban the genetic engineering of plants to produce human pharmaceuticals.

Biotechnology's critics complain that not enough is known about the effects of genetically modified organisms on health and the environment to allow for widespread consumption.

Federal approval is required for genetic engineering experiments, but once such products have been approved for human consumption, there's no system of tracking where the plants and animals end up.

The industry counters that such negative effects have proved nonexistent in the 10 years since the Food and Drug Administration first approved genetically engineered crops for human consumption — and that farmers are increasingly embracing the technology to save money while growing crops engineered to resist weeds and bugs without pesticides.

If Measure H is defeated it would once again highlight the biotechnology industry's staying power and political muscle.

In 2002, companies and industry groups warning against a "biotech police force" spent \$4 million to help defeat the Oregon proposition.

This time, the industry-backed California Plant Health Association sued Mendocino County in an unsuccessful attempt to alter the ballot's language and is expected to file another lawsuit if the ballot passes.

"It's bad policy for individual counties to start banning certain crops," said association head Steven Beckley. "It's also denying farmers a technology they may someday need."

The industry will campaign aggressively to defeat the measure, Beckley said.

County Agricultural Commissioner Dave Bengston said he's officially neutral on Measure H's fate, but is concerned with overburdening his seven-person department, which has been stretched thin by budget cuts.

"We don't have staff trained in dealing with genetically modified organisms and no one in the country has a ban like this," Bengston said. "So it's up to us to figure out how we are going to implement this and anyway you look at it, it's going to cost money."

BUSINESS

Financial planning: What to do in your 30s and 40s



IT'S YOUR BUSINESS

By John Kim

Traditionally financial planning was age-based and meant taking on payments and raising kids in your 20s and 30s, sending the kids to college in your 40s and focusing on estate planning and grandchildren in your 60s. But these days tradition isn't always the best guide. Not everyone gets married in their 20s or 30s. And women are having their first child well into their 40s.

By your 30s and 40s, however, you're probably a master at the basics of managing your money and settled down with a mortgage and spouse. You're now realizing there are even greater challenges to meet — raising your family and caring for aging parents. It's easy for your own financial plan to get sidetracked.

■ The basic rules haven't changed.

You still need to balance your current lifestyle against your future needs. Consider how to invest, how to adequately insure yourself and what you'll leave behind. Here are some basic guidelines for what to do in your 30s and 40s.

■ Make retirement savings your top priority.

Get out of debt. Pay down your consumer debt, starting with accounts that carry the highest interest rate. Don't put saving for a house, car, or child's education ahead of saving for retirement.

Take advantage of your employer's 401(k) or 403(b) plan and contribute the maximum. Contributions to these plans are made on a pre-tax basis, thereby translating into an immediate tax savings. Many of these plans also offer a matching employer contribution giving you an opportunity to double your nest egg. The 401(k) maximum contribution level for 2003 is \$12,000 for individuals under the age of 50.

If you don't have a company retirement plan, contribute to a Roth or Traditional IRA. If you're married and not working, you can still contribute the full \$3,000. A Traditional IRA will be fully deductible, even if your spouse has a retirement plan at work, as long as your joint income is less than \$150,000.

■ Send Suzy to college and care for mom without jeopardizing your retirement funds.

College tuition costs and long-term care of convalescing parents can easily deplete savings. If you haven't saved enough, either refinancing your home or

perhaps a home equity loan at a relatively low interest rate could be good sources of funds. Long-term care insurance policies offer another alternative. But the time to look for them is before you need them.

Take a look at Section 529 savings plans. Section 529 plans offer tax-deferred growth and special estate-planning benefits. Regardless of whether your underlying investments are conservative or aggressive, the tax benefits of these plans make your money work harder than would comparable savings or investment accounts.

Qualified withdrawals from any state-sponsored college savings plan or qualified tuition program will be free from federal income taxes until at least Dec. 31, 2010. Congress must extend the law allowing tax-free distributions to continue after this date. If it isn't, distributions will be taxed at the beneficiary's tax rate. Also, many states extend favorable tax deductions and tax-free withdrawals to state residents who invest in a home state plan.

■ Have adequate insurance and prepare a will.

If you have children or plan to, buy life insurance and, in today's environment, it's also important to prepare a will. A will is a legal document that specifies how your possessions will be disbursed and who will manage your estate upon your death. If you die without a will, state laws determine how your estate will be divided. In

addition, if both parents die without a will designating who will be the guardian of a minor, the courts will make the decision. You can't afford to skimp on the future financial security of your dependents. Even if you do not anticipate owing estate taxes, drafting this document is a crucial part of the estate planning process.

Your financial plan is as unique as you are. However, at every significant juncture in life, we all need to make some very basic decisions to ensure our future financial well being and that of our dependents. A financial consultant can offer valuable guidance along the way, from investing to saving to preserving wealth for your heirs.

(John S. Kim is a financial consultant with Smith Barney in Beverly Hills. For a complimentary consultation, please contact him at (310) 205-4939 or visit his www.fc.smithbarney.com/jkim.)

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\$\$\$ BUSINESS BRIEFS \$\$\$

Su joins Santa Monica developer

By Daily Press staff

Sarah Su has joined JSM Construction, Inc., a Santa Monica-based developer, as chief financial officer.

A CPA, Su formerly was an audit manager in the Los Angeles office of Ernst & Young for eight years, where she audited a broad range of firms in addition to those engaged in real estate.

At JSM she will be in charge of accounting operations for more than 20 projects in Santa Monica, North Hollywood and Pasadena.

Prior to her new post she was a consultant to several city, county and state agencies.



Sarah Su

Law firm adds associate

By Daily Press staff

A prominent Santa Monica law firm specializing in land use and property rights has announced that a new associate attorney has joined its ranks.

Valerie Sacks recently joined Harding, Larmore, Kutcher & Kozal. She was formerly an associate at Christensen, Miller, Fink, Jacobs, Glaser, Weil & Shaprio, LLP in Century City. Prior to that, Sacks served in the California Department of Justice as deputy attorney general. Her practice has primarily focused in land use law.

Sacks received her juris doctorate magna cum laude from the University of Arizona. She also holds a master's degree in cultural anthropology and received her undergraduate degree in humanities from the University of California at Berkeley.

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NATIONAL

Illegal immigrants could stay, work for at least three years

BY JENNIFER LOVEN
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Millions of illegal migrant farmers, hotel maids and others working in the shadows of American society would be granted legal status and freed from the threat of deportation under an election-year proposal President Bush wants Congress to approve.

Bush called Mexican President Vicente Fox to brief him Wednesday morning in advance of Bush's speech later in the day at the White House.

"There are some jobs in this country, in our growing economy, that Americans are not filling," White House press secretary Scott McClellan said. "That presents an opportunity for workers from abroad who want to work."

Bush's proposals break a virtual silence on immigration since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks raised fears about border security.

The president argues that his plan would make America safer by giving the government a better idea of who was crossing U.S. borders, bolster the economy by meeting employers' need for willing low-wage workers, and fulfill a mandate for compassion by guaranteeing the rights and legitimacy of illegal workers.

Likely to be left unsaid during the president's speech were the political dividends White House advisers hoped the proposal would pay.

By dangling the prospect of legal status to some 8 million illegal immigrants now estimated to be in this country, about half of them Mexican, Bush was granting a top priority of the business community while making his most aggressive move yet to

court Hispanic voters — the nation's fastest-growing electoral bloc.

He won just over one-third of that constituency in 2000 but wants to expand his support in the community to better his chances for re-election in November.

The proposal would provide a way for illegal immigrants who can show they have employment to work legally, although temporarily, in the United States. The new "temporary worker program," which also would include people still in their native countries who have a job lined up in the United States, would not, like the temporary visa programs already in existence that involve mostly technical experts, apply only to a certain sector of the economy or industry.

Much of the detail of president's proposal was to be worked out by Congress in future negotiations with the White House.

Bush wants to increase the nation's yearly allotment of green cards that allow for permanent U.S. residency, but won't say by how much, the officials said. Approximately 140,000 green cards a year are issued now.

He also wants the workers' first three-year term in the program to be renewable but won't say for how long; he won't set the amount workers should pay to apply for the program; and he won't specify how to enforce the requirement that no American worker wants the job the foreign worker is taking, according to administration officials who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Perhaps the biggest unresolved question is how the plan will allow illegal immigrants access, which they do not now have, to the process of applying for green

cards, or permanent U.S. residency.

Sensitive to the opposition of many conservatives in Bush's own party to any reward for those who broke the law when they entered the United States, the administration officials said repeatedly that the president is not proposing blanket amnesty for illegals and that the program is not linked to the green card process.

They also said that workers accepted into the temporary program could immediately, with an employer's sponsorship, begin applying for a green card. Although these workers would get no advantage over other applicants, an illegal immigrant who attempted to apply now would simply be deported.

If permanent residency were not granted before the worker's term was up the person would have to return to his or her home country to apply from there.

Even though program participants would be allowed to have dependents with them and be able to move freely between their country and the United States, immigrant advocacy groups say the president's proposal falls short of the comprehensive reform they say is needed.

"Extremely disappointing," said Cecilia Munoz, vice president for policy at the National Council of La Raza. "They're proposing to invite people to be guest workers without providing any meaningful opportunity to remain in the United States to become legal permanent residents."

Bush is proposing incentives to induce the workers ultimately to return to their home countries, including allowing them to collect retirement benefits in their home countries based on Social Security taxes paid here.

Q&A about Bush's immigration proposal

BY SUZANNE GAMBOA
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Some questions and answers about President Bush's immigration proposals:

Q: Just what would they do?

A: Bush has released few details, but broadly he proposes the creation of a temporary worker program that would match workers with U.S. employers when Americans can't be found to fill the jobs. Illegal immigrants who are working in the country when the program goes into effect and foreigners wanting to come to the United States to work could participate. Undocumented immigrants would pay a fee to participate.

Q: Would the plan provide amnesty to illegal immigrants already in this country?

A: That depends on how amnesty is defined. In 1986, illegal immigrants who could prove they had been in the country since before 1982 were allowed to apply for legal permanent residence. Bush's proposal does not provide a similar automatic eligibility for legal permanent residence in this country. Instead, his proposal would allow the immigrant to work legally, with the same worker protections as an American while participating in the program. An employer can petition for the worker to become a legal permanent resident, but under current immigration law, the worker must return home before he can apply himself.

Q: Are Bush's proposals contained in legislation to Congress?

A: No, they are broad principles, an outline of the sort of immigration changes he would support. Several bills have been proposed in Congress that contain a range of proposals. One with the broadest support would create a guest worker program for agricultural workers.

Q: Who supports Bush's proposal?

A: Bush's strongest support comes from members of the U.S. business community who have experienced a shortage of American workers to fill service-sector jobs such as hotel and motel workers, cleaning crews and farm laborers and want a temporary worker program to ensure a continued flow of people for those positions.

Q: What do immigration advocacy groups say? Do they support it?

A: Migrant advocacy groups feel the proposals fall short of what is needed to manage illegal immigration and keep

temporary workers flowing legally into the United States. They had pushed for a program that allows undocumented immigrants and temporary workers from abroad to become eligible to apply for legal permanent residence after working a specified period and without leaving the country.

Without that possibility, workers may have little incentive to participate, the advocates say, because many have been living in the United States for years and have bought homes, have U.S.-citizen children or other ties to communities, and thus won't want to leave when they are no longer participating in the program.

Q: Has the United States ever had a guest worker program before?

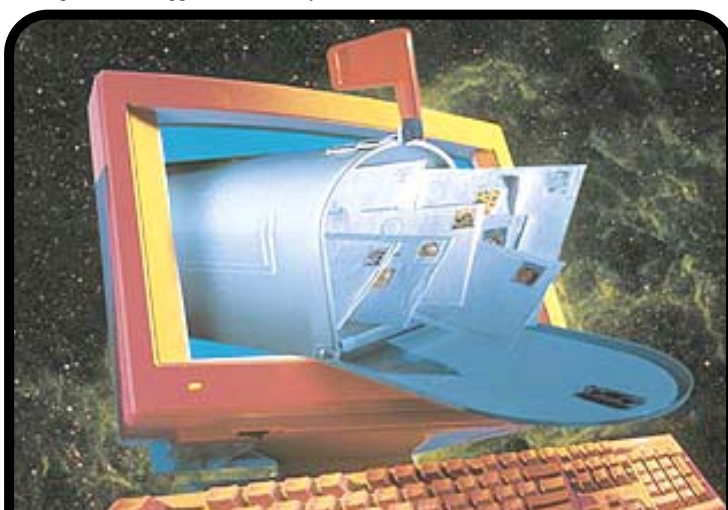
A: The U.S. has many temporary worker programs in place, including for high-tech workers and agricultural workers. But the regulations in some are so cumbersome that employers don't often use them. There was an agricultural guest worker program with Mexico during World War II known as the "Bracero" program. More than 300,000 Mexican farm workers were contracted by the U.S. government to fill jobs left vacant by U.S. citizens called to fight. But the program was rife with abuse and exploitation of workers, some of whom still are trying to recoup unpaid wages.

Q: What percentage of agricultural workers in the United States are here illegally?

A: The federal government estimates 52 percent of agricultural workers are undocumented. Farm labor and industry groups estimate closer to 85 percent.

Q: Is three years enough time to get a green card?

A: Getting a green card generally takes longer. Immigrant workers here and abroad wanting to become legal permanent residents first must get a visa that allows them to apply for a green card. Getting the visa can take several years and is determined by types of workers needed and country quotas. For unskilled workers, there are 5,000 visas available. Another 5,000 visas in that category are reserved for those who apply under the Chinese Student Protection Act. When a visa becomes available, a worker can apply for legal permanent residence, or a green card, and then must wait for that application to be processed. How long that processing takes varies geographically, but experts say the wait is averaging around two years.



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INTERNATIONAL



Prospect of Bush program greeted with guarded optimism

BY OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ

Associated Press Writer

GENERAL BRAVO, Mexico

After lifetimes spent finding ways to sneak into the United States, Mexicans are excited over a new plan by President Bush that may allow them to cross legally for work while maintaining a life in Mexico.

But many worry they will have to compete with a flood of new foreign applicants. Others, jaded by a U.S. immigration system that seems set up to work against them, believe the program could be a trick to catch and deport family members already living in the United States.

In this tiny town, an hour's drive south of the Texas border, the only people who stay are those too young and too old for the trip to the United States. The rest shuttle back and forth, paying smugglers to get them across the border in sealed trucks or through snake-infested deserts.

The trip has become increasingly dangerous as smugglers try to circumvent heavy security measures put in place after the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States.

On Wednesday, the Bush administration announced a program aimed at allowing migrants with jobs to apply for a three-year, temporary work program. Administration officials say the program will make America safer by helping document the estimated 8 million migrants now living underground in the United States.

The program would allow migrants with potential or real jobs — both those in for-

"Don't you think it is going to be tough? Right now it is really hard to get papers."

— ALEJANDRO CHAPA
Mexican migrant

eign countries and others living illegally in the United States — to apply for a temporary work status. They could come and go as they pleased, perhaps even living in Mexico but working in the United States.

The Mexican government welcomed the announcement, with President Vicente Fox receiving a call Wednesday from Bush. Fox said the program would recognize the value of Mexicans living in the United States.

The governments of Colombia and the Dominican Republic also welcomed the changes.

"Most Dominicans who are working in the United States illegally want to regularize their situation and live in peace," said Rafael Peralta, spokesman for President Hipolito Mejia. "Latin American leaders should be celebrating this proposal."

But 20-year-old Alejandro Chapa, sweeping General Bravo's town square for \$36 a week, wondered who would qualify for the new program.

"Don't you think it is going to be tough?" he said. "Right now it is really

hard to get papers."

He believes that migrants living in Mexico won't be able to qualify because it's hard to find jobs without traveling to the United States and usually immigration officials want you to show you have enough money to support the move.

"They ask for too much. They even ask that you have money in the bank, and poor people like us don't have anything," he said.

Many Mexicans are also wary of U.S. immigration officials, seeing them as a sure route to deportation. Many complain the requirements to get even a tourist visa to see relatives in the United States are too stringent. Some have spent years without seeing brothers or even parents.

Others simply aren't going to wait for the program, which must be approved by Congress. Chapa already has a job lined up at a Mexican restaurant in San Antonio, Texas, and plans to cross illegally with three friends on Monday. The four will pay a smuggler to help them.

They dream of the day when they could simply apply for papers and cross a bridge

over the Rio Grande, entering the United States legally and being protected under U.S. labor laws that are often ignored for illegal workers.

Being able to travel back and forth — a key element of Bush's plan — is something many Mexicans would welcome.

For 21-year-old Jose Guzman, the freedom of travel would mean he could earn dollars in the United States, but live in Mexico — where a U.S. minimum wage salary can buy a house, a car and many other things still out of reach for many poor Mexicans.

"I would work anywhere to be able to come home with something," he said.

Some fear the new program will prompt a flood of Mexican applicants trying to enter the United States.

Cruz Salinas, 69, said half of the young men from General Bravo are working illegally in the United States already, and the rest are trying to find a way to follow them. If the new program is approved, "all the young people here are going to want to go."

Priest Esteban Ramirez, who runs a migrant shelter in the border city of Reynosa, across from McAllen, said the program would clear the way for many Mexicans to finally return home. Many migrants stay in the United States for years because they fear they won't be able to return.

Still, he feared the program would impose a lot of requirements most could not met.

"The problem is in the details," he said.



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- 28 Arthur's adviser
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- 32 Summer spell
- 36 Mideast capital
- 39 Egg outline
- 40 Saucer riders
- 41 Monica's brother
- 42 Vampire attacks
- 43 Patella's place

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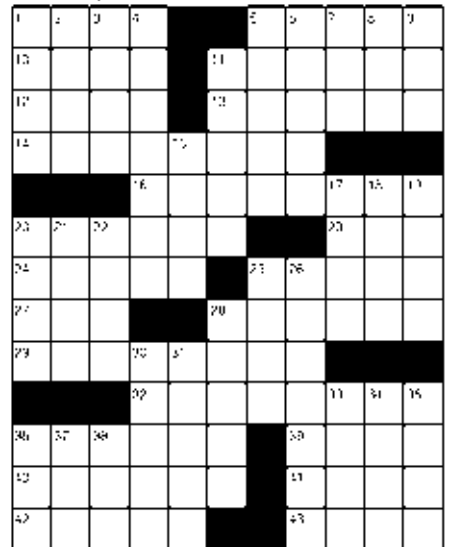
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- 7 Piercing tool
- 8 Got together
- 9 Use a crowbar
- 11 Wide
- 15 Fix
- 17 Member of the nobility
- 18 Play start
- 19 College leader
- 20 Really impresses
- 21 Painted tinware
- 22 Maui dance
- 25 Highland-der
- 26 Gallery fill
- 28 Partner of ways
- 30 Low card
- 31 Noggins
- 33 Bard's river
- 34 Bud holder
- 35 Otherwise
- 36 Computer key
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Yesterday's answer

- 19 College leader
- 20 Really impresses
- 21 Painted tinware
- 22 Maui dance
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PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

Paltrow's choices will make or break her with public

By The Associated Press

■ **NEW YORK** — Whether her films are critical successes ("The Royal Tenenbaums"), commercial hits ("Shallow Hal") or all-out flops ("View From the Top"), Gwyneth Paltrow's choices have made her the subject of constant fascination and scrutiny.

"I had taken a year off and done a play, and they started to say, 'Well, where is she and what's she doing? All these other girls are moving up and she's going to lose her place in line,'" said Paltrow, an Oscar-winner for "Shakespeare in Love," in Vanity Fair magazine's February issue.

"Everybody can't wait for me to fail, because I am supposed to have this perfect life, which is complete nonsense. And then you feel like the tides are turning and it's pick-on-Gwyneth time. I'm just a girl, so that can really get to me," she says. "(I) don't care if I'm not No. 1 or No. 5 or No. 10. I'm really (expletive) good at my job, and people who are interesting and good know that, and that's all that matters."

That attitude also has driven Paltrow to spend more time in London with her husband, Coldplay lead singer Chris Martin, with whom she's expecting her first child this summer.

"Everyone is doing their own thing," the 31-year-old says. "I feel like in L.A. everyone is looking over their shoulder, and in London nobody does that."

■ **LAFAYETTE, La.** — A Louisiana artist renowned for his "Blue Dog" paintings has completed a portrait of Gov.-elect Kathleen Blanco that includes the famous pooch.

George Rodrigue, who gave a portrait of President Reagan to the White House when he was building his reputation, did the painting of the new governor for free. It will go on display Thursday at the Rodrigue Gallery in New Orleans.

"They have strict rules about gifts, but it will hang in the state Capitol, and I've given them the rights to use the image," Rodrigue said this week.

Ed Pratt, a spokesman for the Democrat, said the painting isn't Blanco's official portrait.

The painting, which shows a smiling Blanco standing in front of an oak tree over an outline of the state, carries several messages to commemorate the state's first female governor, Rodrigue said.

The sun is seen rising behind the state Capitol on the left with a ghostly Evangeline sitting behind the tree where Blanco stands. Behind the tree to the right is Rodrigue's trademark loup-garou-blue dog in a sugar cane field.

"The new dawn is overlooking the Capitol, and that's why the sun's coming up," he said. "She is standing in the image of the state, symbolizing her roots, and where she's standing is in the middle of Acadiana."

■ **NEW YORK** — The Dallas-Fort Worth Film Critics Association is the latest group to honor Peter Jackson, naming him the best director of 2003 and choosing "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King" as the year's best film.

Jackson also has been nominated for Golden Globe and Directors Guild of America awards, and has received kudos from the Southeastern Film Critics Association.

Sean Penn is the Dallas-Fort Worth critics' choice for best actor for "Mystic River" and Charlize Theron won for best actress for "Monster."

In the supporting acting categories, the group honored Alec Baldwin for "The Cooler" and Renee Zellweger for "Cold Mountain."

The rest of their top 10 list announced this week, in order: "Cold Mountain," "Mystic River," "Lost in Translation," "Finding Nemo," "American Splendor," "In America," "Big Fish," "Master and Commander:

The Far Side of the World" and "The Last Samurai."

The Dallas-Fort Worth Film Critics Association is made up of 63 print and broadcast critics from across North Texas.

■ **OSLO, Norway** — King Harald V of Norway was released from the hospital Wednesday after being treated for a urinary tract infection, a spokesman for the royal court said.

"The king is in good condition and improving. However, he will be on sick leave for the next two or three months," spokesman Sven Gjeruldsen said.

The 66-year-old king had a "quiet night" and the "development is very satisfactory," doctors at the Rikshospitalet in Oslo said in a statement.

Harald was taken to the hospital Saturday. Doctors said the infection was related to his cancer surgery in December, but added his prognosis was good.

A surgical team removed the king's bladder after tests showed it was cancerous. They replaced it with a reconstructed organ in an operation on Dec. 8.

A figurehead monarch, the king assumed the throne in January 1991 upon the death of his father, King Olav V. Harald is the third king of modern Norway and the first born in the country since 1370.

■ **NEW YORK** — CBS News anchor Dan Rather is off the air for a few days after a minor dermatological procedure on his face.

The 72-year-old had some basal skin cells removed as a precautionary measure, the network said Wednesday.

There's no indication that the cells were cancerous, CBS said. Basal skin cancer is the most common form of skin cancer, often developing because of prolonged exposure to the sun.

Rather is expected back on the "CBS Evening News" sometime next week.

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