

FREE

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Santa Monica Daily Press

A newspaper with issues

Parent of car dealership accused of fraud in Fla.

BY ANDY FIXMER
Daily Press Staff Writer

A class action lawsuit is pending in Florida against the corporate owner of Honda of Santa Monica, alleging similar acts of fraud.

Charlotte, N.C.-based Sonic Automotive Inc. — which owns the Santa Monica dealership and nearly 200 others across the country — is fighting charges of fraudulently inflating contracts and tacking on fees at two dealerships in Clearwater, Fla.

Similar charges have been levied at the company locally by customers who have come forward claiming they were allegedly ripped off by Honda of Santa Monica. A class action lawsuit was filed against the dealership on behalf of several Honda of Santa Monica customers on the same day it was raided by the Los Angeles County District Attorney's

Office last fall. The investigation is ongoing, a district attorney spokeswoman said last week.

The stories told by customers at dealerships in Clearwater are nearly identical to the claims made by customers in Santa Monica, which accuse the company of jacking up interest rates and tacking on extras like theft protection plans for cars.

One customer at Clearwater Toyota claims he was cheated out of \$537 when the dealer inflated the cost of his extended warranty. Others claim the dealership jacked up their interest rates even when they had good credit, according to reports in the Wall Street Journal and the Tampa Tribune.

That's what happened to Encino resident Brett Fung, who has leased or bought four vehicles from Honda of Santa Monica in the past year. He said each deal

See FRAUD, page 6

Vehicle fees may cause pinch for Santa Monica

Governor's proposal hits cities with varying impacts

BY ANDY FIXMER
Daily Press Staff Writer

Santa Monica may not be the worst off when it comes to its budget crisis, but increased vehicle fees won't make life any easier.

If the state chooses to close its budget gap in part by using vehicle licensing fees, Santa Monica's deficit would grow from \$9.1 million to nearly \$12.6 million, accord-

ing to the California League of Cities.

That figure represents about 6 percent of the city's \$200 million general fund, from which most city services — including police and fire — are paid for.

"The dollar amount is significant for us," said Santa Monica Finance Director Mike Dennis.

The Motor Vehicle License Fee is a tax paid when vehicles are registered annually with the state. Once collected, the money is redistributed to cities based on population and it provides about 16 percent of the

See BUDGET, page 7

Bump, set, spike!



Bree Clarke/Special to the Daily Press

A group of Santa Monica residents spend their recent afternoon in a pick-up game of volleyball. Southern California's warm January weather is still attracting beach-goers to the sand.

Proposed reductions from vehicle licensing fees

CITY	CURRENT YEAR	CUT	FOLLOWING YEAR	CUT	% GENERAL FUNDS
Burbank	\$5.66M	\$1.91M	\$6.0M	\$4.0M	5%
Culver City	\$2.2M	\$741,078	\$2.35M	\$1.58M	3%
Hawthorne	\$4.8M	\$1.6M	\$5.13M	\$3.5M	12%
Hermosa Beach	\$1M	\$352,781	\$1.13M	\$759,427	5%
Manhattan Beach	\$1.9M	\$647,884	\$2.1M	\$1.4M	4%
Pasadena	\$7.6M	\$2.6M	\$8.2M	\$5.5M	5%
Redondo Beach	\$3.57M	\$1.21M	\$3.9M	\$2.6M	6%
SANTA MONICA	\$4.76M	\$1.61M	\$5.17M	\$3.49M	2%
West Hollywood	\$2M	\$677,636	\$2.16M	\$1.46M	5%

*Source: California League of Cities

Federal judge throws out lawsuit against McDonald's

By The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Saying the law is not intended to protect people from their own excesses, a federal judge threw out a class-action lawsuit Wednesday that blamed McDonald's food for obesity, diabetes and other health problems in children.

U.S. District Judge Robert Sweet said the plaintiffs failed to show that the fast-food chain's products "involve a danger that is not within the common knowledge of consumers."

The lawsuit was filed against McDonald's last summer and sought

unspecified damages.

"If a person knows or should know that eating copious orders of supersized McDonald's products is unhealthy and may result in weight gain ... it is not the place of the law to protect them from their own excesses," the judge said. "Nobody is forced to eat at McDonald's."

Plaintiffs' attorney Samuel Hirsch filed other, similar lawsuits last year. In one, a 270-pound city maintenance worker alleged that eating McDonald's, Wendy's, Burger King and KFC had caused him health problems. Those suits had been

dropped or put on hold while Sweet considered the lawsuit against McDonald's.

The lawsuits became a lightning rod for pundits and editorial writers who jeered that they were the latest example of a litigious society in which people abdicate personal responsibility.

On Wall Street, McDonald's stock up 7 cents at \$15.41 on Wednesday afternoon.

Hirsch said the lawsuit will be amended and refiled within a month.

Hirsch had argued that the high fat, sugar and cholesterol content of McDonald's food is a "toxic kind of

thing" when eaten regularly by children.

He said that consumers may generally understand that fast-food burgers and fries are not health food, but do not realize just how bad such fare can be.

He cited the case of a 13-year-old New York City boy who said he ate at McDonald's three or four times a week and is now 5-foot-4 and 278 pounds. Other affidavits filed by the parents of obese children claim they never saw posters or pamphlets inside McDonald's restaurants describing the nutritional content of the food.

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JACQUELINE BIGAR'S STARS

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

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

ARIES (March 21-April 19)
 ★★★★★ Your creativity keeps coming out with others. You cannot change directions, but you could adapt to a child or loved one's needs. Meetings and networking prove unusually successful. Express your feelings in a meaningful, detached manner. Tonight: The only answer to an invitation is "yes."

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
 ★★★ If you can delegate or bring some work home, all the better. You have way too much on your plate, and, as a result, you could be exhausted. Your family supports you in a key venture. A partner's efforts are particularly meaningful and add to your security and comfort. Tonight: Off to the gym.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20)
 ★★★★★ Your happy ways certainly draw attention. You know how to communicate what you need. Your playfulness delights others. It seems as if you have been in the doldrums for way too long. A change of pace suits your needs. Others happily receive you into their inner circle. Tonight: Ask yourself why you have been so aloof.

CANCER (June 21-July 22)
 ★★★ Your family anchors you. You decide on an expenditure that could be quite special. Listen well to someone who opens up to you. You might not like what you hear, but clearly you need to be more nurturing. A co-worker pitches in when you feel as if you can do no more. Tonight: Happy at home.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)
 ★★★★★ Say what you will, and others will naturally applaud. My goodness! What a change you experience as a result. Others make an effort toward you that pleases and delights you. Know when to put a halt to too much friskiness at the office. Separate business and pleasure. Tonight: out and about.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)
 ★★★★★ Deal with finances directly. You might be getting incorrect facts, or some information could be off. Your intuition helps you figure out where there might be a gap in information. Consider what you want and expect from a family member. Prepare to ask for it. Tonight: Your treat.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)
 ★★★★★ Realize more of what you want and expect from those around you. You need to do more asking. Review a matter that is close to your heart. You might have been playing games with a friend or a loved one. You cannot continue in this way. Follow your instincts with a family member. Tonight: Playtime!

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)
 ★★★★★ Slow down and take your time with others. You might not realize just how much impact you're having on them. A must appearance proves most important. Let someone else talk and express what is going on. Your instincts take you in a new direction. Tonight: Say little.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 19)
 ★★★★★ Use a meeting to get the momentum going that you need and want with a project. Others prove highly responsive to your actions. Reach out for information that might not be accessible from those at a distance. A different perspective provides a wonderful opportunity. Tonight: Where your friends are.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)
 ★★★★★ You will want to express what is on your mind. Review a situation that is close to you with a fine-tooth comb. Financial options occur through a partnership. You have to admit that someone is very generous with you. Take the lead within your immediate circle. Tonight: A must show.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)
 ★★★★★ Reach out for those in your immediate circle. Others immediately pitch in, ready to do anything to clear your path. Accept offers from others. You might be reading too much into someone's reaction. Listen to your inner voice. Understand what you might be doing to yourself. Tonight: Go to a movie. Relax.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)
 ★★★★★ Take your time when dealing with a quarrelsome or touchy partner. You might even wonder if this person could be intentionally misunderstanding you! Be easy on co-workers who seem more than willing to chip in and help you get through a job. Tonight: Togetherness works.

QUOTE of the DAY

“Sometimes too much to drink is barely enough.”

— Mark Twain (1835-1910)

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LOCAL



COMMUNITY BRIEFS

New pool designers awarded

By Daily Press staff

The architect who designed Santa Monica's swimming pool has been recognized for its contribution to the community.

Killefer Flammang Architects, a Los Angeles-based firm, was recently awarded the 2002 Community Enrichment Award by the Southern California Development Forum for designing a facility that "addresses community needs and creates a festival ambience in a facility that ordinarily is only concerned with functionality."

Surrounded by palm trees and a glazed brick tile wall, the \$7-million center includes a recreational pool and a 50-meter Olympic sized fitness pool with a three-meter high diving board. On an upper level is a sun deck and a viewing platform.

The firm's design principal Wade Killefer and project designer Markku Kari designed the 50,000-square-foot facility so it would invite people in from Santa Monica College's sports stadium and nearby neighborhoods.

The old pool was in the center of the SMC campus, which caused confusion among some resident who wondered whether it was open to them, Killefer said.

"When the 1994 earthquake collapsed a parking structure within the western perimeter of the campus, it became apparent that the parking and pool should swap



Courtesy photo

An aerial view of the Santa Monica swimming pool, which opened last year. The architectural firm that designed the facility was recently awarded for its contribution to the community.

places so that the new swim center could be readily visible to the entire community," he said.

Designed to last 75 years, the building is built of glazed concrete masonry to withstand weather and graffiti. The material is laid in a stacked bond to accentuate a vertical rhythm along the 400-foot long street facade, Killefer said. The architects also utilized QUILITE panels, whose impact resistance, the manufacturer says, is over 200 times greater than glass and also is graffiti resistant.

Julie Rusk, manager of the city's human services division, said the two pools, which can accommodate 900 swimmers, contain almost 1 million gallons and has a state-of-the-art sanitation system.

Law mandates that certain animals be allowed into businesses

By Daily Press staff

Santa Monica may be a dog-friendly city, but they aren't allowed everywhere unless they provide a vital service, city officials said.

The consumer affairs unit of the city attorney's office wants local businesses to know that dogs that are service animals are allowed to be in public places and local businesses, according to federal law.

After the consumer affairs unit received numerous inquiries from local businesses, as well as complaints from residents and visitors, officials launched an educational program to inform people with disabilities of their rights.

A letter outlining legal requirements of a business to allow service animals under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has been distributed throughout Santa Monica. Many local businesses do not have current, reliable information about their legal rights and responsibilities regarding service animals, city officials said.

Service animals include seeing-eye dogs, also commonly referred to as guide dogs, as well as signal dogs and other service animals. The ADA is a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities; it also requires that businesses, as well as governments and non-profit organizations, make accommodations to allow people with disabilities to participate in everyday activities such as shopping and accessing services. The ADA requires that all businesses that provide goods or services to the public allow people with disabilities to bring their service animals into all areas of the facility where customers are normally allowed to go.

If business owners or people with disabilities have more questions about the law, they should call the U.S. Department of Justice's toll-free ADA Information Line at 1-800-541-0301 (voice) or 1-800-514-0383 (TDD), or visit the ADA Business Connection at www.ada.gov.

surf report

Information compiled by Jesse Haley

A good west swell is hitting beaches today. We saw a little of the new northwester Tuesday, but not as much as we'll be getting as the swell peaks. Unfortunately, winds have been a problem lately, strong onshores in the South Bay especially, so the more protected spots should have much cleaner waves again today.

Early morning looks promising, a fun, clean dawn patrol thanks to the well timed low tide.

As long as El Porto isn't blown out, it will be sick, head high on average.

Thursday gets the same treatment, although forecasts say the swell will shift more to the west, which looks positive for north county surf. Expect chest- to head-high surf.



Today's Tides:

High- 12:19 a.m. 4.14'
Low- 5:42 a.m. 1.92'
High- 11:27 a.m. 4.89'
Low- 6:29 p.m. -0.03'

Location	Thursday	Friday	Water Quality
County Line	3-4'/Fair	3-4'/Fair	A
Zuma	3-4'/Fair	3-4'/Fair	A
Surfrider	1-3'/Fair	2-3'/Fair	D
Topanga	2-3'/Fair	2-4'/Fair	A
Breakwater	3-4'/Fair	3-4'/Fair	A
El Porto	4-5'/Fair	4-5'/Fair	A

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The Q Line

The build-up in the Persian Gulf last week instigated anti-war protests throughout the world this past weekend. Activists demanding that the United States' government stop its intent on bombing Iraq stretched from as far away as Hong Kong. Marches were held on the nation's capital, in front of the U.S. embassy in Russia, England and several cities across the country.

While you may agree or disagree with whether or not we are justified in going to war, it appears it's more probable now

than ever.

This week's Q-line question wants to know:

"If there is enough uprising in this country and around the world, do you think our administration will back off?"

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

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OPINION

LETTERS

SUV ads are counterproductive

Editor:

I agree with Ed Silverstein ("There will be no baby aboard my big, bad SUV" 1/22/03). The anti-SUV ads are counterproductive, but he shouldn't buy an SUV just to spite Arianna Huffington. She is correct in that there are alternatives that the car companies don't want us to consider.

Is he buying an SUV to live in Montana and use just when he's there, or will he be driving it solo (with those other seven seats empty, with nothing in tow) every other day of the year on the rough roads of Santa Monica? His argument loses some steam if the latter is the case.

Every SUV owner has a few instances each year when they actually need it, but for the vast majority, an SUV is simply not an intelligent, personally responsible purchase. Before everyone gets all defensive, just consider that a sport wagon or (gasp) a minivan gets better mileage, will be cheaper in the long run, is actually safer and can provide the same cargo space.

Let's face it, we're at war, and it's about time every American did their small part to make a difference, regardless of the fact that our president thinks we need to do nothing.

Mr. Silverstein could buy a junker for towing (government loopholes allow SUVs to be poorly built, so they'll fall apart quickly under heavy use), rent an SUV for when friends visit and drive a normal car for the other 95 percent of the time.

Remember, in the words of the conservative muse Sir Edmund Burke: "Nobody ever made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little."

Craig Boreth
Santa Monica

Comments on the commentary

Editor:

First, George Balanis (letter to editor 1/23/03) can go live with Bauer — they'd make good housemates. Put them both on an island. Pomposity, persnickety, snobbery, and "let's leave me my Santa Monica and get rid of the poor, uneducated and homeless..." Those two ought to start their own 501(c) 3 non-profit organization. Then they can petition grantors for money to continue their insanity. And they wouldn't have to pay real estate taxes on their hallowed, hate-filled home. Yeah, low-income housing causes more traffic; so does Circuit City.

Thom's (letter to editor 1/23/03) ideas are interesting and possible. Is anyone home? Is anyone listening? Can't be that the City Council is listening; after all, we lowly members of the tax paying public only get two minutes to say anything at THEIR meetings.

Now, "Mr. Incites" (1/23/03) — thanks for not having kids. Rent a truck to go to Montana. Or have your "stuff" flown up there. We don't need any more gas guzzlers in this town. It's a penis extension for both men and women. SUVs (and PT CRUISE) are smuggled like full blown trucks. I haven't taken my eyes off the real problem. George "W" is an idiot; 98 percent of the populous has their own "sticker" and won't bother with "causes" and campaigns against the war; campaigns to end homelessness; increase education, etc.

I received the newsletter today from the Center for Nonprofit Management. There is a JOB OPENING as Director of the Ocean Park Community Center; it is the third replacement director in as many years. The job pays \$40-45,000 annually with "great benefits." Caveat — you must be able to handle your caseload within the city's BUDGET. In other words, feed, house and care for those with no hope for about \$1 a day. Want the job? Me, neither!

Libi Warren
Santa Monica

The Zen of living peacefully, but not empty and void



TITTINGER'S TAKE

By Michael J. Tittinger

Each morning as I trudge into work sleepy-eyed and caffeine-deprived, the first thing I do when I get to my desk is log onto the Internet, mostly to see if the rest of the world is still there. Whether or not I did this so instinctively before 9/11 I'm not sure, but soon enough, encouraged the world is intact for another day, I surf on to see if anyone mysteriously e-mailed me in their sleep.

When I double click on the Internet Explorer icon and MSN starts to load, hyperlinks, logos, icons and pictures swarm up from every corner of the navy screen like so many piranhas. Soon, my morning is filled with multi-colored sentence fragments and pop-up windows blinking with the promise of wisdom for questions I hadn't asked, and cures for problems I didn't know I had.

Wading through the sea of virtual uncertainty, my rolling mouse is setting off hyperlinks like startled fish as I bypass "10 signs you're pregnant" and "Surviving job burnout?" The arrow has

almost reached "Bush to Iraq: 'Time is running out'" when one hyperlink manages to catch my eye: "Five ways to feel better about yourself."

I click down where the arrow has evolved into a hand and I'm immediately transported to a new hyperlink-packed window offering tips on how to feel better and live a peaceful, happier life.

All the evidence would support that I'm not swimming alone out here. Each day web browsers cram helpful tips on a variety of subjects onto their home pages, but aside from the breaking news variety, one topic seems to rise to the fore again and again: How to feel better, happier, more fulfilled and in tune with our spirit.

Recently, I paid a visit to Barnes & Noble on the Third Street Promenade in search of a book or two to offer guidance on a new computer program and a book about honing my skills as a screenwriter. My eyes scan the titles ... "How to get started" ... "How to sell" ... "How to get started and sell." Finally, my eyes are fixed on one title: "Zen and the Art of Screenwriting." I pick it up. I need guidance, baby. If I need to know a lot about writing, then I need to know the ZEN of writing.

We all know what the Zen of anything is ... right?

Well, maybe not so much, but we do

know that it is somehow related to those guys we see in the lotus position meditating all the time. We know that in pictures, they seem unconcerned about the newest Armani sweater collection and they are certainly not worrying about their hair!

We know that they never get in gun-fights, and they can sit still and in silence for a much longer time period than can we, which is just about anything past two minutes.

In the careers center, a book's cover promises me I will be able to hone my spiritual power and "inspire" any and all interviewers into hiring me. I don't need to know gimmicks, just my inner strength in order to get the job.

Inner strength, spiritual power — who couldn't use a dose of that now and again?

If the laws of supply and demand are any indication, a huge percentage of the American population is interested in all things pertaining to "getting back to the source," "finding the way," "spirituality" and "getting back to basics." For whatever reason, more and more people are seemingly finding a greater need these days to attend to it.

What does this trend say? The writing is on the wall. Our very society is based on the basic principle of filling cavities. If we want, we purchase. If we are hungry, we eat. If we are in pain, we soothe.

Are we suddenly evolving and cognizant of the fact we will require a spiritual side? So why then would "The Zen of" everything become all the rage? Maybe what we have been filling the voids and cavities in our lives with just isn't cutting it.

We fill the emptiness with noise and TV, cars and clothes, drink and food. This is where the irony comes in — purchasing and reading how-to books will not fill any cavity of this nature. This seems to be the paradox: The more we think that purchases will fill the need, the less those needs seem to be filled.

Many of us seem to have grasped the reality of this; while countless others scramble to fill the void with materials. Not all appears hopeless, though. The obsession with books of Zen-like approaches for everything from cooking to changing an oil filter just might prove to be key. We know that there is something to be said for the Zen people we come across, those bald-headed, quiet, peaceful guys filling a part of themselves without once buying a book or a car or a set of soothing candles.

Or even following Internet hyperlinks to "5 tips to being a quiet, peaceful guy."

(Mike Tittinger is a freelance writer living in Santa Monica.)

YOUR OPINION MATTERS!

Please send letters to:
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OPINION

The paradox of priorities in a time of fiscal crisis

Nothing captures a public's fascination like a crisis. It is one of the most over-used words in the parlance of education. The descriptions of educational practice, culture, policy and data-results often times contain the characterization of a crisis. In education, we are either having a crisis of confidence, a crisis of leadership, a crisis of social adjustment, a crisis of safety, achievement, learning, advancement, retention, stagnation or reaction — all depending on the moment and the media's construction of reality for us.

Crisis management has now been raised to the level of high art and mandated skill training for school leaders. We must plan for them, expect them, recognize them, budget for them and, of course, respond to them — even those crises we do not acknowledge or know to be real. There are, of course, true crises, which unfortunately happen in public schooling. A school shooting, the death of a student or staff member, an earthquake, fire, flood or storm are

a few examples of the obvious. The not so obvious include the explicit demonstration of gaps in achievement between white and non-white students, rich and poor students, native English speaking and non-English speaking and the most tragic: The crisis of failed promises and false expectations made to our students.

One of the frequent cultural tendencies within a community or society during a time of crisis is the drift towards chaos — the idea that the same old rules do not apply anymore. This is inherently one of the most significant fallouts of crisis *modus operandi*. And, it is this that a leader is responsible to help the organization avoid. The dual sets of responsibilities of a school leader to manage and lead through the crisis and prevent the erosion of the fundamental work and purposes of the organization are essential. The current situation for public schools is the same, except with one dramatic difference.

Our society has come to establish norms of behavior that a community, city, state or nation expects when a crisis befalls the society. We have polished responses and protocols for dealing with these infrequent disasters. We have FEMA and Federal/State disaster relief agencies; we rush rapid emergency response teams to a site. We promise to keep on the lights, to protect and to safeguard the health and welfare of our citizenry. We rush much needed supplies and money to the victims of a crisis. We put blankets around the homeless and those left out in the cold. We rebuild infrastructure that is damaged in a disaster with money from other sources and with extraordinary haste.

So, now we have an acknowledged

state budget crisis that is having a disastrous effect on local public schools. We have the crisis of enacting draconian cuts of services, supplies, programs and promises. During the last decade, we made clear promises to all students and communities, we set priorities, we strategically planned, we aligned spending with priorities, we vigorously pursued equity and we told everyone that we would leave no child behind. There is one small problem; now, we have no money to pay for any of this.

There are no Hazmat teams rushing towards school districts. There are no Red Cross shelters being set up on school campuses. There are no photos of millions of children saying the collective expression, why us? There are no massive telethons, concerts or other fundraising or collection events scheduled to rush much needed resources to our schools.

The difference in this crisis is that, currently, the destruction is not visible. But, you will not have to wait long to witness the effects of the near-total abdication of the covenants and promises of public education. When these begin to manifest themselves, we can all watch the outrage and collective public designation of, well, you guessed it, another crisis in education.

Public schools stand in the remarkably unenviable position of attempting to manage the state's fiscal crisis with few tools at their disposal except to dismantle previously supported (albeit under-funded) programs. We have to keep the priorities and expectations of the public because of the explicit promises made — though no longer funded. Now, this is what I call a crisis — the renegeing on the covenant made between a child and the community school.

Therein lies the paradox, you cannot do both. This is not the case where less is more. Less from Sacramento means less in our schools. We cannot both realize the promises and expectations of public education without the resources to fund them. I respectfully suggest that our schools are obligated to the same fiscal treatment (at an outrageous minimum) as our prison system!

With the decisions proposed in Sacramento, let's cut the rhetoric of "Leave No Child Behind" and 'fess up to the reality that all children will be left behind. This despicable, startling situation need not be; we have a crisis, but we still have choices. The full funding of public education is not a choice, it is not an option. It is a state's mandate and a community's imperative!

(John E. Deasy is the superintendent of the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District.)

Guest Commentary

By John E. Deasy

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LOCAL

Sonic one of the fastest growing auto sales chain

FRAUD, from page 1

changed when it went from the showroom floor to the finance department. In one instance, he was told he would have to agree to an extended service contract in order to be approved for a loan because he had "shaky credit."

Fung said he was charged 7.75 percent interest on one deal, but for another vehicle he purchased months later, he was charged over 11 percent. Fung said his credit rating, which might cause the interest rate to rise, hadn't changed.

The claims out of Florida that the dealerships had charged customers "add ons" also is similar to the story of Holly Ciampi of Pacific Palisades who claims she was duped into buying a silent alarm system called a "LoJack."

Ciampi said when she leased a Honda Passport in July 2001, the deal made on the showroom floor was changed once it got to the finance department. Not wanting to spend more than \$300 a month, Ciampi then learned that the Honda of Santa Monica finance department allegedly increased the down payment and jacked up the monthly payments \$50 because the vehicle required LoJack. They allegedly told her she would have to pay higher insurance premiums if she didn't purchase the accessory.

Sonic representatives did not return calls seeking comment for this story.

The activities of Sonic dealerships in Florida attracted the attention of that state's attorney general's office, which has reportedly launched an investigation into Sonic — the nation's third-largest car dealership franchise, according to news reports.

A Florida racketeering lawsuit filed on behalf of 17 car buyers accuses some of Sonic's top executives of orchestrating a scheme to falsify loan applications, overcharge for extended service contracts and warranties and forge customers' signatures on sales documents, according to an article posted on ConsumerVoiceUSA.com last year.

Fung said he believes Sonic officials must have known about the activities at the Santa Monica dealership.

"If you have one dealership that is doing better than your other ones, don't you send someone down there to find out what they are doing that's so special?" he asked. "Don't you want to find out what's so special that one dealership is doing so all the others can do it too?"

"The more I think about it, the more I believe they had to know what was going on," he added.

Dozens of investigators with the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Consumer Protection Division seized boxes of files at Honda of Santa Monica's finance and sales departments in a surprise raid on Sept. 25, 2002.

Since the raid, many of those involved have been replaced, including the dealership's general manager, its finance department manager and sales manager, according to Honda of Santa Monica officials. Some of them are named in the lawsuit filed by former customers. It is unknown whether criminal charges will be filed against the former employees because the investigation isn't finished.

The class action lawsuit filed in downtown Los Angeles alleges the dealership defrauded its customers by adding false state taxes and fees, lying to customers about interest rates and tricking customers into making extra payments on vehicles they wanted to buy or lease.

One scam allegedly added a fictitious state tax called "VT Registration." Customers were told the fee was for Department of Motor Vehicles registration, the suit alleges. However, the state has no such fee.

The Florida class action suit alleges the dealership of sneaking hidden fees into loans, according to an article in the Wall Street Journal last year. State regulators in California, Washington and Florida have reportedly filed lawsuits that focus on loan rates, extended warranties and theft protection plans, according to the Wall Street Journal.

The suit also alleges as many as 10,000 customers at two Clearwater dealerships may have been illegally overcharging as much as \$10 million, according to ConsumerVoiceUSA.com. The Web site article posted in March of last year also says the two dealerships — Clearwater Mitsubishi and Clearwater Toyota — are the targets of a state investigation and are suspected of defrauding at least 165 customers.

With \$1.9 billion in revenues reported from June to September 2002, Sonic is the nation's third-largest dealership chain behind AutoNation and United Auto Group, according to Hoovers.com.

Sonic also has been one of the fastest growing automotive sales companies in the country. Founded with five dealerships in 1997, the company has blossomed into a national brand name with 190 new and used car chains and more than 40 collision repair centers in 13 states.

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DID YOU KNOW?: In 1998, American people, foundations and corporations gave more than \$175 billion to charities and churches. Churches received 40% of the contributions, while public charities and educational organizations received the remainder.



Legislators propose raising vehicle fees to replace local funding

BUDGET, from page 1

general revenues to the average California city, according to the league.

Since 1948, the VLF rate had been about 2 percent of a vehicle's worth, but in 1998 the state Legislature began lowering the tax. Today the registration fee is about .065 percent of a vehicle's market value, according to the league.

The Legislature promised to give cities the same amount of money as they would have received if the tax had not been lowered. According to the league, by last year one-third of the \$1.6 billion given to cities was from registration fees and the rest was paid from the state's coffers.

Now Gov. Gray Davis is proposing to withhold much of the money given to cities to make up for the lower VLF tax revenue as a way to help close California's historic \$34.8-billion deficit.

If approved by the state Legislature, withholding those fees could make an already bad budget situation worse for Santa Monica and other cities, league officials say.

"I believe just about every city in California is facing dire situations this year," said Ron Merkling, a spokesman for Culver City. "Not just from the state, but from a loss of general revenues everywhere."

But those effects vary from city to city. Some have more diverse local economies where the loss in state funds will make a smaller dent in their total budget. Other cities depend heavily on the revenues to function daily.

Compared to Burbank, Santa Monica is faring much better. In that city, officials are predicting a roughly \$6-million deficit without the state taking vehicle licensing fees. Without that revenue, Burbank faces a \$10.1-million deficit next year — a loss of about 9 percent of its general fund.

Already Burbank officials have placed an item before voters during a special election in April that would raise that city's transient parking tax by 2 percent, which could net the city \$400,000 more in revenue.

"But there's only a limited amount of ability cities have to raise revenues," said Mike McManus, a Burbank spokesman.

"Fees we can raise, but taxes have to go to a vote."

In addition to revenue increases, the Burbank City Council will also likely have to approve deep cuts in programs and services, McManus said. Every city department has been asked to cut 10 percent of its operating budget.

"Just trying to stay competitive with our workforce, (we have) grown faster in our salary and benefits than we can sustain," McManus said. "Our revenues aren't growing at a rate that can keep up."

Culver City is facing a similar situation to Santa Monica. Without the vehicle licensing fees, it's facing a \$2-million deficit. That figure balloons to \$3.6 million without the vehicle licensing fees, which represents a 6.3 percent of its \$57-million general fund.

Merkling, the Culver City spokesman, said officials there have been polling residents and business owners about what services can be decreased or eliminated. Last year, the city discontinued its DARE program, which aims to keep kids away from drugs, for a lack of funding.

"It's a very difficult decision for citizens and residents to make decisions about ... police officers and other services like street repairs," he said. "How do you make those types of choices? It's very difficult."

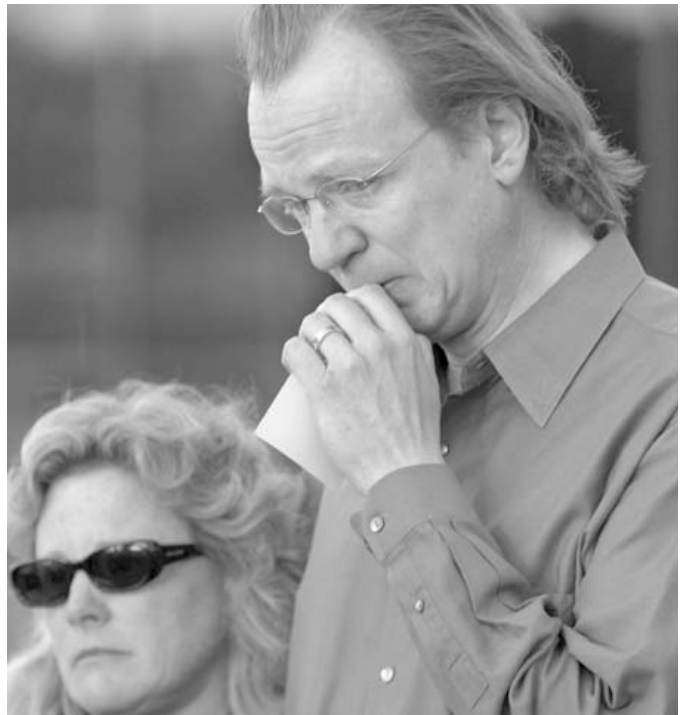
Pasadena is much better off than most cities, including Santa Monica. That city is facing a \$3-million deficit which swells to \$8.5 million if the state takes the vehicle licensing fees. But even with the higher figure, Pasadena is facing a 3 percent decline to its nearly \$277 million general fund.

And officials there report strong sales tax revenues and an investment portfolio that is still paying high interest rates. They also say the city has a reserve of \$44 million to fall back on if necessary.

"Pasadena is in generally good shape," said Ann Erdman, a Pasadena spokeswoman. "We have really excellent investment planners and a very highly regarded finance director. And they have helped keep the city in very good shape."

As far as other bay cities, Hermosa Beach may lose nearly \$1 million of state funding, which represents more than 6

Colleagues mourn murdered executive



Tim Tadder/Associated Press

Tapestry Solutions employees Renea Aswegan, left, and Riny Schoenmakers stand together during a news conference in San Diego, Calif., Wednesday. Company executive Michael Rene Pouliot died in a shooting Tuesday near a U.S. military base in Kuwait while a colleague, software engineer David Caraway, was in stable condition on Wednesday. The two civilians were ambushed by a gunman in Kuwait while working for the San Diego-based computer technology firm that was installing software for the U.S. military.

percent of its \$15-million general fund. Officials there say the drop-off in funding could be potentially devastating.

"It's a big chunk of money for us," said Steve Burrell, Hermosa Beach City Manager. "In the near term, we would adjust or expenditures. And in the long run, we'll probably recommend things (to the City Council) that we can do without and try to save whatever we can."

Manhattan Beach City Manager Geoff Dolan said the only financial troubles his city is facing stem from the loss of state funding.

"We're not nearly as bad off as other cities," he said. "We seem to have some lean years ahead of us. And the state's prob-

lem is looking bad, so we'll have to see how that shapes up. But for now we're OK."

A group of legislators have introduced a bill that would raise the Vehicle Licensing Fee back to its 1998 level of 2 percent to make up for the decline in state funding. Cities across the region, including Manhattan Beach, have begun enacting resolutions supporting the bill.

However Santa Monica's Mike Dennis said he's not so sure raising the fee will make a difference.

"I guess my fear is that the state will increase the motor vehicle tax to what it used to be," he said, "and keep the money to help them further reduce their deficit."

Judge dismisses suit by writers claiming ageism in Hollywood

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A Superior Court judge dismissed a class-action lawsuit brought by more than 175 writers who alleged that television networks, Hollywood studios and talent agencies discriminate against those over the age of 40.

In a decision disclosed this week, Judge Charles W. McCoy Jr. ruled some of the alleged violations occurred outside the statute of limitations and that the writers must first prove their claims on an individual basis before they can show an industrywide pattern of discrimination.

The ruling left open the possibility that the writers could refile their claims individually.

"We consider this a bump in the road," said Paul Sprenger, lead attorney for the writers. "Sometimes these things take years and it should be perfectly obvious to the courts that this is a meritorious claim."

Sprenger said they were considering their options, including an appeal or continuing with new class-action claims, but he did not plan to file individual claims.

The discrimination suit was originally filed in U.S. District Court in Los Angeles, claiming pervasive age discrimination since the early 1980s. The suit alleged violations of the federal Age Discrimination in Employment Act, the Labor Management Relations Act and the California Fair Employment and Housing Act.

The federal court ruled that there was no support for

maintaining the case as a class action, and the plaintiffs refiled in state court. In his decision, McCoy also ruled that having first filed in federal court, plaintiffs couldn't refile the same claims in state court.

The suit targeted six television networks, including CBS, NBC, ABC and Fox, 12 production companies and 11 talent agencies, including the William Morris Agency and Creative Arts Agency.

"We are pleased the court has decided that these television writers cannot proceed on such a broad-based claim," a CBS statement read. "We are also confident that any individual claims of discrimination will be shown to have no merit."

DID YOU KNOW?: The sentence "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog" uses every letter of the alphabet.



NATIONAL

Husbands, wives go opposite ways on importance of sex

BY JIM FITZGERALD
Associated Press Writer

CHAPPAQUA, N.Y. — Love and sex are more important to a happy marriage for men in their late 50s and early 60s than at any other time in their lives, a new survey says. Unfortunately for them, that's just when intimacy becomes less important to women.

The survey, being published in the February issue of Reader's Digest, found that between the ages of 57 and 64 men become more attentive to their wives while women, finally freed from family responsibilities, find more goals outside of marriage.

"The guys are saying, 'Now I get it. I want more intimacy,'" said John Gottman, a marriage expert who analyzed polling data for the magazine. "And the women are saying, 'Sorry, bub, I've already done that. I've got my own goals now.'"

A 60-year-old New York woman in the survey said she was finally getting the chance to travel, but her retired husband didn't want to. "What am I supposed to do? Stay home?" she asked. "Life's too short."

The nationwide telephone survey was conducted in June for the Chappaqua-based magazine by the Ipsos-NPD research group, which randomly chose 500 married men and 500 married women, but no couples. Questions were designed to determine how happy their marriages were and find out about specific behavior and attitudes.

Gottman, who teaches at the University of Washington and is the author of "The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work," then compared the answers to find the relationship between marital happiness and particular behavior and attitudes.

Women in the 57-to-64 age group rated good sex at 46 on a scale of 100 for its importance to a happy marriage. Men rated it 62. For the 44-to-56 age group, the impor-

importance of sex got a 66 from women and a 54 from men.

The differences smooth out somewhat in later years. The importance of sex drops for men, while they remain highly interested in being in love.

"When you're young, you demonstrate love more often with sex," said a 77-year-old man from Michigan. "But when you're a bit older, you find there are many other ways — a peck on the back of the neck or a pat on the butt."

For both sexes, spending time alone together is more important after age 65 than in the first years of marriage. Also, arguments no longer carry the sting they do for younger couples.

"We let off steam and then a few minutes later start talking to each other as if nothing happened," said a 73-year-old woman from Connecticut. "Now that we're older, we don't hold a grudge."

Study finds meal portion sizes growing

BY DEANNA BELLANDI
Associated Press Writer

CHICAGO — Americans aren't just supersizing their portions in fast-food restaurants, they're doing it in their own kitchens.

In a new study, researchers looked at such foods as hamburgers, burritos, tacos, french fries, sodas, ice cream, pie, cookies and salty snacks and found that the portions got bigger between the 1970s and the 1990s, regardless of whether people ate in or out.

It is no surprise it is happening at fast-food restaurants; it was McDonald's that help put the word "supersize" into the American lexicon.

But Margo Wootan of the Center for Science in the Public Interest said the practice has caused Americans to suffer portion distortion at home.

"We're getting so used to these big portion sizes when we eat out that when we go home we forget what a normal portion is," said Wootan, the center's nutrition policy director.

Portions for all of the popular foods studied, except pizza, increased both inside and outside the home between 1977 and 1996. The study was conducted by researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and was published in Wednesday's Journal of the American Medical Association.

"An important point is not just what foods we're eating, it's the fact that we're eating such large portions of

these foods," said researcher Samara Joy Nielsen.

The findings come at a time when Americans are getting fatter. A study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found more than 44 million Americans were obese in 2001.

The University of North Carolina study looked at people's portions at home, in fast-food joints and at other restaurants. It included a sample of 63,380 people over the age of 2.

Homemade burgers beefed up to 8.4 ounces in 1996 from 5.7 ounces in 1977, while fast-food hamburgers grew to 7.2 ounces from 6.1 ounces during the same period. At restaurants other than fast-food ones, hamburgers declined to 5 ounces in 1996 from 5.3 ounces in 1977, according to the study.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture counts two to three ounces of cooked lean meat as a serving.

Not surprisingly, the study found more calories went along with the extra food. A person who ate Mexican food in 1977 consumed an average of 408 calories in one sitting compared with 541 calories in 1996.

The USDA suggests between 1,600 and 2,800 calories per day depending on a person's age, gender and activity level.

Steven Anderson, the president and chief executive of the National Restaurant Association, said, "You don't have to go into a restaurant and eat everything the restaurant offers."



briefs

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INTERNATIONAL



U.S. hurdles raise profile of 'floating air bases'

BY MIRON VAROUHAKIS
Associated Press Writer

ABOARD USS HARRY S. TRUMAN

— Around Iraq's borders, the Pentagon is struggling to persuade allies to host U.S. troops and warplanes needed for a possible attack. At sea, however, America's military power is unhindered and growing to possibly the biggest concentration of warships since the 1991 Gulf War.

Imposing naval flotillas — with aircraft carriers as their mighty centerpieces — are taking greater prominence in strategic planning for a possible war against Iraq as obstacles are raised to ground deployments, officers say.

"I think all of the aircraft carriers will serve as a floating air base," said Capt. Mark A. Vance, commander of the air wing aboard the USS Harry S. Truman, now in the eastern Mediterranean.

"We are a sovereign platform that operates at international sea and airspace, and that gives us a degree of flexibility that is not shared when someone relies on a host nation," said Vance, a native of Montana.

But military analysts note carriers come with distinct advantages and limitations.

They are mobile and can deliver round-the-clock airstrikes with more than 60 warplanes each. But the Navy fighter-bombers mostly carry a limited number of precision-guided bombs, experts said. Only missions from land airfields can carry the heavier weapons needed to open deep bunkers, carpet bomb or strike big targets.

Carriers "allow some opportunity to attack ground targets should the U.S. Air Force not be able to base its aircraft within the region or nearby," Joanna Kidd, a naval analyst with the London-based

International Institute for Strategic Studies, said Wednesday.

She noted that carriers saw extensive use at early stages of the Gulf War.

"They were only used really in the first three or four days of the air campaign because the U.S. Air Force was able to use Saudi Arabia," she said.

But the coalition forged to fight Iraq in 1991 was far broader and stronger than the current U.S.-led pressure against Saddam Hussein.

Even key NATO allies such as Turkey, which shares a border with northern Iraq, are balking at the possibility of hosting Air Force bombers and tens of thousands of U.S. troops.

Opposition to a U.S. campaign in Turkey has reportedly forced planners to scale back from initial plans to base 80,000 U.S. troops there. Now, planners are reportedly considering 15,000 to 20,000 troops.

Another important regional ally, Saudi Arabia, is also reluctant to host a large number of U.S. ground forces. Saudi Arabia was the main staging area for ground forces during the Gulf War.

The Pentagon has turned to smaller and more distant places, such as Qatar and Oman, as it tries to organize its biggest military build up in more than a decade. In Qatar, the U.S. military has two bases: Camp As Sayliyah, where the U.S. Central Command has a mobile headquarters, and Al Udeid air base, where a midair refueling squadron, F15 fighter wing and drive-through maintenance hangars are in place.

In addition, B52 bomber squadrons operate from the British-controlled island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean.

"Carriers are good for smaller con-

Mexican earthquake victims deal with loss



Guillermo Arias/Associated Press

Survivor Amalia Rodriguez, center, who lost her mother Maria Rodriguez, is comforted by cousin Olga Rodriguez, left, and daughter Elizabeth Maldonado following a powerful earthquake in Colima, Mexico Wednesday. The earthquake ripped through western and central Mexico Tuesday night, killing at least 21 people, collapsing dozens of houses and leaving the worst-hit state shrouded in darkness with power outages.

licts, but if you need to have a big war you are really going to have to get bases around there ... because it's just a lot more efficient," said Ivan Eland, director of defense policy studies at Washington's CATO Institute.

Meanwhile, the Navy is moving more firepower into the region.

Military planners could send up to six carrier battle groups — half the U.S. fleet — within striking distance of Iraq, officials say.

The USS Constellation battle group already is operating in the northern Gulf

and the USS Harry S. Truman is in the eastern Mediterranean. They will be joined by the USS Abraham Lincoln and the USS Theodore Roosevelt, which is conducting training exercises off the coast of Puerto Rico.

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld is said to be considering even more deployments.

Possibilities include the dispatch of the USS Kitty Hawk from its home port in Japan, the USS Nimitz in San Diego and the USS George Washington from Norfolk, Va.

American man convicted in arson death of billionaire

BY LIONEL CIRONEAU
Associated Press Writer

MONACO — An American jailed in the arson death of billionaire banker Edmond Safra escaped from his Monaco cell but was recaptured hours later Wednesday at a French Riviera hotel.

Ted Maher, a former Green Beret who had been Safra's nurse, and an Italian inmate saved six bars from their cell window late Tuesday or early Wednesday. They removed two steel grills before climbing down a 26-foot wall on a sash of tied-together plastic bags.

Maher, 44, and Luigi Ciardecci stuffed their beds to fool guards, who noticed their absence at breakfast, Monaco prosecutor Daniel Ferdet told reporters.

Police caught Maher at a hotel in the southern French city Nice, acting on "a clue from a Monaco witness," the prosecutor said without elaborating.

Maher made at least one phone call to relatives from the hotel, and police were investigating if the men had had outside help in their escape.

Ciardecci, who was awaiting trial for armed robbery, was still at large.

Monaco's small prison is perched on the side of a cliff, facing the Mediterranean. Its stone walls are topped with metal fences and security cameras. Instruments the men used to open the cell window "do not come from the prison, where there is no workshop," Ferdet said.

Maher began serving a 10-year arson sentence late last year after a sensational court drama that gripped the U.S. and European tabloid press.

Dubbed Monaco's "trial of the century," by a local newspaper, the case brought a new kind of attention to the tiny Mediterranean principality, best known for sumptuous casinos, Formula One racing and tax breaks that attract the world's rich and famous.

Maher admitted on the stand to setting the Dec. 3, 1999, fire that killed Safra, the 67-year-old founder and principal stock owner of the Republic National Bank of New York, and another nurse Vivian Torrente.

Safra, who had Parkinson's disease, had paid Maher \$600 a day to provide him constant care.

Castro: Yes to tourism, but no to gambling

BY ANDREA RODRIGUEZ

Associated Press Writer

HAVANA — President Fidel Castro says Cuba wants to develop tourism fit for the whole family, without the illegal drugs and gambling.

"You won't see any casinos here," Castro said Tuesday night as he inaugurated a new resort on the island's northeastern coast. "Nor will there be drugs."

Before the 1959 revolution that brought Castro to power, Americans regularly traveled to Cuba to gamble at the island's many casinos. Gambling was declared illegal shortly after the new government took power.

Castro's speech at the inauguration of the Hotel Playa Pesquero in the eastern province of Holguin was broadcast nationwide, underscoring the importance the government places on the new five-hotel complex of 944 rooms that can house up to 1,500 tourists.

The \$100 million complex was completed in 22 months using Cuban capital and construction workers with technical assistance by the French firm Bouygues, Castro said. It will be managed by Gaviota S.A., one of the Cuban government's numerous tour operators.

Communist Cuba wants "safe and sane recreation" for its visitors, Castro said. "Besides, I don't see any future for a tourism that doesn't guarantee the safety and health of its visitors."

The government is struggling to control problems

But Maher said he never expected the blaze in Safra's Monaco penthouse to rage out of control, only to advance a bizarre plan to ingratiate himself with his employer.

He said he started the blaze in a small wastebasket, expecting it to set off a fire alarm that would bring help and allow him to reap the credit for saving the billionaire.

associated with increased tourism to the island, especially drug sales and use blamed mostly on a growing number of visitors.

The number of visitors to the island jumped 33 percent in January compared with the same month in 2002, giving officials hope that tourism is recovering from a drop in international travel after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

In reporting the increase, Tourism Minister Ibrahim Ferrandez did not give specifics on the number of visitors. The number of visitors dropped 5 percent last year to 1.6 million.

Cuba's socialist government began developing tourism in the early 1990s to diversify its economy after losing its most important trade partner, the Soviet Union. It now boasts 40,000 hotel rooms island wide.

Tourism is now Cuba's No. 1 source of foreign income, with 1.6 million visitors generating about \$2 billion last year — despite the slump.

The northern coast of Holguin has been the site of much of the new development, with visitors coming primarily from Canada, Germany, Britain, Italy, France and Switzerland.

"Our friends from the north are not in this list," Castro said with a grin, referring to Americans who are restricted by U.S. Treasury Department regulations from traveling to the island.



SPORTS

Davis: A rebel owner who finally gets Super again

BY DAVE GOLDBERG
AP Football Writer

SAN DIEGO — Al Davis is a rebel with a subpoena, as anti-establishment an owner as any sport will find. He has bedeviled the NFL off the field like no one else over the last 40 years, and he has succeeded on the field like no one else.

Now, at age 73 after a 19-year absence, he and his menacing Oakland Raiders are back in the Super Bowl for what some suspect might be his last time to "just win, baby," as Davis is famous for saying.

If they do, Davis will join the late Art Rooney of Pittsburgh and Eddie DeBartolo of San Francisco as the only NFL owners to win four Super Bowls. The Raiders are already the winningest franchise since Davis took over in 1963.

"He may even retire if we win this Super Bowl. I think that's a possibility," said Tim Brown, who has spent his entire 15-year NFL career with the Raiders. "He has done everything you can possibly do in this league. Everybody doubted him. It wouldn't surprise me to see him walk away from this game."

Don't ask Davis. For a high-profile owner, he avoids the spotlight. He gives few interviews, and when reporters do corner him, he just ignores any questions he doesn't want to answer. At a rare public appearance this week, for instance, he was asked if he was happy for Jon Gruden, who bolted Oakland after last season and now will coach Tampa Bay against the Silver and Black on Sunday. "I'm happy for the Raiders being here," Davis said.

Al Davis is hardly an NFL company man. Not in the way he dresses — usually satin running suits, one white, one black, and the occasional black suit, black shirt and silver tie. Not in the way he wears his hair — slicked back with a '50s duck-tail. Not in the way he talks — Brooklynese with Southern inflection. Not in the way he does business — on his own terms, always on his own terms.

Davis was the first NFL owner in the modern era to hire a black coach (Art Shell in 1989) and the first to have a Hispanic coach (Tom Flores, 1979-1987). They also have the league's only female chief executive, Amy Trask.

There is no doubt, though, that Davis has the real power, and that can be difficult to deal with.

As the only NFL owner who was a head coach, he torments his coaches, whether it be hands-on at practice or occasionally sending orders down during games. "Get down on the field and tell Art to get Smith back in the game," he told an aide during a game in Denver when Shell was head coach.

When Gruden got frustrated by Davis' interference and left after four seasons, Davis — as usual — came out a winner. He got two first-round draft picks, two seconds and \$8 million to let Gruden go.

Davis has been battling the NFL since the 1960s, first as a coach in the rival American Football League, then as AFL commissioner and finally as an NFL owner looking for lucrative markets in northern and southern California.

He sued when the league tried to block him from moving the Raiders from Oakland to Los Angeles in 1982.

Now he's suing not only for the city he left, but also the city he returned to. Even though he moved back to Oakland in

1995 after 13 seasons in Los Angeles, he still claims rights to the LA market and is seeking \$1.2 billion in damages from the NFL in that case. He is suing Oakland for failing to deliver sellouts they promised to get the Raiders back.

Davis can joke about his reputation. At a dedication ceremony Tuesday at San Diego's Qualcomm Stadium, he recalled how the late Jack Murphy, sports editor of the San Diego Union, badgered him in the early '60s to get the AFL to move the Chargers from Los Angeles to San Diego.

"At that time, I said I thought it was a good idea," Davis said with a smile. "You know I'm for moving teams."

If other owners and league executives brand Davis a football renegade, friends and former players find him the epitome of loyalty.

When his wife, Carol, had a serious heart attack a quarter-century ago, he moved into her hospital room and lived there for more than a month. And when he hears that even a distant acquaintance is ill, he'll offer medical help without worrying about expense.

Always obsessed with illness and death, he has been preoccupied lately with the passing of several long-time friends — ex-Raider Dave Dalby, publicist Irv Kaze, sports writer Will McDonough and Davis' one-time coaching mentor, Sid Gillman.

"I can control most things, but I don't seem to be able to control death," Davis said in a recent conversation. "Everybody seems to be going on me."

Davis is most absorbed by winning championships, something his team hasn't done since beating Washington 38-9 in the Super Bowl in 1984 — in Tampa, of all places. The closest the Raiders have come since was a loss to Baltimore in the AFC title game two years ago.

The most valuable player in that 1984 game was Marcus Allen, a leading candidate for the Pro Football Hall of Fame in voting that will take place Saturday.

But for all of Davis' loyalty, Allen is unlikely to go in as a Raider.

For reasons never made clear, Davis took a dislike to his star running back and ordered him benched for two seasons. He released him after the 1992 season, and Allen went to Kansas City.

Davis' only comment: "He was a cancer on the team."

The small incorporated city of Irwindale, 20 miles east of Los Angeles, learned an expensive lesson about dealing with Davis. The city gave the Raiders \$10 million to show its good faith in 1988, but environmental issues, financing problems and regional opposition scuttled plans to turn a gravel pit into a \$115 million, 65,000-seat stadium. The deposit was nonrefundable, and Irwindale never got a penny back.

Friendships come after football, too. In the mid-1980s, Davis noted that the New York Giants, coached by close friend Bill Parcells, had lost a couple of cornerbacks to injury. So he called Parcells and said, in effect: "Have I got a deal for you?"

The deal: Davis sent cornerback Ted Watts, a one-time hot prospect, to the Giants for a draft choice. Watts had a damaged knee and did nothing for the Giants.

Davis kept the draft choice.

"With Al, it's just about winning," says John Madden, who coached the Raiders from 1969-78 before becoming football's most renowned television analyst.

Roddick in the quarters



Mike Fiala/Associated Press

Andy Roddick of the United States hits a forehand at the net against Younes El Aynaoui of Morocco during men's singles quarterfinal match at the Australian Open tennis tournament, Wednesday, in Melbourne.

Cochran: NFL can do better in hiring more minorities

By The Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The NFL needs to get tougher in making sure its teams follow a new policy requiring them to interview minorities for coaching vacancies, attorney Johnnie L. Cochran Jr. said Wednesday.

Of the three teams with new head coaches, only the Cincinnati Bengals followed the policy before hiring Marvin Lewis, who is black, Cochran said.

"We're saying the NFL has done a reasonable job to this point," he said. "They can do better. They've got to enforce the rules that they've set."

Cochran, joined by attorney Cyrus Mehri, made his comments at a hotel news conference near Qualcomm Stadium, where the Super Bowl will be played Sunday. They were joined by former NFL stars Warren Moon and Kellen Winslow, who said they were sensitive to the subject of minority hiring.

Cochran and Mehri led the push to accelerate the pace of minority hiring in the NFL, both in the coaching ranks and among general managers and player personnel directors.

Cochran and Mehri say they don't think the Jacksonville Jaguars followed the NFL's procedure in hiring head coach Jack Del Rio. They called the hiring of Bill Parcells by the Dallas Cowboys "probably a foregone conclusion," and said the Cowboys didn't follow the process because they spoke with Dennis Green by telephone and thereby failed to grant him a "comparable interview."

"What we've asked the league is to put some teeth behind it, and if the owners are really serious, to level the playing field," Cochran said. "That's all we ask for. It's not even a quota. It's just, look, we want a fair opportunity, we want fair competition and a level playing field. Everybody gets a shot."

The NFL disagreed with the contention that the Jaguars and Cowboys failed to follow procedures.

Williams goes on Oakland's IR; Curry, Nash activated

By The Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — Oakland rookie Marcus Williams went on injured reserve Wednesday, further depleting the Raiders' depth at tight end.

Williams is the third tight end in two weeks to be declared out for the season, following starter Roland Williams and Brandon Christenson, who was placed on injured reserve Tuesday.

Rookie Doug Jolley is the starter, but his only backup in the Super Bowl will be veteran Jeremy Bringham, who was re-signed Tuesday after getting cut in training camp.

The Raiders also promoted rookie kick returner Ronald Curry and safety Keyon Nash from the practice squad to the active roster for Sunday's game against Tampa Bay.

They will take the roster spots of Marcus Williams and Roland Williams, who wasn't replaced on the 53-man roster when he went on injured reserve last week.

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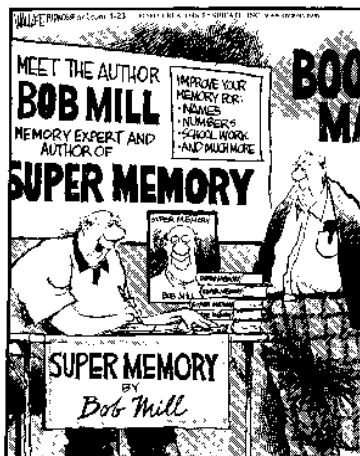


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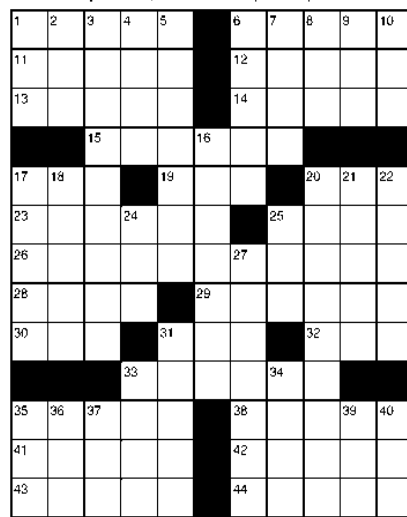
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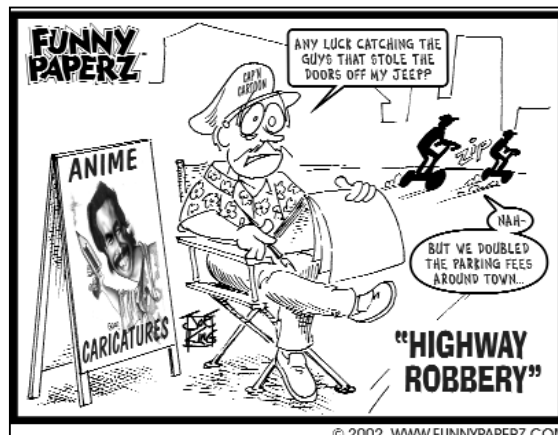
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NEWS OF THE WEIRD by Chuck Shepard

Criminal charges are for the 'stuffed' birds

State authorities raided a Honolulu artifacts dealer in December and filed criminal charges against him for possession of rare or extinct birds without a state license. However, as dealer Don Medcalf pointed out to them at the time (to no avail), not only are the rare birds merely stuffed animals, but they were killed and stuffed sometime in the 1800s, not only before the possession law was passed but before Hawaii was even a state. In January, the prosecutor dropped the case because he "felt (the charges) wouldn't be proven beyond a reasonable doubt."



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Large single 1 block from the beach. New carpet and paint, bright and airy. 1 year lease, no pets. (310) 396-4443 x102

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Single w/lots of charm and original hardwood floors. 1 block from the beach. Close to shopping and restaurants. 1 year lease, no pets, paid parking available. (310)396-4443 ext.102.

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VENICE BEACH \$2,400.00
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WeHo \$795.00 Spanish
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Westside Rentals

SANTA MONICA \$795.00
Fourplex, studio, pet ok, r/s, hrdwd flrs, bright.

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Westside Rentals

SANTA MONICA \$850.00
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Westside Rentals

VENICE CANALS House
\$3,250 3bdrm/2ba, 2 car garage, canal front patios and views, fireplace. Great location! Repainted inside and out, new carpet downstairs, new wood trim, new garage door, new deck, new windows. 1 year lease. No pets. (310)396-4443 ext. 102.

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Announcements

"I sold it one day! When I put my futon for sale in the Daily Press, it took me one day to sell it...thanks!" -Nina Stewart, Santa Monica.

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WOMEN MOUNTAIN Bike, futon, couch bed, kitchen appliances, dishes & miscellaneous. January 25 & 26. 9am to 3pm. 327 12th Street.

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Ring found in pipes

By The Associated Press

LUFKIN, Texas — Rebecca Tarver Robins once again has the high school ring that she lost in 1965.

The 55-year-old Lufkin resident received a telephone call Sunday evening asking her if she'd lost her senior ring from Hudson High School.

"I was at the sink brushing my teeth or something. I had taken the ring off and it fell straight down the drain. I went and told my dorm mom. The next day, a plumber was in there blowing the lines out. I could just hear it clinking all the way to the septic system," Robins told the Lufkin Daily News for Tuesday editions.

University plumber Duane Frazar found the ring last week while replacing old pipes. He had his secretary contact Donny Webb, the high school principal at Hudson, about 5 miles outside Lufkin.

A Hudson teacher who lives in Nacogdoches picked the ring up and brought it to Webb, who then realized the initials on the female class ring were "R.A.T." Skimming through the 33 names listed in the 1965 Hudson High School yearbook, Webb found two possible matches.

It was Helen Weeks, a member of that graduating class, who tracked down Rebecca Ann Tarver Robins and made the call Sunday night.

The ring no longer fits, Robins said, but she's thinking about having it resized.

Swimming for a cause

By The Associated Press

KELLER, Wash. — A swimmer neared the halfway point in a 1,250-mile journey down the Columbia River — a trip designed to raise awareness of its pollution levels and to encourage a cleanup.

Christopher Swain of Portland, Ore., began his swim at Columbia Lake, near the British Columbia-Alberta border, last June. He said he was about on schedule for the journey that will eventually spill him out into the Pacific Ocean.

The 24-year-old has been swimming about 10 days a month during the winter, spending six to eight hours in the water each day. A support team, including an inflatable boat, accompanies him.

Swain faces considerable hazards, including rapids and tricky currents. Nearer the mouth of the river there are container ships to dodge, as well as sharks where the river meets the sea. And there are personal watercraft, barges and pleasure boats.

"I'm going to be swimming through water that runs with everything from arsenic to zinc," Swain said at the start of his journey. "It's just a matter of picking your poison. Heavy metals we've got, radioactive isotopes, human sewage we've got."

Snoopy freed

By The Associated Press

KEY LARGO, Fla. — A 4-foot-long nurse shark named Snoopy, kept for three years in a suburban Detroit billiards bar aquarium, was freed in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary on Monday.

Marine Mammal Conservancy director Rick Trout carefully cradled Snoopy as he slipped into the ocean above the City of Washington, a 100-year-old historic military shipwreck about 6 miles off Key Largo.

Trout kept control of the female shark, which is sporting a bright red identification tag on its front dorsal fin, until they reached the wreck and she was allowed to

swim free. Trout and other divers then watched Snoopy for about 30 minutes to make sure she was OK.

Snoopy was about a foot long when she arrived at the Fifth Avenue Billiards in Novi, Mich., in 1999. She shared a 500 gallon aquarium with another shark and other fish. Snoopy flourished on a diet of calamari, shrimp and occasionally, other inhabitants.

When Snoopy grew too large for her home, manager Jeff Rospierski said he and other bar staffers began a quest to find her a new home. Contact was eventually made with the conservancy in Key Largo, which coordinated the release.

Senior citizen carded

By The Associated Press

OAK CREEK, Wis. — Don Meyer was a little annoyed when a Pick 'n Save clerk here recently carded him in the liquor store.

He wasn't just upset because they carded him while he was buying nonalcoholic beer. He was upset because he's 76 years old.

"I tell you, I was really ticked off — this little-by-little chipping away at your rights," the World War II veteran said.

Meyer won't be the only senior citizen getting carded now that 11 Pick 'n Save stores in Wisconsin have begun requiring clerks to card everyone who tries to buy alcohol.

Most alcoholic-beverage retailers ask for identification from patrons who appear younger than 30 or 40, but Pick 'n Save officials say they wanted to eliminate the chance of selling to someone underage.

"We've had a few complaints," said Robert Mariano, president and chief executive officer of Pick 'n Save's parent company, Roundy's Inc. "People may not like it, but they understand what we are trying to do. We're just trying to do the right thing."

Milwaukee Attorney Michael A.I. Whitcomb, who represents many clients with liquor licenses, said he has never heard of a store carding everyone.

SANTA MONICA SCENE °CALENDAR EDITION

THURSDAY, JANUARY 23, 2003

TODAY

Artful Science: The Social-Cultural Relationship Between Built and Natural Environments. Sam Francis Gallery at Crossroads School in Santa Monica presents an exhibition of drawings, paintings, photographs, and sculpture. Mon-Fri, 10am to 4pm through February 14. 1714 Twenty-First St., 2nd Floor, Peter Boxenbaum Arts Building. For more information please call (310)829-7391 ext. 425.

Dharma at the Clubhouse. A weekly book and multi-media study group, no fee. Applying studies of Buddhism-Dharma into our daily lives. Every Thursday night at the Clubhouse at Douglas Park, 25th & Wilshire. 7:30 to 9pm. Dan (310) 451-4368 www.santamonica-caksg.org

O'Briens Irish Pub, 2941 Main St., Santa Monica, pours A Pint of Funny, every Thurs., 8 p.m. FREE! (310)396-4725.

Gotham Comedy Night! Standup at Gotham Hall, 1431 3rd St. Promenade, Santa Monica; every Thursday, 7:30 pm, \$5.00 + 2 item min. 21/ over. (323) 525-5254

Unurban Coffee House presents Comedy Crunch every Thursday evening. Showtime is 7pm. 3301 Pico Blvd. (310)315-0056

Senior Suppers - Discounted meals for people AGE 55 or older are served daily, from 3:30 p.m. To 7 p.m., in the cafeteria at Santa Monica-UCLA Medical Center, 1250 16th Street in Santa Monica. \$3.69 Info only: (310)319-4837.

FRIDAY

Santa Monica High School Theater Arts Department presents Romeo & Juliet. Friday and Saturday nights at 8:00pm. November 22nd through December 21st. \$10.00 for students, children, and seniors, \$15.00 for adults. Humanities Center Theater at Santa Monica High School, 601 Pico Blvd. For more information please call (310)458-5939.

MAGICOPOLIS presents HOCUS POCUS! (Fish Bones Choke Us). The stage explodes with a colorful mix of Magic, Special Effects, Sleight of Hand, Comedy and Music that's sure to delight audiences of all ages. At MAGICOPOLIS, 1418 Fourth Street, Santa Monica. Fridays & Saturdays at 8pm, \$20. Saturday & Sundays at 2pm, \$15. For tickets call 310-451-2241.

Santa Monica Strutters, a FREE program sponsored by UCLA Healthcare's 50-Plus Program! Walking programs for adults 50 or older looking for safe, low-impact exercise in a comfortable environment. The Santa Monica Strutters meet Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, from 8 a.m. To 10 a.m., at Santa Monica Place, Fourth St. and Broadway Ave. in Santa Monica.

Senior Suppers - Discounted meals for people AGE 55 or older are served daily, from 3:30 p.m. To 7 p.m., in the cafeteria at Santa Monica-UCLA Medical Center, 1250 16th Street in Santa Monica. \$3.69 Info only: (310)319-4837.

MOVIE °GUIDE

LOEWS CINIPLEX BROADWAY CINEMA

1441 Third St. at Broadway
About Schmidt (R) 12:30, 3:30, 6:45, 9:45. Two Weeks Notice (PG-13) 11:00, 1:45, 4:30, 7:15, 10:00. The Hours (PG-13) 11:15, 2:00, 4:45, 6:30, 7:30, 9:15, 10:15.

MANN CRITERION

1313 Third St.
Adaptation (R) 12:30, 3:45, 7:30, 10:35. Confessions of a Dangerous Mind (R) 1:00, 4:00, 7:05, 10:00. Gangs of New York (R) 11:30, 3:15, 7:00, 10:30. Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (PG) 11:00am. Main in Manhattan (PG-13) 2:30, 7:45. Narc (R) 11:45, 2:25, 5:15, 8:00, 10:40. National Security (PG-13) 11:15, 1:45, 4:15, 5:10, 7:15, 9:45, 10:25.

AMC THEATRE SM 7

1310 3rd Street
Just Married (PG-13) 2:00, 4:35, 7:05, 9:35. The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers (PG-13) 1:20, 5:00, 8:45. Catch Me If You Can (PG-13) 1:05, 4:05, 7:10, 10:10. Chicago (PG-13) 1:45, 4:45, 7:40, 10:15. 25th Hour (R) 1:15, 4:15, 7:15, 10:10. A Guy Thing (PG-13) 2:15, 4:55, 7:30, 10:00. Kangaroo Jack (PG) 1:00, 3:10, 5:20, 7:35, 9:45.

LANDMARK NU-WILSHIRE

1314 Wilshire Blvd.
Antwone Fisher (PG-13) 1:00, 4:00, 7:30, 10:30. The Pianist (R) 12:30, 3:45, 7:00, 10:15.

LAEMMLE MONICA

1332 2nd St.
City of God (R) 1:00, 4:00, 7:00, 10:00. Far From Heaven (PG-13) 1:30, 4:15, 7:10, 9:55. Frida (R) 1:45, 4:30, 7:15, 10:05. The Quiet American (R) 1:45, 4:20, 7:00, 9:40.

AERO THEATER

1328 Montana Ave.
My Big Fat Greek Wedding (PG) 5:30, 7:30, 9:30.



BACK PAGE

Hatfields and McCoys appear before judge in dispute

BY ROGER ALFORD

Associated Press Writer

PIKEVILLE, Ky. — More than a century after the last shots were fired in America's most storied feud, the Hatfields and McCoys went before a judge Wednesday to try to resolve a dispute over access to a graveyard.

"Relatives have an unquestionable right to visit the graves," said Della Justice, an attorney representing McCoy descendants who sued Hatfield descendants for

Christo art project for Central Park

By The Associated Press

NEW YORK — City leaders on Wednesday gave the artist Christo the go-ahead to install 16-foot-tall gates of billowing saffron-colored cloth along miles of Central Park walkways for two weeks in 2005.

The artist, best known for wrapping silver fabric around the German Reichstag in 1995 and opening 3,100 brightly colored umbrellas across valleys in Japan and California in 1991, first sought approval for the Central Park display over two decades ago.

Christo and his wife, Jeanne-Claude, will fund the project and give the city \$3 million.

They plan to hang synthetic woven cloth from 7,500 gates along 23 miles of pedestrian walkways in the park in February 2005, Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced.

"During these trying times when our natural instincts are to retreat to the comfortable and familiar, we have to reassure the daring and the imaginative spirit that differentiates New York from any other city," Bloomberg said.

The project, now titled "The Gates, Central Park, New York, 1979 to 2005," was rejected in 1981. The initial proposal called for twice the number of gates.

the right to visit the small cemetery on an Appalachian hillside in eastern Kentucky.

The graveyard holds the remains of six McCoys, including three who were tied to pawpaw trees and executed by the Hatfields in 1882.

McCoy descendants claim they have not been able to visit the cemetery in more than three years because it is on land owned by a Hatfield heir and the driveway leading to the graves has been marked "No Trespassing."

Circuit Judge Charles E. Lowe Jr. did not immediately issue a ruling.

The feud between the McCoys of Kentucky and the Hatfields of West Virginia is believed to have begun in the 1870s over a stolen pig and escalated over timber rights. By 1888, at least 12 people had died as a result of the shooting war. The violence ended by 1900 and the two families have held joint reunions.

The cemetery case has generating widespread publicity that some hope will draw tourists to the area, though the families are focusing on the dispute.

"This is not about publicity," said Ron McCoy of

Durham, N.C., one of the plaintiffs. "I would have to be a marketing genius to get the kind of international press we're getting here."

McCoy said the cemetery is too important historically to remain closed to the public. He and a cousin, Bo McCoy of Waycross, Ga., filed the suit against the Vances.

John Vance, a Hatfield descendant, had posted the "no trespassing" signs. The judge granted an injunction earlier this year giving temporary access until the court could decide the issue.

Ron and Bo McCoy, organizers of the annual Hatfield-McCoy Reunion Festival in Pikeville, want the cemetery to be part of a tour that would highlight points of interest related to the feud. Economic development officials in Pikeville hope the feud sites and cemeteries will draw tourists to the mountain communities.

Larry Webster, an attorney for the Vances, said the cemetery has not had a burial in 114 years. He contends the McCoys lost the right to visit the cemetery when they abandoned it, and he accused the family of trying to capitalize on its tourist potential.

Chimney cut out from under Santa

By The Associated Press

CARPINTERIA — It turns out Santa was too big for his bridges.

Workers preparing a 5-ton plaster-and-chicken wire statue of St. Nick, a Highway 101 landmark for a half-century, for a move to Oxnard concluded Tuesday that the 22-foot-high Santa was too tall to clear overpasses and power lines along the 30-mile route.

Movers considered laying the huge statue face down on a flatbed trailer but decided, after inspecting his crudely braced interior, that Santa had to remain upright to remain intact.

The solution? Workers lopped off the 5-foot plywood base painted to look like a red-brick chimney.

"We saved Santa, we couldn't save the chimney," said Mike Barber, board president of the Garden Acres Mutual Water Co. near Oxnard, on whose land the unique statue will soon reside. "He just won't be as tall. He'll be 17 feet instead of 22."

Moving the bulky statue south on Highway 101 is the job of Specialty Crane and Rigging of Goleta, the same firm that hoisted Santa from the roof of a Santa Claus Lane candy shop last March. Santa's been stored in a driveway behind the building awaiting a new home.

The California Highway Patrol will escort the truck bearing Santa down Highway 101 on Friday or Monday. The water company, which owns a freeway-adjacent parcel on Del Norte Road, plans to spend up to \$5,000 to install a concrete foundation, lighting and landscaping.

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One FREE Bar Appetizer

with the purchase of any beverage during Happy Hour, Monday-Friday. One coupon per guest. Not valid with any other offer. Offer does not include tax or tip. Only valid at Wolfgang Puck Cafe - Montana Avenue location. Expires 1/31/03

3

One FREE Dessert on Jazz Night

during Tuesday Jazz Night hours. No purchase necessary. One coupon per guest. Not valid with any other offer. Offer does not include tax or tip. Only valid at Wolfgang Puck Cafe - Montana Avenue location. Expires 1/31/03

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