

Santa Monica Daily Press

A newspaper with issues

NEWS OF THE WEIRD BY CHUCK SHEPARD

■ Some well-off taxpayers in Washington, D.C., are picking up an easy \$30,000 or so from the U.S. Treasury, courtesy of a 1976 "historic preservation" tax code deduction, according to a December Washington Post investigation. About 900 properties qualify, and owners get the deduction merely by forgoing the right to alter the building's facade (which D.C. law restricts, anyway). Giving up this "right" "earns" them an 11 percent tax deduction, and the average value of qualified buildings (according to the Post) is \$1 million (historic facades are not often found on downscale homes), meaning that a claimant in the middle tax bracket would get about \$30,000.

■ Citing a police press release, the German news organization Deutsche Welle (DW-World) reported in November that the reason that motorist Julia Bauer of Bochum, Germany, lost control and smashed into a parked car and a lamppost was that she was preparing cereal and milk on the passenger seat while driving to work and tried to catch her bowl as it was falling to the floor. The cost of her breakfast (in damages) turned out to be about US\$27,000.

TODAY IN HISTORY

In 1841, the island of Hong Kong was ceded to Great Britain. (It returned to Chinese control in July 1997.)

In 1887, the U.S. Senate approved an agreement to lease Pearl Harbor in Hawaii as a naval base.

In 1942, Nazi officials held the notorious Wannsee conference, during which they arrived at their "final solution" that called for exterminating Jews.

In 1945, President Roosevelt was sworn into office for an unprecedented fourth term.

In 1801, John Marshall was appointed chief justice of the United States.

In 1986, the United States observed the first federal holiday in honor of slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"America is a land of wonders, in which everything is in constant motion and every change seems an improvement."

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE
FRENCH AUTHOR (1805-1859).

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New high school to serve SM parolees

District officials looking for a suitable site for campus

BY JOHN WOOD

Daily Press Staff Writer

DISTRICT HDQRTS. — Recent parolees and expelled students soon will have their own high school, if education officials approve plans for the new learning facility tonight as expected.

State funding is in place for the school and local officials are searching for a suitable site anywhere in Santa Monica, according to Superintendent of Schools John

Deasy, who said the school likely will serve just 15 to 20 students.

"At this point it's site dependent," he said Wednesday. "We could open it, relatively as soon as we find a site."

The school will have, at most, two to three classrooms and will serve only Santa Monica and Malibu students, Deasy said. The idea is to separate out the students with the most severe problems, and provide them with one-on-one instruction. The district as a whole

has some 4,000 high schoolers.

Billed by local officials as a "Community Day School," the school would be staffed by credentialed teachers who would "collaborate with district counselors, psychologists ... and with the county office of education, law enforcement, probation and human services agency staff who work with at-risk youth," according to district documents.

Deasy said about 15 local youths already have been identified for the program, which will receive slightly more funding from

the state, per pupil, than traditional secondary schools. Santa Monica and Malibu high schools receive about \$5,100 a year, per pupil, based on average daily attendance.

"These are kids who have had struggles ... They're kids that are experiencing trouble," Deasy said. "It's a win on both sides."

Ilene Straus, principal at Santa Monica High School, said the new school will help ease the burden on her 3,500-student school, which hopes to shed about 1,000 students in coming years by open-

See **NEW SCHOOL**, page 6



John Wood/Daily Press

Dustin Hoffman is joined at a Wednesday groundbreaking ceremony by interim Santa Monica College President Tom Donner, left, outgoing SMC President Dr. Piedad F. Robertson and Dale Franzen, right, who has overseen fundraising for the \$31-million Madison Theater.

The stage is set

Actor Dustin Hoffman puts shovel to soil for ceremonial ground breaking of new Madison Theater in Santa Monica

BY JOHN WOOD

Daily Press Staff Writer

MID-CITY — Actor Dustin Hoffman and outgoing Santa Monica College President Dr. Piedad F. Robertson officially broke ground Wednesday afternoon on a \$31 million theater slated to open in 2007.

Hoffman, a former SMC student who lives in Brentwood, decried the lack of a major performing arts center on the Westside. The 540-seat theater was designed by Santa Monica architect Renzo Zecchetto and will be built on the Madison School campus at 11th Street and Santa Monica Boulevard.

"I grew up here, and I didn't see any theater," Hoffman told a crowd of 350 during a 15-minute speech that touched on his acting past, and the growing need for arts and artistic expression. Hoffman praised a jazz band that played at the event, saying musicians share a connection few ever understand.

"To be in that zone, and there ain't nothing like it," said Hoffman, comparing the creation of music and art to a religious experience. "That is missing today, that I

See **STAGE**, page 6

Main Street prepares to light up, 'festoon' style

BY KIM CALVERT

Special to the Daily Press

MAIN STREET — The sidewalks here will soon be aglow with new lighting that will stretch from Pico Boulevard to the southern edge of the city.

The installment of the new lights, which started Wednesday, is expected to be completed in the next two weeks. It consists of vintage-style light bulbs suspended

on string wire. Sometimes called "festoon" or "promenade" lights, the outdoor lighting is frequently seen in Europe, according to Main Street Business Improvement Association Executive Director Gary Gordon.

Gordon said the lighting project was the result of a fund established by City Hall to help businesses that were severely disrupted when the city undertook massive sewer repair in the area. The

street was torn up on and off for nearly two years.

"This was massive, it was huge ... the city called it a 'sewer mitigation fund,'" Gordon said. "It was set up to be used by members of our association in whatever way we agreed would best be used for overall capital improvement of the area."

Members of the Main Street Business Improvement Assoc-

See **STRING OUT**, page 7



Kim Kalvert/Special to the Daily Press
Year-round white lights are being strung the length of Main Street, from Pico Boulevard to the southern city limit.



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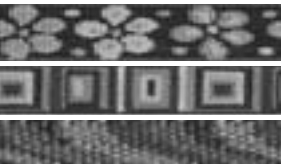


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Christina S. Porter
Vice President

Kristine Johnson Fountain of Joy

The Kristine Johnson Fountain of Joy is seeking donations. Situated in a courtyard garden visible to the community, the fountain will be a respite for those seeking faith, peace and hope amongst the challenges of the world.

Donations to the Kristine Johnson
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ARIES (March 21-April 19)

★★★★ What appears to be a brilliant idea in the middle of the night becomes a little far-out. Communications highlight where you are heading. Keep talks open and refuse to make any judgments until you have all the facts. Tonight: Follow the action.



TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

★★★★ Accept difficulties with a smile, and you'll bounce into the forefront. In the next few weeks, expect to be more on-call than normal. Ultimately, you will see the difference in your checking account soon enough! Tonight: Your treat.



GEMINI (May 21-June 20)

★★★★★ You radiate, and others say "yes." As you hit your power days, you become resourceful, energetic and charismatic. Reach out for more facts and don't allow someone to feed you misinformation. Turn away from gossip. Tonight: Others go along with what you want.



CANCER (June 21-July 22)

★★★★ You know what works for you. Understand that sometimes you need to cocoon. Let others be the cheerleader or the quarterback for now. Go within and find answers. Sometimes you don't need input from others. Tonight: Vanish.



LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)

★★★★★ Others back you no matter how wild your ideas might be. You could worry about an unpredictable partner who frequently creates uproar. Your appealing smile, charm and logic win the day. Don't make problems where there are none. Tonight: Celebrate success, friendship and life.



VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

★★★★ Understanding develops because you are willing to take responsibility for helping to create someone's wild reaction. What could you have done to stimulate this response? Your take-charge attitude tosses you into the limelight. Tonight: No early bedtime for you!



LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)

★★★★★ Your ability to detach and see the big picture comes through. A work-driven problem encourages your sleuthing skills to emerge. Others find you to be remarkable. Love the pedestal you are on. Just be careful not to tumble off, at least not today. Tonight: Let the kid in you out.



SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)

★★★ Accept a partner's wishes without questioning. Toss the normal "why, how and when" out the window. Though you are not normally docile, try that behavior on for style. Don't let daydreams muck up your day. Tonight: Dinner for two.



SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

★★★★★ Reach out for those who count on your intuition and ability. Listen to others, as they hold the power (right now). You will be able to resume more control of your life soon enough. Keep communications flowing. Tonight: Follow another's plans.



CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

★★★ Your sign might be the workaholic of the Zodiac, but you might not appreciate all the responsibilities others dump on you. Stand in the mirror and practice saying "no." You really can prevent situations that don't suit you. Tonight: Choose a stress-buster.



AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

★★★★ Visit with others. A brainstorming session could have you questioning past efforts and solutions. You could be surprised by ideas that get tossed around. Don't let your imagination and self-indulgent ways devour your checkbook. Tonight: Kick up your heels.



PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)

★★★ When others seem to flourish, you tumble into every crevice around. Why not cocoon and go into your head? You might find this pastime a lot safer and happier. Don't worry so much. Any hassle you encounter will pass away, as long as you don't react. Tonight: Happy at home.



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1427 Third Street Promenade, Ste. #202 • Santa Monica, CA 90401 • www.smdp.com

PUBLISHER

Ross Furukawa ross@smdp.com

EDITOR

Carolyn Sackariason sack@smdp.com

STAFF WRITER

John Wood wood@smdp.com

ADVERTISING SALES MANAGER

Robbie P. Piubeni rpiubeni@smdp.com

ADVERTISING ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE

Rob Schwenker schwenker@smdp.com

ADVERTISING ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE

Stewart O'Dell stewarto@smdp.com

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Alejandro Cesar Cantarero II alex@smdp.com

EXECUTIVE TRAFFIC MANAGER

Brenda Casas brenda@smdp.com

CLASSIFIED REPRESENTATIVE

Mirella Reyes mirella@smdp.com

NIGHT EDITOR

Lori Luechtefeld loli@smdp.com

NIGHT EDITOR

Michael Tittinger moneysurf@smdp.com

CIRCULATION

Keith Wyatt keith@smdp.com

CIRCULATION

Glenn Bolan glenn@smdp.com

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Dave Danforth dave@smdp.com

MASCOT

Maya Furukawa maya@smdp.com

LOCAL



COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Elks give to Lions for Tsunami relief

By Daily Press staff

The Westchester Elks and the Santa Monica Elks presented \$1,000 checks to Lions Club International Foundation for Tsunami relief.

The Elks chose the Lions Club because they have been distributing emergency grants for 30 years, officials said. All donations go directly to victims. Donations to the Lions Club will fund immediate survival efforts, as well as long-term recovery aid.

To donate to the Lions Club, mail a check to LCIF at 300 West 22nd St., Oak Brook, Il., 60523. The check should be made out to LCIF and "tsunami relief" must be written in the memo field. For more information, contact Curt Curtiss at (310) 645-8989.



Photo courtesy

(Left to right) Wayne Parish, Santa Monica Elks Trustee; Phil Parlett, Lions District Cabinet Treasurer; Doug Randall, Exalted Ruler of Santa Monica Elks and Bob Baldwin, Santa Monica Elks Trustee

School documentary wins award

By Daily Press staff

A documentary on the rise and fall of the state's public school system that includes the local school district has gained national attention.

The Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District and its superintendent, Dr. John Deasy were featured in "First to Worst," a PBS documentary that chronicled the rise and fall of California's public school system. "First to Worst" has been awarded the prestigious CINE Golden Eagle in the "investigative news" category.

The CINE Golden Eagle Film and Video Competitions acknowledge high quality professional production in a variety of content categories. Learning Matters previously received a Golden Eagle in 1995 for "Caught in the Crossfire."

"First to Worst" traces California's education crisis to the anti-tax movement of the 1970s and 1980s and to civil rights lawsuits that aimed to equalize school spending but resulted instead in disastrous funding limits on schools.

To learn more about "First to Worst" or to order a DVD copy (\$30, including shipping and handling), visit pbs.org/merrow/

See BRIEFS, page 7



SURF REPORT

On Thursday we'll see WNW swell continue, even filling at some spots left out Wednesday. Look for most spots through the region to see chest to head high+ sets. Standout spots in the South Bay are up to a couple of feet+ overhead and occasionally bigger at focal points. Swell fades slowly late Thursday into the weekend. Light offshore flow up to 10 knots on during the morning, followed by light onshore flow for the afternoon.

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

Today the water is:

59°

	LOW TIDES				HIGH TIDES			
	Morning	Height	Evening	Height	Morning	Height	Evening	Height
SATURDAY	7:30	1.9	7:16	0.5	1:17	4.6	12:42	2.2
SUNDAY	8:37	1.7	8:01	1.2	2:09	4.7	2:04	3.3
MONDAY	10:19	1.3	8:53	1.9	3:03	4.7	4:03	2.8
TUESDAY	11:42	0.7	9:58	2.3	3:59	5.0	6:10	2.8
WEDNESDAY	12:41	0.2	11:07	2.6	4:52	5.2	7:31	3.1
THURSDAY	N/A	N/A	1:25	0.2	5:40	5.3	8:19	3.3
FRIDAY	N/A	N/A	1:25	0.2	5:40	5.3	8:19	3.3

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The Q Line

The RAND Corp., a Santa Monica-based international think tank, recently released a report that details the deplorable condition of California's public school system. The state lags behind in almost every objective in education — student achievement, class size, teacher salaries and teacher experience, to name a few. And now, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger wants to cut \$2.8 billion in education to balance the budget.

Despite how poorly school districts perform throughout the state, Santa Monica and Malibu fare

pretty well. But that's because the local community has supported the school district with hundreds of millions of dollars through bonds, parcel taxes, private donations and City Hall contributions.

So this week, Q Line wants to know, "Should it be left up to communities throughout California to fund their own school districts, or is it the state government's responsibility?"

Call (310) 285-8106 before Friday at 5 p.m. and we'll print your response in the weekend edition. Please try to limit your comments to a minute or less. It might help to think first about the wording of your response.

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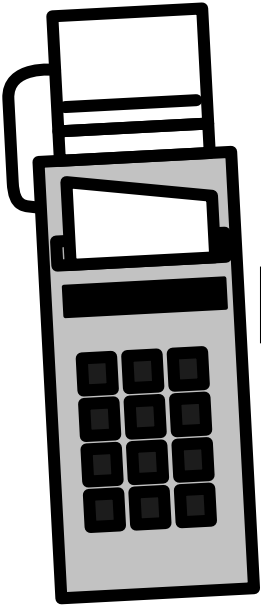


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OPINION



ABHORRING EVIL - I ASK, SEEK AND KNOCK...

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A homeless novelty

Editor:

As a long-term resident of Santa Monica I am sick and tired of council members making Santa Monica a haven for vagrants. I have traveled extensively and nowhere have I encountered more vagrants than in Santa Monica. I suggest the council members approve and enforce more stringent laws against loitering, urinating in public places, panhandling, sleeping in our parks, etc.. Also, the millions spent on the homeless programs are obviously ineffective as there has been no decline in the homeless population for the last 15 years. The monies allocated for these vagrants can be better spent on other programs.

If the council members can't stop catering to the homeless than perhaps they should promote the homeless in Santa Monica as a novelty tourist attraction. Santa Monica can boast that we are the home to the homeless and have more bums and vagrants than any other city.

Fred Alexander
Santa Monica

Rent control benefits no one

Editor:

When asked about the allegation that there are a lot of "wealthy" tenants living in rent-controlled apartments, Santa Monicans For Renters' Rights (SMRR) co-chair and co-founder Denny Zane said, "Such tenants are by far the exception" (SMDP Jan. 18, page 1).

Really, Mr. Zane? And you make this statement based on what empirical data? As far as I know, neither the Santa Monica Rent Control Board nor SMRR collects any specific tenant data relating to income. As a matter of fact, when I called the rent control board and asked why they don't means test renters, their response was, "that was never part of the law."

Let's break down the facts based on 2000 census data provided on the city of Santa Monica Web site.

- 1) The median (not the average) family income in 2000 was \$75,989.
 - 2) The number of households earning over \$150,000 per year doubled between 1990 and 2000.
 - 3) In 1990 AND in 2000, about 70 percent of households were occupied by renters.
- Finally, we can look to the IRS for what is considered "wealthy." According to the 2002 IRS figures, those who filed with an AGI of \$92,663 or more are in the top 10 percent of earners. Those who filed with an AGI of \$56,401 or more are in the top 25 percent of earners.

So, unless all the top 10, 15, or 20 percent of Santa Monica are living in houses north of Montana, it would seem that Mr. Zane's statement that "wealthy" tenants are "by far the exception" is simply a lie.

Now Mr. Zane does make a good point that landlords do get to choose their tenants. And, as a landlord you'd expect that one would want the tenants most likely to pay rent on time, keep the apartment nice, and possibly even make upgrades using their own funds, since no landlord in his right mind would spend a dime more than he has to given the mandatory low rents.

The net result is that high-income people are living in these apartments.

But wait. According to the statement of purpose in the Rent Control Charter Amendment, Article XVIII, the whole point of rent control is to keep rents affordable for "the poor, minorities, students, young families, and senior citizens," not to provide cheap rent for the "wealthy."

Maybe Mr. Zane can enlighten those of us who think rent control has been a colossal failure and has only served a small percentage of the Santa Monicans it purports to help.

On second thought, never mind. We'll all probably feel better if we just continue to believe ... go ahead, take another sip of your non-fat, no-foam latte and enjoy the weather.

Tony Street
Bend, Ore.

Has Martin Luther King's dream come true?

NEWS ON THE EDGE

BY RON SCOTT SMITH



"I have a dream, that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."

— Martin Luther King, Aug. 28, 1963

The esteemed Professor Edwin A. Locke of the Ayn Rand Institute — yes, there is an Ayn Rand Institute — opened his guest commentary for this publication on Monday (SMDP, Jan. 17, page 6) with the above line from perhaps the most powerful piece of public oration ever heard. Of course Locke opened with that line, they all open with that line, as they attempt to justify the new abolition — the abolition of race-based preferential treatment in any aspect of a suddenly-decent society. Maybe it has something to do with having the sophomoric wisdom from an "Atlas Shrugged" on the brain for too long, but Locke must also fancy himself as a reader of minds, as he goes on about King, "It follows that skin color should not be a factor in taking actions toward other people, e.g., hiring and admitting to universities." Is he scared his son might get blocked by the governor at the doorway to the admissions building at the University of Mississippi while a young black man strolls through? That's not the way it happened, Mr. Locke.

King's entire speech was infused with a profound cry out for justice. "America has given us a bad check — a check which has come back marked 'insufficient funds.'" But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. So we have come to cash this check — a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice." Locke conveniently overlooks such passages.

But according to the professor and his ilk — which unfortunately includes the President of the United States — that check has been made good, once and for all. War against bigotry is over. Racism is defeated. We hold these truths to be self-evident ... don't we?

George W. Bush, known for prematurely declaring missions accomplished, today in Washington is officially handed the keys that grant him four more years of running America. Some would say into the ground. Last year, for all intents and purposes, he declared victory for King's epochal battle for justice and equality for America's minorities, when he denounced the admissions policy that uses affirma-

tive action at the University of Michigan as "divisive and unfair," and ordered his legal team to ask the Supreme Court to strike it down. The playing field was thus declared level for one and all by presidential affirmation. According to Bush, if anyone is running uphill due to misguided university admissions policies, it's not the minorities, but kids like his own. He said, "The intentions may be very good, but the result is discrimination ... and penalizes students based on their race."

Never mind that the president got into Yale not so much through scholarly achievement as through "legacy," a different preferential policy based on family name, not minority status. Affirmative action based on being born rich — OK. Affirmative action based on being born poor — see ya.

This nation's history is littered with race-based travesties of centuries, decades, years, days, and I'd dare say, hours ago. There's been progress, but because a stretch of the Santa Monica Freeway is named Rosa Parks, because one of LA's major streets is named Martin Luther King Boulevard, because a Supreme Court Justice is named Clarence Thomas, does it mean it's time for America to take a collective deep breath and say, "Glad we're over that?"

In fact, we're not over that just yet. The Supreme Court upheld at least a limited use of affirmative action in their ruling on the Michigan matter Bush brought before them. Clarence Thomas, whose own career is littered with the benefits he's reaped from the very thing he voted against, wrote in an apparent self-loathing dissenting opinion, "Racial discrimination is not a permissible solution to the self-inflicted wounds of this elitist admissions policy."

The sick and twisted party line taken by Locke, Thomas, and the rest is that Martin Luther King would never have approved of affirmative action of any kind because he dreamed of a "color-blind" society where no one is given privilege or advantage based on race. As if they forget the Reverend was gunned down in cold blood in the prime of his life for the simple reason that he was black and influential. From the same speech they love to quote, King warned, "We will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream."

For Edwin Locke or anyone else to use Martin Luther King's own words against his own cause is to stand on a mountain-top of cynicism, disingenuousness and sleaze beyond all decency, and does not bode well for the ongoing and unfinished struggles that lay ahead.

(To reach Ron Scott Smith, e-mail him at edgeofthewest@aol.com).



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Same-sex couples and their personal economy

The headlines have been filled recently with the ongoing debate over the legality and recognition of same-sex marriages. The battle for the courts and local, state and federal governments over same-sex marriage rights is likely to continue for some time. But another question has existed within the gay and lesbian community for many years and continues to be a focus for the financial services industry: "how do same-sex couples handle money?" It's a question that comes up often as same-sex partners discuss their personal economic situation with their financial advisors. Unlike legally married couples, same-sex partners don't inherit a default set of assumptions about their financial affairs when they enter into a committed relationship. Understandably, the issue is often difficult for gay and lesbian couples to figure out.

JOINT FINANCES

In the late '90s, American Express financial advisors conducted research on this very issue, and learned that, in fact, about 80 percent of same-sex couples do pattern their financial relationship on the traditional marriage model. Predictably, this means that in such relationships assets are owned jointly, income is pooled, and expenses are treated as joint obligations. The advantage to this structure is that it has a very comfortable feel to it. For most people, it's the model they were familiar with growing up, so it seems the natural way for a household to manage its finances. The drawback of this approach is that, just as the relationship does not enjoy any of the legal benefits

that come from marriage, it does not enjoy any of the protections inherent to a legal divorce. Without a domestic partnership agreement in place to spell out how joint finances should be unwound, challenging issues must be addressed under extremely draining circumstances. Similarly, without a solid estate plan and supporting legal documents such as wills in place, the marriage model can pose drastic and sometimes unexpected hardships for the survivor if one partner dies.

A COMBINED APPROACH

More and more, gay/lesbian couples want to understand the approaches available to them in handling their personal economies, and in making intelligent and informed choices about what's best for them. So what are the alternatives to the traditional marriage model?

Some couples take a proportional approach to structuring their personal economy. Under this model, joint assets and joint expenses are managed in proportion to each partner's relative contribution. Thus, for example, if one partner has an income of \$100,000 and the other earns \$50,000, they would divide things two-thirds/one-third. Or, perhaps partners have contributed unequally to the down-payment and monthly payments on a house. They might agree that ownership interests in the property should reflect these proportional contributions. Again, arrangements like these always should be spelled out in a properly drafted domestic partnership agreement and acknowledged in the terms of a will or trust.

GOING SOLO

Finally, some couples prefer to maintain an independent approach to their money. Finances are closely linked with a sense of personal autonomy for many people, and sometimes the non-financial implications of co-mingled funds create more difficulties for a couple than the traditional approach. Under this model, of course, each couple pays for his or her own expenses, and all assets are owned separately. Joint expenses can be shared either evenly or proportionally to income. Often, people who adopt this approach maintain separate bank accounts, and either contribute to a joint account for joint expenses, or simply send two checks. The advantage of this approach is clear — each party retains complete control over his or her own financial affairs, and there are fewer opportunities for messy entanglements in the event the relationship ends. Nevertheless, even couples who opt for the independent approach to joint finances should have domestic partnership agreements and wills or trusts to confirm their intentions with respect to any assets they own jointly.

Write your own rules. It's important to remember in all of this that the approach you and your partner choose doesn't necessarily lock you in forever. Your personal economy will likely change over time and the two of you are perfectly free to rewrite the rules whenever you both agree it's necessary. Here again, the domestic partnership agreement has its advantages. It can give you a framework for making these changes. Sometimes, it's possible to build the change mechanism right into the

document itself. For example, a couple may contribute unevenly to the purchase of their residence. The couple agrees that, initially the ownership should reflect each party's proportional contribution, but that, over time, things should balance out to 50/50. This can be accomplished up-front simply by drafting a sliding scale into the partnership agreement. Note that there can be adverse tax and other consequences if these types of provisions aren't drafted carefully, so don't hesitate to consult with an attorney or tax advisor, as well as your financial advisor.

In fact, regardless of the complexity of your situation, oftentimes a qualified financial advisor is an invaluable resource. Deciding how to structure your personal economy is a difficult issue for many couples. Sometimes, emotions get in the way of clear, objective thinking. If you and your partner are grappling with these issues, consider seeking some dispassionate advice from a professional.

(Mo Barakat is a senior financial advisor in Santa Monica specializing in retirement planning, asset management, and risk management. Barakat is a registered representative of American Express Financial Advisors, Inc., member NASD/SIPC. For more information call (310) 582-3500, ext. 242. American Express Financial Advisors Inc. Member NASD. American Express Company is separate from American Express Financial Advisors Inc. and is not a broker-dealer).

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School board member defends plans for new school

NEW SCHOOL, from page 1

ing two smaller campuses with 400 to 500 students each.

“We as a district, and as a school that serves a large high school population, need options for students where they can be successful,” Straus said. “We don’t have a lot of options in a district our size, and I’m really pleased that the district administration has moved quickly to set up a community day school.”

Straus added the new school will complement but be very different than Olympic High School, an alternative school of about 150 students who either have behavioral problems or need to make up credits quickly to graduate on time. The new school will have fewer distractions and will be available to students who are expelled from the other schools in the district, Straus said.

“We’ve felt for a long time that we need some options that work,” she said.

Priority for seats in the new school would be given first to those students expelled from other campuses. Next would be students who recently had been incarcerated and, thirdly, students who were transferred to the school against their wishes through a district referral process, documents show.

In order to leave the school and return to a traditional campus, students would have to complete the requirements of their expulsion or any specific probation requirements, as well as meet with district officials.

Parents and other community members who watch the schools closely raised concerns this week about the school and its future students. Several residents sent e-mails to other parents on a Samohi distribution list expressing their concerns, apparently under the impression the school would drain resources from other local schools, while serving expelled students from all over Los Angeles County.

Deasy addressed those issues on

“These are kids who have had struggles ... They’re kids that are experiencing trouble. It’s a win on both sides.”

JOHN DEASY
Superintendent of Schools

Wednesday.

“They’re current students,” he said. “It’s not like we’re looking for new students. We know who they are. It’s a very good thing.”

As to the viability of the program, Santa Monica-Malibu school board member Shane McLoud, a teacher in the Los Angeles Unified School District for the past eight years, wrote this to the concerned parents: “I also have been aware of the discussion to create this type of

school, and it’s exactly what we need to create a more personal learning community for those students who don’t do well in typical schools ...

“I know first-hand that these types of schools benefit both the students who need the new school (and its smaller class size and better trained personnel) and the classroom that they are leaving — allowing the students and teachers to spend their time on teaching and learning, rather than behavioral issues.”

SMC president hands over her hardhat and shovel

STAGE, from page 1

know. And that is missing at a very critical time ...

“Art is a gentle way of allowing us the intimacy that we shut off,” Hoffman continued. “We are all here, now. Alive, temporarily, and we have things that we can do and we have things that we can do, symbiotically.”

The beauty of the Madison Theater, Hoffman added, is that actors and directors who live on the Westside will be able to participate in show runs between their stage, screen and television engagements. Unlike Broadway plays, which typically run for six months, a year or longer, shows at Madison will have three-month runs, theater representatives said. Hoffman’s acting troupe, 3 Coasts, will be in residency at the theater.

Several local leaders were on hand for the event, including members of the SMC Board of Trustees, the Santa Monica City Council and Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, a supporter of the theater. Also present were actors Stephen Collins, Tom Hulce and Shelley Morrison, among others.

Plans for the theater have been seven years in the making. Funding comes from a variety of sources, one of which was contributions from a number of celebrities, including Hoffman. Still, the largest chunk of funding, \$24 million, came from Measure S, the \$135 million bond approved by Santa Monica-Malibu voters in November. Another \$4 million came from Measure U passed in 2002 and an additional \$1 million from the U.S. Department of Transportation, said SMC spokesman Bruce Smith.

In addition to the theater, the \$31 million will pay to renovate the Madison campus for use by the SMC music department and convert the existing auditorium into a rehearsal hall.

Robertson, who went on to a farewell event at St. Monica’s Church Wednesday evening, said seeing the project finally take off after years of hard work was a fitting end to her 10 years at the helm of the college. In a ceremonial show of confidence, she handed a yellow construction cap and shovel to Tom Donner, a top college official who will take over as presi-



John Wood/Daily Press

ROCKIN’ OUT: Dustin Hoffman keeps the beat as a jazz band performs for the Madison Theater groundbreaking event Wednesday afternoon. Musical and artistic expression are critical, said Hoffman, whose acting troupe will be in residency at the theater. Below: Santa Monica architect Renzo Zecchetto’s rendering of what the 540-seat Madison Theater will look like on the inside.

dent of the college until a replacement for Robertson is chosen.

When the crowd gave her a standing ovation, Robertson held back tears.

“This is a unique occasion,” she said. “You are all here from the moment of birth for what will be a huge thing for this community ... This will be a place that children will come to have their first introduction to the arts.

“From me to all of you, thank you for helping this to be accomplished,” Robertson later added, as she concluded her comments. “Thank you for believing it could happen.”



LOCAL



Hefty power bill: Businesses to pay \$6K annually for new lights

STRING OUT, from page 1

iation, which consists of 400 businesses on Main Street, discussed the options and determined that permanent, decorative lighting would be the best choice given the amount available in the fund — about \$225,000, Gordon said.

“That much money doesn’t go far when you’re talking about a capital improvement project,” he said. “There wasn’t a whole array of possibilities to choose from. But we did know from the Christmas lighting we’ve done in the past that the right kind of decorative lighting can have a wonderful effect on people.”

Gordon said the association also wanted to pick a capital improvement project that would draw attention to the eclectic personality of Main Street.

“We wanted something that no one else had — something that would signify where Main Street starts and where it ends — something that would make a positive impression on the people who shop and work here,” he said.

Joe Pipersky, co-chair of the Main Street Business Improvement Association, and owner of Joe’s Diner and Holy Guacamole, originally suggested the idea of the decorative lights.

“I saw them on my trips to England and Italy, and always thought they were beautiful,” Pipersky said. “Besides looking really nice, they use a low-voltage bulb, are highly efficient and incredibly inexpensive for what you get — plus they’re resistant to corrosion from salt air.”

The new lighting will turn on at dusk and be left on initially for four hours. It doesn’t replace the regular cobra-head street lighting. Pipersky said the new lights are meant to illuminate the sidewalk, not the street.

“It will cost the business improvement district \$6,000 a year to cover those four hours of lighting each day,” Pipersky added. “But we hope that the businesses that stay open later in the evening, the bars and restaurants, will be willing to kick in the extra funding needed to keep the lights on longer.”

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

BRIEFS, from page 3

Kiwanis’ top dog comes to SM

By Daily Press staff

Santa Monica Kiwanis club members welcomed their California-Nevada-Hawaii District Governor, Larry “Mac” McLeland and First Lady Yolie McLeland at the club luncheon this past Wednesday.

Each year, the incoming district governor makes visits to all the club divisions to meet, promote and encourage the service of Kiwanis. This year, Gov. McLeland has made a commitment to I.D.E.A.S., which stands for “Increase our commitment to young children. Develop leadership throughout the Kiwanis family. Expand Kiwanis service. Access Kiwanis service and growth through the World Link Program and Support our local clubs and encourage growth in membership and service.”

First Lady Yolie McLeland also has a service project. It’s entitled “Read around the World” to promote and encourage literacy among youth

To learn more about the Santa Monica Kiwanis Club visit www.kiwanisclubsm.org.

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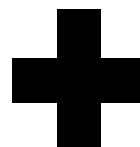
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STATE

School officials say pension shift will hurt schools

BY JENNIFER COLEMAN
Associated Press Writer

SACRAMENTO — Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger’s plan to shift nearly \$500 million of pension fund payments to local school districts has some teachers worried they could face a choice between a cut in their pay or their future retirement benefits.

School administrators say the plan would add another burden to their strained budgets and also hurt their efforts to recruit future teachers as the state is facing a looming teacher retirement wave.

But as Schwarzenegger must close an estimated \$8.6 billion budget deficit, he and his advisers say ending the state’s contribution to the California State Teachers Retirement System, or CalSTRS, would go a long way

toward closing that gap.

In the 1970s, the state began paying into the teacher retirement system under a 30-year plan to make the pension plan actuarially sound, said H.D. Palmer, spokesman for the department of finance.

Now that CalSTRS is sound — it’s the nation’s third-largest public employee pension fund — there’s no reason for the state to keep supplementing it, Palmer said. The state’s share is about 2 percent of payroll, with local districts and teachers each picking up approximately 8 percent.

Schwarzenegger wants to end the state’s 2 percent share, and let local districts negotiate with teachers unions on how to share the increased cost.

“In other words, the district could push it off on the teachers,” said John Johnston, an eighth grade physical

education teacher at C.E. Utt Middle School in Tustin.

Even if the districts didn’t pass it on to teachers, he said, absorbing the 2 percent contribution means “we won’t have enough supplies, or they’ll have to cut programs.”

If her pension contribution rose from 8 percent to 10 percent, “I’d definitely have to tighten my belt,” said teacher Dana Dillon, who teaches fifth and sixth graders at Weed Union Elementary School.

That 2 percent cut in take-home pay could be offset, Palmer said, under another proposal to let teachers opt out of a supplemental retirement plan.

The Legislature created the supplemental benefit in the 1990s, when California was flush with cash. It amounts to another 2 percent of teacher salaries and was designed to recruit teachers at a time when the state was in the midst of a shortage, Palmer said.

Under Schwarzenegger’s proposal, teachers could opt out of the supplemental plan — regaining that 2 percent contribution.

If teachers opted out of the supplemental plan, that means they’d have less to retire on, said Jack O’Connell, superintendent of public instruction.

“It’s the starve now or starve later proposal,” he said.

California’s teachers aren’t eligible for Social Security because they have the CalSTRS, which has \$123 billion in assets. The pension plan pays an average of \$2,500 a month to its retired teachers, though that amount is rising.

“The benefits are not lavish, by any means,” says Ed Derman, CalSTRS deputy chief executive officer.

O’Connell, himself a teacher, said the potential increase to teachers comes at a bad time — just as about one-third of the state’s educators are reaching retirement age.

“This does not help us. We have a teacher shortage in this state and this further exacerbates it,” O’Connell said. “We should be doing more to attract the best and the brightest, not discourage them from being teachers.”

While the retirement payments aren’t lavish, “it is a pension plan that you can rely on,” said Barbara Kerr, president of California Teachers Association, the state’s largest teachers union. That’s vital to bringing in new teachers and keeping the rest, she said.

“None of them go into teaching because they want to make a lot of money,” Kerr said. “They do expect to have stable benefits and this proposal takes that away from them.”

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STATE



SF, frustrated by rising homicides, tries gun ban

BY KIM CURTIS

Associated Press Writer

SAN FRANCISCO — Frustrated by a 28 percent increase in homicides during the past year, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors has proposed a sweeping measure banning handguns, injecting the city into the national debate over gun control.

The proposal will appear on the municipal ballot in November and would bar residents from keeping handguns in their homes or businesses. It also would prohibit the sale, manufacture and distribution of any firearms or ammunition in San Francisco, where residents have bought nearly 22,000 handguns since 1996, according to the state attorney general's office.

Supervisor Chris Daly, who proposed the measure, said he and other supervisors already have received threatening phone calls and e-mails from gun supporters.

"Up to this point, I don't think anyone has come up with anything that's working," Daly said. "This is my contribution to trying to figure out a way to turn back the tide of violence."

Only two other major U.S. cities — Washington, D.C., and Chicago — have implemented handgun bans, and both were quickly challenged in the courts. The national gun lobby already has vowed to challenge San Francisco's ban if voters approve it.

San Francisco had 88 murders in 2004, up from 69 in 2003. Sixty-three of last year's homicides involved a firearm, San Francisco Police Sgt. Neville Gittens said. The city has averaged 71 homicides a year over the past decade, from a low of 58 in 1998 to a high of 99 in 1995.

While last year's number of homicides is an increase from the previous year, it's comparable to other U.S. cities of similar size. In 2003, for example, Jacksonville, Fla., had 92 murders and Indianapolis had 112.

That's one reason opponents are questioning whether such a sweeping proposal is necessary.

San Francisco's plan is ill-conceived and misplaced, said Chuck Michel, a Los Angeles lawyer who represents the National Rifle Association and the California Rifle and Pistol Association.

"It's turning firearms into a scapegoat for failed city policies," Michel said. "Criminals are never going to have any kind of problem getting the kind of guns they want."

Michel said he's preparing a legal challenge claiming a ban would violate the Second Amendment and that cities do not have the authority to regulate firearms. He said he plans to file his challenge before ballots are printed.

If approved by a majority of the city's voters, the law would take effect in January 2006. Residents would have 90

days to relinquish their handguns.

Gun-control opponents argue that such bans elsewhere have had little or no effect.

Washington, D.C., banned handguns in 1976 and noted an immediate 25 percent drop in firearm-related homicides, according to a 1991 study that appeared in the New England Journal of Medicine. The number of homicides fell from 13 per month to about 10.

In later years, however, the district became notorious for its violent-crime rate. Last year, Washington, D.C., had 248 homicides, or 20.7 per month.

That's a rate of 44 homicides per 100,000 residents. By comparison, San Francisco, has a rate of 9.2.

Daly, a Washington D.C.-area native, said it's unfair to compare San Francisco to Washington. The district faces greater poverty, unemployment and "serious social issues that I wouldn't expect the majority of pro-gun America to understand," he said.

A bill to overturn the Washington, D.C., ban passed the U.S. House of Representatives in September but died in the Senate. Meanwhile, the ban withstood a recent legal challenge based on the Second Amendment because it's a district, not a state. An appeals court judge decided the right to bear arms does not apply.

Chicago passed its ordinance in 1982. Under it, no new handguns could be bought or possessed, but those who already had handguns were allowed to keep them.

Two years later, a federal appeals court upheld the freeze, saying it "does not trample fundamental personal rights." The U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the case, leaving the handgun ordinance in place.

It's impossible to know just how many guns are on the streets of San Francisco because the state specifically forbids local governments from requiring firearms to be registered or licensed.

A buyer must fill out a form and submit to a background check when purchasing a gun, but that information does not need to be updated when the person moves, or loses or sells the gun.

There are just three licensed gun dealers in San Francisco, according to the Department of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. Two of those are auction houses that deal mostly with antique weapons. Workers at the city's only retail gun store, High Bridge Arms in the Mission District, refused to speak with The Associated Press.

Gittens, the San Francisco police spokesman, said a concealed-weapons permit is required to carry a gun outside one's home or business in the city. Police have issued just 10 of those permits.

Current and former law enforcement officers are exempt from that requirement.

One is city resident Jack Hart, who spent six years as a California Highway Patrol officer until a motorcycle accident forced him to retire in 1963.

He said he generally carries his .357 magnum semiautomatic handgun with him for protection and doesn't think the ban, if passed, will be allowed to stand.

"Only the lawful people will be deprived," he said while at the Pacific Rod and Gun Club in San Francisco. "The others, it won't affect them at all."

San Francisco's Pink Pistols, a gay and lesbian gun-rights group, also opposes the initiative and is organizing a letter-writing campaign to the Board of Supervisors, spokesman Tom Boyer said.

"Outlawing handguns would raise crime," he said. "A handgun is a very use-

ful defensive tool."

This will not be the first time San Francisco has attempted a handgun ban.

In 1982, a city ordinance was overturned because it applied to anyone who entered the city. A state court ruled that such actions were reserved for the state Legislature.

The drafters of the latest ordinance, anticipating a court battle, made sure it applies only to San Francisco residents, hoping to overcome at least one legal hurdle.

California Attorney General Bill Lockyer has yet to take a position on San Francisco's proposal, but spokesman Nathan Barankin said Lockyer generally opposes such bans because they're "rarely effective in promoting public safety."



Metro Briefs

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NATIONAL

Indie spirit lives on at Sundance despite growth

BY DAVID GERMAIN

AP Movie Writer

PARK CITY, Utah — Critics say the Sundance Film Festival has become too big, too commercial, too focused on celebrity sightings and star-driven movies at the expense of spotlighting undiscovered talent.

“Hollywood on ice” is a frequent wisecrack hurled at the 11-day festival, which opens Thursday amid the snow and cold of Park City’s upscale ski resorts.

Yet unlike Hollywood, where many Sundance filmmakers would be able to get onto a studio lot only if they took a tour with the rest of the general public, the festival is cinema democracy in action.

Where else could unknowns such as Pape Sidy Niang, Anna Oxygen and Eric Breedlove star in a film competing for top festival honors against movies featuring

Keanu Reeves, Liv Tyler and Naomi Watts?

“As much as the press argues that Sundance has completely changed, it hasn’t changed that much,” said festival Director Geoffrey Gilmore. “It’s still a place for discovery. It’s a place for common ground among filmmakers and audiences more than it is the celebrity stuff.”

Niang, Oxygen and Breedlove are among the cast of director Robinson Devor’s “Police Beat,” one of 16 films in Sundance’s dramatic competition, a launching pad for past critical and commercial hits such as “In the Bedroom” and “You Can Count On Me.”

A culture-clash romance following an immigrant West African bicycle cop involved with a Seattle woman, “Police Beat” faces off against such competition entries as “Lonesome Jim,” the tale of a dysfunctional family featuring Tyler and Casey Affleck; “Ellie Parker,” starring Watts in an expansion of her short film about a

wannabe Hollywood actress; and “Thumbsucker,” with Reeves as a dentist in an ensemble tale about a teenager (Lou Pucci) with an oral fixation on his thumbs.

Co-starring Tilda Swinton, Vince Vaughn and Benjamin Bratt, “Thumbsucker” is considered one of the hot potential acquisitions for distributors prowling Sundance in search of the next big indie hit.

Sundance’s dramatic competition is a dream slot for filmmakers seeking a high-profile place to premiere a movie for distributors. It’s also a nerve-racking experience.

“Obviously, it’s a great honor, but it’s given me a major stomachache right now,” said “Thumbsucker” director Mike Mills.

Along with the competition for U.S.-made independent dramas, the Sundance lineup of 120 feature films includes competitions for American and world-cinema documentaries.

New this year is a competition for world-cinema drama, whose lineup includes the Latin American tale “Cronicas,” starring John Leguizamo as a crime journalist; the British flick “On a Clear Day,” with Peter Mullan and Brenda Blethyn in the story of an out-of-work laborer trying to swim the English Channel; and Denmark’s “Brothers,” a sibling drama featuring Connie Nielsen.

Among films in Sundance’s celebrity-heavy premiere category: “The Upside of Anger,” a comic romantic drama with Joan Allen and Kevin Costner; “The Matador,” a hit-man comedy starring Pierce Brosnan; “The Jacket,” a time-travel thriller with Adrien Brody, Keira Knightley and Jennifer Jason Leigh; “Loverboy,” directed by Kevin Bacon and featuring his wife, Kyra Sedgwick, as a dangerously overprotective mom; “Nine Lives,” an ensemble drama with a cast including Glenn Close, Holly Hunter, Sissy Spacek and Robin Wright Penn; and “The Ballad of Jack and Rose,” a father-daughter drama starring Daniel Day-Lewis and directed by his wife, Rebecca Miller.

Sundance is a rare festival that gives equal time to fiction and nonfiction films. Each year, many of Sundance’s most popular films are documentaries, including last year’s “Super Size Me,” which won the festival’s documentary-directing prize for Morgan Spurlock and went on to become a \$10 million theatrical hit.

Robert Redford, founder of the Sundance Institute, credits the festival’s nurturing of nonfiction films for contributing to the explosion of audience interest in documentaries over the last few years.

In the late 1980s, Sundance organizers decided to put greater emphasis on documentaries, Redford said.

“At that time, documentaries were where they usually are at most festivals, off to the side or down lower on the register,” Redford said. “We decided each year to devote more and more screenings to more and more documentaries and see if the audience would allow it. Well, the audience did allow it. The more we pushed, the more the audience came.”

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More minors trying to cross U.S.-Mexican border

By The Associated Press

PHOENIX — A growing number of Central American youths are traveling without their parents, trying to sneak across the U.S.-Mexico border, Mexican officials say. Tighter security at the border has made it riskier for migrants to return from the United States for their children, prompting thousands of young people to attempt the journey alone. The number of unaccompanied minors caught in Mexico on their way to the United States went from 697 in 2003 to 3,722 last year, according to figures released by Mexico's National Immigration Institute.

The report corresponds with what officials in the United States are also seeing. The number of minors held in U.S. migrant shelters, most of them from Central America, rose from 5,000 in 2003 to 6,200 last year, Wendy Young of the New York-based Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children told The Arizona Republic. Most of the Central American youths are caught before they reach the U.S. border because they run out of money or because smugglers take their money and abandon them, said Gabriela Coutino, a spokeswoman at the migrant detention center in Tapachula, Mexico, near the

Guatemalan border. "This place is starting to look like a kindergarten," she said. Most Central Americans caught in Mexico are sent to Tapachula and then bused home. The journey to the United States can be risky, requiring multiple illegal border crossings. It often requires bargaining with immigrant smugglers, who can be violent. Hugo Alberto Reyes, 14, of El Carmen, El Salvador, said he was trying to reach his mother in New York when he was caught in southern Mexico. "I thought it would be easier," he said in a Mexico City-dated story published

Wednesday. "We didn't really know what we were doing. But my mom sent for me, so I had to go." Mexican authorities said his case is typical. Many of the Central American youths caught in Mexico are trying to join families, said Mauricio Juarez, a spokesman for the National Immigration Institute, Mexico's immigration agency. Parents may not be going back to retrieve children because it has become so difficult to cross the border, he said. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has spent millions of dollars to beef up border security with more agents, technology and fences.

Utah wants to downsize Grand Staircase-Escalante

By The Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — The state of Utah wants to reduce the size of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. The Utah attorney general's office asked the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals Tuesday for permission to file a friend-of-the-court brief in a lawsuit that is challenging the creation of the monument in 1996 by then-President Clinton. The Colorado-based Mountain States Legal Foundation has claimed Clinton violated provisions of the 1906

Antiquities Act in creating the 1.7 million-acre monument in 1996. The Antiquities Act gives the president authority to create national monuments. Utah is not challenging the legitimacy of the monument, only its boundaries, said Deputy Attorney General Mark Ward. "The issue, for us, is whether the president reserved too much land to achieve the purposes of the monument," Ward said. "The Antiquities Act says the president shall preserve only the minimum amount of land that is necessary to protect

the features that the president wishes to protect." The state anticipated hearing the court's decision within days. Ward said Utah has made no proposals about how large the monument should be, saying that matter should be argued at the district court level. "The monument is a fixture in southern Utah and the economy in southern Utah has prospered because of the monument," said Steve Bloch, an attorney with the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance. "Bottom line, it's a national treasure and

fully deserving of the protection it received from the president. For Utah to come in a decade later, in support of having the monument set aside, is shocking." The deadline to file friend-of-the-court documents ended Nov. 24. However, the state's filing Tuesday asked for a waiver since new Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr., who took office Jan. 3, resolved to change the state's position once he became aware of its issues. "We gave it a fresh, new legal look. It seems like the right thing to do," said Jason Chaffetz, Huntsman's chief of staff.

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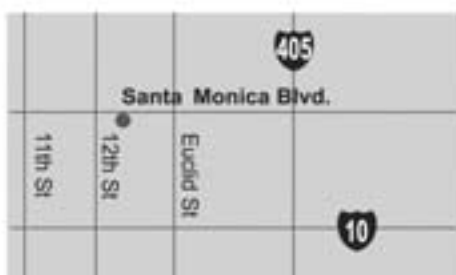
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PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

Johnny Carson still itching to deliver a punchline

By the Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Do you miss Johnny Carson’s comic monologues on “The Tonight Show?” So does he, apparently.

“When he reads the paper in the morning, he can think of five jokes right off the bat that he wishes he had an outlet for,” said Peter Lassally, one of his former producers, who’s now helping guide Craig Ferguson’s career on CBS’ “The Late Late Show.”

“He can call me, Peter,” Ferguson said, in a session before reporters Tuesday.

Sometimes the 79-year-old Carson, who keeps up with the late-night shows from his California home, can’t stand to keep them to himself.

He’ll send a joke every now and then to CBS “Late Show” host David Letterman, who has used some of Carson’s jokes in his monologue, Lassally said.

“Johnny gets a big kick out of that,” he said.

Ferguson is best known for “The Drew Carey Show,” where he played Carey’s boss.

He replaced Craig Kilborn, who stepped down last August.

BANGKOK, Thailand — Pop stars from around the world will appear live or contribute taped performances to a Feb. 3 concert sponsored by MTV to support tsunami relief work.

Performers at the MTV Asia Aid benefit, to be held in Bangkok’s IMPACT Arena, will include Good Charlotte, Kelly Clarkson, Hoobastank, Simple Plan, Asha Bhosle, Jay Chou and Tata Young, MTV said Wednesday. Alicia Keys is scheduled to attend.

Jennifer Lopez will contribute a prerecorded performance, while Moby, 50 Cent, Nelly, Ronan Keating, Ricky Martin and Sting will offer taped messages of support.

“MTV Asia Aid will help to maintain the world’s attention on the devastation and loss that the tsunami has caused for millions of people,” Richard Bridle, deputy regional director of UNICEF, said in a statement.

UNICEF will be the primary recipient of funds raised by the event.

MTV Asia Aid will be available free to broadcasters globally to raise as much money as possible for UNICEF and local charities, the statement said. Organizers hope to reach an audience of more than 1 billion people.

“The MTV Asia Aid event is about empowering viewers everywhere to continue supporting the relief efforts,” said Frank Brown, president of MTV Networks Asia Pacific.

NEW YORK — Jessica Simpson and Nick Lachey are putting a strain on the term “newlyweds.”

The couple, who wed two years ago, will return Jan. 26 for the third season of their MTV reality show, featuring the difficulties of being a (relatively) recently married couple.

Ten new episodes of “Newlyweds: Nick & Jessica” will include housebreaking their new dog, Daisy; celebrating their second wedding anniversary; and the 24-year-old singer-actress’ preparations for her role as Daisy Duke in the upcoming “The Dukes of Hazzard” movie.

Simpson’s younger sister, Ashlee, will be back with the second season of “The Ashlee Simpson Show,” also premiering Jan. 26.

The new episodes will “document Ashlee as she sky-rockets to the top of the music industry and is then forced to face the other side of fame, including intense press scrutiny and live performance mishaps,” Lois Curren, executive vice president of MTV series entertainment, said in a recent statement.

Ashlee, 20, was caught using background vocals on NBC’s “Saturday Night Live,” and her halftime performance at the Orange Bowl was met with a discernible chorus of boos.

MTV also announced that a show featuring Lachey’s efforts to launch a solo music career is tentatively set to premiere in April.

Cameras will follow Lachey as he builds a studio in his home, signs with Jive Records and works with his label to get his CD in stores.

“Viewers will see a different side of me than in ‘Newlyweds’ and be able to understand exactly what goes into the making of an album,” said the 31-year-old Lachey, formerly of the band 98 Degrees.

NEW YORK — One of music’s harshest critics doesn’t think Beyonce is so bootylicious.

Simon Cowell, a judge on Fox television’s “American Idol,” has some choice words about the 23-year-old singer.

“I find the whole Beyonce thing really mystifying,” Cowell says in Esquire magazine, on newsstands Friday. “She’s not sexy, she hasn’t got a great body and she’s not a great singer.”

Cowell defends a more maligned figure: Ashlee Simpson, who was caught lip-synching on NBC’s “Saturday Night Live.”

“Why should you have to do something substandard just for the sake of being real? If it sounds better with the vocal you recorded, why shouldn’t people listen to that? There’s almost a witch-hunt mentality about people miming,” he said.

The British talent judge also came out swinging on several other subjects.

On President Bush: “He could almost be a robot.”

On marriage: “At the end of the day, it’s an incredibly unfair contract.”



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