

FREE

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2002

Volume 1, Issue 50

Santa Monica Daily Press

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Nicky Five Aces/Special to the Daily Press

A man barely makes it across Main Street in front of City Hall in what is supposed to be a crosswalk where cars are mandated by law to stop for pedestrians. Each year, dozens of people are hit by vehicles who fail to stop in crosswalks. A 60-year-old woman was hospitalized last week after she was struck by car on Wilshire Boulevard at 25th Street.

Council buckles to mall landlords

Landlords will be represented on Promenade task force

BY ANDREW H. FIXMER
Special to the Daily Press

Feeling pressure from the business community, city officials decided Tuesday to allow a landlord to be part of shaping a new and improved Third Street Promenade.

The Santa Monica City Council ignored recommendations by senior staff by adding a landlord to the Third Street Promenade task force and shortening the ad-hoc committee's life-span to only one year.

Senior city staff members recommended the council extend the current 45-day retail moratorium for two years and create a task force that included no landlords or business owners.

Critics said following the staff's recommendation would cripple the downtown economy and frighten potential new businesses from setting up shop. They say the council has been far from pro-business and could make already tough economic times

"The city has to take the lead here. Pull in the landlords and make them explain why they feel the need to triple rents and mistreat businesses."

— JOE NATOLI
Santa Monica resident

more difficult for merchants.

"Obviously, from the beginning it has been a problem to us because they (city officials) think a small group of people can dictate what the market needs," said Kathy Dodson, executive director of the Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce. "Not having any business interests on a group that is going to decide and determine what's down there without paying any heed to what works down there is very problematic."

City officials say the Promenade is quickly becoming

See TASK FORCE, page 3

Judge backs local firm; tosses credit card fees

Santa Monica merchant prevails in credit card co.'s 'double charge'

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON
Daily Press Staff Writer

When a consumer purchases an item with a credit card, it sets in motion a transaction so complex that it can ultimately hang the merchant out to dry in processing fees.

When a Santa Monica court last week was asked to rule on such a case, it provided an unusual glimpse into the "middle men" who profit whenever a customer uses plastic.

A judge ruled last week that a credit card processing company overcharged a Santa Monica interior design firm by collecting "round trip" fees — on both the purchase and the subsequent credit canceling it.

Interior Spaces Inc. sued Cardservice International, Inc. in Santa Monica small claims

court for a "double charge" on a \$24,000 transaction. But Cardservice International turned around and sued Interior Spaces for \$3,000 in processing fees because the interior design firm had closed its checking account before Cardservice International could seize the money.

In December 1999, Interior Spaces signed a six-month contract to use Cardservice International as its processing company, so its customers could make credit card purchases. Everything went smoothly for a few months until a customer put a \$24,000 charge on her Visa — an amount well over what Cardservice International allowed.

Grant Schimelpfening, a recovery analyst in Cardservice International's legal department, said Interior Spaces actually

processed \$60,000 in transactions in a short period of time — more than allowed by contract. As a result, Cardservice International held the money in a "reserve" account, and charged Interior Spaces a 2.35 percent handling fee on both the

See CREDIT, page 3

Consumer watch

Man parachutes from building, unto police car

By the Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A man who parachuted from the top of a 37-story building early Tuesday found the wrong target: a police car.

The man, who was not immediately identified, was arrested for investigation of trespassing. There were no reports of any injury.

Police said the man jumped shortly after 2 a.m. from a build-

ing in the 1100 block of Wilshire Boulevard. An alarm sounded at the building alerting authorities that someone was on the roof, said Lt. Jose Perez of the Los Angeles Police Department.

Two people were spotted on the roof but police did not find the other person. The jumper landed on the police car and caused minor damage.

Several people have jumped from the same building in the last year, Perez said.



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believed liberty to be the secret of
happiness and courage to be
the secret of liberty.”

— Louis D. Brandies

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- 7th Street and Montana Avenue; northeast corner, in front of Starbucks Coffee
- 3rd Street and Wilshire Boulevard, northeast corner; in front of Surla Table
- Ocean Avenue and Wilshire Boulevard; in front of the Bank of California building
- Wilshire Boulevard, between 22nd-23rd Streets; in front of Manhattan Bagel
- 14th and Santa Monica Boulevard; in front of Chevron
- Wilshire Boulevard and Lincoln Boulevard; in front of Baja Fresh
- Colorado Boulevard and 3rd Street; in front of Santa Monica Place
- Santa Monica Courthouse

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HOROSCOPE

Virgo, your family takes high priority

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)

★★★★ Your insight takes you in a new direction. Brainstorm with those involved in similar work or those with mutual interests. Use your imagination, and nearly anything becomes possible. Break past the “box” in your thinking. Do you see how you hold yourself back? Tonight: Answer e-mail first.



TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

★★★★ Someone takes charge, whether you are ready or not. You discover quickly that not everyone thinks as you do. Discussions with a boss or an authority figure present different views. An associate supports you in pioneering in a new direction. Tonight: Dinner for two.



GEMINI (May 21-June 20)

★★★★ Others dominate much more than you anticipated. Be open to potential options. Not everything is as you think it should be. A friendship with someone at a distance might seem easy, but it could change if both of you were in the same location. Tonight: Follow someone’s lead.



CANCER (June 21-July 22)

★★★ Others keep making requests. What bosses want is what most bosses want — more money and greater success. As a result you could be pushed. Recognize when you’re overly tired, or nearly everything feels negative. Open up. Tonight: Do something restful.



LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)

★★★★★ Push comes to shove with a friend who KNOWS he or she is right. Closely review a matter that involves someone who is often hazy about his or her needs. You might have to get into the middle of a problem before it becomes a bigger problem. Tonight: Let a friend do whatever he or she wants.



VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

★★★ Your family takes high priority. Share what you consider your better ideas with co-workers. Together, good becomes great. Trust in your communication skills. Trust in your abilities. Someone could play devil’s advocate, making you uneasy. Deal with a boss. Don’t avoid him or her. Tonight: Put your feet up.



LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)

★★★★ Listen to someone who speaks his or her mind loud and clear. You also find that someone shuts off any of your brainy thoughts. Stay with those who appreciate your ideas. Don’t allow a child or a loved one to get away with a fast and maybe deceptive move. Tonight: Out and about.



SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)

★★★ Pressure builds financially as someone pulls out of an agreement with you. You might not have had a written contract between the two of you, because you trusted this person’s word. Use this as a lesson for the future. Don’t play games with yourself. Tonight: Redo your budget.



SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

★★★★ Your personality challenges someone more than you intended. Step back and relax. Don’t let this person get under your skin, though you might be tempted to speak some harsh words. Return calls and look at what is positive in your life rather than what’s wrong. Tonight: Play away.



CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

★★★ Take your time when dealing with others, especially a co-worker who might be a bit slow or negative. You don’t need to slug someone with verbal assaults to get information. Patience works. For now, keep your own counsel. Gossip flies every which way. Tonight: Do something for you.



AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

★★★★★ Join others at a meeting. Use co-workers for a sounding board, especially as you might be a bit low in creativity and ideas. You easily find solutions. Work with someone on a one-on-one level. This person understands you and will help you unlock a block. Tonight: Where your friends are.



PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)

★★★★ Consider where someone might be coming from before reacting. Yes, a roommate or family member could be truly annoying. Recognize someone’s limits. This person could be worn out and in need of a break. Don’t push this person’s buttons. Focus on work. Tonight: Out and about.



WEATHER

Today ...

Partly cloudy with a high 67°F.

Tonight ...

Clear with a low of 49°F.

Tomorrow ...

Sunny High—70°F Low—48°F



QUOTE of the DAY

“All children are essentially criminals.”

— Denis Diderot (1713-1784)

Santa Monica Daily Press

Published Monday through Saturday

Phone: 310.458.PRESS(7737) • Fax: 310.576.9913

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LOCAL



Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press

Sparing his car of pine needles, Michael Bey wheels his Christmas tree to the growing pile at Reed Park. The city of Santa Monica collected the trees Tuesday so they can be recycled.

Moratorium to last one year

TASK FORCE, from page 1

a retail corridor without any flavor, resembling shopping fare commonly found in suburban malls. The city for years has tried to manage the mall so it would be a unique and vibrant entertainment center. Ten years ago there were too many restaurants and not enough retail. Today, it's just the opposite — large retailers are able to pay more per square foot than small businesses. Looking for the greatest return on their investment, landlords let the space go for whatever the market will bear.

But the Santa Monica City Council is trying to buck that economic trend. It voted last month to place a 45-day moratorium on all development and expansion, consolidation and changes in use of commercial properties along the Promenade. In the meantime, a task force is being formed to address the issues.

The task force will be asked to consider regulations that would prevent any new retail stores from coming in and how — if at all possible — the city can deter landlords from raising rents so small, locally owned stores and restaurants can remain there.

On Tuesday, the council directed the city's community development department to take applications from Promenade landlords to serve on the task force. The motion adding a land owner passed 6-1, with Councilman Herb Katz casting the dissenting vote.

"I don't see why somebody who owns land down there automatically qualifies as somebody to serve on the task force," he said. "I think the people recommended to serve on the task force would do a fine job."

Local businesses disagreed with Katz, saying complex issues regulating the Promenade required the work of a task force with a landlord's input.

"The balance of property uses is a complex issue. It needs the work of a task force," said Kathleen Rawson, executive director of the Bayside District Corporation, which oversees the downtown core. "But we believe there needs to be a broad mix from both the city and business and landlords."

As part of the moratorium, Mayor Mike

Feinstein and mayor pro tem Kevin McKeown convinced the council 4-3 to prevent landlords from consolidating retail space so stores can be larger, which has been done in the past to accommodate nationwide retail chains. They fear consolidation of spaces will lead to larger rents and less variety of businesses.

"I am very worried about the corporatization of Santa Monica as a whole and especially on the Promenade," said McKeown. "I hope this will at least allow the small businesses and restaurants a chance to compete with retailers for space."

The council then extended the current moratorium for one year, over the objection of Feinstein who thinks the city is undermining its efforts by not giving the task force proper time.

"The problem with giving us too much time is that we'll use it," said Councilman Ken Genser. "No matter if we could get our work done in a shorter amount of time, we will take all that we have been given. So the shorter the time the better."

Residents Tuesday said landlords are the ones to blame for the Promenade's problems and some even accused landlords of price gouging tactics.

"Landlords are jacking up the rents. It's price gauging in a sense. You pay what they want or you are forced out. Rents are going up and people are going out," said resident Joe Natoli. "The city has to take the lead here. Pull in the landlords and make them explain why they feel the need to triple rents and mistreat businesses."

But landlords disagree, saying they feel the city would only make matters worse by not allowing the real estate market to operate without government intrusion.

"My eyes almost popped out of my head when I saw a two year moratorium being suggested. That may not be long for city government but it means a lot to businesses," said Ann Greenspun, president of the Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce. "It does seem we need representatives of all the aspects of the Promenade on the task force. Only then will we be able to head off the heat and work together."

Judge saves merchant from \$3,000 in plastic processing fees

CREDIT, from page 1

credit card purchase as well as the cancellation which came after the customer agreed to pay in cash or check instead.

Interior Spaces Treasurer Peter Canepa admitted his firm went over the limit. But he explained that the contract wasn't clear and he tried to work with Cardservice International in finding a solution. He said the company's customer service department wasn't helpful and Interior Spaces couldn't get out of the "double charge." Canepa said his firm canceled its contract with Cardservice International after six months. But Interior Spaces still faced a \$3,000 claim in processing fees on a credit card deal which never happened.

Judge pro tem Edmond Siegel ruled that Cardservice International isn't entitled to \$3,000 because it charged the fees for money both coming in and going out.

Interior Spaces didn't win its claim because it never actually paid the money, since it closed its bank account.

Cardservice International serves as the intermediary between the merchant and the card issuing bank. The processing company represents what is called an "acquiring bank." So if a merchant issues a credit to a customer's credit card, the merchant gets the money back and then the card issuing bank turns to the acquiring bank, which takes the money from Cardservice International, which then collects from the merchant.

Sound confusing? It is, according to Jaak Treiman, director of Cardservice International's legal department.

"I have been representing Cardservice International for eight years ... and I still have trouble telling people what we do," he said. "It's high risk, high profit."

When a merchant processes a high dollar purchase, Cardservice International takes a risk because it might ultimately be unable to collect from the customer even though the merchant gets paid. That's why monetary limits are set on credit card transactions and why the processing company uses a "reserve account" for the merchant until the charge clears from the credit card company.

"We get real nervous when we see something out of the ordinary and we'll freeze everything," Treiman said of the \$60,000 in card transactions from Interior Spaces.

He said merchants get confused because they already have been paid by the card issuing bank. They don't understand that the processing company charges fees on any transaction that requires money being moved.

"Whenever there is a transaction, we get paid," Treiman said.

"One of the classic problems in small claims court is we are viewed as the large corporation. And having to explain how the process works and what we do makes it tough."

— JACK TREIMAN

Cardservice International, director

Judge Siegel saw it as an overcharge, but he at least gave both parties ample time to explain how the complicated process works. Treiman said such time is unusual in small claims cases.

"One of the classic problems in small claims court is we are viewed as the large corporation," Treiman said. "And having to explain how the process works and what we do makes it tough."

Judge Siegel deduced through the confusion that Cardservice International's "contract" is designed to confuse the customer — a claim Interior Spaces' Canepa made early in his testimony.

The two-page contract which Interior Spaces received from Cardservice International didn't include a limit on the transaction amount. Instead, it was found in "Article 1.16" in a booklet that came later.

"It behooves you not to do business with people like this," Judge Siegel said to an agreeing Canepa.

"Small merchants are forced to work with people like this," Canepa told the judge.

Even Treiman admits the contract is convoluted. But it's better than it was, he says.

"The contract is long but at least it's easier to read now ... you don't need a magnifying glass anymore," he said. "Still most people don't have the patience to read it. I can empathize with the merchants because it's difficult to make heads or tails of it. No rational person will read it."

Canepa read the booklet too late. He thinks the company intentionally buries vital information.

"It was a booklet that says whatever you do is wrong and whatever they do is right," he told the Daily Press after the court hearing.

Treiman said it's possible that his firm's customer service fell short in this case.

"What Peter said may be," he said. "Nobody is perfect and people mess up."

Canepa said its experience prompted Interior Spaces to drop credit cards altogether, and its customers now use only cash or check.

Looking for the Daily Press?

The Santa Monica Daily Press is a free newspaper that is circulated throughout all six commercial zones within the Santa Monica city limits.

Hundreds of copies can be found in news racks at these local businesses:

Wilshire Boulevard Locations:

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- O’Briens Pub
- LA Subs
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- Dagwood’s
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- The Newsroom
- Polly’s Restaurant
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- Major Hotels on Ocean Avenue
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NATIONAL

ODDS & ENDS

Mayor not of ‘legal age’

By the Associated Press

MOUNT CARBON, Pa. — Jeffrey Dunkel isn’t old enough to pop open a bottle of champagne yet, but that didn’t stop the 18-year-old mayor — or his councilwoman mother — from celebrating his inauguration Monday.

Dunkel, who got involved in politics after studying local government for a high school class, was elected to a four-year term in November.

He ran unopposed and won with 43 votes in this Schuylkill County borough of around 300 residents.

The mayor is paid a stipend of \$50 per month, and has no office and no budget.

Dunkel said he is taking the job seriously. He said his biggest goal is to hire a neighboring community’s police department to patrol the borough.

“Speeding is a major problem here, and there’s a lot of vandalism,” Dunkel said.

He will also have to deal with his mom, Kathleen Dunkel, who was elected to a Borough Council seat with 22 write-in votes. Dunkel swore in his mother Monday immediately after his own ceremony.

A millionaire’s Christmas surprise

By the Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — A roofer at Cape Canaveral Air Station who won the \$6 million Lotto jackpot on Dec. 15 kept it secret to surprise his wife at Christmas.

“I asked her what it felt like to be married to a millionaire,” Juan A. Gonzalez explained Monday as he and his wife Sandra picked up their Lotto winnings. “She did not know what was going on. She said to me: ‘Are you sure? How many zeros is that?’”

The Gonzalezes could have received annual payments of approximately \$200,000 for 30 years. Instead they opted for a cash payout of \$3,422,125.

Gonzalez said he would use the winnings to pay off bills and care for his family.

He said he selected five of the winning numbers, 10-19-27-33-48-53, using his birth date, Oct. 27, 1948; his current age, 53; and Christ’s age, 33, at his death. He didn’t explain where the 19 came from.

Teen becomes Mother Nature; makes snow himself

By the Associated Press

WESTBORO, Mass. — Brendan Moss made sure his family had a white Christmas, despite a lack of snow in this central-Massachusetts community.

Brendan made his own snow gun, similar to those found at ski resorts.

For Christmas, the 16-year-old had asked for — and received — an air compressor, a hose and some plumbing accessories. It took him an hour to assemble his snow maker.

He connected a long hose to the air compressor and to a nozzle with two fittings on the end. A hose from the front of the house goes into the other fitting. In the nozzle, water and air mix, shooting snow into the yard when the air temperature is 30 degrees or below.

The result: the Moss home had a pile of snow on its front lawn.

The family enjoyed it only briefly: they vacationed in the Dominican Republic for a week after Christmas.

Cuomo gets help from Hustler publisher Flynt

BY MARC HUMBERT
AP Political Writer

ALBANY, N.Y. — Andrew Cuomo, in his battle for the Democratic nomination for governor of New York, is getting financial assistance from Hustler magazine publisher Larry Flynt.

The girlie-magazine magnate is among the sponsors of a \$2,500-a-person fund-raiser being held for the former federal housing secretary in Beverly Hills on Thursday. An invitation to the event lists Flynt as a vice chairman, a designation bestowed for \$10,000 donations.

Flynt’s involvement drew fire from one prominent ally of New York Republican Gov. George Pataki.

“I guess it’s who you seek out when you’re blinded by naked ambition,” said state Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno.

Pataki, who is expected to seek a third term this year, declined comment.

A telephone message left for Flynt at his Los Angeles office was not immediately returned Tuesday.

Cuomo campaign manager Josh Isay defended the candidate’s fund-raising.

“Just like Andrew Cuomo has a right to fight for a woman’s right to choose and to create homeless shelters for battered women, these people have a right to support Andrew Cuomo,” Isay said.

The featured guest for the Thursday night event is former Gov. Mario Cuomo, the father of the candidate.

Flynt’s involvement in the Cuomo fund-raiser was first reported by a New York Post gossip columnist Monday.



Consumers increase borrowing by record amount in November

BY JEANNINE AVERSA
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Americans increased their borrowing in November by the largest amount on record. A big rise in auto loans spurred by zero-interest rate financing offers led the way.

Consumer credit soared by a seasonally adjusted \$19.8 billion in November, or a 14.6 percent annual rate, the Federal Reserve reported Tuesday.

The dollar increase was the biggest since the Fed began record-keeping in January 1943 and the percentage increase was the largest since November 1995.

Economists were expecting consumer borrowing to rise, but by a lot less — around \$3 billion to \$4 billion during the month.

While consumer confidence rebounded in December, it was down sharply in November. The nation's unemployment rate shot up to 5.6 percent in November and layoffs also rose.

But for consumers, the lure of zero-percent financing for cars and heavy discounting on many products was hard to

resist, economists said.

"It's apparent consumers haven't been too concerned with softer economic conditions and a weak labor market," said economist Richard Yamarone of Argus Research Corp. "Without the burden of high energy prices and lofty mortgage rates, consumers felt comfortable to borrow briskly."

Demand for nonrevolving credit, including new cars and vacations, soared by \$14.4 billion, or at an annual rate of 18.3 percent in November. That came on top of a \$14.7 billion advance or a 19 percent rate of increase the month before.

Americans used their credit cards much more freely in November than during the previous month.

Demand for revolving credit, such as that used for credit cards, rose by \$5.4 billion, or at an annual rate of 9.4 percent in November. That compared with a drop of \$3.5 billion and a rate of decline of 6.1 percent in October.

In October, consumer borrowing grew by \$11.2 billion, or at a rate of 8.3 percent, according to revised figures. That was stronger than the Fed previously reported.



Associated Press file photo

Dave Thomas, right, founder of Wendy's hamburger restaurants, serves customer Tim Hughes, at a new Wendys in Ft. Wayne, Ind., in this April 30, 1998 file photo. Thomas, died around midnight at his home in Florida, the company said Tuesday. He was 69. Thomas had visited the store built on the site of the Hobby House restaurant where he worked as a bus boy 51 years before.

Wendy's founder Dave Thomas dies at 69

BY KATE ROBERTS
Associated Press Writer

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Dave Thomas, the pudgy founder of the Wendy's hamburger chain whose home-spun commercials helped turn it into one of the world's top fast-food enterprises, died Tuesday of liver cancer. He was 69.

Thomas, who died at his home in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., had been undergoing kidney dialysis for nearly a year and had quadruple heart bypass surgery in 1996.

Thomas became a household name when he began pitching his burgers and fries in TV commercials in 1989 for Wendy's International, based in Dublin, Ohio.

The smiling, bespectacled Thomas, always wearing a white short-sleeved shirt and red tie, appeared in more than 800 of the humorous ads, sometimes featuring stars such as bluesman B.B. King and soap opera queen Susan Lucci.

"People could identify with him. He looks like America — jolly, happy and slightly overweight," said Al Ries, marketing strategist at Ries & Ries in Roswell, Ga. "Serious food is white tablecloths. Fast food is fun food, and Dave Thomas portrayed that."

Thomas was 12 when he got his first restaurant job, as a counterman in Knoxville, Tenn.

In 1956, he was working at a barbecue restaurant in Fort Wayne, Ind., when Col. Harland Sanders of Kentucky Fried Chicken fame stopped in on a promotional tour. Thomas's boss bought a KFC franchise, and six years later, Thomas came to Columbus to take over four failing Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurants.

He sold them back to the founder in 1968 for \$1.5 million, making him a millionaire at 35.

He opened his first Wendy's Old Fashioned Hamburgers in Columbus a year later. He named the restaurant after his 8-year-old daughter Melinda Lou, nicknamed Wendy by her siblings.

Thomas said the burgers were square because Wendy's didn't cut corners.

The chain now has 6,000 restaurants worldwide. In 1996, Wendy's acquired Canadian-based Tim Hortons, a coffee and baked goods chain with more than 2,000 stores. Both have combined sales of more than \$8 billion.

Thomas, who was adopted as an infant, created the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, an organization focused on raising public awareness of adoption. The profits from his books, "Well Done!" and "Dave's Way," go to the foundation.

He once testified before a congressional committee about the importance of creating incentives for adoption.

"I know firsthand how important it is for every child to have a home and loving family," he said. "Without a family, I would not be where I am today."

Thomas took great pride in getting his high school equivalency certificate in 1993, telling 2,500 public school seniors his biggest mistake was not finishing high school. "We have 4,000 restaurants today, but if I had gotten my high school diploma, we might have 8,000," he said.

Thomas was also a forgiving businessman.

The city of Philadelphia in 1994 wanted to fine Wendy's \$98,400, claiming the restaurant was selling quarter-pounders that were up to a quarter of an ounce short. The city later announced it made an error and withdrew the fine.

"I understand what happened," said Thomas, who visited the city shortly after the controversy. "Things happen. Mistakes happen. As far as we're concerned, we just want to go to the future. A bright future."

He tried to retire in 1982 but came back in 1989. "They took the focus off the consumer," he said of the executives who took over the company.

Thomas is survived by his wife, Lorraine; five children and 16 grandchildren.



Associated Press

Students and police officers face off during a protest near Central University in Quito, Ecuador on Tuesday. Students protested the economic policy of Ecuadorian President Gustavo Noboa which increased the price of gasoline in Ecuador by 10 cents per gallon.

Latest developments in the war on terrorism

By The Associated Press

Developments Tuesday related to the Sept. 11 attacks:

— U.S. troops capture two senior al-Qaida fighters and confiscate their computers and cell phones near huge underground cave complex used by Osama bin Laden's terrorist network.

— American soldiers question al-Qaida and Taliban prisoners in Pakistan to identify those with enough knowledge of Osama bin Laden's terror network to merit being moved to U.S. custody.

— Wounded al-Qaida fighter kills himself with grenade during escape attempt after leaping from second story of hospital in Kandahar where he and six armed comrades have been holed up for a month.

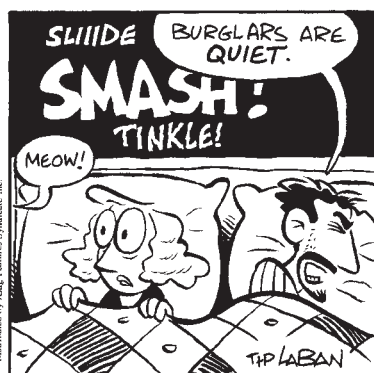
— American special envoy to Afghanistan says bombardment there must eliminate remaining Taliban and al-Qaida strongholds so extremists cannot regroup.

— Line of people waiting to see World Trade Center ruins so long that city decides to issue tickets to the viewing platform.

The Dinette Set by Julie Larson



by TERRY & PATTY LABAN



By Dave Whammond

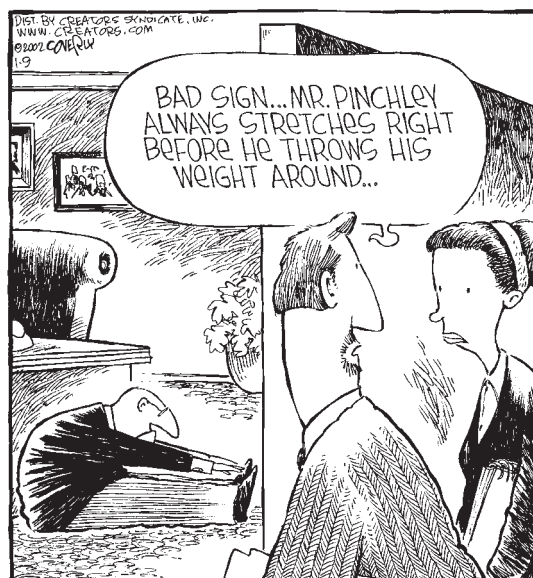


By Russ Wallace



"Einstein said that time moves slower near massive objects, so I just stick close to Shirley, and it keeps me young."

By Dave Coverly

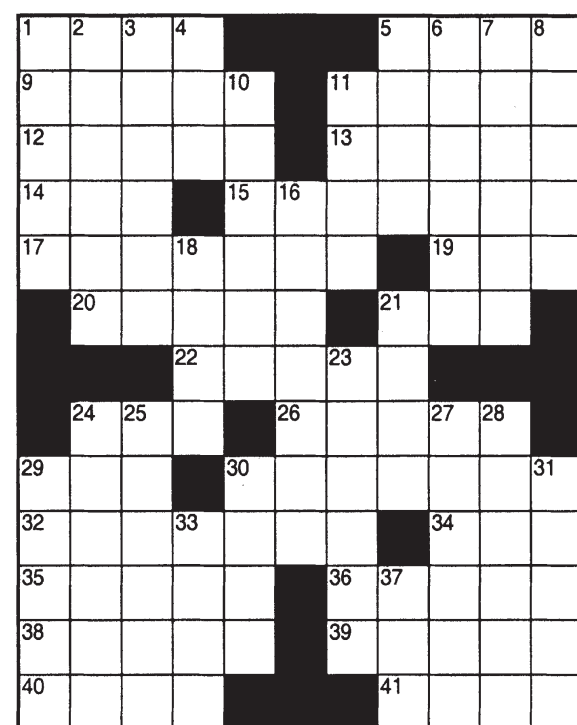


By THOMAS JOSEPH

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weather



1-9

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NEWS OF THE WEIRD

by Chuck Shepard

Man doesn't learn from fetish mistakes

Recidivist voyeur Daniel W. Searfoss, 43, was charged in November with using a tiny lens in his shoe, attached to a video camera he carried in a bag, to photograph underneath women's skirts at a flea market in Brandon, Fla. He had just finished probation for a similar incident at a Wal-Mart last year, and after detectives scanned 45 videotapes from Searfoss' home, they charged him with another November incident at a Plant City church (perhaps the one in which he performed community service on the Wal-Mart charge). At a December court hearing, the prosecutor told the judge that Searfoss had also tried to point his shoe under the dresses of several women in the county probation office.

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BACK PAGE

Asteroid passes half-million miles from Earth

By the Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — An asteroid large enough to wipe out France hurtled past the Earth at a distance of about a half-million miles just days after scientists spotted it.

The asteroid, dubbed 2001 YB5, came within 520,000 miles of Earth — approximately twice the distance of the moon.

The asteroid, estimated to be 1,000 feet across, was traveling about 68,000 mph relative to the Earth when it zipped past on Monday.

"It's a fairly substantial rock. If it had hit us at that sort of speed, you would be taking out a medium size country, France, I suppose, or Texas, or something of that order," said Jay Tate, director of the Spaceguard Centre in Wales.

Astronomers with the National Aeronautics and Space

Administration's Near-Earth Asteroid Tracking program discovered 2001 YB5 on Dec. 26. As the asteroid travels around the sun, it crosses the orbits of Mars, Venus and Mercury, as well as that of the Earth.

"What could we have done about it? The answer is not much."

— **STEVEN PRAVDO**
NEAT project manager

Soon after its discovery, astronomers calculated the asteroid's orbit and determined that there was no danger

it would strike Earth.

Had it been on a collision course, it would have created "one of the worst disasters in human history," said Steven Pravdo, the NEAT project manager at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena.

"What could we have done about it? The answer is not much," Pravdo said.

Dozens of asteroids pass close by the Earth each year. On Friday, for instance, an asteroid known as 2001 UU92 will pass within 11 million miles of Earth. However, just 19 others have come closer than 2001 YB5 since 1991, Pravdo said.

As astronomers discover more and more near-Earth asteroids, they seek a standardized way of alerting the public to what potential hazard they pose.

GM displaying armored car to gauge interest

BY JEFF WILSON

Associated Press Writer

LOS ANGELES — A well-equipped Cadillac these days means adding armor to the accessories.

At the Greater Los Angeles Auto Show this week, General Motors Corp. is showing off an armored Cadillac that protects passengers in a steel and glass cocoon, deflecting .44-caliber bullets and grenades.

It was originally conceived for overseas markets and U.S. diplomats, but the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks increased security concerns domestically.

Bedford Park, Ill.-based Scaletta Moloney Armoring Corp. is building the armored cars in partnership with Cadillac. Scaletta Moloney president Joseph

Scaletta said inquiries have soared 40 percent.

"It's a concept car to see if the retail market is interested," Cadillac's Jay Fanfalone said, adding there appears to be enough interest to sell several hundred armored Cadillacs annually for personal and corporate owners.

"Ninety percent of the luxury vehicles we armor are Cadillac DeVille's. It was born to be armored," Scaletta said. The company builds so-called flag-holder and motorcade vehicles for the U.S. government, but Scaletta was reluctant to give details.

The personal, anti-ballistic Cadillac Sedan DeVille, which weighs another 1,100 pounds for a total rolling weight of 3 tons, would compete with armored versions of BMW's 7-Series and

DaimlerChrysler's Mercedes-Benz S-Class sedans.

The black Cadillac on display in Los Angeles is stretched eight inches and has run-flat tires, inch-thick bullet-deflecting windows and steel plating to protect the passenger compartment, including undercarriage steel plates to protect against grenades.

It's positioned on the showroom floor alongside an identical black Sedan DeVille and it is difficult to tell them apart.

"The whole purpose of having an armored car is having it blend in," said David Ransom, Cadillac manager of professional vehicles. "If people know it's armored it takes away from the security purpose of the car."

Ransom wouldn't disclose the price tag

for the armored versions, but he said it would be competitive with the Mercedes and BMW models costing \$100,000 to \$154,000.

Scaletta Moloney is in the midst of delivering a new line of armored diplomatic DeVilles for the U.S. government's fleet. Secretary of State Colin Powell is already using one of the DeVilles.

"We've had the most demanding customer on earth as our biggest customer for years, so we think that the credibility we'll bring to the private sector will be unchallenged," Scaletta said. "There is a need for these cars and the market has forced us to address a changing world."

For Cadillac, that demand means offering armored cars.

"If you are going to go global you need to address armoring," Ransom said.

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