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Recession hits city hard; cuts likely

Economic downturn and terrorist attacks have ravaged city finances

BY ANDREW H. FIXMER
Special to the Daily Press

Fallout from the national recession and the terrorist attacks have officially caught up with Santa Monica.

As tourism floundered after Sept. 11, the city lost millions on taxes from hotel rooms and sales, creating a projected \$7 million shortfall for this year alone. Municipal services will not be affected for this fiscal year due to the city's large current budget surplus and because many

departments cut future programs and activities.

But senior city officials warned the Santa Monica City Council Tuesday that revenue shortfalls will continue over the next five years. Depending on the severity of the recession, by 2005 there potentially could be a nearly \$14 million difference between the amount of money the city makes in taxes and what it spends on services.

"My responsibility is to urge council to maintain financial flexibility in your future budgets," said Michael Dennis, the city's finance director. "It is likely we will be preparing to come to you with a set of budget cuts, after we have a few more months of data."

Budgets are approved in July, when the next fiscal year begins, but the process began Tuesday night with the

council outlining budget priorities for the staff to consider. The staff will now begin the lengthy process of writing a budget rough draft which will be presented in early June.

Neither the city's staff nor council members mentioned any areas where they were likely to begin making cuts, but officials did make mention of delaying or canceling any non-essential capital improvement projects, as well as stopping municipal subsidizing of beach parking.

"You (council) have been criticized from time to time for not spending more freely, and certainly the demands made upon you are great and needy causes," said City Manager Susan McCarthy. "But you really have to act in

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Voters will decide on election of mayor; districting

Controversial voting measure finds spot on November ballot

BY ANDREW H. FIXMER
Special to the Daily Press

Santa Monica citizens will decide in November whether they should vote for council members by district and elect their mayor.

The Voters Election Reform Initiative for a True Accountability System, also known as VERITAS, col-

"This needs to be decided in a way that will evoke the greatest voter participation."

— KEVIN McKEOWN
Santa Monica pro tem mayor

lected the necessary 9,000 signatures needed to force the Santa Monica City Council to bring the measure before voters.

The council could have called for a special election or put off a vote for another year, but officials Tuesday night decided they wanted the maximum number of residents at the polls to vote on the proposal.

"This needs to be decided in a way that will evoke the greatest voter participation," said mayor pro tem Kevin McKeown. "We have an election coming up where turnout is guaranteed to be high because a lot is at stake. It makes all the sense in the world to put it on the November ballot."

A typically verbose council silently agreed and voted

See VERITAS, page 3



Del Pastrana/Daily Press

Form, precision and discipline is the lesson of the day as Maria Gustavsson overlooks a class of children ages 5 through 12 at the Japan Karate Association of Santa Monica on Fifth Street Wednesday.

Judge hangs up case on cell phone company

Customer wins claim over obsolete phone

BY DAVE DANFORTH
Daily Press Staff Writer

A prominent cell phone company must pay \$1,000 to remove the "hands-free" system from a customer's car because the only phone that it works with is obsolete, a Santa Monica judge has ruled.

But Cingular Wireless saved itself \$811 when Judge pro tem Donald M. Cislo declined to order it to pay the original cost of the phone itself. The customer must bear the cost of an obsolete phone, but not the system made useless as a result, his order suggested.

The case represented a partial victory

for Philip Tanzini, a West Hollywood voice-over actor. He sued Cingular's Santa Monica store after learning that Cingular had no phones to replace the StarTac 8000 model compatible with his car's hands-free system, which cost nearly \$700. To top off that indignity, he said the phone itself needed repeated replacement, and Cingular had lost the last one he had given the company to repair.

The question for the judge dealt with the phone company's responsibility for a consumer's later decision to buy another accessory to use with the phone. Because Cingular sold Tanzini the hands-free system, it must bear that burden, his ruling indicated.

"They give these phones away just to sign you up to the service," the judge said. "So the company does have some

See CELLULAR, page 3

Consumer watch

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ARIES (March 21-April 19)

★★★★★ Reach out. Speak your mind to a friend who sometimes gets thick-headed on key matters. Use your fine linguistic skills to knock on this person's door, so to speak. He or she just might open up. Your ability to present different panoramic views comes into play. Tonight: Spontaneity rules.



TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

★★★★★ Work with others. Explain the natural reluctance you feel to spend anymore. Review a matter carefully, asking needed questions. Use your strong vision to convince a partner or an associate to go along with your thinking. You get a surprising response. Tonight: Togetherness works.



GEMINI (May 21-June 20)

★★★★★ Someone's attitude changes. See the result of your positive thinking. Discussions enlighten this person. Trusting builds as a result. Walk on egg shells with office communication. Gossip could be mixed in. Tonight: Say yes to someone's plans.



CANCER (June 21-July 22)

★★★★★ You feel insecure. If you verbalize a need for more support, an associate or friend will come through. You might want to reorganize your work accordingly. Someone really surprises you with his or her support. Tonight: Get a good night's sleep.



LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)

★★★★★ Keep focused on major goals. You know where you are heading. Use your creativity to present an idea in a manner that someone can hear. Someone pleasantly surprises you with his or her response. Trust in someone's good sense. Tonight: Enjoy yourself. You need to have a good time.



VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

★★★★★ Deal with work and the potential of a move. You find another job just for you. You might be surprised and delighted by what a change of scenery can do for your work habits. Show your innovative and creative streak. Anything is possible. Tonight: Put your feet up.



LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)

★★★★★ Speak your mind and reach out for others. You might try stating the same opinion in a different way so that someone can "hear" you. Your innovative style draws strong, positive feedback. Forget making a relationship more secure. The "oddness" makes it more interesting. Tonight: Where your friends are.



SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)

★★★ Deal with finances, though coaxing a former Daddy or Mommy Warbucks to help out might no longer work. Reorganize with an outlook to becoming more independent. Family does the unexpected. Carefully check out an investment. Tonight: Make a new budget, if need be. Buy a lottery ticket on the way home.



SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

★★★★★ You might change your course midway, deciding that perhaps another approach could be more effective. Realize your limits within a particular situation. Don't worry about others right now, you might have a difficult time keeping track of yourself! Tonight: Please yourself.



CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

★★★ Step back and do some thinking before jumping to conclusions. You will be updating your ideas anyway, no matter what perspective you take. Intuition helps you gain in a tight squeeze. You could even surprise yourself with the strength of your choices. Tonight: Lay out your clothes — get ready for tomorrow!



AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

★★★★★ Where your friends are is where you want to be. A child or loved one lets you know about a personal problem. Your feedback is instrumental in helping someone make a decision. You juggle many different aspects of your life. Your goals change. Tonight: Play away.



PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)

★★★ Others seek you out for advice. Your reactions stem from a knee-jerk reaction. Your boss or supervisor could change his or her priorities. Adjust, and both of you will gain. Still, leave room for some spontaneous fun. Find a family member for a talk. Tonight: In the spotlight.



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QUOTE of the DAY

“Only the shallow know themselves.”

— Oscar Wilde (1854-1900)

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LOCAL

Councilman sees downturn as an opportunity

BUDGET, from page 1

the best long-term interests of the city.”

City staff said anywhere between 2.5 to 5 percent cuts in municipal services would have to be made for next year, depending on the length and severity of the recession.

“We could get away with a 2.5 percent cut in services without it affecting many people, but a 5 percent cut would have a very visible impact on city services,” said McCarthy. “Many of our constituent groups would be effected.”

Proposal expected to be controversial city issue

VERITAS, from page 1

6-0. Councilman Robert Holbrook had left the meeting when the council addressed the measure.

Currently, the mayor is elected by the seven city council members. City council candidates run at-large throughout the eight square miles of Santa Monica’s city limits and there are no term limits.

VERITAS would change that to allow residents to vote for the direct election of the mayor and one council member from their respective voting district. The measure also sets term limits and gives the mayor veto power.

Proponents of VERITAS say the current election process makes it unattainable for the average person to run for office and it is not a representational form of government. The current system allows for slate-financed campaigns dominated by huge special interest money, they say. What’s more, they contend if people could vote for their mayor it would

politically legitimize the position.

“We’re trying to purify the process to bring direct election of our elected officials,” said Paul DeSantis, VERITAS’ author. “And we want the direct election of our mayor. It’s not a personal thing, it’s just that we believe in representational government.”

But opponents say the measure would split the city apart, not just by voting districts but put neighborhoods in competition with each other.

“I think it would result in the balkanization of Santa Monica,” Councilwoman Pam O’Connor told the Daily Press last month. “It would start pitting one district against district.”

Residents appearing before the city council earlier this week overwhelmingly agreed with O’Connor.

“You do not divide a city. This is a very, very bad initiative,” said resident Chuck Allord. “You do not give veto power to one individual. This is a horrible initiative and it will be voted down.”

Overall, the city is projecting a \$14 to \$18 million loss in tax revenue for next year. That figure does not consider the state defaulting on repayment of loans the city took out during the energy crisis, the projected \$1.8 million resulting from the implementation of the proposed living wage ordinance or the culmination of three “large scale” court cases where the city could be forced to pay large sums in settlements.

“We just don’t know at this time how these factors will pan out so we could not include them in this analysis,” said Dennis.

After the city finished its dreary financial forecast, a parade of residents appeared before the council championing special causes from residents with disabilities and the city’s recreation department to the needs of the school district and neighborhood group causes.

Each recognized the dire economic circumstances the city finds itself in, but asked their cause not to be the one to face the brunt of budget cuts.

Council members voted to prioritize the budget by education, quality of life, affordable housing, mobility and sustainable growth. Under each heading, everything from senior citizen and youth programs to traffic remediation efforts is targeted.

“This certainly looks like it will be a difficult year to find money,” said Councilman Robert Holbrook. “My priority would be to

find ways to pay for one-time things rather than creating more on-going funding needs.”

Mayor Mike Feinstein agreed, but he also asked the staff to come back with a list of long-term commitments the city has made, such as the city’s \$25 million open space plan.

“I don’t think we can even begin to divide up the pie until we know how much is left to be divided up,” he said.

Many council members said there would be tough financial choices to be made over the coming months, but said they believed there were ways of reducing city spending without cutting many services.

“We have a rainy day here, but it’s not a historically bad storm or anything,” said Councilwoman Pam O’Connor. “It’s going to take lots of discipline and not taking on many long range projects, but I think we can do this.”

Some council members even see the economic downturn as an opportunity for the city to make tremendous changes for the good.

“During a downturn like this what better time to look locally at our production and consumption cycles and try to replace the wasteful non-local transportation process society has told us is the only way to live,” said mayor pro tem Kevin McKeown. “So I think it’s not really going to be a depressing year but a year of new chances and new choices.”

Consumer frustrated over poor customer service

CELLULAR, from page 1

responsibility if it sells a kit to support it.”

When Tanzini installed the system in mid-1998, the phones were anything but free. His \$811 StarTrac was top of the line at the time, he said. But he lost whatever sentimental attachment he might have had when it repeatedly broke. It was when he brought in his latest model for replacement, at less than a year old, that he learned Cingular no longer had a phone which would work in his car.

Cingular tried to satisfy Tanzini, although he testified he had to come to the store in person and waited an hour to be helped on two different occasions.

Edwin Reese, a Cingular service coordinator, said the company was happy to replace the phone, but balked at replacing a hands-free kit made almost four years ago.

Tanzini said he has now soured on Cingular, adding “what am I going to do when this one breaks?”

He noted the “freebie Nokia” he has been using is sturdier than his former equipment.

But Judge Cislo softened complaints about the quality of Cingular’s service. After Tanzini said he “didn’t like being beholden to a company with bad customer service,” the judge had the last word.

“I take judicial notice that all (cellular) companies are similar in this society,” he declared.

Art exhibit on display at SMC

By Daily Press staff

Santa Monica College’s Pete & Susan Barrett Art Gallery presents “Materials & Meaning: A Sculpture Exhibit,” featuring the works of seven prominent artists who have used a broad range of materials and technologies to explore a sense of wonder and absurdity.

The exhibit will be held from Jan. 12 to Feb. 8 at the gallery, located at SMC’s Madison campus on Santa Monica Boulevard at 11th Street.

The opening reception will be from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Friday, Jan. 11.

The artists to be featured are Dean De Cocker, John Heric, Tina Marrin, Bridget Marrin, Alan Rath, Roland Reiss, and Mark Sparks.

“The art works in this exhibition feature a broad range of materials and employ a variety of technologies from kinetic sculpture and

electronic images to cast metals and three-dimensional miniature models,” said Marian Winsryg, SMC Art Gallery director and curator of the show. “Each artist creates specially constructed environments that depict real or imaginary scenes, which combine both traditional as well as nontraditional materials.”

The exhibit also features some small-scale sculpture environments or dioramas that have “enabled the artist to create a miniature or three-dimensional pictorial world of physical space that encapsulates the totality of life,” Winsryg said.

“These works combine a sense of passion created by unusual materials that compel us to examine our own sense of wonder and absurdity in how we look at the world,” she said.

Gallery hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday. Call (310) 434-3434 for more information.



Carolyn Sackariason/Daily Press

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STATE

Tale of two budgets: Wilson recalls 1990s fiscal crunch

BY ALEXA HAUSSLER
Associated Press Writer

SACRAMENTO — California's current budget crisis is often compared to the fiscal crunch of the early 1990s, but the man who steered the state through a crippling recession a decade ago doesn't buy the comparison.

Republican former Gov. Pete Wilson eliminated a \$14 billion shortfall in 1992 by cutting spending and raising taxes. But he urges his successor, Democratic Gov. Gray Davis, to avoid tax increases.

"The current problem is, I think, far less challenging," Wilson said in a recent telephone interview with the Associated Press.

Today, California is facing a \$12.4 billion shortfall in revenues from a \$79 billion general fund budget. The state's diving revenues have been attributed to an already-weak economy nationwide, the crushed high-tech sector and layoffs and a drop in travel after the Sept. 11 attacks.

In 1992, the state was short \$14 billion, about one-third of the then-\$41 billion general fund budget. The shortfall, Wilson said, came from an international recession, deep defense cuts and base closures and a downsizing trend in corporations.

Davis "has to close a smaller gap against a much larger base. Can he do it without new taxes? I certainly think he should try," Wilson said.

The governor will reveal his plans Thursday to deal with his own budget crisis. He has declared that his budget plan will not include a tax increase, though he has declined to say he would reject any legislative plan that has new taxes.

Wilson, now a consultant living in Los Angeles and visiting fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, called his decision to raise taxes in 1992 "painful."

"I didn't choose it. It was all that was available other than deficit spending which was not, in my view, an option," Wilson said. "It was a most unpopular thing to do politically and I knew it at the time and felt that we really had no choice."

Despite the tax increase, Wilson won

"I didn't choose it. It was all that was available other than deficit spending which was not, in my view, an option. It was a most unpopular thing to do politically and I knew it at the time and felt that we really had no choice."

— PETE WILSON
Former governor

election to his second term in 1994.

Davis and other Democratic leaders have criticized Wilson for his approval of the electricity deregulation law that many say led to the state's power crisis last year.

And Republicans and Democrats have squabbled this year over an automatically triggered sales tax increase — which kicks in if the state's reserves dip too low — signed into law by Wilson.

But Wilson is unapologetic. "It seems to me that they could have avoided it by spending cuts," he said. And, he said, he is accustomed to taking shots.

It was working with a Democratic Legislature that the Republican faced the budget crunch. Wilson said he thinks Davis can avoid some headaches because he is working with two Democrat-run legislative chambers. But party leaders are already giving Davis friction.

Wilson also cautioned against shuffling state debt, which he said could place more risk and costs on future officeholders or taxpayers. The answer, Wilson said he believes, is "having the stomach to make deeper spending cuts now, deeper spending cuts than I hear anybody talking about."

Police spokesperson says he's sorry for misstatement

By the Associated Press

OXNARD — Police Department spokesman David Keith apologized at a City Council meeting Tuesday for using poor judgment when he told a neighborhood council meeting that Oxnard officers were "equal opportunity" shooters.

Keith had been invited to the neighborhood meeting in September, about a month after the shooting of Robert Lee Jones, 23, on Aug. 24. Jones was shot by an officer as he crouched in a closet at his Oxnard home. Police said he threatened officers with a knife.

It was the fifth fatal police shooting in Oxnard last year.

"At one point during the evening I was asked about the racial makeup of the individuals and the officers involved in the shootings that had taken place during the year," Keith told the council Tuesday.

I certainly regret making these statements. I'd like to offer my sincere apologies."

— DAVID KEITH
Oxnard Police Dept., spokesperson

"I stated there was no particular pattern to it and that the incidents included officers and subjects of a variety of races and nationalities. I then said, in an off-the-cuff manner, that we're, quote, equal opportunists. Obviously the statement was an example of poor judgment on my part. I certainly regret making these statements. I'd like to offer my sincere apologies."



Criminal investigation begins in Enron failure

BY KAREN GULLO

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department has opened a criminal investigation into Enron Corp., whose employees lost billions when the company barred them from selling plummeting Enron shares from their retirement accounts.

The department has formed a national task force, headed by the criminal division and made up of federal prosecutors in Houston, San Francisco, New York and several other cities, said a Justice Department official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The Labor Department and the Securities and Exchange Commission are conducting civil investigations.

Enron attorney Robert Bennett said the company was pleased with the prospect of a Justice Department investigation that would "bring light to the facts."

"It's a positive development," Bennett said. "As I understand it, this means there will be a centralized investigation at the Justice Department. ... It's important that

we not let the Washington scandal machine take over, which will have as a consequence that every move will be politicized and the facts will be trivialized."

While ordinary employees were prohibited from selling company stock from their Enron-heavy 401(k) accounts, Enron executives cashed out more than \$1 billion in stock when it was near its peak.

In addition to retirees and some 4,500 out-of-work employees, countless investors around the country have been burned by Enron's rapid descent into federal bankruptcy court in recent weeks.

Enron, which was the nation's seventh-biggest company in revenue and admired by Wall Street as a technological innovator, has acknowledged it overstated profits for four years.

The chief executive of its longtime auditor, Arthur Andersen LLP, told a House hearing last month that the accounting firm notified Enron's audit committee on Nov. 2 of "possible illegal acts within the company."

Enron, which was formed in 1985 and

has 20,000 employees, was once the world's top buyer and seller of natural gas and the largest electricity marketer in the United States. It also marketed coal, pulp, paper, plastics, metals and fiber-optic bandwidth.

One likely focus of the Justice Department investigation: Possible fraud based on Enron's heavy reliance on off-balance-sheet partnerships which took on Enron debt. The partnerships masked Enron's financial problems and left its credit ratings healthy so it could obtain the cash and credit crucial to running its trading business.

The Houston-based company went bankrupt after its credit collapsed and its main rival, Dynegy Inc., backed out of an \$8.4 billion buyout plan late last year.

Just a year ago, stock of the nation's largest buyer and seller of natural gas traded at \$85 per share. Today, it is less than \$1.

The company played a key role earlier this year when a White House task force met with business executives and other interest to fashion an energy policy. Kenneth L. Lay, the chairman, has close ties to the president, as he did with his father, former President Bush.

Last week, the president said: "I think the life savings' issue is something we need to look into. ... The government will be looking into this."

The news of the criminal investigation comes amid questions about the White House's dealings with Enron, whose executives contributed heavily to President Bush's election campaign.

The White House has acknowledged that Enron representatives met six times with Vice President Dick Cheney or his aides on energy issues last year, most recently in mid-October just before the investing public realized the company was heading for disaster.

Junta testifies he threw 3 punches in fatal altercation

BY DENISE LAVOIE

Associated Press Writer

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — A man accused of beating to death another father at their sons' hockey practice testified Wednesday he punched the victim "no more than three" times after the man lunged at him.

Thomas Junta, 44, said he threw out his arms to protect himself as 40-year-old Michael Costin attacked him when he walked into the rink.

"I didn't know what that guy was doing. Why was he even jumping at me?" Junta said. "It was crazy. I didn't know if he had something in his hands."

Junta broke down in tears when he recalled that several children, including his then 10-year-old son, Quinlan, were in the rink and saw Junta beat Costin into unconsciousness. Costin died the next day.

Junta, a truck driver and one of 13 children, is on trial for manslaughter. He began his testimony with some personal details, including that he has no mental

defects but uses a hearing aid, wears glasses and has had surgery on his shoulders and knees.

Junta maintains he acted in self-defense during the July 5, 2000, fight. Prosecutors say the 6-foot-1, 270-pound defendant used his size to overpower Costin, who was an inch shorter and weighed 160 pounds.

The fatal fight was the second altercation between the men that day. Earlier, Junta had yelled to Costin, who was supervising the practice, because the play started to get too rough. Costin told him: "That's hockey."

The two scuffled after practice broke. Costin, in full hockey gear including skates and a helmet, lashed out at Junta and ripped off his gold chain, Junta testified. Even after they were pulled apart, Costin continued to swing his arms and cuss, Junta said.

A medical expert hired by Junta testified Wednesday that one punch could have been enough to cause the fatal injury. Junta has maintained that he hit Costin just three times, but some prosecution witnesses have said Junta beat Costin's head on the floor and pummeled him repeatedly, landing at least 10 blows, by one account.

Both sides agree the fatal injury was the rupture of an artery on the left side of Costin's neck. Dr. Ira Kanfer, a pathologist, testified Wednesday that Costin's artery could have ruptured with one punch.

"It's a rare injury caused by minimal force, and it's just one of those things that happens," Kanfer said. "I don't believe it's cumulative; I believe it's one blow."

On cross-examination by prosecutor Sheila Calkins, Kanfer conceded it may not have been the first blow that was fatal. He said a person would stop moving and become unconscious within two or three seconds after the artery ruptured. Some witnesses have said Costin put up his hands after the first blow and was flailing his hands and legs after a second punch.



Marco Di Lauro/Associated Press

A U.S. Airforce C-130 cargo plane is unloaded on the tarmac at the Kandahar airport in Afghanistan on Wednesday. The airforce is bringing in large quantities of supplies and materials to improve the base in advance of the upcoming Army takeover of the airport from the Marines.

Family says Oregon man among the seven Marines killed in Pakistan crash

BY AMALIE YOUNG

Associated Press Writer

A 23-year-old Oregon man was among the seven Marines killed on board a military plane that crashed into a mountain in Pakistan, the serviceman's father said Wednesday.

Bryan Bertrand had served as a Marine for three years and could have been home about a month ago, but he volunteered for another tour of duty, said his father, Bruce. "He didn't want to be on the sidelines," the father said from his Coos Bay home, along the southern Oregon coast. "He loved what he was doing."

Pentagon officials said there were no initial indications that anyone survived the crash Wednesday night, but a search-and-rescue mission continued. They also said there were no signs the plane, a KC-130 used for in-flight refueling or hauling cargo, was brought down by hostile action.

U.S. Central Command said from its Tampa, Fla., headquarters that the four-engine plane crashed as it was making its landing approach at a base in Shamsi, in southwestern Pakistan.

The Pentagon has not released the names of the victims.

Bruce Bertrand said two Marines stationed in Eugene drove to Coos Bay to give the family the news about their son's death.

"It's terrible, but we're proud of him," Bertrand said.

Bertrand was single, and the youngest of three children. The family last saw him last July, when he returned home for his sister's wedding.



Steven Senne/Associated Press

Thomas Junta demonstrates a portion of the July 5, 2000 altercation, which took place between Junta and Michael Costin, while taking the stand during his trial in Middlesex Superior Court, in Cambridge, Mass. on Wednesday. Junta, 44, is accused of manslaughter in the death of Costin, 40, who allegedly was beaten unconscious by Junta in front of several children at a hockey game on July 5, 2000.



COMICS

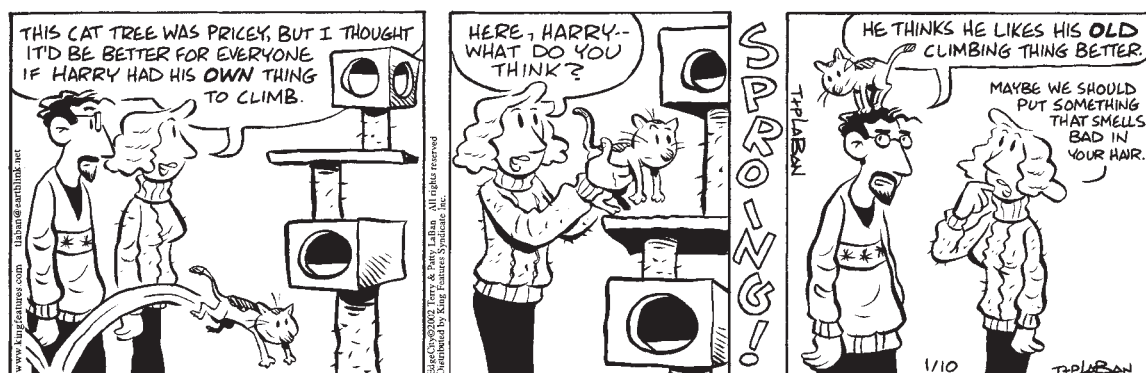
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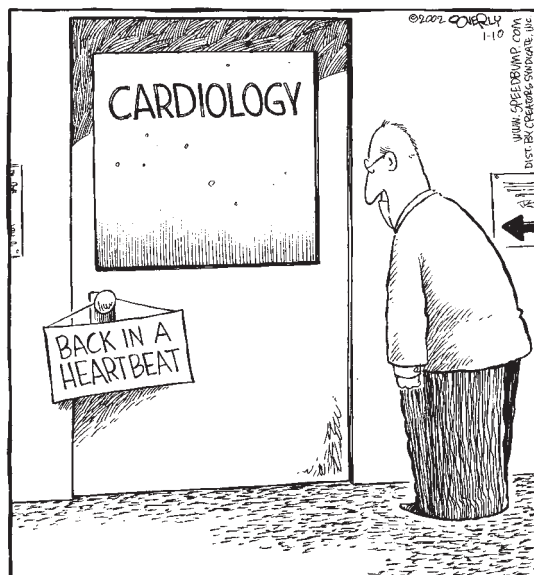
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- ACROSS**
- Checkout quantities
 - Jai — game
 - Complete
 - Pittsburgh player
 - Heaps
 - Rich
 - Raised ridge
 - "The Right Stuff" author
 - Degen-eres and Burstyn
 - Ceases
 - Inflatable item
 - Writer Deighton
 - In 1:1 scale
 - Mag. workers
 - Like
 - Like argon
 - Make thin
 - Tear
 - Like
 - Nary a soul
 - Press
 - Piquancy
 - Fencing sword
 - Hotel area
 - Birder's record
 - Ring at sea
 - Set one's bearings
 - Pinnacle
 - Corner sitters
 - Highland group
 - Fender scars
 - Okla. neighbor

- DOWN**
- Blubber
 - Iran money
 - Opposed
 - Sailing hazard
 - Rocket part
 - Australian area
 - Elevates
 - Choose
 - Script makeup
 - Bruins' sch.
 - Mideast nation
 - Longings
 - Peculiar
 - Regret
 - Traveler's stop

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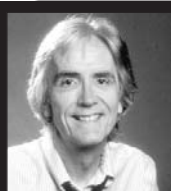
Yesterday's answer

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42							43		

1-10

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NEWS OF THE WEIRD

by Chuck Shepard

Councilman racks up parking tickets

In November, Philadelphia City Councilman Angel Ortiz was revealed to have been driving for the last 25 years without a license, including the last 17 years when he has been a municipal employee or council member. Said Ortiz, "I kept trying to make time to get a new license, and it seemed that something pressing always took precedence." A few days later, Ortiz was discovered also to have 53 outstanding parking tickets (face value, about \$3,000), and as is often the case with public officials' misconduct, Ortiz made the story more interesting by denying that he knew about any of the tickets.

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BACK PAGE

Defecating figurines are part of the holiday fun in Spain

BY SARAH ANDREWS

Associated Press Writer

BARCELONA, Spain — Placing statuettes of defecating people in Nativity scenes is a Christmastime tradition so old and so strong in Spain's Catalonia region that even the Roman Catholic Church here doesn't dare try to ban it.

When an exhibit of the figurines in a California museum sparked an angry denunciation from a Catholic group in the United States, Catalonians who cherish the tradition came ardently to its defense.

"Unfortunately, there are intolerant people who are offended by any little thing."

— JOSEP MARIA JOAN
Toy Museum of Catalonia, director

"Unfortunately, there are intolerant people who are offended by any little thing," Josep Maria Joan, director of the

Toy Museum of Catalonia, said Monday. His museum has a permanent collection of the figurines, known as caganers.

Spanish artist Antoni Miralda's exposition "Poetical Gut" at Copia, a food, wine and arts museum in Napa, Calif., features ceramic figurines of the pope, nuns and angels with their pants down, squatting over their bowel movements.

The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, a 350,000-member group based in New York, has written to the museum's board of trustees to say it finds the show offensive.

"When it's degrading, everybody knows it except the spin doctors who run the museums," the group's president, William Donohue, said Sunday.

In a tradition that dates back to the 18th century, Catalonians hide caganers in Christmas Nativity scenes and invite friends over to try to find them. The figures symbolize fertilization and the hope for prosperity in the coming year, according to Joan.

"It's really only a game," he said. "The caganer is not supposed to steal Jesus' spotlight in the manger scene. But it's logical that when traditions like this are exported they can be misunderstood."

An official with the Cultural Heritage department of the Barcelona Roman Catholic diocese, speaking on condition of anonymity, described the tradition as a

harmless game for children and indicated the church has no plans to oppose it.

Although the traditional caganer resembles a red-capped Catalonian peasant, Miralda is not the first to depict public figures. Since the 1940s, Catalonians have been making modern renditions of the caganer — including, recently, Osama bin Laden.

For Marti Torrent, founder of the 70-member Association of Friends of the Caganer, the meaning goes deeper than child's play.

To him, the caganer's act symbolizes "the fertilization of the earth" and pride in the land of Catalonia, whose inhabitants won the right to speak their own language and govern themselves after the 1939-75 Spanish dictatorship.

"I know that American society is more strict with its religious ideas than we are in Catalonia," said Torrent, 89, who added that what the caganer does is natural. "Even the king has to do it every day or at least every other day."

American jailed for burning huge Christmas ornament

By the Associated Press

STOCKHOLM, Sweden — An American tourist jailed in Sweden for burning an unusual Christmas ornament — a 21-foot-high straw goat — was set free on Wednesday.

Lawrence Litchford Jones, a 51-year-old Cleveland artist, told the court he was sorry he torched the goat with his lighter on Dec. 23, but that he thought it was a local tradition, district court judge Karl-Axel Bladh said.

The huge straw goat is built every Christmas by the merchants' association in Gaevle, a central city about 100 miles

north of the capital, Stockholm. Every year vandals burn it down, but they are seldom caught.

Angry citizens in Gaevle apprehended Jones after he set the fire.

Jones was sentenced Wednesday to a month in prison for inflicting gross damage, but the judge released him, saying the 18 days in spent in jail awaiting trial was sufficient. He was fined \$9,600.

"It was an impulsive act," Bladh said. "He didn't realize how valuable the goat is."

Jones also told the court he was under the influence of alcohol and pain relievers.

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